

"FOR THE SAKE OF HIS SIDE!" POWERFUL LONG YARN OF SPORT AND ADVENTURE AT ST. JIM'S — WITHIN.

The

GEM

2d



*"You've gotta
get out
first ball!"*

THE DEMON BOWLER OF ST. JIM'S WHO PLAYED TO ORDERS!—

FOR the SAKE of HIS SIDE!



"Look here, Langton," said Tom Merry, "this won't do. You can't give the match away to the county!" "Wh-what do you mean?" stammered Langton, turning pale. "I mean what I say," said Tom. "You're giving the match away. I know Levy's fixed it with you to sell the game!"

CHAPTER 1.

A Meeting in Study No. 6!

STUDY No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, was crammed. That study belonged to Blake, D'Arcy, Digby, and Herries of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. It was a pleasant and cosy room, with a sunny window looking on the old quadrangle. But it could not be called commodious.

When, as sometimes happened, each of the four fellows who shared the study brought a friend in to tea, it was only by mutual concession and great politeness that the party found room to move.

It was not tea-time just now, and more room had been made in the famous study by standing the table on one end in a corner. But the capacity of the study was taxed to its utmost limits. For not only were the four owners of the study there, but a gathering of Fourth Formers and Shell fellows had squeezed in. It was an important occasion—in fact, a very important occasion.

Outside in the quadrangle the summer sun was blazing. From the distant cricket-field could be heard the click of bat and ball. The Sixth were at practice there, getting into form for the match with Loamshire, which was coming off on Saturday. Those of the juniors who were near the window glanced out sometimes towards the white-clad figures on the senior ground.

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and watched Kildare at the wicket, or Langton with the ball.

The window-sill was occupied by the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell. They were sitting in a row, jammed together so tightly in the limited space that there was no danger of their falling out. Blake, Herries, and Digby stood in a row on the hearth. Reilly and Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth leaned against the wall opposite them. Kangaroo and Glyn of the Shell found another wall to support them. Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, and Pratt of the New House had disposed themselves wherever they found enough room, or nearly enough. In the middle of the study Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing upon a chair, the cynosure of all eyes.

The door was open, and several more fellows had added themselves to the study meeting, but had to accommodate themselves in the doorway or the passage. There were Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen of the Fourth, and Thompson, Dane, and Gore of the Shell, and several others behind them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, raised on high above the maddening crowd, so to speak, adjusted his eyeglass in his eye, and glanced over the assembly. The juniors looked very warm. The afternoon was very summery, and with so many fellows crowded into so small a space they were bound to be heated a little. Fatty Wynn suffered most, and he fanned himself energetically with a

sheet torn from an exercise-book. Only Arthur Augustus looked cool, and neat as a new pin, as usual.

"Gentlemen," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry. "I know you are here, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, "and now you are here, I have a few words to say. It is a most important occasion. I have already wesoled what I am goin' to do, but I want you fellows to give me your advice."

There was a chuckle.

"You want us to advise you to do what you've made up your mind to do?" suggested Tom Merry.

"Exactly, deah boy! If your views agree with mine, I shall know that you are quite in the wight, and sensible chaps."

"And if they disagree—"

"Then I shall be compelled to weward you as silly asses, I am afwaid. But it's all wight; I am sure you'll agree that I'm quite wight. Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"In the cires—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys."

"Hear hear!" roared the meeting.

Arthur Augustus paused. The meeting grinned. The juniors had all come together at the request of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to hold an important meeting in Study No. 6 in the Fourth

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

Form passage. But if the swell of St. Jim's had not been so preoccupied in his great scheme, whatever it was, he might have observed that the meeting was taking itself in a humorous spirit.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Weally, deah boys—give a chap a chance. Play the game, you know!"

The appeal did not pass unheeded. Tom Merry raised his hand as a signal to the gathering to leave off cheering.

"Go ahead, Gussy!"

"On the ball, old chap!"

"Vewy well, deah boys. You are aware that a vewy important cricket match is comin' off on Saturday. Loamshire is playin' the First Eleven. Loamshire is a minor county team, and it is a big feathah in the cap of St. Jim's to play them. Kildare is workin' hard to get his team into form to play them. It will be wathah a big ordah."

"Yes, rather!" said Jack Blake, with a nod. "I don't think the Sixth will pull it off, either. Kildare has bitten off more than he can chew in tackling Loamshire."

"I don't know," said Tom Merry. "I thought so at first, but since Langton has turned out such a demon bowler, I think the school's got a good chance."

"If they want a good bowler they can't do better than play Fatty!" said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

"Catch 'em playing a junior!" grunted Blake. "I wouldn't mind batting for the First Eleven, if it comes to that."

"The First Eleven might mind!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther, you ass—"

"Pway give me a chance to speak!" remonstrated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I called this meetin', you know. I've been thinkin'—"

"No!" exclaimed several voices in astonishment.

"Pway don't be sillay asses, deah boys. I've been thinkin', and I think that Kildare ought to be asked to play a junior in the school eleven."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's what I've called this meeting about," said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "I think the Lowah Forms ought to send in a wound wobin to Kildare, pointin' out to him that a School Eleven ought to wewepent the School, and not only the two top Forms. What do you fellows think?"

"I think I want some ginger-pop!" gasped Fatty Wynm. "I'm dry as dictionaries!"

"Jolly warm in here, isn't it?" said Redfern. "Next time you call a meeting in this study, Gussy, don't forget to have an electric fan."

"What do you think of my ideah, deah boys?"

"Oh, rotten!"

"Weally—"

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry, "if you propose that to Kildare, he will sling you out of his study."

"I should uttahly wewuse to be slung out of his study!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now I want all you fellows to sign a wound wobin for me to take to Kildare," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy impressively. "In a case like this the New House and the School House ought

to stand shouldah to shouldah, for the honah of the Lower Forms. If all you fellows will sign, we shall get up a wound wobin wewepentin' the leadahs of ewery section of the Lowah School."

"But, my dear ass—"

"I wewuse to be called an ass!"

"Kildare will only grin."

"Let him gwin. I ask you all as a special favah to sign a wound wobin, and I will take it personally to Kildare," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

The juniors looked at one another. The idea of asking the captain of the school to put a junior in the First Eleven, on the occasion of the most important match of the whole cricket season, was an idea that could only have emanated from the swell of St. Jim's. The juniors could not help chuckling at the thought of D'Arcy presenting that round robin to the astonished Kildare. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very much in earnest: and there was no doubt that he would go to Kildare, whether he was armed with the round robin or not.

"I twust you will not wewuse me when I ask you a personal favah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"But, my dear duffer—"

"Good egg!" said Bernard Glyn. "I vote for signing the round robin. I've

Betrayal of the St. Jim's First Eleven in the most important cricket match of the season—or, expulsion from school! When Arthur Langton finds himself in the power of an unscrupulous bookmaker he has to choose between these two courses. And it's upon the Sixth Former that St. Jim's base their hopes of beating Loamshire County! What does Langton do?

got a fountain-pen here, and we can get it done at once. I'll begin."

Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, drew a handsome fountain-pen of his own manufacture from his pocket. And there was a chuckle from some of the juniors. They knew that fountain-pen. It was supplied with Bernard Glyn's famous invisible ink. If the round robin were written out with that fountain-pen, the sheet, by the time it reached Kildare, would present a surface of beautiful blankness. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was surprised by the chuckle that suddenly swept through the study.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Here's a sheet of paper. Now, then!"

D'Arcy stepped down from the chair.

"Gentlemen, I thank you!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway hand me the pen, Glyn, deah boy, and I'll draw up the papah for you to sign."

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus took the paper, and rested it upon the bookcase to write, and took the fountain-pen from the schoolboy inventor. And the juniors, suppressing a most hysterical desire to chuckle, stood round and watched him.

CHAPTER 2.

The Round Robin!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wrinkled his aristocratic brows thoughtfully.

The round robin would require wording very carefully, of course. Kildare, the head of the Sixth, chief prefect of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's, was a very great and important personage. Arthur Augustus felt it his duty to point out to Kildare what ought to be done. But it was only judicious to point it out politely and tactfully. If D'Arcy had known as much about that fountain-pen as the other fellows knew, he might not have been so particular. For whatever he wrote upon the paper, it would be all the same by the time it reached Kildare:

"Deah Kildare," began D'Arcy.—"We, the undahsigned juniahs of both Houses of St. Jim's, wegard it as only wight and pwopah that on such an important occasion the whole school should be wewepent in the eleven meetin' Loamshiro. We, therefore, call upon you to play at least two juniahs in the eleven—one from the School House, and one from the New House."

"Hear, hear!"

"I think that's all wight," said Arthur Augustus, with a thoughtful look. "Will you fellows sign it?"

"Certainly!"

"Yes, rather!"

And the juniors squeezed their way to the mantelpiece, one after another, and took the fountain-pen in turn, and signed the paper.

The signatures were placed in a circle round the body of the letter, so that it could not be told who had signed first, in the manner of a round robin.

The circle of signatures round the paper grew very large.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watched the progress of the round robin with great satisfaction. It was his idea, and it was being carried out, and the fellows were signing with great enthusiasm.

"There you are!" said Jack Blake.

"That's all right, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus glanced at the paper.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, that is a vewy pale kind of ink in your fountain-pen, Glyn!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Glyn easily. "Better put that in an envelope and seal it up. It will look better to deliver it that way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake discovered an envelope in his desk, and D'Arcy carefully folded a sheet, and placed it in the envelope, and fastened the flap.

"That's all wight," he remarked. "Now I'll go and hand it to Kildare. In the circs, he is bound to take notice of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Kildare's at the cricket now," said Blake, grinning.

"Kildare and Darrell are going to have tea with Langton after the practice," said Digby. "I've been tea-fagging for them, and young Frayne is in Langton's study now making the toast."

"Vewy well. I will wait in Langton's study."

"Good wheeze!" said Tom Merry blandly. "And take particular notice how Kildare looks when he opens that letter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus, bestowing the scaled-up round robin carefully in an inner pocket of his elegant Eton jacket, quitted the study.

Then the juniors roared.

Arthur Augustus heard the sounds of laughter as he departed down the passage, and he gave a sniff.

"The uttah asses!" he murmured. "I wegard it as a duty to stand up for the Lowah Forms. And I don't see any reason why Kildare should not do the sensible thing. Anyway, we'll see what effect the wound wobin has on him."

D'Arcy walked down the Sixth Form passage and found Langton's door open. Frayne of the Third was kneeling before the fire, making toast, of which there was already a mountain in a dish on the fender. The fag looked up with a crimson and perspiring face as D'Arcy stopped him.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "I thought that was Langton. Have you come to take a turn at making the toast?"

"No, deah boy; I'm goin' to wait here for Kildare."

Frayne grunted.

"Well, you can keep an eye on this toast, then, and see that nobody sneaks it before Langton comes in," he said, rising to his feet. "That's the last round."

"Vewy well, Fwayne."

And the fag quitted the study, leaving the swell of St. Jim's in sole possession. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked to the window and looked out into the green old quad. Past the elm-trees he could see the great cricket ground. Kildare was still at the wicket, and Langton of the Sixth was bowling. Even as D'Arcy looked Kildare's wicket went down, and there was a shout that was heard as far as the School House.

"Bravo! Well bowled!"

"Bai Jove! Langton is a wippin' bowlah!" murmured D'Arcy. "I weally don't think I could have done that myself."

The Sixth Formers did not seem to intend leaving off practice yet, though it was past tea-time. Darrell took the wicket, and then Rushden, and each of them fell at the first ball from Langton. There was no doubt that the latter was a wonderful bowler. It was only lately that he had come out strong as a cricketer. The time was not long past when Langton's amusements had been of a far more shady character, and his evil associations had very nearly caused him to be expelled from St. Jim's. But that time was over now, and Langton was as keen and clean a sportsman as any of the old school. And his reform had given the First Eleven a most valuable recruit.

There was a tap at the study door, and Arthur Augustus turned from the window. The door opened, and a boy of about ten or eleven looked in. He was a village lad from Rylcombe, and he held a letter in his hand.

"Is this Master Langton's study?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I got a note for 'im."

"He isn't here now," said D'Arcy. "You can leave it if you like and I will see that he has it when he comes in."

The boy hesitated for a moment, and then laid the letter on the table.

"Very well," he said.

And he departed, while Arthur Augustus resumed his watch at the window.

A bunch of seniors were coming towards the School House now. Kildare with his bat under his arm. They were

chatting very cheerfully, as if very satisfied with the result of the cricket practice.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt in his pocket for the round robin.

There was a tramoling of feet in the Sixth Form passage, and Langton, Kildare, and Darrell came into the study together.

CHAPTER 3.

Very Surprising!

LANGTON glanced at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, inquiringly. Kildare and Darrell threw down their cricket bats and seated themselves at the table.

Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Hallo!" said Langton cheerfully. "What do you want, D'Arcy? Have you come here to fag instead of young Frayne?"

"No, deah boy; I want to speak to Kildare," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

Kildare grinned.

"Well, now you're here you can fag," he remarked. "Make the tea."

"Weally, Kildare—"

"And buck up!" suggested Darrell.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put the round robin back into his pocket and made the tea. The three seniors were seated round the table, making inroads on the toast and boiled eggs. Arthur Augustus lifted the teapot to the table. Langton caught sight of the envelope addressed to himself which the messenger from the village had left for him, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo! When did this come?"

D'Arcy glanced at it.

"A young person brougnt it for you, deah boy," he said. "He is gone now. Kildare, will you be kind enough to glance at this?"

And the swell of St. Jim's brought the famous round robin out of his pocket and passed it to the Sixth Former. Kildare took it and glanced at the envelope with a puzzled expression.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There is a lettah inside for you," said D'Arcy. "A wound wobin, as a mattah of fact."

Kildare stared.

"A round robin?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Some rot of the juniors, I suppose," said Kildare.

"It is fwom the juniahs certainly," said D'Arcy stiffly, "but it is not wot. I should be much obliged if you would open it and wead it, deah boy."

Kildare slit the envelope.

He drew out the folded paper within, unfolded it, and looked at it. An expression of astonishment came over his handsome, sunburnt face.

"What on earth—"

"Pway wead it, deah boy!"

"Read it?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The captain of St. Jim's jumped up and seized the swell of the Fourth by the collar. D'Arcy's eyeglass jerked out of his eye and fluttered to the end of its cord.

Kildare shook him.

"You cheeky young ass!" he roared.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!"

"Is this your idea of a joke?" demanded Kildare. "By George, I'll teach you not to jape the Sixth!"

"Ow! Pway welease me! You are wumplin' my collah!"

"What is it?" asked Langton, who had his own letter in his hand unopened.

"A new idea in japes," said Kildare wrathfully, still shaking the unfortunate

swell of the School House. "The young ass has given me a blank sheet of paper to read!"

"My hat!"

"Ow! Bai Jove! It isn't a blank sheet of papah!" gasped D'Arcy. "It's a wound wobin."

"Lend me your cane, Darrell!"

"Certainly."

"I wefuse to be caned! Weally, Kildare—"

Kildare grasped the cane with one hand and D'Arcy's collar with the other. He had thrown the round robin on the table. Arthur Augustus looked at it, and his eyes almost started from his head as he saw that the sheet was indeed blank. It had been covered with writing when he had folded it up and put it into the envelope, but there was no trace of writing upon it now.

The expression of almost idiotic amazement upon D'Arcy's face disarmed Kildare. He laid down the cane.

"Didn't you know that the paper was blank, D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"It's a jape on the young ass himself, I suppose," said Langton, laughing.

Kildare laughed, too.

"Well, in that case, I'll let him off," he said, releasing the swell of St. Jim's. "Cut off, D'Arcy!"

"I—I don't compwehend this at all. There was a wound wobin when I put it in the envelope, and now there is no witin' upon it!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "It is wemarkable!"

"What was the round robin about?" asked Darrell.

"It was to point out to Kildare that it is his duty to play some juniahs in the school team against Loamshire—"

The three Sixth Formers burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for laugh-tah!" said Arthur Augustus, smoothing out his rumpled collar with one hand and jamming his eyeglass into his eye with the other. "I wegard this as a sewious mattah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't undahstand the witin' fadin' away like this—"

"Oh, get out!" gasped Kildare.

"You'll be the death of me yet! Look here! If you had brought me a round robin to that effect I should have caned every young ass who signed it. I suppose that's why they gave you a blank sheet to bring me. Now buzz off!"

"But, weally, Kildare—"

"Kick him out, somebody!"

Langton rose to his feet, and D'Arcy executed a strategic movement to the door, and stepped hurriedly out of the study, with the unfortunate round robin in his hand.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped, as he looked at the paper in his hand. "This is uttably amazin'! I simply cannot compwehend it at all!"

And he hurried away to Study No. 6.

Tom Merry & Co. were still there, most of them, and they greeted the swell of St. Jim's with a joyous chuckle and a chorus of inquiry.

"Did you give Kildare the round robin?"

"What did he say?"

"Is he going to let you skipper the School Eleven against Loamshire?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I cannot undahstand it!" gasped D'Arcy. "You chaps all wemembah signin' the papah, don't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"And you saw me put it into the envelope?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, when Kildare took it out the

papah was quite blank!" said Arthur Augustus impressively.

He expected to be met with incredulity. But the juniors were not incredulous. They yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Weally, deah boys—"
 "Let me see the paper," said Bernard Glyn gravely.

He took the paper and stooped down before the study fire, and held it to the heat.

"It's all right now!" said Glyn blandly.

Then D'Arcy comprehended.
 "You—you feahful wottah!" he gasped. "That wotten fountain-pen had wotten invisible ink in it!"

The juniors shrieked.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle more tightly into his eye and surveyed the hilarious juniors with a glance of great scorn.

"I wegard this as a wotten twick, you wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I wefuse to look upon you fellows as fwends any longah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned upon his heel, with his aristocratic nose very high in the air, and strode from the study. He closed the door behind him with a sounding bang.

From Study No. 6 came sounds which seemed to indicate that Tom Merry & Co. were dangerously near an attack of hysterics.

CHAPTER 4.

The Shadow of the Past!

IN Langton's study the three Sixth Formers were laughing over the invisible round robin as heartily as Tom Merry & Co. in the junior study.

It was some minutes before they

could settle down to toast, and ham and eggs. Langton had forgotten, for the moment, his unopened letter, and it was Kildare who drew his attention to it.

"You haven't read your letter yet, Langton," he said. "Don't mind us."

"Only from a local tradesman, I expect," said Langton. "It's been delivered by hand. But I'll look at it, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead!"

Langton opened the letter. The healthy, ruddy hue of his face died away as he read it.

A strange, hunted look came into the senior's eyes, and the hand that held the letter trembled. Kildare and Darrell glanced at him curiously.

"Not bad news, I hope?" said Kildare.

"No—yes," said Langton, in a troubled voice.

"I—I say, will you excuse me, you fellows? Do you mind if I don't have tea with you just yet?"

"Something wrong?"

"Well, in a way, yes."

"Please yourself, old fellow!"

Langton nodded and rose from his seat. Without looking at his two companions, he quitted the study and closed the door behind him. Kildare and Darrell exchanged glances of amazement.

"Poor old Langton!" said Kildare. "I hope that doesn't mean that he's got somebody sick in the family."

"Especially with the Loamshire match coming off on Saturday," said Darrell.

And the two seniors looked very thoughtful as they went on with their tea without Langton's company.

Langton's face was strangely pale as he went down the Sixth Form passage. He wanted to be alone at that moment, and it was unfortunate that Kildare and Darrell had been with him when he received that letter.

He turned into the Form-room passage, and entered an empty room, and

closed the door behind him. There, with a shaking hand, he unfolded the letter again and read it through once more.

It was written in a crude handwriting and with ill-spelt words. It was a hand that Langton knew well—he had received notes in that hand in other days, and had not been displeased to receive them.

But that was all over now—at all events, Langton had hoped and believed that it was all over.

But the past was not so easy to get rid of. The shadow of the past had fallen again upon the fellow who had sinned and repented:

"Dear Langton,—I want to see you very spechul. Come to the old place to-nite at seven, and I'll be there. If you can't come, I'll come up and see you at the skool.

"Yours truly,
 "S. LEVY."

Langton crushed the letter in his hand.

"The hound!" he muttered. "The beastly, bookmaking cad! What does he want to see me for?"

He strode up and down the Form-room with pale face and knitted brows.

What did Simeon Levy want to see him for?

He had broken with all that set. He had confessed to the Head, and he had been forgiven, and had been given a chance to set himself right again. His old visits to the Green Man in Rylcombe had ceased; he had never seen Joliffe, the landlord, or any of his friends there since.

But with Levy he had not been able to break at once, for he owed the man money that he could not pay immediately. It was money lost in betting; but the man had to be paid. Langton had strained every resource to raise money to pay off that debt, to get rid



Kildare grasped the cane with one hand and D'Arcy's collar with the other. He had thrown the round robin on the table, and as Arthur Augustus looked at it, his eyes almost started from his head in amazement. The sheet of paper that had been covered with signatures was blank! No wonder Kildare thought it was a jape!

of the last of his old associates. He had stinted himself in every way, and he had been able to send the bookmaker enough money to keep him quiet.

He still owed Levy some four or five pounds, but that he hoped to pay off before the end of the term. The man had seemed satisfied so far, and had given no trouble. It could not be that he was anxious about the last few pounds of the old debt. What did he want to see Langton for? Was it an attempt to get the former black sheep of St. Jim's back to his old set?

Otherwise, what did he want?

"I won't go! I won't go!"

Langton muttered the words over and over again between his teeth.

But, even as he said them, he knew that he must go. Until he had finished paying his debt to Levy the man had a hold on him.

But if Levy came to St. Jim's asking for him—

Langton shivered at the thought.

