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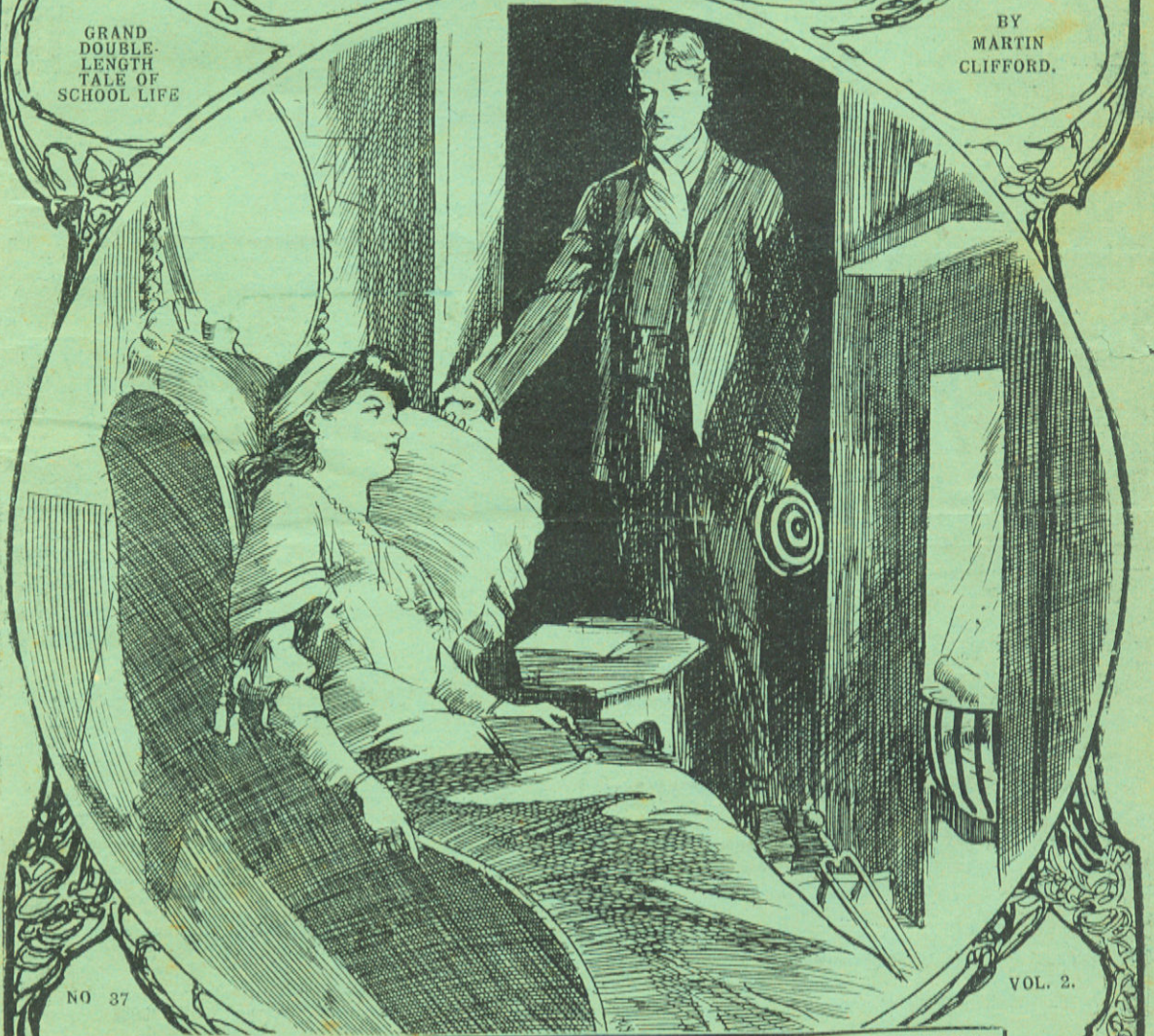
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NEW SERIES

DARREL'S SECRET. A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

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BY
MARTIN
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NO 37

VOL. 2.

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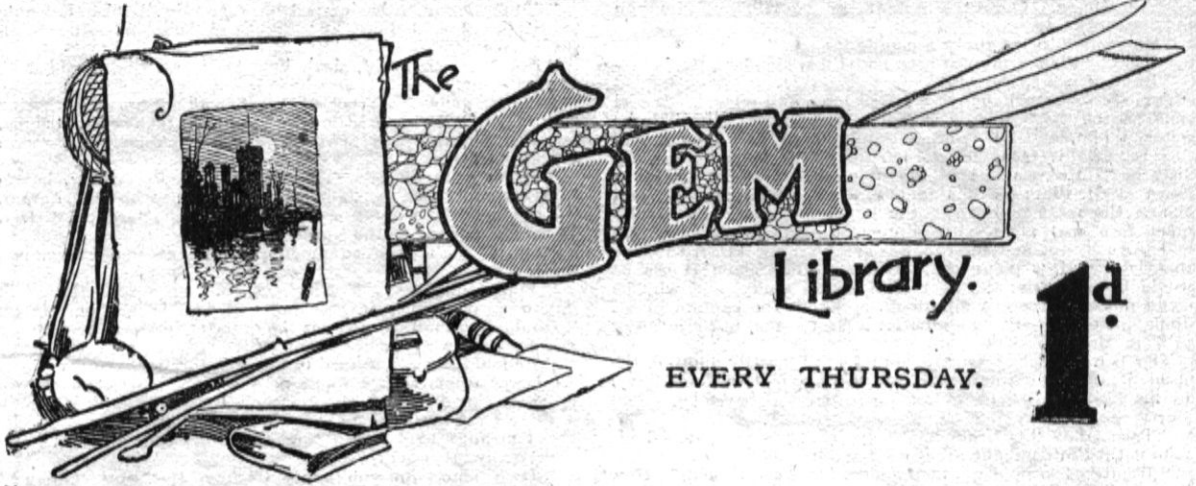
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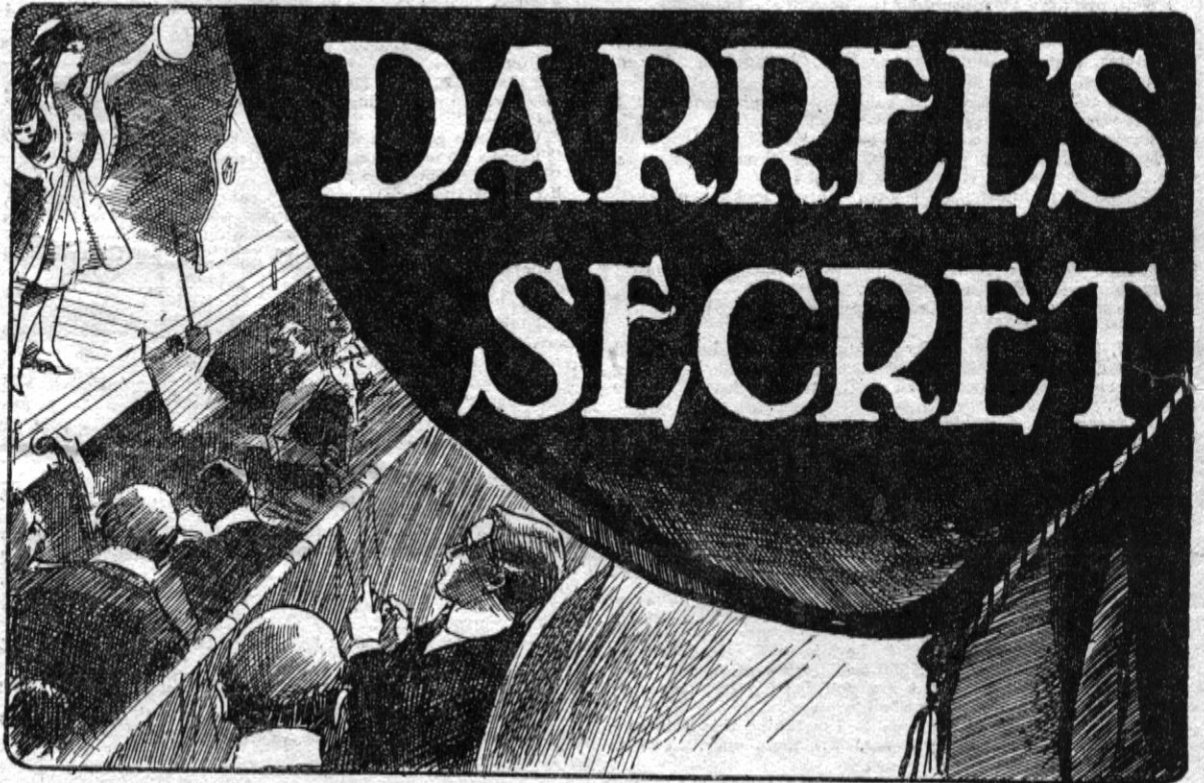
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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
Tom Merry Takes a Note.

DARREL of the Sixth came to the door of his study in the School House at St. Jim's, and glanced up and down the passage.

"Fag!"
There was no fag in sight. At the call of "fag" every youngster within hearing was supposed to hurry up to see what was wanted. As a matter of fact, they frequently hurried in the opposite direction.

"Fag!"

Darrel called again, but no fag appeared. Tom Merry who happened to be going downstairs, looked round as he heard Darrel call a second time. Tom Merry, being in the Shell, was not called upon to fag for anyone. That was the duty of Fourth Formers and Forms below the Fourth. But Tom was an obliging fellow, and Darrel of the Sixth was very popular with the juniors. Tom Merry turned back, and ran towards Darrel's study.

'Anything I can do, Darrel?'

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 37 (New Series).

"Yes, Merry. I want a note taken to Kildare. Do you know where he is?"

"He went into his study ten minutes ago."

"Good! Wait a minute here and I'll write the note."

"Right you are, Darrel!"

Tom Merry leaned against the door-post and waited. Darrel bent at the table and scribbled a brief note. Tom Merry watched him, and he could not quite keep an expression of surprise off his face. Darrel of the Sixth looked strangely disturbed. He was one of the quietest fellows in the Sixth Form at St. Jim's—a fine athlete, a splendid footballer, and one of the most popular of the house prefects. His usually quiet face was alive with suppressed excitement now. He had his coat on, and his cap was lying on the table, showing that he was just going out. To leave the School House he would have to pass the door of Kildare's study, and why he could not stop there a minute to speak to the captain of St. Jim's, instead of writing a note for a fag to take, was a mystery to Tom Merry.

The pen scratched swiftly, and Darrel hastily blotted the sheet, jammed it into an envelope, and threw it to Tom Merry. In his haste he had forgotten to fasten the envelope. Tom Merry caught it.

"Take that to Kildare, Merry. Stay a minute—don't take it till I'm gone out."

"Right-ho!" said Tom, trying not to look astonished. "How long shall I wait?"

"Oh, five minutes!"

And Darrel snatched up his cap, jammed it on his thick curly hair, and strode out of the study. His rapid stride rang along the passage, and he was gone. Tom Merry stared after him, and then stared at the letter in his hand.

"Well, my word!" murmured the hero of the Shell.

He closed Darrel's door, which the Sixth Former had left wide open in his haste, and went slowly down the passage. His chums, Manners and Lowther, were waiting for him on the staircase.

"Come at last, have you?" said Lowther pleasantly. "I thought you were having a nap up there!"

"Sorry; I stopped to speak to Darrel."

"Darrel! He's just passed us, taking three steps at a time. What's the matter with old Darrel?"

"Blessed if I know," said Tom Merry, looking puzzled. "He's gone out, and left a note for Kildare—and you know he's wanted in the football practice this afternoon. Kildare is playing the first eleven against a scratch team, to lick them into shape for the Redclyffe match on Saturday. Darrel is outside-right, and he'll be wanted."

"Something's up," said Manners sententially.

"Looks like it."

"Well, that's no reason why we should stick indoors," said Lowther cheerfully. "The bikes are ready, and it's going to be a ripping afternoon. We shall have a splendid run to Wayland. Come on!"

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Wait a few minutes."

"What on earth for?" demanded Lowther. "We haven't any too much time now. We shall have to scorch a bit."

"Must wait three minutes, old fellow."

"What for?" exclaimed Lowther. "Why should we wait three minutes? Are you off your rocker?"

"No," said Tom Merry, laughing, "but Darrel left this note for Kildare, and he didn't want it given to him till five minutes after he was gone."

"Off his rocker, I suppose?" said Lowther.

"Well, I must do as he says."

"Oh, rats! We don't want to be late in Wayland because Darrel's off his rocker," said Monty Lowther crossly. "Give the note to some fag. What are you fagging for, anyway? What price the dignity of the Shell?"

"Blow the dignity of the Shell! I'm taking this note as a favour. Darrel was calling a fag, but there wasn't one to be had."

"Well, then it's all right if you give the note to a fag."

"Yes, I suppose so, but—"

"Here's D'Arcy—I say, Gussy! Gus!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, looked round as Monty Lowther called. Arthur Augustus was very elegantly dressed—even more elegantly than usual. His fancy waistcoat was a marvel of colour, his gloves were of the palest tint, his boots had an almost aggressive polish, and his silk hat was the silkiest and shiniest hat to be found within the walls of St. Jim's.

"Did you address me, Lowthah?" asked D'Arcy, jamming a monocle into his eye and looking at the chums of the Shell.

"Yes, I did. Tom Merry wants you to take this note to Kildare—"

"I am vewy sowwy, but I am just goin' out."

"Rats! You're a Fourth Former, and therefore bound to fag. Take the note."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. I am goin' out—"

"You're going to be jumped on if you don't take that note to Kildare," said Lowther darkly. "We're in a hurry to get to Wayland—"

"Bai Jove, so am I, deah boys! If you like I will take you with me."

Lowther gave the swell of the School House a withering look. It was D'Arcy's little way to offer to take care of people, but his kindness was not always appreciated by fellows in a higher Form.

"We're going to bike it," said Tom Merry hastily, before Lowther could find words in which to express his indignation. "You oughtn't really to be going out this afternoon, Gussy. What about your football practice?"

"Oh, I don't need so much practice as you chaps, you know!"

"You young ass! You'll have to keep up to the mark if you want to stay in the junior eleven," said Tom Merry. "Mind, if you fail us, you get the order of the boot, and Reilly has your place as sure as a gun."

"I should uttably wefuse to allow Weilly to have my place. As I was wemarkin', I don't need so much practice as you fellows. Some fellows play football by instinct—it is weally a gift. I am one of them. But I must be off."

"You must be," agreed Lowther—"off your chump!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Look here, are you going to take this note, Gussy?" demanded Lowther. "Darrel's left it for Kildare, and as you're a fag—"

"I totally decline to be regarded as a fag."

"You must take the letter. We want to start. Give it to him, Tom."

"It's all right, Monty—"

"It's not all right. We're not going to wait about instead of starting. Why can't you give that young ass the letter?"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as an ass."

"You see—"

"I don't see, Tom Merry. We shall be late in Wayland, because you're an obstinate duffer. Give the letter to Gussy."

"But—"

"We're not going to wait—"

"There's no need to wait. You see—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the time's up," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's more than the five minutes now. You don't notice how the time passes while you're talking, Monty."

"Seems longer to us than to you, old chap!" explained Manners.

"Oh, bosh! Cut off wth that note, Tom, and don't be an ass!"

"Right-ho! Wait here for me—or rather wheel the machines down to the gate, and I'll sprint after you."

"That's a good idea. Come on, Manners!"

Lowther and Manners went out of the School House, and Tom Merry hurried towards Kildare's study. D'Arcy ran after him and tapped him on the shoulder.

"I say, Tom Mewwy—I'll take that note if you like, you know!"

Tom Merry looked round in surprise.

"Well, you young duffer," he exclaimed, "why couldn't you take it at first, then?"

"It was a question of dig. with me," explained D'Arcy. "I was bound to wefuse to take ordahs from a wotah in the Shell. But as a favah—as an act of gwace, you know—I should be vewy pleased to take the note, at the wisk of losin' my twain at Wylcombe."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I won't make you wisk losing your twain," he said. "Cut off! It's all right!"

"Vewy well, deah boy! I was quite willin' to do the polite thing, that's all."

And Arthur Augustus strolled away, while Tom Merry went on to Kildare's study with the note in his hand.

CHAPTER 2.

Darrel Does Not Play.

KILDARE had just changed into his football things, and was putting a long coat round him to go down to the ground, when Tom Merry knocked. Kildare opened the door himself.

"That you, Darrel? Hallo, Merry, what do you want? I'm afraid I can't spare a minute now—I'm just going down to the footer."

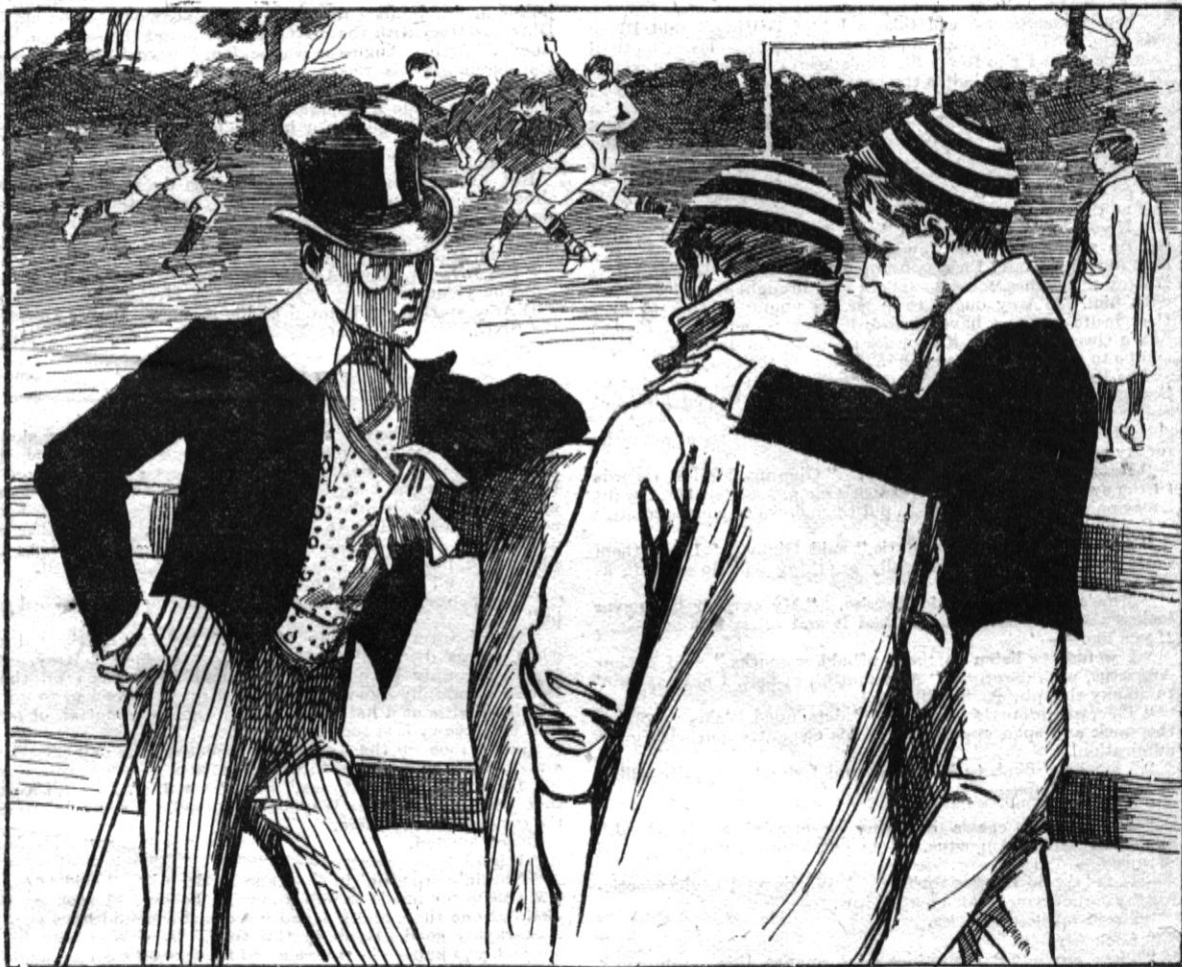
"Note from Darrel," said Tom Merry, holding it out.

Kildare stared at it.

"From Darrel?"

"Yes."

"But—but—what in goodness' name does he want to send me a note for, when we're both just going down to the ground?" grunted the captain of St. Jim's. "Hallo, this is open!"



"I wefuse to listen to your wibald wemarks!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "As a mattah of fact, I am not goin' to do any shoppin' in the village!"

"He didn't fasten it."

"When did he give you this?"

"A few minutes ago, in his study—five or six minutes."

"Then why didn't you bring it before?" said Kildare, and, without waiting for an answer, he jerked open the letter and read the hastily-scribbled lines, and an expression of blank amazement appeared upon his handsome face. He stared from the letter to Tom Merry. "Hold on a minute, Merry! Where's Darrel?"

"I think he's gone out."

"Gone out—and we kick off in ten minutes!" Kildare looked through the letter again. "You are sure he has gone out already?"

"I know he left the School House five minutes back, and he had his coat and cap on."

"That settles it. You can cut."

Tom Merry walked away. Kildare looked at the letter again, an expression of anger mingling with the amazement in his face. Darrel was his closest chum, but Kildare was football captain of St. Jim's, and he thought more of the school's reputation in the football field than of anything else. There was a stiff match coming off on Saturday, and on the present Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at St. Jim's—he was arranging a practice match in which to put St. Jim's first to a final test. To be suddenly deprived of his best winger at a moment's notice was a hard strain upon his patience and his friendship.

And Darrel's note was not very explicit. It ran as follows:

"Dear Kildare,—I am very sorry I cannot play this afternoon. I will put in all the practice I can between this and Saturday. I have to go out this afternoon.—R. DARREL."

Kildare pursed his lips. Darrel had never been known to fail like this before—he was the keenest of footballers, and the honour of St. Jim's first was as dear to him as to the captain. Kildare could not understand it. He thrust the brief note into the pocket of his coat, and left the study. Rushden and Drake of the Sixth joined him in the passage.

"Where's Darrel?" asked Rushden.

"Gone out," replied Kildare, shortly.

"Eh! Gone out?"

"Yes; he's had to cut the practice for some reason."

Kildare's brow was sombre, and the others did not speak again as they went down to the football ground. Most of the team were there, including Monteith and Baker of the New House, who were members of the first eleven. Monteith came over to Kildare at once.

"I say, Darrel's just gone out," he said.

"I know," said Kildare. "He's had to cut it this afternoon."

"Nothing wrong, I hope? He was looking rather queer."

