

"HANDFORTH THE GHOST-HUNTER!" THRILLING ST. FRANK'S CHRISTMAS STORY INSIDE.

The

GEM

2¢



"Aping" Gussy!

TOM MERRY'S



CHAPTER 1. A Fight With a Lion!

"BAI Jove, it's warm!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, made that remark. He did not address anybody in particular—the remark might have been intended for any one of the eight fellows who were seated round him.

Tom Merry & Co. had been through many adventures lately. Their journey up the Congo into wildest Africa had been fraught with peril. But they had never hesitated in following the trail of Gally and the two Spaniards, who had stolen important documents entrusted to Tom Merry by Sir Richard Standish, a St. Jim's governor, to deliver to Captain Crane on board the Opossum, at Southampton.

Tom Merry had been accompanied by eight companions, but he was captured by the three crooks and a false packet substituted for the one the junior had to deliver. In it was a letter, forged by Gally in the handwriting of Sir Richard, instructing Captain Crane to take the juniors to West Africa, and to hand the sealed packet to Henry Hudson, his coast agent.

Not until the packet had been opened by Hudson had the trick been discovered. It had contained an old newspaper instead of the plans which disclosed a new rubber territory in which Sir Richard Standish was interested. Hudson had chased after Gally & Co., and Tom Merry and the juniors had followed, and the plans had eventually been recovered, thanks to Tom Merry & Co.

The juniors of St. Jim's were now returning to school. But in an evil hour they had jumped at the idea of reaching the coast overland, instead of taking Henry Hudson's steamer down the Congo to the sea. As a matter of fact, they were not specially eager to get back to St. Jim's. They were having a rather good time in West Africa, and the wild life of the coast appealed to their love of adventure.

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It was thrilling to the juniors to travel through the African forest with native carriers, and with M'pong, the black man whose life Tom Merry had saved, for a guide. They also had the company of two Belgian officers who were going the same way, and who were glad enough to borrow some of the native carriers for whose services Tom Merry was paying.

Tom Merry & Co. had camped in a glade close by a rippling stream, which ran down to the Congo. Night was falling upon the African forest; but the heat of the day seemed hardly to abate. There was reason for the remark made by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was warm! His aristocratic visage was burnt brown by the sun, and the other fellows at St. Jim's would not have recognised the easy and graceful Arthur Augustus in the travel-stained, sun-browned, perspiring boy who was sitting on a fallen log and fanning himself with a plantain-leaf.

"It's vevy warm," said D'Arcy once mere.

"In fact, hot!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We are in the torrid zone," said Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell Form at St. Jim's. "Don't you think it 'orrid?"

"Think it 'owwid?" said D'Arcy. "Do you mean howwid, Lowthah, deah boy?"

"Ass! That was a pun!"

"Bai Jove! It's weally too thick, Lowthah, to make wotten puns in this awfully hot weathah!" said Arthur Augustus reproachfully. "I wogard it as cwelty to animals! Pway wing off, deah boy!"

"The torrid zone," said Lowther deliberately, "has its zone drawbacks—"

"Its own drawbacks!" groaned Manners. "Oh dear! The heat is affecting the poor fellow's brain!"

"Rats!" said Digby. "It's perfectly well known that heat does not affect a vacuum!"

"Look here—" began Lowther warmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You utter ass—"

"Well, it's warm, anyway," said Tom Merry pacifically.

CANNIBAL!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD**

"Too warm to jaw! I wonder what they're doing at St. Jim's now?"

"Prep!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, there's no prep of an evening in Africa, that's one comfort," said Manners, yawning. "Not that I shall be sorry to get back to St. Jim's. I've used nearly all my films, and I'm rather anxious to get home to develop them."

Tom Merry sat up suddenly.

"Hark! What's that?"

"What's what?"

The juniors, startled by Tom Merry's tone, listened intently.

Round them was the deep, dense African forest; overhead sailed the full, round moon, reflected in the stream by the side of which the juniors had camped.

Faintly, from the deep woods, came a strange, distant sound—a sound the St. Jim's fellows had learned to know during their sojourn in the Congo.

"My hat!" muttered Jack Blake. "It's a lion!"

Tom Merry jumped up and ran for his rifle. Arthur Augustus did the same. The swell of St. Jim's was very anxious to take a lion skin home with him. D'Arcy's ambition was to shoot big game. But he had not had an opportunity yet.

"Keep close!" said Tom Merry. "If he comes here—"

"He's coming," said Digby.

The roar of the lion was nearer now. It was evident that the beast had been attracted by the camp-fire, and was coming towards the spot. A thrill ran through the juniors. A lion at close quarters would be an experience for them—but upon the whole it was an experience they would rather be without.

"My hat!" murmured Digby. "I'd rather be doing my prep in Study No. 6, in the old School House, when I come to think of it!"

"Same here," agreed Blake.

"Bai Jove! I regard it as a stroke of luck! Think how wippin' it will be to have a lion skin rug in the study, deah boys!"

"The lion isn't coming here to provide us with a rug, but himself with a supper!" said Monty Lowther.

"Better wake up the Belgians," said Tom Merry, and he ran towards a tent pitched close to the stream.

The two Belgian officers were asleep in the tent. Tom Merry put his head in at the opening, and called to the two men.

"Wake up! A lion!"

"Ma foi!"

The two officers came out with a bound. They were dapper, dark-skinned little men, not much taller than the juniors, in frayed and stained uniforms. They carried revolvers; but, to judge by their looks as they bounded out of the tent, their deadly weapons were not likely to be of much use to them, or much harm to the lion.

"Mon dieu! It is really a lion!" muttered one of them.

"Parbleu!" said the other.

"Better stand together, gentlemen," Tom Merry suggested, "then we can give him a volley if he comes out of the trees—"

"Ma foi! Yes; but—"

"But—parbleu—"

"Bai Jove! What does parbleu mean, Lowthab, deah boy?"

"It means that they're in a blue funk!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A deep-throated, resounding roar woke every echo of the forest; there was a crash in the underwoods, and a magnificent African lion bounded into view in the glade.

"Bai Jove! Fire, deah boys!"

D'Arcy threw up his rifle and pulled the trigger; there was a click, but no other result. The swell of St. Jim's had forgotten to load it!

"Stand back!" shouted Tom Merry.

Another terrible roar. The lion, standing clear in the moonlight, was lashing its ribs with its tail. There was a howl of terror from the native carriers, and they streamed off into the forest at top speed.

Tom Merry turned to speak to the two Belgians; he was just in time to see them vanish with the natives. The juniors of St. Jim's remained alone in the glade, with the huge beast, his eyes flaming fury, advancing upon them.

Tom Merry had turned pale, but his nerves were calm. His rifle came up to his shoulder and he faced the huge animal with steady eyes.

His eye, unflinching, glanced along the level barrel.

Crack!

Tom Merry's rifle was a magazine, and he continued firing without a pause. By this time the other juniors had their firearms ready. They were a-twitter with wild excitement, but they fired steadily enough.

Crack, crack, crack!

The lion was crouching for a spring.

Several bullets struck him as he crouched, and he roared again; but he sprang, and there was a wild cry from Blake as he was hurled to the ground under the heavy beam.

"Oh, help!"

The lion, desperately wounded, waking the forest with his roaring, lay with a paw across the fallen junior. Blake, almost fainting with horror, lay still. Had he moved he would have been torn to pieces on the instant.

D'Arcy loaded his rifle and he was raising it.

"Stop!" muttered Tom Merry hoarsely. "Stop! You may hit Blake!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We—we must do something!" murmured Lowther. "For goodness' sake—"

"Fire!" muttered Blake in a strangled voice. "Never mind me! Fire!"

Tom Merry seized an axe and dashed forward. The lion turned upon him—as he meant it should—the great

jaws opened as Tom Merry struck with all the force of his arms.

There was a terrible roar from the lion as the axe crashed upon the huge head. The great beast, trailing blood as he moved, charged at Tom Merry. Blake crawled away, and Tom Merry sprang behind a tree. Had the lion been unwounded the junior would have been struck down instantly by the great claws, but as it was the lion moved slowly and painfully.

Crack, crack, crack!

The juniors were firing together now; a shower of bullets struck the sinuous body, and the lion staggered and then rolled over upon its side.

"Bai Jove! Anothah volley and he's done for, deah boys!"

Crack, crack, crack!

"Bai Jove! He's wunnin'!"

"Let him run!" muttered Lowther.

The lion had regained his feet, and was retreating into the bushes. From the crashing underwoods came his faint roaring.

Tom Merry ran to Blake.

"Blake, old man—"

Blake leaned against a tree panting for breath; his face was white as chalk and his breath came in quick, painful gasps.

"Oh," he muttered, "it was horrible!"

"Are you hurt?"

"No; only a bump or two, but—"

Blake broke off. The horror of what he had been through could not be expressed in words. His lips were dry, his throat seemed parched. He was safe now, but it seemed to him that he could still see the red jaws of the lion gaping over him.

Faintly from the jungle sounded the more distant roaring of the wounded lion. The king of beasts had evidently had enough and did not wish to prolong the conflict.

The juniors waited and listened for some time; but the

lion did not return, and his roaring died away at last. Glad enough were the juniors to be rid of him.

"Thank goodness he's gone!" said Monty Lowther at last. "But our carriers are gone, too," said Tom Merry in dismay, "and those two blessed Belgian officers—"

Monty Lowther chuckled. "They're a good distance by now," he remarked, "and I rather fancy they won't come back again, either."

"Then we haven't a guide."

"M'pong here," said a quiet voice. "Me guide Massa Merry. M'pong no lib for run away."

Tom Merry turned round. M'pong, the big black who accompanied the juniors up the Congo, was standing by his side; he had not run with the rest.

"Good!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I thought you were gone with the others, M'pong."

"M'pong lib for stick to Massa Merry," said the black man. "Massa Merry sabe M'pong from crocodile, and M'pong neber leabe Massa Merry."

"Good old M'pong!" said Blake.

Tom Merry smiled. M'pong, the Congo cannibal, had formed a deep attachment for him during their adventurous journey together. In the first place, M'pong and two Congo blacks had attempted to rob the juniors. They had been defeated, and Tom Merry, returning good for evil, had saved M'pong from the jaws of the crocodile. Since then M'pong had been his slave. He could never do enough for Tom Merry, and more than once he had announced his intentions of never leaving him. Tom Merry took that to mean that the black man wanted to serve him until he returned to the coast. But M'pong meant more than that, as the hero of the Shell was to discover.

The night passed. Neither the native carriers nor the Belgian officers returned; they might have lost their way in the forest, or they might not have cared to return after their ignominious flight. Morning flushed up in the east, and then Tom Merry & Co. held a council.

"It's no good waiting for them," said Tom Merry; "they don't mean to come back. After all, we're not far from the coast, and we can do without the carriers. We shall have to leave here all the things we can't carry—and march."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And that was decided upon; and in the cool of the early morning Tom Merry & Co. set out.

CHAPTER 2.

My Hat!

WITH M'pong in the lead, the juniors tramped on over the forest tracks while the sun rose higher in the heavens.

In the heat of the day it was impossible to travel, and the journeys were made in two stages—early morning and late afternoon.

As the sun rose higher the heat became more oppressive, but more troublesome than the heat were the swarms of mosquitoes.

The juniors slapped at them continually and killed them in dozens; but next moment their number seemed to be doubled again.

"Wouldn't I like a nice whiff of the good December wind at home!" sighed Blake, when the juniors halted for a rest in the heat. "Just to put one's head under clean, ice-cold water—"

"Oh, don't talk of it!" said Tom Merry. "Take a swig at the water-bottle and shut up!"

"Ugh! That water's warm!"

"Pway don't gumble, Blake, deah boy! Bai Jove! How these mosquitoes torment a chap! I weally don't know how I can stand this, you know! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr. "Don't grumble!"

"Weally, Kerr, I was not gwumblin'; I was passin' a remark—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

M'pong, the black man, rose to his feet. His keen eyes were peering into the forest. Tom Merry followed his glance.

"Another lion?" he asked breathlessly. M'pong shook his head.

"Me tink gorilla," he said. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, reaching for his rifle.

"Don't fire unless it attacks us!"

"Weally, Tom Mewy—"

"The beast would tear you to pieces if you hurt him, and they're harder to kill than many other animals," said Tom Merry. "He mayn't interfere with us if we don't touch him."

"Lib for run!" exclaimed M'pong. Suddenly out of a forest glade came a huge strangely human form—a gigantic gorilla, loping along, with a huge

club grasped in one of the forepaws. The juniors gazed at him in alarm. It was an enemy more terrible than the lion of the previous night.

"Lib for run!" shouted M'pong. "Gorilla no hurt if no shoot! Lib for run!"

And the juniors scattered as the huge animal came loping along into the camp.

The gorilla stared after them, but did not offer to pursue. The juniors promptly placed trees between them and their dangerous visitor.

"Lib for run!" gasped M'pong. But as the juniors ran no farther he stopped too, crouching behind a bush and watching the gorilla with eyes full of fear.

So long as the beast did not attack them the juniors were content to leave it alone. It was only too probable that in the event of a fight one or two of their number would fall victims to the rage of the terrible beast.

The gorilla plunged into the tent, and reappeared, dragging all sorts of articles after him. He tore out bedding and blankets and hammocks and cooking utensils and scattered them up and down the clearing.

"My hat!" gasped Blake suddenly. "Look! He's found Gussy's topper!"

"Bai Jove!"

The gorilla had pounced upon Arthur Augustus' silk hat, which he had dragged out with the other things. He picked it up and turned it over, examining it with great interest. The swell of St. Jim's uttered an exclamation of dismay. Ever since the juniors had come out to Africa D'Arcy had looked after that top hat very carefully. He declared that he might have occasion to need it.

"The howwid beast will ruin it!"

"Never mind!"

"You uttah ass! It's the only toppah I've got in Afwical!" shrieked D'Arcy. "I'm going to save it!"

Tom Merry and Blake grasped him together as he would have rushed from behind the tree.

"No, you don't!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Welease me, you uttah ass! The howwid beast will ruin my toppah!"

"Let him!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"My only chapeau!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "He's trying it on!"

"Anyone would think he had seen Gussy doing it and was doing the same!" gasped Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors watched the gorilla. The huge animal, after turning the silk hat over in his hands several times, had placed it on his head.

The gorilla did not take the same size in hats, evidently, as the swell of St. Jim's, for he did not get the topper to fit to his satisfaction.

He tried it on the right way, and then turned it round and tried it on backwards, and then put it on upside down; but he did not seem satisfied.

"My word! You might take him for Gussy's big brother trying on a new topper!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wrenched himself loose from the juniors and grasped his rifle. Before Tom Merry could stop him he flung up the rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Crack!

The topper, struck by the bullet, spun round and fell off the gorilla's head. Before D'Arcy could fire again he was pinioned by the juniors, and the rifle was wrenched away from him.

"You uttah ass!" said Tom Merry angrily. "If you had wounded him it might have been the death of one of us!"

"Weally, you know—"

The gorilla seemed amazed at the fall of the hat. He gazed at it in surprise, and then felt over the top of his head with one hand. Then he backed away from the hat as if he thought that it was something alive which had moved of its own volition. He backed away as far as the belt of thickets, and then made a sudden dive for the wood and disappeared from view among the trees.

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief. "He's gone!"

"Bai Jove! And my toppah's all wight, aftah all!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed forward and rescued his topper. There was a bullet-hole right through it fore and aft, as Blake put it; but D'Arcy was only too glad that matters were no worse. He polished it with a handkerchief.

"Thank goodness it's not weally injahed, deah boys!" he exclaimed. "I might have been left to go home to St. Jim's without a toppah at all, you know!"

And the juniors solemnly agreed that that would have been awful!

CHAPTER 3.
The Cobra!

"HURRAH!"

It was a couple of days later, and the juniors were at the end of a tiring afternoon's march when Tom Merry suddenly burst into that shout. Tom Merry was a little ahead, and the other fellows, in Indian file, were tramping on under their packs, tired and dusty from the march. M'pong was a little behind Tom Merry. Tom Merry suddenly halted, cheered with joy, and waved his hand to the others to come up.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, deah boy?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Come and see."

"Some jolly good fruit?" asked Fatty Wynn eagerly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors ran on eagerly and joined Tom Merry in the opening of the forest where he stood. Then they saw what he had seen—a gentle slope downwards, and beyond it a sheet of shining blue. And they burst into a shout together: "The sea!"

It was like seeing an old friend again. Bright and blue, the broad Atlantic rolled there, still many miles away, but rolling blue and welcoming in the glow of the sunset. That same wide blue sea washed the shores of their native country. It was like a glimpse of home again.

"Ripping!" said Blake. "Wouldn't I like a bathe in it now!"

"And a shark to nip you by the leg," grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ugh!"

"Bai Jove! Let's wun like anythin', and weach it before dark!" suggested D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wude laughter, Tom Mewwy!"

"Well, you see, it's ten miles away at least, and it will be dark in two minutes," said Tom Merry. "It gets dark very quickly here. You ought to have noticed that, after the time you have spent in the Congo—to say nothing of the fact that you get the information in the Second Form book at St. Jim's."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"We shall have to hurry to get to the place M'pong told us about for camping."

"Yes; buck up!" said Blake.

The juniors marched on.

They had been on rather short commons the last day or two, owing to the flight of the native carriers which had compelled them to abandon a considerable part of their baggage. They were all keen to reach the sea, and get on the deck of the ship again.

They were thinking a great deal of St. Jim's now. D'Arcy said that he even preferred Herries' bulldog to the mosquitoes in the African swamps, and D'Arcy must have felt homesick indeed when he thought that he could put up with Towser.

The sun dipped below the wide sea, and shadows crept over the waters—a darkness blotted out the forest and the shore. Like a veil suddenly descending, night came down upon the African coast.

But M'pong was a trusty guide. He led the juniors on without a pause in the darkness, and they halted at last in a clearing, where, amid clumps of wild rhododendrons, several wooden buildings stood. They were in a ruinous state, and had evidently long been abandoned. The place had probably been some post of the Belgian soldiers, in the early days of the Belgian Congo.

The juniors camped.

They ate their evening meal, blessed the mosquitoes, and turned in, in their blankets. The night was warm, and they slept in the open air with perfect comfort, taking turns to watch. M'pong did most of the watching; the Congo black man seemed tireless.

Morning dawned upon the African forest.

Tom Merry opened his eyes in the early sunlight. But he was not the first awake. M'pong was building a fire to cook the breakfast, and he turned a cheerful grin upon the hero of the Shell.

"Me lib for cook, Massa Tom," he said.

"Right-ho, M'pong! Hallo, there's the sea!"

Tom Merry ran upon a knoll, and looked towards the sea. Out upon the wide waters he thought he could discern a vessel riding at anchor. It was possibly the steamer that had brought the juniors to Africa and was waiting to convey them back to England.

Tom Merry glanced down towards the encampment. Most of the juniors were awake now, yawning or rubbing



The juniors fired frantically as the great lion crouched for a spring. Several bullets struck him, but next moment the beast launched itself through the air, and there was a wild cry from Jack Blake as he was hurled to the ground by the lion!

their eyes. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was still asleep outside the wooden building.

Tom Merry's glance was suddenly arrested as it fell upon D'Arcy. There was a mass of brushwood near the swell of St. Jim's, and in the midst of it Tom Merry's eyes had suddenly caught a curious gleam.

He ran down towards the camp.

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "Been looking at the sea? I suppose it's still there? Why, what—" He broke off as he caught sight of the anxious look in Tom Merry's face. "What's the matter, Tom?"

"Quiet!" muttered Tom Merry.

He pointed towards Arthur Augustus.

The junior lay asleep, and from the brushwood a snake had crawled. The reptile was coiling close to the swell of St. Jim's, and if D'Arcy had moved he must have noticed it. Lowther turned pale with horror.

