

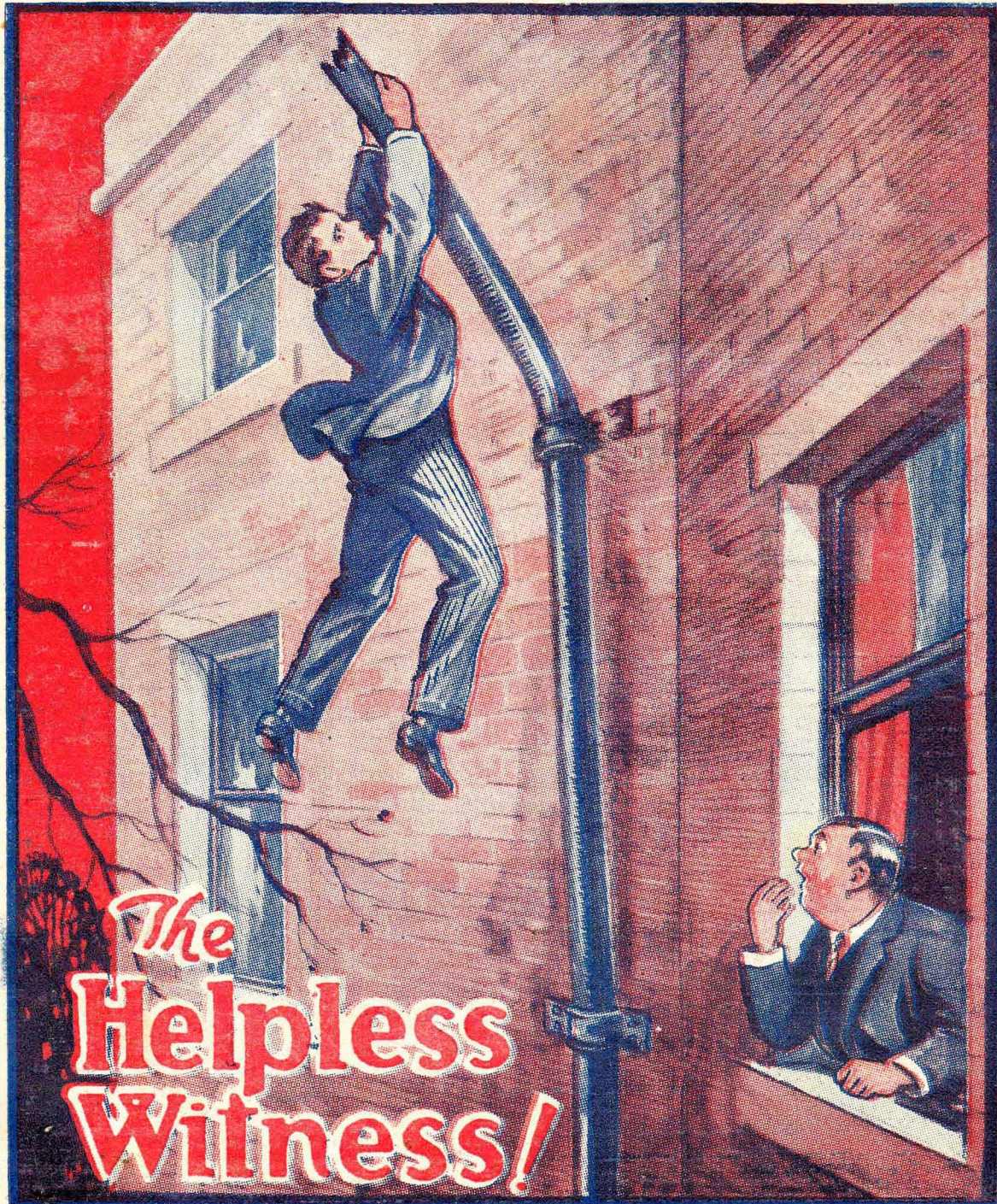
THRILLS
GALORE IN

"THE VENGEANCE OF THE HAWK!" INSIDE.

The GEM

2^D

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.



The
**Helpless
Witness!**

TRIMBLE TO THE RESCUE! BAGGY REVEALS ASTOUNDING PLOT!



CHAPTER 1.
Not Wanted!

"HALLO, you fellows! I'm ready if you are!" Baggy Trimble made that announcement as he blinked into Study No. 6 on the Fourth passage at St. Jim's.

On his fat features was an expression of hope, mingled with doubt; his fat voice betokened no little nervousness; his general attitude gave the impression that he was ready to bolt if circumstances indicated a hurried retreat. The study was rather crowded. Cardew of the Fourth was there, in addition to Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. They had their overcoats on, and were waiting while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave the finishing touches to his silk scarf.

They stared at Trimble, who also wore an overcoat and carried his cap. Arthur Augustus turned away from the study looking-glass, and stared through his monocle at Trimble in some surprise.

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"The Hawk" has sent his last warning! Soon he will strike—but when?—and how? The chums of St. Jim's have their own ideas—and events move quickly in this thrilling, long complete yarn of St. Jim's.

"Bai Jove! Have you asked Twimble to join us in our twip to your grandfathah's place, Cardew?" he exclaimed.

"Not at all," said Cardew gravely. "Trimble fished for an invite, certainly. But I gave him a decided negative—with my boot!"

"Oh, really, Cardew, old fellow—"

"Apparently I was not emphatic enough, and Trimble is under a misunderstanding," went on Cardew. "I must make my meanin' clearer."

"Oh, really, Cardew—Yarooop!"

Trimble turned to fly as Cardew leaped at him. But he was a second too late. Cardew's boot clumped home on his tightly-stretched coat. Trimble roared and flew, Cardew's boot getting home

again and again in a remarkable manner.

At the end of the passage Cardew turned back, but Trimble did not stop running until he reached the quad outside. Then he halted, panting and breathless, his fat face red with wrath and disappointment.

"Beasts!" he gasped. "Mean beasts! But I jolly well know all about it, and I'm jolly well getting with 'em!"

TOM MERRY & CO. SOLVE MYSTERY OF DEEPDENE LODGE!



THE VENGEANCE OF THE HAWK

Trimble did know all about it. He had even read the letter from Cardew's grandfather, asking Cardew to run over for the afternoon, and bring a few friends with him. But by what obscure mental process Trimble reasoned that he was entitled to join fellows who didn't want him, only Trimble himself could have told.

At all events he was determined to go—somehow! Discontentedly, Baggy rolled towards the gates. It was a raw February afternoon, and a light snow was beginning to cover the quad. But Trimble, for once, ignored the weather. His eyes glimmered as he sighted a smart chauffeur in livery standing under the porch of Taggles' lodge. He was chatting with the school porter as that worthy leaned up against the door.

Trimble rolled past out into the road.

A handsome, glittering Rolls-Royce stood outside the gates. It was the car sent by the old nobleman to take Cardew and his friends over to Deepdene Lodge.

Trimble knew that, and his eyes glimmered again. He glanced about him. Not a soul was in sight on the snow-carpeted lane. A thick buttress of the gateway hid Taggles and Lord Reckness' chauffeur from him. The coast was clear.

He rolled across to the car, slipped inside, and closed the door gently after him. A blink round showed that the rear seat had a space under it. Flattening himself on the floor, Baggy scrambled underneath and made himself as comfortable as his bulk would allow. It was a terrific squeeze, but he managed it.

Half a minute later he heard the chauffeur open the door. Then he heard cheery voices and laughter. Tom Merry & Co. seemed amused at something. It did not occur to Baggy that he had left a trail of footprints leading up to the car—but not back again. But Cardew's keen eyes had spotted them, and he knew to whom they belonged.

Nor did Trimble know that a foot, with several inches of trousers, showed from under the seat. He only realised it as Cardew stamped on the foot on entering the car.

Trimble stifled a yelp, and withdrew his wandering foot. "Hallo! What was that?" asked Cardew blandly. "Did I tread on your foot, Gussy?"

"Not at all, deah boy!" grinned Gussy.

The grinning juniors sat down, Blake, Lowther, and Cardew choosing seats just above Trimble's hiding-place. The door was closed, and a moment later the car was gliding away along the snowy lane.

"Well, we're off, dear men!" remarked Cardew. "How lucky that we managed to get rid of that pushin' little blighter, Trimble!"

"Oh, quite! Well, we've done him, anyway, old beans! But isn't he a pushin', nosy, crafty little beast?"

"Absolutely!"

"Of course, we can't tell a fellow to his face just what we think of him," said Cardew gravely. "But as he's not here we can speak freely. In my view he's untruthful, grubby, sneakin', dishonest, pryin', fat and greasy, greedy and selfish, and generally a nuisance all round!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"A disgrace to St. Jim's, in fact! Pity he isn't here to hear what we all think of him!" remarked Cardew solemnly. "Gad! Isn't it cold?"

Cardew began to stamp his feet—though it was cosy and warm in the saloon car. Having stamped his feet, Cardew started to swing them. There was a strangled yelp as one of his heels connected violently with Trimble's fat ribs.

"Yooop!"

"Hallo! Did I kick you, Blake? Sorry!"

"Not at all! Don't mench!" grinned Blake.

And he also began to swing his legs and stamp, while Lowther followed.

Trimble squirmed further back, his fat face twisted with anguish as the swinging heels thumped into him. But squirm and twist as he would, he could not escape them.

The car hummed on through the wintry lanes, eating up the miles, towards Deepdene Lodge. The juniors chatted on cheerily, and the topic of their conversation was chiefly Trimble and his manifold shortcomings. But Trimble was not enjoying himself. That motor ride was a nightmare for Trimble.

It was not pleasant to overhear just how his schoolfellows regarded him, for one thing. It was hot and stuffy under the seat. And it wasn't pleasant to be used as a football. Trimble gasped and groaned and velped inwardly, so to speak, and wondered how much longer he could stand the constant anguish of those lunging heels.

The dreadful torture ended at last.

He heard Cardew's voice, speaking an order to the driver through the speaking-tube. The car slid to a stop. Then came Cardew's voice again.

"We'll get out here, you fellows! Short cut across the fields, you know, old beans!"

"Right-ho, Cardew!"

There was a scramble of feet. Past Trimble's anguished vision moved a procession of feet towards the door which Cardew had opened. They vanished.

Even then Baggy suspected nothing. He was only suddenly alarmed. It would be terrible to be left behind now after the dreadful time he had been through.

It was not to be thought of. With a gasp, Baggy scrambled from under the seat.

Through the open doorway he glimpsed eight juniors crossing the snow-clad road. They disappeared among the thickets and bare trees lining the roadway.

"Beasts!" grunted Trimble. "I'll show 'em!"

He jumped from the car to follow, forgetting the slippery state of the road. Instantly his feet went from under him, and, after a brief display of gymnastics, he went flat on his back.

But he scrambled up instantly. The desperate fear of losing his quarry made even Trimble dismiss his many aches and pains with fortitude. He rushed breathlessly across the road and plunged into the thickets.

For twenty yards he rushed on. Then the bunch of trees and thickets ended abruptly on open meadowland, virgin-white, and without figure or footmark. Tom Merry & Co. had vanished.

"Oh!" gasped Trimble.

A doubt assailed him. It was followed by suspicion, and then by certainty as he heard a sudden yell of laughter from the roadway beyond the belt.

"Oh!" gasped Trimble again. "Oh! Oh, the—the awful beasts!"

It was a trick. He had been done. The beasts had known all the time that he was under the seat in the car! Cardew had stamped on his foot on purpose; that bombardment of kicks as he squirmed under the seat had also been on purpose! And now—

Trimble did not stay to review the situation. He plunged back to the road. He reached it in time to see Cardew follow the rest into the saloon.

The car began to move as Cardew called to the grinning chauffeur.

"Stop!" howled Trimble. "Oh, you beasts! I—I say, wait for me, you beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, bluebell! Hope you'll have a nice walk back!"

Baggy leaped for the moving car. His foot touched the footboard. Then something shot out from the midst of the grinning faces in the doorway.

It was a snowball. It broke into a smother of icy flakes full on Trimble's open, yelling mouth.

With snow in his mouth and eyes and plastered over his face, Baggy roared and sat down hard in the roadway.

The car slid on. It vanished round the bend, and the heartless laughter died away.

Trimble sat up, shaking snow from his fat features.

"Ugh! Groooogh!" he gurgled. "Oh dear! The awful beasts!"

He scrambled to his feet dizzily. Yet all was clear to him now—painfully clear. The beasts had indeed known he was under the seat. And they had allowed him to remain there until now just to play this trick on him. He was stranded, at least five miles from St. Jim's—five weary miles!

That, obviously, was their intention. But it was not Trimble's. They did not know their Trimble!

Having removed some of the snow and recovered somewhat, Trimble drew a scrap of paper from his pocket. He blinked at it, his eyes fairly burning with wrath. The scrap was the heading of a sheet of notepaper, and it bore the embossed address: "Deepdene Lodge, Bilshot, Sussex."

"Beasts!" gasped Baggy. "But I'll do 'em yet! Can't

be far from the beastly place now. Catch me walking back, the beasts!"

He moved hurriedly out from the middle of the road as a motor-lorry came clanging along. At the same moment a small two-seater car slid out from a side-turning, and the lorry slowed up to let it emerge and pass. Trimble glimpsed painted words on the lorry's side—"Jones, Bilshot!"

Baggy Trimble—ever an opportunist—saw his chance and took it. The lorry was obviously from Bilshot and going to Bilshot. The tail-flap was down and anything was better than walking. Indeed, it seemed a godsend to the fat youth just then.

He rushed to the back of the lorry and swarmed over the swinging flap—a far from easy matter to the fat, awkward Baggy. He got his knees on, but just then the lorry started again, and he was all but jerked backwards into the road. His wildly grabbing hands grasped a loose chain, however, and he hung on desperately, and soon he had hauled himself into safety as the lorry rumbled on its way towards Bilshot.

Trimble was not shaken off yet!

CHAPTER 2.

The Shadow Over Deepdene!

"H A, ha, ha!"
Tom Merry & Co. were highly tickled at the thought of the fat and lazy Baggy having to tramp the five miles or so back to St. Jim's. Undoubtedly it served Baggy right. His "neck" was unbounded, and he needed a sharp lesson to teach him not to push himself in where he wasn't wanted.

Only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had any sympathy to waste on Baggy.

"Wathah too bad, though!" remarked the tender-hearted Gussy, shaking his head. "A five-mile twamp in this weathah will be no joke for the flabby young scamp, Cardew!"

"I didn't intend it to be a joke," grinned Cardew. "Kickin' the fat little worm didn't seem to convince him that he wasn't wanted, you know. I wanted to make it quite clear, old bean!"

"He asked for it," grunted Herries. "A good walk will do the fat rotter no end of good!"

"Do him no harm, anyway!" grinned Tom Merry. "And it's stopped snowing; I thought it wouldn't be much. How far to Deepdene, Cardew?"

"Two miles at most!" said Cardew briefly.

His manner had suddenly changed at mention of Deepdene, and Tom Merry glanced at him curiously. Somehow the usually careless and gay Ralph Reckness Cardew seemed strangely anxious and thoughtful—his manner serious and pre-occupied.

Tom could not help feeling that Cardew's afternoon's outing was not merely for pleasure.

"You don't seem to be enjoying the trip, Cardew," he remarked. "Worrying about that fat ass?"

"Eh? Gad! Not at all, old bean!"

"Then what are you worrying about?"

"Nothin' at all, dear man," said Cardew, yawning as he glanced out of the window. "Hallo! I spot Bilshot Church! We'll be at Deepdene in a couple of minutes!"

But Cardew was mistaken.

A sudden turn in the road had brought the distant village into sight. But it had brought swift disaster also.

Almost as Cardew spoke the smoothly running car gave a lurch and then a bump. They glimpsed the driver suddenly reach forward and heard his startled cry.

Then something seemed to leap towards them.

It was a low wall at the turn in the road, and the big car suddenly skidded on the frozen snow. There was a crash and another sickening lurch.

The startled juniors were flung off their thickly cushioned seats in a struggling heap on the floor.

"Oh, gweat Scott! Gwoooogh!"

"Oh, my hat! What the thump—"

Cardew was the first on his feet again, cool as ever.

"Only a giddy skid," he observed, glancing out. "Might have anticipated it on a road like this. Hallo, Wilkins, you all right?"

He opened the door, and they followed him out into the road. Save for slight bruises they were all unhurt.

"Jolly lucky we weren't going fast," remarked Cardew. "Much damage, Wilkins?"

"Skidded, sir!" gasped the chauffeur, raising his head after a swift examination of the damage. "The snow, of course! I could not help—"

"Not your fault, of course, old bean!" assented Cardew, smiling. "Hallo, looks a bit smashed up there!"

Slowly as the car had been moving at the bend, the crash had done no little damage. One lamp and the mud-

guard was buckled into a twisted mass. The radiator was badly dented, and a single glance showed that one wheel was awry—the axle bent, by the look of it.

"That means we can't go on, Wilkins?" grinned Cardew. "I'm afraid not, sir! If you like I'll run on for the other car—"

"My dear man, we've got legs, and a ten minutes' walk won't kill us!" smiled Cardew. "You'd better hang on here, and I'll send Jones along when I reach Deepdene!"

"Thank you very much, sir! I'm sorry this—"

"Don't mench! This way, you fellows!"

The juniors followed Cardew as he started to tramp away. "Sorry, you men!" said Cardew. "But—"

"Couldn't be helped!" laughed Tom Merry. "That chap couldn't help it, and we're only troubled about the damage—"

"That won't trouble me, or dear old granddad!" said Cardew. "Lucky it's stopped snowing. This way!"

Cardew led the way up a narrow lane leading off from the main road. The accident was unfortunate, but they were very thankful that nobody was injured and that it hadn't happened earlier.

After a brisk few minutes' walking Cardew suddenly pointed out the many-gabled roofs of a house showing white over a high, ivy-clad wall they were passing.

"Deepdene," he said. "Quite a decent little place. Dear old granddad's taken it furnished, you know. Well, we'll soon know now what is wrong there," he added, with a curious grimace.

"Bai Jove! What evah can be w'ong there, Cardew?"

"Heaps of things, old bean! F'rinstance, Lord Reckness may be threatened with murder, or it may all be a hoax," added Cardew lightly. "Before I go back to St. Jim's I mean to discover just what!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Not at all, old fruit! I'm perfectly serious. Hallo, here we are!"

They follow him through massive bronze gates. These were wide open, and Cardew led them past the lodgekeeper's cottage and along the drive. Tom Merry glanced again very curiously at Ralph Reckness Cardew. That Cardew was serious he was assured. The whimsical junior's face was set hard, and his eyes glinted as he spoke the words—words that seemed nonsense to the others as well as to Gussy.

"Cardew—" began Tom, but he got no farther. Just then Cardew gave a warning exclamation and stopped short. His eyes were fixed ahead, and as Tom followed his glance he started.

At one side of the drive, on the grass under the great trees, a man was skulking. He was a strange figure. He wore a slouch hat with an unusually wide brim. His thick jacket was rather short, and his trousers were narrow. His face was swarthy, his hair black and lank, and he had a heavy black moustache.

"Hallo, a giddy tramp!" remarked Herries. "A foreigner!" said Digby. "Queer-looking johnny! Looks to me as if he's up to something, Car— Hallo, he's spotted us!"

The man glanced suddenly round. Sighting the juniors, he dived swiftly into the bushes and vanished.

"After him!" shouted Cardew, suddenly alert. "Collar that brute at all costs! Good god! It's the very—"

He was off like the wind the next second, not stopping to finish his curious remarks. The rest of the startled juniors followed instantly, urged by Cardew's frantic voice.

