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The GEM

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

2^D



OUT OF
THE
FRYING PAN—!

WHERE IS TRIMBLE? GUSSY KNOWS—BUT NO ONE BELIEVES HIM!

Lion-Hearted Gussy!

BY MARTIN CLIFFORD



CHAPTER 1.

In Rycombe Wood!

HELP!" Ow! Rescue! Yaroo!"
The voice of Baggie Trimble of the Fourth was raised on its top note.

It was a lovely afternoon in early spring. Being a half-holiday the majority of St. Jim's fellows were out enjoying themselves. Trimble was out, but he did not appear to be enjoying himself.

Through Rycombe Wood a pretty footpath ran towards St. Jim's. The footpath was not the only thing running towards St. Jim's that afternoon. Trimble "also ran"—as the racing men say.

The fat junior was pelting through the wood on top gear, bawling and yelling for help.

Why he required help was not clear. There was nobody chasing him. But evidently he did want help, and he wanted it very urgently, to judge by his voice.

"Yooooop! Keep off! Help!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the Fourth, was strolling leisurely and gracefully through the wood when Trimble dawned on him. Gussy had a volume under his arm and a look of deep thought in his eyes. The Fourth were playing the Shell that afternoon; but Gussy had turned the match down. More important things than football were occupying the noble brain of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

As Trimble appeared in sight Gussy lost his look of deep thought and replaced it with a look of surprise.

"Help! Groooooh!"

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"Gweat Scott! What is the mattah, Twimble?"

"Keep off!" yelled Trimble frantically. "Lemme go, you rotter!"

"Weally, Twimble—"

"Oh, it's you, Gussy!" panted the Falstaff of the Fourth, suddenly recognising his companion. "I say, stand by me, old fellow. Don't let those beasts get at me."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked up the footpath, and he looked down the footpath. Save for the egregious form of Trimble, there was nobody in sight.

"What beasts, Twimble?" he asked in perplexity. "Theah is nobody aftah you."

Trimble pulled himself together and gasped.

"Oh! I—I thought that beast Gay was after me!" he groaned. "I met him in the wood just now, and he and the other Grammar School beasts were going to tie my legs together!"

Gussy grinned.

"Cheekay wottahs!" he said. "And what did you do—wun for it?"

"Yes, rather— I—I mean, nothing of the kind!" said Trimble, blinking at Gussy's unsuspecting face. "I turned on them and fought like—like a demon, you know. You know what I'm like when I'm roused. I felled Gordon Gay to the ground with a terrible blow to the chin. And then I knocked that beast Monk spinning."

"You fat fibbah!"

"Oh, really, Gussy—"

"I can imagine you fellin' Gay to the gwound—I don't think. Yo; wan for it, you fat wascal!"

"Well, wouldn't you run for it? There were six of the

GUSSY LOOKS FOR TRIMBLE IN A LION'S DEN!

beasts!" hooted Trimble. Then his manner changed and he became affectionate. "I say, Gussy, old fellow, are you going to the village?"

"Yaas." "Good! I'll come. We'll tea at the bunshop there. They've got some ripping jam-tarts in, old fellow—simply ripping! Greengage, you know. Fatty Wynn told me. He's gone down to buy some for tea."

"I am not goin' to the bunshop, Twimble." "But these tarts are simply prime—" "Nevah mind the tarts, you fat glutton! I have no time for tarts. Pway buzz off, Twimble!"

Trimble blinked at him. Whenever a St. Jim's junior walked down to the village Trimble took it for granted that he would call at the bunshop. There was no other place in the village worth visiting, in Trimble's opinion. That Gussy would eventually find his way to that desired spot Trimble had no doubt. And he wanted to be on hand when Gussy did so.

"Look here! Why are you going to the village, then?" he demanded indignantly.

"This is not your biznai, Twimble," replied Gussy freely. "But, if you want to know, I am engaged on a case."

"A which?" stuttered Trimble. "A case, Twimble. I have been weadin' this book of Sexton Blake, Twimble, and I have decided to become an amatiah detective."

"Oh crikey!" "It is weally vevy simple!" went on Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning over the pages of the volume he had with him. "I undahstand fully exactly how Sexton Blake and Tinkah handle their cases, and I am convinced I could do quite as well as they do. If you wun acwoss any cwimes, Twimble, I shall be pleased to solve them for you, deali boy."

Trimble gazed at the swell of St. Jim's in astonishment. This was not the first time that D'Arcy had broken out as a detective. Gussy occasionally got hold of a good detective story, and when he did so he was invariably bitten with a desire to emulate the feats of Sexton Blake and Sherlock Holmes.

Trimble grinned. Gussy eyed him frigidly.

"I fail to see any cause for laughtah, Twimble!" he said stonily. "If you are chortlin' at me, you fat wottah—"

"Nunno!" Trimble gasped hastily. "Not at all, old fellow. As a matter of fact, I think you make a jolly good detective."

Gussy thawed.

"Yaas, I wathah fancy I know how to handle a case," he said complacently. "I have felt many times that I should have solved cases as well, or bettah, than most detectives."

"Oh crumbs!"

Trimble stifled his cackles—Gussy being a beast who was always ready to kick a fellow if necessary.

"I say, Gussy, what case are you on now, old fellow?" asked Trimble curiously. "Has anybody been committing a crime?"

The detective pulled a small notebook from his pocket and studied it.

"I am investigatin' a vevy mystewious affaih, Twimble," he replied seriously. "Theah is a man livin' in Wylcombe who I stwongly suspect to be a cwiminal."

"Great pip! What's his name?"

"His name—o: the name by which he is known—is Bellew, Twimble."

"Bellew?"

The fat junior blinked. He knew Mr. Bellew—all the village knew him. And they were afraid of him. He was something of a mystery.

Mr. Herbert Bellew had moved into a large house called Gable Lodge some six months previously. He was a man who had lived in Africa for many years, and he had now retired and come to spend the rest of his days in England.

Being naturally a secretive and reserved man, Mr. Bellew did not choose to talk about his private business in the village. So the villagers agreed unanimously that there was some mysterious secret about him. His house, too, was the centre of a mystery. Awful sounds had been heard coming from Gable Lodge of a night.

All this Trimble knew; but he certainly did not believe that Mr. Bellew was a criminal. That was a little too

thick. Apparently, however, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was satisfied on the point.

"Phew! So you're after Bellew, Gussy?"

"Yaas. Can you give me any information about him, Twimble?" asked Gussy, interested.

"He pulled out a pencil and hopefully moistened the point. Trimble reflected.

"I know he looks a rotter," he answered. "And the villagers are all afraid of him. They call him the 'Sinister Man.'"

"Yaas, I know that, but—"

"And his house, Gable Lodge, is haunted," added the fat junior.

"What wot! It was nevah haunted until Bellew moved into it."

"Well, Gable Lodge is haunted right enough," said the fat junior. "You ask Handcock of the Shell. He says he has heard fearful screams and ghastly cackles of laughter coming from the house."

"Handcock says so?"

"Yes, rather! And everybody in Rylcombe Lane knows the house is haunted. They've all heard squeals and shrieks there of a night."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in his role of Sexton Blake, duly made an entry in his notebook.

"Vevy suspicious!" was his comment. "I deduce that the villain has got some poor w'etch locked up in his house and tortuahs him vevy night."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Do you know anythin' else about the scoundwel, Twimble?"

Trimble paused, and blinked cunningly at the guileless Gussy. As ever, the fat mind of Trimble was on the make.

"What will you give me if I tell you?" he asked.

"What?"

"Well, it's worth something to you if you help to nail him, ain't it?"

"You fat wascal!"

"Make it half-a-crown, old fellow, and I'll tell you what I know. I can prove that Bellew is a criminal."

Gussy eyed the hopeful Trimble with great disgust; but he had heard that Sexton Blake had more than once paid people for information. So, reluctantly, he said:

"If you can tell me anythin' worth while, you howwid wascal, I will give you the half-crown."

"Oh, good!"

"And now what can you tell me?"

Trimble paused. Since he could tell Gussy nothing further about the mysterious Mr. Bellew, he was reduced to the necessity of "stuffing" him. But that was all right. Trimble was prepared to stuff Gussy all the afternoon for two shillings and sixpence. The only question was—what kind of stuffing?

"Well," he said at last, "he's after me, you know."

"What?"

"Yes! He's been looking for me for a long time. He's going to kill me when he gets hold of me."

"Gug-going to kill you!" stuttered Gussy.

"Yes, old fellow! He chased me with a knife the other day—a fearful, gleaming blade. He made a terrible stab at me, but I whirled round and wrenched the knife away from him."

Gussy gazed at him.

"And then," pursued the happy Trimble, his imagination lending a little colour to the truth, "another time he shot at me with a six-shooter. But he missed me, and I struggled with the monster. Seizing him by the throat, I hissed 'Villain! Surrender!' That made him cave in, you know. He hasn't attacked me since; but I know jolly well he's lying in wait for me every day."

Still Gussy said nothing. He merely gazed and gazed. "And now can I have the half-crown, old fellow?" asked Trimble, extending a fat and sticky hand.

It swiftly appeared that Trimble could not have the half-crown. As soon as Gussy recovered his breath, he made this fact plain.

"You—you—you awful fabwicatah!" roared Gussy. "You swindlin' wottah! Do you think I believe a word you say?"

"Look here, you owe me a half-crown, you beast—"

"I owe you a jolly good kickin', you fat wascal!" said Gussy sternly. "Take that for tellin' fibs!"

"Whoop!" roared Trimble, as Gussy's elegant shoe landed on the tightest part of his trousers.

"And that for twyin' to swindle me—"

"Yarooooh! Stop kicking me, you beast!"

"And that—"

"Yooooooop!"

Trimble broke away, and for the second time that afternoon he ran yelling through the wood.

"Whooooo! Keep off!"

"Come back!" roared Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I've not finished yet."

Trimble had finished, though—more than finished. Unheeding the voice of the charmer, he did not return. He rushed at top speed towards St. Jim's.

Still keeping his foot on the accelerator, so to speak, Trimble rounded a large elm-tree at top speed. Coming along the path from the other direction was an elderly gentleman. The elderly gentleman saw Trimble when he was a yard away. Trimble didn't see the elderly gentleman at all. He felt him instead!

There was a grinding collision.

Two forms smote the hard ground, and two yells of agony rose on the calm air.

"Ooooooogh!"

"Wow!"

The gentleman struggled painfully to a vertical plane. Trimble, finding that he was not—as he had at first suspected—dead, sat up and blinked.

"Dud-dear me!" gasped the gentleman faintly. "What-at was that?"

Trimble gasped.

He gasped with terror and dismay. He recognised the victim of his charge. It was Mr. Bellew, of Gable Lodge, known to the villagers as the Sinister Man. It was the man of whom everybody was afraid; the man whom D'Arcy suspected to be a criminal. And Trimble had charged him over.

"You young donkey!" snorted Mr. Bellew, glaring at Trimble's prostrate form. "Why don't you look where you are going?"

Mr. Bellew certainly had a rather sinister appearance. He was a short, stocky, thick-set man with an immensely wiry frame. The hot sun of the tropics had scorched his face to a dark ginger, against which his teeth showed extra white and his eyes extra black. A small, grizzled moustache sprouted on his upper lip, and it needed only a short tuft of beard to make his face a living copy of that of Mephistopheles in "Faust." Small wonder that the villagers stood in awe of him.

Trimble trembled.

Of all the people in Rylcombe, the fat junior would rather have bumped over any than Mr. Bellew. Even the august headmaster of St. Jim's would have been preferable to this sinister-looking person.

His teeth chattered as Bellew came towards him. At the very least, Trimble expected the Sinister Man to draw a knife and slay him.

"Ow! Keep off!" he yelled in terror. "It wasn't me! It was an accident! Yaroooooh!"

Bellew stopped.

"Wha-at?" he ejaculated. "I was only going to help you to your feet, you young idiot!"

Trimble bounded to his feet unaided. He stood there fearfully.

"Dud-don't touch me!" he stuttered. "I won't do it again! Lemme alone, sir, please."

"Is the boy mad?" asked Mr. Bellew, appealing to the universe at large. The universe made no reply, so Bellew continued: "The boy seems in a state of utter fright. What is frightening you, my boy?"

This inquiry was put in quite a kindly tone; but Trimble continued to burble:

"I couldn't help it! Lemme off this time, sir! I won't do it again!"

The Sinister Man snorted.

"Is it possible," he said, "that you are afraid of me? Have you been listening to the silly stories about me in the village, boy?"

"Nunno!" yelled Trimble. "I haven't heard a word. I've never heard that you're a criminal—don't know a thing about it! As for the screams and shrieks in your house, I—I think it must be mice."

Mr. Bellew gaped at Trimble. Before he could say anything further, an interruption occurred.

Through the wood bounded a small black-and-white fox-terrier, barking joyously. The little dog bounded up to Trimble, and gave him a welcoming bark. The terrier was quite prepared to make a friend of Trimble.

But Trimble wasn't prepared to make a friend of the

little dog. In his state of utter funk, the little dog provided the last straw. As he dashed at Trimble, barking with joy, Trimble lashed out with a fat foot.

It was a cruel kick. His boot landed in the terrier's ribs, and sent the little animal rolling over and over on the foot-path. The dog gave one yelp, and then, scrambling up, he bolted for his life towards the village.

Bellew started up.

"Jock!" he roared. "Jock! Come back!"

But the dog had vanished. Bellew turned to Trimble, and his black eyes blazed savagely.

"You mean, spiteful little rascal!" he snarled. "That was my dog, boy! How dare you kick any animal in such a cruel manner as that?"

"I—I—I— Yaroooooh!"

Mr. Bellew had with him a stout rattan cane. He grasped Trimble, bent him over, and made the cane fairly ring on the fat junior's tight trousers.

Whack!

From Trimble came a yell which would have made the celebrated Bull of Bashan sigh hopelessly.

"Whooooooop!"

"Perhaps this will teach you—whack, whack!—a lesson against cruelty to animals—whack, whack! It is mean to attack a defenceless creature—whack, whack!—and this will help you to remember it—whack!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Fire! Rescue! Whooop!"

There was a hurried step along the path, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into view, still with his volume under his arm.

He stood still in dumb astonishment. Was it possible that Bellew really was a member of a criminal gang who were out to get Trimble? It was certainly peculiar that, not ten minutes after Trimble had left him, Gussy found the suspected man himself pitching into the fat junior in a lonely part of the wood.

His jaw set firmly. Gussy had heaps of pluck, and he didn't hesitate a moment. Springing to the rescue, he grasped Bellew's arm, and stopped the castigation of Trimble.

"Stop, you wottah!" he roared. "Welease that fellow at once!"

Bellew turned about angrily; but his frown gave way to a smile, and he dropped his arm.

"Very well, my young friend!" he said banteringly. "Since you seem set on it, I will release him. I have given him a rare pasting, anyway."

"You uttah villain! You were ambushin' Twimble in the wood, Mr. Bellew! I know your game," accused Gussy, in the very best Sexton Blakian manner. "I'll stop your villainous design, deah boy—I mean, you scoundwel!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Bellew, somewhat grimly. "You are making a fool of yourself, my boy. Ask your friend all about it. Good-afternoon! I am pleased to have met you."

He strode rapidly along the path in the wake of his little dog, leaving Gussy frowning. The amateur detective did not like Bellew's sarcastic manner. More than ever he felt convinced that the man was a criminal. And he determined to bring him to justice.

Gussy felt that he could do a detective's job quite as well as Sexton Blake—given scope. That was the trouble. Scope! A schoolboy was somewhat cramped as a detective. Police-inspectors seldom or never visited a Public school and laid knotty problems before one of the scholars. It wasn't done. Silly, perhaps, but there it was.

Since Gussy had decided to become a detective, he had yearned for a mystery to solve. Providence seemed to have heard his prayer and sent him Bellew. And Bellew was a whole volume of mysteries in himself. His sinister appearance—the cries and shrieks from Gable Lodge—Gussy felt that here was a nice problem for his mighty brain to tackle.

But now, it seemed, there was a complication. Bellew was after Trimble. Why he should be after Trimble, Gussy could not yet deduce. Doubtless there were good reasons for it. He turned to Trimble.

"Why was that wottah thwashin' you, Twimble?" he asked.

"Ow-ow!"

"He must have had some weason, surely?"

Trimble shook his head. It was not the slightest use telling Gussy that he had kicked Bellew's dog, for Gussy was one of those soft-hearted beasts who were just as likely as not to give him another kicking for doing so. Gussy did not approve of cruelty to animals.

"No reason at all," groaned Trimble, nursing his injuries. "The beast was hiding in the bushes, and he sprang on me and laid into me with his stick."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I told you he was after me," said Trimble, as he



The gasping countenance of George Plummer was underneath Bates as he fell. The two louts went under with a gurgle!

suddenly remembered that fortunate lie. "The brute is a regular criminal, old fellow."

"Pway don't call me old fellow, Twimble. You are wathah an unpleasant boundah. But if Bellew is weally aftah you, deah boy, you may wely upon me to pwotect you."

"Ow-wow! He is!"

"In that case, theah is little doubt that he is a dastardly cwiminal. I suspected it all along. Twimble, deah boy, you must return to St. Jim's, and keep out of his way. I will shadow him and see wheah he goes."

"You—you'll what?"

"I will keep on his twail, deah boy! Most likely he is goin' to the post office to send a telegram to the membahs of his gang, you know. Then I shall simply look at the next telegram on the pad, and the w'itin' will have come through. Sexton Blake always does that. Leave this to me, Twimble! I will twack the scoundwel!"

So speaking, Sexton Blake the Second tiptoed along the path in the direction taken by the sinister Bellew.

He left Trimble staring after him with wide-open eyes. The fat junior expressed his gratitude in his usual way.

"He, he, he! Silly ass!" he sniggered. Then he made his way towards St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 2.

Fatty to the Rescue!

MR. BELLEW was annoyed. Really, it was exasperating.

It had started shortly after the Sinister Man had caught up with his dog Jock, and rubbed the bruise on the little terrier's ribs. He had glanced behind him, and was surprised to see a well-dressed schoolboy creeping through the bushes in a manner strongly suggestive of a frog with rheumatism.

He recognised the boy. It was the same youth who had butted in and prevented him giving Trimble the thrashing of his life.

Thinking little of the matter—except to wonder whether the boy was quite "all there"—Mr. Bellew had strolled on. But, upon turning again a little while later, he had seen the youth crouching along under cover of a fence.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite unconscious that his movements were observed by the arch-criminal, crept along stealthily. Mr. Bellew pursed his lips. He was beginning to get interested in the game. He rather wanted to find out why he was being shadowed.

In Wayland Road he glanced round just in time to see the amateur detective take cover behind a coal-cart.

Walking briskly round the corner into Rylcombe High Street, Mr. Bellew stopped dead and waited.

The little dog Jock trotted along the road.

Two minutes later the slim form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy edged itself around the corner, and fairly bumped into the object of its attentions.

There was an awful silence.

"Well?" asked Mr. Bellew dryly.

"W-well, sir?" stammered Gussy.

"You are following me, I think? May I ask why?"

This was frightful. Arthur Augustus asked himself feverishly what would Sexton Blake have done. There was no answer. Nowhere in all the stories of Sexton Blake had such a thing as this occurred.

He went pink with vexation.

"Weally, sir, I—I—"

"To save you wasting your time in this profitless fashion," struck in Bellew, in a dry tone, "I may as well tell you that I propose to go to the baker's shop in the village and purchase six muffins."

"Oh deah!"

"After which, I shall probably take my dog for a stroll on Wayland Heath, and then return to my house, toast each muffin, butter it, and eat it."

"Weally, Mr. Bellew—"

"After tea," pursued Bellew remorselessly, "I shall dispose of my victim under the floor of the counterfeiting den in my back room."

"Oh ewikey!"

"To-morrow morning I have arranged to stab a well-known M.P. and steal the House of Lords. No doubt I shall commit other crimes in the afternoon. I will drop you a postcard about them."

Gussy was red with humility and trembling with indignation. Detectives ought never to be exposed to this sort of thing.

"And now," concluded Bellew, in a deep voice, "let me give you one word of advice. You will find as you grow older that if you are at all secretive or reserved, your neighbours will think you have something disgraceful to conceal. And when they can find nothing to justify this belief, they will make up their own stories to confirm it. You will be well advised to pay no attention to the foolish talk of ignorant people. That is all, my young friend. Once again—good-afternoon!"

Gussy was left perfectly speechless with the indignity of his position. Oh, for some definite proof! At present he could say nothing in his defence. He merely suspected Mr. Bellew of being a criminal. But when once he could put his hand on something definite he would come down on the presumptuous Bellew like a thousand bricks—he would

come down upon him like the Assyrians came down upon the fold—he would utterly crush him! Bitterly should Bellew pay for his sarcasm and irony.

