

"STANDING BY THE TOFF!" Great Yarn of the Chums of St. Jim's INSIDE.

The GEM ^{2d}



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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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TALBOT, DOWN ON HIS LUCK, FACES THE MOST DESPERATE POSITION OF HIS LIFE!



Something in the figure standing by the stone balustrade of the Thames Embankment struck Tom Merry as familiar. He ran forward. "Talbot!" The latter figure swung round with a startled cry. It was the cousin of St. Jim's! The Terrorist Three had found their old chum at last!

CHAPTER I.

By Order of the Head!

"WHERE'S Tom Merry?"

It was Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, who was inquiring for Tom Merry, in an angry voice and with a frowning brow.

Kildare came down the passage from the Head's study, and a crowd of fellows in the Hall looked at him curiously, but made no reply.

If they knew where Tom Merry of the Sixth was, apparently they did not intend to give any information on the point.

Kildare looked round him angrily. "Do you know where Tom Merry is?" No reply.

"Has he gone out?" Silence.

"The Head wants him at once!" exclaimed Kildare sharply. "Leatherson-Manners, do you know where Tom Merry is?"

Leatherson and Manners, as Tom Merry's special chum and study-mate, might have been supposed to know where he was; but they did not answer. THE GUN LAMARAN.—No. 1,530.

"Do you hear me?" rapped out Kildare.

"Yes, I hear you," said Monty Leatherson.

"Not deaf?" murmured Manners.

"Tell me where Tom Merry is at once!"

"Haven't seen him for some minutes," said Monty Leatherson.

"Well," Kildare, said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form, "what in the mischief, dear boy! What has Tom Merry done?"

"He has got in report to the Head at once," growled Kildare.

The captain of St. Jim's threw open the big door, and looked out into the dusky quadrangle.

"Hai Javal! Here he is!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

A junior came from the darkness of the quadrangle. His handsome face looked very pale and worn as he came into the radius of light from the open door. It was Tom Merry, the cousin of the Head.

"Merry?" snapped Kildare.

"Yes, Kildare."

"Where have you been?"

"In the quad," said Tom Merry quietly.

"You are not allowed outside the House at this hour?"

Tom Merry did not reply.

"The Head sent for you, and you could not be found," went on Kildare. "He asked me just now to find you and send you to him. Go to the Head's study at once."

"Very well."

Tom Merry came in, his usually cheery and sunny face thickly overcast. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave him a sympathetic look. Monty Leatherson and Manners joined him as he went down the passage to Dr. Holmes' study.

"Back up, Tommy?" murmured Leatherson. "And—mind you don't check the Head, whenever you do?"

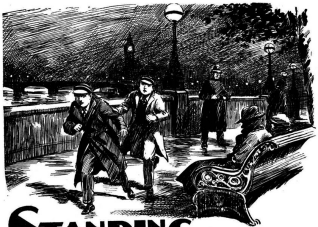
"Mind your own business, you know," muttered Manners.

Tom Merry nodded to his chums, but his look was not reassuring. He tapped at the door of the Head's study, leaving Manners and Leatherson looking on. They did not like the expression on Tom's face, and the Head was too majestic a personage to be "checked."

"Come in!"

Tom Merry entered the study. Dr. Holmes looked at him—not with

A GRIPPING LONG YARN OF DRAMA, THRILLS AND ADVENTURE, STARRING THE TOFF AND THE TERRIBLE THREE OF ST. JIM'S.



STANDING *By the* TOFF!

By
**MARTIN
CLIFFORD**

his usual kind glance. The benevolence was quite gone from his face. His expression was cold and severe.

"Merry, I sent for you a quarter of an hour ago. You could not be found."

"I am sorry, sir."

"I desired to speak to you," said the Head, "upon the subject of the unfortunate and dishonest boy who has just been expelled from the school—Talbot of the Shell. I understand that, in spite of the clear proof of this wretched boy's guilt, you held the opinion that injustice has been done him."

The Head's voice was very severe, but Tom Merry did not flinch. It was not like him to flinch in the defence of a class. He met the Head's stern eyes bravely.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Dr. Holmes frowned.

"So it is as I thought. As you hold this obstinate opinion, Merry, I sent for you to tell you that, whatever views you may hold, you are forbidden in any circumstances to have any dealings with that boy. You are forbidden to communicate with him in any way, either personally or by letter. His career at St. Jim's is closed. He has gone, and I hope he will be forgotten. You understand me?"

"I understand, sir."

Tom Merry spoke heavily, dully.

Talbot of the Shell had been his chum, and Tom Merry could not so easily forget a chum, even if everybody else was down on him.

The suffering in the boy's face could not escape the Head's keen eyes, and his expression softened a little as he noted it.

"I do not desire to be hard upon you, Merry," he went on, in a more kindly tone. "I admire your loyalty to your friend. But it is misplaced; that is what you must understand. It is unworthy of you to continue to feel this regard for a boy who has degraded him-



An outcast from St. Jim's and wanted by the police for theft, what hope has Talbot of proving his innocence? But Tom Merry & Co. loyal to the Toff in his downfall, are not without hope of clearing the name of their chum!



self and his school—who is a criminal and a thief?"

Tom Merry's cheeks burned.

"I don't believe it, sir."

The Head frowned again.

"I will be patient with you, Merry. You know what Talbot was. He was brought up in the criminal classes; he was a truant while still a young lad. When he first came to the school he deceived me—he deceived us all. Afterwards, he appeared to repent. Perhaps his repentance was for the time sincere—I truly hope so. By an act of great courage he was granted the King's pardon, and was free to lead a new life. And he was allowed to stay here; he was awarded a Founders Scholarship; he was given every chance. Even his unhappy past was almost forgotten. Yet, after all that—

"He was sincere," said; and he has never changed since."

"Listen to me, Merry. He quitted the school without a word of explanation. Afterwards the House was broken into at night—my safe was opened and rifled. Talbot's post-life was found where he had dropped it after using it to force the window. Personal belongings of no value to

apologize but himself were taken from his eyes. After this, how can you posit in your belief that he was not the thief? This is mere obstinacy, Merry!"

"But, sir—"

Tom Merry's voice broke. Against that mass of corroborating proof, what could he say in defence of his client? Only that he trusted him—that his faith in him was unshaken by the blackest evidence.

"The police are satisfied of his guilt. A warrant has been issued for his arrest," said the Head. "By this outbreak of inherent dishonesty, he has undone his own work in winning a pardon. There is no hope for the boy. The force of old associations, the attractions of a criminal life, have proved too strong for him. You must forget him, Merry!"

"But—but he came back, sir," stammered Tom Merry. "If he had been guilty he would not have come back."

"He came back hoping to deceive me once more—to impose upon me as he has done before!" said the Head severely.

"He—he told you he had been kidnapped, sir—"

The Head made an impatient gesture.

"A shallow fabrication!" he said. "I should not be likely to believe his unsupported statement; and, even so, it would leave the proof against him unbroken. Whether he went with his old associates freely or not, he committed a robbery in this school. Any connection between him and his friends here cannot be permitted. That is what I wish you to understand, Merry. You must never think of holding any communication with Talbot again!"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I am trying to be patient with you, Merry," said Dr. Holman, with a glint in his eye. "I make allowance for your feelings, but I will be obeyed. Answer me—why could you not be found when I sent for you? Had you followed that wretched boy to speak to him again?"

"I went after him, sir, to say good-bye," stammered Tom.

"He thought so. Now he has gone!"

"He has gone, sir."

"Very well," said the Head, condescendingly. "In doing this, Merry, you know you were acting against my wishes; but I will take no notice of the matter. But understand me clearly—that if you should make any renewed attempts to communicate with Talbot, I shall ask you to leave the school. You may go, Merry."

Tom Merry turned to the door and quitted the study.

CHAPTER 2.

A Difference of Opinion!

TOM MERRY went to his study. He bang himself into a chair and tried to think. His chum had been driven from St. Jim's, cast out from the school—cast out in shame and disgrace. And what would become of him now? The schoolboy crackman, who had once been known as the Toll, who had repented and paid so dearly for his repentance—what would become of him now that he was driven forth into the world again—perished, if—perished, hunted?

And innocent!

Tom Merry's faith in him did not waver. He knew, better than anyone else, how readily the Toll had kept to the straight path. At St. Jim's, *The Gem Librarian*—No. 1553.

Talbot had always played the game. He had been a good chum, a loyal comrade. Had he thrown it all up to fall back into the mire of crime in which his early years had been passed?

Tom Merry could not—would not believe it.

Talbot was loyal and true, and the proofs against him—what were they but the cunning machinations of his old associates, who had determined to drive him from honesty because the schoolboy crackman's services were too valuable to them to be lost.

The Professor, Hooky Walker, and some of the gang had betrayed him with diabolical cunning. Here, Tom Merry could not say, but he was sure of it. Talbot was innocent—Talbot was true—he was sure of that.

But how to prove it—how to save his chum, to let in the light through the darkness that surrounded him? Tom Merry realized his helplessness.

The whole school believed as the Head believed. Even D'Arcy and Blake, Harris, and Egby believed it. Manserv and Lowther stood by Tom, but he could not help thinking that it was their friendship for him, not their faith in Talbot, that made them take his side.

Merry Lowther and Manserv came into the study. They were looking worried and disturbed. They had heard Talbot, too. He had been their chum. They hoped that he was innocent, and that if he was innocent the truth would come out, but they had doubts, for the evidence was overwhelming.

"What did the Head have to say, Tommy?" asked Merry Lowther.

Tom Merry smiled bitterly.

"We are ordered to have nothing to do with old Talbot any more," he said.

"We are not likely to," said Lowther. "He can't come back here again. He will have to get a handle on to keep from being arrested."

"He is innocent," said Tom.

"I hope so."

"And I'm going to back him up. I'm going to find out, somehow, the truth of it and clear him."

"We—we'll help you, old man," said Manserv doubtfully. "If—if there's anything to be done—"

"Something's got to be done," said Tom grimly, "and we've got to do it. We're not going to desert a chum, I suppose!"

"It's! No, certainly not."

"He's innocent, I tell you. And Head or no Head, I'm going to help him if I can," said Tom determinedly.

"I—I say, you'll get into a frightful row if you try to see him again," said Lowther earnestly. "It will be a fog—"

"It will be the sack," said Tom.

"The Head told me so."

"Then you can't risk it!" exclaimed Lowther.

"I shall have to risk it. I mean to establish Talbot's innocence. He was kidnapped and kept a prisoner in some den in London. They let him go after fixing this on him here. He told me so."

"I—I suppose it's possible," said Manserv hesitatingly.

"It's true," said Tom. "Their game is to force him to join them again. They want him to be a crackman, as he was before. He's got no money—nothing, and I'm going to help him."

"But how, Tom?"

"He can't be gone far," said Tom. "He was weary and worn out when he got home—worn, for all I know. I'm going to look for him—"

"Shush!" murmured Manserv, as a knock came at the study door. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth came in. The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyes upon Tom Merry confidentially.

"Seem to see you cut up like this, dear boy," he said. "It's really horrid! About old Talbot turnin' out like that!"

Tom Merry started up fiercely.

"Tarning out like that?" he demanded.

"They don't get excited, dear boy," said Arthur Augustus smoothly. "I assure you that I feel awfully cut up myself. I had the greatest of faith in Talbot; but proved in proof, you know—"

"Folks!"

"Wally, Tom Merry!"

"If you've come here to run down Talbot, you can get out!" growled Tom Merry. "I don't want to hear any of it."

"I warned that remark as very wise," said Arthur Augustus composedly. "However, I can make allowance for you in the circumstances. I came here to ask you whether you had heard anything about Miss March?"

"Hang Miss March!"

"That is a rotten remark, Tom Merry. Miss March is a wipper! get and a splendid nurse, and also has done wonders in the vaccination while the fellows were laid up with the flu. Mamma can back witness to that."

"Heav, hear!" said Manserv.

Manserv was one of the fellows who had been laid up in the recent outbreak of influenza at St. Jim's, and he had done much to the kind ministrations of Miss March, the Little Sister of the Poor, who, young girl as she was, was the best nurse in the school hospital.

"Don't be a beast, Tommy! Miss March is a brick. It'll be a blow to her, this. She was very chummy with Talbot."

"Perhaps that is what it is the matter," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I hear that Miss March has been off-duty for some time now, and is not well. Perhaps this beastly affair has worried her. I was going to inquire if you fellows had heard how she is getting on."

"Rate! No!" said Tom Merry. Miss March was a brick, certainly; but Tom Merry was not in a mood just then to think about her.

"She was very chummy with Talbot," said Arthur Augustus. "Perhaps this has worried her. In that case it is up to us, dear boys, to look after her a bit, and make up for Talbot's rotten conduct."

"You sily ass!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Haven't I told you I won't listen to that! Hold your sily tongue!"

"I refuse to do anything of the sort!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly.

"And I regard you as a wretch, Tom Merry! I refuse to hold my sily tongue—I mean, my tongue. Wats!"

"Am!"

"And unless you immediately apologise for the impertinent epithets you have applied to me, Tom Merry, I shall give you a handful thereof!" exclaimed the swell of the School House, pushing back his spotted neck.

"I can make allowances for your feelings, because Talbot has turned out to be a wretch—"

"Oh, but how!"

"Here, hold up!" roared Lowther, as Tom Merry, excited and furious, rushed at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Gwan, wats!" snarled wits. Lowlish!" yelled Arthur Augustus, putting his hand to his nose. "Oh, you

wretch, to punch my nose! I will thrash you!"

"Get out, Guss!" roared Manners.

"I refuse to get out! I am going to thrash Tom Merry!" The wretch stalked into the room.

"Oh, my last!" gasped Leather, as Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus went at it hammer and tongs. "Chuck it, you scound! Drag 'em apart, Manners!"

"Hallo! What's the row?" asked Blake of the Fourth, looking into the study in great amazement.

"Get your tame fanatic away!" roared Leather. "I'll hold the other idiot!"

"Looks more like a wild fanatic at

"He twisted me with gross disrespect, and I am going!"

"No, you're not going; you're staying!" grizzled Blake, shoving the elegant junior back into the armchair, from which he had risen like a jack-in-the-box. "I'm checked at you, Guss! You must go easy with Tommy, these days."

Arthur Augustus calmed down a little.

"Perhaps I was wretched nasty!" he confessed, after a pause.

"Perhaps you were," agreed Blake.

"Perhaps you're a blithering ass! But you're going to stay in this study now! There's no perhaps about that!"

And Arthur Augustus stayed.

He went to bed, but did not sleep. After Kildare had put out the lights in the Shell dormitory, there was a burst of talk from bed to bed, and it was all on the same subject—the Tuff and his unexpected return to St. Jim's, his years that he had been kidnapped.

Manners and Leather were sleepless, too. They were wondering unceasingly what Tom Merry intended to do. That he had some plan in his mind, they were certain. And if he sought to find and help his old chum, there was consolation from the school hanging over his head. Dr. Holmes had given him warning.

Moody Lawther sat up in bed as he heard the captain of the Shell sneezing.



"If you don't release me I shall thrash you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as Blake and Morris marched him to the door, while Leather and Manners held back Tom Merry. "I've got to thrash Tom Merry!" "You're coming out of this study!" said Blake.

present!" chuckled Blake, grasping Arthur Augustus with forcible hands. "Kin on, Guss?"

"Welcome me—" "Kin on!" said Blake. "Hold the other fellow, you fellows! None of this in the family circle! I'm shocked at you! Kin on!"

"If you do not release me I shall thrash you! I'm going to thrash Tom Merry!"

"You're coming out of this study," said Blake coolly, and he pushed the wretch away of St. Jim's to the door. "I say, Morris, lend a hand!"

Leather and Manners had captured Tom Merry, and were holding him. Arthur Augustus, intent on vengeance, struggled with Blake; but Morris lent a hand, and he was marched forcibly off to Study No. 5.

There he was plumped down in a chair, and Blake suggested a warning finger at him.

"Any gasped wildly.

"Goozoooh! Goozoooh! Oh, you beast! Goozoooh!"

"Keep its little temper!" said Blake authoritatively. "This isn't a time to go for Tommy, when he's cut up over Talbot turning out such a rotter. You must keep your temper with Tommy for a bit, Guss."

CHAPTER 2.

One True Chum!

TOM MERRY was very silent when the Shell fellows went up to their dormitory.

The rest of the juniors were in a buzz of talk.

Talbot's unexpected and dramatic return to St. Jim's, and his crushing reception, formed the sole topic. Guss declared loudly that it was like his thumping cheek to come back; and Crooks remarked that the Head ought to have detained him, and telephoned for the police.

Tom Merry said nothing. He was feeling miserable and subdued. The scene with Arthur Augustus in his study weighed on his mind, too. D'Arcy had always been loyal to Talbot, had always stood by him, and now he had turned with the rest. Tom felt that he was

up against what all the other fellows regarded as indisputable facts. It was useless—were there scoundrels in rag every fellow who made disparaging remarks concerning his former chum. He would now have found himself ignoring all his old friends, one after another.

Yet his inward faith and determination did not waver. His belief in Talbot was founded as upon a rock.

Tom Merry was slipping out of bed a quarter of an hour after Kildare had

gone.

