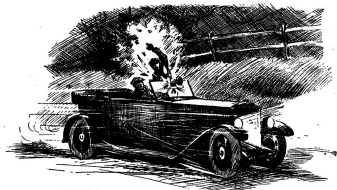


NEW STORIES OF ROOKWOOD SCHOOL EVERY WEEK!

# The GEM

2<sup>D</sup>





**CHAPTER I.**  
**Under the Tyrant!**

**C**LANG, clang, clang!  
 Winked by the garbled hand of old Taggins, the school porter, the bell announcing the finish of afternoon lesson-time rang out across the big hard-wood old quadrangle at St. Jim's.

In the Shell Form room the fellows glanced hopefully towards the master's door—yet their eyes were attracted to the grand mist of the Forum at St. Jim's were already joyfully passing from their respective Form-rooms.

Not so the Shell.  
 Ever since the recent departure of Mr. Linton, the previous master of the shell, from St. Jim's, that famous Form had been groaning under the iron heel of his successor. And the new master always made a point of being very tardy in releasing his unfortunate pupils.

The clanging of the bell had long died away, but still Mr. Pilbeam, as Mr. Linton's successor was known at St. Jim's, continued reading at his desk as if nothing had occurred.

The Shell shifted restlessly in their seats, and glared bitterly at their tyrant.

They had had a hard time of it, that Monday afternoon. As usual, Mr. Pilbeam had awarded lines right and left on the slightest pretext. Monty Leavitt, Handcock, the American junior, and Clifton Dunn, the junior from Canada's vast empire, had, in addition, felt the tyrant's cane at one time or another during the afternoon—again on a very slight pretext.

They all felt that now the bell had gone the man might at least let them go peacefully.

"The cetter!" breathed Reginald Talbot to Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell. "He always keeps us after the bell's gone on purpose."

Tom nodded gravely.  
 "If only they could find old Linton and bring him back!" he muttered. "It'll be ripping—"

The man at the master's desk glanced up. His lean face, with its dark, glittering eyes and thin lips, was malignant as he fastened his gaze upon Tom Merry.

"You were talking, Merry? What did you find so necessary to say to Talbot?"

Talbot gasped. Tom Merry's lips set. But he answered truthfully, without hesitation.

The Gipsy Lantern.—No. 1,232.

"I was saying how ripping it will be when Mr. Linton is found, sir, and returns to the school to be master of the Shell again," he said, in a quiet, steady tone.

The Shell fairly gaped. The new master's eyes gleamed malignantly. His lips set in a queer twisted line.

Mr. Linton had been dismissed from his post at the school, when the Head had had every reason to suppose how guilty of a great charge in connection with the theft of some money belonging to the school funds. Since that time, however, Mr. Linton's innocence had been established, however, and Dr. Holman, the Head, was leaving no stone unturned to find Mr. Linton and bring him back to St. Jim's, to resume his old position as master of the Shell.

But up till now all attempts to trace Mr. Linton's whereabouts had resulted in failure. He seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth after his sensational departure from St. Jim's.

When he was found—and in the end, no doubt, he would be found—he would be brought back to the school immediately. But until then his position would remain filled by the man who had succeeded him, Mr. Pilbeam, as the name of the new master of the Shell was supposed to be by everyone at St. Jim's.

The Shell, in fact the whole school, Dr. Holman included, would have been staggered had they known the truth about the supposed Mr. Pilbeam.

Not for a moment did anyone suspect that the new master was an impostor—that his real name was Hyde, and that he was the leader of a gang of rascals who had deliberately brought about Mr. Linton's dismissal on a false charge, in order that Hyde could take his place as master of the Shell. The gang had kidnapped the real new master, to keep him imprisoned in an old house near the school, while Hyde impersonated him.

There was an amusing reason behind the activities of Hyde and his associates.

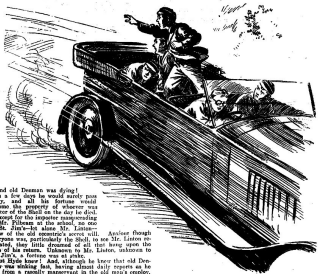
They knew that an elderly man named Danman, who had been a master of the Shell at St. Jim's long ago, before his retirement on inheriting a vast fortune, had left a will, by which all his wealth—more than half a million pounds—was to become the property of whoever was master of the Shell at St. Jim's on his death. Hyde knew of this, since he had been old Danman's private secretary for a time, until he had been dismissed from that post in disgraceful circumstances.

**SCHOOLBOYS versus GANGSTERS**  
**in midnight motor-car race!**  
**BATTLE WITH STORM to save**  
**wrecked liner!**  
**Thrill follows thrill in this gripping**  
**long complete yarn of**  
**TOM MERRY & CO. of St. Jim's.**

—IN DESPERATE EFFORT TO SECURE HALF A MILLION POUNDS!

# The ST. JIM'S FLYING SQUAD!

By  
**MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



And old Dezman was dying!  
 In a few days he would surely pass away, and all his fortune would become the property of whoever was master of the Shell on the day he died.

Except for the inspector masquerading as Mr. Pilbeam at the school, no one at St. Jim's—let alone Mr. Linton—knew of the old eccentric's secret will. Anyhow though everyone was, particularly the Shell, to see Mr. Linton estimated, they little dreamed of all that hung upon the date of his return. Unknown to Mr. Linton, unknown to St. Jim's, a fortune was at stake.

But Hyde knew! And, although he knew that old Dezman was sinking fast, having almost daily reports as he was from a recently marooned in the old man's employ, he knew that there was still a danger of Mr. Linton's being found and brought back to the school in time to inherit the Dezman fortune.

That fear haunted him.

It was partly because of it that his eyes glittered with such a baleful light now, as he glared, thin-lipped, at Tom Merry.

"How—how dare you?" he panted. "How dare you speak to me like that!"

"You asked me what I had said in Tallot, sir," retorted Tom grimly. "I told you the truth, of course."

Mr. Pilbeam—alias Hyde—seemed to choke.

"For this impudence, you shall write me out a thousand lines!" he snarled. "You hear—a thousand? You will bring them to me at the end of the week."

The Shell gasped. Tom Merry's face, however, showed no sign of his inward feelings as he sat down again.

A thousand lines would mean that all his evenings, and most of the Wednesday and Saturday half-holiday that

work, would be taken up with his staggering imposition. But he was not going to let the tyrant enjoy the night of his inward dining.

The bogus Mr. Pilbeam glared round the Form-room as if seeking further victims. There was not a sound to be heard as his glittering eyes swept over the Shell. They knew that the slightest chaffing of a foot, perhaps even a cough, would have brought a hundred lines at least.

"Dames!" rasped the new master.

The Shell fled from their places, and out of the Form-room, Manners and Lovelace and Handcock, Tom Merry's three studymates in Study No. 53, gathered round him sympathetically. So did Yalton and Kangaroo, the Australian junior, and several others.

"Hard choice, old chap!" muttered Lovelace gloomily.

"Tough luck, buddy!" agreed Handcock.

"A thousand lines! It's a bit thick!" growled Manners.

The Gas Lantern.—No. 1,212.

Tom Merry shrugged, and smiled in a twisted way. "Well, what can you expect from a rotter like that? But it's worth it, really, for the pleasure of having told him that we're looking forward so much to getting old Linton back, and seeing the best of him."

"We'll all give you a hand with those lines," cut in Talbot.

Tom shook his head. "No, thanks! Dace's risk it! Filibean's got an eye like a hawk for that sort of thing, you know. But thanks, awfully!"

"And to think we used to grumble over poor old Linton sometimes!" put in Clifton Dace ruefully. "Blessed if we knew when we were well off!"

"If only they could find him, and get him back!" Tom Merry's face was shadowed. "But they don't seem anywhere nearer finding the poor old boy than ever they were. It may be weeks before we hear him back at this rate—and till he comes we're stuck with this rotter as master of the Shell!"

"It's rotten!" granted Manners. The group of Shell fellows turned towards the Hall. The afternoon post had arrived during their absence, and already a crowd of fellows, juniors and seniors, were collecting their letters.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, the swell of St. Jim's, was standing near the letter-rack with Blake & Co., his share in Study No. 16 of the Fourth. At sight of the chums of the Shell, Arthur Augustus adjusted his famous monocle, and surveyed Tom Merry & Co. with a grin.

"Hallo, dear boys! How's the Shell gettin' on under the giddy tyrant?"

This supposed Mr. Filibean's iron regime was well known among the rest of the juniors.

"Naturally!" granted Talbot. "The man's an utter outsider. There'll be no pose for us until Linton's found."

He broke off. There had come a sudden breathless cry from Tom Merry.

Tom Merry had taken down a letter addressed to himself from the rack. He was glancing now, staring down at it as though he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"What's up?" asked Blake curiously. "What's such in the match, dear boy?" queried Arthur Augustus, with equal curiosity.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath. His eyes were dancing as he glanced round at his friends.

"Linton!" he ejaculated, in a voice that was wildly joyful. "It's Linton's writing! It's a letter from old Linton!"

## CHAPTER 2. FOUND!

"MY hat!" "From Linton! Honest!" "Are you sure? My giddy aunt—"

The next moment a wild chorus of cheering had broken out in the crowded Hall!

Drooping with excitement, the fellows crowded round Tom Merry as the captain of the Shell, with quivering fingers, ripped open the envelope, the handwriting on which he had recognised as that of the ex-master of the Shell.

"B-b-b Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, though a member of the Fourth, and therefore not so directly concerned as the Shell fellows, was looking as excited as anyone. So, indeed, were most of the Fourth. "G-g-west Scott! A little from Linton! There—then you'll know now where he is! You'll be able to write and tell him he's known to be in—out, dear boys, and have him brought back!"

"Go on!" cried Blake. "But Jove! Really, Blake—"

Tom Merry reached out the letter from the torn envelope and opened it breathlessly.

The address at the top was that of an hotel at Marlbridge. Tom Merry knew that Marlbridge was a small port on the South Coast, about a hundred and twenty miles from St. Jim's.

From the letter, written in Mr. Linton's neat handwriting, it was only too clear that the ex-master of the Shell had no idea at all that his whereabouts were being sought. He had evidently failed to notice the advertisements that had been put in the newspapers in an attempt to get into touch with him.

"Dear Merry.—Before leaving the country, I feel I must write to you, as captain of my old Form at St. Jim's, to thank you and all the members of the Shell for your great loyalty to me in the hour of my trouble. It will always be a grateful memory, to breathe its truth throughout the future—a future which is a grey one for me.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,232.

"I am innocent of the charge that has been made against me. That you have always believed, I know. But, despite my innocence, I am, of course, a ruined man. I have very little money; recent financial misfortunes have left me very poor. Consequently, my wish to leave England for good might have been impossible, but for a stroke of good fortune which has enabled me to make the acquaintance of a sea-captain—Captain March, of the *St. Niagara*, a cargo steamer which is due to sail from here at midday on Tuesday, for Australia. Captain March has been good enough to grant me a free passage on his vessel."

"Thanking you and your Form-fellows again, with much gratitude, for your loyalty to me, I shall always remain your sincere friend and old Form master—LINTON LINTON."

Tom Merry did not read the letter aloud. It held too much that was personal. He folded the sheet and thrust it back into the envelope, putting it in his pocket. He glanced round at the excited faces surrounding him with gleaming eyes.

"What does Linton say?" demanded Grundy of the Shell eagerly, before Tom Merry could speak.

"Where is he?" cried Kangaroo.

"He's at Marlbridge," answered Tom Merry quietly. "He has arranged to sail to-morrow, at midday, for Australia."

"My giddy aunt!" breathed Blake.

"To-morrow, midday!" Talbot's face was startled at the ejaculation broke from him. "That's less than twenty-four hours!"

"Yes," Tom Merry nodded. "We've got to stop him! He's sailing on a cargo steamer, the *Niagara*—"

"Great pip!" cried Kangaroo. "That'll be pretty well a ten or eleven weeks' voyage; that! If he isn't stopped, he can't be brought back for months!"

"No," Tom Merry nodded again. "Not for months! But he's going to be stopped!"

"He must be!" gasped Crooks of the Shell. "We can't stick having Filibean over us all that time!"

"My hat, go!"

Already Tom Merry was pushing his way towards the stairs. Manners, Lowther, Hankcock, and Talbot followed him.

"Come on!" cried Tom Merry. "We'll go straight to the Head and tell him!"

"What's in?"

"I guess so!"

And leaving a babel of excited talk in the Hall, Tom Merry & Co. and Reginald Talbot, hurried up the stairs. On the landing above, Tom Merry turned to his chums with gleaming eyes.

"There's precious little time, you chaps. Midday to-morrow—less than twenty-four hours! I propose we ask the Head if we can go ourselves, to-night, to Marlbridge, to find Linton and bring him back to-morrow morning!"

"Good egg!" breathed Morrie Lowther.

The five Shell fellows hurried on towards the Head's study.

In the hall below, a tall figure had come striding into view, in top and gown. It was the new master of the Shell. As he turned towards the stairs he passed, his eyes glittering round over the suddenly silent juniors.

"Not so much noise here!" rapped the impostor harshly.

Grundy stepped forward. Grundy often rushed in where angels feared to tread!

"I expect you'd like to hear the news, sir," grinned Grundy. "Tom Merry has just had a letter from Mr. Linton! They've got his address now, and so I expect he'll be back at the school jolly soon to take his old job back!"

There was a triumphant note in Grundy's voice as he surveyed the tyrant of the Shell with a rugged grin on his face.

The effect of his words on the new master was extraordinary to the assembled juniors.

Filibean's face went deathly white, his eyes seemed to fill with utter consternation. Naturally, the juniors supposed the new master would not be glad to have to give up his post so soon after taking it, though no doubt by his contract he would be recompensed with a full term's wages. But they were amazed by the horror and dismay that had leapt into his face at Grundy's words.

He seemed to stagger as if from a blow.

"A—a letter from Mr. Linton?" he stammered.

"That's it, sir," nodded Grundy, staring at the man curiously. "And, as you know, the Head's said that as soon as old Linton—I mean, Mr. Linton—has been found, he's to get his job back—"

Most of the fellows held their breath. Knowing the new master, they expected Grundy to "get it in the neck!"

But, instead, the new master turned abruptly and hurried



up the stairs, leaving the juniors in the Hall staring after him in amazement.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Barboott. "I thought you were in for five hundred lines, at least, for talking to aim like that, Grandy!"

"Oh, rats!" said Grandy loftily. "I'm not afraid of Filibees! But, I say, didn't he look rummy? Anyhow, would you think the idea of losing his job here would be a blessed fortune to him, instead of just a master's usual screw?"

"Grandy little dressed him ever exactly he had his the truth! He must be stopped! At any cost! I've got to stop him before getting back to St. Jim's!"

The words were echoing in the lecturer's brain as he hurried, white-faced, to his study. The thing that he had dreaded had happened at last—and with the old man whose business being in the hall was still living!

Mr. Linton had been found!

CHAPTER 3.

A Desperate Course!

"NO, I cannot permit it."

Dr. Holmes, the dignified headmaster of St. Jim's, shook his head thoughtfully.

His face seemed to have grown strangely younger during the last few minutes, since Tom Merry & Co. and Talbot had arrived in his study with the news of Mr. Linton's whereabouts.