He had promised the Head that he would amend his ways, and he had kept his promise. But he knew that Levy, if he chose, was capable of any falsehood. It was in his power to ruin the Sixth Former of St. Jim's, if the Head should pay any attention to his statements. So long as he was not paid—

He must be paid.

That was the only gleam of light that Langton could see. He quitted the Form-room, and returned to his own study. Kildare and Darrell were gone. Langton stepped along to Kildare's study, and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called out the captain of St. Jim's, in his deep, pleasant voice.

Langton entered the study. Kildare looked in surprise and concern at his pale and harassed face.

"Great Scott! What's happened to you, Langton?" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"Will you help me, Kildare?"

"Of course I will! What can I do?"

"I want some money."

A harder look came over Kildare's face.

"Langton, you don't mean to say that you've been beginning that old game over again, after what you promised the Head—and me!"

"I haven't—honour bright!"

"Then what is it?"

"When I got clear of those rotters, I owed money to one of them, and I haven't finished paying him yet, and he's written to me. If I could pay the brute off, I could snap my fingers at him."

Kildare wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"How much?" he asked tersely.

"Four pounds ten now."

"You want me to lend it to you?"

"If you could, I could get rid of him. I could pay it back before the end of the term. When I owe him nothing, he can't have any hold on me."

Kildare looked at him keenly.

"Will you give me your word, Langton, that this debt was before the time you professed to break off with that set, and that you haven't had any dealings with them since?"

Langton looked him full in the eyes.

"I give you my word of honour!" he said.

"Good! That's enough. I can lend you the money if you like. I'll give you a five-pound note here that I had on my birthday, and you can have it with pleasure," said Kildare.

"You're awfully good, old chap," said Langton falteringly. "I shan't

forget this. You shall have it back this term."

"That's all right. Does this see you clear?"

"Quite clear."

"Has that man got any papers of yours?"

"Yes, for that amount."

"Dated?" asked Kildare quietly.

Langton laughed miserably.

"Yes, dated before I broke off with them. If you saw it you'd be satisfied that it wasn't since that time."

"That's all right, then. The fellow can't do you any harm. If the Head saw that paper, he'd know by the date that you hadn't contracted the debt since the affair came out."

"Yes, I know. But I want to keep him away from here. I want to get rid of him, and have nothing more to do with him. It's the only hold he's got on me, and I want to break it, and have done with it."

"Good!" said Kildare. "Give me ten bob change, if it's four-ten you want."

"Thanks, old man!"

And Langton quitted the study with the five-pound note in his pocket. He had the wherewithal to pay the man now—but his heart was not at ease. If Levy were paid, the man had no further claim. But—but a wretched fear was haunting Langton's heart that the money was not all that his old associate wanted.

Yet, when the money was paid, what hold could the man have upon him? None. And yet the senior was not easy in his mind, and he looked forward with a feeling of almost sickening apprehension to the time when he had to meet the bookmaker.

CHAPTER 5.

Friend or Foe?

TOM MERRY & CO. were on the steps of the School House, in the pleasant sunset of the summer evening, when Langton came out.

The juniors detached themselves from the stone balustrade, and lined up in Langton's path. Langton was, as a rule, the most good-tempered of the School House prefects, and the juniors could always venture to take little liberties with him that they would not have ventured to take with Knox of the Sixth.

"Langton, old man," said Tom Merry.

Langton paused, frowning. He was thinking of his coming interview with Simeon Levy.

"What do you want?" he said, with unusual roughness in his voice.

"A pass out of gates for three," said Tom Merry promptly. "We want to go down to Rylcombe to see about a new bat—"

"I can't give you a pass!"

And Langton pushed roughly by the three Shell fellows, and strode away across the quadrangle. The Terrible Three looked after him in amazement.

"What's wrong with old Langton?" said Tom Merry. "He certainly doesn't seem to be in a good temper."

"Pain in his inside, perhaps," grinned Monty Lowther. "But we're not going to stay in because he's got a pain in his little inside. We're going out."

"Better ask Kildare for a pass," said Tom Merry reflectively. "I'll do it. I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle!"

"Don't mention you've been refused by Langton, then!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"No fear!"

The hero of the Shell returned in a few minutes, armed with the written pass. The Terrible Three had leave out of gates until dark. Langton had been gone ten minutes when the three Shell fellows strolled out of the gates of St. Jim's, and took the road to Rylcombe. They stopped at the stile in the lane, and took a short cut through the wood, which brought them into the village near the river and the old mill.

Tom Merry paused as they came out of the trees, to glance up the river, rolling and shining in the red sunset, and reflecting the colours of the sky. It was a beautiful scene, but after one glance Tom Merry had no eyes for the scenery.

Two figures on the river-bank near the old mill had caught his eye. One of them was Langton, and the other a short, squat man in check clothes, and a big diamond pin, and rings on his fingers, and a bowler hat set on oily locks.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry, in amazement.

Monty Lowther whistled softly.

"That's Levy, the racing tout," he said.

"Yes, rather," said Manners. "And that's why Langton was so ratty about giving us a pass. That's the man he came out to meet."

Tom Merry's face was very grave. "That looks rotten," he said. "We all know that old scandal about Langton and the betting set in Rylcombe, but that was supposed to be all over. But I suppose it's no business of ours. Let's get on."

And the Terrible Three went on their way. It was no business of theirs, certainly, but they could not help thinking about it as they walked on.

Langton had not seen them.

The bookmaker was sitting upon a grassy bank, and the Sixth Former of St. Jim's was standing before him with his hand thrust deep into his pocket, and his eyes fixed upon the dark oily face of Levy.

Levy had a cigar between his teeth, and was smoking and emitting little clouds of a strong-smelling tobacco. He had waved a fat hand, loaded with cheap rings, when Langton offered him the money he had brought.

"That isn't what I want," he said.

Langton looked surprised and uneasy.

"But I owe you the money," he said.

"Keep it!"

"I don't want to keep it," said Langton, more and more surprised. "I owe you the money, and, as a matter of fact, I've borrowed this from Kildare to square you. I want to pay up and have done with it."

"There's no hurry."

"There is a hurry!" said Langton sternly. "I tell you I want to get this finished with. Give me back my IOU, and take the money."

Levy shrugged his shoulders.

"All serene!" he said. "I don't mind, if you like. Here's your paper, and ten bob change for the five. Is that right?"

"Yes."

Langton looked at the scrap of paper Levy handed him. It was his own—the last of the many little papers Mr. Levy had held to his disadvantage. He tore the paper into tiny fragments, and scattered them upon the gleaming surface of the river. Mr. Levy stowed away the five-pound note into a fat pocket-book, and then watched Langton with a sardonic smile.

"That's done," said Langton. "Well, good-bye!"

"Going?" asked Mr. Levy, with a peculiar grin.

"Yes. Our business is ended now."

"Not quite," said the bookmaker coolly. "I've told you that I didn't want to see you about that little account. That was nothing."

"There was nothing else to see me about!" Langton exclaimed abruptly.

"I want to talk to you."

Langton made a restive movement.

"Look here, Mr. Levy," he exclaimed, "I may as well be frank! I want all my connection with the old set I used to meet to end. I've done with that kind of thing for good. Dr. Holmes knows all about it, and he's forgiven me on my promise to have no connection with anything of the sort in the future. I mean to keep my word to him. I intended never to meet any of you again. That's why I've sent you your money from time to time by post. It was rotten of you to make me meet you here like this. If I were seen talking to you, it would do me a lot of harm at the school. I've got to live down the past, and I don't like having it raked up in this way."

"The past ain't so easy to live down, Master Langton," said Mr. Levy. "You'll find that out before you're 'arf as old as I am. Fellows can't get into a thing, and get out of it again, just as they choose. It's easy enough to get in, but it's 'ard to get out."

"I've got out of this."

"Pr'aps not."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Langton fiercely. "Do you mean to say that you want to keep up my acquaintance against my will?"

"Pr'aps."

"Then I won't have it! I'll never see you or speak to you again."

"I might come up to the school."

Langton gritted his teeth.

"If you do, I'll go straight to the Head, and tell him plainly that you are persecuting me, and trying to get me back into your set, and he will soon bring you to your senses."

"But wot would he say if he knew that you had had transactions with me since the time you promised him to reform?" said the bookmaker shrewdly.

"I haven't had any, excepting to pay my debt to you. That paper you just handed to me bore an earlier date, and it's gone now. You have nothing of mine to show. And you wouldn't expect the Head to take your word against mine. He will believe me when I tell him I've kept my word—as I have."

"But if he believed that you had had dealings with me lately?" said Mr. Levy.

"He wouldn't believe it."

"But if he did?"

"He would expel me, I suppose, and I should jolly well deserve it if I had broke my word to him," said Langton. "But I haven't. And you can't make the Head believe a rotten slander without a shadow of proof."

"Perhaps I could."

"What do you mean?" asked Langton breathlessly. "Do you mean to say that you would forge my name?"

The bookmaker laughed.

"No; you wouldn't find me running a risk like that, even if I could do it. But it wouldn't be necessary, Master Langton. I've got your signature, right enough."

"You must be mad!" exclaimed Langton, in amazement. "How have you got my signature? I kept a record of all the papers I gave you, and that one I just destroyed is the last. Besides, the dates would show."

"I've got several of a later date."

"You are dreaming!"

"Look, then!"

The bookmaker took out the fat pocketbook again. He selected a sheet

of paper from it, and handed it to Langton. The Sixth Former looked at it in amazement. It ran:

"Dear Mr. Levy,—I enclose three pounds as promised.—L."

"That was what I sent you with a postal order off the debt," said Langton.

"Exactly! You have dated it February 20th."

"Yes."

"I've got the envelope it came in, too, with the postmark on it," said Mr. Levy. "Yes, you can tear that sheet up if you like—I expected that—but I've got four more, all dated, and the envelopes they came in, with the postmarks, and I reckon your headmaster would know your handwriting."

"I should not deny my handwriting, whether he knew it or not," said Langton. "But these letters are quite innocent. I wrote them when sending you money off my debt to you."

"How are you going to make the Head believe that? Suppose," said Mr. Levy, with slow emphasis—"suppose I deny that you ever owed me any money?"

"What!"

"Suppose I take it that the money you sent me was for laying on horses?" said the bookmaker. "And suppose I make up a claim against you for money lost in bets, and came to your headmaster to complain because you hadn't paid me?"

"You couldn't!"

"I could—and would—if you forced me to it," said the bookmaker coolly. "Them letters would prove that you had dealings with me right up to last week—even after your promise to Dr. Holmes. You could try to make him believe, if you like, that you had only written about paying off an old debt. I don't think he'd believe it."

Langton's jaw dropped, and he stared at the bookmaker with a ghastly face. He realised clearly how utterly he had placed himself in the power of the unscrupulous rascal. The letters—even the postmarked envelopes—would prove that he had been in communication with the bookmaker. What would his explanation be worth?

"Good heavens!" Langton muttered.

The bookmaker grinned.

"I don't say I'm going to do it," he said. "I only warn you that it won't be safe for you to quarrel with me, Mr. Langton. I'm willing to be your friend, if you don't make me your enemy. It's for you to decide—friends or foes."

There was a long pause.

Langton broke it at last, and his voice was dry and husky when he spoke.

"You villain! What do you want?"

CHAPTER 6.

What Mr. Levy Wanted!

MR. LEVY seemed in no hurry to reply.

He lighted a fresh cigar and blew out little streams of smoke, while Langton stood with his fingers twitching and his features working.

"What do you want?" repeated Langton hoarsely. "You haven't told me this for nothing, I suppose? You want to get something out of me."

The bookmaker removed his cigar from his mouth.

"You are playing in the St. Jim's Eleven on Saturday," he said.

Langton looked amazed.

"Yes. But what does that matter to you?"

"I've seen you at practice, and I've

heard about you," said Mr. Levy, unheeding the question. "They are depending on you for their chance of pulling off a win."

"To some extent, yes."

"I suppose you know that there's betting on the match?"

"I hadn't thought of it."

Mr. Levy grinned.

"Well, there is—and plenty of it! The St. Jim's match with Loamshire is a big thing, and a good many Loamshire men have been making bets."

"Rotters to bet on cricket matches," said Langton. "That kind of thing might be kept for the racecourse."

"That's your opinion; but it ain't everybody's. The news about St. Jim's chances looking up in this way, has leaked out—some keen sharpers in Wayland got hold of it before I did," said Mr. Levy. "Loamshire are not up to their usual form, but a minor county team ought to be able to lick any school team, and I've been putting money on Loamshire. I was glad to find men to back your college. I took all the bets I could get, and gave almost any odds against St. Jim's. And if St. Jim's lose, I stand to win a hundred pounds."

"Then I hope you won't get it."

"And if St. Jim's win, I stand to lose a good many hundreds," said Mr. Levy. "You see, in some cases I've taken very big odds—I've given six to one in tenners against St. Jim's in one case."

Langton was silent.

"Then I heard about the new bowler St. Jim's had got," went on Mr. Levy calmly, "and I learn that the new bowler was yourself. I made it a point to watch you at practice one afternoon, and I saw that you were in wonderful form—better than half the county bowlers I've seen this season."

"Thank you," said Langton grimly.

"Oh, I'm not flattering you—I'm dealing in facts. I wish you had been a rotten bowler; I shouldn't have had to bother my head about you, then. But as the matter stands, St. Jim's looks like winning."

"We all think so at the school. Loamshire are not up to their usual form, and we're right at the top of our form."

"Exactly! That's what I want to talk to you about."

"I don't see that there's anything to talk about," said Langton uneasily. "The match will be played on Saturday, and the best team will win. If you've betted on it, you must take your chance."

"That's just what I don't want to do."

"I don't see that there's any alternative."

"Then I must point it out to you," said Mr. Levy coolly. "St. Jim's must not win."

Langton stared at him.

"Do you mean that you want me to drop out of the team?" he exclaimed hotly.

"No; I want you to bowl to give runs, instead of to take wickets."

Langton started back a little, clenching his hands hard. For a moment it looked as if he would hurl himself upon the scoundrel before him.

"You villain!" he gasped at last.

"Fancy names don't hurt me, and don't do you any good," Mr. Levy remarked. "I want you to lose the match for St. Jim's."

"You must be mad to suggest such a thing," said Langton hoarsely.

"I don't see it. It's as easy as rolling off a log," said Mr. Levy. "And don't you see what a splendid thing it is? I'll put on twenty-five quid for you at three to one. That will be seventy-five for

you to touch after the match. What do you think of that?"

"I wouldn't touch it!"

"Seventy-five quid ain't to be sneered at, and I'd secure it to you; you can trust me," said Mr. Levy.

"You must be mad!" said Langton hoarsely. "What you suggest is impossible. I'd better be going."

"Hold on!"

"There's nothing more to be said."

"There's a great deal more to be said, my buck," said Mr. Levy coolly. "You can blow off all the steam you like, but you'll have to come round. You'll lose the match for St. Jim's on Saturday, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or you'll be sacked from the school!"

"You mean that you will go to the Head and show him my letters and tell him that they concern betting transactions with you?"

"Exactly!"

"Every word you utter will be a lie!"

"You'll have to make the Head believe that."

Langton groaned.

"He wouldn't believe me—I couldn't expect him to."

"Naturally he wouldn't. He'd simply think that you'd been hoodwinking him. You'd better take my offer."

"I can't!" said Langton. "Man, are you insane? Do you know what you're asking me to do? To sell my friends, to betray my captain who depends on me, to act as a rotten traitor and thief! Are you mad?"

"You'll be mad if you refuse. St. Jim's has got to lose the match," said the bookmaker stolidly. "You'd better think about it. Anyway, it's that or the sack! If you let me down over the match I'll ruin you. It ain't only the 'undred I stand to win—I could afford to miss that. But if I lose, I lose at long odds: five 'undred quids wouldn't cover it—and that means bust! Do you savvy? If you ruin me, I'll ruin you! You can't expect nothing else."

Langton knew that he could expect nothing else from Mr. Simeon Levy, at all events. This was what his resolution had come to. He was deeper in the mire than ever, and he was utterly at the mercy of the bookmaker. The shadow of the past was still dark and heavy upon his life.

Mr. Levy watched him keenly out of his narrow eyes. For all his assumption of coolness, the bookmaker was anxious himself.

He had been "played," as he would have expressed it, by sharpers sharper than himself. And he had only one resource—to effect by foul play what could not be effected by fair. If Loamshire lost the match he was lost, too; his career as a betting man would come to a sudden termination. Langton was his only hope, and Langton realised that—and realised that if he failed the bookmaker in this extremity the man would not spare him. But to do what was asked—that was horrible and impossible!

"Well, what do you say?" asked Mr. Levy at last.

"I can't do it."

"Better think it over."

"There's no need to think it over," said Langton in dry and husky tones. "I've done enough thinking it over. I simply can't do it, and that's the long and short of it. You must take your chance."

Mr. Levy smiled unpleasantly.

"You know what that means for you?" he asked.

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"You can do your worst! I won't do what you want."

"You'll think it over" said the bookmaker, rising. "I'll see you agin on Friday night."

"I won't see you."

"I'll wait for you 'ere," said Mr. Levy, unheeding. "You'll come and tell me whur you've decided on. That's all now. Good-night!"

He walked away, without another word. Langton stood staring after him silently, almost stupidly. It was some minutes before he pulled himself together and walked away in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Makes a Discovery!

"WE shall have to hustle," Monty Lowther remarked.

The Terrible Three had finished their business in Rylcombe; the important matter of the new bat had been fully discussed, and settled to their satisfaction. Unfortunately, it had taken time; and as the chums of the Shell came down the village street they found that the shadows were lengthening, and the lights were already on in some of the shops in the old Hig Street. Then, a little later, they remembered that they had to be within gates by dark.

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "We can take the cut through the wood and along the towing path, and run for it."

"Hallo! 'War' Grammar School cads!"

Half a dozen juniors had come out of the tuckshop just in time to meet the Terrible Three. They were Gordon Gay & Co. of Rylcombe Grammar School, and they had stayed unusually late in Mrs. Murphy's little establishment. But as soon as they caught sight of the St. Jim's fellows they forgot all about locking-up at the Grammar School. They spread out on the pavement to intercept the Saints, grinning cheerfully.

"Good-evening, my sons!" said Gordon Gay. "What have you come here for—thick ears, or fat noses?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry. "We've got to get in. Buzz off!"

"Well, we've got to get in, too," remarked Frank Monk. "But we've got time to bump you first. Take it in turns and get it over."

And the Grammarians, chuckling, advanced upon the Terrible Three.

The St. Jim's fellows backed away.

"Better cut for it," said Manners in a whisper. "If we have a row now we shall be in late, and that will mean lines."

"Separate, then, and cut."

"Right ho!"

"We'll see you another time, Gay, and give you a licking," said Tom Merry. "We're in a hurry now. Ta-ta!"

And the chums of the Shell darted away.

"After them!" shouted Jack Wootton.

"After which?" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Tom Merry; never mind the others. I've got a bag of jam tarts here, and we'll anoint him and send him home jammy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And three or four of the Grammarians dashed after Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell ran down a side street and into a lane, and then into the footpath in the wood. In the wood he looked back and caught sight of Gay, Monk, and Wootton hot on the track. Tom Merry grinned cheerfully. There was no doubt of being able to get

away. But as he ran on again Gay gave a shrill whistle, and Tom Merry knew that that meant there were other fellows from the Grammar School near at hand. The whistle was answered from the wood.

Tom Merry halted in dismay. "My hat! The whole family's on the scene!" he muttered.

It did not take him long to decide what to do. The noise he made brushing through the thickets was guiding the Grammarians. Tom Merry dropped on his hands and knees and crawled into the thickets. He crept along as silently as he could in the direction of the river till he could see the towing path and the gleaming river beyond, then he stopped.

The shouts of the Grammarians rang close at hand.

He heard the pursuers go crashing by within a dozen yards of him, and then there were more shouts and whistles.

Tom Merry crouched silent in the bushes.

The dusk was deepening, and he knew that he could not now be back at St. Jim's before dusk, whatever speed he made. As he had missed locking-up in any case, he was in no hurry.

He remained where he was, in the thick cover of the bushes by the edge of the towing-path. The Grammarians were welcome to search for him as long as they liked; they were not likely to find him.

The whistles became fainter in the distance. But Tom Merry did not stir; he guessed that there were still some of the Grammarians on the footpath, waiting quietly in the hope that he would show himself. And his retreat in the direction of St. Jim's was cut off till the Grammarians gave up the quest.

Five minutes more passed, and then there was a sound of footsteps on the towing-path and a murmur of voices. Tom Merry fancied for a moment that it was a party of Grammarians, but a strong smell of tobacco undeceived him. Two men came from the direction of the old mill, and one of them sat down upon a log within two yards of the concealed junior. The smell of his cigar came strongly to Tom Merry's nostrils, and almost made him cough.

"Levy!" he murmured.

It was the fat bookmaker whom he had seen in conversation with Langton of the Sixth. Tom Merry could not see him clearly, but he knew the stubby, ungraceful figure. The other was Mr. Joliffe, the landlord of the Green Man, and the most disreputable blackguard in Rylcombe. The pair were very well matched.

In the distance in the wood Tom Merry could hear Gordon Gay's whistle. But it did not seem to disturb Mr. Levy and his companion. Mr. Joliffe leaned against a tree and pulled at his pipe.

"I don't see it" he said. "I tell you I don't see it!"

"It's as safe as houses!" was Mr. Levy's reply.

"The county are bound to lose," said Mr. Joliffe. "I tell you I've seen them at practice, and they never were in such weak form. And the school have got a team that could beat many minor counties."

"I know that."

"Then what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Joliffe angrily. "Look here, Levy, it's not good enough. You've been very mysterious about all this, but I don't see anything in it. The county will be beaten, and yet you're giving me the county as a sure snip. If I put my money on Loamshire I shall lose it."

