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"TALBOT'S FIND!" & "THE GAMBOLLING LAMBS!"

Two Grand Complete School Stories in this Issue.



Waiting for the Signal to Attack!

(A Tense Moment in our first Splendid Long Complete School Story.)

Is YOUR Contribution on this Page?



NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

A Girl of South Africa.

"It may interest you to know that I have again started reading my favourite books, the "Magnet" and the GEM, and I've got a few of my friends to do the same thing. You may think I'm a bit of a kid when I tell you that we have called ourselves the "Terrible Three," and I can tell you you are not far out. It's hard to forget that I'm no longer at school, and sometimes at the office I play some pranks on the clerks. I hope to have some correspondents. Of course, my life is a very busy one, but I hope to find time to write to all those who write to me."—Miss Ruth Olive Vance, c.o. P. O., Box 2174, Johannesburg.

A Busy Canadian.

"I have not yet begun the new serial in the GEM. I have just joined a Scottish society, and this takes up much of my time. We are having rotten weather here just now. One day it snows, the next it freezes, and the next it rains. We had a terrific thunderstorm last week, and I think it was one of the worst I ever heard. It has been raining to-day, and I have not been able to go anywhere, but we are looking for better weather now. I am getting on fine at my work, and I like Toronto. I like the St. Jim's stories very much."—D. N. Greig, 60, Hayden Street, Toronto, Canada.

A Round Robin.

A "round robin" is a circle divided from the centre, like King Arthur's Round Table, whence, no doubt, its origin. In each compartment is a signature, so that the entire circle, when filled, shows a list without one name being more prominent than another. Nobody can say which name has been signed before another name, nor can any signature be described as heading the list. In Dickens' book, "Martin Chuzzlewit," the male boarders at Todgers' sent a round robin to the fair Misses Peckeniff, asking the ladies to honour the company at dinner. The round robin is much used by schoolboys who wish to bring a grievance to the notice of the masters.—R. Driver, 48, Temple Street, Nelson, Lancs.

Charles Dickens.

Charles Dickens was born at Landport, in Hants, Feb. 7th, 1812. He died at

Gadshill, near Rochester, June 9th, 1870. He began his life as a drudge in a blacking warehouse, and became afterwards a solicitor's clerk and a newspaper reporter. His first attempt at authorship was made while he was still a reporter in connection with the "Morning Chronicle," to which he contributed "Sketches by Boz." After this came the "Pickwick Papers," which established him as a writer of fiction. In 1841 he went to the States, and four years later became editor of the "Daily News." Later on he conducted the famous weekly, "Household Words."—H. W. Hopkins, 9, Bawtree Road, New Cross, S.E. 14.

A Quaint Experiment.

Gas can be made in this way on a small scale: Buy a clay pipe and insert a piece of coal in the bowl. Then cover the whole of the bowl with clay. Put it between the ribs of the grate or range, or any fireplace, stem protruding. After a while gas will be observed coming out, and if you will light it it will burn for quite a while. Of course, this is not pure gas. The gas which we use has to go through many processes of cleansing before being used in dwelling-houses.—Wm. Welsh, Telephone Exchange, Dalry, Ayrshire, N.B.

A Quick-witted Beggar.

A lady was walking in a London suburb when she saw a caterpillar on the footpath. To save it from being trodden on she put it into a garden. Two young men noticed the kind action. As they passed her they seemed to be discussing something. Then one turned back and spoke to her. "Madam," he said, "if you were kind to that caterpillar; will you also be kind to me? I am out of work. Can you render me a little assistance?" "Begging is not good, but one can but admire the readiness of the individual in turning to his own account the generous temperament of the friend to a helpless caterpillar."—Henry Bell, 18, Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Guernsey.

Guernsey is the second largest of the Channel Islands. It is ruled over by the States, and by a Lieutenant-Governor. The population is about 40,000. There are ten parishes and two towns, St.

Sampson's and St. Peter Port. The latter is the capital of the island. Granite and anthracite coal are unloaded at St. Sampson's. House coal is taken to St. Peter Port, while from here tomatoes, melons, and figs are shipped.—Herbert Tuckwell, c.o. Mrs. Philip Raben, Bawbigny, St. Sampson's, Guernsey.

Britain's Largest Railways.

The Waverley Station, Edinburgh, on the North British system, is the largest railway-station in the British Isles. It covers 23 acres of ground, 1½ acres being roofed over. There are 18 platforms at which trains can come alongside, their total length being 11,980 feet. The next station in point of size is Liverpool Street Station, London, the terminus of the Great Eastern Railway. This covers 2½ acres, with rather more than a quarter of the space roofed over. The length of the platforms is 11,600 feet. Next is Euston, of the L. & N. W. R., and after that Waterloo, of the L. & S. W. R. The acreage in both cases is 16. Euston has 15 platforms, of a total length of 10,000 feet, while Waterloo possesses platforms 7,500 feet in length.—Thomas R. Bullerwell, 3, Montague Street, Scotswood, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

A Lesson.

Dean Swift, the celebrated author of "Gulliver's Travels," had more ability than generosity. But on one occasion he received a good lesson from a page who often brought him fish and game. One day the boy arrived with a large basket of fruit and partridges and trout. He knocked at the door, and the dean opened it himself. "Here," said the page bluntly, "my master has sent you these things." The dean was annoyed at such rudeness. "Come here, my boy," he said, "and I will teach you how to deliver a message more politely. You shall be Dean Swift and I will be the page." Then, taking off his hat, and with much politeness, he said to the boy: "Sir, my master sends you a little present, and begs you to do him the honour of accepting it." "Very well," said the page, "tell him I am much obliged to him, and there is half-a-crown for yourself."—George William Elliott, 8, Ainslie Terrace, Camel's Head, Devonport.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "Gem," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, the "GEM" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."



TALBOT'S FIND!

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

The Red Crystal.

"JUST about do it!"
Reginald Talbot, of the Shell at St. Jim's, muttered that remark through clenched teeth as he scudded at top speed along the platform at Wayland Junction.

It was Wednesday afternoon, and the handsome Shell fellow, after ending a round of shopping by a tea at the bunshop in Wayland, had arrived on the station platform to find the Rycombe train just about to depart.

There were at least two later trains that evening, but Talbot wanted to catch that particular train. If he missed it, he could not possibly reach St. Jim's before locking-up, and the junior knew what that would mean.

And Talbot intended to catch it.

Slam!
Talbot was within a dozen yards of the last carriage when the porter slammed the last door, and he put on a terrific spurt.

"Stand back!"

The train was gathering speed now, and, dodging the detaining hand of the porter, Talbot made a frenzied leap for the footboard, grasped the handle, and gave a wrench.

It was locked—or held from within; the junior could not see, nor did he look. Reginald Talbot was by no means an impulsive youth, but he intended to catch that train. And he did.

He gave a frantic spring, and literally hurled himself bodily through over the lowered sash of the carriage door as the train rushed on.

Oh crumbs!

Talbot gasped that exclamation breathlessly as he sprawled full length across the legs of two men seated within the carriage. From them also came exclamations—startled and angry exclamations—of a nature that were never—or rarely—heard within the scholastic establishment of St. Jim's.

The smaller of the two men—a thin, saw-toothed individual—was sitting with an opened handbag on his knees, when the junior's cyclonic entrance swept the bag and its contents over the carriage floor.

What the contents were Talbot did not see, for even as he scrambled breathlessly to his feet the second man, a burly, powerful fellow, exhausted his flow of

lurid language and grasped the junior roughly.

"You—you spying, interfering young hound!" he hissed, raising a huge fist threateningly. "What are you after? What's your little game—quick?"

Talbot took a step backwards, his face flushing angrily.

His unceremonious entry into the carriage was, perhaps, enough to startle and provoke anyone. Talbot himself realised this, and he had been quite prepared to apologise.

But the junior did not see why the fellow should be so furiously angry for all that; nor did he consider the incident justified such a stream of objectionable language. And Reginald Talbot was the last fellow in the world to allow a stranger to lay a hand upon him.

"Let me go!" he exclaimed outright, his eyes gleaming. "I'm sorry if I startled you, but I don't see why you should kick up this fuss. And it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't tried to stop me entering the carriage. Take your hand from my shoulder, or—"

"Not just yet, young shaver!" snapped the man, glaring suspiciously into the junior's eyes. "We want to know what you mean by barging in on me an' my pal."

"Let me go!" repeated the junior hotly. "It was your own fault. Why should you prevent other passengers enter—"

"We want this carriage to ourselves for a bit o' private business if you wants to know," was the reply, accompanied by a savage shake. "But don't you poke your nose into what doesn't concern—"

The fellow broke off with a growl as Talbot wrenched himself free, and turned with blazing eyes and clenched fists. But before anything further could be said or done there came an interruption.

During the altercation the smaller man had been on his knees salving the scattered contents of the handbag. But now he snapped the bag shut, and, jumping to his feet, shot a quick, warning glance at his companion.

"Enough of that, Jim!" he said sharply. "Are you mad? Let that boy alone, you fool! It was an accident, an' there's no harm done."

The big man lowered his fists with a growl, and, scowling at the junior, dropped into a seat. Without a word,

Talbot seated himself at the far end of the carriage.

After that there was grim silence save for the rhythmic beats of the wheels striking the line-joints as the train swept on. Several times Talbot shot swift, keen glances at his strange travelling companions. The little man sat smiling at him genially, and the big man scowled out of the window. But Talbot noted that the eyes of both seemed to be continually attracted to the small black handbag which the small man nursed carefully on his knees.

In many respects Reginald Talbot was older than his years. His early life, before coming to St. Jim's, had been spent among criminals, and it needed but a glance at the shifty eyes of the two men to tell him that they were not good and honest citizens, to say the least of it.

The fact that the men wanted the carriage to themselves was significant of itself, and Talbot had strong suspicions that they wished to be alone for no innocent and honourable purpose.

Swiftly the familiar fields and hedges, clothed in their brilliant green mantle of spring, flew by, and amid a grinding of brakes the train drew up at the tiny platform of Rycombe Station.

But before Talbot had time even to get to his feet, the smaller man exchanged a quick glance with his companion, and, flinging open the carriage door, the two men jumped out and hurried along the platform.

"My hat! What a pair of beauties!" muttered Talbot, with a frown. "Wonder what their little game—"

Talbot stopped when about to step on to the platform, as a tiny gleam of something shining roily beneath the seat caught his eye. Stooping, he picked it up, and removed the wad of cotton-wool that partially covered it, and as he did so the setting sun streaming through the carriage doorway caught the small object, and it glowed and sparkled like living fire.

Talbot gave a violent start, and stared with gleaming eyes.

To an ordinary junior the thing would doubtless have appeared to be simply a bit of red-coloured glass of no value. But Talbot's early experience as a cracksman told him at a glance that this was no mere scrap of glass or crystal.

It was a precious stone—a blood-red

ruby of unusual purity and obviously of great value.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he breathed, turning the stone over and over until it danced with fire. "A blessed ruby—and a beauty at that. Must have dropped from the bag, and that little blighter overlooked it. This looks fishy, an' no mistake! What on earth are those blackguards doing with it?"

The slamming of carriage doors higher up interrupted Talbot's reflections. With grim, set face he dropped the glittering stone into his pocket, and, stopping on to the platform, glanced quickly around.

To his surprise, the two men had not left the station. They were moving rapidly alongside the train, glancing into each compartment, obviously in search of an empty one.

There was still time to run after the men and acquaint them with their loss; but Talbot did not obey the natural impulse. He felt convinced that the two seely-looking individuals had not come by the stone honestly, and he had no intention of parting with it without making inquiries.

He watched as the two men vanished into a compartment higher up the train, the porter slammed the door, and a moment later the train steamed out of the station.

Talbot left the platform with a thoughtful frown on his brow. Out in the High Street he hesitated.

The right thing to do, he knew, was to hand the stone over to the police. That public body was represented in Rylcombe only by P.-c. Crump, who was as slow and dull-witted as he was dignified and fat. And, naturally, Talbot was reluctant to entrust such a matter to his care.

"Suppose I ought really to hand it to the police at once," he muttered slowly. "But that fat idiot Crump would want to look me up, or something else. I'd pinched the dashed thing. Besides, I don't want to be mixed up in the business if I can help it. H'm! I think I'd better take the beastly thing to the Head and leave it for him to deal with."

And, having made his decision, Reginald Talbot turned his face towards St. Jim's, little dreaming what the consequences of that decision would mean to him.

CHAPTER 2.

A Surprise for Gordon Gay.

"B A I Jove! Wescue me, you wottahs—you unpwincipled wuffians!"

That request, uttered in wrathful tones and in a familiar voice, assailed Talbot's ears as he strode along Rylcombe Lane towards St. Jim's. "Sounds like Gussy—trouble, too!" murmured Talbot, quickening his pace. "Wonder—Well, my only hat!"

Talbot stopped, and grinned unconsciously as, turning a bend in the lane, he came upon an astonishing, and certainly an amusing scene.

Seated in the mud of the lane was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, and the noble and aristocratic swell of the Fourth was a sight to behold and wonder at.

Undoubtedly Gussy was in trouble. His hands were tied behind him with his own tie of many colours, his topper was squashed over his eyes, his delicate pink socks were pulled up over the bottoms of his trousers, and his fancy waistcoat was turned inside-out, likewise his Eton jacket.

And the Philistines who had done this thing were four cheery youths in Rylcombe Grammar School caps, who

stood round Arthur Augustus laughing uproariously. They were Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and the two Wootton brothers—known as Gordon Gay & Co., and the leaders of the Grammarians and their incessant though good-humoured warfare against their hereditary enemies, the "Saints."

Even as Talbot gazed at the astonishing scene Frank Monk dipped his finger in the mud of the lane and daubed the unfortunate D'Arcy's cheeks and nose with it.

"There you are, Saint Augustus!" he remarked, grinning at the almost frantic Arthur Augustus. "I s'aps that will teach you better than calling me monkey in public, like you did—"

"I didn't!" shrieked D'Arcy. "Bai Jove! I would neevah dream of calling any person opprobrious names in public, Frank Monk. It was Blake—"

"Well, it's all the same, Gussy—Hallo! Look out!"

Frank Monk shouted the warning as he caught sight of Talbot in the offing, as it were.

"Huwwah! Wescue, Talbot, deah boy!" shouted D'Arcy eagerly. "Wescue, S' Jim's!"

But D'Arcy's call for help was hardly necessary, for Talbot was already among the Grammarians, punching right and left. They were four to one, but Talbot hadn't stopped to count the odds, and next moment a wild and whirling conflict was taking place in the lane.

A straight punch in the chest sent Frank Monk backwards into the ditch. And then the gallant Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet and ambled to Talbot's help. His hands were helpless, but, lowering his noble head, he butted Gordon Gay with the already much-battered topper.

The onslaught took Gay unawares, and with a wild howl he followed Monk into the ditch.

But D'Arcy's triumph was short-lived. The ditch held more mud than water, and both Gordon Gay and his chum quickly scrambled out, and, breathing threatenings and slaughter, returned to the attack.