"Don't!" said Leather softly.

"It's all right, Moody!"

"Where are you going?"

"Out."

"But, Tommy—"

"No good talking, Moody. I think I shall find him. I shall try, anyway."

"I'll come with you, then," said

Lawther. He knew that it was useless to argue.

"No good, Moody. If there's anything to be done, I can do it, and you couldn't help. It's all right."

"Hallo! What's that scuffling about?" came a dozy voice from

Noble's bed.

"Who's that going out?" asked Guss.

"Mind your own business!" said

Leather.

"Going to look for that rotter—

what?" said Guss, with a sneer. "Well, serve you jolly well right if a profus

silly you!"

"Oh, dry up!" said Manners.

Tom Merry took no notice of Guss.

He dressed himself, and slipped quietly

from the dormitory, leaving his chum in

a very anxious frame of mind. They did not insist upon accompanying him;

THE GUN LINGERER.—No. 1353.

one fellow was less likely to be spotted than three. He was safer alone.

Tom was in a reckless mood, in one way—he was facing a great risk, and he knew it. If the Head learned of his escapade, his wrath would be great, and Tom knew what he had to expect. But he was careful.

He took his boots in his hand and crept softly down the dark passage. In the box-room, he stopped to put on his boots, and then climbed from the window, over the out-house, to the ground. There was a bitter wind outside, and a slight drizzle of rain. Tom Merry cut across in the shadows to the school wall, and in a few moments he dropped into the road.

Talbot had trumped away in the direction of Rylocombe. Tom knew that, and he hurried in that direction. It was two hours since the depraved janitor, cast out from the school, had gone.

Was there a chance of finding his yet? If he had gone away at once, there was no chance. But Tom Merry remembered how footsore and weary the janitor had been. All the previous day he had spent in tramping from London. He had been at the end of his tether when he reached St. Jim's. It was not likely that he had gone far. He would have to rest before he could commence his weary tramp back to the great city. He would not go to the station, even if he had money; for now he knew that the police were looking for him.

Where was he likely to be?

Sheltering in some spot from the drizzling rain, waiting for dawn before he resumed his weary tramp, that was most likely.

Now that he was outside the school walls, Tom Merry realized the almost hopelessness of the task he had set himself. But it was quite certain to be trying to help his friend.

He tramped down the road towards Rylocombe, his collar turned up, his head bent to the wind. He passed on as he reached the stile in the lane.

Which way had Talbot gone? Probably not through the village, where he would have been seen and recognized. By the footpath, perhaps, towards the moor, through the dark, dark wood.

A sudden thought came into Tom Merry's mind, and he sent forth a shrill, echoing call—the call of the curlew. Talbot had belonged to the Curlew Patrol when he was at St. Jim's. If he was within hearing he would recognize the old signal of the Scouts.

Was he near, or was he, perhaps, miles away on the road to London?

Again and again Tom Merry sent out the call through the silence of the night.

He gave a sudden start as an answering call came back—not an echo this time. It was the Scout signal!

Tom's face lighted up.

"He is still here!" he muttered joyfully.

The curlew call came ringing early over the dark, wet fields. Tom Merry remembered the old barn in the field, a hundred yards from the hedge. He plunged through a gap in the hedge and tramped across the sodden grass. The call came again—it came from the old barn. It was there that Talbot had taken shelter. Tom Merry struck a match and held it up. He caught the glimpse of a white face in the dark

doorway of the deserted barn. It was Talbot.

"Tom Merry?"

"Thank goodness I've found you, Talbot!"

"Tom!" repeated Talbot, in amazement. In the light of the glimmering match his handsome face showed pale and worn and troubled. The match went out.

Tom Merry came into the barn. He could dimly make out the form of his class in the gloom.

"I—I thought you mightn't be gone," said Tom Merry breathlessly. "I came out to see if I could find you, old chap."

"It's good of you, Tom. I've had best," said Talbot. "I couldn't have tramped much further. I got in here for shelter from the rain and to get a rest. There's straw here. I was trying to sleep when I heard your signal. I couldn't understand it at first; then I guessed, and answered it. Tom, what have you run this risk for? You'll get in a fearful row if they—"

"That's all right," said Tom. "Nobody knows I'm out. I had to see you again, Talbot. What are you going to do?"

"Get away from here as soon as it's light," said Talbot quietly. "I mean't to be seen about here, where I'm known by sight. I shall start tramping at dawn, and I shall be safe enough. It will be quite like old times." He laughed bitterly.

"Dodging the police?" I had thought that that was done with! The Tuff has come to light again; Talbot of the Shell is dead and gone."

It was what Tom Merry feared—this reckless, desperate mood, which might throw his class back into his old ways, into the hands of the rascals who had plotted to drive him back into prison.

"That's what I was thinking of, Talbot," he said. "I—I want to speak to you about that. I—we're going to do what we can to find out the truth, to clear you. It may be possible; somehow we shall manage it."

Talbot did not answer. His silence told eloquently enough that he had little hope.

"But, at the worst, Talbot, you mean't think of letting those villains have their way," whispered Tom. "The truth must come out some day, and then you will be cleared. But—but if you should fall back—then it will be useless to clear you. At any price, you've got to stick it out, old chap!"

"You needn't be afraid, Tom. I shall never see the Professor again. I am going to live honestly, come what may."

"I know it, old chap; but I was afraid. I know you mean it."

"Honesty bright, Tom."

"But what are you going to do? You've got no money?"

"No. They cleared me out when they collared me," said Talbot. "The Professor thinks I shall have no resources but to go back to the gang. But I shall not go back."

"That's what I thought, Talbot. And I've brought some things for you," said Tom.

Talbot started back.

"No," he said.

"Not—old chap—"

"No, Tom; I can't!"

"You mean," said Tom. "I've put together all the tin I could raise, and I've brought it here. It isn't much—a couple of pounds. But it will help you at first. And I've got a bundle of sandwiches. And you are going to take my

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cost. You've got no coat. You must be frozen."

"Tom!" said Talbot hoarsely.
 "Don't think of refusing, old chap," said Tom. "Let me do the little I can to help you."

There was a short silence.
 "Very well," said Talbot at last. "I won't refuse. You're a good pal, Tom." Tom Merry slipped off his coat, with the money and the pocketbook in a pocket. He put it on Talbot, and as he did so, he could feel the fellow shivering. It was all he could do, and it was little enough. But the proof of loyal friendship was worth much to Talbot in that dark hour.

"Now you must go," whispered Talbot. "You're raising a beautiful ruck for me. If the Head knew—"
 "You must let me know how you get on," said Tom. "You must send me news—you can't write to the school—that's forbidden. But—but you must let me hear from you sometimes."

"I'll try, Tom. There's one thing. Have you seen Marie—I mean, Miss March, lately—the nurse, you know?"

"She isn't well," said Tom. "She's not on duty in the sanatorium now. I haven't seen her for a day or two."

Talbot grunted.
 "Poor Marie! Tom, when you see her, tell her that you've seen me—that I'm safe, that I'm all right. You will?"

"Yes," said Tom.
 "That's all. I—I can't tell you about it," said Talbot, his face flushing in the darkness. "But she will be troubled about this. I want her to know that I am safe. That's all, Tom."

"I'll tell her," said Tom.
 A few words more, a grip of the hand, and Tom Merry was gone. He tramped back to the school, his heart lighter. In the old barn the sunset lay down in the straw, to sleep if he could. But his heart, too, was lighter—his courage was higher. For he felt that so long as there was one faithful pal who stood by him and trusted him, the future, dark as it looked, held at least one ray of hope.

CHAPTER 4.

The Crackman's Daughter!

"B-A-I-Jee! It's the imposth!"
 It was the next morning at St. Jim's. A crowd of juniors had come out of the School House, when the solid figure of Inspector Skeet, of Rylstone, was seen crossing the quad. He passed into the House.

"It's about Talbot, I suppose," said Hideo. "They telephoned that he had come back here, and the giddy inspector is after information. I—I hope they won't get him."

Arthur Augustus nodded thoughtfully.
 "Yaas, I hope they won't," he agreed. "He has acted very wootterly; but, considerin' all the circum, I t'wast that the poor chap will get away."

The Terrible Three came out of the School House. Tom Merry had been the last down, for once. He was tired from want of sleep. He had returned to the Shell dormitory the previous night without discovery, but little sleep had visited his eyes after he had gone to bed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose down on the captain of the Shell, with a somewhat hesitating manner. Tom Merry's look was grim.

"Good-mornin', deah boy!" began Arthur Augustus.

ST. JIM'S JINGLES. No. 3.



RICHARD REDFERN.

*ST. JIM'S can boast a noble host
 Of valiant strong and steady,
 And chief of those who play the best
 In enterprizing Reddy,
 Who takes a cheerful view of life,
 With all its keen attractions,
 And never fails to sit up stiffly
 Among the rival factions.*

*The ratter who can doat in his
 Is Reddy's pet abhorrence;
 To crush him out he always strives
 With Owen and with Lawrence,
 The odds are rendered even and quick
 Who dash down follows,
 And with a stamp, or hit, or stick,
 Are made to shine and wadden.*

*When Redfern came to his domain
 He found a great ambition—
 To fight with Figgins and obtain
 The paramount position,
 But Figg's friends devoutly swore
 That the assuming new lad
 Must surely drop his plans of war
 And take to learning Euclid.*

*The rivals fought with fierce delight,
 Their throats for blood assuming,
 And in the House, from morn till night,
 A whirling war was raging,
 The famous lights of ancient Greece
 Compared with such a riot,
 Were periods of profoundest peace
 And unexcited quiet!*

*At length the weary warriors thought;
 Unless this conflict ceases,
 A proemper must be brought
 To pick up all the pieces!
 For eyes were black, and faces scarred,
 Where fists had once collided,
 So battles for a time were barred,
 And incomes were divided.*

*When rest had reached a timely pause,
 The vice-junior Redfern
 Received sufficient of applause
 To make his youthful head turn,
 For on the field of play he proved
 Supreme and self-reliant;
 And every manly heart was moved
 To greet him as a giant.*

*Then read the air with ruddy cheeks,
 And made the rafter rattle,
 In praise of Reddy, who appears
 So stout and strong in battle!
 Ye noble host of "Gentles" rise,
 Your voices gaily blending,
 And send his glory to the skies,
 In volume never-fading!*

Next Week: BERNARD GLYN.

"Good-morning!" snapped Tom Merry.

"I may don't be wotly, deah boy!" and the smile of St. Jim's peevishly, "I have considered the matter, and I feel that I owe you an apology."

"Oh yes!" said Tom. Arthur Augustus coloured. It was not a very encouraging reception.

"Wotly, Tom Merry—" "Oh, don't bother!" said Tom.

"Alas! In the stress, I feel it is due to myself to furnish an apology," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I do not agree with your very reasonable opinion, but I admit you have a right to think as you like, and I am sorry I made a remark on your study which was somewhat wastin' in itself. That's all. From one gentleman to another, I presume that an apology sets the matter right."

Tom Merry laughed.
 "You're good little one, Gump!" "Wotly, I object to bein' denigrated as a good little one. However, I will overlook your remark, makin' allowance for your state of feelings," said Arthur Augustus graciously.

Tom Merry walked away with his companion. His brow was woody. He had seen the inspector enter the House, and he knew what it meant. Mr. Sloan was very anxious to lay hands on Talbot. Probably he had never believed in the Toff's information, and had been expecting something of this kind.

"He won't get Talbot," said Mowzy Lawther. "He'll have cleared off and put a good distance between him and the place, Tom."

Tom Merry nodded.
 "Yes, I feel sure of that," he said. "But—last mornin' he does keep free—that isn't all. He's got to be cleared. How's that going to be done?"

Lawther gave a hopeless shrug of his shoulders.

"Hoped if I can see, Tom. If it wasn't Talbot who cracked the Head's safe last week, it was some crackman who's never likely to come near St. Jim's again."

"Not likely," said Manners. "I don't know," said Tom. "Look here. There was fifty pounds taken from the Head's safe. There's fifty more money than that there. The ratter, whoever he was, made a very poor haul. He might try again for something better; it's clear that he's a man who knows the ins and outs of the place."

Lawther and Manners were silent. The fact that the thief was someone who knew the ins and outs of the place was another point against Talbot.

"I'm going to think it out," said Tom. "Something's got to be done. I'll never rest till Talbot is cleared!"

"You can depend on us if there's anything to be done," said Manners. "But I'm blessed if I see anything that can be done myself."

The Shell fellows were late this Form-room. Tom Merry ferried himself to work—there was no choice about that under Mr. Linton's keen eyes. But his thoughts were with his absent chum—tramping wearily through the countryside, friendless and alone.

After morning lessons, Tom went out into the quad by himself. He retraced Talbot's message for Miss March, the Little Sister of the Poor, and he hoped to see her. He knew that the choir walked on the Head's garden, which was overlooked by the school sanatorium. He was not disappointed. Under the halloo trees, he caught a glimpse of the graceful figure, pacing

THE GUN LIBRARY.—No. 1360.

to and fro. The Hood's garden was "taken" to justice; but Tom Merry did not hesitate. He vaulted the gate, and approached the girl. Miss March was looking pale.

Tom Merry raised his cap. The girl looked at him eagerly.

"I have heard," she said, before Tom Merry could speak, "He came back last night—Talbot!"

"Yes," said Tom.

"Where is he now?"

Tom Merry told her quietly of the meeting in the barn. He could see the signs of suffering in the girl's face, and he wondered why she should care so much about Talbot. He knew nothing about the secret history of the crackman's daughter, or that she had known the Toff in the old days, before he had come to St. Jim's. That Miss March was the daughter of John Rivers, the Professor, was a secret Talbot had never confided to his class.

"Then he is safe, at least," said the girl, at last.

"I think so—I hope so!" said Tom.

"And everyone believes that he is guilty!"

"Not everyone," said Tom quietly.

"I believe he is innocent, Miss March. I am sure of it. And I'm going to try to do what I can to prove it."

"What can you do?"

"I have to thank that one. The accident which robbed the Hood's safe has got to be found," said Tom, between his teeth.

"The girl gave very pale."

"You are not well," said Tom quickly, making a movement towards her. It seemed for a moment as if she would fall. But she recovered herself quickly.

"Nonsense! I am all right! It is nothing! You—you think that—that the man can be found—the man who committed the robbery?"

"I hope so. He's got to be found! And I know who it is, too!"

"The girl gave a cry."

"You know? How can you know?"

"I will explain. Before you came here, Miss March, there was a man here—a man who passed himself off as the Hood as Mr. Padington, a science master. Talbot found out that he was really a crackman, called the Professor among his associates. He was arrested, but he escaped. The Professor was a member of the gang Talbot had belonged to in the old days. You know his story!"

The girl nodded, with a faint smile. She knew the story of the Toff only too well—better than Tom Merry did. She wondered what the eager justice would have thought if he had known that it was the daughter of the Professor he was speaking to. But Tom Merry had no suspicion of that.

"Well, this is my idea of it," said Tom. "Talbot was kidnapped by the Professor—the villain's real name is John Rivers—and he tried to make Talbot join him again. Of course, he wouldn't. Then, I am certain, the Professor carried out the robbery here. Having been here as a master for a short time, he knew the place perfectly well, of course. He not only robbed the Hood's safe, but he left Talbot's pen-knife where the window had been forced. He took some small things that belonged to Talbot. All these details take what as a proof that it was Talbot who did it. But I am quite sure that it was the Professor, and he did it purposely to make suspicion fall on Talbot."

"Oh, no—no! I cannot believe that!"

"You don't know what a cunning The Gem Library—No. 1,550.

villain he is," said Tom, unconscious that every word he uttered was a blow to the girl listening to him. "His aim was to force Talbot back into his old ways. That was the way he did it."

Having made it appear that Talbot committed the robbery, he let his prisoner go, and poor old Talbot came back here to find himself condemned unbound. Now he calculates, of course, that Talbot will make the best of it by going back to the gang. But he doesn't know him. Talbot will starve first. And somehow or other I'm going to prove what I know to be true. I don't know how yet, but it's got to be done. As soon as that scoundrel Rivers is arrested, the truth will come out."

"And not till then?" faltered the girl.

"Not till then, I suppose. But he may come back here for another haul. I hope he will."

The look on Tom Merry's face made the girl shiver. It was upon her lips to cry out: "He is my father!" But she checked herself. That miserable secret had to remain a secret. And it would have made no difference to Tom Merry. Whoever should suffer, the truth would come to light if he could contrive it.

Miss March made a sign of adieu, and moved away, slowly and heavily, towards the house.

In her own room she drew out a letter—a letter she had received that morning. It was in the hand of John Rivers, the crackman.

"I must see you. I shall wait for you at eight o'clock by the beach-house."

"Fareem."

If Tom Merry had only known!

CHAPTER 5.

The Professor is Disappointed!

DARKNESS had fallen upon St. Jim's. The beach-house by the River Ebbot was deserted, lit only by a dim glow by the shadowy building a dim figure moved to and fro, wrapped in a heavy overcoat, muttering words of impatience.

A light step came along the path from the school, and the man waiting by the beach-house started.

"Marie!"

"Father!"

"You have not been seen to come!" muttered the man.

Marie shook her head.

