

66 **SAVED FROM THE SACK!**

THIS WEEK'S GRAND LONG COM-  
PLETE SCHOOL STORY OF ST. JIM'S.

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

# The **GEM** 2<sup>d</sup>

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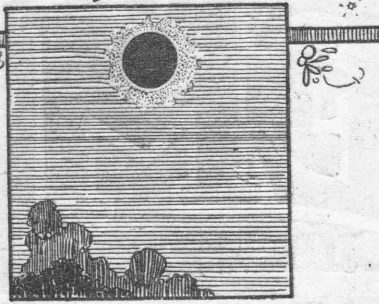


**LEVISON'S  
STRANGE  
DISCOVERY!**

# Once In a Life-Time!



"ECLIPSE"—  
THE WORLD'S  
"FREE SHOW."



An interesting article on Nature's wonderful Spectacle due to take place this Wednesday in the region of 6.24 a.m.

**H**AVE you got your piece of smoked glass ready for the 29th? Without it you'll miss the chance of a lifetime—a total eclipse of the sun, with all the roaring, whirling, and madly-shooting flames that you can only see around the sun when the ordinary sunlight is cut off! Such a thing hasn't happened in this country for over two centuries. And it won't happen again until the year 1999. Only thirteen total eclipses of the sun have "come off" in England in a thousand years!

You'll know all about "eclipse blindness" if you dare to look at the sun without that eye protection just before and just after the eclipse. For a matter of twenty-five seconds we should be safe in staring at the black circle that just previously was the shining sun, for that is the short period that the total eclipse lasts. But at the moment the tiniest crack of sunlight is visible again there is danger to your eyes.

This grand display of the sun's flames is always on, but the light of the sun's face is so intense that, so far as we on earth are concerned, those flames and tremendous upheavals of incredibly hot gas—masses of which are constantly darting out from the sun into space for hundreds of thousands of miles and at the speed of hundreds of miles a second—are beyond our vision except when the moon rushes between the earth and the sun, and the moon's disc fits exactly over the sun and hides it completely.

## A Thirty-Mile-Wide Track!

That is what is due to happen at 6.24 on the morning of the 29th. At four o'clock the sun will rise as usual. Then, as the eclipse starts, all will become dark again. The air will suddenly grow chill. Birds and cattle will fidget restlessly, as though afraid the end of the world is coming. And the stars will look out again.

To see this great stunt of the sun properly, we ought to be somewhere within the thirty-mile-wide track which astronomers call the "Belt of Totality." It stretches across the North of England and North Wales. All that country will be in deep shadow—the shadow of the moon cast by the sun—for just twenty-five seconds. Elsewhere, outside that belt, the eclipse will be only partial, and those of us who are outside will not be able to see the immense flames at all.

Neither will it be very dark; but a star or two will come out for those moments, and there will be a very eerie sort of look cast over everything. And, of course, the black rim of the moon can

be watched, through smoked glass, rushing across the blazing sun.

## Telescopes Like Big Guns!

Millions of people will be up and about soon after dawn specially to see this amazing free show, which is staged at the dizzy distance of 93,000,000 miles from us! At least half a million will go to the Belt of Totality by special excursions arranged by the railway companies; whilst the big officials of the world's most important observatories will be all a-quiver to "snap" the blacked-out sun and take all the numerous astronomical observations which they hope will result in not a few startling discoveries.

The Royal Observatory will be using a giant camera forty-five feet long, with plates measuring fifteen by twelve inches, and telescopes that in dimensions are more like big guns than anything else—though, unfortunately, we in Britain haven't such an outsize in telescopes as America, where they are busy building one with a reflecting mirror measuring ten feet (not inches!) across. There also they have a camera which takes four hundred photographs a second! But our eclipse-watchers are hoping to get along nicely with a "box of tricks" which takes things a great deal more calmly.

## Heads Chopped Off!

If the weather is bad on the great day, the astronomers will climb above the clouds in a "Daily Mail" aeroplane and there do their detective work—though a few thousand feet thus "pinched" from space will be humorously little compared with the 93,000,000 miles we mentioned just now!

Divide that by 400 and you get the distance of the moon from us. Some idea of the size of the sun can be realised if we imagine ourselves taking a round-the-sun trip in an aeroplane whizzing along at a ceaseless 120 miles an hour. That trip would take two and a half years, providing no halts were made on the road!

And supposing the calculations of the astronomers have gone astray and we all gape at the heavens for nothing? Such things have happened, but a very long time ago. There are plenty of records of total eclipses back in the dim beginnings of time.

As far back as the year B.C. 2137 there was one in China, which the official astronomers forgot to give notice of. Their names were Ho and Hi. And the heads of Ho and Hi were chopped off, simply because they failed to give warning of it!

## The Dragon in the Sky!

Like many other races, the Chinese have the wind up pretty considerably when eclipses happen, and even to-day the less enlightened among them organise lengthy processions, with great paper dragons carried in state through the streets during the hours preceding the eclipse, in the hope that their dragon god, being thus honoured, will be induced not to swallow the poor old sun "for keeps."

Ho and Hi paid the penalty because the dragon god might have taken offence because no fuss was made of him as heretofore, and in his wrath might have bolted the sun and kept it inside him!

## The Old—and the New!

In other regions of the earth where deep ignorance of science in any shape or form combines with superstition that is comic in its thoroughness, the natives have the greatest dread of being "laid out" by the sun's eclipse—not by any sudden bolt from the blue, but by a much more subtle process. You cannot for an instant shake their belief that any food or cooking-pots left uncovered, or wells left to remain open to the eclipsed sun's influence, will be poisoned.

And so, as they entertain a lively objection to tying themselves in knots consequent on the death agonies that would surely come from that "magic'd" food and water, they cover up everything of that nature.

As we have mentioned, though excitement among our own astronomers will on the eclipse day fall not far short of that shown by those benighted natives when an eclipse frowns down on their domains, it will be of a calm-and-collected order, as witness the use of the aeroplane should it be necessary to defeat the clouds.

Our scientists, at the time of writing, are trying to decide in favour of one or other of three makes of machine, though choice, in all likelihood, will be in favour of an enormous three-engined Handley-Page, capable of carrying fourteen passengers. Cameras will be fixed in the machine, one with an exposure of one-fifth second—a really big fellow this—and others with one-twenty-fifth of a second exposure.

With these the eclipse will be raked fore and aft, and those of us who are out of it on the great day will shortly after have our curiosity satisfied with newspaper reproductions of the result.

## A Little Experiment.

One thing that may possibly be puzzling you is how that belt of totality, mentioned at the commencement of this chat, is brought about. A dense shadow will be cast across that area and nowhere else simply because the moon is not large enough to hide the sun completely from view everywhere. A little experiment will help you to understand that thoroughly.

Hold a cricket-ball (representing the moon) up to a lighted lamp or gas jet or electric globe (representing the sun), so that the shadow of the ball falls on the floor or wall (representing the earth). That shadow will represent the belt of totality of the eclipse.

Get someone to hold the ball for you, so that when you look at it the light behind is entirely hidden. That's the total eclipse. Move a little to one side, out of the shadow of the ball, and you will be able to see some of the light which previously was hidden. You have stepped out of the belt of totality, and the home-made eclipse is therefore not total—and there you are!

**CARDEW, THE ENIGMA!** Slackness, cynicism and whimsicality would appear to be the outstanding traits in the character of Ralph Reckness Cardew, yet, despite these outward and visible signs, Cardew proves once again that he's capable of great things just when one least expects them of him!



# Saved from the Sack!

A Powerful New Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., the Chums of St. Jim's, with Ralph Reckness Cardew, the "Slacker of the Fourth," well in the lime-light.

By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

## CHAPTER I.

### Ten Thousand Pounds!

"YOUR deal, Lacy!"

Aubrey Racke, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, leaned over and took a cigarette from the open box before him as he spoke.

He was sitting cross-legged on the floor of a large, rather gloomy and dusty room, and sitting opposite to him, on the other side of a small packing-case that was doing duty as a table, was Gerald Crooke, his crony and study-mate.

Racke's remark had been addressed to Lacy of the Rylcombe Grammar School, who, with Carker, also of the Grammar School, made up the quartette of youthful "sportsmen" who were gathered together in convenient seclusion for the purpose of spending the hours of a half-holiday in their favourite recreation—card-playing and smoking.

As Lacy gathered the cards together and commenced to shuffle them, Racke glanced around him approvingly.

"We must come here again, you chaps," he said, blowing out a cloud of cigarette-smoke. "This is a jolly snug little place you've brought us to, Lacy. Far enough away from St. Jim's and the Grammar School to be quite safe; no chance of any dashed prefects stumblin' across us. How did you come to ferret it out?"

Lacy grinned.

"Oh, quite by accident!" he replied, dealing out the cards. "Carker and I were driftin' about in this direction one afternoon, and we happened to notice that this house was unoccupied, so we came along the drive to have a look at it out of curiosity. We found one of the doors at the back—the one we came in by this afternoon—was unfastened, so we had a look round inside."

"Hoping that the last tenants had left something of value behind them when they went, eh?" snapped Crooke, picking up his cards. "Find anything?"

"No dashed fear!" said Carker. "People don't overlook much these days. The only thing we came across was this old wooden box in the stables, and we lugged it in here for a table. Your lead, Crooke."

"I wish you'd found three or four more that we could have used as chairs," grumbled Racke. "It's not too dashed comfortable sittin' on the floor. If I sit here much longer I shall be too beastly stiff to cycle all the way back to St. Jim's. It must be about four miles."

"All of that!" agreed Lacy. "Which reminds me, we shall have to be startin' back soon. Better make the next hand the last."

"What's the hurry?" inquired Racke. "Plenty of time yet."

"For you, perhaps, but not for us," responded Lacy. "We've got an impot apiece to do for our dashed Form

master, and as we've slacked once, and had 'em doubled, he's warned us that if they're not handed in to-night we're booked for detention next half. And we don't want that."

"No fear! That would put the kybosh on our next outin'," agreed Racke.

"And you've put a dashed trump on my trick, Racke!" protested Crooke. "I say, are we supposed to be playing cards or holding a debating-meeting? You can't play cards and wag your chin at the same time."

"Oh, was that your trick?" said Racke, in dismay. "Sorry! I thought Carker played the queen."

"Well, that's lost us the hand," said Crooke disgustedly, throwing down the rest of his cards. "My deal this time, isn't it?"

"Yes! The last hand," said Lacy, lighting a fresh cigarette.

At the conclusion of the next hand the four young rascals settled their accounts with each other and rose rather stiffly to their feet.

"Well, we might as well all go together," said Racke, "though Crooke and I needn't be back at St. Jim's for another hour and a half or so."

The four of them strolled through a fair-sized lounge hall, down a short passage, and out of the house by a door at the rear, as coolly as though the place had belonged to them, and they had every right to be there.

The house of which they had been making a convenience stood in its own grounds, some distance back from the road, and had apparently been untenanted for some considerable time, to judge by the condition of the garden and lawns.

Weeds were sprouting among the gravel of the drive, and a litter of last year's leaves lay everywhere.

The juniors went across to a shrubbery near to the stables, where they had concealed their bicycles, and wheeled the machines out.

They started off down a path through the kitchen-garden in single file towards a small gate that opened on to a narrow lane, little more than a cart-track, running past the back of the house. The lane led out on to the main road some two hundred yards farther along, and Lacy and Carker had brought Racke and Crooke that way in preference to approaching the house by the more conspicuous route of the main road and the drive.

They had not gone many yards before Racke gave an exclamation of annoyance and stopped.

"Dash it all!" he said. "I've got a rotten puncture! My back tyre's flat!"

"That's cheerful!" commented Lacy, also stopping. "But perhaps it's only a slow one. If you can pump it up hard, it may carry you back all right!"

Racke grunted and detached his pump from the clips.

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He fitted the connection and pumped away vigorously, Lacy meanwhile leaning over and holding the machine upright by the handlebars.

At the end of two minutes' brisk work the tyre was as flat as ever. Evidently the air was escaping as fast as Racke pumped it in.

"It's no use!" he growled, straightening up. "It'll have to be repaired."

Lacy and Carker exchanged meaning glances.

"I say, Racke, I'm afraid we shall have to be pushing on," said Lacy. "I hope you won't mind if we leave you?"

"Oh, that's all right!" replied Racke, shrugging his shoulders. "You cut off if you've got to get back early. We shall manage!"

"Thanks!" said Lacy, in a tone of relief. "So-long, then! See you on Saturday!"

"All bein' well," replied Racke. "So-long!"

Carker and Lacy wheeled their machines through the gate, mounted, and rode off along the lane.

"We'd better get back to the shelter of the shrubbery to see to this tyre," said Racke. "Somebody might come along that lane and wonder what we're doing in here."

He led the way back along the garden path, pushing his machine. Crooke followed with his.

They turned the disabled machine upside down behind the bushes and set to work removing the tyre and putting a patch on the inner tube, over the puncture, which they easily discovered.

In less than a quarter of an hour they had completed the task and pumped up the tyre again.

"Look here, I'm dashed if I'm going down that beastly rutty lane again," declared Racke. "Ten to one that's where I picked up that confounded puncture, and I don't want another. We'll go out by the front way, and chance if— What's the matter?" he broke off, staring, as Crooke clutched him by the arm.

"Listen!" whispered Crooke, in a startled voice. "Somebody's coming."

The two juniors stood silent among the bushes.

The sound of footsteps moving through the litter of leaves on the pathway at the side of the house came clearly to their ears.

"Dash it!" muttered Racke uneasily. "I hope this isn't some rotten house-agent come to show somebody over the place. Keep low, Crooke, we don't want to be found here."

"No fear!" breathed Crooke fervently.

They peered between the bushes. From where they stood most of the back of the house was visible to them.

And as they watched, round the far corner came two men. They were rough-looking men in shabby clothes and cloth caps, with muffers round their necks and deep-set, furtive eyes that flickered restlessly about them—certainly not a house-agent and a prospective tenant, as Racke had feared.

It was obvious that the men, whoever they might be, had no more right to be in the grounds than had the St. Jim's juniors, and Racke breathed a sigh of relief as he realised that, as trespassers, he and Crooke had nothing to fear from them. But for all that he did not betray his presence, for there was something about the men that inspired a sense of mistrust. It might have been their appearance or their furtive manner, or a compound of both, but they certainly conveyed a strong impression of being men accustomed to living very much on the wrong side of the law.

So Racke and Crooke, deeming discretion the better part of valour, like Brer Rabbit, "lay low and said nuffin'."

One of the men gave a low-pitched, peculiar whistle, very evidently a signal, and stood listening intently.

There was no reply, and after a few seconds he turned to his companion with an expressive gesture.

"Bill ain't 'ere yet, then!" he said in a tone of disappointment. "'Ope 'e ain't goin' to be late!"

Though he spoke in a growling undertone, the two hidden juniors were just able to catch the words, for the men had halted less than four yards away from the bushes.

"'E ain't likely to be late!" responded the other. "Don't forget as we're ten minutes afore time. Yer can trust Bill to be on the spot this time. We've got the goods, remember. If 'e'd got 'em there might be a good chance o' 'im bein' missing."

He gave a hoarse chuckle.

"Let's 'ave another look at 'em while we're waitin' for 'im," suggested the first speaker. "The sight of 'em does my eyes good."

"Ah, an' mine, too!" agreed his companion, putting a hand into the pocket of his coat. He brought out a flat case of morocco leather and opened it.

The watching juniors craned their necks forward among the bushes and were rewarded with a glimpse of a long necklace of evenly graduated and perfectly matched pearls, which one of the men took out of the case and turned about in his hands so that it caught the light.

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Racke and Crooke almost betrayed their presence by simultaneous starts of amazement, but fortunately the men were too occupied in gloating over the necklace to notice the faint rustling of the bushes behind them.

"Worth ten thousand jimmy o' goblins, accordin' to the noospapers!" said the man who was holding it. "Lumme! Wot a 'aul!"

The other man scowled.

"We'll be lucky if we get five 'undred for it!" he growled. "And 'arf the fencibles won't look at it even at that price! They're gettin' too bloomin' careful o' their precious skins to take a risk!"

"Well, five 'undred ain't so bad!" said the man with the necklace. He gave it back to his companion. "'Ere, put it away agin! I wish Bill 'ud 'urry up if 'e's comin'!"

"Oh, he'll come right enough, you lay to that!" the other man assured him. He replaced the case in his pocket.

"Well, the Countess o' Castledean can say good-bye to these little beauties, bless 'er 'eart! She's seen the last of 'em!"

"Yo' bet she 'as!" said the other man, with conviction. "But I wish she'd 'ad a fancy for diamonds—they'd 'a' bin easier to get rid of. 'Ere, while we're waitin' for Bill, wot d'yer say if we go inside an' 'ave a fag? It ain't safe to light one out 'ere; somebody might come by and see the smoke, or summat."

"Right yer are! This 'ere door ain't fastened, I know."

The two rascals went into the house, leaving Racke and Crooke trembling with excitement among the bushes that screened them.

As the door closed on the men Racke turned to Crooke, his eyes glittering.

"By gad, Crooke, we're on a big thing here!" he whispered feverishly. "That's the Countess of Castledean's necklace! Did you read about it in yesterday's 'Daily Mail'?"

Crooke shook his head.

"No. You know I never read newspapers," he muttered. "Was it stolen?"

"That was the mystery. It was either stolen or lost. According to the paper the countess was comin' down to Abbotsford to stay, and she was bringin' the necklace with her. She was carryin' it herself, while her maid looked after her pet poodle, or somethin'. There was some sort of trouble on the line, and the London train was delayed, so they held up the local at Wayland Junction. All the passengers who were makin' the connection had to rush across from one platform to the other, and there was a lot of confusion. A few minutes after the local had started the countess discovered that she hadn't got the necklace, and she doesn't know whether she left it in the express or dropped it on the way from one train to the other, or what happened to it. I've heard she's an absent-minded old lady at the best of times."

"And now these chaps have got it," whispered Crooke. "I suppose it must have been stolen after—"

"They may have it," muttered Racke grimly, "but they're not goin' to keep it. We're goin' to get it from them."

"What?" gasped Crooke, his eyes goggling. "I say, Racke, are you mad?"

"Not so mad as I should be if I let this chance slip!" replied Racke. "Gad, man, it's the biggest stroke of luck we've ever had, falling across this business!"

"But how do you think you're going to—"

"Don't forget I've got this with me," muttered Racke, drawing something from his pocket.

It was a small, silver-plated water-pistol.

"B-but that's only a dashed toy!" protested Crooke. "You can't tackle two rotters like those with a thing of that kind!"

"They're not to know that," replied Racke. "It looks just like the real thing."

"Yes; but suppose they—"

"Suppose nothin'!" snapped Racke. "If you haven't got the nerve to help me I'll do it myself! I'm not missin' this!"

He stepped out from the bushes and stole towards the house. After a momentary hesitation Crooke followed him.

Racke pushed the door open quietly and crept into the passage. He saw nothing of the men, and it was not until he reached the hall that he heard the sound of voices in one of the rooms.

He stole to the door of the room. Peering round the lintel he saw the two men standing against the window, with their backs to him.

He raised the water-pistol and stepped into the room.

"Hands up!" he said sharply.

The men whipped round, with startled oaths, and found themselves gazing at the muzzle of what looked to be a very serviceable weapon.

They cowered back and raised their hands above their heads.

Racke was trembling violently, but he controlled his nerves with a tremendous effort, and called out to Crooke, who was lurking in the hall, ready to make a dash for safety in case Racke's bold plan miscarried.



Racke and Crooke craned their necks forward among the bushes, and were rewarded with a glimpse of a necklace of evenly-graduated and perfectly-matched pearls, which one of the men took out of the case. The juniors almost betrayed their presence by simultaneous starts of amazement, but fortunately the men were too occupied gloating over the necklace to notice the faint rustling of the bushes behind them. (See Chapter 1.)

