

Tom Merry and Ferrers Locke.

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FIGGINS & CO.'S FAILURE.

A GRAND TALE OF
TOM MERRY'S
SCHOOLDAYS.

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.



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TAKEN IN!

NO. 45.

VOL. 2.

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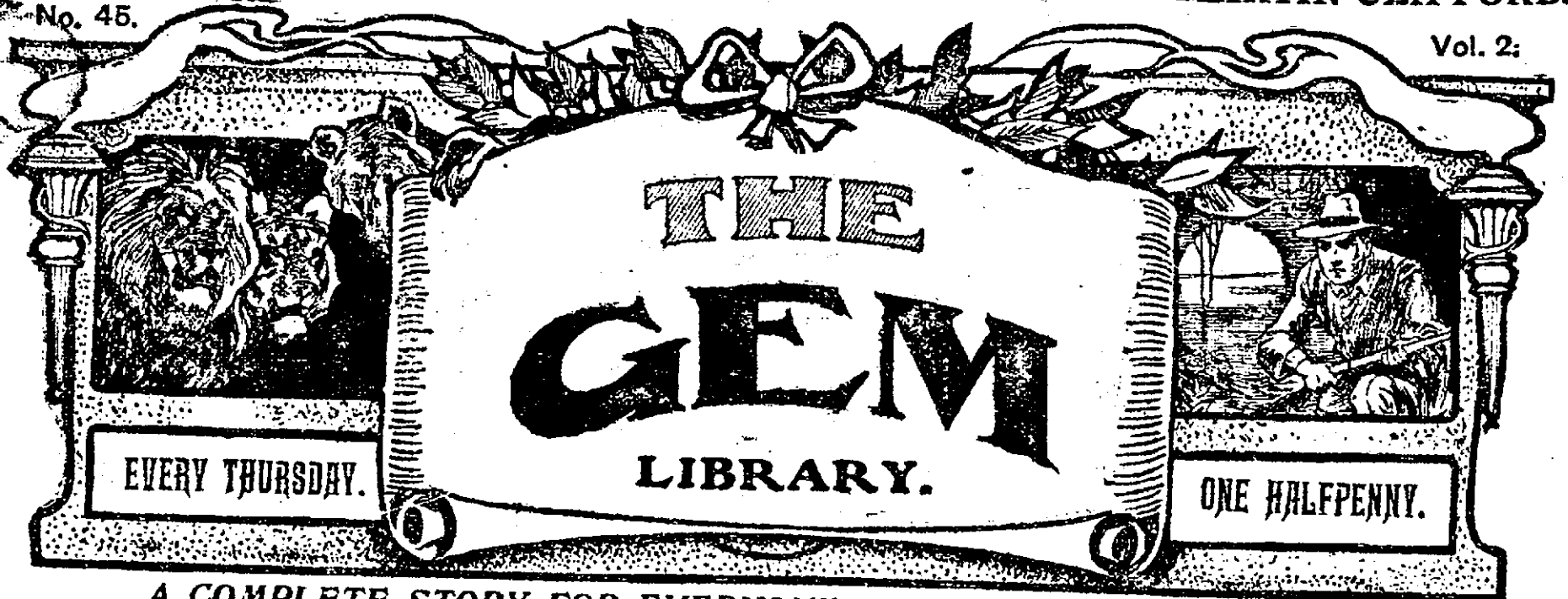
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No. 45.

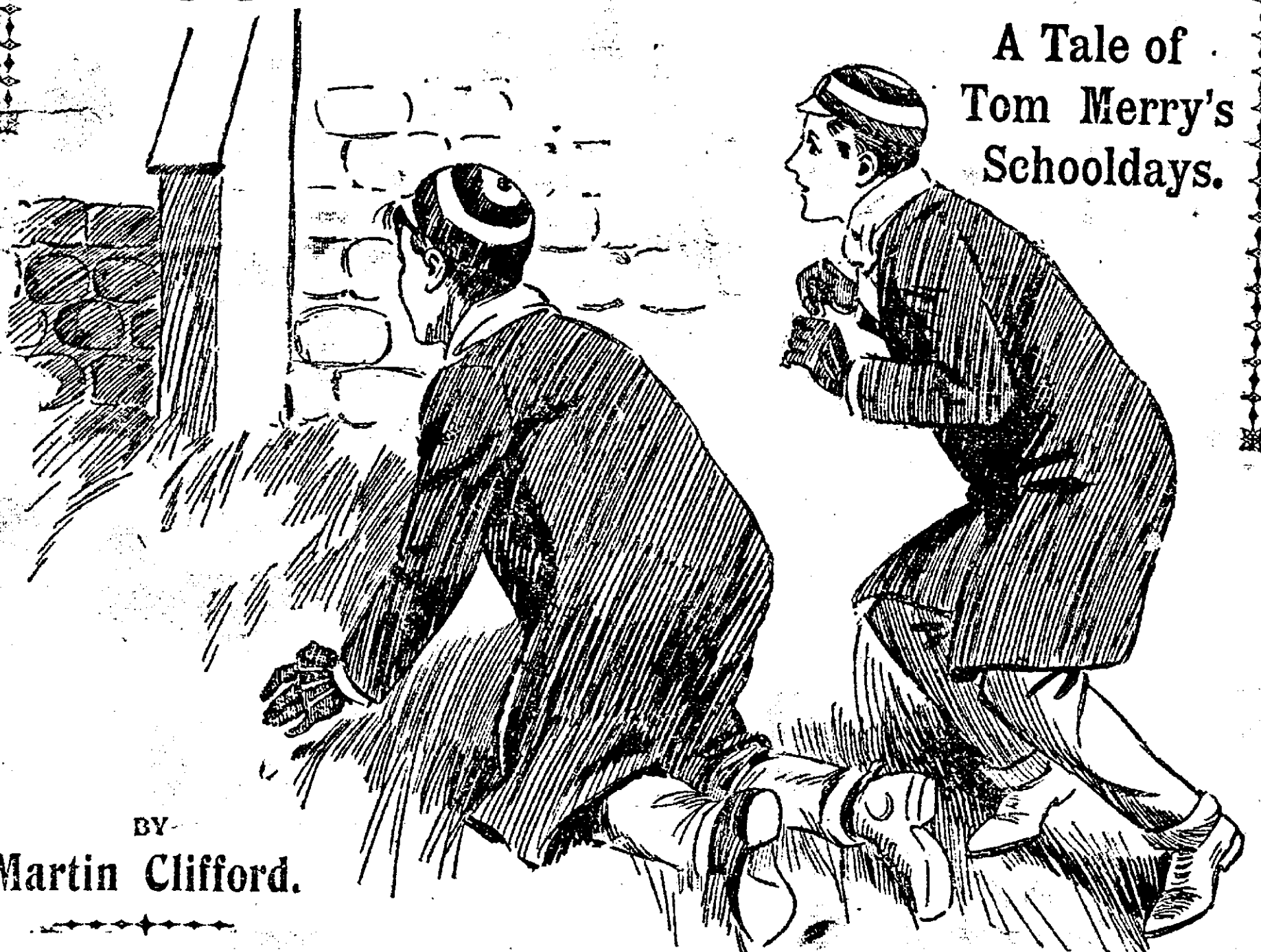
Vol. 2:



A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

Figgins & Co.'s Failure.

A Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.



BY Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER I.

An Unexpected Meeting.

FIGGINS & CO. were sitting in a row on the top bar of the stile in Ryloombe Lane, when Tom Merry came up the lane from the direction of St. Jim's. It was a cold, but fine, Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Tom Merry came up the lane with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his curly head, whistling

cheerily. He stopped at the stile, to turn into the footpath through the wood, and found himself face to face with Figgins & Co.

Figgins & Co. filled up the stile as they sat there in a row, cracking and eating walnuts. They did not offer to move.

"I say, I want to pass, you knoy," said Tom Merry, looking from one to another of the Co., and waiting for one of them to move.

Figgins looked at him casually.

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"Can't be did," he replied, with a shake of the head. "You see, as we belong to the New House, which is the cock-house of St. Jim's, we can't possibly make way for a measly School House bounder."

"Impossible," said Kerr, the Scottish partner in the Co. "It would be infra dig, you know. Sorry, kid, but you'll have to go round."

"It's only about a mile and a half to go round," Fatty Wynn remarked thoughtfully. "And it will be good exercise for you, Merry. You fellows in the Shell need a little exercise to improve your form on the football field, you know."

Tom Merry smiled. He hadn't any intention of going a mile and a half round to save Figgins & Co. the trouble of shifting off the stile; but the New House trio were evidently determined not to move. The only thing was to move them!

"Now, don't be asses," said Tom Merry, in a tone of mild remonstrance. "I mean, don't be bigger asses than you can help. Of course, it's no good expecting a New House kid not to be an ass at all. You can't help being what you were born."

Figgins grinned.

"You're not going to make me get off this stile to lick you, Tom Merry," he said. "We're resting here, and we're not going to move. You can talk till you are black in the face, but we're not shifting."

"Then I shall have to shift you."

"Right-o! We're waiting."

The New House Co. were ready. Tom Merry looked at them rather dubiously. It would be no easy task to drag them off the stile, especially Figgins, who was in the middle, and whose long legs rested upon the lower step.

"Come on," said Figgins invitingly; "I'm waiting to be yanked off this stile. I'm ready to be yanked off. In fact, I'm especially eager to be yanked off."

"Look here, Figgy—"

"Sha'n't! You've no right to expect anybody to look at a chivvy like that. Take it away and bury it."

"I'm coming over that stile."

"You may be, Merry, but my opinion is that you are not," said Figgins. "I may be mistaken, but I don't— Oh! ow! ooosh!"

Tom Merry suddenly charged with outspread hands. Figgins received a sudden push on the chest, and went flying backwards over the stile with his long legs in the air.

He plumped down on the grass on the other side, and in a moment Tom Merry had given Fatty Wynn a push that sent him to join Figgins. Kerr, more quick to move, jumped down into the lane to lay hold of Tom Merry.

But Tom was not to be laid hold of. The step of the stile being clear, he leaped over into the footpath, leaving Kerr on the wrong side of the stile.

Fatty Wynn was gasping like a codfish, and Figgins was just rising to his feet in wrath. Tom Merry gave him a push in passing which sent him sprawling across the fat boy of the New House, and then ran lightly up the footpath with a merry laugh.

Tom was out of sight in a moment, and Figgins & Co., having picked themselves up and sorted themselves out, glared after him.

"My hat!" said Figgins. "I—I wasn't looking exactly for that, you know."

"Let's chase the beast!" said Kerr. "Come on! We'll run him down, and give him a lesson to teach him not to stick his paws on fellows belonging to the New House."

"Right-o!" said Figgins, who was always ready for a house row. "Come on!"

"Excuse me," said Fatty Wynn, "I don't feel much inclined for running. I'm hungry, too. I think I'll stroll down to the tuck-shop in Rylcombe."

"You greedy biped, you've been scoffing walnuts for the last quarter of an hour," said Figgins.

"Yes, I know; but eating walnuts always makes me hungry, and—"

"Oh, rats! Go and feed, then. You wouldn't be much good in a hard run, anyway."

And Figgins and Kerr started down the footpath at a good pace, leaving Fatty Wynn to walk to the tuck-shop in the village. Figgins and his chum were in deadly earnest. Their dignity had had a fall, as well as themselves, and they meant to impart some instruction of a drastic nature to the hero of the School House.

Tom Merry chuckled as he ran up the footpath through the wood, amid the great trees that were just beginning to lose their grim, wintry blackness.

He was soon aware that the New House juniors were on his track, but he had full confidence in his own powers, and little dread of being overtaken.

"I shall have to give Figgins & Co. a wide berth for a bit," he murmured. "I was going over to Wayland, but it's no good going there with those bounders sticking to my track. They would run me down on the road. I'll dodge them, and have a stroll round the old castle."

And having decided this point, Tom left the footpath and

plunged into the deep wood, following a track which led up the acclivity to the ruined castle.

The ruins of the ancient castle were a favourite spot for picnics in the summer with the St. Jim's boys, but in the cold weather they were little visited. More than one adventure had the juniors gone through amid those massive relics of a bygone age. On a famous occasion Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of Study No. 6 in the School House, had been kidnapped and kept a prisoner there by a gipsy.

Tom Merry came out of the wood close to the huge fragments of masonry which marked the line of the fallen walls, and entered the ruins through an ancient, shattered window.

He looked back towards the wood. There was no sign of Figgins & Co., and he grinned over the conviction that he had thrown them entirely off the track. The next moment he gave a start. There was the sound of a footstep in the ruins.

"My Aunt Matilda! Figgy can't have got ahead of me! Ah, it's not Figgy!"

Tom Merry caught sight of an athletic form standing near the yawning opening that gave admittance to the vaults under the ruined castle. It was the form of a man in an overcoat and a bowler hat, and though the back was turned to Tom Merry, there seemed to him something familiar in the form.

His foot crunched on a stone as he stepped further into the ruins, and the stranger turned round suddenly, evidently startled by the sound.

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation:

"Ferrers Locke!"

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins & Co. on the Track!

TOM MERRY came quickly towards the stranger as he uttered the name, a look of cordial welcome on his sunny face. Well he knew Ferrers Locke, the famous London detective, whom he had been able to assist in more than one of his cases.

Between the London detective and the schoolboy of St. Jim's there was a firm regard, and Tom was naturally glad to see Ferrers Locke; and the thought instantly flashed into his mind that Locke required his aid again.

But as he ran towards the detective, the latter's expression undeceived him. A cloud had passed over Ferrers Locke's face. He liked Tom Merry, but it was pretty evident that he was not glad to see him at this moment.

Tom Merry halted some paces from the detective, his expression changing.

"Mr. Locke!"

In a moment the detective's face cleared, and he held out his hand cordially to the boy. Tom took it rather hesitatingly, but Ferrers Locke gave him a hearty grip.