"Oh!" muttered Blake, reaching for a rifle.

"Don't shoot, Blake!"

"But—"

"Quiet! It may crawl away!"

The juniors stood with tense, drawn faces.

The horrible reptile was so close to D'Arcy that a shot would not have saved the swell of St. Jim's if the snake had chosen to strike. And it was extremely unlikely that a single shot would kill the fearful creature. The juniors watched, fascinated with horror, and praying that D'Arcy would not awake.

For a single movement on his part might attract the reptile, and provoke it into striking. And the juniors knew that that would be death!

Tom Merry felt a light touch on his arm. He turned his head and saw M'pong. The Congo black held a bowl of milk in his hand.

"Lib for gib him milk, Massa Tom," muttered M'pong. "Snake like milk—he leabe Massa D'Arcy—cut off him head."

Tom Merry's eyes flashed with hope. He remembered now having heard that snakes were fond of milk. He took the gourd from M'pong's hand.

"Me lib for gib him milk," murmured M'pong. "Massa Tom keep back!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

You have your axe ready, M'pong!"

"Yes, sah!"

Tom Merry held the bowl of milk in his hand, and crept towards the cobra.

At that moment D'Arcy awoke.

"Oh!" muttered Blake, gripping his rifle. "It's all up!"

But it was not all up. For Arthur Augustus D'Arcy saw the reptile, and with wonderful presence of mind he kept perfectly still, affecting to be still asleep.

Tom Merry crept nearer. And as the bowl of milk was brought closer the head swayed towards it. The juniors watched in fascinated horror.

The reptile coiled away from D'Arcy, and approached the bowl of milk. Tom Merry breathed deeply with relief. He was in terrible danger himself now, for the hand that held the bowl was within easy striking distance of the snake. But the reptile was thinking only of the milk.

Tom Merry drew the bowl gently back. The reptile writhed after it. Inch by inch the hero of the Shell drew the horrible creature from D'Arcy.

"Now lib for run, Massa Tom!" came a murmur from behind.

Tom Merry set the bowl down, drew his hand away from it, and backed away from the reptile.

There was a whiz in the air, a sudden glitter of steel in the sun, and a wild hiss from the snake. M'pong's axe had hurtled forward with a deadly aim, and the keen edge of the blade struck the snake full in the neck.

With wild, fierce hissing, the wounded reptile writhed and thrashed the ground with its coils, darting out its forked tongue in wild fury. The juniors crowded back. M'pong darted forward and recovered his axe.

"Look out, M'pong!" gasped Tom Merry.

"All right, sah!"

M'pong was looking out. With the heavy axe he dealt the snake a second blow on the back of the neck, and a severed head rolled in the herbage. Still the sinuous body writhed, the principle of life still strong within it, though conscious life was gone.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's voice was shaking. "Bai Jove! That was a nawwow escape! Tom Mewy, old man, you saved my life!"

"The sooner we get out of these forests the better I shall like it!" Tom Merry muttered. "I've had enough of the Congo!"

And Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the snake, nodded and said with fervour:

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 4

M'pong's Farewell!

"I WONDER—" said Manners.

"So do I," said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas; and I was just wonderin'—"

"You seem to be in a wondering state altogether," said Monty Lowther. "I wonder whether you are wondering on the same subject?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors of St. Jim's were in a cheerful mood. They were at last safe on the deck of the Opossum, lying at anchor on the blue waters. Half a mile away was the sandy shore of Africa, with a white-walled town sweltering there in the blazing heat. Behind it was the forest—the dark, mysterious forest of Africa, through which the juniors had tramped for many scorching days before they reached the sea.

Tom Merry, ever thoughtful, had dispatched a cablegram in the town, informing the Head that they were safe and sound, and were returning home.

The juniors now sprawled lazily in deckchairs. They had a right to slack, after what they had been through. M'pong, the black man, was sitting on the bare deck, his black skin glistening in the sun. There was a very thoughtful expression upon M'pong's face. A native boat was rocking beside the steamer.

"I wonder—" went on Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Manners first," said Monty Lowther. "Now, what are you wondering about, Manners?"

"Whether there are any facilities on this steamer for developing films," said the amateur photographer of St. Jim's. "I suppose Captain Crane would be bound to have at least a dark-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"He might," said Tom Merry, laughing, "if he were a camera-maniac, otherwise, I'm afraid you'll have to wait till we get to St. Jim's, old son!"

"Fatty Wynn's turn now," said Figgins. "What were you wondering about, Fatty?"

"Not rotten old films!" grunted the fat Fourth Former. "I was wondering what kind of grub we're going to get on this voyage, and whether it's better than the stuff we had to put up with on shore!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy's turn!" exclaimed Blake. "What were you wondering about, Gussy?"

"I was wonderin' whethah the captain could lend me an iron to iron my silk hat," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I suppose the skipper of a decent steamer like this wouldn't be likely to sail without at least one silk hat. And, in that case, it would want ironing sometimes. And in that case he—"

"That topper does seem to be losing its gloss," assented Lowther. "But you could get one of the deck-hands to tar it over for you!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Or the cook would give it a coating of grease, if you take it down into the galley, and that would protect the nap, you know."

"You uttah ass!"

"Hallo! Here's the skipper!" exclaimed Tom Merry. Captain Crane came on board. He nodded to the juniors, and went into the chart-room.

The juniors had made their peace with the skipper, for they had defied his orders in going into danger on the Congo after Gally & Co. But Captain Crane was so relieved on their safe return that he had readily forgiven them. For he had meanwhile cabled Sir Richard Standish and Dr. Holmes all that had happened, and in reply Sir Richard had urgently requested him to see that the juniors returned safely.

"We're going to sail," Tom Merry remarked. "It's time to say good-bye to M'pong. I shall be sorry to part with him."

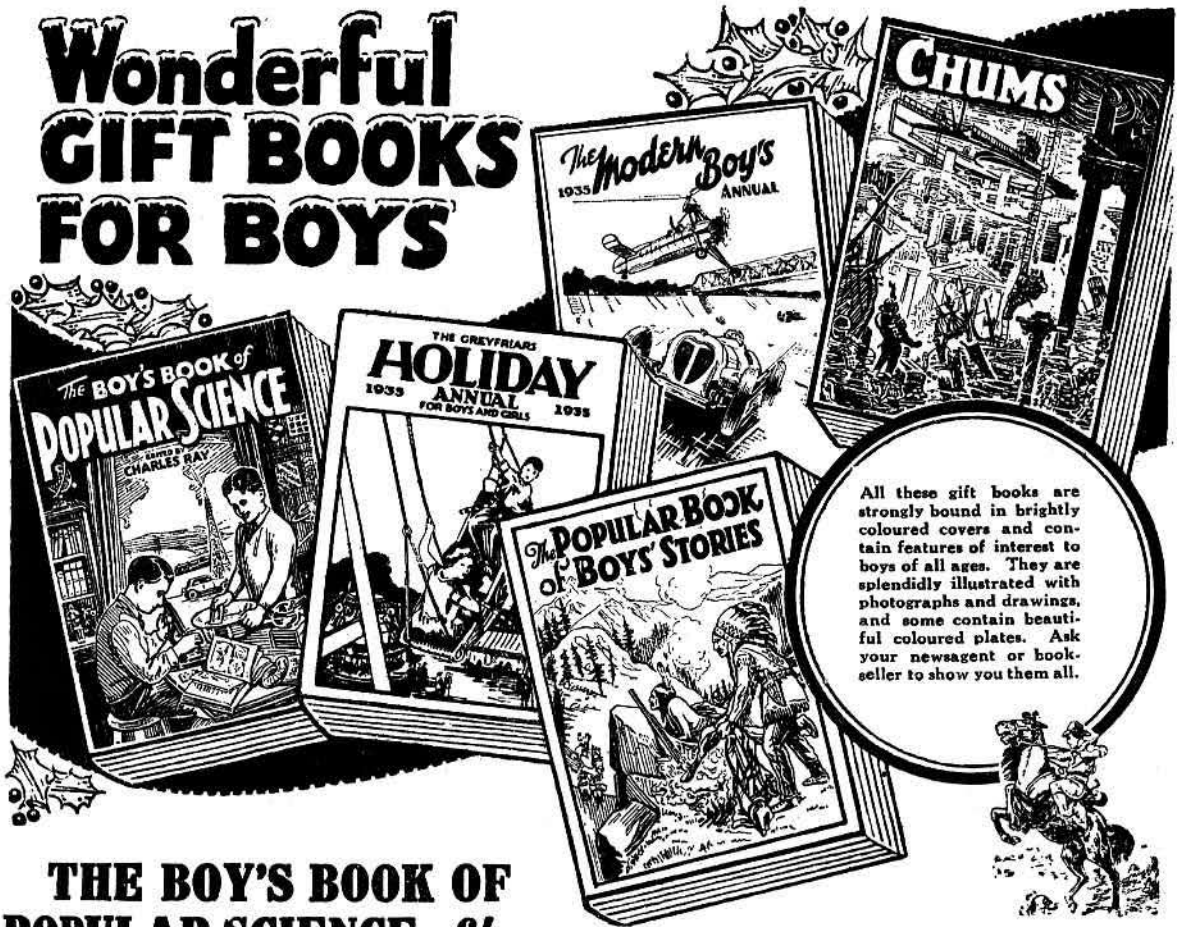
"Yaas, wathah! He's a decent chap, black as he is," said Arthur Augustus. "I have a gweat respect for M'pong!"

"We ought to give M'pong something to remember us by," said Kerr. "I suppose he'll forget us all in a week; but he ought to have something for what he's done. He made our acquaintance by trying to murder us; but that's only a little way they have in the Congo, and doesn't really mean unfriendliness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

(Continued on page 8.)

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"As a matter of fact, I'm feeling rather rotten at parting with him," said Tom Merry. "But I suppose it's no good taking him to England—we couldn't think of it. There's nothing to do with him there."

"If the climate didn't kill him," said Figgins, "we couldn't take him to St. Jim's."

"Wathah not! I but I feel wathah wotten, too, leavin' him! Howevah, I don't suppose he will mind. Only I've noticed he's been looking wathah sewious lately."

"Let's have a whip-round for him, anyway."

"Good!"

Tom Merry rose from his chair and held out his hat. The juniors threw their coins into it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had had a big remittance from home waiting for him on the Opossum, made the biggest contribution, putting in a pound.

The whole sum amounted to five pounds, and as M'pong's wages had already been settled, it was a handsome enough testimonial. Tom Merry put the money into a little canvas bag and crossed over to the Congo black.

M'pong looked up at him.

"The anchor will soon be up, M'pong," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, Mass' Tom!"

"It's time to say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mass' Tom?"

"Yes. We're sailing for England, you know. You don't want to go to England, M'pong."

A strangely pathetic look came over the black face.

"Me lib for follow Mass' Tom?"

"To England?"

"Yes, sah!"

"But it's cold in England, M'pong—jolly cold!"

"All right, sah!"

"And there's no forest, no swamps, no—no mosquitoes," said Tom Merry. "And you would have to wear clothes, M'pong."

"Me wear clothes," said the black. "Me all right with Mass' Tom."

Tom Merry ran his fingers through his curly hair.

M'pong was impossible for England, and England was impossible for M'pong. But the Congo black man, who had never been off his own coast, had not a sufficiently enlightened mind to imagine a country different from his own. He only wanted to follow Tom Merry.

"Mass' Tom no want M'pong," said the black suddenly.

"It's not that, M'pong! I'm jolly sorry to part with you," said Tom Merry. "I shall miss you very much. So shall we all."

"Den M'pong lib for come to England."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's impossible, M'pong. You don't understand, but you couldn't live there. Besides, I could not put you anywhere. I go to school, you know—I'm going back to school as soon as I get to England."

M'pong evidently did not understand. School was a new thing to the black man; he had never heard of one and did not know what it meant.

"Mass' Tom has a house in England?"

"I have a home, M'pong. But—but you don't understand. Look here, we've subscribed a little gift for you, old son. Take it. And we're all very grateful to you for what you've done to help us."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And I should like to have the pwivilege of shakin' hands with you."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

M'pong looked at the canvas bag in Tom Merry's hand. He caught the chink of the money, and drew back. He waved the bag away with a gesture of the hand that was almost stately.

"M'pong no take," he said.

"But it's for you, old man—"

"No take!"

"Well, as you like," said Tom Merry, tossing the bag upon a deckchair. "But we'd like to do something for you to show that we like you, M'pong, and are grateful for your services."

"Yaas, wathah! I would give the deah boy a silk hat, only I have only one, and I weally could not part with that. I have not the slightest ideah what you are gwinnin' at, Lowthah."

The captain looked down from the bridge.

"It's time for your native friend to go ashore," he called out. "We're sailing soon."

"Very well, sir."

The juniors gathered round M'pong. They shook hands with him in turn. The black man went through it dully. The expression upon his face was like that of a dog that had been punished and does not know what it is punished for. It went straight to the hearts of the juniors, and even Monty Lowther was serious. Tom Merry shook hands with M'pong the last.

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"Good-bye, M'pong!"

"Good bye, Mass' Tom!"

The black man dropped down into the native boat. The cable clanked and the anchor came up, and the steamer throbbed on the blue waters. The juniors crowded to the side and watched the native boat as it rocked upon the water, M'pong standing up in it.

"Why doesn't he paddle ashore?" muttered Manners.

"Poor old chap!" said Tom Merry. "He feels it more than a chap would think. Blessed if I quite understand him, either!"

"Look at him!" said Blake. "What is he going to do?"

The juniors watched the black man, their looks growing anxious.

M'pong had turned to the shore and made a gesture towards the distant Congo. Then he looked at the sky, bright in the blazing sun. It seemed as if he was taking farewell of land and sea.

Tom Merry caught his breath. He hardly understood the strange nature of the Congo savage.

What was M'pong going to do? He soon saw!

The black man cast a last look towards the steamer gliding away from him and leaving a track of white foam behind. Then he made a sudden leap and disappeared into the sea.

CHAPTER 5.

From the Jaws of the Shark!

TOM MERRY uttered a hoarse cry.

He understood now!

M'pong, deserted, had thrown himself into the sea—and he did not mean to come up again. The black man had hurled himself to death.

"Oh, bai Jove!" muttered D'Arcy, in a trembling voice.

"He's going to drown himself—"

"Poor old M'pong—"

"Tom Merry!" shrieked Lowther. "Stop! What are you going to do?"

But Tom Merry did not stop, and he did not answer. He had thrown off his hat and jacket and kicked off his shoes. He leaped upon the rail and threw his hands together and dived into the sea.

"Tom Merry!"

"The sharks!" muttered Lowther, with a ghastly face.

Blake ran towards the bridge.

"Stop!" he shrieked. "Man overboard!"

But the captain had seen already, and his face was pale, too. His hand was on the bridge telegraph at once.

Tom Merry struck the sea like an arrow, went deep under, and came up to the surface again with vigorous strokes. He shook the water from his face and shaded his eyes with one hand to look round for M'pong.

A black object rose on the waves close by him. He knew that it was the negro, but there was no motion in the body; it floated with the head under. With sick horror at his heart Tom Merry swam for the floating black.

He reached M'pong and dragged his head up above the water.

M'pong moved. He had resigned himself to death, but he was not dead. He stared at Tom Merry; he would have pushed his rescuer away, but he recognised him and stared blankly.

"M'pong!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Thank Heaven you are alive!"

"Go back, Mass' Tom! You lib for dem ship!"

"Not without you, M'pong!"

"M'pong lib for die," said the black simply. "M'pong no live if not follow Mass' Tom. Mass' Tom no want M'pong now. He lib for die!"

"M'pong, old man," said Tom Merry, "you shall come with me to England if you like. We'll manage it somehow." M'pong's eyes glistened.

"Oh, sah!"

"Swim now. You shall come."

"Yes, sah!"

In an instant there was a change in M'pong. He struck out stoutly, and swam on the curling waters.

There was a shout from the steamer. A boat was plumped into the water, and four seamen were pulling for the swimmers.

Tom Merry waved one hand above the water, and then swam again. But from the steamer came a wild and thrilling cry.

"Look out! The shark!"

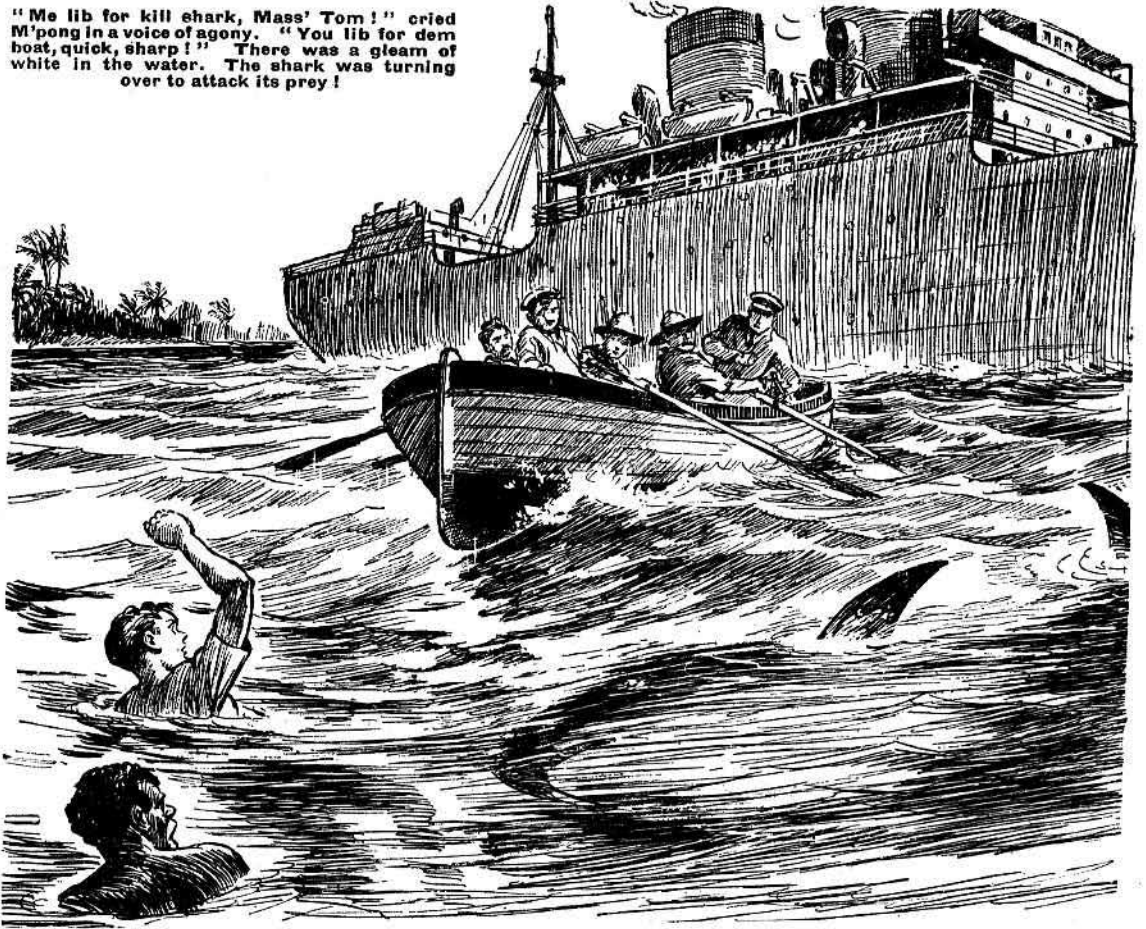
A thrill of fear ran through Tom Merry.

He knew that the coast was alive with sharks, but he had not thought of that when he sprang into the sea to the rescue of M'pong. It would not have stopped him if he had thought of it. But now—

"The shark! Look out!"

The two swimmers stared round them, and they saw a fin glide over the waves within a dozen yards.