"I don't know. He hasn't told me anything, except that he had to go out. We shall have to find a substitute for this afternoon."

And it was not till the two teams were playing that the frown left Kildare's brow. He was annoyed by Darrel's desertion, and, at the same time, anxious about his chum. He felt that there must be something wrong to make Darrel act as he had done—though why the winger should not have explained was a mystery. But in the keen excitement of the game Kildare's face brightened, and he dismissed the matter from his mind.

Darrel's absence from the first eleven was, of course, noticed by the fellows who came round the ground to watch the scratch match. Among them, three juniors of the Fourth Form commented upon it freely. Blake and Co., the chums of Study No. 6 in the School House, were in the habit of commenting freely upon everything, and the doings even of the high and mighty Sixth did not escape their criticisms.

"Darrel's not playing," said Blake, wagging his head in a reproving way at the teams as they came into the field. "They've put in Lefevre of the Fifth as a substitute. He won't be any good for Saturday, if there's anything wrong with Darrel."

"Darrel's all right," said Digby. "I saw him not an hour ago, and he was quite fit."

"Then why isn't he playing?"

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"That's queer."

"The Redclyffe lot will take a lot of beating," said Blake seriously. "I don't take much interest in first-eleven football as a rule—but I like to see St. Jim's keep its head above water. Of course, junior football is the backbone of the college."

"Of course," grinned Digby.

"And we keep that going very well. Still, I was thinking of cutting footer next Saturday and going over to Redclyffe to see the first team play."

"Not a bad wheeze," said Herries. "If it's a fine day we can go on our jiggers. I'll take my dog Towser along for a little run at the same time."

"If you do I'll run over him," said Jack Blake. "I'm getting fed up with your dog Towser and dogs generally. There's that horrid mongrel Figgins brought in the other day, and now D'Arcy minor has come to school and brought a savage beast with him. D'Arcy ought to order his young brother to kick that brute out, or have it drowned or something. Hallo! here's Gus—dressed as if he were going to the draper's in Rylcombe to talk to the blue-eyed maiden over the counter."

The last remark was made purposely for Arthur Augustus to hear as he came by. The swell of St. Jim's turned his head and fixed his eyeglass on Blake with a withering expression.

"Blake, I uttably refuse to allow you to pass these remarks on my appearance—"

"Rats!" said Blake cheerfully. "Give my kindest regards to the sweet charmer in the draper's shop, and tell her I want a new pair of socks, and she can put them down to your account."

"Weally, Blake—"

"And I'll have a new necktie," said Digby. "I like them dark with red spots; but really anything will do so long as it's tasty and expensive."

"Mine's a sweater," said Herries. "My sweater has never looked the same since Towser had it and worried it last time. If you like—"

"I refuse to listen to these wibald remarks," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "As a mattah of fact, I am not goin' to do any shoppin' in the village."

"Then wherefore this thussness?" demanded Blake, surveying the spick and span appearance of his elegant chum with great admiration.

"I am goin' ovah to Wayland, and I should be quite willin' to take you chaps—"

"Go hon!"

"There is an opewa company performin' at Wayland," explained Arthur Augustus. "As you know, I am vevy fond of music—"

"Rats!" said Herries warily. "Whenever I begin practising my cornet, you make a fearful row."

"I said music, Hewwies."

"Look here—"

"They are givin' a matinee performance this aftahnoon," explained D'Arcy. "I am goin' ovah from Wylcombe in the twain. Would you chaps like to come. It would improve your minds, and I would explain the whole thing to you."

"Thanks awfully!" said Blake. "We're watching the footer."

"Weally, Blake, there will be plenty of football matches, but the opewa-company are there for a week only, and I weally think—"

"You can go as my representative, Gussy, and cheer for me," said Blake. "I'm going to see this match out. Hurrah, Kildare! Look at that, my sons!"

Kildare was making a break through the enemy's lines with the ball at his feet. Blake, Herries and Digby yelled and waved their caps. Arthur Augustus could not make his voice heard, and he turned away in disgust and walked down to the gates. A trap had drawn up, and the swell of St. Jim's stepped into it. He didn't wish to make his elegant attire dusty by a walk to Rylcombe, and he had hired Brown's trap to convey him to the station.

"Pway buck up, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, consulting his watch as he settled himself in the trap. "We haven't much time to catch the twain."

"Yes, sir," said the driver, touching his cap.

The trap bowled along the green lane at a good rate. Halfway to Rylcombe a stalwart figure came in sight, tramping along steadily over the thickly-fallen leaves beside the road. It was Darrel of the Sixth. Arthur Augustus immediately hailed him.

"Hallo, Dawwel!"

The big Sixth-former glanced round.

"Are you goin' to Wylcombe, Dawwel?"

"Yes," said Darrel briefly.

"Then I should be very pleased to give you a lift, deah boy."

Darrel smiled faintly, and swung himself into the trap without stopping it.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "I haven't too much time to catch my train, and I shall be glad of a lift."

"Extremely pleased, deah boy," said D'Arcy graciously.

The trap drove up to the little station. Darrel thanked the

junior again, jumped down, and disappeared into the station. D'Arcy settled with the driver, and followed the senior in more slowly. Arthur Augustus was seldom known to hurry himself. He purchased his ticket and sauntered upon the platform, just in time to see the guard waving his flag. Then the swell of St. Jim's made a desperate break.

He crossed the platform in two bounds, and dragged open a door.

"Stand back!" yelled the guard.

But Arthur Augustus dragged at the door. The train was already in motion. A strong hand from within the carriage grasped him by the collar and dragged him bodily in. Arthur Augustus collapsed upon the dusty floor, gasping—the door slammed, and the train shot out of the station.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"You young ass!"

D'Arcy started, and stared at his rescuer. It was Darrel of the Sixth.

CHAPTER 3.

A Pit Crowd.

DARREL looked frowningly at the junior. D'Arcy slowly rose, set his collar as straight as possible—which was not very straight, after the senior's strong grip on it. He put his necktie back into its place, and dusted his trousers with a cambric handkerchief. Then he absently wiped his perspiring forehead with the handkerchief, with rather an unfortunate result as far as appearances went. He took his silk hat off, placed it upside down on the seat, and gasped.

"Bai Jove! What a nawwow escape!"

"You young ass," said Darrel. "Lucky for you I yanked you in."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that. My hat nearly fell off when I was dwaggin' at the door," explained D'Arcy. "I should certainly have lost it if it had quite fallen off then. It was a feahfully nawwow escape. I might have had to go to Wayland without a hat, you know. And, as a mattah of fact, that is my vevy best toppah."

And he took up the topper, and smoothed the nap affectionately, almost as if he were stroking a kitten.

"I feel wathah breatheless," he remarked. "I wasn't aware that you were goin' to Wayland, Dawwel. I am goin' to see the opewa-company there."

Darrel started.

"What!"

"Nothin' surpwisin' in that, surely, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "My taste for music is well known, I believe. I took up the violin at one time, and if I had pwactised I should have been a remarkably good playah by this time. Hewwies thinks he is musical, you know—he makes a feahful wow on a cornet, and he gets quite excited when I explain to him that he doesn't know F flat from a football boot. It was weally good news to me when I heard that the Carlo Fiore Opewa Company were at Wayland. I immediately determined to patwonize the show."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Darrel, with a peculiar grimace in his tone.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you are going there now?"

"Yaas, there's a matinee," explained D'Arcy. "It commences at thwee o'clock. I am particularly anxious to hear the signowina."

"The whom?"

"Signowina Colonna, the famous sopwano," said D'Arcy.

"I am wathah a judge of voices, you know, and I am wathah anxious to hear her. I heard some musical people talkin' about her when I was home last, and they said she had weaved an ofah from Covent Garden to sing in gwand opewa. Bai Jove!"—D'Arcy broke off—"pohwaps you are goin' to the opewa, too, Darrel?"

Darrel coloured.

"Perhaps I am," he assented.

"Good! You can come in with me, if you like, and I will explain the thing to you as we go along—"

"Are you looking for a hiding, D'Arcy?"

"Certainly not, I wegard that as a wathah widiculous question. I should uttably refuse, undah any circs., to weceive a hidin'."

"You might not have the chance of refusing," said Darrel grimly. "You had better shut up."

"If my conversation is not agreeable to you, Dawwel, I shall be vevy pleased to shut up," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "There might have been a more polite way of expwessin' your wish on the subject, howevah."

Darrel did not reply. He leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes, as if going to sleep. He did not sleep, however. Arthur Augustus, in the intervals of polishing his silk hat, looked at Darrel two or three times. The face of the Sixth Former was troubled, and sometimes a curious expression came over it that D'Arcy did not understand. The train stopped at last at Wayland, and Darrel sprang out of the carriage and walked

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quickly away. It was pretty evident that he was not yearning for the society of a Fourth-Form junior, even when that junior was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy's movements were more leisurely. He strolled off the platform in his usually graceful way, and out into the station entrance. Three youths in Norfolk jackets were wheeling bicycles into the station, to put them up there. Arthur Augustus gave a yelp as a muddy wheel jammed against the beautifully-creased leg of his immaculate trousers.

"Oh! You howwid beast, get away!"

"My only hat! It's Gussy!"

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy! Fancy meetin' you! I weally wish you would not run your filthy bike against my trowsahs."

"I wish you wouldn't run your trousers against my bike."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shove that bike in here," said Monty Lowther. "No time to jaw. We've got just time to walk down to the theatre before the doors open."

"Bai Jove! Are you going to the theatre, deah boys?"

"There's a matinee," explained Tom Merry, as he gave Lowther his machine to wheel in. "It's an opera company giving a performance at the local theatre—they're here for the week—blessed if I remember their name—"

"The Carlo Fiore Opewa Company, deah boy."

"Yes, that's it—grand opera in English, you know. We thought we'd run over and see them," said Tom Merry. "It was a fine afternoon for a spin. If we don't like it we can come out and ride round Wayland Hill home."

"Wats! If you have any taste you are bound to like it. I am gink there," explained D'Arcy, "and if you like I'll take you along, and explain the whole thing to you."

"Thank you," said Tom Merry, gratefully. "You're always kind, Gussy. You're always making these generous offers to people."

"As a mattah of fact, deah boy, it is my intention to be kind."

"Always trying to be kind, and always succeeding in being asinine."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You can come along with us if you like," said Tom Merry.

"But I shall insist upon your cleaning your face a little, first."

"Weally!" Arthur Augustus rushed to an automatic machine in which glimmered a square of looking-glass. His face was streaked with dust where he had wiped it with the dusty handkerchief in the train. "Bai Jove! I was quite unaware of this, Tom Merry."

"Oh, I don't suppose you care much about it. You Fourth-Form kids never will wash, I hear, unless there's a prefect standing over you with a cane."

"I dusted my trowsahs with my handkerchief—"

"But you can't expect to go out with chaps in a higher Form with a face that colour."

"And unconsciously wiped my beastly face without thinking."

"We'll take you along if you look respectable—not otherwise."

"That's it," said Lowther. "Rub it off on your sleeve, Gussy."

"I am afraid it would wumple my sleeve, and pwobably make it shiny. There is a place in this station where you can have a wash and a brush up. Will you wait for me, deah boys? I shall not be more than twenty minutes."

"Yes, I think I can see myself waiting twenty minutes," said Manners, "when the theatre opens in five."

"It weally doesn't matter if you miss some of the first act, as I will tell you all about it goin' along."

"Rats!" said the Terrible Three, with singular unanimity.

"Weally, deah boys—"

"We're going. Good-bye."

"Hold on. I could get through in a quartah of an hour if I huwwid."

"More rats!"

And the chums of the Shell walked out of the station. Arthur Augustus hesitated, but a glance in the automatic machine's mirror decided him. He would rather have missed the whole opera than have gone out without a wash. A careful wiping of the face with a handkerchief would have sufficed for any other fellow. But not for the swell of St. Jim's.

The chums of the Shell hurried down the quaint, old-fashioned high-street of the market-town, and turned into the side-street where the theatre stood. There was only one theatre in Wayland and the pieces there were usually of the most thrilling and blood-curdling description. Wicked baronets and heavy fathers and persecuted heroines flourished on the Thespian boards in the little town, as in most provincial towns. But sometimes there was a change. A somewhat different class of theatre-goers welcomed the appearance of a travelling opera-company.

"Grand opera in English" was popular enough to fill the theatre for a week. And though as a rule the performances of "grand opera in English" were very far from perfect, there was no doubt that they did a good work in helping to educate the public taste.

And sometimes, in such a company, would be found a singer not yet known to the world, but with a voice equal to that of a

celebrity whose name was sufficient to cram the Covent Garden opera-house to the ceiling.

Tom Merry had musical tastes. Manners was something of a pianist. Lowther's knowledge of music was mainly confined to the sweet sounds he could extract from a tin whistle. But all three were keen to hear the opera given that afternoon at the Wayland theatre. As the funds did not run to expensive seats, they joined the crowd at the door of the pit. The crowd was very considerable, and the chums of the Shell could not get near the door. The pit price was a shilling, which fell within their means, but it was pretty certain that they would be in the last row, or standing.

"Can't be helped," said Tom Merry, philosophically. "There's one comfort—it's a jolly small theatre, and we shall be able to hear, if not to see."

"But I want to see," said Manners. "There's that what? her name—Signorina something or other—they say she's awfully sweet, and I want to see her."

"Signorina Colonna."

"That's it! Italian name, but I hear she's an Englishwoman. Hallo, who's that shoving?"

A gentleman in a fur cap was shoving. He had come late, but like many late-comers at a theatre, he thought he was entitled to a front place, if he could get it by force of impudence and elbows. He dug an elbow into Manners' ribs, and another into Tom Merry's back, and jammed himself in front. Tom Merry's eyes glittered. He always played the game himself, and anything like meanness made him wrathful at once. And he certainly did not intend to give up the place he had waited for to someone else who had not waited.

"I say, my friend," he remarked, tapping the gentleman in the fur cap on the shoulder, "I don't think you're entitled to stand there."

The man looked round. He saw that he had only a boy to deal with, and he assumed a threatening expression at once.

"Who are you talking to?" he demanded. It was a superfluous question, as he knew that Tom Merry's remark was addressed to himself.

"I was speaking to you," said Tom Merry, quietly. "You had no right to shove by me. Get back into your place."

"I don't think."

"I don't think you do," assented Tom Merry. "But you had better think about getting out sharp, or you will be shifted."

"Who will shift me?"

"I will."

The gentleman in the fur cap did not reply in words. He hit out, and Tom Merry parried the blow easily. Then three pairs of hands fastened upon the obstreperous gentleman, and, before he knew what was happening, he was on the ground, and the chums of the Shell calmly stepped over him. A shove from three feet simultaneously sent him rolling, and he brought up on the edge of the pavement. There he sat up, looking bewildered.

"Door's open!" said somebody.

The throng swayed and pushed forward, and began to pour into the theatre. The gentleman in the fur cap picked himself up, and followed, but a dozen new-comers were in front of him now, and he was separated from the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 4.

D'Arcy is Indignant!

TOM MERRY took three tickets at the pay-box, and the chums of the Shell followed the crowd into the theatre. It was a little dark entrance, and it led into a little dark passage, which gave admittance to a little dusky pit. The pit was almost full, and the Terrible Three looked in vain for seats.

"Never mind, let's stand," said Tom Merry, cheerfully. "We can get behind the middle of the back row, and that's better for hearing, anyway, than any side seat."

They secured standing places in the middle, behind the last row of seats. The people were still thronging in, and a gentleman in a fur cap shoved behind the Terrible Three.

Three or four rows of people standing were soon behind them.

"By Jove, this is a crush!" said Manners. "It's not often you get a crush like this in the daytime at a theatre in a local town."

"The signorina's the attraction," said Lowther. "Everybody seems to be talking about her. Her name's been in the papers a lot lately, too."

The name of Signorina Colonna was indeed on many lips. The opera to be given was "Il Trovatore," and Signorina Colonna was taking the part of Leonora. The fact that the opera was given in English was rather gratifying than otherwise to most of the audience. What it lost by the translation was compensated for by the fact that they would be able to understand better. The pit of the theatre was small, stuffy, and hot; the stalls in front were not much better, but they were less thickly filled, and the chums of the Shell, looking over many heads and hats, wished they were there.

"The stalls are jolly cheap here, too," Tom Merry remarked. "Three bob I think. I suppose it wouldn't run to it. They'd let us change."

"I've got one-and-six," said Manners.

"And I've got a tanner," said Lowther.

"Then it's no good getting out my ninespence," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We shall have to stick it. Can't be helped! Hullo!"

"What's the matter?"

"Look at that chap going into the stalls!"

"Darrel!" ejaculated Lowther.

The chums of the Shell could plainly see the sturdy figure of the Sixth-Former. He was entering the front row of the stalls, and evidently had a booked seat. He sat down in the middle of the front row, without troubling himself to look back at the crowd in the rear, and quite unconscious of the fact that three pairs of eyes were upon him. Monty Lowther gave a sniff.

"So this is what he's cut the practice-match for," he said. "I believe in a chap hearing any decent music when he gets the chance, but fancy cutting a match to come here! Kildare would be wild if he knew."

"It's curious," said Tom Merry, thoughtfully. "I know Darrel is rather musical, as far as that goes. I remember he had permission to practice the organ in the chapel, and he often goes in there and plays. I've seen some scores in his study, too. But I really shouldn't have thought he'd have disappointed Kildare for the sake of coming here. It doesn't seem like Darrel."

"Something curious about it," said Manners, with a shake of the head. "Perhaps he knows somebody in the company."

"H'm! He might."

"Great Scott! Look at that cheeky young bounder!" exclaimed Lowther, indignantly. A familiar form had just entered a box, and there was no mistaking the elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What-ho, St. Jim's!" shouted Lowther.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round at the familiar call, and caught sight of the chums of the Shell at the back of the pit. He waved a lavender glove to them gracefully, and placed his silk hat upside-down on a seat. Then he sat down, and proceeded to languidly survey the audience through his eyeglass.

It was close-upon time for the curtain to rise now. Tom Merry looked over a programme. The name of Signorina Colonna was opposite that of Leonora in the list of characters, but the other names he did not know. The orchestra was filling the theatre with sound. The performance was good in its way, but with the diminutive orchestra of a provincial theatre the result, of course, was very thin. When the curtain went up every eye was fastened upon the stage.

The Terrible Three watched and listened with great interest. The simple melodies of "Il Trovatore" were easy to follow, and many of them, of course, already familiar to the boys. The singing, as was to be expected, was not of a high class—with two exceptions, Signorina Colonna, as Leonora, and the tenor who took the part of Manrico. The latter, whose name Tom Merry saw by the programme was Robert Armitage, had a full, rich voice, which sounded all the finer by contrast with the poorer performances of the rest. The first act finished amid loud clapping. The crowd behind the Terrible Three was very thick. The gentleman with the fur cap was pressing close behind Tom Merry, and as he seemed to have had fried fish for one of his most recent meals, his proximity was not gratifying to the hero of the Shell.

"I say, I'm getting tired in the legs," said Lowther, with a grimace. "Blessed if I like standing about like a stork."

"I've got an idea," Tom Merry remarked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Are you going to squat down for me to sit on your head?"

"Well, no, not exactly. I was thinking that Gussy has a box with some vacant seats in it, and we might pay him a visit."

"By Jove! Rather!"

"Let's see, anyway."

The chums withdrew into the passage behind the pit, and Tom Merry explained to an attendant that they wished to visit a friend in a box. The man explained in turn that communication between the different parts of the house was not allowed. But a shilling in his palm convinced him that the rules might be safely neglected upon a single occasion, and the Terrible Three were led by a circuitous route to D'Arcy's box. They entered the little door, and D'Arcy looked round.

"Tom Mewwy!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather! Shall we come in?"

"Bai Jove, yaas!"

The attendant was satisfied and he departed, shutting the door. The box was not a large one, and four juniors pretty well filled it. Arthur Augustus had risen to stretch his legs, and was leaning in a graceful attitude against the wall. Monty Lowther dropped into his chair.

"Good!" he said. "This is very comfy."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Cheeky young bounder, having a box all to yourself."

"Well, I paid for it, you know," said D'Arcy mildly.

"That's not to the point," said Manners. "It's rot for a Fourth Form kid to have a box and fellows in the Shell to stand in the pit."

"I am weally sowwy for you."

"Oh, don't waste any sorrow on us!" said Manners. "We shall be quite comfy. Can you make a little more room, Lowther? The orchestra are coming in again."

"Bai Jove—"

"Certainly!" said Lowther. "Pull up that other chair beside mine, and keep your head back of my shoulder, and you'll see rippingly."

"Good! You're right!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Tom Merry can stand behind my chair," said Lowther. "I'll change with him at the end of the next act."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry, heartily. "I can lean on the back of your chair. But we must give Gussy a chance, as he's so generously invited us into his box."

"But—but I haven't—"

"Certainly!" said Lowther. "Nothing mean about me. Gussy shall have the side of the box nearest the stage, and keep it to himself."

As the side of the box nearest the stage was blocked off from all view, unless D'Arcy put his head out like a tortoise, Lowther's generosity was not quite so generous as it sounded. Arthur Augustus was growing pink with suppressed indignation. But the chums of the Shell were so serious that it was clear that they believed he had invited them to appropriate his box. At all events, it seemed so. And D'Arcy, who was the pink of politeness, felt a natural hesitation about undeceiving them. He half thought that the Terrible Three were "rotting," but he could not be sure.

The orchestra was recommencing, and the chums of the Shell settled themselves comfortably to look and listen.

"All right over there, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, with solicitude.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Can you see perfectly?"

"I can see nothin'. I—"

"Hear all right as well?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Good! I'm glad you're comfy. Sh, now! They're starting."

"I must weally observe—"

"Don't tak now, Gussy," whispered Lowther. "You mustn't talk while the music's going on, you know. It's bad form."

Arthur Augustus simply glared. To be lectured on good form, under the circumstances, was insult added to injury.

"Bai Jove, Lowther—"

"Hush!"

"I insist upon speakin'. I insist upon—"

"Silence! Shut up!" came an audible buzz from the audience; and Arthur Augustus reluctantly shut up. But the indignation of the swell of St. Jim's during the second act of "Il Trovatore" was too deep for speech.

CHAPTER 5.

Darrel's Secret.

BY the time the curtain fell Tom Merry was pretty tired of standing, and D'Arcy seemed to be a little fatigued, too. He changed from one leg to another continually. He had come round to stand beside Tom Merry, so he did not miss much; and in the interest of the opera and the sweet melodies he had forgotten his indignation. At the end of the act he was beaming.

"Bai Jove! This is wathah wippin', deah boys, isn't it?" he exclaimed. "What a feahful wascal that count is, isn't he?"

