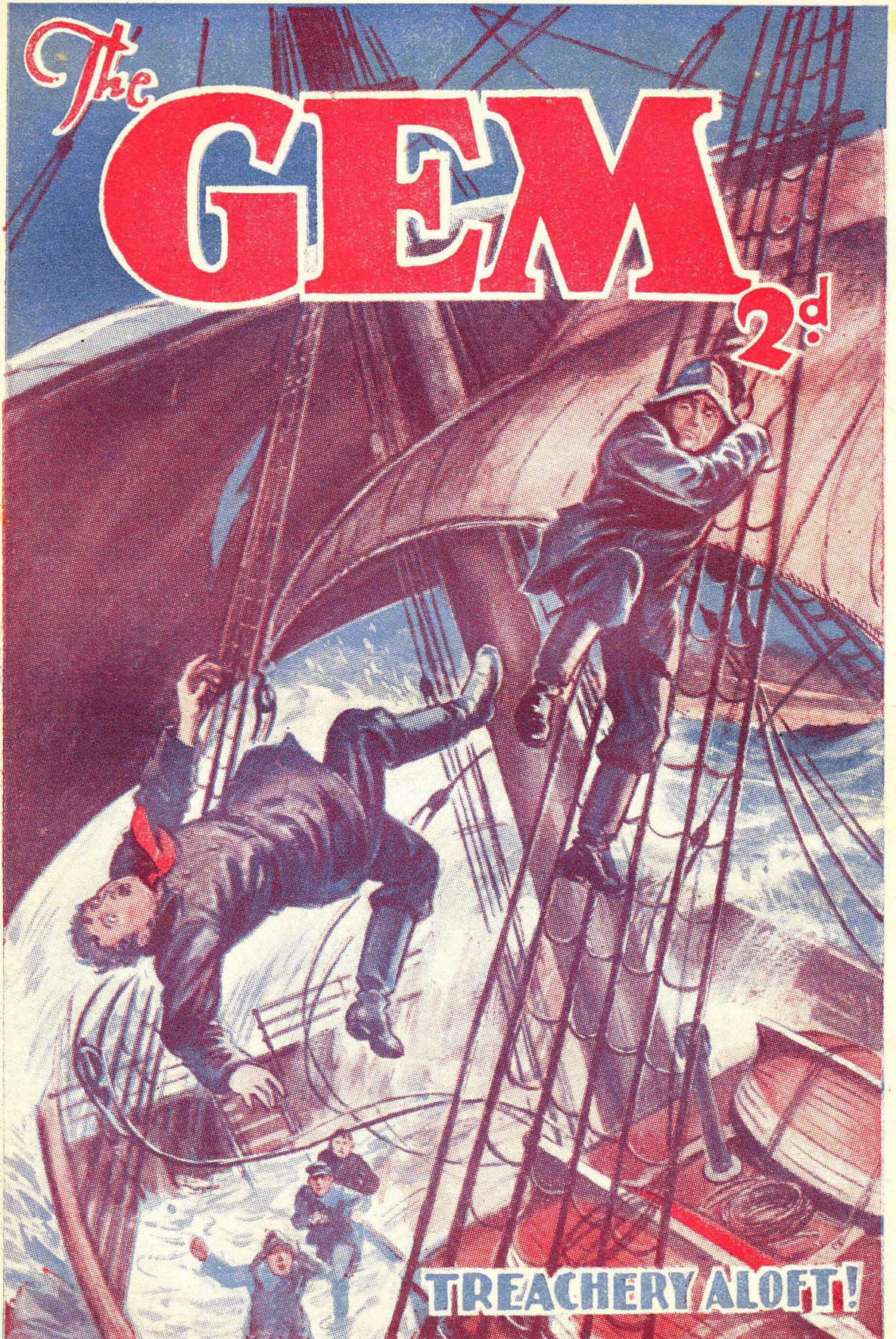


"THE SHANGHAIED. SCHOOLBOYS!" Super Story of Sea Adventure **INSIDE!**
Starring the Chums of St. Jim's

The

GEM

2^d



TREACHERY ALOFT!

The SHANGHAIED



The boat containing Tom Merry & Co. bumped against the Ramhunder, and Captain Gunn looked down over the side. "Got them?" he asked. "Ay, ay, sir!" replied the mate. "You know what to do, then, Mr. Harker!" said the skipper.

CHAPTER 1.

An Exceptional Case!

TOM MEWZY—"Slips!" said Tom Merry. "Tom Mewzy, deah boy," repeated Arthur Augustus, gently but firmly, "I am speakin' to you!"

"Slips!"

"I was about to wemark—"

"Then don't!" said Tom Merry, apparently waking up from his deep reverie, and looking absently at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. "Can't you see that your uncle is worried? Slips, or—"

"I was goin' to say—"

"The question is," said Tom Merry, wrinkling his brows in deep thought, "whether I'd better put Manners in the slips in Blake's place. It's like Blake's cheek to say he can't play on Wednesday, and cause all this bother to a harmless and necessary cricket captain."

"You will requiah a new first slip as well, Tom Mewzy," said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry stared at him.

As junior captain of the School House at St. Jim's, he had all the worries of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,485.

the junior eleven on his shoulders, and the announcement of Jack Blake of the Fourth that he wouldn't be able to play on Wednesday was a worry to him. The further announcement of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that he wouldn't be able to play was distinctly exasperating.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry warmly, "I'm getting fed-up! I'm a jolly good mind to leave you both out for good, and put in a couple of New House chaps permanently in your places!"

"Oh wats!"

"Blessed if I know what you're thinking of!" said Tom indignantly. "What do you mean by slacking, you young boudners?"

"I'm not slackin', deah boy; but I have a vevy important engagement for to-morrow aftahnoon. Aftah all, the village match is not vevy important, and it will be a chance for some of the othah membahs of the club to show what they can do," said Arthur Augustus generously. "I believe in givin' evvry chap a chance. And the team will beat Wylcombe Village, anyway."

"That's not the point. I don't like shirkers!" said Tom Merry severely. "Blow your important engagements!

Chap oughtn't to make a date when he knows there's a cricket match on!"

"I am goin' to have a motor-car out—"

"Blow your motor-car!"

"Blake is comin' with me—"

"So that's why Blake can't play! Like his cheek!"

"And I've asked Lowthah—"

"No good asking Lowther; he won't cut the cricket match to come out in a rotten motor-car!" grinned Tom Merry.

"And he said 'Yaas!'"

"Wh-at!"

"And now—"

"Look here, I'm not going to stand it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Three members of my blessed eleven standing out of a cricket match because you're taking them out for a run! Why, it's rotten! It's the limit! Do you want me to fill up the team with New House fellows? I tell you, I won't hear of it!"

"But, weally, deah boy—"

Tom Merry waved his hand.

"I won't hear a word of it! You're going to play! I can't have my team mucked up because you're taking out a motor-car!"

"We're goin' on a good long wun," said Arthur Augustus. "We're goin'

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SCHOOLBOYS! By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

wight down to the coast, and along the coast aftah that, and then——"

"You're not!" said Tom Merry decidedly.

"Don't you think it will be wippin'?" demanded D'Arcy. "It looks like bein' fine weathah, and we shall weach the coast and have a wippin' wun along in sight of the sea, with a splendid feed at Seacliff Hotel at Sandycliff——"

"Yes; it would be ripping if it came off!" said Tom Merry. "But it's not coming off! My cricket team isn't going to be mucked up so that you can go and gorge at the Seacliff Hotel at Sandycliff! Not much!"

"And then a wun home in the evenin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I've got special permish to stay out aftah callin' o'vah!"

"Permission from whom?"

"F'rom the Housemastah, of course."

"You've got to get permission from me yet," said Tom Merry. "It can't be did! Cricket comes first! Not a word! You're not going!"

"I shall insist upon goin', deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "The othah fellows will be able to beat Wylcombe without me."

"Very likely; but it's the principle of the thing," said Tom Merry. "Cricket matches can't be fooled about in this way! Three players taking themselves off like this, and only telling their captain the day before the match! It's the limit! I tell you, it can't be did!"

"Four playahs, deah boy!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Four!" howled Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say you've got the awful cheek to ask another member of the team?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You—you cheeky image!"

"You see, the car is built to accommodate four fellows quite comfortably, and four is a vevy good numbah——"

"Why don't you ask the whole blessed team?" shouted Tom Merry.

"The car wouldn't hold them, deah boy," said D'Arcy innocently. "I'm askin' two of the Shell, and Blake and I are two of the Fourth, so that's fair all wound!"

"And the fourth chap—what's his name?" growled Tom Merry. "Who's the other measly rotter who's going off and leaving me in the lurch to-morrow?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if you start cackling, I'll wipe up the floor with you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry wasted no more time in words. He laid a sudden grasp upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and proceeded to wipe up the floor with him. The swell of St. Jim's ceased to laugh, and roared instead.

"Ow! Ow! Welease me, you silly ass! You are wumplin' my clothes! Yawoooh!"

Bump!

The two juniors rolled on the floor of the passage together. Arthur Augustus was undermost, and Tom Merry proceeded to sit on his chest and keep him there.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gasped and panted for breath.

"Gewwoogh! Gewwup! Lemme gewwup, you wottah! Wow-ow!"

Blake, Monty Lowther, and Manners came dashing along the passage.

"What's the row?" demanded Blake of the Fourth. "Great Scott! Is that the way you receive invitations to motor drives, Tom Merry?"

Tom Merry jumped.

"Invitations! What do you mean? I——"

"You—you fwabjous ass!" gurgled Arthur Augustus. "I was just goin' to tell you the name of the chap I was mentionin'! The name is Tom Mewwy!"

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

"Howevah," gasped Arthur Augustus, when he was permitted to regain his feet and dust himself down with his handkerchief—"howevah, if you weally feel that you can't miss the cwicket match——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Tom Merry cordially. "I'll ask Figgins of the New House to captain the side. He'll do it like a bird. It's not such a vevy important match, after all. They'll easily beat Rylcombe without us."

=====

Shanghaied aboard an old tramp ship—compelled to work under the toughest crew who ever sailed before a mast—and wrecked in mid-Atlantic! It was a vivid, thrilling glimpse of life at sea that was the outcome of Tom Merry & Co.'s excursion to the seaside!

=====

"But if cwicket comes before ewevythin' else——"

"Well, there are exceptional cases," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "and, upon the whole, I think this is one of them. It's settled."

And it was settled.

— —

CHAPTER 2.

Off!

FOUR juniors of the School House at St. Jim's were looking particularly cheerful the next morning.

The four were Tom Merry and Monty Lowther of the Shell, and Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form. There were smiles of anticipation upon their faces even during morning lessons.

They were looking forward very much to that excursion.

When Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, did things, he did them in style. There was no denying that. Being the son of a noble lord, Arthur Augustus had many little advantages, among them being the use of the parental motor-car on occasions.

Lord Eastwood was sending the car

that afternoon in charge of the chauffeur—though Arthur Augustus would have been equally pleased to dispense with the chauffeur. Arthur Augustus could drive a car, and drive it well; but his noble pater probably had some doubts about letting a party of juniors take entire charge of a car that had cost his lordship a thousand pounds.

After lessons that morning Arthur Augustus was busy in superintending the packing of a gigantic luncheon-basket that was to be taken in the car.

All his friends lent him expert advice on the subject. Fatty Wynn of the New House took quite a fatherly interest in the lunch-basket. He carried his kindness so far as to sample all the good things that were packed in it—indeed, Monty Lowther remarked that it was doubtful, at the finish, whether there was more of the grub in the lunch-basket than there was in Fatty Wynn.

Figgins of the Fourth had cordially agreed to skipper the junior eleven in the cricket match. Figgys was all the more willing to do that because he had a secret persuasion that his skippering would be of superior quality to that of any School House chap—even Tom Merry's.

After dinner, when Arthur Augustus and his comrades were expecting the car, D'Arcy was the cynosure of all eyes, and the recipient of kind attentions from all sorts and conditions of fellows, who hinted gently that probably room could be found in the car for one more.

Arthur Augustus shook his head at that. The car was a four-seater, and that was that.

"Othahwise, I should take with pleasuah more of the fellows," said Arthur Augustus to at least fifty fellows one after another.

"There ought to be a New House chap in the party, you know," Fatty Wynn remarked, with a loving eye on the lunch-basket.

"There isn't room for one, let alone two!" remarked Monty Lowther, with a glance at Fatty Wynn's ample proportions.

"Here comes the giddy bus!" said Gore of the Shell.

It did not look much like a bus as it came sweeping up the drive—a very handsome and most expensive car.

The chauffeur jumped down and touched his cap to Arthur Augustus.

"Here we are, Waggles!" said Arthur Augustus. "Tumble in, deah boys!"

The lunch-basket was put in the car and the four juniors took their seats.

"Now we are off!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove, it's wippin' weathah for a wun! How long will it take you to weach the sea, Waggles?"

"Just over an hour, sir," said Raggles. "Bai Jove! If you do it in undah an hour, I'll stand you a quid, Waggles!"

Raggles grinned.

"I'll try, sir."

And he "tooled" the car gently down the drive to the gates and out into the lane to Rylcombe, and then put on speed.

The afternoon was bright and sunny, and the four juniors of St. Jim's keenly

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enjoyed the rapid run through the country roads and lanes.

St. Jim's was left far behind as the car buzzed on southward towards the distant sea.

When the road was clear, Raggles let the car go at a speed that would certainly have ended in trouble if there had been any policemen about.

Villages and towns were passed, and wide woods and parks and meadows; and Blake, standing up in the car, gave a sudden shout:

"The sea, by gum!"

There it was, rolling blue and gleaming, in the distance. The juniors all stood up to look towards the sea.

St. Jim's was too far from the sea for the fellows to reach the coast on any of their little excursions, as a rule. But the car devoured the distance. The blue water was already in sight. And the car turned into a road that followed the coast, and the wide Channel gleamed on the left hand as they buzzed cheerily along.

"We'll have lunch on the beach," said Arthur Augustus. "Waggles can take the car into Sandycliff, and come back for us in a couple of hours, when we have had a wamble wound."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry.

"Then we can have a dwive up the coast latak, and dinnah in Sandycliff, and a wun home to St. Jim's in the evenin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah think that that will be wippin'!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors alighted from the car with the lunch-basket. It was still barely three o'clock.

Arthur Augustus impressed upon Raggles to return in two hours for them, and handed him a pound note to get his own lunch in Sandycliff. And Raggles drove on with the car.

It was a beautiful spot where the juniors had descended from the car—at a distance from any town, and quite to themselves.

The road ran along the sea, following the curve of a deep bay, and behind the road were the high cliffs, shutting off the land.

In the distance, at the end of the bay, could be seen the roofs of a fishing village, and a vessel lay at anchor there—a small sailing vessel, with a rusty look, evidently an old "wind-jammer" that had seen plenty of service.

The juniors camped down among the rocks, and opened the lunch-basket. As they had had dinner at St. Jim's less than three hours before, and had a dinner again in prospect at Sandycliff, the lunch might have seemed superfluous; but they had keen appetites, rendered keener by the run through the country air. They were prepared to do full justice to the lunch.

"By Jove, this is ripping!" said Jack Blake, as he lay back dreamily against a big rock, and stretched his legs upon soft sand, with a ripe peach in his hand, with which he was completing a substantial meal. "Gussy, I'll never call you a silly ass again—not till the next time. This was simply a glorious idea of yours."

"Yaas; I think it was wathah a good ideah," assented Arthur Augustus contentedly. "I weally think this aftahnoon will be wathah a success."

"First chop," said Monty Lowther. "Pass the peaches, Blake, you bounder!"

"Pass 'em, Gussy," said Blake. "I'm too comfy to move."

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"Here you are, deah boy!"

"What are you looking at, Tom?" asked Lowther, as he noticed that Tom Merry was staring intently at the distant vessel at the end of the bay.

"Something going on there," said Tom, shading his eyes with his hand. "I wish we had some glasses. Looks like a row."

The juniors all turned their eyes in the direction of the distant brig.

Dimly, in the distance, they could see that there was some excitement on the deck; but the figures were too far off to be made out clearly.

"I bwought the field-glasses in the car," said Arthur Augustus. "Didn't you think of gettin' them out, Blake?"

"No," yawned Blake. "Didn't you?"

"Well, no. I nevah thought of it."

"Lucky I did, then," said Monty Lowther, grinning as he produced the field-glasses. "Here you are!"

He opened the glasses, and fixed them on the distant brig. Then he chuckled.

"What's going on?" asked Tom Merry.

"A row, I fancy. I can see a chap—must be a skipper by his clothes—waving his arms, and he looks as if he were using strong language."

"Bai Jove! Lend me the glasses!" The juniors looked in turn. They made out a red-bearded man, evidently the skipper, who was gesticulating and stamping on the deck. Two or three other figures were visible; one of them that of the mate, who seemed to be in an explosive temper, too.

"Looks like being a giddy scrimmage," said Monty Lowther. "Good egg! No charge for front seats."

But the excitement ended, and a boat was lowered, and the juniors saw the mate and three seamen enter it. They turned back to finish their lunch.

"When you've slacked long enough, deah boys, we'll have a wamble ovan the cliffs," said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. A good idea to stretch our legs a bit," said Tom Merry. "Hallo! Who are these merchants? They look a rough crowd."

Four fellows had come in sight, tramping along the road. They were lads but little older than the St. Jim's fellows, and evidently seamen. They looked a decidedly "rough crowd." Their clothes were shabby, and the bags of "dunnage" they carried were shabbier still. They stopped and stared at the juniors sitting on the rocks, and exchanged glances and whispers.

"Look out!" murmured Blake, alert at once. "There's going to be trouble. This is a lonely place. And those merchants look as if they'd just come out of choky."

"Bai Jove! They do look wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus, surveying them through his eyeglass very disparagingly. "Howevah, there are four of us, and if they bothah us we will give them a thwashin' all wound."

The other fellows had some slight doubts about that. The four strangers were older and bigger, and looked as if they had lived on "scraps." One of them had a black eye, and another had a black bruise on his cheek. All the four looked as if they had been up all the previous night, and fighting most of the time.

"Cheerio!" said the young man with the black eye; hailing the juniors.

"Cheewio, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus politely.

"Doin' yerselves well—eh?" said the black-eyed young man.

"Yaas; thank you vewy much!"

There were further whispers among the four hooligans—for hooligans they undoubtedly were. Then they came closer.

"Lucky we came along, ain't it?" said the black-eyed fellow. "We bin in trouble, and we want to be 'elped on our way."

"We does, Sharpey," said the fellow with the bruised cheek. "The old man's arter us already, and if he catches us—"

"And we came away without our pay," said Sharpey. "You can't get along on land without rhino; you git aground in no time."

"Ear, ear!" said the others in chorus.

The juniors rose to their feet. It was quite plain that the hooligans meant mischief, and, though the advantage was on the side of Sharpey and his friends, Tom Merry & Co. had no intention of submitting tamely. The four juniors drew together and stood on their guard.

Sharpey chuckled.

"We ain't got no time to waste," he said. "Will you young gents oblige four pore seamen wot has had to cut and run from a bullying skipper?"

"You're deserters!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"We've lit out," said Arthur Augustus. "Cause why? Did we know that it was Captain Gunn when we signed on? And we was drunk, wasn't we, Billy?"

"We was!" said Billy.

"And Captain Gunn's an 'oly terror!" said Sharpey impressively. "He can't get 'ardly a sailorman to sail with 'im—e's that 'andy with a 'andspike. When 'e's squiffy 'e goes for the mate 'isself."

"That's Captain Gunn. So we've dodged 'im—see? And we're on the rocks, and we want 'elpin' on our way."

"I'm sorry, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "If a pound note would be any good—"

"Lots of good!" said Sharpey. "But that ain't all. Captain Gunn will raise Cain to find us—'cause why? 'E's left short-'anded. We slipped ashore when 'e was drunk in 'is cabin—and the mate was squiffy, too—and that's 'ow we 'ooked it. But 'e can't sail again till 'e's got men—and where is 'e to get men 'ere? 'E's stranded—that's wot Captain Gunn is!"

"And won't 'e ramp, too?" said Billy.

"I believe you," said Sharpey.

Tom Merry & Co. understood now the cause of the excitement they had witnessed on the brig in the bay. The desertion of the four young rascals had been discovered. And a skipper who found himself too short-handed to sail, in a place where it was impossible to obtain fresh men, naturally "ramped" a little.

"And the long and the short of it is," said Sharpey, "we're goin' to change clothes with you young gents, if you don't mind."

"But we jolly well do mind!" exclaimed Tom Merry hotly. "You're certainly not going to have our clothes, you cheeky rotter!"

"Wathah not! I'm sowwy if you had a bad captain, deah boys; and I would be willin' to stand a pound note to assist you, but most certainly you cannot have our clobber," said Arthur Augustus, with great indignation.

Sharpey grunted.

"You'll 'and over your clobber and wot tin you've got about you," he said. "Otherwise, we shall take it. That's 'ow it stands!"

"Line up!" said Tom Merry. "You'd better keep off, you scoundrels! If you try to rob us there will be trouble."

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "'Nuff jaw!" said Sharpey roughly.
 "Are you goin' to 'and over your dun-
 nage, or are you not?"
 "No."

"Then kim en, pals!"
 And the four hooligans, without
 another word, rushed upon the juniors,
 and in a moment more there was a wild
 and whirling fight in progress.

CHAPTER 3.

A Complete Change!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood up
 bravely to the attack.

They were fighting men of
 great renown in their school,
 and well able to take care of themselves,
 as a rule. But the odds, in size and
 strength, were heavily against them
 now.

Sharpey rolled over on the rocks,
 stretched there by a terrific right-hander
 from Tom Merry, and he roared with
 pain and fury.

But the next moment he was up and
 at close quarters with the Shell fellow,
 and they gripped and struggled for the
 mastery.

Tom Merry fought hard, but he went
 down, with Sharpey on him, gripping
 him and pommelling him savagely.