"I won't say I'm glad to see you, Tom," he exclaimed, "because I'm not—not on your own account, of course, but because I'm keeping my presence in this neighbourhood a secret."

Tom Merry nodded.

"I understand, sir. I am sorry I came here, but I hadn't the faintest idea—"

"Of course you hadn't," assented the detective. "After all, it matters little, as I know that I can trust you implicitly."

"I hope so, sir."

"I am sure of that, Tom. You will mention to no one that you have seen me?"

Certainly not, sir. But—but—"

"Well," said the detective, with a smile, "what is it, Tom?"

"Can I help you at all, sir?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

"You have found me useful before—you told me so—and if I could be of use now, I should be glad."

The detective shook his head.

"Thanks very much for the offer, Tom. I know you mean it. If there were anything you could do, I would accept immediately. But this case is not like the others."

"Then there is nothing I can do, sir?"

"Nothing, I am sorry to say—except to keep silent as to this meeting."

"You may rely on me for that, sir."

Ferrers Locke held out his hand again. Tom Merry shook hands with the detective and left the ruins. He understood that the detective wished to be left alone there, and that his visit to the neighbourhood of St. Jim's had something to do with the ruined castle. But he asked no questions.

Neither Tom Merry nor the detective was aware that two pairs of eyes were watching them from a thicket that grew in a gap of the old wall.

Figgins and Kerr had not been thrown off the track as Tom Merry believed. They had tracked the hero of the Shell to the old castle, and caught sight of him through the gap while he was talking to the detective.

Figgins recognised Ferrers Locke at once. He dragged Kerr into the cover of the thicket with a hurried hand, and they

watched the interview. They were too far off to catch a word that was spoken, but Figgins had little doubt that he could guess what it was about.

"You know that chap Locke," he whispered to Kerr. "He's the giddy detective, and he's had Tom Merry to help him in his plans before now. That's where Tom Merry was going when he came by the stile—going to meet Ferrers Locke at this old castle, as he did once before, I remember."

Kerr nodded assent.

"It looks like it," he agreed.

"They're working up some case again," Figgins said, with a chuckle, "and Tom Merry, in his blessed old innocence, thinks the New House at St. Jim's is going to be left out of it."

"He's rather mistaken."

"I should say so," Figgins declared, with emphasis. "We're taking a hand in this little game. You see, Ferrers Locke, although he has a reputation for being a smart man, has made the mistake of getting Tom Merry to help him instead of us. We don't bear any malice for that, of course, and if we interfere it's simply so that he won't suffer by his bad selection of an assistant."

"Exactly," chuckled Kerr.

"We're going to do some giddy tracking ourselves," went on Figgins. "In the end we'll bring about the denouement at the right moment, and astonish everybody. It will put Tom Merry and those School House bounders in their place, and make Ferrers Locke realise that he's got the wrong party to help him."

"Good!"

"Until we prove to the detective chap that we're quite up to the form of Tom Merry, though, we won't let on him or anybody that we're looking into the case," said Figgins sagely. "Mum's the word, Kerr. Hallo! Tom Merry's gone. Locke seems to be going to stick up there."

"Perhaps he—"

"Look! What is he doing?"

"Lighting a lantern."

Figgins's face grew very excited.

"That means that he's going down into the vaults, Kerr."

"My hat! We're on the track of something already. But, I say, what about following Tom Merry? He'll get clear."

"Let him get clear if he likes. Never mind about Tom Merry now. Before we can take part in the case we had better learn what the case is. It will make things easier. Our game is to watch that bounder yonder."

"Come on, then."

Figgins and Kerr stole forward further into the ruins.

Ferrers Locke, having lighted the lantern, had disappeared into the yawning cavity in the flagged floor, where a flight of stone steps led downward into murky gloom.

Figgins and Kerr stopped at the top of the opening and looked in.

From the gloom below came the glimmer of a light.

"Come on," said Figgins resolutely. "Come on. Perhaps he's tracking down some desperate criminal, and may need our help to save him from being murdered. Follow me."

Figgins stopped quietly upon the stair. Kerr followed him with equal caution to the bottom of the steps, and they found themselves in the damp, gloomy vaults.

The light glimmered at some distance.

"Look! He's stopped!" whispered Figgins.

The juniors stopped, too, and watched.

Ferrers Locke had halted in the sixth vault, and dropped upon one knee. He placed the lantern on the ground, and took a knife from his pocket. The glimmer of steel caught the eye of Figgins, as the detective opened the largest blade.

"Good heavens!" gasped Figgins. "He's going to commit suicide! Stop, Mr. Locke! Don't! For heaven's sake—"

Figgins ran forward, forgetting that he was shadowing the detective, and that it was important not to make his presence known. The horrid thought of a grim suicide in the vaults under the castle drove everything else from his mind.

"Mr. Locke! Don't—"

The detective sprang to his feet.

He caught up the lantern, and flashed the light upon Figgins and Kerr, at the same time dropping the knife back into his pocket.

The expression of his face showed that he was angry, but he did not look much like a man who was going to commit suicide.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

He rapped out the words sharply.

Figgins gasped for breath.

"I—I thought—"

The detective looked at him more closely in the lantern-light.

"I think I know you now. You are Figgins, of the New House at St. Jim's?"

"That's me!" said Figgins. "I—I thought—"

"How came you here?"

"Oh, we—we came, you know," said Figgins, "I—I saw

you put down the lantern and open that knife, and I thought you were going to—going to—going to—"

"Going where?" asked Ferrers Locke sharply.

"Where? Nowhere. Going to—going to commit suicide!" gasped Figgins.

The detective stared at him, and then, to Figgins's amazement, burst into a hearty laugh, that rang in peal on peal of echoing through the deep vaults.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins looked at Kerr, and Kerr looked at Figgins.

The chief of the New House juniors turned very red. Whatever might be Ferrers Locke's motive for penetrating into the vaults, and there opening his knife, it evidently was not to commit suicide. He looked about the last man in the world at the present moment to do anything of that kind.

"Ha, ha, ha! That is good, Figgins, very good!"

"Well, you see, sir, I—that is—we—you—we," said Figgins haltingly.

"Very good indeed! Do I strike you, then, as a lunatic or an imbecile?"

"Oh, no, sir. I thought—that is to say—I didn't think—"

"No, I don't think you could have, Figgins."

"Fact is, sir, I didn't stop to think," said Figgins. "I was startled, and—and that's how it was, sir. Now I find it's all right I'll slope. Come on, Kerr."

"But I wish to know—"

But Figgins and Kerr wore off. Figgins pretended not to hear the detective, and the New House chums scrambled up the winding stone stair, and escaped into the ruins again.

Ferrers Locke was left alone in the vault.

"He was going to ask questions as to how we came in the vault," chuckled Figgins, as they left the ruined castle by the path through the wood. "I think I avoided it rather diplomatically. Of course, we couldn't tell him lies, and we didn't want to give it away that we're on to the little game. It was best to hook it."

"He may suspect something, though," said Kerr doubtfully.

"Well, that can't be helped. We must be awfully careful that's all. Hallo, here's Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn was strolling through the wood as Figgins and Kerr came out into the footpath. He had a smear of jam on his plump cheek and a satisfied smile all over his visage, which showed that the visit to the tuck-shop had been duly paid.

"Hallo! Filled up to the chin?" asked Figgins.

"I've had a little feed," said Fatty. "Not much, as money is tight. Only half-a-dozen of Mother Murphy's little pork pies and a pudding, and a cake, and a dozen jam tarts. Are you coming back to the school? I shall be ready for tea when we get in. I was coming to look for you."

Fatty Wynn glanced at Figgins curiously.

"What's happened? You look as if something had."

"We're on the track," said Figgins mysteriously.

"You're what?" asked the puzzled Fatty.

"You don't deserve to be taken into the thing," said Figgins, "as you spent the time in gorging instead of joining in. But I suppose you'll expect it."

"Yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn emphatically. "If you think you're going to leave me out of anything that concerns the Co., Figgins—"

"Oh, keep your wool on, and I'll explain."

Fatty Wynn listened with intense interest while Figgins explained.

"It's as plain as anything," he said, when the New House leader had finished. "Ferrers Locke is down here to look for some fearful criminal, and he's looking for him in the vaults under the old castle. Tom Merry is helping him as he was before. He got that knife out to defend himself if he was attacked."

"But he was kneeling down, and had put the lantern down," said Kerr.

"Perhaps he was going to sharpen the knife on his boot."

"Well, that's possible. Anyway, I know what we're going to do," said Figgins. "We're going to watch Ferrers Locke,



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and find out the game. Then, at the psychological moment

"At the what?" demanded the Co. together.

"The psychological moment," said Figgins importantly, "in the nick of time, you know, we shall chip in and capture the criminal—if there is one—or find out the secret—if there is a secret—or recover the stolen jewels—if there are any. In short, we shall do the trick, whatever it is, and cover ourselves with glory."

And, with this happy prospect in view, Figgins & Co. strolled homeward towards St. Jim's in the growing dusk of the winter afternoon.

Meanwhile, let us take a glance at Ferrers Locke, left alone in the dark vaults beneath the ruins of the old castle.

After satisfying himself that Figgins and Kerr were really gone, Ferrers Locke returned to the spot where he had been interrupted.

He placed the lantern on the ground again, and took out the knife. Then he began to carefully scrape the earth away from a rusty iron ring, deeply set in one of the huge flagstones that floored the vault. The cavity in which the ring was imbedded was filled to a level with dirt, so that the ring would have escaped any but the most careful search.

The ring once cleared, Ferrers Locke caught it in his hand, and, with the exertion of his great strength, pulled up the stone to which it was attached.

He flashed the lantern into the opening revealed below.

In the darkness the dim outline of a flight of stone steps was revealed.

The detective's eyes flashed.

Taking the lantern in his right hand he stepped into the opening and descended the stone stair. It led into a small stone chamber, not more than twenty feet in circumference, dark and damp and slimy.

The detective's keen eyes examined the slimy stones beneath his tread. His eyes sparkled as though he had found something of which he was in search.

He flashed the light round and round the cell. It had doubtless been used as a prison cell in ancient times, for there was a rusty iron staple in the wall, with a fragment of chain still attached to it. It might have served, too, as a hiding-place for hunted fugitives in troublous days.

The detective examined it thoroughly, and a disappointed look came over his face.

After ten minutes he re-ascended the stair, and closed the flagstone down. Then he flattened down the ring in its cavity, and covered it with earth to restore its former appearance, so that it appeared not to have been disturbed.

Then with slow steps and a thoughtful brow he quitted the vaults, and emerged into the ruins.

CHAPTER 3.

On the Football Field.

"TOM!"

Tom Merry heard his name called as he came into the gates of St. Jim's, after the excursion to the old castle and the unexpected meeting with Ferrers Locke.

Manners and Lowther, his chums of the Shell, were coming towards him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Anything on?"

"Yes, rather. Come and look at this chap Bullivant."

"Whom may he happen to be?" asked Tom Merry carelessly, as he walked with his chums towards the football ground.

"He's the new groundman," said Lowther. "Kildare discovered that he could play footer, and asked him to play in a practice match with the first eleven."

"Oh, yes, I remember noticing him on the ground. Can he play?"

"Can he?" exclaimed Manners. "Just look!"

The chums of the Shell found it rather difficult to get a front view. There was a big crowd round the ropes on the Sixth-Form ground. It was not usual for such an honour to be accorded to a practice match of the first eleven, and Tom Merry understood that something unusual was going forward.

The first eleven of St. Jim's was picked wholly from the Sixth and Fifth Forms, though on a memorable occasion a Shell boy—Tom Merry—had played in it. Kildare was the captain, and Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was his right-hand man. Darrel, Rushden, Drake, Baker, and the most popular fellows in the upper forms, were in the team. It was a fine eleven, and well upheld the honour of St. Jim's at home and abroad.

A big match was coming off shortly, and Kildare was endeavouring to get his team into first-class form, and he was now playing them against the strongest scratch eleven he could make up. Mr. Railton, the house-master of the School House, had consented to captain the scratch eleven to strengthen it, and the rest of the members belonged to the Sixth, with one exception. That exception was Bullivant, the new ground-

man, whose abilities in the football line had come to light. Kildare, anxious to make the game as hard as possible for the first eleven, had asked Bullivant to play in Mr. Railton's team, and the new groundman was proceeding to astonish the natives.

Kildare's team were in red shirts, and Mr. Railton's in blue. There was a wild mixture of blue and red on the half-way line as the Terrible Three came up. There was a roar from the crowd.

"He's off!"

"Bravo, Bullivant!"

"Good for you!"

Tom Merry caught a glimpse of a short but active and athletic figure tearing up the field, dribbling the ball in masterly style. He pushed forward to get a better view, and his elbow came into the aristocratic ribs of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. D'Arcy turned an icy look on the hero of the Shell.

"You pushed me, Tom Mewwy!"

"Did I?" said Tom. "Well, Gussy, why don't you take the hint and get out of the way?"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the kind."

"But I want to see the game!"

"Yaas, wathah, and so do I. Go somewhere else, Tom Mewwy, and don't bothah me. You are a wuff boundah, and I wefuse to get out of the way."

And D'Arcy turned his head away, adjusted his eyeglass, and watched the game. There was a roar.

"Goal!"

Bullivant, with halves and backs all round him, and the goalkeeper watching him like a cat, had kicked for goal and scored.

"That's the third goal to Bully!" said Jack Blake, looking round. "That chap plays football like a cherub."

"Ever seen a cherub play football?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, rats! You've missed something, Tom Merry, by not seeing this match. It's nearly over now—only another ten minutes. I'll wager that groundman chap has seen a lot of professional football in his time. He plays a splendid game."

"Make room for a chap to see!" said Tom Merry. "Shift, you bounders!"

"I wefuse to shift for one!" said Arthur Augustus. "I—ow! You have twod on my toe, Lowthah!"

"Dear me," said Lowther, "that's bad!"

"Ow! You have twodden on my othah toe, Mannahs!"

"Horrid!" said Manners. "What I don't see is, why you put your toes under my feet. That's not the proper place for your toes!"

