

SCHOOL, DETECTIVE, ADVENTURE!

The
Penny Popular

3 Grand
Complete
Stories.

NUMBER 207.



TURNING THE TAP ON TAGGLES!

(An amusing scene from the magnificent long complete tale of School life contained in this issue.)

THE SCHEMING SECRETARY!

A Magnificent Long, Complete
Story Dealing with the Further
Amazing Adventures of

SEXTON BLAKE,
the World-Famous
DETECTIVE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Blake Turns Author—Lovers and a Spy—
An Anonymous Letter—Discovery.

SEXTON BLAKE leapt out of the London train at the country station of Warchester. To have looked at his radiant face and to have watched his buoyant step from the station to the hotel, no one would have thought that he had a difficult case on hand. Such, however, was the reason for his arrival at this out-of-the-way place. He entered the only hotel in the little town, there taking a private room, in which he soon made himself comfortable.

Here, in a cosy chair, he became more serious as, in his mind, he went over the facts of the case. How Stephen Crosby, a struggling author, had lost what he called his masterpiece—"When the Dawn Shall Come"—which he had written under the name of Stanwell Creed.

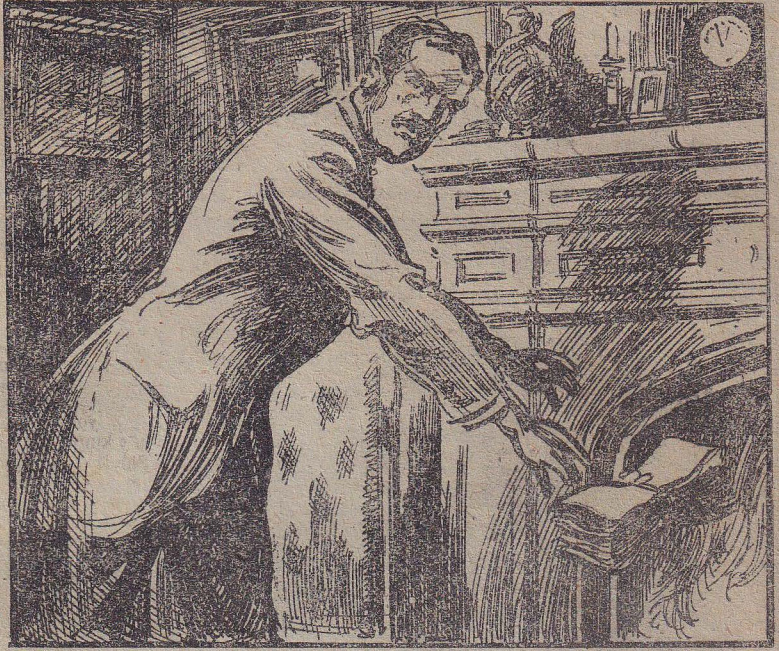
The story had fallen into the hands of two disreputable crooks named Colter and Dirge. Dirge was the secretary to Mr. Goodmayes, the uncle of Stephen Crosby. Mr. Goodmayes had refused to acknowledge his relationship with Stephen while his nephew wrote trashy stories instead of good books for a living. Now that he—Blake—had obtained a copy of the story, and knew the plot that the two rogues were scheming, naturally the thought uppermost in the detective's mind was how to foil the rogues and right the wrongs of the author.

He was pretty certain that Dirge was unconscious of the fact that he had a copy of the manuscript; while he was equally sure that the secretary did not know that he had overheard the plot by which Dirge hoped to publish the book under his own name, and thus raise the esteem in which his employer held him, and so benefit considerably under the old man's will. Dirge had also set his heart on marrying Goodmayes' niece, Miss Nolan. She, as it happened, had fallen in love with the sailor son of Stephen Crosby, having met him on a Transatlantic liner.

Sexton Blake could hardly suppress a smile when he realised that the two lovers would be very near to each other during the next few weeks, for Mr. Goodmayes and his niece lived at Warchester, while Stephen Crosby, who was at present slowly recovering from a severe nervous breakdown, was to come to Swanage, near by, to get thoroughly well.

Always a man of action, Blake rose from his chair, seemingly struck with an idea. Hastening out of the hotel, he walked quickly down the street to the post-office, where he despatched a wire to Tinker.

By an early hour Tinker received the telegram. He was



Dirge leapt up with wildly-working face, his eyes directed to the coals already glowing upon the hearth. In a moment he stepped across to the fire and hurried the manuscript into the flames.

to come down to Warchester with Pedro, and was to bring down a sufficiency of luggage for a long stay.

Tinker arrived in the afternoon. He was met at the station by a tallish man, rather bowed about the shoulders, dressed in Norfolk coat and knickerbockers, a close-cropped Elizabethan beard, and thick hair that lopped about his head. He walked straight up to Tinker.

"Well, my boy," said he, "have you brought everything?"

"Great snakes, gov'nor, is it you? I thought you was Shakespeare for a minute, come to life again. Where did you get your rig-out?"

"Brought it with me from Waterloo Station, my boy."

Blake always kept a portmanteau ready packed with disguises and make-up materials at most of the big London stations in case of emergency.

"And what's the meaning of the rig-out, gov'nor? Going to turn poet?"

"Not quite, Tinker, but novelist. For the next few weeks I'm not merely going to pretend to be an author; I'm actually going to do the work of one."

"Now, what do you mean?"

"I'm going to finish 'When the Dawn Shall Come.' You've brought the manuscript down according to my instructions?"

"Yes, yes; but what's the use of your finishing it?"

"If I don't, Tinker, somebody else will. And Stanwell Creed will lose the result of all his labour."

And in a few minutes Blake had made Tinker acquainted with the plot he had overheard.

"Oh, I twig the game now, gov'nor! It's going to be a race between you and this Quinton Dirge as to who gets the book done first. Is that it?"

"That's it precisely. I start work at once."

"Where are we going to live?"

"That's the thing I'm going to settle to-day. I've heard of a nice, quiet, secluded house which is to be let furnished. I've seen the agent to-day, and I think it's likely to suit me. It's a few miles from here—in fact, midway between Pyden

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Regis and Swanage. We'll see to the luggage, and then we'll go over and have a look at the house."

Within three days Blake had arranged to occupy Bracken Lodge. Within those three days, also, Stephen Crosby had been brought down by his wife and sailor son to their new quarters near Swanage.

The astonishment of Jack Crosby was unbounded when Blake showed that he was aware of the young fellow's engagement to Erica Nolan.

"I wish you joy, my lad," said he; "but I warn you that you have enemies at work who will try to prevent you ever marrying Mr. Goodmayes' niece."

"Oh, I know that!" Jack answered gloomily. "Old Mr. Goodmayes is against it. He quarrelled with father years ago, and it isn't likely that he'll be any better friends with me. But how funny it is, Mr. Blake, that we should have turned out to be cousins. I'd no idea of it till now. You see, neither father nor mother ever spoke much about Mr. Goodmayes, and never once by name. I knew dad had an uncle, but hadn't the slightest idea who he was. As to Erica, I'd never once heard her name mentioned. But it's a name I shall always remember now," he said tenderly.

"Yes, and I hope she'll share your name one day. But you will be wise for the present, I think, to keep your engagement secret. Some day I hope that your father and his uncle will be reconciled—in fact, I shall do all I can to bring it about. To that end I shall need your assistance."

"Why, what can I do, sir?"

"A good deal. Your father, as you know, is a little better. He will recover completely down at this place, I believe. Even already he has quite lucid intervals."

"Yes, sir," Jack said sadly; "but he seems out of his mind most of the time, and then he talks and raves in so strange a way that—"

"I know. But it is precisely to those ravings that I want you to pay particular attention. Don't ask me why, but do as I tell you. You have noticed that his ravings are chiefly concerned with a book which he partly wrote many years ago. On that subject his ravings are strangely coherent. I myself have heard him reel off whole passages in the development of the unwritten part of that book. Many of the phrases he uses in his delirium are brilliant, even wonderful. I myself have noted many. I want you to note everything. Write it all down in a book as he speaks it, and every day let me have the report of what he has said."

"Mr. Blake, this is all very bewildering. Will you not tell me why you want this?"

"Not yet, Jack—not yet. Only be assured that it is for a good purpose, and absolutely to the advantage of your father. When you're not by your father's side your mother will take your place. I have already arranged with her."

So the strange understanding was arrived at.

Blake got to work on his book at once. He was already provided with a very full synopsis, made years before by Stephen Crosby himself, which served as a detailed guide for the completion of "When the Dawn Shall Come." This synopsis, added to the quite voluminous notes which he daily received from Jack Crosby, made his task far easier than it would otherwise have been.

Blake decided to send to Jelf's Typewriting Offices, London, for an assistant in his work. Jelf's promptly sent down a smart young fellow to help in the literary work. So the detective was soon able to get well ahead with the task he had set himself.

Jack Crosby came over on a bicycle almost daily to deliver his notes to Sexton Blake. That done, he would generally, instead of returning to Swanage at once, pedal away in the opposite direction.

Arrived within a mile of the village of Pydon Regis, he would turn, and, stowing his bicycle away in a barn, climb a fence and enter a wide-spreading, well-wooded park.

He was trespassing, and Jack knew it. But then the temptation was too great to withstand.

For this park belonged to Pydon Court, old Mr. Goodmayes' residence, and in a secluded part of it Jack, somehow or other, always contrived to meet Erica Nolan.

Accidental meetings! Well, we won't go so far as to say that. But they met, and for an hour or more at the time would roam about the park, talking of—well, what do a young fellow of twenty-three and a girl of twenty say to each other usually? It is certain that you know quite as well as we do. In any case, we can't tell you what Jack said to Erica. If we did know, we are not sure that we'd tell, because it's only a mean person who would tell about such things.

Unfortunately for the young lovers, a mean person happened to be about one particular day. Not only a mean person, but the one man in all the world who was likely to take advantage of his knowledge.

Quinton Dirge!

The private secretary not only saw them meet, and shake hands, but he saw them kiss, and—mean hound that he was—continued to spy on them, and to listen to their exchange of tender confidences.

What he saw ate into his heart like a canker.

In his own way he loved Erica. Her girlish beauty and charm had captivated him. The sudden discovery that she was in love with this young sailor filled him with fierce jealousy. He determined then and there to put an end to the business.

The way he chose to do this was characteristic of him. He wrote to Samuel Goodmayes an anonymous letter. In that letter he detailed all the information he had gathered by his eavesdropping.

Old Samuel Goodmayes was dumbfounded on reading this letter. To do him justice, he was not inclined to put much faith in an anonymous communication. Still, he felt bound to investigate it.

At once he sent for Erica.

One glance at the old man as he sat surrounded by books in his magnificent library, told the girl that something was amiss. His brow was puckered in a deep frown of worry.

But he loved his great-niece, and, pending proof of the charge against her, he was quite ready to go on loving her. He turned to her then with a somewhat sad smile.

"Erica, my dear," the old man said, "I want to talk to you very, very seriously. Sit down."

She sunk on to a footstool at his feet, and took his shrivelled hand in hers.

"Uncle—dear uncle," she said, with a slight pout, "how very, very serious you're looking!"

"Am I, my dear? Well, perhaps I feel serious. I want to ask you something, Erica. Have you any friends that I don't know of?"

She opened her beautiful eyes wide, and laughed mischievously.

"Why, yes; heaps and heaps and heaps. Remember, I've just been round the world—all, all round the globe." She threw out her beautifully-moulded arms to describe a circle. "And I've been on lots of ships, and on ships one meets a lot of people, and makes friends with them, and—and—"

"Stop that for a moment, Erica. You've made friends on ships. Have you made a friend of any particular one above all others?"

She turned her head from side to side, perhaps to hide her rising colour.

"You're not answering my question!" said her uncle testily, and, disengaging his hand suddenly from hers: "Have you become friendly with anyone of the name—the name of Jack?"

He rose to his feet as he jerked out the question. She, too, sprang up, faced him, her face all crimson now.

"Well—well, have you?" he asked again.

His apparent anger brought her to the verge of tears. But there was nothing of cowardice in her nature. She answered him at once.

"Yes," she said, lowering her eyes. "I have made friends with someone named Jack. He—he belonged to the crew of the Lebanian—the vessel I came home on. He saved my life in the Mediterranean, and—and I—I—"

She broke down, appalled by the fierce anger of her uncle's face.

"And so, out of gratitude, you allowed this man—this common sailor, to make love to you?" he snapped.

"Uncle!" she flashed out. "Jack is not a common man! He is a gentleman, if ever there was one! He is brave, and noble, and true, and—and—"

"And you allow him to come to this place—to come into my park! You meet him there secretly; you walk about with him, and all unknown to me you allow him to make love to you! Is that true?"

"Yes," she cried out, bravely enough, though every fibre of her was a-quake, "it is true."

"And you're not ashamed of it?"

"Ashamed!" Her eyes were filled with indignation now. "Why should I be? He is a brave, noble, and true man. I am proud to know that he loves me, and I am proud to love him in return."

The old man staggered back with a gasp.

"You admit all this?" he cried incredulously. "You admit that you have allowed yourself to fall in love with a—a sailor, knowing full well that such a thing would meet with my sternest disapproval? You must have known that, or why keep the matter secret?"

"Because—because"—her voice trembled, and she hesitated—"because I did not know quite how to tell you. Oh, perhaps I have done wrong, dear—dear uncle—not wrong in loving Jack, but wrong in not telling you before. But forgive me for that. I meant to tell you later—to tell you

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everything, and—and don't be angry with me, dear—dear uncle, but forgive me—forgive me!"

He made a step towards her, and gripped her fiercely by the wrist.

"Yes, I will forgive you," he said, "on one condition."

"Condition! What condition?"

"That you refuse to see this fellow any more—that you tell me who he is, so that I may write to him and forbid him ever to meet you again."

"Refuse to see Jack again! Oh, uncle!"

"You agree? You agree to my terms?"

She broke wildly away from him.

"Never! Never! He loves me, and I love him!"

"Rubbish—utter rubbish! You're not old enough to know your own mind. As to his loving you, the fellow is probably a mere fortune-hunter. You must give him up!"

"Never—oh, never!" she moaned.

"Then, by Heaven"—the old man waved a trembling hand, and clenched his fists in the air—"if you refuse, I cast you off! You are my great-niece, you are the one of my few remaining kin whom I have continued to love. From the time you were a tiny child, I have brought you up, cared for you, loved you. I have intended that you should inherit the bulk of my fortune. I have even provided for this in my will. But"—he paused, while the fury in his eyes increased—"refuse to obey me in this, and not a penny of my money shall ever come to you. You understand? Not a penny! Now will you give this man up?"

"No!"

Her answer came out with an unflinching vehemence that equalled the fierceness of the old man's challenge.

"Never—never! He saved my life, and I love him—I love him—I love him! Nothing you or anybody else can say will ever make me give him up."

Stern and angry, the old man turned to pace the room.

"This defiance of my wishes is unexpected, almost inexplicable. But there it is. You're determined to go your own way. I am equally determined that you shall never disgrace yourself and me by marrying a man who is beneath you. Once more, will you give him up?"

The girl's eyes were streaming with tears.

"Dear uncle," she said, "I have always obeyed you, but in this it is impossible. I love Jack, and he loves me. To give him up would be the vilest treachery, the meanest disloyalty. I can never give him up."

"Then go to your room, and remain there until I give you permission to leave it! I am your guardian still, and you are not yet of age. Until you are, you are subject to my wishes. I forbid you to see this man ever again! Go to your room! I shall put someone to watch and see that you do not disobey me. I wish to give you time to reconsider your position. Most strongly do I urge you to fall into line with my wishes. If you persist in refusing, there will be nothing left for me to do save to cut you out from my will. Now go!"

Erica went. From that day she found herself practically a prisoner in the house. Her own maid was taken away from her. In her place came a tall, hard-faced, gaunt woman, who acted half as personal attendant, and half as gaoler.

Erica had a small suite of rooms for her own particular use. In these she felt herself compelled to remain. Following on the scene with her uncle, she had at once written to Jack, telling him everything, and had given the letter to one of the servants to post.

Eagerly enough she had waited Jack's reply. But none came.

The days passed wearily enough. Three days—four days.

Not a word came from Jack Crosby.

A new sorrow came into Erica's heart. What did the silence of her lover mean? She had told him of her uncle's anger and threat to deprive her of the fortune she had always been led to expect. Was it possible that Jack—

"Oh, no, no! It could not be! No motive so base would actuate him. He would love her just as much when she was poor as if she were rich. Nothing of that sort would ever make him cease to love her. Yet—oh, the dreadful suspense of uncertainty! What did his silence mean?"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Cry of Alarm—Near the Lonely Pool.

AS a matter of fact, her letter had never reached her lover.

In the household of Samuel Goodmayes there was a conspiracy among the servants, mainly engineered by Quinton Dirge, and countenanced by old Goodmayes himself, to prevent her from communicating with the man she loved, and to prevent any news of him reaching her ears.

So it came about that if she was worried by Jack's silence, Jack was no less bewildered by hers, and by her sudden disappearance from their usual meeting-place in the park.

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Not a day came but found the young fellow awaiting her at the trysting-place.

As the days went past, and he saw nothing of her, his anxiety grew.

He confided in Blake.

Blake, in the disguise of a traveller in cheap jewellery, called at Pydon Court, and struck up an acquaintance with some of the servants.

In this way he quickly learned the truth.

Jack Crosby was wrathful. It was in his mind to go and beard old Samuel Goodmayes in his den, openly declare his love for Erica, and demand the right to see her.

With the greatest difficulty, Blake dissuaded the young fellow from his purpose. He did not wish to precipitate any violent action. To do so might spoil his carefully-laid plans.

He told the young sailor as much.

"Have patience, Jack, my lad," said he, "and you'll see that everything will come right in due time."

"Patience!" muttered the young fellow. "You don't know what you're asking me! You don't know how I love her!"

And he went off gloomily to nurse his grief, trying to find consolation in the places where he had been wont to wander with Erica.

Tinker, also, did a good deal of wandering about the neighbourhood. He had, however, shown considerable delicacy in keeping away from Pydon Park. But now that Tinker knew Erica no longer walked there, he felt at liberty to explore the beauty of the fair demesne.

It was some few days after Erica's quarrel with her uncle that, in company with Pedro, Tinker found himself in the neighbourhood of Pydon Court.

Skirting a corner of the park, he dived into a wood, through which various paths wound amongst the dense undergrowth.

