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"THE SHIPWRECKED SEVEN!" A Thrilling and Dramatic Story of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's. By Martin Clifford.

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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By Martin Clifford.

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THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

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"CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!"

By Roland Spencer and Francis Warwick.

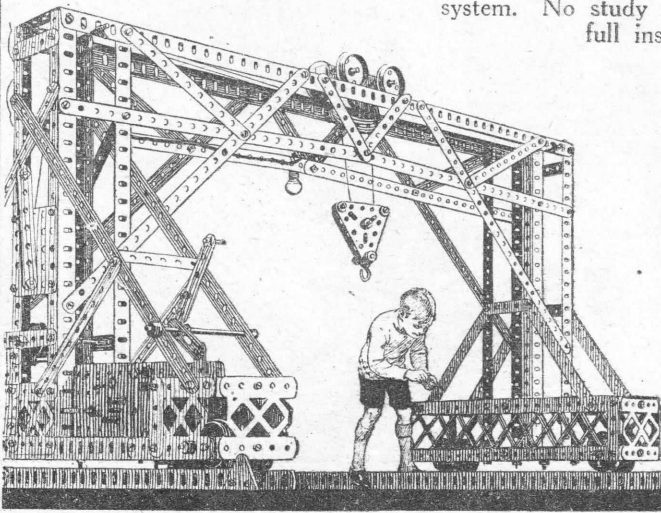
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Greatly elated were the chums of St. Jim's when they were granted permission to accompany Lord Conway on a trip in his famous yacht, the Conquest. With light hearts they started upon the voyage that was to end so disastrously!



An Extra-Thrilling and
Dramatic Long Complete
School Story of the Famous
Chums of St. Jim's—Tom
Merry & Co.

BY

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Lord Conway's Visit!

"I FANCY that'll about do, you chaps—eh?" said Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's.

"Yaas, wathah! Wippin', bai Jove!"

"Jolly decent spread!" remarked Blake.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. had just finished getting tea ready, and now they were looking at the results of their labours with satisfaction and no little pride.

For the tea-table in Study No. 6 certainly was well worth looking at. It fairly groaned beneath the weight of good things reposing upon it. There were several kinds of jam, there were sardines and bloater-paste and tinned apricots. There were also plates of jam tarts, cakes, and biscuits, and meringues, and chocolate eclairs, besides buttered scones and toast and bread-and-butter. The spotless cloth shone with gleaming cutlery and cups and saucers, and a steaming kettle on a blazing fire added to the cosy, inviting scene.

Tom Merry & Co. were seven in number, and as the table was set for eight it was clear that a visitor was expected in Study No. 6; it was also fairly clear that the visitor was someone of importance—or, at least, someone whom Study No. 6 was determined to honour.

"Jolly good job we happened to be in funds," said Blake. "What time is your giddy brother due, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy consulted a handsome gold watch. "Old Conway said he'd be here about five, deah boys," he exclaimed. "It is now five minutes to five."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry. "Kettle's about boiling, so I vote we trot down to the gates and welcome his giddy lordship there."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors snatched their caps, and were about to leave the study when the door was kicked open from outside, and a cheeky, inky-faced Third Form youngster marched in.

It was Wally D'Arcy of the Third, and he glared first at the loaded table, and then at his elder brother.

"Look here, Gus," he said warmly, "is it true that old Conway's coming to-day?"

"Yaas, but—"

"Then why wasn't I told?" snorted Wally. "My hat! Isn't he my brother as well as yours?"

"Yaas; but weally, Wally—"

"What's he coming for?" sniffed Wally.

"I do not know, you disreputable young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "Conway wang me up on the phone half an hour ago to say he was comin' to see the Head for an hour. He is at Wayland, and is wunnin' ovah in the car. Howevah, I tust you do not propose to greet Conway in that disreputable state, Wally."

"Bow-wow!" said Wally.

"Your collar is dirty, and your face is inky!"

"Rats!"

"Your hair is untidy, and your clothes are feahfully wumpled—"

"And your neck wants washing!" added Lowther.

Wally D'Arcy gave a sniff.

"Oh, give it a rest!" he said. "Look here, I suppose this spread is for old Con—"

"Yaas!"

"Good!" said Wally, looking longingly at the table. "I was going to ask Con to tea with us in the Form-room. I needn't now, though. I'll join you chaps instead."

"Bai Jove, no you won't, you young wascal—"

"I'll get a few more chairs in," said Wally, unheeding. "Just for me and Jameson and Curly Gibson and—"

"You'll jolly well do nothing of the sort, my pippin!" said Blake grimly. "Think we're standing a crowd of inky fags in here. Get out!"

He grabbed the cheery Third-Former by the collar, and, twisting him out into the passage, sat him down with a bump on the linoleum.

"Come on!" grinned Tom Merry.

And leaving Wally sprawling breathlessly in the passage, Tom Merry & Co. marched away, Tom carefully closing the door after him as he went.

Wally shook his fist after the departing crowd, and then he joined Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Reggie Manners, who were waiting for him along the passage.

"Cheeky cads!" he snorted. "Here, what the thump are you grinning at, Reggie Manners? Want a biff on the boko?"

"What happened?" grinned Reggie Manners. "What did they boot you out for, Wally?"

Wally grunted, and explained.

"Well, you were an ass to dream of asking your giddy major to tea," chuckled Curly Gibson. "Not that I bar Lord Conway—I don't! I can't stand relations, as a rule, but he's useful—especially at forking out tips. But we've only half a tin of sardines between us."

"I know that, ass!" said Wally, nodding gloomily. "I was going to press my claim, though, hoping they'd let us join their spread."

"Mean bounders!" said Jameson.

"Blow them!" said Wally grimly. "But we're not done yet, my pippins! We'll hang about until old Conway turns up, and then we'll try again. Old Gus won't like to turn us away hungry with Conway there."

"Good wheeze!" chuckled Manners minor.

The four fags strolled along the passage, intending to wait on the School House steps for the arrival of the distinguished visitor to St. Jim's. But they did not reach the steps. As they turned the corner in the passage Wally suddenly stopped short with a gasp, for, standing outside the door of Mr. Railton's study, chatting to the House-master, was a tall, athletic-looking young man, with a handsome, good-natured face.

"Well, my hat!" said Wally, cheering up suddenly.

"Here's Conway, you chaps!"

Lord Conway—for it was indeed he—saw the fags coming along, and with a word to Mr. Railton he came towards them.

"Well, Wally, you young rascal," he said, smiling, "how are you?"

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"Right as rain, old bean!" said Wally, shaking hands. "I say, how long have you been here?"

"Twenty minutes or so—came sooner than I had intended," said Lord Conway. "But where is Arthur?"

"He's waiting for you at the gates, I expect," grinned Wally. "I say, you wouldn't like to have tea with us, I suppose, Con?"

"Well, I'm afraid not—"

"That's rather lucky, as it happens," said Wally candidly. "We've only a few stale sardines and about a couple of spoonfuls of jam in the giddy larder."

"Well, that certainly doesn't sound very inviting, Wally!" laughed the viscount. "As it happens, though, I couldn't accept in any case. I've just accepted an invitation to tea with Mr. Railton, Wally."

D'Arcy minor looked disappointed. He gave a glance towards Mr. Railton's open door, and then he lowered his voice.

"I say," he said eagerly, "you can easily back out of that, Con! You'll only get jam and stale buns with Railton! I know. Better come along to Gussy's crowd. They've got a ripping spread waiting for you—heaps of top-hole grub. I advise you—"

"Now, what a pity I didn't know that sooner!" said Lord Conway gravely. "Your kind suggestion certainly tempts me. I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint Arthur and his chums, however."

"Oh, well, that's your own look-out!" said Wally, a curious gleam suddenly appearing in his eyes. "Anyhow, I'll cut off now—those chaps waiting for me. See you later, old top. Ta-ta!"

And with that, Wally of the Third hurried away to rejoin his waiting chums. He was grinning cheerfully now.

"I say, you chaps!" he exclaimed eagerly. "I've just thought of a top-hole wheeze! Old Conway's having tea with Railton—"

"Then it's off—" began Manners minor.

"Not a bit of it!" grinned Wally, his eyes dancing with mischief. "We're going to be the giddy guests of honour instead of Con. Those old fogies are still waiting at the gates, I suppose—"

"Yes; but—"

"Well, let 'em wait!" grinned Wally, with a chuckle. "And while they're waiting, we'll trot along to Study No. 6 and start on the grub—see?"

"Phew!"

"It's the chance of a lifetime!" tempted Wally. "They don't know Conway's already here. I expect he came by the Head's private entrance. Anyway, perhaps we'll have had our whack long before they tumble, and come in."

"But when they do—"

"Rats! We'll lock the door, and we won't let 'em in until they make it pax!" chuckled Wally. "It's a fair cinch, my lads! Are you on?"

"What-ho!"

"My hat! Yes, rather, Wally!"

"Good man!"

"Then run along, young Manners, and bring old Hobbs and Joe Frayne and Franky Levison," ordered the cheery Wally. "Might as well make a good job of it. Buck up!"

"Yes, rather!"

Reggie Manners rushed away to carry out his leader's orders, while Wally and his other two chums rushed off towards Study No. 6.

To their joy they found it empty—apparently Tom Merry & Co. had not yet discovered that their visitor had already arrived—and without delay the three young rascals seated themselves at the table—carefully locking the door before they did so.

Two minutes later they had to unlock the door again to let Reggie Manners and the delighted and grinning Frayne and Levison in, and then the party seated themselves and got down to business.

"Pile in, you fellows," said Wally, who had seated himself at the head of the table. "Remember this ripping spread is in my brother's honour, and as his representative, I shall expect you to do me honour by enjoying your giddy selves. Pile in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-ho!"

And the young rascals of the Third chortled and piled in.

CHAPTER 2. Great News!

"FIVE past five!" remarked Blake. "No sign of his giddy lordship yet, Gussy!"

"Yaas, it is wathah stwange—"

"Slack, if you ask me," said Monty Lowther. "I must say I'm surprised at your brother, Gussy. As a member of the aristocracy, I consider he should set us

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ordinary mortals a better example in punctuality. He's slack!"

"Bai Jove! Lowthah, you uttah ass! Conway said he would be here about five—"

"Well, he should have been more explicit," said Lowther, shaking his head. "It's disrespectful, to say the least, to keep tea—and us—waiting like this."

"Wats!" retorted the Honourable Arthur Augustus. "Perhaps his car has bwoken down—"

"May have gone indoors by the Head's private entrance," said Manners suddenly. "May be in the School House now."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that, you know."

"Better go in and see," said Tom Merry. "But, my hat! What about the grub? We were asses to leave a spread like that unguarded. Suppose that fat toad Trimble smells it out?"

"Oh, great pip!"

As a rule Tom Merry & Co. were very careful about leaving temptation in the way of fellows like Baggy Trimble. Past experience had taught them the folly of that.

They realised they had been careless now.

"I never even locked the dashed door," said Tom Merry in alarm. "And there's those young Third Form imps. They wouldn't think twice about raiding the grub."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Come on!" snapped Tom.

The memory that the mischievous young rascals of the Third had been in the passage when they came out filled the juniors with sudden alarm, and they followed Tom Merry indoors with a rush.

Tom Merry was the first to reach the door of Study No. 6, and as he twisted the knob, he realised that their fears had not been groundless.

"Locked!" he breathed. "The blessed door's locked!"

"Bai Jove!"

Even as the juniors looked at each other, their ears caught the clatter of crockery, and the cheery hum of youthful voices from within the locked study.

"It's Wally and his gang!" yelled Blake, starting to bang furiously on the door. "You young scoundrels! Open this dashed door, will you?"

There sounded a chorus of chuckles from within the room, and then came D'Arcy minor's cheery voice.

"Hallo!" he said. "Someone tapping at the door, you chaps. Wonder who it is, now?"

"You'll jolly soon know who it is if you don't open this door!" hooted Blake, almost crimson with fury. "You—you cheeky little imps! Come on, you chaps—we'll have them out of that if we have to break the door down!"

"Yes, rather!"

The rest of the infuriated juniors joined Blake in his frenzied onslaught on the door. The sheer cheek and impudence of the raid almost took their breath away—but not quite. They had some breath left, and they used it to hurl blood-curdling threats through the keyhole.

But it had no effect whatever on Wally & Co. At intervals in the commotion the clatter of crockery and the subdued hum of cheery voices could still be heard from within.

Tom Merry & Co. fairly raved with helpless indignation and wrath. Fellows came to their study doors to see what the disturbance was about, and soon the raving Tom Merry & Co. were surrounded by a crowd of grinning juniors. Though Tom Merry and his chums quite failed to see humour in the situation the crowd saw plenty of humour in it.

The thought that at any moment Lord Conway might arrive on the scene almost drove the chums of the School House frantic. They were still banging thunderously on the door when a cry of "cave" was raised, and the crowd opened out to admit Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master.

He stared in astonishment at the scene.

"Blake!" he exclaimed severely. "What is all this commotion about?"

"We—we can't enter our study!" stammered Blake, as sudden silence fell on the scene. "You—you see—"

He gasped and stopped.

Mr. Lathom regarded the door through his glasses, and frowned.

"Do I understand that you have locked the door and lost the key?" he exclaimed severely. "That is careless of you, Blake. Indeed, I fail to see why you should lock the door at all. However, the matter must wait for the moment. You will proceed to the Head's study at once, Blake."

"Bai Jove!"

"But—but, sir—" gasped Blake.

"D'Arcy, Herries, Digby, Merry, Lowther, and Manners will accompany you," proceeded Mr. Lathom, smiling over his glasses at those alarmed juniors.

"But—but, sir—" stammered Blake again.

"Come, come, Blake!" said Mr. Lathom. "You must not keep Dr. Holmes waiting."



Arthur Augustus D'Arcy let out a fearful yell and withdrew his hand from his coat pocket. "Yawoooh! Oh cwumbs! Yawoooh!" As the rest of the boatload looked up they saw the luckless Gussy dancing about with one hand raised aloft, and clinging to the fingers of his hand was a huge live lobster! (See page 10.)

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Tom Merry dismally. He started away, and the rest of the startled juniors almost tottered after him. They were astonished and dismayed. That the Fourth Form master should send them to the Head for kicking up a disturbance in the passage seemed to them too thick altogether.

"Well, my hat!" groaned Tom Merry, as they wended their way in a dispirited crowd to the Head's study. "If that doesn't beat the band! Fancy sending us to the Head for that!"

"Might have licked us himself—or, at least, sent us to Railton," growled Blake. "Oh, blow him!"

"Rotten, bai Jove!"

"It's queer!" said Manners thoughtfully. "Why didn't Lathom come with us, then? It looks to me as if the Head wants us for something else—was expecting us. Didn't Lathom say we mustn't keep the old top waiting?"

"Great Scott! That's so!"

It was in a state of some bewilderment, and a great deal of apprehension, that Tom Merry & Co. presented themselves before Dr. Holmes some moments later.

The Head regarded them thoughtfully—almost smilingly—as they ranged themselves before his desk. That was a good sign, at all events!

"Well, boys," he began, eyeing their dejected faces in no little surprise. "You are aware, of course, of my reason for sending for you? I presume you have seen your brother, Lord Conway, D'Arcy?"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus was astonished.

"Oh, no, sir!" he mumbled. "My bwothah does not appear to have awwived yet, sir."

The Head raised his eyebrows, and then he smiled. He could imagine now why the juniors looked so apprehensive and dejected. They had evidently anticipated trouble.

But it was not trouble—far from it. And Dr. Holmes smiled and proceeded to explain.

"Lord Conway has been at the school some time, D'Arcy," he said. "He has interviewed me, and is now taking tea with Mr. Railton."

"Bai Jove!"

Fortunately, Arthur Augustus gave vent to that exclamation below his breath.

"Your brother, D'Arcy," proceeded the Head grimly, "has visited St. Jim's to-day in order to make a request

to me—a request which is most unusual, and which I at first refused to entertain for one moment. Lord Conway as you doubtless know, has just returned from a holiday cruise around the coast in his yacht, the Conquest."

"Oh, yaas, sir!" murmured the surprised Arthur Augustus.

"Very well," continued the Head, "Lord Conway now proposes to take a short business trip to a certain island—Stark Island, I believe it is called—off the coast of Cornwall. He proposes to be away a couple of days, and he has requested me to allow you seven juniors to accompany him."

"Oh, sir!"

It was a gasp—a breathless, simultaneous gasp.

"As I have said," resumed Dr. Holmes, smiling again at the expressions of mingled hope and amazement on the juniors' faces. "I, at first, refused to entertain the request. In my view it is hardly the time of the year for a yachting cruise, and I was loath to risk the possible dangers of such a trip. However, the weather has been fairly settled of late, and knowing that the yacht will be under the personal control of Lord Conway, I have, after careful consultation with Mr. Railton, given my permission."

"Oh, sir!"

It was a gasp of almost hysterical joy this time.

"Bai Jove, sir!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, his aristocratic features beaming. "How absolutely wippin'! Weally, sir—"

The Head raised his hand.

"Silence, D'Arcy," he said, frowning slightly. "I have not finished yet. I wish you to remember that Lord Conway will be responsible for you all, and that I shall expect you to obey his orders, and to be careful to run no unnecessary risks."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"We'll be as good as gold, bai Jove!" beamed Arthur Augustus. "You can wely upon us, sir—"

"Very well, D'Arcy," said the Head hastily. "You will take suitable clothing, of course, in case of bad weather, and you will be excused preparation this evening in order to pack the few things you will find necessary to take. The yacht, I understand, is lying at Seacalm, a small seaport beyond Southampton. You will catch the Southampton express at Wayland early to-morrow morning—Mr. Railton

will give you all details—and Lord Conway is to meet you at Seacalm. I think that is all for the moment—excepting that I hope you will have good weather, and will enjoy the trip.”

“Oh, thank you, sir!”

“It’s awfully good of you, sir!”

“Weally, sir, I must expwess my— Weally, Blake—”

The Head had already nodded his dismissal, and fearing to bring a frown to his august brow, Blake grasped Arthur Augustus and hustled him out of the room.

In a confused crowd the juniors surged out of the Head’s study, almost falling over each other in their excitement and agitation.

But as the door closed, Monty Lowther, in sheer exuberance of joy, knocked the gleaming eyeglass from the noble eye of Arthur Augustus, and, grasping him round the waist, he started to waltz him round the passage.

“Bai Jove, Lowthah, you ass—”

“Chuck it, Lowther, you idiot!” grinned Tom Merry.

“If the Head comes out—”

“Yes, chuck it, ass!” hissed Blake. “We can’t afford to risk trouble now—we don’t want the Head to withdraw permission. We’ve got to be as good as gold till morning.”

“My hat, yes!” gasped Lowther.

He released the protesting Arthur Augustus like a shot.

“My hat, you fellows!” chortled Tom Merry, almost dancing himself in his excitement. “This is great! Your giddy brother’s a brick, and so is the Head!”

“Yaas, wathah! It’s weally wippin’, deah boys!”

“It almost seems like a dream,” said Lowther. “I feel I’ll wake up presently. My hat! Two whole days holiday, and a sea trip on a yacht. Three cheers!”

“Let’s go and start packing now,” urged Digby.

“What about tea?” said Herries.

“Blow tea!” grinned Blake. “Who wants tea now? My hat, though, what about those Third Form rascals?”

“Oh, let ’em rip—let the little chaps enjoy themselves,” grinned Tom Merry. “We can afford to let the poor kids off now.”

“Yaas, wathah! I wppose we wait for old Conway to come— Bai Jove, heah comes the deah boy!”

At that moment the tall figure of Lord Conway emerged from Mr. Railton’s study higher up the passage, and, after calling a laughing “good-bye!” to the Housemaster within, he came striding along the passage. In a flash the excited juniors surrounded him.

“Conway, you bwick—”

“It’s ripping of you, sir!”

“You’re a real brick, sir—”

Lord Conway laughed cheerily as he eyed the shining eyes of the juniors.

“You’ve heard then, kids,” he said. “I rather thought you’d be pleased with the idea.”

“We’ve just seen the Head, Conway,” exclaimed Arthur Augustus gleefully. “It’s weally gweat, bai Jove! We didn’t even know you had awwived, y’know. It was—”

“I thought I’d see the Head and get it all fixed up before I met you fellows,” laughed Lord Conway. “Well, I suppose you know the programme? You must catch the eight-fifteen train for Southampton in the morning, and then change into the local train for Seacalm. I’ll meet you there, of course. You needn’t bring much—just a few warm togs—sweaters and suchlike. But Mr. Railton will give you final instructions. I’ve left the cash for fares and all that with him. And now I must be off—I’ve got a long journey before me.”

“You’ve seen young Wally?” asked Arthur Augustus.

“Yes, I’ve seen the young rascal,” smiled the viscount.

“By the way, I must say good-bye to him. I’m afraid he’ll have his nose put out over this trip. It can’t be helped, though.”

“Yaas, wathah! The young wapsallion will want to come, bai Jove!”

“I’m afraid so. The Head won’t hear of Third-Form youngsters joining us, though,” said Lord Conway. “I did my best, but it was no good. You’d better tell Wally that, Arthur. Tell him I’ll make it right some other way. You can give him this as a little compensation now, Arthur.”

Lord Conway handed Arthur Augustus a couple of Treasury-notes, and the swell of St. Jim’s pocketed them with a chuckle. A moment later Tom Merry & Co. were accompanying the viscount to his car, and, after thanking the genial Lord Conway again, they watched him depart, and then returned gleefully to the School House.

“And now for those Third Form scamps!” grinned Blake.

“We’ve got to get into the study somehow.”

“Wally will let us in soon enough, if we make it pax,” said Tom. “We’d better do that.”