"You wottah! I believe you did it on purpose! If I weally was suah I should givo you a feahful thwashin'!"

"Now, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "don't get ferocious, but go and take a run!"

"I wefuse to take a wun!"

"Oh, make room for those Shell kids!" said Blake. "You're taking up room enough for two, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to make woom! It is a question of dig, with me. Pway do not push me in that wude mannah, Hewwies!"

"Rats! Make room then!"

"I wefuse! I distinctly wefuse!"

But a shout was going up over a fresh piece of good play, and the Terrible Three, losing patience, shifted Arthur Augustus, and crowded to the front. Bullivant was away with the ball again. The first eleven seemed unable to handle him; but this time Rushden, in goal, saved with great skill, and the attack was baffled.

Tom Merry looked curiously at the new footballer.

Bullivant, the groundman, could not be called good-looking. He had a square jaw and small deep-set eyes, with a shifty expression in them; but there was no doubt that he could play soccer. He was far and away the finest forward on either side, ahead of even Mr. Railton.

"Jolly good!" said Tom Merry. "That's real footer, and it's hard practice for the first. They won't have to face players like that when they meet Redclyffe. But I say, Bullivant is a bit rough, isn't he?"

He glanced at Darrel, who had been sent spinning by a rough charge from the groundman. On a League football field nothing would have been thought of the charge, but it was a little out of place on the St. Jim's ground. Darrel was not the fellow to complain, however, though he looked rather dazed when he got on his feet again.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking over Tom Merry's shoulder, in his interest in the game forgetting his resentment against the Terrible Three. "I wegard him as a wuff bwute, you know! I didn't like him when I first saw him, but I admit that he can play footah, and he can certainly wun like anythin'!"

"He's used to a harder and tougher game than we play here," said Blake. "He's above the weight of a schoolboy team, and he doesn't hold himself in as Mr. Railton does; but he plays jolly good footer. Bravo!"

The juniors cheered and clapped as Bullivant was seen to break away through the first and streak like lightning for goal.

Rushden did his best, but many a League goalkeeper would have failed to stop the rapid shot that came in for a corner of the net. Rushden missed it by inches, and there was a roar:

"Goal!"

The match was finishing. The scratch match, which had been looked upon as a walk over for the first eleven, ended in a defeat for them by five goals to two, and of the five, four had been kicked by the groundman.

When the teams, pretty hot and flustered from a hard and fast game, came off the field, Bullivant was at once surrounded by a crowd of admirers. Mr. Railton went into the pavilion with Kildare.

"That chap plays up wonderfully well, sir," the captain of St. Jim's remarked.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Wonderfully! I should advise you to call upon him often in practice matches, but he must be told to be a little less rough. He certainly plays splendidly."

That was the opinion of all St. Jim's.

The Terrible Three were discussing the groundman and his fine play as they walked away from the football field. It was growing dusk in the quadrangle, as Figgins & Co. came in at the gate, and nearly ran into Tom Merry and his chums.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom cheerily. "How long did you look for me?"

"Oh, we just looked," said Figgins evasively. "You had a run for it, though."

"Not much of a run. You New House bounders couldn't catch a lame dog."

Figgins & Co. looked inclined to renew the war on the spot. But Fatty Wynn pulled Figgins by the arm.

"Don't start rowing now, Figgy. It's tea-time, and there's the bacon and eggs to cook in the study. Come on, and don't waste time."

"Righto!" said Figgins. "We'll make you open your eyes soon, Tom Merry, and you'll see that the New House will come in first."

And Figgins & Co. walked disdainfully away, with their noses in the air. Tom Merry cast a puzzled glance after them. He did not quite "catch on" to Figgins's last remark.

"What was Figgy driving at, Tom?" asked Lowther curiously.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! He's mighty mysterious about something; but I don't get on to it. Perhaps he was talking out of his hat!"

"Well, come in!" said Manners. "There's kippers for tea, and I'm hungry."

And the Terrible Three went in, and were soon busily engaged in preparing tea, and they were prepared to enjoy it after the keen winter afternoon spent in the open air.

CHAPTER 4.

The Fourth Form Alliance.

FIGGINS & CO. went into the New House. There was a shade of thought on the brow of the great Figgins, and he did not reply to the remarks made by the Co. on the subject of tea. Fatty Wynn was surprised. Tea was a most important subject, and here was Figgins not taking the least interest in it!

"I say, Figgy!" he bawled, in his leader's ear.

Figgins started out of a brown study.

"Eh? Have you been talking? What is it?"

"I asked you if it would run to a dozen tarts from the shop. We've got bacon and eggs, but we shall want something to finish with. You could run in and get something from Dame Taggles while I'm doing the cooking."

"Certainly," said Figgins. "I was thinking——"

"So was I—about tea."

"Yes, but I was thinking about the matter we have in hand. You see, Ferrers Locke is down here for some special purpose connected with the ruined castle. Tom Merry isn't likely to let us into the secret. He won't let Blake into it either. Now, Blake is just the fellow to help us!"

"We don't want any School House rotters in it!" said Kerr.

"Well, no; but Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy are as much up against the Terrible Three as we are," argued Figgins. "We don't want really to make a house row of it, but to take down those bounders in the Shell. Blake and his lot are in the Fourth, the same as we are, and it's the Fourth against the Shell. See?"

"Yes, I see, but how can Blake help us?"

"Why, in the first place, D'Arcy was shut up in the old castle once, and knows a lot about the place; then Blake, being in the School House, will be able to keep an eye on Tom Merry, and see where he goes, which, of course, we couldn't do in a different house."

"There's something in that," said Kerr, thoughtfully;

"only you know those School House rotters. If we let them into it, they'll want to take the lead."

"I know; but we'll have it clearly understood from the first that this is a thing run by Figgins & Co., and if they won't agree, they can keep out of it. They can come into the Co. or not, as they like. See?"

"Well, that's not a bad idea! What do you think, Fatty?"

"Oh, any old thing will do for me, so long as you let us have tea!" said Fatty Wynn, almost tearfully. "Look here, if you're going to jaw, I'm going to cook the bacon and eggs."

"Wait a minute!" said Figgins. "We'd better have Blake and his lot over to tea, I think, and so we'll have some sausages as well, and some fried spuds. You cut over to the School House, Kerr, and ask them, and I'll go to the tuck-shop. You can go and start the cooking if you like, Fatty."

And Figgins & Co. separated. Fatty Wynn made a bee-line for the study, lighted the gas, stirred the fire, took off his jacket, and rolled up his sleeves, and started operations. Fatty was a born gourmand and a born cook. He could fry eggs in a way that made your mouth water, and when he turned bacon out of the frying pan it was done to a miracle.

The fire burned up brightly. Fatty Wynn took the frying-pan out of the cupboard and rubbed it out, and the bacon was soon fizzing away. Fatty Wynn was not in doubt as to how much to cook. He cooked all there was, quite confident that if the guests could not finish it, he was quite able to do all that was required himself. A few rashers more or less made no difference to Fatty Wynn.

The study was filled with the fragrant odour of frying bacon when Figgins came in from the tuck-shop, with parcels under both arms. He laid them on the table, sniffing in the scent of the bacon with great satisfaction.

"Getting on all right, Fatty?"

"First-rate," said Fatty, turning a glowing face from the fire. "Got the sausages?"

"Yes, here they are."

"I've done the bacon. Shove them into the fat. Fill the kettle and stick it on the back of the grate, and then spread the cloth and cut the bread."

Fatty Wynn was admittedly master of the ceremonies when it was a question of meals. Figgins did as he was directed. The sausages emitted an odour very grateful to the nostrils of hungry juniors as Fatty turned them over in the pan.

They were getting on nicely when Kerr came in with the chums of Study No. 6, from the School House. Blake sniffed with a happy expression as he came in.

"I say, this is ripping!" he exclaimed. "I hear you want us to come to tea, Figgy!"

"That's so," said Figgins. "Glad you could come."

"Not half so glad as we are," said Blake, grinning. "We had an empty larder, and we are all in a condition of financial famine."

"You've saved us from having tea in the hall," said Herries. "Bread-and-scrape and watery tea and liquid marmalade. Ugh!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We are weally gwateful, Figgins!"

"Pleasure, I assure you!" said Figgins. "So you're stony?"

"Not exactly stony, deah boy! I have a fivah somewhah, but I've mislaid it, and I weally don't know where to look for it, you know."

"Careless ass!" said Kerr. "Wish my governor would send me five-pound notes. I'd take jolly good care of them."

"I weally do take care of them, Kerr, you know, and I was takin' special care of that fivah, as I am in want of a new hat, you know, but it is gone somewhah. I had it in my pocket this morning, but I missed it aftah we played on the footer field. I suppose I dwopped it fwom my pocket in changin' my jacket in the pavilion, you know."

"Have you inquired about it?"

"No, not yet; I feel such a beastly ass, you know, always losin' things and inquirin' for them. But if it doesn't turn up I shall ask somebody to look for it."

"Sausages are done!" announced Fatty Wynn. "Make the tea, will you, Kerr?"

"Right you are," said the Scottish partner in the Co. The kettle was singing, and Kerr soon had it boiling, and made the tea.

Figgins had laid the table, having borrowed some extra crockery from the next study. The six juniors sat down to a really ripping spread. And if some had a knife and no fork, and others a fork and no knife, none was disposed to be hypercritical, and little things like that did not really matter.

"Well," said Blake, as he started on a plate crammed with bacon, sausage, and fried eggs, "I must say that you chaps do things well sometimes in this study. You are doing us down really fine, Figgins, old boy."

"Glad you like the feed," said Figgins modestly.

"Yaas, wathah! Especially as it comes at such a time, you know!" D'Arcy remarked.

"By the way," said Figgins, handing round the cups of

tea, "I had a little matter to discuss with you chaps, and thought this would be a good opportunity."

"Discuss away, old fellow," said Blake, "I'll discuss the Tommy!"

"Are you willing to join us in a little game up against the Terrible Three?"

"Yes, rather. They've been altogether too cheeky lately," said Blake. "Tom Merry called me a kid to-day. Me! He's two months and seven days older than I am, but he looks younger. He puts on that rot because he's in the Shell, you know. I've been thinking that we ought to stop rowing for a bit and put those Shell bounders in their place, for the honour of the Fourth Form."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Do you know, Mannah had the astoundin' cheek to twend on my foot to-day, and Lowthah twod on the othah. It was not an accident, you know, but they did it on purpose, the howwid beasts. It not only considerably hurt my toes, but it has left distinct traces of scowatches on my boots. I weally think it is high time those three wascals were put in their place, dear boys!"

"Good!" grinned Figgins. "I see you're all of a mind on the subject. The question is, are you willing to join the Co.—for this wheeze, of course—and follow my lead?"

"Oh, I thought you were going to ask me to take the command, Figgy!" Blake remarked, in a casual way.

"Did you?" said Figgy. "Quite a mistake. It's the other way round, that's the only difference. What do you say?"

"I weally don't see how we could follow the lead of a New House boundah without an infwaction of our dig!" D'Arcy remarked thoughtfully.

"That's so," said Blake. "Tell us the wheeze, Figgy, and we'll show you how to work it. You ought to be satisfied with that."

"Thank you for nothing," said Figgins. "We'll keep it to ourselves. Nother cup of tea?"

"Thanks. But I say, about that wheeze——"

"Oh, never mind that. We can manage it alone."

"Now, don't be obstinate, Figgy. What's the good of lettin' a good wheeze go to the dogs for want of a guiding hand——"

"Try these tart's; they're ripping."

"Thanks, I will. If you like to let me have that wheeze——"

"Pass along your cup, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"Well," said Blake, looking round, "I never came across such an obstinate bounder as Figgins, but if the mountain won't come to His Whiskers, His Whiskers must go to the mountain. Figgy, old man, I accept the terms."

"You'll follow the Co.?" asked Figgins, highly delighted.

"Yes, for this once only, mind—when we've pulled the Terrible Three off their perch, we are off again—that's understood."

"Righto, that's agreed! Positively for one occasion only!" grinned Figgins. "Herries and D'Arcy say the same?"

"Righto!" said Herries, with his mouth full of jam-tart.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy, setting down his teacup.

"I am willing to follow Figgins's lead, if necessary, to bring these boundahs to their senses, you know. Lowthah and Mannahs twod on my feet——"

"And now, what's the wheeze?" demanded Blake.

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake."

"Well, leave off talkin', then," said Blake, "that's simply done."

"I wefuse to leave off talkin'. I was sayin' that Lowthah and Mannahs twod on my feet——"

"I'll tread on your head if you don't shut up. Now, Figgins, if you haven't been gassing, expound that wheeze, old son!"

Figgins forthwith expounded. At the name of Ferrers Locke the chums of Study No. 6 were all keen attention. They listened with the keenest interest to the recital of the adventure in the ruined castle.

"Well, what do you think?" said Figgins, in conclusion.

"Plain as your face," said Blake. "I mean, nearly as plain, nothing could be quite so——"

"Oh, get on, and don't rot!"

"Well, it's perfectly plain that Ferrers Locke is down here for something or other, and that Tom Merry is in the little game as usual," said Blake. "The horrid bounder hasn't said a word about it to me. He's going to play it on his little lonesome—I don't think! We're going to join in."

"Yaas, wathah! It seems to me like Tom Mowwy's feahful cheek to think of wunnin' an affair like this without our help, you know!"

"That's the idea," said Figgins. "It's a Fourth-Form alliance to put those Shell bounders in their place. I'm the leader; that's agreed, and you're the Co. You'll have to do the scouting business, and keep an eye on Tom Merry's movements. You can easily do that, being in the School House. Then you can keep me informed."

"Good! We'll put our heads together over this, and come

out strong in the denouement," said Blake, with a chuckle. "We'll teach Tom Merry that he's not quite so horrid sharp as he thinks he is, and open Ferrers Locke's eyes to the fact that he's employing the wrong assistant. Locke is a decent fellow, and I shall be glad to do him a good turn by bringing this affair to a successful conclusion for him."