Tom Merry made a movement of repugnance. He knew that the two rascals were discussing bets on the Loamshire-St. Jim's match, and he did not want to lie there and hear about it. But it was not quite possible for him to retreat now. If he left his refuge, it would only be to fall into the hands of Gordon Gay & Co.

"The county will win!" said Mr. Levy. "Look here, Joliffe, I owe you fifty quid. I know it, and it ain't convenient to settle it just now. I've been 'ard 'it. But I'm putting you on to a thing that may be worth a couple of hundred to you. You've only got to book bets on Loamshire, and the thing's done!"

"Loamshire will lose, I tell you! Everybody's putting money on St. Jim's, since it got out what form they were in. Why should they lose?"

"Because they've been got at," said Mr. Levy, sinking his voice; but Tom Merry could hear every word.

The junior of St. Jim's started. Mr. Joliffe seemed as surprised as Tom Merry felt. He took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Impossible!" he said. "It ain't impossible—it's true!" grinned Mr. Levy. "I tell you there's one of them that I can do jest as I like with—he's under my thumb, and I'm going to make it worth his while to lose the match, too!"

"Who's the fellow?" Mr. Levy chuckled. "That's my secret," he said. "Don't you ask me any questions, and I won't tell you any lies. But you can look at the book I've made on the match, and then you'll see that I stand to lose a cool thousand if St. Jim's wins. You know what that would mean to me?"

"The kybosh!" said Mr. Joliffe. "Exactly—the kybosh! And I ain't getting it in the neck like that if I can help it. And I can help it. One of 'em—one of their best—is going to give the match away. He's going to lose his wickets in both innings. He's going to bowl to give Loamshire runs, and he's a bowler they depend on. You can guess the rest."

Mr. Joliffe drew a deep breath. "Then it's a dead cert?" he asked. "Safe as houses! You take my tip. And it's agreed that if you clear a cool hundred over my tip, you wipe off the fifty I owe you. That's fair?"

"Fair enough," said Mr. Joliffe. "I'll have to look at your book first, though, to make sure it's straight business."

"Come along to my quarters, and I'll show it to you." The two men moved away.

CHAPTER 8.

A Fuzzle for Tom Merry!

TOM MERRY kept still. He was feeling almost stunned.

It seemed to him almost like a dream. But he could not doubt the earnestness of the bookmaker. He said that he had one of the St. Jim's team under his thumb, and that he had made it worth that player's while to lose the match for the school.

It seemed horrible—impossible! For a St. Jim's fellow to sell a match—and the most important match of the season—seemed unbelievable.

But it was so! "Good heavens!" murmured Tom Merry.

The junior felt unable to move. He was filled with horror and disgust at

the black treachery he had discovered by accident.

Which of the eleven was it? Not Kildare—not Darrell! That would be impossible! Rushden, Baker—Monteith! Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was in the First Eleven, and Tom Merry did not like him.

Monteith had many unpleasant ways. But he would surely be incapable of treachery like this! Langton—was it Langton? Such an action was directly opposed to all that Tom Merry knew of Langton's character. It was impossible—and yet, only an hour or so before he had seen Langton in conversation with the bookmaker.

Tom Merry shivered. He rose at last from his cover. All sounds of the Grammarians had died away. They must have returned to their school by this time. Tom Merry hardly thought of them as he left his cover in the thickets. He was thinking of this discovery he had made, and of what he ought to do.

What should he do? He could not remain silent and leave the match to be sold by the unknown traitor. But if he told Kildare what he had heard, was the captain of St. Jim's likely to listen to him? Kildare would laugh to scorn the mere suggestion that a St. Jim's fellow could be found base enough to sell the county match.

Besides, even if he believed, what was he to do when Tom Merry could give no hint as to the identity of the traitor?

The match had to be played, and the whole eleven could not be "sacked" on suspicion.

Tom Merry resolved to consult his chums. His mind was in a whirl as he tramped back to St. Jim's. It was long since dark when he reached the school gates, and the gates were closed and locked.

Manners and Lowther were waiting for him outside.

"Hallo, here you are!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Did the Grammar School cads get hold of you?"

Tom Merry shook his head. "Then what made you so long?" asked Manners.

"I had to take cover." "We got away all right," said Lowther. "We were here before dark, but we waited for you. Sink or swim together. Better ring Taggy up now."

He rang a loud peal at the bell, and Taggles, the school porter, came down, grumbling, to the gates.

Taggles unlocked the gates, with a grunt, and the Terrible Three nodded their thanks, and entered the School House.

"Now, Tommy, what is it you have got on your chest?" asked Monty Lowther.

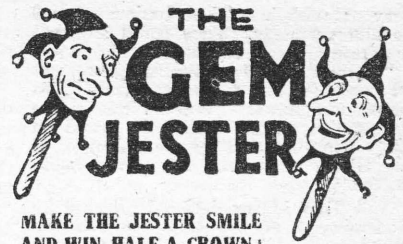
"Come up to the study." Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were waiting for Tom Merry in his study.

"Here the boundahs are!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We've been waitin' for you to come in. I've been thinkin' of doin' an article on the Loamshire match for the next numbah of the 'Weekly,' and—"

"Blow the 'Weekly'!" said Tom Merry, closing the study door. "I'm glad you fellows are here. You may as well know about a discovery I've made."

"Bai Jove!" Tom Merry's handsome face looked

(Continued on the next page.)



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* * *

FLOWERY.

Mrs. Hawkins: "Has the florist any children?"

Florist's Neighbour: "Yes, a little girl who is a budding genius, and a little boy who is a blooming nuisance!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss D. Perkin, Pinglefield Cottages, Streetway Road, near Lichfield, Staffs.

* * *

SCHOOLBOY HOWLER.

Teacher: "Now, Brown, surely you know that Magna Charta brought freedom to the English people?"

Brown: "Oh, yes, sir! I knew he did, but I had forgotten his name."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Smith, 192, Shaftesbury Crescent, Derby.

* * *

FRESH AIR NEEDED.

Composer: "What do you think of my song?"

Critic: "It needs ventilating."

Composer: "What do you mean?"

Critic: "The air's bad."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Sheerburn, Owlerton, Young's Park, Goodrington, Devon.

* * *

HE CAME A CROPPER.

Robinson: "Hallo, Smith, haven't seen you for some time!"

Smith: "Been in bed seven weeks."

Robinson: "Oh, that's too bad! Flu, I suppose?"

Smith: "Yes—and crashed!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to G. Wardle, 73, Derby Street, Macclesfield, Cheshire.

* * *

IRISH.

Pat: "Phwat are ye doing, Mike?"

Mike: "Begorrah! But I've been sawing pieces off this plank for the last ten minutes, and it's still too short!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to "A Reader," 5, Copthall Gardens, Mill Hill, London, N.W.7.

very troubled. The juniors gazed at him curiously. They could see that something very unusual had happened.

"I took cover in the wood to get away from the Grammarians," Tom Merry explained. "While I was in the bushes two fellows came and jawed on the towing-path. They were Joliffe, of the Green Man, and Levy, the book-maker."

And Tom Merry detailed all that he remembered of the talk between the two rascals. The juniors listened with deep attention.

"The unspeakable rotters!" said Blake. "They ought to be ducked in the river! I say, this is a jolly serious bizness."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It can't be allowed to go on," said Monty Lowther decidedly. "But the worst of it is that you have no idea who the chap is."

Tom Merry looked very troubled.

"You remember whom we saw talking to Levy this evening?" he said, in a low voice.

Lowther started.

"Langton, by Jove!"

"Langton!" said Blake.

"You know he used to be mixed up with the bookmakers and that rotten set at the Green Man," said Tom Merry. "It all came out, and Langton owned up to the Head, and he was let off being expelled. But we saw him talking to Levy this evening. I don't know that there was anything in it. It wouldn't be fair to put this on him. But—but one can't help feeling uneasy. Anyway, Langton or not, somebody's going to sell the county match unless he's stopped, and the question is, what's going to be done?"

"There's only one thing to be done," said Blake decidedly. "You'll have to warn Kildare. He's the only person to deal with this."

"I suppose so," said Tom Merry.

And the others agreed.

"Then I'll go and speak to Kildare now, and get it over," said Tom Merry. "You fellows keep this dark. Not a word to a soul, you know. It's bad enough as it is, without having the school disgraced by its getting out."

"Quite wight, deah boy!"

And Tom Merry left the study, and went in search of the captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

Kildare's Opinion!

KILDARE was in his study, hard at work, when Tom Merry knocked at his door. Kildare was a hard worker at lessons as well as on the cricket field.

He rapped out "Come in!" without looking up from his table.

Tom Merry entered the study and closed the door behind him.

The captain of St. Jim's went on writing, and Tom Merry coughed. Kildare looked up.

"Hallo, what do you want?" he demanded. "I'm busy."

"I want to speak to you, Kildare. It's—it's rather important," said Tom Merry, with a very troubled look. "It's about the Loamshire match."

Kildare's hand slid towards a ruler. "Are you coming here with a round robin, like D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"No," said Tom Merry, smiling, in spite of his trouble. "Look here, Kildare! This is serious. There's danger that the match may be given away!"

Kildare started.

"The match given away?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes."

The St. Jim's captain frowned darkly.

"Do you mean to say that you accuse a member of the First Eleven of intending to give the match away?" he asked, in mingled anger and amazement.

"Yes, Kildare. Don't get waxy," said Tom Merry hastily. "It isn't a nice thing to have to say, and I've only come to tell you so that you can look out."

"It's nonsense—utter nonsense!" said Kildare sharply. "I know every chap in the eleven, and there isn't one who is capable of doing anything of the sort. What is his name, anyway? Who is it?"

"I—I don't know."

"What!" Kildare rose angrily to his feet. "You don't know? You tell me that some member of my team is going to give the match away, and you don't know who it is? Have you come here to be funny?"

"I wish you'd listen to me," said Tom Merry. "It wasn't pleasant for me to come here and tell you this. But I know it for a fact. Somebody in the team has been got at by a book-maker!"

"A bookmaker!"

"Yes. A rotter who's been betting on the match!"

And Tom Merry explained once again all that he had overheard on the towing-path.

"You really ought to have had too much sense to believe what you heard," said Kildare, when Tom had finished.

"But—but the way he put it—"

"I don't care how he put it. It wasn't true, and couldn't be true. Very likely he knew that you were listening, and was pulling your leg."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's impossible; he couldn't see me."

"H'm! Well, my opinion is that he knew you were there all the time, and jawed at you to make a fool of you," said Kildare. "And he seems to have succeeded. I've no time to waste listening to this rubbish. You can get out."

"Then you won't—"

"I won't take any notice of this nonsense, if that is what you mean," said Kildare. "For goodness' sake get the nonsense out of your head, and buzz off! When you've thought over it, you'll realise that you've been made a fool of."

"But I tell you—"

"If you say another word, I'll lick you!"

Tom Merry looked at the St. Jim's captain's angry face, and he realised that it was useless to persist. He turned to the door.

"And, look here," said Kildare, "don't jaw this rot over the school! If I hear a word of it, mind, I shall know whom to trace it to, and I'll see that you have a record licking for starting such a silly scandal. Now get out!"

Tom Merry left the study without another word, and closed the door. He walked away with a gloomy face to his own quarters. He had done his duty by speaking to the captain of St. Jim's; but he had done no good, and he knew that he had lowered himself in Kildare's opinion. He had a very heavy heart as he rejoined his chums in his own study. They met him with a chorus of inquiry.

"Well?"

"It's no good," said Tom Merry. "Kildare wouldn't even hear me out. I've left him in a ratty temper. It was just what I expected."

"Pewwaps I ought to have gone," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "In a delicate mattah of this sort, what is wequihed is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "I guessed that Kildare would cut up rusty. You couldn't expect him to swallow such a yarn."

"You believe it?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Well, yes," said Blake, with a slight hesitation. "Of course, I believe every word you say, but I think perhaps your conclusion is mistaken. The rotter may have been gassing."

"He said he stood to lose a thousand if St. Jim's won."

"Might have been gas."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I believe every word of it," said Tom Merry quietly. "It's not a pleasant thing to believe of any St. Jim's fellow, but it's true. And as Kildare won't even think about the matter, I'm going to keep my eyes open, and see whether I can spot the fellow. If we could prove it against him before the match—"

"Not likely," said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"I'm going to try, anyway. This match is the biggest thing of the cricket season, and it's a feather in our caps all round if St. Jim's beat the county. It would be rotten if the match were lost owing to a cad selling his side."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"I don't know what senior it is," said Tom Merry; "but Levy has one of them under his thumb, and he believes, at any rate, that the chap is going to sell the match. And I'm going to keep my eyes open, and see if I can find out who it is."

"No harm in that, of course."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows. It was no wonder that Kildare had been incredulous, for Blake and D'Arcy were incredulous, too; and even Manners and Lowther had a slight hesitancy in their manner. They could not rid themselves of the suspicion that Tom Merry had been deceived.

But Tom Merry knew that he had not been deceived; and he felt, too, that the result of the county match rested upon him now; that if he discovered the traitor in time the match might be saved, and that, otherwise, it would be a defeat for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 10.

Under Suspicion!

TOM MERRY thought over the matter a great deal the following day.

After school the First Eleven went down to cricket practice, and half the school went to watch them. The coming county match filled St. Jim's with growing excitement. The good prospect of the school beating a minor county team delighted every fellow in the old college, from the captain down to the youngest frag.

As Tom Merry stood watching the First Eleven playing a scratch team of Fifth and Sixth fellows, he had to acknowledge that Kildare's men were in wonderful form.

All of them seemed to be at their best; and even without the latest recruit to the eleven, they would have had a sporting chance against the county.

But with Langton in their ranks, not

a fellow at St. Jim's doubted that they would give Loamshire the "kybosh."

Langton was certainly marvellous. His batting was first-class, but it was with the ball that he excelled. The crowd round the ropes cheered Langton again and again as he bowled, with a scope and variety of bowling that gave the batsmen no rest.

Tom Merry watched Langton thoughtfully.

Was he the fellow Mr. Levy had been speaking of in his talk with Joliffe? Tom Merry had no reason for connecting him with the bookmaker's plot, excepting the fact that he had seen him in talk with the shady rascal. That was a suspicious circumstance; but it might be explained away.

If it was Langton who was to betray the team, certainly he was the fellow

so long as the practice lasted; but when the dusk fell and the cricketers came off the field Langton's cheeriness seemed to drop from his face like a mask.

Kildare clapped him on the shoulder as they walked back to the School House in the gathering shadows.

"You bowled splendidly!" said Kildare heartily. "Blessed if I knew I was getting such a treasure when I picked you out, Langton, old man! Bowl like that to-morrow, and the county will get the licking of their lives!"

Langton nodded. "Keep yourself fit, too," said Darrell. "If you should go off colour we should be dished. We're depending on you, Langton. And I've noticed you looked worried lately. You ought to shove everything out of your mind, excepting cricket."

the towing path Mr. Levy would know that the St. Jim's senior did not mean to carry out his orders.

But what was he to do? Defy Levy and let the man come to St. Jim's to lay his cunning proofs before the Head? Langton would certainly not play in the county match then, for he would be expelled from St. Jim's. He had no hope that the Head would believe his explanation. He knew—or, rather, felt that the mere fact that he had been in communication with the bookmaker at all would condemn him in Dr. Holmes' eyes.

If Levy came to see the Head he was ruined, and St. Jim's would miss him on the morrow. The county match would be played without him. It would be no worse for St. Jim's then if he played to Mr. Levy's orders.



"St. Jim's will lose," said Mr. Levy, "because they've been got at!" Tom Merry started as he heard the words. "Impossible!" ejaculated Mr. Joliffe. "It ain't impossible—it's true!" replied the bookmaker. "There's one of their players I've got under my thumb, and I'm going to make it worth his while to lose the match."

who could do it most easily and completely.

Was it Langton?

As he looked at the Sixth Former, keen and flushed and evidently enjoying the cricket practice and the shouts of applause, Tom Merry could hardly think so.

Langton had been reckless once, but even in his recklessness he had never been an utter cad; he had never done anything so base as betraying fellows who depended upon him. And his recklessness at that old time had been expiated by the fact that he had confessed freely to save another fellow who was in danger of suffering for him. Surely a fellow who could do that could not betray his side in a match.

But if it was not Langton, who was it? Tom Merry could think of no one else.

At all events, there was nothing the captain of the Shell could do, excepting to keep his eyes open, especially on the day of the match.

Langton was looking keen and well

"Yes—yes," said Langton absently.

"We all rely on you," said Rushden.

"I wish you wouldn't," said Langton almost irritably.

"Why?" asked Kildare in surprise.

"Well, I might lose my nerve, you know. I've never played such a big team as Loamshire County before. I don't want to feel too much responsibility on my shoulders."

Kildare laughed good-humouredly.

"Oh, that will be all right!" he said. "You won't suffer from stage fright. Come into my room to tea, Langton?"

"Thanks, no. I think I'll have a stroll before tea."

"Right-ho!"

Langton stopped outside the School House when the others went in. He strolled under the old elms, with his hands in his pockets, his brow dark and frowning under his cricket cap. All the light had gone from his face now, and he was worried and miserable. It was Friday evening, and Mr. Levy would be waiting already in the place of appointment. If Langton did not meet him on

It was a kind of sophistry with which he tried to dull his conscience, and which showed that the thought of yielding to the demands of the bookmaker had already come into his mind.

The clock in the old tower struck.

He started.

It was half-past seven. Mr. Levy must have been waiting a long time at the rendezvous—might be already on his way to St. Jim's.

The thought filled Langton with a sudden terror.

He must go; he must see the man and prevent him from coming to the school, at any cost. He could promise him money—promise him anything—beg for a respite. With a white face and his heart wildly beating, Langton hurried to the school gates. The Terrible Three were there.

It occurred to Tom Merry that if Mr. Levy was right, and there was a member of the team in his pay, that member might have to see the bookmaker before the match came off.

There would be no time on the morrow, for the stumps would be pitched very early for a one-day match. And so Tom Merry had determined to keep his eye on Langton that Friday.

The chums of the Shell saw Langton as he hurried down to the gates, and they could not help noting the white, scared expression upon his face, in spite of the dusk.

"Looks as if he's seen a ghost," murmured Manners.

Tom Merry felt a sudden conviction.

"That's the man!" he said.

And Monty Lowther nodded.

Langton came down to the gates, but they were closed for the night. As a prefect, Langton had a key to the side gate, and he unlocked the gate and went out.

The Terrible Three exchanged significant glances.

"Well, what do you fellows think?" said Tom Merry in a low voice.

"Chap would be almost justified in following the boulder and seeing where he's going," Monty Lowther remarked tentatively.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't quite like that idea, Monty, old man."

"Well, I don't, either, for that matter," said Monty Lowther; "and I dare say he would give us the slip, too. But if he's the man, he's going to see Levy—to arrange about selling the county match to-morrow."

"Rotter!" muttered Manners.

"We've got no proof," said Tom Merry quietly. "But we'll watch him to-morrow when the teams are playing, and if he fails St. Jim's—"

"What then?"

"We may be able to stop him," said Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 11.

The Last Struggle!

QUITE unconscious of the dark suspicions working in the minds of the chums of the Shell, Langton hurried down to the river and broke into a run upon the towing-path.

All the day he had been saying to himself that he would not go to meet Mr. Levy, and now that the time had come he was hurrying to meet the bookmaker, lest the man should keep his word and come to St. Jim's.

It never occurred to Langton that he was suspected. He had been too engrossed in his miserable reflections to notice anything outside himself. Had he known that Tom Merry & Co. suspected him of treachery it would have been an added pang in his present misery, but probably it would have made little difference in his actions. He was in the power of the bookmaker, and he had not the moral strength and courage to defy him. He was paying a bitter price for the recklessness of the past; once he had suffered for his sins, and now he was suffering without sinning. Was the shadow of the wretched past to darken the whole of his life?

His brow was dark and his thoughts were bitter as he hurried along the towing-path. In the dusk a fat, unwieldy figure came dimly into view, and he caught sight of the red end of a cigar. He knew that fat figure and the smell of rank tobacco. It was Simeon Levy, and he was coming to the school.

Langton stopped.

"Mr. Levy!"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said the bookmaker, halting, and taking his cigar from his mouth. "You are late, and I thought you wasn't coming. I was coming on to the school."

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"I—I want to speak to you!"

Mr. Levy grinned under his thick, oily moustache.

"Very well; you're only just in time!" he said. "Nother ten minutes, and I should have been calling on the 'Ead! We can talk 'ere. I waited for you a hower!"

"I—I'm sorry!"

"Oh, it's all right, so long as you've come to your senses, and decided to do the sensible thing!" said Mr. Levy. "Seventy-five quid is a big sum, and you can touch it for the asking!"

"I don't want it!"

The bookmaker shrugged his fat shoulders.

"You can please yourself about that, Mr. Langton, so long as you keep the rest of the bargain!" he said.

"Mr. Levy, I can't lose the match!" said Langton in broken, hurried tones. "I can't do it! You don't understand what it would mean to me if I did!"

"I understand what it would mean to you if you don't!"

"It's impossible!"

"Was you coming to meet me to tell me that?" asked Mr. Levy, with a disagreeable laugh.

"Ye-es!"

"Nothing else!"

"N-no!"

"Then you needn't 'ave troubled to come! If you'll kindly stand outer the way, Mr. Langton, I'll get on!"

"Where are you going?" said Langton hoarsely.

"You know where I'm going—to the school!"

"Stop! Listen to me! I—I'll do anything else you ask me!" said Langton desperately. "I'll do anything, but I can't do what you ask!"

"I don't want you to do anything else."

"Kildare was saying to me an hour ago that they rely on me. They all trust me. The match depends on me—they all said so!" muttered Langton.