Meanwhile, Gussy saw nothing for it but to return to St. Jim's and await a future opportunity of scoring off the cynical Bellew.

While the amateur detective was returning, baffled, to the school, stirring scenes were being enacted in a different part of the village.

The central character in these scenes was the dog Jock.

Jock, as has been mentioned, did not wait with his master at the corner; but ran on into the village. There was a reason for this. Jock knew perfectly well that Mr. Bellew was about to visit the baker's shop, and he knew that the baker—a kindly man—always gave him a nice biscuit. Hence he was in a hurry to get there.

He trotted gaily along the village High Street, and wandered along by the duck-pond. He was now feeling merry and bright again after Trimble's kick, and he had no thought of further trouble.

But trouble was waiting for him in the shape of Plummer and Bates, two village louts.

Whenever anything was stolen in Rylcombe, or when there was trouble of any kind, Plummer and Bates were always mixed up in it.

Jock trotted up to Plummer, wagging his tail in a friendly fashion. Plummer did not kick him. Instead, he bent down and lifted the dog carefully in his arms. Jock licked his face.

"Little varmint!" growled Bates surlily. "Eave 'im in the pond!"

"Orl right!" snarled Plummer. "That's just wot I am going to do, ain't it?"

He dodged another lick, and, swinging Jock back in his arms, he sent him hurtling towards the middle of the pond.

Splash!

Jock gave a yelp, and disappeared under the slimy, green water.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

This was humorous! It made the two louts laugh.

Jock came to the surface, very properly indignant at his treatment. He began to swim vigorously to the bank.

But Plummer and Bates picked up a couple of long sticks and waited for him. As he neared the bank Plummer leaned out and prodded him under the surface again.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

This was also humorous.

Jock, making frantic efforts to avoid a watery grave, started for the other side, but Bates ran round and duly prodded him back into the middle again.

The little terrier made further attempts to reach the bank, but each time it was pushed back again.

While this gentle amusement was going on there came a sudden cry of anger.

It proceeded from a fat junior who was passing by with a bag of tarts.

Fatty Wynn of the New House loved animals—being directly opposite in that respect to Baggy Trimble. The sight of the little terrier's plight made Fatty forget even his tarts. Dropping the bag, he gave a wild howl and charged at Plummer.

Plummer was expecting nothing in the nature of a thunderbolt or an earthquake that afternoon; but Fatty dropped on him like both. The lout gave a wild howl and lost his balance.

There was one dreadful second while Plummer—like Mohamet's coffin—hung suspended between heaven and earth, and then a fountain of green water shot into the air, and George Plummer was not. The ruffled waters of the pond marked where he had been.

Splash!

"Gug-gug-gug!"

This was not humorous. Plummer saw nothing whatever to cackle at in this.

Bates, as soon as he saw his comrade consigned to the depths, uttered a furious yell and charged round the pond for vengeance. Fatty, white-faced, waited for him.

The village lout was about three times as big as the St. Jim's junior; moreover, he was willing—indeed, anxious—to resort to any dirty trick to gain his ends. He was a bruiser, purely and simply.

"You young hound!" he snarled savagely. "I'll out yer, sw'elp me!"

But Fatty had heaps of pluck. As the bruiser charged him, he swung a perfect left which crunched home in Bates' eye.

"Whoop! Oh crimes! I'll corpse yer fer that!"

And Bates proceeded first to out Fatty and then to corpse him. His first attempt was to ram his knee into the pit of the junior's stomach, which made Fatty howl with pain and

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drop to the ground. Satisfied with the result of this particularly unsporting action, Bates was about to stamp on Fatty's face when a hand grasped his collar and swung him away.

He turned about savagely, and then he muttered an oath. It was Bellew who had captured him. Bellew, with his eyes flaming pure hatred, Bates was bigger and heavier than the Sinister Man, but he was almost like a child in that wiry grip.

"You delightful specimen!" gasped Bellew, through white lips. "You glorious example of manhood! You miserable cur! I've a mind to take all the hide off your back with a dogwhip!"

"Look 'ere, guv'nor—"

"But, instead, I think I'll ask you to join your boon companion in the pond!" snapped Bellew. "Delightful weather for a bathe—and you can do with a wash! Get in!"

Helpless in that iron grasp, Bates was propelled to the margin of the pond and pushed. The gasping countenance of George Plummer was underneath Bates as he fell. Locked in each other's arms, the two louts went under with a splash.

"Gloooooohoooooop!"

This also was not humorous. This was horrid.

Jock struggled out of the wetness and shook himself. Then, as cheerful as ever, he trotted up to his master and barked. It took more than a ducking to damp Jock's spirits.

Fatty had risen to his feet.

"How do you feel?" Bellew asked kindly.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Fatty. "I'm all right, sir! The brute hit me below the belt!"

"I saw what happened," nodded Bellew dryly. "They won't do it again for a little while. My young friend, you're a true-blue Briton to chip in and save my dog. I'd be pleased if you would shake hands with me. The way you heaved that great lout into the pond was one of the choicest things I've ever seen in my life."

Fatty, blushing awkwardly, shook hands.

And then he made a sudden discovery which completely knocked all the spirit out of him. He could have borne the pain he had received from Bates; but this—this was terrible!

He had fallen on the bag of tarts. They were utterly squashed.

This was, of course, stark tragedy. Those tarts were three-halfpence each (nine for one shilling), and they were filled with luscious greengage jam. They were bigger and better in every way than the tarts sold at the school tuck-shop. Fatty had walked all the way down to the village to purchase those tarts, and when he thought of the empty cupboard in his study he could have sat right down and wept.

Bellew's eye dwelt on Fatty and then on the tarts.

"They won't be very nice now," he smiled.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Fatty dolorously.

"Come!" said Mr. Bellew. "Cheer up! I won't offer to pay for the tarts—I'll do better than that. Come home to tea with me at Gable Lodge."

"Wha-at?" gasped Fatty.

"You are fond of animals, I think?"

Fatty nodded.

"Ah! I have some very curious animals at my home. I feel sure you would like to see them. Let us go to the baker's and get some cakes and tarts. Also some muffins. You like muffins, I expect?"

Fatty licked his lips.

"I'd be glad if you would honour me with your company at tea," said Mr. Bellew.

Fatty's eyes danced. This was what he liked to hear. He smiled.

"Yes, rather, sir!" he said.

"Good! Come along, then!"

They collected Jock, and marched off together to the bushop.

Behind them two spluttering, uncouth figures rose out of the slimy depths, and shook two fists furiously.

The afternoon was quite spoilt for Plummer and Bates. They fairly oozed slime and stagnant water as they stamped their feet on the bank.

It was not their lucky day.

CHAPTER 3.

Where is Trimble?

"SEEN Trimble?"

"Ha, ha, No!"

Three juniors of the Fourth at St. Jim's were hunting high and low for Bagley Trimble, of Trimble Hall. The three were Blake, Herries, and Digby, who shared Study No. 6 with D'Arcy.

In their hands they each carried a fives bat, and it required not the brain of a Sexton Blake or an Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to know that something unpleasant would happen to Trimble when found. Evidently the three juniors were not carrying the bats for ornament. They were for use—very drastic use.

This search for Trimble by the three chums struck the rest of the juniors as comic. They knew what the trouble was. Blake & Co., in common with all the juniors at St. Jim's, had heard of the delicious tarts at the village bunshop. Blake had cycled down to the village immediately after dinner, and he had purchased two-shillingsworth of greengage tarts.

He had taken those tarts, and he had placed them very carefully in the cupboard of Study No. 6, all ready for tea. He had thereupon gone out and played football, and he had returned to look for the tarts.

And, behold, they were not!

Now, unless the tarts had suddenly acquired the power of walking out of the cupboard, it was reasonable to suppose that somebody had shifted them. And that somebody could only be Trimble of the Fourth. It was a little habit of his.

Hence the ferocious search for Trimble.

"Seen Trimble?" hooted Blake, meeting Tom Merry, the junior captain, on the landing.

Tom shook his head.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Lost some tuck?"

"A whole bag of tarts!" roared Blake furiously. "Two bobs' worth of tarts—greengage tarts!"

The fact that they were greengage-tarts seemed to add to the offence in Blake's eyes. Had they been strawberry it wouldn't have been so bad. But greengage—The three chums rushed down the passage with perfectly fiendish expressions on their faces.

"Seen Trimble anywhere, Wildrake?"

"I guess not," replied the Canadian junior.

"Seen Trimble, Cardew?"

"I fancy I saw our fat man about half an hour ago, old bean! I wouldn't swear to it, though. Trimble ain't so important that a fellow notices him."

Back along the passage went the avenging trio. The elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was coming upstairs, with a frown on the aristocratic brow. Gussy was still pondering over his interview with the Sinister Man.

"Seen Trimble, Gussy?" howled Digby.

"Yaas!"

"You have seen him?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas!"

"Well, where, idiot?" howled Blake. "Where, ass?"

"In Wylcombe Wood!"

"How long ago?"

"About an hour, deah boy!"

The three glared at him.

"You—you—you burbling chump! Is this a time for your silly rot?" Blake yelled.

"Bai Jove! What do you mean, Blake? And I have told you more than once that I dislike to be chawactewised as a burmlin' chump."

Gussy's chums glared at him as though they would eat him.

"Give him the bat!" hissed Blake.

To Gussy's wrath, dismay, and utter astonishment, his chums fell on him with upraised bats.

Whack, whack!

"Yawwoooop! Why—what—have you gone pottay?" shrieked Arthur Augustus, in great wrath. "Oooop! Bai Jove! You uttah wuffians!"

"Take that—and that—and that!" breathed Blake.

"And that!" added Digby.

"Here, ease up, you fellows!" came Cardew's voice. "That ain't Trimble! Trimble's a trifle fatter than Gus."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" snorted Blake.

The three juniors went on, leaving Gussy sprawling. From behind them there floated the voice of the detective of St. Jim's raised in indignation. He had been assaulted. His own chums had batted him. There was nothing for it but to administer a most terrible thrashing all round.

"Where is that fat idiot?" hooted Blake. "Seen Trimble, Handcock?"

"Nope!" answered Cyrus K. Handcock of the Shell. "What's the racket, buddies?"

"He's boned a whole bag of tarts—greengage tarts—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is that a laughing matter?" demanded Blake, in surprise and wrath.

"I guess you were a set of doggoned boneheads to let him get away with them," chortled Handcock. "I calculate I should have locked my cupboard door."

And the American junior went on chuckling.

"The fat rotter's hiding somewhere!" growled Herries.

"Well, we'll get him at call-over!" Blake grunted. "He can't very well dodge that."

At call-over that evening three juniors, still on the war-path, concealed bats under their jackets and waited anxiously for Trimble. But when Mr. Railton, who took the roll, called "Trimble!" the only reply was an unbroken silence.

"Trimble!"

More silence.

Mr. Railton frowned, and marked Trimble absent.

"The bouncer's keeping it up," said Blake, as the juniors came out of Hall. "We'll have to wait until bed-time, and give him a dorm ragging. Take the bats to the dorm with you, you men!"

"What-ho!"

"Pity we can't find him before!" growled Herries.

"The bouncer's hiding somewhere."

Herries stopped suddenly, and his eyes lighted up.

"Towser!" he cried.

"Eh?"

"Towser!" said Herries excitedly. "Why didn't I think of it before? Towser will track down that fat rotter!"

"Look here—"

"You're not going to get that blessed bulldog!" roared Blake. "Leave him alone, you silly ass!"

"Rot!" said Herries obstinately. "Towser will soon smell the rotter out. I'd just give him a whiff of Trimble's cap, and he'll be on the scent in no time!"

"If you bring that horrid bulldog in here, Herries—"

But Herries had gone to fetch his beloved pet.

Towser was not liked inside the House. Herries couldn't imagine why. Of course, the bulldog occasionally took lumps out of the fellows' trousers; but that was mere playfulness. Usually Towser managed to bowl over every fellow he met; but he was a big dog, and if the silly asses hadn't the sense to get out of the way, it wasn't Towser's fault.

Blake and Digby breathed hard, and returned to Study No. 6 for prep.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in the study. He was engaged in reading the adventures of Sexton Blake and Tinker—conning the pages in a vain attempt to find what that famous detective would do if a man he was shadowing informed him that he proposed to commit a felony.

D'Arcy looked up as his chums came in.

"You uttah wottahs!" he remarked freely.

"What's the matter with you, ass?"

"I uttably wufese to speak to you in futuah, Blake! You bumped me ovah and batted me! I have vevy sewiously contemplated whethah or not to administah a vevy sevceah thwashin' to you."

"I shouldn't!" said Blake soothingly.

"No, don't!" urged Dig.

"I should be vevy sowwy to do so, of course; but aftah what has occurred, I— Why—what—what—what—Yawwooooooh!"

The study door had opened suddenly, and Towser barged in. He was attached to a lead, which, in turn, was attached to Herries; but the great bulldog seemed to pull Herries just wherever he wanted to go. At that moment he wanted to get at Gussy, and he got at him.

For some reason Towser had taken a violent dislike to Gussy's trousers, and the one joy of his life was to have a chew at them. He made a bee-line across the study, and fixed his teeth firmly in the legs of Gussy's Bond Street trousering.

The swell of the Fourth yelled.

"Gewwoff, you bwute!" he shrieked, trying to climb on to the armchair. "Dwaggimoffme! Yawwooooh! He's bi-bi-bitin' me!"

"Take that blessed dog out!" roared Blake, jumping out of the way.

Herries snorted. It was always the way. Fellows had no sympathy whatever for Towser, although he was easily the cleverest and most affectionate bulldog in the world. At least, Herries thought so. Other fellows didn't.

He pulled Towser's lead.

"Let the ass alone, old fellow!" he said persuasively.

"That ain't Trimble! That's only our champion idiot!"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"Yawwooooh!" Gussy waved his arms and one leg wildly. The other leg was in Towser's possession. "I'm bein' eaten! Take him away, you feahful wuffian! Gwooooh!"

"You'd better get outside, I think, Gussy," advised Herries seriously. "You're making the old fellow a little excited with your silly roars!"

"How can I get outside, you uttah chump?" raved Arthur Augustus. "The bwute's got my leg! Pullimoff!"

There was a short tug-of-war between Gussy and Towser. Then followed a dreadful rending sound. A large section of black cloth hung limply from Towser's stobbering jaws.

On Gussy's right leg was a large section of nothingness—at least, as regards clothes. Gussy's leg—pink with indignation—was laid bare to the knee.

For five seconds Gussy stared, frozen with horror, at the torn remains of what had been a fashionable pair of bags. But as Towser evinced a desire to add the other leg to his collection, Gussy awoke to action. Whipping round the table, he tore open the door and fled.

Roars of laughter floating along the passage showed that Gussy's retreat was being watched.

"You—you—you—" hooted Blake, keeping well out of reach of Towser. "What do you mean by bringing that rotten bulldog in here? Take him out!"

"Tommy-rot!" snorted Herries. "It was Gussy's fault! He always excites Towser with his potty yells. Anybody would think he was afraid of the dear old chap."

"Take him outside!"

"Oh, all right! We're going to look for Trimble, anyway! Come on, Towser!"

Towser suffered himself to be dragged out of the study, and then he took command of matters once more. He sniffed once or twice, and finally got on the scent. When once Towser was on the scent there was no holding him. Down the passage went Towser, pulling Herries after him. Blake and Digby followed him at a safe distance.

"He's on the trail!" chortled Herries. "Go it, Towsy!"

The scent led Towser downstairs to the ground floor, and thence along the corridor to the domestic regions. The trail was very strong now. Towser did not hesitate for a second.

Pushing open the door of the big kitchen, he barged his way in, calling forth screams of horror from the cook and the two maids. Unheeding them, Towser charged across the kitchen and fixed his teeth firmly in a large meat-pie.

Herries' face was a picture. Was it possible—was it faintly conceivable—that Towser had merely been on the trail of a meat-pie?

As soon as the cook recovered from a temporary attack of heart failure and saw her glorious meat-pie in Towser's jaw, she acted promptly. Picking up a large mop, she charged desperately to the defence of her pie.

Whack!

"Yooowwwwwp!" Towser let out a surprised yelp as the mop caught him squarely on the diaphragm. He dropped the meat-pie and backed away.

"Here, look here—" stuttered Herries.

Whack!

Towser could stand no more. He knew when he had had enough. Napoleon himself would have quailed before a mop in the hands of a determined cook. Towser fitted his tail carefully between his legs and streaked for the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake and Digby from the passage.

They soon ceased to laugh. They were not prepared for Towser's sudden advent. The bulldog was in their midst before they suspected he was coming. There was a terrible collision.

"Whoooooop!" roared Blake, as he and Digby fell over Towser and cannoned into Herries.

In one second there was a frightful mix-up on the floor. The cook continued to make great play with the mop, banging it on dog and schoolboys alike.

"Yaroooooh! Ow! He's biting me!" shrieked Digby, who had Towser on his chest.

"Gerrouit of the way!" roared Herries.

"What are you boys doing down here?" It was the voice of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster.

The juniors jumped up in haste. Herries vainly tried to conceal Towser behind him; but he might as well have tried to hide the rock of Gibraltar. Towser was too big to be inconspicuous.

"What is that dog doing in the House?" demanded the master sternly.

"I—I—I thought he might track Trimble down, sir!" stammered Herries. "Trimble is missing, sir. I thought that—"

"Absurd!" snapped Mr. Railton crossly. "You will take that dog back to the kennels, Herries; and you may do me a hundred lines for bringing him into the House against the rules. In addition, you will each write one hundred lines for breaking bounds by entering the kitchen!"

"Oh, lor'!"

Mr. Railton walked away, and Herries' chums looked at him expressively. Four hands were raised and placed firmly on Herries' arms. He was jerked off his feet and dumped beside Towser on the ground. Then Blake and Digby walked away, feeling a little better.

They left Herries roaring.

The missing Trimble did not appear before bed-time. As they went to the dorm the Fourth Form juniors began to take a more serious view of the case. They had thought that

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Trimble was hiding away from vengeance; but surely he would not conceal himself for a whole evening.

There were many speculations concerning the missing junior as the fellows undressed. The majority thought that Trimble was still in hiding. Some thought he might have met with an accident, while Mellish was of the opinion that the police had got him. But nobody heeded Mellish's ill-timed humour.

One junior alone was silent and reserved.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was probably more anxious than anyone to know what had happened to Trimble. If Bellew had succeeded in kidnapping him, Gussy felt that it was his fault for letting the Sinister Man swerve from his purpose.

Had Bellew managed to "get" Trimble? That was what was worrying the noble brain of the amateur tec. He began to feel quite anxious.

Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form master, came to the dormitory before lights out. He glanced questioning at Trimble's unoccupied bed.

"Does any boy here know what has happened to Trimble?" he asked.

No reply.

"Where was Trimble seen last?" was his next question.

"Have you seen him since five o'clock, Blake?"

"No, sir; I've been looking for him everywhere."

"Has any boy seen Trimble since that time?"

Several of the juniors looked at Cardew. Mr. Lathom noted the glance.

"Have you seen him, Cardew?"

Cardew hesitated, and puckered his forehead.

"Well, sir," he answered, "I certainly had an idea that I saw Trimble go into the House some time before tea. But I really couldn't swear to it. There was nothing to fix the fact on my mind. It may be only fancy."

"Then nobody can say that Trimble has been seen since just after dinner?"

"Yaas, sir, I have seen him!" put in Gussy.

"Whereabouts did you see him, D'Arcy?"

"In Wylcombe Wood, a few minutes before four o'clock, sir. He was bein' attacked by a cwiminal!"

Mr. Lathom jumped.

"Wha-a-at!" he ejaculated.

The juniors stared blankly at the noble Gussy.

"Yaas, sir!" returned Gussy calmly. "The fellow has been after Twimble for some time. Twimble told me so himself. And I found this person thwashin' Twimble with a walkin'-stick in the wood this aftahnoon. I chipped in and dwove him off!"

Mr. Lathom blinked at him.

"D'Arcy! Boy! Who is this—this person?"

"He is known by the name of Bellew, sir—Herbert Bellew!" replied Gussy, in his best detective style. "I may say, sir, that before I knew anythin' about Twimble I strongly suspected the man to be a cwiminal."

The Fourth looked at Gussy and Lathom with bated breath. Every fellow there knew Mr. Bellew by sight, as well as by reputation; but Gussy's was the only brilliant intellect to deduce the fact that he was a criminal.

