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RAID AND RESCUE!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.



MR. SELBY AND SILAS STOUT!

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A MAGNIFICENT, NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY
OF TOM MERRY & CO. AT ST. JIM'S.

RAID AND RESCUE!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Talking It Over.

"IT'S a fair question whether we ought not to tell Raitlon, and leave it to him what should be done."

Reginald Talbot, of the Shell at St. Jim's, spoke those words to a crowd of the Shell and Fourth in the junior Common-room.

"Tell him what?" asked Monty Lowther.

"What we know, of course."

"Ah, but what do we know, dear boy?" drawled Cardew of the Fourth.

"Well, I really think we might say we know now that Selby and Skimmy and Trimble are prisoners at the Moat House."

"Are you dead sure you know that, old scout?" gibed Lowther.

"Grundy says so. He and Gunn and Wilkins saw them."

"Did they? Gunn says he saw what he took for a ghostly steed. Grundy says it was a horse, anyway, but isn't so certain about its being a ghostly one—thinks it had something on its back, which might have been Baggy or Skimmy, without a head. Wilkins—What did you see, Wilkins? I don't precisely recall your version."

"Oh, stop rotting, Lowther!" growled George Wilkins. "I really think now that it was one of those two, you know."

"Sure it was!" snapped Grundy.

"And sure he was headless?" inquired Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy glared round at the crowd.

"This isn't funny!" he roared.

"But you are, dear boy!" said Ralph Reckness Cardew blandly.

"I quite agree with Gwunday. It is not in the very least funny, an' I considah it vewy wpevhenisible of anyone to make a joke of it," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, sticking his celebrated monocle into his right eye, and regarding Cardew and Lowther with the gravest disapproval.

"I am wilted!" murmured Lowther.

"I subside!" said Cardew.

"Shut up, Gussy!" growled Herries. "Nobody's making out that it's a joke about those three being collared and imprisoned by that old rotter at the Moat House. But Grundy's a silly ass! His yarn doesn't amount to a row of bean-sticks. And as for Gunn and Wilky, they're worse than old Grundy. They were so jolly well finked that they don't know what they did see!"

"So would you have been finked!"hooted Wilkins.

"You admit that they are there, Herries?" Grundy said argumentatively.

"I think they are. But it doesn't make a scrap of difference what I admit. The point is that I don't know, and that nobody knows."

"So we haven't anything to tell Raitlon," said Jack Blake. "And, as we haven't anything to tell him, I vote we don't tell him anything."

"That sounds reasonable enough," Lowther said. "I think even Raitlon would see it that way."

"Well, I, for one, can't say that I know they're there," Tom Merry said. "So I vote we have another shot at getting them out without letting on to Raitlon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Right-ho, Tom!" Talbot said, good-humouredly. "I was only thinking that they might not be so very keen on staying in prison any longer than they have to."

"Do you think they are in any real danger?" asked Tom.

"Well, no. Of course, you can't tell what a half-crazed fellow like Stout may do. But if he had meant to do them any real harm I fancy it would have been done before this. And there's another thing. If he dangerous, nothing's more likely to make him break out and do something desperate than having the police fetched in to make him give them up—which would be the game Raitlon and the Head would go in for, I suppose. If we could only get inside the place, and rescue them by force of arms, it would be a heap safer for them, I should say."

"And score for us," remarked Kanagroo.

"Nobody could make a big fuss if we fetched them out," said Manners. "It wouldn't look well for the school if the affair fell into the hands of the police. I should think the Head would see that."

"Hear, hear!" murmured the crowd.

"Yes, watah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I quite agree that it is up to us to bring about the rescue. All that is necessary is a fellow of tact and judgment to—"

"Ass!" said Blake witheringly.

"Talk about judgment! If getting them out was left to you, they might jolly well stay there till the Day of Judgment! I won't say you're a bigger duffer than old Grundy, because no one—"

"That's enough, Blake!" snapped George Alfrey Grundy.

"Well, you did make rather a hash of it, you know, old chap," Tom Merry said mildly.

"Rather a hash!" snorted Figgins of the New House. "The biggest mess that I every knew anybody to make of anything. That's what Grundy's rescue expedition was!"

"It was only because you silly idiots wouldn't follow my lead!" roared Grundy. "If you'd done that it would have been all right. But what chance had I with only two turnip-headed maniacs like Wilkins and Gunn to back me up?"

"Let bygones be bygones," said Kerr peacefully. "If Grundy will only have the sense to stand out this time—"

"Grundy jolly well won't have, then!" howled that hero.

"Grundy never has had," said Lowther.

"Had what?" asked Clifton Dana.

"Sense, old top!"

"Oh, you dry up, Lowther! I—"

"Weally, Gwunday, you might have the modesty to welfam fwoom—"

"That's another thing Grundy never had," put in Cardew.

"I've as much modesty as you have, you swanking idiot!" hooted Grundy.

"Just about as much," agreed Cardew.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew certainly could not have been accused of any excess of that quality. He fowed the limelight every whit as much as Grundy did, but he had different methods of securing it.

It was undoubtedly true that Grundy had made a hash of the rescue expedition into which he had persuaded Gunn and Wilkins, whom he now rather ungratefully characterised as turnip-headed maniacs. Perhaps it had not been very bright of them to follow Grundy's lead once again, in spite of all the memories they had of what following that lead had brought upon them in the past. But it was scarcely Grundy who should have grumbled at that.

Two days before Herbert Skimpole of the Shell and Baggy Trimble of the Fourth had disappeared in somewhat mysterious fashion. They were believed to have gone together to visit Professor Burnham, a scientific gentleman who lived at the Moat House, some two or three miles from St. Jim's. But no one was certain that they had gone thither. The assumption was based on the fact that they were known to have been invited by the professor.

Mr. Henry Selby, the master of the Third Form, was an old friend of Professor Burnham; and late on the night of the disappearance he had gone, at Mr. Raitlon's request, to the Moat House to inquire concerning the missing juniors.

He had not returned. On the following day Mr. Raitlon had met the professor, and had been assured by him that neither Mr. Selby nor the juniors were at his place, and that they had not been there.

The professor was not lying. The professor was merely mistaken. In his absence the three had all been collared and imprisoned as spies by his right-hand man, Silas Stout, who was half-crazed on the spy business.

Mr. Raitlon had never met Silas Stout. But some of the St. Jim's juniors had, and, after what they had seen of his ways, they were quite ready to believe that he might be holding the hapless three in durance vile.

They felt almost sure of it, indeed, although they had no proof.

But it was really very difficult to make out what Grundy & Co. had seen of him.

It was not entirely their fault. The moonlight had played tricks with them; and Skimmy, clinging desperately to the neck of the professor's piebald pony as the drawbridge over the moat went up, had looked like a headless rider in the brief glimpse that they had of him

before the moon passed behind a cloud. And when the moon emerged the drawbridge was up, the gate was shut, the pony and his rider had disappeared, and Grundy & Co. stood amazed and half-terrified.

Silas Stout had, in fact, stopped in the very nick of time to bolt for freedom made by his prisoners.

"Everybody agrees, then, that it's up to us to make another attempt at rescue to-night?" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, but everybody doesn't, by gad!" sneered Racke. "I don't, for one."

"I can't, either," said the gad, and three or four more of the black sheep crowd muttered their agreement.

Tom looked at them disdainfully. "I wasn't thinking about you rotters," he said frankly. "You don't count. There's a crowd more than we shall need without you. We don't want anyone to go who isn't really in; and we shouldn't have you with us if you wanted to go!"

"Consider yourself squashed, Crooke!" sneered Racke.

"Not likely! Do you feel squashed, old sport?"

"I do not. But then, I never did care a jot for Merry's side, by gad, and it's not dashed well likely that I ever shall!"

Tom turned his back on them. As he had said, the Shell and Fourth could muster quite an army without Racke & Co. The difficulty would be to keep fellows out, not to get enough.

It did not occur to him that Racke & Co. were likely to meddle in the affair at all, though it might have done if he had given a little more thought to them.

CHAPTER 2.

A Growing Army.

IN Study No. 10 on the Shell passage there was a gathering of the clans that afternoon when classes were over for the day.

The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners—were there. So were Talbot, Figgy, and Kerr, had come across from the New House. Levison represented Study No. 9 of the Fourth Form, and Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy Study No. 6. Roylance of the Fourth, admitted on all hands one of the hottest of the St. Jim's juniors in fight or counsel, and Kangaroo of the Shell, made eleven.

Manners had a sheet of exercise-paper before him, and was making a list of names. He had put down the eleven there present, and had added the names of Herries, Digby, Clive, and Clifton Dane.

"That's fifteen," he said. "More than plenty, I should say."

Harry Noble shook his head. "Glyn's back," he said. "We can't leave him out."

"Oh, all serene," answered Manners; and he added Glyn's name.

"There's Gore," remarked Talbot. "It'll come whether you put him down or not."

"Oh, bother!" snapped Manners. But he set down the name of George Gore.

"Same with Cardew," said Levison briefly.

"He should have thought he wouldn't be a bit mind standing down."

"That's your mistake, Durranee, too. He's got a right to be in it, you know." The names of Cardew and Durranee went down on the list.

"Nineteen," said Manners. "One more will make the absolute limit."

"Got to put in four more, anyway," Kerr said cheerily.

"Oh, rats! Who?"

"Old Fatty—"

"He doesn't want to turn out of bed, I'm jolly sure."

"P'raps not; but he won't stay there

when we go. Then there's Reddy, Owen, and Lawrence."

"We can do without them all right," growled Manners.

"The New House isn't going to be left out of it like that, chump!" said Figgins warmly.

"It isn't really a New House bizney at all. But Reddy's a useful sort of bounder. We'll let him come along. No need to have Lawrence and Owen as well, that I can see."

"You can't keep them out if Reddy comes."

"Let Reddy stay at home, then!"

"We shall if he does," said Figgy. "Well, stay! We don't mind."

"But we won't stay!"

Figgins was getting quite hot. Manners gave way, and the names of Fatty Wynn, Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence were added to the fast-lengthening list.

Talbot, Tom Merry, Levison, Blake, and Roylance were talking in a corner apart, busy with schemes for the passage of the moat, the sealing of the wall, and the entry of the Moat House. Gussy, sitting at a corner of the table, was writing out a plan of campaign entirely his own. Lowther, Figgins, and Kerr crowded round Manners.

There came a tap at the door. "Come in!" howled Manners.

The handsome face of Dick Julian showed itself.

"This is the recruiting-office, I believe!" said Julian cheerily.

"The whatter?"

"Recruiting-office! Don't be dull, Manners! You're enlisting forces for to-night's siege of the Moat House, aren't you?"

"Wrong! The list is closed!" snapped Manners.

"Oh, rot! You'll have to open it again, that's all!"

"You can stick Julian down all right, old bean!" said Lowther soothingly.

"But you've got to put down Hammond, Reilly, and Kerruish as well," said Julian at once. "I've come as delegate from our study."

Manners laid down his pen, and folded his arms.

"That does it!" he said. "The thing's impossible! Why, it would make twenty-seven!"

"Well, what about that?" snapped Julian.

"We can't possibly go along in a crowd like that, you know!"

"Why not? And, if you can't, just stand down yourself, for one!"

"You silly chump!" said Manners hotly.

"What's the matter?" asked Tom Merry.

"Four more of them wanting to go, the silly asses!"

"Be civil, Manners!" rapped out Julian.

"Well, let 'em!" said Tom.

Manners grunted, and the list was lengthened by four more names.

Hardly had the door closed behind Julian as he went out when it opened to admit Buck Finn.

"I'm in this, I reckon!" said Buck. "Oh, you chaps make me tired!" shouted Manners. "We haven't room for any more!"

"Shucks!" said Buck. "I calculate there's all outdoors, ain't there?"

"We won't have you—that's flat!"

"Don't be too polite, old scut!" said Lowther.

"Was, I calculate that if I don't go with the outfit I shall go on my lonesome, that's all!" replied Buck determinedly.

"Put him down, Manners!" said Tom.

"One more won't matter!"

Thompson, of the New House, was the next applicant. Manners, with an air of

weary resignation, set down the name of Thompson.

"Any more of you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! Now I come to think of it, French said he was on," answered Thompson.

Manners took a fresh sheet of paper.

"No waste in war-time!" said Lowther. "Plenty of room on the other side."

"I'm going to start again, with a full list of the Shell and Fourth, and just strike out the names of those who aren't coming," Manners said. "It will be lots easier."

"Yes—if you happen to know who they are. But after you've struck out John Smith, the next thing will be that John will come along and say he's going."

"There's no John Smith in the Shell or the Fourth, duffer!"

"Well, try Frank, then!"

Hardly had Lowther spoken when a tap at the door heralded the advent of Smith minor. Contarini was with him.

"Here comes the identical to try you!" said Lowther, grinning.

But Manners failed to see the humour of the situation.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"We're going on the beano to-night!" said Smith minor.

"Oh, are you? What for?"

"Well, what are the rest of you going for?" asked Smith minor, opening his eyes.

"Not on any beano, fathead!"

"Try it another way, then. We're so disconsolate without our bluvned Baggy that we can't feel easy till he's restored to us, and we're just bound to help."

"You want to go, Jackeymo?" inquired Lowther.

"Si, signore!" replied the little Italian softly.

"Well, you can! Put them down, Manners!"

Manners glared, grunted, and did so.

"That's thirty-two!" he said, as the pair went.

"No contemptible little army, this!" returned Lowther.

Lumley-Lumley was the next to appear. For some reason or other—possibly because he had been one of the smaller band of the night before—Manners made no objection to his inclusion.

Monty Lowther chuckled. He fancied Manners was getting tired of snapping out fruitless negatives. But he saw a moment later that such was not the case.

The news that forces were being enrolled had spread by this time. Half a dozen fellows came along together—Gibbons, Boulton, Lennox, and Walkley, of the School House Shell contingent, Jimson, also Shell, but New House, and Wyatt, of the Fourth. Not one of them all could be counted as a born adventurer.

