

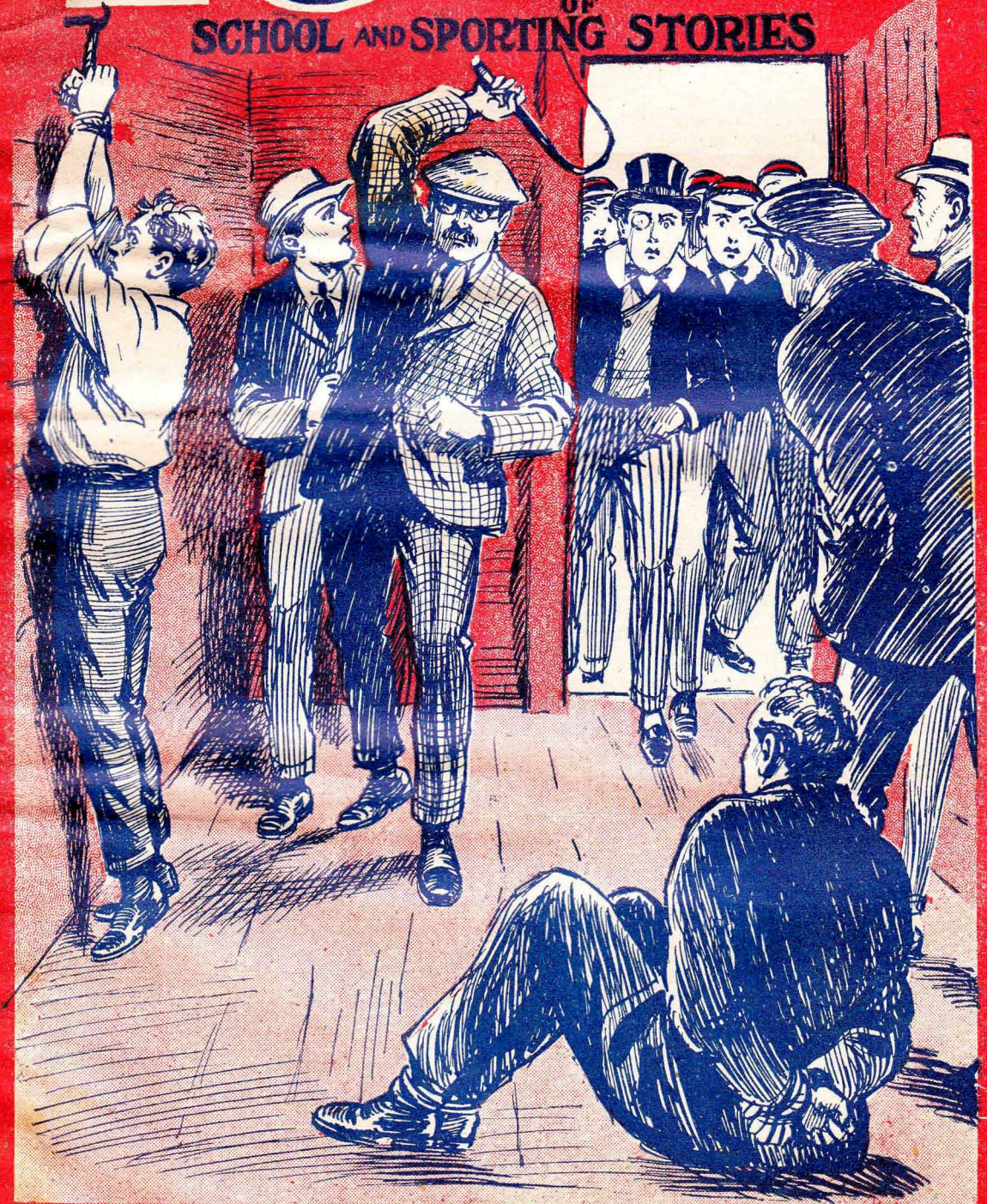
"THE HERMIT OF MOAT GRANGE!" Grand Long School Story
of Tom Merry & Co. at
St. Jim's.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

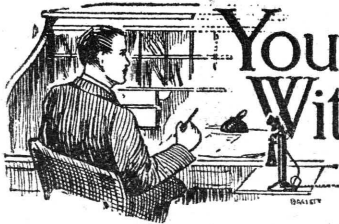
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1924.

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TOM MERRY & CO. TO THE RESCUE!

(A Startling and Dramatic Incident from the grand, long, complete school story contained in this issue.)



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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,—Next week's sensational yarn of St. Jim's is just one of those stories with a directly personal appeal to everybody. The tale for next Wednesday's GEM presents a problem—precisely the sort of problem which crops up into the life of any fellow. It shows once again how one good turn deserves another. But how about the extent and measure of the good turn which is called for in response to some kind action which has been performed? That is the question.

"THE REFUGEE OF ST. JIM'S!" By Martin Clifford.

The story will be well received, I know. It is a perfect whirl of incident. The web of misunderstanding and cross purpose might puzzle one, only you sense from the start the presence of a really big motive behind. A newcomer arrives at St. Jim's in the person of young Frank Digby, the cousin of our old friend, Robert Arthur Digby. Frank has been passing through some record bad times at his old school of St. Ormond's. He has to flee at last, being unable to submit any longer to the treatment he gets from a band of cads who have rendered life unendurable to him.

In "The Refugee of St. Jim's" you get a picture of certain old favourites playing the game as St. Jim's knows how to play it, and adding something to the laurels of the old school. It is irresistible, for it rings with reality. Martin Clifford has studied human nature to good effect. The fellows whose actions are distinctly off-side have their reasons, and you see these reasons. Next week's story is chockful of understanding, and that fact alone will ensure it a bumper success.

A BOXING A.B.C.

You have all heard of Stanley Hooper, the ex-Fly Weight Champion of the Eastern Counties. I want to draw attention to a capital little "A.B.C. of Boxing" which has been written by him. It is bound to interest all my chums. The volume is published at eightpence by Messrs. Drane, Dane-geld House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C., and can be obtained through any newsagent or bookseller. Eugene Corri contributes a short preface, and does no more than justice to Stanley Hooper, when he points out that Hooper was one of the cleverest eight-stone boxers ever seen. He suffered a disability during the

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war which cut short his active career as a boxer, but he is able to give others the advantage of his wide experience as a fighting man. His style was the correct old English upright poise, with a perfect straight left, and it is this style which will yet retrieve this country's lost prestige. The book is written in simple language, and puts the whole science before the reader. More than that it is unnecessary to say.

EXAMS.

These agreeable little amusements so dear to everybody are referred to by a correspondent who is intensely interested in the yarns of St. Jim's. "Why," he asks, "do they never have exams at St. Jim's?" Some boys may say that would spoil the stories, but I am sure it would not. Mr. Martin Clifford could write enjoyable yarns out of the exams. If Tom Merry got promoted from the Shell to the Fifth, and Bagley Trimble said he would be junior skipper, there would be heaps of fun." I should not half wonder. But the fact is there are plenty of examinations at St. Jim's, only, of course, there is not room to cram into a weekly series all that goes on. And the Shell cannot spare Tom Merry. We saw that much in some recent stories about the captaincy.

"CHAMPION BORN." By Geoffrey Prout.

This exciting story of boxing adventure will be found in next week's "bill." It shows Harry Douglas at work, and explains how a number of apparently trivial circumstances brought him his big chance as a boxer. Harry is in pretty low water when the story opens, and it is the merest chance that he strikes lucky in the most unexpected way. A real "live yarn" this.

"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

In the next instalment of our serial Tom gets overhauled by the sinister man in the green spectacles. Thanks, however, to the assistance of Avalanche Hume, detective, things do not turn out quite in the way Tom's foe anticipated. All the same, Tom is far as yet from

being out of the wood. Be sure you read next week's carry on of this engrossing tale.

THE TUCK HAMPER.

A fortunate winner of a Tuck Hamper writes: "Thanks for the splendid surprise. It was topping, quality and quantity combined. I have read and thoroughly enjoyed the GEM for some years now. As other readers have already remarked, we shall be pleased to see some more of that jolly little paper, the 'St. Jim's News.'"

I was about to put in a reminder about the splendid Tuck Hamper offer, but, somehow, it hardly seems necessary. One glance at My Readers' Page of sparklers will show how this well-known feature is booming. There is another thing to be considered. This correspondent refers to our supplement.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

Look out for next week's grand motoring number of the cheery supplement. I took due note of what the writer just quoted had to say on the subject. Personally, I am always eager to get the "St. Jim's News" into the GEM, but space prevents this rather too often. We will hope for the best. In the coming issue Tom Merry has gone straight for the mighty subject concerned. Everybody understands something about motors, and the tricky ways of the frisky carburettor, also the prime need of a strong hand over the magneto. The good old GEM is not really a motoring weekly, though it has ere now found room for the adventures of Mike, a motor-car builder of some renown. But next week's supplement goes deeply into the whole business. Any reader of the lively Wednesday paper who feels friendly towards motor-cars should make sure of next week's issue. Those who despise buzz-boxes should also study this illuminating supplement. It will do them a world of good.

BADGES.

A Bradford reader asks me whether it is not possible to do something in the way of a league. The members would all wear Companion Paper badges, and there would be a special GEM battalion. The idea is, in some respects, attractive, but I doubt whether it is workable. We have, too, the question of outlay to consider. Another point to be taken into account is that we really have such a league. All readers of the GEM, for instance, are linked up in a bond of friendship towards the old paper. When they meet they have a common interest to talk about. I think for the present we shall have to be satisfied with this unofficial, but perfectly efficient league.

Your Editor.

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THE HERMIT OF MOAT GRANGE

A Splendid Story of Thrilling
School Adventure, dealing with
the World-Famous Chums of St.
Jim's—Tom Merry & Co.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Found in the Snow!

"OH dear! This is awful, you chaps," gasped Tom Merry of the Shell Form of St. Jim's.

"Too awful for words," agreed Manners breathlessly.

"Tewwible, bai Jove!" panted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally do not know how I shall evah get them wight again. They—"

"Get what right, dummy?" demanded Jack Blake, his words coming in gasps. "What—"

"My clobberah," explained D'Arcy, great concern in his tones. "This awful snow will uttably wuin—"

"Blow your clobber!" snorted Blake witheringly. "Well, my hat! Fancy worrying about his clobber now! Don't you realise that we're lost, Gussy, you utter ass! Don't you grasp the fact that we're lost in a snowstorm on Wayland Moor; and you know how serious that is."

"More than serious," groaned Herries. "What about poor old Towser, you fellows? He's nearly done, and I'll have to start carrying the poor old chap soon!"

"You ought never to have brought him," said Blake, a trifle snappily. "We told you not to, and it's through him we missed the thumping train at Wayland Junction."

"Oh, rats!" sniffed Herries. "How was I to know the jolly old dog would go chasing that stray cat? And how can old Towser help his sporting instincts, eh?"

"You shouldn't have let go his lead—"

"Oh, don't start wrangling now, for goodness sake," muttered Tom Merry. "We're in a mess, and we look like being in a bigger mess unless we get back on the track before dark—and it's jolly near that now. Let's see if we can take our bearings."

The little party stopped trudging through the snow, and Tom Merry wiped the icy moisture from his eyes and blinked round him in the gathering gloom.

There was little enough to be seen, however. The wild stretch of moorland lay silent and white under a thick mantle of snow, and little of this could the juniors see through the thick dusk and whirling snowflakes. It was a desolate, eerie scene, and they searched in vain for familiar landmarks.

Tom Merry gave it up at last, his usually cheery face grave.

"It's no good, you fellows," he said quietly. "We're lost right enough. Nothing for it but to keep trudging on. It's our own fault as much as Towser's, though. It was snowing when we left the cinema in Wayland, and we ought not to

have risked crossing the moor a night like this. We should have hired a taxi to take us to St. Jim's."

"Without any cash?" growled Digby. "How could we, ass?"

"We could have easily got the money to pay the driver on arrival at St. Jim's," said Tom. "Anyway, it's no use re-pining now—or blaming. Let's get on."

They plodded on again, their heads bent low to shield their faces from the driving flakes and biting wind—silent now. It seemed strange to be lost on Wayland Moor, or on that stretch which lay between Wayland and St. Jim's at all events. But what, in the day-time, was familiar ground, was now nothing but a waste of unknown ground with its huge boulders and gorse bushes assuming strange and fantastic shapes under their coverings of snow.

Certainly the position was serious, as Blake had well said. The moor stretched for miles around, and to be lost amid its trackless wastes in a snowstorm and with night coming on, was anything but a light matter.

Even Arthur Augustus had forgotten his elegant "clobber" now, but Herries had not forgotten his beloved Towser. That sagacious—according to Herries—bulldog was showing signs of distress by now, for the snow was some three inches deep and getting deeper every moment. He laboured along, wheezing and grunting dismally.

"This snow fairly beats the old boy," muttered Herries at last, "or he would jolly soon find the way home for us. You fellows know what a splendid tracker he is."

"Splendid fiddlesticks," grunted Blake crossly. "We know the chump-headed animal is always getting us into a hole. B-r-r-r-r!"

"What utter rot!" said Herries indignantly. "Fancy blaming old Towser! I tell you—Hallo, what's up with the old boy?"

Herries' words ended in a note of excitement, for there certainly did seem to be something "up" with Towser. He had suddenly stopped dead in his listless ambling, and after sniffing the air for a moment he gave vent to a series of sharp barks. Then he began to strain at the lead in his master's hand.

"He's spotted something," said Herries eagerly. "Good old Towser! Lead us home, old boy."

"Smelt the bloters toasting in the fog's Common-room, I expect," remarked Lowther, half grinning. "Let's hope so, anyway."

"Let him go on, Herries," said Tom Merry hopefully. "It looks as if—What's that?"

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The juniors stopped dead in their tracks, their nerves thrilled. From the deathly stillness around them had come a sudden cry—faint and appealing.

"You fellows heard that?" breathed Tom Merry. "It—it was a cry for help. Listen!"

The juniors waited, their eyes searching the gloomy desolation around them. But the sound was not repeated, and it was Tom Merry who broke the silence. He stooped swiftly and peered down at the snow at his feet.

"Look!" he said. "Towser's not spoofing, and that cry was real enough. Look at those footprints. They're recent, and not a man's, either."

"Look like a boy's," said Blake, staring blankly at the double row of deep indentations in the snow. "Who on earth—My hat! Perhaps it's one of our fellows—lost, like ourselves."

"Likely enough," said Tom Merry. "Anyhow, he shouted for help and we've got to find him. Follow up the track, you chaps."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors plodded on—anxious and excited, their eyes fixed on the mysterious footprints, their ears keenly alert for help and we've got to find him. Follow up the track.

But it was Towser who found the stranger. He wrenched the lead suddenly from the hand of his master, and bounded ahead, floundering excitedly in the snow.

"Towser's got him," shouted Herries. "Good old Towser—steady, old boy."

They reached the spot a moment later to find Towser standing over a huddled-up form lying in the snow—the form of a boy. He lay there motionless, his white face strained and pinched with cold.

Towser was licking the boy's face, but he bounded aside as Tom Merry dropped on his knees in the snow and raised the boy's head.

"Who is it?" whispered Blake. "Is he—"

"He's unconscious," said Tom. "He's a stranger to me, though. I wonder what on earth—Hallo, he's coming round. Good!"

Even as Tom Merry spoke the stranger opened his eyes and blinked around him, shivering as he did so. As he sat up, Tom Merry wrenched off his greatcoat and wrapped it round him.

"All serene now," he said, trying to speak cheerily. "You'll soon be all right. What's happened? I suppose you got lost. Here, let me help you."

With D'Arcy's aid Tom helped the stranger to his feet, where he stood swaying, his teeth chattering with cold. He was a boy of about their own age, with a frank, open face and curly hair. His clothes were obviously good, though drenched with snow. But he had been wearing no greatcoat, and even in Tom's he shivered violently.

"I—I heard your voices and then I heard the dog bark," he muttered, gazing about him dazedly. "I hardly know what happened after that. I started to stumble towards you when I fell, and must have struck my head against something."

He held his head dazedly for a moment, and then his face became suddenly agitated and he peered eagerly at the juniors.

"You're from St. Jim's," he muttered quickly and excitedly.

"Can you lead me there—now, at once?"

"But—but—" began Tom Merry blankly.

"I was hurrying there—to St. Jim's—when I lost my way. I've been wandering about for hours, it seemed," said the strange boy, seeing the wondering looks on the juniors' faces. "I was going for help."

"For help?"

"Yes—help for my uncle who's in danger—great danger," panted the boy half hysterically. "Be quick! Don't you understand? They've surrounded the house, and were breaking in when I came away for help. Oh, please start, or show me the way—quickly."

"Bai Jove!"

The startled juniors blinked at the boy, then they looked meaningfully at each other. The stranger's words tumbled from his lips excitedly, and his looks were wild and distraught. They concluded, naturally enough, that the fall and exposure had affected his head.

"But—but—" stammered Tom Merry. "I don't understand. Who are you, and who is your uncle? What—"

"Forgive me—I was forgetting you don't know—cannot know," said the stranger, becoming calm again just as suddenly. "My uncle is Mr. John Marsden, of Moat Grange, and I am his nephew, Jack Marsden."

"Oh!"

"I see you know my uncle—though you don't know me," said the boy rapidly. "Well, what I said just now is true—only too true. A gang of men—desperate men—are trying to break into the house—are trying to capture my uncle—if they haven't captured him already. They—"

"But—but—"

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"I can't explain now," panted the boy, grasping Tom Merry's arm in his agitation. "I must see Dr. Holmes—appeal to him for help. My uncle wouldn't hear of my fetching the police. But when they started to break in I determined to appeal for aid to Dr. Holmes. He's the only friend my uncle has round here. Now come—before it's too late."

"Phew!"

CHAPTER 2.

The House of Mystery!

THE juniors blinked in amazement at Jack Marsden, heedless of the whirling snow and biting wind now. It was almost dark, but they could see the boy's white, strained face and gleaming eyes, and their fear that his brain had become affected suddenly left them. The stranger's earnest, pleading face was sane enough, and his tense words carried conviction.

Certainly, the story was strange—mysterious. But then, so were Moat Grange and its owner strange and mysterious. Mr. Marsden was a queer old fellow—a hermit, according to local gossip—who neither made friends nor encouraged callers, and who was reputed to be a scientist. As for the Grange—the juniors knew it well, standing as it did on the edge of Wayland Moor, delapidated, with ill-kept rambling grounds. It was a house of secrets—a house where anything might happen—to the juniors' vivid imaginations.

The silence was short, and Tom Merry broke it.

"We'd help quickly enough—if we could," he exclaimed quietly. "But, like you, we've lost ourselves."

"Oh!"

The exclamation was wrung from the boy in deep disappointment and despair.

"There's no need to despair, though," went on Tom, rapidly. "If we can't find St. Jim's, we can perhaps reach the Grange and be of help."

"But how—"

"By following your footprints—if we're quick," snapped Tom Merry. "There are eight of us—not counting old Towser. If only a landmark would show up—"

"There is one—quite near!" exclaimed Jack Marsden eagerly. "I passed it just before hearing you—a big ruin standing on a hill."

"Wayland Castle!"

The words came simultaneously from the St. Jim's juniors. "Oh, good!" breathed Tom Merry. "Then it's a simple matter. You must have been wandering in a circle, and so must we. Moat Grange is scarcely half a mile from the castle. On the trail, you fellows!"

They started back, eager and hopeful now, stumbling along in the ever deepening darkness. In places the drifting snow had obliterated the footprints, but they soon picked them up again, and at last Jack Marsden gave a cry and pointed to a dim, shapeless mass rising up to the left of them.

"It's the castle, right enough!" exclaimed Blake, staring at the ghostly, but familiar, shape. "Easy going now."

And it was. The juniors knew where they were and, ignoring the faint footprints now, they pressed on with all haste. All the stranger's weakness and fatigue seemed to have vanished, and he plunged ahead with ever increasing anxiety. And within ten minutes of leaving the ruins behind the gloomy trees of Moat Grange loomed ahead.

"Better scout round first," muttered Jack Marsden tensely. "I—I say, you chaps. You understand, of course, that these rascals are desperate men? I—I hardly like running you fellows into danger like—"

"What rot!"

"Wubbish, bai Jove!"

"We're going on, Marsden," said Tom Merry grimly. "I don't understand a lot about this queer affair, but we've taken the job on and we're going to see it through."

"Yes, rather!" growled Herries. "Wait until old Towser gets—"

Herries' enthusiastic words ended in a startled gasp. The juniors had just reached the snow-clad bushes fringing the ill-kept lawn of the Grange, when something happened.

Without warning, Towser wrenched the lead from his master's hand and vanished into the bushes with a deep-throated growl. They heard him crashing through the undergrowth, and then followed a wild yell and the snarling and growling of the bulldog.

"That's done it!" breathed Tom Merry. "Oh, my hat! Towser's collared someone. Come on!"

There seemed no doubt about that, and the startled juniors dropped all thoughts of caution. With one accord they dashed after Towser, their hearts thumping with excitement.

They came to the scene of the disturbance with a rush. In the snow, with his back to a bare tree-trunk, a man was standing. He was yelling furiously as he frantically lunged at Towser with a heavy stick.

As a general rule Towser was a good-tempered animal, but he obviously had scented an enemy now, and was in a decidedly bad temper.