So it was agreed. Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy stayed in Figgy's study after tea for a long time, talking over the plan of campaign, and did not leave till there was barely time left to get the evening's preparation done. Figgins & Co. escorted them down to the door of the New House, and the ancient rivals parted on the most affectionate terms.

CHAPTER 5.

A Surprise in the Fog.

"KEEP alongside, Gussy, or we shall lose you," said Blake. It was thick mist in the quadrangle. The afternoon had been fine, but a January mist had settled over the countryside after dusk, and when the chums of Study No. 6 left the New House to return to their own quarters, they found it impossible to see more than a yard or two before their noses.

Blake promptly passed his arm through that of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Keep close, kid! You have a perfect genius for getting lost in the fog, and I don't want to have to hunt round the quad for you the rest of the night, and fish you out of a drain. Beastly thick, isn't it?"

"Thick as your head," said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Pway welease my arm, Blake! I object to bein' led about as if I was a helpless person. Pway welease me!"

"Rats! I'm not going to let you get mislaid in this fog."

"I wepeat that I object——"

"And I repeat that I don't care a rap——"

D'Arcy jerked his arm away, and scuttled off into the mist.

"Follow me, deah boys!" he called out. "I will show you the way. You will pwobably get lost if you lose sight of me."

"After the silly imago!" exclaimed Blake. "He'll get himself lost somewhere!"

The juniors hurried after D'Arcy.

But the swell of St. Jim's had disappeared into the thick mist, and they had almost immediately lost sight of him. Blake plunged on, and caught sight of a moving form in the mist. He ran towards it and grasped it by the shoulder.

"Got you, at last!"

There was a startled cry in the fog. A clenched fist, as hard as iron, came crashing into Blake's face, and he staggered back and measured his length on the ground. The dim form vanished into the fog.

Blake gave an involuntary cry. Herries nearly stumbled over him, but just saved himself. He stooped, and helped Blake to his feet. Blake was looking dazed.

"What was it?" exclaimed Herries, in amazement. "I didn't see."

"Neither did I," gasped Blake. "I caught hold of somebody—I thought it was Gussy—and he gave me a fearful omer on the nose. Phew! It wasn't Gussy. It was a man, and a jolly strong man to hit out like that."

Herries uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"But whom could it have been? Why should he hit you?"

"Blessed if I know," said Blake ruefully. "I suppose I startled him. But it was a beastly cowardly thing to do. Lend me your handkerchief. My nose is bleeding."

Blake mopped the flowing "claret" from his nose. He was hurt, and he was amazed. Herries was staring at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

Who was the individual who had been dimly seen in the fog in the quadrangle, and who had struck so savage a blow when Blake tapped him on the shoulder?

"It must have been somebody belonging to the school," said Blake, sniffing. His nose was paining considerably. "I'd like to know whom, unless—my word! Unless it was a gidddy burglar!"

Herries gave a start.

"I shouldn't wonder, Blake. A thief might take the opportunity of sneaking in in the fog, and then your tapping him on the shoulder——"

"It would naturally startle him," chuckled Blake. "He might think for the moment that it was a policeman."

"I say, we ought to look into it, you know. The Head and his wife are away this evening, and it would be a good chance for a burglar to burgle the Principal's house."

"A bit early in the evening for a burglary, I should think," Blake said thoughtfully. "But I think it's quite possible some rascal has dodged in in the fog, and is looking round for anything he can pick up. We'll speak to Kildare about it."

They groped their way to the School House through the mist. D'Arcy was not to be seen. Blake and Herries were quickly in the School House, and they went straight to Kildare's study,

where the captain of St. Jim's was at work. Kildare looked in some surprise at Blake, who was holding the crimsoned handkerchief to his nose.

"Been in the wars, Kildare," said Blake, with a grin. "Thought I'd tell you about it, and see what you think, if you've got a minute to spare."

"Go on," said the captain of St. Jim's, laying down his pen. Blake explained the occurrence in the quadrangle.

The captain of the school looked very thoughtful.

"You have no idea as to whom it was?" he asked.

"Not a bit. I thought it might be some rascal lurking round in the fog to steal something, you know, and he hit out when I touched him on the shoulder."

"It is quite possible, Blake. I am glad you told me. I will speak to Mr. Railton about it," said Kildare.

"Righto, Kildare! We leave it in your hands," said Blake. "If you need any advice or good counsel, you've only got to come along to Study No. 6. Come on, Herries!"

And the Fourth Formers went to their own quarters. They found Arthur Augustus there in a very sad state. The swell of the School House had just come in, and he was covered from head to foot with mud. Blake and Herries stared at him.

"My hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Have you started as a mud-collector in your old age, Gussy? Where did you get all that from?"

"It is wessly your fault, Blake, and I am quite cwoss."

"How is it my fault, image?"

"If you had not insisted upon showin' me the way, I should not have wun off. I caught my beastly foot in somethin', you know, and flopped down in a beastly wotten puddle, and you see the result."

"Ha, ha! Yes, I see it. Lovely!"

"Pwax don't wegard it as a laughin' mattah. My clothes are in a shockin' state, and I am vevy cwoss. I must go and clean myself impodiately, and I shall pwobably not have time to do my pweparation."

"Then you'll have to find time to-morrow to do a hundred lines, I expect," chuckled Blake. "That will instruct you not to be such an obstinate ass, Gussy. Go and scrape yourself clean. Hallo, Tom Merry! What are you doing with that face?"

Tom Merry put his head into No. 6.

"I heard you've been in the wars," he remarked. "You've got a lovely nose on you, Blake. How did it happen?"

"That's my business," said Blake loftily. "I don't intend to take any cheeky kids out of the Shell into my confidence, Tom Merry."

The hero of the Shell stared at him.

"Well, there's no very deadly important secret about getting a biff on the nose, I suppose," he remarked.

"There may not be," said Blake, "and again there may be. I'm not giving anything away. I may be on the track of a thrilling mystery, and I may not be. You'll see."

"I can see that you're off your rocker," said Tom Merry.

Blake smiled disdainfully.

"Perhaps you'll see something else if you live long enough," he said, with a sniff of superiority. "Don't bother me now, Tom Merry. I'm busy, and I can't be bothered with troublesome young children."

"Well, of all the giddy lunatics——"

"Oh, travel!" said Blake.

Tom Merry travelled. Still in a state of wonder, he sought out Manners and Lowther.

"There's something on in No. 6," he said. "Blake has got a biff on the nose, and Gussy is smothered with mud, and they're deadly mysterious about it. We shall have to keep an eye on those youngsters."

Meanwhile, Kildare had gone to speak to Mr. Railton. The house-master listened with great interest to his report of what had happened to Blake in the misty quadrangle.

"If you think there is likely to be anything in the idea of a burglary, sir," the captain of St. Jim's suggested, "we could have a watch kept to-night."

Mr. Railton nodded decidedly.

"I think it is quite probable, Kildare. You may not be aware that there have been four or five burglaries in the neighbourhood during the past fortnight, each carried out with such consummate skill that the police have absolutely failed to find a trace of the perpetrator."

"I have heard something of that, sir."

"The thief has carried off a great quantity of valuable property, especially securities and plate," said the house-master. "St. Jim's is just the place he might visit. The school plate is worth considerably over two thousand pounds, and it is well known. It would be a great prize for a burglar. That the rascal is still in the neighbourhood seems almost certain, though the police have failed to find a trace of him. I shall certainly remain up to-night, Kildare, in case of accidents."

CHAPTER 6.

An Alarm in the Night.

CRASH!

Tom Merry started from his sleep.

Crash!

It was night—black foggy night—at St. Jim's. Twelve had boomed from the clock-tower, and the vast buildings were plunged in silence. Tom Merry was sleeping soundly, dreaming that he was kicking goals by the score, when the sudden terrific crash rang through the silence of the night, and startled him from his slumber.

"What—what was that?"

Tom Merry started up in bed.

Several other fellows had been awakened at the same time, and there was a buzz of startled voices in the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry sprang out of bed and dived into his trousers.

In a twinkling he was out of the dormitory. There was a shouting in the darkness, and a jingling as of falling glass. A light flashed in the gloom.

The disturbance proceeded from the Principal's house, Tom Merry could hear that. He dashed down the stairs, to make for the broad corridor which led into the Principal's quarters. There was a yell in the darkness as he ran into a dim form.

"Collar him, Herries! It's a burglar!"

It was the voice of Jack Blake.

The chums of the Fourth had evidently been awakened at the same time, and had come out of the Fourth Form dormitory in time to run into Tom Merry in the dark.

"No, it isn't!" howled Tom Merry. "It's me! I mean—I! Tom Merry!"

"What did you run into me for, then, fathead!"

"What were you in the way for, imbecile!"

"Who are you calling a——"

"I say, let's get on!" exclaimed Lowther, who was at Tom Merry's heels. "It must be a burglary, and I heard Mr. Railton's voice calling."

"Righto!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors dashed on. They raced along the corridor, which gave access to a passage leading into the hall of the Principal's house. Lights flared before their eyes, and they saw the door wide open, and Mr. Railton straining his eyes into the thick fog. The house-master was fully dressed.

There was a stained-glass window on either side of the door, and one of these was smashed through the centre. As Tom Merry looked at it, two or three loosened fragments of glass tipped down upon the floor.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "I was right. It was a giddy burglar! See! Railton spotted him, and he bashed through the window to escape."

"Looks like it," said Tom Merry. "Must have had a nerve!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But what did you know about it, Blake? You said——"

"Never mind what I said," said Blake mysteriously. "I know what I know. I'm not taking kids out of the Shell into my confidence, as I said before. You know how to keep your own little secrets."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"I haven't any little secrets. What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Blake loftily. "Only there's nothing to be got out of me, that's all."

Mr. Railton turned his head at the sound of voices. The house-master had evidently been considering the advisability of pursuing the escaped burglar, but he realised that it would be useless in a thick fog where he could hardly see his hand before his eyes.

He closed the door.

The juniors had been first upon the scene, but others were quickly arriving. Kildare came up at a run, half-dressed, with a cricket-stump in his hand. The doctor came downstairs in dressing-gown and slippers. He stared at the flaring gas, the broken window, and the crowd of boys, in amazement. Then he understood.

"Ah, you were right, Mr. Railton! There has been an attempt——"

"Yes, sir," said the house-master quietly. "I was on the watch in the room, and the burglar entered from the door. How he came into the house without making a sound I cannot understand. He went straight towards the safe, which proves that he knew exactly where to look for the valuables. Then I sprang upon him, but——"

"But he escaped you."

"I am sorry to say he did. He was a powerful fellow, and I hardly expected to meet a man who was more than my match, as I am not a weakling. But he threw me off, and ran—and went through the window with a single spring, carrying all before him."

"Good heavens!"

"I am sorry he has escaped, and it is useless to hunt for him in the fog, but the plate is safe, that is one comfort."

"One comfort!" echoed the doctor, "it is everything. I cannot say how thankful I am, Mr. Railton. I owe more than I can say to you and to this junior, who was the first to put us on our guard."

And he patted Blake's shoulder.

The junior turned scarlet with pleasure, especially as he saw the eyes of the Terrible Three turned upon him in wonder and amazement.

"Go back to bed now, boys," said the doctor, "I do not think anything is likely to be seen of the scoundrel again to-night, but a watch shall be kept."

The juniors returned to their quarters. Tom Merry tapped Blake on the shoulder.

"I say, Blake, what was the doctor driving at? What had you to do with it?"

Twenty clamorous voices seconded Tom Merry's inquiry, and Blake could not very well refuse information. And besides, he was willing to take all the glory he could get.

He explained about the adventure in the misty quad, and about his own remarkable sagacity in putting the house-master on his guard.

"Well done!" said Tom Merry. "Pity one of us wasn't in your place——"

"Why?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, we should have captured the burglar, and made an example of him. But I daresay you did as well as a kid in the Fourth Form could be expected to do."

"If you want a thick ear, Tom Merry——"

"Pway don't start waggin' one another now, deah boys. My feet are gettin' howwidly cold, and I am goin' to bed."

And the juniors returned to their beds. Tom Merry was very thoughtful as he tumbled in. He had heard of burglaries committed in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe, and now there had been an attempt at the school. Was there any connection between these crimes and the presence of Ferrers Locke in the neighbourhood?

The next morning the attempted burglary was the topic of discussion all over the school. Blake found himself a lion, from having had something to do with it. He suggested to Figgins the propriety of the latter's retiring from the leadership of the Co. in his favour, but Figgins did not seem to see it in that light.

The police came over from Rylcombe, and Inspector Skeet inspected the safe which had not been robbed, and the room where the house-master had seized the burglar, and the window through which the latter had escaped, and made copious notes in a fat pocket-book. Then, assuring the Head that the police would not be idle in following up their clues, and that the capture of the burglar was a question of only a few days, perhaps even hours, the portly inspector and his myrmidons departed.

There was another visitor that morning who possessed a far greater interest for the boys of St. Jim's. It was Ferrers Locke.

The famous detective called to see the Head, and Tom Merry, who caught a glimpse of him crossing the quadrangle, had no further doubt that it was the mysterious burglaries that had called the detective down from London.

Yet why Ferrers Locke should have been found on that occasion at the ruined castle, far from the scene of any of the burglaries, was a puzzle to the hero of the Shell.

Ferrers Locke did not stay more than a quarter of an hour at the school, nor did he seek Tom Merry. Tom understood that this was a case in which Ferrers Locke could expect no help from him. The burglar had visited St. Jim's, but his hiding-place was not likely to be anywhere near the school, and so Tom could render no aid.

Figgins & Co. of course observed the visit of the detective. They had not the slightest doubt that he had communicated with Tom Merry, and Figgins was more keen than ever on the track of his mare's nest.

"We've only got to keep an eye on Tom Merry," he remarked, "and we shall soon have the whole thing at our finger-tips. But mum's the word."

CHAPTER 7.