"All the better!" said Mr. Levy coolly. "That makes it easier for you!"

Langton clenched his hands.

"I suppose that's how you look at it!" he said scornfully. "You don't understand these things! You look on cricket as if it were the same as racing—a trick for getting money out of duffers! You ought to be put in prison for making bets on the game!"

Mr. Levy smiled unpleasantly.

"Is that all you've got to say?" he asked.

"I can't do what you've asked. You ought to know that it's impossible. How could I ever look the fellows in the face again?" said Langton hoarsely.

"That's not my business! Give me a plain 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"No, then!"

"Very well! I'll see that you don't play to-morrow, anyway!" said the bookmaker savagely. "You'll be sacked from St. Jim's to-night!"

The bookmaker walked on.

"Stop!" exclaimed Langton, in agony.

"Bah!"

Levy strode on without a pause. Langton stood on the towing-path, a terrible struggle in his breast. What was he to do? He could not face it. He ran after the bookmaker and caught him by the arm.

"Hold on! Give me time to think!" cried Langton.

Levy stopped, and regarded the wretched boy with a cold, sarcastic grin. Langton's agony of mind did not move a single throb of pity in his breast. He was thinking of the betting-

book in his pocket; of the sum he stood to win if St. Jim's lost the match; of the ruin that stared him in the face if St. Jim's won. He had no compassion to spare for the boy he was dragging to shame and remorse.

"I—I can't do it!" groaned Langton. "Give me time to think! I—I'll let you know to-morrow!"

"You must let me know now!"

"Aiter all, if—I play badly," muttered Langton, "they—they would not suspect the reason."

"Of course they wouldn't!" said Mr. Levy. "I've seen good players go off colour in big matches, and nobody suspected them of selling out. There won't be any suspicion, and it will be seventy-five quid in your pocket!"

"I don't want it! I wouldn't take it!"

There was silence for a few moments.

"Leave it as it is," said Langton at last. "I—I'll see what I can do. I can't say more than that."

The bookmaker grinned. He had been pretty certain of his victim before; he was quite certain of him now.

"That's all right," he said. "Play to lose, that's all I want. Arter all, it's no more than dozens of others do."

Langton groaned.

"Take it cheerfully," said the bookmaker. "Do as I ask you, and you'll find that it will pay you. But if you ruin me, I'll ruin you, and you can bet your socks on that! Good-night, Mr. Langton!"

The bookmaker walked away down the towing-path.

Langton stood and stared dazedly after him. Then he turned and hurried away.

Kildare met him as he came into the Sixth Form passage at St. Jim's. The captain of St. Jim's started at the sight of the senior's white, drawn face.

"Great Scott, Langton! What's the matter with you?" he asked.

"I'm feeling a bit seedy, that's all," said Langton, in halting tones. "I say, Kildare, would it put you out very much if I didn't play to-morrow?"

Kildare started.

"It would muck up everything!" he said anxiously. "What are you thinking of, Langton?"

"I don't feel very fit."

"You were fit enough to-day," said Kildare. "What has happened since this afternoon?"

"Oh, nothing! But—"

"You'll be all right," said Kildare comfortingly. "It's just the thought of playing a big club like Loamshire that's getting on your nerves a bit. You'll be all right, old man! Pull yourself together, and think of beating Loamshire!"

Langton nodded, and went into his study. For long hours the wretched senior paced his room, thinking—thinking. What was he to do?

He knew what he ought to do. He knew that he ought to defy the bookmaker, and take the consequences. But he knew, too, that he had not the nerve to do it. The conviction was borne in upon his mind that all his struggles were but the twistings and windings of a bird in the meshes of a net, and that when the time came he would do exactly as his taskmaster had ordered him.

CHAPTER 12.

The County Match!

GLAD enough on Saturday morning were the juniors of St. Jim's when the welcome word of dismissal came at last.

The Form-room doors were opened,

and crowds of juniors came streaming out into the passages. The Terrible Three made a break instantly for the cricket field with a crowd of other fellows at their heels, and it was a race to the ground. They wanted to know which side was batting, and how the score ran.

St. Jim's had won the toss and gone in to bat first. The St. Jim's first innings was just ended when Tom Merry & Co. arrived upon the scene.

"Ninety for the innings," said Monty Lowther, consulting the score. "My hat! I thought Kildare would do better than that."

"It's not bad against a county team," said Manners.

"It's not a winning score, anyway."

"Well, no."

"What was Langton's figure?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

He soon knew.

Langton had been clean bowled by Dalton, the county captain, and his score had been a duck's-egg.

Tom Merry's face darkened as he learned that.

Langton had lost his wicket for nothing—had he done so on purpose? Certainly, the duck's-egg might have happened to anybody. There was another batsman who had failed to score—Hobson, of the Fifth. Langton had done no worse than Hobson. But in his case it was grimly suspicious.

Tom Merry looked at Langton as he stood in the group of senior cricketers.

Langton was very quiet and subdued. There was none of the cheeriness about him that was to be observed in the rest of the team.

The other cricketers did not seem to notice it; but it was only too plain to Tom Merry that Langton had a weight on his mind.

Langton was the man.

The Terrible Three, with Blake and D'Arcy—the five juniors who were in the secret—drew aside to consult.

"It looks bad, I know," said Blake, with a thoughtful nod, "but another chap's got a duck's-egg, too, you know. Upon the whole, it might have been chance."

"Yaas, wathah! It's wotten to suspect a chap of thwowing away a wicket."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"I know it may be chance," he said. "But it looks bad. Look here, there's no doubt now that Langton's the chap Levy was speaking of."

"I agree with you there," said Lowther.

"The only question is, whether he means to do as Levy's ordered him, or whether he'll be decent enough to play up, in spite of Levy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The only thing is to keep an eye on him when he begins to bowl, and see," said Manners. "If he bowls badly—"

"Then we're going to interfere."

"But how?"

"I shall speak to him about it," said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Bai Jove!"

It was evidently the only thing to be done. But there was no time to talk about it further. Figgins & Co. of the New House joined them.

"Hallo! What are you fellows confabing about?" asked Figgins genially. "What do you think of the match so far?"

"Oh, so-so!" said Tom Merry.

"Loamshire are going to begin their innings before lunch, I hear," said Fatty Wynn. "There is time for an hour's batting. I rather think they'll be surprised when Langton starts bowling."

"St. Jim's may be surprised, too," said Tom Merry grimly.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling



Hallo, everybody! "How should I do a delayed drop?" asks a parachute jumper. "Drop" the idea "without delay"! Remember, it may cost more than you think to have your car overhauled—if it's a speed cop who does it! "To get rich," says Mr. Railton, "spend less than you receive." Some hard-up fags say this would be impossible! Figgins asks what is a Matabele devil dance? We think that must have been what we saw Wally D'Arcy performing after an interview with Mr. Selby! "I hate cricket," writes Crooke. That almost "stumps" me! "What's the best way to play cricket?" asks Gibson. Straight in—but not straight out! "Is wicket-keeping restful?" asks young Hobbs. Well, you certainly get a lot of "squatting"! A fortune-teller says she can see future events dimly, as through a film. A "photographic" mind, well "developed"! Have you ever heard 50,000 people in complete agreement? Sounds impos. No, they all shouted: "Goal!" There's nothing like sea air to blow away cobwebs—it makes a clean

The juniors looked on with great interest as Kildare and his men appeared. All St. Jim's were on the ground now, and many strangers had come in to see the county play.

On important occasions like the present, St. Jim's cricket ground was open to the local public, and there were a great many village folk present.

Among the spectators who did not belong to the school, a fat man in a bowler hat could be seen, and the fellows who noticed him recognised him as Mr. Simeon Levy.

But no open notice was taken of the bookmaker's presence. He was standing quietly as a spectator among the others, and although his presence was not appreciated, no one felt inclined to interfere with him.

The crowd cheered as the St. Jim's men went on the field. They looked a very handsome and a very fit set of fellows, too. Kildare tossed the ball to Langton for the first over, against Dalton, the Loamshire captain.

There was a buzz of expectation among the Saints.

They expected great things of Langton, and they had no doubt that the champion bowler of St. Jim's would open the eyes of the Loamshire men in the very first over.

But they were disappointed.

Langton opened the over with very mediocre bowling. It was neither good nor bad, but quite ordinary—so ordinary that, as Monty Lowther remarked, it was extraordinary.

Dalton had heard of the great bowler of St. Jim's, and he had been looking for trouble. But he did not find any. He knocked away the first two balls with ease, and let himself go at the third. The ball sailed away to the boundary, and there was no need for the batsmen to run.

Kildare cast an anxious glance at Langton.

"sweep." Conundrum: Why do hikers prefer bus routes? The rest is easy. As the lift-boy said to the elderly gentleman: "There you are, son!" "Who are you calling son?" demanded the old gentleman. "Well, I brought you up, didn't I?" asked the lift-boy. An Irishman's house caught fire, and his wife seized the kettle to pour on the flames. "Begorra!" cried Pat. "Are you going to try and put out a fire with hot water?" As the actor said: "I insist on real food in the banquet scene." "Very well," replied the manager, "then you shall have real poison in the death scene!"

"Did the Romans play cards?" asks Crooke. Well, there is the story of Horatius and his men holding the bridge party. "I'm up to the neck in debt," complains a reader. You shouldn't buy your suits by instalments. The national expenditure in U.S.A. is £1,000,000 a day in excess of income. That reminds us of our account at the tuckshop. I see painters and sculptors are to have a conference. An art-to-art talk. "Had an accident yesterday!" said one Chelsea artist to another. "What! Did you sell a picture?" exclaimed his friend. Mr. Lathom's hobby is composing Church tunes, of which he has written seventy. The chants of a lifetime. Of course, you heard of the firemen who went for their annual picnic but couldn't light a fire? "I want to buy something that will go up," says a reader. What about a tin of petrol and a box of matches? "Hot" story: "I understand you sell spare parts for cigarette lighters?" asked the customer. "Yes, sir," replied the shopkeeper. "Very well, I want a new thumb!" Well, I must flash off.

"Go it, old fellow!" he called out. Langton flushed.

He sent down the fourth ball of the over with a vim, and Dalton's wicket had a narrow escape. The Loamshire captain just saved it, and there were no runs. The St. Jim's crowd gave a cheer. Langton was waking up to his work.

Tom Merry looked across at Mr. Levy as the crowd cheered.

He saw the bookmaker's eyes gleam, and his jaws closed like a vice. As well as if Mr. Levy had told him, Tom Merry knew that the bookmaker was there to see Langton betray his side, and that he was following the fluctuations of the game with anxious interest.

"The hound!" muttered Tom Merry. Langton finished the over without event.

The field crossed over. Darrell took the ball for the next over, against Scott, a Loamshire batsman with a reputation for slogging. Scott knocked the leather all over the field, and the Saints had a great deal of leather-hunting. And runs went up on the board.

Langton bowled the third over. The tameness of it astonished St. Jim's. The over gave Loamshire 8 runs, and cost them nothing in wickets.

Kildare looked amazed.

He had depended on Langton for brilliant bowling and falling wickets, and here was his champion delivering mediocre bowling that could have been equalled by a dozen fellows in the Fifth Form. Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth, could have done better, and every fellow on the ground knew it.

When the field crossed over again, Kildare spoke to Langton.

"You haven't got into it yet, Langton," he said anxiously.

"I don't seem to feel quite up to it," Langton confessed. "It's the first time I've played against a county team, you know."

"That's all very well, I know. But if you could only bowl as you've bowled at the nets, you'd give them the kybosh."

"I'll try, Kildare."

"For goodness' sake do!" said the captain of St. Jim's. "We can't equal them in batting, as you know. We can't expect to. If you don't take wickets they will walk over us. We are all relying on you, Langton."

Langton coloured.

"Well, I'll do my best," he said.

He spoke as if he meant it. But if he did his best, his best was very poor. For not a single wicket fell to his bowling. Runs piled up on it, and that was all. Darrell and Monteith both accounted for wickets, and Kildare caught out a batsman. But when the time came to stop play for lunch, only those three wickets had been lost, and the county team had scored fifty runs for them.

A feeling of deep disappointment settled over the St. Jim's crowd.

Fifty for three wickets!

If that kind of thing continued the match was over, bar shouting. Langton, the champion bowler—Langton, the sheet-anchor of the School Eleven, had failed them. Whether he was not in form, or whatever the reason might be, Langton had failed his side.

"He may buck up after lunch," Darrell remarked hopefully to Kildare.

Kildare nodded without replying.

His heart was heavy. He had placed so much faith in Langton, and Langton had done nothing whatever to justify it in the county match. Kildare saw clearly enough that the school was booked for a licking, and he was disappointed and worried. What was the matter with Langton? Kildare could not guess; but there was one fellow on the ground, at least, who knew, and that one was Tom Merry. And when the cricket knocked off for lunch, Tom Merry made up his mind what to do.

CHAPTER 13.

Playing the Game!

"LANGTON!"

The Sixth Former was standing by himself, leaning against the wall of the cricket pavilion, after lunch. Langton preferred to be alone just then. He had withdrawn from the other fellows while they were still lunching with the county cricketers. Tom Merry had had his dinner in the School House, looking very thoughtful and worried all the time, and as soon as it was over he had looked for Langton. He was glad to find him alone. He had something to say to Langton, which it was not advisable for anybody else to hear.

Langton started and looked round as Tom Merry spoke his name.

"What do you want, kid?" he asked.

"I want to speak to you."

"Well?"

"I want to make an appeal to you," said Tom Merry quietly. "I've been watching your bowling."

Langton smiled faintly.

"I suppose the fellows are disappointed?" he said.

"Yes."

"Well, it's hard cheese, but it can't be helped."

"Perhaps it can be helped," said Tom Merry quietly. "Look here, Langton, this won't do! St. Jim's can't be beaten this way. You can't give the match away to the county."

Langton started violently.

If he had had a clear conscience, it

would hardly have been safe for the junior to speak to him in that way. Any other Sixth Former would have replied to such words, not verbally, but with a heavy hand. But Langton's conscience was not clear. The only thought that flashed into his mind now was that he had been found out.

"Wh-what do you mean?" he stammered, turning pale.

"I mean what I say! You are giving the match away, and you've got to stop it!"

Langton's face was like chalk.

"You dare to suspect me—" he began.

"I don't suspect—I know!" interrupted Tom Merry crisply.

"I know what Simeon Levy is here watching the match for. I know he's fixed it with you to sell the match."

If Tom Merry had had any doubt before as to the correctness of his conclusions, he could have had none now. Langton's face was ghastly. He staggered back against the pavilion wall, and held on to it with his hands to keep himself from falling. He stared at Tom Merry with wide-open, hunted eyes.

"How—how do you know anything about it?" he panted.

"Because I heard Levy telling Joliffe so the other day."

"Oh!"

"He said that he had squared a player in St. Jim's Eleven to give the match away," said Tom Merry. "You're that player."

Langton groaned.

"I didn't mean to say a word," said Tom Merry, feeling a sentiment of compassion for the wretched senior, in spite of himself. "If you had decided at the last minute to do the decent thing, and play up for St. Jim's, I should not have spoken a word. I know you're a decent chap, Langton, and I don't know what hold that villain has over you. But think, man. Suppose you kept on and did this—what would you feel like afterwards? You'd never be able to look a decent fellow in the face again."

The wretched Sixth Former groaned again.

"You've got to defy that scoundrel!" said Tom Merry.

"Play up for St. Jim's and show him that you don't care for him."

"You don't understand."

"I understand this much—that it's dirty and cowardly and blackguardly to sell a cricket match, and that you can't do it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with flashing eyes.

"Have—have you told anybody else about this?" asked Langton, almost in a whisper.

"Five of us know."

"And—and—"

"We shan't say a word if you play up for the school," said Tom Merry. "We shan't disgrace you, or disgrace St. Jim's by letting it out—that is, if you play up. But if you keep on as you've started, you'll get it in the neck! That's plain English!"

"You don't understand," muttered Langton. "I'm in that man's power; he can get me expelled from the school if he chooses."

"Do you mean that you owe him money?"

"No—no! It isn't that!"

"He's offered you money to do this?"

"Yes; but I've refused it."

"Then why are you doing it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"He can ruin me by going to the Head."

"But how, if you kept your word to the Head, and hadn't had any dealings with him since that last affair?"



Helpless in the grasp of Tom Merry & Co., the rascally the road! He gave a yell as he bumped down heavily twice before he ventured to return

"He's got letters from me," groaned Langton. "Innocent enough, but—but, you see, I wrote to send him money I owed him to get rid of him. But he's going to use those letters to make out that I've been betting with him up to a few days ago. Do you see? He's got me under his thumb. He's only got to go to the Head and show those letters, and I'm done for."

"And he's asked you to throw this match away—that's his price for letting you off?"

"Yes," groaned Langton.

Tom Merry's brow was very stern.

"And you consented?"

"No—no!"

"But you're doing it?"

Langton shifted restlessly.

"I—I don't know what to do. I tell

you he can ruin me. I asked Kildare to leave me out of the team, but it was no good. If St. Jim's beat the county, I'm ruined."

"Better to be ruined honourably than to save yourself by acting like a dirty cad and traitor!" said Tom Merry scornfully.

"That's easy enough to say," muttered Langton.

"It is easy enough to do, if you make up your mind to it. Look here! Suppose you do as this villain wants—how can you stay here afterwards? I shall tell the fellows what you're doing. You can't expect me to become a party to your dirty treachery. The whole school

being a cur and a traitor! Play the game!"

Langton was silent.

The tense pallor in his face showed how bitter a struggle was going on in his breast.

He had never dreamed of this! Hitherto, the struggle had been between his sense of honour and his fear of the bookmaker's revenge. Now he understood that the position was changed. If he betrayed St. Jim's, his secret would be known. He would be despised and condemned by the whole school—he could not remain! He could, certainly, deny Tom Merry's allegations; but his peculiar play would bear them out—and he knew that he had not nerve enough, nor wickedness enough, to tell bold lies and stand by them. He would blurt out the truth in the midst of his lies, if he started to lie. He knew it!

What was he to do?

"Play the game!" said Tom Merry.

That was good counsel—always good counsel, whatever the consequences might be. But it was hard to follow—very hard!

"Buck up!" said Tom Merry. "Goodness knows, I don't want to be hard; but if you do the decent thing to-day, you'll be glad of it afterwards—I'm sure of that."

"Leave me alone!" said Langton huskily. "Leave me alone now—I've got to think it out."

"Play the game, then, and I shan't mention the subject to you again."

"Yes, yes; but go!"

And Tom Merry went.

Langton was left alone—left to fight out the battle with himself, and to choose which of the paths he would follow—the two paths of honour and dishonour, both of which, seemingly, would lead to the same goal—his own ruin!

What would he do?

Even when the time came for the resumption of the Loamshire innings, the wretched Sixth Former had not yet decided.

And as Darrell handed him the ball to open the innings, and his fingers closed round the red sphere of leather, a sudden resolve came to Langton.

It was the resolve to follow Tom Merry's counsel and play the game! And with that resolve came a sudden sense of peace and rest. There was grim determination in Langton's heart as he went on, with the eyes of all the St. Jim's crowd bent anxiously upon him.

CHAPTER 14.

"Well Bowled!"

DALTON, the Loamshire captain, was still batting after the lunch interval. He had lost three partners himself, but he was still going strong.

There was great confidence in his manner as he faced Langton's bowling again.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on with anxious eyes.

Tom Merry had told his comrades what he had done, and they hoped for the best. But whether Langton would have the courage to do his duty was still a question. The chums of the School House could only wait and see. There was another spectator who watched Langton keenly, but without much anxiety now. It was Mr. Levy.

The bookmaker was quite at ease. Langton had been playing into his hands, and the St. Jim's match, was booked as a loss. The bookmaker, indeed, had thought of leaving the ground to get his lunch, and he only wanted to see the batting recommence.

He looked on with fat satisfaction as Langton bowled an over. The over was unbroken by a single run, but it led to nothing. Langton was not in form.

Mr. Levy grinned, and walked off the field, feeling that he could safely leave his victim to wreck the St. Jim's prospects. He had only to return later to witness their defeat. But the sporting tout would not have sauntered away so contentedly if he had known what was to follow his departure.

Tom Merry looked on grimly. Darrell took the second over, and the Loamshire batsmen scored five runs for it. Then Langton bowled again, and again there was nothing to record.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows. "He's doing better, anyway!" said Blake. "They're not running."

"Looks as if he's bucking up," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Well, I want to give the chap a chance," he said. "If he does his best, that's all we can ask. And I dare say he's feeling pretty rotten."

"Wait and see, anyway."

Three more overs were bowled by Langton. He took no wickets. But it was noted that not a single run was taken off his bowling, and the confidence of the Saints in their great bowler began to revive.

"You watch him!" said Lefevre of the Fifth confidently. "That's what I say! You watch him, and you'll see things!"

And Lefevre proved a prophet.

Langton took the ball again against Dalton's wicket. The Loamshire captain faced the bowling with care. He was beginning to see that Langton was dangerous; but how dangerous he did not yet realise.

Langton took a little run. His face was somewhat flushed now, his eyes were gleaming, and his lips tightly set. He was in the mood to do great things; he had succeeded in banishing every thought from his mind but the thought of duty. He was going to "play the game" for the sake of his side.

The ball came down, and Dalton swiped at it. But the willow never found the leather. The bat whistled in empty air. And then there was a crash. There came a roar from all St. Jim's:

"Out!"

There wasn't much doubt about it. Dalton's middle stump was lying on its back, and the bails were on the ground.

The Loamshire captain gazed down at his wrecked wicket for a moment, as if disinclined to believe the evidence of his eyes. The surprise in his face brought a chuckle from St. Jim's players who were near enough to see.

"Well bowled, Langton!"