Tom Merry & Co. plodded on, anxious and excited, their eyes fixed on the mysterious footprints in the snow, their ears keenly alert for a repetition of the weird cry that had startled them. Suddenly Towser wrenched himself free from his master, and, bounding ahead, he floundered excitedly in the snow. "Towser's got him!" cried Herries excitedly, as the juniors raced to the spot. (See page 4.)

"Back, Towser!" hissed Herries. "Good dog! Back, old boy!"

He sprang forward as he spoke, and dragged the snarling Towser back by main force. As he did so the unknown man kicked savagely at the dog. Then he lunged viciously at Herries' stooping form with his cudgel.

But Jack Marsden was too quick for him. Though the kick went home, the blow never landed. Even as the stick swept down, the boy's fist took the rascal under a stubby chin, and he staggered back, the stick flying harmlessly to the snow.

What happened next the excited juniors scarcely knew. From the house came a sudden, shrill blast of a whistle, and next instant the snowy lawn seemed to be alive with men.

There sounded the thud of feet in the snow; vague, shadowy forms passed the startled juniors. They stood helplessly bewildered by the sudden stampede, and before they had grasped the situation the crashing of bushes ceased and silence fell.

At the first sound of the whistle their assailant had slipped away like a shadow, and the juniors found themselves alone.

"Phew! That was quick work!" breathed Tom Merry, gazing about him blankly. "My hat! There must have been a dozen of them. What—"

"Not a dozen—four or five, at most," said Jack Marsden. "They all came this way, though. But"—his tone became suddenly urgent—"my uncle! They came from the house and must have— Come quickly!"

The boy dashed across the white lawn, the juniors at his heels. A bright light gleamed on the snow from the open french window, and as they followed Jack Marsden over the threshold the juniors stopped dead at the scene within the room beyond.

It was obviously the library of the Grange—a lofty, book-lined room, well furnished, but in a sad state of utter disorder now. Books lay scattered over the thickly-carpeted floor, a desk and a bureau had obviously been ransacked,

and their contents strewn over the floor. The safe door stood wide open, showing a bare interior.

But that was not all. Before the desk a man was seated—a grey-haired, old man, with strong and clever features. He did not move on the boys' entrance, for his arms and legs were bound to the chair he was seated in.

As Jack Marsden ran across to him and slashed at his bonds with a pocket-knife, his face did not move a muscle, though his eyes gleamed brightly.

"You're safe, then, uncle?" panted the boy. "Thank Heaven! I feared—"

"Thank you, Jack, my boy," said the white-haired old man quietly. "You came just in time. I feared that you had gone for help. You should not—but no matter. So this is the help you have brought?"

He stretched himself a trifle wearily and glanced keenly at the juniors. They coloured a little under his penetrating gaze. They had seen little of the old hermit before, but they had heard a lot from the villagers concerning the queer crusty old scientist, and they eyed him curiously now.

"You are St. Jim's boys, I see?" he said, glancing at the glistening caps in the juniors' hands. "You came, though you must have realised there was danger in coming. I am glad to see Dr. Holmes' boys are plucky and unselfish. Thank you, boys."

The queer old man turned abruptly to his nephew.

"Bland is in the kitchen, I believe—possibly in difficulties," he said rather snappily. "I do not think those villains would harm him. You had better see to him, however. If he is all right, kindly instruct him to prepare refreshments for your friends. I will telephone for a conveyance to take them home."

Jack Marsden motioned to the juniors and they followed him in silence from the room. Though they had expected something of the sort from the old hermit, they had scarcely expected such cool—almost unconcerned—treatment of the situation. He had not even asked his nephew any questions concerning the juniors' unexpected appearance there, either.

But they passed no comments—then. Jack Marsden, however, seemed to guess their thoughts.

"He—he's like that sometimes—queer, you know," he confessed hesitatingly. "But—but he's not so crusty, really, as he seems. He's a good sort and no end fond of me. He's grateful to you fellows—I could see that."

"But—but the burglars; haven't they taken anything?" gasped Tom Merry. "He doesn't seem to worry—"

"They're not burglars—at least, not ordinary burglars," said Jack Marsden grimly. "I don't think they got what they wanted—in fact, I know they didn't. What they are after is more precious than silver or—"

He stopped suddenly and his lips shut tightly.

"Come on," he said.

They went hurriedly along the winding corridor, and soon reached the kitchen. And they found what they had half-expected to find. Bound hand and foot to a chair in the kitchen was Bland, the hermit's man-servant, his sole companion, save his nephew, in that lonely house.

There were plenty of signs of a stiff struggle in the room, and the juniors guessed that Bland, who was a powerful man, had made a good fight for it.

He was soon released, and he proved to be less communicative, if anything, than his master. He thanked them briefly, and after chaffing his cramped limbs he set about preparing hot coffee and biscuits for the juniors.

It was not until the meal was ended and the buzz of a motor came from the drive that Jack referred to the queer affair again. While the juniors had been taking their coffee he had been called into the library, and they could see that it had not been for nothing.

"You fellows," he began, flushing slightly, "you've been jolly good coming to our aid like this. But—but my uncle would like you to do him another favour. He wants you to keep silent about this—this business; he would rather you didn't mention the affair to a soul. Will you promise?"

"Certainly—if he wishes it," said Tom Merry, staring. "We won't."

"I know that you fellows are wondering what it all means," said the boy quietly. "And I don't wonder. But—but I can't tell you—yet. All I can do is to ask you to forget what has happened here to-night."

"We'll do that," said Blake. "But your uncle and yourself. Those brutes may return. You ought to have the protection of the police."

"That's so," said Tom Merry, his brow clouding. "You can't fight them alone."

"We've got to. My uncle won't have the police brought into the matter," exclaimed Jack Marsden, his eyes troubled. "I know it's dangerous—madness. But—but I can't help it. My uncle doesn't fear those villains—he defies them."

The juniors nodded glumly, and shortly afterwards they

tumbled aboard the waiting taxi, though not before they had exacted a promise from Jack Marsden to send for them if danger threatened.

The snow had ceased to fall by this time, and a wan moon shone through a rift in the clouds, revealing the countryside in a mantle of white. There was no sign of the besiegers about; but that gave the juniors little comfort. They knew that at any time they might return, and the thought of leaving the lonely defenders to the mercy of the attackers was not pleasant. And as the humming taxi ploughed through the snow, homeward bound, leaving the house of mystery far behind, the juniors' faces were sombre and their hearts full of forebodings.

CHAPTER 3.

The Call for Aid!

IT was long past locking-up time when the juniors arrived at St. Jim's, and as Taggles, the school porter, grumblingly unlocked the gates he gave them a pressing invitation, from Mr. Railton, to visit that House-master in his study.

But the juniors had expected it, and they went along to the master's study without loss of time, expecting trouble. Their out-of-bounds passes were only until calling-over, and being out after lock-up was a serious matter.

But they proved to be lucky. Mr. Railton was a reasonable master, and he accepted their explanation that they had been lost on the moor without awkward questioning. And after lecturing them on the folly of crossing the moor on such a night, he dismissed them without further punishment.

In Study No. 10 on the Shell passage, and in Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage there was little prep done that evening—indeed, neither of the friendly Co.'s attempted to do any. They were too tired for one thing, and for another their minds were too full of their recent strange adventure to bother about such an uninteresting thing as prep.

That there was some strange mystery beneath the old gabled roofs of the house on the moor was undoubted; but no amount of discussion or speculation brought a satisfactory solution to the mystery, and the juniors went to bed still wondering.

But they were anxious, too, and Tom Merry, at least, was a long time getting to sleep. He had taken a strange liking to that quiet, lonely boy at the Grange, and for hours he lay sleepless, wondering anxiously what was happening at that strange house of secrets.

Was all well, or had the attackers besieged the house again at dead of night? And, if so, how had the plucky little garrison fared?

The suspense, the uncertainty, and his own helplessness were intolerable to Tom Merry. And more than once he felt an intense desire to spring from his bed and make a wild, mad pilgrimage across the trackless moor to settle his fears.

But his common sense soon put the reckless idea to flight, and at last he fell asleep, and when he opened his eyes again the wintry sun was streaming in at the high windows of the dormitory.

Monty Lowther, who was standing, looking out of the frost-rimmed window-panes, looked round as Tom Merry leaped from his bed.

"Frost, you chaps!" he announced. "A hard frost after the snow; the jolly old snow won't spoil the skating after all."

"Good egg!"

"Ripping!"

The announcement brought joy even to the slackers, and every fellow was soon out of bed and dressing briskly. Frost and snow meant fun, and plenty of it.

The juniors fairly swarmed downstairs and out into the quad, eager to get to work, and soon a fierce snow-battle was in progress between the rival juniors of the School House and New House.

Lowther and Manners took part in the fun, as did Blake and Co., but Tom Merry, for once, stayed indoors. It had been arranged that if Jack Marsden needed their help urgently he would phone through to Tom Merry, if he got the chance. And Tom Merry did not intend to be out of easy reach should that possibility arise.

But the chapel came and went—as did brekker—without the half-expected and feared call coming. But though somewhat reassured, Tom was still uneasy. And then, just before morning lessons, an idea occurred to the junior, an idea so simple and obvious that he wondered it had not occurred to him before.

Why not ring up the Grange himself, to ask if all was well?

And feeling he could not stand the suspense longer, Tom hurried along at once to the prefects' room.

It was empty, as he had expected, and he was soon giving the number to the exchange. Then he waited. At last a voice came over the wires, but it was the voice of the girl at the exchange.

"No; I can't get them," she said, in answer to Tom's

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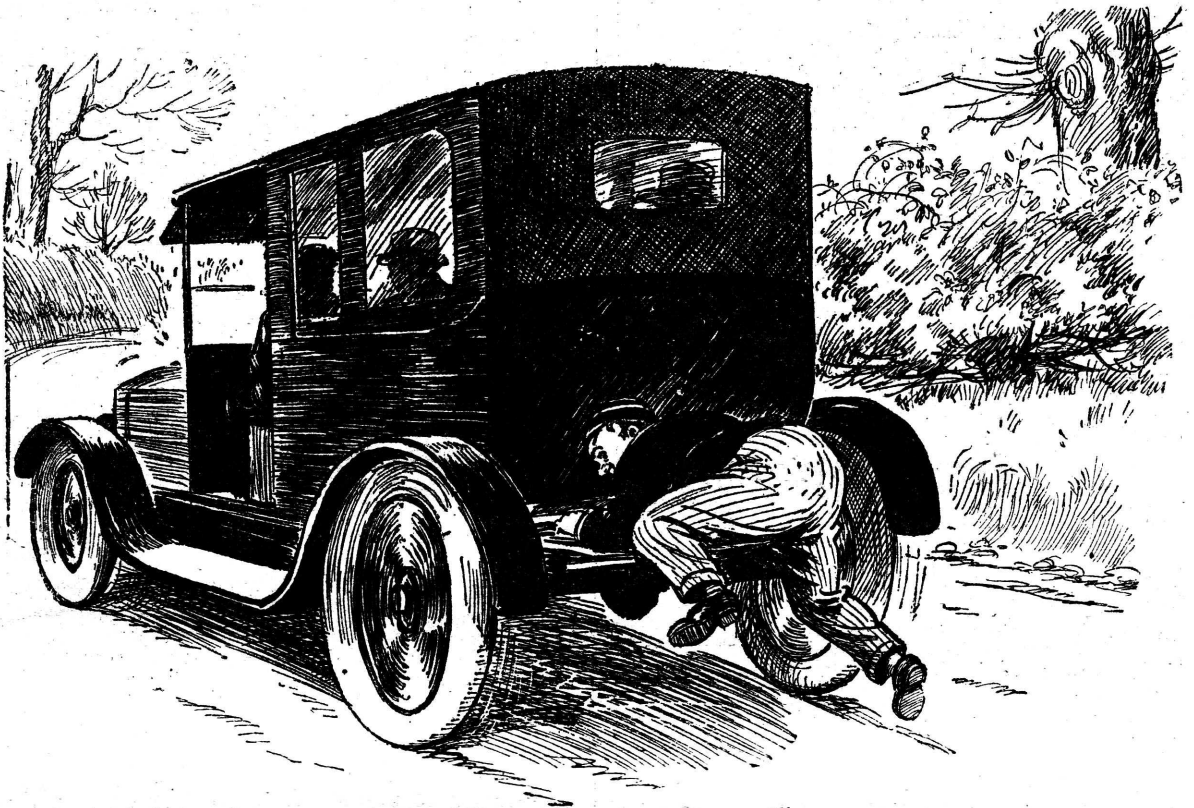
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MYSTERY NOW ON SALE! ADVENTURE



As the car jolted past him Baggy Trimble made a wild dash after it, and sprang awkwardly on to the rusty luggage-rack at the back, holding on desperately. Splashing into ruts, leaping over stones and mounds, the taxi rushed along, with the pasty-faced Baggy clinging on grimly behind. (See page 12.)

anxious query. "They must be away at the Grange, or the line's out of order—the storm, I expect."

Tom Merry scarcely heard the last few crisp words. He hung up the receiver slowly, and a sick feeling of dread came to him.

What did it mean? He knew it could only mean one thing—danger. Something had happened at the Grange, and Jack Marsden had been unable to send a call for aid.

The silence was certainly ominous.

The junior left the prefects' room, and out in the passage he halted, his brain working rapidly. It had scarcely occurred to him that the call might come at an awkward time, and it certainly was awkward now. Already he could hear the fellows tramping in to lessons, cheery and noisy, and with sudden decision the junior hurried along the passage.

He realised that the position was desperate, and, lessons or no lessons, he was determined to apply desperate remedies.

He found that the Shell had already entered their Form-room; but the Fourth were just filing in, ruddy and breathless, and Tom was just in time to catch Blake at the tail end of the file.

He clutched his arm eagerly.

"Hold on, Blake," he breathed. "Can you get your chaps out again—D'Arcy and the others, I mean?"

"What the thump—" began Blake, gazing blankly at Tom's excited face.

"Listen," muttered Tom Merry tensely. "There's something wrong at the Grange—I've tried to get them on the phone, and can't. You know what that means. We're going there—"

"But—but what about lessons? How on earth—"

"Blow lessons. It'll mean trouble; but it won't mean the sack—and we can stand anything else, Blake. Get your pals out somehow, and then get your skates and caps. You can get our skates too, you'll find them in our lockers. Then wait at the gates for me. I've got to get Lowther and Manners out somehow, and it won't be easy."

Blake's amazement was great; but his hesitation was brief, and nodding, he vanished into the Form-room. Knowing Blake would not fail him, Tom Merry hurried along the passage.

He had a ticklish job before him, and he knew there was only one way to do it. He opened the Shell Form-room door and marched in boldly.

The Shell were already settled in their seats, and Mr. Linton was just opening his desk. He blinked rather severely over his spectacles as the junior entered.

"Merry," he began testily, "I have already told you many times that I detest these belated arrivals in the Form-room. You will—"

He paused, and blinked in wrathful astonishment at Tom Merry. For that junior, instead of walking to his own seat had coolly crossed to Lowther and was whispering to him.

"Merry!" ejaculated the master. "How dare you?"

But Merry dared more than that. He went next to Harry Manners and whispered to him. Then with a cool, but respectful "Sorry, sir," he marched out of the Form-room.

He had scarcely done so when Lowther and Manners rose and started after him.

"Merry, Manners, Lowther!" gasped the astonished master. "How—how dare you? Come back at once."

But the three juniors did not come back. The door closed after them, leaving Mr. Linton staring at it as if he could not believe his own eyes.

Once out in the passage, the Terrible Three, though scared at their own audacity, ran for it. Knox of the Sixth happened to be coming along the passage, and they almost bowled him over in their headlong dash. As they rounded the corner they heard Mr. Linton at the door calling to Knox.

"Oh, my hat! That's done it," panted Tom Merry. "Run for it—Knoxy will be after us."

Only stopping a brief instant to get their caps, the Terrible Three flew out of the School House and across the snowy quad. They reached the gates safely, and Tom Merry gasped his relief to find Blake & Co. waiting them there, with skates in their arms.

"You've done it, then," grinned Blake, as they rushed up. "My hat, there'll be a jolly old row about—"

"Knoxy's after us," panted Tom Merry. "Run for it!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Blake & Co. turned to follow the Terrible Three in flight, but they were too late. Through the gateway came the tall figure of Knox, the prefect, and he barged full into the hesitating juniors.

His grasp closed at once on Arthur Augustus, and the swell of the Fourth gave a yell.

"Wescue, deah boys—wescue!" he gasped. "Bai Jove, welease me, Knox, you wottah!"

But Knox had no intention of doing that, if he could help

it. As it happened he could not help it. With a combined rush, the Terrible Three and Blake & Co. swarmed up, and over him.

What happened next, Knox hardly knew. But when he regained his scattered wits at last, he found himself floundering out of a heap of drifted snow, with powdery snow in his mouth, his eyes, down his neck, and smothering his clothes.

Tom Merry & Co. were yards away by then, trotting briskly down towards the frozen Rhyl. They were all looking rather scared now.

"We've fairly done it," panted Tom Merry ruefully, as they ran. "But it couldn't be helped—we had to do it. You've got our skates, Blake? Good!"

"Yes, I wondered at first what on earth you wanted skates for," said Blake. "But I see now—you mean to skate up the Rhyl to Moat Grange—"

"That's it," said Tom, nodding. "It's a short cut, and we'll be there in no time. And if those rascals are there—well, we'll give a jolly good account of ourselves."

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy!"

And Tom Merry & Co. trotted on towards the frozen Rhyl, grim and determined. They had assaulted a prefect—they had defied and flouted the authority of two masters of St. Jim's—and they knew there was trouble awaiting them on their return.

But they were thinking only of the task before them now—leaving the future to take care of itself—trouble or otherwise.

CHAPTER 4.

Just in Time!

THE banks of the river were piled with drifted snow, but out on the wind-swept ice it was fairly clear, save for stray patches here and there.

But though the state of the ice was anything but ideal for skating, the juniors made good progress. They were skilful skaters all, and the ice on the Rhyl fairly echoed to the cheery ring and clatter, clatter of skates as they raced on between its frosty banks.

The rear grounds of the Grange ran down to the Rhyl, and in less time than it would have taken the juniors to cycle the distance by road, they arrived there, ruddy and glowing from the exhilarating rush through the keen morning air.

They lost no time in shedding their skates, and soon were treading the snow-carpeted grounds, anxiously scanning the gloomy house as they approached it.

Even in the bright, wintry sun, the Grange looked dark and forbidding, and the juniors soon noted signs that were far from reassuring.

From the queer, twisted chimneys no smoke curled up into the frosty air, and the whole place appeared to be empty and deserted.

Tom Merry's rosy face became more uneasy than ever as he noted the ominous signs.

"I don't like the look of things, you fellows," he muttered, glancing about him anxiously. "I think we'd better go warily."

"Good job old Towser isn't with us to give the blessed alarm, this time," remarked Lowther. "If he hadn't—"

"Look here, Lowther—" began Herries warmly.

"Dry up, Lowther, you ass," said Tom Merry sharply. "This isn't the time for wrangling. It was just as well, perhaps, that Towser did give the alarm last night. We hardly know what we're up against yet. Quietly now, and take cover where you can."

He led the way, dodging from one clump of white-shrouded bushes to another, and his chums followed him, like Red Indians on the warpath.

They soon had abundant evidence that something was wrong. There was no sign of life about the place, and after a brief inspection of the front of the house, where every door and window was found closed, Tom led the way round the back again.

They rounded the stables, and reached the kitchen door. It was standing wide open, and the juniors hesitated then. There seemed something ominous and disturbing in the empty stillness.

"Come on," whispered Tom Merry.

He entered the doorway boldly, and his chums followed. Then they stopped. Like the previous evening, the room showed visible signs of a struggle having taken place there. The table had gone over and crockery and the remains of a meal lay scattered about the floor.

The signs were only too easy to read. Obviously old Bland had been attacked while at breakfast.

But Jack Marsden and his uncle—what had happened to them?

Full of alarm now, the juniors hurried along to the library. To their astonishment the room was neat and tidy—nothing appeared to have taken place there.

But this fact did not serve to lessen their fears, and the juniors then made a hurried inspection of the bed-rooms. Bland's bed was made—his room neat and tidy. But this was

not the case with the bed-rooms of Jack Marsden and his uncle.

Jack's bed was empty and the clothes tumbled over the floor. There were muddy footprints on the carpet, and more ominous still, obvious signs of a struggle having taken place there.

There were also muddy footprints on the carpet in Mr. Marsden's bed-room; but the bed-clothes had been turned back neatly, showing that the old scientist had risen when the attack came. The room was also orderly.

Baffled and bewildered, the juniors went downstairs and out into the kitchen-yard again. They wandered aimlessly about, searching vainly for a clue to the mystery.

It was Tom Merry who found a clue at last. Just outside the yard, where the swept-up snow had been piled, he stopped suddenly and pointed to the snow, his face alive with excitement.

"Look!" he exclaimed eagerly. "That explains it. They've been captured and taken away—where, goodness only knows. Notice how some of those footprints drag—as if whoever made them had been yanked along by main force? My hat! That's it."

The juniors stared at the tell-tale footprints, all leading from the house—a clue that made the truth plain now.

"You are right, Tom Mewwy," ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, peering down through his monocle. "Bai Jove, deah boys, I wondah wheah those uttah wascals have taken them?"

"We've got to find that out, Gussy," exclaimed Tom Merry grimly. "It doesn't need a trained tracker to follow those. Come on."

