

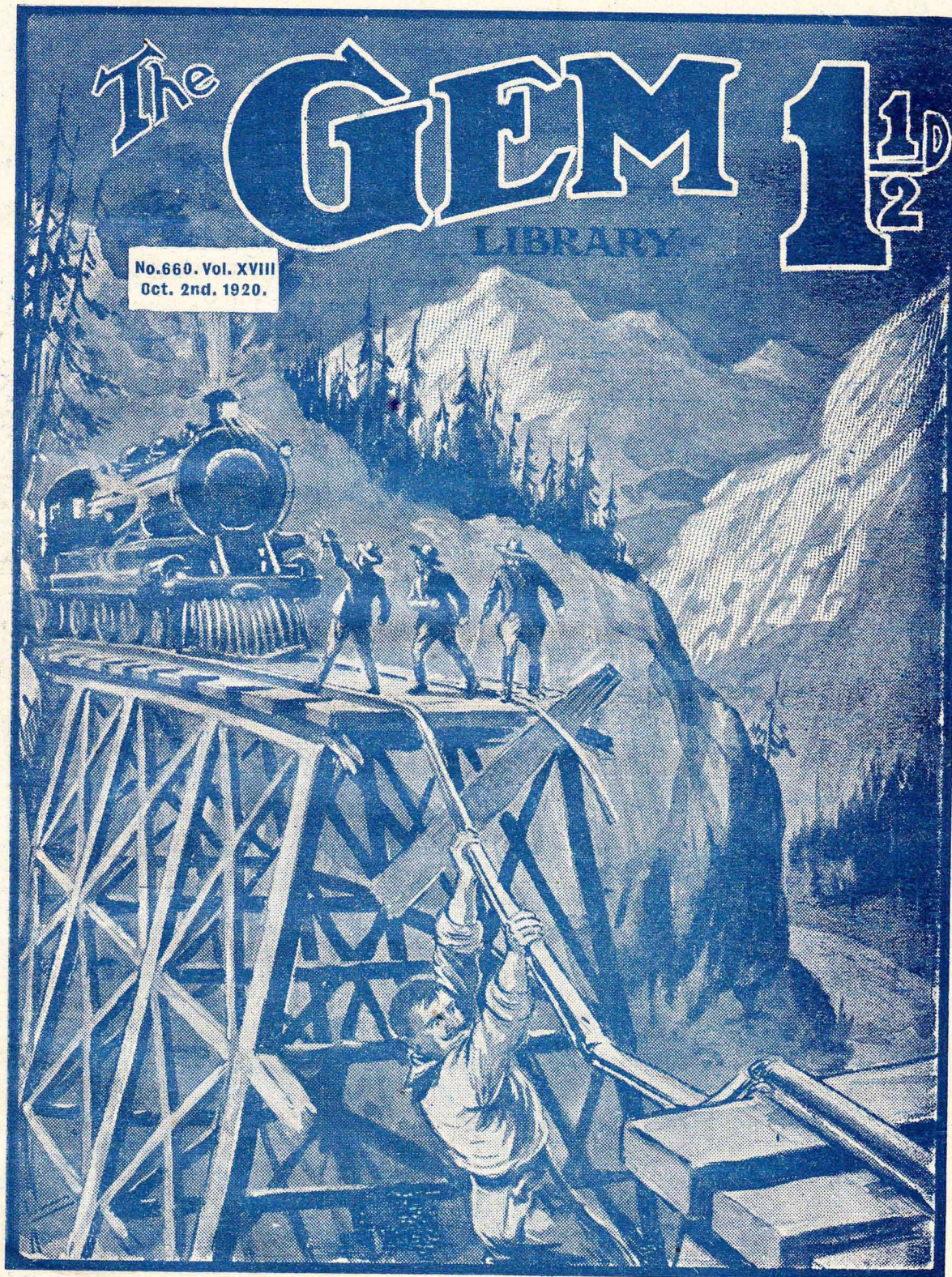
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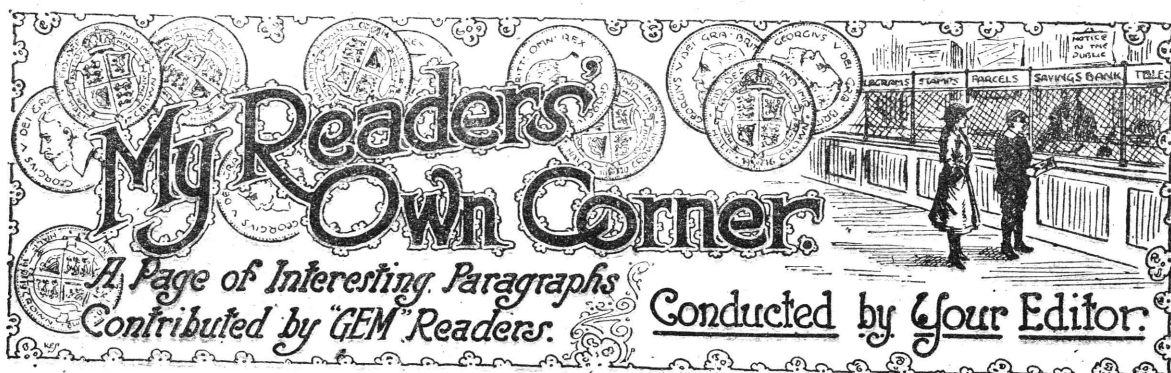
No. 660. Vol. XVIII  
Oct. 2nd, 1920.



**ALMOST A DISASTER! THE MADMAN'S DESPERATE ACT!**

**MAGNIFICENT FOOTBALL ANNUAL FREE WITH THIS ISSUE!**





# My Readers' Own Corner

A Page of Interesting Paragraphs  
Contributed by "GEM" Readers. Conducted by Your Editor.

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

## A COSMOPOLITAN.

"I say, Bill," said a miner to his pal, "what's a cosmopolitan?" Bill thought for a moment before he replied: "Suppose there were a Russian Jew living in London with a Greek wife, smoking Egyptian cigarettes near a Turkish carpet on the floor; if this man drank American cream sodas while listening to a German band playing 'Come Back to Erin,' then you could say that he was cosmopolitan."—John J. McCloskey, 124, Long Bog, Londonderry, Ireland.

## DRAWING THE SWORD.

A professor of a certain university was entertaining a party of friends and students at his residence one night. Taking down a magnificent sword that hung over the fireplace he brandished it about, exclaiming: "Never shall I forget the day when I drew this blade for the first time!" "Where did you draw it?" asked a freshman. "At a raffle!" replied the professor.—Harry Miller, 63, Great Cheetham Street, Lower Broughton, Manchester.

## THACKERAY.

William Makepeace Thackeray was born in Calcutta, July 18th, 1811, a year before the birth of Charles Dickens. Thackeray lost his father when he was five. He was sent to England to be educated. In 1822 he entered the Charterhouse, proceeding seven years later to Trinity College, Cambridge. Here he wrote a burlesque of Tennyson's prize poem, "Timbuctoo," this being his first appearance in print. In 1835 he became a regular contributor to the "National Standard," which paper, however, ceased after a year. Thackeray had great art ambitions, and he studied painting in Paris, meantime writing for his living. Many of his first books failed, such as the "Constitutional," "Comic Tales and Sketches," the "Yellowplush Papers," and "Major Gahagan." Dickens declined Thackeray's offer to illustrate Pickwick. Success came to the famous novelist with "Vanity Fair." Thackeray died on Christmas Eve, 1863, and his grave is at Kensal Green. "Esmond" is reckoned the best of his books by many, while some place "Pendennis" first. Personally I prefer "The Newcomes."—Henry Strachan, 19, Rosebery Street, Aberdeen.

## THE CANNY SCOT.

An Englishman, an Irishman, and a Scotsman were betting which had the most money. The Englishman lit his pipe with a £10 note so as to make an impression on the others. The Irishman thereupon lit his cigar with a £50 note. The Scot, not to be outdone, pulled out his cheque-book, made out a cheque for £100, and set it to his pipe.—Norman B. Adcroft, 17, London Terrace, Darwen, Lancashire.

## THE ONLY WAY.

Just as the train was about to start a very stout man struggled into a carriage and sank into a seat, breathing heavily. A small boy who sat opposite appeared fascinated. His steady stare eventually began to annoy the fat man, who demanded angrily: "What are you looking at me for?" "Please, sir," replied the lad, "there's nowhere else to look."—R. Spurgeon, 103, Leytonstone Road, Stratford, E. 15.

## GOUGH'S CAVES.

While spending a holiday in Cheddar, Somerset, I visited Gough's Caves, where many weird, fantastic, and beautiful stalactite and stalagmite formations can be seen. Outside the caves in a glass case is the skull of a prehistoric man, reputed to be 25,000 years old. The teeth are large and well-preserved, as are the other parts of the skull. The Cheddar Gorge is a magnificent scene, while the River Avon, with the sun shining on the little cascades of silver spray as it falls over the rocks is a sight worth seeing. Somerset is full of interest, and can boast of an old Roman road—the Fosse Way—as well as the ancient Roman baths at Bath.—G. Ellis, Broomfield Park House, Palmer's Green, N. 13.

## MOST EFFECTIVE.

A farmer sent ten shillings for a lightning caterpillar killer which he had seen advertised in a paper, and received in return two blocks of wood with directions printed as follows: "Take this block, which is No. 1, in the right hand, place the caterpillar on No. 2, and press together. Remove the caterpillar and proceed as before."—H. Klein, 29, Canterbury Road, Brixton, S.W. 9.

## MANCHESTER.

In dull old Manchester, where I work, there is not much by which a person can tell that summer is here. Of course, there are the few birds in air, the air itself is much warmer, and several trifling signs like these are to be noticed. What I mean to say, however, is that we have no pleasing views in our smoky towns. In Manchester, one has no lovely countryside, no rippling brooks, no green trees and many-coloured flowers; and the golden glory of an English sunset is seldom witnessed. How, then, do we town people know that summer is fully here? "By the calendar," you say; but no, for did we not have very bad weather nearly all last month when we should have been having our summer? Well, I myself have found a good way. People who live in the surrounding parts of Manchester are able to tell that our summer has arrived and begin to get ready for it. Every day when I am going home I see, maybe, a boy walking along in front of me. He carries in his hand a parcel, which, by its familiar shape, I could safely say contains a cricket-bat. Again, I see the tennis-girl walking as though on air, for she has with her a brand new tennis-racket. The joyful faces of a char-a-banc party from such and such a firm also show that they know that summer is here. Once we know that it has come to stay I and my friends will go for a day in the country.—Tom Bradley, 42, Garden Street, Eccles, Manchester.

## HOW TO OPEN A BOOK.

Never open a book violently or carelessly. Do not bend back the cover. It is liable to break the back, and, not only that, it will loosen the leaves. Lay the book back downwards on a table or other smooth surface. Press the front cover down until it touches the table, then the back cover, holding the leaves in one hand while you open a few of the leaves at the back; then a few of the leaves at the front, and so on alternately, opening back and front, and gently pressing open the sections until you reach the centre of the volume. Do this two or three times, and it will ensure evenness of the leaves and prevent breaking.—Nathan Barth, 693, Colonial Avenue, Montreal, Quebec Pro., Canada.

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."

# RENTON OF THE ROVERS!



**A Magnificent New  
Football Serial.**

BY

**PAUL MASTERS.**

**Read This First.**

**JIMMY RENTON**, a keen footballer, is compelled to leave St. Clive's owing to the failure of his father in business. Jimmy obtains a situation as a reporter on the staff of the "Burchester Times." At the newspaper office he meets

**BILLY DESMOND**, a sterling, good-natured fellow, and

**LUKE RAYNER**, a caddish fellow, and the son of the man who swindled Renton's father.

Accompanied by Billy Desmond, Jimmy sets out to report a local football match between Burchester United and Winton Old Boys. The United are a man short, and Jimmy undertakes to fill the breach. He plays well for his side until the arrival of Mr. Wilberforce, his employer, who orders his return to the office. Without him, the United fail to pull off the match. The Burchester supporters are greatly annoyed, and, with Bob Lee, known as the Terror, at their head, they attack the "Burchester Times" office. By an ingenious scheme Jimmy smuggles Mr. Wilberforce out of the office before the crowd breaks in.

Baffled, the Terror and his hooligans retire. Jimmy has saved the situation! (Now read on.)

**A Tempting Offer!**

THE hostility towards Mr. Wilberforce, though it had been fierce while it lasted, soon died away.

The football enthusiasts of Burchester did not nurse their grievance. And within twenty-four hours it was practically forgotten, and the editor of the local paper was able to go about his

business as usual. All that remained to tell the story of the previous day's uproar were the broken windows of the newspaper office.

Jimmy Renton had quite settled down by this time. His lodgings, though not palatial, were comfortable; and he knew his job. It was no longer necessary for Billy Desmond to accompany him when he set out to report council meetings and police-court proceedings, and so forth. Jimmy performed these duties quite brilliantly off his own bat.

On the day following the storming of the newspaper office, Jimmy spent quite a strenuous time.

He was confined to the police-court all the morning—not as a defendant, but in the capacity of a Press representative. Then, after a hasty lunch, he had to dash off to a concert in one of the outlying villages.

In the evening, there was a big boxing tournament in Burchester; and Jimmy Renton thoroughly enjoyed reporting the proceedings. He wished there could be more boxing tournaments and less mothers' meetings.

As he emerged from the public hall, in which the boxing had taken place, a hand fell upon his shoulder, and a cheery voice exclaimed:

"Hallo, kid!"

Turning, Jimmy Renton found himself confronted by Evans, the skipper of Burchester United.

"Would you care to turn out for us on Saturday?" inquired Evans.

"I'd simply love to!" said Jimmy. "But—"

"What are you butting about? Surely you can get away on a Saturday afternoon?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"There's a skating carnival on, over at Abbotsford," he said.

"Oh, I see! So you prefer skating to footer?"

"Not at all. But I've got to go and report this confounded carnival for the paper! I don't want to do it. I'd prefer playing footer, any day. But duty calls, you know!"

"Surely Wilberforce would let you off?"

"I doubt it. He's a stickler for work."

Evans gave a grunt.

"That's a great pity," he said, "because we happen to be playing your old school on Saturday."

"What! You mean to say you're playing St. Clive's?"

Evans nodded.

"On their ground," he said.

"By Jove! In that case, I simply must turn out. I wouldn't miss it for worlds!"

Jimmy Renton's eyes sparkled at the prospect of visiting his old school. He had many friends at St. Clive's, and they would be overjoyed to see him again. Moreover, Jimmy was very keen on getting another game with Burchester United.

"Count me in," he said at length.

"I'll jaw to old Wilberforce like a Dutch uncle, and get him to give me Saturday afternoon off."

"That's the idea!" said Evans.

"Match starts at two-thirty. And we're going over to St. Clive's by motor char-a-banc. Of course, if that method of transport happens to be inconvenient to you, you can make the journey how you like, so long as you're on the field in time for the kick-off."

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"Ripping!" said Jimmy.

And he seemed to be walking on air as he went along to his lodgings.

"If only Wilberforce agrees to let me go," he reflected, "I shall have the time of my life!"

He turned in early, and arose correspondingly early next morning.

Without disturbing his landlady, he made himself a cup of tea and fried a couple of eggs; and he arrived at the newspaper office simultaneously with the charwomen.

Jimmy had put in a couple of hours' solid work before Billy Desmond turned up.

"Good-morning, old top!" said Billy cheerfully. "Been here long?"

"Since half-past seven," was the reply. "I've typed out the best part of yesterday's reports."

"Then you're a silly chump!" said Billy Desmond. "It doesn't pay to be too energetic in this show. You get no thanks for it. The more work you put in the more old Wilberforce raves and ramps. In fact, it's a case of the early worm getting the bird!"