"Come in here and take it out of his pocket while I keep them covered!" he called. "Hurry up!"

"Arf a mo', mister! Wot's all this 'ere—" began one of the men.

Racke cut him short.

"Shut up! I want that pearl necklace you've got!"

Crooke came doubtfully into the room.

Even now he could hardly believe that Racke had really succeeded in gaining the upper hand.

But when he saw the men covering back before the shining toy, he plucked up some measure of courage and went towards them.

Carefully avoiding passing between Racke and the men, he put a trembling hand into the pocket of the man whom he had seen with the necklace, and took out the jewel-case.

Racke's eyes gleamed. "Let's get out of this at once!"

He stepped backwards towards the door, still covering the men with the water-pistol.

Crooke passed out of the room first, handing the jewel-case to Racke as he passed.

Racke backed into the hall, the men still standing with their hands above their heads against the window.

"Done it!" breathed Racke exultantly.

At that moment the sound of a low-pitched whistle came from somewhere outside.

The ruffians started.

"There's Bill!" ejaculated one of them.

Racke was filled with sudden dismay. He realised that the third confederate for whom they had been waiting had arrived upon the scene. There was no time to be lost.

Crooke was already outside the house.

Racke turned and dashed out of the hall, down the passage, and through the back door, which he pulled to. In his haste he dropped the water-pistol, but he did not stop to pick it up. He could hear the men pounding down the passage.

He dashed across to the shrubbery and pulled out his bicycle.

Crooke, a scared expression on his face, was already standing on the pathway with his.

"Come on!" gasped Racke, flinging himself on to his machine and pedalling furiously down the garden.

He shot out into the lane, with Crooke just behind him.

Loud shouts arose from the direction of the house. The

men had pulled open the door and literally tumbled through it.

But Racke and Crooke, grinding away madly at their pedals, were already out of the garden and hidden by the hedge that bordered the lane, up which they were riding for their very lives.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Stranded!

"EEEEEE! Ugh! Ah!"  
Ralph Reckness Cardew, of the St. Jim's Fourth, sat up among the long lush grass at the foot of a tree against which his back had been resting, and yawned as he stretched himself luxuriously.

He blinked sleepily around him, and encountered the amused regard of Sidney Clive, also of the Fourth, who was propped up on one elbow with an open book before him, two or three yards away.

"Hallo! You're awake, then?" grinned Clive.

"Eh? Oh, yes, I suppose I am—unless your face is part of a horrible dream," yawned Cardew. "Eecee! Ugh! I think I must have dozed off."

"I'm inclined to think you must have done," agreed Clive dryly, "considering that you've been driving pigs to market for about an hour and a half. I began to think you weren't going to wake up again to-day, and I was wondering whether I should be able to bring you back to life by sticking a pin in you, or if I should have to tread on your face."

"My dear Sidney," said Cardew gravely, "I can assure you that either of those delightful methods would have brought me back to life at once, but I am sadly afraid that you would have departed from it immediately afterwards."

"That remains to be seen," commented Clive sceptically.

"Yours would have done, at any rate, unless I'd dumped them in the river," agreed Cardew cheerfully. "What's the time?"

"Time we were thinking about starting back," replied Clive.

"Good! Let's begin thinkin' about it, then," said Cardew lazily. "We might as well think about that as about anythin' else. I'm goin' to think very hard for the next half-hour or so, so please don't disturb me, Sidney."

He settled his back more comfortably against the tree, and closed his eyes.

"Hi!" shouted Clive in alarm. "Don't go to sleep again, you slacking ass!"

"I am not goin' to sleep," murmured Cardew. "I am goin' to think."

"Well, don't shut your eyes to do it, then," said Clive. "We shall have to be leaving here in about twenty minutes if we want to get back without rushing—and I do, I might say."

Cardew and Clive were taking their ease on Greenrush Island, a small place in the middle of the River Rhyl, about eight or nine miles away from St. Jim's.

It was a very pleasant spot for a picnic on a fine afternoon, but it was rarely visited by St. Jim's fellows on account of its distance from the school.

But Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth was the fortunate possessor of a small motor-boat—an interesting fact that was quite unknown to the authorities at St. Jim's, by the way—and in this little craft he was enabled to undertake such a journey with the minimum of time and exertion, which suited Cardew very well indeed. Anything which involved any sort of effort did not make the slightest appeal to Ralph Reckness Cardew.

He had spent some little care and thought in planning this particular outing, and in order to provide his two study-mates, Levison and Clive, with a pleasant surprise, he had kept the arrangements a careful secret from them until the last moment.

It was by no means unusual for Cardew to arrange such unexpected little treats for his chums, and as a rule they worked out quite according to programme, but this occasion had proved to be an exception to the rule.

For, unknown to Cardew, Ernest Levison, who was working hard for a scholarship exam, had made arrangements to spend the afternoon in the study of Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, for the purpose of being coached in mathematics, a subject in which he was not over-strong. And so, when Cardew had sprung his little surprise just after dinner, Levison had been obliged to refuse the invitation.

In his disappointment, Cardew had at first declared his intention of abandoning the picnic, but as the tea-basket had already been put up, and all other arrangements made, and Clive was free to go, he had finally decided that the two of them might as well go up the river for the afternoon as lounge about at St. Jim's.

They had enjoyed a pleasant, lazy afternoon, enlivened by

the contents of the tea-basket, on Greenrush Island, and now that it was nearing the time to return to St. Jim's, Clive was having some difficulty in rousing Cardew to the pitch of making preparations for the homeward journey.

"Look here, Cardew, if you go to sleep again I shall roll you into the river!" he threatened. "Dash it, man, you've been asleep all the afternoon; you can't possibly feel tired."

"I don't!" murmured Cardew. "Not a bit tired. Only just lazy, that's all!"

"Well, you'd better pull yourself together, because we shall have to go in a few minutes," said Clive. "We mustn't be late for lock-up!"

"Oh, no!" said Cardew solemnly. "That would be too dreadful, wouldn't it?"

"Don't be an ass! I'm going to finish this chapter, and then we shall start."

"Shall we?" murmured Cardew drowsily. "Good!"

He was asleep again by the time Clive closed his book and slipped it into his pocket about five minutes later.

Clive went over and awakened him by the simple process of inserting a toe-shoe, none too gently, into his ribs.

Cardew sat up with a gasp, and blinked reproachfully at his chum.

"I warned you!" said Clive. "Now come along and get a move on!"

Cardew yawned and scrambled to his feet reluctantly.

"Oh dear!" he sighed. "And I was so dashed comfortable."

He sauntered down to where the launch was moored to a tree-stump, and climbed aboard.

Clive brought the tea-basket along, and put it into the bow of the boat, then jumped in and cast off the painter.

"Right?" inquired Cardew.

"Absolutely!" replied Clive. "I put all the crockery and the kettle and spirit-stove back into the basket."

"Good enough!"

Cardew bent down and cranked up the little engine.

Chug-chug-chug!

The boat commenced to move through the water.

Cardew sat down on the stern-seat and swung the tiller over. The boat came round in a wide curve, circling about the island, until she was pointing down-stream in the direction of St. Jim's.

Clive settled down comfortably on a cushion in the bow and took his book from his pocket.

"Well, it's been a topping afternoon, hasn't it?" he said contentedly.

Cardew nodded, and stooped to the engine-controls.

The staccato "chug-chug-chug-chug!" of the engine merged into a throbbing hum as Cardew accelerated. The water creamed against the bows and purled away in twin waves that plashed up against the banks of the river with a gentle splash and gurgle.

For mile after mile the little craft forged along swiftly, and the juniors were nearly half-way back to St. Jim's when suddenly the engine missed fire two or three times.

Clive looked up sharply from his book.

"Hallo!" he said anxiously. "Not going to conk out, is she?"

"I don't think there's any fear of that!" replied Cardew. "Probably the plug's sooted or oiled up slightly, or else a bit of grit has worked through to the carburettor. Nothin' to worry about, any old—Oh, jemima!"

Cardew broke off suddenly. Even as he had been speaking so reassuringly to Clive, the engine had coughed and spluttered distressfully, and then stopped running.

The boat slowed down and began to drift with the current.

"My hat!" ejaculated Clive in a tone of dismay. "That has torn it!"

"Well, if it's the plug, it won't be much of a job," said Cardew, taking out a wrench from a box at his feet, and commencing to unscrew the sparking-plug. "Humph! It seems to be all right, as far as I can see. Just crank up, will you, Sidney, while I hold it on the cylinder."

Clive swung the engine over several times. The plug, in contact with the cylinder, sparked merrily at the gap.

"Well, it's not that," declared Cardew. "So it must be a choked carburettor. Just the sort of messy job I—"

"I say, what about your petrol?" put in Clive. "You'd better make certain the tank isn't empty before you start messing about with other things."

"Never thought of that," confessed Cardew, unscrewing the cap, and peering into the tank. "Gad, you're right on the wicket, Sidney! It's bone-dry!"

"I hope you've got a spare tin aboard," said Clive anxiously.

"In me," said Cardew impressively, "you behold one of the original wise virgins. In that bow-locker you will find at least two tins of juice. There may not be more, for, after all, I do not aspire to bein' a travellin' garage—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake stop rotting and tell me where to find that giddy petrol!" entreated Clive from the bows. "I can't see any here!"

"What?" Cardew stepped over to him. "There ought to be some there!"

One glance into the locker assured Cardew that there was indeed no spare petrol aboard.

He went back and sat on the stern seat.

"That has put the gilded roof on it," he said, surveying the fretting Clive with a humorous expression of exaggerated despair. "Alone on the vasty deep with a lingerin' death from starvation starin' us in the face. The sad scenes of my misspent life pass before my despairin' eyes in solemn procession."

"You may be able to see the funny side of it," said Clive, "but I'm hanged if I can. Do you know it's gone six o'clock?"

"No, has it?" said Cardew interestedly. "Fancy that! How time does fly!"

"Ass! You know what I mean; we shall be an hour or two late for lock-up, and Railton will scrag us!" Clive glanced around him desperately. The boat was still drifting with the current, but very slowly. "Look here, Cardew," he broke out, "there must be some way out of this!"

"Out of what—the boat?" inquired Cardew innocently. "Well, there's the river, of course, but if you're thinking of swimmin' back to St. Jim's, old bean, I'm afraid you'll have to go alone, because—"

"Oh, stop fooling!" implored Clive earnestly. "Can't you suggest something?"

"Well, I was noticin' that we seem to be driftin' towards the bank," said Cardew thoughtfully. "And if we can get ashore we might be able to scrounge a tin of petrol from somewhere."

"By Jingo, you're right!" agreed Clive, realising that they were indeed slowly approaching the left bank. "Look, there's the roof of a house there, between the trees. They're practically sure to keep a car, and they'd be certain to oblige us with some petrol if we explain the fix we're in."

"Nothin' is certain in this world," yawned Cardew. "But it's possible, of course. Have a shot at that tree-branch with the boat-hook, Sidney. You ought to be able to manage it."

Greatly to his relief, Clive did manage it, and a few seconds later the little craft was being moored to the trunk of the same tree.

"Come along!" said Clive, springing ashore briskly. "If we can get some petrol within the next few minutes we shall just about land back in time."

"I dare say," agreed Cardew indifferently. "But it's not worth breakin' our necks. We're not likely to get any medals for bein' punctual."

"Oh, come along!" reiterated Clive impatiently, and the two juniors set out through the belt of trees that separated the river from the house whose roof they had glimpsed between the topmost branches.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Levison Goes to Meet His Chums!

"WELL, Levison, I really think that will do for this afternoon. Perhaps you'll work out those four quadratics on your own and let me have them some time to-morrow evening."

Mr. Railton leaned back in his chair and tapped the edge of his desk with the pencil that he had been using to correct Ernest Levison's exercises.

"I will, sir!" promised Levison readily, rising to his feet and gathering up his books. "Thank you very much. It's been awfully good of you, sir, to give up your afternoon to me like this."

"Not at all, Levison," disclaimed the Housemaster kindly. "I'm only too pleased that you've taken advantage of my offer of extra-coaching. You ought to stand an excellent chance of pulling off that scholarship if you'll put your back into these maths for the next few weeks. What's the time? Ten past four! Good gracious! I'm booked for tea with Dr. Holmes. I must hurry across at once. Now, don't forget those quadratics."

"No, sir!"

Ernest Levison closed the door of the Housemaster's study behind him and made his way to the Fourth Form corridor.

When he entered Study No. 9 he found the table set ready for tea, and his minor curled up in the armchair reading.

"Hallo!" said Levison in surprise, putting down his books. "What's the idea of this, Frank? Anything the matter?"

"No," replied the Third-Former, sitting up with a smile, and stretching himself. "I've been ball-fagging at the First Eleven nets, and Wally and Manners and the rest of them have gone off somewhere. So I thought I'd come along and have tea with you."

"Right you are! Thanks for getting it ready. You've saved me the trouble, anyway. Sit down and make yourself at home."

"Will Clive and Cardew be coming in for tea?" inquired Frank as he poured boiling water into the teapot.

"No," replied his brother. "They've gone up the river in the launch for a picnic. They wanted me to go, but when Cardew asked me I'd already fixed up with Railton for extra foot, so it was impos."

"Rotten luck!" said the fag sympathetically.

"Oh, I don't know," smiled Levison. "I dare say the swotting will do me more good in the end."

"I say," said Frank suddenly, pausing in the act of spreading jam on to his bread-and-butter, "wouldn't it be top-hole to take out a boat and go up the river to meet them? Do you know where they've gone to?"

"Greenrush Island. Yes, that's quite a good notion of yours, Frank. I could just do with an hour or so on the river after mugging indoors all the afternoon."

"If we start about five o'clock we ought to get three or four miles up the river before we meet them," went on the Third-Former eagerly. "Then they can tow us back. It'll be better than being in the motor-boat ourselves," he added enthusiastically, obviously delighted at the prospect.

"That's so," agreed his major. "As soon as we've finished tea you can cut across to the boathouse and bag a single-sculler while I change into flannels."

"Good!"

Half an hour later Frank Levison was at the rudder-lines of a skiff that was being steadily pulled up the river by his brother.

"This is the life!" murmured the Third-Former happily, lolling back on his cushion. "Pity we can't use the river all the year round."

"You keep your eyes ahead, and stop twiddling those lines about!" adjured his brother, with mock sternness. "I don't want to be landed into the bank. No sign of the launch yet, I suppose?"

"No," replied the fag, straining his eyes up the long stretch of river. "But there's a canoe coming along, though."

"Who's in it?"

"Looks like Tom Merry, with Manners and Lowther. I wonder if they've seen anything of the launch?"

"Not very likely," said Levison. "Ten to one they've been up the backwater as they're in a canoe, and in any case they aren't likely to have been as far as Greenrush Island."

"Cheer-ho!" hailed Tom Merry as the boats drew near. "Putting your back into it, Levison?"

"Just a bit." Levison rested on his sculls and turned to smile at Tom Merry & Co. "You chaps been on a picnic?"

"Yes. Couldn't resist the temptation a day-like this," replied the Shell captain.

"Georgous way of enjoying yourself—a picnic," put in Monty Lowther. "Ants in the butter, earwigs in the tea, and wasps in the jam. Delightful!"

"Don't take any notice of Monty," laughed Tom Merry. "He's been like this all the while because we won't let him unload a cargo of funny stories on to us. At least, he says they're funny. We don't agree with him."

"You assos can't appreciate real humour," declared Lowther. "Would you believe it, Levison, they can't see the point of this? There was once a fellow who went out on the river in a boat, and—"

"There'll be a story going round at St. Jim's about a fellow who went out on the river in a canoe and didn't come back," hinted Manners darkly. "I'm getting fed-up with that silly yarn. You've told it three times already."

"And you haven't seen the joke in it yet!" retorted Monty.

"Well, you can't expect a chap to see what isn't there," argued Manners. "Let's be getting along. I want to get back and develop that film. I say, Levison, I've taken some ripping photographs this afternoon."



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"Photographs!" jeered Monty Lowther. "That's all Manners can think about! Of all the potty, crack-brained hobbies—"

"Oh, come on, you asses!" laughed Tom Merry, dipping his paddle into the water. "So-long, Levison!"

"Just a moment!" said Levison. "I suppose you don't happen to have seen anything of Cardew and Clive on the river?"

"No," replied Tom Merry. "But they're down this way somewhere. They steered the launch near to a Grammar School boat early this afternoon and almost swamped it. We met Gordon Gay and some of his pals up the backwater, and they were pretty sore about it—in fact, they had a notion of taking it out of us, but there was nothing doing. We splashed them with paddles and made them keep their distance."

"You chaps going to meet them?" inquired Manners.

"Yes," said Levison. "They should be coming along in a few minutes, and then they'll be able to take us in tow."

"And very nice, too," agreed Tom Merry. "Only wish we'd got millionaire pals with private yachts to tow us back and save us the fag of paddling. As it is we'd better be getting along. We haven't got too much time to do it before lock-up. Cheerio!"

"Cheerio!" responded Levison, and bent to his sculls again as the Terrible Three moved off.

It was nearly a mile farther on when Levison eased up and turned on his seat to stare along the river with a puzzled frown.

"We ought to have seen something of them before now!" he muttered, a trifle uneasily.

"Do you think they've had a breakdown?" suggested his minor anxiously.

"I hardly think so," responded Levison slowly. "Of course, it's possible, but I'm more inclined to think they've stayed on the island till the last minute. You know what Cardew is like. Anyhow, we've still got time to get back by sculling hard, and if we don't meet them within the next five minutes we'll turn back. I don't want you to be late for call-over."

"If I wasn't with you, you wouldn't turn back till you met them, would you?" said the Third-Former rather miserably.

Ernest Levison shook his head.

"No. I should carry on till I found them in case anything was wrong."

"Well, if you want to keep on as it is, Ernest, I can risk—"

"That's all right, young 'un. You mustn't chance getting on the wrong side of Selby. And it's a thousand to one they'll turn up in the next few minutes."

But Levison's tone was not quite so confident as his words. He was beginning to fear that, after all, an accident had really happened to the launch.

Suddenly Frank gave an exclamation and pointed to the right bank. His brother rested on his sculls and turned to look.

"By Jove! The launch!" he said. "And tied up to a tree! It looks as if something is wrong, then! But where are Cardew and Clive?"

A few quick strokes brought them to the deserted craft, and Levison climbed aboard.

"I should say the engine's conked, and they've gone to get some help," he said, looking around. "They can't be far away, because the engine's still warm."

"What are we to do?" said Frank.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"There's nothing for it but to wait here till they come back," he said. "Hallo! The cap of the tank's unscrewed! Yes, it's empty! That's what's wrong, then! They've run out of petrol! They must have gone off to try to get some."

"I bet they're feeling pretty blue!" said Frank.

Levison smiled.

"Well, Clive may be," he said. "But I'm pretty certain that Cardew isn't worrying much. It's not his way. Still, things aren't so bad. There's three-quarters of an hour before lock-up, and we're not more than four miles from St. Jim's; and I know the launch will do eight miles an hour. So if there's any petrol to be got near here we shall manage to get back in time even now."

"I say," broke in Frank, "I saw the roof of a house just over there as we were coming along. You can't see it from here—the trees are in the way. Perhaps that's where Clive and Cardew have gone to get petrol."

"Very probably," agreed Levison thoughtfully. "Look here, Frank, you stand by the boats, and I'll go and see if I can find them. I'll be back in five minutes at the most, whatever happens."

"All right. But don't be longer, will you?"

"I won't, kid. I'll come back straightway, whether I find them or not."

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Ernest Levison jumped out on to the bank, and, waving a cheery hand to his minor, disappeared among the trees in search of his study-mates.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Into the Net!

"WITH a bit of luck, we ought to get some petrol," said Clive hopefully, as Cardew and he climbed a stile and came out on to a road that ran almost parallel with the river on the other side of the little spinney through which they had just made their way.