Blake was down, too, with another
 young ruffian sprawling over him, and
 both Lowther and D'Arcy were at hand-
 grips with their foes.

The juniors fought to a finish, but it
 was hopeless, and soon they lay breath-
 less and exhausted in the grasp of the
 four ruffians.

"Crikey!" exclaimed Sharpey, gasp-
 ing. "Jolly tough kids fur schoolboys,
 and it's me that's sayin' it! But we
 got 'em!"

"You uttah wottahs—"
 "Avast, there!" growled Sharpey.
 "Belay the jaw! 'Ave them duds off'n
 'em, pals!"

The juniors had hardly a struggle left
 in them, and there was no help in that
 lonely place. The four hooligans
 dragged them by force round the rocks,
 so that they would be hidden from the
 road, and there Sharpey brandished a
 cudgel over them.

"Now strip 'em!" he commanded.
 "And, by hokey, if you ain't sharp
 about it I'll give yer a nasty head-
 ache!"

"Nevah, you wottah!"
 Sharpey aimed a blow at Arthur
 Augustus with the cudgel. If that blow
 had reached the mark, the swell of St.
 Jim's would have fallen, stunned.

Jack Blake dragged him back just
 in time.

"It's no good," muttered Blake.
 "We've had the worst of it. We'll have
 to stand it."

"Wats! I wefuse—"

Sharpey uttered a savage oath, and
 struck at the swell of St. Jim's again.
 Arthur Augustus did not avoid the blow
 this time—he could not—and he fell like
 a log.

The juniors uttered a shout of wrath,
 and, reckless of the consequences, they
 sprang at the ruffians.

But the hooligans piled on them, and
 they were hurled down again, and
 Sharpey brandished the cudgel once
 more. Arthur Augustus lay insensible
 on the sand.

"If you young fools don't want the
 same you'll obey horders!" said
 Sharpey between his teeth. "We ain't
 got no time to waste, with the old man
 arter us."

There was no help for it.
 The juniors, panting with fury,
 stripped off their clothes, one of the
 hooligans stripping the elegant attire



While two of the crew held Tom Merry's arms outstretched, Mr. Harker rained blows across his back. There was no mercy in the heart of the "bucko" mate, and every lash of the rope's end descended with all the force of his arm.

from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had
 not yet recovered his senses.

The four ruffians stripped in turn,
 throwing their ragged clothes to the
 juniors.

"You can 'ave that there clobber,"
 said Sharpey, with a chuckle. "We
 ain't no use for it now, 'ave we, mates?"
 "We ain't!" grinned his comrades.

The four hooligans, with their dirty,
 bruised faces, looked very odd indeed
 in the clothes of the St. Jim's juniors.
 The clothes were a tight fit for them,
 too—the jackets tight, and the trousers
 scarcely long enough. But there was no
 doubt they had gained by the exchange.

"We kin pawn this 'ere clobber in the
 fust town we come to," Sharpey re-
 marked to his friends, "and git suthin'
 else. Anyway, we don't answer now to
 the diskripshun Captain Gunn will send
 out about us—wot?"

"We doesn't!" grinned Bill.
 "And there's cash in these 'ere
 pockets," said Sharpey. "I reckon
 we're finished 'ere. So-long, young
 gents, and much obliged."

And the quartet of thieves went grin-
 ning on their way.

Arthur Augustus sat up, gasping and
 rubbing his head.

"Bai Jove, what has happened, deah
 boys?" he asked dazedly.

Blake mopped a nose that was
 streaming with red. The tussle had been
 hard, and all the juniors showed signs of
 conflict.

"We're done!" he growled.
 "Gweat Scott! Where's my clobber?"
 "Along with ours," snapped Monty
 Lowther, "walking down the road with
 a blessed hooligan inside!"

"O's deah! I've got a feahful bump
 on my nappah!" said Arthur Augustus,
 feeling his head tenderly. "This is

feahfully wotten, deah boys! Wathah
 a beastly wind up to a weally nice ex-
 cursion—what?"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Tom
 Merry, as cheerfully as he could. "It's
 nobody's fault. Things will happen
 sometimes, you know. We'd better get
 into those clothes they've left. We
 couldn't go into Sandycliff without any
 clothes on, even in the car."

Blake had already begun to dress him-
 self in the tattered sailor garb left by
 the redoubtable Sharpey. Lowther and
 Tom Merry followed suit. Arthur
 Augustus glanced dolefully at the last
 set of dirty attire.

"Gweat Scott! How can I possibly
 dweess in this?" he said plaintively. "It's
 not only wagg'd—I could stand wags—
 but it is dirty and howwid!"

"Better than nothing!" growled
 Blake.

"Oh, the awful wottahs!" groaned
 D'Arcy, as he pulled on the tarry
 trousers. "These wotten things are too
 long for me!"

"Turn 'em up, then, fathead!"
 "Weally, Blake—"

"It's no good growling," said Tom
 Merry. "As soon as Raggles comes
 back with the car we'll scoot into Sand-
 ycliff, and put the police after those
 scoundrels. They may catch them and
 get out clothes back before we have to
 start for St. Jim's."

"Waggles won't be back for an hour
 yet," said Arthur Augustus dismally.
 "What's the time now, deah boys?"

"How can we tell the time without
 any watches, fathead?" asked Blake,
 whose temper was suffering a little from
 a swollen nose, a cut lip, and a black
 eye.

"Bai Jove! Have they taken our
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watches? My tickah—it was a pwsent fwom my patah on a birthday, you know—has it gone?"

"Watches were made to go!" said Monty Lowther, with a dismal attempt at humour.

"Oh, wats! Pway don't be funny now, Lowthah! I'm watah wowwid about my tickah, as it was a birthday pwsent."

"The police may get it back," said Tom Merry. "But what a precious set of sights we look!"

Dressed in the ragged and dirty attire left by Sharpey & Co., nobody certainly would have taken the juniors for St. Jim's fellows at that moment. They looked like a particularly dirty and ill-favoured set of tramps.

"I say, it's no good waiting here for the car," said Lowther. "Let's walk along towards Sandycliff. We shall meet Raggles on the road when he comes along."

"Yaas, watahah!"

"Blessed if I like being seen like this!" said Blake. "Still, it's a good idea. We can leave the lunch-basket among the rocks here, and pick it up in the car. I don't feel much like carrying it."

"Good egg!"

The lunch-basket was repacked and stowed in a safe place in a hollow in the rocks. Then the juniors tramped up the beach to the road, and turned their steps in the direction of the distant town. As they did so they saw the boat, which they had watched leaving the brig some time before, pulling towards the shore in their direction.

They paused to glance at it.

"That's the mate steering," said Lowther. "I suppose they're after those four rotters. I'd give 'em any help I could to catch them."

"Yaas, watahah!"

"He's waving his hand to us," said Tom Merry.

The mate was standing up in the boat as the seaman pulled towards the shore. He had evidently caught sight of the juniors on the road by the sea, and was hailing them, but the wind carried his voice away. But his gesticulations could not be mistaken. He was signing to the juniors to come down to the water's edge and meet the boat.

"He wants to ask us if we've seen those deserters," said Tom Merry. "I don't see why we shouldn't tell him. They've robbed us, and the sooner they're laid by the heels the better."

"Yaas, watahah!"

"Come on, then!"

And, leaving the road, the four juniors walked down the beach towards the crisping edge of the sea. The mate sat down again, steering the boat, and the seaman pulled harder at the oars.

The juniors stood on the shingle, waiting for the boat, which was racing shoreward now. The bows bumped into the sand, and the mate jumped ashore, his face red with rage, and a boat-stretcher in his grip.

He pointed to the boat.

"Tumble in, you scum! Get in, or, by thunder, I'll brain you and take back your carcases! D'you hear? Tumble in!"

CHAPTER 4.

Mistaken Identity!

TOM MERRY & Co. stared blankly at the infuriated mate.

For the moment they failed to grasp his meaning. His flushed face, and the scent of rum his voice wafted to them, showed that he had

been drinking, though he was not exactly intoxicated. He was evidently in a towering rage.

"You 'ear me?" he shouted.
"What do you mean?" asked Tom Merry.

"I mean what I says!" replied the mate, with a menacing motion of the boat-stretcher. "You desertin' dogs! Get into that boat before I brain you!"
"But why should we get into the boat?"

"Because I order you to!" roared the mate.

"I don't understand you," said Tom Merry. "We thought you wanted us to— Hands off, you ruffian!"

The mate was rushing at him. The four juniors sprang together and stood up to him, and the man lowered the boat-stretcher which he had raised. His face was inflamed with rage.

"You'll resist, you dogs?" he roared.
"Certainly we shall!" said Tom Merry, his eyes flashing. "How dare you speak to us like that!"

"Dare," repeated the mate, choking—"dare! You—you lop-eared son of a swab! You say 'dare' to Amos Harker, first-mate of the Ramchunder? You—you scum of the fo'c'sle!"

"I think you must be drunk!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"Will you get into that boat?"
"No, we won't!"
"Wathah not!"

The mate shouted to the seamen in the boat, who were watching the scene curiously and grinning.

"Come ashore, you swabs, and pitch them in! Do you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"
"What!" exclaimed Tom Merry.
"You—you drunken fool, what do you mean?"

"I'll 'drunken fool' you when I get you on board the Ramchunder!" said the mate between his teeth. "I'll learn you! You can bet on that! I'll teach you to desert your ship and give back-talk to your officer when he runs you down—so I will!"

A light broke on the juniors. They remembered that they were in the clothes of the deserters, and their faces, bruised and soiled in the fight, and by rolling in the sand, were scarcely recognisable. The half-intoxicated mate, seeing them on the shore, had taken them for Sharpey & Co., and he was still labouring under the mistake.

Tom Merry burst into a laugh at the idea.

"I think I understand now!" he exclaimed. "You think we are the four fellows who deserted from your ship?"

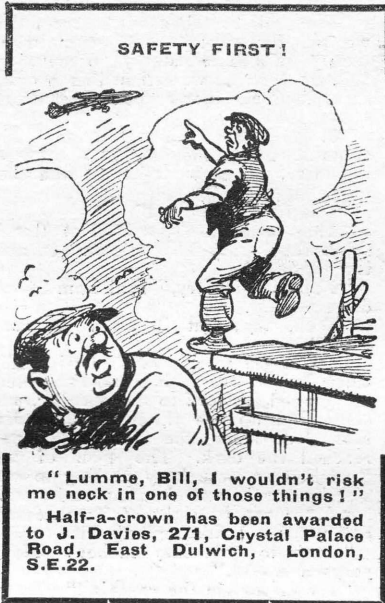
"Ay, ay! I've caught you!"
"We're nothing of the sort. Those fellows robbed us of our clothes—"

"Yaas, wathah, and gave us these beastly wags—"

"And they're gone."
"We're schoolboys," Tom Merry explained. "We're not the fellows you want. Look at our faces, and you'll see you're mistaken."

The mate burst into a scoffing laugh. "You lilyn' scum! You know I've just joined the Ramchunder, and I don't know your ugly figureheads from Satan! Bu: I know you're the four young scoundrels who deserted from the brig yonder, and I'm going to take you back!"

"You're jolly well not!" exclaimed Jack Blake warmly. "We're not going in that boat! Come on, you fellows! We'll get out of this!"
"Yaas, wathah!"



"Belay there! Collar the scum, my lads!"

The three seamen, who plainly stood in terror of the big mate's tantrums, intercepted the juniors and herded them back. A fight with four grown-up men was rather too large an order for Tom Merry & Co., especially as the mate was still grasping the boat-stretcher. And the juniors were not in a condition, either, for such a desperate affray after their struggle with Sharpey & Co.

"Now you git into that boat!" said the mate menacingly.

"Let us explain," said Monty Lowther. "We're not the fellows you're after. We're schoolboys. They took our clothes—"

"Tell that to the marines! Tumble in!"

"Look here, your men must know that we're not the fellows you're looking for!" said Tom Merry desperately. "Ask them. They must know the deserters by sight."

The three seamen were grinning. They were all three very tough-looking specimens, much the same kidney as Sharpey & Co.

The mate glanced at them, with a threatening scowl.

"Do you say that these young swabs ain't the ones I'm looking for?" he demanded, with a threatening movement of the boat-stretcher.

And the three seamen hastened to reply in chorus:

"They're the swabs, sir!"
"Now will you tell me any more of your lies?" growled the mate.
"They're not telling the truth. They're afraid of you."

"Belay your jaw! Are you goin' into the boat or not? That's the last time of asking. By hokey, I'll waste no more time on you!"

And the mate signed to the seamen to throw the boys in, and they advanced with alacrity to obey.

"We'd better get in," said Tom Merry hurriedly. "We can't fight this gang, and we can explain to the captain when we get aboard. He will know that we're not the deserters, and he'll send us ashore again."

"Yaas, that's so, deah boy!"
The juniors tramped down the sand and stepped into the boat. There was nothing else for it. They had to get in or be thrown in. And it seemed undoubted, of course, that as soon as they were aboard the brig an explanation to the skipper would set matters right. The skipper could not want, and would not dare, to take four schoolboys to sea in place of the hands that he had lost.

The mate jumped into the boat, the seamen took the oars, and they pushed off.

Tom Merry & Co. sat silent during the passage to the anchored brig. But the mate was not silent. Mr. Harker had a fine flow of language, and he let the juniors have the full benefit of it during the row across the bay. Tom Merry & Co. had never heard such luridly descriptive speech before. But they were destined to hear a great deal more of it before they had finished with the acquaintance of Mr. Harker.

The boat bumped against the brig, and the skipper looked down over the side.

"Got them?"
"Ay, ay, sir!"
"You know what to do, then, Mr Harker."

"Ay, ay, sir!"
And Captain Gunn went below. The juniors clambered on the brig, and the boat was swung in.

Tom Merry looked round him.
"Where is the captain, please?" he asked a big, burly man, who was directing the taking-in of the boat.
The man stared at him.

"Don't talk to me, you young swab!"

And, with a backward sweep of his hand, the boatswain—for such he was—sent Tom Merry fairly reeling across the deck.

The junior collapsed, with a gasp of pain and surprise. There was an exclamation of indignation from his comrades.

"You rotten brute!" shouted Monty Lowther.

The boatswain did not reply to that. He was busy with the boat, and with cursing the seaman who had let slip a fall. But when the boat was swinging at the davits, he turned on the Shell fellow of St. Jim's.

But Mr. Harker interposed.

"You can leave the young swabs to me, Mr. Hogg. I'll larn 'em! Captain Gunn has left 'em in my hands."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Ben Hogg, with a savage look at the boys.

Tom Merry staggered to his feet. He had been dazed by the blow the boatswain had given him.

"We demand to see the captain!" he exclaimed fiercely. "We don't belong to this ship. We are not sailors at all. We are schoolboys."

"Still that yarn?" said Amos Harker, with a sneering laugh. "Well, I'll larn you! Give me a rope's-end, Ben Hogg!"

"Here you are, sir!"

The mate grasped the knotted length of rope, and rushed at the juniors. Without a word of warning, he began lashing them with savage force. And the crew—probably having had some of the same experience themselves at various times—stood round and looked on, evidently without the slightest intention of interfering in any way.

CHAPTER 5.

Shanghaied!

TOM MERRY & CO. were too astounded and dazed to resist for a moment or two.

The mate, under the belief that they were the deserters, was punishing them for the desertion and for the trouble they had given him, and his ideas of administering punishment were drastic in the extreme.

The thick, knotted rope struck with almost the force of a cudgel, and the mate's arm was very powerful.

He cursed them with lurid eloquence as he smote, with a wild variety of epithets, many of which they did not even understand.

The juniors yelled as the blows fell, but after the first moment or two they did not take their punishment without resistance.

They piled on the mate, and, in spite of his savage blows, collared him, and, combining their efforts, dragged him to the deck.

The seamen, looking on, simply gasped. That was rank mutiny. There was not a man on board the Ramchunder who would have dared to do likewise.

"Mutiny!" roared the mate, as he went down struggling. "Lend a 'and 'ere, Ben Hogg!"

"Mutiny, by gum!" exclaimed Hogg. He ran into the scuffle, hitting out savagely. D'Arcy received his heavy fist, hard as a hammer, and was flung clear across the deck by the blow.

Lowther caught the next blow, and rolled over, panting. Then the powerful boatswain seized Tom Merry and Blake, one in either hand, and wrenched them off the mate.

Mr. Harker staggered to his feet. His face was almost demoniac with rage now.

He groped for the rope's-end and recovered it, and yelled to the crew to hold the delinquents while he thrashed them.

The order was promptly obeyed. The St. Jim's juniors were grasped in powerful hands and held helpless. Tom Merry was brought forward and, with his arms held outstretched, the mate rained blows upon him. Then, in turn, Blake, Lowther, and D'Arcy were punished the same.

It seemed like some evil dream to the unfortunate juniors.

They struggled feebly, but their struggles were useless. They were held fast, and they were at the mercy of Amos Harker.

And there was no mercy in the heart of the "bucko" mate.

He lashed them till his arm was tired and aching, and their clothes were cut and rent by the blows, and the blood was streaming from their torn skin.

Not till he was too tired to thrash them further did he desist. Then he threw down the rope's-end with a breathless oath.

"Pitch them into the fo'c'sle," he said.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

And the four juniors were dragged and pitched down into the murky and evil-smelling fore-castle of the Ramchunder.

They rolled there on the planks, dazed, bleeding, racked with pain, too worn out even to be angry or indignant.

There were sounds on deck, and a motion of the ship before long, and Tom Merry sat up dazedly and groaned.

"I say, chaps, they're putting to sea," he muttered.

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"Ow!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

"We shall be taken out to sea unless we see the captain and explain in time," said Tom Merry desperately. "Great Scott, if we sail in this horrible ship, goodness knows when we shall get out again!"

"No go!" said Blake faintly. "The captain's most likely as big a brute as the mate. They want hands, and they won't let us go."

"But they dare not!"

"They will; you'll see. Not that I think that brute will let you get near the captain."

"I'm going to try," said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Well, try; but it won't be any good."

Tom Merry rose to his feet with difficulty, for he was aching and exhausted. He groped forward to the opening, and clambered up the three rickety stairs that led from the fore-castle, and reached the deck. The men of the Ramchunder were busy putting to sea. The boatswain was shouting and swearing. He caught sight of Tom Merry, and made a stride towards him.

"Turn to, you lazy lubber! Make yourself useful."

"I want to see the captain!"

"Still on that tack?" said Ben Hogg. "Take that!"

"That" was a heavy blow which knocked the junior down the steps into the murky fore-castle again. He rolled there, gasping.

"Well, how did it answer?" said Blake miserably.

Tom gritted his teeth.

"It's no good. We've got to stand it."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus weakly. "This is howwid, you know. I wondah what Waggles will think when he comes back with the car and finds us gone? What will they think at St. Jim's, by Jove?"

"Never mind St. Jim's. The question is, how are we going to get out of this rotten hole?" growled Blake.

"We've been shanghaied," said Lowther; "that's what sailormen call it. I believe that brute of a mate knew we were not the deserters, but he pretended to think we were because they want hands."

"But, bai Jove, we're not goin' to work on this ship, deah boys!"

"I fancy we shall have a pretty tough time if we don't."

"But—but the beastly ship may be goin' to Amewich or China or somewhere, and we shall be cawwied away for weeks, pewwaps months."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh, gweat Scott, what a wotten endin' to our little wun in the motor-car!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "I weally think that we cannot considah our holiday a success, aftah all, deah boys!"

"A rotten, rank, ghastly failure!" said Monty Lowther.

The juniors did not attempt to leave the fore-castle. They knew it was use-

less, or worse than useless. They remained, feeling miserable enough, aching from the terrible thrashing they had received, and sick from the motion of the sea, while the heavy, clumsy old "windjammer" bumped and thumped on through the chops of the Channel.

CHAPTER 6.

At Sea!

TOM MERRY & CO. had been to sea before more than once, and they fancied they were good sailors.

But they had never been on the salt water in such circumstances as these.

A big steamer, or a well-found yacht, was very different from the rolling, clumsy old tub upon which they now found themselves.

The Ramchunder had never been a good boat, and she was long past her best days. The way she rolled was unpleasant, and she thumped into the seas by the head in a way that suggested that at every thump she was making her last plunge in the direction of Davy Jones' locker. And the fore-castle was small, close, evil-smelling, and dirty. There was a lingering odour of bilge that would have turned many a sailor sick, added to the motion of the ship. The juniors were excited, worried, and worn out. Altogether, they were certain to be sick, and they were very sick indeed.

They climbed into bunks, and lay down, feeling utterly wretched.

They no longer cared whether they were "shanghaied" or not—whether the Ramchunder was bound for Dover or the Dardanelles.

How long their seasickness lasted they did not know. It seemed like centuries—long centuries of horror and misery.

Darkness came down. The fo'c'sle was densely dark before the sun had gone, but no one came down.

The crew of the Ramchunder was busy on deck.

Although the mate had insisted that the four juniors were the four deserters of whom he had been in search, he did not order them on deck, thus as good as admitting that he knew that they were no sailors, and useless just then above decks.

He had been mistaken about them at first, but afterwards he must have observed that they were not ship's boys; but he chose to continue the mistake as a pretext for keeping them as hands.

The Ramchunder was evidently in a hurry to get to sea; and from what the juniors had seen of the crew, Captain Gunn was not particular about the type of men he shipped. Indeed, if he was anything like his mate, he'd probably had difficulty in getting decent sailormen to take billets on the Ramchunder. A bad ship, a bad mate, and a bad captain were not likely to attract good seamen. That accounted for the fact that the whole for'ard crowd of the Ramchunder seemed to be of the hooligan variety. Sharpey & Co. had been fair specimens of the rest.

If the juniors had been ordered on deck, they could not have gone. They could not have dragged their limbs up the three steps to the deck. But they were not called—indeed, their existence seemed to have been forgotten.

