

A NIGHT OF THRILLS! READ "THE LIGHTHOUSE MYSTERY!" WITHIN.

The GEM

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

2^D



"The
Lighthouse
Mystery!"

THRILLING SONNORBYN
ADVENTURE YARN UNDER

SCENES ON PUFFIN ISLAND! PRISONERS IN HAUNTED LIGHTHOUSE!

The LIGHTHOUSE MYSTERY!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER I.

A Fearful Mix-up!

"**T**IME, say!"
"The idiot!"
"The hitting-dummy!"
"Tom Merry & Co. were going it."

At least, six members of the famous St. Jim's Co. were going it. The seventh member—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—was the being of their going on, so to speak.

Arthur Augustus was not aware that they were going excited and crazy in his behalf. He was in an outfitter's shop in Loxhain High Street. The shop was warm and well lit and cozy, and Arthur Augustus was a superior fellow among rather mediocre, wonderful satins, and glossy silk hats. Gossip was happy, and he would have remained absorbed all night.

But out in the dingy, chilly High Street it was devilishly cold, and Tom Merry, Blake, Leather, Messers, Digby, and Horrie were far from happy, and had no intention of staying there all night.

They looked on their bicycles and gave their opinion, in decidedly concise, of Arthur Augustus.

"The teen idiot!"
"The lathered fooler,"

he—
"The tailor's dummy—"

"What's he gone back for, anyway?"

"Spotted a new style in neckties as we were riding past the giddy window, I think," grunted Blake. "Just like Gassy. He's like a woman who's spotted a hat. Hello! Here the dummy is!"

An elegant figure appeared from the outfitter's doorway. It was Arthur Augustus, and he carried a large cardboard hatbox in his hand.

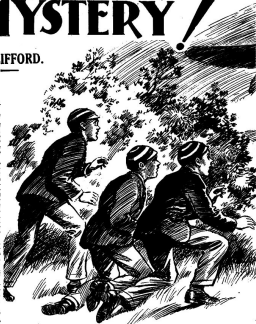
They stared at this.

"You—you harlding cheap!" roared Blake. "We've starved nearly, waiting for you!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"What's that you've got there, lathered!"

"It's a stringy object to bein' called a lathered, Blake!"
"The Gass Liner."—No. 1,223.



said Arthur Augustus, mildly retrospective. "This is a lather, dear boy."

"You—you—"

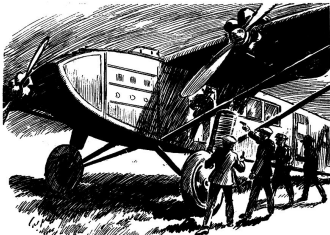
"I went in for a necktie, weally. A weal wiggah I spotted in the window, you know," explained Gassy, with enthusiasm. "Then I remembered I needed a new top-coat. Heavens!"—Arthur Augustus glanced over the group, of eyes—"I am afraid I must request you to do this on your ownish, Lathered."

"You can request, but that's as far as you'll jolly well go!" roared Leather. "Think I'm caring what lather—"

"Weally, Lathered—"

"Slip it round your neck and come on!" bawled Blake. "It's nearly call-come now, and we'll be thumping into as it is! Get a move on, you dummy!"

ST. JIM'S JUNIORS IN TERRIFIC FIGHT BY NIGHT!



"Fray do not wash at a fellow, Jack Blake! Lowlah, as you're the only bike with a cow-wish, I must lean upon you, hi! I have been supplied with plenty of string—"

"Why didn't you ask them to mend it on!" accepted Blake.
"St. Jim's is certain their delivery wadon, Blak. Lowlah, will you kindly allow me to tie this box on your cow-wish!"

"Oh, all right," said Lowlah resignedly. "Back up with it, Gussy!"

"Thank you very much, doah boy! Fray be careful!"

"Leave it to me, old sport!" said Lowlah, sighing at the others. "Here, I'll fix it on myself, old chap!"

Arthur Augustus thanked him, and waited as Lowlah fastened the basket on his carrier with a length of string Gussy produced. It was done in a few moments, and the two mounted their bikes and went after the others, who were already riding along the High Street in the deepening dark.

Lowlah soon fogged ahead of the others, the basket bounding and rattling on his carrier. Arthur Augustus eyed it somewhat anxiously.

"Do! Jove! That basket does not seem very secure!" remarked Gussy to Blake, as he drove alongside. "I really trust Lowlah has tied it on securely."

Blake chuckled as did the rest. They felt that Gussy was very trusting indeed to trust his precious basket to a practical joker like Lowlah at all.

"It does seem a bit wobbly," grumbled Blake. "Lowlah, you see! Oh, crumb! There it goes!"

Just what Gussy had feared, and his chums had expected—happened. As Lowlah reached the end of the High

Street the rattling, banging basket flew off the carrier, and rattled into the roadway.

It was still secured to the carrier by a long length of string, however, and now it went bounding and bounding after Lowlah's bike like the tail of a kite.

Arthur Augustus shrieked.

"Stop, Lowlah! Stop, you feasted ass! Stop!"

"Eh, ha, ha!"

Gussy shrieked, and his chums roared with laughter. But Lowlah did not seem to be aware of the tragedy. He peddled on faster, the basket bounding into perils and over stones as it followed.

"It is wathin' to laugh at," shouted Arthur Augustus, peddling furiously in pursuit.

"Lowlah—Lowlah, you feasted wadon! Stop! Lowlah— Oh, gwaah Scott!"

What he dreaded suddenly happened. The lid of the ill-used basket flew off. A glossy silk hat, a pair of warty lavender gloves, and an assortment of tin snips tumbled over the muddy roadway.

But worse was to come.

Too late did the chums slip on brakes. Next instant Blake's front wheel touched the silk hat, twisting it away, right under Gussy's front wheel!

Crash!

The topper crumpled up like a concertina under Gussy's front wheel. But Gussy was still riding hard, and as it closed up under the respect the hat jammed under the wheel.

The result was that the bike stopped dead, and Arthur Augustus, with a wild howl, took a header over the handlebar.

Not was that all. Unable to stop, Tom Mowry plunged into him, and the next moment there was a terrific ringing
THE GAS LAMPS.—No. 1,20.

An air liner on Lesham Common captured by gangsters! A speeding car! A stolen motor-boat—and a deserted lighthouse! These are the ingredients of this splendid long complete yarn of the chums of St. Jim's!

crash and clatter as the whole six cyclists piled up together in a struggling, jelling heap on the muddy roadway.

"Crash, crash, crash!"
"Carooop!"
"Oh, my hat! What—?"
"Look out!"
"Crash!"

They had all been riding in a close group, and not one of the six missed.

Leather tore off and went out. Six bicycles piled up in a clattering heap, and mixed up with them were the six jelling riders.

"Oh, my hat!"
Leather heard the terrific crash and looked round. Then he came riding back hard and jumped off at the spot, his grin fading, and his face suddenly concerned.

"Oh, erikay! Gussy, Blako, Merry! Oh, my hat! Are you hurt, chaps?"

It was an absurd question in the circumstances. From the row they were making they were all obviously very much hurt. Arthur Augustus staggered up, hugging his nose, which was badly swollen. Tom Merry limped up, rubbing his knee. Blako staggered upright, nursing a bruised forehead. Not one had escaped some injury or other.

Fortunately, none of them was badly hurt, however. But the bikes were. With groans and gasps, the cyclists examined them, after examining their hurts.

"Oh, er, er, er!" gasped Tom Merry. "My—my leg's broken—or nearly broken! Gwoop! And my right pedal's twisted!"

"My front wheel's handle!" groaned Blako.
"I've twisted all over, and my chain's broken!" panted Harrier. "That—that idiot, Leather!"

"Oh dear!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "Oh, er, er, er! Oh, erikay! I am bruised all over! My bike is wrenched, my rubbish is covered with mud and wretchedly swollen, and my nose topkay— I have only just paid two guineas for it! Leather, you feathery wretch!"

"Sorry, Gussy, old chap—"
"You did that on purpose, you feathery scamp!" shouted Gussy. "You purposely tied it loosely, so that it would fall off, Leather!"

"Ahoen! You—you too—" Leather stammered and stopped.

They doubted his guilt in the matter they doubted it no longer.

"You—you feathery wretch!" roared Arthur Augustus. "This is all your fault, Leather! I insist upon giving you a feathery thrashing! Look and now, ha! Jove!"

And, forgetting his many sores and pains, Arthur Augustus rushed at Leather, intent upon assault and battery on the spot. One fat took Leather in one eye and another smote Leather's nose hard. Naturally, Leather couldn't stand that, and the next moment they were rolling over and over in the roadway, fighting furiously.

"Stop the born idiot!" snapped Tom Merry. "Things are bad enough without making 'em worse! Separate them!"

Though they felt his noise inclined to help Gussy thrash Leather, the chaps stepped in and separated the combatants after a swift struggle. Arthur Augustus was raging as they held him back.

"Let go at once!" he shrieked. "I insist upon thrashing! Leather! Welcome so, you crotch wretched! My nose topkay! My bike! My rubbish!"

"You run through him as much as you like when we get back home, Gussy," said Tom Merry soothingly. "And we'll help you, old chap! But its jolly late, and time we went. Let's examine the damage done, chaps!"

Arthur Augustus was calmed down a little at last, and they examined the bikes. The damage was worse than they had supposed. Four out of the seven bikes were unrideable. Only Digby and Harrier's had escaped serious injury—and Leather's, of course.

"That means we'll have to foot it back!" groaned Blako; "unless some of us ride on the back steps!"

"How can four feathery ricks on three back steps?" snorted Harrier. "We'll have to strap it, of course, while that silly magpie Leather rides. I suppose! I vote we make him!"

"Look here, I'll walk with you, if you like!" gasped Leather hurriedly. "Evidently he hoped to placate his chums' wrath with his kind offer. "We can stow the bikes at the garage over there, and walk across the common, chaps."

"You don't jolly well deserve to ride, anyway!" snapped Blako. "Well, sooner we make a start the better. Dig and Harrier can ride home—"

"We'll all walk. Blak or swim together, that's our motto!" said Digby. "What if you say, Harrier?"

"Right-ho!" said Harrier, nodding. "Blissed if I want to ride while you chaps are, anyway!"

THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 1282.

"No need, as far as I can see," said Tom Merry. "Still, if you like—"

"Well walk," said Harrier. "Hallo, here's the garage man. Good!"

Quite a little crowd of villagers had collected by this time. And now a man in oily overalls came across from the garage across the road. Tom Merry explained the sad circumstances, and, telling the garage proprietor they would run across the next day to see about the bikes, the chums left three in his charge—the four damaged machines and the three undamaged ones. Then they started out on the long tramp to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

Very queer!

THE dark was deepening as the St. Jim's junkies started out on their long tramp across Lusham Common. All the junkies were feeling more-or-less weary than one. Most of them were limping a little. A four-mile tramp in such circumstances was not a pleasant prospect.

Arthur Augustus trudged on ahead. He had not yet forgiven his chums for having presented him with three thrashing Leather on the spot. Not until he had thrashed Leather did Arthur Augustus propose to resume normal relations with his chums.

Tom Merry stared curiously at his vague form dimly seen now in the misty darkness ahead.

Very much did he doubt the wisdom of crossing the common in the darkness. It was a desolate stretch of common-land, and it extended for miles. They knew every inch of Wayland Common, but this was almost strange ground to the junkies.

He doubted still more whether Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a safe guide across it.

Arthur Augustus was swallowed up in the misty darkness.

"Better follow him," remarked Harrier, with a shudder. "He's bound to have foot's lock!"

"We ought to have gone by road," said Tom. "Though I'm blessed if I could have managed a seven-mile tramp on my gammy leg! This is all your silly feath, Leather!"

"Go on, old it in!" said Leather, with a groan. "Ain't it as bad for me as for you? I vote we push on and trust to luck."

"Nothing else for it, anyway," said Digby. "We can't go back without Gussy, and it looks to me as if we shan't find the way back, either. We're lost."

Tom Merry stared about him. It was settling in for a dark night, and already little could be seen but clumps of grass and bracken. An eerie stillness hung near the desolate common. If they were lost, then they might just as well push on and trust to luck.

"Come on!" he said. "Let's follow that as Gussy!"

They tramped on in the direction Arthur Augustus had taken. Tom was none than a little uneasy in regard to Arthur Augustus. In his confidence Arthur Augustus was just the fellow to come to grief.

Tom hurried them on, keeping a careful eye open for any landmark which might serve to guide them. And suddenly he gave a cry as he sighted a sudden flash of white light across the common. It was followed almost instantly by three more flashes, from different spots.

"Electric torches, by Jingo!" gasped Tom Merry. "You saw 'em?"

"Yes. What on earth—?"

"Must be someone searching, or something," said Tom. "I say—Hallo! What the thump—?"

It was a cry from somewhere ahead—from the direction of one of the bushes, and it was in the well-known voice of Arthur Augustus.

"Help! Help, you fellows! Wooooo!"

The junkies stopped, startled. Then came another shout, and they waited no longer. Led by Tom Merry, they went cutting full tilt across the rough ground, longed for of possible pitfalls.

In a few seconds they saw what was wrong. Ahead they glimpsed two figures struggling together—those of a man and a boy.

"Wooooo, you fellows!"

"Must have run head of a blessed poacher, or something!" snapped Tom. "On the ball!"

Tom was the first to fling himself to the rescue. As he did so he was startled to hear shouts, and then he glimpsed three more dim figures converging in from different directions.

A swift rescue and then Right was the only thing.

"Run for it, Gussy!" he yelled. "Quick, chaps! Down the brack and bolt!"

He himself ripped in a dashing right-hook, and his fat

caught the unknown man between ear and chin. The fellow howled and fell back on his staggered backwards.

Fortunately, for once, Arthur Augustus obeyed Tom promptly. He kept away. Blake just had time to slam home a hefty punch. The man was already following on his heels from Tom's blow, and Blake's effort sent him crashing down.

The juniors halted, realising they stood little chance against four grown men. But Tom Merry, the last to turn for flight, stumbled against a tuft of dead grass, and came a cropper on hands and knees.

There was a heavy pounding of feet, a din born loomed up, and as he scrambled up again Tom Merry was grasped and held fast.

"What the heck does this mean, Bagden?"

The voice was savage, but the man's anger seemed to be directed against the man Tom had felled rather than against Tom himself. He was a burly fellow, and Tom struggled and twisted in his grasp in vain.

Bagden—if that was his name—staggered up, muttering oaths.

"The blasted kid was spry!" roared—

"We were doing nothing of the kind!" snapped Tom Merry. "We must have barged into you by accident."

"Who are you?" snapped the big man.

"We're schoolboys—from St. Jim's, if you want to know," said Tom curtly. "We are taking a short cut across the common, and have lost our way. We slipped in when our shoes joggled for help."

"What the heck did you touch the kid for, Bagden?"

"I told the kid to clear out, and he dropped in on us. Logan, so I started 'im on."

"You blamed fool! We're here to catch rabbits, not darned schoolboys. Hee—"

Tom staggered back, half-blinded, as the dazzling beam of a powerful torch shined his face. Evidently Logan was assisted with his brief carrying of the boy's face, for he instantly switched off again.

"That's all right, kid. Hook it—sharp! An' if I catches you baggin' round here do-at-night, I'll han you with my belt! Hook it!"

And Tom Merry, feeling himself suddenly released, was only too glad to "hook it."

CHAPTER 3.
The Air Liner!

"Oh dear! That foolish beast! Oh, no! Oh, no, Joe!"

The complaining voice of Arthur Augustus soon guided Tom Merry to where his dreams were. They had stopped, suddenly aware that Tom Merry had not followed them in their hurried flight.

"Oh, good!" gasped Blake, as Tom ran up to them. "We were just about to rush back, thinking you'd been collared, Tom."

"I was collared, but the beggars let me go again."

And Tom explained.

"But what's Garry growning about?" he asked. "Did that chap hurt you, Garry?"

"Yes, wretch! The beastly boogies thumped my head and then kicked me. I saw a light, and went to ask the

brave if he knew the right way, and he used frightful language and attacked me, the wretched wretch!"

"Poohoo, for a possum!" said Blake. "The buggars don't like being interfered with. We were lucky to get off as lightly, blow them!"

"But I'm jolly sure they aren't possums," said Tom Merry coolly, his eyes glancing. "Pouchers don't hunt for bunnies with powerful tools. And that chap Logan was fairly well dressed. I got a good squint at him."

"But you said—"

"He mentioned rabbits, certainly. But that was bunkum, to throw dust in our eyes, cheap. It's a thumping queer business, if you ask me!"

"Who on earth are they, then?"

"Ask me another! But I'm certain they're not possums."

And Tom was certain. Not only had he glimpsed Logan's clothes, but he had also glimpsed the faces of all four men. They were not the shifty, furtive faces of local possums, but the hard, ruthless faces of men who dealt in the more serious crimes than this poaching.

"How then, anyway?" said Blake curiously. "For goodness' sake let's get on, or we shall be wandering about all night!"

"We may if we do get on," growled Mansore, staring about him. "What asses we were—"

"I'm not going on yet," said Tom Merry coolly. "I'm going to find out what game those men are up to."



There was a terrific crash and clutter as the six cyclists piled up to the road in a struggling heap!

"Oh, let 'em slip! They've got teeth, and looks to me as if they're hunting for something," said Blake. "Not our affair!"

"Either hunting for something or signalling to someone," said Tom Merry. "Didn't you notice the way they were flashing their torches? All four were in different spots."

"Pshaw! But why on earth should they be signalling?"

"That's what I'm keen to find out. You chaps can cut off if you like, but I'm seeing into this," said Tom.

"And get a hiding, perhaps."

"I'll chance that. No need to go too near, though. If you fellows—"

"Oh, we're on!" growled Blake.

Tom Merry & Co. were always ready for anything that promised adventure, and Tom's claims were just as curious as he was now. If the four men were not possums, then what were they doing on the desolate common with powerful torches? Moreover, the very fact that the appearance of the juniors had been unwelcome to them was in itself suspicious. It was curious, to say the least of it.