"I was careful," she said. "Father, why are you here?"

John Rivers smiled.



"I asked the lady for a walk. How was I to know her husband was a thief?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to H. Randall, 4, Gilling Road, Manchester, Surrey.

"It is some three days I have seen you, Marie. And I want news—news that you can tell me. What of the Toff? He came back?"

"Yes, and now he has gone," said the girl dully. "He came back to find himself condemned and in danger. He has gone, and I have not seen him."

The Professor rubbed his hands.

"Good! It has gone exactly as it should have gone. The young fool, to get himself against me! None all will be well, Marie. There is no need for you to stay longer at the school. Do not leave in a hurry. You must not excite suspicion. But the Little Master of the Poor can find work in other directions now."

He laughed again. The Professor had cause for satisfaction.

"You must be growing tired of it, Marie. You will be glad to come back to the old life—with the Toff, too! What?"

"Talbot will not be with us," said Marie.

"He must come back," said the Professor. "Only with his old friends can he now feel safe. Everything will be as it used to be, Marie, before he took this crazy idea into his head of leading a new life."

"It will never be, father. I have learned that much. The Toff changed from our way, but he will never change back again."

"Bah!" The Professor gritted his teeth. Perhaps he felt an inward doubt himself. "If he is an obstinate fool, then let him go his own way. He will suffer for it."

The Professor looked sharply, inquiringly, at the girl's pale face.

"What is in your mind?" he asked roughly. "Why don't you speak?"

"Father—Marie spoke with an effort—it can never be as it used to be. I cannot go back to it any more than the Toff. I have changed, too."

The Professor mastered an oath.

"You also! You wish to desert me!"

"I cannot go back to that," said Marie. "I did not think before. I knew only what you had taught me. But that life is finished for me. I have changed, too. Forever."

"So this is the Toff's work!" said the Professor bitterly. "Instead of leading him back to me, Marie, you have let him lead you away from us."

The girl was silent.

"And what will you do?" asked her father. "What will you live out? Have you thought of that?"

"I am a good nurse, and I've been offered a permanent place here, in the sanatorium," said Marie.

"And you wish to stay?"

"Yes."

"To desert me?"

"I will not desert you, father. I—I want you to think it over, and—to do as the Toff has done, and I have done. It is not too late."

"Don't preach to me!" said the crackman savagely. "I am not born to be a poor man. Give me five thousand a year, and I will be as happy as the day. Until that time I remain what I am—and you will help me, Marie!"

"I will never help you again in dishonesty," said the girl quietly. "I have thought it over. I cannot!"

"Have you forgotten that I am your father?" asked the Professor, as much surprised as savaged by the unexpected declaration of his daughter.

"I have not forgotten. But even my father has no right to command me to do what is wrong," said Marie. "I know what is wrong now. I know it

FOILING THE FORGER

Keen-eyed experts who match their wits against the cunning of the stamp forger.

ALTHOUGH forging stamps can prove a very paying piece to those misguided enough to try the job, printers of shady reputations are becoming less and less attracted to it. Naturally enough, it's only stamps with a reasonably high market value which are worth taking the risk of going to prison for—if caught red-handed by the police.

But pitted against the wiles of the deliberate forger are experts with the fruits of certainly sixty years' close experience of their subject, who know to within a fraction of a millimetre exactly how every part of a valuable stamp, its design, its paper, etc., is composed. And their microscopes are quick to detect the sometimes almost absurd flaws forgers seem to make.

BRITISH BEAT FORGER!

Who, for instance, would expect to catch a keen-eyed collector with a mistake in counting? Yet at least one forger has tried this on. The first stamps of Shanghai are reasonably expensive, and, since they bear the stamp of native workmanship, would appear a good subject—in the forger's eyes. Genuine articles show the fierce-looking dragon on them armed with a beard consisting of seven bristles. Forgers



Dragon, postage of Shanghai, in a postage stamp printed in Shanghai.

specialists have now-bred the dragon. Not only in the expert's eyes, but the postal authorities, through the paper they use, defeat him, too. It takes a mighty clever man to take up a watermark, even though, as is exceedingly unlikely, he could produce a paper identical with the genuine article. The watermark, you see, is impressed to a paper during its manufacture.

In the case of hand-made paper, the paper pulp is spread on a wire frame bearing a watermark device attached to

it, or, in the case of the machine-made article, the paper pulp, travelling on an endless wire band, passes underneath a roller, known as a dandy-roll, so which the watermark devices are attached.

In both cases, the paper pulp is slightly thinned through contact with the watermark wires, which explains why a watermark appears slightly transparent when you hold a paper up to the light. (Opaque watermarks, by the way, can be made to show up if you wash a stamp in benzine and lay it on a dark surface.)



The world's first stamp—the penny black.

FAKING THE WATERMARK.

As may be imagined, trying to insert a watermark in a paper after it's made is a pretty hopeless task, and although forgers have tried doing so, they've seldom been successful. Their usual cover is to draw the watermark on the paper in thin green. This makes the "mark" transparent enough, but it shows through on to the front of the stamp!

No, it's not forging stamps that is such a painful nuisance so much as faking them or cleaning them, so that they can be reused. It was this practice which, when we introduced stamps in the world close on a hundred years ago, forced our authorities to change their colour.

The world's first stamp, and one of the loveliest ever issued, was the 1d. black, which, with its companion, the 2d. blue, were colorfastly postmarked in red. But so many instances were found of the postmarks from used spoils were being removed that, eight months after its introduction, the 1d. black was replaced by a red-brown 1d., on which a black postmark proved more than the cleaners could manage.

Sometimes special printing ink is used to get paid to this cleaning business. You can be as lucky that the recent touch of water makes it "run" badly. Some of our own halfpenny stamps were like

this at one time, so beware when trying to remove any blotsches from them. Far more startling are some of the stamps of the Dutch East Indies, bearing the profile of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. Their design just vanishes on contact with water!

SAFETY STAMP PAPER.

More popular than special printing ink is special paper. Certain countries have used a paper known as granite (it certainly looks like some of this tough mineral), which contains bits of small coloured flints. When postmarked, the marking ink sticks readily into these flints, and a cleaner who tries tampering with the mark usually finds the stamp's design comes off with the mark as well.

Much the same thing happens with a paper invented by an Englishman named John Dickinson. Absorbent alk threads run through this. Another "safety" paper consists really of two layers. The design is printed on the top, the gum is on the lower. When you wet the stamp, the two layers just come apart in your hands.

The most popular of all these special papers, however, is that known as chalcid-proof. This usually bears a high-glass finish, and is somewhat stouter than most other stamp papers. But



Woman, with the top of these stamps, the design just disappears.

try covering a postmark chemically from this stuff, and the design disappears.

Perhaps a sad many of our own ostentatious have made very extensive use of this special paper. A good way

to test whether a paper is chalcid-proof is to touch it very lightly with an object containing a very fair percentage of silver in it. You should make a mark much like a pencil mark. Ordinary paper comes through the test unmarked.

Next week: "The Romance of Rare Stamps."

before, but I had never thought—I had never realized it. The Toll has made me understand. Now that I understand, there is no going back for me!"

"This—from you?" said John Rivers bitterly. "Nonsense! You will forget all this. The Toll will be one of us again soon."

Mario shook her head. "That will never be, father. Father, I—I want you to spare him." She caught the man's arm in a trembling hand. "Father, won't you have pity on him! Let it be known that he was innocent; let his good name be given back to him."

The Professor laughed harshly. "Give myself up to the police, do you mean? It is likely!"

"You need not do that. But let it be known that Tallot was innocent. Father, what do you think I feel when I know that it was your crime that he is condemned for, when I could clear him by speaking a word?"

"And betraying your father!" answered John Rivers. "Speak, then! You are welcome to do so!"

"You know that I cannot. But—but if you could go to a place of safety, and then write to Dr. Holman and tell him—"

"You are talking childishly. Besides, I am not finished here yet."

Mario looked at him in terror. "Not finished! What do you mean?" The cracksmen made an angry gesture.

"I did not come at an opportune moment," he said. "What did I take—a trifle of fifty pounds! Yet, as I learned when I was staying in the school, there is sometimes hundreds in the safe. I depended upon you for information, Mario—you could find out for me—"

"Never!" "You doubt me!" exclaimed her father furiously.

"In that—yes!" John Rivers raised his hand. It seemed for a moment as though he would strike his daughter.

Mario did not move. The incensed racial lowered his hand. "You are leaving"—No. L158.

"You will come to your senses!" he muttered.

"I will never repay the kindness I have received with ingratitude and treachery!" said the girl, in a trembling voice. "There has been enough of that—there has been too much. I must keep your secret, and let the Toff suffer and die, because you are my father; but further than that I will not go."

"I shall do without your aid!" said the crackman suddenly.

"Father, there is danger for you here," said Marie. "One of the boys—Tom Merry—has told me. He is working to clear Talbot—he believes in him and, and he—"

"So there is one who believes in him still!" sneered the Professor. "Not more than me, I'll warrant. As for Joseph, do you think I fear a school-boy? And if there should be danger, it will be because you have deserted me! I ask you once more, Marie—will you help me?"

"I cannot!"

"Enough said!"

The Professor turned without another word, and strode away into the darkness.

"Father!" Marie called softly, and then more loudly. "Father!"

There was no reply; the crackman was gone.

With a sob, the girl turned and hurried away towards the school.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy Does His Best!

"WELL!" Blako, Herries, and Digby uttered that inquiring monosyllable together in a sort of chorus.

There had been silence in Study No. 4 for a time. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sitting with a frown on his brow, evidently deeply buried in thought.

And his student-attendants watched him, gazing at one another, and waiting patiently for the idea that was working in that mighty brain to be delivered.

And as it was not delivered, they proceeded to inquire after it, so to speak.

Arthur Augustus started at the three "Wells?" sneered together.

"I've been thinkin', deah boys," he said.

"I thought there was something unusual going on," said Blako, with a nod. "Does it hurt?"

"Waddy, Blako—"

"Has it given you a pain?" asked Digby, with solicitude. "These sudden strokes, you know—"

"Fway don't be an ass, Dig. I have been thinkin' about Tom Merry," said

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Arthur Augustus, with a serious shake of the head.

Blako yawned portentously.

"He seems to be very out of up," said D'Arcy seriously. "He will stick to his absurd belief in Talbot, you know."

"The chap's an ass," said Blako derisively.

"Yess, I'm bound to regard him, as an ass—the dangerous with my opinion entirely," asserted Arthur Augustus.

"However, I feel wathah concerned about him. I don't like to see him mope any about, you know. (Shap wathah get any good from mopes). I've been thinkin' that perhaps it is our duty to cheer him up."

"Good!" said Blako. "You can do my little bit. I'll get on with my prep."

"That is wathah wathah!" Blako. Don't you think it is isolated on keepin' him company, and talkin' cheerfully, it would be bound to buck him up?"

"More likely make him three things at you," said Herries.

"I should wathah to have things thrown at me. Suppose you fellows come along with me now, and we'll exert ourselves to cheer him up!"

"How-woe!"

"If you will not back me up, I shall try it alone. I feel that it is my duty to cheer the poor chap up a little."

"Go ahead!" said Blako. "Call for help if you need it."

"Oh wath!"

Arthur Augustus walked out of Study No. 4, leaving Blako, Herries, and Digby grinning. Tom Merry had been like a bear with a sore head lately, as Blako described it, and they were quite willing to leave the cheering up process to Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's walked along to Tom Merry's study, tapped discreetly at the door and opened it.

Tom Merry was alone. He had got through his prep, and he had declined to go down to the Common-room with Marrows and Leathes.

He was seated before the fire, thinking, and the cloud on his brow showed that his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

Ever since the night when Talbot had been driven from the school, Tom Merry had been cogitating his brains for a way out of the tangle—a way to prove that Talbot was innocent, to rehabilitate him in his old place.

And there seemed to be no way. He felt himself hopeless.

He looked up a little impatiently as D'Arcy appeared in the doorway. He was in no mood for company just then. He had to wrestle with the problem he had set himself—the problem he could not solve, and yet which he had determined to solve.

Arthur Augustus bestowed upon him an approving smile, determined not to notice his decidedly unconvincing expression.

"All alone, deah boy?" he began.

"Yes."

"Like a little company—what?"

"No, thanks!"

"Ahem! What about the prospect for the Grammar School match?"

asked Arthur Augustus.

If any subject could interest the captain of the Shell surely it was football. But even football failed to "draw" Tom Merry then.

"How the Grammar School match?" was all he said.

"Yess; but it's got to be played, you know. It was postponed owing to the flu; but we've got to play them."

"Oh, rot!"

"What about the deems?"

"I'm going to leave it to Blako or Figgins to captain the team for a week or two," said Tom Merry shortly. "I've got other things to think of."

"Bad Jove!"

"And now—if you'll excuse me—I'd rather be alone."

"Wathah wathah to be mappin' alone, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, calmly taking a chair. "I'm here for a little chat."

"I don't want to chat," Tom Merry rose to his feet. "I'm going to take a turn in the quad."

Arthur Augustus rose, too.

"I'll come with you, deah boy."

"Please don't."

"No trouble at all, Tom Merry," said Arthur Augustus, as he followed the captain of the Shell from the study.

"I'm not going to leave you to yourself, to mope in low spirits. Don't say a word, deah boy—I'm comin'."

And he came.

Tom Merry bit his lip with impatience. He wanted to think—not that thinking seemed to do much good. But he was not at all in a mood for being cheered up, anyway.

"Look here, Gussy, I don't want to be bothered!" he exclaimed, as they went out into the dusky quadrangle.

And Tom strode away into the gloom.

Arthur Augustus rushed in pursuit. His good intentions were not to be baffled quite so easily as that. He stumbled over a foot in the darkness, and came down on his hands and knees with a bump and a yell.

Tom Merry disappeared.

"Bad Jove!" Arthur Augustus jumped up, considerably maddened and quite furious. "Tom Merry, you wathah, you ungrateful beast, you have ruined my wathahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a laugh from the darkness of the quad. Arthur Augustus had succeeded in cheering Tom Merry up, for a moment at least. The swell of St. Jim's cloak an unobtrusive fan in the direction of the laugh, and returned gratefully into the School House. He was tid up with the cheering-up process.

Blako, Herries, and Digby looked at him with grinning inquiry as he came back into Study No. 4. Arthur Augustus began to brush down his trousers savagely.

"Cheered him up?" asked Blako.

"Oh, wath!"

"Jolly quick wath," said Dig. "You haven't been a quarter of an hour cheering him up, Gussy. It is quite cheerful now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wathah! I wathah to do anything of the sort. I regard Tom Merry as an ungrateful beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Arthur Augustus brushed away furiously, while his cheeks checked.

There was no further mention in Study No. 4 of cheering Tom Merry up. He could be as cheerful as he liked, and Study No. 4 would be absolutely un-
soured.



As he approached the door, Tom Merry struck a match and held it up. He caught a glimpse of a figure in the dark story map. It was Talbot. "Thank goodness I've found you, Talbot!" exclaimed Tom. "I—I thought you might be gone."

CHAPTER 7.

Talbot's Warning!

"MERRY!"
 "Yes, Kildare?"
 "You're wanted in the Head's study."

The Shell had just come out after morning lessons.

Tom Merry nodded as the captain of St. Jim's tapped out that information.

"Right-o!"

"What the dickens!" muttered Monty Lawther, as Kildare strode away. "More trouble, I suppose. They can't have found out about your getting out the other night, surely?"

"I don't think so," said Tom, with a shake of the head. "Anyway, I've got to face the music, whatever it is."

And he went to the Head's study. He found Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, with Dr. Holmes, and both the masters were looking very grave.

Dr. Holmes had a letter in his hand.

"You sent for me, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Yes, Merry. This letter has come for you," said the Head.

"For me, sir?" said Tom, wondering what the Head was doing with his letter. As a rule, the correspondence of the boys was not interfered with, though, of course, the headmaster reserved the right of overhauling it when he thought fit.

"Yes. Since that unhappy boy Talbot was sent away I have reserved a spot over the roof," said the Head. "I feared that he might attempt to communicate with some of the boys. This letter is addressed in his hand, and therefore, by my instructions, it was brought to me."

"From Talbot, sir?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise and satisfaction.

"You did not expect a letter from him, Merry?" asked the Head, with a searching look at the Shell fellow.

"I did not expect one, sir, but I hoped to hear some time how he was getting on," said Tom.

"I desire you to open this letter in my presence, and hand it to me, to judge whether it is suitable for you to read, Merry."

Tom Merry flushed.

"Very well, sir. I know jolly well that Talbot couldn't write anything that the school would couldn't see."

Dr. Holmes passed him the letter.

Tom opened the envelope, took out the letter, and laid it on the Head's table. He could see that it was a few lines scribbled hastily in pencil.

"You have no objection to my reading this, Merry?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

Dr. Holmes took the letter and glanced over it, and an expression of surprise came over his face. He passed it to Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster read it and coughed.

"May I have it, sir?" asked Tom.

"Yes."

