

The GEM

No. 1,448. Vol. XLVIII.
EVERY WEDNESDAY. Week Ending November 16th, 1935.

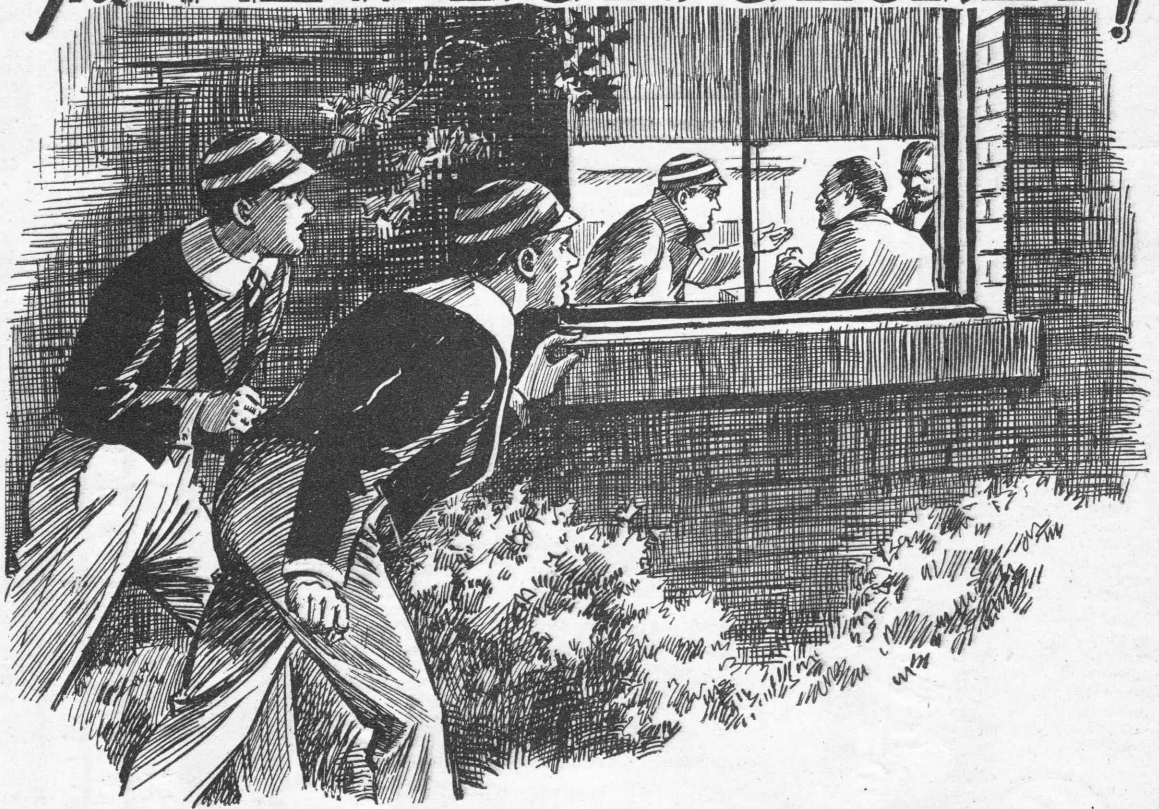
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NOTICE
FIGGINS & COS DOWNFALL
THREE GROANS FOR THE NEW HOUSE



ON PHILIP DENTON'S SECRET HUNG THE FATE OF A FORTUNE!—

The NEW BOY'S SECRET!



Tom Merry and Denton peered in through the window. Two men were in the room, and facing them was Ernest Levison. "I want twenty pounds," the watching juniors heard the cad of the Fourth say. "I nearly got copped pinching this rotten letter, and it's worth twenty!" "We must get that letter back, Merry!" murmured Denton. "It's worth a fortune to me!"

CHAPTER 1.

Check!

"PIFFLE!"

"Look here, Manners—"

"I repeat—piffle! Utter piffle!"

"You—you chump! You weren't there! You don't know anything about it!"

"That doesn't matter. I've got some sense, I should hope!"

"Not much good hoping!" said Tom Merry sarcastically. "I tell you Figgins was offside, if ever a chap was. I wasn't ten yards off!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther—the Terrible Three of the Shell Form at St. Jim's—were standing in a group on the steps of the School House, and the two former were having a heated discussion concerning a junior football match which had taken place the previous day.

Monty Lowther stood looking on, grinning.

"I wasn't ten yards off!" repeated Tom Merry warmly.

"Then you saw twice!"

"I tell you Manners—"

"Bosh!" said Manners politely.

"Look here, you ass, do you want a flat nose?"

"Yes, if you can give me one."

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"I jolly soon will—"

"Hallo, what's the giddy rumpus?" asked a voice suddenly. "What are you kids rowing about?"

The Terrible Three looked round in surprise at the sound of the cool voice. It was a strange voice, and the words were spoken in a decidedly familiar tone. In a moment the argument was forgotten, and the Shell fellows found themselves facing a boy of about their own age. He was slim and apparently wiry, and under a tuft of light-brown hair a pair of merry blue eyes twinkled. He stood regarding Tom Merry & Co. with a cool smile on his face.

"Were you talking to us?" asked Tom Merry, very politely.

"Yes. What are you chaps—"

"You said 'kids' just now," interrupted Manners.

"Did I? Well, kids, then!" said the newcomer cheerfully. "I want to ask you a question or two."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. Whoever this chap was, he didn't lack nerve, anyhow.

Tom Merry stepped forward.

"Half a mo'!" he said. "You're a little too fresh! Let me tell you we don't allow strangers to call us what they like!"

"No offence meant. I apologise!"

"Oh, well, if you put it that way—"

"All serene now? Good!" exclaimed the newcomer coolly. "I only said kids as a figure of speech, you know. I could have said the same to anybody else if I'd seen them before you. I'm the new fellow in the Shell—School House," he said confidently.

"New fellow!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Shell!" ejaculated Manners.

"School House!" put in Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three looked at one another again.

"Yes. Haven't you heard? Do you mean to say that I've been allowed to come to St. Jim's unannounced?" asked the new boy, in surprise. "Well, I call that too bad! I can understand now why there wasn't a crowd of chaps and a brass band waiting for me at the station!" he added thoughtfully.

"You cheeky young ass!" said Manners warmly, looking at the other with renewed interest. "Are you really a new kid?"

"Yes, really!"

"And you're for the Shell?"

"So I've been told," said the new junior. "I'm to be a boarder in the School House."

"What's your name?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Denton—Philip Denton."

"Oh, is it?" said the humorist of the Shell. "Well, Denton, you'll get a dent

—GRIPPING LONG STORY OF FUN, MYSTERY, AND ADVENTURE!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

on your nose if you're not a little more polite to your betters. We're members of the Shell, and we don't allow new kids to ride the high horse!"

"All right, my son, don't get your rag out!" said Denton cheerfully. "Well, I'd better be getting indoors, too. By-the-by, where does a kid named Tom Merry hang out?"

Tom Merry stepped closer to the new boy.

"Where does Tom Merry do what?" he asked ominously.

"Hang out. Where is his study?"

"It may interest you to know that my name is Tom Merry," said the captain of the Shell. "And it may interest you to know that I don't allow any new fat-head to call me a kid! Understand that?"

Denton grinned.

"Well, I admit it interests me a little," he replied casually. "But, my dear kid, you seem to have an exaggerated idea of your own importance."

Manners and Lowther glared, and Tom Merry drew his breath in sharply.

The new fellow was asking for it.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry.

"Bump him!" said Manners, finding his voice. "Bump the young rotter for his nerve!"

And the Terrible Three advanced upon the new junior threateningly. For a moment it looked as though Denton was about to be bumped, and bumped hard, for he had certainly provoked the chums of the Shell to an unwarrantable extent. But Denton was apparently a cool customer, and well able to take care of himself. He backed a little and grinned.

"It's all right," he said hastily. "I was only giving you a piece of necessary information—"

"What?" roared Tom Merry, pushing back his cuffs. "Look here, funnyface, are you going to apologise for your beastly cheek, or do you want to be used as a mop to wipe up these steps?"

"You see—"

"Are you going to apologise?" yelled the hero of the Shell.

"Oh, rats to that!"

"What?"

The Terrible Three gasped. Even if Figgins, the great chief of the New House, had spoken to them in that manner it is probable that he would have been used as a mat for them to wipe their feet on. But a new fellow—a boy who hadn't been inside the school gates five minutes! It was unheard of.

"Rats!" repeated Denton coolly. "I may be a new kid, but I don't see—"

"You won't see in a minute, when I've closed your eyes up!" roared Tom Merry wrathfully. "Come on, chaps, let's teach the nerry bounder a lesson!"

"Rather!"

"Scrag him!"

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther

advanced upon Denton with very warlike expressions upon their faces. To their surprise, the new boy did not even back away, except to plant himself firmly on the steps.

Tom Merry was foremost, and he lunged out at Denton's smiling face, with the intention of giving it a decided biff. But somehow that biff never got home, and before the hero of the Shell realised what was happening he found himself picked up like a feather and flung bodily into the arms of Manners and Lowther.

"Ow!" yelled Manners, as Tom Merry hit him in the chest. "I say—"

"Look out—"

More than that Lowther could not get out, for he and his two chums rolled into the School House door in a struggling mass, the new boy looking on, chuckling merrily. As it happened, another junior was at that moment emerging from the School House, and the Terrible Three hit him with considerable force, sending him flying.

"Bai Jove! You uttah wuffians—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House at St. Jim's, was the junior who had received the three Shell fellows in his chest. As usual, he was resplendent—exceptionally resplendent, as a matter of fact. His topper shone like a mirror, his boots rivalled it in

When Philip Denton came to St. Jim's no one in the school knew that he carried a secret worth unlimited gold. But two crooks had discovered it, and with the help of Levison, the cad of the Fourth Form, they laid their plans to rob the new boy.

brilliance, and his clothes were brushed with scrupulous care. In a word, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was elegant.

And then he was sent flying.

His topper crashed in one direction, his gold-mounted cane in another, and his monocle jerked from his eye and dangled at the end of its silken cord.

D'Arcy sat on the School House mat, dazed.

"Gweat Scott!" he gasped.

"You silly ass! What did you get in the way for?" shouted Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"My hat!"

"You wuff boundahs!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "Look what you have done to my toppah! Bai Jove! I wegard you as a set of dangewous lunatics!"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"I uttably wufese—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The four juniors looked round at the sound of that laugh and beheld Philip Edgar Denton standing at the bottom of the School House steps, laughing like a hyena.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he yelled.

CHAPTER 2.

A Cool Customer!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY scrambled to his feet, jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed the new boy with a cold glare—which should have withered him up into nothingness really.

Apparently, however, the glare was wasted on Denton, for he returned D'Arcy's look with a smile and a nod.

"Sorry! Ha, ha, ha!" he gasped. "I couldn't help laughing, though. You went over a treat. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no reason why you should stand there cacklin' in that wudicrous fashion," said D'Arcy frigidly. "My twousahs are fwightfully dusty, and my toppah has the nap wubbed the wong way."

"Sorry!" grinned the new boy. "I was only teaching that kid over there that I'm not made of jelly. He came for me, so I just returned him to his pals with thanks. It was your own fault for coming out at that moment."

The Terrible Three scrambled to their feet and looked at one another.

"Well," murmured Tom Merry, "did you ever—"

"No, I never!" agreed Manners.

"Hardly ever!" ejaculated Monty Lowther, pulling his collar straight. "The chap's got the strength of a bullock."

"Yes, rather!"

"Look here, Denton—"

"Sorry—can't stop!" said Denton coolly, pushing past Tom Merry and entering the School House.

"Collar him!"

"Cheeky brute!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy excitedly. "The fwightful wagamuffin has uttably wuined my twousahs—"

"Oh, blow your giddy trousers!" growled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy! This is our show," said the hero of the Shell.

"Now, look here, you new kid," he went on, facing Denton, "I don't want to be rough with you—"

"Go hon!"

"But you're evidently on the look-out for a row!"

"I'm not particular," grinned the new junior coolly.

Tom Merry bit his lip. He hardly knew how to deal with Denton. The newcomer seemed to be quite at home, and was ready with an answer for everything that was said to him. Manners and Lowther were fairly itching to grasp him with a firm grasp and bump him hard.

They stepped forward threateningly. Denton didn't move.

"Want some, too?" he inquired genially. "Perhaps I had better warn you that if you come too close you'll be served in the same way as your little chum."

And before Manners and Lowther could recover from their astonishment

SPECIAL FOR NEXT WEEK

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See page 7.

Denton turned and calmly walked into the School House.

He strolled along the corridor, chuckling.

"Hallo! Who are you? And what's the cackle for?"

It was Jack Blake of the Fourth who asked the question. He had just turned the corner with his chums Herries and Digby, and they were on their way to join D'Arcy.

The famous chums of Study No. 6 had arranged to make a trip down to Rylcombe.

They stared at Denton curiously, and he nodded cheerfully.

"Hallo!" he said. "I'm the new chap."

"New chap?"

"Yes. Can you kids—"

"Us what?" interrupted Blake.

"Fellows, if you like it better. Can you tell me which is Tom Merry's study?"

"Yes, it's in the Shell passage."

Blake mentioned the number, and the new boy walked on.

"Half a mo!" said Herries. "Tom Merry's in the quad."

Denton grinned.

"I know that!"

"You know it, eh?" remarked Blake, puzzled. "Then what do you want to go to his study for? Manners isn't there either, or Lowther."

"I know that, too, my son, but it happens I'm to dig in Tom Merry's study while I'm at St. Jim's, so I want to see what sort of a hole it is!"

And Denton walked on, leaving Blake, Herries, and Digby looking at one another.

"My hat!"

"Talk about nerve!"

"Beastly!" said Blake indignantly.

"Let's tell old Tommy."

"Come on!"

Blake & Co. raced down the passage, and found the Terrible Three on the steps, looking angry and indignant.

"If he thinks he's going to do as he likes, he's jolly well mistaken!" Monty Lowther was saying. "Redfern & Co. of the New House were bad enough when they came, but this giddy dummy is ten times worse!"

"Got sauce enough for fifty!" ejaculated Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!" put in Arthur Augustus. "I heartily agree with you, deah boys, that the new boundah is too cheeky. He will have to be stwictly wepwimanded!"

"What's that?" demanded Blake, giving D'Arcy a slap on the back.

"Weally, Blake, pway do not be so wuff! I was just wemarkin' that Denton, the new boundah—"

"Denton, eh? Don't think much of his name, anyhow!"

"Hewwies, you are intewwuptin' me," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I was just sayin'—"

"You generally are saying something, Gussy," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"We just passed the new chap in the passage," went on Blake, "and he called us kids!"

"Yes; and said he was on his way to your study, Tom Merry," said Digby.

"Our study?" chorused the Terrible Three.

"Said he's going to dig there with you—"

Tom Merry snorted.

"I know he jolly well isn't!" he shouted wrathfully.

"My only Aunt Matilda!" exclaimed Manners excitedly. "Have we got to have that funny-faced beggar in our

study with us? Come on! We'll chuck him out on his neck if he's dared to enter our study!"

"Rather!"

And Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther hurried into the School House with determined looks on their faces, leaving Arthur Augustus to explain to his study-mates what had occurred.

Other juniors had strolled up—Bernard Glyn, Dane, Kangaroo, and some others—so D'Arcy had quite an audience. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and the winter sun shone with exceptional brilliance on the old school.

It happened that there was no football on that afternoon, so the juniors found the time hang somewhat on their hands. Of course, Tom Merry & Co. had put in an hour on the field immediately after dinner, and so had the chums of Study No. 6; but now the time was getting on. In fact, the Terrible Three had been discussing whether their funds would run to one of Dame Taggles' famous steak-and-kidney pies for tea, when Manners had started the argument about Figgins being offside. Then Philip Edgar Denton had put in an appearance, and since that moment tea had been entirely forgotten.

Tom Merry & Co. hurried upstairs to the Shell passage.

They burst into their study.

Denton was there, calmly seated before the open window, looking out on to the old quad, with a thoughtful expression in his eyes. As a matter of fact, he was reckoning up how much money he had spent on his way to St. Jim's, and seeing if his balance was correct.

Denton was nothing if not methodical. "Hallo!" he remarked, looking up abstractedly. "You three again?"

"Yes, us three!" said Tom Merry ungrammatically. "We want to know what the dickens you mean by walking into this study as if you owned it? This is our study, you understand—our study!"

"Our study!" chorused Manners and Lowther, like an echo.

"And we're not going to have any blessed outsiders interfering when they're not wanted!" shouted Tom Merry, exasperated by the new junior's cool, self-possessed smile.

"My hat! I believe you're wild!" murmured Denton.

"Yes, I am wild!" roared the hero of the Shell. "And you're going to get it in the neck, you cheeky rotter! Will you get out of this study quietly, or shall we give you a hand?"

"Or a foot?" suggested Lowther grimly.

"Well," said Denton thoughtfully, "it would be easier if you helped me, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, collar him!" yelled Manners, in exasperation.

"Here, I say—"

"Rats!"

And the Terrible Three rushed at the new boy with one accord. They weren't quarrelsome boys in any way, but they weren't going to stand unlimited cheek from a new boy without chastising the incautious one. Denton might be one of the best chaps in the world at heart, but that didn't make any difference.

In a second he was on his feet, and he deliberately put his hands behind him.

"Half a minute!" he said hastily. "I—ow!"

Tom Merry, unable to stop himself, had landed his right fist with considerable force upon the new boy's nose. Denton staggered back, collided with a chair, and sat on the floor with a

crash, the "claret" oozing from his nose in a crimson stream.

"Serve you right!"

"Rather!"

"Chuck him out!" yelled Lowther excitedly.

The study door opened, and Knox, the prefect, looked in.

"What's all this confounded row?" he demanded, looking round with a scowl on his face. "Who's that chap on the floor?"

"New chap, Knox," said Tom Merry. "And you've been knocking him about, eh?" asked the bully of the Sixth, with an unpleasant grin. "Well, you're a nice set! Three of you bullying one—"

"Don't talk rot!" said Lowther warmly. "We—"

"Well, you'll take fifty lines each for creating a disturbance."

"Oh, go easy, Knox—"

"A hundred lines, Lowther, for cheek!" snapped Knox. And he banged the door.

"Nice-tempered chap, evidently," remarked Denton.

"The beast!" muttered Tom Merry. "And all your giddy fault!" he added wrathfully, glaring at Denton as he rose to his feet.

The new boy grinned as he tenderly dabbed his nose.

"All right; I'll do the lines!"

The Terrible Three stared.

"I'll do the lines," repeated Denton cheerfully. "I fully admit it was my fault for acting the giddy ox. I didn't put up my hands just now, because I don't want to fight with you chaps."

"Afraid?" asked Manners.

Denton flushed.

"No," he said quietly. "I'm not afraid; but I've got no quarrel with you, and it would be a silly trick to get rowing. Perhaps I riled you a little too much, and, if so, I apologise. I ought to have explained matters straight away downstairs, but I thought we'd have a little fun first."

"That's all very well," growled Tom Merry.

"I'm sorry for getting you wild," went on Denton. "You seem to be jolly decent chaps—"

"Thank you!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"And as I'm to share this study with you—"

"Who said so?" demanded Manners.

"One of the St. Jim's masters. As I was walking through the village from the station, I met the master of this House," explained the newcomer. "Fine-looking chap he is, and I'll bet he's popular!"

"Rather! He's a brick!"

"Well, Mr. Rail—Rail something."

"Railton."

"That's it—Railton. Well, he said he'd forgotten to tell you that I was coming, and that I was to go straight to a kid—ahem!—chap named Tom Merry, and tell him that I had to share his study with two other fellows, all the rest being full up."

"That's right, too," said the captain of the Shell. "This is the only study with any room to spare. Like your cheek, though, coming in the middle of a term, and putting three quiet studious chaps like us to a blessed lot of inconvenience."

Denton grinned.

"Don't worry!" he said. "I shall only be here a month."

"Only a month at St. Jim's?"

"Just about."

"Well, that's one consolation, anyhow," growled Monty Lowther.

The new arrival grinned again.



Before Tom Merry realised what was happening, he found himself lifted up bodily by the new boy and flung into Manners and Lowther! In a moment the Terrible Three were rolling, with wild yells, in the School House doorway, while the new boy chuckled merrily.

Evidently he didn't take offence easily. To tell the truth the Terrible Three were rather beginning to like him, with his free-and-easy ways, and frank apologies.

"But what's the idea?" asked Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say your people have sent you to St. Jim's just for a month—that you're going to clear out then?"

"Something like that," answered Denton; "but I can't stop to explain now. There's my box to see to, and it's nearly tea-time. I suppose you have tea in the studies at St. Jim's?" he added.

"Rather!"

"Good! I'll stand treat to-night," said Denton generously. "Here's half-a-quid. You know how to lay in the grub best. All serene!"

"Well, that's really sensible," said Monty Lowther heartily. "We can get a ripping feed for half-a-quid, with plenty to spare for to-morrow. Denton, you're shaping better than I thought, though you'll have to learn your place, you know. Tommy's the leader of this study, and he won't stand any nonsense."

"Right-ho! I won't kick," said the new boy, crossing to the door.

"How about that dot on the boko I just gave you?" asked Tom Merry.

"Oh, that's nothing! I'm paid back for chucking you about on the steps."

"Yes; that reminds me," said the hero of the Shell wonderingly. "Are you a giddy Hercules, or what? You lifted me up like a blessed feather!"

"How did you do it?" asked Manners.

Denton winked as he opened the door.

"Ju-jutsu, my sons," he grinned. "Simple trick."

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"That explains it, then."

"Yes," grinned Denton. "I know

plenty more tricks, in case you kids get cheeky."

And before the Terrible Three could move, the cool new fellow had shut the door, and they heard his footsteps in the corridor.