In grim silence the juniors followed up the plainly-read sign. But it did not lead them to the drive—as they had half-expected. It led them straight across the snowy lawn, through the laurel bushes fringing this, and once through these Tom Merry stopped with a warning word.

Facing them was a stretch of rough ground—tufts of frosted grass and thickets showing above the snow. Beyond this was a building—a tumble-down summer-house. And it was towards this that the tracks in the snow led.

"Queer!" muttered Tom Merry. "It almost looks—Here, wait here for me—I'm going to scout round."

He left his chums abruptly and fitted from thicket to thicket like a shadow. They saw him reach the back of the summer-house and, after listening there a moment, he applied his eye to a chink in the woodwork.

Then, abruptly, he turned a white, scared face to his chums, and beckoned them, holding up a warning hand for caution as he did so.

In a trice Blake and the others were at his side.

"What is it, Tommy?" whispered Blake. "Are—"

He broke off then, for to his ears came a murmur of voices from within the summer-house.

"Yes—they're in there," murmured Tom Merry in a curiously trembling voice. "Look!"

There were plenty of chinks in the old woodwork, and in a moment Tom's chums were looking aghast at the scene within. And it was more than startling.

In the little room were six people—five men and a boy. Four of the men were strangers—well-enough dressed in a flashy sort of way; but anything but prepossessing in appearance. The fifth man was Bland, Mr. Marsden's man-servant. The boy was Jack Marsden.

Bland was seated, his back to the wall, trussed up like a turkey. But it was at the boy the chums of St. Jim's were staring; and their faces went dark as they grasped his position.

He was standing, his face to the wall, his arms outstretched above his head, his wrists tied with a thin rope which was stretched tightly from a hook above his head.

But that was not all. His jacket and vest were off, and close by one of the strangers—a hard-featured, sandy fellow wearing spectacles—stood by, a riding whip in his hands.

The meaning of the scene was obvious.

Even as the horrified juniors took it in, the sandy-haired man spoke, his voice hard as steel.

"For the last time, you stubborn little whelp!" he said. "Answer me. Where is your uncle—where is Mr. Marsden?"

There was no answer from the palid lips of the boy—indeed, he appeared to be beyond answering anything. He was triced up so high that his heels did not touch the floor; his face was white and strained, and the pain from his wrists and feet must have been intense.

"The—brutes!" hissed Blake, gritting his teeth. "Tommy, we're going to stop that—"

Another voice from within the room interrupted Blake. It was Bland's, who was struggling fiercely at his bonds, his rugged, honest features red with fury.

"You cowardly curs!" he said hoarsely. "Let me get my fists free and I'd thundering soon teach you to torture a defenceless lad. Torture me if you want to torture anyone—I know as much as that boy knows."

"Perhaps so," remarked the sandy man coolly. "But I

fancy we shall get what we want from the youngster sooner than from you, my friend."

"You—you—"
The plucky fellow was beginning again, but one of the men stooped, and, striking him in the face, sent him toppling helplessly over. The sandy man went on speaking to Jack Marsden as if nothing had happened.

"Very well, then," he said calmly, as the boy still remained silent. "After all, your uncle's whereabouts don't matter—so long as we get what we're after. You know what we want, my boy. You know—"

"You'll never get it through me, you—you brutes!" Jack Marsden had spoken at last—the cry seemed to be wrung from his dry lips.

"Very well; we must try persuasion."
The man's grip tightened on the whip. He raised it aloft, and at that Arthur Augustus gave a stifled gasp.

Unkindness, much less cruelty, always distressed the kind-hearted D'Arcy; and he was much more than distressed now. He turned a shaking face to Tom Merry.

"We—we can't stand that, Mewwy," he muttered huskily. "We must wescue the deah boy. Come on. Wush the wottahs, bai Jove."

And Arthur Augustus was starting away when Tom Merry gripped his arm fiercely.

"Stop!" he hissed. "It's madness. Even seven of us wouldn't stand a chance against four men—and desperate men. We must try strategy. Wait—"

The junior broke off, his pulses thrilled.
From within the summer-house had come a vicious swish—followed instantly by a cry—a sobbing cry of pain. It was enough—rather more than enough for D'Arcy, or his chums.

Wrenching his arm free from Tom Merry's detaining grasp, D'Arcy leaped away and his voice rang out:

"Wescue, St. Jim's—wescue, deah boys!"

CHAPTER 5.

Tom Merry's Ruse!

TOM Merry followed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy like a shot.

There was nothing else for it, even the level-headed junior captain of St. Jim's realised that now.

The impetuous D'Arcy had cast the die, and though Tom Merry and Blake felt the chances of victory were slim, they went into battle with resolution and courage.

They swarmed into the little summer-house on the heels of Arthur Augustus, and next instant uproar and confusion reigned in the confined apartment.

But unlike the others, Tom Merry avoided coming to grips with any one of the four rascals. He knew their only chance was to get the powerful Bland into the fray, and Tom made straight for the helpless man-servant, whipping out his knife as he dodged through the combatants.

He reached the prostrate man, and a couple of swift slashes released Bland's ankles. But that was all.

As the knife touched the cord round Bland's arms, a vicious blow sent Tom spinning across the room, and the knife flew from his hand.

"You little rat!" snapped a voice.
It was the sandy-haired man, and next moment Tom Merry gasped as the man's knee pressed into his chest, pinning him to the floor.

But not for long. Bland's feet were free now as the rascal found out when a hefty boot took him in the ribs, and with a gasping grunt the rascal collapsed and rolled off his victim.

"Oh, good!" panted Tom.
He groped frantically for the fallen knife, and his groping fingers closed on something. It was not the knife—it was a silver whistle; and as Tom's swift glance fell upon it, his eyes gleamed, and he sprang to his feet.

A lightning glance round showed him that already the position was hopeless. Three of the juniors were hors de combat—put clean out of the fight by sundry savage blows and kicks. But Blake, D'Arcy, and Lowther were still clinging like terriers to an opponent—fighting like the plucky juniors they were.

Tom Merry hesitated barely a second, for the sandy-haired man was already scrambling to his feet, then like a flash he went through the doorway.

He reached the shelter of a thick clump of trees, and the next instant the shrill blast of a whistle rang clear on the morning air.

The effect was electrical.
From the summer-house there came a hoarse shout of alarm, and this was followed almost immediately by the stamp of feet, and through the doorway rushed the four rascals, pell-mell like frightened rabbits.

They stood a second, staring blankly about them, and then with one accord they dived into the trees where Tom was hiding.

One of them brushed past Tom's hiding-place, almost touching him. But not until their crashing footsteps had ceased and all was quiet, did Tom Merry move.

He had hoped—he had half expected—something of the sort. Yet, now it had actually succeeded, he was staggered.

His heart leaping with thankfulness, he ran across to the summer-house and sprang inside. His chums were just staggering dazedly to their feet, and they fairly blinked at him.

"What—who—was it the police?" panted Blake.
Tom Merry showed the silver whistle in his hand.
"No—though I fancy they thought it was!" he said grimly.
"It was little me. I found this on the floor—it must have dropped from that sandy-haired merchant's pocket."

"Bai Jove!"
"I remembered what happened last night—how they bolted like rabbits when that whistle went," said Tom. "I guessed it was a signal to the gang—a signal of recall—and I thought I'd try it. I guessed they'd think it was either that or the police. It worked."

"Phew!"
"And now—"
Tom Merry ran across to Jack Marsden, and with D'Arcy's pocket-knife soon cut the cords that held him. The boy sank into Tom Merry's arms, almost fainting.

But he very soon recovered, and while Blake finished releasing Bland, Tom Merry and D'Arcy assisted the dazed boy out into the open air.

"Safe enough now, Marsden," exclaimed Tom Merry. "They won't dare to come back—yet. But—but your uncle? Where is he? Is he safe?"

Jack Marsden nodded as he chafed his bruised wrists.
"He's safe—I think," he muttered. "He—he got up early to work—he often does. He will not know this has happened. He's in—"

He paused and flushed.
"They found me in bed, and poor old Bland in the kitchen at breakfast," he went on hurriedly. "We—we had no chance—"

Again he broke off, his eyes fixed on the house. They had reached the lawn by this, and as the juniors followed his glance they fairly jumped.

Crossing the lawn from the open french window was the old hermit, his white hair showing beneath a close-fitting skull-cap. He walked quickly towards the juniors, his clean-cut features showing quiet surprise.

The juniors were astounded.
"Why—what has happened, Jack?" he demanded, gripping the boy by the shoulder. "You look ill—quite ill. Surely—and why are these boys here again?"

"They've been again, uncle—those men," stammered Jack, eyeing his uncle a trifle nervously. "They captured Bland and myself, but these fellows from St. Jim's rescued me again."

He told the story quietly, and afterwards the juniors told theirs. As he listened the old hermit's face grew dark.

"It has every appearance of being much more serious than I had imagined," he muttered—almost to himself. "I was mad—mad to allow the boy to stay—"

He checked himself, and his hand fell on Jack Marsden's shoulder.

"Go and get your breakfast now, my dear boy," he exclaimed, a queer, strained note in his voice. "And perhaps your friends—your new friends who have once again earned our gratitude—will join you."

"I—I think we'd better be going, sir—if you don't mind," stammered Tom Merry. "We've already cut—I mean, missed—first lesson, and—"

"Very well—as you please," was the quiet reply. "I think that very soon you will probably have every opportunity of making my nephew's closer acquaintance."

He nodded quite genially to the juniors and re-entered the library. His nephew stared after him curiously.

"I wonder what my uncle meant by that," he exclaimed blankly. "You're sure you chaps won't stay, though?"

Tom Merry shook his head, grinning rather ruefully. But he refrained from telling the boy the circumstances under which they had left St. Jim's—and what awaited them on their return. He guessed it would make him concerned on their behalf. And after the lonely boy's promise to send for them if further danger threatened, they shook hands and left him.

There were no signs of the strange men about, and down at the river's edge they quickly donned their skates and started back. Despite their recent triumph, they were feeling by no means comfortable in their minds.

So far the luck had been with the defenders of the lonely Grange; but the juniors all felt that such an extraordinary state of affairs could not last for long, and they were worried and uneasy.

They were also more mystified than ever.

What was the cloud that hung over that house of mystery? And what was the secret the old hermit held—the secret a gang of desperate men were sticking at nothing to get into their hands? And why—this was the queerest part of all

—why did the old hermit refuse to have the police brought into the matter?

There was another strange feature of the case.

Where was the old scientist when the attack had come early that morning? Jack Marsden said he had got up early to work. And, if so, where had he been working? Obviously, he had known nothing of what had taken place. And the house had been empty when they had searched it!

It was baffling.

"There's one thing jolly certain, though," said Tom Merry, as they raced back at express speed. "The old chap was somewhere about the house—I'm certain of that. It's jolly queer!"

"Thumping queer!" agreed Blake glumly. "Anyway, it's no good worrying about it now—we'll jolly soon have something else to worry us. What on earth are we going to say to Railton—or to the Head?"

"I expect it will be the Head," groaned Tom Merry. "Anyway, we've fairly asked for it—and we'll get it right enough. I'm blessed if I know what we can say, though."

Nor could the others. And the faces of the St. Jim's truants were anything but cheery as their gleaming, ringing skates carried them back to St. Jim's that bright, frosty morning.

CHAPTER 6.

A Surprise!

"HERE we are!"

"Now for it!" groaned Jack Blake. "Might as well go straight to Railton's study, I suppose."

"Oh dear!"

In a dismal group the truants tramped into the School House, their skates slung over their shoulders. The chopper was about to come down—the hour of settlement had arrived.

"No good whining," said Tom Merry. "We aren't going to let the fellows see we funk trouble, either. I vote we walk boldly in and take our places as if nothing had happened."

"Oh, good egg!"

The juniors were in a reckless mood, and the suggestion appealed to them.

But it was not to be. Even as they started towards their Form-rooms, a tall form emerged from the Sixth Form room ahead of them.

It was Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and as he sighted the truants his brow went grim and he came towards them.

"So you have returned," he said, eyeing them very curiously. "I was just starting out for the river in search of you."

"Glad we've saved you such a lot of trouble, Kildare," remarked Lowther cheekily.

"What sort of a mood is Railton in, Kildare?" asked Tom Merry.

"That won't concern you much," said Kildare, with a curious grimace. "I fancy you won't find this a humorous matter presently, kids. You are to report yourselves to the Head at once."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

The juniors looked at Kildare in consternation. It was far worse than they had supposed.

"But—but—" began Tom Merry.

"You kids have asked for trouble, and you're going to get it," snapped Kildare. "You assaulted Knox—a prefect—and he has reported you direct to Dr. Holmes. That's all. Now cut off to the Head's study. Here, I'll come with you."

Kildare waited whilst they got rid of their skates, and then he escorted the luckless juniors towards the dreaded apartment. Possibly Kildare felt that they might disappear once again.

He tapped at the Head's door, and in response to a deep "Come in!" was about to enter when he started back with an apologetic "I'm sorry, sir."

For the Head was not alone. With him was a tall, white-haired old man and a boy. Tom Merry and Co. almost jumped as they recognised them.

They were Mr. Marsden and his nephew.

"What is it, Kildare?" demanded the Head, rather testily.

"I am engaged at the— Ah!"

The Head's brow darkened as he caught sight of the crowd of juniors behind Kildare.

"So those wretched boys have returned, Kildare," he said sternly. "Kindly take them to the detention-room. I will deal with them later."

"Yes, sir."

Kildare was about to close the door when the old hermit stepped quickly forward. There was a curious half-smile on his fine features.

"One moment," he said calmly. "Am I right in presuming that these boys are about to be punished for being absent from school this morning, Dr. Holmes?"

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The Head lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"That is so, Mr. Marsden," he exclaimed. "But—"

"Then if you will kindly allow me a few moments in private, Dr. Holmes, I think I can persuade you that the conduct of these boys was not without justification—more, it was impelled by motives which do them the utmost credit."

"Oh, indeed," ejaculated the Head, considerably astonished. "Very well, Mr. Marsden."

He nodded to Kildare, and the skipper closed the door.

"Come on, kids," said Kildare.

He walked away considerably surprised, and the juniors trooped after him, more surprised still. He said nothing, however, and a minute later they found themselves in the detention-room, with the door locked upon them.

"Well, my only topper!" ejaculated Blake, as Kildare's footsteps died away along the passage. "Looks as if we've going to get off after all."

"Better not be too sure," warned Tom Merry. "The Head may not see eye to eye with old Marsden—bless him! What the thump is he doing here, though—with that kid? I wonder—"

"Perhaps young Marsden's got him to come, guessing we'd get into trouble," said Herries.

"I don't know," muttered Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Anyway, we'll soon know."

And they did soon know.

Ten minutes after Kildare returned to the detention-room, and this time he was smiling, though he eyed the juniors curiously.

"Come on," he said briefly.

They followed him back to the Head's sacred apartment, and this time they found only Jack Marsden with Dr. Holmes. As Kildare departed, after closing the door, the juniors ranged themselves before the headmaster's desk, nervous and wondering.

For a full minute the Head eyed them gravely and in silence; then he spoke.

"Mr. Marsden has told me why you left your Form-rooms this morning, and has also detailed the happenings at the Grange—though I am still ignorant of the meaning underlying such extraordinary disturbances," said the Head. "I am amazed and alarmed to know that any boys under my care have taken part in such a dangerous enterprise. Mr. Marsden, however, has satisfied me that you were bound to secrecy, that your motives were good, and that your part in the matter did you great credit."

The Head paused and his voice became stern.

"But for that, but for the fact that I fully realise that you acted, as you believed, for the best, that sheer desperation impelled you to act as you did, your punishment would be severe indeed. You have broken strict rules, you have defied the authority of your Form masters, and you have assaulted a prefect. In view of the circumstances, however, I feel justified in withholding punishment. Your connection with the affair, however, must end here. From to-day, Moat Grange and its immediate surroundings are strictly out of bounds to all the college."

The Head paused again, and his voice changed.

"And now there is another matter," he said. "Marsden, here, whose acquaintance you have already made, is to be from to-day a schoolfellow of yours. He will go into the Shell for the present, and I trust you will become firm friends. You had better take charge of him, Merry. You may go."

And they went—dazedly. But out in the passage, with the door closed behind them, Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he said. "Who'd have thought it would end like that? But it's good to know you're coming here, Marsden, old chap. Did you know it this morning?"

Jack Marsden shook his head.

"No; but I guessed something of the sort from what my uncle said about seeing a lot of you chaps soon. He told me what he had decided when you'd gone, though. He thinks I'm not safe there after what happened this morning. He—he's worried about me."

"Well, I'm jolly glad," said Tom Merry.

"Same here."

"Yaas, wathah," agreed Arthur Augustus.

But there was a cloud on the face of the new St. Jim's fellow as he accompanied his new chums to the Form-room. He was glad—glad to come to St. Jim's, glad to be close to his new friends. But his thoughts were far away—with the lonely defenders of that house of mystery on the bleak moor.

CHAPTER 7.

What Baggy Trimble Saw!

THE sudden and unexpected arrival of a new boy at St. Jim's, at such a time and without previous warning, came as a surprise to the fellows, and Jack Marsden found himself an object of much interest and speculation, especially when the fellows learned that he was a nephew of the queer old hermit of Moat Grange.



Tom Merry had just trapped the ball and had the unguarded Grammar School goal at his mercy when Baggy Trimble, unable to stop his headlong charge on the slippery ground, barged into him, and sent him sprawling. "Whooop!" yelled Tom Merry. (See page 13.)

But the new boy bore the questions and curiosity of the Lower School with good-humoured fortitude, and his first day—or rather half-day—at St. Jim's passed pleasantly enough. He was a likeable fellow, and he quickly made friends with his Form-fellows.

To his own satisfaction—and the obvious delight of the Terrible Three—he was placed in Study No. 10. Had it been any ordinary new boy to be pitch-forked into that select apartment, the chums of the Shell would not have been delighted—far from it. But as Monty Lowther assured Jack Marsden, he was as welcome as the flowers in May.

The next few days passed pleasantly enough for the new boy. He quickly settled down to his new life, proving to be quite a good footballer, and equally handy with his fists, as Aubrey Racke discovered when he happened to pass an unpleasant remark concerning the hermit of the moor.

But he was obviously not happy, though only Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. knew the reason. Certainly, the news from the Grange was reassuring enough. Since that early morning attack, the house had been left severely alone, nor had anything been seen in the vicinity of the gang. They seemingly had given up their objective—whatever it was—as hopeless after their last defeat.

But to Jack Marsden the silence was ominous. He believed that they were only waiting their chance, as did Tom Merry & Co. The old scientist did not share that view, obviously. In his letters to Jack he expressed confidence that all danger was past. It was strange how the stubborn, plucky old fellow underestimated the danger, how scornfully he viewed the attempts of the rascally gang.

Yet Jack Marsden was right—as were Tom Merry & Co.—as they discovered soon enough.

It was the following Wednesday that it happened. After

dinner Tom Merry ran into Jack Marsden on the Shell passage.

"Just looking for you, old man," exclaimed Tom, smiling. "You know we're playing the Grammar School at Rylcombe this afternoon?"

"I know—yes."

"Levison's crooked," said Tom. "The ass thought there were seven steps from the hall-way to the quad, and there are eight. He's sprained his ankle. I want you to take his place in the forward line. Feel fit?"

"I'm fit enough," said Jack Marsden. "But—but, I'm sorry; I can't play."

"But—but—"

"I've got another engagement," muttered the new fellow.

Tom Merry eyed him. Moat Grange was strictly out of bounds to Jack Marsden as it was to any other junior. But several times Jack had been unaccountably missing lately, and Tom Merry had shrewdly suspected where he had been.

"You—you're going—"

"I'm going over to the Grange," said the new boy doggedly. "I'm going to see how things are."

"It's out of bounds—"

"I know; I've sneaked over several times to talk to Bland; he won't give me away. I know."

"It's risky," said Tom gravely. "If the Head—"

"I'm going," said the boy stubbornly. "I'm sorry I can't play."

"All serene—take care, though," said Tom quietly.

And he passed on in search of other talent, looking more than a little worried.

Jack Marsden had started out when the brake containing the St. Jim's footer team left the school. But he did not go unseen—or alone.

He had scarcely taken a dozen steps along Rylcombe Lane when a fat figure came rolling after him. It was Baggy Trimble. He rolled after the new fellow and placed a fat hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"Wait a minute, old chap," he panted. "I'm coming with you."

Jack Marsden stopped, and frowned upon the fat Fourth-Former. Though he had only been at St. Jim's a few days, he already knew all there was to be known about the fat and greedy Peeping Tom of St. Jim's.

"Buzz off, you fat frow," he snapped. "I've no bobs to lend, and I'm giving nothing away. Cut off!"

"Oh, really, Marsden, old fellow, I'm coming. It'll be company—"

"I don't want company—"

"I know you don't," grinned Baggy Trimble, winking. "You don't think I haven't spotted where you've been trotting off to lately. You've been going home. Trust me to find out things."

Jack Marsden was turning away; but he stopped suddenly, and his face darkened. He knew that many of the fellows were curious about him, and that Baggy Trimble was more than curious. Evidently the over-curious Baggy had been watching him.

"You—you—" he began.

"But it's all serene, Marsden, old chap," went on Baggy. "I understand, old fellow. They don't give a fellow half enough to eat at this blessed school."