“Oh, good!”

The chums hurried along to Study No. 6, and, finding it was still locked, Blake rapped on the door. Only some little time ago they had been raging like wild animals at that door, but now they were grinning; they could see the funny

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side to Wally’s little dodge now. As Tom had said, they could afford to let them “off” now.

“Open the door, Wally!” called Arthur Augustus, quite cheerily. “It’s quite all wight, deah boys!”

“Hallo!” came Wally’s cheeky voice. “Oh dear! They’re here again! That you, Gussy?”

“Yaas. Will you—?”

“Oh, do buzz off, there’s good chaps!” called Wally.

“We’ve scarcely finished yet. Run away and play!”

Blake drew a deep breath, but Tom Merry laughed.

“Let us ’in, Wally, you young rascal!” he called. “It’s all serene. We’ll make it pax!”

“Eh, what’s that—you’ll make it pax?”

“Yes, honour bright!” called Blake. “You can open the door, and we’ll call it square if you’ll clear out.”

“Oh, good!”

There was a chortle of satisfaction in the study. They knew they could rely on the word of Tom Merry & Co. As a matter of fact, Wally & Co. were just beginning to worry a bit. They had had a gorgeous “feed,” but they knew they would have a terrific reckoning to face—unless Tom Merry & Co. chose to make it “pax.”

There was a few seconds’ muttered conversation; and then the key turned in the lock, and the door was opened. As Tom Merry & Co. crowded into the study they found the young heroes of the Third standing together by the door.

They were all grinning, but they looked slightly suspicious and apprehensive, for all that. The victory had been just a little too easy for Wally & Co.’s liking. But they looked still more suspicious as they noted the cheery grins on the faces of the fellows they had spoofed. They had expected to face something like raging lions.

“Look—look here,” began Wally, suspiciously and warily.

“What’s the giddy game? You said you’d make it pax—you know you did!”

“My dear man, we’ve made it pax, and we mean it!” laughed Tom Merry.

“Yaas, wathah!”

“Have you little fellows enjoyed your tea?” inquired Jack Blake.

Wally grinned.

“Yes, but look here—”

“Then you might oblige by getting outside the door!” said Blake cheerily. “There it is—hop it! Go while the going’s good!”

For a moment Wally & Co. stared at the grinning juniors, and then Wally gave the word, and they dived for the door. Then, realising to their surprise that no effort was made to stay them, they dashed away, yelling with laughter.

They could not quite understand the meaning of Tom Merry & Co.’s tame acceptance of their defeat—then.

They did later on, however. The news of the yachting expedition was very soon public property. And when Wally D’Arcy heard about it his feelings were too deep for words, and even the handing over of the two Treasury-notes by Gussy did not compensate him much. He felt that had he only not been too busy in Study No. 6, he could easily have persuaded his elder brother to include him in the party. He felt that it was a crying shame, and he even went as far as to lay his views personally before Dr. Holmes—to that gentleman’s great wrath.

It was no good, however; where Lord Conway had failed it was scarcely likely that a Third Form fag would succeed. Nor did he succeed. And in the Third Form quarters that night, while his chums chortled and crowed over their bloodless victory over Tom Merry & Co., young Wally, like Rachael of old, mourned, and would not be comforted.

But in Study No. 6 on the Fourth Form passage, and in Study No. 10 on the Shell passage, all was joy and gladness as Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three, while the rest of their less fortunate schoolfellows did their prep, packed their suitcases cheerily, and made all preparations for the glad morrow.

CHAPTER 3.

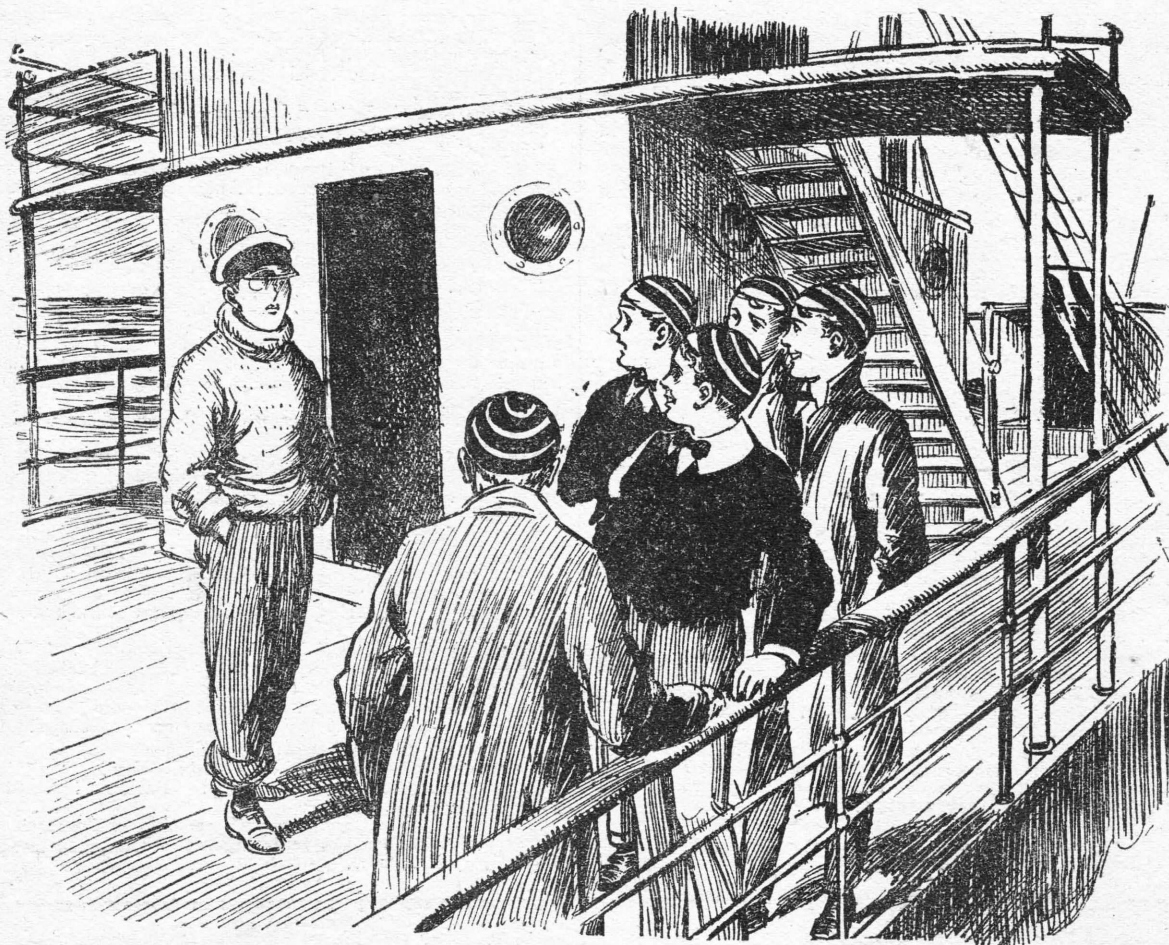
The Exasperating Gussy!

“HERE we are, chaps! All ready?”

The rising-bell was just ringing at St. Jim’s when Tom Merry, with his chums, Manners and

Lowther, joined Blake, Herries, and Digby on the School House steps the following morning.

The chums of the School House had been up early—very early. Whilst the rest of their envious and less fortunate Form-fellows were slumbering, they had dressed and gone down to an early breakfast, which they had disposed of in solitary glory. And now, whilst the rest of the school was rubbing the slumber from their eyes, Tom Merry & Co. were dressed, and apparently ready for the glorious freedom before them. They had already had their final instructions from Mr. Railton, and as far as they were concerned, St. Jim’s had ceased to exist.



No sooner had D'Arcy put foot on deck than he was greeted with roars of laughter from his chums. "Ha, ha, ha!" He had changed his attire right enough, for in place of his precious "topper" he wore a peaked yachting cap several sizes too large for him. His sweater was rolled up at the waist like a lifebelt, and his trousers were also rolled up like miniature lifebelts round his ankles. Altogether he looked a picture. (See page 10.)

"Quite a decent morning!" said Blake, glancing round the deserted quad. "Yes, we're ready, you fellows. But—"

"Where's Gussy?" asked Tom suddenly.

Blake snorted.

"That's just it!" he sniffed. "Gussy's missing, as usual. Goodness knows, he's had time enough to get ready; he was up long before we were, in fact. Said he was packing, though he spent hours last night doing it."

"My hat!" grinned Lowther. "The ass doesn't propose to take a pile of giddy baggage, surely?"

"He did!" said Blake grimly. "But we jolly soon changed his views on that point. He wanted to take three of four suits and a couple of toppers—toppers for yachting, mind you; said we never know what social occasions we might find ourselves in. The ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He spent hours last night selecting neckties and waistcoats, and packing 'em," went on Blake, with a chuckle. "And we spent just two minutes in pitching them out of his trunks again. We're only taking a suitcase each, and that silly tailor's dummy's got to take the same."

"Good old Gussy!" grinned Tom Merry. "He'd better buck up, though, or we'll miss that train. Hasn't the blessed taxi come yet?"

"Doesn't look like it!" grunted Blake, wrinkling his brows. "Blow it! Hadn't we better start out to meet it, Tommy?"

"What about that dummy Gussy?" said Tom. "Heaps of time yet, though. We'll wait a bit!"

Blake grunted. It really was exasperating that Arthur Augustus was missing; they could scarcely go without Arthur Augustus. And it was exasperating, too, that the taxi ordered for them had not turned up yet.

The juniors, after relieving their feelings in regard to Arthur Augustus and the taxi, dropped their bags to the stone floor, and waited. The early morning air was sharp and keen; but they had their coats on, and did not feel the cold. Tom Merry & Co. were as hard as nails.

"Hallo!" said Blake suddenly. "Here's Gussy at last!"

"But where's his bag?" demanded Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came walking sedately across the quad from the direction of the porter's lodge. He had no suit-case with him, and he seemed in no hurry.

The juniors greeted him with glares.

"Gussy, you burbling ass!" snorted Blake. "Where the thump have you been? And where's your traps?"

Arthur Augustus blinked rather coldly through his monocle at Blake. He seemed rather surprised, too—possibly at Blake's last question.

"My twaps?" he exclaimed. "My twaps have just gone, deah boys—some moments ago!"

"Gone?" ejaculated Herries. "Who's taken 'em—old Taggy? My hat! Fancy Gussy being too dashed lazy to look after a blessed suitcase!"

"Why didn't you wait for the taxi, you ass!" grinned Tom Merry.

"I quite fail to undahstand you, deah boys," said D'Arcy, blinking at the juniors. "The taxi-man took my luggage, natuwallly!"

"Your—your whatter?"

"My luggage," explained Arthur Augustus. "As I told you last night, Blake, it is uttably impos for me to pvceed upon such a twip without suitable clobber, bai Jove! In emptyin' my twunks last night you acted like wuffians, bai Jove. I was obliged to get up vewy early this mornin' to pack them again."

"And you—you've sent them on?"

"Yaas. The taxi-man's just taken them, Blake."

"What taxi-man?" ejaculated Blake, a sudden suspicion entering his mind. "You—you—"

"The taxi-man who was ordahed to take us to the station, of course!" replied Arthur Augustus calmly. "It was weally unavoidable, deah— Bai Jove, pway don't make such feahful faces, Blake! As I wemarked, it was unavoidable. I found it necessary to take two big twunks, and two hat-boxes, besides my suitcase. Accidents will happen, y'know."

It is best to be pwepahed, bai Jove! Howevah, I wealised the taxi couldn't possibly cawwy us in addition to my luggage, so I have sent it on to be quite sure of it weachin' the station in time. You see—"

But Tom Merry & Co. did not stop to "see." Arthur Augustus spoke quite calmly—he seemed to take it quite calmly. But his chums did not take it calmly—far from it. Arthur Augustus had expressed his fears of accidents happening, and an "accident" happened now.

"You actually mean to say that you've sent our taxi off with your blessed baggage?" shrieked Blake.

"Yaas. Weally, I do wish you would not wear at me, Blake. I— Yawooh! Ow! Oh cwumbs!"

Bump, bump, bump!

With one accord Blake and his exasperated chums grasped Arthur Augustus, and the surprised swell of the Fourth was rolled down the School House steps, to land in the quad with a final bump and a yell.

"Come on!" hissed Tom Merry. "Oh, the burbling idiot! We'll miss that blessed train yet!"

"Yes, rather!"

And, hastily grabbing up their suitcases, they started off at a run for the gates, heedless of whether the astonished Gussy followed or not.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus gasped, and then scrambled to his feet, breathing threats and expressions of great wrath. He glared after his departing chums, and then hastily grabbed his silk hat, which had rolled—like himself—in the mud. After hurriedly stroking it down, he jammed it on his head and went racing after his chums.

"Bai Jove, the feahful wuffians!" he panted. "I will give the wottahs a feahful thwashin' all wound for this!"

It was not a far cry to Rylcombe Station from St. Jim's, but Tom Merry led the way at a terrific rate, and though Arthur Augustus had nothing to carry, he was feeling not much like "thwashin'" anyone by the time he reached the little station.

He found that the taxi-man was just unloading his luggage from the taxi as he dashed breathlessly up, and he also found Tom Merry and the rest of his chums waiting for him in a state of smouldering exasperation.

"You burbling idiot!"

"You fatheaded tailor's dummy!"

"Buck up, you champion ass!"

"Weally, you wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy, glowering at them. "You feahful hooligans—"

"Hurry up!" hooted Blake. "Go and get the tickets, ass! You've got the cash! We'll miss the train! It's coming in now!"

"Oh, bai Jove! But my luggage—"

"We'll look after your luggage, ass!"

"Oh, all right!"

And, deciding to postpone the thrashings until a more favourable opportunity, Arthur Augustus rushed into the booking-office.

"Come on!" snapped Tom Merry. "We said we'd look after his giddy luggage, and we will!"

"Yes, rather! Better keep his suitcase, though!"

"Oh, yes! Here it is!"

Tom Merry handed over the suitcase to Herries, and, with the help of the others, the luggage was very quickly "looked after." It had already been lifted out of the taxi, but in two minutes the grinning chums had hurled the trunks and hat-boxes back into the taxi again—greatly to the astonishment of the driver.

"But—but the young gent—" began that worthy, staring.

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, handing over some silver. "We're looking after our friend's luggage. Just take it back again to St. Jim's, will you? We find it won't be needed, after all."

"Oh, yessir—certainly, sir!"

The driver pocketed the coins, jumped into his seat, and the next moment the taxi was speeding back to St. Jim's.

At that moment D'Arcy, with a little bundle of tickets in his elegantly gloved hands, came hurrying out of the booking-office.

"Heah are the tickets," he said rather haughtily. "Fway take— Oh, bai Jove! Wheah is my luggage, Blake?"

"On the way back to St. Jim's, Gussy," said Blake, pointing to the disappearing taxi. "It'll be quite safe there until you return, old top. Hallo, there's the train, you chaps!"

D'Arcy gave a howl of wrath and dismay.

"You—you wascally wottahs!" he shrieked. "You've actually sent my luggage back again? Bai Jove! You—you—"

He stopped, almost choking with emotion, and was about to rush in pursuit of the vanishing taxi when Blake turned suddenly—just in time.

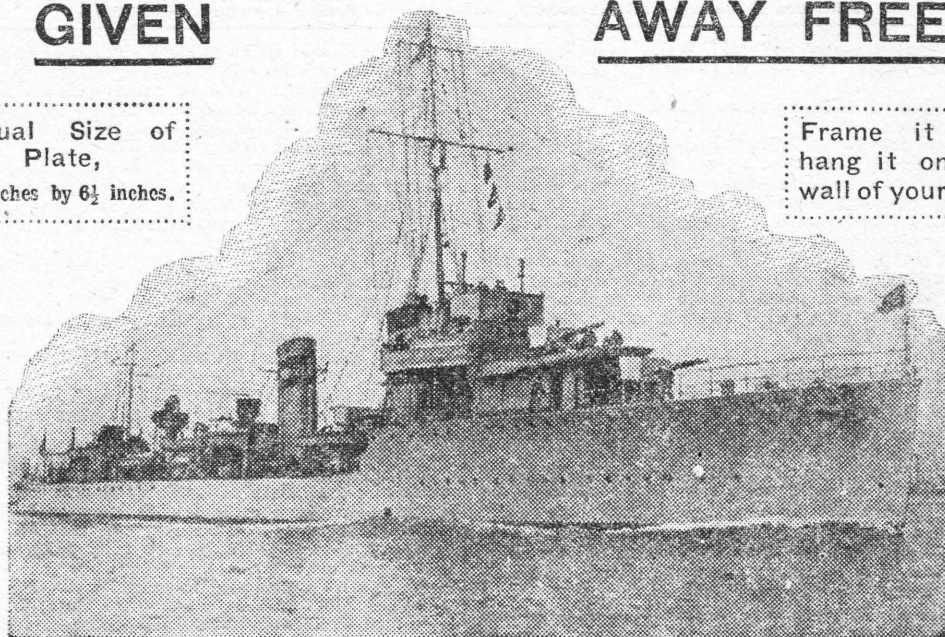
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"Quick, you chaps!" he gasped. "Oh, that burbling chump! Collar him!"

"My hat, yes!"

Leaving Lowther, Manners, and Digby to see to the suitcases, Tom Merry, Blake, and Herries grabbed the fuming Arthur Augustus, and fairly rushed him on to the platform and towards the waiting train.

A carriage door stood open, and they hurled the luckless D'Arcy inside like a sack of coke. Then they jumped in after him, Lowther, Manners, and Digby following a second later with the suitcases.

"Phew! That was a close shave!" gasped Lowther, as the whistle went and the train began to move. "That dummy Gussy nearly mucked everything up that time!"

"You—you howwid boundahs!" choked Arthur Augustus, struggling furiously in the grasp of his chums. "You—you feahful wascals! You have—"

"Now, do be reasonable, Gussy," pleaded Blake. "If you start your old games you're going to muck-up the whole trip!"

"Bai Jove! Blake, you uttah ass—"

"There you go again!" groaned Blake. "Now, listen to me, Gussy, old chap. You simply couldn't take all that clobber and stuff on this trip. It's only a small yacht, and your major will only be waxy. You know that! You've got just what we've got. We've brought your suitcase, so you'll manage all serene for two days."

"But you uttah ass!" howled D'Arcy frantically. "There's only a couple of waistcoats, and two pairs of spats, and some collars and neckties and handkerchiefs, and some pairs of socks in my suitcase. Oh deah! You wuffians! I haven't even got my toothbrush now!"

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a chuckle, and the hapless swell of the Fourth fairly glowered at the grinning juniors. What had happened was a huge joke to the others, to D'Arcy himself it was a calamity. To be without a change of suitable raiment for every occasion—in fact, several changes of raiment—was too terrible for words!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy almost choked with emotion.

"It's all right, Gussy—nothing to worry about," said Tom Merry, grinning. "Your brother will have a spare pair of pyjamas—sure to. And you may get a chance to buy some things in Southampton. Cheer up, old top!"

But Arthur Augustus refused to cheer up.

"You—you wottahs!" he exclaimed, in a voice trembling with wrath. "You have placed me in a most widdiculous position. The vevy moment you welsease me I will pwoceed to thwash you all wound, bai Jove!"

"Now, look here! This won't do, Gussy," said Blake patiently. "Will you make it pax, and—"

"I uttably wefuse to make it pax, Blake—"

"Then we'll have to do it, you chaps," said Blake, turning to the others and winking. "We'll roll him in the dust, tread on his natty coat, pitch his eyeglass away through the window, and bash his topper in!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"That's if you don't make it pax, Gussy," said Tom Merry.

"Is it pax?"

"I uttably wefuse—"

"Then here goes!" said Blake. "On the dusty floor with him, chaps!"

"Right-ho!"

Bump!

"Yawwooooh!"

D'Arcy descended to the dusty floor of the carriage with a bump and a yell. Blake and the others knew what Arthur Augustus was like when "on his high horse," and they realised that desperate ills require desperate remedies. They could scarcely meet Lord Conway without Gussy—besides, Gussy held the cash for the outing!

"Now, Gussy," said Blake grimly, "is it pax, or not?"

"Bai Jove, welsease me! I uttably wefuse to—"

"Over with him, chaps!"

"Heah! Oh deah! Leggo! Oh cwumbs!"

"Is it pax, Gussy?"

"No—yes!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You weckless, howwid wuffians! You will wuin my clobbah, and now I have no change—"

"That's good enough, then!" said Blake, chuckling.

"Let dear old Gussy get up, chaps!"

"All serene!"

They allowed the fuming D'Arcy to rise, and as he staggered to his feet and started to dust himself down, the train ran into Wayland Junction.

The Southampton train was not in yet, and D'Arcy's chums kept a very close eye on him as they waited for it to come in. But Arthur Augustus made no attempt to leave the station, and when the express did come in at last he boarded it with haughty indifference and in chilly silence.

D'Arcy's chums followed him in cheerily enough, however.

They did not mind. They knew that their chum would come round sooner or later.

And he came round very soon. Once seated in the express, with the familiar landscape flying past behind them, Tom Merry and the others combined in making an abject apology, which, at first, Arthur Augustus refused to even listen to. But they persevered, and after Lowther had hinted delicately that Gussy, as their host by proxy, ought not to treat his guests thus, the swell of the Fourth came off his high horse quickly enough. After accepting their apology gracefully, he gradually unbent, and before the rushing train was halfway to the sea, peace and harmony was once more restored to the chums of St. Jim's, and all was merry and bright.

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus Gets Wet!

"HERE we are!"

"Seacalm, bai Jove!"

"Oh, good!"