"D'Arcy!" gasped the little Form master. "Are you alluding to Mr. Bellew of Gable Lodge?"

"Yaas, sir! A wank wottah! Ask anybody in the village."

"You utterly foolish boy! Mr. Bellew is well known both to myself and your headmaster to be a thoroughly respectable gentleman. He has been a Government Commissioner in Africa for many years."

"I am sowwy, sir, but I feel suah that he has nabbed Twimble. I found him thwashin' Twimble with a walkin'-stick this aftahnoon."

"In that case, D'Arcy, Trimble had doubtless given Mr. Bellew some cause for offence, and I shall investigate the matter when Trimble returns."

Arthur Augustus breathed hard. He might have expected this.

"I must wepeat, sir, that—"

"Silence, D'Arcy! If I hear you repeating that absurdly foolish story about a respectable gentleman, I shall cane you severely."

"But, weally, sir, I feel suah that Twimble is in tewwible pewil fwom this cwiminal—"

Mr. Lathom looked at D'Arcy helplessly.

"You are a—very extraordinary boy, D'Arcy. You need say no more! I have warned you that you will be caned if you repeat this foolish story."

Gussy stuck out his chin, and a look of determination came into his eyes.

"Vewy well, sir," he replied quietly.

"Doubtless Trimble will return shortly," added Mr. Lathom. "I will cause inquiries to be made by telephone. Good-night, my boys!"

As soon as the door had closed behind Mr. Lathom, the detective of St. Jim's was the target of dozens of questions. "Have you gone potty?" asked Blake in amazement. "What did you spin that rot to Lathom for?" "Wats!" "Did you really see Bellew pitching into Trimble?" "Wats!" "What on earth makes you think he's a criminal, ass?" "Wats!"

The Fourth looked at Gussy in wrath. That noble youth laid his head upon his pillow in a calm and composed fashion.

He had decided what to do. He would investigate this matter on his own. He would rescue Trimble and expose Bellew. That would make Lathom look foolish.

But he said no word about his intentions to the Form. All their inquiries were met by that classic and ancient monosyllable "Rats!"

And in due course the juniors went to sleep and left him to it.

CHAPTER 4.

The Detective at Work!

"H A L L O, Gussy! Trot in, old bean!"

It was the following morning. The speaker was Tom Merry, the leader of the Terrible Three and captain of the Lower School.

Tom was with Monty Lowther and Harry Manners in Study No. 10, sorting out books for the morning lesson. Cyrus K. Hancock, the fourth member of the study, was dashing off fifty lines for Kildare, who had caught him sliding down the banisters the previous evening.

A scene of industry met the eyes of Arthur Augustus Sexton Blake D'Arcy, as he entered the study, notebook in hand.

"Good - mornin', deah boys!"

"Trimble returned yet?" asked Manners.

"I am sowwy to say, Man-nahs, that Twimble is still absent."

"What's this yarn you Fourth Form kids have got hold of?" asked Lowther, looking up from his books.

"I heard Levison burbling some rot about you telling Lathom that Trimble has been kidnapped by a criminal."

"Perfectly twue, Lowthah!"

"My hat!"

"How do you make it out, Gussy?" asked Tom, with a grin.

D'Arcy spun them the yarn about the happenings in Rylcombe Wood. The Terrible Three and Hancock blinked at him.

"Is that what you call evidence?" ejaculated Lowther.

"More than evidence, Lowthah! Pwoof!"

"And you reckon that Bellew is a proved criminal because you found him thrashing Trimble?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ye gods! I say, Gussy, I saw Grundy thrashing Trimble yesterday. Why not go and arrest him? More proof, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"If thrashing Trimble is a sign of a criminal," grinned Lowther, "I must be a King of Crime. I've thrashed him dozens of times. Clap the darbies on me, Gus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This isn't a laughin' mattah, Lowthah!" said Gussy wrathfully. "Twimble is in gwreat dangah!"

"It certainly is queer that he's been out all night," agreed Tom uneasily.

"Vewy qucer! And I'm positive that he's in Bellew's clutches."

"Now, don't talk piffle, Gussy, old bean—"

"That isn't piffle, Mewwy! I have worked out all the facts, and they admit of no othah conclusion." This was a bit lifted bodily out of Sexton Blake. "Meanwhile, I've just looked in to have a word with Hancock, deah boys."

"Me?" asked Hancock, tersely and ungrammatically.

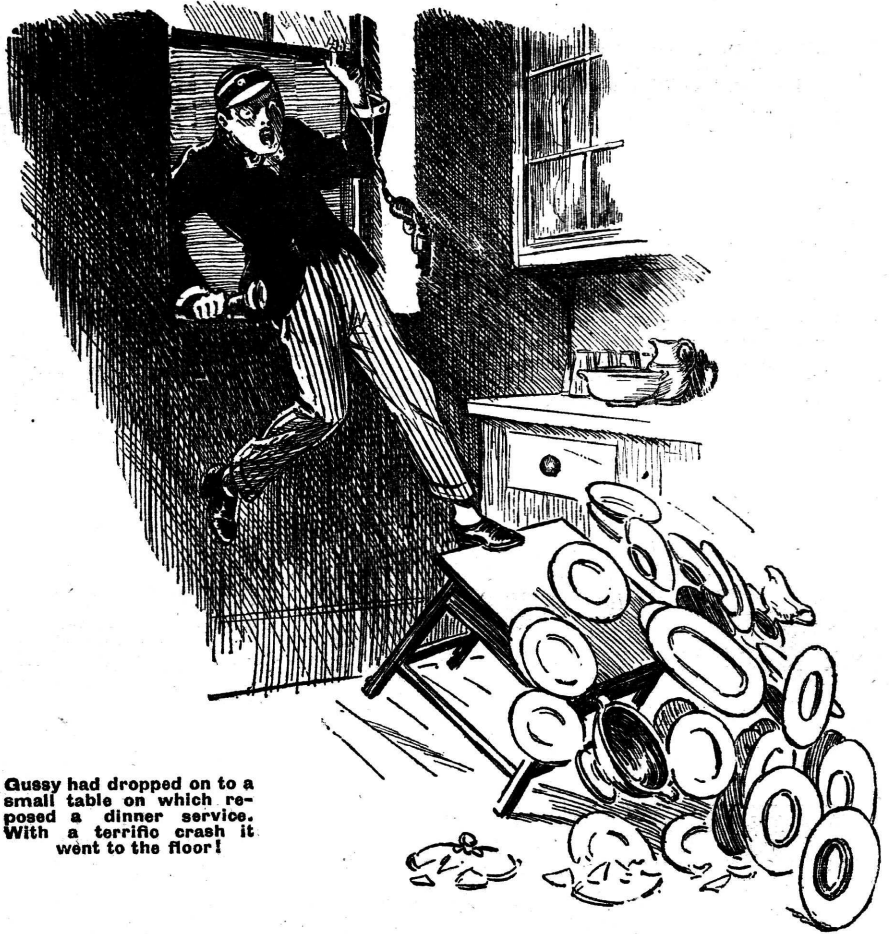
"Yaas!" Gussy consulted his notebook. "It seems, deah boy, that you have heard mysterious noises comin' fwom Gable Lodge of an evenin'."

"Good old Adolphus!" chortled the American junior.

"Still hitting up the high spots?"

"I have told you more than once, Hancock, that my name is not Adolphus. Am I wight or w'ong about the noises?"

"Yes, I guess I've heard sounds. But why me in particular? Heaps of fellows have heard them."



Gussy had dropped on to a small table on which reposed a dinner service. With a terrific crash it went to the floor!

"Well, I got youah name fwom Twimble as one of the fellows. What sort of noises were they? Descwibe them!"

"How can you describe a noise, sonny?" asked Hancock. "They were just noises, I guess—that's all!"

"Yaas; but what sort of noises?"

Hancock thought for a moment, and then suddenly let out a perfectly devastating shriek:

"Wheeeeee! Yow-wow-wowp! Oooeeeee!"

Gussy jumped.

"Gwreat Scott! What's the mattah?"

"The noises!" explained Hancock. "That's what they were like. Here's some more! Hooowooooo! Heh, heh, heh! Grrrrr-gog-gog-gog! Zzzzz!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

"You sillay ass! I didn't mean that! What were the noises—shwieks?"

"I guess! Like forty cats with their tails under a steam-roller!"

"Any cackles of hideous laughter?"

"Tons!"

"And cwies for help?"

"Yes, they were mostly cries for help!" nodded Handcock gravely, while the Terrible Three grinned.

Gussy, considerably excited, wrote the information in his notebook.

"I suppose there were shwieks for mercy, too?" he asked hopefully.

"You couldn't hear yourself speak for shrieks for mercy," agreed Handcock.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Theah's nothin' to cackle at, you uttah asses! I deduce that the man Bellew has a helpless w'etch impwisoned in his house."

"About forty helpless wretches, I guess, judging by the yawps!" put in Handcock.

"Pwobably theah may be a beautiful maiden held pwisoner in his house."

"If you are referring to Trimble," said Monty Lowther, "I shouldn't call him a beautiful maiden."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Deah me, Lowthah, you misundahstand me, deah boy! I was wefewwin' to anothah beautiful maiden—not Twimble—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"I mean, I wasn't alludin' to Twimble at all, you uttah asses! Twimble's not a maiden, and he isn't beautiful! You know jollay well I didn't mean Twimble!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh wats!"

Having obtained his information, Gussy retired from the study in high dudgeon. Witnesses should really be a little more respectful when dealing with detectives.

Blake & Co. grinned as he entered Study No. 6. They had learnt all about Gussy's latest craze, and they looked on it with amusement. They seemed to see nothing whatever dignified or important in Detective D'Arcy.

"How's the case going?" asked Digby, with a grin.

"Clues rolling in all right?"

"The evidence is accumulatin', Dig," replied Gussy, with dignity.

"Phew!"

"When are you going to clap the iron bracelets on your man?"

"To-night, I hope! 'To-mowwow at the latest!"

Blake & Co. looked at him.

"What potty stunt have you got in mind now?" asked Blake. "Are you going to the police, or something? Because, if you are, we're here to jolly well stop you making an ass of yourself!"

Gussy sniffed—elegantly, of course.

"The police! The police only bungle these things. I'm not likely to waste my clues on the police until I've got the case complete, bai Jove!"

"What's the game, then?"

"I feah I cannot take you youngstahs into my confidence yet awhile," answered Gussy. "You would only talk, and give away my secwets!"

He strolled haughtily out of the study. His three chums gazed after him.

"What's he up to now, I wonder?" speculated Blake.

"Goodness knows! Let him rip, anyway!"

Mr. Lathom had a very worried frown as he came into class that morning. He looked over the ranks of his Form, and his frown deepened.

"Has any boy here seen or heard anything further about Trimble?" he asked.

Nobody replied. Several juniors looked at Gussy expectantly; but that noble youth was keeping his information to himself.

Class that morning was not a happy experience. Lathom was worried and Trimble's schoolfellows were worried. It was known that the police had been informed of his absence, and that Mr. Trimble would be wired for if he didn't turn up that day. The mystery of Trimble sat heavy on the Fourth Form class-room.

After lessons Gussy disappeared.

There was a football practice and a rag with the New House before dinner; but Gussy missed these important things. He was on work of special importance.

Taking out his spottless bicycle, he mounted it and set off along the road to Rylcombe. He turned off at Wayland Heath Road, and cycled down the hill to Rylcombe Lane.

In Rylcombe Lane were a dozen large houses. Each of these houses stood in its own grounds, and had its own lodge by its own massive gates. The house next but one from the end of the lane was the mysterious Gable Lodge.

Gussy did not dismount opposite the lodge, however. Instead, he went on to the next house—Hazeldene—and dismounted before the big gates.

The lodgekeeper at Hazeldene was standing in the middle of the drive, and he touched his hat as Gussy approached him. Gussy, always polite, returned the touch.

"Good-mornin'!"

"Morning, sir!"

"I wondah whethah you would mind answewin' one or two questions, deah boy?" said Gussy, who had now quite invested himself with the mantle of the immortal Sexton Blake. "I am intewested in a little mattah which you may possibly help me to cleah up."

"Yes, sir?" said the lodgekeeper, puzzled.

"I suppose," said Gussy, by way of an opening, "that you stand heah most of the day, don't you?"

"Except when I'm in me lodge or up at the 'ouse, sir," replied the man civilly.

"Were you, by any chance, standin' heah yesterday aftahnoon?"

"Pretty well all the time, sir."

"Then pewwaps you noticed Mr. Bellew, fwom the lodge next doah? Did you happen to notice what he did?"

The lodgekeeper thought.

"Yes, sir; I see 'im go out with 'is dog at about 'alf-past two."

Gussy trembled with hope. His pencil hovered over his notebook.

"Did you see him come back?"

"Yes, sir! 'Alf-past four, or thereabouts."

"Anybody with him?"

"Yes, sir! Young feller about your own age! Why, now I look at that badge on your cap, I think he must have come from the same school!"

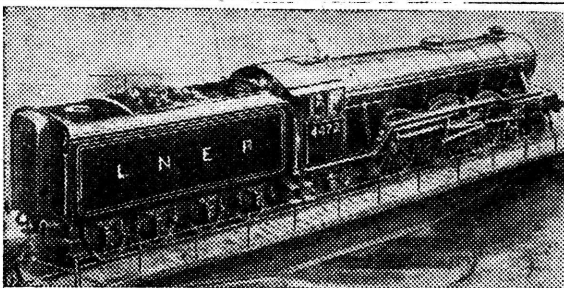
Gussy turned almost dizzy with triumph. There remained but one fatal question. If that was answered rightly, Trimble's disappearance was solved.

"Did—did you notice what sort of chap?" he asked. "Can you descwibe him?"

"Easy, sir. A wunnerful fat boy he was—hextraordinary fat, to be sure!"

The detective drew a deep breath. No further evidence was needed. Trimble had gone with Bellew to Gable Lodge the previous afternoon. He had never come out again.

It did not occur to Gussy's powerful mind that there was another junior at St. Jim's to whom the lodgekeeper's description might have equally applied. It never crossed his brain that it was Fatty Wynn, and not Baggy Trimble,



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who went into Gable Lodge. Had it done so, Gussy would probably have rejected the idea. There was no reason why Fatty Wynn, of the New House, should enter Gable Lodge.

He wrote the evidence carefully in his notebook—a proceeding which was watched with pardonable surprise by the lodgekeeper.

"Theah is no doubt that the fat fellow actually went into the lodge?" asked Gussy.

"None at all! I see him go in!"

"With your own eyes?"

"With my hown heyes, sir!"

Having satisfied himself that the lodgekeeper had not used somebody else's eyes to see Trimble enter the lodge, Gussy produced a ten-shilling note. With his own eyes the lodgekeeper looked at it.

"One more question," said Gussy. "Theah are a lot of stowies about weird noises comin' f'rom the lodge of a night. Have you evah heard them?"

"Scores o' times, sir! And in the day-time, too!"

This was another clue in support of Gussy's theory. Ghosts do not howl in the day-time. It must be some poor, imprisoned wretch.

"What kind of noises, my man?"

"Hofful noises, sir! Screams, gurgles, whines, and what-nots. It fair makes my 'air stand on end." Here the lodgekeeper took off his cap and scratched a head as bald as a new-laid egg.

Gussy pressed the ten-shilling note into the lodgekeeper's hand, and after a short and unilluminating scrutiny of Gable Lodge, he remounted his bicycle, and rode away towards St. Jim's.

The lodgekeeper watched him go.

CHAPTER 5.

Up to Gussy!

"**W**HERE have you been, dummy?" asked Blake, as Gussy dropped into his place at the dinner-table.

"My name is not dummy, Blake!"

"Merely your nature—what?"

"Why didn't you turn up at footer?" inquired Blake.

"Still playing detectives, or something?"

"I have been conductin' an investigation, Blake!"

"Found Trimble yet?" grinned Cardew.

"Yaas!"

"Eh?"

"Yaas!"

"Well, where is he, then?"

"Twimble is a pwisonah in the clutch of a mastah cwiminal, Cardew!"

Cardew chortled.

"Oh! He hasn't declutched himself yet?" he grinned.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Gus!" Blake said seriously. "When are you going to drop this rot? You'll get into a row if you keep it up!"

Gussy smiled mysteriously.

"Oh, yaas?" he observed, in a tired voice.

"I mean, 'tain't as if there was any sense in it. Bellew's a mysterious sort of merchant, but he's not a criminal. That's rot!"

"Is it?"

"Yes it is!" said Blake. "Dash it all, Gus, your old pals keep steering you away from rows, and as fast as we get you out of one, you get into another. You don't see us get into giddy rows like you."

The Terrible Three joined the Fourth Form juniors after dinner. They seemed interested in the latest edition of Sexton Blake.

"How's the giddy crime going?" asked Lowther. "Darbies clapped on yet?"

Arthur Augustus sorted out his eyeglass, jammed it in his eye, and focused a freezing glance on Lowther.

"I may as well inform you, Lowthah, that I now have absolute pwoof that Twimble is in the powah of the man Bellow. I am in a position to lay the facts befoah the headmastah and demand that the police shall intervene."

"I shouldn't bother the Head," said Lowther. "Tackle Lathom first! You'll get off more lightly."

"I do not wegard Mr. Lathom as competent to decide this affaih, Lowthah. I do not like Mr. Lathom's method of judgment."

"I do not like thee, Dr. Fell; the reason why I cannot tell!" chanted Manners.

"You mean," said Lowther, "I do not like thee, Mr. Lathom; the reason why I cannot fathom."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you cannot discuss this mattah sewiously, deah boys, I—"

"Well, is it serious?"

D'Arcy disdained to reply to that question. He cast a refrigerating look at his companions, and moved off with elegant tread.

"Here, where are you going?" called out Blake suspiciously.

"I am going to Doctah Holmes, Blake."

"You burbling cuckoo! Come back!"

Gussy walked on. Blake turned to the others.

"After him!" he bawled. "The ass will land himself for a flogging!"

Six juniors charged up the passage after Gussy, determined to save him from himself, so to speak. Gussy was proceeding with dignity along the passage to the Head's study, when hands were laid on him from all points of the compass.

"Chuck it, you ass!" snapped Blake. "Do you want to be flogged?"

"Welease me, you wottahs!" cried Gussy, thrilling with indignation. "Welease me this instant, you wuff beasts!"

"I don't think!" grinned Tom Merry. "Your old pals will save you from landing yourself in trouble. Come back!"

"If you do not welease me at once," snapped Arthur Augustus, "I shall administah a feahful thwashin' all wound!"

"Well, that's all right! We shan't hurt you quite so much as the Head would hurt you."

"No fear!"

"I tell you," roared Gussy, "I have absolute pwoof—"

"Bosh!"

"Twimble has been kidnapped—"

"Chuck it, old son!" roared Tom kindly. "That's rather rot, you know!"

"Walk him back!" chortled Blake, taking Gussy's legs. "Come on, old bean! Walky, walky!"

"If you don't let me go— Yawooooop! Take that!"

Gussy hit out with great exasperation. Monty Lowther took it. "It" was a life-sized punch on the nose. Lowther staggered back, holding his olfactory organ.

"Whooooogh!" he gurgled. "Why, I—I'll—"

Words failed Lowther. He made a dive at Gussy.

The next instant there was a glorious free fight in progress. Forgetful of the fact that they stood not ten yards from the door of the Head's study, the seven juniors went at it hammer and tongs.

Originally it was a case of six to one. But after Lowther, in his excitement, had caught Blake a terrific drive on the chest, which had been meant for Gussy, but had gone astray, the fight had developed into a five-to-two affair. Blake absolutely thirsted for Lowther's gore.

The door of the Head's study opened. The face of Dr. Richard Holmes peered out.

At this moment Gussy broke free of the crush and made a jump for the august apartment. He did not observe the doctor in front of him.

"What is all this noise?" asked the Head, in a testy voice. "What are you— Ooooooooop!"

Headfirst into the doctor's digestive system crashed the fleeing detective. The doctor gasped like the atmosphere coming out of a punctured balloon, and collapsed upon the floor of his study.

Six juniors stood for one second frozen to the floor in horror. The next instant there was a scuffle, and they had gone as though they had never been.

Arthur Augustus was not so fortunate. He stood in utter dismay.

The Head erected himself painfully. His eyes, as they dwelt on the unfortunate Gussy, seemed to start out of their sockets.

There was a dreadful pause.

"Boy!" gasped the Head at length. "Boy!"

His hand fell on Gussy's shoulder and jerked him into the study. The door slammed. Dr. Holmes strode across to a cupboard, sorted out a peculiarly pliant cane, and pointed with trembling finger at a chair.