Suddenly, from a distance off, he heard the sound of shouts. Listening, he could gather that some sort of quarrel was going on. While he hesitated what to do, he distinctly heard the sounds of heavy blows being struck, a cry of pain, and then, after a thrilling moment, a heavy splash in water.

That was enough for Tinker. With a quick whistle to Pedro, he started off in the direction from whence the sound had come.

Two minutes of running brought him to a clearing in the wood. A glance ahead showed him a large, dark pool, overshadowed by willows, and fringed with yellowing reeds and sword-blade rushes.

He looked about him, but could see no signs of anybody.

Presently, however, a number of footmarks in the soft, clayey margin of the pool attracted his notice. Running forward, he followed the confused line of footprints. They led right to the water's edge.

The reeds had been beaten down. Glancing amongst them, Tinker's heart suddenly leapt into his throat.

Something was floating there among the rushes—the figure of a man!

With heart beating violently, he waded into the water to his knees, then to his waist, then almost to his neck.

One more step forward, and he had grabbed hold of that floating figure, and, gripping him under the shoulders, was dragging him to land.

Not till then did he take a close look at the man's face.

When he did so, his blood seemed to turn to ice, for in that one glance he recognised the unconscious figure as Jack Crosby!

What to do he hardly knew.

A brief examination was sufficient to show that Jack had been the victim of a violent assault ere being thrown into the pool. The blood was even now trickling from a wound in his head.

While Tinker cleansed this with water from the pool, and started to do his best to restore animation, Pedro sat near by, whining softly with sympathy. He had become quite good friends with Jack Crosby, and it was plain that he recognised him in a moment.

"Thank you, old chap!" Tinker muttered. "I know you're as sorry for Jack as I am. What can we do, Pedro—what can we do?"

The dog whined again, and turned his head toward the way they had come.

"We must get help—is that what you mean? By Jove, you're right! But how to get it? I daren't leave poor Jack. I wonder if you— I know! You've got the sense of a man any time, and more than a good many. I'll put you to the test."

From his pocket he snatched a sheet of paper, and scribbled upon it these words:

"Help urgently wanted! Whoever may read this, please follow the dog. He will lead you back to the pool in Pydon Wood. Come without delay."

He folded the note once.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY:

WANTED FOR WEALTH!

A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake.

THE SHAM SCHOOLMASTER!

By Martin Clifford.

THE SPECTRE OF THE FOREST!

By S. Clarke Hoek.

"Do you see this, Pedro?" he said quickly. "This will bring help. Go back through the wood, and the first man you see, drop this note at his feet. You understand?"

Pedro, who had turned his head from side to side, as he always did when his brain was working, gave another little whine, and wagged his tail.

"Off with you, then, old chap!"

And Pedro dashed away, leaving Tinker to continue his efforts to restore Jack Crosby to consciousness.

Twenty minutes later there was a noise in the undergrowth that made Tinker turn his head. Instantly he caught sight of Pedro, followed by three excited villagers.

"So we've found somebody, 'ave we?" said the foremost villager, catching sight of Tinker.

"Told you we should, Ezra," said another man. "Told you that dog was a real scholar, from the way he dropped that note at my feet, and then stood back while I read it. Won'tful dog he be, to be sure!"

"Don't waste time by talking, please," said Tinker. "Something's happened—something dreadful! A man's been half-killed, then thrown into the water. Look at him!"

"Looks main damp, he do," said the leading villager, scratching his head. Water allus serves you in that way. I see a man ducked in th' 'orse-pond once. He looked all wet and mucky like that, 'e did."

"For goodness' sake," cried Tinker, "don't waste time! Where's the nearest house?"

One of the men pointed through the wood.

"Through Beach Grove, then through five-acre mead, and there y'are, nigh to the village."

"Then lend a hand, and help me to carry this poor fellow there."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

On the Trail—Blake Calls on Samuel Goodmayes.

"THERE'S the spot, guv'nor—here's the spot where I found him."

Tinker and Blake stood beside the pool again, and Pedro was with them.

Nearly two hours had passed since Jack Crosby had been found. Since then he had been carried to the village, and medical aid obtained. Tinker had despatched a message to Blake, who had come post-haste to the scene of the attack.

"Whose footsteps are these?" Blake asked, pointing to the marks which had first attracted Tinker's attention.

"They were made by whoever it was attacked Jack. I kept the villagers who came to my aid carefully away from them."

"Good lad—good lad! We ought to get on their trail easily. I see it leads there to the left. See how the wet grass is beaten down. Yes, that's the way. Come on, Tinker. Now, Pedro!"

At the word of command, the bloodhound was nosing along the trail. With hardly an instant's delay, he led the way along the margin of the pool for some fifty yards, then struck obliquely through a corner of the wood.

Presently they emerged on the piece of undulating open ground over which a footpath ran to a stile that gave on to a lane.

Here the dog turned to the right. Trotting along at a good pace, followed by Blake and Tinker, they presently reached cross-roads.

Pedro did not hesitate, but once more turned to the right. Blake glanced at a finger-post set up on a patch of green near by.

"To Ekenwake, two miles," he read.

Out came his map.

"Ekenwake is a small village," said he. "Two inns and—and—yes, a railway-station. Come on, boy, Pedro's impatient!"

The dog seemed so. He padded along unhesitatingly. In twenty-five minutes they reached the village.

An inn sign hung suspended from a tree over the road. Straight to the inn door went Pedro. Blake followed. The landlord gave him "Good-day!" and prepared to serve him.

"I don't want anything, thank you," said Blake, putting down a coin nevertheless. "Only information. Have any strangers called here to-day?"

"Why, yes, sir—four men. Rum sort o' lot they seemed, too; bit excited like. I should have said they'd been out in the sun."

"What sort of men were they? Well-dressed or—?"

"Roughish, three of 'em, though one had a decent sort o' suit on. Big chap he was—a six-footer, and half as broad as he was long. Wore a long grey ulster, he did."

Blake turned to Tinker.

"Griggs," he whispered, "Colter's assistant!"

"Oh, I remember him!" said Tinker, rubbing his head.

"I ain't forgot that tap he gave me yet, although it's a goodish time ago."

Blake turned to the landlord.

"How long did the men stay here?" he asked.

"Not long, sir. Guzzled down a pint each, they did, had a look at the timetable, and then asked how far it was to the station."

"Ha! And how far is the station?"

"Half a mile, sir."

"Thank you!"

They were off again, reaching the station in a few minutes.

Blake sought out the stationmaster, and questioned him.

Yes; four men had caught a train nearly two hours ago. One was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a brutal-looking face, and a long grey ulster.

"Where did they book for?"

"London—Waterloo. They were just in time to catch the fast train at Warchester."

"Ah, then they'll have almost reached town by now!"

Blake turned to Tinker.

"Too late to wire," he said, "to have them stopped at Waterloo, and I'm not sure that it would serve any good purpose. If these fellows are in the pay of Colter, as I think they must be, we can find them at any time. We'll get back to Pydon Regis."

"What to do, guv'nor?"

"I'm going to call on Mr. Samuel Goodmayes. Things have gone far enough now. When it comes to a murderous assault, it's about time I interfered."

"And so you are Mr. Sexton Blake—the famous Mr. Sexton Blake? I am delighted to meet you. I am always delighted to see anybody who has achieved such distinction in his profession as you have."

"Very kind of you to say so, Mr. Goodmayes," Blake answered, as he sat opposite to the old man, in the magnificent library of Pydon Court. "I know, of course, of your philanthropic actions, and I know of your tremendous love of books. I had hardly hoped that your sympathies extended to one whose whole life has been devoted to criminal investigation."

"Why not, Mr. Blake—why not? I am deeply interested in social reform. I wish to see the distress of the world relieved. And surely the detection of evil and the punishment of evildoers form of necessity part of the scheme for the regeneration of the world. It is not good for the rest of the world to let the criminal go unpunished."

"Thank you, Mr. Goodmayes! Then I may hope for your co-operation in trying to find the perpetrators of the assault committed in your woods to-day?"

"Yes, of course; I have heard all about it. Understand, that though I have no particular predilection for the victim, I should wish his attackers to be punished."

"Are you aware of the real identity of the victim?"

The old man knitted his brows.

"Now that he is lying ill I scarcely like discussing it, but he is a young man of whose attentions to my great-niece I most sternly disapproved."

"Yes; but his actual identity—his name?"

"I know nothing of these things. I have never inquired."

"His name is Jack Crosby. He is a relative of yours, the son of your own nephew."

"Stephen Crosby's son? Good heavens!"

Old Goodmayes' teeth snapped together, and his jaw set hard.

"I did not know this," he said. "Had I known it, it would have increased my disapproval, stern though it was already. Stephen Crosby's son, the worthless child of a worthless father!"

"Mr. Goodmayes! Please—please!"

"I mean what I say. I despise his father! Years ago he disobeyed me. He chose to go his own evil ways, to waste his life, and I threw him off. There is no good in him, and there will be no good in his son."

"At least you might wait and judge him on his own conduct."

"I judge him on his immediate family history. His father was a wastrel, a gambler! He married a play-acting woman—"

"Who may easily be a good woman in every way."

"No, no! No good can come out of the stage! But do not pursue this painful subject any longer, Mr. Blake, I beg of you. I have striven to forget my nephew. For years past I have found solace amid my books, and I have found a kind, sympathetic helper in Mr. Quinton Dirge."

"Your private secretary?"

"More than that—my friend and confidant. Quinton Dirge is a scholarly gentleman who has been of the greatest assistance to me. I have always found that I can rely implicitly on his literary judgment. That alone is an important

consideration to me. It has helped me to get together one of the very finest collections of books in the world. Well, well, Quinton Dirge will lose nothing by his devotion to an old man. He will be amply provided for when I die. I had always intended to give him a legacy, but recent events have increased my regard for him. I have added a codicil to my will in which I make Quinton Dirge heir to most of my fortune. But there, Mr. Blake, I don't know why I should tell you this, except that my gratitude to Dirge is great. He has ever tried to please me when everyone else has opposed my wishes."

It served the detective's purpose to take the hint and to change the subject. The conversation veered round to books—that topic of eternal interest to old Goodmayes. Proudly he showed his fine collection of early folios and rare editions.

But he was a reader as well as a collector of books, and he quite delighted Blake by his wide knowledge of literature, both English and foreign.

He was catholic in his tastes. He liked poetry and romance, as well as philosophy and science. He found delight in books of biography and travel, as well as in heavier works. But best of all, perhaps, he loved the "novel with a purpose."

"I know the critics are divided on the point," he said. "I know that many would keep certain utterances for the pulpit, and rigidly exclude them from books. I differ from them entirely. While the pulpit is daily losing its power, the Press is daily increasing its vast influence. Look at this old book."

He took down a well-thumbed copy of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

"It is a mere novel; perhaps, from a purely literary point of view, not a great novel. Yet think of its wonderful power, its mighty effect. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' was not a Blue Book, nor yet a sermon; but it did more to abolish slavery than all the Blue Books ever published, and all the sermons ever delivered. A great book—a great book! Would that someone else would arise and do for modern slavery what Mrs. Stowe did for the negro slaves in America!"

"Modern slavery!"

"Ay!" The old man's voice rose to a pitch of passionate emphasis. "Ay, modern slavery! What is the awful subjugation of man to drink, gambling, and other social evils except slavery? Would that some man would write a book that would point the way to emancipation! How I, for one, would welcome such an addition to our literature!"

Blake's eyes glowed. Here was a chance for him, a better chance than he had hoped to get so soon.

"Mr. Goodmayes," he said quietly, "I believe there is already a story in existence."

"You mean that?" the old man cried eagerly. "What is its name? How is it I have never seen a copy?"

"Because the book is not yet published. It is indeed hardly completed in writing."

"But the author—who is he?"

"An unknown man—an unknown genius."

"You put it as high as that?"

"I have had the privilege of reading the first half of the manuscript. As far as that is concerned, I do not hesitate to say it is a work of genius."

"Mr. Blake, you interest me vastly. How I should like to have a look at this manuscript. Would that be possible?"

"Oh, yes; certainly! Mr. Goodmayes, I will arrange for it to be sent to you."

Blake went away rejoicing. He had found a way of bringing Stephen Crosby's book to old Goodmayes' notice. Out of that circumstance he hoped much good would come. The way to the old man's heart was through his brain. Stephen Crosby had disappointed him in the past by what looked like the neglect of his natural gifts. Now surely this book, as showing the choicest fruit in his mind, would make the old man alter his opinion, and would perhaps bring about the long-deferred reconciliation.

He left the house resolved to act at once. He had scarcely completed the first writing of the book, and he had hoped to have time for a careful revision.

He decided now that it would be better not to wait for that. A policy of waiting might even be dangerous. Samuel Goodmayes was an old man—eighty. Already he had reached the extreme limits of life's span. It was unlikely that he would live very much longer, and his end might naturally be expected at any time.

Now, on his own admission, his will largely favoured Quinton Dirge. A villain, as Blake well knew. For such a man to inherit the old man's wealth would be a thing of the greatest injustice.

Therefore, if a reconciliation was to take place between uncle and nephew, it must be brought about speedily. The book must be finished at once, and the completed manuscript submitted without delay.

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FOR NEXT FRIDAY: **WANTED FOR WEALTH!** A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake.

THE SHAM SCHOOLMASTER! **THE SPECTRE OF THE FOREST!** By Martin Clifford.

By S. Clarke Hook.

Only by that means could the evil schemes of the enemy be frustrated.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Quinton Dirge Plays a Strong Card, but Blake Trumps the Trick.

QUINTON DIRGE had overheard every word of the conversation between Sexton Blake and old Samuel Goodmayes.

Had it been possible, he would have prevented the two meeting, but Blake, foreseeing some such attempt, had taken particular care that his visiting-card should be delivered to the old man, and not to the secretary. The ostensible explanation of Blake's call was this. He had merely chanced to be in the neighbourhood, and had simply called upon Goodmayes to offer his help in clearing up the mystery of the attack on Jack Crosby.

That, of course, was sufficient to arouse Dirge's suspicions. So he had promptly concealed himself in a room adjoining the library, and had listened to the conversation.

Blake's reference to the uncompleted book rather puzzled him. He could not possibly be referring to Crosby's work, he thought; but, in any case, it would never do to introduce any "deserving genius" to the notice of Goodmayes. Such a thing might seriously interfere with his inheritance of the old man's fortune.

And by this time Dirge had set his mind on getting the bulk of that.

On a certain morning a few days later, he went into the library early to sort the letters which had arrived for Samuel Goodmayes, who had not yet come downstairs.

A bulky brown-paper parcel caught his eye as soon as he entered. One quick glance he gave at the handwriting. Then he opened the package.

The first sight of the contents sent him reeling back in his chair. From the covering page of the MS. a title stood out that put his brain in a whirl:

"When the Dawn Shall Come."

By Stanwell Creed."

Stephen Crosby's book!

He glanced at the first few pages, and his heart sank. He looked at the covering letter from Blake, and shivered as he read that this was the book—the work of the unknown genius to which he had referred.

Stephen Crosby's book—the work of Samuel Goodmayes' own nephew! Why, if that book ever got into the old man's hands—ever was read by him—it might defeat all his plans! It might lead to a reconciliation, and then—good-bye to the fortune.

"It must not reach the old man—the book must never, under any circumstances, be read by him!"

Quinton Dirge spoke the words to himself. They came through his clenched teeth hissing, like the wrathful sounds of a serpent. About them was a stress and an emphasis that invested them with all the force of an oath—a fierce, unbreakable vow!

"Never, never, never must he see this book again! Ha, I know! I'll make it impossible for him ever to see it!"

He leapt up with wildly-working face, his eyes directed to the coals already glowing upon the hearth. In a moment he stepped across to the fire, and hurled the manuscript into the flames!

One swift dig of the poker, and in a second the type-written pages were in a fierce blaze.

With eyes that burnt almost like the glowing coals themselves he watched the wicked work of destruction.

"Gone!" he exclaimed at last in demoniacal triumph. "That is the end of Stanwell Creed's work. Never shall he win old Goodmayes' tribute to genius. The work is mine—mine, and I shall reap the full benefit of it. Now to hide all the traces of the burnt paper."

He stirred the fire again until the burnt sheets had all crumbled into small ashes and disappeared. Then and not till then did he rise erect and wipe away the moisture that had gathered on his brow.

A step in the corridor outside. A light, tottering step in felt slippers. It was old Goodmayes.

Quinton Dirge turned swiftly from the fire and glided into a seat near the desk.

When Samuel Goodmayes entered a moment later, the rascally private secretary was busy with the letters, looking as unconcerned as if nothing whatever had happened.

The usual good-mornings were exchanged. The old man glanced around.

"That story, Dirge," said he. "That story I spoke to you about. Has Mr. Sexton Blake sent it yet?"

"Not yet," returned the secretary. "Nothing has come this morning."

"H'm! I am sorry! I can't tell you how eager I am to see it. I confess to you, my dear Dirge, that Mr. Sexton Blake has so aroused my interest that I can hardly restrain my eagerness to read the book he spoke of. I do hope it comes to-day; but if it doesn't, it is almost sure to come to-morrow. You will let me see it directly it arrives."

"Directly it arrives!" repeated the secretary. "Of course, sir — of course!"

He half turned his head away, and grinned to himself cunningly.

"To-morrow," he thought. "No; it will not come to-morrow—nor the next day, nor the next, nor ever. So far as Sexton Blake and your nephew are concerned, the story is destroyed for ever. When the book does appear, it will be under my name, and mine will be the glory and the credit of it."

Sexton Blake waited a week after despatching the typewritten copy of "When the Dawn Shall Come."

Then he went to call on Samuel Goodmayes.

"Delighted to see you again!" the old man greeted. "I have been longing to see that wonderful story you mentioned. Have you brought it with you now?"

"Brought it, sir? Why, I sent it to you a week ago!"

"Sent it! Why, good gracious, it has never reached me!"

"What! Surely it cannot have gone astray?" Blake's distress seemed real. "It must be in your house somewhere."

"I am sorry to say it isn't," the old man answered, with deep concern. "I have inquired for it every day, haven't I, Dirge?"

"Every day, sir—several times a day, in fact," answered the secretary. "You must be in error, Mr. Blake. Had the manuscript reached here, I should most certainly have seen it."

"Dear me—dear me!" Blake exclaimed. "I hope it has not been lost. If you will excuse me, Mr. Goodmayes, I will return home and make inquiries about it at once."

He went out. Quinton Dirge walked with him through the park. There was a smile upon his face, of which Blake caught a glimpse.

"This is a serious matter, Mr. Blake," he cooed.