Marsden almost burst into a laugh at that. Apparently Baggy Trimble imagined his surreptitious visits to Moat Grange were for the purpose of supplementing the food allowance he got at school.

"You fat ass!" he exclaimed, guessing now why Baggy wished to keep him company. "Roll away."

He turned, smiling, and walked briskly on. Baggy rolled after him again wrathfully.

"Look here, you rotter!" he panted. "Are you going to take me with you or not?"

"Not," said Marsden.

And grasping the unwanted Baggy firmly, Jack planted him in a sitting posture in the midst of a thorn-bush by the road-side. Then he walked on again.

It took Baggy quite a time to extricate his fat person from the thorn-bush. And when he did, he was breathless, and his face was red with wrath. The bush was prickly, and Baggy was very much pained in more ways, and places, than one.

"Beast!" he spluttered, looking after the disappearing form of the new boy. "Mean beast! I'm jolly well going, though. Once I get there he won't dare to turn me out before his blessed old nunky. If that fails I'll go round and try the cook—tell her I'm a pal of Master Jack's. He, he, he! Lucky I know how to tackle cooks."

And with these reeds to support his intention, extremely slender reeds had he known it, Baggy grinned and started after Jack Marsden, keeping some distance behind, however.

It was a fairly long walk across the corner of the moor to the Grange; but Baggy felt that the possibilities in view were worth it. It was a tiring walk also, mud and slush from the recent snows making the going anything but easy. And in a short time after crossing the stile from Rylcombe Lane, Baggy was wishing he hadn't started the adventure.

But he stuck it, feeling it hardly worth while giving up now.

Panting and puffing from his efforts to keep up with the junior in front, Baggy stumbled and trotted on, until suddenly he pulled himself up with a startled gasp.

Like a ghost and with startling abruptness, a man's figure rose from a crouching position just ahead of him, and between him and Jack Marsden. Almost at the same instant another man rose up just ahead of Jack Marsden.

"Oh—oh dear!" gasped Baggy.

Too petrified to move, much less warn the unconscious junior, Baggy watched, his knees fairly knocking together, as the two converged in upon Marsden.

Baggy saw the junior start back suddenly as he glanced up and saw the man in front. The next instant the man behind jumped upon Marsden, and the junior went to earth fighting gamely.

It was soon over, however—against the two the youngster hadn't a chance. He lay helpless while a cord was passed round his arms and legs.

Then Baggy awoke to his own danger and dropped behind the shelter of a thicket hard by. He knew the two men had not seen him—but he had no intention of taking further risks.

It was just as well he did, for a moment later yet another man came running from a slight gully to the left of them. His voice came to the ears of Baggy Trimble clearly.

"You've got him, then?"

"Yes, we've got the kid, Cregan," was the answer.

"Good!" The newcomer, a sandy-haired, bespectacled man, whom Jack Marsden had already recognised, glanced back

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towards the way the juniors had come. "There were two of them, one behind the other," he added curly. "Where— It scarcely matters, though. You had better run for the cab, Burt."

Evidently his word was law, for without hesitation one of the rascals started off across the moor at a run. Baggy watched him go almost petrified with astonishment and fear.

Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes passed with scarcely a movement from the men left to guard the captive. They stood smoking, scarcely exchanging a word. From his hiding place Baggy watched, wondering if he was dreaming.

And then the silence of the moor was broken by the sound of a motor engine, and across the rough ground came an old, rickety Ford taxi. It roared and rattled along the cart-track quite close to where Baggy crouched, and as it drew up close to the men, Cregan stepped forward and wrenched the door open.

The other man picked the helpless Marsden up in his arms, and bundled him inside the cab. Then, as Cregan jumped in after him, Burt started up the engine, and as the third man leaped up beside him, the Ford turned and came grinding back towards Baggy Trimble.

Panic seized the fat junior then, and he felt an almost irresistible desire to turn and bolt for his life.

What he actually did do, however, was entirely unexpected and certainly surprising—for a funk like Baggy.

As the car jolted past him Baggy jumped up, and—what made him do it, Baggy himself never knew—certainly those who knew Baggy Trimble never knew, or could imagine. But he did it.

He made a wild dash after the cab, and sprang awkwardly on the rusty luggage-rack at the back, holding on with desperation.

Almost the next instant he regretted his rash act, but it was too late then.

In that instant the car leaped forward, almost jerking Baggy from his narrow perch, and then it was jolting and roaring along the cart-track, with the pasty-faced Baggy clinging on grimly.

Splashing into ruts, leaping over stones and mounds, the taxi crossed the short stretch of moorland track, reached an open gateway leading on to Rylcombe Lane, then turned and went roaring away towards Rylcombe.

CHAPTER 8.

Thanks to Baggy!

BAGLEY TRIMBLE had "sneaked" many, many rides in the course of a somewhat "stoney" career. As he jolted on towards Rylcombe on the back of that taxi, gripping on like grim death, his heart in his mouth, his fat features like chalk, he vowed from the bottom of his heart that this would, indeed, be his last.

But, fortunately, perhaps, for Baggy, it did not last long—indeed Baggy himself was astonished when the cab turned suddenly from Rylcombe Lane through a gateway, and went rocking and lurching over a rough cart-track once again.

Peering round the side of the vehicle, Baggy saw that the taxi was moving towards a small, tumble-down farmhouse, standing well back from the road.

The place was little more than a ruin—it had been unoccupied for years. But though Baggy Trimble only knew the outside of the place he hadn't the slightest intention of getting to know the inside—if he could help it.

Almost before the taxi came to a standstill Baggy was off his perch, and had dived through a hole in the nearest high hedge like a great fat rabbit.

It was as well Baggy did choose that way of retreat, for had he taken the cart-track way, he would almost certainly have been seen. But there came no shout after him, though even Baggy did not stop his headlong dash until he had placed a couple of fields between himself and the farmhouse.

Then, panting and utterly exhausted, his fat face streaming with perspiration, the fat junior halted and glanced behind him.

He could not see the distant farmyard, but as he looked he saw the taxi moving slowly down the cart-track towards the lane.

"Oh dear!" groaned Baggy. "What on earth shall I do?"

He stood reflecting a moment, and even as he stood thus a sudden roar of youthful voices reached his ears. Baggy jumped as he heard it. Then, glancing towards the sound, he understood.

Through the hedge of the field he was in he caught sight of moving colours—moving forms. To his ears came the sharp thump of boot meeting ball, and next second a leather sphere soared high beyond the hedge.

"M-mum-my hat!" mumbled Baggy.

In a flash he realised where he was. He was standing in one of the fields bordering the Grammar School playing fields. Beyond the leafless hedge Tom Merry and his stalwarts were doing battle with Gordon Gay & Co.

As he grasped the truth Baggy's exhaustion left him abruptly, and he charged through the hedge like a mad bull.

He scarcely saw the fellows standing round the touchlines. He had caught a glimpse of Tom Merry near the nearest goal-mouth, and he charged on to the field of play, his fat face ablaze with excitement.

From the touchline came a sudden angry roar.

"Here, what the—"

"Come back, you fat idiot!"

"Get off the field, old grease barrel!"

"Baggy, you burbling maniac—"

Baggy Trimble scarcely heard the roar of voices—nor did Tom Merry. The latter had just trapped the ball—and the Grammar School goal-mouth was unguarded before him.

It was a certain goal—or would have been but for Baggy. But even as Tom Merry brought back his foot, Baggy Trimble arrived. Unable to stop his headlong charge in time on the slippery ground, the fat junior barged full into Tom Merry, sending him sprawling.

Then Gordon Gay nipped in, whipped up the ball and sent it spinning over the touchline.

The roar round the field became a howl of rage.

From everywhere the St. Jim's juniors came rushing up, their faces red with wrath. Tom Merry scrambled to his feet, and was the first to reach the prostrate Baggy.

He wrenched the fat junior by main force to his feet, and shook him angrily.

"You—you fat rotter—"

"Smash him!"

Baggy yelled as he saw the ring of angry faces round him.

"Here, leggo! Stop! Stop 'em, Tom Merry!" he howled in alarm. "I've got news. Listen to me, you rotters! They've got him—they've got Marsden; those awful villains—"

"What?"

Tom Merry jumped.

"Kidnappers!" howled Baggy, excitedly, his mouth and eyes resembling those of a codfish. "They've kidnapped the new kid; they've collared him, and taken him—"

"Gammon!"

"The spoofing rotter!"

"Stop that; let him speak, you fellows!"

Tom Merry's ringing voice silenced the scoffing yells.

"Now, Baggy," snapped Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming, "tell us—quickly!"

And Baggy told quickly enough. As they listened, the Grammarians gasped, whilst the Saints—who knew Baggy—grinned; despite their wrath they could not help it.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Talbot. "What terrific whoppers! That last, though, about Baggy jumping on the blessed taxi, beats—"

"Half a minute, Talbot," said Tom Merry, frowning.

"You say they've taken him to that farm over there—"

"Yes—it's true, I swear, Tom Merry," gasped Trimble eagerly.

Tom Merry held up his hand, his lips set hard.

"Listen to me, you fellows," he said quietly. "What Trimble says I believe to be true—I've good reason to know it must be true. I can't say more than that, though. I can only ask you chaps to take my word for it, and to call on any chap who isn't a funk to help me storm that farm and rescue Marsden."

There was an amazed murmur, and curious glances were cast at Tom Merry. But the juniors did not hesitate long. They knew Tom Merry wasn't the fellow to "talk out of his hat," and the answer came promptly.

"You can call me in, Tommy," cried Talbot.

"And me," came the chorus.

"You Grammarians can—"

"Nuff said, Tommy," said Gordon Gay, grinning. "I don't quite see the merry game, but we're in this. Lead on, old son!"

"Then come on."

And without more ado Tom Merry was off with a rush. What followed was the strangest thing ever witnessed by spectators on that ground. From the ropes they had been watching the group out on the field in bewilderment.

But their bewilderment changed to utter amazement as, without warning, the whole of the players stampeded from the ground with a combined rush.

Many of the players hadn't the faintest idea what it was all about, themselves. They had been dotted about the field when Baggy told his story; but they followed their respective leaders, nevertheless.

Obviously, something unusual was afoot, and they had no intention of missing it.

With Tom Merry leading the way they leaped the ropes one after another, and before the spectators had recovered from their surprise the rescuers were through them like a knife through butter.

They charged through the gap in the high hedge and went streaming across the field beyond in a straggling line of twinkling colours.

They crossed the couple of intervening fields in no time and, reaching the farmyard wall, went tumbling over, pell-mell.

Even as they did so there came a sudden alarmed shout from the farm, and three men came running out. They stared blankly at the oncoming footballers in startled indecision.

But there was no mistaking the destination of the yelling crowd, and as the horde came charging across the yard the men bolted into the house, slamming the door behind them.

If anything was wanted to settle the doubts of the doubters, that significant retreat was enough.

There was a simultaneous angry rush for the door, but as Tom Merry reached it he heard the sound of rusty bolts being shot home.

"Smash the door down, you fellows," cried Tom. "Quick!"

A rush was made for a woodpile a yard or two away, and a moment later willing arms were rushing a heavy balk of sodden timber against the door.

Crash; crash, crash!

At the third thunderous blow something snapped and the door bulged inwards; at the fourth there was another sharp snap, and the rickety door swung back.

Dropping the battering ram, the juniors surged into the kitchen beyond. A glance showed that it was empty, and as Tom Merry led the way into the inner room, they found that empty, too.

But the window swung wide open, and as he dashed across to it, Tom Merry gave a yell.

Racing across the rubble-strewn front garden of the farm were four men. They crashed through the flimsy hedge fringing the garden, and a moment later the starting of a motor-engine reached the juniors' ears.

"They're getting away—after the rotters!" yelled Gordon Gay.

He vaulted through the open window as he yelled, and after him went the crowd—only Tom Merry and his immediate chums staying behind.

From room to room they hastened, anxious and apprehensive.

It was Tom Merry who found Marsden in a garret at the top of the house. The kidnapped junior lay on the floor, his arms and legs bound, his face white and strained.

But his eyes gleamed and sparkled as Tom rushed in to his aid and slashed at his bonds.

They fell away at last, and as they did so Jack Marsden staggered to his feet, swaying in Tom Merry's grip.

"Are you all right, Marsden?" panted Tom. "Have they—"

"Right as rain!" was the muttered answer. "They—they hadn't time to do anything to me—they just flung me in here. But—but how on earth—"

"It was Trimble," said Tom. "He saw those chaps collar you, and followed. Then he brought us on the job, and—Hullo, here are the others."

There was the thud of footsteps on the bare boards below them, and next moment Gordon Gay's cheery voice was heard. He came stamping up the stairs, and as he saw the rescued junior, he gasped.

"Then—then it was no spoof?" he ejaculated, as if he had still doubted. "Is he—"

"It was no spoof—I knew it wasn't!" said Tom quietly.

"This is Marsden, Gay—a new chap."

Gordon Gay shook hands with the rescued boy, and then a buzz of excited questioning burst out as a crowd of footballers came stamping upstairs. Obviously the rascals had got away.

But Tom Merry would have none of it.

"No time for questions, now, you chaps," he exclaimed. "Marsden's had a rough time, and it's hardly fair to worry him. Now, what about the match, Gay? Hadn't we better—"

"What-ho!" said Gordon Gay, grinning.

The leader of the Grammarians was as curious as anyone; but he was a good sort, and he forbore to ask further questions—more, he gave his men no time to ask any either.

In less than a minute he had shepherded his men together and was leading them at a trot back to the field. A straggling crowd of spectators was approaching the old farm, curious to know what the business meant; but they started back on seeing the footballers returning.

"If you're fit you'd better come with us now, Marsden," said Tom Merry swiftly. "You'll be safer among the crowd, anyway. And you needn't answer questions if you don't want to. On the ball, you chaps."

They raced back hard on the heels of the Grammarians, ignoring the shower of excited questions from the crowd on the touchline, and within two minutes the whistle went and the game was restarted.

But the game fizzled out after that, both teams being too excited to play good footer; and both Saints and Grammarians were relieved when the whistle went for time, with no score on either side.

CHAPTER 9.
The Night Raiders!

THE dusk was thick in the old quad when the footballers arrived back at St. Jim's that evening.

They were not a cheery crowd by any means. The match had been a disappointment—more, it had turned out a "frost," and the return journey was rather a gloomy one. Moreover, they were all—with the exception of Tom Merry & Co. and Marsden—puzzled and mystified. Baggy Trimble, for once, had been allowed to ride back with them, and he appeared to be the only bright member of the party. Baggy was immensely pleased with himself. Alone and unaided, he had tracked down the kidnappers, had brought about the rescue of the kidnapped. His voice was heard all the way from Rylcombe, and the burden of his song was the remarkable resource and pluck shown by Baggy Trimble.

Tom Merry and his chums refused to discuss the matter, and during that dismal journey home they—not forgetting Marsden—were objects of much discussion and many curious glances.

Tom Merry himself was looking very thoughtful and disquieted. The matter of the kidnapping would soon be common knowledge among the Lower School. It was probably only a matter of time before it reached the ears of someone in authority. He wondered whether he ought to report the matter himself.

And yet he knew what the Head's view would be. He would never allow a pupil of his to be subjected to such dangers; he would insist upon the police being placed in possession of the facts.

On the whole Tom decided not to take the risk—to allow matters to take their course.

As yet the juniors had had no chance to talk to Jack Marsden, to hear his story. But when the two Co.'s foregathered together that evening in Study No. 10 for tea, Jack gave them a full account.

"They must have been expecting me—they must have seen me visiting the Grange before, and waited for me," he ended quietly. "They downed me, and I hadn't a chance."

"Wotten, bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus, shaking his head seriously. "Weally, Marsden, deah boy, this sort of thing cannot go on for evah, you know."

"And it won't," said Tom Merry gravely. "We've had astounding luck so far—we beat them again this afternoon. But—but it mayn't last. Something ought to be done, Marsden. Sooner or later those rascals will—"

"It won't go on for ever," said Jack Marsden, his face pale. "Look here, you fellows, I'll tell you. Things are approaching a climax, fast. Those fellows were desperate this afternoon. If they don't get what they want to-day they will never get it, and they know it. It's to-day or never."

"But—but I don't understand this—"

"And I can't explain—yet," said Jack Marsden. "But I'll tell you this—I wanted to warn you. They'll be attacking the Grange to-night—a last desperate venture. I know it."

"Phew!"

"I wanted to warn you," went on Marsden grimly. "I wanted to warn you that if I am missing from the dorm to-night you'll know where I am; and if I am still missing in the morning, then you'll know that something serious has happened. You can then tell the police—in fact, it would be better."

"You—you're going—"

"I'm going to break bounds to-night—I'm going to the Grange. If there's danger there, I'm going to be with my uncle to face it."

"Bai Jove!"

"But—but you can't go alone—across the moor—"

"I'm going."

There was a silence. Tom Merry broke it by banging his fist on the table until the teacups rattled.

"Then if you're going, we're coming with you, Marsden," he said flatly. "You're not going alone. Trouble or no trouble, we're in this with you—if we're sacked for it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"By jingo, yes!" snapped Blake.

"Hear, hear!"

Every fellow in the study eagerly added his agreement, and the new fellow's eyes glistened.

"You—you fellows are jolly good sorts," he muttered huskily. "I don't like dragging you into danger—I don't like you risking the sack for me. But—but I'll be jolly glad to have you."

"You've no choice in the matter, my pippin," said Tom, half grinning. "We're coming. We'd be howling funks if we didn't. We'll start out directly the fellows are asleep, and we'll take a torch and cricket-stumps."

"Good!"

And so it was arranged. And by the time Blake & Co. went along to their study for prep, every detail had been fixed up.

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But there was little prep done by any of the chums that night. They were too excited to work, and they could scarcely contain their impatience as they waited for bed-time. It came at last, and only the juniors' eyes showed their pent-up excitement as they went up to bed. They had all agreed to keep awake, and at last, in the Shell dormitory, Tom Merry gave the signal.

He stepped silently out of bed and Lowther, Manners, and Marsden followed his example and began to dress. Then, silent as ghosts, they left the dormitory and crept down to the lower box-room to wait for Blake & Co.

It was ten minutes before the Fourth-Formers put in an appearance, and Tom Merry eyed them impatiently.

"Buck up, you cripples!" he snapped. "All serene?"

"Yes; D'Arcy kept us back, as usual," grunted Blake.

"He insisted on going back for his blessed eyeglass. The burbling dummy—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up!" said Tom sharply. "No time for that rot. All ready?"

He waited while Blake & Co. put on their boots and got their cricket-stumps from the corner where they had been hidden in readiness, and then led the way through the window on to the leads.

In a few seconds all were safe in the quad below. It was not very dark. A shadowy moon showed through the scurrying clouds, and they were thankful for this.

"We'll not need the torch after all," said Tom, with satisfaction. "We'll be able to see our way across the moor easily enough. Come on."

But it was Jack Marsden who led the way; he could scarcely contain his anxiety and impatience. And once outside the school precincts, he set a rattling pace along the quiet lane. They were forced to slow down on the moor, however. Even though they could see clearly enough, the ground was slippery and treacherous, and the going punishing.

Twice Tom Merry called a brief halt to repair bellows, and all were breathless and tired when at last the dark and forbidding mass of the Grange came in sight.

As before, they approached with the utmost caution, their hearts beating fast with the thrilling emotions that gripped them. Jack Marsden's hand shook so that he could scarcely grip his cricket-stump.

To-night, under the wan moon and drifting, scurrying clouds, the old house looked particularly sinister and more than ever a house of dark mystery.

But to Jack Marsden—who knew the secret the old house hid—the house was home; it brought no fear to him. Yet he was afraid—afraid of what they might find under its gabled roofs to-night.

Were they too late? Had the grim and cruel raiders already carried out their ruthless designs?

The anxious boy gritted his teeth at the thought, and only Tom Merry's restraining hand held him from springing to his feet and making a wild, mad dash towards the house.

"Safety first," muttered Tom warningly. "Your uncle's safety and ours, Marsden. I don't think anything's happened yet—see, there's a light in the library."

He pointed through the laurel bushes to where a shaft of bright light streamed across the ill-kept lawn from the french window of the library.

"Oh, good!" breathed Marsden thankfully.

The sight of that warm stream of light was strangely comforting and cheering to the spirits of the adventurous juniors. But it did not lessen their caution.

It told them that all was well—so far; that the old hermit was probably sitting up reading; or working, late. But they knew that the danger would come from the outside—that even then the dark shrubbery and grounds might swarm with enemies.

And it was well they did not relax caution.

They had started to creep forward again, when, quite abruptly Tom Merry gave a warning hiss, and his hand closed like a vice on Marsden's arm as he dragged that junior down beside him.

"Quiet! Not a sound!" he breathed.

"Weally, Tom Merry! What—"

"Shut up, ass!" hissed Tom. "Look—over there by that cypress-tree, you chaps."

"My hat!"

There was a sharp intaking of breath as Tom's chums suddenly saw what he had already seen.

Across the stretch of lighted lawn, standing motionless in the shadow by the cypress-tree was the tall figure of a man. They could not see his face; but as he moved slightly they caught the glimmer of spectacles as the light caught them.

"Cregan!" breathed Jack Marsden.

For an instant the man stood, obviously staring into the lighted room, and then quite abruptly he stepped back, deeper into the shadows.