"Pway excuse me, doctah!" faltered Gussy. "I assuah you it was an accident—a howwid accident—"

"Bend!" The Head managed to articulate that one word.

With a dismal face, Gussy curved his classic form above the chair.

Whack, whack, whack!

The Head put some beef into it, and three anguished ejaculations escaped D'Arcy's lips.

"Oh! Ah! Yah!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Hooooogh!"

The doctor dropped the cane upon his desk.

"You may go!" he said, in grim tones.

Gussy wriggled. In the ordinary way he would have been very glad to go—very glad indeed. But he had come to that study for a special purpose, and he was not the man to let a licking swerve him from his proper duty.

"Thank you, sir!" he gasped. "But I desiah to—"

"You may leave my study, D'Arcy!"

"You are vevy good, sir! But I weally must venchah to inform you that I had discovahed—"

The Head glared.

"Did you hear me tell you to go, D'Arcy?" he asked sternly.

"Oh, yaas! Yaas, sir! But undah the cires I can't vevy well go until I have discharged the ewwand which bwought me heah I am sowvy to inform you, Doctah Holmes, that Twimble is in the hands of—"

The Head picked up the cane grimly. Gussy eyed both him and it.

"Unless you leave my study this instant, boy—"

The Head did not finish the sentence. He merely swished his cane in the air.

It was sufficient. With his detective training and strong reasoning powers, Gussy deduced immediately what would be the result. Nevertheless, he had to save Trimble. He had to rescue him from the clutch of a master criminal.

"If you will listen to me a moment, doctah—"

The Head wouldn't. He closed in on Gussy and took a firm grip of the Fourth Form junior's collar. The cane was raised on high.

Whack!

"Yawwooh!" shrieked Gussy, as the cane smote. "Oh deah! Yoop! Twimble, sir, Twimble! Ow! I know wheah he is!"

Gussy was obliged to sing out his information in a hurry as the Head was preparing to deliver a second smite. As his yell of "Trimble!" fell on the Head's ears, that gentleman paused, coughed, and laid down his cane.

"Trimble! Bless my soul! Do you know what has happened to Trimble, D'Arcy?"

"Ow! Yaas, sir!" groaned Gussy, in anguished tones. "I was twyin' to tell you, sir—"

"H'm!" The Head coughed again. "You should have said so at once, D'Arcy, without wasting my time. Tell me immediately what you know about Trimble's disappearance."

"Ow-wow! He has been kidnapped, sir—"

The Head rose out of his chair like a rocketing pheasant.

"Wha-at?"

"Kidnapped by a feahful villain, sir!" cried the amateur too excitedly. "Held pwisoner at a house in Wylcombe, sir. I have twacked him down, doctah!"

The Head simply blinked.

"D'Arcy! Are you—are you serious?"

"Perfectly sewious, sir! I have considahed the facts, and they admit of no othah conclusion."

"Good heavens! Tell me how you discovered this, my boy!"

"Yaas, sir. Yestahday aftahnoon I came acovss Twimble in Wylcombe Wood bein' fewociously attacked by this man Bellew. He was—"

"Bellew!" put in the Head, puzzled. "You are not, of course, alluding to Mr. Herbert Bellew, of Gable Lodge?"

Gussy began to feel discouraged. Why everybody should take it for granted that Mr. Herbert Bellew was not a criminal he could not make out.

"Yaas, sir!" he admitted. "A feahful cwiminal—"

The Head jumped.

"Boy!"

"I can pwove, sir, that Twimble—"

"Boy!" articulated the headmaster. "Are you aware that Mr. Bellew is a friend of mine?"

"Oh!"

"You dare to tell me that my friend Bellew has kidnapped the boy Trimble?"

"Yaas, sir!" said Gussy stoutly. "Friend or no friend, the fact could not be denied that Bellew was responsible for Trimble's disappearance. I made inqwivies at the house next to Gable Lodge, sir, and—"

"D'Arcy!"

"I am sowvvy, sir; but I have pwoof—"

That was all. Gussy had no chance to say anything more. The Head caught up the cane and fairly swooped on him.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yawwooooooh!"

"You utterly, unbelievably absurd boy! How dare you tell such monstrous falsehoods? Leave my study!"

Flesh and blood could stand no more. Gussy wriggled out of the room and squirmed his way along the passage. He knew when he had had enough.

Tom Merry & Co. were with Blako in Study No. 6, as Gussy reached the celebrated apartment. They favoured him with sympathetic glances.

"Had it bad, old top?"

"Ow! Yaas! Ow!"

He dropped quickly into an armchair, and jumped even more quickly out of it again. For the present standing was more comfortable than sitting.

"Well, you did ask for it, didn't you?" observed Herries, by way of solace.

"You burblin' chump!"

"How many did the Head give you? Six?" asked Lowther.

"Ow! Ten!"

"Ten!" ejaculated Blake. "Oh crumbs! You must have caught him a tidy wallop in the waistcoat!"

"Only six for biffan' him, Blake! One for not leavin' his studah, and thwee for tellin' him Bellew was a cwiminal."

"You didn't swing that silly yarn on the beak?" howled Blake.

"Yaas."

"Phew! Talk about asking for it—"

"You uttah ass!" replied D'Arcy warmly. "Do you think I can leave Twimble a pwisonah in Bellew's clutches without twyin' to save him? Somebody's got to wescue Twimble, and it's up to me."

"Gussy, old man," said Tom Merry, in tones of friendly reproof, "you're really offside. Bellew is a curious sort of merchant; but he isn't a criminal—he really isn't!"

"Deah boy, you must leave this affair to a fellow of tact and judgment. I tell you theah's not the slightest doubt that I am wight. My clues all point to the fact that Bellew has collahed Twimble."

"But the beak knows Bellew—"

"Thinks he does; deah boy!" amended Gussy. "He doesn't know what I know."

"Oh dear!"

"Since my headmastah wefuses to take up this mattah, it is up to me to do it myself. I will expose the wottah befoah Latham and the Head and the police. I will show him up to be a dastahdly cwiminal—a membah of a cwiminal gang. I will wescue Twimble off my own bat!"

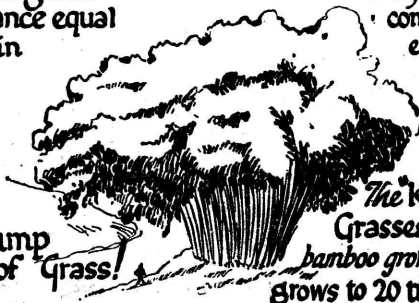
"Oh, my hat!"

Would You Believe It?.....

The Large Hand of Big Ben travels a distance equal to 100 miles in a year



A Clump of Grass!



The King of Grasses—a species of bamboo growing in Ceylon—grows to 20 times the height of a man.

Mozart, the famous musician, played his own compositions when only eight years old, and performed in the various capitals of Europe at the age of eight



CHAPTER 6.

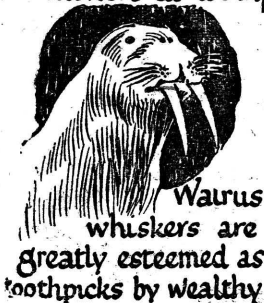
Three in the Wars!

"Gussy, old fellow, be reasonable—"
 "Isn't that weasonable?" hooted Gussy.
 "Well, no, it isn't!" answered Blake, with his Yorkshire common sense. "If Bellow's a giddy criminal, it seems to me that he's doing all he can to throw suspicion on himself. That ain't how criminals behave in real life. They try to act like ordinary people, you know—"
 "People in the village reckon Bellow's a sinister character," laughed Monty Lowther.
 "Village chinwag! What do they know about him apart from the fact that he chooses to wear a moustache like the pictures of Old Nick? He's never done anybody any harm. Nobody knows anything against him."
 "I know somethin' against him, Blake."
 "What's that?"
 "He has kidnapped Twimble!"
 "Ass! Fathead! Burler! Chump!" Blake was becoming quite heated. "If Gussy reckon's Bellow is a criminal, you can bet your boots he isn't!"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Drop it, Gus!" advised Tom Merry. "I don't know what has happened to Trimble; but the police will find him in due course. You'll only get into trouble."
 "It seems to me," put in Harry Manners quietly, "that there are three rather rummy questions to be answered. Gussy claims to be able to answer them; but, so far as I can see, he may have the wrong answers."
 "What questions, Mannahs?"
 "Firstly, where is Trimble?"
 "In the clutches of the wottah Bellow, deah boy!"
 "Secondly, why was Bellow going for him in the wood yesterday?"
 This was not answered. The juniors turned to Gussy.
 "I—I weally can't say that I know why Bellow is aftah Twimble," admitted Gussy. "But," he added, brightening up, "he is aftah him, and that's all that mattahs!"
 "So you say," nodded Manners. "But I think we should all be a jolly sight more convinced if you could tell us why a man like Bellow should kidnap a fat idiot like Trimble."
 "Hear, hear!"
 "Thirdly," said Manners, "what are the mysterious noises that have been heard at Gable Lodge?"
 "Poor w'etches kept pwisonahs, Mannahs!"
 "Now, that's rot, and you know it! A man couldn't possibly keep prisoners in a house like Gable Lodge, and let them bawl and howl all night to attract the attention of passers-by. It stands to reason!"
 "Nevahtheless, Mannahs, that is what is happenin'!"
 Blake breathed hard.
 "The Head has given him ten!" he said sulphurously.
 "Let's give him another two and make it up to a round dozen."
 "Oh, wats!"
 "Now, look here, Gussy—" began Tom.
 "I am sowwy, deah boys! You are wathah thoughtless youngstahs, and you don't know anythin' about this mattah. Leave it in my hands! I shall be all wight!"
 With that, Arthur Augustus limped out of the study. Six separate and distinct glares followed him to the door.
 "Oh, let him rip!" laughed Monty Lowther. "It's no use trying to stop Gus when once he gets an idea into his head. Let's go and rag Figgins & Co. before classes."
 "Yes, let's!"
 And the six juniors, abandoning Gussy to his fate, went to look for trouble with the New House juniors.
 It is sufficient here to state that they duly found it.

"WHO'S that?"
 Blake sat up in bed with a start.
 It was after eleven. The Fourth Form juniors were all asleep. There was silence, save for the sound of deep breathing in the dormitory.
 Ordinarily, there would have been a noise like a steam road-crusher at work; but as Trimble was still absent his snore was also missing.
 Blake had been sleeping the sleep of the almost just, when he awoke with the premonition that somebody in the room was moving about. There was no moon, but it was a clear, star-sprinkled night, and the faint blue light was sufficient for Blake to make out a shadowy figure close to his bed. The junior's heart beat quickly.
 "Who's that?" he whispered again.
 "Don't make a wov, deah boy!" came a whisper from the vague figure.
 "Is that you, Gussy?"
 "Yaas!"
 "What are you doing out of bed, dummy?"
 "I am goin' out, Blake!"
 The dim figure drew on its jacket, and began to lace up its shoes. Blake breathed hard.
 "What do you mean—out?" he demanded, in a whisper.
 "Out of bounds?"
 "Yaas—not so loud, deah boy! I weally hoped you wouldn't wake up."
 Blake sat up grimly.
 "Where are you going? Surely you're not going out pub-haunting, like Mellish and Crooke, are you?"
 "Weally, Blake—"
 "Or are you just going over to the New House?"
 "I'm goin' down to the village, Blake!"
 "My only sainted Aunt Matilda! What for, ass?"
 "I am sowwy to say, Blake, that I am goin' to do a little housebreakin'!"
 "Housebreakin'!" stuttered Blake dizzily.
 "Yaas! I weally would have avoided it if it had been poss. But aftah the mannah in which I was tweated by Doctah Holmes, I wegard it as bein' up to me. Besides, Sexton Blake often has to housebreak to get his evidence."
 A bright light shone on Blake—metaphorically, of course.
 "Gable Lodge!" he gasped.
 "Yaas! To-night I shall either wescue Twimble, or powish in the attempt! I wposose to go to Waitton's studah and bowwow his old Army wevolvah, and then, if Bellow catches me, I shall hold him up with the wevolvah, and make him pwoduce Twimble!"
 "Oh crikey!"
 "I can get a jemmy ffrom the toolshed!"
 "A jemmy?"
 "Yaas. To force open a window at Gable Lodge, deah boy!"
 "Ye gods!"
 "And I've got an electwic torch—"
 "Oh scissors!"
 "I shall search for Twimble, and if I don't find him, I'll wouse up Bellow with the wevolvah and make him hand him ovah!"
 Blake simply blinked.
 "I—I—I suppose I'm dreaming this!" he stuttered.
 "Not so loud, deah boy!"
 Blake felt his hair standing on end. It was no dream. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy proposed—actually deliberately proposed—to break into Gable Lodge and hold up Mr.

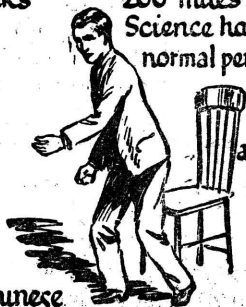
Facts from Far and Near.

Whiskers as toothpicks



200 miles an hour!

Science has proved that a normal person gets up from a chair at the rate of 200 miles an hour



The Magic Circle — By making one cut and putting the two pieces together, this figure can be made

Nearly 6 into a circle
 2,000,000 gallons of petrol are consumed daily in Great Britain.



Solution given on page 28.

Brom

Bellew with an unloaded revolver. For some seconds Blake gasped and gasped. The power of speech temporarily deserted him. In all his experience of Gussy he had never known that noble youth to embark on such a devastating—such an absolutely hair-raising—adventure as this.

"Gussy, old man," he pleaded, almost tearfully, "you aren't serious—you can't be?"

"And pway why not, Blake?"

"It means the sack—it means prison! Ye gods! What won't happen to you?"

"I fancy I can take care of myself, deah boy!"

"You—you—you— Oh, you hopeless, raving, shrieking maniac!"

"I have told you befoah not to talk so loud, Blake. Good-bye, deah boy!"

"But, Gussy, stop—"

The dormitory door opened, and then closed.

Arthur Augustus had gone.

Blake sprang out of bed and lighted a candle. He made a dive for his trousers and jacket.

"Herries! Dig! Wake up!" he whispered.

Snore!

Blake picked up a couple of slippers and took aim. One caught Digby on the nose and the other took Herries neatly on the left ear.

"Whoooop!"

"Ow! What—what—"

"Shurrup!" snapped Blake.

"What the thump are you chucking things at me for?" bawled Herries, sitting up wrathily.

"My nose! Ow!"

Voices began to be heard from other beds.

"What's that thumpin' row?" demanded Cardew sleepily.

"Who's that out of bed?"

"Oh crickey!" groaned Blake. "Get up, you men! Gussy—"

"What?"

"He's breaking bounds! He's going down to the village to break into Gable Lodge and hold up Bellew with Railton's revolver."

"Wha-a-at?"

"That's all very well," came Herries' voice, "but who chucked a slipper at my ear—eh?"

"Bless your ear! Don't you understand, you frabjous, fozzling chump, that Gussy is trying to land himself in choky? We've got to stop him from going out!"

"But—but—but he can't be serious!" stuttered Digby.

"He is, I tell you!"

"Look here! There's a bruise on my ear the size of a shilling—"

Blake held a frenzied fist under Herries' nose.

"Will you stop burbling about your blessed ear and get out of bed?" he hissed. "Do you want to see Gussy nabbed by the police for housebreaking?"

"But my ear—"

Blake picked up a pillow and swiped.

"There's another one to match it!" he ground out sulphurously. "Now get up, and don't talk!"

"Yooooop! Why, I—I'll—I'll—"

Herries got up quickly enough. He bounded out of bed and fung himself on Blake. There was a sharp fight by Herries' bed, and then the two juniors went down with a thud that almost shook the school.

"Yarooooh!" roared Blake.

"Oh, my hat! You'll wake up everybody in the House if you aren't careful!" gasped Cardew.

Blake and Herries picked themselves up, breathing hard. "Now dress, you ass! Dress, you fathead!" snapped Blake.

"Bother you and bother Gussy! I'm going back to bed!"

"Come on, old bean!" urged Digby, pulling on his jacket. "It's one up against our study if we let Gussy get sacked!"

Herries grunted rather sulkily, but he began to dress. While the three chums were pulling trousers and jackets over their pyjamas, the rest of the dormitory speculated what would happen to Gussy.

"It's the sack this time!" opined Clive. "Not much doubt about that!"

"Unless he finds Trimble at Gable Lodge!" grinned Cardew. "He might do, of course; but it's my idea he won't."

"No fear!"

"Did you say he was taking Railton's popgun, Blake?" asked Cardew.

"Yes!" Blake answered shortly.

"Oh, Christopher Columbus! Why, he doesn't even know how to hold a shooting-iron!"

"Good job for Gussy it ain't loaded."

"Come on!" snapped Blake to his chums. "Don't make

a row in the dorm, you men! We don't want Railton butting in!"

"Right-ho!"

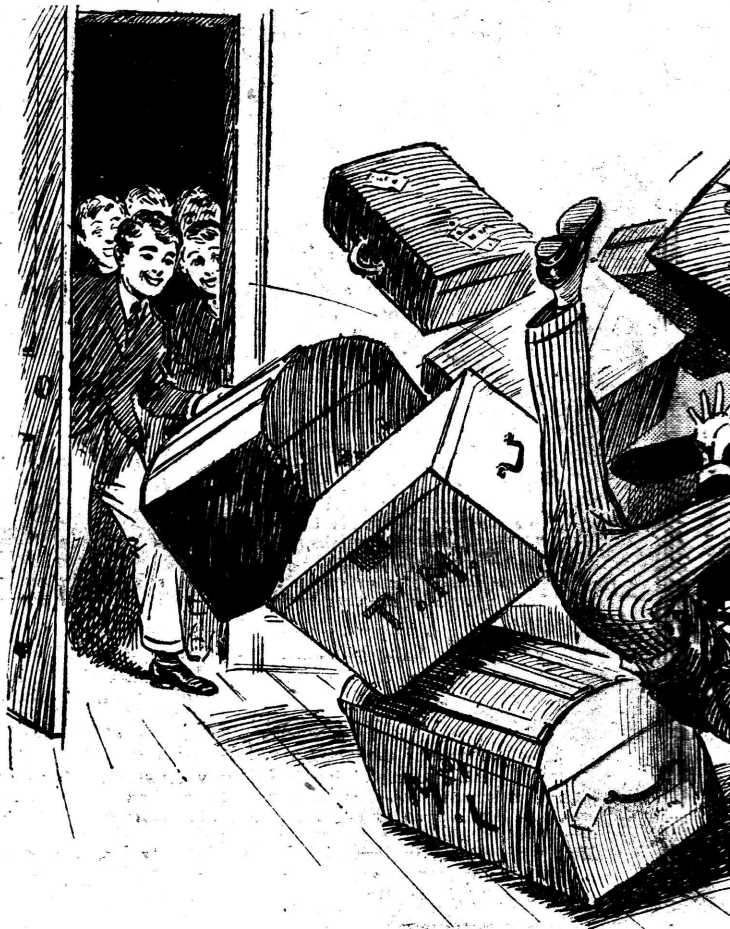
"And to-morrow," muttered Herries, sparring savagely, "we'll give Gussy the record ragging of his existence."

"Yes, rather!"

The three chums crept anxiously out of the dormitory, and began to descend the stairs to the first floor. On this floor Mr. Railton's study was situated, and in that study they hoped to find Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Mr. Railton possessed a revolver, which he had used when he was Captain Railton of the East Sussex Regiment. With that instrument Gussy proposed to make the villainous Bellew disclose the whereabouts of his prisoner—always assuming that the adipose Trimble was his prisoner, which Gussy considered had been proved by the information he had obtained from the lodgekeeper at Hazeldene.

Blake & Co. had no need to go to the master's study, however. They ran into Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at the top of the stairs. In his hand was Railton's revolver.



As Gussy hit them, the trunks came down. It seemed

Gussy jumped as three dark figures made their appearance. "Oh, bai Jove! Who's that?" came his startled ejaculation.

"You'll soon know who it is, dummy!" hissed Blake.

"What do you fellows want?"

"You!" said Herries. "And we're jolly well going to have you!"

"You're not going down to Gable Lodge to-night, Gus! We're here to see that you chuck the silly idea. We're not going to let you be sacked, if we can help it!"

"Rather not!" Gussy trembled with wrath.

"Will you fellows kindly wefwain fwom buttin' in?" he said wrathfully. "Go back to bed, deah boys!"

"Not without you!"

"Look heah, Blake! I've told you—"

"Are you coming back to the dorm, Gussy?"

"No. I'm goin' out!"