In a wild stampede they dashed in pursuit, scattering snow, with Cardew a few yards ahead. The man's crashing flight was easy to follow. Heedless of the tearing branches

and drenching slush, the juniors rushed on, and suddenly Cardew gave a yell.

He had sighted his quarry. The man was running along the wall surrounding the grounds. As Cardew sighted him the fellow vanished through a side-door in the high wall.

There followed a sudden, wild howl.

"He's biffed into somebody," panted Tom. "Quick!"

Cardew was hard on the man's heels now. He reached the doorway, and then—

Crash!

There was another wild howl in a familiar voice, and a savage gasp from Cardew as that youth reeled back and sat



The man dropped full on top of Tom, sending the startled junior flying off the box!

down—hard! He had collided with someone—someone who had just rushed through the doorway from outside.

Tom Merry & Co. dashed up, panting. Then there was a yell:

"Trimble!"

It was indeed Trimble. The fat junior sat on the ground facing Cardew and hugging his fat chin. He yelled at the top of his voice. Cardew jumped up and rushed on.

But the strange prowler had vanished by this time, and after a short while Cardew came running back, black and bitter rage in his face.

"You—you fat little pest, Trimble!" he snorted. "How did you get here, confound you? But for you I should have collared that brute!"

"He's got away?"

"Of course! But for this fat idiot he wouldn't have done, though!" snapped Cardew. "No; it's no good goin' after him again, Blake. The brute's vanished!"

They stared at Trimble, who had scrambled up, groaning dismally.

"But how did this fat worm get here?" said Manners. "Ow! Ow-wow! Ow, ow, ow!" gurgled Trimble

"That beast hit me with his fist—knocked me down! Ow ow, ow!"

"Trimble must have been coming through the doorway," said Tom. "Trimble, you fat ass—"

"Yow-ow! Wow! Yow-ow!" gurgled Trimble.

The fat junior sat there still hugging his nose in anguish. But he scrambled up quickly enough as Cardew, his brow dark, made a stride towards him.

"You—you fat fool!"

"Ow-yow! Lemme alone!" wailed Trimble. "Yow! I couldn't walk all that way home, could I, you beasts? Yow! I got a lift on a rotten lorry, and when it stopped, the beastly driver caught me and kicked me! Yow!"

"Bai Jove! But how—"

"A chap told me this was the house," wailed Trimble. "I had to come somewhere, hadn't I? Grooogh! I was just comin' in through this rotten doorway when that beast rushed out, and before I could get out of the way, the beast struck me and rushed off. Yow-ow!"

"We should have collared that brute but for you, Trimble!" said Cardew thickly. "Get out! Get off back to St. Jim's before I lose control and smash you, you pushin' fool!"

"Oh, really, Cardew— Yow-ow! I say, don't be mean!" groaned the fat youth pathetically. "Why can't you let a fellow come? Your grandfather won't mind. I know him. He's soft—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, he's awfully generous and good-natured!" amended Trimble hastily. "Once I'm in the house he wouldn't turn me out—I know that, old fellow! I—I sus-say—"

"You fat rotter!" snorted Cardew. "So you were bankin' on Lord Reckness' good nature, were you? Thought he wouldn't kick you out? But you forget me!"

"I say, old fellow— Yarrooop!"

With one stride the raging Cardew grabbed Trimble, twisted him round, and brought his boot into play. Trimble roared and roared as Cardew rushed him away, kicking him with every stride.

"Easy on, Cardew!" called the good-natured Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wottah! Twimble is hurt—"

Undoubtedly Trimble was hurt. He roared with anguish. But with a final hefty kick, Cardew released the shrieking fat youth and let him go. Trimble went, nor did he stand on the order of his going. He fairly flew, and disappeared, like the unknown, into the distance. Cardew returned breathing hard.

"Needn't kill the fat ass, Cardew!" said Tom mildly.

"I—I'll smash him if he comes round here again!" snapped Cardew. "If he hadn't chipped in just then we should have collared that fellow, and we'd have got the secret out of the brute!"

"You—you know who he is?" asked Tom, staring.

"I only know he's the brute who's been worrying granddad!" said Cardew, through his teeth. "He must be!"

The chums stared.

Cardew laughed bitterly.

"I may as well tell you just why I came here this afternoon," he said. "I suppose I ought not to have brought you fellows without telling you. The fact is, there's a bit of a mystery about this house. My granddad said nothin' in his letter, but I could read between the lines that something serious was up. So I rang up Benson on the phone—Benson is the butler, and rather a pal of mine. He told me what was wrong, so far as he knew."

"But what on earth is wrong, Cardew?"

"Only this. Benson says that granddad has received threatening letters this last few days—letters threatening his life. Naturally, it has upset the old chap—made him ill. He pretends he thinks it's merely a hoax; but the police don't seem to think so!" ended Cardew grimly. "And it's pretty clear Benson doesn't, either."

"Phew!"

"Bai Jove! And that foweign wottah, Cardew—"

"That's just it," assented Cardew calmly. "The threatening notes were written in Portuguese, accordin' to Benson. Benson himself claims to have seen a swarthy, foreign-lookin' blighter hangin' round the house; several other servants have seen the brute; Lord Reckness himself spotted the merchant just bolting out of the library last night. And—well, we've just seen the brute and chased him!"

"Great pip!"

"Now you see why I kicked that fat rotter!" snorted Cardew. "But for Trimble, we should have nabbed this brute, and forced the truth from him. We should have stood a good chance of solvin' the mystery. Now— Oh, dash that fat worm! Let's get to the house!"

And, with a savage shrug of the shoulders, Cardew led the way back to the drive. His chums followed quietly. They understood Cardew's rage now, and they couldn't help wishing they had kicked Baggy Trimble themselves!

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CHAPTER 3.

The Hawk!

AFTER what Cardew had told them the juniors were not surprised to find a sombre gloom over the household at Deepdene. The servants seemed frightened, and went about their duties silent and almost on tiptoe. An air of tragedy seemed to hang like a sinister cloud over the old house.

Cardew had a whispered conversation with Benson, an old servant of the family, whom Cardew obviously trusted. Afterwards the butler showed them straight into the library.

The juniors knew Lord Reckness well, and they were shocked at the sudden change in the old nobleman. He seemed older, and his face looked worn and tired. Obviously the strange affair was having a serious effect upon him.

Lord Reckness was not alone. With him was a tall, alert-looking man in the uniform of an inspector of police. He had a notebook in his hand, and he was evidently interrogating his lordship when the juniors were shown in. And from the inspector's looks he was none too pleased at the interruption.

But his lordship was undoubtedly pleased to see them. He had, as they knew, a deep regard for his grandson, and they knew he had great faith in Cardew's keen, if youthful, intelligence.

"This is my grandson, and some of his schoolboy friends, Mr. Bentley," he said, after shaking hands warmly with the juniors. "Perhaps you will take them into the drawing-room for a few minutes, Ralph, my boy. Inspector Bentley has come to see me about a trifling matter—some misguided villager has seen fit to make me the subject of an absurd hoax—"

"If you will pardon me, your lordship," said the inspector gruffly, "I do not consider the matter is a hoax—far from it!"

Lord Reckness coughed, and glanced at the juniors. It was only too clear that he himself did not really believe so either.

"I don't think so, either, inspector," remarked Cardew coolly. "What is this Portuguese merchant like, granddad?"

Lord Reckness started.

"Then you have heard, Ralph?"

"We've not only heard, but we've seen the johnny himself!" said Cardew. "We spotted him skulkin' just off the drive as we came along. We chased the dear man, and would have collared him but for a fool buttin' in!"

"You—you have seen this man—this Portuguese?" stuttered the inspector.

"Five minutes ago."

The inspector's eyes gleamed.

"If you would not mind describing the man to me, young gentleman—" he began eagerly.

Cardew described the man they had chased. The inspector consulted his notes grimly.

"Yes—that is the fellow undoubtedly!" he snapped at last. "A swarthy rascal with heavy black moustache, a wide-brimmed hat— Yes, yes! This removes any doubt that the servants were drawing upon their imaginations, your lordship!"

"I fear so, Mr. Bentley! But—but it is amazing—inconceivable! Why should this man—this Portuguese threaten me? Yet—"

He paused. It was clear that at the back of the old nobleman's mind was some vague dread—a fear he dared not put into words. To the startled juniors it seemed certain that Lord Reckness did know why, yet would not admit it.

"I look upon the affair as very serious, Lord Reckness," said the inspector gravely. "You have received two threats in writing—"

"Yes. One yesterday and one the day before. The first was written in Portuguese and the second in English."

"And the threats, sir—"

"The first showed a sketch of a man standing, blindfolded, before a firing-party," said Lord Reckness in a low voice. "Underneath were the words 'Remember my vow! Settlement after the third warning!'"

"And the second—"

"The same sketch, with the words 'The second warning'—that was all!"

"And both were signed, I understand, sir?"

"Yes, with the name 'The Hawk,'" said Lord Reckness quietly.

"H'm. It is a pity—a great pity—that you destroyed them, your lordship. But—"

"I considered the matter merely a foolish, absurd hoax—until I remembered—"

Again Lord Reckness paused, his voice low and hesitating. The inspector coughed again.

"The matter is undoubtedly serious, your lordship," he said. "Apart from the threats—for they are undoubtedly threats—there is the evidence of the servants, and now of these boys who have actually seen a foreign-looking rascal prowling round the grounds. But the man must have a motive. You have travelled extensively abroad, I understand, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Bentley—especially in South America!"

"Have you made any enemies there?"

The old nobleman seemed to have expected the question. He nodded.

"Yes. I was instrumental in bringing a murderer to justice—a villainous Portuguese who richly deserved the death penalty he received. It was an unpleasant affair. His brother"—here his lordship paused a moment—"vowed vengeance upon me!"

"Ah! And his name—"

"The murderer's name was Louis Gonzalez. His brother's name was, I think, Manuel Gonzalez, and he was known as 'The Hawk,'" said Lord Reckness slowly.

"Ah!"

There was a silence. The juniors were breathless—only Cardew seemed to be unmoved by this revelation. The inspector rose to his feet in his scarcely suppressed excitement.

"And the name on these threatening notes was 'The Hawk'!" he said. "Ah! Then the motive is clear, your lordship, I fear—only too clear!"

"But that happened fifteen years ago at the least," said Lord Reckness, his voice shaking a little. "It seems impossible that the scoundrel could have traced me, much less—"

"Yet that unquestionably is the motive, Lord Reckness," said Inspector Bentley gravely. "However, you need have no fear that the man will succeed in his rascally design. I will have the countryside thoroughly searched; the house shall be guarded—"

He broke off as a light tap came to the door.

A tall, slim man in gold-rimmed eyeglasses came softly into the room, his manner deferential and sedate.

"Ah! Here is Mr. Forsyth, my secretary!" exclaimed Lord Reckness, greeting the young man with a smile. "Come in, Forsyth—this is Inspector Bentley from Denshall. I sent for you, Forsyth, to describe to the inspector the man you saw in the grounds yesterday. Mr. Forsyth has also seen this rascally Portuguese, inspector!"

The inspector nodded, and reopened his notebook. Mr. Forsyth smiled apologetically.

"I regret having kept you waiting, inspector," he said, becoming grave again. "This distressing affair has upset me very much, and for two nights I have scarcely slept."

"Mr. Forsyth shares your opinion in regard to the motive, Mr. Bentley," explained Lord Reckness quietly. "Having seen the Portuguese himself—"

"Most emphatically I do," said Mr. Forsyth gravely. "It is undoubtedly a vendetta, despite the years that have passed since Lord Reckness' South American adventure. The motive is, in my opinion, revenge and nothing else, sir. That is why I persuaded Lord Reckness to send for you, inspector!"

"You can describe the man, Mr. Forsyth—"

"Certainly! I must apologise again for having kept you waiting, your lordship!" exclaimed the secretary, turning to Lord Reckness. "I have been up in my room for the last hour reading, and I fear I must have dozed over my book. Loss of sleep, I suppose—"

"You've been upstairs for the last hour, Mr. Forsyth?" repeated Cardew unexpectedly.

"Yes, Ralph." The secretary glanced at Cardew. "Like your grandfather, I have been much distressed—"

"Oh, quite! And do you over walk in your sleep?" inquired Cardew blandly.

There was a short silence. The juniors stared at Cardew. The inspector frowned, and Lord Reckness also frowned, puzzled, at his grandson. Mr. Forsyth gave Cardew a quick, sharp look.

"Really, Ralph—" he began.

"Come, come, Ralph," interposed Lord Reckness hastily. "This is not the time for jokes, my dear boy! I will see you later, in my drawing-room!"

"I was just thinkin' of goin', granddad," smiled Cardew lazily. "In fact, I'm feelin' bored stiff by this rot!"

"Ralph—"

"You see, I think this Portuguese stunt is all rot," you know," drawled Cardew. "Don't worry about it, granddad; it's someone pullin' your leg. Come on, you fellows—we're interruptin' the bisnay, dear men!"

And Cardew led his shocked, amazed chums from the room.

Outside in the corridor. Tom Merry caught his arm.

"Cardew, you ass—"

"Yaas, wathah! I also considah Cardew an ass!" said Arthur Augustus, turning rather an indignant look on the smiling Cardew. "You do not appeal to wealise the gwavity of the situation, Cardew. I am shocked at—"

"Quite a mistake on your part, Gussy!" said Cardew. Though he was smiling, his eyes were curiously hard. "I do realise the gravity of the situation, old bean! In fact, I'm quite certain that my grandfather is in deadly danger!"

"Then why—" began Tom Merry.

"Dear old Thomas, don't worry your little napper about it. It's rather too deep for your intellect, old scout. There's more in this jolly old affair than meets the eye. I wonder just why that giddy Portuguese merchant wanted us to spot him?"

"He didn't, you idiot! He bolted like a rabbit."

"My mistake, then," said Cardew airily. "Only I imagined he did, y'know—an' he bolted the moment he knew we'd spotted him."

The chums stared at the dandy of the Fourth. Cardew was always puzzling them with his whimsical ways and unexpected remarks. But they could not understand him now. Yet, as Tom met his keen, hard eyes, he realised well enough that Cardew, for all his jocular manner, was deadly serious and deeply disturbed.

"Look here, Cardew," said Tom abruptly. "What are you getting at? What's at the back of your mind? It's plain as a pikestaff that the motive is revenge, and that there—"

"Plain enough to the dear old inspector and to jolly old Claude Forsyth, anyway," remarked Cardew cynically. "So it should be plain to me, what?"

"No need to be cheeky to them at all events," grunted Tom. "The inspector looked no end wild. As for that chap Forsyth—well, he seems a decent enough fellow; and there was no need to be impudent. Why did you check him with your sleep-walking rot?"

"Because I don't like liars, old bean!"

"But he didn't—"

"Dear man," said Cardew affectionately, "you'll never make a jolly old tec, Thomas! But let's talk about something else, you men. Hallo, here's dear old Benson!"

(Continued on next page.)



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CHAPTER 4.

Kicked Out!

BENSON, Lord Reckness' butler, came towards them with his quiet, stately tread. He was looking faintly disturbed and uncertain.

"Tea is ready in the drawing-room, Master Ralph," he exclaimed in his rich, fruity voice. "Lord Reckness is engaged at the moment, and I understand that he will be taking tea later, sir."

"Jolly early for tea, Benson, old bean?" remarked Cardew, raising his eyebrows. "Still—"

"Your orders were, I understand, to prepare tea without delay, Master Ralph."

"Good gad! I gave no such orders, Benson, old fruit!" The butler's well-trained visage expressed faint surprise.

"But the other young gentleman, sir. He stated that you desired tea at the earliest possible moment. He has already started—"

"What other young gentleman, Benson?" almost yelled the exasperated Cardew. "I'm dashed if I know!"

"T-the young gentleman who came alone, sir," stammered Benson. "I did not see him arrive with you, Master Ralph. But I have seen him before with you—one of your school-fellows. He was seated in the drawing-room, and he stated that tea was to be served at once. He is—"

"Who is? Who the thump—"

"The other young gentleman—a rather stout young gentleman, sir."

"Wha-at?"

Cardew stared at Benson. His chums stared at Benson. Then, without further inquiries as to the identity of the other young gentleman, Cardew made a dive for the drawing-room.

Tom Merry & Co. followed. And then there was a yell. "Trimble!"

It was Trimble. The fat junior sat all alone in his glory at a small table. On the table were crockery, and silver cake-dishes piled high with fancy cakes and pastries. Lord Reckness had prepared well for his youthful guests! Baggy's fat features betrayed bliss as he waded into the good things.

Then he turned and spotted the juniors in the doorway. Possibly he read no approval in Cardew's face. At all events he jumped up startled, almost upsetting the table.

"I—I say, you fellows, d-dud-dod come in. T-tut-tea's ready, Cardew, dear old fellow. I—I thought I wouldn't wait, you know!"

"You—you fat little beast!" snorted Cardew.

"Oh, really, Cardew, old man. I—I say, come and pile in, you men!" gasped Trimble. "These cakes are spiffing! Simply top-hole, Cardew!"

Cardew breathed hard.

"Are they, old fat man?" he said grimly. "Then have some more, Trimble!"

"Certainly, old chap. In fact— Here—what— Yarroooop!"

Trimble fairly yelled as Cardew made a spring and grabbed him by the back of his fat little neck. Then Cardew gave him some more. He jammed a delicious-looking creamy cake down the back of Trimble's neck. He plastered another over Trimble's nose, stifling a howl as the messy cream filled the fat youth's mouth.

One after another Cardew chose juicy cakes and jam-tarts and plastered them over every inch of Baggy's features and hair, and fairly choked up the space between his collar and his fat neck with pastry and jam and cream.

Trimble gurgled and gasped and choked and howled. Benson looked on, his professional dignity and poise quite forsaking him for the moment.

"Master Ralph!" he stammered. "What—what—"

"Open the french window, Benson, old bean!"

"Oh! Ah! Certainly, sir!"

The astonished and petrified Benson opened the french window wide. From the look of faint satisfaction in his eyes Benson guessed what was coming next.

It came. Cardew held the yelling, gasping Trimble by the hair now. He twisted him round and then—once again Cardew's boot connected with the rear of Trimble's trousers. Biff!

It was a terrific kick, and Baggy's yell was terrific as he went through the french window like a great fat football. He fell sprawling among the snow and slush-filled flowerbeds of the lawn. Cardew nodded and Benson closed the door, evidently very hard put to it to hide his satisfaction. Trimble was never over polite to what he termed "menials."

"Benson!"

"Sir?"

"If that fat pest shows his nose here again you can either set the dogs on him or ring up the police!"

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"Very good, sir! I—I'm sorry, sir, that I allowed him to—"

"Not your fault, Benson, in any way," smiled Cardew. "I believe you've seen him before with us, and we didn't know he came uninvited. Well, you chaps, as tea's ready we may as well make a start, what?"

"Right-ho!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors were hungry, and soon they were piling into the good things. Trimble had vanished, and his howls had vanished with him, so to speak.

They felt, in a way, sorry for Trimble. But they realised he deserved it all for his cheek, and they did not allow their sorrow to interfere with their appetites. Long before they had finished Cardew excused himself and went off to interview his grandfather.

He returned later, and they eyed him curiously.

"Well?" demanded Tom. "Has—has the inspector gone, Cardew?"

"Yes, old bean—some time ago. He's worked it all out to his own jolly old satisfaction. He's promised dear old granddad to have Gonzalez under lock and key by to-morrow! I'm afraid, though, that both he and granddad will be disappointed—unless we chip in, dear men!"

"We?" echoed Blake. "What the thump can we do?"

"We're going to do what the self-satisfied inspector will never do if he lives to be a hundred," said Cardew, his eyes glinting. "No, if my grandfather's life is to be saved we're going to do it, old beans!"