Manners left a cheery word under on his collar, dragging him to a standstill. "Help!" he begged. "Hurry!"

The news was as wonderful to the old Head as it had been to the Shell fellows.

Ever since the discovery of Mr. Linton's innocence Dr. Holmes had been weighed down by the knowledge that he had, though involuntarily, been unjust enough to disgrace an innocent man. Now, at last, he could right that great wrong.

But despite his joy at the news, he had shaken his head when Tom Merry had eagerly put forward his request that he and his chums might be allowed to go that very night to Marlbridge, to tell Mr. Linton that his innocence was established, and to bring him back next morning in triumph to St. Jim's.

"I cannot permit that," the Head repeated firmly. "I understand your feelings, my boys," he went on smilingly. "But I cannot see my way to allowing you to proceed to Marlbridge to-night—you are, after all, only junior boys. Besides, the last train will have gone—there are not many during the day—"

"We could have hired a car, sir," put in Tom Merry quickly.

Again Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"No, I cannot allow it. I shall send Kildare by the early morning train. The ship by which Mr. Linton has proposed to voyage to Australia does not sail till midday, he tells me. Kildare will be in plenty of time."

"Suppose the ship sails earlier than expected, sir?" broke in Mincey Lovelace desperately. "It's not as if it was a liner—you can't always be sure when a cargo boat will leave—"

"There is nothing in Mr. Linton's letter to indicate that there is any chance of the ship sailing after that of the time stated," said the Head, a trifle impatiently. "Yes, I shall send Kildare by the first train to-morrow—"

"But, sir—" began Tom Merry pleadingly.

"I do not wish to have to repeat my refusal of your request, Merry," said the Head, in final tones.

"Very good, sir," murmured Tom glumly.

The five juniors left the study rather less joyfully than they had entered it. The Head's refusal to let them drive to Marlbridge, to Mr. Linton, had been a blow to them all.

"Rotten!" grumbled Manners.

"Oh, well!" Talbot shrugged. "Kildare's sure to be in time, I suppose. Linton will be here to-morrow. On Wednesday, I should think, he ought to be taking the Shell again—"

He broke off, as a tall, harrying figure turned the corner of the passage, striding with oddly white face towards the Head's study. It was Mr. Filibees, and did not seem to notice the juniors as he hurried past them.

"I say, Filibees looks pretty rummy!" muttered Lovelace, staring after the new master. "He must have heard!"

"I guess he's sick at hearing about it," grinned Handcock cheerfully. "He's going to lose his job."

"Thank goodness!" put in Lovelace gratefully. They turned into the Shell passage. Tom glanced at Talbot.

"Come in and have tea with us," he suggested.

"Thanks!"

Despite their disappointment over the matter of going to Marlbridge, tea was a cheery meal in Sandy No. 10 that afternoon. The knowledge that before long Mr. Linton would be back at St. Jim's was enough to fill any Shell fellow with high spirits. Tom Merry alone of the five still seemed sad and thoughtful.

"Cheer up, Tommy!" grinned Manners. "Have a smoke!"

Tom Merry helped himself to sardines. But there was still a thoughtful frown on his good-looking face.

"I don't like it," he said abruptly. "Leaving it till tomorrow to fetch Linton. I dunno why—it may be pretty fooling of me, but I've got a sort of a hunch we oughtn't to waste any time at all. Suppose that ship sails earlier than expected? Linton may have got the time of sailing wrong. And if once he sails on the Niagara, he can't get off and come—he'll have to stick on board all the way to Australia, even though they wireless the news to him that he's wanted back."

"That's so," nodded Manners. "But what can we do? The Head's made up his mind—"

"I know," Tom nodded. "He doesn't seem to realize the risk of an missing Linton, even now. I suppose he'll wire to Linton's hotel; but suppose Linton's gone aboard the ship already, without telling the hotel people where he's gone? That's quite likely, and if so, he won't get the wire."

"My hat!" ejaculated Talbot. "When you look at it that way—"

"It's the way I look at it," said Tom grimly. "I'm jolly sure someone ought to go to Marlbridge to-night!"

"Well, it's no good telling the Head that. We've told him once," said Manners, with gloomed face.

"No. But suppose somebody went to Marlbridge to-night, in spite of the Head—no as not to run any risks?" breathed Tom Merry, glancing round the table at his chums with gleaming eyes.

"But who?" ejaculated Manners, staring at him.

"Why—us?"

Tom Merry's quiet words dropped like a bombshell. His chums stared at him dumbly.

"It would mean a big row when we got back," went on Tom, in the same steady tone. "But the worst we could get would be a flogging, and I think it would be well worth the chance of a flogging, to make dead sure we got to Linton in time to stop him going to Australia—and leaving us with Pilsbeam as master of the Shell for the next few months."

"My hat!" breathed Monty Lovelker. "You mean—"

"I mean," cut in Tom grimly, "that I propose we break out of the dorm to-night, go over to Waterloo, and hire a powerful car, with a driver, and—"

For a few seconds there was a tense silence in the No. 18. Then, one by one, Manners and Lovelker, Handcock and Talbot breathed their assent. It was a desperate course; but they were ready.

"I'm game," asserted Manners.

"Count me in, too," came from Cyrus K. Handcock.

"Good eye!" said Tom Merry laconically.

Four excited faces stared into his own.

But the chums of the Shell would have been a great deal more excited still, had they known of the deadly danger into which they were going to run, by setting out to bring Mr. Linton back to St. Jim's.

They did not dream of the secret enemies who would step at nothing to prevent them from succeeding in that undertaking.

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Hyke Talbot a Head!

**M**UMMMMMMMMMM  
Talbot opened his eyes slowly, to find a hand shaking his shoulder. He sat up, puzzled for a moment, as he stared with sleepy eyes into the gloom of the dormitory. He made out a shadowy figure beside his bed, and recognised it as that of Tom Merry. And then Talbot remembered!

The sleepiness cleared from his brain in a flash. He slipped quickly out of bed, as usual.

From across the quad came the tones of the school clock, striking eleven o'clock. The deep notes were half drowned by a howling wind that was howling against the windows.

In the gloom, Monty Lovelker, Harry Manners, and Cyrus K. Handcock were already dressing silently. Tom Merry and Talbot began to draw on their clothes in the same careful silence.

They did not intend to let any other of the Shell fellows know of their daring plan. Some of the others might have wanted to come with them—and too many cooks are liable to spoil the broth!

In five minutes they were ready. In another three they were dropping noiselessly from a small window at the back of the School House. They turned towards the quad.

A bright moon was shining between racing clouds, making it dangerous work to cross the quad. A light was shining in the Head's study, and another is that of the new master of the Shell. If they were seen now, they might be stopped *van ja!*

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry. "We'll shin over the wall like cats!"

Tom Merry's assistant.—No. 1, 172.

"O.K.," nodded Handcock.

Keeping as well as they could in the shadow of the wall, they hurried along by the School House towards the dark shape of the chapel. The wind beat in their faces—it looked like being a stormy night.

It was a long while since Tom Merry had broken bounds by night. It was not a thing he liked doing—only the strongest of reasons, such as his burning conviction that not an hour should be lost in finding Mr. Linton, would have induced him to take such a desperate course.

But now that his mind was made up that he was doing right, he had no uncertain doubts or hesitation. It was for old Linton's sake!

"Think the garage will be open?" muttered Manners. "Sure to be," nodded Tom. "If it isn't, we can walk 'em up, anyway."

Cyrus K. Handcock, the son of a New York shoe-making millionaire, had a motor-car of his own. But it was only a two-seater; and though Handcock managed to crowd an amazing number of his friends into it on occasion, for the long run to Marlbridge Tom Merry & Co. felt that something smaller was a necessity.

"Quiet, you chaps!" breathed Tom. "We've got to pass Pilsbeam's window!"

A faint light was streaming through the curtains of the new master's window, lighting up the gravel. The master of the Shell had his study on the ground floor—and it was quite clear that he was still up!

Treading like cats, the five juniors crept past the lighted window, scarcely breathing.

With reasonably luck, they would have got by unobserved. But luck was against them!

Old Tapples had evidently been sweeping there that afternoon, and he had carelessly left his broom propped against the wall. Hidden in the shadow just beyond the window, it failed to catch the eye of Monty Lovelker, who was leading the cautious procession. His foot caught against it, almost tripping him up. His feet made a scuffling noise in the gravel, and the broom clattered noisily. The new master the curtain of the new master's window had been drawn sharply back, and a long figure, black against the light, stared out at the five juniors as they crept by.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Lovelker.

There was a sharp exclamation from the cornered figure in the room. He dragged up the window, staring out with glittering eyes.

The impostor had learnt from the Head of Tom Merry & Co.'s anxiety to be allowed to drive over to Marlbridge that very evening to find Mr. Linton. He had been relieved to know that the Head had refused their request; the fact that not till the following morning would Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, be sent to Marlbridge, gave the bogus Mr. Pilsbeam some time in which to hatch a scheme for preventing the return of Mr. Linton to the school even now. He had been peeping his study, deep in anxious thought, seeking for a plan, when the scuffle from outside his window had arrested his attention.

And sight of Tom Merry & Co. and Talbot, in caps and coats, standing past the window at an hour when they should have been asleep in the Shell dormitory, made the impostor realize in a flash that despite the Head's refusal to permit the journey, Mr. Linton's loyal supporters were taking the law into their own hands and were on their way even now to face Marlbridge!

"What—what are you doing here?" he gasped hoarsely. "Why are you not in your dormitory? How—how dare you! I shall have you flogged for this! I—I—"

"Come on, you chaps!" panted Tom Merry. There was a desperate note in his voice. "Bunk for it!"

The five chums of the Shell turned to bolt!

There was a choking exclamation from the figure at the window. At all costs, the tyrant of the Shell was determined to stop the traitors carrying out their plan of driving to Marlbridge that night!

"Stop!" he almost screamed.

With a leap, he was over the sill, dropping into the quad.

"Run!" gasped Talbot hoarsely.

But their pursuer was a tall man, and his long legs covered the ground at a tremendous speed. Tom Merry & Co. reached the shadow of the shaped wall; but then Manners felt a steady hand fasten on his collar, dragging him to a standstill.

"Hold!" he panted. "Reverse!"

Tom, Lovelker, Handcock, and Talbot came to a breathless stop and turned. They saw Manners struggling in the grasp of the tall grizzled figure of the new master, and their faces set in desperate lines.

"Let him go!" shouted Tom Merry, his voice grim and hoarse.

In the dim light, the eyes of the master of the Shell could

be seen to glitter balefully as he held his struggling captive with a steady hand.

"I order you all back to the House!" he cried thickly. "You shall all be hanged for this!"

"Let him go!" repeated Tom Merry menacingly. "If you don't, we'll make you!"

"I guess so!" snapped Handcock.

"Bless!" gasped Masters, half-choked by the hold upon his collar.

"You think you are going to Marlbridge to-night?" exclaimed the new master harshly. "You shall not go!" His eyes glittered with a malignant triumph.

"We're going!" painted Tom Merry. "And you shan't stop us! We're going to old Linton! And when we bring him back, you'll be hooted out of St. Jim's, you rotter! Let Masters go—before we make you!"

"If you dare to lay hands on me—" came the snarling answer.

He got no further! Led by Tom Merry, Masters' comrades hurled themselves at his captor.

It was no time to stand on ceremony with the tyrant of the Shell, even though he was a master of St. Jim's.

The new master struck fiercely at Tom, and Tom staggered back. But the weight of the other three sent the tall figure flying! He fell in a sprawling, gaping heap on the gravel and Masters was free!

"Run for it!" yelled Merry Lowther.

And ran they did! In a few seconds, while the raging, livid figure of the new master scrambled up, the drums of the Shell were beating for the top of the wall behind the dark chapel. They swung over it and dropped into the road.

Hyde heard their footsteps dying away in the distance. He stood trembling with rage and consternation, fighting for breath, his gown waving round his legs in the wind.

"My heavens—they're gone!"

Somewhere across the quad a window opened sharply. Hyde turned, staring up at the outlined figure of Dr. Holmes silhouetted against the light within his study.

The Head was peering across towards the chapel.

"Bless my soul!" The Head's voice was startled and bewildered. "Mr. Fitzbeam, is it not?"

"Yes!" Hyde turned towards the window, white-faced.

"Dr. Holmes! They've gone—"

"Who have gone?" asked the Head in great bewilderment.

"I—I fail to understand! What was all this noise I heard?"

"Merry, Lowther, and the other three—the five boys who asked your permission to go to-night to Marlbridge?" painted Hyde.

"I found them out here intending to break boards! I tried to stop them, and—and they assaulted me! They have gone—to Marlbridge!"

The Head was startled—then his face set in grim lines.

"They shall be punished most severely!" he gasped.

"But can't they be stopped?" cried Hyde excitedly.

"They must be stopped! Surely there is time—"

"It is obviously impossible to stop them now, I am afraid," said the Head, staring down at the master rather oddly.

"My dear Mr. Fitzbeam, guess though their offence is, there is surely no cause for your excessive excitement!"

Hyde got control of himself with an effort. He must not betray his consternation to the Head, he realized.

"I—I—" he stammered. "I feel upset, that is all. They assaulted me!"

"They shall answer for everything when they return," said the Head in stern tones. "In the meantime, I fear that there is nothing to be done. You had better return to your room, Mr. Fitzbeam. I—I confess I am staggered to know that they assaulted you! The boys in question are usually among the best-behaved in the junior school! I can only conclude that their excessive loyalty to Mr. Linton carried them away, when they heard they might be prevented from carrying out their disgraceful decision to ignore my orders!"

There was, perhaps, the faintest touch of irony in the Head's tone. There was very little that went on at St. Jim's which the old Head did not hear about sooner or later; and he knew well enough that the supposed Mr. Fitzbeam was a harsh taskmaster, whom the Shell were keenly anxious to see replaced by their old master, Mr. Linton.

And in his heart he rather doubted the story of that "assault!" Dr. Holmes did not like the new master.

Without a word, Hyde turned and strode towards his own room. The Head's window closed.

"They must be stopped!"

Hyde was telling himself that again and again as he climbed swiftly back over the sill into his study.

"At any cost—"

A sudden gleam came into his eyes. He sprang to the telephone; and in less than a minute he was in communica-

tion with his fellow accomplices at the gang's headquarters—the old house near Wayland Moor, where the real Mr. Fitzbeam was a prisoner while Hyde impersonated him at St. Jim's.

"That you, Flack?"

He spoke into the transmitter in a low, excited tone. "Hyde speaking. Listen—Linton's found! He's at Marlbridge! He's due to sail to-morrow for Australia! If he does, we win, because he could never get back here to take his job again before Duncan dies, and the fortune's ours. But five boys from here are on their way to Marlbridge now—to stop him sailing. They'll hire a car in Wayland and drive to the coast. But you've got to stop 'em—you and Gilling. At any cost. Take the first car and follow them. Catch them on the road if you can—if not, they'll go to the Fairfax Hotel at Marlbridge. Get ahead and stop them getting to Linton!"

He hung up the receiver with a shaking hand. A thin smile appeared on his lips, as he stood listening to the wind howling against the window.

"Flack'll do it!" he muttered, with gleaming eyes. "I can trust Flack! They'll never get to Linton, with Flack on their trail!"