Jimmy laughed.

"I've got an axe to grind, Billy," he said. "I want to try and persuade the chief to give me Saturday afternoon off."

"Some hopes!" grunted Billy Desmond.

"I've been asked to play for the United against St. Clive's," explained Jimmy. "And it's a match I don't want to miss on any account."

"I understand your feelings, dear boy. But I doubt if Wilberforce will unbend to the extent of letting you go. All depends what sort of a mood he happens to be in this morning. If his liver's out of order, you can bet his temper will be ditto. Listen!"

There was a sound of a door being violently slammed, and of a walking-stick being hurled across the adjoining room. Then there was a sound as of the waste-paper-basket being kicked into the fire-place.

The editor had arrived!

Jimmy Renton and his chum exchanged glances.

"Your luck's out, old man," said Billy Desmond. "The chief's got the tantrums!"

Judging by the snorts which emanated from the next room, Billy Desmond was right.

Headless of the fact that it was a very inopportune moment to beg favours, Jimmy Renton stepped into the editor's sanctum.

Mr. Wilberforce was pacing up and down like a caged beast. And if the expression on his countenance was any index to the weather conditions, it was going to be thundery, with storms locally.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Jimmy politely.

"Huh!"

"I wish to speak to you, sir—"

"Look at that fire!" snorted the editor, pointing to a smouldering heap of sticks and coal in the grate. "It's on its last legs already! See if you can coax it into a flame, Renton."

"Very good, sir!" said Jimmy.

And he grovelled on his hands and knees, blowing violently, until tongues of flame began to dart upwards.

"That's better!" said Mr. Wilberforce.

"Now, what is it you wish to ask me?"

"If I can have Saturday afternoon off, sir."

The editor's answer was prompt and emphatic.

"No!"

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 660.

"But I've been asked to play in an important match, sir—"

"Your duty, Renton, is far more important than any football match. I should not let you go even if you were playing in the English Cup Final!"

"But, sir—"

"You've been working very well lately, and I propose to give you an afternoon off one day next week. But on Saturday you have an important duty to fulfil. There is to be a skating carnival at Abbotsford, and I want you to be on the spot. Make your report at least two columns long."

"Couldn't Rayner report it, sir?"

"Rayner will be otherwise engaged."

"Ahem! I'm sure Desmond wouldn't mind—"

Mr. Wilberforce frowned.

"It's not a bit of use your trying to wriggle out of it, Renton. You will go over to Abbotsford on Saturday, and report the proceedings, or the consequences will be serious."

Jimmy looked crestfallen.

"I'm down to play against my old school, sir—"

"Enough, Renton!"

And the editor waved his hand towards the door, to signify that the interview was at an end.

"What luck?" inquired Billy Desmond, as Jimmy emerged into the outer office.

"No luck at all! The old tyrant won't let me go."

"I'm not surprised. Wilberforce is a hard taskmaster."

Jimmy grunted.

"I've half a mind to defy the beast and take French leave," he said. "But, of course, Wilberforce would find out."

"No, he wouldn't!" said Billy Desmond suddenly. "He won't be here on Saturday afternoon. I remember now. He's got a note in his diary to the effect that he'll be clearing off at lunch-time for the rest of the day. If you're really keen on going to St. Clive's, Jimmy—"

"I'm dead keen!"

"Then the coast will be clear." Billy Desmond lowered his voice, so that Rayner could not overhear. "You can borrow my motor-bike, and pop over to St. Clive's. And Wilberforce is not to know that you've taken part in the match."

"But what about the skating carnival at Abbotsford? It's got to be reported and—"

"Leave that to me. I'll do a couple of columns, and get the stuff set up in type, and Wilberforce will think you wrote it."

"It's rather risky—" began Jimmy.

"Well, man, you have to take risks on a stunt of this sort. But the odds are all in your favour. Frankly, I don't see how Wilberforce is to know that you've defied his orders and gone to St. Clive's."

Jimmy Renton hesitated.

It was a big temptation. To spend a few hours at St. Clive's, amongst his old chums, how delightful it would be! What a contrast to reporting a dull skating carnival!

The temptation was altogether too powerful for Jimmy. He succumbed to it.

"I'll go!" he exclaimed.

"Eh? You'll go where?" asked the inquisitive Rayner.

"Mind your own business!" was the retort.

And Rayner's thirst for information remained unquenched.

During the luncheon interval that day Jimmy Renton happened to meet Evans, of Burchester United.

"Well, kid," said that eminent person, "fixed things up for Saturday?"

"Wilberforce refuses to let me go," said Jimmy, "so I'm taking French leave!"

"Excellent!"

"I shall make the journey by motor-bike," Jimmy went on. "Trust me to be there in time for the kick-off."

Evans nodded, and passed on. And Jimmy Renton looked forward eagerly to his adventure.

But he would have looked forward to it less eagerly had he foreseen how it was going to turn out!

### In the Danger Zone!

**S**ATURDAY dawned bright and clear.

All the morning Jimmy Renton worked like a Trojan.

Shortly before lunch-time the editor, clad in a thick travelling-coat, appeared in the outer office.

"Would you mind getting me a taxi, Renton?" he said.

"Very good, sir!" said Jimmy.

And he bolted down into the street, and hailed a vehicle that was crawling along in quest of a fare.

From his window Mr. Wilberforce saw the taxi draw up outside the newspaper office, and he went downstairs.

Jimmy Renton held the door open in readiness for his chief to enter.

"You might tell the driver to take me to the station," said the editor.

Jimmy gave the necessary instructions, and the taxi moved off. Jimmy waved his hand after it, and chuckled.

"Thank goodness old Wilberforce will be out of the way this afternoon!" he murmured. And he went back to the office.

"Has his lordship gone?" inquired Billy Desmond.

"Yes, rather! He's going away by train somewhere."

"Good! Then I vote we go and get some grub."

"I'm coming along, too," said Rayner.

"Your mistake!" said Billy. "We're rather particular about the company we keep!"

Rayner scowled. He knew that a plot of some sort had been hatched by his two colleagues, and he was very anxious to learn the nature of that plot. But it was only too evident that Jimmy Renton and Billy Desmond weren't going to take him into their confidence.

As the two chums were passing along the High Street a few moments later they noticed that Rayner was following them. They gave him no hint that they had seen him, but they quickened their pace, and presently darted down a side-street, and threw the spy off the trail.

"It wouldn't do for Rayner to find out that you're going to St. Clive's this afternoon, and that I'm going to report the skating carnival in your place," said Billy Desmond. "He'd sneak to Wilberforce, and then the fat would be fairly in the fire!"

Jimmy Renton nodded.

"I fancy we've thrown him off the scent," he said. "Come on!"

And they went into a quiet little restaurant for lunch.

After the meal they adjourned to Billy Desmond's lodgings, glancing back from time to time to make sure they were not being shadowed by Rayner.

"Time's getting on," observed Jimmy Renton, "and St. Clive's is a long way from here. I shall have to hustle."

"I'll trot out my ancient 'bus," said Billy Desmond, "and then you'll be well away!"

The "ancient 'bus" proved to be a very modern motor-bicycle, which was extremely reliable, and capable of a high turn of speed.

It was a matter of wonder to Jimmy Renton how his chum had managed to secure such a fine machine, for Billy



Desmond's salary was anything but princely.

But Jimmy asked no questions. He promptly set the motor-cycle in motion, and with a wave of his hand and a "Cheerio!" he disappeared amidst the street traffic.

"Good luck!" sang out Billy Desmond. And then, armed with a notebook and pencil, he set off for Abbotsford to report the skating carnival.

Jimmy Renton was compelled to ride slowly through the streets of Burchester, but as soon as he reached the outskirts of the little market-town he went full speed ahead.

Fortunately he met with no mishaps on the road, and he reached St. Clive's with twenty minutes to spare.

And what a reception he got! Harcourt, the captain of the school, met him in the quadrangle, and he shook Jimmy's hand like a pump-handle.

"Talk about a ghost from the past!" he said. "I didn't think I should ever see you again, Jimmy. Come to have a look round the old place—what? Well, I'd spend the whole of the afternoon with you, old man, but I happen to be playing footer."

"Same here!" chuckled Jimmy. Harcourt stared.

"You don't mean to say you're playing for Burchester United?"

"Right on the wicket!"

"Then we shall have to prepare for a first-rate licking!"

"Afraid you will!" said Jimmy cheerfully. Harcourt piloted his old chum to the senior Common-room, where Jimmy's appearance was hailed with whoops of delight.

It was only with difficulty that Jimmy was able to tear himself away and make tracks for the football ground.

It didn't take him long to don the colours of Burchester United.

As he laced his football boots he glanced out of the window of the dressing-room, and saw that an enormous crowd bordered the touchline. St. Clive's had turned out to a man to see the match.

The news that Jimmy Renton was playing for the visiting team had spread through the school with the rapidity of a fire through gorse. And the fellows were waiting to give Jimmy a full-throated reception.

"We'll take the field now, I think," said Evans. "The referee's gone out."

"One moment!"

Renton had turned suddenly pale. He clutched his skipper by the arm.

"What's the matter with you, man?" asked Evans, in surprise. "Are you ill?"

"It—it's all up!" muttered Jimmy.

"All up? What do you mean?"

"There's Wilberforce!"

"Great Scott!"

Whilst he had been glancing out of the window, Jimmy Renton had seen the headmaster of St. Clive's come on to the field, accompanied by a gentleman in a thick travelling-coat.

Jimmy knew that travelling-coat, and he knew the wearer of it only too well! It was the editor of the "Burchester Times."

Evidently the editor was a personal friend of the Head's, for they were in close conversation.

Had Jimmy known that Mr. Wilberforce was bound for St. Clive's, he would not have dreamed of coming over with the United team.

But it was too late to retract now. Out on the field the crowd was wailing impatient, and there were cries of:

"Buck up, there!"

"Let's have you!"

Jimmy tepped back from the window. "Sorry, Evans!" he said. "But I can't possibly go on to the field now that Wilberforce is here. He'll spot me right away, and there will be a scene."

"Look here, kid," said Evans quickly, "there's only one thing to be done, in the circs."

"Well?"

"You must disguise!"

"What!"

"A false moustache, and a pair of false eyebrows, and there you are!"

"But where can I get 'em from?" asked Jimmy breathlessly.

"Surely one of the St. Clive's fellows can fix you up?"

Harcourt was about to lead his men on to the field. Jimmy called to him.

"I say, old man, I'm in the dickens of a fix! You see that merchant with the Head? He's my boss. And I've come to St. Clive's against his orders!"

"My hat!"

"You're president of the Amateur Dramatic Society, I believe. Can you bag me a false moustache and a pair of false eyebrows?"

Astounded though he was by this singular request, Harcourt lost no time in complying with it. He hastily explained the situation to the other members of his team, and then sprinted away towards the school building. He was back in three minutes with the requisite articles of make-up; and while Jimmy Renton donned the moustache and the false eyebrows, the St. Clive's eleven took the field amid a storm of cheering.

There was a brief interval, and then Burchester United came out.

The St. Clive's spectators were astonished at not seeing Jimmy Renton, and the welcome they were going to give him died away on their lips. They did not connect the person with the twirling moustache and the bushy eyebrows with their hero.

"Where's Jimmy Renton?" everybody was asking.

Mr. Wilberforce heard the question, and he turned to the Head with a smile.

"At the present moment," he said, "Renton is at Abbotsford, reporting a skating carnival for my paper. Evidently your boys were expecting to see him here, in the colours of Burchester United."

"I think you were rather hard on him in not permitting him to come," said the Head. "Ah! They have started!"

Burchester United had kicked off, and Jimmy Renton, unrecognized even by the spectators who stood within a few yards of him, put in a brilliant run on the wing. And the manner in which he dodged the defenders, and crossed the ball to the centre-forward, caused some of the onlookers to exclaim:

"That fellow plays just like Jimmy Renton!"

They little guessed that the fleet-footed winger actually was Jimmy Renton.

The centre-forward having gained possession of the ball, knew what to do with it. He banged it into the net with terrific force, and the St. Clive's goalie rolled over in the mud in a frantic but futile endeavour to save.

"Goal!"

The United were one up in the first minute—thanks to Jimmy Renton.

After this sensational start, the game proceeded on even lines until the interval, when Burchester still led by a solitary goal.

In the second half Jimmy happened to be playing on that side of the field on which the Head and his companion were standing. And he was on tenterhooks

the whole time, feeling that at any moment he might be recognised.

The St. Clive's forwards played up strongly in this half, and the opposing defence had all its work cut out to hold them.

Harcourt scored with a lightning drive a few minutes from the end, and a draw seemed inevitable.

In the last minute of the game, however, Jimmy Renton ran through on his own and scored for the United, who thus won on the post, as it were.

As soon as the final whistle had gone, Jimmy Renton heard Mr. Wilberforce tell the Head that he had to catch his train back to Burchester.

"So soon?" said the Head.

"Yes. I must go at once. And I shall have to put my best foot forward to get to the station in time."

Jimmy Renton heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness Wilberforce is going!" he muttered.

And then he broke off with a gasp of dismay. For the editor was coming straight towards him.

"Er—excuse me," said Mr. Wilberforce. "I haven't the pleasure of knowing you, but I thought you might be good enough to do me a service."

"With—with the greatest of pleasure!" stammered Jimmy.

"I intended to go back to Burchester by train," continued the editor. "But on consideration I feel certain I shall not be able to get to the station in time. And there isn't another train this evening. I believe you possess a motor-cycle?"

"That's so," said Jimmy.

"And a vacant sidecar?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Then, if you have no objection, I will fill the vacancy!" said Mr. Wilberforce, with a smile.

"All serene," said Jimmy, trying to speak as unconcernedly as possible.

"I'll just go and change my togs—"

"And I'll wait here," said the editor.

And as he wended his way to the dressing-room, Jimmy Renton reflected that the worst and most risky part of his adventure was yet to come!

(There will be another instalment of this magnificent instalment next week. Make sure of your copy.)

**Given Free!**

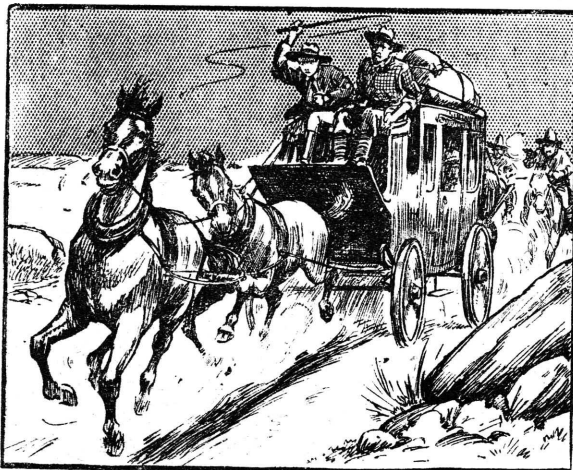
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**Magnet 1 1/2**

The Famous School Story Paper.





Tom Merry dragged the reins from the driver's grasp. Crack, crack, crack! rang out the rifles behind the coach.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Hold up on the Railroad!

**W**HIR! Clang!  
The train jarred and growled from end to end with the sudden jamming on of the brakes.

"We're stopping!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What the dickens—"

"The next stop's at Shoshone," said Levison. "We're miles from Shoshone yet. What the thump—"

The dusk was deepening over the mountains of Idaho.

Tom Merry & Co., crowded in the big Pullman car, were chatting of St. Jim's—the old school that was now so far away from them—as the train boomed on by the lonely mountain-track.

