

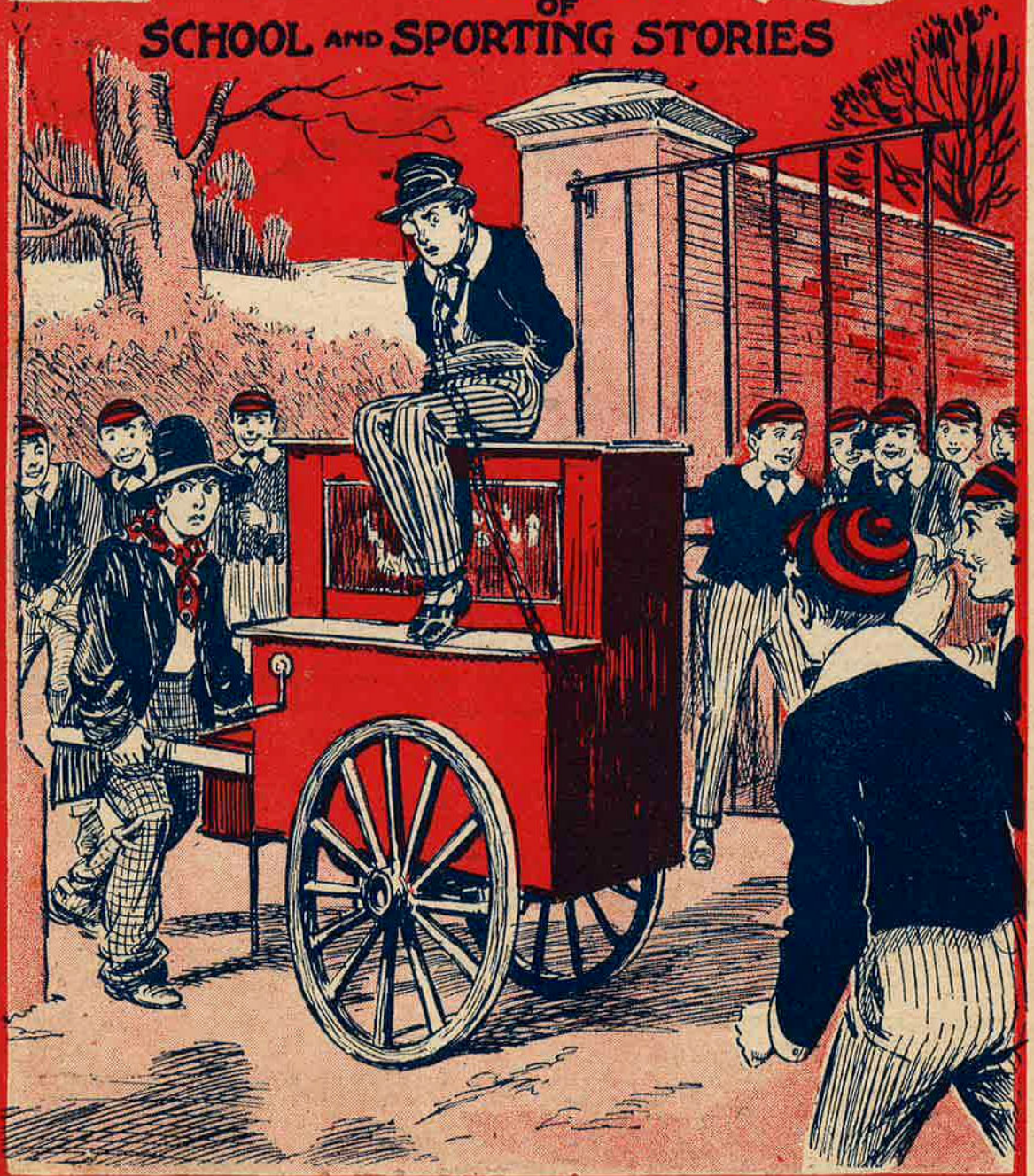
GRAND EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. INSIDE!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

No. 833.
Vol. XXV.
January 26th,
1924.

LIBRARY
OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



ARTHUR AUGUSTUS ON THE ORGAN!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and the Italian boy cut a queer figure, thanks to the kind attentions of Figgins & Co of the New House! (See the grand school story inside.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every
Monday
"THE MAGNET" Every Monday
"THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
"JUNGLE JINKS" Every Thursday
"THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL"
Published Yearly.

My Dear Chums,—It is a plain duty to thank you all for the cheery things you are saying about the GEM. I am in receipt of budgets of letters containing compliments galore. There are valuable suggestions, too, of which I take due note, and also plenty of requests for further stories dealing with some of the characters who have become extra specially popular.

"THE HERMIT OF MOAT GRANGE!" By Martin Clifford.

Before going on to speak of certain matters which I wish to bring to your notice I must just refer to the dramatic and powerful story of St. Jim's which will appear in our next issue. We get in this fascinating yarn something which captures the attention from the first line. A youngster comes to St. Jim's, and it is very soon evident that the movements of the newcomer are being watched. The strangest events follow the arrival at the school of young Marsden, the lad in question, and the author, with his usual dexterity, keeps the interest up to fever heat right to the end. The curtain parts for a second, and you get a glimpse of an abominable conspiracy, the leaders of which are men who stand at nothing to gain their ends. And through it all the lonely hermit of the old grange works on, faced by peril, a weird figure of learning and romance.

You cannot fail to be carried off your feet by this yarn about a fateful secret, which is by way of being the key to enormous wealth. I shall be glad to know your opinion of this story. It is a bit out of the way, and it deals in an extremely unusual manner with the plotting of a gang of fortune-hunters. At the same time, we never lose sight of the life at St. Jim's. The various old favourites who figure in the tale all have plenty of work to do in connection with the danger which threatens the junior who has been so recently placed at the old school.

A LETTER FROM GLOUCESTER.

A loyal supporter of the GEM who lives in the old-time city of the west, writes to say that his tuck hamper was the finest thing he ever struck. He also tells me that in all the fourteen years he has been reading the GEM he has never found the stories better than now.

ANOTHER TRIBUTE.

That reminds me of another cheery word about the old paper which comes from the city of lace, otherwise Nottingham. The writer here says: "I wish THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 833.

you would make the stories about Tom Merry a bit longer. I do get disappointed when I reach the end." So far as that goes, I am arranging for a few extra long yarns from time to time. Naturally one is always pleased to get such letters as this. I could touch on others, but there is only space for one more. It comes from a "Gemite," who informs me that a certain story in which Baggie Trimble figured was read by an invalid, and the effect was magical. The sufferer laughed so much that he forgot his pains and got well. That's one up to the hilarious Baggie!

"OUT OF THE INFERNO!"

By Edmund Burton and Captain Reginald Glesop.

For next Wednesday I have secured a remarkable story about the terrible earthquake in Japan, the frightful disaster which sent a thrill of horror through the world some many months since. These two writers have evolved a really tremendous romance out of the earth convulsions in the Far East. The seismic tragedy is the background to a series of adventures of a most exciting description. Some priceless pearls have been left to a youngster by his grandfather, but the old man little dreamed that he was bequeathing a legacy of peril. The working out of this yarn is baffling in its ingenuity. Look out for the fight to the death on board an aeroplane, and the plunge to doom!

"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

By Roland Spencer.

Next week's instalment of our dashing serial is extra long, and this circumstance

will, I know, meet with general approval, for Tom Gale has established himself as a prime favourite.

It falls to Tom's lot to travel by a certain train, and the man with the green spectacles is also on board. There is a tragic happening in connection with the train, but it is only one of the many thrilling events of which this fine story tells.

THE DAYS AHEAD.

As I told you at the start of this year, the GEM had a mighty big programme for 1924. As you get each week's issue of the grand old paper you will see how correct this statement was, for the GEM yarns are second to none for spirit and enthralling interest. I have heaps of wonderful surprises to come. Tales of school, of adventure on land and sea, gripping detective stories—all these figure in the pages of the famous Wednesday paper which is so welcome all over the world.

DO YOU SING OR DANCE?

Six complete song and dance hits—with all the music printed full size—and a bumper issue of articles as well! This is what you are offered in the first number of a fine new paper, "Popular Music and Dancing Weekly," which is now on sale, price threepence.

Think of it! In the first issue you will find "Romany Rose," the valse sensation of the world; "Just Like a Thief," "He Used to Sing in His Sleep," "Callings," the popular fox-trot; "Tomahawk Blues," and a specially simplified version of the popular "Golden Dreamboat" valse for young people and beginners, together with a fine article, "Behind the Scenes in Pantomime," by Dorothy Ward; and many other interesting features.

If you play, if you dance, if you want to know the tunes which everyone is humming, you cannot afford to miss this great new weekly paper.

Make a note of the name—"Popular Music and Dancing Weekly," published every Monday at a price of threepence only.

YOUR EDITOR.

THERE IS STILL TIME FOR—

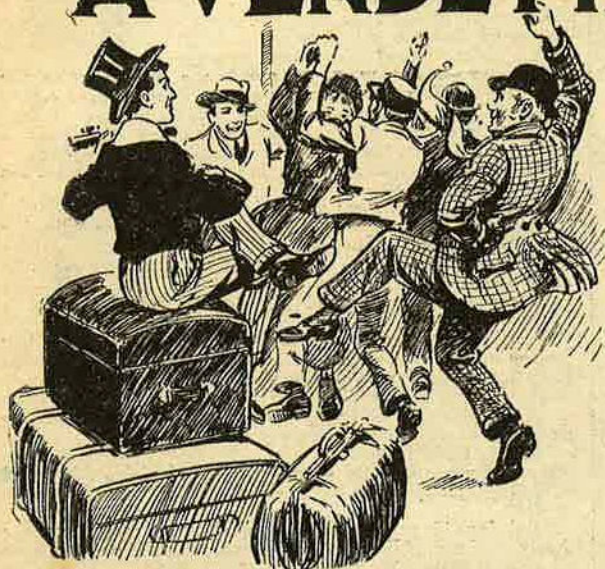
THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!

THE "ALL-THE-YEAR-ROUND" VOLUME!

360 pages - - - Six Shillings only

The British schoolboy's idea is to have a jolly good row and then bury the hatchet deep, but not so with the Italian junior. His methods are entirely different as you will read in this splendid yarn dealing with the arrival of Luigi Dimarco, who has very weird views on the subject of revenge.

A VENDETTA AT ST. JIM'S!



CHAPTER 1.

Rough on Gussy!

"I HOPE you fellows won't be watty!" D'Arcy of the Fourth delivered himself thus as he entered Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

It was Wednesday afternoon, and Blake and Herries and Digby were in their footer togs. They were making ready to go down to Little Side, where a match between the School House Shell and the Fourth had been fixed for that half-holiday.

Arthur Augustus was in his usual ornate attire, but he walked with a slight limp. Yesterday, while riding back to St. Jim's from Rylcombe on his bicycle, Gussy had spotted the young lady from the bunshop, and had gallantly raised his topper to her and bowed. In doing so he had run full tilt into a haycart just ahead, sustaining an injured ankle that made it impossible for him to take part in the footer match.

D'Arcy looked rather anxiously at his chums on coming into the room. His manner, as he spoke, was hesitating. His chums looked curiously at him.

"I'm afraid you won't quite like it, deah boys—"

"You mean about your not playing in the match?" asked Blake. "Well, I think we've already told you what a thumping chump you were, Gussy, to give Maisie of the bunshop the glad eye and cannon into a giddy haycart!"

"Weally, Blake, I wufuse to be chawacterised as a thumpin' chump!" said D'Arcy, with considerable dignity. "And I uttahnly wepudiate the assertion that I was givin' the young lady the glad eye, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle tighter into his eye and glared at his chums through it.

"Weally, I fail to see any cause whatever for wibald laughah!" he exclaimed. "The haycart was wight out of my wange of vision. Moreovah, I considah it no more than an ordinary act of courtesy to waise my toppah to the young lady from the bunshop, bai Jove! Pway don't cackle in that idiotic mannah, deah boys. I want to talk to you about a more sewious mattah. As I was sayin', I hope you won't be watty—"

"About that new fancy waistcoat you've got on, Gussy?" inquired Blake sweetly, gazing at Gussy's waistcoat with shaded eyes. "My word, isn't it striking—brutally striking, in fact? And gorgevous isn't the word for it! Joseph's coat of many colours would appear quite drab and dingy beside it, Gussy. I can't say that I care for the jazzy pattern, though."

"I do not wequiah youah opinion upon my waistcoat, Blake!"

"Oh! Then you were wondering whether we'd object to that natty new necktie you're wearing?" said Blake. "What do you think about it, Dig?"

A Magnificent Extra-Long Complete School Story of the World-Famous Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By
Martin Clifford.

"Grooogh! It doesn't bear thinking about!" said Digby, turning away with a dramatic gesture.

"The purple background and the yellow zig-zags are much overdone," said Herries critically. "They give me spots before the eyes!"

"But don't let's be angry with Gussy, kids," said Blake benevolently. "If we can persuade him to take the thing off and bury it quietly in some secluded spot out of the school grounds, we'll let the matter rest."

Arthur Augustus regarded his chums with great severity. Blake and Herries and Digby were greatly addicted to the harmless and necessary amusement of pulling Gussy's leg. More often than not they succeeded in doing this without the fact dawning on their aristocratic chum until some time afterwards. But just now D'Arcy fully realised that his noble leg was being pulled.

"Weally, you wottahs, I wish you'd twy and be sewious for a little while," he said. "I have come to acquaint you with somethin' that will pwobably affect life in this studay in no inconsiderable degwee."

"Gussy! You're not going to leave us and slope with the girl in the Rylcombe linen-draper's?" exclaimed Blake, in mock alarm.

"Nothin' of the sort, you fwabjous ass!"

"Perhaps Gussy is shifting to another study," remarked Digby. "No more gaudy waistcoats and lurid neckties to hurt our eyes at close quarters! No more tenor solos and piles of hatboxes and other lumber! There'll be more room in here for Herries' feet—"

"You leave my feet alone!" growled Herries.

"I'm not leavin' this studay," said D'Arcy firmly. "As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I have just been to the Head, and he informs me that theah's a new chap comin' into the Fourth."

"Let him come!" sniffed Blake. "What bizney is it of ours, anyway?"

"His name is Luigi Dimarco."

"My hat! A giddy Italian kid!" exclaimed Digby.

"Yaas, watah!"

"Well, there's nothing awfully exciting about an Italian kid coming to St. Jim's," remarked Blake. "We've already got one Italian at the school—Contarini of the New House."

"Yaas, but Dimarco's comin' heah, deah boys."

"Oh, bow-wow!" snapped Blake. "Ring off about the new kid, Gussy! We're going down to footer."

"Weally, you asses, don't be in such a huwvy!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as his chums commenced to push past him. "I'm afraid you don't realise the full significance of what I have told you. I mean that Luigi Dimarco is comin' into this studay."

Blake, Herries, and Digby stopped short at that.

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Their jaws dropped, and they gazed at Arthur Augustus in startled amazement.

"Wh-what did you say, Gussy?" stammered Blake.

"The Head says that Dimarco is comin' into this studay, deah boys. As a mattah of fact, Dr. Holmes and I have awrangged it between us," said D'Arcy. "You see, the new chap's patah happens to be a friend of my patah's, and my patah has witten to Dr. Holmes, askin' him to put young Dimarco undah my wing, so to speak. The patah welves on me to look aftah the young stwangan in the land. 'Dimarco is comin' into this studay, so that I can always keep a fathably eye on him, as it were, deah boys. I—I couldn't rewy well do othahwise, could I? My patah says that young Dimarco is a likeable little chap."

Blake gave a gulp.

"A new kid—comin in here!" he gurgled.

"A giddy Italian!" muttered Herries.

"Oh jeminny!" moaned Digby.

D'Arcy gave his chums a worried look.

"I trust you fellows will waise no objections—"

"Raise no objections!" howled Blake. "Why, you silly, burbling cuckoo—didn't you point out to the Head that we're four in here already, and that we don't want anybody else digging with us, anyway?"

"Bai Jove! Pway don't get excited, Blake. It's all settled now," said D'Arcy, in a troubled voice. "I told the Head that I'd look aftah young Dimarco, and that I'd make it all wight with you chaps."

"You—you—"

"The new boy awvives at Wylcombe by the thwee-fifteen train, and, as I shall not be playin' footah this aftahnoon, I'm goin' to meet him at the station."

Gussy's chums glared at him in an almost homicidal manner. "Then it's settled, is it?" hissed Blake in a sulphurous voice.

"Yaas!"

"We're going to have a greasy Italian kid foisted on us!" exclaimed Digby wrathfully.

"Weally, Digbay, you are labouwin' undah a misapprehension! Dr. Holmes informs me that young Dimarco comes from one of the noblest and gweatest families in Italy!"

"Who cares a brass farthing where he comes from?" hooted Blake. "We don't want any new kids in here! Anybody but a burbling cuckoo like you, Gussy, would have made the Head understand that there's no room here! But you—you've settled it all with the Head, without even consulting us first!"

"You blitherer!"

"You blighter!"

"Weally, deah boys, I weliied on bein' able to work you chaps wound to a weasonable fwame of mind," said D'Arcy.

"As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Work us round!" howled Blake. "We'll work you round, Gussy! Bump the chortling fathead!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, Blake, I— Yah! Wow! Hands off, you wuff beasts! Yawooooogh! I shall give you all a feahful thwashin' if you don't wrelease me— Yow-wow! Leggo! Yah! Oooooooogh!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

The swell of the Fourth was whirled over in three pairs of hands, and he smote the hard floor violently many times. He yelled and struggled, but could not get free.

Bump! Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Yawooooogh!"

"There!" said Blake, as Gussy was at last allowed to drop. "Perhaps that has knocked some of the silly fatheadedness out of him! We'll teach him to arrange for new kids to come in here, without first asking us! The burbling maniac! Br-r-r-r-r-r!"

And Blake, Herries, and Digby, having vented their feelings, departed from Study No. 6 and slammed the door behind them, leaving Arthur Augustus lying sprawled in an ungraceful heap on the carpet, gasping.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgins' Little Joke!

"**W**OW! The wuff wottahs! I shall have to sewiously considah whethah to give them a feahful thwashin' jatah on, bai, Jove!"

Arthur Augustus murmured this to himself as he stood by the ropes on Little Side some twenty minutes later.

The swell of the Fourth had had a complete change of clothing and a general tidy up since his rough handling at the hands of his exasperated chums.

His jacket and trousers were immaculate, his fancy waist-coat and necktie were truly a joy to behold, and his patent-leather shoes vied with his topper in brilliance.

The match between Tom Merry & Co. of the Shell and Jack Blake & Co. of the Fourth was in full swing. Monty Lowthier

had just slammed in the ball for the Shell, and the Fourth-Formers in the crowd were looking rueful.

D'Arcy shook his head sadly and walked on towards the gates.

He regarded it as a catastrophe for the Fourth that he was unable to take part in the match. And, truth to tell, Jack Blake & Co. missed their aristocratic chum in the team. Gussy was quite a useful player.

He passed through the gates and strolled leisurely down the Rylcombe Lane to the railway-station. Arriving there, he took a platform ticket and sat in the waiting-room.

The three-fifteen train, on which the new boy for the Fourth was booked to arrive, came in ten minutes late. As the train steamed into Rylcombe Station D'Arcy looked expectantly at the carriage windows. He set his topper in correct position on his head, and straightened his necktie.

He wanted to make a good impression on the lad from sunny Italy.

At first he saw no signs of Luigi Dimarco.

Suddenly, however, D'Arcy saw that a crowd was collecting at the farther end of the platform, and above the shouts and laughter he heard the sweet and resonant notes of a mandoline.

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle into his eye and blinked.

Seated on a pile of luggage was a dark-eyed, handsome boy dressed in well-fitting Etons, and a topper that was much too small for him. From underneath the topper a mass of jet-black curly hair protruded. As he sat on top of the heap of trunks he had one leg crossed over the other, and he was playing a mandoline with great gusto.

Plonk! Plonk! Plonk!

It was a gay, rhythmic tune the lad was playing, and several of the younger spirits in the crowd started to dance and caper to it.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, advancing slowly up the platform. "I—I wondah if this is young Dimarco? Gweat Scott! I—I weally believe it is!"

Gussy had to jump sideways suddenly to avoid being knocked over by a couple of youths who were dancing to the catchy strains of the mandoline.

"Gwoooogh!" he gasped, standing in front of the youthful musician on the boxes and gazing at him. "I—I say, deah boy, are you Luigi Dimarco?"

The dark-skinned boy nodded and smiled without ceasing to strum his mandoline.

"Si, deah boy!" he said cheerfully. "You are from da School St. Jim? You like my music—eh? Try a dance!"

Gussy gasped, and led Dimarco gently but firmly from the station.

Old Joe, the porter, took charge of the Italian junior's luggage, and D'Arcy, looking very conscious of the grins of the villagers, piloted his dark-skinned protegee into the High Street.

Outside the station D'Arcy looked around him, and to his surprise saw Figgins & Co. of the New House standing in a group on the opposite side of the road, conversing together in low tones. They seemed to have a joke on between them, for they emitted sundry deep chuckles during the course of their talk.

"This way, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "We'll go stwaight to St. Jim's, and I'll show you wound."

Figgins and Redfern detached themselves from their chums and disappeared down a side-street off the Rylcombe High Street.

Fatty Wynn, Kerr, Lawrence, and Owen followed D'Arcy and the new boy.

At the commencement of the Rylcombe Lane, where all was lonely, the four New House juniors suddenly rushed up and surrounded D'Arcy and Dimarco.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed the swell of the Fourth, halting and gazing indignantly at them through his monocle. "Pway allow us to pwoceed, you— Oh! Yah! Hands off, you wuff wottahs!"

The New House juniors attacked with a rush. D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs and hit out well and truly. Luigi Dimarco's dark eyes gleamed. He doubled his fists and drove his left hand on Fatty Wynn's nose.

"Yarooooogh!" roared Fatty.