"Awful!" said Lowther. "But the tenor—Manrico the Troubadour—I like him. He has a ripping voice, too. The count hasn't."

"Leonora is wonderful," said Tom Merry. "I haven't heard a voice like hers but once, and that was when Uncle Frank took me to Covent Garden in the opera season and I heard Tetrzinni. Signorina Colonna is wonderful!"

"Yaas, wathah! I should like to pwesen her with a bouquet," said D'Arcy, thoughtfully. "Do you think she would care for a bouquet, Tom Mewwy?"

"Certainly! Go out and get one, and bring in some lemon squash with you. On second thoughts, bring in the lemon squash first."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I say, doesn't Darrel take it in, too?" said Tom Merry, with a glance at the Sixth-Former sitting in the stalls. "He didn't take his eyes off Leonora once."

"I noticed that," grinned Lowther; "and I rather think I've hit on the explanation of the giddy mystery."

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"Bai Jove! What is it? I didn't know there was any mystery, deah boys. If you like, I will take it up as an amateur detective and unravel it."

"Rats! It is the mystery of Darrel cutting the match to come to see a travelling opera company. It's Leonora."

"Eh?"

"Darrel's moonney!"

"Bosh!" said Tom Merry, incredulously.

"Fact! I've been looking at his chivvy, and I tell you it's so. He's come here to see the signorina, and for no other reason."

"My hat! said Tom Merry. "There might be something in it. You know it was his turn to put lights out in the Shell dormitory this week, and Rusden has been doing it. I asked Rusden last night where Darrel was, and he said he had gone out."

"Here, very likely. These people came to Wayland on Monday."

"My word! But she must be years older than Darrel."

"What does that matter?" said Lowther, with the air of an oracle. "When young fellows fall in love for the first time it often is with girls older than themselves."

"Bai Jove! You seem to know all about it, Lowthah."

"I know all about it by observing Gussy. All the girls he has fallen in love with were older than himself, excepting Cousin Ethel."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Darrel is following in Gussy's footsteps. The question is whether we ought to take the matter in hand, and show him that it won't do."

"You'd better, if you want a particularly fine specimen of a thick ear."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you know, we can't have him neglecting the fobter like this," said Lowther, shaking his head. "What I think is that Gussy ought to point out to him how the matter stands. Gussy has a delicate way of doing these things, and he could make Darrel see reason where we might only put him into a temper."

"Bai Jove! There's something in that, too. What do you think, Tom Mewwy?"

"I think you'd better not be an ass, and that Lowther had better find some safer subject for rotting," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, you know I'm an awfully tactful chap, and a few words from one who knows about these things might be very valuable to a young fellow like Dawwel."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I weally do not see anythin' to cackle at. I think—"

"Think how we're going to get some lemon squashes, kid," said Tom Merry.

"That is easy enough. I will ordah them of the attendant."

And Arthur Augustus did. By the time the juniors had finished their lemon squashes the curtain was going up again. Lowther rose from the chair, and pushed Arthur Augustus into it.

"It's all right, Lowthah, deah boy. You can have the chair."

"Rats!" grinned Lowther. "Sit down!"

"Well, if you insist—"

The swell of St. Jim's, in spite of his politeness, was glad to sit down. The chums of the Shell could see very well behind him. The interest of the opera took all their attention, and they soon forgot Darrel of the Sixth. Darrel was not even aware of their presence in the theatre. The handsome young Sixth-former was gazing only at Leonora, and when the signorina was not on the stage he was quiet and expressionless. When she appeared, his whole face lighted up.

The whole house was silent with ecstasy when the famous "Miserere" scene came on. The singing of Leonora had never been so sweet, so rich, and the answering voice of the tenor from within the lower thrilled every heart. The words, though a very inadequate rendering of the original Italian, were touching enough.

"Ah, now death slowly nearing.

Brings me at last relief,

Here in this dungeon, lone in this dungeon pining.

Farewell! Leonora, farewell!"

Full and rich came the tenor, and the chums of the Shell felt the tears rolling down their cheeks as they heard it, and heard the reply of Leonora. The signorina, for the time, was Leonora herself; there was no doubt that she was an accomplished actress, as well as a marvellous singer, and she was living the part.

"Bai—bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, when the scene was over. "I—I feel wathah queer about the thwoat, you know, deah boys."

Even Lowther, the mocker, was silent and touched. If the whole thing was melodramatic the boys did not notice it. They were thrilled through and through by the sweetness of the music and the wonderful power of the singing in that splendid duet. The last scenes soon were over now, and the crowd poured out of the theatre. The Terrible Three and Arthur Augustus went out together, and almost ran into

Darrel. He did not notice them. He was walking along like one in a dream, and the juniors glanced after him curiously.

Darrel was not going homeward. He went round the theatre, and Lowther, glancing after him, saw him stop at the stage door. The chums walked on.

"Not much doubt about it!" said Lowther. But he was not smiling now; the sweet and wonderful soprano was still in his ears.

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry softly.

Then they strolled on to the station in silence. Sadness was the reigning feeling in their breasts; they did not know why, yet they were glad—very glad—that they had spent the afternoon as they had spent it.

The chums of the Shell fetched out their bicycles, and Arthur Augustus took the train for Rylcombe. The three were silent as they rode homeward. The October dusk was deepening as they reached the gates of St. Jim's.

Blake, Herries, and Digby were lounging at the gates, looking down the road, and they at once hailed the Terrible Three.

"Where have you been, instead of keeping up your footer practice?" demanded Blake severely. "We've been getting instruction by watching the scratch match of the seniors, and then getting up one of our own with Figgins & Co."

"Well, we don't need so much practice as you Fourth Form kids—"

"Oh, cheese it! Where have you been?"

"Been to the opera."

"Rats! Have you seen Gussy?"

"Yes; he was in Wayland, and he's coming home by train. I say, how did the Sixth Form match go?" asked Tom Merry.

"Kildare did it, I suppose?"

"Yes; the first eleven did it—two goals to one, though they were playing Lefevre of the Fifth in the place of Darrel," said Blake. "Darrel wasn't playing."

"Old news, my son."

"How the deuce did you know?"

"Because we saw him in Wayland. Come on, kids, I'm hungry, and the fire's got to be lighted in the study. You'll see Gussy soon, Blake."

And the Terrible Three went on towards the School House. Jack Blake cast a puzzled look after them, and then shook his head. It seemed to him as if the chums of the Shell Form were keeping something back. As a matter of fact, they were!

"No need to spread the yarn about Darrel," Tom Merry remarked. "It's no business of ours!"

"Right you are—but I expect Gussy will."

"Well, we can't help that," said Tom Merry. "It would be rough on old Darrel if it became a joke of the junior Forms. He's a good sort."

"One of the best!" said Lowther heartily—and, speaking of Darrel, as he's out we may as well borrow his methylated spirit stove to boil the kettle, and save lighting the fire. We can get some methylated spirit from Knox's study."

CHAPTER 6.

The Signorina.

"THE signorina will see you, sir."

"Thank you."

Darrel, of the Sixth, followed the man along a dusky passage. He had entered at the stage-door, and sent in his name to Signorina Colonna. The passage was dim, uncarpeted, with bare walls and dusty windows. At the foot of a staircase a gas jet, enclosed by nothing but a bare wire netting, flickered and flared. It showed uncarpeted stairs winding up into dusky dimness.

"This way, sir."

The attendant was shabby, and there was an odour of recent gin-and-water about him. Darrel followed him quietly up the stairs. On the hard, bare wood, their footsteps rang with a hollow sound. Darrel's face was pale—pale with excitement. He hardly noticed his surroundings. The man stopped on a landing where three doors opened. One of them was wide open, and a glare of unshaded gas came from it. Darrel caught a glimpse of a man in the room. He was sitting on a chair in a state of shabby dishabille. The lower half of him was clad in the apparel of the Count of Luna in the opera—not quite so impressive at close quarters. Around the upper part an old Norfolk jacket was buttoned and belted. His face was a mass of half-removed grease-paint. A glass of warm whisky-and-water stood by his elbow, and he had just taken a sip as Darrel saw him. He looked the most curious "heavy villain" it was possible to imagine.

The other doors on the landing were closed. The attendant stopped at one of them, and looked round at Darrel.

"This is the signorina's dressing-room," he said.

Darrel nodded.

"Long way up, sir," said the man suggestively. "I find them stairs 'arder and 'arder hevery day, sir."

Darrel understood. He slipped a shilling into the man's

hand, and he departed—the glow of anticipation in his face telling of more gin-and-water to come. Darrel tapped at the door, and a sweet voice bade him enter.

He entered.

Signorina Colonna's dressing-room was the best the Wayland Theatre Royal could muster, for she was the star of the company at present there. But the dressing-rooms of a provincial theatre are seldom comfortable. The room was somewhat large, and that was the best that could be said of it. The walls were bare, the window dusty, the furniture of the plainest and of a cheap manufacture—of a design that might have made anyone of the slightest artistic feeling weep. And there was not much of it. The properties of Leonora, and of half a dozen other operatic characters, were disposed about in the most convenient places. But there was a neatness, a propriety in the tawdry room that showed the least keen observer that a woman of true womanly feeling was there. The sordid surroundings were as refined as a refined nature could make them under such difficulties.

Sordid the surroundings were without a doubt, yet the room might have been Aladdin's palace—to Darrel. He had eyes for nothing but a sweet oval face and a pair of large, dark, caressing eyes—a sweet face from which the make-up of the stage had been removed, and which glowed with a healthy colour of its own. "Signorina Colonna" was the name by which the singer went—but her name was all that there was of Italian about her. She was an Englishwoman—or, rather, girl—young, though older than Darrel by years. There was a sweet seriousness in her manner, as of one who had found the path of life thorny, and yet faced its difficulties with a brave heart.

She rose as Darrel entered, and gave him her hand. The boy pressed it, with a throbbing heart—and then, instinctively, raised it to his lips. The signorina laughed a little and drew it away, and Darrel sat down. He looked at the signorina, his heart in his eyes. Words would not come to his lips.

"So you have come again," she said—"after what I told you."

"I could not help it."

"But—"

"You are not glad to see me?" he said.

"I am glad to see you. But—"

"But I am a fool!" said Darrel, his eyes falling before hers.

"I know it. But—but—Pauline— You told me I might call you Pauline—"

"Why not?"

"You have not called me Dick!"

The signorina laughed softly.

"My dear boy—"

"I am not such a boy," said Darrel. "I—I suppose I seem a boy to you. I am over seventeen, and I am a prefect at St. Jim's—but I suppose you wouldn't know much about that. But—I am not a boy now. You cannot be much older than I am."

The signorina only smiled.

"Do you remember the night I first saw you in London?" said Darrel in a low voice—"in the vacation? I came into the theatre quite by chance. You were singing Marguerite, in 'Faust.' I did not take my eyes off you once. The opera was a dream to me. When it was over, I went round to the stage door and waited there in the hope of catching sight of you. I did—after a long time. I went home in a dream. Since then—"

"Foolish boy."

"Since then I have thought of nothing else. Oh, Pauline! and I shall never know how I ever found the courage to tell you that—that I loved you! But I told you—did I not?"

"You told me, and—"

"And you said it must be farewell at once and for ever. You had looked upon me as a boy—you were amused by my admiration—"

"Not only amused, Dick, but touched—deeply touched. But—"

"But you said it was impossible."

She laughed slightly.

"Surely you must see for yourself that anything of the kind is impossible. You are a boy at school—"

"I am not a boy, and I shall soon be leaving for Oxford. I shall never change—"

"So you think now."

"I shall never change," said Darrel quietly. "What I feel now I shall always feel. I—I only want to be with you—to see you sometimes—to hear you speak. That is not asking much—and in the future—"

"My dear boy—"

"You are not much older than I am," said Darrel. "You are not more than twenty."

The signorina did not reply.

"Besides, that is nothing. I do not care—"

"My dear lad—"

"Let me wait five years, ten years, any time," said Darrel.

"You shall see whether I shall change."

"Dick! Yes, I will call you Dick, if you wish—why not? But listen to me. I allowed you to make my acquaintance in London—I saw you many times. I liked you, and I liked your friendship. In my surroundings, you came with your honest, simple heart, like—a breath of fresh air from a heath. I liked you—I like you now. I did not think what would come of it. I was thoughtless—and you, my dear boy, were reckless. When you spoke out, I told you we must never see each other again. I did not expect to see you. Now—"

"I heard that the Carlo Fiore Company were in Wayland, and I had to come."

She shook her head.

"You should not have come, Dick."

"You did not wish to see me?" he said bitterly. "I am a trouble to you. Then—"

She laid her hand softly on his arm as he was rising.

"You know it is not that, Dick. I like you—and I am glad to see you. After the kind of men I sometimes meet, I am doubly glad to see you. You do not understand, Dick. You will understand, some day when you are older, what the friendship of a brave and true heart must mean to one in my surroundings. But—it was for your own sake that I said we must part. You must forget this folly."

"But I cannot forget—and I do not want to."

"You must! It will be better for us never to meet again."

"Pauline!"

The misery in the boy's face touched the signorina strangely. She laid her hand softly upon his.

"My dear Dick, you must not think about me. But—but if you wish you shall see me again, while I am staying in Wayland. We are here till Saturday—"

"You sometimes allowed me to walk with you in London," said Darrel. "I—I have so much to tell you. Will you—"

"Perhaps; I will think."

"This afternoon?"

The signorina laughed.

"There is an evening performance," she said. "We have to begin to prepare for it almost as soon as the matinee is over."

"But I shall see you to-morrow?"

"Perhaps."

"May I call, then? I can get here by five, if you—"

"But have you nothing to detain you at the school?"

Darrel coloured. For a moment he thought of Kildare, and the most important football fixture of the season that was coming off on Saturday. But he shook his head.

"There is nothing that I cannot put off."

"Then you may come."

Darrel rose. He bent over the signorina's hand.

"You are very kind to me," said the boy huskily. "You—you don't know how much this means to me."

"Perhaps I do," she said softly. "But remember, if you see me again, it is only as a friend, Dick; you must not think of anything else."

"I will not speak of anything else, at all events," he said.

"How gloriously you sang this afternoon."

"You liked it?"

"It was wonderful. I have heard that you have been asked to sing at Covent Garden," said Darrel. "I shall hear you there."

"There have been negotiations; I cannot say. I may go to America instead."

Darrel's face fell.

"You—to America?"

"It might be better for you, Dick." The signorina pressed his hand. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said the boy, in a choked voice.

The girl stood silent, pensive, after he had left her. A few minutes later there was a tap at the door. The signorina evidently knew the tap, for her expression changed, and a brightness came into her beautiful face.

"Come in, Bob."

The door opened. It was Armitage, the tenor who had sung the part of the Troubadour in the opera, who looked in. He was a handsome fellow in his own proper person, with a cheery English face and laughing eyes.

"We haven't too much time for tea," he said. "You have had a visitor?"

"Yes, Bob."

"The boy I saw in London?"

"Yes. He belongs to a school near this town, and so he came over."

The tenor shook his finger at her.

"Pauline!"

"I wish he had never seen me," she said, as she joined him.

"I like him very much."

And the signorina's fair face was very thoughtful for a long time, till the need to prepare for the evening's opera banished every thought from her mind but that of the new role she was to take.

CHAPTER 7.

D'Arcy Thinks He Ought to Interfere.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY stepped from the trap at the gates of St. Jim's, paid the driver and added a shilling for the man himself, and walked in—into three pairs of arms that closed round him and marched him forward at a pace that nearly dragged him off his feet.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy, looking round in the October dusk. "Weally, Blake—pway welease me, Dig—don't twead on my feet, Hewwies. You will spoil my boots."

"Rats!" said Blake. "I've a jolly good mind to tread on your neck. What do you mean by being late when we were waiting for you?"

"I didn't know you were waiting for me, deah boys. Have you been gettin' into any mischief while I've been out?"

"We've been playing footer," said Blake, "and you'd better play some soon, or you'll lose your place in the junior team. Tom Merry has been talking a lot about shoving in Reilly instead of you."

"I should uttably wefuse to allow Weally to be shoved in instead of me."

"Football," went on Blake, unheeding, "makes you hungry. I'm hungry."

"So am I," said Herries.

"Moi aussi," said Dig plaintively.

"And as you are the only one in funds at the present moment," went on Blake, "we naturally wanted you to come in early. This way to the tuckshop."

"I am weally sowwy—"

"Oh, it's all right, so long as you hurry; Better late than never."

"I am sowwy—"

"Blow your sorrow! Don't I tell you your apology is accepted. Come on."

"I am sowwy, but—"

"Yank him in!"

"It will be useless to yank me in. I am sowwy, but I have spent all my tin at Wayland."

"You've done what?"

"Spent all my tin."

"Do you mean to say that you are stony, too?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, of all the young rotters—"

Pway do not apply such a disrespectful expression to me, deah boy. I do not like it. I should be obliged if you would welease me immediately."

The chums of Study No. 6 released D'Arcy immediately—so immediately that he fell in a heap, and his silk hat rolled on the ground. Blake looked down at him.

"What are you doing that for, Gussy?" he asked.

"You uttah wotlah!"

"Don't you find the ground hard to sit on—especially so suddenly?"

"I wegard you as a set of beasts," said D'Arcy, rising and dusting his trousers. "I have told you before that I dislike wuffness. I feel vewy stwongly upon that point."

"What do you mean by coming home stony?" demanded Digby.

"Weally, Dig—"

"This has got to be inquired into," said Blake seriously. "We can't have Gussy going on the ran-dan in this reckless way. How many cigars have you had, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"How many bottles of champagne?"

"I wefuse to—"

"Then where has the tin gone? As your keepers, we are bound to inquire into the matter."

"I wefuse to wegard you as my keepahs. As a mattah of fact, I have been to the opewa."

"The what?" demanded three voices.

"The opewa—wand opewa in English, you know. I told you I was going before I went, and was willin' to take you boundahs along with me."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Blake. "It's at Wayland Theatre Royal, isn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You can get in the pit there for a bob," said Blake.

"Yaas, I dare say you can," said D'Arcy. "I have neval twied, but I dare say it is poss."

"I suppose you had a box?" suggested Digby sarcastically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you cheeky young bounder—"

"I fail to see any cheek in the mattah, Blake. The boxes are widiculously cheap at the Wayland Theatre—ten shillin' for the one I had. You could have come in it without any extra charge, you know."

"And you've blued our tea on a box!"

"Weally, I had forgotten your tea, and I didn't know you were bwoke. It was a comfy box, though those Shell boundahs took up most of it. The opewa was 'Il Twovatoway,' and I liked it vewy much."

"And how much cash did you bring home?"

"Only the agweed-upon surr for the hire of the twap fwom the station, and a shillin' ovah, deah boys."

"Where's the shilling?"

"I pwesented it to the dwivah."

"Well, the only thing I can think of is to frog's-march him to the School House, and biff his hat over his eyes," said Blake.

"I uttably wefuse to be fwog's-marched, and if you touch my toppah I shall no longah wegard you as twiends. As a mattah of fact, I have a wathah important mattah to consult you chaps about, if you will come up to the study."

"What's it about?"

"About Dawwel."

"Have you seen him?"

"He went in the twain with me to Wayland. It's a great secret."

"What is it?"

"About Dawwel bein' in love with a singah."

"Eh—what?"

"And I don't know whethah I ought to tell you chaps, but I was thinkin' of consultin' you before I spoke to Dawwel about it. Come up to the study."

The chums of the Fourth followed Arthur Augustus up to the study willingly enough then. They had been surprised by Darrel's absence from the football match of the afternoon, and D'Arcy's information was startling. They entered the study, and Jack Blake lighted the gas, for the October evening had already set in. Then he closed the door, and took up an Indian club. D'Arcy watched the latter proceeding in some amazement.

"I suppose you are not goin' to pwactice with Indian clubs in this extremely small woom, Blake?" he remarked.

"Oh, no. This is for use, in case you have been gammoning," explained Blake. "If you've told us that yarn about Darrel as a new thing in jokes, bang goes your topper. Get on."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Get on with the washing!"

"Undah the circs., I shall wefuse to acquaint you with the particulahs. I will pwocceed to Tom Mewwy's study and consult him about it."

"If you don't get on this instant, there will be a new topper wanted in the D'Arcy family," said Blake, poisoning the club in the air.

"Pewwaps I may as well tell you—"

"Yes, perhaps you may. Will you get on. What's this about Darrel being moony?"

"It's a fact, deah boys. You have heard of Signowina Colonna?"

"A singer or something?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The name was in the local paper this week," said Digby. "She's in a company playing at the Wayland Theatre."

"Exactly, deah boy. She is a weally marvellous sopwano, and I was vewy pleased with the opewa. In the Misewewe scene I felt quite dwy about the thwoat, you know, it was so touchin'." I was touched—"

"You were a little touched before you started, though," said Blake, tapping his forehead. "Never mind the singing. Get on with the story."

"Well, Dawwel was in the stalls—"

"Do you mean to say that Darrel of the Sixth cut the footer for the sake of going to a theatre?" demanded Jack Blake incredulously.

"I wathah considah it was for the sake of seein' Signowina Colonna."

"Sure of that?"

"He was watching her all the time, just as Hewwies' bulldog watches Hewwies when Hewwies is takin' him a bone."

"Ha, ha, ha! What a poetical chap you are, Gussy! But did he do anything beside watch her?"

"He went wound to the stage door aftahwards."

"My word!" said Digby, with a whistle.

"Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah thought the same as I did about it," said D'Arcy. "There isn't much doubt on the point. The weal question is, what am I to do in the mattah?"

Jack Blake stared at him.

"Blessed if I can see how you've got anything to do with it," he remarked.

"Weally, Blake, the mattah ought not to won on like this. Dawwel is neglectin' the footah, and I do not appwove of a youth of his age cawwyyin' on like this. A word in season might save him fwom makin' an ass of himself. Lowthah suggested that I should speak to him on the subject—"

"Lowther was only rotting, you young ass!"

"I wefuse to be addressed as a young ass. Lowthah may have been wottin', as he is a wottah; but I think it's wathah a good idea."

"You'd better keep off the grass. Darrel would get into a wax and give you a hiding and sling you out."

"I should uttably wefuse to be slung out."

"Your refusal wouldn't count for much, kid, if Darrel lost his

temper," grinned Blake. "Keep off the grass. The Sixth don't like advice from the Fourth Form. I've noticed that. Bless you, I could put Kildare up to a lot of points in the management of the first eleven, but it's no good approaching the subject even."

"I shall have to turn the mattah ovah in my mind——"

"Don't be an ass, kid. Let's get along to Tom Merry's study, and see if they have anything for tea there. If they have, they may ask us, and if they don't ask us, we can make a rush, and raid the show."