They followed Tom eagerly enough as he trod cautiously back again. Tom stopped at last and continued his claims to join him behind the shelter of a clump of hawthorn.

Through the deep gloom they could just make out the form of a man. He was standing motionless. The other three men had vanished.

They watched in silence. That the man was waiting for someone or for something to happen seemed clear. Minutes after minutes passed. Once a white flash of light stabbed the darkness from where the man was standing. It was answered instantly by three more flashes from three distant points. Then darkness fell again.

The juniors were cramped and cold, but they scarcely noticed discomfort in their curiosity and excitement. That they had stumbled upon a mystery seemed certain now.

Ten minutes passed—as age to the watching juniors—and then the man ahead moved, and from him came a low grunt of satisfaction.

For some moments the juniors did not understand why. Then a familiar noise began to make itself heard—a low, droning whine that grew louder and louder.

"An aeroplane!" breathed Tom Merry, gripping Blake's arm.

"Flying pretty high, too!" said Hancock. "But—"

He broke off, and Tom Merry tensed.

From the dimly seen man ahead of them, and also from the three unseen men, came shafts of white light; and this time they remained steady, and were not extinguished. Moreover, the men were not signalling to each other now.

The white, powerful beams of light were sent skywards. And now the juniors could see that each man stood at an equal distance apart, their lights making the four corners of a square.

"Great pip!" gasped Blake. "They—they're signalling to that aeroplane! I can spot it now! Look!"

"And flying without lights!" breathed Tom Merry, his voice trembling with excitement. "That—this is queer!"

They could all see the plane now—a vaguely seen outline against the faint, misty starlight. It was swooping down in a wide circle, like a great black bird of prey. It showed an engine, and it looked strangely ghostly and terrifying as it became larger and larger.

"A whooper!" muttered Blake. "It—why, it's an—"

"An air liner!" whispered Tom Merry. "I caught a glimpse of windows just then. Hallo, it's coming down! Look out!"

For the moment the great plane seemed about to swoop down upon the spot where they crouched; but before they could even think of flight it had passed over their heads like a great black shadow.

When they looked again it had landed fifty yards away and was taking to a stop on the lumpy ground.

The man ahead started to race towards it, and they soon heard the pounding feet of the other three men as they raced for the landed air liner.

A strange silence fell upon the wide waste of country after the noise of the engines had ceased.

"Come on!"

Tom's shouts scarcely needed to be given that order. They followed Tom in a flash as he darted off towards the shadowy plane. But they did not relax caution. The strange affair promised to be a far bigger mystery than they had supposed. They knew that a man talking would not satisfy Logan and his companions if they were caught "spring" now.

But why should an air liner land, without lights, on that desolate common? And why should four evil-looking men await it so eagerly?

They were within a stone's-throw of the liner now. Again a friendly clump of hawthorn gave them all the shelter they needed. They crouched down, tense and watchful.

And started they were at what they saw.

Logan and his three companions were grouped by the plane. Logan had a wicked-looking, mottled-nose automatic in his hand.

A voice called to him from the plane, and he answered: "All O.K.!"

Instantly the side door of the cabin opened wide, and a light flashed over the doorway flanked on, lighting up the doorway.

Three sounded angry voices from within the plane, and then the door flung open, and a well-dressed man appeared as a ladder was let down to the ground.

The gentleman—obviously a passenger—was trembling visibly as he stepped down the ladder to the ground.

He started, and the angry flush deepened on his clean-shaven, plump face as Logan's automatic was instantly turned on him.

"Come on! No hanky-panky now, grov!" said Logan coolly. "Or this gun's liable to go off! Step along sharply, and stand over there!"

"You—you infernal scoundrel!" roared the plump gentleman. "What—what does this outrage mean?"

He was not answered.

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Logan had coolly turned his attention to a second figure that appeared in the doorway. He also climbed down, and was followed by two more men—one a young, alert-looking young fellow with a broad, open face that showed anger and amazement now. Like the other three passengers of the air liner, he had the appearance of a prosperous business man.

Then came another well-dressed man, but a glance at him was enough. The hard, ruthless features told the juniors enough without the sight of the glistening automatic he carried. Obviously, he had superintended the so-called passengers from the plane.

He helped Logan and his men to line up the four angry passengers. All Logan's companions held automatic now, and a glance at the grim face was quite enough to keep the passengers still and obedient.

But the accused juniors' attention was not upon them. From the pilot's cockpit came angry, excited shouting, and then the pilot appeared, and dropped down to the ground. He was obviously a Frenchman, and he was shouting excitedly and savagely to a second man in civilian's rig who came who jumped down after him, and instantly jammed the end of an automatic against his chest. The Frenchman recoiled with a gasp.

"Mon Dieu!" he shouted, after a flood of angry French which the juniors could not follow. "You are not Jean Mercier! You are not my—What on it? My assistant pilot! You are one wonderful!"

"I'm not your space pilot—not on your sweet life!" laughed the tall man, raising his goggles and revealing a hard, evil face. "You got Jean's trousers up at the back of the damned aeroplane at Le Bourget."

"You villain! But for no passengers I would before have obeyed you and allowed of course! You could have shot me as you wished!"

"Ay, and a month!" drawled the man, who had obviously succeeded as the assistant French pilot, sneeringly. "Don't you get excited, Frenchy. Just you keep still, or this gun will go off! That's the last, child!"

Logan nodded, his dark eyes glistening as they dwelt on the four passengers standing silently in a row.

The juniors were thrilled—far too excited and staggered even to whisper to each other. The strange scene—the giant air liner, the white faces of the so-called passengers, the grim, hard features of the crooks, all seemed strangely weird in the white arc-lamp that accentuated the darkness around.

"Well, here you are, gents," said Logan, with a grin. "I'm afraid I can't offer you the hospitality of a push hotel; but you won't get harmed, and I'll find you a comfy quarters as I can, so long as you don't try any hanky-panky. It won't be for long, anyway, then you can get off to Crocidon. He passed, his eyes settling on the broadest young face.

"Which of you's a Missus Carew—sharp as a hunting horn from South America?"

"I am!" snapped the young man, amazement showing on his face. "What do you want with me?"

"Thought you were the chap," said Logan, with satisfaction. "Step out!"

"But, look here—"

"Step out!" snapped Logan, his voice ringing. "Look lively!"

Carew set his lips, but he stepped out. He was plainly bewildered at events. Yet he saw that the men were not the men to get up with any nonsense. Logan granted and motioned to one of his men.

"You'll go with Flocky. You know the way!"

"Yes, landlord!" granted Herbert.

"Then go off!"

Flock had already ripped off his leather flying helmet and his coat. He pitched them up into the French cabin. Then, with his automatic out, he angled himself just behind Carew, with his automatic fixed on the other side.

"Step, march!" he rapped curtly to Carew. "You'll step out smartly just in front of us. Start getting' fresh, and you'll get' pressed!"

"I refuse!" he bargued to you—" began Carew angrily, but he broke off as a cold circle of steel jabbed into the top of his neck.

"March!" snapped Flock, and this time the young fellow obeyed, and the three disappeared into the darkness.

Then Tom Merry woke as from a trance. It was all well enough—only too real. He acted on impulse.

"You fellows hang on and see what happens here," he breathed to Blake. "I'm going after those chaps."

"Right!"

Tom slipped away stealthily. But he did not go alone. Together, at least, was not going to allow his share to play a lone hand in the strange adventure. He whispered to Blake, and then crept cautiously after Tom. Like his claim he was intensely swallowed up in the darkness.

He soon caught Tom up, and, with hearts beating fast,

they went on the trail of the two crooks and their prisoners. From the casual way in which Logan had treated the other passengers it seemed clear to Tom Merry that in Carrow lay the secret of the whole amazing happenings.

CHAPTER 4.

The Deserted Cottage.

THE light from the air-funnel vanished behind them. Ahead there lay the dark, desolate common, silent save for the occasional creak of a rickety cart. But presently as they hurried on they caught faint sounds ahead—the rattle of a box against stone, and the murmur of voices.

Then, out of the gloom ahead, loomed three shadowy figures, and Tom whispered a caution.

"Carefully now, Mooty! Just keep the hoppers in sight!"

"You mean to try to rescue that chap, Tom?"

"If there's a ghost of a chance. In any case, we can find out where they're bound for, and what the game is."

They pushed on, keeping a safe distance from the men ahead, yet never allowing them to get out of sight. It was clear that the two crooks knew their route well, for only once or twice did they seem to hesitate.

At least a mile was covered, and then a hedge loomed up ahead, and the three dim forms vanished through it.

The chums approached cautiously. A moment later they had reached a thin hazel-hedge, and were peering down into a narrow lane, little more than a cart-track. And in it was standing a bulky shape.

"A car!" whispered Tom. "My hat! This has all been planned out! Quick!"

He led his chums farther along the hedge, and then through a gap. They reached the lane, and with reckless daring, Tom led his chums towards the car, treading the rough ground with infinite caution.

They reached the back of the car, and no outcry came to tell them they were seen. They heard Carrow protesting indignantly, and Flock uttering savage threats.

Evidently those had their effect, for Carrow gave no more trouble. He boarded the car, taking the front seat by Flock's side. Burke took a seat in the back, and suddenly the lane ahead was flooded with light as the car's lights were switched on. Then came the soft purring of the engine, rising in power, then the soft slide of the clutch.

It was now or never for the two shadowers!

Creeching at the back of the car, Tom had already noticed and felt the wide luggage-grid, lowered and empty, and he made his decision in a flash.

"Quick! Up you come, Mooty!" he breathed.

He slid on to the steel grid, clanking on with one hand, and helping his chums on with the other. It was a tight squeeze, and to Leatherer it seemed a mad, dangerous experiment; yet he did not hesitate.

They had scarcely seated themselves, and were leaning on where they could, when the car leaped ahead, jolting over the rough cart-track.

The chums were almost jerked off at the start, but by a miracle they retained their grip of the grid. And after that first violent jolt it was easier to hold on. Soon they had time to make themselves safer and more comfortable.

There were thick straps on the grid, and plenty to hold on to. With backs jammed against the car back they found it easy enough to hold, despite the violent jolting over the ragged track.

Then the car gave a sudden lurch as it swept out into the Leamham road, and all jolting ceased. Flock opened out, and the big car leaped ahead.

"Well, what does it do now?" exclaimed Leatherer, in rather a dismal whisper. "May be bound for London or Lambeth Road, but all we know. And with trouble at the end of it, that likely."

"Don't speak!" said Tom Merry. "I didn't ask you to guess, behind! And you can drop off any time you want, old chap. You'll make rather a nasty splash in the roadway. Still—"

"Chance it!" chuckled Leatherer, regarding his usual cheery recklessness. "We're on this, and we're seeing it through. What do you make of it all, Tommy?"

"Don't know—it's a rummy business! My hat! We're moving now!"

The car had just cleared Leamham village, and was now coasting up miles as it raced on. Faintly lit by the glow from the rear lamp, the roadway beneath their feet seemed to be one continuous streak. Past dark woods and meadows, past the lighth windows of cottages and houses, raced the car, scarcely slackening speed as it passed through villages.

The bats in the car had kept some of the wind from them; but it was bitterly cold for all that. The jammers huddled together on the grid, talking in whispers, though

they could have talked loudly without being heard by the car's occupants.

They knew they were not driving Londonwards, but the knowledge brought little comfort. Wherever they were going, every mile took them farther from St. Jim's. A lorry reckoning awaited them at school—if they ever landed there at all!

The car slowed down at last. Actually the road side had scarcely taken an hour, though it had seemed endless to the shivering, half-frozen drivers.

A sudden curve, and the car entered a narrow lane between high banks. It ran on over bumpy ground for a short space, and then it stopped before a dark, harricote cottage.

Instantly Tom, with a whispered warning to his chums, slid from his perch. He was stiff and aching in every limb, but, like Leatherer, he lost no time in making a dive for the shelter of a ditch.

They crouched there as the car's occupants got out.

"Well, what now, you pair of impudent rascals!" they heard Carrow demand. "Since you won't tell me what this melodramatic business means, perhaps you'll tell me where we are?"

"And perhaps I won't!" replied Flock, with a grim chuckle.

"What do the dickens have you brought me here for?" snapped Carrow.

"Just a little chat—not with us, but with another gent!" was the cool reply. "He'll be along presently. Meanwhile, we'll get inside out of the cold."

He indicated the cottage, the door of which Burke had already flung open. Carrow vowed he wouldn't enter, but Flock soon persuaded him with his ever-ready automatic. They passed inside, and a glimmer of light shewed through the broken shutters.

The house was evidently an empty building, almost in ruins; it stood alone, with no other habitation near. The rascals had chosen their stopping-place well.

The jammers waited until the door had closed upon them, and then they slipped up to the shuttered window. There was Burke to see inside. The room was unfurnished, dusty, and with paper hanging from the walls. The three men stood inside. They saw Flock impatiently offer Carrow a cigarette, which the latter curtly refused.

Flock and Burke stood on either side of the young man, smoking and waiting.

"For whom were they waiting?" Tom Merry wondered. It was all so strange and puzzling. There was a sound approaching at last. It was the soft hum of a powerful motor. A hissing pair of headlights suddenly appeared along the distant road. They dipped as the car came rocking down the narrow lane towards the cottage.

The car was an expensive-looking limousine, and it stopped outside the cottage. The dia lights were switched off, both inside and out. A big, dimly-seen figure emerged and stood up the path.

The jammers scanned the arena of a cigar and glimpsed a fat red and puffy face in the glow of it as the stranger passed. Beneath they also glimpsed the starched white of a wide expanse of shirt-front. The man was air-buffed and in evening dress.

The door opened instantly as he tapped upon it three times, and he came swiftly inside. As they peered again through the shutters, having looked at the man's appearance, they saw him enter the room.

They saw the stranger's face clearly now. The man was stout and well-dressed, and seemed to exude prosperity and self-importance. The eyes were sharp and cold, and his whole appearance suggested a kind of peer to Tom Merry.

He nodded to Flock and Burke, who left the room, closing the door after them. Evidently Carrow had been warned not to attempt trouble, for he made no movement. He gazed at the fat man, who eyed him coldly and curiously.

Then he began to speak. His voice did not seem reach the watchers, for the glass of the window was unbroken. But Carrow's angry replies reached them, though not a word could they distinguish.

Yet obviously the fat man was laying a proposal before Carrow—a proposal the latter refused to consider. His face showed indignant anger, and once or twice he seemed about to fling himself at the stout, crafty face before him.

The interview ended abruptly.

The fat man shook a fist in Carrow's face, and then he turned and left the room. They sighted him speaking with Flock and Burke through the open doorway, and then the front door opened again.

The jammers scarcely had time to sink down in hiding when the fat man walked down the path and entered his car. The lights were switched on, and the car started. It bounced away along the narrow lane, and then they saw

in fact and the brilliant headlights went sweeping away, to vanish in the distance.

The strange interview was over, and Fleck and Burke, securing their prisoner, came out into the open. "So that chap valdure's behind all this!" Carew was saying in grim tones. "And now—"

"Now you're going for a seaside rest cure," grinned Fleck. "As you won't do business with that fat pig, he's ordered you a holiday. See! In you get!"

"I'll be hanged if I will!" snapped Carew; and with a suddenness that took his captors completely by surprise, his fist, brand as they were, shot out.

Branded, they took Fleck full in the neck, and he gulped and went down headlong, his gun flying from his hand.

Burke uttered an oath, and leaped at the plucky Carew. They went crashing down, struggling furiously.

Tom Merry and Lowther stared blankly, but only for a fleeting instant. They had been watching and waiting for a chance to aid the prisoner, and here it was.

Tom Merry leaped in just as Fleck, swearing luridly, scrambled up. His clenched fist struck home, slamming into the fellow's face and sending him to the ground again.

Lowther leaped upon him as he lay there, and strove manfully to hold him down. But a glance showed Tom that he stood no chance of doing so, and he was forced to leave Carew to it and jump to his chair's help.

Over and over the three rolled, fighting like wildcats. But luck was on the crooks' side that night. Tom heard a sudden cry behind him, and busily engaged as he was, he jerked his head round.

He was just in time to see Burke, kneeling on top of Carew, raise something slant and bring it smashing down on Carew's defenceless head.

It was the butt end of Burke's automatic. Carew gave a low groan and collapsed.

The light was over, so far as he was concerned. But it split dimly for Tom Merry and Lowther.

Burke, after one glance at his silent victim, leaped to his accomplice's aid, and after that the game was up for the juniors.

Fortunately, the villainous Burke did not use his gun again—he did not need it. In the hands of the two ruffians his legs were hopelessly at sea. They struggled desperately, but it availed them not at all. They were soon held fast.

Fleck regarded them savagely, and in some amazement. "And where the heck did you kids come from?" he demanded.

Tom Merry's brain was reeling, but he pulled himself together. Burke, obviously, had no suspicion that they were two of the schoolboys they had encountered on the campus, or he would certainly have stated so then. If the rascals had entertained that suspicion for one moment Tom knew they were in a dangerous position. He thought rapidly.

"By—what happened to see you attack that man," said Tom breathlessly. "It was two to one, and so we dropped in. If—if you'd stolen that man's car—"

"Stolen nothing, you young fool!" snorted Fleck. He seemed satisfied at Tom's answer. "Well, you got to learn not to poke your shorn nose into what don't concern you! See! Take 'em inside, Burke— No, get some cord from the car."

Fleck, grasping the juniors by their collars, hustled them into the cottage, laughing grimly at their futile struggles. Burke came hurrying in with cord taken from the tool-bag of the car. In a few moments they were trussed up hand and foot and flung down on the bare boards.

"We daren't leave the Hanged kids here!" said Burke savagely. "How do we know what they've heard? Better take 'em with us to Rhyt!"

"Shut up, you blasted fool!" interrupted Fleck, with a warning glare. "You go and see to that fellow outside, confound your silly tongue!"

Burke hurried out, suddenly reminded of Carew. Fleck looked the bound juniors over.