"Me lib for kill shark, Mass' Tom!" cried M'pong in a voice of agony. "You lib for dem boat, quick, sharp!" There was a gleam of white in the water. The shark was turning over to attack its prey!



M'pong's hand went down to his girdle. It came up again with a long knife in it, and his eyes were gleaming now with fierce and savage resolve.

"You lib for dem boat, Mass' Tom. Me kill him!"

"I won't leave you alone, M'pong."

"Me all right! Me lib for kill shark before, Mass' Tom! You lib for dem boat!" said the black, in a voice of agony. "You lib—quick, sharp!"

There was a gleam of white in the sun. The shark was turning over to attack its prey, and the white belly gleamed as he turned. There was a cry from the steamer—a cry of despair and horror. The seamen in the boat looked over their shoulders. They would be too late to save!

Tom Merry instinctively dived. He knew that that was his only chance, and, fortunately, long practice had made him perfectly at home in the water. Down—deep down—cleaving the water, with every nerve thrilling in the momentary expectation of feeling the shearing jaws of the shark. A lifetime of horror was crammed into those few seconds.

From the steamer the juniors of St. Jim's were watching with straining eyes. They saw Tom Merry disappear, but M'pong remained on the surface. The knife was gripped between the negro's shining teeth now, and his eyes gleamed over it. He swam slowly, and the juniors knew that he was seeking to attract the attack of the shark, to leave Tom Merry unassailed.

The white belly of the great fish gleamed as it rushed like an arrow upon the black man.

The juniors groaned. M'pong was lost!

But at the last moment, as it seemed, M'pong dived. The shark passed over him. And then there was a sudden streak of red in the blue water.

The shark turned over, the white disappeared, and the huge fish thrashed the water in mad contortions.

"By all that's plucky!" yelled Blake. "M'pong has stabbed him."

M'pong's head came up into the blaze of sun, and he looked round anxiously for Tom Merry. Tom Merry had stayed below the water as long as he could endure it, till his lungs seemed to be bursting and his brain swimming.

Then he shot up to the surface, and M'pong's grasp was upon him.

"Lib for boat, sah!"

M'pong dragged Tom Merry through the lashing, foaming water. The death struggles of the shark churned up the blue into white, but its thrashing was growing feebler.

Hands reached out from the boat and dragged them in. Tom Merry sank down exhausted, while the boat was rowed to the ship. He was helped up the side of the steamer, and the juniors gathered round him and M'pong, greatly relieved.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

He looked out over the sea. The struggles of the shark had ceased. It was floating belly upwards, the white gleaming in the sun, and in the throat showed the handle of M'pong's knife, buried there to the hilt.

Tom Merry turned to the black with outstretched hand.

"Give me your fist, M'pong!"

"Yes, Mass' Tom!"

"You want to come to England? So you shall, and we won't part again, unless you want to!"

Tom Merry said it, and he meant it. The steamer throbbed on over the blue waters, and M'pong, the black man of the Congo, was a passenger on board, bound for England and for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Bay of Biscay!

"**B**AI Jove, we're goin' to have wuff weathah!" The St. Jim's juniors had been at sea some days, and the Opossum was nearing the Bay of Biscay.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing on the deck of the steamer, with his legs wide apart and his monocle jammed into his eye, regarded the sky as he pronounced that opinion.

Everybody else on board the vessel knew that there was going to be rough weather before the obvious fact dawned upon the swell of St. Jim's. But D'Arcy made the announcement as if it were a wonderful discovery.

"Go hon!" said Monty Lowther.

"It's a fact, Lowthah! I can tell the signs in the sky."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"You ought to set up as a weather prophet, Gussy," said Lowther. "There are not many fellows who could tell the weather as you do. When the sky's turning black, and the sea's rolling, and the wind going at top speed, it takes a very deep fellow to guess that we're going to have rough weather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave the grinning Lowther a withering look. But it was lost on the humorous junior. He had turned away to Fatty Wynn. The fat Fourth Former of St. Jim's was sitting in a deckchair, with his face very pale. Fatty Wynn had eaten a remarkably solid breakfast only an hour before, and the rolling of the ship was making him feel very strange inwardly.

"Got it?" asked Lowther sympathetically.

"Got what?" demanded Fatty Wynn snappishly.

"Mal-de-mer!"

"No, I haven't! I'm never seasick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Don't you remember yourself the last time we went to sea, Fatty?"

"I haven't been sick on this voyage so far," growled Fatty Wynn, "and I'm jolly well not going to begin now!"

"We've had calm weather so far," said Lowther. "But when the blow comes on—"

"Oh, shut up!"

The sea was growing decidedly rougher. Monty Lowther watched Fatty Wynn, with a grin, but all of a sudden his grinning face became serious. His complexion turned a sickly white, and then was changed into art shades of yellow and green. He made a rush for the rail.

"My hat!" ejaculated Piggins. "Lowther's the first to go!"

"Serve him right!" groaned Fatty Wynn. "I say, Lowther, you beast, does it seem so funny now? Ha, ha, ha— Groogh—ho—hoo!"

Fatty Wynn stopped laughing all of a sudden. He, too, was in the grip of mal-de-mer. Then, one by one, as though the complaint was catching, the other juniors joined Monty Lowther and Fatty Wynn.

M'pong had retreated below and shut himself up in a cabin, and groaned in solitude. But the juniors preferred to remain on deck.

There they had the open air, at least. Tom Merry was the last to succumb. But he did succumb, and he joined Monty Lowther at the rail.

Monty Lowther turned a ghastly face towards him.

"Ow! You got it, too?"

"Yes. Ow!"

"Groogh!"

"Oh!"

"This—this is worse than the lions and the snakes!" groaned Blake. "I'd change it for a cannibal any time!"

"Groogh!"

Fatty Wynn groaned with anguish. Bitterly did he regret the heavy breakfast he had eaten.

"Oh, I—I don't think I can stand this!" he murmured feebly. "I—I'd rather jump overboard, I think!"

"Ow! Groogh!"

"Groogh!"

The sea was running high now, and the ship was rocking and rolling. The engines throbbed without cessation, and the steamer plunged on through rolling seas. The endless pulsation of the engines, the odour of oil that came from them, added to the sickness of the juniors. They would have given worlds to be able to jump on any shore, however bleak and inhospitable.

But there was no shore to jump on.

Round them rolled the wild sea—the stormy waters of the Bay of Biscay. Spain had been left in the south, and the steamer was heading for home; but the deadly Bay had to be crossed.

"I—I wish somebody would—would drop me into the sea!" moaned Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I should've much like to have a watery grave! Oh!"

The steamer ploughed on. For hours the wind blew hard, and the sea rolled and billowed round the ploughing steamer.

Tom Merry rose at last from his deckchair. His face was very white, but the sickness was over. He had remembered M'pong. If the juniors, who had crossed the sea many times, felt like this, what must the Congo black be feeling like? Tom Merry went below to look for the black man.

A deep groan guided him to where the Congo black lay, his eyes gleaming wildly out from the shadows.

"M'pong, how do you feel?"

"Me lib for die, sah!" groaned M'pong. "Me neber see England, Mass' Tom. Oh, me lib for die!"

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Tom Merry smiled faintly.

"It's not so bad as that, M'pong. It's only seasickness—you'll get on your sea-legs in time!"

"Oh!" groaned the black man. "Me lib for die!"

"And that was all that M'pong had to say. He seemed to be fully convinced that his last hour was near. Tom Merry brought him water, but the black man pushed it away.

"Me lib for die!" he repeated.

And long after the juniors had recovered, M'pong was still moaning in the grip of the mal-de-mer.

Fatty Wynn signalled his recovery by a raid upon the dining saloon. He explained that the real reason for his sickness was that he had not laid a sufficiently solid foundation. And he proceeded to supply the deficiency at once—with the result that an hour later he was again hanging over the rail!

CHAPTER 7.

Home Again!

"HOME again!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The steamer glided into her berth in Southampton Dock. A crowd of people on shore waved hands to the ship. Among them the juniors recognised a form they knew well. It was Miss Priscilla Fawcett, Tom Merry's old governess. The kind old lady could hardly wait till the gangway was put down before she ran on board to greet Tom Merry.

The juniors smiled as Tom Merry was locked in the embrace of his affectionate old governess.

"My darling boy! My dearest Tommy!"

"Well, here I am!" said Tom Merry, generously allowing himself to be hugged and kissed without demur.

"My dearest boy! How are you in health, my darling?"

"Ripping!"

"Dear me! Your cheeks are very red!"

"That's the sun, dear!"

"And you're sure it's not a malarial fever, my dear boy?" asked Miss Priscilla anxiously.

Tom Merry laughed.

"If it were malarial fever, I shouldn't be walking around now," he remarked. "I should be in my bunk. I'm in splendid form."

"And were you always careful to keep your feet dry when you were in that dreadful Congo?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Well, I did my best."

"And were you always careful to have a nightcap?"

Tom Merry stared.

"A what?" he demanded.

"A nightcap, my darling boy. You remember Mr. Guzzlerum, who lives at Huckleberry Heath. I have heard him say that the only way he avoided fever when he was on the West Coast was by never missing his nightcap."

Tom Merry grinned.

"I don't think that kind of nightcap would suit me, dear," he replied. "Look here, I'm in splendid form—and all I want is a game of footer. You haven't spoken to the other chaps yet."

Thus reminded, the kind old lady greeted the juniors of St. Jim's. Then Tom Merry brought M'pong forward. Miss Fawcett stared at him in great wonder.

"A friend of mine," said Tom Merry.

"My dear Tommy—"

"His name is M'pong," said Tom. "He saved my life, dear—stuck a shark that was going to make a breakfast of me—"

"The dear, good, brave man!" said Miss Fawcett, eyeing M'pong somewhat nervously, however. "How brave and noble of him."

M'pong grinned, showing all his white teeth.

"Does he speak English?" asked Miss Fawcett.

"Me lib for speak him!" said M'pong.

"Thank you so much for saving my dear boy's life!" said Miss Fawcett. "B-b-but what is he going to do in England, Tommy?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom. "I'm going to take him to St. Jim's. You see, he has a queer idea that he doesn't want to part with me."

"I am quite able to understand that," said Miss Fawcett, with a fond glance at her favourite. "But I think the feeling does the good man credit. But—but what is to become of him?"

"Oh, I dare say something will turn up!"

"Dear me!"

The juniors went ashore with Miss Fawcett. They took the train together as far as the nearest station to Huckleberry Heath, and there the kind old soul left them, perfectly happy now that she had seen her darling safe and in

good health once more. The juniors remained in the express as it rolled towards Wayland, the station for St. Jim's.

The juniors had crowded into one carriage, and M'pong was in it with them. M'pong was rigged out in a suit of clothes belonging to a sailor on board the steamer. They did not fit him, and the black was extremely uncomfortable in them. He had made most of the voyage in the light and airy loincloth and a necklace of beads. That costume, however, was not suitable for England, and especially in the winter. The keen, cool air that the juniors were glad to breathe seemed deadly to the native of the blazing Congo.

M'pong was glad of the clothes for the protection they afforded from the cold, but he found them very irksome. But the good fellow was very patient. He was prepared to follow Mass' Tom even into an English winter. Further than that heroism could not go.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the black man as he sat in the carriage. The railway was very wonderful to M'pong, and he listened in fear and trembling to the rattling of the wheels.

"I wathah think that M'pong had bettah have some new clothes before we take him to St. Jim's," Arthur Augustus remarked meditatively. "I wathah considah that a new wigout would be the pwopah capah."

Tom Merry nodded. "It wouldn't be a bad wheeze," he remarked. "We ought to make him look as nice as possible, to impress the Head favourably."

The juniors looked very grave. What the Head would say when they brought the Congo black man to St. Jim's they hardly dared to think.

But it certainly was a good idea to get him the best clothes possible, and when the express stopped at Wayland Junction and the juniors alighted, they walked out into the town with M'pong in search of a ready-made clothier's.

They found one, and poured into the shop in a crowd. They were followed to the shop door by a crowd of curious urchins. Black men were not common in Wayland Town, and the cheerful youths of the place regarded M'pong with great interest.

Mr. Baggs, the clothier, came forward to meet the juniors with great politeness. He knew the St. Jim's fellows, and would have been very glad to supply them with a special line in trousers at a reasonable price or Eton jackets, latest out.

"Glad to see you, young gentlemen!" said Mr. Baggs, rubbing his hands. "Dear me! How brown you look!"

"We've been to Afwichah!" explained Arthur Augustus. "And we've bwrought a fwriend home with us, Mr. Baggs. We want you to wig him out."

"I shall be most happy, Master D'Arcy. A fashionable lounge suit, I suppose?"

"Yaas," said D'Arcy, a little dubiously.

"I have a splendid lino in lounge suits from three guineas."

"I don't want to teach any man his own business," said Arthur Augustus, "but it's utahly imposs to make a lounge suit of clothes for three guineas."

The clothier coughed.

"I said from three guineas," he remarked. "Of course, you would want something superior, sir. My lounge suits at four guineas are a marvel—"

"Pway let us have somethin' decent, my deah sir."

"My lounge suit at six guineas is bound to give satisfaction," said Mr. Baggs. "I will show it to you, Master D'Arcy. Latest cut, sir."

Mr. Baggs laid out his splendid lounge suit upon the counter. Arthur Augustus regarded it through his eyeglass with great surprise.

"Bai Jovo! If that is the latest thing there have been considerable changes," he remarked.

The juniors grinned as they looked at the suit. It was in the loudest possible check, and old-fashioned in cut. Monty Lowther tapped it with his forefinger.

"Pawn to king's fourth," he remarked.

And the juniors chuckled. It certainly seemed that the game of chess could be played upon that lounge suit.

"Better have something a bit quiet," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Something in a dark grey, Mr. Baggs."

"Ahem! Certainly, Master Merry—certainly!"

Mr. Baggs brought out suit after suit. He was going to charge six guineas for a three-guinea suit, and so he could afford to take a little trouble.

A suit was selected at last, and Mr. Baggs obligingly allowed M'pong to change in his back room. The Congo black looked better in his new clothes, there was no doubt about that, and he was rather proud of them.

"And now there's the question of a hat," said Monty Lowther gravely.

"Bai Jove! Yaas! A silk toppah, of course!"

(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.

CHANGE.

Smith: "I say, old man, I'd like change for a ten-bob note."

Brown: "I'm a bit different. I'd like a ten-bob note for a change!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Cohen, 32, Eleanor Road, Waltham Cross, Herts.

*** * * * ***
PIG EACH END!

The boarding-house pest was annoying the guests by his rudeness. Taking a piece of pork on the end of his fork, he held it up, rudely asking:

"Is this pig?"

"It all depends," came a sweet voice from the end of the table, "to which end of the fork you are referring!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Demet, 53, Benchill Road, Northenden, Manchester.

*** * * * ***
NOT SO FUNNY!

Hoggins: "I'm not narrow-minded. I'm the first to laugh at my own foolishness."

Boggins: "Your life must be one long laugh!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Thorne, West Wood, Lane End, High Wycombe, Bucks.

*** * * * ***
CAUGHT.

Monty Lowther: "Look out, Gussy! It's after you!"

D'Arcy: "What is, deah boy?"

Monty Lowther: "V W X Y Z!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss P. Smith, 36, Mill Way, Mill Hill, London, N.W.7.

*** * * * ***
DRAUGHTS!

A young man entered a railway carriage and opened the window. A sour faced man sitting in the corner promptly shut it up again. Whereupon the young man reopened it.

"What's the game?" asked the sour-faced one.

"Draughts!" replied the young man. "Your move!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Cartwright, 28, Greenock Road, Streatham Vale, London, S.W.16.

*** * * * ***
FREE KICK!

"What shall I do?" asked the actor dramatically, as he walked on the stage and almost fell over the heroine's body.

"There has been foul play. What shall I do?"

"Give 'em a free kick, mister!" came a voice from the gallery.

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Bradford, 17, Langham Gardens, North Wembley, Middlesex

*** * * * ***
SAM'S EXCUSE!

Employer: "Is that all the work you can do in an hour?"

Sam (a new hand): "Well, sah, Ah dussay Ah could do more; but, beliebe me, sah, Ah neber was one for showin' off!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to R. Simpson, 40, Third Avenue, Cathcart, Glasgow.

*** * * * ***
COMPANION WANTED.

While on holiday a director of a zoo received the following note from his assistant:

"Everything is all right except that the chimpanzee is pining for a companion. What shall I do until you return?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Pitt, 84, Second Street, Orange Grove, Johannesburg, South Africa.

"Ha, na, ha!"

"I see no cause for merriment in that remark. We want our friend to make a good appearance at St. Jim's, I suppose."

And Mr Baggs was settled with, and the juniors walked down the street to a hatter's. They fitted M'pong out with a new silk topper, and the black man regarded himself in the glass with pride and something like awe.

"Come on, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "We're weady to go to St. Jim's now."

And the juniors quitted the shop. The crowd of country youths had augmented, and there was a cheer for M'pong as he came out in his new silk topper.

"Raise your hat and bow!" whispered Monty Lowther. M'pong obeyed, and the crowd laughed and cheered again. The black man walked proudly down to the station with Tom Merry & Co.

The St. Jim's party tumbled into the train, and they were borne away to Rylcombe Station, where a rousing welcome awaited them.

CHAPTER 8.

A Warm Welcome!

"I GUESS the train's coming," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"Good!"

There was a crowd of fellows on the platform at the little station in Rylcombe. The Head had given leave to a host of fellows to go down to the station to meet the returning wanderers.

There was a whistle down the line, and the train from Wayland came rolling in.

Tom Merry & Co. poured out of the carriage, to have their hands shaken and their shoulders slapped by enthusiastic fellows.

"Hallo, Gussy, old cock!" said Wally, digging his elder brother affectionately in the ribs, a proceeding which caused D'Arcy major to gasp painfully. "How are you, my son?"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Faith, and it's glad to see ye we are!" said Reilly, slapping D'Arcy on the back. "Sure, and we've missed you entirely!"

"Yaas; but pway don't be so wuff, Weilly, deah boy!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Kangaroo, the Cornstalk. "What have you got there? Where did you pick that up?"

He referred to M'pong.

The black man was gazing round him in surprise and awe at the crowd of boys.

"That's a friend of mine," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Oh, my hat!"

"I twust Kangawoo, that you will tweat our coloured friend with pwopah wespct," said Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, no rotting," said Tom Merry. "M'pong is a friend of ours, and he saved my life on the coast."

"Faith, and we'll love him for ever!" exclaimed Reilly, shaking hands with the black man. "How do you do, my son?"

"How do you do, Pongo?"

The juniors greeted M'pong heartily enough. A broad smile overspread the ebony countenance of the Congo black man. The crowd of fellows formed up in a procession, with Tom Merry & Co. and M'pong in the middle, and marched out of the station.

They marched in a body down the village street, cheering and laughing, and the Rylcombe folk stared on in wonder. Then down the lane to St. Jim's went the procession in high good-humour.

"St. Jim's," said Tom Merry, as the gates of the school and the old tower came into view. "Good old St. Jim's!"

And the sunburnt heroes gave a cheer. It was splendid to be back again. Afternoon school was just over, and the old quad was thronged. Kildare of the Sixth came up and shook hands with Tom Merry, with a genial word of greeting, and stared at the black man. M'pong made quite a sensation.

"My heye!" said Taggles, the school porter. "My heye! I'm glad to see you back again, Master Merry—werry glad! But who's that?"

"It's Tom Merry's uncle from India," said Monty Lowther, with perfect gravity.

"My heye! But he's black, Master Lowther!"

"That's only the sun; it's awfully hot in India, you know," explained Lowther. "We should have become that colour if we had stayed in Africa much longer. Don't you see the resemblance in features between them?"

"My heye! Now you speak of it, I do!" said Taggles.

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"Master Merry, I'm sure it must be pleasant for you to bring your uncle home with you—"

"What!" roared Tom Merry.