## CHAPTER 5.

### A Mile a Minute!

"SIXTY," by Jove!" breathed Monty Lowther. With Cyrus K. Handcock at the wheel, the big open car, which the owners of the Shell had hired in Wayland without any difficulty half an hour before, was speeding down the long, white concrete road at breakneck speed!

Half an hour out of Wayland—and already twenty-five miles had been covered! Monty Lowther, his eyes on the speedometer, saw the speed drop a fraction as the car swept round a wide, banked curve. Then as the straight opened out before them—a ribbon of white between dark woods—Handcock's foot pressed down on the accelerator again, and the quivering speedometer needle mounted again to sixty.

"A whole support taken by—Marlbridge, sixty miles! At this breakneck speed they would reach the park in less than two hours—before two o'clock in the morning, for it was well only a quarter-past midnight. And the road, the juncos knew, was good all the way.

"Keep it up, Handcock, old boy!" muttered Tom Merry, seated at the American's side.

"Here, ladly!" grinned the son of the chewing-gum king.

"Guess I can't squeeze more than sixty out of this old sewing-machine, but maybe sixty'll do!"

Masters, in the back seat with Reginald Talbot, glanced back.

Far down the long road behind them the headlights of another car could be seen, gradually creeping up to overtake them.

"Here's somebody else in a hurry!" grinned Masters.

They raced on, the wind streaming past them in a chill blast. Dark clouds were rolling up across the sky.

Again Masters glanced back. The car behind was quite close upon them now. Handcock, with a glance into the driving-mirror edged well over the side of the road to allow the overtaking car to pass. In another two minutes it had drawn alongside—evidently a car considerably more powerful than their own.

As the other car swept past Tom Merry noticed a dim face, that of a man with a broken nose, staring out from under the hood of them. He gave an exclamation of surprise as he saw that the man was apparently signalling to them to stop.

"Must be something wrong!" he exclaimed to Handcock.

"Better stop and see what they want, I suppose!"

"O.K.," nodded Handcock.

He slowed down, and the other car shot ahead, drawing into the edge of the road in front of them. Handcock brought the juncos' car to a standstill, and the other stopped two yards or so in front. A lanky figure, in a heavy leather driving-coat and a cloth cap, jumped out, followed by another smaller man. They came hurrying back along the grass at the roadside.

"What's up?" shouted Tom Merry.

He received an answering answer.

The man in the leather coat, halting in the light of the headlights, drew out a heavy suitcase and levelled it at the occupants of the juncos' car.

"Hop out!"

The grim command came like the lash of a whip. The juncos stared at the man and his fat-like companion in utter stupefaction. When Handcock's voice answered, with a laconic drawl,

"Go!" he exclaimed. "This is mighty like bats' home in the States! What's the big idea, old boss?"

"Never you mind what the idea is! Hop out!" the man growled. He made a threatening movement with his automatic. "Look sleepy!"

Mossy Lowther was next to the door in the front seat. He glanced helplessly at Tom Merry and Handcock. For a moment he met Handcock's eyes. And the look that flashed to him from Handcock said, as plain as words: "Stick tight!"

The next moment Handcock had let in the clutch, pressed down the accelerator, and set the car leaping at the top man on the roadside!

His action was so sudden and unexpected that he nearly ran them down. Only with a fraction of a second to spare did they leap aside to save themselves. The car sprang like a living thing on to the grass verge, its exhaust roaring out. With a magnificent piece of steering, Handcock drove the leaping machine between the stationary car and the ditch, over the grass, and swung back on to the road. With the accelerator hard down under his foot, they shot away down the road.

"Oh, good work!" gasped Talbot.

Above the roar of the exhaust the crack of an automatic came to their ears. A bullet whined over their heads. Then they had swept round a broad curve, and Manners and Talbot, staring back, saw the standing car vanish from sight.

"They'll be after us in a minute!" gasped Manners.

"Bare!" muttered Handcock. "Well, I guess we'll give those guys a run for their money, anyhow! Yes, sir!"

"What on earth was their game?" cried Lowther excitedly.

"Road handle, I suppose—didn't see we were schoolboys, perhaps, and wanted our money?" said Tom Merry grimly. They leapt down the road at flying speed, and swept round another bend, shooting over a humped bridge at such speed that the car left the ground. Had Handcock not had tight hold of the wheel, they might have crashed. But they took the road again safely and roared on.

That the car behind was faster they knew. If the men who had tried to stop them for some mysterious reason should make up their minds to follow them, it could not be long before they were overtaken again.

And it was certain enough that the men were following! The distant headlights of a car came shooting into sight after a while racing after them.

"Here they come!" breathed Talbot.

Handcock's foot pressed down a fraction farther yet on the accelerator. But the needle of the speedometer would not rise appreciably above sixty.

The car behind they were being overhauled.

Tom Merry's eyes were searching anxiously ahead, looking for a village on the road. But the road was a new arterial one, avoiding nearly all towns and villages, utterly lonely; there seemed no help to be had.

Neither did there appear to be any side roads down which to turn while their pursuers were out of sight round one of the bends, so that they might hide, without lights, while the other car went past. They could only keep on with every possible ounce of speed!

And the car behind was drawing nearer with every passing minute.

Crack!

Again a bullet whined past them.

"There?" Mossy Lowther drew a sharp breath, and smiled in a twisted way. "They mean business!"

"Yes, that's a shot across the bows, so to speak, to make us stop!" muttered Tom. "Well, we aren't stopping till we have to!"

The air streamed past them, icy and chill, as Tom sang another anxious glance over his shoulder.

A hundred yards behind them, down the moonlit road, the flaming headlights of the pursuing car were already drawing on to the right of the road to be ready to pass them.

But this time Handcock did not mean to let them pass!

If their pursuers once succeeded in getting in front of them it would not be difficult for its occupants to force the junior's car to a standstill. And if that happened they would be at the mercy of the armed second car. At all costs Handcock meant to prevent them from getting in front.

He swung out across the road, in the path of the other car, as it came clearing up to pass them on the right of the road.

The following car was forced to drop back. With snatching acceleration it tried to come through on the inside berth, while Handcock was away on the right. But the American passenger saw the quick maneuver and swerved back in front of the pursuers once more.

It was a desperate battle of wits and driving skill.

"Good man!" gasped Tom Merry.

THE END—No. 172.

At that breakfast speed the two cars, flushing down the long, straight road at sixty miles an hour, the flaming headlights close behind their rear number-plates, Tom Merry knew that the slightest thing might mean death to the occupants of either of the racing cars. But he saw that Handcock's hands were steady on the driving-wheel, the American junior's face cool and set.

They could trust Handcock to see them through, if it were humanly possible.

Again and again the car behind, swerving to alternate sides of the road, strove to slip past and gain the lead. But Handcock, his eyes on the driving-mirror every other moment, out-manoeuvred them each time; and as last their pursuers dropped back a little, as if giving up the attempt to squeeze past.

Crack!

Above the thundering exhaust of their flying car the juniors heard the sinister crack of the automatic.

A bullet came ripping along the running-board and slammed into the front fender-guard of one of the hurrying wheels.

Manners gave a sudden, breathless cry.

His foot had kicked against something lying on the floor of the car. Gropping down, he had discovered a heavy jack, and in a moment a flash of inspiration had leapt into his brain.

He snatched up the jack and rose to his feet, sweeping, as the car flew on, curving round a sweeping bend at more than sixty miles an hour down an incline. His face, set and grim as he stared back, was lit by the blazing lamps of the car behind.

"Sit down, you fool!" panted Talbot.

Talbot did not understand Manners' plan; all that Talbot knew was that Manners was exposing himself recklessly to the next flying bullet that was sure to come in a few moments. The men in the pursuing car, recklessly determined, it was clear, to stop them, were certainly firing at their tyres. But as that mad speed firing was doubtless difficult; they had already seen how weak of the mark the bullets of their mysterious enemies were being.

"Down!" panted Talbot again. "What the dickens—"  
Handcock had kicked against the heavy jack high above his head. The next moment he had with it hurled through the air with all his strength, full in the path of the firing headlights that raced behind.

Out of the darkness beyond the blue of light from the great twin lamps there came a shattering crash.

The pursuing car had been some distance behind them; the men were keeping back in case the car they had been firing at should crash; they would need room in which to cross the wreckage. But, racing along at sixty as it was, it hurled clean into Manners' hard-fang mouth.

Talbot, staring back, white-faced, saw the big headlights swing suddenly sideways as the powerful car shuddered violently, evidently quite out of control. The flying jack means have struck the windscreen, shattering it; and whether the driver had been injured or not, it had been enough to make him lose control of the wheel. The shuddering car hauled itself at the high bank on the left of the road; its four wheels shot up the bank, the headlights blazing skywards. High into the air the car went hurtling.

"My heavens!" breathed Talbot, with horror in his voice.

Through the men in the wrecked car had, to all intents and purposes, tried to murder them, the sight of the car shooting skywards over the high roadside bank turned Talbot's heart cold.

Manners had dropped back into his seat, white-tipped. His eyes, too, were filled with horror. He had no wish to have the death of the two second car on his hands.

But luck was with the occupants of the other car.

On the further side of the high bank ran a deep canal, the still water gleaming cold in the moonlight. With a terrific splash, the car dropped sideways and vanished beneath the surface, headlights ablaze to the last. And Manners, with a sigh of relief, saw two dark heads appear and go swimming to the bank.

Five seconds later they had raced away round another curve, and the scene of the disaster to their agonized pursuers' car vanished abruptly from their sight.

Talbot's eyes met Manners'. Their faces were white as death. But now that they knew that both the occupants of the wrecked car had survived the crash into the canal the colour was returning to their cheeks.

Talbot smiled shakily.

"My giddy aunt!" he muttered hoarsely. "So that's that!"

Handcock alone of the five had failed to see that thrilling crash into the canal; he had been far too busy driving. But Tom Merry and Mossy Lowther had seen it, and Tom told Handcock what had occurred in swift, breathless sentences. The American junior grinned.

"I guess a cold shower won't damage a couple of tough

guy like those two geebs," he said coolly. A thoughtful frown came into his face as he drove. "But I guess it's queer how mighty keen they were to get us. They must have been after our dough, sure! But how did they figure out to get a worth-while haul from a bunch of college boys?"

"Yes, it's queer all right," muttered Tom Merry. "But there can't be any other reason."

The car roared on through the broken moonlight. Some miles farther on they came to a sleeping village. The church clock overlooking the village street was striking the hour—six o'clock. There was a cottage labelled "Police," but they did not stop. They felt quite sure that it would only be a waste of time to report the queer, thrilling chase to the village policeman, who would be sure to keep them a long time basking details. By the time the mass could get to the scene of the crash the two eccentrics would undoubtedly have got well away.

So they roared through the village without stopping, and on towards the roaring coast. The moon had vanished now among the great storm-clouds that had rattled across the sky.

Nearly another hour of flying through the dark country-side passed, the chill night air streaming past them as they ate up the miles. And then at last they saw the street-lights of Marblehead ahead of them, and could smell the salt tang of the sea.

Marblehead was a mile or so inland up an ordinary—a queer, old-world little town of narrow streets. They stopped at a corner to ask a policeman the whereabouts of the Fairfax Hotel, and in another few minutes they were drawing up before a small, inexpensive-looking establishment in the centre of the town, its hanging sign creaking in the stormy wind.

"Mr. Linton?" queried the night porter. "Yes, he was here. Left this afternoon. No, he left no forwarding address. A pity he didn't. A telegram came for him after he'd gone."

Tom Merry turned to the other four. His lips were set.

"What did I tell you? He's gone on board to-night, he never got the Head's wire. If the Niagara sails earlier to-morrow than Linton expected he'd go off in her without knowing, and Kildare would never see him at all. Look here, it's late, but we've got to go to the docks right away and see Linton at once!"

"The Niagara!" cut in the night porter. He was a friendly looking, portly man. "What about the Niagara, sir?"

"Mr. Linton is sailing on the Niagara for Australia," explained Tom briefly, glancing at the man. "At least, he had intended to. But we've got some news that'll keep him in England," he added, with a smile.

A queer look came into the porter's face.

"If the gentleman was sailing on the Niagara, you're too late!" he exclaimed.

"Too late!" echoed Mesty Lowther blankly.

"Yes, sir. I've a brother that works for the Niagara's shipping agents here, and he happened to tell me that the Niagara finished loading sooner than expected, so she took the tide right away. The Niagara sailed for Australia at midnight."

CHAPTER 3.  
The Deceased Yacht!

THE EVE St. Jim's juniors stared at the hotel porter in dumb dismay.

"The Niagara sailed for Australia, at midnight!" The man's words had been like a blow in the face. They were too late! Despite their desperate midnight race to the coast—which had so nearly been stopped by their suspicious enemies on the road, after the new master of the ship had nearly stopped them, too—despite all their

desperate efforts, which they knew now definitely to have been anything but unneeded, they were too late!

The Niagara had gone! They had missed her by less than two hours. Already she was out at sea, with Mr. Linton on board—Australia bound!

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Marmoset.

Tom Merry turned to the porter with a face that showed utter consternation.

"Are you sure?" he demanded.

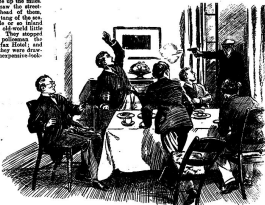
"As sure as I'm standing here," replied the man. "And you're disappointed," he added sympathetically.

"Disappointed!" echoed Tom Merry. He gave a bitter laugh. "Yes, we're disappointed all right."

He glanced at the damaged member of his class. His heart was suddenly as heavy as lead.

"Too late!" he said grimly, with a twisted smile. "And if the Head had only let us go at once, when we asked him, we should have been in time."

But the fact that they were more than justified in their difference of opinion with the Head was little consolation now.



A second before the bullets sped to their mark, Mesty Lowther leapt forward between Mr. Linton and his assailant!

"What about a wireless message to the ship!" cried Talbot desperately.

The porter shook his head.

"The nearest transmitting station is miles away, sir. By the time you could send out a message to the ship she'd be far down Channel—too late for the gentleman you're wanting to get off her with the pilot."

Tom Merry's eyes suddenly gleamed. A faint hope had come to him.

"The pilot!" he ejaculated. "He has to come off the ship!"

"Of course," nodded the porter.

"Where do they drop the pilot?" asked Tom eagerly, in his excitement clatching at the man's arm.

"The pilot'll take her out past Dead Man's Point—that's a goodish way along the coast from here. Past the point, he's taken off by the pilot cutter."

"My hat!" Tom Merry's face was alight with excitement. "That isn't there a chance? Couldn't we get out on the pilot cutter? Be on board her when she goes out on the Niagara for the pilot, and take Mr. Linton off, too?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of that!" The porter grinned sagely. He seemed almost as interested as themselves in their project. "I expect you could. Listen! The pilot cutter cruises round off-shore opposite Long—that's a little fishing village past Dead Man's Point. It's a longish way

round for the ship. She has to put well out before coming around on her line past the point. But it's not so far by road, for the road cuts straight across the Lyng island. Now! You go to Lyng as fast as you can, and hire a launch or something to take you out to the pilot cutter, and tell them what you want. They'll take you out to the Niagara—*will you're in time!*"

"If they were in time! Tom Merry & Co. meant to be in time."

"Follow the main road outside!" exclaimed the porter.