"Your own fault, you young fools!" he snapped. "How long have you been hanging round this place?"

"Find out!" snapped Tom. "We weren't going to see you knock that fellow about, anyway."

Fleck seemed satisfied with Tom's coolish reply. He nodded.

"Well, you can stay here for a bit," he said. "Maybe by morning you'll be able to get your hands free. You're welcome to do as you like them. So-long, kids!"

He switched off his hand electric lamp, and went out. They heard the front door close and a key turned. Then came the sound of the car starting, and after a few minutes it drove away, and silence fell.

In the deep gloom Lowther groaned.

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"Well, we're in a big pickle now, Tom! Nice and to see giddy come about, I mean my!"

"Not the old yet, my pippin!" said Tom Merry through his teeth. "That chap Fleck isn't such a brute as the other fellows, but he's just a trifle too cocky and over-confident. We can do a lot more than he thinks we can."

"By morning he'll be miles away, and I'm hanged if I can see what we can do then, even if we do get free," said Lowther, pained. "We can only tell the police, and it's evidently pretty certain they'll be sleep away by then. He wouldn't have left us here otherwise."

"I know. But you're forgetting Burke's slip, when Fleck stopped him finishing. He said 'Rhyt, Rhyt' what?"

"Our place, the Rhyt. That's the only name."

"But Fleck told Carew he was taking him for a seaside holiday," said Tom significantly. "The only seaside place I know of starting with Rhyt is—"

"There! Rhytmoor!" breathed Lowther. "We might have guessed."

"I did at once," said Tom. "They're taking that ship to Rhytmoor, the nearest place on the coast to St. Jim's. That's a clue for the police, Monty."

"And in the morning—"

"We're not waiting until then. Get busy on these cords, Monty. Those beauties haven't finished with us yet!"

And in the shadowy darkness of the rented cottage Tom Merry and his chum got busy right away. Fleck had been just a trifle too off-handed and careless for a keen-witted junior like Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 8. Blake Chips In!

"**B**LAKE JOVE!" Arthur Augustus was the first to speak after the darkness had swallowed up Tom Merry and Lowther.

The juniors had watched, spellbound, and now they turned their attention again to the scene before them. The white light from the lamp on the side dose of the air liner's saloon lit up the hard faces of the crooks and the white, scared faces of the passengers and pilot.

What it all meant the startled juniors were at a loss even to guess. They stared, scarcely breathing in their excitement. But now Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath.

"Blat Jove! This beats cook-tigins, dog boys!" he whispered. "Shall we work off for help, Blake?"

"Nonsense! No fear!" whispered Blake emphatically. "We're too close, and they'd spot us moving away. Lie low and see what happens."

"Shush!" breathed Morris.

Logan had scarcely glanced after his accomplices and prisoner. He spoke now.

"No need to get the wind up, gentle," he said quite softly. "We've no quarrel with you. Just behave and do as you're told, and you'll soon see the back of us."

"You infernal villains!" roared one of the passengers, a short, stubby individual. "You'll pay for this outrage. I'll promise you. Do you know who I am, confound your impudence!"

"Nay a bit, Fatty!" grinned Logan.

"I am Winthrop Harriman," shouted the portly gentleman, "and I will make you pay for this outrage, if it cuts us every penny I possess!"

Logan started, and the juniors themselves were startled. The name of Winthrop Harriman was well known. He was an American millionaire who had been a great deal in the papers of late.

"You are Harriman, the damned millionaire!" ejaculated Logan.

"Yes. Now will you dare to keep me a prisoner longer!" scouted the portly man angrily.

Logan whitened, and his eyes gleamed.

"And you—who are you?" he went on, nodding at the second emphatically-stirred gentleman.

"My name is Sir Charles Koyton!" was the lip, impressive answer.

"The shipowner?" said Logan, staring.

"Yes. And, like my friend here," roared Sir Charles, "I will make you suffer!"

"Am not that cut!" snapped Logan. "You—who are you? Not another dandy millionaire, eh?"

It was the little, insignificant-looking man—the third passenger—who was shaking with fright. He could scarcely speak as he answered:

"I—I—my name is Bendor, and I—I am a London stockbroker. This—this outrage—"

"That'll do, mister!"

Logan called to his men, leaving one to keep guard over the prisoners. He was evidently not much interested in a weak, shabby-looking stockbroker.

The crooks stood together in a group while Logan talked

with them in whispers. It was clear that some new idea had occurred to the leader of the gang. They separated at last, and Logan addressed the passengers again, his eyes glistening.

"Well, gent's," he remarked coolly, "here's no never know as I had two well-known millionaires for guests!"

"Guests! How dare you, you scoundrel!" began Sir Charles.

"Faring guests, I'm hoping," grinned Logan. "Wait until you see my boarding-house, gent's! Now, listen! His voice suddenly went cold and hard. "You'll walk ahead of me in single file, the lot of you. Any silly lanky-panky and there'll be some expensive barrels! I warn you! Got that? Right! Quick march!"

Two of the men remained behind, while Logan and another took charge of the fire of pressure. Both the French pilot and Sir Charles looked like eating trouble, but the cold, business end of an automatic jabbed into their toes

stagnant water. In the darkness it looked black as ink and strangely forbidding.

Once on a time the quarry had been a hive of industry, with buildings on the side where the cart-track ran, built against the cliff. More than once the janitors stumbled over broken, deserted trolly-rails in their path. In the scolding evenings some of the janitors had explored the quarry, but few of them knew their way about in the darkness.

Quite suddenly a sound reached the janitors' ears. It was the roar of aeroplane engines.

"Phew! Those two must be running off with that giddy air liner!" breathed Blake. "I wondered if they'd dare to leave it! Great job, it's coming this way!"

They all looked wildly upwards towards the sound. It seemed to come over the rim of the forbidding mass of cliff opposite to them across the pool.

It came nearer. Every second they expected to see the giant aeroplane sweep into view over the top of the quarry.



"Down! Get out of sight!" yelled Blake. Like figures the janitors leaped on the backs of the two gangsters.

caused them to change their minds. They tramped away into the gloom.

The two men left behind instantly jumped into the air liner. One switched off the light over the doorway, and the other climbed into the pilot's cabin.

Now that the light was out Blake deemed it safe to move. With a whispered word to his chosen to follow, he led the way on the track of the disappearing file of men.

They hurried on cautiously, and Blake soon noted that they were descending steeply. Presently they found themselves stumbling down a wetty cart-track. And then Blake's eyes saw something, and he understood where they were.

Before them gleamed water, glimmering blackly under the misty starlight. Beyond that loomed up a black mass like a cliff, suddenly ending high up in a jagged edge which showed the sky.

"The quarry pool!" whispered Blake. "I—I think I see the game, chaps. Go carefully now, for goodness' sake, and keep to the track! It winds round one side of the pool, remember!"

"Yess, watch!"

Direction with enthusiasm, the janitors crept on. Before them showed the expanse of black water—the quarry pool. The cart-track they were on ran steeply down and round the edge, skirting the high cliff, which almost surrounded the pool. Round each side the ground rose steeply, forming almost a circle of cliffs round the forbidding mass of

And then, to their surprise, the engines seemed to stop suddenly.

"Conked out," whispered Blake. "What the blump are they—Oh, look!"

Suddenly, and with startling unexpectedness, the air liner appeared in view—on the brink of the quarry cliff opposite!

In vain tautling slowly to the very brink, its two propellers revolved slowly, and then—

"Good heavens!"

It was over. The great machine toppled over the brink and a crushing mass of earth and stone, and nose-dived, clean as a plummet, into the dark, glimmering pool below.

Splash!

A whining, whirling noise that made the watchers' hearts leap, and then a tremendous splash.

A great fountain of black water shot up, and great waves spread across the glimmering surface of the pool. Spray, icy-cold, showered over the startled janitors. They heard a muffled sound like an explosion from the surging, disturbed water.

The water began to settle again, over-widening ripples spreading out and eddies towards the steep margin and cliffs of the pool. And then Blake gave a startled gasp.

"Down! Get out of sight—quick!"

They were just in time. A white light flashed on the cliff top.

They glimpsed a dark figure appear on the brink opposite. They heard a faint shout from him.

"All O.K., Jim!"

The figure was joined next moment by another. They traced down from the height into the quarry pool. The liner had not sunk; it was wallowing in the turbulent water, with just parts of the hull above the surface. But, obviously, it would not be long before it did sink—into the bottomless pool!

Even as Blake spoke something startling happened. From one of the black entrances to the tunnel workings there came a sudden sound—the faint, coloring crack of a shot.

Creak!

To their ears came faint shouts—wailed and urgent.

"That means trouble!" snapped Blake, his eyes glistening in the deep gloom. "That pilot must have tumbled rusty! Quick—here's where we slip in, before those other two turn up. This way!"

"We're with you, Blake!"

"Yess, waitah!"

And Jack Blake rushed for one of the tunnels, his excited, but determined, gleam at his heels, and they vanished into the black, forbidding maze.

CHAPTER 4.

Priests!

IT was pitch dark in the tunnel.

As they pushed in recklessly the velvet darkness enveloped them, and they pulled up for a moment.

Water dripped from the roof, and the floor ran with it, and was slippery and soft with mud and clay. To rush blindly onwards was dangerous, for the broken rails could not be seen, and a fall would probably mean serious injury.

The whole place was soaking with wetness, and the smell of dank earth was overpowering.

But the excited shouts were still ringing out, and after that pause Blake led the way onwards as speedily as was possible. They hurried on, feeling their way with hands on the dripping, slimy wall, splashing into patches of dry water, and tripping over the derelict rails.



One reason of great value "Tatters," the one-time travelling Ticket's assistant, saw the process laid out by George Chalmers, in a room and regarded and the five figures before which he inherited soon to the rest of his. But Tatters has seen one of the best fellows at Claryville killed him; through them, others after whom he struggles to escape. Then, in their desperation, Tatters' ready kinsman gives his wrong road. Everything looks black for Tatters, the greatest evil of the under-grounds, connection, however, all are gone. But at the strength hour resolution overcomes the setback. How all this comes about is vividly told in the exciting long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. in this week's issue of

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The journey was a nightmare. Branched tunnels seemed to run off every few yards, but the connection ahead guided them.

A glimmer of light showed at last.

The tunnel they were now in sloped upwards, and was drier, save for rivulets of water trickling down from the roof. The light ahead grew brighter, and quite abruptly the tunnel opened out into a sort of junction, with rails branching off into other black tunnels.

And here they found the crevices and their victims.

An electric hand-lamp stood on a ledge of rock, throwing a bright yellow light over the underground junction. It shone on rocky, stony walls, rusted rails, and water streaked with brownish earth. And it shone on the white faces of the crotch's prisoners.

They were grouped with their backs to the far wall. Close by, leaning drunkenly against the rock, was the French pilot of the air liner. His face was white and veined with pain. He coughed, hugging one arm, which hung limply by his side. On his leather tunic showed a dull patch of crimson.

With their backs to the junction stood Logan and his accomplice. They had automation in their hands. The smell of powder still hung about the stagnant air of the place.

Logan did not seem to hear the junction's approach, nor did his man. They did not turn.

"That's just to show you we mean business, Frenchy!" Logan was muttering. "You had! I warned you not to try any hanky-panky! You damned well asked for it! And now—"

He paused, obviously puzzled by the sudden, amazed expressions on the white faces of his prisoners.

The pilot and passengers had sighted the junction, and they must have appeared as ghosts to them.

Their startled looks were wanting enough to Logan. He suddenly turned his head, and in that moment Blake realized it was now or never!

"Here's 'em, chaps!" he shouted.

His voice was hoarse with excitement. Like tigers the junction leaped on the backs of the two crotch, striving to bring them down.

Logan pulled savagely, while his companion involuntarily pulled the trigger, and the explosion which followed smashed through the tunnel—into that underground den—the column rang through the tunnels.

It was a mad attack. Blake realized that even so he hoped. Yet he hoped that the passengers would instantly join in the attack.

But only one did—Sir Royton Clarke.

Those followed a wild, whirling scrimmage. Helpless confusion followed. Blake, Harris, and Monner had brought Logan crashing down, and were struggling furiously with him amid the rails. Arthur Augustus and Digby had attacked the other man, who as his charge tripped over a rail and went crashing down on his face.

Sir Royton gave a gasp, stared a moment, and then went to their aid. The pilot lurched forwards, and, with his face hard as steel, and grasped a lump of rock to use as a weapon.

The other two passengers were far too paralyzed with fright even to move hand or foot. The little stockbroker slumped down in a faint, and Winthrop Haysman—a big enough man in the world of finance—gazed a hopeless funk in a fight. He leaped against the wall, his fat, stinky face white as a sheet with sheer fright.

Luckily, the loosed bullet had done no harm, and the men did not get a second chance to use his gun. Digby watched it from his hand, and went in spinning away into the darkness of the tunnel.

They rolled over and over, and then Sir Charles, panting like a pooley pronger, managed to get a grip of the man's one arm, and between them they held the fellow pinned flat, yelling in pain and fury. Arthur Augustus plumped down on his back, pinning him down, with Digby on his throbbing legs.

Meanwhile, Logan was fighting like a demon. Over and over he rolled, while the pilot leered and staggered about waiting to get in a blow with the chunk of rock—a blow that would undoubtedly have settled the fight there and then, could he have got it in.

But the chance never came. Even the three stalwart junction could not hold Logan. Had the pilot been wounded the end would have been different, perhaps. At it was, with the junction and Logan rolling about madly, it was dangerous to strike.

And then rousing footsteps sounded from the tunnel behind them, and Blake's heart sank in dismay. He made a savage effort to hold the raging Logan, dashed as he was by the blows showered upon him. But it was in vain, and next moment came about, and the other two men burst into the junction, their weapons held ready.

"What! By James! Those hands up—sharp!" came a belated order. "Hands up, damn you!"

There was a rush of feet. Arthur Augustus was twisting round in alarm when a hat crashed against his temple, and he rolled off his cot, half stunned, his head aching. Another furious blow sent Blake reeling backwards, to trip over a rail and go headlong.

"Stop! It's no good, boys!" gasped Sir Charles. "Don't shoot— Oh!"

The old gentleman reeled back, and went down as the men wreathed himself free, striking out, and snarling. Dicky looked away, also.

Blake found himself sprawling across a rail, his head rebounding from a blow on the temple down Logan's fist. The next moment Logan also was face. Instantly he whipped out his automatic again, and jumped back to where one man still stood in the entrance to the tunnel, covering the scene with his own weapon.

"Back out of the way, Hooky! Look lively!" yelled Logan.

Hooky leaped out of the line of fire. By the time Blake and the others had recovered their wits they found two wicked-looking automatics pointing their noisier.

"Very neatly, but not quite!" ripped out Logan viciously. "Not a darned move or a wish from any of you. Next time I shan't be so particular where I plug lead! Damn your young hides! Where the heck did you spring from?"

He was staring in amazement at the juniors. They looked right—covered in mud, and more than one showing vivid signs of injury. The pilot was leaning in a sitting position against the wall now, obviously exhausted with his efforts, and with loss of blood.

"Why, it's them blasted kids as ran into us on the concrete earlier on," said Sargun, with an oath. "By James! They must have hit bangs!" roared one of the crew.

Logan's face went black with fury.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "So you started round after my warning, did you? Where have you been all this time?"

The juniors did not answer.

"That means that you've been watching us ever since," snarled Logan. "Your right?"

No answer.

"Well, we'll take it that you have been, anyway!" snarled Logan. "By heck, though! There was more than four of you. Where are the other kids?"

Blake gestured. To tell the truth would most probably bring grave danger on his absent share. Moreover, it would serve to make their own position worse for a certainty. In such circumstances he felt that an evasion was justifiable.

"They wouldn't stay; they went off," he said quickly. "But we believed you were more than thirty pounds, and so we hung on to see what happened."

"Well, you've seen more than thirty pounds for you, you young lads!" snarled Logan. He closely accepted Blake's statement.

If the other two boys believed they were merely pounds, then it was unlikely they would want to linger on the cold, wind-swept beach. "In any case, it scarcely matters," added Logan. "But the sooner we get off the better, lads."

He turned to the shivering Harrieson and Sir Charles.

"Stand over there—away from the rest! You're coming with us."

Sir Charles spluttered.

"And where do you propose to take us now, you ruffian!"

"You're going for a little sail—to my boarding-house," grinned Logan, with grim humor. "To the gods' hands behind me, Sargy. After this bit of trouble, I shan't be so slack, Jim thinking."

"You snarled! How dare you—"

"Cut it out!" snarled Logan, cold and ruthless again at once. "You've said and done enough, snorer. Move trouble from you, and they'll be flying their flag half-mast on your ships, Sir Charles Boyton. That's a warning!"

His cold voice was full of deadly menace, and it was clear the man was capable of his threat. Logan's cold eyes, hard face, and steady gaze were those of a killer.

The juniors felt certain of that, and they shivered. The shipwreck seemed to realize it, also, for they stood quite still, and did not answer. Sargun produced coal, and tied the hands of the two millionaires behind their backs with automatic thoroughness. Harrieson's father clanked away shaking with fright.

"Now the others," said Logan coldly.

The juniors did not attempt to resist, nor did the little stockbroker. In their case their feet were also tied to the wall.

They were left lying with their backs to the

wall. Then the French pilot's feet were tied, and his wounded arm bound to his side.

He did not make a movement as this was done; he was clearly far too spent to resist. Logan wiped his

"Blowed if I like leaving you like that, Frenchy!" he remarked. "But it's your own fault."

"You—you're not leaving us here like this?" stammered Blake.

"You've hit it, kid!"

"But this man; he is wounded, and he needs medical attention," protested Blake angrily. "You heathen villain!"

"I warned him, and he's brought it on himself!" snarled Logan. "But it's only for a few hours. I'll send word to the local cops where to find you—after you've got clear—see? Meanwhile, you stay here. And I don't advise you to try to get out on your own. If you get lost in these tunnels, it's Heaven help you!"