Cardew grinned.

"Well, it hasn't been our lucky day so far," he pointed out. "But, of course, you never know. There's the house, anyway."

It stood well back from the road, behind a high hedge pierced with a wide gate that opened on to a gravelled drive.

When they reached the gate one glance through it to the house beyond was sufficient to dispel their hopes.

"Oh hang!" muttered Clive disappointedly. "The blessed place is unoccupied! What a rotten sell!"

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"So much for luck!" he said lightly. "However, there's sure to be another house, if not a village, somewhere near. We're not in the middle of a desert."

"That's all very well!" grumbled Clive. "We haven't got an hour or so for exploring the countryside. It's the time I'm thinking about!"

"Can't you find somethin' more pleasant than that to think about?" inquired Cardew. "Time was made for giddy slaves, you know."

"Oh, I know you don't worry!" snapped Clive. "I don't believe you'd care a brass button if we didn't get back to St. Jim's before midnight."

"I shouldn't!" agreed Cardew serenely. "Why should I?"

Clive snorted.

"Oh, shut up, and come along, you silly ass!" he growled disgustedly, gripping Cardew by the arm and forcing him to step out at a brisker pace. "Let's get on and find a house, or a garage—any place where we can get some petrol. Leg it, you lazy slacker! Do a bit of a trot!"

"No, thanks, old bean! Walkin' is quite enough exertion—too much, in fact. Don't forget I've still got my sea-legs. Oh gad! Don't jerk my arm like that!"

"Well, hurry up, then!" exhorted Clive relentlessly. "I want to get back before lock-up, if you don't!"

The two juniors broke into a sharp trot, Clive compelling Cardew to keep up with him, much against that easy-going junior's inclinations.

"Oh gad!" gasped Cardew dolefully. "What a giddy life! This is what comes of chumming up with strenuous blighters! I say, Clive, steady up, old bean! This rushin' about an'—Hallo! What's happenin'?"

A sudden shout from behind them had interrupted Cardew's protest, and they paused in their stride and looked back.

Two men, who had apparently just emerged from the drive of the unoccupied house, stood in the road staring after them. Just as the juniors looked round a third man appeared, and a second later all three commenced to run in the direction of the Fourth-Formers.

"Stop!" shouted the foremost man, waving his arm.

"We seem to be greatly in demand all of a sudden," said Cardew, with a puzzled frown.

"Rot! They're nothing to do with us!" said Clive.

"Come on!"

He pulled impatiently at Cardew's arm and forced him into a trot again.

"But really, old bean, I'm certain the gentleman with the nice voice—"

"Stop! You two kids there! Stop, I tell yer!"

"You see, he does mean us!" said Cardew. "Now, I wonder—"

"We're not stopping for them, I say! I don't like the look of them; and, anyway, we've got no time to waste. Keep running!"

Crack!

Something whistled past them and threw up a spurt of dust from the road some distance ahead.

The juniors instantly pulled up, with simultaneous gasps of consternation.

"G-good heavens!" breathed Clive, aghast. "They're shooting at us!"

"I told you they wanted us," said Cardew calmly.

"But—but we— Oh, my hat! What—"

With a swift patter of feet the first of their pursuers—a grim-faced man, with a disfiguring scar that puckered





Racke raised the water-pistol and stepped into the room. "Hands up!" he said sharply. The men whipped round, startled, and found themselves gazing at the muzzle of what looked to be a very serviceable weapon. They covered back, and raised their hands above their heads. (See Chapter 1.)

up one side of his mouth in a perpetual snarl—was upon them. He clutched at Clive's shoulder with his left hand, gripping with a brutal strength that brought an exclamation of pain to the boy's lips. A squat automatic pistol gleamed dully in his right hand, menacing Cardew.

"Why didn't yer stop when I told yer to?" he demanded viciously. "I'd 'arf a mind to plug yer, 'stead o' shootin' wide, yer young whelps! Now then, 'and 'em over afore yer gets 'urt!"

"Eh?" said Clive, opening his eyes widely in amazement. "Hand over what?"

The man glared balefully at him.

"Innocent little duck, ain't yer?" he sneered. "Look 'ere, don't try that game wi' me!"

By this time another of the men had come panting up and grasped Cardew. The man who held Clive turned and scowled at him.

"I dunno what you're a-comin' to, lettin' a couple o' kids like these 'ere put it across yer!" he snarled. "Mighty good job fer you as I were 'andy!"

"I'm sorry, Bill!" whined the other, forcing Cardew's wrists behind his back. "Yer see, we—" He broke off short, staring from one to the other of the juniors, in an amazement fully equal to theirs. "Ere, 'arf a mo'!" he gasped. "These 'ere ain't them at all!"

"What!" rasped the scarred-faced man.

"They ain't the same!" repeated the other. In his astonishment he relaxed his grip upon Cardew, and the junior was quick to avail himself of the opportunity and twist his shoulder free.

The third man had now arrived upon the scene, and he stood staring at the juniors as though he could not believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Launne! Them ain't the two!" he said, in a tone of stupefaction.

"Bah! They 'est be! You're a couple o' idiots!" The

scarred-faced man's voice grated across the moment of silence that had followed the newcomer's words. "Didn't we see 'em runnin' away from the gates?"

"Yes, but look here, Bill, they really ain't the same!" The last arrival spoke with desperate earnestness. "I'll swear as they ain't, an' we ought to know—me an' Sid. We saw 'em, an' you didn't!"

"See 'em!" snarled Bill, with savage contempt. "Yus, I should think as yer did see 'em, seein', as they scared yer out o' yer senses wi' a pop-gun! I expect the truth is yer was both too bloomin' scared to see straight. Anyway, if they ain't the same, they must belong to the same gang, or they wouldn't be hangin' round 'ere, an' I'm 'oldin' on to 'em till we find the others."

"Look here, what does this—" began Clive indignantly. The scarred-faced man turned on him with a threatening gesture.

"Shut yer mouth, or I'll mighty soon shut it for yer!" he gritted.

"But you—"

Smack!

The man struck Clive across the mouth with the hand that held the automatic, bringing a smear of blood to his lips.

"I warned yer!" he snarled. "Now yer've got it!"

"Gad!"

Incensed by the brutal blow, Cardew, who had been standing unguarded, sprang forward and crashed his fist into the bully's jaw. Taken by surprise, the man staggered back, releasing his hold on Clive, who immediately put himself in the path of the other two, who were making for Cardew.

"Stick it, Ralph!" he shouted, hitting out and sending the smaller of the men reeling with a shrewd upper-cut.

"Good man!" applauded Cardew. "But it's hopeless!"

It was, indeed. The scarred-faced man, recovering from the blow, thrust the automatic into his pocket and flung his great arms round the slim form of Cardew, who struggled in vain against that powerful grip.

At the same moment the third man closed with Clive, and, utilising what appeared to be a favourite trick with him, gripped the junior's arm and twisted it behind him until Clive almost fainted with the pain.

"Ere, you!" panted Bill, addressing the man whom Clive had struck. "Come an' get 'old o' this young dog! Wot the 'eck did yer let 'im go for? I'll pay the little brat out for that!"

And he caressed his jaw tenderly, as the other man hastily obeyed his leader's order and gripped Cardew by the elbows, so that he was helpless.

And while the dandy of the Fourth was thus held the scarred-faced man deliberately struck him a heavy, back-handed blow across the face.

"Ere, I say, Bill, we can't stop on the road like this!" urged the man who was guarding Clive, casting apprehensive glances around. "S'pose somebody was to come along?"

"Trust you fer gettin' cold feet," sneered Bill. "Yer white-livered 'ound! Right yer are, then! We'll take these 'ere young cock-sparrrers back to the 'ouse."

In spite of their struggles, the juniors were half-dragged and half-carried to the gates of the drive and up to the house, where an entrance was made through a door at the rear.

They were taken along a short passage and into a large, dimly-lighted room on the ground floor.

Bill closed the door and produced the automatic from his pocket.

"Now look 'ere," he snarled menacingly. "I've 'ad just about enough o' this 'ere funny business, see? The sooner as you understand as I ain't no Sunday-school teacher, and that I wouldn't think no more o' wringin' yer blessed necks than I would a sparrer's, the better it'll be for yer."

"You rotter!" burst out Clive passionately. "Open that door and—"

"I don't want none o' yer lip!" snarled the man. "Yer've 'ad one taste o' my 'and, an' yer'll 'ave another if yer opens yer trap agin!"

"We're wastin' time," protested one of the other men sullenly. "These 'ere ain't the two!"

"Shut yer fool mouth an' speak when you're spoke to! I know what I'm a-doin'!"

"I'm pleased to hear that," drawled Cardew. "It's nice to feel that somebody has some idea of what all this means. I only wish we were as well-informed."

"Eh?" growled Bill, staring blankly at him.

"Why this overwhelmin' desire for the pleasure of our company?" inquired Cardew politely.

In spite of the situation, Clive was forced to smile at the expression on the face of the scarred man. It was obvious that Cardew's nonchalance was something entirely new to his experience.

The man who had been alluded to as Sid scowled savagely.

"E's tryin' to take it out o' yer, Bill!" he volunteered. "Gif 'im a wipe 'side the kisser!"

"E'll get what 'is pal 'ad, if 'e tries comin' it wi' me," snarled Bill. "Now then, you two, get busy! I'll look after 'im while you search the other!"

He stepped forward and thrust the muzzle of his automatic into Cardew's ribs, while his companions rapidly turned out the contents of Clive's pockets, which, as he was in flannels, amounted to nothing beyond a handkerchief, a watch, a packet of toffee, a copy of the "Schoolboys' Own Library," a small pocket-camera, and some loose change. The scarred-faced man was seized with a fierce excitement as the leather case containing the camera was produced, and he ordered the searchers to hand it to him. When he discovered what it was he flung it across the room with a curse.

Cardew's pockets were equally unproductive of anything that satisfied the wants of the ruffians. Even his wallet, containing several Treasury notes, they did not so much as open, but tossed to the ground with the other things.

One of the men who had been searching the juniors shrugged his shoulders.

"I told yer as they weren't the same two," he muttered in an aggrieved tone.

The scarred-faced man stood for a moment glowering sullenly at the Fourth-Formers, and then suddenly snapped his broken, discoloured teeth together with a click and turned on the speaker furiously.

"I know what yer told me!" he gritted. "And likewise I know what a thrice-cursed fool yer are, so I take no manner o' notice o' what yer do say till I've made sure for myself! Secin' yer know so much, p'r'aps yer can tell me where the other two are, eh?"

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The man shuffled his feet and avoided his leader's glance. "Lost yer tongue all of a sudden, 'ave yer?" sneered Bill. "Well, I'll find 'em for myself, they can't be far away. And these 'ere two can stay 'ere till we come back. Get some rope an' tie 'em up."

The juniors had already realised the futility of resistance, and when one of the men produced some yards of stout cord from his pocket they submitted to the binding of their wrists and ankles.

Then the three men hurried out of the room, and a few seconds later the bang of a closing door announced that they had left the house.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Rescue!

ERNEST LEVISON was about to turn in at the gate of the drive when he discovered, to his disappointment, that the house was unoccupied.

He halted abruptly, and stared around him rather helplessly.

Clearly, Cardew and Clive were not to be so easily found as he had been hoping.

Not having any clue to the direction in which they had gone on their quest for petrol, it seemed to Levison that the wisest thing he could do would be to go back at once to the launch and await their return.

Accordingly he was just about to turn away when he caught sight of something lying on the drive about thirty yards or so from the gate, and with a startled exclamation he went inside and picked it up.

At the first glance he had recognised it for what it was—a St. Jim's cap—but it was not until he had it in his hands that he was able to identify it as belonging to Clive.

Levison looked up sharply from the cap and regarded the house with a new interest.

As he stood there a sudden bang, like the sound of a slammed door, came faintly to his ears, and some instinct prompted him to step quickly off the drive into the shelter of a big rhododendron bush.

A few moments later three men came round a corner of the house.

His first glimpse of them gave Levison reason for being glad that he had obeyed his instinct and taken cover, and he drew back a step or two farther behind the bush and waited for them to pass by. As they came nearer he was able to see them through the interstices among the leaves, and what he saw only served to confirm his first impression of them.

They passed along the drive, quarrelling among themselves in snarling tones, without so much as a glance towards the bush that hid Levison from their sight. As they drew level with the junior he overheard some words that sent a chill to his heart.

The speaker was a burly ruffian whose unprepossessing appearance was heightened by a livid scar that extended from a battered "cauliflower" ear to the corner of a loose, cruel mouth.

"Curse the brats!" he was mouthing viciously. "They'll be safe enough in there fer a bit, an' if we don't lay 'ands on the others I'll take it out o' them! They'll talk afore I've finished with 'em! I'll make 'em wish as they'd never a-bin born, you mark—" His voice trailed away into a confused murmur as he and his companions passed out of earshot.

Levison stood rigid behind his bush. He knew now why Clive's cap had been lying on the gravel of the drive, and he was conscious of a sickening fear for the safety of his chums.

He waited only to see the men turn out into the road, and then he was racing round to the back of the house.

The first door he tried was locked, but another on the far side of a large window opened readily. He stepped quietly through into a dimly lighted passage with a green-baize door at the far end and two other doors opening to right and left midway along it; obviously part of the servants' quarters. He pushed open the baize door and came out into the hall.

His heart was beating painfully, and the roof of his mouth was dry, as if he had been running a long way.

"Cardew!" he called softly into the gloom. "Clive! Where are you?"

"Hallo! Who's that? Gad, I believe it's old Levison!"

It was unmistakably Cardew's voice, and Levison, with an exclamation of heartfelt relief, darted into the room from which it had come.

He uttered a gasp of amazement as he saw Cardew and Clive, bound hand and foot, lying on the floor, but he took out his knife and cut the cords without wasting time asking any questions.

"Thanks, old top!" drawled Cardew, dusting himself down with flicks of his handkerchief. "Jolly glad to see you, but where do you happen to have sprung from?"

Rapidly and concisely Levison explained the train of events that had resulted in his finding them, and then gave expression to his own curiosity.

"I suppose the roppers robbed you and then tied you up to give them time to get away?" he ventured.

Cardew shook his head.

"Not at all," he responded. "That's the amazin' part of the whole affair. They haven't taken a bean off us."

"What?" said Levison incredulously.

"A fact, I assure you! Queer, isn't it? They simply lugged our wallets and tickers and things out of our pockets and chucked 'em on the floor. There they are now—not a thing missin'."

"But—but what on earth—" gasped Levison in a bewildered voice. "Do you mean to say they emptied your pockets and tied you up and left you like that, and yet never took your money away, or anything?"

"Just that!" nodded Cardew, picking up his scattered belongings from the floor. "But we'll tell you the rest of the yarn later. At the present moment I have a notion it would be just as well to get out of here while the goin' appears to be more or less good. No knowin' when our pleasant little playmates may be returnin'. There's your penknife, Ernest. Stick it into your pocket an' come on. I rather fancy we've got everythin'—Hallo!"

He stooped to pick up something on which he had trodden while moving about the room recovering his possessions. He crossed to the window to examine it more closely.

"What's that?" inquired Levison curiously. "Found something?"

Cardew turned from the window and tossed a small object across to him. Levison caught it eagerly and submitted it to a short inspection, then turned a puzzled glance upon Cardew.

"Why, it's only your little silver pencil," he said. "What is there—"

Cardew chuckled.

"Nothin' very remarkable about findin' my own pencil on the floor after my pockets have been turned out, is there? Only it just happens that I didn't know I had it with me this afternoon, so I wasn't expectin' to pick it up." "But why make a song about it?" said Levison impatiently.

"It just struck me as curious that I should be so forgetful, that's all," yawned Cardew. "Let's be gettin' a move on. This place is beginnin' to bore me."

The three juniors left the house, by the door at the rear, and as they slipped cautiously through the grounds towards the road, avoiding the drive from motives of prudence, Clive gave Levison a brief account of what had occurred to Cardew and he after they had left the launch in search of petrol.

The story amazed Levison beyond words.

But when they crept through a gap in the hedge and saw Frank standing against the stile by the spinney, a hundred yards or so away, staring up and down the road with an anxious expression on his face, Levison realised, with a distinct shock, that there was another and more immediate problem to be solved—that of getting back to St. Jim's before lock-up.

He glanced hastily at his watch, and discovered to his dismay that though they might have stood some chance of doing it had the launch been serviceable, as matters were there was no chance at all.

As soon as Frank saw them he came running across to meet them.

"Cheero!" he shouted gleefully. "So you found them all right, then, Ernest? Good! You didn't get any petrol, though," he added, glancing at their empty hands. "Never mind; I've got some!"

"Wh-a-a-at!"

"A two-gallon tin," chuckled the fag. "Really, I'm not pulling your legs. It's in the boat."

"But how the—" mumbled Clive blankly.

"Would you mind explainin' this little conjurin' trick of yours, young 'un?" pleaded Cardew. "It's rather beyond our feeble brains."

"Oh, it was just a stroke of luck! When Ernie was away longer than he said he'd be I began to get a bit anxious, so I tied the skiff up and came to see if I could find him. Just as I got out on to the road a car came along, and I waved to it on the off-chance that

they might stop so that I could ask them if they'd happened to see any of you. The driver was a decent sort, and he pulled up at once. He hadn't seen you, and when I told him what you'd gone for, he said there wasn't much chance of your getting any petrol within a mile or two. So he yanked out a tin and gave it to me; in case you came back without any. A jolly topping chap he was."

"He must have been," agreed Levison enthusiastically. "Jove, that's given us a sporting chance of getting back before lock-up. Come on; let's get started! You didn't pay for the petrol, did you, Frank?"

"No. I hadn't enough money. I told him so, and he only laughed and said it was all right. I asked him for his name and address so that we could send the money on, and he gave me a card"—the fag produced it from his pocket and handed it to his brother—"and said that if we were as punc-punc-punctual—"

"Punctilious," suggested Cardew smilingly.

"Yes, that was it—punctilious as all that, we could let him have a tin for it some time."

"Gad!" drawled Cardew. "If this part of Sussex was on the direct route between Jerusalem and Jericho I should say you must have fallen in with the original Good Samaritan himself."

"Oh, for goodness' sake stop chattering rot, and get that tank filled!" said Clive impatiently. "The ass has done nothing but blather piffle all the afternoon."

"You'd think he'd be gettin' reconciled to it by now, wouldn't you?" murmured Cardew slyly, tilting the contents of the petrol-can into the tank of the launch's engine.

A few seconds later the little motor was running merrily.

"Thank goodness!" said Levison, as the two boats moved out into the stream, the skiff, at the end of a short tow-rope, dancing merrily in the rippling wake of the launch.

"Now we're all right. By the way, that motorist lives in Wayland. His full address is on this card, and we can get a tin of petrol and call with it next time we go into Wayland. I say, Cardew, if you can keep her going at this pace we shall stand a good chance of getting back in time."

"Well, we sha'n't be more than a few minutes late at the worst," grinned Clive. "Things look a jolly sight rosier than they did a few minutes ago, thanks to young Frank's idea of stopping that car. Good for you, young 'un! That's what I call brains."

"They run in the family," announced Cardew. "There was a time when I thought Ernest must have bagged the entire supply, but since I've known Doris and Frank—Owp!"

He broke off suddenly as a rubber-soled shoe smote him in the neck. Levison, in order to recall Cardew's mind to the fact that his job was to get them all back in good time, not to hand out laurel wreaths to the Levison family,

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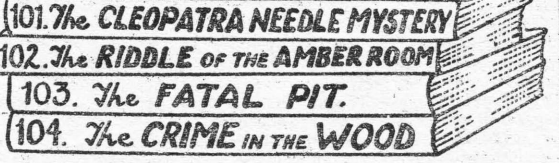
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had slipped off his tennis-shoe and thrown it into the launch.