Tom took the letter from Mr. Railton and read it hurriedly. It ran:

"Dear Tom,—I have met the Professor. He has tried, as I expected, to get me to go back with him—you know where, and for what. I need not tell you that I have refused. You can always rely upon it that, come what may, I shall never do anything that would make you ashamed of having been my friend. I hope some day that the truth may come out, and I may be able to see you again; but, at all events, I shall never forget you, and so long as you believe in me it will help me to keep decent. But that is not what I

was going to say. From some words dropped by Rivers, I suspect that he has some plan for a further robbery at the school. I dare not write to the Head; he would not believe what I say. I am telling you. It may be in your power to stop that villain if he should make any further attempt. At least, you will be on your guard. Good-bye, old chap!"

"R. Talbot."

"Good old Talbot!" said Tom Merry. "Oh, sir, this letter—can't you see by this letter that old Talbot is as true as steel!"

"You may put it in the fire," said the Head.

"Mayn't I keep it, sir?"

"Do as I have told you."

The letter dropped into the flames.

"Now Merry, if you should receive any further communication from that boy without my knowledge, I expect you to bring it to me at once."

"Yes, sir."

"You will remember that. You may go."

Tom Merry left the study.

"That letter is very curious, sir," said Mr. Railton thoughtfully. "If the evidence against Talbot were not so absolutely overwhelming, it would lead me to suppose that there had been some accidental mistake."

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"Nothing would please me more if it proved to be so, Mr. Railton; but I cannot help thinking that that letter was probably written to meet my eyes. The wretched boy calculated on its effect upon me."

"It is possible."

"I trusted him once, in spite of his past," said the Head. "I cannot trust him again."

Tom Merry rejoined Manners and Lowther in the passage.

"Another year!" asked Manners. "No; a letter from Talbot." Tom Merry explained what had happened.

"Hotten to make you learn the letter," said Lowther. "I suppose the Head thinks it was all bunkum."

"I suppose so; but I don't think so," said Tom, in a low, eager voice.

"Talbot wrote that because he believes the Professor means to have another try here. He didn't make much of a haul, and he might have better luck if he tried again. Oh, I hope he will try!"

"What idea have you got in your head now?" asked Lowther uneasily.

"Don't you see? Suppose he came here again, and we called him!"

"But—"

"Then Talbot would be cleared," said Tom eagerly. "Even that brute would have the decency to own up, I should think, when it wouldn't hurt him to tell the truth."

"More likely to keep silent and let Talbot suffer."

Tom Merry's eyes glowered.

"Well, he would get his deserts, at any rate," he said. "Look here, we're going to do our best. If he comes—"

"If he comes, he'll come when we're asleep in the dorm," said Manners. "I suppose you're not thinking of keeping watch for him?"

"That's just what I was thinking," said Tom.

"But he may not come for weeks; he is sure to wait till it has blown over a bit."

"I shall keep watch."

"But you can't, Tom," urged Lowther. "How are you going to keep watch every night, night after night? It's impossible."

"It's not impossible," said Tom, in a low, earnest voice. "I don't say I can keep awake all night every night; I know that's impossible. But that's not necessary. If a thief gets into the House, it won't be till after midnight, after everybody's in bed. And he won't come after a certain hour in the morning. I can keep watch for a few hours every night, from midnight till five."

"You can't, you see! What about your health?"

"Show my health?"

"I'll say" muttered Manners, "now the Head's seen that letter, he's bound to take some steps, you know—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"He doesn't believe the letter. I could see it in his face what he thought. He thinks it's a trick of Talbot's to get into laager."

"Oh—"

"He doesn't know old Talbot," said Tom bitterly; "but if there's a chance of getting him right, I'm going to take it."

"You're not going to chance it alone," said Lowther. "If you mean this, we'll take it in turns, Tom."

"Turn and turn about," said Manners decidedly; "there it will be only one of us every third night, and we can stand that."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"I'd rather—"

"Never mind what you'd rather," said Lowther coolly. "We're going to take our turn."

"If you're set on it," said Tom Merry, "you can take your turns if you like—that's agreed."

"Done!" said Manners and Lowther together.

"And not a syllable on the subject to anybody else," added Tom.

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CHAPTER 8.

A Thief in the Night!

TOM MERRY'S face was brighter that day.

Hope—was as slight a hope—was enough to raise his spirits.

There was a slim chance now that Talbot's name might be cleared. It would be something, at all events, for the real criminal to be caught—and Tom Merry had not the slightest doubt that the real criminal, who had thrown suspicion so cunningly upon Talbot,

was the Professor.

That night the secret scheme of the Terrible Three was carried into effect.

Tom Merry was to take the first night's watch. There was not much doubt that he would wake at the appointed time. It was more likely that he would not sleep until then.

The Terrible Three went to bed as usual with the Shell; and when midnight rang out from the clock tower Tom Merry was awake and alert. He



"If you please, sir, don't put the padding in the shoulders—put it in the seat of the trousers!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to St. George's, Waterloo Road, Surbiton, Middlesex.

slipped out of bed and dressed himself in the darkness.

The rest of the Form were fast asleep.

He left the dormitory quietly. The whole House was in darkness—the lantern of the seniors and the masters had gone to bed; not a single light glimmered in the great building.

Tom Merry, in rubber shoes, descended the stairs silently.

He knew where to take up his watch. Whenever a burglar entered the school, his object would be the Head's study, where the safe was.

In the deep darkness Tom Merry groped his way along the passage, to the recess near the Head's door. There, in the recess of a deep window, was a seat.

Tom Merry sat down, his coat wrapped about him for warmth, and waited.

It was a weary vigil.

The hours passed slowly; he heard each hour strike dully from the old clock tower. He knew that he was probably watching in vain. If the thief came, he might not come for some time; yet, on the other hand, he might come this night.

Tom's eyes were heavy with sleep, but he did not close them.

It was for the sake of his chance, to clear the innocent. That thought was enough to sustain him.

Slowly the long night dragged by. At five o'clock struck from the tower, Tom Merry knew that the first night's watch had been in vain.

He made his way back to the dormitory. He undressed hastily, and slipped into bed.

When the ringing-bell clanged out in the morning, he was fast asleep. He woke up, to find Monty Lowther shaking him.

"Time!" said Lowther, with a faint grin.

"Turn out, slacker!" said Kangaroo.

Tom Merry rubbed his eyes, and turned out. The loss of sleep had told upon him, strong and healthy as he was. But he would have stood more than that for his share's sake. He was dull and heavy in the class-room that morning.

Mr. Linton was sharp with him several times. But he got through with his work somehow.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and the St. Jim's janitors were meeting a team from Kirkcubine Grammar School. Tom Merry, naturally enough, did not feel very fit for footer. But Jack Blake of the Fourth cheerfully undertook to captain the team.

Figgins & Co. of the New House, quite restored to health after their spell in the sanatorium, were fit as fiddlers, and it was a strong team that turned out for St. Jim's.

Tom Merry did not even see the match. He was asleep most of the afternoon in the armchair in his study.

He was doing there when the door was thrown open, and Manners and Lowther came cheerfully in, bringing a heavy gust of fresh air with them.

Tom Merry sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Hello! Who's won?" he asked.

"They have," said Lowther. "Two to one against us!"

"We wanted Talbot," said Manners. "We miss him, you know—and you staying out, too, you boonder!"

"Better luck next time," said Tom Merry. Even football had taken a secondary place in his thoughts now.

"You look a blessed sleepy begger," said Monty Lowther. "Too sleepy to help get tea? I'm as hungry as a hunter."

"No," said Tom, laughing. "I'll help. Have the Gramscians gone?"

"Yes, rather. Come off as cheery as crickets, after licking us," said Lowther. "Whose turn to keep watch to-night—you or me, Manners?"

"Time up for it," said Manners.

"They tossed up after tea, and the lot fell to Manners."

"You'll be careful, old chap!" said Tom Merry anxiously. "You won't fall asleep! E—I wish you'd leave it to me, you know."

"Folksed!" said Manners. "If you keep awake every night, you'll have to go to sleep every day—and you'll jolly soon be spotted!"

There was no doubt about that; and Tom Merry had to submit to the inevitable. That night it was Manners who took up his post, secretly and stealthily, in the window-recess in the passage along by the Head's study, and watched until the small hours of the morning, but he watched in vain.

On Sunday Manners was glad that it was a day of rest. He slept like a top most of the afternoon.

Lowther took his turn cheerfully the next night; but when Monday morning came there had been no alarm. Lowther was decidedly drowsy in class on Monday morning, though he did his best to conceal it.

He was glad when lights were over, and he could take a "nap" in the armchair in the study. He felt better after that, in the afternoon.

"Your turn again to-night, Tommy," he said, as they sat at tea that evening. "Fill yourself up to the neck with tea—it helps to keep you awake. How long are we going to keep up this game?"

"Until we succeed," said Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat!"

"But I don't want you fellows to bother about it," said Tom hastily. "I'm quite willing to watch on my own—"

"Bats" said Lowther, "Likewise bow-wow" chimed in Manners.

That night Tom Merry was on the watch again. It was the fourth night since he had received Talbot's warning. As he sat in the window-room in the deep darkness, he was thinking of the unseen jailer. Where was Talbot now? What had become of him?

Half after four streaked daily through the night. Wearily but grimly Tom Merry kept his vigil. Three o'clock! Silence, deep and still, followed the chime.

Tom Merry started. What was that sudden light? He sat up, breathing hard, his heart throbbing. A soft, stealthy sound in the passage—a sound of a cautious football!

Tom Merry scarcely dared to breathe, as, in dense darkness, that stealthy football passed the screen, the unseen intruder passing within a couple of feet of him. The stealthy flap stopped outside the door of the Head's study. There was a breathless silence, then a click.

The locked door had been opened. Tom Merry, straining his ears, heard the soft sound as it was closed again.

He started to his feet, trembling in every limb with excitement.

"At last!" In the Head's study was the man who had wronged Talbot. He had come again!

CHAPTER 5.

Capturing the Crackman!

TOM MERRY crept silently from the room in his rubber shoes, and stood in the wide passage, listening.

The door of the Head's study was closed, and not a gleam of light came from under it.

He guessed that the midnight intruder had placed a rug inside the door to hide the light. For from the keyhole there came a faint glimmer.

The crackman was at work.

Tom Merry bent his head outside the door and listened. There was a faint sound within—the sound of a drill at work on wood.

The janitor, with beating heart, crept away.

The man was there. How long he would remain Tom could not guess—but long enough for the janitor to take measures for his capture.

Tom Merry had no thought of facing the villain alone. The rascal was not to be given the slightest chance of eluding capture this time.

Tom Merry made his way silently to Mr. Railton's bed-room. He opened the door and called softly. He was at a sufficient distance from the scene of the crackman's operations to be sure that he would not be heard by the thief.

"Mr. Railton!" His whispering voice



Hallo, Everybody!

Thick Form Hoister: "The Ironclads were so called because they rarely laughed, and so never split their sides," wrote Curly Gilman.

What would most crooks do if they had their time over again? asks a reformer. Grumble about having to serve a double sentence, I expect.

They say a thief is a man who sees passes his life.

Editor: "Why did you write that Columbus bought America for just under fifteen hundred dollars. Frayne?" asked Mr. Sully. "It says in the history book, sir," replied Joe Frayne. "Columbus acquired America, 1492!"

Note: Experience is something you get while looking for something else.

"Tight shoes make the feet go to sleep," says a doctor. Yes, and the toes turn in.

An authorship suggests that smuglers who exaggerate the size of the fish they catch should be suitably punished. Stretcher cases, or is it more.

A qualified football referee, we read, always examines the goalposts before a match. A wise referee, however, makes sure of the exits.

Edward Glips, who understands crooks, says that crooks never are thrown back by the moon. Apparently they don't like our progress up there any better than we do!

Hold your breath now and count up to seven. What for? Good! how do I know?

Mary gives that starting record moral reformer out of our existence accused a ballgame in a outside shooting gallery. A case of "shell out"!

Good music will move an audience very quickly, Gussy tells me. So will bad music.

As the American radio engineer said to the frequent artist hanging by his heels: "Would you care to sing a few words now to your great radio public?"

A reader says I write some very peculiar things in this column, and he has half a suspicion that I am trying to be funny. When the whisper has become a certainty, old chap, give yourself a good laugh.

Chin, chin, chin!

scouted strangely, softly, in the dark room.

There was the sound of a sudden move, then a startled voice:

"What—who is that?"

"Wake up, sir! It's I—Tom Merry!"

The crackman is in the Head's study!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"Merry!"

"He is drilling the safe now, sir!"

"Good heavens! Merry, you are sure—"

"Yes, sir. He passed within a couple of feet of me in the passage, sir."

"What were you doing out of bed? You should not have run this risk. But never mind now. Go back to your dormitory, Merry, and leave this to me."

Mr. Railton was already out of bed, dressing himself hurriedly in the dark.

Tom Merry glided away to the Shell dormitory, as the Housemaster directed him. Not that he intended to remain there. He did not mean to be "of the scene" when the crackman was taken. He crept into the dormitory and shook Lowther.

Merry woke up with a start.

"Whatever warmer? You-w-w!"

"Wake up, Monty! He's come!"

"My hat!"

"Manners, old man—"

Tom Merry shook Manners.

"He's really come!" murmured Lowther excitedly.

"Yes, Railton's going down. I expect he'll call Kildare. We're going to be in for this too."

"You bet!" murmured Manners.

"Don't wake the others; we don't want a crowd."

The two juniors dressed quickly. The rest of the Shell were fast asleep. Leaving them undisturbed, the Terrible Three crept out of the dormitory and down to the next floor.

Mr. Railton had come out of his room and gone to Kildare's room, and then to Darrell's. In the faint starlight that came in through the hall window the Terrible Three saw them come out of the Sixth Form passage—the Housemaster and the two stalwart prefects, each with a poker or a cricket stump in his hand. They made their way quietly to the Head's study.

The juniors crept after them as silently as they could, for they knew that the Housemaster would send them back if he spotted them.

But Mr. Railton was not thinking of them just then. He reached the door of the Head's study with the two seniors, and the glimmer of moon light from the keyhole struck upon his eyes in the darkness. Faintly, almost inaudibly, came the steady sound of the drill.

"You are ready, Kildare and Darrell?" said Mr. Railton, in a low voice.

"Yes, rather, sir!" said Kildare.

"Follow me in, but leave him to us," said the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton turned the handle of the door and threw it open.

He rushed into the study, with the two Sixth Formers at his heels.

A man, who was bent before the safe, working in the concentrated light of an electric lamp, sprang round with a hoarse cry.

Kildare turned on the electric light in the study as he followed Mr. Railton in. The room was flooded with light.

"Caught, you wonderful!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

The crackman stared a hoarse oath. His hand was already in his pocket for a weapon, but the Housemaster was upon him before he could draw it.

In the powerful grasp, the smaller man struggled in vain.

The crackman was head and shoulders shorter than the Housemaster, and Mr. Railton had not seen a living athlete for nothing.

The racial had no chance.

His passed throat, fighting wildly for his liberty.

But the Housemaster's grip bore him backwards to the floor, and he went down on the carpet, and a heavy knee was planted on his chest.

It had passed so quickly that Killdare and Darrell, keen as they were, had no chance of helping. But now they grasped the man's arms as he struggled, and held him helplessly.

Outside the open doorway, three juniors blinked into the lighted study. The Terrible Three were there in case they were wanted. But the crackman was already a prisoner. Mr. Railton wrenched a revolver away from him.

"I've seen him before somewhere," said Darrell, as he looked down at the hard, clean-shaven face of the man.

"Faster his hands," said Mr. Railton.

"A handkerchief will do."

The crackman gave a sudden jaw grimace, and stretched out inert under their grasp. His eyes were closed, his jaw had dropped, he seemed hardly able to breathe.

"Fainted, by gum!" said Darrell.

The man lay motionless.

The grasp upon him was relaxed, and they drew back. And as he was released, the apparently unconscious man made a sudden spring to his feet.

"Collar him!" roared Killdare. "Shaming by thunder!"

The crackman was through them in a flash, knocking Killdare aside, and eluding Darrell and the Housemaster. A desperate bound carried him through the doorway.

It had been a clever trick—a desperate attempt—and it might have succeeded if the way had been open, but the desperate man, bounding through the doorway, rushed directly into the arms of the Terrible Three.

They fastened on him like cats and dragged him down.

Before he could even attempt to struggle free from their grip, Mr. Railton was upon him again, and Killdare and Darrell were clanking at him.

With six pairs of hands upon him, he was dragged back into the room.

"Not this journey!" shrieked Monty Lewther breathlessly.

Killdare bound the racial's hands with a twisted handkerchief. The crackman lay panting on the carpet.

"Thank you, my boys!" said Mr. Railton. "You should have been in the dormitory, but certainly you have been very useful here. Keep hold of that racial, Killdare, for the present."

"I've got him, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's cheerfully. "He won't play that trick on us twice."

Tom Merry looked down at the crackman keenly.

In the hard, clean-shaven face he sought for a resemblance to the Professor, the man who had been known once at St. Jim's as Mr. Mackintosh, the science master. And he knew that he was not mistaken.

"At last, you villain!" said Tom Merry. "Do you recognize him, Mr. Railton?"

"Recognize him?" repeated the Housemaster.

"Yes, sir. You have seen him before."

Mr. Railton looked puzzled.

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"There's something familiar to me in his face," he said; "but—"

"It's Mr. Mackintosh."