With a string of his shoulder Logan turned to his men, and gave the order to march. They tramped off, the two millionaires leading the way. Logan went last, and he took the lamp with him. Deep, impenetrable darkness fell on the underground chambers as the last flickering splendor of the lamp died away in the distance and silence reigned.

CHAPTER 7.

Lull!

A DEEP groan came from the French pilot, thick as he was, that hapless plight filled him with horror. The little stockbroker also groaned dumbly.

"Well, we seem to be in a nice pickle," remarked Jack Blake glumly. "If only we had a light—"

"Don't fuss!"

It was an exclamation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He seemed to have remembered something.

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"I have just remembered that I have a torch in my pocket—a tiny waterproof pocket torch," said Gussy eagerly.

"It is really only a toy, but—"

"Oh, good egg! It may help us. At least, it'll enable us to do something for ourselves."

"But we're tied up!"

"We shan't be for long!" said Blake emphatically.

"When that mischief was trying me I lacerated my feet as much as I could—and the cord's already loose."

"And even one more too tight," exclaimed Harrieson excitedly. "That chap was in too much of a hurry to get off."

"They know we don't wish trying to get out, though," grunted Harrieson dispiritedly. "Without a light it would be madness, I suppose."

"I'm going to have a jolly good try, anyway!" snarled Jack Blake. "Here goes for this rotten cord!"

He started to writhe and roll about in his mad efforts to release himself, while his share, though less hopeful, did likewise. But the cords had been tied more thoroughly than they had appeared.

The minutes dragged by as they struggled and snored.

It was only after some time had passed that an idea occurred to Blake. He rolled over, and after a struggle managed to get the cord slipped round a projecting jugged edge of an iron sleeper.

He sat up, and, using his body as a lever, flung himself forward with all his force. The cord did not give, and though the effort was agony to his wrists, he tried again.

Snap!

It was a welcome sound to all of them as the cord snapped.

"Done it!"

"Yes. Now for your torch, Gussy!"

Blake readily wrenched the loose cord from his wrists. Then he whipped out his knife and cut his legs free. He felt his way to Arthur Augustus, and in a few seconds had taken the tiny torch from that junior's waterproof pocket.

A light flared up, its white gleam, though small enough, bringing joy to the prisoners.

It took but a few moments for Blake to release them all. Then he stood up, pointing with his assertions. His first thought was of the pilot's wound. While Arthur Augustus held the torch in position he examined it. It proved to be but a flesh wound in the arm, not serious, but decidedly painful, and there had been no little loss of blood.

With strips of handkerchief and a white scarf the wound was bound up.

But then his difficulties rose again. The pilot was still dazed and weak, and it was clear he was not fit to begin an attempt to escape, and the stockbroker was too terrified to take the risk of being lost.

"Only one thing for it," said Blake at last. "Some of you fellows must stay here with the pilot and this gentleman, Gary, you come with me. We'll take the torch and we'll find a way out somehow. We can follow the footprints."

"Good whose?" said Harrison.

And after some discussion this was agreed upon. Blake had no intention of trusting to Logan's word to have them rescued.

The two made a start at last, leaving the pilot and his companions as comfortably fixed as was possible. Blake took the tiny torch, and Arthur Augustus followed him from the junction into the dark tunnel, where the crooks had vanished.

For a time all went well. As Blake had said, the footprints showed clearly in the mud. And suddenly they reached a spot where the tunnel branched off right and left. Here the ground was flooded with the brownish, discolored water, hiding all footprints.

They splashed through, breasting the icy-cold water, and soon they found footmarks in one of the tunnels, and they pressed on. Higher ground again was reached, and suddenly the trail ended on a stretch of rocky ground.

Blake groined on he shone the light down, striving to find the trail again. They went on again, picking a footprint up here and there. Then they reached another junction of tunnels, and all traces of footprints ended.

They were lost—lost in that horrible labyrinth of quarry workings, and the air was getting thicker. Were they fated to tramp on until they dropped from sheer exhaustion? And what would their fate be if they were never found?

The juniors gave up the search for footprints at last. They wandered on and on recklessly, taking any tunnel by chance, hoping it would lead to daylight, feeling that each one must. They were, in fact, getting desperate by now. They were chilled through and through, their lungs felt choked, and their soaked feet scoured frozen.

Blake's heart was like lead. What fools they had been to chance it! Yet it was equally mad to rely upon the wondrously Logan's word. And it had seemed almost absurdly easy to Blake to find the way back again to the quarry. Now he knew differently, however.

It seemed hours since they had left the others, yet actually it was fifteen minutes at the most, when suddenly Arthur Augustus gave a gasp.

"Light ahead, death bay! Look!"

A faint, tiny glimmer seemed to show in the blackness ahead of them, and they pressed on with renewed hope. They stumbled on, and their hearts leaped in a chill draught began to blow upon them.

Stumbling into puddles and over rails, they plunged on, and suddenly they came out into the open and were gazing in deep breaths of sight air.

Before them stretched the glittering quarry pool, and beyond the looming cliffs showed starlight. The mist had cleared somewhat, and they could see their whereabouts more clearly than before. Blake's glance fell upon the silent pool, but all signs of the air liner had vanished—at least they could see nothing in the gloom.

"But Jove! Thank Heaven we have managed it, Blake!" uttered Arthur Augustus in a low voice. "Now let us wash those, death bay, and get help."

"Mustn't risk getting lost on the common, though," said Blake. "Let's climb up above and try to find out our bearings."

They hurried along the track and climbed up the hill to the top of the quarry. Then they glowered round, and almost immediately Blake gave an exclamation as his eyes caught a silvery gleam across the distant commonland.

"The Rhyl—the river!" he screeped. "And there's Way-

lead!" he added, pointing to a glow in the sky away to the right. "We've only got to reach the river and we can follow it on. Come on!"

Their firelight was gone now as the clear air revived them. Soon they had left the common behind and were crossing fields towards the river. They reached the banks at last and stared down the footpath. Their surroundings were more familiar now, even in the darkness.

"We're just about a couple of miles from St. Jim's," said Blake. "We've got to cross the river first, though. That means going round by the bridge. Hello! There's Glyn House! Good!"

"Yess, watah! Why not knock up Mr. Glyn and ask him to please for help, death bay?"

"Can't. I heard Glyn say early yesterday that his people were away and the house shut up. It's not frightfully late yet, and you see the house is in darkness. I say, though, what about paddling their boat to get across the river? That will save us about a mile, Gary."

"Good idea! But Mr. Glyn keeps the boat paddled." "His people his motor-boat safely locked up, of course," said Blake coolly. "But we can easily borrow the giddy deucey. Come on!"

Glyn House was already looming up on their left, the grounds stretching down to the towing-path. Now was a little jolly, and they could make out the shape of the motor-boat alongside it. Often enough had Glyn taken them out in his pet's big seagoing motor-boat.

The juniors hurried down to the jolly. In fifteen or twenty minutes now at the most they expected to be safe at St. Jim's, relishing their astounding adventure to the Rhod and obtaining his help. The find would soon get the police on the job, and the unjust pilot would have every care and attention in the school infirmary.

That was Blake's programme. He little dreamed what lay before them before that was to happen, however.

They reached the motor-boat—a long, low craft, lying alongside the jolly. Behind it was tethered a small dinghy, and it was into this the juniors tumbled. As they hurried the dinghy was only tied with rope, and though so near now to it they intended to use footboards to ferry them across the river.

The dinghy was covered over with waterproof canvas, and the juniors started to unlash this.

"We'll go for up on the other side and rank her back to-morrow," Blake was just remarking, when he gave a gasp as the tramp of feet and voices sounded from the towing-path. He glanced round and sighted a group of dim forms just emerging from the hedge lining the path. Then a familiar voice said:

"Where the heck is that blessed motor-boat? I'm certain it was somewhere along here. Hello, there it is, lad!"

The juniors tensed and their hearts beat fast. For the voice was the hoaky, hard voice of Logan.

CHAPTER 2.

Where the Trail Led!

"LOGAN!" breathed Blake. "Down-quick!"

Fortunately the canvas still covered half of the boat. They ducked down beneath it and crouched there, with hearts beating fast.

They were astounded. They had fully believed Logan and his prisoners would be miles away by this time. To the juniors it had seemed like hours and hours while they had been burrowing beneath the earth in those noxious tunnels.

Yet a moment's reflection told Blake that, with two prisoners to think of, such a gang of men would have to

Would You Believe It?

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firing about 300 rounds, each of which passes through the barrel in 40 seconds, the gun has to

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A Pair of Rabbits
in 4 years can
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Under Water
for 5 minutes!
The record for
remaining under
water is held
by a Frenchman.
—Guns '33] sec

proceed very cautiously indeed to escape observation, even as that late hour. Logan was not the man to take chances, and he had evidently led his men by devious routes to avoid lanes and corners.

But here they were. And what did they want with Mr. Glyn's motor-boat? Blake suddenly remembered Logan's grim humor; he had told the two millionaire prisoners that he was taking them for a "sail"! Clear enough now that the whole plot had been carefully planned! Yet the cool impudence of Logan in making his getaway in a stolen motor-boat took Blake's breath away.

"There was a tramp of feet on the jetty,"
 "These padlocks stand, Jim?" they heard Logan inquire.
 "Yes; an' gone in the tank, and all ready, chist," came the hoarse reply.
 "Right! Well, step aboard, gents," resumed Logan, with another flash of cold humor. "We looks after our passengers well on this line, Sir Charles. There's cushions, and blankets, and a stove in the cabin, and we'll soon fix you up comfy."

"You rascally kidnappers—"
 "Get aboard," snapped Logan, "or you'll be floating down-stream on your ownage—with a dose of lead in you!"
 Blake and D'Arcy glimpsed the forms fling on board. Soon they heard busy activity on the motor-boat. Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Greatest Scott! Let us jump aboard, Blake! They'll be off in a minute, dash boy!" he whispered frantically.

"We'd be spotted in a flash!" breathed Blake, his eyes on the dim figures of Logan and his men. "We're looked for a mile like these poor beggars, I'm afraid, Guss! In any case, I've been to see this through!" he added, his eyes flashing.

For the moment Blake, in his excitement, had almost forgotten the wounded pilot and the necessity of bringing help to him. He was thinking only of the necessity of saving the kidnapped men somehow—of not losing the trail of the crooks.

In any case, they had small chance of coming to any decision, for even as Blake spoke the engine fired, and then the propeller began to thrash the water near them.

Another moment and the motor-boat, with no lights showing as yet, began to move from the jetty, towing the small dingy behind it.

It gained speed, and soon was travelling down-stream in the darkness.

The dark mass of Glyn House weighed from eight behind the shadowy trees. Lines of glimmering, white-topped foam spread across the river, to splash against the banks as the powerful craft forged on, the dinghy rocking and surging behind.

Soon they glimpsed the dim battlements of St. Jim's through the trees, and then that glimpse vanished behind also, and they were speeding between the shadowy, wooded banks and meadows.

"Well, we're fairly in for it now, Guss," remarked Blake in a grim whisper. "And it's more than likely they've sailing for the sea."

"Oh, greatest Scott!" gasped Guss. "But—but that's impossible, dash boy! They can't get through the locks."

"Why not? Logan's got nerves for anything," said Blake. "He'll get through if he has to force old Bill Elam to open the lock at the point of a gun."

"But it's late—"
 "There's either Bill or his mate on all night!" granted Blake. "You often bring barges up to Wayland from Hylsworth in the night—I've heard 'em boating when I've been in bed at St. Jim's."

"Oh dash! But—but we can warn Bill Elam—"

"And get a bullet for our pains—and one perhaps for Bill if he starts anything," said Blake grimly. "Bill's cottage is a mile from any other house, remember. What chance should we stand against that lot of ruffians? We can do nothing!"

Arthur Augustus groaned. He was thinking of his charges and of the pilot, imprisoned and suffering in that horrible underground den. And Blake had remembered it now—too late!

If they were captured—as seemed likely enough when the strange voyage ended—who was to rescue them? All they could hope for was that Tom Morry and Lowler had come to no harm.

Minutes sped by. The junkies made themselves as comfortable as possible in the bottom of the boat, pulling the covers right over them for extra warmth. Then the junkies suddenly became aware that the lights had been switched on, as he heard the motor-boat. They saw the glow of the navigating lights, and then the lights from port-lights glimmered on the faster water on either side.

An hour must have passed, when suddenly they jumped as the brazen voice of the Elamers aboard the motor-boat echoed across the water. They peered out from under the covers.

As they expected, they saw the lights of Belter's Lock ahead, dancing on the always water. As they looked they glimpsed the door of the lock-keeper's hut open on the distant bank, with the form of Bill Elam framed against the doorway.

The sight of him brought a sudden idea to Blake. They could do something, after all.

"Quick! Your torch, Guss!" snapped Blake. "I'll throw old Bill a message if I can."

They leaped a hail to Bill Elam's familiar voice.

"Hallo! What boat's that?"
 "The Gannet, of Rylcombe!" answered Logan's strong voice.

There was a moment's silence. Evidently Bill Elam was astonished to hear that. They knew he would know Mr. Glyn's boat at once. And he would be astonished at it being out so late at night.

"You want to come through, sir?" he called back at length.

"Of course! Look lively!" bawled Logan.

The lock-keeper hurried away to open the lock. Obviously, he had no suspicion whatever that anything was wrong. Mr. Glyn often made expeditions out to sea, and he paid lock dues—in fact he was on the Board of the Hylt Navigation Company.

The motor-boat slowed down almost to a stop. Presently the dripping gates of the lock began to part wider and wider, and the motor-boat sped into the lock.

Meanwhile, Blake was busy. While Arthur Augustus held the carefully shielded light on his pocket-book, Blake swiftly scribbled a message. There was no time for thought—he hastily put the first thing down which occurred to him:

"To Bill Elam.—Help! Phone to Wayland Police. French air liner sunk in quarry pool on Locks in Common. Passengers imprisoned in quarry workings with three St. Jim's boys and wounded pilot. Other passengers on board Gannet in hands of crooks. Urgent!"

"JACK BLAKE, D'ARCY."

"That should do it!" breathed Blake, closing the note-book. "OM! How our names, and we can only hope he won't think it good."

He hastily drew aside a corner of the covers covering and peered out. It was dark in the lock. The motor-boat

Facts from Far and Near.



A Chariot, 4000 years old.

Made by European bronze-age craftsmen from elm & ash. It was taken across the Mediterranean to Egypt and found in a nobleman's tomb where it had survived in perfect condition.



A 45 mile dance!

The long distance record for dancing is held by an American couple who danced from Providence to Boston—45 miles.



One of the River of Vinograd in Columbia, Sth America, contains sulphuric & hydrochloric acid. It is so sour no fish can live in it.

14 DID THE LION EAT TRIMBLE? GUSSY SAYS "YES"! BUT TOM MERRY & CO. WANT TO

and dinghy were already low down in the lock. A dim glow came from the curtained portholes of the motor-boat, and dim forms could be seen in the walls of the big craft. The surge and roar of falling water was deafening. Bill Elton was not in sight.

It seemed an age before the water ceased to fall, and the outer lock gates began to open, showing the silver, gleaming stretch of water beyond.

Blake's heart was beating fast. If Bill Elton did not appear—

He appeared at last, just as the motor-boat began to move. "Good-night, air!"

Logan called a grateful answer. Blake saw Bill's dim form outlined against a lamp behind him. He was standing slumped on the rim of the lock-ledge. It was now or never, and Blake took the chance.

He scrambled out from the canvas cover, and stood upright in the rocking, twisting boat. His head went up, and he sent the motor-boat whizzing upwards with all its force.

His aim was good—perhaps too good.

The whizzing motor-boat flew through the air and struck Bill Elton full in the face. He staggered backward, and then the edge of the lock wall hid him from their sight as the motor-boat leaped out through the lock-gates into the open river.

Darkness reigned on the water once more, and the lights of the buoy vanished readily behind. Blake, who had dropped swiftly under cover again, crunched breathlessly.

Had he been seen by anyone aboard the motor-boat? No outcry came, however, and it was soon clear that he had not. But Blake's heart beat fast with hope now. Bill Elton knew them well. In the summer months they often made expeditions down-river to the locks, and had tea in the lock-keeper's garden. He knew they were not the fellows to play a stupid game. He would know it was long past their bedtime, and that something serious was wrong.

At all events, it was done now, and they could only hope for the best.

The junkies settled down in the bottom of the boat again. Once past the locks Logan opened out his engine to full speed, the dinghy rocking in the swirl of water behind.

They pulled out, watching the wooded banks, dark and looming as they slid rapidly by. They passed one or two villages, mostly in darkness, and then they passed through a fair-sized town, still at full speed.

An hour passed—two hours—and Blake knew they could not be far from the entrance of the Rhyl.

He woke up suddenly from a daze. The monstrous thrub of the engine and swirl of water against the banks had lulled both of them into a half-sleep. Moreover, they were dead tired, they could scarcely keep their eyes open.

"Can't be far off Rhylmouth now, Gussy," exclaimed Blake, in a low voice. "Looks as if I was right—they're making for the open sea!"

"Oh, hal jove!"

They peered anxiously out from the canvas cover. The boat was lifting and falling now, and spray was rising over the dinghy, falling on the canvas in constant showers. In the distance ahead they glimpsed lights—the long arm of a jetty, with a blinking light at the end. They could scarcely see the banks on either side now.

"Rhylmouth!" breathed Blake. "Now we shall see!"

The motor-boat surged on. Soon it was passing the twinkling light on the far end of the jetty. Rhylmouth was only a tiny place—half fishing village and half seaside resort. They passed the twinkling light, and the tiny dinghy began to frighten the junkies.

Once well out, the junkies began to realize they were hunted for a severe toasting—perhaps worse!

The sea was choppy. The dinghy rocked and pitched violently at the end of the tow-rope. Hissing spray splashed over the canvas. Now and again it came landing under the cover and splashing over the sides of the small-craft.

They were now wet through and shivering with cold.

"There's the lighthouse!" said Blake, through chattering teeth.

Out to their left they sighted the twinkling light of the new lighthouse, its rays flashing now and again on the water before them. Then the motor-boat, now well out, half turned and began to surge down Channel, parallel with the dark coast.