For the rest of the journey Cardew gave his attention strictly to the task of speeding the launch along, with the result that the four juniors just managed to slip in through the school gates on the very stroke of lock-up.

### CHAPTER 6.

#### A Hundred Pounds Reward!

"GWEAT Scott! What an extwaordinawy affaiah, bai Jove! I have nevah heard of anythin' like it."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's comment adequately expressed the feelings of the score or so of juniors who were gathered in the School House junior Common-room.

It was a few minutes after call-over in Big Hall, for which the chums of Study No. 9 and Frank Levison had managed to be just in time, and the assembled juniors had been listening breathlessly to Clive's account of the amazing adventure that had befallen Cardew and him at the untenanted house by the riverside.

His auditors were astounded almost beyond words.

"But—but what on earth were they after?" said Tom Merry, in a puzzled voice. "You say they didn't even rob you?"

"No. Just searched us, and then tied us up and cleared out again," replied Clive.

"My hat! Why the thump should they do that—tie you up, I mean?" put in Blake.

"The big chap said something about our warning the others if they let us go," replied Clive. "He seemed to be convinced that we were pals of the johnnies they were after—the ones they mistook us for, you know."

"He must have been batty, then!" snorted Blake. "How could he think a couple of Public School chaps would be mixed up in some rotten—"

"By gad!" put in Tom Merry quickly. "That's a point that hadn't occurred to me. It must have been boys the rotters were after, or how could they have mistaken Cardew and Clive for them?"

"Phew!" whistled Noble of the Shell thoughtfully. "That's so. It's a jolly queer affair altogether, if you ask me."

"We don't need telling that," said Blake.

"Did—did the men say anythin' at all about the— the fellows they were lookin' for?"

The question came from Racke, standing on the outskirts of the little group, and several fellows turned to look rather curiously at him. He had spoken in a queer, strained voice, very unlike his usual supercilious tone.

"Nothing more than I've told you all," replied Clive curtly. He had no liking for the black sheep of the Shell, and made no secret of the fact.

"But—but didn't they describe what they were like?" persisted Racke, heedless of Clive's brusqueness and the glances of the juniors. "I mean, you say they took you for pals of the others, and so I thought they might have told you what they were like, and it—it was just an idea that came to me, that's all," he concluded, rather lamely.

"Well, they didn't," said Clive. "Is it likely that if they thought we knew the fellows they were after they'd describe them to us?"

"Hardly," agreed Tom Merry dryly. "All the same, it's a pity they didn't. We might have got on to the track of somebody who could have cleared up the mystery. As it is—"

"Why not tell Railton?" suggested Herries. "He'd phone the police station and put them—"

"I suppose it doesn't occur to you that we were out of bounds when it took place," grinned Clive. "And once Railton gets to know that Cardew runs a motor-boat, what do you think will happen to it?"

"Humph! I never thought about that!" confessed Herries.

The juniors chuckled.

"Oh, come on!" broke in Digby. "It's a giddy mystery, and we shan't solve it if we stay here jawing about it till bed-time. And it won't get our prep done, anyway."

"Oh, grief!" said Blake, with a little grimace. "I was forgetting all about prep. Come on!"

The group in the Common-room broke up, and the juniors went along the corridor and up the stairs to their respective studies, still discussing the astonishing story that Clive had related.

Nobody appeared to notice that Racke and Crooke had already gone out of the room. None of the juniors were sufficiently interested in Racke and Crooke to take that amount of interest in their movements. Otherwise it might

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have been regarded as somewhat peculiar, in view of the interest that Racke had shown in the adventure of Clive and Cardew, that he should have left the Common-room while it was still being discussed.

The two black sheep of the Shell were already in their study when the others came upstairs, but it did not appear to be an anxiety to get on with their prep that had taken them there.

For, instead of being at the table busily occupied with their books, they were lounging in two easy-chairs drawn up against the partly-opened window, out of which they were puffing as much as possible of the smoke they were inhaling from the cigarettes they had lighted.

"You see what a dashed narrow escape we had!" muttered Crooke moodily. "Gad, if those rotters had caught us instead of Clive and Cardew, I believe they'd have murdered us!"

Racke scowled.

"I'm beginnin' to wish they'd caught you, anyway!" he snarled viciously. "Then perhaps I shouldn't have had to put up with your beastly whining. That's the third time you've been yelpin' about what they'd have done to us if they'd caught us. They didn't catch us, did they? So what does it matter what they'd have done?"

"But it was only luck. If they hadn't gone off after Clive and Cardew—"

"We should have got away all right just the same," asserted Racke. "We were on the other side of the house, weren't we? Still, I admit their wastin' time with that swankin' ass Cardew and his precious pal gave us a better chance—though we didn't know it at the time. Gad, I wish we had done!" he went on, his eyes glittering. "I'd have risked stoppin' to see those three brutes lammin' the cads, and kickin' 'em into the house!"

Crooke shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll bet you would!" he sneered. "The way you pedalled down that lane without once lookin' back to see if I was behind you all right, shows how much risk you were willing to take for anything or anybody."

Racke turned a furious face on his study-mate.

"See here, Crooke!" he gritted savagely. "I'm standing none of that kind of talk! If you want to quarrel with me—"

"I don't!" retorted Crooke. "It wouldn't pay us to quarrel just now."

"Well, then—"

"But you needn't be so dashed thin-skinned, Racke. I've heard Tom Merry say worse things to you than that, and you didn't—"

"You're not Tom Merry!" said Racke.

"I know that. If I was, you wouldn't be so ready to talk about quarrelling, would you?"

"There you go again, callin' me a funk! I tell you, Crooke—"

"Oh, shut up! I'm not calling you a funk!" said Crooke. "I'm just pointing out that you don't take many risks."

"I'm willin' to take as many as you, anyway, and you're the best judge of how many that is!" snarled Racke sullenly. "But don't forget you're as deep in this affair as I am."

"I know that," replied Crooke, in a low tone, "and I don't mind telling you I'm beginnin' to wish I was well out of it!"

"What!" jeered Racke. "Who's funkin' risks now? Bah! What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything; but I—I don't half like it!" muttered Crooke uneasily. "Oh, I know we've had all the luck up to now, but how long is it going to last? There's that beast Cardew—yes, it's all very well for you to grin your head off about him and Clive getting collared in mistake for us, but I'm not so dashed happy about it. I'd rather it had been anybody but Cardew. I was lookin' at him while you were asking Clive questions in the Common-room, and he'd got his eyes on you all the while, and that smirky sort of grin on his mouth, like he has when he's making a dashed fool of somebody."

"Gad!" gasped Racke, a startled look in his eyes. "If Cardew's got— Oh, rot! It must have been your fancy, Crooke. Most of the fellows were lookin' at me, I remember."

"Perhaps they were; but I'm not worrying about them. It's Cardew—"

"Bosh! How could Cardew guess anythin'? You've got the wind up, Crooke, that's what's the matter with you. Here, let's have another look at the dashed thing. Perhaps it'll back you up!"

Racke rose from his chair and crossed the study to his desk. Producing a bunch of keys, he unlocked the lid, which he raised. At the back of the desk were five or six drawers, each fitted with a lock, and with another key he opened one of them, from which he took the jewel-case.

He came back to his chair, and Crooke leaned forward, his eyes glittering with excitement as Racke pressed the spring catch of the jewel-case and revealed the necklace.

Crooke caught his breath with an audible gasp. Racke picked up the necklace, and ran it through his fingers, gloatingly, while Crooke watched the play of light across it with fascinated eyes.

"Gad! To think it's worth thousands!" he breathed, in an awed voice. "And nobody knows we've got it. I wonder how those rotters came by it?"

"I don't know, and I dashed well don't care!" said Racke. "The less we know about that the better. All we've got to bother about is stickin' to the yarn we've decided to tell—that we saw it lyin' in the grass at the side of the Wayland road as we were cyclin' along, and stopped to pick it up. But we've both got to say exactly the same thing, remember!"

"Oh, I shall leave you to do most of the talking!" declared Crooke. "But—but, I say, Racke," he went on nervously, "hadn't we better give it up at once? It's all very well for you to say that if we stick to it for a bit the reward will be raised; but I—I don't like holding on to it.

"Suppose they're not," suggested Crooke, in a low voice. "Suppose they're hanging about somewhere round here, and they find out we haven't given it up yet? They—they might try to get it back."

He shuddered as he spoke, and glanced involuntarily over his shoulder.

Racke stared at him.

"Good gad! What's put an idea like that into your head, Crooke?" he said. "You're talkin' utter rot! Even if they were still in the district—which I'm dashed certain they aren't—and they did suspect we'd still got the thing, you don't suppose they'd have the nerve to break into St. Jim's after it, do you?"

"I—I don't know!" muttered Crooke uneasily. "You can't tell what rotters like that are capable of. And, anyway, they might hang about outside waiting for us when we went out of gates."

"Well, if you feel like that about it you'd better not

## CAMEOS OF SCHOOL LIFE!

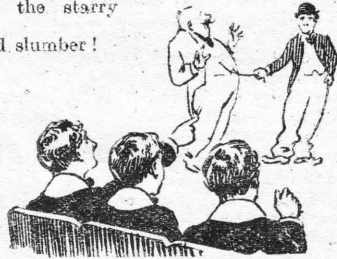
AT THE CINEMA!



ONE jolly evening, every week,  
We patronise "the Pictures,"  
And vote the programme quite unique,  
If not, we pass our strictures!  
We get late passes from Kildare,  
Then off we gaily scamper;  
There's high good humour everywhere,  
And nothing casts a damper.

In Wayland High Street there's a queue,  
A press of eager shovers,  
Waiting to see Adolphe Menjou,  
And other handsome lovers.  
We take our places in the ranks,  
And soon we gain admission;  
And Chaplin, with his merry pranks,  
Then dawns upon our vision.

"Bai Jove!" the laughing D'Arcy  
cries,  
"That fellow's weally funnay!"  
"Rather!" says Wynn, with envious  
eyes,  
"He makes a mint of money!  
If only I had Charlie's luck,  
And his remuneration,  
I'd treat myself to tons of tuck—  
Insured against starvation!"



Manners is keen on Lillian Gish,  
And Blake likes Buster Keaton:  
"That fellow's such a funny fish,  
His antics can't be beaten!"  
Gaily the programme swings along,  
Drama, and gay frivolity;  
The laughter-makers come out strong,  
Making us rock with jollity!

We love the pranks of Harold Lloyd,  
The acting of Novello;  
While Betty Balfour is enjoyed,  
And likewise Miss Costello.  
If asked to name our favourite "star,"  
The vote must go to Barrymore.  
The programme flies too fast by far,  
We feel we'd like to tarry more!

But time is up; and we must quit  
Romance for dull reality;  
No longer, eager-eyed, we sit  
In Film-land's principality.  
Fresh from the cinema's delight  
Our party, twelve in number,  
Goes tramping through the starry  
night,  
Back to St. Jim's—and slumber!



Suppose something happened to it? We can get a hundred quid reward now, you know, and a hundred quid is fifty apiece. And—"

"Fifty fiddlesticks!" scoffed Racke. "Good gad! A hundred quid reward for a ten thousand pounds' necklace! Don't be a fool, Crooke! I've told you I'm not givin' it up till the reward's been raised, and I'm not goin' to alter my mind!"

"Yes, but—"

"You take it from me, Crooke, by next week they'll be offerin' a couple of hundred—if not more. Here, I'll bet you a fiver, even money, that it'll be two-fifty!"

Crooke's jaw dropped, and he stared at Racke in affright. "N-next week!" he gasped, in a tone of alarm. "I—I say, Racke, you don't mean to say you're going to take the risk of keeping it longer than to-morrow? Why—"

"Risks again!" jeered Racke. "What risk is there? You say yourself that nobody knows we've got it—except those blighters we took it from, and they don't count. You can bet they're miles away by now—thinkin' the police are on their track, and sweatin' with funk."

venture out till we've got rid of it!" sneered Racke. "And be careful you don't scare yourself into a fit at the sight of your own shadow! I know I'm not givin' it up for a measly hundred while there's a chance of gettin' more by hangin' on to it for a few days."

Crooke licked his dry lips.

"Oh, all right! I suppose it's safe enough, really," he muttered resignedly. "Let's hold it for a minute, Racke. I should like to see what it feels like to have ten thousand quid in my hands."

"Well, you seem to know what it feels like to have the wind up, anyhow! Be careful, and don't drop it!" warned Racke, passing the case over to the eager fingers of Crooke. "I don't— Oh, gad!"

He sprang to his feet in alarm as the handle of the study door rattled.

The next instant the door opened and Mellish of the Fourth came into the room.

CHAPTER 7.  
Mellish is not Welcome!

At the sight of Mellish Racke completely lost his head for a few moments.

The sudden appearance of the cad of the Fourth had given him one of the biggest shocks he had ever suffered. It was so totally unexpected.

It was habitual with Racke and Crooke to have the door locked when they were together in the study. On this occasion Crooke had entered last, and when Racke had fetched the necklace out of its hiding-place, it had not occurred to him that there was any possibility of Crooke's having omitted to take the usual precaution of turning the key in the lock.

Mellish closed the door behind him and stepped farther into the study.

"I say, Racke," he commenced, "have you—"

Racke became aware that Crooke was still holding the case open in his hands. It was below the level of the table and hidden from Mellish, but another step would bring him into full view of it.

Racke jumped forward to snatch it and thrust it out of sight, but at that same moment Crooke woke out of a sort of stupor and realised the danger.

He fumbled with the case, intending to close it and secrete it among the cushions of the chair in which he was sitting, but Racke's hasty and ill-judged grab knocked it right out of his hands.

It fell to the ground on the other side of the chair, almost at the feet of Mellish.

The cad of the Fourth stared at it for a moment as it lay there, and then he bent down to pick it up, with an exclamation of astonishment.

"Gad!" gasped Mellish.

He looked from Racke to Crooke, and back again at the necklace.

Little as Mellish knew about jewellery, he realised that what he was holding was no mere trumpery gew-gaw, though he was far from guessing its real value.

Had he been asked to estimate its worth he would have named some figure in the tens of pounds—twenty or thirty or possibly forty. He would have been staggered had anyone revealed to him that the figure ran into thousands. He was to learn that fact later, however.

But even at the low valuation that he put on it, he was bewildered at finding such a thing in the possession of Racke and Crooke.

"I say, Racke, where did you find it?" he asked eagerly.

Racke assumed an expression of haughty surprise.

"Where did I find it?" he repeated angrily. "What the deuce do you mean by that, Mellish? It belongs to me, of course."

Mellish winked.

"Tell that to the Marines!" he smirked. "What should you be doing with a thing like this? Why, it must be worth quids!"

Racke tried to laugh contemptuously.

"Worth quids!" he jeered. "That shows how much you know about it, Mellish! Why, it isn't worth ten bob. It's only an imitation—one of those cheap, artificial affairs they're always advertising in the papers. I should have thought even you would have known better than to think it was of any value."

Mellish looked down at the pearls again, doubtfully, and something about them decided him that Racke was lying. Besides, if they were only a few shillings' worth of cheap counterfeits, why had Racke been so desperately anxious to hide them when he—Mellish—walked in? Mellish regarded it as an insult to his intelligence to be expected to swallow a thin yarn like that. It was as clear as daylight that Racke or else Crooke had found the necklace somewhere. Probably they had intended sticking to it. That was just the sort of thing they might be expected to do.

Mellish looked up sharply at the sound of a click. Racke had crossed over to the door and turned the key.

"That'll make certain we don't have any more visitors driftin' in without the formality of knockin' first!" sneered Racke. "An' now perhaps you'll hand me those—those imitation pearls you seem to have taken such a fancy to, Mellish. They don't happen to be yours, you know."

"And I'm not fool enough to believe they're yours, either!" retorted Mellish. "You can't bluff me like—"

"What?"

Racke's voice was seething with fury.

"You rotten sweep!" he said savagely. "I'll teach you to call me a liar! Give me that necklace and clear out of this study before I sling you out!"

"I'll jolly well take 'em to Railton!" threatened Mellish. "Then we'll see— Oh, you rotter! You're breakin' my wrist!"

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"I'll break your beastly neck!" snarled Racke, almost beside himself with fury. "Drop that case or I'll— Ah, I thought you wouldn't stick that! Pick 'em up, Crooke, you dawdlin' fool! Put 'em in my desk! And now we'll settle accounts with Master Meddlin' Mellish! I'll teach him to come in here spyin' and—"

"Oh, you bullying cad!" whimpered Mellish, struggling vainly in the grip of his tormentor. "I—I'll tell Tom Merry— Oh!"

"You'll what?" hissed Racke. "You'll threaten me with that outsider Merry, will you? Here, Crooke, lend a hand! I'll give this little toad a lesson he won't forget!"

"For Heaven's sake, stop it, Racke!" implored Crooke,



Mellish cowered back in the shelter of the recess, staring with dilated eyes at the two shadowy figures appeared out of the dense darkness of the study behind him! (S)

thoroughly alarmed at the state of savage fury into which Racke had worked himself. "Let Mellish alone! You've got the pearls back, and that's enough. Do you want to be reported to Kildare? You know the little sneak's capable of doin' it."

"I don't care!" panted Racke, grinding his knuckles into the back of Mellish's neck.

"Well, if you don't, I do!" declared Crooke apprehensively. "Hang it, Racke, we shall have the blessed corridor out in a minute if Mellish keeps up that howlin' row!"

"The snivellin' little sweep!" sneered Racke. "All right, then, Crooke. Open the door and I'll pitch him out!"

"No need to do that!" protested Croke, with a quick, warning glance at his study-mate. "I—I'm sure Mellish is welcome to stop, as far as I'm concerned!"

"Eh? Oh, just as you like, then!" growled Racke, flinging Mellish contemptuously aside and going over to seat himself in the armchair again. "But if he has any more cheek to me about goin' to Railton—or Tom Merry —"

"Oh, don't take it like that, Racke!" put in Croke uneasily. "I'm sure Mellish didn't mean it. Did you, Mellish?"

The cad of the Fourth stood massaging his bruised arms and scowling evilly at Racke.



His eyes along the dimly-moonlit corridor. And as he watched, Racke, at the other end, and came creeping silently along towards Mellish.  
(Chapter 8.)

"Yow! I'm not so dashed certain!" he muttered sullenly. "If Racke thinks I'm going to stand being bullied and—"

"Look here, you rotten little sweep—" began Racke passionately.

"Oh, shut up, Racke!" interposed Croke. "Dash it all, you've treated Mellish rottenly enough already without callin' him names! You can't expect him to be very sweet about it. I must say I think it's up to you to apologise to him!"

"What?"

Racke turned in his chair and glared at Croke, who glanced meaningfully across at the desk wherein reposed the necklace. Racke scowled and dropped his eyes. He knew well enough what Croke meant. It was an open question

whether Mellish really believed what Racke had told him concerning the worthlessness of the necklace, and if he were allowed to leave the study in a vengeful mood there was no knowing what sort of a tale he might spread abroad, out of pure spite.

Racke bit his nails savagely. His temper was cooling down now, and, too late, he was beginning to realise that he had been a fool to give way to it as he had done and thus incur Mellish's rancour.

There was only one thing to be done—to apologise to Mellish, as Croke had hinted. He writhed mentally at the thought of having to eat humble-pie to the cad of the Fourth, but he managed to screw himself up to the pitch of muttering a few well-nigh inaudible words.

"I—I'm sorry I lammed you, Mellish!" he said sullenly. "I—I lost my temper a bit!"

The words were meagre enough and the tone ungracious and insincere, but Mellish appeared to be satisfied.

"That's all right, Racke," he said. "I'll be going now. I only came in for a bit of a chat, and I see I'm in the way."