Talbot was already on his back, struggling mightily with the brothers Wootton. With only the practically helpless D'Arcy to aid him he now stood no chance against the four Grammarians, and the battle was soon over.

"Now, my bonnie boy!" chuckled Gordon Gay at last, breathlessly. "You've asked for it, Talbot, old fruit, and you're going to get it. We can hardly make you such a swell as Gussy, I'm afraid, but we'll try. Buck up, you chaps, before any more Saints come along!"

"Here—what—leggo, you silly asses!" exclaimed Talbot, struggling frantically. But the grinning Grammarians did not

"leggo." Despite Talbot's wriggles and protests, they tucked the bottoms of his trousers inside his socks, turned his waistcoat and jacket inside-out, likewise his cap. Then Frank Monk dipped his forefinger in the mud and deftly executed a cubist problem design on Talbot's features.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians roared with laughter at the result of their handiwork. Certainly Talbot did not look such a picture as D'Arcy, but he presented a striking and remarkable appearance for all that.

"Shall we stick 'em in this field as scarecrows?" suggested Wootton minor. "Ha, ha! Numo! Mustn't let the little fellows be late for call-over," chortled Gordon Gay. "Tell you what, we'll let 'em have a two-legged race on their own."

"Topping!"

In less than a minute Talbot's right and Gussy's left leg had been tied together with their own handkerchiefs, supplemented by a bit of cord. "And then they were turned loose,

"You—you—you thumping rotters!" howled Talbot. "You burbling chumps! We'll get our own back for this, Gordon Gay!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove! You wuffianly wascals—"

"Silence, varlets!" commanded Gordon Gay sternly. "And now let's see you run—or stop an' be rolled in the ditch. Put your best feet forwards!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was no help for it, and with feelings too deep for words the two unhappy St. Jim's fellows started to amble awkwardly towards St. Jim's. And not until the ludicrous-looking figures had vanished down the lane did the Grammarians cease laughing.

"Well, that's one up for the Grammar School, anyway!" chortled Gordon Gay at length, glancing at his watch. "And now, come on, chaps, or we'll miss old Carboy at the station. Abbotsford train gets in at 6.30, an' it's 6.15 now. Better be—Hallo!"

Gordon Gay stooped suddenly, as something glittering in the mud caught his eye. He picked the object up and glanced at it carelessly.

"What's that?" asked Frank Monk curiously.

"Bit of coloured glass, or stone—must have dropped out of old Talbot's pocket," chuckled Gay. "My hat! Doesn't it just shine? It's not a marble, 'cos it ain't round. I expect it's part of old Talbot's hopscotch outfit! I'll keep it until I see Talbot again. Better not chuck it away, in case it's a family heirloom!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, laughing at his own little joke, Gordon Gay dropped the ruby carelessly into his trousers-pocket, and led the way towards Rylcombe, little dreaming what Talbot's "ickie plaything" really was.

As it happened, the Abbotsford train was just steaming into the station as the four cheery youths hurried on to the platform and scanned the few passengers that alighted in search of Carboy, who had gone to spend the afternoon with a maiden aunt at Abbotsford.

"No go!" granted Frank Monk, as the last passenger passed them. "Dash it all! The silly ass must be coming by the last train. After us coming to meet—"

"Never mind!" exclaimed Gordon Gay cheerfully, coming to a halt before a chocolate machine. "We'll drown our disappointment in chocs. Hallo! There goes Talbot's merry old heirloom!"

Gay had dived his hand into his pocket for pennies to feed the machine, and brought to light a handful of coppers, a piece of string, a pocket-knife, and—the ruby.

It came out entangled in the coil of string, and rolled across the platform, emitting flashes of blood-red light as it rolled.

Gordon Gay moved forward to pick it up again. But before he could reach it a man of somewhat military bearing, dressed unobtrusively in blue serge suit and bowler hat, dropped quickly from the nearest carriage.

Taking a couple of quick strides, he stooped, and, picking the glittering thing up, he placed it carefully in his pocket.

"Well, of all the cheek!" ejaculated Gordon Gay, staring. "Here, I say,



The man laid a hand on the junior's shoulder—and nodded towards the waiting-room. "Come in here, my boy," he snapped curtly. "I want a few words with you!" (See Chapter 2.)

you know! I don't know who you are, but—"

The man laid a hand on the junior's shoulder, and nodded towards the waiting-room.

"Come in here, my boy," he snapped curtly. "I want a word with you!"

There was something authoritative in the stranger's voice and demeanour, and with his wondering clumsy Gordon Gay followed the man into the empty room without further ado.

"Now, my boy," he said, turning abruptly upon the junior, "what were you doing with that—that stone? Where did you get it? Tell me!"

"I don't see why I should," muttered Gordon Gay, a little nervously. "I don't see what it's got to do with you. And it's only a blessed—"

"I am Detective-Sergeant Day, of the Abbotsford police," said the man sharply. "You will tell me how you became possessed of that stone here and now, or come with me and explain at the Abbotsford police-station, my boy!"

Gordon Gay gave a start, and stared at the man in no little alarm. But he saw no reason to doubt his statement. The fellow certainly had the appearance of a police-officer, and now he came to think, he fancied he remembered seeing him in police uniform at Abbotsford.

"A St. Jim's fellow dropped it in Rylcombe Lane, and I picked it up," he ex-

plained briefly. "But—but it's only a bit of red glass, and—"

"Never mind what it is!" snapped the man impatiently. "I wish to know the circumstances—at once!"

Somewhat sullenly and reluctantly Gordon Gay complied, and when he had finished the police officer frowned.

"Very well," he said quietly. "And now I want your names and addresses. You'll possibly hear further from me about this matter. But if you've told the truth, you've no need to be afraid."

And after scribbling for a moment in his pocket-book the detective turned abruptly and left the startled Grammarians staring blankly at each other.

The Abbotsford train had steamed out some minutes ago, but the police-officer seemed to have forgotten all about his train as he strode along the platform, his somewhat hard face puckered in a puzzled frown.

Outside the station he paused.

"Reginald Talbot of St. Jim's," he muttered to himself, as if to impress the name on his memory. "Now, how in Heaven's name did the famous Winnington Ruby come to be in the possession of a schoolboy? I wonder if we're on the wrong track, after all? I must follow this up without delay."

And, turning on his heel, Detective-Sergeant Day strode briskly down Rylcombe High Street towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

Missing.

"GREAT Scott! What on earth's this coming?"

Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners of the Shell were standing chatting by the gates with Blake, Herries, Digby, Cardew, and several other fellows, when Tom Merry suddenly made that surprised remark and pointed along Rylcombe Lane.

"Looks like the Siamese Twins in fancy dress," drawled Cardew, staring curiously at the oncoming sight. "I rather fancy—"

"Or the winners in a two-legged race for scarecrows!" chuckled Lowther. "M-m-my hat! One of 'em's Gussy!"

"Great pip!"

"I thought it was!" murmured Cardew. "I fancied I caught the glimmer of his merry eyeglass. What an astonishing sight!"

"And the other's old Talbot, or I'm mistaken!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What the thump— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors congregated round the gates burst into a roar of uncontrollable laughter as the two unhappy victims of the Grammarians' little jape came ambulating wearily up to them.

And no wonder, for Talbot and D'Arcy looked a truly weird and wonderful sight. Gussy, indeed, with his battered topper

and blackened face, resembled a Christy Minstrel more than a scion of the aristocracy.

"Bai Jove! Pway weleaso me, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus feebly. "I am a complete w'ock, and my clobber will be uttally wuined. Those feathul wufians—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Oh crumbs! What a sight!" laughed Tom Merry. "Gussy, I'm surprised at you appearing in public in such a state—"

"So undignified!" said Manners severely.

"Weally, bai Jove—"
"For goodness' sake, stop that idiotic cackling an' cut us loose!" roared Talbot crossly, flushing crimson as he glared at the hilarious juniors. "Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at, you asses!"

"That's because you can't see yourselves!" grinned Tom Merry, beginning to struggle with Talbot's bonds. "But —ha, ha!—who's done this dark deed? The Grammarians, I suppose?"

"Yes!" granted Talbot shortly, rubbing his freed wrists. "I found 'em japing old Gussy, and was silly ass enough to chip in. I'll bust Gordon Gay for this some day!"

And, as a laughing crowd was already thickening round the luckless cove, Talbot hastily began to put his disarrayed attire in order, and with his handkerchief rubbed some of the mud from his heated features.

Meanwhile, Blake and Digby had released the wrathful and loudly lamenting Arthur Augustus, who immediately followed Talbot's example.

Then he glowered through his eyeglass at his trousers.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he wailed, in horrified dismay. "My toppah is uttally destroyed! But—just look at my trousers! The frightful wottahs! They have wumpled them beyond wopaiah! It is impossible to wernain any longah in such wumpled trowsahs, bai Jove!"

And, followed by many loud chortles, Arthur Augustus rushed off across the quad, apparently to change his "wumpled trowsahs."

"And I think I'd better do the same," said Talbot to Tom Merry, as the juniors began to disperse. "At any rate, I could do with a wash and brush up. Luckily, I had tea in Wayland—"

Talbot paused as a sudden thought struck him, and he clapped a hand

quickly to his pocket. Then his face paled visibly.

"Oh, my hat!" he muttered to himself, in alarm. "It's gone! The blessed ruby's gone! Must have dropped out of my—"

"Eh? What're you muttering about, ass?" asked Tom Merry, staring.

Without answering, Talbot turned away abruptly, and to the astonishment of the Terrible Three, sped swiftly across the quad.

"What on earth's bitten the chump?" ejaculated Tom Merry. "My hat! Looks as though he's making for the cycle-shed!"

"So he is!" exclaimed Manners, in surprise. "Surely the burbling ass isn't going out of gates so late?"

"Can't be!" muttered Tom Merry. "He'll be late for call-over if he does!"

But Tom Merry was wrong. In less than a minute Talbot came hurrying across the quad, and he was wheeling his bicycle.

"Here, I say!" called Tom Merry, in alarm. "Where are you off, this time of night?"

"Can't stop now; tell you everything when I come back!" shouted Talbot hastily.

"But—but what about prep—"
"Blow prep! But I'm not going far. So-long, you chaps!"

And, jumping into the saddle at the gates, Reginald Talbot pressed the pedals and shot away.

"Well, the burbling chump!" exclaimed Tom Merry warmly. "Wonder what his little game is? Hallo!"

Tom Merry broke off with a startled gasp as Talbot swerved to avoid a man who turned the corner of the lane just then.

"Narrow escape, that!" granted Manners. "The silly ass nearly knocked that merchant down! My hat, he's coming here!"

The stranger, after glaring angrily after Talbot, now fast disappearing up the lane, came striding through the gates and approached the juniors.

"I wish to see your headmaster, boys!" he exclaimed crisply. "Will you kindly tell me where I can find him?"

Tom Merry gave the required information; and the stranger was about to pass on, when he paused.

"By the way," he asked quietly, "is there a boy named Talbot at this school?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom, with a slight start. "He's just—" Tom Merry was about to say "He's just gone out," when he pulled himself up. "He's in our Form," he ended.

"Ab, thanks, my boy!"

The man turned and strode briskly across the quad, and the juniors stared curiously after him.

"Wonder who that chap is?" muttered Tom Merry, with a frown. "And what does he want with Talbot?"

"Looks like a plain-clothes policeman," grinned Lowther. "My hat! Looks well if the bobbies are after Talbot!"

"Not likely!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"But the banns will be if he's late for call-over—and us, too, if we don't go and make a start on our prep. Come on, and blow Talbot!"

And, little dreaming how near Lowther had been to the truth, Tom Merry led his chums indoors for prep.

Meanwhile, Detective-Sergeant Day—for it was he—had been ushered into the presence of Dr. Holmes, who gave a slight frown on learning the identity of his visitor.

"Ah, yes, Talbot of the Shell!" he exclaimed, spying the police-officer somewhat uneasily. "I will send for the boy at once. But might I ask why you wish to question this boy?"

"It is in connection with a very serious matter, sir," answered the detective grimly. "Doubtless you have heard of the recent great jewel robbery at Abbotford, Dr. Holmes? Jewels to the value of several thousand pounds were stolen by clever jewel-thieves from the house of Lady Wilmington, on the outskirts of Abbotford. And—"

"Yes, yes, I have read the account of the robbery in the newspapers," interposed the Head sharply. "But really I fail to see what possible connection any boy of mine could have with such an affair."

"Yet such is the case, sir," replied the detective quietly. "One of the stolen jewels was a ruby—a magnificent stone of great value. By a strange accident it was discovered by myself in the possession of a boy from Ryecombe Grammar School, who affirms that it belonged to a boy of his school—Reginald Talbot!"

"Impossible!" ejaculated the Head, with a startled look at the police-officer.

"Bless my soul!"

"It is quite possible, of course," went on the detective, "that this boy Talbot became possessed of the stone in an innocent manner as the Grammar School boy appears to have done. And it is my duty, of course, to question him about it!"

"I am amazed!" exclaimed the Head quietly. "But I will certainly send at once for the boy."

And, striking the bell on his desk, Dr. Holmes, a strip of minutes later, dispatched Toby, the page, in search of Talbot. Whilst waiting, the detective gave the Head a brief account of the finding of the ruby by Gordon Gay of the Grammar School as he had heard it from that junior.

"Extraordinary!" was the Head's astonished comment. "But even now I do not see any proof that Talbot did drop the—"

"Come in!"

In answer to the Head's call, Toby Marsh entered the study again.

"Which as 'ow Master Talbot ain't to be found, sir," he reported. "But Mister Taggles sez 'e saw 'im go out on 'is bicycle ten minutes ago, sir."

Dr. Holmes frowned with annoyance, and the police-officer looked grim.

"Then that would be the boy who passed me as I entered the gates," he said. "I should imagine he has dis-

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Talbot sprang on his saddle to make off, but he was too late. The burly man's grasp fell on his collar, and he felt himself being wrenched backwards. "Not too quick, young shaver! We want a word with you first!" (See Chapter 4.)

covered his loss, and gone to search for the stone."

The Head nodded. "That is quite likely," he said, frowning thoughtfully. "I really think I had better send a senior to bring him back. Ah, yes! And D'Arcy, who will be able to point out the precise spot where the affair took place."

"That would be excellent!" was the quick reply. "I would like to question this boy also as to the truth of the statements made by the Grammar School boys."

A moment later Dr. Holmes had dispatched Toby for Kildare and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who were not long in making their appearance, both more than a little surprised at the summons.

"D'Arcy," exclaimed the Head grimly, "I understand you were the victim of an assault made by Grammar School boys in Rylcombe Lane this evening. I want you to relate the full circumstances to this gentleman, and answer any questions he may put to you."

D'Arcy jumped, and looked not a little distressed.

"Pray excuse me, Dr. Holmes," he replied gracefully but firmly, "but I would much wathah not say anything about the mattah. I am not complain'in', though I can assuah you my clobber

was uttahly wuined. It was meahly a wotten joko, and I would weally wathah not got the Gwammahwians into twouble, bai jove!"