The hearts of the junkies were heavy now. What lay before them they could only conjecture. They had hoped that Bill Elton would not fail them—that he would act swiftly and get the motor-boat stopped long before this. And it came to them that possibly the lock-keeper was only on a private telephone—was between the different locks up-river. Yet, surely, he could have done something!

Drenched and miserable, with despair clanking at their hearts, the junkies gazed ahead across the toasting water. The Old Linnar.—No. 1,893.

The faint murmur of voices reached them occasionally, but only now and again could they get a glimpse of those aboard the motor-boat. And suddenly, as they stood, tired-eyed, close, Blake gave an exclamation.

"Look!"

Ahead loomed a dark, towering column of stone, black and forbidding. Round its base surged white-topped



As the junkies watched, the great machine came down the river.

breakers, glimmering as they dashed themselves against black, jagged rocks.

"The old light-house!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "The Jews! They—they can't be making for that, dear boy!"

"Looks like it," said Blake, in a startled whisper. "My hat! We shall be smashed up, the loach!"

But suddenly the second laser what they were doing. Several minutes ago all lights aboard the motor-boat had been suddenly cut off, and now, in darkness, the motor-boat slowed down and began to creep cautiously towards the looming light-house.

Then the janitors were startled by a soft knock on the kitchen, and a moment later a door in the base of the light-house opened. A dark figure stood there, framed in a yellow light behind.

"All clear, boys!" came a hail in Logan's voice.

"Yes, come in!"

The motor-boat began to move in, taking a deep channel between the coral-licking rocks. It stopped at last near a platform of stone. A rope was thrown and made fast by a couple of men who came running from the light-house.

The janitors noticed another boat drawn up on the rocky platform. They crowded down, nervously daring to breathe, as the motor-boat cautiously ranged alongside the stone platform, hitting and creaking against it. Would they be discovered now?

"Look lively!" shouted Logan hoarsely. "Now, you goats—how you want the blasted lot smashed up and sent under you!"

They heard the two prisoners protesting—Sir Charles angrily and Whitecap Harriman shakily. One by one the two jumped aboard, followed by the crooks.

"Stealing to the net-boat, didst?" asked someone.

"No thundering fear! Eysen was some fisherman comes pokin' round here, you fool! Shows her off! She'll drift away, and still be here before she's picked up—if she ever is!"

"She may strike the rocks and sink, chert!"

"All the better! Let go down!" muttered Logan.

The motor-boat instantly began to coil round and move away from the platform as she was let go. In the grip of the strong tide the Gannet, unmaneuvered, drifted off down the Channel, towing the rickety dingy behind her.

The janitors' hearts were in their mouths.

Should they yell in the hope of rescue by the crooks? Supposing they did crash on the rocks and sink? Blake shuddered at the thought. Yet, on the other hand, if they got safely out of the channel, they were, in some extent, masters of the situation. They would be able to haul the dingy alongside the motor-boat, warm aboard and get the engine going!

They drifted on, scraping against the rocks with a horrible jarring that made the janitors' hearts leap. The crooks had turned away and, with their prisoners, were tramping along the platform towards the open, lighted doorway.

And then the question was suddenly settled for the unfortunate janitors.

There came a sudden tap at the rope, and a grinding crash rang out—the horrible sound of rending timber.

The motor-boat had struck.

It veered round a strike, and the dingy was almost dragged under the water. Again and again came that frightful grinding and creaking from the motor-boat as the tide sent it against the coral rocks. Then the Gannet seemed to slide clear.

But Blake knew it was all up with her.

That terrible grinding and grinding meant, of a certainty, hulls torn for hull to ribbons almost. And soon they had clear evidence of the terrible damage.

There sounded, above the splash of waves, a sudden, horrible gurgling, and the motor-boat sagged and began to sink.

"Quick!" yelled Blake, head-on now of being hoard.

He himself leaped to the power of the dingy, tearing his knife from his pocket as he did so. Unless he was quick, unless he acted with speed and promptness, they were doomed. The plunging Gannet would drag down the small dingy, and them with it!

In that terrible moment Blake, after the first shock, became amazingly cool. He whipped open the blade of his knife and slashed at the rope.

Snap!

The last strand gave, and just in time!

With a strange gurgling sound the hapless Gannet sank from sight, the waves dashing and swirling in kissing foam over her.

But the dingy was free, and for the moment they were safe—or Blake imagined so. He fell back, panting and exhausted, and as he did so there came a furious yell from the light-house, and then—

Crash!

The darkness was split by a flash as the shot rang out. Blake shuddered as he heard the whine of the bullet over his head. And the shot was followed by another and another, as the furious Logan pumped lead into the darkness.

Blake had been seen. The grinding crash as the Gannet struck had caused Logan to turn eyes as he reached the lighted doorway. He had instantly seen Blake's dim form as he dived at the rope, and Logan, in sudden rage and fear, had let loose with his gun, aiming blindly.

"Keep clear, Gussy!" panted Blake. "For Heaven's sake, keep down!"

Their temples throbbed madly as they lay flat in the rocking, twisting dingy. The danger was terrible. At any moment the dingy might strike—and Logan was still firing recklessly into the darkness.

They could only trust to Providence.

The dingy drifted on, every scrape of the hull against a rock bringing terror to the janitors. And then, quite suddenly, the firing ceased.

Blake ventured to lift his head and peer over the rocking gunwale. His heart beat madly with joy at what he saw.

They were out of the deadly channel in clear water. Some hidden current had gripped the light craft and taken it out to safety. Moreover, the rocky platform, and the dark fern outlined against the glow of the lighted light-house chamber had vanished. They were out of sight of Logan—and out of range.

"We're clear, Gussy!" muttered Blake, in a hoaky whisper.

Arthur Augustus did not reply—he could not speak yet. In silence they crouched, drenched and shivering, in the bottom of the drifting dingy. The feeling of joy was leaving Blake now. The danger was by no means over. The boat was drifting out seawards swiftly, and they had no ear in the boat—no means of steering, either. Their position was still desperate—their only hope was of being picked up.

The thought of a night on the sea in an open boat was alarming in the extreme. They were drenched and cold. And the question was in Blake's mind whether such a craft could possibly live long in that choppy sea. Already the boat was becoming waterlogged.

"We've got to make a light for it, Gussy!" whispered Blake. "Luckily, this cover keeps a lot of water out. We've got to keep bailing for all we're worth!"

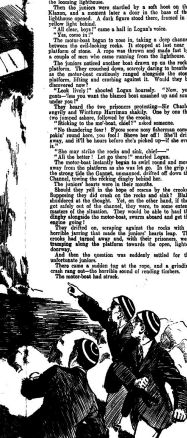
Arthur Augustus had long ago lost his damaged hat. But Blake had his cap, and he started to bawl with it as best he could. They could see lights of fishing-boats far behind them, and farther out in the Channel the lights of steamers. And Blake noted that one set of lights was growing nearer with amazing rapidity.

He could scarcely believe his eyes for the moment. And then he jumped up.

"Your torch, Gussy! Quick! They may see us! Try it, anyway!"

Feasible as were the rays from the tiny torch, there was just a chance, for the steamer undoubtedly was coming towards them at a great speed. Indeed, a new fear came

The Cox Lumber—No. 1,303.



...the top of the cliff, and then toppled over!

to Blake as he gazed towards it—that they might even be run down unseen in the darkness!

The lights came nearer. They could make out the dim shape of the vessel now, smoke pouring from her low funnels. And suddenly Blake gasped.

"A destroyer, Gump! Shoot and wave, for goodness' sake!"

He himself ceased halting and jumped to his feet. They stood in the rocking boat, slinging sheets of spray sweeping them again and again, but they did not heed them. They shouted with all their force, and Arthur Augustus waved the light from his torch madly.

Still the destroyer came forging on, and now they saw that she was passing them. Blake groaned inwardly, and just as suddenly he gave an exclamation.

Far, with startling abruptness, a vivid, white light had shot from the dark upper-structure of the destroyer. It blazed out in a brilliant flash of white, and spread out over the sea, ascending.

The searchlight swept swiftly over the tossing waves in a wide sweep, and suddenly it found them, and stopped. The joyful junction blinked as the white beam dazzled their eyes, showing up their boat and figures in brilliant radiance.

"They've seen us!" gasped Blake. "Oh, thank Heaven!"

Over the tossing water came the boat of a sloop, telling them that they had indeed been seen. And Arthur Augustus collapsed in the boat in a dead faint, while his chain collapsed, exhausted and spent, across the thwart.

CHAPTER 9.

The Escape!

"HALLO! What the thump!"

It was the sound of someone whistling cheerily, and never had anyone been expected to anyone than did that to Tom Merry and Lewther.

Since Fleck and Barker had left them in the deserted cottage the two chums had not been idle by any means.

They had done their utmost to break free from their bonds. But Fleck and his companions had done their work only too well. Though they tugged at the cords until their wrists were sore and aching, and though they had torn at them until their teeth ached and their gums were bleeding, it was all of no avail.

They were still prisoners. Again and again they strove, taking one new spot again, but it was useless. The cord remained fast, and escape seemed as far off as ever.

That Fleck would send anyone to release them eventually they did not believe, and they were beginning to despair when suddenly that unexpected whistling had broken out outside the cottage.

Their hearts leaped.

They had yelled until they were hoarse, and it had soon been borne in on their minds that the spot was lonely, and the fact that Fleck had left them unengaged told them there was little likelihood of their being heard.

And now they heard cheery whistling outside, passing the cottage.

"Shoot!" gasped Tom. "Shoot, for goodness' sake, Merry!"

They raised their voices, and fairly howled:

"Help! Help, there! Help! Help!"

The whistling suddenly ceased.

Tom managed to get to his feet, and he peered through the shutters. He glimpsed a lighted lamp outside, and it swayed about as if carried by someone. Footsteps approached the cottage.

"Hallo!" shouted a cheery voice. "What's up there?"

"We're tied up in here—imprisoned!" called Tom Merry urgently. "Break the door in—get in somehow!"

He supposed the man must be a farm labourer from the clumping, heavy footsteps. They heard the man trying the door, and then he clumped round to the back. He banged and shoved at the back door with as little success as he had had at the front. Then they heard the splintering of wood as he broke the boards near the wrenery window.

Less than two minutes later he came tramping through into the room they were in.

"Oh, good man!" gasped Tom Merry.

The man was young and good-looking, and he wore the uniform of a railwayman. He carried a lighted lamp in his hand. He jumped as he saw the plight of the juniors.

"Of—well, I'm pleased!" he stammered.

"Cut us loose, there's a good chap!" said Lewther. "You'll swallow your whiskers if you gaze like that, old bean!"

The man checked, and, whipping out a knife, he soon freed the juniors. They stretched their cramped limbs thank-

"Well, this beats it!" exclaimed the man, after they had thanked him and explained their position. "Blamed if it ain't like a film story!"

"Where are we?" asked Tom breathlessly. "We haven't the ghost of an idea!"

"You're about a mile from Little Barton Station," said the man. "I'm just off to relieve my mate at the signal-box yonder."

"And where the thump's that—in Surrey, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And we want to get to Wayland quickly!" said Tom, with a groan. "That means—"

"Well, you can be there in a bit over an hour," said the railwayman. "Cut off to the station, and you'll just about catch the London train from Southwester. It stops at Barton and at Wayland Junction. I do know that, young gent!"

"Oh, good!"

"Come along, and I'll show you a short cut—along the lines!"

And the helpful signalman hurried them out. Crossing a stile from the lane, he led the way across a field path, crossing two fields until they reached the line. Here stood the lighted signal-box, and, pointing along the line, the kindly signalman left them.

They thanked him, and trotted along a path running alongside the track. Soon the station lights loomed ahead, and, putting on speed, they dashed breathlessly into a booking-office, darted over for the booking-stick.

"Wayland train gone yet?" gasped Tom.

"No!" The clerk looked at his clock. "Another minute!"

Tom took the tickets—fortunately he had money on him. The minute seemed an age, but the train was seated in the express at last, speeding towards Wayland.

After the still of the empty cottage they found the carriage warm and cozy, and they soon felt better. By the time the train had rumbled into Wayland Junction Tom had decided what to do. The juniors had thought of phoning the police from Little Barton; but they realized how wild the story seemed, and that it was more than likely the police would take the whole thing as a hoax.

But they knew Inspector Short, at Wayland, and he knew them. Tom felt he could convince him when face to face simply enough. But the hour was late, and he feared the inspector would not be at the station.

The worthy inspector was here, however, and, greatly to the boys' astonishment, they found great activity at the station. To their greater astonishment, he greeted them eagerly, drawing them into his office. His eyes gleamed as he scanned their dishevelled clothing.

"You knew something of this affair?" he snapped before Tom could speak. "Have you come—"

"We've come— I don't have you heard about it?" stammered Tom. "Have you heard about the air lines?"

"Yes!" The inspector admitted grimly and in great satisfaction. "But go on, my boy, tell me all you know quickly! The matter is of the greatest urgency!"

Tom began to relate his story rapidly, aided now and again by Lewther. It came to Tom that his chums must have already reported what they had seen on the common. Yet the inspector's attitude puzzled them. And Inspector Short's eyes opened wider as Tom proceeded.

"I see," he said grimly, when Tom ended. "Then you know nothing of what happened afterwards—after you left the common?"

"Only what happened to us!"

"Then I was right in my judgment," said Inspector Short, glancing up at an eagerly listening sergeant. "It is no loss, Bates. It is fortunate indeed that Elton had the good sense to treat it seriously."

"Elton?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What—"

"Strange events seem to have taken place on the common since you left, boy. This message was phoned to the sergeant on duty here a short time ago. The message was brought to me at my house, and I dashed and hurried here at once. I would, possibly, not have taken it seriously myself but for the fact that we have been asked on the phone by Croydon to report if anything has been seen of a missing air liner flying over this district."

"Oh!"

Tom took the message and started as he read it. It was word for word as Jack Blake had written it in his notebook.

"And this message was thrown up to Elton from a motor-car in the lough?" he breathed.

"Yes—from the General, Mr. Glyn's craft. The people have stolen it undoubtedly. Evidently your school friends are abroad here, prisoners, but they managed to send this message. But there— Ah!"

The telephone-bell rang just then, and the Inspector

(Continued on page 12.)

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"THE LIGHTHOUSE MYSTERY!"

(Continued from page 14.)

spring up eagerly. He spins 'cross the transmitter, and then his eyes gleamed as he explained the receiver.

"Right! It was Turner—one of my men. I sent him out once by car to search the cove, and he has already made a report. He states there are clear traces of the glass's landing, and of its dive over the quarry pool; also that Mr. Gray's boat is missing right enough."

"How? And—what our clues—and the plot?"

"They're starting to search the quarry workings right away!" snapped the inspector, grabbing for his hat. "You need not worry about them now, my boys. Come with me, and I will drop you off my car at the school."

"But where are you going, sir?"

"I am taking some men down to Rhydymouth. You are quite sure you heard that man state Rhydymouth?"

"He started to say it, but the other man stopped him."

"Well, it's pretty certain now that that is their destination."

"Unfortunately, I can't get through on the phone to Rhydymouth; there's only one constable stationed there, in any case. If only Shaw had rung as up at once! But, anyway, I must be off!"

He hurried the juniors out. By the back outside the station a big, powerful car was standing, with a uniformed driver at the wheel. A sergeant and two constables followed Inspector Skeet into the car.

"There are six, at least, of the cracks," Tom ventured to point out, "and they're armed—"

"I'm picking up two more men on the way!" rapped out the inspector. "But are out on the cove. Don't worry; we'll be enough to settle their hash!"

But Tom Merry doubted it very much. He did not tell his self-confident inspector, however. Instead, he said:

"Look here, inspector, can't you let us come with you?"

"What? And what would your headmaster say, young man?" barked the astonished officer.

"Well, we want to be in at the finish," said Tom pleadingly. "After all, we've already up to our necks in it."

"Yes, do let us!" begged Muntz Lewther eagerly.

All first the inspector would not hear of it, but after reflection he decided to risk it. In any case, he was anxious not to have to waste time taking the lane round to St. Jim's, for one thing. Nor could he bring himself to allow the juniors to trudge all the way home to St. Jim's on their own. And they had certainly been decidedly useful as far, and might prove useful to him still.

He gave way at last, and instead of turning into Rhydymouth Lane, the big, powerful police car roared off on the direct main road westward. They picked up the two other constables, and then the driver fairly opened out his engine, and the miles flew beneath the wheels.

Tom Merry and Lewther were jammed on the floor of the racing car, and it was a very tight fit; but they enjoyed that exhilarating, exciting run for the coast.

With the powerful headlights blazing the way ahead the great car rushed on through the night. The whole countryside was in darkness, and only in fair sized villages did there not a glimmer of light. What the plump and self-satisfied inspector's programme was when they reached Rhydymouth they could only surmise. As the General had obviously been making for the open sea, it seemed like a futile expedition in a way. On the other hand, it also seemed the only way of picking up the trail.

The junction soon began to get the salt tang of the sea in their nostrils, and at the end of a little over an hour the car ran over the cobble streets of the little fishing village.

"Here we are—Rhydymouth!" snapped Inspector Skeet.

"Now we should get on the trail."

They emerged out of the car, which had halted opposite a small cottage with a plate marked "County Constabulary" over the door. The inspector soon knocked the local constable up. The man stared at the group in some alarm.

"Yes," he answered swiftly, in answer to the inspector's first question, "a big motor-boat did run out through the cove; I saw it myself through my bedroom window. I was just going to bed—"

"It ran straight out to sea?"

"I scarcely noticed—though I did think it unusual," confessed the constable.

The inspector noticed something.

"No way of finding out, I suppose?"

"Hardly, sir; though the men fishing outside the harbour may have seen it. I think sea boat's coming in now."

The dull thrumming of a motor had already been heard by the group. Coming in towards the jetty showed the lights of an unwieldy-looking boat. Her men wore down, and she was coming in from the fishing grounds under her small auxiliary motor.