They looked at one another, and breathed hard. Then Tom Merry burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's up with you, ass?"

"I can't help grinning," chuckled Tom Merry. "The chap's got the

nerve of a dozen. He'll be a jolly good addition to this study, kids, when he's properly broken in."

"Yes; when he is," said Manners doubtfully.

And the others looked doubtful, too. If Philip Denton continued as he had started, there didn't seem much likelihood of his ever being "broken in," as Tom Merry expressed it.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Gets It Hot!

DR. HOLMES, the headmaster of St. Jim's, sat in his study. He looked up expectantly as a tap sounded on the door. Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, entered.

"Ah, Railton! Thank you for coming!" exclaimed the Head. "I just wanted to ask you about the new boy, Denton. He arrived this afternoon, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Railton. "I met him in the village, and spoke with him for a few minutes. Apparently he is sharp and intelligent, and ought to get on well."

"I do not think he will have much chance of getting on at St. Jim's," smiled Dr. Holmes. "He will only be with us for a month, or a little over."

Mr. Railton lifted his eyebrows.

"A month?" he inquired, in surprisa.

"That is all, Mr. Railton. I should not have considered his entering St. Jim's had not the circumstances been unusual. It appears that Denton's father went out to Alaska just over a year ago, leaving his son in England, in charge of a Mr. Robert Barratt, an old friend. Not a month since news came from Alaska that poor Denton had met with a serious accident, and died in consequence."

"How terrible!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, it was very sad," agreed the Head, "for it left his son an orphan. But Denton had been so long away that the boy did not feel the shock nearly so much as he would have done in other circumstances. Mr. Barratt did not tell me the full details, but I gathered from his conversation that Denton left a considerable sum of money, making it necessary for someone to go out to Alaska to clear the matter up. This duty Mr. Barratt decided to do himself."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I understand, sir," he said. "It is a pity the boy will have to leave just when he is nicely settled down; but that, I suppose, is his guardian's business."

"Exactly, Mr. Railton! We have merely to take charge of the boy until Mr. Barratt's return from America."

After a few more minutes' conversation Mr. Railton left the presence of the Head and made his way to his own study in the School House.

As he passed along the Shell passage he smiled. From Tom Merry's study came the sound of many voices, intermixed with laughter.

"I do not think the new boy could have been placed among better companions," murmured the Housemaster to himself. "I expect he has already made himself at home with Tom Merry and his friends."

The new junior had! In the Terrible Three's study tea was just over, and

the festive board was still loaded with good things.

Monty Lowther leaned back and sighed.

"Blessed if I can eat another crumb!" he said contentedly. "After all, it wasn't such a sensible thing to lay in so much grub all at once."

"It'll do for to-morrow," said Denton. "It will if it's still here. I know for a fact Figgins & Co. are stony, and if they get wind of this feed, they'll raid the study if we're not jolly careful!"

"We shall have to be jolly careful, that's all," said Manners, who had finished his tea and was busy making some adjustments to his camera.

"We've been careful other times," said Tom Merry, "and it hasn't been any good. Lately, Figgins & Co. have been going it strong. It's those scholarship bounders who are the cause of it all. Since Redfern & Co. came to St. Jim's the School House has had its work cut out to hold its own."

As a matter of fact, during the last week or two the School House had been getting decidedly the worst of it. There always had been the keenest of keen rivalry between the New House and School House at St. Jim's, and lately the New House had been gaining victory after victory, and, in consequence, the New House juniors were going about highly elated, and, as Tom Merry described it, "a dashed lot too cocky!" Not that Tom Merry & Co. would admit for a moment that their rivals had gained the lead.

The hero of the Shell took pains to describe to Denton at length how Figgins & Co. had been working off jape after jape with complete success, and how they had been assisted in their triumphs by Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen—three Board School boys, who had come to St. Jim's on scholarships.

The New Firm—as Redfern & Co. described themselves—were thorough sportsmen and good sports, but it didn't alter the fact that they had been devising the most elaborate japes, and carrying them out at the expense of the School House.

"It's got to be stopped!" declared Tom Merry firmly.

"That's what you said last week, Tommy," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yes; and what's come of it?" demanded Manners, looking up. "You haven't done a blessed thing! Figgins & Co. are going about more inflated than ever!"

"It would be a job to inflate Fatty Wynn any more!" murmured Lowther, with a chuckle.

"Oh, don't start any of your rotten jokes, Monty!" growled Tom Merry crossly. "Can't you see I'm worried?"

"Don't wonder at it, either. You're the leader here, and you let those New House bounders do exactly as they like. We shall have to have a change!"

"That's about it," said Manners.

Tom Merry jumped to his feet. "What's that?" he roared. "Are you chaps going to jib against my leadership?"

"Well, you see—"

"No, I don't see!"

"Oh, it's no good talking to you when you're in that mood, Tommy!" said Manners. "You know as well as we do that if the School House is ever to hold up its head again something will have to be done, and done jolly quick, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, haven't we done our best?"

"Yes; but—"

"Look here," interrupted the new boy practically, "slanging one another won't do any good, will it? You say Blake

& Co. of the Fourth are just as much up against Figgins & Co. as you are—or, rather, as we are?"

"Yes; but the little beggars won't submit to our leadership."

Denton grinned.

"We can all pull together," he declared. "Now I've come to St. Jim's I mean to take part in this giddy feud between the two Houses, and between the lot of us we'll make things hum. I propose to hold a meeting in this study after prep this evening with Blake & Co., as you call them."

"What for?"

"To discuss an idea I've got at the back of my head," said Denton coolly.

The Terrible Three looked doubtful for a moment. The new boy was going it strong, and it wouldn't do to let him have his head too much. But there was no denying Denton was "all there," and it struck Tom Merry that he might very possibly have a batch of really good wheezes to suggest.

At such times as this they couldn't afford to refuse even the faintest suggestion of help. So the leader of the Shell gave Denton a hearty slap on the back.

"Right, my son!" he exclaimed. "Only if you're rotting, and haven't got any wheeze at all, you'll jolly well get bumped for your cheek!"

"Oh, I'm safe enough!" grinned Denton, pushing his chair back. "Suppose we go out into the quad for a bit before prep? It's a lovely evening."

"Just as you like."

The Terrible Three and their new chum left their study and strolled down the stairs. The heroes of the Shell were even surprised at themselves, for not so long before they had evinced the strongest animosity towards Denton. Certainly, he had come round to their views in the most humble manner, and had apologised for his former cheek. Besides, he had turned up trumps with regard to the tea, and as he seemed to be decent right through, Tom Merry & Co. had no hesitation in counting him as a chum.

In the Hall they met Jack Blake and D'Arcy. Both the Fourth Formers gasped.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye.

"My giddy aunt!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove, that wude boundah Denton is actually chummin' with Tom Mewwy and Mannahs!" said the swell of the School House in surprise. "Weally, Tom Mewwy, I am surprised that—"

"It's all right, Gussy," said Denton cheerfully. "We've made it up, and I've promised to be a good little boy in future."

"Bai Jove!"

"I've apologised for my unbearable cheek."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know—"

"And I crave your pardon for being the unintentional cause of your taking a seat on the mat this afternoon," went on Denton gravely. "I beg of you to forgive me."

The Terrible Three grinned, and Blake joined in. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took the new boy quite seriously, and beamed his approval.

"I call that weally decent of you, Denton," he said graciously. "I sincerely twust I should be the last fellow in the world to act in a mannah unbecomin' of a gentleman. I accept your apology, and wegard you as a fwined. Pway shake hands, deah boy!"

"Certainly!"

Denton held out his hand, and D'Arcy shook it heartily.

"It's all right, Blake," said Tom Merry, "the new chap has turned out trumps. He was only ragging us this afternoon. I admit it was beastly nerve on his part, but it's all right now!"

"Oh!" said Blake.

"He wants you two and Herries and Digby to come to a meeting after prep in our study. He's got a wheeze to work against Figgins & Co."

"The dickens he has!" ejaculated Blake, in surprise. "Started early, hasn't he?"

"Well, rather early. Will you come?"

"Yaas, wathah! The New House wottahs need taking down a peg!"

"That's so," remarked Blake. "But why not hold a meeting in Study No. 6?"

"Rats! Our study's bigger than yours!"

"That doesn't matter—"

"Yes, it does," said Manners. "There'll be eight of us, at least."

"Oh, all right! Have it your own way. We'll be on hand."

"Good!"

And the Terrible Three and Denton strolled out into the quad.

It was bright moonlight, and the brilliant glow from the illuminated windows made the quad quite light.

Fellows of the Fourth and Shell who were out there looked at them curiously, for the news of the new boy's arrival had got about, and the juniors hardly expected to see Tom Merry and his chums on such good terms already.

Kildare, the popular captain of St. Jim's, passed and nodded good-naturedly.

"Glad to see you've chummed up already, you kids," he remarked.

"Oh, we're all right, Kildare!" said Tom Merry. "The new chap was a bit fresh at first, but since we've salted him he's been as meek as a lamb."

"You young rascals!"

Kildare smiled and walked on.

"Fine chap, Kildare," said Tom Merry, "one of the best in the school. Suppose we show the new chap over the gym?"

"Good idea!"

So they marched towards the gym. Suddenly a squeal sounded, but it was cut short immediately. It sounded like one of the Third Form fags in trouble, and Tom Merry looked round, with a frown.

"I bet that's Crooke or Levison bullying some fag or other," he said.

"Came from behind the gym," said Lowther.

They hurried round, without making any noise in their approach, and found Tom Merry's words to be true.

Levison, the cad of the Fourth, was standing over Fane of the Third, with a cruel grin on his unpleasant features. He had hold of Fane's wrist, and was twisting the fag's arm unmercifully.

Fane's face was screwed up with pain, but he saw the newcomers.

"Rescue!" he yelled, in agony.

"You beastly cad!"

Before the Terrible Three could interfere with Levison, Denton had sprung forward, indignant and angry.

Levison released Fane with a start, but a dark frown gathered on his brow when he saw who the newcomer was.

"You beastly cad!" exclaimed Denton hotly.

Levison scowled.

"Better mind what you're saying, you new bounder!" he said darkly. "What's it got to do with you? Why can't you mind your own affairs?"

"Because I'm not going to stand by

and see a rotten bully do just as he likes!" retorted the new boy angrily. "Clear off, before I lay hands on you! I may be a new kid, but I'm not going to have any nonsense from cads like you!"

"Better mind what you're saying," muttered Levison.

"Clear off!"
"Go and eat coke!" snarled the cad of the Fourth savagely. "For two pins I'd knock you down!"

"If you don't get out of my sight in ten seconds, I'll give you something to remember me by!" said Denton wrathfully. "And leave this kid alone in future!"

Levison stepped forward.
"You'd give me something?" he sneered.

"Yes; and jolly quick, too!"
"I'd like to see you!" Levison shouted, lunging forward at the same time, hoping to catch Denton off his guard.

But somehow the lunge was parried instantly, and the new junior's fist shot forward.

Levison staggered back, and clapped a hand to his left eye.

"Ow!" he yelled. "You beastly——"
Then he seemed to go mad for a moment, for he suddenly flew forward at Denton like a whirlwind.

and clear off before I biff you again! Here, youngster," he added to Fane of the Third, who stood by rubbing his arm ruefully. "you'd better buzz off, in case you get in the wars again!"

"Yes, I will!" said Fane gratefully. "Thanks awfully for——"

"That's all right, kid! Cut!"
And Fane cut.

Levison picked himself up, glared at Denton for a moment in bitter hatred, and muttered something under his breath. Then he strode off.

"I shouldn't think the fags at St. Jim's like that chap," remarked Denton thoughtfully.

"They hate him!" said Tom Merry. "Like poison!" added Monty Lowther.

"He's the meanest, most caddish beast the school's ever seen!" supplemented the amateur photographer of St. Jim's. "Levison takes a delight in wringing the arm of some poor kid who can't retaliate. He—— Pah!" Manners added disgustedly. "Let's talk of something decent!"

"That's it! Change the subject!"

And the four Shell fellows dismissed Levison from their minds and entered the gym. But Levison didn't forget the encounter. He was still aching from his violent fall, and his left eye was beginning to look red and puffy.

He made his way in the direction of

Levison sat there undecided for a minute or two, savagely kicking the twigs about which lay at his feet. Then he glanced at his watch, and came to a decision.

"Just time before locking-up if I hurry!" he muttered. "I must have some cigs for to-morrow!"

He emerged from the shed, hurried across the quad, and passed out by the gates.

He hurried down Rylcombe Lane at a half-trot, for there was not much time. The thick woods, with their leafless trees, lay on one side of the road, and the shadows were thick among the branches.

Suddenly the bushes parted, and a figure appeared in the road.

Levison paused, and his heart beat faster.

He knew that tramps sometimes spent the night in the woods, and before now had waylaid juniors from St. Jim's.

He stared at the man who suddenly appeared from the woods in surprise, and with a quickening of his pulse. The fellow was short, well-dressed, and he wore a dark moustache.

"Not so fast, young shaver!"

"What do you want?" said Levison, between his teeth.

The stranger placed a hand on the



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The new boy didn't move. Up came Levison's right foot, with the evident intention of giving Denton a cowardly kick. And if Denton had not been as nimble as a squirrel, he would have received a nasty blow on the kneecap. But he stepped aside like lightning, and grasped Levison's foot as it shot upwards.

Levison let out a wild yell.
Thump!

The cad of the Fourth measured his length on the ground with a thud which knocked all the wind out of him. He lay on his back, gasping.

"Ow!" he groaned. "Ow!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Mysterious Stranger!

PHILIP EDGAR DENTON stood over Levison with a grim expression on his face.

"That serves you right for playing a brute's trick!" he said hotly.

"Rather!" agreed the Terrible Three in chorus. "The rotter meant to kick you!"

"Oh!" groaned Levison painfully. "You beast!"

"Better mind what you're saying!" exclaimed Denton warningly. "Get up,

the woodshed. It was his custom to pay visits to the woodshed when he felt inclined for a smoke. Not that Levison enjoyed it; he made himself think he did, for it was, of course, "manly" to smoke.

"Just what I want to buck me up!" though Levison, as he crossed the quadrangle.

The cad of the Fourth wore an angry scowl as he entered the dark woodshed. His eye was giving him considerable pain, and his feelings towards Denton were not very friendly.

Levison's nature was a peculiar one, and he would remember little injuries weeks after the other boys had forgotten them.

"I'll pay the brute out," he thought vengefully—"pay him out in a way he won't like! Hang him, this eye will be black to-morrow!"

He sat down on a pile of old sticks, tenderly caressing his left eye, and trying to think out a way of getting even with Denton. Then he remembered the object of his visit to the woodshed, and fumbled in his pockets.

"Hang!" he muttered, after a moment. "Blow!"

He discovered that he hadn't a cigarette on him, having smoked the last one earlier in the day.

junior's shoulder, but Levison shook it off, and stepped back a pace.

"Hands off!"
"What's the matter, you young fool?" asked the man, in an amused tone.

"I'm not going to harm you. I simply want you to answer a question. Is there a boy up at the school yonder named Levison—Ernest Levison?"

The cad of the Fourth started.
"My hat!" he ejaculated in surprise.

"How do you know my name?"
It was the stranger's turn to start.

"What's that?" he asked quickly.

"I'm Levison," said the junior, recovering himself rapidly.

The short man grasped his arm again, and looked into his face searchingly.

"You're Levison?"
"Yes."

"Well, I'm hanged if that isn't funny!" exclaimed the stranger. Then he saw a figure in the dusky distance, and went on hurriedly: "Look here, do you want to earn a few pounds for yourself?"

The question startled Levison.

"Because, if you do," went on the stranger, "be here, at this spot, at eleven o'clock to-night—after lights-out."

"I—I——" hesitated Levison.

"That's all. And don't tell a soul you've seen me, and come alone. If you bring any other boys with you, I shan't be here. Understand?"

"Yes; but—"

"Then be here at eleven sharp!"

And the man left Levison's side and disappeared among the trees of Rylcombe Wood.

The cad of the Fourth looked after him uncertainly. But a couple of seniors were hastening up the hill, and Levison didn't want to meet them just then. So he turned and made his way towards St. Jim's.

His mind was in something of a whirl. Who could the stranger be, and how had he got to know Levison's name? The object of Levison's journey was entirely forgotten. He puckered his brows as he hurried along.

The man was aware, too, of his character at the school, or he would not have told him to be out in the lane after lights-out.

What could it mean? But, whatever it meant, it looked decidedly shady and underhand.

Not that Levison cared for that; he was accustomed to performing underhand tricks, and had more than once escaped expulsion by the skin of his teeth. He thought of the strange meeting the whole way to St. Jim's.

"I'll go!" he decided, a gleam of anticipation in his eyes. "There's no telling, it might be simply something that I could do without a soul suspecting me. And I want a few pounds just now to pay that confounded Joliffe at the Green Man. If I don't dub up soon he'll get nasty, the beast!"

Mr. Joliffe was the landlord of the Green Man Inn, and it was no unusual occurrence for Levison to break bounds

at night and spend an hour or two in the little back parlour at the public-house playing cards.

But who the mysterious stranger could be, the cad of the Fourth hadn't the slightest idea, and he felt impatient for the hour of eleven to arrive.

Taggles, the school porter, was at the gate with a bunch of keys in his hand when Levison stepped in. Taggles looked at the junior sternly.

"Another 'arf-minute, Master Levison, an' you'd 'ave been locked hout. I ain't sure now but wot I ought to report yer!"

"Oh, rats!" said Levison. "The gates aren't locked!"

"Which it's the fault of my clock being slow—"

"More rats!"

"You young himp!" roared Taggles.

"I'll—"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Levison crossly. And he strode across the dusky quad, leaving Taggles speechless.

— — —

CHAPTER 5.

Declaration of War!

FIGGINS, the leader of the New House juniors, walked thoughtfully along the Fourth Form passage in the New House at St. Jim's.

Prep was over, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn were in their study.

Figgins had been along to Redfern to return a borrowed Euclid. Now he walked along the passage wearing a thoughtful frown.

He entered the study with a far-away look in his eyes, and closed the door.

Kerr and Wynn glanced up from their

occupations, and wondered what was troubling their chief. The Scots junior was engaged in inflating a football, but Fatty Wynn had something far more important to attend to. A pile of ham sandwiches and a plate of tarts stood before him, and he was causing them to disappear at a surprising rate.

Wynn had received a postal order the day before, and, in consequence, he had been a good customer for Mrs. Taggles, at the school shop, ever since.

Whenever the fat junior was in funds he spent money liberally on grub; there couldn't be a better way to dispose of it.

"Hallo, Figgy!" he said, with his mouth full. "What's the trouble?"

"Yes," added Kerr, "wherefore that worried look?"

Figgins looked at his chums abstractedly.

"Oh, nothing!" he replied. "I'm all right."

"No, you're not, Figgy; you're worried over something," said Fatty Wynn seriously. "Now, whenever I'm worried I find there's nothing bucks me up better than a good feed. I was worried just now about—about prep, but since I've had some of these ripping sandwiches, I've felt as happy as a lark!"

"Oh, dry up, you giddy porpoise!"

"Now, Figgy, don't get ratty," said Wynn patiently. "Have a sandwich, old man?"

"No!" growled Figgins, sitting down. "I'm not hungry, you ass!"

"Oh, that's rot!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Not hungry! Why, this time of the year I seem to want more grub than ever, and I'm jolly sure you're the same! These sandwiches are simply scrumptious—"

"Oh, rats! Chuck them in the fireplace!"

"My giddy aunt, what's up with you, Figgy?" asked Wynn, in alarm.

"Nothing, you fathead!"

"There must be! Have a jam-tart, then?"

"No!" roared Figgins.

"Just one! They're small, and—"

"Br-r-r!"

"My hat, he must be ill, Kerr!"

Kerr grinned.

"Rot!" he said. "Figgy's not hungry, that's all. You can't expect us two to gorge ourselves like you do. Supper'll be ready in three-quarters of an hour."

"Three-quarters of an hour! Great Scott, I should be faint by that time if I didn't have this snack!"

And Fatty Wynn attacked the ham sandwiches with renewed vigour.

Figgins sat down, and for a few moments no words were spoken in the study. Then the long-limbed chief brought his fist down with a thump on the table. There was a yell.

"You chump!" roared Wynn. "Look what you've done—spoiled the jam-tart!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Kerr.

"You—you utter ass!" shouted Figgins, gazing at the sticky mess on his hand. In his abstracted mood he had not noticed that a jam-tart was on the table where he thumped it. "Look at this mess on my hand!"

"Oh, you careless idiot!" howled Wynn. "That was the biggest tart of the blessed lot, and I was saving it till the last!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've ruined it!"

"Rats!"

"It's jolly serious," declared Wynn, almost tearfully. "I shall feel half-empty now right till supper-time!"

"Ring off, Fatty!" grinned Figgins, wiping his hand. "I couldn't help it."

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"Why didn't you look—"
"Shut up! We've had enough jaw about grub, I should think. I've got something far more important to discuss. I've been thinking!"

The faithful Co. were all attention.

"Yes, Figgy?"

"There's a new beast in the School House to-day, as you know," said Figgins, "and he's been shoved into Tom Merry's study. Now, according to all reports, as they say in the newspapers, this new chap's been going it strong."

"Cheeky boulder!"

"And I heard just now that a meeting had been called between Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three to jaw over a wheeze the new chap's got in his napper. Now, if this image thinks he's going to come to St. Jim's and set himself against the New House, he'll find himself in the wrong basket!"

"Rather!"

"We won't stand it!"

"Who ever heard of such a thing?" went on Figgins, waxing indignant. "A new fellow arrives at St. Jim's in the afternoon and calls a meeting in the evening to discuss a wheeze up against the New House! It's—it's unheard of!"