There was a step at last on the ladder, and someone came blundering down in the darkness, cursing.

"No light 'ere!" growled a voice, which the juniors recognised as Ben Hogg's.

A match was struck, and the boat-swain lighted a dirty, swinging oil-lamp, which cast a dim, dull light over the fore-castle interior.

Ben Hogg glanced about him, and saw the four white, drawn faces looking out from the bunks, and grinned.

"Ho! 'Ere you are!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, here we are!" said Blake.

"Don't you know sea manners yet, you young swabs? Call me sir!"

Blake's eyes gleamed; but he had already learned the folly of resistance to overwhelming force.

"Very well, sir."

"Very well, sir!" mimicked Hogg.

"Where were you brought up, you sweepings of Wapping? Can't you say 'ay, ay!' like a sailorman, you lubber?"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"That's better," said Ben Hogg.

"We'll make sailors of you yet, you scum!"

"We don't belong to this ship," said Tom Merry weakly. "You know we're not the boys who deserted."

Hogg nodded.

"I know you ain't. But Mr. Harker don't know it, or he don't choose to know it—and the old man won't choose to know it, neither, my bullies! And let me warn you that Captain Gunn is a holy terror. Mr. Harker is gentle beside him. Don't you sling him any cheek and sauce about not belonging to his ship—he'll brain you with a marlin-spike as soon as look at you!"

The juniors were silent. Ben Hogg, in his rough, brutal way, seemed to be giving them a good-natured warning.

If the "old man" was worse than the chief mate, certainly the prospects of the shanghaied schoolboys were not pleasant.

"You be'ave and I'arn your business, and work, and you'll be all right," said Ben Hogg. "Otherwise you'll be for it. Savvy?"

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"And don't jaw!" said Mr. Hogg.

"I'm doin' the talkin'. Now, if Mr. Harker catches you loafing, you'll catch something. Turn out!"

"I—I weally can't move—"

"Halkett!" said Mr. Hogg.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said a seaman who had followed the boatswain into the fore-castle with several others.

They were the watch below.

"Pitch those swabs out!"

"Ay, ay!"

Halkett grinned, and swung round to D'Arcy's bunk. Arthur Augustus made an effort to rise, but fell back, and was sick. The seaman bundled him out on deck in a quivering and gasping heap.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Blake turned out of their own accord.

Blake helped Arthur Augustus up. The swell of St. Jim's was white and sick and hardly able to stand.

"Get on deck!" said Ben Hogg.

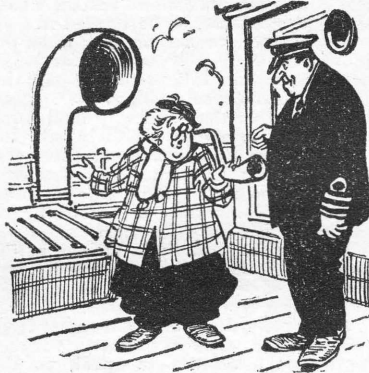
"You'll freshen up there. Kick them out!"

The juniors scrambled on deck without waiting to be kicked out, leaving the watch below grinning and chuckling behind them.

The Ramchunder, under main and topgallant and foresail, was thumping her way through a heavy sea. The Channel, seldom at rest, was very restless now, and it seemed to the juniors that a gale was blowing, as they heard the wind whistling through the cordage and the thrashing of the belling canvas; but it was not what a sailor would have called even a capful of wind.

The Ramchunder, however, was rolling as if she were in the midst of an Atlantic gale, and thumping on the crisping sea like a huge hammer.

IT WAS THE VENTILATOR!



"It seems I'm not the only deaf person on this cruise!"
Half-a-crown has been awarded to D. Philip, Belmont, Easter Aberdour, Fifeshire, Scotland.

"Great Scott!" muttered Blake, holding on to the nearest support. "What will this rotten old tub be like in a storm?"

"I thought I was a sailah, deah boys!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "But this is wathah diffewent from old Conway's yacht!"

"And I thought once that I'd like to go to sea!" said Monty Lowther.

"It wouldn't be so bad if the people on board weren't such brutes!" said Tom Merry. "We shall soon get over the seasickness. I feel nearly all right now I'm in the air."

"Yaas; it is much bettah here."

A raucous voice hailed the juniors. The night was dim, only a few stars showing among the scurrying clouds. The lights of the Ramchunder gleamed red and green ahead on the dark, rolling sea.

"Hallo! Tumble up, you young swabs!"

The juniors, staggering on the pitching deck, made their way towards the poop, where the chief mate was standing with the second "greaser."

The second mate looked a little less of a ruffian than his chief.

The captain was not to be seen.

The juniors began to mount the poop ladder, thinking that the mate wanted them there; but Mr Harker soon undeceived them on that point.

"Stop where you are, you dogs!"

The juniors recoiled to the main-deck.

"Pretty - looking set of specimens you are, ain't you?" demanded Mr. Harker, glaring at them.

And the watch on deck sniggered.

The juniors did not reply. They certainly were a pretty-looking set of specimens, if it came to that.

"N o w, y o u, Sharpey—"

"My name isn't Sharpey, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"I say your name is Sharpey!" said Mr. Harker, raising his voice. "I don't care what name you was born with! You may have changed it a dozen times! But on board this craft you're Sharpey—see?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, what's your name?"

"Sharpey, sir, if you like."

"That's better!" said Mr. Harker.

"Now, Sharpey, don't let me 'ear any more about you not belongin' to this craft! You're a member of the forrard gang—and a lazy, dirty, useless member, too, not fit to holystone the deck of a decent craft! But I'm going to break you in, Sharpey—understand that!"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't bring your dunnage aboard—eh?"

"I—I don't know what dunnage is."

"Don't know what dunnage is, and you a sailor!" roared Mr. Harker. "Did you bring your traps with you—your clothes, you fool?"

"I brought nothing."

"Then you've only got the duds you stand up in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pretty crowd of beggars and loafers!" said Mr. Harker contemptuously. "Well, you'll 'ave things served out to you from the slop-chest, and the price of the same will be docked from your pay—see?"

"Very well, sir!"

"Cooky!"

"Ay, ay!" said a fat, baldheaded little man, appearing from the galley.

Apparently, the cook held the key of the slop-chest.

"Serve out clothes to these ragged robins, and make a note of the same," said Mr. Harker. "See that they wash and make themselves look less like a gang of moochers!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"If there's half a word of sauce, you've full permission to tan their hides till they can't stand!" added Mr. Harker. "Now, foller the cook, you dirty scum; and if I see you lookin' any more like a gang of filthy corner-boys—by hokey, I'll make you properly sorry for yourselves!"

And the juniors followed the cook.

CHAPTER 7.

The Captain of the Ramchunder!

MORNING came up bright and sunny in the rolling Channel.

The Ramchunder, bowling and thumping away before a strong breeze, was speeding westward for the ocean with all her canvas set.

(Continued on the next page.)

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Tom Merry & Co. had joined the last watch below, and they came on deck again in the sunny morning.

They had slept soundly for four hours, in spite of the discomfort of their surroundings, in the bunks of the four deserters whose places, and even whose names, they had been compelled to take.

They were still fatigued, however, when they turned out with the port watch.

But the bright sunshine and the keen, fresh air of the sea cheered them up immensely.

Wide and blue rolled the Channel around them, and the cliffs of England could be seen far away to the starboard.

The juniors were looking much better now. Captain Gunn, like many skippers of ocean tramps, kept a "slop" chest, from which clothing was supplied to the crew; and, like many skippers, again, he supplied clothing of bad quality at a good price. But the juniors were glad enough to get into clothes that were, at all events, new and clean and wholesome.

And a wash had made a great difference to them, too. Their faces were still marked with signs of conflict—they shared three black eyes, two thick ears, two cut lips, and a dozen black bruises among them, but they looked much better than they had looked the night before.

Indeed, but for the aching that remained from the terrible thrashing the mate had given them with the rope's-end, they would have felt very well indeed.

The sickness had gone; it had been caused as much by the foul closeness of the fo'c'sle as by the motion of the ship. They looked away towards the distant coast of England—Devonshire or Cornwall, as they guessed. St. Jim's was far enough away now, and it seemed farther in their thoughts than it was in reality. They had entered into a new existence, and the old one had vanished like a dream.

They wondered what the Head and the fellows would think of their disappearance when the mystified Raggles returned with the car and reported that they had vanished. The police would be searching for them; they would be searched for far and wide. But probably no one would guess that they had been "shanghaied" and taken to sea on an ocean tramp.

Even if Sharpey & Co. were caught—as they probably would be when they attempted to pawn D'Arcy's watch—and it came out that they had changed clothes with the missing juniors, it would not be known that Tom Merry & Co. had been taken on board the Ramchunder.

But for the brutal surroundings, they would not have objected to such a voyage. They were not afraid of work; even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not a slacker in times of necessity.

But to pass weeks or even months with Mr. Harker, and a still worse skipper, in authority over them was no pleasant prospect.

And bad as the "after-guard" were, they were not much worse than the "forward crew."

The crew of the Ramchunder was decidedly "tough."

There were nine or ten men besides the juniors; and there were few of them who did not look as if they had been in prison at some period of their career.

Discipline was maintained on board the Ramchunder in a way that was possibly the only way with such a crowd.

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And order was enforced with curses and blows if necessary. Mr. Harker was new to the brig; but he had already made the crew understand that he would stand no nonsense, as he termed it.

Mr. Harker was not on deck when the juniors came up, the second mate being on the poop in talk with the captain. Captain Gunn was looking aloft, calculating whether the "sticks" would stand any more muzzling. Nearly all the canvas of the Ramchunder was bent and drawing; but Captain Gunn was considering whether he could pile on additional studding-sails—or stuns'ls, as sailormen call them for short.

The juniors took their rations at the galley with the rest of the watch; and the hot coffee—bad quality as it was—made them feel better.

Then, being free for the moment from slave-driving, they considered whether they should venture to speak to the captain.

"It won't do any good," said Monty Lowther. "If we were lords and giddy dukes, I don't suppose he would stop and put us ashore. He would have to lose a fair wind—and no end of time."

"But we've a wight—" began D'Arcy.

Lowther shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyway, I think we ought to appeal to him," said Tom Merry. "He may set us ashore in the first port, or pass us on to some homeward-bound ship. We don't belong to the crew, and he has no right to keep us here, if he knows."

"Might try him," said Blake. "But I don't like his look. He's got a jaw like a bulldog. Looks as if he might be twin-brother to old Herries' bow-wow, Towser."

"You fellows stay here, and I'll tackle him," said Tom Merry resolutely. "No need for us all to get licked, if there's any trouble."

"Rats!" said Blake. "We'll all do it together."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sink or swim together," said Monty Lowther. "I don't think it will be any good, but we may as well try."

"Come on, then—"

The juniors advanced, somewhat nervously, to the poop-ladder. Captain Gunn was still regarding the spars aloft. The Ramchunder was wallowing along before a stiff breeze in a heavy sea, and the captain shook his head at last, as if decided it wouldn't do to bend the stunsails. As his glance lowered it fell on the four boys standing below, waiting to catch his eye.

Captain Gunn scowled at the sight of them.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Ain't there any work on this ship for ship's boys to do? Favourites of yours, Mr. Walker—eh?"

Mr. Walker, the second mate, scowled at the juniors, who had thus inadvertently brought the captain's evil temper upon him.

"No favourites of mine, sir. I'll soon set 'em to work."

"May we speak to you a minute, sir?" asked Tom Merry hurriedly, as the second "greaser" came striding towards the ladder. "We don't belong to this ship, sir. We are schoolboys, and—"

Captain Gunn did not seem to hear. His gaze was fixed on the bellowing canvas again. It dawned upon the juniors that the skipper had been apprised by Mr. Harker of their claims, and did not choose to hear the facts. As he had no intention of parting with the shanghaied hands, probably he considered it wiser to know nothing about the matter. Before Tom Merry could proceed further, Mr. Walker reached

him, and with a savage cuff, sent him staggering across the main deck.

Then he turned on the other juniors, and they retreated promptly. They were already learning that it was not feasible to enter into fistical encounters with officers of the Ramchunder.

Tom Merry picked himself up dazedly and moved away with his comrades. The appeal to the captain had failed, and there was nothing more to be said or done—nothing but, as Blake put it, to grin and bear it; or bear it even if they couldn't grin. But Hogg grinned at them as they came for'ard again.

"Wot did I tell you?" he asked. "The old man is a worst terror than the greasers. You keep your tongue atween your teeth, and work 'ard, and shut up, and be civil, and you'll git on. But if you don't, my hearties, then by the Lord Harry, I pity you!"

"We're in for it!" said Tom Merry gloomily. "We've got to stand it."

"Yaas, it wathah looks like it—we must gwim and bear it!"

And that was what the juniors wisely resolved to do.

CHAPTER 8.

In the Atlantic!

THE chops of the Channel were left behind, and the bluff bows of the Ramchunder were bumping the rolling waves of the Atlantic.

During the following day or two the juniors were gradually falling into the ways of their new life. Escape was impossible, but they had ceased to think of it—until an opportunity should occur, at all events. The Ramchunder was not touching at any port for some time to come; and until she reached a port escape was evidently out of the question. The captain, they knew, had no intention of putting them on a homeward-bound vessel. The crew of the Ramchunder was short, as it was, and the boys were wanted.

They might sullenly have refused to work, but they did not. In the first place, they would have been driven into submission by merciless brutality. But, anyway, sullenness and slacking were not in their line. So they fell into the places of the absent Sharpey & Co., took their watches with the rest of the crew, devoured their bad rations with the keen appetite given by the sea air and breezes, and worked as well as they could.

But the Ramchunder was not a pleasant ship. The skipper was one of the old-fashioned kind, who took every opportunity of "laying his soul in soak," as Ben Hogg elegantly expressed it in the forecabin. And when he was sober the effects of the rum were to be seen in his temper. He bullied the men, and ragged the mates, and the latter passed it on forward, so to speak; and the seamen, ragged by the mates, indemnified themselves by ragging one another, and especially the boys. It was a case of the weakest going to the wall.

Arthur Augustus was specially the object of kindly attentions of that sort. The swell of St. Jim's irritated some of the rough hands by little elegancies of manner, and especially by his deliberate style of speech.

Once upon a time it would have seemed impossible to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that a scion of his noble house could submit to the indignity of a blow. But blows were so freely given on board the Ramchunder that his noble feelings on that subject soon underwent a change.

The most troublesome fellow in the "farrard crowd" to the juniors was, however, not Ben Hogg, but a young hooligan named, or nicknamed, Hookey.

Hookey was only a few years older than the juniors, and was not an A.B. In fact, he was, according to Ben Hogg, a slacker, and as the best of seamen could not have a peaceable life with the officers of the Ramchunder, it was evident that a slacker was booked for a terrible time.

Hookey had to take Ben Hogg's backhanders, and his consolation was to pass them on to the juniors. Tom Merry & Co. were getting used to curses, cuffs, and kicks before the Ramchunder had thumped her heavy way half across the Atlantic, but Hookey succeeded in making their lives a misery.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus one evening. "I wish old Kildare was here to tackle that awful wottah, deah boys! He's in the galley now, and there will be another wov now we go in for our wations. Mr. Harkah has been waggin' him again, and it always makes him vevy unpleasant."

Tom Merry knitted his brows. "I've been thinking about that," he said. "This chap Hookey is only about eighteen. He's bigger and stronger than we are, but I've been thinking whether I couldn't tackle him."

"The other rotters would only pile on you," said Blake.

"I don't know. They're a rough crowd, but they might see fair play," said Tom. "If I could lick one of the brutes, it would make the others a bit more decent. I think old Hogg would see fair play if he's there, too."

"Just as likely to rope's-end you for rowing," said Lowther.

"Well, I'll chance it." "You feel fit?" asked Lowther anxiously.

"Fit as a fiddle!" And that was so. The hard life, the hard work, and the hard tack, were hardening the juniors, and, unpleasant as their life was, they had never been more physically fit.

They went into the galley, which was small and stuffy, and crowded by the watch. Hookey was there, scowling over a pannikin of hot coffee. There was a cut on Hookey's cheek, where the chief mate's knuckles had smitten him an hour before, and Hookey's temper was vile at that moment.

"Where yer shovin' to?" he demanded as the juniors came in.

"I want some coffee," said Tom Merry.

Hookey sneered. "Want some corfee, do yer? 'Ave mine!"

And he jerked the tin pannikin forward, and the hot coffee swamped into Tom Merry's face. Tom staggered back with a gasping cry, and trod on Ben Hogg's foot, and the bo'sun gave him an angry shove that sent him spinning on the deck. Hookey burst into a loud laugh.

"Now, I'll 'ave young feller-melad's corfee, cooky," he said.

"No, you won't!" said Tom Merry, jumping up and wiping the coffee from his face. "You'll have a hiding, if I can give you one!"

And he ran right at Hookey, striking out.

The young ruffian jumped up, but Tom Merry's right caught him on the chin as he jumped, and he crashed over with a howl, and collapsed among the legs of the sailors.

"Now, get up, and come on, you

hound, if you want any more!" Tom Merry exclaimed.

Hookey sat up dazedly. "My heye!" he ejaculated. "Crikey! I'll out yer! I'll slaughter yer! On'y wait a minnit, till I git at yer, mo beauty!"

He sprang to his feet. Then Hogg interposed.

"There ain't no room fur fighting 'ere," he said; "but if you want 'ave it out, you can come out on deck!"

"That bloomin' mate'll stop us!" howled Hookey.

"No, he won't!" said Ben, with a chuckle. "He likes a scrap as well as anybody. There's only Mr. Harker on the poop, and he won't interfere."

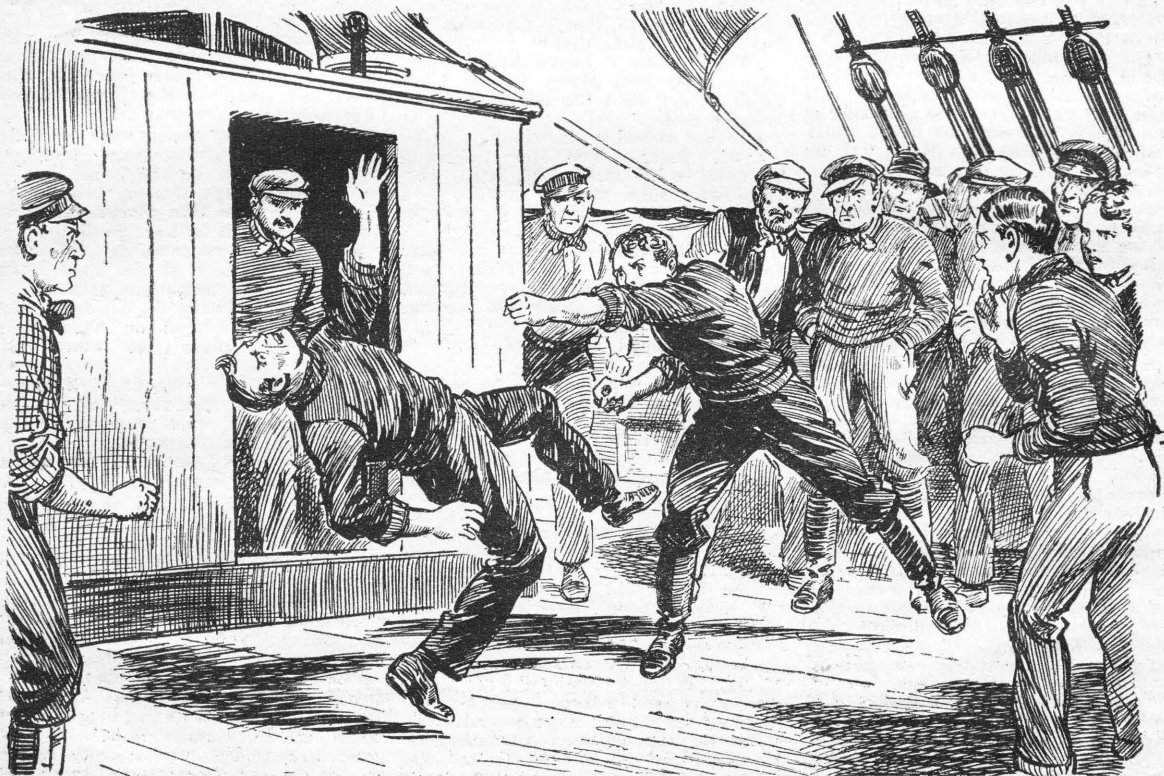
"I don't care where it is, s'long as I slaughter 'im!" said Hookey, with a savage look at Tom Merry.

"Kim on!" said the bo'sun.

And the whole of the watch below trooped out on deck to see the fight; and the watch on deck evinced an equal interest when they discovered what was on.

Tom Merry glanced towards Mr. Harker, on the poop; but the mate evidently had no intention of interfering, though he saw what was going on. He was looking down towards the main deck with an interested gaze, probably glad of a break in the monotony.

Not that Tom Merry wanted the fight to be stopped. He wanted to have it out—his blood was up—and he felt that he had a chance of licking Hookey, older and stronger as he was. And if he licked Hookey, there would be one tyrant the less in the fo'c'sle, at all events. Indeed, Tom Merry's comrades were more anxious about the tussle than Tom Merry himself was.



An upper-cut sent Hookey staggering backwards, half-dazed. Then, smack! came Tom's fist full in his face, and Hookey reeled and went down like a log.

Tom rolled back the sleeves of his jersey, and stood ready, and Hookey came forward to face him. There would be no rounds in that fight—no referee or timekeeper. It was a fight, as long as they could stand and hit, of the most rough-and-tumble character. Science would not be of so much use as brute strength and endurance. Still, it was bound to tell to a certain extent.

Ben Hogg gave the signal to start.

"You young blighters ready?"

"Yes."

"Go it!"

And they went it!

CHAPTER 9.

A Fight to a Finish!