"Not a bit," Croke assured him hastily. "We—we were only just looking at those silly pearl things. They're just—that is, we saw an advertisement in the paper, and sent for some just for fun, you know, to—to see if they were any good. But, of course, they're not—awful trash, really! I'm glad it was Racke who paid for them, and not I, though they were only seven and a tanner for the lot—case and all. Racke was an ass to get his rag out because you saw them, but, you see, he's afraid that if any of the fellows find out how he's been spoofed out of seven and a tanner they'll chip him about it. That's all! But, of course, I know you won't say anything about them to anybody, will you, Mellish?"

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I shan't say anything!" he replied carelessly. "I only wish I could afford to chuck seven and a tanner away on rubbish like that. So-long!"

And with a nod to Croke he unlocked the door and strolled out of the study.

As the door closed behind him Racke sprang to his feet.

"Good riddance to the spyin' little toad!" he snarled viciously. "Look out on to the passage, Croke, and make certain he's gone. That's right. If he has, you needn't stand there a week! Lock the door again and take the key out, so that we've got an excuse to keep anybody waitin' if they come knockin'."

"Why, what are you goin' to do?" inquired Croke wonderingly.

"I'm goin' to hide that dashed necklace! I've thought of a safer place than the desk. I'm takin' no chances of Mellish tattlin'. Here, come and help me to turn this carpet back! There's the end of a loose board under it. Nobody would find it here if they searched the study."

The jewel-case was quickly put into the space revealed by the lifting of the loose floor-board, and the carpet replaced.

"Now it's safe enough," declared Racke.

"I say, that wasn't a bad yarn I made up on the spur of the moment about your buyin' some imitation pearls and wantin' nobody to know how you'd been swindled, was it?" said Croke complacently. "You could see Mellish took it in all right, couldn't you?"

"No, I couldn't!" snapped Racke, smoothing down the carpet. "I wasn't lookin' at him. The less I see of Mellish, the better I am for it!"

"Oh, all right!" said Croke sulkily. "But it was just as well to put him off the scent altogether!"

"It would be just as well, as far as I'm concerned, if somebody put him off the earth altogether," said Racke. "But that's too much to hope for. Come on; let's get a bit of prep. done now. I don't want to be detained to-morrow, in case we have to go over to Wayland."

And the two young rascals got out their books and sat down to a few minutes more or less earnest study of the variety of knowledge that they were really supposed to be at St. Jim's for the purpose of acquiring.

CHAPTER 8.  
At Midnight!

**B**OOM! The last mellow note of the twelve that had just chimed from the old clock over the gateway of the quad at St. Jim's rang out over the sleeping school and faded away into the silence of the night.

Midnight!

There was not a light to be seen anywhere in that vast pile of buildings that comprised the School House and New House. Everybody, from the Head down to the domestic

staff, had been in bed for an hour or more, and was, presumably, enjoying a well-earned repose.

With one exception.

In the Fourth Form dormitory, where the moonlight glimmered eerily upon two rows of white beds, the occupant of one of those beds was sitting up among the sheets and straining his ears. There was no sound to be heard, other than that of the gentle breathing of the sleeping boys.

Percy Mellish, of the Fourth, grinned into the darkness.

The rest of the School House Fourth were safely asleep, and such a condition of affairs suited Percy Mellish very well indeed. For Mellish had a little business on hand which the presence of another wakeful junior in the dormitory would have made it impossible for him to attend to.

He slipped noiselessly from his bed and commenced to pull on a pair of trousers and a coat over his pyjamas, and a pair of rubber-soled gym shoes.

Mellish was going down to the Shell corridor to settle accounts with Racke in his own particular fashion for the treatment he had received in Racke's study earlier in the evening.

It was just like Racke to think he could twist a fellow's wrists and grind his knuckles until he was almost sick with the pain, and then make it all square by mumbling something about being sorry. In Mellish's opinion, it needed far more than an apology—even an abject one—to square a matter like that.

Racke was going to find that he couldn't bully Mellish for nothing.

If Racke had got some rotten business on hand with some jewellery that he and Crooke had found—for the cad of the Fourth had been in no wise deceived by the tale he had been told about the necklace he had seen them with—then it had been up to Racke to make it worth Mellish's while to keep his mouth shut. Instead of which, he had behaved like a rotten Hun. Therefore, argued Mellish, Racke had better look out for himself.

In spite of Crooke's survey of the corridor before he had closed the door of the study, Mellish had managed to creep back and apply his eye to the keyhole. Mellish was not above adopting the methods of Baggy Trimble when it suited him to do so.

Racke's precaution of removing the key had actually made Mellish's task easier, for it had permitted him an unrestricted view of the interior of the study—or so much of it as the keyhole commanded.

And Mellish had been in time to see Racke hiding the jewel-case under the loose floorboard. That action had been sufficient in itself to satisfy Mellish that the necklace was not the worthless thing Racke and Crooke had represented it as being, and at the same time it suggested to him a method by which he might revenge himself upon Racke. What could be easier than to come down during the night and take it?

Mellish had hugged himself with glee at the thought. Of course, it was possible that Racke might guess who had taken it; but guesses are not proof, and Mellish was certain that Racke wouldn't dare to make an outcry, convinced as he was that the necklace had come into the possession of the black sheep of the Shell in some unorthodox manner.

As to what he would do with the necklace when he had it, Mellish wasn't decided. He might, later on, let Racke know he'd got it, and offer to sell it back to him. Or he might take it to the police station and say he'd found it—as he suspected Racke had done.

Certainly that way of disposing of it wouldn't be very profitable for Mellish, unless the owner happened to stump up a small reward, but it would give him the satisfaction of having put it beyond the reach of Racke.

Mellish reached under his pillow and took out an electric torch, then crept softly between the lines of beds towards the door.

With infinite care he turned the latch and swung the door open inch by inch, not so much as a creak disturbing the silence, until there was just sufficient space for him to slip through into the corridor.

He closed the door as noiselessly as he had opened it, and the rest of the inmates of the Fourth Form dormitory slumbered on peacefully.

Mellish glided noiselessly along the corridor, and stole down the stairs at the end of it until he reached the lower landing, where the study passages of the Fourth Form and Shell were situated.

Pausing for a few moments to listen intently, he crept along the corridor and turned into the Shell passage.

There had been a dim light in the corridor, but the passage was shrouded in darkness. That was no handicap to Mellish, however, for he knew every inch of the place,

and he made his way unerringly to the door of the study occupied by Racke and Crooke.

His hand was groping in the darkness for the handle of the door, when a sudden sound came to his ears.

He started violently, and stood rigid, a gasp of alarm escaping his lips.

It had not been a loud noise, but in the silence of the night it had sounded—such a sound as might have been made by someone bumping into a door; or by a rat leaping down from a table or a desk on to a wooden floor.

Rats were not unknown at St. Jim's. The school was so near to the river that, despite all precautions, rats sometimes gained access to the premises. Occasionally fellows had had articles of food filched from the cupboards in their studies; and Pongo, Wally D'Arcy's mongrel terrier, had more than once conducted a lively little rat-hunt along the corridors, to the huge delight of the fag community.

So that it was quite possible that the noise had been made by a rat scuffling about in one of the Form-rooms—for it was from that direction that it had come.

Mellish, trembling in every limb, crouched in the velvety darkness of the Shell passage, listening breathlessly.

A minute passed in utter and unbroken silence.

Another minute.

Still no further noise had reached the strained ears of the Fourth-Former.

"It must have been a rat, after all!" muttered Mellish.

His hand went out again to the door-knob, and slowly, with infinite caution, he turned it.

Like a moving shadow he slipped through the door into the study, and pushed the door to behind him. It moved with no more sound than a faint rustle as the bottom brushed over the thick carpet with which Racke had had the floor covered.

Mellish crossed over to the window and pulled down the blind. Then he switched on his torch and shone the beam in the direction of the corner in which the loose board was situated.

Mellish dropped to his knees and rolled back the carpet. At first he could not detect which board was loose; but by rising to his feet and treading on them he found one that yielded under his weight.

It was the work of a few moments to lay down his torch and prise up the board. Then, holding it agape with one hand, he groped in the space beneath, and withdrew the jewel-case.

He pressed the spring catch of the case and lifted the lid. There, on its bed of white satin, was the pearl necklace.

Mellish chuckled as he shone the rays of the torch on the necklace.

He closed the case and slipped it into the pocket of his jacket.

Then he pressed the board into place again, rolled back the carpet to cover it, and stood up. He switched off his torch, and went over to the window, where he pulled up the blind.

A minute later he was creeping noiselessly back along the Shell passage.

When he reached the corridor, instead of making for the stairs that led up to the dormitories, he turned to the right and went towards the smaller staircase at the other end of the corridor.

Mellish had no intention of taking the jewel-case back to the Fourth Form dormitory. There was no safe hiding-place for it there. Nor did he mean to trust it anywhere in his own quarters in the Fourth Form passage—not with Baggy Trimble as one of his study-mates.

Mellish knew a trick worth two of that.

There was a cupboard in a recess in the corridor, a yard or two from the other staircase—a cupboard that was used by the domestic staff as a receptacle for brooms and pails and tins of polish and dusters and so forth. And on the upper shelf of that cupboard, behind some old tins, the jewel-case would be safe enough for a few hours. Mellish had hidden boxes of cigarettes there for days together, and they had never been discovered; and he did not intend to leave the necklace there for longer than until the next day, in any case.

He opened the door of the cupboard, and, standing on tiptoes, pushed the little morocco-leather case right to the back of the shelf.

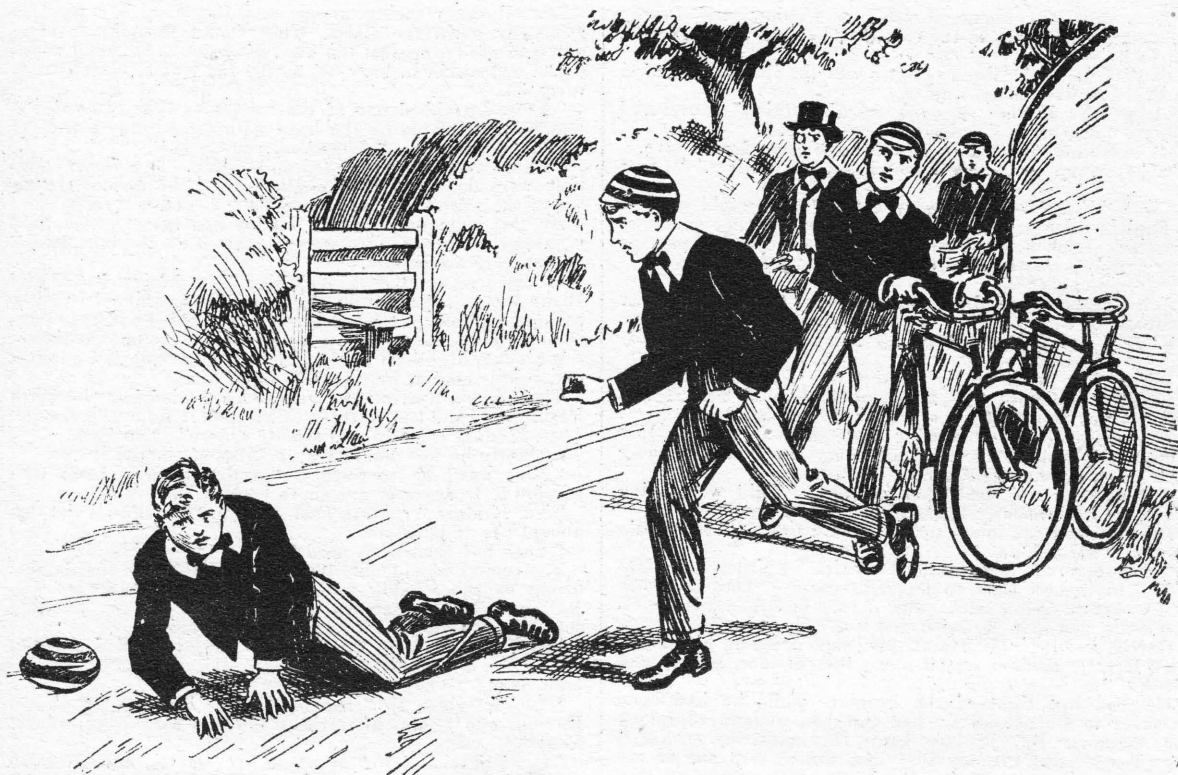
He closed the doors and latched them, and was just about to steal away, when a faint mutter of voices came to his ears.

It seemed to Mellish that his heart stopped beating for a few awful seconds, and then it started again at a furious pace so that the blood sang in his ears.

He cowered back in the shelter of the recess, staring with dilated eyes along the dimly-moonlit corridor.

And as he watched two shadowy figures appeared out of the dense darkness of the staircase at the other end and came creeping silently along the corridor towards him.





Tom Merry & Co. came sweeping round the bend, and jammed on their brakes just in time to prevent themselves running over Mellish, who lay moaning and groaning directly in their path. "Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry in astonishment, leaping off his machine. "What the thump—" At the sound of the Shell captain's voice, Mellish struggled up on his hands and knees. (See Chapter 11.)

## CHAPTER 9.

### Alarms and Excursions!

**K**ILDARE of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, awoke with a queer impression that something was wrong.

He lay still, wondering what had roused him, and why he should have such a feeling of uneasiness in his mind.

He could hear the ticking of the small clock on his mantel-piece, and but for this the silence was utter and complete; yet Kildare was almost certain that he had been awakened by some slight noise.

He sat up in bed and strained his ears.

Creak!

Somebody was on the staircase at the end of the passage.

Very carefully Kildare pushed back the bedclothes and swung his feet to the floor. Reaching for his dressing-gown he wrapped it round him, and then pulled on a pair of slippers.

He opened his door cautiously and stepped out silently into the Sixth Form passage.

When he reached the top of the stairs he peered down into the gloom.

A faint light shone through the staircase window and revealed that the stairs were empty. Yet Kildare was positive that somebody had been moving about on them a few seconds previously.

He slipped along the corridor towards the Fifth Form passage, and just as he reached the corner he stopped dead as the sound of low-pitched voices reached his ears.

Somebody was prowling about in the Fifth Form passage.

Kildare's thoughts instantly went to Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger, of the Fifth. The captain of St. Jim's was not ignorant of the fact that those three gay young blades were occasionally guilty of the offence of breaking bounds at night for the purpose of visiting certain disreputable haunts at Rylcombe.

Kildare's face went grim. If Cutts & Co. were just returning from some dingy nocturnal expedition, so much the worse for them.

He was just about to step round the corner and confront them, when one spoke again in a husky whisper, and Kildare realised, with something of a shock, that he had been over-hasty in assuming that they were Cutts & Co.

For there could be no doubt that it was certainly not Cutts, Gilmore, or St. Leger who had spoken.

Indeed, the accents were such that it was clear that the

persons standing whispering in the corridor could not have any sort of right within the walls of St. Jim's at any hour of the day or night.

The words Kildare overheard brought a puzzled frown to his forehead.

"I reckon as we're on a fool's game, if yer asks me anythink," muttered the husky voice. "This place is like a blinkin' rabbit warren, an' we ain't got the least notion what part on it them kids 'angs out. It's like lookin' for a needle in a bloomin' 'aystack—on'y worse!"

"Well, I ain't got much 'opes myself," came an answering undertone. "But it ain't no good arguin' wi' Bill, you knows that, and 'e said we'd got to 'ave a try at it."

"Bust Bill! 'Ow the blazes—"

"Once we get our 'ands on them there brats we'll make 'em tell us what they've done wi' it! We've got to find out where they sleeps."

"Sounds easy, don't it? 'Ow are we goin' to find it out? Lumme, I never thought the place was anythink like this 'ere, or I'd never 'ave taken the job on, I give yer my word."

"Well, come on; it ain't no good 'angin' about like this. P'r'aps they're in one o' these rooms 'ere. Be careful as yer don't wake nobody up."

"I'm likely to do that a-purpose, ain't I?"

"Well, I'm only tellin' yer! One thing, youngsters don't sleep very light as a rule."

Kildare was completely mystified. It seemed that the intruders were in search of some particular boys, but what their purpose could be, or who the boys might be, Kildare could not hazard a guess.

But in any case his duty was obvious—to take steps to have the men captured.

He tiptoed back to the Sixth Form passage and went into Rushden's room.

It was an easy matter to awaken him, for Philip Rushden was one of those people who come out of sleep into immediate possession of all their faculties, and a few words sufficed to acquaint him with the situation.

While he was getting into a dressing-gown and slippers, Kildare went into the next room and roused Darrell.

When the three prefects, armed with singlesticks, reached the Fifth Form passage, there was no sign of the burglars, but a slight sound, like the cautious closing of a door, guided them, and they went along the passage and round the corner, treading warily.

The moonlight shone through a window and faintly illuminated that part of the corridor, but the burglars were not to be seen.

To the left of the three prefects was the staircase that led up to the Lower School studies.

"I wonder if they've gone up the stairs," murmured Kildare cautiously. "I shouldn't—Hark!"

He broke off suddenly as a faint noise came from above. "They're up there!" whispered Darrell tensely. "Come on!"

"Wait!" breathed Kildare urgently. "They might manage to find the other stairs and escape that way if they got away from us. Look here, Rushden, you slip along the passage and guard them while Darrell and I go up here."

"Good enough!" And Rushden tiptoed along the corridor towards the other staircase, to cut off that line of retreat.

Kildare and Darrell crept up the main stairs, step by step.

When they were nearly at the top, Kildare, who was leading, halted abruptly. He put out his hand behind him and grasped Darrell by the arm, in urgent warning.

The moonlight was shining through the windows that pierced the wall of the corridor every few yards, making little pools of faint light on the linoleum.

And one by one those dim splashes of light were being blotted out as shadowy forms passed over them.

Darrell crept cautiously up to Kildare's side. The captain turned towards him.

"You stay here and guard the stairs," whispered Kildare softly, his mouth close to Darrell's ear. "They're pretty sure to try to double back. But if they find the other stairs, slip along and help Rushden and I to hold them."

Darrell nodded understandingly, and, grasping his single-stick tightly, Kildare set off along the corridor, grimly and silently.

He had lost sight of the burglars while he had been speaking to Darrell. They had vanished somewhere among the shadows. But Kildare knew they must be within a very few yards. Possibly they had turned into one of the passages.

Kildare suddenly stopped dead. A shadowy figure had just emerged from a recess and was flitting noiselessly towards him.

Kildare moved his arm to free his shoulder in the loose armpit of his dressing-gown, and the wicker-guard of his singlestick tapped lightly against the wall.

Instantly the figure stopped, with a startled gasp, and as Kildare, realising that further secrecy was impossible, jumped forward, it whirled round and sped off along the corridor at top speed, with Kildare in pursuit.

As he ran, Kildare pressed the button of his electric-torch, and the bright beam shone out on to the back of the fugitive. Only for an instant, however, for the next moment the speeding figure darted into the darkness of the Fourth-Form passage. But in that instant Kildare saw, with a shock of amazement, that he had been pursuing a boy. Kildare's glimpse had been too brief to enable him to recognise who it was, but that it was a St. Jim's junior the captain was positive.

At that moment Rushden's voice rang out. "Kildare! Here they are!"

The captain wasted no time in responding. Realising that he had been on a false trail, chasing some junior who was out of his dormitory—a matter that called for investigation, but not in the face of such an emergency as this—he flashed off to the assistance of Rushden. Evidently the burglars had taken alarm, and, finding the far staircase, had endeavoured to escape that way.

Darrell came racing along, and together they plunged recklessly down the stairs. They found Rushden leaning, sick and giddy, against the wall, his hand to his head and a dazed expression in his eyes, as the light of Kildare's torch revealed.

"I—I—I grabbed one of the rotters as they came down, and his pal hit me on the head with something—a stick, I think!" he gasped. "After 'em, you chaps!"