"Preposterous!" agreed the faithful Co.

"And we won't put up with it—"

"Hear, hear!" said Wynn.

"Shut up, Fatty! We won't put up with it! Which is Cock House at St. Jim's?"

"New House!" roared Kerr and Wynn, in unison.

"Exactly! Well, we're going to remain Cock House!" declared Figgins, jumping to his feet. "Now this new chap's come, Tom Merry & Co. may buck up, and I think it's time we issued a declaration of war!"

"A—a what?"

"A declaration of war!" repeated Figgins firmly. "We'll write out a notice warning the School House rotters that if they try any tricks on us, they'll jolly well get bumped for their pains! We're Cock House, and we're going to stand Cock House!"

"We are!"

"We is!"

Figgins & Co. were decided on that point. They had been gaining many victories lately over the School House juniors, and the effect produced was one of careless confidence in Figgins & Co.

They looked upon it that they had ample cause to be indignant if the School House dared to think of retaliating. It is to be feared that the continued run of successes had tended to make Figgins and his followers just a little over-confident.

"It's going to be war if that new image doesn't submit quietly," went on Figgins. "He may have some good wheezes, and the only thing for us to do is to forestall the School House bouncers in every case. We've got to keep our eyes skinned, kids."

"Why not see Redfern & Co. and hear what they have to say?" said Kerr thoughtfully. "They've pulled with us jolly decently lately, and they could help us to draw up the—the declaration, as you call it."

"Good egg!"

And the three juniors left their study for the room next door, where resided Redfern, Lawrence, and Owen.

The scholarship boys were in, and they looked up inquiringly as Figgins & Co. entered.

"Hallo!" remarked Redfern. "Why this invasion?"

They looked as solemn as judges.

"Fatty just heard that Dame Taggles isn't going to make any more pastries?" inquired Lawrence innocently.

"Look here, Lawrence—"

"Dry up, Fatty!" interrupted Figgins. "We didn't come here to rag these bouncers. We want your advice, Redfern."

"All serene."

"Yours for the asking," added Owen. "No charge made whatever."

Figgins laughed.

"Well, look here, it's about that new chap in the Shell."

"Denton?"

"That's his name, I think. Well, he's showing a dashed lot too much nerve for a new kid, and he might incite Tom Merry & Co. to—break out in a fresh place, as it were, and jape us."

"Awful!" murmured Redfern.

"So we're going to issue a declaration to the effect that if the School House doesn't keep in its place, the New House, as Cock House at St. Jim's, will immediately get on the warpath."

"My word! That's a good speech!" exclaimed Lawrence. "I'll bet you thought it out before you came in. Still, it's a good idea of yours, Figgy."

Figgins explained it at greater length.

"Why not go out into the quad and yell out the declaration under Tom Merry's window?" suggested Redfern. "If we draw up a notice and pin it on to the School House notice-board we stand a good chance of getting chucked out on our necks. It would be going right into the enemy's country."

"There are six of us."

"And about twenty of them might be about," said Redfern. "No, my children; we'd better stick out in the quad. Besides, it would be more effective. We could tell Tom Merry a few home-truths from the safety of the quad."

Figgins grinned.

"Perhaps so, Reddy," he said. "Anyhow, the main thing is to let the bouncers know we're not going to stand any nonsense! We're Cock House—"

"And we're going to crow—eh?" grinned Owen.

"Well, it isn't exactly crowing; it's sticking up for our rights."

"Of course."

"We'll get across then."

"All serene."

And Figgins & Co. and the New Firm left the study and sallied out into the moon-illuminated quad.

CHAPTER 6.

The Battle!

"H A, ha, ha!"

"Gorgeous!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ripping! Simply ripping! Absolutely gorgeous! Ha, ha, ha!"

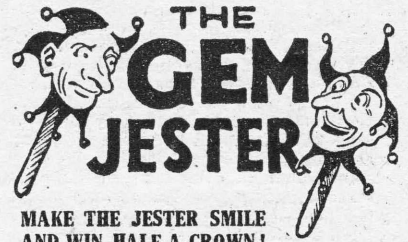
The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. roared. Denton, the new boy in the School House, had just explained his wheeze, and the idea of it had tickled the juniors to such an extent that they held their sides and shrieked with laughter.

"Bai Jove, you know!" gasped D'Arcy, groping for his monocle. "Bai Jove! Deah boys, the ideah's simply wippin'! Denton, I wegard you as a wondah for thinkin' of such a weally wippin' wheeze!"

Denton grinned.

"Oh, it's nothing!" he said modestly. "Figgins & Co. will be done as brown as a berry!" chuckled Tom Merry, looking round the ring of grinning faces in his study. "My hat! Denty, you're going it strong, and no mistake! We'll

(Continued on the next page.)



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BLUNT.

Barber: "Razor all right, sir?"
Customer: "If you hadn't mentioned it, I shouldn't have known that there was a razor on my face."

Barber: "Really, sir?"

Customer: "Yes; I thought you were using a file."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Sherwin, 76, Mollart Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent.

POSTMAN'S KNOCK PREFERRED.

Boxing instructor (to newcomer): "Now you have finished your first lesson, is there any question you'd like to ask?"

Newcomer (rubbing his bruises): "Yes; there is. Can I finish my course by correspondence?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to P. Ashton, 12, Ashley Road, Hale, Cheshire.

NOT SO CLEVER.

Mr. Smith (after reading a newspaper article): "Do you know, I think there is something in this—the cleverness of the father proving a stumbling block to the son."

Mrs. Smith: "Thank goodness our Bobby won't have much to fall over!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Chadwick, 35, Cheadle Road, Uttoxeter, Staffs.

A FALSE SMILE.

"Now, Tommy!" said the teacher. "Can you tell me what a hypocrite is?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tommy, with a grin. "A boy who comes to school with a smile on his face."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Lurie, 22, Oxford Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, South Africa.

SELF-CONVICTED.

Rastus was charged with theft, and his lawyer decided to put him in the witness-box.

"If you tell a lie," said the judge, "you know what will happen?"

"Go to de debil!" said Rastus.

"And if you tell the truth you know what will happen?"

"Yes, sah," replied Rastus. "I'd sure lose de case."

Half-a-crown has been awarded to S. Wijeyeratne, Gaminii, Alfred House Gardens, Colpetty, Colombo, Ceylon.

WORK-SHY!

Lady: "Why don't you work for something to eat?"

Tramp: "I'm hungry, ma'am—not desperate!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Smallman, 14, Yew Tree Road, Aston, Birmingham.

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forgive you for your cheek this afternoon."

"Rather!" said Manners heartily. "We never thought you had it in you. I don't see how the wheeze can fail."

"Not a word to the other chaps," warned Jack Blake. "They mustn't know anything about it till it's all over; then they'll simply scream."

"One moment, deah boys—"

"Hallo, Gussy! What's up with you?"

"An ideah has just stuck me—"

"Where?" asked Blake curiously. "Weally, Blake, I fail to see the weason for that question," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I wemarked that an ideah had just stuck me—"

"And I asked you where," said Blake, with a wink. "Whereabouts did it strike you—in the waistcoat?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or in the neck?"

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, you should make yourself clear, fathead!" said Blake. "You say an ideah just struck you. How should we know where, unless you tell us?"

"I wefuse to argue with you, you uttah wottah!" said D'Arcy frigidly.

"An ideah just flashed into my bwain—"

"My hat!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"My hat!" repeated Herries.

"I wepeat, an ideah flashed into my hat—or, wathah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"An ideah flashed into his hat," chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"That's all right, Gussy," said Monty Lowther soothingly, "we know you're talking out of your hat, and can't help yourself."

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

"You feahful duffah, Lowthah!" shouted Arthur Augustus wrathfully.

"It was a slip of the tongue! Yow—ow!"

The indignant swell of the School House sat down suddenly as Blake tripped him. He was on his feet again in an instant.

"You uttah ass!" he shrieked.

"What was that for?"

"That was a slip on the floor," grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a dangewous wuffian, Blake," said D'Arcy deliberately, smoothing his ruffled collar.

"Go hon!"

"And, in the cires, I am goin' to administah a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Bai Jove! Put your hands up, deah boy—I mean, you wottah!" yelled D'Arcy, dancing up to Blake in a very warlike attitude.

Blake dodged behind Tom Merry.

"Save me!" he wailed. "Oh dear! What shall I do?"

"Bai Jove, Blake, pway cease wottin'!"

"Please, Gussy, don't hit me!" moaned Blake.

"You uttah fathead!" shouted Arthur Augustus wildly. "Stand up so that I can give you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake grovelled at D'Arcy's feet, and the swell of the School House gazed down at him indignantly. He knew quite well that Blake was only rotting.

"Are you goin' to get up, you feahful ass?"

"Yes; when you've forgiven me, Gussy," replied Blake. "I apologise for having been so rude to you, and as one gentleman to another, I hope you'll let me off without administering the fearful thrashing."

D'Arcy looked at Blake suspiciously.

"Vewy well, deah boy. Since you have apologised, I will let the mattah dwop," he said graciously. "Pway get up, and cease this widiculous wottin'!"

Blake got up.

"If I've said anything I'm sorry for," he remarked seriously, "I'm glad of it."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the idea, though?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, deah boy, as we have come to a decision to go for the New House wottahs, I suggest we should issue a challenge to Figgins & Co. that we will work more japes on them duwin' Denton's stay at St. Jim's than they will on us. You are goin' to be here about a month, aren't you, Denton, deah boy?"

"About that," answered the new boy cheerfully.

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus. "The challenge will be that we defy Figgins & Co. to do their worst; that we will keep our end up, and prove to Denton that the School House is the Cock House at St. Jim's."

"Hear, hear!"

"It would nevah do to let mattahs west as they are," went on D'Arcy seriously. "Denton may have got the ideah that the New House is Cock House, and that, of course, is perfectly widic. Denton must say, when he leaves St. Jim's, that he wesided in the Cock House duwin' his stay. The honah of the School House is at stake, deah boys."

"Gussy's right," said Blake thoughtfully. "I admit it's surprising, his suggesting such a good wheeze; but there it is. We'll issue the challenge just to show Figgins & Co. that we're still alive and kicking."

"And we'll have to jape them right and left," added Tom Merry. "Denton's idea, to start with, is simply top-notch, and that alone will cause Figgins & Co. to hide their diminished heads."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The meeting's over now," said Lowther. "Suppose we sally out into the quad, and make some nice polite remarks under Figgy's window?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Good!"

The juniors crowded out of the study, and clattered down the stairs in a body. They emerged into the quad at the exact moment as half a dozen juniors were seen leaving the New House doorway.

"There they are!" shouted Tom Merry. "Figgins & Co. and the New Firm."

A yell floated across the quadrangle. "Who's Cock House at St. Jim's?" And a chorus of voices yelled: "New House!"

"Cheeky bounders!" roared Blake. "School House for ever!"

"Yah! You're afraid to come over here!" yelled Figgins defiantly.

The School House juniors let out a roar of indignation, and rushed across the quad in a body.

A chorus of shouts rent the still air.

"School House cads!"

"New House rotters!"

"Go for 'em!"

"Teach the cheeky bounders a lesson!"

"Sock into 'em!"

"Yah!"

"School House for ever!"

In a moment the two parties were a struggling mass, and the din which arose was surprising.

Backwards and forwards the juniors swayed, shouting at the top of their voices, giving as good as they received.

Tom Merry was engaged with Figgins in a deadly embrace, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, forgetting in the excitement his elegant clothing and patent leather shoes, was sitting forcibly on Owen's chest.

"Oh!" gasped Owen. "Gerroff!"

"Weally, Owen, you are my pwisonah!"

A wild yell sounded near D'Arcy's ear, and he saw that Fatty Wynn had just dropped upon the stomach of Monty Lowther. All around the fight was at its height.

Thump, thump, tramp, tramp, scuffle, scuffle!

Then a trio of tall forms appeared in the porch of the School House.

"You young rascals!"

Kildare, Baker, and Darrell hurried out into the quad.

Thump! Tramp! Scuffle!

"Silence!" roared Kildare sternly.

The excited juniors didn't even hear the captain of St. Jim's. And he made a sign to the other two prefects. The three sallied among the combatants, and commenced laying about them with a will.

All the prefects carried canes, and a different sort of yell rent the air.

"Ow!" howled Digby. "Who did that?"

"Get indoors, you young ruffians!" shouted Kildare sternly, though his eyes twinkled. "And take fifty lines each for creating this disgraceful disturbance! Indoors with you!"

The combatants separated with alacrity, and retreated to their own Houses. A crowd gathered round Tom Merry & Co. as they came, dusty and dishevelled, into the School House.

They all showed signs of the struggle, and black eyes and torn clothes and swollen noses were general.

"Don't worry!" grinned Bernard Glyn. "It was a jolly good fight!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "But I shall weally have to change this collah before suppah, deah boys. And I shall be obliged if you will give me a bwush down, Blake!"

Denton went off with the Terrible Three. He had entered into the battle as heartily as anyone, and had accounted for himself well. He grinned cheerfully as he dabbed a tender nose.

"Never mind!" he chuckled. "I gave Redfern a beautiful black eye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry patted the new boy on the back.

"My giddy aunt, Denton, you've started well, I must say!" he said heartily. "Keep it up while you're at St. Jim's, and those New House bounders won't be able to lift their heads again for months!"

Clang, clang!

"Supper!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We shall have to buck up!"

They hurriedly washed and made themselves presentable, then slipped down to the dining-hall, where supper was already in progress.

"Go for 'em!"

"Teach the cheeky bounders a lesson!"

"Sock into 'em!"

"Yah!"

"School House for ever!"

In a moment the two parties were a struggling mass, and the din which arose was surprising.

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CHAPTER 7.

Out of Bounds!

TEN-THIRTY chimed solemnly on the still night air.

The Fourth Form dormitory in the School House was still and quiet. The long rows of beds contained soundly sleeping forms—all save one.

At the stroke of ten-thirty one of the boys had sat up and looked round.

It was Levison.

He remembered the appointment he had to keep in Rylcombe Wood at eleven o'clock.

The cad of the Fourth felt rather curious. Lately he had been keeping to himself, for a narrow escape from being expelled from St. Jim's had made him more cautious.

out in Rylcombe Lane. He grinned to himself as he strode rapidly down the road. The adventure appealed to him, and he didn't feel at all nervous.

"This is the place, I reckon."

Levison stopped, and tried to pierce the darkness of the wood. The lane was absolutely deserted, and the only sounds which reached the junior's ears were those caused by the wind swaying the branches of the trees.

Levison pressed forward.

"Anybody there?" he whispered.

No answer.

Levison stamped impatiently.

Then eleven o'clock chimed out.

There was a crackling of twigs, the trees parted, and a dark form appeared.

"You are alone?" inquired a voice abruptly.

won't stand the slightest chance of being found out."

"Well, I'm not going to get myself sacked from St. Jim's," said Levison.

The man laughed.

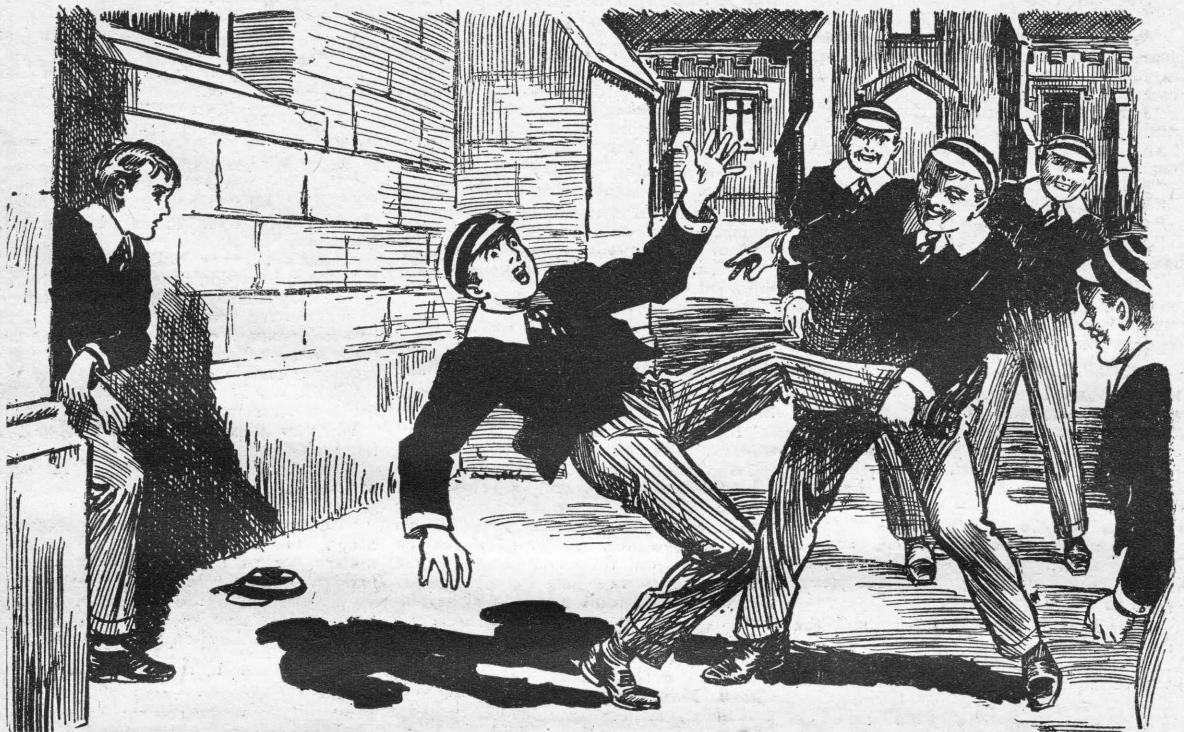
"Don't you worry about that," he said. "The risk will be nil, and when you've done what I want I'll hand you a liberal sum. I'll give you a fortnight, so that you won't have to hurry. But there's a chance of our being overheard here. Follow me!"

"Where to?" asked Levison.

"You'll see soon enough."

And the man turned, and made off into the heart of the wood.

Levison followed without hesitation, for he was decidedly interested. So far he knew absolutely nothing, but the chance of raking in a few pounds for



Up came Levison's foot with the intention of giving Denton a cowardly kick. But the new boy stepped aside like lightning, and grasped the lunging foot, and Levison measured his length on the ground with a thump. "That's what you get for bullying a fag!" said Denton.

But there was no harm, he argued, in slipping down Rylcombe Lane to see what the man with the black moustache wanted. So Levison sat up in bed and looked round him.

"I say, you fellows!" he whispered cautiously.

No answer.

Levison grinned in the darkness.

"I'm safe enough," he thought.

He rapidly dressed, then, with his boots in his hands, he crept towards the door.

Levison was quite accustomed to walking about in the dark, and he lost no time in slipping out of the School House by means of the little window at the end of the Fourth Form passage.

The night was dim, for clouds had appeared. A cold breeze swayed the leafless branches of the old elms. The school buildings stood out clear against the sky, and one or two brightly illuminated windows told that Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, perhaps, had not yet retired.

The cad of the Fourth stole across the quad quietly, and in a few minutes was

"You can see that, can't you?" said Levison, looking at the short man before him. "What's the game? What's all the giddy secrecy for? Why couldn't you have come out just now, when I spoke?"

"Steady on! Don't get impatient. I wanted to make sure that you were alone," said the stranger coolly. "I've taken pains to learn all I can about you, my young friend, and I wouldn't trust you farther than I could see you!"

"What do you mean?" growled Levison.

"I mean that you are quite a character at St. Jim's, and not a very excellent character at that. Still, you'll do for what I want!"

"Look here!" said Levison. "If you're not jolly careful what you say, I'll go back, and then tell the police tomorrow that some shady character is—"

"Don't get excited, and don't talk rubbish!" interrupted the man. "I want you to do a little job for me—a job that won't take you more than ten minutes. I'll pay you well, and you

performing a ten-minute job was distinctly inviting.

Levison had no particular scruples, and it would be something to relieve the monotony.

The cad of the Fourth was getting a bit fed-up with Mellish and Croke, and the rest of the school regarded him with more or less indifference.

"I wonder who the merchant is, and what he wants me to do?" Levison asked himself, as he followed the bearded man through the woods. "Anyhow, I mean to find out, whether he tells me or not!"

They tramped on until at last they stood upon the edge of Wayland Moor. The dreary stretch of open country lay before them, and the wind blew coldly.

Levison shivered a little; but his curiosity was aroused, and he followed his strange companion without hesitation.

A little cottage lay near the edge of the wood—a ramshackle place which had stood empty for months. It was

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther
Calling!



Hallo, everybody. "What are the chances for a professional boxer?" asks a reader. Well, it is often a "hand-to-mouth" existence, but if you can "take it on the chin" you should not be "K.O." but "O.K."

It takes two to make a quarrel, they say. But Crooke never has any difficulty in finding the other one.

"As the sheriff said to the lynching party: "You can't hang about here."

A cannibal king who wears little has insured himself for five thousand pounds. He is "well covered" now!

Fatty Wynn astonished visitors by eating twelve slices of bread and jam and seven cakes at tea. He said he would have done better if he had been hungry.

A restaurant theatre is opening in Wayland. Instead of clapping the show, diners will just smack their lips.

"Morecambe's Highest Tide for Forty-Seven Years." Bathers who only meant to put their toes in the water found "more cambe" in than they expected!

called Moor Cottage, and there was no other habitation for a mile. The River Rhyl flowed between steep banks close by, and the soft gurgle of its waters could clearly be heard.

"What's the idea?" asked Levison curiously.

"You'll see in a minute."

The man hurried forward, and a minute later pushed open the creaking gates, and walked up the grass-grown path to the cottage door.

A soft whistle left his lips, and the door opened, letting out a streak of light. The shutters of the windows were up, so no light had been visible until now.

