

"THE LOYALTY OF LEVISON!"

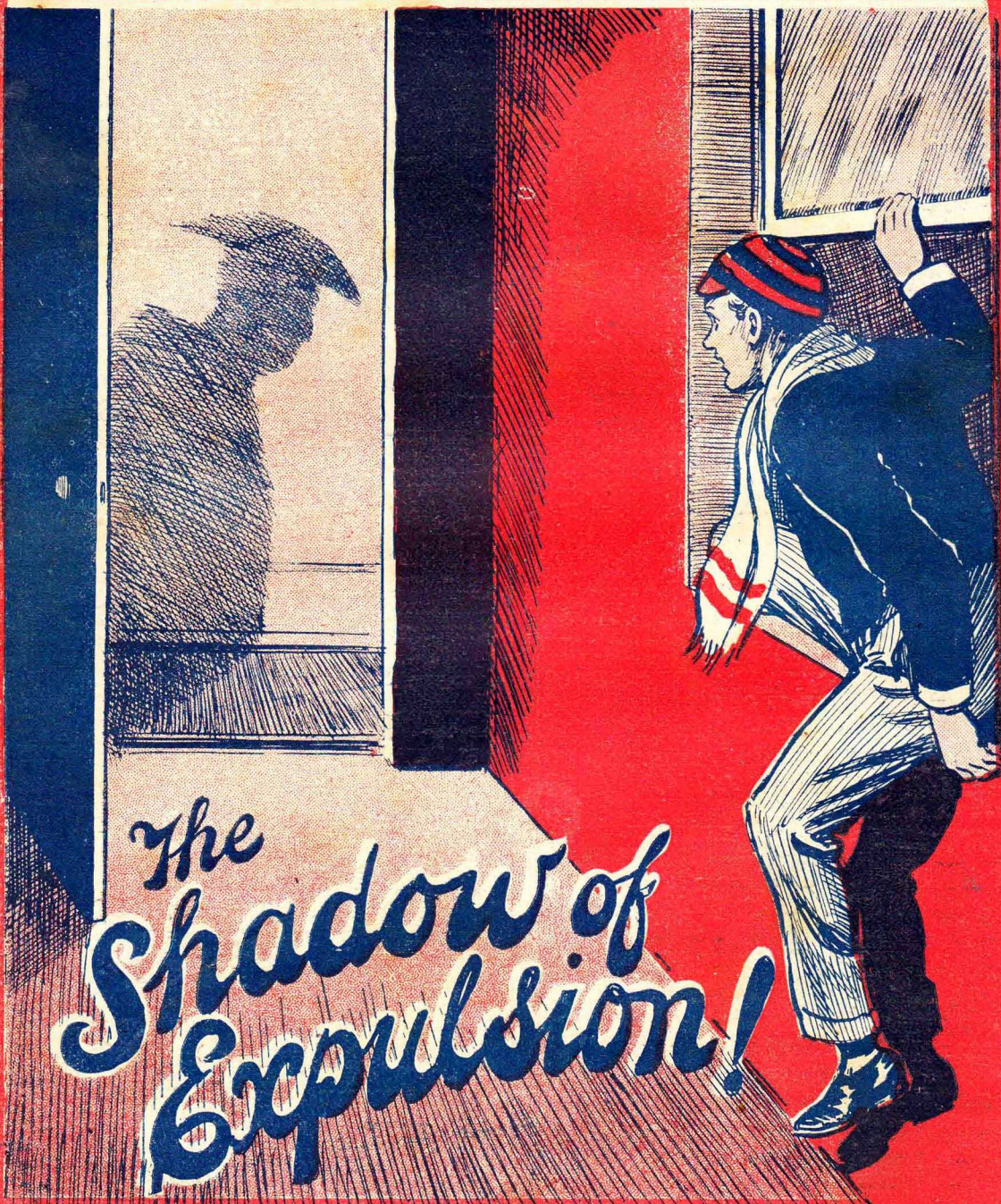
This week's "special request" story of an old favourite at St. Jim's.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

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No. 2,006.
Vol. XXXI.
May 28th, 1927.



The Shadow of Expulsion!

TWO BIG HITS!

Just starting—a stirring
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Full of
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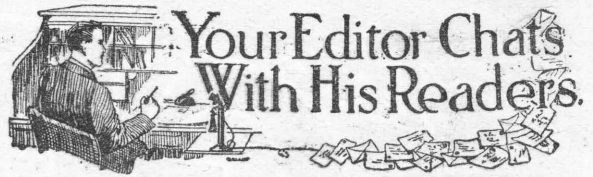
A New Series of amazing
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sleuth,



SEXTON BLAKE.

These two NEW
features are in this
week's issue of our Grand Tuesday
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Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library,
The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.
Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

FOR THE FIRST TIME!

THIS week's mail from readers of the GEM really astonished me, for, without exaggerating, ninety per cent of the writers admitted that this was the first time they had written to me. Quite a number of these chums then went on to apologise for "wasting my time." But really that wasn't necessary. When I'm reading my chums' letters I'm very happy—there's no question of time being wasted. And again, while I am on this subject, let me hasten to add that a criticism, either adverse or favourable, on the stories appearing in the GEM need not be accompanied by an apology. Why should it, anyway? Everyone is entitled to his opinion; it's the sifting of opinions that makes the world go round; it's the sifting of opinions that help to make the GEM the great success it is. Therefore, chums, wade in with your letters and cut out those apologies. They are not necessary among pals.

QUERIES!

Since our boom thousand's number made its record sensation I have been literally snowed under with requests for all the back yarns "out of the limbo of the bygone, as it were. But it does not end there. So intense is the interest in all that has happened at St. Jim's that enthusiasts ask for details, names, plots—in fact, every kind of information regarding the stories since Number One. Well, gratifying as it all is, I find it absolutely impossible to meet all these requests. Back numbers have vanished. The old copies of the GEM are worth their weight in gold, and those readers who have kept them intact wouldn't part with them for the world. Still, as a consolation, we get glimpses of the old times at St. Jim's in the "Popular" and the "Schoolboys' Own Library." I regret it is not possible for me to supply correspondents with the titles of all the St. Jim's yarns, with details of the plots. Life is short, and a job like that wants a bit of doing. Added to which the really important job is to keep the GEM moving forward at that gratifying pace, which brings a batch of new readers to its banner every week. So correspondents who have asked me these questions about the stories from Number One will, I feel sure, accept my regrets in the right spirit.

THE LEVISON'S!

The admirers of Ernest and Frank Levison—and they are legion—will feel bucked with themselves this week, for Martin Clifford has obliged with a really first-class yarn in which these popular characters figure prominently. And while we are about it, let me add that there's a sequel to this week's fine story, so you Levison enthusiasts in particular should make certain of next week's GEM by ordering it now. 'Nuff said!

NEXT WEDNESDAY'S PROGRAMME.

"FOR HIS CHUM'S SAKE!"

By Martin Clifford.

This is the sequel to "The Loyalty of Levison" referred to in the Chat par above, and I feel convinced that every Gemite will make a point of reading it.

"BEYOND THE SILVER GLACIER!"

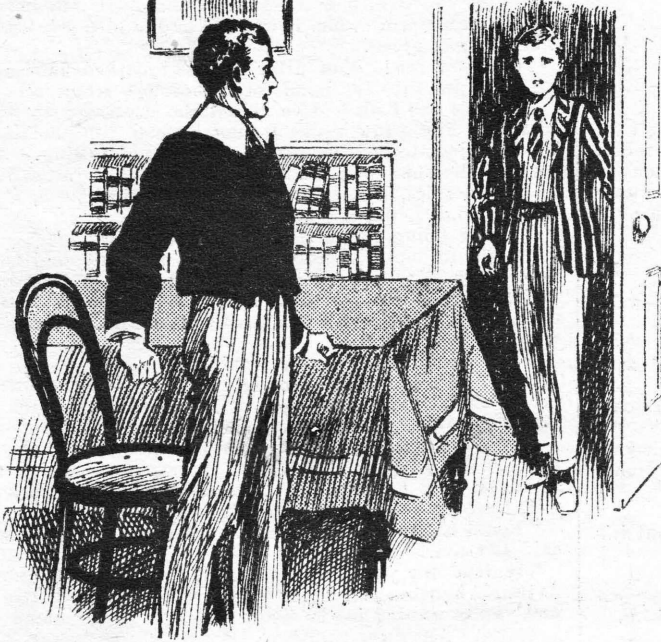
By Arthur S. Hardy.

There will be another instalment of this popular adventure serial in next week's issue, and, of course, another topping little poem from the versatile pen of the St. Jim's Rhymester entitled "Sports Day!" Chin, chin, chums, till next Wednesday.

Your Editor.

A FRIEND INDEED! The type of fellow that would risk expulsion to save his pal—the fellow who wouldn't whimper, whatever the consequences of his sacrifice—that's the type of fellow Ernest Levison is, staunch and generous-minded to a fault!

THE LOYALTY OF LEVISON!



A Powerful and
Dramatic Long Com-
plete Story of Tom
Merry & Co., at St.
Jim's, with Ernest
Levison playing a
principal part.

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

No Cricket for Cardew!

WHAT about you, Cardew?"

"Nothin' about me."

"Oh, don't be such a dashed slacker!" exclaimed Tom Merry impatiently.

Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth Form smiled.

He looked a picture of idle slackness as he sat on the bench under the elm, leaning back against the trunk, his hands behind his head. His elegant legs were stretched out before him idly and carelessly, but with a due regard to the crease in his trousers.

Levison and Clive stood near him. Both of them were in flannels, and Levison had a bat under his arm.

"Look here, Cardew," went on Tom Merry. "You look as if you're too dashed lazy to live; but you can play cricket if you choose. I'm asking you to play for the House this afternoon."

"Thanks no end!"

"A fellow ought to be glad to be useful to his House."

"I know."

"And a fellow ought to be jolly glad to be offered a place in the House eleven," went on Tom warmly.

"Quite."

"You're playing, then?"

Cardew shook his head.

"Excuse me—no."

Tom Merry, junior captain of the School House at St. Jim's, breathed hard. He felt a strong inclination to collar the slacker of the Fourth, and yank him bodily off the bench. Cardew read the thought in his face and smiled again.

"Don't, old bean," he said. "It's too warm for exertion."

"You're doing nothing this afternoon, Cardew," said Levison of the Fourth, frowning. "You're bound to play."

"Can't be done, old scout."

"Why not?" demanded Levison.

"I've got an engagement."

Tom Merry set his lips. He could guess the nature of the engagement that claimed Cardew of the Fourth that afternoon.

"That's enough," he said, and he turned and walked away without wasting another word or look on Ralph Reckness Cardew. Sidney Clive followed him in the direction of the cricket ground.

Levison of the Fourth made a movement to follow, but he paused and turned back to Cardew.

The lounging junior gave him a careless glance through half-closed lids. Levison's eyes were keenly and intently on his face.

"Aren't you goin' along to Little Side?" asked Cardew lazily. "They'll be kickin' off—I mean pitchin' stumps—an' they'll want you."

"What's the trouble, Cardew?" asked Levison very quietly.

"Trouble?" repeated Cardew.

"Yes."

"Do I look as if I were in trouble?" yawned the dandy of the Fourth.

"To me—yes," said Levison. "You've given Tom Merry the impression that you're going out blagging this afternoon. You've made Clive think you're a dawdling slacker that ought to be kicked. But you can't fool me, Cardew. You've had something on your mind for days. You've landed yourself in trouble of some kind. What is it?"

Ralph Reckness Cardew sat upright and stared at Levison. He coloured a little, and then his handsome face broke into a grin.

"Ernest, old bean, you ought to be a jolly old detective," he said admiringly. "You read a fellow like a book. I'm really not a fellow to wear my heart on my sleeve for daws to peck at, and I like to let my little troubles blush unseen. I wish you weren't so deuced keen."

"I've known for several days that you had something on your mind," said Levison.

"Fancy that!" smiled Cardew.

"You admit it?"

"Dear man, it's no use tryin' to hide the painful truth from your penetratin' eyes. I've got somethin' on my mind."

"What is it?"

"My hat!" answered Cardew gravely.

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Levison stared at him for a moment, and then knitted his brows. He was not in a mood for Cardew's jests.

"Does that mean that you won't tell me?" he asked gruffly.

"Why should I?" drawled Cardew. "You're a good pal, Ernest, old bean; too good a pal to drag into my disreputable troubles. Run along and play cricket, and leave me to bear my little worries alone."

"Is it serious?"

"More or less."

"Not money?" asked Levison.

Cardew laughed lightly.

"How could it be money?" he asked. "Ain't I the favourite grandson of a wealthy peer, and doesn't he make me an allowance that's too liberal to do any fellow good, and doesn't he weigh in with tips to such an extent that it makes my affectionate relatives gnash their teeth with envy? How could I be short of money?"

"What's the time?" asked Levison quietly.

Cardew started a little.

"Time for you to be on Little-Side, if you don't want Thomas to rag you," he answered.

"Will you tell me the time?"

"Look round at the clock-tower, old bean, an' save me the trouble of draggin' out my watch."

"I thought so," said Levison, in the same quiet tone.

"What have you done with your watch, Cardew?"

"So you've noticed it," smiled Cardew, unmoved.

"It's gone, old thing; but what's the odds—watches were made to go."

"You've sold your gold watch?"

"Not at all. I've parted with it temporarily, but it's bein' taken good care of by a relative."

"A relative?" repeated Levison.

"My uncle!" explained Cardew gravely.

"You've been to a pawnbroker!" exclaimed Levison.

"Guilty, my lord!"

Ernest Levison's face, which did not often show emotion, was very distressed now. For several days he had suspected that the reckless scrapegrace of the Fourth had landed himself in trouble—as had happened before frequently enough. But Cardew's cool, flippant manner had half-deceived him. The dandy of the Fourth was not, as he had said, a fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve. Neither was he the fellow to ask for help when his reckless folly landed him into difficulties.

That his present difficulties were great was clear enough. He would not lightly have parted with the watch that had been a birthday present from his grandfather, Lord Reckness. Evidently the scrapegrace had been "plunging" more recklessly than was his wont.

Cardew smiled at the expression on Levison's face.

"Dear man, don't worry," he said. "It's all serene. If you insist upon knowin' how the matter stands, I've been in it rather deep. I happened on an entertainin' fellow who plays poker much better than I do. Ever played poker, Ernest, in those jolly old days when you were the hardest case at St. Jim's? It's a great game—the quickest known way of gettin' rid of one's superfluous cash. I got rid of mine so fast it almost made my head swim. But the gent was accommodatin'; he was willin' to play for paper when the ready ran out. Hinc illae lacrymae, or, in common or garden English, hence these tears, old thing. I rather wish he hadn't been so dashed accommodatin', though it was agreeable at the time."

"How much are you in for?"

"A mere trifle of twenty pounds."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Levison, utterly aghast.

"Now I'm shockin' and alarmin' you!" sighed Cardew. "Well, you would have it, you know. I wasn't goin' to tell you anythin'."

"I can help you out," said Levison. "I guessed it was this, and—"

"I knew you'd say that if I told you the trouble," smiled Cardew. "One reason why I didn't tell you. I'm not plunderin' my friends because I've got into a hole. Besides, it's all right—I've parted with some pretty but useless articles of personal adornment, and I'm prepared to look the whole world in the face, for I owe not any man, like the jolly old blacksmith in the

poem—as soon as I've handed over the proceeds to Mr. Tapp."

Levison started violently.

"Tapp! Do you mean Tickey Tapp?"

"I believe that's the gent's name. I believe you used to know him," grinned Cardew. "He asked me after you, and I thought he was goin' to have a fit when I told him you were now a reformed character and never looked on the wine when it was red or the billiards-table when it was green."

"Oh, you ass! You utter fool!" breathed Levison. "You've got into the hands of a thorough scoundrel!"

"What's the odds? I've raised the necessary to pay him off. For a few weeks I shall have to tell the time by the clock-tower, or depend on you, old thing. As for my diamond pin, diamond pins aren't a necessity of life—besides, D'Arcy says they're not good form, and D'Arcy knows, doesn't he?"

"You're going to see the man this afternoon?"

"Right in once! Merely to pay off my little debt and to recover the little bit of writin' I gave him, after which I shall drop Mr. Tapp like a hot potato. He's an entertainin' gent, but I don't really like him. I suspect that he doesn't wash."

Levison's face was deeply troubled.

"So that's my reason for lettin' down Thomas over the cricket," yawned Cardew. "It's hard cheese, for I really should like to play cricket this jolly afternoon. I'm really keen on it. But it can't be helped. At three o'clock Mr. Tapp will be waitin' to see me in Pepper's Paddock, and I mustn't let him down. So the cricket will have to go. What a life!"

"You'd better see the man and get clear, if you can," said Levison. "I only hope—"

"Waitin' for you, Levison!" said the cheery voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The New House are battin', and you're wanted in the field, old chap. Twot along!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass on Cardew.

"Comin' to see the ewicket?" he asked.

"Just what I should like more than anythin' else in the wide world, dear man!" answered Cardew.

"Come on, then!" said Gussy cheerily.

"Only I've got another engagement," said Cardew regretfully. "But I may be back in time to see you bat, Gussy. If not, I'll look in at Pepper's Farm—and see much the same thing."

"Eh! What?"

"Duck's eggs, I mean."

"I regard you as a sillay ass, Cardew. Come on, Levison—don't waste time talkin' to that slackah!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched Levison off. Cardew watched them go with a smile on his face. But as they disappeared from sight behind the old elms the smile faded and a thoughtful, almost harassed look took its place. Cardew's cool and nonchalant manner hid a deep-seated trouble from the eyes of friends and foes, but he could not hide it from himself.

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble in the Third!

"THERE'S a House match—"

"Bother the House match!"

"But my major—"

"Blow your major!"

"Look here—" began Frank Levison indignantly.

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor and Reggie Manners simultaneously.

"But—"

"Now, you look here, young Levison!" said D'Arcy minor, wagging an admonitory forefinger at Frank Levison. "We know all about your major. We're willing to admit that Levison of the Fourth is the best thing going in the elderly brother line, that he's the best cricketer St. Jim's ever turned out, and that watching him at cricket is a sight for sore eyes. We admire him no end—and we're fed-up with him! Take my tip and leave off bunging your major at your pals!"