Tom pressed a couple of half-crowns into the man's hand, and the five St. Jim's juniors hurried out into their waiting car. They scrambled in, and Hancock started the engine with a roar that echoed down the street on the blustering wind. Latching in the clutch, Hancock sent the car shooting away in the direction which the porter had indicated.

Down the street they roared, and away up the hill that led out of the town. In a few minutes the lights of Mart-bridge had dropped behind them, and they were speeding along between high, windswept hills.

"Lyng, four miles," muttered Monty Lowther, as his eyes caught the words on a signpost in the light of their glaring headlights.

"We'll do it, with any luck," breathed Tom.

"If only we're in time!" muttered Manners, in the back seat. "If we can get Linton off the ship at the last giddy minute, the Board ought to let us off a row when we get back to St. Jim's. He'll know then he was wrong, and we were jolly well right to buzz off to Linton!"

"Rather!" nodded Talbot, with excited gleaming eyes.

They rounded a high, black shoulder of hill in another half mile, and down the valley ahead they could see a

glimpse of the sea. The moon appeared for a moment from among the uminous clouds that almost covered the sky, glittering on the far-off waves that were surging in to the coast, rolling and ugly, capped with flying foam.

Far off though they still were, it was clear enough to the juniors that it was a wild night out on the water. Then the moon vanished again. The howling gale that blustered past the racing car was enough, however, to tell them that a storm was raging in the Channel that night.

"Fifty poor sailors on a night like this!" grinned Monty Lowther; but his smile was a little rueful.

The juniors would have to get out to the Niagara in the teeth of that gale.

But not till they came out from the comparative shelter of the hills did Tom Merry & Co. realize the full strength of the storm. It caught them suddenly as they turned the base of a hill and came out on to the high cliff road. Shrieking and howling, the air carrying stinging spray, the gale hit them with full force, almost causing Hancock to lose control of the car. He slowed down with a startled glance at Tom, and the American had to shout to make his voice heard above the shriek of the wind.

"Holy smoke!" yelled Hancock. "Look!"

His eyes were on the sea. Mountains of waves were covering madly towards the base of the great, rugged cliffs, where they could be heard smashing thousands. Under the stormy sky it was an awe-inspiring sight. But it caused Tom Merry's heart to sink.

"My hat!" he muttered to himself. "What a night! Shall we ever be able to get out to the ship in that sea?"

He knew well enough that when a gale was raging in the Channel, it was sometimes impossible for even the pilot cutters to get out to ships.

Was the weather going to beat them when they had overcome everything else?

It looked almost likely.

With the gale howling past them they drove on along the lonely cliff road, their blazing headlights making the gloom about; lightning-bug dash across, and wind-swept leaves almost bent double by the roadside. The night seemed a shrieking inferno around them.

But they could not be far now from Lyng, the little village from which they were to make their last, desperate attempt to intercept Linton. The high, black promontory which they realized must be Dead Man's Point was looming up on their left, thrusting out into the foaming sea with rugged grandeur.

They passed through a deep cleft where the wind tore at their faces with icy fingers, the sea hidden from them for a few minutes. Then they came out into sight of it again, the road dropping steeply before them down towards a huddled village a mile away—the village of Lyng.

"Look!"

The heavy sheet burst suddenly from Reginald Talbot. Talbot was staring out to sea. He had half-risen in the back seat, his arm outflung, pointing.

Under the towering cliffs of Dead Man's Point a steamer could be seen, her navigation lights gleaming through the rank as she rolled and plunged among the mothing waves that seemed to be driving her helplessly towards the great rocks at the foot of the cliffs.

Hancock brought the car to a standstill, and the five juniors stared with startled eyes towards the darkly seen ship.

"She's being driven on the rocks!" gasped Manners.

"Holy smoke!" Hancock had to shout to make his voice heard above the howl of the wind. "I guess she must have lost her propeller! It must be that! And in a few minutes she'll be on the rocks!"

Again, for a moment, the moon broke through the clouds, lighting the scene. So near to the cliffs of Dead Man's Point was the evidently helpless vessel that Tom Merry's keen eyes were able to make out the painted letters on her plunging bows.

"My heavens! Do you see? Do you see what ship that is?"

Tom Merry stared round at his chums with horror-stricken eyes. The moon was swallowed again by the clouds, darkening the wild scene. But Tom had read the name of the ship that was being driven in before the storm towards those merciless rocks! And now that name was imprinted as in letters of fire upon his brain!

"What is she?" cried Lowther hoarsely.

Tom Merry gasped. The ship was already as good as lost, he knew.

"It's the Niagara!"



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## CHAPTER 7.

## Through the Storm:

"MY heavens!"

The hoarse cry broke from Reginald Talbot. His face had gone very white, as he stared, thunderstruck, at Tom Merry.

"The Niagara!" he breathed. "Then Linton's on board that ship?"

He broke off, his eyes fastened on the plunging ship, dimly seen among flying spray through the shadowy mark. Already the helmsman, her propeller evidently lost, was nearer by a hundred yards to the jagged teeth of rock that rose around the base of Dead Man's Point. With the gale shrieking through her rigging, and seas of foaming water pouring across her lower decks, the Niagara wallowed like a sea monster in the black shadow of the Point.

And Mr. Linton, the co-mander of the Shell at St. Jim's, was on board!

The juncos stared down from the high cliff road with eyes that were utterly aghast.

As they watched, they saw the doomed ship lifted by a vast wave, as though it had been no more than a corking-boat—saw it twist helplessly as it was hurled forward towards the cliffs. On the wind they heard the ghastly crash of smashing steel plates as the Niagara was hauled on to the rocks—rocks whose jagged heads tore through the stricken hull as though it had been as much cardboard.

"She's struck!" gasped Manners.

Hoisting over steeply on her side, the battered steamer settled on the rocks like some weary sea-boat. Her bows were lifted high, her stern was under water. The great waves thundered round her, smashing over her, with the high-fang spray flying in clouds high over the navigation-bridge.

From where she was caught upon the rocks it would be impossible for those on board to get on land. The rocks were washed by every wave, and a deep, foaming channel of water lay between her and the base of the cliffs. Even had the crew been able to climb out on to the rocks and gain the foot of the cliffs, the high, sheer sides of Dead Man's Point would have been unclimbable.

And it could only be a matter of minutes, comparatively, before the Niagara was smashed to pieces by the giant waves that were smashing against her torn plates.

It looked as though Mr. Linton and the crew of the ill-fated ship were to be drowned before their very eyes!

Tom Merry gave a sudden exclamation, pointing down over the cliff edge.

"Look!"

Lights had appeared below, glimmering at the water's edge, like will-o'-the-wisps in the gloom. There was evidently a little beach on the other side of the tiny bay, into which the Niagara had been driven by the storm after losing her propeller. The fishermen of Lyng had seen the wreck of the Niagara, were down there at the water's edge, and at sight of those glimmering lights hope kept into Tom Merry's heart.

"Come on!" he said, between his teeth. "Let's get there quick—perhaps something can be done to save Linton and the others on board that ship, even now!"

Handcock dropped into his seat and engaged the gears. The car leapt into motion as the American youngster drove on down the winding road towards the little village in the hollow below.

In a few minutes they were in the village, racing through the dark, winding streets, between stone cottages, towards the beach.

A small crowd of men, carrying lanterns, could be seen gathered on the shingle, staring out towards the lights of the doomed ship. Tom Merry & Co. sprang from the car as Handcock brought it to a standstill at the point where the road curved past the shingle and ran scumbingly down the beach towards the group.

"Can't something be done?"

Tom Merry's voice was hoarse as he grasped the arm of a Jewish fisherman. The man stared down at him.

"Nothing! We can do," he said gruffly. "We couldn't get out to her in this sea!"

Tom Merry's heart went cold.

"But—let something can be done—something, surely?"

"No," said the man, shaking his head. "I tell you no man could get across to her in that!" He pointed a strong finger at the waves that thundered in the little bay between the shore and the steamer caught under the base of the great precipitous opposite. "If she don't smash up at once, the lifeboat may come in time, though. She's got wireless; she'll have sent out an SOS long ago!"

"Where does the lifeboat have to come from?" asked Manners, in astute tones.

"Macbridge. It'll be hard for 'em to get here in this sea. May take 'em hours."

From the man's tone it was only too clear that he had very little hope that the lifeboat could reach the Niagara in time to save the lives of those on board. Tom Merry glanced round with desperate eyes. There were several heavy rowing-boats drawn up on the shingle, well out of the reach of the sea. A desperate look sprang into his face.

"If someone could get a line to the ship——" he began.

"If!" said the fisherman, with a look of scorn along his broad shoulders. "But how? We've no rocket apparatus."

"But if we could?" cried Tom impatiently. "Would that——"

"If we could, it might save their lives," nodded the man. "They could rig up a brooch-haly on board her, with a pulley or two, and get across in the middle of the wind of the beach there. But it's impossible to get a line to them."

"Well, I wish to try!"

Tom Merry turned a pale, set face to his chosen.

"Any of you chaps game to try to run out with a line to that ship?" he demanded grimly. "We can't stand by and see old Linton drowned, or any of the others, either——"

"I'm game," nodded Talbot swiftly.

Manners and Lowther nodded without speaking. They felt that it was almost unnecessary for them to have to show that they would go with Tom Merry. Tom turned with glowing eyes to the big fisherman.

"Will you help us get one of these boats down to the water, and give us a line? We're going to try to get through to her!"

"You're crazy!" ejaculated the man roughly. "You can't hope to get through——"

"We're going to try! So you may as well help us."

The fisherman stared from one to another of the five chaps of the Shell. A further astonished protest rose to his lips. But he did not utter it.

He saw, perhaps, that it would have been useless! He could read in the jesters' faces that they were determined.

"All right!" he said gruffly. He hesitated; then he made up his mind. "Hang it, I'll come with you!" he added, in a tone of fierce engagement. He slapped Tom on the shoulder with a heavy hand. "Good luck!" he said simply. "We might get through, possibly, after all, if a persistent miracle!"

That the rest of the fishermen believed the five jesters and their now silly to be getting to their deaths was clear. At first they flatly refused to help in hauling a boat down to the water's edge. But the fisherman's fierce look, as he argued with them, his huge fist clenched, made them change their minds after a minute or so.

"All right, Joran!" growled one of them, at last. "It's madness, and if you were a married man we wouldn't let you go! But if you can't these youngsters have made up your minds, I suppose you'd better go, and good-bye to you!"

Joran, as the big fisherman's name seemed to be, laughed.

"Come on, then! Old Sam's boat'll be best, I reckon."

"Ar!"

With feet scrambling below the shingle, Joran and the St. Jim's juncos, aided by willing helpers, dragged one of the boats down the wide beach towards the thundering waves. The end of a line had been fastened securely to one of the thwart, and some of the men were busily collecting more line to knot to the other end, so that it should be long enough, if it ever reached them on board the Niagara, to haul a rope out to the ship from the beach.

"You youngsters take the care!" shouted Joran. The thunder of the surf almost drowned his words. "I'd better be in the stern with an oar to steer her."

"Right!" cried Tom Merry.

They were at the water's edge. The jesters tumbled in, and each seized one of the heavy oars. Joran kept in after them, at the boat was shoved out into the boiling foam left by a retreating wave. Tom Merry & Co. lashed out with their oars, and the strong old boat leapt at the feet of the great breakers. It hung there high, almost sweeping them back ashore, and but for a miracle of steering on Joran's part, would have twisted and overturned like a toy. But they got through somehow, sliding down almost sideways into the trough below.

Another huge wave, with foaming crest, came at them out of the gloom, seeming to curve over them as it came, to smash them down beneath its vast weight. But they rode it, just in time before it broke, and, with the five jesters steering at their oars, they planged on.

The breakers were past! That had been one of their greatest dangers. But there was still a long way to go—and every wave between them and the ship that lay grinding helplessly on the opposite rocks might mean death to all six of them.

With set teeth Tom Merry, half blinded by spray

spray, his feet jammed against the side of the little, heavily planked boat, dragged at his ear with savage strength as they fought on across Long Bay in the teeth of the gale.

### CHAPTER 8. LINTON AT LAST!

THAT half-hour was like a nightmare to the St. Jim's janitor—a nightmare of shrieking wind and leaping waves that tore past them, foam-capped and roaring in the neck. But for the amazing skill of the fisherman with his steering-ears in the stern, the little boat—long like a cork from wave to wave—would have been overturned and sunk time and again! But Joran, his ragged face set like rock, his keen eyes peering ahead towards the lights of the Niagara, kept them head-on to each towering wave, despite their tiny craft's wild twisting plunges. And gradually, the janitor's arms aching horribly, but still dragging on the oars with an almost mad strength, they drew near to the doomed steamer.

Above the howl of the wind and the thunder of the waves they could hear at last the grinding of steel platen on rocks as the Niagara rolled and heaved. The side was rising, and there was every likelihood that before long she would be lifted off the rocks that held her bows and dragged back into deep water. If that happened she would go down like a stone, for her plates were holed in many places. And the janitor, realising this, dragged on their oars madly, though the muscles of their arms felt ready to crack under the strain.

At any rate they must reach the doomed ship before she was lifted off the rocks. The lives of all on board depended upon that—and amongst them the life of Mr. Linton!

It seemed like an eternity of time to the janitor before they suddenly realized that they were close under the wave-washed stern of the Niagara. Tom Merry flung a swift glance over his shoulder, and saw the jagged stump of a spit jutting against the murky sky, not far away.

"Full, full!" roared Joran fiercely. "Full! We're near now, isn't it?"

The dripping oar-blades rose and fell with grim persistence, though there was not a janitor who did not feel that his next stroke must be the last of which his aching arms were capable. Slowly but surely the plunging little craft fought its way under the battered iron side of the belching ship. It was colder in the lee of the steamer, but close by there now were the rocks, with the waves leaping and thundering among them. If once they were swept amongst those jagged teeth, it would be the end of all of them. No one could hope to swim for more than a few seconds in that raging turmoil of mad waters.

"We've done it!" muttered Morry Leather through tight teeth. "My hat, we've done it!"

A rope came trailing to them out of the gloom. Joran caught it dexterously in his gnarled hand. He could see men peering down at him from the rail above. A faint doubt came to the ears of the janitor and the big fisherman; but the words were lost in the din of the storm.

There was still the danger that the little boat might be smashed against the side of the ship. But Joran,

clinging with one hand to the rope, while he held off with an ear, prevented that with all his Herculean strength. A rope-ladder had been hastily dropped down the side of the Niagara, and Tom Merry, at a word from the fisherman, sprang for it and scrambled up into the gloom above.

One by one the janitors followed.

It was no easy task climbing that swaying ladder up the side of the doomed ship as it rolled and ground upon the rocks. But they managed it at last, dropping over the rail on to the gleaming wet steel deck. Already Joran had fastened the end of the line that they had brought out to the rope from the ship's side. As the last of the janitors disappeared up the rope-ladder, he rose to his feet and sprang for the ladder himself.

A wild plunge of the little boat almost costed him to raise his hold. But one hand grasped the ladder, and he swung on to it. The next moment the little craft under his feet came crashing in against the side of the doomed ship. It broke like an eggshell, and the splintered wreckage vanished among the waves.

Head-over-board, the big fisherman came swimming up the ladder and swung over the rail on to the deck.