"Got the kid with you?" asked a voice.

"Yes; it's all serene."

And the short man entered the cottage, Levison following, feeling more curious than ever.

He found himself in a bare room, the only furniture of which consisted of two old boxes, a table, a gladstone bag, and some blankets. A badly smelling paraffin-lamp burned on the tiny strip of mantelpiece.

"This young gentleman is Master Levison," said the man who had met the cad of the Fourth in the lane. "I reckon he'll suit our purpose O.K., Wright."

"You're in a beastly hurry!" growled Levison. "I want to hear what the game is before I consent to do anything for you! I'm jolly well not going to take any risks, so I tell you straight off!"

He stared at the two men defiantly, half-wishing he had had nothing to do with the business. The man who had been in the cottage wore a heavy beard, and he stood a good six feet in his shoes. He looked at Levison searchingly, then laughed.

"My dear boy," he said, "there are no risks for you to take. Surely my

"What should we do without Form-masters?" asks a writer. We should worry!

The story goes that Gore turned six somersaults in rapid succession. He had taken some medicine without shaking the bottle.

A missionary reports that when he first visited a cannibal tribe they didn't know what to make of him. Luckily none of them had a cookery book handy.

Watching boring operations, Gore said they couldn't dig a well for nuts. They wouldn't be likely to find any if they did.

The champion athlete had a temperature. "How high is it, doctor?" he asked. "A hundred and two," answered the doctor. "What's the world's record?" demanded the athlete.

"Would it be easy to ride a log like a Canadian lumberjack?" asks Skimpole. Easy as falling off a log!

As the waiter said: "One steak pudding, and step on it!" Squelch!

The Head's gardener says he thinks nothing of putting in an hour's work in the garden before breakfast. We don't think much of the idea, either.

"Gale Holds Up the Majestic"—headline. A weight-lifting wind?

"What awful instruments of torture!" exclaimed the visitor to the old castle. "From what period do they date?" "Oh," said the guide, "they date from the good old times!"

Well, as the airman said when he ran into a fog bank—I've no further observation to make! Be seeing you.

friend Smith has explained to you that—

"I haven't explained anything yet," said the other man.

"Ah, that accounts for our young friend's hesitation, then!" said the man named Wright. "We'll be perfectly frank with you, Levison. When we came to Rylcombe we set ourselves the task to find out the sharpest and cutest junior at St. Jim's—one we could trust, and one who hadn't any namby-pamby scruples. We hit on you immediately."

"Oh!" said Levison.

"We know that you are acquainted with the excellent Mr. Joliffe at the Green Man, and that that you owe the gentleman something like five pounds for—"

"Four pounds ten!" said Levison sullenly.

"I wasn't far wrong," proceeded Wright easily. "Well, for that reason we requested your company here to-night. There's a little matter of business we want transacting, and you—"

"I've heard that before!" interrupted Levison. "What's the game?"

"Simply this. There's a new boy arrived at St. Jim's—a youngster named Philip Denton—"

Levison started.

"Denton?" he exclaimed quickly.

"Exactly! I gather you've met the new boy?"

Levison frowned darkly.

"Yes, I have!" he muttered, with vivid recollections of the moonlight encounter with Denton behind the gym.

"The rotten outsider! I—"

"Ah, you don't like him?" asked Mr. Smith eagerly.

"He's a priggish cad," said Levison, "and I mean to make him jolly well sit up for sticking his rotten nose into my affairs!"

The two men exchanged glances.

"Well, our business is connected with this Denton," said Wright, bending close to the cad of the Fourth. "As you are at loggerheads with the new boy,

your task will be more congenial. It's a very small matter indeed."

Levison looked up. His eyes were shining eagerly. Here he saw an opportunity of getting even with Denton, and doing himself a bit of good at the same time. He nodded.

"Well, what's the simple matter?"

"We want you to procure for us a little package which Denton has among his property," said Wright eagerly. "It is nothing; merely an ordinary foolscap envelope, pale blue in colour, with a black seal. It is sure to be knocking about in Denton's box—"

"Half a mo'!" interrupted Levison cautiously. "If you want me to steal this envelope, and I'm found out doing it, I should be sacked from St. Jim's!"

"But, my dear boy, there's no possibility of your being found out!" declared Wright earnestly. "There'll be plenty of opportunities when Denton is out. You can do the business as simple as winking."

"And what's in the envelope?" asked Levison cunningly.

"That's our business!"

"I don't think! It's mine as well as yours, anyhow, especially as I'm going to get the blessed thing!"

"You are too curious!" said Smith sternly. "All you have to do is to hand the envelope over to us and ask no questions."

"That's all very well—"

"Come, boy, don't be obstinate!" said Smith impatiently. "We have no time to waste over you. If you do not wish to avail yourself of our offer you can return to the school, and we will accomplish our end in some other manner."

"Will you?" sneered Levison. "I could warn Denton—"

Wright gripped Levison's shoulder firmly.

"You had better not try," he said ominously.

"Why not?"

"Because we should know immediately. Then it would be a simple matter for us to write to your headmaster, and tell him that you are in Joliffe's debt to the extent of several pounds."

"I—I—" Levison turned pale. "Of course, if—"

"You think you see matters in a different light, eh?" said Wright, with a laugh. "If you act square with us, Levison, we will act square with you. The job is a small one, with no risks attached to it, and with the money we pay you you will be able to pay Joliffe his debt."

"Oh, all serene!" growled Levison. "I don't want to know what's in the giddy envelope. How much are you going to give me for the bisney?"

"Ten pounds—if you carry it through satisfactorily."

"Ten pounds!" echoed Levison. "My hat!"

"It is an extremely liberal payment," went on Wright, "and you ought to jump at the chance. There is no hurry; you can await your opportunity, and earn the money in a few minutes. Will you agree?"

"Rather!" said Levison instantly. He had certainly expected no more than five pounds. With the ten he could pay the landlord of the Green Man, and still have a big sum of money in hand.

The cad of the Fourth didn't hesitate now.

"I'll do the job for you," he said.

"Good!" said Wright, knowing full well that Levison would not play them false. "Remember, the envelope is a foolscap one, pale—"

"Pale blue with a black seal," said Levison. "All right, I shan't make a

muddle of it. I suppose I'd better not come here again until I am able to bring the envelope?"

"No; there is no necessity to take unnecessary risks."

"All right; I'll get the bisney through as quick as I can," said Levison, quite at his ease. Taking an envelope could not be called stealing, he argued, and anyhow, he was doing it for someone else. Levison's conscience was quite clear. "And about the tin?" he asked.

"Ah, yes!" Wright felt in his pocket. "I'll give you two pounds now, and eight pounds when you hand over the envelope. That's fair enough; and, remember, Levison, we trust you to do your best."

Levison pocketed the money. "Don't worry," he said coolly, "you'll see me again in a day or two."

And two minutes later the cad of the Fourth was hurrying to St. Jim's under the clouded sky.

CHAPTER 8.

The Great Wheeze!

THE next morning Mr. Linton noticed a slightly apparent air of suppressed excitement in the Shell, especially in the direction of the desks where the Terrible Three sat. But Tom Merry & Co. took care to behave themselves; they didn't want lines that morning. They didn't want lines any morning, of course; but this occasion was exceptional.

A meeting was to be held immediately after lessons in Blake's study, and it wouldn't do to be detained.

At last morning lessons were over, and the Shell trooped out.

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Hurry up!"

The Terrible Three and Denton hastened down the passage. They turned the corner, and came face to face with Figgins & Co. and the New Firm.

The Fourth had just been dismissed.

"Hallo!" said the long-legged chief of the New House juniors. "What's the giddy hurry?"

"That's our bisney, my son!"

"Oh, is it?" said Figgins.

"Anything important!" inquired Redfern.

"Well, rather——"

Tom Merry gave Manners a nudge.

"Shut up, you ass!" he muttered.

"Oh, sorry!" said Manners. "I forgot!"

And the Terrible Three and their new chum hurried on.

Figgins & Co. looked after them thoughtfully.

"There's some game on," said Lawrence, shaking his head. "Perhaps that jape of Denton's!"

Fatty Wynn shook his head.

"More like a feed," he said. "That would account for the hurry. I know jolly well I always hurry when I'm going to a feed!"

"Oh, dry up, Fatty!" exclaimed Figgins. "Tom Merry doesn't gorge like you do."

"Look here, Figgy——"

"Peace, my children!" interrupted Kerr, the shrewd Scots member of the "Co." "I reckon Lawrence is right. There's something on, and we'd better keep our eyes skinned. I vote we go over to our study——"

"And have a snack before dinner," suggested Wynn.

"No, you fat boulder!" roared Kerr. "I vote we go over to the New House and keep watch. There's half an hour before dinner, and a lot could happen in that time."

"All serene!"

And Figgins & Co. and the New Firm—in perfect harmony and agreement now that they were all "up against" the School House—strolled out into the quad and made for the New House.

Meanwhile, Tom Merry & Co. had joined the chums in Study No. 6. Blake & Co. were already in the little apartment.

"Oh, here you are!" said Jack Blake. "Yes, here we are. We passed Figgy in the passage, and I think he guesses there's something on. Manners nearly let it out like a fathead!"

"They'll be on the watch," grinned Denton.

"Weally, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "the New House boundahs will get it in the neck this time, deah boys! I sincerely twust I shall not spoil these new twucks of mine."

"That would be awful!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"You are quite wight, Lowthah."

"Besides, there might be some dust in the woodshed."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Which would alight on your spotless linen," added the humorist of the Shell.

"Look here! There's no time to waste," said Tom Merry. "If we're to work Denton's giddy wheeze this morning, we shall have to buzz off straight away. I suppose you all know what you have to do?"

"Rather!"

"Got it all off by heart?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

"You're sure you can do your bit, Gussy?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I considah that question unnecessary," said D'Arcy frigidly. "You know that a fellow of tact and judgment is wequiahed for a ticklish job like this——"

"Then it's no use relying on you," said Lowther.

"Bai Jove, Lowthah, that wemark is uncalled-for!"

"Dry up!" said Blake impatiently. "Look here! I'll go first, as we arranged. You chaps follow at intervals."

"Good!"

"Lead on, Macduff!"

Blake left the study, and the others talked excitedly over the wheeze, which was to bring about the utter downfall of Figgins & Co.

Over in the New House the New Firm were with Figgins & Co. in the latter's study. They had a clear view of the quad, and they stood at the window, quite confident that something was "on" in the School House.

"Manners nearly let something out," said Figgins thoughtfully. "Tom Merry only just stopped him in time. It's up to us to see that we don't get taken on the hop. Our policy is to nip their giddy game in the bud and give them the kybosh!"

"Hear, hear!"

"If you ask me, it's a feed," said Fatty Wynn firmly. "Tom Merry was afraid of Manners letting it out in front of us, in case we raided it."

"Hallo!" said Kerr suddenly. "There's Blake!"

"So he is!"

They crowded to the window. Jack Blake had just sauntered out of the School House. He paused carelessly for a moment on the steps, then lounged across the quad, apparently aimless in his choice of direction.

Finally he disappeared round one of the old elms.

Figgins & Co. looked at one another. "He's gone to the woodshed!" declared Figgins.

"What on earth for?"

"How should I know?"

"My hat!" interrupted Owen. "Tom Merry has just come out!"

The hero of the Shell had certainly appeared at the door of the School House. Like Blake, he paused for a short space, looking round; then he, too, wandered across the quad in the direction of the woodshed.

"Something fishy about that," said Lawrence thoughtfully.

"Rather!"

"There'll be another of the bounders out directly——"

"Here's Monty Lowther!"

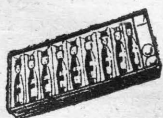
Monty Lowther came out briskly, and made straight for the gates.

Figgins & Co., and the New Firm, crowded round the window, watching. The humorist of the Shell seemed to be in a hurry. He hastened across to the gates, but before he reached them he dodged to one side, and vanished behind the trees.

"Woodshed!" said Figgins firmly.

(Continued on the next page.)

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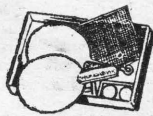


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"My hat! There must be a secret meeting on!" said Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Redfern. "I like that! Secret—eh? Why, the silly chumps have absolutely given the game away by going across singly! There's Herries now! There he goes, look! trying to make himself inconspicuous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The New House juniors chuckled.
"I will stick to my first opinion," said Fatty Wynn.

"What's that?"
"Why, the bounders have got a feed on! If they hadn't—why—"
"Oh, ring off, porpoise!" said Redfern.

"Well, I believe I'm right!" said Wynn obstinately. "And I say we ought to make a raid. Look what an opportunity it is! The grub's sure to be all there, and—"

"Hallo, here's the one and only!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lounged elegantly down the School House steps, and seemed to take a great deal of interest in Fane and Gibson of the Third, who were punting a footer about in the quad.

For quite half a minute the swell of St. Jim's stood contemplating them, then he moved off across the quadrangle.

Figgins grinned.
"Same direction," he chuckled.
D'Arcy paused half-way across the quad, and took his handkerchief out to flick off a piece of fluff from his immaculate jacket. And as he did so, a slip of paper fluttered to the ground.

Arthur Augustus walked on, unconscious of his loss.

"We'd better buzz out and pick that piece of paper up," suggested Kerr.
"Might be a fiver!"

Figgins and Kerr decided to go, and they hurried out of the New House.

In a minute they reached the piece of paper.

Figgins picked it up.
"It isn't a fiver," he said. "It's—My only summer hat!"

"What's the matter, Figgy?"
Figgins chuckled.

"Look at this! Don't worry; it's nothing private."

Kerr looked, then he grinned broadly.

"Just like Gussy," he said. "Fancy dropping that piece of deadly evidence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The paper was a half-sheet torn from an exercise-book, and on it were the words:

"Immediately after morning lessons, woodshed. Saunter across quad three minutes after Herries. Secret meeting."

The writing was very obviously Tom Merry's.

"Secret meeting, eh?" chuckled Figgins. "My hat, those School House fatheads are as easy as pie! We'll jolly well break their giddy meeting up!"

"This is Denton's wheeze!" grinned Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Still laughing, Figgins and Kerr hurried back to the New House. As they did so, Manners appeared with his camera.

The New House juniors affected not to see him, but Figgins gave Kerr an expansive wink.

Manners hurried between the old elms.

He had hardly disappeared when Denton came down the School House steps.

"Hi, Manners!" he called.

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Manners reappeared from behind the elms.

"Half a tick!" called Denton; and he hurried across.

"All part of the giddy scheme," said Figgins. "They think they're absolutely putting us off the scent by all this elaborate preparation. Come up and tell the others!"

And Figgins and Kerr hurried upstairs.

But they weren't the only ones who had noticed the peculiar behaviour of Tom Merry & Co. At the window of one of the School House studies a junior stood looking out with a thoughtful expression on his face.

It was Ernest Levison.

CHAPTER 9.

On the Track!

LEVISON was thinking.

The cad of the Fourth wore a far-away expression. He was thinking of his interview with the two men on the edge of Wayland Moor. He had been at the window for some time, looking absently into the quad.

Then he had noticed the juniors crossing, one after another, in the direction of the woodshed. Finally Denton had appeared, and a gleam came into Levison's eyes.

The Terrible Three's study was deserted now.

"I'll go and look for that envelope now!" muttered Levison, crossing the room.

"By Jove, what an opportunity! I——" He paused, and walked slowly back to the window. "No, it would be too risky!" he decided. "Besides, the thing wouldn't be there. It would be in the box-room, and I couldn't go there now. I've got over a week, so there's no hurry."

Levison thrust his hands into his pockets and stared before him.

His task was a ticklish one; a mistake, and it would mean expulsion. But Levison did not intend to make any mistake. He had only just escaped being sacked from St. Jim's once before, and he wasn't going to run the risk again.

The thought of what his act would be did not affect Levison in the least. He did not regard it in the light of a criminal act, which would be punishable by expulsion.

It was only an envelope, anyway!

An envelope, with some document or other inside it. Levison had no qualms whatsoever; his need for money just at the moment dispersed any doubts which may have occurred to him.

"I am not going to back out of it," Levison muttered. "I can't, anyhow! The brutes would show me up if I jibbed. That ten pounds will come in jolly handy, too. Ten pounds, eh?"
The cad of the Fourth grinned knowingly. "My name isn't Levison if I don't get twenty pounds before I've done!"

Meanwhile Figgins & Co. were busy.

The long-limbed chief and Kerr had

raced upstairs and shown the half-sheet of paper to Wynn and the New Firm.

"Secret meeting!" grinned Redfern.

"My hat, I like that!"

"They think we little innocents wouldn't notice anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So we'll just prove that we're not green."

"Yes, rather!"

"How?" asked Owen.

"By putting the giddy kybosh on their little game," said Figgins. "We——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins turned.



"On 'em!" roared Figgins. "Wipe the bounders up!"
amazed faces as New House juniors appear

"What's up with you, Lawrence?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ass! What are you cackling like that for?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Sorry!" gasped Lawrence. "Something tickled me, that's all!"

Figgins glared.

"Oh, did it?" he said warmly.

"Something tickled you when I was in the middle of a sentence, eh? Like your blessed cheek! You'll——"

"Ease up, old man!" grinned Lawrence. "It's a wheeze!"

"Oh!"

"Look here!" went on Lawrence.

"All these School House chumps are in the woodshed, aren't they?"

"Well?"

"Well, why shouldn't we creep up unheard and lock them in? There's a lock to the door, and the key's always

on the outside. That would be killing two birds with one giddy stone. We should jape the bounders and show them that we're up to their little dodges."

"Lock them in?"
 "That's it!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Jolly good!" chuckled Redfern.
 "When they're nicely cooped up we could fetch a crowd of our fellows and show 'em how the School House chaps work off their japes! It would be rich!"

"Rather!"
 "Come on, then," said Figgins,

Then a couple of voices made themselves heard from the direction of the old elms; they belonged to Tom Merry and Lowther.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Figgins blankly.

"They are not there!"
 "My hat!"

"It's a giddy frost!" said Redfern.
 The New House juniors looked at one another rather sheepishly.

"They were jolly quick over the meeting, anyhow!" growled Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted.

"How the dickens were we to know they'd be so quick?" he demanded crossly. "Mucked up a jolly good jape, that's what they've done!"

Redfern chuckled.
 "Can't blame them for that," he said. "How were they to know we were on their giddy track? It's your rotten idea, Lawrence, anyhow! Just like you to go and suggest a silly wheeze like—"

Lawrence gave a sniff.
 "Rats!" he said. "You needn't have come. And I wasn't to know, anyhow. Let's have a look round the shed, and see what they've been doing."

"Fat lot of good that'll be!" growled Figgins. "I don't believe the silly asses have been to the woodshed at all. Yet they came in this direction, one after another. There's something fishy somewhere."

"It's something connected with a feed," said Fatty Wynn firmly.

"Oh, dry up, you giddy porpoise!"
 "Look here—"

There was a shout from the woodshed. While the others had been talking, Lawrence had strolled into the empty building. He appeared at the door now, and beckoned to the others.

"I say, you fellows, come in here!" he exclaimed.

The tone of his voice caused the juniors to hurry into the woodshed. They looked at Lawrence inquiringly, then glanced round the building.

"Well, what have you found out, Sexton Blake junior?" asked Kerr.

"Nothing; but—"
 "Why, you ass, you called us as if you'd unearthed some deadly piece of evidence!" said Figgins. "Look here! I'm fed-up!"

"Half a minute!" exclaimed Lawrence. "Look over in that corner!"

He turned and pointed to an obscure corner, where a pile of old faggots were resting.

The New House juniors looked, but nothing was visible except the old pile of sticks, a rotten piece of sacking, and some torn scraps of paper.

"Well," demanded Figgins, "what's the good of looking there?"

"Explain yourself, fathcad!" added Redfern.

Lawrence grinned.
 "Are you chaps blind?" he asked politely.

"Look here! If you're going to act

the giddy ox, I'm off!" said Figgins.
 "The thing's a frost, anyhow."
 "Half a tick!" put in Kerr. "Lawrence means those pieces of paper. Don't you see, Figgy? They're bits of a sheet out of an exercise book—fresh, too. Looks as if they've been chucked down there by the School House bounders."

"My hat!" ejaculated Figgins.
 Kerr stepped forward, and bent down. In a moment he had collected the scraps of paper. He had seen at a glance that some of Tom Merry's handwriting was upon them, and the keen Scot could see that the ink was fairly fresh.

The papers, pieced together, might easily prove to be a clue.

"There's a chance of our finding out the reason for their blessed flying visit here yet," said Kerr. "Come on! We'll cart these up to the study and fit them together."

The juniors crowded out of the woodshed, eager to see if the scraps of paper would lead to anything. Figgins was as excited as anybody. To tell the truth, he had been feeling rather done. As leader of the New House juniors, it was his duty to uphold the honour of the House, as it were.

Tom Merry & Co. were up to some little game, and Figgins couldn't catch on to it. Perhaps the torn paper might lead to something.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Kerr, as he flung open the study door.

"Now to ferret out the giddy secret," grinned Redfern.

Fatty Wynn sniffed.
 "There isn't any secret," he declared.

"How do you know?"
 "Why, it's as plain as my face!"

"Well, I admit that's pretty plain," agreed Lawrence.

"Oh, don't be funny! The blessed paper's simply a list of grub Tom Merry's made out to get at the tuck-shop."

"Grub again!" exclaimed Figgins. "Look here, Fatty, you'll get a thick ear if you shove that record on again! You've got grub on the brain!"

"Well, it's nearly dinner-time now. The bell will go in about two seconds. I say, Kerr, we'd better give it up till we—"

Kerr turned from the table, and his eyes were sparkling.

"Give it up, be blowed!" he said. "I've got it!"

"Got it!"
 "Rather, my sons!"