Tom Merry & Co. tumbled out of the local train at the little seaport of Seacalm with cheery faces—even Arthur Augustus had quite a cheery face.

At Southampton the juniors had some time to wait, and Arthur Augustus had put the time to good purpose by making purchases—a toothbrush, and many other articles too numerous to mention—which D'Arcy had deemed to be necessities. Arthur Augustus had wanted to purchase many more things which he had deemed necessary, but his chums had been quite firm on the question of overloading the party with baggage, and once again trouble had followed with Arthur Augustus.

But, as before, an abject apology all round had cleared the air, and now the swell of the Fourth was his genial self again as they arrived at their destination.

He tumbled out of the train, and his chums kindly helped him with his suitcase and his numerous parcels. In the midst of these Arthur Augustus stood on the little platform, and looked about him through his monocle.

"Bai Jove! This is quite a tiny place, you fellows!" he ejaculated. "How feahfully awkward, deah boys! I cannot even see a taxi!"

"Well, we can walk, can't we?" grinned Tom Merry cheerfully. "We'll help you with your trucks, Gussy. Hallo, here's Lord Conway!"

"Oh, good!"

Lord Conway, looking smart and business-like in a yachting suit and cap, came striding up, and greeted the party with a smile—though Tom Merry noted that his face had a trace of anxiety in it.

"Here you are, kids!" he said, speaking cheerily as if with an effort. "You managed to catch the train then, Arthur?"

"Oh, yaas! Bai Jove, Con, deah boy, why shouldn't I catch it? Weally—"

"No reason at all, Arthur, of course," said Lord Conway blandly. "I see you've brought plenty of things," he added, nodding to the parcels.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to carry them yourselves," smiled the viscount. "There isn't a conveyance to be had here. However, it isn't far to the beach. Come along, boys—sharp's the word, as I'm anxious to make a start."

He picked up D'Arcy's suitcase, and the juniors picked up theirs. Arthur Augustus blinked at his pile of parcels rather dubiously.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Here, I'll take one!" laughed Tom Merry. "Buck up, old chap!"

Blake and Herries also took charge of one of the parcels each, while Lowther kindly took charge of D'Arcy's coat. The rest Arthur Augustus himself gathered together rather reluctantly, and they started out for the beach.

"Bai Jove, it is wathah winday!" remarked Arthur Augustus, as the glimmering sea came into sight. "I trust you fellows will not be seasick if it happens to be wough."

"I trust you won't, either, Arthur," said Lord Conway, with a short laugh. "As a matter of fact, you fellows, I'm rather worried on that score."

"You have no need to wowwy, deah boy," smiled D'Arcy confidently. "We are all good sailors. Wough weather will not twouble me, bai Jove!"

"I'm not so sure about that, Arthur. You'll find a small yacht in rough weather isn't quite the same as a big passenger boat. And if I'm not mistaken," added the viscount, glancing rather uneasily at the sky, "we're in for rough weather before very long."

"Weally, I fail to see any cause for alarm, deah boy!"

"Perhaps not," laughed Lord Conway; "but there's every indication of a break in the weather, for all that. There's dirty weather hanging about; though I'm hoping it won't strike us before we bring up at Stark Island."

Obviously, Lord Conway was not a little worried about the trip. But Tom Merry & Co. were not worried. The prospect of rough weather rather appealed to them, in fact. They did not want a tame trip—they wanted excitement and adventures. Had they only known it, they were fated to get more than they bargained for of both.

A moment later the little party reached the beach of the little fishing village, and their eager eyes saw the Conquest lying at anchor in the bay, her white paint and brasswork glinting in the sunshine.

"Wippin', bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"And there's the boat!" said Tom Merry.

A small spic-and-span dinghy tossed alongside the little jolly, in charge of a smart-looking sailor, with the name "Conquest" across his blue jersey.

"Here we are, Wilks!" called out Lord Conway, as the sailor touched his cap. "Now, boys, tumble aboard."

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry suddenly. "Where's old Lowther?"

As the others stowed the baggage in the boat, and jumped in, Tom looked about for Lowther, who had apparently dropped behind.

"Here he comes," grinned Manners. "Been buying shrimps off that fisherman, or something."

"Rats!" said Tom. "He's up to some game, I suppose. Come on, Lowther, you ass!"

Monty Lowther came running up, a broad grin on his mischievous face.

"All serene!" he grinned. "Been having a chat with that old fisherman. He seems to think we're in for rough weather, too."

He handed his bag to Wilks, and jumped in. A moment later the boat was pushed off, and Wilks settled to the oars.

"Sit down, Arthur!" warned Lord Conway. "We don't want you overboard."

But Arthur Augustus refused to sit down. Apparently he was anxious to show all and sundry that he had got his "sea-legs." He stood up in the rocking, pitching boat, with legs wide apart and one hand holding his eyeglass in place whilst the other held his silk hat on.

"Wats!" he rejoined loftily. "I'm quite all wight, Conway, deah boy. Bai Jove, though," he added in some alarm as a sheet of hissing spray swept the boat, "it is wathah wough. My clobber will be uttally wuined, I fear. I think I will have my coat, Lowthah, deah boy."

Monty Lowther handed over the coat rather reluctantly, Tom Merry thought. He wondered why; but he very soon knew.

Arthur Augustus, with some difficulty owing to the wild pitching of the boat, managed to put his natty, elegant coat on. Then he put his hands in his pockets, having jammed his hat tightly on his noble head and having placed his precious eyeglass in his waistcoat pocket.

For about two seconds he stood thus, and then, with quite startling abruptness, he withdrew his hands with a most fearful yell.

"Yawwooh! Oh cwumbs! Yawwooh!"

As the rest of the boatload looked up they saw the luckless Gussy dancing about with one hand raised aloft, and clinging to the fingers of his hand was a huge, live lobster.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Lowther.

"You ass, Lowther!" hissed Tom Merry.

He understood now why the practical joking Monty Lowther had stayed behind to converse with the fisherman.

Lord Conway fairly blinked at his younger brother's extraordinary antics.

"Arthur!" he ejaculated. "What—what—Be careful, you young idiot! Stop—look out!"

His warning came too late. Arthur Augustus, in his wild anguish and pain, failed to look out. He pranced

about, frantically striving to shake off the clinging lobster; and as there was scarcely room to move in the crowded boat, he very soon came to grief.

He suddenly stumbled backwards over Herries' stooping form, and as he did so Tom Merry gave a wild yell:

"Look out!"

Again the warning came too late. Tom Merry's wild clutch closed on D'Arcy's coat, but though he held on grimly, he was too late to save the luckless Gussy.

Splash!

"Gwooh! Ow! Gwooooh!"

Arthur Augustus gave vent to a gasping yell—a yell that ended in a gurgle as he soured into the chilly, sparkling sea.

"Oh, great Scott!"

In their hurried efforts to be of use, the rest of the juniors fell over each other, and almost capsized the boat.

"Keep still!" roared Lord Conway. "Leave him to me."

He grabbed a boathook, and without hesitation inserted the business end of the hook in the yelling D'Arcy's collar. "Yawwooooh!" wailed Arthur Augustus again.

Only his head was above water, but Tom Merry still retained his frantic grip of his coat-tails, and after a brief struggle the hands of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy closed on the gunwale of the boat.

After that it was a comparatively easy matter to haul the hapless swell of the Fourth into the rocking boat. He collapsed on the footboards, gasping, and streaming with water. Only a moment before he had ventured a fear that his "clobber" would be "uttally wuined"; and it had come true sooner than he had anticipated.

Wilks grinned behind his hand, and picked up the oars again. Lord Conway dropped the boathook, and looked down at the hapless Gussy. He was looking grim.

"Arthur, you young rascal!" he snapped, though his eyes were twinkling. "How did this happen? What—"

Monty Lowther interrupted with a cough.

"It—it was all my fault, sir," he gasped. "I bought that lobster and shoved it in his coat pocket."

"Begad, you did?" ejaculated his lordship. "But what on earth—"

"It—it was only a joke, sir," stammered Lowther, his face scarlet. "I never expected him to want to put his coat on. I—I was going to—to make him a present of it when we got aboard, you see?"

"Oh," said Lord Conway, his mouth twitching now. "It was an—ahem!—accident, then? Arthur, you must have a rub down and a change of clothing immediately we get aboard. Luckily, I have some of my old clothes on the yacht. You have made rather a bad start."

Arthur Augustus did not reply to that. He lay and sprawled in the bottom of the boat like a stranded fish. Possibly his feelings at that moment were too deep for words.

The next moment the boat touched the side of the yacht.

Very kindly the juniors all helped Arthur Augustus and his baggage aboard—all, that is, with the exception of Monty Lowther. The dripping and dismal-looking swell of the Fourth maintained a deadly silence; but the look he gave Monty Lowther warned that youth to keep his distance.

Leaving the juniors and Wilks to see to the bags, Lord Conway rushed his young brother below, and when D'Arcy emerged on deck again he found that the boat had been stowed aboard, and that the yacht was under way.

He found his chums leaning on the rail watching the village of Seacalm and the bay receding behind them. The juniors looked at Arthur Augustus, and then they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus had changed his attire, right enough. His precious "topper" had vanished into the deep with the lobster, and now he wore a peaked yachting-cap, several sizes too large for him. His clothes were likewise several sizes too large for him. His sweater was rolled up at the waist like a lifebelt, and his trousers were also rolled up like miniature lifebelts round his ankles. Altogether he looked a picture.

But Arthur Augustus still had his eyeglass, and he jammed it into his eye and regarded his laughing chums with deadly coldness. Then his eye fixed itself on Lowther's grinning face, and he started to roll back his sleeves still more.

"Lowthah, you feahful wottah!" he exclaimed icily. "You have treated me with uttaly wudeness and disrespect. You have uttally wuined my clobber, and lost me my toppah. I am now about to administah to you the biggest thwashin' of your life. Put your fists up, you wottah!"

He advanced upon Lowther, but that youth held up his hand.

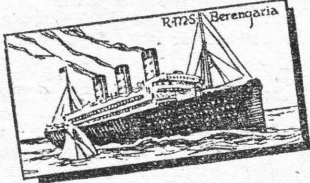
"A minute, Gussy," he said solemnly. "Do I understand that you are about to attempt violence—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"If so," said Lowther severely, "I warn you that I shall utterly refuse to accept your hospitality ever again."

"Bai Jove!"

"I am surprised at this," went on Lowther, shaking his



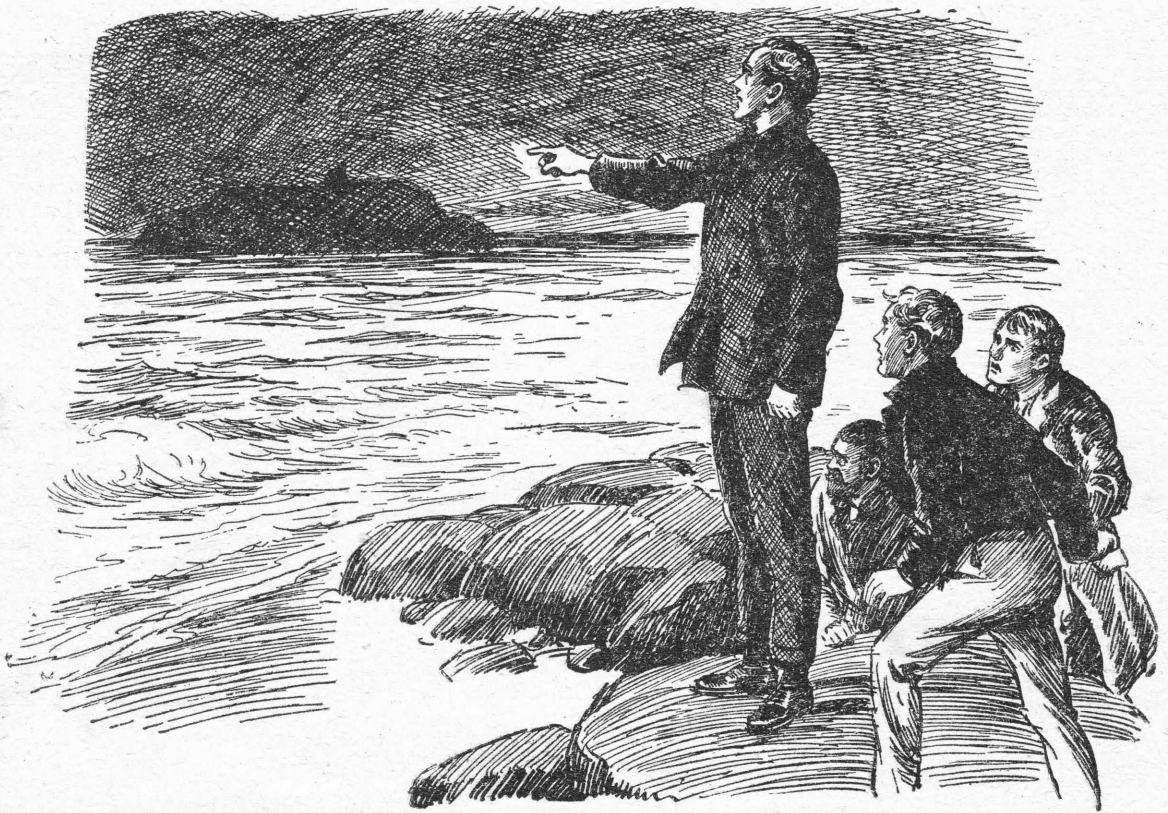
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Tom Merry & Co. joined Lord Conway as he sprang stiffly on the highest point of rock on the islet, his eyes fixed anxiously in the direction he knew the shore must be. Their hearts leaped at what they saw. "Land!" cried Tom Merry excitedly. "The mainland, I suppose, sir?" Lord Conway stared at it hard and long. "No," he said quietly, "it's an island! We've been wrecked within sight of our destination!" (See page 14.)

head. "I am not used to treatment like this, either. When accepting the hospitality of friends I have hitherto been accustomed to being treated with the respect and consideration due to a guest. I have certainly never been offered personal violence before."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus went pink to the roots of his hair. He looked at Lowther, and then he looked at the others. They were all as grave as judges.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Lowthah," stammered the swell of the Fourth in great distress. "I—I weally do not know what to say."

Nor did he. The scion of the House of Eastwood had been extremely well brought up—perhaps too well brought up. The thought of the narrow escape he had had of such a heinous offence as committing assault and battery upon a guest made him almost shudder.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last. "You have placed me in an exceedingly awkward posish, Lowthah. Howevah, I will withdraw what I have said; I will certainly not cawwy out my intention of givin' you a feahful thwashin', Lowthah."

"And I, in my turn," said Lowther solemnly, "will apologise most humbly, Gussy."

"Vewy well," said Gussy, eyeing the juniors rather suspiciously. "I will accept your apology, Lowthah, undah the circs. I must insist, howevah, that you will wefwain duwin' the wemairder of this twip, fwom playin' wediculous pwactical jokes upon me, bai Jove!"

"I promise, Gussy," said Lowther.

D'Arcy's noble brow cleared.

"Wight!" he exclaimed with an obvious effort. "Then we will call it square, and once more I can weward you as a fwiend, Lowthah. So ewewythin' is now quite all wight."

CHAPTER 5. On the Rocks!

"RAIN!" said Blake dismally.
"And wind!" added Digby. "Lots of it."
"We're in for it," said Tom Merry.
There really seemed little doubt about it. Tom Merry & Co., aboard the racing yacht *Conquest*, were certainly "in for it." Hours had passed—jolly hours for the chums of St. Jim—since they had left *Seacalm* far behind,

and they had enjoyed every minute of them. Tea was over on the little yacht, and dusk was settling over the Channel. Up to this time it had not been a smooth passage by any means. The Channel was unusually choppy, but the chums were all fairly good sailors, and they had enjoyed the shaking up none the less for that.

But now a change was coming over the spirit of their dream, as Lowther put it. For the last hour the wind had been gradually increasing in violence, and the choppy waves were changing to long, great green seas that lifted the small yacht with a heaving motion that was decidedly unpleasant—especially to the juniors, good sailors as they were.

But that was not all. With the wind came ominous black clouds that spread with alarming rapidity across the sky. The wind blew hard, whipping the spume from the tops of the long rollers, and sending blinding sheets of spray across the little yacht. The *Conquest* was a speedy boat at all times, and being stern on to the wind and the surrying seas, she fairly tore through the maddening waves.

The juniors had been standing by the wheel with Lord Conway, who on this trip was acting as his own skipper; but Tom had suggested finding a more sheltered position, and the others had quickly agreed. As a matter of fact they, like Tom Merry himself, were feeling just a bit shaky inwardly. The sickening rolling of the yacht was becoming just a trifle too much for them.

"Bounding waves, eh?" said Lowther, grinning feebly. "Why, the blessed waves, do nothing but bound. Where's Gussy, I wonder?"

"Hiding somewhere," grinned Tom Merry. "I think he's sneaked away to feed the fishes. My hat! This is the limit!"

"I'm not feeling any too bright myself," said Blake, with a wry grimace. "And this is only the giddy beginning, I fancy."

"Oh dear!" The juniors groaned. All of them were looking just a little green. Arthur Augustus had announced confidently that rough weather would not trouble him. Yet it was. But his chums did not even think of chipping him. They did not feel up to it.

As they stood by the rail in rather a sad-looking group, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 876.

Lord Conway, who had handed the wheel to Wilks, came hurrying past them. He stopped, and his face was serious.

"As I feared, lads," he said quietly, "we're in for a rough passage. You had better get oilskins on; it will be raining hard soon. Where's Arthur?"

"He's not feeling very well," said Tom Merry, smiling. "He's run away somewhere."

Lord Conway forced a smile.

"Well, I'm afraid he'll be feeling much worse before the night's out!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"There's nothing to worry about, though," laughed the viscount grimly. "The Conquest is a rare craft in a storm, and luckily we're not far from our destination now. I'm afraid we sha'n't land to-night, though."

He nodded and passed on.

"Hallo, here comes the rain," said Tom Merry. "Come on, you chaps!"

Even as Tom spoke the rain came with startling abruptness. The black clouds had spread completely across the sky, and then the heavens seemed to open as the rain came down with a great swishing sound, beating on the deck with tropical violence.

"Phew!" gasped Blake. "Run for it!"

The chums made a dash for shelter, and in a moment were in oilskins. In the saloon they found Arthur Augustus, but they forebore to remark upon his white face and dejected looks. They were not looking very cheery themselves.

Even as they gained the shelter of the saloon a vivid flash of lightning stabbed the black skies, and a crash of thunder followed it.

"We're in for it right enough," said Tom Merry, trying to grin. "If only this boat would stop rolling I wouldn't mind the storm."

"Same here!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus feelingly.

For some time the juniors remained in the saloon watching the play of lightning across the dark skies, and listening to the roar of the storm.

But they soon tired of being "out of it." Moreover, they felt worse in the rather stuffy cabin, and at Tom's suggestion they went on deck again.

This time Arthur Augustus accompanied them, clad also in oilskins. They found Lord Conway at the wheel. His oilskins were streaming with water, and he eyed the juniors rather grimly.

"Found it a bit stuffy down below?" he said. "I fancied you would. Well, I'll be able to keep my eye on you all up here. I don't think it will last much longer, kids."

But it lasted much longer than Lord Conway had expected, and it grew worse as the night drew on. The juniors seemed to have got used to the rolling by this, however, and even Gussy was feeling better.

Despite the pelting rain and the blinding sheets of spray, the juniors remained near the wheel for hours, it seemed, and they were thoroughly enjoying it all now. The drenching rain did not trouble them, nor did the crashing thunder and the blazing lightning that illuminated the boiling seas around them.

As yet the Conquest was behaving perfectly, but for all that Lord Conway's face showed anxious in the pale light from the compass-lamp.

Long ago the lights had been hoisted—one of the many tasks in which Tom Merry & Co. lent a willing hand—and little could be seen around them but the white-topped waves racing past, and the lashing rain. Occasionally the lights of passing ships gleamed in the distance.

Only once did the juniors go below to snatch a bit of supper—coffee and sandwiches—and Wilks took the wheel while Lord Conway joined them. In the ordinary way the crew of the Conquest numbered four—she was a motor-yacht and did not require a bigger crew—but one sailor was away on holidays, and they were short-handed in consequence. The juniors made up for the shortage, however. They had long ago made themselves familiar with every inch of the yacht, and they had also made friends with McCallam, the engineer, and Scott, his young assistant.

"We'll get through it all right now, kids," grinned Lord Conway, showing a dripping face to the juniors in the dim light from the binnacle lantern. "The thunder's gettin' farther away, and I fancy all will soon be well."

But Lord Conway had spoken too soon. Even as he uttered the words there sounded a sudden grinding crash from below, followed instantly by the scream of racing engines.

The stout yacht shuddered from stem to stern. Then followed an ominous silence as the engines below seemed to stop dead.

But that was not all. As the vessel seemed to stagger and stop, a great green wall of foam-crested water came leaping out of the blackness behind them, sweeping the yacht from stern to stem.

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"Look out!" yelled the viscount. "Hold on—hold on for your lives!"

The juniors, however, anticipated what would happen, and were prepared.

The next moment another giant wave, looking terrific in the gloom, swept over the stern and crashed, amid a smother of foam, on to the decks. It was followed by another and another, and all on board the staggering, plunging yacht clung desperately to whatever hold they could find.

Then with startling suddenness the blue-overalled figure of McCallam appeared at the viscount's side, his face serious in the glimmering light.

"Propeller-shaft gone, sir," he reported laconically. "Engine's useless, sir."

Lord Conway nodded, his face drawn and tense.