Kildare and Darrell needed no bidding. In a few seconds they were down on the ground floor of the School House, where the men must have made their forced entrance.

By this time most of the House had been roused, and pyjama-clad figures were emerging from all the dormitories and coming downstairs.

A dozen or so juniors, including Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., appeared on the scene just as Darrell had discovered that one of the windows in the Fifth Form-room was open. He raised a shout to recall Kildare, who was pursuing his investigations in the domestic quarters, and climbed out, lightly-clad as he was, into the Close.

The juniors, hearing his summons, crowded into the Fifth Form-room, and two or three of them were following Darrell when Kildare came in and sternly ordered them back.

Instantly he was assailed by a babel of excited voices. "Shut up!" he snapped. "And get away from that window! Is anybody out there besides Darrell?"

"No, Kildare," replied Tom Merry. "What's all the row about? Is it burglars?"

"Yes; but there's no need for you to—Hallo!"

The room had suddenly blazed with light, and the dazzled group by the window swung round, blinking, to see Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, standing just inside the door, his hand on the switch.

"Boys, what does this mean?" he demanded sternly. "Who has opened that window—Why, Kildare, you are here, then? What is happening?"

"Two burglars, sir," replied Kildare briefly. "Rushden, Darrell, and I went after them, but I'm afraid they've got away."

"Good gracious! And where are Darrell and Rushden now?"

"I think Darrell's outside in the Close, sir, and Rushden—Oh, here he is!"

Rushden had just walked into the room, looking a trifle pale and with a large lump that was rapidly swelling to an even larger one on the side of his head, but otherwise sound in wind and limb, and very eager to know how the chase had ended.

"Jolly good job my skull's pretty thick!" he grinned ruefully.

It was a disappointed Darrell who presently climbed back into the Form-room and announced that the men had made their escape; but the fact weighed less with Mr. Railton than did the knowledge that they were off the school premises, with their object unattained and nobody at St. Jim's—with the exception of Rushden, whose injury was fortunately slight—any the worse for their visit.

The Lower School was rounded up and sent back to bed, and such prefects and members of the Sixth and Fifth who were not engaged in that task went the round of the House and made certain that no unauthorised person was lurking in any part of it, and that all the windows were properly secured.

And then, when the excited buzz of voices in the dormitories had died down, St. Jim's once more fell asleep for what was left of the night.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Cardew Speaks Out!

THE next morning there was only one topic of conversation in the School House dormitories and bath-rooms as the juniors tubbed and dressed—the attempted burglary of the night before, or, rather, the early hours of the same morning.

It was generally agreed, with all due respect to Kildare and his fellow-prefects, that if a few chaps from the Shell or Fourth had only had the luck to get on the trail of the burglars, there would have been a very different ending to the affair. The intruders wouldn't have been permitted to make their escape in that tame fashion.

George Alfred Grundy of the Shell said so in as many words, and for once Grundy enjoyed the luxury of having his opinion heartily endorsed by the rest of the Form.

Neither Racke nor Crooke took any share in the discussion, however, and they hurried over their dressing in silence and left the dormitory well in advance of the others.

Racke and Crooke were feeling far from cheerful. They knew only too well whom the burglars had been, and what they were looking for, and the realisation of the lengths to which the men were prepared to go to regain possession of

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the necklace had proved an unpleasant shock to them. They wanted a few quiet words together in private, and they were making for their study where they could talk in safety, and also make certain that the necklace was still in its hiding-place.

Half-way down the stairs they were hailed by a cheery voice, and turned, to see Ralph Reckness Cardew of the Fourth a few steps above them. Cardew was as debonair and immaculate as ever, though he must have dressed and hurried out of his dormitory as quickly as Racke and Crooke had done.

Racke scowled and muttered something under his breath. "So I'm not the only one out an' about early this merry mornin'!" drawled Cardew smilingly. "Looks like bein' a toppin' day—what? You chaps takin' a stroll in the quad before chapel?"

"No!" said Racke shortly. "We're just goin' to our study to—get something we—we've forgotten."

"Really?" Cardew's expressive eyebrows rose in surprise. "Rather early in the day to start forgettin' things, isn't it? Mind if I come with you? Levison an' Clive are still in the dorm arrayin' and adornin' themselves, an' I'm in danger of bein' bored to death with my own company."

Racke and Crooke exchanged a swift glance. "I—I don't think we'll bother after all," said Racke. "It'll do later on, after chapel. Let's go out into the quad instead."

"Splendid notion!" approved Cardew. "A breath of fresh air will do us all the good in the world. Nothin' like startin' the day with a breath of fresh air. Curious affair, that burglary last night, wasn't it?"

Racke and Crooke started violently, and exchanged anxious, scared looks.

"Pity Kildare didn't manage to lay them by the heels," went on Cardew regretfully. "But I suppose it's too much to expect that the Sixth should rise to an occasion like that. Really, this district seems to be gettin' a happy huntin' ground for members of the criminal class. Did you hear what happened to Clive an' I yesterday— Oh, of course you did, though! You were both in the Common-room when Clive was spinnin' the yarn, weren't you? I recollect your askin' him some questions, Racke, now I come to think of it. Extraordinary affair, wasn't it? Do you know, it's occurred to me that possibly the same chaps might have been responsible for last night's business. What do you fellows think? Because in that case I suppose I ought to tell Railton all about—"

"There—there goes the chapel bell!" blurted Racke. "Come on! We don't want to be late!"

Crooke and he left Cardew's side abruptly and hurried across the quad in the direction of the school chapel. Cardew smiled in a peculiar fashion and followed them at a leisurely pace. There was actually not the least reason for any haste. Very few of the other fellows were even downstairs yet.

When Racke and Crooke came out of chapel, Cardew sauntered up and joined them, still talking airily about nothing in particular, and he only left them when they went into the Shell Form-room for first school.

At breakfast, every time one or other of them glanced across the dining-hall he met the smiling eyes of the dandy of the Fourth regarding him with a curious intentness, and when they got up from their almost untouched plates to go out of the dining-hall, Cardew rose from the Fourth Form table and strolled out with them.

They went up to their study to get their books for second school, and Cardew accompanied them, still talking cheerfully and inconsequentially in his most whimsical vein, and apparently quite oblivious of the restless movements and sidelong glances with which Racke and Crooke were betraying their nervousness and apprehension.

One thought only was occupying the minds of the two black sheep of the Shell.

Did the keen-witted Cardew guess anything of the truth? And if so, how much?

They picked up their books and glanced swiftly and covertly towards the corner of the study where the jewel-case had been hidden under the flooring, seeing with relief that the carpet showed no signs of having been disturbed.

Then they came downstairs again, and Cardew with a cheery "So-long. See you later, old beans!" left them at the door of the Shell Form-room.

Their pale features and strained expressions attracted the attention of Mr. Linton, their Form master, and he asked them, sympathetically enough, if they felt ill. Racke explained that they had both lost a good deal of sleep during the night in consequence of the excitement occasioned by the attempted burglary—which was perfectly true in a sense that Mr. Linton could not possibly suspect. He accepted the explanation, and dealt leniently with them, which was fortunate for Racke and Crooke, who were in no frame of mind for Form work.

They came out of the Form-room dreading and fully

expecting to see Cardew waiting for them, but to their unutterable relief he was not to be seen, though the Fourth had already been dismissed.

Racke gritted his teeth.

"Hang the beast!" he said savagely. "He's only been pullin' our legs, after all, an' now he's got tired of it. He can't possibly know anythin'. Come on, let's get up to the study!"

He strode off up the stairs to the Shell corridor.

Crooke followed him into the study.

"Shut the door and lock it!" directed Racke, tossing his books on to the table. "We'll have that dashed board up and make certain—"

A footstep sounded outside in the corridor, and a gentle tap came on the door.

Racke, who was on his knees in the corner, jumped up in alarm.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"Only little me," drawled a well-known voice from the other side of the door.

"Cardew!" gasped Crooke. "I say, Racke, I really think he must—"

Racke strode to the door, unlocked it, and flung it open.

Ralph Reckness Cardew, smiling blandly, stepped into the room.

"Well, here we are again," he observed cheerfully. "I often wonder—"

Racke shouldered up to him, quivering with fury.

"Look here, Cardew, you swankin' cad," he ground out thickly, "what's your dashed game? I've had enough of this. What are you followin' us about for?"

"Eh?" said Cardew. "Am I followin' you about? 'Pon my soul, I never thought of it in that way, but—well, yes, I suppose it really does look a trifle like that, now you come to mention it. Sorry, an' so forth. I'll see it doesn't occur again. As a matter of fact, I only dropped in to ask if you'd mind lettin' me have my pencil back."

Blank amazement showed in Racke's face.

"Your pencil?" he echoed uncomprehendingly.

"Yes. It's probably escaped your memory, but I lent it to you one evenin' when we were havin' a hand of bridge in here, about a week or so ago. It was a little silver one, with my initials engraved on it."

"Oh, that dashed thing!" said Racke contemptuously, feeling in the pockets of his vest.

"Only that," murmured Cardew apologetically. "A poor thing, sir, but mine own, as the dear old bard—Shakespeare, of course, not Wilkie—expresses it. Perhaps you've mislaid it, Racke. Don't bother—"

"Oh, I shall come across it somewhere or other," said Racke carelessly. "One thing, I haven't lost it, anyway."

"I trust you'll pardon my contradictin' you, Racke, but that's just exactly what you have done."

"What—what the dickens do you mean? Who says—"

"I do!" interrupted Cardew. "And I have the best of reasons for knowin', because I happen to have found it."

"You've found it! Then what the thump do you mean by botherin' me?"

"Well, it occurred to me that you might possibly be interested to know where I picked it up, that's all. By the way, perhaps you don't mind if I take a leaf out of your own book?"

He stepped to the door and closed it, turning the key, which he withdrew and dropped into his own pocket.

"That's better!" he said. "Now we're not likely to be interrupted while you're explainin' to me, Racke, how my pencil came to be on the floor of an unoccupied house several miles up the Rhyl. For that's where I found it, an' I don't mind tellin' you I don't take kindly to havin' my property scattered about the countryside in that lavish manner. It might lead to all sorts of complications."

"I—I—I—" stammered Racke, his face paper-white.

"We—we—that is, Racke—he—" gulped Crooke wildly.

"Don't both try to speak at once, you'll only make a mess of it," advised Cardew calmly. "Just decide between yourselves which of you is goin' to satisfy my curiosity. I don't doubt that both of you know all there is to know about it; but perhaps Racke had better be the spokesman. He—"

"You—you sneerin', swankin', overbearin' cad!" hissed Racke, almost beside himself with rage and terror.

"True as that may be," smiled Cardew, "it does nothin' towards enlightenin' me as to how my pencil came to be in that house."

"If you're as clever as you think you are, you'd better find out for yourself how it got there," sneered Racke.

"That's exactly what I intend doin', with your valuable assistance," Cardew assured him. "Look here, Racke, I'm not foolin', so don't make any silly mistake about it. Because if you think I'm goin' to have one of my chums—to say nothin' of myself—dragged about and cuffed and pawed over by a gang of filthy roughts, as scapegoats for you and

your blackguardly toady, you're makin' the mistake of your worthless life. We stop in this room, all three of us, till I've got to the bottom of this business."

Racke and Crooke stared dumbly at Cardew. Their tongues were cleaving to the roofs of their mouths, and they were momentarily incapable of speech.

"Of course, I've got a pretty good notion of what must have occurred," went on Cardew. "It's clear enough that you two were in that house just before we came along, and that by some means or other you managed to trick that choice little gang out of something fairly valuable. What it was I don't pretend to know, but it was small enough for them to suspect that Clive and I might have it concealed about us, which suggests that it was some piece of jewellery. Judgin' by the expressions on your faces, I seem to have made a lucky guess. What was it, exactly?"

Racke licked his dry lips and glanced furtively at Crooke.

"It—it was a pearl necklace," he muttered sullenly. "Gad! Not—not the Countess of Castledean's, surely? It was? Phe-eece-ew! Ten thousand quid's worth—eh? And you and your gaolbird pals are playin' hunt-the-slipper with it as merrily as if it was a string of beads. My hat! And now let's hear the interestin' story of how you got hold of it."

Racke hesitated for a few moments, breathing hard, and surveying Cardew malevolently from the corners of his eyes, gleaming with fury.

He felt that he would willingly have given twenty necklaces, if he had possessed them, to have been free to smash his fist into Cardew's face and call upon Crooke to help him to throw the elegant Fourth-Former out of the study. But as matters were he knew only too well that Cardew had the upper hand; that whatever tune he chose to call Racke would be forced to dance to it. So Racke bowed to the inevitable, and in a low, strained voice related what had taken place in the riverside house the previous afternoon, from the time, he, Crooke, Carker, and Lacy had arrived there together, right up to the frenzied flight of Crooke and himself with the necklace.

Cardew listened in silence.

"Humph!" murmured the Fourth-Former thoughtfully, as Racke finished speaking. "I see. So when they rushed out of the house and saw us running down the road they mistook us for you. And, in the meantime, you were clearing off in the opposite direction. Very convenient for you, wasn't it?"

"We—we didn't know you were there," said Crooke. "If we had done—"

"You would have done exactly the same—streaked off and left us to stand the racket," interrupted Cardew. "I know you both too well to have any doubt about that. Well, you seem to have made pretty complete fools of Bill Sikes & Co., but though robbin' the robbers might be applauded as bein' a highly moral proceeding, it seems to me that it's possible some people might rather question whether you're altogether justified in holdin' on to the swag."

Racke stared at Cardew in horrified amazement. "Good gad, Cardew!" he gasped. "You don't think we were goin' to stick to the thing, do you? It was the reward we were after. They were offerin' a hundred quid reward for its recovery."

"So I heard," nodded Cardew. "But, in that case, why didn't you take the necklace straight to the police station, and tell the truth, or as much of the truth as either of you is capable of tellin', about it? Then there'd—"

"That's what I wanted to do," broke in Crooke bitterly. "It was Racke's fault we didn't. The dashed fool said he was goin' to hang on to it till the reward was raised."

"Very typical of Racke," commented Cardew. "And now you've landed yourselves into a nice mess, haven't you? Suppose those johnnies fall into the hands of the police, what's more likely than that they'll blurt out the whole yarn? Then where do you come in?"

"Oh, heaven!" moaned Crooke affrightedly. "I—I say, Racke, let's get rid of the beastly thing at once. Give it to Cardew—"

"Thanks!" drawled Cardew dryly. "I suppose it doesn't occur to you, Crooke, that I might possibly have some slight objection to appearin' in a police-court as a receiver of stolen property? Where is the thing now?"

Racke went over to the corner of the study and lifted the loose board. He plunged his hand into the cavity, but after groping about for a few seconds he jumped to his feet with a cry of dismay and alarm.

"It—it's not there!" he panted. "It's been taken! Oh, good gad, what—"

"Taken!" echoed Cardew and Crooke.

"Yes. Those dashed burglars must have—"

"Rot!" snapped Cardew. "They couldn't possibly have

found it. Are you certain that nobody else at St. Jim's knew you'd got it?"

"Mellish!"

The name came from Racke's lips in almost a shout. "I had my doubts about the little rotter takin' in the yarn about it bein' only an imitation!" gritted Racke. "He must have sneaked back last night and looked through the keyhole when I was hidin' it. He could have come down in the night—"

"Just so!" interrupted Cardew. "There's no time to waste. If the pearls are gone, and you're certain Mellish was the only St. Jim's fellow besides yourselves who knew you'd got them, we'd better look for Mellish at once and put a few questions to him."

And, unlocking the door of the study, he led the way out.

But Percy Mellish was nowhere to be found.

## CHAPTER 11.

### A Shock for Mellish!

MELLISH of the Fourth strolled leisurely through the gates of St. Jim's into Rylcombe Lane with an elaborate air of nonchalance. In the same apparently aimless fashion he turned his steps in the direction of the village, but when he had covered fifty yards or so his manner changed abruptly. He cast a swift, furtive glance behind him, and then, seeing that he was alone upon the road and unobserved, set out at a brisk pace that was in striking contrast to his former indolent saunter.

A bulge on the left side of his jacket betrayed the presence of something tucked away in his pocket, and as he hurried along he chuckled to himself at the thought of Racke's rage and dismay when he should discover that the necklace was gone.

Mellish had been spending some little time and thought in considering what was the best hiding-place he could devise for the necklace, and he had finally decided that he could not do better than secrete it in a certain hollow tree he knew of, near to a footpath in Rylcombe Wood. It was a much more secure hiding-place than could be devised anywhere on the school premises.

And so, at the first opportunity, he was setting out with the necklace, bound for the woods.

As he turned a bend in the lane he came in sight of a man who was lounging against a stile a little farther along, and to Mellish's uneasiness this individual, after subjecting him to a prolonged scrutiny, came forward and stood in his path.

"Arf a mo', young gen'l'man!" he said, in a hoarse, rasping voice. "I'd just like a word wi' you."

He was a burly fellow, dressed in a cheap, badly-fitting suit of obviously ready-made clothes, with a shabby bowler-hat on his head, and what was clearly an unaccustomed linen collar, far from clean, confining his thick red neck.

An ugly, livid scar creased the angle of his jaw, lifting up one side of his upper lip in a perpetual snarl.

Mellish eyed him apprehensively. "It's no use your stopping me," blustered the Fourth-Former. "I—I've got no money with me!"

The snarl deepened into what was no doubt intended for a reassuring smile.

"Ha, ha! That's a good 'un, that is," smirked the man. "Blow me if it ain't! So yer takes me for a beggar, young gen'l'man—eh? Well, p'r'aps it ain't to be wondered at, me stopping you in this 'ere way. Yer needn't worry, sir, I only want to ask yer a few questions, that's all."

"Eh?" said Mellish, staring. "What on earth—"

The man checked Mellish by laying a finger to the side of his nose and leering in a very secretive manner. He edged nearer to the astonished junior.

"Ere," he whispered hoarsely, "what should yer say if I was to tell yer as I was a split—eh?"

He drew back as if to observe the effect of his words.

"A split?" echoed Mellish blankly.

"Yas. Mean to say as yer dunno what a split is? Lumme! Well, yer knows what a 'tec is, don't yer?"

"You mean a—a detective?" gasped Mellish.

"That's it. A 'tec—a bloomin' copper's nark! That's me. From Scotland Yard!"

Mellish stared at the man in astonishment. It was impossible to suppose, for a moment, that this seedy-looking person could be a police official. What purpose he had in making such a claim was inconceivable to Mellish, and, in any case, he was too anxious to get along to have any curiosity in the matter. So he shrugged his shoulders and tried to brush past with a curt nod. The man put out a grimy hand and detained him.

"Not so fast, cocky!" said the self-styled detective. "I can see as you come from that there big school, an'—"



The man with the scarred face jerked round with a snarl, as he heard a faint noise behind him. But before he could raise his pistol, Tom Merry and Blake had sprung upon him. Crack! The automatic fired, but Blake was clinging to the ruffian's wrist, and deflecting the muzzle of the weapon downwards, so that the bullet thudded harmlessly into the turf. (See Chapter 12.)

"Will you get out of the way and let me go past?" demanded Mellish angrily.

"Not till you've answered them questions as I want to ask yer," persisted the man. "An' you take my tip an' be a bit more civil-like in your talk. Let me tell yer as I've only got to lift my 'and to 'ave yer put in the stone jug for hobstructin' a p'lice officier—"

"Oh, rot!" snapped Mellish impatiently. "You can't bluff me that you're—"

"I ain't a-bluffin' yer! I'm a-givin' yer the straight griffin. Now, look 'ere! I'm down in these parts on a special case. There's a necklace what's been stolen—"

"What?" gasped Mellish, suddenly pale to the lips. He clutched at the man's arm, trembling from head to foot.

"S-s-stolen!" he gulped. "Wh-what sort of a necklace was it?"