It was likely enough that most of them had never broken bounds after lights-out since they came to St. Jim's. But the contagion had spread, and nearly everyone wanted to be in this adventure.

"What on earth—" began Manners.

"It's all serene," said Gibbons hastily.

"We're only asking to be enlisted. We don't want to butt in on the deliberations of the army staff."

"But we've got over thirty already!" hooted Manners.

"That's all right! We make six more," said Jimson.

"It's all serene, old chap! The more the merrier!" said Tom Merry.

"My hat! Tommy's going potty!" growled Manners.

"I say, Manners, old scout, Koumi Rao can't be left out, you know!" said Kerr, looking round. Kerr and Figgy had some time ago joined the group who were making plans of campaign.

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"That's forty!" said Manners, like one reduced to despair. "Can you silly chump, what do you expect to do with forty chaps to muddle everything up?"

CHAPTER 3.

All But the Black Sheep.

THE door opened again, and the shock head of Mulvaney minor was thrust in.

"Sure, is it yez that are takin' the names, Manners darlint?" he asked.

"Yes; but I'm not taking yours!"

"Oh, bedad, then, it's after havin' it down already yez'll be? Ye knew I'd be in it. Well, put down Tompkins, too, if 'tisn't troublin' yez I am!"

"You are! I'm not going to put down Tompkins! Tompkins is the limit in giddy asses! And I'm not going to put you down—you're worse than Tompkins!"

"Sounds as though you were more fish than Mulvaney, old top!" Lowther put in.

"Dry up! Scoot, Mulvaney! The lists are full!"

"Sure, an' it's not after scootin' I'll be until I see yez write my name, an' Tompkins, too, bedad! An' if yez won't do it, come over into the passage wid me, an' I'll write my name on the features of yez, entirely!"

And Mulvaney began to turn up his cuffs.

"Put 'em down, Manners!" said Tom, turning again, with a broad grin on his face.

"What do one or two more matter?"

"Oh, get out, Mulvaney! You and the other silly ass make forty-two! Do you think that's enough?"

"Sure, an' it's a fine lot of asses entirely! An' yez're in it, av course, Manners!"

"Oh, get out, do! There—I've put your name down! Go and see if you can bring along some more recruits—bigger idiots than yourself and Tompkins, please!"

Mulvaney went. A moment later his dulcet voice sounded along the passage, calling loudly on Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins.

"You thought you had set him the impossible to do, dear boy!" said Lowther blandly. "It would appear that you were labouring under a delusion."

"I'd forgotten all about those three!" admitted Manners.

"I, on the contrary, have been expectin' 'em for at least twenty minutes," replied Lowther.

But it was not Grundy & Co. who looked in next.

It was Dick Brooke, the day-boy.

"I say, you fellows, I'm not to be left out of this, am I?" he asked pleadingly.

"I can join up on the way, you know!" Manners put down Brooke's name without argument. But it was only because he liked Brooke, and regarded him as worthy of a place, not because he was past argument.

Lorne, McDonald, and Bates came along next.

"Scots wha hae!" remarked Lowther.

"I'm not a Scot," said Bates.

"Still, at a pinch, you can wha hae as well as any Scot I suppose!"

"I might if I knew how!"

"Stand on your head, and make a noise like an underdone turnip, dear boy," answered Lowther.

"Oh, dry up, Monty, you fathead! Look here, you chaps—"

"I'm thinking we have as good a right as any of the rest of you, and we mean to go!" said Lorne, rather hotly.

"Ay, you're right, Alan," chimed in McDonald.

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"Forty-six!" groaned Manners, using his fountain-pen once more.

"No, old top—fifty!" chuckled Lowther.

For Clarke, Pratt, Robinson minor, and Diggs, of the New House, had arrived.

"This is the limit!" snorted Manners.

"No, Henry, my son! Here comes the limit!"

It was Grundy. He strode into No. 10 with a look of indignation on his face, and elbowed his way through the quartet of New House fellows without any ceremony.

"Look here, I wasn't told anything about this!" he roared.

"Has it occurred to you that you may not have been wanted, Grundy?" asked Lowther softly.

"Oh, you're an ass! You can put my name down, Manners—Gunny's and Wilky's too, of course!"

"This is where I strike!" snapped Manners. And he laid down his pen and pushed the paper from him.

Grundy snorted, picked up the pen, and inscribed upon the paper in his rugged handwriting the illustrations of the names of Grundy, Gunn, and Wilkins.

"There!" he said. "Now we'll talk things over!"

"My hat!" gasped Manners. "And this is the chap who mucked up the whole giddy show last night!"

"What's the row now, Manners?" asked Tom Merry.

"Grundy!" answered Manners faintly.

"Aheh! Grundy, eh? You don't really want to take a hand in this, Grundy—not after last night, do you?"

"Want to? Of course I want to, you silly idiot! And, what's more, I'm jolly well going to!"

"Oh, put him down, Manners!"

"Could anyone ever put Grundy down?" murmured Lowther. "If I'd thought it even barely possible I would have started a society for the putting down of Grundy long ere this! The total suppression of Grundy—the extinction of Grundy—the annihilation of Grundy!"

"He's put himself down," said Manners faintly.

Grundy shoved his way into the group of plan-makers.

"Did you want anything, Grundy?" inquired Levison politely, but with a sarcastic gleam in his eyes.

"Yes! I've come to take my place here—my proper place!" roared Grundy.

"That's on the other side of the door!" growled Blake.

"I should like to see you put me there, Blake!"

"Oh, well, jolly well soon will!"

"Oh, let him stay!" said Tom; and Grundy turned from Blake to glare at Tom Merry.

"Thank you for nothing, Merry!" he said. "I mean to stay!"

He stayed. It was not worth while to contest the point—more especially as all but minor details were already settled.

Grundy wanted to start the business all over again, in order that his valuable advice might have fair play; but, to his surprise, no one seemed anxious to do this. In fact, there was a general and most unflattering refusal even to think of it.

Manners, who had taken his particular job with great seriousness, was wont to do when anything really gripped him, was running through the list meanwhile.

"Racke, Crooke, Scrope, Mellish, Clampe, Chowle," he muttered. "Of course, nobody expected those rotters to weigh in."

"I think I might persuade one or two of them, if you really want them, old scout," said Lowther kindly.

"Want them? My hat! We've three times as many as we want already, and I wouldn't have those rotters at any price!"

"The undesired may be treated as mere cannon-fodder, or as shock-troops for the first assault," suggested Lowther.

"Under the gallant leadership of Mulvaney minor or Grundy, or some other absolute ass—"

"Eh? What's that about me?" roared Grundy.

"Merely a scheme for putting you in the forefront of the battle, most illustrious!" replied Lowther blandly.

"Oh, well, I don't mind that! But I suppose you're rotting, as usual!" growled Grundy.

And there's Frere—he hasn't woke up yet after his usual afternoon nap in the Form-room, I suppose," Manners went on. "Lucas—he's in the music-room, strumming duets, or something, Jones minor—"

"Probably also in the music-room!" suggested Lowther.

Ass! He doesn't take music—doesn't know a sonata from a caterpillar!"

"Still, Lucas would need a partner for a duet, wouldn't he?"

"Oh, you funny chump! You ought to be muzzled!"

"Is that all who aren't down, besides our dear friends of the gay dog persuasion?"

"That's all, as far as I can make out!"

"Well, here comes one of the three."

But it turned out to be two of the three—Lucas and Frere, of the Shell. Frere was always slow to move, and Lucas spent most of his time at his music. But they both wanted to be in this, having learned that everyone who counted was going. And while they were still in No. 10, Jones minor burst breathlessly into that apartment.

"Am I too late?" he panted.

"You're just in time to be last!" replied Manners.

"Well, I couldn't help it. I—"

"The narrative of your journey to Jericho and back will keep, dear boy!" said Lowther.

"But I haven't been to Jericho, you fathead!"

"Not? Never mind! It will keep, anyway!"

"Fifty-six!" groaned Manners.

"And there's the Third to come yet!" said Lowther consolingly.

"The Third! Oh, you potty chump! Do you think we're going to have those kids with us?"

"Well, on second thoughts, they would hardly come. They might go to the aid of Skinny, possibly even of Baggy; but they would hardly be simple enough to stir a finger to release Selby!"

"And a jolly good job, too! Fifty-six—fifty-six! Oh, my only chapsen!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Black Sheep Plot.

BUT Tom Merry and some of the rest looked at the matter from a different standpoint from that of Manners.

At tea—a frugal, war-time tea, to which Talbot was the only guest—Tom explained his views.

"No, we don't need such a crowd, Manners. There's said, and it's true enough that some of them will be precious little use, though you never know who may turn up trumps in a crisis. But I'm glad of it, all the same! Don't you see why?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Manners, puzzled.

"Listen, then! Practically the whole Shell and Fourth are in this bizney now. Six are standing out, and who are they?"

Why, the rotters who don't care a scrap for their Forms or the School!"

"Yes, that's so, Tommy. But—"

"It's no longer a private adventure of us and a few more. It's now a bizney in which the two Forms are moving almost as one man. The Head can't sack two Forms. He can't even punish them very stiffly. A few of the supposed ring-leaders may be picked out for extra punishment; but I don't think even that will happen. We shall probably get lines and a caning all round, but who cares for that?"

"Well, I rather thought that the chaps who brought it off ought to get some credit with the Head and Reilston," said Manners slowly.

"So you wanted to keep it in the family, more or less?" Lowther said.

"Well, something like that, perhaps. But I wasn't expecting any big whack of credit to my own check. I know I was precious little good the other day," replied Manners.

Whatever the faults of Harry Manners were—and he had one or two grave ones—awack was not among them. He possessed self-respect, but he was not vain.

"Suppose we don't bring it off?" said Talbot. "Or suppose they turn out not to be there? It's possible, you know. I wouldn't have asked a single chap to come who wasn't keen on it. We don't want to drag anyone in to save our own faces. But it is better like this."

"Yes; I see that now," admitted Manners.

But even then it did not occur to any of them that the few rotters who had hung back might plot to wreck the expedition, and to get all concerned in it into trouble.

Yet a scheme for doing that was exercising the minds of Racke and Crooke as they sat at tea together. Scribe was also of the party, but he showed no keenness for meddling.

"The old Gibbons is nearly off his dashed head about it!" he sneered. "I've hardly ever known him to think of breaking bounds before. He's no sport. But he's keen on this gadget."

"They all seem to be," returned Racke. "Mouldy frumps like Lucas an' Frere, too, by gad—mothers' meetin' sort of specimens!"

"An' all for objects like Skimpy an' Baggy an' old Selby!" snorted Crooke. "Not exactly!" grinned Scribe. "Nine out of ten of 'em care just as much for those three as we do, which is nothin' at all."

"Or a trifle less," agreed Racke. "That's so. But they mean to go, that's the point! An' what are we goin' to do about it?"

"What should we do?" asked Scribe, opening his eyes. "It's no dashed bizney of ours!"

"They make it their bizney when we go on the randan," Racke said.

"No, they don't. They let us alone."

"That's only because they pretend to think that we're such lost souls that we don't matter!" Crooke sniggered.

Crooke looked rather like a lost soul in these days. He was more shunned by the Shell than ever since his last escapade. Everyone knew that he had treated Talbot badly—with gross ingratitude; some knew, and others suspected, that that was worse than ingratitude to be told of if ever the full story came to light.

But it was never likely to. Reginald Talbot and the few chums in whom he had confided would keep their own counsel. They were under no delusion as to Crooke's present feelings towards his cousin now.

The hate of Crooke was more rancorous than ever. It made him writhe to think how completely he was at Talbot's



Gordon Gay in April I
(See Chapter 9.)

mercy. He writhed none the less, and he hated all the more, because he knew that Talbot was to be counted upon to be merciful.

"Talbot an' Merry," said Racke thoughtfully. "They're the leaders in the affair. Levison's deep in it, too, an' that swankin' boulder Cardew. Talk about killin' two birds with one stone! We could slaughter a dozen as easy as fallin' off a form, by gad!"

"By Jove, yes! There's Lowther! I'd like to take him down a peg," rejoined Crooke, scowling. "Manners, too, an' that Hun, Laurenz, who calls himself Durraunce."

"That's his name, ain't it?" asked Scribe.

"He says it is. Who knows? Roy-lance as well. I can't bear that chap. An' Noble; he's another of the mob. I hate the whole crowd!"

Crooke gritted his teeth as he spoke. He meant what he said. And as he felt, so did Racke.

Scribe was made of milder stuff. He had no special friend among the decent fellows, not even his study-mate Gibbons. But he did not hate any of them particularly.

"Better leave them alone, by gad!" he said unthinkingly.

"If you haven't the pluck to stand in, you're only to stand out," sneered Racke. "I've as much pluck as you have, any-way! What's your game?"

"Well, I've been thinkin' that we might let Railton know, say, half an hour or so after they've started. Clampo or Chowlo could do the same thing in the New House; those boulders are all in it except for Clampo an' Chowle. An' we've a score or two again Figgins & Co., an' one or two more over there, as well as against the crowd this side."

"Not much harm in that," said Scribe. The scheme entailed no danger that he could see.

"Harm in it, by gad? Why, it's the right thing to do!" sneered Crooke.

"Railton an' the old bird ought to be no end grateful to us for givin' them the tip."

"I can see them bein' grateful," replied Scribe, grinning.

"There's another thing we might do, y'know," said Racke.

"What's that?" Scribe asked.

"Put that boulder at the Mount House on the qui vive, so that they don't get any bango out of their dashed expedition even there."

"But what about Skimpy and the rest?" said Scribe.

This was going a bit farther than he cared about.

"What about them?" jeered Crooke. "What do they matter to us?"

"I'm not nuts on anythin' like that," Scribe said weakly.

"I'm not askin' you to do anythin' except keep your mouth shut!" replied Racke nastily.

"Mellich would take a message for a quid," said Crooke.

"For half that," Racke corrected him.

"Yaas, I dare say he might. He's a poverty-stricken rotter. Or there's young Piggott."