HOOKEY started with a savage rush to get a clinch on his opponent. Then he would have punished him with his fists and elbows at close quarters, and the junior would probably have been "outed" in a very short time. But Tom Merry was alert, and he did not allow Hookey to clinch with him. He gave ground, retreating round the ring made by the eager onlookers, and avoiding Hookey's savage rush.

Right round the ring they went, Tom Merry back-stepping quickly and holding his assailant off till Hookey made a sudden, tigerish spring; and then Tom side-stepped, and the hooligan swept past him without being able to turn in time. As he swept past, Tom Merry's right came with a crash on the side of his jaw, and Hookey went spinning.

Crash!

Hookey was down, gasping, with his hand to his jaw.

"Oh, well hit!" shouted Ben Hogg. "It was a corker! 'Ookey, old son, what was you thinkin' of?"

"Groogh!" groaned Hookey.

"Git up! You ain't licked yet."

"Git up, 'Ookey!" chorused the crew.

"I'm gittin' up, ain't I?" snarled Hookey, as he regained his feet.

His little ratty eyes were glittering at Tom Merry. He came on like a whirlwind, and this time Tom Merry was not so lucky in avoiding in-fighting. Hookey got a grip on him with his powerful arms, and as Tom Merry wrenched in his grasp the young ruffian succeeded in driving his elbow into the junior's ribs with a force that made Tom almost sick and dizzy. He seemed to crumple in the hands of the hooligan, and his chums were apprehensive for him.

Hookey's hard, savage face wore a grin of malicious triumph now. He felt his enemy at his mercy, and he did not mean to show any mercy. By the time he was finished Tom Merry should be lying—bruised, breathless, helpless—on the deck, unable to crawl away; that was Hookey's intention.

Blows were raining on the junior, but the fight was not so near its end as Hookey supposed. Tom Merry made a desperate effort and brought his right up with an upper-cut at close quarters that caught Hookey under the chin. It was a hard blow, and it seemed to Hookey as if his whole head were being knocked off upwards. He gave a gasp, and released Tom and staggered back, dazed and half-senseless. Then, smack! came Tom's fist full in his face, and he reeled and went down like a log.

Tom Merry reeled back into the arms of Monty Lowther—exhausted, breathless, aching in every limb, and half-blinded by the blows that had rained on his face.

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But Hookey's state was worse.

He lay palpitating on the deck, and the jeers and sneers and encouragements of the other hands alike failed to rouse him.

"Git up!" roared Ben Hogg. "You ain't finished yet, 'Ookey!"

Hookey groaned.

"I can't git up! Me jaw's fractured, I reckon!"

"I'll fracture yer neck if you don't git up!" said Hogg.

And he ran towards Hookey and began to kick him in the ribs with heavy kicks.

Hookey yelled and scrambled to his feet, reeling with weakness.

"Now will you go on?" roared Hogg.

"Yes!" panted Hookey. "Leave me alone, you blighter! I'll fight 'im as long as I can stand! Ow! Let 'im kim on!"

"Forward there, you whelp!"

Tom Merry came forward. He was not in a much better condition than Hookey, but he had another round in him yet.

"I don't want to go on, Hookey," he said.

"You'll git kicked round the deck if you don't!" snarled the bo'sun. "Who's givin' orders 'ere, you whelp?"

"Kim on, durn you!" said Hookey.

And they started again. Hookey made savage attempts to clinch, but Tom Merry held him off. Hookey went down again at last under a terrific right-hander that almost lifted him off the deck, and he lay where he fell.

Ben Hogg growled.

"There ain't no pluck in that shirker!" he said. "Bah! Crawl away, you cowardly lubber!"

And the unfortunate Hookey crawled away out of sight.

Ben Hogg turned to Tom Merry.

"You've beat 'im 'oller!" he said.

"Yes," said Tom.

"But you ain't goin' to put on any sauce because of that," explained the boatswain. "Take that!"

"That" was a heavy back-hander, which flung Tom Merry two or three yards away; then the boatswain went into the galley.

Lowther picked up his chum.

"Oh!" groaned Tom Merry, pressing his hand to his head. "My hat! This is a lively ship, and no mistake! I don't think I'd mind much if she went down with all hands!"

"I'd jolly well like to see it!" said Lowther viciously. "And if there is a gale I believe she will go down. Blessed if I know how the crazy old tub has kept afloat so long!"

And he helped Tom Merry down to his bunk.

Tom Merry was utterly done, and he could hardly have reached the bunk without aid. As he lay down, Hookey's bruised, bleeding, and savage face looked at him from the opposite bunk. Hookey's face was convulsed with rage and hatred.

"I'll do fer yer yet!" he muttered thickly. "You mark my words, you 'ound! I'll do fer yer afore this 'ere trip is hout!"

Tom Merry did not reply. He was too worn out to bandy words with Hookey; and, besides, he had heard so many threats from Hookey directed towards different persons whom the hooligan disliked that he did not attach any importance to them.

He settled himself down to rest.

But he was destined to remember Hookey's threats before long. The savage hatred Hookey had displayed towards the "old man," the mates, and the boatswain seemed now to be transferred to Tom Merry's account, for his

licking at the hands of the junior had made matters very much worse for Hookey. After that encounter he did not venture to bully or rag any of the four juniors. Tom Merry's right fist was ready for him every time.

That was a pleasure and a consolation lost to Hookey; and, besides, the other seamen took to bullying and ragging more than ever the youngest hooligan among them all—who had let himself be licked by a mere kid.

So Hookey's last state was much worse than his first, as he found out bitterly enough before another twenty-four hours had passed.

Indeed, Tom Merry's prowess had earned him a certain amount of respect among the rough crew, and many cuffs and kicks that had formerly been bestowed upon him were now bestowed upon the unlucky Hookey.

And before long Tom Merry had reason to know that Hookey's muttered threats of vengeance were not to be disregarded.

CHAPTER 10.

The Sight of Death!

THE Ramchunder found "dirty weather" in the Atlantic.

By the time the dirty weather was encountered, Tom Merry & Co. had fallen into their places as members of the crew, and were quite at home in the rigging, and, indeed, very active and useful there. It was fortunate for them, for had the rough weather come on earlier, their training would have been much more dangerous.

All the morning, now, the sky had been darkening with heavy clouds, and the wind had become fresher and fresher. The brig was under heavy canvas. Captain Gunn was known to be a reckless skipper, and to take great risks with his "sticks."

The Ramchunder ploughed her way on through seas that were gathering in size and force every moment, and every now and then she shipped a sea that swept her fore and aft.

The watch on deck were already drenched, and in savage tempers. And the captain, on the poop, was in an equally savage temper, because he saw that he must soon shorten sail, and he did not want to lose speed.

He hurled swear-words of the most lurid variety at the crew when he ordered the topgallant sails to be taken in, and during the afternoon the Ramchunder thumped on under less canvas, but under too much for safety.

The whole crew were on deck now—even the cook had come out of the galley—and all were regarding the canvas with anxious eyes.

As dusk settled down on the sea it was blowing a regular gale.

The crew cursed, and muttered to one another that the "old man" would have the masts out of her; but as if he enjoyed their uneasiness, the captain gave no order for reefing the canvas. But at last even his reckless hardihood reached its limit. If sail was not taken in it would be blown clean out of the boltholes, unless, indeed, the Ramchunder—as some of her crew feared—took a "header" into the boiling seas and plunged right down into Davy Jones' locker.

With a choice variety of swear-words, the skipper gave orders at last for a reef to be taken in the mainsail.

It had been left so long that it was by this time extremely perilous work.

The wind was howling through the rigging, and the brig was pitching and tossing on the tumbling seas. The men who went aloft had to take their lives in their hands, and they cursed the obstinacy of the skipper that had exposed them to terrible and unnecessary peril. But there was no hesitation in obeying the order. The men were only too glad that the "old man" had come to his senses before it was too late.

Tom Merry was among those who went aloft, and Hookey's duty was also to go; but he was seeking to keep out of sight in the obscurity and leave his place to be taken by someone else. But the keen eye of Ben Hogg was upon him, and with a sounding cuff he drove the slacker to his duty.

Hookey was last on the yard. Tom Merry, as he clung to the yard and struggled with the flapping, furious canvas, dared not look below. The ship was rolling so heavily that half the time the yard was over a gulf of tumbling waters.

When the yard sloped to the waves it seemed a miracle that the seamen were not tossed into the water; but they clung on with hands and feet, and all the time they were struggling with the canvas.

The reef was taken in at last, and then it was time to descend—a task of equal danger and difficulty in the howling gale.

The darkness, too, added to the danger.

Tom Merry, struggled after the rest to the weather-shrouds, and in the darkness he made out a dim form close to him, but he did not recognise it.

The form was clinging to the shrouds without descending, and apparently holding on for a few moments to rest.

Tom Merry clambered down, and the dark figure was just above him on the ratlines, when a foot came dashing out and struck the junior fairly on the shoulder, tearing him away from his hold and hurling him backwards into space.

In that instant Tom Merry knew all—he knew that it was Hookey just above him on the shrouds, and that the young villain had deliberately kicked him from the rigging, in revenge for the licking he had received a few days before, and what had followed it. In the darkness the act could not be seen.

It passed through Tom's mind like a flash, but he had not time to think.

He shot backwards from the swaying shrouds, his hands clutching wildly at the empty air.

A cry of despair broke from his lips, but it was drowned in the gale.

In that horrible instant he tasted death. He knew that nothing could save him from the awful crash upon the deck below, or the dive into the raging sea, from which he would never emerge.

Then he came to, with a sudden jerk, head downwards.

There he swung in the darkness, his head below, his feet above, and his hands clutching wildly. His right leg was through the shrouds, and he was hanging on to a ratline by one bent knee, and swinging in the air as he hung.

For some moments he swung, buffeted and beaten by the wind, almost out of his senses with the horror of his position, and yet, by instinct, not by thought, tightening the grip of his leg on the ratline.

JUST MY FUN

Monty Lowther Calling!



Hallo, everybody! There is nothing more fascinating than old coins, says a collector. Except, perhaps, new ones!

"What is more soothing than the sound of running water?" asked the poet. The sound of the plumber attending to the leak!

Story. "You've filled in 128 for 'Age of father if still living,'" pointed out the registrar to the rustic. "Well, that's what he would have been if he were alive!" came the reply.

"Now, mind, no clock-watching!" warned the foreman, engaging a new man to help in cleaning the face of Big Ben.

Story goes that Gore snores so loudly he has been advised to sleep in the room next to himself!

Golf story. "Now what on earth can I use here?" demanded the very bad golfer, in a ghastly bunker. "May I suggest a bomb, sir?" murmured the long-suffering caddy.

From the "Wayland Courier": "With regard to the peace negotiations, it is all over bar shooting."

The new Wayland Cinema boasts a rest room, lounge, dance hall, and restaurant. And they also show films!

Then there was the poet who often

Then his clutching hands found the ratlines below, and he held on, still head downwards on the weather-shrouds, with the wind tearing at him, striving to beat him from his hold into the tossing sea.

He held on convulsively, unseen by Hookey, who was still crouching aloft, too shaken by his fearful deed to have the nerve to descend just then.

But as he felt his position secure, Tom Merry's courage and presence of mind came back. He slowly and carefully released his leg, and slid over to right himself, clinging on all the time with his hands. Then he descended the shrouds, with a thumping heart, and regained the deck.

"Thank goodness you've got back," Lowther muttered in his ear, grasping his arm to steady him as he reeled. "My hat, you look white, Tom!"

"I've nearly been murdered!" muttered Tom Merry thickly. "That scoundrel Hookey kicked me off the shrouds!"

"Oh, the villain!"

"But you—"

"It was a miracle I didn't drop into the sea!" said Tom.

"The bound!" muttered Lowther. "But where is he? He hasn't got down yet."

Tom Merry drew back into the shadow.

"He thinks I'm in the sea!" he muttered. "I'll give the scoundrel a shock when he gets on deck!"

Hookey was clambering down now. He dropped on the deck, with a very

got an inspiration in the middle of the night. He went from bed to verse!

A heavyweight training locally has felled everybody who has entered the ring with him. Seconds "out."

Mr. Ratcliff is a strong believer in the "back to the land" movement. He was caught in a storm on his first aeroplane flight!

Mellish has been spreading false reports. He has a sense of rumour!

In answer to Skimpole, let me state that nitrates are not cheaper than day rates. Oo-er!

America for the balmiest airs, says Buck Finn. Yes, some of the dance tunes!

Story. A group of workmen in Wayland were discussing politics, and one of them was asked for his opinion. "I ain't a-goin' to say," he replied doggedly. "I remember Alf Brown and me thrashed that question out once." "And what conclusion did you come to, Joe?" they asked him. "Well," said Joe, "we didn't arrive at the same conclusion. Alf arrived at the 'ospital, and me at the police station!"

If you are going to be a doctor, keep your temper, or you will lose your patience.

Why, even our postman is quite learned. Well, he's a man of letters!

Weather Note.—After a little more snow, sunshine, fog, frost, gale, hail, and rain, we shall be able to settle down to the autumn.

Time for this one. "This is the most wonderful comb on the market," said the salesman. "You can bend it in a loop, hit it with a hammer, jump on it—" Then a voice piped up: "Say, can you comb your hair with it?"

Chin-chin, chaps!

white face and an uneasy glitter in his little beady eyes.

"Been to sleep in the top, you lazy lubber?" hooted the bo'sun.

Hookey made no reply.

He was looking round him stealthily, still very white. Tom Merry suddenly stepped out from behind Lowther and stood before him, where the light of a "glim" fell full upon his face.

Hookey stared at him blankly, and gave a gurgling cry.

"Oh, it's his ghost!"

"I'm not a ghost, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry. "You tried to murder me, but you didn't succeed!"

Hookey was trembling in every limb. He had not the slightest doubt that Tom Merry's body was in the tossing sea, but the sight of the junior had thrown him completely off his balance. But he made an effort to recover himself as Tom spoke.

"Watcher talkin' about?" he growled savagely. "I ain't touched yer!"

"You kicked me off the shrouds, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry, raising his voice for all the watch to hear. "If I hadn't caught my leg in the ratlines, I should be dead now!"

"Wot's that?" asked Ben Hogg.

Tom Merry pointed at the shrinking Hookey.

"That villain tried to kick me off the shrouds!" he said.

"I never did, on my davey!" yelled Hookey. "It was the wind. I knocked agin him in comin' down, that was all. He wasn't 'urt!"

"Accidents will 'appen," said Ben Hogg, with a sharp look at Hookey.

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"But I reckermend you not to 'ave any more accidents like that, Hookey!"

"I swear—"

"That's enough!" said the bo'sun. "Call it an accident, and take that fur bein' a clumsy lubber, 'Ookey!"

And he dealt Hookey a blow between the eyes that sent him reeling across the deck, to collapse in the scuppers.

"And that's all about it, I suppose?" said Lowther, with blazing eyes.

The boatswain stared at him. "Want to tell the old man?" he asked. "Go and jaw to him, and be kicked off the poop! I hain't got no objection!"

"It doesn't matter," said Tom, catching his chum's arm. "I don't want to make a fuss, Monty. I shall be more careful of that rotter after this!"

And no more was said. The Ramchunder thumped and wallowed on under shortened sail, and all that night the storm raged. There was no sleep for the weary and anxious crew. When morning came up, grey and dismal over the sea, it showed the Atlantic wild and tumbling, the sky grey and threatening, and the brig rolling and pitching.

CHAPTER 11.

In Direst Peril!

FOR three days the gale blew, and the Ramchunder rolled and pitched under a foresail, and the crew were almost too weary to eat and sleep.

It was the hardest experience the juniors had had so far, and they were so worn out with work and watching that they fell into an almost dazed state.

Their clothes were continually wet, they had to sleep in snatches, and get meals by mouthfuls when they could get them.

The "after guard"—the captain and mates—were incessantly in violent tempers, and their savage tempers were reflected in the fore-castle. Never had curses and cuffs been so freely bestowed, and it seemed to the juniors that they were in a floating den of wild beasts.

And that was not the worst, as Blake remarked, for it was quite possible that before the gale ended the den of wild beasts would no longer be floating. The Ramchunder was an old vessel, in constant need of repair, and when she was repaired money was saved in every possible way, with the result that the work was scamped and rotten.

The juniors heard Ben Hogg expressing his opinion often enough that it was a miracle that the rotten old tub held together in such a sea.

To add to her danger, she was overloaded, like most merchant craft; and that, added to her natural clumsiness and heaviness, placed her almost at the mercy of the waves. Instead of riding the seas, she bumped through them like a bull through a hedge, and many times the seamen wondered whether that plunge would be her last.

But the gale blew itself out, and the weather, though still what a landsman would have considered very stormy indeed, abated, and the fears of the crew were relieved.

The skipper had remained sober for three days and nights, and had hardly slept all the time. When the danger was over he hastened to make up for lost time by shutting himself in his cabin with his rum bottle, and "laying his soul in soak," according to the elegant expression of the boatswain.

Mr. Harker, who was just as worn out as the skipper, had the doubtful

pleasure of remaining in charge, without the consolation of rum.

But the next day the sun was seen again, and the glimmer of it on the sea was very cheering. Captain Gunn had hardly been seen on deck for twenty-four hours; but now he emerged, with a red face and bleared eyes, shaking hands, and tottering gait.

Evidently his last wrestle with the rum bottle had been more severe than usual.

He talked to the mate in a way that the seamen enjoyed hearing, and that made Mr. Harker turn white with rage.

When the skipper was recovering from a "drunk," he had a bitter tongue, and Mr. Harker had most of the benefit of it.

The chief mate went below, and the second greaser came in for his turn of the old man's invectives.

Then it was the turn of the watch on deck, and Captain Gunn, glaring down with bleared eyes from the poop, told them what he thought of their looks, of their seamanship, and of the characters of their relations to the third or fourth generation.

Having relieved his feelings in that way, the skipper went below for more rum, leaving the crew wondering why the very atmosphere had not turned blue.

"There'll be trouble with the old man!" said Hogg despondently. "He's always like that after a gale and after the rum! He'll be drunk again before the dog-watch, and then you look out for squalls, my hearties!"

"And 'ere comes the gale a gain!" growled Halkett.

"Oh, we're goin' to 'ave a 'oly time across the pond this v'yage," said Ben Hogg. "The old man will pile her up if he takes charge, you can bet on that."

"He ought to be locked up in his cabin, that's what he oughter be!" snarled Hookey.

"You go and turn the key!" suggested Ben Hogg, amid a yell of laughter from the rest. And Hookey turned away, snarling.

The lull in the gale was over. It seemed as if the weather had paused to gather strength.

Before the first dog-watch the wind was thundering upon the Ramchunder again, and the weary rolling and wallowing in the sea was going on once more. Captain Gunn had crowded on canvas to make up for lost time, and he had given Mr. Walker, the second mate, strict injunction to call him before taking in an inch.

The second mate was not in a hurry to call him up.

He knew that the skipper was soaking himself again, and by that time he must be intoxicated. And when he was drunk Captain Gunn was obstinate and more reckless than ever.

If he came up intoxicated to take command there was no telling what might happen to the Ramchunder. Yet the mate dared not take in sail without telling him, after his orders.

The masts were groaning and straining, and every moment it looked as if the brig would take a "header" and disappear for ever in the foaming waves.

"Why doesn't the idiot take in sail?" Tom Merry muttered desperately. "Either the mast or ship will go!"

"Yaas, wathah! I'm afwaid it's all up this time!" said Arthur Augustus. "Oh, bai Jove! I wish we had nevah gone on that blessed motor-twip! I wondah what they'll say at St. Jim's?"

St. Jim's seemed centuries behind the juniors now; it seemed to them as if they had always been ship's boys, amid the savage and squalid surroundings of the ocean tramp.

Ben Hogg ventured at last to speak to Mr. Walker.



Tom Merry caught sight of a white, terrified face, and the tangled ropes were dragging him to death.

"She won't stand much more, sir," he said.

The second greaser answered with a curse.

"Mind your own business, hang you!"

And Hogg cursed, too, under his breath.

But Mr. Walker realised that it would not do, for every moment the canvas looked as if it would be blown to tatters. And at last he called the chief mate. Mr. Harker came on deck, and swore profoundly, and agreed that the skipper would have to be fetched up. He called the skipper himself.

Captain Gunn came on deck, with a purple face, breathing an odour of rum around him. He held on to the rail to keep his feet.

"Shorten sail, sir?" suggested Mr.

Harker, as the skipper gave no order, only staring aloft with bleared and glassy eyes.

Captain Gunn turned his eyes on the mate.

"Shorten sail! Are you undertakin' to give orders on my ship in my presence, Mr. Harker? Are you skipper of the Ramchunder?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Harker, biting his lip.

"Who's captain on this 'ere ship?" roared Captain Gunn.

"You are, sir," said Mr. Harker, humouring him.

"Yes, I'm captain of the old Ramchunder, and I'm goin' to get her into Vera Cruz afore a month of Sundays," snarled the skipper. "No, I shan't shorten sail!"



clinging to the rail. Hookey was already over the side, "Elp! 'Elp!" he gasped. "I'm caught!"

"But, sir—"

"You hear me, Mr. Harker?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Hold your tongue!"

The chief mate ground his teeth and stepped back. Captain Gunn held on to the rail and surveyed the anxious faces on the main deck.

"Ha, ha, ha! Skeered of a capful of wind, are ye, ye sloppy, lubbering swabs! I'll teach you! I'll sail my ship under full canvas, if I have to sail her to Davy Jones! And I'd like to see the man that won't obey my orders! Let him come out!"

Nobody spoke.

But the looks of the seamen grew blacker and blacker as the gale howled through the rigging, and the canvas strained and groaned.

Suddenly, high aloft, came a report like a pistol-shot as the top-gallant sail

was blown clean out of the bolt-ropes and disappeared like a bird in the air.

Ben Hogg gritted his teeth.

"The top-gallant's gone, and we'll be going, too!" he muttered.