"Good wheeze," said Herries.

"Yaas, I regard that as a wathah good idea. Wait a few minutes till I've got my toppah in the hat-box. It's no good you fellows goin' without me."

But the chums of the Fourth did not wait, and D'Arcy left his topper on the table, and hurried after them towards Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 8.

Called to Account.

KILDARE, the captain of St. Jim's, was standing at the door of the School House, looking out into the dusky quadrangle.

The captain of the school had his hands in his pockets, and a sombre shadow on his face. He was evidently waiting at the door for someone, and he had been waiting there nearly an hour.

A form loomed up in the dusk at last, and Kildare made a movement.

"Is that you, Darrel?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"I've been waiting for you."

Darrel came up the steps into the porch. His face clouded over as he saw Kildare. He gave the captain of St. Jim's a short nod.

"How did the match go, Kildare?"

"We beat the scratch team."

"Whom did you play instead of me?"

"Lefevre, of the Fifth."

"He is a good winger."

"Not much to play against the Redclyffe lot, though."

Darrel started.

"Well, you won't want to play him against the Redclyffe lot," he said. "I shall be in the match on Saturday."

"Come up to my study," said Kildare abruptly. "I want to speak to you."

Darrel hesitated a moment.

It was pretty plain that an unpleasant interview was coming, but he followed the captain of St. Jim's upstairs and into his study.

Kildare turned up the gas, and the light fell upon Darrel's troubled face.

The captain looked at him curiously.

"Is anything wrong, old chap?" he asked suddenly. "Your note explained nothing."

"No," said Darrel.

"Nothing wrong? No bad news from home?"

"Oh, no."

"Then why did you leave us in the lurch this afternoon?"

"I—I had to."

"You had an important matter to attend to?"

"Ye-es."

"I want this matter to be settled quite frankly," said Kildare, after a pause. "I heard some chatter from some of the juniors awhile ago about your having been seen in the theatre at Wayland this afternoon."

Darrel coloured uncomfortably.

"I suppose it was only jaw," said the captain of St. Jim's, looking at him.

"No, it was true."

Kildare's brows contracted.

"You have been to the theatre?"

"Yes."

"And that was why you cut the match?"

"Yes."

"And that was the important business?" asked Kildare, with a ring of scorn in his voice.

"You don't understand," said Darrel awkwardly. "You don't think I'd cut the footer to go to a theatre in the ordinary way, do you?"

"I should hope not; but you appear to have done it to-day."

"I had to go."

"Why?"

Darrel did not reply to the direct question. His face was scarlet, then pale, and his eyes remained fixed upon the floor.

Kildare's glance never wavered.

"I don't want to inquire into your private affairs," said the captain of St. Jim's, after a pause, "but I think that as captain of the football team you belong to I am entitled to some explanation."

"I know you are, but I cannot explain. It's not exactly a secret, but I don't want to talk about it."

"Very well," said Kildare drily, "we won't talk about it. I think you've treated the first eleven rather shabbily, but if you had good reasons, let bygones be bygones. I suppose nothing of the sort is likely to happen again? That's the chief point."

"Certainly not."

Kildare's face cleared.

"That's all right, then. I don't want you to look upon me as an inquisitor; but you know how a football captain is placed. You are the best winger, and you simply must be in form for the Redclyffe match on Staurday. If you fail us, I don't know any fellow in either the Sixth or the Fifth who will be able to take your place—any fellow half your form. But you know that as well as I do."

"But why should you think I might fail you?" said Darrel, with a touch of irritation. "I should think you know me well enough by this time to depend on me."

"I depended on you to-day."

"Well, it was only a scratch match to-day."

"It was important enough. I was trying how the first eleven worked together, and putting them to a final test against the best eleven the Fifth and Sixth could muster. It was very important for all the eleven to be there."

"I am sorry."

"Well, it can't be helped now. You can put in some practice every evening, anyway. It is light enough after afternoon school for a bit of practice still."

Darrel flushed again.

"I—I cannot do any practice after school to-morrow," he stammered.

Kildare looked hard at him.

"Why not?"

"I—I have an engagement."

"At Wayland, I suppose?"

"Ye-es."

"At the theatre, perhaps?"

"Ye-es."

"And you can't put it off?"

"Impossible."

Kildare's face set hard. He looked directly at Darrel, who did not meet his eyes. The winger's glance was on the floor, and his face was red and pale by turns.

"I don't understand you, Darrel."

"And I can't explain; but—but you can rely on me. I shall put in enough practice to be quite fit for Saturday. You can be sure of that."

"But——"

Kildare was interrupted. There came a terrible crash upstairs, followed by a yell of excited voices.

The captain of St. Jim's gave a start.

"Very well," he said hastily. "Leave it at that. I rely upon you."

And the captain of St. Jim's hurried from the study, and went up the stairs three at a time.

Darrel went slowly down the passage to his own room, and shut himself in.

CHAPTER 9.

Chucked Out!

MONTY LOWTHER was alone in Tom Merry's study when our juniors came quietly along the study and locked in.

Lowther was extracting the remnant of the contents of a jam-pot, and lading it out into a soap-dish, newly-washed. Tom Merry and Manners were not to be seen.

"Ahem!" coughed Jack Blake.

Lowther looked round. Four faces smiled at him agreeably from the door.

Blake came into the study, and D'Arcy followed him. Digby and Herries remained leaning against the doorposts.

Lowther resumed scraping out the jam-pot.

"You fellows want anything?" he asked. "If you do, you can't have it. If you don't, bunk. In either case, take your faces away."

"I uttably wufuse to take my face away——"

"Dry up a minute, Gussy, while I explain to Lowther——"

"I wufuse to dry up."

"Oh, do ring off. Lowther, old man, this is how the case stands. We've come to have tea with you on condition you don't tell funny stories——"

"Or ask conundrums," said Digby.

"Especially those you've made up yourself," added Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is it a go?" asked Blake.

Lowther ladled out the last relic of the jam, and scraped the spoon into the soap-dish.

"No," he said, "it isn't a go. Get!"

"We have come to tea——"

"On condition you don't tell any funny stories——"
 "Or ask any conundrums——"
 "Especially those of your own make, deah boy."
 "Are you going?" roared Lowther, "or do you want this jam slung at you?"
 "Now, young fellow," said Blake severely, "don't you forget that you're addressing the top study in the School House."
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Oh, get back into the monkey-house," said Lowther. "Take your faces away. Fellows oughtn't to go round with such features. It's a marvel to me how you stand one another. Clear out! I can't stand cheeky Fourth-Form fags here!"
 "We are the top study."
 "Rats!"
 "We are the top study in the School House——"
 "Are you going?" exclaimed Lowther, holding up the jam spoon with a threatening gesture. "I tell you your features worry me."

"Bai Jove, I wathah considah that that wottah ought to have a feahful thwashin'."
 "My opinion, too," said Blake. "The chaps seem to have a jolly good feed ready here. Where are the other two asses, Lowther, old man?"
 "Gone to look for methyated spirit," granted Lowther. "We've borrowed Darrel's little stove. There wasn't any spirit in Knox's study. Get out, will you! We're going to talk business over tea, and we can't be bothered by a lot of fags."

Blake made a sign to his comrades.
 The four heroes of the Fourth entered the study quickly, and closed the door. Lowther whisked the jam spoon through the air, and a lump of plum jam flew forward, and, of course, impinged upon the aristocratic countenance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy gave a wail of anguish.
 "Ow! Bai Jove, I am howwibly sticky! You wottah!"
 "Collar him!" shouted Blake.
 Blake, Herries, and Digby promptly collared Lowther. He struggled desperately, but he was down in a moment. He opened his mouth to yell, but Blake, who had snatched away the jam spoon, thrust it into the opened mouth promptly, and the yell died away in a quaver.
 "Sling him out!" said Blake hurriedly. "Quick—before Tom Merry comes back!"

Lowther struggled frantically, but three pairs of strong arms were round him. He was dragged to the door, and D'Arcy threw it open. Lowther went rolling along the passage, the door was slammed, and Blake turned the key in the lock. The next moment Lowther hurled himself against the door. But it was too late.

Jack Blake chuckled.
 "Good!" he exclaimed. "I call this a victory. Lowther wouldn't ask us to tea——"
 "He might have if you had put it a little more politely, deah boy."

"Perhaps, my excellent Gus; but, you see, I had observed the supply on the table, and saw at a glance that there wasn't enough for seven," said Blake coolly.

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"
 "You wouldn't! Blessed if I know who would think of things for you youngsters if I wasn't with you!" said Blake.

"Oh, wats! Undah the cires, we are justified in waidin' this feed. The Tewwible Thwee waided my box at the opewa and collared my chair, you know."

"Of course! One good turn deserves another. Hallo, that sounds like someone knocking at the door!"

It certainly did. Monty Lowther was bumping on the door with all his strength. But the stout oak and the strong lock would have resisted ten times the force he could bring to bear on it.

"Anybody there?" called out Blake.

"You rotter! Open this door!"

"Rats!"

"We'll pulverise you!"

"Not just yet, anyway," chuckled Blake. "Keep your hair on. You'll have a prefect up soon at that rate."

"I don't care! Open this door!"

"Go and eat dog biscuits."

Lowther continued to thump furiously. The Fourth Formers chuckled. The old rivalry between the Fourth Form and the Shell—between Study No. 6 and the Terrible Three—never slept for long. The two parties, it is true, would make common cause in rows with the New House. But when there was not a House row on they were always ready for a Form row.

"Looks comfy, doesn't it?" said Blake, with a glance round the study. "Only needs a fire to make it complete."

"Let's have one, deah boy."

"Yes, rather!"

Jack Blake opened the coal locker. It was empty—or nearly so. A few sticks reposed there, with a lump or two of coal. There was not sufficient fuel for a fire.

"Lazy young bounders, those Shell-fish!" said Blake, shaking



"I don't suppose you care much about having a dirty face," said Tom Merry. "You Fourth-Form kids never will wash, I hear, unless there's a prefect standing over you with a cane!"

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his head. "They were going to use methylated spirit to save the trouble of making a fire, and you see what trouble it has got them into. Let this be a warning to you, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"We haven't any methylated spirit, so we shall have to light a fire," said Jack. "There doesn't seem to be much coal here. Still, a wood fire is very cheerful."

"Blessed if I see where we're going to get any wood from, unless we behead Gussy," Digby remarked.

"Weally, Dig—"

"We must find something," said Blake. "I should be sorry to chop up the bookcase or the easy chair, but if those Shell-fish run out of fuel they must take the consequences. I don't hold with carelessness in young people. What a row that chap is making at the door! Go away, little boy, and be quiet."

"Open this door!"

"Go and eat pink pills."

Jack Blake looked round the study for fuel. Lowther hammered at the door in a fury.

Tom Merry and Manners came dashing up from different directions. Lowther turned a red and fiery face towards his chums.

"What's the row?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Those Fourth Form rotters are in our study."

"We'll jolly soon have them out!"

"The door's locked."

"Phew!"

"There's the four of them—they're going to wolf our tea. We must get this beastly door open somehow."

"What did you let them get you out of the study for?" asked Manners innocently.

"You shrieking ass, what could I do against four?" demanded Lowther heatedly.

"You could have yelled."

"How could I yell with a beastly jam spoon jammed into my beastly mouth?"

"Oh, don't ask me conundrums," said Manners. "They're going to scoff our tea, and we can't get at them. They've done it before."

"I'm going to get at them," growled Lowther.

And he resumed thumping on the door. There was a swift footstep on the stairs, and Kildare dashed up. He did not stop to ask questions. He went for Lowther.

"Oh!" roared Monty, as the big Sixth Former seized him by the ear. "Leggo!"

"What are you making this confounded row for?" demanded Kildare angrily. "Get along! Go down into the common-room, all three of you!"

"I say—" began Tom Merry.

"Do as I tell you!"

There was no arguing with Kildare. The chums of the Shell exchanged glances, and went downstairs. And Kildare, with a grim countenance, followed them as far as his own study, where he went in. Within Tom Merry's room Blake & Co. had heard all, and the chums of the Fourth huffed themselves with glee.

CHAPTER 10.

Outside.

JACK BLAKE found the remains of a packing-case in a corner, and a chopper in the cupboard. He chopped up the case, and Digby started a fire. The remnant of a packing-case was enough for a start.

Blake looked round for more fuel.

"I'm sorry," he remarked. "It's their own carelessness. The stool will have to go."

The stool went. With powerful chops Blake divided it into logs, and the fire was liberally fed. The blaze roared up round the kettle, which was soon singing. Herries found the teacaddy, and Blake warmed the teapot.

"This is all right," Digby remarked. "Anybody know where there is a tin-opener. That's the worst of dining out like this—you don't know where to find the things?"

"I'll run to No. 6 and get a tin-opener, Dig," said D'Arcy putting his hand on the lock of the door.

Blake jerked him back.

"Ass! Don't open that door!"

"I refuse to be called an ass. And how am I to go out without openin' the door, deah boy? Don't be wiculous."

"That door's not going to be opened till after tea," said Blake, taking the key from the lock and putting it in his pocket.

"We don't know whether those Shell-fish may be hanging about outside."

"I heard Kildare tell them to go down to the common-room."

"What about that?"

"Well, I should pvesume they went, deah boy."

"And how long do you think they'll stop there?" snorted

Blake. "Just as long as Kildare keeps his eye on them, and not a tick longer."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"I've got a tin-opener in my pocket-knife," said Herries. "I'll have that salmon open in a jiffy. I wish I had my dog Towser here. He's awfully fond of salmon."

"Blow your dog Towser!"

Blake made the tea. The salmon tin was opened, bread-and-butter was cut, and the cold pork pies and saveloys served out. The Terrible Three had laid in a sufficient supply for themselves, and there was quite enough for four at a pinch. But, as Blake had remarked, it would have been short commons for seven.

Blake sat down at the head of the table with a seraphic smile. It is said that stolen fruits are sweetest, and certainly that raided feed was very agreeable.

"Yaas, I wegard this as wathah wippin'," remarked Arthur Augustus, as he took up the teapot to pour out the tea. "It is about time those Shell boundahs were put in their place, I—ow—ooch!"

D'Arcy was standing at the table exactly opposite the door, which he was facing. A sudden jet of water came through the keyhole, and it caught the swell of the School House exactly under the chin.

Crash!

The teapot went down on the table and splintered into fragments, the hot tea splashing in all directions.

There was a wild chorus of yells.

All four of the juniors had received splashes. Blake was dancing on one leg and clapping the other. Digby sprang backwards so quickly that he knocked his chair over and sprawled across it. Herries clapped his hands to his knees and yelled. D'Arcy had had the worst of it. His beautiful waistcoat was smothered with hot tea, and the heat was penetrating through it.

"Bai Jove! Ow, I am howwibly scalded!"

"Oh, you young ass!"

"You shrieking idiot!"

"How could I help it, deah boys? The wotten teapot bwoke of its own accord. My beastly waistcoat's spoiled!"

"What did you drop it for?" roared Blake. "It was only some water from a squirt through the keyhole that hit you."

"I was extwemely startled, and, in fact, thwown into quite a fluttah."

"You ass, we're all scalded!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a laugh from the passage outside. It was evident that the Terrible Three were there again, though this time they did not venture to thump on the panels.

"You rotters!" shouted Blake. "Why can't you run away and let us have our tea in peace?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard these continual intewwuptions as bein' in the worst of taste."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop your cackling, ass! I suppose there won't be any tea for us now, now that Gussy has smashed the teapot. Blessed if I know what makes him so clumsy."

"Weally, Blake, I must we mark—"

"Oh, don't! Shove round the milk as far as it will go, and we'll have milk-and-water."

"Well, that's better for you than tea, you know," said Digby philosophically. "Silver lining to every cloud, you know. Let's have milk-and-water."

And they had milk-and-water. The teapot lay in fragments, and the tea was soaking into the cloth. But that, as Blake remarked, was Tom Merry's look-out. If he liked to smash teapots on his own table he must take the consequences. The juniors shifted the table out of the line of fire from the keyhole, and the feed proceeded merrily.

The Terrible Three chuckled over the success of their attack, but their chuckles died away as they heard the merry clinking of knives and forks in the study. An odour of salmon, very appetising to hungry juniors, came faintly to their nostrils.

"Blessed if I know what we can do," said Tom Merry. "The worst of it is, that they're scoffing our grub while we're thinking about it."

"That's because we've got such a jolly good leader," said Lowther.

"Oh, don't grouse! You let them into the study, anyway."

"What could I do against—"

"Oh, we've had all that!" said Manners. "The question is, how are we to get them out. We can't bust in the door; and if we try, Kildare will get his wool off and come up again. It's a bit rough to be shut out of one's own study."

"Some more salmon, D'Arcy?" came a voice, purposely loud, from the study.

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy."

"Another saveloy, please, Herries."

"Right-ho! Here you are."

The Terrible Three exchanged glances. They were very hungry. Tom Merry tapped at the door, and Blake halloed from within.

"Anybody there?"

"Yes, you worm!" said Tom Merry, through the keyhole. "Do you call it playing the game to scoff a fellow's grub?"

"Yes, rather," said Blake. "You've scoffed ours often enough, I think."

"That's different. You're only fags——"

"Go and eat tin-tacks!"

"Yaas, wathah! This is wathah wuff on you, Tom Mewwy—— almost as wuff as collahin' your box at the opewa and takin' your chair, you know. Ha, ha aa!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"He's got us there," he remarked. "What the dickens are we to do? Hallo! Who's that coming along the passage? Hallo, Skimpole!"

A junior, with a big forehead and a very large pair of spectacles, was coming along the passage. It was Skimpole of the Shell, who shared Gore's study, next door to Tom Merry's. He stopped and looked at the Terrible Three, and blinked.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes, rather. We can't open the door."

"Dear me! Is it locked?"

"If it wasn't we might be able to open it," snapped Lowther.

"Very true. What you say is quite correct, Lowther. In all probability it would be quite easy to open the door if it were not locked" agreed Skimpole. "If it is locked the simplest way to open it would be to get the key."

"The key is inside in Blake's pocket."

"Oh, I understand!"

"Sure?" asked Lowther sarcastically. "Can you understand anything, Skimmy?"

"Certainly, Lowther. I understand many matters that are far beyond your comprehension. I am now writing the three hundred and fiftieth chapter of my great book, and it contains a disquisition upon persons who sneer at those they have not the mental powers to appraise at their proper value——"

"Oh, get along, Skimmy! You make me tired."

"If you wish this door opened I have no doubt I can devise some methods," said Skimpole. "Why not manufacture a skeleton key and pick the lock?"

"That's a good wheeze. Can you make a skeleton key?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, no, I cannot say that I can make one—that is merely a suggestion. There are other ways of opening the door. You could tie a small bag of gunpowder to the handle, and light it from a distance by means of a fuse or an electric wire——"

"Have you any gunpowder?"

"Oh, no! I never keep such stuff in my study."

"How are we to attach a bag of gunpowder to the handle of the door if we haven't any gunpowder?" asked Tom Merry patiently.

"I am afraid it would be impossible. Of course, the value of my suggestion depended entirely upon you having a supply of gunpowder close at hand. It is a very useful thing to keep about, and I have already been thinking of suggesting to the science master that a keg or two should be kept in the laboratory for the use of the juniors. But if there is a lack of gunpowder, I suppose that suggestion is impracticable. Let me see," Skimpole rubbed his bumpy forehead, apparently to assist his brain to work. "Yes, I have another idea. I was speaking of an electric wire. If a sufficient current of electricity be applied to any object it will be burnt up. Suppose you were to run a current to this door, burn a hole in the panel, and put your hand through and unlock the door."

"Where is the electricity to come from?"

"Electricity is easily produced. You could generate a sufficient quantity by turning a wheel two feet in circumference at the rate of thirty thousand revolutions a minute——"

"Good!" said Tom Merry. "Run along and fetch the necessary apparatus, Skimmy, and we'll get to work at once." Skimpole blinked at him.

"I could obtain the necessary apparatus in a few days, Merry, at the cost of a few pounds," he said. "If you are willing——"

"And will that enable us to open this door now?" said Lowther pleasantly.

Skimpole scratched his head.

"Well, no. But I have another suggestion to make——"

"Nuff said," remarked Tom Merry. "We're getting fed up with your suggestions. They are so practicable, so sensible, you know. Get along, Skimmy."

Three pairs of hands grasped the genius of the Shell, marched him into his study, and plumped him down breathless there. Tom Merry slammed the door. The chums of the Shell resumed their anxious discussion outside their own door.

"We're done in," said Lowther. "We may as well cut it."

Skimpole's door opened. The brainy man of the School House blinked out at them.

"I say, Tom Merry, I have another idea. If you happen to have an old garden-roller about anywhere——"

"I haven't," said Tom Merry. "I've dropped the one I usually wear on my watch-chain, and it's lost."

"Really, Merry! But I have another suggestion to make——"

Lowther made a rush at the brilliant propounder of new ideas,

and he looked so dangerous that Skimpole hastily popped back into the study and locked the door. An inky-fingered youngster of the Third Form came along the passage, and nodded coolly to the Terrible Three, apparently quite unimpressed by the fact that they were members of the Shell, the next form below the Fifth. It was D'Arcy minor, younger brother to Arthur Augustus, and as unlike the swell of St. Jim's as could possibly be imagined.

"Hallo, kids!" he said.

"Hallo, young shaver!" growled Lowther. "Have you come up this passage to look for a thick ear?"

"No. I came to look for you three bounders," said Wally D'Arcy cheerfully. "You stood me a feed the day I came to St. Jim's. I told you I'd stand you one."

"Like your cheek."

"Run away, little boy," said Manners. "Members of the Shell don't feed in a Form-room with inky little ruffians in the Third Form."

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "There's a good spread. I've got Jameson and Curly Gibson coming, and I'd like you three. There's saveloys and pork pies and jam roll and marmalade pudding, and heaps of tarts."

The chums of the Shell thawed visibly. They were very hungry, and tea in hall was over long ago. It was pretty certain that Blake & Co. would not leave much that was eatable when they had finished. Wally's offer, as a matter of fact, came in the nick of time—like corn in Egypt in the lean years!

"It's a bit below the dignity of the Form," said Manners meditatively.

"Terribly," said Tom Merry. "Still, we ought to give our protection to this interesting youth——"

"Rats!" said the interesting youth.

"We might look in," said Lowther, in a thoughtful sort of way.

"Oh, cheese it!" said D'Arcy minor. "If you're coming come. If you're not, I'll go and ask some other fellows. My feed won't go begging."

"You've got such a charming way of putting it," said Tom Merry. "We couldn't resist if we wanted to. Lead the way."