"You're werry like your nephew, sir, if I may make so bold," said Taggles, taking off his hat to M'pong. "Werry like indeed, sir, if I may say so."

"Me no savvy."

"My heye! I say, Master Merry, your uncle—"

"You frabjous ass!" said Tom Merry. "My uncle! Who told you he was my uncle?"

"Why, Master Lowther said—"

"You ass, Monty!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "But come on. I can see Dr. Holmes at his study window, and he's seen M'pong. We shall have to explain him away somehow!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And it won't be so jolly easy, either," said Blake.

The juniors marched on to the School House. Figgins & Co. were marched off by a crowd of School House fellows, and Tom Merry and the others entered the School House. M'pong was left in the midst of an admiring crowd in the Hall, while the returned juniors went in to see the Head. Dr. Holmes greeted the juniors very cordially.

"I am very glad to see you all home again!" he exclaimed, shaking hands with Tom Merry. "But—but who is that black man I saw with you in the quadrangle?"

Tom Merry coloured. As Blake had remarked, it was not very easy to explain M'pong away.

"He's a Congo chap, sir," said Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"Dear me!"

"He saved my life, sir!"

"Ahem!"

"And—and he became attached to me, sir, and—and I couldn't leave him behind," said Tom Merry awkwardly.

"So—so I brought him home, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"I—I thought something could be done with him, sir. I've been teaching him things, and he's completely given up cannibalism, sir," said Tom Merry diffidently.

Dr. Holmes jumped.

"He has given up what—what?" he ejaculated.

"Cannibalism, sir!"

"Is it possible, Merry, that you have brought home a cannibal to St. Jim's?" gasped the Head.

"He—he isn't a cannibal now, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "And—and I'm sure there's no danger, sir."

Dr. Holmes sank into his chair, and stared blankly at Tom Merry.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

CHAPTER 9.

M'pong Meets the Head!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood silent.

They had expected the Head to be surprised, and they did not know how he would take it, and they waited for the verdict like criminals before a judge.

The Head did not find his voice for a full minute.

He took off his glasses and wiped them, and put them on again, and looked at Tom Merry.

"Merry!" he ejaculated at last.

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Is it possible that you have brought a cannibal home to England with you?"

"He isn't a cannibal now, sir."

"But—but he has been one?"

"I—I'm afraid so, sir."

"Merry, it is unheard of! Outrageous! What could you possibly mean by such a proceeding? Where is the man to go?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did you expect me to allow him to stay in the school?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Come, Merry! I suppose you have some explanation to give of this most remarkable action?" said the Head, somewhat tartly.

"Well, yes, sir."

"I am waiting to hear it," said the Head.

Tom Merry began to explain. He found himself telling the story of M'pong's faithful services on the Congo—of his help in saving D'Arcy from the reptile; of his fight with the shark off the coast. His face flushed as he proceeded, and unconsciously he grew more eloquent. The Head listened, his expression softening more and more. Tom Merry broke off at last, with a catch in his voice.

"You see, sir, I—I couldn't leave him behind," he said.

"I suppose you could not, in the circumstances," said the Head; "but now that he is here, what is to become of him?"

"I don't know, sir. I thought you might be able to advise me, sir."

(Continued on page 14.)

LISTEN IN HERE FOR FACTS AND VIEWS FROM—



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

HALLO, chums! Our great St. Frank's story is now in full swing, and I expect most of you have already travelled to Norfolk, so to speak, with Handforth and his Christmas party, and read of their strange welcome at Handforth Towers and the eerie events that followed. To say the least, it promises to be a nerve-tingling Yuletide for the St. Frank's chums—and it is!

Next week's issue of the GEM is the Grand Christmas Number, and it's a thriller throughout. Ghosts are always associated with the festive season, and in the St. Frank's serial and the long St. Jim's story phantoms play a big part.

"THE SPECTRE OF ST. JIM'S!"

It is an old legend at St. Jim's that when the first fall of snow comes, the ghost of the White Monk walks. None of the juniors, of course, believe for a moment that anything of the sort will ever happen. But it does happen, and on the first fall of snow! A spectre, dressed in the white robes and cowl of an old monk, starts to haunt the quadrangle. Who is the ghost? It is proved that no boy in the school is playing a hoax. Yet it is difficult to account for it otherwise. Tom Merry & Co. don't believe in the supernatural, but their ghostly visitant gives them enough scares to make them wonder whether they have a spectral presence in their midst.

You will greatly enjoy this exciting

long yarn, which Martin Clifford tells in his inimitable and fascinating style.

"HANDFORTH THE GHOST-HUNTER!"

In next Wednesday's thrilling chapters of our gripping serial, the St. Frank's boys have a hectic time with a ghost, too. In the night all sorts of weird things happen, which put Handy so much on edge that he takes his chum McClure for a ghost, and promptly "dots him one"! That's characteristic of the impetuous Handforth, but he's determined to lay that ghost!

This instalment is packed with surprises and breathless incidents, and, with a ripping Yuletide issue of "Tom Merry's Weekly" and our other usual features, completes a tip-top Christmas Number of the GEM. There will bound to be a big rush on it, so make sure you are one of the first—or, safer still, order it in advance.

HARD-HEADED!

A native in Durban is thanking his lucky stars to-day that he was born with a very hard head. African natives usually have tough skulls, but you will agree that this native has a particularly hard one when you read what happened to him. He was working on the ground

PEN PALS COUPON

8-12-34



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.

Miss Peggy M. Whitehouse, Mon Abri, 20, Well Grove, Hove, Edge, Lightcliffe, near Halifax, Yorks, wants girl correspondents; age 13-15; riding, swimming, cricket, tennis, books, films; Ireland, France, Egypt, China, etc.

Alfred Hill, 15, Butler Road, Dagenham, Essex, wants a pen pal in Germany, France, or China; age 15-16; stamps, Scouts, cigarette cards.

Billie Lloyd, Albemarle Hotel, Marine Parade, Brighton, wants correspondents; age 13-15; British Empire, South America, France, Germany, and the Near and Far East.

T. Making, Lower Quinton, near Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, wants pen pals.

J. Weatherley, 6, St. Mary's Crescent, Hayes, Middlesex, wants correspondents in the Empire and China; age 12-14; sports, autographs, souvenirs.

Blake Dempster, Scottburgh, Natal, South Africa, wants a

pen pal interested in stamps; India, China, Japan, Spain, Egypt, South America.

Arthur Saxby, 31, Regent Street, Yeoville, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants correspondents; age 16-17; sports, films, photography.

Miss Joan Yih, 119, Warwick Street, Liverpool 8, wants a girl pen friend; age 14-15; overseas preferred; literature and sports.

Soymour Faiga, 17, Alexandra Street, Berea, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wants a correspondent in Australia or England; meccano; age 12-16.

Robert McIndoe, 190, Albertbridge Road, Belfast, Ireland, wants pen pals; age 14-16; stamps, books, football, cricket; Australia, Egypt, India.

George Hind, 94, Dorchester Avenue, Palmers Green, near Hedge Lane, London, N.13, wants a pen pal in Australia, Canada, or U.S.A.; age 15-16; aeroplanes, swimming, dance bands, stamps, football, saxophones.

N. R. Prasad, e/o Kishan Prasad & Co., Ltd., 207, Kalbadevi Road, Bombay 2, India, wants correspondents in Germany, Italy, China, Japan, Malta, Russia; keen on sports; age 16-19.

Miss G. Silvertown, 55, Filey Avenue, London, N.16, wants a girl correspondent in Canada, Australia, and Ireland; films and dance bands; age 15-18.

(Continued on page 27.)
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THE CANINE CROONER!

Dance-band crooners are not popular with everybody, but there is a crooner in Prague who fully deserves all the popularity he is getting. For this crooner is a wolfhound dog! He can sing many favourite dance numbers in the approved style of the crooner. But his cleverness doesn't end there; he can also play the drum and the cymbals. Good dog!

TAILPIECE.

Schoolmaster: "What is blotting-paper, Tommy?"

Tommy: "It is something we hunt about all over the place for while the ink is getting dry!"

THE EDITOR.

TOM MERRY'S CANNIBAL!

(Continued from page 12.)

"Ahem!" said the Head.

This was really a brilliant stroke on the part of Tom Merry, as it placed the responsibility on the shoulders of Dr. Holmes, instead of upon his own.

"Yaas, wathah, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "We should all be vewy pleased to be guided by your advice, sir."

"Ahem!"

"I'm sure that we couldn't ask anything better, sir," said Blake.

"Ahem! I will consider. Bring the man in here, Merry, and let me see him."

"Certainly, sir!"

Tom Merry opened the door of the study and called to M'pong. The black man was surrounded by a curious crowd. He turned immediately at Tom Merry's voice and pushed his way through the crowd.

"Come in here, M'pong. The Head wishes to see you."

"Yes, Mass' Tom!"

M'pong entered the Head's study. Dr. Holmes rose, and regarded him through his spectacles with great interest. Tom Merry whispered to the black man.

"This is the Head—the great chief—you savvy? Great ju-ju—you lib for obey him. Him great chief here."

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

The big black advanced towards Dr. Holmes, fell upon his knees before him, and touched the floor with his forehead. Dr. Holmes regarded him with astonishment.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "What is he doing?"

"That's his Congo way of paying his respects, sir," said Monty Lowther.

"Bless my soul!"

"My hat!" murmured Manners. "If I had my camera I—"

"Lib for get up, M'pong," said Tom Merry.

M'pong rose to his feet.

"Merry tells me that you saved his life, and that you wished to come to England with him, M'pong," said the Head, a little flurried.

"Yes, sah."

"Do you not find it very cold in England?"

M'pong shivered.

"Yes, sah."

"Do you wish to return to your native country?"

M'pong looked puzzled. The precise English of the Head of St. Jim's was a little beyond his attainments in the language. Tom Merry translated.

"You lib for Congo, M'pong?"

M'pong shook his head vigorously.

"No, sah. Me no want to leabe Mass' Tom. Me lib for die with Mass' Tom."

The doctor stroked his chin thoughtfully. He couldn't help being touched by the simple attachment of the black man. But he could not think that the man from the Congo was a suitable inmate for the old school.

"I suppose he had better remain here for the present, Merry," said the Head, "while we consider what can be done with him. It is a very awkward state of affairs. I hope his temper can be relied upon."

"I—I hope so, sir."

"I suppose he has no deadly weapons about him?" said Dr. Holmes, a little nervously.

Tom Merry smiled.

"Oh, none, sir!"

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No. 43. Vol. 1. (New Series.)

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling



Hallo, everybody! I hear a U.S. factory was bombarded by strikers. "Shooting the works!" "Does that plant belong to the Arbutus family?" inquired the professor. "No, sir," answered the gardener, "to the borough council!" I am told Wayland Ramblers have just signed on a Scots goalkeeper, because they think he will be more "saving." And then there was the poacher who explained that he only carried a gun because he was afraid of rabbits. A "fur-fetched" story! A Wayland house has been burgled six times in six weeks. A "repeating rifle!" Quick story: "And why wasn't your examination paper as good as the top boy's?" demanded Curly Gibson's pater, visiting St. Jim's. "Well, you see, pater, he comes of clever people!" said Curly. "Why is it that railway porters are always so sympathetic?" asks Skimpole. Perhaps because they are always shouldering other people's "burdens." Oh yes, and it was old Skimmy who thought a livery company was a meeting of retired Indian colonels! Talking of Indians, Buck Finn says North American Indians are the most secretive people on earth. Red men tell no tales. Crooke complains that during last vac the cawing of numberless birds woke him up early every morning. Too many rooks spoiled the sloth! "Is throwing the hammer difficult?" inquires Digby. Just hit your thumb with it first—you'll find you'll throw it quite a long way! Several juniors have been breaking bounds in order to disport themselves on the new Wayland skating rink. An "ice" state of affairs! Hot from the Third Form Room: "What comes after 'O'?" asked Mr. Selby. "Yeah!" replied Wally D'Arcy. Yeah—and after that, a licking. Talking of licking, Blake says he dislikes sticking stamps on letters. Send postcards, old chap! Figgins knows a man who said "Sh-h-h!" at a football match as the crowd yelled, and was promptly sat on. Nobody realised that the man stuttered, and was only trying to say "Shoot!" Skimpole tells me he has just bought some new books on psychology, with metal covers. We fear they have "dry rot" inside, however! Buck Finn tunes in to tell me that in America a crooner gets five hundred pounds a week. Hi-de-hi—"dough"! "Boxers often love fighting," says Blake. Yes, we've seen them simply hugging each other with delight! Break away, there! The "Wayland Courier" reports that a local bad character has been charged at the Old Boiley. In hot water at last! "Does a hen sit or set?" demands "Chick Fan." Doesn't matter, old chap—the thing is, does she lay or lie? Joe Frayne says he wants to be a watch manufacturer. He is so good at making faces! Then there was the country yokel visiting the theatre, who, asked if he would like a stall, said no, he wanted a seat with cushions on it, like other people! Chin, chin, chaps!

GIANTS AT GRIPS IN ST. FRANK'S FLYING

Wally D'Arcy at the Microphone

You don't need to be a detective to see that this is going to be a "needle" match. St. Jim's and St. Frank's are level at the head of the Eastwood League, and this game played on the St. Frank's ground, may give one or the other a definite advantage. There's a keen wind blowing across the field. A record crowd is present, a good sprinkling of St. Jim's supporters among them. Even St. Jim's voice cheers lustily as Tom Merry makes his appearance on the pavilion steps, followed by the rest of the junior eleven. And here are St. Frank's, led on to the field by Nipper, and a tremendous cheer greets them.

Nipper wins the toss and takes with advantage the cross-wind will give. Phee! St. Frank's are away, like the wind in jumping crackers, is this how they play football at St. Frank's? Call it speedball—it's more appropriate! Nipper flashes his leather out to Tregellis-West on the wing who soars past defenders and centres bang Nipper's feet. Nipper, at high speed, makes the ball on the volley and slams home a terrific shot that gives poor old Wynn no chance at all! Spinning right there in the net is St. Frank's first goal. Hark at the shouting—would shame a Cup-tie!

Merry & Co. are looking grim and determined. But it needs more than steadiness to stem the St. Frank's sixty-mile-an-hour attack. Nipper leads his line in great style, never flagging, never at a loss. A sweeping pass to the wing sends Pitt away. Figgins veers through the St. Jim's defence like a knife through cheese, and bangs home number two for St. Frank's!

St. Jim's aren't stunned—they're just out paced. Up, you heroes! No, they can't get going—St. Frank's are swarming round the goal. Fatty Wynn tips one over when he seems lost. Great stuff, Fatty! Keep it! Watch that corner kick! Here it comes sailing in, curving—oh, heck, what bad luck it just beat Wynn and swept in under the bar—aided by the wind! No good grumbling. St. Frank's are value for a 3-0 lead if ever a team were. Hallo! St. Jim's are smashing their way into the picture for a spell. Skimpole's forceful football drives St. Frank's on to a defensive, while Merry, Blake, and the Lowther essay shots. Far-famed Ed Oswald Handforth holds the fort, however, in a cool and efficient manner. Now and again he succumbs to a temptation "to play to the gallery," but he's a great keeper! A smash drive from Gussy almost catches Handforth unawares, but Handforth just gathers himself. Now look—an overhead shot from Lowther completely deceives Handforth, dropping neatly into the net to give St. Jim's no hope. Good man, Lowther!

Hallo, it's going to be another. No, isn't! Sorry—hope ran away with it. Look out, Figgins! Watch Figgy race with long legs to catch Pitt, who's clear away. Pitt pulls up miraculously on the very edge and snaps a backward pass into the middle. Nipper, racing up, takes it in his stride and rams it home even as Fatty Wynn starts

Merry's Weekly



Week Ending December 8th, 1934.

GAME OF TWELVE GOALS

START AGAINST ST. JIM'S

heroically to save. St. Frank's ahead, 4-1, at half-time.

Facing a big deficit on your opponents' ground is no joke. Even Lowther looks solemn as St. Jim's turn out for the second half. But there's a glint in Merry's eye which I know appears when his back is to the wall! Watch out, boys! St. Frank's set the pace in the first period. But they are not so fast now. St. Jim's seem possessed with a fierce fire which will brook no opposition. See, Gussy—my major, you know—flies down the wing, centres. Tom Merry leaps high to the ball, flicks his head—and the ball is in the net! Boys, we've struck form! 4-2 against St. Jim's now.

Speedier and speedier St. Jim's return to the attack. Their usual game is slower, skilful. Now everything is sacrificed for speed—and for once, St. Frank's are rushed off their feet! Gussy goes through, sweeping down on goal. No centring this time! Watch old Gus steady and let fly like a giddy international. That's a goal, that was! Handforth didn't even glimpse the ball. Score, 4-3.

Now it's fierce going! Nipper, with a typical burst, all but adds a goal—but Fatty Wynn dives right at his feet and afterwards clears. Swaying to the other end, play is round the St. Frank's goal. Handforth is lost to sight in a melee. Suddenly Tom Merry comes out with the pill, to pop it home from close range. 4-4—level pegging!

St. Frank's are fighting back hard now. St. Jim's have for a moment lost grip, and Nipper threads through to finish off with an unstoppable shot from twenty-five yards. 5-4 to St. Frank's. Fatty Wynn saves three times in succession—marvellous goalkeeping! Now Merry breaks clear, dribbles like a wizard down the centre, all alone. Nobody but Handforth to stop him—Handforth rushes out—Merry evades him with a swerve and bangs home a smooth ground shot—5-5. Five minutes to go!

St. Frank's are not finished yet, however. Here come their forward line again in a last do-or-die effort to win. Travers receives the ball close in and—boomph!—it's in! Fatty Wynn was unsighted. St. Frank's lead 6-5. Two and a half minutes—is it as good as over? No! There's Tom Merry, heroic leader, away solo with the ball yet again, and even as the referee puts the whistle to his lips, Merry discharges a cannon-ball drive. See Handforth dive, full length in a gallant effort to save, but he's beaten—that was one of Tom Merry's very best, and it has levelled the scores on the actual stroke of time! Six goals all—what a match!

FULL RESULTS.

ST. FRANK'S .. 6	St. JIM'S .. 6
Nipper (3), Pitt, Tregellis- West, Travers	Lowther, Merry (4) D'Arcy
ABBOTSFORD .. 1	St. JUDE'S .. 0
CLAREMONT .. 2	BAGSHOT .. 1
HIGHCLIFFE .. 3	RIVER HOUSE .. 1
ROOKWOOD .. 4	REDCLYFFE .. 2
RYLCOMBE	GREYFRIARS .. 4
GRAM. SCHOOL 4	

ST. JIM'S SPOTLIGHT

THESE NAMES MAKE NOISE

DANCING LIKE A DERVISH

in the Third Form Room, Wally D'Arcy gave a remarkable exhibition before a crowd of fags. The intricate steps he performed, punctuated by wild leaps, drew forth gasps of admiration. Jameson attempted to imitate D'Arcy minor's weird evolutions, and very soon many of the Third were whirling and pirouetting, too. It was obvious, however, that nobody could equal D'Arcy minor, until he began to tire. Slowing down at last, Wally D'Arcy fixed his comrades with an indignant glare. To their absolute astonishment, he accused them of deliberately making fun of him, when he was suffering agonies from a licking just received from Mr. Selby! He explained that his wild leaps and hops were not part of a Dervish dance, but merely a means of letting off steam until the pain in his palms cooled off! But did the rest of the Third "cool off"? No! To Wally's chagrin, they united to give him a bumping for trying to lead them a "high old dance."

