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SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

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THE ROAD TO RUIN!

(Philip Rushden finds "punting" a fool's game. A pathetic incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story entitled: "RUSHDEN'S FOLLY!" contained in this issue.)

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OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "CHUCKLES" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

My dear Chums,—Another big treat next week! Look out for it! At this time of the year most sport lovers cast longing eyes at the river. Who will blame them? There is a real magic about the river, and you will find plenty of that magic in next Wednesday's jolly river yarn.

"SPORTSMEN OF THE RIVER!" By Martin Clifford.

It is a brilliant story, full of grip, and with the real atmosphere of the gray old summer time. But that is not all, by a long way. It brings Gordon Gay back on the scene. Time after time of late I have read letters from chums who say, "Can't we have a yarn about Gordon Gay?" The answer is in the infirmary, so to speak. You see what I mean? The irrepressible, and irresistible, Gordon Gay, the hope of the Grammarians, with his nice turn for clever stunts, is to the fore next Wednesday.

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That's what it is. You would expect a big pull in a river tale, and you will not be disappointed. There is the description of such a tussle on the river as never was. Tom Merry & Co. have the rowing honours of St. Jim's in charge, but they are up against an array of doughty antagonists. The struggle will be remembered for a long time, and one of the big reasons is to be found in the splendid style in which St. Jim's plays up, and faces long odds. For Grimes & Co. of the village are on the scene. You remember Grimes; the grocer's boy, who taught Aubrey Racke a lesson? There

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is a lot to be learned from the trusty Grimes. Anyway, next week's aquatic tale can be safely left to do its own work. It is a topping, dashing, sparkling story of the river, and of a stupendous fight for rowing fame. As for the surprises which crop up, well, leave all that to Tom Merry and Gordon Gay, and their stalwart supporters. When champions get to grips strange things may be expected!

"THE VANISHED RACEHORSE!" By Edmund Burton.

People who know the history of the Turf often spin strange yarns about weird experiences away back in the limbo of the bygone. But Mr. Burton writes of things as they are now. This author tells a vivid tale next week, and the mystery which lies behind and all around his consummately skilful plot will baffle the cutest intelligence. The mystification pretty well floored Anthony Sharpe, the prince of detectives, who happens to be called in to fathom the mystery. There is as smart a bit of trickery here as anybody could conceive if he sat up all night to think it out. I shall let it go at that, but I give you my assurance that Edmund Burton has eclipsed his former efforts in the clever portrayal of out-and-out roguery.

"CROZIER'S TREACHERY!" By Gordon Wallace.

Just pay particular attention to this feature in next week's issue of the GEM. The Sportsmen of Thunder Creek jumped into unparalleled popularity, and they are likely to add to the general admiration felt for them by their fresh exploits. The new story is about the land, and it shows to what inhuman lengths a mean, crafty, detestably avaricious individual can go to retain a parcel of land which he thinks is his by right. For the details of an amazing yarn I can refer you to the coming yarn of the famous Sportsmen. They play the game because it is their nature to. They always have done so, and they are sticklers for equity. To see justice done they do not object to facing deadly peril, such as that with which they are confronted, thanks to the underhand work

The Second Prize of £2 10s. has been awarded to the following competitor, whose solution contained one error:

A. Woodcock, 9, Warton Terrace, Bootle, Liverpool.

Twenty-one competitors, with two errors each, divide the ten prizes of 5s. The names and addresses of these prize-winners can be seen on application at this office.

SOLUTION.

The Yorkshire eleven is a very powerful one, for nearly all can bat well, and a number are splendid bowlers. It is one of the most noted cricket clubs in the country, and has gained championship honours twice since the war. Most of the players are high scorers.

of Crozier. The latter fancies he has a grievance. Beware of the chap who harbours ideas of this kind! The man with a grievance is generally an arch humbug, and worse. You may urge that it is not his fault. Maybe not in the first instance. You may catch a grievance like the mumps or the measles, but the victim's job is to go in for a quick cure, not to let the unpleasant business hang round his neck for a lifetime, or to wear it on his watch-chain as if it were a charm against snake bite. There is no good in a grievance. But there is a powerful drama connected with the added reasoning of the scoundrel who takes a leading part in this sensational story for next week.

£300 MUST BE WON!

Look out for next week's issue of the GEM! Then you will know all about the Grand New Cricket Competition, open to all readers. Next Wednesday's GEM! Don't forget! Three hundred pounds in prizes will go to the clever forecasters of cricket results. The prizes are the biggest ever offered. Tell your friends to be on the watch for next week's GEM. Give your orders NOW! There will be a rush, and late comers may lose the chance. It would be a pity for anybody to get left. We are all keen on cricket, and prizes of this magnitude are not going begging every day.

TRIUMPHANT NEWS!

Be on the qui vive for the notable happening fixed for August Bank Holiday Week. In the Special Number of the GEM for that day there will be a grand, extra, long, complete story of St. Jim's written in Mr. Martin Clifford's happiest vein. This tale will run out to 25,000 words. Something worth noting, that!

ANOTHER WORD!

I do not hesitate to draw attention to this fact, because I know it just fits in with what thousands of my readers really want. The stories of St. Jim's were never more popular than now, and everybody wants more of them. Well, I am breaking the ice in this direction the first week in August—the great holiday time when a first-class yarn is such a good wind-up to the day.

Your Editor.



The life story of Bernard or "Brownie" Carslake, the famous jockey, will appeal to every lover of the "Sport of Kings." It is graphically told by article and picture in a wonderful 4-page supplement which is given FREE in this week's SPORTS BUDGET (on sale Friday, July 13th). Don't miss it. Order your copy TO-DAY!

SPORTS BUDGET

Every Friday, 2d.

RUSHDEN'S FOLLY!

A Splendidly Written School Story of the World-Famous Tom Merry & Co., telling how a Sixth-Former, in his efforts to assist others, speculates but fails to accumulate.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus is Concerned

"I'M awf'ly shocked!"

"Eh?"

"In fact," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy impressively, "I am howwified!"

Six juniors of St. Jim's were listening—more or less—to the remarks of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. But, impressive as D'Arcy's manner was, none of the six, strange to relate, seemed very much impressed. Perhaps that was because they were talking cricket at the same time, and were more interested in the summer game than in Gussy of the Fourth.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther of the Shell continued to talk cricket, just as if Gussy hadn't made any remarks at all. Blake and Herries and Digby of the Fourth continued to disagree with them—being of a different opinion on the subject under discussion.

The remarks of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy wasted their sweetness on the desert air.

"I wepeat, deah boys—"

"Don't!" said Blake.

"That's a good tip!" assented Monty Lowther. "When about to wag your chin, Gussy—don't!"

"I wepeat—"

"Now, as I was saying—" observed Tom Merry.

"As I was saying," said Blake, with emphasis, "the only way to save the House match is to put in a few more of the Fourth."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Dig.

"I am speakin' to you fellows!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, so far forgetting the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere as to raise his voice a little.

"You generally are!" sighed Blake.

"I have remarked that I am howwified."

"Been looking in the looking-glass?" asked Monty Lowther, with a slight appearance of interest.

"Eh? No!"

"Then what has horrified you?"

"You uttah ass! Pway listen to me, deah boys; this is a sewious mattah. It's about Wushden of the Sixth."

"Blow Rushden of the Sixth!" said Herries.

"He is goin' to the dogs, deah boys!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Arthur Augustus had succeeded in getting the attention of his hearers at last. Six pairs of eyes turned upon him in a stare. Philip Rushden of the Sixth Form was a prefect of St. Jim's, a member of the eleven, and a great

gun in every way—he dwelt on Olympian heights, comparatively speaking, far above common mortals in the Fourth and the Shell. He was almost as great a man as Kildare himself, the captain of St. Jim's. For a junior of the Fourth Form to bother his head about Rushden at all—except with a view to keeping clear of his official ashplant—was unusual. And Arthur Augustus had declared that he was going to the dogs, and apparently could not let him go unheeded!

"Rushden is?" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Going to the dogs!" said Tom blankly.

"Goin' wight off to the howwid bow-wows!" said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Now, I wonder," said Blake in a meditative tone—"I wonder what Gussy has got in his noddle now, in the place where brains would be if he had any?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, what's Rushden done?" asked Tom Merry, laughing. "Has he given you six for not taking in your lines?"

"Nothin' of the sort!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have taken in my lines. I ought not to have had any lines, you know; Wushden was in a vewy bad tempah, or he would not have handed them out. I simply twod backwards on his foot on the cwicket-gwound—a thing any fellow might do!"

"Better tread on Lower School feet!" grinned Manners. "Prefects don't like their tootsies trodden on."

"Yaas, but—"

"Rushden does seem to be a bit ratty lately," remarked Blake. "I've noticed that. He whacked Trimble for having tarts in the dorm last night."

"Serve Trimble right! He's always got tarts about!"

"Yes; but it was rather unlike old Rushden. He's generally a sleepy sort of good-natured chap. And he was frightfully ratty the other day when he took on the Fourth at cricket practice."

"Well, Fourth Form cricket is enough to make any man ratty, isn't it?" remarked Monty Lowther.

"You silly Shell fathead!"

"Pway don't wandah ffrom the point, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "I am not complainin' of Wushden's watty tempah. But I am weally concerned about him."

The juniors grinned.

"Rushden would be flattered if he knew," said Manners. "He doesn't suspect that he's got a grandfather in the Fourth Form."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Well, about the junior House match—" said Tom Merry.

"You are wandewin' ffrom the point, Tom Mewwy. I have just taken in my lines to Wushden," said Arthur Augustus. "And what do you think he was doin'?"

"Give it up, old top!"

"He was goin' ovah a list of horses in a wacin' papah, and—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"And markin' them with a pencil," said Arthur Augustus. "What do you think of that?"

"Rats!"

"Rubbish!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, deah boys—" protested Arthur Augustus.

"You utter ass!" said Blake witheringly. "You might

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see something of that sort in Knox's study, or in Cutts'. But Rushden isn't that kind."

"I am awah of that, Blake. I was sewiously shocked. In fact, as I have remarked befoah, I was howwified."

"Ass! You dreamed it!" said Manners.

"I did not dream it, Mannahs. I saw the wacin' papah quite plainly—it is called 'Turf Tips.' Wushden was goin' through it, with no end of a wowried look on his face. He didn't even heah me tap, and when I went in, there he was, with his wotten wacin' papah. He jumped up in a wage, and bundled me out of the studay without even lookin' at my lines. He wumped my collah!" added Arthur Augustus, as if to give a final and convincing proof that Rushden of the Sixth was going to the dogs; and was well advanced on his journey to that undesirable destination.

"Serve you right if he's rumpled your silly neck!" said Blake unsympathetically.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You see, you were mistaken, Gussy," Tom Merry kindly explained. "Rushden isn't that sort. You either dreamed it, or your brain miskicked. See?"

"Nothin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy! I was shocked and howwified. I should have wemonstwat with Wushden on his wotten conduct, but he bundled me out so fast that I had no time to wemonstwat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is not a laughin' mattah when a prefect of the Sixth Form is goin' to the dogs," said Arthur Augustus severely. "What do you fellows advise me to do?"

"I advise you to go to sleep and dream again!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"You uttah ass!"

"Anyhow, dry up, old bean!" said Blake. "Your chin must be getting tired by this time."

"I wegard that remark as asinine, Blake. Do you fellows think I had bettah go back to Wushden's studay and wemonstwat with him, and speak a word in season?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a yell of laughter from Tom Merry & Co. They could imagine how a Sixth Form prefect would greet a "word in season" from a junior of the Fourth Form.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"But it is weally a sewious mattah, you know. Wushden is goin' to the jollay old bow-wows. What's a fellow to do?"

"Has it ever occurred to you to mind your own business, old bean?" inquired Monty Lowther.

"I watah think it is my biznai to speak a word in season to Wushden, and pwevent him fwom goin' to the dogs, Lowtah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

And the swell of St. Jim's walked away with his noble nose in the air, leaving Tom Merry & Co. chortling.

CHAPTER 2.

The Culprit!

"HALLO! What's the trouble?" Kildare of the Sixth asked that question in tones of astonishment. He had tapped at Rushden's door, in the Sixth Form passage in the School House, and strolled in.

Philip Rushden was seated at the table. As Kildare entered he hurriedly thrust into a drawer a paper he was looking at, and rose to his feet, his face crimson.

His startled confusion was so evident that Kildare could not help noticing it.

"Anything up, Rushden?"

"Oh, no!"

"Did I startle you?" asked Kildare, with a smile. "Awfully deep in Greek roots, what?"

"No! Yes! I—!" Rushden stammered.

Rushden of the Sixth was a bad hand at keeping a secret. Generally it was not very difficult to read his thoughts in his face. At the present moment it was obvious that he had something to hide; though what he could have to hide from his friend and fellow-prefect was a mystery.

Kildare could not help feeling surprised; but he was the reverse of curious. He elaborately affected not to notice Rushden's confusion.

"I just looked in to tell you about the prefects' meeting," he remarked casually.

"Prefects' meeting!" repeated Rushden.

"Yes; seven, in the prefects' room."

"Oh!" Rushden had recovered himself now. "Anything special on? Somebody up for judgment?"

Kildare smiled.

"Not yet. I've just seen the Head, and he's given us a job. Somebody is kicking over the traces, apparently."

"Some young rogue in the Lower School?"

"Well, no; I shouldn't call a prefects' meeting about that," said Kildare. "It seems to be a bit more serious."

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Somebody's been pitching the Head a yarn—I hope it's only a yarn, anyhow. But you'll hear it all at the meeting at seven." And Kildare turned to the door.

"Hold on!" said Rushden. "That's rather curious. What's the yarn? And how did it get to the Head?"

Kildare came back, and sat on a corner of the study table. He was not looking pleased. A prefect of the Sixth was a great man; but there were some of his duties that were not pleasant.

"It's rotten, if true," he said. "I can't think of any fellow in the St. Jim's Sixth who would play such a game—unless Knox, perhaps. I'm not sure about Knox. Well, Knox will come to the meeting, and if—!" Kildare paused. "Dash it all, it's not fair to think of Knox, either. But if the fellow in question is at the meeting, he'll hear all about it, and take it as a warning, perhaps."

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Rushden. "You're dashed mysterious all of a sudden."

"Somebody has seen a St. Jim's fellow—or thinks he has—sneaking in at the back door of the Tontine, in Wayland," said Kildare.

"Oh!" ejaculated Rushden.

He sat down suddenly.

"I can't believe it!" growled Kildare. "I dare say you've heard of the Tontine—it's a sort of sporting club, and the people there are a rough old crowd. No end of betting and so on goes on there—it's pretty well known. I can't believe that any St. Jim's senior would be found dead in such a place. Can you?"

Rushden did not answer.

"Of course, it's him for the long jump, short and sudden, if there's anything in it, and he's nailed," said the captain of St. Jim's. "Serve him jolly well right, too, for that matter, if it's true. It would be bad enough in a silly junior; but a senior knows better."

"Yes; of—of course."

"There are black sheep here, I suppose, same as everywhere," said Kildare. "I can't say I feel sure of Knox—and I've told him so. And I've had an eye on Cutts of the Fifth. But I don't believe—"

"You say a fellow was seen?"

"Yes; somebody saw him, and thought it his jolly old duty to report it to the headmaster. Of course, it was his duty right enough, if he was sure."

"But—but I don't quite catch on," said Rushden. "If the fellow was seen, I suppose he would be known."

"Well, it was at night, you see—late in the evening, anyhow, and pretty shadowy. But the giddy informant is sure that the fellow was wearing the St. Jim's colours."

"Oh! He didn't see his face?"

"Not to know it. Anyhow, he wouldn't know all the fellows here by sight, of course. He's sure of the colours. Of course, no outsider would be likely to be wearing a St. Jim's cap."

"How do you know it was a senior?"

"Size," said Kildare, with a smile. "The fellow was too tall for a junior—man's positive about that."

"Oh!"

"Might be in the Fifth or the Sixth," said Kildare. "Of course, the Head is rather upset. I don't know who told him; but I've a fancy that it was old Major Stringer—he's a governor of the school, and his place is near Wayland. But that doesn't matter, anyhow. The question is, to find out whether there's anything in it, and if there is, to put a stop to it!"

"I—I understand."

"It would be pretty rotten to have an expulsion in the school," said Kildare, with a frown. "But, of course, a thing like this can't go on. The Head's left it to the prefects, and we've got to handle it somehow. So I'm calling a prefects' meeting to deal with it."

"I see."

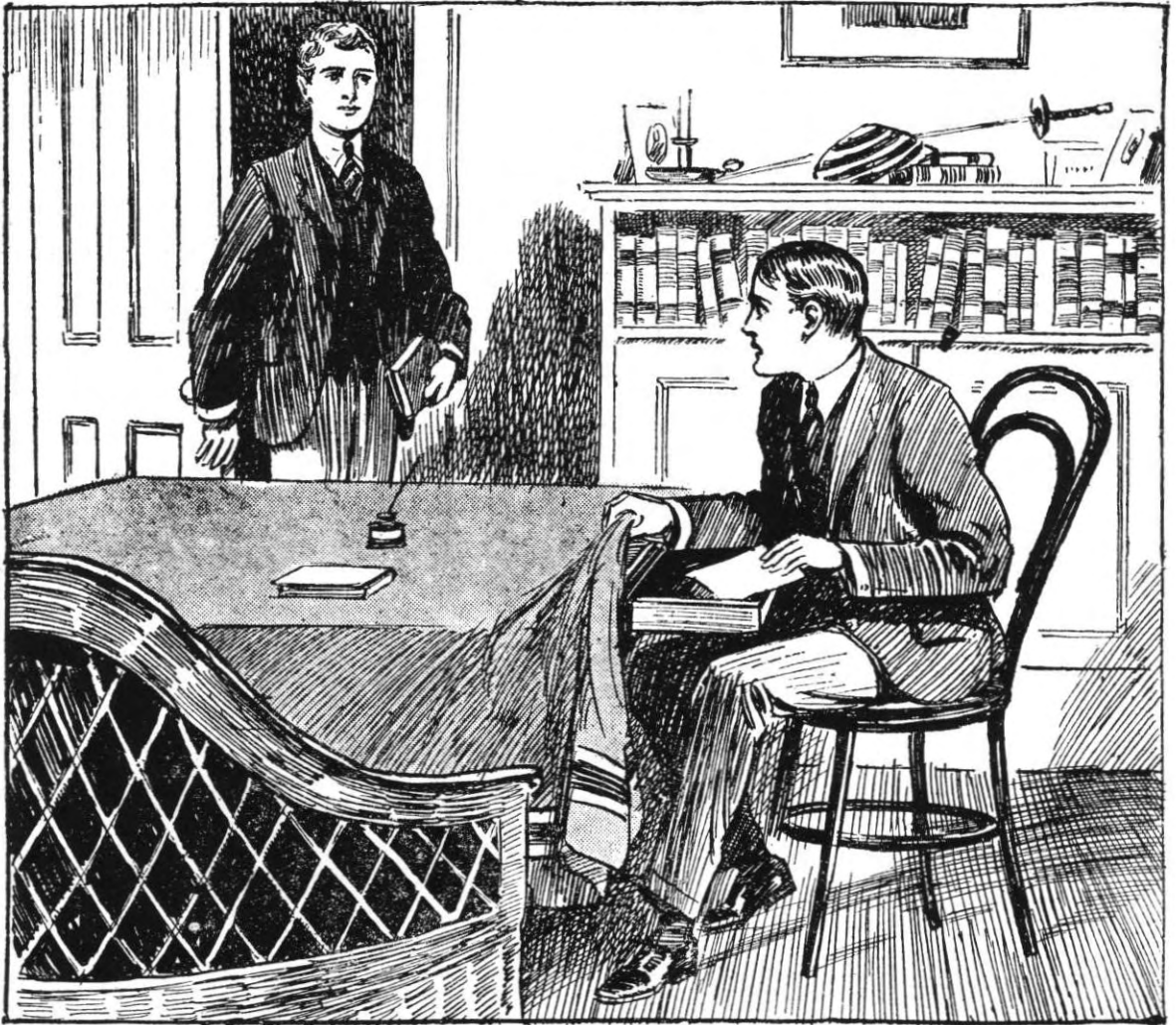
"Seven, in the prefects' room," said Kildare, and he slid off the table and strolled out of the study.