"Right-ho! Follow your leader."

And D'Arcy minor—secretly not a little proud of having three members of the Shell to tea—led the way, and the Terrible Three followed. It was a triumph for D'Arcy minor, and a great relief to the chums of the Shell.

CHAPTER 11.

Pauline.

DARREL came out of his study with his coat on at a quarter to five on the following afternoon, and walked quickly down the Sixth Form passage. Kildare's door was open, and the captain of St. Jim's was standing just inside his study, talking to Rushden and Drake of the Sixth. All three of them looked at Darrel as he passed.

The prefect gave a quick, awkward nod, and hastened past. He did not stop to speak, and his face was very red as he hurried away. Rushden and Drake looked at Kildare, who had a sombre cloud on his brow.

"What does that mean, Kildare?" asked Rushden. "Isn't Darrel coming to the footer?"

"No."

"I suppose he's going to play on Saturday?"

"Yes. He has some engagement this evening."

"And an engagement yesterday afternoon," said Drake. "Seems to me that Darrel has too many engagements for a member of the first eleven."

"I was thinking so too," Rushden remarked. "We've got the toughest fight of the season before us on Saturday, and to-day's Thursday."

"Well, I suppose it can't be helped," Kildare said uneasily. "It isn't because he's my chum that I stand it. But Darrel at his worst form is the best winger we can find, and we must have him on Saturday whether he keeps in form or not."

"I know that, and that only makes it the worse of him to fool us about like this."

"It will be all right," said Kildare.

But Rushden and Drake were looking gloomy as they went down to the football ground. The first eleven needed to strain every nerve on Saturday to win the match against their old rivals. It was too bad for one of the best players in the team to be neglecting the game like this. Darrel was thinking, too, of the looks they had given him, as he strode along the lane to Rylecombe, and took the train there for the market town. Darrel had a keen sense of duty; but it was the old conflict—love and duty, pulling the boy different ways.

He knew that he ought to be, at this moment, with the other footballers. Yet in a few days' time the signorina would be gone—gone too far for him to see her again—perhaps for years. Was he called upon to give up everything? He would play on Saturday; he would play his best. Surely that was as much

as his school had a right to expect of him! So he argued with himself; but while the inward argument was proceeding, the train was bearing him swiftly towards the signorina. Love was stronger than duty!

Darrel's heart was beating hard as he knocked at the little stage door of the Wayland Theatre Royal.

Young as he was—boyish in so many ways—he was yet a man in others, and in truth and depth of feeling quite a man!

The signorina was the first woman upon whom he had bestowed a thought in this way, and she, with her beauty and grace, had won him at a glance. Foolish he might be, blind to obvious impossibilities, yet he was sincere and true, and there was something noble in the boy's love for the beautiful singer, a love founded as much upon his instinctive knowledge of her goodness and true womanliness, as upon anything else, as the signorina knew.

Darrel was shown into a small and barely furnished room to wait for the signorina. He had not long to wait.

Pauline came in in a few minutes, dressed for walking. She had looked lovely on the stage, in the glare of the footlights. She seemed lovelier now to the boy in the garb of everyday life. She was dressed plainly, but in the best taste, and Darrel, whose boyish eye naturally noted nothing of detail, only felt that the total effect was sweet and charming. She shook hands with the boy in her frank and candid way.

"I am glad to see you, Dick. You are punctual."

"I was not likely to be late, Pauline."

She laughed.

"Let us go, then. But it was scarcely worth your while to come. I shall only be free for half an hour."

"I shall see you this evening, before the scenes."

"You are staying the evening in Wayland?"

"Yes."

She looked at him curiously.

"But are you able to get away so easily from your school? Dick, you must not leave St. Jim's when you are not allowed to do so."

Darrel smiled.

"A prefect is allowed out whenever he chooses," he said.

"The Head doesn't make a fellow a prefect unless he can rely upon him in every way."

They left the stage door, and walked down to the High Street. On the other side a road, soon becoming a lane, led into the deep of the country. Pauline was silent until they were under the overhanging branches of the trees, with the leaves falling about them with a gentle rustle in the autumn breeze.

"But a prefect has duties to do," she said.

"Oh, yes, and plenty of them."

"How, then—?"

"My evening duties have been taken over by another prefect for this evening," Darrel explained. "That is all right. We can do each other turns like that. As a matter of fact, I took over his work for a week when he was swotting for an exam."

"I see. And what about the football?"

"You don't care about football news," said Darrel, with a smile.

"But I do: I care about all that interests you," said Pauline seriously. "You should tell me about your sports. You keep up a great deal of practice, I suppose."

Darrel coloured a little as he thought of Kildare.

"Yes. We are playing Tedelyffe in a few days. I wish you could come and see the match, Pauline."

The signorina nodded.

"I wish I could, Dick. I should like it above everything. But a member of a travelling opera company has little time for excursions."

"You work too hard," said Darrel.

"We all have to work hard," she said. "Too hard for our voices especially. Yesterday was market-day here, and the greatest day of the week for the box-office. I sang both in the afternoon and the evening. If I were to sing to-night I should be hoarse for days. I cannot be so careful of my voice as I wish."

"Then you will not appear to-night."

The signorina laughed.

"Yes, I shall appear; the company is too small for a single member to be spared from the stage. But I shall be in a small rôle that exacts nothing from me, and my name will not be on the programme."

"It will be better for you when you are at Covent Garden."

"Yes, when! Then three or four performances in the week will be the utmost."

"You will be very rich then?"

"Yes, if I am successful."

Darrel's brow clouded a little.

"And then—then—"

"It would make no difference to our friendship, Dick, and we shall never be anything but friends."

"Oh, Pauline!"

"Come, come, remember our compact."

"I remember, but it is hard for me. You don't know what this means to me, Pauline."

"I think I do, and for that reason it would be better for us to meet no more."

"Oh, no, no."

Pauline was silent. They walked under the old trees, and Darrel told her much of his school-life, a topic interesting enough to the girl who had lived in an atmosphere so totally different. With a word here and there she drew from him the description of his life at St. Jim's, the school-boy aims and ambitions, hopes and fears. The time passed all too quickly, and Pauline gave a start at last as the church clock chimed out over the woods.

"We must return," she said.

They walked back to the theatre and parted at the door. It was eleven o'clock that night when Darrel left himself in at the side gate at St. Jim's with his key.

CHAPTER 12.

Arthur Augustus Speaks a Word in Season!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had a thoughtful frown upon his brow. He was polishing a silk hat in Study No. 6, and his hand holding the pad was arrested in mid-air, showing that he was deep in reflection. Jack Blake, who was roasting and eating chestnuts, glanced at him. Finally Jack spun a chestnut from his finger and thumb, and caught D'Arcy on the chin with it.

The swell of the School House started up with a gasp, thus suddenly roused from his deep meditations. The silk hat went one way and the pad another.

"Bai Jove! Blake, you uttah ass!"

"Thought you were going into a trance or something," explained Blake. "Pick up that chestnut and throw it back to me, will you?"

"Certainly not. I wegard the wequest as insult added to injury."

"It's a pity to waste it."

"You have caused me to drowp my silk hat, and it is dented," said D'Arcy, picking up his valuable headgear, and brushing it tenderly.

"Sorry! What were you thinking about? How to get another feed on the cheap, same as we did Wednesday evening."

"I was not thinkin' about anythin' so gwoass."

"Gross," said Blake meditatively. "I believe I remember that you kept your end up pretty well in clearing Tom Merry's table, anyway."

"I was thinkin' of a more important mattah. Do you know that Dawwel went out last night, and did not return till a vewy late hour."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"It is a fact. He was not in when we went to bed. I haven't the slightest doubt that he was gone oval to Wayland."

"No business of yours, my son."

"That is quite a mistake. As a fellow who has been through these things, don't you think I ought to speak a word in season to Dawwel?"

"Yes, if you want to get your silly head knocked off."

"I wegard that expession as wude and oppwobwious. You see, the Wedelyffe match is on Saturday. We can't have Dawwel playin' the giddy ox like this and failin' us then. The honah of St. Jim's is at stake. There is a matinee of 'Faust' on Saturday. It would be just like Dawwel to cut oval to Wayland to see the signowinah, and forget all about the footah match."

"Oh, I don't know about that. He's several sorts of an ass, but not such an ass as that. Have some of those chestnuts?"

"I don't mind if I do, deah boy. But look here, to-day is Fwiday, and if anythin' is to be done, I think it ought to be done at once."

"There's nothing to be done, ass."

"Weally, Blake—"

"If you want to exercise your thinker, think of some way of getting a feed," said Blake. "I'm stony, Dig's stony, Herries's stony; we're all stony."

"The footah match to-mowwow is of more importance. The question is, would it have any result if I spoke a word in season to Dawwel?"

"Yes, I am pretty sure it would—a rather painful result for you."

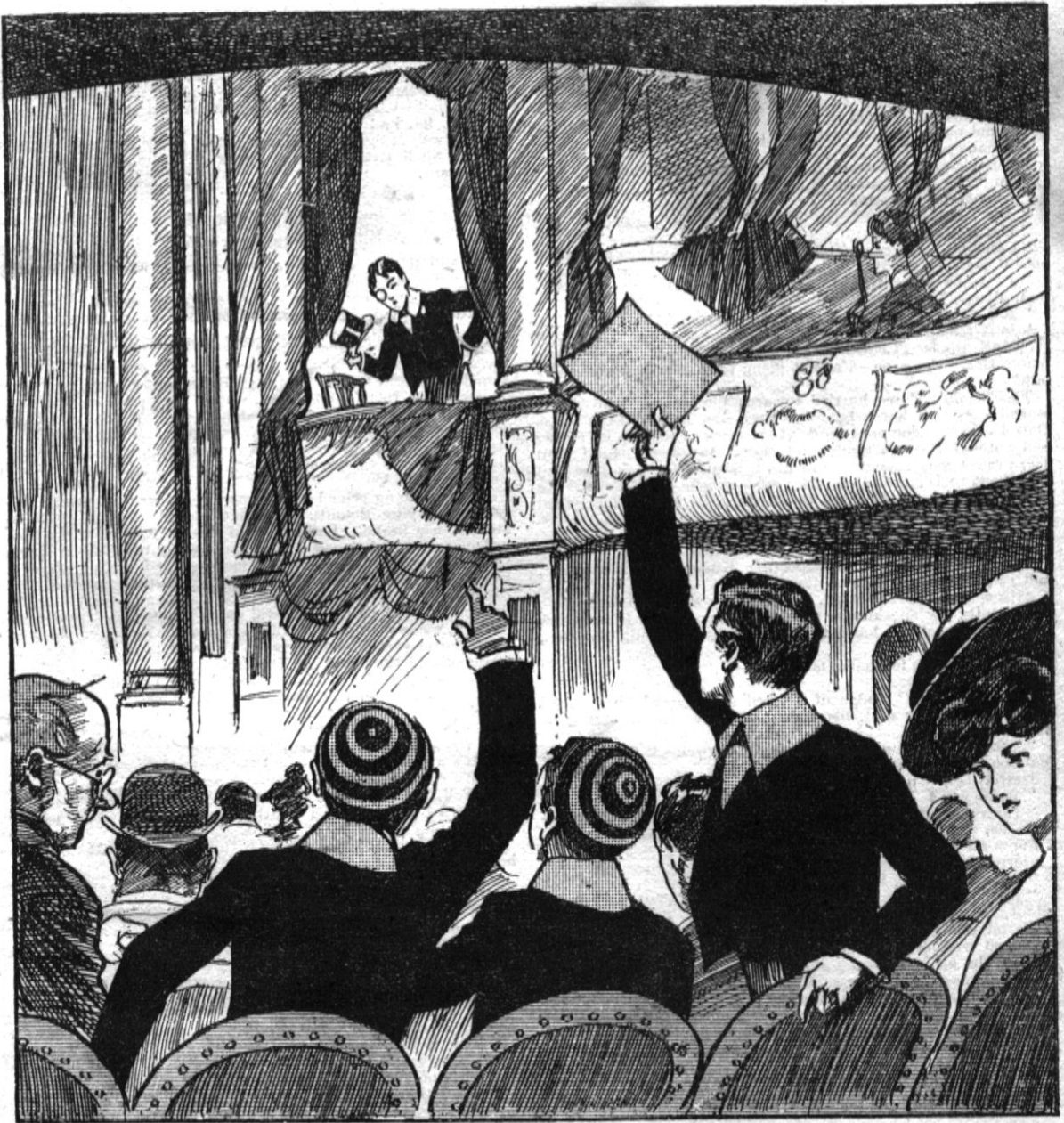
"Of course, I should be willin' to wisk that for the sake of the coll. But I hardly see how Dawwel could fail to weceive me with the politeness due from one gentleman to another."

"Oh, you can't rely on those Sixth-Form chaps," grinned Blake. "My advice to you is, keep off the grass."

"Undah the cires, I am afraid that it would not be consistent with my duty to the coll., to keep off the gwass. I must welect upon the mattah."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked out of the study, his brow corrugated with thought.

Blake chuckled. He had done his best, and if D'Arcy spoke a word in season to Darrel now, it would be his own look-out. It unfortunately happened that Monty Lowther was coming from the Shell passage, and he met Arthur Augustus a minute



"What-ho, St. Jim's!" shouted Lowther, from the back of the pit.

after he had left No. 6. Monty Lowther looked a little warlike. He had not forgotten the raid of the Fourth-Formers. But D'Arcy, with his mind full of another matter, was oblivious of the looks of Monty Lowther. He stopped the Shell fellow and tapped him on the arm.

"I want to speak to you, Lowthah. It's about Dawwel."

"Oh, is it?" said Lowther.

"Yaas. What do you think of the idea of speakin' a word in season to him?"

"A word in what?"

"A word in season. He was ovah in Wayland last night again. Now, I do not approve of young fellows fallin' in love with opewa singahs as a wule, but apart fwom that, there is the Wedclyffe match on Saturday. I weally think somebody ought to speak to Dawwel for his own good, in case he should think of buzzin' off on Saturday and leavin' the coll in the lurch, you know."

Monty Lowther nodded, with a face as grave as that of a judge about to pass a heavy sentence. He seemed to fully comprehend the importance of the matter.

"Good," he said. "It takes a fellow like you to think of these things, Gussy. Suppose you were to speak to Darrel, and point out to him that it won't do. Point out to him that it's not what the Fourth Form expect of him."

"Yaas, I was thinkin' of somethin' of that sort."

"A tactful chap like you might do a lot of good, in a delicate matter like this."

"Yaas. Blake seems to think that Dawwel would be waxy."

"Why should he be waxy? And if he were, I suppose a chap like Darrel would be hardly likely to fall in the courtesy due from one gentleman to another," said Lowther solemnly.

"Yaas, that has occurred to me before, Lowthah. You weally think, then, that it's a good ideah for me to speak a word in season to Dawwel?"

"My dear chap, there's nothing I'd rather see you do."

"Will you come with me and back me up, then?"

Lowther started a little.

"Well, I'm afraid I should only muck it up," he said. "A delicate matter like this ought to be left wholly in the hands of a really tactful sort of chap."

"Yaas, powwaps you are wight."
"Darrell's in his study now. He's going to play footer.
Better catch him at once."
"Wight you are."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away to Darrel's study.
Monty Lowther nearly exploded. He hurried back the way
he had come and looked into Tom Merry's study.
"Come out, you bounders," he gasped.

"What's up?"
"Gussy's going to speak a word in season to Darrel."
Tom Merry and Manners jumped up.
"About the signorina?"
"Yes. Ha, ha, ha!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on. We can watch from the stairs and see him come
out of Darrel's study."
"I say, he will get slain," exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's too
bad, Monty."

"Not so bad as scoffing our tea the other night."
"Is it too late to stop him?"
"Much too late," chuckled Lowther. "He's at Darrel's door
before this. Come on—I'm not going to miss seeing him come
out."

The Terrible Three hurried towards the stairs. Tom Merry
looked over the lower banisters and saw D'Arcy tapping at
Darrel's door. The next moment the swell of the School House
had entered Darrel's study and closed the door behind him.
The prefect was changing into his football things, and he had
called out to D'Arcy to come in, expecting to see Kildare. He
glanced hastily at the swell of St. Jim's as his head emerged
from the jersey he was pulling on.

"What do you want, D'Arcy?"
"I want to speak a word to you, Dawwell—"
"Buck up, then! I'm expecting Kildare every moment,
and I'm just going down to the footer."

Arthur Augustus hesitated. It certainly was not a favourable
opportunity for speaking a word in season. But D'Arcy felt
that he had set his hand to the plough and could not turn
back.

"It's about the football, Dawwell—"
"Buck up."
Darrell sat on the edge of his bed and shoved his football
boots on. Arthur took his courage in both hands and went
ahead.

"I was in Wayland the other day, Dawwell—the day of the
matinee at the theatre there—"
Darrel looked up quickly.

"Were you? What about it?"
"I saw you from my box. I am wathah expwienced in these
mattahs, deah boy, and so I may as well tell you at once that
I know all about it."

Darrell breathed hard.
"All about what, D'Arcy?"
"About the opewa singah. A most charmin' young lady, I
admit, but it won't do, Dawwell."

Darrel was too amazed to be angry—for the moment. He
remained with one leg crossed over the other, a half-fastened
boot in the air, and stared at D'Arcy.

"What won't do?" he said.
"I have seen with gweat wegwet that you are neglectin' the
footah," said D'Arcy. "I thought it my duty to speak a word
in season. I have been through these expwiences myself,
and so I can speak with authowity. It won't do, Dawwell. My
advise to you—"

Darrel turned scarlet for the moment. Then he deliberately
finished putting on his boots. Arthur Augustus, deceived by
his composure, went on with more confidence.

"My advise to you, Dawwell, is to make a clean bweak of it
—chuck the whole thing out of your mind. A word in
season—"

Darrel rose. The glint in his eyes rather alarmed D'Arcy.
"Thank you very much, D'Arcy," said the prefect quietly.
"It is very kind of you to come and give me advice, especially
as it is not common for Fourth Form juniors to advise prefects
on delicate matters. You impertinent little rascal, get out of
my study."

"Bai Jove—"
Darrel seized the swell of St. Jim's by the collar before he
could say any more, and slung him round. He tore the door
open, and swung D'Arcy into the passage. Then the football
boots came into play.

Arthur Augustus reached the end of the passage in record
time. Darrel went back to his study with a grim smile on his
face. D'Arcy sat up on the mat in blank amazement. He was

aching all over, and feeling very confused and shaken up. From
the stairs came a formidable roar of laughter. The Terrible
Three were clinging to the bannisters and simply yelling.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "I—I have been used with
gwoas diswpect. I wegard Dawwel as an ungwateful wottah,
and I shall let him go to the dogs in his own way."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of the School House limped away leaving the chums
of the Shell sitting on the stairs and almost weeping with
merriment.

CHAPTER 13.

Off to Redclyffe!

SATURDAY dawned a bright, cold, keen October day.
The weather was excellent for football, and the ground
in good condition. And everyone at St. Jim's was
accordingly glad. There was to be football galore that after-
noon.

The First Eleven were going over to Redclyffe to play their old
rivals. At home at St. Jim's there was a House match between
two Fifth Form teams. Antother House match, with two teams
belonging to the Fourth Form, was to take place on the junior
ground. Added to that a scratch team from the Sixth was
meeting a visiting eleven from Wayland. And the Third Form,
not to be out of it, had fixed up a Form match, between two inky-
fingered elevens captained respectively by Jameson and D'Arcy
minor.

After morning school and dinner, there was a general break
for the playing-grounds. The first eleven were to go to the
station in a brake. Redclyffe was the furthest off of St. Jim's
out matches, and it was a good journey by rail. After dinner,
most of the members packed their bags and waited about for
the brake. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were holding a
discussion in the hall, and Darrel was standing on the steps of the
School House, looking at a local paper that had lately come in.
Tom Merry saw what he was doing and smiled quietly. He knew
that Darrel would be looking up the reports of the opera per-
formances at the Wayland Theatre.

"We seem to be a bit out of it," said Lowther. "There's
no Shell match on this afternoon. We'd better get one up, I
think."

"Or shall we go over to Redclyffe and see the first team
play?" Manners suggested.

"It's a jolly long way—and there are the fares."
"We could manage it on our jiggers."
"Well, yes, we could. What do you think, Merry?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'd rather play, I think. Hallo, Blake,
are you playing to-day?"

Jack Blake had just come by with his coat on. He shook his
head.

"No. We're going over to Redclyffe to see Kildare's let
play."

"But there's a Fourth Form match on."
"That's all right. Reilly is captaining in my place, and they'll
get on all right for once without me. Nothing like giving the
other fellows a chance sometimes, you know."

"Yes, when you want to be off somewhere else," agreed
Lowther.

"Well, I think some of us ought to be on the ground to
encourage the Sixth," said Blake. "I shouldn't like them to
think we didn't back them up, you know."

"No, it would worry them fearfully."
"Oh, don't be funny. Are you fellows going over?"
"No, I think we shall play."
"So long, then."

The chums of Study No. 6 went round to the bicycle shed for
their machines. They could not afford the fares to Redclyffe, and
it was a fine afternoon for a long spin. The four of them rode
away together, and they were joined on the road by Figgins &
Co. of the New House. Figgins & Co. did not consider the Fourth
Form match up to their weight with Blake and his chums away,
and Figgins had resigned the captaincy for the day to Pratt,
and the Co. had determined to see the Redclyffe match. Several
New House seniors were in the First Eleven, and Figgins felt that
somebody ought to be on the spot to cheer.

Tom Merry and his chums discussed the matter, and decided
to set up a scratch match. They had no fixture for the after-
noon, but the weather was too good to be wasted.

"Good heavens!"
The sharp, low exclamation from Darrel came plainly to the
ears of the chums of the Shell, and they glanced at him quickly.

The paper had fluttered from Darrel's hands, and lay on the
stone steps of the School House, and the prefect's face had
become deadly pale.

"Good heavens!"
The senior leaned on the stone balustrade. His face was
white, his brow lined with care. It was evident that he had
learned some bad news from the paper. The chums exchanged
glances, and Lowther quietly stepped to the hall-stand, where
lay a copy of the Wayland weekly.

ANSWERS

ANSWERS' Great New Short Autumn Serial starts next Tuesday, October 27th. Order your
copy of "Answers" to-day. Price One Penny.

"There's something wrong," he muttered.

He glanced through the paper, and knew that it was the column dealing with the visit of the opera company that he should look at. He quickly found the paragraph that Darrel had been reading—at all events, there was little doubt about it.

"We regret to learn that during the performance of 'La Bohème' last night at the Theatre Royal, there was an accident to some of the scenery, and Signorina Colonna was injured. Whether the injury was serious we are not yet informed."