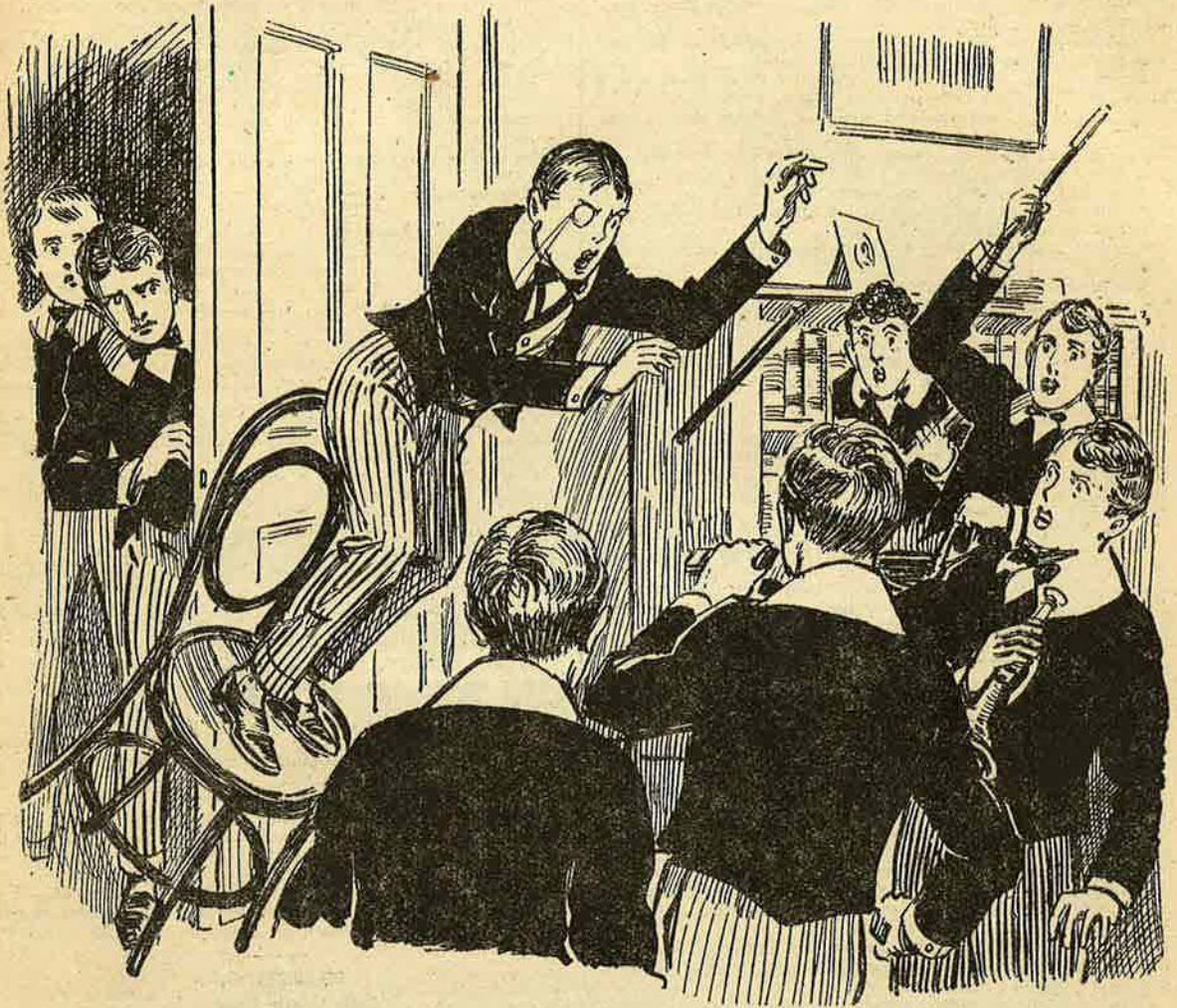
Biff! Wallop! Thud!

Young Dimarco fought like a Trojan. He sent Owen reeling back with a well-planted uppercut on the jaw, and gave Lawrence a hefty biff in the chest.

"Bwavo, Dimarco!" chortled Gussy. "Down with the New House wottahs! Huwway!"

Gussy and the new boy were holding their own against the New House fellows in a masterly manner, and looked like getting away; but at the crucial moment Figgins and Redfern came into view, trundling behind them an ancient barrel-organ.

Seeing how matters stood, they left the organ in the road and dashed to the attack. The heavy odds now told, and



Crash! The study door was hurled open by Cardew and Lumley-Lumley. Unfortunately, Gussy's chair happened to be in the way, and the violent push that Cardew and Lumley-Lumley gave the door caused it to cannon into the chair. "Yaroooh!" roared Gussy, losing his balance and tipping forward. (See page 7.)

D'Arcy and Dimarco went down, still fighting gamely to the last.

"Woop! My nose!" gasped Figgins. "That Italiano kid is some fighter, and no giddy error!"

"Grooogh!" moaned Owen, who was nursing his chin. "He's a regular little tiger!"

"Wefuse us, you wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy, on whom Fatty Wynu was sitting.

"Not much!" retorted Figgins. "This is where the New House puts one over the School House. It's some time now since we gave you School House microbes a reminder that the New House in cock house at St. Jim's. Yon Italiano kid is fond of music. The barrel-organ is the national instrument of his race. I think he'd go well as a young organ-grinder, with you, Gussy, taking the part of his monkey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the New House juniors. Owen and Redfern trundled up the barrel-organ, the former carrying a long coil of rope on his arm.

D'Arcy and Dimarco blinked at the organ in alarm.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of the Fourth, a horrible suspicion dawning on him. "You wottahs are surely not goin' to tie us to that—that howwible bawwel-organ?"

"You've hit it, Gussy—right first time!" grinned Figgins. "Here's a parcel of old clothing we got in the village, too. I reckon there'll be some fun at St. Jim's when you arrive. Let's dress up young Antonio, kids!"

Luigi Dimarco struggled wildly as Figgins & Co. proceeded to array him in the old clothes they had procured. They dressed him in a pair of baggy corduroy trousers, very ragged at the ends and much patched, an ancient, bob-tailed coat, a red scarf, and a huge, black Homburg hat.

Luigi Dimarco presented a most comical appearance by the time the New House heroes had finished dressing him up. He raved at them in Italian and English. Figgins & Co. roared.

They tied Dimarco between the shafts of the barrel-organ, and then grasped D'Arcy.

"Wefuse me, you wottahs!" roared Gussy. "I wefuse to be made a monkey of—"

"Ha, ha, ha! String him up!"

Poor Gussy was bound hand and foot, perched on top of the barrel-organ and roped there. A dog's collar was fastened round his neck, and from it a huge iron chain dangled, the other end being affixed to the organ.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Figgins & Co.

Gussy struggled to get down from his perch on top of the organ, but his efforts were in vain. The luckless swell of St. Jim's was speechless with wrath.

"Now, right away for St. Jim's!" chuckled Figgins. "Pick up the shafts and shove, Antonio!"

"Go and cata da coke!" roared Luigi Dimarco, wrenching desperately at the bonds that held him between the shafts of the barrel-organ. "I will not doa da shove! I— Oooogh! Wow-wowp!"

Figgins planted a huge boot gently behind the Italian junior. Dimarco gave a roar, and, picking up the shafts of the barrel-organ, started forward with a rush.

The New House juniors kept him going. Prodding him from behind, they made him trundle the organ, with D'Arcy perched on top, along the Rylcombe Lane towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

A State Arrival!

"WH-WHAT the merry dickens—"

"Who the—"

"Look here, chaps!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were just filing off the footer-ground, the former having beaten the

Fourth by four goals to three, when a strange apparition met their gaze at the school gateway.

A barrel-organ, with a familiar figure chained to the top, was pushed in by a weird-looking individual.

Figgins & Co. were there, and gathered round them was a large crowd of New House fellows.

Boys ran up from far and near to witness the strange sight.

Figgins and Redfern released Dimarco from the shafts of the barrel-organ, and tied his right hand to the handle.

"Now, turn!" commanded Figgins.

"Sapristi! I won't!" roared the Italian junior defiantly.

"Prod! Prod! Prod!" Dimarco changed his mind and proceeded to turn the handle of the barrel-organ with avidity.

The melodious strains of "Boiled Beef and Carrots" floated out upon the air, and a large crowd collected.

Howls of laughter greeted the recognition of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy on top of the barrel-organ.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Cutts of the Fifth. "Look at the tame monkey! I expect he'll get down and dance in a minute!"

"Weally, deah boys—" "Ha, ha, ha!"

Jangle, jangle, jangle went the ancient barrel-organ. Luigi Dimarco was at the mercy of the New House juniors.

He ground out time after time, and excitement reigned supreme in the ancient Close at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. gazed speechlessly at the organ, and at the weirdly arrayed youth who was playing it, and at Arthur Augustus.

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Tom Merry, in wonder. "If this doesn't take the giddy biscuit! Is this a joke, or what? Who is that seedy-looking merchant who is playing?"

"It's young Dimarco, the new Italian chap who's booked for the School House, old top!" grinned Figgins from afar.

"This is his state entry into St. Jim's. Gussy goes well as a monkey, doesn't he?"

"You—you—you—" stuttered Blake. "Chaps, this is a New House rag! Those awful bounders have japed Gussy and the new kid—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear us smile! Trust the New House to make the School House look small—every time! Chaps, who's cock house at St. Jim's?"

"New House!" came the unanimous roar from Figgins' partisans.

"Rats!" shouted Tom Merry. "School House is cock house! We'll show you New House Worms what's what! Rush 'em, kids! Rescue Gussy and the new kid!"

"Hurrah!"

The School House juniors, led by the Terrible Three and Blake, made a rush towards Figgins & Co., who surrounded the barrel-organ.

The rival juniors met, with fists flying and minds grimly made up to do or die. Tom Merry grabbed Figgins round the neck and dragged him away from the barrel-organ. The two youthful rivals commenced to fight hammer and tongs. Monty Lowther waltzed round with Kerr, both of them pummeling away at each other for all they were worth.

The New House fellows tried to rush the barrel-organ away, but Tom Merry's valiant followers made a concerted rush, and in the wild melee that followed, the barrel-organ went over with Gussy still on top.

Crash!

"Yawooooooooooooogh!"

"Sapristi! Ow-wowow-wow!"

Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!

The overturned barrel-organ became the vortex of a wild and whirling conflict, and the yells of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Luigi Dimarco were heard loud above the shouts of the combatants.

"Soek it to 'em, chaps!" panted Tom Merry, planting a well-timed uppercut on Figgins' nose. "We'll capture the barrel-organ, and—"

"Boys! Boys! Cease this riot this minute! How dare you!"

A stern voice broke in. The juniors let go of each other and wheeled round with gasps of alarm. They beheld the tall figure of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

Mr. Railton's brows were contracted with anger.

"How dare you lads engage in this unseemly ruffianism in the school precincts!" he rapped. "Get up this instant!"

The boys who were reclining on the ground, or on top of the barrel-organ, arose. And then Mr. Railton's startled eyes beheld the organ, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and—

strangest sight of all—the youthful Dimarco.

"Yawooooooooogh!" gasped Gussy. "Pway welsease me, deah boys. I am bein' swangled with this beastly dog-collah, bai Jove! Gwoooooogh!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Railton. "D'Arcy, it is you! And who—who is this individual?"

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"Wowp! It is Dimarco, the new boy, sir," said D'Arcy.

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Railton was amazed. Tom Merry & Co. glared, and Figgins & Co. grinned—some of them rather sheepishly.

"Goodness gracious!" said Mr. Railton. "Can it be possible, D'Arcy, that you and Dimarco have conspired together in this idiotic joke of bringing a barrel-organ here? I heard it playing from my study, and came down to ascertain the cause of the unseemly music. D'Arcy, I am surprised and shocked!"

"Gwoooooogh! Pway get me welsease, sir!" gasped D'Arcy.

Tom Merry, Lowther, and Blake sprang forward, and Gussy and Luigi Dimarco were released. They stood up by the overturned barrel-organ and gasped.

Dimarco presented such a comical appearance that loud chuckles arose. Even Mr. Railton smiled, but he quickly checked it.

"Boys, kindly disperse, and let there be no more of this disorder!" he rapped. "Dimarco, you will accompany me to Dr. Holmes. D'Arcy, have this barrel-organ removed immediately!"

Mr. Railton swished away, and Luigi Dimarco followed, grabbing his mandoline, which, by a miracle, had sustained no damage in the scum.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at each other grimly.

"Well, Gussy, you are a frabjous idiot!" growled Jack Blake. "Is that the way you look after a new boy? The New House will crow over this no end!"

"Weally, deah boy—" "We'll get our own back on those New House microbes another time," said Tom Merry. "Leave the barrel-organ for Figgins to take away. Come on, kids! I'm jolly peckish!"

"Gussy's standing tea to-day," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "We'll have a wippin' spwead in honah of Dimarco. Hands across the sea, you know. You Shell chaps will come?"

"We will!" said the Terrible Three with great unanimity. "There's one consolation in having Gussy for a study-mate—he gets fivers pretty regularly," said Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Hewwies, you disrespectful wottah—" "Gussy, you're a hero!" said Monty Lowther, linking an arm affectionately in Gussy's. "Come on, old chap! We'll help you do the honours to young Antonio."

"Dimarco, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Oh, any old thing! This way to the tuckshop, Gussy!"

And their good humour quite restored, the heroes of the School House marched the noble Gussy away to the tuckshop.

CHAPTER 4.

Musie Hath Charms!

"BUONO! Good egg!" said Luigi Dimarco, as he stood at the door of Study No. 6, rubbing his hands with pleasure on seeing the spread that lay before him.

"Welcome to youah studey! We've a fine spwead weady for you!"

Dimarco had been to the Head, and looked quite different now that he had divested himself of the ridiculous garb that Figgins & Co. had arrayed him in. He entered Study No. 6, his dark eyes gleaming and a beaming smile suffusing his dark, handsome face. He had his mandoline tucked under his arm.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked rather askance at him. They felt a natural resentment towards the fellow who had come to break into their more or less friendly circle.

Arthur Augustus was all good humour, and the Terrible Three treated the new Italian boy with cheery friendliness.

Under the influence of that splendid feed the hearts of Blake, Herries, and Digby gradually thawed towards Dimarco, especially as he began to prove himself quite a cheery, likeable fellow.

"Jolly good spread!" said Tom Merry, laying down knife and fork at last.

"Yaas, the feed has been a gweat success, deah boys," said D'Arcy. "Have anothah of these wippin' cweam buns, Dimarco?"

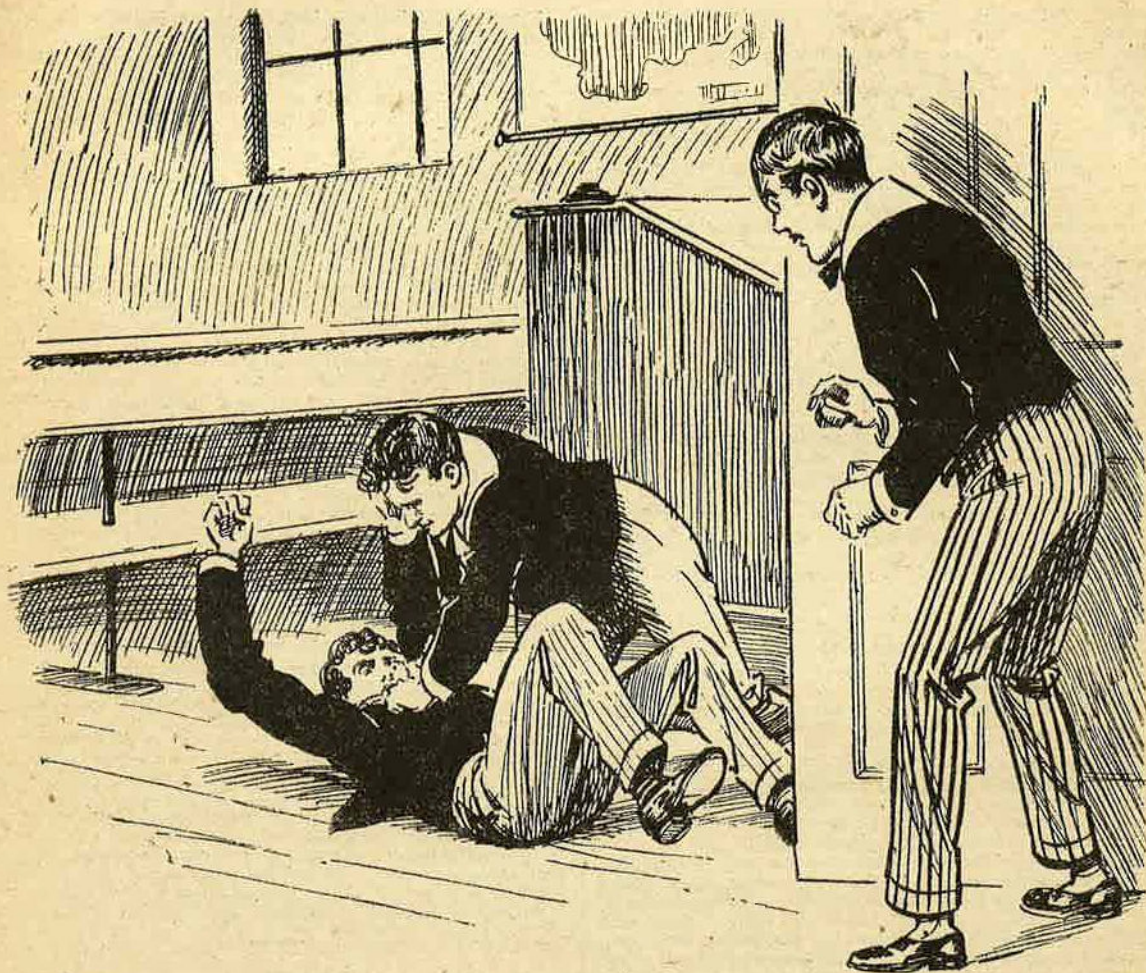
"Basta! Enough! No more, or I busta!" gasped Luigi Dimarco, whose face was quite shiny after the huge feed he had partaken of. "Grub verria good—what? Now me play a da musie!"

Dimarco leaned back and took up his mandoline.

Tom Merry & Co., and Blake, Herries, and Digby looked alarmed.

But their expressions changed after Dimarco had played a few bars, and they began to tap their feet on the study floor in time with the gay tune the Italian boy was strumming.

"Jolly good!" said Herries appreciatively, when Dimarco had finished the tune. "I reckon I could accompany that on my cornet."



At the sound of high-pitched voices D'Arcy burst into the Form-room. He drew back in amazement as his gaze fell upon Contarini and Dimarco on the floor, locked in each other's embrace and fighting furiously. Both their faces were suffused with hatred and rage, their eyes were glittering, and they shouted as they fought. (See page 9.)

"Rats!" snorted Digby contemptuously. "My banjo's the thing! A banjo and a mandoline go well together. I'll get my banjo!"

"I'll fetch my cornet!" snapped Herries. "You can bury your rotten banjo, Dig!"

"Look here, you fathead—"

"Why, you blithering chump—"

"Peace, my infants!" grinned Tom Merry. "I suggest we have a musical evening, then we can all play. I've got a tin whistle, and Monty's got his jew's harp on him, I believe."

"Good idea!" said Blake. "I'm a great hand at playing on a comb and paper."

"Gimme a couple of cricket-stumps and the coal-scuttle, and I'll do the drumming," said Manners. "What about Gussy?"

"Weally, deah boys, I was thinkin' about singin' some tenah solos—"

"Oh, don't!" gasped Blake. "Here, take this ruler, Gussy, and you can be the conductor. Every band has a conductor, you know!"

"Vewy well, deah boy," said D'Arcy, taking the ruler. "I— Gwoogh! Don't blow that beastly cornet in my yah, Hewwies, you ass!"

"I was just tuning up," said Herries. "Now, Dimarco, are you ready?"

"Si!" grinned the Italian boy.

Gussy stood on a chair and raised the ruler. The instrumentalists prepared and watched him.

"Weady, deah boys?" asked the conductor. "One—two—three—go!"

There was a rending blare from Herries' cornet, a furious plonking from the banjo, a shrill shriek from the tin whistle, a whine from the jew's harp, and a buzz from the comb and paper, and a gay strumming from the mandoline. And above all could be heard Manners banging with the cricket-stumps on the coal-scuttle.

Bom! Crash! Hoot! Buzz-zz! Plonk, plonk! Wallop!

The effect was most remarkable. Each player did his uttermost to vie with the others. The din in Study No. 6 became terrific. And Gussy, mounted on the chair, waved the ruler with great gusto, and kept his amateur "orchestra" hard at it.

Beroom! Howl! Crash! Plonk! Buzz-zz! Biff!

Amazed and wrathful howls sounded up the Fourth Form passage. Fellows opened their study doors and demanded to know where the earthquake was.

"Go it, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "Pway don't be so heavy on the coal scuttle, Mannahs—you're dentin' it!"

But Manners did not hear him above the uproar, and he banged away with vim and vigour, while Tom Merry tooted wildly on his tin whistle, and Herries blared blatantly on his cornet, and Digby dug away at the banjo at great speed, and Monty Lowther wrosted loud wails from the jew's harp, and Blake buzzed with all his might on the comb and paper, and Dimarco, entering into the spirit of the thing, strummed furiously at the mandoline, and added quite a respectable quota to the din.

Crash!

The study door was hurled open by Cardew and Lumley-Lumley. Unfortunately Gussy's chair happened to be in the way, and the violent push that Cardew and Lumley-Lumley gave the door caused it to cannon into the chair and tip it forward.

"Yawwoooooogh!" roared Gussy.

He lost his balance on the chair and lurched over on top of Digby, who rolled off the edge of the table and sat down heavily on his banjo on the floor.

The ruler, whirling from D'Arcy's hands, struck Blake on the nose, and caused him to almost swallow his comb and paper.

"You noisy idiots! Stop it! Give it a breeze!" howled

Cardew. "What the dickens do you think you are doing, anyway?"

The "musicians" rather breathlessly stayed their labours and glared at the intruders.

"Buzz off!" said Tom Merry. "We're having a musical evening!"

"Great pip! It sounds like nothing on earth!" gasped Lumley-Lumley. "You don't call that music, do you?"

"Gwoogh! Wun away, deah boys—you can listen frown outside," said Gussy, arising and picking up the ruler. "You're intewwuptin', you know!"

"Interrupting!" ejaculated Cardew. "What about our prep? We're trying to do our prep! We—"

"Oh, bother prep!" said Blake, rubbing his nose. "Leave prep till later. Sit in your dens and listen to our playing."

"Faith, an' it wouldn't be safe, ye noisy spalpeens!" exclaimed Reilly, entering upon the scene. "The ceilin's would be fallin' in wid that row gin' on, entoirely!"

"Weady, deah boys?" asked Gussy, scrambling up on the chair again and raising the ruler. "We'll have anothah go and show these boundahs what we can do, bai Jove! One, two, three—"

"Go!" howled Sidney Clive, crowding into the doorway with a pack of Fourth-Formers behind him. "Down 'em! Sit on 'em! Smash their horrible instruments up! Come on, boys!"

The others came on, and the amateur musicians in Study No. 6 found themselves suddenly overwhelmed by their unappreciative schoolfellows.

"Yawooogh!" shrieked D'Arcy, as Mellish and Bates whirled him off the chair. "Hands off, you wuff wottahs. 1—1—Yah! Ow-wow-wow!"

Crash!

The table went over, and Digby, Monty Lowther, and Tom Merry were sent sprawling. Dimarco jumped up in alarm as Reilly and Kerruish made a rush at him.

"Addio! Keep away!" he exclaimed. "Me puncia you on da nose if you— Oh! Yah! Oooogh!"

Bump!

The new Italian junior smote the floor with a hard concussion and Kerruish and Reilly piled on top of him.

There was a scene of wild and whirling conflict in Study No. 6. Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. made a desperate fight to defend themselves, but the odds told.

They soon found themselves lying on the floor in captivity. Tom Merry's tin-whistle and Monty Lowther's jew's harp were stuffed down their respective owners' necks, Manners' head was rubbed in the coal inside the scuttle, Blake and Herries had the cold contents of the teapot emptied down their backs, whilst Digby was laid upside down across Lumley-Lumley's knee, and held there whilst Levison belaboured him with the banjo.

"Yarooogh! Yah! Wowp!" roared Dig. "Mind my banjo! You'll—wow, wow!—bust it! Groooogh! Yow-wooooop!"

"Break the Italian kid's mandoline over his head!" said Mellish, with a spiteful chuckle. "Here, I'll do it!"

Mellish grasped the mandoline and raised it over Dimarco's head. The Italian junior was lying on the carpet with Kerruish and Reilly both sitting on him. His dark eyes flashed when he saw Mellish standing over him with the mandoline raised, ready to strike.

"Sapristi! You busta my mandoline!" he cried, and then he gave a heave.

Neither Kerruish nor Reilly were prepared for that upheaval, and with concerted yells they rolled off Dimarco and disappeared under the table.

His eyes blazing with rage and his white teeth gleaming, the Italian boy jumped up, grasped a knife from the table, and leaped at Mellish.

"Look out, Mellish!" shouted Cardew. "The murderous little beast is going to—"

"Yarooogh! Yah! Help! Keepimoff!" shrieked Mellish, going as white as a sheet.

He dropped the mandoline, and in his haste to turn round, he trod upon it. There was a rending crack from the instrument, and a shrill scream of rage from the Italian boy.