Rushden sat looking at the door after it had closed. There were beads of perspiration on his brow.

Not for a moment had it crossed Kildare's unsuspecting mind that Philip Rushden could know anything personally about the matter. Rushden was well known as one of the straightest fellows in the Sixth; he had gone up in the school with Kildare, and they had been friends since they had been fags in the Third Form.

Rushden was a keen cricketer, though of late he had been looked on as rather a "swot," as he was working for a Greek prize. He was a dutiful prefect; though perhaps rather too good-natured and easy-going for his authority to have much terror for unruly juniors. Anybody at St. Jim's would have said that he was the very last fellow in the school to "kick over the traces," in the shady manner of Cutts & Co. of the Fifth.

But if Kildare had seen him now, with dark dismay in his face, certainly the captain of the school could not have avoided doubt.



'Hallo! What's the trouble?' Kildare of the Sixth asked that question in tones of astonishment. He had tapped at Rushden's door, and strolled into the study. Phillip Rushden was seated at the table. As Kildare entered, he hurriedly thrust into a drawer a paper he was looking at, and rose to his feet, his face crimson. (See page 4.)

Rushden rose at last. It was getting towards seven, the time of the meeting in the prefects' room.

The Sixth-Former left the study, but he did not head for the Prefects' Room. He went out into the quadrangle.

When the meeting gathered Rushden was not present. Kildare, who presided, looked round for him.

"Where the dickens is Rushden?" he asked. "Not here," said Darrell, with a smile. "Swotting, perhaps, and forgotten all about the meeting."

"I told him specially," said Kildare. "There's a notice up, too."

"Not so jolly keen on duty, as usual," sneered Knox. "Oh, rot!" said Langton.

Kildare took no notice of Gerald Knox's remark. "Well, we can get on without Rushden," he said. "I've told him what the meeting's about, so it doesn't matter much."

And the business of the meeting proceeded—without Rushden.

CHAPTER 3.

On the Make!

BAGGY TRIMBLE of the Fourth put his head into Tom Merry's study that evening when the Terrible Three were at prep. Prep, apparently, was not bothering the worthy Baggy.

"Haven't you fellows finished?" asked Trimble. "No! Cut!" said Tom Merry briefly.

"Well, I won't interrupt you long—"

"You won't interrupt us at all," growled Manners. "Get out of it, you fat slacker!"

Instead of getting out of it, Baggy came in and closed the door. The Terrible Three went on working.

"It's a matter of a subscription," explained Baggy. "I'm sure you fellows would like to roll up, as you like old Rushden."

"What?" "He's hard up," said Baggy.

"Rushden is?" asked Manners, with a stare. "Yes. Poor old Rushden," said Trimble sadly. "Awful, ain't it? Family troubles, you know—shortness of cash at home, and all that."

"You fat jabberwock!" said Tom Merry. "Do you want us to believe that Rushden has told you so?"

"Well, I happen to know," said Baggy. "I know a good deal, you know. This is how the matter stands—"

"Buzz off!" "Rushden's got a sister—"

"Bless his sister, and bless Rushden! Get out!" "She's married—"

"Travel!" roared Tom Merry. Prep was the order of the day, and the Terrible Three were not specially interested in Rushden's sisters, married or single.

"She's hard up—" continued Baggy. "Give me a cricket-stump, somebody!" said Lowther.

"She's written to Rushden—"

"Outside!" "And he's no end bothered about it," said Baggy. "Ain't you fellows sympathetic?"

"I wish Rushden could hear you," granted Manners. "Rushden's rather a pal of mine—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Some fellows have pals in the Sixth Form," said Baggy.

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"I'm rather thick with Rushden in a way. Now, I'm going to speak to my numerous friends, on the quiet, you know. I'd do something for him. See? In a quiet way, of course—don't want to make it the talk of the school. Then he will be able to hand it out to Gertrude."

"Gertrude?" repeated Tom.

"Yes. That's his married sister."

The Terrible Three looked at Baggy, and Monty Lowther held back the cricket-stump. They were astonished.

"You see, her husband's on the rocks," pursued Baggy cheerily. "Phil gave me the letter—"

"Phil?"

"Old Rushden, you know."

"If he heard you calling him Phil—"

"Oh, we're great pals, you know," said Baggy easily.

"Otherwise, of course, he wouldn't have given me the letter, would he?"

"You fat fraud!" roared Manners. "There isn't a letter, and it's all bunkum!"

"That's all you know," said Baggy loftily. "I'm at liberty to show you the letter if you stand by the subscription. I'm limiting it to ten shillings each chap."

Baggy fumbled in his pocket and drew out a letter. The Terrible Three stared at it. They had not the slightest doubt that this was one more of Baggy's many stunts for raising the wind, though undoubtedly it was an extraordinary stunt, even for Baggy. It was hard to imagine what would happen to him if the Sixth Form prefect discovered how his name was being used.

"Here's the letter," said Baggy. "I'll read out some of it. That will convince you, I suppose."

And Baggy proceeded to read:

"Dear old Phil,—You're not to worry about it. I wanted to keep it all from you, but now the doctors have decided about poor Arthur, it could be kept a secret no longer, of course. I know, my dear boy, that you would help if you could, but you must not think of it. Even if you win the Greek prize you speak of, I could not take the money—you will need it all. Poor Arthur is quiet now, and—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry suddenly.

It dawned upon Tom at that moment that this letter was not, and could not be, a composition of Baggy's own. And if it was not that it was genuine, and the Terrible Three were listening to a private letter. That thought made Tom Merry's face flame.

He leaped up and grasped Baggy by the shoulder.

"You fat villain! Whose letter is that?"

"Rushden's, you know. Leggo!"

"Then you've stolen it!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

Tom jerked the letter from Baggy's hand. He folded it up so as not to see what was in it, though inadvertently he could not help seeing on the last page the signature "Your sister, Gertrude." Before attending to Baggy further, Tom took an empty envelope from the table drawer and put the letter in it.

"I—I say, is that a genuine letter of Rushden's, do you think?" asked Manners in a low voice.

"Looks like it."

"And that fat rascal has read it?"

"Look here, Manners—"

Tom Merry's eye glistened at Trimble. Seldom had the captain of the Shell looked and felt so savagely angry.

"How did you get hold of that letter, Trimble?" he asked.

"Phil gave it to me— Yaroooooh!"

Tom Merry grasped the fat junior, and ruthlessly banged his head against the study door. Trimble's yell rang the length of the Shell passage.

"Now tell me—"

"Yoooooop!"

"Tell the truth, you rotter!"

"Yow-ow-ow! You're not going to have that letter, Tom Merry. It was my idea to raise a sub— Yoooooop!"

Bang!

"Ow! You awful rotter!" gasped Trimble. "I wish I hadn't come to this study now. I thought you fellows liked Rushden—ow!—and would back me up. I—I say, his brother-in-law is gone potty, you know—shell-shock, I believe—and there's no end of trouble, and they're hard up, and—and a subscription— Yarooooop!"

Bang!

Trimble's head collided with the door for the third time. The door opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in.

"Pway excuse me buttin' in, deah boys," he said politely, "but if you are killin' Twimble, would you mind doin' it quietly with a choppah, or somethin'. A fellow can't work with this wov goin' on."

"Help!" yelled Trimble. "Rescue, D'Arcy!"

"I wufuse to wescue you, Twimble. I weward you as wathah unfit to touch. But this feahful wov—"

"He's taken my letter!" howled Trimble. "Rushden's letter, you know—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Come in and shut the door, Gussy," said Tom Merry hastily. "We don't want all the House here."

"Certainly, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus shut the door behind him and turned the key.

"Now, what does it mean, deah boy?" he asked. "I know, of course, that Twimble is lyin'."

"Look here, D'Arcy—"

"Wats!"

"Look here, Tom Merry"—Trimble rubbed his head, and tried to be ingratiating at the same time—"I'll tell you fellows what. We can work this together. Rushden's jolly popular, and a lot of fellows would rally round if they knew he was hard up. We'll show that letter round, in confidence, you know, as a proof of good faith—just as I was showing it to you. We shall get a lot of subscriptions—I feel sure of that. Well, we keep fifty per cent for expenses—"

"Expenses!" babbled Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; the labourer is worthy of his hire, you know. Rushden, can't expect us to raise money for him for nothing."

"Bai Jove!"

"Perhaps seventy-five per cent, as there's so many of us in it now," said Trimble, blinking round at the dazed juniors. "That will be a good thing for us—what?"

"Is the fellow pottay?" asked Arthur Augustus blankly.

"No, you ass. Rushden's brother-in-law is potty, and his sister's hard up, and—"

"How do you know, you wapsallion?"

"He's stolen a letter of Rushden's," said Tom Merry. "I've got it here. Where did you get that letter from, Trimble? I'm going to bang your head on the door for every lie you tell!"

"I—I—I found it!" gasped Trimble.

"You uttah wottah!"

"D'Arcy put me on to it—"

"I did?" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Yes; I heard what you said to these chaps this afternoon, you know, about seeing 'Turf Tips' in Rushden's study. After he'd gone out I thought I'd look."

"You spyin' beast!"

"I found that letter," said Trimble. "As a friend of Rushden's, I—I thought I'd read it, and—and help him, you know—"

"You howwid weptile!"

"Then I thought about the subscription," said Trimble brightly. "My idea is, for all Rushden's friends in the Lower School to rally round, and—and place the money in my hands. A very deserving case, you know—"

"I understand," said Tom Merry quietly. "And I'm going to make you understand, Trimble, if you've got brains enough. Put him over the chair!"

"Here, I say—"

"Give me that stump, Monty!"

"Right-ho!"

"Look here, I'll yell for a prefect!" howled Baggy, in great alarm.

"Do!" said Tom. "I've a good mind to march you off to a prefect, anyhow; and, mind, if you tattle a word about Rushden's affairs among the fellows, I'll take you straight to Rushden and explain."

"Oh! I say—"

"Now you're going to have six, for spying and prying, you cad! You can take it from me or from Rushden!"

"I—I say, old chap—"

Whack!

"Yow-ow! Tom, old fellow—"

Whack!

"Oh, you rotter! I—I say, old pal, I'll let you have three-quarters of the profit—"

Whack!

"Woooooop!"

PRISONER AT THE BAR.

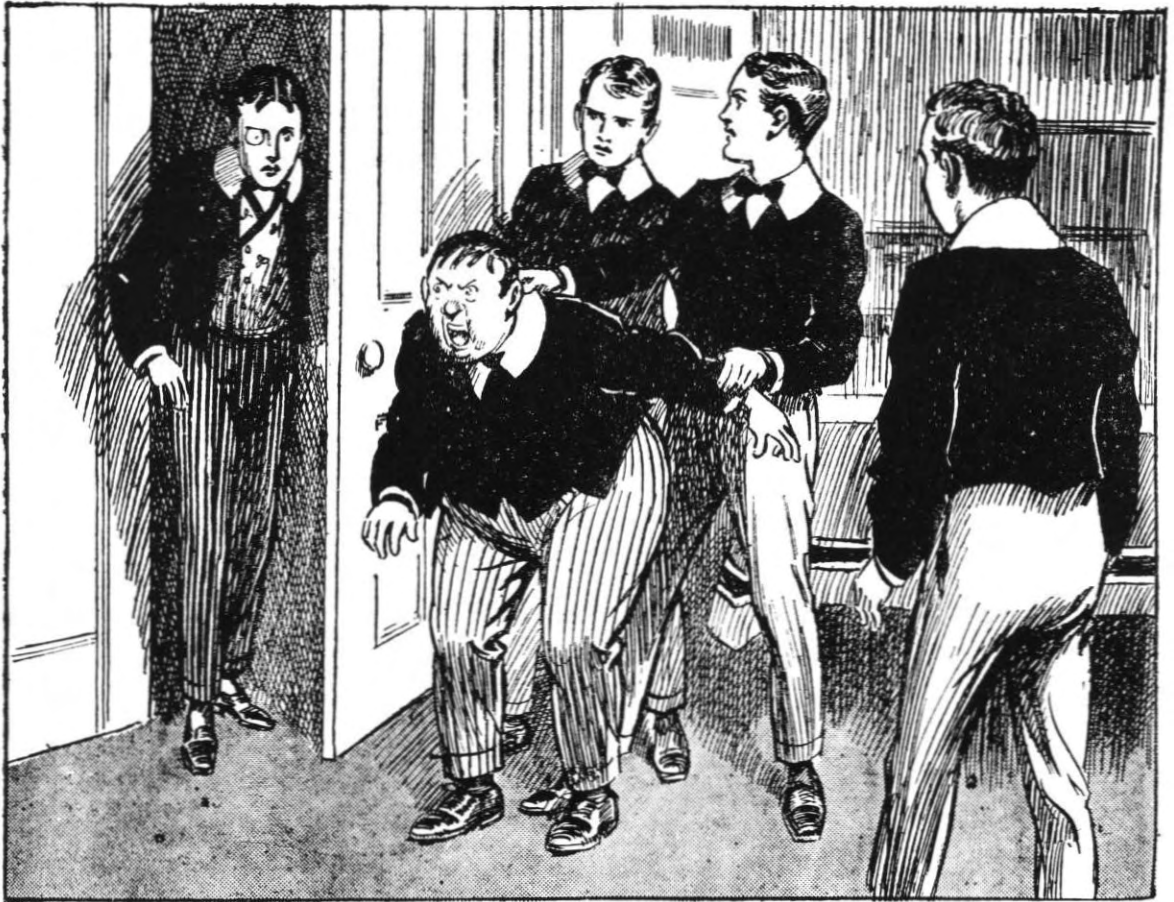


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As Trimble's head collided with the door for the third time, the door suddenly opened, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked in. "Pway excuse me buttin' in, deah boys," he said politely, "but if you are killin' Twimble, would you mind doin' it quietly with a choppah, or somethin'." A fellow can't work with this wog goin' on." "Help!" yelled Trimble. "Rescue, D'Arcy!" (See page 6.)

Whack, whack, whack! It was a severe "six," and Baggy Trimble fairly squirmed with anguish. When the infliction was finished, the captain of the Shell opened the study door, and tossed Trimble, neck and crop, into the passage. There was a bump and a howl, and a sound of flying feet.

Baggy Trimble was gone, leaving behind him Philip Rushden's letter, and all hope of making a profit out of it.

CHAPTER 4.

A Surprising Catch!

KILDARE of the Sixth turned up his coat-collar, and grunted discontentedly. He was not in a good humour.

It was ten o'clock; and at that hour Kildare was generally turning in, unless he had some work to finish in his study. But on this especial evening, Kildare was a good distance from St. Jim's. The night had come on cold and rainy, and a keen breeze blew in the streets of Wayland town. And Kildare, pacing a narrow, dark entry in a back street of the town, was satisfied neither with the weather nor with his business there.

Kildare, head prefect of St. Jim's, was on the watch. It was a hateful task to him—utterly foreign to his nature. It savoured of spying, this waiting about in a dark street, near the half-hidden back entrance of the sportive Tontine Club. But there seemed no help for it.

The prefects' meeting—which Phil Rushden had not attended—had discussed the matter long and seriously, and had come to a decision. Some senior fellow belonging to St. Jim's was making surreptitious visits at night to a "low hole" that was strictly out of school bounds even in the daytime. Kildare was satisfied that it was not Knox of the Sixth, in this instance—the only Sixth-Former upon which his suspicions could have fallen. He could not help feeling that probably it was Cutts of the Fifth—fairly well known to be a reckless "sportsman." But it might be St. Leger or Prye of the Fifth, or some New House senior. And the only way to know was to find out.

Kildare hated the task; but he could see no other way. It had been agreed that the prefects should take their turns in keeping an eye on the place for a time; and Kildare, all the more because he detested the task, had taken the first turn. He hoped that the whole thing would turn out to be a mistake; though the more he thought about it, the less likely that seemed. Anyhow, he had to know; the Head had left it to him and his fellow-prefects, and the duty had to be done.

Kildare hoped deeply that if he discovered the culprit he would be able to warn him into better courses, and avoid reporting him to the Head.

As nothing had been said outside the circle of the prefects the culprit could not be on his guard; and if he was in the habit of going to the place, it was fairly certain that he would turn up there before all the prefects had taken their turn of duty. So it looked like a simple task to get at the truth; only such a distasteful method of getting at the truth worried Kildare deeply. As he moved about and turned up his coat-collar, and waited, he felt more and more inclined to give the culprit a sound hiding, if he did come along.

He wondered again and again who the fellow could be. He felt almost certain that it was nobody in the Sixth—certainly not a prefect. He wondered whether Rushden had a suspicion, remembering how startled Rushden had been. It was annoying that Rushden had not turned up for the prefects' meeting. If there was "no catch" to-night, Kildare determined to speak to Rushden in the morning, and ask him plainly if he suspected anyone. The sooner the wretched business was over the better.

There was a footstep in the alley, and Kildare, standing in a shadow, looked up.

A fellow muffled in an overcoat came turning quickly out of the street into the alley, at the end of which was a private back door of the Tontine Club. The newcomer had his collar turned up, and a bowler hat pulled down over his brows;

and Kildare, for a moment, supposed that he was a stranger. But the next moment something familiar struck him.

"My hat!" he ejaculated.

The newcomer stopped dead, staring round in the shadows, with a faint exclamation. Kildare stepped out.

"Rushden, old man!"

Rushden of the Sixth tottered back.

"Kildare!" he breathed. "You here!"

"Yes; mine's the first turn," said Kildare cheerily. "I suppose Darrell's told you, as you weren't at the meeting—"

"What?"

"Jolly glad of your company, old chap; but you shouldn't have come! Two may attract attention."

So far Kildare had spoken without suspicion. But even the unsuspecting captain of St. Jim's could not be blind to the white terror and dismay in Rushden's face. He broke off and stepped back a pace, his own face paling as the truth rushed on his mind.

"You!" he panted.

Rushden gave a groan. It did not seem that the thought of denial crossed his mind.

"You—you've found me out!" he gasped.

"Good heavens!" muttered Kildare. "You, Phil! Are you mad? It was you—you who— Good heavens, I can't believe it now!"

He stared blankly at Rushden. The truth was plain before his eyes now; but even now Kildare found it difficult to believe.

"Phil," he said huskily, "you must be mad! I thought of Cutts—and St. Leger—Knox, even—but you—"

The wretched Sixth-Former did not speak. He seemed stunned by the sudden discovery.

Kildare caught his arm.

"Come with me!" he muttered. "We—we've got to talk this over. You must be out of your senses, Phil!"

"I—I can't come with you!"

"Why not?"

"I—I've got to see a man there."

"At that show—the Tontine?"

"Yes."

"Are you potty, Phil? You tell me that! Who's the man?"

"What does that matter? I've got to see him. I—I've got business with him!" muttered Rushden.

"Betting, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You haven't learned iving yet, with your other new accomplishments," said Kildare.

"I've got to see him."

"You've got to come away with me," said Kildare quietly, tightening his grip on his fellow-prefect's arm. "Before you go into the Tontine, Phil, you'll have to knock me out—and you don't want to do that, if you could. I only hope I may be able to keep this from the Head. Come!"

"I've got to see him."

"Come, I tell you!"

It seemed, for the moment, that Rushden would resist. But he realised how useless that was, and he allowed Kildare to lead him away. He went with sunken head.

Not a word was spoken as the fellow-prefects walked away through the wind and the rain. They were close to St. Jim's when Kildare spoke at last. He had been thinking hard.

"Rushden, old man, I don't know what's made you take to this. It's not your sort. The Head's left the matter to me—I want you to make it easy for me. Will you give me your word never to go near that show again, and I can let the matter drop?"

Rushden did not speak.

"Otherwise, I shall have to report you, Phil—you know that."

"I know."

"Give me your word, then."

"I can't."