"Serious? It is almost calamitous! If that story is lost, it will mean—"

"That your unknown genius will have wasted his work—eh, Mr. Blake?" There was an unmistakable sneer in the secretary's voice.

Blake had been waiting for that sneer, or some equally open sign of triumph. He turned on the secretary, and eyed him steadily.

"I don't know that it means quite as much as that," he said quietly; "but if the typescript is lost, it will necessitate sending in a duplicate, won't it?"

The secretary's face fell.

"A duplicate!" he said, in a weak voice. "Do you mean to say that you can supply a duplicate?"

"Oh, yes, easily enough! I must see about sending it at once."

Quinton Dirge gnashed his teeth as the detective moved away.

A duplicate—then there was a duplicate of the story in



"Don't you see he has betrayed himself?" cried Blake. "Constables, I have a charge for you; arrest that man!"

existence, and Sexton Blake was going to send it to old Goodmayes.

All his—Dirge's—trouble had been in vain, then. His destruction of the MS. had been a waste of time!

Need it be? Could he not just as easily destroy the duplicate? Yet what would be the good of that? It would only be another copy, and Blake would still have the original draft. Not the actual original, though. He—Dirge—had that locked in his box. There must have been a duplicate all the time the manuscript had been stolen by Griggs. That was why so little fuss had been made by Blake over its loss.

Quinton Dirge began to feel he had been rather shortsighted over this business. Still, he must go on with it now. Must carry out his scheme to the bitter—or, rather, the sweet—end.

"I must get the credit of this book," he said vehemently to himself, "and I will get possession of old Goodmayes' fortune!"

But how? No use to destroy the duplicate when it came. How, then, to prevent the old man from reading it? How could he make sure—

Quinton Dirge suddenly halted in his walk. An idea had come to him—a hideous, terrible idea!

There was one way—and one way only—of making it absolutely certain that Samuel Goodmayes should not read that book. That was to rob him of the power of reading anything!

When the next morning Sexton Blake arrived at Pydon Court, he was met with some dreadful news.

While walking in the park on the previous evening, old Mr. Goodmayes had been attacked and robbed.

He had been waylaid by a gang of ruffians, who had knocked him down and stolen his watch and money. His injuries might have been a great deal worse, but for the timely arrival on the scene of Mr. Quinton Dirge, who, bravely going to the rescue, had driven the assailants off.

According to the local police, the private secretary had undoubtedly saved the old man's life, but had arrived too late to save him from terrible injuries.

For, on getting Mr. Goodmayes indoors, it was found that

something had been thrown into his face. Some acid substance, which had severely scarred his face, and had done worse than that.

It had rendered the old man blind.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Book at Last—Dastardly Work.

EXCITEMENT reigned at Pydon Court, police in the house questioning the servants, police in the park examining the scene of the outrage, and doing all they could to get upon the trail of the villainous gang who had attacked Samuel Goodmayes.

Then messages were despatched to London and to France, summoning the greatest oculists, who forthwith came post-haste to Pydon Court to examine old Samuel Goodmayes' eyes, and say if anything could be done to recover his sight.

With despairing unanimity all agreed that only one hope remained. A difficult operation would have to be performed. After that, Mr. Goodmayes would have to remain in a dark-room for three months, or even more.

It was a stern edict, but there was no going against it.

"Hard lines on the poor old man," Sir Edmond said, "to eminent English specialist, to Sexton Blake.

The two men were fairly old friends, and could talk confidentially.

"Hard lines on the poor old man," Sir Edmond said, "to have been attacked in this fashion. I suppose the idea was robbery?"

"The police say so," said Blake.

"Oh, come, Blake, never mind what the police say! What do you think? I can see that you don't agree with the police a bit."

"Perhaps I don't, Harrigan. As a matter of fact, I have got a theory of my own, but you won't mind if I don't discuss it?"

"Of course not, my dear fellow, though you pique my curiosity tremendously. I shall be down here for a while, off and on, so perhaps we shall get a chance of a talk over old times."

"I hope so. Are you going to perform the operation?"

"No; I'm leaving it to Lafitte."

"The Frenchman? No international jealousy?"

The specialist shook his head.

"Not in our profession. Lafitte is a splendid chap, knows everything about the eye that is known, and he's a younger man than I. He will actually perform the operation, but I shall be present, of course."

"Harrigan," said Blake rather suddenly, "you'll do me a favour?"

"Of course. What is it?"

"Give orders—it'll be easy for you to do—that Samuel Goodmayes must be kept absolutely quiet."

"He'll have to be, in any case. He'll remain in a dark room all the time."

"Well, say that he must have no communication with his ordinary daily associates."

"What do you mean, Blake?"

"I want Quinton Dirge to be kept away from him!"

"Quinton Dirge? He's that lanky chap, isn't he?"

"Yes; he's Mr. Goodmayes' private secretary."

"And you want him kept out of the way. Why? But you don't want to tell me. Part of your theory—eh, Blake? Well, well; I won't hinder you. You've no doubt a very good reason for asking, and I can do what you say easily."

So Sir Edmond Harrigan gave peremptory orders that Mr. Goodmayes was to see nobody except his doctors and nurses. To this there was to be no exception, save in the case of Sexton Blake himself. Later on, when such a course was permissible, the detective was to be allowed to see the patient. But that would not come about for some time.

Quinton Dirge obeyed the doctor's instructions like a lamb. Suspicious though his nature was, he did not dream that there was anything unusual in Mr. Goodmayes not being permitted to see his ordinary associates. He knew nothing of the old friendship existing between Blake and Sir Edmond Harrigan, and still less of any arrangement between them to get rid of him.

Now to go away from Pydon Court for a time was a thing that accorded with his own wishes. He wanted very much to complete his version of the partly-finished book. If by the time Mr. Goodmayes had recovered, he could have the book ready, he fancied he could effectually forestall any further design Blake might have.

In the meantime, and during the months that Samuel Goodmayes would be confined to his darkened room, it would of course be quite impossible for him to read any book, owing to his blindness. He, Dirge, could then go away feeling absolutely secure that nobody could steal a march on him during his absence.

He did not, however, go away until he had discovered that Blake had already left the neighbourhood.

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FOR NEXT FRIDAY: WANTED FOR WEALTH! A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake.

The detective had, in truth, given up the house he had taken, and had given it out that he was returning to London. As a matter of fact, his visit to London was only of short duration.

It was long enough, however, to put some trusty assistants on the track of Colter & Co., and to give them instructions to keep a careful eye on the villains. Then Blake returned to Dorset, taking up his quarters in the neighbourhood of Swanage.

Weeks went by almost uneventfully. Now and again during those weeks Blake would sit by the bedside of Stephen Crosby, who, by careful nursing and feeding, and abundance of pure sea air, was improving every day. At other times, Blake would spare a day to revisit London. Had anyone watched him they would have seen that his visits were always to the offices of a famous firm of book publishers.

With this firm, Blake had negotiated for the publication of "When the Dawn Shall Come."

For this publication he did not wait for the usual formalities of having the book read and approved. He was desirous of having the book ready for publication at the shortest notice, and was himself bearing the expense of printing and binding.

There was much intermediate work to be done in connection with it, any amount of proof-reading, and so on. But Blake, working with wonderful energy, got through it all in double-quick time.

In due course, a full edition of the book was printed, bound, and made ready to despatch to the libraries and booksellers at short notice.

But for the moment the actual publishing was delayed. Blake was waiting for the word from Sir Edmund Harrigan as to when it would be possible for him to see old Samuel Goodmayes.

That word came at last. Blake received permission to go and see the patient. He found the old man propped up on a couch. Considering his lengthy confinement to his room, he looked wonderfully well. The room, however, was still darkened, and he wore a green shade over his eyes.

He welcomed Blake with genuine cordiality.

"I have been thinking about you a good deal, Mr. Blake," he said, "since I have been ill. And I have been thinking about that wonderful book you talked of. Did you ever trace that missing manuscript?"

"No, Mr. Goodmayes. I only know that it must have reached your house."

"Strange that I did not see it, then. But the author had another draft of the story?"

"Oh, yes; I brought a duplicate here on the morning following that dastardly attack on you."

"Ah," sighed the old man wearily, "that unfortunate occurrence put everything back! But have you the duplicate now?"

"I have something better. I have a copy of the book here printed." And Blake drew a volume from his pocket.

"Really, that is excellent news! How I wish that I could see it! How I wish that I could read it! But that, alas! is impossible at the moment. My eyes are very much better, but it will be several days before I shall be permitted to use them."

The detective drew nearer to the old man and laid a hand kindly on his arm.

"Let me use my eyes for you," he said gently. "Let me read this book, 'When the Dawn Shall Come,' aloud to you."

"Oh, if you would! If the doctors will permit it."

"I have already Sir Edmond Harrigan's permission," Blake answered. "We will make a start at once."

And there and then, sitting close to a shaded lamp, Blake began the reading of the book upon which so much depended.

The reading lasted several hours. All through it the old man never once showed the slightest sign of weariness, but remained like one rapt, drinking in every word and sometimes nodding his head slowly as if in agreement with some particular sentiment expressed.

With only a slight pause now and then, Blake continued his reading until he had almost finished that part of the book actually written by Stephen Crosby.

Then he stopped and looked at the figure on the couch. Almost in shadow though it was, Blake could see tell-tale marks that showed that the old man had been crying.

For two or three minutes he remained in deep thought. At last he spoke.

"Mr. Blake," he said, in a low voice, "that book is everything you said of it. It is wonderful! It is a work of genius. It is a piece out of real life. The author is a man who has suffered—has endured great hardships."

"He is not a man to complain of his own sufferings."

"No, that I can understand. He is a man of too wide sympathies for that. His soul feels so much for the anguish of others that his own hardships are forgotten. A wonderful book! It has made me think! It will keep me thinking!

THE SHAM SCHOOLMASTER! THE SPECTRE OF THE FOREST!
By Martin Clifford. By S. Clarke Hook.

Mr. Blake, you have been very kind to an old man. Will you add to that kindness?"

"Anything, Mr. Goodmayes, that I can do—what is it?"

"Bring the author here to see me!"

Sexton Blake's heart jumped.

"Supposing you were disappointed in him?" he said.

"Supposing he turned out to be someone quite different—"

"How could I be disappointed in him? His writing shows him to be a man of noble heart. Bring him to me. Humour an old man who has been taught things by this book which he has never known before. Bring him to me."

"Very well, then, Mr. Goodmayes, I will!" Blake answered, touched by the old man's pleading and obvious emotion. "Within a few days, directly you are well enough to receive visitors, I will bring Stanwell Creed here. He will be as happy to see you as you to see him. Meantime, I will return to-morrow and finish reading the book."

Blake went happily on his way homeward. Half the battle was won. The reading of that book, so "like a piece out of life," had affected the old man strangely. He did not know it—how could he?—but enshrined within the pages of "When the Dawn Shall Come," was the very heart of Stephen Crosby. And in the words of simple eloquence which he had written, there was a cry of a human soul for the love and sympathy of his own kindred. Out from the printed page came a passionate appeal from blood to blood, and, knowing not why, Samuel Goodmayes' own heart was answering the mute appeal of his own sister's son.

All this Blake saw, and in the near future he could foresee a bright vision of reconciliation. So rejoicingly, and tempted by the fine afternoon, he set out to walk the ten miles that divided Pydon Court from where he was staying.

As he tramped along the road there came the sudden whirl of a motor-car towards him.

To his astonishment it pulled up dead abreast of him. Equally to his astonishment he beheld seated in it three men whom he recognised.

They were Dirge, Colter, and Griggs.

Dirge made no attempt to disguise his anger at seeing Blake.

"So you're here again, are you?" he hissed. "Been to see Mr. Goodmayes, I suppose?"

"Why not?" Blake answered.

"Think to steal a march on me, I suppose?"

"Really, I ought to ask you what you mean by that, I suppose?"

"Oh, you know what I mean! By Heaven, if I find that you've been doing anything in my absence, I'll—"

He broke off, his face working with fury.

"You'll what?" Blake asked.

But Colter, foreseeing trouble, had pulled Dirge into his seat, and the car sped off.

The detective watched it out of sight.

"Dirge is in a towering rage," he murmured to himself.

"Evidently he's had a wire from someone at Pydon Court saying that I was there, and has come down post-haste from London in consequence. I'd like to see Dirge's face when he learns that the book is finished, and that I've read half of it to Mr. Goodmayes. Good heavens, though, it won't do the poor old man any good if there's a scene! I think I'd better go back in case Dirge does anything to upset him!"

He turned at once and retraced his steps to Pydon Court.

The old housekeeper met him in the hall. Her face was pale, her manner terribly agitated.

"What is the matter, Mrs. Lanning?" Blake asked anxiously.

The housekeeper threw up her hands.

"Oh, sir," she moaned out, "the master's been poisoned!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. A False Charge—Arrested.

BLAKE fell back a step.

"Poisoned!" he gasped.

"Yes, that's what the doctor says, sir. He's with him now. Oh, it's dreadful—dreadful! Just as the master was going on so nicely, too!"

But Blake had pushed past her, and was hurrying along to the room where he had left Mr. Goodmayes.

The family doctor met him at the door.

"Terrible, this, Mr. Blake!" said he. "Terrible—terrible! You—you've heard the news?"

"Yes. How was the poison administered?"

"In his medicine. I've found a white precipitate in the glass. I must discover its exact nature later on. Meantime, Mr. Dirge has gone for the police!"

"He—he of all men!" Blake gasped. "Whom does he suspect, then?"

"It's most painful, Mr. Blake—most painful! But—ah, here are the police!"

Two constables entered at that moment. With them was Quinton Dirge. Blake stepped back out of sight.

From his hiding-place he saw Dirge whisper to a maid-servant, who promptly hurried upstairs. In two minutes she came down again. Someone was with her.

Erica Nolan!

Quinton Dirge turned to the policemen.

"This is the young lady," he said. "Constable, arrest her!"

The girl gave a wild shriek, and fell forward in a faint.

Sexton Blake sprang forward.

"Look to Miss Nolan," he said to the housekeeper. "Now, then, what is the meaning of this outrage?"

"It means, sir," answered one of the policemen, "that we've come to arrest Miss Nolan!"

"On what charge?"

With fiercely-knitted brows Quinton Dirge rapped out:

"On the charge of administering ammonio-chloride of mercury to—"

"So it was that!" exclaimed the doctor. "How did you know?"

"Don't you see he has betrayed himself?" cried Blake. "Constables, I have a charge for you! Arrest that man!"

"Hands off!" cried Quinton Dirge, white to the lips. "Hands off, or I—"

But the revolver he had snatched from his pocket was knocked out of his hand, and, despite his struggles, he was handcuffed and secured.

"Keep him here for a while," said Blake, "and send to Wrexhester for more assistance! This man has accomplices in the neighbourhood, and they must be taken as well!"

"A malediction on you!" cried Dirge.

"Thank you!" Blake answered. "I'd rather have your curses than your blessing! Now, Miss Nolan," he said, turning to the pale girl to whom the doctor was attending, "as you are better, perhaps you can throw some light on this matter, and explain how Quinton Dirge came to make so monstrous a charge against you!"

Erica had recovered from her swoon, but she still looked very weak and pale. She pulled herself together as she explained to the detective what had happened. What she told him amounted to this:

Directly after Blake's departure her uncle had sent for her. That was sufficiently surprising, since he had practically ignored her since that day when they had disagreed. Her astonishment increased when, on going to the old man's room, she found him in tears.

Without referring in detail to what had happened in the past, he still made it perfectly plain that he was deeply sorry about the quarrel. Something had evidently occurred which had wrought a wonderful change in him.

"Erica, dear," he had said, "I have sent for you to ask your pardon for my harshness. I am deeply sorry for it. I am deeply sorry for many things. It will seem strange to say it, but I have only now made the discovery that all my past life has been a narrow one. I have prided myself on being a good and just man, only to waken now to the fact that my conduct has been moulded by narrow, prejudiced views. I have kept aloof from the world, and have kept ignorant of its ways. More or less, I have lived the life of a recluse, and that has served to cramp my sympathies and to narrow my humanity. I see it all now. I see my mistakes. I have learnt it all from a book—a wonderful new book which Mr. Blake has been reading to me. So now, dear Erica, I ask you to forgive me, and to believe that in the few years which may still remain to me I will endeavour to make amends and strive to secure your happiness."

"Such was what my dear old uncle said to me," Erica went on. "And, of course, Mr. Blake, it made me very happy. We made it all up, and we sat talking for a little time. Then uncle said it was time for his medicine, and asked me if I would give it to him."

"There was none in the room, and I jumped up to go and find the nurse. I went to the door rather suddenly, and on opening it was astonished to find Mr. Dirge outside in a peculiar attitude. He was kneeling on the mat!"

Blake started.

"With his ear to the keyhole most likely. He had been listening!"

"That's just what it seemed like, Mr. Blake, but I could not be certain. However, he recovered himself in a moment, and, learning what I wanted, went to fetch the medicine himself. In a minute or two he returned with a dose in a glass, and went away."

"I gave the medicine to my uncle. No sooner had he taken it than an awful change came over him. He went deathly pale, and was seized with convulsions. I was greatly frightened, and sent for the doctor at once. The doctor told

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me to go to my own room, and that is all I know, Mr. Blake. But it is dreadful—dreadful for this to happen. My poor, poor, dear uncle! And we were so happy only a little time before!"

And, having concluded her statement, Erica began to weep afresh.

Blake strove to comfort her.

"All will come right," he said. "Your uncle will recover, thanks to prompt medical aid. As to the charge against you, that is absolutely ridiculous! It is quite certain that the poison was put into the glass by Quinton Dirge. He betrayed himself by saying what the poison was!"

"But why should he wish to kill my uncle?"

"To secure his fortune. There is a will largely in his favour. He overheard your talk with your uncle, and he thought then that your reconciliation would alter matters. The fortune might slip from his grasp. That thought, added to others, maddened him, and he took this desperate step. But, thank Heaven, it has not succeeded! Mr. Goodmayes will recover, and all will be well!"

Old Samuel Goodmayes did recover, but not for several weeks. When at last he got back his consciousness, his first request was for Erica. She was by his side in a moment, making him happy by her love and girlish caresses.

The old man drew her to him.

"I have been very ill," he said, "but I am better now—better and happier than I have been for a long, long time. I have lived another life during my illness, darling child, and I am a changed man. Oh, how kind I will be to you in future!"

"You have always been the kindest of uncles to me," she said, nestling her pretty head on his shoulder.