"Nonsense!" rapped out the Head sharply. "At the moment I am not interested in the assault itself, my boy. And you need not fear that anything you may divulge will lead to the punishment of the culprits. This gentleman is a police official, and he desires to learn the truth of the matter for a very good reason."

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus hesitated a brief moment, but as he met the stern eye of the Head he decided to obey. As he proceeded with his woeful recital Kildare raised a hand to hide a laugh, whilst the Head coughed gently. Only the police-officer appeared to see no humour in Gussy's tale of woe.

"And did you notice if your friend dropped anything during the scuffle, Master D'Arcy?" he asked, as the blushing swell of the Fourth concluded his story. "Something like a bit of red glass, I mean?"

"I do not memebah seeing anything of that description!" replied Gussy warmly. "But, weally, I was too dis-twessed about my clobber to wowwy

about such a twivial mattah, I can assuah you."

The police-officer glanced at the Head, who turned to Kildare.

"I understand that Talbot of the Shell is out of gates," he explained briefly. "We have good reason to believe he has gone to search Rylcombe Lane for an article he lost there this evening. Will you please go and look for the boy, Kildare? Should you find him, I want you to bring him here without delay. D'Arcy, you will go with Kildare and point out to him the spot where you encountered your assailants, and where Talbot is most likely to be found."

"I will go at once, sir!" said the amazed Kildare. "Come, D'Arcy!"

The captain of St. Jim's and the swell of the Fourth proceeded at once to the cycle-shed, and within three minutes were speeding out of the gates. Fifteen minutes later they returned, flushed and breathless, but without Reginald Talbot.

"No, sir!" said Kildare, answering the Head's look of inquiry. "We have been as far as the outskirts of Rylcombe, but we saw nothing of Talbot."

Dr. Holmes frowned, and Detective-Sergeant Day's face was curiously grim as he rose to his feet.

"Then I will detain you no longer,"

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he exclaimed quietly. "The boy has doubtless gone on to the Grammar School, and as I am going that way it is quite possible I shall meet him. Should I not do so, however, I presume you have no objection to my visiting the school again to-morrow morning, sir?"

"None whatever," exclaimed Dr. Holmes, though not very cordially.

When the police-officer had departed the Head turned to Kildare, with a frown of deep annoyance on his worried face.

"Kildare, will you please send Talbot to me the moment he returns?" he ordered sternly. "And kindly ask Mr. Railton to step this way."

And at the Head's nod of dismissal Kildare went along to Mr. Railton's study; whilst Arthur Augustus D'Arcy proceeded thoughtfully towards the junior Common-room.

As he entered quite a number of fellows looked at his excited and worried face curiously.

"Wherefore are that worried frown, Gussy?" inquired Tom Merry, with a grin. "Been on the carpet?"

D'Arcy shook his head slowly. "I am vewwy wovvied about Talbot," he confessed. "I am vewwy much afraid theah is somethin' wadically w'ong, deah boys. Pore old Talbot seems to be in gweat trouble, bai Jove!"

And Arthur Augustus told the astonished juniors who had taken place in the Head's study. There was a buzz of excitement in the Common-room at once.

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry, looking grave. "It certainly does look like trouble for Talbot. So that chap we saw was a plain-clothes bobbie after all, Lowther. But what does it all mean? What sort of a stone, Gussy?"

D'Arcy shook his noble head again. "I am afraid I cannot answah that question, Fom Meswuy," he exclaimed.

"But where evah is Talbot, deah boys?" "That's another question," said Tom Merry, frowning. "He went off in a thumping great hurry somewhere. Anyway, it's nearly locking-up now, so he won't be long."

But Tom Merry was wrong. Locking-up came and went, but Talbot did not put in an appearance. As the minutes flew by the excitement in the Common-room increased, and discussion became rife as to what had become of the missing junior.

Frequently Kildare looked in to ask if the absent junior had returned yet, and each time his face seemed to set more grimly.

As yet no alarm was felt for Talbot's safety. The Shell fellow was well able to take care of himself, and it seemed impossible that anything serious could have happened to him. But when bedtime came at last, without any news of him, there were many anxious faces among the juniors.

"I suppose nobody here can give any information as to where Talbot is?" asked Kildare for the tenth time that evening as he came to shepherd the juniors off to bed.

There was a general shaking of heads, and Kildare set his lips.

"Very well," he said quietly. "And now off to bed, everybody. And no noise, mind."

The juniors trooped off to their respective dormitories silently enough. And after seeing lights out, Kildare returned to the Head's study, where he found Mr. Railton, the school House master, standing with Dr. Holmes by the telephone.

The Head was just replacing the receiver on the rest, and his face was stern and set.

"I suppose you have nothing to re-

port, Kildare?" he asked anxiously, as the captain of St. Jim's entered.

"No, sir. I and several other seniors have made a thorough search, and the fullest inquiries, without result."

"It is extraordinary!" said the Head, with a bewildered glance at Mr. Railton. "I have just received a telephonic communication from Mr. Day, who was here this evening, Kildare. He has called at the Grammar School, and learned that Talbot visited a boy named Gay there this evening, but left the Grammar School about seven o'clock."

"Then he should have been back here long ago, sir!" said Kildare, looking surprised.

"That is so. I cannot understand what has happened to the boy!" exclaimed the Head testily. "However, Mr. Day, the police-officer, has kindly volunteered to make the fullest inquiries at Rylcombe Station and elsewhere, and I think we can do no more now. But someone should, of course, wait up for the boy."

"I will do that!" exclaimed Mr. Railton at once.

"I should be very glad if you would," replied the Head. "I think you had better wait in my study, though, in case any message comes through on the telephone, though I have every hope the boy will return before I retire, and make that unnecessary."

But Dr. Holmes' hope was not realised. An hour later St. Jim's was in darkness, save for the light in the Head's study, where the School House master kept his lonely vigil.

But Mr. Railton was not the only person who waited anxiously for Talbot's return.

In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry, who was perhaps Talbot's closest chum, lay tossing, sleepless, long after his Form-fellows had dropped off to sleep, staring into the darkness, and asking himself all over and over again the question that all St. Jim's had been asking that evening:—

Where was Talbot?

CHAPTER 4.

Captured.

"NOW for that blessed stone! I hope to goodness no stranger's picked the thing up!"

Those muttered remarks were made by Reginald Talbot as he jumped from his bicycle in Rylcombe Lane.

After leaving Tom Merry & Co. at the gates he had ridden at top speed until he reached the spot where the affray with the Grammarians had taken place, and where he hoped to find the missing ruby.

Leaving his machine against a fence, Talbot began a systematic search of the ground, which still bore traces of the brief struggle with Gordon Gay & Co.

But though he scrutinised every inch of the ground in the immediate vicinity the search proved to be fruitless. Still hopeful, Talbot closely examined the grass bordering the roadway and the grass patches on each side. But here again the search was without result.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Talbot at last in dismay. "What rotten luck! If I did drop the thing about here it's gone now, that's certain! What the dickens had I better do, I wonder?"

It became borne in upon Talbot's mind then that he was in an awkward position. He had found the precious stone, and had lost it again, and was to a certain extent responsible.

He wished now that he had given the thing up to the guard of the train, or the stationmaster at Rylcombe, or even into the hands of P.-c. Crump. That important personage might have made a temporary mess of the affair, or he might not; in any case, Talbot's responsibility

regarding the ruby would have ended there and then.

And then another thought entered Talbot's mind.

Supposing his suspicions regarding the two men in the train were proved to be groundless—supposing they really had become possessed of the stone in an honest manner—that it was really their property—what then?

In all probability they had already discovered their loss before the arrival of the train at Westwood. Not finding the ruby in the compartment they had previously occupied, they would at once remember the schoolboy they had left in that compartment. And his school cap would soon lead to his being traced to St. Jim's.

True, he could deny all knowledge of the stone; no one could prove that he had found it. That easy way out of the difficulty did occur to Talbot's mind, but he instantly rejected the dishonourable suggestion with scorn. He would tell the truth, and all he could say was that he had found the stone and lost it again.

But would they believe him? Talbot mentally decided that under the circumstances they would not.

However, there was still a chance: that Gordon Gay & Co. had picked the thing up, and Talbot determined to settle the matter without delay.

"I'll run along to the Grammar School at once," he reflected. "With luck I'll get back before calling-over. Blow it! It's fairly running into the enemies' country. But I'll have to risk a ragging."

A moment later Talbot had mounted his machine again, and twenty minutes later dismounted at the gates of the Grammar School. Then, feeling like Daniel entering the lions' den, he left his bike in the gateway, and was entering the quad, when he saw a tall, strapping senior crossing the quad ahead of him.

"Good egg!" he muttered with satisfaction. "Old Delamere's a good sort, and he'll see me through. Here goes!"

Breaking into a trot, Talbot soon overtook the Grammar School captain, who raised his eyebrows in surprise on recognising the St. Jim's junior.

"Hallo, kid! What are you doing here?" he exclaimed. "Want me?"

"I wanted to see Gordon Gay!" gasped Talbot breathlessly. "But—but, I say, Delamere, I suppose I couldn't come in with you?"

"You mean you want me to be your guide and protector?" said Delamere, with a good-humoured laugh. "Well, come along, kid."

Followed by many curious and not a few hostile glances from the stray Grammarians hanging about the passages, Delamere led the St. Jim's junior to the Fourth Form passage, and after indicating the study occupied by Gordon Gay, he left him, with a smiling nod.

Talbot knocked boldly at the door, and in response to a cheerful "Come in, fat-head!" he entered wearing a faint grin. Gordon Gay and his study-mates were evidently doing their prep, but they jumped up with startled gasps as they recognised the visitor.

"Great Scott!" gasped Gordon Gay. "It—it's Talbot! Here, what the dickens—"

"Pax, you chaps!" cried Talbot hastily, as Frank Monk picked up a ruler, significantly. "I want to speak to you a moment, Gay—no harm."

"All serene, Talbot," said Gordon Gay, standing curiously at Talbot's grave face.

"I think I can guess what you're after. Is it that blessed bit of glass?" Talbot's face cleared.

"So you found it, then?" he ejaculated. "My hat, what a relief—"

"But I haven't got it now," interposed Gay quickly. "You see—"

"What?"

"The police collared it!" replied Gay. And a moment later he was relating to the astounded Talbot what had taken place on the Rylcombe Station platform.

"Anyway, I hope it won't mean trouble for you, old chap," ended up the Grammarian. "But what on earth does all this mean? What the thump does all this fuss about a bit of red glass mean, Talbot? Surely it isn't a real—"

"I don't quite know myself yet," confessed Talbot. "But I've got a good suspicion—"

Talbot paused. He was naturally of a cautious nature, and he decided it unwise to confide in anybody yet. "But I can't stop to have a chat now, old sport," he went on hurriedly. "Anyway, I'm glad it's in safe hands. And now I must be getting back. I'm jolly late as it is."

"We'll escort you to the gates, or you'll want carrying home on a stretcher," grinned Gordon Gay. "Come on, you fellows!"

Talbot parted from the cheerful Grammarians at the gates, and he was whistling cheerily as he mounted his machine and started back along the leafy lane in the gathering dusk.

The news that the ruby was safe in the hands of the police was good news indeed, and even the certainty of being late for call-over did not worry the junior just then.

Talbot had covered half the distance, when he slowed down a little as he noted the figures of two men walking in the centre of the road ahead. Ringing his bell, he swerved a little to pass them, when one of the men called out to him.

What the question was the junior did not catch, but unobtrusively, and perhaps unwisely, he applied his brakes and dismounted.

It was too dusky under the trees to see the faces of the men, but Talbot casually noted that one was a much bigger fellow than his companion.

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" he asked cheerfully.

The men approached quickly, and it was the big man who answered.

"Could you kindly put us right for St. Jim's College?" he granted sturdily. "There's a young feller there we wants to see most particularly—"

The fellow stopped short suddenly, and peered eagerly into Talbot's face. Then he started violently.

"Why, Meeson," he yelled hoarsely, "if it ain't the very chap 'isself! It's the young 'ound—"

The man broke off again—this time with a savage snarl, as Talbot made as if to spring into the saddle.

Talbot had suddenly recognised the men, and instinctively read danger in the eyes of the speaker. But he was too late. The man's grasp fell upon his collar, and his bike fell with a crash as he himself was wrenched backwards roughly.

"Not yet, young shaver!" growled the big man fiercely. "We want a word with you first!"

Talbot's eyes gleamed, and he tried to wrench himself free angrily. But the man swiftly released his grip of the junior's collar, and gripped both his wrists in a vice-like grip that bit cruelly into the flesh.

"Let go! What does this mean?" panted Talbot furiously, though he was well aware what it meant and what the men wanted. "You'll suffer for this—this outrage!"

The bullying ruffian's answer was to twist the junior's wrists until Talbot had to clench his teeth to keep back a cry of pain. But at that moment the man called Meeson interrupted.

"Stop that, Brent, you idiot!" he muttered warningly. "We've no time for that foolery! No need to hurt the kid, either, if he's sensible and dubs up. Get him out of this before someone comes along. I'll look after 'is bike. Look lively, man!"

"Right-ho!" growled Brent with an unpleasant grin at Talbot. "Kim on, kid!"

And before Talbot knew what was happening his wrists were released, the fellow's arms swept round him, pinning his arms helplessly to his sides. Then he was borne like a child into the deep recesses of the trees and thickets bordering the lane.

Not until he was well out of sight and hearing of the lane did the fellow stop, and then he lowered the writhing junior without slackening his grip in the slightest.

Next moment Meeson crushed his way through the thickets. Stepping forward, the fellow peered closely into the junior's pale, twisted face. His thin features were twisted into a grin; but as Talbot noted the hard, ominous glitter in his eyes the junior's heart sank, and he mentally voted him the more dangerous ruffian of the two, for all his apparently harmless manner.

"Now, my young friend," he exclaimed briefly, "you know what we want to see. We want what you picked up in the train to-night—that bit of red crystal. It belongs to us, an' we mean to 'ave it. We means you no harm, providing you gives it up without any trouble. That's the programme."

Talbot shrugged his shoulders. "You won't get anything out of me by threats," he muttered through clenched teeth. "I haven't got the ruby. I've lost it. And—"

"Stow that!" was the quick, threatening answer. "You must take us for mugs to expect us to swallow that yarn, you young fool! Hold 'im a minute, Brent. I'll soon see if he's got the thing on 'im!"

And, stepping forward, Meeson ran his fingers deftly through Talbot's pockets, and over every inch of the junior's clothes where the ruby could possibly be hidden. He gave it up at last with a savage and disappointed imprecation, and his eyes were glinting dangerously as he faced the Shell fellow.

"It ain't 'ere, but we've got to 'ave it!" he said savagely. "I knows a little place where we can talk it over quietly with 'im. 'Old him down."