Mr. Levison was dozing in his seat, and Frank had fallen asleep; but Tom Merry & Co. were wide-awake and cheerful. Levison of the Fourth was looking from the window upon the vista of hill and valley, growing dim as the shades of evening fell darker.

It was days since the party had crossed the border from Canada and started the journey upon the American railroad. During those days they had seen nothing of the deadly enemy who had dogged them across the ocean, and had so nearly brought them to their doom in the icy wastes of Alaska. They doubted whether Dirk Power was still pursuing them.

But as the train clattered to a halt, far from any station, the thought of the man from Alaska came into every mind.

"It can't be—" began Tom Merry.

Mr. Levison started to his feet.

The sudden pallor of his worn face showed the fear that was in his heart.

The conductor came hurrying through the car, and Mr. Levison touched his arm as he passed.

"What has happened?" he breathed.

"Line blocked—trees across the rails ahead!" The man hurried on.

There was a buzz of voices among the passengers, and the train windows were crowded with inquiring and startled faces, peering out into the dusk.

"It's a hold-up!" said several voices.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Twain wobbahs, deah boys! I wish I had bwought my wife from Canada!"

Levison set his teeth.

"Train robbers!" he repeated. "It may be—but—"

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"The madman again!" whispered Frank Levison.

Mr. Levison sank into his seat again. His face was white, his lips twitching. He had allowed himself to hope that his deadly foe had been thrown off his track; but that hope was dashed away now.

"A few more days!" he muttered. "Only a few more days, and we should have reached Texas—and safety! And now—"

"We don't know yet that it is Dirk Power," said Tom Merry.

"I am sure of it!"

Tom stared from the window.

The train was at a stop now; the engine was within a few yards of a pile of rocks and trees, stacked up across the track. But for the watchfulness of the engineer the whole train might have dashed to destruction upon the barricade.

In the dusk dim figures loomed up by the track on either side—Tom Merry counted four of them, with rifles in their hands.

It was evidently a "hold-up"—not uncommon on lonely sections of the railroad in the Western States.

But was it merely a gang of Western "rustlers" in search of booty, or was it Dirk Power, whom the juniors had last seen in the frozen Arctic?

"Can you see them, Tom?" muttered Monty Lowther.

"I can't make out their faces—"

Manners caught his arm.

"Look!" he whispered.

In the light from the engine ahead a figure stepped into clear view—a figure the juniors knew well.

Tom Merry knew the coppery face, the burning eyes of the half-mad avenger—the man from Alaska!

"Dirk Power!" said Figgins.

"I knew it!" groaned Mr. Levison.

Levison of the Fourth caught his father by the arm.

"Father, pull yourself together! There are only a few of them, and we shall resist!"

"There's eight of us!" said Fatty Wynn. "They won't find us an easy handful, sir!"

"Listen!" muttered D'Arcy.

The sibilant voice of Dirk Power came to their ears along the silent, halted train. He was speaking to the engineer and the conductor.

"Keep cool! I'm not after the stuff in the express car; I'm after a man—one

man! He's a passenger on your train. I want him!"

"I guess you can't touch any passenger on this train, Mr. Man!" answered the conductor.

"Give him up, and you can pass on. I give you one minute before we open fire on the train!" said Dirk Power coolly.

"I guess—"

"Enough said! Are you handing over Mr. Levison? He was watched getting into the train at Boise City, and I know he is aboard—within sound of my voice very likely!"

Dirk Power glanced along the train as he spoke.

Quick as thought the conductor jerked out a revolver.

"Hands up!" he snapped. "Or—"

Crack!

From the shadows came the sudden ring of a rifle, and the conductor uttered a sharp cry and fell back into the car.

Dirk Power's lip curled in a cruel grin. "You're covered!" he said to the engineer. "I guess if you want to follow that fool—"

"I reckon this isn't my game, pardner. I pass!" said the engineer, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Dirk Power gave a whistle.

"Board the train!" he called out, as four or five dark figures came running from the shadows.

The train robbers clambered on board.

The frightened passengers had left the windows now, in fear of shots from the dusk. They were ready to "put up their hands" as soon as the rustlers came along the train.

Tom Merry was opening his gun-case, his face a little pale, but his lips set and resolute. In a few moments his rifle was in his hands. Dirk Power was standing by the engine, watching his followers as they boarded the train.

"Tom!" whispered Manners.

Tom Merry did not speak.

He thrust the rifle-barrel from the window, and glanced along it with a steady eye, his finger on the trigger.

There was no shot from the shadows now; the rustlers had crowded on board the train at their leader's order; only Dirk Power remained for a moment standing on the track.

That moment was enough for Tom Merry.

Crack!

Dirk Power had made one step to follow his men—but he did not make a second.

# THE TABLES TURNED!

A Magnificent Long, Complete Story of the Thrilling Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. with the Levisons.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



As he moved the bullet struck him, and, with a fearful cry, the man from Alaska staggered and fell upon the metals.

**CHAPTER 2.  
A Fight for Life!**

"H'E'S down!" yelled Levison. "Dirk Power's down—"

Mr. Levison sprang to his feet, jerking a revolver from his pocket. Those words seemed to have awakened his courage and energy.

There was a shout from the rustlers as their leader dropped.

They were crowding along the train corridor towards the Pullman, but they halted as Dirk Power shrieked and fell.

"Fire on them!" shouted Tom Merry, his eyes ablaze.

He swung the repeating rifle round into the train corridor.

Crack, crack!  
Mr. Levison's revolver rang with the rifle. And as the shooting began a dozen passengers or more produced revolvers and joined up. It needed only the beginning of resistance to encourage the rest.

Crack, crack, crack!  
The train rang and echoed with the detonations. The rustlers were firing blindly, almost at random, as they received the fire of the passengers.

Had Dirk Power been on his feet to lead them they would probably have rushed on, and a fearful affray would have followed. But the man from Alaska lay motionless on the railway track.

With loud cries of rage, the train-robbers scuttled back, and one by one they jumped from the cars.

Whizzing revolver bullets followed them now from all the windows on one side of the train.

"We're beating them!" panted Tom Merry.

Crack, crack, crack!  
Some of the raiders turned to fire back at the train as they fled, and the bullets crashed and splintered on all sides.

There were screams and groans among the passengers, but the fire from the windows was too hot, and the rustlers rapidly beat a retreat.

Dirk Power still lay stretched where he had fallen.

But as his followers fled, the man from Alaska raised himself on his elbow and stared dizzily round him.

Blood was flowing down from under his hair and streaking his coppery face.

He staggered to his feet.

"Come on!" he panted.

He made a spring towards the cars. Crack, crack, crack!  
Three or four bullets narrowly missed the madman, and a voice shouted to him from the shadows.

"The game is up, captain! Follow us!"

There was a sound of hoof-beats from the darkness. Two score of passengers were crowding from the train now, revolver in hand—Tom Merry & Co. with them. Dirk Power paused, and sprang back, and fled, panting, into the darkness. He staggered as he ran, but he vanished in the shadows.

"After him!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Fire, fire!"

A dozen revolvers rang as the madman darted into a belt of pines close by.

A yell of defiance answered the shots. Then came the staccato beat of a horse's hoofs, as the man from Alaska threw himself upon his horse and fled at a wild gallop into the night.

"He's gone!" said Levison.

"But he's hit!" said Tom Merry quietly.

Mr. Levison passed his hand across his brow.

"Saved!" he murmured. "Once again saved! You have saved all our lives, Tom Merry! But for you—"

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "If you had not potted their leadah, Tom Mewwy, I wathah think it would have been all up with us."

Some of the passengers were still rattling off revolver shots into the shadows. They were full of fight now, and it would have gone hard with the train-robbers if the rascals had lingered. But Dirk Power and his gang were gone; and the crowd proceeded to clear the track of the barricade to allow the train to proceed.

There were five or six wounded on the train as it boomed on at last towards Shoshone. But it was probable that not one of the rustler gang had escaped un-wounded, and there were two dead rustlers lying by the track when the train steamed on.

Tom Merry & Co. were glad enough to see the lights of a town ahead at last.

The attack on the train was proof conclusive that their old enemy was on their track as savagely determined as ever. The dangers they had escaped in the wilds of Alaska were dogging them in their journey across the United States.

How was the wild chase to end?

Tom wondered.

But Tom Merry and his chums did not falter.

They had left St. Jim's to help Levison and his father, and to see them through their peril, and they were grimly prepared to see it through to the bitter end. Day followed day as the railroads bore them to the south, by Colorado and New Mexico, and Dirk Power was not seen.

They could guess that his wound kept the madman inactive; but that he had given up the pursuit they did not think for a moment.

On the plains of Texas they were to meet their deadly foe once more.

**CHAPTER 3.  
Hands Up!**

**T**HE little two-horse hack that ran on the Conchos trail was crowded. Inside there were eight passengers, and Tom Merry sat beside Neuces Jim, the driver. On the roof there was a stack of baggage.

They had left the railroads behind at last. Since the attack on the train at Idaho, on their way south from Canada, they had pushed on with hardly a halt. Mr. Levison was in feverish haste to reach his destination—where he hoped to find safety from his deadly pursuer. But to some of his companions it seemed far from prudent to leave the track of civilisation and plunge into the Western wilds.

Levison of the Fourth was thinking so as he sat beside his father in the crowded hack. The party had the vehicle all to themselves—their places had been booked days ahead, and other intending passengers had had to stay at Conchos and wait for the next coach. To the right, as the hack rattled on, the sun gleamed upon flowing waters—a wide and shining river that swept down from the barren uplands of the Staked Plain on its way to join the Colorado River of Texas.

"The Rio Conchos!" said Mr. Levison, glancing from the window, and his worn face brightened a little.

He was on old ground here. In younger days he had ridden on the Texas prairie, and hunted in the deep canyons of the Staked Plain. He knew it all, from the Brazos to the Rio Grande—from El Paso to the shores of the Mexican Gulf. And his companions had noted that his spirits rose as the journey extended over the wide Texan grasslands.

Levison of the Fourth followed his father's glance.

"I suppose this is ranching country?" he remarked.

Mr. Levison nodded.

"You've been here before, father?" asked Frank.

"Yes, many years ago. I had a friend here—a comrade who has not forgotten me," said Mr. Levison. "The only man who can help me now."

"The cowboy you've spoken of—the man you call Texas Bill?" asked Levison.

"Yes."

"Where will you find him?"

"At Frio Crossing, on the upper Conchos," answered Mr. Levison. "If only we reach Frio in safety—"

"But how can Texas Bill help you, father?" said Levison uneasily. "It seems to me that we are asking for fresh dangers in getting out of the reach of law and police and civilisation."

Mr. Levison shook his head.

"Wait till you see my old comrade," he answered. "Then you will understand, Ernest. If Dirk Power follows us to Frio, I do not fear him any longer."

Levison was silent.

He was well aware that the bitter pursuit of the madman, the incessant dangers that had dogged his steps, had shaken Mr. Levison's nerve, and rendered him little able to care for himself. Levison remembered the wild journey to Alaska, where his father had hoped to find proofs of his innocence, and thus to disarm the vengeance of the madman. The journey had led to terrible perils—nothing more. Levison could not help wondering whether his father was pinning his faith to another hope that was to fail him in the hour of need.

To the schoolboy of St. Jim's, accustomed to the ordered life of a civilised country, it seemed the wildest imprudence to plunge into the Western wilderness, where Dirk Power, with unlimited wealth at his command, could raise up countless lawless enemies against them.

Of Texas Bill, the cowboy, Levison knew nothing, except that he was an old comrade of Mr. Levison's of days long gone by.

But he was glad at least to see his father's confidence returning—glad to see the haunting terror disappearing from the worn face.

The hack rattled and bumped on over the rough trail.

On either side stretched the wide plains, broken only by the rushing waters of the Rio Conchos, and a few straggling belts of live oak and sassafras.

Tom Merry, as he sat beside the driver outside, had a rifle across his knees, and his eyes swept the plains with a vigilant look-out.

Tom looked little like the Shell fellow of St. Jim's now.

At San Antonio the juniors had changed their outfit. Tom Merry wore a blue shirt and a velveteen jacket, and deerskin trousers tucked into riding-boots, and his curly head was shaded by a big Stetson hat. His face was already browned by the hot Texas sun.

Neuces Jim glanced at the English schoolboy several times as he handled his two-horse team. He could see that Tom Merry was on the watch, and it seemed to entertain the Texan stage-driver.

"I guess you're looking for road-agents, sonny?" he remarked, after a long silence, and having freed his mouth for speech by ejecting a stream of brown tobacco-juice.

Tom smiled.

"Are you ever held up on the trail?" he asked.

"Waal, it's happened, I guess."



answered the driver. "But I reckon you won't find any use for that popgun this journey, lub. There was a gang of Mexican rustlers used to cavort around in this hyer section, but they was cleared out years ago by Texas Bill and the cowboys at Frio."

"Texas Bill!" exclaimed Tom. "You know him?"

The driver nodded.

"I guess there ain't a galoot along the Conchos that don't know him!" he answered. "I was with him when he cleaned out Dirk Power's gang of rustlers, fifteen years ago, in the Staked Plain!"

"Dirk Power!" repeated Tom. "Then Power has been here?"

"I should smile!" said Neuces Jim. "I guess Power was the most dangerous rustler that ever lifted cattle in Texas, till Texas Bill got him. He lit out after his gang was broken up, though, and I heard that he went north, to Canady or Alaska."

Neuces Jim let the reins fall on his knees, while he cut a fresh plug of tobacco and jammed it into his capacious mouth.

Tom Merry's eyes roamed over the plains ahead.

He had wondered why Mr. Levison placed so much faith in the aid of Texas Bill, but he was beginning to understand now. It was the Texan from whom Dirk Power had fled in the old days—before he went to Alaska. If the madman followed them to Frio, he would find his old enemy there. Was that Mr. Levison's plan, then—to turn the tables upon him, so that the hunter would become the hunted?

Ahead of the hack a belt of live oaks and cottonwood trees sprawled across the trail; the scarcely-marked track ran under spreading branches.

Neuces Jim jerked a stubby thumb towards the clump.

"I reckon that's where this old horse was held up last time," he remarked. "But you needn't handle your popgun, bub—there ain't nary a road-agent on this trail now."

Tom Merry was not thinking of road-agents as he handled his rifle. He was thinking of Dirk Power, and wondering whether the man from Alaska would seek to strike another blow before the party reached the shelter of Frio Crossing.

He caught sight of a shadowy, moving figure under the trees.

"Somebody's there!" he said to the driver.

"I guess it's a cowboy restin' in the shade," drawled Neuces Jim. "You ain't no call to be skered."

"I'm not scared," answered Tom quietly. "If you should be called on to halt, what would you do?"

Neuces Jim grinned.

"I guess I'd halt!" he answered. "I'm paid to drive this hyer hack, not to fight road-agents. That's the sheriff's business. If any galoot popped up a gun, I reckon this infant would put up his hands. Just a few! I ain't arguing with a rustler and a gun!"

Tom Merry set his lips.

From his own point of view, Neuces Jim was not to be blamed, but if an attempt was made to hold up the stage, Tom Merry had his own ideas on the subject, which did not agree with Neuces Jim's.

He watched anxiously as the hack rattled on towards the belt of timber through which the trail ran.

There were shadowy figures under the trees, he knew, and he was on the alert for danger.

The hack passed under the big, wide-

spreading branches of the cottonwoods, that shut out the blazing sun overhead.

There was a jingle of bridles, a click of rifle-locks, and a voice shouted from the trees.

"Halt!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!" ejaculated Neuces Jim.

"Halt, and put up your hands!"

A dozen horsemen pushed out of the thickets, surrounding the hack. Neuces Jim stared at them blankly, and dragged at the reins.

Tom Merry caught his arm.

"Drive on!"