"We'll try Mellich first," said Racke.

"Will you see Clampo or Chowle, an' arrange to have the alarm given over the way?"

"I'll do that all serene!" Crooke said.

CHAPTER 5

A Grammarian's Capture.

PERCY MELLISH, the sneak of the Fourth, left the School House before prep was over. Racke had had to shell out a sovereign after all. Mellich would not take less. But for that sum he was quite prepared to betray his Form, and the Shell into the bargain. He was not looking forward to the enterprise with any pleasure. Mellich was a funk, and he wished the whole business well over and done with.

But it really ought not to be difficult, though, of course, there was some little risk.

Before prep he had wheeled out his bicycle, unnoticed by anyone, and had slunk back without it. The machine was hidden in the Rylcombe woods, not very far from the gates.

Now he stole across the gloomy quad, and pulled himself to the top of the wall under the cold moon that could have told so many tales had it suddenly been endowed with the gift of speech.

Five minutes later he was riding along the road that led to the Moat House.

His instructions were simple. Racke had written a message upon a half-sheet of foolscap. If the drawbridge was down, Mellish was to steal across, put it under the gate, and ring the bell. Then he was to bolt.

So big a piece of paper was sure to be seen by Silas Stout if he came to the gate; and, whether he believed the warning to be genuine or otherwise, the result of it could hardly fail to be an increase of his vigilance.

In the event of the drawbridge being up, as was most likely, Mellish had instructions to wrap the paper round a stone and do his best to fling the stone through a window.

Mellish was no crack shot, and his range was limited. But he did not trouble about that, and Racke did not remember it. Mellish's chief interest was in the quid that made the price of his treason.

He found the road very bumpy as he neared the Moat House.

"Oh, hang!" he said, as the front wheel of his bike slipped into a rut, and he dismounted in haste to save himself a nasty fall.

"Who goes there?" spoke a voice out of the gloom.

Mellish, looking wildly about him, stood silent.

"Who goes there?" repeated the voice, in sharper tones.

Mellish turned his machine. This was too much for his scanty courage. After all, Racke & Co. would never know whether he had delivered the warning, and the quid was safe in his pocket.

But, with his foot on the step, he was seized.

"Here, chuck it!" he burred, unable to see who his assailant was, but recognising the fact that it was someone stronger than himself.

"Who are you?" growled a voice he did not know, yet felt he ought to know.

"Er—Racke of St. Jim's," answered Mellish.

"You may be. But I'm hanged if you sound like him!" snapped the unknown.

"I—I— Oh, leave me alone! I'm not doing—"

"You're not going to do anything, that's a cert! We'll see to that. Here, Monk!"

Then Mellish knew. The voice was the voice of Carboy, and he was in the hands of the Grammarians.

He was by no means reassured by this discovery. Too late he repented of having given a name not his own. That in itself would seem ground for suspicion.

But for that matter the Grammarians would not trouble about anything in the way of excuse for putting him through it.

The old feud between the St. Jim's juniors and those of Rylcombe Grammar School had awakened into fresh life. Since the new term began there had been several attempts by both sides to bring off a big score against their rivals. Only a couple of days before Tom Merry & Co., with five of the Fourth, had been in collision with the Grammarians.

Mellish had little to do with the feud.

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in any active sense. It was not in his line.

But Gordon Gay & Co. knew all about Mellish, and despised him as heartily as anyone at St. Jim's did.

They had little mercy on fellows whom they counted, outside the feud, as friends. They were not likely to have any mercy at all on Mellish.

Frank Monk came up. Mellish recognised his voice.

"Bring him along here, old chap!" he said. "We've caught the right sort of bird. Mellish will tell all he knows as soon as he understands that he'll jolly well get zip if he doesn't tell!"

"So I don't know anything," faltered Mellish. "I was only—"

"That will keep," said Monk. "Bring him along, Carboy!"

"Are you coming quietly, or must I yank you?" inquired Carboy pleasantly.

"I— Yes, I'll come, of course. But what about my bike?"

"Oh, Monk, you will take charge of that! Spoils war, you know!"

"But—but—"

"Going to say, you're not at war with us—oh? Well, you certainly ain't the warlike chap I know, Mellish. But you St. Jim's bounders are all in it, whether you like it or not!"

DOES YOUR SOLDIER PAL WRITE TO YOU?

Note-paper is "some" price these days, and it none of us would grudge Tommy all the paper he needs on which to write those cheery letters of his if paper were treble the price it is to-day. Still, it's no use simply "gassing" about it; it's up to each one to do his bit to pay the paper.

It costs the Y.M.C.A., who supply Tommy with free stationery, no less than £60,000 a year. Sixpence will supply your own or somebody else's pal with enough note-paper to write one letter each week for a year. Going to let him have it? Of course you are!

Send sixpence along to-day to Y.M.C.A. (Stationery Fund), Tottenham Court Road, London, W.C., mentioning that it comes from a reader of this paper.

Mellish did not like it at all; but it was no use saying that. The threat to bag his machine sent him nearly frantic, however.

"You can't do that!" he howled.

"Here, stop it, Monk! That's as bad as highway robbery!"

And he began to struggle hard.

Carboy thrust a knee into his back, and as he did so something that showed white in the gloom fell from Mellish's pocket. He knew that it was the quid. Racke had given him, and he bent forward to grab at it.

He did more than bend forward, but less than grab the paper. He plunged heavily on to his face, and his nose ploughed the road. It was Carboy who secured that paper.

"Ov-word!" howled Mellish. "You rotten beast!"

"Shurrup!" snarled Carboy, and yanked him to his feet as he spoke.

"Get along!" was the next order; and Mellish got along, crenching his scarred nose, and thinking that by the time he got back that quid would have been more than well earned.

A minute or two later he found himself in what was apparently the headquarters of a Grammarian army. Gordon Gay and Wootton major were there, in a space well screened by bushes. They threw down the bike, and Carboy gave

Mellish a push which landed him at the feet of Gay.

"Hallo! What's this?" demanded the Grammarian general.

"A saintly spy," replied Carboy, grinning in the gloom.

"Who?"

"Mellish!"

"They wouldn't send that outsider spying," said Jack Wootton.

"Well, they couldn't find anyone better up to the job, and chance it," said Gay.

"I'm not spying. I didn't know you chaps were anywhere near," whined Mellish. "Look here, let me go, and I'll promise not to say a word to anyone about your being here."

"Not good enough!" answered Gordon Gay sharply. "What have you there, Carboy?"

"Document, general. Taken from prisoner."

"Hand it over! Where's your electric torch, Monk?"

"Here you are, old top!"

"I say, you know, you can't look at that; that's private," protested Mellish.

"Your mistake, Mellish! We can, and were going to. All despatches are meant to be private, of course, but—"

"Tain't a despatch. It's private, I tell you. Oh, don't be a cad, Gay!"

"Who wrote it?" asked Gay.

"Racke," replied Mellish, thinking that the truth might serve his turn for once.

"He means he wrote it himself," said Carboy.

"I don't! I shouldn't say it was Racke who did it!"

"You said you were Racke when I caught you, you rotten liar!"

"That—that was a slip of the t-tongue," burred Mellish.

"You've got a slippery tongue, haven't you?" said Monk sardonically.

"He's slippery every way," remarked Carboy.

"But not slippery enough to dodge us," Jack Wootton said.

"My hat! The rotters! The dirty sweeps!" gasped Gordon Gay, with his eyes upon the paper taken from Mellish.

"What's the row, old top? If you're talking about Mellish and Racke, you aren't giving us any news," said Frank Monk.

"The rotten, heastly traitors! Wouldn't Tom Merry like to see this?"

"Didn't know we were so keen to please Tom Merry, Gordon," said Wootton major.

"Well, we're not, of course. But this really is past the giddy limits. Look at it!"

Monk, Wootton major, and Carboy craned their necks to read the message. But Carboy kept fast hold of Mellish all the time.

"My word!" snapped Wootton. "If that isn't the outside edge! You putrid snake in the grass!"

Mellish squirmed under the contempt of the Grammarians. As usual, he tried to lie his way out of the mess into which he had fallen.

"I don't know anything about what's in the paper," he said. "I brought it for Racke. He asked me to. He didn't say what it was."

"He said you, I suppose?" snapped Gay.

"No. Well, yes, then, he did. That was all I did it for. It was nothing to do with me what he'd written, was it?"

"But what were you going to do with it?" asked Monk.

"Deliver it at the Moat House, that's all."

"What for?"

"Why, so that that chap Stout should know—"

Mellish stopped short. He could have bitten his tongue out for letting himself be so easily trapped.

"That's enough!" said Gordon Gay sharply. "Tie the prisoner up! We'll hand him over to the enemy when we've finished with them. We know now that they're coming. An attack in force, too!"

"I can tell you more than that, and I will, if you'll let me go!" said Mellish eagerly.

"We know all we want to, thanks!" Gay returned.

"Do you know why they're coming?"

The Grammarians did not know that. As yet they were quite ignorant of the fact that Skimpole, Trimble, and Mr. Selby were missing, let alone the theory that they were prisoners at the Moat House.

"Can you tell us?" Wootton major asked. "You aren't exactly the sort of merchant they'd trust secrets to, you know."

"I can, and I will, if you'll let me go!"

"Nothing doing!" snapped Gay. "Tie him up, Carboy, and gag the sweep!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Army from St. Jim's.

"MY hat! It's a giddy miracle if someone doesn't spot this!" said Manners.

And it really did seem rather remarkable that, so far, no one in authority had come upon the start of the rescue expedition.

From four dormitories—two in the School House, two in the New House—they had come, fifty-five of them in all. The night was cloudy, and the moon had not yet risen; but, even so, anyone looking from a window into the quad could hardly have failed to perceive a stir of figures there.

"We're all right now. I fancy!" replied Lowther. "Old Tommy and Talbot have certainly fixed up things well."

It was, in truth, the generalship of those two which had brought the crowd into line along the wall, instead of leaving its members to wander about the dark quad and run into one another. They had split up the fifty-five into seven squads, each with a leader; and each squad-leader kept in touch with his men.

Tom stood under the old tree, and called to Blake.

Out of the gloom Blake came forward, with seven Fourth-Formers at his heels.

"Herries, Dig, Gussy, Smith, Contarini, Lumley-Lumley, Bates," came Blake's loud whisper; and one by one, each bunked up by the fellow behind him, the eight passed over the wall, Blake last.

"Kangaroo!" said Tom.

Over went eight of the Shell—Noble himself, Dano, Glyn, Thompson, French, Walkley, Lucas, and Lennox.

"Figginus!"

"New House to the front—Kerr, Fatty, Pratt, Jimson, Diggs, Robinson, Koumi Rao!" breathed Piggy out of the gloom.

"Levison!"

"Cardew, Clive, Roylance, Durance, Macdonald, Lorne"—so Ernest Levison numbered off his squad. Dick Brooke had been assigned to that, and would join up later.

"Redfern!"

Reddy's little lot consisted of Owen, Lawrence, Clarke, Julian, Kerruish, Hammond, and Reilly—a mixed crew from the two Houses.

"Talbot!"

"Look here, you know, Merry, this ought to be my squad, not Talbot's!"

protested Grundy hotly. "I'm not going—"

"You're jolly well not, unless you shut up!" snapped Tom.

"Grundy, Gunn, Wilkins, Gore, Freer, Finn, Gibbons!" called Talbot softly.

Grundy went without more grumbling. He could bear better to be led by Talbot than by anyone else. But there was no certainty that he might not break away from his guard, and take with him his two faithful henchmen, Wilkins and Gunn.

"Now our lot!" said Tom, with a deep sigh of relief. "Are you there, Monty?"

"Silly question, Thomas! I am, and half inclined to fancy that I'm here, for the giddy night!"

"Manners, Boulton, Mulvaney, Tompkins, Wyatt, Jones," went on Tom.

"A job lot!" whispered Manners in the ear of Lowther.

"What need of more than the Terrible Three?" returned Lowther.

"Just what I mean, chump! The rest of 'em would be better in their downy beds!"

But the rest of them did not think so. "Sure, Tom Merry, it's not after leavin' us in the rear all the time ye'll be!" spoke Mulvaney minor. "It's we are the boys for the front, bedad, an' do ye see four of us?"

"Shut up, you wild Irishman! Silence till we're all well clear, and no talking after that!" commanded Tom.

The other squads had gone on a bit ahead. But there was an arrangement that all should wait at a given spot.

There they found Dick Brooke waiting, and their quota was complete.

Then, avoiding Rylcombe village by making a detour through the fields, they reached the Westwood road, crossed it, and marched upon the Moat House.

Two of the squads were now carrying long ladders, procured in advance and hidden in a hedge fitly they were needed. They would serve alike for crossing the moat and for scaling the wall afterwards. They might also be dragged over and used to obtain entry to the house itself, if need be.

Dark clouds rained overhead before a strong wind from the west. Soon the full moon would be rising, but in that stormy sky the light it gave would be but intermittent.

The Grammar School army of investment—a much smaller army than that which St. Jim's had sent—had had to be withdrawn for a time. Gordon Gay & Co., partly out of rivalry, partly because of the vow they had made to get even with St. Jim's, had set out to throw Harry Wootton, had cut prep to throw a cordon round the Moat House and wait for any chance that offered.

But, like their rivals, they had to show up at bed-time. They had got in without detection; but getting out again had not proved so easy, and circumstances had delayed their arrival upon the scene till the enemy had reached it.

They were not more than a quarter of a mile away, however, when Tom halted his forces.

Meanwhile, Percy Mellish had been left bound and gagged among the bushes. The Grammarians saw no reason why they should relieve their prisoner.

As Frank Monk pointed out, either he had carried a false warning—which hardly seemed likely in view of the fact that there was evident malice behind the warning—or else he would, in the event, be only one of a crowd who had broken bounds. He could go back with them. If he did, he might be caught and punished. He would fare no worse than the rest, and if they were not caught he would get off a good deal more lightly than he deserved.