"A pearl necklace, the property o' the Countess o' Castle-dean, an' worth ten thousand jimmy-o'-goblins!" recited the man impressively. "An' I 'ave reason to believe as—"

Mellish was staring at him in wide-eyed horror. "T-ten th-thousand pounds," he stammered, in a terrified whisper. "Why—why I—I thought—"

"As some o' you young rips at this 'ere school knows somethink about it," the man was saying. "An' so, in the name o' the Lor I calls on you to answer me some questions, tellin' the truth, the 'ole truth, and nothink but the truth, an' all you says will be took down an' used in evidence agin yer, so 'elp yer!" he concluded somewhat vaguely.

"But—but there must be some mistake!" muttered Mellish feverishly.

"There won't be no mistake if I lays 'ands on the young brats as 'ave got it!" snarled the "detective" viciously. And then, with a tardy recollection of the part he was playing, he went on hastily: "Now, if you 'appens to know anything about who's got that there necklace, you tell 'em from me that if they 'and it over to you and you bring it along to me, they won't 'ear no more about it. But if they ain't got the sense for that, it's the stone jug for 'em, an' no bloomin' error!"

He might have saved his breath for all the notice that Mellish was taking of him.

The Fourth-Former had been shaken to the depths of his craven, crafty nature by the discovery that the necklace he had filched from Racke's study as an act of petty spite was stolen property, worth a fortune.

For he did not for a moment doubt that it was the same necklace, and the thought that he had made himself responsible for its safety sent him almost dizzy with terror. Suppose something should happen to it while it was in his possession! And suppose he should be found in possession of it!

His hand went involuntarily to his jacket-pocket before he recollected that he was not alone. He withdrew his hand hastily.

But his terror had been so manifest that the man could not but notice it, and he had been staring at the wretched Fourth-Former with growing suspicion, when that incautious movement of Mellish's had attracted his attention, for the first time, to the tell-tale bulge in the jacket.

He drew a quick breath, and spat out a lurid oath. "'Anged if I don't think as you're one o' the young brats yourself!" he gritted. "What's that you've got under your coat?"

"N-n-nothing!" stammered Mellish desperately, backing away. "I—I—"

"Come 'ere!" snarled the man, grasping Mellish by the shoulder, and pulling him savagely forward. "Let's 'ave a look! Keep still, you little hound, or—"

Smack! Mellish, struggling fiercely in a very paroxysm of frenzy, had smashed his fist full into the mouth of the ruffian. It was not a very hard blow, but for the moment it staggered the man. Mellish's triumph, however, was short-lived, for the next moment the man flung him to the ground and rained heavy blows down upon him.

"Yer young whelp! I'll learn yer! Take that! I'll flay the 'ide off'n yer!" snarled the ruffian, and as Mellish lay bruised and bleeding, he literally tore out the pocket of his jacket, and possessed himself of the jewel-case.

Rising to his feet, his eyes glittering, the ruffian kicked Mellish brutally in the ribs.

"I thought I weren't mistaken!" he mouthed exultantly. "Ere it is, unless—"

He snapped open the case to make certain that the necklace was indeed inside, and discovering that it was, he closed it again, and crammed it into a pocket of his coat.

He glared down at Mellish, and raised his foot to again kick the prostrate junior; but at that moment the tinkle of bicycle-bells sounded from just round the bend in the lane.

The man turned, with a startled oath, and scrambled over the stile, to go running off across the field in the direction of the woods.

A moment later Tom Merry & Co., with Blake, Digby, Herries, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, came sweeping round the bend.

They jammed on their brakes just in time to prevent themselves from running over Mellish, who lay moaning and groaning directly in their path.

"Great pip!" gasped Tom Merry, in astonishment, leaping off his machine. "What the thump—"

At the sound of the Shell captain's voice, Mellish struggled up on to his hands and knees.

"Don't let him get away!" he implored distractedly. "Catch him, for Heaven's sake! He can't have got far yet!"

"Eh? Catch whom?" inquired Blake, staring. "What's the matter, Mellish? What's happened to you?"

"Never mind me!" panted Mellish desperately. "Catch that chap! He's gone off with the necklace!"

"Necklace? What necklace?" said Monty Lowther. "What on earth are you babbling about, Mellish?"

"It's the Countess of Castledean's necklace, and it's worth ten thousand pounds!" shrieked Mellish, almost beside himself. "I've had it taken away from me! Oh, get it back! Don't stand there staring like a lot of—"

"There's somebody running across that field!" pointed out Manners. "There he goes, into the woods!"

"That's the rotter!" howled Mellish, wringing his hands helplessly. "Oh, why don't you—"

"I don't understand this!" said Tom Merry curtly. "But it looks to me as if some sort of rotten business is going on, and, as usual, Mellish is in the thick of it. And I'm hanged if I see why we should get ourselves mixed up in some—"

Ting-a-ling!

Three more cyclists came speeding round the bend, pedalling furiously, to pull up with a suddenness that nearly spilled them over the handlebars as they sighted the little group in the roadway.

The newcomers were Cardew, Racke, and Crooke.

"I say, you fellows," called out Cardew urgently, as he dismounted. "Do you happen to have seen anythin' of Mellish?"

"Mellish?" echoed Tom Merry wonderingly. "Why, he's here!"

"What?"

Cardew dropped his machine and strode forward, his face set in grim lines.

"Now then, Mellish," he snapped grimly, "where's that necklace?"

Mellish looked up, at him with an expression of hopeless misery, tears streaming down his face.

"It—it's gone!" he sobbed.

## CHAPTER 12.

### Run to Earth!

"GONE!" Cardew echoed the word in a tone of consternation, and his face went haggard.

"Gone!" moaned Racke, looking as if he was going to be violently sick. "Oh, my Heaven!"

There was a clatter of falling metal. Crooke, the weaker vessel, had collapsed outright over his machine, in a half-fainting condition.

"I say, what's all this fuss about a necklace?" began Tom Merry. But Cardew cut him short with a gesture.

"Wait a minute, Merry! Now then, Mellish, pull yourself together and tell me what's happened to it. You took it out of Racke's study last night?"

"Yes! I—I was going to take it into the woods and hide it. And some rotter stopped me and pretended to be a detective. While I was talking to him he suddenly sprang at me and took it out of—"

"What was he like?"

"A frightful, hefty brute, with a scar across his mouth."

"The leader of the gang! Just what I expected! Which way did he go?"

"Over that field towards the woods. Manners saw him—"

"What's that?" Cardew whirled round accusingly on Tom Merry & Co. "You mean to say you fellows saw him and didn't go after him?"

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"Why should we have done?" demanded Tom Merry heatedly. "We didn't know what—"

"Of course you didn't! Sorry!" interrupted Cardew contritely. "I shouldn't have said that. Well, look here, you chaps, there isn't time to explain fully, but these three fools have been ass'n' about with the Castledean pearls, valued at ten thousand—"

"What?"

It was a simultaneous gasp from seven throats.

"They were stolen from the countess," went on Cardew, speaking rapidly. "Then Racke and Crooke stole them from the original thieves, and Mellish stole them from Racke and Crooke."

"I didn't know what they were!" wailed Mellish.

"And now one of the professional thieves has managed to steal them back from one of the amateurs. I can tell you fellows that it's a jolly serious matter, and if that necklace isn't recovered—and at once—Racke and Crooke and Mellish will be lucky if they don't see the inside of a prison!"

"Serve 'em right!" said Blake disgustedly. "Best place for them!"

"No doubt! But what about the good name of St. Jim's?" inquired Cardew.

Blake stared at him.

"I didn't know you are so concerned about the good name of the school!"

"No? Well, there's quite a lot about me you don't know yet. Come along! We've wasted too much time already. Leave the bikes where they are. Mellish and Crooke can look after them. About the only thing they're any use for."

Led by Cardew, the juniors raced across the field and plunged into the wood. It was not long before their training as Boy Scouts enabled them to pick up the trail of the fugitive.

It led them right into the depths of the wood, and suddenly Tom Merry stopped.

"I say, you fellows," he said excitedly. "I believe I know where he's making for—the Priory ruins! They're just ahead, you know."

"I dare say you're right," agreed Cardew. "It's just the sort of place he might use as a hidey-hole. The three of them might live down in the crypt for days without anybody bein' any the wiser. Let's get along!"

"And mind how you go," put in Blake. "We want to take him off his guard if we can."

"I should imagine that gentlemen of his profession are never really off their guard," said Cardew sagely. "Still, there's just a chance that in the circumstances if he's gloating over his swag, he may be a trifle less alert than usual. Let's hope so, anyway. We don't want any shooting, if we can help it."

"My hat! No!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"I think you chaps ought to be warned that the blighter's armed with an automatic pistol, and I can assure you that he won't think twice about using it if we give him half a chance."

"We shall have to take thumping good care not to give him one, then!" said Tom Merry grimly.

Blake eyed Cardew curiously.

"I say, Cardew, you seem to know quite a lot about him," he said.

"I do! He was the leader of the gang that collared Clive and I at the house by the river yesterday," replied Cardew briefly. "That's how I came into this business. Steady on, we're gettin' near the ruins. Oh, there's another thing, though. He may have a couple of pals with him. Look out for them!"

"Right!"

The juniors approached the clearing in which the ruined priory was situated, with the utmost caution.

They carefully surveyed the moss and ivy-covered walls, crumbling and tottery, that were all that was left of the ancient building, as they crouched among the undergrowth at the edge of the clearing.

But there was no sign of the ruffian, and the juniors broke cover and approached the ruin as silently as weasels, stepping on tiptoe among the fallen stones that littered the grass.

Motioning his companions to hold back, Tom Merry crept towards the dark opening that led down to the crypt, and stood listening intently.

A faint sound came to his ears.

Somebody was down there in the crypt.

Trembling with excitement, Tom Merry slipped back to the rest of the juniors, and in a tense whisper reported his discovery.

"Well, what are we going to do?" muttered Blake. "We can't very well go down there and tackle an armed man—even supposing the other two Cardew has told us about aren't with him."

"Do you think we could sneak down the stairs and take him unawares?" said Digby in a low tone.

Cardew shook his head.

"Not the slightest chance!" he said decidedly. "He'd be certain to hear us before we were half-way down, even if he didn't see our shadows as we started. Then there'd be the merry dickens to pay, and I, for one, am not exactly keen on being shot."

Tom Merry's face, which had been overcast by a thoughtful frown, suddenly lighted up as an idea came to him.

"I've got it, you fellows!" he whispered. "Look here, Dig, you and Gussy go back into the wood. Get about a hundred yards away from here and fifty yards or so apart. In a couple of minutes start yelling to each other at the tops of your voices, and crash about in the bushes. The rest of us will slip over and hide ourselves behind the wall there just against the entrance to the crypt."

"I get you!" broke in Blake. "When he comes darting out to see what's happening and stands looking towards the place where Dig and Gussy are kicking up the row, we hop up behind him and grab him before he can turn round, eh?"

"Exactly," whispered Tom Merry. "If we're quick we ought to be able to prevent him from getting a chance to shoot."

"What about if they're all three there?" murmured Racke uneasily.

Tom Merry shrugged his shoulders.

"We shall have to chance that," he said curtly. "Off you go, you two!"

"But weally, Tom Mewvy, I considah that it would be bettah to send some othah chap to make a wow in the woods, while I assisted in the captuuh of the misewant," protested Arthur Augustus. "I am suah—"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy! Do as you're told and don't argue, for goodness' sake! There's no time for it now," growled Blake.

"Yaas, but—"

"You burbling jabberwock!" hissed Blake. "Save all that chinwag till you get among the trees, where it'll do some good."

As Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Dig stole off, to vanish among the undergrowth, the remaining seven juniors, with infinite caution, crept across the intervening ground and secreted themselves behind a creeper-covered wall, less than four yards from the yawning entrance to the crypt.

They stood still as statues, but alert and tense-muscled, ready to spring forth at a moment's notice when the time for action came.

In less than a minute after they had taken up their position, the sound of a lusty yell came to their ears. It was followed by another—in the unmistakable tones of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy this time—and then came the noise of a violent disturbance among the bushes.

In a very few seconds heavy footsteps clattered on the stone stairs of the entrance to the crypt, and a burly figure emerged from the gloomy depths.

It was the man with the scarred face.

He cast a swift, startled glance around him, but failed to detect the little group of schoolboys crouching behind the corner of the ivy-covered wall; then he devoted all his attention to the direction from which the noise of shouting and crashing of undergrowth was coming.

His automatic pistol, gleaming dully in the sunlight, was grasped in his right hand, obviously ready for instant use.

Nobody came up the stairs after him, and the juniors drew little breaths of relief as they realised that he must be alone.

His back was towards them, and when, at a sign from Tom Merry, the half dozen juniors stole out from their place of concealment towards him, he did not turn. His whole attention was concentrated on watching the woods in front of him.

He was breathing quickly, through distended nostrils, like a hunted animal at bay.

He jerked round with a snarl and spat out an alarmed oath as he heard a faint noise behind him, but before he could raise his pistol Tom Merry and Blake had sprung upon him.

Crack!

The automatic exploded, but Blake was clinging to the ruffian's wrist, and deflecting the muzzle of the weapon downwards so that the bullet thudded harmlessly into the turf.

He did not get a second chance to fire. Blake wrenched at his wrist with both hands and forced him to drop the pistol. By this time the rest of the juniors had piled in and were helping to subdue the struggling rascal.

In the hands of seven determined juniors he was helpless to do more than mouth oaths as they pulled him down and sat on him.

Tom Merry went rapidly through his pockets and took out the jewel-case.

"This is it, I suppose?" said Tom, holding it up. "Here, you'd better take charge of it, Cardew."

"Thanks!" drawled Cardew, taking the case and making certain that the necklace was in it. "I trust that nobody is goin' to suspect my integrity, by the way."

"Don't be an ass!" laughed Tom Merry. "I say, what about this blighter, though? We can't stop here sitting on his head for ever. And I suppose it wouldn't do to hand him over to the police. Shall we kick him out, or leave him here?"

"I vote for kicking him out!" said Herries promptly. "It'll perhaps do him a bit of good. And then we can kick Racke, and by the time we get back to the bikes we shall be ready to start again with Crooke and Mellish."

"Well, I don't know about the whole programme," grinned Tom Merry. "But we can certainly lead off with this merchant. Come on!"

Propelled by half a dozen feet well used to punting a football about a field, the discomfited ruffian bolted out of the Priory ruins and scuttled across the clearing, to vanish into the obscurity of the woods, pausing only to shake his fist and hurl some lurid threat at the juniors.

"Now for Racke!" said Herries briskly; but Tom Merry shook his head quickly. It was generally agreed that Racke had suffered sufficiently, in anguish of mind, for his folly. And that applied also to Crooke and Mellish.

"And now we'd better cut off to Wayland and hand that thing over at the police station," said Tom Merry in a rather anxious voice. "The sooner we get rid of it the better."

"Just a moment, Merry!" came Cardew's quiet drawl. "Would you mind putting it down on the ground somewhere about here?"

Tom Merry turned round, to see Cardew holding out the jewel-case towards him. He stared at the elegant Fourth-Former in bewilderment, as did the rest of the juniors.

"Eh?" gasped Tom Merry blankly. "Put it down on the ground? What on earth for?"

"So that I can pick it up again," said Cardew calmly. "Then I shall be able to say I picked it up in the old Priory ruins. Don't forget we shall have to give some sort of account of how it came into our possession, and I don't particularly want to tell an absolute untruth."

"Getting rather squeamish all of a sudden, aren't you?" said Blake satirically.

"Not at all! It's you fellows I'm thinkin' of," Cardew assured him blandly. "Knowin' your lofty moral standard, I wouldn't dare to call on you to bear me out in a yarn that hadn't at least a grain of truth in it. Quite apart from the fact that I don't believe any of you have sufficient imagination to tell a lie without bein' instantly bowled out in it."

"Grr-rr!" growled Blake.

Tom Merry took the case and placed it on the ground. Cardew bent down and picked it up.

"That's good enough!" he said. "Come along!"

The juniors hurried back to the road where they had left their machines and set out for Wayland. Racke went with them, but Mellish and Crooke, in spite of their overwhelming relief at the recovery of the necklace, were in no state to accompany them, and returned to St. Jim's.

The utter amazement of the inspector on duty at Wayland Police Station when a party of St. Jim's schoolboys crowded in and laid the missing Castledean necklace on his desk, with the astonishing statement that it had been picked up among the ruins of the old Priory, and that they desired the reward to be handed over to the treasurer of the Wayland Hospital, was ludicrous.

"What a life!" sighed Cardew, as they remounted their machines outside the police station. "Alarms and excursions—and excursions and alarms. And what does it all amount to in the end? Nothin'. Here we've given the kybosh to a gang of desperate criminals in a fashion that a squad of bobbies couldn't have bettered, and restored ten thousand quid's worth of junk to its sorrowin' owner, and how much better off are we? Not a cent! We can't even claim any credit. The only consolation is that we've saved Racke and Crooke and Mellish from languishin' in prison—if that is a consolation."

"Oh, shut up!" growled Blake. "I don't want to hear any more about Racke and Crooke and Mellish."

"Well, I don't suppose we shall—till the next time they get themselves into a mess," said Cardew consolingly.

"I shall take thumping good care that I don't put myself about to get them out of it, if they do!" grunted Blake.

"Humph!" said Cardew thoughtfully. "I wonder. I just wonder!"

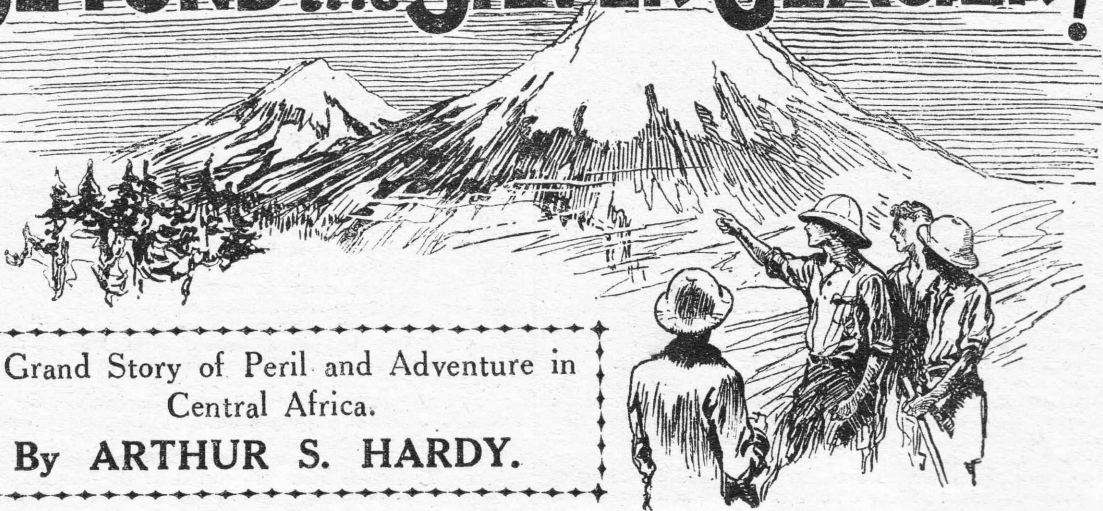
THE END.

(There will be another topping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. in next week's GEM. Note the title, chums: "GUSSY, THE REBEL!" It's a great story this, and no "Gemite" should miss reading it!)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,011.

**THE TURNING POINT!** Ever since Professor Byrne was acclaimed a white god by the Hokahula tribe, the witch doctors have been putting on their thinking caps in order to get him deposed. And the chance comes their way now of proving to the Hokahulas that the professor is no more a god than they are!

# BEYOND *the* SILVER GLACIER!



A Grand Story of Peril and Adventure in  
Central Africa.