As he heard the words a cold chill of dread filled Talbot's heart, and he struggled frantically, expecting every moment the dull blow of a cudgel or life-preserver on his defenceless head.

But what did come was utterly unexpected.

Something was thrust over his mouth and nose—a rag soaked in something that had a strong, sickly odour.

Chloroform!

The truth flashed in upon Talbot's mind, and he held his breath and struggled and kicked frenziedly; but it was useless.

"You—you scoundrels!" he gasped.

"You—?"

His senses swam; the figures of the men, the trees, and thickets whirled dizzily above his staring eyes, and then blackness descended, and he remembered no more.

CHAPTER 5.

MERRY A Cloud.

TOM MERRY'S first thought as he opened his eyes at rising-bell the next morning was of Talbot.

But as he glanced eagerly across at his chum's bed his heart sank. The bed was empty, and very plainly had not been slept in. Talbot had not returned.

Full of vague forebodings, the junior captain of St. Jim's climbed out of bed and was beginning to dress, when Kildare looked in. As his eyes fell upon Talbot's empty bed his face became grave.

"I thought I'd look in before going down, Merry," he exclaimed; "but I see Talbot hasn't returned."

"No; worse luck. I suppose you've heard nothing further of him, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

"Not since last night. He was last seen at the Grammar School, and left there at about seven, I believe—"

Kildare stopped suddenly, as though it dawned upon him he was saying too much.

"The—the Grammar School!" echoed Tom Merry, in astonishment. "But what on earth was he doing there, Kildare?"

Kildare did not answer that question. To the junior's surprise, he turned abruptly and left the dormitory.

"My only hat!" muttered Tom Merry, with a frown. "This business licks me altogether. What does Kildare know, I wonder?"

Tom was preoccupied and gloomy as he resumed his dressing amid a buzz of excited discussion as the other fellows awoke to find that Talbot was still missing. Quickly Tom Merry dressed, and when he was joined by Manners and Monty Lowther the three hurried downstairs, anxious to learn any fresh news of the missing junior.

But there they learned nothing beyond the fact that Mr. Raiton had waited up until a late hour, and that the police had searched without finding any trace of the missing junior.

"I don't like it at all," confessed Tom Merry, as the Terrible Three were discussing the matter with Blake & Co. in the quad after breakfast. "What on earth did that police Johnny want with old Talbot in the first place? And then there's that yarn of Gussy's, about a stone. What sort of a giddy stone was it, Gussy?"

"Ask me another, bai Jove!" answered Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. "It is a most remarkable—Hallo, dear boys, there's that policeman fella again!"

Crossing from the gates was a well-built man, dressed in blue serge suit and bowler-hat. Blake, Herries, and Digby, who had not yet seen Detective-Sergeant Day, were staring with interest after him. Tom Merry sighted another figure advancing towards him.

"Hallo, here's Miss Marie!" he murmured. "She looks jolly upset, too."

Marie Rivers had known Talbot in the old dark days, when he had been a member of the famous Angel Alley gang of crooks, of which John Rivers, Marie's father, had been the leader. It was long ago, though, since John Rivers had renounced the life of crime and become a respected member of the community—as also, of course, had Reginald Talbot.

But the friendship formed in those dark days had ripened into something more than mutual regard and admiration between the school nurse and the handsome Shell fellow. And so it was perhaps no wonder that Marie Rivers

was now "looking upset," as Tom Merry had put it.

"Tell me, Tom Merry," she asked, her face pale and agitated, "is there any fresh news of Talbot? I only heard this morning that he was missing, and I was just hurrying over to ask if anything further had come to light. What can have happened to him?"

Tom Merry's eyes were troubled.

"I do not know—I wish I did," he replied quietly. "But I don't think we need worry just yet, Miss Marie. He went out on his bike, and it's quite possible he met with a slight accident somewhere out of reach of phone or telegraph."

Marie Rivers nodded slowly.

"Yes, I suppose that is possible," she murmured. "But you know Talbot has many enemies, Tom Merry. And I cannot help feeling something horrible has happened. You will let me know, won't you, if any news comes—bad or good?"

"I certainly will, Miss Marie. But don't worry over-much. Talbot can take care of himself, and he'll probably turn up this morning, lively as ever."

But, when Marie Rivers had fitted away, Tom Merry did not look as if he himself placed much reliance on the hopes he had held out to Marie Rivers.

And could he have heard the discussion taking place at that moment in the Head's study he would have felt more uneasy than ever on his absent chum's behalf.

As on the previous evening, Detective-Sergeant Day had been shown straight into the Head's study; but this time his somewhat hard face wore a particularly grim and suspicious expression as he took the chair indicated by Dr. Holmes.

"I understand this boy Talbot has not yet returned, Dr. Holmes?" he began politely.

"No, he has not," replied the Head, with a harassed frown. "I do not know what to make of it. His disappearance just now is most remarkable."

"Perhaps it is not so remarkable when one considers the facts, sir," ventured the police-officer drily.

"What do you mean, pray?" exclaimed the Head sharply.

"The police-officer coughed.

"This morning, sir, I have had some conversation with Inspector Skeat, of the Wayland police, in regard to this boy Talbot. He has given me some remarkable information in relation to the past history of the boy—information that, as far as I am concerned, has altered the whole complexion of the case."

The Head bit his lip, and his kind face clouded as he moved uneasily in his chair.

"Pray proceed," he said quietly.

"I am given to understand, sir, that, before coming to this school, the boy was a member of a notorious gang of criminals. In those days he was known as the prince of cracksmen. Not only was he a skilful cracksmen himself, but he was the brains of the gang to which he belonged."

"That—that is quite true," muttered the Head quickly. "But that past is dead and done with. You cannot surely cannot think I would suspect the boy of complicity in the jewel robbery? He has lived down and atoned a thousand times for the past. He has given every proof of a high and honourable character, and I have every confidence in his sterling honesty and integrity."

The police-officer coughed gently as he rose to his feet.

"Then I fear, sir, that the news I

have for you will prove doubly unpleasant. The case is in my hands, and I cannot afford to ignore the evidence nor to delay action. I came here this morning to acquaint you with the fact that we are searching diligently for the boy, and that in all probability he will be arrested when—"

"What—what! Arrest Talbot? Good gracious!"

The Head gripped the arms of his chair, and half-rose to his feet in sheer amazement and distress of mind.

"Yes, sir; in view of the exceptional circumstances, we are reluctantly compelled to take that step. He will be arrested on suspicion of complicity in the theft of Lady Winington's jewels. I trust, sir, that should the whereabouts of the boy become known to you, you will let us know as early as possible."

There was a pause.

"That will be my duty, and I shall certainly do so," replied Dr. Holmes coldly at last.

"Thank you, Dr. Holmes. I wish you good-morning, sir!"

As the door closed behind the detective, the Head sank back in his chair, with a deep sigh. He jumped up with a start, however, as a sudden startled gasp, followed by a scuffle, came from the passage.

The Head strode to the door and looked out quickly. Standing outside the door was the detective, who was staring in astonishment along the passage, and, following his glance, the Head was just in time to see a pair of fat legs vanish round a corner ahead.

"It was a boy," explained Mr. Day grimly. "He was apparently listening at the keyhole. I stumbled over the young rascal as I came out."

The Head frowned darkly, and stepped into the passage.

"Come back, boy!" he called out angrily. "Come back at once!"

But Baggy Trumble—for it was he—did not come back. The Peeping Tom of the Fourth had a suspicion that the Head would strongly object to a junior listening at the keyhole of his study door, and he had no intention of coming back. He was also in too great a hurry to impart to all and sundry the astonishing news he had overheard regarding Reginald Talbot.

And this he did very quickly. Wildly excited and nearly bursting with the great news, he rushed off first to the junior Common-room, where quite a number of Shell and Fourth-Formers were standing about waiting for the bell for morning classes to ring. And from there the news quickly spread until all St. Jim's was buzzing with the startling story.

Talbot of the Shell was wanted by the police on a charge of complicity in a jewel robbery at Abbotsford!

CHAPTER 6.

Talbot's Defiance.

REGINALD TALBOT came to himself slowly and dazedly. He was shivering and aching in every limb, and his head throbbed wildly. His first conscious thought was of wonder. Where was he? What had happened?

Half-dazed and stupefied as he was, it was difficult to think coherently. Then suddenly the memory of his struggle with the two men returned with a rush, and he glanced around him dizzily.

But though he strained his burning eyes he could see nothing. Around him was the blackness of a pall; of the two men, the thickets, the trees and sky he could see nothing.

It was quickly borne in upon Talbot's

mind, however, that he was not lying in the open air at all. He was lying upon a hard stone floor, and the apartment he was in—apartment it was—was damp and musty, like a dungeon.

And then Talbot made another discovery. Feeling a dull, aching pain in his wrists, he attempted to move them, only to find they were tightly tied together with cord.

He was a prisoner. But where? Fortunately, Talbot's legs were not bound, and he staggered to his feet. Barely had he taken two steps when he was brought up against a solid wall of stone. Turning, he moved blindly in the opposite direction, when he stumbled over stone steps, and only saved himself from going headlong by flinging out his bound hands in front of him.

Still puzzled and perplexed, Talbot continued his investigations. It soon became clear to him that he was not in a room at all. The floor was barely four feet wide, while its length began at the stone steps and ended in the entrance to what close examination proved to be a tunnel leading into the bowels of the earth.

"My hat!" muttered Talbot, in surprise. "This beats the band. It's the entrance to the underground passage beneath the old monk's cell in Rylcombe Wood."

The junior was very familiar with the place, and he experienced a feeling of relief and hope at the discovery.

The tunnel, he knew, led a considerable distance underground. It ended in the labyrinth of vaults and passages beneath the old castle on Wayland Hill.

But to escape that way, Talbot knew also, would be practically hopeless. Bound as he was, and with no lights, he would probably wander about in that maze until he became lost and dropped from exhaustion.

His only chance, the junior realised, was to escape by the trap-door over his head. When Talbot had visited the place last, the square opening had been open to the sky, and he surmised that the rascals had placed a heavy stone over it.

Talbot felt his way up the stone steps until his head touched the stone covering the aperture. Lowering his head, he placed his shoulders against the stone, and, bunching his muscles, prepared to lift.

But before he could do this he suddenly relaxed and stood listening intently. From above came the sound of footsteps and harsh voices.

Talbot's heart sank. To him it could only mean one thing. His captors were returning.

"What rotten luck!" breathed Talbot. He stepped swiftly down the steps and flung himself on the stone floor in a helpless and dejected attitude.

An instant a moment too soon. From above came the harsh grating of stone on stone; then came a dull, heavy thud, and a flood of dazzling sunshine shot through the opening.

Almost instantly a dark figure appeared at the opening, and next moment Meeson, his thin-faced assailant of the previous night, dropped down the steps, and stood smiling down at him scornfully. His companion, Brent, followed him through the opening, but stopped at the top of the steps, evidently on the watch.

"So you've come round, my young friend?" exclaimed Meeson.

Talbot glared up at him.

"You'll be made to suffer for this, you scoundrels!"

Meeson laughed softly, and seated himself on the steps.

"So you've not altered your tune, my young fighting-cock?" he sneered. "I

should have thought a night in this pleasant place would have knocked some of the spirit out of you. But we're in a hurry—me and my mate. Our business ain't finished in these parts until we've got that bit of stone back we lost. And that depends on you, my lad. We're staying 'ere until you tell us where to find it."

"Then you'll stay here for ever?"

"I don't think so," was the significant answer. "I expect you'll be feeling 'ungry and thirsty by dinner-time, youngster, and will talk differently then."

Talbot gave a start.

"So that's the game, is it?" he muttered, in a low tone. "You mean to starve me into submission?"

"You've hit it, young feller. Neither bite nor sup will you taste until you're put on the track of that ruby," answered Meeson slowly and deliberately.

Talbot's face paled a little as he glanced into the hard, unrelenting face of the man.

His position, unless he could find a means of escape from the clutches of the scoundrels, was hopeless indeed.

"You can starve me—do your worst, and be hanged to you!" he said, through clenched teeth. "I've told you I've lost the stone, and it's true. If I wanted it myself I could not get it. But as for starving me, perhaps you won't get the chance to do that."

Meeson's glance strayed to the dark entrance to the tunnel, and he grinned.

"If you're thinkin' of escapin' along that tunnel you'd better think agen," he said. "If it was lit up with electric light, you might stand a chance. But unless you're lookin' for a living grave I'd advise you to stay as you is."

"I'm not thinking of trying it," said Talbot, with a curl of the lip. "But do you think they'll not miss me at school? Or do you imagine they'll not search for me? When they find my bike—"

"They'll find it where we hid it in the river," chuckled the ruffian. "But they'll have to dredge the blessed river to find it, take my word for that. Do you suppose we was fool souch as to leave a clue like that behind? What do you say to that, mister?"

Talbot's face fell. He had not given the scoundrels credit for such cunning. Then, after a pause, his jaw set squarely.

"I say what I said before," he exclaimed doggedly. "You can do your worst, and be hanged to you!"

"That's final, then?"

"Yes."

"So much the worse for you, then!" said the man savagely, as he rose to his feet. "We'll leave you to think it over now. But we'll be back about one o'clock, and you'll be wanting some dinner by then, an' p'raps you'll be willin' to think about it."

Talbot did not answer. He was afraid of betraying the satisfaction the man's last words had aroused in him. He had hardly hoped that the men would leave him again so soon, and his hopes of escape rose.

With a deep breath of relief, Talbot watched as the men climbed through the opening and vanished from sight.

And next moment the heavy stone dropped into place with a hollow thud, and the blackness as of the tomb descended on Talbot once again.

CHAPTER 7.

Talbot's Resolve.

TALBOT allowed a long interval to elapse before devoting his attention to the trap-door above his head; he was taking no chances of the men still being in the rear vicinity. Then, clambering to his feet, he stumbled on the stone steps until he

reached the third from the top, and there he paused, listening intently.

No sound came to his straining ears, and, taking a deep breath, he braced his muscles and placed his shoulders under the huge stone. Clenching his teeth hard, he drove upwards with all the strength at his disposal. But the flagstone did not move.

Panting and exhausted, Talbot rested a while, and tried again, but without any result. But as the third attempt the stone shifted sideways. It was only the slightest fraction of an inch, but it gave him renewed hope, and after that he set to work with savage determination.

Alternately driving at the stone and resting, Talbot worked away until his shoulders ached with the terrific strain, and his back felt as though it were breaking. But it was not without result.

At the end of half an hour the stone had slid aside six inches. At the end of an hour an opening wide enough to permit the plucky junior to escape had been made.

But it left Talbot feeling a physical wreck, and it was with his last ounce of strength that he hauled himself out into the bright morning sunshine, and sank breathless and spent on the grass-grown flagstones of the old monk's cell.

For fully five minutes he lay there motionless. As his strength returned he staggered to his feet, and drew into his lungs a deep breath of the fresh morning air.

"That's better!" he muttered thankfully. "But, by jingo, that thumping stone wanted some shifting. And now for getting my hands free."