Arguments of this kind were small com-

fort to Mellish. He knew that the adventurers were going to be caught, for Racke's scheme had been imparted to him in full. He was sure, too, that the Grammarians leaders would not fail to let Tom Merry know of his treachery.

So, taking one consideration with another, Mellish felt that he was between the devil and the deep sea; and as he lay helpless among the bushes he wished most heartily that he had never set eyes on Aubrey Racke or Gerald Crooke. He put down his misfortunes to them; it did not occur to him that a fairer balance might have been struck if he had taken into account his own nature, which made him the willing tool of rascals worse than himself.

As the St. Jim's army drew near the Moat House Tom Merry issued orders to the various squads. Talbot and his commando took a ladder to the back of the place. The other ladder was in charge of the Levison commando, and this was taken to the front. Piggins and his followers supported Talbot, Tom Merry and the fellows with him joined Levison. Harry Noble and Dick Redfern were bidden to take their forces, one to the south, one to the north of the house, which was thus surrounded. To Blake and his merry men was entrusted the important mission of acting as a scout corps.

Thus it chanced that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stumbled upon Mellish.

"Good gracious! Oh, bai Jove, it's alive!" cried Gussy in alarm.

Herries came hurrying up.

"Stop that row, Gustavus!" he snapped. "Anyone could hear you a blessed mile away. Why—Oh, my hat! What's this?"

"Stwike a match, Howwies! It's alive, an' I do believe it's—Bai Jove, it's Mellish!"

"You rotter!" growled Herries, stooping over the unfortunate sneak of the Fourth. "How did you come here?"

"Gurrerrrr!" was all that Mellish could get out in the way of an answer.

"He's gagged, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Can't I see that, dummy? What I want to know is who gagged him?"

"I should wathin think that we might have a bettahn chance of findin' out that if we wemoved the gag," said Gussy, practical for once.

"Well, why don't you take it out, fat-head? Can't you see I've got the matches?"

"Light anothah, Howwies, if you please! I might hurt Mellish if I tried to wemove that gag, an' I can't see it." "A fat lot that would matter! Sha'n't light more than one for the job—matches ain't so easy to get these days!"

One match sufficed to get Gussy started, and he managed to finish the task in the darkness.

"He's tied, too, Howwies!" he remarked.

"Well, cut the ropes, chump!"

"They are not ropes, Herries! It is stwivng."

"Oh, you frahbious ass! All the easier to cut, ain't it? What are you spluttering about, Mellish, you toad!"

"Gurrh! You'd splutter it—groog!—you'd—"

"Shut up that beastly row! Get on, Gustavus!"

"It is a pity to waste stwivng in these hard times, Howwies! Had I not bettahn untie it? I shall need anothah match or two, natuachvally—"

"You can leave it on him for all I care, but I'm not going to waste one match more on the rotter! How did you get here, Mellish?"

"Oh, hurry up, D'Arcy, do! I'm all cramped with being stwivng so long, and

Cadet Notes.

Many boys who have never belonged to the Cadet Movement seem to be under the impression that the training and work of these corps is entirely restricted to a continued carrying out of monotonous infantry drill—forming fours, etc. This is a great mistake, as any of the old members of a well-managed corps could tell them. Of course, it is necessary that a certain amount of drill and physical training of this kind should be gone through in order to create esprit de corps and give smartness and accuracy of movement to the company or battalion. But besides this, there are numerous other ways in which the work of a Cadet Corps is made not only useful, but highly attractive and interesting to those who belong to it, such as, for instance, the various arts of scouting and tracking, which afford admirable training for the mind, and, at the same time, are very enjoyable to those engaged in them. A knowledge of woodcraft and animal life, and of the habits of natural objects in the fields and woods, is also necessary and valuable, and it is hoped in these Notes, on some future occasion, to give some ideas of the sort of work which is done in the corps in these directions.

Besides all this work, which is part of the duty of a Scout or Tracker, there is, of course, the annual camp with its introduction to the simple life, and its training in bivouacking and field cooking, etc. These, however, are only summer occupations for members of the Cadet Corps, and in the winter the headquarters often provide facilities for gymnastics, games, and even, in some cases, swimming, etc. Of course, many of these things are very much more difficult to carry out in a great city like London than they are in the smaller provincial towns. Even in London, however, apart from those corps situated in the heart of the City, who cannot get to green fields and woods without a train journey, a good deal of work in these directions mentioned above is carried out from time to time. Every boy who wants to have a good and pleasant time, and also to sharpen his wits and improve his knowledge of things and people, would be well-advised to join one of the corps in his neighbourhood. He can obtain particulars and information about them on application to the C.A.V.R., Judges' Quadrangle, Law Courts, Strand, W.C.2.

"Is that true, Hewwies, do you think?" asked Gussy anxiously. "It may be, you know, an' we should not wish to misjudge Mellich, I am sure."

"Speak for yourself, Gustavus!" I don't care a hang whether I misjudge the rotter or not. Can't see how you can very well do that if you only take it for granted that what he says ain't true."

"But it is!" bleated Mellich.

"Rats! How did you come here, tied up and gagged like that, then?"

"I— I stopped for—to the pony—bootlace, and the Grammarian cads pounced on me," explained Mellich.

"My hat! Are those bounders about?"

"This is vewy important, Hewwies. I considah that we should let Tom Mewry know at once!"

"Right for once, Gustavus! There are times when you don't seem quite such a fool as you look. Cut along and tell him, and mind you don't get captured by the Grammarians!"

"But what are you goin' to do, Hewwies? Do you considah that you are competent to take charge of Mellich alone? For I think he must vewy well be wogarded as our prisoner till we have ascertained whethah he is tellin' the twuth."

"If I can't hold him I'll jolly well eat him!" answered Herries grimly. "Cut, old scout!"

And Arthur Augustus went. He was a hundred yards on his way before it occurred to him that no one had put Herries in authority over him.

But it was hardly worth while to go back and argue the matter, more especially as he had already argued with Tom Merry the propriety of the leadership of the squad being taken from Blake and given to him without getting any change out of it.

CHAPTER 7. The Grammarian Forces.

"WED better send out a scout or two, or Frank, or Gordon, or Gay to Monk." "I can't hear anything or see anything suspicious, but I've a sort of a kind of feeling that there is something."

"Same thing here," replied the Rylcombe headmaster's son, "though I rather fancied I heard something a few minutes ago. Those bounders may be ahead of us, you know."

"They may. We were later starting than we had counted on being. But I think we'd have heard something of them before now if they had been. They're clumsy beggars on a job of this sort, you know, compared with us."

Frank Monk grunted. He did not hold the generosity of Tom Merry so cheaply as Gay pretended to. But he knew it was only pretence. After all his experience of Tom Merry the Grammarian leader could not really despise him.

"Carboy, just go a bit ahead and sniff round," said Gay. "You, too, Harry. We will be plenty."

Wootton minor and Carboy disappeared into the gloom. There were not more than fifteen or so of the Grammarians. But their force did not contain any of the fellows usually reckoned among the non-combatants, whereas at least a dozen of Tom Merry's army were what Monner called "jokers."

"Better look after our prisoner, hadn't we, you fellows?" said Jack Wootton, as they drew near the spot where they had left Mellich.

"Oh, let him rip!" returned Frank Monk. "The rotter deserves to stay there all night."

"Can't be done, Monkey!" said Gay. "After all— Hallo, he's gone!"

"Sure this was the place?" asked Lane.

"Am I sure this was the place? Why, I know it as well as I know your ugly old dial!" snorted his leader.

"It's the place right enough," said Monk. "The worm must have got the gag out of his mouth and gnawed through the string round his wrists."

"That I'll swear he didn't!" snapped Wootton major. "I helped to tie him up."

Gordon Gay was down on his hands and knees.

"No, don't show a light!" he said sharply, just in time to prevent the flaring-up of a match. "Was that you, Pellatt?"

"Yes, but—"

"You didn't light it. You only scratched it on the box for fun, I suppose. If I hadn't spoken we might have been given away nicely!"

Pellatt stood rebuked, and did not presume to bandy words with his chief.

There followed a few seconds of silence, the Grammarians standing still. Then Gordon Gay thrust something into Monk's hands.

"Feel that," he said. "It's the string we tied up Mellich with, and it hasn't been bitten. It's been cut!"

"That means someone's come along and found him," said Lane.

"Go up one! You're getting quite intelligent. Now tell us who someone was!"

"Some of the St. Jim's crowd, I suppose."

"Brains again! You fellows will do credit to my coaching yet. And what follows from that?"

"Why, that they'll know we're on the job," said Pellatt.

Just then Carboy stole in among them with the stealth of a Red Indian on the war-trail.

"They're out!" he said, in a thrilling whisper. "I've sighted their pickets—Blake and a fellow I couldn't make out in the dark."

"Where's Harry?" asked Gay.

"He went on to find out more. I reckoned it was better for one of us to scout back and let you know. But I'm

my blood's stopped running in my arms and legs. Don't be so beastly slow!"

"I am afraid of cuttin' you or your clobber, Mellich!"

"I shouldn't worry about that!" said Herries. "How did you get here, you skunk?"

"I— I thought, after all, that I'd better come with the rest of you," faltered Mellich, thinking perhaps that a weak lie was better than the truth. But the truth was not likely to be exactly good for him, anyway, in this particular case.

"Weally, Mellich—"

"Tie up, Gussy! I'm talking to the rotter. Whose squad did you come with, you crawling worm?"

"Tom Merry's," said Mellich, at a venture.

Herries frowned in the gloom. He did not in the least believe that yarn. Yet it might be true. Tom Merry's company had, after his capture, sure it would have been the last to leave.

Mellich might have joined up. Herries could not remember having noticed him before they left the dormitory. They had dressed in the dark, indeed; and, as a matter of fact, Mellich's absence had passed completely unnoticed in the general excitement.

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This is the best way for a patriotic boy to put money by. Won't you try it?

off again now. I want to find out what force they're in."

"Good!" said Gay. Carboy disappeared again. "We'd better wait here a minute or two," said Gay. "Wootton minor may be turning up."

But hardly had he spoken when from somewhere not many yards away came the sound of Wootton minor's voice.

"Help, you chaps!" called the Australian junior. "I've caught Herries!"

"Bring him here, then!" replied Gordon Gay.

"I can't. He won't let me! Ow! He's taking me—"

There seemed to be room for doubt whether Herries had not caught Wootton minor rather than that Wootton minor had caught Herries. The Grammarians knew George Herries, the burliest fellow in the St. Jim's Fourth, and rather overweight for Harry Wootton in a struggle, viry and active as Wootton minor was.

Jack Wootton was off to his brother's aid at once. The rest followed. There seemed little use now in trying to steal upon the enemy unawares. That should surely have reached some of their pockets, and if Harry Wootton had not shouted Herries could have got away with news even if without his prisoner.

Herries was an obstinate fellow, but he was not so pig-headed as to refuse to go without the captured foe-man when he realised that the Grammarians were at hand.

But Wootton minor had something to say about that. He might not be able to bring Herries along, but he could hold him.

And he held on like grim death.

Meanwhile, Mellish had done a bunk. He was now hidden some fifty yards away, holding his breath for fear of discovery. To Percy Mellish the rival boys were both enemies. All he wanted just now was to slink back to St. Jim's if only he could recover his bike, which he believed to be concealed somewhere close at hand.

Jack Wootton was first to his brother's aid, and the two were altogether too much for Herries.

"Do you surrender?" gasped Wootton minor.

"Yes, ass! Gerroff my tummy, can't you, your other clump? Where's that sweep Mellish?"

"Was he with you?" inquired Gordon Gay, coming up with the rest.

"Yes. He told some yarn about you fellows collaring him and trussing him up—a lie, I reckon," answered Herries.

"Well, not exactly!" He was trussed up a few, wasn't he?" returned Monk.

"But you weren't here when—"

Herries stopped short.

"When you came along—eh?"

"You needn't think you'll get anything out of me, Gay!" growled Herries.

"No need, old chump! We've our seats out. In five minutes or so I expect to know your numbers and all about it!"

"Then you don't need me to tell you—not that I should, anyway!"

"Of course, you wouldn't! Don't we know that a donkey and a piddled into one couldn't be more obstinate than you are?"

Herries did not answer that very doubtful compliment.

"What yarn did he tell you?" asked Monk.

"Find out!"

"That ain't very polite, Herries, old buck!"

"Well, I'm not going to answer questions!"

"He's not very intelligent, you see!" gazed Lane. "He can't trust himself to know a harmless question from the other sort."



The Professor Talks to Silas.
(See Chapter 12.)

"If I was such a cheap ass as you, Lane—"

"Oh, dry up, Herries! Chuck it, Lane!" snapped Gordon Gay. "Look here—I've a good reason for asking—honour bright, old fellow! We know as well as you do that you don't trust Mellish any further than you can see him!"

"Not so far!" growled Herries. "I don't mind telling you that the yarn Mellish told me sounded like a lie. He was with Tom Merry's lot, he said, and they were behind us. But I don't believe he was with them at all, because he was one of the six or seven who hung back when—"

Again Herries made a sudden halt in his speech.

"How long is it since Merry and his lot went along?" asked Gay.

"Find out!"

"Oh, of course, you won't tell that! He's got a bit of intelligence, after all, Lane!"

"A very little bit, old scout!"

"But I don't mind telling you, Herries, that we captured the noble Mellish pretty much two hours ago—"

"More!" said Monk.

"So it was!"

"Then he must have sneaked over here while we were still at prep," said Herries.

"Tain't much like Mellish. You wouldn't expect the chap to take risks. And for what, I wonder?"

"Well, I could tell you that!" said Gay, grinning in the gloom.

"Tell away, then!"

"But I'm not going to. I'll tell Tom Merry later on, though!"

"And won't he just be pleased with Mellish!" said Wootton major.

"I say, though, you might as well tell me!" growled Herries.

"I will, then," said Gay, with a sudden change of tone. "It's only fair you should know. Mellish was sent along by Racke—so he said—with a warning to the queer merchant at the Moat House

that you bouncers were going to attack to-night!"