"We'll have to be jolly quick, then," said Tom grimly.

"I'm with you to do everything in my power, Cardew. But you forget we are due back at St. Jim's at seven to-night!"

"Nothing of the kind!" smiled Cardew. "We're not due back until Saturday morning, old fruit!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I've persuaded granddad to ring up the Head, and get us leave to stay here until Saturday morning. And Dr. Holmes has agreed!"

"Wha-at?"

"Bai Jove!"

"The Head wasn't pleased at the request, of course!" grinned Cardew. "But you fellows know what granddad is like. He talked the old chap round, and—well, it's a settled fact. We're all to stay here at Deepdene until Saturday morning. And," added Cardew, with fierce intensity, "we're not staying just for fun, old beans! We're goin' to get to the dashed bottom of this rotten mystery—the mystery that's takin' years off granddad's life!" he added, his voice shaking. "You know what he was like before this happened—jolly and bright, a chirpy old gent! And now—well, you see how it's pulled him down!"

Tom Merry nodded, his face set.

"We're with you, Cardew," he said quietly. "You can count on us!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Right!" said Cardew, glancing at the juniors' grave, eager faces. "Well, the first and only thing it seems to little me is to collar that foreign merchant! It won't be easy—he seems to know the place well enough. But we're goin' to collar him."

"If the bobbies can't find him, though—"

"We shall," said Cardew confidentially. "It's growin' dusk now! I vote we start at once!"

"What's your plan, then?"

"That foreign merchant's bound to come again—accordin' to his jolly old warnin'," said Cardew crisply.

"We've got to be on the spot when he turns up. I've heard all about it from granddad. He says the warning notes were found on the library table each time—just by the french window. The catch was found broken, by the way. Anyway, my idea is to keep watch outside the french window—plenty of shelter among the laurels, though it won't be comfy work!"

"We're on, anyway!" said Tom, glancing out of the window. "Let's get our coats on and make a start right away. It's not snowing now!"

"Right!"

And so it was settled. To some of them it seemed rather a futile proceeding, but they said nothing, being ready to help in any way Cardew suggested.

CHAPTER 5.

Thrilling Work!

BAI Jove! It's frightfully cold, deah boys!"

And the "deah boys" agreed—rather dismally.

It was undoubtedly cold keeping watch and ward among the laurels. The ground was sodden—most of the snow had melted away by, now. But it was cold, damp, and dismal. Every movement brought a shower of

melted, icy snow scattering over them from the laurel leaves—it splattered in their faces and dripped down the backs of their necks. Altogether, keeping watch on the library window was proving a decidedly dismal and depressing business.

It seemed to them all rather a futile proceeding—outside the grounds plain-clothed constables were already patrolling, keeping watch on the house. The inspector from Denshall Police Station had lost no time. The countryside was being searched, and it seemed impossible either for the Portuguese to escape or to gain entrance again to Deepdene without being observed and apprehended.

But they did not tell Cardew so.

All the same, willing as they were to help by every means within their power, the juniors were getting a bit fed-up. Dusk was falling rapidly, and the air was damp and raw. But inside the house cheerful lights gleamed.

The man vanished inside, leaving the window wide. He was inside only a brief second before he reappeared again, and it was then Cardew spoke.

“On him!”

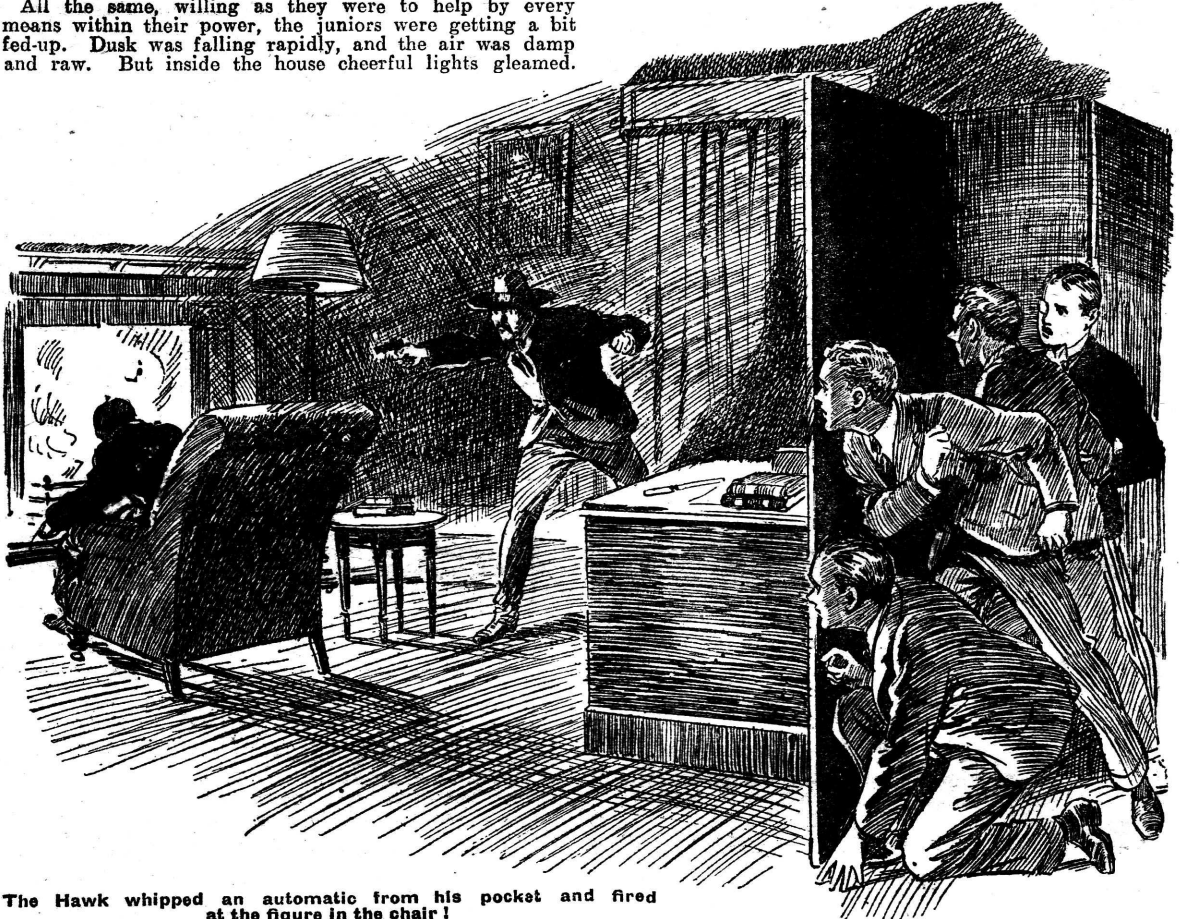
There was a rush—a startled cry.

The man stood for the fraction of a second motionless, as if stunned, and then he wheeled swiftly.

“After him!” yelled Cardew.

They stampeded into the library, jamming in the doorway in their eagerness to get at the Portuguese.

But Cardew was inside, and he leaped after the man as he dashed across the room and tore open the inner door.



The Hawk whipped an automatic from his pocket and fired at the figure in the chair!

The library was unoccupied, and the light was out in that room. But the firelight flames were leaping high in the old fireplace, flickering and dancing on walls and ceiling, and the inside looked cosy and inviting to the hidden watchers.

“Yes, it’s cold, Gussy, old bean!” assented Cardew, his own teeth chattering a little. “But you can pop inside if you want to, you fellows. If anythin’ happens I’ll shout!”

“We’re staying with you, old scout!” snapped Tom Merry.

“Yaas, wathah! I am not weally gwumblin’, Cardew, old fellow!”

Cardew himself was inclined to grumble. He began to wonder if it was all worth while after all. But even as Arthur Augustus finished speaking, he knew that it was.

From somewhere behind them came a sound—a cautious footstep on gravel. Then came a faint, swishing tread.

Someone was coming up behind them, walking cautiously on the grass now. Cardew gripped Tom Merry’s arm fiercely as a figure showed for an instant among the laurels. “Gonzalez!” breathed Tom.

There was no mistaking the figure—they caught a glint of a heavy moustached figure suddenly loom up before them against the window.

“Wait!” breathed Cardew warningly. “Let him get in—then we’ll nab the brute!”

They waited. It seemed as if the man was desperately cautious now—that he knew he was ringed round with enemies—the police. He looked behind him, and about him. For an instant he listened at the french window, and then they saw it open as if no catch held it.

He raced out in the hall, and Cardew tore after him, his jaw set hard with grim determination. The hall door was closed, and a startled footman stood by it.

“Stop him!”

The man leaped for the wide staircase. When Tom Merry & Co. tumbled out of the library after Cardew they glimpsed him just vanishing up the stairs.

They went after him with a wild, eager rush.

Up one flight and then up the next raced the desperate fugitive, with the grim-faced Cardew at his heels almost. On the next landing the man hesitated outside a door, but as Cardew made a mad leap at him he turned and rushed on again, gaining a narrow flight of stairs, evidently leading up to box-rooms or attics.

Cardew gave a shout to the juniors following, and went after him, leaping the narrow stairs two at a time. He reached the top and paused on the landing. Several doors faced him, and all were closed. But next second he heard the scraping of a heavy object from one of the rooms, and, guessing what it meant, he dashed at the door and tore at the knob.

The door flew open; and, dashing inside, he found himself in a lumber-room, empty but for several boxes, one of which stood now in the centre of the room. On the box Gonzalez was standing; and even as Cardew rushed in, the rascal leaped upwards and got a grip on the rim of the skylight, which had already been flung open by the man.

“Good gad!” gasped Cardew.

The man was obviously desperate, and intended to take

refuge on the roof—a dangerous proceeding, indeed, with half-melted, half-frozen snow covering it.

But Cardew did not hesitate. He leaped upwards, grasped the edge of the skylight, and scrambled out, finding himself on a small square expanse of leaded roof. Beyond the flat square showed twisted chimneys and gabled roofs, patchy-white and glistening in the dusky mist.

The man had vanished seemingly. And then Cardew sighted a chimney-stack, rising up at the far edge of the flat roof.

He ran towards it. As he came abreast, the fugitive suddenly emerged from behind the stack, his swarthy face savage and frightened.

He muttered something; and then, before Cardew even realised his desperate intention, the man had struck out with all his savage force.

Cardew glimpsed the man's swarthy face and gleaming eyes; felt his hot breath on his face. Then a fist struck him between the eyes with stunning force, and he reeled backwards.

His calves jabbed against something cold and hard—the low parapet of the flat roof. The next instant, clawing madly, a sickening dread in his bemused mind, he was over the edge.

Desperation nerved him to jerk his falling body round, and he fell asprawl of the parapet. But his frantic efforts to keep his balance did not avail.

His body slid over the parapet, his clutching hands grasping the edge of the slippery, icy stonework. His grip held for a brief instant, slipped off again, and then he was clawing desperately at drenched ivy-roots.

The roots tore away amid a spattering of icy water, and again his grip failed. He was falling again, and then his clutching fingers grasped something.

It was a drainpipe, ice-covered and slippery. But this time his grip held, and his flaying feet scraped at the ivied wall.

He had escaped by a miracle, it seemed, and he shook from head to foot as he glanced dizzily downwards through the dusk, clinging on frantically with bruised and bleeding fingers.

But had he escaped? For even as he glanced downwards a sudden thrill of horror shot through him. For the pipe to which he was holding was beginning to come away from the wall under his weight—slowly but surely! In another minute at most it would be pulled from its fastenings. Nothing could save him.

"Help! Help!" The junior's voice was almost a scream.

CHAPTER 6.

Cardew's Rescue!

TOM MERRY was yards behind Cardew, and behind Tom came the rest of the excited pursuers in a scampering swarm.

Cardew had vanished through the trapdoor when Tom rushed into the lumber-room. Tom gasped in alarm and halted as he glimpsed the box and the open skylight above it.

"Oh, great Scott!" panted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in great alarm. "The wascal has taken to the wool! Has Cardew—"

"He's gone after the beggar!" yelled Tom. "Quick!" Fear suddenly seized the junior skipper of St. Jim's. The man was desperate, and there was no knowing to what lengths he might go to evade capture. If the juniors had doubted that the affair was serious before, they had no doubts now. They were dealing with a desperate, ruthless scoundrel.

Tom leaped up on to the box. But he never touched the skylight then. For even as he leaped upwards a figure loomed above him; a swarthy face and glittering eyes glared down at him. Then the rascal swarmed through the skylight.

He dropped full on top of Tom, sending that startled junior flying headlong off the box.

Crash! The man was down in the room. Blake yelled as a savage fist sent him to the floor; and the juniors, taken utterly by surprise, were scattered like chaff as the rascal rushed to the door and vanished. His pounding feet sounded on the stairs.

"After him!" yelled Tom Merry. Dazed and hurt as he was, Tom was the first to recover from the general confusion. He scrambled up and rushed in pursuit. He went bounding down the stairs two at a time, and he glimpsed the fugitive in the corridor below.

The Portuguese reached the door of a room down a passage beyond, and, flinging open the door, vanished inside.

The door crashed shut; but Tom reached it the next instant, and before the key could be turned, Tom had his foot in the door.

"Quick!" yelled the junior. "We've got him!" He crashed his weight against the door, and Blake rushed up to aid him. There was the sound of an oath inside, and then the door flew open under the combined charge of the juniors.

Tom Merry rushed in, glanced round, and then dived for the window.

He was an instant too late. The window was wide, and the man had clambered on to the sill outside, his form outlined against the window.

"Good heavens!" The man's desperate intention seemed obvious. The next instant his figure vanished as he leaped outwards.

Tom reached the window; his frantic clutch came too late. Then Tom understood as his horrified eyes looked out.

The man had not, after all, leaped to his death. Out in the mist, several yards out from the window, the gnarled branches of an oak swished and swayed violently. He glimpsed a form scrambling downwards through the shaking, crashing branches.

"Phew! He'll get away yet!" panted Tom, astounded at the fellow's nerve and resource. "Well, what he can do I'm jolly sure I can! Here goes!"

"Tom! You fool!" But Tom easily evaded Lowther's frantic clutch. He slipped under the sash, poised on the sill for a brief second, and then leaped outwards and downwards.

He crashed into the bare branches of the oak amid a splintering of twigs and a scattering of wet snow. He felt the numbing shock of the fall, the pain of the scratching, tearing branches that whipped at him.



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Then he landed, astride of a huge, massive branch with a thud that shook him sickeningly, and sent his teeth grating together. Half stunned, bruised, he hung on desperately, feeling warm blood trickling down his cheeks from scratches.

Then he recovered himself somewhat, and, setting his teeth, he began to swarm down the tree. Below he glimpsed the swarthy-faced man just dropping to earth. The man glared up at him, and then he vanished in the dusk.

Tom dropped to earth and started in pursuit. But after staggering twenty yards he gave it up. His quarry had vanished, and he realised it was useless to hope to catch him, dazed and dizzy as he was. He stood panting in dazed indecision, and just then Blake, followed by the rest of his chums, came rushing out through the open french window of the library.

"Tom—thank Heaven you're safe!" panted Lowther, his grasp falling on Tom's shoulder as that junior reeled. "You shouldn't have made that mad leap; it was suicidal, Tom. Are you all right?"

"Yes; a bit shaken and bruised," panted the junior. "But the bouncer's got away! Cardew will—"

He broke off abruptly, suddenly aware of a voice shouting somewhere above them—a faint, frantic voice which he recognised only too well.

"Help! Help!"

It was not Cardew's voice; but as the startled juniors looked swiftly upwards they understood what it meant, and horrified alarm seized them in its grip.

"Good heavens! Cardew—he'll be killed!" hissed Tom Merry. "Quick! Upstairs again, you fellows!"

And he led the way in another mad stampede into the house.

"Beasts!"

That was Baggy Trimble's well-considered opinion of Tom Merry & Co.—and especially of Ralph Reckness Cardew. During the last few hours Baggy had given his opinion with emphasis—emphasis that increased with the hours. Baggy Trimble had never thought much of Cardew. Cardew was a beast who kicked on sight, as a general rule—where Baggy was concerned, at all events. Baggy had no use for such a fellow.

Baggy was still sore from Cardew's treatment, in more ways than one. Yet he had not gone home. An eight-mile tramp along slushy roads, with dusk falling, on a winter's night, did not appeal to Baggy. Nor did the idea of mouching round Deepdene in the cold and wet appeal to him, either. He preferred to risk Cardew's boot to either. And there was still Lord Reckness. The old nobleman was good-natured and easy-going. Baggy knew—none better—that Lord Reckness would never turn him out once he got in.

It was a mystery to Baggy why Cardew and Tom Merry & Co. had not yet started for St. Jim's. But that was a mystery which was not troubling Baggy much at the moment. For Baggy had managed to get into the house, though he had not ventured to seek out his noble lordship yet. Finding a small window conveniently open, Baggy had crawled in, to find himself in the larder—a happy hunting ground indeed for Baggy.

Having filled himself up to the Plimsoll mark with good things, Baggy had purloined a pie to store away somewhere in case of eventualities, and then he had ventured forth in search of a hiding-place. At any moment a nose, interfering servant might enter the larder.

With the pie under his coat Baggy had left the kitchen regions. He scouted round, scarcely knowing how to act next, but seeking, for the moment, a quiet place in which to devour the purloined pie.

In the hall disaster almost overtook him. Baggy was just making a dive for the nearest open door, when a footman had appeared from a side passage.

With all the coolness he could muster Baggy had given the menial a haughty blink and calmly started upstairs.

To his great relief the footman barely glanced at him. Quite likely the butler's own lofty dignity prevented him from relating what had happened to Bagley Trimble in the drawing-room. The footman looked upon him still as a honoured guest—though, quite possibly, a grubby and disreputable guest!

That did not trouble Trimble at the moment, however. He mounted the stairs, hastening his steps considerably once out of sight of the footman. He reached the landing above, and blinked about at the many passages and numerous doors.

But before he had time even to select one something happened. From below came a sudden outcry—the thud of racing feet on the stairs.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Baggy. "That beastly menial—"
He was discovered. That beastly "menial" had spotted

him after all, and given him away! Baggy did not doubt that Cardew was now hot-foot on his trail.

But it was a time for action, not thought—so Baggy considered in his sudden fright. His one idea was flight, and, glimpsing stairs at the end of the thickly-carpeted corridor, he flew towards them and flew up them.

The thudding footsteps—numerous ones; it sounded to Baggy like the footsteps of the whole household—followed. Baggy panted and tore up the next flight.

Still the pursuit followed. He heard Cardew's yell:

"This way—quick!"

"Beast!" panted Baggy.

He raced on, not even daring to glance behind or over the banisters. He reached a landing at last. More passages and more doors. Baggy dived into the only room with the door open.

He closed it swiftly, and felt with trembling fingers for the key. There was no key. Even as he fumbled desperately, the thudding feet reached the landing at the top of the stairs. They came nearer—and passed! A door slammed. Then came a stampede of running feet—the voices of his school-fellows, excited and shrill. He heard Tom Merry yelling, and then a sudden commotion from the room near by, shouts and yells followed by another rush of feet past his door—towards the stairs.

The commotion died away downstairs.

"Oh!" gasped Baggy.

He began to realise now that the pursuers were not after him at all, or they would certainly have tried every room on the landing and passages. Moreover, he had heard sounds of a struggle.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Baggy.

He sat on a chair, gasping and panting huskily. That race upstairs had been no joke for Baggy. But he had kept a tight hold on the pie, at all events!

The room he was in was evidently a spare servants' room. It held a washstand, a dressing-table, a wardrobe, and an iron bed, with only a mattress on it. But Baggy had no eyes for the contents of the room. His eyes were on the pie—a rabbit-pie, still warm, with a delicious smell.