"Bravo, St. Jim's!"

Dalton strolled off to the pavilion with his bat under his arm. Another man came out to take his place. He



maker was marched to the school gates and shot out into the street. "Ow! Ow! Ow!" Simeon Levy would think of St. Jim's cricket ground again!

will know how you've played the traitor, and you'll be booted out of St. Jim's. That will be as bad as being sacked by the Head."

"You—you won't do it!"

"Won't I?" Tom Merry's eyes blazed. "Do you think I'm going to stand by and see you betray the school, and let us all down and disgrace us, and not say a word? If you don't promise me now to play up, and keep your word, the whole school will know the truth before the Loamshire innings is over!"

"Oh, what shall I do?" groaned Langton.

"I'm sorry," said Tom Merry more gently. "But you've got to play the game! No one ever did any good by

headed Langton's bowling, and he was very careful. But he was a little too careful. At all events, he failed to block the ball, and his leg stump was whisked out of the ground.

And St. Jim's roared:

"Well bowled!"

"Two down for Langton!" roared Kangaroo. "This is going to be the hat-trick! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah, Langton!"

"Yaas, watah! Huwvah!"

Loamshire sent another man in. The last batsman warned him to be on the look-out for a ball which looked simple to start with, but broke in in a mysterious way from nowhere in particular. The new man tried to bear that somewhat puzzled warning in mind; but it did him no good, for the next ball broke in from a new quarter and slid under his waving bat as if it were alive, and the next instant the bails were on the ground.

St. Jim's yelled:

"The hat-trick!"

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, pip! Good old Langton!"

Kildare's eyes danced. While the defeated batsman was going out Kildare rushed up to Langton and thumped him on the back.

"Good for you!" he shouted. "Oh, this is great! Keep it up, Langy, old man!"

Langton laughed.

"I don't know about keeping it up," he said, "but I'll do my best."

"Oh, pile in! I thought you'd gone to sleep; but you're waking up now, and no mistake! Give 'em gyp!" said Kildare jubilantly.

For a moment, before Langton's eyes the evil face of the bookmaker seemed to swim, and a pang went to his heart. He was playing the game—but at what a price!

Then he drove the thought from his mind. It was for the sake of his side—the side that trusted him and relied upon him! What a coward he had been! But that was over. St. Jim's should win if he could bring it about, and he felt that he could. After a long struggle in darkness he had reached the light. That was how it seemed to him, and he was in a mood to conquer.

St. Jim's watched him keenly, delightedly, as the next batsman took up his stand. Was the hat-trick to be outdone? Were there more painful surprises in store for the Loamshire men? They hoped so—and they watched.

Crash!

A flying wicket, and a roar from the school:

"How's that?"

"Four giddy wickets!"

"Well bowled! Oh, well bowled, sir!"

It seemed as if the Saints would go mad with joy. They roared and yelled and tossed up their caps, not caring where they came down again.

The Loamshire men were looking very serious now. They wondered where the school had dug up this demon bowler. Matters were looking serious for Loamshire now; for they had lost four wickets for no runs, and their total was now seven wickets for less than sixty.

The over finished without the fall of another wicket, and Loamshire breathed again.

But they were not done with Langton yet.

Ten minutes later he took another wicket; and a few minutes after that Kildare caught a man out off Langton's bowling.

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Then the word passed round:

"Last man in!"

St. Jim's were jubilant.

"Last man in—and they've only got 65 to their credit!" grinned Figgins of the Fourth. "My sons, we're going to beat the county!"

"Nother innings yet, deah boys!"

said Arthur Augustus.

"Nother innings—rats! If we beat 'em in the first, we'll beat 'em in the second!" said Herries.

"Quite wight, Hewwies, old man!"

"It's ripping!" said Blake.

Tom Merry's face was very bright.

He needed no further evidence that his talk with Langton had had the desired effect. Langton was playing up wonderfully; he was doing all that had ever been expected of him—and more. He was risking everything for the sake of his side—and that was as it should be.

St. Jim's was a winning team!

Both St. Jim's and Loamshire watched the finish eagerly. The end came suddenly—a man caught out by Darrell—and the innings ended for 65 for Loamshire. And the Saints had scored 90 in their first innings! No wonder the crowd were jubilant! No wonder they roared!

Kildare linked arms with Langton as they walked off the field at the finish of Loamshire's first innings. Kildare could have hugged him. The value of Langton to the team was more than ever apparent now. His failure at first had plunged St. Jim's into despair; his bucking-up had raised the hope of the school sky-high. Langton was the hero of the hour, and fellows pressed forward to clap him on the shoulder and congratulate him.

Langton took it all very quietly.

For at the back of his mind—though he strove hard not to think of it—was all the time the haunting knowledge that he was playing for the success of St. Jim's and for his own ruin. But that knowledge, though it might torture him, could no longer make him act the coward and the traitor. The die was cast!

CHAPTER 15.

The Winning Side!

WHEN Mr. Levy came sauntering back upon the cricket ground of St. Jim's the second innings of the school was well under way. Mr. Levy read the score casually—five wickets down for 40. St. Jim's was enjoying a fairly average innings.

Mr. Levy was a little surprised. It was yet early in the afternoon, and he had fancied that the Loamshire innings would still be going on. But no doubt Loamshire had declared! That was his first thought.

When he discovered the facts, Mr. Levy had a most unpleasant shock.

Loamshire had not declared—Loamshire had been dismissed for 65 runs!

Loamshire had been 25 runs behind St. Jim's on the first innings.

The bookmaker could scarcely credit it at first.

"The bowling must have bucked up a lot," he remarked to a bystander.

"It did!" grinned the spectator. "Langton of St. Jim's beat the hat-trick—he took four wickets at a run, and two afterwards."

Mr. Levy turned yellow.

"Langton?"

"Yes."

"Six wickets?" said Mr. Levy faintly.

"Yes, as neat as you please. That kid is a colt for the county; he'll be playing for Sussex some day!"

Mr. Levy moved away without replying.

It took him some minutes to realise it. Langton was not playing to orders, after all; he was playing for his side. So far the county lagged behind in runs, and if Langton played up to the finish, the county was beaten.

Mr. Levy ground his yellow teeth.

His dupe and victim seemed to have developed a will of his own. Had he determined to defy the bookmaker for the sake of his side, then? It looked like it. Mr. Levy made straight for the pavilion.

Langton stood leaning against the pavilion, with his pads on ready to go in and bat. He was unnoticed in the throng, as every eye was turned upon the field of play.

His heart throbbed painfully.

He was not sorry that he had played up for St. Jim's. But the dreadful certainty of the consequences came to him now, more clearly than ever, and he ground his teeth to keep back a groan of misery.

The fat bookmaker came over towards him. Mr. Levy's features were working with rage and malice. He could not speak to Langton without being observed; but he caught the senior's eye and beckoned to him, and Langton followed the bookmaker behind some shrubs at the edge of the playing field.

"What do you mean by it?" the fat bookmaker muttered, in a voice thick and trembling with rage. "What have you been doing?"

Langton met his eyes.

"Playing the game!" he replied firmly.

Mr. Levy gave a savage, scoffing laugh.

"You ain't been playin' your own game!" he said. "Do you know what this means? If you bowl like that again, the county will lose! You've gotta get out first ball when you bat, and you've gotta bowl to let Loamshire get runs!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort!"

"Then what about your arrangement with me?"

"I made no arrangement with you!" said Langton desperately. "I promised you nothing! I told you all along that I couldn't do what you wanted!"

"You started doing it!"

"I know I did—like a coward and a villain!" said the Sixth Former passionately. "Well, I've stopped! I'll risk everything rather than betray my team! Is that plain enough for you?"

Mr. Levy clenched his fat hands.

"Take care!" he muttered. "You'd better take care, Mr. Langton! You know what this means to me—and you know what it'll mean to you!"

"I don't care!"

"I'll ruin you, you fool!" hissed the bookmaker. "I'll—"

"Here he is!"

It was a shout from Tom Merry. Five juniors had detached themselves from the crowd that eagerly watched Kildare's batting—Tom Merry, Lowther, Manners, Blake, and D'Arcy. Tom Merry had spotted the bookmaker talking to Langton behind the shrubs, and he knew what the rascal was speaking about. Whether he would be able to influence the Sixth Former again Tom Merry did not know; but he did not mean to leave anything to chance.

"Collar him!"

"Yaas, watah! Collah the wottah, deah boys!"

Simeon Levy started back.

"Ands orf!" he said fiercely. "Ands orf! I— Oh!"

The five juniors ran right at him.

(Continued on page 17.)



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

HALLO, chums! King Willow once more holds full sway, and it's good to hear again the merry clack of bat meeting ball. But, on the other hand, it's not quite so pleasant—for the batsman, at least—to hear the crack of the wicket being shattered! But it's all in the game.

This cricket season gives promise of being as exciting as the last, for we have the South Africans with us, and five Test matches are due to be played. These have been arranged as follows: At Nottingham, June 15th, 17th, 18th; at Lord's, June 29th, July 1st, 2nd; at Leeds, July 15th, 16th; at Manchester, July 27th, 29th, 30th; at Kennington Oval, August 17th, 19th, 20th. If neither team has gained an advantage at the end of the Fourth Test the last match will run to six days.

The South Africans are not quite such formidable opponents as the Australians, and they have yet to break their duck of Test victories in this country. But, nevertheless, they have given us many hard games in previous series. The records between the two countries read: England, 28 wins, South Africa, 11 wins, and 15 drawn games.

An interesting feature of the season is the amended leg-before-wicket rule, which is being given a trial in all Test and county matches, and surprising results may be the outcome of the change. The rule now reads: "The

striker is out l.b.w. if with any part of his person (except his hand) which is between wicket and wicket, he intercepts a ball which in the opinion of the umpire at the bowler's wicket shall have been pitched in a straight line from the bowler's wicket to the striker's wicket, or shall have been pitched on the off-side of the striker's wicket and would have hit it."

There is sure to be a good deal of controversy over the amended rule before the season ends. Many prominent cricketers have already expressed their disapproval of it. There is no doubt that run-getting will not be so easy. However, the season will show, and I'm all in favour of trying out an experiment to brighten county cricket.

"THE NEW HOUSE RIVALS!"

A sparkling St Jim's yarn is on the programme for next Wednesday, and it shows Martin Clifford at his very best, as usual. The story deals with the keen rivalry that exists between Figgins & Co., the accepted leaders of the New House, and Redfern & Co., the New Firm, who refuse to fall into line with Figgins' leadership. Matters reach a head between the rival Co.'s, and there is no little fun

PEN PALS COUPON

18-5-35

(Continued from previous page.)

Mr. Levy's bowler hat went flying, and the fat bookmaker rolled on the ground under the sprawling juniors.

They were up in a moment, with the sporting tout struggling like a fat worm in their grasp. But his struggles were of little avail against Tom Merry & Co.

He was marched out of the school gates at top speed, and there he was shot out into the road. He bumped down in the dust with a heavy bump. He sat there dazedly, his collar torn out, his coat split up the back, and his hair wildly rumpled.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Tom Merry shook a warning finger at him.

"Now you buzz off!" he said impressively "Don't you dare to show your nose on our ground again, or we'll duck you in the fountain next time!"

The bookmaker staggered to his feet, pumping in breath—and dust. But he did not venture to return to St. Jim's cricket ground. Anxious as he was to know the result of the match, he did not care to venture within reach of Tom Merry & Co. again.

CHAPTER 16.

Out of the Depths!

ALL down for a hundred was the result of the St. Jim's second innings, and, unfortunately, Langton made another "duck's egg." Then came an interval for refreshments, and both sides took a well-earned rest. There was still ample time for another innings; play during the day had been quicker than was anticipated.

The county team had come to St. Jim's expecting to have to declare first innings—but, as it happened, they hadn't had to do anything of the kind—and it was considerably doubtful whether their second innings would pull the game out of the fire for them. All really depended upon one man—upon whether Langton's bowling remained up to the mark. St. Jim's had no doubt about it, and the whole school was joyously anticipating a victory over the county.

After tea, when the county went in to bat for the second time, the crowd was more numerous than ever, and the stately form of the Head could be seen outside the pavilion.

The Head had been a keen cricketer in his youth, and he was keenly

and trouble caused in trying to prove who are the top dogs of the New House. You'll be thrilled and amused in turn when you read this lively long yarn. Look out for it, chums!

THE RAM RAN WILD.

When a wild ram from the Rocky Mountains was passing through Glacier Park, Montana, recently, it happened to glance at the plate-glass door of an hotel, and thereupon took a dislike to its own reflection in the glass. Next moment the ram had ducked its head and went charging at the door. With a terrific crash the glass shattered under the impact of the ram's charge, and the ram, continuing its headlong rush, went right through into the hotel lobby. It could not stop on the highly polished floor, and skated across the lobby, to make its exit from the hotel through another window. Fortunately, the ram was captured before it could do any more damage, but it is to be feared that the ram's dislike of its own features will cost its owner a pretty penny for the damage done!

DEATH VALLEY.

The Death Valley, J. Bourne (Brighton), is on the borders of the American States of Nevada and California, and the place gets its grim name from the fact that it is a valley of deadly danger. To cross its ten-mile width in daytime is to ask for death for the heat is unbearable. No one can stand it for more than an hour without water, and every drop in the valley is poisonous!

THE SCHOOLBOY BANDITS.

This is the great Western school yarn in store for you next week, and you will unanimously vote it another winner. When Steve Carson and his pals receive a well-deserved quiting from Bill Sampson, they resolve to give the headmaster a taste of his own medicine. How they set out to do it makes a story that you will enjoy immensely.

Finally, there is another smashing instalment from our popular serial, "The Secret World!" It tells of the further adventures of the St. Frank's boys in Gothland, and, believe me, chums, it is one long thrill. Cheerio!

THE EDITOR.

interested in the historic battle between St. Jim's and Loamshire County. And there was another matter he was interested in, too. He had called Tom Merry to him, and was observed to be speaking earnestly with the hero of the Shell.

But when fellows asked Tom Merry afterwards what he had been talking about, Tom Merry seemed to develop a sudden attack of deafness, and the curious inquirers were unsatisfied.

But, as a matter of fact, the St. Jim's fellows had little attention for anything but the finish of that exciting match with the county.

One name was on every lip—that of Langton's! Langton's bowling was the theme of endless and enthusiastic comment.

"Well bowled, Langton!"

The roar rang out again and again. Langton was playing wonderfully. He seemed to have cast every consideration from his mind but one—that of winning the match for his side. And he was doing it. The St. Jim's crowd roared as the hat trick was repeated, and three helpless Loamshire batsmen went bootless home. And then

(Continued on page 28.)

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WHEN TWO SCHOOLBOYS FACED ONE DEATH TO ESCAPE ANOTHER!—



By FRANK RICHARDS.

The Empty Saddle!

DOGGONE my cats!" roared Bill Sampson.

The headmaster of Packsaddle School was wrathful.

He was, in fact, hopping mad!

Bill was standing by the flagpole in the playground of the cow town school. He had a neckscarf in one hand—the other hand on the cord that ran to the summit of the pole.

It looked as if Bill was about to hoist a signal. But, if so, he was a long time about it. For he had been standing there for a good hour, and still the signal was not run up.

Bill, generally quick to decide, seemed unable to make up his mind. His rugged, bearded face was worried and troubled under the shadow of his ten-gallon hat. For a long hour he stood there that afternoon, in the hot glare of the Texas sun, still unable to decide what he was going to do.

The Packsaddle bunch were in the school-room with Mr. Brown. Three of the bunch were missing—Dick Carr, Mick Kavanagh, and Slick Poindexter. But the rest were there, and no doubt they figured that Bill had gone out, having seen and heard nothing of him for a good hour. Usually the headmaster of Packsaddle was in the school-room in lesson-time to keep the bunch in order while they received instruction from Small Brown.

It was fairly certain that the bunch supposed that Bill was gone. For, breaking in on the gloomy and worried meditations of the cow town school-master, came an uproar from the school-house.

Only when Bill was absent did the bunch let themselves go, regardless of Small Brown. Now they were letting themselves go.

And Bill snorted with wrath.

He reckoned that he had trouble

enough on hand, with three of the bunch missing from the tally, without the rest making whoopee in school-time.

"Doggone 'em!" roared Bill. He dropped the cord and the neckscarf, and gripped his quirt. "That pesky guy Brown sure can't ride herd over that bunch—not worth a red cent, he ain't! But I'll sure put 'em wise that their headmaster is around!"

Bill strode to the schoolhouse, and tramped through the porch.

He glared into the school-room.

Quite an exciting sight met his eyes. Small Brown, the Packsaddle teacher, was dodging behind Bill's high desk. His startled eyes almost popped through his horn-rimmed spectacles. Steve Carson, Slim Dixon, and Poker Parker were pelting him with school books. The rest of the bunch were on their feet, roaring with laughter.

"Take your places!" Small Brown was squealing. "Sit down at once! I will report this to Mr. Sampson! I will—yooooop!" Small Brown yelled as a volume caught him under the chin.

"Bullseye!" chuckled Steve Carson.

"Wow!" yelled Small Brown.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the bunch.

A heavy tramping of feet in big cowhide boots interrupted the merry roar. The Packsaddle bunch stared round at Bill as he strode in.

"Watch out, you guys, it's Bill!" gasped Slim.

There was a rush to the desks.

Bill grabbed Steve Carson by the back of his neck. Big Steve wriggled and roared in his grasp. Small Brown emerged from behind the headmaster's desk, gasping for breath.

"Say, you, Steve!" roared Bill. "You honing for more quirt—eh? I guess you had enough yesterday to satisfy you, if you sure wasn't a hog and never knowed when you had enough!"

"Let up, you ornery old guy!" gasped Steve, struggling in the headmaster's powerful grip.

"Let up nothing!" snapped Bill. "You figure this is a time to make whoopee, with young Slick cinched by that doggoned kidnapper, Hawk Walker, and young Carr gone after Slick, and Mick gone after young Carr, and all three of them missing?"

Whack! came the quirt round the legs of the struggling Steve.

Steve's yell woke all the echoes of Packsaddle.

"Ain't it you that put up the trouble?" roared Bill. "Didn't you claim that young Carr had been paid by that lobo-wolf Hawk to put Slick into his paws, and didn't you plant a ten-dollar bill in his rags to make it look like it? And didn't young Carr go off on his ear, the pesky young pie-can, 'cause all the bunch turned on him?"

Whack, whack!

Steve roared.

"And didn't that young jay Mick go arter him, riding off under my very nose, and me a-shouting to him to pull in?" hooted Bill.

Whack, whack!

"Let up!" shrieked Steve.

"I ain't letting up yet a piece!" snorted Bill. "You sure put across enough trouble, young Steve, without raising Cain in this here school-room, and fanning Mister Brown with school books!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"And me waiting for Mister Poindexter to horn in, and a puncher coming up from the ranch to allow that he's gone to San Antone!" roared Bill. "Him not getting word from me, and me not knowing what to do!"

Whack, whack!

"And that lobo-wolf Hawk watching for me to put up the signal that the ransom's to be paid for Slick!" went

—SMASHING STORY OF THRILLING ADVENTURE IN TEXAS.

on Bill. "And me figuring that I've got to talk turkey to that doggoned kidnapper!"

Whack, whack!

The bunch looked on, breathless. For every worry and trouble that the headmaster of Packsaddle enumerated, he gave Steve a lick of the quirt. Steve hopped and roared and howled, but he could not break away from the iron grip on the back of his neck.

But Bill pitched him away at last.

Steve sprawled, yelling, among the desks. Bill glared at the bunch.

"Now, I guess you'll keep order here!" he roared. "You tend to Mister Brown, like your folks send you here for. You get me? You let me hear you whisper again, and I'll sure hide you like you was a bunch of ornery steers!"

And Bill strode out of the school-room. Mr. Brown had a very quiet class after he was gone. No fellow in the bunch wanted to bring Bill Sampson back again!

Bill strode out into the brilliant sunshine of the playground.

Not a whisper came from the school-house. Bill dismissed the bunch from his mind.

He went back to the flagpole. Still he hesitated to run up the signal for the kidnapper to see from the distant prairie.

He was still thinking out that problem when there was a beat of horse's hoofs on the school trail, and he spun round, to stare at the horseman riding in at the gate.

"That doggoned young gink Kavanagh!" exclaimed Bill.

He gripped his quirt, and strode to meet Mick as he rode in. Mick Kavanagh was riding his own bronco, and leading Dick Carr's pinto by the rein. Mick had returned to the cow town school—but not the tenderfoot of whom he had gone in search—only his riderless horse! What had happened to Dick Carr? What did that empty saddle tell?

"Say, you young geck—" roared Bill, grasping Mick's bridle with one hand, and lifting the quirt with the other.

But he lowered it again. Mick slid from the saddle, and stood unsteadily, facing the schoolmaster. His face was white and strained—and the look on it disarmed Bill. The black frown faded from his brow, and he dropped his rough hand gently on the boy's shoulder.

"Spill it, kid!" said Bill softly. "What's come to young Carr?"

A sob choked in Mick's throat.

"I—I guess he's passed in his checks, Bill, and I've come back to tell you it was my fault!" he groaned.

A Desperate Chance.

"SLICK!"

"Yeah?"

"We've got to get out of this!"

"Sez you!" grunted Slick Poindexter. Dick Carr set his lips.

He was standing in the deep cavern in the lonely gulch in Squaw Mountain, his eyes fixed on the underground stream that flowed at the back of the cave.

Slick Poindexter sat on a boulder, weary and almost hopeless.

Days and nights had passed since Slick had been shut up in the hidden cave by Hawk Walker. No food had passed his lips, and, strong as he was, he was feeling faint and sick.

Dick Carr had been only that day in the cavern. It was only that morning that he had been swept away by the torrent that flowed into a gap of the hillside, and amazingly he had been carried alive into the cavern through which the subterranean stream flowed.