"But—" urged Frank.

"Shut it!" suggested Manners minor.

In the Third Form of St. Jim's the manners and customs were not Chesterfieldian. Third Form men said



Tickey Tapp held out a grubby hand. "Shell out!" he said contemptuously. "I've got you where I want you, and you're going to dance to my tune. Now—oh!" He broke off with a howl of pain as Cardew, his teeth set and his eyes blazing, struck him full in the face with his clenched fist. (See Chapter 3.)

what they thought with frankness—sometimes quite painful frankness.

"We're fed-up with your major," went on Reggie. "I've got a major in the House match this afternoon, but I'm not going to watch him. Wally's got a major in the House match, but he's not trying to drag all the Third down to Little Side to see Gussy bag duck's eggs for the House. And you're jolly well not going to, either—see? Blow your major!"

"That's right—blow him!" said Wally of the Third. "And now come along, young Levison, now we've settled about your major."

"But we haven't settled—"

"Don't I keep on telling you that we're not going to watch any rotten House match!" exclaimed Wally D'Arcy, exasperated. "When they play some of the Third in the House matches, well and good. Until then they can go and eat coke! We're going down to Pepper's Pond, and you're coming along with us."

"We can have old Pepper's boat," said Reggie.

"But I'd like to watch the match," said Frank Levison wistfully. "My major is worth watching at cricket. We can pick up tips from him."

"You'll pick up a tip from me, and it will be the tip of my boot, if you don't ring off about your major!" said Wally darkly.

"But I'd really like—"

"Cheese it!" said Reggie.

"Look here, we'll go and see them begin, if you like," said Wally in a burst of generosity. "We'll watch the start and then get off to Pepper's Pond. Is it a go?"

"You and your major!" said Reggie Manners derisively.

Frank Levison coloured.

His attachment to his major, Levison of the Fourth, was rather a jest in the Third Form. His chum Reggie certainly was not distinguished by any great attachment to his major, Manners of the Shell. And if Wally of the Third was deeply attached to his major, the one

and only Arthur Augustus, no one would have suspected it from his manner towards that elegant youth. But it was useless to point out to Frank—as his devoted chums often did—that family affection was bad form at a public school. Frank was the most good-natured and easy-going fag in the Third, but he could be as firm as a rock when he liked. Levison of the Fourth was something like a paragon in his eyes, and he made no secret of the fact.

"Well, let's see the start," he said.

"Oh blow!" said Reggie.

The three minors walked down to Little Side, where the junior House match was beginning. Rather to Frank's disappointment the School House side were in the field, and Figgins and Redfern were batting for the New House. Frank had wanted to see Ernest Levison piling up runs for his House.

"There's your major—standing like a sack of coke in the field," remarked Reggie.

"He's not standing like a sack of coke, you young ass!" exclaimed Frank indignantly.

Reggie chuckled. It was always easy—and generally amusing—to "draw" Frank on the subject of his idolised major.

"Looks as if he's going to sleep," said Reggie Manners.

"Fathead!"

"I don't think much of your major's form, Frank," said Wally of the Third critically. "Look at that!"

Figgins had hit the ball away, and it looked like a catch for Levison in the field. Monty Lowther, who had a chance, left it to Levison, who was nearer. Every School House man on the ground expected to see Levison bag the ball and put Figgins out. Instead of which Levison of the Fourth seemed to pull himself out of a brown study too late—his grasp missed the whizzing ball, and the batsman got safely home before Manners of the Shell captured it and sent it in.

"Call that cricket?" inquired Reggie Manners. Frank flushed with annoyance. Several of the fieldsmen stared curiously at Levison of the Fourth, surprised by his clumsiness.

"Wake up, old man!" Clive called out to him.

Levison's face was red.

"Look here, we don't want to hang about watching Levison major muffing catches," said Manners minor. "Let's get off."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Frank.

"Now you're getting ratty," said Reggie.

"Who's ratty?" Frank's tones were very ratty indeed.

"You are!" said Reggie coolly.

"Look here, young Manners—"

"Well, you look here, young Levison—"

"Order!" said Wally of the Third authoritatively.

"Don't you two kids begin ragging. Now, we've seen the match start, so let's get off. Come on, you two!"

Wally of the Third and Reggie Manners started. Levison minor lingered a few moments, his eyes on his major. He could see that Ernest Levison was out of sorts, for some reason; it was very unusual for Levison to be clumsy on the cricket field. Apparently Levison had been thinking about some matter other than the House match. But he pulled himself together and looked alert enough, after that one muffed catch.

Wally and Reggie shouted to their chum from the distance, and Frank turned away reluctantly at last and joined them. He would greatly have preferred to watch the innings through; but his chums were quite uninterested in the performance of Levison major, as they had informed him with the candour of the Third Form. The three minors went out together and headed down the lane for Pepper's Paddock, across which lay their route to Pepper's Pond.

On Pepper's Pond was an ancient boat, which had seen better days, and seen the last of them long ago. But it was sheer joy to Wally & Co. to "muck about," as they elegantly expressed it, in that leaky old tub on the pond. Wally and Reggie looked very cheery and bright, but there was rather a thoughtful look on Frank Levison's face. He was still thinking of his major, and wondering why Ernest was out of sorts that afternoon.

The three fags followed the path through the untidy, weedy paddock. Everything on Mr. Pepper's little estate was untidy and weedy. The scent of a powerful cigar struck them as they threaded their way among the trees on the edge of the paddock, and they glanced round at a man who was leaning on a gnarled oak. He was a horsey-looking man in riding clothes, with a puffed, pimply face that told of late hours and reckless living. He glanced carelessly at the three schoolboys as they passed him, and then his eyes became fixed on Frank Levison's face with a stare of interest. It seemed as if he recognised the fag, though Frank was unaware of ever having seen the sporting-looking man before.

"Hold on, young 'uns!" said the man, taking the cigar from his mouth as the fags passed him. "Haven't I seen you before somewhere, kid?"

His eyes were on Levison minor's face with a very penetrating look.

"Not that I know of," answered Frank curtly.

"Isn't your name Levison?"

Frank started a little.

"Yes," he said. "I don't know you."

"You're like your brother," said the man, with a grin. "It's the likeness I noticed, I suppose."

Frank flushed hotly as Wally of the Third and Reggie Manners exchanged grinning glances. It was plain enough that this disreputable-looking fellow was some acquaintance of Ernest Levison's old days—the days when he had been a hard case. Frank did not like being reminded of that time, and he gave Mr. Tickey Tapp an angry look.

"You don't know my brother!" he snapped.

Tickey Tapp laughed.

"It's not very long since I knew him very well," he said.

"Well, you don't know him now!" said Frank, and he turned his back on the man and walked on quickly.

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Wally and Reggie followed him, still grinning. Tickey Tapp stared after them, scowled, and resumed smoking his cigar.

"I say, I've seen that outsider before," said Reggie Manners. "He was loafing outside the Green Man when I passed one day. I say, he's waiting there for somebody."

"Looks like it," said Wally. "I hope it isn't a St. Jim's man."

"Frank's major, perhaps!" suggested Reggie brightly. The three minors had reached the edge of the pond when Reggie made that cheery remark. Frank turned on him with a blaze in his eyes that made Manners minor stare.

"You little rotter!" exclaimed Frank.

"Eh? What?"

"How dare you say such a thing?" exclaimed Frank passionately. "You know jolly well that my brother has nothing to do with those loafers at the Green Man."

"Steady on, old hoss!" admonished Wally. "Don't get your rag out, young Levison!"

"I won't let him say rotten things about my major!"

"Blow your major!" said Reggie angrily. "I'm fed up with your major. Your major has seen the Green Man crowd often enough in his time, if he isn't seeing them to-day. He was jolly nearly sacked once for it, too, when the Head found him out."

Frank Levison clenched his hands.

"That's enough!" he said, between his teeth. "If you can't be decent, Reggie, you don't want my company!"

And Frank turned and walked away.

"Come back, young Levison!" roared Wally.

Frank did not heed. His face was pale with anger and resentment as he tramped away across the field beyond the pond.

"Silly young ass!" commented Reggie.

"Come back!" yelled Wally.

But Levison minor did not even turn his head.

"Now you've done it, Reggie, you young 'ass!" said Wally gruffly. "Why the dickens can't you let Franky's major alone? You know as well as I do that he's potty about his major."

"I'm sick of his major," said Reggie sulkily. "Besides, I was only joking."

"You shouldn't joke about Franky's major. Still, I must say I'm a bit sick of his major, too," said Wally. "Let's get that boat out. Frank will come back when he's got over his tantrums."

But Frank Levison did not come back, and his chums "mucked about" with Pepper's old boat through the sunny afternoon and did not see Levison minor again.

CHAPTER 3.

In the Toils!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW sauntered away from the school gates, with his hands in his pockets, and a bored expression on his handsome face, looking the laziest and idlest fellow in all Sussex that afternoon. He nodded nonchalantly to two or three St. Jim's fellows whom he passed in the lane. The handsome, well-dressed fellow looked as if he had not a care in the world. But in Cardew's face appearances were very deceitful. For all his nonchalant looks there was black care at his heart.

Many times had the scapegrace's careless folly landed him into trouble. But his luck had always held good; somehow or other he had always pulled through. This time the trouble was more serious than it had been before. For the money he had lost, in gambling with Tickey Tapp, Cardew cared little. But to raise the sum he still owed the man he had been driven almost to the end of his tether.

Still, he had the money in his pocket now, so far as that went. What weighed most upon his mind was the fact that he had given the "bit of writing" to Tickey Tapp. Never before, in all his reckless career, had Cardew been guilty of such folly as that. He wondered contemptuously at his own fatuous folly as he thought of it.

That I O U, signed with his initials, was enough—

more than enough—to get him expelled from St. Jim's if it was seen by his headmaster. Cardew found plenty of excuses for his own conduct, and his friends found some excuses for him; but the Head of St. Jim's would have found no excuse whatever for a fellow who was guilty of gambling with a bad character outside the school. If Dr. Holmes' eyes had rested upon that "bit of writing," as Tickey Tapp called it, the result would have been the "sack," short and sharp, for Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Certainly Cardew did not suppose that that paper was likely ever to meet Dr. Holmes' eyes. But its mere existence was a danger to him, and a deep anxiety on his mind. He was feverishly anxious to settle with the sharper and get that telltale paper back into his own hands. With great difficulty, and by means which even his careless mind had to acknowledge were degrading, he had raised the necessary sum of money. He lounged along idly to the place of appointment, lazy and carefree to all eyes that saw him, striving to conceal even from himself the fact that his heart was heavy with anxiety. But every now and then, in the solitary lane, a dark and harassed expression settled like a cloud on his face—to vanish instantly at the sight of a passer-by.

He was feeling an uneasiness that he could scarcely define. There had been a strange expression on Tickey Tapp's face when Cardew had last parted with him—a mocking gleam in the sharper's eyes. When he remembered it Cardew felt an irrepressible disquietude. The man was a blackguard—an unscrupulous outsider. Probably—in fact, almost certainly—he had cheated the young rascal who had gambled with him. That did not matter—Cardew thought little of money. But so long as the man held that paper, Cardew was in his power. The scapegrace of St. Jim's, who had hardly known the meaning of the word fear, had been driven to realise that there was something very like fear in his breast now. Fear—of a blackguardly outsider who was hardly worth a look of scorn from a decent fellow. Cardew was shamed to the very soul at the thought of it.

He entered the paddock by a gap in the ragged fence, and looked round in the clump of trees for Tickey Tapp. That was the spot where he had arranged to meet the man, to settle his debt, and to have done with him.

"'Arternoon, sir!"

Tickey Tapp detached himself from the tree-trunk, and removed the half-smoked cigar from his mouth. He gave the St. Jim's junior a familiar nod, which brought a glitter of anger to Cardew's eyes. On the afternoon when he had played cards with Tickey Tapp, in the back parlour of the Green Man, Tapp's manner had been civil, deferential, almost fawning. There was nothing deferential about him now.

But Cardew repressed his deep anger at the man's insolent familiarity. He could not afford to quarrel with the man who held, for the moment, his fate in his grubby hands.

"Hallo!" said Cardew easily. "You haven't had to wait, I hope."

"Always was an early bird," said Tickey Tapp, with a smile. "Glad to see you again, Master Cardew. I hope his lordship's well."

Cardew stared at the man. Tickey Tapp was was not a regular habitue of the Green Man; only on rare occasions did he honour the neighbourhood with his presence—probably on occasions when he had made other neighbourhoods too hot for him. Cardew had met him as a stranger, and knew little or nothing of him, and supposed that Tickey Tapp was in a like state of indifference and ignorance as regarded

Cardew himself. But the sharper's words enlightened him.

"What do you mean?" snapped Cardew.

"Lord Reckness, your honoured grandfather, sir," said Tickey Tapp, with a grin. "I had the pleasure of seeing his lordship once, at the races, a long time ago. He was a sporting gentleman in his time, sir. Runs in the family—what?"

For no consideration whatever would Cardew have discussed Lord Reckness with the dingy, disreputable sharper. But he repressed the contemptuous rebuke that sprang to his lips. It was one of the penalties of his own shady conduct that he had to be civil to this outsider, whose mere presence filled him with loathing.

"I've got the money," he said coldly.

"Twenty pun?"

"Exactly."

Mr. Tapps' eyes glittered.

"You're a lucky young gentleman," he said. "I wonder 'ow many schoolboys could raise twenty pun at a few days' notice, now?"

"That's neither here nor there," said Cardew. "I've got it, and here it is. You've got my paper with you?"

He tried to speak casually, but, in spite of himself, a note of anxiety crept into his voice.

"The bit o' writing!" said Mr. Tapp reflectively.

"Yes, yes! Hand it over, and here's your money! I'm in rather a hurry," said Cardew. "I've got to get back to the school!"

Tickey Tapp replaced his cigar in his mouth and blew out a little cloud of smoke. There was a derisive gleam in his eyes as he watched Cardew's face, in which uneasy anxiety was growing.

"I'm waiting," said Cardew.

"Come, there ain't such a 'urry!" said Mr. Tapp. "You wasn't in such a 'urry the other day at the Green Man."

"I'm in a hurry now," said Cardew icily.

Tickey Tapp smiled.

"We're wastin' time," said Cardew; and he was enraged to realise that his voice was husky. "Come, don't beat about the bush, Mr. Tapp. I've got to get back. Give me my paper."

"I've been thinking about that," said Mr. Tapp, slowly and deliberately, "and my idea is that that bit of writin' is worth more than twenty pun, Master Cardew."

Cardew's heart beat.

"How can it be worth more than face value?" he asked, as calmly as he could.

"Lots of papers are worth more than face value," said Tickey Tapp, with a hoarse chuckle. "I had a cheque once in my hands that was made out for ten pun. First and last, it was worth more'n a hundred to me. You see, the covey had signed the wrong name to it."

Blackmail!

That word shot into Cardew's tormented mind.

He realised now that that was what he had been dreading. Unconsciously, or half-consciously, he had feared exactly this.

"Now, you've given me a little bit of writin' for twenty pun," went on Tickey Tapp, in an argumentative tone. "That paper's mine now, and I ain't letting it go at the same figure. I'm a poor man, and I've had hard luck on the races. Now, you're a wealthy young gentleman, you are, and the grandson of a rich nobleman. Why, a hundred pun wouldn't be a lot to a young gent like you."

Cardew tried to laugh.

"I've never heard of a schoolboy who could command a hundred pounds, Mr. Tapp," he said.

"Not all at once," agreed Tickey Tapp. "I ain't an unreasonable man, and I don't expect that. But little by little—what? A tenner here, and a fiver there. You get me?"

Cardew stood very still. His eyes were on the rascal, and he was measuring the man with his eye. But Tickey Tapp, bloated as he was with strong liquors and late hours, was far too hefty a man for a schoolboy to tackle with any chance of success.

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There was a long minute of silence.

"I've raised the sum I owe you, Mr. Tapp," said Cardew at last. "You can take it or leave it, in exchange for my paper. You will not get a single shillin' more from me."

"That's the talk, is it?" said Mr. Tapp. "And suppose I call on your 'eadmaster with this little bit of writin' to show him?"

"In that case, you will get nothing."

"But what will you get?" grinned Tickey Tapp. "You'll get the order of the boot, Master Cardew. And what will his lordship say when you go 'ome? And your uncle, Lord Lilburn? What?"

"You've been gettin' information about me, I see," said Cardew, between his teeth.

"That's my business," said Tickey Tapp coolly. "Do you think this is the first time I've played this game?"

"I suppose not—you blackmailing scoundrel!" said Cardew, his anger flaming out.

"Better language, please!" said Tickey Tapp, threateningly. "You'll 'and me that twenty on account, young feller-me-lad. I'll wait a fortnight for the next tenner!"

"Not a shillin' unless you hand over the paper."

"I ain't doing that in a hurry," grinned Tickey Tapp. "Why, you young fool, I was pulling your leg and leading you on, jest to get a bit of writin' out of you."

"I can see that—now," said Cardew. "You're right in callin' me a fool. But I'm not quite fool enough to be looted by a blackmailer, Mr. Tapp. You'll get nothin' from me except in exchange for my paper!"

Tickey Tapp held out a grubby hand. "Shell out!" he said laconically and contemptuously.

"I've got you where I want you, my fine fellow, and you're going to dance to my tune! Now— Oh!" roared Tickey Tapp, suddenly, as Cardew, his teeth set and his eyes blazing, struck him full in the face with his clenched fist.

The blow, with all Cardew's strength behind it, sent the sharper reeling. He crashed on the ground, with a howl and an oath.

Tickey Tapp lay panting and gasping. Cardew gave him one bitter look, and jumped back through the gap of the fence into the lane.

Tickey Tapp did not follow him. But Cardew heard the shouted threats of the sharper as he walked back towards St. Jim's, his face white, and despair in his heart.

CHAPTER 4. In the Depths!