"Hay?"

"Drive on, you fool!"

"I guess—"

"Halt!"

Tom Merry dragged the reins from the driver's grasp with a fierce clutch, and tore the whip from him. The whip cracked and rang on the backs of the team, and the hack, which had nearly halted, leaped forward suddenly.

Crack, crack, crack! rang the whip on the horses' backs, as Tom Merry plied it furiously; and the startled horses tore forward frantically. And crack, crack, crack! rang out the rifles behind the flying coach.

#### CHAPTER-4.

#### Surrounded!

CLATTER, clatter! Bump! Inside the hack there were startled exclamations and cries.

The sudden leap of the vehicle on the rough trail had hurled the inside passengers into one another's arms.

Neuces Jim sat dazed.

Tom Merry did not heed him. With an iron grip on the reins, he drove on the two-horse team, with lash on lash, crack on crack, of the whip.

Behind the hack the wild horsemen were in the trail, shouting, and loosing off rifle and revolver.

Tom Merry's sudden action had taken the rustlers by surprise.

They had counted on an easy prey as the driver drew in his horses at their order; and the sudden leap forward of the hack had left them stranded. Two or three of them had had bare time to back out of the way and avoid being run down.

Bullets hailed on the coach from behind.

Crack, crack! Smash!

"Bai Jove, they're shootin'!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as he extricated himself from Monty Lowther. "It's an attack!"

Mr. Levison leaned from the window regardless of the whizzing bullets, and looked back along the trail.

A dozen horsemen were in fierce pursuit, firing as they galloped, and among them he recognised the scarred Spaniard, Juarez, and the Mexican half-breed, the old associates of Dirk Power. But the man from Alaska was not to be seen.

Mr. Levison smiled bitterly.

"Again!" he muttered.

"Is it the enemy, father?" asked Levison.

"Yes."

The hack tore on. They were through the belt of timber now, and the wide plain lay open before them.

Tom Merry drove hard.

The two horses were tearing on at top speed, and the hack bumped and rocked and swayed behind like a boat in a high sea.

Neuces Jim sat in silent astonishment for some minutes. But he turned on the junior at last.

"I guess you'll hand me them ribbons, bub!" he said.

"Will you drive on?"

"Sure!"

"Here you are, then!"

Neuces Jim grasped the reins once more, and drove on his team. He was "in for it" now, as well as his passengers, and he was bent on doing his best to escape the road-agents.

Tom Merry was glad to be relieved of his task.

He stood up in his seat, holding on to avoid being tossed off by the leaping of the hack. The baggage on the roof obstructed his view to the rear, and he had to stand on the seat to look over it. He laid his rifle across the top.

Tom Merry was a good marksman, but shooting was difficult at a moving mark, with the hack leaping and bumping under him. The bullets of the pursuers were mostly flying wild, though some of them struck the hack and splintered the woodwork.

Tom Merry fired back at the pursuers, pumping out the bullets from his magazine-rifle.

Three bullets flew wide, but the fourth claimed a victim, and he saw a yelling Mexican roll out of his saddle and disappear in the high grass.

Crack, crack, crack!

The scarred Spaniard, better mounted than his comrades on a big "American" horse, was spurring on furiously, slanting from the trail to the right. Tom Merry guessed his object easily enough; it was to get a shot at the horses, protected by the hack from the riders behind. Tom fired twice, thrice at the Spaniard; but the motion baffled his aim, and the scarred man rode on.

Now he was firing not at the hack, but at the horses.

"Faster, faster!" panted Tom.

Neuces Jim turned the quid in his mouth.

"I guess this hyer hossflesh is doing its durndest," he answered coolly. "If that galoot gets a bead on the critters, we're done. But we ain't above two mile out of Frio now."

Clatter, clatter!

The horses tore madly on.

Crack!

The scarred Spaniard, riding almost abreast of the team now, was firing at the horses savagely.

There was a sudden shrill squeal from the leader, and the hapless animal gave a last leap and rolled in the trail. The Spaniard's bullet had gone home at last.

The other horse piled over the fallen animal at once, and the hack, carried on by its own impetus, crashed on the sprawling beasts and overturned. With a terrific crash it came down on its side in the trail.

There was a yell of triumph from the pursuing horsemen.

They came galloping on faster, and firing furiously.

Tom Merry sprang clear as the hack fell. He did not heed the cries from the interior; there was no time to attend to his comrades then. He jammed fresh cartridges into his magazine, and threw the rifle to his shoulder, firing across the overturned vehicle as the horsemen swept on.

Another man dropped from his horse, and another. From the hack Mr. Levison struggled, followed by Levison of the Fourth, and both of them opened fire on the enemy.

The horsemen opened out, and swept round on either side of the fallen hack. The hot fire had stopped the charge.

But there were still nine of the enemy, and they were all round the wreck of the stage, ahead as well as on either side, and flight was out of the question. They drew back from an immediate encounter, but it was only a breathing-space.

Tom Merry panted.

"I guess this lets us out!" drawled Neuces Jim.

"Line up, you fellows! We'll beat them yet!"

"Yaas, wathah!" panted a muffled voice from inside the hack. "Lowthah, will you have the extweme goodness to get off my neck? You are causin' me vevy gweat inconvenience!"

The juniors struggled one by one from the hack.

They were badly shaken and bruised by the smash, but fortunately none had received serious injury.

They scrambled out, rifle or revolver in hand, and joined Tom Merry on the trail.

Juarez and his gang had dismounted, and were in cover in the high grass on either side of the trail. From their cover they were opening a steady fire on the hack.

The two horses had ceased to move; they were almost riddled with bullets. Neuces Jim had a streak of blood down one tanned cheek. He had been pumping out bullets from a big Navy revolver, and one of the rustlers had fallen to his shooting.

"Down in the trail!" rapped out Tom Merry; and his comrades obeyed his order promptly.

They lay on their faces, firing back at the rustlers without seeing them. The bullets tore and whistled through the grass.

Neuces Jim took cover close by the hack, and reloaded his revolver.

"I guess this is my last bender," he remarked, ejecting a stream of tobacco-juice. "I owe you a hiding, sonny, for takin' the ribbons out my grip. If we live I guess you'll get it some!"

Tom Merry did not reply.

He was watching for a rush from Juarez and his gang. He wondered that Dirk Power was not with the ruffians. Probably his wound was still troubling the man from Alaska, and he had left his black work to his associates.

The fire of the rustlers whizzed overhead; there was little danger from their shooting. But at any moment the rush might come. The stirring in the grass showed that the ruffians, on foot now, were creeping to closer quarters.

"Look out!" breathed D'Arcy. "They're comin', deah boys!"

"And we ain't a mile out of Frio!" murmured Neuces Jim. "I guess the shootin' orter be heard at Frio. What wouldn't I give to see Texas Bill at this hyer minute!"

Crack, crack, crack!

Some of the rustlers were still firing to cover their comrades who were creeping through the high grass.

Tom Merry fired at a stir in the grass, and a fearful cry answered the shot. The bullet had found the unseen, creeping enemy.

"Well done, Tom!" panted Manners. "They're coming!"

"Stand up to them!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

There was a wild stirring in the grass, and Stetson hats rose into view as the rustlers, close to their prey now, rushed suddenly to the attack. At the same moment the thunder of horses' hoofs rang to the ears of the juniors, and there was a fresh burst of firing on the prairie. Mr. Levison gave a groan.

"We are lost! It's a fresh gang—"

For one bitter moment Tom Merry & Co. gave themselves up for lost. If it were reinforcements for the rustlers, all was over. But the next moment they understood.

For the ruffians who were rushing down on them suddenly stopped, with howls of alarm, and turned back and

ran for their horses... They scrambled wildly upon their animals, and galloped through the grass in all directions. The sudden flight astonished the juniors, and Tom Merry threw up his rifle again as a bunch of horsemen came riding down on the hack. But Mr. Levison caught his arm.

"Stop!"

"But—"

"Friends! We are saved!"

"Thank Heaven!"

Tom Merry lowered his rifle as the horsemen cantered up—six or seven cattlemen in Stetson hats, with rifles in their hands. The leader, a powerfully-built man with a deeply-bronzed face, sprang from his horse, and Mr. Levison rushed to meet him.

"By Jerusalem! Levison!"

"Texas Bill!"

They gripped hands.

In the distance, what were left of Juarez and his gang were riding wildly in flight.

### CHAPTER 5.

#### Straight from the Shoulder!

"SO this is Frio Crossing?" said Tom Merry.

The sun was sinking, in a blaze of purple and gold, towards the desert uplands of the Staked Plain.

Tom Merry stood on the wooden veranda of the Lone Star Hotel at Frio Crossing and looked about him.

Frio Crossing was a rough-and-ready settlement in the wilds of Texas.

There was a single street of cabins and shacks, with here and there a Mexican adobe jacal. The hotel was the only large building, and it was a lumber-built structure of a very primitive kind. Next in size was the Red Dog Saloon, where the naphtha-lamps outside were already flaring as the sun went down.

Close by rolled the waters of the upper Conchos, where the ford lay, the muddy banks trampled by the hoofs of innumerable cattle. The lowing of cattle could be heard on all sides.

Round the cattlemen's camp lay wide ranch-lands, where for scores of miles a rider might gallop and see nothing but grass and herds of steers.

Mr. Levison and his companions were at the Lone Star Hotel, safe at last. And Neuces Jim was in the bar, recounting the exciting episode on the trail to a crowd of interested hearers, and imbibing the potent "tanglefoot" in large quantities.

Tom Merry & Co., after a meal in the hotel, came out on the veranda to look about them, leaving Mr. Levison in talk with Texas Bill within.

"Wathah a wuff spot, deah boys," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass on the rugged, unpaved street. "But I am vey glad to get heah, all the same. I wathah like that chap Texas Bill. Wuff and weady, you know, but a weal good sort."

"We're safe here, anyhow," said Frank Levison.

Levison of the Fourth drew a deep breath.

"I think father was right to come here, after all," he said. "It seems that his old comrade, Texas Bill, is now sheriff in this section, and he's just the man to help him. He has an old quarrel with Dirk Power. The man was an outlaw here years ago—that was before my father knew him in Alaska. If Power should show himself here, it would be a case of lynch law. I think the tables are going to be turned upon that mad villain at last."

Tom Merry nodded.

"But will he come?" he said. "He will know his danger—"

"Oh, he will come! What happened on the Conchos trail to-day doesn't look as if he had given it up."

"That's so."

Levison glanced at the plains beyond the group of cabins, darkening now as the sun sank lower.

"Dirk Power is not far away," he said. "He will have to be careful here—he's in a country where he is known. It's fifteen years since he was a cattle raider in these parts; but he hasn't been forgotten. In the last tussle, before he fled, he shot Texas Bill's brother. If the sheriff should get hold of him he will hang him on the nearest tree."

Tom Merry shivered.

"After all, it would be justice," he said.

"We're in a country now where justice is rough and ready," said Levison. "My father was right to come. I think Texas Bill will see him through."

"Hallo! There's the driver!" said Manners.

Neuces Jim emerged from the hotel below the veranda, with several grinning cattlemen in his company.

The tanglefoot had evidently had its effect on the stage-driver; his face was flushed and excited, and his eyes were gleaming.

"Where is he?" he roared. "Where is that young tenderfoot what grabbed the ribbons under my paws? I want to know!"

"Looking for you, Tom," said Figgins.

Tom knitted his brows.

"Where is he?" roared Neuces Jim, blinking up at the veranda. "Are you there, you gol-darned tenderfoot?"

"I'm here!" answered Tom quietly.

"Come down and be hided!"

"Don't be a fool!" answered Tom Merry crisply. "Go and lie down somewhere and get sober!"

"I guess I'm going to hide you, you gol-darned tenderfoot," answered Neuces Jim, and he came clambering up the wooden steps to the veranda, with his whip gripped in his hand.

"Go slow, Jim!" advised one of the cowboys, who were looking on and grinning. "The tenderfoot was right. I guess he did what you ought to have done."

Neuces Jim blinked round at the cowboy.

"You shet your yaup-trap, Buck-kin!" he said. "I've drove that there hack for twenty years, and never had the ribbons grabbed out of my hands yet! No, sir! And a durned tenderfoot schoolboy, by gum! I guess I'm going to hide him!"

Buckskin shrugged his broad shoulders. "The sheriff's jest inside," he said.

"Durn the sheriff!"

"You won't durn the sheriff if he steps out to intervue you," grinned Buckskin.

"Oh, you go and chop chips!" retorted Neuces Jim savagely. "I guess I'm going to hide that tenderfoot, just a few! You watch out!"

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That uttah ass is lookin' for twouble, Tom Mewwy. You can't fight a big wuffian like that, old chap. Pew-waps I had bettah tackle him."

Tom Merry smiled.

He stepped towards the head of the steps from the ground, up which Neuces Jim was clambering, whip in hand.

The stage-driver gave him a surly glare.

"Oh, hyer you are!" he said.

"Here I am," said Tom Merry quietly.

"I guess you're going to be hided, and I reckon you'd better take it quiet," said the stage-driver. "I'm a bad man when I get my mad up, and I've got a gun hyer—"

"Keep back!" said Tom. "If you put



a foot on this veranda, I'll knock you off it fast enough!"

Neuces Jim gave a snort of contempt. "You knock me off!" he said. "I guess it would take about a dozen head of greenhorns like you to do that. I'm coming for you."

He plunged on to the veranda, his whip singing in the air. The long lash curled round Tom Merry's shoulders. Tom's eyes blazed, and he closed in on the stage-driver, and struck out straight from the shoulder. Neuces Jim certainly had not expected a drive like that from a tenderfoot schoolboy. Tom Merry's clenched fist struck him fairly on the jaw, with a blow that was a good deal like the kick of a mule.

The stage-driver uttered a startled howl, and toppled back on the steps. The next moment he was crashing down.

A roar of laughter came from the group of cowboys below.

"Well punched, sonny!" yelled Bucks-kin.

Crash!

Neuces Jim sprawled dazedly on the ground. He sat up and blinked round him, with an ache in every bone of his body. His glance passed dizzily over the laughing cattlemen.

"Waal, carry me hum to die!" he gasped. "Whur's that mule what kicked me? Say!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say, pard, whur's that durned mule?" howled Neuces Jim, dragging at a revolver in his belt.

"You jay, you're full of tanglefoot!" grinned Bucks-kin. "It wasn't no mule, it was the tenderfoot!"

Neuces Jim sat and blinked at him, and his mind seemed to clear. He struggled to his feet at last, a deadly gleam in his eyes, and his revolver came whipping from his belt.

"I guess I've been hit by that tender-foot!" he said thickly. "I guess he's downed me, and I ealkerlate it's the last thing that tenderfoot'll do on this hyer aith."

His revolver was swinging up towards the veranda, when a tall figure came out of the hotel. A grip of iron was laid on Neuces Jim's arm, and his pistol was forced down towards the earth. He turned his head to glare savagely at the man who had gripped him, and looked into the grim, bronzed face of Texas Bill.

## CHAPTER 6.

### An Alarm in the Night!

**T**EXAS BILL tightened his grasp on the stage-driver's arm till the bone almost cracked in his muscular grip. Neuces Jim gave a howl of pain. All his ferocity was gone now.

"Let up, sheriff!" he gasped.

"What were you going to do with that gun, say?" said the sheriff of Frio Crossing grimly.

"I—I guess—"

"The galoot's mad at the tenderfoot for takin' the ribbons from him on the trail, sheriff," said Bucks-kin. "I guess he started in to hide the tenderfoot, and slipped up on it, some."

Texas Bill nodded.

"I reckoned so! Drop that gun, Neuces Jim!"

"I guess, sheriff—"

"Drop that gun!" thundered the sheriff.