"My hat! Is it anything good?"
 "Let's have a squint!"

The juniors crowded round the table where Kerr had laid out the scraps of paper. The Scots junior let out a yell.

"Look out, you chumps, you'll have the blessed lot disarranged!" he exclaimed. "It's a giddy clue. We've got the School House rotters absolutely on toast!"

Figgins bent over the table excitedly. The words on the paper were easy to read now, and stood out quite distinctly. They were in Tom Merry's handwriting, and read thus:

"In woodshed. Tell chaps to be ready for jape against Figgins & Co. immediately after tea. Castle ruins. Meeting time, 6.15 exactly."

The words were only scrawled, and were evidently jotted down to remind Tom Merry as to what he had to tell

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shouted Redfern. Tom Merry & Co. stared round with red on all sides from behind the masonry.

glancing at his watch. "Only ten minutes before dinner, so we'll have to buck up."

The six juniors crowded out into the passage. They crossed the quad quietly, then, separating, approached the woodshed from different quarters. The door was closed, and no sound came from within.

"They're jolly quiet, anyhow," murmured Kerr.

Figgins nodded.
 "They're in there, though," he said.

"I—"
 As he spoke the door of the woodshed blew slightly open with the breeze, then closed again. It certainly looked very much as though the place was deserted.

Figgins and Kerr looked at one another.

"That's rummy—" began Figgins uneasily.

the meeting. Having no further use for it after the meeting had assembled in the woodshed, he had naturally torn the paper up, never dreaming that the cute New House juniors would get on the track.

"My only summer hat!" ejaculated Figgins. "This means the bounders are going to the castle ruins after tea to work off some jape on us! The meeting in the woodshed was to tell the chaps what to do!"

"Of course!"

"The little innocents!" grinned Redfern. "We'll forestall them and show them that it won't do to play monkey tricks with the Cock House of St. Jim's."

"It'll be the jape of the season."

"Rather!"

Clang, clang!

"Hallo! Dinner!" said Figgins. "Kerr, you're a wonder! If it hadn't been for you—"

"For me, you mean!" interrupted Lawrence warmly. "I found the giddy paper, and chance it!"

"Of course," said Owen, "we found it, Figg—"

Figgins waved his hand.

"I don't care a jot who found it!" he said. "The main thing is we've succeeded in getting on the track. Tom Merry & Co. will want to hide their diminished heads when we've done with them!"

And Figgins & Co. and the New Firm quitted the study and descended to the dining-hall, where dinner was just on the point of commencing.

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins & Co. Triumph!

DURING afternoon lessons little Mr. Lathom could scarcely help noticing that certain of his pupils were rather restless and impatient.

Blake & Co. seemed equally as restless as the New House juniors. Every now and again Figgins would catch Blake's eye, and a slow lowering of his left eyelash became noticeable.

"I say, you know," murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when Mr. Lathom's back was turned, "Figgins seems remarkably pleased ovah somethin'. I have seen him wink across the woom several times."

"Figgins is hugging himself for being so smart!" chuckled Blake. "My only aunt! We'll knock those New House bounders into the middle of next week to-night! The little innocents have been getting a jape or two home lately—by luke, of course. But to-night they'll catch it fairly in the neck!"

"Wathah, deah boy!"

"They're as easily diddled as Gussy!" chuckled Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

Mr. Lathom turned away from the blackboard.

"Silence!" he said mildly. "I really cannot allow this talking. Pray wait until lessons are over!"

The murmur of voices died away and the afternoon's work proceeded, the juniors being particularly careful to avoid getting lines.

Time for dismissal came at last, and Figgins & Co. and the New Firm hurried over to the New House.

"Now we shall jolly well have to buck up!" said Figgins, as they entered the study and closed the door. "We don't know what Tom Merry's plans are, but we won't give him time to carry them out."

"No fear!"

"Six-thirty is the meeting-time," said Figgins. "I suggest we go right off—"

"No jolly fear!" put in Fatty Wynn hastily. "How about tea, you ass?"

"Blow tea!"

"That's all very well; I'm starving!"

"Well, as you're starving," said Figgins, "it won't hurt if you starve a little longer."

"You chump!" yelled Wynn. "I should never hold out—"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Kerr. "How about us? You've eaten about six times as much as anybody else to-day, so you can easily hold out till supper-time."

Fatty Wynn snorted.

"I shan't risk it," he said. "I shall

take a pocketful of sandwiches and one of Dame Taggles' pies. You and Figg might as well fill your pockets, too, in case I get hungry."

"Are you going to ring off?" asked Figgins, grasping his fat chum by the shoulders. "Do you think we've got nothing better to do than cart grub about for you to gobble up? If you mention grub again we'll sling you out of the study!"

Wynn relapsed into silence.

"Now, about going," said Figgins, looking round at the grinning New Firm. "The School House bounders have arranged to be in the ruins at half-past six. I vote we go right off, and be there to welcome them."

"Warmly!" said Redfern.

"With open arms!" added Lawrence, grinning.

"Of course, they won't expect us, so we shall have 'em absolutely on toast!" chuckled Figgins. "The question is—what shall we do with the asses when we've collared them? We ought to make them realise that it's no good trying to jape the New House!"

"Not a bit of use!"

"Mere waste of time!"

"Of course!"

"Therefore," went on Figgins, "it would be rather neat if we took our weapons—"

"Weapons?" ejaculated Redfern.

"Just so, my sons—weapons of war, in the shape of sticks of grease-paint," grinned the long-legged chief. "We'll tie the prisoners up and send them back to St. Jim's like Fifth of November guys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ripping!" chuckled Owen.

"It'll show Tom Merry & Co. that cheeky new chaps are barred," said Figgins. "It's just like Denton's sauce to come here and immediately plan a jape on the New House! We'll prove that we're equal to the occasion, and take a rise out of the School House which will never be lived down."

"Hear, hear!"

"Jolly good!" said Redfern. "And now we'll make a move! Get the grease-paints out, Kerr, old man."

In a few minutes the juniors were armed with their deadly weapons; then, reinforced by Pratt, French, Jimson, and three other New House juniors, they all trooped out into the dusky quad and slipped out of the gates.

It was nearly dark, and a cold breeze blew down the lane.

Fatty Wynn munched ham sandwiches as he walked. It would have been simply unheard-of to wait until supper-time without a "snack."

By the time the New House juniors were in the vicinity of the castle ruins, six o'clock had struck. It was as well to be in good time, for the School House contingent might turn up before their appointed hour.

"My only topper!" ejaculated Pratt suddenly. "They're coming!"

The others turned abruptly, and gazed down the slope. Quite distinct in the moonlight a small group of figures could be seen approaching.

Figgins ducked behind a chunk of masonry.

"Hide up somewhere, you chaps!" he said, in an urgent whisper. "Anywhere, as long as you're out of sight! Directly the bounders get near, rush out and collar them!"

In five seconds there was not a sign to show that a dozen very alert juniors were on the watch. They lay as still as logs, and waited. Voices could now be

(Continued at foot of next page.)



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HALLO, chums! It gives me much pleasure to announce that our great new school series starts in next Wednesday's number. It will take the place of the St. Frank's serial which ends in this issue. For the present, therefore, we say cheerio to the boys of St. Frank's, whose exciting adventures have entertained us for so many weeks. Their places will be filled by Jimmy Silver & Co., the irrepressible, happy-go-lucky juniors of Rookwood, who make a welcome return to our pages.

Most of you will remember cheerful "Uncle James" himself, his staunch supporters, Raby and Newcome, and the fourth member of the Fistical Four, the fatuous but likeable Arthur Edward Lovell. Then there are many other favourites, including the three Tommies, Dodd, Cook, and Doyle, of the Modern House, the old rivals of Jimmy Silver & Co. All these popular chums will be with you again in this series of new stories, the like of which Owen Conquest, the author, has never equalled. The first yarn is called:

"JIMMY SILVER & CO.'S NEW CHUM!"

It deals with the arrival of a new boy—Dudley Vane. As he has been involved in a plane crash and has been ill, Jimmy Silver & Co. are requested to keep a fatherly eye on him and see that, like most newcomers, he's not ragged. Looking after an invalid is not much in the line of the Fistical Four, but as the request comes from a master, they have to bow to his wishes. However, there's a big surprise in store for the chums—particularly Lovell, who finds out to his cost that Vane can well look after himself!

You will thoroughly enjoy this first full-of-pep yarn of a wonderful series. Look out for it!

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To go with the ripping Rookwood story, there is, of course, another grand long yarn of the chums of St. Jim's. It is a powerful story, telling of the dramatic adventures of Tom Merry. That the popular leader of the Shell

could stray from the straight and narrow path seems incredible to his own chums; yet what else are they to think when he refuses to explain certain suspicious dealings with a shady character? Can it be true that Tom Merry has fallen into the bad habits of Levison & Co., the cads of St. Jim's? That is what most juniors think, and even Tom's chums regard him with suspicion—with the result that there is a rift in the friendship of the Terrible Three. What is the mystery of Tom Merry?

Don't miss this splendid yarn which, with readers' prize jokes and "Just My Fun," completes our next issue. Order your GEM early.

AT GRIPS WITH A PYTHON!

Catching wild animals and bringing them back alive is a dangerous and thrilling occupation, as the stories of Frank Buck's exploits in the jungle bear out. The famous big-game hunter has had many narrow escapes, but none so near as the time when he had a life-and-death struggle with a large python.

A trap had been set in a jungle thicket to catch a small antelope. Frank Buck went to examine it and found that an antelope had been snared. As he caught hold of the animal to release it, he suddenly felt a vice-like grip on his ankle. Glancing down quickly he was horrified to see that a big python, which had obviously intended making a meal of the antelope, had coiled round his ankle. Before even he could attempt to free himself, the reptile had wound itself round his legs and body.

Then began a desperate struggle, Frank Buck striving desperately to get at his revolver in his pocket, and the python slowly tightening its grip on him. Buck's arms were held to his sides by the reptile, so he had to exert all his strength to force his hand up to his trousers pocket. And the life-crushing grip round his body was getting tighter and tighter. It seemed an age to him before he felt the opening of his pocket. He forced his hand inside and felt the comforting grip of the gun. Then began the struggle to get his hand out again.

heard, and Figgins grinned as he listened.

"Weally, you know, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was saying, "I considah we shall take a wippin' wise out of Figgins & Co. this time!"

"I don't think!" muttered Figgins.

"Oh, they'll be simply mopped up!" declared Tom Merry cheerfully. "When we get in the ruins we shall be able to lay our plans, and then nothing can save them!"

"Yes; I think the wheeze will pan out all right," said Denton cheerfully.

The group of School House juniors entered the ruins, and marched straight

to the centre. There they stopped, and gathered in a little crowd. The possibility of their being watched never seemed to enter their heads. Apparently Tom Merry & Co. were so confident of their scheme working correctly that they didn't even take ordinary precautions.

Figgins crept from behind his pile of masonry.

He made a sign to the other New House juniors.

"On 'em!" he roared.

"Wipe the bouders up!" shouted Redfern excitedly.

Tom Merry & Co. stared round with amazed faces, and before they could

When he felt that his ribs would crack under the python's pressure, he got the gun out of his pocket. Crooking his wrist and taking careful aim, he fired at the reptile's head. It was killed instantly, and great was his relief when the crushing coils fell away from his body.

That was a nasty experience for Frank Buck, but it's all in the day's work of catching wild animals.

A WAY WITH WOLVES!

One of the most daring men who followed the life of the hunter was a man known as Catch-'em-alive Abernathy. He specialised in catching wolves alive. But the most amazing thing about him was that he only used his hands to do it! How he caught them was like this: He would wait until the wolf was springing at him, with mouth wide open, and then drive his hand into the animal's jaws and right down its throat! With the other hand he gripped the wolf's lower jaw, and so choked it into insensibility. After that, it was an easy matter to rope up the wolf.

In his time, Abernathy, who was little more than nine stone in weight, but very wiry and strong, caught over a thousand wolves with his bare hands!

MENTAL TELEPATHY!

Here is the story of a girl who cannot read what she can see, but can read what she cannot see! That sounds paradoxical, but it's true. The girl, who lives in Riga, Latvia, is ten years old, but she is very backward for her age. She has recently been tested by doctors, who discovered that she could repeat long sentences aloud which somebody else in the room was silently reading from a book. She also repeated sentences in French, German, and English, and yet she has never learned these languages! It must be a kind of mental telepathy, her brain possessing the power to receive what is passing in the mind of another person. It is a strange gift which Nature has bestowed upon her to compensate for her backwardness in other directions.

JOIN THE PARTY!

By the way, readers over twenty who are interested in a social gathering in honour of the GEM and "Magnet," are invited to communicate with Mr. W. C. Butterworth, 17, Artillery Road, Guildford, Surrey, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope for reply. Readers up North should write to The St. Jim's Club, 3, Croft Lane, Hollins, Whitefield, Lancs. Mr. G. T. Swaine, of the latter address, and Mr. Butterworth are organising this social function, and they will be pleased to hear from anyone who wishes to attend.

TAILPIECE.

Teacher: "If it wasn't for me you'd be the biggest fool in the school!"

Tommy: "Oh, sir, how does it feel to be the biggest?"

THE EDITOR.

move an inch, twelve New House juniors simply flung themselves at the common enemy.

Arthur Augustus found himself bowled over like a ninepin. He lay flat on the grass with Lawrence sitting on him.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy indignantly. "You uttah wottah, Law'ence! You have simply wuined my twousahs!" "That's all right, Gussy!" grinned Lawrence. "Plenty more where they came from!"

"Let me get up!" shrieked D'Arcy excitedly. "I'll give you a feahful thwashin' if you do not instantly we-lease me! I—"

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Figgins let out a whoop. "Got 'em absolutely clean!" he shouted triumphantly. "Now, Mr. Swanky Denton, how about your wheeze now?"

Philip Edgar Denton grinned sheepishly, and took a sidelong glance at Tom Merry. The captain of the Shell was looking decidedly wrathful, for, apparently, their whole elaborate scheme had failed, and once again Figgins & Co. had scored.

CHAPTER 11.

The Laugh of St. Jim's!

"THIS is where we crow!" grinned Redfern, sitting more comfortably on Monty Lowther's chest. "Fancy these bounders thinking they could bring off a jape against the New House!"

"The cheek!" said Figgins.

"The utter nerve!"

"Fork out the grease-paint!" grinned Kerr. "We'll paint 'em up like African war chiefs!"

Tom Merry struggled.

"Grease-paint!" he gasped.

"You—you rotters!" roared Manners. "You don't mean to say you're going to bung some rotten grease-paint all over our chivvies!"

"We are!" chuckled Figgins. "We is!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Herries breathlessly. "I've had Fatty Wynn squashing me flat for five minutes! You might let me off the rest. I've been half killed already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys, give the alarm!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I weally cannot allow Lawrence to smothah me any longah! I am jolly glad I put on these wotten old togs before I came out!"

Figgins waved a stick of grease-paint in his hand.

"Now for the medical treatment!" he grinned.

"Yes!" shouted Tom Merry, with a yell of laughter; "now for the medical treatment! That's a jolly good idea, Figgy! School House ahoy! Rescue! Kangy, Dane, Glyn—"

"What's up with the ass?" asked Kerr, looking round.

Figgins looked startled.

"I—I don't know!" he stammered uneasily. "Looks as if—"

"Bosh! He's only kidding!"

"Kidding!" exploded Jack Blake.

"Figgy, you're absolutely dished!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy.

The next second the place seemed to spring into life. From every corner of the old ruins the form of a School House junior broke into view. Before Figgins & Co. could realise what had happened, they found themselves beset by a dozen determined foes.

Naturally, the New House juniors released their prisoners to combat with the new enemy, and Tom Merry & Co. scrambled to their feet, and assisted their rescuers.

In three minutes every one of the New House juniors lay panting and breathless, secure prisoners.

Figgins breathed hard. He realised now that he had been a little too previous. At the moment of victory had come defeat. Figgins had never been more surprised in his life.

"You—you rotters!" he gasped. "You wouldn't have escaped if these other School House bounders hadn't turned up."

The Terrible Three yelled.

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"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Who's crowing now?"

"How do you like 'em done?" chuckled Manners.

"Ever been had?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, Figgy is quite in a fluttah!"

"He'll be in something else before long," grinned Blake.

The New House juniors couldn't make it out. How had Kangaroo & Co. got on the scent? How had they known of their chums' capture? It seemed altogether too mystifying to Figgins.

Several long coils of rope appeared from somewhere, and in five minutes the New House juniors were securely bound. Their legs were left free, and they were placed in a row against one of the old walls. In the moonlight Tom Merry & Co. stood grinning.

"What do you think of the jape, Figgy?" asked Denton calmly.

"Why, it's only by accident that you're not painted up like a set of Red Indians!" said Figgins savagely. "If Kangy and the rest hadn't come along—"

"But they did come along!" chuckled Tom Merry. "That was part of the jape, my son!"

Figgins started.

"Part of the jape!" he ejaculated. "Yaas, wathah!"

"My—my hat!" gasped Kerr. "The bounders led us into it!"

The Terrible Three roared.

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "And you thought we were as green as grass! Look here, Figgy, I'll tell you how utterly and absolutely you've been diddled!"

"Dished and done brown!" added Blake.

"It was a put-up job from the very first," grinned Tom Merry. "We knew you were watching from the New House when we all strolled across the quad to the woodshed. That's why we did it—we wanted to take you in!"

"And we did it!" said Herries.

"You—you rotters!" ejaculated Figgins, glaring.

"When D'Arcy dropped that piece of paper with the message on it, we knew you'd come and pick it up. Gussy worked the thing first-rate—rather to our surprise—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And those torn bits of paper were shoved in the woodshed for the special purpose of luring you to the ruins," grinned Tom Merry. "You thought you were on the track of our jape when you were walking right into the giddy trap all the time!"

Figgins glared round helplessly. The other New House fellows looked about as sheepish as possible. They had been so sure of themselves that it came as a shock to learn that they had fallen into Denton's trap like inexperienced fags.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the School House juniors.

"You grinning idiots!" shouted Redfern. "You couldn't—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You burbling jabberwocks!" yelled Owen.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. let themselves go. The whole thing had passed off so smoothly that they could afford to grin now. Figgins & Co. had been completely defeated.

"Bai Jove!" chuckled D'Arcy. "I weally must say that it is a jolly good jape of Denton's. It has taken some of the cheek out of Figgy—"

"Has it?" grunted Figgins, glaring round impotently.

"It will do pwesently, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus cheerfully. "Law'ence, I will ovahlook the fact that you wotted me in the dirt. I put on old duds especially for the occasion, you know, so I don't mind."

D'Arcy looked round triumphantly. The fact of his wearing old clothes seemed an exceedingly cute dodge to the swell of St. Jim's. The others, however, weren't so particular about their clothes, so they didn't appreciate D'Arcy's forethought.

Tom Merry turned.

"Got the sacks there, Glyn?" he asked.

"Every one of them!" grinned Bernard Glyn.

The Liverpool lad dived behind a pile of masonry, and reappeared with an armful of sacks. The New House juniors eyed them with trepidation.

"I—I say," said Figgins, "what's the game?"

"No larks, you know!" said Redfern. "Oh, no! We're going to let you loose now—I don't think!" chuckled Denton.

"He's a treasure!" grinned Blake, slapping the new boy on the back. "Denty, you've proved yourself worthy of being a School House chap! We're proud of you—"

"Fall on his neck!" said Figgins, with a sniff.

"Weally, Figgy, Denty has pwoved his worth!" said D'Arcy.

"I should kiss him if I were you!" advised Lawrence.

"You ass, Lawrence—"

"Gussy leaves all the kissing for Miss Bunn!" chuckled Figgins.

Arthur Augustus turned a beautiful pink.

"You wottah!" he shouted indignantly. "How dare you insinuate that I am in the habit of kissin' Miss Bunn, Figgins! Bai Jove, I'll give you a feahful thawashin'!"

Four pairs of hands grasped the excited swell of St. Jim's.

"Hold on, Gussy!" said Blake, grinning. "Figgy's bound. You can't hit him now."

"I shall make a point of wipin' up the quad with him to-morrow!" exclaimed D'Arcy excitedly. "Bai Jove—"

"Hurry up with those sacks!" said Jack Blake.

"Blake, you are intewwuptin' me!"

"I know that, Gussy. We can't listen to you all night!"

"You ass! I wepeat—"

What Arthur Augustus repeated wasn't heard, for the juniors were busy on something more important.

Struggling and protesting, Figgins & Co. were, one by one, enclosed in sacks which reached to their chests. The sacks were reversed, so that they hung over their heads. The fact that some of them contained a little flour was a mere detail. The unfortunate New House juniors did not think so, however. They spluttered and sneezed violently as the flour descended over their heads, and got up their noses.

Their roars were drowned by the yells of laughter from the triumphant School House juniors. The sacks were tied securely round their waists, so that any attempt to get loose would be futile; for Figgins & Co.'s arms were bound securely.

"Now for your giddy paste!" grinned Tom Merry.

Denton came forward. In his hand he held a large tin of phosphorus paste. He opened the lid, and the contents glowed luminously.

"What a wheeze!" chuckled Blake. "Denty, you're a marvel!"

"Absolutely a gem!" grinned Monty Lowther.

With a big brush Denton proceeded to write, in big, broad letters, the word "FIGGINS" right across the sack which imprisoned the chief of the New House juniors. Then, in turn, the others were treated to the same proceeding, until the whole dozen had their names emblazoned on the sacks.