"**H**OW'S it goin', old bean?" Sidney Clive glanced round in surprise at Cardew's voice. Clive was standing before the pavilion watching the opening of the School House innings. Tom Merry had opened the innings with Levison of the Fourth.

"Hallo! You back?" asked Clive.

"Turned up like the bad penny in the jolly old proverb," said Cardew easily. "Ain't you glad to see me here?"

"Yes," said Clive, with a smile. "I thought—"

He paused.

"Dear man, I tore myself away from fascinatin' company, to get back here and watch your deeds of derring-do," said Cardew. "I simply couldn't keep away."

"You've been in a row?"

"What on earth makes you think that?"

"Your knuckles."

Cardew glanced at the knuckles of his right hand. He had hardly been conscious of the force of the blow he had given Tickey Tapp. But the force of it had left very plain signs on his knuckles, almost as if he had jammed his fist against a stone wall.

He laughed lightly.

"I knocked my hand against somethin' hard," he said. "But you haven't answered my question. How's it goin'?"

"New House all down for ninety," said Clive. "We shall beat that in our innings."

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"Levison takin' their wickets right and left, I suppose?"

"Well, no; Levison seemed rather off his form," said Clive. "His bowling wasn't so good as usual, and his fielding was a bit off colour. I suppose Levison isn't bothering about anything, is he?"

"Why, what could he be bothering about?"

"I don't know; but he seemed to be worried over something," said Clive. "Didn't seem as if he could put his mind into the game, somehow."

Cardew stared away at the batsmen. They were running.

"He seems all right now," he remarked.

"Yes; I hope he will knock up some runs for the House," said Clive, his eyes on the white-clad figures rapidly crossing the pitch.

"Levison seemed vewy off colour, you know," chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He muffed some catches, Cardew. But a man can't always be at the top notch. He is a wippin' playah as a wule. Tom Mewwy made wathah a mistake in puttin' him on to bowl, I think. I offhahed to take the New House wickets, but Tom Mewwy did not seem to see it."

"Oh, my hat! There goes Levison!" exclaimed Blake of the Fourth.

"Bai Jove!"

Levison's bat was almost on the crease when the ball came in from Figgins of the New House, straight as a bullet from a rifle, and his wicket was knocked to pieces.

"How's that?" chortled Figgins.

"Out!"

Levison stared at his wrecked wicket, the colour deepening in his face. He was out for a single run.

Tom Merry, who had made his end good, glanced at him along the pitch. He could not quite understand Levison that afternoon. One of the most steady and reliable men in his team seemed to be going all to pieces in the House match.

"That's wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Levison carried out his bat. "The chap's not fit. Weally, he ought not to have played."

Cardew bit his lip.

He wondered whether it was what he had told Levison, just before the match, that was worrying the cricketer and spoiling his form for the game. Yet why should it? Cardew had been in trouble often enough before. Levison was used to that; it was nothing new. Levison could not know in what terrible trouble his chum was on this occasion.

"Hard luck, old man," said Clive, as Levison came up to the pavilion and Manners of the Shell went out to take his place.

Levison nodded without speaking.

"Wuff on the House, old bean," remarked Arthur Augustus. "I don't want to wub it in, Levison, but we weally expected somethin' bettah frowm you."

"I know I've done rottenly," muttered Levison.

"Fortunately there's my innin's still to come," said D'Arcy kindly. "Don't wowwy, it will be all wight."

Levison smiled faintly.

"What's the matter with you, Levison?" asked Jack Blake bluntly. "You've been putting up a game like Grundy of the Shell, or Baggy Trimble."

"As bad as that?" said Levison.

"Jolly near, anyway."

"Sorry!"

Levison went into the pavilion. He had not seemed to notice Cardew standing with the cricketers. But he came out in a few minutes and tapped the dandy of the Fourth on the arm.

"You've got back," he said in a low voice.

"As you see, old bean."

"Come away. I shan't be wanted here again; it's a single innings match," said Levison.

"Don't you want to watch it through?"

"I want to speak to you."

"Any old thing," yawned Cardew, and he strolled away from the cricket ground with his chum.

His manner was light and careless, and would certainly have deceived any eye but Levison's. But Ernest Levison was not to be deceived.

They strolled under the old elms, Cardew whistling



Levison's bat was almost on the crease when the ball came in from Figgins and knocked the wicket to pieces. "How's that?" "Out!" Levison stared at his wrecked wicket, the colour deepening in his face. (See Chapter 4.)

softly a snatch from an opera. Levison waited for him to speak, but he did not speak.

"You've seen that man?" asked Levison at last abruptly.

"I've seen him."

"Is it all right?"

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"I'm asking you whether it is."

"Dear man, I'm fed-up with the subject," smiled Cardew. "I never meant to tell you anythin' about it, but you are so deuced keen. I've seen the man, an' seen him for the last time, I hope. Blot him out."

Levison stopped and fixed his eyes on Cardew.

"It's been on my mind all through the game," he said. "I couldn't help worrying. I knew you'd been playing the fool lately, Cardew; but I thought it was only your usual foolery—"

"Thanks."

"I thought you'd got yourself mixed up again with the mob at the Green Man. I never knew till this afternoon that you'd seen Tickey Tapp at all—never knew the man was in the neighbourhood. If I'd known that I might have been able to keep you out of it. Cardew, I'm uneasy, I'm scared for you. I knew that man once—I know his sort. It's been on my mind ever since you let out his name. It's bad enough consorting with those rogues Banks and Joliffe and the rest, but this man Tapp is a dangerous character. I believe he's been in prison; I know he ought to have been. If you've got into his hands—"

Levison paused.

"You knew him in your jolly old days before I came to St. Jim's, when you were the hardest case in the school!" smiled Cardew.

Ernest Levison winced.

"I did," he said quietly. "He cleared out, and I never supposed he would come back here again. Cardew, tell me how the matter stands. You don't understand your danger in dealing with a man of that sort."

"Don't I?" murmured Cardew.

"Is it all clear?" demanded Levison. "Don't be a fool, Cardew. Tell me how the matter stands, and I may be able to help you."

Cardew stood silent for a moment or two. He was strongly tempted to tell his chum everything; the burden of the secret was heavy on his mind. But he shook his head. He was "for it," he knew that; the penalty of his reckless folly had to be paid, and there was no escape for him. But he would face it alone. Levison could not help him, and he would not drag Levison into it. What he had brought upon himself he had the courage to face; he only hoped that the blow would fall quickly and end the suspense. It was hard to keep up care-free appearances with ruin staring him in the face—ruin and disgrace that would cling to him all through life. But at least he would not drag his loyal friend into his disaster.

"Well?" said Ernest Levison after a long pause.

Cardew laughed lightly.

"My dear man, you're makin' a mountain out of a

molehill—a poor little molehill," he said. "Do you think I'm a chap unable to take care of himself? It's all serene."

"If you mean that, Cardew—" said Levison doubtfully.

"Every jolly old syllable! I've been on the rocks before and got off again right side up." Cardew gave a deep yawn. "Run along and watch the other strenuous youths pilin' up runs, old bean. I think I'll take a little rest on the study sofa; I've had quite a long walk."

And Cardew, with a cheery nod, turned away and walked across to the House. Levison stood gazing after him doubtfully.

Ralph Reckness Cardew went into the House and lOUNGED up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage. He entered Study No. 9 and shut the door. Then the careless indifference dropped from his face like a mask.

He threw himself into the armchair, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and his face was grim and lined with care as he stared moodily across the room.

"What am I goin' to do?" he muttered.

He had answered the demands of the blackmailer with a blow—and he did not regret it. Tickey Tapp had refused to part with the paper, and it would have been futile to yield to his demands—he would still have refused to part with it at the finish. Cardew knew that. It was futile to be bled white by the rascal, with the danger still to face after all. If it was to come, let it come at once. The sooner it was over the better. But—

Cardew thought of his grandfather, old Lord Reckness—an exacting and selfish old man, but whose kindness and affection to his scapegrace grandson had never failed. How would he take a blow like this? His pride was great in his handsome grandson—and the boy was to return home disgraced, turned out of his school! Cardew thought of his uncle, Lord Lilburn, heir to the Reckness title and estates, who had always resented the old lord's affection for the son of his younger son; always resented the knowledge that Cardew was down in the old lord's will for a great sum that, in Lord Lilburn's opinion, could ill be spared from the estate. This would not be bad news for Lord Lilburn—or for other relatives who resented Cardew's influence over the rich old lord. They would make the most of it—they might even turn his grandfather against him, if the disgrace itself did not do that.

Yet that troubled Cardew little. He was thinking chiefly of the blow to the old man who was fond of him and proud of him, who cared for no other human being in the wide world, not even his eldest son and heir.

"What a fool I've been!" Cardew whispered to himself.

The old lord, half of whose time was spent on a bed of sickness, was to learn that his grandson had been expelled from school! Cardew shivered at the thought. Why had he not thought of this before?

It was too late—too late! Cardew could have groaned aloud as he thought of it. His handsome face grew haggard and worn.

The door opened suddenly.

Cardew sprang to his feet, as Ernest Levison stepped in. His eyes blazed with anger.

Levison had seen him—plunged in gloom and trouble, all disguise gone! Only for a moment, but he had seen him.

"Cardew—"

"What do you want? Can't you give a fellow a rest for a minute?" shouted Cardew furiously.

Levison did not answer. He gave the dandy of the Fourth a long look, and then quietly withdrew from the study and closed the door. His face was grim as he walked away.

All that Cardew would not tell him he knew now, knew from the haggard face he had seen for a moment. Cardew of the Fourth was at the end of his tether, deep in despair, and Ernest Levison knew it now.

Levison went out into the quad again. From the distance he heard a shout from the playing fields.

"Bravo, Tom! Good man!"

Tom Merry was still batting for his House, playing a great game, but Levison was not thinking of the
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House match now. Cricket was far from his thoughts. He walked away to the gates, and in a few minutes had left St. Jim's behind him.

CHAPTER 5.

Bad Luck for Levison!

"THAT rotter!" muttered Frank Levison.

His eyes gleamed at the sight of Tickey Tapp. Frank had not been enjoying his half-holiday. He had parted with his friends in anger, and he had not rejoined them. It was very unusual for the good-natured Frank to give way to feelings of anger or resentment; but there was one subject, at least, upon which he was sore and touchy. Levison of the Fourth had long ago redeemed his rather doubtful past; but fellows still remembered the time when Ernest Levison had been the hardest case at St. Jim's and had had more than one narrow-escape from expulsion. Any remembrance of that time was unpleasant enough to Frank, and any allusion to it stirred his ire. And Reggie Manners' mischievous suggestion that Tickey Tapp might have been waiting in the paddock for Levison of the Fourth had roused Frank's usually placid temper. Like the prophet of olden time, he was angry, and felt that he did well to be angry.

Still, it was disagreeable to have parted from his friends and to spend the afternoon "mooching" about by himself. Frank had rambled for a time in the fields and woods, and now he was returning to St. Jim's by a field path which led into Rylcombe Lane, intending to fill in the rest of the afternoon watching the House match. There would be solace in watching his admired major knocking up the runs for the School House.

As he turned into the lane he came in sight of Tickey Tapp.

The man was seated on a log beside the lane, under the trees, dabbing his nose with a grubby handkerchief, which came away red from the dabs. Mr. Tapp looked as if a vigorous fist had recently landed upon his evil countenance, as was indeed the case. He looked up at the sound of Frank's footsteps on the grass and scowled at the fag.

Frank passed him without a second glance. The sight of the evil face made him feel almost sick, with its reminder that this man had once been his brother's associate. He passed on down the lane, and a few moments later he started at the sight of Ernest Levison coming towards him. Levison of the Fourth saw his minor at the same moment, and a cloud came over his face.

"Why aren't you with your friends, Frank?" he asked, stopping.

"We—we had a bit of a row!" muttered Frank.

"You young ass! Go and make it up, then!" said Levison of the Fourth, with a smile. "You fags are always ragging about nothing!"

"You're not playing cricket?" asked Frank.

"I've played."

"But the game isn't over yet."

Levison laughed.

"Do you expect me to be first in and not out every time?" he asked. "I was bowled in the first over."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank. "I—I was coming back to watch your innings, Ernie."

"Run along and watch Tom Merry's—it's more worth watching."

Frank shook his head.

"If you're going for a walk I'll come with you, if—you don't mind," he said timidly.

"Better get along and see the cricket, kid," said Levison.

"You—you don't want me?" asked Frank.

"Yes, but I'm going somewhere. Cut off!"

Frank stood as if he had been rooted to the ground. He would not doubt his brother; but Reggie's words came back into his mind in spite of himself. Ernest did not want him—and he was going towards the spot where, a dozen yards away, Tickey Tapp sat on the log! Levison of the Fourth stared at his brother, perplexed by the distress in his face.

"What's the matter with you, Frank?" he asked.

"Ernie! You—you—" stammered Frank. "You—you're not—" His dismayed voice trailed away.

"Not what? What do you mean?"

Levison spoke a little testily.

"Nothing!" gulped Frank.

As he passed on his way Levison turned his head to gaze after his minor for a moment, perplexed. But he resumed his way at once, his eyes on the red chimneys of the Green Man Inn that showed over the leafy trees.

"Young Levison!"

Levison of the Fourth stopped at Tickey Tapp's voice. The ruffian left off dabbing his damaged nose to nod to the St. Jim's junior.

Ernest Levison drew a deep breath.

He had left the school to see this man on Cardew's account. He had been prepared to take the risk of calling in at the Green Man to see him. But he was glad enough to effect his purpose without going out of school bounds.

"Long time since I've seen you, Master Levison," said Tickey Tapp, with a grin. "You've forgotten all your old friends."

"You've been in the wars," remarked Levison, with a glance at Mr. Tapp's flaming nose.

The ruffian gritted his teeth.

"I've been punched," he said. "But the covey will pay for it—pay 'igh, too. Friend of yours, too, I think; I've seen you together. Birds of a feather, anyhow."

"Whom are you speaking of?" asked Levison carelessly.

"I fancy you know," grinned Tickey Tapp. "Young Cardew! Has he packed his box yet?"

"Why should he?" asked Levison, with a sinking of the heart.

"Because it's the boot for him," said Tickey Tapp, between his teeth. "Because he's punched my face, the young hound! That's why. I've got him in the hollow of my 'and, as I fancy you know. You ain't talking to me 'cause you fancy my conversation. You've come along on his business.

"Cardew doesn't know I've come," said Levison quietly. "But, as a matter of fact, I came along to see you if I could, Tickey. I knew Cardew was seeing you this afternoon. I hope everything's settled?"

"Did he tell you so?" sneered Tickey.

"He's told me nothing."

"Well, you'll know soon enough, and so will all your blinking school, when I send his paper to your 'eadmaster!" said Tickey Tapp viciously. "I told 'im the price had gone up, and he hit me in the face. That was his answer, that was. Well, let him wait till I put a spoke in his wheel. I'll make him squirm."

Levison stood looking at the rascal. He knew how the matter stood now; it was as he had suspected from the moment Cardew had told him the name of Tickey Tapp. He knew it was useless to argue with the scoundrel or to make any appeal to him; the man was a blackmailer by profession. Levison, in the old days, had known something of him and his ways.

"What do you want for the paper?" he asked.

"A hundred!" said Tickey Tapp coolly.

"You're mad!" muttered Levison.

"Not so mad as a feller who punches my face, when I can get him kicked out of his school!" jeered Tickey Tapp. "I dessay the old lord would pay twice as much to save his skin."

"More likely to hand you over to the police for blackmail," said Levison coldly.

"Well, I ain't seeing his lordship—I'm giving that young hound Cardew away to his 'eadmaster!" sneered Tapp. "If he's a friend of yours, as I fancy he is,

you tell him so. Tell him I'll give him one more chance. I'll wait for him in the paddock agin th' evening, and if he comes and treats a man civil, I'll give him time to raise the rest of the money. Twenty pun down, and the rest a fiver at a time. See? You tell Cardew that, and if you're his friend, persuade him to do the reasonable thing. I'd rather have the money than see him sacked."

Levison's eyes glistened.

"In the paddock this evening," he said quietly. He reflected for a moment. "Make it nine o'clock. If Cardew doesn't come, I will come."

"Not without the money," said Tickey Tapp threateningly.

"Not without the money," agreed Levison. "Twenty pounds."

"And the rest to foller." Tickey Tapp lighted a cigarette. "I'm a reasonable man, but I ain't letting go a good thing when I've got hold of it. I—"

"Levison!"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Levison.

It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House. The Housemaster was coming along from the village with his long strides, and as he came round the bend of the lane he almost ran into the junior. His glance fixed on Ernest Levison and Tickey Tapp, and his brow grew stern.

Levison's face was flooded with crimson.

"Levison!" Mr. Railton's voice was deep. "Go back to the school at once! Remain within gates till lock-up!"

"Yes, sir," said Levison, in a low voice.

His heart was almost sick within him as he went. He had taken the risk to help his chum in the hour of trouble, and the risk had materialised. He knew what his Housemaster must think of seeing him in talk with such a man as Tickey Tapp. He did not need to ask the man's name—Tickey's character was written all over his evil face.

Mr. Railton stood with his eyes fixed grimly on Tickey Tapp's face after Levison of the Fourth had gone.

Tickey Tapp backed away from him a little. Impudent rascal as he was, he did not care to meet the Housemaster's stern eyes.

"Who are you?" rapped out Mr. Railton.

"Name of Tapp," said Tickey.

"I think I have seen you before, loafing about a public-house," said the St. Jim's master. "Your face seems familiar. You were speaking to that boy belonging to the school where I am a master."

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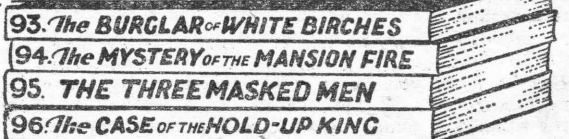
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"No 'arm in passing the time of day with a young gent," said Mr. Tapp defensively. "Asked him the time, I did."

"That is false," said the St. Jim's master. "You were in conversation with him."

"S'pose I was, then," sneered Tickey Tapp. "Can't a man speak to a covey if he chooses?"