Talbot moved to the broken wall of the roofless old cell, and, selecting a stone, he began to rub the cords that bound his wrists, backwards and forwards along its jagged edge.

After some minutes' brisk sawing, the last strand parted, and he was free.

Only stopping a moment to rub his swollen wrists, the Shell fellow turned his back on his recent prison, and started off through the deep woods at a trot. He realised that the sooner he made from that locality the better.

As he emerged into Rylcombe Lane he paused, debating in his mind whether to go on to the local police-station and report what had happened, or hasten to St. Jim's.

"I think I'd better make for home," he decided, at last. "I reckon they'll be more than a little anxious about me. The Head will soon put the police on the track of those brutes—though I don't suppose the worthy bobbies will believe a word of my yarn in any case."

And having made his decision, Talbot turned his face in the direction of St. Jim's. As he walked briskly down Rylcombe Lane he laughed softly to himself, as he reflected what a sensation his story would create among his schoolfellow. He little dreamed how the position really stood.

But he was soon to know. For, as the gates of the school came in sight, he noted a familiar, girlish figure walking towards him, and his face lit up eagerly.

"Marie!" he exclaimed gladly. "So Marie's to be the first to welcome the wanderer home. Poor old girl, though. I bet she's been worried no end over my absence."

And, forgetful of his grimy and dishevelled appearance, Talbot broke into a run, eager to greet his girl chum.

Marie Rivers did not see him until he was close. She was walking slowly, with bent head, and her face was pale and careworn.

"Marie!" It was Talbot's voice, and she heard it. The girl gave a violent start, and looked up swiftly. But as she

recognised the junior running towards her, she gave a queer cry of amazement and intense gladness.

"Toff! Is it really you?"

"It's the Toff right enough," laughed Talbot ruefully. "Though I don't look much of a toff now, do I?"

Marie warmly returned the pressure of the junior's hand, and her eyes were shining.

"Oh, Heaven you are safe, Toff! Oh, I have been dreadfully anxious about you. But—what has happened? Tell me—where have you been?"

Talbot laughed lightly.

"I have been spending an uncomfortable night in the old monk's cell in Rylcombe Woods," he said.

"What—what do you mean?"

"It's been my turn to be kidnapped, Marie," smiled Talbot.

Marie Rivers gave a quick start, and eyed the Shell fellow in alarm.

"You—you don't mean—surely not by any of the old gang—Dawlish, or anyone we know?"

"No; the men who captured me are strangers to me, and I to them," replied Talbot.

And he briefly related to the astounded girl all that had happened since his precipitate entry into the railway carriage at Wayland Junction the previous evening.

But though Marie Rivers listened breathlessly, Talbot failed to see the strangely troubled look in her eyes.

"And now I'll be getting in," he ended cheerfully. "It's about dinner-time now, and I'm famished, I assure you, Marie. But I'd better see the Head first, and spin him the yarn."

Marie Rivers gave a little dismayed gasp, and laid a detaining hand on Talbot's arm.

"But—but you cannot—you must not enter the school!" she exclaimed, with a frightened glance around. "Don't you know—"

"But why not?"

"Because the police are searching for you, Toff. You would at once be detained and arrested. Oh, Toff, it is horrible!"

And, in her turn, Marie told her astounded chum all that had happened in his absence, and when she had finished, Talbot laughed mirthlessly.

"The fools!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I wonder if these local police can help blundering? But surely I can easily clear myself!"

"You could explain, but would they believe you? Dr. Holmes would, and so would all your friends here. But to the police your story would be too wildly improbable to be true."

"You called them, Toff. And you know they would never trouble to investigate the story. You would be arrested, and the two scoundrels would remain at large. Oh, what can you do, Toff?"

Talbot frowned thoughtfully.

But a moment's reflection told him that Marie's sage view was quite right. His story was so improbable that the local police would regard it as an absurd fairy tale, trumped up to save himself. They would never trouble to visit the monk's cell, and, as Marie said, the men would remain at large, and he would be arrested.

He could not afford to take the risk—until the scoundrels were captured he must keep out of the way.

And with this thought there came a plan into Talbot's mind—a plan whereby he hoped to trap the kidnappers, and thus clear his own good name.

He turned suddenly to Marie.

"What is the time, Marie?" he asked tensely. "My watch has stopped."

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Marie Rivers consulted her wrist-watch.

"Half-past twelve," she replied, with a questioning glance at Talbot. "But why—what—"

"Then I must lose no time," said Talbot swiftly. "At all costs I must reach the monk's cell before one o'clock. Good-bye, Marie, for the present. I'll see you—"

"The monk's cell?" echoed Marie Rivers in alarm. "But why?"

"To keep an appointment with my late captors," returned Talbot, with a grim smile. "I'm going to turn the tables on the rotters. They kidnapped me, and, with a bit of luck, I'll return the compliment."

"But the danger, Toff! You must not! What can you do against two grown men?"

"If I'm smart, there'll be no danger, never fear. Good-bye for the present, Marie."

And Talbot was turning away, when his girl chum grasped his arm appealingly.

"Don't do it, Toff. It is madness!" she pleaded. "Why run such risks when you have plenty of good chums here who would be only too willing to help. If you are bent on your plan, why not enlist the services of Tom Merry and his friends? Let me tell them?"

Talbot paused at that. He would have preferred not to have brought anyone else into the business. But his common-sense told him that Marie was right.

He stood a moment, thinking swiftly.

"You are quite right, Marie," he muttered, at length. "Tell Merry to come to the old monk's cell in Rylcombe Woods, but tell him to scout round first until he sees me. I'll explain everything to him then."

And after hurriedly outlining his plan to his girl chum, Talbot sped away at top speed along Rylcombe Lane.

Marie Rivers watched him for a brief moment, and then, with a heavy heart, she retraced her footsteps, and went in search of Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 8.

The Informers.

"WHAT do you chaps make of that?"

Barely had the light footsteps of the school nurse died away in the direction of the gates, when three excited and amazed faces peered over the thick hedge bordering the lane.

Racke, Crooke, and Mellish had been taking advantage of the brief recess between classes and dinner to have a quiet smoke in the secluded corner of the playing-fields between the high school wall and the hedge.

They had watched the meeting of Talbot and Marie Rivers, though they had only caught brief snatches of the conversation.

It was Gerald Crooke who asked the question, and his eyes were ablaze with tense excitement and unholy triumph.

"What do you chaps make of that?" he repeated, glaring with bitter enmity after the rapidly retreating form of Reginald Talbot. "So that rotten, cheating cad must be hiding somewhere about here. Let's go after him and find out—quick!"

"But what about dinner, ass?"

"Hang dinner!" snarled Crooke. "Isn't it worth missing dinner to get our own back out of that beastly cad?"

"But what's the object if we do find out—tell the police?" asked Racke.

"Of course. It's only our duty to do
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that," said Crooke, with a hypocritical smirk.

Aubrey Racke grinned. He was fairly well acquainted with the depth and extent of Crooke's sense of "duty."

"Oh, all right, then. It'll be a smack in the eye for Tom Merry and the rest of his rotten pals, and I've a good few scores to settle with Talbot myself. Come on, Mellish!"

And the three shady rascals crushed through a gap in the hedge, and set off at top speed after the distant figure of Reginald Talbot.

Racke & Co. were not athletes; they were not in good condition, either. And very soon all three had fellows to mend.

"Oh dear!" panted Percy Mellish, at length. "Do stop, you chaps! I'm fagged-out! We'll never catch the cad up!"

Glad enough of an excuse to stop, Racke and Crooke dropped to a walk, panting and wheezing like broken-winded cabhorses.

Ahead of them the figure of Talbot was but a speck on the white road in the distance, and they realised they could never reduce that distance. Even as they slowed down the dark speck disappeared altogether.

"Gone into Rylcombe Woods!" panted Crooke fiercely. "What putrid luck! It'll be worse than looking for a needle in a haystack, searching for the cad in there!"

"I say, though," cut in Mellish eagerly. "I heard Talbot saying something about the monk's cell. Supposing he's—"

"The very place!" ejaculated Crooke delightedly. "Good for you, Mellish, old sport. That's just where he would be hiding. My hat, we've got him! Buck up!"

And, putting on speed again, the cads of V.C. Jim's ambled on with renewed encouragement. Reaching the spot where they judged their quarry had disappeared, they dived into the woods, and were soon tramping through the gloomy thickets.

As they neared the clearing in which stood the monk's cell, Crooke held up a warning hand.

"Carefully now!" he breathed. "If the brute spots us, he'll most likely get the wind up, and bunk for it!"

Very cautiously Crooke trod forward until he reached the fringe of trees, and from the shelter of a thicket peered into the clearing. Then he gave a muttered grunt of satisfaction.

Talbot was indeed there. He was feverishly engaged in rolling a heavy stone towards the dark opening in the floor of the ruins.

Crooke watched him with glittering eyes for a moment; then he turned eagerly to his pals.

"That's good enough!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "And now we've got to do it as hard as we can pelt to Rylcombe post-office, and phone the Wayland police up. Come on—quietly!"

"Think the police jonnies will swallow it, though?" grinned Racke.

"Not if they knew the message came from us," chuckled Crooke. "But it isn't going to come from us—officially. I'm going to be Dr. Holmes—speaking from our respected Head's study—for one afternoon only. And now buck up!"

And chuckling softly, Gerald Crooke led the way back through the tangled undergrowth. And five minutes later the three cads were speeding towards Rylcombe post-office.

Meanwhile, blissfully unconscious of the treacherous plot hatched for his undoing, Reginald Talbot was making brisk preparations for his "appointment" with the kidnappers.

It was already close on one o'clock, and, knowing that at any moment now the men might return, he set to work feverishly.

His first task was to replace the huge slab of stone over the opening; and this was no easy job. But the urgency of the case gave him added strength, and after a strenuous struggle the stone was levered into place.

After which he rolled several smaller stones from the shattered walls of the ruins, and left them in a casual, though hazy, position by the trap-door.

Then, his preparations being completed, he hid behind a mass of masonry to watch and wait.

His plan for turning the tables on the two rascals was simplicity itself—in theory, at least.

It was to wait until the men had lowered themselves through the opening, and then to rush from his hiding-place and slam the heavy stone into place, afterwards piling other loose stones on top to make escape impossible.

Five minutes after Talbot had taken up his position behind the pile of masonry, he heard heavy footsteps crashing through the wood. A moment later Meeson, followed by his burly companion, entered the clearing.

Trembling with excitement and suspense, Talbot watched as the big man sullenly bent his massive shoulders, and under his powerful grasp the stone lifted easily. And then, to the junior's intense relief, they left it standing on its side.

But next moment Talbot's heart sank. Meeson dropped down the steps and disappeared, but his companion did not follow—not then.

He stood furtively glancing round the clearing, obviously keeping watch, until, quite suddenly, there came an angry shout from below. It was a shout of fury and alarm, and it told Talbot that his absence was discovered.

Evidently, however, the man above did not understand the situation for the moment. He leaned over the opening, and shouted a question to Meeson below. And in that instant Talbot saw his chance, and took it.

He sprang to his feet, and, with a wild yell, reached the unsuspecting man. Then, with one frantic push, he sent the fellow headlong down the steps.

Turning swiftly, he grasped the heavy stone, and wrenched with all his strength.

But Talbot's luck deserted him there. The huge stone moved, balanced a brief moment on its edge, and dropped back to its former position.

Desperately, Talbot grasped it again. But he was too late, for in that instant an unexpected thing happened.

From the gloom below came a savage shout, a sudden spurt of flame, and something pinged past Talbot's ear unpleasantly close.

It was so unpleasantly close, indeed, that Talbot spun round involuntarily, slipped on the moss-grown flags, and tumbled headlong through the aperture in his turn.

He dropped sprawling half-way down the stairs, and rolled to the bottom. Scarcely had he ceased to roll when he was gripped, a heavy knee was pressed on his chest, and rough hands gripped him by the throat.

"Got you, my pippin!" came Brent's voice hoarsely. "We'll watch you don't escape us agen, hang you!"

And Reginald Talbot realised that his plan had failed.

CHAPTER 9. To the Rescue.

READY, you chaps?" Tom Merry asked the question impatiently as Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came up to the Terrible Three outside the gates.

As can be imagined, Marie Rivers had lost no time in seeking Tom Merry, and imploring that he should accompany and relieve junior to hasten to Talbot's help.

And, needless to say, Tom Merry had required little impugning to do that. Five minutes after Marie had given him Talbot's message he had rounded up his own study-mates, Manners and Lowther, and the chums of Study No. 6. Then hasty preparations were made for the expedition.

The juniors realised, of course, that to go out of the gates in a body at that time of day would arouse comment, and at Tom Merry's suggestion they had separated, and left the house by devious routes.

"I thought you chaps were never coming!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with a questioning glance at the heated and somewhat wrathful faces of Blake & Co. "What's happened? Railton spotted you?"

Blake grunted, and glared at George Herries.

"No; but that silly chump Herries wanted to bring his blessed bulldog, and arguing with him delayed us. As if that mongrel Towser was ever any good at anything except tracking down bones and blasters!"

"Look here, Blake!" began Herries heatedly. "You know jolly well old Towser's as good as any bloodhound, and I've a jolly good mind to go back and fetch him now!"

"Bai Jove, if you do, Hewwies, then I uttally wufuse to accompany the party! That howwid dog has no respect wathafvash for a fellah's trousers, and—"

"You silly ass, dry up!" interrupted Tom Merry curtly. "We've no time for that rat now! Are you chaps ready?"

"Ready for anything!" said Blake grimly. "Though I'm blessed if I quite know what we've got to do! What is the programme, Tommy?"

"I'm not quite clear myself," muttered Tom Merry sharply. "From what I can make out, old Talbot's been kidnapped by two men in the old monk's cell in Rylcombe Wood, that he's managed to get free, that he's gone back to tackle two desperate men single-handed, and that the sooner we go to his help the better."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!" "Then come on!"

And without further ado the seven juniors started off down Rylcombe Lane at a brisk trot, and ten minutes later had plunged into the woods.

Tom Merry's curt reminder had brought the family squabbles of Blake & Co. to an abrupt conclusion, and all the party now looked grimly determined and ready for anything as they tramped on through the thickets.

Presently Tom Merry called a halt. "Better do a bit of scouting now," he said quietly. "We don't want to barge in and spoil Talbot's plans. I vote you take your chaps round and approach the ruins from the rear, Blake. I don't suppose—What's that?"

From the gloomy depths of the woods before them came a sharp, distant crack; it was the ominous and unmistakable sound of a shot, and a chilling fear entered the juniors' hearts as they heard it.

"That came from the direction of the

ruins," muttered Tom Merry tensely. "My hat, you chaps! Are we too late? Quick!"

Disregarding all caution now, and with hearts beating faster than usual, the alarmed juniors followed Tom Merry as he crashed through thickets and brambles, caring nothing for scratches and tumbles, but only anxious to be in time to help Talbot.

To them that single shot could only mean one thing—that Talbot's plan had failed, and that he was in danger.