The skipper stared aloft with drunken gravity. Mr. Harker ventured to approach him once more.

"The foresail will go, sir—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"By gosh, I won't hold my tongue!" shouted the exasperated mate. "If you don't shorten sail, sir, I'll undertake to give orders myself."

The skipper glared at him. There was a murmur of approval from the crew. If the mate gave orders they were ready to obey them at once. The responsibility of mutiny would be upon Mr. Harker's shoulders. And mutiny, even against a drunken captain, determined to sail his ship to destruction, is a very serious matter at sea.

The skipper pointed with a shaking hand at the enraged mate.

"Put that man in irons!" he exclaimed in a choking voice.

Not a man stirred.

Mr. Harker turned his back on the skipper and shouted to the men.

"Look alive there! Hands aloft to take in sail!"

And there was a rush to obey.

CHAPTER 12.

To Save His Enemy!

CAPTAIN GUNN stood on the poop, staring stupidly at the seamen as they rushed aloft in obedience to the chief mate's orders.

He did not seem to realise for the moment that his authority was being disregarded, and that he was being set aside by his second in command.

The seamen were aloft in a twinkling, spread out over the yards, and the mate watched them with anxious eyes, fearing that he had taken the law into his own hands too late.

The ship was pitching wildly under her load of canvas, little relieved by the blowing away of the top-gallant. But for the fact that the top-gallant had parted, the Ramchunder would probably have been bows under by that time.

Tom Merry & Co. had remained on deck. They had been quite willing to take their share of the work. But in that tearing wind stronger hands were wanted, and Ben Hogg had ordered them to remain.

The boatswain himself was one of the men spread out on the yards.

"By gosh!" stuttered Captain Gunn. "By gosh! Who's the skipper of this old hooker, Mr. Harker?"

The mate did not reply.

There was anxiety in his eyes as he gazed aloft. If the order to shorten sail had come too late nothing could save the Ramchunder.

The obstinacy of the drunken captain, which had often before been carried to

the very verge of disaster, would have passed the verge this time.

Would the masts hold?

The top masts were bending like whipcord before the gale. The mainmast was groaning and straining, as if it would be torn bodily from its hold in the very heart of the ship.

"Oh, that mad idiot!" Jack Blake muttered. "If the mast goes, what of the men aloft?"

Would the masts go?

Captain Gunn held on to the rail, and raved to the men aloft.

"Down with you! Down with you, every mother's son of you! I'll have you all flogged for mutiny! I'll have you put in gaol, every manjack of you! Down with you!"

But the seamen did not even hear him in the roar of the gale. And they would have taken no notice if they had heard.

They had their hands full struggling with the canvas.

Tom Merry uttered a sudden cry.

"Good heavens! It's going!"

Crash, crash!

The topmast crashed like a stick, and came down, only the rigging holding it to the ship and preventing it being blown away like a feather on the gale.

The foretopmast followed in a twinkling, and a mass of wrecked spars and rigging came hammering down on the Ramchunder's bows.

There were loud cries from the seamen aloft.

But their voices were drowned in the gale. The foreyard was over the side, and two men who had been at work on it had disappeared into the raging waters.

The captain stood holding on to the rail, too stupefied to speak or move. From the two mates came a stream of oaths.

Men were struggling, entangled in the rigging. But the wild pitching of the brig had abated a little now that she was relieved of most of her canvas. The loss of the masts had helped her; but the two topmasts were hanging over the side now, held on by the rigging, and they thumped away at the side of the ship with every heave of the sea. The crashes sounded like blows of a giant hammer.

"Cut it away!" yelled the mate.

He came leaping down to the main deck with an axe in his hand. Bully and brute as he was, he did not lose his presence of mind for a second, and at that moment of fearful peril he showed up at his best.

The mainyard was still intact, and men were clinging to it. All but two scrambled back to the deck—by a miracle, as it seemed. But two members of the Ramchunder's crew would never answer the call of their names again.

While the drunken captain stood dazed on the poop, the two mates and the seamen worked away fiercely, slashing at the rigging that held the broken topmasts to the ship.

The beating of the broken spars on the side of the brig would not be long in staving in the timbers, and once there was a leak in the rotten old fabric all was over.

The four juniors were as quick as anyone in rushing to work.

The axes and knives were very busy, slashing through knots and ropes, and at length the foretopmast was cut loose, and it disappeared on the crest of a wave.

The maintopmast was still grinding

on the timbers of the Ramchunder, and great seas were breaking over the brig.

The hatches had been battened down, or the brig would have filled and sunk. The seamen worked knee-deep in water, and sometimes a great sea broke over them and swamped them to their necks.

They had to cling to the wreckage as they slashed at it to save themselves from being carried away by the wild waters.

"Stand clear!" the chief mate shouted suddenly.

The wreckage was going. The last strands were parting like pistol-shots and the men scrambled back to avoid being carried away in the tangled ropes.

There was a fearful yell in the roar of the waters.

"'Elp, 'elp!"

In the dimness hardly anything could be seen, but the crew knew the voice of Hookey.

"Stand clear, you fool!" shouted the mate.

"'Elp!"

Tom Merry dashed the water from his eyes, and stared towards the shrieking voice. He could see nothing.

Crack—crack—crack!

The last ropes that held the floating mast were cracking one by one. It was like a succession of reports of fire-arms.

And amid the cracking of the last ropes and the roar of the sea came that shrieking, terrified voice:

"'Elp! 'Elp! I'm caught! 'Elp!"

"He's caught in the rigging!" said Blake, with chattering teeth. "Tom, where are you going?"

Tom Merry did not reply; he did not even hear.

He knew what had happened to Hookey. The wretched lad had become entangled in the torn ropes, and he could not extricate himself. He was being dragged overboard. When the last strand that held the floating mast to the ship had parted, Hookey would be whirled away—to death in the wild waters.

Tom Merry plunged forward, axe in hand.

He caught a dim sight of a white, terrified face, and hands clinging to the rail. Hookey was already over the side, and the tangled ropes round his body were dragging him to death.

To venture near him now was to risk being caught by a similar fate. For one moment Tom Merry hesitated. This was the enemy who had made a cowardly attack upon him aloft—who had sought to hurl him to death in a stormy sea. Why should he risk his life to save him?

But the hesitation was only for a moment.

He ran on, stumbling and reeling on the pitching deck. He lost his footing, and brought up in the scuppers with a thud, with the water swirling over him. He scrambled up, his hands clutching at ropes. The white face of Hookey was close to him.

"'Elp! 'Elp!"

"I'll help you!" panted Tom Merry.

He had retained his grip on his axe, in spite of his fall. He raised it, and slashed at the ropes that tangled round Hookey.

The axe slipped from his hand as he was caught and whirled over by a heavy sea, and it disappeared. The wave passed. Hookey was still holding on, but he was exhausted.

"I'm a goner!" Tom Merry heard him say. "I'm done!"

"Hold on!" shouted Tom.

He opened his clasp-knife and slashed



desperately at the ropes. Hookey gave a sudden yell of delight.

"I'm clear! I'm clear!"

Tom grasped him and dragged him in. With a crack, the last of the detaining ropes parted, the torn rigging whisking overboard like serpents, whirling round the two as they held on, but fortunately not entangling them.

The Ramchunder, relieved of the encumbrance, righted. Hookey gave a groan, and fainted in Tom Merry's grasp. The strain had been too much for him.

Monty Lowther and Blake came to their chum's help, and Hookey was dragged into the forecastle and lifted into his bunk. There they left him. There was no time to trouble about him further. They hurried on deck, knowing only too well that it was touch-and-go with the old Ramchunder, and the chances were that the dismantled and disabled old ocean tramp would never see the light of morning.

CHAPTER 13.

To the Rescue!

ALL through the night the gale raged and roared over the tossing sea.

Captain Gunn had gone below.

He was solacing himself with his rum bottle, leaving the two mates to command the brig.

Not a soul on board the Ramchunder thought of sleep. They were only too near the last long sleep.

The loss of the topmast had relieved the brig, and not a rag of canvas was showing now as she plunged on through the foaming seas.

While the wreckage had clung to her, she had turned almost gunwale under, the seamen fearing every moment that she would turn turtle.

Now that the wreckage was cut away she had righted, but not quite. She was swamping through the seas with a heavy list to starboard, and for a time the men feared that she had sprung a leak. But it was not a leak—at all events, not a serious one. Word was soon passed round among the dismayed crew that the cargo had shifted.

While the brig had lain almost on her

beam-ends the cargo had shifted, and it was not likely to settle again.

The brig thumped on through the waters, with her deck sloping down to starboard so steeply that it was impossible to keep a footing upon it without holding on.

When she rolled to port she came almost level; when she rolled to starboard she went down so low that the crew's hearts were in their mouths, lest she should turn completely over.

And there were no signs of the gale going down.

The mates were seen to consult sometimes, with anxious faces, but what they said could not be heard. The skipper remained below.

The crew hung on to ropes and stanchions, and cursed sullenly when they had breath enough.

To most of them it seemed pretty certain that the end had come. The Ramchunder was in no state to live through such a gale at the best of times, and the skipper's drunken obstinacy had destroyed what chances she had.

Yet hour after hour the brig thumped and laboured on, at the mercy of the sea.

Seas broke right over her deck as she rolled, and swept her fore and aft.

It was near midnight when the carpenter clambered up to the poop with a scared face and made an announcement that brought a fresh stream of lurid language from Mr. Harker.

"What's the mattah, sir?" Arthur Augustus bawled in the ear of Ben Hogg, overcoming his dislike and dread of the boatswain in his anxiety to know what the danger was.

The boatswain cursed volubly.

"A leak, of course!" he replied. "And the pump's jammed, you bet!"

shouted Halkett furiously. "I know them pumps—the pumps of this old coffin! We're doomed, that's what we are!"

"There's the boats!" said Tom Merry.

The boatswain snorted.

"The boats in such a sea as this? You're mad!"

Tom Merry glanced at the sea, and his heart sank. Truly, there did not seem much chance of a boat surviving in that maddened whirl of waters. But the Ramchunder was filling under their feet.

Some of the men received the news with sullen resignation, too drenched and cold and weary to care. Some of them burst into savage execrations.

The captain was seen on the poop again now. The calamity that had overtaken his vessel seemed to have had the effect of sobering him to some extent, but he was still in a dazed state. He did not speak, but he held on to the rails, gazing before him with stupid eyes. The command was in the hands of the chief mate, but there was little that Mr. Harker could do.

"Will it never be morning?" muttered Tom Merry wearily.

How long was that black night of danger and horror to last? When dawn came, help might come with the daylight. If the Ramchunder was sighted in her helpless state, any other vessel would do all that was possible to aid, though it was doubtful what could be done in such a sea.

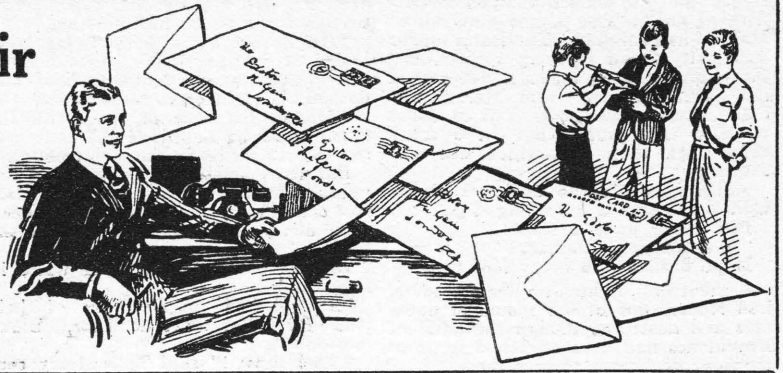
But there were long hours of darkness before the helpless crew yet, with the ship under their feet leaking, and taking ever and ever a greater list to starboard, till it seemed a miracle that she did not turn turtle at every plunge in the seething waves.

Mr. Harker ordered the pumps to be

(Continued on page 13.)

The Editor's Chair

Let the Editor be your pal!
Drop him a line to-day,
addressing your letters:
The Editor, The GEM,
Fleetway House, Farring-
don Street, London, E.C.4.



HALLO, chums! What do you think of the sea story in this number? Great, isn't it? Martin Clifford has certainly "hit the high spots" with this yarn. But he's always turning out winners, and next week's story is yet another tribute to our author's great skill. It bears the title:

"ST. JIM'S ON STRIKE!"

That sounds very much like a spot of bother at St. Jim's! A strike is the unusual form the juniors' protest takes when the Head places a ban on their pets. The trouble first arises over Towser, Herries' bulldog, breaking loose from the St. Jim's menagerie and, in a wildly excited state, chasing the Head across the quad. Naturally, Dr. Holmes' dignity is very much offended, and he thereupon orders all pets to be removed. This causes great indignation and dismay among the juniors, and feeling runs so high that a strike is declared in protest! The excitement and wild scenes which follow the juniors' action make a lively yarn that will grip and hold your interest throughout.

"THE GHOST OF GREYFRIARS!"

In this gripping yarn of Greyfriars you have read how the unknown ghostly grub-raider has so far baffled Harry Wharton & Co.'s attempts to "nail" him. But the chums of the Remove are determined not to "let up" until they have solved the mystery of the ghost. In next week's exciting chapters they succeed in laying the "ghost," and great is the surprise to Greyfriars when he turns out to be— Well, I'll leave Frank Richards to unravel the mystery in his own way and surprise you with the identity of the secret grub-raider.

To complete this ripping issue there will, as usual, be more prize laughs from readers, and Monty Lowther has another batch of the week's best wise-cracks and jokes to tell you. See that

you don't miss next Wednesday's sparkling number, chums.

THE CHARMER!

The man who can, by his magic influence, cure adder-bitten animals—such is Mr. Maunder, of Pothole, Cornwall. His uncanny skill in this direction has gained him quite a reputation, and local farmers always get in touch with him when they discover that one of their cattle has been bitten by an adder. As you probably know, the adder is the only poisonous snake in the country and a cow bitten by one will succumb in two or three days. But not if Mr. Maunder is allowed to bring his strange power to bear on the animal, no matter how badly it is bitten. No animal that he has "charmed" has ever died. Mr. Maunder's skill as a charmer has brought him many letters asking him how he does it; but that's his secret.

THE MYSTERY ISLAND!

"Is it true that there's an island in the Arctic Ocean which has been seen several times, but on which no one has ever succeeded in landing?" asks Fred Boulter, of Bradford. Yes, the island you refer to is known as Sannikov Island, named after the man who first sighted it in the eighteenth century. It has now become known as the "phantom of the Arctic," owing to the fact that although ships have reported having seen it, man has yet to set foot on its shores. There are those who are inclined to the theory that no such island exists, and that it's merely an ocean mirage. Whether this is true or not will perhaps be proved soon, for an attempt is to be made to find the mystery island.

PEN PALS COUPON

1-8-36

BIRD PRANKS!

It's a well-known fact that jackdaws are beggars for stealing small articles which shine, but no jackdaw was ever such a rogue as a starling in Budapest. The bird, called Pityu, belongs to an innkeeper, and it has been a source of trouble not only with its habit of stealing, but with other tricks it gets up to. One of Pityu's dodges is to sneak away playing-cards when customers in the inn are engaged in a game, and this sometimes leads to players suspecting each other of cheating. Another trick of the bird, and one which is very dangerous, is to suddenly run into the road as a car approaches. The driver very often has to choose between running over Pityu or jamming on his brakes, and its always the latter course which the motorist takes. One of these days the bird will run into the road once too often!

But until lately no one ever suspected that the starling had a secret hoard. This was recently discovered when a loft was being repaired. Under some boards were found, among other things, many silver coins. Now the innkeeper knows where many of his customers' tips disappeared to!

ANT HOMES!

The ant is a better builder than man—at least, in the Belgian Congo it is. There the white ants build their hills to great heights, sometimes over thirty feet high. These ant-hills are exceptionally strong, and are a safe protection against the worst of tropical storms. They are so well built that natives in the Belgian Congo live in them—after first clearing out the ants—preferring them to their own baked-mud dwellings!

TAILPIECE.

Mother: "Now, Johnny, come and sit down here and tell Willie a story."

Johnny: "I can't—I've just told dad one!"

THE EDITOR.

Eric Leo Houn, Lautoka, Viti Levu, Fiji (P.O. Box 3); age 10-15; postcards, stamps.

Raymond Manman, 42a, Lombard Street, Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa; age 12-15; football, cricket; Canada.

Frank Browne, 4, Havelock Road, Gravesend, Kent; age 14-18; overseas.

Samuel Dale, R.F.D., 2, Portland, Connecticut, U.S.A.; pen pals.

Sam Goldman, 9, Savile Road, Chapeltown, Leeds 7; age 11-13; stamps, sports; France.

F. Buckingham, 9, Hares View, Shepherds L.N., Leeds; age 12-13; U.S.A.

British & Dominions Film Club; Sec., F. S. Burton, 8, Cordelia Street, South Grove, London, E.3. Members wanted.

Miss Winifred Eales, 297, London Road, Hazel Grove, nr. Stockport, Cheshire; age 14-16; girl correspondents; books, music, films.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,485.



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging topics of interest to each other. If you want a pen pal, post your notice, together with the coupon on this page, to the address given above.

D. J. May, 205, Beresford Street, Hastings, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand; cig. cards.

Miss Lorraine Acheson, 75-79, Berri Street, Montreal, Canada; girl correspondents; age 16-20.

Miss Birdwood Paddon, River Grange, Ryal Bush, Southland, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 18-20.

Miss Grace Gibson, New River Ferry, Invercargill, New Zealand; girl correspondents; age 10-15.

rigged, and the scamen pumped wearily without hope. The pumps jammed, as Halkett had foretold. The Ramchunder was badly found in every respect, and the pumps were as rotten as the rest of her outfit. Indeed, Tom Merry, who had looked at her boats, was in doubt whether they would live in a much calmer sea than that which was now running.

Suddenly, from the darkness of the wild sea, came a gleaming light.

Ben Hogg gave a shout.

"A steamer, by thunder!"

Hope flushed into every face then.

A great ship, lighted up like a theatre, had loomed out of the gloom of darkness and death, as though the hand of Providence had been stretched forth in the hour of despair to save them.

"A liner, by Jove!" said Tom Merry. "What luck, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus, through his chattering teeth. "I wondah if they can take us off, though?"

"It's our only chance, anyway."

Mr. Harker, with hope in his face, too, ordered flares to be burnt as a signal to the steamer.

It could be seen that the great ship had stopped on her course. She had sighted the hapless brig rolling in the trough of the sea, and was coming to her aid.

But how to aid?

The bravest seaman might have shrunk from launching a boat in the sea that was running almost in mountains between the two vessels. But there is no danger at sea from which British seamen will shrink in attempting to save those in distress. Every man in the Ramchunder knew that, whatever the peril, the steamer's crew would do all that could be humanly done.

Mr. Harker rapped out an order for the longboat to be lowered.

The steamer was standing by to receive them, and there was nothing for it but to make an attempt to reach her in the boats. The Ramchunder might disappear under their feet at any moment.

Then followed an incident only too common with ill-found ships—the longboat went down by the head as the rotten tackle gave, and plunged under the water, hanging on by the stern falls. A wave dashed her against the Ramchunder, and the splinters of the boat disappeared in the froth of the sea.

There were two other boats—smaller skiffs—and each in turn was lowered. One of them was smashed at once against the brig, the other floated; and half a dozen men piled into her with the second mate and pulled off. There was not room in the boat for more, and others had to wait their turn. The risk of going in the cockleshell dancing on the waters was almost as great as that of remaining on the sinking ship, and no one was very keen to go, so there was no rush for places. The men whom the mate had ordered into the boat went quietly and sullenly, that was all.

The mate had taken the rudder, and six men bent to the oars. In the flare of lights burnt by both ships the crew of the Ramchunder—those who remained on the brig—watched the progress of the boat.

The men of the big steamer were standing ready to receive the boat, to do all they could to help the refugees on board. The boat laboured on, sometimes mounting the crest of a huge wave, sometimes disappearing from sight in the trough of the sea. Every time she disappeared it seemed that she would never reappear; but again she

came up, still floating, and gaining foot by foot towards the waiting liner.

"Bai Jove! She's there!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

A great wave caught the boat and dashed her right on to the steamer.

Through the roar of the storm the crash could be heard as the boat was smashed to atoms on the metal plates.

But lines had been thrown, and the wrecked crew were clambering on board. Not one of them went down. More dead than alive, they were dragged on the liner.

But the boat was under the water in fragments.

"They'll have to send one of their boats for us, or we're done for," Blake muttered.

"They'll try!" said Tom Merry confidently.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There was no doubt about that. Fearfully dangerous as such an attempt was, it was quite certain that the steamer's crew would make it.

And the remaining hands on the Ramchunder gave a feeble cheer as a boat dropped from the steamer and fended off, and the sturdy seamen pulled for the wrecked brig.

CHAPTER 14.

Too Late!

TOM MERRY & CO. watched the oncoming boat with bated breath. On the Ramchunder now remained only nine persons—the captain, the chief mate, the boatswain, the four juniors, the cook, and Hookey. They were all on deck and watching the boat with intense gaze.

The Ramchunder's boat had barely succeeded in reaching the steamer, and had there been dashed to pieces. The steamer's boat had to make the journey and return if the attempt was to be successful. It seemed too much to expect.

But the seamen came steadily on.

Closer and closer to the rolling, thumping brig—lifted now on a high wave and looking as if it would swoop down on the deck of the Ramchunder, sunk now in a deep abyss, seemingly about to be overwhelmed by the curling seas. Still the boat fought and struggled on.

One man was bailing incessantly, for the boat was swimming with water.

But still it drew nearer.

Close at last, under the lee quarter of the rolling Ramchunder—closer it could not come without courting disaster.

The mate in charge of the boat stood up and shouted.

"Jump!"

Jump! With twenty feet of raging water between them and safety, between the rolling brig and the dancing, tossing boat!