"No," said Mr. Railton quietly; "not a man of your character. You look like a racecourse ruffian, and I have no doubt that that is what you are. I warn you to keep clear of boys belonging to St. Jim's."

"And if I don't, what then?" sneered Tickey.

The Housemaster made a step towards him.

"I shall make it a point to ascertain whether you do so or not," he said sternly, "and if you do not, I shall take measures to deal with you. I think it very probable that your record would not bear looking into by the police, for one thing; but I may take the simpler course of thrashing you."

"What! You dare to lay a 'and on me—" blustered Tickey Tapp.

"Bear in mind what I have told you," said Mr. Railton, "and now go!"

"I'll go when I choose."

Mr. Railton gripped his walking-cane, and stepped nearer to the ruffian. Tickey Tapp jumped away.

"I'm goin'!" he snarled.

And the rascal slouched away towards the Green Man, and Mr. Railton, frowning, followed Levison of the Fourth to the school.

CHAPTER 6.

Supper in Study No. 6!

"SUPPAH in No. 6," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Hear, hear!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice.

"The fact is, deah boys, I have had wathah a decent wemittance to-day," said the swell of St. Jim's, beaming, "and we are havin' wathah a spwead."

"A remittance couldn't be expended with a better object," said Tom Merry gravely.

"I was wathah undecided," confessed D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' of a new toppah. But Blake suggested puttin' it to the vote of the studay, and that seemed fair. Blake and Hewwies and Dig all voted for a spwead, so the majowity was against the toppah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We add three votes to the majority," said Monty Lowther. "At what hour does the great event come off?"

"What about nine o'clock, deah boys? Pwep will be oval, and there will be time befoah dorm."

"Good!" said Manners. "Count us in."

"I am goin' to ask some more chaps," said D'Arcy. "I was thinkin' of Levison and Clive and Cardew. Levison wathah let us down in the House match to-day, so—"

"So you are going to reward him with a feed?" asked Tom.

"Not exactly, deah boy—I mean, it will show him that there's no ill-feelin'," said D'Arcy. "As a mattah of fact, I was wathah watty with Levison at the time. We ought to have beaten the New House."

"We ought!" agreed Tom Merry.

"And we didn't, you know, owin' weally to Levison cwackin' up. We only wanted ten more wuns to win, and Levison ought to have been good for ten wuns. Howevah, we cannot expect to win ewevy House match. I think Levison feels it wathah. I saw him comin' into the House aftahwards, and he looked vevy down in the mouth."

"He didn't put up much of a game," said Tom. "But a fellow can't be at the top of his form all the time. No reason why he should look down in the mouth."

"But he does, you know. He looked weally wotten when I saw him. I am afwaid he is wathah upset by the wemark I made to him," said Arthur Augustus. "I weally did not mean to hurt his feelin's. But I'll make him come to the spwead, and it will be all right."

And the swell of St. Jim's ambled away to Study

No. 9, in the Fourth, where he found Levison, Clive and Cardew. It was time for prep, and Sidney Clive had sat down with his books. Levison had taken out his books, too, but he was not working. His face was very grave. Ralph Reckness Cardew reclined in his armchair, with a novel in his hands. He was not reading, but evidently he was not thinking of work.

"Trot in, old bean," he said, as the aristocratic countenance and gleaming eyeglass of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy appeared in the doorway of Study No. 9. To Arthur Augustus' innocent eyes, at least, Cardew was his usual nonchalant self.

"Busay, you mean?" inquired D'Arcy, as he came in.

"I'm getting busy," said Clive, with a smile. "Levison seems to be slacking like Cardew, for once."

"I want you thwee fellows to come to suppah aftah pwep, in Studay No. 6," said Arthur Augustus.

"Done!" said Clive, at once.

"Toppin' idea," assented Cardew. "Sort of farewell feast for poor little me, Gussy."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass in surprise on the dandy of the Fourth.

"You are not goin' away, Cardew?"

"I'm goin' to ask leave for a run home for a time," explained Cardew, urbanely. "My respected granddad, as you know, is a martyr to the gout. He's been rather bad lately, and it has occurred to me that I might be able to cheer him up a bit with my entertainin' and fascinatin' company."

"Bai Jove! It is wathah decent of you to think of that, Cardew!" said Arthur Augustus. "I twust the Head will give you leave for so vevy worthy a purpose."

"I trust so," said Cardew, gravely.

Levison gave his chum a quick look for a second. He understood at once. Cardew might or might not be concerned about old Lord Reckness; but his real object was to be off the scene when the blow fell. If he was to be "bunked" from St. Jim's, he preferred to be absent when the Head promulgated his sentence.

Cardew avoided Levison's eyes.

"So we'll come," he said. "Awfully kind of you to ask us, Gussy."

"Not at all, deah boy. You haven't spoken, Levison, but I twust you will come with your fwiends. Nine o'clock, in Studay No. 6."

Levison started a little.

"Sorry; I can't come," he said.

"Weally, Levison—"

"What rot!" said Clive. "Why can't you come, Ernest?"

"I twust, Levison, that we shall see you in the studay," said Arthur Augustus, gently. "I weally do not think that you should allow such a twifin' mattah to west on your mind to this extent."

Levison started again, violently.

"What? What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"I think my meanin' is cleah," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You must be an ass, you know, to think so much about a mere twifle."

Levison stared blankly at the swell of St. Jim's. There was one matter that was heavy on his mind; but surely Arthur Augustus could know nothing about Tickey Tapp.

"Will you tell me what you mean?" he asked, harshly. "Are you talking out of the back of your silly neck?"

"Weally, Levison—"

"What are you driving at?" snapped Levison, impatiently.

"What on earth has Levison got on his mind, Gussy?" asked Clive, in wonder. "What bee have you got in your bonnet now?"

"I was alluding to what happened this afternoon—"

"What do you know about that?" almost shouted Levison.

"Pway do not wear at me, Levison!" said D'Arcy, stiffly. "I dislike vevy much bein' woared at!"

"You silly ass—" Levison eyed the swell of St. Jim's as if he could eat him. "You know nothing about it—"

He broke off suddenly.

"I pwesume that I know about it, Levison, as I was pwesent."

"You—you—you were present?"

"Yaas, wathah."

"You were not present. What do you mean, if you mean anything?" snapped Levison. "You were still at the cricket then."

"Eh? Of course I was at the cwicket. So were you."

"Wha-a-at?"

"And I twust, Levison, that if you are feelin' wotten or upset ovah the wemark I made about your wotten innin's—"

Levison stared blankly at the swell of St. Jim's for a moment. Then he burst into a laugh.

"Oh, that!" he exclaimed. "Is that what you were speaking of?"

"Yaas, wathah! What the mcwwy dickens do you suppose I was speakin' of?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "I wepeat, Levison, that I wegard it as wathah fatheaded of you to keep up a gwudge ovah a wemark I made on Little Side. You played wottenly, and I said so. But, aftah all, it was the fact, you know, and weally—"

"My dear ass, if you made a remark, I've forgotten that you made one," said Levison, laughing.

"Bai Jove! Then that is not what you were lookin' so down in the mouth about?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not quite."

"Vewy good, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus placidly. "It is all wight, then, and you will come to the spwead in Studay No. 6?"

"No; I can't come," said Levison. "I've got something on hand this evening. Thanks, all the same."

"You are suah you are not feelin' watty ovah what I said—"

"Oh, quite!"

"You see, your innin's weally was wathah wotten, and my wemark was quite justified."

"Bother your remark, and bother you!" said Levison. "You're like the little brook, Gussy—you go on for ever!"

"I am sowwy if my observations bore you, Levison," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in his most stately manner. "If you do not care to come to the spwead, Levison, of course you will please yourself. You two fellows are comin'?"

"Count us in," said Cardew; and Clive nodded.

"Wight-ho, then!"

And Arthur Augustus retired gracefully from the study. Both Clive and Cardew regarded Levison rather curiously; but, affecting not to notice it, he began his preparation.

Cardew sat idly, with no thought of work in his mind. Levison, for once, worked reluctantly, finding it hard to put his mind into it. He had fully expected to be sent for to the Housemaster's study, to explain to Mr. Railton. But he had not been sent for. He wondered whether the Housemaster intended to pass over the incident without remark, or whether it was to come later. Levison's reputation as a steady and decent fellow, though not of long date, probably stood him in good stead now; but he knew that his Housemaster could not have forgotten the time when his reputation was of a very different kind. It was likely enough that, seeing him in talk with a character like Tiekey Tapp, Mr. Railton had felt a misgiving that he was slipping back into his old ways. Still, some hours had passed, and no message from the School-House master had reached him.

It was an unpleasant state of uncertainty, all the more so because of the appointment he had to keep in Pepper's Paddock that evening. Gussy's invitation to a spread could not have been more ill-timed, from Levison's point of view. He knew that his study-mates were curious, and the other fellows would remark on his absence. But it could not be helped. If he was to save his chum from ruin, Levison of the Fourth had to take risks, and by taking the risks he was confident that he could save Cardew. Cardew, reckless and volatile as he was, had stood manfully by Levison more than once, when he had needed a loyal friend. One good turn deserved another.

Levison settled down doggedly to work. But he hardly saw the Latin he was preparing, and it was certain that if he was called upon in the Form-room the following morning, Mr. Lathom would not be satisfied with his "con."

Meanwhile, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had returned to Study No. 6, where Blake and Herries and Digby were already at prep.

"Five fellows coming, deah boys," announced Arthur Augustus. "Levison can't come, for some weason. I am afwaid he is still feelin' wathah gwumpy because I wagged him a little about his wotten cwicket to-day. But weally, you know, his cwicket was the limit."

"It was," agreed Blake. "Worse than yours, old bean."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or as bad, anyhow," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Or nearly," said Digby.

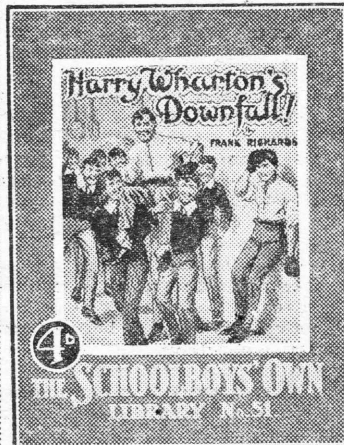
"Weally, Dig—"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down to prep.

But prep was not the most important function in Study No. 6 that evening. It was, in fact, scamped a little—a thing that was liable to happen in junior studies on important occasions.

After prep Blake and Co. turned their attention, with much more interest, to getting ready for the spread.

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Books and papers and pens and ink were cleared away, and the good things arranged on the festive board.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther arrived quite early with cheery smiles on their faces.

"Twot in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus hospitably.

The Terrible Three trotted in.

Clive and Cardew came along a few minutes later. Sidney Clive glanced round the rather well-filled study as he entered.

"Levison's not here?" he asked.

"No, deah boy. You wemembah he said he couldn't come."

"He's cleared off somewhere and I can't find him," said Clive. "I thought he might have changed his mind and dropped in."

"Probably helpin' his esteemed minor with Cæsar," suggested Cardew, lounging in after Clive.

"Very likely," said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Levison will be vewy welcome if he dwops in," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway sit down, deah boys. I twust that some of you will not object to sittin' on boxes, and there is the leckah and—"

"Right as rain, old bean!"

The juniors sat down to supper in Study No. 6 and there was a buzz of cheery voices round the table. Cardew's voice and looks were as cheery as any. The

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dandy of the Fourth was "keeping it up." If there was a burden on his mind, a weight on his heart, certainly his looks did not betray the fact. The scapegrace of St. Jim's was at the end of his tether, and knew it; but he was game to the last. Supper in Study No. 6 went on merrily. But it was destined to be interrupted in a very unexpected manner.

CHAPTER 7.

The Upper Hand!

LEVISON of the Fourth had finished his prep—or, rather, left it unfinished—early and quitted Study No. 9. His plans for that evening were cut and dried. Levison had thought the matter out carefully in his usual steady and methodical way. It was easy enough to slip out of the House unobserved, scale the school wall in the dark, keep his appointment in Pepper's Paddock, and return to the school before dorm. In the old days Levison had been accustomed to such things—the experience was by no means new to him. He did not anticipate any difficulty on that score. The difficulty lay in his dealings with Tickey Tapp; but his plans were laid for dealing with the unscrupulous sharper, and his determination was fixed. He was going to save Cardew from the penalty of his folly, if he could—and if he did not succeed matters would be no worse for the scapegrace. But Levison's belief was that he would succeed.

He went quietly to the Fourth Form dormitory in the dark and closed the door before he turned on the light of an electric torch. There he unlocked his box and groped in it for a leather case, which he drew out. From the case he drew a number of currency notes. He counted twenty—there were more than that number in the leather case. Levison, who was a careful fellow with his money, had an account in the Post Office Savings Bank, which was seldom drawn on and generally on the increase. But two or three days ago Levison had drawn out all he had. That was when he had first discerned that Cardew was in trouble and guessed what the trouble was. Few fellows would have been willing to hand over the savings of several terms to a reckless scapegrace who had, as a rule, more money than was good for him. Ernest Levison was not only willing, but prepared to do so without a second thought.

With twenty currency notes in a little bundle in his pocket Levison left the dormitory and went quietly along to the box-room at the end of the passage. From the box-room window he dropped on the leads outside, leaving the window an inch ajar for his return. Nobody was likely to visit the box-room at that hour; nobody was likely to miss Levison from the House, excepting his own chums. He did not intend to be long absent.

A few minutes later he had dropped from the school wall and was scudding away through the shadows. Pepper's Paddock was at no great distance from the school, and Levison was soon clambering through the gap in the broken fence. He was a little early for the appointment with Tickey Tapp, but the glow of a cigar-end in the gloom showed him that the sharper was already there.

Tickey Tapp peered through the shadows, as he heard the rustle of Levison's approach.

"That you, young Cardew?" called out Tickey Tapp.

"No."

"Levison!" exclaimed Tapp.

"Yes."

Tickey Tapp peered at him as he came up a little breathless.

"Cardew hasn't the nerve to come—what?" he sneered.

"Cardew doesn't know I have come," said Levison quietly. "I have not told him that I have seen you. But I am here to deal with you for him."

"All the same to me, if you've brought the spondulics," said Tickey Tapp, with a coarse laugh.

"Twenty pounds," said Levison. "You will give me Cardew's paper in exchange. That is the amount due to you."

Tickey Tapp laughed again.

"Hand it over," he said.

Levison quietly handed him the bundle of currency

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notes. Tickey Tapp struck a match and examined them and shoved the bundle into his pocket.

"That's all right," he said. "Tell young Cardew that a tenner will have to be ready next week, or the week arter at the latest."

"I shall tell him nothing of the kind," said Levison steadily.

"Please yourself!" grinned Tickey Tapp, and he made a movement to go.

"Don't go, Mr. Tapp," said Levison in the same steady, quiet tone. "I haven't finished yet. I want that paper."

"You can want!"

"You've been paid," said Levison icily. "Now you will give me the paper, and the matter ends."

"I don't think!" grinned Tickey Tapp derisively.



"Levison!" "Oh, my hat!" breathed Levison, for it was the voice of Cardew. "Go back to the school at once! Remain within gates till lock-up! I knew what his Housemaster must think of seeing him in talk with you!"

Levison's face hardened grimly.

"You've played this game before, Mr. Tapp," he said. "You score because your victims are afraid to go to the police. You've landed on a fellow this time who is not afraid. Leave this paddock without handing me the paper, and I go straight to the police station."

"What?"

"You knew me once," said Levison, "and you knew that I was a fellow of my word. You've had your money and you shall not have another shilling! You can be sent to hard labour for demanding money with threats, and you know it. And if you keep Cardew's

paper you will be charged with blackmail and arrested. I mean what I say!"

Tickey Tapp stared blankly at the St. Jim's junior. There was a ring of earnest determination in Levison's voice. The face of the sharper grew black with rage.

"You—you'd never dare!" he panted at last. "You put the peelers on to me and that paper goes straight to your headmaster. What will happen to Cardew then?"

"What will happen to him if you keep it?" said Levison quietly. "If my chum is to be ruined there will be the satisfaction, at least, of sending you to prison. I mean every word I say, Tickey Tapp. You know best whether you want trouble with the police. If they take up this matter, I fancy there are a good many other matters they will get on to while



voice of Mr. Railton. "Levison!" Mr. Railton's voice was deep. "Levison's heart was almost sick within him as he went. He had such a disreputable character as Tickey Tapp. (See Chapter 5.)

they're dealing with you. This isn't the only rascality you have in hand."

"You—you—" panted Tickey Tapp.

"Are you giving me the paper?"

"No!" hissed Tickey Tapp.

"Very well."

Levison turned and jumped through the gap in the fence into the lane. Tickey Tapp followed him, enraged and alarmed. He expected to see Levison turn in the direction of the school, but it was towards Rylcombe that Ernest Levison turned.

"Stop!" hissed Tickey Tapp.

Levison stopped.

"You'd never dare!" snarled Tapp. "You're out of your school at this time of night. 'Ow're you going to explain that to your headmaster?"

Levison laughed contemptuously.

"That's a small matter. The Head will have to know, and you can depend on it, Mr. Tapp, that he will take the matter up and see that you are prosecuted. He will expel Cardew; but he will see that a scoundrel who has blackmailed a St. Jim's fellow does not escape punishment. But I needn't tell you that—you know it as well as I do."

Tickey Tapp did know it only too well. He glared at the icily-cool St. Jim's junior with black rage in his face. In his peculiar career as a blackmailer Tickey Tapp had had more than one jolt, but never had he received so unexpected a jolt as this. If Levison carried out his threat the game was up, and Tickey Tapp knew it. He had had the experience of appearing before a magistrate, charged with attempting to extort money by threats. He did not want to repeat that experience, or the period of retirement from public view that had followed it.

"You—you—you—" he spluttered.

Levison watched his face coldly and grimly. He was quite determined, and his determination showed in his looks. If Cardew was to be ruined this rascal should pay the penalty. It would be something, at least, to place the law-breaker in the hands of the law.

"Look 'ere," said Tickey Tapp at last, with a deep breath. "I ain't an unreasonable man. I'll make terms."