Hardly had the flying bottle forced Cregan to drop his revolver than Tom Merry's voice rang out. "At them, you chaps! St. Jim's for ever!" Like a pack of hounds the juniors flung themselves at the rascals, hitting out right and left and sending them down with a simultaneous crash. At that instant the head and shoulders of Bland appeared above the stairs. (See page 16.)

The next moment they saw why. A tall, grey-haired figure appeared at the french window. Plainly ignorant of the danger without, he raised his arms and dragged a heavy, thick curtain across the window.

The broad beam of white light vanished from the lawn, leaving only a thin streak that escaped from a slit in the drawn curtains.

And in that instant there sounded a rustle from the direction of the cypress-tree, and a dim figure glided across the lawn like a shadow. It was followed by another and yet another.

They vanished into the shrubbery on the opposite side, near the house, then a stillness followed.

"Quiet!" breathed Tom Merry. "Wait!"

There sounded no rustle of footsteps or parting of foliage, and whether the men had gone they could not tell. The juniors waited, their hearts thumping, hardly daring to breathe.

Minutes passed and the stillness was nerve-racking to the juniors, wound up to a high pitch of excitement and tension as they were. It seemed an eternity before Tom Merry whispered:

"They've gone, I think. I—I don't like this, you fellows. We'd better risk it; we'll try the french window, Marsden—to warn your uncle."

Marsden nodded—he could not speak. Tom Merry stepped softly across the lawn, keeping well in the shadows; and his chums followed. There came no movement from around them—no sound or sign to tell them they were discovered. Tom reached the window, and peered through.

The slit in the curtains was wider than he had thought—he had a clear view of the interior of the room. And what he saw sent the blood rushing to his heart.

CHAPTER 10.

The Secret Room!

MR. MARSDEN, the old scientist, was there. He was seated at the table, with a little heap of papers before him. He sat, facing the window, his back to the door, and he was so engrossed in his writing that he obviously was utterly unaware of what Tom Merry could see.

He seemed unaware that behind him the door had opened, and that he was not alone—that in the doorway behind him a man was crouching, the light glinting on a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles he wore.

But the juniors outside saw him—and recognised him with a thrill.

It was the sandy-haired man—the man known as Cregan. In the passage behind him, they also saw the dim form of a second man.

With an impatient gesture the old scientist suddenly threw down his pen, and rising to his feet he crossed over to the fireplace.

His hand closed on a queerly carved projection beneath the mantel-shelf, and—what happened next must have amazed Cregan as much as it did the juniors.

Soundlessly—or so it appeared to the juniors outside—a whole section of the old, finely panelled ceiling slid aside, and as it did so something bulky came sliding downwards—moving as if on oiled wheels.

It proved to be a wonderfully contrived flight of steps, and as the bottom step touched the thick carpet, the old hermit went up them slowly and steadily.

As he reached the top he stopped a brief second, and then a sudden flood of light lit up the dark aperture.

"A secret room," breathed Tom Merry, finding his voice then.

It was undoubtedly. And the effect the staggering discovery had upon the crouching Cregan was amazing.

He stared blankly upwards for a brief moment, and then his hard features became ablaze with triumph.

Turning swiftly he beckoned to the man out in the passage, and the next moment he was treading stealthily up the queer, flimsy-looking staircase.

He reached the top, vanished from sight, and then to the startled watchers' ears there sounded a cry—followed by the faint sounds of a struggle.

The juniors awoke from their trance then.

"Quick!" gasped Tom Merry, gripping Jack Marsden by the arm fiercely. "How can we get in—we must get in."

"This way," panted Marsden chokingly. "There's a window—"

He dashed away, and after him when the other juniors, heedless of direction, stumbling and tripping over dimly-seen obstacles in the faint moonlight.

Hard on Jack's heels they rounded a corner of the ivy-clad wall, and even as they did so a startled, half-stifed cry rang out on the still night air.

Rushing up they found Jack struggling in the grip of a man—a man who had evidently been guarding an open window just above their heads.

The juniors did not stop to ask questions—they piled in, and under half a dozen clinging forms the man went to earth with a thud.

But he was up again the next second, hitting out savagely. Manners went spinning into the bushes from a brutal blow, and a savage swing of the man's arm sent Tom Merry and Lowther staggering back.

But aid was at hand for the St. Jim's juniors. There came a shout and a man carrying a swinging lantern came hurrying round the corner. It was Bland, the hermit's faithful man-servant.

Like the juniors before him he did not stop to ask questions. As he raised the light aloft and glimpsed what was afoot he gave a bellow, and a fist like a leg of mutton shot out.

It took the swaying ruffian clean under the chin, and as the clinging juniors jumped away, he went down like a falling log.

"Quick! Never mind him, Bland," panted Jack Marsden. "They—"

"It won't need anyone to mind him," growled Bland. "Any more of 'em, Master—"

"Quick!" repeated Jack Marsden hoarsely. "They've got my uncle—the library, quick."

He leaped up and grasping the edge of the window-sill above them, pulled himself up. He vaulted through, and in turn the excited juniors went after him.

Such athletic feats were beyond the old man-servant, and after making sure the rascal he had felled, was, indeed, "out," he hurried round to the back of the house.

But the juniors hadn't waited for Bland.

With a rush they reached the library door. It was still wide open and unguarded and they surged into the room. Heedless of whether the flimsy stairs would stand the strain, they swarmed up, dimly aware of muttered voices above them.

All were unarmed—they had left their cricket stumps in the garden—and though they knew they had desperate men to deal with, not one of them faltered.

They found themselves standing in a brilliantly-lighted room—a room they recognised at a glance as a well-equipped chemical laboratory.

But the juniors did not allow their eyes to dwell on their surroundings. For flat on the floor lay the old hermit, a prisoner in the hands of his enemies at last.

By his side Cregan was kneeling, holding his wrists; whilst his accomplice was about to pass a cord around them. But as the juniors dashed in Cregan half rose and turned his head.

Then he gave vent to a savage exclamation and like lightning his hand went to his hip-pocket.

But if he was quick, Tom Merry was quicker.

His grasp closed on a bottle standing on a bench hard by, and it left his hand with a whiz.

His aim was true—amazingly true for such a lightning throw. It struck Cregan's wrist with a soft thud, and the glinting weapon flew from his nerveless hand across the floor.

The crash of the falling bottle had scarcely sounded when Tom Merry's voice rang out.

"At them, you chaps—St. Jim's for ever!"

Like a pack of hounds the eight juniors flung themselves at the rascals, and they went down with a simultaneous crash. And at that instant the head and shoulders of Bland appeared above the stairs.

That worthy soon grasped the situation, and it was soon over. Against eight determined juniors the men stood no chance at all, but when Bland piled in, they stood no chance at all.

They gave in at last, savagely and hopelessly, and whilst the juniors held them firmly Bland skilfully trussed them up. By that time Mr. Marsden had recovered sufficiently to take charge of Cregan's revolver.

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His calmness, under the circumstances, was amazing.

"Ah, loaded, I see," he said, examining the weapon. "I think I will take charge of this in case of accidents. I think we may leave these unwelcome visitors of ours where they are for the night, Bland. And, by the way, Cregan—I think that is your name—you will perhaps be interested to know that the formula you have been at such pains to acquire has now left my hands—for ever. My work is finished. Without the formula and notes—of which I have no duplicates—even I could not make use of the information they contained. I am acquainting you with this information in case you should imagine it worth your while to annoy me further at some future date with your unwelcome attention. But I will explain these things to you in detail to-morrow. And now, boys, we will go down to the library. I shall be interested to hear how you came to be at hand so opportunely."

He started down the staircase, and the wondering juniors followed, Bland bringing up the rear. When all were down, the scientist crossed to the fireplace, and a moment later the section of panelling slid back into place, effectually sealing up the secret laboratory—and its prisoners.

"They will be secure there," said the hermit, with one of his rare smiles. "It is impossible to move the panelling except from below. However, we need never fear them again. And now—"

He looked inquiringly at the juniors, but it was Jack Marsden who explained. He told of the afternoon's adventure, of his fears, and of their reasons for undertaking that night's expedition. And as he finished, the old hermit's grim features softened, and he laid his hand on his nephew's shoulder.

"You did wrong—very wrong—to leave the school," he said quietly. "But I also did wrong in subjecting you to such dangers. I can only feel thankful that you have found such loyal friends as these boys, for whose pluck and resource I shall always feel the deepest gratitude. They have certainly earned an explanation from me. But that must wait. The hour is late and you must return to school at the earliest possible moment. To-morrow I propose to ask Dr. Holmes to allow you to bring them here to tea, when they shall hear the full story. I will telephone for a taxi at once, and meanwhile Bland can be preparing refreshments."

And for the moment the curious juniors had to be satisfied with that.

But in the taxi, homeward bound, the juniors heard the secret from Jack Marsden himself. How a fellow-scientist had invented a formula for the manufacture of diamonds, and how, being unable to work out the experiments himself, he had enlisted the aid of Mr. Marsden, who was a clever chemist, under a vow of secrecy. For the last twelve months the old hermit had been experimenting, and it was only on that night of the snowstorm, when Cregan's gang had stormed the Grange, that the need for secrecy was brought home to the scientist. In some manner—through a burglary at the inventor's house it was supposed—the secret had become known to Cregan, who was the leader of a gang of international crooks.

The need for secrecy was gone now, however. The experiments were completed, and though successful, were disappointing in that the diamonds little more than paid their manufacture, considering the time spent upon them. They were, however, sufficiently successful to alarm seriously the powerful organisation which controls the world's diamond supply, and only that day Mr. Marsden and his partner had been paid by their representative a huge sum of money for the formula which the syndicate obviously intended to destroy for ever.

Probably through his spies, Cregan had known that the deal was to be settled that day—but what Cregan did not know was that the precious formula and notes had left Mr. Marsden's hands early that morning.

All this the amazed juniors learned from Jack as the taxi whirled them back to St. Jim's, but it was not until the following afternoon that they learned what had happened to Cregan and his accomplices. Not desiring unnecessary publicity, the old hermit had simply released them—after making it abundantly clear to them that the game was up—that the formula was gone for ever. And not wishing to meet the police on charges of burglary and criminal assault, the rascally crooks went gladly enough.

Jack Marsden did not stay long at St. Jim's. His uncle—a comparatively rich man now—went abroad, and Jack went with him—much to the regret of Tom Merry & Co., who had become firm friends with the plucky youngster. But Jack remained during his stay at St. Jim's a mystery to all but Tom Merry & Co., and St. Jim's never learned the truth of the mysterious kidnapping, nor did the Head or anyone else at St. Jim's ever learn how the juniors broke bounds, and of the part they played in that night's adventure.

THE END.

(Look out for another topping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "THE REFUGEE OF ST. JIM'S." By Martin Clifford.)

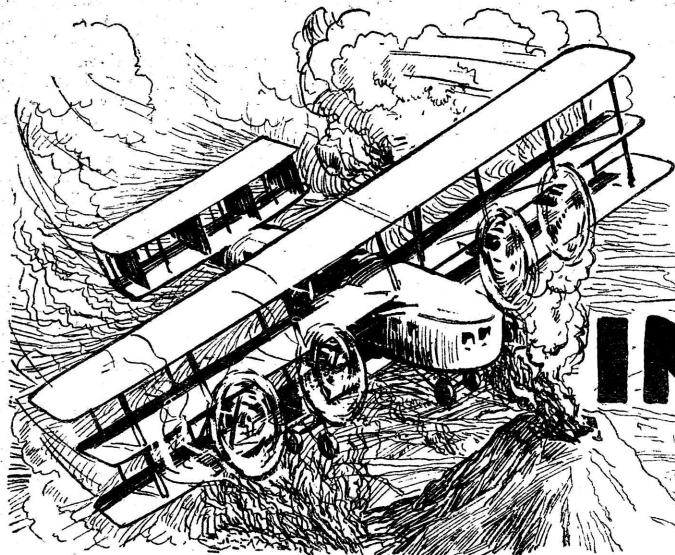
A remarkable story about the terrible earthquake in Japan, telling how young Oku, in endeavouring to safeguard some priceless pearls left him by his grandfather, falls into a sea of thrilling adventures.

OUT OF THE INFERNO!

A Powerful Story of Thrilling Japanese Adventure

BY

EDMUND BURTON and
CAPTAIN REGINALD GLOSSOP.



CHAPTER 1.

Pearls of Great Price!

KUROKI, a very old man of Japanese nationality, whose best years of life had been spent in the pearl industry, in which he had amassed much money, had settled down in Shima to live out his remaining days in peace and rest.

Kuroki knew all about pearls, but in his make-up, as in that of many another man, there was something lacking. In this case that "something" was precaution. He had always been thrifty, but he had overlooked the necessity of insuring his property.

Now, after taking a short sea voyage for the benefit of his health, he had returned to find his house blazing furiously. How the fire had originated nobody seemed to know. Suffice it to say that very little was saved—just a few valuable antiques, a bag of choice pearls, and a large brass-bound copy of the Koran.

The last mentioned Kuroki now clutched as he sadly watched the flames devour the remaining remnants of his once comfortable home.

There was no saving the building—that was evident—and finally old Kuroki turned away, making for the sea front at a slow pace.

He had decided upon a plan of action. Advanced in years as he was, he could not hope to live very much longer, so he would send these pearls to his daughter's son, who was being educated in Tokio at his grandfather's expense.

Young Oku's own father was dead, and his mother also. She had previously been estranged from Kuroki owing to the latter's aversion for his daughter's second husband, named Matsu, for Kuroki knew something about Matsu's past and had forbidden the union, but Oku's mother had been obstinate, and so the second marriage took place.

This, however, did not interfere with the relationship between Oku and his grandfather, for a strong bond of affection existed between the pair—hence Kuroki's decision as to the destination of the pearls.

He hobbled along, eventually pausing at a small house facing the sea. Here he was greeted cordially by another man almost as old as himself, and a brief conversation took place. Kuroki had known his friend, Okara, from boyhood, and was not averse to asking the owner

of the house for accommodation, pending his finding other quarters.

His request being readily granted, he next borrowed a sharp knife, some strong gum, and a set of soldering utensils, armed with which he retired to the small chamber set apart for him.

Alone again he set to work and carefully cut a hole through the centre of the copy of the Koran, placed the choicest specimens of the pearls in the cavity, then gummed down the remaining pages and soldered the heavy brass clasps. This done, he wrapped the volume up carefully and addressed it to young Oku at his lodgings in Tokio.

"And now to see the honourable English captain," Kuroki murmured, as he left the house and made his way to a long wharf, at which several small steamers were moored. "He will deliver this in safety for me, on account of our friendship."

Captain Peter Dixon, aged thirty-two, was owner of the little trader Inaba Maru, which plied between Shima and Yokohama, and, some months before, Kuroki had chanced to render Dixon a certain service which the Britisher never forgot. A warm mutual regard had resulted, for Peter both admired and respected his Japanese acquaintance.

The Inaba Maru was just getting up steam, prior to starting on a fresh trip, when Kuroki appeared on the wharf. Dixon spotted him from the bridge and gave him a friendly hail, asking him to step aboard.

In the skipper's cabin the aged Japanese laid his parcel on the table.

"Can you deliver this in Tokio for me, my friend?" he asked with a smile. "Are you likely to be there, or will you not go beyond Yokohama? See!"—he produced some loose pearls and extended his hand—"I shall pay you, of course, for any extra trouble, but I should like you to bear this for me personally, as it is important and I can trust no other trader."

Dixon took the book, noted the address—and waved the proffered pearls aside.

"It will be a pleasure, Kuroki," he said, "and I need no payment for the service. As a matter of fact, I shall be in Tokio while the old Inaba is taking in a fresh cargo at Yokohama, so I can easily carry out your request. By the way, you look pretty sick. Has anything happened?"

Kuroki spread out his hands with a despairing gesture.

"Have you not heard?" he replied, in a low voice. "Everything has happened! My house is burnt and nearly all it contained. I have, indeed, barely enough left to keep body and soul together—I who was once moderately rich—"

"But surely you had the place insured?"

"Alas, no!" answered Kuroki. "I fear I was negligent and allowed that important proceeding to slip my memory." He paused. "You will deliver this parcel into the hands of my grandson only? If he is not at his lodgings you will probably find him at Professor Kano's wrestling school, where he is a pupil."

"I know it well," Captain Peter smiled. "I had a few lessons there myself once." Then his lips pursed, as he added: "But you've certainly been hard hit, friend. Can I do anything else for you?"

"No. I thank you," Kuroki answered, with the calm smile of a fatalist. "What is to be, will be—and my old comrade, Okara, who lives close by, has given me board and lodging until I can make my plans. I bid you farewell, Englishman, and again tender you my thanks."

The elderly Japanese took his departure, and half an hour later the Inaba Maru left Shima en route for Yokohama, with the precious Koran and its valuable contents locked in a small safe in Captain Peter's cabin.

CHAPTER 2.

Fortune's Smile!

SAKI, you little scorpion, bring me saki at once, a bucket of it, or I shall thrash you again! I am thirsty!"

The evil, yellow-faced man with blood-shot eyes rose unsteadily from his seat and advanced across the room. The young, well-built lad retreated involuntarily.

"I shall not!" he retorted stubbornly. "You have had far too much saki already—"

"What! You defy me?" the other snarled, grasping a pliable bamboo cane which leaned against the wall close by. "You defy me—eh!"

"Yes, I do!" young Oku answered, between his teeth. "You are a brute! If my father had lived you would never

have come into our lives, to ill-treat my mother and me, and to rob us, also!"

"Rob you! Put a curb on your tongue, you whelp—"

"No, I shall not!" Oku gasped, his long pent-up indignation at last breaking all its bonds. "I repeat that you robbed us. My dear grandfather, Kuroki, gave us an allowance to pay for my education, but you have stolen most of it for your own reckless use. While my mother lived she had to work like a slave, and now that she is dead—killed by your ill-treatment—you expect me to be your slave also!"

For a moment the bullying Matsu's jaw dropped at this daring outburst of rebellion. Then he moved threateningly towards his stepson, and Oku did the wisest thing under the circumstances—he bolted for the door.

Matsu immediately gave chase, but he had little chance of overtaking his fleet-footed victim. Unfortunately, though, he had sufficient wit to guess where his stepson would make for—the most likely place to seek protection—Professor Kano's wrestling school, where he was one of the pupils practising the art of jiu-jitsu, which is part of the education of every Japanese.

Oku dashed into the small courtyard of the college and looked back anxiously. So far, his stepfather was not in sight, yet he feared that he might suspect his destination. The lad could easily have placed the bully hors-de-combat, for he was one of Kano's most promising pupils, and had only another year to serve before he would receive the coveted blue sash of the school; but Oku feared that, in his righteous indignation, he might fatally injure his adversary, for none knew better than he the possibilities of jiu-jitsu if due caution be not observed.

He did not wish to go to extremes if it could be avoided, for, like most true sportsmen, he was naturally of a gentle disposition. He intended, if practicable,

to finish his term with Kano, secure his sash, and then join the Japanese police, applying for service in Korea, in which country there was ample prospect of promotion. This was the wisest career he could think of, his allowance having been so reduced by Matsu that there was little left to pay for anything beyond the fees for wrestling tuition.

As Oku turned towards the school he noticed that great and benevolent personage, Professor Kano, talking to a young, broad-shouldered, sunburnt man, who wore a peaked cap at a rakish angle. Perceiving his pupil, Kano immediately beckoned to him.

"This is the boy you are seeking, captain," he said, turning to his companion. "This is Oku, stepson of the rascally Matsu, who lives in Skigi Street."

"You are the grandson of Kuroki of Shima?" the seaman queried, and the boy nodded.

"Yes," he replied, taking another glance towards the roadway—a glance which Kano cleverly interpreted the meaning of. Once or twice before, he remembered, Oku had flown here after a heated difference of opinion with Matsu, and on those occasions the bully had followed him and made a disturbance in the courtyard until it was found necessary to have him forcibly ejected. Indeed, the professor had wondered why Oku ever went back to his taskmaster.

"What is the matter, lad?" Kano asked. "Your stepfather again, eh?"

For a second time the other nodded in verification.

"Yes, I have left him for good; I care not what happens to me, but I cannot live any longer in that house in Skigi Street. Ah! He comes! I expected he might!"

Through the courtyard gate strode Matsu, his yellow face wreathed in an evil leer, his little eyes blazing with fury. Straight up to the trio he came, panting from his unaccustomed exertions.

"Ah, you little cockroach!" he gasped. "So you would defy me, eh? You will come home with me now, this instant, for I have the right to take you. You are my son!"

"Your stepson, you mean!" Oku corrected. "And even were I your true offspring I should not return with you. I have finished with you and your evil habits for good!"

Matsu was still carrying his pliable bamboo cane, and at this fresh outbreak of defiance, he suddenly raised it aloft with the intention of slashing Oku across the face. But even as the blow was falling, the tall, sunburnt seaman stepped forward and received the full force of the stroke upon his tanned cheek.

A white veal sprang up upon the coppery skin, and his well-chiselled lips grew very firm. Then his great fist shot out, catching Matsu full upon the point of the jaw. Back went the Jap's head with a sudden jerk, and he fell to the ground in an inert mass. There was no need for a second punch like that.

"Which illustrates what happens to people who hit Peter Dixon with sticks!" the sailor said grimly, as he rubbed his knuckles against his coat. "That's the British equivalent of jiu-jitsu!"

Kano smiled. "Excellent, indeed!" he said, gazing down at Matsu's inert form. "He will not ask for more—eh?"