It seemed like jumping to certain death.

"I ain't going!" growled Hookey between his teeth. "I'll stick to the Ramchunder as long as she floats. I ain't going to commit suicide—not me!"

"Jump, you cowardly scum!" roared Mr. Harker.

"Get a line to the boat, sir!" said Ben Hogg. "I'll jump first and take a line."

"Ay, ay!"

And, with the rope tied to his belt, the burly boatswain plunged into the water, and a minute later was dragged into the boat.

The line was made fast, and—with the assistance of the line, and encouraged by the boatswain's example—the cook followed.

The anxious, straining eyes on the

brig watched the cook dragged, half-senseless, into the boat.

Then a wave swept on to the boat, and the line—strong as it was—snapped like a fiddle-string, and parted.

The boat, struggling for life in the wild waters, was swept back from the brig, and at the same moment there came a yell from Mr. Harker.

"Jump—and chance it! She's going!"

And the chief mate threw himself into the sea.

The Ramchunder had taken the last plunge. The list to starboard had told fatally, and as she rolled deep in the trough of the sea she fairly turned turtle.

The juniors were together, and they had intended to stick together if they could, but at that moment they were swept apart.

Tom Merry caught an arm as he was swept away; it was Lowther's arm, and he clung on to it unconsciously.

What was happening? He hardly knew. He only felt that he was being engulfed in a pandemonium of waters. Then his hand left the arm he was holding. He clutched at anything—everything. Something came into his grasp, and he caught it. He did not know what. And he was holding on—clutching for dear life!

Waters round him, boiling and seething and thumping. A roar in his ears, darkness over his vision, despair in his heart, mixed with wild anxiety for his comrades. Still his hands were clutching, and he felt himself clambering upon something that gave him support from the wild waters.

He freed one hand, and gouged the water from his eyes.

Where was he?

What was the huge mass that floated under him, in black darkness, with the white-frothed waters foaming round.

He realised it at last.

It was the hull of the brig. The Ramchunder had turned completely over, and was floating with her keel in the air, and Tom Merry was clambering up the inverted hull—clambering till he reached the very keel, and clung there.

High out of the water the hull rose now. The stumps of the masts were below the sea, pointing to Davy Jones' locker, pointing the way the survivors must soon go, as he felt bitterly enough.

He tried to look round him, but all was darkness.

Far in the distance gleamed the lights of the steamer.

But where was the boat?

After seeing the brig turn turtle, the seamen were not likely to remain near her. They could not have a suspicion that a survivor was clinging to the up-turned keel in the darkness. And even if they knew it, they could not reach him. But they did not know it. They had done all they could. And Tom Merry realised, with a deadly sickness in his heart, that the boat was pulling away in the darkness towards the steamer.

He was lost!

He felt for a moment that he did not care. Where were his chums—Monty Lowther, Jack Blake, and D'Arcy? Swept away to death—leaving him to die but a little later!

He clung on the keel and shouted.

"Lowther! Blake! D'Arcy! Answer me if you are alive! Is anybody here beside me?"

"Tom!"

It was Lowther's voice, shouting back from the darkness.

Tom Merry gave a joyful cry, and clambered along the keel to where his chum was clinging.

Lowther's white, wet face glimmered in the gloom.

He tried to look round him, but all was darkness.

"Monty—oh, Monty, you're here, at least!"

"You haven't seen Blake or Gussy?"

"No!"

"They're gone!" said Lowther, with a shudder.

"Shout to them! They may hear—it's possible!"

The two chums shouted again and again. But no answer came back save the sullen boom of the sea.

They ceased at last, in despair.

"They may have been picked up by the boat," said Lowther, with a faint hope.

"It's barely possible."

"Where is the boat, Tom?"

"Gone!"

"Gone!" groaned Lowther.

"Yes. When the brig turned over, they couldn't have any hope of saving any more. They're gone. They'd have heard us shout if they were near. Besides, they were burning a light. There's no light in the sea now! They're gone!"

"Heaven help us!"

"And the steamer's going!" muttered Tom.

They stared through the darkness towards the distant lighted ship. The lights were disappearing as the great ship swept away into the night.

They shouted wildly, but the howl of the wind drowned every cry.

Smaller and fainter grew the lights of the steamer.

Then they vanished.

Darkness lay upon the waters, broken only by the fitful gleaming of the foamy crests of the wave.

Drenched to the skin, weary, despairing, the two survivors of the wreck clung to the keel of the overturned Ramchunder.

The wrecked brig still floated.

In her hold the air was pent up, and probably that, to a certain extent, kept her afloat; and her cargo perhaps aided. At all events, she floated, as ships will sometimes do after turning turtle—much to the danger of other ships that come upon them in the darkness.

Round the floating hulk the waves were buffeting; but it seemed to the juniors that the force of the gale was dying away. It was as if the storm-fieft felt that he had done his worst.

It seemed ages before a pale glimmer of light showed in the eastern sky.

Dawn at last!

The sun came through the thick grey clouds; it glimmered with pale rays upon a foaming, tumbling sea, and a floating wreck upon which two ghastly figures clung.

The juniors swept the sea with their weary eyes as the light strengthened.

But there was no sail in sight; no smoke of a steamer. They were alone upon the bosom of the Atlantic.

"If only Blake and Gussy were here," groaned Tom Merry.

"I'd not complain of anything else. The old hulk is going to float."

"And there's a chance of being picked up," muttered Lowther.

"The gale's almost gone."

"If only they were here!"

The danger they were in was nothing, if only their chums had been with them. The chance that Blake and D'Arcy had been picked up by the steamer's boat was infinitesimal, though they clung to it. It seemed only too certain that their comrades had found a resting-place beneath the grey, rolling waters.

The sun strengthened, and the rays brought a comforting warmth to the juniors. The sea was rapidly going down, and on their perch on the Ramchunder's keel they were twenty feet out of the water. Their clothes began to dry. And now the pangs of hunger began to assail them.

"We must have food, Monty," said Tom Merry at last. "Do you think we could hack a hole in this rotten timber?"

"It's our only chance, Tom. I've got a knife!" said Lowther. "My hat! I never thought the time would come when I should be glad that the Ramchunder was a rotten old tub and half-eaten by worms! But it's a stroke of luck now!"

The juniors scrambled over the hull,

There was no doubt about it. Tom Merry's eyes blazed; his breath came almost in sobs. There were survivors within the floating hull! Survivors—and whom? Only the juniors, Hookey, and the captain had been on board the Ramchunder still when she took her final plunge. And the captain, dazed by drink, could hardly have survived. There were survivors shut up in the hold of the floating wreck—Blake, D'Arcy, or Hookey—probably all of them—possibly, at least. And the thought that their chums were living, that they would see them again, gave new life to Tom Merry and Lowther.

"Oh, this is ripping—ripping!" Lowther muttered.

"It seems too good to be true!" Tom Merry said, with a choke in his voice.



"Lend me a hand, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry and Lowther bent down and lent a hand, and the swell of St. Jim's was dragged up through the opening in the hull the juniors had made.

looking for the rottenest spot. Tom Merry started with his clasp-knife hacking at the rotten timber. His blows brought a hollow echo from within the hold.

Suddenly he paused, his hand in the air, his face fixed and startled.

"Good heavens, Monty!"

"What?"

"Listen!"

Knock, knock, knock!

As if in answer to Tom Merry's blows upon the hull, there came three steady knocks from within the hold of the Ramchunder!

"It—it may not be them; but I hope— Cut away, Monty!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors hacked away desperately at the timber.

Rotten the timber certainly was, with patches that it seemed marvellous had not given way to the sea and leaked long ago. But the timber, all the same, offered a stout resistance to the wretched implements the juniors had to use. They had nothing but their clasp-knives.

But they worked with feverish energy, fatigue and danger forgotten.

Once the survivors were extricated from the hold of the Ramchunder, there was a chance of life. A raft might be built before the brig took her final plunge, and stocked with food from the interior of the brig. And the sea was growing calmer now with every minute that passed. The gale had fairly blown itself out at last.

Hack, hack, hack!

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CHAPTER 15.

From the Jaws of Death!

TOM MERRY, with a trembling hand, knocked on the timber again with the haft of his knife.

From below the answer came

back: Knock, knock, knock!

From below came the sounds of incessant knocking. Whoever was below was aiding in the work of hacking through the timber.

Suddenly there was a gleam of steel under Tom Merry's eye, and he saw the edge of an axe emerge.

Whoever was inside the hull was better provided with an implement than the juniors outside.

The axe-edge quivered through the wood, and was withdrawn. And Tom Merry and Lowther worked away from the gash, enlarging it, and chipping away the wood in great splinters, thinning it down to render it more vulnerable to the blows from below.

Crash, crash, crash! came the axe again, and huge splinters came out. The sun was past the meridian; the juniors had been working for long hours without noticing the passage of time.

The hole was clear through the timber now—an inch across, several inches long—and Tom Merry paused in his labour and called out:

"Who is below there?"

A joyful voice answered:

"That you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Blake! It's you, Blake?"

"Yes. Have you seen anything of Lowther?"

"He's here with me."

"Good egg!"

"But Gussy—"

"Gussy's with me," said Blake, "spoiling his beautiful hands hacking at this rotten timber! He forgot his gloves when the ship turned over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and Lowther.

They could afford to laugh now.

"Weally, Blake—" came the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Anybody else there, Blake?"

"Yes—Hookey."

"And the captain?"

"Haven't seen anything of him."

"The old man's 'ad 'is last drink this voyage!" said the voice of Hookey.

"Thank goodness, you're there, you fellows!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "We—we were afraid you were gone!"

"We felt the same about you chaps," said Blake. "I never dreamed you'd be hanging on to the keel. You can imagine what I felt like when I heard knocking."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How on earth did you get there?" asked Monty Lowther.

Blake chuckled.

"I'm blessed if I know!" he said. "I was washed away by the water when the old tub took a dive, and swept below. I was hanging on to Gussy, and Hookey was hanging on to my leg. When we were swept into the hatchway I thought we were going to be drowned like rats in a trap—or, rather, I felt it. I didn't have any time for thinking. Then we were in the dark—shut up here—not knowing how it happened. But here we were, expecting to go down every second, and Hookey howling and swearing, and Gussy and I trying to take it as calmly as we could; and then I think I went to sleep a bit."

"You were certainly snorin', deah boy!"

"Then we heard your knocking," said Blake, "and it seemed like a chance. I found I still had the axe in my belt that I'd been cutting rigging away with before, and it came in jolly useful. That's all."

"Have you got any grub there?" asked Monty Lowther.

"No. But Hookey's been gorging while we've been working, so I suppose he's found his way to the grub."

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"Easy as winking!" said Hookey. "The cargo's all shifted. But you kin crawl aft to the lazarette, and get at the cabin stores."

"Get us some biscuits while we hammer away," said Lowther.

"Get them, Hookey," said Blake.

"I ain't obeyin' your horders!" said Hookey.

"Ain't you?" said Blake pleasantly.

"Do you want to be left in here when we get out? As there are four of us, and only one of you, I think you'd better obey orders, and be glad of the chance."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Hookey seemed to think so, too, for he growled, and crawled away in the darkness. The juniors resumed their work. They hammered and hacked at the hole in the timber, and it grew larger and larger. By the time Hookey returned with a bag of captain's biscuits the hole was large enough to pass the biscuits through, and Blake passed them up singly to the two juniors outside the hull.

The hole in the timber grew larger and larger as the afternoon wore on. Above the juniors now was a blue sky, and the sun was decidedly warm. Blake passed up from below a bottle of mineral water that Hookey had brought from the cabin stores, and Tom and Monty drank it gladly. Hunger satisfied, thirst had followed. The opening in the planks was large enough at last for Blake to put his head through.

Gladly the junior put out his head, and drew in deep breaths of the keen sea air.

"Jolly thick down below," he remarked. "This is better! We should have been suffocated long before this if we hadn't made that opening."

"Yaas, wathah! I'm feelin' quite headachy!"

Blake withdrew his head.

"A bit more, and we can get out," he said.

And, heedless of the fatigue that ached in their weary arms, the juniors resumed their work, Hookey taking his turn much against his will. The hole grew larger, and Blake was able to get his shoulders through. He clambered out on to the sloping hull with the assistance of the juniors outside.

"Now, Gussy—"

"Lend me a hand, deah boys."

Tom Merry and Lowther lent a hand, and Arthur Augustus was dragged up through the opening. Hookey was helped out after him.

"Bai Jove! We do look a feahful cwovd of scarecwovs!" D'Arcy ejaculated.

"Yes; I don't think anybody would take you for the best-dressed fellow at St. Jim's now!" chuckled Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"St. Jim's!" said Lowther. "I wonder whether we shall ever see it again?"

"Of course we shall," said Tom Merry cheerily. "After what we've been through we can't grumble now. There's plenty of stuff here to make a raft, as soon as we've had a rest, and lots of stores inside the hulk that we can get at. And the gale's gone."

"Yaas, wathah! I must remark that we are wathah in luck."

When the juniors had rested they descended one after another into the interior of the ship, and brought up bags of biscuits and tins of preserved meat and bottles of mineral water. And then, seated on the keel of the plunging wreck, they enjoyed a feed—very different from the feeds they had been used to in the old study at St. Jim's, but perhaps even more enjoyable.

"Well, I feel better now," said Tom

Merry, with a deep sigh, as he finished his meal. "If we could only see a sail now—"

There was a sudden yell of delight from Blake.

"Look!"

He jumped up, reckless of the danger of pitching into the sea, and waved his hands.

In the red sunset the black smoke of a steamer came shadowing over the sea before the wind. The juniors clambered up in wild excitement.

"Crikey!" said Hookey. "Wot luck! If they see us—"

"Help!" shouted the juniors together. "Ship, ahoy! Help!"

They were too excited for the moment to realise that their voices could not reach half the distance.

"They can't hear us, of course!" exclaimed Tom Merry at last. "But they may see us."

He plunged into the gap in the hull, and reappeared in a few minutes with a blanket from the captain's cabin and a spar. The blanket, tied to the spar, was waved in the air by the juniors.

The black smoke bore down nearer to them—they had been seen!

The steamer ran close down to the wreck; a boat dropped into the water. A quarter of an hour later Tom Merry & Co. and Hookey were on the steamer's deck—bound for the Thames and home.

CHAPTER 16.

Home Again!

FIGGINS of the Fourth rushed like a lunatic into the School House at St. Jim's.

He bumped into Levison and knocked him out of the way; he ran into Cutts of the Fifth and sent him staggering, and rushed on towards the Common-room.

At any other time George Figgins' sudden irruption would have been taken as a sign of hostility, and Figgins would have been piled on by the School House fellows and hurled forth ignominiously into the quadrangle.

But just now House raids and House rags were no more.

The shadow of the fate of Tom Merry and his companions lay upon the old school, and the rival juniors had ceased from ragging in the gloom that hung over both Houses. For the disappearance of the four juniors, and their long absence without a word, was not explained, and seemed inexplicable, unless some terrible accident had befallen them.

St. Jim's had been astonished when Raggles had returned with the car and the announcement that Master D'Arcy and his companions had vanished.

When they failed to appear next day the school was alarmed as well as surprised.

A day or two later came the arrest of Sharpey & Co., when they attempted to dispose of the plunder they had taken from the St. Jim's juniors.

D'Arcy's watch was known at once, and the other things easily identified, when the young rascals were in the hands of the police, and the Head of St. Jim's communicated with. So much light was let in on what had happened to the juniors since Raggles had left them in the car.

But Sharpey & Co. could only own that they had robbed the juniors, and left them safe and sound otherwise. They knew nothing of the shanghaiing.

They were held by the police, but it could not be suspected that they had done worse than they had admitted—the actual disappearance of the juniors could not be attributed to them. Then

what had become of Tom Merry & Co.? As day followed day without news, their friends at St. Jim's almost abandoned hope.

Manners went about with a very long face, and Herries looked too miserable for words; there were visits to the Head from their friends and relations; the police were busy everywhere with searching, and still there was no news.

Hope began to die. Figgins & Co. of the New House seemed to feel it almost as much as Manners himself.

Hence Figgins' excitement when he burst into the School House, shoving fellows to right and left as he dashed to the Common-room.

Into the Common-room he burst like a whirlwind.

A crowd of juniors were there, most of them discussing the same old subject—what had become of Tom Merry & Co.?

Figgins gave a shout and brandished a newspaper over his head.

"News!" he shouted. "Safe and sound—all of them!"

"Hurrah!"

"It's in the 'Wayland Evening Times'!" gasped Figgins. "Only a short item; there'll be fuller news in the morning, I suppose. But here it is. The s.s. Baltic, New York to London, has picked up five survivors of a wreck in mid-Atlantic. Four of them state they are schoolboys, 'shanghaied' on board the vessel they sailed in. Their names are given as Merry, Lowther, Blake, and D'Arcy—the last-named a son of Lord Eastwood. If this account is true, the remarkable disappearance of four boys, which has caused so much commotion, is now explained."

"That's all," said Figgins; "but it's

enough. The young bounders have been to sea!"

"Shanghaied!" said Manners. "My hat! Then they've been to sea as sailors!"

"Poor old Gussy!" chuckled Herries. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"And they'll be back here soon," grinned Digby. "Oh, this is ripping!"

"The Baltic's in the Thames now. They've landed already," said Figgins. "They'll be here in the morning, I should think. We'll give 'em a reception."

"Yes, rather!"

Excitement reigned in St. Jim's that evening in both Houses as the great news spread.

From Kildare, the captain of the school, down to the youngest fag, the whole school rejoiced.

And the next morning St. Jim's was looking forward with eagerness to the return of the wanderers.

The Head had received a telegram apprising him of their safe return, and of the fact that they would arrive at St. Jim's in the morning.

"What blessed train can they be coming by?" Figgins exclaimed, after lessons. "The twelve train's in long ago. They ought to be here."

"Not coming till the afternoon, perhaps," said Dig, and his face fell.

"But they said this morning—"

"Hallo!" shouted Kangaroo of the Shell, who was looking along the road from the gates. "Hallo! Look out! Here they are!"

There was a rush to the gates. Down the long white road came sweeping a big car, and the St. Jim's fellows recognised Raggles, the chauffeur of Lord Eastwood, in the driving-seat.

It was the car in which the swell of

St. Jim's and his guests had gone for that famous drive. They were evidently returning to the school as they had left it—in Lord Eastwood's car. There was no doubt about it, for as the car came nearer the four juniors were recognised sitting in it, waving their hands, and Arthur Augustus waving a silk hat.

The crowd of juniors at the gates burst into a welcoming cheer.

"Hurrah! Hip, pip, hurrah!"

The car came dashing up to the gates and stopped. It was surrounded by a mob of fellows all eager to shake hands with the returned wanderers, and to thump them on the back, and congratulate them, and ask them where they had been, and what they had been up to.

"Vewy glad to see you all again, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "We've been wathah longah away than we intended."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But now we've come home from our little wun in the car," said Arthur Augustus, as calmly as if he and his comrades had returned from the afternoon's run they had planned. "Yaas, thanks; we've had quite a good time—weally quite a good time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the four heroes of the hour descended from the car, and a cheering crowd marched into the quadrangle with the Shanghaied Schoolboys.

THE END.

(Next Wednesday; "ST. JIM'S ON STRIKE!" No pets—no lessons! Such is the attitude of the St. Jim's juniors when the Head places a ban on their pets! Read what happens in this thrilling long story. Order your GEM early.)

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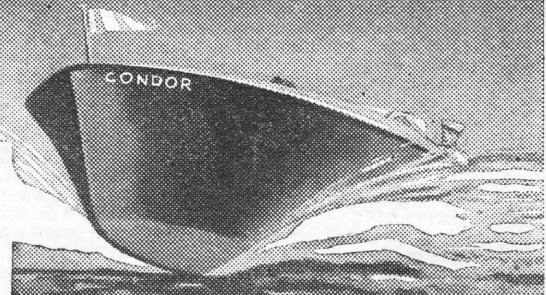
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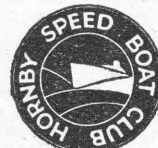
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THE GHOST of GREYFRIARS!

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long yarns of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Magnet.")

Bulstrode Makes Reprisals!

"BUNTER!"

"Yes, Bulstrode."

"Come here!"

Bulstrode, the bully of the Greyfriars Remove, was standing in the doorway of Study No. 1, a scowl on his face, and his eyes glinting with anger.

Billy Bunter was alone in the study, getting tea ready, expecting the arrival of Harry Wharton and his chums, Nugent and Cherry, every moment. He had looked up at the sound of the door opening, but instead of seeing his study-mates, he beheld the threatening face of Bulstrode.

"Wh-what is it, Bulstrode?" asked Bunter nervously. "I—I can't come just now. I'm getting tea ready."

"Come here, I tell you!"

Billy Bunter slowly laid down the teacups and saucers he was arranging, and adjusted his big spectacles, which had earned him the nickname of the Owl in the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

He was a timid junior, and he felt a very natural uneasiness when he found the threatening eyes of the bully of the Remove on him. Bulstrode had once occupied Study No. 1, and Bunter had often experienced his brutality. But, although Bunter would rather have gone anywhere than near Bulstrode at that moment, he dared not disobey.

He slowly approached the burly Removite, blinking uneasily, while Bulstrode watched him with a grim, sneering smile.

"Wh-what do you want, Bulstrode?" faltered the junior. "I'm getting tea ready for Wharton and the others."

"Hang Wharton and the others!" exclaimed Bulstrode, and he reached out and gripped Bunter by the shoulder with a powerful hand, and the Owl gave an anticipatory wriggle.

"Oh, don't, Bulstrode!"

"Don't what?" demanded the bully of the Remove.

"I—I mean, I—"

"You know what you deserve. That's what you mean, isn't it? You know why I've dropped on you, you greedy young porpoise!"

"Ow! I haven't done anything, Bulstrode—really, I haven't! I—I wouldn't do anything you didn't like, you know," mumbled Billy Bunter. "Ow! Don't shake me like that. My spectacles will fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them."