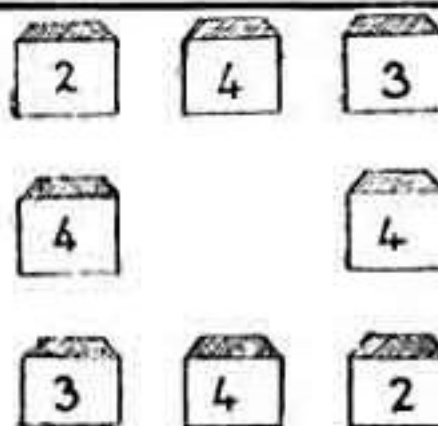
"NO ADMITTANCE—DO NOT DISTURB"

was the legend which decorated the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell passage the other evening. As it was past the hour for prep, the notice led to much speculation. The notion that the Terrible Three were doing extra "toot" was scouted, especially when Tom Merry and Manners were reported to have gone across to the New House to see Figgins about a footer fixture. What, then, was the mystery of Study No. 10? Gerald Crooke, having no scruples, put his eye to the keyhole and said he could see Monty Lowther poring over an exercise. Lowther's brow was furrowed, and his usually cheery grin was absent. His mouth set grimly, he drove his pen over the paper, only to scratch it all out again the next moment. This happened again and again, until at last the watchers could stand it no longer. Bursting open the door, they demanded an explanation. Was Lowther writing his comic column? asked Kangaroo humorously. Kangaroo jumped as Lowther replied in the affirmative, saying that he was trying to invent an entirely new joke. "And you've given it to me!" added Lowther, grinning cheerily. "When does a Kangaroo jump? When he sees a funny 'bounder.'"

CALIBAN'S PUZZLE CORNER

Can you arrange eight matches to form two squares and four triangles? (Solution next week.)

Solution of
Last Week's
Puzzle



"I will tell Taggles to prepare a room for him," said the Head. "I think, perhaps, a room over the garage will be excellent for him—the rooms occupied by my chauffeur are now vacant, as he is on his holiday. M'pong can occupy them for the present. He will feel more free there than in the House. You—you may go now, Merry."

"Yes, sir; and thank you very much, sir! Come on, M'pong!"

And the juniors quitted the study. M'pong walked beside Tom Merry. The old school seemed to impress M'pong very much. He had seen nothing like St. Jim's in Boma, the largest town he had ever seen before leaving his native land. Juniors appeared round all corners to stare at the black man. Wally and a crowd of the Third met them in the passage.

"Uncle Tom, by Jove!" said Curly Gibson. "Where's his giddy cabin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wonder if his wool will come off?" remarked Levison of the Fourth.

"Let him alone!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, rats!" said Levison.

And the cad of the Fourth, with a grin, caught hold of M'pong's long thick wool and jerked at it. M'pong uttered an exclamation of pain and knocked Levison's hand away.

"Don't touch me, you black hound!" said Levison. "You'd better keep your beastly niggers out of school, Tom Merry, I can tell you. We don't want any dirty cannibals here. I— Oh!"

Levison broke off.

M'pong, with a face convulsed with fury, had seized him in a savage grasp.

Levison struggled; but he was as a baby in the powerful grasp of the Congo savage. M'pong swung him off his feet and whirled him in the air. The floor and the walls swam round before the terrified eyes of Levison.

"Help!" he shrieked. "Oh, help!"

M'pong swung the cad of the Fourth high in the air and held him poised over his head, evidently considering which wall to hurl him against.

"You lib for die!" he muttered between his teeth.

"Help!"

Tom Merry sprang forward.

"M'pong! Stop!"

Tom Merry's voice rang out sharp and clear.

M'pong stopped. The voice of Tom Merry exercised a magical effect upon him. He lowered the trembling Levison to the floor and bowed his woolly head submissively to the hero of the Shell.

"Me lib for stop, Mass' Tom!"

Levison staggered away, and leaned helplessly, exhausted, against the wall. His face was white, his eyes starting from his head. He realised that he had had a fearfully narrow escape from death or terrible injury.

Tom Merry looked sternly at M'pong.

"M'pong! Is this your good behaviour?" he asked.

"M'pong sorry, sah!"

"If you had done as you intended, M'pong, do you know what would have happened? You would have been taken from here and put in prison for the rest of your life."

"Oh, Mass' Tom!"

"And I should have got into trouble for bringing you here," said Tom Merry.

"Me sorry, Mass' Tom! If Mass' Tom say so, me lib for die."

"Nothing of the sort," said Tom Merry. "But if you let your temper break out again you will have to leave this place at once."

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"Yes, Massa Tom."

The contrition on M'pong's face was so great and so genuine, that Tom Merry took compassion upon him. After all, the wild, untutored savage was little to blame. He was acting according to his instincts and his training, and Levison had provoked his rage.

Tom Merry turned towards the cad of the Fourth.

"You've had a pretty narrow escape, Levison," he said. "It was your own fault—you ought to know better than to insult a man who has never offended you."

Levison gritted his teeth.

"I'll complain to the Head," he said. "I won't go about in danger of my life. The villain may break out into cannibalism at any moment."

"Go and complain, then, and shut up!" said Blake.

Levison stamped away. He was beginning to recover his nerve, but his temper was bitter. The fright he had had left him in a fury. It was not a pleasant experience, and he meant to make Tom Merry and M'pong suffer for it if he could.

Tom Merry looked and felt considerably worried. M'pong was sorry for his fault now, but there was no telling when his wild temper might break out again. And there were other fellows as bad as Levison at St. Jim's. If any serious accident should happen the blame would be Tom Merry's, for bringing a savage to the school. Not that Tom Merry was thinking much about where the blame would fall, but he did not want anything of the sort to happen.

Kangaroo of the Shell clapped him on the shoulder.

"Come on, Tom Merry! We're holding a feed in the gym in honour of your return," said the Cornstalk. "You see, practically the whole of the Lower School is coming. And the feed is something gorgeous. You should have seen Fatty Wynn's face when he saw it."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Good!" he said. "I'm hungry. You fellows peckish?"

"What-ho!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I feel decidedly peckish, deah boy."

"Hungry, M'pong?"

"Me lib for cat, Mass' Tom."

"Come on, then!"

Tom Merry meant to keep the savage under his own eye. M'pong was now very quiet and contrite. But Tom Merry felt a great deal as if he were taking a lion about with him.

The scene in the gym was most imposing.

Tables had been laid, and chairs arranged, and the tables were loaded with good things. Chairs and forms had been borrowed from all quarters. And there were seats for all. The feed was a great success, especially from Fatty Wynn's point of view. The juniors enjoyed themselves—and fed themselves—to the full. As Tom Merry remarked, it fully made up for all they had missed while in Africa.

When the feed finally finished, there was only one junior who was still going strong, and, needless to say, that one was Fatty Wynn!

CHAPTER 10.

The Cannibal's Breakfast!

TOM MERRY slept soundly that night in his old bed in the Shell dormitory in the School House.

It was a very comfortable bed, and it felt more comfortable that night than it had ever felt before. It was good to be back at the old school—good to be among his old friends again—good to have clean sheets, instead of a rough blanket haunted by ants, to sleep in. The Congo was very well for an adventure, but England was the place to live in. Tom Merry thought so dreamily and he fell asleep. The clang of the rising-bell in the morning was pleasant to the ears.

Clang—clang!

Tom Merry sat up in bed and yawned. The sun was streaming in at the high windows of the dormitory; it was a fine, cold winter's morning. Tom Merry hurled his pillow at Monty Lowther to awaken him, and Lowther started up.

"Ow! Hallo!"

"Time to get up—"

"You fathead!"

"Hallo! Where's Manners?" asked Tom Merry, as he turned out of bed. "He's up first. Where has he got to?"

Monty Lowther chuckled.

"Oh, he's up early to develop his precious films. He's brought home yards of them from Africa. We shall have the blessed study decorated with photographs of African scenes, like a giddy wallpaper. Palm-trees with fruit—palm-trees without fruit, niggers bathing—niggers who never bathe, crocodiles basking in the sun, river scenes, the Congo seen from the south—the south seen from the Congo—and so on. We shall never hear the end of

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Manners' photographs. We were asses to let him take his camera."

Tom Merry laughed.

The chums of the Shell went down, and Tom Merry tried the study door in the Shell passage. It was locked on the inside, and an irritable voice came through.

"Who's that? Go away!"

"What are you up to, Manners?"

"I'm developing my films. You can't come in—I've got the frame over the window and the red lamp going."

"Can we help you?" asked Lowther.

A snort was audible from the study.

"No, you can't!"

"Any of them successful?" asked Lowther through the keyhole.

A-louder snort.

"Yes, ass—all of them! I never had a better set of negatives. I only wish I had thought of snapping M'pong when he was sticking the shark. I thought of it, afterwards."

Tom Merry and Lowther laughed, and went downstairs. It was useless to think of getting into the study when Manners was developing negatives there. When the study was turned into a dark room it was like Gibraltar—impossible to capture.

The chums of the Shell strolled out into the quad. It was a fine fresh morning, and it was pleasant and invigorating to the juniors after their experience of the sickly breath of African swamps.

"Oh, this is ripping!" said Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather! I wonder how Pongo is getting on?" he remarked.

Lowther was referring to M'pong, not to Wally's dog Pongo. Most of the St. Jim's fellows had already short-ened M'pong to Pongo.

"Let's go and see him," said Tom Merry.

They made their way to the garages. The apartments attached to the garages, formerly occupied by the chauffeur, had been assigned to M'pong, and the juniors had seen him bestow there the previous night before going to bed. But M'pong was not there now. In the bed-room the bedclothes were in an untidy heap on the floor, showing that the black had slept there instead of upon the bed. And M'pong was gone.

"I wonder where he is," Tom Merry said, rather unasily.

"Let's look for him!"

The chums looked round the garages, but M'pong was not to be seen. They strolled up and down, round the kennels and the outbuildings, and looked round the chapel and the gym. But the black man was not to be seen. In the quad they encountered the chums of the Fourth, who had just come out for a saunter before breakfast.

"Seen anything of M'pong?" asked Tom Merry.

"No," said Blake. "Isn't he in his quarters?"

"No. We've been looking for him. I hope he isn't in any mischief," said Tom Merry anxiously.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll find him for you, if you like," said Herries.

"Eh? How can you find him?"

"Towser—"

"Towsah!"

"Yes," said Herries, with emphasis. "Towser will find him. I'll fetch Towser, and if you show him something belonging to Pongo, he'll track him down in next to no time. You know what a wonderful dog Towser is on a scent."

"Ahem!"

"Look here—"

"Pwaw leave Towsah where he is, Hewwies, deah boy. That dog has no respect whatever for a fellow's trowsahs."

"Oh, rats!"

"If you say wats to me, Hewwies—"

"More rats!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

The Terrible Three strolled away, leaving the Fourth Formers to argue. They looked into the Head's garden. That was forbidden ground to the juniors, but there was no telling whether the Congo black might not have invaded it.

Tom Merry gave a sudden start as he caught sight of a thin column of smoke rising above a thicket of rhododendrons at the extreme end of the garden.

"Look there!" he muttered.

Monty Lowther nodded, but did not reply. They hurried down the garden. In a little clearing in the midst of the rhododendron bushes, M'pong was squatted upon his haunches beside a fire made of sticks ruthlessly dragged from the trees about him. A fowl and a rabbit were cooking over the embers, and several cleanly picked bones showed that the savage had already disposed of part of his repast.

The juniors stared at the black in blank dismay. It had been fully explained to M'pong that he was to take his meals indoors, at a table with knife and fork. But the

nature of the savage was too strong for him. He had been up at dawn, and he had prepared his own breakfast in his own way. Tom Merry wondered where he had obtained the rabbit from, till he saw the white, furry skin on the ground. It was one of the boy's tame rabbits that had fallen a victim to M'pong's voracious appetite.

"M'pong!"

The black started up.

He stood before Tom Merry, and if colour had been able to show in his black face, no doubt he would have blushed.

He knew that he had been doing wrong, and stood like a schoolboy found out in a fault, penitent, but more troubled at being found out than at having done wrong.

"Mass' Tom!"

M'pong's new clothes were sadly stained with dust and dirt and grease. But cleanliness is not a virtue of the Congo savage. Tom Merry had had great difficulty in making him understand that it was a good idea to wash. But as for washing every day, even his respect for Tom Merry could not prevent M'pong from regarding that as simply ludicrous.

"You should not have done this, M'pong."

"Me sorry, Mass' Tom."

"You must not light fires here, M'pong. You must not take your meals out of doors like a savage. You must do as I tell you."

"Yes, Mass' Tom."

Tom Merry sighed. M'pong was ready with promises, and he meant well, but a savage was not to be turned into a civilised man in a few days. M'pong followed Tom Merry back to his quarters, and there washed and dressed himself, and looked all the better for it. But it was only until the next time, as Tom Merry knew.

CHAPTER 11.

Levison's Scheme!

THERE was trouble that morning over M'pong's little escapade.

Mellish of the Fourth was the owner of the white rabbit, and he made an uproar about it that was quite out of proportion to the loss. Mellish bred white rabbits to sell to the other fellows at a profit, and it was not a case of losing a pet. Mellish had never had a pet. But he had a grievance now, and he aired it. Levison and Mellish never lost an opportunity of trying to score against Tom Merry, and here was an opportunity. They made the most of it.

The whole school echoed with the fact that Mellish's white rabbit had been killed and eaten by the Congo cannibal. Tom Merry offered to pay for it most liberally, but Mellish refused at first with great dignity.

"It's not the value of the animal," he said, "but I was fond of it. It was my pet, and I miss it. That's what I feel so deeply."

Then Tom Merry lost his temper.

"Don't tell lies!" he exclaimed, with more directness than politeness. "You weren't fond of it. You're never fond of anything. You don't know what it is to be fond of animals!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Don't tell lies on the subject," said Tom. "Say what you'll take for the rabbit, and shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Do you want the money, or not?" snapped Tom Merry. Mellish decided that he did. He named the price that was three times the market value of any white rabbit, and Tom Merry paid it.

Mellish was settled with, so far as the money went. But he still complained, and trailed his wounded affection, as it were, before the whole school in search of sympathy. And as all St. Jim's did not know Mellish so well as Tom Merry did, he gained a certain amount of sympathy on the subject.

But Mellish was not the only troublesome person. The chicken that M'pong had cooked with the rabbit belonged to Taggles, who kept chickens. M'pong had very vague ideas on the subject of personal belongings. He generally took what he wanted wherever he could get it, in the natural manner of a savage.

Taggles came inquiring after his missing chicken with a very grim look. Tom Merry settled with him more easily than with Mellish. Taggles, having made a good profit on the transaction, retired satisfied, and, in fact, rather hoping that M'pong would steal another of his chickens.

But more to be dreaded than Mellish or Taggles was the Head. When the Head saw that burnt patch in his garden, and saw the tall branches whence M'pong had obtained his brewwood, he seemed to be on the verge of an apopleptic fit.

Tom Merry was sent for. He came into the Head's study

(Continued on the next page.)

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with a very solemn expression upon his face. He knew that he was in for it.

"Merry, you know what that black savage has done?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You understand, of course, that such outrages are intolerable?" the Head exclaimed warmly.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir!"

"I dare say you are!" the Head said somewhat tartly.

"Unfortunately your sorrow will not repair the damage that man has done."

"I—I suppose not, sir. But—"

"It must be clearly understood, Merry, that if any further outrage occurs here the man must be sent away from the school."

"Oh, sir!"

"There is no alternative. I have had a complaint from Levison that the black man attacked him savagely. Now he has made fires in my garden, and stolen rabbits and chickens to cook there. You must see that the thing is impossible. At the next outrage he must go, and you had better warn him of it."

"Very well, sir."

Tom Merry quitted the Head's study with a heavy heart. He realised that St. Jim's was not the place for a reformed cannibal. He wondered whether M'pong was beginning to realise it, too. The sharpness of the weather would probably have some effect in helping the Congo savage to understand that his native land was the proper place for him. Many times already he had been seen crouching over fires, trying to keep warm, and trying in vain.

Tom Merry went in to morning lessons, but during lessons he was haunted by the fear that M'pong might be up to something. Immediately the Shell were dismissed Tom hurried off in search of the savage.

He found M'pong in his quarters this time. The Congo black had piled up a great fire, and the room seemed to Tom Merry like an oven. But it was evidently not warm enough for M'pong, for he was crouching over the fire with an overcoat on, and the blanket from his bed wrapped round him. He turned a pitiful glance upon Tom Merry as the Shell fellow entered.

"Cold, M'pong?" asked Tom Merry.

M'pong's teeth chattered.

"Yes, sah! Me lib for die with cold, Mass' Tom!"

"Poor old Pongo!"

"Always all the time lib for cold like dat, Mass' Tom?"

M'pong asked the question uneasily.

"Well, no," said Tom. "We have warm summers, though not so warm as the Congo. But the winter is here now, and we may have ice and snow soon."

"What dem, Mass' Tom?"

Tom Merry explained what ice and snow were. At the idea of the cold being so great as to solidify water, M'pong shuddered visibly.

"Oh, Mass' Tom! I know you lib for tell troof."

"Of course, M'pong."

"It is drefful, Mass' Tom!"

Tom Merry smiled ruefully.

"I warned you that you wouldn't like the country, my poor old chap," he said.

"Me no savvy it like dis," said the unfortunate cannibal.

"Why you not lib for Congo, all de time?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"We wouldn't live on the Congo at any price," he said. "We like this country, and we like the cold."

M'pong wondered. Evidently to him the blazing sun and the fetid swamps were the paradise of the globe, and a cold country a weary place for exiles. It all depended on the point of view, and M'pong's view was very different from Tom Merry's.

"Would you like to go home, Pongo?"

"Me no leabe Mass' Tom!"

But M'pong's protest was evidently weaker.

"Mass' Tom lib for Congo two time?" he asked.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Perhaps, M'pong. But it's not likely."

"Congo better dan dis, Mass' Tom!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Me debblish cold!"

"I'm sorry, Pongo. Shove on some more coals and give yourself a good baking. I think I'll get out; I can't stand the heat, it's suffocating me."

And Tom Merry quitted the room. He left M'pong crouching over the fire. He drew a deep breath of keen, cold air as he went into the quad, and felt relieved. The sufferings of the Congo savage touched his heart, and he could not share the choking atmosphere of the heated room. There was a call behind him, and he looked back to see M'pong at the window, with a blanket round him.

"Mass' Tom!"

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"Hallo! Here's Uncle Tom in his cabin!" said Levison, strolling up with Mellish. "Looks a picture, doesn't he?"

"Clear off!" said Tom Merry angrily. "What is it, M'pong?"

"Me debblish cold, Mass' Tom! Me lib for rum—get warm!"

"You must never touch that stuff," said Tom Merry.

"Rum wouldn't make you any warmer, old son. It would warm you for a time and then leave you colder. You can't have it!"

"Yes, sah!"

And M'pong drew sadly in and closed the window, and crouched over the fire again. He was realising that it had been a mistake to come to England. Tom Merry walked away with a clouded brow.

If M'pong should at any time find intoxicants there would be terrible mischief, he was sure of that. He could hardly get any at the school, but if he went out it would be easy enough. What would happen then? Tom Merry felt that the responsibility of looking after his cannibal was almost too much for him.

Levison stood with his hands in his pockets watching Tom Merry as he walked away, a cynical smile upon his face.

"My aunt!" he murmured. "What a game!"

Mellish looked at him.

"What do you mean, Levison?" he asked.

Levison chuckled softly.

"There's a way of getting our own back on Tom Merry—and on that black brute, too—to get him kicked out of St. Jim's, and perhaps Tom Merry, too, for bringing him here."

"How?" asked Mellish eagerly.

"Suppose that black brute were given the rum he wants—"

Mellish started.

"My hat! Levison! It may make a madman of him! You don't know what he'd do—murder somebody, perhaps!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he's not likely to do anything so bad as that; I suspect that his savageness is partly humbug, and put on to make the fellows afraid of him, you know. But I've no doubt he'd have a glorious time—smashing things up and all that. They'd have to shift him out of the school then."

Mellish grinned.