"Not likely to!" Cap'n Peter grinned. "He's good for fifteen minutes' snooze, and he'll doubtless feel all the better for it. And now, youngster," he turned again to Oku, "here's a birthday present from your respected grandpa. I know him well, and he asked me to deliver this parcel into your hands, I called at your address about an hour ago, but nobody was there, so I came along here as Kuroki told me you were a pupil of Mr. Kano's, as I myself was once."

"And a promising pupil you were, too, Captain Dixon," Kano said, with a smile. "It was a pity you could not spend a longer term with us."

"Oh, I learnt enough to help me in a rough-and-tumble," the other grinned. "What's more, I've always got my fists to back up the wrestlin' tricks, so I guess I'll pass!"

Kano laughed outright at this. "You British—you are so whimsical!" he exclaimed; then became suddenly serious as he once more addressed young Oku: "Since you have definitely decided to sever all ties with your stepfather, lad, I have an offer to make you. You may stay here with me for the remainder of your term, after which I shall inquire if my brother in Kobe will see to your schooling. He is well placed in education circles there and may be able to arrange something for you."

"Oh, professor, you are being a second father to me!" Oku cried gratefully. "I shall never forget your kindness!"

"Best see what's in that parcel I gave you, kid," advised Cap'n Peter, with a twinkle in his eye. "It felt like a book, but it must be a pretty heavy one."

Oku thereupon began to unwrap the coverings, and presently exposed to view a large, brass-bound copy of the Koran. Unsuspected by the little group, Matsu, who had now recovered consciousness, was watching them furtively from beneath his half-closed eyelids.

"The Koran!" Oku said, in some surprise. "But it will not open. See! The clasps are soldered down."

"Funny!" Captain Dixon exclaimed, taking the volume and examining it closely. "Shall I try to force it? I can hear something rattling inside."

"Yes, yes!" Oku consented eagerly, and Cap'n Peter's strong hands closed round the soldered clasps.



Matsu raised his pliable bamboo cane with the intention of slashing Oku on the face, but even as the blow was falling the tall, sunburnt seaman stepped forward and received the full force of the stroke upon his tanned cheek.

A mighty wrench, a swift twist, and the first fastening was torn from its hinge; then the second followed suit—yet the book still remained firmly closed.

"It's been gummed, or glued," Dixon said suddenly, examining the edges of the leaves and covers. "Jupiter! I've seen this dodge worked before, professor, and there's surely something valuable hidden inside."

Again his tough hands seized the volume and began to rend the leaves. Presently he laid bare a cavity hollowed out of the centre of the book, and in this lay a number of exquisite pearls which scintillated and glistened in the evening sunlight.

"Jove!" the captain gasped. "It's small wonder that old Kuroki was so cunning! These are worth a big sum, or I'm no judge. Youngster, you're moderately rich, and I congratulate you. I always knew Kuroki had a kind heart."

"How was he when you last saw him?" Oku asked, taking the book and letting the pearls trickle through his fingers back into the cavity. "In good health, I trust?"

Dixon was silent for a moment.

"Yes, he seemed well enough," he replied presently, deciding to say nothing about the old fellow's house having been burnt out, and his losing practically all it had contained. It would be a pity, Peter thought, to damp this youngster's happiness so soon, especially after the life he must have endured at his stepfather's hands; and Kuroki had seemed tranquil enough under the blow which Fate had dealt him. Also, Oku was bound to learn the truth in due course; meanwhile, let him enjoy the possession of his unexpected good fortune without the clouds interposing between him and the sunshine.

"When you see my grandfather again, will you bear him my grateful thanks?" the boy asked. "You will see him soon, I suppose?"

"Probably," Peter nodded. "I shall be returning to Shima in a day or so, and I'll give him my message."

"And now, captain, suppose we partake of some refreshment?" Professor Kano suggested. "It is right to toast our young friend's good fortune, is it not?"

"Lead on!" Peter grinned, "my throat's pretty dry, and I could do with a little refreshment."

The trio made their way arm in arm across the courtyard, and at that moment the prostrate Matsu stretched out his claw-like hand, picking up something that glistened brightly amid the dust and gravel—a single loose pearl which had accidentally slipped through Oku's fingers when admiring his legacy.

As Matsu slipped it into the folds of his clothing his burning eyes followed the figure of the boy just entering the school, while his lips were drawn down in a leer of evil triumph and hatred.

"So, my little scorpion," he muttered, "you think you can throw aside the hand of your excellent foster-parent, do you? But that is a difficult thing to do, as you will soon discover—especially as you are now so much more worth looking after than before. Yes, yes, I am glad I followed you, and I can almost thank that accursed Englishman for the blow he gave me!"

CHAPTER 3.

Nature in Revolt!

THE possession of his newly-acquired wealth made a considerable change in Oku's plans.

After some discussion with Professor Kano, it was decided that the boy should leave for Kobe almost at once, instead of finishing his term at the



"There's surely something valuable hidden inside here," said Dixon, as his tough hands seized the volume and began to rend the leaves, leaving bare a cavity hollowed out of the centre of the book in which lay a number of exquisite pearls.

wrestling school just then, and so lay the foundation stone of a proper education somewhat sooner than was originally intended.

There was an excellent air-service plying between Tokio and Kobe, and a few days later Oku took his place in the big machine, along with several other passengers, after bidding the professor an affectionate farewell. Some of the plane's other occupants were European—tourists who had come to feast their eyes upon the beauties of Chrysanthemum Land, which possesses scenery second to none—and, consequently, a complete circuit was made en route of the wonderful Fuji Yama, the sacred mountain of Nippon, that snow-capped contrast to a land of sunshine and flowers.

All the morning a strange heaviness had been noticeable in the atmosphere—an oppressive heat which held no breath of cooling wind to relieve it—and over Fuji's peak hung a coppery, sulphurous cloud. Yet few of the natives, if any, had been troubled by these signs, for Japan has its drawbacks as well as its advantages. It is, unfortunately, situated well within the earthquake zone, and upheavals, typhoons, and tidal waves are common enough to be almost part and parcel of the population's life.

The big plane flew steadily, completing the circuit of Fuji and presently heading direct for Kobe. An it was then, almost in the twinkling of an eye, that the worst earthquake history has ever recorded sent its first shock quivering through the stricken land below.

The coppery cloud above Fuji's summit suddenly deepened, and a long, throbbing rumble sounded, mingling with a series of heavy crashes. Then a great wave of hot air seemed to burst upwards, tossing the big aeroplane as

a straw is tossed by a millstream, and giving the experienced pilot all he could do to prevent disaster to himself and his load of passengers. As for the latter, they were clinging on to anything they could grasp, staring white-faced at one another, while the plane bucked like a mettlesome horse and finally zoomed upwards to a higher altitude where the disturbance in the atmosphere was less marked.

But even here, so far from the earth, something could be seen of what was taking place beneath. A distant glow showed that Tokio was already in flames, the red tongues licking wickedly at palace and hovel alike. Then came a dull, muffled explosion as some arsenal or chemical works was blown to the four winds of heaven. The advance of the fire was all too swift, for many of the buildings were of bamboo and other woods, and even paper, such flimsy construction being considered advisable in a land where subterranean upheavals were so terribly frequent.

Oku, who was alone near the stern of the plane, watched as if fascinated, a dull pain gnawing at his heart-strings. He had, even in his young life, already experienced some mild examples of the power of Nature in revolt; but neither he nor anyone else had ever dreamed of such an awful cataclysm as this.

Inwardly, he knew that Tokio and Yokohama were doomed, and probably many miles of the coastline also, for it seemed that the centre of the earthquake lay in that vicinity.

By now most of the other passengers were bordering upon collapse, stupefied by the fearful peril of their position, for one never knew whether some deadly "air-pocket" would open in the disturbed atmosphere and cause the

plane to drop like a stone for thousands of feet.

And it was then that Oku found himself once more face to face with a danger he had almost forgotten—danger from Matsu, his cunning stepfather, who had shadowed the boy like a sleuthhound ever since that fateful day in the courtyard of Kano's wrestling school, when the evil-minded one had picked up the solitary pearl which had whetted his covetous appetite.

Matsu had secured a place in the big plane, intending to keep out of sight until Kobe was reached, where he hoped for an opportunity of possessing himself of the remainder of those pearls, when Oku was removed from the protective presence of Professor Kano and his comrades at the college.

But now, seeing how events had panned out, Matsu decided to take advantage of the abnormal situation. He looked at the other passengers, seeing how their attention was fixed upon what was taking place below, and then sprang like a panther towards Oku, who was occupying a place somewhat screened from observation of the rest.

The boy felt those bony yellow hands grip his waist, felt himself drawn from his seat and dragged towards the side of the rocking plane. Then his eyes met the glaring orbs of his stepfather, and he read no mercy therein.

Oku instinctively realised that at last he must use all his skill of defence against his relative, for he plainly interpreted the latter's intention in his hate-distorted visage. The grip had tightened, and there was not the fraction of a second to lose, for one of Matsu's claw-like hands was already trying to get at the pearls concealed inside his stepson's clothing.

Swiftly employing a counter-hold, Oku broke that clutch; then gave a heave which sent the would-be thief staggering. The plane dipped wildly at that moment, as the pilot strove to keep it on an even-keel, and a shout of warning for the passengers to remain still came from the forepart of the machine. But Matsu paid no attention whatsoever; instead, he sprang again towards his victim, a knife now gripped in his hand, and Oku was forced to go to extremes.

Bending sideways, he clutched the other's body as it shot past; then, with an agile movement, he sent his foe flying across his hip. The plane swayed dizzily at that moment, and before Oku could realise what was happening Matsu's body went crashing through the large glass window at the rear of the plane to disappear from sight in the heavy pall of smoke now rolling heavenward from the stricken earth beneath. He had uttered no cry, merely vanishing as a moth will vanish in a candle-flame.

For a few moments Oku stared aghast; then he wiped the sweat from his forehead with a trembling hand and gazed about him. Screened as the pair of combatants had been from the others, no one seemed to have noticed what was taking place astern, for all eyes were fixed in hypnotised gaze upon the raging inferno which marked the position of Tokio and Yokohama. Moreover, the roar of the plane's engine and the buzz of the propeller had effectually drowned what noise they made, while any additional swaying they produced in their struggle was naturally thought to be caused by the disturbed atmosphere.

Oku presently resumed his seat, shaken to the very soul, although he knew well that he was not to blame for what had taken place. Matsu had undoubtedly

intended both robbery and murder, so it was purely a case of self-defence.

Eventually the rolling machine drew nearer Kobe, where much calmer conditions were encountered, and after what was surely one of the most hazardous flights ever recorded, the big plane finally swooped down towards its aerodrome.

CHAPTER 4.

Cap'n Peter Makes An Offer!

BUT Oku soon found that Kobe, distant though it was from the main channel of the disaster, had been completely thrown out of its natural prosperous groove. Though the town was so far undamaged, business was at a standstill, the schools and colleges turned into hospitals, and every preparation being made to receive some of the thousands of destitute refugees who would soon be fleeing from the devastated area.

Professor Kano's brother, a doctor of medicine as well as law, had already departed from the capital, partly to ascertain his relative's fate, and partly to lend his skill in relieving the suffering population of the stricken city.

Oku, his precious pearls concealed beneath his attire, walked aimlessly about the streets—a youth carrying a fortune. A couple of the stones he had realised for cash just before leaving Tokio, so he decided at length to make his way to Shima, if at all possible, in order to ascertain how his beloved grandsire, Kuroki, had fared.

That the journey would be terribly dangerous, Oku well knew, but the ties of affection proved stronger than his fear, and after what seemed an eternity, travelling by a roundabout route, he at length reached his goal.

Shima had been damaged also, but a considerable portion of the town had escaped unscathed, and while Oku was making inquiries of sundry folk he encountered, he learned of the fire which had destroyed his grandfather's homestead.

"But where does Kuroki live now?" he asked in surprise, for surely the Englishman, Dixon, must have known of this! Why, then, had he not told him of the previous disaster?

But concerning Kuroki's present place of habitation, those whom Oku met were entirely ignorant. Then, as he dejectedly turned towards the sea-front, the lad

suddenly pulled up short, for there, hobbling feebly along by the aid of a staff, and looking very frail, was the very person he sought news of—Kuroki, his dear mother's sire, who had been so good to him.

We may pass over that meeting, for it concerns us not. Suffice it to say that Oku learned the full story of the fire and of the kindness of Okara, who had sheltered his grandfather.

"And the Englishman Dixon?" queried the lad. "Where is he?"

For answer old Kuroki pointed to a little steamship lying at the end of the wharf.

"Yonder," he replied. "My friend the captain is about to leave for Yokohama with a relief party. O Buddha! What help is needed there, and how strange the working of Fate!"

"I should like to see him again before he goes," Oku said; and Kuroki nodded.

"Then go, my son," he said, pointing with his stick. "See, steam is up and the vessel will soon depart!"

Cap'n Peter was on his bridge, his hand on the engine-room telegraph, when he suddenly recognised the lithe figure sprinting along the wharf.

"By James, it's young Oku!" he gasped. "How, in the name of Fate, did you get here?"

Dixon, in his surprise, had dropped into English, but Oku knew enough of that language, picked up in cosmopolitan Tokio, to understand.

"I came to seek my grandfather," he replied, springing aboard, "and I have found him. Why—why did you not tell me what had happened, when you came with those pearls?"

Dixon smiled good-humouredly.

"Well, you see, lad," he answered, "you'd had a nasty kind of existence at the hands of your stepfather, and I didn't like to bring clouds into your newly-found happiness. Old Kuroki seemed content with his lot—you never find one of your race grumbling at misfortune—so what was the use of upsetting you and spoiling your pleasure?"

Oku looked at the bronzed, kindly-faced seaman for a moment; then he impulsively held out his hand.

"Thank you!" he said, simply.

"Oh, you needn't thank me!" laughed Cap'n Peter. "I owe a lot to your grandfather, lad. He did something for me once, and I'll always be in his debt. Yet, say—" He paused. "Suppose we try to square some of that debt when I return from Yoko? I've pretty well lost my trade there, from all accounts, but the old Inaba's sound as a bell and there are other places to steam to somewhat further afield. What d'you say to taking a third share each in this bit of property?"—he waved his hand round the trim deck—"you, Kuroki, and I—eh?"

"Captain," Oku replied instantly, "I shall buy a share of the ship for my grandfather and myself. That is only fair."

But Cap'n Peter shook his head decisively.

"No, it isn't!" he rapped back. "You'll keep your legacy, my lad, as I took the trouble of bringin' it to you. You'll need those pearls later on, when things are settled and you can begin your education. Meanwhile, you two are goin' to have a third of my tradin' profits each. Is that all fixed up?"

Oku still hesitated for a moment; then he grasped the big brown hand of Captain Peter again, and a tight grip sealed the compact.

THE END.

(Look out for a splendid yarn of thrilling boxing adventure in next week's GEM, entitled: "CHAMPION BORN!" You will vote it great.)



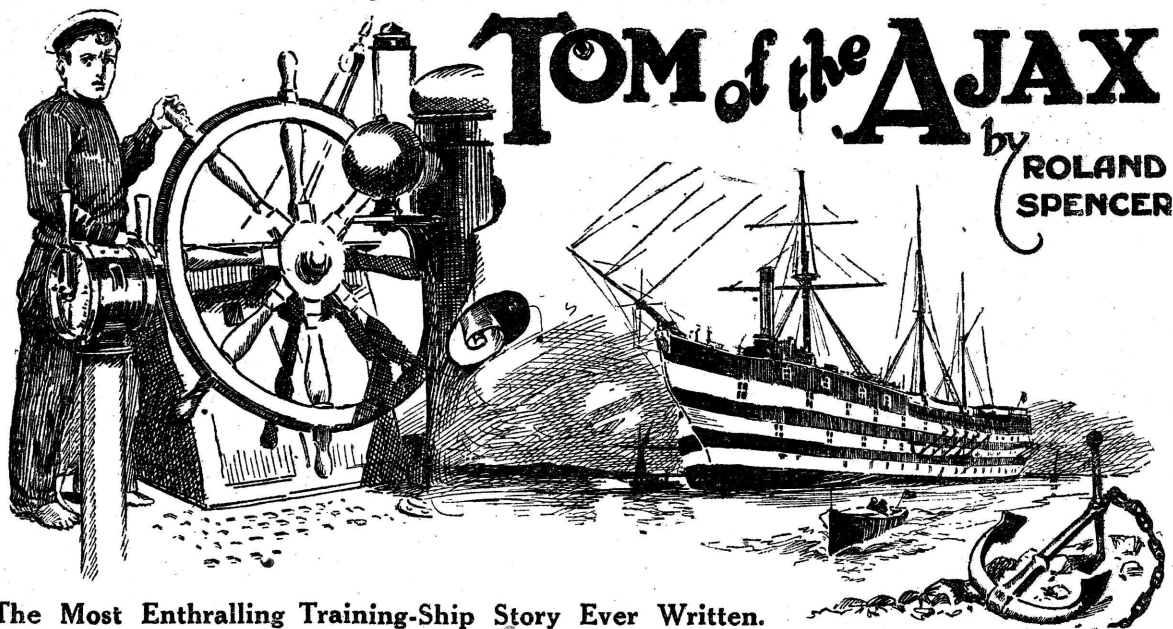
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TOM of the AJAX

by ROLAND SPENCER

The Most Enthralling Training-Ship Story Ever Written.

Burr's Triumph.

TOM GALE staggered back in horror.

Mr. Cosine, ascending the ladderway at the critical moment, had arrived on the scene just in time to receive that flying swab full in the face!

There was an ugly gleam in Burr's eyes, and that gleam told Tom a lot. He realised instantly why Burr had suddenly joined in that game of impromptu football; the Blake fellow had seen the ship's officer coming, and had deliberately led Tom into a trap. And Burr had succeeded up to the hilt!

Mr. Cosine's lean face was flaming with his fury. His eyes were like darting points of fire as he stood trembling with rage at the head of the ladderway. When he spoke, his voice was scarcely steady: "Gale! You threw this?"

Tom shook his head. "No, sir. I'm awfully sorry, I—I kicked it—"

"Then don't beat about the bush!" the master ground out fiercely. "I have seen too much of your capabilities for falsehoods, Gale—it is time you learnt to admit your guilt without word-twisting! I shall not attempt to deal with this gross insolence myself—Mr. Landfar shall hear of your conduct."

The navigation master swung on his heel, leaving Tom staring after him. There was a low chuckle from Burr.

"Silly ass, Gale!" he sneered. "Serves you jolly well right for ragging about! You're out to make yourself popular with old Cosine, aren't you? First the nose of old Ajax, and telling him a lot of whoppers over it, and now this! Dash it all, isn't it enough to be disrated without—"

Burr did not finish his words. Tom stooped suddenly and seized a pail by the handle—a pail of water that was not only dirty, but six inches thick on top with froth and soapsuds. He swung it through the air.

Burr got the lot in the face, and he choked as the soapsuds went swilling down his throat. He reeled back against the bulwarks with a yell, gouging the water from his smarting eyes. Tom set down the pail with a grim smile.

"P'raps that'll teach you to speak when you're spoken to!" he said cheerfully.

"You—you—you—" Burr gurgled. Tom chuckled.

"Sorry, Burr, don't understand Hindustani; that's what it sounds like, anyway. Or are you babbling in German?"

Burr did not answer the pleasant witicism. He turned and raced for the wash-house to get the soap out of his eyes, and a roar of laughter followed him. Then Starling turned to Tom.

"That's all very well," said the Nelson leader in a sympathetic voice, "but Stoniky Burr will report that as sure as eggs. You'd have done better to let him talk, Gale."

Tom's lips were tight closed. His eyes were flashing bitterly.

"Think I care?" he cried recklessly. "I don't care a bean what happens. I shouldn't care a tin-tack if the whole Ajax went to the bottom!"

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE, a sturdy-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 Fleetithe, falls foul of

STONIKY 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 Stoniky Burr, as hare 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 enlists 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, torn 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.

Following this Tom falls an easy prey to a trick of Burr's, and gets disrated. Later, by a strange coincidence, Tom meets Acalanche Home, detective, to whom he finds a staunch friend.

Burr's cunning leads Tom into further trouble, for, when on swabbing fatigue, Tom is induced to take a flying lick at his swab. To his horror, Tom hears a gurgling burble, and realises that the flying swab has found a billet!

(Now read on.)

There was something in the words that went straight to Starling's heart. He had imagination, and he could feel something of what the disrated petty officer of the Hoods was feeling then. On an impulse, he held out his hand.

"Don't talk like an ass, old man," he said. "Things may be going badly, but the chaps know you're true blue, and don't you forget it!"

Tom gripped the other's hand and turned away. From the wash-house he could hear the splash of water as Burr struggled to rid his smarting eyes of soapsuds.

Tom had not long to wait. He was sent for by Mr. Landfar almost at once. Though Burr was not there, Mr. Cosine was, and Tom knew well enough that Burr had been to tell his tale.

He was in for a tanning—and a training-ship tanning means something. Now that he was no longer a chief p.o., he was liable once more for that punishment.

But it was after he had been attended to on the whipping-horse that he learnt the worse. Mr. Landfar, looking very grave and stern, led Tom back to his cabin, where he said quietly:

"I'm sorry for this, Gale—you seem suddenly to have run on the wrong tack. I only wish you had not done so, that you were still the trusted chief petty officer of a crack division that you once were. However, as things are, of course, your name has been struck off the list of those boys who will be aboard the Ulysses for the cruise round the British Isles. That is all, Gale. You may go!"