"No, not always," he said sadly—"not always. But I shall make amends. That book has taught me how to live—how to sympathise. It has broadened my humanity, and widened my whole outlook on life. 'When the Dawn Shall Come.' A happy, happy title! After the long night the dawn has come to me!"

They talked on happily together. Then quite suddenly the old man said:

"Where is Mr. Blake? I want him to read the rest of the book to me! Where is he?"

"Here, sir, waiting for this happy moment!"

And Blake stepped forward.

"Ah, how pleased I am to see you! The book—I want you to begin it all again! When will you read it?"

Blake was shaking his head with a smile.

"I am going to leave the reading in better hands," he said. "The author himself is going to read it to you!"

"Mr. Stanwell Creed! Where is he?"

"He is here!"

In at the half-open door, at a signal from Blake, came a man. He was pale, but his pallor was not of the illness from which he had now thoroughly recovered. It was the pallor of the moment's stress which intensified as he drew near to the old man's bed.

"Uncle—my dear uncle!" was all he said; but there was a tenderness in his tones that meant much.

The old man started.

"That voice," he said—"that voice! It comes to me out of the dead past. I have heard it while I have been here upon a bed of sickness. It has spoken to me in dreams—beautiful dreams, and the words that it has spoken, have been the words I have heard read from that book. Whose is that voice? Am I mistaken? No, I cannot be. Stephen, Stephen, my nephew! My dear, dear sister's child. Tell me that you are Stephen Crosby!"

"Yes, yes, dear uncle. I am Stephen Crosby!"

"Thank Heaven—thank Heaven, you have come back to me!"

"But even now I do not quite understand," the old man said. "The book—the book! What have you to do with the book, dear Stephen?"

Blake moved forward.

"It is your nephew's work," he said.

"Not all of it—" Stephen Crosby was beginning; but Blake went on:

"Every word you have heard read is the fruit of your nephew's brain. Into it he has put all his heart and soul."

"And I thought you had wasted your life," the old man cried out. "Yet you have produced a noble work like that. Oh, Stephen—Stephen, will you ever forgive me?"

"It is I, uncle, who should ask your forgiveness. Even in this matter of the book, I am winning your praise under false pretences. It is not all mine!"

"I care not for that; to have produced a part of it is enough. But as you imply you had a collaborator, I should like to see him. Who is he?"

"He is here—he is Mr. Sexton Blake!"

"Mr. Sexton Blake—and I never knew!"

Again Blake moved a step, after first feeling inclined to shrink out of sight.

"Let me explain," he said hurriedly. "I would have preferred that my humble part in this should not have been mentioned. But since it has been I had better explain."

And he did so, emphasising with all his might that his share in the book had been but small, since even the part he had put into literary form had been but an expansion of Crosby's notes and delirious ravings.

Stephen Crosby tried hard to make Blake take his due part of the credit, but the detective would not hear of it.

But one puzzling matter still remained. It was necessary to explain why Blake had hurried forward the completion of the book instead of waiting for Stephen Crosby's recovery from illness.

With admirable delicacy Blake told the old man about Quinton Dirge and his designs upon his fortune.

"So that explains the attempt he made to poison me," the old man said. "He was desperate; it was his last card."

"Yes, it was his intention to finish the book first. I have secured the original draft of the first part which he obtained possession of through Cashel Colter. Here it is!"

The old man sighed.

"Wretched, misguided man!" he murmured. "To think that he should have been such a villain, and that I should have trusted him so implicitly. I am deeply grateful to you, Mr. Blake, for having unmasked his villainy, and thus prevented my doing a gross injustice to my own kith and kin. From the bottom of my heart I thank Heaven for bringing me back to health, and giving me the chance to make amends. Stephen, where is your wife?"

"She is in an adjoining room with my son!"

"With Jack!" The old man's face lit up, and looked radiant, despite the shade which still covered his eyes.

"Bring them both to me. I have much to ask their pardon for."

No need to dwell upon the scene that followed. It ended as all scenes must where nought but love exists—in happiness.

"I called you bitter names," the old man said, turning to Stephen's wife. "I did not know you then; did not know how good and constant your heart was. Kiss me, and say you forgive me! Heaven bless you—Heaven bless you!" he murmured, as Mrs. Crosby bent to him. "Where is your son?"

He took the young fellow's hand.

"I have to ask your forgiveness, too, Jack," he said.

"No, no, sir. It is I who should ask yours."

"Tut, tut! Erica!"

"Yes, dear uncle."

"Take hold of Jack's hand. There—there, don't sob! I am not going to— Jack, take my little girl, and love her and cherish her all your days."

Jack and Erica were married a few months afterwards. Before that happy event came off, Quinton Dirge and his villainous accomplices had been tried and sentenced to long terms of penal servitude.

Old Mr. Goodmayes is still alive, his old age cheered by the presence of Stephen Crosby and his wife. Very soon after the reconciliation he recovered his sight. Stephen has made a great name for himself as an author, and has never ceased to be grateful to Blake for the help rendered in connection with "When the Dawn Shall Come," the book which laid the foundations of his fortunes.

That book sold in thousands, running into several editions. In all the editions, apart from the first, Stephen Crosby insisted on Blake's name appearing as collaborator.

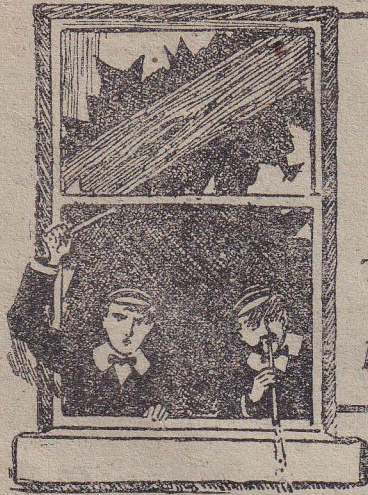
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— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Too Thick!

"I'M not going to stand—"
"Sit down, then, Figgy!" said Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, pushing a chair towards the great Figgins, in perfect simplicity and sincerity.

Kerr chuckled softly. Figgins bestowed a glare upon Fatty Wynn, much to the astonishment of that plump youth. He had only meant to be kind.

"You ass!" said Figgins. "I tell you, I'm not going to stand—"

"Well, there's a chair."

"I'm not going to stand this any longer," said Figgins.

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins had just come into his study in the Fourth-Form passage, in the New House at St. Jim's. Figgins was looking very red and excited. He had his right hand tucked away under his left arm, and was squeezing it there, as if he were trying to alleviate some pain in it—as, indeed, he was. It was easy to see that Figgins had suffered under a very recent application of the cane.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn had been talking to Redfern & Co., the New Firm at St. Jim's, and one or two other fellows who belonged to the New House. They gazed at Figgins in amazement.

"I'm not going to stand it," went on Figgins. "It's getting too thick."

Kerr nodded.

"Altogether too thick!" he agreed.

"I saw Blake a few minutes ago," said Figgins. "He said that if he had a Housemaster like ours in the School House he'd pulverise him!"

"Gas!" said Kerr.

"But it's too thick!" exclaimed Figgins excitedly. "He's just caned me!"

"How many?" asked Fatty Wynn sympathetically.

"Two!"

"What for?"

"For whistling in the passage!" said Figgins, with biting emphasis. "Two scorchers—for whistling in the passage!"

"Rotten!" said Kerr.

"Beastly!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins extracted his damaged hand from under his arm, and clenched it.

"I came jolly near giving him an upper-cut," he said.

Kerr looked alarmed.

"Steady on, Figgy! You can't punch a Form-master, you know."

"I know I can't!" growled Figgins. "That's the worst of it. If it was a prefect—if it was Monteith, for instance—we could give him something back. But a giddy Housemaster is out of our reach."

"Better grin and bear it," said Fatty Wynn. "Look here, Figgy, have some of these ham-sandwiches, and forget all about it."

"Blow the ham-sandwiches!"

"Some of the jam-tarts, then," urged Fatty Wynn.

There was a fixed conviction in the Fourth-Former's mind that jam-tarts and ham-sandwiches would cure any ills that flesh was heir to.

Figgins snorted.

"Blow the jam-tarts!"

Fatty Wynn sighed. He had got to the end of all the consolations he could think of.

Figgins brandished a clenched fist as he went on:

"It's too thick! It's utterly rotten that we should have to stand it! Ratty is going too far, and he'll jolly soon get to the limit. He thinks because the Head's away he can do just as he likes."

Kerr nodded.

Kerr fully agreed with Figgins, and sympathised with him. He was willing to agree that it was too "thick," and that Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, was getting dangerously near the limit. The fact that the Head was away from the school for a few days made matters worse.

But Kerr did not see what was to be done. That was the difficulty in the situation.

Mr. Ratcliff was Form-master of the Fifth; and if ever a Form-master was detested, Mr. Ratcliff was by the Fifth Form at St. Jim's. But the Fifth were seniors, and Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasant temper could not have full play in that Form. It was not in accordance with the traditions of St. Jim's for seniors to be caned by Form-masters or Housemasters. In case of a very serious delinquent in the Upper School requiring that correction, he had to be sent in to the Head.

Mr. Ratcliff did not like that. He preferred to do the punishing himself. Mr. Ratcliff was a sour-tempered man, and had never been known to risk spoiling the child by unduly sparing the rod.

All that he could not give to the Fifth, he generously bestowed upon the juniors of his House.

As Housemaster of the New House, he had under his authority all the juniors who belonged to that House—Shell, Fourth, and Third.

And of all the New House juniors, the three whom Mr. Ratcliff disliked the most were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn—otherwise known as Figgins & Co.

Whether it was the independence of their spirit, or the fact that they were responsible for more mischief than any dozen fellows in the House, or that they were specially distinguished in keeping up the warfare with the School House—whatever the reason, Mr. Ratcliff was always "down" upon Figgins & Co.

A feeling of revolt was rising in the breasts of the New House juniors, and yet the impossibility of "backing up" against a Housemaster held them in check.

Once, on a great occasion, Figgins & Co. had tied up an unpopular prefect, and left him in a room for a night to consider himself. The juniors still talked of that punishment inflicted upon Monteith with considerable glee.

But it was hardly feasible to think of punishing a Housemaster in that drastic fashion. To grin and bear it seemed

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to be the only resource—but it was growing impossible to grin, and very difficult to bear it.

"Something's got to be done."

Figgins emphasised that remark by bringing his fist down upon the table with a terrific thump. The ink spurted out of the inkpot, and splashed over Kerr's exercise-paper, and over Fatty Wynn's jam-tarts. Figgins did not even notice it. And the two juniors said nothing. Fatty Wynn gave his inky tarts a very mournful look, but he bore it manfully.

"Do you hear?" exclaimed Figgins. "Something's got to be done."

"All serene!" said Kerr. "But what?"

"There's only one alternative," said Figgins slowly. "We've got to knuckle under to Ratty all along the line, or else—"

"Or else what?"

"Go it, Figgy!"

"Or else kick?"

"How can we kick?"

"There's only one thing."

"And that—"

"A barring-out!"

"Phew!"

"I say, Figgy—"

"A barring-out! My hat!"

Figgins looked very grim.

"Well, what's wrong with a barring-out?" he said quietly. "We've got to show Ratty that we're not slaves. Now the Head's away he will get worse and worse, and we've had enough of the mailed fist bizney. I vote that we don't stand it. Will you fellows back me up?"

"Yes, rather!" said Redfern promptly.

"Hear, hear!"

"We'll back you up, Figgy."

"Then, if you'll all follow my lead, we'll stand out against this," said Figgins. "We'll all refuse to be punished, in the first place. If we stand together, shoulder to shoulder, you know, he can't touch us. And if he starts the prefects on us, we'll bar him out, and hold out, too, till the Head comes back. And then we'll put our complaints before him, and get him to stop it."

"Phew!"

"Who's game?"

"All of us, I think," said Lawrence. "Hands up for the barring-out if Ratty doesn't come to his senses!"

Every right hand went up.

"That settles it," said Figgins. "We all refuse to be caned or gated, unless we deserve it. I'll see the other fellows, and get them to follow our lead. We'll get ready for the barring-out to-night."

"Hear, hear!"

And that evening no preparation was done by the juniors of the New House. Figgins expounded his scheme to the rest of the New House juniors, who, having received numerous unjust punishments at the hands of Mr. Ratcliff, readily expressed their willingness to join in the barring-out.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Barring-Out!

MORNING dawned upon St. Jim's.

To all appearances, it dawned as many other mornings had dawned. The rising-bell clanged as usual to wake the St. Jim's fellows, and in the School House and the New House they came down to breakfast as usual.

Directly after breakfast, however, Figgins got his followers together, and they took charge of the New House. The cook and the maids were told, much to their astonishment, that a barring-out was intended, and that their room would be more highly prized than their company, and, in spite of objections, they were marched out of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff, having failed to suspect anything, went across to the School House to interview Mr. Railton. Whilst he had gone Figgins and his followers made the final preparations for the siege.

Every window was closed and

fastened, and every door was locked and bolted, with the exception of the big door in the quadrangle.

There the rebels were massed, looking out, ready to shut the door and bolt it, and hold parley from the window if required.

After about a quarter of an hour the lean figure of Mr. Ratcliff was seen striding across the quadrangle.

"Here he comes!"

"Better fasten the door," said Kerr. "He will try to get in, and we don't want to be driven into actually laying hands on a master if we can help it."

The advice was too good not to be followed.

The big door was jammed shut and the bolts were shot, and the chain rattled into its place before Mr. Ratcliff was within a dozen yards of the steps.

The clang of the door warned the Housemaster that he was being shut out, and he quickened his pace.

There was a window in the hall beside the door, and Figgins stood at the window, looking out, ready to parley with the Housemaster, if Mr. Ratcliff was in a mood for parley.

Mr. Ratcliff strode up the steps, and smote the shut door with a sounding blow from his cane.

"Open this door at once!" he shouted.

There was no answer from within.

Crash, crash!

The cane rang upon the door, and split with the force of Mr. Ratcliff's furious blows, and he was left with only a fragment in his hand.

But the door did not budge, and there came no reply. Mr. Ratcliff, almost choking with rage, glared round him, and caught sight of three or four faces at the window. He turned towards the window.

"Figgins!"

He was in so great a rage that he could hardly articulate the name.

"Yes, sir," said Figgins, from the open window as respectfully as he could.

"Open this door at once, Figgins!"

"I am sorry, sir, but I cannot."

"What, what!"

"There has been too much caning, and too many punishments of all kinds, sir, in this House lately," said Figgins firmly. "We can't stand it, sir."

"We're fed up," explained Redfern.

"Past the limit!" said Kerr.

"What, what!"

It seemed as if the enraged and astounded man had lost the power of speech, excepting for the ejaculation of that monosyllable.

"It's a barring-out, sir!" Figgins explained.

"What—what!"

There was a pause. Mr. Ratcliff tried to calm himself, and the juniors, crowded at the window, watched him in silence. Their hearts were beating hard; resistance to constituted authority was new to them and strangely thrilling and exciting.

And no one knew how it would end.

"Figgins," said Mr. Ratcliff at last, "I order you to open that door!"

"I cannot, sir!"

"Do you refuse to obey me?"

"If you put it that way, sir—yes."

"You—you refuse to obey me—me, your Housemaster?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will be flogged and expelled for this, Figgins."

"I don't stand here alone, sir!"

"You are the ringleader—"

"We're all in this together, sir," said Kerr; "and we'll stand by Figgins, and whatever punishment he gets we shall get, too."

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Sink or swim together!" shouted Redfern.

"Hurrah!"

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"Open that door at once!"

"We cannot, sir."

"You refuse?"

"We've said so, sir. We don't open that door until our demands are granted, sir."

"Your—your demands!" cried

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Mr. Ratcliff, not yet quite able to trust his ears. "Your demands! You dare to make demands of your Housemaster?"

"Everybody has a right to ask for justice, sir."

"Hear, hear!"

"Justice!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff. "I will give you justice! If you do not immediately return to your duty I will cane every boy in the House, and stop all holidays for the whole term, and all the ring-leaders shall be expelled from the school!"

"Then you can go ahead, sir. We are holding out!"

"No surrender!" yelled Redfern.

The cry was taken up. "Hurrah! No surrender! Hurrah!"

"Figgins, Redfern, Kerr! You are the ring-leaders! I know that well! You shall be expelled from the college. I will cane all the others. Now, open the door at once!"

"Good offers — any takers?" murmured Redfern.

And there was a chuckle.

That was too much for Mr. Horace Ratcliff. He made a spring at the window, and drew himself up on the sill, with the evident intention of forcing his way into the House. The juniors receded for a moment; the habit of discipline is strong, and if Mr. Ratcliff had been wise, he would never have done anything to weaken it. But Mr. Ratcliff was not wise. If he had been wise in time, there would have been no trouble in the New House at St. Jim's; but the trouble had come now, with a vengeance.

Mr. Ratcliff's head and shoulders were through the open window when Figgins rallied. He rushed to repel the attack, with the rest of the juniors backing him up. Many hands—whose hands could hardly be ascertained in the confusion—grasped Mr. Ratcliff, and he was pitched bodily back into the quadrangle.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Bump!

"Oh!"

The window was slammed and fastened.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Attack.

MR. RATCLIFF scrambled up. He had not been much hurt by his fall, but he had been very much shaken up, and he was spluttering with rage.

Figgins, inside the House, breathed hard.

The rebellion had started now with a vengeance.

Some of the rebels were looking a little scared, but not so Figgins & Co. They were grim and determined.

"We've shown Ratty that we mean business!" said Kerr.

"Hear, hear!" yelled Redfern.

"I wonder what he will do now——"

"The prefects," said Lawrence.

Figgins laughed.

"We're not afraid of the prefects!" he said.

From the windows of the New House the rebels watched anxiously.

Mr. Ratcliff made no second attempt to enter the window. He had already sufficiently compromised his personal dignity, and on rising from his fall he had found the whole school looking on. Across the quadrangle, within easy view, the



"Break open the lock immediately, Taggles!" commanded Mr. Ratcliff, in his thin, spiteful voice. "Yes, sir," replied the school porter. "Werry well, sir! Yow; Yaroooh!" The jet of sooty water flew from Figgins & Co.'s syringe with deadly aim, and Taggles fairly jumped into the air in his surprise.

whole School House was gathered to watch. Even the masters seemed to have forgotten that it was more than time for the fellows to be in the Form-rooms.

Mr. Ratcliff limped away.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Figgins & Co. are goin' it now, and no mistake, deah boys!"

"Good luck to them!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Bravo, Figgins!" roared Blake.