"That was all.

But it was clear that this was the paragraph that had wrung those startled words from Darrel.

Tom Merry looked out of the hall window.

Darrel was standing there, leaning on the stone balustrade, his face very white. There was an almost wild look in his eyes. The clatter of horses' hoofs rang in the old quadrangle, and the brake from Rylcombe dashed up. Kildare came out of the house with a bag under his arm. He tapped Darrel on the shoulder.

"Brake's here, old fellow. Scott! What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You are looking fearfully seedy," said Kildare anxiously. "Don't you feel fit?"

"Yes, yes. Leave me alone for a minute."

Kildare looked at him curiously, and turned away. He tossed his bag into the brake.

The fellows came out and mounted into the vehicle. Darrel picked up the paper again and looked at the fatal paragraph.

"We are waiting for you, Darrel," said Kildare quietly. "We have our train to catch."

Darrel started.

How could he go—how could he play football when the woman he worshipped was lying injured—perhaps even to the death?

Yet perhaps—more likely than not—it was but a trifling injury, and his anxiety was for nothing! He could not fail his captain for a trifle. But how could he know?

The Terrible Three came out of the house, and Darrel's face brightened up as he caught sight of Tom Merry. He signed to him, and Tom came up at once.

"Merry"—the senior spoke quickly and nervously—"will you do me a favour?"

"Anything," said Tom quietly.

"Are you fixed up for this afternoon?"

It was like Darrel, even at such a moment, to remember to be considerate towards others. But it only needed that very consideration to make Tom Merry willing to do anything for him. The junior shook his head.

"No," he said. "We were going to get up a scratch match, but it's nothing."

"Will you go to the post-office for me, then, and send a wire to Wayland, wait there for a reply, and—and—" The prefect hesitated.

"Willingly. That is easy enough."

"Wait at the post-office for a reply, and bring it to me at Redclyffe."

"Yes, rather."

"It's a long way."

"That's nothing! I can do it on my bike in less than half the time you take by train," said Tom Merry. "Scorching a bit, you know."

"Good! Thank you, lad. I'll write out the wire. Here's some tin."

Darrel scrawled a message on the leaf of his pocket-book, and handed it to Tom Merry. "Better read it, Merry; but don't jaw afterwards—you understand?"

"I understand, Darrel."

Tom Merry read the message. It was addressed to the manager of the Wayland Theatre, with whom Darrel was acquainted, and contained a brief inquiry as to the state of the signorina.

"You will pre-pay the reply and wait for it, Merry. Then scorch over to Redclyffe. If you go down to the village on your bike, you can get the wire off before we reach the station. Cut along!"

"Right-ho, Darrel!"

Two minutes later Tom Merry was on his bike, dashing down to the village. He had not waited to give a word of explanation to Manners or Lowther, but his chums did not need it. They simply fetched out their machines and scorching after him. Darrel stepped into the brake, and sat silent and troubled during the drive to the station. Kildare looked at him once or twice, but did not speak. He saw that his chum had some trouble on his mind; and he did not want to worry him with questions. Darrel was still silent and anxious when the team alighted from the train at Redclyffe, and entered the brake that was waiting to convey them to the school.

CHAPTER 14.

Bad News!

TOM MERRY jumped from his bicycle in the High Street of Rylcombe, and let the machine slide against a lamp-post. He dashed into the post-office, and jammed the scribbled message down at the telegraphist's desk. The telegraphist at Rylcombe was a pretty girl, and she was enjoying a conversation with another charming young lady, whose duty it was to attend to stamps and parcels. Tom Merry rapped on the counter, but the conversation was on the subject of hats. Needless to say, it had to finish before the telegraphist had time to attend to the boy from St. Jim's. Having settled what kind of autumn headgear would best suit her complexion, the young lady condescended to take the note and tick it off.

Tom Merry paid for the reply, which was to come to Rylcombe post-office, and then strolled out into the street. Lowther and Manners had arrived, and were standing on the kerb holding their bicycles. Tom Merry mopped the perspiration from his forehead with his handkerchief.

"And now," said Monty Lowther, "if it won't bother you too much, you might give us an inkling as to what the fuss is about."

Tom Merry explained.

"My hat!" said Lowther. "That means waiting half an hour at least. We'd better get along to the tuckshop and have a feed if we're going to ride to Redclyffe."

"Are you fellows coming?"

"Well, you're not worth it; but as we've come so far, we may as well stick it out."

"Good!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

It was not long since the juniors' dinner, but it was a good idea to take in a fresh supply in case the next meal was postponed. The visit to the village tuckshop filled in the half-hour pleasantly enough, and the chums of the Shell were looking satisfied as they strolled back to the post-office. The reply from Wayland had not yet come. It ticked in a few minutes later, however, and the message was handed out to Tom Merry. He did not feel justified in reading it, though he would have given a great deal to know whether the signorina was seriously hurt or not.

"Got it?" asked Manners, as Tom came out of the post-office.

"Yes," said Tom Merry, tapping his pocket. "Now for a scorch to Redclyffe."

"Good! It's ripping weather for a scorch."

And scorch the Terrible Three did!

Through village streets, through wide country roads and rutty lanes, they went as fast as their machines could carry them; riding in a row at a dead level, the pace hardly ever slackening.

Tom Merry glanced at his watch as a grey old tower rose above the distant trees.

"What is it?" panted Lowther.

"Quarter to three."

"My hat! They kick off at three."

"That's all right! We shall catch Darrel before he goes on."

They dashed on in silence—up a hill at a hot pace, and then free-wheeling down the slope at a rate that made the wind sing in their ears, and made them draw their jackets tighter over their chests. Manners broke the silence.

"I say, Tom, suppose it's bad news about the signorina."

"It may be."

"Do you think Darrel will play then?"

Tom Merry started. He had not thought of that.

"I suppose so," he said.

"If it's good news he'll be relieved in his mind, and play all right," said Lowther. "But if there's anything seriously wrong with the signorina—"

"He'll bolt!" said Manners.

"I fancy so."

Tom Merry looked worried.

"Well, it can't be helped now," he remarked. "I've given Darrel my word, or I should be tempted not to take him the wire. But then it would be rotten for the poor chap to be in suspense."

"It would muck up his play."

"Most likely."

Down the hill, and then along a smooth slope right up to Redclyffe. With the impetus of the rush down the hill, the chums free-wheeled at a terrific rate along the level. The gates of Redclyffe, wide open, came into view. Right on the Terrible Three dashed. They could see the clock over the trees, and the hand was pointing to five minutes to three.

"It's rotten!" muttered Lowther. "There's precious few fellows gone with the first eleven, you see, and it won't be easy for Kildare to get a substitute if Darrel were to bolt."

"There's the secretary, Crabbe of the Sixth."

"He's a linesman—and he can't play for toffee!"

"Can't be helped now."

Tom Merry sprang off his machine and dashed forward. Outside the pavilion on the match-ground a group of fellows were standing. It wanted four minutes to the kick-off, and the footballers were about to go on the ground. Tom Merry sighted

Darrel, who was chatting with Kildare, but with a cloud on his brow that told that his thoughts were far away. He caught sight of Tom Merry panting up, and his face flushed. He strode towards the junior and held out his hand.

"Have you the telegram?"

"Here it is."

Tom Merry handed it over. Darrel tore it open and read. A cry broke from his lips, and he staggered back. His face was white as a sheet. Kildare sprang towards him.

"Darrel! What is it? Bad news?"

"Yes."

The telegram fluttered from Darrel's hand. The fellows were crowding round him. North, the Redclyffe captain, came up, looking concerned.

"Something wrong?" he asked.

"Darrel's had bad news," said Kildare, with a worried look.

"I'm sorry. I hope—"

North broke off as Darrel turned hurriedly towards Kildare and grasped him by the arm.

"Kildare, I'm sorry—I can't play."

Kildare's face set hard.

"I suppose you've had bad news, Darrel, by your look. But it would have to be very bad to justify a desertion like this."

"Read for yourself."

Loytzer picked up the telegram and handed it to Kildare; the captain of St. Jim's glanced over it moodily. It ran as follows:

"Injury to head. Doctors uncertain so far.—Platt."

"Well, what does it mean?" asked Kildare. "An injury to a relation of yours?"

"No. A—a friend. Good heavens, she may be dying! I must go."

"If you feel like that, I suppose you had better go."

"Kildare! You can see I shouldn't be fit to play like this."

"I suppose so."

Darrel looked round him quickly. He was in his football things, but he could not go to Wayland like that. His face was working.

"Merry, will you lend me your machine?"

"Of course, Darrel."

"Then put up the saddle for me while I'm changing."

"Right-ho!"

Darrel disappeared into the pavilion. Tom Merry set to work on the bicycle. Kildare's face was a study. He was sorry for Darrel, but he was left in the lurch. There was only one Sixth-Former on the ground outside the team, and his football left much to be desired. Where was a substitute to come from? To play Redclyffe a man short was to court defeat. Kildare's eyes fell upon the sturdy figure of Tom Merry, and his face lighted up. Once before, on a similar occasion, he had played Merry of the Shell in the First Eleven, and he had pulled through. The same thought was in his mind now. The match, of course, was far above a player of Tom Merry's age and weight. But any port in a storm!

"What are you going to do?" asked North, catching the brightening expression on the worried face of the St. Jim's captain.

"Can you lend me some footer things?" asked Kildare. "Things that will fit Merry—the lad with the bicycle there."

"Easily done! My young brother's things will suit him to a T. But—"

"I am going to play him."

"I'll send for the things," said the Redclyffe captain, concisely.

Darrel came out of the pavilion, dressed in a remarkably short space of time. He jumped on Tom Merry's bicycle, and dashed away without a glance behind. What was a football match to him now—what was anything to him—when the woman he adored—with a boyish, yet a deep and earnest adoration—lay at Wayland injured, perhaps dying!

He disappeared in a cloud of dust. Kildare called on Tom Merry. His face was so hard that Tom feared the captain of St. Jim's was angry with him.

"I'm sorry about this, Kildare," he said quietly. "But—"

"It's not your fault, youngster," said the captain, kindly enough. "Nor Darrel's either, I daresay, though he's left us in a rotten hole. Are you in good form?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Fagged after your ride?"

"Oh, that's nothing!"

"Then get into the dressing-room and get your things off."

"Get my things off!" said Tom Merry, staring at the captain of St. Jim's.

"Yes. They're bringing you some footer things. I want you to play."

"You want me to play!" shouted Tom Merry, his eyes dancing.

"Yes."

"Good egg! I'll be ready in half a jiff."

And Tom Merry plunged into the pavilion, and was stripped in record time; and when North's young brother brought the football things, he jumped into them. The kick-off had been

postponed five minutes; no more was needed. Tom Merry lined up with the First Eleven of St. Jim's, and Monty Lowther and Manners, Figgins and Co., and the chums of Study No. 6, gave him a wild yell of encouragement. Redclyffe won the toss, and Kildare kicked off, and the game commenced; and the lithe, sturdy figure of Tom Merry of the Shell was seen, ever to the fore, among the mighty men of the Fifth and Sixth.

CHAPTER 15. A Noble Heart.

DARREL hardly remembered anything of that ride afterwards—it was a nightmare to him. He rode as he had never ridden before, even when winning the bicycle race at St. Jim's sports. He sat hard in the saddle, his grip on the centre of the handles, his feet working as if by machinery. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. His eyes were fixed sternly ahead—yet they saw nothing. Nothing but the vision of a beautiful face and two dark brown eyes.

Twice Darrel narrowly escaped. Once in turning a corner, when he almost crashed into a lumbering market cart that nearly filled the lane from side to side. A wrench on the handlebars saved him, and he went spinning, machine and all, into a ditch filled with fern; fortunately dry. He was up again in a second and dashing on, without even a glance to see whether the bicycle had been damaged. He left Tom Merry's pump lying in the dry fern, but that was all. As he drew near to Wayland a motor-car came snorting round on the wrong side of the road and all but ran him down. His calf grazed a wheel as he wrenched aside and dashed on. Darrel did not stop; but the motorist did, with a face like chalk. But the boy was out of sight in a few seconds.

The incidents made no impression on Darrel's mind; he hardly recalled them afterwards. Wayland came in sight at last. He had ridden long miles at a furious rate, but he had no feeling of fatigue. He rode into the town, and the first thing to catch his eye was an announcement bill of the afternoon's matinee at the Wayland Theatre, with a slip pasted over the name of Signorina Colonna.

He dashed on to the theatre. The machine went reeling against the wall as Darrel sprang off, and crashed down on the pavement. He did not know it. Trembling in every limb he knocked at the stage door. The matinee was in full swing, and he could hear the strains of music from within the theatre. The opera was *La Bohème*, and the boy knew, from the strains from the orchestra that reached his ear, faint and afar, that the scene was the one in which Mimi tells her name to Rudolf. The door was opened, and the strains came clearer to his ears. As he stepped within the building, he could even hear the soprano in the distance—but it was not the voice of Signorina Colonna. Some one else was taking the role of Mimi for the matinee.

"They call me Mimi.

My story is brief—"

Darrel was not listening. The man who had opened the door—whom he had seen several times before—looked at him curiously. Darrel grasped him by the shoulder.

"The signorina! How is she?"

"Signorina Colonna?"

"Yes! Yes! Is she—well?"

"She is better, sir. It turns out that it wasn't so serious as they feared at first."

"Heaven be thanked."

"It was a heap of scenery fell down, sir; and some of it struck her—she was stunned. But the doctors say it will be all right now, though she won't be able to sing again for a week or two, sir."

Darrel almost sobbed in his relief.

"Can she see anyone?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Is she conscious?"

"I can't tell you, sir. I could inquire."

Darrel groped in his pockets, and pressed five shillings into the man's hand.

"Do the best you can for me," he whispered huskily.

The man nodded and disappeared. Darrel waited in the grimy passage, his heart throbbing. It was not so bad as he had feared. But he felt that he must see her—that he must know from the evidence of his own eyes that the signorina was not in danger. The strain of the terrible exertion he had undergone, and the anxiety, was telling on him. The boy leaned against the wall, panting, pale as death.

From the direction of the stage came the soprano—feeble and poor compared with that of the signorina. Darrel listened mechanically.

The man came quietly back. Darrel's eyes fixed on him with a mute question.

"She is asleep, sir."

"I—I can wait here, I suppose?"



"Bal Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"The signorina may sleep for hours, sir."

"I must wait."

"I suppose there's no objection to that, sir. I'll get you a chair."

"Thank you."

Darrel sat down. His cap, wet with perspiration, fell to the floor from his hand. He was feeling cold now, and a slight shiver ran through him. He drew his jacket closer. The strains from the orchestra fell dully on his ears. A loud sound of clapping broke upon his attention. The first act of *La Boheme* was over, and the audience were testifying their appreciation. They knew that Signorina Colonna's understudy had taken her part, and, with the chivalry always found in an English audience, they were giving the timid artiste a good reception, though her efforts were very poor compared with the singing of the signorina. But doubtless the singing of the tenor in the part of Rodolfo gained a great deal of the applause. Darrel, in spite of his pre-occupation, had noticed the tenor voice, and he knew that it was the same that had sung the part of the Troubadour, in *Il Trovatore*, on Wednesday.

There was a step near Darrel, and a man came by—a man clad still in the shabby attire worn by Rudolf in the opera. He looked curiously at Darrel, and dropped a hand on his shoulder. Darrel started and looked up.

"I think I have seen you before," said the tenor.

Darrel nodded.

"Why are you here?"

"I have come to inquire about Signorina Colonna."

"She cannot be seen now."

"I know it."

"Why are you waiting?"

"To see her as soon as I can."

"It may be hours."

"Let it be hours."

The tenor looked at him with a gleam of compassion in his eyes, and passed on without another word. Ten minutes later he came downstairs.

"Would you care to see the signorina, young sir?" he said, in a quiet voice.

Darrel started eagerly.

"Can I see her?" he breathed.

"Yes, she is awake now, and she can talk for a few minutes to you."

"Did you—did you tell her I was here?"

"Yes. Follow me."

Darrel followed the tenor up the uncarpeted stairs. Armitage led the way into a shaded room. The signorina was lying on a couch, with cushions and pillows round her, in the dim glow of a wood fire. Her face was pale, and a bandage was over

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her forehead. A woman, evidently a nurse, sat quietly by the window.

Armitage showed Darrel into the room, and then withdrew without a word, closing the door gently behind him. It was time for him to prepare for the second act.

The signorina looked up, and her glance met Darrel's. The boy, red and pale by turns, advanced towards her, and dropped on his knees beside the couch.

"Dick! Don't—don't!"

The signorina's voice was low and sweet. Darrel choked back a sob; his lashes were wet with tears, but he would not let them fall now. It was only a moment of weakness; the outcome of long anxiety, long misery of heart and mind.

"Pauline! You are better?"

"Much better, Dick! It is nothing like what the doctors at first feared. But you—how did you know?"

"I saw in the paper that there had been an accident—I wired to the manager here. His reply alarmed me terribly—oh, Pauline!"

"And you came from St. Jim's?"

"I was not at St. Jim's; I had gone over to Redelyffe. I rode over from there."

"It was a long ride."

"Nothing much for me, on a good machine. Oh, Pauline—I feared—I feared—"

"My poor boy."

"And you are not much hurt; it will be all right?"

"I shall not be able to sing again for some time—that is all. It is a bad bruise; I am very fortunate to escape so lightly."

"Heaven be praised that it is no worse."

He was still holding her hand. Pauline drew it away gently. Her face was very tender, yet there was regret in her dark eyes.

"Dick! So you came over at once?"

"As soon as I had the wire."

"But what were you doing at Redelyffe? Was not that the match you told me about—the football match you were to play in to-day?"

"Yes."

"Then you have not played?"

Darrel coloured.

"No; I came away before the match started."

"Can they do without you?"

"They must."

The signorina's face was very grave.

"That is not right, Dick. Your comrades—your captain—have a right to expect you to play; you may have left them in a difficulty—"

"What is that, compared with— Oh, Pauline! Do you think I could have played with the thought in my mind that you were perhaps—perhaps—oh, heaven!"

She touched his curly hair softly.

"My poor Dick! I understand!"

His cheeks were wet. For some time he was silent, his heart throbbing. Suffering such as his young life had never known before had been compressed into the last few hours; it seemed to him a lifetime of suffering. The nurse at the window made a movement.

"Dick! I am glad to have seen you; but you must leave me now."

Darrel rose to his feet.

"Now I have seen you," he said, "I can go. Pauline, you did not mind my coming?"

"It was kind and sweet of you, my dear boy."

"I can go now that I know you are—"

He broke off.

"Good-bye, Pauline."

"Good-bye, Dick."

He pressed her hand, and left the room. A few minutes later he was riding through the lanes towards St. Jim's—slowly, with a throbbing heart and a heavy brow. But the terrible weight was gone from his mind. He left the girl with a shade on her fair face. She lay silent, resting—till at last a gentle tap came at the door, and the tenor entered. He came quietly towards the couch, and caught Pauline's glance.

"Still awake, Pauline?"

"Yes, Bob."

He sat down beside her, and took her hand. His glance was tenderly fixed upon the sweet and troubled face of the signorina.

"What is it?" asked Armitage. "You are thinking of the boy?"

"Yes."

"A fine lad; I like him."

The signorina's face lighted up.

"I am glad to hear you say that, Bob. I haven't kept anything a secret from you; tell me what I am to do?"

"You cannot do more than you have done—tell him that he must not see you again."

Her face was sad and clouded.

"If I could only pass out of his life in every way—somewhere where he would never hear of or see me again—where he would never even hear my name."

The tenor smiled.

"That is impossible, Pauline. You have the offer from Covent Garden—you will be singing there next season, rivaling the fame of Melba and Tetrassini, and your name will be known in every corner of the kingdom."

She nodded slowly.

"Yes—if I accept."

He looked at her in amazement.

"Pauline! It is the chance of a lifetime—you could not think of refusing."

"I have had an offer—from America—"

"Yes, and it is a good one; but it does not mean a tithe of what the offer from the Grand Opera Syndicate means. Think, Pauline! You have a chance that every singer would give years of her life to obtain. Think!"

"I am thinking, Bob—I have thought."

"You have not decided?"

"Yes; I have decided."

"To accept the offer?"

"No—to refuse it."

The tenor pressed her hand.

"As you choose, Pauline; then it is America for us."

And the signorina bowed her head.

CHAPTER 16.

Goal!

"PLAY up, St. Jim's!"

"On the ball!"

A hard fight was proceeding on the Redelyffe ground. The first half of the football match was over, and, though the St. Jim's eleven had fought hard, it had ended in favour of the home team. Redelyffe were one goal to nil when the whistle blew for the interval.

The second half was well advanced, and as yet the score had not been altered. St. Jim's were making strenuous efforts to equalise, but the Redelyffians were making equally strenuous efforts to get further ahead.

The result was a desperate struggle, in which the play on both sides was sometimes nil unworthy of a league match.

Sorely enough the St. Jim's First missed Darrel from their ranks. The steady but brilliant winger would have made much difference. But it had to be admitted that Tom Merry filled his place splendidly—though, of course, nothing like Darrel himself.

Kildare had given the junior more than one pat on the shoulder and word of encouragement during the progress of the game. Lowther and Manners had already cheered themselves hoarse and husky. Figgins & Co, and the chums of No. 6, forgetting Form rivalry and House rivalry, cheered Tom Merry at every step he took. If cheering could help the hero of the Shell to put up a good game, he would not lack that.

And Tom was indeed putting up a splendid game. He had a turn of speed that was wonderful for a junior, and all that was to be known about the grand old game Tom Merry knew.

The juniors of St. Jim's who were watching the game were delighted, and it was no wonder they waved their caps and yelled at the sight of the junior streaking among the big Sixth-Formers.

"My hat!" ejaculated Lowther, as Tom Merry captured the ball from a burly Redelyffe half and escaped with it. "Look at that!"

"Bai Jove, that was wathah neat! I could not have done it better than that myself, deah boys."

"You couldn't have done it at all, Gussy."

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Ripping!" said Fatty Wynn. "We ought to stand Tom Merry a feed if they pull off the match. It's ripping. If you think it's a good idea, I'll do the shopping for you when we get back to St. Jim's, and the cooking into the bargain."

"Hurrah!" roared Manners. "Good!"

"Yes, it is a good idea, isn't it?"

"Eh?"

"It is a good idea."

"What is?"

"Well, you must be a howling duffer to say it was good if you don't know what it was!" ejaculated the Falstaff of the New House at St. Jim's.

"Blessed if I know what you are talking about. I said it was good, the way Tom Merry let Kildare have the ball just then."