"I suppose so. But if he—"

"Oh, if he tried to do any real harm, there are enough fellows here to down him, I suppose," said Levison carelessly. "What do you think of it for a lark?"

"Too jolly dangerous."

"Then you can keep out of it!" sneered the cad of the Fourth.

"Thanks, I will!" said Mellish.

"Mum's the word, then!"

"Right-ho! But I don't want to know anything about it," said Mellish, and he walked away.

Levison remained alone, thinking out his scheme; and cunning as he was, he did not realise how terrible the consequences of his unscrupulous action might be.

CHAPTER 12.

M'pong Breaks Out!

THE next day was a half-holiday, and the St. Jim's juniors were playing Rylcombe Grammar School, on the latter's ground.

While Tom Merry & Co. were away was an excellent opportunity for Levison to carry out his scheme. Tom Merry was far from having any suspicion of it. Had the idea crossed his mind, he would never have suspected even Levison of such reckless wickedness. But the idea did not cross his mind. He was a little uneasy at leaving M'pong alone for the afternoon, but that was all. He did not think of Levison at all in connection with the savage.

"I suppose I shall have to go!" he remarked, when the junior footballers were making their preparations to set out.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Though, of course, if you wished to stand out, Tom Merry, I should be quite willing to captain the team."

"The team wouldn't!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, you must come," said Kangaroo decidedly. "The Grammarians beat us hollow while you fellows were away—and Gordon Gay & Co. are in ripping form now, too. You must come. We're going to give the Grammar School socks this time, and you've got to help!"

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry. "I feel rather uneasy about M'pong, that's all. I'll go and see him before we start."

Tom Merry found M'pong in his room, shivering over the fire. The savage spent very little time out of doors. He looked pitifully at Tom Merry.

"Would you like to come and watch a footer match, Pongo?" asked Tom Merry.

M'pong hesitated.

"Big fire dere?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha! No; footer is played in the open air. You stand and look on."

M'pong shuddered.

"Me lib for stay indoors, Mass' Tom."

"Now, look here, Pongo, if I leave you here, will you promise not to go out of doors until I come back?" asked Tom Merry. "I shall come straight back when the match is over, so I shall be back here at half-past four. I'm going to take my bike so as to get back directly. You won't go out of doors?"

"No, Mass' Tom."

"Good enough! Good-bye, Pongo!"

"G-good-bye, Mass' Tom!" shivered Pongo.

And Tom Merry went in the charabanc with the rest of the team and other juniors who were going to watch.

Taggles was busy near the garages, and while he was Levison did not venture to approach M'pong's quarters; he loitered about in odd corners, waiting. On the football field the Fifth and Sixth were playing a Form match, and a crowd had gathered round to watch the game. Excepting for Taggles, Levison ran little risk of being observed.

The school clock struck half-past three. Levison was growing savage and impatient. If he did not get the business over soon Tom Merry's return would nip it in the bud. If Tom Merry returned when M'pong had drunk the whisky it did not matter.

Taggles was finished at last and he went off towards his lodge, leaving Levison a clear field. The cad of the Fourth hurried to M'pong's door and knocked at it.

"Lib for come in!" said the voice of the negro inside.

Levison opened the door.

M'pong was sitting by the fire, the blankets round him. He scowled at the sight of Levison; he had not forgotten his first encounter with the cad of the Fourth.



With a face of fury M'pong seized Levison in a savage grip, whirled him in the air, and held him poised above his head, evidently considering which wall to hurl him against. "You lib for die!" muttered the negro. Tom Merry sprang forward. "M'pong, stop!"

Levison and Mellish stood in the gateway looking after the departing motor-coach crammed with cheerful footballers.

"Well, they're gone," said Mellish.

"Yes," drawled Levison.

"What about your little scheme? Got the rum?"

"Whisky will do."

"Well, have you got the whisky?"

"I'm going to get a bottle out of Taggles' lodge," said Levison coolly; "then if there are inquiries it will be supposed that M'pong stole it. He's stolen chickens and rabbits, so he might steal a bottle of whisky."

Mellish looked at him uneasily. He admired the cunning of his associate, but it made him a little bit afraid of Levison.

"You'll jolly well end up in prison," he said.

"Thanks!" yawned Levison.

He strolled away. Having ascertained that Taggles, the porter, was busy, Levison coolly entered the lodge and took the bottle of whisky from the cupboard in the little parlour. Taggles, the porter, was supposed to be a tectotalter, and it was probable that if he missed the bottle of whisky he would say nothing about it.

Mellish saw Levison come out with the pocket bulging under his jacket. He walked out of the gates. He did not wish to have a hand in the plot, and he did not wish to be on the scene when M'pong started his rampage.

"You lib for vamoose!" he said threateningly.

Levison smiled an agreeable smile.

"It's all right, M'pong," he said. "I've brought you a present from Tom Merry."

"From Mass' Tom!"

"Yes. Look!"

Levison drew the bottle of whisky from under his jacket. The black man's eyes glistened at the sight of it, showing that he was no stranger to the potent fire-water.

"Bery good!" he said. "You sure Mass' Tom sent it?"

"Yes, of course. You see, he said you couldn't have rum; but this is whisky, and it will make you warm," said Levison.

"Me lib for drink him," said M'pong.

Levison handed him the bottle and left the room quickly. He closed the door and stood for a moment listening outside. From within the room he heard the sound of gurgling and gurgling. M'pong was drinking from the bottle!

Levison chuckled softly and hurried away. If M'pong drank the whole of a large bottle of whisky the results were likely to be sudden and surprising.

Levison concealed himself in a loft at a little distance, from the window of which he could watch M'pong's quarters. Ten minutes passed.

Then a sound was heard from the savage's room; it was the sound of a wild, tuneless chant—low at first, and then rising higher and louder.

No notes were distinguishable; if there were any words they were in a barbarous African dialect which Levison did not comprehend. The chant sounded like a succession of consonants chanted without time or tune.

Levison grinned.

"He's beginning!" he murmured.

Crash!

Levison started. The glass of a pane in M'pong's window was smashed to atoms, and a bottle, broken by the shock, came hurtling through, falling in pieces along with the fragments of glass outside.

Levison turned a little pale and caught his breath; for a moment remorse and fear for his wicked action smote him. The savage had hurled the empty whisky bottle through the window. He had drunk all the powerful liquor, and evidently it had maddened him.

"My hat!" murmured Levison.

Crash, crash, crash!

The crashing of furniture, smashed up by heavy blows, resounded from M'pong's quarters. Levison caught a glimpse of him through the broken window. M'pong seemed like a madman. He had a leg from his table in his hand, and, using it as a club, he was smashing everything in the room.

Crash, crash, crash!

"Good heavens!" muttered Levison, pale to the lips. "What will happen next?"

The crashing died away. Taggles, the porter, attracted by the noise, was coming towards the spot. M'pong came out of his door. He had his silk hat on the back of his woolly head, and his black face was flushed as much as it could flush under its colour; he was showing his teeth, and his eyes rolled wildly.

Taggles started back in alarm.

"My heye!" he ejaculated. "He's mad!"

M'pong rushed at him. The porter dodged him nimbly, but not nimbly enough. M'pong grasped him and tossed him into the garages. Taggles sat down there, almost stupefied, and gasped for breath.

M'pong ran on.

He was maddened by the liquor he had consumed and was evidently no longer responsible for his actions.

Under the influence of drink all the ferocious nature of the savage came out.

Levison remained in the loft trembling. Too late the young rascal repented of what he had done. What was to happen now? He hardly dared to think, but the vision of the savage rushing by with gleaming teeth and rolling eyes haunted him and would not leave him.

CHAPTER 13.

The Savage Runs Wild!

"GOAL!"

"Hurrah!"

Kildare of the Sixth had just put the ball into the Fifth Form net, and the crowd was cheering. Kildare, as he walked back to the centre of the field, suddenly stopped. He stared at a wild figure that was dashing towards the football field.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter with Pongo?"

"Great Scott!"

"My hat!"

"Look at him!"

The players forgot even the game. M'pong, with gleaming teeth and bloodshot eyes, dashed upon the football field. Kildare strode towards him sternly.

"M'pong! What's the matter with you?"

The black man glared at him.

"Me lib for drink!" he muttered. "You gib me rum. You savvy?"

Kildare started.

"You've been drinking!" he exclaimed.

The savage chuckled horribly.

"Me drink him—me warm now," he said. "Hang you—white trash! You lib for die!"

"He's drunk!" muttered Lefevre of the Fifth. "Mad drunk! That's what I say! He's dangerous!"

"Look out, you fellows! Keep back!"

"Give the brute a wide berth!" exclaimed Rushton.

Kildare advanced upon the black man. Darrell of the Sixth followed him, and then Monteith, the head prefect of the New House. The other fellows held back. Kildare fixed his eyes sternly upon the black man.

"Go back to your room!" he said.

"No lib for dem house."

"Go at once!"

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"You lib for die! Gib me rum!"

And M'pong's eyes rolled horribly.

Kildare set his teeth.

"Stand by me, you fellows!" he exclaimed. "The brute's been drinking, and he's dangerous. He will have to be secured."

"Look out!" shouted Monteith.

The black man made a rush at Kildare. He seized the captain of the school in his brawny hands.

Kildare was an athletic fellow, but he seemed a child in the hands of the powerful black.

He was swung off his feet into the air. Darrell and Monteith rushed desperately at M'pong. They grasped him, and dragged him back before he could hurl Kildare to the earth, as he evidently intended to do.

Baker and Rushton and Lefevre, and several more of the boldest fellows piled on. M'pong struggled furiously with numbers. Kildare wrenched himself loose, and lent his aid. A crowd piled on the brawny black man, seeking to secure him.

M'pong struggled to his feet, shaking the fellows off as a stag might shake off the dogs, and bounded free.

"You lib for die!" he shrieked. "You lib for die!"

"Run!" yelled Crooke of the Shell. And he set the example.

M'pong looked round wildly for a weapon. He tore up one of the wooden seats outside the pavilion, and whirled it over his head. Then the fellows ran—the Sixth as fast as the Second.

They crowded into the School House, leaving the black man raging in the quad.

"Shut the door!" said Kildare huskily.

The door was jammed shut.

Darrell shot the bolt upon it; and only just in time.

There was a terrific crash without as M'pong smote with the wooden garden seat.

Crash, crash, crash!

"My only Aunt Jane!" muttered Wally of the Third.

"There will be murder done! Don't tremble against me, Crooke! You're shaking me!"

Crooke's teeth were chattering. He staggered away to hide himself in his study. But Crooke was not the only one who was frightened. The raging of the black savage in the quadrangle was enough to shake anybody's nerves.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, came striding out of his study with a frowning brow. He gazed in astonishment at the crowd of fellows, some of them in football garb, in the Hall.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"The cannibal, sir."

"M'pong?"

"Yes, sir! He's broken out!" gasped Monteith.

Crash, crash!

The door trembled under the crashing from without. Mr. Railton stepped to the Hall window, and looked out into the quad. M'pong had thrown down his weapon now, and was gesticulating frantically on the steps of the School House with rolling eyes.

The Housemaster's lips set.

"The man has been drinking," he said.

"It looks like it, sir."

"Do you know where he obtained it?"

"No, sir."

"This must be inquired into," said the Housemaster. "I only trust that the man can be secured before he has done damage. I will see."

Kildare caught at the Housemaster's sleeve as Mr. Railton turned to the door.

"Don't go out, sir!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's anxiously. "The fellow is as strong as a horse, sir! He picked me up as if I were a kitten."

"Indeed he did, sir," said Rushton.

"But he must be secured!" said Mr. Railton.

"Hark!"

Crash, crash!

It was a sound of smashing windows. M'pong was raging in the quad now, and had quitted the School House door. Mr. Railton flung the door open. The black man was hurling stones at the House windows, the rage of destruction strong upon him. M'pong was the wild savage of the Congo again now, with a vengeance. He shouted in a barbarous African dialect at every succeeding crash.

"What—what—what is the matter, Mr. Railton?" exclaimed Dr. Holmes, coming through the crowd of juniors. "Is it that fearful negro?"

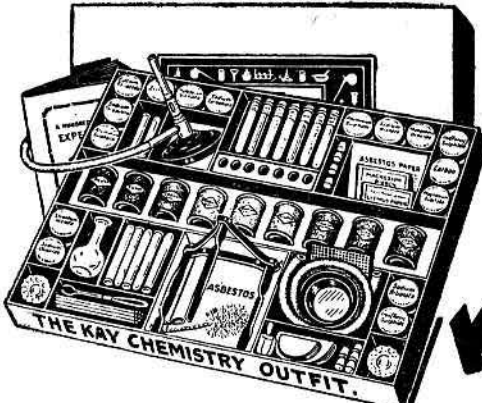
"I'm afraid so, sir. He is intoxicated."

"Good heavens! Foolish that I was to allow him to remain here," said the Head anxiously. "He will wreck the place. He must be secured. Dear me, he is coming towards us!"

The black man had just perceived that the School House

(Continued on page 22.)

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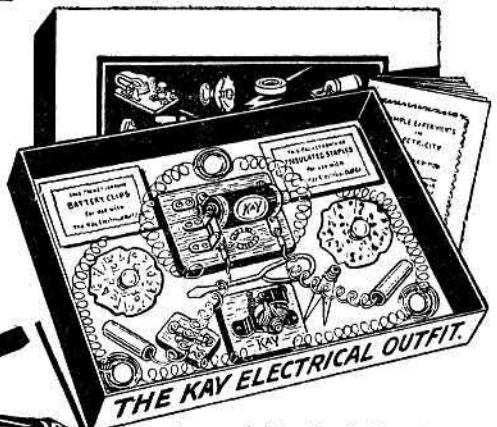


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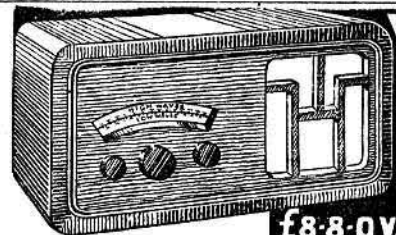
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door was open. He tore a branch from a tree, and, waving it above his head, charged back towards the House.

"Fasten the door!" gasped the Head. "The man may commit murder!"

Mr. Railton obeyed. The door was closed again, and fastened; and then there came the crash of the negro's club upon the outside of it, making it tremble.

The Head simply gasped. "What an utterly unheard-of happening!" he murmured. "The wretched man shall be sent away from the school immediately. What deadly calamities may happen before he is secured. Oh dear!"

"I think, sir, if some of the prefects came out with me—" suggested Mr. Railton.

"No, no! The danger is too great! He might kill some of you!"

Crash, crash!
"You lib for open door!" roared M'pong. "You lib for die! You poor white trash!"

"Bless my soul!"
There was the sound of the ringing of a bicycle-bell in the quad. Mr. Railton started and turned pale. He sprang to the window and looked out.

A cyclist had ridden in at the gates. It was Tom Merry of the Shell.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "He will be attacked—murdered! We must go to his aid, sir!"

He ran to the door.

CHAPTER 14.

The Cannibal Goes!

TOM MERRY jumped off his machine in the quad. He had caught sight of the black man, raging at the door of the School House. He did not know what was the matter with him, but he could see that he was on the warpath.

He threw his bicycle against a tree, and ran towards M'pong, calling to him.

"M'pong! M'pong!"
The black man heard him call, and swung round. The great club in his hands was raised to strike down the junior as he approached.

His distorted face, his bloodshot eyes, his furious gestures, and the smell of spirits that came from him, showed Tom Merry what had happened.

For a moment the junior's heart turned sick within him. M'pong was intoxicated—mad! Would he listen to the voice he was accustomed to obey? If not—

Tom Merry for a moment felt a shudder of horror run through him. He read death in the furious face of the savage.

But he did not hesitate; his courage did not fail. It was he who had brought the savage to St. Jim's, and he had his duty to do.

He ran towards the negro.
"M'pong!" he shouted.

The negro glared at him.
"Put down that club!" rapped out Tom Merry. "You hear me, M'pong? You lib for put down stick! Quick!"

For a moment there was hesitation in the savage face. The fierce instincts of the savage struggled with the habit of obedience, half broken. In that moment, Tom Merry's life trembled in the balance. If he had shown a sign of fear probably the savage instincts would have triumphed in M'pong's breast. But he did not. There was no fear in his face, no faltering in his voice. His hand rose commandingly, and his eyes flashed.

"You lib for obey me, M'pong!"
The club crashed down on the steps. M'pong, half tamed, stood with hands clenching and unclenching.

"M'pong, you lib for room!"
Again the negro hesitated. But Tom Merry's hand pointed imperatively, and the black man slunk away. Once he looked back, to meet a steady, stern gaze, and then he went on, and disappeared into his quarters.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.
Now that the strain was over he felt almost sick.

The School House door opened; the Head appeared. There was deep emotion in Dr. Holmes' face.

"You have acted bravely, Merry," he said. "I can forgive you now for having brought that terrible savage here. He must leave at once, of course. But you have probably prevented him from doing terrible harm by your courage. Thank you, Merry."

"I am sorry this has happened, sir," muttered Tom Merry. "The poor fellow has got drunk from somewhere, sir. He is not responsible for what he does then. But I suppose he will have to go. I'll go and stay with him now, sir, till he is better."

"He may hurt you!" the Head exclaimed anxiously.
"He won't hurt me, sir."

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Tom Merry joined M'pong in his quarters. The fit of fury was over now; the negro lay upon his bed sleeping heavily. Tom Merry sat down quietly by the bedside. He did not mean to leave M'pong till he had fully recovered from the effects of the liquor.

Levison stole out of his hiding-place, trembling in every limb. Fear of being found out as the cause of the negro's outbreak lay heavily upon his mind.

Tom Merry sat for some time by the bedside of the sleeping savage. The other footballers returned from Rylcombe. They had beaten the Grammar School, and they returned in high spirits. But they became grave enough when they saw the broken windows and learned what had happened at St. Jim's during their absence. It was pretty clear to all that M'pong must go.

The negro awoke at last. He stirred and shifted and groaned and opened his wild eyes. He stared at Tom Merry with a guilty look, and pressed both hands to his woolly head.

"Oh, Mass' Tom, me lib for die in head!"
M'pong meant that his head was aching terribly. That was not surprising under the circumstances.

He pressed his great black hands to his temples and groaned. Then he shivered. The cold struck him as he awoke.

Tom Merry looked at him anxiously. He was very angry with M'pong, but he pitied him, too. He could see that the negro had caught a cold, which would probably turn out to be a severe one.

"It's no good talking, M'pong," said Tom Merry. "You know what you've done. You promised not to leave this place while I was gone—"

"Me drunk!" pleaded M'pong.

"Where did you get the liquor?"
Tom Merry listened, with a black brow, while M'pong explained. He mentally determined that Levison should be sorry for what he had done.

M'pong was shivering and trembling now with the reaction, and Tom Merry covered him up.

"Stay in bed, Pongo, old chap," he said. "You've got a cold, and you'll have to have a doctor. I'll be back soon."

"Yes, sah! Yes, Mass' Tom!" said poor M'pong submissively.

And M'pong had a cold—with a vengeance. For more than a week he struggled with it—and with the English climate. Rainy weather came on, and M'pong, from his sick room window, looked out upon glistening rain, and listened to howling winds. He thought of the heat of the Congo, and almost wept.

Tom Merry attended him assiduously. He told M'pong how Levison had been punished for what he had done—having been soundly thrashed in the Fourth Form dormitory, all the fellows lending a hand—but M'pong was too sick to feel revengeful. All M'pong could feel was an intense desire to get back to blazing suns and scorching winds and hot, thick, fetid swamps.

And when he was better he broached the subject himself without waiting for Tom Merry to do so.

"Big chief tink me lib for Congo?" he asked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, M'pong; I'm afraid the Head does think so."

"Me tink so, too, Mass' Tom."