"Oh, you're mad!" exclaimed Kildare roughly. "You! Taking up with bookies, billiards-sharpers, and racing—"

"I'm not!" muttered Rushden. "It's once—only once! This once! But I've got a bet on with Banks, and it's cash. I've got to hand him the money, or it's off. Kildare, old man, give me a chance. It's a ten to one chance, and—and I must have a hundred pounds—I must!"

"You can explain that to the Head," said Kildare grimly. "Come on!"

He led his fellow-prefect to the gate of which the prefects had the key. Within the walls, they walked towards the School House. Once more Kildare stopped and spoke.

"I want to give you a chance, Rushden, if I can. You know that. You seem to be off your chump to-night! We'll talk about it in the morning, and see what can be done. Will you promise me not to go out again to-night?"

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"Yes, I'll promise that," muttered Rushden. "For to-night."

"That will do."

And no more was said. But when Kildare of the Sixth laid his head upon the pillow that night he found it much more difficult than usual to sleep. And before Phil Rushden slept the morning sun was glimmering in at the window.

CHAPTER 5.

The Missing Letter!

"OLD Conway's comin' to-day." "Well, he can come," said Jack Blake, with a nod.

"Weally, Blake—"

"I bar most chaps' majors," said Blake. "But I admit I can stand your major, Gussy. Does he ever squeeze out anything in the shape of a tip? If so, I hope he'll blow in before tea."

"That is wathah a mercenawry view to take of my eldah bwothah's visit, Blake."

"Very likely. But does he?"

"Will he come in khaki?" asked Dig, with some interest.

"Old Conway is not in the Army now, Dig. As a mattah of fact, he is not exactly comin' to see me," said Arthur Augustus. "Of course, I shall see him—and I will let you fellows see him, if you are good. But he is weally comin' to see the Head and Mr. Waitton, about some stunt or othah for ex-Service men. He is pwesident, or secwetawry, or somethin', of a society, or an association or somethin' to do somethin' or othah for chaps who have been left on their uppahs, you know, owin' to the war, and don't get enough to go wound."

"Good man," said Blake.

"It's a howwid welfection, deah boys, that some of the fellows who kept the Huns out are vewy hard up," said Arthur Augustus seriously. "I quite appwove of old Conway takin' a hand in the mattah, and I have told him so."

"Which bucked him up no end, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," assented Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly. "Pwobably he would value my opinion, you know, as that of a fellow of tact and judgment. But it is wathah lucky old Conway comin' along to-day—"

"Only if he comes before tea," said Blake; "and then only if he shells out. Otherwise, it's tea in Hall for this study."

"I was not thinkin' of tea, Blake."

"I was!" said Blake.

"I was thinkin' of Wushden."

"Eh! Who's Rushden?" asked Blake, with an elaborate assumption of ignorance. "There's no chap of that name in the Fourth."

"Weally, Blake—"

"One of young Wally's fag friends in the Third?" asked Blake.

"You know perfectly well, Blake, that I am alludin' to Wushden of the Sixth."

"The what?"

"The Sixth!" shouted Arthur Augustus.

"Bless your little heart, now I come to think of it, I remember there is a Sixth Form here," assented Blake. "These little things slip the memory."

"You uttah ass! I am quite wowwied about Wushden of the Sixth," said Arthur Augustus. "I told you he was goin' to the dogs. I fancy Kildare knows somethin' about it now."

"Go hon!"

"I saw them meet in the quad this mornin'," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "Well, Wushden turned vewy wed, and Kildare looked howwidly awkward, and turned away."

Blake looked at his noble chum admiringly. The chums of Study No. 6 were discussing matters during the morning "break," on the day following Gussy's startling discovery that Rushden of the Sixth was going to the dogs. That discovery his chums had refused to take with due seriousness; but Arthur Augustus had taken it very seriously indeed. There were times when the Honourable Arthur Augustus was very serious, not to say solemn; and this was one of the times.

"With your imagination, Gussy, you ought to be at least a journalist," said Blake. "Dash it all, you've got the makings of a political wizard in you!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"You ought to be Prime Minister," said Blake. "With an imagination like that, you could imagine that you won the war with your chin, couldn't you?"

"I weward your wemarks as simply asinine, Blake! I have not, so far, spoken a word in season to Wushden."

"I know that, old bean."

"Bai Jove! How did you know, Blake?"

"Because you're still in one piece, old chap," said Blake, with a chuckle. "If you spoke a word in season to a Sixth Form prefect, you'd be in two or three—if not half a dozen."

"Wats! Havin' welfected on the mattah, Blake, I am goin' to consult old Conway when he comes."

"You're going to spin him fairy tales about what you imagined you saw in a Sixth Form study?" asked Blake.

"I am goin' to consult him. He is an old St. Jim's boy, you know, and he will know what to do. It is p'wobable that he is a fittah person to speak a word in season to Wushden, you know. He was a p'wefect when he was in the Sixth Form heah. It has occurred to me that Wushden might w'gard it as cheek on my part."

"That has really occurred to you?" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas."

"What a brain!"

"Hallo, here comes Rushden!" muttered Dig. "He's looking awfully waxy. Has he heard any of Gussy's potty chatter about him, I wonder?"

"Weally, Dig—"

The chums of the Fourth fell silent as Rushden came striding up. Although Blake & Co. did not place much faith in Gussy's opinion regarding Philip Rushden, they had to admit that the Sixth Former was not looking his old cheery and good-natured self. His face was pale, there were lines in his brow, and his eyes were glinting.

"D'Arcy!" he rapped out.

"Yaas, Wushden," said Arthur Augustus benignly.

"You were in my study yesterday."

"I b'wrought in my lines, yaas."

"Did you take a letter?"

"What?"

"I have missed a letter from my study," said Rushden.

"I don't know of anyone else having been there. Do you know anything about it?"

Arthur Augustus did not answer that question. He extracted his celebrated eyeglass from his waistcoat pocket, jammed it into his noble eye, and fixed that eye on Rushden. He fixed it first on Rushden's nose, and allowed it to travel down to his feet. From Rushden's feet the freezing eye rose again to Rushden's nose.

This process was what Arthur Augustus would have described as lookin' a fellow up and down, and was supposed to be crushing in its effect.

Rushden, however, only looked impatient and angry.

"Do you hear me, you young fool?"

"I am not deaf, Wushden."

"Then answer me."

"I w'fuse to answah."

"What?"

"You have asked me," said Arthur Augustus, in a tone trembling with indignation, "whethah I have been guilty of a dishonourable action. I w'fuse to weply to such a question. I w'gard it as an insult. If you were not a p'wefect, I would give you a feahful thwashin'."

Blake & Co. expected something like an earthquake to follow that speech. But Rushden, after an angry start, controlled his temper.

"I suppose that means no," he said.

"I w'fuse to say yaas or no, or to uttah a single word at all," said Arthur Augustus. "I w'fuse to weply. I will not address a single syllable to you on the subject, Wushden. I considah—"

"You young idiot!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I hadly think you could have done such a thing," said Rushden, more quietly. "But I don't know of anyone else having been to my study. The letter is missing, anyhow, and was taken from my table drawer. I think—I'm almost sure I put it there. It—it's an important letter." The anger faded out of Rushden's face, and a look of deep trouble took its place. "I'm sorry, D'Arcy; I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"All wight, deah boy. F'wom one gentleman to anotheah an apology is quite suffish!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "Now you put it like that, Wushden, I don't mind tellin' you that the lettah is safe, to w'lieve your mind."

The prefect spun back again.

"Then you know something about it?"

"Gussy!" murmured Blake.

"I know that a lettah was taken f'wom your studay, Wushden," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I know the howvid fat w'ascal who took it, and I know that Tom Mewwy took it away f'wom him to put it back again."

"Who took it?" shouted Rushden.

"I am sowwy I cannot tell you that, Wushden, as you are a p'wefect, and it would be sneakin'. But it was taker away f'wom him again, and Tom Mewwy—"

"Who has it now?" rapped out Rushden.

"I should have thought Tom had put it back in your studay by now, but I suppose he hasn't had a chance yet—"

(Continued on next page.)

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Rushden strode away. Arthur Augustus glanced after him and shook his head sadly.

"I feah, deah boys, that Wushden's mannaahs are detewiowatin', owin' to his goin' to the dogs," he remarked. "Did you notice an uttah absence of wepose in his mannaah?"

Blake chuckled. "What beats me," he said, "is why he didn't wring your silly neck, Gussy!"

"I should refuse to let him w'ing my sillay neck—I mean my neck, Blake. I wegard your wemark as absurd. And I am vevy sowwy to see a Sixth-Form pwefect of this school so dweadfully lackin' in wepose of mannaahs. And there is nothin' whatevah to cackle at, you duffahs."

But the duffers persisted in cackling, in spite of Gussy's assurance. Meanwhile, Rushden of the Sixth, with a grim brow, was hunting for Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 6.

A Difficult Position !

TOM MERRY moved quietly along the Sixth-Form passage, and stopped at Rushden's door and opened it. He had seen the prefect in the quad, and was satisfied that the coast was clear. The letter in his pocket weighed on Tom Merry's mind. As he had enclosed it in an envelope after taking it from Trimble the day before, it was safe enough. But he wanted to get it back to where it belonged before Rushden missed it. The previous evening there had been no opportunity, and early in the morning there was none; but at the interval in lessons at eleven o'clock, Tom Merry found his chance. Hence his cautious approach to the prefect's study, while most of the fellows were out in the sunny quad.

Tom's position was difficult enough. He had felt bound to take the letter from Trimble; but even Trimble, prying rascal as he was, could not be betrayed to punishment. So all that Tom could do was to return the letter to Rushden's study, and hope that it had not been missed.

As he opened Rushden's door there was a patter of feet in the passage, and Tom turned with beating heart. But it was only Trimble.

"Get out, you fat brute!" Tom almost hissed. He had feared for a moment that it was Rushden.

"I say, Tommy—"

"Get away!"

Tom stepped into the study. Baggy Trimble's ample form filled the doorway after him.

"Don't be such a thumping ass!" breathed Trimble. "I know what you're here for—giving away that letter. Look here—"

"Cut off!"

"Don't be such an ass!" urged Trimble. "I tell you that letter's valuable. Lots of the fellows would subscribe—"

"Shut up!"

"Besides, see what a hold it would give a chap," explained Trimble eagerly. "Suppose Rushden gave a fellow lines? Well, a fellow needn't do them. Hold it over his head, you know."

"What?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Rushden would be simply sick at the idea of that letter being shown round," said Trimble. "Have him fairly under our thumb, you know! Rather a catch to have a Sixth-Form prefect under your thumb! See? Yarooooop!" added Trimble, in a wild yell, as a hand of iron closed on his collar.

He almost fell down as Rushden of the Sixth towered over him.

"You!" said Rushden, between his teeth.

"Yaroooo!"

With a swing of his arm, Rushden spun Baggy Trimble into the study. He strode in after him. Tom Merry stood transfixed, the letter in his hand.

"That's my letter, Merry?" asked the prefect.

"Yes," said Tom.

"I missed it this morning." He took the envelope and opened it. "You took it away from Trimble!"

"Yes."

"Thank you, Merry. It was decent of you. I quite understand. You can cut."

Tom Merry left the study. It was all out now, and he did not envy Trimble. But for Baggy's last desperate effort to regain the letter it would have been left in the study, and Tom Merry would have been gone by the time Rushden arrived there. Baggy Trimble's last effort had delivered him into the hands of justice.

The fat junior realised that as he scrambled up and stood blinking at Rushden's white face.

"I—I never touched it, you know!" he gasped.

"I heard what you were saying as I came along the corridor," said Rushden.

"Oh dear!" groaned Trimble.

"You've read the letter?"

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"Not at all. I wouldn't, you know."

Rushden looked at him searchingly.

"Why did you take it?"

"I—I didn't."

"What?"

"I—I mean, it was only a lark! I—I never looked at it. I—I wouldn't, you know. I—I hope I'm honourable!" gasped Trimble.

"If that's true—"

"Word of honour!" gasped Trimble. "I—I don't even know you've got a sister named Gertrude."

"What?" roared Rushden.

"I—I don't, really, and—and I never knew anything about her husband having shell-shock, and going off his rocker, and—and— Yaroooooh!"

If Trimble hoped to convince Rushden, by those details, that he knew nothing of the contents of the letter, he failed lamentably. The prefect grabbed him by the collar with one hand and caught up an ashplant with the other.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooo! Help!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh, crumbs! I say, Tom Merry stumped me for it last night!" howled Trimble. "Tain't fair! Yaroooo!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Then Trimble went rolling out of the study, to sprawl in the passage. He did not sprawl long, however; he was afraid that Rushden might follow him out. He leaped up and fled.

Rushden kicked the door shut after him, and threw himself into a chair. His brow was black and gloomy. The trouble that had come upon him was bad enough in itself, and it had driven him to a foolish step, and caused further trouble with Kildare. And now there was a possibility of his wretched trouble becoming the talk of the fags, owing to Trimble's prying. He groaned at the thought.

He sat buried in black thoughts, when there was a tap at the door, and Kildare came in. Rushden gave him a gloomy, almost savage look. His nerves were shaken, and he felt that he could not stand much more.

"Well?" he growled.

"I'm bound to speak to you, Phil," said Kildare very quietly. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

"Yes."

"You'll keep clear of that rotten show, and give me a chance to keep the thing to myself without betraying the Head's trust in me?"

"I can't."

"You must, old chap."

"I'll swear that after to-day I'll never go to the show again," said Rushden huskily. "Good heavens! Do you think I want to go there?"

"That means you're going to-day?"

"I suppose I've let that out now."

"You can't, Phil."

"I've got to."

"You went out on your bike before brekker this morning," said Kildare quietly. "Was it to see that man Banks?"

"I had to hand him his money. You prevented me last night."

"And you're going again this afternoon?"

"I must."

There was a long silence. Kildare turned to the door at last, without speaking again. Rushden's face grew haggard as he watched him.

"You're going to the Head?" he muttered.

The captain of St. Jim's turned on him fiercely.

"What can I do? Any other fellow in the school I should report to the Head. You know it's my duty. Am I to let you off because we've been friends?"

Rushden's head drooped.

"I know!" he muttered thickly. "I don't ask it! But—but it's the finish for me here if you do."

"The matter's in your own hands."

The unhappy fellow gave a groan.

"I know I've been a fool—and worse! It seemed to me the only way. If I get the money I don't care. And that's certain, anyhow—practically certain. Do as you like, Kildare. I'm not asking for mercy! I'd do the same in your place—I should be bound to. Go to the Head."

"I think you're potty!" said Kildare bitterly. "I'd have given anything rather than this should have happened. We've been pals since we were kids in the Third, and now I've got to get you sacked from the school, or else go back on duty and fair play. How can I ever be down on any other fellow who does the same thing if I let you off? I shall have to resign, at least. And even then I shall know I've done a weak and rotten thing—rotten favouritism. If you'd give me your word to chuck it all up at once—"

"I can't!"

Kildare drew a deep breath.

"I've got to think it over," he said. "I sha'n't speak to the Head yet. You're making it as hard for me as you can,



A fellow muffled in an overcoat, and a bowler hat pulled down over his brows, turned into the alley at the end of which was a private door of the Tontine Club. Kildare, for a moment, supposed that he was a stranger, but the next moment something familiar struck him. "My hat!" he ejaculated. "Rushden, old man!" (See page 8.)

Phil, but I hope you'll come to me and make me the promise I want. I know I could take your word, and that would see me clear."

Without waiting for a reply, Kildare left the study. Rushden sat staring dully at the door after it had closed.

CHAPTER 7. Much Advice Wanted!

"IT'S old Conway!"

A tall, athletic-looking young man came with an easy swinging stride towards the School House. It was after dinner, and that afternoon was a half-holiday. Arthur Augustus was gracefully adorning the School House steps with his elegant person, waiting for his brother to arrive, and he gave a little chirrup of satisfaction as Lord Conway appeared in the offing.

Wally of the Third, Arthur Augustus' younger brother, was also on the steps. Gussy turned to him quickly.

"Wun in and change your collah, Wally."

"Bow-wow!" said Walter Adolphus D'Arcy disrespectfully.

"Do you want old Conway to see you in a soiled collah, Wally?"

"It was clean this morning, you ass!" said Wally.

"Bai Jove! It is not vewy clean this afternoon," said Arthur Augustus. "And your hair is wuffed, Wally. There is a went in your twousahs, too. I considah—"

"Hallo, kids!"

Lord Eastwood's eldest son greeted his two younger brothers cheerily. Wally grinned, and Gussy frowned slightly. The noble Gussy did not really like being classed as a "kid" along with his minor of the Third.

"Jollay glad to see you, Conway!" said Arthur Augustus, shaking hands with the viscount. "You had bettah not shake hands with Wally—his paws are fwightfully gwubbay."

"Ass!" said Wally, shaking hands with Lord Conway. "Glad to see you, old bean!"

Lord Conway laughed.

"We want you to come to supper in our Form-room," said Wally with a glare at Arthur Augustus. "Young Levison, and Reggie Manners, and me—"

"Wemembah your gwammah, Wally."

"Give us a rest, Gussy! We've got kippers, and sardines, and two kinds of jam, and a cake," said Wally temptingly.

"By gad! Have you?" said Lord Conway.

"Yes. Manners minor said it's no catch entertaining fellows' relations, but I jolly well banged his head on the desk, and he'll be civil."

"Sure he'll be civil?" grinned the viscount.

"What-ho! If he isn't he knows I'll bang it again," explained Wally. "Reggie's a bit sore because I can't stand his pater when he comes. But that's all rot, because Reggie can't stand his pater himself. If you were like his pater, now—"

"Weally, Wally —"

"Don't butt in, Gus!"

"Bai Jove!"

"You'll come, old bean, won't you?" asked Wally.

"If I were not dining with the Head," said Lord Conway gravely. "I should be delighted; but I fear that the two engagements might clash."

Wally did not look very disappointed.

"Well, if that means no, never mind," he said. "Mind, I've asked you. You can't get out of that. It's against a fellow to have relations butting in, but I've asked you, old bean. Bear that in mind. Ta ta!"

And Wally of the Third cut away, to rejoin a mob of fags who were waiting for him at a respectful distance.

"That young wapsallion weally takes the cake!" said

Arthur Augustus. "The Third Form heah are weally like Wed Indians, Conway."

"But in the Fourth the manners are polished, I know," said Lord Conway. "The result of your example, Arthur."

"Well, a fellow does what he can," said Arthur Augustus modestly. "I want you to give me some time this afternoon, Conway. I want to consult you about a wathah important mattah."

"Those troublesome tailors—"

"It isn't a tailah's bill this time, deah boy—not a personal mattah at all. I am wathah wowwied about a Sixth Form chap!" said Arthur Augustus confidentially.

"Eh?"

"A Sixth Form pwefect, you know. I feah that he is goin' on in a vey wad way."

"Oh!" ejaculated Lord Conway. "And you are worried about it?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Is your Housemaster going on to your satisfaction?" asked the viscount gravely.

"Yaas, I am vey well satisfied with old Wailton," said Arthur Augustus unsuspectingly.

"And what about the Head?"

"The Head's all wight."

"You are not worrying about him?"

"Not at all."

"That's good!" said Lord Conway, with undiminished gravity. "It's only the Sixth Form pwefects that you are not satisfied with?"

Sarcasm was a sheer waste when applied to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He nodded cheerfully.

"Yaas, that's it—and only one of the pwefects. I am not vey well satisfied with Knox, as a mattah of fact; but it is not Knox this time. It's Wushden."

"Does he know that you are so concerned about him?"

"I have not mentioned it yet."

"It might be advisable not to mention it to him," suggested Lord Conway. "When I was here myself, it was quite unusual for the Fourth to look after the Sixth. Quite the other way about, in fact."

And Lord Conway, with a nod to Arthur Augustus, walked into the School House.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, after about five minutes' reflection. "I wondah whethah old Conway was pullin' my leg?"

And Arthur Augustus shook his noble head seriously.

Meanwhile, Lord Conway, progressing towards the Housemaster's study, came upon Kildare of the Sixth. Kildare was in flannels, but the troubled expression on his handsome face did not indicate that cricket was in his mind. His face brightened as he saw Lord Conway.