"Oh, I thought you were referring to the feed. We are thinking of standing Tom Merry a feed in honour of the occasion. It is a good idea, too, from our own point of view. I get awfully hungry in this October weather."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" roared Lowther.

Tom Merry had the ball again, and he passed to Kildare in the neatest possible way, giving his captain the ball just at the psychological moment; and Kildare slammed it into the net with a shot that gave the goalie no earthly chance.

St. Jim's had equalised!

The juniors roared.

(Continued on page 22.)

GRAND FOOTBALL PUZZLE-PICTURE

COMPETITION.

FIFTY POUNDS IN CASH PRIZES.

Specimen Picture.



APPLEBY.

First Prize—

£13 0 0: ONE POUND A WEEK FOR THIRTEEN WEEKS.

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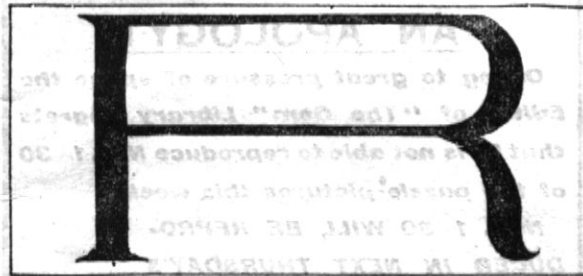
The First Prize will be awarded to the person who gets all or, failing this, most of the pictures right. The Second Prize will go to the reader nearest to the First Prize Winner, and so on. In the event of ties, the Prizes will be divided—that is to say, if two competitors tie for the first place, the first and second prizes will be divided between them, and so forth.

What Competitors have to do.—The Competition is very simple. We are publishing thirteen sets of Puzzle Pictures, each set consisting of six pictures. This is the Seventh Set. Keep this set until you have all the others. Each of these pictures represents the name of a well-known Association Football Player.

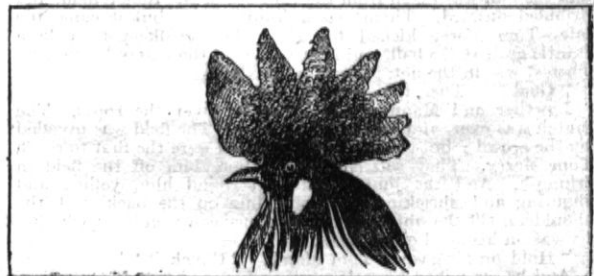
All you have to do is to write carefully under each picture the name of the Player you think it represents—it is NOT necessary to add the name of the player's club. Then place the set away until the others have appeared, when the latest day for sending in competitions will be announced. The Editor of the GEM LIBRARY will not be responsible for any loss or delay in transmission or delivery of the lists by post, nor for any accidental loss of a list after delivery. There will be attached to the final list a form to be signed by each competitor, whereby he agrees to these conditions, and no list will be considered unless this form shall have been duly signed by the competitor. No questions will be answered. Read the rules. The Editor's decision is final.

The easiest way to solve the Pictures is to get the issue of "The Boys' Realm" now on sale, price 1d. During the next thirteen weeks "The Boys' Realm" will publish a column of brief biographies of notable footballers, in which will be included all the names of the Players illustrated. Girls may compete. All competitors may get anyone to help them.

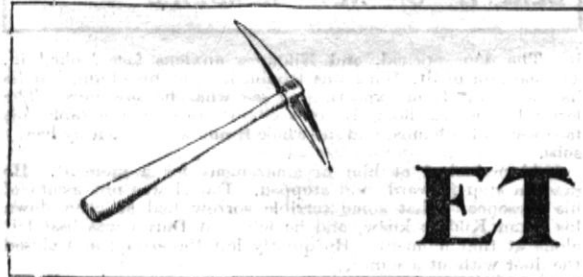
THE SEVENTH SET. (Nos. 1-30 will be reproduced next week for the benefit of new readers.)



No. 37.....



No. 38.....



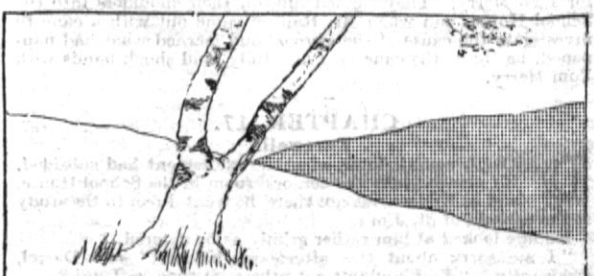
No. 39.....



No. 40.....



No. 41.....



No. 42.....

KEEP THESE PICTURES BY YOU UNTIL NOTICE IS GIVEN TO SEND IN.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"
 "Ten minutes more to play," said Blake, looking at his watch.
 "Our men won't let the Redelyffe lot get ahead again, you can bet your socks on that, my pippins!"
 "Yaas, wathah!"
 "Rather!" chuckled Manners. "It will be a draw at the worst now. Good old Kildare—and good old Tommy! Half that goal belongs to Tom Merry."
 "Bai Jove, it is weally wippin'!"
 Five minutes passed, and both sides were playing hard and fast. The players were almost all showing traces of fag after the hard struggle, but they were playing up splendidly. Kildare and Monteith looked fresh enough, and Tom Merry seemed to be very fit. Five minutes more to play—four minutes!
 "Three minutes!" said Jack Blake anxiously. "Where's that goal?"
 "What goal?" asked Herries.
 "The winning goal, ass! St. Jim's is going to win this match, but the duffers haven't left themselves much time."
 "Yaas, wathah."
 "There they go!" shouted Digby. "Go it—go it, St. Jim's!"

"On the ball!" shrieked Figgins.
 St. Jim's were on the ball with a vengeance now. The forwards had broken away in line, and with a splendid exhibition of passing they brought the leather right up the field. The Redelyffe forwards were scattered, the halves were nowhere. A desperate back rushed in and drove out the ball; but a lithe figure leaped into the air, a curly head biffed the football back again. The juniors yelled frantically.
 "Merry! Tom Merry! Hurrah!"
 North strove to clear, but he rolled on the turf, and Monteith had the ball. He passed to Rushden as he was charged, and Rushden let Kildare have it. The St. Jim's captain brought it right in and kicked for goal. The spectators—Redelyffians and Saints alike—held their breath for a moment. But the goalie was all there. The ball came out, fisted by the goalkeeper, and a Redelyffe back kicked to clear. But a foot was there in time, and the ball was taken from the very toe of the Redelyffian, and dribbled onward. There was a frantic rush, but it came too late—Tom Merry kicked for goal. The goalkeeper made a frantic grab at the ball, and it just escaped the tips of his fingers. Then it was in the net. There was a shriek.

"Goal!" Then the whistle blew.
 Lowther and Manners were the first over the ropes. The match was over, and St. Jim's had won. The field was invaded by the crowd; but the chums of the Shell were the first to reach Tom Merry. They seized him and bore him off the field in triumph. And the juniors gathered round him, yelling and shouting and shrieking, thumping him on the back and the shoulders, till the object of their enthusiasm wondered whether he was on his head or his heels.
 "Hold on!" gasped Tom Merry. "Chuck it!"
 And he wrenched himself away and rushed into the pavilion. But they followed him, and eager hands rubbed him down with rough towels and helped him to dress. It was an honour to put his shirt over his head, and to lace up his boots. Had he not kicked the winning goal in a first eleven match?

And as the visiting eleven prepared to take their departure very well pleased with themselves, North shook Tom Merry cordially by the hand, and Kildare helped him into the brake, and gripped his hand, too.
 "You played up wonderfully," he said. "There was luck in it, but your play was splendid. We're all proud of you."
 And the words, from the football captain of St. Jim's, brought a glow of pride to the junior's cheeks.
 It was a merry drive to the station. The footballers sang a football song at the tops of their voices, and the cyclists following the brake joined in heartily. Tom Merry had the honour of returning by train with the first eleven, while the others rode home.

The cyclists arrived at St. Jim's first, and spread the good news, and nearly all the school was waiting at the gates of St. Jim's when the victorious footballers came in sight.
 Wild cheering greeted them, and the Shell, to a man, roared for Tom Merry. They carried him on their shoulders into the School House, and when Mr. Railton came out with a cane to investigate the cause of the uproar, and learned what had happened, he threw the cane into his study, and shook hands with Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 17.
 Farewell.

DARREL came in later, when the excitement had subsided. He glanced into the seniors' room in the School House, and as Kildare was not there, he went direct to the study of the captain of St. Jim's.

Kildare looked at him rather grimly as he entered.
 "I am sorry about this afternoon, Kildare," said Darrel, awkwardly. "I—I couldn't act otherwise than as I did."
 "As it happens, it did not matter."

"What do you mean? How did the match go?"
 "We won—two goals to one."
 Darrel drew a deep breath.
 "I am glad," he said simply.
 "I played Tom Merry in your place. Of course, he was not up to your form, or anything like it; but he is a splendid player for his age, and we had luck, too. We beat them."
 "I'm jolly glad. I—I would explain if I could, Kildare, but—"
 "I don't want to question you, Darrel, but I shall have to think over whether you can remain in the first eleven," said Kildare bluntly. "As for the cause of what's happened to-day, I don't think that much explanation is required—half the school knows it!"

Darrel started.
 "What do you mean? What do they know?"
 "Lefevre of the Fifth has told me that there is a letter for you in the rack, in a woman's hand, postmarked Wayland. It came in by the evening post. A dozen fellows have seen it. Everybody knows about your going over to Wayland so often. I'm afraid that you've been making a fool of yourself, Darrel."
 "Perhaps I have," said Darrel quietly. He left the study. The letter was in the rack, sure enough, and several fellows grinned as Darrel took it down. He hardly noticed them. He took the letter to his study, and opened it there. It was from the signorina, and she must have written it very soon after he had left her, for the letter to reach St. Jim's by the evening's post.

The boy glanced eagerly over the letter. It was the first he had had from the signorina, and it made his heart beat as he read it. But, as he read, the colour faded from his cheeks, and a cry broke from him. One sentence danced before his eyes—one sentence that went to his heart like a dagger.
 "I have accepted an engagement in America, and shall be leaving England next week, for two years."

The letter fell from Darrel's hand. He flung himself into a chair. There was a tap at the door, but Darrel did not notice

AN APOLOGY!

Owing to great pressure of space the Editor of "The Gem" Library regrets that he is not able to reproduce Nos. 1-30 of the puzzle-pictures this week. NOS. 1-30 WILL BE REPRODUCED IN NEXT THURSDAY'S "GEM" LIBRARY FOR THE BENEFIT OF NEW READERS.

it. The door opened, and Kildare's anxious face looked in. The captain of St. Jim's was troubled about his chum, but he had been far from expecting to see what he saw now. The letter lay on the floor, Darrel's elbows were on the table, his face was in his hands, and his whole frame was shaken by heavy sobs.

Kildare looked at him in amazement for a moment. He made a step forward, and stopped. Darrel was not aware of his presence. That some terrible sorrow had stricken down his chum Kildare knew, and he felt that Darrel was best left alone at that moment. He quietly left the study, and closed the door without a sound.

The next day Darrel was very pale and quiet, but quite himself. He had a sorrow in his heart—but he had courage there, too; he had his battle to fight, but he had the pluck to face it. Kildare looked at him questioningly when he saw him in the morning. Darrel smiled faintly.

"It's all over, old chap," he said. "That letter was the finish. I shall never see her again. Perhaps I may tell you about it some day—not now!"

That was all Darrel said on the subject. It was enough for Kildare. The matter was indeed over. And if Darrel's heart ached when he read in the papers that Signorina Colonna had sailed for America, to enter upon her new engagement there, he said nothing about it. If he suffered, he knew how to suffer in silence. And time, as Pauline well knew, had power to heal the wound—in time nothing would remain of the boyish love but a memory tinged with sadness.

(Another splendid Story of Tom Merry and Co. next Thursday, entitled "The Scouts of St. Jim's."—Please order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF A GRAND STORY.



A THRILLING TALE OF THE COAL-MINES.

By MAX HAMILTON.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

David Steele, fifteen years of age, is forced through circumstances to leave the little North-country village which had been home to him all his days.

Wrexborough is his destination. He tramps on hour after hour, but at last, being too tired to move, falls to sleep on the banks of a canal. He is awakened by voices, and overhears a vile plot. He resolves to frustrate it, and is successful in saving the victim's life.

The next morning the rescued man tells David he is Mr. Scott, a wealthy Wrexborough mine-owner. He exacts a promise from the boy not to say a word about the attempt on his life, and orders Mr. Grafton, his manager, to find David some work to do. He also gets Mrs. Nichols, the wife of one of his men, to board and lodge him.

One day, while David is in an old shaft, he finds a strange letter, and so decides to hide and wait to see who comes for it. After a time Markham—one of the men who had made the attack on Mr. Scott—arrives.

(Now go on with the story.)

How David Fell into the Hands of His Enemies.

It was not chance that had brought Markham to the old shaft that afternoon. When he emerged from the shed he held a crumpled piece of paper which he smoothed out, read with a puckered brow, and then tore into small fragments and tossed away as he turned back by the path he had come.

Not till his footsteps had died into silence did David emerge into the open air.

His two mysteries, it seemed, were only one, after all. At least, the same man—Markham—was at the bottom of each. It was to Markham that the order to be "here at ten to-morrow night" had been addressed.

If David had been curious before, he was ten times more curious now. More, he determined to follow up the clue he had so strangely and unexpectedly obtained.

Who was the writer of the letter? The man who had seemingly vanished into thin air? Was it Scott?

That was his first idea. Dimly as he had seen the stranger, something about him had struck him as familiar, and he was certainly about Scott's height. But the next moment in a flash he recollected that the note was certainly not in Scott's handwriting. While he had been in his employer's house he had seen more than one specimen of his peculiar penmanship—peculiar because, in writing, as in everything else, Scott used his left hand in preference to his right. The note he had seen, on the contrary, was written in a running scrawl, quite unlike Scott's rather stiff, backward characters.

If not Scott, who was it?

Markham's companion on the night of the attempted murder! The boy's eyes flashed at the thought.

"If it's that brute who tried to drown me," he muttered, clenching his fist, "and he has any little game on hand, I'll see if I can't do my best to spoil it for him. I owe him something for that night, and if Mr. Scott won't let me pay him in full, why, I'll pay him what I can on my own!"

On one point he had made up his mind. At ten o'clock on the following night he, as well as Markham, would be at the appointed rendezvous.

He did not disguise from himself that the risk would be great. He was about to play the spy on men who had already shown themselves utterly unscrupulous with regard to human life. If he were discovered he could hope for little mercy at their hands.

Before he started homeward he had mapped out a plan of action for the following night.

To begin with, he must be on the ground before Markham and his accomplice. The shed where the paper had been concealed was probably their place of meeting, and he examined it with a view to concealing himself inside it. That a hasty glance

showed him was impossible. He must be content, therefore, to stow himself away in the old engine-house, and be guided by circumstances after the conspirators had arrived on the scene. It would go hard if he could not manage to overhear something of their conversation.

He would have given a great deal to talk over his plan with someone, to propose to one of the lads of the mine, for instance, to accompany him on his adventure, a proposal that he knew would be gleefully accepted. But loyalty to Scott held him back. It was possible, after all, that his employer was in some way concerned in this strange midnight meeting. If so, he—David—would respect his secret.

The next day seemed to the boy interminable. The hours simply dragged by, and when he met Markham in the evening he was afraid of betraying his excitement.

The miner, on his part, seemed perfectly cool. There was nothing in his conduct, as he sat, after tea had been cleared away, quietly smoking his pipe, to give the impression that he had any unusual undertaking on hand.

At half-past eight David rose, said good-night, and went up to his bed-room. A couple of minutes later he had dropped from his window into the street. He had previously examined the outside wall, and found that he could easily climb up to the window again. There was no necessity, therefore, for any of the household to be aware of his midnight expedition.

It could have been very little after nine when he reached the appointed spot, and crouched down in the shadow of the old engine-house. The night was a clear one, and, from the position he had taken up, he could not fail to see anyone approaching the door of the shed.

The air was cold, with a touch of frost in it, and the boy began to shiver as the minutes that seemed like hours crept slowly by.

Suddenly he started.

"Markham, are you there?" said a voice that sounded close beside him.

There was no answer, and the next moment a man emerged into sight—a man who carried a lantern. He passed quite close to the crouching boy, as if awaiting a reply, and then entered the shed.

Five minutes later the sound of advancing footsteps became distinctly audible. Another figure loomed up through the night, walked to the shed, went in, and closed the door behind him. Markham had come.

In an instant David had leapt to his feet, and, creeping cautiously as a cat, he advanced to the door of the shed.

He could hear nothing—nothing but an indistinct murmur of voices from within. Uselessly he pressed his ear to the door. The two men were evidently on the further side of the building, and for all the information he was likely to obtain, he might as well have been lying at home in bed.

In vain he crept round the shed, seeking for some chink which would enable him to overhear what was going on in the interior. Nowhere could he catch anything but a faint and quite unintelligible murmur.

"I'm done," he muttered—"done to a turn. No, I'm not, though! There's the roof!"

It had flashed across his memory that the roof was full of holes. If, therefore, he could get close to one of those holes, there would be nothing to prevent his hearing the conversation of the men almost as plainly as if he were actually with them in the building.

It was a risky job. At one end of the shed an old rubbish-heap reached half-way to the roof. There was no difficulty in getting on to it; therefore the danger lay not only in the likelihood that he would be heard by the men beneath him, but in the chance of the rotten planking giving way altogether and precipitating him into the shed.

Holding his breath, the boy climbed up. To raise himself to the sloping roof was easy enough. It was not so easy to crawl

Do not miss "Answers" New Short Autumn Serial, "GREED," which starts next Tuesday, October 27th. Order your copy of "Answers" to-day. Price One Penny.

along on hands and knees without making a sound. Cautiously he crept on until he reached almost the centre of the building, and paused close to a jagged opening a foot or two across, through which the sound of voices came clearly and distinctly.

The two men must be standing exactly beneath him.

"He won't be such a fool as to come," Markham was saying. "That's all you know about it," came the answer, with a contemptuous laugh. "He'll come, and come by himself, too, though with a very different object from meeting us. You don't give me credit for as much brains as I possess."

"What was the time you told him?"

"Half-past ten."

"It's getting on for that now."

"Yes. You don't sound cheerful, my friend. Don't be alarmed. We are two to one, and I'm not going to hazard your precious neck this time."

"Well, what have I got to do when he comes?" Markham asked surlily.

"Simply throw yourself upon him as soon as he is inside the door. Between us, we shall have him down in no time. There is a coil of rope in that corner. We must truss him up like a chicken, and then it only remains to escort him to his quarters. We must gag him as soon as we've got him fast. It isn't likely that there is anyone about, but we won't take any risks."

"Risks?" replied Markham bitterly. "We're risking a good deal in this business, it seems to me—risking a stiff dose of penal servitude at the least."

"That is where you make a mistake," rejoined his companion coolly. "The game is a perfectly safe one. It is impossible for anyone to find me out."

"Ay!" growled Markham. "Safe while we've got him, perhaps. But what is to prevent him splitting on us after he's given in—if he does give in?"

"His word," returned the other. "I know William Scott better than you do, my friend; and I know that, his word once given, he would hang on to it in the face of death itself."

Not a syllable of the conversation had escaped David. Incomprehensible as some of it was to him, he had at least learned the object for which the two men were met together. They meant mischief to Scott, and Scott, lured by a lying pretext, was on his way to meet them.

There was only one thing to do—to intercept and warn him of the danger into which he was unconsciously running. They expected him at half-past ten. Haste was necessary, for, though not yet in sight, at any moment he might arrive and fall defenceless into the trap prepared for him.

David waited to hear no more. He had been lying outstretched upon the roof, his head close to the aperture. Now he scrambled to his hands and knees, and began crawling back by the way he had come.

Perhaps his haste made him less cautious. At any rate, he had only advanced a foot or two when the planks beneath him cracked loudly and ominously. He paused, motionless, hoping that the sound had not attracted the attention of those beneath him.

He soon discovered that his hope was vain.

"What's that?" he heard Markham say. "There's someone on the roof!"

A fierce exclamation from his companion followed.

"A spy!" he cried furiously. "Give me the lantern! If it is, I'll—"

Further concealment was hopeless. The boy's escape was henceforth only a question of speed. To leap from the roof to the ground and take to his heels in the direction whence Scott was coming was his best, if not his only, chance.

He sprang to his feet, and then a cry burst from his lips. The rotten planking had borne his weight lying down, but it gave way beneath him the moment he stood upright. With a sound of splintering timber, one foot went right through the roof; and before he could withdraw it, he heard a shout from below, and felt himself gripped tightly round the ankle. In vain he struggled; his captor only held him the faster.

"Tear away the boards and pull him through!" David heard him shout.

And then followed the rending of rotten timber as the hole was enlarged.

"Help!" shouted David, with the full strength of his lungs. "Mr. Scott—help, I say!"

But his cry remained unanswered, and the next moment, between his own struggles and the efforts of his captors, he fell with a crash through the roof right upon the man who still clutched his leg—fell with such force as to knock him to the ground, at the same time upsetting and extinguishing the lantern.

David was uppermost. His adversary's breath must have been almost knocked out of his body; at any rate, he loosened his hold of the boy's ankle, and David scrambled out of his clutches and rushed towards where he believed the door to be, only to run almost into the outstretched arms of his other enemy, who had already placed himself in front of it.

By a backward leap he just saved himself from capture. But



"Don't forget the bad penny partner; it always turns up."

Here is a scene from the greatest serial story ever written, a story which none of us should miss. This is just one picture among a thousand thrilling incidents from a rattling story which absolutely teems with adventures and excitement.

Its name is "GREED." It starts NEXT WEEK in ANSWERS. 1d.

he was still a prisoner—a prisoner in the darkness. His only hope was in the arrival of Scott.

"Where are the matches?" he heard Markham shout from the door. "Strike a light and let's get hold of him!"

David's fallen adversary was by this time scrambling to his feet. The boy held his breath, expecting each moment the flash that would reveal his presence as he shrank against the wall panting from his recent struggle.

"I've dropped them, confound it!" came back the answer. "Where are you?"

"At the door. I can't leave it, or he'll get out."

"All right, I'll have him in a minute!"

His enemy was unconsciously almost touching David as he spoke, and the boy augured but little mercy from his tones. A sudden desperate idea came to him. Stooping down, he clutched at the man's foot, jerked it violently towards him, and, for the second time, brought him with a crash to the ground.