"There are no terms to be made."

"Make it another tenner!"

"Not another sixpence," said Levison, unmoved.

"You young 'ound—"

"I've no more time to waste," said Levison. "I've got to get back. If I'm missed the whole thing may come out, whether I like it or not. If it does, Mr. Tapp, you won't have another chance."

The rascal gritted his teeth. He was beaten, and he knew it. Once information was laid against him at the police station Tickey Tapp's game was up. Like all blackmailers, he relied for success on his victim's fear of exposure. A victim who was prepared to face exposure rather than yield to his demands was too much for Tickey Tapp. His teeth were drawn. The mere thought of a visit from Inspector Skeat made cold shivers run down Mr. Tapp's back.

There was a short silence, and then Tickey Tapp fumbled in his pocket. With a muttered oath he handed a slip of paper to Ernest Levison.

Levison took it quietly and turned on the light of his electric torch to examine it. Tickey Tapp watched him almost wolfishly. Levison gave a satisfied nod; he knew Cardew's light and graceful hand well enough. With a sigh of relief he thrust the paper into his inside pocket.

Without a word to the defeated rascal Levison of the Fourth turned and strode back towards the school. Tickey Tapp, still muttering oaths, tramped away to the Green Man. He had been beaten by a schoolboy, which was not a pleasant reflection to the hardened rascal. But Levison's heart was light as he hurried back towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Missed!

"LEVISON of the Fourth?" Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, looked surprised.

"Levison of the Fourth!" replied Mr. Railton.

"I must say, sir, that I think Levison is as straight as any fellow at St. Jim's," said Kildare. "I know he had rather a bad reputation at one time, but that was some time ago, and—"

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I also have a high opinion of Levison at the present time," he said. "But it is impossible to forget that at one time he was found to be associating with bad characters outside the school, and Dr. Holmes almost

decided to expel him. Levison, I believe, has mended his ways. Nevertheless, this-afternoon I came on him in conversation with a man whose whole appearance was that of a race-course blackguard—a man whom I have observed loafing about a public-house at Rylcombe."

"I'm quite surprised, sir," said the captain of St. Jim's. "I should certainly never have suspected Levison of anything of that kind now."

"It is possible that appearances are against him," said the Housemaster. "The man may have claimed acquaintance against his wish—the meeting may have been accidental. But in view of Levison's former conduct the matter can scarcely rest there. If he has deceived the Head and is carrying on his old pursuits in secrecy, he must leave the school."

"Certainly, sir."

"The matter must be placed beyond doubt," said Mr. Railton. "I should like you, therefore, to keep Levison under observation for a time, Kildare. It would serve no useful purpose to question the boy, as, if he is deceiving me, he would scarcely hesitate to answer falsely. Neither do I desire him to suppose that he is suspected, as that would be very unjust if indeed he is innocent in this matter, as I hope and, in fact, believe. His talk with the man to whom I refer was interrupted this afternoon, and I sent him back to the school. If he has no dealings with the man, the matter ends there."

"But——" said Kildare.

"If, on the other hand, he has dealings with him, it is probable that he will see him again. This must be ascertained."

"I understand, sir," said the prefect.

"You will take note particularly whether Levison leaves the school at any forbidden time," said the Housemaster. "It was discovered once that he was in the habit of doing so."

"You may leave it to me, sir," said Kildare.

And he left the Housemaster's study.

Kildare's face was rather grim as he went. He had been slow to believe in the reform of the "hard case" of St. Jim's; but he had believed in it at last. If Levison had pulled the wool over his eyes and was laughing in his sleeve, he had no mercy to expect from the captain of the school. The sooner he was discovered and kicked out of St. Jim's the better.

Kildare made it a point, a little later, to stroll into the junior Common-room and glance round. A good many juniors were there, but Levison of the Fourth was not among them. But some of the Fourth were still at prep, and it was probable that Levison was still in his study. Kildare went up to the Fourth Form passage.

Between roll-call and bedtime it was not a difficult matter for any fellow to slip away. Kildare made up his mind to ascertain whether Levison of the Fourth had slipped away. He tapped at the door of Study No. 9 in the Fourth and opened it; but the room was dark and untenanted.

It was likely enough that the three juniors who belonged to the study had finished prep and gone to some other study for a "jaw." Kildare was not feeling disposed to "root" among the junior studies looking for Ernest Levison. Still, it was a coincidence, at least, that Levison was not in his study, not in the Common-room, and not to be seen in the passages, just after what Mr. Railton had told the prefect. Kildare decided to see whether it was more than a coincidence.

Tompkins of the Fourth was in the passage, and Kildare called to him.

"Where are the fellows who belong to this study, Tompkins?"

Clarence York Tompkins glanced round.

"There's a spread in No. 6," he answered. "I think they've gone there."

"Right."

Kildare strolled along the Fourth Form passage with a smile on his face. If Levison was attending some feast of the gods in a junior study he could hardly have been more innocently occupied. Kildare was feeling relieved, and he doubted whether it was worth while looking into Study No. 6. Still, he decided to

glance in. He tapped on the door of that celebrated apartment and threw it open.

"Bai Jove! It's Kildare!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Pway twickle in, old bean. I twust that you have come to suppah, Kildare."

The captain of St. Jim's laughed.

"No, thanks," he answered. "Much obliged, all the same."

"We've got a wippin' cake," said D'Arcy.

"And meringues," said Monty Lowther.

"Two kinds of jam!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Yaas, wathah! And I assuah you that you are as welcome as the fowahs in May, Kildare."

The Sixth Form prefect glanced round the study. The company was numerous and select, but Levison of the Fourth was not there.

"Where's Levison?" he asked.

"Levison wasn't able to come, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "I wathah feah that he is still allowin' my remark on the subject of his cwicket to wankle a little."

"Well, I want to speak to him," said Kildare. "Anybody here know where he is?"

Some of the juniors shook their heads.

"Somewhere about the House," said Clive. "I'll cut off and look for him if you want him, Kildare."

"Very likely helping his minor with his Latin, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "Levison often does that."

Kildare looked at his watch.

"The Third are gone to their dormitory now," he said. "It's turned nine. Was Levison at prep in your study, Clive?"

"Oh, yes," said Clive, beginning to look a little anxious. All the juniors could guess that there was something behind this unusual inquiry for a Fourth-Former.

"Then you've seen him quite recently?"

"Well, he finished rather early."

"You haven't seen him since?"

"No."

"Is anythin' up, Kildare?" drawled Cardew.

Kildare did not answer that question. He stood in the doorway of Study No. 6, reflecting, and with his suspicions growing. Levison's two nearest friends were here, and neither of them knew where Levison was. That was very singular, to say the least.

"Well, I want him," said Kildare at last. "He may be in one of the other studies. You can cut along and see Clive, and I'll wait."

Clive left the study in a rather uneasy frame of mind. Kildare of the Sixth waited in the passage. In five or six minutes Sidney Clive came back again, alone.

"I've looked in the Fourth and the Shell," he said. "He's not there."

"And you don't know where he may be?"

"Only that he's about the House somewhere," said Clive.

"Sure of that?"

"Of course; it's past lock-up."

Kildare smiled grimly.

"It's odd that nobody can find him if he's still in the House," he said. "Fellows are not supposed to disappear like that."

"You don't think——" began Clive, rather hotly.

"I think that the sooner Levison is found the better," interrupted Kildare. "It looks to me as if he's not in the House at all. He can't be over in the New House at this hour; the Houses are closed for the night. All you kids had better look for him, and if you find him, send him to my study at once."

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry.

Kildare went down the staircase, and the interrupted supper-party looked at one another rather blankly.

"Levison can't be out of bounds," said Tom Merry slowly. "He's not that sort."

"Of course not," said Clive.

"Kildare seems to think he is," said Blake. "I thought Levison had chucked up that kind of thing long ago."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Clive flushed.

"I'm sure he's in the House," he said. "Let's look for him, before a story spreads round the House that he's broken bounds."

"Let's!" agreed Tom Merry. And the juniors proceeded to look for Levison and inquire for him up and down and round about. But they did not find him, and they did not find anyone who knew where he was. Perplexing as it was, it was clear at last that Levison of the Fourth was not in the School House at all.

"Well, this beats it, Tommy!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Looks as if Levison is up to his old games again."

"I can't think so," said Tom.

"Kildare thinks so," said Manners. "That's plain enough. Besides, if he's not out of bounds, where is he?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom.

"This is vewy peculiah, you fellows," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a worried brow. "Levison told me he could not come to the spread, you know, and it weally looks as if he could not come because he was goin' out of House bounds. It's wathah wotten."

Tom Merry took his way to the Sixth Form passage, Manners and Lowther waiting for him on the stairs. Cardew and Clive went to Study No. 9; neither of them was inclined to return to the interrupted spread in Blake's study. Sidney Clive was looking puzzled and glum; Ralph Reckness Cardew had a strange glimmer in his eyes. Levison was out of bounds, after nine o'clock at night; they knew that. Why?

Clive did not know why, and could not guess why; but he had faith in his friend. Cardew had little faith in himself or anyone else. He wondered—he could not help wondering—whether the one-time "hard case" of St. Jim's was kicking over the traces again. It would have been surprising to him, and yet not very surprising. He had been surprised at Levison keeping "straight"—a thing that was beyond his own powers. Clive, had he suspected Levison of anything of the kind, would have been shocked and pained. But Ralph Reckness Cardew was not easily shocked. He would have been sorry, doubtless, to learn that Levison was

CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!

Cricket Practice.



KING WILLOW proudly sits his throne,
His grassy empire ruling;
At last he comes into his own:
And when we're free from schooling
We scamper off to Little Side
With bat and ball and wicket,
To show the Sixth, and fags beside,
How we excel at cricket!

Tom Merry, armed with gloves and pads,
A slim and supple figure,
Is batting; while the lazy cads
Just stand around and snigger.
For cricket has no charms for Racke,
Or Croke, or Percy Mellish;
They much prefer to lounge and slack,
Hard games they never relish.

Red-hot from Fatty Wynn's right hand
The frisky ball comes speeding;
Tom Merry's shoulders then expand,
And cheers and jeers unheeding,
He smites the leather good and true
(A batsman in a million!)
Away it soars, before our view,
To land on the pavilion!

Arthur Augustus takes the bat,
Graceful as Grace is Gussy;
Although the way he stops to pat
The turf, proclaims him fussy.
If there should be a bumpy weed,
Or just a harmless daisy,
Or anything that might impede,
It sends poor Gussy crazy!

But once the Swell has cleared the course
To his own satisfaction,
He bats with freshness and with force—
A youthful Hobbs in action!
The bowlers strive with might and main
To capture Gussy's wicket;
But they are foiled, and foiled again,
Thanks to his sterling cricket!

And so the merry game proceeds
Till bowlers' arms are tiring;
And Fatty Wynn says: "Study feeds
Are boons to the perspiring!"
So off we go, a cheery throng,
With faces gay and ruddy;
And joyous sounds of feast and song
Pervade each junior study!



"If he's gone out of the House, he will be able to explain when he comes in," said Clive. "Might be some jape on the New House men, or—or something or other."

"Might be anything," agreed Tom Merry. "I don't think fellows ought to jump to the conclusion that Levison is playing the goat, because he's missing from the House. Fellows have broken bounds before, and no great harm done. We've done it ourselves."

"We have—we has!" said Monty Lowther. "But—"

"Levison's rather a dog with a bad name," said Blake, with a grin. "He shouldn't do these things. It reminds one that—" Blake paused.

"Oh, rot!" broke in Clive.

"Well, he's not to be found," said Blake. "Somebody's got to tell Kildare so. You're junior captain of the House, Tommy; it's up to you." And Blake went back to Study No. 6, followed by his chums.

following his own shady example, but he would have derived some cynical entertainment from the discovery.

"Well, what do you make of it, Clive?" he asked, as Sidney Clive moved restlessly about the study.

"Can't make anything of it."

Cardew opened his lips, but closed them again. He would not speak what was in his thoughts. But he wondered grimly whether the "sack" impended over two heads instead of one, and whether, when he left St. Jim's, Levison of the Fourth was to follow.

CHAPTER 9. Caught!

ERNEST LEVISON, little dreaming of what was going on in the School House of St. Jim's in those very moments, tramped back to the school with a light heart. He had gone to the meeting with

the blackmailer in a mood of grim determination, hoping for the best, hoping that he might be able to save Cardew, and determined that Tickey Tapp should be handed over to justice if he failed. But he had not failed. The rascal had surrendered at the threat of the police once he was convinced that Levison intended to carry out the threat. His teeth were drawn now; Tickey Tapp could do no further harm. All that remained was to hand Cardew the paper he had so recklessly signed and to watch him destroy it.

Levison's face was bright as he thought of that. And he thought, too, that this terribly narrow escape would make a deep impression even upon Cardew's volatile mind. Even the scapegrace of St. Jim's could hardly fail to realise that the straight path was the preferable one, after the stress he had gone through, and the danger he had so narrowly escaped.

Levison reached the school, and clambered over the wall and dropped within. He had heard the quarter strike in the lane, but he had plenty of time. Bedtime for the Fourth was half-past nine, and it wanted yet ten minutes to the half-hour. Two or three minutes were enough for him to climb the leads outside the box-room window, clamber in, and stroll casually down to the Common-room. There was time to explain to Cardew before dorm, and to see him destroy that dangerous paper. As for Clive, he might wonder how Levison had been occupied, but he was not a fellow to ask questions. The whole wretched matter would be at an end, and could be dismissed from his mind. And Levison was very anxious to dismiss it. Contact with a character like Tickey Tapp filled him with deep loathing; he had a feeling of having been contaminated. But it was all over now—or would be all over in a few minutes more.

He climbed the leads, and reached the window of the box-room. It was still ajar, as he had left it. Levison pushed up the sash and climbed in at the window. He closed the sash down carefully, and, not venturing to strike a match, picked his way across the box-room to the door. He started, and his heart seemed to miss a beat as he groped for the door. He had left it shut—he knew that. It was half-open now. And as Levison stood with his hand on the door the passage outside was suddenly flooded with light.

Levison stood quite still.

Outside the box-room doorway stood Mr. Railton, the master of the School House. He was waiting.

The fact that he was waiting, and that he had switched on the light as he heard Levison groping across the box-room to the door, left nothing for the hapless junior to guess. For a moment or two Levison felt almost physically sick. His face whitened, and set bitterly as he looked at the grim, stern countenance of his Housemaster. He had been missed from the House, he was waited for, and he was caught returning. His luck had failed him at the finish.

"So you have returned, Levison!" said Mr. Railton, in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Levison.

"Where have you been?"

"Out of bounds, sir," said the junior. It was not much use denying it, even had Levison felt disposed to deny the truth.

"I am aware that you have been out of bounds, Levison, and that you have been gone a considerable time."

"I have done no harm, sir."

"I hope not. What place have you visited?"

"None, sir."

"You have met someone?"

Levison did not answer that question.

"You do not ask me to believe, Levison, that you have stolen out of the school at night, merely to take a ramble in the lanes?"

"No, sir."

"Then what was your object?"

"No harm, sir," said Levison, more firmly. "I don't think you'd blame me if you knew."

"I am waiting to know."

Levison was silent again. There was no explanation to be given, unless he sacrificed Cardew. That was not to be thought of. Cardew had not asked him to intervene—did not know or suspect that he had inter-

vened—indeed, would probably have repudiated his intervention, had he known. He could not give Cardew away to save himself.

"I am waiting, Levison, for your answer," said the Housemaster, sternly.

"I can't explain, sir."

"I feared not."

"But I have done no harm," said Levison desperately. "I give you my word, sir, on that."

"Have you any explanation to make before I take you to your headmaster?"

"No, sir," said Levison heavily.

"Listen to me, Levison," said Mr. Railton, in a kinder tone. "There was a time when you were the worst boy in the House—when Dr. Holmes consulted with me, and I advised him that my opinion was that you should be expelled from St. Jim's. The Head was lenient, and I have come to believe that you had made the most of the chance he gave you. I am sorry to lose the good opinion I have formed of you. I am aware that the junior schoolboys do not always act with due thought, and that there may be harmless reasons for breaking such a rule of the House as you have broken. If there is any such innocent explanation of your conduct, give it to me now, and I need not take you before your headmaster. You may rely upon me to take a lenient view, if you can convince me that you have been guilty only of an act of thoughtlessness."

Mr. Railton's tone was kindness itself. It was as if he was pleading with the junior to give him a pretext for clemency.

But Levison of the Fourth was silent.

There had been a time when a glib falsehood would have leaped to his lips. But that time was past.

Mr. Railton waited a few moments, patiently. Then his face hardened again, as Levison did not speak.

"You have nothing to say, Levison?"

"No, sir, except that I've done no harm."

The Housemaster made an impatient gesture.

"You have done no harm, yet you cannot tell me what it is that you have done, Levison?"

"Yes, sir," said the junior, in a low voice.

"You can scarcely expect me to credit such a statement," said Mr. Railton dryly. "You will now follow me to the Head's study."

"Very well, sir," said Levison, wearily.

With a drooping head he followed the Housemaster. As they came down the staircase into the hall of the House many eyes were turned on Ernest Levison. He was glad it was past the bed-time of the Third; Frank was not there to see him. But a good many fellows looked at him very curiously. Most of the House knew by that time that Levison of the Fourth had been missed, and that he had been out of bounds; the search for him had made that known. Under the stare of many curious eyes Levison flushed and raised his head proudly. He was being taken to the Head as a delinquent, but he did not feel a delinquent, and he would not look like one.

"Levison!"

Sidney Clive came out of the junior Common-room. He ran towards his chum as he saw him.

For the moment he did not realise that Levison was in the custody of the Housemaster.

"You've turned up at last," he said. "Where have you been all this time, old scout?"

Levison gave him a faint smile, but did not answer as he walked on after Mr. Railton. Clive stared after them.

"Railton's taking him to the Head," muttered Tom Merry. "He must have got in by an upper window, as Railton bagged him upstairs. The ass—asking for trouble!"

"I don't see why Railton should take him to the Head," said Clive. "He's been out of the House, I suppose; but it was only a lark of some sort."