"Carramba! Rascal, I kill you!"

Mellish gave a howl and made a dive for the door.

Dimarco leaped after him, the knife raised, and his dark eyes afire with ungovernable anger.

The other juniors fell back, aghast with horror.

Mellish stumbled in the doorway, and with a cry Dimarco jumped towards him.

Just then Kildare of the Sixth appeared in the doorway, and, seeing the Italian boy about to strike, seized his arm and whirled him back.

"You reckless little ruffian!" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's angrily. "Give me that knife!"

"No!" gasped Dimarco, struggling in Kildare's grip. "Let me go! He breaka my mandoline! I kill him!"

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Kildare wrenched the knife from the Italian's grip, and flung it back on the table. All the juniors were on their feet now, and they crowded round, looking scared. Mellish crouched behind Kildare, trembling visibly.

"He—he tried to knife me, Kildare!" stuttered the cad of the Fourth. "You ought to complain to the Head! He's dangerous!"

Dimarco's eyes blazed, and, clenching his fists, he made a movement to get at Mellish. But Kildare swung him back.

"Dimarco, don't you know that you musn't use knives in England?" he rapped. "You will be turned out of St. Jim's if you try that trick again!"

Dimarco leaned against the wall, his chest heaving with passion, his fists clenched tightly together.

His exhibition of temper had quite unnerved the juniors. Several of them, in fact, edged away from him uneasily.

"Don't you let me hear of your attempting any such thing again, Dimarco!" exclaimed Kildare sternly. "And now, you little rascals, what is all this noise about?"

"Ahem!" coughed Blake, whose hair was smothered with tea-leaves. "We—we were having a little music, Kildare, to—celebrate Dimarco's arrival, you know."

"I'll give you music of another sort if I hear any more of this disturbance!" rapped the school captain. "You will all take a hundred lines each, and clear off to your own studies for prep. Blake, I should advise you to keep an eye on Dimarco—and see that he doesn't get into any more tempers. They're likely to become dangerous."

"All serene, Kildare!"

The juniors dispersed, leaving Jack Blake & Co. and Dimarco to clear up the debris in Study No. 6.

The Terrible Three exchanged meaning glances as they made their way back to the Shell passage.

"Well, if young Dimarco doesn't beat everything!" exclaimed Manners. "We know, of course, that Italians are jolly hot-tempered, and that over in Italy they are accustomed to settling quarrels with knives and things. But it scared me, I can tell you, when Dimarco started it here."

"Same here!" said Tom Merry. "Mellish, too, was scared stiff. Dimarco is evidently raw from his native land, and he hasn't learned to curb his temper yet. We'll knock it out of him if he stays at St. Jim's long. We don't want any accidents at the school."

"No jolly fear!" said Monty Lowther. "I'm glad, kids, that Dimarco wasn't put into the Shell and foistered on us. That little dago will want some looking after."

And Tom Merry and Manners agreed.

CHAPTER 5.

An Amazing Feud!

LUIGI DIMARCO recovered from his temper as quickly as he had flown into it. His mandoline was not irreparably damaged, and while Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy busied themselves with their prep, the Italian boy mended his cherished musical instrument.

After prep, Blake, Herries, and Digby left Study No. 6 and went along to see the Terrible Three. D'Arcy remained behind to chat with the new boy.

"You won't feel absolutely alone in youah new suwoundings, deah boy," said the swell of St. Jim's kindly. "Theah's anothah Italian fellow at the school, and you are bound to make fwiends with him, although he belongs to the New House. His name is Contawini—his Chwistian name is Giacomo, I think."

Dimarco gave a start.

"Giacomo Contarini?" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, deah boy," replied D'Arcy. "I will introduce you to him to-morrow, and I'm sure you will become great chums."

Dimarco's eyes glittered, and he shook his head.

"Never!" he said, in a strangely harsh voice. "A Contarini and a Dimarco friends? That is impossible!"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and stared at the new Italian junior in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "What evah do you mean, deah boy? Contawini is wathah a decent fellow, although he, too, is vewy hot-tempahed. I'm afraid it's a chawacteristic twait of the Italian wace, you know. No offence meant, of course, deah boy!"

Gussy said this rather hastily on seeing Dimarco's fists tighten.

But Dimarco was not looking at him. His gleaming eyes seemed to be gazing into space, and the Italian boy made a strange gesture.

"No friendship will I own with a Contarini!" he said, between his teeth. "I did not know that Giacomo Contarini was here. Sapristi! If my father had known, he would not have sent me here!"

D'Arcy looked amazed,

"Weally, deah boy, I quite fail to comprehend youah meanin'!" he said. "You seem to beah Contawini a gwidge. Have you met him before?"

"No, we have never met," replied the Italian boy, in a low voice. "But we shall never be friends! He is a Contarini, and a Contarini is a hated name to a Dimarco. Both families are of bel sangue—gentle blood. In Italy the names of Dimarco and Contarini are famous, and held in high honour. But there is a hatred between them. For many generations the Dimarcos and the Contarinis have been bitter foes. Why? It is an old quarrel. There is a vendetta between the families. Now you understand?"

"Bai Jova!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I—I think I undahstand now, deah boy. A vendetta is a cwusade of vengeance, I believe, between one family and another. The family who swears the vendetta takes howible veyenge on the othah, and—"

"Si—that is so," replied Dimarco. "The vendetta may go on for generations, but it is never forgotten. The Contarini imagined a grievance against the Dimarcos, and took life. Then the Dimarcos swore the vendetta on the Contarinis. So far, we have not taken vengeance, and we keep silent. But igran dolori sono multi—great griefs are mute. One day a Dimarco will repay, and fulfil the vendetta. So now you see, amigo mio, why I shall not be a friend to Giacomo Contarini!"

Arthur Augustus polished his monocle.
"Bai Jove! You have sent me into quite a fluttah, deah boy, with youah revelations concernin' youah family and Contawini's!" he said. "Of course, it seems strange and widge to me."

"You are English, and we are Italian—we have Corsican blood in our veins," came the quiet reply. "We love and we hate with all our hearts, and we never forget."

D'Arcy could not help worrying over Dimarco's words. He confided to his chums when they came in later, Dimarco having gone to see Mr. Bailton.

Blake, Herries, and Digby looked alarmed.
"So Dimarco's and Contarini's people have sworn a giddy vendetta, eh?" growled Blake. "Pretty fine state of affairs for St. Jim's, I must say if those two giddy firebrands start trying to slay each other!"

"The Head ought to know," said Herries gruffly. "He'd jolly soon put a stopper on the vendetta—so far as these two kids are concerned, at any rate!"

"Ye-es, but it's no bizney of ours," said Blake. "We'd better wait and see what happens."

Next day the Terrible Three were chatting to Kangaroo and Talbot on the School House steps when a dark, handsome junior came up and halted at the bottom of the steps. It was Contarini of the New House.

"Hallo! It's one of those microbes from that horrid old casual ward opposite!" said Monty Louthor. "Buzz off, Antonio! The School House is a respectable establishment. Dogs, vagabonds, and New House fellows are not admitted!"

"I have come to see Dimarco—the new Italian boy," replied Contarini calmly. "Let me pass!"

"We'll chuck you down on your neck if you come up here!" said Manners threateningly. "This is no place for—"

"Oh, let him go in," said Tom Merry good-naturedly. "After all, Contarini is quite harmless compared with those other wasters from the New House. Besides, it's only natural that he'd like to pay Dimarco a visit, as they are both Italians."

"Right ho, Tommy!"
The School House juniors allowed Contarini to pass without molesting him.

The Italian junior of the New House walked into the Hall and made his way up to the Fourth Form passage.

He looked in at Study No. 5, and found Blake & Co. busy writing impots.

Blake picked up a ruler, Herries the inkpot, and Digby the poker when they saw Contarini.

"Pax!" said Contarini hastily. "Where is Dimarco?"
"We don't know, and we don't care!" snapped Blake. "We kicked him out for playing his rotten mandoline in here while we were trying to work, and the last we saw of him he was running down the passage with his mandoline for all he was worth. And you'd better follow his example, Contarini. We don't want New House worms here."

Contarini withdrew his head and walked on.

As he neared the corridor where the Fourth Form classroom was situated he heard distant melodious strains. Contarini's dark eyes glittered, and he moved stealthily along the corridor towards the closed door of the Form-room, from behind which the music was coming.

Grasping the handle, he thrust open the door suddenly and stood on the threshold.

Seated on a desk near the back of the Form-room was Luigi Dimarco, enjoying himself on his favourite musical instrument.

He looked up with a start at the sudden intrusion, and

ceased playing. Then his whole body became taut when he saw the newcomer was none other than Contarini.

The two were face to face!

Contarini closed the Form-room door and walked slowly and softly up the gangway. His fists were clenched, his eyes narrowed and glittering, and his teeth were bared in a snarl that his schoolfellows did not often see, except on occasions when he was in a frenzy of rage.

"Dimarco!" exclaimed the New House junior, and then burst into an impassioned speech in his native tongue.

Luigi Dimarco set down his mandoline and faced the other. Meanwhile, back in Study No. 6 D'Arcy had been feeling quite worried.

He set down his pen at last and rose from the table.

"I say, deah boys, I wathah think there will be twouble if Contawini and Dimarco meet," he said. "They are bitta' enemies, bai Jove, although they have nevah met before, and—well, I considah it my dutay, as a fellow of tact and judgment, to see that Contawini is sent out of the School House."

"Go ahead, then, Gussy, and turn him out!" growled Blake. "Close the door behind you."

D'Arcy looked reproachfully at his studymate, adjusted his monocle firmly in his eye, and left Study No. 6.

He met Levison at the end of the Fourth Form passage.

"Seen eithah Contawini or Dimarco, deah boy?" inquired the swell of the Fourth.

Levison grinned.

"I think you'll find Dimarco in the Form-room," he said. "I heard the sweet strains of his mandoline coming from there a short while ago."

"Thanks awfully, deah boy."

D'Arcy hurried along to the Form-room.

He could hear no mandoline music, but as he approached the door sounds of high-pitched voices, shouting in Italian, reached his ears, and there were other noises, too, as if a fight were in progress.

A look of alarm crossed D'Arcy's face. He hastened his footsteps and burst into the Form-room.

Two juniors were rolling together on the floor in front of the desks, locked in each other's embrace, and fighting furiously. They were Contarini and Dimarco!

Both their faces were suffused with hatred and rage, their eyes were glittering, and they shouted as they fought. As D'Arcy stood in the doorway Dimarco was underneath Contarini, but next minute the new boy gave a twist, flung his adversary over, and whirled round on top of him. His hands clutched at Contarini's throat, and the fingers tightened.

Contarini struggled desperately, choking for breath. Dimarco did not relax his grip of the other lad's throat. Contarini's eyes dilated. He was fighting for breath.

"Dimarco!" shouted D'Arcy, dashing into the Form-room. "Release Contawini at once! You weekless little wretch, you'll choke him!"

"Si—I kill him!" snarled Dimarco, who, in his rage, seemed to be a different boy altogether. "He would have me leave St. Jim's—threatened me—reminded me of the vendetta— Ah! Sapristi! He will die, and I will have revenged—"

He got no further, for D'Arcy sprang upon him and dragged his arms away from Contarini.

Contarini jumped to his feet, and, when he had recovered, flung himself again at Dimarco. The two rivals clinched and renewed their grim struggle.

"You feahful idiots! Break away! Bai Jove, they mean to do each othah some injuw!" gasped D'Arcy. "I must stop them! Contawini! Dimarco! I will not allow you to— Ow! Yah! Yawoooooogh!"

D'Arcy pluckily tackled the two contestants again, and found himself next minute the target for a torrent of fierce blows. Both the Italian juniors turned on him and flung him to the floor.

"Yawooooogh!"

Then, while the swell of the Fourth was lying dazedly on the floor, Dimarco and Contarini turned again to each other and renewed the fight.

Hurried footsteps sounded outside, and Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, appeared.

He fell back in horror when he saw the two Italian boys fighting like two tigers.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Boys! Are you mad? Stop! Do you hear me? Dimarco! Contarini! Cease this ruffianism this instant!"

Neither of the contestants took the slightest heed of the Form master. They were fighting hammer and tongs.

Mr. Lathom, without more ado, laid violent hands on them, and D'Arcy, dashing up, lent his assistance.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Dimarco and Contarini seemed determined not to be separated. They meant to fight to a finish, apparently. They fought with Mr. Lathom and D'Arcy so furiously that Mr. Lathom became quite dazed and had to shout for help.

There was a rushing of feet outside the Form-room, and a crowd quickly came in. Tom Merry & Co. were among the first to arrive, and Blake & Co. followed, with a number of seniors and fags.

"All serene, sir! We're coming!" sang out Blake. The juniors piled in and rescued Mr. Lathom. Contarini and Dimarco were separated, forced to the floor and sat on. As they lay there they glared at each other homicidally.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Lathom, who was quite puffed. "I have never undergone such an ordeal in all my life! Groooh! I have actually been forced to engage in fisticuffs with two of my own pupils! Dimarco! Contarini! What is the meaning of this?"

The two youths addressed were snarling at each other and talking swiftly in Italian.

Mr. Lathom looked helplessly about him. "I think I can explain mattahs, sir," said Arthur Augustus, who had been making frantic efforts to adjust his collar, which had been ripped from its stud, and knock the dust from his beautiful clobber. "These two silly duffahs—I mean, these two Italian boys have sworn a vendettah!"

"D'Arcy!"

"I should say, wathah, that their families have sworn vendettahs with each othah, sir," went on Gussy. "They come from Corsican stock; and are wathah a hot-temperah and bloodthirsty lot, bai Jove! They still keep up the old family gwivance, which becomes almost a religion with these people, I believe. The Contawinis and the Dimarcos are sworn enemies, and these two feahful asses—ahem!—are keepin' it up!"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Lathom. "So that is the explanation! What an utterly preposterous and dangerous state of affairs! I presume that Dimarco's family were not aware, when they sent him to St. Jim's, that he would meet Contarini here."

"No, I wathah fancy it was a coincidence, sir," replied D'Arcy. "Dimarco did not know that Contawini was here, until I told him."

The two Italian boys still struggled to get at each other. Mr. Lathom looked shocked and the boys started.

"Allow those two belligerent lads to rise," said the Fourth Form master.

Dimarco and Contarini were dragged to their feet and held apart from each other. Mr. Lathom looked at them severely.

"You lads must realise that it is forbidden to bring family quarrels into your school life!" he said. "You must keep your tempers under control, and whatever personal feelings you may have with regard to this—er—vendetta which, I understand, exists between your respective families, they must be subjugated. To impress that point upon you I will now administer a severe caning to both of you."

Mr. Lathom swooped over to his desk, took up his stoutest cane, and turned to Contarini.

"You, having been at St. Jim's some time, Contarini, should have known better," he said. "Hold out your hand."

Contarini set his teeth and obeyed.

Mr. Lathom gave him six cuts, and he did not spare his vigour. By the time he had finished Contarini was quite doubled up.

"Now, Dimarco," said the Form master grimly. "Kindly hold out your hand."

"Sapristi! I will not!" exclaimed Dimarco, turning fiercely on Mr. Lathom. "You fight with da stick—eh? Bah! A Contarini may bear such treatment, but never a Dimarco! You, signor, I challenge to combat!"

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Lathom, looking thunder-struck.

"That is da way we settle da quarrel in Italy—by duel!" cried Dimarco. "You choosa da stick—as weapon if you like, but you fighta da duel—now!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "The boy has actually challenged me to a duel! He—he must have taken leave of his senses!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked on in surprise. Dimarco's dark eyes glittered.

"I mean it!" he cried. "Carramba! Does he refuse da combat? I—"

"Dimarco, I will not bandy words with you!" said Mr. Lathom between his teeth. "You must surely be ignorant of English methods and ideas. Duels are not allowed in England, neither are they legal in Italy, although I am fully aware that they take place. But we are not in Italy or Corsica now. You are a schoolboy here, Dimarco, and must obey. Will you hold out your hand?"

Dimarco set his teeth and clasped his hands firmly behind him.

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"Blake! Herries! Merry! Seize Dimarco, and lay him face downwards across the table!"

The juniors obeyed. They laid violent hands on Luigi Dimarco, and, despite his

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fierce shouts and struggles, they laid him across the table and held him there.

Mr. Lathom then pushed back his right cuff and raised the cane.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Stoppa! Oh! Yah! Yarooooo!" wailed the youthful scion of the fiery Dimarco stock.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"There!" panted Mr. Lathom, pausing when his arm ached. "Let that be a lesson to you, Dimarco! You must submit to discipline, or suffer the consequences. Contarini, kindly return to your own House, and do not enter here again, except at the usual lesson times. Do not seek to fight Dimarco any more, or I shall ask Mr. Ratcliff to deal most severely with you. Go!"

Contarini went, glaring at Dimarco.

That latter youth stood by the blackboard, gasping and muttering furiously in Italian.

"Boys, I trust that you will do your utmost to keep those two misguided youths apart," said Mr. Lathom. "Their tempers are primitive and unbridled, and it is possible that they might do serious harm to each other, unless stringent methods to keep them separated are resorted to. I will speak to Dr. Holmes on the subject. D'Arcy, take Dimarco away!"

"Come along, deah boy!" said D'Arcy, laying a gentle hand on Dimarco's arm.

"Si, I will come, amigo mio," said the new junior. "But as for the signor—poof! He is da coward not to accept my challenge! I snappa my fingers at him!"

Mr. Lathom turned very red, and the boys in the room chuckled.

"Silence, boys!" rapped the Fourth Form master. "The insolence of the boy towards me, a master, is unparalleled. But he has not yet learnt the discipline of an English school, so that I will not punish him further. Disperse, boys, and let there be no more disturbance."

CHAPTER 6.

The Fight in the Cloisters!

BLAKE & CO. had tea in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage with the Terrible Three next day.

Tom Merry had received a remittance and a parcel of cakes from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess, and it was his treat to-day.

Over the tea-table he propounded a scheme he had thought out that morning.

"It's time we got our own back on Figgins & Co., isn't it, kids?" said the curly-headed captain of the Shell. "We've sworn a sort of vendetta against the New House, although, of course, we wouldn't think of going about it in such a blood-thirsty manner as Dimarco and Contarini. My proposal is this: To-night six of us will get into Figgins' dormitory, and, at a given signal, pull all the clothes off their beds and throw 'em—the clothes, I mean—out of the window. Properly worked, it could all be done before those New House duffers woke from their dreams. If the cold doesn't wake 'em, we'll see that they wake and discover that they are minus their bedclothes. We'll make them sign a paper saying how sorry they are for the barrel-organ business the other day, before we let 'em have their bedclothes back. How does that idea strike you?"

"Topping!" said Blake promptly.

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "The nights are vewy cold now, and if we can manage to get those boundahs' bedclothes, they'd do anythin' to get 'em back. It's a weally wippin' wheeze, Tom Mewwy! I couldn't have thought of a better one myself, deah boy!"

"Go hon!" grinned Tom. "For those kind words, Gussy, much thanks! So kids, it's settled!"

"It is!"

Night came, and the Fourth and Shell retired to their dormitories at the usual time.

Blake & Co. had intended keeping a close watch on Dimarco, but so occupied were they with that projected jape on Figgins & Co. that they relaxed their vigilance on the Italian junior.

Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy remained awake long after the others in the dormitory had fallen asleep.

As eleven tolled from the old clock tower those four youths arose and dressed themselves.

With their boots tied together and suspended round their shoulders, they crept from the dormitory.

The Terrible Three were already out of their dormitory, and were waiting for them at the end of the passage.

"Ready?" said Tom Merry. "This way, then. Careful not to make a noise!"

The little party crept very stealthily downstairs and into the lower box-room. Tom Merry, having previously climbed through it one by one and dropped into the quadrangle.

All was dark and silent as the grave. They crossed the quadrangle to the New House.



The juniors heaved willingly, and Dimarco shot into the air like a shuttlecock. Down he came with a bump into the blanket, to be shot up again the next minute. "This is just to teach you a lesson!" said Tom Merry, in a warning voice. "If you make a noise and bring the masters, we shall have to tell them of the duel!" (See page 12.)

Not a light glimmered anywhere, seniors and juniors and Mr. Ratcliff all having retired for the night.

Suddenly Blake noticed that one of the lower windows was open.

"That's rummy!" said Tom Merry. "A maid would hardly have been careless enough to have left the window unlocked and wide open. Perhaps a burglar has broken in, or— My hat! Look!"

Tom's quick eyes caught sight of a dark, shadowy figure moving near the cloisters, to disappear among the old elms.

The others saw it, too, when Tom had pointed it out to them.

"Great pip!" gasped Blake. "Then it must be a burglar—or somebody who has no right to be out here at this time of the night. Chaps, I vote we stalk that giddy marauder and find out who he is, and what he's up to."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!" said Tom Merry, setting his teeth. "Mind how you go! This is where our training as Boy Scouts will come in handy!"

Keeping well within the shadows, and making the least noise possible, the School House juniors crept over to the elms. Arriving by the cloisters, they were suddenly startled to hear a low cry ring out through the night darkness.

"My hat! Did you hear that, you fellows!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It came from the cloisters, and—well, we must find out what it means!"

The juniors made their way stealthily into the cloisters. Rounding a corner of one of the wide, lofty arches, they suddenly came upon a scene that caused them to stop motionless with horror.

The moon, coming out just then from behind a thick bank of cloud, revealed to them Dimarco and Contarini in the small courtyard of the old cloisters. Both of the Italian juniors had knives, and they were fighting a duel!

"Oh, good heavens!" muttered Blake. "I—I didn't know that Dimarco was out of the dormitory! He and Contarini must have arranged this between them! They arranged to fight a duel—with knives—out here in the middle of the night!"

"Fools!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "They'll do each other some awful damage if they're not stopped! Come on!"

Dimarco and Contarini were fighting with all the reckless fury of their native tempers when Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. dashed upon them.

The chums of the Lower School did not waste time upon ceremony. Their methods were rough but effective. They grasped the two duellists and hurled them in different directions to the ground. Then they piled on top of them and wrested the knives from their grasp.

"Now, you idiots!" cried Tom Merry angrily. "You've got to understand here and now that this sort of thing isn't allowed! You could be put into prison for fighting as you were! Haven't you been told before about it? Contarini, you should have known better!"

"The vendetta!" muttered Contarini savagely. "We have sworn the vendetta! We must have vengeance—"

"What you both want is a jolly good hiding apiece with a whip!" retorted the Shell captain. "Why, I've never heard of such a thing—especially between two school kids! It's ridiculous, and would be a laughing matter were it not so terribly dangerous. I'll take charge of those knives. Thanks, Lowther! I'll see that these two maniacs don't touch them any more!"

Dimarco and Contarini struggled to get free, but they were powerless in their schoolfellows' grasp.

"What are we going to do with them, Tommy?" inquired Blake. "By rights, of course, we should report them to the Head. It's a serious matter, and—"

"We won't do that," said Tom Merry quietly. "We can

manage this affair on our own. Run along to the woodshed, Monty, and get some rope."

Rope was quickly procured, and the two Italian boys were gagged and bound securely.

"Now let's carry out our raid on Figgins & Co.," said Tom Merry, with a laugh. "Contarini has very kindly left the window open for us, so there'll be no trouble in getting in. You wait outside, Blake, and collect the bedclothes as we others throw 'em out of the window. Come on!"

Contarini and Dimarco were carried out of the cloisters and dumped down against the wall of the New House, underneath the window of Figgins & Co.'s dormitory.

The Terrible Three, and Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy then cautiously entered the New House via the open window, and crept stealthily and silently up to the dormitory.

Various sounds of heavy breathing and snoring intimated to them that Figgins & Co. were sleeping the sleep of the just.