"My hat! The rotters! The beastly traitors!" flared up Herries.

"Looks hot for Tommy and the rest of your heroes, with Silas Stout forewarned in front, and another enemy on their rear—eh, Herries?" said Gay.

The rest of the Grammarians grinned. They knew that Racke's message had never reached Silas Stout. Herries took it for granted that it had. Perhaps George Herries was not quite the sharpest-witted among the St. Jim's army. Levison or Kerr or Clifton Dane would not have failed to ask whether the message had been delivered.

And those three—and not they alone—might have thought of finding out whether the Grammarians had any notion that their rivals were upon an enterprise more serious than the mere harassing of Silas.

Had they known the truth they would have been prepared to join forces for the rescue of the three prisoners. But they did not even know that Silas had prisoners.

Herries took it for granted that they were aware of that.

"I say, you chaps won't butt in, as things are, will you?" he said.

"Oh, won't we?" snapped Jack Wootton.

"You're cads if you do!" cried Herries, clenching his big hands.

"Listen to reason, old scout!" protested Gordon Gay. "Stout's ours. We bagged him before any of you had ever met the weird merchant. It's Tommy and the rest of you who've butted in. Are we going to be baulked of our revenge on Silas because you silly chumps have got up against him too? Not likely—not giddy will likely!"

"But you know what we're—"

It was nearly out then. But Carboy appeared again at that moment.

"By Jove, you fellows, the saintly Jimmies are going, it seems to-night!"

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said excitedly: "There's a regular army of them—fifty, I should think; and they're all around the Moat House! They've got two ladders, and when I came away from there was just going to cross the moat with them!"

"Did any of them twig you?" asked Harry Wootton.

"What do you think? I was in and out among them like one of themselves, and they never twigged a twig—not a giddy leaf!"

"Bon, mon ami! Oh, Carboy, he sees you!" said Mont Blanc, the French junior, in ecstasy.

Gay whispered in Jack Wootton's ear: "Let Herries get away, old man! He'll take the news to them that we're close at hand, and that will muddle them up. If we only play our cards properly, and Herries doesn't forget to mention that Silas is sure to be on the quiver, perhaps 'tain't the St. Jim's crew that will cross on those ladders after all."

Herries did not hear a word of that. But he heard Gay say to Wootton a second later:

"You and Harry had better take charge of the prisoner, Jack! He's your bag. Be careful with him!"

Then Wootton major gave his brother the tip aside, and less than three minutes later, while they were carefully being careless, Herries gave them the slip in the dark, and hurried off to join the main army and tell his news.

Gussy ought already to have let Tom Merry know that the Gramscarians were in the offing; but the story of Mellich's traitorous errand was news indeed!

CHAPTER 8.

Within the Walls.

THE three prisoners of the Moat House were not enjoying themselves at all.

They would hardly have enjoyed themselves in any case—Silas would have seen to that. But matters were made worse by the fact that they simply could not get along together.

Only Skimpole made any attempt to be pleasant to his fellow captives. He disliked and despised both Mr. Selby and Baggy Trimble; but he held that it was unworthy of a philosopher to let such feelings get the upper hand of him, and he did his best not to show them.

It was not a very successful best, for Baggy rubbed Skimpole's wrong way constantly, and all Skimpole's philosophy did not prevent his jumping on Baggy at times. As for Mr. Selby, Skimpole really could not help letting out the fact that he regarded that gentleman's intelligence as of the lowest order, and his manners on a level with his intelligence!

Baggy's impudence to the master was gross; but there was some excuse even for that. Mr. Selby behaved in so many ways like a spoiled and ill-tempered boy that Baggy could hardly feel awe or reverence for him. But Baggy felt his heavy hand very frequently.

Stout never felt so inflicted any punishment for the attempt at escape; he had contented himself with threatening dreadful things if it were repeated.

As a matter of fact, Silas was not feeling too easy in mind. His mad fit may have been passing; anyway, he remembered many times during the day which preceded the assault in force that Professor Burnham hardly looked upon the spy question in quite the same way as he did.

Silas, of course, thought himself in the right, and "Old Plomp," as he called his master behind his back, in the wrong.

But it was not to be denied that the

professor was master at the Moat House when there; and Silas was not looking forward with any zest to his return to find three "spies" imprisoned on the premises against law and—as Silas knew the professor would say—against reason. It had begun to dawn upon Silas that the stories the three told might be true; and "Old Plomp" could not be greatly delighted to hear that his invited guests had been collared and locked up.

But the man was obstinate. He clung to his absurd spy theory, and did his best to choke down his doubts.

There was one improvement in the condition of the three that day.

The grub was distinctly better and more plentiful. Breakfast was quite decent; even Baggy Trimble did not grumble much. The midday meal ran to hot meat and apple-pie, and Baggy would have been happy but for the greed of Mr. Selby, which resulted in Baggy's getting certainly not much more than half the pie. Mr. Selby was fully as disgusted with Baggy's greed as was Baggy with his.

Which of them, was the worst Skimpole could not decide. All he knew was that his share, even of the bigger meals now provided, was not by any means generous; and that, whereas the master complained bitterly of indigestion, Baggy made no such complaint, which seemed to indicate that it was the older individual who was swallowing more than he knew how to deal with.

But Baggy Trimble was well known to have the digestion of an ostrich, while Mr. Selby was a chronic sufferer from dyspepsia, that did not prove much.

Tea was brought up just after Mr. Selby had chased Baggy all over the room for impudence, had cornered him at last, and had administered to him a pummeling which caused Baggy to roar with pain and Skimpole to protest. Baggy deserved something, but Skimpole thought Mr. Selby went too far.

There was a large jar of potted meat on the tray, and Baggy, though he still used a very dirty handkerchief to wipe tears from a face no less dirty, brightened visibly at the sight of it.

For the first time Silas did not show up with the little grey old man, deaf and dumb, who brought the meals. He might have been outside, but they had not heard his heavy footsteps on the stairs. The doubt as to where he was, and the certainty that to get out of the room would still mean being quite a long way off freedom, prevented Skimpole from trying a bolt; and the other two were altogether too intent on the tea even to think of it.

The little grey old man retreated. Baggy stretched out a podgy hand towards the jar of potted meat.

But another hand grabbed it first—the hand of Mr. Selby, which was like the talon of a bird of prey, seen against Baggy's.

"You will have none of that, Trimble!" said the master sternly.

"You'll jolly well see!" snorted Baggy.

"Don't dare to speak to me in that tone, you ill-bred and impertinent whelp!" roared the master.

"I'll bet I'm a jolly sight better bred than you are!" retorted Baggy hotly.

"My family are the Trimbles of Trimble Hall," never heard of by your family as having anything in particular. I should think you were dragged up somewhere in—"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Selby.

"Shan't! I'm going to say just what I like; and I'm jolly well going to let the Head know how you've knocked about when you get in to see to St. Jim's!"

He'll let you know whether you can do

that sort of thing or not, you bully! Everybody says he'd be jolly glad to get rid of you, if he had an excuse; and he needn't want a better one than this, for if he doesn't see about it, the father—Squire Trimble of Trimble Hall—will be down on him like a thousand of bricks! I shouldn't wonder if the squire comes along and horsewhips you! He's like me, a tiger when his blood's up!"

Baggy paused for breath. Mr. Selby had sat on the edge of his bed, listening in petrified astonishment. Skimpole stood with wide-open mouth, wondering whether he would be able to hinder Mr. Selby from slaughtering Baggy outright after this. Gross as had been the podgy junior's previous impudence, this outdid it all.

"Go to that corner, Trimble!" hissed the master, his face aflame with wrath.

"Shan't!" howled Baggy.

"Go to that corner, Trimble, or I will not be responsible for what may happen to you. You shall have no tea at all!"

The tiger blood of the Trimbles leaped up at that.

Baggy hurled himself at Mr. Selby, and essayed to snatch the jar of potted meat from his hand. The jar came down heavily upon Baggy's head, and behind it was the full force of the master's arm. Neither he nor the boy was quite aware of what he was doing; rage and hate had gripped them both. Nearly forty-eight hours in company had given to each a feeling towards the other that would probably last as long as both lived.

The junior staggered back, his hand to his head. His unkempt hair was plentifully besprinkled with the potted meat, and blood was running from a slight cut inflicted by the broken jar.

Skimpole sprang forward. He snatched up the jar, which had dropped from Mr. Selby's nerveless hand, and hurled it through the window, breaking another pane. Then he threw himself between master and boy. The heroic attitude he struck was ridiculous enough, but there was courage behind it, for all that. Mr. Selby had really seemed dangerous in his insensate fury.

But the danger had passed now. Skimpole saw that almost at once. Mr. Selby's face had lost all its raging red; he had gone as pale as ashes.

In truth, he was bitterly ashamed of himself. But he had only enough grace to be ashamed—not enough to admit it.

"Go over there, Trimble!" said Skimpole, taking command.

"Shan't!"

Baggy stopped. Somehow, he thought it best to obey Skimpole. It was horribly afraid of what Mr. Selby might do next, and against the master's violence the eccentric Shell fellow was his only protection.

He went to the place indicated. Skimpole turned upon the master.

"Our relative positions prevent my giving due expression to my utter abhorrence of your ill-governed violence, sir," he said. "I will therefore refrain from saying anything whatever upon the subject, save that I consider that you have shown yourself completely unfitted for the post you hold, or for any other description of rule over others. He who cannot govern himself—"

"You're a jolly sight better governed than I am," broke in Mr. Selby, his voice trembling.

But it was not fear of Skimpole that made it tremble; it was the realisation of his own gross misconduct.

"I will say no more, sir, except that I shall not again allow you to touch Trimble. On the other hand, I forbid Trimble to say as much as a single word to you. Thus there is a possibility of the remainder of the term of our unjustified

able incarceration here passing pacifically. Trimble, I will bring you your tea."

Not a word said Baggy; not a word said the master. Baggy was cowed, Mr. Selby was too shocked with himself, and, at the same time, too annoyed with Skimpole, to speak.

Tea was eaten in silence. In silence the three sat or lay till dusk began to fall.

Baggy was snoring now. Mr. Selby could not tell whether Skimpy was asleep or wrapped in profound meditation. He sat against the window with his head propped by the wall.

"Ahem, Skimpole!" said the master.

Skimpy made no reply.

Mr. Selby got up. It was mere restlessness that led him to the door; but once there he saw something that amazed him.

The door was slightly ajar! Temptation assailed him at once. Alone, he felt sure, his chance of escape would be far better than in company with the two juniors.

He stood with his hand on the knob, justifying—or trying to justify—to himself what he knew to be treacherous desertion.

Baggy had been insufferable. Skimpole had actually dared to talk to him as if his superior.

They deserved to be left there—at any rate until they were fetched out by the strong hand of the law, invoked by Dr. Holmes.

He would escape alone. That was what Skimpole ought to have done the previous night. It would have been easy to do that, and Skimpole was very much to blame for missing the chance. He would be equally to blame if he missed this opportunity. He was prepared to run all the risk. Really, he was not entitled to take the two juniors into peril. They were safer here than attempting an escape which might rouse Silas Stout to murderous fury.

But all the time he knew very well that what he did he did because he felt rancorous against them both; and all the time he felt sure, at the bottom of his heart, that neither the Head nor Mr. Railton would approve of his conduct.

His worst instincts won the battle. He stepped outside the door. Then he glanced inside again. Baggy still snored; Skimpy had not stirred.

He withdrew his head, and stole on tip-toe downstairs.

In the hall he paused, looking about him. Then the heavy footsteps of Silas sounded, and he took refuge in a desperate hurry behind an overcoat which hung on a peg close by.

Silas passed so near that his elbow actually touched the coat, and Mr. Selby shivered with fear.

When the man had gone back he was too frightened to move for quite a long time. It may have been an hour, or it may have been two hours. It seemed to Mr. Selby like a century or so.

Cramp seized his legs; pins and needles invaded his arms, and still he stood there. When at last he made up his mind to move he had to dodge back again hurriedly, for Silas was coming!

The heavy footsteps sounded again. The man went to the front door, opened it, and then turned back as though he had forgotten something.

He disappeared into the regions of the kitchen.

Mr. Selby saw his chance. Greatly daring, he slipped out of the door.

Hardly had he got outside when Skimpy and Baggy scuttled down the staircase. They had just discovered the absence of the master and the fact that the way to freedom was open.

Skimpy's face was screwed into an

expression of dauntless resolution; but Baggy quaked like a jelly, and kept a tight grip of his bolder comrade's arm.

Out of the door into the courtyard they slipped, and scarcely were they well outside, when once more the heavy foot-steps sounded, and Silas passed out also.

CHAPTER 9.

Strategy!

HERRIES told his story in flaming words. If he could have laid his hands on Racke at that moment it would have gone hand in hand with the scoundrel of the Shell.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I'd never have thought even that rotter would have gone as far as this. But it can't interfere with our plans now. We won't let it. After all, that Silas chap is only one man."

"Albeit, a Stout one!" murmured Lowther.

"Oh, shut up, ass!" snapped Manners. "The beast has got a gun, though, they say, Merry!" put in Jones minor.

"Well, what about it?"

"Not jolly well likely! He won't dare to use anything but blank cartridge. And he needn't think he'll frighten us with that."

It was not likely that Silas would frighten Tom Merry & Co., or Mulvaney minor, or any of Levison's squad. But the faces of Jones minor, Wyatt, Boulton, and Clarence York Tompkins, could the expressions upon them have been discerned in the gloom, would have shown that they hardly fancied the risk.

"Has Gustavus been along?" asked Herries.

"Yes," said Tom. "He told us the Grammarians were on our track, I s'pose?"

"He said that Mellich said they were about," Tom answered.

"Which, seeing it was Mellich, isn't precisely the same thing, old bean!" remarked Lowther.

Mellich is a beastly liar, but he happens to have told the truth this time," Herries said. "I've been captured by them."

"How did you get here, then?" asked Wyatt.