With a yell of rage, he recovered himself and turned on his invisible foe. And now began a fierce and exciting chase from end to end of the shed. Markham, afraid to leave his post at the door lest David should slip through it, could only listen while the pursuit went on, the boy twisting and doubling in the darkness and more than once actually slipping through his enemy's fingers. Hither and thither they dashed, stumbling and whirling in the obscurity, David's only hope in prolonging the chase being to allow time for Scott to appear upon the scene. His foot struck the extinguished lantern as he ran; he stooped, snatched it up, and hurled it behind him with all his might. A fierce exclamation and the sound of shattering glass told that his random shot had taken some effect, but not enough to disable his enemy, who only increased his efforts to seize his prey. Again David doubled. But he was getting exhausted. The perspiration streamed from every pore, and it seemed to him as if this horrible contest, this chase in the dark, had lasted hours instead of minutes. The man was close on his heels; his outstretched fingers had brushed his clothes. The boy tried to spring on one side, but as he did so a hand seized his arm, and the next instant another was on his throat.

The hunt was over. He was helpless in his enemy's grasp.

Greatest of all the "Answers" serials is "GREED," the new story which will start in next Tuesday's issue of "Answers." Price One Penny. Order your copy to-day.

"Help!" he shouted, in the hope that Scott might hear. "Help! help!"

His cry was almost choked as the fingers round his throat tightened their grasp upon it.

"Hold your tongue, you young cub!" was hissed into his ear. "Hold your tongue, or I'll strangle you!"

He was not far from carrying out his threat. The blood sang in the boy's ears, and he felt himself choking for breath.

"Listen!" cried Markham suddenly. "He's coming!"

He spoke truly. Footsteps—hurried footsteps—were nearing the shed.

"Stand back from the door!" whispered David's captor, pressing his hand over the boy's mouth. "Stand back—and be ready!"

The next moment the door was flung open.

"What's the matter? Who called for help?"

The voice was Scott's.

For an instant his tall figure stood outlined against the doorway; then, as he advanced a step, Markham rushed out of the darkness and dealt him a blow that sent him reeling sideways.

The Plot of a Fiend.

Of the confused struggle that followed David retained but a vague and dim remembrance. He heard Scott's voice ring out in a shout of "You coward!" as he recovered from the unexpected blow and rushed at the giver of it; then the sound of shuffling, stamping feet as the two men closed, and, locked in each other's arms, swayed hither and thither in the darkness.

He made a last and desperate attempt to free himself from his captor and go to Scott's assistance—an effort that was answered with a swinging blow delivered with all the strength of a man's right arm. It fell full upon his forehead. Lights swam before his eyes; he felt as if he were sinking downwards into nothingness. And then his senses left him as his assailant satisfied of his helplessness, dropped him to the ground and rushed to Markham's aid.

For a few minutes, by sheer pluck and weight of fist, Scott kept both his antagonists at bay. But the fight was too unequal to last for long. Attacked on both sides at once, he was overpowered, and borne to the ground, where he lay prostrate, with Markham's knee pressing into his chest.

"Who are you?" he gasped. "And what do you mean by this cowardly assault?"

"You'll know who we are as soon as we can find the matches," was the curt reply.

And a moment later a faint splutter of flame shone through the darkness, and lit up the face of the man who had kindled it.

"George!" cried Scott.

"Yes, George," returned the other coolly, picking up the shattered lantern and proceeding to relight it. "George, who has laid a very successful trap for you, my dear Will—one into which you have tumbled head over heels. Here, Markham, make him fast with this bit of rope. That's right. Now we shall have no more trouble with him for the present; for I warn you, Will, that if you attempt to cry out, I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of stuffing a handkerchief half-way down your throat! As for the boy," he added, holding the lantern to David's inanimate face, "he's quiet enough."

"You've killed him!" exclaimed Scott fiercely.

"No," was the nonchalant reply, as the speaker laid his hand on David's breast. "I haven't. It would have served him right if I had, though. This is the second time he has interfered in my concerns. However, we'll consider what is to be done with him later on. It's you that I want to have a word with just now."

He turned to Scott as he spoke, with a sneer upon his lips—turned to him a face that, save in expression, was the very counterpart of his prisoner's own. And it was not only in feature and colouring that the two men resembled each other. To a fraction of an inch they must have been of the same height; in breadth of shoulder, in gait and bearing, and even in trick of gesture they were exactly alike.

And yet in temperament no two men could have been more dissimilar than these two brothers—for brothers they were. George Scott, the elder, a wastrel and a gambler from boyhood, had broken his father's heart by his follies and vices, and had finally crowned a career of debt and extravagance by being convicted of forgery. On the day that he was sentenced to a five years' term of penal servitude his father had disinherited him in favour of his younger brother, and his dying injunction to the latter had been never to allow the fortune which had been built up by honest work and endeavour to pass into the hands of George.

Thus it had come to pass that George Scott was a poor instead of a rich man, and this was the reason that he hated his younger brother with a fierce and bitter hatred—a hatred that shone from his eyes, and twisted his lips into a thin line as he looked down upon the face of his captive.

"Well," he said brutally, "I've got you at last. You

slipped through my fingers the other night, thanks to that young cub there. I take it there's small chance of your doing so to-night. You're mine now, my dear brother, mine to do as I like with—to put a bullet through your brain, if I choose, or toss you over the edge of the shaft yonder. You've fattened on the property that should have been mine all these years, and now I'm going to make you pay."

"And you have set your mind on my death?"

"Not on your death, but on getting you into my power as I have done to-night. On thinking matters over I have come to the conclusion that you are worth more to me alive than dead. I will let you go, therefore. I offer you your liberty and safety, but at a price."

"And that price is?"

"One hundred thousand pounds. That was the amount of the capital my father bequeathed to you. You have probably doubled or trebled it by this time, therefore I consider myself extremely moderate in only asking for the original sum. Of course, you cannot realise it in a day; but if you give me your word that it shall all be paid into my hands within a time which we shall agree upon—say two or three months—why, you will be at liberty to return home as soon as you like."

"And if I refuse?"

"You will not refuse."

"But if I do?" Scott repeated.

"You may refuse now; but before I have done with you you will be only too glad to consent."

William Scott smiled.

"It strikes me, George, that you are trying to terrify me. I am not a child, remember, to be frightened with threats."

"No," was the reply; "and I will do you the justice to say that I believe you are as brave—ay, and braver—than most men, and that you would look death in the face without flinching. But there are things that men look on as more terrible than death—loss of liberty, for instance. What if I told you that it was in my power to shut you up in a prison hundreds of feet below the surface of the earth, and to keep you there, never allowing you to look upon the light of day until you had consented to pay me the sum I ask of you? What would you say if I told you that?"

He leant forward as he spoke, fixing his eyes upon his brother with a curious smile.

"I should say," the latter returned, "that, as I told you just now, I am not a child, to be frightened by that sort of invention. Further, that we are living in the twentieth century, not the tenth, and that a man in my position cannot suddenly vanish from his surroundings without inquiries being made and a search instituted."

Again George Scott smiled.

"You give me credit for less intelligence than I possess, Will. If you persist in your foolish obstinacy, and thereby force me to carry out the plan I have in my mind, I can assure you of one thing—that no inquiries will be made, and no search be instituted; for the simple reason that only two people—Markham and myself—will know that you have disappeared from Wrexborough."

The prisoner made no reply. Some inkling of the other's scheme flashed into his brain even before George continued jeeringly:

"I need scarcely recall to your memory how very much alike we are, my dear Will. We used to be continually mistaken for each other in the old days, and occasionally you were annoyed by the fact. The likeness, in spite of the different lives we have led, does not seem to have grown less with years. I am perfectly certain that if I should present myself openly in Wrexborough, I should be taken for you, and greeted on all hands as the flourishing colliery proprietor. I think you are beginning to see what I am driving at, aren't you?—beginning to see that there is nothing to prevent my keeping you a prisoner as long as I like, until, in fact, you agree to my terms, and give me your word of honour to pay me one hundred thousand pounds as well as your solemn promise to keep the transaction secret. Knowing you as I do, I am convinced that your oath once given to that effect, it will be held sacred. To save yourself trouble and inconvenience, therefore, I should strongly advise you to agree to these terms at once. What do you say?"

"I don't agree to them," replied Scott firmly.

"Very well," snarled his brother fiercely. "You have made your choice, that's enough for me. We'll see how long you'll abide by it. You'll talk in another strain before long. Here, Markham, come and help me to carry him along."

Markham, who, during the whole of the above scene, had stood in silence by the door, made a step forward.

"Where are you taking me to?" asked Scott.

"You'll see soon enough," was the reply. "Lift his head, Markham. I'll take his feet. We'll leave the boy for a time, he's safe enough for the present!"

He extinguished the lantern as he spoke, and the next

"GREED" is the title of "Answers" Great New Short Serial which starts in next Tuesday's issue. Price One Penny. Order your copy of "Answers" to-day.

moment Scott felt himself lifted from the ground by his head and heels, and carried out into the open air. Where were they taking him? he asked himself. Not very far, for, after a few yards had been traversed, he was laid down again upon the ground. Then, as he raised his head, and, looking around him, realised where he was, the meaning of his brother's threats suddenly flashed into his mind.

"To shuf you up in a prison hundreds of feet below the surface of the earth, to keep you there, and never allow you to look upon the light of day."

He understood now what that meant. For his captor had deposited him upon the earth within a yard or two of the black, gaping mouth that led down to the old mine—to workings which no man ever now entered, to tunnels which the foot of the miner had long ceased to traverse—tunnels falling into decay as years went by, but which would still form a hiding-place and a prison secure from even the keenest search.

Fighting the Flames.

Half an hour had passed by since David had been left alone; and then, had anyone been there to listen, they would have heard him stir, and a faint moan come from his lips.

The stupefaction produced by the violent blow he had received was passing away, and consciousness was coming back to him.

A few minutes more, and he raised himself on his elbow, and peered round him, trying to recall where he was and how he had come there.

His head throbbed sickeningly. He could not bear to hold it up, and soon slipped back into a recumbent position. For a little while he lay dazed and bewildered, and then the memory of his midnight excursion, of his fall through the roof, his capture, and the subsequent arrival of Scott came back to him with a rush.

What had happened since then? He was still in the shed, but, so far as he could make out, alone. Markham and his companion were gone then. But what had they done with Scott—killed him? If so, in all probability his body was lying somewhere close at hand, invisible in the darkness.

The boy shuddered at the thought. The horror of it overcame his physical weakness, and he made a desperate effort to rise to his feet.

He had only scrambled to his knees, however, when he stopped suddenly. Footsteps were approaching the shed.

Instinct rather than reason prompted him to fling himself on the ground again, and lie there motionless and seemingly senseless, awaiting the outcome of events.

He had not long to wait. The door opened, and a man entered and groped his way to the boy's side. Stooping down, he seized David's wrists and, holding them together, made a couple of turns round them with a rope. Suddenly, however, as if a thought had struck him, he stopped.

"No," the boy heard him mutter, "there's no need of that. He can't get away, and if the rope was found on him, it would point to foul play. Safer not to."

He unwound the cord and tossed it aside, then rose to his feet and walked across the shed, and the next moment David heard the striking of a match.

From where he lay he could not see his enemy. His back was towards him, and he dared not stir. What, he asked himself, with a beating heart, was he about to do—murder him? If so, he—David—was helpless in his hands.

Another and another match spluttered into flame. Then, to his surprise, the boy heard the door slammed, something that sounded like the thrust of a rusty bolt, and he was alone. His enemy had left him. For the moment he was safe. The footsteps were rapidly receding.

His relief was short-lived. A whiff of choking smoke enveloped him, and the next instant the shed was lit up by a glare of light.

The place was on fire. Already in one corner the flames were running rapidly up the dry and rotten timbers, sending out rolling volumes of thick smoke that rapidly filled the shed and rose through the rents in the roof towards the starlit sky.

Fear lent the lad strength. He leapt up and rushed towards the door. Then, when, as he had instinctively guessed would be the case, he found it fastened on the outside, he flung himself against it and beat upon it with an energy of which a moment before he would not have believed himself capable.

In vain! The door held in spite of his frenzied efforts, and every moment the roaring and crackling of the flames increased, and the volumes of smoke grew denser. The fire had reached the roof now, and long, red tongues were shooting up above it. The heat was intolerable.

Pausing in his frantic attacks upon the unyielding door, David shouted for aid, hopeless, even as he did so, and knowing that there could be no one in hearing except those

who would turn a deaf ear to his appeals for mercy. But only the increasing roar of the flames returned an answer to his cries.

It was not only fear that filled his heart, but rage against those who had trapped him and consigned him to a horrible death, lest he should live to be a witness against them, for such he felt was the secret of their desire to rid themselves of him. And he gnashed his teeth in helpless fury as he thought how impossible it would be to fix the crime upon them, how easily and how safely they had swept him from their path. Their hideous cruelty would in all probability remain for ever unavenged. To all except the scoundrels who had encompassed it the manner in which he had met his death would remain a mystery.

The increasing heat of the flames drove him from the door to the further end of the shed. The roof was well alight by now. One end of it was blazing furiously. As he leant up against the wall and gazed fascinated upon the advancing fire, a strange lethargy fell upon the boy. He wondered dreamily how long it would be before the flames seized him in their fiery fingers and wrapped him in their embrace.

He had heard, as a rule, in fires, men were suffocated by the smoke before the flames reached them, and the smoke was thickening around him every moment.

He gazed upwards. Right above him—through a jagged tear in the roof—the very place where he had been dragged through an hour or two before—the sky was plainly visible. A momentary puff of wind had blown the smoke on one side, and he could see the stars shining clearly above him, and one beam of broken timber stretching half-way across the opening. And, as he looked up at it, a sudden hope flashed into his mind.

A rope slung over that broken beam might save him. A rope! And somewhere on the floor of that shed a rope was lying. In an instant he was down on his knees, creeping towards the pit where he thought it to be—somewhere in the centre of the shed.

The smoke almost choked him—would have done so if he had not thought of tying his handkerchief over his face. The heat was intense as he worked his way nearer to the burning end of the shed. He felt as though he could bear the awful heat no longer, when at length his hand touched and closed over what he sought.

Blinded and scorched, he struggled back to the other end of the shed. The broken beam was almost hidden from his sight, now, by volumes of choking smoke. His head felt bursting, and he could hardly see out of his streaming eyes. Having knotted a noose with his trembling fingers, he flung the rope upwards. It failed to catch the beam, and fell back. Again and again he failed!

Reeling and gasping, he reached his arm for a fourth attempt. His weakening sense told him that this would be the last—that he would never have strength for another cast. Once more he flung the noose, almost at random, for, blinded by the smoke, he could not see to aim.

This time it caught. The noose slipped over the timber, and the rope grew taut between his hands. The next instant he was swarming upwards.

He reached the beam, flung his leg across it, and scrambled out on to the roof, whence he took a flying leap to the ground, picked himself up and staggered a few paces, and, for the second time that night, fell senseless to the earth, just as the building, from which he had barely escaped with his life, collapsed with a crash, the roof falling in and sending showers of sparks up into the midnight air.

It was broad daylight before David opened his eyes again. Someone was speaking to him. A hand was laid upon his shoulder, and then upon his head; but it seemed as though some weight was holding him down, and he could not stir. By degrees the voice grew clearer, though it still sounded dim and a long distance off, and at last he could make out the words.

"Wake up, I say! Yer ain't dead, are yer? Oh, whatever am I to do?"

David opened his eyes. A face was looking down into his own, an anxious, not over-clean face—the face of Micky Jones, the barge-boy.

"I thought you was dead," said Micky, with a sigh of relief. "I've been trying to wake you up for the last hour or more. 'Ow did you come 'ere, and what's the matter with you?"

David made no answer. With infinite difficulty he raised himself upon his elbow, his head throbbing as though it would burst at each movement he made. Then, as he looked around him, a cry burst from his lips. Only a few yards away from him stood the blackened and still smouldering remains of the shed from which he had escaped the night before; and at the sight of it the memory of all that had occurred within its walls came back with a rush.

He staggered to his feet, and stood swaying like a

(Continued on page 28.)

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drunken man, clutching at Micky's shoulder to steady himself.

"Help me along, Micky!" he said thickly. "Wait a moment, though! You haven't seen anyone about here since you came?"

Micky shook his head. "It's nigh an hour since I found yer lying here," he said. "I was on the tramp to Wrexborough. Dad's in 'orspital with a broken leg, and me bein' on me own thought I might get a job down Wrexborough way. I starts early this mornin' from Mickleton, and all of a sudden I nearly tumbles over yer. What's been up with you? Your eye's as black as my boot, and your forehead's all swelled!"

"Look here, Micky!" David returned. "I haven't time to tell you everything now, but you must help me into Wrexborough as fast as you can. My head swims, and I don't believe I can walk so far unless you help me. There—there's been foul play, and I must give the alarm! Here, hold on!"

He slipped his arm through Micky's as he spoke, and together they set out towards the town, Micky with his eyes rounder than ever, and with half a dozen questions on his tongue. David, however, was in no condition to talk. Even with his companion's help, it was all he could do to stagger along, stumbling at every step. It was not alone from the effects of the blow he had received from which he was suffering; the cold to which he had been exposed during the long hours of the night, after his escape from the burning shed, had chilled him to the marrow, and he was well on the way to a high fever. Faint, weak, and giddy, more than once during the walk he was on the point of swooning again, and it was more than an hour after they had started before the outlying houses of Wrexborough came in sight.

David had intended giving the alarm at Scott's house, but he was saved the necessity of going so far. A few hundred yards from the gates he saw a strongly-built figure swinging along the road with bent head and an air of deep thought.

"Mr. Grafton!" he cried. The manager of the mine pulled up short, and stared at the boy.

"David Steele!" he exclaimed. "How is it you aren't at work this morning? Good heavens, lad!" he went on, as he noticed the boy's pale, bruised face. "What have you been doing with yourself, you look half dead?"

"Never mind me, Mr. Grafton!" said David, seizing his sleeve in his excitement. "It's Mr. Scott you must think of. There's been foul play. He was attacked last night by Markham and another man close by the old shaft, and they have either carried him off or murdered him. For Heaven's sake send out in search of him as quickly as you can!" he added, as he met the manager's incredulous gaze. "I tell you it's a matter of life and death! Don't you believe me?"

"Believe you? No!" returned Grafton bluntly. "Mr. Scott carried off and murdered? If you didn't look as if you had been half murdered yourself, I should think you were trying one of your hoaxes on me. Have you gone crazy, my lad?"

"Crazy?" cried David passionately. "Hoax? Mr. Grafton, I swear to you I am speaking the truth! Mr. Scott was attacked on the moor last night. I was there when it happened, and I barely escaped being burned to death by them in the old shed, and I firmly believe his body is lying somewhere about on the moor now!"

"And I firmly believe it isn't," said the manager coolly. "And as I left Mr. Scott in his own house not ten minutes ago, I should think I am more likely to be in the right than you!"

"What?" cried David, unable to believe his ears. "Mr. Scott is safe at home?"

"Safe at home!" repeated Grafton. "And I should imagine he's been safe at home all night!"

"Then," stammered David, "he did not tell anything about what happened at the shed?"

"No," replied the manager grimly; "he did not. Come, come," he went on sharply, "we've had enough of this. Next time you want to play a practical joke, remember I'm not the proper person to try it on, or you'll be sorry you made the attempt."

He was about to pass on, but once more David stopped him.

"Mr. Grafton," he exclaimed, "forgive me, but is it really the truth that you have told me?"

"The truth!" said Grafton angrily. "What do you mean, you impertinent young cub? I'll teach you to doubt my word. Bless my heart!" he added, with a sudden change of tone, catching David in his arms as the boy staggered and would have fallen, "the lad's ill. What a brute I am to speak to him like that! What's the matter with him?" he went on, turning to Micky. "Been up to any mischief, eh?"

Micky shook his head. "Don't know nothin' about it," he declared, "'cept that I found him lyin' on the moor this mornin' an' helped him to walk here."

"Out on the moor?" said the puzzled Grafton, looking down on David, who lay in his arms moaning faintly, and for the moment incapable of speech. "How did he get there? And who's been knocking him about, I wonder? He's had a blow on the forehead that would have stunned an ox, to judge by the mark it has left. And his clothes are all singed, too—he said something about being nearly burnt, didn't he? Well, there's one thing certain, and that is that the sooner he's lying in bed, the better."

He hoisted the boy in a pair of muscular arms as he spoke.

"Hallo! what's this? Somebody ill?" Grafton turned round to face his employer.

"It's David Steele, sir," he replied. "I'm afraid he has been hurt, though how I can't make out yet, for the queer part of it is, he came up to me just now with a story that you'd been attacked and perhaps murdered by two men near the old shaft. Good heavens, sir, what's the matter?"

For Scott was staring at David as if he had seen a ghost. His pallid lips moved, but no sound came from them, and as David's eyes opened his own dilated with horror.

The lad gave a faint cry of mingled surprise and relief. "That you, sir?" he exclaimed. "You are safe, then? How did you get away? I was afraid Markham and that other brute had done for you."

But the momentary delay had given the man he addressed time to collect himself, and David's words were answered with a stare of seeming astonishment.

"Markham—done for me? What's the boy talking about?"

David looked up in blank amazement. "Last night, sir—the moor—the shed!" he gasped painfully, astonished at his employer's strange pretence of not understanding him.

Scott shrugged his shoulders. "You're dreaming, my lad," he answered sharply, "or talking arrant nonsense!

What on earth should I be doing in a shed or on the moor last night?"

There was something so harsh in his tone that the kindly Grafton broke in:

"The lad's ill, Mr. Scott; anyone can see that with half an eye. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

"Evidently not!" returned Scott roughly.


Then, seeing the look of astonishment on Grafton's face, he altered his tone, and laid his hand on David's pulse.

(To be continued.)

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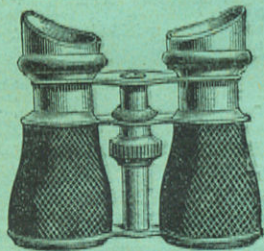
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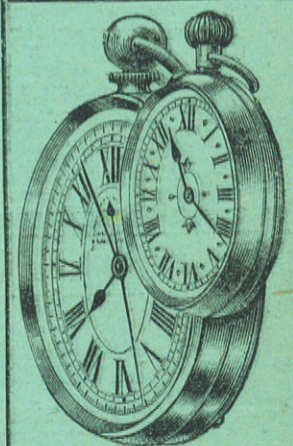
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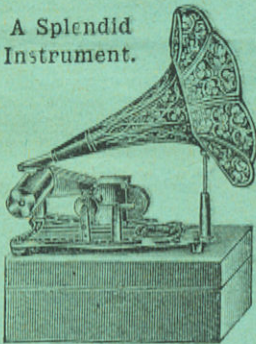


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