"Your mistake! You're going back! If you don't come quietly, you'll be taken!"
 "You uttah asses! Cleah off! Who told you to butt in, Blake?"
 "Never mind that! Are you coming?"
 "No!"
 "Right, then! Collar him!"
 "Hands off, you wuff wottahs! I shall administrah a feahful— Yawoooooh!"

Three exasperated juniors hurled themselves on Gussy. Arthur Augustus roared with anger and indignation. Then he gave fight.

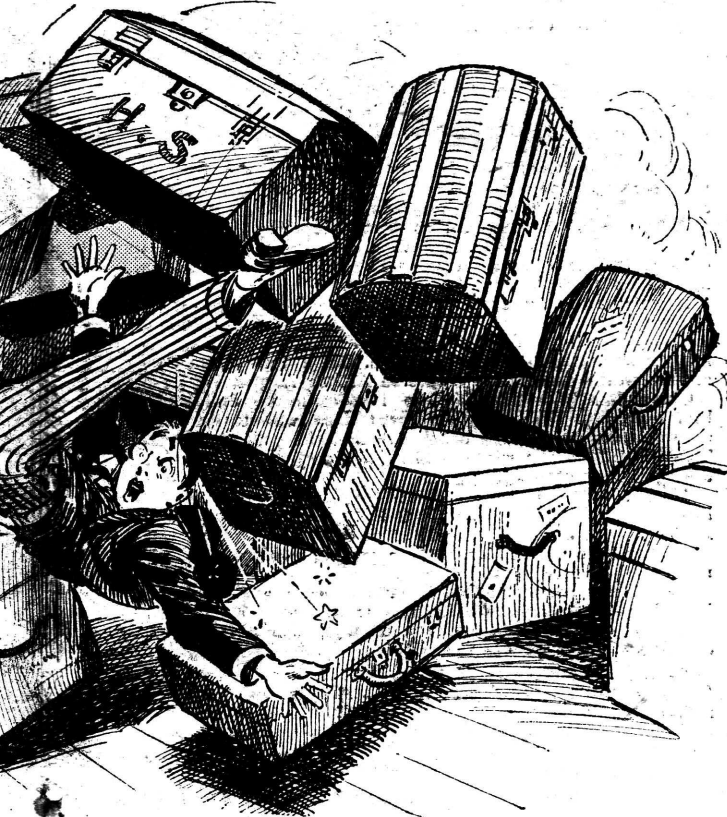
The sound of the fight was quite audible in the Fourth Form dormitory, on the floor above. It was audible pretty well all over the House. When angry passions are roused caution goes by the board.

"Take that, you wottahs!" bawled Arthur Augustus, in a voice that awakened a sleeping cow half a mile away.

"Collar him!" roared Blake.
 The three juniors charged together. Gussy made a valiant stand; but was borne over backwards.

Now, unfortunately for the contestants, Gussy happened to be standing just at the top of the flight of stairs, and when the four juniors went over backwards they fell neatly through space for some yards, and then bounced from stair to stair with terrific concussions.

Bump, bump, bump!



It seemed that every trunk hit him somewhere!

"Whoooooop!"
 "Wow!"
 "Yawoooooh!"

There came a resounding crash, and the four juniors landed on the floor below. At the same moment lights began to appear in the House, and Mr. Railton's voice was heard demanding what was the matter.

Blake & Co. were sitting up dizzily, blinking at each other, when the Housemaster came up and switched on the light. And then the juniors made a discovery.

Gussy had got the better of them! He had slipped away in the darkness and was gone.

They groaned inwardly.
 Mr. Railton's face was stern. His eyes bored holes in the recumbent juniors.

"What is all this? Why are you boys out of bed at this time of night? Why are you making all this noise? You have aroused the whole House!"

The juniors were silent.
 "Were you intending to leave the House, Blake?" demanded the master sternly.
 "Nunno, sir!"
 "Why, then, have you donned your jackets and trousers? Why are you out of your dormitory at all?"
 "We—we—we—"
 "Well?"

Blake looked glumly at his chums. He could scarcely explain to Railton without giving Arthur Augustus D'Arcy away, and he would not do that. He was silent.

"Well," repeated Mr. Railton, in a deep voice, "why are you making all this noise? Explain!"

"We fell downstairs, sir!"
 "But what are you doing out of bed, in any case?"

The juniors were silent. Mr. Railton pursed his lips.
 "Very well!" he said severely. "You understand, my boys, that this is a serious matter. You will come with me to your headmaster immediately after chapel to-morrow morning."

"Oh, yes, sir!" groaned Blake.
 "And now return to your dormitory at once."
 "Yes, sir!"

Blake & Co. ambled dolorously back to the dorm. Their efforts had been unavailing. Gussy had gone, and they had landed themselves with a record licking from the Head. They really felt that life was hardly worth living.

The crowd of fellows, senior and junior, who had been attracted by the uproar, melted away. Mr. Railton followed Blake and his chums to the dormitory, and watched while they got back into bed.

Then his eye glinted at the vacant bed next to Blake's.
 "One boy is missing!" he snapped. "Who is it?"

"D'Arcy, sir," Blake answered dolorously.
 "D'Arcy!" exclaimed Mr. Railton, starting. "Where is he, Blake?"

"I couldn't say, sir," replied Blake, with perfect truth. He knew where Gussy was going, but he didn't know where he was at that moment.

"Is he outside the school?"
 "I don't know, sir."

"Blake, this is a serious matter," Mr. Railton said sternly. "It is useless for you to attempt to conceal anything. Do you know if D'Arcy intended to leave the school?"

"I—I—yes, sir," said Blake in a low voice. "But Gussy isn't going to run loose, or anything at all like that, sir."

"Leaving the school at night, for whatever purpose, is a very serious matter, Blake. I will instruct a prefect to wait up for D'Arcy's return, and you will bring him with you before the headmaster to-morrow."

Mr. Railton switched off the light and went out, shutting the door.
 Blake, Herries, and Digby looked at each other in the starlight.

"Well, it's all up for Gussy now!" groaned Dig.
 And there seemed no doubt that it was.

CHAPTER 7.
Awful for Gussy!

GUSSY shivered. He pulled his coat-collar around his ears and took a firm grip of the jemmy, torch, and unloaded revolver in his pocket.

He was walking down Rylcombe Lane.
 Leaving St. Jim's via the window of the Shell classroom had been comparatively simple. No thought of dodging an impending row would have made Gussy leave his chums in the lurch; but there were more serious considerations than a mere row. There was Trimble.

Gussy alone knew what had happened to Trimble, and it was up to Gussy to rescue him. He had tried to tell the headmaster, and had been licked. There was only one thing for it. He must play a lone hand.

His walk to Rylcombe Lane at midnight had been an eerie experience. Part of the walk lay across Wayland Heath, where there were no lights or street lamps. Gussy had been compelled to use his torch, and he had dreaded that someone might discover him the whole time.

However, he was reasonably stout-hearted as he clambered cautiously over the wall at Gable Lodge. His courage also failed him the next moment, however.

Borne to his ears on the still night air came one of the most horrible, long-drawn-out wails he had ever heard. It was a faint whine, rising to a prodigious bellow and dying gradually into silence.

The junior knew at once that no living human being had made that sound; no human throat could have produced it. It was either a ghost or an animal.

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But if an animal—what animal? So far as Gussy knew, only a panther or perhaps a hyena could have managed it, and he was quite sure he had never noticed any panthers or hyenas in Rylcombe Lane. It was quite the wrong part of the world for panthers.

In that case, it must have been a ghost.

At this moment a series of fiendish cackles drove the colour from D'Arcy's cheek. Cackles that must have been produced by either a goblin or a jackall; and since jackalls were out of the question—a goblin. No other conclusion.

It speaks well for Gussy's pluck that, though he trembled with fear, he did not retreat. He screwed his courage to the last ounce, and set his teeth grimly. Somewhere in that haunted house Baggy Trimble was lying a helpless prisoner. His only hope was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

As noiseless as another ghost Gussy prowled around Cable Lodge, and he found to his satisfaction that after all the jummy was unnecessary. A pantry window was open!

Pocketing the jummy, Gussy grasped the pipe at the side of the window and swarmed up it. It was a ticklish job pushing up the bolt which kept the window from opening wide, but he managed it in the end. Then he swung on to the window-sill, climbed through the window, and dropped.

Crash! Bang!

There was a rending, cracking sound and the tinkle of china. Gussy had dropped on to a small table on which reposed a dinner service. With a terrific crash it went to the floor.

"Ow!" gasped Gussy, in surprise and dismay.

Broken china surrounded him in a wide sea. His heart nearly stopped beating. Surely that crash had been loud enough to wake everybody in Rylcombe Lane?

He waited breathlessly! Save for a few wails and cackles there was no sound.

Then Gussy realised what had happened. It was an amazing bit of luck. At the very instant the plates hit the floor the unseen ghost had let out a terrific roar—a roar like a lion—and this had drowned the noise for everybody save the fellow who made it. The crash had been swallowed up by the roar.

Secretly thanking his lucky stars, Gussy drew out and switched on his torch, and stepped carefully out of the pantry, closing the door.

He had assumed that it would be easy enough to find Trimble once he was in the house; but, in point of fact, it was by no means as easy as he had imagined. Walking silently about an unknown house with a torch is nervy work at the best of times; but when that house is haunted with screaming spooks, it becomes positively fearful. So Gussy thought.

He examined the drawing-room and dining-room without success, and was about to chance it and go upstairs, when he had another stroke of luck. At the end of the passage he spotted a large iron door, secured by three massiye bolts.

Here, then, was the prison-chamber, if anywhere. Gussy stole towards it, thrilling with hope.

More luck awaited him as he reached the door. The key was actually in the lock.

Cautiously Gussy turned the key, shot back the three great bolts, and pulled. The iron door swung open quite easily.

It was very dark in the prison-house, and there was a nasty, fusty smell which Gussy did not like at all.

"Twimble!" he breathed softly, looking through the door. "Are you theah, Twimble?"

There was a soft movement from somewhere in the darkness, and Gussy's heart bounded. Evidently Trimble must be gagged, since he made no reply. The amateur tec advanced into the chamber and drew the door to behind him, to prevent him being heard by the villain Bellev.

Then Gussy's luck deserted him with a frightful collapse. Click!

Gussy jumped. The sound had come from the door.

He swung round and pushed the door apprehensively. The door was immovable. He pushed and pushed, but it did not give an inch.

Gussy groaned in the bitterness of his spirit. The door was fitted with a spring catch. It locked automatically when closed. He had locked himself in.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he muttered. "I wathah fancy I've done it now!"

There wasn't really much doubt about that. Gussy shone his torch over the door; but it presented a smooth, unbroken iron surface. The door wasn't meant to open from that side evidently. Gussy was as much a prisoner as Trimble.

There was only one thing to do. He shone his torch around the prison-house, to see if there was any chance of escape.

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At least, he began to shine his torch around; but he had hardly switched it on again before its rays fell on a form that made Gussy's blood run absolutely cold.

Not two yards away from him was the largest lion he had ever seen in his life!

It was a monstrous, great tawny animal. Its huge mane was like a great cushion of fur; its great head was buried upon its forepaws in slumber; its bristles occasionally rustled as it moved its enormous mouth.

It was fast asleep.

Poor Gussy's legs all but gave way beneath him. He was in a lion's cage—he could see that now. On the other side of him he could make out iron bars which separated the cage from—what? Possibly a passage. Or it might be another cage. However, the fact was that Gussy was in the lion's den.

The lion moved his head. Gussy, quick as thought, snapped shut his electric torch. The light had been playing on the lion's closed eyes, and had disturbed its slumbers.

What could he possibly do? That was what Gussy was asking himself feverishly. The only possible hope seemed to be to cross the cage; shin up the bars, and drop on the other side—chancing what was there. Whatever it was, it couldn't be worse than the lion!

In pitch darkness, Gussy began to tiptoe across the cage with trembling feet.

It was unfortunate that his sense of direction led him somewhat astray.

He steered a course as straight as an arrow for the lion's body. Silently and cautiously he advanced until—

It was the lion's hind paw that tripped him over. Uttering a wild, involuntary yell, Gussy lost his balance and sat down.

He sat down right on the lion!

Right in the middle of the lion's stomach. He couldn't have done it more neatly if he had tried.

Roar-r-r-r-r!

Gussy gave himself up for lost. There was a terrible reverberating roar, and a huge paw slashed by his face, savage claws tearing into the sandy floor of the cage.

D'Arcy was too terrified to think clearly. He acted mechanically. Scrambling off the lion, he dashed into a corner and fell in a heap. Then he waited for the inevitable.

The lion, having been aroused, seemed to have some curiosity as to what was happening. He got up, stretched himself, and yawned. Then came the soft pad-pad of his feet as he walked around the cage. In a few seconds he crossed to the corner and inspected Arthur Augustus.

Gussy hardly breathed. The lion came up and smelt him carefully. The animal's great face was thrust into Gussy's own, so that his bristles tickled the junior's cheek. Two baleful-looking eyes—seeming to Gussy about as big as dinner-plates—glared at him.

After a while the lion seemed to lose interest in his captive. He yawned, shuffled back to his corner, and settled down again.

Relief overwhelmed Gussy like a cooling shower. Making no sound, he rose to his feet—shaking.

He became conscious that his hands were grasping cold iron bars—the very bars he was trying to reach a few moments before. And, oh, joy of joys, one hand rested on the catch of a gate in the railings.

He tried the gate, and found that he could open it. Gussy could see two great, yellow eyes watching his movements.

He slipped backwards through the door, keeping his eyes on the lion, and wagging a warning finger at it. Once through the door he closed it quickly.

The lion rose to his feet again, and Gussy moved quickly away from the bars.

Where was he now? Gussy reached for his torch. He pressed the button, and a bright light flooded the apartment.

It was a square cage, about twelve feet each way. Two large black panthers were walking about close to Gussy; but, apart from himself and the panthers, the cage appeared to be empty.

Gussy stared at the panthers.

The great cats stared back at him through their slanting, evil eyes.

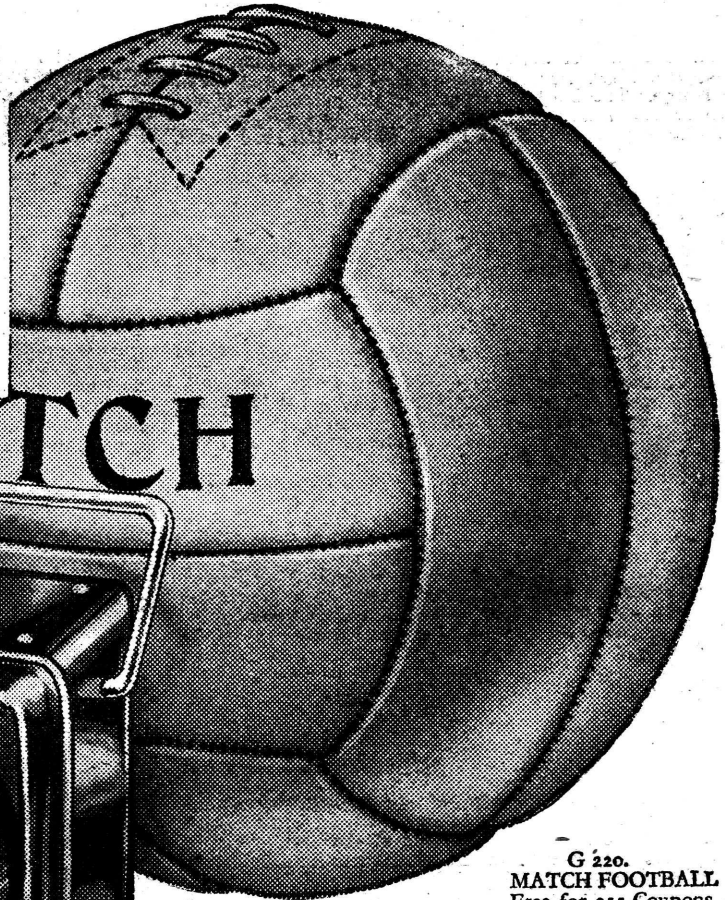
Poor Gussy had received such a shock in the lion's cage that the presence of two great black panthers had not the power to do more than make him turn a little dizzy. He was rather sorry he had exchanged one lion for two panthers—it was rather out of the frying-pan into the fire; but, at the worst, he could only be eaten, and Gussy really didn't mind whether he was eaten by lions or panthers. It was immaterial.

He kept the torch switched on this time. He wanted to see

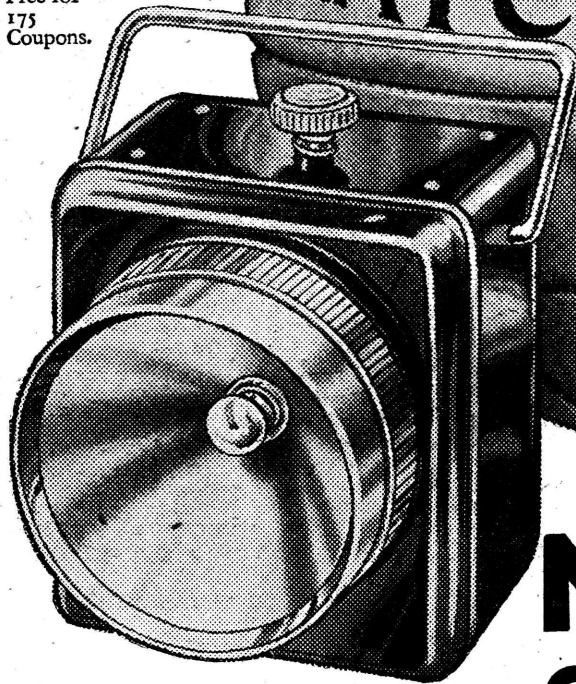
(Continued on page 18.)

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"LION-HEARTED GUSSY!"

(Continued from page 16.)

what was to happen to him. The great cats did not seem in any hurry to attack him. They just padded round and round, like Indians on a death circle.

By and by, as he was watching them, Gussy saw something glinting on the floor. He turned his torch upon it. Then he really did feel sick.

It was a St. Jim's badge—torn off a St. Jim's cap.

Gussy felt his own cap. The badge was intact. It was not his badge. Whose, then? Had he any need to ask?

There was no need to wonder what Trimble's fate had been. Trimble—or what was left of Trimble—was inside the two great black forms which wandered round and round that cage. Trimble had encountered the panthers, and was now an inside passenger.

As he realised this, Gussy turned white. His head swam. He felt physically sick. And presently the cage seemed to rise into the air, and Gussy felt himself floating on nothing. Then came insensibility.

Gussy had fainted!

It was morning when he recovered consciousness. Daylight was flooding the room of the panthers. Gussy blinked.

The saturnine face of Mr. Bellew was peering at him through the bars. The Sinister Man was standing in a passage which ran beside the cages. In the cage one side of him was the lion, then the panthers, and then a cage of monkeys.

Mr. Bellew chuckled.

"Well, well!" he observed. "Is it any use wishing you good-morning, or don't you find it quite so good?"

"Let me out!" choked Gussy. "Whease me at once!"

Mr. Bellew unlocked and threw open the door of the cage. Gussy stumbled out, deeply thankful to find himself unfeared. The Sinister Man regarded him quizzically.

"Perhaps I had better explain myself," said Mr. Bellew, with a smile.

Gussy flushed, but was silent.

"I am, and always have been, a zoologist," explained Mr. Bellew. "These animals in my private zoo were acquired in Africa, and they are pets of mine. I have housed them temporarily at Gable Lodge; but they are going to the Bristol Zoo when their cages are ready. That is the explanation of the weird sounds which may be heard of a night in the lane outside. Perhaps you had already guessed that."

"Yaas! But I didn't come heah to satisfy my curiosity, Mr. Bellew. Your affairs are no concern of mine."

"Then why, may I ask, do you favour me with a call during the night?"

Gussy thought swiftly. If he told Mr. Bellew all he knew about Trimble's fate, he stood a very good chance of sharing it. He could not tell him a falsehood, however; he would rather have died than do that. He must cloak the truth a little.

"Theah is a boy at our school who has been missin' for a couple of days," he said. "I thought perhaps he might be held a pwisonah in heah."

"A very reasonable supposition," nodded Mr. Bellew. "It is rather a hobby of mine—making schoolboys prisoners. You no longer think he is a prisoner?"

"No," replied Gussy.

Strictly speaking, perhaps, Trimble was still actually a prisoner—inside the panthers. But the word "prisoner" implied that he was still alive, so Gussy was justified in denying that belief.