"How my word! Yes, I know him now."

"The Professor?" exclaimed Killdare. "The man Talbot denounced when he was here passing himself off as a science master, I know him now."

"Yes," said Tom Merry steadily; "the man Talbot denounced, and the man who committed a robbery here last week, and left evidence behind him to make suspicion fall upon Talbot."

"Merry!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "I am sure of it, sir! Ask him. He may tell the truth now."

Mr. Railton fixed his eyes upon the huffed, panting crackman.

"You hear, my man?" he said. "You are a prisoner now. It may do you good, in your position, to tell the truth."

"Was it you who came here in the night a week ago—"

The Professor laughed sardonically.

"I?" he repeated.

"Yes, you, who robbed this safe, which you have attempted to rob again; who took articles belonging to Talbot of the Shell, and left Talbot's parkie where you stole by a window."

"A pretty story!" said the Professor.

"Do you confess it?"

"Hardly. This was my job, because the Toff made so small a haul last time," said the Professor coolly. "The Toff, whom you call Talbot, is one of us now. He had better luck than I have had."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Tom Merry fiercely.

The Professor laughed.

"It is useless to expect the truth from him," said Mr. Railton. "But I begin to think, Merry, that you may be right."

"This is the man who kidnaped Talbot," said Tom Merry, between his teeth. "You can see how low Talbot's parkie came to be here. It was easy enough for that scoundrel to take it from him when Talbot was his prisoner. And he took Talbot's things away to make it look blacker because Talbot had denounced him when he was playing his game here. Mr. Railton, you must see that it is the truth—"

"I think that it is possible," said the Housemaster gaily. "But this is not the time to discuss that. Take this racial to the punishment-room, Killdare. He can be kept securely there for to-night, and handed over to the police in the morning."

And with strong hands grasping him, the crackman was marched away.

CHAPTER 10.

A Startling Meeting!

THE House was still silent; there had been no alarm. The capture of the crackman had been effected with little noise. The sleeping quarters were at a distance from the Head's study. In their dormitories the School House fellows were sleeping,

little dreaming of the dramatic scene that had passed before.

The punishment-room in the School House—Nobody's Study, as the juniors called it—was a small room, plainly furnished, with a little barred window.

The crackman glanced around him swiftly and eagerly as he was marched into Nobody's Study. It was clear that he was calculating his chances of escape, but a glance was enough to tell him that there was none. There were strong bars to the window, and outside was a drop of forty or fifty feet. The door was big and solid, and the lock strong. The crackman was thoroughly searched, and every kind of instrument or weapon taken from him before he was left.



Mr. Railton suddenly threw open the door of the Head's study. A man who was bent before the safe, working his hands.

"Caught, you scoundrel!"

Mr. Railton, too, had sent one of the juniors for a cord, and the man's hands were bound behind him—loosely enough to allow him personal comfort, but securely enough to prevent him from using them.

A bed with a mattress was in the corner of the room, and Mr. Railton pointed to it.

"You will remain here for to-night," he said. "I will send you some blankets."

The crackman shrugged his shoulders and made no reply.

The door of the punishment-room closed upon him.

"He is safe," said the Housemaster. "You may return to bed now, my boys."

There is no need to escape an alarm in the House at this hour; the man is safe. One moment, Merry. It was you who discovered this man's presence in the House. How did it come about? You could not have been in the dormitory."

"I was not, sir."

"Then where were you?" asked Mr. Railton, a little sternly.

"I was keeping watch, sir."

"Keeping watch?"

"Yes, sir. I may as well tell you now," said Tom Merry calmly. "Ever since Talbot wrote to me that warning that you saw, sir, we have been keeping watch—one or other of us. We knew the villain would come sooner or later."

tern in. He sat on his bed in the darkness, thinking.

"Better turn in, Tom," said Leather, in a low voice.

Tom shook his head.

"It's all over," said Manners. "We've got our man. There's nothing more doing, Tom."

"We've got our man, but he hasn't done what I hoped. It hasn't come out that he was the thief, and that Talbot was innocent."

"Not much good expecting him to give up, I'm afraid," said Leather.

"Still, this makes it look better for Talbot. It can't be denied that it was owing to his warning that the Professor was collared."

"That's something," said Manners.

"But that's not enough," said Tom Merry. "Look here, we captured the man; he's our prisoner, isn't he?"

"I—I suppose so," said Leather usually. "What are you going to do?"

"He's our prisoner," repeated Tom Merry, "and he's going to clear Talbot. If he makes a confession, and clears Talbot, I don't care what becomes of him. He can go free, or go to the deuce for all I care!"

"Tom?"

"I'm going to see him!" said Tom Merry determinedly.

"But—but it's no good, Tom," said Manners, in a startled whisper. "The fellow would say anything to get free—he would write anything—sign anything. Unless he makes a personal confession to the police, it wouldn't be taken any notice of."

"I don't see that. If he writes out a confession, stating how Talbot was kidnaped, where he was kept, and so on, we can jolly soon find other evidence to prove it," said Tom. "Others it must have seen Talbot when he was a prisoner, and they can be found, arrested perhaps, and made to confess. If we were get the true story, we may be able to prove it; but if that villain is taken away by the police to-morrow morning, he will keep silent, if only for revenge upon Talbot."

"But—but—"

"He's our prisoner, and we're going to do it," said Tom.

"There'll be a row—"

"I don't care about that."

"But—but he's locked up in the punishment-room, Tom. You can't get at him."

"We've still got the key—the other key," said Tom. "You remember when I was shut up there once, you fellows got a key for the door. I've got it now; it's in my box."

"But I say, Tom—"

"Nuff said, old chap. As soon as Railton's last asleep, I'm going down."

There was no moving Tom Merry from his resolution. In the darkness he hasted in his box for the key. Half an hour was allowed to pass. By that time it was pretty certain that the Housemaster and the prefects were asleep again.

"We're coming with you," said Leather.

"Just as you like."

The Terrible Three left the dormitory silently. Manners and Leather were feeling extremely doubtful and uneasy; but, as Tom said, the crackman was their prisoner. They had kept watch for him, in the hope of helping Talbot by means of his capture. Tom Merry felt that he was acting within his rights, whatever view the powers that were might take of the matter.

The three juniors crept down the passage. All was silent and dark about them. But as they came upon the lower landing Tom Merry suddenly paused, with a deep breath.

"Hold on, you fellows!" he whispered.

"What?"

"Listen!"

A sound had come from below—from the dark Hall. It was a slight sound, but they knew what it was. It came from the window in the Hall.

"My only hat!" murmured Leather. "Lucky we didn't go to bed. There's another. He must have had a confederate outside, and we never thought that—"

Manners chuckled softly.

"All across! We'll nab him like the other one. Wait till he's got inside."

"What's he?"

The juniors, forgetting all about the prisoner in the punishment-room for the moment, crept silently down the stairs to the ground floor. In the darkness of the Hall they watched the window. Outside was a glimpse of starlight, and against it a form showed dimly at the window. There was another faint creak. Then creak again.

The juniors stood with bated breath. They had no doubt now that the crackman had had an accomplice who had remained outside the House, and, guessing that something had gone wrong, was seeking to enter the House to release the Professor. That, at least, was how it appeared to the Terrible Three, and they waited, grimly and silently, for the newcomer to enter, to cut off his escape when he was fairly inside the House.

The minutes passed. Evidently the newcomer was not so skilled a crackman as John Rivers or the Bell. To them the Hall window would have presented few difficulties. But minutes followed minutes, and the shadowy figure without was still at work.

The juniors waited, wondering.

"I say," murmured Leather, when a squatter of an hour had passed, "that can't be a jolly crackman; more likely some fellow who's broken boards, and is trying to get in again. Anybody who knew the house would have had that window open long ago."

The same thought had come into Tom Merry's mind.

"Must be Catts of the Fifth!" chuckled Manners. "Been on the ransie, perhaps, and found that he couldn't get in again. Railton found a window open, and thumped it, you know. Catts might have got out before the Professor got in."

The chums of the Shell laughed aloud, if the black sheep had been out of bounds, and had found his return cut off, they could guess what a blue funk he would be in. He would have to get into the House somehow, and he might have tried the Hall window as the easiest way.

Little as they liked Catts of the Fifth, it was not their business to give him away if he had been on the ransie, as Manners expressed it; and if the figure outside proved to be a St. Jim's fellow,

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and pushed into the room, with the two Sixth Formers at a light of an electric lamp, swung round with a hoarse cry, and seized the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton knitted his brows.

"Then it's Talbot who's really caused this rowal to be started!" exclaimed Kibber.

"Yes," said Tom.

"By Jove! It looks—"

"It looks as if Talbot has been wronged," said Tom Merry bitterly. "I'm glad you're beginning to see it now."

"You may go to your dormitory," said Mr. Railton, without passing any comment upon Tom Merry's contention.

The Terrible Three returned to their dormitory. The Housemaster and the prefects went back to bed, but in the Shell dormitory Tom Merry did not

would come. Near dawn, I have been unable to sleep. I have been doing no duty. I have slept in the daytime and watched at night. I know he would come. And—and tonight, when I saw the light, I knew—"

She choked.
"Poor kid!" muttered Leather. "That awful villain is your father."

"He is my father. I came here to save him. I knew that he must be a prisoner now, as he was not taken away."

The juniors were silent. Villain as John Rivers was, he was her father, and she sought to save him. They understood now why the poor girl had forced her way into the School House at that hour. It was to save the crackman before the police closed their grip upon him and hope was lost.

The devotion of the unhappy girl went straight to the juniors' hearts. They understood that she was no confidante of the villain; she had watched for him to attempt to turn him from his purpose. But when she found that he was a prisoner, her devotion had led her to this. It was wrong—but it was noble.

"You will help me?" breathed the girl.
"Help you?"

"I must save him! Afterwards I will go away. I will leave the school; I will do anything you choose! But you will let me save him?"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.
"Goodness knows I'm sorry," he said. "But—but it was that man who robbed the school, Miss March. It was he who threw suspicion upon Talbot. Talbot's name has got to be cleared. The innocent cannot suffer for the guilty."

"Let me see him. I will plead with him. I will make him tell the truth. Talbot shall be cleared," whispered the girl.

"You will see him," said Tom Merry; "but—but as for letting him go, I—"

"Let me see him!"
"That must, you."

The chains of the Shell, still in a state of amazement, led the girl to the punishment-rooms. What to do in that amazing emergency they simply did not know. They knew what Marie must be suffering. But in their thoughts Talbot came first.

Tom Merry silently unlocked the door.
There was a low, startled exclamation from within. They heard the crackman roll off the bed. He had not been sleeping.

Tom Merry struck a match, and lighted a candle—and that Leather produced from his pocket. The flickering light showed up the room, and the crackman, with his hands behind him, heard. His face was haggard. He gazed in amazement at the stricken girl as she came in.

"You here?" he muttered.

The juniors followed the girl into the room and closed the door.

The crackman did not look at them. His eyes were fixed upon the colorless face of his daughter. For once concern had awakened in the Professor's hard heart.

"Father?" he repeated.
"Father?"

"Hush!"
"They—they know," said the girl. "I have told them that you are my father."

"Marie?"

"They have let me see you. I—I tried to save you," murmured the girl, with white lips. "Now it does not depend on me. Father, why did you come here? I watched for you—every night I have watched from the quadrangle, in the cold and darkness, to stop you when you came, to turn you back, and—and when you came I did not see you. I did not know until you were a prisoner," she added.

"And you came to save me?" said the crackman, in wonder.

"Yes."
"You are a good girl, Marie," said the Professor, in a softened tone. "I have not been a good father to you. Perhaps—if it were over again—things might be different; but it is too late now. Go back. Don't you understand that you are risking your liberty in coming here?"

"I do not care."
"But you must care! Go back while there is time. These boys will keep your secret. Save yourself, you foolish child!"

Marie turned her wet eyes on the chains of the Shell.
"You will let me save him?" she pleaded. "It is nothing to you if he escapes; but he is my father."

"Let him continue, then," said Tom Merry steadily. "Let him confess that he was guilty and that Talbot was innocent. Let him prove it, and—and we'll take the law into our own hands and let him go."

(Continued on the next page.)

THE OLD GUY-



BLOW HIM SKY-HIGH WITH BROCK'S

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Ask for these new wonderful combinations.
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"Father! You hear?"

There was a strange expression upon the Professor's face. The white, striking face of his daughter had deeply moved him, hard-hearted as he was.

"You will do justice to the Toff," said Marie. "It will cost you nothing more, and my liberty!" said the Professor, with a gleam in his eyes.

"You shall go free if you clear Talbot," said Tom Merry. "But he must be cleared beyond the shadow of a doubt."

The Professor shrugged his shoulders. Even at that moment he hesitated. His plan to get the Toff, the prince of crooks, into his hands again had to be abandoned. His face hardened again.

"Well!" said Tom Merry.

"I have nothing to say," said the Professor solemnly.

Marie uttered a cry.

"Father—father!"

"You have made your choice, John Rivers!" said Tom Merry, setting his teeth. "You will remain here till the police come, then?"

The Professor did not reply. The thought was working in his mind that his daughter would yet convince to some man. He knew that the girl would not abandon him.

"Father!" exclaimed Marie.

"I have nothing to say! Leave me in my fate!"

"I cannot!" The girl turned appealing eyes upon Tom Merry. "You will let me save him! Say that you will let me! Let him go free!"

"Miss March—"

"Let me save him! I will save him! You shall not stop me, unless you send me, too, to the police!"

The justices looked at one another helplessly. To let the girl share the fate of her recently father through there was not to be thought of. Was, then, the cunning villain to escape after all, and Talbot unharmed, still an outcast? Yet to resist the pleading of the girl was a harder task than Tom Merry was equal to.

There was a silence in the room, broken only by the sobbing of Marie. In the silence three cases a step with out, and the door was flung open. Mr. Railton strode in. There was an angry frown upon his face, and angry words upon his lips, but they were checked at the unexpected sight of the weeping girl.

"Miss March! You here! Merry, what does this mean?"

CHAPTER 12.

Light at Last!

TOM MERRY stood aloof. The matter was out of his hands now.

The justices had taken it a little too readily for granted that the Housemaster had gone back to sleep. Evidently he had remained very much awake. As a matter of fact, the Housemaster had thought of the possibility that the crookmaster had not come alone, and he had decided to watch for the remainder of the night. He had come to look at the punishment-room to be sure that all was safe, and he had seen the light and heard the voices.

"What does this mean?" repeated Mr. Railton.

The crookmaster flung himself solemnly upon the bed. The boys that had risen in his heart was gone now.

"Miss March," began the bewildered Tom Cox Lassard.—No. 1590.



"I just can't help whistling, sir!"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to M. Melchior, 12, Hodgson Avenue, Bradford Moor, Bradford.

Housemaster, "how did you come here? What—"

"I am not Miss March," said the girl dully. "That is not my name. My name is Marie Rivers, and I am his—his daughter."

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Railton almost staggered. "I knew he was a prisoner, and I came to set him free," said Marie. "Rise—rise it is all over, and you may send me to prison with him."

"Marie!" muttered the crookmaster. "That man, John Rivers, is your father!" said Mr. Railton.

"Yes," muttered Marie. "But—but you had nothing to do with this—with his coming here!" the Housemaster said hesitatingly. "I cannot believe that!" Marie shook her head.

"I will not keep the secret any longer," she said wearily. "I have been no better than he—no better than Talbot was in the old days, but—but since I came here, since I saw the Toff again, I—I changed, even as Talbot has done. After that, it was my only object to prevent this. I would have stopped him if I could, but now—I could not abandon him. He is my father!"

"It was Talbot who showed you a better way of life!" said Mr. Railton.

"Yes, it was Talbot."

"And yet he has—has gone back—"

"He has not gone back," said Marie. "Father, the truth shall be told now. If you will not tell it, then I will tell it."

The crookmaster did not speak.

"It was not Talbot who robbed the Head, sir, it was my father. It was his plan to make suspicion fall on the Toff, to force him to go back to his old life."

"You knew it?"

"I knew it."

"And you allowed this outwitted boy to be driven from the school in disgrace, when you could have saved him with a word!" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"Could I betray my father?" said the girl bitterly. "Now it does not matter. He is a prisoner. But while he was free I could not give him up. I have suffered—"

"My poor child!" said the Housemaster softly. "I understand. But why didn't Talbot speak? If he had told us that you knew the truth you could not have succeeded in them."

Marie wept faintly.

"Talbot would never have uttered a word to harm me," she said.

"And he has suffered for his silence," said the Housemaster, deeply moved. "But there, at least, repentance shall be made."

"But my father—my father—"

Mr. Railton knitted his brows in thought. The misery in the girl's face touched his heart, as it had touched the hearts of the justices. The silent crookmaster observed, a dozen times over, the punishment that was in store for him, but—

"I must speak to the Head," said the Housemaster at last. "In this I cannot act on my own responsibility. But if this man will write out a free and full confession it is possible that something can be done. I possess nothing."

"Father!" whispered Marie. The crookmaster gave a hard laugh.

"After you have told all, it is not much use for me to keep silent," he said. "I will do as you wish."

Mr. Railton made a gesture to the justices.