He had scarcely sat down, and was just about to start on the pie, when he jumped, suddenly aware of a panting, hoarse voice.

"Help! Help!"

It was Cardew's voice, and no wonder Baggy jumped. For the voice seemed to come from just outside the window. Baggy had never been so astonished and scared in his life.

Dropping the pie on to the chair, he rushed to the window. It was of the sash variety, and the lower sash was open a little. Baggy grabbed it and shoved it higher and blinked out. The frantic note in Cardew's faint voice thrilled him to action.

Then he saw Cardew. He was still clinging desperately to the drain-pipe. Trimble's face went like chalk as he saw that the pipe was bent clear of the wall, and that only a miracle could save the unfortunate junior.

"Oh!" panted Baggy. "Cardew—what—hold on! Oh crikey!"

Baggy was frightened—badly frightened. But, for once, he kept his head. Cardew suddenly sighted his white face peering out.

It must have startled Cardew. But his voice came instantly, husky and tense.

"Help, Trimble! Get something—shout for help! Do something! I—I— My hands are slippin'!"

And Baggy did something. The fat youth was not usually given to quick thought or action. But he thought and acted swiftly now. One wild glance about him, and the next moment Baggy was tearing at the thick, heavy curtains that hung at the window.

The result was startling—and painful for Baggy. Instead of the hooks or rings giving way, the whole contraption came down with a rush. Baggy's frantic tug had pulled the brackets clean out of the rotten, age-old plaster.

Thump!

Baggy's howl was earsplitting as the heavy curtain-pole descended on his head. But that one howl was all, for Baggy displayed really heroic fortitude after that. He was enveloped as in a shroud, but he tore himself free somehow.

The next moment he had grabbed the thick curtain and, hurriedly twisting it into a sort of rope, he flung the end out, leaning out of the window as he did so.

Baggy had some sort of wild idea that the curtain would save Cardew, and it certainly might have proved useful had Cardew been below instead of above. But Cardew was hanging above the window a little to the right.

None the less, the curtain did prove useful—by a miracle.

For, just as Trimble leaned out and yelled, Cardew's hands slipped on the icy piping.

He yelled, and dropped. Baggy shrieked. But even as Cardew dropped, the athletic junior made a last desperate effort. He flung his body sideways with a frantic jerk, his hands outstretched and clawing.

His feet scraped the corner of the sill, slid off, and then his hands got a grip, stopping his downward plunge. But only for a moment, for the sill was like glass and they instantly slipped off.

He was falling again—and then his wildly clawing fingers grasped the curtain. The curtain gave, and Cardew fell, but his fingers retained their desperate grip.

Under Cardew's weight the curtain whipped through over the sill. And then it jammed.

Cardew's arms were nearly wrenched from their sockets, but he still hung on, swinging at the end of the thick, twisted curtain.

Trimble was howling, and it took the fat youth several seconds to grasp what had happened. He felt as if a mule had kicked him at the back of his thighs, and then, looking down, he understood.

As the curtain whipped over the sill under Cardew's weight, the pole had jerked up and jammed against Trimble's legs, pinning him against the low wall and sill. The pole was wider than the window, and had Baggy not been there, it would have jammed against the window just the same. But had the sill been much lower Baggy would have been flung headlong out.

"Oh!" panted Trimble. He now understood the position, and he shrieked out: "Hold on, Cardew! Oh, help, help!"

And it was then that Tom Merry, down below in the garden, heard and looked up. Trimble heard him shout up, and he grabbed the curtain and held on, fearful that the pole might give even yet.

Seconds that seemed an eternity to Baggy and Cardew passed, and then, once again, Baggy heard thudding feet on the stairs, and this time he heard them with joy.

The door flew open, and Tom Merry, followed by Blake and the rest, rushed into the room.

"All right, Baggy! Stand aside, old man!"

Baggy tottered away from the window, as many hands grasped the curtain and the weight on the pole was released.

With Herries, Digby, Manners, and Lowther putting their weight on the pole, Tom, Blake, and Gussy grasped the curtain.

"Hold on, Cardew!" cried Tom Merry. "Hold on for Heaven's sake!"

Cardew held on, though his fingers were numbed and bleeding. Slowly the determined juniors hauled him upwards. His head came over the sill at last, and eager hands grabbed him and hauled him to safety. He dropped down on the floor, gasping and panting.

"A close call!" panted Blake.

Cardew got up at last, trying hard to grin, though it was a ghastly effort.

"Yes, dear men—a dashed close call!" he assented coolly. "Thanks, you men!"

"I—I say," panted Trimble. He sat up and glared. "What about me, Cardew? It was me who saved you, you know! I hope you won't forget that!"

"Bai Jove! It weally is Twimble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Gussy—"

"Yes, it's jolly old Baggy, right enough," smiled Cardew, breathing heavily, but cool enough now. "And it was

Baggy who saved my bacon right enough—our giddy, uninvited guest! Hallo, is that a pie?"

"I—I say," stammered Baggy, his eye on the pie. "I want you fellows to understand that I didn't pinch that pie, and I never came here to eat it. Nothing of the kind! You—you see it—it was like this—"

Baggy paused, seeking inspiration.

"Never mind the jolly old pie, Baggy," smiled Cardew. "I should have been rather a messy pie by this time but for you, old bean! I'll present you with the pie in exchange for my jolly life, old fruit. Pile in!"

"But that's not good enough," said Baggy, deciding to strike while the iron was hot. "I'll accept the pie as you're so pressing! But what about saving your life? I know your thumping life isn't worth much—"

"What?"

"But it's worth more than a pie," said Trimble. "Look here, the least you can do after this is to make it clear that I'm to stay on as your honoured guest, Cardew! I refuse absolutely to accept any other reward for shaving your—I mean saving your life."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "I weally think Twimble has earned that, Cardew, deah boy!"

"Yes, rather!"

Cardew grinned at Baggy, who had already begun operations on the rabbit pie. The cynical Fourth-Former was under no delusion as to Baggy's part in the affair. Trimble had saved his life unquestionably.

"Right-ho!" he chuckled. "I'll make that right, old fat bean! You can stay, Baggy!"

"Very well, I'll accept your invitation," said Baggy, with some dignity. "Only mind—I shall expect to be treated as an honoured guest, you know! No more kicking! No more hooliganism to a fellow! Any more of your ill-mannered, inhospitable treatment and I shall refuse to stay as your guest! That's flat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Cardew promised solemnly that he would treat his guest decently, and then led his chums downstairs. Baggy Trimble was to stay as a—more or less—honoured guest at Deepdene.

CHAPTER 7.

What Trimble Saw!

"I UTTERABLY wefuse to listen! I wefuse to put up with it! I am goin' to thwash that feahful boundah, Twimble!"

Arthur Augustus was going it.

The swell of the Fourth was raging. His chums tried to pacify him, to soothe his ruffled plumes, to calm his indignant ravings. But the noble Gussy would not be pacified, or soothed, or calmed.

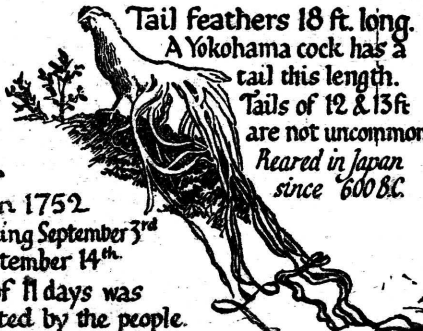
He had been hurt in his tenderest spot. Trimble had committed the unforgivable crime. He had interfered with the noble Gussy's clobber.

When Cardew had stuffed jam-tarts and cream cakes over Trimble on the previous day, Trimble's clothing had suffered. He was a most disreputable sight to be seen sitting down to lunch and dine at the house of a peer of the realm. He was not fit to be seen prowling about the house and grounds at Deepdene Lodge.

Arthur Augustus realised this more than anyone. Gussy himself felt the situation of being there without a change of clobber very keenly. He could sympathise with Trimble. But when it came to Trimble purloining his own clothes—Gussy's clothes—Arthur Augustus lost all sympathy.

Would You Believe It?

Because the calendar was nearly a million seconds "behindhand" an Act of Parliament was passed



in 1752 making September 3rd September 14th.

This loss of 11 days was bitterly resented by the people.

Tail feathers 18 ft. long. A Yokohama cock has a tail this length. Tails of 12 & 13 ft are not uncommon. Reared in Japan since 600 B.C.

The Black Watch was formed in 1739 to keep the wild highlanders at bay

Trimble's collar especially had suffered, being smothered with jam and cream. And that morning, while Gussy was in the bath-room, Trimble had calmly annexed Gussy's collar, leaving his own dirty, bedraggled collar in its place for Gussy to wear, if he liked.

Before Gussy could slaughter Trimble, however, Cardew had come to the rescue, and had supplied them all with clean collars. So Gussy had forgiven Trimble for that.

Now, Trimble had done a worse thing. Lunch being over, the chums had decided to go for a stroll, leaving Cardew at home—that junior preferring to stay with Lord Reckness. Then Gussy had found, to his great horror and wrath, that Trimble had eloped with his natty, elegant overcoat, likewise his silk scarf, leaving his own grubby coat for Gussy to wear.

Gussy didn't like it. He wanted to find Trimble, to regain his coat, and to slaughter the unspeakable fat junior.

"Gussy, old man—"
 "I wufuse to listen! That unspeakable wottah—"
 "My dear man, I can lend you an overcoat," remarked Cardew. "You can wear mine as I shan't be goin' out, Gussy, old bean!"

"I uttably wufuse! Though I appweciate your kindness, Cardew, I wufuse to go out until I have appweciated Trimble and wecovahed my coat. He must be somewhere about the gwounds! He is too lazy to go far! I tell you that you must wait while I—while I—"

Gussy paused.
 A figure had just passed the dining-room window—a fat, familiar figure, muffled up in a natty overcoat that fitted tightly as if it had grown on Trimble.

"M-my coat!" gasped Gussy.
 "He borrowed a bob from me an hour ago—just after lunch," grinned Tom Merry. "I expect he's going to the giddy village for some toffee!"

"The fat scoundrel!" choked Gussy.
 And he flew out of the room. The chums followed, laughing. Arthur Augustus rushed out of the house and met Trimble almost face to face outside the library window.

Trimble gave a startled gasp, blinked in alarm at Gussy's wrathful face, and then bolted.
 Arthur Augustus raced after him across the lawn.

Trimble forgot that he was going to the village—forgot even the toffee. He just bolted anywhere to get out of reach of Gussy and vengeance. He flew on. He heard Gussy slip and crash down behind him, but he did not dare to look back. Obviously Gussy had come a cropper on the wet, slippery ground.

But the slip had saved Trimble. He stopped suddenly, and glanced back up the garden. High bushes and ornamental trees hid the house—and Gussy. Gussy was not in sight, though he could hear him crashing towards him.

Then Baggy sighted a haven of refuge—or what he hoped would be a haven. It was a small, circular summer-house of rustic-work, built on brick piles. Baggy rushed towards it, and just as suddenly decided not to risk being trapped inside.

Instead he hid behind the building, crouching down among the dripping bushes.

He waited. Sounds of pursuit had died away, however. Evidently Arthur Augustus had given up the chase and gone back. Still, Baggy was taking no chances. He waited.

"Beast!" he mumbled. "As if a fellow would harm his rotten coat! Mean, I call it—the fellow's mean as— Oh!"

Baggy broke off. For some moments there had been silence in the big garden save for the dripping of water from trees and bushes. Then Baggy heard a rustle among

the bushes up the garden. It came nearer. Baggy wondered why Gussy should be stalking him so stealthily. He understood as a figure suddenly emerged into view scarcely a dozen yards from him.

Trimble felt his heart jump. His teeth chattered, and his fat little knees knocked together. It was not Arthur Augustus at all. The figure was tall and broad-shouldered—a man. And he was dressed in a wide-brimmed hat, and clothes that were not of English cut. He was a swarthy-faced man, with a heavy moustache, and lank, black hair.

Manuel Gonzalez, "The Hawk"! Baggy had heard all about him, of course. And in his terror Baggy nearly suffocated.

The Portuguese crept towards him. Then, just as Baggy was striving to make his limbs take him away in a wild, mad rush, the skulking figure gave a swift glance about him, pushed open the summer-house door and vanished inside, closing the door after him.

"Oh!" panted Baggy. "It—it's that fearful ruffian!"
 He waited no longer. Gussy was far to be preferred just then to the mysterious and sinister Portuguese gentleman. Baggy jumped up and flew up the garden, heedless of anything save flight.

But no sound followed him; the man had not seen him for there was no window on the door-side of the little shanty. Baggy arrived at the house with a rush, breathless and wildly excited. Cardew was at the front door with Tom Merry & Co. Arthur Augustus was arguing heatedly, but he halted as Baggy rushed up.

"I—I say," spluttered Baggy. "It—it's all right, Gussy! Keep the beast off, you fellows. I—I say, Cardew, I've just seen that beastly Portuguese rotter!"

"What?"
 Even Gussy was too startled to deal with Baggy. With terror still showing in his fat, flabby features, Baggy gurgled out his story. Cardew's eyes gleamed.

"In the summer-house, is he?" he snapped.
 "Yes—the rustic one!" panted Baggy. "Fact! I saw him! He—he rushed at me with his dagger—"

"Never mind the artistic details," said Cardew, cutting Baggy's imaginative effort short. "Run along to the cook, Baggy. She's makin' some fresh jam-tarts, I believe. Tell her I sent you for some, old bean!"

Baggy did not even wait to thank Cardew for his unusual kindness. He knew Cardew wanted to get rid of him, but Baggy did not mind. He just went to interview the cook about the tarts.

Tom Merry and his chums wanted to rush off at once, but Cardew kept cool and dissuaded them.

"Plenty of time, old beans!"
 "But—but the scoundrel may clear!" gasped Blake, excitedly. "I believe that fat ass is speaking the truth for once. It was that rotten Portuguese, of course."

"Quite so. But no good lettin' the jolly old world know we're on the trail," drawled Cardew. "Let's stroll down the garden, old beans!"

They strolled along down the garden, Cardew's chums scarcely able to restrain their impatience, and certainly unable to understand Cardew's cool nonchalance. And Cardew irritated them still more by stopping occasionally to examine a plant of tree.

"You want that brute to get away, then, Cardew?" snapped Tom Merry at last.

"Not at all—though it might have been better to hurry, but you never know. I think— Hallo! Here's jolly old Forsyth!"

A young man was strolling up the garden path towards them—a young man in gold-rimmed eyeglasses, and smoking

Facts from Far and Near.



L. Vanderstuyft holds the motor-paced cycle record
 76 miles 504 yds in an hour.

16,000
 3/8 tacks to the lb.



Louis XIV
 drank the first cup of coffee made in France.

Can you make a tin roll uphill?



(Solution given on page 26.)

a cigarette, and wearing a cap. It was Mr. Claude Forsyth, Lord Reckness' secretary.

"Hallo, you men!" he hailed them genially. "Just going out? There's a policeman on duty at the side gate in the wall. Mind he doesn't mistake you for that foreign johnny!"

The juniors laughed, and Cardew also laughed. They rather liked the genial secretary, who seemed to have easily forgiven and forgotten Cardew's impudence; possibly he was used to it! Cardew stopped.

"You seem a bit more cheery about it all to-day, Mr. Forsyth," he said, some eagerness in his tone. "Has somethin' come out—"

"Unfortunately, not to my knowledge," said Mr. Forsyth, his brow suddenly clouding. "We can only hope the police will be successful in their search for the ruffian. Apart from being cheery about it, I am more worried than ever," he added gravely. "Happily the police are now guarding the house—"

"Yet the merchant got in last evening," said Cardew.

"Ah! Yes, that is so. Really, it is very strange and upsetting," said Mr. Forsyth. "But we ourselves must keep careful watch. The man undoubtedly intended to leave the third and final warning when you interrupted him! However, I certainly feel easier in mind now the police are here."

He nodded to the juniors and walked on. The chums looked at Cardew.

"Why didn't you tell him what Trimble saw?" demanded Tom. "I believe Trimble did see the Portuguese. I was very nearly telling him—"

"I'm glad you didn't, Thomas," said Cardew coolly. "He would have told us to go indoors, and the jolly old bobbies would have had the job of collaring the dear old Hawk! Let's have a chat to the bobby, by the way."

"But that copper-skinned merchant—"

"He can wait, Thomas!"

Cardew took the gravel drive that branched off towards the gate in the wall, and they followed him through the shrubbery a few yards. Cardew suddenly stopped and glanced round.

"No; I think we'd better make for the jolly old summer-house, after all," he murmured. "This way—we'll cut through the shrubbery!"

"You silly owl! Better go cautiously, anyway, Cardew!" called Tom Merry. But Cardew was already hurrying ahead. He seemed suddenly keen to reach the summer-house, and he certainly betrayed no caution. Tom Merry bit his lip as he and the others followed. He could not understand the dandy of the Fourth at all.

They reached the rustic house very soon. Cardew ran to the door and flung it open. His chums joined him next moment. The little room was empty.

"That fat ass was spoofing us, of course!"

"He's had time to get away twice over," said Tom, in disgust. "While you've been wagging your chin and acting the fool, Cardew—"

"But he's been here, I fancy," remarked Cardew, unmoved. "Look!"

He pointed to a trail of muddy, wet footmarks on the floor, obviously recent.

"Probably a gardener," said Herries. "Trimble—"

"The jolly old footprints lead to one spot, you'll notice," said Cardew, ignoring Herries. "Hold on!"

He crossed the summer-house, and looked under the seats. Then he began to examine the floor closely. The juniors watched him very curiously. That Cardew had some strange thought in mind was clear. He spoke at last, and his voice bore excitement.

"Here we are, old beans!"

He stooped down, got his fingers in a crack in the floor-boarding, and with little effort wrenched up a floorboard. Then he tugged two more boards up, all three of them showing freshly sawn edges, and each several feet long.

His chums joined him and glanced curiously into the hole revealed.

"Bai Jove!"

"Great pip! What on earth—"

They were stunned—though Cardew seemed unmoved still.

In the large hole under the flooring was a box, and in the box was a familiar suit of shabby clothes, and a wide-brimmed hat, and a pair of boots. Cardew stooped and began to examine. In the box was also a smaller box containing theatrical make-up. There was a box of grease-paints and powders. There was a mirror. There was a wig of lank, black, greasy hair, and a heavy false moustache and eyebrows of the same colour.

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The juniors blinked at them and then at each other.

Cardew laughed softly.

"Here lies all that remains of Manuel Gonzalez, the jolly old Portuguese," he remarked lightly. "See the wheeze?"

"Bai Jove! Then—then it's all a fearful hoax, deah boys!"

"Not at all—far from it!" said Cardew, his face abruptly going hard.



Inspector Bentley recoiled back as Forsyth's fist crashed in. Forsyth twisted round and leapt for the door.

"What?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You still think it serious after this? Can't you see it must be some fool—possibly a member of the household, a foolish manservant, who is frightening Lord Reckness?"

"I don't think so. Would a practical joker take such risks to preserve his liberty and identity as that merchant did last night?"

"Phew! I never thought of that!" admitted Tom.

"My granddad's life is in deadly danger, you fellows," said Cardew quietly. "It will need all our efforts to save him—the police are so self-satisfied that we need hope for little in that quarter. As our old friend Forsyth says, the man came last evenin' with the intention of leavin' the third and final warnin'. After that—"

"But who on earth can it be?" gasped Blake. "And why—"

"Let's get up to the house," said Cardew abruptly. "And mind, not a word to anyone of this, not even to old Bentley or granddad! Once the merchant gets wind that we're on the trail, he may not wait to give warnin', but he may strike swiftly."