"Do you, M'pong?"

"Yes, sah! Me lib for die in England," said M'pong piteously.

"Me no want leabe Mass' Tom; but me debblish cold! Me lib for Congo, or me die, Mass' Tom."

"I think you're right, old chap," said Tom Merry, much relieved.

"I shall be sorry to part with you, but you had better go back to the Congo."

"Me no like leabe Mass' Tom. Mass' Tom lib for Congo some day," said M'pong wistfully.

"Den see Mass' Tom again."

"Perhaps, M'pong. Anyway, I shall never forget you. You've been a jolly good friend to us, when we needed one," said Tom Merry, grasping the big black hand.

And when M'pong was well Tom Merry & Co. obtained leave to see him off at Southampton, and M'pong went on board a steamer for the West Coast, and the juniors waved their hats in farewell as the vessel glided out.

It was taking M'pong back to the country where he would be healthy and happy, and it was better so.

Tom Merry voiced the sentiments of all when he said:

"He was a splendid fellow, with all his faults!"

And Arthur Augustus said emphatically:

"Yaas, wathah!"

Out in the blue the steamer disappeared from sight, bearing away over the wide sea to the beloved swamps of his native land Tom Merry's cannibal.

THE END.

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Edward Oswald Handforth impressed upon his Christmas party the fact that Handforth Towers was the last word in ancestral mansions. But what a shock his guests got when they arrived at a creepy old house, with a ghost awaiting them!

Handforth's Christmas Party!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH leaned out of the window as the train slowed down against the snow-covered little platform. He peered eagerly at the ill-lighted lamps, and uttered a grunt of satisfaction. "North Walsham!" he said triumphantly. "By George! And about time!"

He flung the door open, and as he leapt lightly on to the platform, his feet skidded from under him, and he turned a back somersault.

"Jolly good, Ted!" said Willy Handforth, from the next window.

"My only hat!" gasped Handforth, sitting up dazedly.

"It might have been better," said Willy, as he jumped down. "Still, for a first attempt, it wasn't so dusty."

"Any more, my lad, and I'll rub your face in the snow!" said Edward Oswald, as he scrambled hastily to his feet. "Huh! North Walsham! A fine welcome to give, I must say! Why can't they put gravel on the platform, or something? I might have skidded under the train!"

He looked round, regretfully observing the fact that some of the Moor View girls had seen his undignified method of alighting.

But they soon forgot the incident as the party alighted. St. Frank's juniors were crowding out of several compartments, helping Irene Manners & Co. with their baggage, and generally making themselves useful.

In London, the merry holiday party had started off amid sleet, fog, and mud. But here, near the Norfolk coast, what a difference! Snow everywhere, and it was still falling—a cold, crisp, healthy feeling in the air—and a real atmosphere of Christmas.

"Well, thank goodness we've arrived!" said Irene Manners, as she stood on the platform. "Isn't it glorious here? Not a trace of mud—and snowing in just the way it ought to!"

"Rather!" said Doris Berkeley. "And am I hungry? Five hours without a bite of food—"

"Well, Ted wanted to get some lunch-baskets," said Winnie Pitt. "We refused them, and we mustn't grumble—"

"But how were we to know that the train would be three hours late?" interrupted Irene. "The plan was to get to Handforth Towers in time for dinner, and it would have

been all right if we had arrived at seven o'clock. But it's ten!"

"Oh, well, it's only two or three miles to the Towers, and then we shall have a royal welcome," said Ena Handforth. "My uncle's a sportsman, and I'm sure he'll give us all a wonderful time."

"And the hungrier we are, the better," said Doris, smiling.

There were over twenty in the party, and they all crowded down the platform towards the exit, with Edward Oswald Handforth in full control.

"Now, then, everybody!" he sang out, with a fatherly air. "I've got all the tickets, so follow me. Don't forget your bags and things, and get a move on!"

"Talking to me?" said Chubby Heath of the Third.

"I'm talking to everybody!" replied Handforth firmly.

"Rats!" said Chubby. "Juicy and I are Willy's guests!"

This was rather a sore point with Handforth, and he frowned. But it was hardly the time for arguing, especially as he had reached the exit, and the collector was asking for his tickets.

General Gregory Bartholomew Handforth, D.S.O., Handy's distinguished uncle, had told his brother's three children that they could each bring their own friends to Handforth Towers for the Christmas holidays. And they had taken full advantage of this wholesale invitation.

Edward Oswald, always lavish, had brought eleven Removites, making a round dozen of them altogether; Ena was accompanied by five of her chums from the Moor View School; and Willy, much to the regret of many Third Formers, had only selected his two personal chums, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon.

Still, the party was quite big enough to ensure a jolly Christmas, even if General Handforth had no other guests—which was most unlikely. For the general always maintained a big establishment at Handforth Towers, and was famous for his house parties.

Edward Oswald and Ena had never been to Handforth Towers at all, although Willy had paid a short visit once, a year or two back, with his mother.

The Christmas invitation of Handforth's uncle had been unexpected—just one of the general's impulses. And Willy, at least, was enthusiastic.

"You'll absolutely love the Towers!" he had declared. "Just the place for Christmas. Great panelled rooms—

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oaken rafters—open fireplaces. A lovely place, I can tell you!"

It suited Edward Oswald to take a crowd of Remove fellows there so that he could show them that the Handforth family had its big country mansions. He had been in the best of humours ever since the journey had started.

Not that it had been a journey to sweeten anybody's temper. Fog and slush in London—jostling crowds at Liverpool Street—delays in getting out of the metropolis—and then further delays all down the line. And the train, packed almost to suffocation, after another tedious wait at Norwich, had finally reached North Walsham at two minutes past ten, instead of in mid-evening.

Naturally, all plans were upset, for the party was supposed to reach Handforth Towers for dinner. But who cared? It was only a few nights to Christmas, and one couldn't expect anything else but delays at such a time.

The snow had put Handforth and his party into the best of spirits. For this was the kind of Christmas weather they had hoped for, and which had seemed so remote in muddy London. The surprise was a very welcome one. North Walsham Station was already converted into a fairyland of whiteness, with lights gleaming on the snow, and with myriads of flakes steadily falling.

With Handforth still leading, the St. Frank's fellows and Moor View girls emerged into the station yard.

"Hang on here a bit," said Handforth briskly. "I'll locate the cars."

There were several big motor-cars waiting, and Handforth reckoned that his uncle had sent at least three to collect the young guests—perhaps four. Nobody would mind a little crowding, anyhow. And it was only a journey of about two and a half miles.

"Handforth Towers?" asked Edward Oswald briskly, as he ran up to the first car he saw and accosted the chauffeur. "We're all here—"

"Sorry, sir," said the man. "I'm from Bacton."

Two other cars that Handforth approached moved off as he prepared to put his questions. And when he looked round he found that the remaining ones were already filling with people.

"Rummy!" he said, frowning. "What's the idea?"

Willy came hurrying up.

"Haven't you located them yet?" he asked.

"No, but they must be here," said Handforth gruffly.

"Uncle Gregory wouldn't be late—"

"Late!" echoed Willy. "I expect the cars came here at the right time, found the train was going to be hours late, and went back again."

Handforth looked indignant.

"This is a nice go!" he said warmly. "Just when I wanted to show the chaps that the Handforths could do things in style, too! Not a car here for us—and nothing in sight!"

"We'd better ask and see if we can find out anything," said Willy.

By this time all the cars had gone, and most of the foot-passengers, too. The station yard and the booking office were beginning to take on a deserted appearance. The boys and girls were waiting just outside, curious, but too polite to make any pointed inquiries.

"Shan't be a tick!" said Handforth, as he ran into the booking office.

He knocked against a porter.

"Oh, I say, do you know anything about the cars from Handforth Towers?" he asked breathlessly. "Have they been here earlier or something?"

"Haven't seen a sign of them, sir," replied the porter.

"There ain't been any cars here from Handforth Towers—not one all day, if it comes to that."

"Well, it's queer!" said Handforth, turning aside.

"Thanks!"

He went out again, and looked at the waiting group.

"There's a mistake, or something," he said apologetically. "There aren't any cars here to take us to the Towers."

"That's all right—we can walk," said Nipper.

"Walk!" roared Handforth. "Do you think I'm going to let my guests walk nearly three miles? It's a mystery to me! I sent a wire this morning, and that was on top of a letter that I wrote two or three days ago. Uncle Gregory gave the right orders, I'll bet a quid. Somebody else must have blundered."

"Oh, well, what are we going to do?" asked Ena practically. "It's no good waiting here, is it? If the cars are on the way, we might as well be walking, and we shall meet them."

"But we don't know the way!" objected Handforth, greatly worried.

"I know the way!" put in Willy briskly. "I came here a year or two ago Straight through the town, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,399

and then along the Mundesley road. Come on! We shall get cold feet if we stand about here."

And the whole party, much to Handforth's grief, started walking. This was not what he had desired at all!

"Snow" Joke for Handy!

N OBODY said anything, but it was generally felt that something was rather wrong.

For, after all, when a gentleman invited a large party to his country house for Christmas, and when that country house was nearly three miles from the station, it was only common courtesy to provide a conveyance of some kind.

Handforth was mystified, and while the boys and girls started on their trudge in the best of spirits, Edward Oswald himself was in an angry mood.

"Don't look so peeved, Ted," said Willy, as he fell into step beside his major, with Church and McClure on the other side.

"I am peeved!" growled Handforth. "And unless Uncle Gregory can give a jolly good explanation, I shall tick him off for this! What does he think we are—tramps? Does he expect us to walk miles and miles—"

"It may be one of his jokes," said Willy.

"Jokes!"

"Well, Uncle Greg is a bit of a sport, you know," Willy reminded him. "A pretty boisterous edition of the pater if it comes to that. Why, if we stopped still and listened, we should probably hear him talking to his guests at the Towers! He's got a voice like yours, Ted—only more so!"

"Never you mind about my voice," said Handforth. "I'm worried about this affair. It's so—so rude! I mean, inviting us down, and then neglecting—Hallo! What's this?"

He paused in his stride as they were passing a garage. "I'll tell you what!" he went on. "We'll hire some cars—"

"Not likely!" interrupted Church firmly. "Don't be such an ass, Handy! There's been a misunderstanding, I expect, and nobody minds. These things do happen at Christmas-time."

"All the same, it's too bad—"

"Nonsense!" laughed McClure. "Let's go on!"

Nobody would hear of putting his suggestion into practice. The bulk of the luggage had been sent on days ago, and there was nothing heavier to carry than a few attache-cases and small parcels.

North Walsham was very quiet, for most of the worthy inhabitants were already in bed. Willy, who was the possessor of an excellent memory, knew the way without any necessity to make inquiries. And this was a fortunate circumstance. For, after the town had been left behind, they were not likely to meet any pedestrians.

They passed through the lower end of the market square, and then turned down the short slope and bore off sharply to the right, on the Mundesley road.

"Queer little old place, this," said Irene, as she found Handforth by her side. "I hope Willy knows the way properly."

"If Uncle Gregory had sent the cars, Willy wouldn't have needed to know the way!" said Handforth, who was still thoroughly upset. "This is a bit too thick, Irene! It doesn't matter so much about the chaps, perhaps—"

"Well, we girls aren't grumbling," smiled Irene. "You needn't think we're afraid of a little exercise. If it came to that, I'll bet we could walk you fellows off your feet!"

"That's not the point, Renie," said Handforth. "You oughtn't to have to walk at all. I simply can't understand—"

"Give it a rest, Ted!" pleaded Willy. "Don't keep chewing the rag, old man! We're walking, and if you ask me, it's just one of uncle's games."

"Then I don't think much of his sense of humour!" retorted Handforth.

"My dear old son, it's just what Uncle Gregory would do!" chuckled Willy. "You know what a beggar he is for walking!"

"Is he?"

"Well, he walks ten miles every day of his life, anyhow," grinned Willy. "When I came down here that time, I was nearly without any feet by the time I left! It would be just like him to make us walk three miles through the snow!"

This seemed a very likely explanation of the little mystery, and so the subject was dismissed. Indeed, if it hadn't been for Handforth's original fuss, nobody would have thought anything at all. The trudge along the quiet, snowy roads was rather fun.

The full moon was obscured by clouds, but the diffused light was sufficient to show them the road and the hedges. And the countryside had a wonderful aspect, with the snow clinging to every gate and every tree and twig.

"It seems to me that we're going to have a tremendous lot of snow before we've done," said Reggie Pitt, who was escorting Doris Berkeley. "The wind's rising, too— Whoa! Look out for this flurry!"

"It's a regular storm!" laughed Doris.

"A fine night to be walking!" said Handforth gruffly.

"If you don't dry up about walking, Ted, we'll drop you into one of these ditches!" said Willy, with exasperation. "Uncle probably failed to send the cars because of the snow. You ought to know what it's like, motoring on snowy roads— My hat! Blessed if I'm not bringing up the subject myself!"

"Forget it!" advised Nipper. "We shall be there soon."

Before long they were entering the little hamlet of Swaf-field, where everything was silent and dark. There were only a few houses, and then the road bore sharply round to the right, while a small lane ran on straight ahead.

But the young people were warm enough—the exercise alone ensured this. And although the hour was late, there was nothing to worry about. They would soon be sitting down to a wonderful meal before a crackling log fire. It was something to look forward to—something to make them put their best foot foremost.

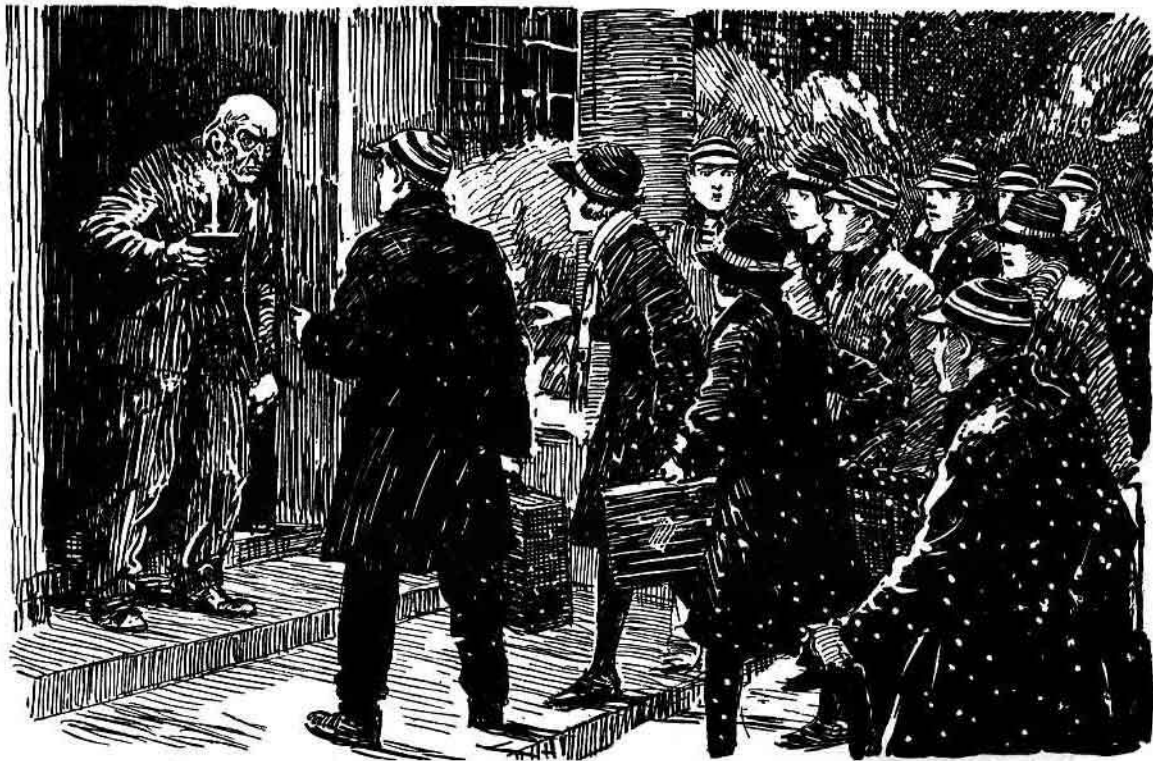
"We don't go right into the village of Trunton," said Willy. "As far as I can remember, we turn off about half a mile this side of it—"

"As far as you can remember?" interrupted Handforth. "That sounds cheerful! It's my opinion that you're going to lose us!"

"We're not interested in your opinions, Ted."

"That's what you'll do, you young bouncer!" went on Handforth, with conviction. "You'll get yourself hopelessly lost, and we shall probably have to trudge along these roads all night! My only hat! Fancy having to rely on my minor, you chaps!"

Edward Oswald looked upon it as a terrible indignity. He was the big man of this party—and he had to play second fiddle to Willy! Having never been to the Towers



As the front door was opened a bent, wizened old man, holding a guttering candle, stood in the gloom of the hall. "My goodness!" exclaimed Edward Oswald. "Is—is this Handforth Towers?" "Sure enough, young sir," said the old man in a creaky voice. The creepy old house was not a bit like the mansion Handforth's Christmas party had expected!

"This way!" said Willy, as the crowd was automatically keeping to the road. "Up this lane!"

"Rot!" said his major. "Uncle Gregory wouldn't live up a cart-track like that!"

"You fathead, this is the main road to Trunton!" said Willy. "It may be a bit narrow, but it's a jolly good road!"

"Sure you're right, Willy?" asked Church.

"Haven't I been here before?"

"You might have forgotten—"

"If you don't believe me, you can look at that signpost!" said Willy. "Handforth Park is in Trunton, and the Towers are in the park."

Nobody disputed Willy's knowledge after that. And they all walked up the lane, while the snow continued to fall with greater density than ever. A fairly high wind was springing up now, too, adding to the wintry nature of the night.

They came upon drifts, and in some places they were obliged to plunge almost knee-deep through the piled-up snow.

The coast, of course, was only a mile or two away, this part of Norfolk being cold and bleak throughout the winter. The north-easterly wind was coming right off the sea, carrying further loads of snow with it.

himself, he was obliged to trust his minor to guide them there safely. It was too thick for words.

However, Willy seemed to be doing fairly well, for, after about another mile, he called a general halt. An ancient gateway stood on their left, with high trees, stark and bare, on either side.

"What's this?" asked Handforth.

"We've arrived," said Willy, grinning. "This is the entrance to the park."

"Good egg!"

"We're here at last, then."

"Now for a good old feed!"

The boys and the girls eagerly pushed on and entered the drive. But they were aware of a vague feeling of surprise. Again, this was not quite what they had expected. For that gateway had a forbidding aspect, and the drive itself was dark, eerie, and somehow mysterious.

A Cold Welcome!

A SILENCE fell upon the boys and girls as they walked up that drive

There were bleak yew-trees on either side, and forbidding and ghostly they looked. The increasing wind was whistling through the barren branches, and it

made the place seem more creepy. The drive was hardly the kind of spot to be in at night, alone.

But there was a score here, and still they felt subdued.

And then, as they turned a bend, the yew-trees no longer impeded their view. Handforth Towers stood within sight—a gloomy, gabled structure, which was not at all like the picture which the guests had in their minds.

There were two sentinel towers standing out against the background of sky, and the whole building looked more like a prison than anything else. There were mullioned windows, and most of the walls were overcrowded with clinging ivy. But, most remarkable of all, only one dim light was showing!

"I say, this is a bit queer, isn't it?" murmured Willy into his major's ear as they drew nearer.

"Queer isn't the word!" replied Handforth. "Everything's been queer ever since we arrived at the station; but this takes the cake! Only one miserable little light! I thought Uncle Gregory was having a big party, in addition to us."

"That's what I understood, too," murmured Willy. "I say, do you think he could have made a mistake? Perhaps he isn't expecting us until to-morrow?"