"You, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Little me," said Lord Conway, shaking hands with the captain of St. Jim's. "I'm in luck if there's a match on this afternoon."

"A House match," said Kildare. "But I'm afraid I shall have to stand out of it. I—I wonder, sir—"

"Yes?"

"I—I'd like to ask your advice."

"About cricket?" asked the viscount, with a smile. "You could tell me things about that, I fancy."

Kildare smiled.

"Something a bit more serious, sir! I believe you could give me a tip how to act, as an old St. Jim's fellow. I've never been in such a difficult position."

"I'll be glad to help you if I can," said Lord Conway simply. "I'll look in at your study after I've seen Mr. Railton."

"Thanks very much, sir!"

"Not at all!"

Kildare went to his study feeling greatly relieved. Lord Conway, once of St. Jim's, was the very man he was glad to see that afternoon, and the viscount's arrival was a godsend to him. As a rule, Kildare knew how to deal with difficulties as they arose, but the case of Philip Rushden was a problem to him.

Lord Conway went on his way, but he was not fated to see the Housemaster yet. Tom Merry was in the corridor.

"Excuse me, Lord Conway," began the captain of the Shell diffidently. "I—I dare say you remember me—Tom Merry—"

"Of course I do! Glad to see you again!"

"I—I wonder whether you could spare a few minutes while you're here, sir? I—I'd like to ask your advice—"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated the viscount involuntarily. It really looked as if all St. Jim's was in need of advice that afternoon, and regarded the viscount as adviser-in-general.

"I—I suppose it's a cheek, sir," said Tom, colouring. "But if you knew the circumstances—as an old St. Jim's boy—"

"My dear lad, I'm quite at your service," said Lord Conway genially. "Shall I look in at your study?"

"If you'd be so kind."

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"I'm seeing the Head at five," said the viscount, looking at his watch. "Lots of time yet. After I've had a chat with Mr. Railton, Merry, I'll come up to your study."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom. "Study No. 10 in the Shell."

Lord Conway proceeded, and this time he was allowed to arrive at Mr. Railton's study. Tom Merry was busy while Lord Conway was with the Housemaster. His business was rather peculiar. In company with Manners and Lowther, he tracked down Baggy Trimble, and that fat youth was persuaded—strongly persuaded—to accompany the Terrible Three to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

There, Trimble wasted his breath, which always was short, in loud expostulations. But his expostulations fell upon deaf ears. The Terrible Three kept him in the study, giving him a kick or two when he approached the door, and there was no help for Trimble. Apparently Trimble of the Fourth was to see Lord Conway when that young gentleman arrived in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

CHAPTER 8.

Lord Conway Takes a Hand!

KILDARE rose eagerly as Lord Conway came into his study at last. Having had his chat with the Housemaster, the viscount was proceeding to make his calls on the various St. Jim's fellows who had welcomed his arrival as adviser-in-chief. Kildare, as captain of the school, was the most important, and he received Conway's first call.

"It's good of you, sir!" said Kildare. "I hardly know whether I ought to bother you. But—"

"Nothing that has to do with my old school would be a bother to me, Kildare."

"Sit down, sir. I'll tell you."

Lord Conway sat down in Kildare's best armchair.

"You know Phil Rushden, I think, Lord Conway?"

"One of your best cricketers," said Lord Conway. "I've spoken to him. A decent lad."

"One of the very best, sir," said Kildare earnestly. "We've gone up in the school together, and I've never known him do a shady thing—till now."

The viscount's brows knit a little.

"Till now?" he said. "That means—"

"It means that he's playing the fool—the blackguard!" said Kildare, his face utterly miserable. "I can't understand it; it's not his sort at all. It beats me hollow. It's not an ordinary case. I can answer for Phil all the time he's been at St. Jim's. We've always been friends. And now—"

There was a catch in Kildare's voice.

"A queer business," said Lord Conway quietly. "Better tell me the whole story."

"I want to, sir, if you'll hear it. Of course, I could consult my Housemaster. But that's giving Phil away. I must report him, I suppose; but—but I can ask your opinion without giving him away, and you may be able to see farther into it than I can."

"Quite right. I'll try. Fire away!"

Kildare explained the whole matter so far as he knew it, from the Head's communication, and the prefects' meeting, to his discovery of Rushden at the Tontine, in Wayland.

The viscount's face was very grave as he listened.

"I know," wound up Kildare, "that it's rotten. But Rushden is one of the most decent chaps that ever breathed. If he'd promise me to chuck it at once, I could let it go at that, without going back on my duty. The Head allows me some discretion, of course. But he won't."

"You've asked him?"

"Yes; and he refuses. It beats me hollow. If you can understand it, sir, and advise me—"

"Where's Rushden now?"

"In his study. He's standing out of the cricket."

"He's going to that shady show again to-day?"

"Yes; even if I report him to the Head! I can't let him go. If I stood out of this, how could I ever act as a prefect again?"

"You couldn't."

"But to report him—to see him sacked from the school. There's something behind it I don't understand. He's not that sort. A straighter fellow never breathed."

"That was my impression of him," said Lord Conway. "A simple, straightforward sort of chap."

"That's it, sir."

"It's dashed odd. But you're right to take your time about it. There's something behind it all, and its not just a case of blackguardism," said Lord Conway.

Kildare brightened.

"I'm glad you think so. That's my belief. But what can I do? Thank goodness you came this afternoon, sir!"

The viscount smiled.

"He's not going yet?" he asked.

"I don't know."



Lord Conway came out of the telephone box, and there was compassion in his face as he met Philip Rushden's almost haggard eyes. "Well?" muttered the Sixth-Former. "What's happened?" "Blue Moon has lost!" answered Lord Conway. "Was not even placed!" "Oh!" breathed Rushden. (See page 17.)

"Tell him I want to speak to him, and to wait for me ten minutes," said the viscount. "He'll do that, I suppose."

"Oh, of course."

"Then I'll look into his study in ten minutes' time."

"I'm sure he'll listen to you," said Kildare, as the viscount rose. "You can influence him if anybody can. I'll go to him at once, and see that he doesn't leave before you speak to him."

"That's right!"

Lord Conway quitted the study and went up the big staircase. He had two juniors to see; but possibly he would have deferred those engagements, but for D'Arcy's mention of Rushden. Evidently D'Arcy knew something about the strange proceedings of the Sixth-Former, and Lord Conway thought that what he knew might throw some light on what puzzled Kildare so deeply. So his first visit was paid to Study No. 6. He found Arthur Augustus at the door.

"Comin' up for me, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"That's it."

"Twot in."

"I'm in rather a hurry, as it happens," said Lord Conway, sitting on the corner of the table in Study No. 6, "so get it off your chest as quickly as possible, Arthur."

"Yaas, wathah! I won't delay you, deah boy, if you are in a hurwy," said Arthur Augustus considerably. "I know that your time is probably valuable—"

"Come to the point, kid."

"I'm comin' to it. I was only explainin'—"

"Something about Rushden of the Sixth?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, what do you know about him?"

"I'm afraid he's goin' to the dogs, Conway," said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Exactly how?"

"I saw him with a sportin' papah in his studay, markin' on it—markin' the names of horses, you know. Now, that is not a pwopah occupation for a Sixth Form pwefect, Conway."

"Not in the least," agreed Lord Conway.

"He has also been feahfully upset and watty-tempahed lately," added Arthur Augustus. "I attwibute that to the wowwy of playin' the gidday ox, and pewwaps to his conscience, you know."

"Is that all?"

"You see, I couldn't mention this to any othah person," said Arthur Augustus. "I couldn't give Wushden away. My fwinds think it would be a cheek on my part to speak to him—to uttah a word in season, you know—"

"Your friends seem to be very perspicacious."

"Yaas. But I am weally concerned about Wushden. He is quite a good chap, and not at all a shady boundah like Cutts of the Fifth. Now, I was thinkin'. Conway, that as an old St. Jim's fellow, you could speak a word in season to this weekless fellow, and lwing him wound."

Arthur Augustus spoke with grandfatherly seriousness, and the viscount smiled. But he nodded.

"Quite a good idea of yours, Arthur," he said.

"That's all, exceptin' that a howwid fat boundah named Twimble stole a lettah fwom his studay the othah day, and wead it, and makes out fwom it that Wushden is hard up. That looks as if the sillay ass has been losin' his money, and, in that case, pwobably you will find him in a wepentant mood, Conway."

"My dear boy, you speak with a wisdom beyond your years," said Lord Conway, with great gravity.

"Yaas. Most of the chaps admit that I am wathah a fellow of tact and judgment," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Tom Mewwy has got Twimble in his studay, Conway. He says—"

"Oh! Well, I'm going there now."

And Lord Conway, having disposed of his younger brother, left Study No. 6 in the Fourth, and proceeded to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

(Continued on page 18.)



The St. Jim's News

GREAT GRUNDY NUMBER

EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

GEORGE ALFRED GRUNDY is by way of being an institution at St. Jim's. You can't miss him; indeed, there are times when you can't even dodge him. This is particularly noticeable a few days before a Form match. It is then that Grundy is mostly in evidence—at least, so far as I am concerned. On such occasions Grundy positively haunts me. Wherever I go, there George Alfred is sure to be. He buttonholes me in the corridors, accosts me in the Form-room, follows me up the stairs, intrudes into the study, badgers me on Little Side, and argues with me in the dormitory.

And the burden of it is always the same. "Am I playing, or am I not?" The answer is invariably the same also—"You are NOT!"—and I have no diffidence about acquainting him with it. Yet he continues to inquire, sometimes hopefully, sometimes truculently, pleadingly, threateningly, or pathetically, day in and day out. There are times when I have serious doubts as to whether he is capable of understanding plain English.

During the last week or so he has turned his attentions to the "News." For a space he has either abandoned his athletic aspirations, or else he has at long last gained some idea of what I mean when I say "NO!" Anyway, he appears to have become suddenly possessed of a desire to shine in the journalistic world.

Grundy has asked for an edition of the paper to himself. I not only has he asked; he has demanded it as a right. He argues that if he only had control of the "News" he would produce an issue that would amaze everybody. I certainly don't doubt that, but unfortunately there are several ways of amazing people. I am of opinion, from what I know of Grundy, that his method of doing it would be hardly calculated to maintain the prestige of the periodical.

Now, I have not the faintest objection to George Alfred having an edition of the "News" to himself, but I am absolutely opposed—and so are the rest of the editorial staff—to the idea of his taking charge of the issue. So I have decided upon this compromise, that the subject matter for one week shall be Grundy, but the actual Editorship is to be in my hands. Grundy has agreed to this, and professes himself quite satisfied. But having regard to the nature of the contributions that I have received—and passed for publication—I am inclined to wonder whether that satisfaction is destined to be very long lived.

Tom Merry

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AN EPISODE.

By Monty Lowther.

I HERE may be a bigger idiot on earth than George Alfred Grundy. I don't pretend to be an authority on idiots, and my experience of them is limited. But, speaking as an average fellow with an average experience, I must say that I can scarcely believe that it is possible.

Now, what is really wrong with Grundy is— But, stay! I have only a column at my disposal, and that space is totally inadequate for the purpose of stating what is wrong with Grundy. The best thing to do would be to say what is right with Grundy. A couple of lines would be ample for that—if I could think of anything, which I can't.

But of one thing I am absolutely certain—Wilkins and Gunn are heroes and martyrs. They live with Grundy, they have undiluted Grundy from morning to night—and they survive it. Furthermore, they are almost cheerful at times. They have even been known to smile, but only when they are at a safe distance from Grundy.

George Alfred is the leader of his study. It often happens that he leads without being followed, Wilkins and Gunn having more respect for their own welfare than they have for Grundy's leadership. But occasionally they are forced to toe the line. Grundy has great ideas of bringing them up in the way that they should go—or the way that he thinks they should go, at any rate.

Last week he took them down to Little Side to teach them to play cricket. Wilkins and Gunn aren't much as cricketers, but compared with Grundy, they are Jessop and Grace. However, Grundy doesn't know that. Come to think of it, there isn't much that he does know.

The first thing they did was to clean bowl him eight times in succession. Grundy said it was luck, so Wilkins smashed his wicket again, four times in four deliveries, just to show Grundy how fortunate he could be when he was really trying.

"Bah! It's a bowler's wicket!" growled Grundy disgustedly.

"Perhaps you'd better bowl, then," suggested Gunn politely.

So Wilkins went to the wicket, and Grundy prepared to do wonders with the ball. Gore was batting at the next net, about twenty yards away, and when the ball hit him on the shoulder he came across to Grundy and made himself disagreeable.

At the cessation of hostilities George Alfred went on bowling to Wilkins, who sent the next delivery nearly over the pavilion. He treated the following six in a similar fashion.

"Bowler's wicket!" murmured Gunn softly, and Grundy overheard him. It concluded the "lesson" for that evening, at any rate, because by the time Wilkins had rescued Gunn the light had gone.

ME!

By George Alfred Grundy.

BY rites I ought to be editing this no. of the "St. Jim's News," but Tom Merry is afraid that if I get a chance to show what I can do, everybody will want me to be editor altogether. That would be a bit of a knock for him, and you can bet that I could buck this paper up if I could have my way. It wants a really smart fellow, like me, to talk charge of it and put pep into it.

They keep me out of everything in this school, all because they are jellus. But that has all ways been the case with really great men. History teems with instances of the same thing. I am only putting up with what Julius Cesar and Napoleon and Charlie Chaplin and Joe Beckett had to put up with. But the other people suffer for it in the end, because they lose the advantages they would get from the use of brains like mine.

This school would be a different place altogether if only they had the sense to consult me about things and talk my advice.

Look at the junior kriket and football elevens. They aren't so bad on the hole, I admit, but that only proves how good they could be if I was aloud to have my way. They could rely on never losing a match, and soon they would be good enough to challenge the county teams, and even be chosen to represent England in the Test matches.

But when I offer to coach them, what does Tom Merry say? It fairly makes me sick of the hole thing. The truth is, there are a lot of fellows who have pushed themselves in to positions where they are no blessed good, and they refuse to give way to superior talent, like mine.

They want kicking out, no getting away from it. Only give me the job, and see me do it. No half-measures with George Alfred Grundy. No fear. You watch me. One of these days I shall be worth watching, too, I give you my word. One day there will be fellows proud to say they were at St. Jim's with Grundy. When I am Prime Minister and Speaker and captain of the English kriket team and the polo team and football team, and the world's heavy-weight champion, and stroke of the winning Boatrace crew, and big-game hunter, and most famous cinema aktor well, you just weight, and see what they say then!

I have a skeme now in mind, wich if it proves succesful—of course, it isn't likely to prove otherwise—everybody will be rushing to shake me by the hand. I nearly rote to the Government about it the other day, but checked myself just in time. I thort that perhaps they would take the thing up behind my back, and get the benefit of my brainwork whilst I was busy on some other stunt. You take my word for it, I'm flie, I am, and it's a good man that's flie now-a-days.

GRUNDY'S BARGAIN.

By William Cuthbert Gunn.



A WEEK or so ago George Alfred Grundy bought a second-hand motor-bicycle through the columns of the "Wayland Gazette." He bought it without any sort of examination, simply because it was cheap and the advertisement said that it was good. It cost him £15, and he had it sent up to the school from Wayland. It looked like some survival of the Stone Age, and, as a matter of fact, Monty Lowther suggested that the man who sold it had dug it up on his allotment. Grundy said that he was going to have a run on it the next half-holiday. I looked at the jigger, and said that I had my doubts.

The following day it took three-quarters of an hour to start that bike off, and half the school got more fun out of it in that time than Grundy was likely to get in ten years. Not a sign of life did it give for twenty minutes, and that in spite of the fact that Grundy, Wilkins, and I fussed round it like a mother's meeting. Then, all of a sudden, there was a snort, followed almost immediately by a cough. Then the jigger gave a loud report, and we all gave a loud cheer. We needn't have worried; it wasn't the engine, after all—it was only the front tyre.

Of course, that put the tin hat on all hopes for the afternoon's run; but Grundy said he'd get the engine to start, any old how, just to show that it could be done. And, amazing to relate, it could. What is more, it did—and jolly unexpectedly at that. We hadn't really realised that the miracle had happened, before Grundy was roaring down the Rylcombe Lane at about twenty miles an hour. Wilkins yelled to him to pull up, but it ought to have been obvious to everybody that this was the very thing Grundy was trying to do—and couldn't. He went down the lane and round the corner like a rocket trying to get away from its stick, and Cardew said that as it had taken three-quarters of an hour to start it, there was every chance that it would take quite as long to stop it.

But Cardew was wrong for once. It took ten minutes. At the end of that time it stopped in Rylcombe High Street, with the front wheel caressing a lamp-post, and Grundy got off suddenly. There was a box of eggs disputing the right of way at that particular place, which happened to be exactly opposite to the grocer's shop, and doubtless Grundy was the victor in the contest; but, at any rate, the eggs had their revenge. It was probably the most expensive omelette to which hen-fruit has ever contributed. It cost Grundy thirty-five shillings and the value of his clothes.

He lugged what was left of the bike round to the local garage, and the proprietor gave one look at it, and told him to take it away, as they weren't in the market for scrap iron. Grundy explained that he'd brought it round to be repaired, and the proprietor said he'd do what he could.

He examined the jigger, and then called a mechanic, and the two of them tapped it and poked it, and then went into a corner and laughed themselves helpless. Finally the garage proprietor told Grundy that the magnet was next door to useless, the cylinder was cracked, both wheels were out of the true, the tyres were too worn and patched to be of any real use, the belt was perished, the saddle springs broken, all the valves worn, and the carburettor leaked. The petrol tank had got a hole in it, too, but that didn't matter, because the thing was safer without any petrol in it, and the little drop that would stop in below the level of the leak would do to fill a cigarette-lighter.

Any old how, Grundy left it, with instructions that it was to be made rideable, no matter what was wanted doing, though the mechanic refused to pledge himself to do more than make it look something like a motor-bike when seen from a distance. His offer to turn it into something really useful, like an umbrella-stand, or a set of garden tools, Grundy ignored.

Well, a fortnight later the machine came up to the school again, with a bill for repairs amounting to £46 10s. Grundy pulled a long face, and sent the bill home to his pater, but consoled himself with the thought that it was all right now, anyway.

The first time he went out on it he was twice pulled up by the police for noise, as the blessed thing made a row like a battery of machine-guns; and he had two summonses served on him in consequence. Then he got stranded, miles away from St. Jim's, without any petrol, and had to leave the thing in a barn and take the train home, landing in an hour after lock-up. He got a fortnight's gating for that.

Then, the next day, he received information from the farm where he'd left it—at his own risk—that somebody had apparently stolen it out of the barn during the night. (After all, it must be consoling for Grundy



The motor-engineer and his mechanic could not refrain from laughing at Grundy's damaged motor-cycle.

to reflect that he's not the only idiot in existence.) It was afterwards found, in a smashed-up condition, by the side of the road. Then the summonses materialised, and cost him a guinea and costs on each count, and, of course, his name and school were in the paper, and he had to go before Raiton and got a caning and another fortnight's gating.

And what is left of the motor-bike still reposes in the woodshed. Nominally, it is still Grundy's property, but it wouldn't be safe to remind him about it. His balance sheet is appended.

	£	s.	d.
To original cost of motor-bike ...	15	0	0
To eggs damaged in smash ...	1	15	0
Repairs to bike ...	46	10	0
Police-court fines ...	3	0	0
	£66	5	0

This doesn't include petrol, oil, train fare, and two ruined suits. I should say the present value of the jigger is 4d., though I shouldn't like to give him that for it.



JAZZ!

By George Wilkins.

IT'S all very well being asked to write an article about Grundy. I have enough of Grundy in the ordinary way. I want to forget him when I have a chance. Tom Merry says I ought to be able to turn out some interesting stuff, having such a lot of material to draw on. I know so much about Grundy, he says. I don't know whether he's trying to be funny or not, but it sounds to me as though he is.

Now so much about Grundy, do I? Well, I know so much I don't want to think about it. The thought makes me homesick.