They went up to the house. The affair, instead of removing all fears, had filled them all with a nameless dread. Cardew's words had dismissed the idea that it was a cruel

hoax. Somewhere lurking about that old house, unseen and unknown, was a killer—a man whose actions so far left little room for doubt as to his terrible intention. And he seemed to come and go as he pleased—to laugh at the police guarding the house. The old, gabled house seemed suddenly to become a house of fear—a place of sinister foreboding. Where was the unknown, and when would he strike?

CHAPTER 8.
Trimble's Luck Again!

"BEASTS!" Evidently Tom Merry & Co. had been upsetting Baggly Trimble again—or somebody had. "Beasts!" grunted Baggly again. "They've got something on. I know that! Always shoving off and giving a fellow the slip! Gone out, I bet, perhaps to the pictures somewhere!"

Until Trimble had suddenly become aware that Cardew and Tom Merry & Co. had disappeared, he had been quite merry and bright. He had had a jolly good tea—a ripping tea. He had fed well if not wisely. Trimble had rolled into the drawing-room, but finding only Lord Reckness and Mr. Forsyth there, he had rolled disconsolately out again. He had looked into the dining-room and in most of the other rooms. But his school-fellows had disappeared from sight.

Seated in the armchair in the library, he began to snooze, lulled by feelings of comfort and the fire.

How long he slept he did not know—it could not have been long. But suddenly a faint creak at the door roused him. He blinked his eyes, and glanced round the back of the chair towards the door. If it was Lord Reckness disturbing his rest he would have to make the best of it. But if it was any other selfish beast he would jolly well let him see he wasn't wanted in there!

It did not prove to be Lord Reckness, however. It was Mr. Claude Forsyth, the nobleman's secretary. And the way in which he entered the room astonished Trimble and caused that youth to freeze into silence.

The young man in gold-rimmed eyeglasses came softly into the room, and cautiously closed the door behind him. He did not even glance towards the armchair. Possibly he believed Trimble had gone out after the others. He came in, and very quietly, treading like a cat, he crossed to the windows and drew the heavy curtains across with a soft swish.

Then he crossed to the door again and switched on one of the electric lights.

This done, he went to the corner by the window and gently dragged aside a high, old-fashioned desk. He bent down behind it, evidently examining something there.

Trimble stared, astonished and fascinated.

Why the secretary should walk about and act in such a stealthy, secretive manner was beyond him. But Trimble was a very curious youth indeed, and instead of making his presence known he sat quietly where he was, scarcely daring to breathe.

For a few seconds at most the man remained crouching behind the desk as if examining something, and then he rose and switched off the light again. Then he drew aside the curtains and left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

"Phew!" breathed Baggly, his eyes glimmering. "Now what was the nosy beast up to? Cheeky rotter! Sneered at me only at lunch because I asked for a fourth helping! Blessed if I know what these cheeky menials are coming to!"

Trimble left the armchair and crossed to the desk which Forsyth had replaced into position. After a bit of a struggle Trimble managed to move it, and he was just blinking round to see what was there when the door opened.

Trimble spun round guiltily, thinking it must be the secretary again. But it was Cardew, and behind him was Tom Merry. They came into the room and Cardew closed the door. He seemed startled at sight of Trimble, as did Tom.

"Hallo, what are you doing here, Trimble—"

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Trimble, "it's all right! I'm not up to anything, honour bright! I say, that beast—"

"Mr. Forsyth was in here just now," said Cardew. "What did he come for, Trimble?"

"I—I say, he was up to something!" gasped Trimble excitedly. "I was snoozing in the chair and the beast sneaked in and woke me up!"

"Yes, we saw him switch on the light—we were outside," said Cardew calmly. "What was he doing, Trimble?"

Trimble told them, and sending the fat youth to the door to keep watch, Tom and Cardew drew aside the big desk. They stared at what was behind it. Cardew had already turned the light on.

"Phew! What the thump—"

No wonder Tom Merry was astonished. For fastened to the wall, low down on the panelling, and hidden from view by the desk, was a curious contraption. It was a revolver, clamped to the panels! From the trigger of the revolver ran a fine, slender wire, which ran to a tiny battery near the floor, and then went up to the beaded top of the panelling running round the room.

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into his face.

'They reached the house, and, noticing that the library french window was slightly open, Cardew hurried them towards it. The room was empty, and rather dusky, but Cardew's keen eyes soon saw a slip of paper on the table by the window; perhaps Cardew was looking for it.

"Hallo! What's this?"

"It proved to be a sketch of a blindfolded man facing a firing-party! Underneath was the inscription and signature:

"FINAL WARNING! PAYMENT IN FULL!"

"THE HAWK."

"Payment in full, what!" remarked Cardew, his eyes gleaming. "Not yet, my friend! Our jolly old unknown must be forgettin' his Portuguese lingo!"

"That—that must have been left here during the last hour," breathed Tom Merry. "Trimble—"

"Must have spotted him returnin'," assented Cardew. "Well, I'll hand this to Forsyth, and ask him to decide whether granddad's to be shown it or not. No good worryin' the old chap, what? I expect he'll phone for jolly old Bentley. Meanwhile, I think we'd better hang on and keep our peepers open, what?"

"Phew! Yes, rather!"

There was no thought of going for a walk after that.

"This revolver's loaded, Cardew!" breathed Tom.

"What—"
"Yes, with blank cartridge," said Cardew, after a moment's examination.

"But why? What on earth is it doing there?"

"We're going to find that out, old scout," said Cardew coolly.

He stood up on a chair, and found that the wire ran round the room to the door, hidden by the beading above the panelling—a tiny shelf on which ornamental plates were lodged at intervals.

The wire disappeared through a tiny hole above the door.

"I think I'll risk it!" breathed Cardew. "This is no end interestin', dear man! Wait here, Thomas!"

Cardew looked cautiously out into the hall, and then he vanished. He was back in a couple of minutes.

"I've followed the giddy wire up, old bean!" he smiled grimly. "It leads to the jolly old front door! Fancy that now!"

"But what's it mean?" ejaculated Tom, utterly bewildered. "Why should Mr. Forsyth fix a gadget like that up—if he did do?"

"Forsyth's no end of a joker!" said Cardew lightly. "You'd hardly think the fellow would play with jolly old gadgets like this under the circumstances? Shove the desk back, dear man, and we'll resume our stroll outside. Perhaps that gadget's got something to do with wireless, eh, Trimble?"

"What rot!" grunted Trimble.

"Anyway, I shouldn't like to be in here when that goes off," said Cardew, shaking his head seriously. "Looks to me as if it might go off any second, you—Hallo! Where are you goin', Trimble? Wait—"

"I—I want to get something from—from my room!" gasped Trimble, and he vanished through the doorway at great speed. It was unlikely that Baggy Trimble would be found in that room again that evening; Baggy was not the fellow to take chances!

"Tom," said Cardew, in a low voice, and his face was unusually serious, "things are movin' to a crisis—I can feel it! Something's goin' to happen to-night—this evenin'! Go and fetch those fellows in—they'll be jolly glad to get in out of the cold, I bet."

"But—" began the bewildered Tom.

"Tell them to make for their rooms in the usual way. Instead of watchin' from the outside we'll watch from the inside. I heard granddad tell Forsyth that he was goin' to spend the evenin' in here by the fire with a book—and that he wasn't to be disturbed. But I'm goin' to persuade the old chap to go to his room instead. And I'm goin' to insist that he has Benson and a footman with him!"

"You—you think that villain will strike to-night?" breathed Tom.

"I think he'll try," said Cardew soberly. "We shall be here when he comes to greet him, old bean!"

"I don't quite grasp your idea, Cardew," said Tom.

"We've got to get in here without anyone seein' us, to begin with," said Cardew. "Not a soul in the house must know that granddad is not in here—or that we are here. We'll rig up a dummy in the chair there."

"My hat! I see—"

"And we ourselves will hide behind the screen there," went on Cardew calmly. "Then we'll see what we shall see, old bean."

"I'll slip out by way of the french window," said Tom grimly.

Cardew crossed to the window. To his surprise he found it unfastened, but he said nothing. Tom slipped out in the darkness. He soon found his chums, shivering as they crouched in the dark shrubs on watch and guard. He gave them Cardew's strange instructions, and soon they were hurrying indoors.

They, also, felt that a crisis was approaching.

CHAPTER 9.

Unmasked!

ALL clear!"

"Yes, old beans!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew came softly into the library. A glimmer of starlight and a hazy moon showed through the chinks in the heavy curtains of the big windows. But inside all was dark save for the ruddy glow from the fire which cast grotesque and flickering shadows over the dark panelling of the big room.

Before the fire was a standard reading-lamp, but the lamp was unlit. By it was a big armchair, the shade from the lamp and the massive standard itself hiding the chair somewhat. In the chair was a figure, seated back as if gazing into the flames of the fire. It wore a velvet jacket and a tasselled velvet smoking cap. On a side-table on the other side of the chair was a book, opened.

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In the dark, shadowy room the figure in the chair looked real enough. At a first glance, or a second glance, nobody would have dreamed that the figure was a dummy, rigged up out of pillows and cushions. Yet it was a dummy—a very clever dummy.

Cardew glanced at it anxiously as he came in. He had only been out of the room a minute at most.

"Gad! It's dashed lifelike, you men!" he breathed. "Comin' in from outside—"

"Is Lord Reckness in his room?" asked Tom Merry eagerly.

"Yes—with Benson and Jones. The dear granddad took some persuadin', but I managed it. The old chap thinks I'm no end brainy, y'know!"

"And the servants?"

"They won't bother us. And dear old Forsyth's playin' billiards in the jolly old billiard-room," drawled Cardew, with a cynical smile.

"Oh, good! Then—"

"All's set for the jolly old play," said Cardew. "An' the sooner we take cover the better, you men!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

They were excited and seething with eagerness to see the outcome of Cardew's plan—if there would be an outcome, and Cardew himself did not seem to doubt that. Cardew gave a final glance round, and then he gave the word, and they took up their positions behind the big, massive screen that cut off one corner of the big room.

They crouched down in silence, speaking only in low whispers.

The minutes passed. Save for the subdued ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece and the crackling of the log fire, all was still.

It was a thrilling business, crouching there in the stillness waiting for they knew not what. The minutes seemed hours. Now and again the faint footfalls of a servant passed the door, but no other sounds from outside reached them.

"Beastly slow," murmured Herries at last, with a grunt. "I say, your granddad was supposed to be reading, Cardew?"

"Doesn't a fellow ever get tired of readin', dear man?" said Cardew softly. "And doesn't a fellow sometimes want to rest his eyes from the light? That's all right."

The minutes ticked on. It was Tom Merry who heard the first faint sound from the windows, and he gripped Cardew's arm hard.

"Quiet!"

Again came the faint, scarcely perceptible sound, and then the curtain across the french window moved gently aside.

It revealed a dark form—the outlines of a wide-brimmed hat.

A man stood there, tense, watchful. Despite what they know, the chums felt their hearts thumping, and they scarcely dared to breathe. The man stood a full minute, still as a mouse, his eyes scanning the room.

Then he moved towards the figure in the chair. He moved softly, eyes fixed on the form in the armchair—or what little he could see of it. Nearer and nearer he drew, and they glimpsed the swarthy face, the heavy moustache, and the black, lank hair.

Through holes in the screen the juniors watched, spell-bound.

The man was a yard from the chair now. Another step and he had whipped something from his jacket pocket. There was a flash of metal—the gleam of an automatic in the firelight. And then—

Plop!

The sudden, deafening explosion they expected did not materialise. Instead came a plop, like the explosion of an airgun.

Instantly the dummy figure, obviously disturbed by the bullet from the strange gun, flopped forwards in the chair with startling reality.

The man stood motionless. He scarcely glanced again at the still figure slumping in the chair. He was listening intently—listening lest the "plop" of the automatic, obviously fixed with a silencer, had been heard in the house.

He seemed satisfied after a few moments, and he crossed quietly to the door and locked it. Then he stepped across the carpet to the window, drew aside the curtain, and vanished. Tom Merry & Co. heard no sound after that.

"Phew!"

"Oh, gweat Scott!"

The juniors were scared—more scared than they had ever felt in their lives perhaps. They knew only too well that had that figure in the chair been flesh and blood it would have been murder they had witnessed. Their faces were white, and they were shaking. Cardew had impressed upon them his desire that they should not act until he gave them

the word, but it had taken all their will-power to resist the desperate desire to rush out and fling themselves upon the dastardly would-be killer.

But now Cardew gave them no time to think or speak. "Quick!" he breathed. "After him! Never mind anything, dear men—just follow—and don't let him spot us on any account!"

"Right!" They followed Cardew. He led the way to the window, and cautiously drew aside the curtain. He had known from the draught and blowing curtain that the french window had been left wide open by the scoundrel as he went. Cardew glanced out, and, after a good look round the quiet garden, he stepped out on to the grass, his chums at his heels.

They crossed a gravel path, and then plunged into the bushes. Cardew had caught a glimpse of a form disappearing across the grounds, and he followed slowly.

"You saw him, Cardew?" whispered Blake.

"Yes." "But he's gone now, anyway," said Tom Merry, his voice showing his bitter disappointment. "We'll never find the scoundrel now, Cardew. You ought to have let us rush him and chance it, you ass!"

"And some of us would have stopped a bullet," said Cardew coolly. "Besides, I'm no end keen to see what our friend does now, you men. We'll get him all right, never fear!"

They hurried through the grounds with the caution of Red Indians on the trail. The ground was hard and frosty, and once or twice they heard the snap of a twig ahead, and they knew they were on the right trail. Cardew hurried them more, and suddenly through the bushes and trees they glimpsed their quarry.

The dim shape of the summer-house was in sight now. All knew now that the trail was leading there—indeed, they would have guessed it. But suddenly they had clear proof when they glimpsed a dim form cross the patch of lawn in front of the rustic shanty.

The wide-brimmed hat was too familiar to them now to mistake it. And, as they expected, the form vanished into the rustic summer-house, and the door closed silently upon it.

"Now we'll watch," smiled Cardew in the gloom. "What about a little bet as to who comes out, you men?"

But nobody was ready to make a bold guess.

They had not to wait very long. The door suddenly opened and a form emerged from the summer-house.

The juniors caught their breath. Their eyes strained through the gloom in an attempt to see the face of the man standing just outside the door. He stopped suddenly to light a cigarette, and the flame lit up his features. It sparkled on glass and on gold-rimmed eyeglasses.

"Forsyth!" breathed Blake.

"Good heavens!"

"Jolly old Forsyth," murmured Cardew softly. "I told you he was a lad, didn't I?"

There was a silence until the man threw his match away and walked hastily up the garden again. His figure vanished.

"You knew, Cardew?" breathed Blake.

"I had a vague suspicion at first," said Cardew coolly. "In fact, I've had my giddy optic on jolly old Claude from the first!"

"How on earth did you guess—"

"It wasn't a guess, dear man! I just suspected because the fellow told what seemed to me an utterly purposeless lie! You'll remember the dear man said he had been upstairs snoozing when we arrived that afternoon?"

"Yes; and you asked if he ever walked in his sleep. But—"

"Exactly. An' I asked that," chuckled Cardew, "because he still had snow on his boots. If the fellow had been upstairs for the past hour—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I told you you'd never make a giddy tec, Tommy," said Cardew. "An' I noticed other little clues—only this afternoon I purposely stopped him as he came up the garden.

I noticed then that his hands and clothes were dusty—his clothes somewhat rumbled. I pretended to lead you towards the bobby guardin' the gate, you remember. As I glanced back I spotted him also glance back—to make sure where we went."

"Phew! And that's why you did that?"

"Yes. I was certain then that I'd got my man—and more certain still when Baggy told us what he'd spotted in the library. But we'd better hurry, old beans, if we want to be in at the finish."

"Bai Jove! Why—"

"Our friend Claude has gone to meet the giddy inspector," said Cardew briskly. "You remember he told us he had phoned, and Bentley said he would be here at six. It's about two minutes to, now, old scouts."

"And the scoundrel's gone to meet him?" gasped Herries.

"Exactly! He'll bump into the dear old inspector quite accidentally on the drive somewhere, an' he'll bring him along to the house. More jolly old dust in the inspector's eyes, y'know!"

"But why on earth—"

"You'll see. Buck up!"

They hurried back to the house, and after making certain nobody was near, Cardew led the way into the library again through the french window.

Leaving it open behind them, they took refuge again behind the big screen. Several of them were mystified as to Cardew's expectations. But one or two were not—Tom Merry felt he could guess what was going to happen.

"The last giddy act, dear men!" murmured Cardew, and his eyes glinted in the gloom behind the screen. "Whatever happens, don't move until I give the word! Just sit tight!"

And they "sat tight," and waited.

CHAPTER 10.

The Alibi!

THE fire had burned low in the library. Everything loomed shadowy and gigantic on the walls. The crumpled form in the big armchair looked dreadfully real and terrifying. Though the chums had made the dummy themselves, they shuddered as they glanced at it. The whole strange, ugly affair had tried their nerves to the uttermost.

Cardew felt thankful, from the bottom of his heart, that he had paid the visit to Deepdene. He felt thankful that he had been enabled to solve the mystery so far. Luek had aided him a great deal, certainly. Yet, but for that lie

of Forsyth's, Cardew knew he would not have suspected. The Portuguese stunt was certainly romantic, melodramatic. Yet the inspector had accepted it without question, and Lord Reckness himself had fallen in with that theory.

Cardew himself had heard the story of the Portuguese murderer from his grandfather. Doubtless enough, Forsyth had heard it more than once from Lord Reckness' lips. It was easy to see how the scoundrel had thought of and planned the plot. Cardew gritted his teeth as he thought how near the dastardly plot had come to success.

The juniors scarcely spoke. Now and again a burning brand dropped, crackling, from the fire into the hearth with a splutter of sparks. Now and again the room was lit up by a leaping flame. It seemed an eternity before a sound from outside came, though actually it was only a very few minutes.

From the hall clock six chimed in silvery notes at last.

Cardew tensed. There was another seemingly endless wait, and then, with startling suddenness, what Cardew had been expecting happened.

It was a ring at the front door—a faint ring. And then came a second, much more violent. And simultaneously with the second ring something happened that made the watching juniors nearly jump out of their skins.

From behind the big desk in the corner came a sharp report—a report that sounded thunderous in the confines of the library. A puff of acrid-smelling smoke rose in the air from behind the desk and drifted across the room in the draught from the open french window.



"Good heavens! What—"
 "Quiet!" hissed Cardew. "It's only a blank cartridge! Hark!"

The front door was open. To their ears came startled cries and hurried footsteps. The footsteps stopped outside the door, and they heard the voice of Mr. Claude Forsyth raised in horror.

"Good heavens! We're too late, inspector! Don't you understand? That was a shot—"

The door-knob turned. Then came a banging on the door that increased in violence.

"Break the door down!"

They heard Inspector Bentley's harsh, startled voice.

A crashing on the door began as shoulders were thrust against it. Tense and startling as the situation was, a soft chuckle came from Cardew.

"Go it, old beans!" he murmured.

The crashing on the door increased. It did not seem to occur to the worthy inspector to send someone round to the window, or to go himself. His official mind did not seem to work quickly.

There was a sharp snap, and the door flew inwards, nearly precipitating the burly inspector, an equally burly footman, and Mr. Forsyth into the room in a heap.

In the open doorway a group of frightened, horrified servants clustered.

"Good heavens!"

The inspector rushed to the form in the armchair. Mr. Forsyth switched on the lights. He had just done so, when from Inspector Bentley came a startled cry—a cry of utter amazement.