Tom left the cabin in a daze. The staggering blow had left him voiceless. Struck off the list—not to sail on the Ulysses!

Stoniky Burr had triumphed this time with a vengeance!

"A Disgrace to the Ship!"

THE work of fitting out the Ulysses for her annual cruise would entail a week or two of pretty stiff labour. This, to Tom, under ordinary circumstances, would have been a joy. But now he had been struck off

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the roll for the barquentine's company, so every bit of work he would have to do on the vessel would tend to remind him of his disgrace. He would have to help fit out without reaping the reward for his labours later on!

"Dicky, old man," Tom said, as he and his chum crossed the deck of the barquentine on the first morning of their labours, "I've had a pretty stiff time of late, and you're the only real pal I have on the ship—"

"Oh, rot!" put in Dicky. "You're worrying your nut about things too much, Tom. You fancy everyone has his knife into you. The officers dislike you, I know, but you mustn't forget, old son, that the luck has been so against you that they all think you a codger up. But things'll come right, old son—"

Tom shook his head. "I feel, Dicky, that things are going so wrong that they'll never come right again. I'm in the log for this, for that, for everything, it seems. Of course, I know it's someone working against me, as Avalanche Hume has said. But I'm not allowed to spout out anything about that!"

"Course you're not," replied Dicky. "Can't you trust Mr. Hume?" "Yes, rather; I'd trust him to the end of the earth! And though, as he says, he could prove that I didn't paint the figurehead's nose red, it would be against his plans to do so yet awhile."

"Well, don't worry. That incident has been forgotten now, so why rake it up again? Jumping Jupiter, Tom, this isn't like you! Anyone would think it was dial's day to see your face just now—"

"Can't help it, Dicky," replied Tom. "It's worse than dial's day for me. You'll be off in this natty tot of a Ulysses soon, and then I sha'n't have anyone on the ship to talk to. It'll be enough to make me clear off!"

Dicky stopped dead and swung Tom round to face him.

"Look here, Tom, put that out of your head, you ass! You doing a dingie! Gum, I wish I weren't going on this Ulysses cruise. I'd be best back on the ship, to look after you, I think. Forget about that figurehead stunt. Forget about the spats on your hide. Forget everything except that Hume will see you out of it all right enough!"

Tom began to brighten up at Dicky's words. The red-headed youngster, however, did not feel so hearty and carefree as he tried to make out in his talk. Tom, he fully realised, needed the tonic of straight talk. It was only to be expected that the unfortunate young ex-chief petty officer and leader of the Hood Division should be down in the dumps—almost down far enough for him to take desperate measures.

For Tom, in the eyes of the officers and nearly all the boys of the training-ship, was, despite what they had once thought of him, a mean-spirited fellow, who could lie to further orders without a flicker of an eyelid.

The lad thought of it all as he wearily assisted in the interesting and tricky work of sending up the fore-topmast and fore-top-gallantmast of the barquentine, under the direction of the naval seamen sent to the Ulysses for the purpose of instructing in the annual cruise of the vessel.

The rigging party returned to the Ajax for dinner. Tom was glum on the way over in the boat, and Dicky kept up a lively conversation to try to cheer up his chum a bit.

At the top of the gang-ladder, just at the opening on to the main-deck of the

training-ship, Mr. Landfar, the chief officer instructor, and Mr. Cosine were standing talking. As soon as they saw Tom, Mr. Landfar, with a face like one carved in stone, beckoned to Tom.

Tom felt his heart go down into his boots. Dicky felt the same; but instead of voicing his thoughts Dicky gripped Tom's arm and whispered into his ear:

"Cheer up, Tom! Probably Avalanche Hume has spoken up for you—about that painting business or something. He was aboard this morning, I know—"

"More likely a fresh basketful of trouble, Dicky," replied Tom miserably as he doubled over to the officers and saluted.

"Follow to my cabin, boy!" said Mr. Landfar.

Tom, feeling hollow and miserable, followed the officers.

Once in the cabin, Mr. Landfar banged his fist on a newspaper spread out on his table. Tom noticed that it was the "Fleethithe Herald," the local weekly. He was puzzled, until his eyes fell on a pen-and-ink drawing, the weekly cartoon of the paper. Then he started violently, and Mr. Cosine's jaw's snapped shut, as much as to say, "Proved!"

"Did you design that cartoon, Gale?" asked Mr. Landfar, coming straight to the point. "You are a bit of a draughtsman, we all know, but I want you to tell me whether you designed this abomination or not."

Wonderingly, Tom took the paper held out to him. He looked at the cartoon—a clever enough thing in its way. It was a picture of the figurehead of the Ajax in a bashed top-hat and with a glowing nose. The figure held a pint mug in his hand, with a foaming top. Underneath the drawing were a few words describing the outrage in a humorous and none too tasteful manner.

The figurehead itself was horribly grotesque, more like a gargoyle than an ancient Greek hero. It had a violent squint, and Tom felt a wave of anger that such a thing should have been published. The lad turned to Mr. Landfar.

"I did not draw that thing, sir," he said steadily, looking straight into the chief officer instructor's eyes.

"If I tell you we have written to the editor of the 'Herald,' and that he has sent us the original drawing as it was submitted to him, will that make any difference to your answer as to whether you designed the thing or not?"

Mr. Landfar's voice was hard and stern. Tom met his steady look without a flinch.

"If you have done that, sir, you have found out that I didn't do it. I know nothing about it. I wish you would write and find out from the editor—"

"I have written!"

There was a sudden pause. Mr. Landfar and Mr. Cosine thought it a dramatic pause, and watched for the flinching of the youth before them. But Tom never wavered. He looked straight at the headmaster. Then Mr. Landfar spoke again.

"Your bearing, Gale, is admirable," he said. "I will say this much: I am doubtful now whether you sent in the drawing or not. But the commander has seen the cartoon. He has the original, and he will see you about it at once. Follow me."

The officers left the cabin and turned towards the commander's quarters. Tom followed, feeling as if he were going to his own execution.

Commander Boyce shot a steely glance at Tom, then took out a sheet of plain foolscap from a drawer. Then he drew another sheet before him. On this second sheet was the pen-and-ink sketch that had

been reproduced in the "Herald." These he handed to Tom without a word.

Tom looked at the drawing, then stumbled back with a swift cry of amazement. Below the drawing, in his own handwriting, were the words, "Submitted by Tom Gale, T.S. Ajax, Fleethithe, Kent."

The cry of amazement gave way to a blaze of anger, and Tom turned towards the commander with burning eyes.

"I didn't do it, sir! I didn't do it! It's someone trying to get at me! It's been done before! I—I—"

"You what?" rasped Commander Boyce. "What has been done before?"

Tom stammered something inarticulate. He had very nearly betrayed the trust placed in him by Avalanche Hume—to give no hint that someone was engineering trouble expressly to land him into hot water. The stammer was taken for a show of confusion—a sign of guilt.

"Gale," said the commander—and though his voice was sharp and stern, there was more pain in it than anger—"Gale, Mr. Landfar has told me that a very short while ago you were known as one of the most upright, truthful, clever, and enthusiastic boys on the ship. Now you are the reverse, except as regards cleverness. It is a great pity that your cleverness has led you into such a degrading crime as this. I will not call it a prank. It is revenge, you think, no doubt."

"You were disgraced for outraging the figurehead, you have been logged time and time again since then, you have been caned for deliberately throwing a dirty swab into the face of Mr. Cosine, pleading that it was an accident. Now you do this—this!"

"I know nothing of it, sir. I—"

"You will remain silent. Evidently the whipping-horse is useless for such a boy as you. You have already been struck off the roll for the annual cruise. You are fully occupied with scores of punishment fatigues, I hear. You will not be punished for this low-down trick of travestying the famous figurehead of this ship and making the Ajax the laughing-stock of the district. All I will say is that you are a disgrace to the ship, Gale, a disgrace to the ship! Fall out!"

Tom, his head bent low, left the commander's quarters and walked swiftly forward. He slipped down the ladders to the orlop deck, managing to dodge through the mess, deck without attracting attention. On the orlop deck, at the present moment deserted, he sat down where his hammock was slung at night and gave way to his misery. There it was—Dicky West found him, and hauled him up on deck for continued work on the Ulysses. If it had not been for Dicky, Tom would have been an absentee, and fresh trouble would have descended on to his unfortunate head.

"So I'm a disgrace to the ship, am I, Dicky?" said Tom through his teeth. "I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I don't care what happens now!"

"There must be some way of proving you didn't draw that cartoon, Tom," said Dicky fiercely. "Must be—"

"Hallo, Gale! There's a letter for you! Not many chaps get letters and don't claim 'em as soon as their name's called out."

Tom and Dicky swung round, to see a cheerful, fresh-looking round face before them. The lad held out a letter to Tom.

Young Gale took it mechanically, and opened it without any show of excitement.

"Crums! What's that?" "Jupiter, Tom! What's it mean?"

Tom stared at the slip of paper in his hand, his face white as chalk, and his fingers trembling. It was a cheque for ten shillings and sixpence from the "Fleethite Herald" payment for the cartoon entitled "AJAX—ANTI-PROHIBITIONIST!"

In Deadly Peril.

THE week following was or of torture for Tom Gale. It was only the encouragement of Dicky West and Avalanche Hume that kept Tom from heading deliberately into trouble, with the idea of being hung for a sheep instead of a lamb.

The Scotland Yard detective had taken the cheque Dicky had received from the "Fleethite Herald." He had also gained possession of the original drawing of the cartoon. Being a specialist in forgery crimes, Avalanche Hume said that, by laborious comparing of the cartoon and the wording thereon with one of Tom's exercise-books, he would be able to prove that the cartoon was a forgery.

This he would do, and hold that proof ready for the time when he could clear Tom's name of all the things that had been sullyng it of late. But, for the present, Tom would have to suffer in silence.

"The forgery is of Kalche's engineering. His scheme, no doubt, is to try to get you to run away," Hume had stated. "Obviously, it is. I am glad to see it. It shows me that he is still alive and kicking and anxious to be active. I'll get him yet."

The quick, incisive tones did wonders to console Tom for his black weeks on board the Ajax. Without Hume and Dicky, Tom felt that he wouldn't be able to stand it all. He couldn't blame the others for disbelieving him. They didn't know all that Dicky knew. Perhaps even Dicky would have a doubt if he were not in his and Hume's confidence.

Despite Tom's efforts to remain perfectly well-behaved and to do his level best, he found that he could not keep to his resolution. Gale was not an extraordinary boy. He had his faults, and he was human. So, when he found that his best left him in hot water, he just let things go, got as much fun out of life as he could, slacked in his studies, and became more daring than ever in his japes and practical jokes. These were always above-board and good-natured, but they were certainly daring. Tom didn't care how much trouble he came up against now.

The Ulysses was to get under way the next morning. Thirty joyful training-ship boys were giving their hammocks a "taut un"—that is, an extra strong lashing up—preparatory to leaving them till their return to the ship after the cruise. Tom was looking wistfully on, wishing with all his heart that he could treat his own hammock likewise.

Burr noticed Tom looking dismal and glum beside Dicky West, as the red-headed young chief petty officer of the Hoods heaved away at his hammock. The bully of the Ajax taunted the lad.

"Yah!" he cried. "Galey looks like a boiled codfish! Wishes he could feel the heave o' the North Sea rollers like us fellows will to-morrow, I know."

"Yes, you utter outsider! And I would, too, if it hadn't been for your rotten caddishness!" cried Tom, in great anger. "It was you got me in the log for that swab business! You're a

bigger swab than that rag that hit Mr. Cosine, you navy-neck!"

"Oh, yes; everyone'll believe you, won't they, Gale? After all the pretty lies you've told lately, too—"

Burr got no further. Tom, aflame with rage, rushed at the bully and hit out as hard as he could—left, right, left, right. Burr crumpled up in a heap and lay on the deck, too winded to get up. Tom, eyes blazing, stood above him.

"Get up, you coward, and fight! I'll give you something to take aboard the Ulysses with you, you cad! You dare to call me a liar—you, above all the others on this ship! You—you—"

Just at that minute Mr. Dennithorne, the officer instructor of physical exercises hove into sight.

"What's this?" he cried, hurrying up to Tom and Burr. "If you boys want to fight you'll do so in the proper manner. What's the quarrel, Gale? Making yourself unpleasant again?"

Tom muttered "No, sir!" and turned away bitterly. Such was his reputation now that the officers always blamed him if he were found mixed up in any trouble. Burr was grinning sheepishly.

"We don't want to fight, sir," said the bully, dropping his eyes before the keen gaze of Mr. Dennithorne.

"Then don't brawl about!" snapped the "jerks" officer, turning on his heel and strolling off towards the ladderway.

Tom turned in that night feeling very lonely. There were empty places on either side of him—places before occupied by boys who were now turning in on the Ulysses for a short sleep before getting under way with the young ebbside at three o'clock the next morning.

The barquentine had a head of steam up already. She had moved out to the other side of the river and was riding to her bower anchor. This would be

weighed in a few short hours, when the vessel, under steam, would move down-river to the open sea, for who knows what adventures on her summer cruise.

Bitterly Tom twisted about in his hammock. The orlop deck was wrapped in slumber before long, but no sleep came to Tom Gale. The lad was full of reckless, mutinous thoughts. He had looked forward to the cruise in the barquentine for twelve long months—ever since, in fact, he listened enviously to the tales told by the boys who had returned from the cruise last year. These lads were now doing men's work—in the Royal Navy, in the Mercantile Marine, and some of them in the Army. It was only those boys who were near the end of their training who could be on the roll for the annual cruise.

Midnight came and passed. Tom heard the flood-tide washing against the Ajax's side becoming less strong. Half-past one in the morning arrived, with no sound save the heavy breathing of the sleepers of the orlop deck and the now quite weak wash of the current against the training-ship.

A shouted order sounded out from across the river, followed by answering shouts. The Ulysses was beginning to stir. Tom heard the powerful hum of the vessel, denoting that she now had a full head of steam up. Soon he would hear the roar of her capstan-engine and the joyful clink, clink, as the heavy cable was shortened, the massive links falling into the chain-locker as the chain was wound in.

The youngster sat up in his hammock. His eyes were smouldering, his head felt burning and throbbing. A mad impulse had seized him.

He capsized himself from his hammock, padded softly up to the cook-house, crammed some lumps of bread—



There was a startled yell, which changed to a kind of gurgling burble, as Mr. Cosine arrived on the scene just in time to receive the flying swab full in the face. Tom Gale staggered back in horror.



Tom, aflame with rage, rushed at the bullying Stoniky Burr and hit out as hard as he could—left, right, left, right. Burr toppled backwards from the smashing blows just as the officer instructor of physical exercises hove in sight.

waste half-loaves too dry even for puddings—from the "gosh" tub into his kit-bag, half-filling the latter, then stole back to his hammock.

Now quite carried away by the daring and adventure of his reckless scheme Tom lashed the mouth of his kit-bag securely, left his hammock slung, and slipped out through the imitation gun-port window near his berth.

He would swim over to the Ulysses and stow himself away. He wouldn't be left behind, just because someone had a down on him, and he wasn't allowed to try to prove it, and so clear himself of the "crimes" he had been accused of.

It was, in very truth, a madcap scheme, but even the cold souse into the water as Tom took the stream—did not cool him down. Muttering to himself "I'll do it! I'll go in spite of it all! Stoniky Burr sha'n't score all the way round!" he struck out across the now weak current towards the lights and sounds of the barquentine at anchor opposite.

The boy got aboard by the anchor cable. He saw, as he crouched wet and shivering in the shelter of the capstan, that some sort of work was keeping the ship's company aft. The way was clear. He'd get below into the chain locker. Nobody ever looked in there, except for the annual cleaning out of the mud and bits of weed that accumulated, brought in by the chain as the anchor was weighed.

When Tom arrived at the chain-locker he found that his choice of a place for stowing away was good as far as security went, but bad from a point of view of comfort. The bottom was of concrete, the end of the cable shackled to an eyebolt cemented into the floor. The big links passed up through the pipe on deck above.

The place was clean, that was one comfort, even if it was cold and rather smelly. It was a square, planked apartment, the port cable on one side and the starboard one on the other. From the amount of starboard cable—the one to

which the Ulysses was at the moment riding—lying heaped on the concrete floor, Tom judged that the barquentine was riding to half her chain. The port cable was not out.

Young Gale looked for a "soft spot" on the concrete, put his bag of "gosh" from the mess tables under his head, and settled down for a quiet spell. The vessel would weigh anchor in another half-hour or so.

Already the Ulysses' siren was roaring and the ship vibrating. The young stowaway heard the mate's sea-boots thumping on to the anchor deck, followed by the tramp of some of the boys and the ex-naval seamen. Then the siren stopped its bellowing, and a voice bawled out from aft:

"How does the cable grow, Mr. Bowser?"

"Broad on the starboard bow, sir," returned the mate. Merchant ship routine was observed on the Ulysses.

"Right away, then! Shorten in!"

The capstan-engine roared and clanked and the cable links began to clink round the capstan. Tom saw the heavy links dropping one by one through the pipe leading down into his refuge—the chain-locker. The lad thrilled with excitement. They would be off now, in a matter of twenty minutes or so. He would not be missed from the Ajax till about six o'clock in the morning, if then, and they would be well out to sea by that time. What ever the outcome of it, Tom felt it would be worth it.

"May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," he repeated to himself, as he watched the heap of slack chain on the starboard side growing bigger and bigger and getting higher and higher as the wet chain came down.

Suddenly, to Tom's surprise, the chain stopped coming in, though the capstan still clinked dolefully. For about three minutes he wondered, then the mate's voice bawled out:

"Clear that cable for runnin' down into the locker, ye lubbers. Want to stow the chain on deck?"

So one of the links had caught in the pipe above? Well, they'd soon clear it, thought Tom.

They did. The chain came down with a rush, and Tom gave a swift, startled exclamation as the pyramid of chain near him tottered, and the mighty heap fell over, roaring, towards him. Fully six tons of chain came down in that heart-stopping moment. And part of it smashed on to Tom's feet and held him a prisoner.

The lad cried loudly, but the noise of the chain drowned his words. His feet had not been hurt, but he was as firmly held there as he would have been in old-fashioned village stocks. And the chain was coming in rapidly. Another fall of the chain like that, on top of him this time, would mean certain, instant death.

The young stowaway's lips were white as he watched the fresh pyramid of chain above him growing steadily in height. Would it topple over his way?

Suddenly the mate's voice boomed out from above:

"Hove short, sir!"

"Right-ho!" came back from aft. "Bit of starboard helm at the wheel there! How does she grow now, Mr. Bowser?"

"Broad a-starboard, sir!"

"Trip up! Hard a-starboard at the wheel, there!"

Clang, clang!

The engine-room telegraph sounded throughout the ship and the engines began to throb. Tom felt the vibration as the barquentine felt the thrust of her propeller. Then suddenly, as the anchor came out of the mud, the chain began to descend from above in an alarmingly rapid manner.

The pyramid of chain was tottering—towards him! Tom shouted in helpless frenzy, but still the chain heaped up. No one heard him.

The lad's brain began to swim and a red mist floated before his eyes. Never before had he been so near to death!

For the heavy heaped cable was on the point of slipping over, another six tons of it, right on to his helpless body!

Stowaway's Luck!

FROZEN with horror, fascinated, as a rabbit looks into the eyes of a snake, Tom Gale watched in the lantern-light filtering through the hole in the deck, the tottering mass of heaped chain rising like a miniature mountain above him.

He was powerless now to shout; powerless to help himself. He must just wait for the crash—and then oblivion!

The Ulysses was well under way now, pointing out into the river. Tom could feel the steady vibration of her hull, the forward motion of the little vessel. He could hear every sound from the decks—every order, every heavy foot-fall. In those few seconds Tom seemed to have lived an age.

A few more links on the heap above and the whole lot would come down on to his chest—over six tons' weight of stout, heavy chain! The suspense nearly made the lad's senses leave him. But he remained conscious, terribly conscious, as he watched the cable still descending into the chain-locker.

It would be now—

"Over a-starboard, at the wheel, there!"

The order came crisp and sharp to the lad's ears, and he felt the Ulysses answer to her helm—gently listing from the curve she was taking to point her nose downstream for the open sea.

At that second, the heaped-up cable fell!

Tom closed his eyes, but he felt no pain. He heard the roar and crash of the chain as it toppled over, but not even the slightest jar reached his body, though he had expected to feel his ribs stove in by the crash!

Wonderingly, the lad opened his eyes, then a swift exclamation of overwhelming relief escaped him. The chain had fallen, but, owing to the sudden swerving round of the Ulysses at that second, the chain had fallen to the other side, beyond him! He was safe and sound, though still a prisoner, held by the feet as he was!

"Gosh, what a narrow shave!" gasped the young stowaway. Then he laughed loudly, a trifle hysterically, his body shivering as if with the ague. The sudden relaxation of his tense muscles had left him quivering from head to imprisoned feet.

Exhaustion followed. Reaction had set in, and, with head fallen heavily back on his kit-bag of "gosh," Tom sank to insensibility. It was not exactly a swoon—more half coma, half sleep, occasioned by nerve-shattering suspense and physical exhaustion.

How long he slept, Tom did not know. When he awoke he felt the lift of sea waves rolling under the bilges of the Ulysses. The ship was still under power, but by the sounds of running feet along the deck above, the less violent stamp of the engines, and a few terse, bawled orders, Tom gathered that sail was to be made and the engines stopped. It was now pitchy dark in the chain locker.