They stole into the dormitory, and Tom Merry locked the door quietly behind him, slipping the key into his pocket afterwards.

"Now get the bedclothes off one article at a time!" he whispered. "I've got an oilcan here, and I'll grease the window first. Then it will open without making a noise."

This was done, the dormitory window coming open without rousing the New House fellows, who were still slumbering in blissful ignorance of the presence of their rivals from the School House.

Tom Merry & Co. silently and swiftly removed the bedclothes one by one from the beds, commencing with the overlays, and then the blankets, leaving only the sheets. All these were dropped noiselessly out of the window as they were taken off, to be collected and made into a pile by Blake, who was on duty below.

The heap of bedclothing in the quadrangle rapidly assumed mammoth proportions. Tom Merry & Co., having stripped their rivals' beds of all their covering, made a rope out of two blankets, and slid down it from the window to the quadrangle. The whole operation did not take a couple of minutes, so dexterously was it carried out.

"All serene?" whispered Blake.

"Rather!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Not one of them woke up while we were shifting the bedclothes. Perhaps they'll wake in a minute, when the cold begins to penetrate. If not, we'll wake 'em."

But Tom Merry & Co. had no need to wake their rivals.

It was a very cold night, and suddenly Figgins gave a shiver on his bed, and reached out with his hands with the intention of grasping the bedclothes and pulling them tighter round him.

But, alas! there were no bedclothes covering him, and Figgins, with a sleepy grunt, sat up.

"Yaw-aw-aw! Groooogh! Where are the giddy clothes? I— Mum-my hat! They're gone!"

It came as a great shock to Figgins to discover that his bed was bare. He rubbed his eyes, and sat up with a jerk.

"What checky ass has bagged my bedclothes?" he roared. "I'll punch his nose, and—"

"Gerroooogh!" came a growl from Fatty Wynn's bed. "Whassermarrer with the bedclothes? They've r-r-rolled off, and I'm c-c-c-cold—"

"Oh, jemy!" gurgled Figgins, looking round him in the faint moonlight. "There aren't any blankets on any of the beds! My only hat!"

The juniors were curled up in their pyjamas in their bare beds, some slumbering, others shivering sleepily.

"Wake up, you chaps!" howled Figgins. "All our bedclothes are gone!"

The New House juniors woke up. Candles were lit. All gazed about them bewilderedly, wondering whether they were really awake, or whether they were in the midst of some horrible dream.

The bitter cold of the night wind coming through the window, however, soon brought home to them the harsh reality of their situation.

"Gug-great Scott!" stuttered Figgins, shivering violently. "Somebody's b-b-b-been in here and p-p-pinned all our bedclothes! How c-c-can we s-s-sleep without any bub-b-b-bedclothes? Oh dud-d-dear!"

All the juniors were shivering in their bare night attire. Some of them put on their jackets for warmth.

"Groo-oooh! It's bub-beastly c-c-c-cold!" gasped Redfern between his chattering teeth. "I'm b-b-blessed if I can m-m-make this out! Wh-what's the matter, Fatty?"

"The dud-d-door's locked!" howled Fatty Wynn, who had been wrenching at the door-handle for some time. "And the k-k-key's gone! We've been r-r-raided, Figgy!"

A chorus of soft chuckles came to the startled New House juniors' ears from somewhere outside the window. They rushed to the window and gazed downwards. They saw their bedclothes lying in a great heap in the quadrangle below, and

round that heap stood Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., grinning up cheerfully at them.

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry sweetly. "Do you feel rather exposed up there without your bedclothes? Rather a cold night, isn't it? The wind nips a bit, I think."

"You—you rotters! Give us our bedclothes!" howled Figgins, in a suppressed voice from the window. "We'll catch our deaths of c-c-c-cold, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. chuckled at the sight of their shivering rivals. The New House juniors were beside themselves with helpless wrath.

"You can't leave us without bedclothes all night!" exclaimed Figgins. "We want our b-b-bedclothes, and—"

"Before we allow you to have them, dear children, there is a paper here which you must sign," replied Tom Merry.

"I will read it out to you. This is how it goes: 'We, the undersigned, having been made to feel the draught by the gentlemen of the School House, hereby state our abject sorrow at our puny efforts at making the School House look small, and admit that the School House is Cock House at St. Jim's, and that the New House is only a spurious imitation. We therefore beg pardon for our naughty ways, and promise to be good little boys in future.'"

"Mum-my hat!" stuttered Figgins from the window. "You—you want us to s-s-sign that?"

"Sign it, or we'll take all your bedclothes back to the School House with us!" chuckled Tom Merry. "All's fair in love and war, you know!"

"We won't sign!" howled Figgins.

"Then stay there and shiver!" grinned Blake.

The New House juniors were shivering in real earnest. They blinked down at their bedclothes, and then at their tormentors, and then at Figgins.

"Are you going to sign?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Never!" howled Figgins.

"I—I say, Figgy, it's horribly cold, you know!" stuttered Fatty Wynn. "Those rotters mean b-b-business, and—"

"We can't stay here all night without bedclothes!" gurgled Pratt. "Br-r-r!"

Figgins looked helplessly about him, and then glared down at the School House juniors.

"All right, you awful rotters!" he said between his clattering teeth. "We're cold, and you—you've got the upper hand now. But w-w-wait! We'll p-p-pay you out for this!"

Tom Merry wrapped up the paper in a pencil and flung it up through the window. Figgins & Co. all signed it with hands that trembled with the cold. The paper was flung down again, and Tom Merry & Co. looked at it in great satisfaction.

"Good!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We'll hang this in the Common-room to-morrow for the world to see! Thanks awfully, dear boys! Now, you can have your bedclothes. And you can have Contarini back. First of all, he's got to be bumped for being a bloodthirsty young idiot, and duelling with Dimarco. Grab him, boys!"

Contarini was grabbed, and his bonds taken from him. Then Tom Merry & Co. subjected him to a severe bumping in the quad, afterwards rolling him up in Figgins & Co.'s bedclothes, and leaving him there.

Dimarco had watched the punishment of his rival with wide-open, gleaming eyes.

"There you are, Figgy!" said Tom Merry, pointing to the heap of bedclothes in which Contarini, gasping and writhing, was a prisoner. "You can come down as soon as you like now, and fetch 'em. Good-night, old scout! Thanks for signing the paper!"

"You—you—you—"

Tom Merry & Co. laughed softly, grasped Dimarco, and hurried away with him.

They saw Figgins & Co. climbing down from their window in order to get back their bedclothes, and rescue Contarini. Chuckling softly, they entered the School House, via the lower box-room, and went up to the Shell dormitory.

The juniors in there were all awake, and candles were lit. Chuckles arose when the paper was passed round and read.

"Good for you, Tommy!" grinned Clifton Dane. "The whole school will roar over this paper to-morrow. But what have you got Dimarco here for? What has he been up to?"

Tom Merry explained how they had found Dimarco and Contarini in the cloisters fighting a duel.

The Shell fellows gasped and looked aghast at Dimarco.

"The dangerous little heathen!" exclaimed Talbot. "He wants his hot temper knocked out of him!"

"And we'll proceed to do it now, chaps!" said Tom Merry. "A gentle tossing in a blanket will do Dimarco the world of good! Who'll assist?"

"We all will, Tommy!"

Dimarco was released, and Tom Merry gave him a severe talking to. He was then grasped in many hands and flung into the blanket.

"Now, you'd better take your gruel quietly, Dimarco!"

said Tom in a warning voice. "If you make a noise and bring in the masters or prefects we shall have to tell them of the duel, and you'd be turned out of St. Jim's for that. This is just to teach you a lesson in time. Now, boys, are you ready? Heave!"

The juniors heaved willingly, and Dimarco shot into the air like a shuttlecock. Down he came with a bump into the blanket, to be shot up again next minute.

"There!" said Tom Merry, as Dimarco was allowed to bump to the floor at last. "I hope that's taught you to curb your temper, Dimarco, and that you won't be so handy with weapons in the future. Cart him away, Blake! I think he's had enough."

CHAPTER 7.

Playing with Fire!

THE news of the midnight duel between Contarini and Dimarco leaked out next day at St. Jim's, and both the delinquents were summoned before Dr. Holmes. The Head of St. Jim's gave them a severe talking to, and then a caning.

The masters and prefects were instructed to keep Dimarco and Contarini as far apart as possible. Dr. Holmes was plainly worried by the affair, and he told Mr. Railton of his intention of notifying Dimarco's parents.

Contarini was forbidden to enter the School House except for lessons, and Tom Merry & Co. did their best to keep a watchful eye on Dimarco.

A few evenings later Aubrey Racke, Crooke, Clampe, and Mellish were crossing the quadrangle from the direction of the old tower. They had spent over an hour in there together, surreptitiously playing a little game of cards and smoking cheap cigarettes—bidden pastimes to which the rotters brigade at St. Jim's were secretly addicted.

Night had fallen, and there was no moon.

Racke suddenly gripped Mellish's arm and pointed to a schoolboy figure that was prowling about the School House in the darkness.

"Contarini!" ejaculated Racke. "He's hanging about on the offchance of getting in. He's after Dimarco, of course."

"My word!" said Clampe with a snigger. "If those two do meet again there'll be no end of a squabble, and—"

"Why shouldn't they meet?" said Mellish, looking round stealthily. "Look here, you chaps, it would be great fun to get Contarini and Dimarco together. It would be more fun than shutting a couple of cats in a dustbin! They'd fight and—well, what about it? Tom Merry and Blake and that gang are doing amateur theatricals in the Rag, so they won't interfere with us. If we can smuggle Contarini into the School House—"

"It would be sport, as you say, Mellish," said Racke, his eyes gleaming spitefully. "But what about Contarini?"

"If we got him in he'd keep mum about it," said Mellish. "He'd be glad of the chance of getting at Dimarco, and he wouldn't sneak. Let's talk to him, anyway."

Aubrey Racke shook his head.

"It's too risky for me!" he said. "There's no knowin' what those two might do to each other if they once got goin'. You others can go ahead if you like, but I'm not havin' anythin' to do with it! Personally, I think it's a mad idea."

Mellish sneered.

"Oh, well, if you're funky of having a bit of fun, Racke, I'm not!" he said. "Who's coming with me to work the trick?"

Clampe and Crooke followed Mellish.

Racke gave a careless laugh and strolled away.

The other three young rascals went up to Contarini, who was hovering about the School House, under the window of Study No. 6 for some purpose.

He gave a start on seeing Mellish & Co.

"Hallo, Contarini!" said Mellish. "It's only us. You want to get in to see Dimarco, eh?"

"Yes; but I am forbidden," replied Contarini in a low voice.

Mellish grinned.

"I think we could manage it for you, Contarini," he said. "I'd like to see you give Dimarco a jolly good hiding—he needs it! Look here, if you'll promise, honour bright, not to split on us, whatever happens, we'll get you in."

Contarini's dark eyes gleamed eagerly.

"I promise!" he exclaimed. "I will not tell."

"All serene!" chuckled Mellish. "We'll just pop in and see how the land lies."

The three young rascals went into the School House. The corridors and Hall were deserted. The juniors were engaged in amateur theatrical rehearsals in the Rag, the seniors were at the Debating Society meeting, whilst of the fags there was no sign. Those youths were comfortably ensconced in the Second Form room before a roaring fire, busy in the task of toasting kippers.

"The coast is clear, so far," said Mellish. "I think we can manage it."

They went outside and called softly to Contarini.

The New House junior came up at once.

He entered the School House, walking in the midst of Mellish & Co. Those youths kept Contarini well concealed, in case they should meet anyone.

They passed through the Hall and up the stairs.

On the upper landing Cutts of the Fifth was talking to St. Leger, but they only gave the juniors a cursory glance as they walked by.

Skimpole passed them without recognising Contarini. At last they reached the Fourth Form passage.

"Here we are, Contarini!" chuckled Mellish. "You'll find Dimarco in Study No. 6, I expect. If not, you can wait for him, and then I hope you'll settle accounts with the rotter!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Clampe.

Contarini clenched his fists and moved swiftly and silently along the Fourth Form passage.

He paused at the door of Study No. 6, and then thrust it open.

Mellish, Clampe, and Crooke, waiting at the corner of the passage, heard an exclamation in Italian from within, and next minute Contarini had entered the study and closed the door behind him.

"He's in!" muttered Mellish.

"Now for a rumpus!" said Crooke.

"He, he, he!" giggled Clampe. "You'll hear the feathers fly in a minute!"

Angry voices sounded from inside Study No. 6, followed by a wild scuffling noise and a crashing of chairs.

"They're going it!" chuckled Mellish. "I hope they break up the happy home in there, too!"

"Rather!"

"He, he, he!"

Thus charitably minded, the three young rascals listened to the sounds of fighting in Study No. 6 in high glee.

Suddenly a shrill, terrifying scream rang out.

Mellish & Co.'s amused looks vanished. Their faces turned pale.

"Did—did you hear that?" stammered Mellish.

"Ye-es!" gasped Crooke. "I—oh! There it is again!"

Another cry rang out, louder than before, from behind the closed door of Study No. 6.

Mellish & Co. exchanged uneasy glances.

"I—I say, something terrible is happening in there!" muttered Crooke. "Racke was right—it was a mad thing to do, to get those two reckless young fools together to fight. Hark!"

Somebody screamed again in Study No. 6, and following the scream came the sound of a thud on the study floor, and then silence.

Mellish licked his dry lips and looked fearfully at his two trembling companions.

"I—I don't like this!" he muttered thickly. "Let's clear off. We—we needn't know anything about it. Come on, you fellows—let's get away from here!"

Thoroughly frightened, the three young rascals took to their heels and ran. They did not meet anybody except Taggles, and they crouched in an alcove until he had gone by.

They then crept down the back stairs and made their way into the Common-room.

Not a word did they speak concerning what they had just heard in the Fourth Form passage. They composed themselves as well as they could, and made a pretence of playing draughts on the corner table.

CHAPTER 8.

The Fugitive from St. Jim's!

"**B**AI Jove! Whatvah has happened in heah?" D'Arcy made that astonished exclamation on entering Study No. 6 just before bed-time. Blake, Herries, and Digby were behind him. The chums of the Fourth had just returned from the Rag.

The study was in a state of great confusion. The tablecloth lay on the floor and appeared to have been trodden on, the inkpot was upset all over the carpet, and so was the coal out of the scuttle. Two chairs lay on their backs on the floor, and a pane of glass in the bookcase was smashed.

The chums of Study No. 6 looked at their study in amazement.

They then became aware of a boy who was sitting in the armchair, with his head bowed down and clasped in his hands.

It was Luigi Dimarco.

"Dimarco!" cried Blake, springing forward. "What has happened? Who did this?"

Dimarco looked up. There was a haggard expression on

his face, and his eyes had a dull light in them. His hair was dishevelled, and a bruise showed on his forehead.

"How did our room come to get into this state?" demanded Herries.

Dimarco shook his head.

"Don't you know?" asked Blake, looking curiously at the Italian boy.

Dimarco shook his head again.

Herries gave a snort.

"He's telling whoppers! He knows all about it! Look at him! He's been fighting in here!"

The chums of Study No. 6 looked hard at Dimarco.

The Italian junior avoided their glances and sat sullenly in the armchair with lowered head.

"Look here, Dimarco, you cannot deny that you've been fighting in here with somebody!" rapped Blake sharply.

"Who was it—Contarini?"

"I tell nothing!" replied Dimarco, setting his teeth.

"Bai Jove! I weally think you should tell us, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Theah isn't any secwet about it, is theah?"

Dimarco shook his head, but remained silent.

"We'll make him tell!" roared Herries. "I vote we bump the silly ass!"

"Hear, hear!"

Blake & Co. laid violent hands on Dimarco and whirled him out of the armchair. He shouted in Italian and struggled wildly.

Bump! Bump Bump!

"Carambo! Ow! Yarooogh!"

"Now will you tell?" demanded Blake. "We mean to find out, and—Hallo, Kildare!"

The captain of St. Jim's looked in grimly at the doorway. The chums of Study No. 6 ceased to bump Dimarco, and allowed him to rise breathlessly to his feet.

"Not so much noise in here, please!" rapped Kildare.

"I'm looking for Contarini. Have you seen him?"

"No, Kildare," said Blake. "We've been rehearsing in the Rag all the evening."

"What about Dimarco?"

The Italian boy gritted his teeth. He made a gesture as if to speak, but restrained himself.

"Have you seen Contarini, Dimarco?" asked Kildare, looking straight at him. "He is missing from the New House and cannot be found anywhere. Do you know where he is?"

Dimarco shook his head.

"How should I know?" he said sullenly.

Kildare looked curiously round the room.

"You kids have been making a fine mess of your study," he said. "What was the trouble?"

"We didn't do it!" growled Blake. "We found our room in this state when we came in just now, and we were bumping Dimarco to try to knock some information out of him."

Kildare fixed a grim look on Dimarco.

"Has Contarini been here, Dimarco?" he exclaimed.

"Answer me, do you hear?"

Dimarco shook his head.

Kildare fastened a strong grip on the Italian boy's coat-collar.

"Come with me, Dimarco!" he exclaimed. "I'll see if I cannot make you speak!"

Blake & Co. exchanged uneasy glances as Kildare marched Dimarco away.

"So Contarini's missing!" muttered Digby. "He—he can't be found! Dimarco knows more about the affair than he cares to tell! Contarini has been here—and those two have been fighting. I'll bet my boots on that!"

Blake nodded.

"You're right, Dig! Contarini got in here somehow. He and Dimarco came to blows, and—well, I hope to goodness nothing serious has happened."

"Bai Jove! This is a most sewious mattah!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "I feel fwightfully wowwied, deah boys! Bai Jove! What are you lookin' at, Hewwies?"

Herries was examining a large red stain on the carpet.

"Blood!" gasped Herries, shuddering.

Blake and the others turned pale.

"Rats!" muttered Blake. "It can't be! I——"

"It is!" said Herries. "Look! A great pool of it——"

"Why, you silly ass, it's only red ink!" cried Digby suddenly. "Look! Here is the broken bottle near by. The red ink has been knocked down and upset!"

The others drew deep, deep breaths of relief.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Blake. "Herries, you chump, you gave me quite a turn!"

They laughed over the incident, but their laughter was forced. The chums of Study No. 6 were plainly uneasy and apprehensive.

Dimarco returned to the study some time afterwards. His eyes were glittering fiercely, and his hands were tucked tightly beneath his armpits. It was apparent that he had just undergone a severe caning.

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"Well, you bounder, have you told Kildare the truth?" demanded Blake.

Dimarco flung himself down in the armchair.

"I tell Kildare nothing!" he muttered. "I speak to nobody. Non mi ricordo—I do not remember. That is all."

Blake & Co. set about clearing up their disordered study, and the task occupied them till bed-time.

The whole of St. Jim's was buzzing with excitement. Contarini of the New House was missing! He had not been seen since just after tea-time. The whole school had been hunted high and low for him, but without result. Dimarco of the Fourth had been questioned, but had refused to speak. Kildare had caned him, but still Dimarco's lips remained sealed. That something had taken place in Study No. 6 was apparent from Dimarco's dishevelled appearance and the fact that Blake & Co. had found their study in disorder on coming in.

Where was Giacomo Contarini? What had happened to him?

The night passed, and morning came, and St. Jim's heard, with alarm and misgiving, that Contarini had not been found. His bed had not been slept in that night. His disappearance was as mysterious as it was startling.

Dimarco of the Fourth was taken to Dr. Holmes and subjected to a severe cross-examination. But the Italian boy was more stubborn and uncommunicative than he had been the previous evening. He maintained complete silence to all questions, even after Dr. Holmes had caned him, and at last the Head had to admit the impossibility of obtaining information from Dimarco.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. discussed matters gravely in Study No. 10 in the Shell passage that morning.

"I don't know what to make of it," said Blake. "The whole school is talking. Everybody thinks that Contarini came into my study last night, that he and Dimarco had a fight. What happened after that is a mystery!"

"It's rotten!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We must find out what Dimarco is keeping back. We've got to solve the mystery somehow. The only thing to do, then, is to watch Dimarco!"

"Just what I was goin' to suggest, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "We'll watch him closely in whatever he does. He musn't know that he is bein' watched, of course!"

"Any silly chump knows that!" growled Blake. "But that's the idea. We'll keep our eyes on Dimarco."

The Italian boy was shunned by all his schoolfellows that day. It was believed that he was responsible for Contarini's disappearance, although it was impossible to say for certain owing to the lack of proof. Dimarco's silence, however, only tended to lower the black cloud of suspicion that hung over him.

After tea that day the Italian boy slipped out of Study No. 6 and went down into the quadrangle. Dusk was deepening over St. Jim's, and the old elms and cloisters were thick with shadows.

Tom Merry, Lowther, Blake, Digby, and D'Arcy followed Dimarco at a respectful distance and saw him go into the cloisters. They ran up quickly, and, crouching behind the arches, they watched Dimarco pacing up and down, his hands clenched, his eyes burning with a strange, fierce light. The boy seemed to be distracted.

Suddenly two forms detached themselves from the shadows and confronted Dimarco.

They were Mellish and Clampe.

"Just a minute, Dimarco!" said Mellish. "We want to know what you did to Contarini in your study last night!"

Dimarco gave a cry and whirled round on Mellish.

"Sapristi! What do you mean? I did nothing——"

"Rats! You can't pull the wool over our eyes!" sneered Mellish. "We were watching at the end of the passage. We saw Contarini enter Study No. 6 and heard him talking to you. We also heard you fighting, and heard screams——"

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake, clutching Tom Merry's arm.

Dimarco was looking at Mellish with eyes that dilated with fear.

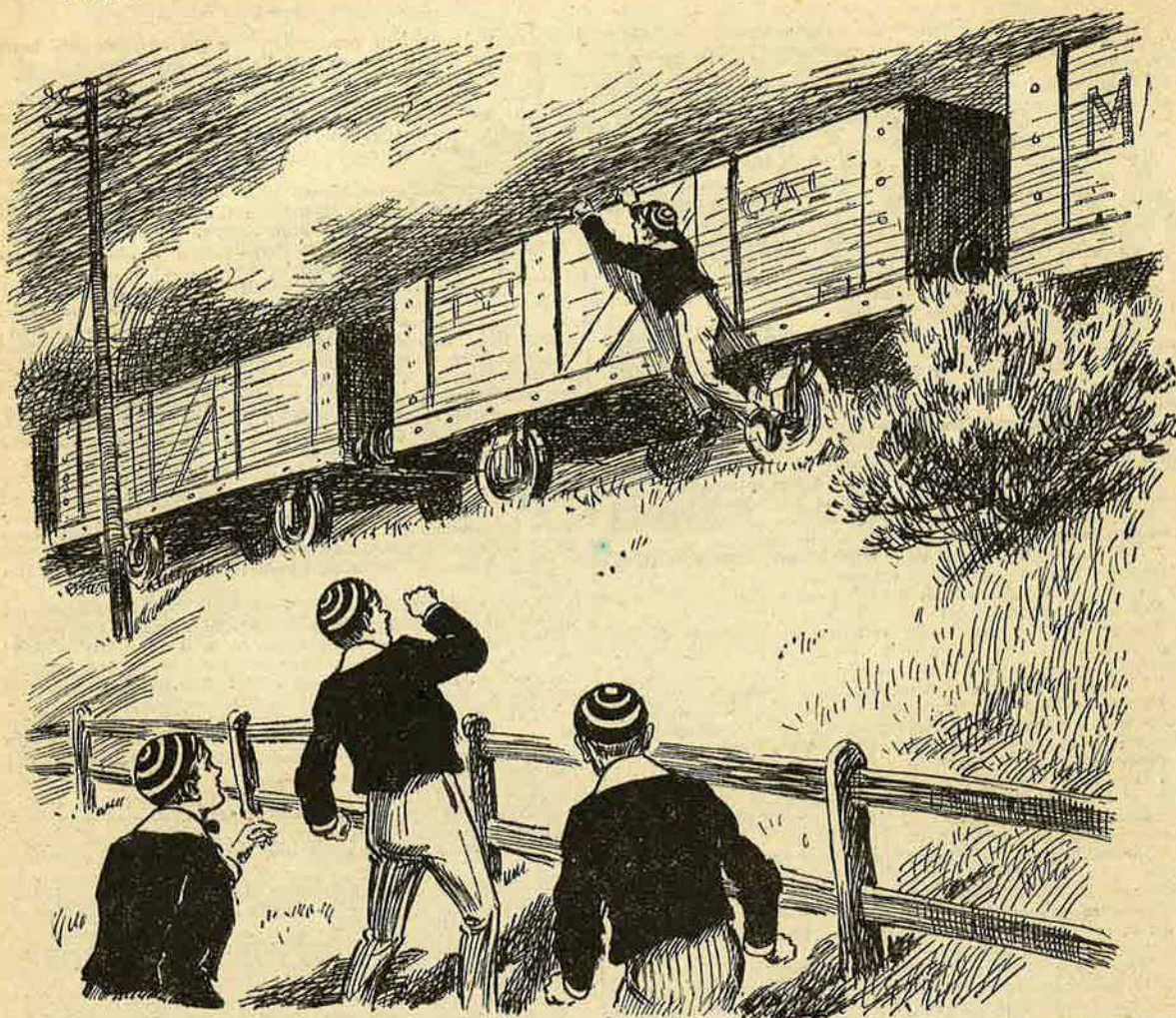
"So! You saw—and heard——"

"Yes! And we'll tell, unless you make it worth our while!" came the cool rejoinder from the cad of the Fourth.