Little did Hawk Walker dream that his kidnapped prisoner had been joined by a comrade from Packsaddle School. Little, indeed, would Hawk have cared, for in the hidden cave Dick was as secure a prisoner as Poindexter.

The great rock that barred the cave-mouth was immovable. The united strength of the two schoolboys had failed to shift it an inch.

Through crevices came the glitter of sunrays to remind them of the outer world from which they seemed eternally shut off. The sun was sinking behind Squaw Mountain now, and the deep twilight in the cave was deepening.

"Slick, old man—" Dick began again.

"Aw, can it, ol'-timer!" said Slick wearily. "I guess it won't buy you anything, chewing the rag! We're as good as gone up the flume—you as well as me! I'm powerful glad to have you with me, Dick; but I sure wish you'd stayed back at the school! I'm telling you, the jig is up!"

"While there's life, there's hope!" "I guess I'd sell what's left for half-a-dollar, and that a Mexican one!" said Slick Poindexter, with a faint grin.

=====

Hawk Walker, professional kidnapper, is made to regret the day he ever tried his nefarious business on one of Bill Sampson's pupils at Packsaddle School!

=====

"We got to chew it, Dick! That lobo-wolf Hawk wants five hundred dollars to let me vamoose. I guess if my folks was going to pony up, they'd have worked the raffle before this!"

Slick shook his head.

"That ransom ain't going to be paid, Dick," he said quietly. "Mebbe my popper can't raise the dust; it's a big sum for him. Mebbe he's away from the ranch, and Bill ain't got word to him. And Bill ain't the man to talk turkey to a kidnapping thief of Hawk's heft, nohow and I reckon he couldn't raise the dollars if he wanted. Mebbe if Hawk got a letter through from me to my popper it would work the raffle. That's what he's been howling for, doggone him! But I sure ain't sending no word, not if I pass in my chips here, Dick!"

"The villain!" muttered Carr, between his teeth. "If I'd known who and what he was, that day on the trail when I brought in his message to you—"

"You sure was a boob!" said Slick. "But I guess I was as big a boob to walk into his hands that-a-way! Dick, ol'-timer, that guy Hawk allowed, last time he tooted to me, that he'd come ag'in to-morrow—and that would be the last time. And he sure meant it."

"And if the ransom isn't paid—" muttered Dick Carr.

"He sure will pull up stakes and leave us to it! And that's what's going to happen!" said Slick. "I guess I don't hone for the eats like that guy, Pie Sanders, but I sure can't last much longer without a bite between my teeth!

That guy Hawk is sure a hard-baked cuss!"

"We're getting out of it, Slick! There's a chance, and we're going to try it!" said Dick Carr, quietly and firmly.

Slick stared at him. "I guess I don't see no doggoned chance!" he answered. "Give it a name, ol'-timer, and see me jump at it with both feet!"

Dick pointed to the underground stream, flowing dark and swift across the back of the cavern. From a gap at one side, it came swirling and gurgling, to disappear into a gap on the farther side.

Slick Poindexter started violently. "Listen to me, Slick!" said the tenderfoot of Packsaddle quietly. "You know how I got here. I took a tumble in the torrent up in the canyon, and it washed me away underground. I got into this cave alive."

"You said it!" agreed Slick. "I guess it was a miracle, and then some; but you sure did land alive and shouting!"

"That torrent must have an outlet," said Dick Carr. "It must flow into the Squaw River!"

"Sure!"

Slick rose from the boulder and joined his comrade on the rocky ledge of the subterranean stream. He knew now of what Dick was thinking, and the bare thought of it made him shiver.

"It's sudden death!" he breathed.

"I came this far alive, Slick," answered the tenderfoot of Packsaddle. "It was a close thing, but I came through. It depends on the distance before that water hits the open."

"And who's going to guess the distance?" muttered Slick. "We ain't fur from the Squaw, but how fur I ain't guessing."

"That's the chance we've got to take." Slick was silent.

For a long minute he stood staring at the dark, swirling water, vanishing in constant flow under the low, arched rock of the gap in the cavern side.

Between the water and the rock above there was no space for a swimmer's head. A plunge into the gap meant going under—and keeping under!

If the distance was short, they would be swept out headlong into the Squaw River in the rush of the water. If it was long—that was hopeless death in the darkness—the death of drowned rats!

Poindexter shivered. But his face set hard and firm. It was casting the dice, with death on the hazard of the die. But he had the pluck for it.

"It's sure death to hang on!" he muttered. "Hawk ain't handling the ransom, Dick, and when he lights out to-morrow, he lights out for keeps! We'll be left here—and never found! He sure is a tough guy! Dick, ol'-timer, I guess if we get through alive, we'd sure have a surprise party ready for that bulldozer when he humps along to-morrow like he allowed he would!"

Dick drew a deep breath. "I'll chance it, if you will, Slick! It's the only chance, and we've got to take it, or die here in a trap!"

"It's a cinch!" said Slick Poindexter steadily.

No more was said. Desperate as the chance was, it was all that remained to the prisoner of Hawk Walker and the comrade who had so strangely joined him.

Dick had come down the upper torrent

alive. There was an even chance, at least, of going down the lower torrent alive. Such as the chance was, they resolved to take it.

The thought was in Dick's mind that he wished he had parted friends with Mick Kavanagh, but he did not utter it. Steadily and in silence, he prepared for the desperate plunge.

They fastened themselves together with neckscarfs knotted to their belts. It was to be both or neither. If either won through to life and liberty, both would win through; if either failed, the other would share his fate. On the edge of the swirling water they exchanged, in silence, a last grip of the hand. Then, setting their teeth, they took the plunge.

In an instant the dark water was over them, and they were swept away together under the rock. In black darkness, tossed and whirled by the gurgling water, they swept away, as if into the deepest, blackest depths of the earth. And as they rolled and whirled helplessly on in the sweep of the torrent, the icy hand of the grim King of Terrors reached for them in the blackness.

Alive or Dead?

"SPILL it!" muttered Bill Sampson. He stood with his big, rough hand on Mick Kavanagh's shoulder, steadying the boy. The Packsaddle bunch would hardly have known their headmaster at that moment. Big, burly, brawny, rough-and-ready, Bill Sampson could be as gentle as a woman, and he was strangely gentle now. Mick, standing unsteadily, choked a dry sob in his throat.

"He's gone up, Bill!"

"Carr, the tenderfoot?"

"Sure!" groaned Mick.

Bill felt a pang. He had been angry with Dick Carr for riding out of the cow town school without leave in search of his kidnapped comrade. He had promised him the quirt on his return, hard and heavy. But he liked the cheery schoolboy from the Old Country, and the thought that the tenderfoot of Packsaddle had ridden away to his death gave him a hard blow.

But he answered quietly:

"You got it sure?"

"I—I guess so! I guess there ain't no dog's chance!" muttered Mick.

"How come?" demanded Bill. "He went rubbering arter Slick what's in the grip of that lobo-wolf Hawk! Mean to say he met up with Hawk, and that doggone cuss shot him up?"

Mick shook his head.

"I ain't seen nothing of Hawk, nor nothing of Slick!" he answered. "I'm telling you it's my fault Dick's gone over the range—my fault!"

"How come?" demanded Bill again.

"I got after him along to Squaw Mountain, Bill. He'd lighted a campfire, like the tenderfoot he was, telling all Texas where to look for him. I sure came to him friendly—" Mick broke off, with a groan.

"You ain't telling me you had a rookus with him?" growled Bill, guessing the truth.

"I told him it was all O.K. with the bunch," said Mick. "I put him wise about you finding out that Steve planted that ten-dollar bill in his rags, making it look like he was in cahoots with the kidnapper. I figured that that would square it, and he would ride back with me. But he sure did have his mad up about the bunch turning him down, and me along with them, and—and—we came to hitting—"

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Bill was silent.

"He was standing on the edge of the water," muttered Mick. "I guess you know that canyon on Squaw Mountain, Bill, where the stream runs underground—"

"Sure!"

"He went in," said Mick. "I nearly got him with my rope, but—but he was washed under the rock, Bill, and—and I—" Mick's voice broke.

Bill breathed hard.

"I guess that water runs out into the Squaw River," he said. "I guess there's a chance he went through—"

"I sure knew that, and I beat it for the Squaw!" said Mick. "I found the place where it comes out of the hill, and—and I've been watching there for hours, Bill, but not hide nor hair of him came through. Dead or alive, I reckoned I'd find him on the Squaw, but—but—"

Kavanagh choked.

"Then I figured I'd come back and tell you!" he went on drearily. "He's gone up, Bill! I never meant it—you know I never meant it! We was fighting on the water's edge, and, sure, I might have gone in instead of Dick! I wish I had—"

"Aw, can it!" grunted Bill.

The Packsaddle schoolmaster stood in deep thought, a wrinkle in his rugged brow.

Bill knew all the country between the Rio Frio and the Staked Plain, and there was hardly a gulch or an arroyo on Squaw Mountain that he had not trodden. He knew where the mountain torrent disappeared into the hillside; he knew where it emerged on the bank of the Squaw River and joined that stream to flow down to the Frio. He knew that driftwood often floated through to the Squaw. But—a living man or boy? His heart was heavy as he thought of it. A dead body would be washed through, sooner or later. But a living one—

"I guess," said Bill, at last, "that there ain't much chance, Mick! I surely say there ain't much chance that that tenderfoot's still alive and shouting. Nope! But I ain't going to believe that he's passed in his chips till I got it dead to rights!"

Mick looked at him.

"You figure—" he began.

"I figure that I'm going to give that spot the once-over," said Bill, "and I'm sure doing it pronto. Put them cayuses into the corral and go and tell Tin Tung to fix you up some eats."

Bill called to Hank, the hired man, to bring his bronco. Mick led the two ponies to the corral and turned Dick Carr's in. But he did not unsaddle his own horse.

When Bill mounted at the gate to ride to Squaw Mountain, Mick Kavanagh rode after him. Bill stared round at him.

But he did not speak. If there were a remote chance of finding Dick Carr, dead or alive, Mick wanted to be there, and his headmaster was not the man to say him nay. Bill stretched his bronco to a gallop westward over the rolling prairie, and Mick Kavanagh rode with him.

Bill's face was dark and gloomy as he rode. His problem of dealing with the kidnapper was still unsolved, though, in his anxiety for Dick Carr, he had shelved it for the time. And that problem had to be solved.

The search for the kidnapped schoolboy had been hopeless. Marshal Lick had done his best—and failed. Either the ransom had to be paid, or Slick left to his fate.

And, by ill-luck, Mr. Poindexter was

away at San Antone, and Bill had been unable to get word to him. He had to decide for himself, without taking counsel with Slick's father.

It was no easy matter for the cow town schoolmaster to raise the sum of five hundred dollars. But his friends in the cow town would have helped; he could have found the money.

Handing it over to Hawk Walker, for the release of his victim, was another matter. It got Bill's goat even to think of it. That was why he had hesitated so long with the signal in his hand at the foot of the flagpole.

Hawk, the professional kidnapper, carried on his deadly business on ruthless lines. He did not feed his prisoners. Already days and nights had passed. It was Slick's life that was at stake now. Yet to yield to the unscrupulous rascal, and without the authority of Slick's father, was a tough proposition to Bill. Now, as he galloped for Squaw Mountain, the problem was shelved for the moment, but it had to be settled soon. Bill would have given all he had for a sight of Hawk Walker, and a chance of pulling a six-gun on him.

The rolling prairie fled beneath the galloping hoofs. The grassland was left behind, and the hoofs of the horses rang on the stony trails of Squaw Mountain.

They struck the bank of the Squaw River where it rolled down through a broad canyon, and followed the bank up-stream.

Bill Sampson dropped from his bronco where a swirling torrent gurgled from a gap in the canyon-side, and flowed down to the river. From a great arched gap it came, rippling and tumbling. Mick dismounted. On that spot, for long, dreary hours that day, he had watched and waited, and only the swirling, glimmering water had rewarded his watch, and sometimes a whirling lump of driftwood.

The canyon was red with the sunset. In the crimson glare of the setting sun Bill stood on the rocks beside the torrent, staring at it with grim eyes.

Was there a chance? A chance that a desperate swimmer, swept underground, might yet be clinging for safety in some hollow of the mountain where there was room for his head above the water? There were many caves in Squaw Mountain—that stream, for all Bill knew, might flow through one of them. There was a chance—remote enough, but a chance that the tenderfoot still lived. Lived—in some hollow of the great mass of rock, out of sight, out of hearing—not, perhaps, out of the reach of rescue! But how—

A pine branch from the upper hill came bobbing out of the rocky gap, and rolled down the stream, floating away on the broad waters of the Squaw. It was a trifle, but it showed that the underground passage of the water was clear. If that branch came through, a swimmer, alive or dead, should have come through. Dead, the tenderfoot's body would have rolled out at the gap. Surely—

Mick Kavanagh gave a sudden yell. He grabbed the Packsaddle schoolmaster by the arm.

"Look!" he shrieked.

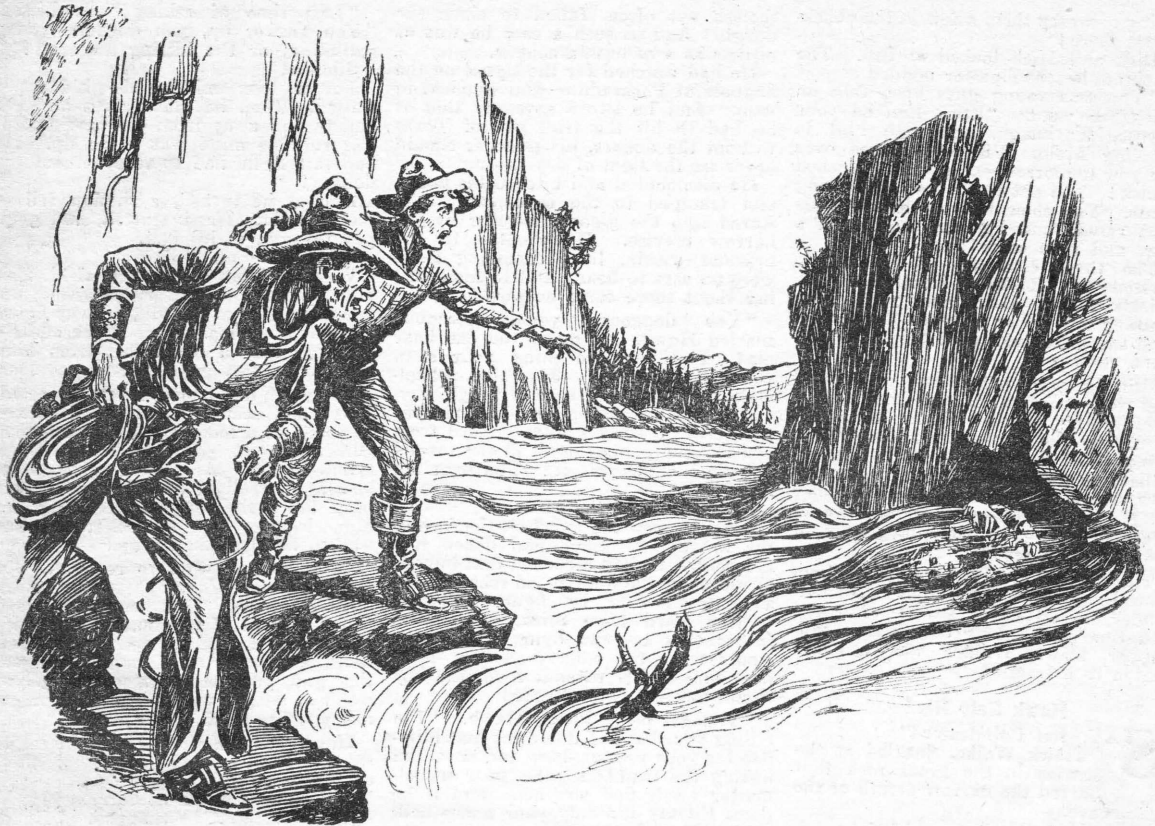
"Carry me home to die!" roared Bill Sampson.

Something came shooting out of the gap in the wild, rushing water. A dark object that rolled and whirled—a body—two bodies—clinging together!

"Dick!" shrieked Kavanagh.

"Slick!" roared Bill.

His lasso flew. The loop dropped, caught, and tautened; the two figures



"Carry me home to die!" roared Bill Sampson. "Something came shooting out of the gap in the rushing water. A dark object that rolled—a body—two bodies clinging together!" "Dick!" shrieked Mick Kavanagh. "Slick!" exclaimed Bill.

that clung together were dragged from the water and landed on the rocks at Bill Sampson's feet. Alive or dead?

Safe and Sound!

A LIVE!" roared Mick. "Jumping painters!" gasped Bill.

He unhooked the riata. He jerked loose the neckscarf that tied the two schoolboys together by their belts. Dick and Slick sat up, streaming with water, white as chalk, half-senseless, but alive, in the helping hands of Mick Kavanagh and the head-master of Packsaddle.

They gasped, they gurgled for breath. They stared dizzily, helplessly. Through the very valley of the shadow of death they had come, choked, suffocated, buffeted, and beaten, tossed and whirled, utterly spent; so near death that they had felt its icy touch. But alive—and in the hands of their friends.

"Hurroo!" roared Mick. "Dick—Slick—howly Mike! Hurroo!"

"Doggone my cats!" gasped Bill Sampson. "Slick! That guy's sure Slick! I figured that we might raise young Carr—but Slick— This here is the elephant's hind legs, and then some! It's sure Slick! Slick Poindexter, or his pesky spook! I'll tell a man!"

It was long minutes before either of the rescued comrades of Packsaddle could speak.

Dick Carr was the first to find his voice.

"Bill! Mick!" he panted. "You here— Mick, old man, I'm sorry—"

"Aw, forget it, ol'-timer!" almost sobbed Mick. "Sure it was all me own fault!"

"It wasn't!" said Dick Carr. "It was mine!"

"Ye pesky boob, if ye say it wasn't my fault, I'll sure hand ye a sock-dolager, and so I will! I'm telling ye it was all my fault!" roared Mick.

Dick Carr laughed. "Anyhow, it was luck, Mick! I found Slick—"

"I'll say this gets my goat!" gasped Bill Sampson. "I'll tell all Texas that it sure gets my goat! It's you, Slick; it's sure you—"

"I'll say it's a galoot about my size, Bill," grinned Slick Poindexter, "and powerful glad to see you, Bill!"

"But how come?" roared the amazed Bill.

He listened with open mouth as they told him.

"By the great horned toad!" said Bill. "I'll say you had some nerve to try that game! But you got by with it—you sure got by with it! And that's where that guy Hawk had you packed up—in a cave on Squaw Mountain! I'll say he will be surprised, a few, when he learns that you got out by the back door!"

Slick chuckled.

"He sure wanted me to write a letter to my popper, Bill, putting him wise that I was nix on the eats. He allowed he was hitting the cave to-morrow for the last time, and if I hadn't wrote that billy-doo, and if he hadn't got the ransom, he was lighting out for New Mexico, and leaving me to it. He sure will find his hide-out empty to-morrow, Bill!"

Bill smiled grimly.

"I'll say nope!" he answered. "I guess if that guy hits the cave to-morrow, Slick, he will find somebody there, and I kinder reckon it will be a

guy about my size, with a gat in his grip! I'm going to mention that Mister Hawk Walker is riding his last kidnapping trail! He sure struck a bad patch when he hit Texas!"

Dick and Slick, as they recovered their strength, wrung the water from their clothes. Mick, grinning, drew a bundle of sandwiches from his pocket and held them up. Slick Poindexter pounced on them, and grabbed them. A prairie wolf had nothing on Slick for the next few minutes!

"I'll tell a man," he said, when he had finished, "that I was honing for some eats!"

He turned to Bill.

"Say, Bill, we hitting Packsaddle?" he asked. "I want to mosey into the chuckhouse, and I want to mosey in pronto!"

Bill shook his head.

"We ain't hitting Packsaddle," he answered. "That guy Hawk Walker is sure watching for the signal from the school. We ain't putting that guy wise that you've made your getaway, Slick! I guess he would hit the horizon so sudden nobody would see his heels for dust! No, sir! That guy Hawk is going on thinking you're safe in his hide-out."

Bill grinned, a rather savage grin.

"I guess I want to see that feller, and want to see him bad!" he went on. "You ain't hitting no Packsaddle to put him wise, young Poindexter! You're hitting Kicking Mule Ranch, and you'll sure stay there, hunting cover, till we've rounded up Hawk! You get me?"

"Bill, old-timer, you've got more hoss-sense in your boots than Small Brown has in his head!" said Slick. "Me for Kicking Mule—and I'll say I'm THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,422.

going to worry them a few in the chuck-house there!"

Dick and Mick looked at Bill. The Packsaddle schoolmaster nodded.

"You two young guys keep tabs on Slick," he said. "Stick him on your cayuse, Kavanagh, and tote him to Kicking Mule. I'll send hosses over for you to-morrow—after we've cinched Hawk! You got to lie low at Kicking Mule. You show hide or hair outside that ranch, and I'll sure quirt you a few, and then some!"

The three comrades of Packsaddle started for Kicking Mule—Slick on Mick's horse, Mick and Dick Carr walking on either side of the bronc. And the three faces were bright as they went.

Bill Sampson remounted his bronco, and rode back to Packsaddle with a grin on his bearded face. Bill, just then, was the happiest man in Texas. His problem was solved. There were no dollars to be found for the kidnapper now, there was no need for surrender to Hawk Walker—that signal would never be hoisted in the playground of the cow town school.

The greedy rascal, watching from some hidden spot for the signal of surrender, would never see it. For the first time in his long career as a kidnapper Hawk Walker was beaten—beaten to a frazzle!