"We'll try the cove!" snapped Inspector Skeet. "Flash driving and come after us; we shall probably need you."

TWO CAR LEAVES.—No. 1,233.

"Right, sir!"

They left the car and hurried along to the jetty. By the time they had reached the jetty the local constable came running after them, following on his heels as he ran. The fishing-boat touched the stone harbour wall, and a young fellow in oilskin scrambled ashore and knitted on ropes. Then he stood and stared blankly at the police and juniors.

"Saw anything of a big motor-boat out there, my man?" demanded Inspector Skeet, coming to the point at once.

"A big motor-boat? I did see one in the distance, yes; heard its engine—"

"Which way did it go—out to sea?"

"Turned off when a mile or so out, sir, and went down the coast, I think. I didn't notice it particularly; when I looked again the lights had gone."

"Looks as if we've done," said the inspector, with a grunt, turning to the local constable. "Any places along the coast where anyone could hide—save us—"

"There are plenty of caves, sir; and the island—Puffin Island."

"Puffin! I remember it now!" rapped the inspector. "The very place, I'll be bound! You mind— Good good!"

He was interrupted in starting fashion.

From somewhere out across the dark, misty sea came a sudden faint flash—the unmistakable streak of a shot. It was followed instantly by several more, and the darkness far out at sea to the left seemed stabbed suddenly by several tiny flashes of fire.

Crack! Crack, crack, crack!

"Good good! Shot!" ejaculated Inspector Skeet. "What's over there?"

"Maybe a boat!" interposed the startled fisherman.

"But—No, by Jove, it's from the lighthouse!"

"What?"

"The old lighthouse," added the local constable swiftly.

"You can almost see it from here."

They watched, scared and motionless. But as more flashes came, and did any farther could reach them from across the sea. Then the Wayland officer woke up again.

"Anybody at the lighthouse that you know of?"

"No—at least—" The young fisherman paused, and looked at an elderly man in dripping oilskin, who had joined him on the sea wall. "That was from the lighthouse right enough," he went on hurriedly. "It—it's supposed to be haunted. A keeper once fell from the balcony and got killed—years ago. After the war one was built, but of course!"

"Haunted! Rubbish!"

"Well, young Sam Hutton of the Jane Marlow said a light there only two nights ago—from a window in the lighthouse. And now a one of my mates has seen it, too!" added the fisherman, a trifle sulkily.

"That's so, sir," admitted the elderly man. "There's a rumour rumour goes on over these, if it ain't ghosts."

"I don't doubt that!" snapped Inspector Skeet, his eyes glancing in the light from the jetty lamp. "Look here, men, I want you to take us out to that lighthouse at your top speed. Get that! You'll be compensated for your trouble, of course. Get aboard, lads!"

He did not wait for the fisherman's approval. Inspector Skeet was accustomed to being obeyed unhesitatingly. And before they realized it the fisherman found themselves obeying.

The police tumbled aboard, followed by the excited juniors, and stowed themselves where they could. The boat was manned by two men and a boy, and soon it was moving away from the jetty and turning its bluff nose to the waves.

Inspector Skeet gave a grunt of satisfaction when the old lighthouse loomed ahead at last.

The boat slowed down to a crawl, and the man at the helm edged it carefully into the channel. That the dull clanging of the auxiliary engine had been heard was soon clear.

The stone ledge below the lighthouse itself came in sight, and suddenly they saw a door open and a flood of yellow light shoot forth. It revealed a man standing in the doorway with others behind him.

Only for the fraction of a second, and then the light vanished and deep darkness covered the lighthouse and the rocks round it once more.

But the Wayland inspector had seen enough.

"That settles it," he snapped. "Get ready, lads! We've some rough work ahead! You men, there," he called to the fishermen. "I shall call on you for aid if I find it necessary."

"As, ay, sir!"

"You boys get out of sight into that cabin there!" snapped the inspector.

"Oh, yes, sir," grinned Tom Merry.

The boys were likely to do that!

The boat stole along the channel—evidently well-known

to the man at the helm for all his fear of the place. It touched the rocky platform, and the inspector—a brave man with all his petty self-importance—prepared to jump ashore. And just then a harsh, menacing voice rang out from the dark doorway of the lighthouse.

"No, you don't! The first man to land here will get his damned carcass riddled with lead! Get out!"

The inspector jumped ashore. After him tumbled his men, one after the other. Where Inspector Sheat dared to go they dared.

Crack! Crack, crack, crack!

There were flashes of blood-red fire, and bullets hissed and rattled on the rocks and splashed in the sea.

"Back 'em!" yelled the inspector.

He himself led the rush.

The janitors sprang ashore, and rushed after them. Ahead they saw dim figures struggling furiously together. Now and again a gun went off. Tom Merry kicked aside a helmet, and almost sprawled over a groaning form at his feet. He heaved over and rushed on. From the grey rocks another constable, lagging a bullet wound in his arm.

He heard the gasping pants of Inspector Sheat as that plucky officer struggled furiously with Logan. It was Logan, for suddenly a flash lit up his rage-distorted features.

As Tom rushed in Logan raised aloft a clubbed automatic to bring crashing down on the inspector's unarmored head. But the blow never fell. Tom's fist was small, but it was like iron. It took Logan a smashing welt under the chin, and Logan's head went back, and his arm went wide.

Lowther came rushing up and leapt like a tiger on his back. Logan crashed down, but he was up again in a flash and racing for the door of the lighthouse. After him went Tom Merry, with Lowther following up behind.

In the darkness no one noticed the chase.

Logan rushed through the open door of the lighthouse and dashed madly up the spiral stairway. Tom pulled after him, sobbing and gasping for breath, but never for a moment relaxing in his effort to catch the master crook.

They reached the top of the lighthouse with barely a yard separating them, and as Tom leapt out on to the outer gallery Logan turned on him like a wild beast.

"Thank you can get me, do you?" he snarled viciously. "By hehoy, you won't! If I go, you go, too!"

As Logan leapt in Tom ducked and struck up with all his force at the man's face. The blow glanced off Logan's cheek, and with a yell of pain he swung his arms round Tom's chest and began to squeeze the breath from his body.

Powerless, his arms pinned to his sides, Tom struggled furiously. This was no time for Queenberry rules; this was a fight for life. Tom let out a vicious kick at Logan's shin. The kick went home, and with a cry Logan released his hold and staggered back. In a second Tom had followed up his advantage with a terrific punch to the jaw.

Logan, jerked suddenly backwards, crashed into the railings behind him. There was an enormous snapping sound and a half-rusted support post came away.

At the same moment a blinding flash of light lit up the struggling pair, and stayed on them. Directly it penetrated to Tom's brain that it was a searchlight. Probably a destroyer was on her way to help them.

But there was no time for speculation now.

With a scream of terror Logan clutched at Tom and caught him by the nose, pulling him with him as he crashed through the rusted railings. Tom looked out blindly; felt his blow get home, and then Logan's grip relaxed. But Tom had lost his balance, and as he felt his feet slip down under him, he grabbed a piece of the broken railings. It held firm, and Tom, gasping for breath and half fainting, dangled over the edge of the gallery.

Suddenly he heard a voice above him, and, looking up, saw a Monty Lowther, lying full length on the floor of the gallery, and leaning over the edge.

"Hang on, Tom!" and Monty. "Take my hand with one hand, and I'll try and hold you back."

Tom caught the outstretched hand and held on; but, try as he would, Lowther could not raise Tom an inch. Tom gradually he, too, began to slide forward towards the edge, under the weight of Tom's body.

Tom help was at hand.

Inspector Sheat dashed out from the lighthouse on to the gallery, followed by two policemen. In a moment they had both the janitors, weak but safe, inside the lighthouse.

"What's happened to you, Monty?" asked Tom, seeing blood on his own's face.

"I tripped on the stairs," said Monty, with a grin.

"That's why I didn't reach the gallery quicker."

"How did things go below, inspector?" asked Tom Merry.

"I think we would have beaten the ruffians, anyway," replied the inspector, "but the appearance of the destroyer spoiled things. Logan's dead."

There was a pause.

"Come on!" said the inspector. "If you feel fit to come now, we'll get down again. The boat from the destroyer should be here by now."

It was the unshining searchlight from the dimly seen destroyer lit up the storage room as the boat touched the fishing craft and was made fast. Then the eager party, led by a young officer, came swarming over, boatswain's, and ready for anything.

But the fight was over. They helped the partying police to secure their men, and every inch of the lighthouse was searched. Then the glowing crooks were lined up along the ledge, and they looked a battered, evil crowd. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Jack Blake had already found their old chums, and told their story. They had insisted on coming with the boatload of sailors from the destroyers.

Inspector Sheat himself released the prisoners locked in a room in the lighthouse. Sir Charles Roxton, Mr. Winthrop Harriman, and Mr. Curlew came blinking out into the searchlight rays, amazed, but thankful beyond measure at what they saw. The inspector was in high spirits.

After some time another boat came from the distant destroyer, and the prisoners were taken ashore in the two boats, guarded by police and sailors. The rescued prisoners, with the janitors and Inspector Sheat, went ashore in the fishing craft. Other local cases were commandeered and the prisoners pushed away. And not only the prisoners, but a great deal of loot found in the lighthouse, obviously the secret headquarters of the gang.

The ride back was uneventful, and the men stopped outside Sir Jim's to drop off the janitors, Inspector Sheat promising to report to the Head in the morning. And then the janitors, tired and weary, but happy, went in. From Mr. Bealton, hastily aroused, the janitors learned that Manservant, Horton, and Digby were safe in bed, and that both the little stockbroker and the injured French skipper were asleep in the school infirmary.

They told their story to the astounded Mr. Railton, but it was not until the next morning when Mr. Sheat called that they themselves heard the meaning of it all. And that it proved to be something more than a case of kidnaping.

Briefly, the originator of the whole thing was Harry, the man in evening dress, who had interviewed Curlew at the cottage. He was a fraudulent company promoter, and the managing director of two Mexican mines. Recently he had ceased it to be announced that the two mines were shut—shut—flooded and unworkable. But the disgruntled shareholders were not only dissatisfied, but strongly suspicious. They had severely engaged Curlew, a clever young mining engineer, to go out to Mexico and inspect the mines, afterwards to report his findings to them.

But Harry had got wind of this, and saw all his schemes bubbling, unless Curlew was stopped. The mines were valuable, and he intended to re-open them afterwards under other names to his own profit. And knowing what Curlew's report must be, and that if he was found out, it would lead to other investigations into his many financial activities, he had tried to get Curlew "removed" in Mexico, and had failed. Now, hearing Curlew was to return to his journey home by air liner from San Domingo to Crockett, he had engaged Logan's gang to kidnap him on the way, and to bring him to the company. And if Curlew refused to and to bring him to the company. And if Curlew refused to be bribed to keep his mouth shut—as Curlew did—he was to have been kept a prisoner in the lighthouse until the wealthy Harry had made his final bid and abandoned.

That was the plot. But Logan was greedy. On learning when the air liner landed on the common that two of the passengers were well-known millionaires, he had conceived the daring project of kidnaping them and holding them to ransom. And his plots would, undoubtedly, have been successful but for Tom Merry & Co.

Luckily, like the air liner, Mr. Glynn's motor-bus was covered by insurance, and fortunately both the two shot constables and the pilot were recovered from their injuries.

Harry paid a dear price for his villainy. And though Arthur Augustus mourned the loss of two good topers, he, like his chums, had the satisfaction of knowing they had accomplished something worth while in the part they had played in solving the mystery of the lighthouse.

THE END.

(Well, chums, enjoyed the Thrills? Next week you'll read with laughter, when you read "LION-HEARTED GURRY!" See that you order your GRM text at address!)

THE GUN LITRATURE.—No. 1,233.

A Rousing Complete Yarn of Dockyard Gangsters!



CHAPTER I. Slick Drops a Hint!

IT all happened in a moment. One moment Slick Dolan was innocently sipping along the broken, dirty pavement, and the next—rough hands had grabbed him, and he was dropped, in a flash, into the narrow entry, and the door had closed upon him.

Porter Street, with its stark, ugly warehouses, and still taller tenements, was deserted at the moment, save for a single Chinaman who leaned dejectedly against a lamp-post, a cigarette drooping from his thin lips.

Such incidents were far from being rare in that Thames-side locality, and the Chin's almost eyes merely narrowed a trifle. But the sudden disappearance of the ragged street Arab had clearly interested him, for he spat out the slag, glanced about under his sleepy eyelids, and then slithered across the cobbled street.

Reaching the narrow door, next to the double doors of the garage, the Chin pushed it open, and slipped like a shadow into the entry.

Meanwhile, Slick Dolan found himself heeled along the entry, across the garage yard, and into a small office at the back. The room was dirty and shabby. Yet it was the headquarters of a gangster as wealthy and powerful, as ruthless and merciless, as any underworld "boss" in Chicago.

Slick knew this, and why he was there, with that iron grasp on his ragged clothes.

His heart pumped painfully, and his thin, pinched face was white. But he stared with unflinching eyes at the two men in the room.

Gat Leopardi, gangster and crook, sat at the table, thin white hands under his chin, elbows on the table. He was neatly dressed in a blue suit, and wore a hard bowler. He had a long pulled face, slick black hair, and curiously black shiny eyes.

Curney, his chief lieutenant, leaned on the mantelpiece, a cigar between his thick lips. He was loudly dressed, and looked just what he was—a coarse bully and a brute.

Yet Slick knew which man to fear most, and his eyes were fixed on Gat Leopardi.

"Well, and so you've given us a look in, Slick," remarked Gat, his silky, purring voice quite genial. "I bin wanting to see you, kid."

Slick Dolan panted.

Only a few days ago his greatest ambition had been to be a member of Gat Leopardi's gang. He had been tired of petty pilfering and acting as errand-boy to the gangsters. He had wanted to pack a gun, and do big things like Gat and Curney did. Now he knew he had as much chance of

Yan Gaa Linnar.—Ms. 1293.

SLICK DOLAN "WHARF RAT"

joining the gang as he had of getting out of that den with a whole skin—possibly with his life.

"What you want with me," he panted. "I ain't done nothing!"

"Done nothing, you little rat!" Curney was bawling out with a savage oath, when Gat Leopardi cut him short.

"Aw, don't spill your mouth so much, Curney," he drabbed lazily.

"The old's switched on us!" snarled Curney.

"Switched—nothing!" smiled Gat. He regarded Slick Dolan reproachfully. "Aw, Slick, why you done what you did, kid? We had that cop where we wanted him. And you goes and heads him his getaway. You let us down, kid. Twice now you gone and saved that cop Brent from getting his. Why you done it?"

Slick gasped. He hardly knew that himself. He only knew that something had changed inside him. No longer did he look upon Gat Leopardi with awe and admiration. Since he had witnessed Curney's brutal attempt to murder Detective-Sergeant Brent, he felt he hated the brutal gangster, and all the crookedness they stood for.

"I—I couldn't see Mister Brent killed like that!" he burst out thickly. "He—he bin good to me, he has!"

"That cop—good to you?" roared Gat, arching his eyebrows.

"Yes!" gasped Slick fiercely. "He used to live in our home in Porter Street, and he was always good to me, since he was a cop, as well as an artorward. I wasn't going to see him killed like that."

"That so?" smiled Gat, glancing at the scowling Curney. "I see what it is, Curney—the kid hasn't exactly opened up on us. He's just soft—too soft for us—eh? And you wanted to join the gang, Slick?"

He laughed softly.

"I don't want to join now," said Slick dejectedly.

"I'm afraid you won't get the chance, kid," said Gat Leopardi pleasantly. "But you can't queer our pitch and get away with it, you know. You got to learn a lesson, and Curney here's going to be your teacher—won't he? So you won't do it again. Go to it, Curney, and jett out bits out of him!"

Gat nodded to the man who held the youngster. He handed Slick over to Curney, and at a nod from Gat left the room. Curney already had his thick leather belt off, and his brutal face was cruel and merciless.

Slick started to struggle frantically, but he was helpless in the man's strong grasp. Gat looked on, smiling, as Curney raised the belt and brought the gleaming buckle down with vicious force.

The buckle cut through Slick's thin jacket and into his flesh with savage, vicious force. The boy gave a half-choked yell of pain.

The heavy belt whirled up again. But it never fell.

Out in the passage sounded a sudden commotion—a startled yell, followed by a sharp, ringing crash, and then a heavy fall.

Next instant a man leaped into the room. It was the Chinaman—no longer sleepy-eyed and slouchy.

His feet shot out and connected with Curney's jaw with a stunning crack, dull and sickening. Curney gurgled and tottered, spinning on his heels, backwards. He crashed full on top of Gat Leopardi, who had just given vent to a smothered oath, and was whipping something from a holster under his armpit.

There was a glint of metal; but that was all, for just

HE MAY BE SLICK—
He is—nippy as they make 'em!
—BUT HE'S NEVER SLACK!

then Gurney landed on top of the gangster. The chair splintered under him, and both crashed amid a medley of oaths.

"Run for it, kid!"

The crisp order sounded strange, indeed, coming from the Chick.

Slick Dolan gulped and ran, the Chick hard on his heels. Out on the short passageway Slick almost fell over a protruding, grating beam; but he leaped in time, and the Chinaman leaped after him.

To the right was the doorway leading to the garage; to the left the opening of the covered entry.

Slick turned into it, and as he did so he received. Two man—rough-looking customers—were just coming through the door from the street.

"This way, Slick!" snapped a voice over his shoulder. The Chick's strong hand grasped him, and fairly lifted him into the garage, and then flung him across, past a couple of cars, and through a doorway into the back.

They were in a whitewashed yard now. Facing them, and to the right, rose the dirty walls of the building; to the left rose a high wall, ten feet, at least.

The Chinaman gasped a packing-case against the wall and shoved it nearer; then he jumped up on to the box, reached down, and helped Slick up.

"Quick, young 'un!"

From the garage behind sounded a clamour of oaths, and the clump of feet.