"I—I hope so."

"What else could it have been?" demanded Clive, almost fiercely.

"Railton seems to think it was something else," remarked Manners. "But let's hope for the best. Anyhow, he's going to the Beak."

The door of the Head's study closed on Levison of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 10.
The Only Way!

DR. HOLMES laid down his book. His glance rested in some surprise on the Housemaster and Levison of the Fourth.

"What is it, Mr. Railton?" he asked.
"A matter which I must place in your hands, sir," said Mr. Railton. "This junior was missed from the House this evening. He was out of bounds, and, on making a search, I discovered a box-room window left unfastened. A few minutes ago Levison returned by way of the window."

Dr. Holmes' face grew stern.
"Levison refuses to make any explanation to me," said Mr. Railton. "I can only conclude that he has fallen back into his former bad courses. I must tell you that this afternoon I saw him in conversation with a disreputable character in the lanes. I sent him back at once to the school. I cannot help suspecting that he left the House secretly after lock-up in order to see this man again."

Levison breathed hard. It was natural enough for the Housemaster to come to such a conclusion—indeed, it was the actual truth. The Head's brow knitted ominously as he listened.

"Levison declines to make any explanation to me," added Mr. Railton. "I therefore place the matter in your hands, sir."

"Levison!"
The Head's voice was very deep.
"Yes, sir!" muttered the junior.

"Have you anything to say?"
"No, sir!" said Levison after a moment's pause.

"You confess, then, that you have broken bounds at night, that you have mixed with bad characters outside the school, and that your pretended reform was a pretence from first to last?" exclaimed the Head sternly.

Levison's face grew paler.
"No, sir, nothing of the kind. I can't explain how the matter stands, but I have done no wrong."

"You do not call it wrong to break school bounds surreptitiously at night?"

"I don't mean that, sir. I admit breaking bounds, and I expect to be punished for it. I mean that I have done no harm."

"Who was the man with whom Mr. Railton saw you in conversation?"

"A man named Tapp, sir."

"What is he?"

"A blackguard, a scoundrel, and a villain!" said Levison bitterly.

Both the masters looked sharply and curiously at him. There was no mistaking the bitter sincerity of his tone.

"The man, then, is not a friend of yours, Levison?"

"Certainly not, sir! He is the enemy of every decent fellow—a brute who ought to be in prison!"

"And that man is the man you have chosen to converse with?"

"I—I did not choose. It was circumstances—"

Levison faltered, realising how impossible it was to explain without stating the whole of the facts.

"Is this man Tapp a man you knew some time ago, Levison—at the time when your bad conduct was discovered and you were punished?"

Levison winced.

"Yes, sir. I knew him then, and had reason to be sorry for it. I don't know him now—I wouldn't speak to the wretch if I could help it! I wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole!"

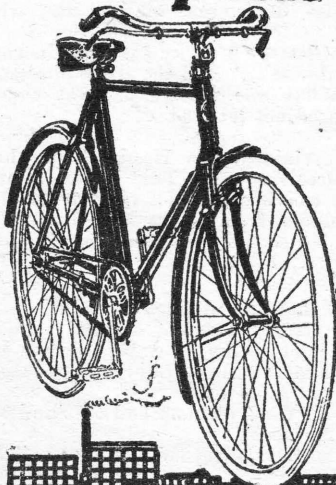
"If the man forced his acquaintance on you against your will that would excuse you, Levison; but not if you left the school of your own accord to see him again. Did he speak to you first this afternoon, or did you intend to see him when you went out of gates?"

"I intended to see him, sir." Levison drew a deep breath. "I wanted to make the brute leave St. Jim's fellows alone. I had nothing to do with him; but I knew he was hanging about the school, trying his old games on again with another chap. I wanted to find out how the land lay and get rid of him. That is the truth, sir."

(Continued overleaf.)

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"And you left the school this evening for the same purpose?" asked the Head, with a very searching look at Levison.

"Yes, sir, and I succeeded!" said Levison. "I made him understand that he had to get clear of the school and keep clear."

"And in what manner?"

"I threatened to go to the police station and ask the inspector there to deal with him," said Levison.

"Bless my soul!"

There was a short silence in the study. Both the masters were evidently perplexed, but both of them were looking kinder.

"If this is true, Levison, you have certainly done no harm, but may have done much good," said the Head at length. "Certainly I should not dream of allowing a St. Jim's boy to deal with such a rascal in any way or for any purpose whatsoever. Yet I can pardon you for that, if the matter is really as you state. Can you give me any proof of your statement?"

"Only my word, sir," said Levison.

"That is scarcely sufficient in the circumstances. We have to deal with facts," said the Head dryly. "You are discovered in an act which would cause me to send you away from the school, and your bare word that you acted from good intentions is scarcely enough."

"I—I know, sir," faltered Levison; "yet it's the truth. But Mr. Railton knows that there is nothing against me for a long time, and my Form master will say the same. So will any of the fellows—Tom Merry or Blake or anybody. They all know that I play the game now."

There was another long pause.

"If I am to believe you, Levison, you took this matter into your own hands, believing that this disreputable man Tapp was haunting the school with an evil object, and desiring to save some foolish lad from falling under his influence."

"That is so, sir."

The Head's glance was very penetrating, but Levison met it fearlessly. His conscience was clear, at least. He knew that his statements must sound almost incredible; yet he was telling the truth, although not the whole of the truth.

"Heaven forbid that I should misjudge you, Levison, if you have really acted from such good motives," said Dr. Holmes. "Strange as your statement appears, I am inclined to believe it. What is your opinion, Mr. Railton?"

"I agree with you, sir," said the Housemaster. "But Levison has, by his own act, placed himself under strong suspicion. It is scarcely possible to exonerate him on his bare word."

"Quite so. Yet—" The Head paused. "If you are deceiving me, Levison, your guilt is very great."

"I am not deceiving you, sir."

"I think not—I hope not." The Head turned to the Housemaster. "If Levison is speaking the truth, Mr. Railton, he must be pardoned for a breach of the rules of the school. If, however, he is addicted to bad ways, it is most likely that proof may be discovered. As he was taken by surprise he can have had no opportunity of getting rid of any evidence that may be upon his

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person. Will you examine the contents of Levison's pockets?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Levison caught his breath.

Once before, long ago, he had undergone such a search, in the days when he had been the "hard case" of St. Jim's. On that occasion a box of cigarettes and a cutting from a racing paper had been found in his possession. Obviously the Head had not forgotten.

Nothing of the kind certainly was to be found upon Levison now. But in the inside pocket of his jacket was the paper he had extorted from Tickey Tapp—the "bit of writing" that had placed Cardew in the power of the blackmailer.

Levison's brain almost swam.

The discovery of Cardew's IOU would clear him—his motives would be plain enough then. The Head would know that he had intervened to save his chum from the sharper. He would be saved and Cardew would be lost. All that he had done would go for nothing—Ralph Reckness Cardew would be completely exposed, as completely as if Tickey Tapp had betrayed him, and Cardew would be expelled. Instead of saving his chum, Levison's intervention would have brought disaster upon him at a swoop.

The change in his looks did not escape the Head and the Housemaster. Their looks grew stern again.

"Levison, turn out your pockets!" rapped out Dr. Holmes.

Levison's hand went to his inside pocket.

His fingers closed almost convulsively on the paper signed by Cardew of the Fourth.

There was no time for thinking. Mr. Railton was stepping towards him.

Cardew was lost if that paper were seen—and it would be his chum who had brought ruin upon him in seeking to save him. There was no time for Levison to think of himself.

His hand came from his pocket, the paper crumpled in it. Swiftly he sprang towards the fire, and the crumpled paper was flung into the flames.

CHAPTER 11.

Condemned!

"LEVISON!" thundered the Head.

"Levison!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

The Fourth-Former stepped back, panting.

So swift had been his action that neither master had had a chance to intervene. The crumpled paper tossed into the flames had been consumed almost instantly.

The Head stared at Levison and then at the blackened fragment of paper in the glowing fire. What it was that had been written on that paper was impossible to discover now. But Levison's action had been enough.

The headmaster was almost trembling with anger as he fixed his eyes upon Ernest Levison again.

"Levison! How dare you?"

The junior stood silent, with pale cheeks. He knew what his action must imply; yet he had had no choice. But he began to realise, dully, that all was over with him now.

"You have dared to destroy a paper that was in your possession before I could see it," said the Head in almost a gasping voice. "What was written on that paper, Levison, which you dared not let me see?"

No answer.

"Wretched boy!" exclaimed the Head. "You had almost succeeded in deceiving me. That paper, I presume, contained some convincing proof of your guilt—some letter, I conclude, from some of your vile acquaintances outside the school. Wretched boy!"

Levison did not speak. It was useless to speak. He knew he was condemned now.

But he was not sorry that he had acted as he had done. He had tried to save Cardew; he had had no right to save himself at the cost of giving away his friend. He had intervened in the matter of his own accord, unasked, and he was bound to carry on to the end.

Dr. Holmes rose to his feet. Seldom had the kind old Head looked so intensely angry.

"Mr. Railton, the matter is beyond doubt now," he said.

"Quite!" said the Housemaster.

"This boy has deceived us, and he has had the temerity to destroy, before our eyes, the proof of his guilt. That ends the matter. Levison, you will be expelled from the school."

Levison shivered, but did not speak.

"The boy's duplicity seems to be beyond all explanation," said Mr. Railton. "I certainly believed his statement. But for his act I should believe him still. Such a boy cannot be allowed to remain here, sir. I am shocked more than I can say."

Dr. Holmes raised his hand.

"Leave my study, Levison! To-morrow you will leave the school."

"I—I—" stammered Levison.

"Say no more. I will not listen to further falsehoods from your lips!" exclaimed the Head indignantly. "Leave my study! Mr. Railton, will you see that Levison is locked in the punishment-room for this night. Now that his character is known he cannot be allowed to come into contact with other boys for a single moment before he goes."

"Undoubtedly, sir."

Levison, with faltering steps, left the headmaster's study. Mr. Railton followed him into the corridor.

"Follow me, Levison!" said the Housemaster briefly.

At the corner of the passage a number of juniors were waiting. It was close on bedtime now for the Lower School. But many of the Fourth and some of the Shell had gathered to see Levison when he came away from the Head. Levison had many friends in his House; indeed, there were few fellows in the School House who were not his friends more or less. Clive and Cardew were both in the little crowd, and they started forward as Levison came up.

Mr. Railton frowned at them.

"Stand back! Do not speak to Levison."

"But, sir—" exclaimed Clive.

"Levison has been sentenced by his headmaster to be expelled from the school. Follow me at once, Levison!" "Levison—expelled!" ejaculated Tom Merry in amazement.

"Expelled!" almost shouted Clive.

"Levison!" exclaimed Cardew.

Levison gave his chums a glance, and followed the Housemaster. His heart was like lead.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in a low voice. "That is wathah a shock, you fellows! What on earth has Levison been doin'?"

"He's done nothing!" exclaimed Clive fiercely. "It's some mistake—some ghastly mistake!"

Clive hurried after his chum and the Housemaster. Cardew remained where he was, with utter astonishment in his face.

"Do you know anything about this, Cardew?" asked Tom Merry.

"Nothin'."

"You're Levison's chum," said Blake, with a keen look at the scapegrace of the Fourth. "If this had happened to you nobody would have been very much surprised. But Levison! Look here, Cardew, you must know something about it. Clive doesn't, but you do."

"I know nothin'."

"You had no idea that Levison was in trouble?" asked Tom.

"None whatever."

"You haven't led him into any of your own little games?" asked Blake suspiciously.

Cardew's face became crimson.

"Why, you rotter—" he began hotly.

"Oh, cut that out!" exclaimed Blake. "We all know your little games, Cardew, and we all know that Levison used to be the same sort of outsider. I don't believe he fell into it again of his own accord."

Cardew's lips trembled.

"I know nothin' whatever about it," he said. "If Levison's been playin' the goat I never even dreamed of it. Only this afternoon he was lecturin' me and I took it all seriously. I never dreamed—in fact, I don't believe it now. There's some horrid mistake."

"That's all rot; the Head wouldn't expel a man unless he was driven to it," said Blake. "Whatever it is he's got against Levison is as clear as daylight or the chopper wouldn't come down."

Cardew was silent. He knew that as well as Blake. There was evidence that had satisfied the Head and the Housemaster. What had Levison done? It was known that he had broken school bounds that evening, but that alone would not mean the "sack." There was more to it, and what else could it be, excepting that the "hard case" of St. Jim's had fallen back into his old ways and had been found out?

"It's wotten," said Arthur Augustus dismally. "I can't believe that Levison has been takin' us all in all this while. But if he has he must be a frightful wottah."

"And you really know nothing of it, Cardew?" asked Tom Merry.

"I've said so."

"Well, it's queer," said Manners.

"If Levison's been playin' the goat he's taken me in as much as anybody," said Cardew. "But I can't get it down. I know he's not that sort—now, at any rate, whatever he used to be."

Cardew swung away, deeply disturbed and troubled. In his amazement and concern he almost forgot his own position.

Meanwhile, Clive had followed the Housemaster and Levison as far as the punishment-room—"Nobody's Study," as the juniors called it. Levison entered the room in silence.

"A bed will be made for you here, Levison, for to-night," said the Housemaster coldly. "In the morning you will leave!"

"Mr. Railton—" Clive came into the doorway.

"You should not have come here, Clive," said the Housemaster, frowning. "Go away at once!"

"Levison's my friend, sir," said the South African junior stubbornly. "What has he done, sir?"

"He has disgraced himself and his school, and deceived his headmaster," said Mr. Railton sternly. "He leaves the school to-morrow. Now go."

"But, sir—" gasped Clive.

Mr. Railton took the junior by the shoulders and pushed him into the passage.

"Go!" he snapped.

And Clive, with his brain in a whirl, went. Mr. Railton turned the key in the lock, and Levison of the Fourth was left alone.

CHAPTER 12.

A Crushing Blow!

LEVISON MINOR was puzzled.

It was the following morning, and Frank had come down cheerily enough with the rest of the Third Form.

After breakfast it dawned on Frank's mind that something was "on."

His two chums, Wally and Reggie, knew it, whatever it was. Frank could see that. Piggott of the Third had been about to tell Frank something just before brekker, with a grin on his face, when D'Arcy minor had taken Piggott by the collar and rolled him away unceremoniously. After breakfast Frank Levison noticed that a good many fellows glanced at him—some of them, he thought, commiseratively.

The cheery fag was in no need of anyone's commiseration, so far as he knew. He wondered what was up.

He looked in the quad for Wally and Reggie. They seemed to have dodged him after breakfast.

That was not due to the little tiff of the day before, on the occasion of the expedition to Pepper's Pond. That little tiff had blown over before bedtime. Trouble in the Third often arose suddenly, but it seldom lasted long. The St. Jim's Third had no use for fellows who sulked or nourished grievances.

It was not that, Frank knew. Wally and Reggie had been his cheery pals when the Third turned out that morning. Now they were avoiding him—and Wally had prevented Reuben Piggott from telling him something. The fag was perplexed, and he was a little uneasy.

He found D'Arcy minor and Manners minor at last, under the elms. They seemed disposed to walk away when Frank appeared in sight; but he ran towards them, his face flushed.

"Look here, what's this game?" he demanded indignantly.

"Game?" repeated Wally of the Third, vaguely.

"You've been dodging me."

"Dodging you?"

"Haven't you?" demanded Frank.

"Have we?" murmured D'Arcy minor.

"For goodness' sake, don't be a parrot!" exclaimed Frank testily. "What's the trouble?"

"Trouble!" repeated Wally.

D'Arcy minor really seemed unable to do anything but repeat Frank's words, parrot-like. Reggie Manners did not speak at all, but he looked red and uncomfortable.

"Well, if you don't want my company, I don't want yours," said Frank. "Go and eat coke, the pair of you!"

He turned angrily away, though he was more puzzled than angry. Wally of the Third jumped after him and caught his arm.

"Tain't that, Franky!" he said.

"Well, what do you mean, then?"

"You—you see—" stammered Wally.

"Better tell him," said Reggie Manners. "He's bound to hear before class, with the whole school talking about it."

"Hear what?" hooted Frank.

"About your major."

"My brother?" exclaimed Frank.

"You—you see—" stammered Wally, again. "It's bound to be rather a shock to you, Frank, and I—I didn't want to be the chap to tell you. See?"

"What about my brother?" asked Frank, staring at the two discomfited fags. "Nothing's happened to Ernie, I suppose?"

"I shut young Piggott up," said Wally. "He was going to rub it in. He's a little beast! You saw me shut him up."

"What's happened to Ernie?" asked Frank, with a catch in his breath. His heart was thumping painfully. "You don't mean he's ill. He was well enough yesterday."

"He's all right, so far as that goes. But—" Wally hesitated. "Look here, young Levison, this won't make any difference to you. You're not to blame."

"That's so," concurred Reggie. "Don't run away with the idea that we shall treat you differently, young Levison. You've got nothing to do with what your major does."

Frank's eyes gleamed.

"We had a row because you talked about my brother yesterday, making rotten jokes in bad taste," he said. "If you're beginning that again, young Manners, you'd better shut up."

"Oh, all right!" said Reggie sulkily. "Have it your own way! I don't want to talk about your major, I'm sure. I can find nicer subjects to talk about."

"Cheese that, young Manners!" said Wally. "Franky's upset, of course. Any fellow would be upset. Suppose your major was going to be sacked—"

"What?" roared Frank.

"Well, it's out now," said Manners minor.

Frank Levison stared at them blankly.

"You—you dare to say—" he gasped.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Reggie. "The whole school is daring to say the same thing, and chance at! Your brother's bunked!"

"It's a lie!"

"Oh, is it?" said Manners minor, hotly. "Well, I can tell you that it's true, and all the school knows it, and the surprise is that it hasn't happened before, considering the kind of fellow he is. So there!"

"Hold on!" shouted Wally, as Frank Levison made a spring forward, his fists clenched and his eyes blazing. He shoved the angry fag back. "That's no good, Franky—that won't alter it."

"How dare you say my brother's sacked?" shouted Frank furiously.