"On my feet!" snapped Herries.

"But——"

"I escaped them, ass! See here, Tom, there's more in this than you think. Gay and that lot say they captured Mellich two hours or more ago. They were about here before us, but I guess they had to go back and show up before bed-time. Anyway, they're here again, and in some force, too—a dozen or more of them, I should say, may be more than that."

"Yes, Gussy tumbled over Mellich, and we got what we could out of him—mostly lies, I reckon, but some of it was true. Then I sent Gussy along to you, and I started to bring Mellich in. But Wootton minor jumped out on me, and while we were struggling the sneaking wog got away. Some of the other Grammarians came up, and Gay let out that they meant to attack you in the rear while you were at this job."

"I say, Tommy, we are all ready," came Levison's voice out of the gloom.

Levison and his squad had been busy with the ladder. It was now fixed across the wall, giving passage easy enough for anyone who was not nervous.

"Half a mo'!" said Tom. "I say, Herries, I wonder why Gay told you that?"

"He didn't think it mattered. They fancied they could hang on to me, you know," replied the Fourth-Former.

"Did you have much trouble in getting away?"

"Nunc! It was only those two Wootton chaps. I gave them the slip easily enough."

Tom smiled. He knew the Woottons. Herries would hardly have given them the slip quite so easily if they had been keen on keeping him, he fancied.

Gordon Gay was playing some deep game of his own. Tom meant to turn that game to his own purpose if he could see a way.

"Do we or do we not now advance to the imminent, deadly breach, Merry, dear boy?" asked Cardew languidly.

"It's about time we were doing something," Clive said. "We shall have Talbot's lot ahead of us if we don't look out."

"They won't start till they get the word," answered Tom. "Herries, you cut round to Talbot, and tell him it's now the time. Tompkins and Jones minor can go with you."

He whispered another word or two into Herries' ear. The two thus despatched with Herries were not to share in the real attack, though Herries himself might. Talbot was also to sort out any of his men of whom he felt doubtful, and send them with Tompkins and Jones to join Noble.

As soon as Herries had gone Tom despatched Wyatt, Boulton, and Mulvaney minor, of his own squad, with Macdonald and Lorne, from Levison's, to Redfern's aid. This left only the Terrible Three, the three from Study No. 9 on the Fourth Form passage, and Roylance, Durrance, and Brooke as the storming party on that side. But the nine were picked men.

Mulvaney minor alone grumbled. Now that it came to the pinch, the rest were by no means keen on crossing the moat by ladder in the dark. But that was just the sort of thing to appeal to Mick Mulvaney.

"Sure, now, Merry——" he began.

"The Grammarians are coming, Mulvaney!" said Tom. "I can't spare all my best men for the job here. Go along and give Gay & Co. socks when you see them!"

Something of the same sort would take place round on the other side, Tom knew, for Herries had the tip to give Talbot.

Talbot's party were to drag the ladder over the moat and use it to scale the wall, thereafter dragging it over that, if possible, so that it might be used inside.

Thus, if the Grammarians came in on that side they would find no one to resist them, but they would also find an impassable barrier in the moat, unless they cared to risk getting over by the polled willow, which they would hardly fancy in the dark.

But if they reached the spot where Tom and his men had crossed they would find the ladder.

For that was Tom's plan—the best he could contrive on the spur of the moment.

Let us the Grammarians get within the walls, and bring Silas out upon them. Then would come the chance of the St. Jim's picked men to achieve the rescue of the three prisoners.

It would be all the bigger triumph if they could manage to do that without coming into actual collision with Silas at all.

The Grammarians were engaged on an enterprise of their own; they had no rescue to achieve. If they wanted to scrap with Silas, let them scrap! Meanwhile, their rivals could make certain whether Mr. Selby, Baggy, and Skimpy were there; and, if they were, Tom felt

no doubt about being able to get them out by some means or other.

While the picked nine waited for Herries to have time to get round to Talbot, Jack Blake appeared in their midst from his scout duty.

"Grammarians about, Tommy!" he said.

"We've heard that," replied Tom. "Gussy and Herries came in separately with the news."

"Smarter than I took them for," Blake said. "As you've heard, it's all serene, though. What are you going to do?"

"Where are the rest of your squad?" asked Tom quickly.

"I left Smith and Costantini and Bates, under Lumley-Lumley's charge, in the bushes about fifty yards away. Dig's hanging on to the Grammarians. You can account for Gussy and Herries."

"Bring up those four to guard the ladder here when we've gone over," said Tom. "And if the Grammarians come up don't resist them too long—just break and make a bolt. Twig?"

"Blessed if I do!" said Blake.

"I want them on the other side of the wall—see?"

"Not quite; but I suppose it's all right if you say so. They're pretty nearly in contact with Kangaroo's mob; if he had the tip he might kind of shepherd them this way."

"Good notion! Let him have the tip, Blake!"

Blake darted off.

"Now then!" said Tom. "Time to go over. Lead the way, will you, Levison?"

"Right-ho!" replied Levison, and, on hand and knees, he crossed the ladder over the moat.

Cardew, Durrance, Lowther, Manners, Clive, Roylance, Brooke all followed him. Tom went last; and before it came to his turn Blake and three more dim figures loomed up beside him.

"I've sent Lumley-Lumley," Blake said. "I say, Tommy, hadn't I better go back with you?"

"Not till the Grammarians are inside, old chap. Come then, if you like. But let them drive you off first, and don't let them fancy it's a feigned retreat."

"My hat! You're some strategist, Tommy!"

Tom did not answer that; he was on the ladder now. Arrived on the other side of the moat, he found Levison and Clive already backing up Cardew to the top of the wall, while Lowther and Roylance did likewise for Manners, and Durrance and Brooke waited to give Tom himself a lift.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Tom quietly. "The other chaps have to get their ladder across the moat."

Bound on the other side Talbot had had the message Herries brought, and had taken measures accordingly. He had weeded out the two squads under him. It was no use to suggest that Grundy should be left behind; any suggestion of that kind would only have led to trouble. Fatty said that if Figgy and Kerr were going, must go; and Gussy and Wilkins wanted to go, too. With Talbot himself, Herries, Kumi Rao, and Gore, there were ten for the entry; the rest were sent off to join Kangaroo's commando.

"I'll go first," said George Alfred Grundy, in his magnificent way.

"Well, I figure your blessed cheek!" snapped Figgis.

"Oh, never mind, Figgins! It's no odds who crosses the ladder first!" said Talbot. "No one goes over the wall till the ladder's that side, you know!"

Grundy strode on to the ladder.

"Here, that's not the way to do it!" bawled Kerr. "Hands and knees, you duffers!"

"Not likely!" replied Grundy. And he held on his way.

"The silly ass! He'll fall off, sure as eggs are eggs, and sing out when he finds himself going!" growled Gore.

A half-choked exclamation came out of the gloom.

But there was no splash. Grundy had not actually fallen off; he had only put a foot between two rungs of the ladder through miscalculating his stride, and had come down flat upon it, with rather painful results.

His right foot had gone into the moat, but that did not matter much. He pulled it up, and did the rest of the crossing on hands and knees.

Figgins, Wynn, Kerr, Gore, Herries, Kumi Rao, Gunn, and Wilkins followed him. Talbot came last, after a glance around.

There was no sign of the Grammarian approach. It would matter nothing if they came up once the ladder was dragged across, of course.

But Talbot noted something else. The clouds had lifted, and the moon was rising. Already the sky over the house was much lighter. Soon the gloom would have vanished.

He passed over. The ladder was dragged across, and placed against the wall. Grundy elbowed his way to the front.

"Not this time, Grundy!" said Talbot. "Oh, rot! Who's to lead the way if not me?" snapped the great George Alfred.

"Well, I rather think it's my job!" Talbot replied.

"You can lead from the rear, Grundy!" growled Gore, pulling the burly Shell fellow back.

"Rate! I'm going—"

Grundy might be going; but he was not going first. Herries and Figgy seized him, as well as Gore, and Talbot began to mount the ladder.

"The moon's coming up. It will be as light as day in a few minutes," said Gunn uneasily.

"That's no great odds!" Gore answered. "I say, what was that? Hanged if it didn't sound like old Selby!"

CHAPTER 10.

The Rescuers and the Raiders!

WHEN Silas Stout had opened the door and then gone back, giving Mr. Selby a chance to slip out, it was to get his gun that he had gone.

Tom Merry & Co. were quite right in their theory that Silas fired nothing but blank cartridges. In fact, he had none but blank ones to fire.

But he cherished that gun. He had a firm belief in its use as a means of frightening intruders, and he had not suffered it to remain long at the bottom of the moat, where Tom Merry had buried it.

From an upper window he had distinguished, in the lessening gloom outside, vague figures that came and went. There seemed a lot of them. Silas was puzzled by their number. Peering from other windows, he fancied that he could discern more on all sides, though, because of the fact that the light was better at the top, where Tom Merry and his men were—for the front faced the east, and received the first rays of the moon—he could not be so certain of those at the back and sides of the house.

Silas went back. Mr. Selby scuttled out. Skimpy and Baggy came downstairs together, Baggy clutching Skimpy's arm.

They were scarcely out of the door

before they heard the footsteps of Silas in the hall.

"He's coming! He'll shoot us!" bawled Baggy. "And there's that old funk of a Selby scotting for the gate! But he can't get through, you know—he'll be shot, and I shall be jolly glad!"

Silas gave a howl of rage.

Skimpy pulled Baggy round a corner. "Wharrier doing? I—I— Look here, Skimpy—"

"He has not seen us, Trimble! He is pursuing Mr. Selby! Really, I do not feel it incumbent upon me to hasten to Mr. Selby's assistance, as it is obvious that he was basely deserting us."

Silas was rushing after Mr. Selby. That gentleman ran as he had not run for years—as possibly he had never run in his life before. If he could only open the gate, he was almost desperate enough to hurl himself into the moat and try to struggle across—anything to get out of the way of that madman with the gun!

"Help! Murder!" he shouted as he ran, though of help he had no real hope.

Talbot's contingent heard those cries. So, in front, did Tom Merry's.

But Talbot and his comrades at the back could see nothing; and, of the other crowd, only Cardew and Manners had a view of the proceedings.

"Come on, Cardew!" cried Manners, making ready to drop from the wall.

"Oh, dashed if I do!" returned Cardew. "There's no such hurry as that comes to, now that we know they're there. Let's see the circus first!"

"That brute may shoot him!" snapped Manners.

"I shouldn't've wined much if he did," replied Cardew coolly. "But he can't, dear boy. He's dropped his gun—see?"

Tom and some of the rest were clambering to the top of the wall now. But all paused there.

Grip, who had for some time been growling furiously, disturbed by the sounds that reached his ears from outside, was barking now and struggling at his chain. Silas rushed up to him.

"Get into the house, or I'll loose the dog on you!" he howled.

Mr. Selby, after a frantic effort to get the gate open, seemed to have lost all command of himself. He ran hither and thither, shouting at the top of his voice.

"By gad, what a funk!" murmured Cardew.

"I'll loose the dog on you, if you don't get in!" yelled Silas.

"Oh, dear! If that dog gets loose he'll find us, and we shall be murdered!" bleated Baggy.

Mr. Selby, dancing in fright, saw neither his fellow-victims nor the faces on the wall. Silas, with his hands on the collar of Grip, was also oblivious to the fact that the scene had spectators.

"Don't! Good gracious! I shall be torn limb from limb! I—"

"Just you git!" roared Silas.

And Mr. Selby got. He scuttled across the courtyard like a hare on a gridiron, and disappeared into the house. Silas followed, snatching up his gun as he went. The dog slammed behind them, and Skimpy and Baggy were left outside.

Tom Merry was the first to drop into the courtyard. Cardew, Manners, Levison, Clive, Roylance, and the rest, following him, were not far behind.

"Dear me! I do believe that—"

"Rescue! Help!" howled Baggy.

And he rushed towards the advance guard of the army from St. Jim's.

"Oh, shut up your silly row!" snapped Tom Merry. "You're all right. Get behind us. We see that you're not captured again. But we've got to get old Selby out of this as well as you."

"How goes it, Skinny, dear boy?" inquired Cardew.

"Very well, on the whole, though it would not be true to say that our sojourn here has been wholly pleasant, I thank you, Cardew," replied Skinny sedately.

Others besides Cardew opened their eyes when they heard that. Skinny spoke as with a new voice.

"When that chap comes out again, some of us must rush in and fetch Selby out," said Tom. "We may be able to dodge into the place while he goes for the Grammarians. I expect them along any minute now. Where's cheery old Selby likely to be found, Skinny?"

"I will show you the way, Merry, my dear fellow!"

"Do you fancy going in again, now that you're once out?" asked Clive.

"I do not mind in the least, my dear Clive."

"I ain't going! You needn't ask me!" burred Baggy. "I wouldn't go into that beastly place again for a blessed pension! Let's all clear. That's the best thing to do. That Silas chap has got a gun, and— Oh, never mind old Selby! Let's clear!"

"Clear, then!" snapped Levison.

And no doubt Baggy would have cleared had he seen any way out. But he saw none at present, so he hugged himself in a corner of the courtyard and waited his chance.

Now Talbot and his men emerged from the smaller yard at the back. A few words passed between Tom Merry and Talbot. Then the score or so of St. Jim's fellows all waited in the shadows until the big bull dog should reopen and Silas come forth.

They waited, also, for the coming of the Grammarians, though not all of them knew this. Tom trusted to their coming to fetch out Silas.

"They ain't coming, Tommy!" said Herries.

"Oh, I think they'll come!" Tom replied confidently.

The moon was sailing high into the sky now, and the clouds had passed over.

There came a shout, then confused noises as of a scuffle beyond the moat, and after that a Grammarian yell of triumph.

"Blake's retreat, Herries!" said Tom, with a grin.

A minute or two passed. Then, plainly to be seen against the moonlit sky, the head of Gordon Gay appeared above the wall.

"My hat! They didn't waste much time in getting the ladder across," said Dick Brooke.