A dim group of figures was gathered there, wearing life-belts. Tom Merry, peering round, saw the tall figure of the captain of the Niagara, a man with a pointed beard. A couple of younger men, who were evidently mates, an engineer, dock-hand, and fireman—all were gathered there apparently. He heard the voice of the captain, half-drowned by the roar of wind and waves:

"Boats all gone! Fifteen minutes to live, I should think!"

And then, his eyes searching through the shadowy group of men, Tom Merry found what he was seeking:

He drew a sharp breath.

Clinging for support to a companion-ladder as the ship lurched abackwardly on the rocks, was a familiar figure—a figure which Tom Merry and the others usually associated with the quiet surroundings of the Shell Form room at St. Jim's. The man who had suffered such terrible wrong from the school he loved—the man whom they had risked their very lives to find!

"There's Linton!"

There was a note of excited triumph in Tom Merry's voice as he grasped Manners' arm, and pointed. After all that they had been through since breaking out of the Shell dormitory that night, they had come to Mr. Linton at last! Here on this doomed ship, with the gale shrieking over their heads, and knowing that death might be near to all of them, they were face to face at last with the unfortunate old gentleman who still believed himself to be a displaced person from St. Jim's.

The mild-looking ex-master of the Shell had seen this.

His white, lined face was turned towards them. He was haggard, and the wind was tearing at his graying hair, as he peered through the gloom towards the half-drowned janitor as though he could not believe his eyes.

The Terrible Three, Handcock, and Talbot stumbled towards him eagerly. They might have been ghosts, to judge from the look in Mr. Linton's haggard eyes. Tom Merry gazed at his head.

"It's really you, sir?" Tom laughed shakily, but there

### Return of Potts, the Office-Boy!





was a queer lump in his throat. "Thank Heaven you are all safe!"

"Merry! Talbot! My boys—my boys!"  
Mr. Linton was like a man in a dream. A trembling smile quivered on his lips as he stared from face to face.  
"My dear, dear boys! How did you get here, in Heaven's name! Am—I am I dreaming? Can I believe my senses?"

"You bet you can, sir!" grinned Handcock cheerfully.  
"We came to Manchester to find you, to stop you going to Australia!" panted Tom Merry. "You'd gone! Then we found the ship on the rocks, so—we we came out! We'll rescue you yet!"

Mr. Linton stared at him dumbly.  
"But why?" he breathed hoarsely. "Why did you come?"  
"Because we've got some news for you, sir!" cried Monty Lowther. "Wonderful news!"  
"News—for me?"

Tom Merry smiled. But his smile was as shaky as that of Mr. Linton. He was thinking. What if they had brought that news too late? What if they failed to reach the shore in safety, despite all their efforts, and Linton and they perished together in the raging waters of Lyng Bay?

"Wonderful news, sir!" Tom Merry had to shout to make his voice heard above the elements. How little he had dreamed then when they told Mr. Linton that his innocence was now known at St. Jim's! It would be in such circumstances as these! "That letter—you know, sir—that letter has been proved to be a forgery! One of the crooks that robbed you did it! It's known to everybody that you're innocent. And you've wanted back at St. Jim's."

CHAPTER 3.

A Last Desperate Chance!

MR. LINTON, clinging to the green companion-way as the Niagara lurched heavily, stared at Tom Merry with burning eyes.

"My—my innocence is established! I am wrecked back!"

"That's it, sir!" cried Talbot. "The wreck's tried to your help—but you've gone!"

Mr. Linton passed a trembling hand across his face. When he looked at the juniors again, he was smiling quietly; it was as though he had grown ten years younger in the space of seconds.

"I—I shall return to St. Jim's at once."

For the moment, apparently, Mr. Linton had forgotten that both he and they were on board a wrecked steamer, with what looked like a fifty-fifty chance only of reaching land alive. The wonderful knowledge that his name was cleared had made him forget for the moment everything but the fact that his honour was free from the dark shadow that had lain upon it.

"But why did anyone seek to ruin me in this way?" he cried suddenly. "Why—why?"

"Goodness knows!" muttered Mansers. "That's a mystery!"

A sheet of flying spray struck their faces as they turned to where the captain of the Niagara and some of the crew, aided by Jones, the big fisherman, were hard at work rigging up a breeches-buoy, while others bailed on the line that

Jones and the juniors had brought out to the ship. In a few minutes, a stout rope had been dragged on board out of the waves—a rope which connected with the shore, and was their one chance of defying death!

The Niagara was heaving more heavily now. The rising tide was striving to lift her off the rocks—and once that happened, it would be the end for anyone left on board. The shattered vessel would go down instantly as the water poured in through the great jagged rents in her sides.

The clouds had broken, swept away across the sky before the howling wind. A bright moon was lighting the wild scene, as those on board the doomed ship worked feverishly.

The juniors had donned lifebelts, like the rest. But they knew that if the ship went down before the breeches-buoy was ready, no lifebelt ever made could hope to save their lives in the raging moonlit waters of Lyng Bay!

But it was ready at last—a rope-and swing from a heavy pulley that was ready to run out over the water along the rope, fastened now to an iron stanchion on the bridge, and swinging out daintily to the high rocks at the end of the little beach opposite, where ladders could be seen glistening afar-off. The captain of the Niagara turned to where Mr. Linton was standing, white-faced but steady; there was nothing of the coward about the co-master of the Shell.

"Mr. Linton, you are to go first!"  
For a moment Mr. Linton hesitated—not from fear of the hazardous crossing, which might well end in his death if an accident occurred, but from a disinclination to be the first to seek safety. But the captain's word was law.

"Very well, Captain March!"

Mr. Linton stepped forward, and clambered, helped by willing hands, into the rope-seat. The end of the line that swung across the gulf with the rope that was to support him was fastened to the pulley. At a flash signal from the ship, the fishermen on the rocks began to haul on the line, and the swaying figure of Mr. Linton went swinging out over the hazy waves.

The juniors watched beautifully. Each lowering wave seemed to be striving to leap high enough to drag Mr. Linton down to a watery grave.

Droved with spray, swaying daintily as he clung on with his thin, shaggy hands, Mr. Linton went swinging through the moonlight, slower and slower to the opposite rocks!

Ting, ting, ting!

The telephone bell in the bogus Mr. Pilbeam's study at St. Jim's rang sharply.

It was after breakfast. Mr. Pilbeam—alias Hyde—had glanced at the clock a moment before to see if it was time for him to go to the Shell Form rooms for morning classes. But there were still ten minutes before lessons started, and he had resumed his restless pacing to and fro across the carpet, a curious twitching of his thin lips betraying the excitement that was inwardly consuming him.

At sound of the telephone bell, he turned swiftly and hurried to the instrument. The voice of Flack, his underling, greeted him through the receiver.

"You fool!" hissed Hyde fiercely into the instrument. "So you failed to stop those boys last night? How do I know! The headmaster had a telegram from them this morning—saying Linton was saved from the wreck of the Niagara—they all escaped, curse them! Where are you now?"

A Bald Statement!



"Marionette?" came the salient tones of Flack along the wires. "We did our best, but we couldn't stop 'em. They're all at the Fairfax Hotel now, Linton and the boys. Yes, they were all saved from the ship, thanks to the boys and a thousand; the whole town's excited over the story of what they did—"

"Never mind that!" cried Flack. "Don't you realize that we stand to lose a fortune? Demons! still living! They think he will live until to-morrow, at least. At any rate, Linton must be stopped from getting to St. Jim's!"

"How?" demanded the salient voice of Flack.

Flack looked his dry lips.

"Kill him!" he growled hoarsely. "If that's the only way, kill him! But stop him you must!"

There was a startled gasp from over the wire.

"I said, kill him, if that's the only way!" panted Flack. "We're gone so far, Flack, we aren't going to let ourselves be done out of that half-million now! We must stop at nothing! Yes, kill him, I said, and, by thunder, don't fail me this time, Flack!"

Among the quad came the clanging of old Tagger's bell. It was time for morning classes at St. Jim's.

The impostor who had become Form master of the Shell hung up the telephone receiver with trembling fingers. He wiped the perspiration from his brow with a shaking movement of his hand. His evil face was twitching strangely as he crossed to the door, and hurried from the study on his way to the Shell Form room.

"Well, you sleep, here's to Mr. Linton's jolly good health!"

Tom Merry spoke with a cheery grin.

Tom had just risen to his feet, at one end of the table in a private room of the Fairfax Hotel at Marionette, where the five chums of the Shell and their old master were enjoying a handsome tea.

They had slept since about breakfast-time, after Tom had sent his telegram to Dr. Haines. After their thrilling night they had needed sleep. But now they were up and dressed again, having a well-deserved meal preparatory to setting off for St. Jim's.

Manservant and Lowther, Handcock and Talbot, followed Tom's lead.

"Cheer's, sir!" greeted Mandy Lowther.

"Best of luck, sir!" said Talbot. "Baby-stud you'll be back at St. Jim's soon now, as master of the Shell!"

"Baby-stud!"

Mr. Linton was still looking a little pale and worn. But he smiled very cheerfully in response to their whole-hearted good wishes.

"Thank you, my love, very much!" he said quietly. "I, too, am delighted at the prospect of finding myself back at the school again before long, to be reinstated almost immediately, I hope, as your Form master." He smiled. "I gather from what you have been telling me that my successor did not make himself very popular with the Shell!"

"I guess not!" nodded Handcock dryly.

"Well, he'll soon have to clear out now, sir, with you back at the school," grinned Manservant. "Won't old Filbeam be sick! I—!"

Manservant broke off abruptly. His words seemed to have frozen in his throat.

He was staring past Mr. Linton at the window behind the commander of the Shell, with a face that had gone suddenly as white as chalk.

They were gathered in a room on the first floor, and outside the window there was a balcony. A figure had suddenly stepped into view on the balcony—the figure of a small, rat-like man with a white cloth tied round his face, pierced with eye-holes. It was clear that he must have slipped up to the balcony from the garden of the hotel.

"Great Scott!" gasped Manservant hoarsely. "Look!"

As the others turned started down, the half-croaking figure of the masked man, starting in at the open window that opened on to the balcony, whipped out an automatic— an automatic that was fixed with a trigger.

Pointing the sinister weapon steadily at Mr. Linton, the middle-aged man crossed the trigger twice. In quick succession, two bullets whizzed into the room, directed for Mr. Linton's heart.

They saw Lowther stagger and drop as the bullets struck him.

"My heavens!"

Mr. Linton was on his feet, dazed and horrified, staring down at Lowther's still figure with a face that had gone deathly white. The men instead Tom Merry, Handcock, Manservant, and Talbot had leapt for the window.

There was a cry of chagrin from the masked scoundrel. He had seen, even as he turned to make good his escape, that his attempt on Mr. Linton's life had been a failure. Whether he had no more bullets, or whether he dared not wait to fire again, the javiers did not know, if he had more bullets they were in deadly danger; but they were not going to let that fact stop them from making a desperate effort to catch him.

Talbot was first out on to the balcony. The evil little



figure was dropping swiftly to earth down the side supports of the balcony. In a flash Talbot swung over the rail and jumped, just as the fugitive reached the path beneath and tried to bolt.

But he had no chance of bolting. Talbot heaped full on his shoulders, and they went down in a heap together.

"That!"

Talbot's fat crashed heavily into the masked man, as the man tried to wriggle free. With a groan the evil scoundrel dropped back, stunned. Talbot rose, passing to his feet, as Manservant dropped beside him, followed by Handcock and Tom Merry.

"Got him!" panted Talbot hoarsely. "Good heavens—he tried to murder Linton! And he got Lowther—"

"Mandy's all right," gasped Tom Merry, who had passed in the pursuit to find out what had happened to his chum. "A couple of bullets in the shoulder—only both

CHAPTER 16.  
The Truth at Last!

IT was Mandy Lowther who saved Mr. Linton's life in that desperate moment.

A second bullet had the bullets sped for their mark, he had leapt forward to place himself between Mr. Linton and his assailant. It all happened so quickly that the others had scarcely time to realize what was happening. THE GUN LINGERER.—No. 1, 222.

words, I think. He's unconscious; but he's not killed, or anywhere near it. Linton's life was saved, though, when 'Id Morry jumped in front of him."

He stomped swiftly, and dragged the cloth from the hidden face. A startled ejaculation broke from Tom's lips, as he recognized the man, instantly as the master of the pair of ruffians who had held them up on the previous night on the road, during their race to Marlbridge.

"My hat!" breathed Mazon. "What the deuce does it mean?"

Even somewhere in the road that ran past the garden, along the back of the hotel, there came the sudden sound of a motor-engine. A car roused hastily away down the road.

Flash, the big man with the broken nose, had been waiting for Gilling, the captured crook, in a motor-car

"Yes, why?" muttered Mazon. That was a problem which was utterly mystifying to the justice, and even their present bitter fury against the man could not stifle their curiosity.

"I—I didn't mean to kill him!" whispered Gilling, as he stood gaped by two of the hotel servants.

"That's a lie!" Tom's voice was hoarse. "You'll be up for attempted murder!" He gazed anxiously into the whispering captain's dusty face. "Why did you do it?" he repeated grimly. "What have you got against Mr. Linton?"

"I ain't nothin' against him!" came the whining answer. "But I was told to stop 'em getting' to St. Jim's."

An eager note came into his voice. Gilling thought, perhaps, to carry favour by telling the justice all they wanted to know.

"Yes," he went on eagerly, "there's an old gent dying in London, who's left a fortune to whoever's master of the Shell at St. Jim's at 'is death. That's why they want to keep Linton away—that's why they got 'em along out of 'is job. Yes—"

He broke off, as a stalwart figure in blue came striding along the path. It was a police-constable, teleled by someone from the hotel.

"What's all this?" demanded the constable gruffly. "I'm told there's been an attempted murder here. Is that the alleged subject?"

"Yes," replied Tom Morry solemnly.

He turned to his charge with gleaming eyes. "So that's the secret!" he breathed. "A dying man's fortune for whoever is master of the Shell at his death! That—that Filbeam must be one of the crooks. Now he got the job goodness knows; but he got it so that he would inherit this fortune. Good luck—"

"We must get Linton back to St. Jim's at once!" gasped Mazon. "Filbeam may be a crook, but he's master of the Shell. And if this man dies, whoever he is, who is leaving the fortune, it will go to Filbeam if he's not been kicked out before he dies. We've got to get Linton back to St. Jim's without a moment's delay."

"Yes, every moment counts," muttered Talbot. "Linton must be reinstalled at St. Jim's as master of the Shell before the other of their giddy-fortune dies. And if he's dying now, poor chap—"

"What about an aeroplane, budgie?" suggested Handcock. "I guess that's the quickest way to transport Linton to St. Jim's. We know there's an aerodrome outside the town here."

"Good where?" muttered Tom. "One of us can fly back with Linton right away. If the police here want him as a witness over this affair, he can come back to Marlbridge after he has been reinstated as master of the Shell. But if there is a fortune at stake, Linton's not going to be checked out of it by that lousy Filbeam?"

"Good egg!" nodded Mazon. "Come on—we'll explain to Linton at once! You go with him to the school, Tommy. The rest of us will wait here to look after poor old Minny. Thank goodness he's not badly hurt!"

In their excitement the justice had forgotten the captured crook. Gilling, standing near them, being questioned by the policeman, had heard their talk.

The crook was patting his wife together now.