The revolver clattered on the ground.

It was pretty evident that Texas Bill's word was law at Frio Crossing. Not that Neuces Jim had much chance of resistance, if he had been so minded. Brawny man as he was, he seemed like

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an infant in the grasp of the gigantic sheriff of Frio.

As the pistol dropped, Texas Bill pitched the stage-driver against one of the wooden posts of the veranda, and Neuces Jim staggered there, shaking. The sheriff's quiet blue eyes were fixed on him.

The crowd of cattlemen in the rugged street thickened. There were two score of onlookers now, all keenly interested. From the veranda Tom Merry & Co. looked down, wondering what was going to happen. So far, Texas Bill had seemed to them a rugged, good-natured cattleman; but the look on his bronzed face was quite different now, and it made the hapless Neuces Jim shrink in fear.

"So you're going to hide the tenderfoot for doing a real plucky thing, that you ought to have done, you galoot?" said the sheriff of Frio Crossing.

"I guess I'm letting him off, sheriff, if you say so!" stammered Neuces Jim.

"I guess you are!" said Texas Bill.

"But I guess I ain't letting you off, Neuces Jim, for drawing a gun on the tenderfoot!" He glanced round. "Give me a quirt!"

## NOTE!

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"Hyer you are, sheriff!"

Bucks-kin handed the sheriff a heavy cattle-whip.

"I—I guess, sheriff—" mumbled Neuces Jim feebly.

"Bai Jove! What is he goin' to do?" breathed D'Arcy, staring down from the veranda.

It was soon clear what the sheriff of Frio was going to do.

He gripped Neuces Jim by the collar with his left hand, and swung him clear of the veranda-post. The heavy quirt sang in his right.

Lash, lash, lash!

Neuces Jim roared and struggled as the quirt rose and fell.

"Now, run, you galoot, run!" said the sheriff, releasing his collar. "I guess I'm after you! Run!"

There was a roar of wild laughter from the crowd of cattlemen as Neuces Jim broke into a frantic run up the street. Behind him strode the sheriff, lashing with the heavy whip.

Lash, lash!

Neuces Jim disappeared into the dusk, his wild howls ringing from the distance.

"My hat!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"They have queer ways of keeping up law and order here! I think I shall be awfully polite to Texas Bill!"

"Yaas, wathah!" grinned Arthur Augustus.

The tall figure of the sheriff came striding back.

He tossed the quirt back to Bucks-kin, and came up the steps of the Lone Star veranda. His bronzed face had its good-humoured smile again now. The St. Jim's juniors regarded him curiously. He came up to Tom Merry and held out a big hand.

"Shake, youngster!" he said. "I guess you're the real goods! My old pard, Mr. Levison, has told me how you ran the stage on after the driver was letting up. I guess you're the real white article!"

Tom Merry smiled as he shook hands with the sheriff of Frio. He winced the next moment. Texas Bill's grip was a powerful one.

"I've been talking it over with Mr. Levison," continued the sheriff of Frio. "He reckons that that fire-buff, Dirk Power, is coming back to this section after him, owing to their trouble up in Alaska. I guess we'll be glad to see him. Some of his old gang—Jaurez, and that Greaser, Antonio—was in the row to-day on the Conchos trail, so I reckon Dirk Power ain't fur off. He's wanted bad in this section—there's a rope ready for him. To-morrow morning I'm taking the trail for him, and if you'd care to ride with the sheriff's posse you're welcome!"

"I'll be jolly glad!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Count us all in, my deah sir!"

Texas Bill glanced at the swell of St. Jim's.

"I reckon you wouldn't be any use," he said—"no room for dudes in my outfit!"

"Bai Jove!"

The sheriff went into the hotel with that. Apparently Tom Merry was the only member of the St. Jim's party he cared to ask to join his "outfit" on the trail of the man from Alaska.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy polished his eyeglass, and jammed it very firmly into his eye.

"I was wathah inclined to wespect that chap," he said. "I am sowwy to discovah that he is such an attah ass. I am certainly goin' to join in wunnin' down that wuffian to-mowwow!"

"Same here!" said Figgins. "If the sheriff doesn't want us we'll go on our own!"

"We can take some grub with us," remarked Fatty Wynn thoughtfully. "I'll see to that!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Better ask Mr. Levison," he said. "We're under Texas Bill's orders here, and we'd better toe the line. He's a good chap, I believe; and he's just the man to deal with Dirk Power. I fancy that villain has met his match in the sheriff of Frio."

Mr. Levison looked out on the veranda. "Bed now," he said, with a smile. The hunted man was looking years younger since his talk with Texas Bill. There was a new confidence in his manner, a new light in his eyes.

"Are you going on the trail to-morrow with the sheriff, father?" asked Frank Levison.

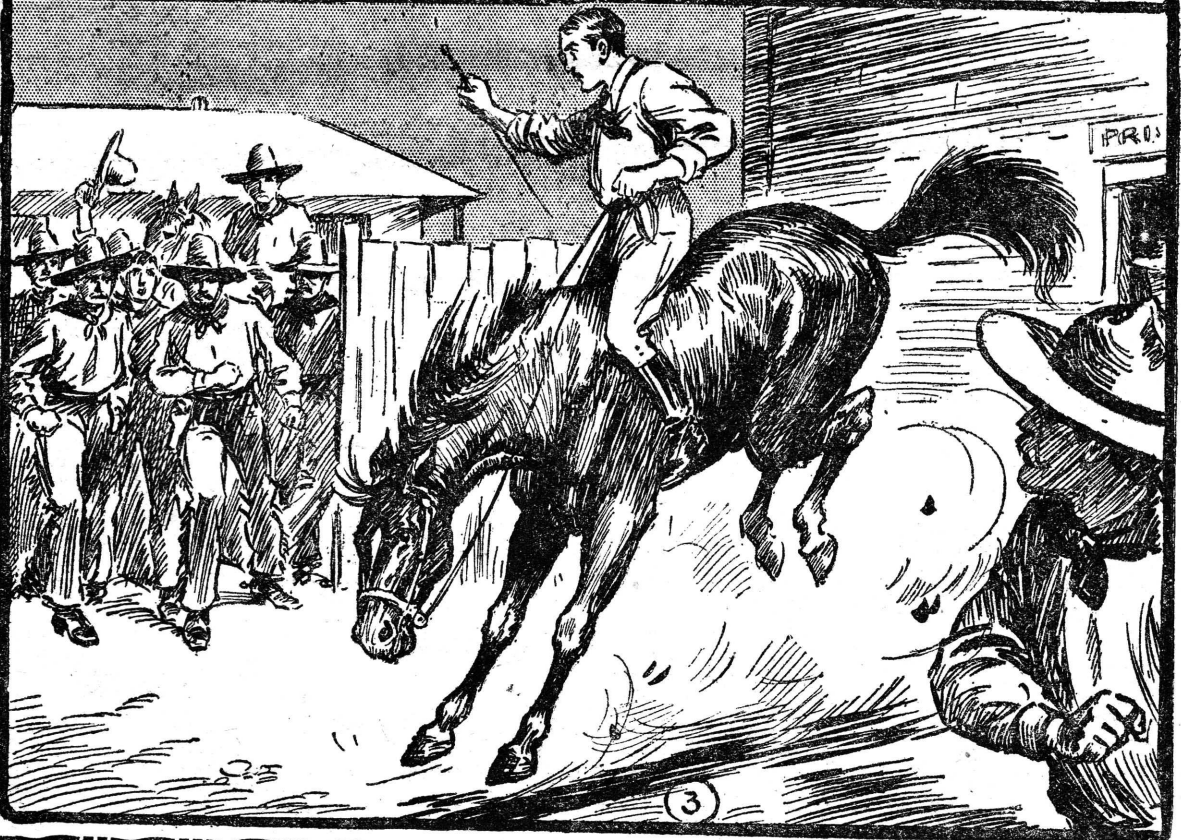
"Yes, my boy!"

"We're all coming!" exclaimed Manners.

"That must be left to the sheriff," answered Mr. Levison gravely. "Texas Bill gives orders here. Now to bed!"

Tom Merry & Co. trooped off to bed; and after their exciting experiences that day they were ready to fall into sound

(Continued on page 12.)



(1) Tom Merry threw the rifle to his shoulder, and fired across the overturned vehicle as the horsemen swept on. (See page 8.)

(2) Tom Merry's clenched fist struck the stage-driver fairly on the jaw and sent him crashing down the steps. (See page 10.)

(3) There were exclamations of amazed admiration, as Arthur Augustus still sat the prancing, foaming mustang, baffling every attempt of the savage animal to unseat him. (See page 13.)



sleep. But their sleep in the lonely camp on the Conchos was destined to be interrupted. They slept in their clothes on the rough mattresses which were all the beds provided at the Frio Crossing Hotel. They slept soundly enough, undisturbed by the lowing of cattle, and the buzz of noise from the Red Dog Saloon, which did not cease till midnight. It was after midnight, when the stars glimmered down on the sleeping town, and on the murmuring waters of the Rio Conchos, that the awakening suddenly came.

Tom Merry started suddenly from his sleep, and his hand instinctively sought the rifle that lay beside him on the planks.

Crack, crack, crack! Gallop, gallop! A thunder of hoofs, a roar of voices, and a rattle of firing awoke every echo of Frio Crossing. And as the juniors started up in alarm the deep, powerful voice of Texas Bill rang to their ears, booming through the shack hotel.

"Wake! Wake! The rustlers are on us!"

## CHAPTER 7.

### The Midnight Raid!

**T**OM MERRY rushed to the window, rifle in hand.

Dim starlight glimmered down on the street of Frio.

In the dimness Tom caught wild glimpses of dark faces, flashing black eyes, blazing rifles, and tossing manes.

The street was crowded with horsemen, shouting wildly, and discharging their rifles recklessly at the buildings on both sides of the rugged street.

Smash!

Two or three bullets splintered on the shutter, and Tom Merry jumped back from the window.

"What's the wow?" gasped D'Arcy.

"It's a raid on the town!" said Tom.

"A raid of the rustlers, I suppose—there's a big crowd of them. They're holding up the camp!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Shoot!" came the roar of Texas Bill.

"Shoot, you galoots!"

"Back up, you fellows!" panted Tom.

Crash, crash!

Heavy blows resounded on the door of the shanty hotel.

A number of the rustlers had dismounted there, and had crowded under the veranda, where they were safe from firing from the upper windows. Axes crashed and clattered on the barred door.

A crowd of horsemen galloped and careered up and down the street, yelling and firing—evidently a plan to keep the townsmen off while the hotel was attacked.

Windows and doors of the cabins were shut and barred, and from many windows came the reports of firearms. At one end of the street a blaze leaped up and danced on the blackness of the night. A Mexican jacal had been fired there, the jay leaves with which it was thatched bursting into ready flame. A red glow, dancing and wavering amid black shadows, was flung on the wild scene in the street.

Crash, crash!

A voice was heard shouting to the rustlers to hurry, and the juniors recognised the tones of Dirk Power.

The street was held by the raiders; but it was not likely to be held for long. Dirk Power had but a brief space to get to close quarters with his enemy before the townsmen rallied and fell upon the raiders in strong force.

Crash, crash!

"Back up, there!" shouted Texas Bill.

The juniors crowded down, rifle in hand, to help in the defence. Texas Bill

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and two or three cowboys were within the doorway, firing through the door as it splintered under the axes. Yells from outside showed that their fire was effective. Among the defenders was Neuces Jim—sober now, and blazing away with his revolver. Tom Merry jostled him in the gloom, and Neuces Jim, recognising him, grinned at him, all his animosity apparently gone.

"It's nip and tuck now, sonny!" he said. "If they get into the shebang before the cowboys rally and round them up we're all gone coons, and you'll never get that hiding!"

Tom laughed breathlessly.

"Shoot! Shoot!" yelled the sheriff.

The door was crashing into strips, and starlight glimmered through a dozen gashes and rents.

From within volleys pealed through the crashing woodwork, and loud cries answered, amid crashing blows.

The voice of Dirk Power was heard shouting again.

"Levison! Where are you, Levison? Come out, you coward!"

Crack, crack, ran Mr. Levison's revolver in reply.

With a final crash the door burst in.

With a fierce rush the wild-looking rustlers came to the attack, scrambling through the broken door.

Fierce fire met them from within, and it stopped the rush. Five or six men sprawled in the doorway, yelling.

The raiders fell back.

Tom Merry heard groans beside him in the gloom. The raiders were firing in from the street, and two of the cowboys lay on the floor.

There was a clatter of horses' hoofs in the street, and the scarred Spaniard dashed up. He dragged in his mustang almost upon its haunches, and shouted to Dirk Power.

"Capitano! Mount—mount and ride! It's too late!"

Dirk Power uttered a savage oath.

"Not without—"

"In a minute more all is lost!" shouted Juarez.

Without waiting for a reply from his leader, the Spaniard put spurs to his horse and dashed away at a wild gallop.

Dirk Power stared round him, gritting his teeth.

The horsemen were in flight now, riding out of the prairie town as fast as they had ridden in, or faster.

Heavy fire was sweeping the street, and more than one saddle was emptied as the rustlers dashed away.

The man from Alaska ground his teeth with savage rage.

The attack on the prairie town had been wild and reckless, but from its very recklessness there had been a chance of success. Had the hotel been rushed at the first attack, the madman would have dealt with his victims and ridden off before the townsmen could rally. But the defence of the hotel had baffled him. He had only minutes to count upon, and the minutes were gone. As soon as the townsmen of Frio recovered from their surprise, they rallied on all sides to deal with the raiders, and then there remained nothing but flight for the gang.

Dirk Power realised that his chance was gone, and he sprang towards his horse.

His comrades were already seeking safety in flight, save the men who lay groaning on the ground and could not flee.

He threw himself into the saddle as the sheriff of Frio rushed out into the street.

"Dirk Power—at last!" shouted Texas Bill.

He fired at the man from Alaska jabbed the long Mexican spurs into his horse's flanks.

The bullet missed by an inch, as the horse leaped madly forward.

The next moment Dirk Power was in the midst of the mob of horsemen pouring out of the town upon the dark prairie, riding for his life.

"Texas Bill muttered a curse.

"Horses!" he thundered. "Horses hyer!"

In a few minutes the sheriff and a crowd of cowboys were mounted and galloping from Frio on the track of the rustlers. Tom Merry would have joined them, but Mr. Levison called him back.

For the remainder of the night Frio Crossing was in a state of wild excitement.

The fire spread to three or four lumber shacks, and there was a struggle before it was quenched with water drawn in buckets from the Conchos. There were a dozen wounded men to be seen to; and a dozen or more of the raiders remained in the hands of the vengeful townsmen, to be tried in the morning before the sheriff's court, and to receive terribly sharp and swift justice.

The sky was pale in the dawn when Texas Bill and the cowboys rode back into Frio.

They returned empty-handed, and fatigued with a hard ride. Dirk Power and his followers had escaped in the darkness on the prairie.

Texas Bill flung himself from his horse, and stamped into the hotel, with a black brow. Mr. Levison met him as he came.

"Vamoosed!" said the Frio sheriff between his teeth. "He's got clear, old pard; he has Satan's own luck! But I guess we're going on the trail at sun-up!"

"But you have no clue—"

"I guess he's got a hiding-place somewhere along the Conchos," said the sheriff. "He's gathered a gang of the toughest rustlers in these parts, and he must have a place for camp not fur away, I reckon. And I guess we'll find it!"

"But how—"

"There's prisoners in the calaboose," said Texas Bill grimly. "I guess one of them will be ready to tell tales to save his neck. Now for an hour's sleep before we take the trail!"

And the sheriff strode away to his room.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Quality of Arthur Augustus!