And the cheer was taken up.

Mr. Railton came out of the School House.

"Silence!" he exclaimed.

The cheering died away. Mr. Railton was too popular a master for anyone to wish to show him the slightest disrespect.

"The boys will now go into their Form-rooms," said Mr. Railton. "All School House boys go in at once!"

"Very well, sir."

The juniors went in reluctantly. They would greatly have preferred to see the siege of the New House, but it was hardly likely to be over before morning lessons finished. There would yet be plenty to see.

"Railton can't be going to back up Ratty?" muttered Tom Merry.

"No fear!" said Blake.

"Wathah not! If Railton did anythin' of the sort, I should certainly not regard him with respect."

"Then he wouldn't, of course!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Get into your Form-room, you kids!" exclaimed Kildare.

The Fourth and the Shell, the Third and the Second crowded in. But there were many vacant places in the Fourth and Shell rooms. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, noted down the absentees with a frowning brow. Mr. Linton did not quite approve of Mr. Ratcliff, but he approved

still less of Shell fellows staying away from classes. A third part of the Shell boarded in the New House, and every one of them was with Figgins.

In Mr. Lathom's Form—the Fourth—the gaps were even more numerous. Every Fourth-Former who belonged to the New House was with Figgins & Co. Little Mr. Lathom shook his head solemnly, and began the instruction of his diminished class. But his words fell upon inattentive ears. The juniors did not care twopenny for the fortunes of Cæsar in the war with the Helvetians, but they cared very much for what happened in the war between Mr. Ratcliff and his rebellious House. They were listening with all their ears for sounds from the quadrangle.

In the quadrangle Mr. Ratcliff was not idle. He called upon the prefects of St. Jim's to help him, but he found, to his surprise, that the prefects were by no means enthusiastic in backing him up.

Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was the least enthusiastic of all.

"The Fifth and Sixth will go into their Form-rooms," said Mr. Ratcliff. "All the prefects, however, will remain here—I shall want them. Mr. Railton, you will perhaps be so good as to take charge of the Fifth as well as the Sixth this morning, as I am likely to be busy for some time."

"Certainly!" said Mr. Railton.

"You, Kildare—"

"Excuse me, sir," said Kildare quietly. "I am not a New House prefect, and I do not consider that I am called upon to interfere in a purely New House matter."

Mr. Ratcliff glared.

"You will obey my orders, Kildare."

"I do not wish to interfere here, sir."

"It is not what you wish, but what I wish, that matters," said Mr. Ratcliff acidly.

"I appeal to you, sir," said Kildare, turning to Mr. Railton.

Mr. Railton was frowning.

"I shall not order the prefects of my House to assist you, Mr. Ratcliff," he said. "I do not think it is required of them to do so."

"What?"

"You heard what I said, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"You are aiding and abetting this extraordinary rebellion, then?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing of the sort! But I shall certainly not interfere in it, or allow any boy under my orders to interfere," said Mr. Railton calmly.

"That is the same as aiding them."

"I do not think so; and, since you force me to speak, I must remark that I do not think things would have come to this pass, Mr. Ratcliff, if you had exercised a little more tact and a little more humanity."

"Sir!"

"School House prefects will go in at once," said Mr. Railton.

And the School House prefects went in, and the School House master followed them. Mr. Ratcliff opened his mouth as if to say some very bitter things, but he closed it again with the unpleasant words unuttered. It was useless for him to infringe upon Mr. Railton's borders.

The New House prefects remained at the orders of their Housemaster. There were four of them, and they did not look very pleased with their prospects.

Mr. Ratcliff turned to them. By this time only Mr. Ratcliff and his four prefects remained in the quadrangle. The rest of the school, with the exception of the rebels of the New House, had gone in to classes.

"What do you want us to do, sir?" asked Monteith.

Mr. Ratcliff pointed to the New House.

"You must make an entrance there," he said.

"If they try to keep us out, I don't see how we're to get in, sir," said Baker.

Mr. Ratcliff frowned darkly.

"It is not for you to argue, Baker, but to obey my orders," he said. "Go and do as I tell you at once."

"Come on!" muttered Monteith.

And the four Sixth-Formers made their way unwillingly enough to the New House. They were very angry, though more with Mr. Ratcliff than with the junior rebels.

"They're coming!" said Redfern from the window.

"How many?"

"Four—Monteith, Baker, Wood, and Sefton, the prefects."

"Four!" grinned Figgins. "And we're nearly fifty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They look as if they mean business," Kerr remarked.

"Well, we mean business, too!"

"What-ho!"

Defiant faces crammed the windows as the prefects came

up. Monteith & Co. were looking and feeling somewhat irresolute. They hardly knew what to do. Unless the juniors would open the doors when ordered to do so, the prefects did not seem to have much chance. And they were not likely to obey prefects when they had disobeyed a Housemaster. The New House could not, like Jericho of old, be taken by sound alone.

Monteith rapped on the window.

"Open the door at once, Figgins!" he exclaimed. "There's been enough of this foolery; you'd better chuck it."

"Sorry, Monteith; it can't be done."

"You'd better do as I tell you, Figgins."

"Has Ratty accepted our terms?"

"No, you young ass!"

"Then we're holding the fort."

"Look here, if you don't let us in, you'll soon have to open the doors and come out for your meals," said Baker. "You can't live without eating, especially Patty Wynn."

There was a laugh.

"Look here—" began Patty Wynn wrathfully.

"We're fixed all right for grub, Baker," said Figgins cheerfully; "and we'll starve sooner than surrender. That's flat!"

"Hear, hear!"

"No surrender!"

"Some of you will be expelled for this!" growled Wood.

"We're sticking together, old man, and we're not going to surrender till it's promised that no one shall be punished at all."

"Look here—" began Sefton.

"Nuff said!" replied Figgins briskly. "Go and tell Ratty that if he doesn't accept our terms he can go and eat coke! That's our last word."

"Will you let us in?"

"No!"

Monteith and his three companions backed away. Mr. Ratcliff came striding up, his face purple with rage.

"They won't let us in, sir," said Monteith.

"Break in, then!"

"I don't see—"

"You will not be responsible for any damage done," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I order you to break in the windows, and effect an entrance."

"Very well, sir."

The hall window was the most accessible in the New House. The assailants gathered there. Figgins & Co. were ready for the attack. Figgins had posted a sentry at every window on the ground floor, ready to give the alarm if there were a surprise attack, and that left him ample forces for the defence. Fellows had gathered up cricket-stumps and pokers and stuffed socks as weapons, and they meant to use them if necessary. It was soon evident that it would be necessary.

Crash!

Fragments of glass fell into the House. The window had been shattered by a heavy blow from without.

"They're coming!" yelled Lawrence.

"Line up!"

Through the smashed window came a hand to unfasten it. Figgins raised a cricket-stump, but he did not like to hit the defenceless hand. Instead, he grasped it round the wrist, and held it fast. It was Monteith's hand, and Monteith's other fist lashed in and caught Figgins upon the nose.

Biff!

Figgins gave a fearful yell, and staggered back, and sat upon the floor, with a red stream bursting from his damaged nose.

Monteith, with a herculean effort, dragged himself through the broken window, and rolled heavily into the house. Baker came clambering in after him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Defeat of the Prefects.

REDFERN gave a shout. Figgins was sitting on the floor, dazed, his hand to his nose.

"Collar him!"

There had been a momentary pause among the rebels; but it was only momentary. They followed Redfern fast. Seven or eight juniors threw themselves upon Monteith as he rose, and bore him to the floor again with a crash.

Five or six more fastened upon Baker as he came clambering through the window.

Sefton and Wood, outside, ran along to the next window, and there was a crash—crash of breaking glass.

Two heads came in at the broken windows.

"Collar them!"

"Sock into them!"

"Sit on that cad!"

Monteith was struggling desperately, hitting out with all

his strength. Redfern had fallen, his eye closed by a heavy blow—Kerr had dropped across him—Owen was reeling away, half stunned. But the juniors did not falter. Five or six were grasping Monteith, and he was rolling over again, and they held his arms and his legs, and Fatty Wynn sat on his chest, and the head prefect of the New House gasped helplessly.

Baker, in the window, was held by every pair of hands that could get at him. Baker was a popular prefect, and the juniors would have been sorry to hurt him, but they did not intend to let him get in to the aid of Monteith.

At the other window Wood had rolled in. But he was instantly pinioned by half a dozen fellows and dragged down, and the captors sat upon him promptly, and held him pinned down in spite of his furious struggles.

Sefton was less lucky. Sefton of the Sixth was a bully, and the juniors were not sorry for a chance of paying off old scores. Pratt of the Fourth rushed to repel him with a cricket-stump, and it rang across Sefton's head, and he dropped back into the quadrangle with a terrific yell.

He did not return to the attack. He sat in the quad rubbing his head, and Pratt, inside, looked at a dent on his cricket-stump with much pride.

"Let me gerrup!" yelled Monteith.

"Will you go out quietly, if we do?" asked Figgins.

"No!" roared the prefect.

"Then you'll stay as you are."

"Yes, rather."

"Prisoners of war, my son," said Redfern, rubbing his eye, but grinning good-humouredly. "Take it calmly."

"You young scoundrels—"

"Oh, draw it mild! It's the fortune of war, you know."

"Get a rope, somebody, and tie him up!" said Figgins grimly. "Now then, Baker, are you coming in or going out?"

"I'm coming in, you young sweep!" gasped Baker.

"You'll come in on your head, then!"

"And go out on your neck!" grinned Lawrence.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baker was dragged in by so many hands that he had no chance of fighting. He was bumped on the floor, and as many juniors as could find room sat upon him. He could do nothing more than gasp for breath, and he found some difficulty in doing even that, with the weight of the juniors upon him.

"Tie the bounders up!" gasped Figgins.

There was cord in plenty. Monteith and Baker were tied up with as much cord as if they had had as many legs as centipedes, all requiring tying.

Wood was struggling in the grasp of the juniors, but the numbers were too great, and he was quickly tied up like the others.

"Got 'em!" gasped Redfern.

"Hurrah for us!" yelled Kerr.

And the victorious rebels cheered.

Three of the prefects were bound prisoners, gasping on the floor, and the fourth could be heard outside, groaning and threatening vengeance.

"Chuck 'em out!" said Figgins, turning to the window. "We don't want 'em here. We can't afford to keep prisoners of war. Chuck 'em out!"

"Look here—" began Monteith.

"Sorry—no time!"

"I say—"

"It's not the time for you to say anything. I can do all the saying that's required just now. You've chosen to back up Ratty, and you can take the consequences."

"You young rascal—"

"Chuck him out!"

Monteith, bound as he was, was lifted bodily through the broken window. The fragments of glass cut and tore his clothes, and he did not venture to struggle, lest his skin should suffer in the same way.

He was dropped into the quad on his feet, and lay there, panting and gasping. Baker was dropped out in the same way, and then Wood. Sefton had taken good care not to attempt to enter a second time.

"Beaten them!" yelled Fatty Wynn.

"Hurrah for us! Hear us smile!" shrieked Redfern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Outside, Mr. Ratcliff gazed in speechless rage at the helpless prefects. He motioned to Sefton to untie them, and Sefton obeyed. The dishevelled, bruised, and breathless seniors staggered to their feet.

"Get in again, at once!" said Mr. Ratcliff, finding his voice.

The prefects exchanged glances.

"It's no use," said Monteith.

"It can't be done, sir."

"There's too many of them," said Wood.

"I order you—" began the New House master.

Monteith's face set obstinately.

"It's no good ordering four chaps to fight fifty juniors, sir," he said bluntly. "We can't do it, and it's no good trying. I've had enough of it, for one."

"And I, for another," said Baker.

And the prefects walked away with savage, sullen faces, leaving their Housemaster speechless with rage.

"Hear us smile!" roared Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the smile of the victorious New House juniors could be heard as far as the School House. It reached the open windows of the Form-rooms, and caused some interruptions in the lessons that were going on there.

Mr. Ratcliff heard it as he paced under the elms in the quad, debating within his own mind what his next move should be. Like many men who were accustomed to be hard-handed, and to show no mercy, he was quite astonished when he had provoked resistance, and found that he could not drive and harry beyond a certain limit. But he was far from being willing to admit that he was in the wrong. According to Mr. Ratcliff, everybody else might be in the wrong, but he was always the representative of high righteousness.

Figgins & Co., for their part, had no doubts about what they were going to do. They were going on as they had started. The defeat of the prefects had encouraged them immensely.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Wet!

TAGGLES, the school porter of St. Jim's, came towards the New House, with a dubious expression upon his weather-beaten face, and a heavy axe under his arm. Mr. Ratcliff was following him, his face white and set. The Housemaster had evidently resolved upon desperate measures.

The bell had rung for afternoon lessons, and the School House fellows were all in the Form-rooms—all the school, in fact, excepting the rebels of the New House.

Mr. Ratcliff and Taggles had the quadrangle to themselves. The New House prefects had gone in with the rest of the Sixth; they had had enough of the contest.

"Here comes Taggy!" muttered Redfern from the window. "He's got an axe."

"Ratty means business," said Figgins, with a chuckle.

"Have you got that syringe ready, Kerr?"

"Here you are!"

"Good!"

Figgins took the garden syringe in his hands, and stationed himself at the window beside the doorway. A pail stood beside him, with a mixture of soot and water in it. That syringe had been used by Redfern in a "jape" on Figgins & Co. that was still fresh in the memory of the New House juniors—and its usefulness was not over yet. From the window, which was now innocent of glass, Figgins had a good aim at the doorway, and Taggles was not likely to break in the door unscathed.

Figgins filled the syringe and waited. It was a big syringe, a couple of feet long, and usually used for garden work. A jet of sooty water from it would come as far from pleasant surprise to the assailant.

"You fellows be ready," said Figgins. "If they get the door open, mind, you're to fight like thunder. If Ratty gets in, he's to be chucked out again. At a sign of the door giving way drag the furniture out of the studies and barricade it. Ratty's study first, and then the seniors' things, and then the dining-room furniture—leave our own studies to the last, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha! Right-ho!"

There was an audible grunt from outside as Taggles stopped upon the steps of the House. Mr. Ratcliff's thin, spiteful voice was heard.

"Break in the lock immediately, Taggles."

"Yes, sir!"

"Waste no time, please; I'm waiting for you."

"It's a big job, sir—"

"Then set to work at once."

"Oh, werry well, sir!"

Crash!

Taggles' heavy axe descended upon the lock, and the door shook from top to bottom. Figgins looked between the boards that were nailed across the broken window, and took aim with the garden squirt.

Whiss-s-s-s-sh!

The jet of water flew with a deadly aim.

It caught Taggles full in the face, as he was raising the axe for a second blow.

"Yaroo!" roared Taggles.

The school porter fairly jumped in the air in his surprise. Sooty water was streaming over his face, and his hair, and

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his collar. Taggles clapped his hand to his ear, and danced. The axe fell with a crash.

"Yow! Ow! Wharrat! Yaroooh!" roared Taggles. "I'm wet! Yowwoop!"

Mr. Ratcliff gritted his teeth.

"Break in the lock, Taggles!"

"Groo! I'm wet! I'm sooty! Ow!"

"Do you hear me?" shouted Mr. Ratcliff furiously.

"I'm hoff!" roared Taggles.

And Taggles was off. With sooty water running down all over him, the school porter strode away to his lodge. Mr. Ratcliff called after him, but Taggles did not even turn his head.

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard.

He stooped and picked up the axe Taggles had dropped, and advanced to the attack himself.

"My hat! Ratty's going to chop!" muttered Figgins.

Crash! Crash!

Figgins hesitated. Rebels as the New House juniors were, it seemed a little too "thick," even to Figgins, to drench a Housemaster with sooty water. But the door would soon give way under Mr. Ratcliff's terrific blows if he were allowed to go on.

"Mr. Ratcliff!" shouted Figgins, at last.

Crash! Crash!

"Will you go away and let that door alone, sir?"

Crash! Crash!

"If you don't, I shall serve you the same as Taggles, sir!"

Crash! Crash!

The blows descended in a savage shower. Mr. Ratcliff was putting an unexpected amount of muscular force into the attack. He did not believe for a moment that Figgins would dare to serve him as he had served the school porter. Mr. Ratcliff never could believe a thing till it happened.

"Buck up, Figgy!" shouted Redfern. "The lock's giving!"

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The lock on the door, strong and heavy as it was, flew into pieces. The bolts still held the door in its place, but they would not last long if the attack continued. Figgins made up his mind.

"Will you buzz off?" he shouted.

Crash! Crash!

"Well, you will have it, then!"

Whis-s-s-sh!

The sooty stream from the garden syringe smote Mr. Ratcliff just under the nose.

He started back, gasping, and fell, and rolled over the steps into the quad.

"Ow, ow, ow! Oh! Yah! Oh! Oh!"

Thus Mr. Ratcliff.

Within the house the juniors chuckled rather breathlessly. This was "going it" with a vengeance. But Mr. Ratcliff had brought it upon himself. They could not feel that they were to blame.

"Ow, ow! You young scoundrels! Oh!"

Mr. Ratcliff jumped up. His thin, angry face was almost hidden under sooty water. His eyes were gleaming with rage. Forgetful of everything but vengeance upon the rebels, he rushed up the steps again. But Figgins was ready. There was no hesitation now.

Whis-s-s-sh! went the garden syringe, and a fresh jet of sooty and inky fluid smote Mr. Ratcliff under the chin.

"Oh! Oh! Groooh!"

He staggered, and as he staggered Figgins refilled the squirt, and drove a fresh stream upon him, and Mr. Ratcliff fairly jumped off the steps and fled.

Figgins threw down his weapon with a yell of laughter.

"He's hopped it! Ha, ha, ha! Hurray for us!"

"Hurray!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors watched from the windows. Mr. Ratcliff was gone, and he did not return. They did not see him again till school hours were over at St. Jim's, and the various Forms came streaming out into the quadrangle. Crowds of fellows—seniors and juniors—stood staring towards the New House, grinning and laughing and talking. Evidently the barring-out was the one great topic of conversation at St. Jim's.

There was no fresh attack. But Figgins noted that Scroon and Monteith were stationed in the quad, to keep School House fellows from coming near the house. Mr. Ratcliff did not mean the rebels to hold any communication with the rest of St. Jim's.

"It's going to be a siege now," said Figgins, as he sat down to tea, with one eye on the window. "I suppose Ratty thinks he can starve us out. He doesn't know how much grub we've got here. It will last us for days."

"Hear, hear!"

"Hurray!"