No one knows what I have to put up with, except Gunn, and he's in the same plight. If you want to have some idea of it, try living in a small room with a bad-tempered grizzly-bear, a half-witted village natural, a homicidal lunatic, one of those politician johnnies who's got an idea he could run the earth on his own, and a gramophone that's kept going night and day. That'll give you a mild impression of what sharing a study with Grundy means.

It doesn't appear to be public property yet, but the fact remains that Grundy has been taking dancing lessons since Christmas. What on earth induced him to have aspirations in this direction I can't understand. He's as capable of learning to dance as he is of learning to behave like a sane human being. There's a hall down in Wayland where they give lessons, and Grundy went there one afternoon. He bought some swagger dancing-shoes. He never spares any expense, that's one thing. We had to have tea in Hall for a week to pay for those blessed shoes. He toffed himself up fit for a Lord Mayor's Show. He'd got enough brillantine on his hair to drown a cat in, and his necktie was a revelation, even to Arthur Augustus. He evidently meant to shine at one end if he couldn't at the other.

He came back in a couple of hours' time, and moved the table back against the wall. He said he was going to practise. Off he started.

"One—two—three, one—two—three, turn, glide; one—two—three, one—two—three, turn, dip."

Round and round the study he went. He wanted Gunn to stand in a corner and whistle, while I counted the steps for him. But one chap acting the ass in a study at a time is quite enough, thank you!

So he commenced again on his own. "One—two—three." And so on.

You should have heard the crockery rattling in the cupboard! You should have felt the floor shake! You should have seen the crowd that gathered and hammered on the door to know what was going on.

But somebody heard it all right. Gilmore and Cutts' study, on the fifth corridor, is immediately under us. They came up with ashplants to investigate. Their ceiling was coming down like a snowstorm all over their tea-table. They didn't like it, and they made no secret of the fact.

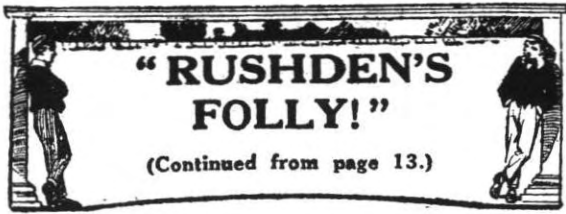
They came into our study as soon as we opened the door to reassure the crowd that there was no need to call in the police. They stood there and gazed in amazement at Grundy, who, blissfully unconscious, continued the merry jazz. In about three seconds he was jazzing to another tune.

It was "One—two—three, cut, swish! One—two—three, bump, biff!"

And the watching crowd, including Gunn and I, chortled mightily. For once our sympathies were with the Fifth. After all, Grundy had asked for it!

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CHAPTER 9.
Light at Last!

YOU beasts!"
"Shut up!"
"You rotters——"
"Kick him, Manners; you're nearest."
"Yaroooooh!"
Lord Conway smiled, and tapped at the door of Study No. 10.
"I hope I'm not in the way," he remarked, as he stepped into the study. "Interrupting a polished conversation—what?"
Baggy Trimble blinked at the viscount. The Terrible Three jumped up, and Tom Merry closed the door.
"Thanks for coming up, sir," said Tom. "You know these fellows. That fat beast is Trimble of the Fourth——"
"Look here, you know——"
"We've got him here for you to speak to, sir, if you will," said Tom, colouring. "I—I hope you'll excuse my cheek. But it's a beastly difficult matter. About a letter the fat rotter stole from Rushden's study in the Sixth."
"More about Rushden!" murmured Lord Conway.
He sat on the table.
"Go ahead!"
"This is how it is," said Tom. "That fat rotter——"
"Look here——"
"That crawling cad stole a letter from Rushden's study and read it," said Tom. "He read part of it out to us, and we were thinking it was some rot he had made up. As soon as we knew, I took the letter from him, and it's been returned to Rushden now. Trimble's been thrashed."
"Good!" said Lord Conway. "Hard, I hope."
"Well, I stumped him," said Tom, "and Rushden gave him two afterwards. He's had enough, if it comes to that. But the fat beast is chattering about Rushden's private affairs, that he nosed out by reading the letter. Of course, Rushden isn't anything to us—he's in the Sixth. But, of course, he would feel awful if he knew, and he's a decent sort. We can't put up Trimble before the Housemaster—sneaking's barred. So—so when we heard you were coming we— we thought you'd perhaps speak to the cad, and make him hold his tongue about what he's spied out." Tom Merry stopped, his face very red.
"It's a cheek, we know, sir," said Lowther. "But——"
"Not at all," said Lord Conway. "I think you're acting very sensibly, and I think I know how to deal with this young gentleman who reads other people's letters."
"I don't!" howled Trimble. "I never saw the letter. My belief is that Tom Merry took it himself."
"What?" roared Tom.
"I mean, there wasn't any letter!" gasped Trimble. "Actually no letter at all. Besides, Rushden's got it back now."
"Oh gad!" said Lord Conway, staring blankly at the fat junior. Trimble seemed to surprise him.
"I'm glad you can take my word, sir," said Trimble with dignity. "I—I suppose I can go now. These beasts have been keeping me here, you know, against my will. Fancy that!"
"So you did not read the letter?"
"Not a word, sir. I don't know what was in it. I told Rushden himself that I didn't even know he had a sister named Gertrude. He refused to believe me."
"Oh, did he?" gasped Lord Conway.
"He did—suspicious cad, you know," said Trimble. "He was waxy, as if it's my fault that his sister's hard up. If the man's gone potty, I suppose he can be put into an asylum, can't he?"
"Eh! What man?" said Lord Conway, wondering for a moment whether it was Baggy Trimble who was "potty."
"Arthur, I mean—Arthur Bainbridge," said Trimble.
"Suppose he has shell-shock! Well, I didn't give it to him, did I? I can't help it! No good Rushden pitching into me."
"What does the fellow mean?" said Lord Conway. "Is he insane?"
"I—I think he's speaking of Rushden's brother-in-law,"
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 805.

said Tom Merry reluctantly. "He read it all in the letter."
"Oh, I see! You young rascal, Trimble——"
"I didn't!" roared Trimble.
"Then how do you know about Rushden's affairs, you fat villain?"
"I don't! I mean, Rushden told me," said Trimble. "We're pretty good pals, you know. I'm going to ask him to come to Trimble Hall for the holidays, and—and bring his brother-in-law with him—not if he's violent, of course. I'm sorry for a chap who's had shell-shock and gone off his rocker; but there's a limit."
"You—you——" gasped Tom Merry.
Lord Conway's face was very grim.
"Besides, I'm going to ask my father to help them," said Trimble. "He's got more money than he knows what to do with. Look at the cheques he sends me. No need for Gertrude to take anything from Rushden—as if he had anything to give! Besides, she said in the letter that she wouldn't, and he was not to worry. Now, my pater——"
"Shut up!" roared Manners.
Lord Conway slipped off the table and dropped an iron hand on Trimble's shoulder.
"Trimble," he said quietly, "you've learned a lot that doesn't concern you. You're to forget it. You're not to speak a word about it. You seem to be more a fool than anything else; but you must have sense enough to hold your tongue."
"I—I——" stuttered Trimble.
"These boys have placed the matter in my hands now," said Lord Conway. "I shall deal with it. If you utter one more word of tattle, Trimble, about Rushden's affairs, I shall see that you are sent away from this school."
Trimble's jaw dropped.
"I mean that, every word!" said Lord Conway grimly. "If you want to be expelled from St. Jim's, go on with your tattling. Because these boys have told me in confidence, I'm giving you a chance. But another word of tattle, and I shall place the whole matter before your headmaster. Bear that in mind."
There was no mistaking Lord Conway's grim determination. Trimble shivered in every fat limb.
"I—I won't say anything!" he gasped.
"Keep to that, if you understand when you're well off. Now get out."
Baggy Trimble almost tottered from the study. There was not much doubt that Baggy would hold his tongue after that warning—difficult as the task was for Baggy.
After a few more words with the Terrible Three, Lord Conway quitted Study No. 10 in the Shell. He left Tom Merry & Co. in a satisfied frame of mind. But the viscount himself was not feeling very satisfied. From different sources, now, he had learned most of the story, and was able to understand the problem that perplexed Kildare so much. He went down the big staircase, and entered the Sixth Form passage. Kildare met him there.
"He's gone, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's blankly.
"Rushden?"
"Yes. He had gone when I came to his study; I've learned from his bag that he had been gone about ten minutes, on his bicycle." Kildare knitted his brows. "It's too rotten—after what I said to him."
"He's gone to the Tontine?"
"No doubt about that—he said he would! It can't be helped now—I've got to go to the Head."
"Hold on!" said Lord Conway quietly. "Oddly enough, Kildare, I've learned something about this matter already; and I begin to understand what that foolish lad has done—and why. Have you enough confidence in me to leave the affair in my hands, Kildare?"
"Of course, sir, and jolly glad, too," said Kildare. "I'll act on your advice, whatever it is."
"Then leave it to me to see Rushden, and say nothing till I've seen him."
Kildare drew a deep breath of relief.
"I don't know how to thank you," he said.
"That's all right." The viscount looked at his watch. "I've time before my appointment with the Head. My car's at the gates. You'll be wanted in the House match, Kildare."
"Yes; but——"
"Get on with it, my boy, and leave Rushden to me."
And, with a nod, the Old Boy of St. Jim's walked out of the School House, leaving Kildare greatly relieved and with a new hope in his heart.

CHAPTER 10.
The Reason Why!

STOP!"
Rushden of the Sixth stopped, catching his breath with a gasp. He stared at the tall figure that had stepped into his path.
"You will remember me, I think," said Lord Conway, with a smile, as Rushden stared helplessly.

"Yes—Lord Conway! What—what do you want with me?"

Rushden gave a glance past the viscount, at the half-hidden back door of the Tontine, at the end of the alley.

"I came here to stop you," said Lord Conway quietly. "Kildare has consulted me, and left the matter in my hands."

"You—you came—"

"I beat you on the road," said the viscount, with a smile. "You came on your bicycle, I in a car. As I knew your destination, I was easily here first. But come away from here to talk."

"I've got to go in."

Lord Conway shook his head. A fierce look came over the St. Jim's Sixth-Former's face, and he seemed to be bracing himself for a struggle.

"I suppose you mean kindly," he said. "But you've no right to interfere with me. I'm not standing it."

"Only the right of an Old Boy of St. Jim's, who cares for the good name of his old school," said Lord Conway. "I know more of this affair than you imagine, Rushden—and I want to be your friend. Tell me why you must go into that den?"

"There's a man there—"

"The bookmaker, Banks?"

"Yes," muttered Rushden.

"Why must you see him again?"

"It's the last time. He's got to hand me the money," muttered Rushden. "I—I don't mind telling you, as you seem to know all about it. I've backed a horse for the two o'clock to-day at Abbotsford—a ten to one chance—and I'm here for my winnings. Now you can turn your back on me."

"I shan't do that," said Lord Conway gravely. "I pity you too much, my poor fellow. No one would need telling that you are new to this. You suppose your horse has won?"

"Banks said it was absolutely certain. They—they've been keeping it dark till the day of the race—it was certain to romp home, Banks said."

"How much money did you hand him?"

"Ten pounds. I win a hundred."

"The name of the horse?"

"Blue Moon," muttered Rushden, his face crimson with shame, and yet dogged in its expression.

"There is no need to see Mr. Banks—yet," said Lord Conway. "Let us get the result of the race first. I will telephone for that to Abbotsford."

Rushden stared at him.

"But he's won. It was a dead cert—" He broke off gasping. "You don't mean to say you—you think—"

He could not finish.

"Ten to one chances do not often come off," said Lord Conway dryly. "And it would be very remarkable to capture a hundred pounds from a keen gentleman like Mr. Banks at the first attempt."

"It isn't his money—he only laid the bet for me, as—as an agent—"

"I know—I know!" said Lord Conway patiently. "Come with me, and we will telephone. It will not take long."

"But I—I—" Rushden did not stir.

"My dear boy, you must come. But if we find that you have won a hundred pounds on Blue Moon, you shall collect it from Mr. Banks, and I will come with you to do it."

Lord Conway felt himself quite safe in making that promise. Rushden nodded slowly, and turned away with him.

He walked in silence with the viscount to the post-office. He waited while Lord Conway entered a telephone-box, and spoke over the wires. His face was getting a drawn look now. Lord Conway came out of the box in a few minutes.

There was compassion in his face as he met Philip Rushden's almost haggard eyes.

"Well?" muttered the St. Jim's Sixth-Former.

"Pull yourself together, my boy! You're not alone here, you know."

Rushden made an effort to calm himself.

"But tell me!" he breathed.

"Blue Moon has lost—was not even placed!"

"Oh!" breathed Rushden.

"Come!"

Rushden seemed in a stupor as Lord Conway led him from the post-office. In the street, the viscount signed to a chauffeur, who drew a car to the kerb.

"Where's your bicycle, Rushden?"

"Eh! I—I left it at the station."

"We'll pick it up. Get in."

"I—I—"

"Get in!"

Rushden sank on the cushions in the car. Lord Conway followed him after a word to the chauffeur.

Rushden hardly noticed where the car was driving. He seemed in a stupor. He found green fields and hedges gliding along by the car after a time, and realised that he was returning to St. Jim's. The car stopped, Rushden's bike was handed down, and the car glided on, leaving Lord Conway

and the St. Jim's prefect standing by the roadside, on the border of Rylcombe Wood.

"We can talk here," said Conway.

Rushden leaned against a tree, and groaned.

"Lost!"

"You've thrown away ten pounds," said Lord Conway quietly. "That is what you deserve. You seem to have been more foolish than anything else. Only an utterly inexperienced duffer would have been taken in like that by Mr. Banks. He knew, of course, that the horse had no chance, and never laid the bet, and simply pocketed your money. Haven't you commonsense enough to see that?"

"Yes—now!" said Rushden.

"So much for your folly! Now for your blackguardism!" said the viscount grimly, and Rushden winced.

"If you knew—" he muttered.

"I do know, and I can excuse you," said Lord Conway, more gently. "But make a clean breast of it. Kildare will take my word whether he can let this matter rest where it is. But I must know the facts."

There was a long silence.

"I—I had to get some money!" muttered Rushden at last. "Not for myself. I wouldn't have done it for that, if it had been a thousand pounds, or ten thousand. Somebody else, who's hard up against it. But I don't suppose you'll believe me, or Kildare, either."

"I shall believe you. I know something already."

"I don't see how you can know," Rushden pulled himself together. "I—I was trying to think of how to get some money, and—that came into my head. You needn't tell me it was shady, or talk to me about my duty as a prefect—you can't say anything worse than I've said to myself. But—but the money was needed—needed hard."

"Your sister?"

"How did you know? Yes. You see, they're up against it," said Rushden miserably. "Her husband—he's not a bad chap, but he had shell-shock in the war, and he never really got over it. Now he's gone all to pot, and he's got to be taken care of. His job went when he joined up, and he's done nothing since. All her money's gone. My people are doing all they can, but we've all been hard hit; there's not a lot of money around. It made me feel wild that I couldn't help. Then I knew a chap who knew Banks, and he introduced me. I know I was a fool. But I thought there was a chance. I sold some things to raise ten quids; if it had come off there would have been a hundred pounds to help her through. I see well enough now that there never was a chance, and I was gulled like a baby—serve me right, I dare say. I've been a pretty blackguard. I—I wouldn't care if it was for myself—"

He broke off.

"I don't care much if I go before the Head! I told Gertrude I thought I should be able to help—now I can't! I'm ready to face the music for what I've done."

Lord Conway looked at him.

"You've done wrong," he said.

"I know that."

"You ought not to have acted as you've done, for any reason at all."

"I know!"

"Can I tell Kildare that it is all over—that the matter can be allowed to rest—that I have your promise?"

"I've been a fool once," he said. "I'm not likely to play the fool again, I hope. You have my promise, if it's worth anything."

"Then the matter closes," said Lord Conway.

Rushden nodded. He was grateful; but it was evident that he was not thinking of himself.

"And now about Arthur Bainbridge," said Lord Conway. Rushden crimsoned.

"You—you can't think—" he panted. "You—you can't imagine—I may be a blackguard, but I'm not a beggar!"

"Don't be so jolly hasty, old man!" said Lord Conway, laughing. "Do you know why I came to St. Jim's to-day? Of course not. I am organising secretary of a society for helping ex-Service men who are wounded and knocked out. Mr. Railton and the Head are working with me. We have raised a good amount of funds already, and hope to raise more. Among our stunts is a country home for victims of shell-shock—the most serious cases. Your brother-in-law seems to be a serious case. Catch on?"

"But—"

"No 'buts' in the matter. You can give your attention to cricket and Greek from to-day, and leave Arthur Bainbridge to my society."

"But—"

"Not to put too fine a point on it, we're more capable for the job of looking after him. We don't raise funds by backing ten-to-one losers, you know. Give me your brother-in-law's address, and leave the matter in my hands."

Rushden could not speak. His heart was too full. Lord

(Continued on page 23.)

A Grand Story of Mystery and Thrilling Adventure!



The Lure of Limehouse!

by Malcolm Arnold

Featuring the Ever-Popular Favourites—Tu Sin and Ginger Dan.

CHAPTER 1.

A Spill—and a Scrap!

"H! Look out, there! Look out!"

Honk, honk!
Crash!

The above three sentences describe just exactly what happened.

It was Ginger Dan who had raised the warning shout, a big two-seater car was responsible for the musical note, and the crash came when the bonnet of the two-seater smote against the back wheels of the old caravan, twisting it half round and driving it against the lamp-post at the corner of the street.

The crash of crockery, followed by a yowl of protest ended the scene, and Tu Sin came rolling down the little flight of steps. There was a jug of milk in his hand, and the white contents sprayed all over him as he came.

It was getting towards dusk, and the quiet street that led to the little stretch of waste ground was almost deserted.

Ginger Dan had been leading the old nag by the head as he reached the corner, and he had had no possible chance to avoid the disaster, for the two-seater had come flying down the wider thoroughfare and had taken that corner at a terrific pace.

Now, with its front mudguard buckled and one of the headlamps smashed, its driver had brought the car to a halt, and while Ginger Dan hung on to the head of the frightened beast, Tu Sin picked himself up from the roadway and came striding towards the car.

In his hand was the remnant of the broken milk-jug. It had crashed with him on to the pavement, and the Chink's long yellow face was filled with wrath.

"Why you not look where you going—eh?" he bawled towards the figure at the steering-wheel.

It was a sandy-haired youth, and beside him sat a stocky, dark-haired, rather ugly looking fellow. The driver stopped his engine, and with a quick movement slipped out from behind the steering-wheel.

"You confounded Chink! Look what your blinking caravan has done to my car!" he broke out.

The right wing had certainly suffered severely. It looked like the frayed end of a soiled collar as it hung limply over the wheel.

As he scrambled for the door the thick-set man caught the youth by the arm.

"Steady on, Cyril!" he said. "Don't THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 805.

be a silly ass! Let's clear out of this as quick as we can!"

An angry jerk saw his arm freed, and the tall youngster, opening the door, dropped out into the street.

Tu Sin was standing in front of the car, and the youth strode up to him, clenching his fist.

"You hear me, you confounded, yellow-faced idiot!" he went on. "You smashed up that right wing of my car, and I'm going to make you pay for it!"

By this time Ginger Dan had managed to soothe the old nag, and he came round to the back of the caravan.

Tu Sin was staring at the angry speaker in speechless wrath.

"Look here, mister!" Ginger Dan said. "No good of your coming that stuff with us! You drove that car round the corner at about forty miles an hour, and any damage that's been done is your doing!"

Save for a graze on the back of the panel, the stout old caravan had come off practically scot-free so far as its exterior was concerned; but the broken jug and Tu Sin's drenched garments indicated that the shock had had considerable effect inside.

"Two cups, one plate, and quarter-pound of butter on floor inside!" said Tu Sin. "I just laying out tea when you smash into us!"

"Don't you give me any of your jaw!" came the angry reply. "You had no right to have a rotten-looking thing like this in the street! Besides, I sounded my horn, and you ought to have got out of the way!"