Keenly interested in trying to visualise the doings on deck, Tom followed the orders, and imagined the great mizzen and mainsails spread to the breeze. He could hear them lashing and rumbling as the Ulysses's engines held the vessel in the teeth of the wind.

Then the braces were manned and sea chanties struck up as the seamen and training-ship boys tailed on to the lines and hauled the great yards on the foremast round to the proper angle.

The barquentine began to list from what Tom now judged to be a stiff breeze. The first grey streaks of dawn began stealing down to the gloomy depths of the chain-locker through the chain pipe on the deck. The thick blackness became thinner, and Tom began to see things again, as clearly as he had seen them when the light from the lanterns on the deck had filtered down through the pipe the previous night.

"Well the fore-yard!" The lad heard the order from immediately above him, where the mate was stationed. "Now trim the upper yards a bit sharper than the lower ones. Haul, there, ye cripples! Well all! Make fast!"

With a thrill, Tom heard the engine-room telegraph sound its clang-clang. The engines stopped, and the Ulysses was forging ahead under sail alone. Another clang sounded—no doubt "Finished with engines" on the engine-room indicator. That meant they were on a slant of wind that would carry them for some hours. So they must be well out to sea!

"Gosh, what a ripping adventure I'm having," the lad chuckled to himself as he hauled his kit-bag round and dived his hand in for some of the "gosh," or leavings from meals, which he had secured before leaving the Ajax.

"Now for a hearty meal, me lads!" said Tom jovially, to the grey depths of his chain-locker. "M'm! I've tasted better toke than this, but stowaways can't be choosers!"

He munched away for some minutes, chuckling now and again at the surprise he would occasion when he showed himself above. Always reckless, he had

been made more so by the misfortunes that had crowded on to his unfortunate head during the past weeks. He'd give them all something to talk about!

"There'll be a pleasant five minutes with the commander when I do show up," he told himself coolly. "Hope he's a decent sort, that's all. But all these naval officers are really good sports."

He finished his "toke"—training-ship slang for bread—and then turned his attention to freeing his feet from the heavy chain, that held him as in a vice. He had found the crowbar kept in the chain-locker for levering the chain about. With this he felt confident he'd be able to free himself.

His feet had not been damaged, he knew, for he felt no pain and his limbs were not numbed. Link by link, with the help of the iron bar, he'd be able to move the chain from his feet.

He started work at once and, to his joy, found that with fifteen minutes' patient work, he'd be free. Very soon he was trying to stand on his feet, and, laughing recklessly at his own rockiness, he sat down to rub the stiffness out of his joints.

"Now for it!" he said at last. "I'll just swank up on deck and stroll aft to give myself up. Gee, won't Dicky be surprised—and Burr, and all the others. They'll all think I'm a ghost. I expect I'll be flogged for this little issue. But they can't kill me and, once here, I expect they'll let me stop for the cruise. Won't it be a cruise, though, for me? I expect I'll have to do it in the fore-top, or somewhere else interesting like that!"

Thoroughly resigned to whatever punishment lay in store for him, Tom Gale squirmed out through the trapdoor in the chain-locker and padded softly across the bo'sun's locker, where the spare rope and other details of rigging were kept. He stepped out into the sleeping quarters of the training-ship lads, right in the waist of the vessel,

which had been specially designed for her work.

All the boys were on deck, so Tom climbed the upright ladder through the companionway and stepped on to the deck, trying to look perfectly at his ease.

Five training-ship boys reeled back at sight of him, and the Hood youngster grinned at them.

"Well, chaps, you see I'm here all right," he began, "I—"

But there was a rush, and Tom's arm was gripped by the hand of Dicky West.

"Tom, Tom, you utter idiot! What on earth have you done now? You'll be hung from the yardarm, you ass. You'll be flayed alive with a stoniky—"

Tom laughed recklessly into the frightened face of his chum.

"I stowed away, Dicky," he said steadily. "Going aft now to take my gruel—"

"Get back—back, before you're seen, Tom. I'll bring you food and water," Dicky's eyes were wide with alarm for his chum's safety, for discipline was twice as strict on the cruiser as it was on the mother ship, the Ajax. But Tom shook his head and shot a defiant glance at Stoniky Burr, whose mouth was opened to speak.

"Go on, Stoniky," said Tom bitterly. "Have your say. I know what it'll be!"

Burr looked round slyly.

"I'm a chief P.O.," he said. "It's my duty to report anything like this. Also to report West if he tries to shield you."

"Don't you worry, Burr," replied Tom. "I'm going to give myself up. I've had my fling now, so I'll be off for my gruel. Crumbs—I've been spotted!"

Mr. Bowser, an ex-chief petty officer from the navy, strolled over to the group.

The mate was barrel-shaped, had a round, jovial face and a deep-sea roll in his walk. His eyes were blue and inclined to twinkle with good humour. Tom brightened up. Here was no



"What in thunder are ye up on deck in such a dirty condition for, boy?" roared Mr. Bowser. "Get below an' walk up again in your workin' uniform—parading up here in your nightshirt with your trousers drawn over 'em." Tom looked at the mate. "I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but—but I'm a stowaway!"

man-killer but a human being. He was in luck's way.

"What in thunder are ye up on deck in sech a dirty condition for, boy?" roared Mr. Bowser. "Get below an' walk up again in your workin' uniform—paradin' up here in your nightshirt with your trousers drawn over 'em. And you'll be for it, me lad, for—"

The man's eyes seemed to start out of his head as he peered at Tom.

"Bust me," he roared, "but you ain't one o' the company. I know every man jack o' the thirty by sight now. What—what— Jest you explain yourself, boy!"

Tom looked at the mate fair and square.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but—but—I'm a stowaway—"

"A stow-a-what? Split me if this don't take the flamin' biscuit. Here, you, come aft wi' me!"

The man laid a heavy hand on Tom's shoulder and jerked him aft. The mate was angry, and he yanked Tom along as though he was a refractory and vicious terrier on a lead.

Tom went before the commander—an ex-naval captain. Mr. Bowser explained matters and Captain MacNayre rasped his chin. Tom hoped that this was to hide the twitching at the corners of his mouth. But the little naval officer could not hide the crinkling at the corners of his eyes.

"Boy, what have you to say for yourself?" he boomed at last. Like most little men, Captain MacNayre had a topsail-yard-ahoy voice which was the envy of even Mr. Bowser.

Tom told his story.

"Egad! You mean to say you swam over to the Ulysses from the Ajax?" cried Captain MacNayre. "And the chain-locker! It would have served you well, you scamp, if you had been buried under that cable. Lock him in the fore-peak, Mr. Bowser. His punishment must be left to Commander Boyce. We'll ship him home by train from Harwich when we put in there."

Mr. Bowser saluted and Tom's heart sank. Back to the Ajax! He had certainly considered the possibility, but had concluded that he would be punished on the Ulysses and retained on the barquentine for the cruise.

And the fore-peak—that black hole right up for'ard beyond the chain-locker! He was not even to be allowed to enjoy on deck the trip up the east coast as far as Harwich. He had not expected such an outcome of his reckless escapade as this.

Tom looked miserably at the captain first, then at Mr. Bowser. The mate read the boy's look and turned to the captain.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said, tugging at the peak of his pilot cap, "but I've plenty of fatigue work on deck to be done. He can go to sleep in the fore-peak, but I'll guarantee he won't go to sleep on deck or aloft—"

"Splendid, splendid!" said Captain MacNayre. "Throw a bucket of water over him to wash off some of the rust and mud, then give the bo'sun a free hand with him. Get for'ard, now, you."

Tom hastened to obey. He scuttled up on deck in double-quick time, expecting to be helped along by Mr. Bowser's elegant, well-polished ankle-boot. But no such thing happened, and the lad felt sure he heard a rumble of laughter down in the captain's quarters as he sped forward past the skylight.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 834.

Deep-Water Ways!

THE bo'sun, Tom found, had, like the captain and the mate, a bark which was a good deal worse than his bite. He certainly threatened to strip every square inch of skin off Tom with a rope's end if he didn't "look slippy" with the work he was to put the lad to do.

Mr. Bowser gave the bo'sun minute and lengthy instructions for making Tom's life "a little 'ell" during the time the ship would take to get into Harwich. As a preliminary canter he was to have a bucket of water soused over him as he stood, to wash off some of the rust and mud collected from the chain-locker.

The other training-ship boys stood by and looked on with awe at first. Dicky West was looking very worried. The only two people grinning were Stoniky Burr and Tom himself.

"I'll put that there grin on the other side o' your face, me hearty, afore I'm through with ye," promised the mate, as the bo'sun drew a bucket of water from overside. "Stand clear all, an' give him a cheer when he splutters."

Souse!

Tom coughed and spluttered and dug his knuckles into his eyes, as he danced about from one foot to the other. The lads roared with laughter, even Dicky West joining in, for he noticed that the mate and bo'sun considered it an excellent joke—and Tom could stand lots of that!

With whoops and cheers the boys danced about, greatly excited as Tom's grinning face was turned towards them. Stoniky Burr was more excited than anyone else. With shouts of sheer joy at the prospect of being able to torment someone, particularly Tom, who had dashed some dirty deck water over him quite recently, he seized the rope attached to the handle of the canvas bucket the bo'sun had discarded.

Plunging the bucket over the lee side, he filled it with water again, and, before anyone noticed what he was up to, sent another stream of water dashing over Tom.

This time Tom did not grin! His eyes flashed fire! He leapt towards the bully of the Ajax.

But he was too late to close with Burr. Mr. Bowser was there. The stout, heavy mate had brought the palm of his huge horny hand down on the back of Burr's neck, laying out the bully flat on his face on the deck.

"There!" he said, his voice like the rumble of distant thunder, as Burr rose dazedly to his feet. "Ye'll do things like that when ye're told to on this ship, me lad."

He turned to Tom.

"Get below, you drowned rat, you, and tumble into some dry clothes. Five minutes to give yourself a stiff rub down! Look alive now, or I'll get the bo'sun to rub ye down with a rope fender—"

Tom heard no more. He was already below, with Dicky West close on his heels.

"Gee, Tom," said Dicky, his eyes dancing with delight. "That was one for his knob for Burr! I hope he gets plenty like that. But you're in for it, my pippin—"

"You're right!" agreed Tom. "Gimme some dry togs, old son, for godduss' sake. Must buck up, or they'll chuck me overboard or something. Gee,

don't they make you jump to it on this ship, Dicky?"

"They do!" replied Dicky, with feeling. "But what a stroke of luck you'll be able to work with us, Tom. You'll cop it pretty heavy, of course, but we'll be together—"

"That's just where you're wrong, Dicky," said Tom miserably. "I'm to be sent back by train from Harwich—"

"Turn up, there, Gale. Look alive an' slippy or I'll flay ye good and hearty!" boomed out the mate's voice.

And, Dicky tugging to help, Tom scrambled into some of the red-headed youngster's "spares," then made for the deck.

"Look alive, there! Hang on to this squeegee, you stowaway, you, an' get busy on the deck. Keep at it, every mother's son of you, or I'll know the reason why."

And as every lad bent his back for swabbing down, he told himself that he was in for a lively time during the cruise of the Ulysses.

The barquentine made excellent way. She was taking an open sea route to Harwich, for the sake of the sailing, and Kentish Knock Sand was the last of the banks of the estuary. The breakers were lashing and hissing over the shoals on the port quarters when the boys were allowed a respite from their labours.

Tom was delighted to note that both the mate and the bo'sun had apparently forgotten all about him, and he was allowed the run of the ship, forward of the quarter-deck, like the rest. Their instructions were to get in plenty of training "up aloft."

This was just what the lads wanted, so, with whoops of delight, led by Tom and Dicky West, the boys sprang for the weather rigging of the lofty, square-rigged foremast.

Up, up, up they mounted, slipping round the futtock rigging like monkeys, scorning the lubber's hole in the top. Up, up—well above the top-gallant till they were clinging like flies to the rat-lines and swishing through the air at every dizzy reel of the groaning top-gallant mast.

The wind-tautened royal sail bellied out to leeward of them, the weather braces twanging like bow-strings in harmony with the singing back-stays. Tom, with Dicky clinging on close to him, was gasping for breath and laughing in the sheer joy of it all.

It was life—life as Dicky, Tom, and other lads who had climbed up so far judged it.

"Street-bred people don't know what living is if they haven't been aloft in the rigging of a sailing ship in a blow," Tom gasped to Dicky.

A shout sounded out from the deck. The boys looked down and saw Mr. Bowser with a megaphone to his lips. Or rather, they saw a megaphone which hid Mr. Bowser's form below it.

"Out on the yards, ye cripples," bawled the mate through the megaphone, his voice coming to the lads like a distant pipe. "Out on the royal yard a-weather, you stowaway, you. Every man jack of you to a yard-ar-r-m to wind'ard. Endurance test. Get there, and hang on for your lives."

Tom, with a shout of excitement, climbed slowly higher. He was soon lying across the royal yard—the topmost spar on the ship. With feet on the foot-rope, Dicky close to him, he edged out to the tip of the yard.

(Continued on page 28.)



All attempts in this Competition should be addressed to: The GEM, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

MADE HIS BLOOD BOIL!

Covered with grime and slime, the motorist emerged from beneath his car. His smiling friend, fresh and debonair, beamed down upon him, waving an oil-can. "I've just given the cylinder a thorough oiling, old man," he said. "Thought that might help to make the old bus go." "Cylinder, be hanged!" yelled the enraged one. "That was my ear!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. A. Sharp, 17, Brazil Street, Leicester.

ONE BETTER!

"Father," asked Alice, returning home from school, "are you good at punctuation?" "Yes," replied the father. "Well, how would you punctuate: 'The wind blew a five-pound note round the corner'?" "I'd put a full-stop at the end of the sentence." "I wouldn't," said Alice. "I'd make a dash after the five-pound note!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Kathleen Chadwick, 418, Lytham Road, South Shore, Blackpool, Lancashire.

A NEW SET!

Two old yokels were talking together, and the following conversation was overheard. No. 1: "Young Smythe, the squire's son, said he be cummin doon to ower ouse ter-night, an' bringin' 'is fineanoy wi' 'im. Wot did 'e mean, James?" No. 2: "'E meant 'is young wumman, John." No. 1: "Well, I'll be blowed, an' I've bin an' tode the missis ter get ready, as 'e was bringin' one o' them new wireless masheens wi' 'im!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Davies, Dorsett Road, Dareaston, Staffordshire.

THE PEACEMAKER!

Farmer Heartyboy, a bluff, cheery, good-natured old fellow, was on his first visit to London. He had never before left his beloved sleepy country side. "Eh, but this 'ere Lunnon is a big place!" he muttered to himself, as he gaped his way past the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, and on to Buckingham Palace. There his roving

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER!

TRUE TO TRADITION!

A man who had been mending a road had fallen down a ditch and broken his leg, and his comrades had propped him up against the roadside hedge. "Dear, dear," exclaimed an old lady, appearing upon the scene, "has he hurt himself?" "Yus," replied one of the workmen. "Fallen down a ditch an' broke 'is leg." "But aren't you going to take him to a doctor, or the hospital?" asked the old lady kindly. "Wot?" came the horrified reply. "In 'is dinner-our?"—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to T. C. Lawday, Claremont Cottage, Church Street, Gt. Malvern, Worcestershire.

attention was taken by the sight of two sentries. He stood for some minutes with a gradually deepening frown on his red, jolly face, watching the smart, uniformed figures as they repeatedly walked up to each other, and then turned about without speaking a word. At last, unable to control himself any longer, Farmer Heartyboy strode up to the sentries, and, laying a hand on each man's shoulder as they came together again, he said, in his bluff, kindly way: "Come, lads, can't you make it up?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Roy Hudson, 123, Fitzgerald Street, Bradford, Yorks.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE!

Sam had seen a ghost. With many gestures he was narrating his experience to an audience of his fellow "darkies." "Ah jest come out of de cowshed," he said impressively, "an' Ah had a bucket of milk in ma hand. Den Ah hears a noise by de side of de road, an' de ghost rushes out!" His listeners crowded more closely round him. "Did yo' shake with fright, Sam?" one of them asked. "Ah don't know what Ah shook with," replied Sam. "Ah ain't sayin' for suttin Ah shook at all. But when Ah got home Ah found all de milk gone, an' two pounds of butter in de bucket!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to J. Glock, 3, Pomeroy Street, New Cross, S.E. 14.

THE HERO!

"This is one of my ancestors," she said, pausing before a portrait. "He

fell at Waterloo. Have you any ancestors?" He remembered an uncle who had sole charge of the front of a cinema theatre, and murmured: "Er—yes, one." "Did he fall anywhere?" "Not exactly; but I remember being told how, clothed in full uniform, but unarmed save for a light cane, he stood before a gorgeous palace and kept a howling, surging mob at bay single-handed!" "Really! How splendid!" "Oh, he thought nothing of it. Did it every night for years!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Cambeltown, N.B.

AN EYE-OPENER!

Smart Boy: "Father, why does my teacher resemble an eye?"
 Father: "I cannot say, my boy."
 Smart Boy: "Because he is an everlasting punisher."
 Father: "But why is the eye an everlasting punisher?"
 Smart Boy: "Because it keeps its pupils under the lash all day, and at night gives them a good hiding!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to John Spencer, 18, Windmill End, Netherton, Dudley.

EXPLICIT!

At the steamship office the prospective traveller had pestered the clerk with questions. Meanwhile, a long and angry queue had formed. But the clerk enjoyed the joke. "Upper or lower berth?" he had asked. "What's the difference?" asked the gentleman. "Difference of half-a-crown in this case," said the obliging young man. "The lower berth is higher than the upper. The higher price is for the lower. If you want it lower, you have to go higher. We sell the upper, lower than the lower. In other words, the higher the lower. Most people don't like the upper, although it is lower on account of its being higher. When you occupy an upper, you have to go up to bed, and get down when you want to get up!" They were still arguing when the steamer left port.—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Miss Betty Cound, 93, Manselton Road, Swansea, S. Wales.

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"TOM OF THE AJAX!"

(Continued from page 26.)

A few other lads gingerly worked their way out on to other yards, but most of them would not leave the ratlines on the shrouds.

"Bravo, you stowaway, you! And you red-headed son of a bunch of carrots," bawled Mr. Bowser. "All secure? Hang on like grim death. We're going to luff!"

The boys, with a gasp, clung to buntlines and ties as if their lives depended on it, as indeed they would in a few minutes. They all knew what luffing meant—bringing the ship closer into the wind till the pressure in the canvas was lessened. The sails would growl and roar, boom and lash about, jerking the yards terribly. Well, it was what they would have to expect if they "went sail" in a few short months' time, when they would sign on for distant lands on merchant vessels.

Half of the lads shut their eyes and gripped till their fingers ached. They all felt the yards jerked about savagely. Then the sails rumbled and roared, and the luffs lashed and boomed angrily. They just hung on. It was no place for a weakling, out there on the yard-arms, with the ship luffing into the wind.

It was an ordeal for most, but a sheer

joy for Tom and Dicky and one or two others. Tom could imagine he was on a wind-jammer, rounding Cape Horn—a reefer aloft to take in canvas. But he was not left to day-dreams long, for the Ulysses bore away again and the sails "fell asleep" once more. The yards became steady, and the piping voice from below ordered all to descend.

Once more safely on deck, Mr. Bowser placed his megaphone down, big end to the planks, and addressed the boys.

"Next time," he said, just to show how pleased he was with the boys' performance, "I'll be up there myself with a belayin' pin to make ye put more of a jerk into it. Split me, but that was a schoolgirl job compared to what'll be expected o' ye all in another nine months or so. Imagine yourselves aloft in a big, heavy-sparred, iron man-killer out o' Glasgow, roundin' Cape Stiff, or hopin' to, lines all froze stiff as marine-spikes, sails crusted with ice like big iron plates, a belayin' pin in the hand of each o' you to smash away the ice before ye can reef or furl with your pore, bleeding fingers. Them as aren't men'll go under. Cape Stiff kills a man a day! So we'll start on this ship what you'll have to go through then, rememberin' always to get a holt o' something, and stick to it."

Mr. Bowser paused and rubbed his big, horny hands together. It was said that while haranguing his men the mate could talk for hours on end without stopping for breath, taking in the necessary amount of air for life through his pores, like a plant.

The fatigue work that Tom had been promised—"enough of it to break his heart"—dwindled to nothing, and the mate's eyes twinkled in a kindly way on the lad. Mr. Bowser had been impressed by Tom's daring aloft, and he heartily wished the lad were coming on the cruise instead of going back to the Ajax from Harwich.

The barquentine steamed in past Landguard Fort, Harwich, as the mate struck six bells (seven o'clock) that evening. She was to remain at Harwich for a few days, but Tom was not allowed ashore with the rest.

Captain MacNayre had written for instructions from the Ajax as to his action in regard to the stowaway, so the young Hood's first hope of continuing on the cruise revived.

But his hopes were dashed to the deck at the end of the second day. Instructions to the effect that Tom was to be sent back at once by train, under care of the guard, arrived.

So, in the evening, Tom was taken ashore by a seaman and delivered to the guard of the express for his journey back to the Ajax.

So this was the end of his wild adventure! This, an ignominious return to the mother ship where a stiff punishment awaited him.

But had Tom known it, it was not to be so very long before he would be aboard the Ulysses again.

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