"I thought so," he said quietly. "No use trying a rag of sail in this wind, I suppose? We'd better let her run before the storm. It can't last much longer."

"Nothing else for it, sir!" said the engineer.

Both men had spoken almost calmly, but the juniors could scarcely fail to note the gravity underlying their words. They had longed for excitement and adventure, and were getting plenty of both now.

Swept continually by the scurrying masses of green, foam-capped water, shaking and plunging at the mercy of the wind and tide, the hapless Conquest tore on through the pitch darkness under bare poles, her engines silent and useless.

It was late now, but not a soul on board thought of sleep. Lord Conway certainly did not. He had realised a danger the juniors had not realised yet. The thunder and lightning had passed now, and the rain had almost ceased, but the wind had not abated, and the ship was off her course—being driven landward in the grip of wind and tide. Without power from the engines and with sails out of the question, Lord Conway had little control over the yacht, and he knew it.

The worst was yet to come. And it came soon.

Above the roar of the wind and waves a sudden faint sound became audible—the dull, unmistakable sound of a bell—the harsh, funeral-like note of a bell-buoy.

Even as the chums heard it there sounded a hoarse yell from the forepeak where Wilks was crouching—a yell of warning.

"Breakers ahead! Sandbanks, I reckon, sir!"

"Good heavens!"

Lord Conway uttered the startled exclamation in amazement, and as he attempted to peer into the inky blackness ahead the worst happened.

The helpless yacht's plunging progress stopped suddenly with a sickening lurch. Then, amid a horrible grinding and scraping of metal on sand, it slid forward a few yards, and then once again it stopped with a sickening jolt which threw all aboard off their feet.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"She's stuwck, bai Jove!"

There was no doubt about that. The alarmed juniors picked themselves up on the lurching, tilted deck. Then Lord Conway left the now useless wheel, and his voice rang out above the hubbub in a yell of warning.

"Hold on! Hold on, lads!"

The next instant a huge volume of shining water came pouring over the stern of the wrecked yacht, sweeping all before it—or almost all.

Clinging on with might and main, drenched through to the skin, shivering and with white, desperate faces, Tom Merry & Co. clung to rails, and rigging, as did Lord Conway and the crew, and they remained behind—only to be drenched and pounded by another overtaking wave, and yet another.

For dear life the shipwrecked men and boys clung on while the hapless Conquest heaved and crashed beneath them on the cruel, treacherous sands.

Lord Conway realised the danger at once. To remain inactive whilst the ship broke up under them was madness.

"The dinghy, Wilks, McCallam!" he roared. "It's our only chance—"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

With Lord Conway leading, the crew of the yacht worked their way aft to where the dinghy—the only boat the yacht carried—swung on her davits above the stern.

It was a risky undertaking—almost a forlorn hope, as Lord Conway knew; but it seemed the only chance. Tom Merry & Co. had been ordered by Lord Conway to remain as they were, but for once they refused to obey. They scrambled aft along the tilted, slippery deck, and lent a willing hand.

They worked feverishly, and at last the little dinghy swung out over the tossing waters.

But at that moment what Lord Conway and his crew had feared came about. Once more the viscount raised his voice in a yell of warning as a great green sea came racing towards the lowered stern.

The juniors made an instant rush for safety, and when the

wave had passed on its destructive course it left them safe and sound, clinging to rails and rigging, and ropes.

But the dinghy had gone. Only a few tossing splinters of wood on the dark waters beneath the stern showed what was left of it.

The calamity left them almost stupefied with dismay. They were in terrible danger now, and all on board the doomed yacht knew it well enough. Not for long could the craft stand that terrible pounding on the sands, while the pursuing waves were creating havoc on the deck.

It was only a matter of time, and then—

Young Scott, who had been sent below by Lord Conway, came fighting his way along the lurching deck.

"We haven't a rocket aboard, sir—nothing to signal with!" he cried, his face white.

Lord Conway muttered something beneath his breath. He looked at the shivering juniors crouching by the rails, and he set his teeth hard.

"Get me a rope, Wilks!" he shouted. "I'm going to try to reach those rocks there."

He pointed into the darkness. Fifty yards away, faintly seen beyond the white-capped wave-tops was a black mass of land or rocks; it was hard to discern which.

"But—but—" began McCallam aghast.

"I'm going!" snapped Lord Conway. "There's a chance for us all yet. If I can swim to those rocks with a rope I—"

He broke off suddenly, for a dark figure had appeared, standing on the rail, holding on grimly to the sparse rigging. Round his waist was a rope, knotted securely—a handline.

It was Tom Merry, his face shining wet in the gloom, grim and resolute.

"Merry!" shouted Lord Conway aghast. "What—"

For an instant Tom Merry stood there, his eyes searching the boiling surf below him, and then, even as Lord Conway jumped forward to stop him, he jumped upwards, and downwards.

For an instant his dark head was visible amid the boiling waters, and then it vanished in the trough of a great wave.

CHAPTER 6.

Stranded!

"GOOD heavens!" "Bai Jove!" With cries of great alarm, all on board the wrecked yacht stared blankly at the smother of foam into which Tom Merry's youthful figure had vanished.

They did not need to be told what Tom's object was. He had evidently seen what Lord Conway had seen—that their only hope of life lay in getting a rope across the gulf of tossing waters to the dimly-seen rocks. At any moment the groaning, straining wreck might break up—at any moment it might even slide off the bank of sand, only to founder in deeper waters.

Someone had to take the terrible risk of crossing that turmoil of boiling waters, and Tom Merry had determined he should be the one. He had not waited for anyone else to volunteer.

"Good heavens!" groaned Lord Conway, his white face haggard. "It is madness! The plucky lad will never do it!"

"Yes, he will!" cried Manners, who had overwhelming confidence in his chum. "He'll do it! He's the best swimmer at St. Jim's!"

"Yaas, wathah! But—but—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's almost hysterical voice was drowned as another huge volume of water swept the lurching ship from end to end. It passed, and the eyes of all the clinging boys and men went anxiously out to that dark head, dimly seen amid the gloom and smother of foam.

Tom Merry was still swimming—fighting for the lives of his comrades and for his own.

Then that rushing wave overtook him, lifted him like a cork on its frothy crest, and then he vanished from their sight.

With agonised eyes the shipwrecked men and boys watched for his reappearance.

It seemed an eternity before they saw his head again—it was merely a speck in the gloom now, though the rock was no distance away. To the watchers the time seemed interminable.

Tom was still fighting gamely on—terribly slowly, but surely, pitting his puny strength against the tons of boiling surf that fretted about him. Another moment they saw the vague dark shape bobbing on the waters, and then it vanished again in the gloom.

But the line in Wilks' hand was still paying out!

Was the plucky youngster still going ahead, or had the cruel waves beaten him?

"He'll do it!" muttered Lord Conway, between set teeth, as if to quieten his fears. "Pray Heaven he may do it!"

More than once in those tense, horrible moments, the viscount had moved as if to dive over the side to Tom's aid. But the thought that his duty lay on the ship until the last, kept him back.

There was another fear in Lord Conway's mind. Even if Tom succeeded, there was still the danger that the gallant boy would be dashed against the cruel rocks with a force that would crush the life out of him!

And that fear was in Tom Merry's mind, too. For, though lost to sight of his anxious comrades, he was still struggling gamely on, inch by inch, lifted forward by each rushing wave, dragged back again by the receding one; but, happily, gaining ground each time. Moreover, the caprice of the current was in his favour.

In smooth water, under more favourable circumstances, Tom had swum miles without effort, or fatigue. But those few terrible yards taxed his strength to the uttermost as he fought on, buffeted by the crashing surf, almost blinded by the stinging spray. The thunder of the surf deafened him, and, half dazed, as if in a nightmare dream, he fought on.

Only a few yards now, through smarting, stinging eyes, he glimpsed the dark mass of rock.

But the worst was yet to come, he believed.

And then, as a great green wave passed over him, his heart gave a leap as he felt himself suddenly standing on his feet in a swirl of receding water.

The worst danger was over—the danger of being smashed against the rocks. Happily, the rocks were by sloping sands, and not by deep water, as he had feared.

But there was still the danger of being hauled back by the vicious sea, and as another wave came pounding up behind him, he lurched forward with his last remaining ounce of energy.

The wave broke, but it merely covered him with stinging spray, for he had reached the shelter of the rocks now. Out

MOST IMMACULATE OF YOUTHS!



ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.

A member of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form—known to all as the swell of St. Jim's. This noble scion of the house of Eastwood is the younger brother of Lord Conway, an Old Boy of St. Jim's. Arthur Augustus has a minor in the Third Form—Walter Adolphus, one of the inky tribe. D'Arcy is liked by all the decent fellows at the school. He is a good sportsman, excelling as a forward in the Junior Eleven football team. D'Arcy's "patah," Lord Eastwood, keeps him well supplied with "fivers."

of reach of the snarling waters he flung himself down, spent and utterly exhausted.

And as he did so, a watery moon, scudding from behind the racing clouds, showed for an instant through a ragged rift. Its dim radiance fell on the white-fringed, rocky islet, and revealed the scene to the anxious watchers on the wreck.

Faintly, on the wings of the storm, came a ragged, thankful cheer. As it reached Tom he set his teeth and lurched unsteadily to his feet.

Every moment was precious. Exhausted and spent as he was, there could be no resting yet!

With numbed fingers he hauled in on the handline. The line was followed by a stronger, thicker rope. With feverish haste Tom jumped to a jutting mass of rock, and made the rope fast, knotting it again and again.

He was satisfied at last, and sent a ringing shout towards the faint outline of the wrecked yacht.

The shout seemed to be hurled back in his teeth by the wind, but the tense watchers on the wreck heard it for all that. Tom felt the rope tighten and shake almost at once.

Through the gloom and flying spume he stared hard towards the wreck. A dim figure appeared, half in and half out of the water. It came nearer, and Tom recognised Digby, a lifebuoy round his waist. He was half-swimming, half-dragging himself along the rope.

Tom plunged waist-deep into the foaming waters and grasped him. He raced him ashore, the waves thundering behind them hungrily, almost savagely.

Manners came next, and with Digby to aid him now, Tom plunged once again into the boiling surf. Manners was followed quickly by Blake, Herries, Lowther—each fellow on being rescued lending a hand to rescue the next.

"Hallo!" panted Tom Merry, as Scott, the youthful mechanic came next. "Where's Gussy?"

"Turned stubborn, of course—the dear old ass!" gasped Blake, with a ghastly grin. "He wants to be the giddy last. I expect Lord Conway will have to biff him on the head to make him come!"

As they expected, there was some little delay next, and then the form of Wilks came lurching through the gloom, and then came McCallam. There followed another short delay—evidently the noble Gussy was still stubborn—and then at last he came.

With hands linked the rescued band hauled him in, and then, last of all, came Lord Conway. He dropped panting on the hard wet sand, his heart almost beating high with thankfulness.

"Thank heaven!" he breathed chokingly, as Tom Merry helped him to his feet. "Merry, my dear kid—"

He said nothing more, but the look he gave Tom as he grasped the junior's hand spoke volumes.

Crouching in the shelter of the rocks, the rescued party rested, their eyes fixed on the filmy outline of the wrecked yacht. Arthur Augustus was the last to stagger to his feet on the streaming sands, and he joined the rest, an expression of dismay on his face.

"Bai Jove, you fellows," he exclaimed breathlessly, "I have lost my eyeglass! I must have w'enched it f'rom the cord when I jumped for the wope, bai Jove!"

"Horrible!" said Blake sympathetically. "Why not go back and dive for it, Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake— Bai Jove, it is all wight, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, his distressed features clearing. "I wemebah now—I have a spare one in my pocket, deah boys. Isn't that lucky?"

There was a feeble laugh—the juniors, at least, felt they could laugh now. Lord Conway, however, was still staring at the wrecked yacht, his face grave.

"We're safe enough here for a bit," he said. "We shall have to wait for daylight—won't be long before dawn now, I should think."

"The poor old boat's sticking fit well, sir," said McCallam quietly. "I fancy it's getting a bit easier now. Wind's dropping, and there's a chance she won't break up even yet."

Lord Conway nodded.

"I believe you're right, Mac," he said. "The wind's certainly easing."

"Any idea where we are, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"It's hard to say," said the viscount, glancing round him in the gloom. "This islet can't be far from the mainland—or an island. As a matter of fact, we can't be far off our destination now—Stark Island. We'll soon be able to see when daylight comes. All we can do now is to wait for the dawn to break."

"Nothing else for it, sir."

So they waited, making themselves as comfortable as possible in their cramped, comfortless surroundings, under

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the shelter of the barren rocks. They were drenched through to the skin, stiff, and aching with cold and fatigue. But they felt they were safe now, and their hearts beat with thankfulness as they waited for the dawn.

CHAPTER 7.

Stark Island!

"DAWN at last!" As he spoke Lord Conway pointed towards the east where a glimmer of pale light showed in the sky.

He spoke in a whisper, for most of the shipwrecked boys were asleep. Exhausted and heedless of their hard couches of sand, they had dropped off into troubled slumber. But McCallam and Wilks and Scott had remained awake, though their eyes were red-rimmed and weary. Tom Merry had been dozing, but the viscount's whisper brought him to instant wakefulness.

He shivered, and blinked wearily about him.

It seemed that he had only closed his eyes a couple of seconds, and he was surprised to see the cold grey light in the sky, and to find that the storm had almost passed. The wind had dropped, although the sea still rolled in a heavy swell, with turbid waves booming on the sandy shore of the islet.

The tide was going out, for his first glance showed the junior a wide stretch of sand round the islet. He looked through the hazy gloom and he drew a deep breath as he saw the Conquest, still on the sands, the waves fretting round her sides, though none swept her decks now.

"Oh, good!" he breathed. "She's not broken up, then, sir."

"No, kid," said Lord Conway grimly. "She's safe enough now. But she's hard and fast on the sands, and it won't be easy to get her off. Well, here's the dawn, and we'll soon know the worst."

In silence they waited, striving to pierce the half-light over the shadowy sea. It was cold—bitterly cold especially to Tom Merry, who was the only one who was not still wearing oilskins. Lord Conway—in fact, several of the party—had tried to persuade Tom to take theirs, but he had refused.

What would they see when the sun rose?

Once or twice since they had been on the islet they had seen glimmering lights in the far distance—far out in the Channel. It was fairly clear that they were somewhere well out of the regular course of shipping. In the direction of the shore they had seen no lights whatever.

They had not long to wait. The sun flushed up at last, and as its dim radiance spread across the sky, Lord Conway rose to his feet, his eyes fixed anxiously in the direction he knew the shore must be.

Tom Merry and the others who were still awake joined him, as he sprang stiffly on the highest point of rock on the islet.

Their hearts leaped at what they saw. At first in the feeble light they took it for a cloud—a low, hazy cloud on the skyline. They stared at it, and the hazy mass resolved itself into land, rocky, solitary, and mysterious.

"Land!" said Tom Merry. "The mainland, I suppose, sir?"

Lord Conway stared at it hard and long.

"No," he said quietly. "It is an island; and it's less than a mile away. That is not all. If I am not very much mistaken," he went on grimly, "it is Stark Island. We have been wrecked within sight of our destination."

"My hat!"

"I visited it two years ago," said Lord Conway, "and I have not forgotten. When the light gets stronger I shall soon know."

By this time the others had been awakened by the talking, and they very quickly joined the group on the rocks. As the sun rose higher and higher it glimmered on the choppy sea, dispersing the mist and gloom. The island seemed to come nearer, and its formation became clearer. Already the juniors were feeling the comforting warmth of the sunlight.

Tom Merry's eyes were sharp, and he suddenly gave an exclamation and pointed to a spot on the seaward side of the island.

"A house!" he said. "At least, it's a building of some sort. My hat! It—it looks almost like a ruined castle."

"It is," said Lord Conway, his eyes lighting up. "It is Stark Castle, and that is Stark Island, boys."

"Phew!"

After all, it was not such a strange coincidence; they had been making for the island, before the gale, and they had been wrecked within sight of it. But the juniors were amazed for all that.

"I think we've nothing to worry about now," smiled Lord Conway, the look of anxiety disappearing from his handsome features. "We are stranded here, but Captain Pentre



As Lord Conway wheeled round he gave a gasping cry: "Look out—look out, lads!" The warning, coming so abruptly, made the juniors' hearts leap. They turned suddenly, and then they also gasped, for seemingly from the very earth behind them shadowy figures were rising—four burly, rough-looking men in seafaring garb. (See page 18.)

is on the island, and we will soon find a way of attracting his attention. It is useless to try now, however; the captain will be in bed, of course. See, there is his bungalow."

The juniors saw it now—a small, red-roofed building high up the beach, below beetling cliffs. Higher up, seemingly built on the edge of a deep ravine, was the castle, its ruined towers broken and crumbling, as they could see from that distance.

"That was the home of the Pentires ages ago," said Lord Conway quietly. "It is a ruin now—as are the fortunes of the Pentires, alas! Captain Pentire, as I've told you, lives there alone in that bungalow, boys."

The juniors nodded. They had wondered why Lord Conway was making this trip, what his business on the island could be. But over tea the viscount had told them.

Lord Conway's visit to the island, they had learned with surprise, was in order to negotiate for its purchase from the owner, Captain Pentire, a bachelor—and something of a hermit—who was a very old friend of the viscount.

The Pentires had owned the island, and a great part of the rugged mainland, for generations, but of late the family had fallen on evil times. Like a great number of old families, they had been forced to part with property after property, and now Captain Pentire, the last of his line, had found it necessary to dispose of Stark Island.

The captain loved the island, and he had placed the reservation in the sale that he could still retain the bungalow for his own use. Naturally, under these circumstances, he had found it exceedingly difficult to find a purchaser. But a prospective purchaser he had now found in Lord Conway.

Arthur Augustus had been exceedingly curious. He had ventured to ask why his elder brother wanted such a desolate island in such a lonely part of the coast. He could not understand it. The viscount had laughingly told them that it would make a splendid base for his yacht, and for sea-fishing.

But the swell of St. Jim's knew—and the rest of the juniors knew—that it was more from a generous desire to

help his old friend that Lord Conway was proposing to buy the island.

So now the juniors looked at the island, with its ruined castle and lonely bungalow, with keen interest. It was George Herries who broke the silence that followed.

"I'm jolly hungry!" he said.

"My hat! So am I!" said Jack Blake, the leader of the Fourth.

"Same here, bai Jove!"

They all suddenly discovered that they were hungry—and thirsty!

Lord Conway laughed.

"Well, there's plenty of stuff on the yacht," he said.

"Really, we might just as well have stayed on the yacht last night. We took the wisest course, though. It was just luck that the gale abated just afterwards."

"Yaas, wathah! I suggest, deah boys, that we all swim across to the yacht, and have bweakfast aboard in comfort, bai Jove."

It was quite a good suggestion. The water was cold certainly, but the distance was not great, nor was the water very rough. Then it was pointed out that one member of the party—Wilks, curiously enough—could scarcely swim a stroke, and that there was the difficulty of getting clothes across.

"I've got a better suggestion than that," said Tom Merry quietly. "If you'll look just some distance this side of the bungalow, you'll see a boat drawn up on the sands—it looks like a boat, anyway. Why not let me swim over for it?"

"Good man!"

"It will save the trouble of making signals later on," said Tom. "I can row the boat here, and we can either pull straight for the island, or go to the yacht first for breakfast."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That is wathah a good notion, Tom Mewwy."

"It is certainly an excellent way," said Lord Conway.

"But—but it is rather a long swim, Merry; and it will be dashed cold, kid!"

"I can stand it," said Tom. "In fact, I'd enjoy it thoroughly, sir. Do let me go!"

The viscount hesitated dubiously. He was not a great swimmer himself, and it seemed a big task to him. At the same time he knew Tom's powers in the water, and at length he nodded.

"Very well, youngster, you can try it. If the boat happens to be secured, or the oars are not there, you had better run along to the bungalow and rouse the captain. Otherwise come straight here, and we'll have breakfast aboard the yacht before disturbing him."

"Good egg!"

In a flash Tom was tearing off his clothes—clothes that still were wet and uncomfortable. In a couple of minutes he had plunged into the sea, and was swimming strongly towards the island, now bathed in the early-morning sunlight.

On the barren islet the shipwrecked party watched him breathlessly. But Tom Merry & Co., at all events, had no fears that Tom would fail in his undertaking.

Nor did he. After that first icy chill of the plunge, Tom revelled in the swim, and the exercise warmed and loosened his stiff and aching muscles.

He drove on with powerful strokes, making straight for the boat lying high and dry on the beach. His feet struck the sand at last, and he staggered ashore, gasping and panting.

His big task now was to get the boat afloat, but it was a very light dinghy, and after a brief rest he tackled it with a will.

Luckily the beach sloped steeply, and after a few minutes' struggling he got the craft on the move, and the rest was easy. Luckily, also, the oars were in the boat, and as the light craft danced out on the crisp waves, he sprang lightly aboard, and grasped them.

He turned the boat, and a moment later was pulling strongly for the islet and his stranded companions. A cheer greeted him as he grounded the boat at last and jumped out. "Good man!" said Lord Conway. "You're the hero of this expedition, Merry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now we can have breakfast," laughed the viscount. "I suppose you saw nothing of the captain, Merry—no sign of movement at the bungalow?"

"No, sir. It appeared to be deserted to me," said Tom. Lord Conway wrinkled his brows.

"Right, then," he said, nodding at last. "We'll get across—have to do it in two parties, of course."

A moment later the little dinghy was crowded with cheery juniors—stranded no longer, and with keen appetites for the breakfast before them.

CHAPTER 3. Mystery!

IT was more than an hour before the shipwrecked party left the yacht and started out for the island. In that time Tom Merry & Co. had been busy—very busy.