Tu Sin was looking at the speaker keenly. There was something rather curious about the colourless face, with the set, angry stare of the eyes. The voice, too, was strained and tense.

It seemed as though the youth had difficulty in picking his words, and had to choose them one at a time carefully.

To Ginger Dan it seemed as though the fellow was beside himself with rage, hardly able to speak coherently. But Tu Sin, with a sudden stride forward, thrust his yellow face close to the white, pallid one and looked into the glazed orbs for a moment. Then the lean, parchment-like countenance lifted into a contemptuous smile.

"Oh, I see what matter with you," he said. "Go along, then. You go home."

The quiet contempt in the voice seemed to rouse a demoniacal fury in the listener. A spot of colour leaped into either cheek, and with an

inarticulate cry, the tall figure made a sudden leap at Tu Sin.

A shout came from the car, and the dark-haired man made as though to slip out of the vehicle.

"Do you hear me, Cyril? Stop it—stop it!" he called.

Tu Sin had ducked his head to avoid that first vicious swing. Then next moment he and his adversary were in a lock, and they swayed across the street together, tugging and straining at each other.

An angry oath came from the man in the car, and he hesitated for a moment. Then, slipping back into his seat, he swung into place behind the steering-wheel. Next moment the engine-starter whirred and the powerful motor took up its beat.

By this time one or two witnesses had arrived on the scene. A fight in Limehouse is always calculated to draw an interested audience, and as Tu Sin and his adversary rolled over into the gutter the big car moved off, changing speed as it passed the caravan, to go on along the side street and vanish round the corner below.

"Go on, kid, sock him! That's the stuff to give 'em!"

"Give 'im one!"

Everyone in Limehouse knew the two wafs and their caravan, and two or three of the witnesses to that fight had recognised the lean, lanky Chink.

It was a cat-and-dog struggle while the fight lasted, marked principally by the sheer ferocity of the attack of the stranger. He had caught Tu Sin by the throat and was doing his level best to strangle the Chink, while Tu Sin tried again and again to break that mad hold.

Ginger Dan had no chance to go to the aid of his chum, for the two locked shapes were rolling over and over, fighting as they went, and it seemed to Ginger Dan that Tu Sin was not revealing that usual savage strength of his.

Again and again he had openings given him in which he could have punished his attacker severely enough; but those ugly fists made no effort to fight, and it was only when, during another wild-cat struggle, Tu Sin found himself on top of his rival in the gutter that he managed to break the other's hold. Then a quick, ~~dot~~ punch on the jaw saw his rival's head go back against the kerbstone, and the struggle came to an end.

Tu Sin arose to his feet, brushing the grime from his clothes. The group began to close round the twain then,

and one of them—a stocky-looking fellow in a rough blue jersey—grinned across at the young Chink.

"The honourable stranger's dishonourable head has had a nasty thump this time, Tu Sin!" the man remarked. "Looks to me as though he's going to croak!"

That quiet mimicry of Tu Sin's usual method of address made the little knot chuckle; but Tu Sin, dropping on one knee, reached out and raised his slim adversary, peering for a moment into the white, set face.

Ginger Dan appeared on the fringe of the throng, and Tu Sin beckoned to him swiftly.

"Quick, Dan! You help me—eh? Quick!"

The two vagabonds raised the limp shape, and, as the throng parted, Tu Sin and Dan carried their burden across the street, on up the little flight of stairs into the caravan, where he was placed on Tu Sin's bunk.

His head fell back, and Ginger Dan listened to the broken, stertorous breathing for a moment.

"By Jove, Tu Sin, it looks as though—as though he's in a bad way!" Dan whispered, turning alarmed eyes towards his chum.

The Chink was slipping out of his ragged jacket, and he nodded to Dan.

"Mebbe he is in bad way," he said, "but it not my fault—for that honourable stranger in velly bad way before he drove car into caravan. Better get doctor quick as you can."

Ten minutes later the caravan was in its usual place on the waste ground, and Ginger Dan glanced again into the interior.

Tu Sin was hard at work on the inanimate figure stretched out on the little

bunk. So far as Ginger Dan could see, Tu Sin seemed to be adopting the usual process which one carries out on a drowning man—raising and lowering the arms, filling and emptying the lungs.

"Go get doctor, Ginger Dan!" Tu Sin called.

And Ginger Dan sprinted off, with Bill, the shaggy sheepdog, at his heels, to return presently with the dapper little Irish surgeon who was a personal friend of the two waiifs.

"What have you been getting up to now, Tu Sin?" the doctor asked, as he came into the shabby shelter.

Tu Sin's face was wet with sweat as he leaned against the bunk.

"Tu Sin has been tlying to get honourable gentleman out of—out of dishonourable sleep," he said.

Dan, who was leaning against the door of the caravan, saw the surgeon lean over the pallid-faced youth for a moment, then, with a shrug of his shoulders, the doctor turned.

"I didn't know you went in for this sort of thing, Tu Sin," he said sternly.

The almond eyes narrowed.

"The highly-distinguished physician makes a mistake," he said. "Tu Sin has nothing to do with present condition of honourable stranger. He full of smoke when he drive car, doctor, and come whack into caravan. Him fight Tu Sin in read."

The sickly odour which had been making itself felt in the caravan was recognised by Ginger Dan now, and he crossed to his chum's side.

"Opium, eh, Tu Sin?" he asked. "Do you mean to tell me that that chap's been smoking that terrible stuff?"

Tu Sin seated himself on the edge of the bunk opposite.

"That was what was the matter with

him," Tu Sin said. "Him have spoke two, mebbe thlee hours ago; no one can tell time, but him go quite out of him senses. Thump on head send him to sleep again."

The doctor worked for about twenty minutes on the unconscious sleeper, then he turned away from the bunk.

"Come across in about half an hour, Dan, and I'll give you a draught for this chap," he said. "He's safe enough now, but he won't be able to move for three or four hours. He hesitated a moment. "Of course, if you like, I'll report it to the police, and you can have him taken to hospital. That's where he ought to go, the young fool! He'd probably find himself in the police-court to-morrow morning."

Tu Sin stepped forward.

"We don't want him locked up, do we, Dan? We look after him all light, doctor. Take him home by'n-by, when him better."

The doctor left the caravan, and Tu Sin, slipping up to the side of the bunk, took out a pocket-book from under the pillow.

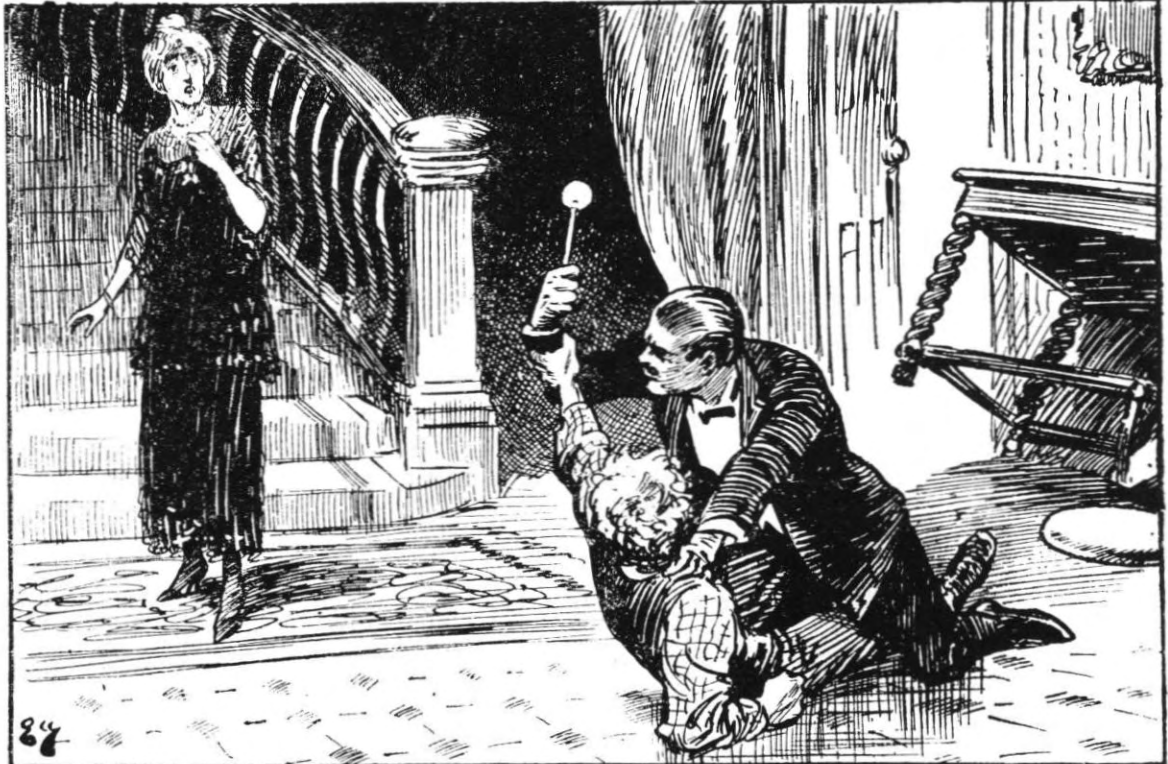
"I found this fellow in him pocket," he announced. "There some cards here; perhaps them belong to him."

There was a visiting-card, and the name engraved upon it was, "Cyril Alberley, 37, Sanderdale Square, W."

In another compartment of the pocket-book were four £5 notes, and a few smaller Treasury notes, to the total value of £27 in all.

"He seems to have had more money than sense," Ginger Dan said, with a glance at the set, pallid face.

Tu Sin took something out of his pocket and held it towards his chum. It was a little brass disc, highly polished, and on one side of it there was a small design,



The thick-set man was about to bring the gong-stick down upon Dan's head when he heard a sudden cry. "Mr. Seaton! Stop!" There was a rustle of silk, and a slender, grey-haired woman appeared under the light of the hall.

a dragon's claw, with an inscription in Chinese around it.

"I found that in his waistcoat pocket, Ginger Dan," Tu Sin said. "You— you no seen anything like it before, eh?"

Dan examined the tiny brass emblem, then shook his head.

"No, can't say I've ever seen anything just the same as this before, Tu Sin," he said. "Why do you ask?"

The slant eyes were expressionless as Tu Sin slipped the disc back into his voluminous garments.

"I was only just wondering, Dan; that was all."

Later on, after Dan had called at the surgery and come back with the draught, their lodger began to give further signs of returning consciousness.

Tu Sin went off to make a few purchases, and he came back somewhere about ten o'clock. It seemed to Dan that he was rather agitated, for he leaped into the caravan, slamming the door behind him, then came up to where Dan was seated, looking over into the bunk.

Cyril Alberley's eyes were open, and he was staring up into the roof of the little lighted space, a puzzled expression on his face.

"He's come round all right, Tu Sin," Dan said. "I've spoken to him once or twice, but he can't seem to understand."

"Time we took him home, Dan," Tu Sin began hurriedly. "You go 'long get taxi, and I watch here until you come back. Better go quick. Good job if we get him home soon!"

There was a strained note in Tu Sin's voice that Ginger Dan noted, but he thought that it was brought about by anxiety concerning their patient, and, calling to Bill, Dan ran down the steps of the caravan, hurrying off across the waste ground to head for the busier thoroughfares and try to locate a taxi.

There are not many vehicles of that kind in Limehouse, but finally Dan did discover one standing outside a public-house, and, after a little argument, the driver consented to start up and come round to the edge of the waste ground.

"I ain't goin' to drive my blinkin' keb in among all that rubbish," he said. "You go and bring yer friend 'ere, and I'll wait for yer."

Dan and Bill tumbled out of the vehicle and hurried off across the rough ground, heading for the caravan. They were about thirty yards away from it when Bill began to bark, then suddenly he darted off, heading for a huge heap of broken tins and scrap-iron on the left.

"Here, Bill! Bill! Where are you going to?" Dan called.

He heard the dog bark again, then it vanished behind the dump, and a frantic whimpering and scraping sounded.

Dan whipped round, following the huge sheep-dog. As he rounded the dump, he saw the shadowy outlines of Bill, tugging at something that lay half-hidden under the rubble.

In another moment Ginger Dan's hand was gripping at a limp shoulder, and, as he dragged the half-unconscious figure out of the dust, he heard Tu Sin's muffled voice:

"They—they got him, Dan. They got him!"

It was only then that Dan discovered that Tu Sin was bound hand and foot, and a gag had been thrust between his lips, before his attackers had half buried him beneath that rubble.

When the bonds were loosened, and Tu Sin was able to stand, they headed for the caravan. The door was thrust open, revealing the disordered interior.

"They jump on me while I got back 'o door," Tu Sin explained.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 805.

There was a bruise on his forehead, and it was evident that he had gone through a rough time of it.

"Who were they? What have they done with that chap?"

Tu Sin looked at his chum.

"I not know who they were, Dan," he said; "but I think we better go and tell that chap's fiends. Him likely to be in danger now."

Dan caught sight of a dark object lying under the steps, and, stooping, he lifted it. It was one of those round, close-fitting caps that are only worn by the yellow men who haunt the narrow streets of Limehouse.

Tu Sin, English born, had never worn such a cap, and, holding it up in the light, Dan looked at his Oriental companion.

"You didn't see who it was who attacked you, Tu Sin?" he asked.

The long, lean face was expressionless.

"I no get chance to see him, Dan. But I think you better go to tell people at Sanderdale Square by yourself. They no like Chink to come, mebbe."

He took the dark cap from Dan's fingers and slipped it into his pocket.

"I go look lound," he said. "Tly find owner of this honourable cap."

CHAPTER 2.

A Scene at Sanderdale Square!

FROM Limehouse to the West End of London is a far cry, and it was after eleven o'clock before the taxi came to a halt outside the quiet house in Sanderdale Square.

The taximan nodded to Dan as he stepped out of the vehicle.

It had taken Dan some time before he had managed to persuade the driver into accepting him as a fare, and, naturally, the taximan was just a little anxious about payment.

Dan, in his shabby clothes, did not appear to be the type who could afford to pay for a jaunt through London.

"This is number twenty-seven," the taxi-driver said.

"All right! Just wait!" Dan returned. He walked up the wide steps and rang the bell.

There were no signs of any lights in the front part of the house, but there was a single glimmer shining through the glass panels of the door; and, after waiting a moment, Dan rang again.

He was standing in the porch, and to his left was one of the big bay-windows of the house.

Dan had very quick eyes, and he caught a movement from the left. Turning his head, he was just in time to see a shadowy figure standing behind the curtain.

The light from the doorway fell on the window, and Dan had a brief vision of a bullet-shaped head with a crop of dark hair. The curtain fell at once, but Dan had time to recognise the lowering countenance of the man who had driven off in the two-seater, leaving Cyril Alberley to his fate.

"Well, I've found the right house, in any case," Dan thought.

He raised his hand to ring again, but, as he did so, a shadow appeared in the glass panels, and a moment later the door opened, revealing a tall figure in livery.

"What do you want, sonny?" the servant asked, in a harsh voice.

"I have come to see someone concerning Mr. Cyril Alberley," Dan said. "I understand that this is his house?"

The light in the hall was shining on the servant's face, and it revealed the angular, rather cunning features clearly.

"Mr. Cyril Alberley?" the man repeated. "Well, 'e ain't 'ere just now."

He made no attempt to open the door, and Dan could almost sense the antagonism in his manner.

"I know that he is not in at the moment," Dan went on. "I want to give a message to the people who are here, though, concerning him."

"There's no one in the house now but myself, sonny," the man returned. "If you've got a message, you'll have to give it to me."

Under other circumstances, Ginger Dan might have given his information to the servant; but the fellow's manner was so suspicious that the sturdy youngster decided not to do so.

For some reason or other, the man did not want him to get into the house, and Ginger Dan made up his mind that this was just exactly what he would do.

"My business is private," the lad said, "and I'll have to wait until your master is at home."

He drew back from the threshold.

"I'm in no hurry," he added; "although there's a taxi outside ticking up threepence every ten minutes. But that don't make no difference."

The man opened the door a trifle wider, and his long face had a menacing look on it as he glared at Ginger Dan.

"Don't you be so darned saucy, young fellah-me-lad!" he said. "If you've got any information to give, and it over and clear off. We don't allow ragamuffins like you to 'ang about this part at all hours of the night!"

Ginger Dan was on the top step now, and he nodded towards the threatening figure.

"Oh! I'll wait on the kerb," he said. "I'm not particular. Here I am, and here I'll jolly well wait until your boss pays me!"

The words were hardly out of his lips before the figure made a sudden leap from the doorway and caught Dan by the collar.

"I'll stand none of your sauce, you young varmint!" he snarled.

He made as though to thrust Dan bodily down the steep steps, and it is more than likely that Ginger Dan would have had a severe fall; but as the fellow made his thrust the young vagrant, with a quick wriggle, was out of his loose-fitting coat, then, ducking swiftly, he caught the manservant around the knees, giving him a quick, deft heave.

There was a yell of rage as the fellow felt his feet flying away from under him, and a second later he was bumping down the steps, with the lad's ragged garment in his arms, while Dan, with a quick dart, had crossed the threshold, and was in the dimly lighted hall of the great, lonely house.

Near to the wall on the left was a small table, and on that table was one of those heavy brass gongs which old-fashioned houses use to announce dinner. Dan seized the leather-covered stick, and began to beat a quick tattoo on the deep, reverberating gong.

He had only smote it three times when the door on the right was swung open, and the stocky figure of the black-haired man came leaping into the hall.

"Here, you— Confound you, you young skunk!"

The man made a rush at Dan, raising his fists as he came. Dan shortened the gong-stick, and as his enemy came into distance the sturdy youngster brought



The light from the constable's bullseye fell upon the doubled-up figure of Cyril Alberley. He was tied hand and foot, and a slip of linen had been fastened over his lips, but his eyes were wide open, and they glistened in the light of the lamp.

his weapon down full on the fellow's forehead.

The padded end landed with a thud, and next moment Dan and his adversary crashed into the little table, unsteading it, and the brass gong fell with a resounding clatter.

They had sprawled together on to a heavy rug, and Dan was undermost. "You young hound! I'll brain you for that!"

Dan's attacker had grabbed the gong-stick, and a fierce tussle took place until at last it was wrenched out of the youngster's hand; then, pinning Dan down, his furious opponent raised the weapon over his head.

"Mr. Seaton! Mr. Seaton, stop! What on earth is the matter? Stop!"

A woman's thin voice sounded, and Dan, lying breathless under his antagonist, heard the man mutter an oath beneath his breath. There was a rustle of silk, and a slender, grey-haired woman appeared under the light of the hall.

"What is wrong? What on earth is happening? Quick—explain!"

Very reluctantly, the thick-set man raised himself to his feet and turned towards the woman.

"I am sorry this young ruffian has disturbed you, Lady Alberley," he said. "If you will permit me, I will clear him out at once!"

Dan picked himself up slowly, rather dazed from his fall on the hard, tiled floor. In his torn shirt and ragged trousers, he was by no means a very presentable figure.

There was a shuffling footfall from behind him, and the manservant came hurrying in through the open door. A moment later Dan's arms were pinioned to his side by the newcomer.

"Caught 'im red-anded, my lady!" the servant broke out. "But it's all

right now; we'll 'and him over to the police."

Seaton had stepped up to the fragile woman, and he put his hand on her arm.

"This young blackguard tried to get in here," he explained. "But you need not let it trouble you, Lady Alberley. Come, I'll help you back to your room."

The lanky servant was twisting Dan's arm behind him, and he had swung the youngster round, dragging him bodily out of the door.

Dan heard the slim woman turn, as though to go back upstairs; then, and not till then, did the youngster find his voice:

"I didn't break in here! I came here to warn you that Cyril Alberley is in danger! He's in Limehouse now, in the hands of the Chinks—"

"Stop—stop! Thomas, release that boy at once!"

The tall, ugly-looking servant fell back a pace, and, with a quick, imperious movement, the fragile woman brushed past Seaton, coming up to where Dan stood with his back against the wall.