"Go back to your dormitory," he said. "Kindly do not leave it again until the morning. Miss March, go back to your room, and leave your father with me."

"But—"

"At dawn I shall consult the Head. You may be present. I cannot promise you more than that. But you shall see the Head before anything is decided."

"Thank you, Mr. Railton!" Marie moved towards her father timidly.

"Father, you will do what is right now. It is your only chance; you see that."

"You can rely on me to see which side my head is bettered," said John Rivers, with a sneering laugh.

Tom Merry & Co. quit the room. "How did you enter here, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I—I had a key, sir," stammered Tom.

"Kindly give it to me."

Tom Merry handed over the key and the three justices returned to the Shell dormitory. They turned in.

"Well, this has been a night!" said Monty Lowther, as he drew the sheets about him.

"It means everything in Talbot," said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "He will be cleared now—through Marie Rivers."

"Poor girl!" said Monty. "I—I say, we'd better keep all that dark, you know. No need for anybody else to know that she is that villain's daughter."

"Yes, rather!"

It was some time before the justices slept.

They were up before the dial-needle changed out in the morning.

Tom Merry was very keen to know what had happened since the crookmaster had been left with Mr. Railton.

He had a strong suspicion that John Rivers would be allowed to escape, after signing a confession, for the sake of the Little Sister.

The rising-bell was beginning to clang when the justices came downstairs. They made their way first to the punishment-room. The door was unfastened; the room was empty. There was no sign of John Rivers.

"Gone!" murmured Lowther.

They straggled out into the quadrangle. In the dimness of early morning a light streamed from the Head's study. Dr. Robinson had evidently been down

very early. A slight, graceful figure came away from the School House and hurried across towards the mansion.

Tom Merry ran to intercept the little Sister.

"Miss March?" he exclaimed. "Is it all right?"

The girl stopped, and smiled through her teeth.

"Yes," she said. "I have been to the Head. He was very kind. There is a full confession, signed by my father, and witnessed by Mr. Bailton and the Head. It is going to be made public to-day. Talbot is cleared."

"Thank goodness! But—but your father?"

"He is gone," said Marie, in a low voice. "He—he was placed in the punishment-room again, but—but the door was not locked, and—and he escaped."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I am glad," he said.

"And—and he is not so bad as you have believed," said the girl, with pathetic eagerness. "He has granted to accept!—I—I hope he will keep his promise."

"I hope so," said Tom.

"I shall help him all that I can," said Marie. "I shall join him."

"You are leaving here?"

Marie smiled a little.

"After—after what has happened, could I remain?" she said.

"Why not?" said Tom. "Nobody will know about your connection with him. You don't think we shall chatter, surely?" And Talbot, when he comes back—"

Marie shook her head.

"I must go," she said. "I'll stay a few days, that is all. I—I am not well enough to go at once. You will tell Talbot that I have done all I could for him, and I was sorry to let him be wronged, but he will understand that I could not sacrifice my father; he is always generous."

"I will tell him," said Tom.

Marie hurried on.

Tom Merry was very thoughtful. All had gone well so far, but Talbot remained to be feared. Where was Talbot?

There was a surprise for St. Joe's that morning.

Aller prayers, the whole school was assembled in Big Hall, and the Head came in, with a grave face, to address the school.

There was a hush of expectancy. With the exception of the Terrible Three, no one had the faintest idea what was coming.

"Something" waitah uttered on this occasion," Arthur Augustus whispered to Blake. "I wonder—"

"Silence!" rapped out a prefect.

There was a deep silence as the Head began to speak, and then a hush of wonder as the juniors heard what he had to say. Dr. Halloway, with emotion in his fine old face, told them in concise words of the discovery of the plot against Talbot, and his former confederate's confession, and the complete clearing of the junior from all suspicion. The St. Joe's fellows listened in blank amazement.

The plotter had confessed, and not only confessed, but given proof, for, sewn up in his clothes had been found some of the banknotes which had been taken from the Head's study on the occasion of the robbery that had been attributed to Talbot. Of Marie Rivers, the Head made no mention. The girl's secret was to be kept.

"But Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, in wonder. "I must confess, dear boys, that this beats the band, you know. It appears that Tom Merry was right all the time. That is not so surprising; but it appears also that he was wrong, and I regard that as very surprising indeed!"

"Shurrup!" murmured Blake. "The Head's starting on another lip!"

"My boys," resumed the Head. "I

have explained this to you so that justice may be done to the unhappy lad who has been so grievously wronged. I need not say that search will instantly be made for him, and that he will be found and brought here to take his place once more among us. And I can rely upon you all to give him a hearty welcome."

"Hoorah!" shouted Loucheux.

And the choir was taken up.

"Hip-hip-hoorah!"

There was no doubt of the kind of welcome Talbot would get when he returned to St. Joe's.

CHAPTER 13.

Through the Valley of the Shadow!

TALBOT had been cleared! St. Joe's was eagerly waiting to welcome his return.

But where was Talbot?

Search for him had immediately started, but day followed day, and there was no news of him. The unhappy boy, penniless, alone, hunted, as he believed, by the police, had disappeared.

That he had gone to London was surmised, but in that vast, overgrown city, where was he to be sought? Tom Merry & Co. waited anxiously for news.

But news did not come. Day followed day, and the detection the Head had employed to seek the unhappy boy made over the same reports—nothing. Talbot had disappeared.

A week passed, and still there was no news, and Tom Merry made up his mind what he must do. He went to the Head's study to ask leave to look for Talbot himself, fully resolved to take French leave if it were not accorded. But the Head was kind; his own heart was heavy with anxiety for the missing junior. If he thought of a refusal, it died upon his lips as he looked at Tom Merry's anxious face.

"But what could you do, Merry,



The match flared out in the darkness, and Tom Merry held it up. [A cry of amazement burst from the three juniors, for the light shone up the whole pale face of Miss March, the same! Tom Merry sprang forward. "Miss March! What are you doing here?"]

where others have failed!" said Dr. Holmes, kindly enough.

"I can try, sir," said Tom restlessly. "And—said Mansers and Lovther will be only too pleased to help me search for Talbot."

"Very well, you and your friends may go," said the Head, nodding up his mind. "I give you leave for a week, but you must obtain permission from home."

"Thank you, sir?"

Permission from home was obtained easily enough, and the Terrible Three prepared for their father's lopes.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy expressed his doubts as to their success owing to the Terrible Three having forgotten to ask permission for him to accompany them. But he nobly hoped for the best. Before they started, Tom Merry sought Maria Rivers to tell her they were going. He found the Little Sister pale and troubled.

"I wish you every success," she said. "I have almost given up hope."

"And you?" said Tom. "Will you be here when Talbot comes—if he comes?" Maria smiled faintly.

"I shall be here," she said. "I—I have had a letter from my father. He has left England. He has promised me again to keep the promise he made to the Head—his repent and reform. I think he will keep his word. And—and Dr. Holmes wishes me to remain in my post here, and I have consented. He has forgiven me, and trusts me! Oh, I shall be happy here, if—I—"

"We will bring him back," said Tom. He knew she was thinking of Talbot. "We won't come back without him!"

And the Terrible Three started with determination, if with faint hopes.

Mr. Fox, of Scotland Yard, went down at the London conveyance. The detective, who had once hunted Talbot as a villain, was seeking him now to restore him to honour; but even Mr. Fox had failed so far.

For several days the juniors, sometimes with Mr. Fox and sometimes alone, pursued their search. They had put up in an hotel near the station, and every day they went at their work—searching, searching. But as the days passed they realised the hopelessness of it.

At St. Jim's it was easy to think of searching for Talbot in London. In London, they realised what it meant. In that vast city, where millions came and went, a single human being could disappear like a drop of water in the ocean.

In the wintry, misty streets, in parks and commons, under the shadows of night in darkened thoroughfares, they wandered and sought in vain.

They found themselves scanning strange faces, peering into crowds, in the hope of seeing the well-known face of their chum among the tens of thousands—while hope died lower and lower in their hearts.

At night they went without fail to the Embankment, that last hideous refuge of the homeless poor, and peered at the shivering, wasted figures shivering pitifully on the seats, in the hope that their friend might be among them. And still they did not find him.

"We won't give up," said Tom Merry, when the week of leave was up. "I'm going to write to the Head for leave to stay longer. He must let us. Come what may, I'm not going back without Talbot. We must find him."

"We must!" said Mansers; but there was little hope in his voice. But they were determined, hope or not, to succeed—in find their chum, to get him away from that noisy, roaring, homeless desert of bricks, back to the green country and St. Jim's.

The night came on again—night, dark and chill and misty, with a drizzle of rain, and the three chums turned up their coat-collars and jaded down their caps, and went on their pilgrimage once more by the cold, shining river.

Even in the drizzle of rain there were wooded outcrops upon the bank, huddled in their rags. With heavy hearts the jinxon walked on, peering at the haggard faces.

A figure was leaning on the stone balustrade, looking down at the river—a ragged, tattered figure, only too familiar to their eyes now in its misery.

Tom Merry gasped. There was something in the hopeless gaze of that outcast, fixed upon the water, that startled him. Well he knew that to many of those hopeless wretches the river was the only refuge from suffering.

But even as he passed the figure

turned away, and Tom saw him shake his head. He passed on, and in the shivering form it seemed to Tom Merry that there was something familiar. His heart bounded. Was it possible? At last!

"He ran forward.

"Talbot!"

The tattered figure swung round with a startled cry. The light of a lamp showed his face—shaved it thin and wan, emaciated. But even in that changed and frozen face Tom recognized the same hardness and healthy tone of his old chum.

He grasped the boy's arm, his hand trembling.

"Talbot, I have found you at last, old man!"

Talbot smiled.

"Tom Merry!" he muttered thickly. "Talbot, old chap!" exclaimed Lovther. "Here, take my coat; wrap it round you."

Talbot was reeling unsteadily. They wrapped him in Lovther's warm coat, and Tom led him to the nearest seat.

Talbot could not speak. But it was Talbot—it was the Talbot—and they had found him!

"You've—you've been looking for me!" muttered Talbot at last.

"Yes, you?"

"But—but why—why are you here?"

"Don't you understand? It's all come out. John Rivers has confessed—you're cleared. You've got to come back; we're all waiting to welcome you!"

"Oh, Tom—" Talbot closed his eyes for a moment—"it is seems like a dream! And—and you've been looking for me, and I—I've been hiding and starving!"

"What have you been doing, Talbot, all this time?" asked Tom.

"Hiding from the police," said Talbot bitterly. "I had no chance. I wouldn't go back to—to—you understand?"

"I knew it!"

"And there was nothing else. I tried to get work; but, unknown, without a character, I couldn't get a permanent job," said Talbot. "I got one or two odd jobs. But jobs are not easy to get these days. And when my money was gone—the money you gave me, Tom—I had to sleep under arches, in brickyard sheds—anywhere I could get for shelter. Have you got something to eat about you, Tom? I haven't tasted food for three days."

"Well be at the hotel in five minutes," said Tom.

He slipped to an empty taxi that was crawling by. Talbot, weak with hunger and suffering, was helped into the taxi, and it drove off, and the outcast devoured ravenously a chunk of toffee that Lovther found in his pocket.

"Oh, it's like new life to see you fellows again!" said Talbot, with a catch in his voice. "You don't know what it's like. I'm not soft, but—but I've been through it. In my first looking my coat was stolen, and some of the money you gave me was in the pocket. But I couldn't blame the poor wretch who robbed me; he was cold and starving, too. And sleeping in the open in this weather takes it out of a fellow. Did you—did you see me—"

He stammered in his speech.

"I saw you looking at the river," said Tom, in a choked voice.

"The thought came into my head," said Talbot. "I suppose it was a cowardly thought; but after starving for a week, and in constant dread of being arrested—" The junior broke off.

"But I meant to fight it out to the finish."

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OPENING CHAPTERS OF A SPARKLING STORY OF FOOTER, FUN, AND FIREWORKS ON GUY FAWKES DAY AT GREYFRIARS!

The "FIFTH" at GREYFRIARS!

A Visitor Expected!

HARRY WHARTON came into Study No. 1 in the Rensore at Greyfriars with an open letter in his hand. There was a strong smell of blisters in the study and a crackling sound from the frying-pan Billy Baxter was watching on the fire. Wharton gave an expressive sniff.

"Buster, hold on! Open the window, Nugget! Buster, get that frying-pan off the fire at once!"

Billy Baxter looked round from his busy occupation with a red and pouting face. He blinked at Wharton through his big spectacles.

"Oh, really, Wharton! The blisters are not done yet."

"Check them out of the window! We can't have them siffing here like that with a visitor coming!"

"A visitor!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes; a distinguished visitor, too. Just like Buster to be filling the study with a ruff of blisters at a time like this!" said Wharton.

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Billy Baxter indignantly. "There's nothing else for tea except bread-and-butter, and I raised a tanner by selling a pen-knife to get these blisters. Is that what you call gratitude, Wharton!"

"-Whose pen-knife did you sell?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"Well, as a matter of fact, it was yours."

"Mine!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Yes. As you chaps leave it to me to keep the meals going, I had to raise the wind somehow. I sold it to young Johnson, and he said I could have it back for a bob any time I liked. It's all right, you know. I've got a postal order coming to-morrow, and I'll get it back if you want it."

"You—you—you—"

"There's nothing to be excited about. Anyway, you've got the blisters. They're nearly done, and they will be ruffing for tea."

"Take them away!" said Wharton.

"But—"

"Check them out of the window, or kill them somehow. I tell you we've got a distinguished visitor coming, and I can't have the study reeking of blisters! I wish I'd known you were going to start cooking blisters. I'd have cleaned you up in time."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Get with them!"

"I fancy they're off already, so judge by the sniff!" growled Bob Cherry. "But what's the distinguished visitor who is going to luncheon our humble host?" This is the first I've heard of."

He glanced at the open letter in Harry Wharton's hand.

"Same here!" said Nugget. "Is that letter from St. Jim's?"

"Yes; it's the reply from St. Jim's junior captain. It's all right about to-morrow. I ought to have settled the matter before, but I've been so busy keeping you chaps out of mischief, and so on. This letter is from Tom Merry; I'll read it out to you."

"Go ahead!"

"I see, you fellows—"

"Tidy up, Buster! Get on with the letter!"

By Frank Richards.

(Author of the grand long series of Greyfriars appearing every Saturday in our companion paper, the "Mugger.")

"Dat about these blisters—"

"Take them away," said Wharton. "I can't read the letter out while they're talking. Go and bury them somewhere!"

"That's all very well—but what are we going to have for tea?"

"We're got to get up a good feed somehow, with D'Arcy coming; but

"Gay, gay, gay! Stick him up on high!" Wan Lugg has good cause to remember the Fifth of November!

blisters won't form part of it. Get these horrors away, and leave the dope wide open. Open the windows wide, Nugget. With a draught straight through we may get rid of the concentration of these blisters. Duck up, Buster!"

"I may as well finish cooking them, and then if you don't want them for tea, I can have them first as a snack—"

"Take them away!"

"Yes, but—"

Wharton strode to the grate and jerked the frying-pan off. A hissing steam rose from it, and the fish crackled again.

"Now, if you don't want this hot biffed on your head, Buster, you'll get out!"

"Oh, very well! But, really—"

"Get out!"

"I'll take them along to Wan Lugg's study," said Buster, snuffing up the frying-pan. "He'll be as faink them there, if I give him one of them."

"You'd better hark up, then; we shall want you to help with the tea."

"Right-ho! This won't take me long, but it's against my principles to waste good grub. You see—"

Harry Wharton pushed him out of the study, and he carried the frying-pan and its odorous contents along the passage. Then Wharton read out the letter. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugget, and Horace Slight—the Nabob of Bessipar—listened with great attention:

"The School House, St. Jim's, Sussex."

"Dear Wharton,—Yours just received. We are in the same boat, so it will be all right. We always have a half-holiday on the Fifth of November, and as it comes on a Friday this year, the Wednesday half is given on Friday instead. The same arrangements will hold good, the match being played on Friday afternoon. But in case there should be anything new to be settled, one of our fellows is coming over to see you about it.

"I don't know whether you know

D'Arcy. He will call this evening, about tea-time.

"Kindest regards,"

"Tom Mann."

"Nice letter," said Bob Cherry, with a nod.

"Yes. I saw Merry about making arrangements for the football match," said Harry Wharton. "A very decent chap. I don't remember meeting D'Arcy, and I don't know what sort of merchant he is, but we must do him pretty well, you know. I think we shall get on pretty well with the St. Jim's chaps, and we might fix up other matches later. If D'Arcy is coming about tea-time, he won't be long now."

"And there ought to be some tea."

"Yes, rather. I should really like to do things in decent style while that chap is here, and show him that Greyfriars knows how to be hospitable. What an earth can we do to get the smell of blisters out of the study?"

"Oh, it will clear off in time! The chief question is, what about tea? We're all stony—everything gone for fireworks."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, that's awkward. Even the nabob is busted—oh, lanky!"

"The banefulness is terrific," snarled the Nabob of Bessipar. "The lastful cash of my honourable self went in largish stores of the esteemed crackers and the honourable quabs, and the excellent rousin candles, and the august cake-and-sheets. The broken-fishes is wide."