On the Track of Tom Merry.

THE fog had cleared off with the morning, and the day turned out fine and only slightly misty. Kildare, who had to lead his team to battle with Redclyffe First on Saturday afternoon, had determined upon some hard practice for them while the weather gave him a chance. As Tom Merry left the hall after dinner the captain of St. Jim's beckoned to him.

Tom Merry came up smiling. He was always ready to do anything for Kildare, the most popular fellow in the school.

"Run over to Taggles's lodge and ask Bullivant if he can play for us for about half an hour, Merry," said Kildare. "Tell him I sent you."

"Right you are, Kildare," said Tom cheerily.

He crossed the quad to the porter's lodge. Bullivant, the new groundman, had his quarters in Taggles's comfortable little

house. Tom was received with a suspicious brow by Taggles, who had had many a rub with the hero of the Shell.

"I've got a message for Bullivant, Taggy," said Tom, "is he here?"

"Which he is," said Taggles, "and here he's likely to be."

"Anything the matter with him?" asked Tom.

"No, only he's got a cold, that's all."

"A cold! Not a bad one, I hope. He was all right yesterday, and he was playing up on the footer field like a giddy International," exclaimed Tom Merry.

Taggles sniffed.

"He sez it's a bad one. When I has a cold I does my work. But that doesn't suit Mister Bullivant. Ho, no. My hidea is that he's a lazy 'ound. He won't let anybody do nothin' for him, anyway. Cold! Precious little cold he's got! Hey did he catch a cold in a warm bed, hey? And I know he went to bed all right last night."

"Can I see him?" asked Tom Merry, who did not quite know what to make of Taggles's statements.

"No law agin it that I know of," said Taggles. "You've only got to go up that stair and knock on the first door."

"Thank you, Taggy, old son."

The porter grunted, and Tom Merry went up the stair, and knocked at the door. A voice bade him enter, and he went in.

Bullivant was in bed. At the first glance he looked very much like a man with a bad cold. His head was bound up so that his face was nearly covered, only his deep-set eyes and the tip of his nose showing amid the wrappings. But he was sitting up in bed, propped on the pillows, and did not seem to be taking much care to avoid the draught. The atmosphere of the room was thick with tobacco fumes, and the invalid had a pipe in his hand.

Tom Merry coughed a little. The deep-set eyes of the invalid glittered upon him.

"What do you want, Merry?"

"I've got a message from Kildare." Tom Merry smiled a little. "He wants you to turn out for a little practice, but I suppose you can't."

"Of course I can't." The man's voice was husky, yet it did not sound exactly as if he had a cold, Tom thought. "You see how I am?"

"Yes, you look pretty rotten."

"I caught a cold in the night, I suppose. I feel beastly. I'm wrapping myself up to try and get rid of it."

"Do you think you'll improve it by smoking?" Tom gently suggested.

"Oh, hang, I must do something."

"Very well, I'll tell Kildare you can't come," said Tom Merry.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you, sir," said the man, civilly.

Tom returned to the School-House, and made his report to Kildare. The captain of St. Jim's looked concerned.

"I'm sorry to hear it," he said. "He was in such fine condition yesterday, too. Well, I suppose we must do without him."

The St. Jim's First put in their practice without the aid of Bullivant. But Kildare was not the only fellow to feel sorry for his illness. The new groundman's fine football had appealed to most of the St. Jim's fellows, and all were sorry to hear that he was laid up.

"I wondah if we could do anythin' for the poor fellow," said D'Arcy. "Do you think he would like me to go in aftah school and wead to him, Blake?"

"Better go and see," grinned Blake.

"It would only be chawitable," said D'Arcy. "Of course, I don't want to catch his beastly cold, you know."

"You'd better not, or you'll get fired out of this study," said Herries, warningly.

"Oh, wats! If I catch a cold I shall expect you chaps to nurse me through it. I weally think I will go and see Bullivant aftah school, and see if I can do anythin' for him."

And when lessons were over for the day, Arthur Augustus made his way to Taggles's lodge, and ascended the stair to Bullivant's room. He tapped on the door, but there was no reply.

"I suppose he's asleep," murmured D'Arcy. "I think I had better have a look at the poor fellow, and if he's all wight I'll leave him."

And he turned the handle of the door. But the door would not open; it was evidently locked on the inside.

D'Arcy tapped again on the panel.

"Are you asleep, my poor friend?"

"What do you want here?"

It was an angry voice from inside.

Arthur Augustus started; that was hardly the tone of voice in which an invalid should have greeted a sympathetic visitor. But D'Arcy remembered the irritating effect of the "flu" upon the temper.

"I have come to see you, Bullivant, to see if I can do anythin' for you," said D'Arcy. "I should like to wead to you if——"

"I don't want you to."

"Well, the beast might be a little more civil about it, anyway,"



"Jolly good!" said Tom Merry to the spectators around him. "That's real footer, and it's hard practice for the first. They won't have to face players like that when they meet Redclyffe. But, I say, Bullivant is a bit rough, isn't he?"

murmured D'Arcy. "If he were not ill, I should feel quite cross. Is there anythin' I can do for you, deah boy?" he called aloud through the door.

"No, there isn't."

"Anythin' I can get fo' you f'rom the tuck-shop? I should esteem it a pleasuah to stand t'weat."

"I tell you I don't want anything."

"Vewy well. I cannot regard your manna's as gwacious, but I suppose you are feelin' wotten and iwritable. Good-bye!"

There was no response, and D'Arcy descended the stairs. Taggles met him with a sour grin.

"Well, what do you make of the invalid, Master D'Arcy?" he asked.

"He seems to be in a vewy iwritable fwame of mind."

"Yes, he do," said Taggles. "I'd hev looked arter him. Bless you, no; he don't want me in his room, he don't. Rude as you like. Take up his meals and shove 'em on the table and clear out! That's the programme. Ill! Not he! He doesn't cough or sneeze or sniff, and them wrappings is a humbug. He's malingering; that's what he is. Doesn't like work this cold weather. Ho, no. That's wot his complaint is. If he's got the flu, wot's he up and dressed for? And I know he is, 'cause he's got his boots on; I've heard 'im moving about over the ead. Flu! Ho, no! It's all gammon!"

How much of Taggles's growlings were justified, D'Arcy had no means of ascertaining. He returned to the School House, and found Blake talking to Tom Merry on the subject—very important to them—of jointly hiring a brake on Saturday to convey them over to the Redclyffe ground to witness the First Eleven match.

"Well, how's the giddy invalid?" said Tom Merry. "Have you seen him?"

"No, I have not had that pleasuah," said D'Arcy. "I am beginnin' to think that he isn't so beastly ill aftah all, you know. It's wotten bad form to be suspicious, but one can't help seein' things, if one is a wemarkably deep fellow like me."

"Rather," said Blake. "But what can you see this time?"

"Taggles thinks the boundah is malingering," said Arthur Augustus; and he proceeded to give details.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled indignantly.

"I say, that's beastly mean of him, if Kildare wanted him to play!" he exclaimed. "I never liked the fellow's looks, but I should have thought that such a splendid footballer would be a decent fellow. Well, you never know. But Taggles is a grumblin' old ass, though, and he may be doing Bullivant injustice; more likely than not, in fact."

The school clock boomed out.

"Hallo, I must be off!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'll speak to you again about that brake on Saturday, Blake." And the hero of the Shell hastened away.

Blake's eyes were blazing.

"Did you hear that, Gussy?" he whispered. "He must be off—he's going somewhere—it's to meet the detective, of course."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Keep an eye on him while I buzz off and fetch Figgins. He won't see you in the mist if you're careful. We could manage better without Figgins, as a matter of fact, but we must keep to the compact."

Blake ran off. Tom Merry had gone out into the quad. It was not yet dark, but the mist was settling down again over St. Jim's for the night. In the grey shadows the hero of the Shell could be dimly seen, and D'Arcy hurried on his track.

Tom Merry went straight to the gates, and D'Arcy followed

The time for locking up was not yet, though it was close hands. Tom Merry went out into the lane, and D'Arcy hesitated whether to follow him further or to wait for Blake.

"He's gone towards Wylcombe," murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "Of course, he's gone to meet Ferrers Locke. We shall be able to overtake him in the lane."

Meanwhile, Blake had burst into the New House, and rushed like a whirlwind up to Figgins & Co.'s study.

The Co. were just having tea, and Figgins had raised his teacup to his lips when Blake hurried the door open and came tearing in.

Figgins jumped up in alarm, and the tea went with a gush over his chest. It was hot tea, and Figgins gave a yell.

"Buck up!" shouted Blake. "I——"

"You howling idiot!" roared Figgins. "Look what you've done!"

"Rats! What does that matter? I——"

"I'll show you whether it matters."

"I tell you——"

"And I tell you——"

"Ass!" bawled Blake. "We're on the track. Tom Merry has just gone out to meet Ferrers Locke!"

The news calmed Figgins at once.

"Oh, I see!" He mopped his waistcoat with his handkerchief. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am, fathead. Come on!"

Figgins snatched up his esp.

"Come on, kids. Don't stop for your coats."

"I say, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn anxiously. "Better finish tea first; it's cold, and——"

"Come on!" roared Figgins, in a tone that made Fatty Wynn jump.

There was no further delay. The juniors hurried out of the study and dashed into the quad. Down to the gate they went with a run, and found Arthur Augustus turning back to meet them.

"Where is he?" gasped Blake.

"Gone down towards Wylcombe," said D'Arcy. "I thought I had better wait for you, deah boys. Where's Hewwies?"

"Blow Herries!" exclaimed Figgins. "We've no time to stop for him. Come on!" He ran into the lane.

"Wait a minute!" shouted Blake. "I'm going to fetch Herries. He's not going to be left out."

But Figgins & Co. were gone.

"I regard that as wotten," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy unweasonable of Figgins not to wait for Hewwies. I'll go and look for——"

But Blake had dashed after Figgins & Co. After all, there was no time to be lost. Arthur Augustus remained undecided for a few moments, and then he followed Blake. Down the lane went five juniors in hot haste, on the track of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins Does Some Shadowing—The Tracker Trapped.

THE mist was thickening in the lane. Figgins ran on, his long legs covering the ground in good style, and the Co. panted after him. Fatty Wynn, fat and full up with bacon and eggs, soon dropped out of the race. Blake passed him like a shot and joined Figgins and Kerr.

"Seen anything of the bounder?" gasped Blake.

"No," grunted Figgins. "I suppose he really came this way?" He halted, and peered round in the mist. "Or was Cussy acting the giddy ox as usual?"

"I object to that remark," came a voice out of the mist.

"I regard it as extremely obnoxious, Figgins."

"Oh, you're there, are you?" exclaimed Figgins as D'Arcy came up panting, his eyeglass dangling at the end of the cord.

"Are you sure Tom Merry went towards Rylcombe?"

"Yaas, wathah, and——"

"But was he running full pelt?"

"No; he was just walkin' along, you know, deah boy."

"Then we ought to have passed him before this. He must have left the road."

"Very likely," said Blake. "It stands to reason that he wouldn't go to the village to meet Ferrers Locke. He's in the wood somewhere." And Blake peered dubiously towards the misty wood that bordered Rylcombe Lane.

"We're close by the stile," said Figgins. "It's a straight run to the old castle. Perhaps Tom Merry has gone there to meet the detective, same as he did before."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm going to see," said Figgins resolutely. "We've lost him here, anyway. I'm going up to the castle to see if he's there."

"Yaas, wathah; shadow the boundah, Figgins," said Arthur Augustus encouragingly. "Get on his beastly twack, you know, deah boy. Of course, the shadowin' business is done better by a chap on his lonesome. I'll buzz off back to the coll."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn, coming panting up. "You'll manage it better alone, Figgy."

Figgins sniffed.

"Quite right," he replied. "When I'm shadowing, I don't want a lot of noisy kids at my heels. You fellows wait for me to help me over the wall in case I'm back after locking up. So long!"

Figgins vaulted over the stile, and disappeared into the mists of the footpath.

"Well," said Blake, "if he wants to go it alone, I'm not the chap to follow him; and it's cold and foggy, and there's a comfy fire at home. Let's get back."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors turned back towards the school. Figgins, alone but undaunted, tramped through the footpath under the old misty trees. Figgins was in a determined humour. He was going to take a hand in the little game, as he put it, if he burst a boiler over it. Tom Merry had quitted the lane, and what so likely as that he had gone to the ruined castle? Certainly he had met Ferrers Locke there before.

So to the ruined castle went Figgins through the misty wood. The great masses of shattered masonry loomed up through the fog, and Figgins gave a start as he entered the broken arch of the gate and saw a glimmer of light ahead in the mist.

He was right. Someone was there; and who was that someone? The ruins were sometimes used for shelter by tramps in the summer, but in black winter they were deserted. Someone was there in the damp mist—who was?

Figgins pressed forward cautiously, silently.

The light was carried by someone who was picking his way among the ruins towards the yawning cavity which gave admittance to the vaults below. The light was very necessary, for in the thick mist it was quite possible to step into some cranny or crevice and break a limb or two. The light served another purpose now; it illumined a face—and the face illumined was one Figgins knew well.

"Ferrers Locke!" Figgins muttered the words to himself.

There was no sign of Tom Merry. The detective was evidently alone. But that did not matter to Figgins, he was on the track.

Ferrers Locke moved cautiously, with the hurricane lantern held before him, through the ruins, and Figgins followed. The detective halted at the opening and quietly descended the stair into the vaults.

Figgins waited till he was gone, and then followed.

Was Tom Merry awaiting the detective below ground? Figgins's heart was beating as he descended the steps. Down in the dark vaults he caught the glimmer of the detective's lantern. The vaults were black and misty, chilly as the tomb. The chill smote Figgins, and he shuddered; but he pressed on in pursuit of the moving light.

The detective stopped.

Figgins drew a deep breath. He stopped at the same spot where he had stopped before, and put the lantern on the flagstone. Then he took out a knife and opened it.