"We're sorry, old chap," said Wally. "No good getting your rag out with your old pals because your brother's come a mucker. You might be a bit more decent about it, young Manners."

"Oh, might I?" snapped Reggie. "I think young

Levison ought to be jolly glad fellows will speak to him at all, considering that his brother's bunked. Calling me a liar for telling him what all the school knows, from the Head down to Taggles, the porter!"

Frank Levison dropped his hands. The compassion in Wally's face was enough to tell him that it was true—that this was not some ghastly joke. His blaze of anger passed, and his face whitened, and he put a hand against it. Fellows had shown him consideration; nobody but Piggott had wanted to "rub it in." It was true! The white horror and distress in his face melted Reggie's resentment at once.

"I'm sorry, Frank, old chap," stammered Reggie—"I'm really sorry. It's not your fault; nobody will think of blaming you. I—I don't care if you punch my head, if—if you like."

Frank looked at him dully, hardly comprehending. For several moments he stood, as if rooted to the ground, leaning on the elm. Then he turned and walked back to the House without another word.

Wally and Reggie exchanged glances of great discomfort. Even their thoughtless and careless young minds were impressed by Frank's terrible distress. The fag seemed to have crumpled up physically under that heavy, unexpected blow.

"It's hit him hard," muttered Wally, uncomfortably. "He thinks no end of his major."

"Blessed if I see why!" grunted Reggie.

"His major must be an awful rotter, to let him down like this," said Wally. "He might have thought of Franky."

"I should jolly well think so," said Manners minor. "I'm sorry for old Frank, but I jolly well think that the sooner Levison major goes the better."

To which Wally of the Third assented with a nod.

Frank Levison went blindly towards the House. A good many fellows observed him, and the look on his face showed that he had heard what all the school had known for some time. Tom Merry put out a kindly hand and tapped the fag on the shoulder.

"Buck up, kid!" he said.

"What's happened to my brother?" asked Frank, in a faint voice. "Is he—is he accused of something?"

"I—I'm afraid so, kid," said Tom uncomfortably. "He was out of bounds last evening, and the Head seems to have come down heavy."

"He was not out of bounds!" exclaimed Frank fiercely.

"He was caught getting back by a box-room window, old chap," said Tom. "He doesn't deny that."

"Oh!" gasped Frank.

He caught sight of Clive and Cardew, and left Tom Merry, who gave him a pitying look as he went. Clive and Cardew were speaking in low tones, both of them looking deeply disturbed. Frank caught Sidney Clive by the sleeve, and the South African junior glanced round.

"Oh! You, kid!" he said.

"Is it true that my brother's expelled?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Where is he now?"

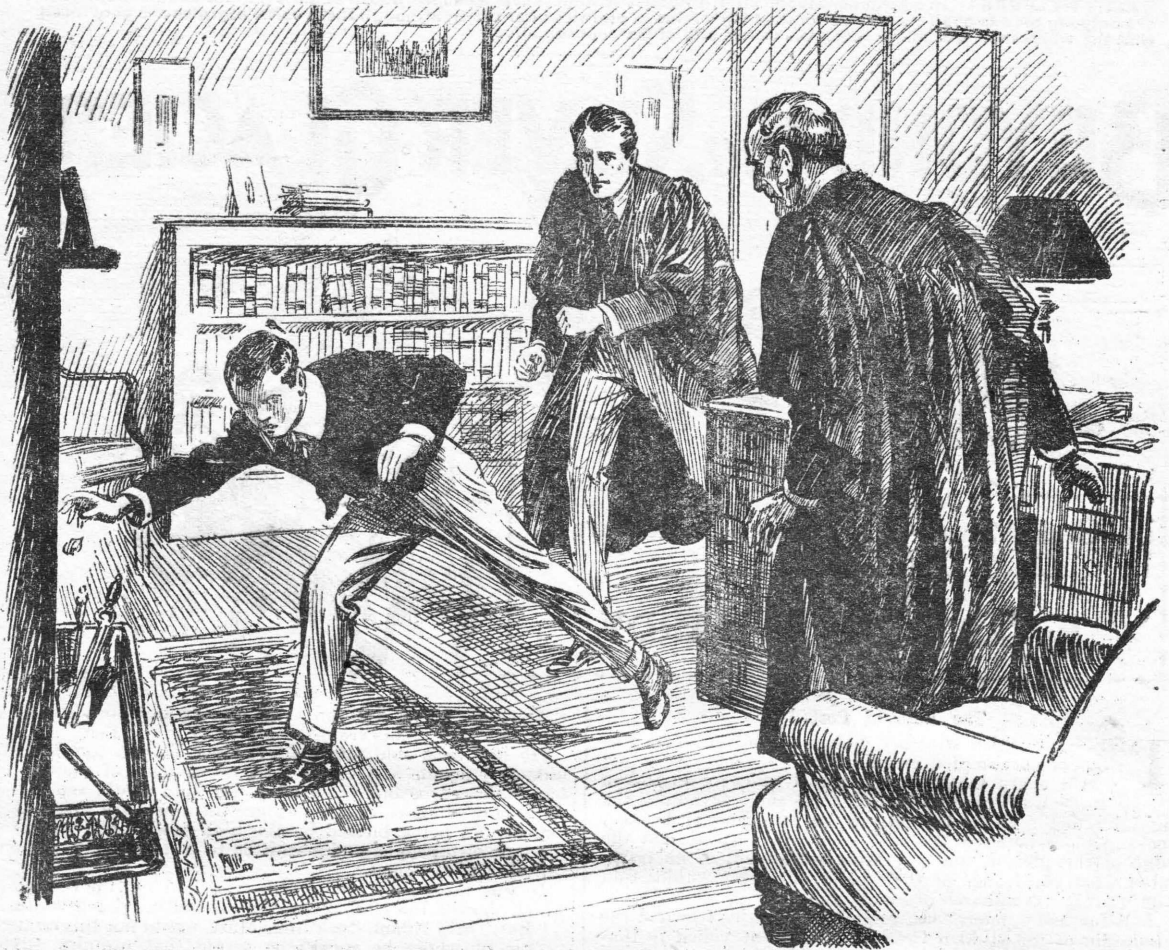
"Locked up in Nobody's Study."

"Oh!" panted Frank. "It—it—it's true! But it can't be true! What do they say he has done?"

Cardew smiled faintly, sadly. Frank did not ask what his brother had done, only what it was that he was said to have done. The fag's loyalty to his brother was proof against everything.

"Nobody knows exactly," said Clive. "He was out of bounds just before dorm last night—that seems clear. There's a story that he was mixed up with some blackguardly fellow—Trimble heard Mr. Railton saying something of the kind. The story is that Mr. Railton caught Levison with the man yesterday afternoon, and sent him back to the school, and Levison went out again after lock-up to see the brute, whoever he was. I can't believe it—only—the Head does, for he's bunked Levison."

Frank's white face became whiter. He remembered that meeting with his brother in the lane the day before, when Ernest had not wanted him. He remembered the evil-faced man who had been loafing by the roadside, the man he had seen earlier waiting in the paddock. It seemed to Frank that a hand of ice was



"Levison! Turn out your pockets!" rapped out Dr. Holmes. Levison's hand went to his pocket and withdrew a crumpled paper—a paper that would mean Cardew's ruin if the Head saw it. Next minute, before either master had a chance to intervene, Levison sprang towards the fire, and flung the incriminating paper into the flames. (See Chapter 10.)

gripping his heart. He had quarrelled with Reggie Manners for suggesting that the racing man had been waiting in the paddock to see Levison. Yet—he knew now—that must have been the man with whom Mr. Railton had seen his brother—the man his brother had broken bounds to meet again, after lock-up. What did it all mean? Cardew put out a hand to the fag's shoulder as he swayed. But Frank Levison pulled himself together.

"It's not true!" he said thickly. "There's some mistake—some horrible mistake! I'm going to see my brother!"

He went into the House.

With almost limping steps, the unhappy fag went up the staircase, and along the passage to Nobody's Study. He had to see his brother—to hear what Ernest had to say. Nobody's Study lay back from the passage, at the end of a deep alcove. In the alcove, Kildare of the Sixth was leaning against the wall.

He glanced at the fag kindly enough.

"Cut off, kid," he said. "You're not allowed here."

"But I want to see my brother," said Frank huskily.

"I dare say the Head will let you see him before he goes," said Kildare. "But you can't see him now; nobody can. Head's orders."

Frank clenched his fists, and for a moment looked as if he would hit out at the captain of the school. But he realised the folly and futility of that. He dragged himself away.

"Awf'ly sowwy, kid," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy softly, as Frank passed him on the stairs. "This is a fearful shock to all of us. But you must twy to beah up, you know, like a pluckay kid."

Frank nodded without replying, and went down the stairs. He made his way to Mr. Railton's study. The

bell was ringing now for class, and the fellows were going into the Form-rooms. Mr. Railton was leaving his study to go to the Sixth Form-room, when Frank Levison came up.

"Mr. Railton—"

The Housemaster paused. Frank was trying to keep composed, but his face was colourless, his lips quivering. The Housemaster gave him a look of deep compassion.

"Yes, my boy? I suppose you have heard about your brother. I am deeply sorry, Levison minor. You must not think that anyone will think the worse of you on this account."

Frank smiled bitterly.

"I want to see my brother, sir," he said, softly.

"I have no doubt the Head will allow you to say good-bye to him before he goes, Levison minor. I will speak to him on the subject, and send you word. Now go to your Form-room."

Frank turned away, sick at heart. He went blindly along the corridor. Wally of the Third came up, slipped his arm through Frank's, and led him along to the Form-room. He sat in his place there, dully, the room, the maps on the blue-washed walls, a dim blur before his eyes. The voice of his Form master was a meaningless buzz in his ears. His thoughts were with his brother—his brother, ruined and disgraced, about to be driven from his school—and he could think of nothing else.

THE END.

(Now look out for the sequel to this topping yarn: "FOR HIS CHUM'S SAKE!" which will appear in next week's GEM. An early order for your copy saves disappointment. See your newsagent right now!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,006.

PIGMY HELPERS! In a strange, savage land, amongst strange, savage people, Adam and his gallant band of explorers are only too glad to avail themselves of the help a tribe of pigmies offer them, although these same pigmies are convinced that the white men will never reach the secret city of Barcoomba alive!

BEYOND *the* SILVER GLACIER!

A Grand Story of Peril and Adventure in
Central Africa.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

The Line of Posts!

THE scene which stretched before the adventurers was one of unexampled magnificence.

On every hand lay miles and miles of unbroken snow, a mirror that reflected the sun's rays until the light blinded. There seemed only a thin line of broken, rocky ground between the spot where they stood and the edge of the glacier, and yet Muta explained, as he translated what the leader of their band of pigmy guides told him, that it was a march of several hours to the snow.

And far away, monstrous, mightily majestic, frowned the Mountain of the Hidden Crest, the top of it veiled in that tremendous sweep of cloud which never seemed to move.

They had, during the last day's march, donned thicker clothing.

To Adam, Harry Franklin, Jimmy Brown, and Sandy McTavish the cold was invigorating. It was a crisp, dry cold that sent the spirits soaring high.

"Makes you wish you had your winter sports stuff with you, Adam!" laughed Harry, as he blinked at the unending sweep of silver.

"Save," smiled Adam, "that there are no great runs to toboggan down and no jumps or slopes for the skiing."

Adam now asked a question of the chief of the pigmies through Muta, who knew their language.

"How if one began to cross that enormous field of snow and ice, would one find one's way if one wished to reach the fertile land which must lie beyond?"

Adam, watching the pigmy's face, saw it lengthen in dismay as he replied, through Muta, that none of the pigmies had ever attempted to cross the land of the cold death. It was forbidden. Evil spirits lay beyond.

The pigmy who disobeyed the wishes and regards of his people paid for the breaking of the law with his life, and his spirit was carried beyond the land of the cold death to stiffen and lie beneath the white snow where ghostly spirits forever tormented it.

But it was said that there were people who lived beyond the land of the cold death, a strange people who knew the way over the white land and who sometimes crossed it—though only in pursuit of one of their own people who had disobeyed the sacred law which forbade them to wander from their own land. These people had marked the way by setting posts, each one in view of another, which acted as guide-posts to the trail and enabled them to cross and return over the Silver Glacier.

He, the pigmy, had seen these posts—but he had never dared to step across the border of the land of the cold death.

He had heard from those who had seen a fugitive from the unknown land beyond the snow that lies beneath the mountain whose crest was always veiled, that the people of the unknown land were strange indeed and like no other

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race upon the earth—even as a white man differed from a black and the giants from the pigmies.

He had been told, and believed that it was so, that the unknown people had in the past, when some of their tribe had ventured beyond the land of the cold death, sent forth an organised expedition to capture them and kill them, such expeditions being blessed by the high priests and rulers of the unknown people, and permitted to go and return without suffering punishment.

It was these men, no doubt, who had set up the posts which showed the trail across the field of unbroken white.

"But," said Adam, "ask him, Mutt, would not this strange people of whom he speaks be afraid that enemies might make use of the guide-posts to which he refers and so cross the field of snow and attack them?"

Swift came the answer:

"The unknown people harboured no such fear. Between them and any such enemies stretched the land of the pigmies. The pigmies lived at peace with the tribes nearest them. Years ago they had been attacked by the tribe of the Hekebus, renowned and unbeaten warriors up to that time. These black men of a giant race had looked upon victory over the little men as assured. But the cunning of the pigmies, led by their great warrior king Gulalulu, had brought about the defeat of the Hekebus, who had left eleven thousand of their greatest fighting men dead upon the battlefields. The pigmies had ringed their enemies with a circle of fire. They had slain them with their poisoned arrows.

"It was the greatest defeat ever suffered by the Hekebus, who had from that day adopted the war device of the skeleton whenever they were bent upon raiding the villages of a neighbouring tribe.

"For years past the pigmies had lived at peace with all their neighbours, and they did not fear the strange people who lived beyond the land of the cold death, nor had they any desire to follow the line of posts which served to mark the track across the snow. They loved their own country and had no desire to leave it."

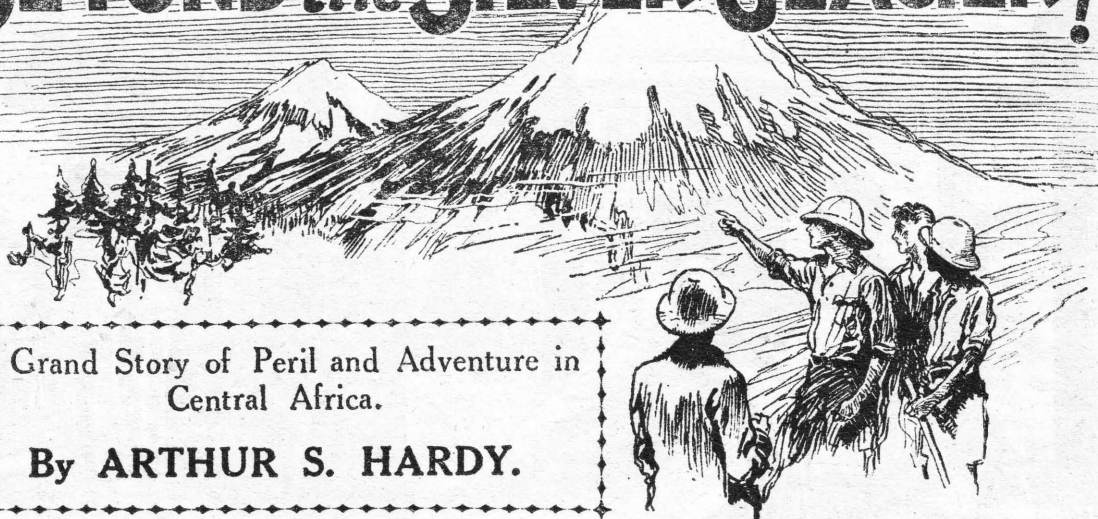
"By George, Adam," laughed Harry. "All this is very interesting, and sounds like truth. And if these posts exist, as this pigmy chieftain says, it will render our task of crossing the Silver Glacier a simple one. Mutt, old sport, ask him whether he has any idea as to where the line of guide-posts begins."

Muta put the question, and gave the answer.

"He has led us to the place," Muta said. "The line of posts begins upon the snow ahead of us."

Adam swung the pair of powerful binoculars he carried from case to eye level and closely examined the glistening field of white that lay before him. He was not long left in doubt.

"By Jove!" he cried, as he handed the glasses to Harry Franklin. "Take a look, old man. Unless my eyes deceive me, there's a post out there. Take a bee-line from that



putting point of rock in front of us and you will see the post standing up clearly on what we may call the horizon."

Harry swiftly found it.

"It's a post, all right," he agreed. "Mutt, ask him how, having gained the first guide-post, one picks up the next one."

Muta again asked, and again gave the answer. When the first guide-post was reached the second could be seen, so the pigmy had told. There was always one post in view. But the pigmy chieftain warned the white gods of the air that when they had passed the land of the cold death they would find even greater difficulties before them, for none knew the way into the land of the unknown people save those who had come from it—and only those who left it under sanction and permission of the king and the high priests returned to keep inviolate their secret under pain of death, whilst those whom they hunted were slain.

"A pretty prospect enough, Harry," smiled Adam. "And yet we must cross the Silver Glacier. Beyond it lies the land of the Hokahulas and the City of Barcoomba. We are near the end of our quest."

Eagerly he asked the pigmy chief, through the interpreter, whether he would not accompany the expedition further. They had plentiful supplies. They had tents to shelter them from the cold at night. In the day, as they could see, the air was invigorating. He would clothe them against the cold, to which they were unused.

They would make sledges from the timber of the forest. Even if he and his men went no farther than beyond the Silver Glacier, they would have the posts to guide them back and food and clothing for their comfort. It would be an adventure unparalleled in the history of the pigmy tribe.

The reply was no. The pigmies would help the white gods of the air to make their sledges. These, with the baggage they would carry for them over the rocky ground to the land of the cold death—but would venture no farther.

Argument proving worse than useless, Adam surrendered. "So be it!" he cried. "Tell him we are grateful, Mutt."