"You mentioned the name of my nephew Cyril just now," she said. "What do you now about him? Where is he?"

She looked at the freckled face, with its mop of tangled hair.

"Quick—tell me!" she said. "Where is my nephew?"

"I—I can't say where he is now, ma'am," Dan returned. "But I know he's in danger—and he's somewhere in Limehouse!"

"In Limehouse? But I understood that he was spending the night with some friends of his in Maidenhead!"

She turned towards the thick-set man.

"You told me that Cyril had stayed with the Brockleys."

"I can assure you, your ladyship, that this young ruffian is lying!" Seaton

came forward, an oily smile on his dark features.

"Lying, am I?" Dan broke out. "Then where did I get this?"

From his ragged shirt he drew out Cyril Alberley's pocket-book and held it out to her ladyship.

"I took him into my caravan, ma'am, after he had been knocked out," Dan said. "And I know that this man was with him in the big two-seater in Limehouse this evening. If you don't believe me, ma'am, you can prove it by looking at the car. You'll find that the right wing has been smashed."

The fragile face that was looking down at him suddenly went tense, and the woman turned towards Seaton.

"I saw the car to-night, Mr. Seaton," she said, "and I did notice that the wing was broken."

With a sudden movement, she reached out and put her hands on Dan's sturdy shoulders.

"I am going to accept this boy's statement," she went on, in a quiet, level tone. "Please tell me everything that has happened."

CHAPTER 3.

In the Grip of Li Fu!

DAN saw the look of baffled rage that crossed the dark face of the man opposite him; then, in a quick rush of words, the youngster made his report.

Lady Alberley's face was deadly white when he came to the end of it; then, with her hand on his shoulder, she walked out on to the porch, turning to nod to the two men who were watching her as she went.

"I am going to the police, Mr. Seaton," she said. "If this boy is

lying, then he will soon be found out. But I don't think he has lied."

Next moment Dan found himself seated beside the quietly dressed woman as the taxi hurried them to the nearest police-station, and Dan's broad hand was being held closely by two cold, thin ones.

"I know it—I have felt it all along that Cyril was being led astray by that dreadful man!" her ladyship said. "He was Cyril's tutor, engaged by Cyril's guardian. But I never trusted him—I never trusted him! Cyril seemed to be completely under his power, and I could not understand why."

The taxi halted outside a quiet building over the entrance to which the blue police-lamp hung, and Dan and her ladyship entered the police-station, to reappear later, and this time they were accompanied by a couple of plain-clothes officers.

"Better take us back to where we started from," said Dan to the driver, "and don't bother about your fare, old man. Her ladyship gave me this for you."

It was a couple of Treasury notes that Dan slipped into the willing fingers, and that taxi fairly flew over the return journey through the dark streets of London to the lonely, deserted waste ground in the heart of evil, dingy Limehouse.

Ginger Dan led the way to the caravan, and Bill, the sheepdog, barked as the party reached the doorway.

There was a lamp lighted in the interior, and as Dan swung the door open and entered he saw a sheet of paper pinned to the little table in the centre of the caravan. There was a message on it in Tu Sin's curious scrawl. It ran:

"Honourable Companion Dan,—Come round to Li Fu's steam laundry, 17a, Chadwell Lane, and collect one large hamper washing, which you find beside wall back yard. Better come round and collect quick."

"I know the place," Ginger Dan said. "It's not very far away, and we'd better get busy. Tu Sin's message means something."

They hurried back across the waste ground, and once more the taxi moved off through a dingy region of streets, finally turning into a quiet side lane, to halt at an archway which gave access to a long, paved alley.

It was the superintendent and Dan who hurried off along the dark space, and half-way up the alley the superintendent flashed an electric torch in front of him at Dan's suggestion.

Under the high wall was one of those long wicker hampers that are used by laundrymen for returning washing.

"We're just at the back of Li Fu's place," Ginger Dan said. "This must be the hamper all right."

They hurried towards the wall and reached the basket. The police official caught at the lock, flinging the lid back.

It creaked as it lifted, and Dan heard a sudden whispering sound, followed by the soft flip-flop of slippers feet.

"Look—look!" Dan called.

From the doorway lower down a robed shape had appeared, followed by another and yet another.

"Look out, young 'un!" the superintendent exclaimed.

His large hand shot out, dragging Ginger Dan aside. Next moment the three lurking figures made their rush, and a grim battle began.

The superintendent lashed out at the first attacker, bowling him over; but the other two closed with him, and they

rolled together on to the top of the basket.

Dan made a leap and grabbed at a pair of lean, sinewy legs, bringing the Chink down with a thud. A long, claw-like hand fastened on Dan's throat, and, with the wiry body wriggling under him, Dan fought for his life.

Then suddenly the shrill pheeep of a police-whistle sounded from the top of the alley, to be answered a moment later by a similar call from the other end.

Dan's assailant made a savage effort to free himself, and an ugly fist caught Dan between the eyes, bowling him over. Then the next moment the catlike figure of the Chink had leaped to its feet, and as Dan rose, half blinded, the man darted to the other side of the alley, leaped up at the wall, and a second later he had vanished over the top.

A grunt and a crash from the basket revealed the superintendent sprawling against the wicker receptacle, while his antagonist made off at full speed up the alley, to slip into a doorway just as a couple of uniformed figures appeared ahead.

A bullseye lantern flashed, and a second or so later three of the local police came dashing up to the superintendent and Dan. Behind one of them Dan caught sight of a lean, ragged shape—a very familiar shape—and he lurched at it, catching Tu Sin by his scraggy arm.

"Velly solly, Dan!" murmured Tu Sin. "But it take me long time to find police. I hope you no hurt?"

One of the constables had directed his light into the basket, and lying in the bottom of it was the doubled-up figure of Cyril Alberley. He was tied hand and foot, while a slip of linen had been fastened over his lips; but his eyes were wide open, and they glistened in the light of the lamp.

Willing hands were stretched into the basket, and presently the tall youth was standing upright, supported by the superintendent.

"Don't want to hurry the honourable superintendent," the drawing voice of Tu Sin whispered, "but this humble personage suggests that we leave here. There are still a lot of hornets in the hive."

One of the local constables chuckled. "That's darned good advice!" he said. "I think we'd better clear while we've got a chance!"

They began to hurry down the alley, and it was obvious that Tu Sin's warning had not been given a moment too soon.

In the darkness, windows lifted, and thin, sibilant voices began to call softly to each other.

"Quick, men! Make a bolt for it!"

That last twenty yards was covered with a rush. Cyril Alberley was thrust bodily into the taxi, and the superintendent climbed in after him. Then, at a quick command from one of the local police, the taxi started off at full speed down the narrow side street.

As it swung round under the light at the corner a lean, lanky yellow shape darted out of a doorway in front of it, waving long arms; but the driver sent the taxi headlong at the threatening figure, and only a mad leap saved the Chink from disaster.

Next moment the vehicle had swerved round the corner and was drumming off along the wider thoroughfare at full speed.

Tu Sin, holding Ginger Dan's arm in a vicelike grip, swung him round, and they darted off up the side street, to turn into another narrow passage. Then

for a long ten minutes Tu Sin kept Dan on the trot.

It was only when they emerged out of a narrow courtyard, to find themselves opposite the high hoarding which guarded the waste ground, that Tu Sin slackened his pace.

"All light, Dan! I think we safe now!"

They found the gap in the hoarding, and trudged across the waste ground to the caravan. As soon as they entered it Tu Sin closed the door carefully behind them. Then, crossing to his bunk, he flung himself down, his arms and legs lying limp for a long moment.

Under the light of the lamp, Dan had a chance of studying his companion. He saw that Tu Sin's clothes were covered with grit and dirt, and the lean, lanky face was deathly pale.

"Hallo! What the blazes has been happening to you, Tu Sin?" Ginger Dan demanded.

Tu Sin turned his almond eyes towards his chum.

"After you leave me, Dan, I—I go look up honourable relation of mine," he said. "Perhaps it better for me not to tell you where that relation stay. But I recognise his mark on that brass ornament."

He was silent for a moment, staring up at the roof of the caravan.

"My uncle velly bad man. His name Li Fu, and he no like me—much!"

He drew a deep breath.

"I go to the honourable house of my honourable relation, but I have to get in—by chimney."

He leaned out of the bunk.

"My honourable relation bad man. He run opium-den, and Tu Sin go there find out how it come that Cyril Alberley look like dope-fiend."

He leaned back in the bunk.

"To-morrow morning Tu Sin and Ginger Dan go see Cyril Alberley at Sanderdale Square," said Tu Sin.

"Bad man called Mr. Seaton live there, and he bribe Tu Sin's uncle into making Cyril Alberley like the smoke. Cyril give Mr. Seaton lot of money—fifty pounds—hundred pounds—every time they go to my relation. My uncle not pleased when Tu Sin do him out of velly good customer."

"But—but how did you find out about the—the washing-basket, Tu Sin?" Dan asked.

The yellow youngster's face twitched.

"When my uncle not run opium-den him run big laundry business, and that mark that I find on ornament him use on his laundry-baskets. To-night, when men attack Tu Sin, Tu Sin see laundry-van waiting on edge of waste ground. Tu Sin get into uncle's house and find out what happen to Cyril. Then Tu Sin come back to leave message for Ginger Dan, and afterwards Tu Sin go find police."

Dan sat still for a moment, studying his chum.

"But if you knew that Cyril Alberley was in that basket, why on earth didn't you go and get him out of it yourself?"

Tu Sin sighed a long, quiet sigh.

"Tu Sin was afraid to interfere with plans of honourable uncle," he replied slowly. "All light for Ginger Dan to go along and save Cyril, but no all light for Tu Sin. A humble nephew must not bling down the wrath of a highly honourable uncle on his head. And Li Fu will be velly, velly cross, for him lost a velly good customer!"

The bunk creaked as Tu Sin turned over.

"But if you no object, Dan," he added, after a long, long pause. "I think we shift away from here to-morrow

morning, for that laundry-van might come back again!"

About twelve noon on the following day there passed down along the Bayswater Road a crazy old gipsy-caravan, drawn by a shaggy nag, and driven by a shock-headed, freckled-faced youth poised on the small seat above the shaft. And inside the van sat Tu Sin, gloating over a little heap of Treasury notes that had been handed to them by a grateful, grey-haired lady on whom he and Ginger Dan had made a personal call at a very early hour that morning.

Nor was there any sign of Mr. Seaton or the servant Thomas when they were ushered into the quiet house. These two precious rogues had been in the scheme together, and had vanished on the previous night.

"You saved my nephew from slipping into a life of degradation and shame!" the old lady had said. "This scoundrel of a tutor of his gradually taught him the craving, and I know now where all Cyril's money was going! That wretch must have got pounds and pounds out of him during this last year! And Cyril himself doesn't even know where he used to go to in Limehouse, for it was always that wicked man who led him through those terrible side streets! All Cyril knows is that it was a Chinaman who ran that horrible place—a very terrible, very awful-looking Chinaman!"

Her eyes sought Tu Sin's, and the lean, lanky shape went rigid for a moment.

"I suppose it would be impossible to trace the place and have the man punished?" her ladyship went on.

Tu Sin's slant, almond eyes glistened for a moment as he shook his head.

"Velly bad place Limehouse, my lady," he said. "Velly bad Chinamen live there. Best thing you can do is to tell your honourable nephew that he not go near it again. It a velly bad place for nephews to go to!"

And just why Ginger Dan grinned at this was a question that her ladyship could never answer.

THE END.

(Another topping complete story next week, boys: "CROZIER'S TREACHERY!" A grand yarn of the Sportsmen of Thunder Creek. Be sure and read it.)

"RUSHDEN'S FOLLY!"

(Continued from page 17.)

Conway shook hands with him, and walked away to his car.

"Phil, old man!"

Kildare spoke hopefully, brightly, as Rushden of the Sixth came into his study.

"It's all right," said Rushden. "Conway's gone, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"How did the House match go?"

"We beat the New House."

"I'll play in the next, if you'll have me."

"Glad to! Lord Conway's told me it's all right, and I needn't say anything," said Kildare. "You never went to that show-to-day, after all?"

"He stopped me. He's a good chap—one of the best! And now I'll go to the Head, if you like, Kildare."

"Don't be an ass!" said Kildare. "I left it to Lord Conway to decide, and he's decided. Not a word more!"

"But—"

"Cheese it, old man!"

And the subject dropped.

It was some days later that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in Study No. 6, addressed a little tea-party, consisting of Blake and Herries and Dig and the Terrible Three, in tones of modest self-satisfaction.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best story yet sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER.

A GOOD SUBSTITUTE!

Seated on the bank of a river, a young urchin was fishing. There was a notice close by stating that fishing was private. This did not seem to trouble the youthful angler, however. Suddenly a wrathful individual burst upon the scene, and he eyed the youth and the very fine catch of fish which was lying on the ground beside him. "Hi, you young rascal!" howled the man. "What do you mean by it? You can't fish here without a permit." "Can't I!" retorted the youth. "Well, I dunno. I seem to be doing pretty well with a worm!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to George Mackenzie, Craigmore, Saltburn Road, Ross-shire.

SOME BANK!

A newsboy entered a bank wishing to convert into coppers a sixpence which had been given him. Pushing open the large swing doors, he marched up to the counter; but the cashier, failing to see the importance of the transaction, bade the boy run away home. Deeply hurt, the urchin drew himself together, walked to the door, and there surveyed the whole

place—cashiers, clerks, etc. "Ca' yersel' a bank!" he said with disdain. "Ca' yersel' a bank, and canna change a tanner!" — Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Campbelltown, N.B.

AN EFFECTIVE SUBSTITUTE!

Doctor (feeling his patient's pulse): "Your pulse is very weak." Patient: "Yes, doctor; but I have been asleep for two days, and had no food till now." Doctor: "Have you been taking too much of the sleeping powder I gave you?" Patient: "Well, doctor, you told me to take enough to cover a sovereign, but as I couldn't get one, I used a pound note instead."—Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Yelland, 69, Broadfield Road, Sheffield.

"GO EASY!"

Bricklayer (to small boy blowing trumpet): "Nah, then, me lad, hop it! Yer can't blow that round here. 'Tain't safe. Yer knows what happened to the walls of Jerico, don't yer?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to V. Hartley, 19, Boothon Old Road, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

ONLY NATURAL!

The Scouts' Rally had been an unqualified success, and the smallest bugler beamed with pride when the scout-master approached him and asked genially: "Have you learned all the calls yet, my boy?" "Nearly all, sir." "You know the assembly?" "Yes, sir." "And the fire alarm?" "No, sir!" "Ha, ha! Then what would you sound if a fire broke out in the camp?" The scout paused for a moment, and then replied: "Er—lights out, I suppose, sir!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Fred W. Jones, 71, Overton Road, Hillsboro', Sheffield.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

The GEM LIBRARY.
No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

"Wushden seems all wight again."

"Who's Rushden?" yawned Blake, with a wink at the rest of the tea-party.

"Well, you ass, be sewious! He looks all wight again. He was knockin' up no end of wuns to-day, and Kildare's got him down for the Wookwood match. I don't want to say that I told you so, you know; but I weally must remark that I was wight. I got old Conway to speak a word in season, and it has worked the owacle."

"Pass the salt!" said Blake.

"If you mean that remark as humowous, Blake, I do not see the humah of it. If old Conway had not come along that day, I should have spoken a word in season myself; and I have not the slightest doubt that the result would have been the same."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is only one thing I am wathah doubtful about," said Arthur Augustus. "Would it be tactful to drop into Wushden's studay and congwatulate him on havin' turned ovah a new leaf!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gave it up. Fortunately, after much cogitation, he decided not to drop into Rushden's study. Which saved him from dropping out again—hard.

THE END.

(There will be a grand sporting yarn of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM, entitled: "SPORTSMEN OF THE RIVER!" by Martin Clifford. Make a point of ordering your copy EARLY.)

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THE STORY OF A THOUSAND THRILLS!



A plucky Lancashire boy sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire. This is famous David Goodwin's most powerful story.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

TOM COMPTON, a young piccer, formerly of Barton's Mills, sets out to track down the "Spider," whose evil power has become the curse of Lancashire.

Mill after mill has suffered at the hands of this treacherous foe. At last Tom, by chance, actually catches the Spider in Barton's Mill. He gives chase, but the Spider, a sinister figure in blue goggles, makes good his escape. He drops a pocket-book, however, from which Tom Compton obtains valuable information.

Later, another mill is threatened, and Peter Grant, the manager, calls for Compton's assistance. Tom hurries to the scene, and is just in time to avert disaster. After this Tom receives a strange message—a call for help from Mr. Kane, who is made prisoner by the Spider in an old hulk out at sea. Tom effects a rescue, and a fierce fight with the Spider's men ensues. Tom makes good his escape, however, only to find that Kane has mysteriously disappeared again.

All trace of Morton Kane being lost, Tom next makes tracks for headquarters.

Reaching Hargreave Buildings in safety, he rushes noiselessly up to Kane's private office, and is just in time to see a picture slide back into position, covering a secret exit from the room.

Very shortly afterwards, Tom discovers that there is a secret lift, and that pictures conceal doors giving on to the lift. He enters the Spider's office through one of these doors, and then makes the startling discovery that Morton Kane and the Spider are one and the same man. The Spider is furious.

"I have had you watched—you were my most dangerous enemy!" rasps the Spider. "I saw you needed special attention, and you got it."

(Now read on.)

An Offer Rejected!

"It did you no good," said Tom; "you were beaten at every turn. But you made a better show as the Spider than as Kane the philanthropist. There wasn't much colour in the latter part as you played it. You really looked rather a fool!"

"It gave me some excellent chances to play you into my hands—the Spider's hands," returned the other. "You were very lucky to escape so often. As Morton Kane I had to let you alone, of course. That saintly man dared have no suspicion thrown on him. However, confess that you were taken in."

"I'm quite ready to admit that," said Tom, "during the first half. But you couldn't keep it up. You've made several little blunders lately that put me on the right track. Your disguises were too good. By the way, that black eye isn't painted out so neatly as it might be."

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"Excellent youth!" beamed the Spider. "What insight! What penetration! It is true; I was very pressed for time this morning. But it was rather neat, don't you think, the way you were decoyed off to the hulk on the sands to save me from the wicked tricks of the Spider? I took a lot of trouble over it, and it was nearly perfect. That still puzzles you, my observant young friend."

"Oh, no!" replied Tom; "it is quite simple. You had the note put in my hand, calling me to the rescue, after which you started for the coast in a motor-car, and so got there an hour or two ahead of me. Your rascals tied you up in a dramatic but quite safe position, so that if the capture failed the story would look plausible. The three boats and their crews returned to make an end of me at the critical moment; but it didn't come off, you see. Your launch came and fetched you at daybreak, and took you to Liverpool at full speed; and on arriving there you hurried back to Dunchester by motor again. You came on me half-way, and tried to run me down; but that was rather a fizzle, too."

"You had wonderful luck, of course," said the Spider.

"No doubt," said Tom. "However, you got to the office a little ahead of me, and were there when I arrived, only you scuttled through the secret door in the wall—I saw the picture move as I came in—touched yourself up, and then came up the staircase."

"A very good guess," said the scoundrel.

"It wasn't a guess," returned Tom. "Then you told me some artistic lies about your hair-breadth escapes from the Spider. Under the circumstances, the story was not at all bad. But you made one or two little mistakes. The special train, for instance. I have just come from the station, and they haven't had one for a week. It was smart of you to send that inspector to tell another lie about it—he was one of your men, no doubt—but it didn't go down. I'd got hold of the stationmaster, you see."

The Spider's face changed.

"Yes," he said slowly. "To tell the truth, I saw this morning, when I was telling you of my adventures at the Spider's hands, that there was something wrong. You had already got the suspicion at the back of your head; and I was just now arranging a little affair for your benefit, from which even you could not have escaped. However, I have you safe enough now!"

"It certainly seems you've got me," said Tom; "for I suppose you've signalled your orders out already, and both houses are in your hands. But it's consoling to know that it's by my own doing I'm caught, and not by any trick of yours."