He had discovered that the humped-up figure in the chair was a dummy.

The next moment Mr. Claude Forsyth also discovered it, as he joined the inspector.

He stood petrified.

The blood rushed from his face, leaving it white as marble. A look of baffled rage, of utter consternation, showed in his eyes, and then he reeled back.

"A dummy!" grunted Inspector Bentley. "What fool's joke is this?"

He looked at Forsyth. That baffled scoundrel opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

Then Cardew's elegant figure emerged from behind the screen.

"I think I can explain, inspector!" he drawled.

The inspector jumped as Cardew confronted them, while Tom Merry and the rest of the hidden juniors emerged.

"What—what does this mean?" snapped the inspector.

"It means this!" snapped Cardew in return, his eyes blazing, as he pointed an accusing finger at the shaking Forsyth. "It means that I give that scoundrel in charge for attempted murder, inspector. Arrest him!"

"Ralph—" It was Lord Reckness' shocked voice from the doorway.

The old nobleman came in, with Benson at his heels, and his lordship's face was startled and amazed.

He was not the only one who was amazed. The inspector looked blankly at Cardew.

"What are you talking about, Master Cardew?" he stammered. "Mr. Forsyth is your father's secretary, and—"

"The boy is a fool!" said the secretary thickly, fear and rage showing now in his eyes. "Lord Reckness, I protest most strongly against your grandson's inexplicable impudence!"

"My dear fellow," gasped his lordship, in great distress, "please do not attach any importance to Ralph's amazing charge. It is absurd!"

"The boy must be mad, your lordship!" panted the rascal, recovering himself somewhat. "The only person who has ever dreamed of attempting your life is that scoundrelly Portuguese—"

"Exactly!" assented Cardew coolly, watching the man like a cat. "And you are Manuel Gonzalez, the jolly old Portuguese. You have heard the story of the Portuguese murderer from your employer, and you have used it to cover your own murderous intentions, you villain!"

"Ralph, my dear boy—"

"If Inspector Bentley wants proof I can supply it," said Cardew. "He will find the clothes worn by the giddy Portuguese merchant in the rustic summer-house in the garden, and with the clothes, false hair and a false moustache, also grease-paints, and other details like that."

"It—it is utter rubbish!" whispered Forsyth. "You—you dare to claim that I have been masquerading as the Portuguese—"

"I do!"

"You young fool! How do you know that?"

"Because my friends and I watched you enter the summer-house as Manuel Gonzalez, and come out again as Claude

Forsyth," said Cardew coolly. "I first suspected you when you lied to us on Wednesday. You claimed that you had been reading upstairs and had dropped asleep. Yet there was fresh snow on your boots."

"Ralph! Good heavens!" gasped his lordship, while the inspector started and looked hard at the shaking Forsyth.

"Since then we have been keepin' watch," resumed Cardew. "And then we staged this little trap," he added, pointing to the dummy. "I persuaded granddad to keep to his room. We then rigged up that dummy in the chair, and we hid behind this screen!"

Mr. Claude Forsyth gave a violent start, and a soft oath escaped him.

"You—you were hiding behind the screen?" he articulated thickly.

"Exactly. We watched you enter in your giddy disguise as the jolly old Portuguese, and we watched you shoot this dummy. Look here, inspector!"

He pointed to a black, scorched hole in the side of the smoking-cap—an ominous hole.

Forsyth panted.

"But—but what are you saying, boy?" stammered the astounded inspector. "Mr. Forsyth was with me when the shot was fired. We were standing on the doorstep, and Mr. Forsyth had just rung the bell."

"Quite so, old scout!" said Cardew calmly. "But this was the weapon that made the report! Shift that desk, you men!"

Tom Merry and Blake eagerly moved the desk aside, revealing the revolver fixed to the wall.

"Good lor!" ejaculated the inspector.

Cardew smiled grimly.

"That was loaded with blank cartridge!" he said crisply.

"A wire runs from it, via the battery, to the front door bell. A violent ring would—and did—explode the blank cartridge. That was the report you heard, inspector. A perfect alibi for jolly old Claude, what?"

There was a silence. Forsyth's lips were working in impatient fury.

"Then—then the real shot—"

"Was fired by this!" snapped Cardew—and with a spring he leaped at Forsyth.

His hand flew to the scoundrel's jacket pocket, where an ominous bulge showed, and when Cardew withdrew his hand an automatic with a curious nozzle on the barrel was in it.

"You've seen a shoo-shoo gun before, I expect, inspector!" he laughed lightly. "An automatic fixed with a silencer! Forsyth fired the real shot with this, and—Stand back, you villain!"

He jumped lightly back, the automatic pointed at Forsyth. That discomfited rascal's face was fiendish, and it was only the wickedly pointed weapon that prevented him from flinging himself at the smiling Cardew's throat.

The inspector was stunned—as was Lord Reckness. But the truth of Cardew's charge was too obvious now—Forsyth's fiendish face was proof enough, and there was a jangle of handcuffs as the police officer stepped towards the secretary.

There was a shout from Tom Merry.

"Look out!"

CHAPTER 11.

The Motive.

IT happened in a moment.

The game was up, and nobody knew it better than Claude Forsyth.

Heedless of the pointing automatic, the would-be murderer jumped forward. Inspector Bentley reeled back as a fist crashed into his face and he crashed headlong.

Forsyth twisted round and leaped for the door behind him—the open door of the french window.

"After him!" yelled Tom Merry.

There was some confusion. The juniors rushed forward, as did Benson and a footman. Cardew dared not fire now, had he wanted to—the risk of hitting a friend was too great. Forsyth had vanished though the window, the curtain falling back into place behind him.

But the juniors reached it the next instant and tore it aside. Inspector Bentley leaped to his feet again and rushed after them. The next moment a police-whistle was shrilling on the night air. It was answered by others from round the grounds. Inspector Bentley must have realised well enough how futile his guard had been—with the enemy in the house itself!

Outside the juniors gazed about them. But the rascally secretary had vanished in the darkness.

"Go back, boys!" snapped the inspector. "My men will soon have the scoundrel! You will only be in the way, and the man is desperate."

The juniors would have followed, none the less, but for Lord Reckness, who appeared at the door behind them, his face white and strained.

"Yes, do not dream of going after that heartless villain, my boys!" he said shakily. "Leave the man to the police! Come back at once!"

The juniors could not disobey a direct order from Lord Reckness, and they pulled up. But two footmen and the butler followed Inspector Bentley as he rushed away into the darkness, shouting. Cardew joined the chums on the grass outside the french window.

He was chuckling. "I'll put my shirt on jolly old Claude, anyway!" he remarked. "Why didn't I shoot, I wonder?"

"He'll get clear, I bet!" grunted Herries. And Herries and Cardew proved to be right.

For some time the excited juniors stayed outside listening to the sounds of the searching, but at last Lord Reckness called them inside and closed the window.

"The police will catch the rascal sooner or later!" he said. "Ralph, my dear boy—"

He was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Inspector Bentley was shown in. The inspector was breathless, and he did not look very happy.

"Ah, you have caught the scoundrel, inspector?" "Unfortunately no, your lordship! But my men are still searching! And I have phoned to all surrounding police stations—the man cannot remain at large for long."

His lordship seemed relieved rather than otherwise. "But there is no need for fear that the man will return," resumed Inspector Bentley grimly. "His game was an exceedingly clever game, but it is finished. And for that, Lord Reckness," said the police officer, with a glance at Cardew, "you have your grandson to thank! A lad of unusual intelligence, sir, and—hum—of remarkable deductive ability!"

"Unquestionably!" said his lordship, smiling at Cardew. "But the case even yet is not clear! With your permission I would like to question your grandson, Lord Reckness."

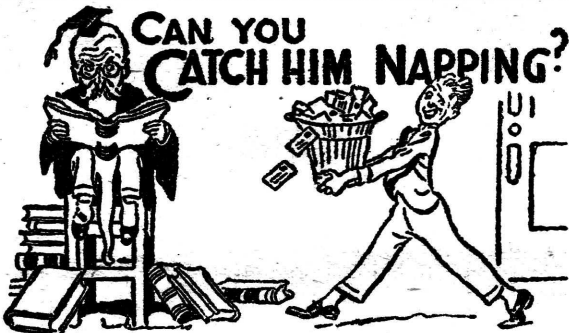
"By all means, inspector! I also am still amazed and bewildered."

The notebook came out, and the smiling Cardew gave a resume of their adventures. The worthy inspector blushed as Cardew explained how the snow on Forsyth's boots had given him the first suspicion.

"And you suspected him from the first, Master Cardew?" "I decided to keep my jolly old optics on him after that

(Continued on next page.)

The Question is—well, whatever it is, Ask the Oracle!



Old Whiskers is getting bumpitious! If someone doesn't beat him with a question soon his head will get too large for the office door! Come on, do your stuff!

"I HOPE you're wide awake this morning, my lad," was the Editor's first remark when I stuck my head through the door on Monday morning. I couldn't make a suitable retort, because my cranium being, as you all know, a bit of an out-size in hat-rests, it got jammed in the aforesaid door, and young Adolphus, the O.B., had to come and shove me through.

Of course, the whole thing ended in my falling headfirst on to the carpet, and the parrot cackling at me from the cage. "Get up!" bellowed the Ed. "I've got a desk full of letters from readers. Quick now, tell me how a speedometer works!"

"A speedometer, sir," I spluttered, "is a contrivance for finding out the speed at which a vehicle is travelling, and the way it works is this. If you take the diameter of one of the wheels and the gear ratio between the wheel and the speedometer shaft, and then take—"

"Look here, my lad," the Editor broke in, "if you go on like that, you'll be taking a week off for a new set of false teeth. Explain in simple language how the speedometer is driven, will you?"

I took a deep breath. "A speedometer is usually driven from the transmission, sir," I explained, "through a flexible shaft and a gear mechanism. A principle often applied is that known as the magnetic drag. A cup of sheet aluminium is mounted on a spindle and held in position by a spiral spring. A permanent magnet—"

"You'll be taking a spiral spring down the staircase if you don't dry up!"

roared the Ed. "And talking of someone has moved it. It rises to 28,250 feet, and it was climbed for the first time in 1909 by the Duke of Abruzzi."

"It gets better and better, sir, believe me. My young nephews were only saying to me this morning, what a lot of fine features we've had in the paper since the New Year."

"That's right, Whiskers, we have, and one day we'll put your features in, and then the other features will look better than ever—what? But

look here, Whiskers, my lad—" "You'll excuse me, sir," I broke in, "but I would prefer you to address me as Oracle, not Whiskers!"

"I'm not going to bandy words with you!" snapped the Ed.

"I'm not bandy!" I snapped back. The Ed. picked up a letter. "Know anything about mountains?" he asked. I told him that I used to collect them as a lad, and that he could fire away with his questions.

"Well, Whiskers," said he, "a young reader in Hornsey wants to know if Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world, and whether anyone has ever been to the top!"

"Yes, sir. Mount Everest is the highest mountain," I replied, "29,002 feet high, and not long ago a band of brave men tried to climb it. Two of them, named Mallory and Irvine, got within 400 feet of the top, and then disappeared. It's quite possible, sir, that they got to the actual top, and perished."

"Pretty difficult work, that?" said the Ed.

"The great difficulty," I told him, "is breathing. The climbers had to take seven deep breaths with each step they took."

"What's the second highest mountain, oh learned one?"

"K2," I said promptly.

"How d'you spell it?"

"You don't," said I. "Just K2."

"I've heard of a thing being A1," said the Ed., "but I've never heard of a mountain being K2."

"Well, this mountain's called that, anyway," I answered. "It's the second

highest mountain in the world, and it's in Cashmere—at least, it was, unless someone has moved it. It rises to 28,250 feet, and it was climbed for the first time in 1909 by the Duke of Abruzzi."

"Very well, Whiskers, I'll take your word for it. Now, here's a question you ought to know something about—bathchairs. Ever been for a ride in a bathchair, old son?"

"No," I snapped. "They are only for old people."

"A Brondesbury reader asks us why they're called bathchairs."

"Because the man who invented them, some two hundred years ago, lived in the city of Bath."

"Peter Crump, a Walthamstow reader, wants us to tell him what the Royal Humane Society medal is given for."

"In the first place," I explained learnedly, "our young chum had better hear what the Royal Humane Society is. This society was formed over 150 years ago, and was the work of a physician who first made it generally known that a person's life can sometimes be saved, even though they have been in the water a long time, and appear dead. The first depot opened by the Royal Humane Society is the one in Hyde Park on the north bank of the Serpentine. The gold medal they give is for the greatest act of gallantry in life-saving performed during the year, and it's known as the Stanhope Medal."

"Now tell a Glasgow reader what a barbecue is."

"In the United States a barbecue is an open-air feast, and in Cuba a barbecue is a room for storing grain. Years ago a barbecue was the name given to a gridiron on which animals were roasted whole. Originally a barbecue was a framework over a fire—"

"Dry up!" interrupted the Ed. "That's the worst of you. If I ask you something you know a bit about, you go on gassing all the morning. Just take my parrot out of the cage, will you, and teach it some French—you know, bon joor, Editor, and all that sort of thing. I'm going to Paris for my spring holiday, and I want that bird to be able to talk to people."

"Right-ho, sir!" said I, gleefully grabbing the parrot by the beak. I was keen on the idea, and made up my mind to teach that parrot a few things that would make a Paris policeman's hair stand on end when the Ed. got over there.

lie," smiled Cardew. "Then other little things—it was Forsyth's room that the giddy Portuguese made for when we chased him upstairs, but I was too close on his heels. Afterwards it was into Forsyth's room that Tom Merry chased him, but this time Tommy was too quick for him. Then—but you've got all the giddy yarn now, inspector."

"Not quite!" Inspector Bentley looked at Lord Reckness. "There is still the question of motive. You can suggest none, my lord?"

"None. I have treated Forsyth with unusual kindness and consideration. He came to me with good credentials. As a man who claimed to have been shell-shocked in the War I made many allowances for him. The motive for his wicked plot is beyond me."

"Yet there must be a motive, my lord. If you will pardon me—in the event of your demise—"

"The estates are entailed; but as regards my personal fortune I made a will several months ago, during a slight illness," said Lord Reckness, smiling. "By that will, Forsyth would have benefited by five hundred pounds. Absurd to suppose that he would commit such a dastardly crime for such a comparatively paltry sum!"

"I have known men to commit murder for a fraction of that amount, my lord," replied the inspector, with a grunt.

"Let's see the jolly old will, anyway, granddad!" suggested Cardew.

"It is scarcely necessary," said the inspector. "But if it is at hand, my lord—"

"You shall see it!"

Lord Reckness crossed to a safe fitted into the wall. He returned a few moments later with the will in his hand.

He unfolded it and handed it to the inspector. That worthy glanced down the document, and then he gave a start.

"Cough it up, inspector!" smiled Cardew encouragingly. "Has the jolly old five hundred grown to five thousand or fifty?"

"You are certain, my lord, that Forsyth was to benefit only by five hundred pounds?"

"Most certainly!"

"The sum stated on this document is five thousand pounds," said Inspector Bentley grimly.

"Then there is your giddy motive, inspector!" drawled Cardew.

"A very clever forgery, undoubtedly!" resumed the police officer, as he handed the will to the startled peer. "You have been harbouring an accomplished rogue as well as a heartless scoundrel, Lord Reckness!"

"Good gad!"

Lord Reckness took the document and scanned it closely. His face was a study as he looked up at last.

"The villain!" he gasped. "I see it all now, of course! This will was made in haste—a sudden heart attack and I became alarmed. No copy was taken, nor did I trouble to send this to my lawyer. I am very careless in such matters, I am afraid. That scoundrel was well aware of this, and he had easy access to that safe—I trusted him implicitly. He was well aware, alas, that both witnesses—old servants—have since, by a strange coincidence, died. Good gad! I remember having told him over dinner one evening of the affair of Gonzalez, the Portuguese, and he has made use of that character to turn suspicion from himself. The scheming villain!"

The inspector rose.

"The whole case is clear now, my lord," he said. "With your permission I will come again in the morning, when I hope to report the capture of Forsyth—unless, of course, you send for me in the meantime."

"Very good, inspector!"

And Inspector Bentley took his departure, looking none too happy. The mystery was solved now. But it must have occurred to him that there was not overmuch credit due to him for the successful outcome of the affair.

"My dear Ralph, I have not yet fully expressed my deep gratitude to you and your friends for what you have done," said Lord Reckness, his voice quiet, but shaky still. "I will take the opportunity now!"

"My dear granddad, please don't!" groaned Cardew. "We'll take the jolly old speech as read. Let's talk about somethin' more cheery—Baggy's approachin' demise, frinstance. If he scoffs any more chestnuts he'll surely burst!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dinner was over, and Lord Reckness, with Cardew and Tom Merry & Co., were seated round a blazing fire in the library, the leaping flames lighting up their cheery, ruddy faces.

"Well, we don't deserve much credit, anyway!" laughed Tom Merry. "Cardew did it all—the whole credit is due to him, Lord Reckness!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I like that, Tom Merry!" spluttered Baggy Trimble, with his mouth full of chestnuts. "What about me? Where do I come in?"

And Baggy blinked indignantly at the juniors. Baggy was in clover. He had bagged the cosiest corner by the fire, and he sprawled in a big armchair, with silken cushions under his feet, behind his head, and round about him.

"And where do you come in, Baggy?" demanded Blake.

"Me? Well, of all the nerve!" said Baggy warmly. "Where do I come in? Didn't I save Cardew's life? And if I hadn't saved Cardew's life how the thump could he have saved his grandfather? Tell me that!"

"That," smiled Cardew, "is indisputable logic!"

"If you ask me, the credit for the whole affair is due to me," said Baggy, blinking indignantly at the grinning juniors. "Look here, I want it distinctly understood that when we get back to St. Jim's you fellows will stick to the truth. I shall insist that you tell the fellows all that I've done—that I'm the fellow who saved the situation. The right man in the right place, as usual—see?"

"Oh, quite!" said Cardew gravely. "Remember that, you fellows! Baggy bags all the credit. We must give him his due."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all right, then," said Baggy, satisfied. "Hand the chestnuts over, Manners—don't be lazy, you know!"

And Manners, like the cat in the fable, raked out some more roasted chestnuts from the glowing embers and passed them over. And Baggy's squeaking voice was silent for some time after that. He was too busy eating to dispute, at the moment, the triumph of Cardew, as a detective.

THE END.

(That was a thriller, chums, eh? Next week's GEM will make you laugh! Gussy has got another idea! Don't miss "Gussy the Optimist!")

Next Week's Programme!

"GUSSY THE OPTIMIST!"
By Martin Clifford.

Side-splitting Long Complete Yarn of
St. Jim's.

Another Gripping, Complete Yarn of
"THE DEEP-SEA PALS!"

Further Red-Hot Chapters of our Knock-Out
Serial

"THE RANGERS' RECRUIT!"

And other fine features.

A Gripping Yarn of Ocean Mystery!



DEEP-SEA PALS.

"Opal, Ahoy!"

BILLY ROSCOE did not know exactly what it was that had roused him from a deep sleep, but he was alarmed. He tumbled from his bunk and pulled on his heavy sea clothes, then rushed out on deck.

The trawler *Sapphire*, of Lowestoft, L.T. 0033, lay rolling to the heavy swell. Her engines were silent, and all round the thick, choking fog swirled and eddied.

Skipper Roscoe, Billy's uncle, leant out of the wheel-house window, his hand on the siren cord. At intervals he let her blare as a warning in case other vessels were close at hand. He saw Billy coming from the fo'c'sle, and yelled at him.

"I can't leave here. Something wrong with Frank."