Now, while preparations were being made for the camping out, warmer clothing being handed out, and some fires built, Julian Del Rivo, whose teeth were clashing despite the pile of clothing, Adam had given him, ventured a protest.

"Why go on with this?" he asked. "Look at that awful field of snow and ice! We shall never get across it alive! I have heard natives speak of this place, but always believed that they lied. Ugh! My blood is like ice already. I could never live through it!"

Adam frowned.

"If you don't like it, Del Rivo," he declared, "you are at liberty to go back. After all, we have not asked you to accompany us. My father and my sister are captives among the people who live in the unknown land over there." He pointed across the Silver Glacier. "I intend to save them if I can and to die in the attempt if I can't. And why should one doubt the story the pigmy told? Take these glasses. You can see the guide-post with your own eyes."

Del Rivo looked, and grinned shudderingly. He loathed the cold.

"It is a post, sure enough," he conceded. "Yet might not this people, the Hokahulas, as you call them, seeing that they wish to keep their land secure to themselves, have set up those posts as a trap to possible invaders? Supposing one were to slavishly follow that line of guide-posts and discovered when it was too late that they led to a death trap—what then?"

Adam smiled grimly.

"Why, then—we die," he said. "But we have supplies to last us a long time. With snow-shoes on our feet, which we brought with us because my father wrote of the Silver Glacier, and dragging sleds behind us, we ought to find progress sufficiently fast. We will pitch our tent at night and travel with sunrise. Remember, a messenger escaped from the City of Barcoomba with a letter from my father. I don't suppose he had much clothing upon him—he must have endured the hardships of the freezing night—and yet he survived."

Del Rivo grinned.

"To die in Baruda immediately after delivering the message!" he sneered. "Unless that rascal Beavan shot him. Well, if you are bent upon crossing this glacier I am with you, Mr. Byrne. Your father was my dearest friend. And since we have to cross somewhere, we may just as well follow your line of guide-posts, I suppose—though I doubt whether we shall be able to pick up a second when we reach the first." He flung wide his arms in a dramatic gesture. "There was a time, and not so long since—before those accursed Hekebus slew my native bearers and stole my treasures—when Julian Del Rivo had wealth enough in skins and trophies and jewels to have enabled him to return to the land where he was born, a millionaire. Now all is gone. I have to begin afresh—at my age. It goes hard with me. And if I accompany you further, Mr. Byrne, it is only in the hope that I may be able to acquire another fortune, and because my dearest friend, the explorer, Professor George Willis Byrne, may be still alive to greet me at the end of the long journey."

Adam shivered as he listened to the man. In spite of his words and the note of sincerity he imparted to their utterance, he could scarcely stifle the feeling that came to him that the Portuguese did not mean one word he said. How could one trust a man with those slanting, hypocritical eyes, a man who never spoke openly or frankly upon any one subject—who was so self-contained, so cautious?

"You can please yourself, Del Rivo," he said shortly. "I tell you we don't want you. Come if you wish. But we sha'n't break our hearts if you remain behind."

Del Rivo bowed, rubbing his hands together with a smooth and calculating motion.

"I will come, of course," he said. "But, oh, if one could only change this accursed cold!"

Across the Silver Glacier!

A DAY was spent in their camping-place, and during that day the sleds were made, Jimmy Brown and Sandy McTavish supervising the work and setting strips of metal on the runners.

They slept at night in their tents, piling up the huge fires outside, with always someone on the watch and the machine-guns ready.

Wild beasts, attracted by the glare of the fires, came near and circled round them—yet none attempted to attack.

Of human beings they saw never a sign.

After breakfast on the morning of the second day a start was made, the piles of heavy baggage and the sleds being carried by the pigmies across the broken ground to the very edge of the snow-field and set down there.

Progress was at times reduced to a snail's crawl, owing to the roughness of the way, so that it was close upon sundown when they arrived in the open and made their camp for the last time this side of the Silver Glacier.

Harry Franklin and Jimmy Brown kept the watch in turns that night, but nothing happened to alarm them.

Towards morning the fires burned low. In spite of the masses of clothing they had put on the watchers shivered. About them lay the dark and shrouding night. The watchers were beginning to feel that they had had enough of it, when, almost without warning, the sun struck fire from the field of the Silver Glacier, and the air warmed so perceptibly that they were obliged to cast some of their clothing aside. The camp awakened into activity. Soon breakfast was going. And then came the packing up of the sleds, a thoroughly well organised and methodical piece of work carried out swiftly by the gallant Scotsman, Sandy McTavish, helped by Jimmy Brown.

Far ahead of them, looking no higher than a walking-stick, they were able to pick out the guide-post. That was their line.

When the start was made the pigmies, looking strange and grotesque in the clothing they had donned to protect them from the cold, their feet elaborately wrapped up in canvas

WHO'S WHO IN THIS STORY!

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his three companions, HARRY FRANKLIN, SANDY McTAVISH, and JIMMY BROWN, set out in search of Adam's father and sister, news having been received that the great white explorer, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, and his daughter, ROSA, who left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, are alive and well, but prisoners in the hands of a strange people at Barcoomba, which lies north of the Silver Glacier and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

Soon after leaving Baruda for the interior Adam and his companions, aided by MUTA, a native friend of Adam's, rescue from a horde of

hostile natives JULIAN DEL RIVO, a Portuguese, who claims to be an old friend of Adam's father. In consequence of this he is allowed to join up with the party, which then resumes its journey. Before very long, however, the expedition is forced to land owing to a shortage of petrol. When they fall in with a tribe of pigmies who show them great hospitality. The plane is left in charge of the pigmy chief, who supplies guides to direct the party through the forest to the borders of the glacier. After three days' journeying in the teeth of an icy blast Adam sights the Silver Glacier, beyond which towers the Mountain of the Hidden Crest.

(Now read on.)

and skins, lined the boulder-strewn and rocky ground to bid the white air gods farewell.

They began a chant in a strange and not unmusical monotone, swinging their arms to the words they sang. Muta, interpreting this as a song of farewell, replied to it in a harsh and ridiculous roar of his own, accompanied by much frenzied swinging of the arms.

Then the pigmies uttered their last good wishes for the success of the expedition.

At long last Adam Byrne set his head to face the snow trail, and feeling to make sure that he had properly adjusted his snow-shoes, a pair of which each of them wore, bent his weight to the heavily laden sled, which moved easily over the frozen snow.

The others, similarly employed, followed on behind, Julian Del Rivo cursing loudly, though his by no means was the most heavily laden of the sleds.

Last but one in the line came Muta, straining at the cords and muttering to himself. He wore boots and snow-shoes, over which he was inclined to stumble. His body, bulking enormously in the clothing Adam had found for him, was sufficiently protected for him to have accompanied an Arctic expedition.

But his teeth chattered, nevertheless.

Sandy McTavish brought up the rear.

They discovered as they went that the ground was not flat at all, that it rose and fell in waves which had been unobservable owing to the all-pervading white.

As they mounted to the top of the steepest rise they had come upon, they all turned back to look. There stood their pigmy guides in line, their leader standing a little in front of them. They waved a last farewell.

The pigmies at once returned answering signals.

Now the adventurers set their sleds to the fall of the snow-field.

"Good luck!" laughed Harry Franklin. "We shall be able to toboggan down this one."

Suiting the action to the word, he got astride the sled and, giving it a push from behind, Adam sent it flying down.

The slope was far longer and steeper than appeared, the sled simply racing down the final stretch of it to make part of the corresponding rise. One after the other the rest followed. Then they began to pull again.

There were times when the guide-post showed up vividly.

As they drew nearer to it they could tell that it was a very tall and strong post, standing fully thirty feet above the snow and planted deep in it.

It took them an hour and a half, alternately pulling and sledging to reach it, and it had been set at the summit of a rise.

Adam's heart beat as he made the last few yards of the summit and set his sled beside the guide-post. What if there were no other guide-post to be seen?

Not for one fraction of a second was he left in doubt, for as his eyes swept the field of ice and snow ahead of him, which was blinding white under the fierce light of the sun, he saw a second post standing up prominently in the far distance—the one object they could see that differed from the eternal snow.

"Look, Del Rivo!" said Adam exultantly. "The guide-post even as the pigmy said."

"Ah, yes!" growled the Portuguese. "As you say. It is a post. There may still be more of them—but whither do they lead? Are we not marching and sliding to our death?"

Adam's lips curled in contempt.

"What," he cried, "with all these supplies? With the tents to shelter us and the posts to lead us back if we want to return? Talk sense!"

They went on and on until they were too tired to journey farther.

Adam gave the order to rest, the tent being pitched beside one of the posts. There they ate their evening's meal, and as the sun vanished and the night came with unexpected swiftness, they covered themselves up with heavy clothing and slept.

The next day they resumed their journey, after eating, finding themselves obliged to cast off much of the clothing they wore, so hot was the sun.

And all the while they came upon post after post, each post set within sight of the other, and leading the way across the vast Silver Glacier—with the mountain whose crest was veiled always on the right of them.

There was something weird and terrifying about that enormous mountain. Adam caught himself wondering whether there could be such another mountain in the world. He believed whenever he looked at it that the veil which

hid its crest was made up partly of ordinary raincloud and partly of volcanic smoke—for how else could it always be there?

They seemed to draw no nearer to it. Its aspect never changed.

The sight of it began to get upon Adam's nerves. He would have screamed aloud as he looked at it had not the others been there.

Now the white snow was all around them. They could no longer see any trace of the higher boulder-strewn land where they had said good-bye to their pigmy friends.

How many days would it take them to cross this Silver Glacier—and what would they discover when they reached the other side of it?

Adam began to realise why it was none of the tribes in the country through which they had passed had ever attempted to cross the great snowfield.

Without proper equipment, and clothing, foods, stores, etcetera, it would prove an impossible task.

And yet that Hokahula messenger who had brought that letter his father had written from the unknown City of Barcoomba—where his father and sister were imprisoned—to Baruda, where the settler Walter Beavan lived, had accomplished it.

The Hokahulas must be a hardy race, Adam decided.

They camped a second day upon the glacier and beside one of the guide-posts which had been set up so cunningly—presumably by the Hokahulas—though how they had managed the task it was difficult to imagine.

Then began the third day's trek with the suffering Portuguese, now reduced to silence, staggering as he pulled his sled, and forever begging for brandy.

"This accursed field of snow will kill me!" he moaned; and sometimes when Adam caught the gleam of his wild eyes he believed that the man was mad.

Del Rivo, who had shaved every other day until they started to cross the glacier, would not look at safety razor and soap now, though they made water hot by means of an oil-stove.

He kept on repeating that he would never survive the snow tramp.

But that day they could see ahead of them a sweep of dark rising boulder-strewn ground, where patches of snow lay in the hollows, and beyond signs of vegetation.

Sandy McTavish was at pains to point this out to Del Rivo.

"Look, you crazy loon!" he cried. "You're the end of the glacier. It's miles awa', maybe, but we'll make it soon. The posts hae guided us aricht."

The Portuguese made no answer, but he ceased his raving and his cursing, and made lighter weather of it after that.

The Voice in the Night!

ALL were thoroughly weary from the constant trudging in the flat snowshoes and the dragging of their heavy loads.

But less than another day would see them safely through their troubles. They laughed and joked at that, and the deep tan of their faces, touched with red from the glare of snow and sun, showed how fit they were. The freedom from biting flies and all sorts of poisonous insects had been in itself a blessing.

It was Adam's firm belief that they would reach the far limits of the snow-field before the day closed.

Several times they halted for food and rest.

And as the day closed in they could see ahead of them yet another of the guide-posts. The last was vanishing behind them.

Adam frowned as he took stock of the new one.

"Look, Harry," he cried, "does it occur to you that there is something unusual in the shape of the post ahead of us?"

"Why, yes!" answered Harry, looking hard. "It has a support at the bottom of it—it is thickened there. Otherwise it does not differ from the others."

They had halted. Adam sought his glasses and focused them.

"Why," he cried, "the post is fashioned in a fantastic design—carved to resemble the figure of a man!"

"So it is!" Harry agreed, as he in turn used the glasses. "Odd, isn't it? And a clever piece of work, I should say, as well as one can make out from here. They must have some clever sculptor or wood-carver among the tribe we are seeking."

"It would indicate," suggested Adam, "that this is the first and last guide-post of the series from the Hokahulas' side—according as to whether their explorers are going or



Mounting the top of the steepest rise Harry Franklin got astride the sled. Then giving it a push from behind Adam sent it flying down the steep incline. (See page 26.)

coming. By George, it's been tough work. I couldn't have stood much more of it, Harry."

And now as they advanced to the post which they believed to be the last of all, the night shut down upon them as they struggled to come up with it before they were enveloped in darkness.

When they could see it no longer they pitched their tents, and, covering themselves up, lay down to sleep till dawn.

But Adam could not sleep that night. His restlessness kept Harry awake.

For the first time since they had begun their journey across the great glacier the wind sighed and moaned about the tent, so that Adam was glad it had been properly weighted down.

He could hear the soft beat of falling snow upon the canvas.

And there came to his alert and wakeful ears curious moans, as of a soul in torment.

It was the wind, Adam told himself, as he sat erect for the twentieth time, listening with bated breath; it must be the wind. And yet the cries were as those of a dying man—a man in pain.

"Are you awake, Harry?" asked Adam, in the darkness.

"Yes, Adam."

"Did you hear that awful sound?"

"Those cries—yes. Must be some wild beast on the prowl."

"Out here on the ice and snow?" asked Adam.

"Impossible, old man. I believed it must be my imagination. I know it wasn't now, since you heard it. I wish the day would come."

It seemed as if the long night would never end. It was the most awful night that Adam could ever remember.

And then the wind died down and the dawn came, ushered in by the glory of the sun. Adam, casting aside the warm things which had covered him, leapt to his feet, stretched his arms, and opening the flap of the tent, kicked the snow which had blown and drifted there aside, then stepped into the open.

It was a wonderful day—already hot—unbelievably hot after the cold of the night. His first glance was in the direction of the post, which he believed would be somewhere near at hand; and, sure enough, there it stood, not two hundred yards away.

It was capped with snow, as was the carved figure that formed the base of it. Adam stood petrified with amazement as he looked at this, the figure was so amazingly life-like in its outline—so real.

"Harry!" he shouted. "Come and look!"

Harry joined him. They moved forward—and as they did so from the direction of the post echoed that agonised cry that had haunted them through the night.

With a low cry, Adam sprang towards it. He did not wait to put on snowshoes. Sinking up to his knees at every stride, he floundered onward—Harry close at his heels.

And when, panting for breath, he reached the spot, he saw that it was no carved image that graced the bottom of the post, but a living—or, to be correct, a dying—man.

The snow that had clung to his cooling body had melted under the rays of the sun, leaving the flesh wet. The man was naked.

A magnificent man he was, full six feet three inches in height, such a man as Adam had never seen.

His head hung limp upon his shoulder, but Adam could see that the pinched and agonised face was handsome. The skin of the man was of copper brown and flesh tint mingled—skewbald. He was a Hokahula. And they had left him at the mercy of snow and ice all night when they might have released him—for he was tied securely hand and foot to the post, his legs being buried in the snow almost to the knees.

Now Sandy McTavish appeared in the mouth of the tent. "Snowshoes, Sandy!" yelled Adam. "Bring Jimmy Brown—and a sled. There's a dying man here. We must try and save him."

When Sandy McTavish and Jimmy Brown joined them, dragging the sled, Adam and Harry had already set the poor fellow free. He gave no sign of life, and his body was frozen stiff when they laid him full length upon the sled and covered him with warm clothing.

Whilst Sandy and Jimmy Brown dragged the sled and its burden away, Harry and Adam slowly followed, hampered by the looseness and the depth of the snow.

The Hokahula—for there could be no doubt as to the race to which the stranger belonged—was taken into the tent where Del Rivo was slowly rousing himself to wakefulness. The eyes of the Portuguese widened.

"Ah," he cried, "a man belonging to the skewbald race of which I have heard. I did not believe in the myth. But it seems it is so."

Adam, brushing the snow off him, helped to tend the sick man.

The Hokahula was frozen to the marrow, dying. Sandy McTavish believed him to be dead. And yet there was a certain warmth in his body, and his heart was beating feebly. They chafed his limbs. They massaged him from head to foot. They poured brandy down his throat. Then they covered him with warm clothing and skins and rugs and left him whilst they ate their breakfast. The tent was packed away. The sleds were loaded. The journey was begun anew, with an extra weight to carry. They passed the last of the guide-posts—just one more—and hauled the

(Continued overleaf.)

sleds by way of the smoother ground to shelter where they made their camp out of reach of the searching wind. Again they tended the rescued Hokahula. He was fast coming round. Hot soup from the can helped his recovery. At last he sat up, staring at them wonderingly. He blinked as he studied their faces. Then he spoke, and Muta, listening to him, answered back: "How! How! He speaks the tongue of my mother, the witch O-Kama!" ejaculated the black man. "He speaks of you as white gods. He says that he has a message for you." To the amazement of the adventurers, Muta and the Hokahula entered upon a long talk, at the end of which the skewbald native managed with shaking fingers to drag a pin made of horn out of his hair. This pin Muta seized, and pulling it apart took out of it a rolled paper. "For you, O white flyer of the air!" he said. Adam seized it greedily and read: "Written in the City of Barcoomba, in the land of

Hokahulas, beyond the Silver Glacier, and beneath the Mountain of the Hidden Crest. "I am sending this message by a faithful friend, in the hope that he may succeed in delivering it into the hands of a white man. I am languishing in the City of Barcoomba, from which there is no escape. My daughter Rosa is with me. They have made me king. The chief of their tribe is desirous of marrying my daughter. We are safe—but we desire our freedom. Let the news be conveyed to my dear wife—if still alive—and my dear son, Adam, The Grange, Studley, near Featherstone, England—and may God, in His Great Mercy—send us relief. "GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE."

Adam choked. A film of grateful tears blinded him. He handed the letter to his chum. "Harry!" he choked. "Look! Look!"

(It is cheery news indeed, but the plucky adventurers are by no means at the end of their quest yet! Don't miss next week's exciting instalment, chums.)

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