By **ARTHUR S. HARDY.**

## The Fateful Day!

**C**HOITAE smiled, his cunning eyes gleaming dangerously.

"The Hokahulas are not afraid of your tubes that deal death!" he stated. "I have no faith in your white gods, who say they can fly through the air like the birds. The Hokahulas are as the leaves of the forest, uncountable. You may kill some—but you cannot slay all. Now let me declare the will of Beeda, the chief. He has lost faith in the power of the white god, who has been crowned king of the Hokahulas. To-morrow he will wed the beautiful white princess. If as much as the hair on the head of a single Hokahula warrior is harmed, so will the white flyers of the air be punished for it! The man Kyhte, the traitor messenger, will yet be dealt with as he deserves! Consent to the marriage of your daughter to the chief Beeda, O king of the Hokahulas"—and the high priest bowed mockingly—"or thou mayest find thyself deposed—and the white gods who were led past the sacred waterfall may be hurled from the head of the stone god of the Hokahulas, the idol, Booma the Magnificent! Then shall we see whether they can fly."

He half-turned away.

"To-morrow," said he, "the wedding will take place. Until then, O king, you and your white gods will be shut up in the palace. It is the order of Beeda, our chief."

The professor, looking glum, turned to Adam.

"Adam, my dear boy," he murmured, "it really does look as if we are deep in the mire. I don't quite see how we are going to get out of it, either. Being a king is all right as long as one's subjects obey and one is treated with adequate respect. But when one is defied by a wily rogue like this high priest and rendered impotent, why—er—it's a regular dickens of a job to know what to do. Can you suggest anything?"

Adam pondered quickly, caught sight of Muta, and smiled.

"Why, yes; we will win Rosa back with our guns if needs be," he declared. "But at the moment I think Mutt had better say a few words. Mutt, boy, give that horned old rascal a bit of your mind and threaten him just as much as you please."

The high priest was in the act of walking away, the Hokahula warriors standing to attention as he passed, when, with a spring, Muta reached him.

Stretching out his hand, Muta seized the priestly robes and hauled Choitae round.

A shout of consternation rang from the lips of the assembled warriors and the attendant horned priests.

Mirana, the warrior, drawing a knife with a curved blade, raised it over Muta's heart. But the big black, flicking his sail-like ears and baring his great white teeth, laughed in the fellow's face, tore the knife away, and tossed it spinning into the air.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,011.

"Back, Mirana, you dog!" he shouted. "Back, Choitae, the high priest of the Hokahulas, and listen to Muta, son of the Queen O-Kama, who knows the history of the great Hokahula people from the beginning of time as if he had always lived in the country around Barcoomba."

Choitae, staring at him in awe, fell back a step. His eyes betokened a great uneasiness.

"To-morrow," Muta went on, "the white princess will be given back into the arms of her father, the white god, king of the Hokahulas. To-morrow the chief Beeda will acknowledge the supremacy of the white king, and will do honour to the white men who fly through the air."

Here Sandy McTavish cut in with a stage whisper addressed to Jimmy Brown:

"I dinna ken what the thump that black gorilla is talking about, James, but he has the gift o' the gab all right eno'. Tae listen tae him he micht be standing on an egg-box in Hyde Park."

Muta certainly possessed imagination, and had power to impress. No doubt he had heard his exiled queen mother talk in this fashion by the yard ever since he was first able to understand.

"You doubt that the white gods can fly?" Here Muta's lips curled contemptuously. "I, Muta, the black god of the Hokahulas, tell you that I have seen them speed through the air at a pace that no bird can equal; that I have been carried up by them as if I were the lightest leaf of the forest borne upon a tempest and brought down again as gently as the leaf falls when the air is still."

The warriors began to murmur.

Muta, to obtain added effect, pointed upwards towards the spangled sky, whose stars blinked blurredly now through the onswEEPing mist.

"Beware what you do to-morrow! Let chief Beeda think twice before he arouses the wrath of the white gods! Let the princess be given back into the arms of the king, her father, or the vengeance of the white gods may come to the Hokahula people—through the air."

Muta, ceasing to speak, looked round to note the effect of his words. The warriors were staring at him in silent awe. Even Choitae, the high priest himself, appeared to be shaken.

With a supreme effort he managed to regain his composure.

"So be it," he smiled mockingly. "To-morrow the white princess shall be married to the Prince Beeda. We will put the omnipotence of the white god, our king, to the test."

The adventurers had no sleep that night. They had no desire to sleep. The events of the day had been too disturbing, the promise of the morrow was too serious for them to waste their time in sleeping. Instead, they sat up and talked, Sandy McTavish handing round his tobacco.

Muta sat just beyond the ring of white men. Kyhte, the guide, marked down for death should the high priest, Choitae, gain the upper hand, lay stretched across the door-



way of the palace, through which the party could see the flaming torches gleaming dully in the mist.

The man Symes, as if he had made up his mind to sleep even if he died on the morrow, lay with knees drawn up and head set upon a rush pillow close in against the wall.

Del Rivo, the sullen Portuguese, moving restlessly, but with ears pricked up to listen to the conversation, was stretched out full-length a few yards apart.

They did not mind his hearing what was said.

After all, he could do nothing to embarrass the situation one way or the other, and their safety was his safety. Del Rivo, therefore, was ignored.

The plan of campaign Adam & Co. arranged was this: That they should bear with them when they were allowed to enter the great square, the machine-gun, rifles, and revolvers, and a sufficiency of ammunition; they would take Muta and Kyhte with them, knowing full well that Kyhte, at least, would be slain if they were to allow him to stray beyond reach of their protection.

Then in the presence of the multitude Professor Byrne, crowned king of the Hokahulas, would claim his daughter, refusing to allow her to be wedded to Beeda, prince and natural chief of the Hokahulas, on the ground that she was a daughter of the white god, and therefore sacred.

Professor Byrne would essay to gain his end by pacific means; but should all else fail, then, and only then, they would tear Rosa from the hands of the priests by main force and defend her and themselves by rifle and machine-gun fire.

Although but a mere handful of white men opposed to the whole strength and might of the Hokohulas with their formidable army of warriors, they might, by reason of the terror they would instil into the minds of the tribesmen, then be able to escape from the city of Barcoomba, and, by forced marching, reach the waterfall gateway of the kingdom of the Hokahulas, pass behind it, and, traversing the narrow ledge which ran round the face of the cliff-face, gain safety.

It would be a desperate chance—and they might fail. Should they fail it would mean the end, death for them—death, too, for Rosa, for George Willis Byrne, for his son Adam and Harold Franklin, and for the others; yet they solemnly agreed that it would be better thus than that Rosa should be mated with Beeda the Prince.

"Muta," said Adam, calling the great broad-shouldered black aside soon after the dawn broke and the sun lightened the all-prevailing mist, "I shall want you to stand by me. We will get as near to my sister as they will allow. As a last resource, when I give you the word, I shall want you to spring to where she stands, pick the girl up, and bring her to me, where she will be safe behind the guns."

Muta glanced at Adam wide eyed.

"It shall be done as you wish, O White Flyer, my master," he answered. "I owe you my life. You own the charm Oyorara. But have no fear—he who wears it will come safely through the greatest dangers: Choitae, the high priest, disbelieves in the might of the white gods because he is a fool and ambition leads him where sense should tell him he ought not to tread. My dead mother, the Queen of the Hokahulas, foretold that a white god should bury her, that a white god should come to save her son Muta, that he who should overcome the might and power of the Hekebus, the skeleton killers, would pass unharmed through every difficulty and danger, to die in peace and in his bed when his allotted span was run. Whoh! So it has been written."

They could hear the clamour and the shouting of the gathering populace grow in force as the mist lifted. When they were able to gain a view of the great square, or clearing, they could see that it was held by a double row of warriors. Behind them the people swayed to the beating of drums and the blowing of horns.

They could see a wonderful array of priests and minor chieftains of the skewbald tribe gathered upon the rostrum, the elaborate garments they wore presenting a magnificent spectacle by reason of their brilliancy of colour.

In front of the palace the giant warriors kept guard.

When they moved to the back of the palace to see what

was happening there, they found the garden occupied by troops, every way of escape being safely held.

They ate a frugal breakfast, being too excited to bother about their food.

Then, at last, came Mirana the Warrior and attendant officers with a selected bodyguard of finest troops to escort the white king and the white men to the square.

Bearing their rifles, their revolvers, and the machine-gun and ammunition with them, they moved in step to the square.

Muta, striding just behind them and in advance of Del Rivo and the man Symes, and with Kyhte beside him, frowned as he stared at the great crowd of people.

When they would have mounted the raised platform the high priest Choitae, after greeting them with mock ceremony, spoke sharply to Mirana, who, with some of his men, would have taken the machine-gun from Sandy McTavish and Jimmy Brown, who bore it.

Swift as thought Sandy struck the outstretched hand of the warrior chieftain upwards, and Adam's father, raising his hand, sternly ordered him back.

"He who lays hands upon the machine that deals death dies instantly," he said; and with an expression of awe the warrior drew back.

### Muta Obeys!

CHOITAE, with a twisted smile, flashed a keen and threatening glance at the white king.

"I have no faith in the white god's magic!" he said harshly. "Though the death tube might kill a few—our warriors would prevail. Yet take your tubes that flash fire with you."

The Englishmen mounted the platform amid the loud shouting of the populace.

At a word of command the warriors who kept the square raised their spears aloft and shook them as they saluted their white king.

Then the chief Beeda, attended by a group of Hokahula princes, all clad in dazzling garments and smothered with strings of jewel beads, came in procession to the rostrum and mounted it.

Facing the professor, Beeda raised his right hand in greeting, then stared proudly round him.

And now a roar of interest and welcome announced the coming of the white princess. Adam and Harold held their breath as they saw Rosa appear, borne in a litter and clad in wedding garments of many colours.

Very pale and very wonderful she looked, and in spite of the gravity of the situation she smiled as her eyes strayed to where her father and Adam and her friends stood.

Behind her, walking four abreast, came attendant hand-maidens to the number of fifty, all bedecked in ceremonial garments.

The light that played upon the scene from above was of a veiled gold. Round and about the great clearing the trees of the forest loomed darkly, whilst here and there could be seen the roofs of the native houses and huts, rising tier upon tier among the trees.

Far away, towering in its might at the end of a wide way or street, Adam could see the mighty image, the idol Booma, stone god of the Hokahulas, which the mist that hung above invested with a sombre majesty.

It was from the head of this great idol that Choitae had threatened to hurl the white men to see whether they could fly.

The litter in which Rosa rode was set upon the ground beside the raised platform, and, stepping out of it, the girl ran nimbly up the steps and sped to where her father stood.

But before she could reach him, horned priests, at a command of the high priest Choitae, seized her and led her apart.

"Choitae," commanded the professor imperiously, "be-ware what you do! You have disobeyed my commands. You have snatched my daughter, the white princess, from me by main force. It is my desire that she should be instantly handed to me."

### WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

ADAM BYRNE, accompanied by his three companions, HARRY FRANKLIN, SANDY McTAVISH, and JIMMY BROWN, set out in search of Adam's father, GEORGE WILLIS BYRNE, who, together with his daughter ROSA, left England four years ago to explore the African jungle, and both of whom are now 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, the adventurers, aided by MUTA, a native friend of Adam's, rescue from a horde of hostile natives JULIAN DEL RIVO, a Portuguese, who on claiming to be a friend of Adam's father is allowed to join up with the party.

Resuming their journey across the great icefields the white men discover, tied to a post and dying with exposure, KYHTE, a native of the Hokahula tribe, who bears a written message from Professor Byrne. On regaining consciousness, Kyhte leads the party to the land of the Hokahulas, where they find the professor crowned king of the race who took him captive, and Rosa feigning illness in order to evade an undesirable alliance with the native chief BEEDA. Wise to the ruse, however, CHOITAE, the high priest, raids Rosa's hut and carries the girl off. Thoroughly enraged the professor confronts the high priest.

"Restore Rosa to me, unharmed," he orders, "ere the white gods take their vengeance!"

(Now read on.)

"That cannot be," answered Choitae, his eyes glinting craftily. "She who feigned sickness in order to throw dust in the eyes of Beeda, our lawful king, so that she might evade marriage with him, shall this day become the wife of our real king. Beware, O white god and crowned king of the Hokahulas, lest you try our patience too far. We have begun to doubt the magic of the white gods. It would be well if thou didst now consent to the marriage of thy daughter to our chief Beeda. Child"—and he turned to Rosa—"speak the words with your own mouth that you will marry our prince."

Rosa eyed him defiantly.

"Never! Never!" she cried, throwing up her head. "Sooner would I die than become the wife of the chief of the Hokahulas!"

Beeda, standing a few paces away from her, eyed her sornbrelly. With a leering smile Choitae glanced at him and spoke.

"You have given your throne to the white stranger from the far lands," he said, "in order that his daughter, the white princess, shall despise you. Therefore, O Beeda, king and ruler of the Hokahulas, you will marry her, seeing that she is but human and only a woman, and once again become ruler of your people."

Beeda, eyeing Rosa, nodded.

"It shall be so!" he cried as, swinging round, he faced the professor.

"Those who have made thee king of the Hokahulas can unmake," he assured them. "Beware how you mock Beeda, king of the Hokahulas. Consent to the marriage of the white princess, your daughter, to Beeda, whom she has treated with contempt, if thou wouldst escape the wrath of Choitae and the priests and live in peace in Barcoomba."

The professor, adjusting his bejewelled crown of dried hide, seized Harry Franklin by the hand and led him forward.

"What you ask for cannot be, Beeda, chief of the Hokahulas!" he cried. "The white princess is affianced to the white god, flyer of the air, who stands before you. Since Choitae the high priest has made these elaborate preparations for a royal wedding, let him marry the white princess, my daughter, to the white flyer, who has come from the far ends of the earth to be with her again, according to the Hokahula race; then shall we all dwell in peace, the white gods and the people of Barcoomba, and happiness and peace be yours for evermore."

The high priest laughed derisively.

"Let us proceed with the wedding, O chief Beeda," he smiled. "The power of the white gods is as nothing—less than the dust!"

There arose at once a clamorous strumming and a blowing of horns. The chief moved forward, Rosa was dragged to his side. The horned priests closed round them.

Raising his right hand the horned high priest, shouting, addressed the people, who answered with a mighty clamour.

Seizing the right hand of the girl and of Beeda, the priest Choitae dragged them together, the Hokahula tightening his fingers round Rosa's so that they were held as in a vice.

Choitae began to repeat the words of the marriage service of the Hokahulas.

"Father," cried the girl, as she struggled to free herself, "save me!"

Harry Franklin sprang forward. Adam, revolver in hand, prepared to act.

Del Rivo, his lips curving a sneer, watched the distress of the Englishmen with evident satisfaction.

Professor Byrne now interfered.

"Adam, my son," he said, "be patient! We cannot mow them down with a machine-gun, for my daughter would die with the rest. You say Muta is strong?"

"As strong as twenty men," answered Adam.

"It is well." Turning to Muta, who was awaiting orders and moving restlessly, the professor cried, pointing: "Muta, my friend, black prince of the Hokahulas, obey the commands of your white king! Rescue the white princess from the horned priests! Bring her back to me!"

"Whow!" laughed Muta, and with a leap he thrust his way among the Hokahula warriors, swept Choitae back upon his heels, struck Beeda's arm down so that his fingers released their vice-like grip of Rosa's hand, and then, before anyone could stay him, he whipped the girl up in his left arm and, bearing her on his shoulder as if she were a child, sped to where the professor stood.

"Kill! Kill!"

A SHOUT of consternation rang from the lips of Mirana the warrior.

The priests, crying "Sacrilege!" called for the warriors to slay the black man.

Mirana, whipping out a gleaming blade, leapt at Muta. And at this very moment the mist thickened, seemed to sweep downward as if to meet the earth. From the lips of the dismayed populace rang a deafening clamour.

Mirana would have killed, believing it to be his duty, and Adam, fearing for Muta, covered the warrior with his revolver.

But there was no need for him to use the weapon, for with a swing of his clenched right fist Muta struck the giant chieftain full upon the chin, so that he dropped like a sack and lay inert.

The next moment Rosa was in her father's arms, and Adam, Harry, even Del Rivo, who was shivering with fear, believing that this meant the end of everything, stepping in front of them, stood with their weapons handy. Jimmy Brown and Sandy McTavish, who had fixed the machine-gun upon its stand, thrust it in front of them, and the man Symes, grasping a spear, also prepared to do his bit. Kytte, the guide, watched in silence, his arms folded, ready for any fate that might await him.

Choitae, the high priest, mad at the humiliation that had been thrust upon him in the presence of the people, with his headdress with its golden horns tumbled grotesquely aslant upon his head, now ordered the warriors to advance and make the white men prisoners.

They came with a rush, their fast-moving feet resembling the breaking of waves upon a beach. The priests, drawing aside to watch the scene, made room for the warriors to pass. The Hokahula maidens who had attended Rosa fled with shrieks of alarm. The princes drew apart, leaving Beeda standing in splendid and solitary isolation, his face set and gloomy.

"Adam, my son," sighed the professor, "this may mean the end. I hate the thought of slaying these people who have been so good to us, yet we may have to do it. Bid those men hold back the machine-gun fire until the last moment."

Muta had set Rosa upon her feet. Harry Franklin had caught her in his arms and then swung her behind him.

Glancing upward Adam saw the mist rolling in fog clouds above him, sweeping earthwards. From somewhere far away came a strange whirring sound, which he believed to be the forerunner of a violent storm. The air seemed to be charged with electricity.

Choitae, striding up to his prince, spoke in Beeda's ear.

With a rush, advancing in orderly line, row upon row of armed warriors came to storm the platform. As they halted for a moment below it, their officers waiting for final instructions, Beeda, pointing, cried:

"Tear the white princess from the hands of the false white gods, then kill—kill!"

With a shout the warriors raised their spears, then came on like the wind. Beeda, thinking to gain possession of Rosa himself, leaped in advance of them.

Muta gave him one look, and jutting-out his under jaw sprang to meet him.

They faced each other, the great broad-shouldered, long-armed giant crouching low with hands held ready.

"Stand aside, thou black dog!" ordered Prince Beeda, and the onrushing warriors halted to watch.

"Stand aside yourself and give pride of place to Muta, black king of the Hokahulas, son of the Queen O-Kama!" Muta ordered.

"You lie!" roared Beeda, feeling for a weapon. "The Queen O-Kama died many moons ago, and she had no son!"

"Thou liest thyself!" answered Muta, and leaping under the other's guard he seized the prince, raised him, and flung him bodily, as if he weighed but a few pounds, among the ranks of the skewbald warriors.

Choitae, enraged at the insult and fearful lest he lose all authority over the people, repeated Beeda's command.

"Kill!" he shrieked. "Kill! Kill! Spare not the white dogs! Kill even the white princess!"

(Another full-of-thrills instalment next week, chums.)

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This is a real scream of a story dealing with the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth. You've all made the acquaintance of old Gussy, and you've grown to like him, I'll wager. Well, you'll like him more than ever after you have read next week's topping yarn.

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Don't miss next week's instalment of this popular adventure story. It's simply stunning; and look out, too, for another jolly poem from the pen of the St. Jim's Rhymester, entitled:

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Your Editor.



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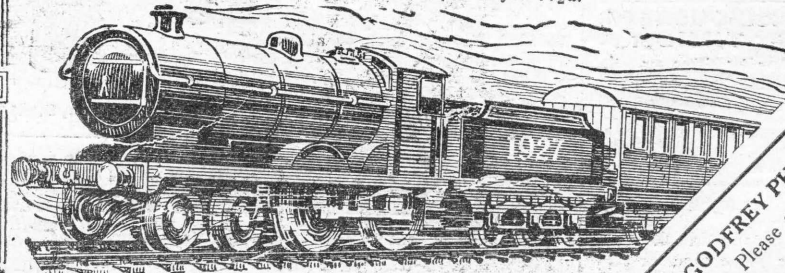
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