The effect was extremely ludicrous. In the darkness the letters glowed brilliantly, causing the forms of the sacks behind them to be almost blotted out. Seen from a distance, it looked exactly as though a series of names were written on nothingness, glowing in the darkness like spirit writing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The victorious juniors roared. "Oh, my hat!" sobbed Manners. "Isn't that simply gorgeous!" "You beastly rotters!" mumbled Figgins, from within the sack. "Good old Figgy!" grinned Blake. "Hope you're nice and warm!" Tom Merry and Denton were busy with a large banner—one which had to be carried by two juniors. On it Denton proceeded to paint the words, in huge size:

**"NOTICE!
FIGGINS & CO.'S DOWNFALL!
THREE GROANS FOR THE
NEW HOUSE!"**

The three groans were uttered heartily, almost before the banner was raised. Tom Merry looked round at the crowd of grinning faces. "All ready for the procession to start?" he asked.

"Ready and waiting!" "Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "Rope the bounders up!" in two minutes Figgins & Co. were roped together in a long line, each junior being about four feet apart. Protestations and angry threats were uttered on all sides, but they were ignored.

"Now," said Denton, walking to the front of the line, "quick march!" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Denton tugged at a length of line which had been left over, and the New House band were forced to walk onwards, one following the other. The sacks prevented them from seeing, and they simply had to follow Denton, who was acting as guide. At first one or two of the prisoners jibbed, and refused to walk, but they soon realised that the agony and humiliation would be over sooner if they went quietly.

The victors were almost in a state of hysterics when the gates of St. Jim's hove in sight. Glyn and Herries had cut on in advance, and a whole crowd of juniors were waiting in the quad.

A roar of laughter went up as the procession entered the gates. Each name stood out clear and distinct in the darkness.

Over the heads of the unfortunate champions was the huge banner, with its wording quite distinct and readable.

"My only topper!" gasped Lumley-Lumley. "What is it?"

"Sure, and it's an iligant jape entirely!" exclaimed Reilly, chuckling.

The New House section of the juniors roared forth their disappointment and chagrin. But they were drowned in the shouts and laughter which arose from the School House boys. Juniors and seniors alike were doubled up at the ludicrous procession.

"Little bounders!" said Cutts of the Fifth.

"It's simply a scream!" chuckled Lefevre. "That's what I say!"

Kildare pushed his way through the laughing crowd.

"Look here, you young rascals!" he said laughingly. "This won't do!"

"Only a harmless little jape, Kildare," said Tom Merry.

"That's all," said Denton.

"Well, there's been enough of it!" said the skipper sternly, although his eyes twinkled. "Cut those ropes at once, Merry, and stop this nonsense!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Blake. "The show's over now, anyhow."

"Yaas, wathah! Figgy & Co. have been shown up wippin'ly!" said D'Arcy.

The ropes were cut, and Figgins & Co. stood revealed, red and sheepish. The long-limbed chief glared round at the crowd of grinning faces, and shook his fist.

"You bounders!" he roared. "We'll make you sit up for this!"

"If you can!" grinned Tom Merry. "Hear us smile!"

And the smiles could be heard almost in Rylcombe. The New House juniors stood round, silent and glaring. They couldn't see anything to laugh at all. But the rest could. They roared.

**CHAPTER 12.
Levison Gets to Work!**

FIGGINS & CO. were chipped unmercifully that night and the next morning. There was no doubt that they had been very completely and very thoroughly taken down a peg. He had been so confident that they had almost begun to think the School House would never bring off another successful jape. But, as Tom Merry remarked, this great wheeze of Denton's had completely turned the tables.

No amount of argument made any difference. Figgins & Co. had not merely been captured and sent home; they had gone to the ruins of their own accord, had actually made prisoners of Tom Merry & Co., and had then fallen into the carefully laid trap. The whole thing, from beginning to end, had been planned beforehand, and

the New House had taken the bait like mere novices.

And while all the chipping was going on, Ernest Levison was thinking of his commission. He sat in his study immediately after breakfast wondering how he could gain possession of the blue envelope. It ought not to prove such a difficult task. After all, the letter was probably hidden in Denton's box.

But it was a risky game. Levison was none too popular at St. Jim's, and everybody knew what an underhand character he was. If he were discovered searching through Denton's box it would probably mean expulsion. And Levison had escaped being sacked once or twice by the skin of his teeth. He didn't want to get into another scrape.

(Continued on the next page.)

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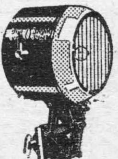
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He paced his study thoughtfully for a few moments; then a gleam came into his eyes, and he paused in his stride.

"Yes, that ought to work!" he muttered. "Anyhow, there'll be no harm in trying it on."

When morning lessons commenced Levison was looking as cool and self-possessed as usual. Nobody, to look at him, would have guessed the object he had constantly in his mind. The class settled down to work after a while, although Figgins & Co. came in for a good deal of whispered chaff. Little Mr. Latham put a stop to it, however, by giving Blake a hundred lines to do.

Half-way through the second lesson Levison was called upon to construe. The cad of the Fourth stood up, and passed a hand across his brow. For over half an hour he had been looking rather ill, and Mr. Latham had glanced at him once or twice.

"Now, Levison," said the Form-master, "you will proceed—"

Levison stood up, then swayed dizzily. The book fell from his hands. Levison pulled himself up with a jerk, and grasped hold of the desk.

"Are you ill, Levison?" asked Mr. Latham concernedly.

"I'm all right, sir!" muttered Levison.

Suddenly he swayed again, and fell heavily against the next desk. Clifton Dane sat there, and he held Levison up. The rest of the Form looked on in surprise.

"What's up with you?" whispered Dane.

"Good gracious, I trust you are not ill!" ejaculated the little Form-master anxiously. He knew that Levison had been subject to peculiar fits in the past, and he wondered if this was another of them coming on.

Mr. Latham walked across the room and bent over Levison. The cad of the Fourth was certainly looking very queer.

"I'm all right, sir!" muttered Levison.

"Would you like to lie down for a little while, Levison?" asked the master. "If you feel unable to continue your work you are at liberty to lie down in your dormitory, or in your study—"

"I don't think so, sir," said Levison, pulling himself together.

His voice was hoarse, and Mr. Latham was anxious.

"Yes, Levison," he said sternly, "you must leave the Form-room!"

"But I'm—"

"You are unwell, my boy. Either go to the matron and tell her you are feeling unwell, or lie down in your study for a little while. I insist, Levison!"

"Very well, sir," said Levison unsteadily.

He rose to his feet, swayed a little, then crossed rather uncertainly to the door. All eyes followed his progress. The door opened, and Levison passed out.

"The boy looks ill!" said Mr. Latham concernedly. "Now, boys, we will proceed."

"The giddy swanker!" muttered Digby, with a sniff.

"Yaas, wathah, Digby!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Levison is shammin'. I expect the boundah wants to do somethin' pwivate, and so pwetended to be ill. Bai Jove, I don't twust that vottah!"

"D'Arcy, you are talking!" exclaimed Mr. Latham mildly.

"Yaas, sir."

"Take fifty lines, D'Arcy!"

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"Vewy good, sir!" said Arthur Augustus resignedly.

But the swell of St. Jim's had been very near to the truth in his surmise. Levison had been shamming, and he certainly wanted to do something private. As soon as he reached his own study a crafty smile broke out on his face. He had remarkable control of his features, and it had been a simple matter for him to feign illness.

"Now to do the business!" he muttered.

He left his study, and passed down the deserted passage. Being mid-morning, everybody, masters and boys alike, were in the class-rooms, and this half of the House was quite deserted.

In three minutes Levison was in the box-room. His eyes gleamed as he saw Denton's box there in the corner. He crossed over to it, and tried to raise the lid. It refused to budge.

"Locked!" murmured Levison.

He grinned. The lock was of the ordinary common type, and would not prove a very formidable obstacle. Levison dived a hand into his pocket, and produced a bunch of little keys. He always carried them about, and had found them useful on more than one occasion.

For two or three minutes he tried various keys, but none turned the wards of the lock. At last he had gone through the whole bunch. One key had almost succeeded in turning, and he inserted this again. He turned it and twisted it, but it refused to unlock the box.

"Really, my dear Levison, you are having quite a job with that key!" said a voice suddenly.

Levison dropped the key as though it had become red-hot, and turned a pale face towards the door. It had opened silently, and Skimpole, the genius of the Shell, stood just inside the door. Skimpole stared down at the Fourth Former through his big spectacles.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Levison fiercely.

"If you will listen, I will explain," said Skimpole. "You see, my dear Levison, I happened to tip my inkpot over a short while ago, and the ink unfortunately spilled itself on to Crooke's trousers. Of course, you will understand that it was no fault of mine. I was not to blame in any way. As a matter of fact, the accident was predestined, and nothing I could have done would have averted it. Crooke, however, became highly incensed, and immediately flung the whole contents of the inkpot in my face. Of course, it was most ungentlemanly of him, and I can only put it down to environment during his youth. Crooke could not be blamed for throwing the ink. Mr. Linton immediately—"

"You silly idiot!" cut in Levison. "What are you doing here?"

"Really, Levison, there is no necessity to become enraged," said Skimpole, blinking. "I was ordered to go and wash my face. I have, as you can observe, already performed the task, and thought that it would be a fitting opportunity to search for a great book on Determinism—by the famous Professor Balmncrumptet—which is in my box. I had no idea you were here. However, since you are here, perhaps you will allow me to read to you a few lines of my new book on Determinism—"

"Clear out!" said Levison, between his teeth, startled at being disturbed in such a delicate task as he was attempting. "Buzz off, you fatheaded chump!"

Skimpole backed a pace.

"Really, Levison—"

"Can't you see I'm busy?" roared Levison angrily.

The Determinist of the Shell blinked at the box which Levison had been trying to open.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I am afraid you are making a mistake, Levison!"

"A mistake, you ass—"

"That box belongs to Denton, the new boy in the Shell," said Skimpole. "I presume you are endeavouring to open it while under the impression that it is your own."

Levison bit his lip. But he quickly regained his self-control. He gazed at the name on the box.

"Why, so it is Denton's!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "That's funny! I wondered why the key wouldn't fit."

Skimpole beamed.

"I am glad to have been of some slight service to you, Levison," he said. "Nevertheless, it is rather peculiar that you should mistake Denton's box for your own. Fourth Form boxes are in the next room."

Levison laughed easily.

"Oh, that's nothing!" he said. "I came along the passage, and thought I had entered the Fourth Form box-room. I say, there's no need to say anything about this to the fellows, you know. They wouldn't understand like you. They might think I was trying to open Denton's box deliberately."

"Oh, surely not!" said the genius of the Shell.

"I don't know. You won't say anything, will you?" asked Levison. "By the way, you may as well show me this new book of yours—"

"My dear Levison, I assure you I shall say nothing about this little matter," beamed Skimpole, forgetting all else except his Determinism. "If you will come to my study, I shall have much pleasure in showing you the manuscript of my great new book. You realise, of course, that it is not yet published in book form, but I am sending it to a big firm in London this week, and I confidently expect them to accept it immediately."

And Skimpole led the way to the Shell passage.

Ten minutes later Levison entered his own study and slammed the door. A black frown was on his brow, and he scowled as he savagely kicked the fire.

"The interfering brute!" he muttered fiercely. "Just when I was on the point of getting the box open! Hang it! Hang Skimpole, and his rotten Determinism as well! The silly ass ought to be shoved into a lunatic asylum!"

CHAPTER 13.

Like a Thief in the Night!

"FEELING better, Levison?"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Levison savagely.

Mellish grinned. It was bed-time, and Levison was still feeling savage at having been foiled in his object. He had been forced to keep up his pretence of being ill, and had eaten sparsely, in consequence. He was hungry now, and it did not tend to improve his temper.

The rest of the Fourth Form dormitory were still discussing the great jape against Figgins & Co. The big room rang with laughter at the New House juniors' expense.

Levison got into bed without delay. His mind was made up. He would go down to the box-room at about eleven o'clock, and obtain the letter then. It would be, perhaps, the least risky plan.

If he took special pains, there was no reason why he should be discovered.

"I'll get the beastly thing, and take it straight to the house on the moor," he decided, as he lay in bed. "It'll be done with then, and I shall have my ten quid—or more!"

After the usual animated conversation in bed, the Fourth Form gradually dropped off to sleep. But Levison was wakeful enough. He lay there and listened to the school clock chime the quarter-hours. It was a tedious enough task, and Levison was impatient to get the matter settled and done with.

Eleven!
Levison sat up, and cautiously looked round. A creak sounded from Blake's bed, but Blake lay perfectly still, breathing regularly.

"Any of you chaps awake?" asked Levison, in a low voice.

"Yes, I am," mumbled Herries.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh," said Levison, a little confused, "n-nothing, only I thought I heard a noise!"

"Oh rats! Go to sleep!" grumbled Herries.

Levison lay back on his pillow, with a muttered exclamation of annoyance. He had confidently expected the dormitory to be asleep, and Herries' ready answer had disconcerted him a trifle.

Fifteen minutes later he again put the murmured question.

Silence!
"Good!" muttered the cad of the Fourth. "I'll go right off!"

He slipped out of bed. In a few minutes he was dressed in his trousers, shirt, and coat. Then, with his boots in his hand, he crept to the door. It opened without a sound, and closed again.

Jack Blake sat up like a spring. "The beauty!" he murmured. "Off to the Green Man, I expect."

Levison had been quick in getting

into his clothes; Blake was about half the time. He simply jumped into his things, then crept from the dormitory. He had heard Levison the first time, and guessed that he had some game on. Therefore, Blake had kept himself awake.

The passage was deserted. Blake popped into the Shell dormitory, and shook Tom Merry's shoulder. Tom Merry opened his eyes and blinked.

"Hallo! What— Who's that? What's the giddy game?"

"It's me," whispered Blake urgently. "Blake! Well, of all—"

"Sh!" murmured Blake. "Levison's just gone out of the dorm with his boots in his hand."

"Phew! Do you mean to follow him?"

"Yes. Buck up!"

"I'm on," said a voice behind Blake. Philip Edgar Denton slid out of bed, and coolly commenced to dress.

"I say—" began Blake.

"What you say won't make any diff, my son," said Denton calmly. "I'm going with you chaps to see what game Levison's up to. I don't like that chap."

In less than a minute Tom Merry and Denton were ready. Tom Merry and Blake didn't object to Denton accompanying them. They rather enjoyed the new junior's company, in fact.

They crept cautiously along the corridor. When they examined the little window which was usually used by the juniors when breaking bounds at night, however, they found that it was securely fastened on the inside.

"He hasn't been through here," muttered Blake.

"How could he have got out, then?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "Let's look at the side door."

The three juniors carefully descended

the stairs. They crept along the passage to the side door. It was pitch dark there, and Tom Merry cautiously struck a match. All three examined the door. It was locked and bolted on the inside.

"You fathead, Blake!" said Tom Merry wrathfully, carefully stamping the match head out. "Levison hasn't gone out at all."

"Then he's still in the House," grinned Denton.

"Go hon!" said Blake. "I can't make it out, though. Levison had his boots in his hand. If he didn't mean to go out, why did he carry his boots with him?"

"Perhaps he was going to clean 'em," suggested Denton.

"Oh, don't be funny, Denty, old man!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Come on! We'll go back and see if we can see any sign of the rotter."

They found their way back to the Fourth Form passage. Moonlight entered the windows in a stream, and suddenly Tom Merry pointed.

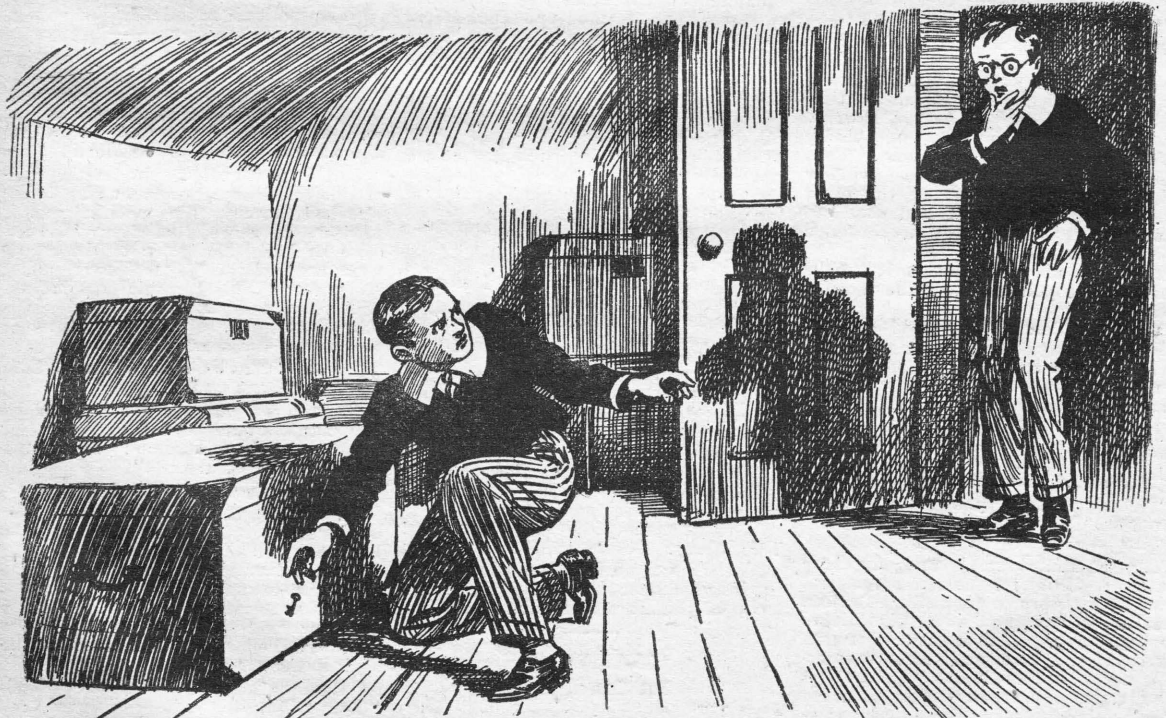
"My hat!" he murmured. "Look there! They're Levison's boots!"

A pair of boots had been placed close to the skirting. They had certainly not been there when the Fourth Form went up to bed. Therefore, it was quite obvious that they were Levison's.

The three juniors stood for a second looking at them. Then a creak on the stairs sounded. Tom Merry tugged at his companions' arms.

"Look out!" he whispered. "He's coming!"

They scurried back into the dark passage, and stood there waiting. In another moment Levison appeared, and he paused before the window. The moonlight shone in, and clearly lit up Levison's form and features.



"Really, my dear Levison, you are having quite a job with that key," said a voice suddenly. The cad of the Fourth started guiltily, and dropped the key with which he was trying to open Denton's box. He turned a pale face to the door, to see Skimpole standing there. "What are you doing here?" demanded Levison fiercely.

The cad of the Fourth had not the least idea that he was being observed.

There was a smile of contentment on his face, and he held a blue, oblong envelope in his hand. He looked at it for a second, then stuffed it into his pocket.

At the sight of the envelope Denton took half a step forward, his eyes blazing excitedly and wrathfully. He was just on the point of crying out when Tom Merry clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Shut up!" he breathed. "We'll see what Levison's going to do."

Denton controlled himself with an effort. His eyes were still blazing, and his breath came in quick gasps.

"The—the awful thief!" he muttered. "That letter's mine—"

Tom Merry pinched Denton's arm. The new boy took the hint and relapsed into silence. Less than a minute later Levison, with his boots on, cautiously made his way to the little window. He clambered out quickly without a sound.

"The rotten thief!" said Denton fiercely. "He's pinched that envelope out of my box. He must know what's in it. It's worth thousands of pounds."

"What?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Eh?" ejaculated Blake.

"It's true! The contents of that letter are worth thousands," said Denton, his voice quivering with emotion. "Quick! We must follow him!"

Excited now, Tom Merry and Blake followed Denton up to the window. Suddenly Blake paused.

"I'll rush back and get some of the other fellows!" he said quickly. "I'll tell you what! You follow behind Levison, Tom, and Denton will follow you. Then Denty will still be in sight when I come along. The others will follow me. There'll be a giddy procession of us."

"Good idea!" said Tom Merry. "Come on, Denton!"

The two scrambled out of the window. Meanwhile, Blake hurried back to the Fourth Form dormitory. Rules and regulations were totally forgotten, and in practically less than no time Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, Lumley-Lumley, and Reilly scrambled into their clothes. Then they rapidly slid out of the window after Blake. Blake was at the other side of the quad, for he had gone out a minute or two before. He beckoned to the newcomers to hurry.

They did so. Once out in Rylcombe Lane, Blake pointed down the moonlit road.

"There's Denton!" he said quickly. "He's keeping Tom Merry in sight; and Tommy's following Levison. You see, that way Levison won't have a whole crowd following him and giving the show away."

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "That's jolly smart, you know!"

"My idea," said Blake modestly.

"Weally, Blake, you needn't cwow about it!"

"Oh, come on!"

They hurried down the lane, for there was no necessity for them to spread out now. They were so far behind Levison that the cad of the Fourth could have no possible suspicion of their presence. Levison would have received a considerable shock had he known that no less than eight juniors were hot upon his track. Undoubtedly Blake's idea was an extremely good one, and admirably suited to the occasion, for it enabled the whole cight juniors to follow the cad

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of the Fourth without his being aware of it.

"Bai Jove! They've turned into the footpath leadin' through the woods!"

It was true, and very soon the crowd of juniors were following very closely behind Denton. The new boy himself was feeling very indignant. He felt like hurrying on and forcing Levison to give up the valuable paper. Such a course, however, might end in Levison's object remaining undiscovered for ever. Therefore, Denton curbed his impatience, and kept Tom Merry in sight.

Suddenly the hero of the Shell stopped.

Denton came up to him breathlessly.

"Where is he?" he asked quickly.

"Just gone into that old cottage," said Tom Merry. "My hat, Denton, there's some underhand game going on here! Look! There's a light in that cottage! What the dickens is Levison doing there?"

"I mean to find out!" said Denton, through his set teeth.