He knew that if he was to hope to escape a long term of imprisonment on the grim charge of attempted murder, he must try to make his escape at once. Despite his fast blood, whispering terror, he was beginning to realize that there was a faint hope of escape even now.

With a sudden twist, he wriggled like an eel out of his shabby jacket, which was tightly held by the two men on either side of him. There was a shout from the policeman. He made a dive at the evil-faced little scoundrel, but Gilling eluded him. The next moment he had raced away down the garden, and vanished over the wall, while his pursuers were still gathering their wits together.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Handcock. "He's made a getaway!"

"Oh, never mind him!" snapped Tom. "Come on—it's Linton and poor old Minny we've got to worry about!"

Leaving the policeman and his eager helpers scrambling over the wall in pursuit of the escaped scoundrel, the justice slipped unnoted into the house.

Even now they knew very little of the mysterious fortune which they knew to be hanging in the balance between Mr. Linton and the present master of the Shell, the supposed Mr. Filbeam. But they knew enough to realize that Mr. Linton must be taken back to St. Jim's, to be reinstated in his old position in place of the new master, without a moment's delay.

There was, as they knew now, a fortune at stake!



Slowly, but surely, the plunging little craft sought its way under the water-tortured lee side of the outcrop Niagara!

with its engine running. But Flash had realized that something had gone wrong, and he had made good his escape. He did not much care what happened to Gilling, so long as he saved his own skin.

Hasting footsteps came to the care of the four wretched patients. Round the corner of the hotel building half a dozen men came racing—hotel servants and visitors, whom Mr. Linton had told of the attempt upon his life, when the commander of the Shell had hastened downstairs in trembling agitation in search of a doctor to attend to Morry Leither.

Gilling's eyes flickered open. He staggered unsteadily to his feet, terror in his eyes. But he was seized instantly. He did not struggle—there was no light left in him.

"You found?" Tom Morry faced the shivering figure with gleaming eyes. "You—you tried to murder Mr. Linton! Why did you do it?"

The telephone bell in the study occupied by the master of the Shell at St. Jim's broke the silence that had reigned for many minutes in the handsome room.

Afternoon classes were over. Hyde, the attendant who had become a schoolmaster, had been pacing restlessly to and fro across the thick carpet, his face drawn and grey.

What was happening at far-off Marlbridge? That was the question that had racked his brain all day.

He sprang to the telephone, every nerve taut. A quick exclamation broke from his lips as the voice of Gilling came to him across the wires.

"Gilling! What's happened, man?"

The voice of the receiver was full incoherent with agitation. But Hyde, listening with eager dismay, heard enough to know what had happened at the hotel at Marlbridge.

"To get to get Linton—missed him—caught—got away. Flack belted, once him! Linton's flying to St. Jim's, gun/over—heard the boys say!—no—I'm through! I got down, but they're hunting for me! I'll head for Southampton, and if you beat old Linton for old Demman's money, I want my share! I'll get into touch with you as soon as it's safe."

Hyde listened in awe to the whining voice of the hunted man. He replaced the receiver. He had heard enough.

"The fools!" he choked. "They've bungled again! And Linton is going to fly to the school! He'll be here this evening. Coming by air—"

He broke off, gazing out of the window, with clenched fist. An almost mad light glittered in his eyes.

Was he to lose, after all! Was the huge fortune that he had planned to obtain to be snatched from his grasp at the last moment, despite all his clever, evil schemes?

"No!" he panted aloud. "Linton shall win!"

He rushed to the telephone and barked on the number of a garage at Wayland. In a few moments he was through.

"Send your latest car at once! To drive me to Venleigh Aerodrome!"

He replaced the receiver, and turned to a drawer of the desk near the window. Unlocking it, he snatched out a heavy automatic, and a number of clips of cartridges, thrusting them into his pockets.

"The aerodrome's about fifty miles away. A fast car will do it in the hour. I'll make the driver do it! I shall promise a man in the Air Force—before they chuck me out!" he added, with a sardonic smile. "I've only to show my client's certificate to hire a plane, so long as I pay the price. And I'll be up there in time to meet Linton's plane!"

He laughed, with a horrible ring of evil humor.

With old Demman's fortune at stake, Hyde was sticking at nothing. He meant to prevent Mr. Linton from robbing him of his wily woe position as master of the Shell even now, at the eleventh hour.

He meant to win the Demman fortune even yet!

## CHAPTER 11.

### The Fight in the Air!

"SHANT' be long now, sir!"

Tom Merry spoke in eager tones. Mr. Linton nodded, and smiled.

The two of them were seated in the comfortably-cushioned seats of a small air-taxi, speeding through the clouds at a height of over two thousand feet, on their way from Marlbridge to St. Jim's. There had been some delay at Marlbridge, the police having insisted upon questioning both Mr. Linton and Tom Merry closely concerning the attempt upon Mr. Linton's life; but they had allowed them to go at last, on their assurance of the urgency of their departure. And now they were rapidly nearing the school, the pilot flying at full speed.

Soaring down through the window beside him, Tom Merry saw that the countryside beneath was already becoming familiar. He peered eagerly ahead, and in a few minutes St. Jim's had come into sight, far away on the horizon, a tiny speck of building mass in the waning sunlight.

"There's the school, sir!"

"Again Mr. Linton nodded, without speaking.

The old gentleman still appeared rather like a man in a dream. The amazing knowledge that a fortune was awaiting him if he reached St. Jim's in time to be reinstated as master of the Shell before the death of an unknown man in London, had staggered him. But it had also exhilarated a very great deal!

Mr. Linton knew now that an utterly unscrupulous gang of crooks had wished to have him removed from St. Jim's, and later to prevent his return to the school. And, in the face of their clever schemes, he knew that he could no

longer blame Dr. Holmes for having been convinced of his guilt in the charge that had been "framed" on him.

"I—I trust we shall be in time, Merry," he said at last, in a quiet voice. "Heaven forbid that I should meet a dying man's fortune; but, if it is true, and the poor man is actually passing away, I feel that in justice the fortune should come to me rather than to the scoundrel who has succeeded in replacing me by friend and villain!"

"Rather, sir!" nodded Tom. "And you can let it be true all right. These crooks wouldn't have taken all the trouble they have, if they did not know it was true about this fortune. The trouble is that, even if Mr. Fillmore is a rascal, he is master of the Shell at present, all the same. And by law he is bound to inherit the fortune according to the will, even if he had to go to prison first, before coming out to inherit his ill-gotten gains! But I think we shall be in time, sir. The fact that those crooks were so desperately keen to stop you getting to St. Jim's by this evening, shows that they know the dying man—whatever the poor fellow is—so he's likely to live on some little time yet."

"That is so, Merry," agreed Mr. Linton quietly. An anxious light came into his eyes. "Poor Leecher! He saved my life, the dear, brave boy! I only wish—"

"Don't worry about Leecher, sir," said Tom Merry soothingly. "The doctor said he wasn't badly hurt, really. He'll be well looked after in Marlbridge Hospital, too. In a day or two he'll be back at St. Jim's!"

Slipping through the clouds, the little aeroplane was dropping nearly to the earth, as the distant speck that was St. Jim's drew swiftly nearer.

"You say I can land in the playing fields at the school all right?" asked the pilot, glancing over his shoulder at Tom Merry.

"Hears of 'em!" nodded Tom.

As he spoke he noticed a dark shape in the sky towards the north—another aeroplane, that was speeding rapidly towards them. He watched it with interest as it approached. In a few minutes it had rounded past above them. Then, to Tom's surprise, it came swooping round in a great circle, and headed towards them once more.

"What on earth's this fellow up to?" growled the pilot angrily.

He spoke in a low, hoarse voice, and turned away from the higher altitude. Mr. Linton, starting out of the little window beside his seat, gave a startled exclamation.

"Here my soul! He is diving right at us! Surely the pilot of it is behaving in a highly dangerous fashion! I—"

He broke off, as at their own pilot, with astonished face, dived sharply to get well clear of the menacing action of the other plane. Instantly the other dived, too, and came roaring past them, alongside, so near that their wings-tips all but touched, it seemed. Tom Merry gave a breathless gasp, and the next moment a spurt of flame had come from the open cockpit of the other machine, freezing his ejaculation in his throat.

That stab of flame had been the sport of an automatic. The single occupant of the other machine, staring round at them through goggled eyes from his open cockpit, was firing at them with cold deliberation!

Again the stabbing flame of the automatic flashed out, and a third time, before the other machine curved away from them. But the bullets, unbarred in the rear of their own propeller, had missed their mark altogether.

The face of their pilot was as white as those of Mr. Linton and Tom Merry.

"Good heavens!" cried the pilot hoarsely. "There's a madman in that plane. He's attacking us—firing at us!"

Already the other machine was curving round towards them again. And in a flash Tom Merry understood!

He had believed that the attempt on Mr. Linton's life at the hotel at Marlbridge had been the final effort on the part of the mysterious crooks to prevent him, Linton, from reaching St. Jim's. But he had been wrong!

How the villains could have learnt of their intention of travelling to the school by air was a bewildering mystery to Tom. But it was certain enough that the man in the attacking machine knew that Mr. Linton was a passenger on board the air-taxi, and in cold blood he was seeking their destruction!

At that height, no one on the earth below would be able to see the shots fired. If a lucky bullet struck the petrol-tank or an oil-pipe, and caused them to crash in flames, there would be nothing left of their aeroplane but charred remains—nothing to show that their fate had not been the result of some tragic accident!

White-lipped, Tom Merry saw their attacker swooping at them.

It cut past in front of them, recklessly near, clearly in the hands of a skilled pilot. And as it passed, two flashes of

fire leapt from the automatic in the hand of the helmeted figure in the cockpit.

There was a splintering of woodwork near the front of their little cabin. The seat nearest the pilot had dropped sideways in his seat with a little groan.

"He's hit it," panted Mr. Linton. "My heavens, we—we shall all be killed!"

Already the little plane, stately out of control, had dipped into a spinning nosedive, all but King Tom Merry and Mr. Linton from their seats. With the engine full out, the machine went roaring earthward at two hundred miles an hour!

In a flash, Tom Merry had clambered from his place, and was struggling past the inert figure of the wounded pilot to get at the controls.

The captain of the Shell had piloted an aeroplane before. Only the fact that he lacked the qualification of age had prevented him obtaining his pilot's certificate. His knowledge of aeroplanes was going to stand them in good stead now!

In a few seconds—though they seemed like hours—he was expressed in beside the unconscious pilot, hands and feet at the controls.

The machine was still diving earthward like a stone. Tom knew that to attempt to right it too abruptly would probably cause the wings to collapse under the strain. And already the earth seemed very near! He could see a church apparently rushing up to meet them.

With set teeth, he drove over the controls as far as he dared.

"Dane it—"

With a swoop like that of some great bird, the diving plane righted itself. It shot above the church spire so close that Tom wondered for a flash if the weathercock would catch their undercarriage. Then they were mounting upward at breathless speed towards the sunset-redder clouds.

For the moment, Tom Merry's one idea had been to get the plane safely out of its breakneck dive. Now still a dark shape loomed up in the sky, swooping down towards them, did he remember that he had to deal, too, with the attacking machine that sought their destruction!

He brought the plane round in a sharp curve, seeking to twist away from their murderous attacker. It came tearing in pursuit.

For an instant, Tom peered down. The ground below was heavily wooded—nowhere to land for another few miles! But away in front could be seen the buildings of St. Jim's, surrounded by the smooth green expanse of its playing fields. He opened the throttle full out, and sped desperately for the school.

And behind them came roaring the attacking machine!

It was a faster plane than theirs. It came swooping up alongside, wing-tips dangerously close. Tom twisted away, and shot higher. The other machine followed, driven by skillful hands. Again it came speeding alongside, and blades of stabbing force from the cockpit met Jim's eyes as he glanced through the windshield. At the same moment, a bullet ripped through the woodwork near his head.

But St. Jim's was very near now.

Tom put the machine into a dive. With a long swoop, they went speeding down over the winding ribbon of Ryecroft Lane. Over the school gateway they roared, all out, and over the quad towards the playing fields beyond.

The quad was crowded. A hundred upturned faces made spots of white against the earth, as Tom Merry, swooping up beside the unconscious pilot, rose higher to clear the old class—with his attacker still following in mad desperation!

A bullet tore through the material of one of the wings, as Hyde fired a last desperate shot. In his raging determination to cause the plane carrying Mr. Linton to crash, he is hope that the co-master of the Shell would be killed. Hyde had forgotten the fact that his murderous attack could now be seen by the crowd in the quad!

All Hyde knew was that Mr. Linton was back at St. Jim's when he would be reinstated as crew officially as master of the Shell, while he was removed from the position that meant a fortune to its holder. A few seconds left in which to make his last mad attempt to get rid of Linton for ever!

In that moment, the second's brain must have been utterly unbalanced with his mad excitement. For those staring up from below with white, horrified faces saw the pursuing machine sweep forward abreast of the other, then turn as if deliberately and ram it in mid-air.

There was a ghastly crash and a cry of horror from the crowds of St. Jim's fellows in the quad.

A torn-off wing, fragments of shattered bodywork, went spinning away from the interlocked machines, already dropping in a tearing crash, falling like so much rubbish.

"Good heavens—"

Eric Killare, the captain of St. Jim's, standing on the steps of the School House, watched the falling, interlocked wreckage of the two planes with breathless horror in his eyes. A strange noise rose in the quad from the throngs of onlookers and juniors—a groan of appalled dismay—as the two machines, suddenly breaking away from one another, vanished beyond the old class. They could hear the sickening crash as they struck the earth, out of sight of the playing fields.

For a few moments there was not a sound, not a movement in the crowd gathered in the quad. Then, white-faced and horror-stricken, the St. Jim's fellows raced towards the playing fields, and what lay hidden beyond the class.

## CHAPTER II.

### Mr. Linton's Fortune!

WHEN Tom Merry came to his senses—he had been lying on unconscious in the crash—he forced himself lying on the grass with Mr. Bailton, the Housemaster of the School House, tending anxiously over him.

Tom awoke faintly. For the moment he could not quite remember what had happened. Then it all came back to him, and despair fear for Mr. Linton rushed into his brain. He raked himself, supported by Mr. Bailton's arm, and stared wildly round.

The first thing he saw, beyond the wreckage of the two planes, was a stretcher-party disappearing in the direction of the Sixth. His heart went cold.


"Is—it he badly hurt?" he muttered hoarsely.

But the next instant his eyes fell on the figure of Mr. Linton standing near, looking horribly white and shaken, but evidently unhurt, except for a cut on his hand which Kangaroo of the Shell was binding up for him.

Tom guessed that the stretcher had been carrying the pilot of their machine, hurrying him to the infirmary.

"Feeling better, Merry?" murmured Mr. Bailton.

"Yes," muttered Tom. "We—we were attacked in the air by one of the crews that wanted to keep Mr. Linton from reaching St. Jim's alive—"



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He broke off, closing his eyes wearily. His head was aching terribly. He put up a shaking hand to his forehead; it came away stained with blood.

"You've had a nasty knock on the head, Harry," said Mr. Raitton kindly. "Take it easy for a bit—you will soon be all right."

"Why was it in that other plane?" Mr. Raitton's face clouded.

"It was Mr. Pilbeam, your Form master. It is evident that he had lost his sanity, and for some reason hired an aeroplane and attacked your machine. He is badly injured. I fear—they have taken him to the sanatorium. When he recovers from his injuries I fear there is every chance that he will still be mentally unbalanced."