Figgins did not fall into the same error as before. He grinned at the remembrance of his absurd blunder, and kept well back in the shadows to watch.

The detective stooped and scraped the dirt away from the iron ring, and lifted the flagstone from the floor, revealing the black cavity below.

"My hat!" gasped Figgins. "So that's the little game!"

He pressed forward to the opening.

The detective went down the steps into the little stone chamber below, taking the lantern with him. Figgins, looking down from the top of the steps, saw him flash the light round the cell, apparently examining the walls; not a crevice or cranny escaping his eager gaze.

What was the object of his search Figgins had not the faintest idea, unless he was looking for some concealed opening.

From the top of the steps Figgins watched breathlessly, forgetting that if the detective should chance to look up, his face would inevitably be revealed in the light. And look up Ferrers Locke suddenly did. Whether Figgins had made some slight movement, or whether his eager, hurried breathing had caught the detective's keen ear—certainly Ferrers Locke's suspicions were awakened, and he glanced quickly up.

Figgins popped back out of sight instantly.

Had the detective seen him? Figgins crouched in the blackness and wondered. Ferrers Locke did not come up the steps; he remained in the cell for several minutes longer, and then Figgins heard his steps. From the darkness the junior watched for his re-appearance. Ferrers Locke's head came into view, and the lantern glimmered through the vault. The detective's face was clearly seen in the light, and it was quite calm and expressionless. Figgins drew a deep breath of relief. The detective could not have seen him.

Ferrers Locke stepped from the opening, and laid the lantern on the flagstones. He did not look once in the direction of Figgins. He took out his watch and gave a sudden start as he looked at it, as if he had overstayed an appointment and suddenly become aware of it.

"I must go instantly," he muttered aloud. "I can return and replace this stone later."

He hurried away, forgetful of the lantern, and Figgins heard his footsteps die away in the direction of the opening into the ruins.

Figgins's heart was beating hard. He listened intently, waiting till the detective's footsteps had completely died into silence, and then ran forward to the raised stone.

Ferrers Locke, if his muttered words were anything to go by, would not be back for some little time, and there was a good chance for Figgins to explore the cell, and for a guess as to what had interested the famous detective there.

Figgins picked up the hurricane lamp the detective had fortunately left behind, and descended the stone steps. He found himself in a little cell of stone, with blank walls, formed of huge blocks set closely together, scarce a cranny showing between them even after the lapse of long centuries.

Figgins wondered what the detective had sought there. Surely he must have been looking for a secret opening. But why? Why should Ferrers Locke come down from London to seek for a secret passage under the ruins of the ancient castle of Rylcombe? It was an amazing puzzle, and Figgins gave it up.

He flashed the light over the walls, and scanned them closely. He could hardly expect to discover what had been invisible to the keen eyes of the detective, but he put it to the test.

Suddenly he started. There was a sound above—a vague sound which made him look up. What he saw as he looked up made the blood run cold in his veins. The huge block of stone which had been raised from the cavity was descending into its place! Figgins gave a yell.

"Stop!"

But the stone did not stop!

Thud! It dropped into its place, and the cavity was closed. Figgins, with the perspiration breaking out on his brow, dropped the lantern and dashed up the steps. He shoved the stone above, he beat on it with his fists, he shouted. But there was no reply, and the stone did not move. Figgins was a prisoner!

CHAPTER 9.

The Detective's Quest.

"TOM!"

Tom Merry looked round in the mist, and ceased his cheery whistle.

He had been over to Wayland to make some purchases which could not be obtained in the little village of Rylcombe, having a pass from Kildare which enabled him to stop out after locking-up. He was returning by the path over the hill, intending to pass the old castle and take the footpath through the wood to Rylcombe Lane. But for the mists of the winter evening the ruins would have been visible on his left as he came towards the wood. His name suddenly spoken made him halt, and he glanced at the figure, dim in the mist, that came striding down the path from the hill.

"Mr. Locke!"

"I knew you by your whistle, Tom," said the detective, as he shook hands with the hero of the Shell. "You are out late."

"I've got a pass," said Tom. "I've been over to Wayland to get some films for Manners, and some other things I can't get in Rylcombe. I'm going back now."

"Then I'll walk with you through the wood," the detective remarked.

They entered the dim misty footpath together.

"Have you been successful, sir?" Tom Merry asked, looking up at the detective. "I don't mean to be curious," he added hastily. "Don't think that. Only, of course, I should be glad to hear that you have succeeded."

"I quite understand, Tom. No, I have not succeeded yet, but—" A gleam came into Ferrers Locke's eyes. "I shall not give up till I have done so."

"I am sure of that, sir."

"I wish you could help me, Tom, as you have done before," said Ferrers Locke. "Unluckily this case lies outside your sphere. You saw nothing of the burglar last night at the school, I suppose?"

"No, sir, he was gone before we got down. Mr. Railton was the only one who saw him."

"And he did not really see him, as he was masked."

"Yes, the rascal knew how to take care of himself."

"It was a bold action to hurl himself through the window like that," Ferrers Locke remarked musingly.

"It was his only chance, Mr. Locke. Mr. Railton was close behind him, and the whole school would have been about his ears in a minute or two more."

"He must have been badly cut, I should say."

"That he was," said Tom Merry. "I saw the glazier refitting the window this morning, and I looked at some of the fragments of the old pane. There was blood on some of them."

"Yes, I observed that myself, when I came up to the school," Ferrers Locke said, with a nod. "I should say that the burglar

was badly cut about the head and face, and perhaps hands, and he can hardly appear in public without showing the traces of his injuries."

"He will have to lie low for a bit then."

"Yes. According to Mr. Railton's description, the rascal made straight for the safe. He must have known the lie of the land pretty accurately."

"It looks like it."

"That means, Tom, that he had either been over the ground before, or had obtained a plan of the building. Have you noticed anything like a suspicious character hanging round the school?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I can't say that I have, sir. The burglar certainly seemed to know a lot about the place. He must have been hanging round some time before; but I never happened to see anything of a suspicious ruffian—"

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"But the man I have in my mind may not have been a ruffian, Tom. I think I will explain some of the circumstances to you. Although the case lies outside your scope, you or your chums may have seen something of the scoundrel, as he had undoubtedly visited the school. You have heard of the mysterious burglaries that have taken place of late in this neighbourhood?"

"Everybody has, Mr. Locke," said Tom Merry.

"Exactly. Well, I was asked at Scotland Yard to look into the matter, and before coming down here I gave the matter a great deal of thought. The robberies were carried out in a wonderfully clever manner, and not a trace of a clue was left behind for the police. But this circumstance was in itself a clue. There was only one criminal I knew of who was capable of such raids, an accomplished rascal known as Nobbler Jim. I made some investigations, and learned that Nobbler Jim having had some rubs with the police, had disappeared from his usual haunts, and the date of his disappearance was only a few days before the date of the first of these mysterious burglaries. I concluded that Nobbler Jim had decided to rusticate a little in this quiet country, and improve the shining hours by a series of robberies in the wealthy houses hereabouts."

Tom Merry listened with keen interest.

"The work, wherever the robberies have occurred, has betrayed the skilled hand of Nobbler," went on Ferrers Locke. "I am sure of my man. But where is he? That he is not staying at any of the inns hereabouts I am certain, unless he is in a very skilful disguise. Where is his plunder stored? He has carried off plate to the value of many thousands of pounds, and much of it is bulky. He must have a secret place for hiding it. I immediately thought of the ruined castle as a place where a thief might find some secret cranny to conceal his loot. I searched the castle, and discovered a moving flag, raised by a ring, and the traces upon it convinced me that it had been lately raised."

"Then you knew—"

"I knew that I was on the track. But in the stone cell below, though I found marks of recent feet in the slime, I found nothing else. The cell was evidently not used for a habitation, and if there was a secret hiding-place in it, it was unknown to me. If the secret place is indeed there, the Nobbler probably discovered it by accident or he may have a confederate who has worked this neighbourhood before, and made the discovery, and imparted it to him."

"Then—when I met you at the ruined castle—"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"You know now why I was there, Tom. I have been frequently on the watch there, and have several times visited the cell in the hope of finding some fresh clue. I am more than ever convinced that this was used by the thief, for the traces are unmistakable; but the secret receptacle for his plunder baffles me. If I could find it probably the greater part of the proceeds of many robberies would be recovered, and I might happen upon one clue to the whereabouts of the thief himself."

"Very likely."

"If the burglary at the school had succeeded, I should probably have had the scoundrel," Ferrers Locke continued, "for my belief is that he would have conveyed his loot there, and placed it in concealment, before returning to his hiding-place. I was on the watch for him, but he did not come. Mr. Railton saved the college plate; he also, I think, saved Nobbler Jim from arrest."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Then Blake takes rather too much credit to himself over that business," he remarked. "But you will have him yet, sir."

"I hope so. Unfortunately a case I cannot neglect is calling me back to London. I am determined not to abandon the pursuit of Nobbler Jim, yet if I have to leave the case for a time, all may be lost."

"That is a bit rotten," said Tom Merry. "I wish I could help you, Mr. Locke."

"Unless you have, as I suggested, seen the rascal lurking about the school, I am afraid you cannot," the detective replied. "As known to the police, Nobbler Jim is not a common criminal."

He had a good education, and fell to want owing to dissipation, and then took to robbery for a living. He is a man of medium stature, and usually wears a beard, but that he would probably discard while in the country. He is of a sporting turn, and spends most of his ill-gotten cash on betting, on horse races, and football matches. He has played football himself, in his time, as a professional in a big club, and was kicked out for taking a bribe to lose a match. If he came round the school looking for information he might come in the guise of a pedlar, to get into talk with the servants, or a beggar, or a gardener looking for work. He has tried all those dodges to my knowledge. Does anything come into your mind now?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't think of anybody I've noticed, sir; but I shall keep my eyes open."

The detective smiled.

"No, Tom, I'm afraid this is a case in which you cannot help," he said. "I only wish you could. If I could get information as to the Nobbler to-night, it would save me from a very great difficulty. But I suppose I must not hope for it. In case of anything turning up by chance, however, you know where to find me—the Red Lion, in Rylcombe. I see we are at the end of the footpath. By the way, you did not mention anything to Figgins about meeting me?"

"I gave you my word not to, sir."

"Yes, I remember. Then Figgins must have been watching."

"What makes you think so, sir?"

"Only the fact that he was shadowing me in the ruined castle this evening," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile.

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"Figgins shadowing you?"

"Yes, he shadowed me into the vaults, and there, unluckily for himself, gave his game away. I tricked him into the cell—and shut him up there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be a little lesson for him," smiled the detective. "But I think you may as well mention to his chums that he is there, and they may go and let him out. Or perhaps it would be better for you to go, as the existence of the cell should be kept a secret for the present."

"I'll certainly go, sir. There's a short cut through the wood to the castle. But, I say, if Nobbler Jim uses that place to hide his loot, mayn't he go there, and—"

Ferrers Locke shook his head.

"So long as his face is cut up, Nobbler Jim will be lying low," he said, "and in any case he would only visit the ruins at night, in order to be safe in doing so. I intended to leave Figgins there only for half an hour or so. I shall pay a visit to the ruins again after I have had some dinner, to have another look for the secret, and to remove any traces Figgins may have left."

The detective shook hands with the hero of the Shell.

"Good-bye, Tom; and I wish you could get some information for me, but I don't think it will turn out so. Give Figgins my kind regards, and tell him to do his shadowing a little more carefully next time."

"Ha, ha! Certainly. Good-bye, sir."

They parted, the detective striding down the lane towards the village, and Tom Merry turning into the short cut through the wood to get to the old castle, to release the unfortunate shadower from his predicament.

CHAPTER 10.

Tom Merry Makes a Discovery.

FIGGINS thumped and thumped on the hard cold stone till his knuckles were sore. He gave it up at last, and descended the stone steps into the cell again.

He had been very startled at first by the closing of the stone, but it had not taken him many moments to realise the truth.

The upraised flagstone had been turned back, and could not have fallen into its place by accident. It had been closed purposely, and Figgins knew that it must have been closed by Ferrers Locke.

Figgins snapped his teeth at the thought of how easily he had been taken in. Of course, the detective had seen him looking down into the cell, but had not allowed him to see it. His muttered words, his pretended departure, had been part of the game. He had trapped Figgins, to give him a lesson; and Figgins had tumbled into the trap as easily as any unsuspecting baby.

"The rotter!" muttered Figgins. "Hang him! It serves me right for being such an ass! My hat! How Blake would cackle if he knew this! The question is, how long does the boulder intend to keep me here. I shall be late for calling-over if I don't get out soon."

Closed as the stone was, the air in the cell was fit for respiration, showing that there was some slight opening to admit it. Figgins tramped to and fro on the cold stones to keep his blood in circulation. It seemed centuries to him, when his watch

indicated that half an hour had elapsed since his imprisonment in the cell.

At last came a sudden sound in the heavy stillness, and Figgins gave a start of relief. The stone, which could not be raised from below, was moving under a steady pull from above. Figgins watched it like one fascinated.

The cavity opened, and a face looked down upon him—the face of Tom Merry!

Figgins gritted his teeth.

Tom Merry's was about the last face he wanted to see just then.

"Hallo," said Tom, laughing. "Getting tired of it, Figgy?"

"Rats!" said Figgins crossly. "It's nothing to grin at, that I can see. I suppose it was Ferrers Locke shut me up here."

"Exactly. He's sent you his kind regards, and advises you to do your shadowing a little more carefully next time."

Figgins turned red.

"You're not bringing up the lamp," said Tom Merry, as the New House chief ascended the stone steps.

"Blow the lamp!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you're looking for a thick ear, Tom Merry, you've only got to go on cackling," said Figgins wrathfully.

"Ha, ha, ha! Keep your wool on, Figgy! It strikes me as funny, that's all. You New House kids are really too funny to live. Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry was doubled up with laughter.

Figgins regarded him with a stony gaze for a full minute, and then as the School House boy was still laughing, Figgins let out with his left.