"All right!"

Billy rushed to the engine-room hatch from which poured a cloud of steam. He shouted down into that inferno:

"Frank!"

Muffled and indistinct came the answer:

"Hallo!"

"You all right?" asked Billy.

"Nothing wrong with me, but you might open that skylight and let some o' this steam out."

"What's happened?"

"She's blown a valve."

"Bad for us," said Billy, opening the skylight.

The steam cleared somewhat, and he saw Frank struggling with the broken valve.

"Just our luck!" grumbled Frank.

"Can you mend it?"

"In time," said Frank.

"And time might be important."

"In what way?"

"Well, supposing the fog clears and Sims sights us?"

"I'm not worrying much about Sims," said Billy.

"Neither am I!" retorted Frank. "But there's only three of us to run this hooker into port, and we've a darned long way to go yet. We couldn't stop Sims coming aboard, especially if he brings half a dozen men to help him."

"I see what you mean," said Billy. "But he'll be lucky if he finds us in this fog. Want any help?"

"Come on down," said Frank.

"I'll report to the skipper first," said Billy.

He went back to the wheel-house, where Skipper Roscoe leant out of the window waiting to hear the news.

"Valve blown," reported Billy. "Seems like we'll stick round here for several hours."

"A pity," said the skipper. "But it can't be helped."

"Where are we exactly?" asked Billy.

"Last night," growled the skipper, "it was blowing great guns and not a star to be seen. Early this morning, before dawn, the wind dropped like a stone, the temperature

and this fog came up blotting out everything. And you ask me where we are! How the dickens do I know?"

"Then, with the engines not working, ought we to drop anchor?" asked Billy. "We may drift ashore somewhere."

The skipper looked worried.

"I doubt if we're within twenty miles of land, though it's all guesswork," he said. "We're short-handed. If we drop the anchor we've got to lift it again. I think we'll risk it and drift. How long will Frank be?"

"I'm going to help him," said Billy. "Maybe an hour."

"All right. I'll keep the foghorn going, and I'll bawl if I want you. I think our greatest danger is Sims."

"So do I!" agreed Billy, returning to the engine-room.

Aboard the *Sapphire* were the skipper, James Roscoe, who was also the owner; his nephew, Billy Roscoe; and Frank Parkes, Billy's pal.

The *Sapphire* was short-handed, and Billy and Frank really belonged to the trawler *Opal*. It had come about in this wise. Skipper Roscoe owned both the *Opal* and the *Sapphire*. In bad times he had borrowed two hundred pounds from Skipper Sims of the *Opal*. Sims was an unscrupulous man, with evil ambitions, who stuck at nothing to get what he wanted, and what he wanted above all was to own the *Opal*, the trawler he commanded. He had insisted that Roscoe should give him a mortgage on the *Opal* as security for the two hundred pounds. Then he laid his plans.

Sims had bribed Tom Roberts, the mate of the *Sapphire*, to bore a hole in her hull, in the hopes that she would sink in the first storm she encountered. The crew would have a good chance of being rescued amidst the fishing fleet off Iceland, and Roberts would time things carefully. The

idea was that by this loss Skipper Roscoe would be unable to repay the two hundred pounds, and Sims would claim ownership of the *Opal* in repayment of the debt.

But several things had happened to spoil that plan. The *Sapphire* had run full tilt into a storm that was not expected, and had sprung a leak. Scared by the knowledge of the hole he had bored in her hull, Roberts got panicky, and, with the crew, abandoned the ship, although Skipper Roscoe refused to leave her.

The *Opal* had sighted her. Billy and Frank were aboard the *Opal* at that time. Billy wanted Sims to heave-to and investigate matters, but he refused. There was a row, in which Billy was accidentally knocked overboard. Frank went after him with a lifebelt, but Sims deserted them both, and all that was left to them to do was to swim to the *Sapphire*, where they found Skipper Roscoe unconscious, and the ship badly knocked about and waterlogged.

But they patched her up, and, having attended to the

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,199.

AMAZING SCENES ABOARD THE SAPPHIRE!

Boarding party coolly swamped
overboard—with scalding hot water!

skipper, vowed to bring the Sapphire to port, and so fool Sims, after all. They had a sporting chance of doing it, but the fog had followed the terrific storm, and the engines had raced a bit through want of attention. Frank knew a deal about engines, but he couldn't be in two places at once. The valve-head had blown out, and the ship was helpless in the swirling fog, heaving with the swell that worried Billy considerably.

"The skipper won't drop anchor," he said to Frank.

"But this swell seems like a ground swell to me."

"Hasn't he fixed our position yet?" asked Frank.

"No chance," said Billy.

"Hammer!" said Frank curtly.

Billy passed the required implement, and conversation was impossible against the row Frank kicked up with the hammer.

"That's that!" grunted Frank. "Get her stoked up with a good head of steam, and we'll test her."

Billy dived down to the stokehole and humped coal on the furnace with such energy that the perspiration streamed down his face. The fires roared, and the boiler complained. Frank watched his valve anxiously, hoping it would hold.

The skipper was still in the wheel-house. The siren blared its warning through the fog, and from out the fog came a reply—Whoo-oo-ee!

Billy heard it, and started for the deck. The skipper was already yelling for him.

"Hey, Billy! Fog lifting!"

"And where's the stranger?" asked Billy, coming up from the stoke-hole smothered with coal dust.

"Can't see her yet. Listen for it!"

The skipper tugged at the siren-cord and the warning blared. From ahead came the answer, louder than before.

"Either she's coming straight at us, or we're drifting," said Billy. "We ought to have dropped anchor. I reckon we—"

"There she is!" snapped the skipper. "A trawler, Billy!"

Billy leapt up on the bulwarks, steadying himself by a stack-stay. He peered ahead through the whirling fog wreaths that now were thinner. He made out the lines of a trawler, and it puzzled him.

"Something fishy here!" he said. "May be fancy, but her siren sounds familiar."

"What d'you mean?" snapped the skipper.

"If that isn't the Opal, I'll eat my hat!" retorted Billy.

The skipper said nothing, contenting himself with studying the ship. She was forging ahead through the fog, coming nearer. The Sapphire's siren warned her, but she made no reply this time. She changed her course slightly to starboard.

"Look!" cried Billy. "Registration marks hidden!"

The fog was clearing rapidly as the wind sprang up, and the sun was struggling to shine, looking like a great orange ball in the east, angry and menacing. Ahead was the Opal—there was no doubt about it—and fisherfolk can recognise boats from their home port two or three miles away.

But Sims was up to dirty work again. That was obvious. Dirty canvas had been draped over the registration marks on the smoke stack, and a sail hung over the bulwarks so as to hide conveniently the letters and figures on her free-board.

"The skunk!" hissed Skipper Roscoe. "Fishing inside foreign waters!"

"We've got to shift, then!" snapped Billy. "If we're inside the Norwegian three mile limit."

Billy saw that they were lowering a boat over the side of the Opal. Men dropped into the dinghy and rowed strongly towards the Sapphire. Sims was in the stern-sheets, two men rowed, and another was in the bows, boathook in his hand. The strong rowers sent the dinghy leaping over the waves.

"Repel Boarders!"

NO time was to be lost for whatever scheme Sims had in hand. The fog had gone and merely hung on the eastern horizon like a black cloud. In the west great billowy clouds were sweeping out of the northern Atlantic—dazzling white they were, with here and there a grey smudge to indicate a terrific wind up aloft that might swoop down at any moment and whip the wave-crests to foam.

Another storm was brewing, and Sims knew it, but he refused to hold back on that account. His first plot had failed, and that was all the more reason why his second attempt must be successful.

When the dinghy was within a cable's length of the Sapphire he rose to his feet and hailed her.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,199.

"Sapphire, ahoy!"

"You sheer off, Sims!" bellowed Skipper Roscoe.

"Don't you want help?" asked Sims.

"Not from you!"

"I'm coming aboard," yelled Sims.

"Gosh!" cried Billy. "Look who's in the bows!"

It was Roberts, the former mate of the Sapphire, who had been picked up by the Opal. The sight made Skipper Roscoe knit his brows. The two rowers were former members of the Sapphire's crew who had deserted her.

"You bring them skunks aboard here and I'll brain 'em!" bawled the skipper.

"They're your crew," retorted Sims. "And you've got two o' my crew! Never mind him, boys. Lay us alongside!"

"Keep clear!" bawled the skipper in a rage.

"Your crew!" said Sims maliciously.

"Deserters!" hissed the skipper. "I don't want 'em!"

"Bend to it!" cried Sims.

The rowers put forth all their strength and the dinghy scraped alongside the Sapphire. It was obvious that Sims meant to become master of the ship, and it was plain that Skipper Roscoe would lose everything if he succeeded.

As the dinghy grated against the side of the trawler Roberts, the former mate, leapt over the bulwarks.

The sight of him made the skipper see red, and he leapt at him savagely, swinging the belaying pin. Roberts grabbed the skipper's wrist and held the weapon poised in mid-air, while they wrestled together fiercely, knee to knee.

Billy went for Sims as he came over the side. Sims was fighting mad, and Billy wasn't hanging back. He crashed his fist into Sims' bearded face, caught him full on the mouth, and shot him back into the dinghy with a crash that nearly sunk the craft.

But the other two men were clambering aboard, and Billy found himself forced back against the wheel-house, fighting madly, hitting out at the bronzed faces that leered at him. He shipped blows himself, but hardly felt them in the heat of the unequal combat.

Billy saw Frank poke his head out of the engine-room hatch, and yelled at him.

"Come on, Frank! We're nearly whacked!"

"Hear that?" panted Sims, looking groggy. "They're whacked! At 'em, lads, and wipe 'em up! We'll show 'em!"

But the Opal blew a blast on her siren, then another. Sims took one look, and a cunning expression came into his beady eyes.

Before he had time to say anything Skipper Roscoe was on his feet again.

"Overboard with 'em!" he snarled. "Ready, Billy?"

He stepped forward to do battle yet again, but suddenly Billy grabbed him by the arm and held him back.

"What the dickens!" he exclaimed.

"Keep out of range!" snapped Skipper Roscoe. "Look!"

The grin that came to the skipper's face broadened, and then there was a fierce hissing, and a stream of hot water hit the men from the Opal.

Sims caught most of it, and it was scalding. The force of it sent him reeling against the bulwarks. His great sea-boots slipped on the wet deck and over he went into the dinghy, while the two seamen scrambled aboard after him, only too glad to get away from that hot water from the hose that Frank held.

Billy was suddenly aware that the engines of the Sapphire were pounding and thudding again, the screw lashing the water to foam under her counter. She was moving in an erratic circle because no one was at the helm.

Skipper Roscoe leant weakly against the winch drum, mopping his brow, while Billy rushed to the helm in the half-wrecked wheel-house, and kept her heading south by the compass.

Sims stood up in the dinghy brandishing his clenched fist at them.

"I'll get you yet!" he bellowed angrily.

Then there was another sharp summons from the Opal's siren, and he motioned to his men to row him back to his own ship.

Skipper Roscoe began to recover and take an interest in things. He frowned as the Opal sounded her siren.

"What's the matter with her?" he muttered half to himself.

"Nervous," said Billy. "Afraid they'd lose their precious skipper when Frank gave him a wash-down with the fire-hose! Guess you saved us, Frank."

"It was a brainwave, wasn't it?" said Frank, half in and half out of the engine-room hatch.

"Engines all right, Frank!"

"Seems like it. The valve's holding its own; but—"

"Put the helm down!" roared Skipper Roscoe, suddenly rushing from the fo'c'sle head.

"What for?" asked Billy.

He thrust his head through the aperture where the window of the wheel-house would have been if it hadn't been wrecked. He peered astern, and saw the Opal steaming away to the north-west at full speed.

"They're not coming after us," he said.

"Look ahead!" raved the skipper, coming aft.

The weather was growing thick. Visibility was bad. Overhead the sun was obscured by driving storm clouds. The wind began to howl and moan, and the rain was coming in blinding sheets—the usual type of weather one expects at this time of the year on the Norwegian coast.

But through the murk of it all Billy made out the long, dark line of land on his port bow, only two miles away, he estimated. That was serious enough for a British trawler, but to make things worse there was a steamer coming straight at them from the south. She was not very plain against the grey sky behind her. That indicated that she was in all probability painted grey. Her smoke trailed out astern of her hugging the wave crests and streaming like a pennant from her stacks.

"Gosh!" gasped Billy. "A gunboat!"

"That's what they wanted Sims for back on the Opal!" said the skipper harshly. "He's been fishing inside the Norwegian three-mile limit."

"But we've done nothing wrong," argued Frank.

"Look inshore," said the skipper. They looked, and saw several small fishing-boats speeding northwards. "Bergen trawlers, or I miss my guess," continued Skipper Roscoe.

"They saw Sims with his nets down inside their waters, and wireless for the gunboat. Sims was running for it when he met us in the fog. Now he's got clear away, and we'll be arrested."

"But we've never dropped our trawl," said Billy.

"Think they'll believe us? Aren't we inside their limit now?" argued the skipper. "Haven't we got fish in the after-hold? Put that helm down?"

"What are you going to do?" asked Frank.

"Fool Mister Gunboat, if I can!" rasped the skipper. "You get down and coax every bit o' speed you can get out o' them engines."

"Trust me!" said Frank, disappearing abruptly down the engine-room hatch.

"I'm taking the helm," said the skipper. "Stand by, Billy!"

Running For It!

SKIPPER ROSCOE climbed up into what was left of the wheel-house and gripped the wheel. He brought the Sapphire round to starboard until she was heading almost due west, running full tilt into the wind.

For the first time they realised how bad the weather had become. The wind howled at them and flung the waves over the Sapphire's bluff bows.

"Put the fores'l on her, Billy," bellowed the skipper. "Lift her nose!"

It was hard work for Billy, single-handed, to haul the straining brown canvas to the top of the jury mast he had fitted in place of the wrecked foremast.

The gunboat saw their manoeuvre, and altered her course to overtake them. She was driving athwart the storm, her engines racing, and at every lurch she put her nose deep into the heart of the rolling waves, until only her fore control tower could be seen above the creamy smother. She



Billy crashed his flat full into Sims' jaw and sent him crashing back into the dinghy again!

cut through every wave, while the Sapphire went over the crests, shooting up, then diving down so sharply that it seemed as if she would never rise again. Yet she did!

Then the gunboat let fly with her bow chaser, and the shell struck the water a hundred yards ahead of the Sapphire, sending up a column of spray.

"Curse Sims!" muttered the skipper. "We're running from the law because he's broken it!"

Boom! The gunboat repeated her summons. This time the shell came nearer. They were getting the range.

"It's getting warm," said Billy, clinging to the side of the wheel-house.

"So's the weather," grunted the skipper. "That's our only chance. Hope it gets worse!"

That hope looked like being gratified, although it was doubtful which was the greater danger—the weather or the gunboat. Another shell roared and whined towards them, dropped with a plop into the water not ten yards from their bows, and they drove into the spray of it.

"They'll get us next time!" said Billy.

"More speed!" bawled the skipper.

"More speed, Frank!" bellowed Billy.

"Come and get it, then!" retorted Frank. "If I squeeze any more out of her the boiler'll bust!"

"Then bust it!" yelled the skipper. "It's that or a Norwegian prison!"

Frank meddled with his levers, and oiled his cranks and pistons. What he did he never explained, but he certainly did coax more speed out of those rattling engines, while the storm howled louder and more menacing than ever. The wind roared and tore at them. The waves ran high, and the spray was icy, pattering on the decks like hail. The rain came down out of the west like smoke, careering over the desolate waters before the gusts like giant curtains.

The skipper held on his course, his face set and grim, his

blue eyes glinting. He was outside the three-mile limit now, but the gunboat was hanging on to him, running on the same tack. Another shell came whining through the air. It plopped in the water close to their bows, and the spray swept over them.

"Next one will be a bullseye," said Billy. "They've got our range all right!" growled the skipper. "But batten down that hatch there. Look slippery! Number one size squall coming down. Take a reef in that fores'l. Hustle, now!"

Billy rushed about, obeying orders, and got the jobs done in record time. The gunboat yawed a bit as a squall struck her. Her gun flashed and the skipper wrenched at the helm. The Sapphire put her nose up into the wind, then paid off smartly. The squall came screaming down on her, hit her, heeled her over, smothered her with pounding waves that set the decks awash, spun her round, as the skipper had foreseen, turned her until she was running on the opposite tack—and the gunboat's shell hit the water two hundred yards astern of her, or where she would have been if the course had not been altered.

Back towards Norway they were rushing, but the weather was growing worse. The gunboat was fighting to turn and continue the pursuit. The waves swept over her from stem to stern. She let fly with twelve-pounder amidships, but the aim was too erratic to worry about.

"But," bellowed Billy against the wind, "if you hold on this tack you'll run us ashore!"

But Skipper Roscoe knew what he was doing. He was not steering in a straight line, but gradually bringing his gallant vessel round to the south.

"We've got to hug the wind!" snapped the skipper. "Take a reef in the fores'l and haul in y'r slack!"

"Ay, skipper!" said Billy, jumping to orders.

The gunboat was coming round, however, in pursuit, and there was the chance of her intercepting the Sapphire. He let fly again with his bow chasers and the shells came dangerously close to the trawler.

Skipper Roscoe did not so much as wince as the spray from a shell drenched him from head to foot. He held his way, watching every movement of the gunboat, as far as he could see her through the driving rain.

The squalls became more frequent and more furious; and when the rain drove along it blotted out everything completely.

Billy came clawing his way aft, and when he came abreast of the forehatch he saw the dim figure of a man rise from the lee scuppers and stand there swaying.

"Roberts!" gasped Billy.

It was the former mate of the Sapphire, knocked senseless in the fight by Skipper Roscoe, and who, in the excitement, had remained where he had dropped, forgotten.

Billy saw Roberts leap at the wheel-house. He had something in his hand, and he struck out with it savagely.

Billy leapt at him and grabbed his arm. The blow missed the skipper's head and crashed on the compass, smashing it to smithereens.

But the attack caused the skipper to lose his hold on the wheel and lurch against it, forcing the spokes down.

The rudder was jammed hard over starboard and the Sapphire spun round, nose up to the wind, and a squall swept over her.

Billy smashed a blow at Roberts and felled him, then jumped on top of him and held him down.

Then Skipper Roscoe let out a yell of dismay and whirled the wheel furiously. Billy glanced up and his blood ran cold.

Out of the squall the gunboat was bearing down on them, not twenty yards away. The skipper fought with the wheel. Frank came up out of the engine-room and grabbed a lifebelt.

Roberts, in his attack, had caused the skipper accidentally to alter the course. His blow smashed the compass and Skipper Roscoe could not bring his ship back on the true course again. Now the gunboat was almost on top of them. It looked as if her keen prow would cut them in two like wire going through cheese.

But Billy left Roberts to fend for himself and rushed to the wheel-house, helping his uncle to bring the helm hard up.

The Sapphire paid off gallantly, and that speeding grey form missed her by five yards.

"Gee, that was close!" murmured the skipper. "Closer than I'd ever had dared do it. But we're safe. She'll never catch us now. By the time she's turned on our tack we'll have a five mile lead of her. Guess we've got Roberts to thank for this, although—"

Billy needed no further reminder. He leapt from the wheel-house to the deck just in time. Roberts was scrambling to his feet, an ugly look on his face.

Billy jumped on him and forced him down again. They fought there, but the fight was brief. Billy got his man with a beautiful half-arm jab to the jaw that knocked him senseless. After that it was easy to bind his hands and feet.

"We're short-handed as it is," said Billy, "and we can't run risks with this chap."

"Lock him in his own cabin," said the skipper, "till he cools down. I'll talk with him later on, the dirty skunk!"