While Lord Conway and McCallam conducted an examination of the yacht, they prepared breakfast as best they could. The saloon was flooded with several inches of water—that terrific pounding on the hard sands had had its effect on the stout timbers of the Conquest. So they were obliged to have breakfast on the tilted deck—a breakfast that was heartily enjoyed for all that. And after breakfast there was a busy time drying clothes and obtaining necessities from the yacht before leaving it.

"She'll be safe enough here, unless another gale comes along," said Lord Conway. "But she's hard and fast, and will take some moving. Someone had better run across to the mainland some time to-day and hire a tug to haul her off the bank. We can then beach her high and dry."

"That's going to be an expensive business, sir," said McCallam. "If I might make a suggestion, we can avoid salvage by getting her off ourselves. The motor-boat's lying at Seacalm. She's a powerful craft, and speedy. If you'll allow me to take Wilks and Scott I'll slip over in the dinghy to Tregenna, and take train for Seacalm. We'll be back here with the Alice by the evening, sir."

Lord Conway nodded, and his brow cleared.

"That's an excellent idea, Mac," he said. "In any case, I've got to see that these boys are back at school in the morning. I'm afraid," he added, turning to the juniors, "that you had better return to St. Jim's by train immediately McCallam returns with the motor-boat. It will be much tamer than by sea, but it can't be helped. I'm sorry, kids."

"That's all right, sir," laughed Tom. "We're having a ripping time, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hear, hear!"

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A moment later the first party had boarded the dinghy, and were pulled across the sparkling sea to the island. They landed, and waited for the others. After that Wilks pulled across again for the juniors' baggage, and several things Lord Conway felt it wise to bring ashore.

The sun was high in the heavens by this time, and the dark smudge on the distant horizon beyond the island that denoted the mainland could be plainly discerned.

The crew of the stranded Conquest lost no time in getting afloat. To be back in time to take the juniors over to the mainland would necessitate their making all speed. The viscount had already supplied them with expenses for the journey, and given them their instructions.

They boarded the dinghy again, and, stepping the little mast, pushed off. A moment later the sail was shaken out, and the dinghy went heeling away under a brisk breeze.

The juniors watched it round the headland until it vanished into the purple haze towards the distant mainland, and then, with Lord Conway, they started for the bungalow.

"Now for Captain Pentire," said Lord Conway grimly, staring at the bungalow with puzzled brow. "I confess I am not a little amazed that he has not shown himself before this. Unless he is a very late riser he must surely have seen the yacht lying out there."

"Perhaps gone over to the mainland," suggested Tom Merry.

"But he is expecting me—he would scarcely do that," said the viscount. "I cannot understand it."

It was certainly rather strange. The bungalow, as they approached it, looked deserted. No smoke came from her chimneys, all was silent, and not a movement showed at the windows.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom Merry suddenly. "The front door's open."

"Then somebody must be at home," grinned Lowther.

But Lowther was mistaken there. Lord Conway, looking more puzzled than ever, hurried up to the house with the chums of St. Jim's at his heels. He reached the open front door, and banged on it.

"Hallo!" he called cheerily. "Anybody at home?"

A silence followed; there was no answer from the somewhat gloomy interior of the bungalow. With a muttered exclamation Lord Conway strode in, the curious juniors following in his wake.

They found themselves in a small room—evidently the dining-room of the bungalow. On the table a meal was laid—a meal that was certainly not breakfast! It was obviously dinner, and from every indication it was also obvious that whoever had been dining had been disturbed in the middle of it.

But that was not all. Though the half-emptied plate lay on the table the knife and fork lay on the carpet. The cruet was upset, and the contents had spread across the cloth which was twisted across the table, as though a heavy body had brushed roughly against it. The chair lay sideways on the carpet, which was crumpled and turned up. On the crumpled carpet were the marks of many muddy boots.

"By gad!"

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

With exclamations of startled amazement the stranded yachting party stared blankly at the scene.

What did it mean? What had taken place in that lonely bungalow the night before?

Something unusual had taken place, without a doubt. Every indication pointed to the fact that Captain Pentire, the solitary inmate of the gloomy bungalow, had been disturbed during dinner—disturbed abruptly. And every indication pointed to the fact that a struggle—or something suspiciously like a struggle—had taken place within the room.

"Good gad!" exclaimed Lord Conway, looking considerably disturbed. "This is simply amazing. It—it almost looks—"

He broke off abruptly, and passed hurriedly into an inner room. The juniors followed breathlessly and silently. The ominous silence that brooded over the gloomy bungalow rather subdued them.

They found themselves in another small room—evidently used as a study—sparsely furnished like the dining-room, but with expensive rugs on the floor, and trophies of an Oriental nature on the walls.

A somewhat similar and alarming scene met their eyes there. A bureau had been broken open; the lid hung down with smashed lock, the drawers had been broken open and their contents scattered about the room. A desk in one corner of the room had been treated likewise.

Lord Conway stared blankly at the scene of havoc, and then, with grim features, he started a tour of the house. A tiny combined kitchen and scullery revealed nothing unusual, nor did the two bed-rooms of the bungalow—the only remaining rooms. The beds were made, and everything appeared to be in order.

"Bai Jove! This weally beats the band, y'know!" said Arthur Augustus, when they had finished the tour. "It is watah alarmin', Conway!"

Lord Conway nodded, his face more than a little agitated. "So this explains why Pentire did not greet us," he said quietly. "There has been foul play of some description here, boys. I do not like the look of things. We had better start a search of the island. It is rather a pity McCallam and the others have gone with the boat."

"Captain Pentire can't have left the island," said Blake, in a low tone. "Unless he had another boat!"

"He had no other boat to my knowledge," said Lord Conway. "That does not prove he is still on the island, however. We will search, though."

"Anybody else live on Stark Island, sir?" asked Tom Merry.

"No; this is the only habitation—with the exception of the ruined castle, of course," was the reply. "Captain Pentire is a strange fellow, though a jolly good sort. He lives here entirely alone, without help. He has travelled extensively, and is quite used to attending to his own wants. As a matter of fact, he has only very recently returned from a two years expedition in Africa. During that time the island has been deserted, and the bungalow closed up."

The explanation made many things that had been puzzling the juniors quite clear.

In a silent, thoughtful group they emerged from the bungalow, and as they did so Lord Conway gave an exclamation—an exclamation of vexation.

"Hallo!" he said. "This puts our search out of the question for a bit. Look!"

The seven juniors followed the direction he indicated. Then they understood.

Creeping across the blue sea at amazing speed was a great swirl of whitish vapour. It seemed to be blotting out sea and sky as it came.

"A sea-mist!" said Herries. "And a thick one!" added Lord Conway. "I'm afraid there'll be no searching until this melts away, kids."

With almost inconceivable rapidity the fog swept nearer. It blotted out the sun and the sea, and came creeping across the beach. It reached the bungalow and engulfed them in a thick, horrible, clammy pall of moisture that seemed to press upon their eyes.

It was chilly, too, and the juniors shivered. "Inside again, boys!" ordered Lord Conway. "We can do nothing in this! Stark Island is riddled with dangerous gullies and ravines—not to mention the cliffs. We might as well make ourselves comfortable inside until this mist clears again."

"What about those fellows in the dinghy?" said Tom in some alarm. "They can't have reached shore yet?"

"Not by a long way," said Lord Conway, his face showing a trace of anxiety. "It is miles to the mainland, and I expect they have set a course for Tregenna, which is farther along the coast. And they haven't a compass, I'm afraid. We must hope for the best, though."

And the juniors followed him into the gloomy bungalow—looking more ghostly and forbidding than ever now with the thick, eerie fog pressing in upon it—and, closing the door, they settled down to make the best of things. A fire was lighted in the dining-room grate, and the chilled juniors sat round it, and while Lord Conway smoked his pipe they discussed the strange affair almost in whispers.

What queer mystery had they stumbled upon in that gloomy bungalow on Stark Island?

CHAPTER 9.

The Brown-Sailed Lugger!

CONTRARY to expectations—and hopes—it was not until the afternoon was well advanced that the mist cleared away.

In the meantime the stranded eight had made the best of things. Lord Conway was a very close chum of Captain Pentire, and he knew that the latter would heartily approve of his guests making themselves fully at home, could he have known the circumstances.

Accordingly, while the thick mist lay like a blanket over the bungalow the juniors kept the fire going, and as noon approached they raided the larder and prepared a meal. Expecting to find their host at the bungalow, they had, of course, not dreamed of bringing food with them.

It was not a very cheery meal by any means. Lord Conway was worried, and the juniors were accordingly worried. The uncertainty as to what had happened to McCallam and Wilks and Scott in the thick fog was in itself enough to fill them with keen anxiety.

But there was also the problem of Captain Pentire—of the mystery of his disappearance. That he had gone of his own accord they could not believe, with the significant evidence left behind.

The meal ended at last, and once again they settled down

to wait, anxiously watching for the curtain of filmy mist to melt away from the window without. Several times they ventured out, but they were soon in again—the fog was cold and clammy, and seemed to penetrate their very bones with its deadly chill.

And as the afternoon wore on they saw with joy that it was thinning, and at last Lord Conway gave the word, and the search-party started out. The sun was low in the heavens now, however, and Lord Conway knew they would have little time for searching before dusk fell.

Tom Merry suggested that they should split up into two parties to explore, but the viscount would have none of it. He had been over the ground before, and he knew the dangerous pitfalls it held for the unwary—and the over-venturesome. Knowing the juniors' little faults in the latter respect, he was taking no chances.

Stark Island was little more than a mile in extent, but it was an exceedingly difficult place to search—a land of deep gullies, of iron-bound cliffs, of treacherous ravines and clefts. On the landward side it was completely bounded by beetling cliffs, while on the seaward side only the little cove where the bungalow nestled beneath the cliffs upon which stood the ruined castle, offered a landing-place.

Now the juniors were nearer they noted that the castle, however, did not rest immediately above the cove as it had appeared to do from a distance. It lay half-way up the beetling cliffs to the left, and between it and the lip of the cliff appeared to be a deep chasm—a great yawning gap, whose base was washed by thundering waves.

It was extremely dangerous of access—a mere broken path-way led up to it from the cove in a winding, zigzag, ever-rising steep ascent; and Lord Conway had warned the juniors against exploring it—yet. For the mist had not yet cleared away completely, and with the ever-growing dusk everything—rocks and hollows—appeared distorted to the vision.

So that little searching could be done. A tour of the cliffs was made, and the little cove was searched, and then the little party returned in the gathering dusk, tired and dispirited. Lord Conway had not lost sight of the possibility that quite an ordinary accident might have accounted for Captain Pentire's disappearance. He might have been disturbed by a noise outside, during the gale, and rushed out, heedless of his falling chair and the disturbed cloth. And he might have fallen into a gully and injured himself.

But they had now searched every inch of the island, with the exception of the castle above the ravine, and they had searched in vain.

Tea came and went, and the juniors settled down again by the fire and chatted of anything that occurred to them—of the mystery surrounding the bungalow, of their own predicament, and of St. Jim's far away. It seemed queer to them that in the ordinary way they would be deep in prep at this time. And now, here they were, stranded, ship-wrecked, waiting for rescue in the lonely bungalow on Stark Island—the bungalow that seemed to them to hold a mysterious, fearsome secret.

Lord Conway wandered about, restless and uneasy. He was worried now concerning the juniors in his charge. He had undertaken to Dr. Holmes to see them safe back to St. Jim's on the morrow, and he was wondering how it was going to be done. He knew that news of the gale in the Channel would reach the ears of those at St. Jim's, and he knew they would be worried and anxious at hearing no news from the yachting party.

Supposing McCallam and his men had come to grief in the fog? What then? Apart from the tragedy, it would probably mean no hope of rescue for days, perhaps longer. To signal to the mainland from that distance was out of the question.

But as the hours passed Lord Conway became more and more worried. At ten o'clock he got hat and coat and announced his intention of going for a stroll before turning in.

Manners and Lowther, who had rooted out a chessboard and chessmen from somewhere, were deep in a game, and they elected to stay in, as did Tom Merry and D'Arcy. The latter had the toothache, while Tom was just beginning to feel the lack of sleep and the effects of his strenuous exertions the night before, and he did not feel up to it.

So only the viscount and Blake, Herries, and Digby started out from the bungalow.

It was a fine night—keen and bracing. The mist had cleared away completely, and myriads of stars gleamed in the velvety sky, and were reflected in the glimmering sea.

Yet somehow the juniors could not help shivering as they moved across the beach, with the shadows of the beetling cliffs flung across it. The desolate island held a weird feeling, and the moan of the rising tide filled their ears with strange, creepy sounds. The piled up masses of rock looked oddly unfamiliar and awe-inspiring at night.

"Ugh!" shivered Jack Blake. "This isn't the cheeriest of places is it, sir? Are we going far?"

"I was thinking of a walk round the cliffs," said Lord Conway quietly. "It's safe enough with ordinary care. I'm hoping we shall see something of the motor-boat coming along."

"You think it will come to-night, sir?"

"If all has gone well, it should have been here before this," said the viscount quietly. "The Alice is a powerful craft, with a fine turn of speed. I'm afraid of that unlucky fog, though."

The little party mounted the steep path to the top of the cliffs almost in silence, their eyes constantly turning seawards. Blake pointed out a glimmering speck of light across the sea hopefully, but hope went when Lord Conway announced that it was a large sailing vessel, probably a fishing-smack.

It took the party fully an hour to walk round the island, for the going was rough, and they had to walk warily. They saw no light, however, on the glimmering water, and at last they reached the edge of the cliffs—at a spot just below the ruined castle, and opposite to the spot from which they had started across the little cove.

Before they started to descend the path they stopped a moment to take a last look around the glimmering sea; and it was then Blake gave a startled exclamation and pointed seawards.

Below them, some little distance out, was a black, shadowy shape on the water. It careened strangely with a gentle swaying motion.

"A boat—a sailing boat!" said Blake eagerly.

It was—a lugger, a bulky, cumbersome-looking craft. The starlight glimmered on her tarred hull, and on the huge brown sails that flung back grotesque shadows on the water.

"Showing no lights!" breathed Lord Conway. "That's queer—dashed queer! What does this mean, I wonder?"

CHAPTER 10.

Prisoners!

ON the crisp grass of the cliff top the St. Jim's juniors and Lord Conway stood under the starlight, and stared down at the almost shapeless black mass of the mysterious lugger.

She was moving inshore, slowly and awkwardly. The great brown, shadowy sail came down quite suddenly, and the sound of creaking blocks reached their ears clearly across the water.

On her dark deck shadowy figures could be seen scurrying about.

"They're lowering a boat," whispered Blake. "Are they fishermen, sir?"

"Not they!" was the curt reply. "Not honest fishermen, at all events. Why should she come creeping in, showing no lights? I tell you it's queer."

It certainly did look queer. The juniors began to feel strange thrills of excitement. A sudden memory came back to Jack Blake as he gazed down spellbound on the scene—a memory of a film he had seen on the screen, of just such another scene as this—of a little cove, of a brown-sailed lugger, of smugglers.

Were these smugglers?

The faint sound of gruff voices reached the watchers' ears. A shadowy boat left the lugger, and came creeping shorewards. They could see the forms of the oarsmen and of the figure standing in the stern.

"Three of them!" muttered Lord Conway, leaning perilously over the edge of the cliff in his excitement. "But—but where on earth are they making for? It's impossible for them to land below here."

The startled juniors were wondering that also. Below them the cliff dropped sheer to the frothy breakers booming on the iron-bound set of the cliffs. And straight for the cliff, almost immediately below where they crouched, the boat was being steered—steered it seemed to her doom on the rocks below.

Were the unknown sailormen mad? Nearer and nearer it crept. Once it seemed to check, and a cry came up to the watchers—a cry, it seemed to them, of warning, and Lord Conway drew back suddenly, fearing that they had been seen.

But the boat came on again. It reached the fringe of white spume below, and then, to the utter astonishment of the juniors, it vanished—vanished clean into the cliffs below them.

"What—what!" gasped Jack Blake.

Lord Conway gave a hard laugh.

"A cavern!" he said quietly. "Haven't you guessed that? It's a cavern that is flooded at full-tide, I imagine!"

"Oh!"

"Are they smugglers, do you think, sir?" asked Herries breathlessly.

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"It is quite possible, of course," said Lord Conway thoughtfully. "Smuggling has increased since the Revenue started to economise by thinning out the coastguards. But—but I do not believe they are smugglers, boys!"

"Then, what can they be up to?"

"Goodness knows!" was the puzzled reply. "It's queer, though. They're certainly up to no good. It wouldn't be a bad idea to wait and see."

It was just what the juniors wanted to do. It was the excitement and adventure they had longed for—better than the fireside in the bungalow. Blake could not help chuckling at the thought of the Fourth Form dormitory at St. Jim's far away, where Cardew and Levison and Baggy Trimble would be fast asleep at that moment—dreaming possibly, but little dreaming what their absent schoolfellows were doing at that moment.

Almost in silence the little party watched the scene below. What he expected to see Lord Conway himself scarcely knew. But he expected to see the boat emerge eventually from the cavern below them, and he was eager to solve the mystery. A thought came to him that quite possibly the appearance of the lugger had something to do with the strange disappearance of Captain Pentire, and his eyes gleamed.

For their part the excited juniors fully expected to see the boat emerge, loaded up, possibly with smuggled goods, to be shipped aboard the brown-sailed lugger.

As it happened, they were fated to see very little.

The minutes passed with painful slowness. Out on the gleaming water the lugger was at anchor now. Once or twice they saw a dim form moving about the boat. Even in their coats the juniors began to shiver in the keen night air.

Once Jack Blake glanced behind him at the black ruins of Stark Castle, and the sight of the shadowy, ghostly mass made him thankful that Lord Conway was with them in that lonely spot.

Ten minutes passed, and then quite suddenly something happened—something they certainly did not expect.

As he stooped, chin on hand, staring thoughtfully at the craft below, Lord Conway fancied he heard a faint sound behind them—the rattle of a displaced rock.

He glanced uneasily behind him, and then he wheeled with a gasping cry:

"Look out! Look out, lads!"

The warning, coming so abruptly, made the juniors' hearts leap. They turned suddenly, and then they also gasped.

Seemingly from the very earth behind them shadowy figures were rising—four burly men, rough-looking men, in seafaring garb.

What followed seemed like a horrible nightmare to the juniors.

Blake glimpsed one of the shadowy figures go down with a thud under a hefty drive from Lord Conway's fist, and then he himself was struggling and fighting in the grasp of a blue-jeaned ruffian.

"Mind the cliff edge, lads!"

The warning cry came in a gasp from Lord Conway, and even as it sounded Blake went down under a blow that made his head reel, and as he rolled on the short grass, perilously close to the dizzy brink of ocean, his heart almost missed a beat with sheer horror.

But almost instantly a rough hand grasped him, and he felt himself dragged back. Almost swooning with the sickening fear that had momentarily gripped him, he lay helpless, and the next thing he knew was that something—a rough canvas sack it felt like—was thrust over his head, and his arms were pinned to his side with savage strength.

Blake saw nothing more of the fight—a fight that was all too brief.

Taken utterly by surprise, with the knowledge of that terrible edge of death so close behind them, the remaining three stood little chance against their unknown attackers.

Herries and Digby went down almost at once, and after a brief but plucky struggle were rendered prisoners, and treated as Blake had been treated.

But Lord Conway was not easily overcome by any means. He had been taken not quite so much by surprise, and he put up a terrific struggle. He blamed himself bitterly for having failed to take precautions. He might have known that their figures would be outlined above the cliff top, and he realised now that they had been seen, and that the men had crept up by some unknown, secret way from the cavern.

Headless of the nearness of the dizzy brink—indeed he had forgotten it in the excitement by now—he reeled and staggered, fighting and struggling madly.

Even when he glimpsed the fact that his companions were down he fought on until he was brought down crashing by the four rascals, and then something struck him with stunning force, and he knew no more.

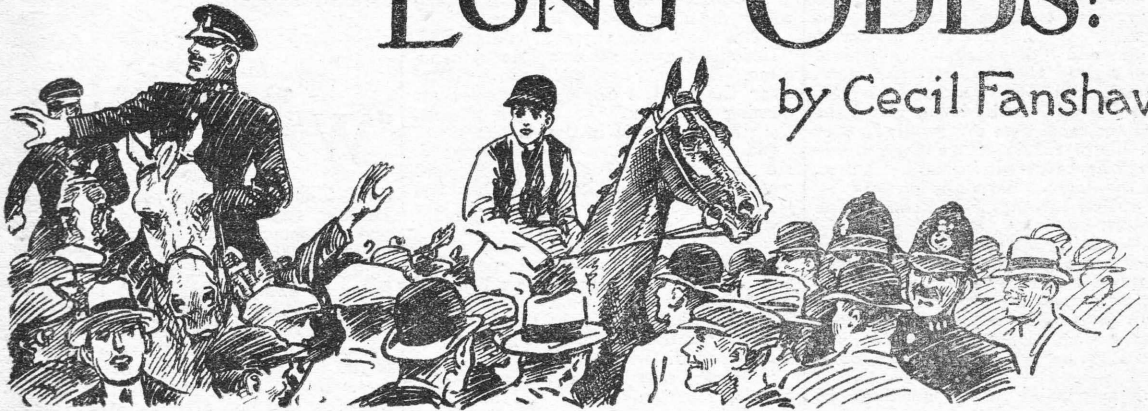
What happened next only Blake, Herries, and Digby had a dim idea. Their heads were completely covered by the dirty canvas, and they could scarcely breathe much less

(Continued on page 27.)