"Well," said Mr. Bellew at length, "I can't hope to follow the workings of your extraordinary intellect. I take it that I am now acquitted of the crime of making the boy a prisoner. That being so, you had better return to your school and forget about it. As a reward for providing my panther with a comfortable pillow during the night, I will say nothing about your burglarious escapade. I fancy Dr. Holmes would not appreciate it much."

That was really very kind of Mr. Bellew. But he little knew what D'Arcy had intended to tell the Head immediately he returned to St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Trimble Turns Up!

"GREAT Scott!"

"Where's Gussy?"

"H's not come back!"

"Phew!"

The whole Fourth Form at St. Jim's was startled and dismayed. As they turned out of bed at rising-bell D'Arcy's bed was seen to be vacant. Gussy was absent.

Blake caught his breath.

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"What on earth can have happened to him?" he wondered.

The juniors dressed themselves quickly. Blake stumbled downstairs and went to Mr. Lathom's study. He knocked and opened the door.

"What is it, Blake?" asked Mr. Lathom.

"Do you know if D'Arcy returned during the night, sir?" asked Blake.

"D'Arcy? What do you mean, Blake?"

"He broke bounds during the night, sir. He was caught absent by Mr. Railton, who told us to take him to the Head this morning. But he hasn't come back. His bed's not been slept in since he went out, sir!"

"Good heavens!" Mr. Lathom jumped to his feet. "I must look into this! You did right to report it to me, Blake. The utterly foolish boy!"

Mr. Lathom rustled away to see Mr. Railton. Blake went to breakfast in the dining-room with a decidedly worried expression on his face. There were now two juniors absent from the ranks of the Fourth. The thing was getting alarming.

The school buzzed with the topic. Naturally, Gussy's intentions could not remain a secret. Before long everybody knew of his intention to break into Gable Lodge.

There was hardly a cheerful face in the ranks of the juniors that morning. Gussy was universally popular, and not a fellow there but believed he would be sacked immediately.

After chapel, Blake & Co. trailed off to the Head's study. There they found Mr. Railton talking with Dr. Holmes. The Head was reading a telegram as they went in.

"It is from Mr. Trimble," he said to Railton. "He will be coming down this morning."

"There is no further news of the boy yet, sir?"

"None!" replied the doctor wearily. "I have been on the telephone to the police again. They have searched everywhere in the neighbourhood; but have found absolutely no trace. Rylcombe Wood has been searched from end to end."

"It is a most extraordinary thing, sir."

"Unaccountable, Mr. Railton! Absolutely unaccountable! If one could only be sure where he was last seen—"

The juniors shuffled their feet and coughed. The Head glanced at them.

"Ah!" he said. "You three boys and D'Arcy were reported to have been out of your dormitory last night. You are aware that this is a serious infraction of the rules. Explain yourselves!"

"The fact is, sir—" began Blake, and stopped.

"Well?"

"Well, sir, since D'Arcy's absence has been found out it's no good keeping quiet. We heard that he was going to break bounds, and we got up to try and stop him."

The three chums looked at each other in a haggard fashion. Silence was no longer any use.

Dr. Holmes' eyes dwelt on them.

"You got up to prevent D'Arcy going out, Blake?"

"Yes, sir! We had a row—I mean, a struggle—and fell downstairs, and Gussy hopped it—I mean, buzzed off—I mean, sneaked off, sir, and Mr. Railton caught us."

"Quite! Mr. Railton had already surmised that that was what happened, Blake. I believe your explanation."

"Yes, sir."

There was a pause.

"You are aware, Blake, that D'Arcy has not yet returned to the school?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" Blake groaned dismally.

"Do you know where he is?"

"No, sir! I—I suppose the police haven't got him, have they, sir? You would have heard, wouldn't you?"

Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton jumped as if moved by the same spring.

"The police!"

"I—I—I mean—"

"Blake," said the headmaster, with great agitation, "this is a serious matter—a most serious matter! The very strictest inquiries will have to be made into this affair. I require you to tell me all you know about D'Arcy's intentions last night!"

"Oh crikey!"

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

Blake was saved a most uncomfortable cross-examination. At that moment there was a tap on the door.

"Come in!" cried the Head.

The door flew open, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy precipitated himself into the room like a mad bull. He was looking considerably flustered. His face was red with excitement.

Mr. Railton and the Head fairly jumped.

"D'Arcy!"

"Doctah Holmes!" cried Gussy, in thrilling tones. "Pway listen to me, sir! This mattah is sewious! Twimble is dead!"

"Good gracious!" The doctor fell into his chair as though he had been hamstrung.

"Dead!" cried Gussy feverishly. "Cwuelly murdahed, sir! Eaten by a panthah!"

"Wha-a-a-at?" shrieked the Head, Mr. Railton, and the three juniors in one breath.

"Two panthahs, sir!" roared Gussy, dancing with excitement. "Cwuelly eaten by panthahs, sir! Mr. Bellew shut him up in the cage, Doctah Holmes! I have pwoved it!"

"Are you mad, boy?" thundered the Head, rising.

"No, sir! I tell you I have pwoved it—"

"How dare you! How dare you make such wicked allegations! How dare you break bounds and stay out till morning! You shall be flogged and expelled from St. Jim's for this conduct, boy!"

"Yaas, my deah sir!" exclaimed Gussy peevishly. "I know all about that. But pway listen to me a moment! This is a vewy dweadful affaih! Last night I bwoked into Mr. Bellew's house, Gable Lodge—"

Dr. Holmes seemed on the verge of a fit. He rose up and made a frantic clutch at a cane.

"Stay!" cried Mr. Railton, holding up his hand. "Let us be calm! Now, D'Arcy, state clearly and succinctly exactly what you know about this matter."

Thus encouraged, D'Arcy related how Trimble had said Bellew was after him; how he had found Bellew thrashing the fat junior; how he had obtained a description of Trimble from the lodgekeeper in the next house; and how he had found the badge from Trimble's cap on the floor of the panther's cage.

Blake & Co. looked at each other strangely during Gussy's recital. Their eyes almost started out of their heads when Gussy told his experiences in the cages of the lion and panthers.

"Boy!" articulated the Head faintly. "Boy!"

"It is, at least, a very extraordinary succession of coincidences. I am persuaded there is nothing in it," put in Mr. Railton soothingly. "It is quite impossible, sir. We know Bellew too well for that. We both knew that he had a private collection of wild animals at Gable Lodge. But it might be as well to speak to him on the telephone about the matter. Undoubtedly he can explain it."

"Yes, yes, yes! My dear Railton, I do not for one moment even faintly suppose that Bellew has any connection with Trimble's strange disappearance." The Head glared at D'Arcy. "Boy! You may return to your study while I speak to Mr. Bellew on the telephone. I will send for you when I require you, and you will come instantly—instantly!"

"Doctah Holmes," exclaimed D'Arcy indignantly, "it is useless to telephone to Mr. Bellew. The police, Doctah—"

"Leave my study!" thundered the Head.

"But, sir—"

"Leave my study this moment!"

Blake & Co. seized the noble detective and whirled him out of the study, closing the door after them.

"Will you stop buttin' in on this mattah, Blake?" shrieked Arthur Augustus, struggling wildly. "If the Head telephones to Bellew it will put the wottah on his guard. I'm goin' for the police."

"Frog's-march him!" snapped Blake. "Let's take him up to the top box-room and lock him in there till lessons. Bag his legs, Herries!"

"What-ho!"

"You uttah wottahs!" came Gussy's vibrant tones. "Let me go, you howwid beasts! I'm goin' for the— Yooop!"

Blake stopped Gussy's eloquence by tapping his aristocratic head on the floor. Herries picked up his legs, Blake and Dig took an arm each, and Arthur Augustus sampled the doubtful joys of a frog's-march.

Right to the top of the building went Blake & Co., frog-marching the noble D'Arcy, and occasionally bumping his classic nose on the stairs. It was like a nightmare to the dismayed detective. It was worse than the lion's den.

Digby flung open the door of the top box-room.

This room was very rarely visited, save at the beginning and end of each term, and this was Gussy's prison until lesson-time.

"Heave-ho!" said Blake. "Bung him in!"

The juniors heaved. Gussy sailed through the air like an albatross, and crashed on the back of his neck on top of his own handsome travelling trunk.

"Whoooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lock the door!"

Slam! Click!

There was a stack of trunks piled high in the corner. As Gussy hit them, the trunks overbalanced and came down.

Crash! Bang! Thud!

"Yawoooooh! Oooooop! Ow!"

Gussy rose dazedly to his feet, and dashed his hand across his eyes. Then he made a dive for the door and wrenched at the handle.

"Open the door at once, Blake!" he yelled furiously.

"You stay there, dummy!" came Blake's voice faintly from outside. "You're much safer locked up!"

"Help!"

Gussy wrenched at the handle.

"Unlock this door!"

"Help! Help!"

Gussy paused.

"Help!"

He looked puzzled. Somebody was screaming for help. The voice was faint; evidently it came from the passage, where Blake and the other juniors were standing. He put his ear to the door.

"Help!"

The sound wasn't coming from the passage. It seemed farther away than the passage. D'Arcy stared round in bewilderment. He forgot even his exasperation in his wonder.

"Who is that calling?" he bawled.

"Eh?" came Blake's voice.

"It's me—Trimble," replied the faint, tiny voice from somewhere.

The room reeled in Gussy's eyes. His ears must be playing him tricks.

"Tut-tut-tut-Twimble!" he stuttered dizzily.

"Is that you, Gussy?" came the faint voice. "Lemme out, old fellow! Help!"

Gussy pulled himself together and blinked round the room.

"Where are you?" he bawled.

"Oh dear! I'm in a secret passage—a sort of cubby-hole!" Trimble was evidently bellowing, but his voice sounded not much louder than a whisper. "There's a sliding panel. Lemme out!"

"Where?" yelled Gussy.

"Look for it, you beast, can't you?" groaned Trimble's voice. "There's a spring, or button, or something in the dado on the wall opposite the fireplace."

With this vague clue to guide him, and gasping with amazement, Gussy searched the dado for a spring catch. The oak-panelled wall was ornamented with carved fleurs-de-lis, and D'Arcy shrewdly suspected that the button in question would be one of the petals of the carved flowers.

As he gave each one a jerk Gussy suddenly awoke to his position. Bellew was innocent. He had not put his panthers outside Trimble. Consequently Gussy had made the most frightful and awful blunder. His heart almost stopped beating at the thought of what he had done.

"Oh deah!" he murmured dismally. "I've done it now! I shall be expelled! Oh ewikey!"

"Haven't you found it yet?" came Trimble's voice.

"Ow! No, Twimble! I am lookin' for it!"

Even as he spoke, one of the carved petals sank into the wood at his touch, and a large section of the panelling slid noiselessly out of sight, leaving a black, uninviting opening.

Through this opening an awful figure emerged.

It was Trimble—no doubt of it! But what a Trimble!

He was smothered and cloaked in dust from head to foot, save only for some streaks of dirty white down his face. He had evidently been blubbing with fear. His face was grey, and his eyes wide with fright. He was perceptibly thinner, and, indeed, his waistcoat had actually a couple of loosish folds in it.

"Oh! Oh! Oh dear! I'm hungry! Ow!" groaned this figure, in a cracked voice.

D'Arcy gazed at him, and then gazed at the place whence he had emerged. It was evidently an ancient hiding-hole. In olden times the king's troops had a habit of dropping into various places to kill the occupants and pillage their houses. This was a refuge to meet such emergencies.

"Twimble!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "Have you been theah all this time?"

"Ow! Yes! Wow! I'm hungry!"

"But what evah made you shut yourself up in theah, Twimble?"

"You silly ass!" responded Trimble, with a glare. "I got shut in by accident. I kept yelling for help; but you can't be heard except in this box-room, and you're the first fellow who's visited this box-room since I've been in there. I'm hungry! I haven't had anything to eat for nearly three days. Ow!"

The key was turned in the lock, and the door opened. Eric Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, strode in.

"D'Arcy!" he snapped. "The Head wants you in his study at once. He's sent me to fetch— Why—what—what—who? Trimble!"

Kildare fairly jumped off the floor. He goggled at the fat junior.

"Twimble was shut in a secret passage, deah boy!" explained Gussy. "I have just weleased him!"

"Great pip!"

"I—I say, Kildare, I'm hungry—" began Trimble.

"You've got to go to the Head at once, D'Arcy," said Kildare. "You had better take Trimble with you. Get a move on!"

"Look here! Gimme something to eat first!"

"You young ass! You must go to the Head right away. He's frightfully worried about you. Your father's coming down this morning. Jump to it!"

Dismally the two juniors left the box-room. In the passages and on the stairs were crowds of fellows. There was a universal yell.

"Trimble!"

"Great Scott!"

The Fourth Form juniors passed through the crush on their way to the Head's study. And in about ten minutes the whole school knew that Trimble had been found locked in a secret hiding-hole. The box-room was thronged with fellows all the morning—gaping and goggling at the prison where Trimble had spent three unhappy days.

CHAPTER 9. One of the Bes.

"COME in!"

The Head's deep voice was heard as Kildare tapped on the door of his study. The prefect ushered the two juniors into the august sanctum.

The Head, Mr. Railton, and a stout gentleman in a rain-coat and bowler hat were present. All three gentlemen jumped at the sight of the fat junior.

"Trimble!"

"D'Arcy discovered Trimble locked in a secret hiding-hole behind the panels of the top box-room," said Kildare. "Apparently he shut himself in by accident, and was not able to release himself again."

"Bless my soul!"

Trimble gaped at the stout gentleman.

"Dad!" he gasped.

"Dear me! I am relieved to see you, Bagley," said Mr. Trimble, puffing. "Your mother and I have been extremely anxious about you—extremely anxious!"

"Trimble!" said the Head, leaning back in amazement.

"Bless my soul! What an appalling condition you are in!"

"Ow! Yes, sir! I'm hungry!"

"Tell me, Trimble, how did you get into such a—such a predicament?"

The fat junior blinked.

"Oh! Yes, sir! It wasn't the tarts, of course—"

"The tarts!" gasped the Head.

"Nunno, sir! I've just said it wasn't the tarts! Of course, I never even knew that Blake had a bag of tarts. And as for taking them up to the box-room to eat them, why, I couldn't sir, could I? Not having had the tarts. I mean!"

"You—you took a bag of tarts to the box-room to eat them?"

"No, sir!" howled Trimble. "Besides, they were my own tarts. If Blake has missed any tarts, sir, it's no use blaming me. I never even knew he had any. I didn't even know he had been down to the village to buy any. Ask Fatty Wynn, sir! He told me about it!"

The three gentlemen gazed at him.

"Bagley!" snapped Mr. Trimble. "Tell the truth! You annexed a bag of tarts from a schoolfellow, and conveyed them to the box-room to eat them?"

"That much is clear!" said Mr. Railton, cutting short Trimble's indignant denial. "But, what puzzles me, is how Trimble got into the secret hiding-place!"

"You see, sir, I found it by accident!" gasped Trimble.

"I bumped my head on the spring, and the panel opened. Then I went in to see where it led to, because I thought it would be useful to have a secret hiding-place not known to anyone else, in case that beast Blake made a fuss about the tarts, sir—"

"Oh!"

"I mean," amended Trimble, hastily, "in case he didn't make a fuss about the tarts—that is, they weren't his tarts at all. You see, sir, I touched something in there which closed the spring, and I couldn't find out how to open it again. I shouted and shouted, but nobody came to the box-room until Gussy butted in just now, sir—"

"Very good! I quite understand!" said the Head. "In the circumstances, I shall take no notice of the matter of annexing Blake's pastry. You will have a wash and change, Trimble, and I will see that a meal is prepared for you in the housekeeper's room."

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The Head turned to Mr. Trimble.

"I am rejoiced to see your son little the worse for his terrible ordeal, Mr. Trimble," he said courteously. "I will see that he has two or three days' complete rest in the sanatorium, and doubtless that will make him quite fit again. May I have the pleasure of your company at lunch before you go?"

"Certainly, Dr. Holmes. I will return shortly. Thank you."

Mr. Trimble led his hopeful son away. The Head turned to Kildare.

"Kildare, kindly fetch the boy Wynn from the New House and send him to my study."

"Yes, sir."

"D'Arcy," said the Head quietly, as Kildare withdrew, "your conduct has been absolutely unparalleled in the history of this school."

"Oh cwumbs!" Gussy really wished that the floor would kindly open up and devour him. He had an awful sinking sensation inside him. "Yaas, sir; I was in ewwor. I wealise that!"

"In error! Really, D'Arcy, it is not easy to know what to say to you. I appreciate the fact that, amazing as it seems, you really did think that Trimble was a prisoner in Gable Lodge when you committed the audacious act of breaking into the house in the middle of the night. That much is clear. But nothing—not even good intentions—can excuse the—the disgraceful—the wicked act of breaking bounds and forcing your way into the private house of a respectable gentleman in the middle of the night."

"But, sir, it weally was a vewy extraordinary coincidence—"

"That matters nothing. The fact remains that you committed this wanton act."

"Yaas, sir!" groaned Gussy.

There was a tap at the door, and Fatty Wynn trotted in. He was looking apprehensive. Fellows always did look apprehensive when sent for by the Head.

Fatty was turning over in his fat mind all the crimes he had committed, and was wondering which of them had got to the ears of the Head.

"Wynn!"

"Oh dear!"

"Listen to me! I have been speaking on the telephone to Mr. Bellow, of Gable Lodge. It appears that you went to tea there on Wednesday afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

Gussy started. A whole flood of understanding came to him. The lodgekeeper's description of the "wunnerful" fat boy. It was Fatty Wynn. Gussy had forgotten that Trimble was not the only fat boy at St. Jim's.

"F-F-Fatty Wynn!" he gurgled.

"While you were there," pursued the Head, "did you lose the badge from your cap?"

"Yes, sir," said Fatty, puzzled. "Mr. Bellow took me in to show me his animals. A monkey snatched my cap, tore the badge off and threw it at the panthers in the next cage. Mr. Bellow rescued my cap for me; but he didn't trouble about the badge."

"Quite so!" The Head turned to D'Arcy. "You see, D'Arcy, how your researches led you astray?"

"Oh, yaas, sir!" groaned Gussy. "I—I nevah guessed—"

"You may go, Wynn!"

Fatty, deeply thankful, went. The Head turned to Mr. Railton.

"Will you now be kind enough to take D'Arcy to the punishment-room, Mr. Railton?" he asked. Gussy shivered. "I shall communicate with Lord Eastwood and inform him that his son must leave St. Jim's."

"Oh deah!"

"Come, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton kindly.

He dropped a hand on Gussy's shoulder.

Five minutes later Gussy was in solitary confinement, awaiting a dark and dismal fate.

The news of the threatened expulsion of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, however, reached Mr. Bellow through Fatty Wynn, and, like the good sportsman he was, the "Sinister Man" appealed to Dr. Holmes to waive the sentence of expulsion. After considering D'Arcy's previous exemplary conduct at St. Jim's, the kindly old Head agreed, with the result that the swell of the Fourth got away with the light sentence of three weeks' detention. As soon as the opportunity afforded, D'Arcy apologised most profusely to Mr. Bellow, and thanked him for his kindness. The two shook hands—Mr. Bellow expressing a wish that the unfortunate affair should be forgotten.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's GEM and another ripping story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "THE SHADY THREE!" Boys, you're on a peach of a yarn here, so don't miss it, whatever you do!)



SLICK DOLAN

"WHARF RAT"

and packages on board. Then he looked at the packing-case. It was a strong case, and had labels marked "FRAGILE" in red plastered over it. It certainly might have held a showcase.

Yet Slick wondered, and he wondered because he had recognised two, at least, of the men as being members of Gat Lesparri's gang of crooks—the worst gang in London. Moreover, he recognised the small lorry as belonging to Gat Lesparri—had seen it in that worthy's garage in Limehouse.

"Gosh!" he repeated, his sharp, intelligent eyes glinting. "There's somethin' behind this! Old Gat don't waste his time doin' ordinary transport work with his lorry, not 'im! I'd best tell Mister Brent about this!"

The constable was coming down the street again, on his beat, but Slick instantly decided against mentioning his suspicions to him. He knew he would only get a cuff for his pains, if anything. So Slick set off for a run for Wesley Terrace, where Detective-Sergeant Brent, of the C.I.D., had his bachelor rooms.

Slick had only left those rooms an hour ago. Since his narrow escape of being done to death on the river by Lesparri's gang, two nights ago, Slick had lived with the detective, who had considered Slick safe there from Gat Lesparri's vengeance.

The rooms were warm and cosy, and the food was sumptuous to the wharf-rat. Yet Brent's landlady, though good-hearted enough, could not help being suspicious of the waif, who, until recently, had been a hanger-on to dangerous criminals. And Slick was more afraid of Mrs. Simpson than he was of Gat Lesparri's vengeance!