"Bai Jove, here they are, deah boys!"

"Sure, and you're right entirely!"

The others came up quickly, and Tom Merry rapidly told them what had happened.

Denton was impatient.

"I'm going!" he exclaimed firmly.

"You chaps can—"

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "it looks to me as if there's some danger in this. I vote we spread out and approach the cottage from different directions. Then, if it comes to a row, we can rush in and rescue that letter."

The suggestion was acted upon immediately. Without loss of time, the juniors, thoroughly excited, spread out and crept towards the cottage. Denton, Tom Merry, and Blake were the first to arrive, and they cautiously crept over the low fence and approached the window.

The blind was down, but there was a space left at the bottom, so that the occupants of the room were quite distinctly visible. Denton and Tom Merry peered in cautiously. The two men, Wright and Smith, were standing before the fire, and Levison was on the other side of the table, looking excited.

"I want twenty pounds!" the watching juniors heard him say. "I very nearly got copped pinching this rotten letter, and it's worth twenty!"

Wright had the contents of the blue envelope spread out before him.

"This—is this is the thing," he said, with keen satisfaction. "Well, Levison, since you have been so prompt, I'll spring five pounds more than I offered, and let you have fifteen."

"What's it all about?" breathed Tom Merry, mystified.

"I can't explain now!" said Denton quickly. "But we must get that letter back, Merry! We must! Good heavens, it's worth a fortune to me!"

There was a sudden stumble in the darkness close by.

"Bai Jove!" gasped a voice audibly.

The sound of a startled exclamation came from within the cottage.

"Gussy's given the show away!" cried Tom Merry. "Come on, chaps!"

And the next second Tom Merry burst the cottage door open, and the whole troop of juniors crowded in.

CHAPTER 14.

The Secret Out!

THE two men started back with exclamations of rage and fear. The dramatic interruption had been so sudden that they had been totally unprepared for it. Levison,

twirling round, turned the colour of chalk as he saw who the newcomers were.

"Great Scott!" he muttered blankly.

"Thunder!" shouted Wright. "The infernal young rascal has betrayed us! Quick! Take those papers—"

A lithe form shot forward.

"I'll take them!" cried Denton.

And, almost before Wright could realise what had happened, the new boy at St. Jim's had sprung forward and snatched the precious paper from his hand.

"You little thief!" snarled Wright. "They're—"

"Collar them!" shouted Tom Merry, in the confusion. "Pile on to 'em!"

The juniors complied with a will. They literally flung themselves at the two men, and by sheer force of numbers both Wright and Smith were bowled over like ninepins. They rolled on the floor, roaring out threats.

"You young rascals!" spluttered Wright furiously. "What is the meaning of this outrage? By thunder, you shall suffer—"

"Bai Jove," ejaculated D'Arcy suddenly, "look at the boundal's whiskahs! Gwreat Scott, they are comin' off!"

Blake leaned forward and gave Wright's whiskers a tug. They came off in Blake's hand. Denton uttered a cry of amazement, and turned white.

"Mr. Barratt!" he cried incredulously.

"Yes, Phil!" said the now clean-shaven man hoarsely. "Order these ruffians to release me! I have been working in your interests, and—"

Denton recovered himself with his customary swiftness.

"My hat," he exclaimed in an even voice, "I think I can see through it all! You will have to tell your story to my headmaster, Mr. Barratt, and then to the police!"

"The police!" cried Wright wildly. "You don't mean to say—"

"I mean to say that you have tried to rob me!" flashed back Denton hotly. "Do you think you can bluff your way out of it after this? Come on, chaps, we'll take these rotters to the school and have it out before the Head!"

And in a very few minutes the pair of dejected scoundrels were being marched through the moonlit woods. Levison, in a whirl of fear, followed close behind. The gates of the school were reached, and Tom Merry pulled the porter's bell. It pealed out loudly, and after a little delay Taggles appeared, grumbling. He gazed through the bars at the crowd of juniors.

"Open the gates, Taggy!" said Tom Merry. "Buck up!"

"My heye! What's the meanin' of this here?" demanded Taggles. "I never see such goings-hon! You young rips ought to be in bed!"

"Open the gates!" roared Blake.

Taggles grumbled, but the gates were opened. As it happened, Dr. Holmes had only just left his study to retire for the night, having been kept up by some important examination papers. He was amazed to see the crowd of juniors at his door, and still more amazed when he heard Tom Merry's account of the fight in the cottage.

"Good gracious!" said the Head. "You might have been injured, my boys. But I fail to understand it all. One of these men is Mr. Robert Barratt, who is your guardian, Denton."

(Continued on page 23.)

THERE ARE THRILLS GALORE IN THESE GRIPPING CHAPTERS OF—

The BLACK HAND at ST. FRANK'S!



By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

The Way of Escape!

"THIS is the place," said Chief Inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard.

The motor-coach in which he was riding came to a halt. Behind it another motor-coach and two lorries drew to a standstill, too. And from these vehicles police officers and plain-clothes men poured out.

They were ready for the raid on Gallows Mere—the headquarters of the dreaded Mafia, the Black Hand gang which had been terrorising this quiet corner of Sussex for so many weeks!

Nelson Lee, the schoolmaster detective of St. Frank's, had for a long time been investigating the mystery of Gallows Mere, and at last he had discovered that Dr. Zangari, who posed as an astronomer, was secretly reorganising the Mafia, the notorious secret society which had been extirpated in Italy.

Now the time had come for action—hence the police raid.

The road was very quiet and dark. A wooded hillside rose up to the left, and round that hill, not more than half a mile away, was the grim, old house which sheltered Dr. Zangari and his Italian conspirators.

"Only a little after four," said Inspector Lennard, as he looked at his watch. "Plenty of time before dawn. We're early, Jameson. Mr. Lee ought to be here in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour."

"I hope this raid will put an end to the whole wretched business," said Inspector Jameson anxiously. "Murders and outrages—never had anything like it in the district before!"

"And never likely to again," said the Yard man. "These people aren't ordinary crooks; they're Italian extremists. I'll bet most of 'em joined up with Zangari in order to avoid military service in East Africa. That's the type they are. They figured it was safer to risk imprisonment in England than death from a bullet, or fever, or sunstroke in Abyssinia. They're not true to their own flag, and they're abusing their

privilege of being sheltered in this country. We're going to enjoy the next hour, Jameson, rounding them up."

"It's not going to be easy," said the police inspector. "They'll be desperate, and they're killers!"

"We're taking no chances with them!" retorted Lennard grimly. "If there's any shooting, we'll be the first to shoot. This time we're more than a match for them!"

He spoke with confidence. The police officers and plain-clothes men of the raiding force were even then getting gas-masks ready for emergency donning if they should be required. Every man carried an automatic pistol, and some were armed with rifles, too. The raid which had been planned was to be no velvet-gloved affair. The Italians, Lennard believed, were unsuspecting of any attack, and they would be swamped and overpowered in the first rush.

But Inspector Lennard was wrong.

The wily Zangari, receiving information from his spies, knew of the projected raid, and at that very moment he was preparing for instant flight. Zangari had no illusions; he knew that it would be suicide to remain and give battle. Gallows Mere had to be abandoned. But the organisation of the secret society was extensive, and, unknown to the police, plans had long been made for rapid flight if the occasion should arise.

The occasion had arisen now.

Dr. Zangari stood in the darkness at the bottom of the garden, at the rear of the old house. Shadowy figures were all around him. Others came up from time to time, reporting themselves by number. Every man was dressed from head to foot in black.

"One more," muttered Zangari. "Only one more. So. A pity to sacrifice everything, but there is no alternative." Mazzini, his chief assistant, hovered near.

"Would it not be better, excellency, if we retreated?" he murmured. "We

are dangerously near the house, and if there should be a mishap—"

"Bah! Does blood run in your veins, or water?" interrupted Zangari contemptuously. "Bono will make no mistake; he is our best electrician. Also, he values his own life. Ah! He comes now!"

Like a ghost, a shadowy figure materialised out of the gloom.

"All is ready, excellency," he said briefly.

"You have set the trap?"

"No matter how the house is approached, the invisible rays are ready," replied the other. "The instant the ray is broken, electrical contact will be made with the explosive—"

"And Gallows Mere will go a thousand feet into the air!" gloated Dr. Zangari. "The explosives stored in the cellar are deadly. No man within a hundred yards can survive; and it is certain that the entire raiding party will be annihilated. Thus shall I answer the challenge of the accursed Lee and the police!"

"Is there no danger of a premature explosion?" asked Mazzini, gazing at the shadowy outline of Gallows Mere with apprehension, for it was dangerously near. "Even an animal straying towards the house might break the ray—"

"No, comrade," said Bono. "The rays are five feet above ground level—at about the height of a man's shoulders. Only a horse, or a similar animal, could cause premature disaster."

"Good! You have done well, my friend," said Dr. Zangari. "Now we will go. Lee and the police, when they come, will be blown to eternity. When, later, reinforcements arrive, they will find no trace of us."

He and his men passed out of the Gallows Mere garden, crossed a couple of meadows, and arrived on the banks of the River Stowe. A more secluded spot could not be imagined. There were no roads or footpaths; the river bank, on one side, was heavily wooded. On the other—where Zangari and his men

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were standing—the bank was high and steep. There was no boathouse here, and no boat was visible, either.

But at a word from Zangari an extraordinary thing happened.

With a quiet rumbling, a large part of the grassy bank moved back, revealing a dark cavity. It was, in fact, a cunningly constructed and cleverly camouflaged boathouse. A strange-looking vessel slowly emerged into the river. It was a motor-boat—a craft constructed to Zangari's own orders. It was dead black, heavily armoured, and bullet proof. The deck was very much like that of a submarine.

One by one, obeying Zangari's orders, the men of the Mafia passed down the hatchway into the boat's interior. The vessel was so constructed that it could navigate shallow water. At the same time it was a thoroughly seaworthy craft. Its presence here, hidden in the harmless-looking river bank, was eloquent evidence of the Mafia's preparedness. How easy to slip silently, and invisibly down the river to the sea!

Zangari was the last to enter. The bullet-proof hatch was lowered and secured. Somewhere in the vessel's interior a motor started; but it was so efficiently silenced that scarcely a sound broke the stillness of the night. The strange craft commenced gliding down river, causing only a few ripples to disturb the water. Speed was out of the question, for speed would certainly have sent the vessel aground in the shallows. Moreover, Zangari was particularly anxious to attract no attention. By going down-river slowly, his vessel would remain silent and practically invisible.

So the mysterious craft crept on its journey, like a very ghost of the waterway.

Inspector Lennard looked at his watch again.

"Lee ought to be here by now!" he muttered. "I'm getting fed-up with this waiting."

He was impatient. Actually, the time of the appointment had not yet arrived, for Lennard and the police had reached their position early. But the men, waiting about in the darkness, were becoming restive. They wanted to get into action. Inspector Jameson saw no reason why he should not raid Gallows Mere at once; but Lennard refused. He and Nelson Lee had arranged this thing together, and he was determined to wait until the great detective arrived.

The Yard man walked down the road alone. There was a corner about a hundred yards ahead, and he decided to stroll to it. Perhaps he would meet Lee on the way. He was sorry now that he had not made a more definite arrangement. However, there could be no misunderstanding; Lee was certain to arrive within a few minutes.

The road was very black; the trees on either side intermingled their branches overhead. It was like a black tunnel.

Lennard had almost reached the corner when a startling thing happened. Phut!

A curious sound, like a dull thud, came from overhead. In the same split second, Lennard recognised it for what it was—the report of a silenced pistol! Something struck him; it was like a punch. He experienced a burning sensation, and the next moment staggered drunkenly.

He crashed to the road and lay still, blood pouring from him. A pool began to form on the hard road. No movement came from overhead, no sound

broke the stillness, except the rustling of the breeze in the almost leafless branches.

The seconds ticked away. Half a minute passed. Then, like a ghoul of the night, a black shape dropped to the road with the springiness and agility of a gorilla. It moved forward towards the fallen Yard man.

The mysterious killer, gun in hand, a black patch in the surrounding gloom, bent over Lennard. And Lennard, as though actuated by a hidden spring, leaped upwards and grappled.

With one swift, dexterous twist, he disarmed his antagonist; his legs hooked themselves round the body of the killer, and a moment later they were both rolling over and over on the road.

"Hey! Jameson!" yelled Lennard, with surprising liveliness. "This way—quick!"

A guttural grunt came from his antagonist. The man struggled desperately, and Lennard found it difficult, if not impossible, to retain his hold. For this man was not one of Zangari's Italians, dressed in black—but an almost naked black man, probably an Eritrean, and from head to foot he was smothered in grease. An unlooked-for difficulty. The more Lennard tried to grasp him, the slipperier he became.

Over and over they rolled, and the Yard man, realising that he would not be able to retain his grip, sought desperately to punch his enemy into unconsciousness. Many of his blows found their mark, but they seemed to have no effect. Subdued shouts now came from up the road, accompanied by the sound of running feet.

"This way—this way!" gasped Lennard. "Hurry yourselves!"

But, even as a number of his assistants dashed up, the mysterious black man wriggled free. Like a monkey he found his feet, and bounded off into the night. The police-officers, as they ran up, caught a glimpse of a figure rising in an amazing leap over the hedge which bordered the road; then it had gone.

"Ten thousand curses!" ejaculated Lennard, breathing hard. "I had the devil! If you'd been here ten seconds earlier—Gosh! My shoulder hurts!"

"What happened?" panted Jameson agitatedly.

"That brute was perched up in the tree—one of Zangari's outposts, I suppose," grunted Lennard. "He took a pot shot at me as I walked underneath. Silenced gun. I thought I was only scratched—"

"Good heavens! You're badly hurt, Mr. Lennard!" said Jameson, as he flashed on an electric torch.

The Yard man was a shocking sight. He was smothered in grime from head to foot, and his left sleeve was saturated with blood; blood dripped from his hand.

"Funny," he muttered. "I thought it was only a scratch. Didn't feel anything at first. Phew! It's hurting now, though!"

They ripped off his coat, tore open his shirt, and revealed the wound. The bullet had crashed through the fleshy part of his shoulder, missing the bone by a fraction. It was a nasty and ugly wound, and it was now having its effect.

"There's a first aid outfit in one of the coaches," said Jameson, his voice shaky. "Bring Mr. Lennard along, men. We'll patch him up, and then leave him comfortable in one of the seats—"

"Nothing doing," interrupted Lennard. "What do you take me for? Just shove a bandage on this with some iodine, or something, and I'll be all right. I can't miss the raid!"

"But you're badly hurt, Mr. Lennard," protested Jameson. "You can't do anything more to-night—"

"Can't I? We'll see about that," grunted the Yard man. "Don't make such a fuss. It looks a lot worse than it is. Come on—we've got to look lively!"

He was angry. Being winged at such a critical time was exasperating; and he was annoyed because the killer had escaped.

The killer, at that moment, was rushing forward to a dreadful doom.

Fate plays strange tricks—and this trick was one of the strangest of all. Dr. Zangari had laid a dreadful trap—a murderous trap—for the police raiders. Yet it was one of Zangari's own men whom Fate selected as a victim! Little as Inspector Lennard realised it at the time, the very man who had wounded him was to be the means of saving his life—and the lives of all the other police officers!

The black man, lurking in the tree, watching the road, had known something was afoot. He had believed that his shot had killed the man beneath him; then in the struggle he realised the truth. The men were police officers. It was his duty to rush straight to Zangari and give the alarm. For this sentry watching the road knew nothing of the events which had taken place at Gallows Mere. He was a man who had been forgotten—or at least, abandoned.

He reached Gallows Mere. The road in front of the old house was deserted. The house itself was black; not a light gleamed from any window. Everything seemed peaceful and quiet. It was the hour before dawn—the darkest hour of all.

The Eritrean vaulted the gate, and, taking to the grass, padded towards the silent house. He felt that he would be richly rewarded by Dr. Zangari.

Nearer and nearer to the house he crept—nearer and nearer to that deadly invisible ray, the breaking of which would cause an electrical contact down in the very cellars of Gallows Mere.

Nearer and nearer!

Fifteen feet from the house he walked into the invisible ray—and one second later he was dead, blown to a million fragments.

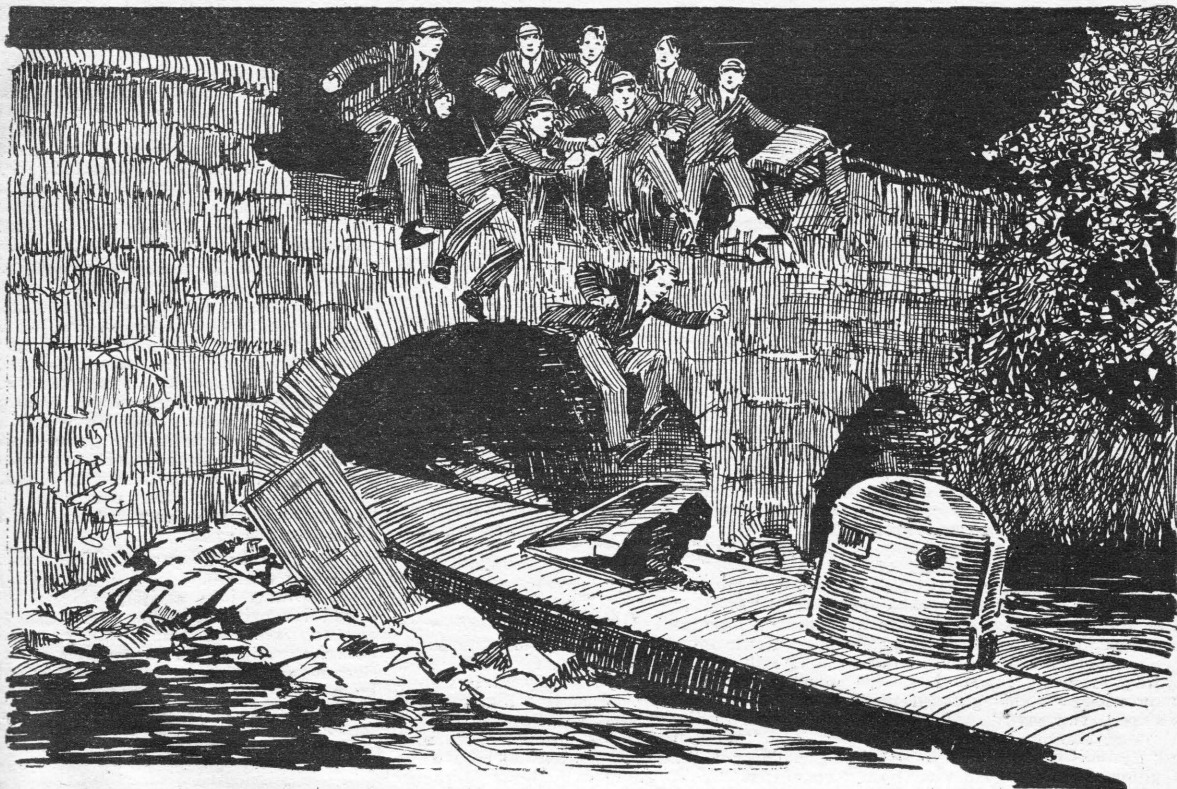
The explosion was like the knell of doom itself—a crashing, ear-splitting detonation which shook the countryside for miles and broke the windows of every house in the neighbourhood.

As for Gallows Mere, it ceased to exist.

First a lurid, reddish blaze of hideous fire leaped 300 feet straight into the air; immediately following, the walls of the old house burst outwards; the blast of the explosion was so terrific that bricks and stones were hurled outwards and upwards for 500 to 600 yards. Gallows Mere in those brief seconds was razed completely to the ground—every wall, every outbuilding. Not a tree in the gardens remained standing; the expensive and elaborately equipped observatory was blown to fragments like everything else. There remained nothing but a vast crater in the earth—a crater which burst into livid flame.

Up to Nipper & Co.!

THAT terrible explosion was heard all over Sussex—and by the adjoining counties, too. People of the immediate neighbourhood, awakened from sleep, were bewildered, and, indeed, frightened. Scores of windows in Bannington, three miles away, were shattered. A few minutes after the explosion the entire town was



As the hatch cover of the mystery vessel started opening, the head and shoulders of a black-garbed figure appeared. Nipper gave a shout of warning. "All serene!" yelled Handforth. "Leave it to me!" And he projected himself from the bridge and dropped down on to the opening hatchway.

wakeful, and people were streaming out into the streets for information.

Of all the people who were staggered by the explosion—and they included all the fellows of St. Frank's, who were roused from their sleep—three parties were affected more than any of the others.

Dr. Zangari and his men, within the armoured motor-boat, gliding down the river, heard the terrific detonation and felt the concussion.

"So!" gloated Zangari, his eyes burning. "We left none too soon, my comrades! The explosion, it was a success—yes? Lee and his accursed policemen are no more!"

"But everything is lost, excellency," muttered Mazzini with regret. "The work of many months, our stores, our explosives—"

"Yet we are free—and we shall begin again," interrupted Zangari. "Success will be all the sweeter when it is finally ours. Nothing can hinder our escape now. The police are dead, the people of the district are in a panic. We shall be unmolested on our way to the sea. And when we reach the sea—I have plans. Yes, we have a haven to which we can go. Leave it to me, my comrades."

Nelson Lee, on his way to join the "Fighting Eight" on Willard's Island—for he was faithful to his promise—was brought up in mid-stride by the explosion.

The Fighting Eight were Nipper and his chums of St. Frank's, who had also been fighting against Zangari & Co. To safeguard themselves against the latter's gangsters they had fortified themselves on Willard's Island. They were there now, waiting for Lee to give

them the word to join in the raid on Gallows Mere.

The terrific explosion seemed to come to Lee out of the sky, and the ground beneath his feet rocked. He spun round, staring. He saw a ghastly flame in the sky. It flickered and died, and a moment later was succeeded by a yellow glare. And the direction was the direction of Gallows Mere.