"Merry! I say, Merry, aren't we going to attack those bounders?" demanded Grundy hotly.

"Stop where you are!" rapped out Tom.

And even as he spoke the door opened, and Silas came rushing forth.

The Grammarians were swarming over the wall. Silas had seen that. He had not seen the St. Jim's forces come over, and he had no notion that nearly a score of the enemy were waiting their chance close to him.

"He's there!" snapped Tom.

And he, Manners, Figgins, and Kerr dashed into the house and up the stairs; Skinny, whose arm Tom had seized, panting alongside the leader.

"Line up in front of the door," ordered Talbot; and most of the rest obeyed the order.

But Grundy, to whom the sight of the Grammarians was as a red rag to an angry bull, broke out of the ranks and dashed upon them. And Gunn, Wilkins, Roylance, and Clive darted after Grundy—no to follow his lead, but to fetch him back.

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Grundy forgot that he had no treaty of alliance with Silas, and that an assault upon the Grammarians was very like taking the side of the fellow.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Sock the bounders for their cheek!"

Silas must have heard, but he did not turn his head. He rushed on, brandishing his gun.

The Grammarians were all inside the walls now. Some of them drew back as Silas came on. They did not much like the look of him, and for that they had some excuse.

It was a jape they had planned at the Moat House. The fact of their rivals being in the field had led them on to do more than they had meant at the outset, and they found themselves inside the walls, which they had hardly anticipated when they set out.

And now, as this seeming madman charged down upon them, his face contorted with fury, his gun brandished over his head, they began to realise that this was not quite a joking matter.

There followed what they took for a rush of St. Jim's fellows upon them. They could not know that those who followed Grundy were only seeking to stop him.

So, while some of the rescuers rushed up the staircase, and some kept guard by the door, and others surrounded the walls, the raiders, who knew not that their rivals were on a mission of rescue, wavered and drew back, and wished themselves well out of it.

But they had plenty of pluck. As Silas rushed in upon them, Gay and Monk and the two Woottons and Carboy all flung themselves at him.

Jack Wootton grabbed at the gun; his brother hung on to Silas' right arm, Carboy seized the left; Gay and Monk flung their arms around the man, and strove to bear him to the ground. But so strong was he that there was plenty of work for all five.

"Yah!" howled Silas. "Yah! Owl! Would you, then?"

"Go for them!" roared Grundy, as he made in at the Grammarians.

"Stop it, you silly ass!" roared Wilkins.

But it was no good calling upon Grundy to stop it. His fighting blood was up, and he could not stop to think of anything but that the enemy were before him.

Lane and Browne and Pellatt, sturdy

Grammarians all, met his attack. Lane went down under a mighty blow. Pellatt was sent staggering into the arms of those behind.

"Yoooop!" yelled Browne, as the fist of Grundy smote his nose.

But now Roylance had gripped Grundy on one side, Clive on the other. They pulled him back. At the same moment Silas crashed to earth, and Jack Wootton snatched the gun from his hand. Wootton minor and Carboy and Monk sat upon Silas at once.

Gordon Gay turned, saw Lane down, and saw the St. Jim's caps, but did not see that Grundy was struggling in the grasp of his own schoolfellows.

"St. Jim's bounders!" he sang out. "Go for them, you fellows!"

And he rushed at Grundy. The Grammarians, as little comprehending the situation as he, responded to his call. In a moment Clive and Roylance were compelled in self-defence to release Grundy.

In another moment the fray rocked fast and furious around the great George Alfred, and Gunn and Wilkins rallied to their leader, and Clive and Roylance struck doubly blow. Now Lane was up again, and now Gordon Gay was down. But Wootton major lifted him to his feet, and charged into the thick of the fight by his side.

And now over the wall appeared the head of Jack Blake, and Digby followed, and Lumley-Lumley, and more behind them. And from the north side and the south, Kangaroo's commando and Redfern's were rushing up; and from across the courtyard, to join the fray, came some whom Talbot could no longer hold back.

The raiders had bitten off more than they could chew!

Already it was as much as they could do to hold their own. In a few minutes they would be hopelessly outnumbered, and they knew it. But their retreat was cut off, and they had Silas on their hands, a prisoner for whom they really had no use.

What could they do but what they did—fight on?

CHAPTER 11.

The Black Sheep Move!

THE Fourth Form dormitory in the School House was left quite empty. Baggy was a prisoner at the Moat House; Mellish was lurking somewhere within a hundred THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 556.

yards or so of that building, seeking his bicycle; and all the rest had gone to the rescue.

There were three left in the Shell dormitory—Racke, Crooke, and Scrope. The others had followed Tom Merry's lead.

Over in the New House Clampe and Chowle were the only members of Shell and Fourth who remained in their beds. They were in different dormitories—Chowle in the Fourth, Clampe in the much smaller one which the few Shell fellows under Mr. Ratcliff's rule occupied.

Both Clampe and Chowle had agreed to share in Racke's treacherous scheme. But now that it came to the pinch their understanding, that they would go together to Mr. Ratcliff bade fair to fail. Both were afraid.

Chowle crept along to the Shell dormitory.

"Look here, Clampe, old sport," he whined, "tain't any use both of us going."

"Just my opinion," answered Clampe, pulling his bedclothes up closer to his chin. "You're out of bed, an' I s'pose you've got somethin' on. You go!"

"Dashed if I do!" snarled Chowle. "You said you would, y'know."

"So did you, you rotter!"

"Well, I've changed my mind," replied Clampe.

"So have I, then!"

"You mean you're funk'd!" Clampe sneered.

"You're not, are you?"

"Well, if you like to put it that way, I don't mind ownin' that I ain't keen on the job, now that I've had time to think it over. Old Ratty's an awkward sort of joser to tackle. Those chaps over the way have an easier job with Railton."

"There's somethin' in that," said Chowle. "After all, it's really no bizney of mine. I don't see why we should pull the chestnuts out of the fire for Racke an' Crooke. What do you say to chuckin' it, old top?"

"Best thing we can do," answered Clampe, yawning.

Chowle snuck off.

In the Shell dormitory over the way Racke sat up in bed and spoke:

"Asleep, Crooke?"

"Not likely!" growled Crooke.

"Asleep, Scrope?"

"Yes," muttered Scrope drowsily. "At least, I mean no. But I jolly nearly was. You chaps going 'down to speak to Railton now?"

"Are you going, you mean?" snarled Crooke.

"I'll take my dashed oath I don't mean anythin' of the sort!" retorted Scrope, quite wide awake now.

"I don't see why you shouldn't go!" said Racke angrily.

"I dare say you don't. I do, though!"

Racke and Crooke looked at one another by the light of the electric-torch Racke had flashed.

Scrope would not go—that was plain. Were they to chuck it, out of funk?

They might have done that, but for the hate that surged in them.

Crooke thought mostly of Talbot. Racke thought of half a dozen fellows—perhaps most bitterly of Lawson, the renegade from the black sheep band, and of Tom Merry, whom he had always hated.

There might never come again such a chance of scoring over them all at once—over them and others—Cardew and D'Arcy, Talbot and Grundy, Manners and Lowther, Roylance and Noble, Blake

and the burly, outspoken Herries—over every decent fellow in the two Forms, in short!

"We'd better both go, Crooke," he said. "This funk won't!"

"Just what I was thinkin'," replied Crooke. "After all, I don't see how it down to feelin' that we ought to let him know."

Racke was not very confident about that. If Mr. Railton believed in their good intentions he would show himself more simple and credulous than Racke fancied he was.

They hastily put on some clothes, and went downstairs together. All that was said on the way came from Crooke.

"You'd better sling the yarn, Aubrey. You're downer than I am!" he growled.

And accordingly it was Racke who slung the yarn.

Mr. Railton looked up in surprise when his call of "Come in!" was answered by the appearance of Racke and Crooke.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked sharply.

"I'm afraid so, sir," replied Racke, as though reluctant to tell.

"What?"

"Well, sir, we two an' Scrope are the only fellows left in our dormitory. All the rest—"

"Bless my soul!" said the Housemaster, getting up at once. "I must look into this! What of the Fourth?"

"I don't know, sir. We didn't think to—"

But Mr. Railton did not wait for an answer. His long strides were already carrying him upstairs.

He looked into the Fourth dormitory first. The switching on of the light revealed at once the fact that every bed was empty!

The two behind him stared, and felt uncomfortable. Where was Mellish? It was quite according to programme that all the rest should be absent, but their messenger should have returned. He should have been lying there in solitary virtue—the one righteous person among all the School House Fourth! They did not mind about Mellish; but his failure to return gave them qualms on their own account.

"Ah!" was all Mr. Railton said. He passed on to the Shell dormitory.

Only Scrope was there.

"Now, then, if you know anything as to the cause of this you had better speak out at once!" said Mr. Railton sharply.

"We thought it our duty, sir—"

"Enough of that Racke! I have never yet observed in you or in Crooke any conspicuous sense of duty. I cannot well blame you for letting me know of this; but we will not discuss motives. Have you any idea where the missing boys have gone?"

"They may have gone to the Moat House," said Racke sullenly.

"We heard them talkin' about it," added Crooke.

"With what object?"

"They fancy Mr. Selby an' Skimpole an' Trimble are prisoners there, sir," Racke said. "Of course, it's all rot, but—"

"Bless my soul! This must be seen to at once! Have you any idea whether any of the New House juniors are concerned in this business?"

"Sure to be!" growled Crooke.

"Scrope, put on your clothes, run across to the New House, and ask Mr. Ratcliff if he will be good enough to ascertain whether any juniors in his House are missing! Racke and Crooke,

complete your toilets! I am going to Dr. Holmes at once to tell him of this, and, on the whole, I think you two had better come along with us to the Moat House. Scrope, you might tell Mr. Ratcliff that we will not trouble him. I know that he is not very well; and, as I am sure that Dr. Holmes will go, his company will really not be necessary."

Racke and Crooke looked at one another in dismay.

"Do you really want us, sir?" stammered Racke, at length.

"I consider it best that you should come. I do not propose to argue the point with you!" said the Housemaster sternly.

"He fancies that we've put him on a false scent!" whispered Crooke, as the master left the room.

"Not likely! He's takin' us just because he means the rest to know that we split on 'em!" returned Racke bitterly.

Neither was quite right. Before he reached the Head's study Mr. Railton was asking himself what had prompted that order. He could only account for it by the hot wave of resentment that had flooded his mind at the sneaking treachery of those two. But had he any right to look at it in that way? Well, he would leave it to the Head.

The new, old crowd it was coolly and without excitement—for by this time the Housemaster was quite himself again—staggered the Head.

"Upon my soul!" he said. "Do you think that it is possible that the missing three should be at the Moat House, Railton?"

"I cannot think it likely; I will not say that it is impossible. That is not the aspect of the affair that strikes me as most important, sir. We must go at once and fetch back these misguiding boys. An attack in force of this sort—"

"One moment, Railton! I have not felt easy that we should not have done more to discover the whereabouts of Mr. Selby and the two boys. We have applied for the help of the police, of course; but they have discovered nothing as yet."

"Well, sir, we could hardly do more than that in the circumstances."

"But these boys are doing more. They are wrong, of course, but—"

"So wrong that, unless what seem their absurd suspicions turn out to be justified, a scandal may come of this that will cause irreparable harm to the school!" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"That is exactly my point, Railton! While we have been thinking of the school's welfare, they have apparently been concerned about its missing members. Who shall say whether they or we are right?"

"I see your attitude, sir. To a certain extent I must admit that I agree with you. But this is a very serious matter. By the way, I have sent Scrope across to Mr. Ratcliff, and have ordered Racke and Crooke who brought me the news, to dress fully that they may accompany us."

"Do you think they will be of any use to us?" asked the Head.

"I don't! But I consider that their warning was very belated; if given at all, it should have been given earlier. If you would rather be without them the news, Oh, let them come! I agree with you that their action was at least dubious. Perhaps we could both respect them more, Railton, if they had gone with the rest!"

Five minutes later Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton passed out of gates, followed by

two sulky juniors. Behind, in the New House, Mr. Ratcliff fumed and raged, almost ready to tear his hair at the escape of the juniors under his charge. And meanwhile Percy Mellish had found his bicycle, and was making tracks for home.

Cutting round a corner, he almost ran into a stoutish gentleman with long white whiskers, who carried a portmanteau and wore his white hat well to the back of his head.

Mellish swerved in haste, floundered in a rut, and went over, with a howl.

The stoutish gentleman dropped his portmanteau and picked up Mellish.

"I trust you are not severely hurt, my boy," he said graciously. "Why, bless me, you are from St. Jim's, are you not? What are you doing out at this time of night?"

Mellish looked up, and guessed that this was Professor Burnham.

"I—yes, sir, they're attacking your house," he blurted out.

"What! Who are attacking my house? What do you mean? Are you demented, boy?"

"A lot of our chaps, and the fellows from the Grammar School as well," answered Mellish. "I was just off to let them know."

"But what for? What on earth—You must be dreaming, boy!"

"They say one of our masters and two of our chaps are prisoners there!"

"I never in all my life heard such—By Jove, though! Oh, say, this is—"

The professor stopped short as the sound of quick footsteps came to his ears. Next moment Dr. Holmes and Mr. Raiton, with Racke and Crooke at their heels, came up.

The moonlight showed Mellish before it showed the professor.

"Why, Mellish—" began the Head. The professor stepped out of the shadow of the hedge.

"Professor Burnham!" cried Mr. Raiton. "The very man I most desired to see!"

"This boy tells a most extraordinary story, sir!" snapped the professor. "He says that a number of your boys, with others from the Grammar School, are actually laying siege to my house, for the purpose of rescuing Mr. Selby and the two missing lads. And, upon my word, I am not by any means so sure as I should desire to be that the three may not be there!"

"What?" cried Mr. Raiton. "Boys from the Grammar School?" exclaimed the Head. "You are sure of that, Mellish?"

"Quite sure, sir!" whined the Fourth-Former.