That afternoon he had wandered out, not being sure whether he intended returning again to Wesley Terrace. Then he had spotted the lorry, and so the question was settled for him. Once Slick's ambition had been to be a full-blown crook; now it was to be a detective—like Brent, the C.I.D. man, who had befriended him.

A run to the end of the street, and then a twopenny bus journey, soon took him to Brent's diggings.

It was just growing dusk when he landed there, and, to his joy, he found Brent had just come in for his tea.

Brent's grim face cleared as Mrs. Simpson showed in Slick.

"Hallo, young 'un, I was beginning to think you'd left me in the lurch," he said, smiling. "Your tea's ready—pile in!"

"I—I went for a walk, sir!" stammered Slick, colouring a little. "But I've got news for you, Mister Brent—leastways, I think I have!"

He told what he had seen, and Brent's eyes gleamed a trifle, though his face showed nothing.

"You're quite sure it was Gat's lorry and Gat's men, Slick?"

"Quite sure, mister! One was Joe Garret and the other was Prouty. I'd know 'em anywhere, sir!"

"Then I think I'd better run along and have a look round there," said Brent crisply. "You get on with your tea—"

"I'm comin' with you, mister!" said Slick, his face showing reproach. "I can show you just—"

"Oh, all right!" laughed Brent. "Be drinking a cup of tea while I get on the phone! Lucky thing I have a car with me, kid!"

Brent wasn't long on the telephone, and soon he was hustling the eager and excited Slick into a small police car that stood outside the street door.

"Finestones, Westbury Street," commented Brent, as he threaded the car in and out of the traffic skillfully. "Yes, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,204.

CHAPTER 1.

The Motor Lorry!

"GOSH! That's bloomin' queer!" Only Slick Dolan, the Thames-side waif, thought it queer, however.

It was just an ordinary London street, and the lorry was just an ordinary lorry. It came to a stop close to the curbstone, and the driver and two men jumped from the front seat and started to lower a big oblong packing-case from the lorry. They had just done the job when the driver seemed suddenly to become aware that the jeweller's shop opposite which the lorry had stopped was closed.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he snorted loudly. "The bloomin' shop's closed, mates!"

"Well, by heck!" came a disgusted growl from one of the men; while the other fumed and stared savagely at the shutters and railings of the closed shop.

There was a dingy grocer's shop two doors away, and the proprietor stood in the doorway. He was a fat, jovial individual, and he grinned as he nodded to the big packing-case.

"That for old Finestones?" he asked, nodding again at the case.

"Yes, darn it!" growled the driver. "What's the thunderin' shop doin' closed at this time for, mister? Think we're goin' to lift that bloomin' case on again and take it back? Blowed if—"

"If it's full of gold watches and diamonds," grinned the grocer facetiously, "you'd best take it back! Old Finestones closes all day Saturdays!"

The motor-driver raised his cap and scratched his head, scowling.

"Blow 'im, anyway!" he said. "It's a showcase, or summit like that! We've bin told to deliver it 'ere, and we've done it. Yes, we'll leave the bloomin' thing here, mates," he added, as if with sudden decision. "An' if the boss does kick, then we'll 'ave to come agen and fetch it, that's all. Shove it agen the door, outer the way!"

The driver's mates seemed no keener than he to lift the big case on to the lorry again. Between them they jammed it up against the stout door of the jeweller's shop, which stood a little back from the pavement, leaving plenty of room still for people to pass.

This done, the driver drew out a grubby cigarette-packet, offered it to his mates, who lit up, and then all three boarded the lorry again and drove off.

The grocer went into his shop again. A constable who had been passing at the time had not even noticed the incident, much less had the people passing on the pavement. It was an ordinary incident that happened every day in any street.

But Slick Dolan thought it queer. He stared after the lorry, which was a small one, and had several other boxes

WHEN SLICK TURNS UP
—to the rescue of Brent—
SOMEONE GOES DOWN!



Gurney leapt at the detective, and Brent hit out for all he was worth.

I know the place, young 'un. Let's hope we're not too late!"

"You—you think—" questioned Slick, glancing sideways at the clean-cut features of the detective.

"I'm afraid you'll soon know what I fear, at least!" was the cryptic answer. "Anyway, I've phoned, asking the police to send someone to have a look at that packing-case—though we may get there first yet!"

As it turned out they did. Brent drove hard, and it seemed scarcely five minutes before the car shot round into Westbury Street. As it did so Slick gasped:

"There they are—look, mister!"

Brent did not reply, but his face went grim. Once again the small lorry stood before the jeweller's shop, and now the three men were just lifting the case on to the lorry again. The fat grocer was at his shop door, as before, and he wore a grin. Evidently he had been chaffing the men about having to return for the case, after all!

The case was on the lorry now, and the three men, calling something jokingly out to the fat grocer, clambered aboard, and the engine was started. At that moment two policemen, followed by a sergeant, came running along the street.

Just then, also, Brent ran his car up and leaped out, followed by Slick Dolan.

But they were too late. One glance at the oncoming police had been enough for the three lorry-men. There were muttered oaths of startled astonishment, and then the lorry went roaring away at top speed.

Brent shouted angrily; a whistle shrilled, and then both constables tore furiously in chase, one of them leaping on to the footboard of a passing car.

But by this time the lorry was swallowed up in the mist and dusk, and the thick traffic at the end of the street.

The sergeant hurried up to the disgusted Brent, glancing curiously at the jeweller's shop as he did so.

"We got your message," he began, saluting the detective. "But—"

He was evidently puzzled, and clearly under the impression that it was all a mare's nest.

"I fancy you'll soon see what it means, sergeant!" snapped Brent.

He stepped up to the shop door and peered through the small grating. Then he kicked hard at the door.

Instantly a square piece of the door fell inwards, disclosing an aperture through which a man could easily crawl. The sergeant fairly jumped, and a fat gurgle came from the grocer who had ambled up, his eyes wide.

Brent stooped down and crawled inside, followed by the

astounded and alarmed sergeant. As Brent fully expected, the inner door had been forced, while the shop inside was the scene of desolation. Showcases were empty—the window had been rifled; the whole place had, very obviously, been thoroughly and skilfully burgled.

"But—but how—" stammered the sergeant.

"Easily enough," grunted Brent. "Inside that packing-case—which had a sliding door, if I'm not mistaken—was the crook; and a clever fellow he was! The sliding door was jammed against the shop door, and then the other crooks drove away, leaving their accomplice to do the rest. He cut a hole in that door, through steel and wood, while people were passing within a few yards of him. Cute!"

"Phow! And—and they've just been to call for him again!"

"Yes—another few seconds and we should have collared the lot!" snapped Brent. "But—"

"They can't get far, sir!" said the sergeant. "With a car they might stand a chance, but a lorry—"

"I'm not so sure about that!" rapped out Brent. "Anyway, I'll leave you in charge here—we're wasting time."

And Brent, his iron jaw showing grim and firm, hurried out to his car. Then he looked about for Slick Dolan. But

he looked in vain—Slick had vanished. With a muttered exclamation, Brent let in the clutch and the small car tore away—towards Limehouse. By this time, the Flying Squad should be on the track, and it seemed impossible that the lorry could make a clean getaway. But Brent was not the man to take chances.

CHAPTER 2. On the Trail!

IT was quite dark by the time Brent parked his car in a narrow alley just off Porter Street. The detective knew the street only too well. He had lived there, as a ragged urchin, and afterwards he had trodden that dingy, dangerous beat in his early days as a constable. That was how Detective-Sergeant Brent knew all there was to be known about Slick Dolan and his haunts. But he was not thinking of Slick just then.

Brent was well known in that locality, and he was still wearing his ordinary blue-serge suit and bowler hat. But it was dark now, and he was cautious.

Switching off the lights, he hurried along the alley. At the end of the alley was the back of a garage facing on to Porter Street. That garage belonged to Gat Lesparri, the head of the criminal organisation Brent had sworn to smash. Yet never had the police been able to trace a single crime to that sinister garage or its owner. Gat was far too clever for that.

Now, however, Brent's eyes were glinting and his heart beat high with hope. At last he believed he was on the verge of bringing one crime home to Gat, at least. He doubted whether the motor-lorry would be driven back to the garage with its loot—Gat was much too clever and cautious. But he had great hopes that the packing-case, or its contents would arrive there that night.

He reached a high brick wall, shinned over it, and found himself in a whitewashed yard. To the right was a small door, and finding it unlocked, Brent passed through and soon reached the garage itself.

The double doors in front were partly closed, and a single cobweb-covered electric light burned. Four vehicles stood inside—a brand new, powerful-looking car which Brent guessed was Gat's own; a shabby tradesman's van; another car in process of being repainted; and a fourth car under repair. Gat carried out repairs, and ran an ordinary garage business. But Brent smiled grimly as he noted the partly-painted car; stealing cars was only one of Gat's many activities.

Brent knew he was carrying his life in his hands—the

gangster had a big account to settle with him. But he looked about him coolly, and then he settled down to watch and wait behind a pile of boxes and old tyres in a corner.

It was then Brent discovered he was not alone in the garage after all. Scarcely had he crouched down, when he collided with a human form, and a sudden gasp followed. Like lightning Brent's hand shot out, but as it did so, a relieved voice gasped out:

"Oh! It's you, guv'nor!"

"Slick! You young rascal!" breathed Brent

At the back of the garage all was deep gloom, but he could make out Slick Dolan's white face now. Actually, though startled, he was not surprised. When the car had stopped outside the jeweller's, Slick had been the first to leap out, and Brent had glimpsed him tearing after the vanishing lorry, and he had guessed where Slick would make for.

But he had scarcely expected to find the daring youngster inside the garage for all that.

"You daring young scamp!" he breathed, though there was admiration in his voice. "I should think you'd had enough of this place, Slick! Have you seen—"

"I tried to catch up the lorry—meant to jump on!" grinned Slick. "But it was too quick—got powerful engine, that lorry has, you bet! But it won't come here, mister!"

"I know that!"

"What's in that there packing-case will, though!" said Slick. "I s'pose those blokes had it full of stuff from that shop, though how it was worked—"

"I'll tell you how it was worked later, Slick," said Brent crisply, eyes and ears tense. "But they half-emptied the shop, all right. Did you bus it here, kid?"

"Yes. Only just got here afore you come, mister!"

"Then now you've got to get out and leave this to me, Slick!" said Brent. "Slip out at the back and wait for me—you'll find my car at the end of the alley by the wharf. If I don't turn up—"

He broke off with a warning hiss.

A motor had drawn up outside the double doors with a soft squealing of brakes. A moment later, the double doors were pushed open wide. Hardly daring to breathe, Brent watched as a small two-seater car was tooled into the garage and the headlights switched off.

Two men jumped from the car, and as the light flashed on the face of one of them, Brent caught his breath. He recognised him as

one of the men who had been with the lorry. Next moment he recognised the second—not as one of the lorry-men, but as Gurney, Gat Lesparri's chief lieutenant!

"Gosh!" breathed Slick.

He had been right—and Brent had been right. Brent had taken a chance. The police might have overtaken the lorry, or the plunder might never have come to the garage at all. But now Brent knew his swift move had been sound.

Obviously, Gurney had met the lorry in some quiet rendezvous, for here was one of the lorry-men, at least.

But had they the plunder?

The two men passed into the little office, the window of which overlooked the garage. A light flashed on, and almost in the same instant the two men emerged again, and this time someone else was with them.

It was Gat Lesparri, neatly dressed as usual, in his tight-fitting blue suit. His white face was calm, but his curiously shiny eyes glittered in the dimly-lit garage.

"You say it worked O.K., Ginger?" he was saying in his soft, gentle voice. "Then why—"

"Why, because it was a durned close call, boss!" snapped the man. "Somebody must have squealed about it, or else the cops tumbled somehow! It all went well until we was hookin' it, and then the cops turned up!"

"You're quite sure you weren't followed here?" asked Gat, unmoved.

"You bet!" grinned Ginger. "That there lorry of yours can go it, Gat! Squad car nearly got us, though, but we chucked some boxes and their bloomin' bus swerved to dodge 'em and smashed inter a lamp-post! We got clear then and made straight for Gurney!"

"And the stuff?"

"All O.K., boss!" The man looked at the pallid-faced gangster. "And who d'you think turned up just as we were hookin' it, Gat? Your old pal—that nosy cop, Brent!"

"What?"

Gat Lesparri showed animation at last. At mention of Brent's name his thin lips tightened into a snarl, and his shiny black eyes glinted.

"That means the nosy stop's on to this!" snarled Gurney, with an oath. "I'm thinkin' it ain't safe, Gat, to keep the stuff here now he's—"

"You're right, Gurney," said Gat, nodding. "Get my car out. I'll be ready in five minutes and we'll get off!"

The gangster disappeared into the little office. Gurney helped Ginger to carry two big leather bags from the small car to the big new car at the end of the garage, and they were packed into the back. Then Gurney started the engine and switched on the lights.

"Where's the boss for, Gurney?" asked Ginger in a hoarse whisper.

"A nice, quiet little place in Surrey," grinned Gurney. "But don't you get too curious, Ginger! You hang on here, and we'll be seein' you agen to-morrow."

Gurney passed into the office, and Ginger followed him—to Brent's relief. Brent was thinking swiftly. Evidently Gat was bound for one of his secret haunts—one that Ginger did not know of. Brent wished that he had a gun with him, but he was unarmed, and long before he could get help on the job, Gat and the two leather bags would be miles away.



A well-aimed truncheon sent Gurney's gun flying, while the gangster himself sank down, overpowered
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He had to play a lone hand; but Brent loved playing a lone hand.

A whispered word to Slick, and then Brent led the way out through the back door, into the yard, and then over the wall. A quick run brought them to the waiting car, and Brent switched on the lights and started the engine.

In a matter of moments the car had taken them alongside the dark, dimly lit wharf, and then down another narrow alley, leading into Porter Street. Near the street Brent stopped and shut off his lights.

"Now you'd better get off back to my diggings, Slick!" he snapped. "This is a pretty dangerous job, and it's time you cleared. See, kid!"

"No, I don't," said Slick. "Who put you on to this, mister?"

"Why, you, of course. But—"

"I'm coming!" said Slick. "If you chucks me out I'll follow somehow!"

Brent laughed, and glanced into the eager, excited face of the former wharf-rat. In the new clothes Brent had provided him with, and with good food and home comforts, Slick looked a far different youth from the Slick Dolan he had known.

"Right!" he said grimly. "You can come, young 'un, but mind—"

He broke off as the hum of a car was heard and a car passed the end of the alley-way. There was no time to argue now. Brent switched on the lights again, and the next instant the car was out into Porter Street.

The trail had commenced, and Brent knew he would need all his eyesight and attention to keep on it.

He had already made his decision. The car ahead, he felt quite certain, not only held Gat Lesparri and his chief

lieutenant, but the proceeds of that day's clever haul in Westbury Street. He could easily have the car stopped, and possibly make an easy capture. On the other hand, Gat was armed, and he did not want gun-play, and he knew Gat would fight to the death.

But that was not all. Gat was bound for a "nice quiet little place in Surrey," and Brent was very curious indeed to see that place. He fancied it would contain something of great interest to the police.

CHAPTER 3.

The House in Surrey!

BRENT had scarcely expected an easy task, but he found it surprisingly easy. It was a dark evening, and it soon became clear that Gat and his companion did not suspect the possibility of being followed. They did not hurry, and though it was no simple matter keeping in touch with the car ahead in the heavy, early-evening traffic, once they were outside London it was child's play.

Gurney had mentioned Surrey, and so it proved. Over London Bridge, past the Elephant, and on through Kennington went the big car to Clapham, and soon Brent guessed the direction at least. Through Morden and Ewell, and thence to Epsom, where Brent lost the trail for a few moments, but the policeman on point duty soon gave him the required information: In a matter of minutes they picked up the big car's headlights on the road across Epsom Common.

It was after a good half-hour's run beyond Leatherhead that their quarry slowed down and turned down a narrow, rutty lane, coming to a stop at last.

From the end of the lane Brent's keen eyes saw the car stop, and instantly he had stopped his own car, and was leaping out with the excited Slick at his heels.

"I'm bleesed if you aren't as eager a bloodhound as I am, young 'un!" said Brent. "We'll make a tee of you yet—and I fancy that's your bent, Slick. Now, you hang on here with the car. If I don't return in an hour, shove off to Helmsley back there and report to the local cop. Got that?"

Without waiting for an answer Brent dived through the hedge and disappeared in the darkness.

Slick Dolan chuckled, waited a brief moment, and then he went after him cautiously, his sharp eyes gleaming. If Brent thought he was going to be left out of the fun he was jolly well mistaken.

Brent, meanwhile, had arrived at the spot where the big car had halted, just in time to see it move through double gates and crunch along a short drive to a pretty, detached house, set among trees.

The front of the house overlooked a well-kept lawn and flower-beds, while the back dropped sheer down to a still mill-stream, covered with weeds for the most part. The place was obviously old, and had once been the mill house, but had been improved and modernised. Brent smiled grimly as he reflected upon the hundreds of pounds that must have been spent on that pretty, innocent-looking house.

So this was Gat's private residence. It was to this haven of refuge that Gat Lesparri went when he made his frequent disappearances from his town haunts.

The car had reached a garage now, and as the lights were switched off Brent slid through the gates and made for the house, which now showed lights. From the shelter of a bunch of laurels he watched the front for several long minutes and then he moved to the back.

Sheer up from the still, shining water rose the wall, covered in thick, ancient ivy. But it was broken by a couple of windows, covered with rusted bars, and above these two more windows, evidently of ground-floor rooms.

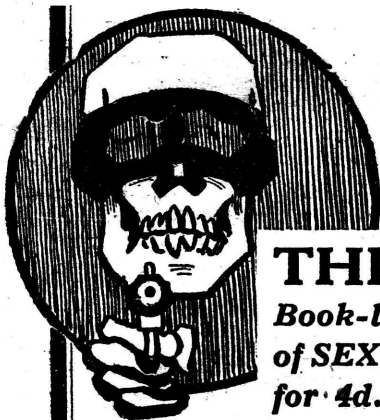
And the nearest was open. Brent's eyes gleamed as he sighted it.

It was six or seven feet above the water, but there was the ivy. Brent tested it, then he edged round the wall and began the climb. To an active man it was an easy matter, and within a few seconds he was holding on to the sill, dragging wider the casement window.

Then, after a cautious glance inside, the detective hauled himself over the window-ledge and dropped into the room.

It proved to be the dining-room, and it was empty. With every nerve tense and on the alert, Brent moved to the door, opened it gently, and peered out. He found himself looking into the lighted hall. Opposite him showed a small room, lighted up, and apparently a cloak-room.

But instantly he glimpsed something else—a telephone clamped to the wall. For several long minutes the detective waited, listening intently. From somewhere he heard a low hum of voices, but he could see nobody, and suddenly he took the plunge.



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Slipping across the hall he dived into the cloak-room, closing and locking the door gently after him. Another moment and he had the receiver of the telephone off and was speaking rapidly into it. He finished at last, replaced the receiver gently, and listened.

He had made scarcely any noise, however, and no sound of alarm came. Should he make a move now, or should he wait until—

Brent decided quickly. Perhaps better to wait, and yet he was filled with a burning desire to see Gat and to explore this country home of the gangster. In any case, if anyone came to the cloak-room there was no escape for him—he was trapped.

With the thought, the detective slipped from the room, intending to make for the dining-room again. And just then he glimpsed a door ajar at the end of the passage leading from the hall, and he realised that the faint hum of conversation came from there.

Brent was used to taking great risks, and he took one now. A few cautious steps took him to the open door, and he peered inside.

Gat Lesparri was there, and with him was Gurney and another man. The room was furnished as an office, and on a table in the centre were the two leather bags. As Brent looked in he saw Gat take from the nearest bag something which scintillated in the electric light over his head. It looked like a diamond necklace.

But Brent scarcely got a glimpse, for just then a door on his right opened suddenly and a man bumped into him, moving almost soundlessly in carpet slippers.

"Hallo! That you, Gurney, you blamed—"

That was as far as the man got. It was a time for swift action, and before the man had even realised his error, Brent's fist slammed home and he crashed back, the door behind him flying open again as he went headlong with a howl.

Brent took to his heels along the passage as a chorus of startled oaths came from the office, followed by the ominous scrape and crash of overturned chairs. In the hall he paused, however. He had closed the dining-room door, and now he was momentarily at a loss, for several doors opened off into the hall.

But a furious yell from the passage made him decide abruptly, and he leaped for the nearest, tore it open, and darted inside.