Straight and honest Sid Morris, the stable boy of Ashdown House stables, is up against it again, but the courageous youngster battles through to win at—

LONG ODDS!

by Cecil Fanshaw.



A Sensational Yarn of Turf Rivalry.

CHAPTER 1. Waylaid!

OVER the rolling downland to westward the sinking sun glowed fiery red. The chill of autumn was in the air as Sid Morris, the stable-boy of Ashdown House stables, hurried across the yard of Sam Hall's stables.

The boy was making for the end loose-box. Reaching it, he jerked the door open and slipped inside.

There came a rustling swish as a big bay thoroughbred swung round in his deep bedding and came forward blowing out his nostrils. He nipped playfully at Sid with strong, white teeth.

"Cit hup, Red Knight!" laughed Sid, dodging aside and clapping the horse on his shining neck. "We're goin' to get movin'. I'm hanged if I know what the boss' game is; but it seems we're in for an all-night joy ride in a shut-up wagon. Shift over now!"

Two seconds later Sid had stripped the Knight, and was giving him a final rub down.

With his powerful quarters, sloping shoulders, great muscles rippling under satin skin, the big horse looked what he was—a smasher.

No wonder Red Knight was a hot favourite for the Manchester November Handicap.

Scarcely had Sid slung on a couple of rugs and slipped a hood over the Knight's lean head when a heavy foot-fall sounded in the yard outside.

Sid faced about as his big-built boss, Sam Hall, suddenly appeared at the open doorway.

"All ready, Sid? Good!"

The burly trainer nodded approval, then leant forward and sank his voice to a whisper.

"I expect you're a bit puzzled, Sid, eh?" he laughed. "Well, I'm sending you up to Manchester by road because I want it kept dark that the Knight has left his training quarters. The whole world knows all about it when a horse travels by rail. You'll go by van the whole way. The driver has orders to take you and the horse straight to Mr. Sansom's stables. He'll also keep his mouth shut. I've seen to that, for this move's to be kept a dead secret. Got that?"

"Yes, sir," replied Sid wonderingly.

"The Knight's running at very short odds," Hall went on; "but both myself and his owner are mighty keen to see

him lift the prize. Well, we've learnt that Bedouin's owners are betting that their horse could lick the head off anything in the race except ours—"

"Bedouin, sir?" broke in Sid. "Ain't that the little black that's owned by a group—a partnership or something?"

"Yes," snapped Hall. "And that group's a queerish crowd. I'm not giving them the slightest chance of getting at the Knight. That's the reason for this van business. I'm stopping down here till the last moment. So no one'll guess where the horse has gone to."

"Top-hole, sir!" cried Sid, eagerly entering into the scheme. "What time do we shift off?"

"Almost at once," replied Hall, straightening up and swinging round. "I think I can hear the van now. Got your gear ready?"

From away across the downs came the raucous blare of a Klaxon horn, followed by the banging and clattering of a heavy vehicle lumbering over the stony road.

Sid darted out of Red Knight's box and dashed across the yard towards the saddle-room.

He reappeared with his kit-bag and racing saddle just as a big, closed van rumbled up to the yard entrance and slid, groaning, to a standstill.

The driver, a sharp-featured, Jewish-looking fellow, shut off his engine and jumped to the ground.

"Tham Hall's, ain't it?" he jerked out, catching sight of Sid. "Hoss ready?"

"Bet your life!" cried Sid. "Catch!"

He slung his bag and saddle at the swarthy little driver, who deftly caught them and stowed them alongside his seat.

Several stable boys were in the yard now. They had heard the van's arrival, and came rushing down to help get Red Knight aboard.

"Hi, Jim!" cried Sid, suddenly spotting his special pal. "Give us a hand! No," he added in an undertone, "I daren't let on where I'm bound for. It's a dead secret. Come on!"

It was the work of a moment to bring the rugged and hooded Knight out of his box. But it took several minutes to coax him up the wooden incline into the specially-fitted van.

At last the job was done, and the door was slammed and the bolts shot home. The driver cranked up his engine, and

then scrambled to his seat as the motor roared to life.

Sid leapt up beside him.

"You quite understand your orders, Jacobs?" barked Hall, coming round to the front.

"Yethir," nodded the driver, releasing the clutch. "Got 'em pat! Mum's the word!"

Dusk was falling as the big van slid forward, and a few stray stars winked and glittered in the darkening sky. The wind whistled in Sid's ears as Jacobs, having switched on the lamps, began to hit up speed.

"Some change this!" thought Sid as they went swaying and jolting over the uneven road across the downs. "A short time ago the boss wouldn't ha' told me his plans. An' he'd have played some trick with a favourite rather than let him win at odds on. Gee! I guess Sammy Hall's given up being a crook! Thank goodness!"

Sid had good reason for his thoughts. For Sam Hall had shown himself an utter rogue ever since Sid had worked under him. Nearly all his lads were crooks, too.

But Sid, insisting on riding straight, had proved to his boss that it paid to have an honest lad in his stables. Since then Hall had played the game and treated Sid pretty decently—for which young Sid thanked his stars.

"I'd got plumb sick of bein' bossed by a crook!" muttered Sid aloud.

"What yer say?" snapped Jacobs, changing gear noisily as they crested a rise and began to roll down a long slope.

"Who's a crook?"

"No one!" exclaimed Sid hastily. Then, briskly changing the subject and pointing to scattered lights ahead that gleamed yellow against the surrounding blackness, he asked: "What are those lights down there?"

"Horstead," said Jacobs. "We'll be through the town in two ticks. Then I'll let this bus rip when we hits the main road beyond."

They were soon clattering along the lighted streets of Horstead. And none of the folk hurrying along the pavements guessed that the big van carried the favourite for the Manchester November Handicap. Then, Horstead left behind, they were rushing through the night along a white road that led away to the Midlands.

The night was pitch-dark now, but the

powerful headlamps threw a brilliant arc some yards in front of them.

Trees loomed up, came abreast, and were dropped behind. Telegraph poles seemed to whiz past endlessly. All the time the engine roared and hummed a song of speed.

They swept on hour after hour. One brief halt was made for food at a wayside inn, and Sid saw that Red Knight was all right. Then on they sped again.

"Doin' vell—eh?" shouted Jacobs, raising his voice to be heard above the din, at the same time slowing down over a bad bit of road. "We'll get to—

"Hallo!" he bellowed, in sudden alarm. "Vot the dooce is dat right ahead?"

He cut off his engine and clamped on his brake.

Sid, straining his eyes, half started up and let out a yell of rage. They were just running over a bleak stretch of moor, and it was mighty lucky they had slowed down. For a little way ahead, and shown up plainly by the lamps, a big, snaggy branch lay right across the road.

With a grinding and scrunching, the van slid to a halt in the nick of time.

"Hop out o' your seats!"

The order was bawled in a hoarse voice as a couple of men sprang up from a ditch, and came rushing forward at full speed. Both wore black masks, and had peaked caps pulled down over their foreheads.

"Vot yer vant?" shrieked Jacobs. "I didn't know—"

"Shut up!" howled the nearest man. "Got no time to waste. Get down, will you?"

As he shouted he raised an automatic. The steel barrel glinted viciously.

It was enough for Jacobs. With a yell of dismay, the little man quitted his wheel, jumped down, and darted off as fast as he could plank one foot in front of the other.

"Now, you!"

Sid was on his feet, his fists clenched and his eyes gleaming viciously. He found himself covered on each side, but the barked command only lashed him to fury.

"Horse thieves!" he yelled. "Pinch a racer in England, would you?"

He hurled himself clean at the nearest ruffian, and his lard frame went flying through the air as if fired from a gun. It took the scoundrel by surprise, and with the force of a battering-ram.

Down he crashed on his back, his heels kicking in the air, and his head making stunning contact with the hard roadway. Sid was on top of him, and he jammed his knees into the fellow's chest and grabbed at his throat.

Though as tough as wire—he had to be, as he was due to ride Red Knight at Manchester in two days—Sid quickly found the man he had floored was equally tough. He was also powerful, and struck up at Sid with bony fists.

"Help!" bellowed the scoundrel between jabs. "Help, Mason! Hand this cub the knock-out!"

Sid ignored the blows, and tried to settle his man before the other rascal could join in. But there came a sudden rush of feet, and then something crashed down on the back of Sid's head.

A million lights jazzed before the stable-boy's eyes, and a roaring filled his ears as he clumped forward in a senseless heap.

"The young whelp!" growled the fellow called Mason, bouncing on Sid and heaving him roughly aside. "Who'd have thought he'd scrap like that? Hurt, Lumley?"

Mr. Lumley sat up and felt gingerly at the back of his head. Then, fuming wildly, he scrambled to his feet.

"Got the horse, anyway!" he snarled. "Bedouin's owners'll come down handsome. But we'd best get a move on an' clear the road. Some car may come buzzing along, an' that'll spell trouble. Let's heave the kid in the ditch."

Sid had only been slightly stunned. He was struggling back to consciousness when he felt his ankles and shoulders seized. Then he was hoisted from the ground, to be flung to the bottom of a dry ditch like a sack of potatoes.

Though his limbs seemed powerless and his head was ringing like a bell, Sid could vaguely hear voices. It flashed to his brain that they were the voices of the two assailants. With a mighty effort Sid forced himself to listen.

"This kid may be dangerous, Mason," Lumley was growling. "If he comes round too soon he may get away and give the alarm. Best tie him up, or else hand him another clip on the head."

"Oh, he'll do!" snapped the other ruffian. "I laid him out properly. And we haven't got any cord. Besides, who could trail the van to that old run up by Gallows Hill. The track's like iron."

"Sam Hall'll get busy," said Lumley doubtfully. "He'll put 'tees on the job directly this kid—"

"No, he won't," cut in Mason. "I'm going to post him a note. He'll get fair warning that if he starts hunting around, the Knight will be killed. If he's sensible and keeps quiet he'll learn where the horse is—after the race. That's all Bedouin's owners want done—Red Knight kept out of the way till the race has been run. And Jacobs daren't split. Come on!"

While the two rascals were wrangling Sid had risked opening one eye. He promptly closed it again, but not before he had registered a mental picture of both their faces.

Sid was already aware of Lumley's black beard. And now that the masks were off he glimpsed that Lumley also had a bent nose, and that Mason, a sandy fellow, had a scar right across his face.

"I'll knock both you twisters again," Sid chuckled grimly, as the sound of retreating footsteps reached his ears. "But what the dickens had Jacobs to do with it? I thought he was surprised, too. By gosh, he must have been squared!"

Sid gritted his teeth as he heard the scraping of the big branch being dragged aside. Then came the roar of the motor-van as it was restarted.

But the boy could do nothing. And a moment later a jangling and rattling told that the van carrying Red Knight had rolled away.

It was some time before Sid could move. The blow on his head had temporarily paralysed him. But at last, cramped and shivering with cold, he managed to crawl out of the ditch.

"Mighty good job I heard the whole plot!" he hissed through clenched teeth. "If I can find out where Gallows Hill is I'll get the Knight away somehow, then I'll ride him to the nearest station, and ask for a horse-box. But I reckon I ought to phone the boss, an' tell him I'm on the scent, and will turn up all right. He'll have to lie low, though, for fear those blackguards maim our horse. They looked proper cut-throats!"

His mind made up, Sid went staggering off along the dark, wind-swept road.

But it was a full hour before he reached a straggling village, and

managed to knock up the keeper of the inn, only to learn he couldn't telephone till morning.

Exhausted, Sid did the only thing possible. He demanded a room and stumbled to bed. He was dead-beat, and his head was swimming.

CHAPTER 2.

Sid on the Track!

"WHAT in thunder does this mean?"

As he shouted, Sam Hall, the burley trainer of Ash-down House stables, jumped to his feet. His big, round face was red with rage, and he smashed his fist down on his breakfast-table, making the crockery dance and rattle. Then he unrolled the letter he had crushed in his hand and glared at it again with unbelieving eyes.

"We have got Red Knight," it ran. "You are warned not to search for him. If you make any move the horse will be shot. If you keep quiet you will learn where to find him after the race. Take heed! Your movements are watched."

That was all. There was no signature, and the postmark on the envelope had been badly smudged.

"What's it all mean?" exploded Hall, crushing the letter to a ball and hurling it across the room. "I reckoned no one could guess the Knight was going by van! Could that driver have played the traitor? By Jove, if he has— But what's happened to Sid?"

Hall stamped up and down the room, fuming. The news that Red Knight had been waylaid had come like a thunderclap.

"They've got the infernal cheek to threaten!" stormed the big trainer. "They say they'll kill the horse if I hunt for him. Well, I'll bet my last dollar Bedouin's crowd have got something to do with this! An' I'll put the police on 'em. Hanged if I won't! No anonymous letter-writer is going to scare Sam Hall!"

Kicking chairs out of his way, Hall strode down the room. He was making for the telephone when the bell started ringing.

Buzz!

"Hallo, hallo! Who's there?"

Hall had jumped forward, snatched up the receiver, and roared his question in bull-like tones. Over the wire a voice came thinly.

"Sid Morris speaking. I want Mr. Hall," came the voice.

Hall gasped and almost dropped the receiver.

"You've got him!" he bellowed, and the instrument hummed and buzzed.

"Can't hear," came Sid's voice again. "Speak more quietly, please. I want Mr. Hall."

Hall went purple, trying hard to restrain his wrath.

"This is Hall this end!" he shouted down the phone at last. "If that's you, Sid, speak up quickly. Where—eh? What?"

"I'm all right, sir, I said," repeated Sid. "And I know where Red Knight is. Don't risk doing anything yourself, sir. The men who've tricked us are a dangerous gang. Trust me, sir. I'm going to turn up with our horse in time."

"What's that?" bawled Hall. "Hi, Sid! Where are you speaking from?"

There was no answer.

Ting-aling! Ting! Ting!

Hall was winding madly at the handle of his instrument. Again he roared into the mouthpiece:

"Answer me at once, Sid! Where are you?"

.....

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But Sid had rung off, and only a whining and buzzing of the wire fell on Hall's ear. To add fuel to the flames, the exchange girl chipped in:

"Have you finished, please? Time's up! D'you want an extension?"

"Yes! I mean no!" thundered Hall, beside himself with rage. "Where was I rung up from? Eh! Grrrrh!"

Bang!

Hall clapped down the receiver and strode away, clenching his fists.

"The young puppy!" he fumed, smashing his big right fist into the open palm of his left hand. "He didn't tell me anything. Had the cheek to ring off!"

For a time Hall did nothing but rage. But when he had calmed down he began to see things differently.

"Sid's a smart lad, really," he muttered. "The smartest and most trustworthy I've got. I almost think I'll let him handle this job himself. If I butt in, the rogues may carry out their threat and shoot the Knight. Yes, I'll leave it to Sid. And if he does turn up with the Knight in time, I'll make him my head lad!"

Hall worried a lot for the rest of the day. But feeling certain his movements would be watched he did not ring up the police.

But at sundown he rang up his London club, and inquired the latest prices for the Manchester November Handicap.

He learnt strange news. A rumour had gone round that Red Knight would not run in the race, and that its price had dropped several points in consequence. He was now being quoted at quite long odds.

Hall refused to answer any questions. "I can't think how it's got about," he muttered to himself. "But the book-makers seem to have learnt there's something in the wind."

A grim smile crept across the trainer's face.

"If Sid does turn up," he added, "Bedouin's folk'll be mighty sorry they kidnapped the Knight. Why, bringing him down to long odds'll be the best turn they could have done us—if Sid turns up! Yes, Red Knight would be a real good thing then."

But Hall knew too much about racing to count his chickens before they were hatched. Long years on the Turf had taught him that "good things" don't always come off as expected.

As soon as he had phoned to Sam Hall, Sid Morris strode out of the little post-office and quitted the village by a back lane.

He quickly found himself on a wild, undulating, heather-clad moor. But neither the greyness of the November sky nor the bleakness of the scenery troubled Sid. For, from the landlord of the village inn, he had learnt the whereabouts of Gallows Hill.

"Of course, the boss'll be mad with me for ringing off," Sid told himself, as he scrambled amongst bushes and boulders. "But I reckon it was the best course. If Hall sent tecs down here, they'd find the Knight a dead 'un. But the bounders won't be expectin' me. I'll try an' locate the horse first, and then get him away after dark."

It proved mighty tough work, mile after mile over rough ground. The moorland was like a switchback, and Sid had to keep down in the little valleys to avoid being seen.

"Six miles o' this?" he gasped, halting for breath after two hours' toil. "But I know I'm heading right. The fellow at the inn said to keep due west. It's a slice o' luck I had a compass on

my watchchain. Phew!" He broke off. "I'll just scramble up this rise and have a peep round."

Cautiously Sid scrambled to the summit of a stony ridge, then he flung himself prone and scanned his surroundings.

"That's it!" he gasped delightedly. "That's Gallows Hill straight ahead—the round hill with a clump o' twisted pines on top. But where's the ruin? Must be round the other side."

Sid had travelled faster than he guessed, for from where he was lying he could plainly make out the hill he wanted. Its appearance had been carefully described to him. The next thing was to find the old ruin where Red Knight was hidden.

"There won't be a hope of getting him away till dark," Sid grumbled. "Mason an' Lumley'll be hanging around, an' a chap can't hardly pinch a horse in broad daylight. But," he added, shifting his gaze, "down there's

the Knight, Sid had a hard job to control his excitement. Realising that nothing could be gained by rushing things, he settled down to keep watch.

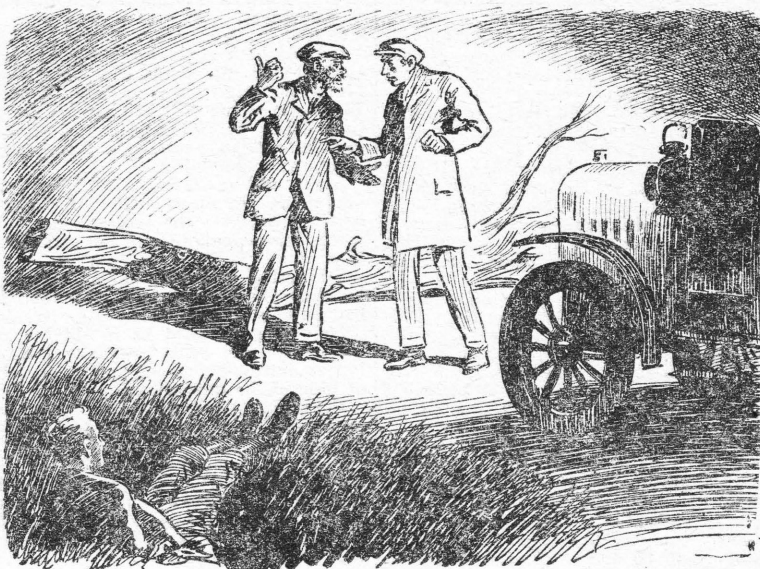
The hours dragged wearily. The red, wintry sun wheeled slowly from east to west. All day, save for one brief trip to a stream for a drink, Sid lay stretched on the hummock and kept his eyes glued on the old farm.

Twice a man emerged from the house. On one occasion Sid glimpsed two men and chuckled grimly. But there was no sign of horse or van.

Dusk fell at last. As it deepened Sid rose to his feet and began to go cautiously forward.

Stumbling and falling over rough ground, Sid at last came to the track. Then he straightened up and crept stealthily forward.

The house—a black, indistinct mass—was close in front of him now, and a yellow light gleamed at one of the windows. On his right Sid could make out



While Mason and Lumley were wrangling, Sid Morris risked opening one eye. He promptly closed it again, but not before he had registered a mental picture of his two assailants.

the track they must ha' drove the van up. So I am right. Good biz!"

Carefully withdrawing from the exposed ridge, Sid continued his journey, keeping below the skyline.

Every ten minutes he clambered up some hillock, looked carefully round, chuckled to see he was still going right, then slid down and went on again.

At last his efforts were rewarded. Scrambling up another hillock, he saw he was now to westward of the big round hill. At the base of Gallows Hill, Sid could make out a dark clump of time-worn, stone buildings.

"A deserted farm, I guess," he muttered, screwing up his eyes. "There's the old house and—yes, that's a barn there, with stables alongside. Hallo! Somebody's moving about!"

A man came out of the distant ruined house, paused for an instant, then vanished into the old stables.

"Lumley or Mason!" gritted Sid. "I daren't risk getting too close to make sure, though. What's the odds Red Knight's in those stables, an' the van's in the barn? It's a pound to a packet of pins!"

Convinced he had successfully trailed

the shadowy outline of the barn and stables.

Swerving, he headed for the stables.

Crash!

A fearful clattering and jingling broke the stillness.

Sid had walked straight into a bucket, stumbled over it, and had fallen head-long.

There came a raucous shout from the house, and shadowy figures came rushing out, to hurl themselves on Sid before the lad could gain his feet.

Gripped by rough hands, Sid bunched his muscles and fought like a tiger. He realised he had bungled. His boss would wait in vain for Red Knight to turn up in time for the Manchester November Handicap.

CHAPTER 3.

Rescued!

SID heaved himself backwards and forwards, and tried to butt with his head, but it was hopeless.

His assailants twisted his arms behind his back, then they hauled him up to the house and forced him into a

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dimly-lit room. A moment later Sid was lying on his back, bound hand and foot.

"Lumley and Mason! I guessed so!" Sid ground out, recognising his captors. "Hear that?" Lumley shouted, rounding on his pal. "This young rip even knows our names! I told you he wasn't laid out properly. You should ha' left him to me. He was just foxing when we thought he was lying stunned in that ditch!"

He turned to Sid. "How did you track us here?" he roared.

"Easy enough!" scoffed Sid. "You shouted your plans out plain enough."