"Then, ride at once to the Grammar School, give Dr. Monk my compliments, and ask him if he will be good enough to meet Mr. Raiton and myself at the Moat House at the earliest possible moment. Bless my soul! Did anyone ever hear of such an affair as this?"

Mellish rode off. The Head turned to the professor and Mr. Raiton.

A sudden light had broken in upon Professor Burnham. He remembered the queer manner of Silas when he had paid his hurried visit home—the noises he had heard, his invitations to his old friend and the two boys, and, above all, Silas's spy mania. And in a few words he explained to the two masters his suspicions.

"Extraordinary!" said the Head. But he breathed a sigh of evident relief. "In the circumstances, Professor Burnham, I trust that—well, the boys have been guilty of a very serious offence, but—"

"I take you, sir—I take you! Rest easy as to that. I can forgive the lads most fully, but I cannot so easily forgive

my man Stout. And I fear that my dear friend Selby will never forgive me!"

The three gentlemen hurried on. Racke and Crooke trudged after them, in a state of the greatest moroseness. After all, it seemed, nothing in particular was going to happen to their enemies.

CHAPTER 12.

The End of It All.

"HERE we are, sir!" cried Tom Merry, as Skimpy opened the door of the room on the second floor.

Mr. Selby jumped up from the bed upon which he had flung himself when driven back into the room by Silas.

"What?" he panted. "Is that you, Merry? But where is that fenish madman? I cannot move from this room until I am assured that—"

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" said Figgins cheerfully. "Silas is outnumbered. There's a crowd of us here, come to rescue you."

"You are quite sure that the man—"

"Quite, sir. And I don't believe he's really insane, though it's a mystery why he should have made you three prisoners," Tom said.

"Is Mr. Raiton here?" asked the anxious master.

"No. We've done this on our own," answered Manners.

They all noticed that Mr. Selby did not inquire after the safety of Baggy and Skimpy. And he had not seen Skimpy, who had stayed outside. Skimpy had no desire to enter that room again, though there was one on the floor above it that he would gladly have explored.

But no one was surprised at Mr. Selby's utter selfishness. They were not even surprised when they heard, later, how he had behaved while a prisoner at the Moat House.

It was in fear and trembling that he went down with them.

"Is it all right?" asked Talbot at the front door.

"All right!" replied Tom cheerfully. "We've brought Mr. Selby along. How's Silas getting on?"

"Well, as far as I can make out, most of the Grammarians are sitting on him," answered Talbot, grinning. "It would be fairer if some of our fellows did that, for the enemy have got their hands full; and more of ours are pouring over the wall every moment. Look!"

Over the wall they came. Noble and Dacre, Glyn, Redfern, Owen, Lawrence, and more behind them. The courtyard fairly seethed with battle. Outnumbered and outgeneralled, the Grammarians stuck to it gamely, but they had no chance.

Then, as the surging ranks broke at one place, Tom and Talbot saw, in the clear moonlight, something that made them start forward at once.

Grip, frantic with excitement, had broken his chain, and was dashing straight at Gordon Gay.

The weight of his great body sent Gay to earth. But as the savage brute snapped at his throat George Alfred Grogan's big hands clutched the dog's collar.

It was gallantly done; and it may be that of all there only Grundy could have done it. Even he could hold back the great, savage beast for but a few seconds. But in those few seconds Tom and Talbot had reached his side; and they clutched, tore, and the combined strength of the three dragged the big dog back, growling furiously.

Monk and Carboy and Wootton minor had rushed to the rescue, also. But Wootton major was before them; and he

had the dog by the throat now, the foam from its mouth dripping upon his clutching hands.

Silas jumped up, and shoved him aside.

"Leggo, him!" he roared. "He'll obey me!"

"They let go. Gay jumped up, his face pale."

"Thanks, Grundy, old sport!" he said, holding out his hand.

"Oh, it's nothing!" growled Grundy, as though he were in the habit of doing that sort of thing daily.

The great dog crouched at the feet of Silas, and slunk back to his kennel at the man's word of command.

"Better give in, hadn't you, Gay?" asked Tom, breathing hard.

"You're outnumbered about four to one, so it's no disgrace. Thanks for the help you've given us. We've rescued the prisoners, you know."

The sight of Gordon Gay's peril had put an end to the battle. It might have recommenced; but Gay called to his men that peace was declared. Then he turned to Tom Merry with a puzzled face.

"Prisoners?" he said. "What are you gassing about, Tommy?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Haven't heard a blessed syllable about any prisoners!"

"What did you think we came here for, then?"

"Why, for a go at that merchant, same as we did. We couldn't quite make out your being in such force, and the ladders puzzled us above a bit. It seemed carrying the game pretty far. But we weren't going to knuckle under to you, so we used the ladder, too."

"Just as I meant you to when I had it left there!" chuckled Tom. "You chaps have helped us more than you know."

"Well, we wouldn't have minded helping if we'd known about the prisoners," said Monk.

"Who are they?" asked Carboy.

A dozen voices started to explain. But before half the story had been told the voice of the professor came from the other side of the moat, calling loudly upon Silas Stout.

"Blister my tongue, if there ain't old Pomp!" growled Silas.

He pushed his way through the crowd, all rather taken aback by this unexpected development, opened the gate, and let down the drawbridge.

And in over the drawbridge and through the gate came not only the professor, but also Dr. Holmes and Mr. Raiton, with Racke and Crooke at their heels.

"My hat! We're in for it now!" gasped Bernard Glyn.

But it did not turn out so badly, after all, though for that the rescuers had not Mr. Selby to thank. He treated their rescue as a most unwarrantable intrusion, and seemed to regard the sufferings he had undergone as having been due to them.

There was a scene not easily to be forgotten at the big hall of the Moat House, crowded with boys, when the professor tongue-lashed Silas till the fellow fairly wilted, and the Head and Mr. Raiton lectured the adventurers, and Mr. Selby broke in continually with complaints of what he had had to bear, and the professor was apologetic to everybody, and even Silas was at last moved to mumble some sort of contrition, though he hardly looked contrite.

Then Dr. Monk arrived, in a tearing rage. But the professor soothed him down. Professor Pompey Burnham seemed ready to applaud all the adven-

lurers had done, and everybody but Rake and Crooke and Mellish voted him a brick. Dr. Monk wanted to march his desperadoes off home at once; but the genial professor would not let them go until everybody had had something to eat and drink. The Moat House stores were drawn upon to an extent which suggested that the professor's absent-mindedness must have been extended to the Food Rationing Orders. There was tea and coffee in buckets, and everybody got something to eat, though Baggy failed to get enough.

So, after all, it ended well alike for raiders and rescuers, though both at the Grammar School and at St. Jim's impositions and canings were freely awarded next morning. Punishment had to be given; but though Mr. Ratcliff was sour, and Mr. Selby bitter beyond words, the Head and Mr. Reillon appeared to regard

the punishments as, in a sense, formal, and congratulated each other on coming so well out of what might have proved an exceedingly troublesome business.

Silas was not sacked. He may have had notice, but he did not take it; and the professor, if he gave it, never expected it to be taken. Baggy would not go near the Moat House again, and Mr. Selby also shunned his boyhood friend. But Skimpy became a frequent visitor, and actually got quite chummy with Silas, who always referred to him as "that rum 'un with the goggles."

Others of the St. Jim's juniors came to know the professor better, and to like him well, in spite of all his eccentricities. The spy mania of Silas, though not cured, stopped short of anyone in the St. Jim's colours in future, though he had his doubts about the Rylcombe fellows. And that the mania was not without some

justification, Tom Merry & Co. learned later. But that is another story.

Rake and his crew got off more lightly than they deserved. But a ragging by the two Forms in conjunction gave them at least something to be going on with; and for weeks thereafter they were very careful about going near the Grammar School, for Lady told them that Gordon Gay & Co. were only waiting their chance to give the traitors a second ragging.

Gordon Gay & Co. were also awaiting a chance to avenge their set-back of that night, too. And before long they were sure to find one.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's — "SISTER MABEL!" — by Martin Clifford.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Wednesday:

"SISTER MABEL!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is a story of the kind that many readers like better than any other—full of caping and fun. It deals with the feud between the St. Jim's juniors and those of Rylcombe Grammar School. There is no real comedy in that feud, of course; but the rivals are always keen on taking one another down. Lately the feud has assumed a new lease of life, and the Grammarians have rather a heavy score to pay back against St. Jim's, for this far they have scarcely claim much success. "Sister Mabel" tells of a wheeze worked upon Tom Merry & Co. by Gordon Gay—in fact, it tells of more than one wheeze, but not all of them are successful. Look out for more of these fine yarns!

AFTER THE WAR!

The phrase is one that we are constantly hearing. It crops up very often in the letters I receive.

"Will the 'Gem' go back to its old price after the war?"

"Will the 'Gem' have its old blue covers after the war?"

"Will the 'Gem' be the same size after the war as it was in 1914?"

We have been asked these questions again and again. There is only one of the three that I can answer with any certainty—that is the last.

I am pretty sure that, for a long time after the war is over, there is no chance of a penny buying so much of anything as it did before the war. There are many reasons for this, but the chief one is that the withdrawal of so many men from work to set them to fighting has made all commodities less plentiful than they used to be, and scarcity always means dearth. This will right itself to some extent in the course of time; but it will take years, not months.

But there is a far more important aspect of "after the war" than any question of prices. That is what "after the war" is going to mean. Prices are bound up with that, also, for if Germany comes out unbeaten we shall have to live waiting for the next war, piling up armaments, keeping hundreds of thousands of men away from productive work that they may be trained for fighting, and paying very heavy taxes. But Germany must not come out unbeaten!

You cannot influence the end, you may try, but to some extent that is true, and it is not wholly true. Everyone can bring influence to bear. What matters more than anything is that the nation should stand itself to endure all that may be necessary to bring the Huns to their knees. You, the boys and girls of today, are the men and women of to-morrow. After the war is over, to matter more to you than to us who are older.

So try to think rightly about it. Don't wince. Don't listen to the talk of the Pacifists. If your family has suffered heavy losses—those sad losses which nothing can ever make good—be proud in your sorrow, proud that they who have died have died for England!

Did you ever read these lines? They are by a poet whose name you have heard, perhaps, but I know nothing better or finer:

"What have I done for you,

England, my England?

What is there I would not do,

England, my own?"

Ever the faith endures,

England, my England!

Take and break us; we are yours,

England, my own!

Life is good, and joy runs high

Between English earth and sky.

Death is death; but we shall die

To the song on your bugles blown,

England—

To the song on your bugles blown!"

NOTICES.

BACK NUMBERS WANTED BY—

G. Bullen, 1, Kitchener Flats, Drury Lane, W.C.—"Bob, Cherry's Barring-Out"—any price.

W. Lowndes, The Plough, Bromley Common, Bromley, Kent—"Boys' Friend," 870-871; also "Tom Merry's Minor," "Tom Merry in the Rockies," "Figgin's Fig-Pudding," "The St. Jim's Tournament," "Figgin's Folly," "The Kid's Guide for Ireland." State price.

J. W. Ferguson, 26, Bank Street, Cambs-lung, Larnarkshire, Scotland—some back numbers of the Companion Papers to send to the troops.

R. Macdonald, King Harold Street, Lerwick, Scotland—30 "Magnets" and 30 GEMs before 1914.

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Alex. Barrow, 4, Pellok Buildings, Corker-hill, Cardonald, Glasgow—GEMS, 31, 4, 304, 6d. offered.

J. Dunn, 119, Priory Road, West Hill, Hastings—"Magnets," 290, 225; also "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out"—1d. each offered.

L. S. Towne, 21, Riverside Terrace, White Hart Lane, Tottenham—GEMS, 334-337; also 335-378; also "Wingate's Secret," "Wingate's Plum," "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves," and "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out"—1d. each offered.

Edward Norman, 14, Clarence Road, St. Albans, Herts—GEMS, 1-200, especially those dealing with "Tom Merry's Weekly"; also "Magnets," 7-131.

E. A. Cockdale, Fern Lea, Conistow, Lancs.—Any numbers of Companion Papers to send to a soldier.

FOOTBALL.

MATCHES WANTED BY—

ABERGAVENNY WEST END UNITED (JUNIORS) A.F.C.—15-17—A. J. Trotman, 10, King Street, Abergavenny, Mon.

FINCH LUTON—16—H. V. Payne, 52, Dean's Buildings, Hint Street, Walsworth, S.E. 17.

FINCH PARK U.F.C.—15—home and away—5 miles—R. Allard, 48, Victoria Road, Strong Green, London, N. 4.

STANMORE ATHLETIC F.C.—3 miles—all date except April 12th, 1919.—E. Wilder, 7, Stanley Road, West Green, London, N. 15.

FINCH LUTON F.C.—14-15—players wanted.—Edward Viney-St. Haynes, 29, Wenlock Road, Liverpool.

DELIVER ATHLETIC F.C.—17-5 miles.—J. C. Bony, 257, Lordship Lane, East, Durrish, S.E. 2.

ST. JOSEPH'S F.C.—15—play Wornwood Scrubs, 9, O'Connor, 40, Horace Street, Crawford Place, Edinburgh, E. 7.

WEST HAMPSHIRE UNITED—16-5 miles.—R. Tidd, 97, Ravenshaw Road, West Bampstead, N.W. 6.

ST. ELIZABETH ATHLETIC—17.—C. McEneaney, 34, Kilburn Street, Litherland, Liverpool.

FOREST GATE F.C.—12-15—Forest Gate, Manor Park, and district.—H. S. Smith, 452, Renford Road, Forest Gate, E. 7.

FALKIRK SPORTS CLUB—members wanted.—Robert Martin, 21, Newmarket Street, Falkirk, Scotland.

CORRESPONDENCE WANTED BY—

W. R. Crockett, 98, Gertrude Road, West Bridgford, Notts, with readers interested in establishing an international magazine—age 12-15—state abilities—in U.S.A. and West India.

Basil James, c/o Longworth & Co., P.O. Box 204, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, with readers any age—15 years.

Your Editor