It was the dining-room; the draught from the open window met him as he charged in and leaped for safety. And as he did so he caught a luckless foot in the carpet and went headlong on his face.

Gurney came first, his face furious, and as he switched on the light and sighted the prostrate detective he gave an astounded roar.

"It's Brent! It's that blamed, nosy slop, Brent! By heck—"

He rushed at Brent as that unfortunate worthy leaped up. The other two men, followed by Gat himself, were now in the room, and Brent spun round, hitting out for all he was worth. He knew it was a hopeless fight, however. And it certainly would have been had not something unexpected happened just then.

Suddenly something came whizzing through the opened doorway and crashed into the electric light, plunging the room in darkness.

What it was, or how it had come, Brent least of all knew. But he realised it was his chance, and he was the last man to miss a chance.

Scarcely had the splintered glass ceased to fly when he had torn himself free and was leaping once again for the patch of starlight.

A figure loomed before him, but a smashing upper-cut crumpled it up. As Gurney's gulping yelp shrilled, he reached the window and swarmed through.

This time the ivy did not tempt him. He sprawled over the sill, bunched his muscles and nerves, and took a flying leap into the black, shiny stream.

The icy chill of the water struck to his vitals as he soused under. But he kept his wits, came up for a deep breather, and then dived again. This time he swam under water until he bumped into the slime and mud of the opposite bank.

It was as well he did. From the window above, resounding now with yells and oaths, came the vicious crack of a shot as the maddened Gurney let off his gun into the darkness.

But Brent was safe now, well hidden in the shadows of the overhanging bank. With his head and shoulders out of the water he took in great gulps of the fresh night air.

He waited. The hub-bub from the window had died down. But he could hear Gat Lesparri's quiet but vibrant voice as he cursed Gurney for shooting. Then the figures vanished from the window.

Brent scrambled out of the water, gasping and panting. He was chilled through to the bone. And he knew that it would be only a matter of seconds before the crooks would be round searching for him.

He took shelter for a few moments in the bushes lining the bank. He felt he had been reckless to the point of madness, and that it looked as if he had hopelessly ruined the game. He had been recognised, and soon the birds would flee.

Yet it seemed that they were determined to get him first. Suddenly lights flashed round the corner of the house. He glimpsed three dark forms racing across the footbridge, dimly seen along the bank.

Brent decided it was time to quit then. But the decision was never acted upon, for just then he heard distant shouts, followed by a yell of pain.

One voice was Gurney's, the other was Slick Dolan's.

It was enough for Brent. The three figures had turned in their tracks and rushed back over the bridge, and, biting his lips savagely, Brent went after them. How Slick had come to get caught he could only guess. But to leave him in the brutal hands of Gurney was not to be thought of. And there was still hope that his telephone message would bear fruit in time!

Brent, his soaked clothes flapping about him, tore over the bridge. He came upon a struggling group round by the garage, and he piled in with a will, coming on the group like a whirlwind. There followed confusion, a mad medley of struggling figures; grunts and curses and the quick smack of blows.

Just as Brent felt the game was up he glimpsed flashing lights that glistened on bright buttons and blue uniforms. The telephone Gat had had installed in his cloak-room had proved his undoing. It was the help Brent waited for—not too late after all.

Consternation seized Gurney's men, and Gurney himself tore out his gun in sheer desperation and rage. Vicious spurts added to the general uproar, but luckily he did no harm, and suddenly a well-aimed truncheon sent his gun flying away, while Gurney himself sank down under the weight of another.

Brent was free now, and his thoughts were only of Gat Lesparri. He staggered up dizzily and looked about for him. But he did not find him.

There were only three men left. Gurney was already knocked out, a second was down and handcuffed, and as Brent looked about, the third went down under the weight of two burly local constables.

But Gat Lesparri had vanished. Brent led the hunt for him with deep and savage disappointment in his heart. Once again the gangster had slipped through his fingers.

The hunt was given up at last. Brent blamed himself bitterly for having bungled the affair. And there were still things that puzzled him. Who had smashed out the light in the dining-room, and who had slashed the tyres of Gat's expensive car—for they were found slashed? He soon learned this, however, when he found Slick after the search.

"It was little me, mister!" grinned Slick, his face bruised but cheery. "I got inter the house by a pantry winder just as Gurney downed you. I chucked a stick through the doorway and smashed the light, and then hooked it. Then I shoved along to the garage and did in Gat's tyres so's he couldn't get away. Then I got caught—"

"But Gat's got away, none the less, Slick!" snapped Brent. "We've lost him, and we've lost the loot, young 'un. Never mind, I can now get a warrant—"

"Who says we've lost the loot, Mister Brent?" grinned Slick Dolan. "Afore I hooked it to do in them tyres I also dropped them bags through the winder of that there office. You'll find 'em in the flower-bed below the winder—"

"What?"

Brent did not stay to say more. With the equally eager sergeant of police at his heels, he raced round to the front of the house, Slick limping along leisurely in the rear. When he arrived under the office window Brent and the sergeant were examining the contents of the two bags.

"I expect som' of them gold watches is smashed," observed Slick, shaking his head. "But that can't be helped, gov'nor. I only had a couple of seconds to think and act, see?" And don't you worry, Mister Brent," he added confidentially. "We'll collar old Gat yet."

And Detective-Sergeant Brent laughed, his eyes gleaming as he looked at the bags again.

"Yes, young 'un," he chuckled. "If I have you to help me, I fancy we will—eh, sergeant?"

And the sergeant agreed.

THE END.

(Well, chums, Brent's got Gurney, but he's still got to get Gat! Don't miss next week's thrilling story of Slick Dolan!)

THRILLS GALORE IN OUR GRIPPING SERIAL!

THE RANGERS' RECRUIT!

By
HEDLEY SCOTT.



(Opening chapters retold on page 27.)

A Message of Warning!

CALLING Hartley aside, Locke withdrew a dog's collar from his pocket.

"This ordinary-looking dog's collar was the cunning hiding-place of Inspector McDougherty's clues," explained the detective. "McDougherty, poor fellow, was an eccentric. You will remember that he was given the job of rounding up the mysterious gang responsible for innumerable robberies and crimes of violence. He died while on duty, but he left behind him a valuable note that's helped me considerably.

Bill looked nonplussed. Tich scratched his head. All this was beyond them.

"That harmless-looking collar is in reality a metal cylinder with a secret lock. The leather covering, of course, hides that; and in that secret cylinder were McDougherty's clues—clues, let me add, that prompted me to become very inquisitive into the affairs of the Tindean Film Company."

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Bill. "But how on earth did you fasten on to this collar, and—"

"That was due to observation in the first place, and luck in the second," said Locke.

"The collar, as you will see, is a little bit out of the ordinary. My powers of observation saw that. The luck element entered when I took the liberty of exchanging it on my next visit to your flat. You, apparently, haven't noticed the deception I played on you."

"Ha, ha!"

"I certainly never noticed anything different about Scotty's collar," confessed Bill, "so it seems that my powers of observation want gingering up."

"I shouldn't worry on that score," smiled Locke. "It's my business to see things that other people miss. But to return to McDougherty's clues. He clearly indicated that the secret of the mysterious gang robberies would be found at the Tindean Film Studios. He was correct. The Tindean Film Company, my son, is nothing more than a gigantic fraud, organised and kept going by a gang of crooks. Only one film from those studios has ever seen the inside

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of a public cinema, yet the Tindean Studios are always a model of industry. Every day, every week, something is going on there. Artistes are engaged, they rehearse, they are paid. But the secret is that each play rehearsed is nothing more or less than a rehearsal on a giant scale of an intended robbery."

"Good heavens!"

"The last film the Tindean Studios 'shot,' resumed Locke, "was a mystery thriller, in which a gang of daring men, garbed as policemen, raided a castle and by a cunning ruse gained access to the family strong-room which contained two million pounds' worth of jewellery. The film—"

"Phew!" ejaculated Bill and Tich.

"This place?"

"Exactly!" agreed Locke. "Stapleton Castle it was. The drum of films I entrusted to you, Bill," he added, "shows the raid from the very beginning to the time that the Duke of Stapleton was chloroformed and thrust into his own strong-room."

"But Buxton—"

Locke shrugged.

"The film contained nothing in parallel with Buxton's condition, more's the pity. I suppose that was unnecessary. The idea of the laborious method of filming the robbery was to make absolutely certain of every detail. But once

the swag was safely in the hands of the gangsters no further rehearsing was necessary."

"Crikey! That'll be a story for the papers!" said Tich. "This beats Chicago and the whole bloomin' United States holler!"

"It is certainly very original," said Locke, with a smile. "But we'll give a climax to that film that its directors never bargained for."

Ferrers Locke reached for his hat.

"Well, Pycroft, we'll be getting along. Our next place of call is London." To Bill and Tich: "I'll see you later. Come along, Jack!"

Pycroft paused, and with a jerk of his thumb, indicated the two unconscious figures on the lounge around which a number of servants buzzed with well-meaning attempts to render assistance to their master and his guest.

"What about him?"

"Buxton? Oh, let him do what he likes!" replied Locke in low tones. "Don't have him watched. We'll trap him later."

With that he strode out of the spacious hall and entered his car.

Pycroft and Drake followed him.

A moment later the pulsating roar of a high-powered car engine shattered the silence, and Tich and Bill watched the retreating red rear-light until it was swallowed up in the night mists.

"Lumme!" exclaimed Tich at length. "The old boy told us to look out for thrills at the dook's reception, but, swop me, I never bargained for this little lot!"

"And neither did I!" admitted Bill. "Come on, old son! It's time we started for home, too. I want to have a squirt at the collar old Locke planted on Scotty. Cool, wasn't it?"

"Cold!" grumbled Tich, buttoning up his overcoat. "Bloomin' cold!"

"Time we heard something!" drawled Haverswood.

LOCKE TURNS KEY ON BUXTON GANG!

But Buxton's still at large!

"More than time," grunted Thomas Chakenham, whilst his twin brother nodded gloomily.

The three were lounging in Sir Raston Billenter's house. The air was thick with tobacco smoke. On the walnut table a half-empty decanter and three glasses more than indicated that the three had imbibed freely.

Adolph Haverswood seemed to be the most composed member of the gang. He sprawled in a deep armchair, sneering occasionally at the Chakenham twins as they paced agitatedly up and down the carpeted floor, stopping only to help themselves to further liquid refreshment.

"Something's gone wrong," said Thomas suddenly. "Relland and Billenter ought to have returned long ago. We knew Buxton wouldn't be here until to-morrow. But the others—"

He broke off as his keen ears caught the sound of hurried footsteps without. Next moment the door was thrown open violently, and a figure, plentifully daubed in mud, panted on the threshold.

"What in Heaven's name has happened?" jerked Haverswood, leaping from his chair.

For a moment the travel-stained figure, in the uniform of an inspector of police, gasped for breath. Blood streamed from numerous cuts on his hands and face.

"The game's up!" he spattered hysterically at last.

Haverswood leaped forward, and caught the fellow as he reeled. With a savage nod to the Chakenhams to shut the door, Haverswood half-dragged the spent man to a near-by settee. Then he splashed out a liberal dose of spirit and forced Billenter to swallow it.

"Now, what's the trouble?" asked Haverswood grimly.

Sir Raston Billenter glared like a terror-stricken animal at his three associates.

"The raid went off according to rehearsal until we were coming away," he panted. "Then a whole crowd of real police turned up and overpowered us—"

Haverswood swore violently. The twins crouched back against the table, their faces pale and frightened.

"How did they tumble to the game?" snapped Haverswood. "How did you escape? What happened to Relland and Buxton—"

"I don't know," panted Billenter, replying to the questions in turn. "I made a jump for it through a plate-glass window; look at me. Relland had handcuffs on him when I saw him last. Buxton was in the strong-room under the chloroform, as arranged."

Again an oath escaped Haverswood.

"Have you been followed here?" he followed up.

Billenter shook his head.

"I got a lift from Stapleton from a carter!" he gasped. "Told him I was on important police work. Dropped me about two miles from here—"

"And then?" snapped Haverswood.

"I walked—roundabout route," added Billenter.

"Hadh't we better clear?" said Thomas Chakenham, licking his dry lips. "The police may be here at any moment, and—"

"Shut up, you snivelling dolt!" cursed Haverswood. "There's no need for panic yet. Let's keep cool."

All the same for that, Haverswood wiped a stream of perspiration from his forehead.

"Have you any reason to suppose that the police know of this rendezvous?" he asked Billenter.

"None!" replied Billenter. "But I don't like it. The way the cops swooped down made me feel that they knew of the raid from beginning to end."

"Lamonte!" said Haverswood suddenly. "Perhaps that poor mutt blew the gaff to them before we bumped him off!"

Billenter shrugged.

"If we didn't know for a fact that Ferrers Locke was dead and gone, I'd say that he had had a hand in this."

Haverswood sneered.

"Ferrers Locke! Poof! Why they make such a fuss of the fellow I never could understand. He didn't make much of his last case, anyway."

"Mr. Haverswood, I beg to differ!"

The four men froze into rigidity as that voice fell upon their ears. Like beings mesmerised, they saw the big door swing open to reveal Inspector Pycroft and Ferrers Locke himself. The detective had disposed of his Michael Kelly identity, there being no reason now why he should retain it.

The effect his appearance caused would have been ludicrous in more ordinary circumstances. Haverswood gripped the arms of his chair until his knuckles showed white, the Chakenham twins looked like a pair of corpses, Billenter collapsed in a dead faint.

"Greeting!" said Locke, with a slight bow. "Behold the man you thought your cheap Frenchman had poisoned; behold the man your equally cheap gangsters took for a ride a few hours ago—"

"Michael Kelly!" screamed Haverswood.

"The same!" smiled Locke. "My case is nearly finished. Gentlemen, you will pardon the inconvenience of handcuffs, but I fear they are necessary."

Pycroft advanced with the necessary bracelets. As he moved forward, Haverswood leaped from the chair, snatched it up in a frenzy, and flung it full at Ferrers Locke. Almost in the same moment he bounded for the long french window.

He was within a pace of it when the curtains suddenly divided, and there emerged a smiling youth with a gun.

"Not so fast!" said Jack Blake. "Stick 'em up!"

Haverswood came to a halt, his face flaming rage and surprise. Slowly his hands went aloft.

"Now turn and walk back!" snapped Drake. "Lively!"

Sullenly, Haverswood did as he was bid. The bracelets clicked home on his wrists. Then Locke and Drake returned their guns to their pockets.

"Smart work, Jack!" complimented Locke. "You didn't find the window difficult to force, what?"

"Easy, gov'nor!" grinned Drake. "I was inside this room, hidden behind the curtains, about a couple of secs before you arrived."

"I should have said very smart work, my lad," added Locke, with a twinkle in his eyes. Then to Pycroft: "Get them away. We've only one more man to round up now. I'll wait for him."

"Buxton?" jerked Pycroft.

"The one and only," returned Locke. "Unless I'm mistaken, he'll phone here directly."

The prisoners exchanged glances. Haverswood's face was pale and drawn; his eyes glimmered like points of steel. In one evening his life, his freedom, his career as a gangster had been taken from him.

He burst into a maniacal tirade against the man who had brought him to this pass, and in the midst of it the telephone whirred.

Locke jumped to the receiver.

His lips framed the name of Buxton to Pycroft, who stood near. But Haverswood read that lip message, too, and quickly atop of his discovery his voice boomed out with the full power of his lungs behind it.

"Keep away, Buxton! Ferrers Locke! Trapped!"

"Silence him!" snapped Locke, and Pycroft shoved a big, broad hand over Haverswood's mouth, successfully stifling further cries. But the message of warning had been conveyed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Locke's voice rose impatiently as he barked into the transmitter. Then he turned to Pycroft. "The blighter's rung off!"

Buxton's Last Chance!

MARCHANT BUXTON slammed home the receiver as Haverswood's voice filtered through the telephone instrument. His face had blanched, his hands were trembling. Mechanically he repeated the warning his accomplice in crime had passed on to him.

"Keep away, Buxton! Ferrers Locke! Trapped!"

Perspiration streamed across Buxton's forehead.

"Ferrers Locke!" he muttered, in a croaked voice that was strangely unlike his own. "Ferrers Locke! But the man's dead!"

There was a lurking fear in his heart, however, that the detective was very much alive. Why Haverswood's warning otherwise? Keep away! Trapped!

The warning dinned in his brain and began to panic him. From the Duke of Stapleton's servants he had heard of the double raid of police at Stapleton Castle, and of the subsequent arrest of the first band of policemen. From the duke himself he had received profuse apologies for the rough treatment he had received in the old aristocrat's house—apologies and thanks for what he had done.

For what he had done—

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WHAT'S GONE BEFORE.

BILL HARTLEY, a six-foot edition of brawn and muscle, with flaming red hair, is "sent down" from Oxford. Through the help of Major Carstairs, an old friend, he is signed on by the Cashton Rangers F.C., only to find that Marchant Buxton, the man who had brought about his dismissal from the "Varsity, is the club's centre-forward. Buxton, who is also the leader of a gang of crooks, is determined to ruin Bill, but Ferrers Locke intervenes. Buxton appoints a member of the gang to poison the detective. The dastardly plot fails, but Locke causes it to be known that he has been killed. Meanwhile, in the guise of Michael Kelly, the criminologist gets a job at the Tindean Film Studios, from where he procures two drums of films. After a big match with Stapleton, the Rangers' team, including Buxton, go to the Duke of Stapleton's ancestral home as his guests. During the reception the Buxton gang, disguised as policemen, ransack the treasures of Stapleton Castle. Ferrers Locke, accompanied by a squad of picked men of the Force, arrives and rounds up the gang with the exception of one who makes good his escape.

(Now read on.)

Buxton had been hard put to it to restrain his laughter. The old fool of a duke had never guessed the truth. It was obvious he didn't know the part that Buxton had played in the raid, or the signal of the three green flashes he had sent out into the night.

The duke, none the worse for his experience, and very much relieved to know that his family jewels were still in safe keeping, had almost begged Buxton to stay and partake of his hospitality; but that hadn't suited Buxton's plan. His first thought was to get to his chambers and phone Sir Raston Billenter.

That had been easy enough. It was apparent that no suspicion attached to Buxton, but the arch-soundrel had been careful to take note of any possibility of police observation. The sergeant still on duty at the castle had allowed him to depart without any attempt at hindrance. In fact, he had been most affable and sympathetic over Buxton's rough handling by the bogus policemen.

No one had followed Buxton to his chambers, of that he was sure. He was safe. All the same for that, his mind was a wolter of anxiety, mixed with curiosity. How had the carefully arranged plan failed? Who had been responsible for it? Time and again Buxton had asked himself these questions on his way home, but he could not find a satisfactory answer. Only one thing he knew, and that was Sir Raston Billenter, in the guise of an inspector, had escaped. He would be able to tell him the news.

And now the news contained the disquieting discovery that Ferrers Locke was implicated. Ferrers Locke, supposed

dead. No wonder Buxton's hands shook as he poured himself out a stiff "bracer" from a crystal decanter.

Feverishly he reached the telephone again. This time he called up the number of a private aeroplane club, of which he was a member.

"Get my bus out!" he snapped into the transmitter. "I shall be along within a quarter of an hour. Fill up the tanks to capacity. Shove in the ballast; shan't be taking a passenger!"

He broke off into a snarl of impatient rage as the drome manager informed him that the meteorological experts had forecast dangerous weather for flying.

"Confound it, sir! Am I giving orders, or are you?" he bellowed. "I tell you I take off within a quarter of an hour. See to it!"

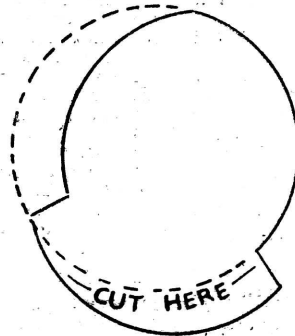
Bang went the receiver on its hooks again, and Buxton turned into his bed-room to commence a hurried packing. He brought a suitcase loaded with clothes into the lounge, and then turned to his wall safe.

From its hidden recess he brought to light a dazzling array of jewels, the result of many a burglarious raid, and laid them beside the half-filled suit-case. Then from a drawer in his bureau he took a loaded automatic and placed it on the table.

Then his heart missed a beat as he heard the piercing ring of the front door bell.

(Will Buxton's attempt to fly the country succeed, or will the police be in time to prevent him? See next week's fine instalment.)

SEE HOW IT'S DONE?



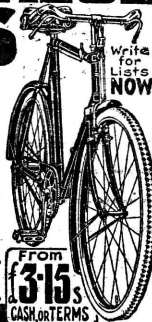
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