Slick got a grip and squeezed over the wall, and the Chinaman was not a second behind him. The boy fell sprawling into the narrow side street beyond, but he was wrenched up and rushed on by his rescuer.

Ahead, between the tall warehouses, showed a glimpse of a wharf, a crane, and the masts of a large vessel against a background of gleaming Thames water.

The Chinaman glanced about as they reached the wharf.

The crane was working, and a gang of men were loading the barge.

"Safe enough now, Slick!" panted the man. "They won't follow here."

Slick stood, panting heavily, his eyes fixed in amazement on the Chinaman, whose wrinkled face, hard enough before, now broke into a faint grin.

"You!" he panted. "You, Mister Brest? I might have known it."

"You," said Detective-Inspector Brest, of the G.I.D. "And it's thundering lucky for you I was watching that garage, Slick, my lad! When possessed you to go near that place after what happened, kid? Gai's not the man to forget or forgive. A thrashing was not all he meant for you, Slick—you can take my word for that! He doesn't let you go, knowing what you must know about the gang."

"Where else can a lads go?" said Slick Dolan sulkily. "I was just passing, and weren't thinking about him."

"Well, never mind that now," said Brest, glancing quickly about him. "But get this, kid—you've not safe anywhere near Forter Street after this! You're going to stay at my digs for a bit! I'll rig you out with some decent tops, and if I can—"

"I ain't coming!" said Slick sulkily.

Brest looked at him.

"Now listen to this, Slick," he said gently. "I'm a cop, and I know you look upon me as an enemy still. You've got some sort of an idea that I want to make use of you for

my own ends—to make you a copper's mark, to make you spread on Gai and his gang? Isn't that it?"

Slick scowled, yet looked uneasy.

"I know it is, kid," said Brest. "But it isn't true. I want you to come because I know you're not safe round here, and because—well, I want to help you, young 'un. You've never had a chance yet, and I mean to give you one. Murr's the time I could have taken you to the station, but I didn't."

He panted.

"I didn't, because I knew there was good stuff in you, Slick," he went on quietly. "I've known you dive into the flooded river to sink out a kid no you'd just been scrapping with. You're not out for something better than tailing round cars like Gai Leopard, Slick?"

"Ay, more that, mister—" Slick moved, but Brest's hand shot out.

"Not yet," said Brest, smiling. "No, don't run away, kid! I can stand a bit of shock from a lad who saved me, only a couple of days ago, from being drowned like a rat in that cellar! Listen! You've finished with this life, Slick. You're going to my digs now, and I'm going to get you a decent job. We'll talk it over later. Here's my address."

He fished out a card from his dusky clothing, and gave it to the milk-faced boy.

"Go there and report to my landlady; I've already spoken to her about you!" he said. "Don't fail me, or I'll see you out again and send you where I might have done long ago—Barnard!"

He spoke half-laughingly, but Slick gave him a startled look and nodded, crumpling the card into his ragged pocket.

"All right, Mister Brest!" he muttered.

He had taken away, shoulders hunched and hands in pockets. He had taken the card, but he hadn't the slightest intention



The blow from the Chinaman's fist sent Gurney splintering backwards to crash full on top of Gai Leopard!

of going to the address. Suspicion of his natural enemy—the police—was still too strong.

"Why can't he become alone," he muttered to himself. "Sail, he ain't like other cops—he's been good to me, and—"

He wriggled at the smarting pain on his shoulder reminded him of Ganney's bolt, and what he had escaped. Then, as if on a sudden impulse, he twisted round and hurried away the slithering Chinaman.

"Hold on, Mister Brent," he said, gripping the detective's arm. "You wants to find out how that stuff's been lifted from these steamers, don't you?"

"Why, you; that's one of the reasons I'm down here, Slick!" said Brent, his grey eyes suddenly going hard. "Gin's gang is behind it, of course, and—"

"Then be at Belter's Wharf at dusk to-night, mister," whispered Slick, glancing swiftly about him. "Watch that there lighter—the Alice Copper. That's all!" And Slick hurried away again.

Brent gazed after him, his grey eyes gleaming. "I know the kid knew something, but I couldn't ask him," he mused grudgingly. "The Alice Copper, eh? Well, I'll be on Belter's Wharf at dusk, and we'll see!"

CHAPTER 2.

Caught!

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT BRENT lounged in the shadow of a dockside wharf in the gathering dusk. It looked like sitting in for a wet night, and on a wet night Belter's Wharf, with its rusted cranes, ramshackle warehouses, and dim lamps severely piercing the mist from the river, looked anything but an inviting place.

Out on the heaving river showed a small steamer, and Brent's keen attention was divided between that and a dirty lighter moored to the wharf thirty yards away.

Several figures lounged near the lighter, and it seemed to Brent that they were waiting for the dusk to deepen.

Brent's face was grimy, and he wore sily trousers, a woman's jersey, a pilot jacket, and a peaked cap. He looked a typical sailor on his hours out; an individual not likely to attract a second glance in that locality.

Yet he did attract more than a second glance—from a man who suddenly came round the crane against which he was leaning. He was a man in semi-official uniform, and was evidently a dock official.

"What you hangin' about 'ere for?" he started at Brent, coming to a stop. "Hook it sharp!"

Brent smiled at his blackened pipe. "Ere, hold on mate!" he granted. "This 'ere wharf belong to you?" "Can't a bloke—"

"Hook it—sharp!" snapped the man, with a glance towards the lighter. "Look you want me to call a cop—"

"No! No! No! No! No!" said Brent hurriedly. "All right, mister, I'll top it; though blamed if I see what 'ere a bloke's doin'—"

"Hop it, and don't show the rag!" snarled the official. Brent hunched himself away, muttering to himself.

The dock official glanced after him, and then went across to the gang of men by the lighter.

The moment he was safely out of sight Brent stopped his shuffling walk. In the shelter of a warehouse he halted, and his keen grey eyes were glinting.

"So my over-officious friend orders me off, though he won't know he hasn't the slightest right to shift anyone off this wharf," he mused. "This is interesting!"

He leaned against the warehouse wall as if sheltering from the rain. But his keen eyes were fixed on the distant lighter and the group of men. For twenty minutes he watched, and then he was rewarded as the men boarded the lighter and it moved slowly away from the wharf, making direct for the steamer out in the river.

"Six men—and the usual crew of a lighter of that size is two at most," he reflected. "I fancy Slick hasn't pulled my official leg—"

He watched the lighter reach the distant steamer, dimly seen now in the gathering darkness and gusty rain. Only when he saw the dock official disappear off the wharf did Brent move. Then he moved, after a cautious glance about him, to the far edge of the riotous wharf.

At the bottom of the steps were a couple of boats, and Brent slipped down and jumped into one. It was moored to the wharf by a chain and rusty post. But the second boat was merely tied with a length of rope to a ring in the slaty bulkhead. Brent jumped into this.

An oar lay in the bottom of the boat, and Brent soon was it rocking out on the swollen Thames.

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 1,233.

Brent had the reputation of always working a lone hand, and though he knew he was running into grave danger, he did not hesitate. Only that morning he had been called into the office of a certain alderman, and his ears still tingled at thought of the scolding remarks the mayor had made regarding the Force's inability to bring to book the thieving "water-cats"—crooks who were getting away with merchandise, silks, furs, and all kinds of valuable stuff worth thousands of pounds.

Cap Leppard's gang was working the game—Brent knew that. Out had a great many women in the line. And Detective-Sergeant Brent had never to get Cap Leppard, just as that had sworn to "get" him, in another way.

Lighter wrinkled from both banks of the heaving river, but it was far from dark yet, and Brent approached the steamer cautiously. He worked steadily at the stern, standing, with sharp eyes scanning the steamer and the lighter. Presently he stopped walking, and allowed the dingy to drift down on the strong current upon the steamer, giving a touch now and again to the oar.

All was dark on the steamer, save for her riding lights and a glow from one of her holds, above which Brent caught a glimpse of a moving derrick.

"Easy already," reflected the detective grimly. "Here you!"

The dingy touched the stern of the lighter. Brent tied the dingy up and swarmed stealthily over on to her deck.

He stood there listening. Not a soul showed on either lighter or steamer. But to his ears came the hum of voices from the steamer's lighted hold.

Then Brent sighted a gangway leading steeply up on to the steamer's decks. He slipped up this. The fore-castle's door swung open, and a light streamed out on deck. He tiptoed to the low doorway and peered down.

Seated with elbows on table and a cigarette in his mouth was a young sailor. At his side sat an elderly, phot-jerked individual, stout, and with a red, puffy face. At his elbow were the remains of a meal, and also a glass and bottle.

As Brent peered down, the elderly man lit his pipe and half rose.

"Better be gettin' above now, Jim!" he granted. "Don't be a bloomin' fool, Luke!" shouted the sailor, with suspicious haste, he spoke to Brent. "You sit tight and have another drink, old mate. Rain's still, and bloomin' cold it is. What about a 'ud of rap?"

The elderly man, who was obviously deaf—grinned and sat down again. Evidently he did not object to another drink and a head of cork in the cozy 'ole'side on a cold, wet night.

Brent moved away, his eyes gleaming. The elderly man looked honest enough, and he was obviously the watchman—who should have been guarding the cargo! Had he insisted upon going on deck Brent had no doubt the sailor would have stopped him—by fair means or foul.

The detective glanced sideways into the hold of the lighter. It was empty—though there had been several big bales there when it lay off Belter's Wharf.

He moved to the steamer's dimly lit hold and looked cautiously down. The men were working there with feverish haste—some tearing the canvas coverings from bales; others stitching on coverings.

Brent saw it now. The mystery had been how the goods had been stolen from the hold, after being stored there by stevedores. Now all was clear. When the bales reached their destination they would be found to contain worthless rubbish—the valuable goods having been taken ashore on the lighter by the gang in other coverings.

"Watchman with a workman for grub and drink, and officers ashore," mused Brent. "Come in with gang, and stow transferred with well-greased tackle—right under the watchman's nose. Very neat! And now for getting the Thames police on the job!"

He moved away and bumped clean into a hairy form who gave him a startled start. The man had curly beard the man's mouth, and though started himself, Brent acted like lightning.

His hat shot off and slammed into the sailor's face, and as he reeled back Brent followed up with a nasty rip under the ear. The man crashed down with a struggled flop.

But he must have been as tough as leather, for scarcely had he touched the deck when he twisted himself round, looking out viciously with both legs.

Brent was just laughing away, but the savage kick sent his aching feet clean from under him. He went down with a thudding, sickening slam that almost shook him into insensibility.

But as the sailor scrambled up and leaped at him, sheer desperation gripped Brent. He rolled over, and, grasping the man by the legs, strove to bring him down.

The man lurched, biting out at the detective angrily, and then he fell to his knees, and the two rolled over and over on the wet deck, fighting furiously.

Brent was doing all he could to break free, for he heard startled shouts from the hold now. Then came the thud of feet on deck, and a light flashed in his eyes.

Escape was hopeless, and even Brent realized it, something crashed on his head. The light became a blaze that opened to fill the harbor, and then darkness crept over him and his senses left him.

Into his white, still face one of the men flashed the light from the stern-lantern.

"Who the heck is it?"

Brent's peaked cap was half over his face, and the man wrenched at it. With the cap came away a loaded mop of gray hair. Beneath showed sleek, neatly trimmed hair, just graying a trifle at the temples.

"A 'Juba wig' vowed one, with an oath. 'It's a cry, and, by back—'

Again he flashed the light into the white face, stooping low as he did so. His voice held excitement and triumph when he spoke again.

on the steamer's deck; that his sharp ears had caught distant shouts.

"Bible hint!" he muttered. "Goin' alone, when he might have had a score of cops to help 'im! Blowed if I don't—"

He was just moving when he glimpsed a boat leaving the lighter's side. Was it Brent—who else could it be! But it wasn't the police officer. The dinghy touched the wharf and a man climbed the rotten wooden steps, carrying into the dim, yellow light from a lamp fixed against the wall of a warehouse.

"Patchy Quin!" breathed Slick. "And he looks—"

He broke off sharply. Patchy Quin had halted by the warehouse door and whistled softly. Almost instantly a man emerged from the doorway. It was the dock official.

"Hallo! What's up, Patchy?" he snapped. "Anything' wrong, man—"

Slick failed to hear Patchy's answer; but he heard the other's oath and savage reply.

"You blawed fish! Why couldn't you fetch him off without botherin' Gai—the new stop's his ank'le to be bumped off later enough! You know what Gai'll say—"

"I ain't doin' it on no even, anyway!" said Patchy, his voice angry now. "Gai ought to know as we got 'im, Starkey!"

"Come along then—I'll go with you, Gai!" started Starkey. "He's at the garage I expect."

They moved away into the darkness, the ill-tempered dock official angrier savagely.

Slick caught his breath—his woe-laden eyes were realized. Brent was caught, and Slick knew only too well what the ruthless gang-leader's reply would be—swift and certain death for the detective.

He waited until the two men had vanished, and then he slipped down the wooden steps into the boat. It's hard,



"It is—blowed if it ain't! It's that new cop, Brent—Detective-Sergeant Brent, of the Yard! Thunder! Into the Aiken Capper's cabin will him, boys! Patchy, you shove off ahead and tell the boss! I reckon this will please 'im more'n a thousand quid—by back it will!"

Brent had succeeded in solving the mystery, but it looked as if he was fated never to solve another.

CHAPTER 3.

Slick Misses the Boat!

SLICK DOLAN shivered as he crouched in the black shelter of a pile of ancient timber on Bolter's Wharf. He was soaked through and his teeth were chattering. But his sharp eyes glanced as he stared out across the shining, oily river to the steamer riding out at anchor, with the lighter alongside.

Slick had wondered if Brent would follow up the hint. Certainly at that point had brought Slick prowling round Bolter's Wharf, and he had been within a dozen yards of Brent when the dock official had ordered him away. Slick had grinned, knowing the dock official was paid more wages by fat Lepart than he earned as dock official.

He had watched Brent pull away in the dinghy, and he had waited for what would happen next. He was still waiting, his face tense with anxiety.

Certain that he should feel so anxious and afraid in regard to a cop—a natural sneaky. Yet he was anxious and afraid—he wanted to see the big, kindly Brent return safe and sound, whether successful or not.

However, he had come for assistance. He was certain that his eyes had caught a glimpse of struggling forms

From the prow of the boat, a powerful searchlight shed ahead—and fell upon a struggling form in the water!

Unflinching face was set, his sharp eyes resolute. He wanted no truck with cops—out loose, only with cops like Mister Brent. He'd see it through on his own, blowed if he wouldn't! He hadn't forgotten Gai's words, either. Gai had ordered Gurney to "cut his outer hair!" Well, he'd show 'em!

He unhooked the rope, grasped the coil, and, standing in the stern, started to propel the rocking boat out toward the steamer.

It was a chance, and Slick took it. The heavy, cowardly dinghy veered the lighter, and he steered up. If the boat had been seen he would be halted for a certainty now. But no sound came from either lighter or steamer, and Slick edged gently in and hitched up. Then he scrambled on the deck of the lighter, and lay flat, listening.

From the steamer's hold came words of hostile and methodical conversation. He glimpsed the arm of a derrick

slowly move. Then he heard a voice from the steamer's deck.

"Ready, boys! Let's have the stuff—sharp! Hustle with that damned derriek, Crozely!"

It was new or better.

The boy jumped up and raced for the lighting's hatchway from which came a gleam of light. If Brent was aboard he would be there. Slick was nearly half-way along the narrow dock when a curly form hove out of the hold, stepping from a ladder on to the dock.

No time to pull up, no time to slip past. Slick's head took the stair-thing full in the waistcoat. The man went backwards, falling floor down into the hold with a thud. He lay there groaning—with a broken leg.

A shout sounded from the steamer's deck, and Slick raced on for the hatchway, reached it, and tumbled down the steep ladder.

Brent sat in the tiny cabin, lit by a shaded oil-lamp. He writhed tired behind him. There was blood on his brow, and he seemed half-dead.

"Quick—aster this, Mister Brent!" panted Slick. "I gutter beat 'em up!"

He whipped out a cheap-knife, and slashed at the cords round the detective's wrists. Brent staggered up. His head felt like a factory working overtime, and the agony of his wrists made him gasp. But he followed Slick at that stout-hearted youth took up the ladder.

They reached the deck just as the foremast of the men from the steamer dropped off the gangway and came pelting along to the hatchway.

Slick Dolan leaped forward, catching the man round the legs, and as he stumbled forwards blindly, Brent hit him under the chin—and Brent could hit, despite a ringing head and throbbing wrists.

The man yelled, staggered backwards, and went over the

side with a resounding splash. Then the rank came, and Slick found himself in the midst of a fighting, struggling group of savage men.

Brent was calling to him.

"Get off, young 'un! Fetch help! Shout! Go—"

One of the gang ran along the deck, tugging something from his hip pocket and firing, and he went head long over Slick. There followed the vicious, resounding crack of a revolver as the weapon flew from his grasp and clattered on the deck.

Slick knew the fellow had no intention of using the gun—the shot was an accident, and an unfortunate accident for the gang. The last thing they wanted was for a revolver-shot to attract attention to them. And, knowing this, Slick stood like lightning.

Resisting up the weapon which had fallen almost to his hand, Slick raised it and pumped lead up into the sky.

Crack, crack, crack, crack!

Four times the crackling shots rang over the water, and then the man was up and rushing at the boy, with a volley of startled paths. Slick just had time to send the weapon slamming into the man's face, and then a vicious swing hit the boy on the temple, and he plumped overboard.

With a sudden exclamation Sergeant Meers, of the Thames Police, took a firmer grip of the tiller, and brought the motor-launch round again in a hoisting stroke.

"You heard that?" he snapped angrily.

"A revolver-shot!" said a dim, uniformed figure by his side. "Came from the steamer, right enough?"

"Brent, for a cert," said the sergeant.

"Hunt—the U.I.D. man."

"Yes; stopped me the last time afternoon to hang about here, or there," said the sergeant curtly.

Four more vicious cracks sounded from the steamer, dully seen out in the river.