Tom Merry received it on his nose, and he sat down with startling abruptness on the hard, cold floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Figgins. "There's some more for you to cackle at. Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins dashed away towards the stairs leading to the open air. Tom Merry scrambled to his feet in wrath. Figgins's laugh rang back from the gloom, but Figgins was gone.

Tom Merry rubbed his nose ruefully.

"The horrid rotter!" he muttered. "I'll dot him on the boko when I meet him again. But now I'm here, I'll have a squint at the cell."

He descended the stone steps. The lamp was standing beside them, and as Tom Merry stooped to pick it up, something caught his eye on the floor—the mark of a thumb in the slime on one of the flagstones!

Tom Merry gave a jump.

"My hat!"

His face went pale with excitement.

He remembered all that Ferrers Locke had told him, of the suspected existence of a secret recess in the underground cell.

Moving the lamp a little to one side, Tom Merry pressed his thumb to the print on the slimy stone, taking care to stand clear of the stone as he did so.

It was well that he did.

The pressure was followed by a slight scraping sound, and he knew that his thumb was pressing upon a bolt in the stone, and the next instant the stone revolved on a pivot, and revealed a dark cavity in the floor.

"The secret!"

It was the secret, undoubtedly; and Tom Merry had discovered it, by a wonderful chance. The cavity was about three feet deep and two wide, and in the bottom of it lay a sack. The bulging sides of the sack showed what it contained.

The neck of it was not fastened, and it was easy for Tom Merry to look inside. A glimmer of shining metal met his eye.

Gold and silver plate, vases, ornaments of all kinds, silver spoons by the score, and several bundles which doubtless contained money or valuable securities.

Tom Merry had discovered the hoard of the mysterious burglar! The loot of Nobbler Jim lay exposed to his eye!

For some minutes Tom Merry gazed at the hoard with starting eyes, hardly believing in the reality of the vision.

"My hat! Mr. Locke will be glad to hear of this."

He closed the stone again, and carefully noted the position of the secret spring. Then he took up the lamp and ascended from the cell.

He closed the trap-door and left the vaults. His heart was beating with the excitement of his discovery, and his eyes were gleaming. Ferrers Locke had not been expecting aid from Tom Merry in this case, but he would receive it, all the same!

Tom's eyes were bright as he followed the footpath through the wood and turned into Rylcombe Lane, to hasten to Ferrers Locke with the news.

ANSWERS

CHAPTER 11:

The Failure of Figgins & Co.

FIGGINS reached St. Jim's after a hard run, but he found the gates closed against him. He did not pull the bell. He hurried to the spot where he had told the Co. to await him, and whistled. Kerr's head appeared over the wall.

"That you, Figgy?"

"Yes, what's left of me," growled Figgins. "Help me over, for goodness sake. Calling-over yet?"

"No, you're barely in time."

A rope slithered down the wall, and Figgins grasped it and pulled himself over. Then the three New House juniors tore off to the hall to answer to their names, and fortunately were there just in time to answer "Adsum," as Mr. Patchiff rapped them out.

Calling-over finished, the Co. were anxious to hear an account of Figgins's adventures. There was nothing for it but to tell them, and that Figgins did.

"There's no need to tell the story to Study No. 6," he said.

"Blake will only cackle over it. He'd cackle at anything—What the dickens are you grinning at, Kerr?"

"Was I grinning?" asked the Scottish partner in the Co.

"Yes, you were, like a hyena."

"Well, you see—"

"Yes, I see a silly fathead. If you don't leave off that gurgling, Fatty Wynn, I'll sling you out, so there!"

"It's only something in my throat, Figgy."

"Gr-r-r-r!" said Figgins lucidly. "I say, we've been done this time—"

"You've been done, you mean," said Kerr.

"We've failed," said Figgins, taking no notice of this remark.

"But we're not going to give up the game. We'll have another try—Hallo, Blake!"

The chums of Study No. 6 looked in.

"Hallo, Figgy! We've come over to hear what discoveries you've made."

"Haven't made any."

"Didn't you twack Tom Mewwy to the wains?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"No, I didn't."

"Didn't you see anything of Ferrers Locke?" asked Herries.

"Yes, I saw him."

"Well, what was he like—what was he doing—what did you find out—did he meet Tom Merry—hang it, out with the yarn!"

exclaimed Blake.

"Righto!" said Herries. "Out with it, Figgy!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins turned red. As leader of the Co. he could not refuse to explain, and it was certain that if he was reticent, Blake would guess something. He might question Tom Merry and learn the truth. Poor Figgins found, as many have found before him, that a secret is hard to keep.

"Come, explain," said Blake. "If Tom Merry's got the better of you this time, you may as well own up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins reluctantly explained. He expected that the chums of No. 6 would laugh. They more than fulfilled his expectations. They roared. They shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake. "Oh, you giddy shadower, to get shut up in a box."

"It wasn't a box," snapped Figgins. "It was a cell."

"Yes, it was a sell, and no mistake," said Blake, deliberately misunderstanding. "It was a rotten sell from start to finish."

"If you're going to cackle like a lot of hyenas, you fellows, you'd better get out of this study."

"Certainly. We beg to withdraw from this rotten Co.," said Blake, immediately. "We don't want a leader who gets himself shut up in a bandbox—I mean a cell! I had a feeling all along that the whole affair would be mucked up if you New House fellows were allowed to take the lead in it, and you see I was right."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We're out of the rotten Co.," said Blake. "The Co. is busted, in fact. Now that Ferrers Locke and Tom Merry know that we're on the track, they'll be careful, and we stand no chance. They'll be on their guard against us, so the game's up. Can't you see that?"

"Well, I suppose—"

"It ought to be put in the Gazette," grinned Blake. "Failure of Figgins & Co.—great news in the New House—a very old firm bankrupt—"

"Get out of my study!" roared Figgins.

"Figgins & Co.'s Failure—latest news!" chanted Blake, in the tone of a newsboy. "Great Failure and Bankruptcy of Figgins & Co.—"

But this was a little too much for the patience of Figgins.

He seized a Greek lexicon and went for Blake. The Co. backed him up well, and the chums of No. 6 were rushed out of the study.

New House juniors came flocking along the passage at the

sound of a row, and Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy thought it wisest to retreat. But as they scuttled out of the New House, Blake turned in the doorway and yelled back at the top of his voice:

"Latest edition! Startling News! Crash in the New House! Great Failure of Figgins & Co.!"

Then he stopped—for the lexicon left the hand of Figgins with deadly aim, and Blake was simply bowled over! He rolled out into the quad and disappeared in the mist.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins.

The School House trio were gone. But from the misty quadrangle came a chant of three voices in unison.

"Startling Bankruptcy! Great Failure of Figgins & Co.!"

Figgins snorted.

Blake, Herries, and D'Arcy went on towards the School House, chuckling.

"We had 'em on toast that time!" said Blake, with much satisfaction. "Figgins won't be so jolly anxious to lead next time! Failure of Figgins & Co.! Why, that will be a good gag for weeks to come; we'll spread it over the School House, and chant it at 'em in the quad, and howl it in the passages, and whisper it in the class-rooms. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha, ha! I regard the matter as extremely funny. Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums entered the School-House in high, good humour. Tom Merry had just come in and was taking off his coat. Blake grinned at him.

"Where have you been, you bounder?" he asked. "I hear that Figgins has been a-tracking of you like a giddy Red Indian, and found himself caught in a trap."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, that's so. Were you chaps in the game?"

"Oh, we were backing him up a little," said Blake, cautiously.

"We knew those bounders would muck it up if we didn't help. They've mucked it up anyway, though. Figgins & Co. have failed, and we've retired from the partnership. We'll join you, if you like, and help you make a success of the thing."

"Thanks," said Tom Merry, politely. "Thanks for nothing."

"Oh, we don't want to. We know a lot about it already. You've been meeting Ferrers Locke—"

"Hush! Don't give it away."

"Righto, we'll keep mum," grinned Blake. "That's understood. So will Figgins & Co., though they've made such a ghastly frost of the business. You look cold."

"It's horrid cold out," said Tom Merry, with a shiver.

"Come into our study and warm yourself. Manners and Lewther are in the gym, and I expect your fire's out. We've got a good one, and something hot to drink."

Tom Merry accepted the invitation. The fire was blazing in No. 6, and Blake quickly made a glass of steaming lemonade as Tom put his feet on the fender and stretched out his hands to the warmth.

"This is jolly decent of you kids," said Tom Merry, as he sipped the refreshing and warming beverage, and enjoyed the warmth of the fire. "I wish I could tell you about what's going on, but I'm not in it myself as a matter of fact—only by accident—"

"Why, Figgins thought you met Locke specially at the old castle—"

"Ha, ha! That was a little mistake! It was quite by accident. I've just been down to see Mr. Locke in the village, but that was owing to a discovery I made quite by chance. Figgins was barking up the wrong tree all the time."

"Ha, ha, ha! Just like old Figgy!"

"Yaas, wathah! It would weally have been bettah for Figgins to leave the leadahship in my hands," D'Arcy remarked.

"I suggested it to him, and he only used wude expwessions in woply. That was just like Figgins, too."

The juniors chatted as Tom Merry warmed his feet and drank his lemonade. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch and rose to his feet.

"Where are you going, image?" asked Blake.

"I object to being called an image."

"Well, where are you going, anyway?"

"I think I ought to wun in and see that unfortunate fellow, Bullivant, you know, before wetirin' for the night," said D'Arcy.

"He is vevy wude to Taggles, and has no one to speak to, and I think a few words might cheer him up, you know."

"I can't help thinking there's something in what Taggles says about his being only malingering," Blake said, with a shake of the head.

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said, "I never liked the man's looks; but it's a beastly caddish thing of him to pretend to be ill at a time when Kildare needs him. Kildare has treated him very well."

"He has, rather," said Blake. "Why, he offered to send for Dr. Short, and the fellow refused so snappishly to see a doctor that Kildare—I heard him say so to Darrell—would have given him a shaking up for it if he hadn't been ill."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"Why should he refuse to see a doctor?" he exclaimed.

"Because he's only rotting," said Herries. "That's it, and he is afraid of being bowled out if a doctor saw him, as, of course, he would be."

"Looks like it," said Blake. "Well, go and see him, Gussy, and bring your mighty brain to bear on the matter. If he's malingering he ought to be ragged."

D'Arcy took his departure. He returned in about ten minutes, looking very exasperated.

"He refuses to admit me," he said. "He said through the keyhole that he didn't want to be bothered, and that I could cut off! The fearful cheek!"

"Oh, it's a case of malingering," said Blake.

The chums of Study No. 6 got out their books to do their evening preparation, and Tom Merry quitted the study. He was in a very thoughtful mood as he went along to his own quarters. Manners and Lowther were in the study when he arrived there, trying to persuade the fire to burn.

Manners looked up as Tom came in.

"Got my films?"

"Yes," said Tom, putting his parcel on the table. "I say, kids, what do you think about that fellow Bullivant's illness?"

"He's refused to see a doctor," said Lowther. "He's malingering."

"If he's only rotting, he ought to be taught a lesson," said Tom, with kindling eyes. "He ought to be willing to oblige Kildare. Don't you think, kids, that we should look into the matter, and find out the facts, and put him through it, if he's only playing the goat?"

"Not a bad idea," said Lowther. "I wish this fire would burn."

"Oh, blow the fire!"

"I am blowing it, but it doesn't seem to do it any good."

"Well, we're going to look into this," announced Tom Merry.

"Taggles says the fellow is up and dressed, and that doesn't look like an invalid. It's as easy as anything to get on the trellis of Taggles's lodge and look into his window. I fancy I could tell whether he was ill or not. What do you say? If he's pretending he ought to be shown up."

"Righto," said Manners, reflectively. "Let's show him up."

"Come along, then."

The Terrible Three left the School House. To cut across the quad unnoticed was easy in the mist. They reached Taggles's lodge. Two windows were lighted—that of Taggles's little parlour, and that of Bullivant's bedroom. The latter had the blind down, but the blind was ill-fitting, and several beams of light escaped into the night.

"Up you go, Tom," said Lowther.

Tom hesitated for a moment. He did not like to do anything that savoured of spying. But the thought that the man was repaying the kindness Kildare had shown him by a mean and contemptible deception nerved the hero of the Shell to the investigation. He climbed the trellis-work, drew silently close to the window, and applied his eye to one of the narrow rifts where the light shone out into the darkness.

He had a view of the interior of the room—and the next moment he drove his teeth into his tongue to keep back the cry of amazement that rose to his lips!

CHAPTER 12.

The Arrest of Nobbler Jim—Tom Merry Comes Out Ahead!

TOM MERRY dropped from the trellis to the ground, and Manners and Lowther jumped. For a moment they thought he had fallen.

"What's the matter, Tom?" gasped Manners, catching sight of his chum's deadly white face in the mist.

Tom was gasping for breath.

"I—I have had a shock, that's all! I'll tell you presently. Come!"

He hurried away through the mist. His chums, utterly amazed at his strange looks and stranger action, followed him. Lowther caught him by the arm.

"In heaven's name, Tom, what's up?"

"Come. I've got to get out—to get to Ferrers Locke! Help me over the wall. Mind, don't stir from this spot till I come back again; don't go near the lodge—promise me!"

"Honour bright!" said Lowther. "Blessed if I understand, though! We'll wait for you here!"

Tom Merry was over the wall in a twinkling.

He dropped into the lane, and dashed away towards Rylcombe. At full speed he went, running as he had never run on the cinder-path, though cumbered now with his coat. With steady strides, faster and faster, through the dim mist, the hero of the Shell raced on towards Rylcombe.

Almost spent, he reached the Red Lion Inn, and stumbled into a coated figure in the porch. There was a cry of astonishment.

"Tom!"

It was Ferrers Locke.

"Mr. Locke!" Tom grasped him by the arm, but he tried in vain to speak; in his excitement and breathless exhaustion the words would not come!