"Great heavens!" muttered the detective, aghast.

His thoughts were for Inspector Lennard and his men. Running hard, he sprinted over the fields and meadows towards Gallows Mere. In that moment of dire emergency he had forgotten about Nipper & Co. on Willard's Island.

They, expecting Nelson Lee every moment, were ready for the coming action. They were eager and alert. Then—the explosion. It staggered them, bewildered them. The very walls of the miniature castle shook. They knew that the explosion must have been of terrific force.

"Gallows Mere!" ejaculated Nipper tensely. "Look at that glare! Something's happened—"

"It's a dirty trick!" roared Handforth. "Mr. Lee hasn't kept his promise! The police have raided the place already, and we've been left in the lurch! By George! That's pretty low down of Mr. Lee—"

"Shut up!" snapped Nipper. "My gov'nor wouldn't let us down—and you know it! Whatever's happened is something none of us bargained for."

"Well, why stay here?" asked William Napoleon Browne. "It seems to me, Brother Nipper, that we should do a considerable amount of dashing across the landscape."

"Absolutely," said Archie Glen-thorne.

"Come on!" yelled Handforth.

"No, no! Wait!" shouted Nipper.

"Wait? What for?"

"My gov'nor said he would come for us," replied Nipper steadily. "If we go blundering into the thing without orders we don't know what'll happen. Mr. Lee promised, and he'll keep his promise. He may need us. And then where will he be if he sends for us and we're gone?"

"Something in that," said Tommy Watson. "We'd better stay, I suppose."

They stayed.

Meanwhile, Inspector Lennard and his men, only half a mile from Gallows Mere, felt the actual shock of the explosion more than anybody else. Lennard's arm had just been bandaged, and then came the blast. The ear-splitting report was instantly followed by a blast of wind which sent scores of trees crashing down—some across the road, missing the police by inches. Most of the men were bowled over like ninepins, but, fortunately, none was hurt, they were deafened and dazed. Beyond the hillside, beyond the trees, they could see an unearthly glare.

"Come on!" yelled Lennard. "No sense in waiting here any longer. Sounds as if Gallows Mere has gone up in smoke. We'd better go and see."

Still bewildered and deafened, the raiding party went running down the road, Inspector Lennard at its head. They were obliged, here and there, to climb over fallen trees. But at last they rounded the hillside and came in sight of more level ground. There, only 300 yards away, was an area of leaping fire. The flames, curiously purple, were flickering weirdly; they lit up the whole awful scene.

"Ye gods and little fishes! Where's the house?" muttered Lennard, blinking.

"It's gone—absolutely gone!" panted Jameson. "Look! There's not a wall left—not even a tree! Gallows Mere has been wiped off the face of the earth!"

"House, observatory, outbuildings—everything!" said the Yard man. "Well, I'm hanged! So that's Zangari's reply, is it? Seems to me he must have known of this raid."

While they were standing there watching, fascinated by that sight, a running figure approached. Lennard was the first to see it, and his hand went automatically towards his gun. But he checked; he recognised the runner.

"Lee!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward. "A bit late, aren't you?" "No; it is not yet four-thirty," replied Lee. "Good heavens, Lennard, I'm glad to see you! I feared that you and your men—"

"Had gone up with that lot?" said the inspector, nodding towards the blazing crater. "No, thanks. Not this time. How it happened I don't know. But either Zangari and his crowd escaped, or they've taken a swift journey to Kingdom Come."

"Zangari is not the kind of man to make such a blunder," said Nelson Lee. "It's far more likely that he has twigged us—Hallo! You're winged, Lennard. How did that happen?"

The inspector briefly explained. "Oh, indeed!" said Lee, his eyes narrowing. "This greased black man escaped, you say?"

"Yes, confound him!"

"The odds are he ran straight to Gallows Mere, to give the alarm," continued Lee. "It looks ugly."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we have all escaped death by a miracle."

"I don't get you."

"But surely it's obvious? Zangari, somehow, must have got word of our raid," said Nelson Lee. "Either my trick failed—which I don't think likely—or Zangari's spies saw you leaving Bannington, and gave the alarm."

"So what?"

"Zangari immediately decided to abandon Gallows Mere—and rather than let it fall into our hands, he planned to destroy it—and us with it."

"Great Scott!"

"That black man ran straight to the house," continued Lee. "He knew nothing of the preparations; unconsciously, he must have made the electrical contact which detonated the explosive. Probably an invisible ray. I know for a fact that Zangari has already used invisible rays. Don't you understand? If everything had gone as we had planned, we should have encircled the house, and we should have crept nearer and nearer. Then one of us would have broken the ray—"

"And we should have been blown to fragments," put in Inspector Jameson shakily. "Good heavens! What an escape! You're right, Mr. Lee; we've been saved by a miracle."

"Funny, when you come to think of it," said Lennard. "I've got a wound in my shoulder, and I shall probably be laid up for a week or two; but it's saved my life. Queer how things happen."

"And Zangari has escaped, after all," said Lee regretfully. "It's a pity. There's nothing more we can do now."

"We can search the countryside—"

"Not much use, I'm afraid," said Lee. "Zangari and his men have obtained a good start, and there is no telling which direction they took. The only consolation is that the brutes are cleared out of the district for good. But they'll

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recommence their activities elsewhere. Yes, it's a pity. I hoped to round them all up to-night."

"Why doesn't the gov'nor send for us?" muttered Nipper anxiously.

He and his chums were on the battlements of the quaint little castle, watching—waiting. They had waited for over ten minutes. The glare in the sky was more pronounced than ever. Motor-cars were racing up Bellton Lane, towards Edgmore. Bellton village was full of lights. People had been aroused throughout the countryside, and many were motoring towards the scene of the glare, filled with curiosity.

But the boys on Willard's Island remained idle.

Even Nipper was getting impatient now. It occurred to him at last that Nelson Lee, with no intention of breaking faith, had forgotten them. That explosion had driven everything else out of his mind.

"I say!" exclaimed Church, suddenly running up to Nipper. "Have you seen Handy?"

"No."

"He's missing."

"What?"

"Mac and I thought he had gone down into the building for something, but there's no sign of him," said Church. "I'll bet the silly ass has gone off on his own. Just like him to do a dotty thing of that sort."

"Well, we're all going off," said Nipper grimly. "I'm fed-up with waiting. We're going to Gallows Mere—to find out what's happened."

Meanwhile, Edward Oswald Handforth was very wet, but very pleased with himself.

It was quite true that he had "gone off on his own." His was not the nature to wait with patience for a summons. He wanted to be up and doing. So at the first opportunity he had slipped away from his watchful chums, and then quietly he had plunged into the river and had swum to the opposite bank. The water was icy cold, but Handforth did not care. He had had enough of waiting.

Pulling himself out of the river, he dodged behind some willows—in case he should be seen by his watching school-fellows—and then ran along the towing-path. Soon he was completely out of sight, and he continued running hard.

"The fatheads!" he muttered. "If they like to stick on the giddy island and miss everything, let 'em! I'm jolly well going to be on the scene of action!"

The hard running, immediately following his immersion, soon put him into a warm glow, in spite of his wet and clinging clothes. As long as he kept active he would come to no harm. He ran on tirelessly, his gaze always on the glare in the distance.

But suddenly his attention was distracted.

As he ran alongside the silent, lonely river, he caught a glimpse of some strange ripples on the surface of the water. The river was broad just here, and the surface until a moment ago had been still. At first he thought the ripples had been caused by a fish, and he ran on. But then he checked. He caught a glimpse of a dark object moving slowly down-stream. He halted in his tracks, staring.

"My only sainted aunt!" he breathed.

He saw then that the object was a strange-looking boat. It was not an open boat, and no human figures were visible. All he could see was a covered

deck and a projecting tower, squat and rounded, not unlike the conning tower of a submarine.

Handforth was not usually quick-witted; his faithful chums, indeed, frankly called him dense. But he was not dense at this minute. He quickly put two and two together. The great explosion had happened about twenty minutes ago, and now a mysterious covered-in craft was stealing slowly and silently down the river towards the sea!

It could mean but one thing! Zangari and his men, warned of the coming raid, had blown Gallows Mere to fragments, so that it would not fall into the hands of the police, and were escaping! And unless something was done pretty quickly, they would escape!

Obviously, there was no pursuit. Nelson Lee and the police knew nothing of this cunning move. But Fate—again taking a tricky hand in the game—had brought the men of the Mafia down the River Stowe. And the Fighting Eight, the boys who had been the ruin of Zangari from the very start, were located on the river!

"My only hat!" gurgled Handforth. "It's our chance!"

He sprang into activity. He abandoned his original plan. One glance at the boat told him that he could easily outstrip it. It was going downstream cautiously, steered, evidently, by a man who knew the deeper channel. Such a craft must of necessity make the journey with caution.

Handforth ran like mad.

To his satisfaction he found there was no necessity to swim across to Willard's Island, for Nipper and the others had got out one of their boats, and had crossed to the main bank. They were, in fact, about to hurry along the towing-path when Handforth came dashing up.

"So there you are!" exclaimed McClure. "Where the dickens have you been, Handy?"

Handforth, almost exhausted, waved his arms wildly.

"Boat—Zangari—coming down—escaping!" he gurgled jerkily.

"What!"

"Say it again, Handy."

"Give him time," said Nipper.

Handforth fought for his breath.

"There's a rummy-looking boat—coming downstream," he explained at length. "Like a submarine! I was running towards Gallows Mere—saw it. Coming this way—might be here any minute. By George! Don't you understand, you chaps? It's our chance!"

"Our chance for what?" asked Church.

"Gallows Mere has been blown to bits—and the police have failed!" gasped Handforth. "But we're not going to fail! Didn't I say from the very first that we'd get Zangari's crowd? So we shall! I tell you it's our chance!"

"By Jove, he's right, you chaps!" said Nipper keenly. "It's up to us now!"

It was a time for instant action, and although it was Handforth who had made the big discovery, Nipper was the fellow to organise the operations for the big capture.

The Last Round-up!

NIPPER was at his best in an emergency. There was no time to get in touch with Nelson Lee or the police. The situation was clear enough: Dr. Zangari had blown up Gallows Mere and was

in flight. A boat of curious design was carrying Zangari and his men to the sea—

"The bridge!" said Nipper abruptly.

"Eh?"

"Come on—follow me!" said Nipper crisply.

He gave them no opportunity of asking questions. He ran at top speed down the towing-path. The others, without hesitation, followed. Handforth, who had had a brief rest, was full of beans again. He ran strongly.

For half a mile they went, keeping to the towing-path and making the speed of track racers. The river grew narrower, and, just ahead, was spanned by an ancient stone bridge which carried a little-used by-road. Nipper called a halt at the bridge, and his eyes were blazing.

"What's the idea?" asked McClure. "What are we going to do now?"

"Spill it, old boy!" urged Tregellis-West.

"See these boulders?" said Nipper, pointing to a great heap of rocks. "Four of us are going to carry them up on to the bridge and drop 'em in the river."

"What the dickens—"

"The other four will dash about and wrench gates off their hinges and carry them here," continued Nipper. "Look lively! If you find any other big things, such as loose gateposts, bring 'em along!"

"But—but—"

"You get the idea, don't you?" went on Nipper quickly. "There's not a second to lose. The river's narrow here, and Zangari's boat must pass beneath the bridge. If we can drop things into the river, and block the channel, the boat won't be able to pass under the bridge—"

"By George! That's pretty good!" exclaimed Handforth eagerly. "Then we shall have the advantage, eh? Being up on the bridge, we can drop things on the rotters if they try to escape! Good egg! Let's get going!"

A moment later the eight determined schoolboys were working as they had never worked in their lives before. Four of them, according to Nipper's orders, carried the great boulders of rock upon the bridge, and toppled them over, and they splashed dully into the river. Others raced about, searching for gates.

They found several, and three of them, at least, were easily removed from their hinges and carried to the bridge. The gates, too, went down into the water, and although one floated away the others jammed and formed an obstruction. More boulders followed. Then Browne made a big discovery.

"Look at the stones of this wall," he said. "Some of them are positively loose, brothers. Why do all this fetching and carrying when we have material right at hand?"

As he spoke, he wrenched at one of the ancient stones of the bridge's parapet, and it toppled over into the water. In a moment the other boys were doing the same. The stones, once loosened, came away freely; within a few minutes half the wall was demolished, descending in a great rain of loosened stones into the river.

"Look out!" said Nipper suddenly. "Better stop now. Here comes the boat."

"Crumbs!"

"Get your guns out, and don't hesitate to use 'em if the blighters start firing," said Nipper. "Don't forget they're desperate. They're killers. We mustn't take any chances."

They crouched back, waiting with bated breath. They could just see the river shimmering in the gloom, and on the surface of it, coming slowly nearer, was the strange, submarine-like boat containing Dr. Zangari and his men of the Mafia. The boat was being steered straight for the arch of the bridge, in midstream. The obstruction, part of which projected above the surface of the water, was invisible in the blackness of the arch.

Nearer came the boat.

The steersman in the little tower evidently had no suspicion that anything was wrong. To him the river looked quiet and deserted. This stealthy, creeping escape down the stream seemed certain of success. Dr. Zangari, indeed, had no qualms of any kind. He and his men were quite secure within the boat: it was bullet proof, and if a hundred police officers fired at it they could do no damage. Zangari felt that he could defy the forces of law and order.

Zurrrrrr-thud!

The boat's nose entered the blackness underneath the arch, and then, the following second, a dull crashing sound came to the ears of the boys overhead. The boat came to a complete stop.

The obstruction had served its purpose.

"Now!" panted Handforth triumphantly. "Quick, you chaps! Down with the bricks and stones!"

"Hurrah!"

"We've got 'em!"

"Rather!"

Without a second's pause the Fighting Eight dislodged the great stones and blocks of brick, and sent them crashing down upon the enemy vessel's closed-in metal deck.

Clatter! Bang! Thud! Crash!

The hail of missiles became an avalanche. In the midst of the commotion the metal hatch cover started opening, and the head and shoulders of a black-garbed figure appeared. Nipper gave a shout of warning.

"All serene!" yelled Handforth. "Leave it to me!"

He projected himself into midair, dropped like a stone, and landed on the hatch cover. With a clang it dropped back into place, but not before the boys heard a confused, wild shouting in Italian.

In a moment Handforth's example was followed. For the boys had seen by this time that there was only the one hatchway. If that could be held down, Zangari and his men would be bottled up, caught in their own boat! This secret boat, in which they sought freedom, could be converted into a metal prison!

Church and McClure and Tommy Watson dropped, and they added their weight to that of Handforth.

"Now try to get out!" shouted Handforth triumphantly. "By George, we've bagged 'em, you chaps!"

"Not yet!" panted Church. "I say, we'll never be able to keep this hatch-cover down! It's operated by machinery, and—Whoa! We'd better look out!"

Nipper, at least, realised the peril of his companions. If the hatch should be forced open, Zangari's men, armed with deadly gas pistols, would start opera-

tions at once. They would have no mercy.

Nipper was quick to put another plan into operation.

Earlier, he had seen a telegraph-pole lying by the side of the towing-path. He gave a shout, and he and Browne and Archie Glenthorpe and Tregellis-West hauled at the pole, and succeeded in swinging it across the river.

"Look out, you chaps!" shouted Nipper. "Grab hold! Jam it across the top of the hatchway."

"Good egg!" yelled Handforth.

Crash!

Before the covering could be opened again the pole was in position; one end of it, on the river bank, was jammed against the brickwork of the bridge. The four boys raced round, seized the other end of the pole, and, heaving with all their strength, jammed this into position on the other side of the river.

The boat, already aground, its flat bottom obstructed by the stones and boulders, was pressed hard down by the telegraph pole which straddled it. The pole itself lay across the hatchway, so there was no possibility of the men forcing their way out.

"Your guns!" panted Nipper. "Fire 'em into the air, but go easy! We've got to attract attention. We've done pretty well so far, but we need help now."

"Anyway, they can't say we didn't make the final capture!" chuckled Handforth.

Crack, crack, crack, crack!

The guns which were in the boys' possession were fired one after the other, and the reports rang out with staccato sharpness on the night air.

Nelson Lee and Inspector Lennard, and a group of other police officers, approaching Willard's Island to tell the boys that there would be "nothing doing," heard the reports, and were startled.

"Pistol shots!" ejaculated Lee. "And the boys aren't here!"

"I'll bet they're up to some mischief!" grunted Lennard. "Those sounds came from down-stream, didn't they? We'd better go and have a look."

But Lee was not there to answer; he was already running down the towing-path. He was intensely relieved, some minutes later, to find Nipper and the other boys near the old bridge, and they all seemed unharmed. Lee noticed, however, that the bridge was greatly damaged.

"What has been happening here, Nipper?" he asked sharply.

"Plenty, sir!" replied Nipper. "I believe you've lost Zangari and his crowd, haven't you?"

"Yes; they managed to get away—"

"They didn't get far," interrupted Nipper. "Sorry to dish you out of the glory, gov'nor; but we chaps started this thing, and we've finished it! Allow us to make you a present of Dr. Zangari and his Black Hand gang!"

And that, as Handforth gleefully remarked, was that!

The excitement was over. Nelson Lee and the police now took charge of the enemy boat, and, with all hope of resistance gone, Zangari and his men came out one by one—to be handcuffed and taken away. It was the end of the "reign of terror" at St. Frank's.

And the Fighting Eight, needless to say, were not only the heroes of the hour, but heroes for a full nine days, subsided. And life at the old school, after the recent hectic weeks, resumed the even tenor of its way.

THE END.

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THE NEW BOY'S SECRET!

(Continued from page 22.)

"I know, sir," said the new boy. "He's a treacherous rotter!" Dr. Holmes turned to the shrinking scoundrel.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he asked sternly. "I understood you to say in my former interview with you that you had gone to Alaska."

Robert Barratt looked up wretchedly. "That was my intention, Dr. Holmes," he said earnestly. "Heaven forgive me! I was tempted, and proved too weak to resist it. I will make a full confession."

And now, thoroughly cowed, Barratt told the Head how he had given way to temptation. It seemed that when Denton's father had died—or, rather, before he died—he had made out a plan of a cache in the hills where he had hidden a considerable fortune of gold-dust and nuggets. This plan he had managed to send to Robert Barratt, an old friend in England, who had charge of his son. Barratt had shown the plan to Denton, and had told the boy that it was necessary for him to go out to Alaska to clear up some minor parts concerning Mr. Denton's death.

Barratt had left the plan with the boy, thus disarming Denton of any vestige of suspicion. Barratt had sent Denton to a Public school because it seemed to be the safest place for the boy to be at. Then, when Denton was at St. Jim's, Barratt had come to the district with a confederate—both of them in disguise—and planned to rob Denton of the plan. In this way Denton would simply miss the plan, and know nothing about how it came to be lost. He could not possibly dream of implicating Mr. Barratt. The guardian would return home after a month or two, and would say that all was ready for him to go out and fetch the gold.

Denton would then have told him that the plan was stolen. How could Denton have guessed that Barratt himself was the culprit?

The scheme was certainly ingenious, and but for the juniors of St. Jim's would have been successful.

"It is a miserable story," said the Head sternly, when he had heard all. "In addition to robbing this young lad, you deliberately dragged into your plot another junior of this school—Levison. I will not say that Levison was not greatly to blame, but I have no doubt that you intimidated him into working out your rascally scheme."

"Yes, sir, that's right!" said Levison eagerly.

"Silence!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes sternly. "Levison, you may go to your dormitory; I will deal with you tomorrow. I shall not expel you, because I believe you have been practically forced to do this man's will. Nevertheless, I shall give you a severe flogging. Go!"

Levison went, feeling quite relieved. "As for you, you scoundrels, I shall immediately send for the police—"

Denton interposed.

"Don't you think, sir, it would be best to let the matter drop?" he asked quietly. "We don't want a public scandal about St. Jim's, sir—and, after all, I've got the plan. Barratt's had all his trouble for nothing. So why not let him go? I'm sure I don't want to give him in charge of the police, although he deserves it."

Dr. Holmes lifted his eyebrows. "You have a generous heart, my boy," he said. "But the story would get about. All these boys here know about it—"

"We shouldn't say a word, sir!" said Tom Merry quickly.

"Rather not, sir!" added Blake. "Bai Jove! The affair would be kept a strict secret, sir!"

"Sure, and so it would!" All the juniors were agreed upon it. They would keep the matter a dead secret. Robert Barratt and his wretched

companion listened with anxious ears. The Head thought for a moment, then he looked sternly at the two miserable men.

"Owing to this lad's kindness—the lad whom you tried to rob—you are being given a chance of escape," said the Head coldly. "Go! And never allow your faces to be seen in the vicinity of St. Jim's again! If they are, or if you try to molest this lad further, I will immediately take steps to have you arrested. That is all. Go!"

Dr. Holmes pointed to the door. A minute later the two scoundrels slunk out and vanished into the night.

The juniors kept their word. Not a word was breathed about the midnight adventure, and the rest of St. Jim's never knew about that exciting hour. Taggles was given a liberal tip to hold his tongue, and everything turned out satisfactorily.

Denton stayed at St. Jim's another ten days, then Dr. Holmes learned that a relative of one of the seniors was travelling out to Alaska. Dr. Holmes arranged that Denton should go out to Alaska with this gentleman, and both were more than agreeable.

A big feed was given to Denton on his last night at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry's study was packed to overflowing. And the following morning Tom Merry & Co. were given leave to see Denton off at the station.

It was a rather regretful little crowd of juniors who tramped back to St. Jim's in the keen morning sunlight. Denton had made himself thoroughly at home while he had been at the old school, and the School House were very sorry to part with the junior who had held such a valuable secret.

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