"Look here, Dimarco, we don't say that you're at the bottom of Contarini's disappearance, but there's no telling what the rest of the school would think if they knew what we know. I reckon it will be worth your while to—make it worth our while to keep silent. We happen to be jolly hard pressed for money at the moment, otherwise—well, we wouldn't stoop to this. So, to put things plainly, Dimarco, you've got to give us a quid each; otherwise, we'll go straight to the Head and tell him that—— Yarooogh!"

Mellish did not finish that sentence; for Dimarco, with a sudden movement, lashed out with his right fist and dealt Mellish a smashing blow on the chin.

Mellish gave a howl and staggered back. Next minute



As the goods train roared past, Tom Merry & Co. saw the lithe, active figure of Luigi Dimarco give a spring. The Italian boy's hands clutched the footboard of a truck, and he was drawn along. "The mad idiot!" cried Tom Merry. But Dimarco did not fall. With his foot on the truck he clambered up to the side of the truck. (See page 16.)

another blow caught him between the eyes and made him blink.

Clampe started to run, but Dimarco whirled round on him and sent him reeling under a rain of fierce punches.

"Bai Joye!" murmured D'Arcy. "Good old Dimarco! He's pitchin' into them, deah boys!"

Mellish and Clampe rallied, and, pushing back their cuffs, attacked savagely. They imagined that between them they would be able to overpower the Italian boy.

But they reckoned without their host. Dimarco soon proved that he could fight with his fists as well as with weapons. He hit out to right and left, and the howls of Mellish and Clampe testified to the accuracy of his blows.

"Yooop!" moaned Mellish, dabbing at his nose.

Clampe gave a howl next minute as Dimarco's hefty right crashed upon his jaw.

The two young rascals of the Fourth did not wait for any more. They took to their heels and fled precipitately from the cloisters.

Dimarco, with a bitter laugh, flung their caps after them. Tom Merry & Co. exchanged glances.

"My hat!" muttered Blake. "Dimarco's got some pluck, and no mistake! Mellish and Clampe got what they deserved, the low-down rotters!"

"Yes, and they'll go straight and tell the Head what they know!" said Tom Merry in a quiet voice. "Dimarco is in for it now!"

"We've got to find out what happened in our room last night!" said Blake grimly. "Mellish, I believe, was telling the truth when he said he heard screams. And Dimarco's got to tell us all about it!"

The Italian boy wheeled round fiercely when he saw the juniors come out of their hiding-places. His face went white. "You!" he cried. "Then you heard?"

"Yes, we heard!" rapped Blake. "Now, Dimarco, you've got to tell—"

He broke off, for Dimarco gave a sudden spring forward, and before the chums of the School House realised what had happened he had burst his way past them and disappeared into the fast-gathering dusk.

Tom Merry raised a shout. "After him! Don't let him escape! Come on, you chaps!"

They tore after Dimarco. Reaching the end of the cloisters, they saw the Italian boy's lithe figure making for the gates.

Taggles was just closing the gates for locking-up for the night. Dimarco made swiftly towards him, and Tom Merry & Co. dashed after him.

"Look out, Taggles!" shrieked Blake. "Lock the gates—quick! He's going out! He's— Oh, you fool!"

Taggles dropped the keys as Dimarco leaped towards him, and he let out a bellow of alarm. He allowed himself to be thrust against one of the gate pillars, and next minute Dimarco had slithered through the open gates.

He turned and slammed the great iron gates together in Tom Merry's face as he ran up.

The Shell captain caught one glimpse of Dimarco's wild, flashing eyes and livid face in the lamplight, and then the fugitive disappeared down the lane.

Luigi Dimarco had run away from St. Jim's!

CHAPTER 9. Dimarco's Heroism.

"OPEN the gate!" bawled Blake. "You young warmints! You mustn't go hout!" roared Taggles, as Tom Merry and Digby dragged open the gates. "It's lockin'-hup time and— Come back! Do you 'ear? Stop! Young rips! Which I'll report yer!"

Tom Merry & Co. dashed through the gates, heedless of Taggles' angry cries, and they pounded up the lane after Dimarco.

Darkness had set in now, and the moon was hidden behind a mass of heavy black clouds. Peering ahead down the Rylcombe Lane, they saw the lithe figure of Dimarco in the light of a solitary street lamp.

The Italian boy was looking back like a hunted stag.

He evidently sensed that Tom Merry & Co. were on his track, for he turned sideways and ripped his way through a hedge, disappearing next minute into the field beyond.

Tom Merry & Co. ran as hard as ever they had done on the cinder-path. They reached the hole in the hedge and clambered through it one by one. Beyond the field was a large meadow, and beyond that the railway line, which led from Rylcombe Station to Wayland.

"He's making for the railway!" cried Blake. "We may catch up with him if we run hard! Come on!"

Dimarco turned, and in the flood of moonlight that came out from the night clouds above, he saw his schoolfellows running after him.

He scrambled over the fence that bounded the meadow, and ran up the railway embankment. Tom Merry & Co. tore through the meadow after him.

There was a roar round the bend in the railway, and the juniors saw a goods-train approaching. It was not moving at any great speed. Dimarco ran towards it, and crouched beside a telegraph post at the side of the line.

"He means to board that train!" said Blake grimly. "Chaps, we must stop him if we can!"

"Wun like anythin', deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy.

But they were too late!

The goods-train roared past, and they saw the lithe, active figure of Luigi Dimarco give a spring. The Italian boy's hands clutched the side of a truck, and he was drawn along.

"The mad idiot!" cried Tom Merry. "If he falls—"

Dimarco did not fall. Gaining a foothold on the buffers, he clambered up the side of the truck, watched breathlessly by the juniors at the bottom of the embankment below.

Next minute he was lost to view.

"He's done us again!" muttered Blake, clenching his fists. "Goodness knows where he'll get to now, and—"

"Look at him!" cried Tom Merry. "I don't believe he means to stay on the train!"

The railway line stretched for miles through the open fields, and, climbing up the embankment, the juniors obtained an uninterrupted view of the goods-train as it clattered in its journey to Wayland.

Dimarco was crouching on top of the truck—now climbing down to the footboard below.

"He's going to jump off!" exclaimed Digby.

The train receded far into the distance, but in the moonlight the watching juniors could still see the form of Dimarco crouching on the footboard of the truck.

Minutes passed, the moving train gradually becoming smaller, then something seemed to drop from it to the side of the line as it climbed the gradient by Cope Hill.

"It's Dimarco!" muttered Tom Merry. "He's jumped off the train at Cope Hill!"

"Then we'll follow!" said Blake grimly. "We'll hang on to his trail while we can."

The juniors ran along the railway line towards Cope Hill. The train had now disappeared over the brow of the hill, and all was silent. The moon shed its soft radiance down on the railway line and lighted the juniors' path. Cope Hill was nearly a mile away. Would they be able to pick up the fugitive's trail when they got there?

Trees grew on each side of the line by Cope Hill, and beyond that was Wayland Heath. Standing at the bottom of the hill was a grim, tumble-down old farmhouse that had been untenanted and boarded up ever since Tom Merry & Co. could remember the neighbourhood.

Looking towards this spot as they hurried along the railway line the juniors were suddenly amazed to see a column of smoke rise from the old farmhouse, followed by a lurid flame.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Blake. "The farmhouse is alight!"

By the time the juniors neared Cope Hill the farmhouse was well ablaze. Its rotten timbers became ready prey to the great hungry flames that enveloped the old structure like a ghastly, crimson mantle. The noise of the flames was like the savage howling of a thousand demons. The heat was terrific. Crash upon crash sounded, and myriads of sparks arose as the inner timbers of the farmhouse fell.

"Bai Jove! The place is well alight, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy, as the juniors scrambled down the railway embankment and stood round the crackling blaze, their faces tinted red by the crimson glow from the flames. "Nothin' can save it now. This place is miles from any o'ath house, there is no watah available, and—"

"Look!" cried Tom Merry, his body stiffening suddenly.

Out of a clump of trees at the farther end of the burning

house a figure had emerged. The glare from the flames played upon him as he approached.

It was Luigi Dimarco!

Tom Merry & Co. stood transfixed with amazement and horror as Dimarco, looking neither to the right nor left, dashed through the gate, and, with head bent down and shielded by both his forearms, plunged into the hectic inferno beyond.

The terrible flames leaped at the schoolboy figure as he dashed blindly through them, and then he was lost to view.

"Good heavens!" cried Tom Merry. "Dimarco must be mad! He—he's gone into the burning house! He'll be burnt to death, and—"

"Come back, Tommy!" shouted Blake, as the Shell captain ran forward. "You'll never get him out of there! It's madness to enter, I tell you! Come back!"

No need to call Tom back. He was driven back next minute by a shower of sparks and burning timber as part of the front of the house collapsed and thundered to the ground.

The juniors watched the devouring flames in awed, terrified silence. Their faces were drawn and haggard, their eyes wide with horror.

"Dimarco's in there!" muttered Tom Merry. "Did we drive him in, I wonder? He must have seen us coming, and—and he preferred to go to his death in the flames rather than be taken back. Oh, he could save him! But there is no water—no means of getting in—"

"There he is!" shrieked Blake suddenly. "Look—at the window!"

Dimarco appeared at the window, his figure silhouetted against the crimson glare behind. And, to the amazement of the watching juniors below, they saw that he held another figure in his arms. They could not see who it was, because Dimarco had taken off his own coat and wrapped it round the other's head.

"Then there was somebody else inside!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "Dimarco didn't run in to escape us, then! He—he went in to rescue somebody! Oh, bravo Dimarco! The kid had the pluck of a thousand!"

"He's shouting to us!" cried Blake.

Through the roar of the flames the Italian junior's voice reached them.

"He is on a rope. I let him down so far—you catcha him!"

He raised the motionless figure in his arms, and lowered it through the window. Tom Merry & Co. then saw that a rope was attached to it.

Dimarco lowered the rope through the lapping flames. Tom Merry & Co. approached as close as they dared to the side of the house, underneath the window.

"No more rope!" cried Dimarco, from above. "Catch!"

The figure dropped, and Tom Merry, Blake, and D'Arcy caught it.

The coat fluttered away, and an amazed cry arose from the juniors when they saw the white, pallid face that was revealed.

"Contarini!"

They looked upward, but Dimarco was no longer at the window.

Next minute there came a sickening crash, a forest of leaping flames, and a tornado of sparks from up there. The roof of the farmhouse had crashed in!

Tom Merry & Co. carried Contarini to a place of safety, their faces blanched with horror.

"Dimarco! He is in there! He has saved Contarini, but—"

Tom Merry shuddered as he spoke the words.

Where was he? Had he been trapped by the falling roof and perished in the devouring flames?

A choking cry, almost a shriek, rang out from within the burning house. Wheeling round, Tom Merry & Co. saw a figure stagger through the flames in the yawning gap where the front of the house had fallen.

It was Dimarco. The gallant boy was still alive, but in awful peril. Fighting his way through the flames and smoke, blinded and choked, it seemed that moments only separated him from his doom.

Even as Tom Merry & Co. looked, Dimarco staggered and pitched forward on the blazing floor, where he lay in a huddled, motionless heap.

Next minute Tom Merry and Blake dashed forward, heedless of the flames and smoke now. Dimarco would be burned to death before their very eyes, unless they got him out.

"Hold on to me, Blake!" cried Tom. "I'll reach him!"

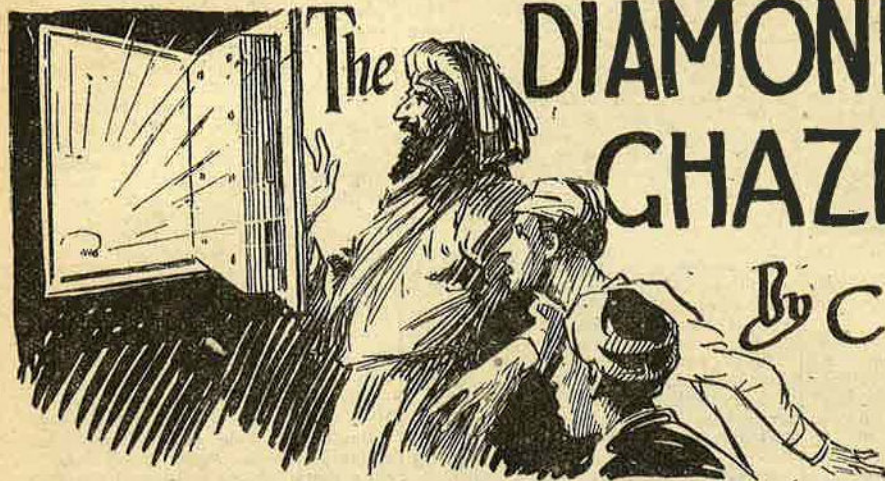
The flames scorched their clothes and burnt their flesh cruelly, the smoke filled their nostrils and choked them. But Dimarco was in a worse plight.

"I've got him!" Tom Merry's voice choked. "Pull!"

Blake and Tom Merry pulled. The still form of Dimarco came off the burning boards. Then Tom Merry leaped forward, caught up the huddled figure in his arms, and dashed into the open with him.

(Continued on page 27.)

This splendid story tells how Paul Mannering, of the Indian Secret Service, gets on the track of a famous diamond which is worth a king's ransom.



The DIAMOND OF GHAZIABAD

By Cecil Fanshaw

A Grand Yarn of Intrigue and Adventure.

CHAPTER 1.

A Strange Story!

AT a large writing-table in a darkened, plainly furnished room sat two men. One was a stout, clean-shaven Indian, clad in a rich robe of yellow silk, and wearing a great white turban; the other, a lean, hawk-faced Englishman, with a high forehead and a close-clipped, black moustache, who wore white ducks.

Seated on a cane chair, slightly in rear of the Englishman, was Paul Mannering, who was quite a youth, yet, nevertheless, a member of the Indian Secret Service. Paul, whose most striking features were a long nose and a pair of shrewd, grey eyes that missed nothing, was watching the two men closely, though he had not joined in the subdued conversation that had just ended.

Young Paul had only been in the I.S.S. a few months, previously having been a clerk in the Delhi branch of the London & Oriental Banking Corporation. But the life of a clerk had not appealed to Paul's adventurous nature, and he had always longed to be in the Indian Secret Service.

Paul's chance had come when, though still a clerk, he had unearthed a plot to murder the Viceroy of India. As was his custom most evenings, he had been exploring some ancient temples near Delhi. He had fallen asleep in one, and wakened to hear men talking in a side-chamber. The men proved to be native anarchists, who were plotting to blow up the Viceroy the following day, when he would be present at a great festival. Paul had been discovered, set on, and left for dead, but had contrived to warn the Viceroy in the nick of time, thus averting a terrible catastrophe.

As a reward for his skill in outwitting the blackguards—who had blown themselves up instead of the Viceroy—young Paul had been admitted to the Indian Secret Service.

But he had soon learnt that he was required to use his eyes and ears more than his tongue. So he sat in silence while the hawk-faced Englishman, who was Hugh Trevelyan, the chief of Paul's department, knotted his brows over the problem his native visitor had just laid before him.

For a moment in the dim chamber—that was darkened to keep out the burning rays of the sun—silence reigned, broken only by the whining drone of the

punkah* as it flapped to and fro, gently stirring the hot air.

Outside, it was a day of blazing heat. Even for Central India in the hottest season, the flesh-shrivelling scorch of the sun was exceptional. And the hot winds blew fitfully against the tattiest, on which, now and again, a native servant threw buckets of water. The water splashed on the stone floor with a refreshing, melodious twinkle.

Suddenly Trevelyan looked up and met the harassed gaze of the bulky Indian who sat facing him.

"Well, Maharajah," he said in crisp tones, "you are quite certain that you were wearing the diamond when you visited the Taj Mahal at Agra? And that you first missed it when you were in the gardens?"

"Even so," replied the Indian, whose high rank was denoted by Trevelyan's form of address. "I was wearing the jewel in my turban when I entered the gardens. But I had it not when I came out. And, listen, Mr. Trevelyan," he continued in excellent English, leaning forward anxiously, "the diamond is an heirloom. For centuries it has been in the possession of the Rajahs of Ghaziabad, of whom I am the twenty-first. And it must be recovered quickly, at any cost. Within one week is the greatest annual festival held in my State, when the priests show the diamond to the people. If, for the first time in centuries, it is not forthcoming, my people will look on the loss as an omen of disaster. There will be uprisings, and perhaps revolution!"

As he finished speaking the rajah's face became almost grey, and his voice shook. It was evident that, to him, the immediate recovery of his family's heirloom meant far more than the recovery of any ordinary jewel. Valuable though the

*Punkah. A large fan suspended from the ceiling, drawn to and fro by a cord.

†Tatties. Thick grass mats with which windows and doorways are blocked in hot weather.

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diamond of Ghaziabad was in itself, its significance as the omen of the State's fortunes rendered it absolutely priceless.

Not by so much as a gasp did Trevelyan betray his secret dismay at the rajah's words.

Though he inwardly raged at the man's stupidity in wearing such a gem, and in not reporting the loss to him for nearly a week, Trevelyan was outwardly calm.

"Seven days, Maharajah," he said slowly. "That is very little time. But if the diamond is not recovered before the festival the consequences in your State will be terrible, I understand."

"Unthinkable!" groaned the rajah, rocking from side to side in his chair. "But," he ended rather pompously, "I am confident that the chief of a department of the Secret Service can accomplish the matter. And he will not find the Rajah of Ghaziabad ungrateful."

Trevelyan made a slight gesture of impatience, then rapped out:

"Is there anyone you suspect, sir? Anyone in your State who might wish to see you deposed?"

"No," was the immediate reply. "There is no one who would dare to lay hands on the jewel. The robber must be somebody outside. But who could sell such a well-known diamond? Answer me that!"

Trevelyan rose to his feet.

"I am afraid, Maharajah," he said, "I can answer you nothing at the moment. But if you leave it to me, I can promise you that no stone shall be left unturned. And now, if you please, I wish to discuss the affair with my assistant alone."

Trevelyan touched a bell, summoning a native servant, gorgeous in a scarlet uniform, to show the rajah out to his high-powered motor-car. And with a dismal sigh, the rajah hauled himself up, bowed deeply to Trevelyan, distantly to Paul, and then waddled away.

Directly the rajah's bulky figure had vanished through the curtains that masked a doorway at one end of the room Trevelyan turned to Paul.

"Well, young fellow," he said, with a faint smile, "you've heard it all, though it took his portly highness nearly an hour to tell his yarn. What do you make of it—eh?"

"I think, sir," replied Paul, "that the rajah must have been several kinds of an idiot to wear such a diamond, when he was just touring about the country. But I've got no theories yet. He's given us no clues."

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"You're right!" snapped Trevelyan. "He was an idiot! It was just vanity, and his vanity may cost him his throne. For, if there's trouble in his State, the British Government won't help him. They'll declare him incapable of ruling, clear him out, and appoint his son in his stead. But first, when the natives discover the stone is missing, there'll be riots and bloodshed. That must be prevented, if we can possibly do it."

Trevelyan relapsed into silence, sitting with bent brows, and digging the point of his penknife into the table. Paul watched him anxiously, gasping the while at the heat, sweat trickling down his back despite the punkah that waved over his head.

"You've never seen Durga Nath yet, have you, my lad?" queried Trevelyan suddenly, without looking up.

"No, sir!" said Paul. "But—"

"Exactly!" broke in his chief. "I know what you're going to say. Durga Nath was suspected of being at the back of that conspiracy to blow up the Viceroy—the one you nipped in the bud. Well, I've got my eye on that fellow. He's only a low-caste Hindu, but he's the brains of the most dangerous gang of Anarchists in India. I happen to know he's short of money at the moment, which is the reason he's been keeping so quiet lately. I think"—went on Trevelyan, in his quiet, decisive tones—"Mister Durga Nath's movements would be worth watching. If, being short of money—for he is not an ordinary thief—Durga Nath should have stooped to stealing the Diamond of Ghaziabad, no one would know better than he how to dispose of it. That ruffian has agents everywhere. The stone would be cut up and sold in London within a month!"

Paul said nothing. But he hung on his chief's next words, hoping for an order that would send him packing at once. He was doomed to disappointment.

"I'm going to Agra," said Trevelyan, rising suddenly. "The theft was committed there, and one must trail the job from the start. What's more, Durga Nath is at Agra, has been there a week. I got a private report in this morning. You will stay here in Delhi, Mannering."

Paul looked disappointed. But Trevelyan went on quickly:

"Don't you worry, my lad. Durga Nath may have nothing to do with this business. But if he has, you'll get all the excitement you need. For I'll send you a wire, in code, of course, telling you where to join me. You'll have to 'make-up' as a Hindu, for preference, but you've learnt how to do that. And bring Sigaon with you; he's the smartest native lad on our books. One thing more—don't forget to wear your badge, whatever you do. That's all. You're in charge of this office until you hear from me. Just file the reports, and so on. Now I'm off—got to catch the Agra train within the hour."

Trevelyan hastened away, leaving Paul to the somewhat monotonous task of filing and sorting documents. But first Paul decided to send for Sigaon—one of the most innocent-looking, but, at the same time, one of the shrewdest natives employed by the I.S.S.—and acquaint him with the chief's orders.

As regards reminding Paul not to forget his badge on any account, Trevelyan might have saved his breath. For Paul had too recently become the proud possessor of one of the bronze talismans carried by Secret Service men, to omit to have it in his possession awake or asleep, though the real use of the bronze badge is for its holders to be able to obtain assistance from each other, or the police, when disguised.

So Paul sent for Sigaon, and was soon busily engaged with the native lad in filing the reports that Secret Service men had sent in from all over India—reports that contained the most startling news concealed in, seemingly, most uninteresting messages, and that had been written by every type, white and native, of man imaginable.

And, meanwhile, a red-bearded Afghan horse-dealer, clad in a rough tunic, a pair of very baggy trousers, the whole topped off with a dirty turban, was climbing into a third-class carriage on a train bound for Agra. The carriage was packed almost to the roof with yelling natives, surrounded by a weird assortment of baggage.