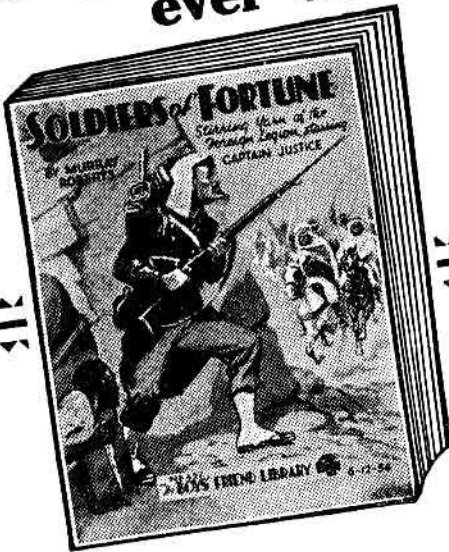
"But I wired!" said Edward Oswald.

If the three Handforths were growing a little uneasy, so were the other young people. But they said nothing. After all, they were guests, and it was not for them to be impolite.

"The place looks pretty awful, but you can never tell," whispered Reggie Pitt into Doris' ear. "It's past eleven, too, and I expect the greater part of the household is in bed. Let's hope for the best."

"I'm jolly glad to be here, anyhow," smiled Doris. "Oh goodness! I'm tired! I didn't quite realise it until now." She was not the only one. They had all had a day of

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rushing about—up early, and then hurrying and scurrying over the last details, followed by a tiresome journey and this long walk. It was something to be thankful for, at least, that they had arrived at their destination.

"Look here, Willy," said Handforth grimly, as a sudden idea smote him. "I believe you've made a mistake. This isn't Handforth Towers at all. You've brought us to the wrong place. By George, that's the explanation of it!"

Willy grunted.

"I'll trouble you, Ted, to give me credit for being sane!" he said coldly. "Do you think I could forget a house like this? I recognised the towers in a flash. There's not another mansion of this type in the whole county. This is Handforth Towers, and thank goodness we've arrived! My hat, won't I eat some supper! Just watch me!"

By this time they had arrived in front of the great porch. There was a wide gravel frontage, now covered in freshly fallen snow. No footprints were visible—proving that there had been nobody here for some time.

"Oh, well!" said Handforth, taking a deep breath.

He thumped vigorously upon the door, releasing some of his pent-up exasperation. He was wild. These fellows had come down here to see Handforth Towers, the wonderful ancestral home of his uncle—and this was the spectacle they were confronted with! It was totally opposed to what Handforth had planned in his own mind.

"They—they don't seem to hear!" murmured Irene, after a wait.

"Then they must be deaf, or dead!" said Pitt. "Supposing we all have a bang? They might be in bed. It's nearly eleven."

Several of them helped Handforth, and they made such a noise upon the great door that the old house rang with the echoes.

"This is awful!" muttered Handforth miserably.

Then Irene gripped his arm.

"There's somebody coming!" she said, with relief.

"Splendid!"

Everybody listened. Faint footfalls were heard on the other side of the heavy door, and then came the sound of great bolts being drawn back, followed by the rattle of a heavy chain.

The juniors and the girls looked at one another. Handforth gazed at Willy with a peculiar concentration, and Willy scratched his head.

"More like a prison than anything else!" breathed Willy.

Then the door was pulled back, and a bent, wizened old man stood there, holding a guttering candle while he peered out into the crowded porch.

"My goodness!" breathed Handforth, aghast.

"Ah, so here you are, then, at last!" said the old man, in a creaky voice. "Ay, and about time, too! I thought ye was never coming!"

"Is—is this Handforth Towers?" demanded Handforth, still sceptical.

"Sure enough, young sir!" replied the ancient. "I take it that you're Master Edward?"

"Why, it's Rodd!" exclaimed Willy, pushing forward.

"Hallo, Rodd, old son! You know me, don't you?"

The old man looked at Willy severely.

"Ay, an' I ain't like to forget you, either, Master Willy!" he replied in an injured tone. "Many's the dance ye led me—"

"Ahem! That's all right!" said Willy hastily. "This is Rodd, you chaps. Girls, this is Rodd—Uncle Gregory's butler. Once seen, never forgotten! Walk in! There's welcome on the mat!"

"By George, then you were right!" said Handforth blankly.

"As usual!" grinned Willy calmly.

They all crowded into the great hall—a vast, gloomy place, full of dense shadows, and unutterably chilly. Rodd closed the door with a dull thud that sounded strangely sinister—particularly as he shot the enormous bolts and fixed the rattling chain.

"Just a minute, Rodd," said Handforth, feeling that it was up to him to assert himself. "We know we've come to the right house—that's one point settled. But what's the idea? Where's Uncle Gregory? Why isn't he here to welcome us?"

The old butler hesitated and looked uneasy.

"The master said that you were coming this evening, Master Edward," he replied. "He gave me to understand that over twenty of ye—"

"Yes, I know; but where is Uncle Gregory?"

Again the old man hesitated.

"The master was called away," he said, his wizened face taking on a stubborn look. "He was called away sudden-like, but he told me to let ye know that he'd be back in good time for Christmas. 'Tell the boys and girls, Rodd, that I'll be with 'em for Christmas,' he says. That's how it is, Master Edward."

Handforth stared.

"But—but it's so strange!" he exclaimed. "Why should Uncle Gregory be called away like this? And where did he go to?"

The old butler became very dignified.

"It's not my habit, young sir, to ask the master his business!" he replied stiffly. "If ye'll all hang up your overcoats, I'll escort ye into the dining-hall. Supper has been waiting for two hours."

"The train was late," explained Willy.

Then he broke off, noticing a rather alarmed expression on Irene Manners' face. The other girls, too, appeared to be uneasy. And Willy saw that they were all looking down the great, shadowed hall.

"My hat!" murmured Willy.

An old woman was standing down there—a bent old hag, she seemed, and she held another guttering candle. She reminded the girls of some old witch, particularly in that eerie atmosphere.

"Oh!" breathed Irene. "Who—who is she?"

"You needn't be scared," grinned Willy. "That's Mrs. Rodd, the housekeeper. A perfectly harmless old lady, I can assure you."

The butler introduced his wife a moment later, requesting the girls to place themselves in her care, so that they could remove their outer clothing, and prepare for supper. So the girls followed the old lady up the great staircase, and vanished. The juniors, in the meantime, were shedding their overcoats and generally making themselves at home.

But Handforth, standing aside, gave Willy a hard look—and Willy returned it with interest.

"This is awful!" murmured Handforth.

"Hardly awful, old man, but certainly a bit on the strange side," agreed Willy. "Did you like the way old Rodd answered you about Uncle Greg?"

"No, I jolly well didn't!" replied Handforth darkly. "It's my opinion there's something fishy about the whole giddy business."

"Now, Ted, don't get any of your melodramatic ideas," said Willy. "There's nothing fishy about it. It's hardly what we expected, but there's nothing wrong. The only thing I can't understand is why Uncle Gregory should have gone off unexpectedly. But he'll explain when he turns up, so why worry?"

But Edward Oswald Handforth did worry—he worried very much.

At the Hour of Midnight!

REGGIE PITT held out his hands to the blaze.

"By Jove, this is something like the real thing!" he said cheerily.

"It only shows you mustn't judge too hastily," smiled Nipper. "You'd better turn your back on the table, Tommy—it's dangerous to look that way. We mustn't start until the girls come down."

"I hope they won't be long," Tommy Watson said hungrily. "I'm starving."

They were in the dining-room—a great oaken-raftered apartment with panelled walls. None of the juniors had troubled to wash or tidy themselves up. They were so hungry that all they wanted to do was to sit down at table. Besides, Rodd had not suggested any adjournment to the bed-rooms, and Handforth, of course, had never given the subject a thought.

A great log fire was blazing in the open grate, and the long table was packed with good, homely food. Indeed, the sight of that table had put everybody into a good humour. Uncle Gregory could wait until to-morrow. When all was said and done, he knew his duties as a host, at all events.

In the centre of the table stood an old-fashioned candleabra with a dozen candles burning in it. It was provided with a great shade, which cast the light down upon the table. The rest of the great apartment was in deep shadow.

The wind was still rising, and it could be heard whining round the old mansion, and a shutter would occasionally rattle. There was a feeling of mystery in the very atmosphere. But, at the moment, the table was the great attraction.

"Here we are!" said a cheery voice in the doorway.

The girls came in, looking bright and attractive after a quick tidy-up. And, somehow, their presence dispelled a great deal of the gloom of the place.

"Food!" said Doris. "Oh, lead me to it!"

"Bravo, girls!" smiled Reggie Pitt. "This must be a record."

"When you're hungry," said Mary Summers, "you hurry."

And so they all sat down at the great table, chatting and laughing. The log fire crackled and roared, and the butler bustled himself with the wants of his charges. Mrs. Rodd hovered in the background, presiding over the groaning sideboard. Hot coffee warmed up the guests wonderfully, and everybody voted the supper to be fit for a king.

"Didn't Uncle Gregory tell you anything else, Rodd?" asked Handforth, when the keen edge had been removed from his appetite, and when the others were fairly settled over the supper. "When did he go away?"

The old butler was trembling slightly.

"If ye'll do me a favour, Master Edward, I'd rather not say anything about the master," he replied, with a quick glance at his wife. "The master told me to make ye at home, an' to look after you all well until he came back. And that I'll do, young sir, to the best o' my ability, as ye may be sure."

"Of course, Rodd, I know that," said Handforth, nodding.

"But what of the other guests?"

"The other guests, Master Edward?"

"I thought uncle had invited lots of people," said Handforth.

"There ain't no one arrived, young sir—exceptin', of course, your good selves," replied the old butler, shaking his head. "Maybe they'll come to-morrow."

Handforth felt rather helpless.

"But what about the servants?" he asked, trying to decide another point that had been worrying him. "I always thought that uncle maintained a big staff at Handforth Towers?"

"The missus and I are the only servants here," said Rodd, with another quick glance at his wife. "But we'll look after you, Master Edward, never fear."

Handforth gave it up. After all, it was hardly the thing to question the old butler like this, in front of everybody else. But, to Edward Oswald's mind, the whole situation seemed mysterious. The other fellows and the girls, however, were finding nothing to grumble about. They weren't so sensitive as Handforth. He was a fellow who had a habit of forming all sorts of exaggerated ideas in advance. And then he would be disappointed when he came face to face with the real thing.

"What about Christmas decorations?" he demanded, by way of changing the subject. "I don't see any about."

"The master didn't give any orders, sir," replied Rodd.

Handforth had anticipated brilliant lights everywhere, hosts of servants, and numerous other guests. He had expected the rooms to be festooned with holly and mistletoe, and endless carnival decorations of brilliant colouring.

And the reality was so gloomy—so drab! No other guests, and only an aged butler and an old witch of a housekeeper! To Handforth it was a shock, and to the others it was a mild surprise, and they were slightly disappointed.

Pen Pals

(Continued from page 13.)

H. J. Varnham, 46, Coniston Road, Bexley Heath, Kent, wants pen pals in the British Empire; stamps, curios, pictures, and sport.

H. Gildenhuis, Port Shepstone, Natal, South Africa, wants a pen pal in U.S.A. or Japan; age 13-16.

T. M. Smith, Riding Fields House, Beverley, East Yorks, wants correspondents overseas; age 12-15.

Miss Connie Culverhouse, No. 5—240, Great College Buildings, Kentish Town, London, N.W.1, wants girl correspondents in England, France, and America; age 17-25; films, books, music.

Alan Hyslop, 9, Hanover Square, Leeds, 3, wants correspondents; age 14-15; rugby and films.

William Manchester, 11, Pool Cottages, Moor Lane, Ince Blundell, near Liverpool, wants members for the Red Triangle Society; age 14-17; cycling and sports.

W. R. Whalan, 3, Wedgwood Street, Wolstanton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs, wants a pen pal interested in books and swimming; U.S.A., India, Africa.

R. Marriott, 87, St. Albans Road, Arnold, Nottingham, wants pen pals in the Dominions; age 12-14.

Miss Lillie E. Hammond, 2, St. Brendan's Road, Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland, wants girl correspondents overseas; age 20-22.

Harry E. Verran, 20, Cambridge Square, Paddington, London, W.2, wants pen pals in British Empire and Europe; age 14-16; animals, geography, books.

E. Parry, 31, Ronald Street, Oldham, Lancs, wants to hear from readers who have made a hobby of old issues of Companion Papers.

Miss Lucy Walker-Smith, 1131, London Road, Alveston, Derby, wants a girl pen pal in any foreign country; age 15-16.

Tony Eade, 38, Glendor Gardens, Mill Hill, London, N.W.7, wants a pen pal overseas; interested in boxing and wrestling.

Miss Irene Walker, 227, Kingston Road, Teddington, Middlesex, wants a girl correspondent; British Isles and France; acting, sports, cricket.

John Sheridan, 143, Denison Road, Dulwich Hill, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia, wants pen pals interested in stamps and sketching; age 12-16.

For, after they had satisfied their appetites, they began to feel that it would be impossible to have much fun in this grim old house. Already they were beginning to feel the atmosphere of mystery creeping into their bones.

"As it's so late, young sirs, I am suggesting that you should excuse the young ladies at once," announced the butler, when supper was over. "The master expressly urged Mrs. Rodd to look after the young ladies, and get them to bed well before midnight."

"Why before midnight?" asked Irene curiously.

"The master was very precise on the point, missy," replied Rodd. "Before midnight, Rodd," he says. 'Make certain that it's before midnight.' The missus is waiting now, young ladies."

Irene turned to the others.

"Well, I suppose we'd better go," she said, with an uncomfortable little laugh. "Good-night, Ted! Good-night, everybody!"

All the girls cheerily said good-night. But they were looking just a little scared as they went out, escorted by the strange old housekeeper. Rodd went out, too, leaving the juniors entirely to themselves.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Handforth in a thick voice.

"Anything the matter?" asked Pitt politely.

Handforth stared at the others.

"Yes, there is," he replied. "Everything's the matter! I tell you, you chaps, I'm jolly worried! Where's my uncle? And what was the idea of leaving these two old fossils to welcome us, and practically act as host and hostess?"

The juniors murmured their sympathy.

"It's no good pretending," went on Handforth. "You're just as surprised as I am—aren't you? Come on, speak out!"

"Well, yes," admitted Nipper. "But we didn't want to say anything—"

"Say it!" interrupted Edward Oswald. "I shan't mind. We're all friends."

"They were all glad that Handforth had made it possible for them to talk freely."

"Didn't you know about this, Willy?" asked Reggie Pitt, turning to the Third Former.

"Know about what?"

"Well, about the peculiar gloom of the place—"

"There was nothing gloomy about Handforth Towers when I came before," replied Willy. "There were heaps of servants, too; and brilliant lights everywhere. I'll admit it seems jolly queer this time. But you mustn't take too much notice of Ted—you mustn't get any silly ideas."

"You can go and eat coke!" snapped his major.

"Where's uncle? That's what I want to know!"

He peered round at the door, and turned back.

"Another point," he said, lowering his voice. "What was the idea of insisting upon the girls going to bed before midnight? Now, there's a rummy bit of business, if you like!"

"It did seem—well, unusual," admitted Nipper.

"Unusual!" breathed Handforth. "I didn't like it! What the dickens is there to be afraid of about midnight?"

"It's the hour of ghostly things," said Reggie Pitt solemnly.

"Here, chuck it!" said Church, with a glance over his shoulder.

"Yes; we don't want to talk about ghosts," smiled Nipper. "Of course, there's nothing in it, but in this atmosphere of gloom—"

"What's that?" gasped De Valerie, swinging round.

"Only the window rattling," said Handforth, with a start. "You ass! What's the idea of making me jump?"

He broke off as the grandfather clock in the hall commenced booming out the hour.

"Midnight!" breathed somebody.

And, somehow, a complete silence fell. The juniors grouped round the great log fire, instinctively held their breaths, and listened to the strokes. And then, as the last one tolled out, the fellows looked at one another.

The Lady of the Tower!

"WHAT—what was that?" muttered Handforth shakily.

Nobody replied.

"You heard something, didn't you?" went on Handforth, looking round. "I say, didn't you chaps hear that—"

"It was only the wind, I suppose," said Nipper.

"The wind!" muttered Handforth. "That wasn't the wind! It—it sounded like—like— Look here! This place is getting on my nerves!"

He rushed to the door, flung it open, and ran out into the hall. Then he came to a sudden halt, and fell back. The other juniors had followed him, and they all held their breath.

The hall was almost in darkness. A single candle burned on a little table on the far side, and its flickering light, in a draught, was very unsteady. And there, half-way up the stairs, was a figure—a shape!

"Who—who's that?" asked Handforth, with a gulp.

The figure descended a few stairs.

"It's only me, young sir," said a wheezy voice.

"Mrs. Rodd!" said Handforth, with relief. "I say, you needn't creep about like that!" he added, with a note of indignation in his voice. "You gave me a turn for a second. What was that scream we heard, Mrs. Rodd?"

"Just as midnight was striking," said McClure.

The old lady came down the remaining stairs, and in the faint light the juniors could see that her wrinkled face was uneasy. Her eyes were wide open, and staring.

"The Lady of the Tower!" she murmured fearfully.

"What?" muttered Handforth.

"The Lady of the Tower!" said the old woman, as she pushed past. "'Twas the Lady of the Tower!"

She went down the hall and vanished in the dense shadows in the rear. A door closed, and the juniors stood there, more uneasy than ever.

"Why can't we have more light?" said Handforth fiercely.

He looked at the candle, which was now burning steadily.

"What's the good of a miserable candle—"

He broke off, for, without any apparent reason, the candle abruptly went out. It had been burning with a steady flame, proving that no draught was affecting it.

"My only hat!" said Handforth shakily.

"Let's get back into the dining-room," said Church, making a dash for the door.

They all crowded in, glad to be back in the lighted room. Here, at least, it was comparatively cheery, with the big candelabra and the crackling fire, which sent the shadows dancing over the oak rafters of the ceiling.

"The Lady of the Tower!" said Handforth, in a queer voice. "What did she mean?"

"Goodness knows!" said Willy, trying to keep his voice firm. "Dash it! We're not superstitious, or—"

"Where's Rodd?" interrupted Handforth. "Where the dickens has Rodd got to? Isn't there a bell here, or something?"

Handforth went to the door again.

"Rodd!" he shouted. "Rodd! Where are you?"

His voice echoed eerily in the hall, but there was no reply.

"Confound it!" muttered Handforth. "I'll tell him something when he comes!"

He walked out into the hall and tried to feel his way down to that door which the housekeeper had used—a door obviously leading into the domestic quarters. But before he got there something seemed to touch his face. He halted in his tracks, and his heart leapt.

"Who's that?" he muttered.

He took another step forward, and as he did so there was a thud on the other side of the hall, and he had an extraordinary sensation of someone gripping his left ankle.

"Oh!" he breathed unsteadily.

And then a door opened only two yards away from him, and Rodd appeared, carrying a candle. Handforth stared down at his feet, but there was nothing there—nothing to account for that ghostly grip, which had affected him only a second earlier. He took a deep breath. And Rodd, with a creaky exclamation, stood staring at the wall.

"The picture!" he muttered.

Handforth turned round, and saw that a heavy picture was lying on the oak floorboards. So this was the thud he had heard. That picture had fallen down. But why?

"What—what was that scream we heard at midnight?" asked Handforth, pulling himself together with an effort. "Didn't you hear it, Rodd? Your wife came downstairs, and said something about the Lady of the Tower."

"The Lady of the Tower!" shouted Rodd huskily.

He threw up his hands, and turned on his heel, and fled. Handforth was again in the dark, and his ears were struck by that throbbing cry once more, which seemed to come from somewhere upstairs. It hung on the air, and died away into a whispering wail.

(A haunted house with uncanny things happening! Read of the wild night the St. Frank's boys spend at Handforth Towers. Watch out for our Grand Christmas Number next week.)