"Down with Ratty!"

And the rebels of the New House had their tea—a very plentiful tea—in the highest of spirits. They had won all along the line so far, and they meant to hold out, as Figgins put it, "to the last shot in the locker."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Hot Stuff!

TOM MERRY looked out of the door of the School House. Night was black in the old quad of St. Jim's, but from the direction of the New House came a flare of lighted windows. Every electric light in the New House was burning. The house was lighted from end to end. It was near bedtime for the juniors of St. Jim's, but it was very clear that the rebels of the New House were not thinking of bed.

"Bai Jove! They're goin' it, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Figgy doesn't mean to be taken by surprise," he remarked. "Ratty has been talking with the New House prefects this evening, and I think he means to make a raid to-night."

"Yaas, wathah! It wouldn't be a bad ideah to give old Figgy a word of warnin'."

"Good egg! I'll cut across the quad and tell him."

Tom Merry slipped down the steps of the School House, and disappeared into the shadows. A couple of minutes later he was tapping at the boards nailed across the broken window in the porch of the New House.

"Hallo!" came Figgins' cheerful tones from within.

"It's all right, Figgy!"

"That you, Tom Merry?" asked Figgins, peering out.

"Yes."

"How's Ratty?" grinned Figgins.

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's raging!" he said. "He's had some words with Mr. Railton about not backing him up in this row, and he's asked for the School House prefects to help him, and Railton won't have it."

"Good old Railton!"

"Mr. Railton sent off a telegram to-day, and I think it's to the Head," said Tom Merry.

Figgins looked grim.

"There will be more trouble if the Head comes back on account of this," he said. "We're jolly well not going to surrender unless we get our terms."

"Rather not!" chimed in Redfern.

"Ratty and Monteith and the New House prefects are whispering over something," said Tom Merry. "We all think it means a raid in the middle of the night. You chaps had better keep some of your eyes open."

"That's right!" said Figgins confidently. "We've arranged to have sentinels in turn all night, and if Ratty comes we shall be ready for him. We've got every blessed door and window nailed up, and I don't think he'll get in."

"Well, keep a good look-out, that's all. I thought I'd tell you."

"Thanks awfully!"

Tom Merry disappeared.

Figgins & Co. were having supper in the New House, and they were very liberal with themselves. The enthusiasm of the rebels was still keen, but some of them were beginning to feel very sleepy.

Figgins had told off the sentinels for the first watch, but it was not till after ten o'clock that any of the juniors went to bed. Then they did not undress, but lay down in their clothes, to be ready in case of a surprise.

The lights were extinguished one by one in the School House and the other buildings round the old quad. But in the New House the electric light blazed away all through the dark hours.

To stay up after the usual bedtime was a treat to most of the juniors, chiefly because it seldom fell to their lot. But now that they experienced it the treat was not so enjoyable as they had supposed.

The fellows who were keeping watch felt very sleepy long before midnight sounded, and they would have been very glad to go to their dormitory.

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FOR NEXT FRIDAY: WANTED FOR WEALTH! A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake.

THE SHAW SCHOOLMASTER! THE SPECTRE OF THE FOREST! By Martin Clifford.

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The sentinels yawned and tramped about to keep themselves awake, and most of them began to nod after a time.

Figgins was in the second watch, realising that in the middle of the night the most keenness would be required.

Pratt woke him up, and he came down with Kerr and Redfern and Owen to keep watch, the earlier sentinels going off to bed gladly enough.

Figgins rubbed his heavy eyes, and looked out into the quadrangle.

Half-past twelve had rung out from the clock-tower, and the old school was very silent and still.

Not a light was to be seen in the great black mass of the School House. The quadrangle, silent, dark, save where the light from the New House streamed into it, looked ghastly and weird.

"Groo!" said Figgins. "I wish they'd come if they're coming!"

"Yaw-aw-aw!" said Redfern. "I wish they would!"

Owen nodded off in a chair, and Redfern sat down and yawned, and soon began to nod, too.

Figgins leaned up against a wall, and his head drooped.

Kerr was as wakeful as ever.

The Scottish junior moved about from one window to another, looking out into the quad every few minutes. In the hall firegrate a large fire was burning, for the night was cold, and the juniors had no reason to be economical with the coal. Kerr replenished the fire from time to time, and thoughtfully left the poker between the bars to get red-hot. It might be useful if the attack came, as Tom Merry had warned them.

One!

The stroke boomed out from the clock-tower.

Figgins half-opened his eyes, and yawned.

"Keeper goo' look-ou—" he murmured.

Kerr grinned.

"All right, Figgy!"

Another hour passed slowly.

The sentinels were all fast asleep by this time, with the exception of Kerr, whose keen, unresting eyes never closed.

The Scottish junior gave a sudden start at last.

There was a faint sound in the quadrangle. It was followed by the creak of a board. Kerr's eyes gleamed.

Someone was trying one of the boards at one of the nailed-up windows.

It was one of the broken windows, of course. The others could not be got at without smashing the glass outside, and the midnight assailants did not want to awaken the whole house with a terrific crash.

Kerr stepped towards Figgins, and shook his leader by the shoulder. Figgins started out of a dream.

"Grooh-oh!" he murmured. "Wharrer marrer? 'Tain't rising bell."

Kerr chuckled.

"No, it isn't the rising-bell, you ass, and it isn't morning! It's the enemy!"

"Oh, all serene!"

Figgins was wide awake in a moment.

"Doggo!" muttered Kerr. "If they think we're asleep they'll show just where they are, and we can get at them!"

"Right-ho!"

Figgins awakened Redfern and Owen. The four juniors, silent and keen, waited for the attack. Kerr twisted his handkerchief round the handle of the poker, and held it ready, the glowing point still between the bars.

Creak! Creak!

The attack was coming. It was at the hall window, the easiest to reach, as it was nearest the ground, and the glass was gone. There was a sound as some tool from the outside prised at the nailed boards; then a whispering voice:

"Careful, Monteith!"

"Yes, sir."

Figgins chuckled audibly, and strode towards the window and tapped on the inner side of the boards. There was a sharp exclamation from without.

"Hallo!" roared Figgins.

"Oh, they're awake, sir!"

It was Monteith's voice.

"Yes, we're awake," grinned Figgins, "and quite ready! You'd better go back to your little bunks, my sons, unless you're looking for trouble!"

Crash! Crash!

Heavy blows descended upon the nailed boards. The attacking party had given up all caution now, and they were using hammers. The boards tore away from the nails under the crashing blows, and Monteith's face was seen in the aperture.

"Now, Figgins," said the prefect, between his teeth, "we're coming in!"

"You're not, my son!"

"If you lay a finger on me you'll get hurt, and it will be

your own look-out!" said the prefect; and he put his head and hand through the window.

There was a cricket-stump in his hand, and his look showed that he meant to use it.

"Mind, if I brain any of you, you will only have yourselves to blame," he said.

"Look here, Monteith!"

"I'm coming in! 'Stand back!"

Figgins rushed forward, and the prefect made a savage slash at him with the stump. Figgins jumped back only just in time.

Monteith grinned savagely, and clambered through the window.

"Hold on!" said Kerr coolly.

He had jerked the red-hot poker from the fire, and swung it round to the window, and the glowing point of it was within an inch of the prefect's nose.

Monteith started back so violently that he knocked his head on the window-frame, and uttered a yell of anguish. He fell back into the quadrangle, and the window was clear.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear us smile!"

Kerr chuckled, and stuck the poker in the fire again. Outside, Mr. Rateliff's acid voice could be heard urging the prefects to attack; but they evidently did not like the task.

"He's got a red-hot poker, sir!" said Monteith.

"Bah! Are you a coward?"

"I don't like getting my chivvy burnt, sir," said Monteith sullenly.

"Nonsense! He would not dare to touch you with it!"

"Well, try yourself, sir."

"Don't be insolent, Monteith!"

"Well, I've had enough of it. If you think he wouldn't touch you with the poker, get in at the window, sir, and we'll follow you!"

"Get ready, Kerr!" muttered Redfern.

"What-ho!"

Mr. Rateliff's face appeared at the window, pale with rage. He put his hands in, and clambered up, his teeth set, and his eyes gleaming. Kerr swung the red-hot poker round, and Mr. Rateliff paused, half in the window. He made a savage cut at Kerr with a cane he had in his hand; but Kerr parried it with the poker, and there was a scent of scorched cane.

"Better keep out, sir," said Kerr politely. "You might get burnt, sir!"

"Kerr, stand back at once!"

"Sorry, sir! Can't be done!"

"If you dare to touch me with that poker, Kerr—"

"I won't if you don't come in, sir. If you try to get in, I shall give you just a little dab on the nose, sir—only a little one, sir!"

"Kerr, you insolent young villain, stand back!"

"Rats, sir!"

Mr. Rateliff, mad with rage, scrambled on. There was no help for it. Kerr poked forward with the poker, and the extreme tip of it touched for a second the extreme tip of Mr. Rateliff's prominent nose.

One second was enough.

Mr. Rateliff gave a terrific yell, and rolled back into the quadrangle.

"Oh—oh—oh! Yow! I'm burnt! Oh—oh—oh!"

"I told you so, sir," said Monteith, rather tactlessly.

"Ow—ow! Oh! Yar-o-oh! Ow! Oh!"

There was a sound of retreating footsteps.

"What's the row?" came the voice of Lawrence from the stairs. "Is it an attack, Figgy?"

Figgins roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! It was, but it's over!"

And it did not come again. The remainder of the night passed undisturbed for the rebels of the New House.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Peace with Honour.

MORNING dawned upon St. Jim's. Almost before the rising-bell had ceased to clang the quadrangle was crowded with juniors staring towards the redoubtable New House.

Seniors and fags belonging to that House had been accommodated in the School House for the night, not without a great deal of overcrowding and inconvenience, which did not make the general feeling towards Mr. Rateliff any the more amiable.

The feeling of the whole school was against him; and though the masters and prefects could not uphold the revolt of the New House juniors, and were bound to condemn anything in the nature of a barring-out, they knew perfectly well that Mr. Rateliff was to blame, and they let him see pretty plainly that they thought so.

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DELICIOUS FREE TUCK HAMPERS FOR READERS. SEE THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 1^o TO-DAY.

Mr. Ratcliff was in an unenviable state of mind that morning.

It was dawning upon even his obstinate mind at last that he had gone too far, and that the mailed fist was not really what was most needed in dealing with the juniors of his House. That he would ever reduce the New House to subordination again seemed impossible. He knew that Mr. Railton had wired to the Head the previous day, and he was relieved rather than otherwise at the thought of Dr. Holmes returning to take the responsibility off his hands. It was certain, of course, that the Head would return the instant he heard of the barring-out in the school.

When Mr. Ratcliff appeared in the morning he was greeted with smiles. There was a huge blister on the end of his nose, and as the nose was already a very large-sized one, the big blister was given great prominence.

It hurt considerably, and Mr. Ratcliff caressed it tenderly from time to time. It caused broad grins wherever he appeared, and even after having their ears boxed for grinning the fags would grin again.

It was about an hour after breakfast when a cab drove into the gateway, and the New House juniors recognised the station hack from Rylcombe. They saw it cross the quadrangle, and saw Dr. Holmes step out at the door of the School House.

The Head of St. Jim's had returned.

Dr. Holmes went directly to his study. His face was very grave and stern. Mr. Ratcliff followed him there at once, and there was a grim silence for a moment as the two masters looked at one another.

Mr. Ratcliff caressed his nose. Serious as the state of affairs was, the Head could hardly help smiling as he looked at it.

"Will you kindly explain what has happened during my absence, Mr. Ratcliff?" asked the Head coldly.

Mr. Ratcliff explained, with emphasis. He pointed out the rascality of the New House juniors, their wicked insubordination and insensibility to kindness, the backwardness of Mr. Railton and the School House prefects in lending him support, and his own uncommon patience, moderation, and general virtue as a Housemaster. The Head listened in silence till he had finished. Mr. Ratcliff did not finish till he was nearly out of breath.

"I have more than once pointed out to you, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head at last, "that I consider your measures too severe with the boys of your House. I cannot blame Mr. Railton for refusing to be drawn into a dispute which did not concern him, and which he entirely disapproved of. What do you propose to do now?"

"I should expel half a dozen of the ringleaders, sir, and cane the rest without mercy!" said Mr. Ratcliff through his tight, thin lips, and caressing his blistered nose again.

The doctor frowned.

"That is hardly likely to sow content and order in the House," he said, "and I think I know these boys well. I do not think they will desert one another, and surrender, to allow their leaders to be punished so severely. Once a barring-out has started, Mr. Ratcliff, it is not easy to see where it will end. It is very fortunate that the movement has not spread over the whole school, and I owe that to Mr. Railton. You appear to have suffered some personal injury—"

"I was assaulted with a red-hot poker."

"I must say, Mr. Ratcliff, that I think it was injudicious of you to come into personal conflict with juniors."

"Sir!"

"You must allow me to speak plainly. This is a most serious matter, and will do St. Jim's incalculable harm if it continues and becomes known to the public," said the

Head severely. "It must cease at once! As you have received an injury which is, to say the least, unsightly, I think you had better take a holiday—"

"What!"

"And stay away from St. Jim's for a few weeks till this has blown over."

"Oh!"

"Meanwhile, the boys will settle down again. I really think this is the best thing to be done, Mr. Ratcliff. I have thought the matter out carefully, and I hope you have no objections to make."

The Head's tone was final. Mr. Ratcliff had plenty of objections to make; but he did not make them. He felt that if he spoke at all he would say things which would make it impossible for him to retain his position under the Head of St. Jim's. And he choked back his feelings and said not a word.

Kildare walked across the quadrangle and stopped under the window of the New House, where a dozen faces were crammed together to watch him. Kildare's face was very stern, but there was a glimmer in his eyes.

"Any news, old man?" asked Figgins.

"Yes; the Head's come back."

"I know that."

"I've a message for you."

Figgins' lips set.

"It's no good asking us to surrender," he said. "We're not going to surrender without a free pardon for everybody. Oh, I know it's rotten bad form backing up against the Head; but we're not going to be flogged, and some of us sacked, and then be put under Ratty again, rattier than ever. It's not good enough!"

"Not by long chalks!" said Redfern.

Kildare smiled slightly.

"Mr. Ratcliff has left St. Jim's," he said.

"What!"

It was a general exclamation of surprise.

"He has suffered in his health from these rows, and he's going away for a rest," said Kildare. "He won't be back the rest of this term, I hear."

"By George!"

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, ripping!"

The satisfaction of the New House juniors was not complimentary to their Housemaster, but it was evidently very genuine.

"You young rascals!" said Kildare, laughing. "Well, he's gone now, and it's all over. You kids had better go into your Form-rooms now, as if nothing had happened, and the Head won't inquire into the barring-out."

"Is that understood?"

"Yes. Of course, the Head couldn't approve of anything like this."

"Of course not!" said Figgins. "We know that—we're not asses! At the same time, he knows jolly well that it was Ratty's fault; but he can't say so officially. We savvy!"

"Never mind that," said Kildare. "I've just come over here to advise you to go into your places in the Form-rooms, and hold your tongues; and if you're wise, you'll do it."

"You bet!" said Redfern.

Kildare walked away.

There was no hesitation among the rebels. The boldest of them had his doubts about continuing the struggle now that the Head had returned, and all they wanted was an honourable peace—and they had it now.

In ten minutes the barring-out was a thing of the past, and Figgins & Co. were in their places in the Form-rooms.

THE END.

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By **S. CLARKE HOOK.**



"I'll have you know, you impertinent fellow, that I am Algernon Sinclair Strange," said the swell, gazing at Pete in a manner that ought to have quelled him.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

On Board the Steamer—The Steam Man Causes Some
Trouble—Rough on Algy.

THE three comrades stood on the Equator—that is to say, they stood on that portion of the ground which the Equator demarcates; and, to be still more exact, they were on the bank of a river which flows to the Gold Coast, except in the rainy season, when it flows all over the low-lying country.

Pete's dog—Rory—was hunting for rats along the river-bank, but he was much more likely to catch a crocodile.

Beside Jack, Sam, and Pete stood an extraordinary-looking object. He looked something like a knight in armour, and smelt like a motor-car. This was Pete's steam man, and he was a perfect terror. Even Pete, who was supposed to like him, was not at all satisfied with his behaviour, which had been atrocious.

"You ain't been behaving yourself at all well, old hoss!" observed Pete, gravely shaking his head at him. "I ain't at all pleased wid you. Seems to me dat when you want to knock anyone about you might just as well start on Jack and Sammy, instead ob your lawful master. Woooohoo! Don't you dare to hiss at me like dat! What do you tink I had better do to correct his behaviour, Jack?"

"Chuck it into the river, and let the crocodiles try their teeth on it!" laughed Jack. "The brutal thing is neither use nor ornament, and the trouble it has given us travelling through the forest is abominable! The trouble he will give us when we reach inhabited parts is too frightful to contemplate!"

"All de same, it seems to be a pity to waste a good steam man like dat. It would hurt de inventor's feelings if he eber got to know ob it. Besides, I gabe two hundred pounds for him as he stands; den, consider all de money he has cost us besides dat. Nummo! We can't frow him away. I might be tempted to sell him, if I could get a good offer; but de worst part ob it is, directly I make him start working, so as to please a would-be purchaser, he commences to show off, and act de gidly goat in such a manner dat de would-be purchaser don't seem to get any natural lub and affection for him.

"You see, if I start him boxing, f'rinstance, and he hits de man who wants to purchase him on de nose, it takes away all de man's yearnings for him. I tink we will take him for a sea voyage up de river. De inventor ob de man said dat a steamer runs up and down at intervals. Do you tink we had better wait here for one ob de intervals, boys?"

"I reckon it is about the only thing to do," answered Sam. "I don't want another twenty miles with that steam-man like the last twenty we have done."

"Bery well, Sammy, just you light a fire, and cook something to eat, and when dat steamer comes along we will go aboard."

The comrades had just finished their meal when the steamer was sighted, and the skipper, when hailed, at once brought his vessel up, while a boat was lowered, and the comrades were taken aboard, Pete nearly swamping the boat by lifting the steam man into it.

There was a delay of nearly half an hour before the steam man was hauled aboard, but the skipper, a good-looking young fellow named Alan Fern, did not appear to be in the slightest hurry. He leant his arms on the rail of the bridge and laughed at the proceedings, while his mate, who was very stout and abominably bad-tempered, fumed about and roared out all sorts of orders. He did not use bad language, because there were two lady passengers on deck.