"So long as the result is the same," beamed the Spider, "the first causes do not trouble me. I am permitting myself to thoroughly enjoy the situation before ringing down the curtain on your fresh young life!"

He pressed a button in his desk. A flap flew open, and a little platform, on which were a whisky decanter, richly cut, two large goblets, and a siphon of soda, came into view neatly.

"Will you join me?" said the arch-scoundrel, coolly pouring out a peg. "No? Then I drink to a kindly welcome for you in the next world!"

"You seem very confident you are going to get rid of me," said Tom.

The Spider waved his hand airily.

"It is all arranged for," he said. "Give yourself no concern about that."

"And I suppose," said Tom, "you intend to carry on your infamous schemes, both as the Spider and Morton Kane, when I am gone?"

"I shall be able to apply myself to them with renewed vigour," replied the Spider. "You have taken up a lot of my time lately which I should have devoted to business."

He drank half the whisky-and-soda with keen zest.

"Surely the Morton Kane part wastes time, too?" remarked Tom, who was now talking to gain time, his wits working rapidly the while. There might be a chance for him yet.

"A little," said the Spider; "but it is necessary to keep up Morton Kane to cover my tracks. While I hold the field in that way, no other troublesome reformer is likely to come forward and bother me in my Spider capacity. Besides, though it's not such interesting work, I make a good deal of money as Morton Kane. The 'Clarion' newspaper is a great property and very popular. I am glad to see you still taking such an intelligent interest in worldly matters, in view of your rapidly approaching decease."

"If I am really hemmed in, as you say," said Tom grimly, "I could die happy, but for one thing. It seems, after all, that, stripped of all disguises, you are the Morton Kane I knew at first, and therefore are an Englishman. That, I confess, makes me sick!"

The Spider snapped his fingers. "Wrong, for once!" he said. "I am a cosmopolitan, which means I belong to no one nation; but I am by birth a German, and not of your pestilent nation!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Tom, quietly but decisively.

The Spider turned on him fiercely. "Boy," he said rapidly, "will you throw your life away? I offer you life, fame, and wealth, if you will only join me! I offered it before. Then I could only threaten you. Now I have the absolute choice to offer you. Refuse, and you have not five minutes to live!"

"Consider—is it so great a step? I am gathering the trade and wealth of Dunchester into my arms. One by one the great firms are going down and their trade coming to me. I break them as I break this pen-holder! Soon I shall have all Lancashire under my thumb. With your quick young brain and ready courage to help me I will beat all England, and the greatest and strongest shall bow to me. You shall be my lieutenant, and, when I die, my successor. It is power and money, money and power, all the world over!"

"Choose, boy! I do not wish to be hard on you. Your life is in my hands. Every exit of this house is blocked. In five seconds I can kill you in one of a dozen ways! My men are at my elbow, though you do not see them. Choose, Tom Compton, between fame and riches—and death!"

The great criminal became almost sublime in that moment. His face lit up, he held out his hands to Tom appealingly. There was a moment's silence.

"As far as I understand," said the boy slowly, "you ask me to enjoy power and wealth, both of which are excellent things, and both of which I desire. But you build them on a rotten foundation. Underneath them is murder and treachery and suffering. I absolutely refuse your offer! I believe you have cornered me. I do not expect to get out of this house alive; but before I go"—Tom stepped forward to the desk—"I should like to express my real opinion of you!"

With a sweep of his hand Tom picked up the half-emptied goblet and dashed it with all his force into the arch-criminal's face.

It shivered to fragments, and the Spider fell back a pace. Then, pulling out his knife, Tom ripped the great map on the wall from top to bottom, grasped the handle of the door behind it, and flung the door wide. He seized the two wire ropes of the lift-shaft and began to swarm rapidly up them, hand over fist.

He had gained some twenty feet, when he glanced down, and saw looking up at him the face of the Spider, livid with rage and hatred, and covered with blood from the broken glass. It stared up and drew back again. In another moment that fiendish face appeared once more, and in his hands the Spider held a huge pair of wire-cutting shears.

The cut wire rope came curling and lashing up about Tom's legs like a broken-backed snake as the shears severed it, and an echoing crash far below told that the lift-platform, cut away, had fallen to the bottom of the shaft.

Tom found himself descending like lightning, one side of the rope whizzing up through his hands, and burning them like hot iron as his weight dragged it through the pulley-wheel in the roof. Alive to his danger, he threw all his weight on this rope. It cut his hands to the bone, but he hardly felt the pain. His descent was checked, and nearly stopped. It was hard to hang on to the greasy wire, lubricated with blacklead, but he set his teeth, and gripped with all his force, curling his legs round it.

To his horror, he found he still descended, although very slowly. The second lift-platform at the bottom was not enough to balance his weight, and being deprived of the other platform, the whole poise of the arrangement was upset.

Below him, at no great distance, Tom saw the secret door of the Spider's room still open, and the arch-criminal himself waiting with gruesome zest as his young victim slowly descended towards him.

"I'm not saved, after all," thought Tom despairingly, "only relieved. There's no way out of this horrible chimney-flue, and he'll be able to reach me in a minute."

He tried with all his strength to stop his descent, but now the balance of the lifts were upset it could not be done. He threw half his weight on the other rope, but it sailed upwards so steadily and resistlessly that the boy felt certain somebody must be winding the other part down among the machinery below, but that he could not see. He heard the suave, hateful voice of the Spider,

"Come, my young friend," it said with devilish malice, "do not linger so long up there, but descend, and listen to my final argument. You are coming, as it were, to the point."

Tom saw what the ugly jest meant. The Spider was waiting, feasting his eyes on the slowly-descending boy, a long, sharp knife in his hand, the point of which he felt lovingly with his thumb.

"It was not very civil of you to throw the goblet in my face. However, we shall soon wipe that insult out."

Tom stared down at him as if fascinated, turning slowly round and round like a joint on a roasting-jack as the rope let him down. Never had he felt so utterly helpless and at his enemy's mercy. He had no pistol, nor weapon of any kind. The pocket-knife with which he had slit the map he had thrown down the shaft when he began to climb.

He made no reply to the taunts and jeers of his enemy, but braced himself to bear the stroke as pluckily as he might. There was no way to avoid that long knife in the narrow shaft.

"Perhaps," said the Spider suavely, shifting his grip on the knife, "you would prefer to let go and drop. It is a long fall—about sixty feet. But you would have the satisfaction, as you said before, of knowing you died by your own deed and not at my hands. It would amuse me quite as much. Come, pull your courage together and let go! What—you will not? Well, perhaps the knife is quicker!"

Tom's feet came slowly within range, and, with a look that showed how he enjoyed the situation, the Spider thrust at them with the point of his knife. But Tom drew them up out of the way, and then, just as he was dropping level with the enemy, made himself swing violently by thrusting his feet against the wall.

The knife flashed, and Tom twisted his



Ripping the map on the wall from top to bottom, Tom grasped the handle of the door behind it and flung the door wide open. Seizing the wire rope, he hauled the lift upwards.

At Grips with the Spider!

TOM saw the deadly peril he was in, and climbed for his life. There was no place of safety he could reach in time.

The Spider glared up at him with a snarl of hatred, and then, catching the wire rope in the nick of the shears, he drew the handles together with all his force.

body desperately. He felt the steel cut his shoulder; it seemed to sear like red-hot wire.

So vicious did the Spider thrust that he nearly overbalanced himself. Before he could recover, Tom swung forward again, and, with a hoarse cry, flung one arm round his enemy, and fairly tore him from his place in the doorway.

The Spider shrieked wildly as the two swung out again over the shaft, and slashed savagely but vainly with his knife. His arm was pinned to his side, and he could do no damage. Already Tom and his assailant were too far below the open doorway to swing their feet on to it.

The moment they swung out Tom loosed his grip of the man. But the Spider did not drop. He was ready for the move, and gripped hold of the wire. As they swung inwards again, like a pendulum, the ruffian made a frantic spring at the opening, and just caught his fingers on the door-sill. He hung there, his shrieks echoing through the shaft, while Tom, giddy and half fainting, clung to the rope for his life.

He could hold on no longer. He felt that he must drop. His hands, gripping the rope, caused him sickening pain. He became conscious that he was descending faster than before, when he saw just abreast of him the recess of one of the doorways, on the side that he had believed was Morton Kane's.

With a last effort he swung himself into



The Spider's knife flashed, and Compton twisted his body desperately. He felt the steel cut his shoulder. It seemed to sear like red-hot wire.

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the recess. There was not room to stand, but he clung on to the door-handle and turned it. The door swung inwards, and he staggered into the room, swooning. He collapsed on the floor, and the door shut behind him with a bang.

"Tom," cried a voice in his ear, as everything swam before his eyes, "is it you?" Then he knew no more.

A False Friend!

WHEN Tom came to his senses he found himself in an armchair, with Dick Stearns bending over him anxiously.

"Where am I?" he said.
"In the back room of my office," replied Dick. "What's happened, old chap? Good heavens, what a state you're in!"

"How long have I been here?"
"Not a minute. You came in through the wall and doubled up on the floor. I lifted you into this chair and gave you some brandy, and you came round at once."

"Thank goodness! There's no time lost!" said Tom. "Open that shaft door again, Dick. Let's see what's become of the Spider!"

"I don't know how the thing opens, old boy. It beats me, all of it! What happened?"

"You don't know of the shaft, then? I didn't till just now. I found it with a vengeance!" Tom shuddered. "Never mind. Let it keep shut, then. Dick, I've been through into the rival's offices. And I've found the Spider at home—found who he is!"

"Who?" said Dick eagerly.
"Morton Kane! He tried to finish me, but I got away somehow. I'll bet he's saved his villainous hide, too! But he knows I know the truth, and he holds both buildings. I'm not to get away alive, at any cost!"

"Good heavens!" said Dick, aghast, as he realised the danger. "He'll get you, if he has to blow both buildings up to do it! Wait till I see who's at the exits. Stop, though, there's someone knocking at my office door. They mustn't know you're here."

"Brandy!" gasped Tom. "I feel faint again!"

He sank back in the chair. His eyes closed, and the colour left his face. Dick Stearns looked at him a moment anxiously, but the knocking at the door of the outer room grew louder and more imperious, and Dick hurried out to answer it.

Tom was not unconscious. He lay for some time, a strange buzzing in his ears, and a feeling of utter impotence to move possessed him. Then, as through a dream, he heard voices in the next room.

"Both sunk, sir—the Cretan and the Cyprian, too, with full loads o' cotton for the Dunchester mills, and two hundred Canadian emigrants aboard each to work on the mills here. We've sent 'em both to the bottom!"

"Hush!" said Dick Stearns' voice anxiously. "Not so loud, you block-head!"

"Why not?" said the first voice. "We're alone here, an' in our own offices, I reckon. Yes, the nitro worked first rate—it's better than dynamite. Both vessels at the bottom of the sea, with all hands. An' we thinks you ought

to stump up an extra hundred shiners apiece this time. Then there's the Aegean next week!"

"All right, I'll see about the extra pay!" whispered Dick's voice hoarsely. "For goodness' sake, go now, and come back later!"

"Not till I've got my money!" growled the other.

Tom, sitting upright in the chair, felt physically sick. Terrible as was the strain he had gone through, this was hardest to bear of all.

There was no possibility of mistaking what he heard. Dick Stearns, his trusted ally, was a tool of the enemy's!

The cool voice of the stranger, reporting the sinking, by foul play, of two great cotton steamers, with cargoes for the Dunchester mills, and carrying Canadian emigrants—old Dunchester hands, no doubt—to take the place of those maimed or killed by the Spider's machinations—fell on Tom's ears like a knell.

He knew of this effort of the old Dunchester mill-owners to bring back prosperity again. He had had some hand in it himself, ensuring that the Canadian hands would not fill places that Dunchester men might have. They were badly wanted, and so was the cheaper cotton. And now all this had been sent to the bottom of the sea by the Spider's agency, and the villain who was leader of those that did the dirty work came to Dick Stearns for his pay!

Tom made an attempt to rise and confront them, and see who the stranger was. But he was too weak. As he staggered to his feet he heard the chink of coin and hurried whispers, and then the outer door shut. The ship-scuttler, whoever he was, had gone.

Dick Stearns' step came quickly towards the inner door, and he appeared in the back room again.

"What! Up already, old chap?"
He stopped short; for Tom, swaying where he stood, was looking at him with unutterable scorn and hatred glittering in his eyes.

"You hound!" cried Tom hoarsely. "You spy! You traitor!"

The colour left Dick Stearns' face, and he gulped. Then he took a step forward, and opened his mouth as if to speak.

"Keep back, or I'll strangle you!" said Tom hoarsely. "I will—with these hands! I trusted you. You of all people to be a spy and a murderer! Don't deny it! I heard every word you said to that hound of a dynamiter!"

Dick stood as if frozen, his eyes bent on Tom's, and not a sound passed his lips. He listened to the boy's fierce accusation without moving a muscle.

"You belong to this villain whom I've just escaped from—he's bought you body and soul!" continued Tom, his eyes blazing. "Why didn't you finish me for him, long ago? You've had plenty of chances. No, you're not that sort—you haven't even the grit for first-hand murder! You do the dirty work, the arranging, the spying, and the treachery! When did the Spider buy you over? Lately, I suppose. You stood by me honestly up to a week ago. Or was that part of your game?"

Still Dick Stearns looked at him, and said nothing.

"Speak up!" said Tom bitterly. "You've got me safe here; there's nothing to be afraid of. Your master is guarding every door of the two houses. Tell the truth for once, if you can! What did he pay you for this? When did he make you an agent for the sinking

of cotton steamers and the murder of their crews? What do you call the trade you drive?"

Dick looked at him for a moment appealingly. Then his face hardened; he glanced round the room with quick eyes, and shut the inner door. He drew a blank visiting-card from his waistcoat-pocket, and with a fountain-pen scribbled three words on it in the tiniest hand-writing. He held it out, and the angry young piece glanced at it. Tom read the words, and his expression changed with marvellous suddenness.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Is it true? Is it—"

"Hush!" whispered Dick hurriedly.

He licked the ink off the card, set light to it, burnt it up, and rubbing the ashes to powder between his hands, scattered them in the fireplace.

"I see," whispered Tom—"yes, I see now. Of course, it's true. Dick, can you forgive me?"

"That's all right!" said Dick hurriedly. "You weren't to blame—no wonder. But I won't shake hands, old chap—yours are in such a mess!"

"Yes, my hands are cut all to pieces," said Tom, looking at them. "But I feel better now—the excitement has bucked me up, and I'm feeling fit again. I shan't last much longer, though. I shall double up if things don't keep moving. It isn't much good, they'll take care I don't get out alive, even if half a dozen were to swing for it. The whole show is at stake. I mean to do it somehow, though."

"It's a mighty poor chance," said Dick, with a sigh. "But it must be done—it must! I'm not thinking of you only as the best partner I ever had, Tom, but as the only chance Dunchester has—perhaps all England—who knows? We must get you out. I'm pinned, you see. I can't act as you'll be able to, if you get free."

"By George, yes!" said Tom, beneath his breath. "If I once get out, it won't take me long to play the last hand. Once out, I'll stake my life against the winning of the last link of the chain, and then I'll bring this den of infamy toppling about the villain's ears. He knows he's done for if I escape alive now, knowing what I do. Dick, can you get me a weapon of some sort? A pistol would help."

"Do nothing in a hurry," said Dick. "You've time yet. They won't come in here after you. As for pistols, haven't you a better dodge than that in your head?"

"I own I'm cornered," replied Tom, thinking rapidly. "I've fooled them all often enough, but I see no way to do it this time. Of course, fighting won't get me out, but it would be a satisfaction. If I tried to leave, they would follow me. I'd just be murdered on the staircases or at the doors. They dare not even let me get into the street."

"That's true," muttered Dick. "Still, I've a plan—a good one—though I wouldn't pull it off, but you might."

"There's no way along the roofs," said Tom. "The block is separate from other buildings. There's no way out through a window."

"Do you see that door?" said Dick, opening the ante-room door and pointing to a side entrance in the outer office.

"It's locked, but I've a key to it. It doesn't lead into the passage, but into Reynolds' room. He's not in his room just now, and it's forty to one he's with the Spider, settling about your finish. He may be back any minute."

"And then they'll start on me, I suppose."

"About that. I've seen several of the Spider's pet ruffians around. Reynolds is what you took me to be just now—no



"You hound!" cried Compton. "You are working for that villain of a Spider. You're a spy, a— a traitor, and I've always trusted you!" Dick Stearns stood as if frozen, his eyes bent on Tom's. He listened to the boy's fierce accusation without moving a muscle.

fighter, but a fine hand at helping to arrange a little unobtrusive murder or kidnapping. Not that they'll kidnap you; they'll finish you!"

"I know that," said Tom impatiently. "But I don't see what there is left to arrange between the brutes, except, maybe, a little impromptu scheme to account for the crime and to get rid of my body, so as not to make the affair too bold."

"That's all there's time for," said Dick. "And it's a wonder Reynolds isn't back already. But I can let you into his room before he arrives. And he's not a fighting man. Do you see?"

"What—grab him, and hold him fast as a hostage, do you mean?" said Tom.

"No good. The Spider wouldn't stop for him. He'd have the pair of us killed sooner than let me escape."

"Of course, that's no good," said Dick rapidly. "But he's got sandy whiskers—Reynolds, I mean."

"Great Scott, man! What of that?"

"I happen to know they're false."

Tom stared.

"And that tangled tow hair of his is false, too," continued Dick, speaking quickly. "And he's worn the suit he's got on every day this week. Don't you see?"

Tom stared at him in silence as this apparently irrelevant news fell from Dick's mouth. Then a sudden light flashed into Tom's eyes.

"I see!" he exclaimed. "By George, it's a hundred-to-one chance, but I'll try it! Let me into his room. Quick; or we shall be too late!"

"You've just time," said Dick, as he turned back the key of the door leading to Reynolds' room. "In with—"

The sharp whir of the telephone-bell in the ante-room cut him short, and Tom paused a moment, with his hand on Reynolds' door-handle, as Dick jumped across the room and took down the receiver.

He nodded significantly to Tom as the

first word came over the wire; it was the Spider's voice, and no other. Hard pressed as he was, Tom waited. He always found it paid to get the latest news.

"You've somebody in your room," said the smooth voice of the arch-enemy, sounding thin and clear through the telephone. "Keep him there."

"It's only Tom Compton, sir," said Dick, with a wink at Tom, and a wave for him to go through the doorway. "He's just going. Hi, Tom! Stop! Hi! He's gone, sir. Shall I go after him?"

"No, you thick-headed dolt!" came over the wire, with an oath to back it—the first they had ever heard the Spider use. "Why didn't you stop him sooner?"

The receiver at the other end was hung up, and Dick was shut off with a slam. Immediately he heard the distant tinkling of other bells in different parts of the building.

"Told me to stop you," whispered Dick to his chum; "that's all. In with you! It's neck or nothing now!"

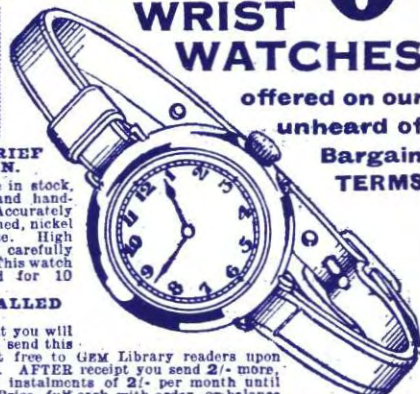
Tom slipped through the wall door into Reynolds' room, and glanced round. It was empty. He heard the wall door close behind him gently, and Dick turned the key on the other side, and went quietly back to his desk.

"I've got to do it all on my own!" muttered Tom. "False whiskers and false hair, has he? It's a chance, though a beggarly one. And all this time I've been thinking Dick Stearns was a fool. False whiskers and false hair, and the same old suit! Come along, then, Mr. Reynolds. You may be my saviour, after all, though I bet you won't like it!"

(Next week's instalment of this powerful serial is packed with thrills, boys. On no account must you miss next week's bumper GEM with its grand programme and its £300 prize cricket competition.)

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