**T**OM MERRY & CO. did not close their eyes again that night.

Dawn was near at hand, and after the wild excitement of the rustlers' raid they were in no mood for sleep.

In the early sunlight they had a hurried breakfast at the hotel, which had a wrecked and ruined look in the light of day. All the prairie town was astir and buzzing with excitement. The daring and reckless raid of the prairie rustlers was the one topic in Frio. Cowboys coming in from the ranches heard the news, and a goodly array of horsemen paraded before the Lone Star Hotel ready to take the trail with the sheriff.

Texas Bill had gone across to the calaboose—a log building down the street where the rustler prisoners were confined. The juniors wondered how the captured rustlers would be dealt with, but they preferred not to know. It was probable that Dirk Power's gang would receive very short shrift. Between cowboy and rustler in the lanos of the West it was war to the knife.

Mr. Levison joined the juniors as they finished breakfast. He had a rifle on his back and a bandolier across his breast. There was a gleam in his eyes, and grim determination in his face. He looked

little enough like the man, haunted with fear, who had fled from Dirk Power. For the first time it was now he that was to hunt, and the man from Alaska who was to flee. The tables were turned at last!

"I've spoken to the sheriff," he said. "You will join the party with me—that is, if you choose. Texas Bill saw how you faced the enemy in the raid last night, and he will be glad to have you—and I am glad, too. I did not wish to leave you behind; you are safer with the sheriff's outfit."

"That's good news!" said Figgins with great satisfaction. "Don't forget to take a bag of grub, Fatty!"

"Trust me!" grinned Fatty Wynn. "I am vewy glad—" began Arthur Augustus.

Mr. Levison coughed. "I am afraid you must be excepted, D'Arcy!" he said.

"What?"

"Texas Bill does not seem impressed with your fighting qualities, and he thinks you may be in the way," said Mr. Levison. "You will be made quite comfortable at the hotel while we are on the trail—"

Arthur Augustus flushed crimson. "Weally, sir—" he began hotly.

"It's your eyeglass that's done it, Gussy!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I saw the sheriff squinting at it several times."

"I believe nearly all the town has been squinting at it," chuckled Manners. "You should have left it at home with your silk topper, Gussy!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"You can get some good grub here, old chap," said Fatty Wynn comfortingly.

"The cook is a Chinaman, and not half bad. They've got some stuff they call frijoles—a Mexican dish—that's prime. And—"

"I am not thinkin' about gwub, Wynn!" Arthur Augustus turned to Mr. Levison. "You see, sir, I cannot possibly be left behind. These fellows wequial to be looked atah—"

"I am sorry, D'Arcy, but it is Texas Bill who gives orders here," said Mr. Levison.

"I must remark that his mannahs leave vewy much to be desiahed," said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"I have arranged about horses for the party," continued Mr. Levison. "There are a number of animals in the yard for you to select from. You had better get

ready at once, as we are to start as soon as the sheriff comes back from the calaboose."

"Right-ho, sir!" said Tom Merry.

The chums of St. Jim's hurried down to the hotel yard to look at the horses, Arthur Augustus following them. The swell of St. Jim's was frowning in a very lofty manner. He was offended. Although Arthur Augustus had donned prairie garb, like the rest, at San Antonio, there was a nattiness and elegance in his attire which distinguished him among his comrades, and he had flatly refused to part with his monocle. It was that which had caused the sheriff of Frio to regard him with an unfavourable eye. He did not look, certainly, as if he would be of much use in a wild ride across the prairie and a fight with the rustlers, and the sheriff of Frio had judged him on his looks.

There were two or three strings of horses in the yard, and the juniors soon selected their mounts. Arthur Augustus examined the animals one after another with an experienced eye—the swell of St. Jim's knew a great deal on the subject of horseflesh. Buckskin, the big cowboy, came into the yard from the street leading a black mustang by the bridle—a mustang that backed and struggled and laid back its ears wickedly, and was only kept in command by an iron grip from the big Texan. The cattleman glanced at the juniors with a grin.

"I guess this hyer critter is for sale, if any galoot is looking for a good mount," he said.

"I guess you can keep him," said Tom Merry, laughing. "He looks a good deal too savage for my taste."

"Yes, rather!" said Manners emphatically.

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the black mustang, with a very approving glance.

"Bai Jove, that's a wippin' horse!" he exclaimed.

"Like to try him, sonny?" grinned Buckskin.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the cattleman. "Keep clear! He'll make mince-meat of you!"

Arthur Augustus gave the big Texan a lofty glance.

"I have nevah yet seen the horse that I could not widge," he answered calmly. "You have offered to let me twy that horse, and I hold you to your word, sir."

"I guess I was joking," said Buckskin good-humouredly. "This hoss has killed a man on the Conchos ranch, and he's to be sold for anything he will fetch, because he's got to be shot otherwise. See? Why, I wouldn't ride him myself!"

"Vewy pwobably," assented Arthur Augustus. "But that is no reason why I should not widge him."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Keep back, Gussy!" exclaimed Tom Merry anxiously. "He's too savage for you, old chap. Look at his ears!"

"Wubbish!"

"What?"

"Wubbish, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus coolly. "I am goin' to widge that horse."

"Oh, don't shoot off your mouth, dude!" said Buckskin contemptuously. "I tell you I can't ride him!"

"And I wepeat that I am goin' to!" said D'Arcy. "Pway give me the bwidle!"

"Waal, carry me home to die!" ejaculated the cattleman, as he saw that the elegant junior was in deadly earnest. "Mind, I've warned you that he'll kill you!"

"I am perfectly pwpared to wisk that, deah boy."

"Stop, D'Arcy!" called out Mr. Levison, hurrying towards the juniors.

Arthur Augustus turned a deaf ear to the injunction.

He approached the wicked-looking black mustang fearlessly, and took the bridle from Buckskin's hand.

The big cowboy sprang away from the clattering hoofs as he relinquished the bridle.

"I guess it's your funeral!" he remarked. And he backed away against the fence to look on.

To his amazement, Arthur Augustus was on the mustang's back the next moment. The animal was bridled, but not saddled; but Arthur Augustus had ridden bareback many a time and oft.

"Jehoshaphat! Now see him smashed!" said Buckskin, apparently regarding that process in the light of an entertainment.

"Gussy!" gasped Tom Merry. "Stand cleah, deah boys!"

There was a rush to get clear as the mustang pranced and reared and tossed his forelegs in the air. He came down on his forefeet with a crash, head down, and everyone expected to see the elegant junior shoot over his head and spin along the yard. But, instead of that, Arthur Augustus leaned back till the tossing tail behind flicked the back of his head. And the mustang, realising that he could not unseat his rider, began to caper furiously about the yard, foaming with fury, and again and again the juniors had to scuttle out of his way.

"Jerusalem!" stuttered Buckskin. "He's ridin' him—he's ridin' Comanche! Boys," he roared into the street, "there's a tenderfoot hyer ridin' Comanche!"

The gateway was thronged with cowboys, on horseback and afoot, as that news spread. There were exclamations of amazed admiration on all sides as Arthur Augustus still sat the prancing, foaming mustang, baffling every attempt of the savage animal to unseat him, and slowly but surely mastering the fury of the animal.

"He's sure a good horseman!" exclaimed Buckskin, in involuntary admiration. "I tell you, pards, that there hoss has killed a man on the Conchos ranch, and the galoot knew how to ride, too. I guess he was going to be shot, but I calculate the boss reckoned he could plant him on a tenderfoot, perhaps, for ten dollars or so. And hyer's a tenderfoot what can ride him! I should smile!"

Clatter, clatter!

"Keep clear, there!"

The crowd in the gateway surged back hurriedly and parted as the frantic mustang made a break for the street.

The animal raced out, D'Arcy riding him well, and tore up the rugged street, and there was a rush to watch him go. Texas Bill came striding over from the calaboose, and had to jump out of the way of the flying animal. Arthur Augustus vanished from the street's end into the open prairie.

Texas Bill stared after him. "Who's that ridin' Comanche?" he exclaimed.

"The dude!" gasped Buckskin. "That ornery dude with the glass eye!"

"Great gophers!"

"I guess Comanche hey tuck him out on the prairie to kill him easy," added Buckskin coolly. "Aire we startin' sheriff?"

"Sure! Saddle up!"

There was a clatter in the street as the sheriff's posse prepared to start, and Arthur Augustus came riding back on the black mustang. But he was cantering easily now, and the savage animal seemed quite subdued. Arthur Augustus rode up

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to the party, and saluted with his Stetson hat gracefully.

"Good-mornin', shewiff! I twust that you will allow me to come with my friends, now that you have seen that I can wide?"

Texas Bill blinked at him.

"Gol-darn my boots!" he said. "If you can shoot as well as you can ride, sonny, you're the antelope I want in this outfit. You can come an' welcome, I guess, and I take back what I've been thinking about you!"

"Thank you vewy much!" said Arthur Augustus, with calm dignity.

Tom Merry pushed his horse alongside, and clapped the swell of St. Jim's on the shoulder.

"Good old Gussy!" he said. "You've shown these cowboys that some of us can ride in the Old Country, anyhow. I'm jolly glad you're coming along!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy grinned. "I should have wufused to be left, in any case, deah boy," he explained. "But I am vewy glad the shewiff has come wound. But does the shewiff know where to look for the wustlahs?"

"I think he's got some information from the prisoners in the calaboose," said Tom. "Come on! They're going!"

And the juniors rode after the sheriff's outfit.

## CHAPTER 9. Hunted Down!

THE blazing sun of Texas climbed higher in a cloudless sky. Under the burning sunshine the sheriff's outfit of Frio rode on without a halt, and the juniors of St. Jim's kept pace with them. Mr. Levison was riding beside the sheriff, occasionally exchanging a word or two with Texas Bill. The direction was southward, across rolling prairie that extended as far as the eye could reach.

It was pretty evident that Texas Bill had gained some information as to Dirk Power's headquarters; what means he had used to extract it from the prisoners the juniors did not know, and did not care to know. The outfit rode on without a halt, and without a trail to follow. It was high noon when Texas Bill raised his riding-whip, and pointed to a dark line that lay across the prairie in advance, far ahead.

"That's the barranca," he said.

"What the thump is a bawwancah, Tom Mewwy?" murmured D'Arcy.

Tom shook his head.

"Ask me another!" he replied.

"We shall soon see," remarked Figgins. "We're riding straight at it."

The dark line became clearer to the view as they rode onward, and the juniors could see at length that it was a deep, wide split in the plain. The sides dropped abruptly down to unknown depths.

"That rather stops us, doesn't it?" remarked Fatty Wynn. "Anyhow, it's time we stopped for grub."

The sheriff pulled in his horse close by the barranca. Tom Merry rode close, and glanced down, not without a shiver. Water ran below—the barranca had been flooded by heavy rains in the Staked Plain. The sheriff of Frio was speaking.

"I guess we've rounded them up," he said. "We follow the barranca west till we come to the timber clump, an' that's Dirk Power's headquarters. So the Mexican told me in the calaboose, and I reckon he told the truth. He knows what to expect if he sends us on a fool's errand." The sheriff's jaw set square and grim. "I guess we're on a cinch now, boys."

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"They cannot escape across the barranca?" asked Mr. Levison.

Texas Bill shook his head.

"Nary a crossing nearer than the railroad-crossing ten miles up," he said.

"That's the railroad down to the Pecos. We shall cut them off from that."

"Good!"

The sheriff of Frio rapped out an order, and Buckskin and a dozen cowboys quitted the party and rode away. The rest—numbering thirty men or so—camped by the barranca, and lunched on cold beef, the juniors joining them. The whole party were in high spirits now, and Mr. Levison had an elated look. Tom Merry & Co. understood the sheriff's plan, which was simple enough. Buckskin and his party, making a detour, were to cut the rustlers off from the only crossing of the barranca; and, after allowing them time for that manoeuvre, the outfit was to ride on to the timber clump and "round up" the rustlers.

The heat of noon passed while the outfit rested, but at last the word was given to mount. Texas Bill and the cowboys started, followed by the juniors. Every man looked carefully to rifle and revolver before he started. Their weapons would be needed soon.

Ahead of the outfit, near the edge of the yawning gulf in the plain, a clump of timber rose into view—one of the "timber islands" of the prairie. Great ceiba trees reared their branches to the height of a hundred feet and more, laced with lianas and Spanish moss. From amid the trees a column of thin smoke was rising, showing that a camp was there.

The sheriff's eyes glinted.

"I guess we get them!" he said.

The outfit rode on at a gallop now.

Tom Merry's eyes were on the timber ahead, growing clearer to view at every stride of his horse.

He saw a figure in a red sash and a sombrero appear for a moment on the edge of the timber, and then vanish among the trees. A shot was heard ringing faintly across the plain. It was evidently a signal of danger to the rustlers scattered in the timber island.

"Whip and spur!" shouted the sheriff.

The cowboy outfit swept down on the timber island at top speed. A wild and scattering rifle-fire greeted them, and a bunch of horsemen issued from the timber on the other side, and rode away at full gallop to the west. In a minute more the cowboys were among the trees.

Scattering shots rang out on all sides as they dashed up to a group of bark jacals. But the jacals were empty and deserted; the rustlers had fled. Only a few of the gang, who had been scattered in the timber and could not get at their horses in time, remained to put up the shadow of a fight.

"After them!" shouted Texas Bill.

A dozen men were left in the group of jacals to round up the handful of rustlers in the timber at their leisure, and the rest rode after the sheriff on the track of the fugitives. Dirk Power's gang had suffered losses in the raid on Frio, and not more than a dozen men had been with him in the timber island, and of these six or seven remained among the trees. Tom Merry, as he dashed after the sheriff, counted the fugitives in the distance—there were five of them. Dirk Power, the Spaniard, and Antonio, the Mexican, he could recognise among the five. The other two were half-breed rustlers in Mexican sombreros and laced jackets. Dirk Power glanced back with blazing eyes, and shook his fist at the cowboys as they galloped in pursuit. The hunter was hunted now, with a vengeance.

"We've got them," said Texas Bill coolly. "They'll be riding right into Buckskin's lot, I guess."

It was evident that Dirk Power did not know that his escape along the barranca to the west was cut off. So far Buckskin and his party were not to be seen. Tom Merry guessed that they were in cover. He soon had proof of it. Less than half a mile from the timber there was a sudden blaze of rifle-fire from the grass, and two of the fleeing rustlers toppled out of their saddles as the rifles rang. Dirk Power dragged in his horse.

The rifle-fire came from ahead of him, and as he halted a dozen cowboys leaped into view from a belt of sassafras, sprang upon their horses, and rode towards the rustlers.

The three remaining ruffians were taken between two fires now. Ahead of them was Buckskin's party, behind them the sheriff of Frio with his outfit, and both parties were closing in on the trio of desperadoes fast as horseflesh could carry them.

Dirk Power raved out curses.

"Carambo! We are lost!" muttered Antonio, the half-breed.

"Ride for your lives!" hissed the man from Alaska.

He swung his horse round to the northward, and galloped furiously. The scarred Spaniard followed him desperately.

From either side the foes were closing in on the ruffians as they rode. There was a fearful shriek from Antonio as he sought to follow his leader; Buckskin's rifle had marked him, and the half-breed rolled from his saddle, his riderless horse careering away wildly across the plain.

Dirk Power did not look back.

He rode like a madman, and he was splendidly mounted. With whip and spur he urged his horse on mercilessly. Beside him, dropping a little behind, rode Juarez.

Crack, crack!

The sheriff's outfit fired as they rode, and bullets whistled round the desperate fugitives. The scarred Spaniard's horse gave a sudden leap, and pitched forward on its knees.

Juarez leaped clear as the animal fell.