"Look alive, there!" sang out the captain, winking at Jack, as his first officer received a blow in the chest from the steam man as he swung aboard. "Are you ready, Mr. Gunter?"

"No, I ain't!" roared the angry mate. "I don't know what's the sense of allowing this nigger aboard, let alone this 'ere knight in armour."

"Dat ain't a knight, my dear old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Dat's a particular friend ob mine, and I want—"

"Here jest you talk to your superiors with proper respect!" growled Gunter. "I don't want you calling me your dear old hoss; and, what's more, I won't have it!"

"Well, p'raps you are right 'bout dat matter, old hoss, 'cos you don't much resemble one ob dose animals. Yah, yah, yah! A horse wouldn't be much use if he got as fat as you, would he? I tink you more resemble a prize pig."

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"Why, you impertinent vagabond of a nigger!" roared Gunter. "If you talk to me again like that I'll knock you down!"

"Den I tell you what it is, old hoss, I won't talk to you again like dat, if you don't like it, 'cos I wouldn't like you to start knocking me down. Oh, golly, golly! Why did we come aboard dis vessel?"

Pete's gaze was fixed on one of the ladies, who was not only young, but also remarkably pretty. She appeared to be much amused by the steam man, and came forward to inspect him, while the elderly lady gazed at the comrades through her lorgnon; and, judging by the expression of her haughty features, she did not approve of them.

"Marie, my dear!" exclaimed the elder lady, in tones that meant to say, "How dare you!"

"What a strange man!" exclaimed Marie, without taking heed of the admonition. "Does he belong to you, Pete?"

"Myes, my dear," growled Pete; "dough I must say dat I dunno how you learnt dat was my name."

"Oh, I know all your names!" exclaimed Marie, smiling and tossing her pretty head. "You are Jack, and you are Sam, and that dog is Rory."

"Mind he don't bite you!" growled Pete, who did not like the glance Marie cast at Jack.

"He is very handsome!" exclaimed Marie.

"Well, you needn't tell him so, my dear. Jack is quite conceited enough already, and—"

"You know perfectly well that I was referring to the dog!" exclaimed Marie.

"Well, you were looking at Jack, my dear, and I naturally thought you were referring to de puppy."

"What is this, Marie?" exclaimed an awful swell, striding up. He was a fair young man, with an aquiline nose, blue eyes, and a good-looking face. "Has that nigger fellow been rude to you?"

"Oh, no, Algonron!" answered Marie, glancing at Jack again. "I was referring to a dog, and he said that he thought I was referring to a puppy. I am quite sure he did not think anything of the sort, because no puppy is here. It is not surprising that I know your names are Jack, Sam, and Pete, because I have heard you address each other by those names. I think I also heard you called a silly owl, Pete."

"Dat was Sammy, my dear!" growled Pete.

"Fellow," cried the young swell, striding up to Pete with clenched fists, "this young lady's name is Miss Grace, and—"

"Well, dat ain't at all a bad name for de child, 'cos I must say she's just as graceful as she's pretty; but I wish you would take her to her moder ober dere, and tell dat lady to take her below. I don't want her here. I would rader she was miles and miles away. If she only had green eyes, or yellow eyes, I wouldn't be so afraid 'bout—"

"You silly owl!" cried Jack, clapping his hand over Pete's mouth. "If you dare to utter another word, I vow I will dive overboard, and chance the crocodiles."

"I don't understand a word of what that idiot of a nigger is saying!" declared the swell, sticking an eyeglass in his eye, and gazing at Pete in a manner that ought to have quelled him. "I'll have you know, you impertinent fellow, that I am Mr. Algonron Sinclair Strange, and that—"

"All right, old hoss," interposed Pete, gazing first at Marie, and then at Jack, then back again. "I can't call you all dat ebery time I want to tell you to do anything, so I will call you by your initials—let me see! Algonron—dat's A; Sinclair—dat's S; Strange—dat's nodder S. Yah, yah, yah!"

A. S. S. Dat spells Ass. Well, dat's a short name, and I'm rader inclined to tink dat it is appropriate."

Now, Algonron Sinclair Strange was not the sort of man to allow a nigger to address him by his initials, especially in Marie's presence. He was a boxer, was Algonron—a light-weight one, perhaps, but still a boxer, and the blow he struck with his left was scientific.

"Oh, Algonron, how could you strike the poor negro!" exclaimed Marie, who was tender-hearted, and really thought that Pete was seriously hurt. It looked just as though Pete was hit in the face, whereas he had only been hit on the top of the head, and no man's fist could hurt him there. He had ducked his head, and brought it up so quickly, that the blow, which was a hard one, appeared to have landed in his face; in fact, he held his hand to his nose, and, pulling out Jack's handkerchief, pretended to wipe his eyes with it.

"Don't take the slightest notice of him, Miss Grace!" exclaimed Jack, raising his hat. "He is quite incorrigible, and never happy except when playing tricks; as he is always happy, the corollary is obvious."

"But he must be hurt!" exclaimed Marie. "Such a terrible blow in the face! What is the matter, Algonron?"

The unfortunate Algy had got his left hand under his right arm, and he knew that there was a good deal the matter. He had hurt his knuckles badly, but was not going to tell.

"Allow me to conduct you to my mother, Marie," he said, flashing lightning glances through his monocle at Pete, who commenced to howl at the top of his voice, which had a fine compass.

The skipper held to the rail of the bridge and shouted with laughter.

"I dunno what I hab done to be knocked about like dis!" hoated Pete. "I wish you would stop your laughter, Jack, and try to comfort me a little. Dat's right, Marie, my dear, you take Algy to his moder. He's too mighty dangerous to be let out ob her arms. I'm afraid she spared de slipper in his younger days. Why, here he comes again! He's worse dan raging tigers!"

Then Pete, pretending to be in great dread, bolted round the deck, much to the delight of the skipper and crew. Algy was in such a state of fury that he cared for no laughter now. He made himself look utterly ridiculous, but his temper had got the better of him, and he could not possibly control it.

"I am afraid he will injure your friend," murmured Marie, who was really frightened.

"There is not the slightest chance of that!" laughed Jack. "No more fear than that Pete will injure him."

"But Mr. Strange is so violent when he loses his temper."

"It doesn't matter. Pete may make him look ridiculous, but he would never strike one so much weaker than himself."

"Mr. Strange is very strong—he has often told me so."

"Well, Pete is ten times stronger," said Jack. "You will see what will happen directly."

No one on board knew what was going to happen except, perhaps, Pete. He rushed up to the fat mate.

"Protect me, old hoss!" he exclaimed. "Algy is going to hit me!"

"Bust you, so am I!" roared Gunter, dealing a blow at Pete's face at the very moment that the infuriated Algy delivered one at the back of his head.

Now, those blows were heavy ones, and, seeing that they were delivered simultaneously, there is little doubt that they would have hurt Pete had he not ducked. The result of this was that Algy received the mate's blow on his nose, while the mate received Algy's fist in his left eye. Pete slipped behind the mate and winked at the convulsed captain.

Now, there was little to choose between the tempers of Algy and Gunter, and both their tempers were roused by the

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respective blows they had received. Algy, being a boxer, might have got the better of it had the mate tried a little sparring, but he was not going to do anything so silly as that, because he knew more about the use of a fender than a boxing glove. He merely rushed in, and, dropping his weight on his assailant, dropped him to the deck, Gunter falling on him.

Algy knocked the back of his head upon the deck, while the mate's weight, which was something like eighteen stone, knocked all the breath out of his body.

"I'll teach you to hit me in the eye, you puppy!" howled the infuriated mate.

"It was all that beastly nigger's fault!" panted Algy. "Get up! We will give him what he deserves!"

"Why, so we will!" cried Gunter, coming to the conclusion that Algy was not really to blame for the little accident. "Come on!"

There was not the slightest difficulty in doing that. They both went in with a rush, and the next moment found Pete's arms encircling their necks, while the two blows they delivered struck the air.

"Now, look here, my dear old hosses!" cried Pete, holding them in chancery. "It's a mighty wrong ting for you two to fight. You know what Dr. Whatisname says:

"It's only de dogs dat delight in deir fighting,

And yowling and tearing and scratching and biting,
Because ob deir natures which people call furious,
But fat and lean men when dey fight must look curious;
So leabe all de scratching and tearing and fighting
To de animals who wid such tings take delight in.
Den you'll go froun your lives wid more peace and
more bliss.

Dear Gunter and Algernon, make friends wid a kiss."

"I dunno weder dose are de exact words ob de poet, but I rader tink I hab slightly improved dem. Dis way to London for de kiss, if you please."

Pete caught the two men by the backs of their necks, then forced their lips together, while by means of his ventriloquism, he made a sounding kiss appear to come from either of them, while he also caused roars of laughter to come from the spectators.

"Now, run away, my poor men!" exclaimed Pete, releasing them. "I ain't got time to attend to you any more, but if you feel like quarrelling again, just you come to me, and I will worry out a little more poetry to suit de occasion."

There was something about Pete's action that convinced the two men he was not to be trifled with. He had got far too much strength for that, and Gunter was rather glad that the skipper came to the rescue.

"When you have quite done fooling about, Mr. Gunter," cried the captain, "perhaps you will be so good as to pay attention to your duties. I engaged you as first officer aboard this vessel, and your duties do not comprise kissing the passengers."

Gunter muttered something not at all complimentary to his captain, but as that worthy did not hear it, it did not matter. Jack went on the bridge and booked first-class passages.

"It is perfectly satisfactory, Captain Fern!" exclaimed Jack, when told the cost. "I will pay you now, but at the same time I must tell you that your terms will not nearly cover the cost. You have not yet seen Pete eat. You can consider his requirements are about equal to five ordinary passengers; however, that does not matter, because we will settle the extra cost at the end of the voyage."

"I expect there will be a few rows with that snob Strange," observed the captain. "He is such a detestable fellow."

"Miss Grace does not appear to think so."
"Well, I don't believe she cares for the puppy, but the fellow's mother wants to catch her, because she has some private property. I should not be a bit surprised to see the old lady's plans upset, though."

"She is very beautiful."
"What, the old lady?"

"Scissors! No; I mean Marie."
"Yes, and she is remarkably sensible. Far too sensible to marry that puppy. I should say. But what is that man of metal Pete has brought aboard?"

"That is Pete's steam man. We bought him from an inventor, and I must say he is a wonderful contrivance."

"I would like to see him work."
"Oh, I expect you will soon have the pleasure of that!" said Jack. "Why, I do declare Pete's setting him going now! Well, captain, I will bid you good-bye for the present. I think I had better go and see that Pete doesn't let his steam man do too much damage to the ship."

Jack went down to the deck, and as he arrived there, he heard Pete talking to Marie.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

When the Steam Man Talked—Algy's Disappointment—The Captain's Triumph.

"HES working now, my dear," said Pete, as he tinkered about with the steam man. "You must remember, dough, he ain't at all safe when you start him at hard work, 'cos you neber know what he will say."

"But he can't talk, Pete," said Marie.

"Golly! Dat's because you hab neber heard him. Hallo, Jack, you're just in time to shift his talking-lever!"

Jack stepped towards the steam man, and pretended to shift a lever. He knew perfectly well that Pete was going to make the steam man talk by means of ventriloquism, and he was very interested to hear what he would say.

"Good-afternoon!" came a deep voice from the steam man, who kept repeating that remark.

"It is really very clever. Don't you think so, 'Algernon?" inquired Marie.

"It is done by a gramophone inside the model," explained Algy, who knew most things, or thought that he did. "It can say a lot of phrases that have been spoken into the instrument. It will say something else presently."

"Certainly I shall!"

Algy started. He had not expected such an appropriate sentence.

"Why, it answered you!" exclaimed Marie.

"Merely chance. You hear it is repeating that sentence. Now it will say something else."

"Algernon Sinclair Strange, your initials are appropriate."
"This is a deliberate insult!" snarled Algy. "That nigger has got his friends to talk that rot into the——"

"Now, look here, Algy," cried Pete, in his natural voice, "I ain't done arytin' ob de sort! I won't be responsible for what de steam man says or does. It ain't fair to blame me for what he says, and——"

"Shut up, you silly nigger!" came the voice from the steam man. It did not sound the slightest bit like Pete's voice, because he always took care, when making use of his wonderful ventriloquial powers, to use the words he could pronounce properly, or, failing this, he spoke so quickly that the errors were not noticeable.

"Dat's de way I get insulted and blamed for oder people's faults!" growled Pete.

"I really don't see, Algernon, how Pete could have made the model speak like that," said Marie. "I don't understand——"

"Child! You did not understand you were a pretty little craft our captain would like to take in tow!" came a deep voice from the steam man—at least, that is where the astonished listeners believed it came from.

"I knew, but you did not——"

"Golly! I ain't allowing dis!"

"Shut up, you miserable nigger, or I will crush you!"

"Golly! Ain't dis mighty awful!"

"I knew your beauty and your goodness must win his heart. I knew it had done so. I knew he would ask you to be his wife. I knew he has done so. I know your heart is his——"

"Golly! Den I ain't got cause to worry 'bout Jack," interposed Pete, in his natural voice. "I made sure dat man was going to fall in lub wid de girl. Hi, take your hoof off my trilby, Jack! How dare you behave like dis."

"Look here, Miss Marie," exclaimed Jack, "Pete is really not responsible for what he says! He is too fond of practical jokes!"

"But we are both sufferers!" laughed Marie.

"Unfortunately, he makes me bear the brunt of it!" grumbled Jack.

"You be quiet, Jack!" exclaimed Pete. "De steam man is pretending to know a lot more dan he does, and——"

"I know your captain has towed his pretty little craft's heart into port," came that deep voice. "I know his heart is hers, and hers is his, and I wish all happiness to each."

"Now, look here, Marie, my dear," exclaimed Pete, in his natural voice, "you ought to hab told me 'bout dis, you ought really, and den I might hab kept dat steam man's talking lever at 'done wid engines.' Seems to me dat de man can't respect a secret. Oh, don't wave your silly arms at me like dat, you hissing idiot! I'm annoyed wid you—I am, really! Telling dat de girl is engaged to de captain, and dat she has consented to be his wife. You ain't got de slightest consideration for Algy's feelings. Den, again, dere's Ja—— Woohoo! He's knocked my shin wid his heel dis time. I wish you would be more careful wid what you are doing, Jack. You'm de clumsiest man I eber met!"

"Sense me, my dear! Allow me to congratulate you. I'm mighty certain dat de captain has chosen his pretty little craft wisely, and I don't tink you hab made a mistake in consenting to be taken in tow. You see, I can generally tell

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a man by de look ob him. Used to train wild beasts once, and men are much de same."

"Marie," cried Mrs. Strange, "what is the meaning of this? Can I believe my ears—that you, a lady by birth and education, have promised to be the wife of a low steamboat captain, that you have discarded my son for a creature like this captain?"

"Now don't you get excited, my dear!" exclaimed Pete. "You ain't got de right to scold Marie 'cos she happens to hab better taste dan you hab. You see, Algy is a sort ob acquired taste, and you hab been able to acquire him after years and years ob trying; now, it ain't at all likely dat Marie could acquire a taste for him during de time she has known him."

"You vulgar monster, you ought to be flung into the river, and devoured by the crocodiles!"

"But, you see, my dear, it ain't my fault. I didn't tell Marie to fall in lub wid de captain, and I didn't tell him to go and fall in lub wid her. It is a ting dat seems to hab come natural to dem bof. I dunno, Marie, my dear, weder you hab had much practice wid lub-making?"

"Indeed, I have not, Pete!"

"Well, you seem to hab managed it bery well for a first attempt, and if dere's anyting 'bout de matter dat you don't quite understand, just you ask Jack, 'cos dat man has had a tremendous amount ob experience in de matter."

"Don't you believe a word that he is saying, Miss Marie!" cried Jack. "I have had no experience at all."

"It is a thing that I think you will soon learn," murmured Marie.

"Do you mean to tell me, Marie, that you have accepted this captain's offer of marriage?"

"I did not tell you so. It was Pete's steam man, and I must say I think it very clever of him to make it talk so sensibly."

"Have you promised to be this man's wife? Answer me—yes or no?" roared Algy's mother.

"Yes."

"Then I am simply ashamed of you, and you will never get my sanction to such a shameful marriage."

"I consider that I have been treated in the most scandalous manner!" declared Algy.

"Dat's right, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Just you let yourself go a bit, 'cos it will do you no end ob good! I really don't see how you could expect Marie to care for a man like you."

"If I have any more of your impertinence, fellow, I will knock you down!"

"Look at dat, now! I shall take mighty good care not to offend him, if he's going to do anything like dat. Don't you tink, Algy, dat you would like to start fighting de steam man, 'cos he's about your weight? You would be surprised to discover how well dat man fights."

"You insolent, black beast, if you dare to utter another word to me you shall feel the weight of my fist."

"Well, if it would be any sort ob satisfaction to you, ob course you can start doing all dat, only if I was in your place I would take on a lighter weight, 'cos dere's no telling how much you might get hurt if you commenced to fight wid me. Nunno, if you are feeling sort ob vexed and disappointed, de best ting for you to do is to go and kiss de mate again; or you might let me carry you below, and den you can kiss de ship's cook. I feel sure it would be sort ob soothing to your feelings."

"Algernon," cried Mrs. Strange, "order the captain into my presence at once!"

"Don't you boder about de captain, my dear," said Pete. "Dat man has got de vessel to attend to, and it would be a great pity to take him off his duties. Here comes Bill, de steward, and he will be able to tell us all about de captain. Where is he, Bill?"

Bill wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and sighed.

"He's been took very bad," declared Bill. "He's been boxing the compass, and has got the worst of it. I've jest took his tea in to him, and he says he don't want any, and that he's going to take the dog-watch, and we are to bring him a bucket of water, and let some of the ship's biscuits loose, so as they can walk up to him. I suppose you ain't got a bit of ribbin, miss, so as we could lead them bisenits? You see, if we let 'em loose, they may get a bit frisky and jump overboard, and I wouldn't like any of the crocodiles to get poisoned by 'em."

"Don't you dare to talk that rubbish in my presence, fellow!" cried Mrs. Strange, in a voice that gave Bill a start. "Tell the captain to come here immediately!"

"I'm afraid that can't be done, ma'am!" growled Bill. "The medical man says as he ain't to be disturbed on any account. He says as there's summat the matter with his heart. He's over-exerted it towing a little craft into port, and that some of the strings have got a bit too taut."