Hawk Gets His!

"**S**AY, you Poindexter!" Hawk Walker snarled at the crevice in the great rock that barred the narrow mouth of the prison-cave.

It was high morning, and bright sunshine streamed down in the lonely gulch on the rugged side of Squaw Mountain. That lonely gulch, far from the habitations of man, had looked as lonely, as utterly deserted as usual when Hawk rode into it. He rode with a blackly scowling face under his stetson.

In his long career as a professional kidnapper, Hawk had sometimes,

though not often, failed to cinch the dough. And in such a case he was as pitiless as a mountain cougar.

He had watched for the signal on the flagpole at Packsaddle—and watched in vain. And he swore savagely that if he had to hit the trail out of Texas without the dollars, his prisoner should never see the light of day again.

He dismounted and hitched his horse, and tramped to the cave-mouth, and stared into the gloomy interior by the narrow crevice. He shouted to the prisoner within, little dreaming there were no ears to hear. But to his snarling shout there came no answer.

"You doggoned young peecan!" snarled Hawk. "I guess you can hear me! You want to mind your step, young Poindexter! Say, that schoolmaster of yours is sure a tough guy, and he ain't standing for handing over the dust! I guess I want a word from you to your popper down at the ranch! I'll see that he gets it! You hear me toot?"

No reply from the cave.

Blacker grew the scowl on the face of the kidnapper. Slick had defied him before, but he had reckoned that hunger would drive the imprisoned schoolboy to surrender. And he figured that a written word from Slick, to tell his father that he was dying of hunger, would work the rifle! Surely, after days and nights without food, the boy would not still be obstinate!

"You get me?" hissed Hawk. "I'm telling you that if I don't get that billy-doo for your popper, here and now, I'm hitting the trail! I guess your schoolmaster won't find you here, and if he does, I'll say it's only your bones he'll raise. You shouting?"

Deep silence from the cave. Hawk peered in at the crevice. He could see nothing but the dim twilight within. Hunger could not yet have done its work—he knew that. Why did not the boy speak? Hawk figured that he could guess—that Slick had hoped to trick him into shifting the rock, to get at him with a stone in his hand. The kidnapper set his teeth.

"Last time of asking!" he hissed. "You answer up, you doggone young scallawag, or I'm hitting the trail!"

Silence!

For a long minute the kidnapper waited. Then he snarled out an oath and turned away from the cave-mouth. His ruthless mind was made up. He had failed—he had to ride without the dollars!

And as he turned, a shadow fell in the sunlight. Hawk started, and gripped the gun in his belt.

"Stick 'em up!"

With his hand on the butt of his Colt Hawk Walker stared, with startled, unbelieving eyes, at the tall, brawny figure of the schoolmaster of Packsaddle—standing only a dozen feet from him, his bearded face grim over his revolver.

The gulch had looked lonely, deserted. There had been no sound of a horse—no sound of a footstep. Yet there stood Bill Sampson, covering him with a levelled Colt! And the desperado, as he stared, realised that Bill must have been there before him, watching for him, waiting for him—that he had walked blindly into a trap!

"I guess you want to reach for the sky, Hawk Walker!" came Bill's menacing tones. "Put 'em up, you doggone rustler! I got you, you goldarned lobo-wolf! I sure got you by the short hairs, you pesky thief, and if you pull that gun, you get yours so sudden you won't be wise to what hit you! You get me, you doggoned, pesky skunk?"

Hawk Walker stood as if turned to stone, his hand on his gun, utter desperation in his glaring eyes.

Bill made a stride nearer.

"Put 'em up!" he snapped. "Hands up, I'm telling you!"

His eyes, under his rugged, knitted brows, gleamed over the levelled gun.

But the kidnapper was desperate. He made a sudden backward spring, at the same moment pulling his Colt.

Bang!

Bill's six-gun roared, and even as Hawk swung up his gun-arm to fire, that arm dropped to his side, smashed by the bullet.

With a yell of agony the kidnapper reeled and fell. The revolver dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Bill, with smoking gun, strode up to him. He stared down grimly on the groaning kidnapper.

"I guess," said Bill, "that you was honing for it, Hawk, and you sure got yours! I'll say I was some gink not to put it through your think-box, and make it last sickness for you; but I sure don't want to cheat the sheriff."

Hawk Walker answered only with a groan. He had one more trail to ride—to the calaboose at Packsaddle. But he had ridden his last kidnapping trail!

That day was a holiday at Packsaddle School.

Even Bill could hardly keep the bunch in check when the news got around that the Packsaddle schoolmaster had roped in Hawk Walker, the kidnapper, and when Slick, Dick, and Mick came riding in from Kicking Mule!

But Bill did not want to keep the bunch in check that day! Bill was as merry and bright as the bunch, and all that day Packsaddle made wild whoopee, and Bill forgot he possessed a quirt!

(Next Wednesday: "THE SCHOOL-BOY BANDITS!"—another gripping yarn of the Packsaddle pals. Look out for it.)

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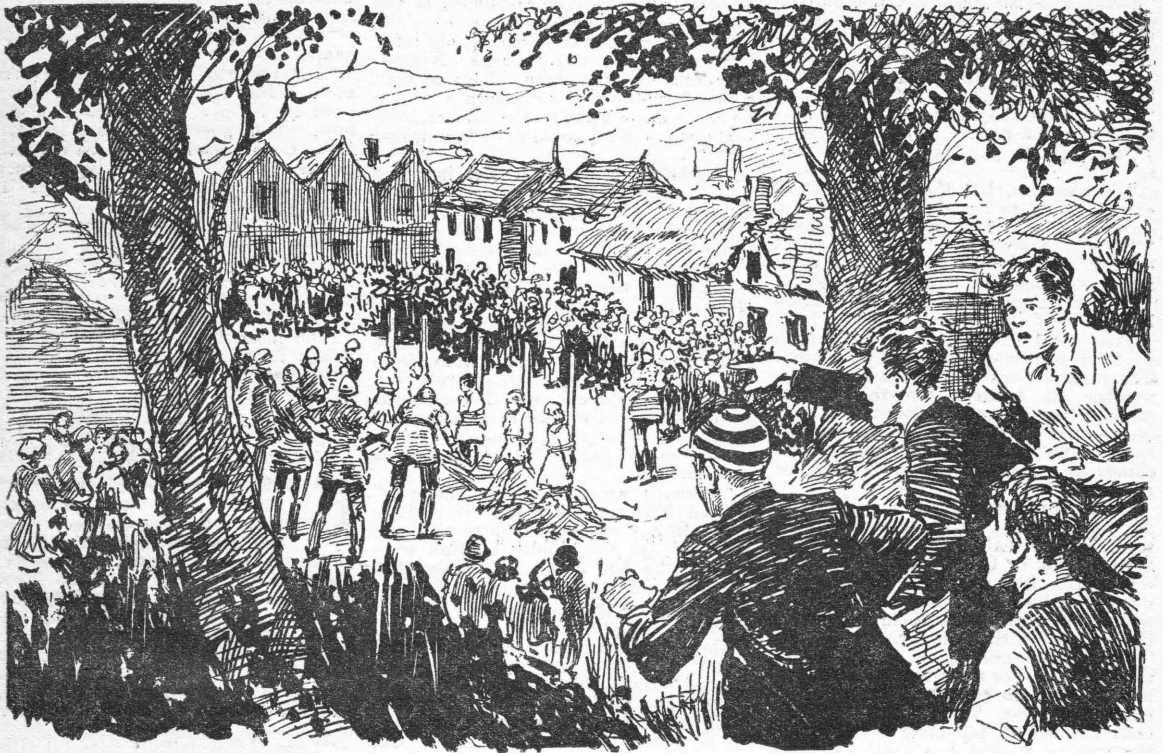
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THE ST. FRANK'S BOYS' DARING MISSION INTO ENEMY COUNTRY!

The SECRET WORLD!



"Look!" exclaimed Tregellis-West as the St. Frank's juniors reached the edge of the woods and gazed down on the Gothland village. Stakes had been set up in the centre of the square, and to each was fastened a figure, with faggots piled around the victim! The rescuers had come none too soon!

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

One of Kassker's Victims!

WHEN Northestia and Gothland, two countries of a secret world, go to war against each other, it is only the prompt action of Nelson Lee & Co. and the St. Frank's boys that saves Northestia from being completely overrun by their enemies, and the Gothland armada is put to rout.

Nelson Lee and the schoolboys have been stranded in Northestia—an old-world country separated from Gothland by a large lake—so they have joined forces with them to repel the enemy.

In a galley the St. Frank's boys are patrolling the lake, watching for the first sign of another Gothland attack, when they see a raft on which a woman is bound.

Very little was said now as the galley came up. The raft was ahead, a point or two to port, and the pirate ship was swinging gently round, so that the raft would drift alongside.

There was a feeling in the air that they were in the presence of a tragedy.

But none could guess the exact nature of it. It seemed certain that there had been foul play. The raft contained the body of a woman, sure enough, and she was lashed cruelly by many ropes, so that there was no chance of the body slipping off into the water.

The juniors could see that the woman was wearing the plain, simple garb of a peasant, and her hair was straggling down and trailing in the water.

Most of the fellows were looking worried. They wished they hadn't come near this tragedy. What good could they do, anyhow?

"Some of those beasts of Kassker's, I expect!" muttered Church. "All those Gothlander soldiers are savages!"

"By Jove, you chaps!" exclaimed Nipper, from the bows. "Get ready, there! She's alive—"

"What!"

"Her eyes are open, and I'll swear she's alive!"

"Hurrah!"

They didn't quite know why they gave a cheer, but after the thoughts of tragedy it was a relief to hear Nipper's announcement. And the eyes of the schoolboy pirates were more keenly searching than ever as the galley swung gently up and the raft swirled alongside.

"Come on!" sang out Handforth.

He heaved himself on the side of the boat, straining to reach the raft. Two of the other fellows lost no time in jumping overboard, and a moment later they were grabbing at the edges of the raft, careless of any possible danger from the deep waters. They regarded the unfortunate woman with growing rage.

"Oh, I say!" muttered Pitt. "This is terrible!"

"Where's a knife?" snapped Handforth. "Quick—a knife! Can't one of you idiots—"

"All right, I've got one," said Pitt tensely.

At such close quarters they were appalled. The woman, it seemed, was of about middle age, but there was no sign of consciousness now, although it was quite evident that she was alive. Her cheeks were slightly tinged with colour, and there was a regular movement of her bosom. She was breathing, and that was enough for the rescuers.

But they were horrified by the evidences of torture.

The poor woman was bound so tightly that her wrists were terribly bloated and swollen. Another cord passed round her neck, so that her head was held immovably down upon the raft. Her ankles were tethered in the same way.

She had been cast out upon the lake alive, bound hand and foot to that raft, so that no movement was possible. And the fellows were equally sure that she was a Gothlander, for her features were different from those of the typical Northestrian peasant.

Pitt slashed through the cords viciously. And he and the others, between them, succeeded in gently lifting that tortured body and raising it to

Handy's willing arms, which were waiting above. The woman was lifted on board and taken gently down into the big cabin.

All the juniors were Boy Scouts, and they knew something about first aid. But they had never had a case like this to deal with.

"Massage!" said Handforth quickly. "That's what she needs! Come on, you chaps, lend a hand with her arms! We'd better massage 'em until the circulation's restored."

"It's a pity we haven't got any brandy," said Nipper, frowning. "That's what she needs more than anything else just now."

"But didn't you say she was conscious?"

"So she was, but the sight of us, I expect, going to her rescue, was such a shock that she fainted," said Nipper. "Tommy, there's a big pot of meat extract somewhere. See if you can't make some beef tea!"

"That's a good idea," said Watson briskly.

That meat extract, of course, was a part of the wrecked airship's stores. The juniors were provided with quite a number of luxuries of this type—piquant reminders of home. For in Northestria the fare was very plain, and the people knew nothing about such things as meat extracts, or relishes, or preserves.

Gradually the woman showed some signs of recovery. It made no difference to the juniors that she was of the enemy. Northestrian or Gothlander, it made no difference. She was in a pitiable condition, and she was a woman. That made it imperative for them to give all the aid within their power.

Watson was quickly on the spot with the beef tea. For there was a spirit-stove aboard, and no time had been lost in getting it going. The grateful beverage soon had effect, for after five minutes the woman opened her eyes. A good deal of beef tea had been forced down her throat, and now, at last, her eyelids fluttered, and then she attempted to sit up.

"Gently—gently!" murmured Nipper. "Don't exert yourself—"

"Spare me!" moaned the woman. "Of your charity! I wish but to die now—"

"No, you won't die!" interrupted Nipper. "You're with friends. We're not going to harm you."

But she was panic-stricken with fright. Perhaps she mistook them all for pirates, but it was far more probable that she recognised them as members of that party from the Outer World, which had wrought such havoc upon her countrymen. Perhaps she expected to be brutally killed.

"We are friendly," repeated Nipper. "See, we have rescued you from the raft, and now we want to restore you. Tell us where you live, and how you came in such trouble. We will try to land you on your own shore."

Gradually the woman's fears subsided. She refused to speak, however. They could only get murmured words out of her—words that were disjointed and incoherent. It was taking her some time to fully realise that she was in safe hands.

"Better leave her alone for half an hour," suggested Pitt softly. "There's a kind of couch on the other side of the cabin here. Let's put her on it, cover her with a blanket, and leave her there. If she's alone she may get over this panic."

It was an excellent suggestion, and within a couple of minutes the Gothlander woman was left alone, and the

fellows went on deck and discussed the affair.

Nipper gave no orders for the galley to proceed, and the vessel remained there, with still oars, the men resting and waiting.

"We'd better go easy," said Handforth warningly. "For all we know, it may be a trap. Perhaps it's just a wheeze to get us into the hands of the enemy—"

"I admire your forethought, old man, but you're wrong," said Nipper. "There's no trap here. This woman would have been dead within a couple of hours if we hadn't released her from that raft. She couldn't have lasted long."

"Perhaps she's been floating for days," said Watson.

"Not for more than an hour or two," replied Nipper grimly. "My dear chaps, she couldn't have lived! It's my opinion that she was tied to that raft only a short time ago. There's a river almost opposite this spot—look! Can't you see how the current is sweeping down the lake? It's one of those rapid streams which tumble down from the upper glaciers, and there's big force behind the current. The raft was swept out into the lake in a very short time."

"But why?" asked Pitt. "Who could have done it?"

"Perhaps you shall never find out," replied Nipper. "Not that it matters much, in any case—we've done all that's possible. On the whole, I think we'd better take her across to Northestria. She'll be safe there."

"I say, Nipper!" called Church. "She's talking!"

They hurried into the cabin, and found a big change already. The rescued woman was not merely talking, but sobbing pitifully. There was something rather terrible in her anguish.

"My children!" she sobbed. "Oh, my children!"

"Can't you tell us—?" began Nipper.

"My children!" she repeated dazedly.

"What of them?" said Nipper. "Perhaps we can help—"

"May a curse fall upon the soldiers of Kassker!" shouted the half-demented creature, suddenly becoming coherent.

"May Kassker die a thousand deaths! I hate him! I hate his soldiers! My children—my poor children!"

Her eyes were blazing, and for a moment she sat up, tense and terrible to look upon. Then, just as suddenly, she relaxed, and sobbed hysterically. Nothing further could be got out of her for the moment.

The juniors were looking at one another uncomfortably.

"She may be a Gothlander, but she doesn't seem to be particularly loyal to Kassker," murmured Pitt. "What do you make of this outcry about her children?"

Nipper shrugged. "Isn't it pretty obvious?" he asked quietly.

"I don't quite see—"

"The anguish is all for her children," said Nipper. "She hasn't spoken a word about her own plight. I say, the whole affair's worrying me. Doesn't it prove what a hound Kassker is? Even his own people curse him."

"Well, that's a surprise, anyhow," said Fullwood. "We always thought that all the Gothlanders were tarred with the same brush. But there must be some good among them, I suppose. By Jove, I'd like to see Kassker where he deserves to be—with his head on the chopping block!"

Handforth got excited.

"Doesn't this prove that I was right?" he asked fiercely. "Doesn't it prove that we ought to raid—?"

"Don't start that again now, Handy, for goodness' sake!" interrupted Nipper. "We want to learn this woman's story if we can. If there's any possible way of helping—" He broke off. "By Jove!" he muttered. "If it's necessary, we'll do some raiding, too—in spite of the gov'nor's orders!"

"Good man!" said Handforth heartily.

"But the need will have to be pretty acute before I'll permit such a thing," went on Nipper, cooling down. "Anyhow, we've got to find out the truth first. Come, good lady, there is nothing to fear," he added, as he bent over the woman. "Perhaps we can help. Tell us of your trouble."

For the first time the woman had a light of understanding in her eyes, but her expression was one of such anguish that the watching juniors felt more and more uncomfortable.

"I will tell you!" she whispered. "Thou hast been kind to me, good young friend," she added, clutching at Nipper's hand. "I will tell thee of my terrible troubles."

The Hounds of Kassker!

FROM every part of the ship the St. Frank's fellows gathered in that big cabin, eager to hear the woman's story. But Nipper, at least, did not forget the necessity of maintaining a watch, and he insisted upon two of the juniors going on deck, in order to keep their eyes wide open.

The rescued woman was now sitting up, and she was looking much stronger. A light of agonised resignation had come into her eyes, as though she had had her battle and knew that all was lost.

"I am of Gernfrith, a peaceful village not a mile up the river," she began. "Until to-day I knew not of Kassker's real brutality. Yet for long had we suspected the truth. By name I am called Bessber—Mistress Bessber, since that is the name of my husband. Alas, he is dead—killed by those hounds from Kassker's Court. Only to-day did he die—and before mine eyes."

"But why?" asked Nipper gently. "Why did they kill him?"

"Because he did desert from the army," she replied.

Some of the fellows exchanged glances, feeling that this piece of information put a new light on the affair. After all, Kassker's army was on active service and death is the due of any soldier who deserts at such a time.

"Nay, ye are all wrong!" cried the woman, as she saw the glances. "My husband did not desert because he was afraid. I tell ye that most of us in Gothland hate Kassker and his cruel, murderous ways. 'Tis only the soldiers who favour him—for they are of the same breed, and delight in bloodshed. In our little towns and villages, we desire peace with Northestria. But Kassker is ruthless. Has he not swept every man into his armies? And my children! My poor—"

"Wait!" interrupted Nipper, fearing that she was about to become incoherent again. "What of your husband? Tell us why he deserted, Mistress Bessber."

"'Twas ill that he should have been chosen as a soldier," murmured the woman. "My good man was always ailing. I faith, I thought to look the last upon him when he was taken away, for he was mortally ill with

some complaint of which no doctors could cure him. Ah the everlasting agonies he suffered! He was a dying man ere he was snatched from his cottage."

"In spite of this he was forced into the army?" asked Nipper.

"Thinkest thou that those cruel curs care of aught that ails a man?" she said bitterly. "Nay, good youths, they take all in Gothland, whether they be old, infirm, or crippled. Three days ago my poor husband returned. In despair, he had deserted, knowing full well that death was near. 'Twas his wish to die in my keeping."

She broke off, overcome for a moment. And her listeners were now beginning to get a better grasp of the situation. Their gore arose as they peered over it. A poor wretch of a peasant-dying—and deserting from Kasker's army. Of what service could he be, in any case?

"We did think that his last hour would be peaceful," continued Mistress Bessber sadly. "But nay—Kasker's hounds were not to be denied. We were warned of approaching soldiery, and 'twas then that we were alarmed. A party, perchance, searching for my poor, dying husband. And so I concealed him amid the rafters of our little cottage, trusting to Providence that he would not be discovered. I well knew that none in the village would betray us—for not in the whole of Gemfrith is there one who loves Kasker's soldiery."

It was becoming more and more obvious that Kasker the Grim was a greater ogre than ever the juniors had imagined. Sad though the woman's story had been, there was yet worse to come.

"They searched—these soldiers?" asked Pitt quietly.

"Ay, they searched—in vain," she replied. "All seemed well, and those cruel brutes were about to depart—and then, by my soul, my poor man was attacked by a fit of agony from within him, and groans were forced from his trembling lips. They dragged him down, those soldiers! They dragged him outside!"

"They killed him?" asked Handforth, in a fierce voice.

"Slowly—by inches—before mine eyes!" she sobbed. "'Twas an example to all the other villagers, who were forced to stand round under pain of death. I would that I had died on the lake, rather than remember all—" She broke off, shuddering. "Oh, I can speak no more!"

"You must!" insisted Nipper. "Why did they tie you to that raft?"

"Why?" she said dully. "'Twas an example to the other women of my village. Perchance they might harbour husbands or sons who deserted. So the officer in charge caused the logs to be hewn, and 'he raft to be made. And thus I was cast into the river, to be swept into the lake, there to die of agony, alone."

"Ye have saved me from that, good youth, but I almost wish ye had left me there. My children—"

Her voice thickened, and a sobbing wail came from her.

All the juniors were aghast. The first part of her story had angered them, but they were now horrified beyond measure. Not content with putting the deserter to death, these soldiers of Kasker had vented their savagery upon the wife, sending her to a dreadful death as an example.

Perhaps this sort of thing was but an everyday incident in Gothland, where the people were ground under the heel

of the military. In all probability the woman was right in what she said. The majority of the simple Gothlanders only desired peace. It was Kasker the Grim who had such warlike ambitions—Kasker and his brutal officers. The soldiers, of course, were forced to obey orders. The juniors had already known that the Gothlander army was ruled with harsh and brutal tyranny.

"Leave her alone now," murmured Pitt, with compassion. "Haven't we heard enough? Poor thing, she's gone through enough tortures, without us pressing her for the awful details."

"Yes, and she's just about whacked, too," said Watson.