"And we're all in the same state," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose we can't wire to anybody for tin!"

Wharton shook his head.

"A chap's governor would be apt to get wild if he received a wire from the school and found it was only a kid wanting tin," he remarked. "He wouldn't send any. My credit might, as he's so jolly good-looking, but—"

"But you wouldn't ask him!" grinned Bob. "Quite so. But otherwise, lanky, as lanky puts it, what's to be done? We can't borrow it of D'Arcy when he comes, can we?"

"Hardly, my worthy chum," said the nabob.

"Where's Wan Lugg?" said Harry Wharton. "He's coming in tin, and he would do anything for us. The young bouncer is always lending money right and left to fellows who will never repay him. I hate borrowing money, but there are times when you has to do it, and this is one of them. I'll get a quid from Wan Lugg, and we'll square with him on Saturday. I know my uncle is waiting me an extra tip then."

"Good! Chase in the rousin!"

"You chaps put the study as straight as you can—don't shift the things too much, though, in case D'Arcy comes in the middle of it. I say, don't leave the milk in that old pun-bottle this time—see if you can borrow a milk-jug of somebody. And mind you don't put a pecknote nor the visitor to stir his tea with—D'Arcy is to have the spoon."

"Right-ho! I'll look out for that."

"Then I'll run along and speak to Wan Lugg, and Buster can come along with me to the turkshop to do the shopping."

And Harry Wharton left the study and hurried along the passage to the study which the Chinese junior shared with Russell, Lacy, and Mark Linley. The new boy from Louisiana, a young man of trying blondest proceeded from the study and warned him that Billy Bunter was at work. Wharton stopped at at the open door.

Wan Lung Obliged!

WUN LUNG, the Chinese member of the Greyfriars Rowers, greeted Wharton with an expansive grin. The Celestial was very much attached to the captain of the Rowers, and there were few things he would not have done for Wharton.

Billy Bunter was at the fire, drying the blondest, which were nearly done by this time. Wharton coughed as he came into the study.

"For goodness' sake, kill these blondest, Bunter!" he exclaimed. "The sweet simply burns me. You'll make the whole House roak with it!"

"They're jolly good blondest!"

"They talk too much!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Well, keep them quiet while I'm here. Wan Lung, old chap, I want to ask you a favour."

"Was Lung ready."

"I want a pound till Saturday."

"Ma masher glad lend."

The Chinese shoved his hand into the pocket of his knee breezers and brought out a palm full of loose change, and two or three pound notes. The Chinese junior was the richest fellow at Greyfriars, and extremely careless with his money.

Wharton laughed as the Celestial laid the money on the table.

"Taken number—all—allice same," said Wan Lung.

"A pound will do," said Wharton, taking up a pound note. "We've a visitor coming to Study No. 1, and we want to give him a decent spread, and all our tin has gone for fireworks for the Fifth. You shall have this back for certain on Saturday?"

"Allice light."

"And put that tin into your pocket again. I don't like to see a chap careless with money," said Wharton.

The Chinese replaced the money in his pocket.

"Allice light."

"I want you to come and help me do some shopping, Bunter," said Wharton.

"We're going to have a decent feed. Let them blondest alone!"

"Right you are, Wharton!" said Bunter. "I'll do the shopping for you, with pleasure, and the cooking, too—"

"And most of the eating," grinned Wan Lung.

"Oh, really, Wan Lung—"

"Come on, then," said Harry.

"There's no time to waste. D'Arcy may be here any minute. You ought to be ready when he comes. You'll come to tea, too, Wan Lung?"

The Chinese junior grinned.

"Ma come, ma masher glad."

"Good! Leave those blondest there, Bunter, and get a move on."

"Ma masher glad you if like," suggested Wan Lung.

Harry Wharton shook his head decidedly.

"Not mean! I remember the last feed you stood us, when you japed us over that stew which you led us to believe contained Mrs. Kobbie's dead dog. Thanks all the same, of course. Come on, Bunter!"

"I'm coming! I say, Wan Lung, you'll finish the blondest for me, won't

you? Take them off when they're done.

"I'll be back soon!"

"Ma masher nice-nice!"

Billy Bunter followed Wharton from the study.

"I suppose you're going to have a decent spread!" he remarked, as he walked with Harry to the school shop kept by Mrs. Minble, the gardener's wife.

"Is it necessary to limit yourself to a pound?"

"It's all I have."

"Your credit is good at Mrs. Minble's. She won't trust me for some reason, but she will let you run it up to any figure. Suppose you spend a pound and you a pound—"

"Thank!"

"That's hardly a polite way of answering a chap when he makes a suggestion. I only want to stand a jolly good feed to do honour to the stranger within the gates. I'm not thinking of the little bit I shall eat myself. If you think I'm allowing that to weigh with me the money we get off the subject the better," said Billy Bunter, with dignity.

"Quite so. Get off it, then!" agreed Wharton. "Here we are! You can get a ripping feed for a pound—and there are very few fellows in the Sixth who spend as much on a study feed. It's a curious thing to me that a chap who never has any money is always more extravagant than a chap with a large allowance. Good afternoon, Mrs. Minble! We are having a little celebration in the study at tea-time, and I want Bunter to select stuff up to a pound."

"And Wharton laid the pound note on the counter."

The good dame was all smiles at once. Wharton was not her best customer, but he always paid cash, and

that was very grateful and comforting to Mrs. Minble.

"Made up your mind about the other pound, Wharton?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Yes, you young an!"

"If you like, I'll settle it out of my pocket order to-morrow—"

"Oh, cheero it! Get those things to the study as quickly as you can, and get tea ready— Hello, what's the row about?"

There was a sudden sound of voices in the Class—a shout of laughter, followed by many yelped voices.

Harry Wharton stepped out of the backshop, contemplating the distinguished visitor whom he expected any moment at Greyfriars. The next moment he uttered an exclamation of anger and indignation, and ran swiftly towards the crowd who had collected near the gates of Greyfriars.

D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

A SCHOOLBOY had entered the gate, and was looking about him with an expression of somewhat languid interest. He was a very interesting fellow to look at. There were some fellows at Greyfriars who "dressed to kill," though they were not numerous in the Lower Forms. But the newcomer was a swell such as had seldom been seen at the old school.

He was clad in flannel, which found him like a glove. He carried a light overcoat of elegant cut over his arm, and he wore neat gloves. The polish of his boots equalled that of his silk hat, but could not equal it. His collar was spotlessly white, his necktie tied with a finish that bespoke a master hand. Diamond links flashed on his shirt-cuffs. An eyeglass was jammed in his right eye, and it was through the



"Let me tell I'm suffocating!" Every head in the sleep-room turned towards Bunter as that last voice proceeded from him. Bunter had expected Mr. Quetch to stare at the desk, imagining that somebody was shut up in it. But he didn't; he stared at the would-be ventriloquist!

gold-rimmed monocle that he was taking his mechanical survey of Greyfriars.

Every fellow who was in the Globe had immediately moved towards that elegant figure to obtain a closer view. But what occasioned the laughter was the action of Balstrode, the body of the November.

It happened that Goding had been turning some timber, and had left the tarpot outside the lodge when called away on some duty. Balstrode had taken the tarpot, and, holding it behind him, was walking towards the messenger. His intention was evidently to get near enough to dab the hairy brags in the face of the elegant stranger.

The tarpot was hidden from the stranger by Balstrode's bulky figure, but it was strictly evident to all the Greyfriars fellows, and they chuckled with laughter, as much as the absolute or the consciousness of the stranger as at the coming joke.

Wharton immediately guessed that this elegant junior was the mysterious John St. Jim's, and he ran forward to stop the intended joke.

It would have been a rough enough joke on a fellow belonging to Greyfriars, but upon a friendly visitor it was shocking bad form.

Wharton dashed up at full speed, and caught Balstrode by the shoulder when he was within a few feet of the messenger.

"The Reverse badly looked round, 'Let me go!' he exclaimed. 'What are you holding me for?'

"Put that tarpot down!"

"Shan't!"

"Look here, this is the chap from St. Jim's, come to arrange about the football match to-morrow—"

"I don't care a rap!"

Harry Wharton swung the big Reverse round.

"Put that tarpot down!" he said, "If you put it any where near that chap, I'll knock you down!"

Balstrode breathed hard. Harry's eyes were flashing with anger.

The messenger turned his eyes upon the two juniors. The tarpot was visible to him now that Balstrode was facing Wharton.

"Bal Jove!" he ejaculated. "Is that the way you usually greet visitors, deah boys?"

Wharton turned towards him, Balstrode, after a brief hesitation, hurled the tarpot to the ground, and strode safely away, with his hands in his pockets.

"I'm glad to see you," said Wharton, making no reply to the messenger's remark. "I suppose you are D'Arcy of St. Jim's?"

"Yess, wathah!"

"My only but!" murmured Hazledene. "I wonder where he dug up that accent!"

"Good! I'm Wharton, junior football captain here."

And Harry shook hands with the elegant stranger.

"Are you really?" said D'Arcy. "I am very glad indeed to make your acquaintance. I have come by train from St. Jim's and walked from the station. You have a great many woad little boys in the village."

"Have we?" said Harry, laughing. "I hope they haven't recovered to treat you with anything approaching disrespect."

"As a matter of fact, that is what they have done, deah boy. Several woad little boys called out 'Hara's wathah go!' when I came out of the

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station, and I regarded that as extremely woad."

"They're rather excited about the Fifth," said Harry, laughing. "We've got a Chinese boy here who gets the same greeting whenever he goes to Friarside."

D'Arcy laid his monocle upon Wharton.

"Woadly, deah boy, I hope you don't mean to say that I look any woad-brook on a Chinese boy," he said.

"Oh, no!" said Wharton hastily. "I mean, he's a little remarkable, too—that is to say—"

"I presume the youngsters are not used to seeing a woadly woad-brook fellow about here," said D'Arcy complacently. "I imagine that is the truth of the matter. Was that person going to show that woadly tarpot on me, deah boy?"

"I'm afraid so—it was his idea of a joke, you know."

"Bal Jove, if he had spoiled my clothes I should have given him a woadly woad-brook!" said the junior from St. Jim's.

Harry Wharton grinned at the idea of the slim and elegant stranger bestowing a fearful thrashing on the burly Balstrode. He did not betray his thoughts, however, but conducted the junior towards the house.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked about him with considerable interest. There was nothing shy about the woad of St. Jim's. He had the gift of self-possession to a remarkable degree.

"Wathah a dearest place you've got here," he remarked. "This woads me of the good at St. Jim's but it's not quite so big. Very pleasant old times, I get dark woadly early now, doesn't it?"

"Yes, one expects that in November."

"Yess, but it's wathah woads!" all the same. Bal Jove, who's that? We've got a chap a good deal like him in the New House at St. Jim's—chap named Woad."

D'Arcy had turned his eyes upon Dilly Hunter, who was just settling

into the House with a basket full of book for the coming term.

Wharton smiled.

"Woadly, Bal Jove! Hunter—he's in our study. We call him the Owl! I'm jolly glad to see you here, D'Arcy, and I hope you'll have tea with us in the study."

"Woad pleaseah, deah boy. As a matter of fact, I'm wathah hungry. It is wathah a long way from St. Jim's, and I haven't had anything since an early dinner. I shall be very pleased indeed to have tea with you, if it won't be any botherah."

"Oh the contrary, it will be a pleaseah."

"Very good, deah boy. If tea isn't woadly good, I'd like to have a book woaded Greyfriars before it gets too dark."

"Bal Jove!" said Harry, inwardly much relieved, for the book was far from ready in Study No. 1. "I shall be very glad to show you round. By the way, are you coming over with the team to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yess, wathah! The team could hardly come woad without me, I suppose."

"Are you secretary, or what?"

"I am, indeedly."

"You—you're playing!" gasped Wharton.

"Yess, wathah!"

Wharton could not help looking a little surprised, for the book was far from ready in Study No. 1. "I shall be very glad to show you round. By the way, are you coming over with the team to-morrow afternoon?"

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For Next Wednesday

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Holding the fan-brush behind him, Bunter walked towards the elegant newsboy. His intention was evident—to get near enough to dab the hairy brush in the face of the stranger!

Arthur Augustus was too polite to refuse. He snook the left hand of the Chinese boy, and threw was a leader long than before, and a stream of blue sparks that off with a bang. D'Arcy jumped back in alarm.

"But Jove! I shall certainly refuse to shake hands with you any more!" he exclaimed.

Harry Wharton gave Wan Long a warning glance. He knew that the Chinese youth was a past master of the art of making fireworks—an art very much cultivated in the Flower Land. The curious result of the handshaking was one of Wan Long's little tricks.

"Tea's ready," said Wharton. "Come on, D'Arcy."

And Harry Wharton conducted the junior from St. Jim's into the house.

Tea in Study No. 2.

STUDY No. 2 presented a very cosy appearance when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy entered it. There was a nice white cloth on the table and a cheerful fire burning in the grate. The kettle was singing on the little hob, and there was a fragrant smell of freshly made tea. The chairs of the Berrys were there, all with cherry seats. Study No. 2 was getting the best side treatment in honor of the stranger.

D'Arcy took in the scene through his eyeglass. Harry Wharton presented D'Arcy to his chair, the visitor going through the ceremony with Chesterfieldian grace. Then he accepted a chair and treated his silk hat—a little doubtfully—to Nugent, who deposited it in a safe corner.

"But Jove, you know, this is wathah wipah of you," D'Arcy remarked. "I'm a real hanger." Yes, I will have some sausage and chips, don't you. Thank you very much."

"I can recommend the sausage," said Billy Bunter. "I cooked them myself."

"Did you really? Yes, they are wipah."

"The rippahfulness is terrific," said

the Nabob of Bismarck. "But I will provide my honorable Bunterish class for the sausage fritter."

"Here you are, loby!"

D'Arcy looked rather curiously at Hurroo Singh. Perhaps the nabob's variety of English surprised him.

The smell of St. Jim's was really lovely, and it made an excellent tea. There were both quantity and variety in the food, and even a fastidious fellow like Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was satisfied.

The tea being under way, as to speak, the juniors came to the subject of D'Arcy's business at Greyfriars. The rucy from St. Jim's explained over his third cup of tea.

"We shall be having a Gay Fether celebration on the eve of the Fifth," he explained. "I wathah think there is gain to be a competition between the School House and the New House as to which can make the most woe. I dare say you know we have two houses at our school, and they are always at daggers drawn. There will probably be a fight at some stage of the proceed, in's. We should like to fix the football match to-morrow, as early as poss, so as to get home as soon as we can."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "We shall be doing some fireworks business ourselves in the Close, and we should like the match over early."

"As a matter of fact," said D'Arcy, "we ought to have two half-holidays this week—the usual Wednesday one, to-morrow, and an extra one for the Fifth. I wogah it as wathah inconsiderate of the proceah that to be to give us only one, and make us play Wednesday's match on Friday. However, it cannot be helped, if agreeable to you chaps, we'll fix the kick-off for half-past two."

"Agreed!"

"Gibahwah, leave it at three, as arranged for yesterday."

"Half-past two will be all right. I suppose you chaps will be coming by train to Friday?"

"Yes, wathah!"

"Then we'll come down and meet you with a coach," said Harry, "and bring you here. I suppose you'll be in the train that gets in at a quarter-past two?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then we'll have the coach outside the station to meet that train. That suit you?"

"Yes, wathah! And I wogah it as extremely obligin' of you, I'm sure," said Arthur Augustus, looking round the table through his eyeglass. "I am quite sure we shall enjoy our visit to Greyfriars, and I wogah hope we shall have a wipah match. I wogah you, however, that the St. Jim's team is in good form."

"So are we," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "The Harrow eleven is in pretty good trim. We are stronger than the Upper Fourth, as you are really meeting the best junior team Greyfriars can put in the field. We'll give you a good game, anyway."

"I suppose you are football captain of St. Jim's, D'Arcy?" said Bob Cherry innocently.

Arthur Augustus shook his head. "Certainly not, don't you! Tom Merway is captain of the junior team, though, as a matter of fact, I am wathah inclined to think that I should fill the post better. What is wanted for a football captain is a fellow of tact and judgment, and I wogah think I have those qualifications. But Tom Merway is the next best. He is a wathah good footballer, and so are Binks and Figgins."

"I suppose you play in an eyeglass?" resumed Bob Cherry.

Wharton stamped on his foot under the table.

"Not now," said D'Arcy. "I used to do so, but it led to wathahs. Tom Merway always called me names, and Binks sometimes took the thing away and hid it, which I wogah as feebly impertinence of him."

The claps of the Berrys could not help grinning.

The juniors had finished their tea, and as all arrangements about the match had been settled, Arthur Augustus rose to take his departure. He had a long journey before him, and it was getting late. He shook hands all round, and Wharton accompanied him down to the gate.

"Well, good-bye, dear boy!" said D'Arcy, shaking hands warmly with Wharton. "I shall see you tomorrow."

"Yes, rather! Good-bye, old chap!"

"An' wot!"

And the swell of St. Jim's walked away down the lane to Fivardale.

A Little Ventriquist!

THE next morning there was considerable suppressed excitement at Geylriam. The Fifth of November was always celebrated there, especially by the juniors. A huge bonfire in the Close, and the letting off of innumerable crackers, squibs, rockets, roman candles, Catherine wheels, and other fireworks, made night hideous every fifth.