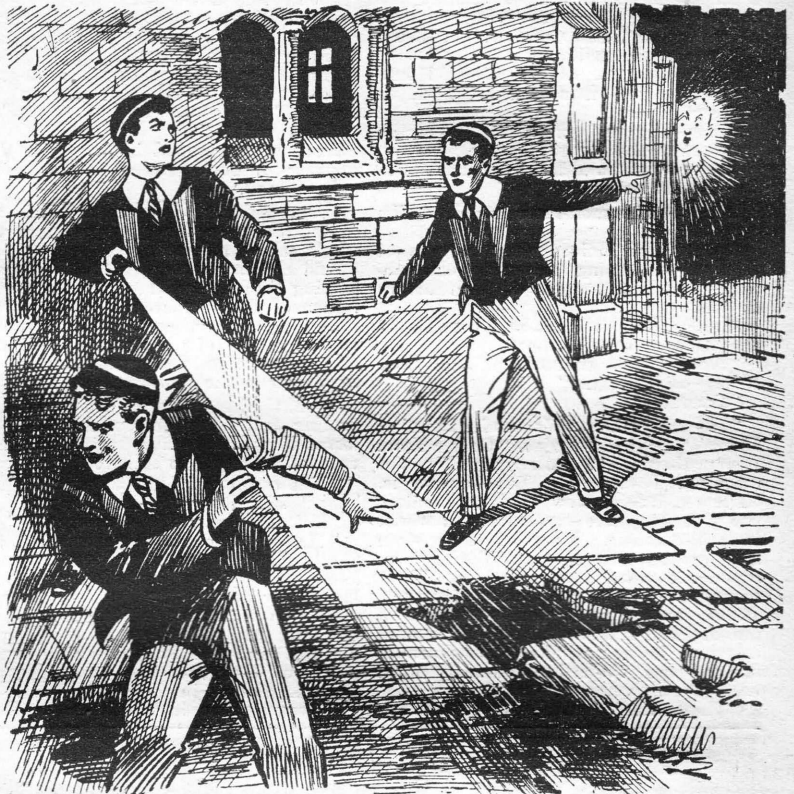
"You greedy young cad! What have you done with the grub out of my study?"

Billy Bunter blinked at him in astonishment.

"I—I haven't seen it, really! I haven't touched any grub in your cupboard."

"Don't tell lies!" said the bully of the Remove. "If you didn't take it, who did? Answer me that."

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"Look!" exclaimed Nugent suddenly, turning to Harry Wharton. For a moment a white, ghostly face appeared in the dark gap in the farther wall, then it was gone!

"I can't, Bulstrode. I don't know who took it."

"You're the hungriest and greediest little brute in the Remove!" said Bulstrode, shaking him. "If any grub's missed, it's pretty safe to set it down to you. What I want to know is, where is it?"

"I really don't know, Bulstrode. You see, I haven't taken it. I didn't know there was any there; and, besides, I wouldn't have taken it, anyway."

"Don't tell lies! I'll shake the truth out of you if you don't tell me!" exclaimed Bulstrode savagely. "Several of the fellows have been missing grub from their studies the last day or two, and I know very well that you take it. Now, I'm not going to waste my grub on a greedy porpoise like you. Tell me where it is!"

"I don't know."

"You can't have eaten it all. It was there at dinner-time, and you must have slipped in immediately after school and taken it, while we were all out in the Close. You haven't been out, have you?"

"N-n-no, but—"

"That's it, then. I know you had it, so you may as well own up. Perhaps it's my grub you're getting ready for Wharton's tea."

"No, it isn't, Bulstrode—it isn't, really. I don't see why you should pick on me. There is Vaseline. He shares your study, and he'd take anything from anybody."

"Oh, would he?" exclaimed another voice at the door, as Hazeldene of the Remove looked in.

"Oh, I didn't mean that, Hazeldene!" said the unfortunate Bunter. "I mean that you wouldn't have taken it on any account—that's what I really meant to say."

Hazeldene—Vaseline, as the Removites called him—laughed unpleasantly as he came into the study.

"You're the champion prevaricator, Bunter. That shows you how much we can believe your word. And as you're the greediest young brute in the Form, it stands to reason you took the grub. There has been a lot of grub-lifting lately in the studies, but I notice that nothing's been heard of any grub being taken out of this study."

"That's so," said Bulstrode. "Naturally, he wouldn't rob his own quarters."

"I shouldn't wonder if Wharton or Cherry send him out to collar other people's tommy," said Hazeldene. "I dare say it comes cheaper in the long run. As it happens, the grub that's missing is as much mine as it is Bulstrode's. I'm pretty certain that our grub has been brought here, so if we collar all this—"

"Good idea!" said Bulstrode hastily. "You mustn't!" exclaimed Bunter in alarm. "This tommy belongs to Wharton and Cherry, and they are just coming in to tea."

"I'm afraid they'll have to miss their

ANOTHER EXCITING ADVENTURE OF HARRY WHARTON'S EARLY SCHOOLDAYS

tea, then," said Hazeldene, gathering up the supplies on the table. "H'm! Jam tarts, cream puffs, chocolate biscuits. Good! Ham and tongue, brown bread, and a nice pat of butter. We'll have the sugar, too."

"And the tea-caddy," said Bulstrode. "Good! I think that's enough. Lend me a hand with them, Bulstrode. I don't want to stuff all of them into my pockets."

"Right-ho!"
Bulstrode released Bunter and helped Hazeldene to pick up the eatables on the table. Their movements were rather hasty, for they didn't want to be caught in the middle of the raid by the chums of the Remove.

Billy Bunter watched them open-mouthed. This barefaced brigandage was a little new, even for Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove; and, since he had been licked in fair fight by Wharton, Bunter wondered at his nerve.

"I say, you fellows—" began Billy Bunter.

"Oh, shut up, you young ass!"
"You mustn't take those things!"
"Get out of the way!"
"I can't stop you, but—"

"But I can," said a quiet voice as Bulstrode and Hazeldene stepped to the door, and Harry Wharton stood before them.

"Let me pass!" said Bulstrode savagely.

Harry Wharton made no reply. He stepped farther into the study and closed the door behind him, and stood facing the bully of the Remove.

Who?

BULSTRODE'S face became crimson with rage. Until of late it was new to him for any fellow in the Remove to stand up against him. Harry Wharton had done so, and had beaten him in a hard-fought fight; but Bulstrode's spirit was far from tamed yet.

"Get out of my path!" he hissed.
Harry Wharton did not move.

"It seems to me that you've been taking rather a liberty in my study," he remarked quietly. "What are you doing with my things under your arms and crammed in your pockets?"

"Mind your own business!"
"It is my business, I imagine, when I find a fellow raiding my study and carrying off my tea!" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment. "I can take a joke with anybody, but this is really a bit too thick!"

"If you want to know, the things belong to us."

"How do you make that out?"
"If you send a rotten little fag round stealing in the studies, you can't expect to be allowed to keep all the things he brings home!" said Bulstrode savagely.

Wharton stared in astonishment.
"Are you speaking seriously, Bulstrode? If this is a joke, I don't see the point of it."

"You know grub has been missed from some of the studies lately, Wharton," said Hazeldene, in the conciliatory, insinuating manner which had gained him the name of Vaseline in the Greyfriars Remove.

"I have heard so."
"Well, it must have been Billy Bunter who roped in the things."

"It wasn't!" interjected Bunter.
"Dry up, Bunter! I say it was Bunter who collared the things, and so we came here to get them back—didn't we, Bulstrode?"

"Yes, we did!" growled Bulstrode.
"Do you mean to say that some of the articles in this study belong to you?" asked Harry Wharton.

Hazeldene shifted uneasily.
"Well, perhaps not exactly that, but, you see—"

"I don't see! Can you identify any article here as belonging to you?"

"Well, no, if you put it like that!"

"Can you, either, Bulstrode?"

"You know I can't! But I know jolly well that it was a fellow from this study who has been raiding the rooms!"

"How do you know it?"

"Well, nothing has been taken away from this study, for one thing."

"There are some other studies from which nothing has been taken, I believe."

"Very likely. I don't know, and I don't care! But you've got the greediest little rotter in the Remove in this study, and he—"

"You think Bunter has been raiding the studies?"

"I know he has. Who is more likely than Bunter to have raided the grub, I'd like to know?"

"It's not a question of what's likely. If you had any proof, or reasonable suspicion, against Bunter, it's different. But you haven't. You've jumped to a conclusion without the slightest reasonable grounds, as far as I can see."

"I'm satisfied about it, anyway."

~~~~~  
*Who was the ghostly visitor who haunted the ruined wing at Greyfriars and raided Remove studies at night? Read what happened when Harry Wharton & Co. set out to lay the spook!*  
~~~~~

"But you can't expect me to be satisfied when it's my grub you're carrying off," said Wharton, smiling slightly.

"I don't care a rap whether you're satisfied or not. Get out of the way!"

"I'll get out of the way," replied Harry, "when you've replaced those things on the table—not before!"

"That's right!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "Cherry and Nugent will be here in a minute, and then we'll kick these rotters out."

"Come on, Vaseline," said Bulstrode, in no wise inclined to leave the tussle until the other two juniors arrived to turn the odds against them.

Bulstrode and Hazeldene rushed at Wharton. Harry did not flinch from the unequal encounter. He hit out with his right, and Hazeldene reeled back against Bunter, who pushed him off, sending him with a bump to the floor.

Bulstrode sprang upon Wharton, and jammed him back against the door.

Almost at the same moment the door was pushed from outside, and a cheery voice called out:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" It was the usual greeting of Bob Cherry of the Remove. "What are you shutting the door against your uncle for in that way?"

"Come in, Cherry!" exclaimed Bunter. "Bulstrode and Vaseline are here, and they're trying to collar the grub!"

"By Jove, are they?"
And Bob Cherry hurled himself at the door.

It came flying open under his weight, and Harry Wharton and Bulstrode

reeled away, still grappling fiercely with one another.

Bob Cherry and Nugent sprang into the study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?"

Hazeldene staggered to his feet. He was quick to realise that the game was up.

Bulstrode tore himself loose and made for the door. Harry Wharton set his back against it.

"No, you don't!" he said grimly.

"Not till you've emptied your pockets, old son!"

"Let me pass!"

"Rats!"

"Come off, Bulstrode!" said Hazeldene. "Can't you see it's no good. I'm quite willing to empty my pockets."

Wharton. It was all in fun, of course."

And the cad of the Remove, with assumed cheerfulness, replaced his plunder on the table. Bulstrode, after a brief hesitation, did the same. Harry Wharton opened the door for them and shut it again when they had gone.

"What was the cause of the rumpus?" asked Nugent.

Wharton explained.

"Well, it's true enough that a lot of grub has been missed from the studies this week," said Nugent thoughtfully.

"I say, make the tea, Bunter; you must be useful as you can't be ornamental. But it was like Bulstrode's cheek to jump on the Owl like that without any proof. Of course, Bunter, is the most likely person to take the grub; there's no denying that."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Did you take it, Bunter?"

"No, I didn't!"

"The truth, now," said Harry Wharton. "Was it you who took the things from Bulstrode's study and the other studies?"

"I'll swear it wasn't, Wharton," said Bunter earnestly.

Harry gave a nod.

"I believe you, Bunter. What do you others say?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Nugent.

"I believe him, for one. But it's queer, all the same. Somebody has been rummaging round the studies and collaring the grub. Who could it be?"

Wharton looked puzzled.

"It ought to be looked into," said Bob Cherry. "I know some of the fellows have complained to Mr. Quelch about it. I suppose it is a fellow in the Remove playing the giddy goat, and he ought to be dropped on. The fact that this study hasn't been victimised points suspicion on us to a certain extent, although I know there are some other studies that haven't been touched."

"Tea's made," said Billy Bunter.

"Pour it out, then," said Harry Wharton. "As Bulstrode has accused this study of being at the bottom of the matter we might as well look into it—and it wants looking into, anyway. When did the thing start—let me think."

"Oh, I remember," said Nugent. "It was the day after we saw the foreigners off at the station. Russell told me next morning that somebody had been at his study cupboard overnight and simply cleared out the cupboard."

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

Lately, a number of foreign boys had been at Greyfriars, most conspicuous among them being Hurree Jamset Ram!

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Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur, who had shared Study No. 1 with the chums of the Remove.

The foreigners were gone, and the Nabob of Bhanipur had gone with them; most unwillingly, for he had become strongly attached to Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent during the time he had shared their study.

Wharton remembered that the mysterious thefts had not commenced till after the departure of the foreigners, now that it was mentioned.

"Well, I don't understand it," he remarked. "It's a trick being played by somebody, of course, but I can't say I like the kind of trick, especially when this study gets accused of it."

"We'll look into the thing."

"That's the idea! So far as I've heard, most of the purloining has taken place at night," Harry Wharton went on. "The fellow, whoever he is, goes prowling round after lights out."

"Looks like it."

"Bulstrode said his cupboard had been cleared out during afternoon school, or just after," Billy Bunter remarked.

"H'm! Then it must have been a chap who was absent from classes," said Wharton thoughtfully. "It might have been any of a dozen, though, as we don't know what time in the afternoon it took place. As something seems to have been taken pretty nearly every night, I think it's quite possible the rotter will be on the prowl again to-night. Suppose we get out of the dormitory after lights out and look for him?"

"But if the fellow is in the Remove he'll see us get out and know we're on the watch," Nugent remarked.

"We can manage it quietly, without alarming anyone."

"Well, yes, it will be dark, and we may be able to get out silently."

"It's settled, then?"

"Yes, if we— What on earth's that?"

The Mystery of the Box-room!

THE study door flew open with a crash. A junior with a white face and starting eyes dashed into the room.

"What's the matter?"

"It's Skinner!"

"Collar him!"

"Hold on," said Harry Wharton quietly. "There's something wrong. He's frightened out of his wits. What is it, Skinny?"

It was Skinner of the Remove who had burst so suddenly into the study. He turned a white face to the chums.

"Sh-shut the door!" gasped Skinner.

"What for?"

"Shut it! Oh dear, shut it!"

Harry Wharton stepped to the door and closed it. He could see that Skinner was terribly frightened about something, though he could not imagine what. It was better to humour the scared junior, at all events.

"Now, what's the matter, Skinner?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I—I say, you chaps," said Skinner nervously, "do you believe in ghosts?"

Harry Wharton looked searchingly at the junior.

"What on earth are you talking about, Skinner? Have you seen a ghost?"

"Ye-e-es, I believe so."

"Ass!" said Nugent.

"Well, I saw something," said Skinner. "It was very dark up in the

box-room, and I didn't see it very clearly."

"What—the box-room?"

"No, the ghost!"

"What was he like?" asked Bob Cherry. "Hoofs and horns and tail, and flaming eyes, or anything in that line?"

"No; he had a face like chalk."

"Perhaps some fellow has been chalking his face. That would account for it."

"Look here, if you can't take a serious matter seriously—"

"Oh, go on with the yarn! What was he like?"

"I—I couldn't see very well. It had a fearfully white face, as white as chalk, and two glaring eyes."

"And you saw it in the box-room?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes, I did."

"What were you doing up in the box-room in the dark?"

"Well, it's not quite dark there yet, and I was going up to fetch down my cricket bat to oil this evening," said Skinner. "I knew just where it was, so I didn't trouble to take a light. I had just got the bat out when I heard a noise. I looked up, and there, in the shadows, was that awful face looking at me."

And Skinner shuddered. Whether he had been mistaken or not, he had certainly been terribly scared.

"And what did you do?"

"Oh, I bolted!"

"Why didn't you dot him in one of his glaring eyes?"

"I'd like to see you do it. I was scared—well, startled. I bolted, and came down the stairs four or five at a time. I rushed into the first room that had a light in it—it happened to be this one. I—"

"It was some fellow playing a joke, of course!" said Nugent.

"Well, now I come to think of it calmly, perhaps it was," said Skinner. "But it was a jolly startling thing to see, anyway."

"I don't quite catch on," said Harry Wharton. "Had you told anybody you were going up to the box-room to fetch your bat, Skinner?"

"No; I just ran up."

"Then the chap who played the trick didn't know you would be there?"

"Certainly not!"

"He can't have intended to play the trick on you, then?"

"N-no, I suppose not."

"It's queer," said Wharton. "He couldn't have known that Skinner was coming there, and he couldn't have expected anybody to go into the room. Nobody goes up to the box-room after dark. And I suppose he didn't go up there to play ghost just to amuse himself."

"Perhaps it was a real ghost," quavered Billy Bunter.

"Perhaps you're a silly ass," said Bob Cherry. "We can bar the theory that it was a real ghost, at the start. The question is whether it's anybody playing a trick, or whether Skinner only imagined that he saw it all."

"Think I should be likely to imagine it?" snapped Skinner. "I suppose I'm not afraid of the dark, am I?"

"Well, it was a jape, then."

"Let's go up and search the box-room," said Nugent. "Come on, Skinner!"

"No, thanks!" said Skinner promptly. "Of course, it was only a jape, as you say. But—I promised to play a game of chess with Russell in the Common-room, and I'm late already. I must be off."

And Skinner quickly quitted the room.

Bob Cherry gave a chuckle.

"He doesn't want to go in for any ghost-hunting," he remarked. "We may as well have a little run up to the box-room. The ghost can't hurt three of us. If it's a fellow who has chalked his face we'll make some of it black for him, for a change."

"Good!" said Nugent. "I can see that Bunter is simply burning to start. Come on, Bunter! You shall lead the way."

"I—I—I don't think I'll come, if you don't mind, Nugent," stammered Bunter. "I—I want to run downstairs and see whether a postal order I am expecting has arrived yet."

And Bunter fairly bolted from the study.

"Ha, ha, ha! Let's go, you chaps."

Harry Wharton took a flash-lamp from the cupboard.

"Come on!" he said. "One of you bring a cricket-stump. If it's a fellow playing a jape we may as well give him something for his trouble."

"Good wheeze!" said Bob Cherry, picking up a stump from the corner. "Lead on, Macduff!"

And Harry Wharton, lamp in hand, led the way upstairs to the box-room.

The Ghost Hunters!

DARK and gloomy looked the box-room as the three juniors entered it. It was an extensive apartment, and pretty well filled with lumber, and well coated with dust. Harry Wharton flashed the light of the lamp to and fro as he advanced into the shadowy room.

"There's Skinner's bat!" chuckled Bob Cherry, picking up a cricket-bat from the dusty floor. "He didn't stop to take that with him."

"No; he must have been scared. I hardly think he can have imagined it all," said Wharton thoughtfully. "Skinner's a chap not given to imagining things. Perhaps the silly ass who frightened him just came into the box-room to chalk his chivvy, intending to go out in the passages afterwards."

"It's a bit early to start playing ghost. It's only just dark."

"Yes; that's curious, too. Well, let's look for him."

The juniors hunted carefully through the box-room, but not a sign of the mysterious apparition could they discover. They ransacked every corner of the room, and even peered into the empty boxes, but not a trace of anything out of the common could they find.

They stopped at last, disappointed, and somewhat soiled from the dust they had disturbed in their quest.

"Nothing in it!" said Nugent.

"We've wasted a quarter of an hour, got ourselves filthy, and the tea's spoiled."

"Nice sort of comforter you are!" Bob Cherry remarked.

"Well, let's go and get a wash and brush down, for goodness' sake!"

"Wait a minute," said Harry Wharton. "Where does that door lead to?"

He pointed to a low door, set in the wall of the box-room, almost hidden in the shadow of a great box. Nugent glanced at it.

"Oh, that opens into a passage leading into the disused wing, behind the Cloisters, you know. Nobody ever goes there."

"The ghost may have gone that way."

"Well, if it was a real ghost it may have gone up the chimney, or out of the window. If it was a fellow playing a jape, I can answer for it that he didn't go into the disused wing at this time of

the day alone. It's dark, and full of pitfalls for the unwary. The chaps are not allowed to explore it because it's dangerous. It's part of the ancient abbey that was here in King John's time."

"The door is never opened, then?"

"Not that I know of."

"Well, it's been opened lately, anyway," said Wharton, looking closely at it. "The dust is brushed off near the handle, here."

Nugent grinned.

"That's easily explained. I showed Hurree Singh through the passage the day before the foreign chaps left Greyfriars. He was curious to explore it."

"Oh, I see!"

"But we went in the daytime. It's too risky after dark."

"Look here," said Wharton abruptly, "the chap who was playing ghost—and I'm convinced that there was somebody—couldn't have gone down the stairs in the usual way. He couldn't show himself with the chalk on his face. He's

Harry Wharton advanced into the passage, casting the light before him. "The floor's shaky."

"All right; I'll be careful."

Harry Wharton went steadily along the passage. Suddenly there was a sharp clink and a rattle, and he stopped and flashed the light on an object lying in the dust.

"Why, here's a salmon-tin!" he exclaimed.

"My only hat! How did that get here?"

Bob Cherry picked up the tin, and the juniors stared at it in blank amazement.

It was a common tin such as salmon is preserved in, and had evidently only lately been opened, for fragments remained attached to the tin, and there was no unpleasant smell from them.

"A salmon-tin—here!" ejaculated Nugent, breaking the silence. "My only aunt! Does the ghost live on potted salmon?"

"Very probably," said Harry Wharton. "I begin to see light, I think.