Tom Merry was the first to reach the fringe of trees and bushes ringing the clearing, and there some instinct bade him pause.

Holding up a warning hand to his chums behind, he peered through the foliage into the clearing.

Since the sound of that shot a deep and ominous silence had fallen upon the woods; and now, as the juniors peered cautiously into the clearing, they saw no signs of life or movement in or around the ruins.

"Blessed if I understand this," muttered Tom Merry, mystified. "I'd swear that shot came from hereabouts. Looks to me as—Hallo!"

Tom Merry gripped Blake's wrist almost convulsively.

Through a gap in the shattered wall of the monk's cell, that only a moment ago had been silent and deserted, could be seen the figures of two men, while their harsh voices came clearly to the juniors' ears.

"Great Scott!" murmured Blake blankly. "Where the dickens—"


"Quiet, and keep out of sight!" breathed Tom Merry softly. "They must have come up through that entrance to the secret passage. Look, they're covering up the opening with slabs of stone."

"Then depend upon it they've got old Talbot in there!" muttered Jack Blake excitedly.

"When I give the word, go for 'em!" muttered Tom Merry grimly. "Blake, Herries, Lowther, and I had better tackle the big chap. He looks a hefty brute, and—Here they come! Down!"

Fortunately, the thick, green foliage well-screened the hiding juniors from the view of the approaching men, who glanced round furtively as they crossed the boulder-strewn grass.

With hearts thumping a little, the seven juniors crouched down and waited for Tom Merry's signal.



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It came at last. He allowed them to approach to within a couple of yards, and then his voice rang out clearly.

"Now, you chaps! At 'em, St. Jim's!"

The two men stepped back with savage and alarmed exclamations as the seven determined juniors hurled themselves upon them.

Crash!

The smaller man went to earth, and rolled over and over in the undergrowth with D'Arcy, Manners, and Digby clinging to him like terriers.

The fellow was thin and undersized; but had the three juniors hoped to win an easy victory they would have been speedily disillusioned. He was wiry and active as a cat, and fought furiously, striving to reach his pocket.

Again and again the three juniors pinned him down, but each time he wriggled free.

But at last Digby pinned him against a tree trunk, and with D'Arcy and Manners clinging to his arms, his wriggles availed him little after that.

But Tom Merry and the other three juniors were not so lucky.

The big fellow was a man of prodigious strength. At the first onslaught by the four, he merely staggered backwards a step, and swinging his arms round, swept Blake and Lowther crashing into the bushes.

They were up again in a moment, however, and returned grimly to the help of Tom Merry and Herries, who were clinging to him fiercely, despite the rain of blows they were subjected to.

The struggle that followed was one which none of the juniors are likely to forget. Backwards and forwards the fellow lurched in the tangled undergrowth, with the plucky juniors striving desperately to bring him down.

And then, quite suddenly, D'Arcy lent a hand.

As the tramping feet came near him, he suddenly released his grip on the smaller man, and, grasping the other fellow's legs, he tugged with all his strength.

Crash!

The burly ruffian went to earth, and the four juniors swarmed over him. They had the advantage now, and they intended to make the most of it.

And just at that moment other help came from an unexpected source.

There came the sound of heavy footsteps through the woods, and Inspector Skeat and a constable, followed by Detective-Sergeant Day, entered the clearing from behind the juniors.

"Bai Jove, huwahh!" cried D'Arcy. "It's the police, deah boys!"

At the word "police," the captives increased their struggles frantically, but as they saw it was too late, they subsided, with savage imprecations.

"Quick, inspector!" panted Tom Merry. "Collar this brute. He's too much for us."

For a brief moment the three newcomers stared in astonishment at the scene, and then Detective-Sergeant Day stopped and glanced quickly into the furtive faces of the captives.

Then he turned and whispered something to Inspector Skeat, and a moment later the handcuffs clicked on the wrists of the ruffians.

"And, now, what does this business mean?" he demanded, turning to Tom Merry. "What—"

But Tom Merry hadn't waited to answer questions; he was too anxious to know what had happened to Talbot.

With Blake and the others at his heels, he dashed across to the ruins, and a

(Continued on page 20.)

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THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

Note:—Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Address: Editor, The "Gem," The Plectyung House, Farrington Street, London, E.C.4.

NEXT WEEK'S STORIES.

Our next grand, complete story of the chums of St. Jim's is entitled:

"THE TUCK DOERS!"

By Martin Clifford.

My chums will find this a most amusing yarn of the lighter sort.

The next of the famous St. Katie's series throws a strong light upon the real esteem his unruly pupils feel for that amazing man, Mr. Roger Blunt, master of the Transitus Form at St. Katie's. Once more it is Jimmy Curtis, the new Australian junior, who takes the stage at the critical moment—and very nearly makes a mess of things, as it happens. This real good school story is entitled:

"MAKING A HERO!"

By Michael Poole.

Our new feature, My Readers' Own Corner, is going well, and I am sending off a number of half-crown postal-orders again this week. Good things for this page are coming in by every post; but I can do with still more, so hurry up and send yours along! Half-a-crown for every par published, remember!

Our little series of Australian stories is meeting with considerable appreciation, and I hope to be able to find room for another next week. You can learn a lot that may be both interesting and useful to you from the experiences of

"A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA."

By "COOEE."

"THE LUCK OF THE ESTORS!"

The Estors are a grand old English family, and you can hear all about them in the fine new tale which appears in the "Greyfriars Herald" which is on sale June 1st. I recommend all my chums to make sure of the "G. H." for that date. Lord Estor has had bad luck on the Turf—that is, it is called bad luck, but an extra sharp-witted stable-boy discovers that it is really something else. One of the big attractions of this famous yarn is that you will find therein a splendid account of the Derby. The great scene on Epsom Downs, with all the fun of the fair, and the thrilling interest which marks the event, are described in real sporting style. You will like this tale about the Derby.

AMATEUR CLUBS, Etc.

Basil F. Barber, 11, Ashgrove Road, Redland, Bristol, asks me to draw attention to his Information Bureau for Readers of the Companion Papers. Will editors of magazines send along all particulars to the address above, stating what they pay for stories, their advertisement rates, etc., and all other particulars? Readers requiring information about magazines can obtain it if they send a stamped, addressed envelope and a loose halfpenny stamp.

HERLOCK SHOLMES.

You will be delighted to know that the celebrated detective has decided to reappear in the "Greyfriars Herald." THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 644.

There have been any number of requests for further stories of the famous crime investigator. A year or two back he was winning laurels for his prodigious work in unravelling mysteries, and readers of the Companion Papers were not a bit satisfied about his retirement. Well, Mr. Herlock has had a rest, and now he is coming forward again, so please watch for him in the "G. H."

CULTIVATING THE MEMORY.

This is all important for success in life. It helps a fellow wonderfully to be able to remember things—dates and facts which are usually forgotten. I knew a journalist who won through simply because he had a retentive memory. He was not a specially brilliant chap. He could just write common or garden English, but he was no star at the business. He could recollect things, however. It was this speciality that made him. As time went on he became known for the talent in question. In all newspaper offices there is a constant demand for information concerning matters which do not happen to get set down in encyclopedias, and, naturally, the individual who can come up smiling with just what is needed finds himself welcomed. Now, it is not a bit easy to remember things. Fellows who can do this are wanted in all departments of business. It is not possible for some people to keep mental notes in this way. With a few it is inborn. But everybody can train his memory to greater usefulness.

ENCOURAGEMENT.

To a very large extent indeed success in the world is due to a little kindly encouragement given at the right time. If people understood the real value of help of this sort they would, without any doubt, be more generous in according such aid. The fellow who has put his best into some pet scheme, and then hears his work scoffed at, may, in a moment of fatigue, slip back a tremendous distance, not alone in his own self-confidence, but in his imagination.

It is appallingly easy for an outsider to come along and jauntily belittle something it has taken the worker months to accomplish, but it is not playing the game. It is mischief-making of the worst kind. Perhaps you will say that the victim ought not to be sensitive; but have not you noticed that many of the hardest and most useful workers are sensitive? It is so. They strain their nervous system so as to succeed in what they have set themselves to do. The scornful remark comes to their consciousness just when they are unarmed. They have been living for just one thing. Their brains are tired with all the wear and tear and anxiety. Consequently, the silly, mocking comment of a fellow who is conceited in his laziness, and who never troubles to think at all, finds the listener quite unprepared.

Your Editor

A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!

By "COOEE"

JACK THORNTON was much interested in everything he saw during the visit he paid with his uncle to Roselands Farm. It was not at all the sort of place he had been expecting, being so very similar to farms he had seen at home in England.

Mrs. Belton, the wife of the farmer, gave Jack and his uncle a warm welcome, and showed them round the garden, which was her special care, while her little golden-haired daughter, Patsy, toddled along after Jack and soon made friends.

"My husband is away fishing just now," said Mrs. Belton. "He has had a tremendously busy season, you know. We have got good prices for lambs and wool from the Government."

It was a real old-fashioned farm, and Jack gazed with curiosity at the old native who was engaged in tending the cows. The farmer's wife saw his look, and smiled.

"I expect you have heard the most terrible stories of the abos," she said; "but it has all been greatly exaggerated. Of course, up in the north there are plenty of savage natives with whom nothing can be done but keep them on a reservation out of harm's way; but dear old Peter, my husband's man, is a most faithful and valued servant. He would do anything for us, and he is most intelligent."

She signed to the old man to approach and speak to the visitors, and Jack shook hands.

Mr. Thornton and his hostess started speaking of the potato crop, which had been sadly damaged by a record river flood, the whole plantation being covered by water.

"But, after all, we have not much to complain of, my husband and I," said the pleasant-faced woman brightly. "For we have done well in other things, and the foxes must have been engaged elsewhere during the past season. Anyway, they gave us a wide berth."

"Foxes!" cried Jack, in wonderment. "Yes, to be sure," said Mrs. Belton. "We have plenty of them as a rule, and the young lambs have to be looked after, or it would be ruinous altogether."

Mr. Thornton laid his hand on his nephew's shoulder as he said, with a merry laugh:

Jack here thinks that in Australia the only animals that run wild are kangaroos and their relatives, and the laughing jackass."

"Well, I do know he is a bird!" cried Jack, his face crimsoning.

"Oh, yes! He is picking up a lot of knowledge which will be ever so useful to him by-and-by," said Mr. Thornton.

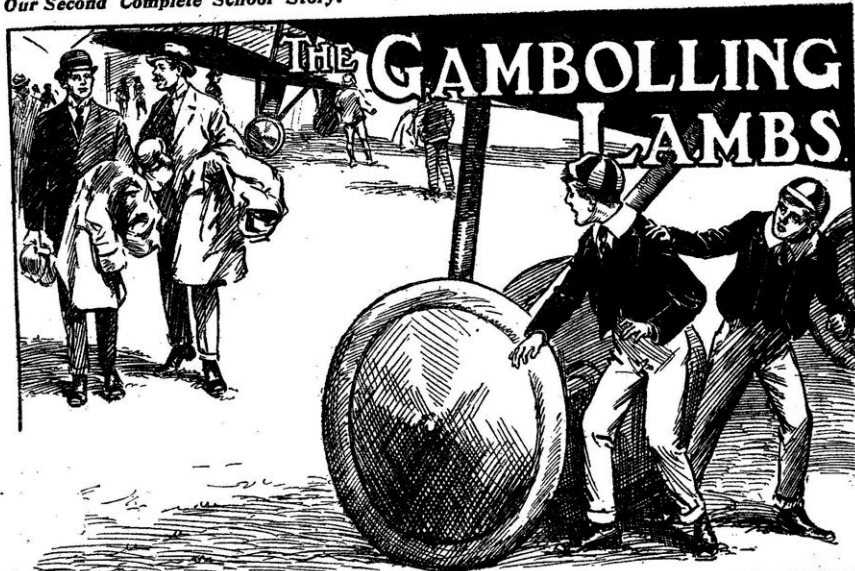
He turned to Mrs. Belton and put a question about her brother in Europe, to which the other replied.

"So he is coming by one of the new Commonwealth motor steamers, is he?" continued Jack's uncle. "That is good."

They strolled towards the long, low white house, which stood very picturesquely amidst the trees, and made one think of some old Sussex homestead, although much of the vegetation was strange.

(More about Jack's new experiences next week.)

Our Second Complete School Story.



A Splendid Tale of Dicky Dexter & Co. at St. Katie's. By MICHAEL POOLE.

CHAPTER 1.

Roger Comes to Tea.

"IT'S queer he's never said anything about it to us," Dobbie remarked.

"It's a wash-out!" Bill Strong pronounced solemnly. "You can't get Jolly Roger in the soup. If you did, he'd just smile, and say what splendid soup it was, and make you think he was really enjoying it."

"He's what they call a master-mind," said Curtis. "He ought to have been a statesman, or a well-known author, and then everybody would have had a chance of getting full benefit from him. In Australia we'd make a chap like Roger Minister of Education, or something of that sort. It's unfair to let him concentrate his intellect on children."

"We are not children. Far from it!" retorted the Kid. "Don't forget that we beat him! Keep that fact firmly fixed in your headpieces, gentlemen. The noble Kangaroo, aided by my unworthy self, and bravely supported by Bill and Dobbie, led Jolly Roger astray and beat him. He knows it, and we ought to gloat!"

But there wasn't anything to gloat about, and even Curtis was depressed over the outcome of his great scheme.

Roger's watchfulness had annoyed them. Carefully and skilfully they had laid a trap, and led him on until he had dragged the Head into the business.

Both Jolly Roger and the Beak became convinced that gambling on a wholesale scale was going on in the school. A fierce inquiry was made, and Jolly Roger was made to look several kinds of a first-rate ass.

At least, that's what he ought to have looked. He ought likewise to have slunk away and buried his head in

shame, while the whole school grinned joyously at the joke, and the occupants of Study No. 10 gloated gleelessly.

But it was nothing like that. Before they could really start their own story everyone in the school had got hold of quite a different yarn.

Big Hallam and all the Sixth knew about it. The Fifth were full of it, and they had first-hand information from one of their own members. Smith had been one of those sent for by the Head to give evidence on the question.

"But I've seen Roger since then," Smith explained to his friends. "He's not a bad sort, old Roger. 'Don't you get any wrong idea into your head, Smith,' Roger says. 'Both the Head and I are very pleased indeed with the way you spoke. So is Renfrews. You see, Smith, there has been a good deal of unpleasant rumour just lately, and we felt the best plan was to get to the bottom of it at once. We have cleared the air. There is now no reflection whatever upon the honour of the school, and I think you can take some credit to yourself for the very definite help you gave.' That's what Jolly Roger told me."

"You're a sort of giddy hero, then, Smith?" they suggested.

"No," said Smithy. "But I helped to squash the idea that this show is a sink of iniquity, and all that sort of thing. What I'd like to do now is to find out who started the rumour, and tried to put the tar-brush on Katie's. It wasn't Renfrews, because he was under suspicion, too. A dirty sort of trick, you know; and if we could only find out—"

"Doesn't Roger know?" they asked.