"All right, young fellow!" growled Lumley. "You won't get another chance! But I suppose you've warned the police. Very well! We shall have to shoot the horse and beat it!"

"I haven't warned the police!" yelled Sid in desperation. "And don't you dare to shoot Red Knight! I tell you I was working on my own. Nobody knows where I am."

"That's your yarn!" barked Lumley.

"It's true!" Sid declared. "If it wasn't I'd have had a bunch of bobbies with me. But I warned nobody. 'Cause I'd heard your threats an' guessed you'd shoot the Knight."

"You guessed right, boy," said Lumley grimly. "But I ain't sure I believe you."

"I reckon he's telling the truth," Mason put in. "The spies would have warned us if police were moving. The trouble is—what's to be done with this kid now we've got him? We'd best keep him tied up in the house until after the—"

"An' chance his getting off again?" sneered Lumley. "Not much! This lad's a sight too slippery!"

"I'm!" granted Mason, propping himself up against the bare stone wall and folding his arms. "I dunno what you're hinting at. I ain't for outing him!"

"Who is?" came the quick retort. "Ain't there a disused well near the stables? It's dry. The boy won't come to harm in it; and I bet my boots he won't get out! He can stop there hungry till after the race. When Hall's told where to find the horse he can be told about this boy."

"Smart idea!" chuckled Mason. "Let's get on with it!"

Vainly Sid twisted, squirmed, and tried to fight; but, bound as he was, he could offer little resistance. The two scoundrels easily picked him up and carried him out into the dark night.

They went about fifty yards and halted. Then Sid found himself dropped beside the coping of a well.

"He'll bust his legs if you heave him down," protested Mason, who seemed to have some spark of feeling.

"No, he won't!" Lumley growled into his bushy beard. "There's plenty of rubbish at the bottom, an' it ain't more than twelve feet deep. In with him!"

Sid let out a shout, and tried to kick with his bound legs, but Lumley dodged and grabbed his ankles. The other fellow seized him under his arms.

"One! Two! Leggo!"

It was Lumley who counted and shouted the order. Then Sid felt a rush of cold air pass his face. He was falling down and down. The sides of the well seemed to fly up before his eyes like a black curtain.

Bump!

Sid landed on the bottom, all the breath knocked out of his body. He had fallen soft on a heap of leaves and other rubbish, but he was badly wounded.

From somewhere above came a hoarse chuckle, then followed the sound of retreating feet. Sid gnashed his teeth.

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In trying to rescue Red Knight he had only landed himself—literally—in an awful hole!

As soon as he got his wind back Sid promptly started to hatch out a plan for escape. Above him the mouth of the well showed like a black ring, and, glaring up, he could see the glitter of stars in the inky vault of the sky.

"If I got free," he gritted, struggling to free himself of his bonds, "I might manage to shin out o' this!"

Sid's captors had reckoned the well a good enough prison, and hadn't bothered about the cords. So within five minutes of frantic writhing Sid had both his hands free.

His wrists were rubbed raw. But he was too eager to notice trifles, and plucked and tore at the rope round his legs.

"Done it!" he gasped finally, hurling aside the thongs and scrambling to his feet. "Now for some climbing!"

With groping fingers he searched for a handhold in the mossy brickwork. He soon got a purchase and fought his way up a few feet.

Crash!

Sid was back at the bottom of the well again, with an avalanche of broken bricks rattling down on top of him. The walls of the well had proved deceptive. They were old and jagged enough to give hand and foothold, but they were rotten and crumbling.

Again and again Sid tried. Twice he fought his way up some five or six feet, only to slither to the bottom again. It was a heart-breaking job, but Sid didn't give in.

Exhausted and with fingers torn and bleeding, he paused to rest. Then he had another try—with the same result.

How long he kept at it Sid had no idea. But the halts gradually became longer and longer; and, finally, in spite of himself, he dropped off to sleep.

He woke up suddenly, and like a flash he remembered everything and let out a groan.

Then, to his astonishment, he thought he heard a low call. His heart beat rapidly. Was it only the voice of one of his captors, or— In any case, no harm could be done by attracting attention, so Sid whistled.

"Where are you?" came in a soft, astounded whisper.

Sid's pulses leapt; for it was the voice of Jacobs, the van driver.

"Here!" called Sid gently. "Down the well!"

"Vell, I'm blowed!"

Yes, it was Jacobs! Sid now heard shuffling feet, and the head of the van driver was thrust over the rim of the well an instant later.

"Thought I heard a groan!" exclaimed Jacobs. "Who is it? Vhy, bleth my thoul, it's Thid Morris! Vot you doin' down there?"

"Got thrown down!" Sid called up, gulping down his wrath. "Are you goin' to help me out? Or are these blackguards pals of yours?"

"Arf-time!" protested Jacobs softly. "Of courthe you think I'm a ratheal, but 'tweren't all my fault. I'll put you wise later. How can I help you out now?"

"Here's some rope!" called back Sid, bending swiftly and scooping up the cords he had been tied with. "Catch! An' knot 'em together!"

It was the work of a moment for the van-driver to catch the cords, tie them together, and cast down a noose to Sid.

Then came a tug-of-war.

Sid adjusted the noose under his arms and called up to Jacobs to heave. The little man pulled with all his strength.

There came a scuffling and scraping sound, and quantities of rubble went clattering to the bottom of the well.

But Sid was coming up. First appeared his head, then his shoulders. A final heave, and Sid was out of the well, lying beside the coping, and gasping like a fish out of water.

"Goin' to help get the Knight away?" breathed Sid, scrambling up when he had got back his wind.

"Yeth," hissed Jacobs. "That's why I've been tryin' to track the van all day. But I didn't reckon to find you here. Where ith the 'orse? I hope he's still in the van."

"Of course he ain't!" snapped Sid. "But we'll soon get him in. I can handle the Knight. Let's run the van out first, get it some way away, then lead the horse down to it. Come on!"

Quickly but quietly Sid and Jacobs stole up towards the old barn, the doors of which had long since vanished. Sid's guess proved right, for the van could be dimly seen in the ruined building. It had been stowed out of sight by the two scoundrels in case some wandering tramp should spot it.

"Yes, it's empty," whispered Sid. "The Knight must be in the stables. We daren't risk the row of trying to ship him here. Push!"

They pushed and shoved with straining muscles. Luckily, it was a steep slope downhill from the barn entrance. With groaning wheels the van lumbered out, then went swaying down the slope.

Jacobs jumped on the running-board, reaching out and jamming on the brake when they were a good fifty yards from the house and well below it. Everything was going O.K.

"Now the Knight!" whispered Sid. He ran towards the stables, with Jacobs at his heels.

The two scoundrels in the house could not have dreamt of an escape, and must be sleeping soundly.

But just as Sid was half-way to the stables a bright moon emerged from behind a cloud. At that moment Sid heard the harsh voice of Lumley shouting inside the house.

"Mason," he called out, "thought I heard—"

The voice snapped off, and Lumley's bearded face appeared at a window.

"Blazes!" he roared. "Quick, Mason! There's that van-driver down there, and great smoke, there's the cub we heaved down the well!"

CHAPTER 4.

Defeat—and Victory!

SID let out a shout and whirled in his tracks. On the threshold of success bad luck had stumped him again.

It seemed impossible for young Sid and the little driver to overcome two powerful ruffians. But Sid was furious, and meant to have a try. He doubled his fists and sprang forward.

Out through the gaping ground-floor window the burly Lumley came like a thunderbolt. A door banging inside the house told that Mason also was not far behind.

Lumley came charging down with his big hands outstretched. By his sheer weight he would crush Sid to the ground. But Sid, crazy with wrath, hurled himself blindly up to meet the attack.

At that moment Mason shot out of the house. It seemed all up with Sid and Jacobs. And Jacobs hadn't moved. He was standing irresolute. But all at once he became galvanised to action.

Whiz! Something buzzed like a bee over Sid's shoulder, struck Lumley square on the forehead, and brought him crashing down almost at Sid's feet.

In the nick of time Jacobs had remembered he was carrying a spanner. Plucking it out of his pocket, he had hurled it at Lumley with deadly effect. Against horse-thieving blackguards who carried pistols the use of any weapon was justified.

Sid, amazed, saw Lumley go down in a heap. Then he whipped round to face Mason.

Crack!

Mason snatched out his automatic, firing point-blank at Sid from a few yards. But Sid had hurled himself aside, and had dived at Mason's legs like a Rugby footballer.

Down went Mason, and his pistol flew from his hand, to thud on the ground a few yards away. Mason's head struck a large stone, and he went limp.

"That was a near thing!" gasped Sid, scrambling up. "Get that rope again, Jacobs! Look sharp! If either of these fellows come round before they're triced up we'll be for it!"

But neither Mason nor Lumley came round, for Jacobs was mighty smart about fetching the rope.

Sid trussed up the heavier and more dangerous Lumley first, then paid attention to the lean, sandy-haired Mason. When the two scoundrels regained their wits they were as helpless as mummies.

"Hurrah!" cried Sid, ignoring Lumley's crackling oaths. "Now for the Knight! Give us a hand, Jacobs!"

They raced up to the dark stables, where they found Red Knight standing in a broken-down stall. He was still rugged and hooded, and appeared to have been fed. A few oats lay neglected in his manger.

Within a minute the big horse was being trotted down towards the van with Sid at his head.

Sid and Jacobs let down the back of the van, after which Jacobs sprang up and backed the vehicle against a bank. Coaxing with hand and voice, Sid got the Knight on to the bank and then into the van.

Slam!

The sound of vigorous cranking followed, and the engine of the van roared to life.

Dawn was at hand now. In the east the sky was paling.

"So-long!" Sid yelled back, as the van started forward. "You two fellers'll soon get quit of those ropes. But we'll be nearly at Manchester by then."

Swaying from side to side, the big van clattered along the hard track. It was unsafe to hit up speed till they struck the road, and Sid began to be anxious.

"Will you make it, Jacobs?" he asked the driver. "The race is run to-day. We ain't got too much time."

"Should do it," replied the driver, "barrin' accidents."

On they went, jolting and banging, till they swung into the main road. Then they began to hum along.

"It beats me," said Sid suddenly, placing his mouth close to Jacobs' ear, "why you helped to get the Knight away. I gathered from what those fellows said that it was your fault we got held up."

"That's true," nodded Jacobs, looking very ashamed of himself. "Your boss paid me to keep mum about the whole buthineth. But a flashy cove came to the garage and give me a tenner to say what road we were goin' by, and when. He swore no harm was meant. He spun a yarn about only wanting to know if your hoss wath really goin'. Took me in proper, he did."

"You were a treacherous ruffian, Jacobs!" Sid cut in.

"I knows it now," admitted the driver

miserably. "But I knew nothin' about the kidnappin' plot. I was fair surprised when I saw that log. An' the pistols was too much, so I cleared. Later I tells meself I'm a mean bounder, and looks for you; but you'd gone. So I thinks I'll get the hoss an' van. It took a heap o' tracking, all day an' most o' the night. Jest when I gets to the old farm I hears a groan in th' well. 'Crumbs,' says I—"

"I know the rest!" snapped Sid.

"Yer won't thplit?" asked Jacobs nervously.

"No," replied Sid. "It's thanks to you, anyway, that we got clear. The boss sha'n't learn whose fault it was. But, if we're late, I'll give you a gosh-awful hiding!"

Jacobs murmured his thanks, and then gave his full attention to driving.

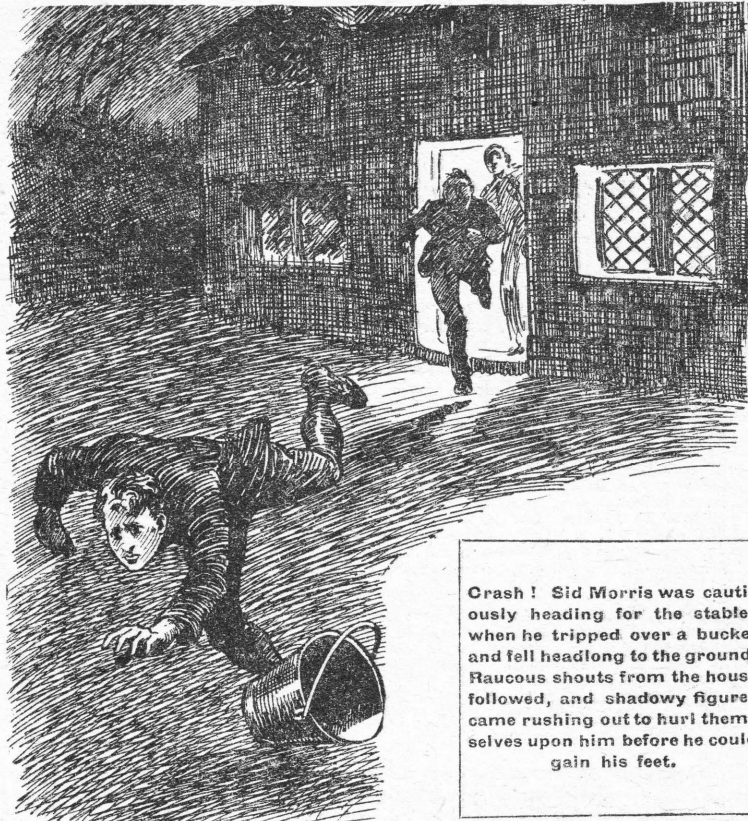
aside people who tried to stop and question him. He had heard nothing since Sid's mysterious telephone message.

As he strode into the saddling paddock he was brought up short by a tall, dark man who planted himself in front of him. It was Sir John Digby, Red Knight's owner.

"Well, Hall," snapped the latter, "what's this mean? Where's my horse?"

"I can't tell you more than you know already, Sir John," replied Hall desperately. "But I don't believe that Sid Morris will let us down. I back him to turn up somehow."

"Stuff and nonsense!" barked the furious owner of Red Knight. "There's only ten minutes to go. No one believes my horse will run. Listen to the bookies—they're offering twenty to one now!"



Crash! Sid Morris was cautiously heading for the stables when he tripped over a bucket and fell headlong to the ground. Raucous shouts from the house followed, and shadowy figures came rushing out to hurl themselves upon him before he could gain his feet.

They swept on mile after mile, the van leaving a billowing cloud of dust in its wake, and Sid's spirits rose. But, when they were humming along in a lonely district, disaster overtook them.

With a sudden, jarring grunt, the van slowed down and then stopped. Jacobs jumped from his seat to locate the cause of the trouble.

"What's up?" demanded Sid, his face paling.

"No petrol!" groaned Jacobs. "She's dry. I forgot to fill up. And we're ten miles from anywhere!"

"Even money Bedouin! Six to four White Cockade! One hundred to seven Red Knight!"

Above the humming murmur of the dense throng the shouts of the book-makers rose stridently. They were shouting the odds for the Manchester November Handicap. And rumours about the missing Knight were flying round thick and fast.

Hall, stamping furiously, pushed

Sir John Digby strode off, leaving Hall fuming under his breath and clenching and unclenching his big fists.

Truly things seemed hopeless. Time was running mighty short, and there was no sign of Sid or Red Knight. Hall had received no telegrams or telephone messages on the course. Yet he still clung to his belief in Sid.

Suddenly the murmuring in the packed stands took on a deeper note. The horses for the big race were going down to the post.

Hall pushed through the crowd and made his way down to the rails where he could see down the green course.

Bedouin came out first, a shapely little black, dancing and fretting. It was followed by three others that were not much fancied. Then came White Cockade, a slashing grey, with a big, springy stride.

Hall ground his teeth. Red Knight should have been in that parade.

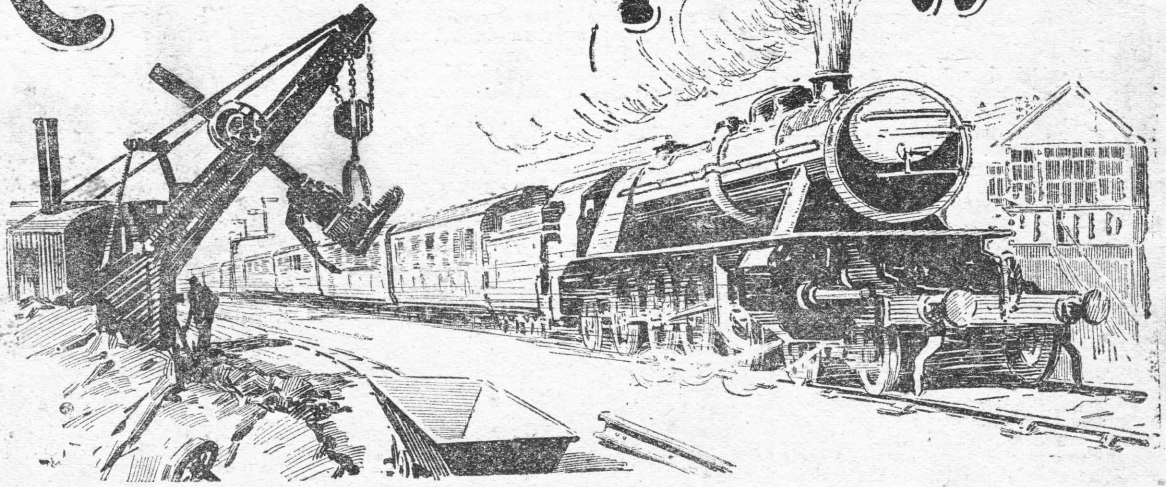
Thudding and drumming, the horses captered away to the starting-gate.

(Continued on page 28.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 876.

The bitter blood that exists between the rival railways comes to the surface even on the football field.

CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!



A Thrilling Yarn of Exciting Adventure on the Railroad. By ROLAND SPENCER and FRANCIS WARWICK.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

JIMMY SPEED, a plucky and cheery young newsboy of Blackhampton.

SIR RICHARD GRANT, chief director of the Great Scottish and Central Railway, who has in his employ nearly all the male population of Blackhampton.

JOHN LANGRISH—whose heavy and determined features, square-set jaw, and steely eyes earn for him the title of "Granite" Langrish—chief director of the Great Electric Northern, and a rival of Sir Richard Grant.

HAROLD SOPER, a foreman shunter on the G.S.C., and an unscrupulous rascal, working in the pay of John Langrish, and

SAM BLUNDELL, a fireman on the G.S.C., and as true as steel.

It was a lucky day for the cheery young newsboy, Jimmy Speed, when, at great risk to himself, he rescued Sir Richard Grant from being crushed beneath the wheels of a monster goods-train engine, for it meant the realisation of his long-cherished ambition—to get a job in the great workshops of the G.S.C. To hear the clanging and the shouting, and to see the great steel locomotives towering around him, sent a thrill through Jimmy Speed.

But he is soon up against it when he meets Soper, who, in the pay of Granite Langrish, is endeavouring to poison his fellow-workers against the G.S.C.

He finds a friend, however, in Sam Blundell, a fireman. Then, anxious to learn more, he shadows Soper, who, together with Cridland, another confederate of Langrish's, have met in the lonely ruins of Black Hill to discuss further villainous plans. A thrilling fight follows, Speed miraculously escaping from the hands of the villainous Cridland. Suspecting further villainy next night, Sir Richard Grant, together with some detectives, and Jimmy Speed, crouch in a ditch waiting. An attempt is made to wreck a train. Speed and Blundell are captured in the scrap, and taken by Langrish's men to Black Hill ruins, where they discover a plot to collapse the tunnel. The two chums effect an escape, but before help arrives Langrish carries out his vile scheme. The disaster casts a still deeper shadow over the great railway town, and the newspaper talk makes bitter reading for Blackhampton.

The following Saturday Carnborough are to play Blackhampton in a Cup match, and, fearless of the consequences, Speed and Blundell join the crowd that is streaming towards the great gates of the football-ground.

(Now read on.)

First Blood to Blackhampton!

COLOURED favours were to be seen everywhere, black and yellow respectively, yellow happening to be the colour of Carnborough's football team as well as of their electric locomotives. There was a good deal of chaff flying between the supporters of the rival teams, and here and there the bad blood that existed was coming to the surface already, in the form of hustling the Blackhamptonians, and mud-throwing by bands of young hooligans apparently out for trouble.

Sam and Jim found seats high up behind one of the goals. At this point the football ground was flanked by the Great Electric Northern's lines, and it was with keen interest that Jim, from his high seat had his first real view of the rival railway at work.

The middle-rail system was used on the G.E.N., and to Jim and Sam the metals looked distinctly "messy," as Jim said, with their extra rails, compared with the handsome, clean sweep of lines to be found on their own railway.

There came a grinding hum, like some giant metallic bee; the next minute a great yellow electric locomotive, reminding Jim in appearance of some sightless prehistoric monster, went by, with a roar; a few minutes later a second passed by on the other line, this time hauling a fast goods-train.

"Of all the rum-looking things!" muttered Jim, to Sam Blundell. "More like Army tanks than anything, bar the colour of 'em! But they seem to travel some! I'll say that for 'em."

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"Ay," nodded Sam, "they can travel! But they're not beauties. Side by side with a blue-an'-gold G.S.C. 4-5-2, they might be Beauty and the Beast out of a pantomime!"

Then, with an excited roar from the spectators, the two football teams took the field.

Both the Albion and the Rovers were in the First League, and both teams had high hopes of success in the Cup. Jim Speed preferred a kick-about in which he could join, to watching professional football. But both he and Sam were soon keenly excited in the game, for the football of both teams was beautiful to watch, and the Albion and the Rovers seemed perfectly matched.

The first fifteen minutes of play were brilliant. If there were any difference it was that Blackhampton's forwards were faster than their rivals, but this was counteracted by the slight superiority of the Carnborough Rovers' defence.