And the burly Afghan was Trevelyan! But his own mother would not have known him!

On a sweltering morning two days later, Paul was seated in Trevelyan's office. Opposite him sat a solemn native

lad, with round, childish-looking eyes, a black skull-cap on his head, his body clothed in a white drill suit. The punkah swished drearily over their heads as they worked.

Suddenly, pushing aside a pile of rustling documents, Paul addressed his companion.

"No amazing news in this morning, Sigaon," he said, "nothing to write home about, anyway! Though the report from Calcutta looks promising. The chap there hints he's on the track of disguised Russian spies. But that can wait, just file it. By heck, I wish Trevelyan sahib would send for us! I wonder how he's getting on?"

As he spoke, Paul leaned back wearily, and, pulling out a large handkerchief, mopped his streaming brow.

"You are right, sah!" observed Sigaon, in squeaky tones, seeming unmoved by the heat. "I also would much rather be with Trevelyan sahib than sitting in this most dismal office."

Smiling a little at the native lad's pedantic speech, Paul turned again to the papers. And for the next two hours the lads worked almost in silence, filing and decoding reports for Trevelyan to examine later.

It was the swish of the curtains that made Paul jump to his feet, just managing to suppress a glad cry. For a tall native servant, in a scarlet and gold uniform, had just entered the room. In his hands he bore a brass tray, on which lay a buff-coloured envelope.

Hoping desperately that the telegram contained the expected summons, Paul snatched up the envelope, signed the receipt, and dismissed the servant. A moment later he and Sigaon were feverishly trying to decipher a message that merely stated:

"Goods have been despatched as ordered. Accept delivery."

"I've got it!" cried Paul, within ten minutes. Then, lowering his voice, he whispered to Sigaon: "It is from Trevelyan Sahib! An order to meet him in the grounds of the Taj Mahal at midnight-to-night. Gee! I wonder what the chief has discovered! Well, hustle now! We've got to 'make up' and catch the afternoon mail."

Two hours of breathless activity followed. A reliable native clerk, who could not decipher messages, but could receive them and place them in safe keeping, was left in charge of the office. And then Paul and Sigaon hastened away to prepare for the journey.

These preparations were quite unlike ordinary people's. They did not consist of packing baggage—for, on business, the two lads carried none—they consisted of totally changing their appearances.

And nobody, not even the most lynx-eyed, would have recognised Paul and Sigaon in the two dirty native boys, who, shortly after midday, elbowed their way through the press of brightly-clad Indians that thronged Delhi railway station. In their rags and blue turbans they might have been syces (native grooms), beggars, or anything—anything but what they really were. And Paul's face, neck, and arms were stained brown with a dye that was guaranteed not to wear out.

This dipping into native life, this mingling, unsuspected, with the many coloured, chattering crowds in packed trains, and seething bazaars, was the breath of life to Paul. He had taken to the ways of the Secret Service as a duck takes to water.

Paul was bursting with impatience to reach Agra and join his chief, whom he felt certain was on the track of the

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rajah's diamond. But he little guessed the startling and unpleasant developments that awaited him.

CHAPTER 2.

Turning the Tables!

NIGHT had fallen when, tired, covered with dust, half-dead with heat, Paul and Sigaon stumbled out of the crowded train that had brought them to Agra. Then, unnoticed, jostled by the chattering concourse, at times even abused by some overdressed, wealthy native for getting in the way, they made their way through the brightly lit, narrow streets of the bazaar.

The streets twisted like a rabbit warren, and seemed designed to keep out as much fresh air as possible, for, in places, the overhanging upper storeys, jutting out from each side, nearly touched.

On the street level shopkeepers sat in the open fronts of their stores, importuning the passers-by, and sweetmeat vendors wandered about crying their wares in monotonous, sing-song voices. The bazaar was a babel of sound—and the stifling atmosphere, choking with stirred-up dust, reeked with the odour of garlic, incense, and the ordinary smell of a native crowd.

Owing to their disguises the two lads were forced to eat at a tenth-rate native cookshop; and both were equally relieved when at last they emerged from the packed bazaar into wider roads flanked by bungalows. Sigaon, who had visited the Taj Mahal before, showed the way.

A bright moon had arisen, causing the tall trees on either side of the road to throw long, black shadows across the white dust.

With hardly a word Paul and Sigaon tramped onwards, presently arriving at a high wall. This they skirted, until they reached a great, frowning gateway of stone. They passed through unchallenged, and found themselves in the garden of the Taj Mahal.

Paul gasped. Never had he seen such a wonderful sight as that great white pile of pure marble, its minarets towering up into the purple vault of the night sky. The whole palace-like tomb, bathed in the soft silvery light of the moon, presented a scene of unearthly beauty.

But instantly Paul pulled himself together. He had not come to visit the Taj for the purpose of sightseeing. Here was the spot where the Diamond of Ghaziabad had been lost. The diamond that must be recovered within five more days if calamity was to be avoided. Here also was the place where Paul and Sigaon had been ordered to meet their chief.

Reflecting on these things, and the great issues that hung in the balance, Paul tore his gaze away from the marvellous building and turned to Sigaon.

"Where shall we await the chief?" he whispered.

"Follow me," replied Sigaon in an undertone. "Beneath yonder trees we may observe all who enter the garden, without ourselves being visible."

Paul nodded, and the two lads left the tiled path that led down to the Taj itself, and turned aside into the dark shadows of the tall peepul trees that formed an avenue. Keeping parallel with the path, the lads moved forward for about fifty yards, then halted.

In front of them lay a square artificial pond, on their right the great building, some distance to their left was the stone gateway, with the path leading down from it to the square pool. No one



Paul Mannering ducked, and the burning brand whizzed over his shoulder. Then the Hindu charged upon him, his great hands outstretched. Paul avoided the grip, ducked again, and slammed out his left, which slugged into his opponent's stomach.

could pass through the gardens without being seen, while they themselves were completely hidden.

A deep silence reigned, broken only by the occasional hoot of an owl, and the croaking of frogs in the pond. But, though it was after midnight, for nearly half an hour nothing happened.

Then suddenly a dim figure appeared in the gateway. It paused and looked anxiously about. Then it moved slowly forward down the tessellated pavement, still peering round. As it approached, the two lads could make out the form of a tall native.

Paul caught his breath, and, clutching at Sigaon, whispered:

"I guess it's the chief! Something's delayed him. And he's changed his rig-out again."

The figure drew abreast of the watchers, and passed. Then Paul stepped forth from the shadows, opening his mouth to speak. But before a word passed his lips, the native jumped round, as if startled out of his wits.

"That's not the chief!" muttered Paul. "His nerves are stronger than that."

But he stood still, and the fellow, recovering himself, came forward. Paul stood silent, waiting for the other to speak the first word. The native, however, said nothing, but approached like a shadow, his bare feet making no sound on the pavement. When within a yard of Paul, he halted, and plunged his hand into his robes.

Stiffing an exclamation, Paul jumped back. And his hand flew to the automatic he carried in the ragged garments of his disguise. But no attack followed; for the native withdrew his hand and extended it, open, palm upwards.

"Know ye this?" he growled, in Hindustani.

Paul glanced at what the fellow held, and then uttered a gasp of surprise. For he had glimpsed a small brown object, a bronze talisman, the exact replica of his own.

"Who are you?" gasped Paul, in the native dialect.

"Examine the badge," replied the man.

Paul seized the object and turned it over, examining it by the light of the moon. Then a cry of amazement escaped him, and he turned to Sigaon, who had come to his side.

"It is the chief's," whispered Paul, in English. "See! It has his number on the back."

Swinging round to the strange native, Paul addressed him again, using the vernacular.

"How came you by this?" he asked sternly. "Who sent you?"

"It is enough that you know the badge," answered the man. "Trevelyan sahib himself sent me. I did but test you, to make certain—knowing only that I had to seek two native lads in these grounds. Now, return the badge and follow me. I will lead you to the chief."

Paul, thankful that he had met an ally who could elucidate the mystery of his chief's absence—instead of an enemy who would add to it—immediately returned the badge. Then, in silence, he and Sigaon followed their strange guide out of the grounds of the Taj Mahal.

Down the dusty road the two lads had recently come up moved the tall native at a quick, shuffling gait. And presently they were again in the glittering, twisting streets of the bazaar, mingling unnoticed with the jostling native throng. No one cast more than a careless glance at the tall Hindu or the two lads,

seemingly dirty horse-boys, who followed in his wake.

Suddenly the guide left the glare of the lighted shops, and plunged down a dark side-alley. Here was slime underfoot, with trampling buffaloes wallowing in it—a typical back-street of an Eastern city.

Before a tall building, the edge of whose flat roof showed like a black line against the star-spangled sky, the guide halted. He pointed to a dim, open doorway, and motioned to the two lads to enter before him. Unsuspecting, Paul and Sigaon went in.

They found themselves in a narrow passage, the stone walls of which felt damp to the touch. Paul struck a match, then, as the shadows fled away, they hastened forward. The passage ended at the top of some steps, and Paul, impatient to meet the chief, blundered on.

"Back! Jump back!" It was the voice of Sigaon, shrill with terror, hair-raising in such a spot, that broke the silence. The sharp eyes of the native lad, glancing up, had glimpsed something that seemed to move at the top of the arch above the steps.

As he yelled, Sigaon hurled himself backwards, colliding with the guide now in the rear. Both crashed to the ground. Paul swung round at the cry, only in time to see what had caused Sigaon's alarm. It was a great iron screen, that exactly fitted the archway, and that now crashed down, like a portcullis, with a thunderous clang.

Sigaon had escaped the trap by a scant inch. And he burst free from their betrayal and fled, shrieking, back down the passage. Panic drove him on, the unreasonable panic that lurks in the brains of most natives.

Involuntarily, as the screen thundered down, Paul leapt back, to tumble head over heels down the steps in his rear. Bruised and dazed, he scrambled to his feet.

His eyes already accustomed to dim light, Paul hastily took stock of his surroundings. The while he abused the "guide" for his treachery, and himself for his blind haste.

He was in a noisome dungeon, a place that smelt evilly; and by the flickering flame of a lantern set high up the wall, he could see the damp trickling down the moss-covered stonework.

"Confound it!" groaned Paul. "What

a fool I was!" Then, with a gasp, he stepped back, suddenly realising he was not alone. In the corner lay a figure, apparently bound; the figure of a native. But at Paul's words, spoken in English, it jerked itself up.

"Paul Mannering!" exclaimed the prisoner. "What the—"

But Paul, astounded at hearing his name, had darted forward, and flung himself down at the captive's side. He peered into a brown face and a red beard, then he penetrated the disguise.

"The chief!" he cried, in accents of alarm and dismay. "How the deuce did you get here?" Then he went on hurriedly: "We got your message, sir—to meet you in the Taj grounds! But a native came, who showed us your badge, and guided us here. Like a fool I got trapped, but Sigaon escaped."

"I sent no message!" gritted Trevelyan. "It must have been Durga Nath! So the brute's solved our code! He's got the diamond, too!" continued Trevelyan savagely. "For he came here yesterday, showed it, and laughed. He'll pay for that yet! I'd no sooner tracked him than I got knocked out by a mob in a back-street—woke up in here, with my badge stolen! I guess he wanted to get hold of you, young fellow, to square things for your saving the Viceroy that time. Of course, the fellow sent to the Taj was a decoy. Cunning—"

Trevelyan broke off, raising himself on one elbow, and listening with straining ears.

"They're coming!" he whispered. "The gaolers to tie you up! Quick! Lie down, and pretend to be knocked out. We'll take 'em unawares. No; don't bother about me! I've worked my bonds loose. I'm free really, and been waiting this chance!"

Paul moved quickly away, and, casting himself flat at the bottom of the stone steps, pretended insensibility. At that moment a massive door at the far end of the dungeon burst open. In rushed three natives, all stripped to the waist. Their leader, a gigantic fellow, bore a flaming torch. The flare lit up the horrible den with a ruddy glow, revealing the muscular brown bodies of the intruders.

From the corner of one eye, Paul gazed at the fellows, and shuddered. He was reminded irresistibly of pictures of the dread torturers of the Spanish Inquisition, bursting in to mangle some wretched victim.

The blackguards lost no time. The huge leader and one other rushed at Paul the third hung back to gloat over Trevelyan.

Then, even as rough hands seized Paul, there came the sound of a quick scuffle from the far corner. For Trevelyan reached up, gripped the ruffian who stood over him by the throat, and pulled him down. The fellow gave a strangled shout, and one of his comrades spun round to help him.

Paul, galvanised into action, twisted round, hunched on his knees. Out shot his hands, to seize the giant leader by the ankles, striving to bring him down. But, with a brute yell of fury, the native jumped clear. Then he hurled his flaming torch at Paul, just as the lad gained his feet.

Paul ducked. The burning brand whizzed over his shoulder, and crashed, amidst a shower of sparks, against the wall. Then the Hindu charged in, his great hands outstretched.

Paul avoided the grip, ducked again, and slammed out with his left, which slugged into his opponent's stomach. The giant gasped, but still came on, and the terrific onslaught bore Paul to the ground.

Pinioned beneath that great bulk, the lad could do nothing, and suddenly a vice-like hand gripped his wind-pipe. Feebly Paul beat with his fists at the mass of flesh and bone above him, but without result. He might have been plugging a stone wall.

Then, just as his lungs seemed bursting and a myriad stars danced before his eyes, Paul's hand fell on something. He gripped it, and, with a last furious effort, struck up. It was the half-expired torch, and the red-hot end smashed into the brown flesh of the monster's face.

Again Paul struck savagely. With a wild scream of horror and pain the giant reeled to his feet. For the moment he was blinded. Gulping for breath, Paul scrambled up. Then he followed up his advantage by another swinging blow to the big man's stomach. The fellow's knees sagged, and he crashed on his face, groaning.

His labouring lungs still sobbing, Paul swung round to assist his chief. He was in time to see that the latter, though beset by two men, needed no help.

As Paul whirled round, Trevelyan had just got both ruffians by the scruff of their necks. With amazing strength he swung them wide apart, then crashed them together. The two skulls met with a sickening crunch. Then Trevelyan cast them aside, and the two remaining Hindus clumped down in an untidy heap.

"Tables turned, I guess!" gasped Trevelyan. Then he turned to Paul. "Well done, youngster!" he cried. "You've outed your man all right. Now give me a hand to tie him up. Don't bother about those others; they'll not stic for a long time—if ever!"

As he spoke, Trevelyan scooped up the ropes with which he had been bound himself. Then he and Paul secured the writhing, groaning head gaoler, in whom there was no more desire for fight.

The job done, they stood listening a moment, straining their ears for sounds of more enemies. But silence reigned. So the two erstwhile captives stole forth from the dungeon.

They left by the door through which the gaolers had come, neither knowing whither the passage beyond would lead.

"Quietly!" whispered Trevelyan. "This is Durga Nath's house. But we must get out and have it surrounded. No use to tackle him alone. He's got a score of men inside."

On tiptoes they crept along the dimly-lit passage, then up a flight of stone steps. Now they were in a corridor, with curtained doorways ranged along each side. Which would lead out it was impossible to guess.

A moment's hesitation. Then Trevelyan dashed aside the nearest curtain.

A great roar of rage greeted his appearance on the threshold. For the room was full of gaudily clad natives, who, seated on the ground, were listening to the impassioned words of one who stood in their midst.

"Durga Nath!" gasped Trevelyan, pointing to the white-robed, bespectacled speaker. Then he dropped the curtain, and swung away, dragging Paul with him.

Along the corridor, and up more steps at the end, fled the two Secret Service agents, pursued by fierce, guttural cries, and the stamp of many feet.

At the top of the steps was another door. This they burst through, to find themselves—on the flat roof!

Neither were armed. Paul had lost his pistol during the struggle, and had only just missed it. Trevelyan had been robbed of his when he had been flung into the dungeon.

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sheer drop of thirty feet, and Durga Nath and his anarchist friends were storming up the steps howling like wolves.

CHAPTER 3.
Victory at Last!

PAUL dashed to the edge and looked over. Then swung round with a glad cry on his lips.

"Police, sir!" he yelled. "A whole bunch of 'em. I guess we win out, after all!"

Trevelyan was standing alongside the door, waiting to fell the first man who came up. But at Paul's cry he dashed forward and looked down into the dark, narrow street, dark no longer, for the ruddy glow of fast-approaching torches was turning night into day.

"Good lad, Sigaon!" cried Trevelyan. "Sigaon's down there! He must have fetched them!"

Trevelyan swung about, a sinister smile on his lips. He had just glimpsed the white-robed figure of Durga Nath as he came storming up.

But Durga Nath, the arch-anarchist, the despoiler of the Rajah of Ghaziabad, had sighted the leaping reflection of the waving brands, and knew what it meant. None but a force of native constables would dare invade the dangerous back streets of Agra city by night.

A frenzied howl burst from the Hindu conspirator. Then something flashed in his hand. A sharp crack followed, and Trevelyan ducked as a bullet whizzed over his head.

The next instant Durga Nath had vanished. And the confused cries and trampling of his followers quickly became fainter and fainter as they plunged back down the steps. Now they were as eager to rush down as, but five seconds before, they had been to press up.

Hot on their heels went Paul and Trevelyan, seeking nothing of possible bullets. But in the ramifications of the old building, tortuous dark passages that wound here and there, they quickly lost track of their quarry.

Speeding round a corner, Trevelyan dashed headlong into the constables who had just burst in. The hindmost were waving torches. But at sight of Trevelyan the front rank whipped rifles to shoulders. Small wonder, for, disguised as well as disguised, Paul and Trevelyan looked as bloodthirsty a pair of ruffians as one could wish to meet.

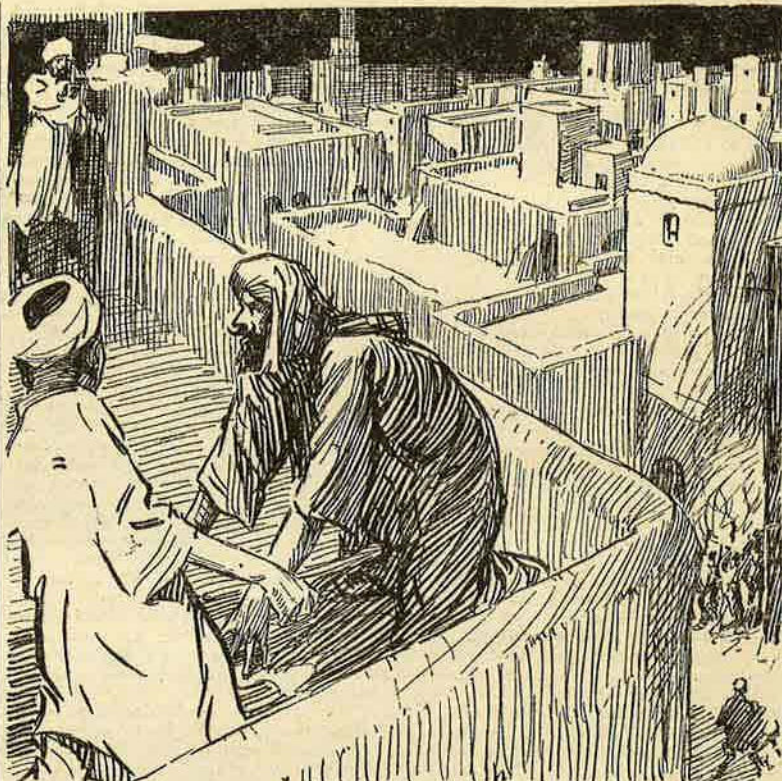
But again Sigaon saved the situation, dashing forward and, in voluble Hindustani, pointing out to the constables their grievous error.

Next followed a rapid search of the house from roof to dungeons. But too late! Durga Nath and his companions had got clean away, and with them the Diamond of Ghaziabad. All that was left to capture was the chief gaoler, Paul's assailant. The other two had ceased to breathe.

Half an hour later Trevelyan, somewhat crestfallen, led the way to a mean hovel in a side alley. That dingy, ill-lit hovel, with its chained and padlocked door, was a "rendezvous" for all Secret Service men who had business in Agra. But it looked like the home of a bazaar sweeper.

On the way, in his queer, clipped English, Sigaon told his tale.

After Paul had been trapped he had gone to the police-station, displayed his badge, and demanded assistance. But the native inspector had been dull, and only despatched his men in the nick of time.



As Durga Nath rushed upon Trevelyan he sighted the ruddy glow of the flaming torches, and knew what it meant. A frenzied howl burst from his lips, then something flashed in his hand. A sharp crack followed, and Trevelyan ducked as a bullet whizzed over his head.

Trevelyan nodded gloomily. He thoroughly appreciated the native lad's promptness, which had saved their lives, but he chafed badly at Durga Nath's escape. On the verge of capture the scoundrel had slipped through his hands. Now, moreover, the fellow knew who was on his track, and would be doubly wary. Worse, there remained only four days in which to recover the diamond. Anything might happen to the stone in that time, and then red riot would break out in Ghaziabad.

For the next twenty hours the trio remained in Agra. Separating, they hunted relentlessly for traces of Durga Nath. But there were none.

Yet, shortly after dusk, Trevelyan stumbled on a faint clue. Apparently aimlessly he was wandering up a packed street, but his eyes were keen. Suddenly his gaze fell on something—something that made him stop dead, then drew him like a magnet to the front of a tawdry jewel shop.

In the large, open front, cross-legged on the floor, sat the proprietor, a stout native. And he looked up lazily as Trevelyan approached, seeing only an Afghan horsedealer.

"What do you wish?" murmured the shopkeeper in Hindustani, bringing the palm of his podgy hand to his white turban in salaam.

"A look round," answered Trevelyan, in the same language. "Merely a look round, friend."

The fat native only grunted. So Trevelyan wandered inside, picking up trifles here and there, and pretending to examine them. Then suddenly his hand closed on the thing that had drawn him— a little bronze triangle—his own badge!

Holding the object carelessly,

Trevelyan returned to the shopkeeper and squatted down beside him.

"You have many curios, friend," he said, displaying the badge, "but none more curious than this. Whence came it?"

The fellow looked sideways at Trevelyan, then shrugged his fat shoulders.

"I forget," he answered. "I have had it a long time."

"You liar!" growled Trevelyan. Then he placed his lips close to the other's ear and whispered long and vehemently.

Before Trevelyan had finished speaking the man's face was grey with fear, and his whole body shook like a jelly.

"Nay, *Gharib Parwar, †Hamara Bap!" he whined, extending his hands. "How could I know the thing was the property of Trevelyan Sahib? How could I recognise you, the sahib who sleeps not, in that disguise? I will speak truly, lord."

"You'd better," gritted Trevelyan. "And speak softly. No, look not at me! Hold up this tray of bangles as if praising them."

Thus adjured the fellow gulped, then spoke swiftly in an undertone.

"Sahib," he said, "the thing was brought to me this morning. It was sold to me, as I buy curios, by the native driver of one of these new †firecarriages. Truly I know nothing about the man, but I can find him. Meanwhile, sahib, take back your property!"

"I will," replied Trevelyan grimly. "Now go swiftly, and bring back the man you speak of. I will wait here."

*Gharib Parwar: Protector of the Poor. †Hamara Bap: My father. ‡Fire carriage: The man meant taxicab. They ply for hire in the European quarter.

With amazing alacrity the stout jeweller scrambled to his feet, summoned a small boy from the back to take charge of his shop, then rolled away, becoming quickly lost in the crowd.

In half an hour he was back, together with a low-caste native clad in dirty khaki and wearing a brown skull-cap. Whatever the jeweller had said to his companion, it was enough to make the fellow cringe as he met Trevelyan's fierce eyes.

"Enter and be seated!" growled Trevelyan. Then, his order obeyed, he showed the bronze badge, half-hidden in his curved palm.