"I expect so," Smithy said hopefully. "We can leave 'em to Roger."

And that was the attitude of everyone at Katie's. Certain evil-minded persons

had spread false rumours regarding Katie's, but Jolly Roger had acted swiftly, and proved quite definitely that there was no ground for complaint.

Instead of Roger hiding his head, he became a slightly bigger hero, and the four in Study No. 10 didn't dare tell anyone how they'd wangled the stunt.

"It's a wash-out!" Bill Strong repeated. "You'll have to get up very early in the morning to catch Jolly Roger napping—"

He was going on to say a lot more, but a sharp tap at the door interrupted him, and before anyone could call out the door opened, and Jolly Roger himself stood before them, smiling gladly and joyously.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen!" Roger greeted them cheerily. "May I come in? This is quite an unofficial visit, so don't worry about hiding anything, Dexter! It's such a miserably wet afternoon that I feel depressed and cheerless, and want pleasant society. If you ask me nicely, I'll stay and take tea with you!"

The four stared at him helplessly. A master coming to tea in their study was something to make them gasp! They knew that masters went to tea with fellows in the Sixth at times, but the Transitus! It was a joke, surely!

But Roger had fixed his eye on Bill Strong, and Bill felt that he was waiting for him to speak.

"We'd be delighted, sir," Bill struggled to say. "I mean—"

"Thank you, Strong!" said Roger. "You know, I've been trying to get Dexter to invite me to tea for some weeks past. He ignores my hints with a persistence which makes me feel that he doesn't like me. You don't really dislike me, Dexter, do you?"

"No, sir!" the Kid mumbled.

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He hadn't quite got over the shock of this visit yet; and, moreover, he was wondering just what lay behind it. Dobbin had risen, and pushed forward a chair for Roger.

"Thank you very much, Dobbin!" Jolly Roger beamed on him, and settled himself very comfortably in the solitary armchair Study No. 10 possessed. "It is scarcely necessary to mention the fact, but, just in case of misunderstanding, let me assure you that, temporarily, I have no connection with the Form known as the Transitus. It's a very trying business to keep up the role of master continually. This afternoon I am forgetting it, and am merely your guest. Ah! And how do you like being in Study No. 10, Curtis?"

He turned cheerfully to the boy from Australia, and the Kangaroo smiled. There was no doubt about it that Roger had a way with him. In about ten minutes' time they had almost forgotten he was their Form-master, and Dexter and Curtis, aided by Bill Strong, talked freely; while Dobbin, the "expert" attendant to the role of master, made a hurried visit to Study No. 9 to borrow additional cups and plates.

"A very wonderful land," Roger said to Curtis, after some reference to Australia. "I suppose you know all about gambolling, Curtis?"

It was the first jarring note Roger had struck.

"Gambling, sir?" Curtis said doubtfully.

"Ha, ha," Roger laughed. "Not gambling, Curtis! Gambolling! The thing that the little lambs do. You've seen them often, of course? One does get mixed up in the two words. I did myself a short time ago. Quite a good story, really, and I think you know part of it. This is quite between ourselves, of course; but I got the impression that there were tiger-cubs in my Form, and that they were gambolling—on horses, you know. Then it turned out that it was nothing at all of the sort, and that really it was two or three of my pet lambs gambolling—having a frisky little game for my amusement. Ha, ha!"

He laughed jocosely; but the others didn't, and Roger looked at them in perplexity.

"Oh, do laugh, Dexter!" he begged. "You see the joke, don't you, Curtis? I've spent nearly a week in working it out. You grasp the point, don't you, Strong? I thought they were tiger-cubs G-A-M-B-L-I-N-G—gambling—and it was only my little lambs G-A-M-B-O-L-L-I-N-G—pulling my leg, if you like. Very funny!"

"Yes, sir," said Bill Strong, and turned to help Dobbin lay the feast.

But Roger stuck to the gambolling lambs. It seemed to amuse him most tremendously, and at last even Dexter entered into the spirit of the game. Curtis was already answering Roger, jest for jest.

"Very ingenious indeed!" Roger commented at last. "But what a life for that poor unfortunate man who has to watch over you! Think of it, Curtis! He had already got one pet lamb to guard, though I gather that popularly he is known as the Kid. And now you add extra energy. It was an Australian idea, I suppose?"

The Kid chipped in swiftly. "You don't think Curtis was to blame, sir?" he asked. "I mean, if anyone was to blame, I—"

"No, no, Dexter!" Roger interrupted genially. "Let us give credit where credit is due. It success was doubtless due to your efficient help, to say nothing

of the assistance which Dobbin and Strong kindly gave. But I fear that your Form-master will now take a special interest in two lambs—Dexter and Curtis by name. I feel sure that he will regard it as a duty to watch over them more and more carefully."

Curtis looked carefully at Roger, who was still smiling very happily.

"What will the Form-master do with the lambs now, sir?" he asked for it was part of the jest that they referred to the "Form-master" as a totally different person from Jolly Roger, their guest.

"Do?" asked Roger. "What can he do? Just wait and watch, ever on the alert, lest they attempt any further gambols. Then, if he catches them—Whew!"

Jolly Roger sighed strenuously and closed his lips firmly together for a moment.

"Thank you, Dobbin! I will have another cup of tea," he said jocosely. "You make an excellent brew. What do you think about the cricket prospects, Strong? I hear Curtis is a promising addition? Keep your eye upon him!"

They talked cricket for nearly half an hour, till at last Mr. Roger blurt rose.

"I'm afraid I shall have to run away now," he said. "But I have enjoyed our chat very much indeed. I hope that some time I shall be able to take tea with you again—if you are good enough to ask me. Good-bye, my lambs!"

"Good-bye, sir!" they said, and smiled, because they really felt that Roger had thoroughly enjoyed himself. Only they hoped he wouldn't make a habit of coming to tea in Study No. 10!

CHAPTER 2.

A Meeting of Kangaroos.

"NO," said Curtis slowly. "No, Kid! I shall never try to lead Jolly Roger astray again. He's a good sort, but he's too smart altogether for a poor Australian laddie. I'm going to be good—or keep out of his clutches, anyway!"

"That's what I said," the Kid answered dolefully. "But it's a hard life, Kangy. And it's shocking dull!"

Richard Dexter, the bright-eyed little wonder of the Transitus, and his new friend, Jimmy Curtis, the tall and graceful Kangaroo from Australia, were walking leisurely down the High Street of Dulchester.

They had left Strong and Dobbin at the school, as both had other interests this afternoon.

Just as they passed the Royal George Hotel a tall man came running down the steps, and made as though to cross the footpath to the long grey racing-car waiting.

"Jumping snakes!" Curtis gasped. "It's—it's Ross!"

The young man in a hurry swung round, for Curtis had spoken the name in a sort of thrilling stage-whisper.

"We-ell!" If Curtis was excited, the tall man was simply staggered. He put his hand to his forehead, then jerked it out suddenly, and gripped Curtis.

"It's not Fairy Curtis, is it?" he begged. "Little Curtis! Where on earth—Why? Am I dreaming? How many miles are we out from Sydney? Has there been an earthquake?"

If it hadn't been for the fact that by this time Curtis and the man he called Ross were shaking hands violently, and that their faces were contorted with glad smiles, Dexter might not have understood what the tall young man was talking about.

At the end of about two minutes Dexter was swung into the joyful gather-

ing, and Mr. Ross was shaking his hand just as excitedly as he'd pumped Curtis'.

"We were at Murray's together," Curtis was explaining. "Old Ross was captain of the school. I was his gyppie-sort of fag, you know, but not quite. I'll tell you all about it. He's a wonderful chap."

"You're a wonderful child!" retorted Ross and laughed.

Then they both had to explain to Dexter all about it, and after that explain to each other why they both happened to be in Dulchester High Street instead of wandering round some corner of Australia.

"I've been in the flying game," Ross told them. "Went to France, and so on, and now I'm in it for good. I've been back to Australia, and my people are fixing up a place here. You know it? The Wigan Aerodrome, about two miles outside Dulchester? You'll have to come along, and I'll show you. By Jove! I'll have to clear now, though!"

He began to play about with the car, but all the time he went on talking about the extraordinary and wonderful meeting.

"You come with young Curtis, too," he told Dexter, as he jumped into the car. "Go to the office there and ask for me, Fairy. Here's a card. Come along any afternoon—soon. Don't forget!"

Br-r-r-r-r! His car began to move ahead, and he waved one hand.

"You'll come?" he yelled. "Certain! Any afternoon!" Br-r-r-r-r! Thursday!

"We'll come!" Curtis yelled. And he and Dexter stood still, watching the car till it disappeared.

"Isn't he great?" Curtis asked. "He's the finest chap you ever met in your life, Kid! And he's asked us to go round to the aerodrome! Just like old Ross! What day did he say? Thursday?"

"I think he said Thursday," Dexter answered. "Yes, it was Thursday!"

"We'll go! The day after to-morrow!" Curtis said definitely. "Good old Ross!"

"Of course, Wigan Aerodrome's out of bounds," the Kid said quietly. "But I don't—"

"Out of bounds?" Curtis gasped. "Great Scott! What on earth for? Did you mean to say we can't see old Ross? Rot!"

"Course it is!" the Kid agreed heartily. "I only just mentioned it. We needn't take any notice of a silly rule like that!"

"Not a little bit!" Curtis answered. "Keep out of Jolly Roger's course, naturally! But even his eagle eye won't follow us there."

"Probably he'll take us up in an aeroplane," suggested the Kid hopefully, ignoring the reference to Jolly Roger, and after that the mere detail that Winton Aerodrome had been placed very strictly out of bounds to the scholars of all schools within ten miles of Dulchester was left out of the discussion.

There was an excellent reason for the aerodrome being out of bounds. It had nothing to do with Jimmy Curtis or the Kid. There was also an excellent reason why Frank Ross had said, "Any afternoon except Thursday." But as the noise of the engine had drowned the "except," the two decided quite definitely that Thursday would be their day out.

Normally the Kid was due to take tea with Mr. Blunt on Thursday afternoon, but Fortune was on his side at present. Both Mr. Blunt and the Head were going to the opening ceremony of the County Scientific Institute at Warrendon, twenty miles from Dulchester, and Jolly Roger told the Kid that the tea festival was postponed.

"Couldn't be better!" Curtis agreed. "He'll be out of the way, and his eagle eyes won't spot us at twenty miles' distance! It's Winton Aerodrome for us, my bonnie boy!"

It would be about two-thirty that Thursday afternoon when the two drew near the newly-made lane which led to Winton Aerodrome and the offices of the company who owned it. High black railings enclosed the ground, and just as they approached the corner they became aware of the fact that several cars were held up in the lane.

Evidently there was a blockage farther down the lane. Another big car came swinging round the corner from the opposite side, then pulled up swiftly.

Curtis felt his arm gripped by Dexter, and even as he felt the pressure his eyes wandered to the two people sitting in the back of the last car.

The man nearest them was Jolly Roger!

Just for the moment he was staring straight ahead, evidently trying to discover the cause of the stoppage.

"Come on! Quick!" Dexter whispered, and Curtis turned.

They slunk swiftly and silently round the big black railings until they felt quite certain that Roger was right out of sight. Not until then did they stop and face each other.

"My giddy aunt!" Dicky Dexter said. "Did he see us? Did his eagle eye light upon our countenances for one single instant? If it did, my noble Kangaroo, we're for the high jump!"

"I don't think he spotted us," Curtis answered hopefully. "Anyway, we'll stick here for a time, Kid, and then we'll saunter along to the office. Old Ross will be expecting us to-day."

They waited for perhaps five minutes. At the end of that time it was decided to go forward and observe if the coast were clear.

They went carefully, keeping close to the railings, with Dicky Dexter in front. He had not gone more than fifty yards before he stopped suddenly, and began to shrink back on Curtis.

"Cut for it!" he ordered sharply. "Roger's coming this way!"

They ran swiftly, but presently paused to hold another parley.

"Blow the office!" Curtis suggested. "Let's climb these old railings and then hunt round. We're bound to find Ross somewhere!"

It was the best and simplest way out of the difficulty. The railings wanted a certain amount of negotiating, but the Kid climbed on the Kangaroo's back, and then the Kangaroo, being taller, clambered up after him.

They found themselves in a huge field, on one side of which were ten or a dozen hangars, while on the far side were huge sheds near a building which looked like a glorified cricket pavilion.

"That's the office," Curtis decided. "We'll go over to those round sheds where they keep the jolly aeroplanes and ask for old Ross!"

Outside the hangars were half a dozen big aeroplanes, and about each machine a number of people were gathered. For just a brief space both Curtis and Dexter were too interested in the machines to worry even about finding Ross.

They were looking up at the great wings of one of them, when Curtis happened to turn his gaze towards the office. Not thirty yards away two men were walking towards the planes, each of them carrying a heavy coat and an airman's cap.

"Jumping snakes!" Curtis said. "Here's Roger again!"

He said nothing more. Both he and

Dexter just glided gracefully round the machine and tried to lose themselves.

"It's a nightmare!" Dexter said, when at last they paused. "Can't we get out of his way anyhow? What's he doing here? This is what they call a series of amazing coincidences, Kangy! What?"

"Let's find old Ross!" Curtis gasped. "It's getting on my nerves!"

They wormed their way along, looking for someone who seemed a likely person to question. Just for a change, the luck was with them. Frank Ross, in leather cap and coat, was standing near the end machine.

"I say, Ross!" Curtis ran towards him excitedly. "We're in a mess, and don't quite know—"

"Hallo, hallo!" Ross said, and didn't seem quite so pleased to see them. "What's the idea, young Curtis? I said any day except Thursday! It's a big day with us—flying to Warraden—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Curtis. "We thought you said we were to come on Thursday! And now one of our masters is chasing us, and there'll be a terrific row, Ross! Can we hide, or get out of the way, somehow?"

Ross began to laugh, but before he could speak, someone else from the head of the machine called to him.

"Right-ho!" he yelled back and turned to Curtis. "Come on! I'll give you a trip! Round this way! Quick!"

CHAPTER 3.

A Mixed Entertainment.

CURTIS and Dexter followed the airman till he pointed to a step-ladder which led up to a small door in the side of the machine.

"Up there!" Ross whispered loudly, because there was a row going on at the time. "Keep at the back! One or two big pots aboard. Say you're scientific students if they ask questions—specially invited! See you at the other end!"

They scrambled up the ladder, and hopped into the inside of the aeroplane. One of the mechanics came up after them and fastened the door on them.

The little steps led to a larger sort of cabin, and in this place were small chairs. There were three or four people sitting here, but their backs were towards Curtis and Dexter.

"We'll stay here!" Curtis shouted, for by now the noise almost drowned his voice.

The Kid nodded. There was a gleam in his eye, and his lips had lost their pathetic droop. A few moments later he was clinging to the side of the place in which they were standing, for the machine was bumping and rushing along at a terrific rate.