Dirk Power rode on furiously, without even a glance at his comrade, whose escape was hopelessly cut off now. The scarred Spaniard dropped on his knees behind the body of his horse, and threw forward his rifle. His black eyes blazed with hate and vengeance. He knew that he was doomed, that there was no escape for him, and his only thought was to die fighting like a rat in a corner.

The Frio outfit rode on at full gallop as the Spaniard's rifle began to ring.

Tom Merry felt a bullet whistle past his ear so close that it singed his cheek as it passed. There was a sharp exclamation from Arthur Augustus as the second bullet spun his hat from his head. The scarred Spaniard's aim was good. His third bullet struck one of the cattlemen in the chest, and the Texan rolled from his horse.

The Spaniard had no time to pull trigger again. The outfit was sweeping down on him with a storm of rifle-fire, and the ruffian rolled on the plain behind his horse, riddled with bullets. Texas Bill gave him one glance as he passed without drawing rein. One glance was enough; the last of Dirk Power's gang had paid the penalty of a lawless life. Buckskin dropped back to succour the wounded cowboy; the rest of the outfit swept on after the sheriff on the track of Dirk Power.

Without a glance behind, alone now, the man from Alaska rode on at frantic

speed, keeping his distance ahead. The better mounted of the Frio outfit were just keeping pace with him; the others tailed off behind in the furious race. Mile after mile of trampled grass vanished under the thundering hoofs, and the outfit thinned out more and more in the race. But well ahead rode D'Arcy on the black mustang, and the sheriff of Frio. The rest, though urging on their horses to their greatest speed, had dropped hopelessly behind.

Dirk Power glanced back at last. But his dark face changed at the sight of the sheriff; if it had been his intention to turn and fire, he abandoned it. He dared not face the Frio sheriff, the only man who had ever succeeded in striking fear to his wild heart. Texas Bill drove on his powerful horse furiously. He was gaining a little on the fugitive at last, and his face was flushed with triumph. He had his revolver in hand now, and he fired, and the bullet missed the man from Alaska only by a few inches.

Texas Bill was about to pull trigger again, when his horse went stumbling headlong and rolled on the plain. The galloping animal had put a foot into a prairie-rabbit's burrow unseen in the grass. The sheriff rolled heavily to earth. D'Arcy was riding on, but as he saw the sheriff's fall he wheeled his mustang and rode back to him.

But the few minutes of delay had been enough for Dirk Power. Still riding at a mad gallop, he had vanished behind a belt of live oaks, and was lost to sight. The band of rustlers had been wiped out, but the man from Alaska had escaped once more.

#### CHAPTER 10.

#### By the Skin of His Teeth!

"THERE'S the bridge!"

The moon sailed high over the Texas plains.

A silvery sheen lay on the waving grass. In the moonlight the barranca lay a black line on the prairie. With weary horses, the sheriff's outfit of Frio pushed on towards the railway bridge that spanned the chasm.

Dirk Power had escaped them—for a time. But Texas Bill's first thought was to cut off his escape across the barranca, and the weary outfit had ridden on to the bridge. In the moonlight, ahead of them, the railroad track wound across the prairie. Tom Merry & Co. could make out the track in the distance, and the bridge on its high trestles that spanned the chasm. Were they in time to stop the flight of the outlaw, he wondered, or had Dirk Power already doubled back to the bridge and crossed in safety towards the boundless plains of the Pecos?

"Hark!"

A sudden deafening roar came booming through the dusk, as if in answer to Tom Merry's unspoken question.

For a moment the moonlight was blotted out by a red glare. A thousand echoes boomed along the depths of the barranca and across the rolling plain. The sheriff spat out a curse.

"The bridge—"

"Blown up!" muttered Mr. Levison.

"Then Dirk Power was there—and he has escaped!" said Tom Merry between his teeth.

The cowboys rode on.

There was one thought in every mind—that Dirk Power had crossed by the bridge and blown it up behind him to cover his retreat. Doubtless his plans had been laid in readiness, in case the fortune of war should turn against him. The outfit rode up to the bridge-head, cursing volubly. They dismounted near the track. In the glimmer of the moonlight the wrecked bridge lay before them, with iron girders twisted and broken—only the

railway metals, twisted but unbroken, spanned the gap in the middle of the bridge.

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom.

He spun round, and looked along the railway-track. A red light glared from the darkness, and there was the dull boom of a train. Tom's face went white.

He sprang to his horse, and groped in the saddlebag for a lantern. With fingers that were shaking he lighted it and ran on to the track.

The noise of the oncoming train was louder now. Ignorant of the destruction of the bridge, the driver was keeping steadily on—to sudden and fearful death in the depths of the chasm, unless the train was stopped. It was useless to shout; the din of the train would have drowned the voice.

Tom Merry's face was white as chalk. He did not think of his own danger as he waved his lantern and shouted—shouted frantically, though his voice was inaudible in the rumble of the train. A sudden jarring and growling echoed through the night, the eye of light that was rushing down on Tom Merry slackened, and the train rumbled to a halt only a few yards from the gap.

Tom Merry panted.

"Saved!" whispered Mr. Levison, with white lips.

A sudden shout rang from the sheriff. His eyes had been on the train—but now they were turned on the gap in the trestle bridge spanned by the twisted metals.

"Dirk Power!" he yelled.

Crouching among the wreckage, the hunted man had essayed to cross the yawning gulf by the twisted rails, clinging to them like a cat, while all the attention of the outfit was given to the approaching train.

But he was seen before he could get clear.

The sheriff of Frio ran closer, firing furiously.

Bullets hissed and spat round the desperate outlaw as he swung on—but still he was not struck.

Crash!

The twisted metals gave at last; but, with a final desperate spring, the outlaw caught a slanting girder on the opposite side of the chasm as the broken rails crashed down into the rocky barranca.

A moment more and he was springing to firm earth beyond the chasm.

For a second he turned, to shake a furious fist across the chasm at his foes, and then he fled into the darkness.

Texas Bill fired a last shot, answered by a yell of defiance from the outlaw, and threw down his rifle.

"Escaped again!" he said, between his teeth. "But only for the time—only for the time! I'll never leave his trail till the rope is round his neck! He has come back to Texas to swing on a tree!"

A weary party rode back into Frio Crossing the following day.

The sheriff's outfit had scored a success. The gang of rustlers, gathered by Dirk Power to aid him in his vengeance, had been wiped out, and the plains cleared of them. Only the desperate man himself remained at large—alone, hunted, desperate. On the rolling prairies of the Conchos and the Pecos scouts were riding, seeking for traces of the hunted man, and ere many days had passed news was brought to the sheriff of Frio—and again the order was "Saddle up!" And with the sheriff's outfit rode Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's—on the last trail of the hunted outlaw.

THE END.

(Do not miss next week's thrilling story of Tom Merry & Co. with the Levisons.)

## The Editor's Chat.

### OUR GRAND FOOTBALL ANNUAL COMPLETE.

With this issue, our splendid Free Football Annual is completed, by the addition of Section 4, which is inset. By following the simple instructions given in Part 1 (page 2), every reader will readily see how to make up the book. The result is a Football Annual which, by the quality of its printing, the beauty of its illustrations, and the value and interest of its information, is worthy to be classed with any Football Annual published. I am sure my chums will not forget the fact this this splendid Annual was obtained Free through the GEM Library. A "leg-up" for the old paper from every reader whenever possible is all I ask in exchange. Don't forget that back numbers of the GEM, containing the first three sections of the Football Annual, can be obtained through your newsagent.

### ANOTHER FREE BOOK.

And now I want to draw my chums' attention to the magnificent

### FREE BOOK OF CINEMA FAVOURITES.

which is being offered by the "Magnet" Library this week. The splendid book is copiously illustrated with splendid photographs of all the most popular cinema stars, and when completed, will form a unique souvenir which every cinema lover simply must have. Do not miss this week's "Magnet Library" on any account, now on sale everywhere.

### FOR NEXT WEEK!

In next Wednesday's issue of the GEM Library, the thrilling narrative of the vengeance-mad Dirk Power's savage quest after the Levisons, and the party of schoolboys accompanying them, is continued in the fifth of this powerful series of stories.

The title is

### "HUNTED DOWN!" By Martin Clifford.

Dirk Power now knows what it is to be relentlessly pursued, but his savage nature knows no defeat, until every desperate device for ridding himself of his enemies has been exhausted. Mr. Martin Clifford has never written anything better in his long career, than this vivid and powerful story.

### JOTTINGS.

Holloway United want matches: 16 medium; E. Ling, 13, Sonderburg Road, Finsbury Park, N. 7.—Bury Athletic, colours claret and blue, average age 16, want matches; 6 miles; ground, Wormwood Scrubbs; E. H. Hanney, 118, Walmer Road, North Kensington, W. 10.—Fred Bramwell, 92, Arnald Avenue, Fort Rouge, Winnipeg, Canada, asks for correspondence, age 17.—L. F. Wilson, Bungalow, Wilga Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia, would like to hear from readers in European countries, and with English readers interested in Pitman's shorthand.—Hallsville United F.C. wants fixtures; J. Dean, 25, Hallsville Road, Canning Town, E. 16.

Your Editor



## Something Quite New in the Way of Serials.



By MATTHEW IRONSIDE.

## An Amazing Romance of Mystery, Intrigue, and Adventure.

**Synopsis of First Chap'ers.**

Jasper Standish leaves Bleakmore Prison after ten years' penal servitude. Years before he had taken on his shoulders a crime committed by Richard Harmer, on condition that Harmer looked after his wife and sent her abroad with her young son. Harmer went back on the bargain, and left his wife unprovided for, and after a few years she died. Standish vows revenge on all the family. When he leaves prison he makes a bargain with Hans Meppel, a Dutchman, who is the owner of Slave Island, to kidnap Dick Harmer and make him a slave on the Dutchman's secret plantations. Meppel agrees to do this.

Dick Harmer is attacked by several Malays and taken on board ship to Slave Island, accompanied by Hans Meppel and Standish. On the strange island Dick sees the Dutchman belabouring a white girl slave with a heavy whip. He attacks her assailant, but is overpowered, brutally bastinadoed, and made a prisoner. Meanwhile, Standish views the wonders of the strange island. The slave-girl returns, and is about to release Dick from captivity, when there is a sound of approaching footsteps.

"Too late!" she cries.

(Now go on with the story.)

**Into the Unknown!**

As he heard the footfalls, Dick knew that the gaoler had missed his keys, guessed something was wrong, and was on the point of bursting into the cell to investigate.

His one thought was for the courageous girl who had risked all to save him from a repetition of the torture he had already suffered for championing her. For himself, he cared nothing. She had said that discovery of the part she was playing might mean her being beaten to death, and, from what he had seen on Slave Island, he could quite believe her.

In a trice he had glided silently behind the door, and as the gaoler reached it, and paused for a brief moment on the threshold of the cell, the boy poised himself upon his toes ready to make a neat and all-surprising spring.

His pulses were racing, and he was a quiver with suppressed excitement. If there was the faintest chance of the farther side of the island offering them escape, he meant, with luck, to reach it and take the girl with him.

The gaoler thrust the door fully open and strode in, a cry breaking from him

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as he saw the white-faced slave-girl recoiling against the wall.

"You little hussy!" he snarled, with a savage imprecation, and, with his great hands outstretched to seize her, he took two sharp strides that carried him into the cell.

Dick jumped at him with the speed of an arrow freed from a bow, springing on to his back and simultaneously gripping at his throat from behind.

The man—he was a powerful Dutchman—uttered a choking gasp of anger and dismay, and, staggering forward and losing his balance, went heavily down upon his face.

Dick Harmer clung to his windpipe like grim death. Having gained so good an advantage, he was not taking risks and losing it. He tightened his strong fingers about the fellow's bull-like neck, squeezing, squeezing, until suddenly he realised that there was not the least movement in the herculean body beneath him.

"Phew! Unconscious!" he rapped. "That's lucky! The smash he caught his forehead when he fell has stunned the beast! Quick! Tear some strips from that blanket on the bed! We'll bind and gag him before we go!"

The blanket was coarse and thick, and it was no easy task Dick had set his fair companion; but the girl was quick-witted, and after wrenching small holes in the blanket with her strong white teeth, she inserted the end of the keys in them and ripped away at the material until there were sufficient strips for the boy's purpose.

Meanwhile, he had been sitting astride the gaoler in case he came to his senses. The man was still motionless and breathing laboriously when Dick was ready to bind him, however.

The lad hastened over this, but did not bungle his work.

He jerked the man's hands behind his back and lashed them tightly together. Then, serving his ankles similarly, he turned his attention to keeping him silent for some time.

Firstly, he rolled up a strip of the blanket into a ball and stuffed it, with charming disregard for the Dutchman's comfort, into his mouth; and secondly, he made sure of it remaining in position by binding other strips of the fluffy material round and round the lower part of his face.

"So far, so good!" he jerked, as he rolled the man's bulky form against the wall. "Now to quit this place and try to reach the interior! Come!"

The girl hesitated.

"I shall only be a burden to you," she protested. "You will be able to make better progress alone!"

"What? And leave a plucky lass like you behind, to be ill-treated and perhaps killed by brutes like this?" Dick cried, spurning the senseless overseer with his foot. "Not likely! We either both go or both remain where we are!"

"You are noble and brave," she whispered, her pretty, girlish face full of admiration; and Dick was glad the light was uncertain. For, as he inwardly put it himself, he was "blushing like an ass," and felt hot and confused.

"Oh, rats!" he said. "Er—I beg your pardon, really! I didn't exactly mean that. But, if I am anything like brave, you are absolutely the essence of pluck, and a little brick! But we mustn't waste time here!"

"Why, no! His wife may follow him at any moment to find out why he has not returned. If you are sure I shall not be in the way—"

For answer, he slipped his arm about her slender waist, and urged her from the cell. He took the keys from her hand, locked the door, and dropped them into his pocket. Then, after he had also shot the bolt, they stole along the moonlit corridor.

The prison was large, and the corridors they traversed would have been confusing to Dick had he been alone. The girl had often been in the building with messages to the gaoler from his wife, and led him unerringly to the main door, which the guard had slammed and bolted after him when he had entered on his disastrous tour of investigation.

With as little noise as possible Dick Harmer drew the bolts, and slowly—very slowly—he opened the great door some few inches.

He listened. There was not a sound in the narrow street that ran past the gaol, and, after peering cautiously out, Dick quitted the building, followed by the girl, whose hand he held.

As its silence had suggested, the street was deserted, and the girl hurriedly whispered an explanation.

"The slaves are not allowed to be out of their quarters after nightfall unless some special duty takes them out," she said, "and at this hour the overseers are always in the canteen, where they drink and gamble."

"Then, so far, luck is with us," Dick answered. "Let us make hay while the sun—or, rather, the moon, shines!"

Keeping in the shadows as far as they

could, the pair stole along through the night.

Dick's dainty companion whispered to him that they were at no great distance from one point where the fringe of the jungle, which extended into the interior of the island, was situated, and pointed down a narrow alleyway as the direction to take.

This was just a passage from one street to another, and in traversing it they encountered no other living soul, though their hearts were sent into their mouths just as they reached its end.

Footsteps, and the sound of harsh, guttural voices floated to them from the street into which they had been about to step.

Pressing himself flat against the wall, and forcing the girl there, too, with a quick pressure of his arm, Dick waited for the men to draw nearer. Every nerve in his body was strung up to concert-pitch with excitement, and his teeth were set hard.

That the two pedestrians were overseers was certain. They were speaking in Dutch, and laughing together and joking with an abandon that at once killed the possibility of their being slaves.

Would they pass the mouth of the alley and fail to glimpse them in so doing? the boy asked himself. Or would their way lie through the alley, and they swing into it and come face to face with them?