"The truth," he whispered. "Did you steal this?"

"No, heaven born!" stammered the new-comer. "As I live, I found it on the floor of my cab! Knowing not its value, I sold it for fourpence to this shark of a jeweller. Early this morning four native gentlemen hailed me near the station, and made me drive them to a white house, about twenty miles out. On returning, I discovered the thing in my cab. But, since I received no 'buksheesh,' I kept it. And afterwards I sold it. That is all."

But it was not all as far as Trevelyan was concerned. In a very few moments he had obtained from the taxi-driver a fair description of the four native gentlemen. Enough to make certain that one was Durga Nath! Undoubtedly, after fleeing from his house, the scoundrel had dashed to the railway-station. Accompanied by three friends, he had taken the taxi, then dashed out to the house in the country. Accidently he had dropped the stolen badge on the floor of the cab—carelessness which was to prove his undoing.

"Enough!" snapped Trevelyan, when the fellow had finished. "Get back to your cab. Have it ready. Very soon I and two others will join you. You shall take us to that white house."

Thankful to escape, the man hastened away. Trevelyan sat still, to avoid being seen with him. But, five minutes later, Trevelyan rose to go.

"Take this," he muttered, pressing a five-rupee note into the jeweller's ready palm, at the same time pretending to select a silver amulet, "and have a care what you buy in the future."

Trevelyan hastened away, leaving the shopkeeper bowing to the ground, only too thankful to see his back.

Ten minutes later, Paul and Sigaon, who had just returned to the miserable hovel—their temporary home—discouraged by a fruitless search, were staggered to see the door fly open and Trevelyan burst in.

In a moment he had recounted how he had recovered his badge, and what he had learnt. Then the trio slipped out of their wretched quarters, fastening the chain and padlock after them.

In grim silence Trevelyan led the way through the teeming bazaar and out on to the white dusty road beyond. Arriving at the railway-station, he quickly picked out his man, then they jumped into the car. There came the quick slam of the door, a hoot of the horn, then the car slid forward, its powerful lamps cleaving the darkness.

Though the road over which they travelled was uneven, it was flat and deserted and led over a wide plain. So they hit up a good speed, the rush of the air moderating the heat.

After forty minutes' furious driving, the brown chauffeur pulled up and turned round in his seat.

"The entrance to the grounds is but a little way down the road, sahib," he said. "Will the sahib descend?"

Trevelyan nodded, and the trio scrambled out—a very ragged-looking crew to be using a motor-car. Then, after ordering the driver to turn his car round and wait, ready to dash off, they crept down the road, hugging the shadows.

Arriving at two stone pillars, from which hung rusty gates, they peered up a long, neglected drive, which was flanked on each side by a tangle of tropical shrubbery. At the top, gleaming faintly in the moonlight, was a tall, white house. The place seemed deserted, and dead silence reigned.

Silently, cautiously, they approached the window, a murmur of voices becoming audible. Then Paul, who was slightly in front, applied his eye to the narrow gap in the curtains. With the utmost difficulty he repressed a gasp.

What Paul saw was a luxuriously-furnished, circular room, with low divans ranged all round. On the divans sat about a score of richly-dressed natives, all arguing at once. But these had not given Paul his shock. It was the figure who sat at the top of the circle—Durga Nath himself! And his eyes gleamed craftily from behind gold-rimmed spectacles. A bright lamp was above his head, and before him a small table, on which reposed an open iron casket.

Paul listened, understanding. The ruffians were wrangling as to whether they should cut up the Diamond of Ghaziabad or sell it whole.

Gently Paul withdrew and reported the scene. Then Trevelyan led the way into the shrubbery.

"We must draw them off," he whispered. "Create a disturbance that'll fetch 'em out of that room. Then, if we rush in, we may get the stone. We'll enter the house. Come on!"

Little anticipating the sort of disturbance they were destined to create, the trio crept round to the back of the house, to find themselves in a derelict garden bathed in soft moonlight. A tall mango-tree grew close to the house.

"Windows on the ground floor all shuttered," whispered Trevelyan. "We'll have to shin up that tree."

This was not difficult. They climbed up the tree, along a branch, thence on to the sill of a first-floor window. The old casements opened inwards, so, with soft thuds, they dropped into a bare room.

Moonbeams flooded the room, falling on to the furthest wall, which was stained with the damp of many monsoons (rainy seasons).

"This'll do!" muttered Trevelyan. "We'll make a row here. Draw 'em up. Then jump from that window, and—"

He broke off. His keen eyes had spotted straight cracks in the wall, not quite hidden by the stains of damp.

"One moment," he whispered. "That needs investigating. Maybe it's a safe!"

He went down on his knees, and producing a long instrument from his clothes, went quickly to work.

There were few things Trevelyan could not force, and at last the concealed door swung open. Then he drew in his breath, and the two lads, peering over his shoulder, gasped also. For, in the black depths of the safe, lay a glittering object, half the size of a hen's egg. And it sparkled and gleamed, with the vicious, blue-white spurt of a priceless diamond!

"Thank Heaven we kept quiet!"

muttered Trevelyan, pressing a shaking hand to his damp brow. "Why, here it is! Obviously Durga Nath wouldn't even trust his pals to look at it. Here, steady!"

Trevelyan broke off, seizing Sigaon's wrist. For the native lad had impulsively darted out his hand to grip the treasure.

"Have a care!" gritted Trevelyan, prodding at the diamond with his steel instrument. "You don't know—"

Bang!

His words were cut off by a terrific crash that resounded through the house. The three leapt back astounded. For, as the chief moved the stone, the safe-door slammed home. An intruding hand would have been crushed and its owner held prisoner. Simultaneously, electric bells buzzed and whirred all over the building. And above the clangour sounded hoarse shouts of triumph, and a rush of feet.

"A trap!" yelled Trevelyan. "That's done it! Get out!"

The frenzied yells and stamps approached quickly as Durga Nath, followed by his blackguards, stormed up, thinking to find some wretched victim held fast. But the "victim" had flown!

Before the first of the anarchists had reached the room, the two lads and Trevelyan had leapt down from the window.

They fell soft, picked themselves up, and dashed round to the front of the house.

Paul was leading, and with great strides gained the curtained window. No need for stealth now—he smashed the glass and climbed through, scrambling up as the others followed him.

Then he shouted in anger—the iron casket had gone! And the uproar above told that the conspirators were coming down again.

"Here!" shrieked Sigaon suddenly, and he dived behind a couch. There lay the casket where it had rolled, slung aside by Durga Nath, forgotten in the wild scurry to wreak vengeance!

Then the Secret Service agents hurled themselves out, as the dark-skinned ruffians came charging in.

As they raced zigzagging down the drive, a score of figures came flying after them. And vivid gun-flashes stabbed the gloom, and whining bullets hummed overhead.

But, unscratched, they regained the car. The plucky driver had waited.

The next instant they were hurtling through the night, and the sounds of pursuit grew rapidly fainter. Haunted by vague fears they burst open the casket, to find the real, dazzling gem flashing fire within.

Two days later, Paul, despatched on special duty, arrived at the palace of the Rajah of Ghaziabad. And, at an interview, to which there were no witnesses, he restored the fateful jewel to its rightful owner. It was the very eve of the great festival, thus tragedy was only averted in the nick of time.

With tears in his eyes, the foolish potentate protested he would never wear the diamond again. And Paul hoped he wouldn't, as he thought of his struggle in the dungeon.

Durga Nath's men deserted him, for without money they could do little; and their last desperate effort to raise it had failed.

THE END.

(Another splendid full-of-thrills yarn next week, chums. "OUT OF THE INFERNO!" Don't Miss It!)

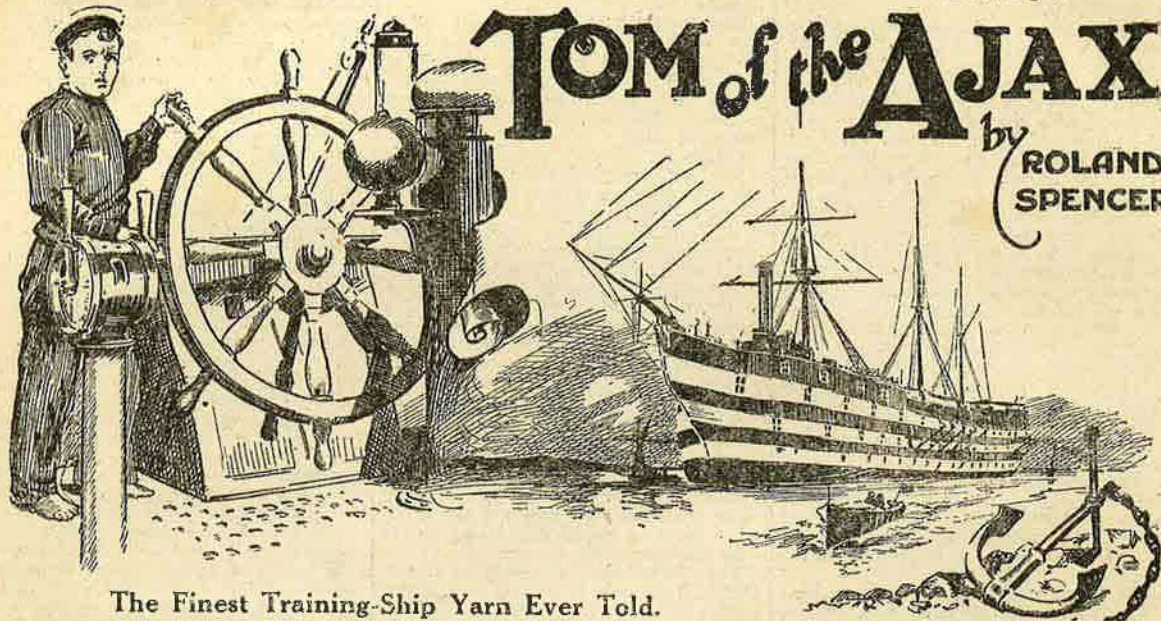
* Buksheesh: tip, or gift.

Young Tom Gale meets
more trouble—

—but he bears it
bravely!

TOM of the AJAX

by
ROLAND
SPENCER



The Finest Training-Ship Yarn Ever Told.

Port v. Starboard.

HUME'S eyes were on Tom Gale, a queer look in them.

"That's something, anyway, that you've been able to tell me!" said the Scotland Yard man quietly. "I knew that Kalche was using someone aboard the training-ship as a spy, and now I know who it is! I don't know how he has got hold of the youngster Burr, but it's clear enough. Well, I think I can promise you that Burr won't try the same thing on you again, Tom. I can't tell you why now, but I can guarantee that your life is safe enough now, though it wasn't at first."

Tom came to a standstill in sheer bewildered amazement. Burr a tool of Kalche! It sounded incredible. Yet he remembered that he himself had connected in his mind Burr's sudden wealth with his attacks upon him. So it was true!

"Of course," went on Hume, "this is deadly serious. No word of it, I know, will pass beyond either of you. And you must not denounce Burr."

"Rather not!" cried Tom and Dicky almost in one breath. And Tom felt tremendously relieved that he had not mentioned Burr's name at the inquiry.

"I'm staying for the time at the Anchor Hotel, in Fleethithe," said Hume. "Tom, I want you to tell me at once of anything that happens that seems to you possibly to have some bearing on this affair. Tell me, or tell Commander Boyce, and he will communicate with me. Well, that's that! Here you are!"

The three had arrived at the gateway of the training-ship playing-fields. Tom stopped.

"Not coming in to watch the match, sir? It'll be worth watching. When Port and Starboard get at each other, if it's on the footer-field, or boxing, or swimming, or rowing, or anything else, you can generally reckon on seeing the fur fly!"

Hume laughed, and glanced at his watch.

"Right you are!" he said. "I can just spare the time."

They turned in at the gate. Though Tom and Dicky had started off from the Ajax early, ahead of the others, it was not long before the two teams were there and ready for the whistle. Round the touchline a solid jam of boys from the Ajax were already arguing as to the respective merits of Port and Starboard. Feeling, as Tom had said, always ran high on these occasions.

At the last inter-watch match Port had beaten Starboard by 4-3, after as hot a game as most could remember. This time, however, the Starboard Watch meant to wipe out the stain, if it cost them their lives. But the two teams were well matched, and the Starboard eleven were by no means confronted with an easy job.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE, a sturdily-built youth and chief petty officer of the starboard watch aboard the famous old training-ship Ajax, which is moored near the southern bank of the Thames a quarter of a mile down the river from Fleethithe, falls foul of

STONKY BURR, C.P.O. of the port watch, a bully of the first water.

DICKY WEST is a cheerful ginger-headed youth and a staunch chum of Gale's.

Trouble arises when Tom Gale is detailed, together with Stonky Burr, as a hore in a cross-country hare-and-hounds that is to take place. Hot words and a fight follow, and Burr is thrashed and left. It is then that a mysterious, sinister man in green spectacles approaches Burr. He gives his name as KALCHE, and he entreats the aid of Burr in a plot against Tom Gale, without, however, giving any reason for this.

Tom is puzzling the whole thing out in his hammock at night, when he is startled by a rending crash, and he feels the Ajax quiver from stem to stern. The next moment he utters a startled cry as a jagged hole appears in the ship's side, tora like paper by the stem of a huge red-rusty steamer which crashes into the Ajax. In the ensuing melee a pair of hands grip at Tom's throat, and he recognises the face of Burr. Before Tom can recover he is sent hurtling off the ship into the water. He escapes, however, and is returning to the ship when he is waylaid by Kalche. His cries for help are answered, and a crowd of the Ajax boys rush to the rescue.

Further trouble follows, for, falling an easy prey to a trick of Burr's, Tom gets disgraced.

Later, by a strange coincidence, Tom meets Avalanche Hume, detective, who is also on the track of Kalche. His suspicions aroused, Hume questions Tom about Burr.

"Well, sir," says Tom, "I think I'm right in saying Burr has tried to do for me twice lately."

(Now read on.)

"We'll do our best, anyway!" muttered Tom to himself as he took his stand, having won the toss, with the ball at his feet. "Good luck to the Starboard Watch!"

And then the officer from the Ajax, who, was acting as referee, raised the whistle to his lips.

"Whoop!"

The big match had commenced.

Tom, the skipper of his team, was playing at centre-forward, and on the instant he flashed the ball across to his inside-left. The inside-left took the pass neatly and ran on, twisting round the attack of an opposing forward. Then he sent the ball, fast and low, out to the wing, where the flaming red hair of Dicky West was bobbing down the touchline.

Dicky got the ball into control without wasting a step of his run. He was a fast wing man, was Dicky West, and already, at the sight of him racing down the field towards the Port Watch goal, the Starboard Watch spectators were yelling themselves hoarse.

But luck was against them.

Though the day was crisp and dry, with scarcely a breath of wind, several bad patches of mud still lingered after the recent storm. Dicky came across one now, when he was least expecting it, and his feet slid from under him as though they had been on roller-skates. There was a roar from the Port Watch fellows as he sat down gracefully, and the next moment the ball had been whisked to the red-shirted Port forwards by their right-half.

Though their backs and halves were the strength of the Port eleven, their forwards were all useful men, though not so fast as Tom's front line. They swept forward, and the Starboard inside-left—a stocky, well-built youngster named Field—was sent flying. The halves closed in towards their left to oppose the attack as they saw their own forward line swept away.

Hemming, Burr's crony, was playing centre-half. He was a good footballer

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in spite of his unpleasant personality, and he all but succeeded now in stemming the sudden attack. But the opposing forwards, though not very fast, were heavy, and after a brief tussle for possession with the Port inside-right Hemming was knocked flying. The Port forwards swept on like a battering-ram.

They were through the halves—only the backs and the goalkeeper stood between them and the net. The Port spectators yelled lustily, very pleased with life.

The Starboard backs were both hefty fellows, and they rose manfully to the occasion. A fierce tussle checked the rush temporarily, but only for a few moments. As the halves rushed back to the defence the skipper of the Port team, playing at outside-right, twisted away with the ball at his feet. A shout went up as he raced on towards the goal.

The goalie crouched ready beneath the bar, every muscle and nerve on the alert. Tom, tearing back, saw the Port man pause for the fraction of a second in his stride.

The ball, propelled by a strong, straight kick that well merited the cheer it gained, went shooting towards the net. The goalie leapt—his fingers felt the leather scorch past as it crashed into the net.

The whistle shrilled out, and the faces of the Starboard Watch, both players and onlookers, gazed blankly. A goal against them in the first two minutes of the game!

Tom returned with the ball to the centre of the field, his lips shut doggedly. The Port Watch would not hold their lead long if he knew it!

For the second time he tapped the ball to an inside man. The Starboard forwards swept down the field.

It looked for a few moments as though they would penetrate the defence. But the opposing half line were a formidable obstacle, and the Starboard forwards broke upon it like a wave at a breakwater. The ball came to Tom, and he twisted away with it round the centre-half who attacked him. But the left-half was on him the next moment, and he slipped the ball out to the right wing. The winger failed to get possession, and the ball went trickling over the line.

The two teams closed in to the right for the throw-in. There was a brief struggle, and then the ball went sailing from the boot of a Port man towards his centre-forward. The next instant the opposing forwards were again sweeping down the field.

"Port! Port! Po-o-ort!"

The cry swelled round the field, though the Starboards fought valiantly to shout it down. Tom, hurrying back, watched with chagrin as the halves crumpled up before the attack. Things looked black for the Starboard Watch.

The two backs were perhaps the weakest part of Tom's team. Though hefty enough for the job, neither of them was quite fast enough even for a back. They came heavily to the attack, and Tom saw in a moment that both of them had a bad attack of "wind up" already.

Their feeble defence was useless. The Port forwards simply ignored them and passed on towards the goal. A groan rose from one or two Starboard players near Tom.

The opposing centre had the ball, and he was about to shoot when he hesitated. The goalkeeper was doing the only thing possible under the circumstances—running out towards him. The Port centre looked like losing the ball as the Starboard goalie dived for it; but just in time he swept the ball aside to the inside-left. The inside man did not waste a second.

and for the second time that afternoon the ball went crashing into the Starboard's goal.

The Port Watch shouted and yelled, but suddenly their excitement was quenched. The referee's whistle had sounded, and he was pointing to the spot where that last fatal pass had been received. The Starboard's drew a deep breath of relief.

Off-side!

The kick was taken, and for some minutes a hard, ding-dong battle wavered in the centre of the field. Neither side could gain much advantage, till Tom, getting possession of the ball, curved past the Port man who tackled him, and led the forward line down the field in a sudden fierce rally.

Tom, lithe and nimble as he was, was undoubtedly a genius with the football. It danced at his feet now in the most perfect control, swiftly though he was running. With his speed, Tom was an ideal wing man, but he was playing centre to-day, for lack of anyone else capable of taking the position efficiently.

The halves rushed to the attack, but Tom danced lightly through them, a grim smile on his lips. Then he was past them, with the two backs thundering up to stem the Starboard assault.

Tom flashed the ball down the line to Dicky West with a magnificent pass—hard and true. Dicky trapped the ball neatly and raced on, twisting out towards the line as the right-back came for him. Then, as the Port man tackled, he flashed the ball to the inside man, who passed it on immediately to Tom.

One or two of the spectators wondered for a moment if it were a case of off-side. But the keen eyes of the referee had seen that Tom was not yet past the backs, though the next instant he was well away, with only the goalie between him and the Port net.

Dimly the skipper of the Starboard team heard the thundering of the pursuing back who was hot on his heels. He slipped neatly aside, and chuckled breathlessly as the back pounded past him. The other swung round in surprise, and had a brief vision of Tom as the Hood youngster danced round him again, the ball still glued to his feet.

"Starboard! Sta-a-a-ardboard!"

Tom heard the excited shouts dimly as he poised himself for the fraction of a second, about to shoot. His foot flashed forward. With a hiss of air, the ball went smashing towards the goal.

It looked a certain score for the Starboards. But the Port goalie was a long, thin fellow, and his long arms just succeeded in reaching the ball as it came hurtling towards the top left corner of the net, straight as a bullet. The ball, deflected, smashed the goalkeeper's hand on the post, and went leaping off at an angle over the line for a corner.

The goalie sucked his knuckles ruefully. But he was not worrying much about his stinging hand. He had saved what had seemed to most a certain goal.

The corner-kick was taken, and a close-packed struggle swayed in the goal-mouth. No one dared breathe among the spectators—the faces of the Ports were anxious, the faces of their opponents tense.

The ball, seen at intervals, came bobbing suddenly upwards above the struggling figures by the net. Tom, in the thick of it, saw a swift flash of red hair—and then a shout arose round the field that startled the rooks in the neighbouring trees. Dicky West, with a lightning header, had sent the ball spinning into the goal.

One all. The excitement was at a high pitch. But though there was still some time to run before half-time, the score

was still unaltered when Hume strode across the grass in the interval towards the little knot of Starboard players sucking lemons in the centre of the field.

"Fine, everybody!" exclaimed Hume. "You've kept your promise, Gale. You've given me as fine a game of football as I could wish to see!"

Tom chuckled.

"You wait, sir! That's nothing to the second half! We've got to get ahead of the Ports in the second half, and it won't be too easy. There'll be some fur flying then, I'll bet."

Tom was right. The two teams settled down to keen, swift football in the second half, such as the Ajax was famous for. It was a desperate battle for the mastery, with both teams fiercely determined to "get there." And though the Starboards fought doggedly, they could not keep back their opponents. At last the Port forwards, breaking away, swept down on the goal.

The two backs, though Tom had tried to rally them during the interval, were still suffering from nerves. They failed lamentably to back up the halves, and when the second line gave way, virtually the goalie was the only defence left.

And though he fought manfully to save his charge, with the ball crashing in time and time again in swift succession, he was beaten at last. Forced to his knees by a shot that was more like a thunderbolt than anything else, he could not reach the ball as it flashed an inch below the bar a moment later. The Ports were ahead again, 2-1.

Tom's jaw was set. His team was growing unsteady, as he realised only too well. Dicky West was still cool and calm out on the wing, and the inside-left had not lost his head. But the other forwards, and the majority of the defence, had all become very shaky. Unless the Starboards could equalise soon, a rot would set in.

And they did! It was a run of his own and Dicky's that did most of the work, though it was Hemming, close behind the forwards in support, who succeeded in putting the ball into the net. The Starboards on the touchline roared joyfully. But they had only equalised, and Tom meant them to win.

But already time was getting on. He saw the referee glance at the watch on his wrist as he sounded the kick-off. Unless the game were to end in a draw, someone—either Port or Starboard—had to do something quick.

"We've got to lick 'em!" muttered Tom through tight teeth.