Even the high and mighty members of the Sixth usually condescended to take a hand in the commemoration of the Gunpowder Plot. As for the juniors, they went into the thing wholeheartedly. They celebrated by consuming as much noise as possible in a single evening, and it was wonderful what they could do in that line when they really tried.

But besides the Guy Fawkes celebrations, there was the football match with St. Jim's to be thought of. That was a matter of intense interest to the Romans. For the team that was to meet St. Jim's juniors was wholly selected from the Romans, without any recruits from the Upper Fourth.

Although Temple & Co. and other members of the Upper Fourth shook their heads decidedly over the Romans' prospects in the match, Harry Wharton had very high hopes of winning.

"We've got to lick St. Jim's," said

Bob Cherry, as they went into class that morning. "You see, if we were licked, the Upper Fourth would never leave off crowing. St. Jim's play Shell fellows, and it will be a feather in our cap for the Romans to wipe them up."

"It seems a jolly hard game for us, anyway," said Nugent. "As a matter of fact, they're above our weight."

"All the more glory in licking them," said Bob Cherry, who was really too keen a footballer to admit that any match was beyond the powers of the Romans' eleven. "We're in good form, too."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hawdson is a good goalie, and the Saints will have to be wearing their best shooting boots to get the ball past him."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Did you speak, Bunter?"

"Yes, I did, Cherry, and I really think—"

"No objection to your thinking, Bunter, if you know how; but don't speak, old chap. As I was saying, walk inky in the front line with us—"

"I say, you fellows, it's about the football match—"

"Oh dear! Get it over, then—quick!"

"That's hardly a polite way of putting it, Cherry."

"Then dry up!"

"But it's important. I say, you fellows, we ought to stand a good feed to the St. Jim's place this afternoon."

"Do you want a slap in the team, Bunter?" asked Nugent.

Bunter blinked rather indignantly.

"Oh, really, Nugent, Wharton might do worse than play us, you know! I've always said that it was only jealousy that kept us out of the junior eleven. Mind, if the Romans doesn't play me I'm thinking of offering my services to the Upper Fourth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to chuckle at! When we have a Form match and you find us playing against you, you may alter your tune."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to chuckle at! When we have a Form match and you find us playing against you, you may alter your tune."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it wasn't about that that I was going to speak. I was thinking that after the match the St. Jim's fellows will very likely be hungry."

"Trust you to think of that, Bunter!"

"Well, it's a rather important matter, isn't it? I suppose you want to be hospitable and do the decent thing. As I shan't be playing, I could give practically the whole of the afternoon to preparing a really ripping spread. The weather is going to be decent, and we could have it in the open air—al fresco, you know. I would willingly make all the arrangements if you fellows like to attend to the less important details—such as finding the money, for instance."

"Better leave it till your postal order comes."

"I'm afraid there may be some delay in the post over that, Nugent."

"The delayfulness will be terrific!"

"It may not come till Saturday now."

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch as he came into the Form-room.

Billy Bunter collapsed into silence, but he soon found an opportunity of whispering to Harry Wharton.

"I say, Wharton, you'd better think that over about the food. There's absolutely no grub in the place, except my blainers."

Harry laughed silently.

"Haven't they walked away yet?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! They're all right, you know. I didn't need them last night, and they're in Wan Lurg's cupboard. They're all right when they're cooked. But they won't do to feed a hungry football team."

"You are talking, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Take Billy lines."

"Oh, really—"

"Silence!"

Billy Bunter was silent at last, but he was wrathful. The class on his brow and the gleam behind his spectacles showed that he was meditating vengeance.

Skinner leaned over when Mr. Quelch's back was turned and tapped the fat junior on the shoulder.

"Bunter, old chap, why don't you give him some of your ventriquist and make him sit up?"

"That's just what I was thinking of, Skinner," whispered Bunter. "Suppose I made a voice come out of his desk? It would make him jump!"

"Ha, ha! Rippling!"

Mr. Quelch had gone to his desk. He was closing down the starting lid when Bunter, clearing his throat with a preliminary cough, started his ventriquist.

Bunter had been practising for a long time now, and had fully mastered the ventriquistal device, with which he had been defeating the claims of the Romans ever since he had taken up his new hobby. He had several times tried throwing his voice, but his voice was somewhat obstinate when it came to that and declined to be thrown.

But Bunter had a vivid imagination. If he wanted his voice to proceed from the chimney he tried to throw it there and was satisfied that it was all right. Some of the Romans, too, were in the habit of starting him throwing his voice for the fun of the thing. Bunter's unconsciousness of the fact that anyone knew the voice was proceeding from his own throat was extremely diverting.

"Go it!" whispered Skinner.

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Billy Baxter "went it." He felt just a little vertigo; for if the joke did not come off it was probable that a rioting would come off, for Mr. Quetch was not the kind of man to take kindly to fun in the classroom. But Baxter had great faith in his own powers.

Mr. Quetch closed down the lid of the desk. In a faint, far-away ventriloquial voice, appeared to proceed from the desk, Baxter started convulsions.

"Let me out!"

Every head in the classroom turned towards Baxter; every eye was fixed on him. He had expected Mr. Quetch to stare at the desk, imagining that somebody was seated in it. But to disturb; he stared at Baxter.

"Let me out! I'm suffocating!" went on the ventriloquial voice.

There was a faint giggle in the class. Mr. Quetch's face was a study. Wharston looked Baxter in the jacket.

"Quiet, you are!" he intoned.

Baxter did not hear him. His whole mind was concentrated on the work in hand. The effort of producing the ventriloquial voice made his face the colour of a beetroot. He went on unobtrusively.

"Let me out! I'm choking!"

Mr. Quetch made a stride towards the class.

"Baxter!"

The fat junior's jaw dropped. Short-sighted as he was, he could see now the expression on the Form-master's face, and realized that there was something wrong.

"Ye-es, sir!" he stammered.

"What are you doing?"

"I, sir? Nothing, sir!"

"You said you were suffocating."

"I—I— Did I, sir?" gasped Billy Baxter, contrived by this ploy that his voice had not been thrown so far as he had intended. "I—I think you're mistaken, sir."

"I am not mistaken!" thundered Mr. Quetch. "You said you were suffocating, and asked me to let you out. Your face is certainly very red, and if you have been undergoing some strain. What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Come, Baxter!" said Mr. Quetch more kindly. "If there is anything the matter with you tell me at once, and it shall be seen to."

"I—I am all right, sir."

"Then why did you say you were suffocating? And why did you speak in such a strained and unnatural voice?" demanded Mr. Quetch.

"I—I—I—"

"Answer me!" thundered the Form-master.

"I—I— If you please, sir, I—I was ventriloquising!" gasped out Billy Baxter.

"Oh, you were ventriloquising, were you?" said Mr. Quetch. "I understood that ventriloquising consisted in making the voice appear to proceed from another place, not in simply speaking in a strained and artificial voice. But in any case, the classroom is not the place for it. You will take two hundred lines, instead of fifty, Baxter, and you will write them all out this afternoon immediately after dinner, before you leave the house."

"Ye-es, sir."

"And now," said Mr. Quetch, "we will proceed with the lesson if Baxter has quite done ventriloquising. You are quite finished, Baxter?"

"Ye-es, sir," stammered Baxter.

"Then we will proceed."



"Used you to have a flower pot on your windowsill?"

Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Saunders, 5, Redway Cottages, Kingston, Tarrworth, Staffs.

Guying Wan Lung!

BAXTER was looking gloomy when the Remove was dismissed after morning lessons. Bob Cherry gave him a slap on the back as they went into the passage. He meant it for encouragement, but it landed nearly all the breath out of the fat junior. Baxter slouched at his glasses to hold them on.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, it's you, Cherry! I wish you wouldn't remark me like that. You nearly made my glasses fall off, and if they had got broken I should have expected you to pay for them. It's rotten, isn't it? I can't be able to come to the village with you chaps now, leaving all these lines to do. Do you think I could risk leaving them?"

"Yes, if you want a licking."

"Of course, I don't want a licking. I'd rather do the lines. But how are we to manage about going to the village?"

"We shall have to contrive to do without your assistance," said Bob Cherry gravely. "If we weep, we shall console one another, and—"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know! I mean, I was going to get the things for the food at the village shop, and now I—"

"What food?"

"The food you fellows are going to stand after the football match."

"We shall have to make your bladders do, I think," said Nugent, grinning.

"There's not going to be a food; we're all starved, my ass."

"If you're going to be mean—"

"It's all right," said Harry Wharston. "I've fixed that with O'Arry. The Saints want to get off immediately after the match is finished, and the coach is going to be ready for them at the gates. They're going to have some sandwiches in the pavilion, and the housekeeper is going to provide the grub."

"If you've arranged that for the sake of doing me out of a food, Wharston—"

"I haven't really, Baxter," said Harry, laughing. "It's the most convenient arrangement. It's all right, and you can do your lines without bothering about coming down to the village."

"That's all very well."

"Then don't grumble," said Bob Cherry.

"I don't want to stick fingers on a

fine day doing lines. I think some of you fellows might help me out."

"Well, we would," said Wharston; "but it's no good. Quetch always looks at the lines, and he knows our hands. If it were Capper or Frost, we could lend a hand."

"I don't see how I can write two hundred lines. Don't slap me on the shoulder like that, Balstrode."

"It isn't a Balstrode, an'?" said Skinner. "I say, about those lines. It was I who got you in for them, and I'll do them for you, if you like."

"Well, that's decent of you; though, of course, it's only what you ought to do," said Billy Baxter. "By the way, can you lend me five bob?"

"No, I can't," said Skinner, who never made any bones about refusing a request of that sort. "I'll do the lines, if you like."

"Make it half-a-crown, then. You might spend me something after getting me into a scrape," said Baxter, with an indignant blink. "You can have it back with interest, if you like, out of my postal order."

"Bast! I'll do the lines."

"It's risky," said Wharston. "Quetch knows your hand, and knows Baxter's, and he's certain to spot the difference."

Skinner grinned.

"Not if I have a copy of Baxter's handwriting to work from," he said.

"Come on, Baxter, and give me some of your second, and I'll get the lines done before dinner."

When the Remove went in to dinner, Baxter and Skinner were there, the latter with a sneer of ink on his fingers, and a satisfied expression on his face.

"It's done," he remarked to Wharston.

"I made Baxter write the first few lines, and I did the rest, and I think they'll pass muster with Quetch."

After dinner the class of the Remove were to walk down to the village, where the coach would be in readiness to convey the visiting team from the station to Greffrins. Wharston had written tonight to engage it, and it was to be outside Friarshole Station at a quarter-past ten.

The Fancous Four went along the Remove passage together with their caps on, and Wan Lung came to the door of his study.

"Come walk!" he asked.

"You've gone to the station."

"Me come."

Wharston would rather have left the Chinese junior behind on that particular day. It was the Fifth of November, and Friarshole was in a lull with Guy Fawkes' celebrations. Of late, whenever Wan Lung had appeared in the village, a crowd of youthful villagers had followed him about with remarks on the subject of guys.

The Chinese part of the junior was rather striking in a quiet village, where a Chinaman was rarely seen. The patient, too, seemed to excite a sort of fascination upon the Friarshole boys. Harry knew that there was to be a Guy Fawkes' procession in the afternoon, and all Friarshole would be out to see it.

"Me come walk," said the Chinese junior.

Wharston could not refuse, and he did not care to offend the little Chinese. He nodded, and Wan Lung grinned expansively, and joined the Fancous Four. They walked quickly down Greffrins, as there was no time to lose.

Harry's expectations were quite fulfilled. There were a great many villagers back in the old High Street of Friarshole. Feeling between them and Greffrins

The Gun Library—No. 1550

boys was always somewhat strained. There was a yell as soon as the Chiver was sighted, and a crowd gathered round to stare.

"Hallo!"
"Here's another guy?"
Wan Lang looked over the village people with a tilted smile. He was not hurt. In fact, he seemed to be rather pleased with the impression he was making.

First, a side street near a fresh crowd, with shouts and yells, and in their midst a hideous-looking guy, resembled upon an old man, and married in the procession. The Greyfriars just stepped outside the backshop while the crowd passed. Wan Lang glanced into the shop.

"Be gone to hell," he said. "You give me no more trouble."

"Good!" said Wharton, rather relieved in his mind. "The coach will pass here, and we'll pick you up."

"Lighten!"
And the Famous Four hurried on to the station, leaving Wan Lang to make his purchases, whatever they were, at Uncle Glegg's shop.

The coach was standing outside the railway station when the Famous Four arrived there, but the train was not yet in. As was not uncommon on the local line, it was delayed several minutes, and at a quarter past two there was no sign of it. The chums waited outside the station until it should come in.

The Guy Fawkes procession had passed on its way, but a renewed shouting and yelling of laughter caused the Greyfriars juniors to look down the High Street in the direction of the backshop. A crowd of village boys was coming along, with a figure upon a chair in their midst. Wharton looked



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at them keenly, trying to make out in the distance what the figure was.

"Only another greenhorn!" said Neagot.

Wharton shook his head.

"It's not a guy. That's a boy that've got on the chair, and I believe— 2d put on, I'm sure it's Wan Lang!"

"Wan Lang! By Jove, you're right!"

There was no reliance about it. The Chiver—coming out of the backshop, had been collared by the village boys and forced to mount the chair, and was being carried on the shoulders of half a dozen fellows, the rest whooping and laughing round him.

"Guy, guy, guy?" roared Stakes, the blacksmith's son, and the valiant leader of the village boys in their forays against the Greyfriars juniors. "Stick him up on high!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Remember the guy?"

The chair staggered forward with the Irish Chiver clinging to it. Wan Lang was very much alarmed. His position was precarious, for the learners were laughing so much that it appeared that any moment he would fall to the ground. He clung to the chair. His stomach ached with fright.

Wharton's face darkened.

"We've got to get him out of that," he said loudly.

But Chiver gave a whistle. There were fellows on either side in the crowd, and there were only four of the Greyfriars chums. They were not used to counting odds, but this was what they called a "big order."

The village boys stopped outside the station, sending spite of the Famous Four there, and sent them a yell of defiance.

"Guy, guy, guy!" roared Stakes.

"Hallo, lads!"

The boys "hoisted" with a very noise. Then they struck up the well remembered ditty:

"Huge to remember the Fifth of November!"

"Hoise!" squealed Wan Lang.

"Hoiseo!"

"Gave us" muttered Hare. When too, and he led a desperate charge.

When the chimes at Greyfriars, against odds of four to one, rescued Wan Lang from the villagers? Their own guy don't make over every's carrying chapters of this grand Guy Fawkes story.

"Very sh," said Marie softly. "But you are better now and you will be well soon."

"I'm very happy now," said Talbot.

From that day he needed but in a few more days his chums could come in and talk to him, and the other children came in to chat with the invalid—to tell him they were sorry that they had distressed him. And Talbot listened to them with a smile.

He was very happy now. The dark days of the fall were over, and the future stretched bright and golden before him. The Professor was gone—the wide sea ran between him and the boy he had persecuted—but Marie remained. And when Talbot at last recovered from the school hospital, the missing welcome he received from the St. John's fellows was more than enough to furnish him his heart's happiness of the past.

Talbot of the Shell was more sure in his old place at St. John's with his chums who had been loyal to the last.

Next Wednesday: THE HISTORY OF MARRIOTT! Look out for this great gem, telling of the startling occurrence of the French minister's strange disappearance at St. John's. Now that your GEM is reserved for you!

STANDING BY THE TOFF!
(Continued from page 24)

As he looked at the owner's crumpled face, Tom Merry feared that their chase was not far from the point of a serious breakdown to health.

And he had none to lean, for in his room at the hotel, where food was brought, Talbot could not little, staring as he was, and there was a pallor in his face that brought a sickening dread to the heart of his chums.

Messner had slipped out to call in a doctor, and the medical man, when he came, ordered the boy immediately to bed. And in the morning Talbot did not wake in his room; he awoke with wildly staring eyes and bubbling tongue, not knowing where he was, or what he said. It was evident that he was ill—that he was going to be very ill—and he could not remember where he was.

Unconscious of what was done to him, the scampish boy was carried down, warmly wrapped, into an ambulance car, and, with his three chums caring for him, was carried swiftly away from the city where he had known so much suffering.

The journey was swift, but Talbot saw nothing—knew nothing of it. He did not know when they arrived at St. John's. He did not see the kind, anxious face of the Head boarding over him. From that day and for many days he was dead to his surroundings.

There was a hush of sadness in the school during these dark days, while it was known that Talbot lay between life and death in the sanatorium, under the care of the girl who had been his childhood chum, and whose face now he did not know.

But a strong constitution pulled Talbot through the crisis, and there came a day at last when his eyes opened with weeping in them, and he looked about him in wonder, and recognized a sweet, kind face that watched by his bedside.

Talbot stretched out a thin, feeble hand.

"Marie!" he whispered.

The girl's pale face brightened up.

"Talk, you know me again?"

"Where am I now?" Talbot's eyes wandered about him. "This is—"

"The school," said Marie. "They found you and brought you back."

"And I never knew! Have I been very ill?" asked Talbot.

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