The sergeant opened out, and the police-launch fairly hined towards the steamer, the five uniformed men in the boat sitting silent and tense. The throb of the engine echoed over the heaving water. Then from the dim form in the bows came a quiet voice:

"Cut her off—sharp, sergeant! Someone's ahead!"

But the sergeant had also heard a faint, gasping cry from the darkness ahead, and, though he had seen nothing, he slowed down, abruptly. From the prow of the launch a powerful shaft of white light shot ahead. It moved about for several breathless seconds, and then it fell upon a white patch struggling form—in the water.

The launch edged swiftly alongside, and strong hands gripped Slick Dolan and heaved him aboard. He sank in a limp, exhausted heap on the floorboards.

"It's a kid!" exclaimed the sergeant, astonished, as he reached and set the engine full speed ahead. "This beats me! Say, young 'un—"

Slick interrupted him. He sat up, gasping and panting.

"Quick—that steamer out there! Brent—Brent, the 'ee! They've got her—going to cut him, they are!" he coughed. He dropped back, unconscious.

"Well, I'm blotted!" said the sergeant. "Seems to me as if—"

His face was grim as he ran the launch alongside the lighter. He was the first on the deck, and as he reached it a man broke from the group of struggling ferries by the steamer's gangway, and came rushing up, swinging a boat-hook.

The sergeant slid neatly under the flying weapon, and he took an aggressive that Slick the man three yards along the deck. He dropped, and did not rise again.

The struggling group farther along looks up; two dark figures raced up on to the steamer's deck, and a third came staggering towards the river police.

It was Brent, and the sergeant's ready arm caught him. "Two more just boarded the steamer, and you'll find the others hiding there, I fancy," panted Brent. "But that kid! He went overboard! Quick! Never mind those rats! You've got to—"

"Two kid's all right, sir! We picked him up, and he's in the boat now; done up, but safe enough. But—Hullo!"

A launch hurried alongside, and a sergeant of police, minus his helmet, leaped lightly on to the deck. He nodded to Sergeant Meers.

"We got that crowd all right!" he said. "What's the delay— Oh, you, sir!" he broke off, recognizing Brent.

"Yes, it's me," said Brent, with a faint grin. "But I'll explain afterwards. I'm whacked, and—"

He slumped to the deck. Like Slick Dolan, Brent had had a little too much excitement for one evening.

THE END.

(By Jove, Slick and Brent are going to have a tough time, getting Col. Exuperi, aren't they? There's another great complete yarn in next week's GEM!)



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Hands like steel closed about the Duke's wrists, and a disconcerted and was pressed over his nose.

The Man in Blue!

REVERELY at Stapleton Castle was at its height. The guests had retired from the dining-hall, and were enjoying the various amusements their hosts had generously provided for them.

Not ungenerally many of these had asked permission to be shown over the far old place, a request that the good-natured duke had readily granted. In fact, his Grace personally conducted a party of his guests on a tour of the moor, revealing its treasures, and explaining their history with unassuming grace.

Marchant Buxton, with ears and eyes on the alert, noted everything as they went along. There was a shade of disappointment on his good-looking face, however, as the party made tracks for the reception-room again.

"By the way, your Grace," he said, somewhat unconcernedly, "rumour has it that the Stapleton family jewels are so valuable that a millionaire has three or four couldn't purchase them."

The duke laughed. "I won't say that," he replied, "but they are valued in the region of eight million dollars—at least, that's what an American valuer placed them at when I showed them to him a couple of years back."

"By Jove!" ejaculated Buxton. "I would—"

"Like to see them, my boy?" put in the duke. "So you shall."

Buxton's eyes narrowed greedily. The big price for which he had advanced so much was within reach.

The party retraced their steps. In a castled chamber, hundreds of years old, his Grace halted.

"This is the family strong-room," he smiled. "As safe as a bank—safe, perhaps."

Buxton nodded. "The door is cleverly constructed, as you can see," went on the duke, "and that door, my friends, is fifteen inches thick—solid steel."

As he spoke the duke peered carefully over the embossed decorations, and, with scarcely a sound, the massive door swung open, revealing a roomy vault beyond. A light flashed on in response to pressure of the switch, and the party could see for themselves the dimensions of the vault.

Two fellows crowded in, Buxton among them. Then all stood gravely were created to the sight of a collection of jewels that an opulent Indian rajah would have envied. Diamonds gleamed and scintillated; blood-red rubies flashed a brilliance that dazzled in the lustreous gleams of pearls and sapphires, and dazzled the eyes of their beholders. From all came an involuntary murmur of surprise and pleasure.

Anyone catching sight of Buxton then would have seen a being transfixed. His eyes had narrowed to glittering pinpoints; his face was drawn—the hands trembled with excitement.

Here was wealth—a king's ransom!

For quite ten minutes the party gazed at that precious hoard of family jewels, a collection that had ranged over centuries of time. Then steps were retraced. The great door swung back, and once again the dazzling gems were hidden from mortal eyes.

Back in the reception-room streamed the guests, and Buxton took the opportunity of absenting himself.

Suddenly a silhouetted figure appeared at one of the upper landings. It moved to a spacious window. Three stains of colour, vivid green, went out into the night, and then Buxton, pocketing his torch, rejoined the revels.

It was exactly five minutes later that all the lights failed. For a moment there was panic, and then his Grace's voice could be heard summing his guests.

"A fire, I expect," he said. "Friends, keep your heads!"

Footmen disappeared to bring candles, but before they could return there was a violent hammering on the iron studded doors of the main entrance, followed by excited voices.

POLICE v. POLICE!
Bogus bobbies bagged by Pycroft!
Daring raid on Castle fails!

In the light of a few candles, hastily lit by the guests themselves, who had snatched them from their ornamental brackets in the reception-room, could be seen a squad of uniformed men.

An inspector pushed his way up to the duke.

"Your Grace," he started out, "I'm afraid we are too late."

"What?" The Duke of Stapleton was flabbergasted. "What, in the name of—"

"Your Grace," hurriedly went on the inspector, "we have received intelligence that a gang of notorious cracksmen have advanced to rob the castle to-night."

"Good God!" exclaimed the duke. "This is monstrous!"

"We caught one of them as we watched here," said the inspector. "He's split on his mates. They're at the strong-room now, trying to lift the Stapleton jewels."

"What?" The old aristocrat's face set grimly. "The second floor?"

"Where is the strong-room, sir?" went on the inspector. "Lead me and my men to it. We may yet be in time!"

Already the duke was striding for the door. Several of the guests made to follow him. But the police formed up a line, and only Burton managed to duck under a constable's arm. The inspector motioned to his sergeant, and that individual lifted up his voice.

"Everyone is to stay here!" he ordered. "I ask you gentlemen to keep quiet. Until this matter is satisfactorily cleared up, anyone is liable to be suspected. Constable Williams," he added, "round up all the servants and keep them under observation in their own quarters. Get the butler to call the roll."

"Yes, sir."

"You, Foreman, Brothers, Talbot, and Cook, guard these doors while I follow the inspector. Let no one leave."

"Very good, sergeant!"

And the sergeant, taking the commander of his men with him, departed.

"Well, then, are in a blessed fix, are'nt' you?" ejaculated Tick Foreman. "Just as I was enjoying myself, too!"

Bill Hartley's face was wrinkled in disgust.

"It's all very sudden," he muttered. "The police are acting very peculiarly, anyway."

"They always do," said Tick, with a wry grin. "It's damned funny they don't give us more lights, anyhow!"

Meanwhile, the duke was agitatedly striding towards the family strong-room. By his side, keeping up a rattling commentary, was Burton. At their heels trooped the inspector and his men.

The strong-room was reached at last.

A gasp of relief left the old aristocrat's face when he saw that, to all intents and purposes, the thieves had not broken in. The door of the strong-room looked just the same as when he had left it. The inspector's words dispelled him, however.

"Some all right, sir," he remarked, "that is, unless the lighters have done their job quickly and got away."

"Nonsense!" snapped the duke. "There is not a cracksmen living who could get that door open without considerable apparatus on a big scale."

"Beg your pardon, sir," apologized the inspector, "I was thinking that the cracksmen might have known the combination."

The duke started.

"Impossible!" he retorted.

Nevertheless, his fears had returned. With shaking fingers he bent and probed the ornamental surface of the steel door. With glittering eyes Burton watched him. Then a covert wink passed between him and the inspector.

The door swung open. The Duke of Stapleton laughed—laughed at his own fears.

"Yes, yes, inspector—why, what?"

His words broke off in a strangled cry. Hands like steel had closed about his windpipe; a thick pad sloped in sickly chloroform was being pressed over his nose. Through widely staring eyes he beheld Burton being treated similarly. A yell for help choked on his lips. As in a dream he saw the grinning face of the policeman, now the insensible form of Burton drop to the floor. Then the old aristocrat, struggling to the last, succumbed.

Like Rain in a Trap!

JUST in time, inspector!

Ferrers Locke said the words quietly enough, but they sent a thrill through his listeners.

The Gem Library—No. 1,222.

In the roomy police car, the first of six that roared all out along the road to Stapleton Castle, sat Ferrers Locke, still in the guise of Michael Kelly, Jack Drake, Inspector Pycroft, and three county inspectors. In the conveyer behind them travelled thirty picked men of the Force, armed with Service revolvers.

As the cars shuffled on to the castle drive, Locke pointed to an upper window of the main structure.

For the space of ten seconds a dark figure, recognizable as a human being, appeared there. Simultaneously with his appearance came three deep, brilliant points of green light.

"The signal!" said Locke simply.

Inspector Pycroft thrilled all over. Used as he was to the emergencies of his calling, he frankly never conceived anything of a material nature to emerge from the fantastic plot Locke had unfolded to him. All the more for that, Pycroft—many times mentioned in high place for the good work he had done—had had cause to thank Locke, and Locke only, for these matters. Hence his belief in Locke's adventures at the moment.

Pycroft shoulders to think what the outcome of the "adventure" would be if Locke's theory and assurance that the biggest gang of crooks the world had ever known was operating at Stapleton Castle in the guise as policemen proved to be wrong. Promotion, position, disgrace—mixed thoughts chased their way through the inspector's worried brain.

Yet the signal indicated something. Locke had mentioned the three green lights on roofs; and now Pycroft had seen them for himself.

The cars swept on.

The lodgekeeper, now accustomed to the sight of police cars tearing up and down on this particular night, readily admitted them. Like shadows the police dominated and listened to instructions.

Quickly Locke pointed out three large cars waiting outside the very gates of the castle.

"You'll find the drivers armed," he whispered. "Take them without a shot, if you can."

Three shadows rolled in the direction of the waiting cars. Came the noise of a slight scuffle, and the first part of the raid was accomplished. Pycroft wondrously followed Locke into the apse-hall. At their back came the armed policemen.

Crack, crack, crack, crack!

Four reports availed the echoes as Locke and his men came in sight of the false policemen posted outside the door of the reception-room.

The two entries dropped to the floor with police bullets in their shoulders; and Pycroft checked.

"That proves it!" he said. "The swipes—wearing our uniform! Gee ho! ho! ho! Show the brassards on them!"

Inside the reception-room the reports of the shots brought about another panic. But it started first with the other two false policemen guarding the inner side of the doors. They exchanged glances of uneasiness.

"Somebody's gone wrong!" muttered one.

His companion did not stop to answer. He bolted for the french windows.

"Caller him!" roared Bill Hartley. "I thought there was something darned fishy about this job. I don't believe in a cop at all!"

In a flash Locke's words came back to him—"Look out for Gilly!"

In a headlong rush Bill dived at the fleeing constable, while at least a score of the guests divided themselves into falling on the second false policeman and following him.

Bill's quarry, however, was showing his teeth. He turned abruptly at the window and a gun appeared in his hands.

"Keep back, you red-headed crab," he roared, "or your red hair won't be of any use to you in a minute."

But Bill was not to be defied by a gangster, even if he had a gun in his hand. Close at hand was a heavy brass grating mounted on a high pillar.

Bill climbed it and harled it straight at the uniformed gangster.

Crack!

The revolver spoke at the same time, but the brass ornament, landing on the gangster's head, caused him to lose wildly. Before he could pull the trigger again Bill's large size in brass took him once—twice—three—

The gangster did not recover until he was seated in the police-car, handcuffed.

His companion, set so carefully with the gun, gave in

WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

BILL HARTLEY, a six-foot edition of brains and muscle, with flaming red hair, is sent down from Oxford. Through the help of Major Foreman, an old friend, he is signed on by the Constable, Inspector P. C., only to find that Michael Kelly, the man who had brought about his dismissal from the "Force," is the chief constable. Foreman, who is also the leader of a gang of crooks, is determined to rob Bill and Ferrers Locke before they can appoint a member of the gang to poison the attraction. The dastardly plot fails, but Locke insists it is known that he has been killed. Meanwhile, in the guise of Michael Kelly, the aristocrat gets a look at the "Flemish Film Studio," from which he procures the dress of a film actor. As soon as he is ready to put in a new crack, after a big snarl with Foreman, the former turns, including Burton, go to the Duke of Stapleton's ancestral home as his guests. The castle, as Locke knows, is to be the scene of a daring raid by the Burton gang, and with all eyes the detective knows there, hoping to roll in to time.

(How and on.)

quietly as at least a dozen athletes closed in on him. The doors of the reception room were being open and the guests rushed out.

One or two of Inspector Fyerooff's men got them wise. "The first lot of copper were taken! We're bagging the lot!"

In a rather queer the guests sneaked towards the family surroundings, whither they knew the duke and Burton had gone. Bill and Tich Freeman were in the van.

There came the debouché crackle of revolvers as the party rushed round a corner, followed by the unusual sight of uniformed constables firing at each other.

But Fyerooff's men held the advantage of surprising the insurgents. For one thing the squad, led by the lagged inspector, was headed with the spoils of his crib. Jewels (attached to the purloined flooring, and guns fished out as the genuine police burst upon them.

Weight of numbers and the surprise of the attack told in less than two minutes the whole gang, with one exception, was safely rounded up and made captive.

The lagged inspector, doubtless not liking the prospect of several years' imprisonment, made a sudden break for freedom. Shooting off two of the constables who had ranged themselves on either side of him, he jumped for an adjacent alcove and smashed through the non-fort glass window before anyone could stop him.

"Dink's away!" said Locke grimly; "I fancy I know where to find him, Fyerooff!"

With the chattering crowd of guests behind them Locke and Fyerooff marched into the vault-like chamber in which was the strongroom. The door was half-open, the electric light was out.

Not knowing of the presence of the watch, Locke motioned to Fyerooff to turn on his torch.

A harsh fall on the assembled crowd pressing behind as the white ray swept the chamber. Then a long, imbrued marmoset crouched as the travelling arc of light dwelt on the portrait figure of the Duke of Stapleton.

In a moment Locke was down on his knees. The old aristocrat was alive! Locke's sense of smell quickly discovered the fumes of alcoholism. But there was a shock in store for the Baker Street detective as the beam from Fyerooff's torch moved on.

Living about four feet from the old aristocrat was another insubstantia figure, and as Locke's quick eye saw it crouched near to a regular chorus from the guests peering in:—"Hasten!"

Locke's face set grimly. He had known all along that behind this massive scheme to smash the treasures of Stapleton Castle was the master brain of Marchant Burton. But even Locke had never suspected the extent of the cunning and duplicity with which Burton had laid his plans.

For some moments Fyerooff Locke peered down at the insubstantia figure of Marchant Burton, then the flicker of a smile crossed his face. Turning to Inspector Fyerooff he mentioned that very satisfied officer to give him a hand.

Between them they carried the Duke of Stapleton and Burton to a nearby house, the excited onlookers parting an avenue for them.

Bill and Tich Freeman could hardly contain themselves. They gazed into the cheerful face of Jack Dink, and that youngster gave them a covert wink and a primrose that implied silence. But Bill was not quick enough to catch the wink.

He started forward and plucked the private detective by the sleeve.

"Mr. L—!" he was beginning, when Locke sharply interrupted.

"Mr. Kelly!"

"For the moment Bill was unheeded. Then a huge grin creased over his face.

"Mr. Kelly! I say, oh—I say—!"

Inspector Fyerooff's grin went loosed.

"Charlotte, Mr.—or—Kelly!" He remembered himself in time. "No signs of damage. They will both come round in due course."

Locke nodded.

"I don't think we need bother about them," he said. "His Grace might suffer a little from the shock, but that, doubtless, will be negligible when he learns the news that his precious jewels have not been stolen."

He glanced round at the sullen group of prisoners. Each was securely handcuffed to a genuine constable. The spoils of the raid had been taken from them and none were returned to the strong-rooms. Victims of a lengthy period in the close seclusion of his Majesty's prison stared them in the face.

At last the Buxton gang was rounded up—or nearly so.

"I think the sooner we get these roughnecks under lock and key the better!" growled Fyerooff. "By Jingo, this little business will give the Commissioner something to think about!"

With usual courtesy he brushed his prisoners to the waiting cars and saw them driven off. Then he returned to Fyerooff's office.

The detective was quietly explaining matters to an astonished audience.

"The whole thing was a carefully thought out raid, gentlemen, and no divinely attributes to you for being taken in by gangsters in police clothing. In the circumstances," Locke concluded, "I sincerely thank you will stay in here. His Grace will be some time before he recovers, so he is not a young man, remember."

The party broke up in a hubbub of conversation. The night's events provided an exciting topic.

Bill and Tich Freeman lingered, Locke, catching sight of the former, suddenly reached for his pocket.

"You will pardon me, Bill," he said, "but since since ago I took the liberty of buying this from your dog."

He held out a small dog's collar, at sight of which Bill jumped.

"Well, I've tagged!"

"You won't be tagged," replied Locke grimly, "but the idea this collar contained will be the means of harrying more than one of this precious gang!"

(What else has Fyerooff Locke found in the dog's collar? How has it helped him to chase up the gang? Stay, there's a keep more thrills in next week's gripping instalment.)

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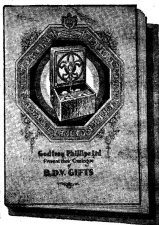
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