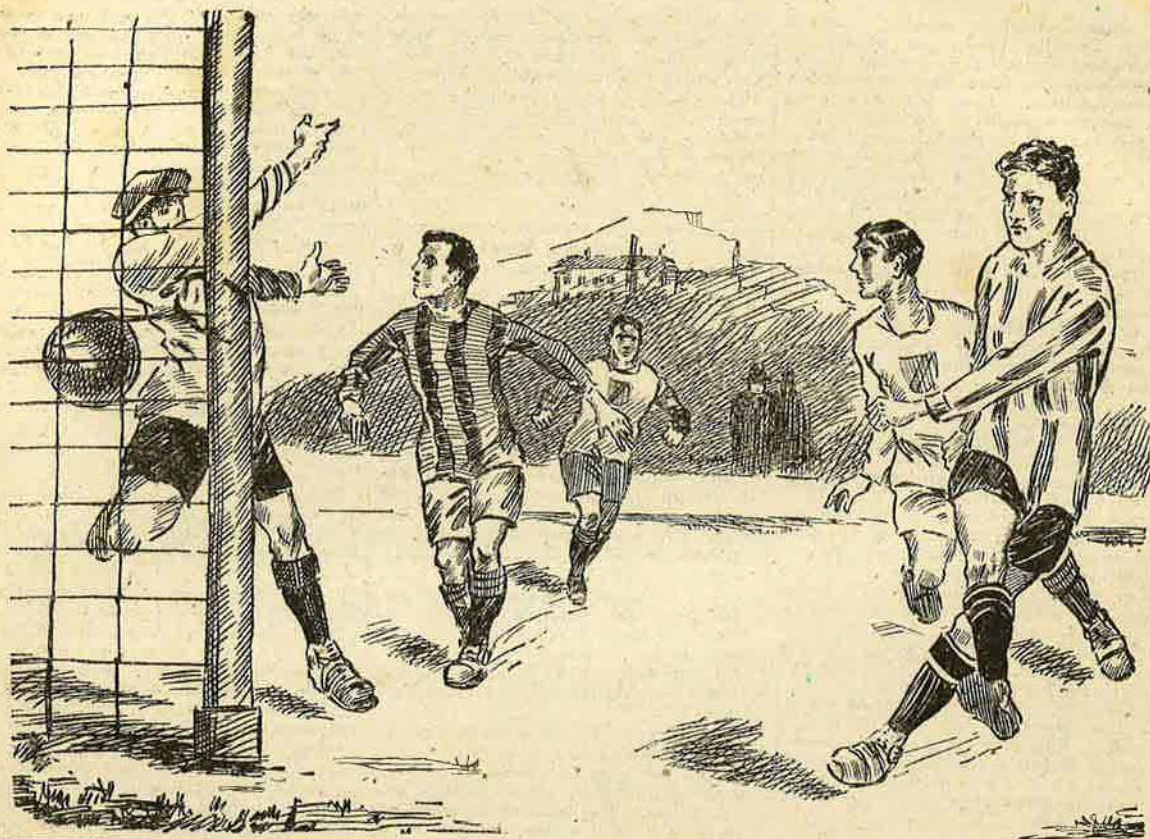
For five minutes the ball stayed in the centre of the field. Neither side seemed able to get away. Then Hemming got the ball and sent it up to Tom.

"Now for it!" Tom told himself grimly. "I dunno how much more time there is, but if there's time enough—"

He twisted past a couple of Port forwards who attacked him. He saw the opposing halves close in to stem the rush. Then, the ball dancing at his feet, Tom raced towards the enemy goal.

Seconds to Spare!

TOM raced on, the ball dancing at his feet. He saw, out of the corner of his eye, the referee glance again at his watch. There were barely two minutes more to play. If he failed to score now, the last match of the season between the Port Watch and the Starboard must end in a draw. But Tom was fiercely determined that the Starboard Watch should win. He could hear the roar from round the



As the ball came swooping towards the goal, Tom Gale saw a swift flash of red hair, and then a shout arose round the field. Dicky West, with a lightning header, had sent the ball spinning into the goal!

bed: "Starboard! Starboard!" He knew that the Watch was relying on him now. Could he do it?

But for Dicky West and the other outside forward, Tom had left the rest of the Starboard team far behind. Together the three raced on down the field. But both his wingers were too well marked for Tom to pass out to them. For the present, at any rate, he must rely upon himself.

Already he had fricked the halves—only the backs were between himself and the goalkeeper, crouching tense and expectant.

He had a swift vision of a burly form looming up in his path—one of the backs was on him. The Port halves were tearing back to the defence. The forwards, too—the whole team was concentrating upon Tom, straining every muscle, every effort to hold him for those last few seconds before the whistle should sound.

Tom tried to slip aside, but a powerful charge by the opposing back crashed into his shoulder, and he staggered. But somehow the ball was still at his feet. He heeled it back swiftly as the other's boot shot out towards it, and then, without knowing how he had managed it, he found himself clear of the man who had tackled him, still racing on mechanically towards the Port Watch goal.

The shouting had died down. The spectators were scarcely breathing as they watched that thrilling struggle, one against eleven, virtually, for Tom was powerless to pass now, for he was hemmed in back and sides; only in front was the way clear, though even there the second back and the goalkeeper still barred his path.

The thunder of feet echoed in his ears. Crash! He scarcely knew what had happened, but he saw dimly that the second

back was lying on his back in the mud. But there was the ball, still twisting at his toes—and the goal ahead.

It was then that Tom shot. The ball rose from his foot, straight and hard in a rising shot that seemed to be flying straight for the goalie's face. Tom groaned aloud. He felt convinced that the goalkeeper must save. How could he help it, with the ball coming straight for him?

He came to a standstill, his eyes still glued on that soaring orb. He saw the goalie's hands go out for it, clutch the slippery leather. And then a great shout swelled from the onlookers. The goalie, unable to hold the stinging shot, had clutched at the ball in vain. It crashed through into the goal with resistless force, and Tom found himself staring stupidly at the shaking net even as the whistle sounded.

The Port Watch were beaten. "Starboards for ever!" Tom heard the shout closing round him, and then he was swung off his feet, high on to the shoulders of a swarming, excited mob.

It was some time before they put him down. Tom protested in vain as he was marched in triumph round the field. But when at last he was allowed on his feet again, he found himself shaking hands warmly with Avalanche Hume.

"Fine—fine! As fine a goal as I've ever seen!" cried Hume, his steady grey eyes gleaming enthusiastically into Tom's. "Look here, Tom, you come along with me!"

And in a few minutes Tom found himself with Hume and Dicky West making in the direction of Fleethithe. The two youngsters were cleaned of most of the mud, and overcoats hid their mud-scarred footer togs. Hume was still full of the game. He had spoken to the ship's

officer, and it was not long before Tom and Dicky were seated in a teashop overlooking the river front, great piles of cream buns, doughnuts, and other confections hiding most of the view of the Thames from them.

Not that they minded. They had other business on hand, that of making those cream buns, doughnuts, etc., die a noble and useful death.

Avalanche Hume looked thoughtful as they ate. Then he said suddenly:

"I'll tell you what, I've got an idea! You training-ship youngsters seem to be great sportsmen. I've seen you play footer, and I've seen you row. I'll bet any money you are as good with the boxing-gloves and swimming. I mean to talk to your skipper about it. I'm going to give a pot of sorts to the Ajax—a challenge-cup to be competed for annually by the various divisions in all branches of sport. See the idea? So many points for football, so many points for swimming, so many for boxing, and so on. What do you say?"

Tom's eyes sparkled, and Dicky West, half-way through the good work of putting a jam-tart through its paces, was too excited to bother about his mouth being rather full.

"Oh, that would be great, sir! By gum, yes! There's one thing, the Hoods will have a mighty good shot at carrying off the pot the first time! Tom and I can guarantee that!"

Hume laughed.

"Good luck to the Hoods!" he said. "I hope they do get their name on the cup first, to head the list!" He broke off, glancing at his watch. "I shall have to be getting a move on now. I'll leave you two to finish up this stuff!"

Tom chuckled.

"Thanks awfully!" he said. "But I know I'm too blown out already to tackle any more. Dunno about Dicky. He always did have the appetite of a boa-constrictor. Dare say he's good for another lap still!"

But Dicky West shook his head sadly. "I only wish I were!" he said, eyeing the remains of the feast regrettably, not that the remains amounted to much at this stage of the proceedings. "I would if I could, but I can't. The spirit is willing, you bet; but the flesh is weak. I feel more like a football that's been pumped up too hard than anything human."

Hume glanced round. Their table by the window was some distance from the nearest customer in the room with them. But his voice was quiet when he spoke again. Avalanche Hume had no wish to be overheard.

"Tom, if anything should happen—if you should find out anything—let me know. Keep your weather-eye on Burr. But, whatever happens, don't denounce him. You can be sure that Kalche and his crowd won't let the grass grow under their feet. They failed this last time, but they'll try again, and when they do they'll do their worst! Goodness knows what form their next attempt will take—something unexpected, a blow in the dark, as it were. They're as keen to get their hands on you as I am to get my hands on them."

Hume's jaw was set grimly as he spoke. He knew the men he was up against. Whatever the mysterious reason was of Kalche's determined attempt to kidnap Tom, the man with the green spectacles would stop at little to accomplish his aim.

Tom nodded.

"Jove, I wish I knew what they want with me!" he said slowly. "But there's one thing, Mr. Hume, in a few weeks now the Ulysses sails for her cruise round the British Isles. I'm going with her, so, for a time, at any rate, Kalche will have to take a holiday where I'm concerned."

"The Ulysses?" echoed Hume, puzzled.

"Yes. Don't you know? That's the name of our sea-going barquentine, that three-masted boat with yards on the foremast, moored astern of the Ajax. Every year about thirty of us who are specialising in navigation go for a long cruise round the British Isles—right round the North of Scotland, down by Ireland to the Lizard, and back up the Channel to the Thames. Takes about a couple of months or more."

Hume nodded.

"Lucky young dogs, that's all I can say!" he cried enviously, with a laugh. "No, I don't see how Kalche can do much, then. Though you never know, of course," Hume added meaningly. "You've got to be on your guard wherever you are, Tom, and don't you forget it! Anyway, I shall still be on Kalche's track on land, and you'll hear from me if there's danger. I suppose you don't know whether Burr will go on this cruise as well?"

"Sure to," answered Tom. "He's in the navigation class, you see."

Again Hume nodded. His strong, forceful face was thoughtful. Then he rose abruptly to his feet.

"I've got to get moving," he observed.

The two training-ship youngsters said good-bye to the Scotland Yard man.

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outside his hotel, the Anchor, in the High Street. As they turned away towards Black Doll Lane and the Ajax, Tom's eyes held a thoughtful shadow.

Those quiet words of Avalanche Hume were still sounding in his ears—"You've got to be on your guard wherever you are, and don't you forget it!"

A Staggering Blow!

BUT it was evident that Kalche was biding his time. He must know, as Tom realised, that the training-ship youngster and the ship's officers knew something from Hume. The man with green spectacles was awaiting his opportunity—he did not mean to strike fruitlessly a third time.

Two weeks slipped by without a sign of that strange, sinister figure. It was as though the atmosphere itself had swallowed Kalche without leaving one trace. Hume confessed to Tom that he had entirely lost all track of his man.

"But he'll turn up again, never fear," repeated Avalanche Hume. "He's not the man to say die yet awhile! I know Kalche too well to be fooled into a feeling of false security. That's probably what he's waiting for—hopes our vigilance will relax. Well, it won't!"

At the end of those two weeks the thrill of excitement that had swept through the Ajax as a result of the nose of the figurehead's being painted red, had lulled. The paint had been removed, and most of the youngsters had tired of the nine days' wonder. But Tom had not forgotten.

Though he still seemed as far as ever from his aim, Tom was doggedly determined to find out who the real guilty party was. The fact that the mysterious unknown had never revealed his identity, and had allowed Tom to suffer in his stead, pointed strongly to Burr; but though he strongly suspected the bully, Tom had to admit to himself that he had no solid foundation for his suspicions.

Now that the warm weather was approaching, and swimming had begun again in the river, instead of in the baths ashore, the first contest for Hume's sports cup—the Avalanche Cup, as the youngsters called it—had already taken place. The swimming contest had been won by the Nelson division, with the Blakes just beating the Hoods for second place.

Tom and Dicky were determined that the Hoods should carry off the trophy in the end, and Tom found that by plunging heart and soul into the work of rallying the enthusiasm of his division in the matter of training for the future contests for the cup, he had a good antidote for the fits of depression that had been attacking him of late.

For, though he was as popular as ever with the other youngsters, he found that things were becoming none too easy for him on board the Ajax. The masters were decidedly less friendly since the affair of the figurehead's nose, and Mr. Cosine, in particular, was "down" on him. At times Tom had been thoroughly fed-up with everything, and only his dogged pluck had kept him outwardly cheerful.

It was on a Saturday morning about a

fortnight before the Ulysses was to set off on her cruise round the British Isles from the Ajax, that Tom was put down for a swabbing squad. About a dozen of the youngsters, some from port and some from starboard, were set to work cleaning the upper deck. A couple of chief petty officers were in charge of the squad, and Tom was none too delighted to find that Burr was one of them. Since he had been disgraced he was, of course, liable for swabbing fatigue, whereas a short time ago he had been in charge of such a squad himself.

And Burr did not mean to let Tom forget the fact.

"No slacking there, Gale!" called Burr more than once, as they got busy with the big hand-swabs on the planks. A nasty grin was on his face.

Tom said nothing, but splashed on with the swab and soap-suds without looking up. He had ceased to bother about Burr.

The swabbing continued with a good deal of noise and laughter. It was Pole, a rather undersized youngster of the Hood division, who first passed his swab along the planks with a hard kick and the cry, "Come on, starboard! Show these port chaps how to play footer!"

The challenge was taken up. Neither of the chief petty officers interfered. In fact, it was Starling, leader of the Nelson division of the port watch, who passed the swab back to Pole, sending it spinning along the wet, slippery deck.

"Think the ports don't know how to play footer as well as you wets from the starboard?" he demanded, with a laugh. "Just because you beat us on the field last time don't get swelled heads! Pass out to the wing there!"

The swabs started to fly in all directions as the ports swept down upon the starboards. A lively tussle ensued. Then Tom, tackled for possession by Starling, twisted away, laughing, with the wet swab at his toes.

He did not see the queer look in Burr's face, only heard his voice as the bully of the Ajax called suddenly:

"Bet you can't score, Gale!"

Burr had crossed suddenly to the big square opening at the head of the ladder-way, leading down to the main deck. He stood there with hands half outstretched as if to save a goal, and all the footballing instincts in Tom rose to the surface.

He could not resist the shot; it was too tempting. With a hefty kick he sent the swab flying through the air towards the big opening behind Burr.

But Burr did not save the shot. He did not attempt to. At the same moment that the swab came flying through the air the leader of the Blakes slipped aside. In a moment his tone had changed.

"Stop ragging there, you chaps!" he roared. "Get on with it, or there'll be trouble from me and Starling. I can tell you."

But before his words were finished, another sound cut the air like a knife—a startled yell that was cut off as abruptly as it rang out; it changed to a kind of gurgling burble; there was the noise of someone masticating wet cloth, of someone who spluttered through soap-suds. Tom Gale's swab had evidently found an unexpected billet!

(Who was the unfortunate person? Don't miss next week's thrilling instalment, chums!)

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPERS ARE PRIME!

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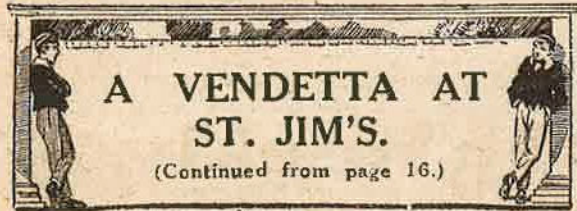
TUCK FOR SHEFFIELD!

HE MISUNDERSTOOD!

As the little boy entered the shoe-repairer's shop he exclaimed: "Please will you sole, heel, and stretch these boots for father?" "Stretch!" exclaimed the cobbler. "Do you know where the boots pinch him?" "No," returned the lad; "but I can tell you where he pinched the boots!"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Frank Bell, 29, Leicester Street, Sheffield.

CROWDED OUT!

"I wish, Henry," said the editor's wife, "that you'd try not to be so absent-minded when you are dining out." The editor looked up, surprised. "Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What



A VENDETTA AT ST. JIM'S.

(Continued from page 16.)

"Good old Tommy!" cried Lowther.

They laid Dimarco down on the grass and looked at him. The poor lad was burnt terribly. At first they feared that he was dead, but Tom Merry assured his chums soon afterwards that Dimarco lived.

"Thank Heaven!" breathed Blake fervently. "If ever a fellow went through hell, Dimarco did! I never thought we should see him again!"

The night air had revived Contarini. He sat up and looked about him with eyes that were distended with fear.

"You're all right now, Contarini," said Blake. "Dimarco fetched you out of that blaze."

Two wagons and a motor-car arrived, bringing startled people to the spot. Men came running up. But the old farmhouse was doomed.

"Back!" cried Tom Merry, as an ominous rumble sounded. "The house is falling! Run back for your lives!"

Tom's warning came not a minute too soon. Scarcely had the onlookers run back than the house collapsed in a garish mass of lurid flame and tumbling woodwork.

Contarini and Dimarco were placed on the motor-car and driven to the nearest house, which was two miles distant.

These restoratives were given them, and their burns attended to as best as was possible. Contarini quickly recovered, and, although dazed, seemed little the worse for his adventure. Dimarco, however, remained still and silent, and Tom Merry & Co. knew that he was hovering on the brink between life and death.

The owner of the car suggested driving them to St. Jim's, and this offer Tom Merry & Co. gratefully accepted.

Dimarco was lifted gently aboard, the others climbed in after, and the car set out for the school.

CHAPTER 10.

The Truth At Last!

ST. JIM'S seethed with excitement when the car arrived, and Tom Merry told Dr. Holmes what had happened.

Dimarco was taken to the school sanatorium, and the doctor sent for immediately. Dr. Holmes took Contarini away to his study, whilst Tom Merry & Co. remained behind in the Hall, in the midst of a crowd of eager schoolfellows, to tell the story of their thrilling adventure.

Contarini soon afterwards was sent to the sanatorium. The reaction of his ordeal had set in, and Dr. Holmes said that he was very ill.

Two days elapsed before Contarini was well enough to take his old place in the school. Then it was that St. Jim's heard the truth about his disappearance.

Mr. Railton told Tom Merry, and Tom made it known to a crowd in the Common-room afterwards.

"Mellish, Crooke, and Clampe showed Contarini into our

have I done now?" "Done!" cried his wife. "Why, when the hostess asked you if you'd have some more pudding, you replied that owing to the tremendous pressure on your space, you were compelled to decline!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to L. W. Wilson, 58, Boston Avenue, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex.

GAME!

The football-match was very hotly contested; fouls were frequent, and several players were cautioned by the referee. Then a fight between two players led to their being sent off the field. Still unpleasantness continued, when a mighty kick sent the ball into the neighbouring field. During the wait an interested spectator cried out: "Never mind the ball! Get on with it!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Nevill Warde, 123, Lansdowne Road, West Didsbury, Manchester.

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House!" said Tom. "The cads wanted Contarini and Dimarco to meet and fight. They thought that Contarini was hanging about with the idea of attacking Dimarco, but it was no such thing. Contarini wanted to speak to Dimarco—to make friends with him."

All eyes were turned on Mellish, Crooke, and Clampe, and the young rascals of the School House covered back in shame.

"When Contarini entered Study No. 6," went on Tom Merry, "he found that Dimarco had two men with him—two relatives. They were both cousins of Dimarco. Dr. Holmes had written to Dimarco's father, telling him that Contarini was here, and suggesting that he removed Dimarco, in view of the vendetta, and these two cousins got to know of it. They were even more embittered against the Contarini family than Dimarco and his father. They came to St. Jim's that night secretly, and tried to persuade Dimarco to join them in a plot to kidnap Contarini. Dimarco would have nothing of it, though. The canings and raggings he had received here had taught him his lesson, and he had decided to leave Contarini alone. He refused to have anything to do with harming Contarini, and he told his cousins to go. Then Contarini entered the study, and Dimarco's two cousins set about him."

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "The wottahs! And what did Dimarco do, deah boy?"

"Dimarco backed up Contarini. He fought his cousins to protect Contarini," said Tom. "But his cousins were men, and the two boys did not stand a chance against them. Contarini was knocked senseless, and was bound and gagged. And then, despite Dimarco's pleadings, his cousins left St. Jim's by climbing out of the window, taking Contarini with them, a prisoner. They threatened to kill Dimarco if he exposed them. That was why, afterwards, Dimarco wouldn't say a word about what happened in Study No. 6 that night."

Blake drew a deep breath.

"And we bumped him—and Kildare and the Head licked him!" he exclaimed. "Poor kid! He ran away, rather than tell the truth!"

"Yes, Dimarco ran away after Mellish and Clampe had tried to blackmail him," said Tom Merry. "He knew where his cousins had taken Contarini. He knew that he would find Contarini in that old farmhouse by Copse Hill, and he intended breaking in there and setting him free, in defiance of his cousins. In a lower room in that farmhouse the two Dimarco cousins were keeping watch on Contarini, who was lying bound and gagged on the floor. They were playing cards in the light of a lamp when young Dimarco arrived, after laying given us the slip on a goods-train on the railway. Dimarco got in. There was a fight, and the lamp went over. That's how the fire started. Dimarco dragged Contarini out of the burning room and got him to a place of safety away from the flames. But then his cousins attacked him and took him out of the house, leaving Contarini still a prisoner, to die in the flames!"

"The villains!" muttered Herries.

"The house was soon blazing like matchwood, of course!" went on Tom Merry. "Dimarco got free from his cousins, and ran back to the house. They did not follow, thinking that Contarini had already perished. But Dimarco flashed into the burning house to rescue Contarini, if he could. We all know how he did rescue Contarini, using the ropes that bound him to lower him from the window, and how he nearly lost his own life in doing it."

(Continued on next page.)

The juniors in the Common-room drew deep breaths. Tom Merry's story had amazed and thrilled them. "Then—then we were wrong in our suspicions of Dimarco," muttered Talbot. "He is a hero!"

"He's the pluckiest kid in the world!" said Tom Merry huskily. "You should see him now—his burns are terrible, and he's suffering awful pain, although he makes no murmur. The doctor says he will recover, and that he will not be disfigured. But his burns will take some time in healing. He will not be able to stay at St. Jim's."

"Shame!" said D'Arcy. "Let's get him some things from the village, dear boys." "We'll make things as pleasant for the poor chap as we can while he's here. And we'll get permish to go into the sanny and express our appreciation of his fine conduct and bvavevay!"

"Good idea, Gussy!" Gussy had received a liver from his noble pater that morning, and he purchased things lavishly in the village after lessons that day. He and Tom Merry & Co. arrived back at St. Jim's laden with hothouse grapes, jellies, and all manner of delicacies.

Dr. Holmes smiled kindly when the juniors asked permission to take their gifts to Dimarco in the sanatorium, and readily assented.

The Terrible Three and Blake & Co. made their way to the sanatorium. They crept very quietly along the spotlessly clean corridor, and halted at the ward door.

"Is he awake?" asked Blake softly. They crept in behind the curtain and pulled it gently aside. "Look!" muttered Tom Merry.

Dimarco, his head bandaged, was lying in bed, propped up

on a pillow. His face was lined with the pain of his grim ordeal. And kneeling beside the bed, holding Dimarco's hand in his, was Contarini.

The two boys were talking softly together in Italian, their eyes shining radiantly with the light of friendship.

"Come away, chaps!" he said a trifle huskily. "We won't disturb them. We'll leave those things with Sister Marie."

The juniors left the sanatorium, feeling strangely quiet, yet glad.

The two Italian boys who had been such bitter foes were now friends—thanks mainly to the great self-sacrifice of Luigi Dimarco of the Fourth.

A few days later Dimarco's father called at St. Jim's in his handsome limousine. Dimarco was able to walk about, and it was decided that he should leave St. Jim's and go with his father.

St. Jim's gave the young Italian boy a great send off. The quadrangle rang with cheers as the car moved towards the gates. As many as could manage it crowded round and shook hands with Dimarco, whose eyes glistened with tears of pleasure. And the last to shake Dimarco by the hand and wish him a swift recovery was Contarini of the New House. Gone was the bitter enmity of the vendetta, and gratitude took its place. St. Jim's as a whole regretted that Dimarco had to go. But he did not go from their memory, and for many days afterwards the sole topic of conversation was Luigi Dimarco, the boy who had suffered, but had found an opportunity of showing the magnificent good that was in him by the vendetta at St. Jim's.

THE END.

(Make a note of the title of next week's story of St. Jim's: THE HERMIT OF MOAT GRANGE! It's great.)

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