Brief though it was, it was a nerve-racking moment as the two Dutchmen tramped level with the passage-way. Then Dick could have shouted in relief, for they were passing it without turning their heads.

They had gone on, and were out of sight! The lad smiled into the girl's eyes in delight and triumph. The luck he had prayed for was holding good!

The two waited until the footfalls of their enemies had died away in the distance. Then, with their hearts once again beating high with hope, they crept out into the street, and, still clinging to the shadows, started to traverse it.

At its end lay the fringe of the town. There was an open space of grass extending for about twenty to thirty yards, then the stunted bush that formed the edge of the jungle, and to them the great unknown.

In a few moments they had left the settlement behind, and were forcing their way through the tangled mass of shrubs, bushes, creepers, and vines.

Their progress was slow. A knife apiece with which to slash their way through the creepers would have been a Heaven-sent gift. But they were young, and both of them plucky, and made light of their difficulties.

Ever and again Dick called a halt, and listened intently for sounds that would tell them they were pursued. But, save for the grunting of a wild boar somewhere in the bush ahead, and the croaking of frogs from a stretch of swamp away on their left, the stillness of the tropical night was so far left unbroken.

"It strikes me that if the gaoler's wife came to the gaol to look for him she must have gone away again without realising that he was locked in the cell," the lad said at length.

The girl nodded and smiled, in spite of the anxious times through which they had passed and those that still had to be faced.

"I expect she has taken it that he has gone to the canteen, if she did go to seek him," she answered. "It is seldom the women go there; and in that case she would return to her home."

"Then the beggar will probably stop in that cell until well into the night," Dick answered, with a chuckle. "Well,

it serves him right, and it will give us a start—for which we have got to be mighty thankful! Ah, see! We are coming to real jungle now!"

He was right. In front of them giant trees reared themselves in silhouette against the moonlit sky—a thick mass of trees that were entwined with gorgeous tropical vines, and looked as though they might extend for many miles across the strange and mysterious land.

As they reached the first of them Dick laid a hand on his fair companion's arm, and they stopped once more, tensely straining their ears. The reassuring silence from the rear, however, remained undisturbed.

The girl shivered and hesitated just for a moment on the edge of the shadowy jungle. Dick, noticing this, took her arm, and commenced some light chatter that had the desired effect of causing her to forget the vague misgivings, and they pressed onward.

"I wonder if you have been missed?" Dick said thoughtfully after a while.

"Perhaps not," she returned. "When I stole to the prison to free you I was free to go to my bed, as we slaves had to rise very early. The gaoler's wife probably thinks I am there and fast asleep."

He nodded, and for some time silence fell between them as they thrust and fought their way through the vines and moved ever forward into the very heart of the forest.

Now and again sounds reached them that caused the girl's heart to flutter wildly—animal calls that fell weirdly upon their ears in the great solitude.

Disturbed by their footfalls and the rustling they made in fighting their way through the undergrowth, monkeys screeched and chattered above their heads, and parrots and parakeets, with which the island abounded, fluttered with startling abruptness from one tree to another.

They came to a stretch of muddy water which, for quickness, Dick was for wading through, carrying the girl in his arms.

But as he picked her up in his arms and stepped into the water he received a shock that caused him almost to drop her, it was so startling.

What had appeared to be half-submerged pieces of bark abruptly leaped into active life. A loathsome, scaly, blackish-brown head reared itself from the water, and vicious teeth snapped at his leg, missing it only by a hair's breadth.

"Alligators!" he gasped, positively throwing himself backwards, and falling with his burden on the bank.

In a trice he was on his legs and had dragged the girl out of immediate danger.

Quite half a dozen of the deadly reptiles were stirring in the thick, evil-smelling water, though the brute that had made to attack the lad had slipped back under its surface.

"This is no place for us, little girl!" Dick exclaimed, seizing her arm and hurrying her away from the water. "We must find where this precious pool ends, and go round it. Phew! But that was too narrow an escape to be pleasant!"

He felt that she was trembling violently.

"Oh, it was horrible—horrible!" she shuddered, her small hand clutching hard upon his arm. "That monster was within an ace of dragging you down and—devouring you!"

"Yes; but, to use an old and worn-out saying, a miss is as good as a mile," he returned as lightly as he could. "Ah, here we are! Here's the end of the water at last!"

They made their way round the edge

of the pool, which appeared to be free of its ugly denizens at this point, and yet again they went struggling through the jungle.

From time to time they heard the soft, menacing hiss of snakes, which their tramping through the undergrowth aroused perhaps from slumber, and once a bright green lizard, fully two feet in length, darted from under their feet.

Dick was one of those lads who could never really understand the meaning of intimidation, and, with all the healthy British boy's love for adventure, he enjoyed the journey through the unknown depths rather than otherwise.

His companion, however, was but a girl, after all, and although she tried to be brave, there were occasions when she clung to him in terror; and, with the chivalry that was his by nature, he would whisper comforting words.

At length they were obliged to halt from sheer fatigue—at least, it was so on the part of the girl. But this was not until about an hour before dawn, and as she sank down in the undergrowth, her weariness lulling her fears of snakes and other reptiles, the lad declared that he would keep watch whilst she slept.

Though he did for upwards of an hour, though his eyelids felt as though they were weighted with lead, and he was forced to rouse himself by pacing as quietly as he could to and fro.

The girl awakened when the sun was rising, and insisted upon taking her turn at keeping guard. Dick protested at first, urging upon her the need for them to press farther into the jungle, and thus do all they could to avoid possible pursuit and recapture. But he was so done up that he fell asleep even as he sat and talked.

She let him slumber for roughly two hours; then, growing anxious that at any moment she might find Hans Meppel's overseers bursting through the forest to drag them back to a terrible punishment, she roused him.

"Whar's-marrer?" Dick gurgled, as she shook his shoulder. "The first bell hasn't gone yet, and—Great pip! I was forgetting! How long have I been sleeping?" he asked, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

She told him. "Had we not better be getting along?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, rather!" he answered, springing to his feet. "But I say, aren't you hungry and thirsty? Do you think some of these fruits will poison us if we mop—that is to say, eat them?"

The girl smiled and pointed to a heap of the fruit which she had picked while he had slumbered and which lay amongst the ferns and undergrowth.

"It will be quite safe to 'mop' those," she said, with the hint of a roguish smile that made her dazzlingly beautiful. "Since I have been on the island I have come to know which are fit to eat and which are not."

"Haven't you been here all your life, then?" he asked, in surprise, as he pocketed the fruit, and they once again commenced their journey. "Somehow, I felt that you must have been born on the island."

She shook her head sadly. "No, er—" And she hesitated for his name.

"Dick!" he said. "We are going to be great chums, so please call me that. My full name is Richard Montgomery Harmer; but I hate people who call me 'Monty,' so please always make it plain Dick!"

She nodded. "Very well, Dick," she said simply. "Then you had better call me Elaine, for that is my name."

(Continued at foot of next page.)



# 4th WEEK OF OUR MAGNIFICENT NEW COMPETITION.

## GRAND CASH PRIZE CONTEST FOR READERS OF THE "GEM."

1st PRIZE 10/- every week for one year.

2nd " 5/- " " " " "

3rd " 2/6 " " " " "

And many Consolation Prizes.

THIS WEEK WE ANNOUNCE A VERY NOVEL  
COMPETITION.

On the right you will find six puzzle-pictures, and each of these has the last two or three letters of the word represented.

What you have to do is to fill in, IN INK, the letters which you think should go before those we publish.

For instance, Picture No. 19 has the letters "ASS" and when the correct letters are supplied, which in this case are COMP, the word is revealed. The same thing applies to the other pictures.

This competition will run for eight weeks, and there will be four more sets of pictures for you to solve.

DO NOT SEND IN YOUR EFFORTS NOW.  
FULL INSTRUCTIONS WILL BE GIVEN AS HOW  
YOUR EFFORTS ARE TO BE SENT TO US.

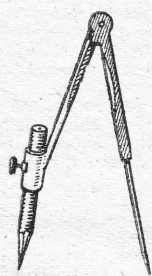
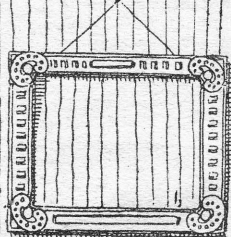



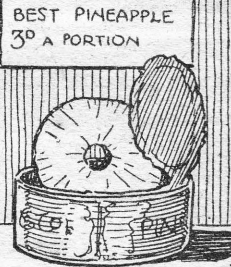
The First Prize of 10/- a week for one year will be awarded to the sender of the eight sets of pictures which bear solutions identical with the list now locked in the Editor's safe, and other prizes to the competitors sending in the fewest number of mistakes.

Competitors must bear in mind that the Editor's decision must be accepted as final and binding, and entries are only accepted on this express understanding.

You may send as many complete sets of eight puzzles as you please, but each must be submitted on a coupon taken from the "GEM," and when the time comes for sending in, sets must be made up separately.

START TO WORK NOW, BUT DO NOT SEND YOUR  
EFFORTS IN UNTIL WE ASK YOU TO DO SO.

Employees of the proprietors of this journal are not eligible to compete.

		
19 <u>COMP</u> ASS 20	<u>FR</u> AME 21	<u>FO</u> RT 22
		
22 <u>IN</u> 23	<u>ER</u> 24	<u>ICE</u>

"Elaine—" He paused.

"Elaine Standish," she answered.

And he would have been surprised and curious could he have known that this was also the name of the man who was responsible for his being upon the island.

As Meppel, when in the lad's hearing, had always called Jasper Standish either "mein friendt" or "mynheer," Dick had not the slightest idea of his name or whom he could be.

"And you have not been on the island always?" the boy said, as they struggled on through the jungle.

"Why, of course, I was going to tell you how I came here!" she said, remembering. "It is for about six years that I have been a slave in the bondage of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 660.

that cruel and scoundrelly old man Meppel. I can remember my father only very faintly, and I—I think some great trouble came to him, and— Oh, I wonder if you will think ill of me if I tell you?"

"Of course not, Elaine!" Dick cried. "I'm not that sort of prig! You are you, and—well, whatever trouble your father got into you cannot be blamed."

"I think he was sent to—to prison," she said, her eyes filling with tears and her lips quivering. "Mother always said that he had gone abroad, but there were unkind neighbours in the London street in which we lived who jeered at us, and—and called us the wife and daughter of a gaol-bird!"

Dick's face was both grave and sympathetic as he listened.

"Don't tell me any more, if it makes you sad," he said quickly.

But she made a gesture of protest, and went on.

"I feel that I should like you to know all there is to know about me," she answered, "though I cannot say quite why. We grew very poor, and mother's health was so bad that soon she had to give up the work she found when my father went away. We very nearly starved. I have often thought my mother did starve herself to give to me, though I was too young then to understand. Then an old friend of my mother's offered her work in one of London's suburbs, and, having no children of her own, offered also to care for me for a while until my mother's circumstances brightened.

"I was about eight or nine years old at

that time, and my mother's friend took me with her on a long sea voyage she was compelled to make for business reasons.

"The ship on which we sailed met with disaster, and being blown and buffeted far out of its course during a long and violent storm, was cast against the rocks of this island.

"As it happened, the steamer Hans Meppel runs here from time to time was not far away, and I and a few others of the passengers and crew were picked up, and brought ashore. We were all made slaves. I have been here ever since, and do not know whether my father and mother are alive or dead! Oh, if we can only find a means of escape!"

"We'll have a good try!" Dick declared. "Poor little girl! I'm more than sorry to hear you've had such a rough time of it!"

"It is nice to find so staunch and true a friend at last!" she murmured, smiling through the tears that had started to her eyes.

On, on through the tangled profusion of vines, flowers, and trees they went, always fearing pursuit, and not stopping until the afternoon was drawing to a close, and with an almost startling abruptness the jungle ended.

As they stepped from it they found mighty rocks similar to those which shut out the sea on the farther side of the island towering before them; and Dick, uttering a low, eager cry, flung up his hand and pointed.

"Look! The cave and the water!" he exclaimed, his voice thrilling with hope.

The girl gazed in the direction he was pointing, and, in her turn, saw the cavernous opening in the rocks and the water that filled a low channel which extended from it.

They hurried forward, and, dipping his finger into the water and putting it to his lips, Dick announced that it was salt, and must come from the sea.

They were looking into the dark mouth of the cave, on either side of which ran a wide ledge of rock clear of the water. The same thought was in the minds of both. Did the cavern extend right through the rocks to the open sea, and could they reach the shore on the other side of them? Or was the sea barred from them, and had the water in the

channel merely forced its way under the huge boulders which they might find the cave terminate in?

"Let us go in and investigate!" Dick cried. "You will not be frightened, Elaine?"

"No," she assured him bravely, though her heart was thumping hard. "I shall not be frightened with you, and it may mean everything to us to explore the cavern's depths!"

"Wait here for a moment!" he urged. "I have just one wax vesta, which has got loose at some time in my pocket. I will twist some of the dry undergrowth in the jungle into a torch, and light it. It will be possible then to see where we are going."

**Don't forget to buy this week's Bumper Number of The "MAGNET" Library**

containing the Free Cinema Supplement!

A few minutes later he had the rough torch fashioned, and together they climbed to one of the ridges that ran into the cave. When they were free from all possibility of a breeze, Dick lit his precious match and set the twisted undergrowth blazing.

Holding the torch above his head, he advanced into the gloom of the cavern, his hand holding that of the girl, who was close upon his heels. He had made several spare torches whilst he had been in the jungle, and Elaine carried these under her arm.

The cave seemed never-ending. For fully three miles it turned and twisted into the heart of the giant rocks, and at last they grew so tired they were obliged to halt and rest.

Dick lit a fresh torch from the stump of that he was carrying, and thrust it into a crevice in a pile of boulders near the water-filled channel. Then he joined Elaine, who had dropped wearily to the ground, and sat down beside her.

A glance into her pale little face told Dick that the mighty silence, the gloom, and the mystery of their surroundings terrified her, though she made no com-

plaint. As an elder brother might have done, he slipped his arm about her shoulders and drew her to his side.

Then suddenly he found her soft hair brushing his face, and her head resting upon his shoulder. She was so exhausted that she had fallen to sleep.

Dick tried valiantly to keep awake and watch over her; but tired nature asserted itself after awhile, and, with his arm still about the girl, he, too, dropped into a doze.

He was awakened by strange scraping sounds, and the touch of something wet and slimy upon his hand. Still only half-aroused, he shook it off, and would have slept again but for Elaine giving a sudden horrified scream.

The girl leapt to her feet, and, fully awake now, Dick had joined her in an instant. She clung to him, shuddering and crying out in terror. And there was little wonder.

All around them on the ledge beside the water were hosts of crabs—not the ordinary crab one finds in English waters, but gigantic, nightmare-like creatures of the size of an Irish terrier, with greenish, hairy bodies suspended on long, crusty legs, long, loathsome feelers, and vicious-looking claws.

Dick Harmer was a brave lad, but he had to put forth all his will-power to prevent himself joining Elaine in a cry of dismay and repulsion.

For he knew that the creatures were the giant man-eating crabs he had read of as being found in remote islands in the Pacific, but until now had scarcely credited existed.

Even as they stared in a terrible fascination at the crawling, darting horde, and listened to the eerie scraping and tapping of their claws upon the rocks, several of the monsters grew bolder.

One extended a claw in a lightning-like movement, and gripped at the hem of Elaine's dress, while another fastened itself with a sudden dart upon Dick's leg.


And then, to add to the horror of their position, the torch, which they had not noticed was burning so low, went out, and plunged them into a blanket-like darkness.

(Another instalment of this grand adventure serial next week.)

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