A grim smile flickered over Tom Merry's face. Strength was returning to him. He sat up again, staring into Mr. Raitton's face with heavily gleaming eyes.

"You're wrong, sir! Mr. Pilbeam isn't dead. He had a definite reason for attacking our plane. He's a crook, sir, and he wanted to stop Mr. Linton getting to the school because he—"

And in jerky sentences Tom Merry told his amazing story. "Impossible!" speculated Mr. Raitton hoarsely, when he had finished.

"No, sir!" said Tom grimly. "You'll find that Mr. Pilbeam is one of the gang. He must be! It's as clear as daylight! He's—"

His broke off, his senses reeling. He had had a worse blow on the head than he had realized, and the effect of sitting up had been too much for him. Mr. Linton knelt hastily beside him.

Tom Merry's head sank back on Mr. Linton's arm with a little sigh. He had fainted.

That was an evening of breathless excitement for St. Jim's.

During the course of it, the whole staggering truth of the plot to win the Deansian fortune came to light. Hyde, delirious in the sanatorium, talked incessantly in his unconscious state of his evil schemes. He said enough to cause a strong force of police to be dispatched to Soranston Manor, the old house on the edge of Weyland Moor, which his gang had used as their headquarters. And there, after the capture of two minor satellites of Hyde's who had been left in charge during the absence of Flach and Gilling, the prisoners of Soranston Manor were found and released—the real Mr. Pilbeam, and Gerald Curtis of the Fifth, who had been imprisoned there when he had accidentally learnt the truth of the evil schemes afloat.

During the evening, too, it was learnt from the police that Flach and Gilling had both been captured in the neighbourhood of Marlborough, and were safely under lock and key, awaiting trial as soon as their leader, Hyde, had sufficiently recovered from his injuries to face the consequences of his villainous deeds.

The return to St. Jim's of Messrs. Hancock and Talbot, together with Money Lowther in a road ambulance, caused further excitement. They found that they and Tom Merry were the heroes of the hour—with nothing said about breaking from their dormitory.

Almost the whole school gave Mr. Linton a cheer, too.

## Next Week's Great Programme!

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next morning, when the fellows gathered outside the Shell Form room in a huge crowd to see "old Linton"—a disgraced captain no more—come straggling into his old Form-room for morning lessons.

Mr. Linton was once more master of the Shell.

Tom Merry was not in Form that morning. But he was well enough to attend afternoon classes. And two days later Money Lowther, too, was out of the sanatorium, still a little rocky, as he himself cheerfully put it, but well on the road to health and strength once more, and as full of cheery fun as ever.

It was on the morning of Lowther's return to the Form-room that Mr. Linton received a letter from a well-known firm of London solicitors. It informed him that their client, Mr. James Deansian, had passed away; and that, by the terms of his will, his whole fortune, amounting to some half-million pounds, became the property of Mr. Linton, since he was master of the Shell at St. Jim's. A representative of the firm would have pleasure in calling upon Mr. Linton as soon as was convenient, etc., etc.

And, as Cyrus E. Hancock remarked, when they heard the news: "Old Linton has come into a real wad! Half a million pounds! I guess that's money—money of money!" There were murmurs of grizzling amongst in the junior Common-room, where Hancock made that observation.

"Yes, old Linton's half-way to being a giddy millionnaire!" gasped Harry Triskin of the Fourth in an awed voice. "I— wonder if he'll stand the whole school a week-end party?"

"He, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you chaps! Nothing to laugh at! If I was Linton's—"

"If you were Linton, old fat man," chuckled Tom Merry. "you'd spend the lot on tack, eh? I dare say you would. But you can't expect Linton to behave like a fat porpoise, too."

"He, ha, ha! No!" grinned Money Lowther.

"Oh, really, Merry?"

"I wonder what Linton will do with all his money, though?" put in Talbot seriously. "He's a very wealthy man now—dreadfully wealthy! And he's about the age for retiring. I wonder if it occurs to St. Jim's?"

"My hat! I hope not!" exclaimed Bernard Glyn.

"I expect it will mean that," replied Tom Merry quietly. "I expect he'll retire and enjoy his money."

He added a comfortable old age if ever a man did. Good luck to you, if he decides to retire and enjoy his wealth!"

"Well, hear 'n, modified Glyn."

"Hear, hear!" murmured several of the fellows.

"We shall soon know, anyway, I expect," added Tom Merry; "but I expect we shan't have Linton here much longer now."

During the next few days the Shell waited eagerly to know whether Tom Merry's prophecy would prove correct. Would "old Linton" ever retire? he was a very rich man, retire and leave St. Jim's? The general opinion was that he would, and that the real Mr. Pilbeam, whose name of the fellows except Curtis, who had been his fellow-prisoner, had yet seen, would become master of the Shell on Mr. Linton's retirement.

"If old Linton retires, what sort of a chap will the real Pilbeam be?" That was another question that was being asked a good deal.

But it was not till more than a fortnight after his dramatic return to St. Jim's that Mr. Linton's decision became definitely known.

Dr. Holmes summoned the whole school to Big Hall one afternoon; and there the fellows listened to the Head's quiet statement that Mr. Linton, having inherited a vast fortune, had decided to leave St. Jim's.

The news came as a bombshell to Tom Merry & Co. and their Form-fellows. Though they had expected it, they could not quite imagine St. Jim's without Linton. His going would be a blow to them all. Linton had had his faults, but he was a fine old gentleman, and all his Form-fellows such fellows as Burbank and Crooks—had a deep-rooted affection for him. But, nevertheless, the Shell were the first to feel glad that Mr. Linton, now that he had grown elderly in the service of the school he loved, was to enjoy a prosperous retirement and a happy old age free from any care in the world.

"I would suggest three cheers for Mr. Linton, boys," said the Head quietly.

And the shouts that echoed and echoed again in Big Hall were the loudest that had ever been heard beneath the ancient roof.

Mr. Linton was standing on the dais with the Head. He stepped forward, and instantly the tumult of cheering died away, as the fellows waited eagerly for him to speak.

(Continued at foot of next page.)

## Information Supplied Here!



There must be a question the Oracle can't answer! Yes, you may know it! Try one and stop him!—Ed.

"LOOK here," said the Ed., directly I got in, "George Bullock, an Edinburgh reader, is writing to me. He wants to know how many Boy Scouts there are in the world." "Two million," I told the Ed. "And can you tell George anything about the International Rover Meet?" the Ed. asked.

"I can, sir," said I. "The International Rover Meet is an enormous gathering of Rover Scouts which is going to be held in the first week of August (this year of course) at Sandawald, in Scotland. There will be 2,000 Rovers going from the British Isles alone. The Scouts have what is called an international camp at Sandawald, and in the summer Scouts from all over the world go and camp there. There are a Rover Meet held near Glasgow last summer, and 1,000 Rover Scouts camped and there during the August Bank holidays."

"The Rovers are the senior Scouts, I suppose?" the Editor then asked me. "Scoutwise years old and over, sir," I said. "There are over 25,000 of them in the United Kingdom."

The Ed. picked up another letter. "Sam Trott, of Spalding, is interested in North Pole exploration. Rather a odd topic, if you ask me, for this time of year. Anyway, he wants to

know whether it would be possible to get to the North Pole in a submarine? What do you say to that, Whiskers?"

"I'll say it's quite possible, Ed.," I replied. "It's a matter of fact a distinguished American explorer, named Sir Robert Wilkins, is making preparations to do that very thing during the coming summer. The idea is to submerge the vessel under the great ice barriers. They reckon that the submarine will be able to remain under the ice for from five to three days, and it will travel at about three and a half miles per hour."

"That's very interesting," said the Ed. "How big is this submarine, say he?"

"It's 275 feet long," I said, "and is named *Nautilus*. It's fitted with an apparatus which will enable it to bore through ice fifty feet thick, and on both sides of the cutting-tower it will be fitted with spiral runners. By means of these runners the vessel will be able to slide slowly underneath the ice-cap. A kind of spiral-down sled, if you get the idea. The submarine will also be fitted with a tail-rope, and a wireless apparatus."

"I'd like to go on that," said the office boy looking in. "That sounds more exciting than flying to China. How many are going, Whiskers?"

"There will be eighteen aboard," said I, "and I'm not having you call me 'Whiskers.' Believe me, it'll be a wonderful trip. When they want to get their coats

wearing, they'll have to bare holes in the ice overhead. Another thing they've got to be careful of is not to let the inside of the submarine get too hot. They're carrying a refrigerating plant on board, to keep it cool."

"That's jolly good," shouted the Ed. "They'll do a roaring trade, selling ice-cream to the Eskimos, now, my lad, another reader, Ralph Hodges, asks whether pictures can be sent by telegraph?"

"Yes, the Post Office have a system for sending pictures by telegraph," I told the Ed. "If you want to send a picture by telegraph, they charge you according to the size of the picture. A picture fifteen inches square would cost a pound to send."

"Is this gadget used much?" the Ed. asked.

"Yes, Scotland Yard uses it. They send pictures of finger-prints by it, also photographs of wanted criminals, and planes."

"We won't be long now," said the Ed., grabbing another letter, with a gleaming optic. "What was Mr Henry Squares' speed in his speed-boat, Miss England?"

"He reached a speed of between 28 and 30 miles an hour. That was on Lake Windermere. Unfortunately, he lost his life in making this record, which beat the previous one put up by the American, Gar Wood, of 28 miles an hour—upon the Kays Dam, in Lake Superior in 1901 in the *Miss England*."

"Marvelous," gazed the Ed. "I don't know how you remember it all. How few manage to get your hat on besides me. Wait a minute, though—here's one I think you'll find a bit difficult, with all your grey matter. Who's going to win the Boat Race next year?"

"That's an easy one, Ed.," I gaped. "Oxford, every time, unless Cambridge gets in from."

"That's dodging," said the Ed. "Perhaps you can dodge this," he added, handing one of last year's Annals at my head. I did, dodging out of the office just in time.

## THE ST. JIM'S FLYING SQUAD!

(Continued from previous page.)

It was clear that Mr. Linton was deeply moved. But his face was alight with happiness. Those cheers had told him, if he had needed to be told, the affection in which he was held by the whole school.

"I will not make a speech, my boys," said Mr. Linton quietly. "I only wish to thank you for your good will towards me. And though I am retiring from the position, I have held so long, I shall not quite be saying good-bye. I am intending to purchase a house some miles from Weyland—Troxton Towers—and so, living there, I shall be in constant touch with St. Jim's, and a frequent visitor."

"I have long had it in my mind to write a history of St. Jim's. It will be a monumental work, and will afford me great happiness in the writing of it. So you can rest assured that I shall never for a moment be forgetting St. Jim's—and I trust that you will not easily forget me."

"You say we won't, sir?" shouted Tom Merry cheerily.

"Never!"

"Rather not!"

Mr. Linton smiled.

"Thank you, my boys," he said simply. "I shall remain here until Saturday. On Monday, my successor, Mr. Fitzham, will be here to take the Shell. May I say I consider him fortunate to be taking charge of such a splendid set of boys?"

"You may, sir," grinned Monty Lothian. "There was a roar of laughter in the Big Hall. Mr. Linton and the Head smiled.

"Perhaps I had better say no more," laughed Mr. Linton. "Three more cheers for Mr. Linton!" shouted Tom Merry. "Come on, Shell!"

And though the whole school joined in the fresh cheering that thundered out, the voices of the Shell could be heard above those of everyone else!

To Tom Merry & Co.—as well as to Mr. Linton—the few days preceding Saturday seemed to fly like the wind. For they knew it, almost, it seemed, Saturday had come, and for the last time Mr. Linton had taken the Shell in morning lessons!

In the afternoon, a smart tarlish drove into the quad to take Mr. Linton away to his new home—Troxton Towers, the grand old house, seven miles from the school, that he had purchased. All St. Jim's had gathered to see him off.

With his smiling face beaming upon the excited crowds of well-wishers who thronged round the slowly springing taxi-cab as it rolled out through the gates, Mr. Linton waved his hand.

"Good-bye, my boys! Come and see me sometimes!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The taxi-cab vanished at last round a bend in Ryckombe Lane.

Mr. Linton had gone. Mr. Fitzham, the new master of the Shell, would be arriving soon to take his place.

THE END.

(Good old Linton, he deserves his best! But what will you do now Mr. Fitzham? He's a Head "SHARP FLUTE AT ST. JIM'S!" next week.)

A NEW COMPLETE YARN OF MYSTERY AT BOKWOOD!

# MUFFIN'S MIDNIGHT MANŒUVRE!

By  
OWEN CONQUEST.



## CHAPTER I.

### A Mistle for Muffin!

"MUFFIN here!"

Patty of the Fourth put his head into the end study as he called that position. It was tea-time, and Jimmy Silver & Co. were in their study. Cool Adolphus Reginald Muffin was there also. A large cake had arrived that day from home for Arthur Edward Lovell, and it now adorned the tea-table in the end study. Naturally, Tubby Muffin adored the tea-table also. Muffin had the nose of a bloodhound for a cake; and he had, as it were, tracked that cake to its lair. Tubby was now disputing of the line's share of it, with an anxious eye on the National Four. Tubby was well ahead in the race; but with four eyes, he peeped, it looked as if he would get hardly more than half of the cake.

He did not trouble to look round as Patty of the Fourth looked in. He was too busy to bend Patty. Cake filled Tubby's mind as well as his capacious stomach. He gobbled on regardless.

"Here he is," answered Jimmy Silver. "You can have him if you want him!"

"I hope you want him!" remarked Baby.

"My dear chap, could anybody want Muffin?" said Patty.

"I've got a note for him."

Tubby looked up at that.

"A cursey note?" he asked.

"No, indeed?"

Tubby's attention returned to the cake.

Patty of the Fourth came into the study. He had an envelope in his hand—a rather grubby envelope.

"A man outside the school gave me this note for Muffin," he said, "but I'm divided if I know whether I ought to have brought it in. He said it was important."

"Against the rules?" said Jimmy Silver, shaking his head.

"Tubby, you fat villain, you've been making what the Head calls undesirable acquaintances outside the school. Well, I suppose that's natural, as you're an undesirable acquaintance yourself!"

Tubby Muffin did not reply. His jaws were fully occupied.

Neither did he seem interested in the note that Patty had brought in. A cursey note would have roused a chord in Tubby's plump heart. Any other note did not matter, at least, so long as Lovell's cake lasted.

The Girl-Letter.—No. 1,212.

Mr. Bright is looking for a brass lizard, but he's not overjoyed when it lands on the end of his nose—with a bump!

Patty threw the envelope on the table. It was addressed in a scrawling hand to "Master Muffin, Bokwood School."

"The man writes that on it when he gave it to me," said Patty. "He didn't seem to know Muffin's name; He described him to me."

"Oh?" said Tubby, a little interested. "How did he describe me, Patty? Did he say a distinguished-looking chap?"

"No, he jolly well didn't!" checked Patty.

"Did he say a fat freak with a face like a bleater?" asked Lovell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Something like that," grinned Patty.

"He said a jodgy fellow who looked as if he couldn't move without bursting off half his buttons. I suppose that would be you, Tubby."

"Yak!" replied Tubby Muffin. And he returned on the cake after the interval—a very brief interval.