The detective understood. He led the boy to the nearest bench, and made him sit down. Tom sank upon the bench, gasping, and gasping, his breast throbbing, his heart thumping away like a hammer.

"Don't be in a hurry, Tom," said Ferrers Locke, quietly. "Take your time, and calm yourself. I have just been to the castle, and I found your account quite correct. The loot is in the hands of the police, but the discovery will be kept a secret for the present, in order not to alarm the thief——"

"I have found him!"

Tom Merry gasped out the words. Ferrers Locke gave a great start.

"Are you serious, Tom! You have found the thief?"

"Yes," panted Tom, "I have found him!"

"Where?"

"At St. Jim's." Tom calmed himself at last. "I know it is he! Did you not say, a man of medium stature, probably clean-shaven——"

"Exactly."

"Once a professional footballer——"

"That is true."

"And he would have his face and head cut by his violent passage through the window."

"Terribly out, I should say."

"Then I have found him."

Ferrers Locke's eyes were gleaming now. He waited patiently for Tom to speak.

"There is a new groundman at St. Jim's," said Tom, more slowly. "A chap employed to keep the football ground in order, you know. He calls himself Bullivant. Nobody liked him much, but he was a splendid footballer, and so some of the fellows took to him for that. Kildare treated him very well, and wanted him to play in practice matches. To-day he has been ill—but we knew that he was only pretending. He affected to have a bad cold, and kept his face and head wrapped up so that only his eyes could be seen."

"Ah!" It was a quick breath from the detective.

"We didn't suspect anything from that, but a lot of things seemed to point to his cold being only an excuse for not playing; we thought he was a disobedient brute, and looked into it, you know, to see if he was really ill or not."

"Very right."

"I looked into his window, and saw——"

"What did you see?"

"He was washing his face, and I saw it—he had just taken the bandages off to change them. His face was horribly cut all over, red and gashed, and some of the cuts bled afresh as he bathed them."

The detective rose to his feet.

"How did he get hurt like that?" said Tom Merry quickly. "If it was done by accident, why should he conceal it, and pretend to have a cold? The moment I saw his face I knew that he was the man who had jumped through the window with Mr. Railton after him."

"There is not the slightest doubt on that point, Tom."

"You feel as sure as I do, sir?"

"Quite. Come, if you are sufficiently rested. I will call at the police-station for a couple of constables, and we'll get to St. Jim's as fast as a trap can carry us."

Ferrers Locke's preparations did not take long. In ten minutes a trap, with the detective and Tom Merry and a couple of constables in it, was bowling swiftly along the misty lane towards St. Jim's. Ferrers Locke rang up Taggles, and the trap rolled into the quad, and the four at once ran to the porter's lodge.

"Take this constable up to Mr. Bullivant's room," said Ferrers Locke, unheeding Taggles's amazed inquiries. "Obey me quickly!"

Taggles obeyed. One of the constables, who had received his instructions, went up with the porter to the door of Bullivant's room and knocked. Ferrers Locke, with Tom Merry and the other policeman, waited in the shadows below the window.

Tom Merry knew what was expected. As soon as Nobbler Jim knew that a policeman was at his door, he would spring from the window—into the arms of Ferrers Locke.

He was right. The light in the room suddenly went out and the window opened. A figure dropped from the trellis to the ground, and two strong pairs of hands gripped it in a twinkling. Almost before the rascal knew that he was seized the handcuffs were clinking on his wrists, and he was a prisoner.

The policeman turned on the light of his lantern, and it flashed in the face of the prisoner. A ghastly face—cut and gashed with broken glass—convulsed now with fury.

"Nobbler Jim!"

A stream of curses poured from the prisoner's lips.

"Hang you, Ferrers Locke! You've got me at last, but

you'll never get the swag. That's hidden where you will never find it!" he yelled.

"You are mistaken," said the detective quietly. "The police have already visited the old castle—the secret is discovered, and the loot is in their hands."

The rascal seemed stunned by the detective's words, so quietly spoken. He gave Ferrers Locke a dazed look, but uttered no word as he was led away by the police. Handcuffed, with a stalwart constable on either side of him, Nobbler Jim was driven away in the trap to Rylcombe Police-station.

Ferrers Locke tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Come with me, Tom. I must explain to the doctor, and tell him, too, how much of the credit of this capture is due to you."

And a few minutes later Dr. Holmes was listening in utter amazement to the detective's explanation.

Tom Merry was looking very well pleased with himself and things generally, when he came out of the Head's study. He found a group of juniors waiting for him in the passage. Manners and Lowther had waited for him to return from Rylcombe, and did not comprehend in the least what was on the tapis until the arrest of Nobbler Jim enlightened him. They seized Tom Merry by the arms as he came out of the Head's study, and marched him off, and Study No. 6 crowded round, with Figgins & Co. from the New House, and a host of other juniors eager to hear the tale.

Tom Merry was called upon by the general voice for an explanation, and he gave it in a few quiet, modest sentences.

"Hip, hip!" said Lowther. "Of course, it was bound to fall to us to set the matter to rights. I never did like that chap, you know. No wonder he knew the way to the safe when he was living here in the school all the time."

"No wonder," said Blake. "And he used to go out of a night and burgle, and hide the loot in the old castle, and come back here to lie low—the cheek of it!"

"He played jolly good footer, though," said Herries. "I think they ought to let him off lightly on account of that."

"Rats!" said Blake. "A chap who could play like that ought to have known better than to steal, I should think. And it was Bullivant—I mean Nobbler Jim—who gave me that tap on the boko in the fog. No wonder he was startled when I tapped him on the shoulder suddenly, and hit out. Perhaps he thought it was Ferrers Locke!"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think gweat ewedit is due to our study for unwavellin' this mystewy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Eh?" said the Terrible Three together.

"What?" ejaculated Figgins & Co. with one voice. And even Blake and Herries looked surprised.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Who was it first suspected that Bullivant wasn't playin' the beastly game, you know? I did. I thought he was wottin', and waised suspicion on the subject. Tom Mewwy simply followed out my ideahs. If I hadn't suspected Bullivant of malingerin', Tom Mewwy wouldn't have discovered that he was Nobblah Jim, and if——"

"Nuff ifs!" said Tom Merry. "Talk about cheek! We did the trick, we three, and the credit belongs to the Shell."

"Wats! The ewedit belongs to the Fourth Form. I admit that Figgins & Co. have made a muck of it—a weally ghastly failyah!"

"Rather!" said Blake and Herries. "Of course, Figgins & Co. were no good!"

"Stuff!" said Figgins. "Rot! Bosh! If we hadn't——"

"If you hadn't made asses of yourselves you wouldn't look such giddy donkeys at the present moment!" said Blake.

"If you want one on the nose, Blake——"

"Scat! Go and do some more shadowing," said Blake. "You're great hands at that, you three. You can shadow Kerr, and Kerr can shadow Paddy Wynn, and you can all three get shut up in a cellar, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the School House crowd.

Figgins, with a face aflame, went for Blake headlong, but the crowd surged between and he was driven back. Blake was laughing too much to defend himself. Figgins & Co. tried to make their voices heard, but in vain. They were laughed and howled down.

"Look here!" yelled Figgins, the colour of a beetroot now.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "What are these New House bounders doing in a respectable place like this, anyway? Kick them out!"

Figgins & Co. were gently kicked out. A roar of derision followed them across the misty quad, and as they disconsolately travelled towards the New House, the echo of the School House yell was wafted to their ears.


"Crash in the New House! Bankruptcy of a rotten firm! Figgins & Co.'s failure!"

THE END.

Another long, complete tale dealing with Tom Merry's Schooldays next Thursday, entitled, "Danger Ahead!" Please do not fail to order "THE GEM" LIBRARY in advance. Price One Halfpenny.



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so the Head leaves it to the boys to re-christen him. After a lengthy discussion, Billy Barnes and Cyril decide on naming their new schoolmate Snowy White Adonis Venus. He is taken as a fag by Graft, a bully.

(Now go on with the story.)

The New Master.

"This new master is sure to be a rotter," was Billy Barnes' verdict, on the eventful morning of his arrival. "He will ask me questions that I don't know. The silly brutes always do that. I never yet knew a master to ask me a question that I do know."

"That's because you don't know anything, you empty-headed idiot!" said Snigg.

NEXT THURSDAY!

"DANGER AHEAD!"

A Splendid Tale of Tom Merry's Schooldays.

(Continued).



TEMPEST HEADLAND

The Only New and Original School Tale.
By S. CLARKE HOOK.

"I wish I knew all you don't know," retorted Billy. "I'd be the cleverest fellow on the face of the earth. What did you say the fellow's name was, Venus?"

"I tink it's Rolls. I ain't quite certain, but I tink dat was de name Cyril said, 'cos he remarked dat we might call him Buster. He said a roll and a buster were one and de same ting. I wish de man would make hasto and come, if we'm got to wait in for him. Seems to me master ain't got de right to keep boys waiting for dem in dis—"

"Silence!" commanded a stern voice.
"Woohoo!" yelled Venus; and, looking round, he saw the new master standing in the doorway in his cap and gown.

He was a small, slimly built man, with a mass of curling hair, and a long, drooping moustache. He strode up to his desk in a very dignified manner, took down the cane that was hanging there, and, rapping the desk, commanded attention in a voice that gave the impression he would enforce his orders.

"Let there be silence, boys!" he cried. "I am given to understand that this is a very unruly form, and I wish to give you to understand that I am a strict disciplinarian. I will have every order obeyed immediately, and without question. That coloured boy there—what is your name?—I mean the one who was speaking when I entered the room."

"Snowy White Adonis Venus, sah."
"Stand up, boy. Who gave you such a ridiculous name as that?"

"De boys, sah."
"Absurd! Who is the best boy in this class, Venus?"

"We ain't got anyting like dat here, sah."
"What!"
"Woohoo!"

"Don't dare to howl at me like that. Do you want me to flog you?"
"Nunno, sah!"

"Well, you had better behave yourself. What do you know concerning astronomy?"

"I was neber dere in my life, sah."
"Pshaw! Ridiculous! That boy there—what is your name? No, no, not that one. I mean the lad with that remarkably stupid-looking face."

"Dat must be Snigg, sah. I tink he's got de stupidest face dat was eber put on a schoolboy."

"Stop this way, Snigg. What do you mean by laughing in that idiotic way, boy?"
"It isn't idiotic, and— Woohoo! Stop it! Don't you dare to—"

"What, boy, what! You venture to speak like that to me! Not dare to hit you! Ah, we shall soon see about that! I shall make an example of you if I have any more of your impertinence. You stand there. I shall question you next, and just you be careful that you answer my questions correctly, or else it will be the worse for you. Silence! Don't snuffle like that. Put that filthy rag in your pocket. Do you hear me, boy?" added Mr. Rolls, catching the unfortunate Snigg a crack over the knuckles before he had time to obey the order.

"Now, then, Venus," continued the new master, daring Snigg, who was weeping, out of the corner of his eyes, "tell me what you know concerning the sun."

"It's sort ob hot in summer and cold in winter, sah."
"You stupid boy! The heat of the sun is the same all the year round. Do you know what makes the earth colder in winter?"

"Spect it's de snow, sah."
"What makes the snow?"
"Can't tink what dat can be."
"What causes the day and night?"
"De darkness causes de night, sah."
"Haven't I told you not to laugh, Snigg?" demanded Mr. Rolls, catching him a crack over the shoulders. "What causes the day and night? Do put that dirty rag away! I detest a boy who is always snivelling. I expect you are a bully—they are always cowards. Now answer my question. What causes the day and night?"

"The—oh, my back!—the earth going round the sun."
"Why, the boy is a perfect idiot! Have you no sense at all?"

"Yes, I have. Mum—my father says I am very clever."
"I hope you do not take after your father in so far as veracity is concerned. No one on this earth could think you were clever. Do you suppose that the earth goes round the sun in twenty-four hours?"

"I nev—never said it did."
"Don't answer me in that way, boy," cried Mr. Rolls, giving him some cuts that caused him to weep copiously. "Who is that little boy here—that very small one?"

"Dat's Willie, sah. He's de smallest boy in our class, and—"

"Silence! Come here, boy!"
Willie, who was very sensitive, trembled a little, but he obeyed. He had a bad black eye, and a cut on his forehead. "How did you damage your face like that, boy?"
"I—I fell, sir."
"Boy," roared Mr. Rolls, bringing his cane down on the desk with a force that made Willie leap into the air, "do you dare to lie to me? That black eye was caused by a blow. Who gave you that blow?"
"I didn't lie to you, sir. I did fall, and that is how I got the cut. I fell on the fender."
"Ah! You only told me half the truth. Is that so?"
"Yes, sir."
"Which boy struck you in the eye. Mind, I will know, and if he is a much bigger boy than you are, I shall flog him with the severity such brutal conduct deserves. His name?"
"I would rather not tell you, sir."
"I dare say you would, but as it is my intention to find out, you will have to tell. Are you going to tell me?"
"We never sneak at Tempest Headland, sir. The masters here never force us to do so."
"What do I care what the masters here do. I am your master now, and I will have implicit obedience from all. You must not think that you can play with me. Now, are you going to tell me the boy's name?"
"I cannot, sir."
"Indeed! Do you know what it means to disobey my command?"
"I think so, sir. I would rather you flogged me than become a sneak."
"I shall advert to the matter later on. Now, little boy, can you tell me what causes day and night?"
"The rotation of the earth on its axis, sir."
"Quite correct. How long does it take to revolve?"
"Twenty-four hours, sir."
"Correct. What causes the various seasons?"
"The earth's inclination as it revolves round the sun in the year."
"Now, you great stupid boy, Snigg," cried Mr. Rolls, "are you not ashamed of yourself? This little boy has answered all my questions correctly, and you have not answered one. Keep your hands down, will you? Don't keep rubbing your eyes with that filthy rag."

"I wish I knew all you don't know," retorted Billy. "I'd be the cleverest fellow on the face of the earth. What did you say the fellow's name was, Venus?"

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