Jim held his breath as the Carnborough centre-forward wormed his way with the ball to the Albion's last line of defence. The yellow-shirted forwards were keeping up well, and there came a roar of shouting as the centre man, with a magnificent long pass, sent the ball sailing away to the outside-left. The next moment the winger was past the backs, curving in with amazing speed towards the goal.

The right-back was left standing, and the left-back was nowhere. The shouting grew in volume, deafening; and then there was a matter of disappointment as the man shot and the Blackhampton goalkeeper tipped the ball high over the bar.

The corner-kick was taken, and for some breathless minutes the play was all in the goal-mouth. Then the halves cleared. The black-shirted forwards got possession, and with a burst

of excited cheering from the supporters of the visiting team, the ball was carried up the field, across the half-way line into the enemy's territory.

The black inside-left flashed the ball out to the winger, who took it in his stride and raced on. Twisting round the half who came out to tackle him, the Blackhampton man passed back to the centre. The home backs came up fiercely to meet the attack, and for the next five minutes the play was in Carnborough's territory. Then gradually, close-passing in a way that roused all the admiring enthusiasm of the crowd, the visiting forwards pressed nearer and nearer to the Carnborough goal.

The ball went hurtling towards the goal-mouth, but the home goalkeeper fisted out strongly. The ball was trapped by the Blackhampton's centre-forward. For a moment a breathless hush fell. And then the ball went singing into the top right-hand corner of the net, and the whistle sounded a long blast.

"Goal! Goal!"

The silence was shattered by a storm of excited cheering from one half of the spectators. But Jim and Sam did not join in. Jim had suddenly gripped Sam's shoulder.

"Look! Down there—see him?"

"Who is it?" asked Sam quickly, puzzled by Jim's excited tones.

"Down there, next to that fat chap. It's that rotter in Laugrish's pay—Soper!"

A Thrilling Tussle!

AS far as they knew, Soper had not yet seen them, though he was only a few yards away.

"Ay, it's him all right," muttered Sam. "To think of the brute sitting there, smug and oily, when he ought to be in the dock answering a charge of manslaughter—or murder!"

Jim's lips were tight.

"And why not? The birds had flown when Sir Richard's other party got to the Black Hill Ruins on the night of the wreck, but Soper's one of the chief of 'em, and he's there now—"

"It's no good, lad," Sam said grimly in a low tone. "We can't call to one of those policemen and have him arrested—"

there's no warrant out for Soper—not yet, anyway! You forget we've no proof—only our word against his and his friends'. You can bet your last bob Soper could prove an alibi all right for that night if he were called upon to do so. Ay, and so could all of 'em, I don't doubt—Cridland and young Webber, and all of 'em!"

Jimmy nodded bitterly.

"I was forgetting that," he said. "But it's rotten to sit here as mum as an oyster, with that swab in calling distance! But you're right. We can't do anything, any more than Sir Richard Grant can. Soper—by gum, Sam! Troubles never come singly! There is Webber, too, and Snaith with him!"

Jimmy nodded across the steep bank of men's heads. A good distance farther on Webber and Snaith were watching the game also.

Jim, acting up to advice, had continued to ignore Webber in the cleaning-shops, for the bully evidently had not known that Jim had recognised him the night of the fight on the line. But it was clear that Webber's connection with the enemies of the Scottish and Central was by no means at an end. He was very "thick" with those who were busy talking disloyalty in the G.S.C. workshops, Webber being backed up by Uriah Snaith, who was the brains of that undesirable partnership.

Then the game recommenced. But it was some minutes before Jimmy's mind could concentrate once more on football.

The Carnborough supporters were in a bad mood now that Blackhampton were a goal up. There was a good deal of "barracking" going on now, and the play of some of the Carnborough team was none too clean. At last the referee had occasion to warn the Carnborough centre-forward. At once there was a wave of hooting and cat-calling.

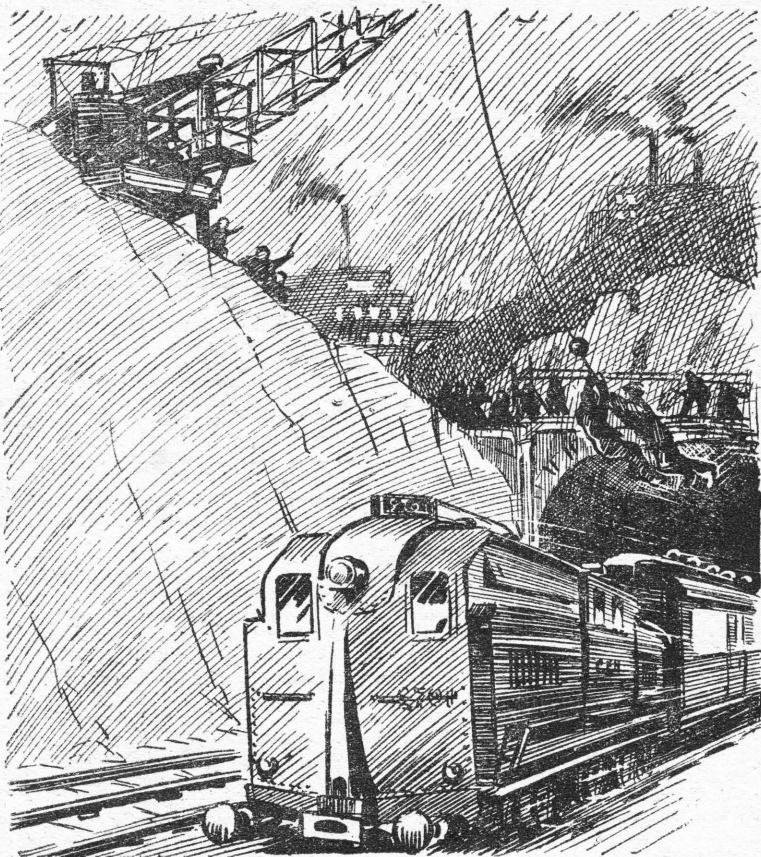
By half-time there was an ugly atmosphere abroad. Sam Blundell snorted angrily.

"There's going to be trouble—unless Carnborough win!" he said. "Talk about sportsmanship! Well, I hope the Albion will give the Carnborough crowd a thundering good licking!"

It seemed as though the black shirts would. Within a few minutes of the opening of the second half they had scored again. Carnborough kicked off once more; three minutes later the ball crashed into the Carnborough goal for a third time.



Side by side with his comrades Speed was forced back by the Carnboroughites. Then suddenly he heard Sam Blundell's voice, loud above the tumult: "Look out! Hold your ground for your lives! We're on the lines—the Northern Electric, men! Hold on! If you touch the live rails you're dead men!"



Suddenly Speed and Blundell shot forward from the staging, swinging down and out with ever-increasing speed at the end of the crane cable, to alight on the rushing Northern Electric express beneath them! (A thrilling incident from next week's powerful instalment.)

The Blackhampton supporters, who were only slightly in the minority, cheered lustily, Jim and Sam with the rest. A weedy young hooligan behind Jim, sporting a yellow rosette in his buttonhole, seemed to resent this intensely.

"Yah, Blackhampton wreckers!" he observed, removing a rather bent cigarette from his slit of a mouth. "How're your trains, eh? Smashed 'em all up yet?"

Jim flushed and glanced round. But he said nothing. A dirty boot dug into the small of his back. He glanced round, hot words upon his lips. But Sam caught his arm.

"Shut up, Jimmy," whispered the young fireman. "Let him talk!"

"He can talk all right," said Jimmy warmly, "but I'm hanged if I'm going to be kicked in the back by the swab!"

"Black'ampton wreckers!" repeated the Carnborough supporter with relish. But he did not apply his boot again; and Jimmy, his blood quickened, turned away again to watch the continuance of the game.

Their reverse seemed to have upset the Carnborough team altogether. Their excellent play of the first half seemed utterly to have gone to pieces. Their own supporters were angry with them, and that did not help them to improve.

"Three—nil!" muttered Sam delightedly. "They're in for a licking by Blackhampton this time, an' no mistake!"

For the next ten minutes the play was all in the home team's half. But Blackhampton could not score again. And at last the yellow shirts managed to get away with the ball.

They swept down the field. With a sudden return to their old form, they completely baffled the halves by their lightning passing. Then the inside-left got past the Blackhampton backs. The goalkeeper, undecided, hesitated in the goal-mouth, and then rushed out.

Thud!

Behind their goal as they were, Sam and Jim heard the sound of the leather very clearly as the Carnborough forward shot. The goalkeeper leapt to one side to intercept the ball

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and fell, sprawling. A moment later the ball was lying in the net, and the Carnborough supporters went mad.

"Go it, the Yellows! Well shot! Show the G.S.C. we'll beat 'em yet!"

From the shouts of the crowd it was clearly a railway football match—a struggle between the rival railways, as far as the spectators, for the most part, at any rate, were concerned. And all the old bad blood was coming to the surface.

"Good for the Yellows! We'll show the railway duds—the G.S.C., Great Smash 'em and Crashes!"

Jimmy felt the blood tingling in his head at these sneers at the railway he loved. But Sam's warning hand was on his arm, and he kept quiet, even when the weedy youth behind plucked up courage enough to dig his boot once more into Jimmy's back.

The game went on, growing more rough at every minute. Carnborough seemed to have rallied in a most amazing way. Before long they had scored again, making it now 3—2, in favour of Blackhampton.

The excitement was terrific. There was a continual roar from the spectators now, and Jim's teeth were tight with excitement. After leading by three goals, were Blackhampton going to let victory slip from their grasp at the last minute? A fierce mid-field struggle ended with a resistless attack by the black shirts. They swept down on to their rivals' goal in magnificent style, crumpling up the first defence line like paper. Then, when it looked as though they were about to score, the home team gave a corner kick. A gust of wind took the ball behind the goal, and there was a groan of disappointment from Blackhampton's supporters.

With the ball again in play the yellow halves succeeded in getting it forward to their front line once more. There was a brief mid-field struggle. Then came a sudden moment of breathless quiet, succeeded by a storm of shouting, as the

Carnborough forwards went sweeping down upon the Blackhampton goal.

But they were soon checked. The halves came to the rescue of Blackhampton, and the ball returned to the half-way line. Another fierce mid-field struggle, then again the Carnborough forwards went sweeping down towards the Blackhampton goal.

This time the halves could not check the attack, and a minute later the backs were struggling with the yellow-shirted forwards.

The centre-forward passed to his inside-right and slipped on past the backs. The inside man flashed the ball to the outside. With a clever twist the outside-right was away with it, curving in to the Blackhampton goal.

The excited shouts were deafening. The wing man, pursued by the left back, passed to the centre. Trapping the ball neatly, the centre-forward steadied himself for a fraction of time, then he shot. The goalkeeper leapt across the goal-mouth, utterly surprised by that lightning pass, but he was a fraction of a second too late. The net shook as the ball crashed home, grazing the post in passing.

"Goal! Goal!" howled the weedy Carnboroughite behind Jimmy. "Goal! So much for the Great Smash 'em an' Crashes!"

On the Live Rails!

THE referee's whistle sounded shrill above the clamour. "No goal!" said the referee quietly. "Offside!"

The shake of his head was seen by all. Then, as the Blackhampton goalkeeper fished the ball out of the net, the referee glanced at his watch. For two moments he stood looking down at it. Then he raised his whistle to his lips and blew a long blast.

The game was over. And Blackhampton had won.

In their hearts Carnborough must have known that the referee's decision was indisputably right. Jimmy had seen

the offside even from behind the goal, so that those with a view across the field could not have helped seeing it. But that did not alter matters. They meant to lynch that referee.

A howling pandemonium had broken loose! In a few moments the field was black with the hooligans who were leading the trouble. The police had succeeded in surrounding the referee, and, side by side with the majority of the footballers, were fighting in a small, desperate ring in the heart of that seething hooligan crowd.

Jimmy was knocked flying by someone clambering over the benches towards the fight. Blackhampton supporters were going to the help of the police and the footballers, and in a startlingly short space of time a vast free fight was taking place on all sides—a grim, ugly struggle.

With tight lips Jim and Sam fought fiercely. The little knot of Blackhamptonians were entirely surrounded by their foes, and things were looking very ugly. But, with grim, desperate faces, back to back, they gave all they took.

In grim silence Jimmy fought. Bob Williams had worked his way to Jimmy's side. On Jim's other hand was a big man with a bulldog jaw, whom Jimmy recognised as an engine-driver of one of the G. S. C. locals. Sam was next to this man, and next to Sam was a burly policeman without his truncheon or helmet.

Through the corner of his eye Jimmy saw Sam lift a big man who attacked him clean into the air with a smashing blow on the chin. The engine-driver, too, was doing well. He had just downed three men in rapid succession with a terrible leg-of-mutton left fist.

A red-headed young ruffian, with a yellow rosette that clashed badly with his hair, sent a smashing blow into Jimmy's face, and he staggered back, blinded, his nose streaming with blood. Bob Williams leapt forward with flashing eyes, and sent the red-headed one sprawling. He lay unconscious against the fence, clean knocked out, and Jimmy chuckled grimly.

From the other side of the high hoarding a sudden loud hum came to Jimmy's ears, and then died away. One of the great yellow electric locomotives of the G.E.N. had gone sweeping past on the down-line.

Crack!

An unexpected sound came to Jimmy's ears a moment afterwards, sharp and clear. It was followed by a sudden shattering crash.

What had happened? Despite the fact that he was so hard-pressed Jimmy glanced swiftly round. A quick cry broke from him.

At one point the flimsy hoardings had given way, crashing outwards!

The next instant there came a second crash. The hoarding against which the red-headed youth was lying had also gone down before the press of fighting men. The Carnboroughites surged forward.

Jimmy tried to hold his ground, but could not. Side by side with his comrades he was forced back. His feet rang hollow on the fallen hoarding, drowned to all ears but his in the general trampling of the fighting crowd. Back—back—back—

He caught a glimpse of shining rails. And then he heard Sam Bhrndell's voice loud above the tumult.

"Look out! Hold your ground for your lives! We're on the line—the Northern Electric, men! Hold on! If you touch the live rails you're dead men!"

But Jimmy could not hold on. Though he fought madly, slowly and relentlessly he and the others were being driven back by the surging sea of fighting men.

Faces came and went—faces ugly with passion. Then among the others Jim's eyes picked out suddenly two that were familiar.

Soper and Webber!

Back, back, towards the glittering ribbons of steel that spelt death for any who should touch them! And in that moment Jim realised all—knew that it was Soper and Webber and Uriah Snaithe who were bounding on the crowd of hooligans that was driving the little knot of desperate men from Blackhampton back, nearer and nearer to the live rails of the G.E.N. main line.

If Soper should succeed in his hideous scheme the only two witnesses of the tunnel crime would be silenced for ever. Jimmy realised that as he was forced back another step, and another, with Sam's words still echoing in his ears:

"If you touch the live rails you're dead men!"

*(To avoid being forced on to the live rails the Blackhamptonians put up a stubborn defence! Don't miss next week's instalment of this powerful serial, **Chums!**)*

"THE SHIPWRECKED SEVEN!"

(Continued from page 18.)

They felt themselves hauled to their feet, a gruff voice ordered them to march, and they were forced, stumbling and lurching over the rough ground.

Where they were being taken they hadn't the faintest idea—they only knew they were mounting a steep, rocky pathway, with a strong grip leading them. Then came a steep flight of rough stone steps—steps that seemed endless to the dazed, bewildered captives.

Then they became aware of a faint gleam of flickering light about them, while the smell of dank earth and bad air almost choked them, whilst the cold chill seemed to grip their hearts.

The long, wearying journey ended at last—the underground tunnel—they knew it must be that—ended in what they guessed was a cave, and they were flung roughly down on yielding masses of dry seaweed. Then with startling abruptness the sacking was wrenched from their heads, and in the flickering light of a lantern they blinked about them.

They caught a glimpse of their captors—of the rocky, glistening walls of a cavern—but it was only a brief glimpse, for without a word the ruffians tramped back into the tunnel. They took the lantern with them, and then darkness—darkness black and complete descended upon the hapless captives.

In the gloomy lamp-lit dining-room of the lonely bungalow on the beach Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Manners, and Lowther were eyeing each other with white, anxious faces. The chess-board had been thrown aside, and Arthur Augustus had forgotten his toothache. More than once during the past half-hour Tom Merry had stepped outside the bungalow to glance up and down the shadowy beach with an uneasiness he could not account for. But now, at half-past eleven, he knew that his uneasy, foreboding had not been without grounds. Where were their friends? They had only gone for a stroll—they should have been back ere this! Something had happened to them!

"It's no good, you fellows," muttered Tom, licking his dry lips. "Something rotten has happened to them. They wouldn't stay out late like this for the fun of it. Something's happened. We—we'll have to go and look for them."

The others nodded mutely. With resolute face Tom reached for a lantern and lit it. The chums then got caps and coats and passed out into the starlit night. But their search revealed nothing. It was long after midnight when they returned, almost fainting with fatigue and despair. A flickering hope that their comrades might have returned in their absence vanished abruptly on reaching the bungalow to find it empty. But Tom's will was indomitable, and he led the way out again, and the wearying search was resumed. But again it led to nothing. Lord Conway and their chums seemed to have vanished into thin air—as Captain Pentire had vanished! And with hearts sick with dread the chums of St. Jim's sat round the dying fire to watch and wait. They had already prepared rough beds in another room, but none thought of them now. And when dawn came it found them still there—waiting. Their friends had not returned, and they longed for the daylight, hoping that with the daylight help would come—that McCallam and his men would turn up to aid them to find the missing four.

But at that time—had they only known it—the crew of the wrecked Conquest were not in a position to aid anyone. They were lying, wrapped in blankets, sleeping the sleep of exhaustion in the fore-castle of a sailing barge, lumbering up the Channel, bound for London River. For, as Lord Conway had feared, the dinghy had indeed come to grief in the fog that morning. Lost in the blinding swirl of chilly vapour, without compass to guide them, they had drifted with the treacherous currents far out into the Channel, where the lumbering bows of the sailing barge had crashed into the dinghy, smashing it to matchwood.

Happily, it had been scarcely moving, and the crew of the barge acted promptly, and half-stunned and exhausted, McCallam, Wilks, and Scott had been hauled aboard and put to bed in the kindly sailors' own bunks. And at the rate the barge was moving then, there was little chance of her making the Thames that day or the next.

There was no rescue or aid for Tom Merry & Co.—yet!

THE END.

(Don't miss the further startling adventures of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's magnificent yarn, entitled: "THE SECRET OF SPARK ISLAND!" by Martin Clifford.)

"LONG ODDS!"

(Continued from page 23.)

Mechanically Hall raised his glasses and watched them. All hope of Red Knight's arrival had died out now.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed suddenly. "What's the shouting for?"

From somewhere about the grand stand a volume of cheering had broken out. It increased, becoming deafening.

Then Sam Hall himself was cheering like a madman; for a big, blood-like bay had swept out of the paddock, and was cantering down to the post.

It was Red Knight, with Sid up, wearing Sir John's colours.

Sid had turned up in the nick of time! Pandemonium broke loose. Hats and sticks were flung into the air. Never was there such a scene on a racecourse just before a big race. No one knew or cared what had delayed Red Knight.

The fact remained he had arrived. Ten minutes later the horse was facing the tapes alongside the others.

As the gate flew up and the horses bounded forward a shout burst forth from the stands like a thunderclap.

"White Cockade's bringing them along!" gasped Hall, his eyes glued to his glasses. "What's his game? They're coming a rare bat! Can't see the Knight!"

In a few seconds—it seemed—the

bunched-up horses had neared the bend, swept round it, and flashed into the straight.

Now the little black led, fairly skimming over the ground, with the big grey second. Close in rear the field was still packed.

"Bedouin!" roared the crowd. "The favourite wins!"

"No, by James, he doesn't!" roared Hall, quite beside himself with excitement. "Here comes Red Knight!"

And the Knight did come. He seemed to walk out of the ruck just when he liked. He swooped down on White Cockade like a hawk chasing a sparrow, flashed past, and raced up alongside Bedouin.

The black's jockey promptly got out his flail. He turned on every ounce of speed.

Bedouin was going great guns already. Now he shot ahead. But he couldn't shake off the Knight, and the bay and the black ran neck and neck.

They shot past the post, and no one but the judge could separate them.

A hush followed. Then the shouting began again. Red Knight's number was at the top of the frame!

"A short head!" was the judge's verdict.

Sid rode into the paddock surrounded by a delirious throng. He had almost to fight his way to the weighing-room.

His weight correct, the lad emerged, to be pounced on by Sir John Digby and carried off in a car to a large hotel.

Later, having despatched Red Knight by rail for home, Hall joined them.

Sid related all that had happened, except that he kept his promise to Jacobs.

"Well, sir," Sid ended, "I thought we were beat when we ran dry of petrol. But luckily a feller in a Rolls-Royce whizzed along, and we stopped him. He gave us enough to get here. I must say I hope the police get Lumley and Mason and find out for certain who paid them."

"I'll put police on their tracks right now!" boomed Hall, crossing over and wringing Sid's hand. "But what concerns you more is that I'm in need of a head lad—since I had to sack Foster. D'you think you could manage the job?"

"I guess so, sir," cried Sid, jumping up, amazed. "Just try me!"

Hall did try Sid as a head lad and never regretted it. He also gave up his old crooked methods and cleared out those of his lads who didn't take to the new straight ones.

Lumley and Mason got caught and gave Bedouin's owners away—with disastrous results!

Hall did very well out of Red Knight's victory, but, as he said himself, he never wanted such a trying experience again as when Red Knight won at long odds.

THE END.

(Keep a sharp look out for a splendid series of wireless stories which will appear very shortly in the GEM.)

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