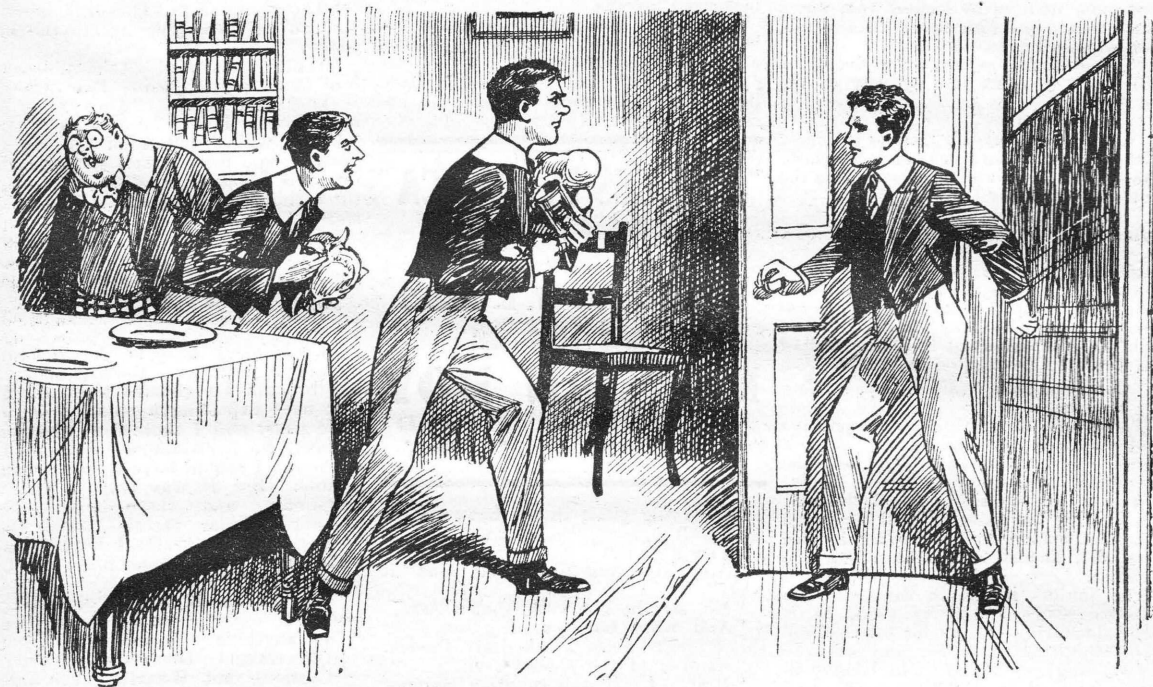
tin seemed to show pretty plainly that the ghost was of the human variety; but the eerie sound in the gloom of the deserted recesses had set the nerves of the juniors a-quiver. But they followed Wharton without hesitation.

Harry, picking his way carefully, led them on to the end of the passage. There was no door at the other end, though a pair of rusty hinges still adhered to the stone wall. Beyond lay a stone chamber, with a flagged floor and an arched roof. There was a deep window so overhung with ivy that even in broad daylight hardly a glimpse of the sun penetrated to the room.

"Mind the floor!" muttered Nugent.

The warning was not needed. In some places the flags were broken, and here and there was a black gap, yawning and dangerous. The juniors trod lightly. A false step might have precipitated them into the chamber below, to injury upon the stone.

"The chap must have a nerve if he



Their arms loaded with the foodstuffs belonging to Harry Wharton & Co., Bulstrode and Hazeldene stepped towards the door. "I can't stop you taking these things!" said Billy Bunter, "but—" "But I can!" said a quiet voice, as Harry Wharton entered the study.

not here, so I think he had cleared out that way."

Nugent gave a grunt.

"You determined boulder! I can see you have made up your mind to explore the ruined wing of Greyfriars," he said.

"I haven't been over it yet, as a matter of fact. You have been going to show me, and we may as well have a look at it now."

"It's all gaps and broken mortar, and cobwebs and dust."

"We can't get much dustier than we are now."

"Well, that's one comfort. Come on, then!"

Nugent pulled open the little oaken door. It creaked rustily on its hinges, and a gust of cold air came from the dark passage beyond.

"Ugh!" grunted Bob Cherry. "I can't say I like the look of the place, anyway."

"Take care!" exclaimed Nugent, as

It did not occur to me before that there might be a connection between the ghost of the box-room and the purloining of grub from the junior studies."

Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation.

"My hat, you've hit it!"

"I believe you have," said Nugent slowly, as he stared at the tin. "The chap who bones the grub brings it here to eat. Is that what you mean?"

"Well, it looks a great deal like it, doesn't it?"

"By Jove, it does!"

Bob Cherry dropped the tin to the floor. The light thud was followed by another sound farther up the passage, and the juniors started.

"Was that an echo?" whispered Bob, taking a firmer grip on the cricket stump, while Nugent's fingers closed hard on the cane handle of Skinner's bat.

"I don't know; come on and see!" And Harry Wharton led the way.

The discovery of the empty salmon-

scuttles about here in the dark!" muttered Bob Cherry. "I shouldn't care for the thing myself."

Nugent gave a sudden gasp as he turned to Harry Wharton.

"Look!"

"What is it? Where?" asked Wharton quickly.

"There—there! It's gone now!"

Nugent had turned white. His hand was raised and pointing towards a low, dark gap in the farther wall. Wharton and Cherry stared in the direction, but could see nothing but the bare stone.

"What was it?" muttered Wharton.

"A face!" muttered Nugent. "A—a face just as Skinner described it. White—horribly white—with flashing eyes!"

"Are you sure?"

"I tell you I saw it!"

"Then we'll see it, too!" exclaimed Harry. And, followed by Nugent and Cherry, he hurried across the room

towards the opening of the passage on the farther side.

Harry, though swift in his movements, was careful of the pitfalls, and he reached the passage without mishap. A cold breath of charnel-like air came from it. He flashed the lamp inside and saw the top of a flight of stone steps.

"We can't go down there," said Nugent. "The steps lead down to the Greyfriars vaults. They're immense, and extend under the school, and there's a passage leading away into the Friar's Wood, too. If the chap's had the nerve to go down there, we've got no chance of catching him."

"Is there any other way out of this place besides the box-room?" asked Harry Wharton, flashing the light round.

"Yes, there's the big door of the vaults, but that's always kept bolted," said Nugent. "There's another door into the corridor, but that's always bolted on the outside, too, and locked. The Head has all the keys. He takes care of that to keep the juniors from getting in here. The little door in the box-room used to be locked, too, but a chap busted the lock once, months ago, and it hasn't been noticed."

"Then if the fellow comes back, he will have to come out by way of the box-room?"

"Yes, of course."

"Good! We needn't trouble to follow him. We have only to keep a watch on the stairs and he can't get back into the school without our knowing it."

"That will settle his hash."

The idea was certainly a good one. It was only a question of how long the vigil would last. If a Greyfriars fellow were playing this trick he would have to get back into the school before bedtime at the latest, or he would be missed. The chums of the Remove had only to keep a watch on the stairs.

"Come on, then," said Harry, leading the way back.

The chums passed through the passage and regained the box-room. Nugent closed the little door. They left the box-room, and on the stairs Harry Wharton extinguished the flash-lamp. They went downstairs and emerged into the passage, and came face to face with Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

The juniors halted in dismay. The Remove-master stared at them as if he could hardly believe his eyes. They were smothered in dust, and cobwebs were clinging lovingly to them in places.

"Where have you been?"

Bunter Keeps Watch!

MR. QUELCH asked the question, but it was a superfluous one, for he knew perfectly well where the juniors had been. There was only one place in Greyfriars where they could possibly have got in such a state.

"Where have you been?"

"In the box-room, sir."

"Have you been in the deserted wing?"

"Well, yes, sir, but—"

"Follow me to my study," said Mr. Quelch. "Not a word! Follow me!" And the Remove-master turned and stalked away majestically.

The chums of the Remove looked at one another glumly and followed. Their plan of watching the staircase to the box-room was knocked on the head at once. But as they went down the passage Billy Bunter met them. Harry

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Wharton whispered hastily to the short-sighted junior.

"Bunter, will you buzz along to the stairs up to the box-room?"

"I—I can't."

"Ass! I don't mean go up to the room. Just stay at the foot of the stairs and see if anybody comes down."

"Oh, certainly, Wharton!"

"Mind you stay there till I come."

"Certainly."

And Billy Bunter hurried off. The chums of the Remove, somewhat relieved in their minds, followed their Form-master to his study. Mr. Quelch's grim face as he ushered in the juniors did not bode a happy interview.

"You have been in the disused wing against the headmaster's direct orders!" he rapped out sharply.

"If you will allow me to explain, sir—" began Harry Wharton.

"I am waiting for you to do so."

"We have been looking for somebody."

Mr. Quelch stared at him.

"You have been looking for somebody in the deserted wing," he said in measured accents.

"Yes, sir. You see, sir, a fellow has been playing ghost, and he frightened a chap in the box-room!"

"Oh, I see!" said Mr. Quelch, looking a little less stern. "Someone has

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been playing ghost in the box-room, is that it?"

"That's it, sir."

"And have you discovered who it was?"

"No, sir; he got away somewhere."

"And what boy was frightened by this supposed ghost?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Skinner of the Remove, sir."

"H'm! I will not question Skinner because I can place reliance on your word," said Mr. Quelch. "This alters the case somewhat; but even for this reason you had no right to enter the disused wing. It is too dangerous to anybody, and therefore it is placed out of bounds by the Head. I have no alternative but to punish you for disobeying orders. You will remain indoors the whole of to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, sir—"

"Not a word, Cherry! You might have broken a limb by this reckless conduct, and I intend to make it an unprofitable escapade, for your own sakes," said Mr. Quelch. "By the way, I understood that the door giving on that old stone passage was locked."

"The lock was broken long ago, sir," said Nugent.

"H'm! I will see that it is replaced. You may go, boys."

The dismayed Removites filed out of the study. Three gloomy faces looked at one another in the passage.

"Gated for a whole afternoon," growled Bob Cherry. "What the

dickens did he want to remember that to-morrow was a half-holiday for?"

"Oh, it's just like Quelch," said Nugent. "He always comes down heavy like this. Can't be helped."

"Did you notice what he said about having a new lock put on the door in the box-room?" said Harry Wharton. "I hope that ghost will be safe out before it's put on, or he'll get shut up in the ruined wing."

"Oh, he could get out into the quadrangle by climbing down the ivy from one of the old casements," Nugent remarked. "That couldn't be done in daylight without his being spotted, though."

"It wouldn't do to speak to Mr. Quelch; we can't give the fellow away."

"No. Let's go and see if anyone has passed Bunter on the stairs!"

The chums of the Remove hastened to the spot where Billy Bunter was supposed to have taken up his stand. But there was no sign of the Owl to be seen.

Harry Wharton looked round wrathfully.

"The young ass! He's not here."

"Can he have gone up to the box-room?"

"Wild horses wouldn't have dragged him up there," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "He's gone off somewhere. Hallo, here he is!"

There was a patter of feet in the passage, and Billy Bunter came running up. His jaw dropped at the sight of the three chums standing at the foot of the stairs.

"I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

"Why didn't you come here as I told you?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I did, Wharton, I assure you."

"Then why didn't you stay here until I came?"

"I was going to, only Vaseline came by and he said that the postman had just brought a registered letter for me. I've been expecting a postal order for some time, and I thought it had come at last. So I just buzzed down to see about it. I should have been back in a minute. But it was only a joke of Vaseline's, and there wasn't any registered letter at all," said Billy Bunter ruefully. "But I haven't been away for more than four or five minutes at the most."

"Oh, get out of sight!" said Harry growly.

"Is anything the matter?"

"Oh, travel! Don't ask questions."

"Certainly not, Wharton. I'm not at all curious, but what's the matter?"

"Shall we take him up to the box-room and lock him in?" asked Bob Cherry, looking questioningly at his chums.

There was no need for them to answer; the suggestion was enough. Billy Bunter went along the passage as if he were on the cinder-track. He disappeared in a couple of seconds, and the Removites burst into a laugh.

"Do you think the rotter has escaped while Bunter was away?" asked Nugent, glancing up the stairs.

"It's impossible to say, but it's quite likely he saw the stair was watched, and was waiting for an opportunity."

"Then it's no good us staying here, watching?"

"Not much, when we don't know whether the fellow's there or not."

"Well, I want a wash and brush up for one," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, you chaps. After all, we'll have another chance to-night when we lay for the bouncer. If he does any more of his raiding on the studies, we shall have him!"

"We'll keep watch, at all events," said Harry Wharton.

And the chums of the Remove walked away in search of a wash and brush up.

Quite unknown to them, a resolution similar to their own had been arrived at by others in the Remove. Bulstrode and Hazeldene were talking the matter over in the Junior Common-room.

"And you still believe that it was Bunter?" Hazeldene said.

The bully of the Remove nodded emphatically.

"I'm certain it was."

"I should hardly think he would have nerve enough," Hazeldene remarked dubiously. "He's a greedy young hog, I know, but he's got no nerve!"

"He would have if there was somebody behind him."

"You mean Wharton and the rest in Study No. 1?"

"That's it. You noticed how Wharton flared up in defence of him."

"Well, his view was that there was no evidence against Bunter."

"If you're going to take Wharton's side, Vaseline—"

"I'm not," said Hazeldene hastily. "I thought you wanted to get at the facts. Very likely it was Bunter."

"And he had those cads behind him to back him up," said Bulstrode savagely.

Hazeldene was silent.

He knew perfectly well that Bulstrode's statement was false, and he did not think that Bulstrode believed it himself. But it was not his policy to quarrel with the bully of the Remove if he could help it. He had done so before, with sorry results to himself. It suited him best to keep on the right side of Bulstrode.

"Well, what do you think?" snapped Bulstrode.

"Why, I think you're about right."

"No, you don't," growled the bully of the Remove. "You don't think anything of the kind. But I do, and that settles it. Anyway, whether Wharton has a hand in it or not, I know very well that Bunter does the pinching, and we're going to show him up."

"How?" asked Hazeldene.

"By keeping watch to-night for the rascal. He's bound to go for another raid. It's been done every night for the last two or three nights, at least."

Hazeldene nodded.

"That's not a bad idea. But Wharton may see us getting out of the dormitory."

"No he won't; not if we're careful. We'll leave it until eleven o'clock, when the fellows are all asleep."

"Good! I'm agreeable."

"We'll catch the young rotter in the act," grinned Bulstrode. "And even if Wharton didn't put him up to it, we can make him implicate the rotter. He'd say anything to save his own skin. We may be able to fix this on Wharton. We'll have a good try, at any rate."

In the Night:

THERE was suppressed excitement in more than one junior in the Greyfriars Remove as that Form marched upstairs to bed that night.

Wharton, Nugent, and Cherry had kept their own counsel as to their intended vigil, save for Billy Bunter, who was in the secret, because he had unavoidably heard them talking it over in the study. But it had been impressed on Bunter that if he chattered, he would be visited with unheard-

of punishments, and for once in his life, the chatterbox of the Remove kept a still tongue.

Bulstrode and Hazeldene had kept their secret, too. The latter was not very whole-hearted in the enterprise, but Bulstrode was obstinately determined to make out some kind of case against Study No. 1.

The Remove dormitory at Greyfriars was an extensive apartment. The Remove was a numerous Form, and the long rows of white beds stretched away with seeming endlessness. There were three doors in the dormitory, all giving on the same passage, and a huge window at either end. The dormitory contained firegrates at intervals of its length, which were ablaze in the winter, but at this time of the year, fires had been stopped in the Remove sleeping quarters.

The Removites indulged in the usual horse-play before getting into bed. Carberry, the worst-tempered prefect at Greyfriars, looked in to see lights out, and warned the Remove expressively what would happen if they were not all in bed in another five minutes.

There was a howl from the Remove as the prefect turned to go again.

"What's the odds on Bonny Boy, Carberry?"

The prefect turned round with a crimson face.

The question was an evident allusion to his sporting proclivities, which were quite well known to the Remove, although unsuspected by the Head of Greyfriars.

"Who said that?" shouted Carberry.

A howl of laughter was the only reply he received. The prefect glared at the juniors, looking greatly inclined

to lick some of them, but there were too many of the Remove.

He scowled and strode from the dormitory and slammed the door.

The Removites tumbled into bed, and when Carberry looked in again five minutes later, they were all quiet and apparently slumbering. The prefect turned out the light and withdrew.

There were five of the Remove who did not think of sleep. Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent had three end beds in the dormitory, and, as it happened, Bulstrode and Hazeldene were at the other end.

Each of the juniors had determined to remain awake, but Bob Cherry dropped off first, and then Nugent. Harry Wharton sat up in bed, feeling that he would go to sleep if he remained lying down.

Half-past ten boomed out from the clock tower

Then Harry Wharton made a movement. It was time to take up the watch, as the corridors would now be deserted, and the opportunity of the raider had come. There had been no sound in the Remove dormitory; but Harry was already pretty well convinced that the mysterious prowler of the studies did not belong to his Form.

He slipped quietly out of bed, and tapped Bob Cherry on the shoulder. Bob opened his eyes sleepily.

"Gr-r-r-r!" was his lucid remark

"Wake up!"

"Wharrrr marrer—"

"Shut up, Bob! It's time!"

"Oh!" murmured Bob Cherry, fully

awakening.

He slipped out of bed, and hastily put on his clothes. Harry shook Nugent, who, after a preliminary grunt, turned

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out and dressed himself. The juniors had taken care to provide themselves with rubber-soled shoes for the occasion, so that their movements made no sound.

Although there were no blinds to the dormitory windows, the darkness of the night made the interior of the room almost pitchy. There was no danger of being observed, even if the other Removees should happen to be awake.

"Quiet!" whispered Wharton.

"Right-ho! Lead on!"

Harry Wharton led the way to the nearest door. It was opened without a sound, and the three juniors passed out into the corridor.

"Where are we going to watch?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Down in the corridor," replied Harry. "No good remaining here. There are two staircases a fellow could come down by, as I'm pretty certain he's not in the Remove. We'll be close to the studies, and we are bound to see or hear something if the rotter is on the warpath again to-night."

"Jolly dark to see anything."

"Well, we have our ears, anyway. And if he goes into our study, he's bound to knock over the chair we've placed ready for him to run into in the dark. If he has a light, we shall spot him at once."

"Let's get to the spot, then."

The chums descended a flight of stairs and entered the wide, oak-floored passage on which the Remove studies opened.

It was a curious circumstance that most, if not all, of the raiding had been confined to the Remove studies, a fact which seemed to indicate that the raider belonged to that Form, and had an idea of committing all his deprivations at home, as it were. At least, that is how it seemed to most of the Remove.

Harry Wharton had a suspicion that it might be a fellow in the Upper Fourth, or even in the Shell or the Fifth, who was thus favouring the juniors with his kind attentions, and who left his own Form alone so as to leave no traces near at hand.

The passage was pitch dark. Eleven chimed out solemnly from the clock tower, the strokes booming with eerie distinctness through the sombre silence of the night.

"Eleven," murmured Bob Cherry. "We've been out of bed nearly half an hour, and no grub pincher yet!"

"Not even a ghost!" muttered Nugent.

"Quiet, you chaps! I believe I heard something!" Harry Wharton whispered.

The chums were silent, listening tensely.

A faint sound had come to Harry Wharton's ears; a curious sound which could not have been noticed in the daytime, but which was audible enough in the night silence. It was the distant creak of an old stair. It was repeated as the chums of the Remove stood, statue-like, in the darkness, listening with strained ears.

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"It was somebody on the—"

"The old stair to the box-room."

"Yes."

"I know that creak!" muttered Wharton. "All these stairs are part of the new building; but that old stair has been there for centuries, and—"

"And it always lets you know if anybody is going up or down," chuckled Nugent. "We shouldn't hear it so far away in the daytime, but now everything is still—"

"That's it. There it is again!"

"It must be the box-room stair, from the direction and the way it sounds," said Harry Wharton, wrinkling his brow thoughtfully.

"No doubt about that, Harry."

"But what on earth can it mean? The raider can't have been in the box-room, can he?"

"The chap who played ghost—"

"He must have turned up for bedtime, or held have been missed. There was no talk about anybody being missing."

"True. Perhaps he's gone up to the box-room first."

"Before raiding the studies? Why should he go up there and come down again for nothing?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"It's not that," said Wharton decidedly. "If that's a chap coming down from the box-room now, he hasn't been up from one of the dormitories."

"But he must belong to the school."

"I can't make it out."

"I say, it's not possible that—" stammered Nugent.

"Are you thinking of the ghost again?"

"Well, not exactly; but it's strange, isn't it?"

"Very strange. Did you tell me something about there being a subter-

anean passage from the Greyfriars vaults to the wood?"

"Yes, so some of the fellows say—from the vaults below here to the ruined chapel in the Friar's Wood."

"Then it may be a stranger."

"By Jove, I never thought of that!"

"But why should a stranger come here?" said Bob Cherry. "If it was a burglar, I could understand. But for a fellow to take so much trouble for the sake of a bit of grub—that won't hold water, Harry."

"How do you explain it, then?"

"Oh, I can't explain it—it's a mystery."

"There's one way," said Harry. "We're going to collar that fellow, whoever he is, and make him explain."

"Right!" said his chums tensely.

"Silence, now! He's down the stair!"

There was no further sound from the darkness. The mysterious prowler of the night had left the ancient stair, and was in the oak-floored corridor, where the solid wood gave no creak at his footsteps.

"Hark!" murmured Harry suddenly.

There was a sound on the stairs—cautious footsteps, but audible enough to the chums of the Remove.

"He's coming!"

"There's more than one!"

"Yes."

"But, I say, they're coming from the direction of the dormitory," whispered Bob Cherry.

That had already occurred to Harry Wharton.

Was it possible that there were two parties of raiders abroad that night in Greyfriars?

But there was no time to think out the puzzle. The stealthy footsteps were entering the passage where the chums stood. They crouched against the wall. From the high window at the end of the passage came the merest glimmer of light; but it sufficed to reveal dimly two dark forms stealing quietly along.

Harry Wharton nudged his companions.

"Follow me!" he whispered.

And the chums of the Remove sprang on the dim figures and bore them to the floor, with the suddenness of their attack, and there were two wild, terrified yells in the quiet night!

(Whom have Harry Wharton & Co. collared in the darkness? Are they the unknown grub-raiders of the Remove? Don't miss next week's exciting chapters.)



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