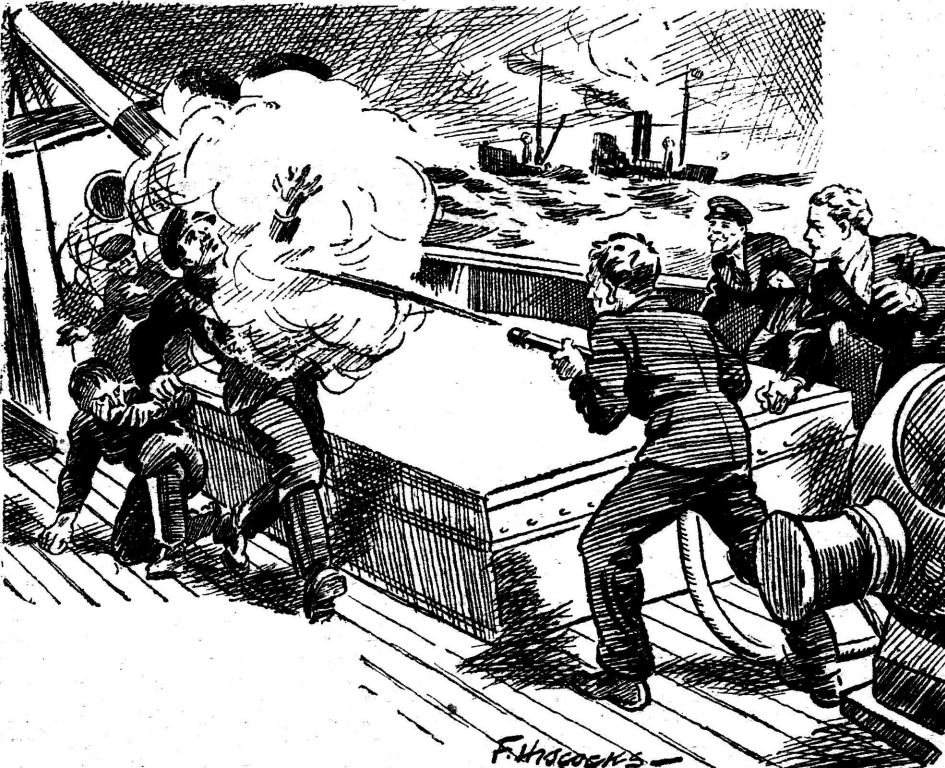
The storm cleared about two hours later, and they steered by the sun that shone wanly in a troubled sky.

"That's the second time we've ditched Sims," said Frank, coming up from the engine-room.

"Don't crow," warned the skipper. "We've got one of Sims' pals aboard; we've got no compass—and I reckon we're due for hectic times before we make port."

THE END

(Billy and Frank, the deep-sea pals, feature in another thrilling sea adventure next week. Be sure and read all about it, chums.)



With a fierce hissing a stream of hot water hit the men from the Opal and sent them reeling backwards!

Our Red-Hot Detective and Football Serial!



The blow missed its mark, and carried forward by the impetus, Bill crashed into one of the supports.

THE RANGERS' RECRUIT!

By
HEDLEY SCOTT

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

BILL HARTLEY, a six-foot edition of brawn and muscle, with flaming red hair, is "sent down" from Oxford. Arriving home, he quarrels with his father and goes to London to find work. There he meets Major Carstairs, an old friend, who is chairman of the Cashton Rangers F.C. After a trial Bill is signed on by the club, only to find that their centre-forward is Marchant Buxton, who brought about his dismissal from the "Varsity. Buxton, who is also the leader of a gang of crooks, is determined to ruin Bill, but Ferrers Locke intervenes. Inspector McDougally gets on the trail of the gang, but is shot down in cold blood by unknown assailants, who afterwards set fire to his "digs." Bill, however, heroically saves the inspector's dog. Later, Cashton Rangers play Bidstead Wanderers, and rumour has it that the Rangers have sold the match. During the first half Bill, for some unaccountable reason, repeatedly misses gull-edged chances of scoring, with the result that when he enters the dressing-room his team-mates accuse him openly of selling the game.

(Now read on.)

The Hero of the Hour!

"YOU deliberately missed those chances!" snapped Jennings, the half-back. "That's what it seemed to me, you rotter!"

Bill Hartley's face turned a furious crimson.

"That's a lie!" he retorted. "And you know it! I can't make it out! My eyes—they seem queer!"

"Your eyes!" sneered Jennings. "It's your heart that's queer. You're yellow! You're selling the game!"

There was a noisy chorus to Jennings' accusation. White now with fury, Bill threw off Tich's detaining hand and leaped forward. His fist shot out like a rocket. Certain it was, had Jennings been in the passage of that blow, he would have hit the floor in a stunned heap. But, even as Bill's shots at goal had missed by feet, so that mule-kicking right fist missed its objective by inches.

Carried forward by the impetus of the blow, Bill brought up sharp against one of the steel pillars. His forehead struck home with a sickening sound that echoed dully round room. Next moment he had slithered to the floor in an unconscious heap.

Tich Freeman and Sandy Ferguson were the first to reach him.

"Stunned!" muttered the old trainer, dashing a gleaming wet sponge in Bill's white, set face. "It was a good job Jennings didn't stop that right."

Jennings was offering himself congratulations on that score, but he had little sympathy to waste on Bill Hartley, and neither had the rest of the team. Back into the minds

of all of them had returned the rumours that had preceded the match; came also recollection of the flash-looking book-maker they had encountered at Euston Station.

Was there any real connection between the incidents?

That was a question every player asked himself; that was a question to which every player, with but one exception, found a unanimous affirmative answer. The one dissentient was Tich Freeman. With his diminutive arms curled round Bill's broad shoulders, Tich faced the others challengingly.

"You lot of moulting owls!" he roared. "You rotten lot of pals! You've condemned him, because it's the easiest way out. If you'd got twopennyworth of pluck between you, you'd not jaw like a lot of old women, but pile in and pull the game out of the fire! I tell you Bill's as straight as a die; he'd no more think of selling the side than robbing his grandmother!"

And then, like a douche of cold water, came a low voice from amidst the crowd.

"What was he sent down from Oxford for?"

"Pinching the games' funds!" volunteered another player who wished to remain anonymous.

And Major Carstairs, still in the background, started violently. Even into his mind doubts were beginning to take array. Tich Freeman snapped his fingers.

"Fools!" he exclaimed impatiently. "You've listened to that swanking idiot Buxton's mischief-makin' chatter. What's Hartley's Oxford business got to do with this matter?"

"Everything," said Jennings quietly and simply. "Some bookmakers will pay handsomely for 'cooked' results."

And Major Carstairs' doubts troubled him more than ever now. He pushed his way forward in his usual boisterous fashion.

"Come, come! This won't do!" he snapped. "I've heard all this nonsense. I've been here at the doorway. Let's have no more of it!"

Under Sandy Ferguson's persuasions Bill was showing signs of returning consciousness. Above his temple there was a nasty bruise, colourful testimony to the force his head had struck the pillar.

"Take it easy, son," said Sandy, as Bill opened his eyes and shook his head. "Ye'll be all right in a wee minute or two."

But in that minute or two the two teams were lining up

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,199.

BILL CAN'T SCORE A GOAL!
Every shot goes wide! Angry crowd accuses him of selling match! But Bill's a match for anyone when he gets going again!

for the second half—without Bill. Despite his protestations, Sandy would not allow Bill to re-enter the field of play. As the Fates decreed it proved a piece of rare fortune. Just as Bill was declaring for the umpteenth time that he was fit, Ferrers Locke entered the dressing-room.

He crossed over to Bill, a shadow of concern on his finely chiselled features.

"Just got down here, Bill," he said briefly. "Noticed you weren't with the team. Anything wrong?"

In a semi-incoherent burst of bitterness Bill described his lapses in the first half. Locke allowed him to run on without interruption. Then, at the conclusion, he motioned Bill to the window. A north-east light lit up the square of window-pane with dazzling brightness. Bill found himself blinking at it. Suddenly Locke opened Bill's eye with finger and thumb and closely studied the pupil. Bill's other eye underwent the same process.

Then Locke whistled. "You've been doped!" he ejaculated tersely. "Come here, Mr. Ferguson!"

At Locke's invitation the trainer studied Bill's pupils. They were unnaturally small and lacked lustre.

"Doped!" gasped Sandy. "Why, mon, if he'd been doped the pupils would have been large and bright—"

"In some cases, yes," said Locke. "But the particular form of mild poison I have in mind—it's of Chinese origin—affects the senses, particularly the sight, in exactly the opposite fashion that most dopes work."

"Good gad!" Bill fairly hung on the detective's words.

"The design of the scoundrel who administered this drug was to spoil Bill's sight. In that he seems to have succeeded particularly well," said

Locke quietly. "I said a moment ago that the drug was of Chinese origin. In days of old, the Chinese war lords used to dope their prisoners with a poison and then offer them their liberty, if they could hit the targets specially arranged for them. It was a brutal form of torture, for owing to the peculiar action of the dope no prisoner ever stood a chance of regaining his liberty—their shots were never anywhere near the target."

"But who on earth could have got at me with this awful stuff?" Bill's outburst was pardonable.

"That we have to discover," said Locke, "but it was a well-thought-out scheme, well backed, too, by other evidence. I refer to the bookmakers' odds of three to one, and the strong rumours that the Rangers were going to sell the match."

"Well, well!" Sandy Ferguson had hardly recovered from the shock. Locke's explanation, following his unexpected discovery, was too much for him.

As a man just emerging from deep sleep he watched Ferrers Locke whisper a few words to the club doctor; saw the latter unlock his medicine cupboard, saw him mixing some compound to Locke's directions, and finally saw the detective use a hypodermic syringe on Bill Hartley's brawny arm.

"Hurt, Bill?" asked Locke, with a smile. "Never mind, you'll find it's worth it. In less than five minutes you'll be yourself again."

And so great was Hartley's belief in the extraordinary powers of Ferrers Locke that he began to feel a different being already. Certainly the peculiar feeling about his eyes was wearing off.

It wanted thirty minutes to time when Bill decided that he was fit enough to resume. Sandy Ferguson almost hugged him before he departed from the dressing-room.

"Bill, go in and show the blighters," he implored. "We're two goals down now, but I believe in ye. Take no heed of the crowd. They'll be sarcastic at first. Just play for the Rangers and your old friend Sandy."

Bill made no reply in words, but he gripped the trainer's hand firmly, flashed a grateful smile at Ferrers Locke, and trotted out on to the pitch.

"Boooo!"

"Hiss!"

"Go home, you traitor!"

"Who sold the match?"

Bill's ears burned at the reception, but he caught the referee's eye and was signalled to take his place in the game. The crowd seemed to be in lynching mood. Still, Bill remembered Sandy's advice and acted upon it.

With the exception of Tich Freeman his team mates frowned upon his reappearance in their midst. Things had gone from bad to worse with them since the interval. With but ten men, ten men mostly demoralised by the turn events had taken, it looked a certain victory for the Bidstead club. But that fickle fortune which sways, and will for ever sway football into glorious uncertainty, kept the home side's score down to a two-goal lead. Sufficient, surely, for a victory? But no—

Tich Freeman became a new man with the return of his partner, and fortunately for the Rangers he was in possession of the ball. Just as the Bidstead half-back rocketed at the diminutive winger, Tich touched the ball neatly to Bill. Like a pattern weaver, big Bill threaded his way through three successive onslaughts, and finally slung the leather out to Tich again.

In a headlong race for the corner-flag went Tich, every muscle straining to give of its best. Then, slam—

In came the twirling leather over the heads of an over-anxious defence.

Up rose a shock head of flaming colour, round jerked a well-muscled neck.

Swish!

The ball was rushing mockingly up and down the netting till it came to a standstill at the feet of a bewildered and disgusted custodian.

Two—one!

"Up, the Rangers!"

"Played, sir!"

Bill's heart throbbed to the applause. Once more it seemed he had been returned to the confidence of his supporters. At all costs he would get the equalising goal.

The home side dashed away from the restart with redoubled fury, but they found a different defence awaiting them now. Bill's sparkling goal had done more than any other tonic could have done.

Half-backs in the Rangers' colours held the raiding forwards of the Bidstead side, sending them back time and again and gradually wearing down their once-full store of confidence.

It was a grand come-back, and the crowd rose to it in tumultuous fashion. No squared match this, they told themselves. On the contrary, it looked odds on the Rangers winning even if they were still a goal on the wrong side of the sheet.

Up in the grand-stand Major Carstairs was waxing enthusiastic. In between his outbursts of enthusiasm he was censuring himself for those doubts concerning Bill's integrity and loyalty. Marchant Buxton, on his right, grew more reserved as the major grew boisterous.

"Look at that!" roared the major, as Bill tricked two Bidstead defenders. "Through them like a knife through cheese! Aren't you glad, sir? Then, dang me, look glad. Oh, good shot, my boy!"

Bill's capable left foot had very nearly found a weakness in the Bidstead goal-net, but the left-back, seeing his keeper out of the goalmouth, whither he had been lured by Bill, had flung himself bodily on the ball and scooped it over the touchline for a corner.

The air was tense with excitement when Spider Rawlings' wiry frame shaped up for the corner kick. Bobbing heads arose on all sides. Then from amidst a welter of plunging legs and feet a large size in boots snicked out. Followed a rapid flight of the ball and a howl from the excited mob, and a youthful reporter up in the Press-box excitedly asked his elderly and more experienced neighbour to whom the foot belonged.

"Bill Hartley!" was the response.

And Bill Hartley it was!

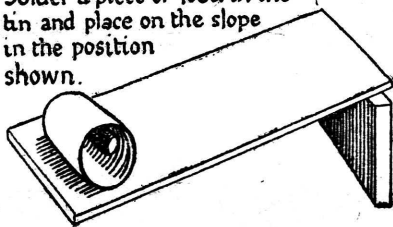
Carstairs' face became wreathed in smiles of jubilation; Buxton's handsome face assumed a cloud of disappointment.

"We'll pull it off yet!" roared Carstairs. "Where's that imbecile of a bookmaker? If it were not against my principles, I'd take him on at three to one. Why, the Rangers will pull it off, as sure as—sure as—"

But Buxton was in no mood for Major Carstairs' high spirits. Murmuring something about getting away early to avoid the crush, he made his adieux. As he threaded his way through tiers of seats for the exit, Ferrers Locke, who had found a seat in the stand, watched him narrowly.

SEE HOW IT'S DONE?

Solder a piece of lead in the tin and place on the slope in the position shown.



Answer to puzzle on page 13.

"None too pleased at the way things are going," he told himself, "that is, if I'm any judge of a man. I wonder—"

The peculiar Oriental ring on Buxton's finger, which Locke suddenly caught sight of, set a wild theory running through his mind. He stored it for future reference and then edged his way up to Major Carstairs. So excited was the major that he did not remark upon Locke's unexpected appearance or the time of it.

"Isn't it great, Locke?" he said excitedly. "Look at the boys. Why, nothing can stop 'em!"

It was true. The Rangers had come into their own again. This was no faked match; the Rangers were all out for a win, and a win it was, for four and a half minutes from time the "right wing again swept down on the Bidstead citadel. The defence was left standing and gasping at the very audacity of the attack. The ball lobbed to Bill Hartley and thousands of voices bade him "shoot." But Bill was the true footballer, not a limelight seeker. A foot or more away to his left was Markham, the centre-forward—and Markham was in a position that promised a certain goal. To Markham, then, went an unselfish pass—a pass that brought its own reward in a mighty crash of voices as the ball found the net.

Once again the timid reporter, now to his job, asked a question of his veteran neighbour.

"Was that Bill Hartley?"

"Yes," snapped the veteran. "But Markham shot it." The remaining minutes of that memorable game saw the Bidstead Wanderers hopelessly outclassed and run off their feet. Tich Freeman added a fourth goal for the Rangers before the referee brought the game to a halt. Then Bill had to run for his life, or the excited crowd would have done him serious injury in their excitement to congratulate him.

On the station platform at Bidstead stood Thomas Chakenham and Marchant Buxton. From the distance they heard the roars of the spectators and knew the result of the match.

"Done again!" snarled Buxton. Thomas Chakenham, more fatalistic than his companion, shrugged his shoulders.

"The dope worked in the first half," he said, "anybody in the know could see that. But you couldn't have used enough of the stuff, Buxton."

"Don't be a fool," snarled Buxton. "There's still enough stuff on this ring to rig a regiment."

With the words, he thrust out his right hand, on the third finger of which gleamed a curiously-fashioned ring, under the nose of his companion.

"I did the good sportsman stuff," he growled, "took 'em all in an' squeezed that hound Hartley's hand as if he were my long lost brother. One scratch from this ring is enough, and yet—"

"And yet one scratch was not enough," said Chakenham philosophically. "Something went wrong. What it was we shall probably never know."

An ever-growing crowd rapidly filled the platform at Bidstead. The great match with Cashton Rangers was over; the selling of the result was nothing more than a vicious rumour—or, at least, so thought the enthusiasts who were

still remarking upon the strange stories they had heard prior to the match.

Buxton and Chakenham found themselves surrounded by a mixed crowd. In a moment the former was recognised, and not a few of the Cashton supporters gave him a boisterous greeting. To all, Buxton returned a special smile adopted for the occasion; to some more favoured he gave a friendly hand grip. Thus it occasioned no surprise when three ordinary-looking fellows gathered round him and greeted him familiarly.

Buxton smiled at them, and spoke in lowered tones. But beyond those three fellows and Chakenham not a soul overheard the gist of his remarks. They were brief and very much to the point.

"Follow him. If he takes a train, get him between here and Euston. Make no mistake. Understand?"

"O.K., chief!" The reply came promptly from the taller of the three men. Followed a few commonplace remarks, and then the trio elbowed their way out of the crowd and the station precincts.

"Was that wise?" asked Chakenham mildly.

Buxton scowled at him darkly.

"It's not for you to question so much," he snarled. "Bill Hartley's got to be put on the spot—"

"But—"

"There are no buts, my dear Chakenham," broke in Buxton icily. "And, unless you show a little more enthusiasm and loyalty, there's no knowing but you'll be bumped off, too!"

A savage expression dwelt on Chakenham's face for a moment. The next he had himself in hand. But that one glance would have shown a student just how friendly and loyal were his feelings towards Marchant Buxton.

The London bound train screeched into the station, and Buxton and Chakenham selected a first-class compartment. When the train had rumbled on its way for a quarter of an hour, Buxton pulled out his watch.

"Next train just due at Bidstead. Bill Hartley, I wonder if you know it's your last journey?"

A fiendish grimace transformed his handsome face, and Chakenham felt a longing to put a great distance between himself and that unmasked desperado. For a moment Chakenham's thoughts dwelt on Bill Hartley. What had he done to incur such bitter enmity? Poor wretch, he had merely wounded the inordinate vanity of Marchant Buxton. Very little more than that, reflected Chakenham. Too much was he under the thumb of Marchant Buxton to feel compassionate towards his victims; too much was he afraid of the hypocritical villain he styled his chief.

Yet Chakenham might have saved himself that pity for Hartley. With the red-headed forward of the Rangers was Ferrers Locke, and it was the detective's keen eye and sense of danger that first brought him to notice the three murderous tools of Buxton lounging at the Bidstead Wanderers' ground.

"Just keep on," Bill, he whispered. "Unless I'm mistaken, three prize specimens of gangsters are waiting for you. One of them, at least, I know to be an old lag from Chicago. Now, don't look round!"

(Bill Hartley's in terrible danger this time, chums! But he's got Ferrers Locke with him. Who's the smarter—Locke or the crooks? See next week's instalment.)

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