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FOR NEXT FRIDAY: WANTED FOR WEALTH! THE SHAM SCHOOLMASTER! THE SPECTRE OF THE FOREST!

A Grand Tale of Sexton Blake.

By Martin Clifford.

By S. Clarke Hook.

"I shall leave this vessel at once!" declared Mrs. Strange. "Certainly, ma'am!" exclaimed Bill. "We will put you ashore wherever you like. There's a landing-stage about forty miles along the river, and there's another one ten miles higher up that we have just passed. Or perhaps you would like to be dumped in between the two? This 'ere part is mighty pleasant in the forest. You can hear the lions roaring now, but that's nothing like they roar at nights. It was jest this spot where we landed two ladies and a gentleman last voyage coming up, and if you will believe me, when we was coming down again, there was the tall, thin lady standing there waiting to be took aboard."

"Where was de oder lady and gentleman, Bill?"

"Ah, they was stout! The one as come back was thin and that scraggy that she worn't no good. The savages don't care for stews or soups; then, again, she was too thin for the lions to tackle. As I was taking her aboard two or three lions come sniffing around; but they knew there worn't no proper meat on her, so they jest turned up their noses, and walked away in disgust. That there young gent wouldn't be much good to them; but, bless you, ma'am, the savages wouldn't let you escape 'em! But here comes the old man. He will be able to confirm that 'ere story."

Bill thought it time to bolt. He had an idea that the captain did not want to interview Mrs. Strange, but thought he would not appreciate the fairy tales he had been telling, and so he hurried away.

"Captain Fern!" exclaimed Mrs. Strange, eyeing him through her lorgnon, while Algy eyed him through his eyeglass, and both those glances were truly terrific.

The young captain, however, did not take any heed of them. He was looking into Marie's beautiful eyes.

"Yes, madam?" he answered carelessly.

"I wish to know if you have actually had the effrontery to offer this young lady marriage?"

"I have!"

"Indeed! And you stand there and actually confess your abominable behaviour—and to me?"

"There is only the truth to be told."

"It is surprising to me that a man who so forgets all honourable conduct, as you have done, should have any regard for the truth. I am Miss Grace's guardian, and your duty was to have spoken to me. I should have told you then, as I tell you now, that I consider your conduct grossly presumptuous. I would never give my consent to such a marriage!"

"Really, Mrs. Strange," exclaimed Marie, "your consent is not necessary! I have no legal guardian."

"I am speaking, Marie."

"So I noticed; but I must really request you to speak facts."

"Morally, I am your guardian. You have come on this vessel under my care, and if a designing man—"

"Alan never knew that I had any money until I told him."

"Listen to me, Captain Fern!" cried Mrs. Strange. "I insist on being put ashore, and Miss Grace will accompany me!"

"In that case, what you ask is quite impossible. I have no power to keep you aboard this vessel against your will; but I have the power to keep Marie aboard, because she could not possibly land without my permission, and I certainly would never give it, any more than I would give her permission to jump into the river. Well, as I have not the slightest intention of allowing Marie to needlessly risk her life, it stands to reason that you will have to give up your intention of landing. You are acting as chaperon to this young lady, and therefore it is necessary for you to remain aboard."

"I never heard such gross impertinence!" cried Algy. "You mean to say you dare to keep me a prisoner aboard this vessel against my will?"

"Not at all! You can go ashore when you please; but your mother will not do so."

"Suppose Miss Grace wishes to go ashore?"

"I have already said I would not allow it."

"I hope you see what you have to expect from such a man, Marie?" cried Mrs. Strange, who knew that Marie liked her own way. "He is already dictating to you what you shall do and what you shall not do."

"But surely you would not expect him to allow me to risk my life?" exclaimed Marie, glancing at Alan with a very happy light in her eyes.

"I should not expect you to allow him to give you orders."

"But there is no help for it!" exclaimed Marie, looking demurely at the tyrant. "I must obey Alan, because he says distinctly that I shall not go ashore. I believe passengers are bound to obey the captain. In this case there is no alternative. I cannot swim, and even if I could there are the crocodiles."

"I should protect you from all dangers, Marie," said Algy.

"It is very kind of you, Algernon," answered Marie, looking serious; "but, you see, the captain says he won't let me run into danger. I must obey him. I think you have the power to put me in irons, have you not?"

"Certainly!" exclaimed Alan, looking quite serious. "I might put you in irons, and feed you on bread and water."

"I think I would rather have that than ship's biscuits!" murmured Marie, raising her brows, as she fixed her laughing eyes on the captain. "Bill talks of the biscuits coming upstairs and running about the deck."

"Bill is not the most truthful man I have ever met," laughed Alan. "And, all the same, I am under the deepest obligation to him, so I will overlook his faults."

"It is your duty to obey me, Marie!" said Mrs. Strange very sternly.

"But I don't want to be eaten by savages or lions, the same as those other passengers were; besides, I can't go ashore if the captain won't let me, and puts me in irons."

"Don't be so silly, child! You know he would not dare to do anything of the sort!"

"Well, I am bound to obey the captain. He might feed me on what Bill calls the frisky biscuits; besides, I wouldn't like him to chain me up like a wild beast."

"Yah, yah, yah! I wonder what sort of wild beast de girl would resemble? A baby tiger, I tink. Dey are mighty pretty!"

"Well, I must say, seeing dat de skipper has taken de pretty little craft in tow, dat he's bound to see dat she comes to no harm. When he puts you in irons, my dear, I will see dat you get a little chicken to go wid de frisky biscuits."

"Let this fooling cease!" cried Algy. "Captain Fern, I tell you to your face that you are an insolent cad! You are a presumptuous scoundrel! Fellow, you are nothing better than a thief! What have you to say to that?"

"If I am a thief, I have stolen the greatest treasure on this earth," said Alan, without the slightest show of anger. "How I value that treasure it would be impossible to express by words. I trust to be able to do so by deeds, but I hope that I would give my life to shield that treasure from harm."

Marie's dainty hand was clasped in the young captain's now.

"I say that you are an infamous ruffian!" hooted Algy, letting himself go. Now, you puddle-blooded cad and bully, what have you to say to me?"

"Nothing. But I fear that if I were to do my duty, those irons that Marie speaks about would be your share."

"I challenge you to mortal combat! Name your weapons!"

"Not I!" laughed Alan. "I would not harm a hair of your head. Indeed, I am very sorry for you, although I do not think that you are worthy of Miss Grace. Neither am I, for that matter, so I ought to say nothing on that subject. However, she has chosen."

"Do you want me to strike you to rouse your puddle blood?"

"It would not go well with you were you to attempt such a thing," observed Alan. "At the same time, I trust, for your own sake, that you will not be guilty of such foolish action."

Whether Algy, in his furious passion, would have been so misguided as to execute his threat of striking the captain must always remain in doubt, for he had scarcely uttered the words when he received two tremendous bangs on either side of the head; then he got a kick that sent him sprawling to the deck; then he got a few more kicks, while Pete's steam man dropped on him and pinned him to the deck.

This was bad enough, but worse was to follow, for while the steam man banged at the deck with his fists, he kept punching Algy with his knees in the endeavour to walk.

Algy was helpless. He could not shift that weight, and could only lie there and howl for help.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, rushing forward and turning the levers. "He won't hurt you. It's only his play. He will stop kicking directly I get hold ob de right buttons, only my steam man is rader impulsive, and he's got so many buttons dat—yah, yah, yah!—I tink dat's all right. Wait till I lift him off. Hot? M'yes, he does get warm in dis climate. Yah, yah! Dis road to London, old hoss! You'm a lot too impulsive, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you hab hurt Algy."

"Now den, stand on your feet like a sensible man, and try to behave yourself like a gentleman. You may be de first ob your race, but you don't want to race frough life at dat speed, specially when Algy happens to be in your way. Yah, yah, yah! He's broken de chain ob your eyeglass, Algy. Let's hab a look at you, old hoss!"

Pete picked up the eyeglass, stuck it in the right eye, and screwed up the left corner of his mouth in a manner that showed his beautiful teeth, and made Marie nearly hysterical with suppressed laughter. She felt sorry for Algy. She felt he deserved some pity, seeing that she had blighted

his hopes; but he looked so utterly ridiculous as he sat on the deck, wondering how it had all happened, and Pete looked so comical as he gazed at the fallen man, that Marie could scarcely be expected to be serious.

Algy rose slowly; then he gazed at the new stationary steam man with a most vindictive expression.

"Glad you are not hurt!" came a deep voice from the steam man.

Algy only muttered, and then went below, followed by his mother.

"Bill!" shouted the captain.

Bill was so busily engaged polishing a piece of brass—a most unlikely thing for him to be engaged on unless under orders—that the captain had to shout twice before he answered.

"Ay, ay, sir!" exclaimed Bill, approaching.

"Did you start the steam man?"

"What steam man, sir?"

"There is only one aboard. Did you start him?"

"What, me, sir?"

"Yes, you!"

"Beg pardon, sir! You'd best keep under that 'ere awning. You've got your 'ead in the sun. A mate of mine went raving mad through getting in the sun. There's nothing like sun and whisky to make a man think strange things; but I must say it would take an awful lot of 'em to make him think sich a strange thing as I should be guilty of starting a steam man."

"Who told you to clean that brass?"

"The mate, sir. He gave me strict orders as I was to do it."

"Did he tell you to do it with the corner of your coat?"

"Well, sir, I mentioned as I hadn't a rag, so he says take the fust thing as comes to hand."

"Tell Mr. Gunter I wish to speak to him; and you come back with him."

"He's asleep now, sir. He always takes a nap in the afternoon when he ain't on dooty."

"Wake him up, and say I wish to speak to him. Ah, here he comes! Mr. Gunter!"

The mate waddled up, and he looked cross. Perhaps he had not been able to take his customary nap.

"Did you tell Bill to clean that brass?"

"No. I never spoke to him about it."

"Beg pardon, sir, you are mistook!"

"What?" roared Gunter. "Do you mean to stand there and say that I told you to clean that brass?"

"Begging pardon, sir, I distinctly heard you mention the word 'brass.' I told you I was busy, jest afore you went for your afternoon off-duty snooze, and then you turned round and said you didn't care. I was to obey your orders, and clean it as bright as a brass fardin."

"I certainly said I didn't care a brass farthing whether you were busy or not, but that you were to obey my orders."

"Well, look at that now!" exclaimed Bill, looking extremely virtuous. "I made sure you said 'Go and clean that brass, and make it as bright as a brass fardin.'"

Go away, Bill!" growled the captain. "After that, it is quite useless asking any more questions."

"Am I to finish cleaning the brass as Mr. Gunter ordered, sir?" inquired Bill.

"Be off with you! You know as well as I do that you were never given any such order, and I firmly believe that you started the steam man."

Bill gave a slight tug at the corner of the awning, then glanced anxiously at his captain. After that he winked at Pete with his off eye, and went forward.

"You won't punish him, Alan?" murmured Marie.

"I can't!" laughed Alan. "The rascal knows that he has got to windward of me. You see, he made the tow-line of that beautiful little craft fast."

"I congratulate you, Alan!" exclaimed Jack, grasping his hand. "I had my doubts whether you would like Pete and his steam man, but have no doubts now."

"No! The steam man has been very kind to me. But for his smash-up, and Bill's message, I would never have dared to complete his metaphor. We sha'n't need the irons after all, shall we, Marie?"

"No. I think a captain ought to be obeyed," laughed Marie. "Now I am going below to take my scolding. Oh, don't look worried, Alan! I sha'n't mind a bit now. I have changed my chaperon for a cicerone."

Then Marie flashed her brilliant eyes from the comrades to the captain, but they did not see the light of love that met his gaze.

"Try a cigar, Alan!" exclaimed Jack.

"Ever been in love, Jack?" inquired the captain, taking one.

"Never!"

"Golly! I tink we had better send for Bill!" cried Pete. "He might be able to gib you a few lessons in veracity."

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 207.

DELICIOUS FREE TUCK HAMPERS FOR READERS. SEE THE "BOYS' FRIEND" 1D. TO-DAY.

If you knew de way I hab to watch dat man when we get near inhabited places, Alan, you would scarcely believe de amount ob anxiety I hab on my shoulders. It is a daily nightmare to me dat he will go and get married to some girl, and, as he has got a mighty big fortune, why, dere are plenty ob girls who would put up wid his personal appearance."

"I pity poor Marie!" exclaimed Alan. "She will not have a very pleasant voyage with that old lady. All the same, it is very certain dat I am not going to let anyone land."

"Nunno!" exclaimed Pete. "And if Algy gibs you any more trouble, just you refer him to me, and I will set de steam man on to him. Yah, yah, yah! Dat steam man tackled him in a mighty funny manner. Couldn't tink what was happening, and I believe he was in much de same position."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Letter—The Surprise it Caused—The Woes of Algy.

DURING the rest of the voyage the one aim of Algernon and his mother was to keep Marie away from the captain. They did not succeed quite so well, because the one aim of the captain was to spend all the time he could in Marie's company, and perhaps there was a little collusion on that young lady's part.

On the afternoon of a very beautiful day the vessel reached her destination, and the passengers went to the best hotel, while Pete gave Alan an invitation to follow, and the captain decided to cancel his next voyage, because of certain arrangements he had made with Marie.

Pete left his steam man aboard, and Bill touched every button in the hope of making him move, but he did not succeed.

It was only at meal-times that the comrades saw anything of Marie, nor did the captain turn up.

Jack and Sam became rather restless; but, strange to say, Pete did not trouble himself, and each day, when the comrades went out for a walk in the afternoon, Pete sprawled on the sofa, and appeared to doze; but Jack and Sam had scarcely left the hotel when Pete would spring up, and go out, to return just before dinner.

Jack and Sam paid several visits to the vessel, but they failed to find the captain. There was one thing quite certain, and that was that he did not see Marie, for Mrs. Strange never let that young lady out of her sight.

"Boys," exclaimed Pete, one morning, "I am going to gib you de greatest surprise you hab had for some years to come!"

"I think you mean some years past, Pete," laughed Jack.

"Are you going to commence to snore in the daytime?" inquired Sam. "That would surprise almost any hearer."

"I am going to gib de whole inhabitants ob dis town a surprise. Nuff said!"

"I do not understand you," observed Mrs. Strange, who was of an inquisitive turn of mind, and happened to be in the room with her son.

"Well, you see my dear," observed Pete, putting the wrong end of his cigar into his mouth, and spluttering, "Jack and Sammy are in exactly de same boat. Dey don't understand what is going to happen; but perhaps dat is because dey don't know, and you neber can understand a ting in dis life if you don't understand de meaning ob it. Well, here comes de lunch, and dat is a ting we can all understand, specially if it happens to be a good one. M'yes! Dis one seems to be all right. You ain't got de right, waiter, to grin wid your starboard eye and your port lip in dat fashion. What's de matter wid you? Got a letter? Well, what could be nicer dan dat?"

"It's not for you, sir," murmured the waiter, as Pete coolly took possession of the letter that he knew was coming.

"Nunno! I see dat. Mrs. Strange. Strange ting if dat belonged to me. Dere you are, my dear! Funny ting dat handsome men will write to beautiful ladies, and beautiful ladies won't write to handsome niggers. I dunno what de world is— Hellup! Murder!"

"Woohoo!" shrieked Mrs. Strange, as she tore the letter open and realised its contents.

"We'm getting shrieks on de top ob de groans and creaks. Now, I wonder what is happening?"

"This is scandalous! Oh, it is wicked!" cried Mrs. Strange; and Pete knew perfectly well by the pitch of her voice that the waiter would be better out of the room.

"Just you go downstairs, old hoss, and gib de cook dat half-crown. I will watch you go."

Pete did, but he did not see the half-crown given to the cook. Still, the waiter went downstairs, and that was all that Pete required.

"Algy! Listen!" shrieked the excited lady, reading the letter.

"Dear Mrs. Strange,—Captain Fern and I were married this morning. We are spending a short honeymoon, and shall return to the hotel in the course of a week, when we hope to have the pleasure of meeting you. Pete has arranged for a great entertainment in honour of the event. With kind regards from Alan and myself.—Your affectionately,
"MARIE FERN."

"Yah, yah, yah! Mark de Fern part ob de business!" cried Pete. "She's a mighty graceful fern, too! I tink she must be a maidenhair fern."

"You dastardly black beast!" howled Algy, banging at Pete's head with both his fists. "You scum of a nigger, you knew all about this! Oh, you fiend! I will have a fearful vengeance for it! I tell you, mother, I will have revenge!"

"Well, I dunno 'bout dis," observed Pete, winking at Jack. "Seems to me, Algy, dat if you want anything like revenge, and take it in such a violent manner, I would much rader you started clumpin' Jack or Sammy ober deir noddles. Your fists hurt, but—yah, yah, yah!—I tink you notice dat."

Algy did. His fists did hurt, and Pete's head had hurt them. They had not hurt Pete's head in the slightest.

Algy rushed from the room, and Mrs. Strange commenced to sob. No tears came to her eyes, but she worked up some very realistic sobs.

"My son! Oh, my dear son! He is lost to me for ever!"

"Not de slightest fear ob dat, my dear!" exclaimed Pete. "You will find dat son will stick to you frough life like a well-mixed glue-pot so long as you don't stop his allowance. Once you stop his pocket-money, and he may bolt, unless you gib him some food; but Algy ain't de sort ob man to run away from £ s. d."

"Did you know of this shameful affair, young men?" demanded Mrs. Strange, turning towards Jack and Sam.

"We had not the slightest idea," answered Jack. "We only knew that Pete had got one of his mysterious schemes in hand, though what it is now we don't know, except that it is something to surprise people; and I can quite believe that if Pete has anything to do with it."

"It is shameful! I have been treated most scandalously by that girl. I have brought her up from childhood."

"Quite right, my dear," said Pete, "and you hab been well paid for de purpose."

"You vulgar monster!"

"Well, it ain't as if you did it for nuffin, my dear. You hab been paid out ob Marie's money, as dat young lady tells me. You got all you wanted, and now she has got all she wants. So has de captain."

"I know all the best people in this place. None of them will recognise her. I don't believe they are married!"

"I attended de wedding, my dear, so know all about it. Oh, do stop dat shouting. Dat won't improve matters. You'm been beaten all along de line, and de only ting you can do is to take your defeat smiling."

"You vulgar monster!" exclaimed Mrs. Strange. "I will not stay with you another minute! Come on, Algy!"

Mrs. Strange put her arms round Algy and led him from the place. The comrades did not see them again, for the next day they left the district with their steam man, and continued their travels.

THE END.

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By S. CLARKE HOOK.

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