Then suddenly it stopped. Beyond the whir of the engine, and the gentle sighing of the wind, the aeroplane might have been quite stationary.

The Kid climbed on to one of the steps which enabled him to look over the side. Below he could see green fields and little houses which seemed to be gently sinking from them, and drifting away behind.

Curtis, because of his greater height, was able to look over without the aid of the step. Just for a time both of them stared downwards.

"Ripping!" Curtis shouted to the Kid, at last.

"Great!" the Kid shouted back. "This is a decent gambol!"

For the next twenty minutes or so they enjoyed themselves thoroughly. For the first time either of them had made a flight, and it really was a gilded sort of joy-ride!

They came to earth again at last. A bumping, rushing little journey over another field, and then the machine came to a standstill. In a few moments the

little door at the side was opened, and Curtis and Dexter hopped down the step-ladder, which had been placed there almost before the mechanic, who had opened the door, had descended.

"We'll see old Ross," Curtis said, when they stood together on firm ground again. "He's bound to be going back soon, and we'll have another trip!"

"I'm not worrying," the Kid answered cheerfully. "Don't care if it snows now—so long as Jolly Roger doesn't turn up! But I guess we've left him this time! Let's watch this!"

Another aeroplane was careering over the ground towards them. It stopped, gently and quietly, twenty or thirty yards to the right of the machine which had brought them, and the Kangaroo and the Kid ran towards it. They wanted to see more of it.

By the time they got to the far side the passengers were descending. They had left their flying outfits in the plane, and one or two of them actually came down the ladder wearing silk hats. The last man to descend was wearing a pleasant grey suit and a soft felt hat, and even as his head came through the doorway in the side of the machine, there seemed something familiar about him.

"Jolly Roger!" the Kid gasped. "Come on!"

They dashed away towards their own plane, and sought out Frank Ross. He greeted them cheerfully.

"You've got here all right?" he laughed. "Wondered where on earth you were! We've got to wait two or three hours now. There's some ceremony on over there, but I'm not needed, so I guess we'll have a little afternoon together. You haven't to be back at school before seven o'clock or so?"

Curtis was just about to gasp out that they would be locked out, and would miss preparation school; but Dexter was before him. If there was one thing the Kid disliked it was admitting to outsiders that he was subject to any rules or regulations.

"Oh, that will suit us splendidly!" he assured Ross. "They are really very decent with us, and it's quite understood that if we have private engagements they come before school work. Our Form-master, Mr. Roger Blunt, was having tea with us only a day or two ago, and he said then that he feared Curtis was over-working, and ought to take a few days off."

"By Jove," said Frank Ross, and looked at the Kid carefully. "It's different from what it was at Murray's, isn't it, Curtis?"

"Ah, yes; but that was in Australia," said the Kid gently, and winked violently at Curtis. "We manage these things better at Katie's!"

Whether Frank Ross quite swallowed all the Kid's yarns no one but himself will ever know. They had had quite a fair amount of excitement already, and the young Australian airman put the gilt on it during the next two or three hours.

They wandered away from the field, and the new Scientific Institute was left far behind. Instead, they found a pleasant restaurant, where Ross showed that being brought up in Australia hadn't upset his digestion at all, nor had it weakened his power of selection.

It was a great feast! It sent new ideas into the Kid's mind, and he realised that it would be the simplest thing in the world to get back to Katie's, climb a certain fence, and wander round quietly until they reached their own study.

In all probability their absence from

prep would never be noticed. If Roger had been taking it, of course, things would have been different, but old Gladrige, the mathy master, was on te-night, and they were as safe as houses. Nothing could go wrong.

"This is a great day, my noble Kangaroo!" the kid remarked to Curtis as they waited outside the restaurant for Ross to join them. "Roger's evidently come to this jolly old scientific institute business, and that's why we've dropped across him so often. But he won't see us again! Not likely! We'll keep out of his way, get back to Katie's, and everything in the garden will be lovely. It's the giddiest little gambol I've ever been on, and so long as we keep clear of old Roger—all's well!"

"That's the idea!" Curtis agreed, for he, too, felt that this had been an epoch-making day in his career. It really was something to write and tell them in Australia, about meeting old Ross and flying in his aeroplane, and having a jolly feed with him. Then there would be the flight back, and the adventure of getting into Katie's without being seen. What a life!

They went back with Ross to the ground near the new Scientific Institute, where the aeroplanes were resting.

"We're a bit late," Ross said genially. "Hallo! There's my little party already waiting for me. Come along! I'll see you aboard all right. You got in after the pots have gone in. You've got the idea?"

"Trust us!" said Curtis. "You're a brick, Ross!"

Four or five people were standing at the side of the aeroplane, but even Curtis could tell that they weren't the same people who had travelled over with them. There were no silk hats among this little lot—Yes, there was! One! And the man who wore it was coming towards the plane.

They might not have noticed him but for the fact that he called out just before he reached the others.

"I've decided to make the experiment, after all, Blunt!" a well-known voice cried very clearly. "I understand you can fit me up with the proper attire?"

"Of course, sir!" One of the four detached himself from the little group.

Another also cried out: "Come along, Mr. Bird! Literature and the arts will take advantage of science! Ha, ha!"

They laughed.

"Jumping snakes!" said Curtis. "It's Jolly Roger again!"

"It's the Beak, too!" gasped the Kid. "Where's Ross? We've got to hop it, old son! It's a train-journey—anything but the jolly aeroplane for us! Come on."

They couldn't see Ross anywhere at the moment, and in any case this wasn't the time to try and make polite explanations. Both of them had the wind up most thoroughly.

Any way home was good enough; any place was better than this. The prospect of trying to sneak on board the plane with the Beak and Jolly Roger hanging round was the kind of job that even Dickie Dexter regarded as something beyond his powers.

They bolted. There were no serious fences to negotiate here, and in a few minutes they were chasing away down the road in the direction of the town of Warrenden.

Not until the field where the aeroplanes had been was a mile away did they stop running. Then, looking up, they saw the big Handley-Page floating gracefully above them.

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"There they go!" Curtis said bitterly. "The Beak, Jolly Roger, and old Ross—all serene! And we've got to pad the hoof to the station! Wonder what time we'll get back to-night!"

The Kid was silent. He was thinking—trying to evolve some new brain-wave. You see, there were new dangers confronting them now. Jolly Roger would be back at the school long before they were, and he might discover their absence, in which case it would be an awkward business to explain.

"If only we can get back to Katie's by nine-thirty," the Kid said at last, "I think we'll manage all right."

Hopefully they went to the Warrenden Station and waited the first porter. He had a kind face, but it became clouded with perplexity when they talked of Dulchester.

Then he explained. The last train to Dulchester had gone ten minutes ago; the next would be at seven thirty-nine in the morning.

"My hat!" said the Kid bitterly. "And you call this a railway? Why—Oh, my giddy aunt! Let me go somewhere and weep for my country! Come on, Kangaroo!"

Hopelessly, helplessly, they left the station. It was beginning to rain, and was growing dark.

"We're in the soup, Kangaroo!" said Dickie Dexter. "Right up to the neck in it! Wouldn't Jolly Roger smile now! We've had our giddy gambol, and now we're lost, stolen, and strayed—twenty miles from Katie's!"

"Look out!" said Curtis suddenly, and dragged him to one side.

A car came dashing up the incline to the railway-station, and nearly ran into them.

Someone jumped out, and was coming towards them.

"Ah, Curtis! Dexter! My little lambs have gone badly astray, I fear!"

It was Jolly Roger—again!

CHAPTER 4.

Back to the Fold!

YOU very often find that what appears to be the most amazing series of coincidences is nothing at all of the sort, but just the most natural thing in the world.

Mr. Roger Blunt had been invited to attend the ceremony at Warrenden. Both he and Mr. Bird, as well as other distinguished guests from Dulchester, were also invited to go by car or by aeroplane. At the opening of a scientific institute a few aeroplanes added the right touch.

Mr. Bird motored with one of the governors of the school. Mr. Roger Blunt promptly accepted the invitation to go by plane, and he and another visitor were motored up to the aerodrome from Dulchester.

There was a brief stoppage just near the aerodrome, and Mr. Blunt and his friend descended for a few moments and walked together a little way.

In that short time Roger saw Curtis and Dexter twice. He was surprised, but didn't show it. Later on he would ask questions.

He was more surprised during the course of the afternoon. Wherever he went he seemed to see Curtis and Dexter suddenly chasing away from him. The greatest surprise of all was just before

Bird joined him and others at the last aeroplane to make the trip back to Dulchester.

Once again Mr. Blunt had a vision of the two youths doubling wildly across the field and clambering the fence. It began to get on his nerves, and he decided to inquire of the airman.

Frank Ross was also puzzled by the picture of Curtis and Dexter racing away madly. With Mr. Blunt's aid he grasped the whole mystery, and Roger did likewise.

They discussed it, and fixed the matter in a few minutes. Roger was to get a taxi and chase the two. Ross would take his aeroplane back, and then turn out in a car and come to Warrenden to pick them all up.

Quarter of an hour later Roger was in a taxicab dashing up to Warrenden Station. The car nearly ran into two boys wandering idly in the middle of the road, and Roger's eagle eye recognised them instantly.

He jumped out quickly and called to them. In a few moments they were standing sheepishly before him. Both of them felt that they couldn't fight against this sort of thing. They couldn't even get lost but Roger turned up!

"I expect you are thirsty, Curtis?" Roger said joyously. "We will dismiss the man with the taxi and then discover a place where we can drink tea or cocoa, as your taste desires. You have had a very pleasant little gambol this afternoon, I gather?"

Roger led them to the Station Hotel, where, in the little lounge, tea and sandwiches were brought to them. Once again Dickie Dexter began to revive.

Someone else came into the lounge presently, a tall man, in a heavy motoring coat, and he waved his hand cheerfully to the three. And it wasn't Roger who felt the shock of this coincidence, but his two lambs!

For Frank Ross had broken the speed limit in order to get to the Warrenden Railway Hotel!

"So you've got them all right, Mr. Blunt?" he asked, and turned to Curtis. "You young scoundrel! I guess you want someone to keep an eye on you, young Curtis! I'm glad I'm not your Form-master! Ha, ha!"

He laughed, and Roger laughed, and both of them seemed to think it was quite a good joke, which cheered the other two up considerably.

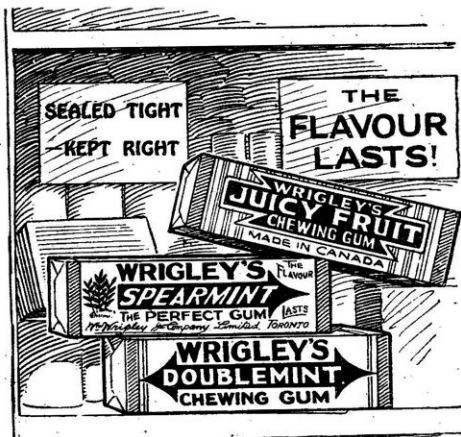
Outside, a big car was waiting, and Dexter and Curtis were told to get in at the back and cover themselves up with rugs. Jolly Roger took the coat Ross handed him, and climbed up by the young airman's side.

It was actually quite a thrilling finish to a big ride. Ross evidently thought the car would fly if he got it going fast enough, and it was really a lot more exciting than the aeroplane trip had been.

Arrived at the school, Jolly Roger, as usual, had the last word.

"Your friend Ross has explained to me his part in your day's outing, Curtis, and in the circumstances I shall regard our meeting to-day as quite unofficial. I hope, however, you will have learnt certain lessons. And, by the way, Curtis, whenever you wish to visit friends you will in future ask permission from your Form-master. That is all!"

And that was really the end of the giddy gambol of Roger's two pet lambs, English and Australian. Jolly Roger never referred to it on the following year. He'd forgotten it so much that he seemed positively pained they hadn't learned their prep properly, and said that—But that's another story, which has really nothing at all to do with aeroplanes and motor-cars. Roger had forgotten those, but he never, never forgot work!



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TALBOT'S FIND!

(Continued from page 13.)

moment later they were struggling with the stones.

As if he had already guessed something of the truth, Detective-Sergeant Day came hurrying across, and with his help the heavy slab was rolled back.

"Hurrah! Good old Talbot! Bai Jove, how weally wippin'!" shouted D'Arcy, nearly falling headlong down the steps in his excitement and delight.

As the juniors crowded down the stone staircase, Reginald Talbot, who was lying bound hand and foot on the stone flags, grinned up at them feebly.

"Well, my hat, I thought you fellows were never coming!" he said ruefully. "Cut these blessed cords loose, Tommy! Those brutes—"

Talbot paused as the police-officer came down the steps and peered at him curiously.

"I suppose you are Reginald Talbot?" he said grimly.

"Talbot waited until Tom Merry had cut his bonds, and then he rose stiffly to his feet.

"Yes," he said, with a faint grin. "I suppose you've come to arrest me—"

The detective smiled grimly.

"I certainly did come here with that hope," he said. "But I hardly think that

will be necessary now. But if you will tell me what all this business means I shall be obliged."

Nothing loth, Talbot began to relate the full story from the beginning, and when he had finished, the last vestige of suspicion and doubt disappeared from the detective's face, and he nodded.

Detective-Sergeant Day led the way up the steps.

As yet, Talbot did not know of the capture of the two men, and when he emerged into the open, and saw the inspector and constable mounting guard over the handcuffed ruffians, he nearly fell down with surprise.

"Good egg!" he said, in delight. "I'm jolly thankful those brutes are collared. They were going to starve me, and—"

"You must have had a jolly rough time, old fellow!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You look— What's the excitement about?"

Tom Merry broke off as Inspector Skeat called eagerly to Detective-Sergeant Day, and as the juniors hurried after the detective and joined the group they saw the reason.

Whilst searching the two men for weapons, the constable had discovered a pearl necklace hidden in a secret pocket, and a further careful search brought to light what afterwards proved to be the whole of the stolen jewellery.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Detective-Sergeant Day. "And now, the sooner we get these beauties to a safe place the better. And I advise you lads to take

your friend home and give him a good dinner. He looks as if he needs it."

Five minutes later the seven happy and excited juniors helped the police to escort their prisoners to the waiting police-car in Ryecroft Lane. And then, with Reginald Talbot in their midst, they made a triumphant return to St. Jim's.

The Head's astonishment can be imagined when, that afternoon, his august study was invaded by seven dishevelled and excited juniors, bearing in their midst the missing Talbot. But his amazement and delight knew no bounds when the full story was told, and he learned that the jewel thieves had been caught, and that the dark cloud of suspicion lay no longer over Reginald Talbot's head.

Though the Head made strict inquiries, he never discovered who had phoned the message in his name to the Wayland police regarding Talbot's whereabouts. But Tom Merry & Co. did—as Messrs. Racke & Co. found out to their sorrow.

Talbot's bike was never found. But the Shell fellow did not mourn its loss for long. A few days later a ripping new Sunbeam arrived at St. Jim's for him, with "Lady Winnington's compliments and thanks!"

THE END.

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