"Can't we do something?" said Handforth thickly, as they moved away. "By George! Can't we take some sort of revenge?"

"Be reasonable, Handy!" urged Church. "What do you suppose we can do? If we go to this village, we shall only find the place swarming with soldiers, and we might run right into their hands."

"All the better!" rapped out Handforth.

"You idiot! They'd kill us!" "Huh! They can kill half-dying men and innocent women, but they'd have a job to kill me!" said Edward Oswald, with fine disdain. "No fear! I'm not afraid of those butchers! Let's go and avenge her!"

"We can't do anything like that, Handy, although I must admit I feel as worked-up as you do," said Nipper quietly. "There'll probably be hundreds of soldiers there—"

"Why not ask her how many?" said Handforth quickly.

"No, it's useless—"

"I say, she's getting hysterical again!" murmured Jack Grey. "You're the one she seems to like best, Nipper. Try to soothe her, for goodness' sake!"

Nipper went over, and found that Mistress Bessber was attempting to leave her couch. She pushed Nipper back when he tried to stop her.

"Nay, let me rise!" she pleaded. "I must return! I must go back—"

"But you can't do that!" broke in Nipper. "They'll only kill you!"

"Don't you understand?" she said, her voice almost mechanical in its set purpose. "I must go! My children! Perchance they are dying now at the hands of those monsters!"

"They would never dare to harm your children—"

"Dare!" she cried wailingly. "Did they not tell me before setting me adrift?"

"Tell you?" said Handforth. "Tell you what?"

"My five little ones are to be burnt!" she said huskily.

"Burnt!" went up a horrified chorus. "No less! Burnt at the stake, as an added lesson to the people of the village," she said. "I must go—I must try to save them. Oh, do not attempt to keep me here—"

"Burnt at the stake!" shouted Nipper, aghast.

"It can't be true!" muttered Watson, with a shudder. "Even Kasker's men wouldn't go to such a length as that! They wouldn't wipe out the whole family!"

"No; she must be dreaming!"

But the woman shook her head. "I neither dream nor imagine," she replied. "'Twas the last thing said to me ere I was thrown upon the current. Later in the day, they told me, my five children were to be burnt in public—burnt alive! I cannot bear it! I cannot—"

"One moment," interrupted Nipper, conquering his horror. "Later in the day? Then your children may still be alive?"

She nodded dully. "'Tis why I wish to go," she said simply.

"How long is it since you were sent forth on that raft?"

"I know not; but it seemeth many hours," she said. "Perchance the time is less. I remember little of what happened, save for the dreadful agony."

"By Jove!" murmured Nipper. "And this village is only a mile or two inland?"

"Scarce even that distance—beyond the woods."

"How many soldiers are there?"

"Full a score."

"A score!" yelled Handforth. "Only twenty!"

"Great Scott!"

"Only a score!"

"Ye seem surprised?" she asked, gaining more confidence in their presence. "A score—enough! There is one officer—no man, but a devil! 'Tis he who is the worst!"

"And what of other soldiers?" asked Nipper, his voice tense. "Aren't there any other soldiers close at hand?"

"None nearer than ten leagues."

"Thirty miles!" muttered Pitt. "Only twenty soldiers within a radius of thirty miles, you chaps, and the village is right near the coast."

Handforth took a deep breath. "Why not make a crusade?" he asked excitedly. "By George, that's it! We'll be crusaders, and dash to this village and rescue the children from the stake!"

"Hurrah!"

"We'll do it!"

The woman was looking at them, dumbfounded.

"Ye will do this?" she asked, without belief.

"We're game to try it!" said Nipper keenly. "Yes, Mistress Bessber, we'll make an attempt to rescue your children."

"Oh! If thou really meanest—"

"We've got to!" said Nipper. "We can't think of your youngsters being burnt at the stake, and just leave them there! We'll do everything in our power to save them. This time, if we can prevent it, Kasker's brutes—"

"We've got to prevent it!" broke in Handforth fiercely. "Cheer up, Mrs. Bessber! Leave everything to us, and we'll have your children here in next to no time. We'll dash right off, and save them from the soldiers!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's go at once!"

The poor woman was so overcome with sudden hope that she suffered a relapse, and fainted again. They made her as comfortable as possible on the couch, and then Nipper called a council on deck.

"Well, we've pledged ourselves now, and there's no getting out of it," he said quietly.

"Who wants to get out of it?" asked Handforth.

"Nobody; but you'd all better realise that it's going to be a desperate mission," continued Nipper. "You may sneer at twenty Gothlander soldiers, but there's more than a chance that some of us'll never come back."

Reggie Pitt expressed the opinions of the others.

"This isn't a case where there's any choice," he said simply. "We've got to go, Nipper, and that's all there is about it!"

Active Preparations!

THE whole affair was unexpected. An hour earlier there had been no prospect of action. And now, what a dramatic change! The juniors had pledged themselves to venture on to Gothland soil, and to make an attempt to rescue Mistress Bessber's children from the hands of the ogre's henchmen! Even Handforth, the fire-eater, could not grumble now! He had wanted action, and he seemed like getting it.

"As long as we all know where we stand, I needn't say any more on the subject," said Nipper. "We're going, so that's that! I think you'll agree that this is a case for strategy."

"Yes," said Pitt promptly. "And you're the fellow to plan the thing."

Nipper turned and surveyed the shore—now only two or three miles distant. The swift river, down which the raft had been borne, was in clear view. The village of Grenfrith, then, was a mile or so in that direction, hidden by the belt of dense woodland which came almost down to the lakeside. But the whole coast hereabouts appeared to be devoid of any humanity.

"I don't want to repeat what I said about the dangers," said Nipper. "You all know them, and I think you're all prepared to undertake the risks. It's an exceptional case, and there isn't a minute to be lost."

"Then why aren't we doing something?" put in Handforth.

"We are; we're under way already."

Handforth looked round and saw that the oarsmen were pulling hard at the sweeps, and the great galley was plunging along straight towards the enemy coast.

"We've got nearly twenty minutes to make preparations—twenty minutes before we can land," continued Nipper. "I'm not going to call for volunteers to go, but I want a couple of volunteers to stay behind."

"Not likely!" said a dozen voices.

"There ought to be three really," said Nipper. "As you're the youngest, Willy, I think that you and your two chums had better stay on board."

Willy Handforth glared.

"Then you'd better think again!" he retorted.

"You'd better think hard!" said Chubby Heath.

"And leave us out of your thoughts!" said Juicy Lemon.

The Third Form trio spoke with conviction.

"But look here, my lads, you're only fags—"

"I like your nerve!" growled Willy.

"Only fags! We're not at St. Frank's, are we? Age doesn't count here! It doesn't matter whether we're in the Third, or any other Form. We're all in this affair, and we're not going to be left out in the cold just because we're fags!"

Nipper realised that he had been too blunt.

"Oh, all right; I don't suppose it'll be any good arguing!" he said. "There's no time for us to draw lots. Somebody's got to volunteer."

"But why?" asked Pitt. "There'll be nothing to do on board. What about all these oarsmen? Can't they look after the galley? We shan't be gone for more than half an hour."

"Half an hour!" said Handforth. "You mean half a minute! This village is on the riverside—"

"It may be, but we're not taking the galley up the river," said Nipper.

"Why not?"

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"It'll be too risky; we might get ourselves into a hopeless trap," replied Nipper. "No; our best method will be to leave the galley out here in the open. We'll go to within two or three hundred yards of the shore, and then take the boat. We'll penetrate the wood. According to Mistress Bessber, Grenfrith is only just beyond."

"He's right, you chaps," said Buster Boots, nodding. "Always trust Nipper to know the best thing to do when it comes to generalship. Even if we're spotted, it'll be difficult to round us up in the recesses of a wood."

"I'm thinking of the escape," said Nipper. "We want to get these children, if we can, and make a dash for it. We shall stand a lot more chance in the wood than out in the open—especially if we keep together, and mark the path in advance. There's only a short strip of beach, and once across it we shall be practically safe, although there might be the risk of arrows."

"I agree with all this," said Pitt. "But why do you find it necessary to leave three fellows on board?"

Nipper looked thoughtful.

"We want to rescue those children, if possible, without getting any of ourselves killed," he replied. "That's putting it bluntly; but this is no time for choosing any words. Look at the thing squarely," he added, addressing everybody in a grim voice. "What do you think Mr. Lee or Dorrie will say if we go back with five Gothlander children, and leave five or six of our own fellows dead in the enemy's country?"

The others were silent.

"So we mustn't lose any opportunity of safeguarding ourselves," continued Nipper. "There's another point. This 'pirate galley' deception will be exploded once and for all."

"How do you mean—exploded?" asked Tregellis-West.

"Well, we can't expect to rescue these children without showing our true colours," replied Nipper. "Kassker's men are bound to know the truth, whatever happens, so it'll be good policy to take the bull by the horns and summon help."

"Summon help!" said Handforth.

"How?"

"By giving the signal that I arranged with the gov'nor."

"You—you hopeless chump!" said Handforth. "The Northestrian coast is thirty miles away. We can't stop to get help—"

"We're not stopping for anything, my dear chap," interrupted Nipper. "This is where a bit of strategy will come in. After the main party has penetrated the wood, the fellows left on board will let off a whole volley of smoke rockets."

"But you're crazy!" ejaculated Reggie Pitt, staring. "That's the very thing to attract the enemy! Over in Northestria they'll hear the report, and they'll shoot over in a motor-boat to see what's up; but that doesn't alter the fact that the enemy'll be on the job, too."

"Exactly! That's my idea," said Nipper coolly. "I want those soldiers in Grenfrith to be startled by the explosions. The chances are that they'll get the wind up and leave anything they happen to be doing. Perhaps they'll rush to the shore here."

"And leave us the village to ourselves!" gasped Pitt.

"That's what I'm hoping."

"By Jove! Nipper, you're a brainy boggar!" said Reggie admiringly. "It's a priceless scheme!"

"As far as I can see, it's the only thing to be done," replied Nipper. "The soldiers can't harm the galley, because

it'll be out of arrow-shot. And during all the confusion we may be able to get hold of the children."

"And they'll hear those explosions in Northestria and dash to our help," said Fullwood. "If Mr. Lee comes in the motor-boat he'll be across the lake in less than an hour."

"I'm counting on that, too," nodded Nipper. "If we fail to come back the fellows on the galley will know that something has happened. That's where the gov'nor will come in. The motor-boat will be handy to dash up the river, and there's the machine-gun on board. You see, we shall have two chances of success by taking this course. And the fellows who remain on board will have a serious duty to discharge. Who'll volunteer?"

Nobody wanted to stay—for all of them were eager to take part in the actual "crusade," as Handforth insisted upon calling it. But at last Tommy Watson, Archie Glenthorpe, and Jack Grey were persuaded to remain behind in charge of the rockets.

Nipper gave them very full instructions.

"Don't let them off until we've been in the wood for ten minutes," he said. "That'll give us a chance to get near the village. Bang will go the rockets, and if we're lucky the soldiers will bolt, or something. And during the lull we can make the raid. As for getting back, we shall have to take our chance."

And so, without any further planning, the affair was arranged.

There was one thing strongly in the schoolboys' favour. The coast was very deserted and empty. There was none to see the galley's approach. At least, the juniors could see no sign of life.

By this time the pirate vessel had got close within shore, and many of the men at the sweeps were looking uneasy. They hadn't the same courage as the British schoolboys, although they were loyal enough.

The boat was got ready, and the fellows prepared themselves for the big adventure.

"Everything seems quiet, thank goodness!" said Nipper, as he examined the shore. "There's nobody watching, and there's nothing but these woods in front of us. We'll just go ahead, and trust to luck."

Five minutes later the boat had put off, and the great galley was left waiting off shore. Her oarsmen were ready to spring into instant action, and the vessel's bows were pointing towards the open lake.

At last the boat grounded upon the beach, and the raiders experienced a curious little thrill as they felt the grind of the enemy soil beneath their feet.

In the Thick of It!

NOT a moment was wasted on the beach. The boat was left there, and they made a swift dash for the cover of the trees. Within a few seconds they were swallowed up in the wood.

The trees in this strange country were very much the same as English trees, but there was less undergrowth. The trunks were clean, and the ground under foot was almost devoid of grass. Overhead, the foliage spread in a complete pall, high above. It was gloomy in the wood—and still. Now and again a wild creature would scurry off, but the raiders were satisfied that there was no ambush. Their landing had been unobserved. Mistress Bessber's story was no trick, as some of the fellows had vaguely suspected at first.

"What's the idea of this slow, deliberate progress?" asked Handforth impatiently, as he pushed ahead of the little column. "You're leading, Nipper—why can't you run for it?"

Nipper was looking at his watch. "Four minutes!" he murmured. "We've got another six before those rockets go off. I'm trying to time it exactly, you ass, so that we shall get within sight of the village at the critical moment. And I'm taking stock of these trees, too. We don't want to get lost on the return trip."

Handforth glanced round him. "There's nothing to note here," he said. "All these trees are the same."

"That doesn't say much for your woodcraft, old man," said Nipper grimly. "If you'd only look, you'll see a hundred different signs to memorise—not that it's really necessary, anyhow, because we're leaving our footprints pretty clearly in the soft ground."

They continued onwards, and Nipper was beginning to feel anxious when he saw that eight of the specified ten minutes had elapsed. They still seemed to be buried in the heart of the wood. One or two of the juniors were wondering if they had been going round in circles—quite an easy blunder to make in a wood. But Nipper, who was leading, was not likely to make such a mistake.

As he had said, the whole thing was a gamble.

They knew that the river flowed somewhere away to their right, and if Mistress Bessber had given correct directions, the village of Gernfrith should now be only a short distance ahead.

And then, just as they were beginning to have serious doubts, the trees suddenly thinned, and almost before they knew it, they emerged.

"Back!" murmured Nipper. "We mustn't let ourselves be seen yet!"

"By George!" ejaculated Handforth. "Houses! It must be the village—"

"Look!" muttered Church, pointing. They hung back, half hidden by the trees. And they found that they could gaze down into a small, shallow valley. Only four or five hundred yards away nestled a quiet village. It was planned in almost the same way as the North-eastern villages—the picturesque little houses straggling round a big market-place. Almost every village had this same central square, and all these squares were spacious.

This particular one was thronged. People were crowding round it on every side. There must have been hundreds present, and among the sombre colours of the peasants' garb gleamed the chainmail, here and there, of a soldier.

Nipper's eyes were eager as he took in the view.

"Can she have been right?" he murmured. "I can't count more than fifteen or sixteen soldiers—"

"Never mind the soldiers, dear old boy!" burst out Tregellis-West. "Look! In the centre of the square! Begad! Don't you see?"

"Yes," muttered Nipper. There were long poles sticking upwards—stakes! And to each was fastened a figure, and the watchers could gain a glimpse, here and there, of faggots being piled up.

The rescuers had come none too soon! The children were bound to the stakes already, and were being prepared for the burning!

As they watched, the St. Frank's fellows felt their hearts rise into their throats, and they were one and all filled with a great and burning fury. It

seemed incredible that such a ghastly massacre could be contemplated. But yet, these people were living in the realms of the Middle Ages—and all the fellows knew that burning at the stake was practised in those days. And the Gothlanders were savages of the most atrocious type.

"Come on!" rasped out Handforth. "By George! I'll smash—"

"Wait!" urged Nipper. "Wait for the rockets!"

He looked at his watch—the ten minutes were up. Nipper vaguely wondered if those on the galley would do their part properly.

Boom!
"The rockets!" gasped Handforth.
"By Jove, yes!"

The explosion had sounded clearly, high in the air, a mile away. It was a sharp, echoing concussion, which, even at this distance, caused one's ears to tingle in the drums. And there was a sort of echoing sound with it, too, rolling like miniature thunder.

"Look!" said Church breathlessly. There was a big stir in the market place. Faces were turned—a sea of faces. People were moving, and it was clear that the entire assembly had been startled by that unaccustomed sound. For here, in Gothland, they knew nothing of high explosives.

Boom! Boom!
Two more came—sharp and penetrating.

"Good man, Tommy!" murmured Nipper. "That's the stuff to give 'em! Let's have the other three now, as soon as you like! Jove, they're having an effect, anyhow!"

They were!

The movement in the market place had become a stampede. The soldiers, particularly, were hurrying off, and groups of them could be seen forcing their way into the streets.

"It's worked!" said Pitt. "Those soldiers are hurrying off to investigate the explosions. They probably think there's an attack, or something. When do we go, Nipper? Just say the word!"

Boom! Boom! Boom!
"Now!" said Nipper grimly.
"Hurrah!"
"St. Frank's to the rescue!"
"Come on, you chaps—make a dash for it!"

They needed no urging. Angered and indignant, they were only too ready to dash hotly into action.

As they rushed towards the village, so the soldiers of Kassker rushed away. It was exactly as Nipper had desired. Everything seemed to be going well.

Panic had seized the peasants. They were running in all directions, scattering through the streets madly, although there was no peril for them. Nipper rather wondered at this scare, for he had hardly expected such a result.

Perhaps the volcanoes sometimes went into violent eruption. If so, that might be the explanation of this panic. The villagers thought that those reports were caused by a neighbouring volcano, and they were now rushing for shelter.

"Don't waste time on anything!" yelled Nipper, as they approached. "Go straight for the kids, grab them, and bolt again!"

(Will the St. Frank's boys succeed in their dangerous mission? Don't miss next week's thrilling developments in this great serial.)



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FOR THE SAKE OF HIS SIDE!

(Continued from page 17.)

came a batsman caught and bowled Langton, and the crowd roared again.

Long after the match St. Jim's fellows loved to relate how Langton of the Sixth had made hay of the county batting, and how astounded the Loamshire men had looked at the summary dismissal of their best bats.

Seven down for 50—that was the score of which Loamshire could not be proud, but which made the Saints yell with delight.

Dalton, the tower of strength on the county side, had been dismissed for 8 runs. And it was Langton who dismissed him.

"Langton! Langton!"
"Bravo!"

If ever a cricketer was a hero in the eyes of his schoolfellows, Langton was at that moment. His "pair of spectacles" in the St. Jim's innings were forgotten. That was nothing—less than nothing. The Saints only thought of the way he was taking wickets. And he seemed tireless. Fellows who had remarked that he seemed out of sorts and out of condition at the beginning of the match, observed now that he was all life and all fire.

"Can you do another over?" Kildare asked him, laughing, as the announcement ran round that the county were last man in.

Langton laughed.

"A dozen, if you like!" he said.

"I think one will be enough!" grinned Kildare.

And it was. For in that over the deadly bowler took a wicket first ball, and the match—the great match between St. Jim's and the Loamshire County was over!

Loamshire were all down in their second innings for 82. Total, 147 for Loamshire, and 190 for St. Jim's. St. Jim's had beaten the county by 43 runs.

No wonder the field was swarmed as the last wicket fell; no wonder Langton was caught up by wildly

enthusiastic fellows and carried off the field in triumph.

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Good old Langton!"

"Bwavo!"

"Hurrah!"

They bore him back to the School House, and set him down there—flushed, excited, joyous. But when he had retired to his study, the hero of St. Jim's was changed. The flush died out of his face, the excitement died from his eyes. It was over now. He had won for St. Jim's—and now he had to pay the penalty! He had risked everything for the sake of his side—and now was the time to face the music.

Langton did not join in the celebrations which followed the victory of the school over the county. He pleaded fatigue, and stayed in his study. He felt like a condemned prisoner in a cell. The only question was—when would the blow fall?

Mr. Levy would know that the county had lost very soon after the conclusion of the match. He would have to fly, for he could not meet his engagements. Would he come to St. Jim's first, or would he write to the Head, with his lying accusations and his lying proofs?

Darkness had long fallen. Langton paced his study in the gloom, with misery in his heart. How long would the racking suspense last? There came a knock at the door.

Langton started, and stopped his feverish pacing. He guessed that it was someone who had come to summon him to the Head's presence.

"Come in!" he called out, in a shaking voice.

The door opened.

"Why are you in the dark?"

Langton trembled. It was the Head's voice. It was Dr. Holmes who had come to his study.

He switched on the light, but he hardly dared to look at the Head. Dr. Holmes' glance rested upon the senior's white, tortured face.

"Langton," he said, "I have something to say to you. I have received a letter, accusing you, and enclosing what the writer declares to be proofs that you have had betting transactions with him up to last week, in spite of your promise to me. What have you to say?"

"I expected it, sir," said Langton dully. "It's no good telling you the man is lying. You won't believe me."
The Head's look was kind and compassionate.

"On the contrary, Langton," he said quietly, "I shall not doubt your word. I have learned some things this afternoon from Merry of the Shell. Is it correct that this man Levy tried to induce you to betray the county match?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you refused?"

"I gave in at first, but afterwards I—I couldn't do it!" muttered Langton. "Kildare says I've won the match for the school. That's enough for me. I can face the rest; anyway, I've done the decent thing. If you believe that man—"

"I do not believe him," said the Head. "I think you have been very careless and very foolish, Langton. I believe nothing more. Your conduct, in defying this man and doing your duty, convinces me that you have been guilty of nothing worse than that. I believe that you have kept your promise to me. I believe it because you have played the game to-day!"

Langton staggered. The relief was too much.

"Oh, sir!" he gasped.

It was all he could utter.

"This letter that I have received I shall burn, and take no other notice of it, Langton," said the Head. "Let me warn you in future to be careful to have no dealings, even of the most innocent nature, with bad characters—that is all. I have no doubts of you, Langton; you never stood higher in my opinion than at the present moment. Look to the future, my boy, and forget the past—and shake off its influence. That is all!"

Langton sank into a chair. The Head was gone.

The Sixth Former's face was flushed with happiness.

He was saved—and he was saved because he had played the game that day, and done his duty for the sake of his side.

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