"Well, there's the note if you want it," said Patty. "I wouldn't have let the man bother me, only he said it was important, and he seemed jolly serious about it. I dare say you know the man—a fellow with two front teeth missing."

And Patty walked out of the study and went whistling down the passage.

"My hat!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

Patty's last remark had started the chains of the end study.

"A fellow with two front teeth missing!" exclaimed Lovell.

"That must be that man Bright—the fellow who's accused of pinching a string of pearls from old Isaac at Latham—the fellow I had a steady with—"

"What on earth can that fellow want with Tubby?" asked Norwood.

"I jolly well know what he wants," granted Tubby, showing a large mouthful of cake. "He's after that brass lizard."

"The brass lizard?" repeated Jimmy Silver.

"You fellows remember I had a brass lizard—somebody checked it over the school wall one day last week, and it bit me on the nose," said Tubby.

"I sold it to Leggett of Monders' House for some money. I told the man so when he nabbed me in the fields and wanted it. He can jolly well bother Leggett for it if he wants it."

"That's why he tracked me out to him as Leggett; and he bagged me, and I gave him a jolly good hitting for his cheek."

"I remember!" said Jimmy. "Look here, Muffin, you don't want to get into touch with a man suspected of being a thief. You'd better take that note to Dalton."

"Well, I don't want to tell Dalton about the brass lizard," objected Tubby. "He might think it wasn't wise to tell to Leggett."

"Well, it wasn't yours, you fat villain!"

"It bit me on the nose—"

"That doesn't make it yours. I might hit you on the nose—in fact, I will, if you don't go away with that cake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, see what the man's got to say, anyhow," said Baby, "and then check his note into the bro."

"You open it, Jimmy," said Tubby Muffin. "I say, this is good cake! I'll have another slice. I don't want to have anything to do with that man Bright. He's a bad hat. Pass the cake, Norwood!"

The Jimmy Silver picked up the grubby envelope, slit it open, and traced out an equally grubby sheet of paper that was folded inside.



"Read it out, old chap," said Tubby, with his mouth full, "or chuck it in the fire without reading it. I don't mind."

"Better see what he's got to say," said Jimmy, frowning. And he read out the letter.

Dear Sir,—You was pulling my leg when you told me a fellow named Leggett had that brass lizard when I lost Leadwate, he says he hasn't got it. Now, sir, I want it back, seeing it belongs to me. I'm willing to pay for it fair and square. What about two pounds?"

Tubby Muffin jumped. For the moment he forgot the cake.

"Two pounds!" he gasped.

"My hat!" said Lovell. "Bright seems jolly keen on that old brass thing. What on earth can he want it for! It's not worth two pounds!"

"Goodness knows," said Jimmy Silver, and he went on reading out the letter.

"You come along Connie Lane and bring that brass lizard, and I'll hand over two quids, straight. It belongs to me, like I said, only a fellow showed it over your school wall for a job. But if you ain't taking my word, I'll buy it fair and square,—E. Bazaar."

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver, as he finished that curious epistle.

"And—and I sold it to Leggett for sixpence?" groaned Tubby Muffin. "That silly ass would give me two pounds for it, and I parted with it to that mean Modern rascal for a fraction of the dear! I say, give that letter!" The fat Classical grabbed the letter from Jimmy. "I say, you fellows, think I could get that lizard off Leggett again? I say, I dare say he would part with it for five bob! Lord me five bob, Jimmy! I'll let you have it back out of the two pounds, and!"

"Look here, you ass," said Jimmy Silver gravely. "You can't have any dealings with a man like Bright—"

"Two pounds!"

"It's jolly certain he pinched those pearls from old Isaac, though it isn't proved against him. He may have pinched that brass lizard, though it doesn't look worth pinching. Keep clear of him, Tubby!"

"I say, is there any more cake?"

"No, you rascal!"

Tubby Muffin jumped up.

"Sorry I can't stay any longer, you fellows! I've got to see Leggett."

"Look here, Tubby—"

But Reginald Muffin did not "look there." He started for the door. As there was no more cake, there was no reason for lingering in the mad study; and Muffin was anxious to get his pecky lunch again on the brass coils which he had so unfortunately sold to Leggett for sixpence. He rolled out of the study in haste.

"Look here, Tubby—"

Tubby vanished.

money at interest in the Lower School. He was too wary and cunning to be caught out; but his Form master's eye had long been upon him.

"What is it, Leggett?"

Leggett opened the door, and came across to the writing-table. To Mr. Dalton's surprise, he drew a glistening object of brass from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"It was a brass lizard, about six inches long, very shifflily

green.

"I thought you might like to see this, sir," said Leggett diffidently. "It's a paper-weight, sir, and I thought—"

Mr. Dalton picked up the brass lizard, and examined it with some slight interest. Probably it was intended for use as a paper-weight, though if it was hollow it might have been used as a receptacle. There was no sign of an opening to it, however.

"I thought you might like it, sir," said Leggett. "I was rather taken with it when I saw it, and bought it, sir; but afterwards I thought I'd rather have the money back. If you've any use for a paper-weight, sir—"

Mr. Dalton smiled faintly. Leggett was always hoping or selling something in the Fourth; but this was the first time that he had tackled his Form master as a possible customer.

"Really, Leggett—" said Mr. Dalton.

"It's quite cheap, sir," said Leggett. "I only want ten shillings for it."

"That is certainly cheap," said Mr. Dalton, with a smile. "If you desire to part with it, Leggett, there is no reason why you should not receive what you gave for it."

Leggett started.

"What I—!" he stammered.

"I have seen this brass lizard before," explained Mr. Dalton. "I noticed it in the window of Mr. Isaac's, a week or two ago, at Lutetian, and it crossed my mind that I might purchase it. It was marked ten shillings."

"Oh!" ejaculated Leggett.

It was news to Leggett that the brass lizard had ever been in Mr. Isaac's shop at Lutetian. All he knew of it was that some person unknown had hung it over the school wall, and that Tubby Muffin had begged it. He had driven a hard bargain with Tubby, who professed his taste to curise any day; but he did not want Mr. Dalton to hear of that hard bargain. If Bicky Dalton stood to fancy that he had bought the lizard at Isaac's shop Leggett had no objection to letting him fancy so.

"As a matter of fact, I am in need of a paper-weight," said Mr. Dalton. "The one I use has been unaccountably lost."

Leggett did not smile. Mr. Dalton was a keen gentleman, but he did not dream of suspecting that Leggett had surreptitiously slipped his paper-weight up the study chimney one day when he was out. Leggett had minutely



The next moment Leggett was trailing along the earth with Mr. Bright gripping him tightly by the collar!

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Lark!

**T**AP!  
"Come in!" said Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, looked up from his pile of papers as the door of his study opened and a junior entered. It was Albert Leggett, of the Modern Fourth.

Richard Dalton's glance dealt rather coldly on Leggett. Leggett was the member of the Fourth of whom Mr. Dalton had the lowest opinion. Leggett was given to hard bargaining among the other fellows; and he was suspected of leading

made sure that Mr. Dalton would be in need of such an article.

"You should not expend your money thoughtlessly, my boy," said Mr. Dalton kindly. "Before you buy an article you should reflect whether you really want it or not. However, I will certainly take the paper-weight off your hands at the price you paid for it."

"Thank you, sir," said Leggett, and laid a ten-shilling note on the table. Leggett picked it up, suppressing a grin. The transaction secured a profit of nine shillings and sixpence for Albert Leggett, little as Mr. Dalton supposed it.

He left the study, leaving the brass lizard on the Form master's table. He did not grin till the door had closed on him. Dicky Dalton was supposed, in the Bookwood Fourth, to be rather a "downy" bird; but Leggett feared that he could make things crueler than when it came to downing. The idea of thoughtlessly expending his money, or of selling an article for the same price that he had paid for it, made Leggett smile.

Leggett looked very cheery as he walked across the quad to Mademoiselle House. The three Trustees of the Modern Fourth were in the doorway, and they eyed him as he came in.

"When have you been dithering, Leggett?" asked Tommy Dodd maliciously. "You look awfully backed."

"Go and eat cake!" was Leggett's rejoinder.

"There's a fat snail crawled in to see you," added Tommy Dodd. "He's waiting somewhere around for you. That fat an Muffin?"

"How Muffin?" answered Leggett.

He was not in the least interested in Muffin. He went to his study, and did not look pleased to find Reginald Muffin waiting for him in the room.

"You can get out!" said Leggett.

"I say, I've been waiting for you—"

"Don't wait any longer!"

"I say, I want that brass lizard back, Leggett!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin breathlessly. "You acknowledge that brass lizard I sold you last week for a tanner? I say, I'll give you a shilling for it."

Leggett laughed.

"I've sold it!" he answered.

"Oh crumbs!" Tubby Muffin's jaw dropped. "You've sold it! You cotten! I bet you made a profit on it."

"I didn't buy it to sell at a loss!" agreed Leggett.

"What the deer after you, Muffin?"

"But, I say, I want it!" exclaimed Tubby, in dismay.

"I say, what fellow's got it? Perhaps I can get it off him."

"Mr. Dalton's got it," answered Leggett coolly. "What do you want it back for, you fat an? You were keen enough to sell it."

"You; only I never knew how valuable it was!" purred Tubby. "If you've sold it to a Form master, you cotten, I can't get it back."

"You can't?" asserted Leggett cheerfully. "And it's not valuable. It was marked ten bob in old Isaac's shop once. Shut the deer after you!"

"Yah!"

Tubby Muffin rolled dizzily out of the study. He rolled dizzily back to the Classical side. Jimmy Silver & Co. were coming out of the House when he arrived there, and they looked down at Tubby's dinned fat countenance and grinned.

"Wasn't Leggett part?" chuckled Lovell.

"The brute's sold it!" purred Tubby. "Sold it to Dicky Dalton. And I could get two pounds for it. I say, Jimmy, that brass lizard's really mine. Leggett deceived me down to a tanner when he got it off me. It's really mine, you know. D-d-do you think I should be justified in snatching it out of Dalton's study?"

"What?" purred Jimmy Silver.

"Well, in the circumstances, you know—" argued Tubby.

"You fat scoundrel!"

"In—in—the circumstances—" stammered Tubby feebly.

"In the circumstances, you'd better keep your fat paws from picking and scooping—and in all other circumstances, too," said Jimmy Silver. "And just to impress that on your mind, Muffin, you're going to be bumped!"

"Here, I say, leggo!" roared Tubby Muffin, in alarm.

The Fathead Fug grinned, and grasped the fat Classical. Jimmy Silver was thinking that he was justified in "mooching" the brass lizard out of Mr. Dalton's study, it was time for

him to be jolled back into the straight and narrow path. Jimmy Silver & Co. proceeded to jolt him back.

Humph, bump, bump!

"Yow-or-ow!" roared Muffin. "Leggo! Yooooooop!"

Bump! Bump!

"Ow! I was only jig-jig-jog-jog!" purred Tubby.

"Kik-kik-man's you fat-fat-take a jig-jig-jog!" Yawoo!"

Bump!

"Whoooooooop!"

"Now think again," said Jimmy Silver cheerily; and the clams of the Classical Fourth walked on to the gates, leaving Cecil Adolphus Reginald Muffin cowering.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Ready for Bright!

"LOOK here, Leggett—" A man, with little, piggy eyes, and two front teeth missing, started as those words fell on his ears.

Mr. Ephraim Bright had been lounging moodily under the leafy trees in Coombe Lane. He lounged there in the hope of seeing the fat Muffin come along, with a brass lizard for sale. He had no doubt that his note had been discovered, and he hoped for the best.

Mr. Bright was getting rather desperate about that brass lizard. Only Mr. Bright knew, so far, that in the hollow interior was hidden the string of pearls he had "pinned" from Mr. Isaac, of Lambton. But with the lizard handed about in the hands of schoolboys, the secret might come to light at any time.

That meant not only the loss of Mr. Bright's loot, but it meant that his former employer would be able to "cop" him, as Mr. Bright expressed it, on the charge of theft.

With a conscience at his heels, Mr. Bright had tumbled the brass lizard over the school wall at Bookwood, to get rid of his plunder before he was run down. It had been his only resource at the time. But it left him with the difficult problem to solve of getting the lizard back into his hands. Four hundred pounds' worth of pearls were concealed within the brass lizard; and, so far, Mr. Bright had had all the trouble and risk of "pinching" them for nothing! Which Mr. Bright could not help thinking was very "hard cheese" on the outside!

Mr. Bright backed out of sight behind a tree, as a Bookwood junior came along the lane. Bright was not anxious to be seen hanging about the school, and the fellow scooping up the lane was not the fat fellow he wanted to see. It was a rather thin, bony fellow, with a rather crafty face.

Bright had seen him before; it was the fellow who had pointed out a junior to him, and told him that that junior was Leggett. Bright was not aware that his informant had been Leggett himself, and that he had pointed out Arthur Edward Lovell. He stopped out of sight to let the junior pass.

Another Bookwood man came along from the direction of the village and stopped. Leggett stopped, and the two spoke together. Mr. Bright was not in the least interested in what they said, till suddenly Jones minor raised his voice angrily and addressed Leggett by name. Then Mr. Ephraim Bright was very interested indeed.

"Look here, Leggett!" howled Jones minor. "You jolly well know that you gave me threepence for my Latin die, and I'm jolly well not going to give you two bob for it back, an' I've a jolly good mind to punch your nose!"

"If you want that die—" said Leggett coolly.

"Oh, go and eat cake, you meany worm!" said Jones minor, and he stalked on towards Bookwood, leaving Leggett grinning.

Mr. Bright stepped out from behind the tree. His little, piggy eyes were glittering. He cast a swift glance up and down Coombe Lane. For the moment, after Jones minor had gone, there was no one in sight in either direction. Mr. Bright stopped swiftly and silently towards Leggett from behind.

The malicious grin vanished from Leggett's face, and he gave a yelp of surprise and alarm as a sudden grip fastened on the back of his collar.

"Oooooop!"

The next moment the Modern junior was trawling along the earth. With a grip on his collar, Mr. Bright dragged him promptly and swiftly into the trees beside the lane.

Out of sight of the road, Leggett was flung to the ground. He sat up and stared in stammered fright at the man with the missing teeth.

"Oh!" spluttered Leggett.

Ephraim Bright's piggy eyes glinted down at him.

"So you're Leggett, are you?" said Mr. Bright, between his teeth. "You was fooling me the other day, was you, you young 'ound you?"

Leggett shrunk back from him. Mr. Bright had rather scared him at their first meeting, which was the reason why

Leggett had pointed out Arthur Edward Lovell as suspect. Mr. Bright sneered him more than ever now. What the man worried with him, Leggett could not begin to guess; but he knew the man was a suspected thief, and he was afraid of him.

Bright eyed him wilyly. His face still showed signs of his encounter with Arthur Edward Lovell. He had collared Arthur Edward, supporting him to be Leggett; and, greatly to his astonishment and dismay, Arthur Edward had given him the thrashing of his life. But he had nothing of that kind to expect from the genuine Leggett. Leggett was fairly springing with terror.

"You—you let me alone!" gasped Leggett.  
 "You young 'sard you!" said Mr. Bright. "Putting me on to the wrong fellow! No wonder he said he hadn't the brass liard when he saw't Leggett at all, as I've just found out! Pulling a man's leg and getting him a blinking 'ding from a blinking young prig-squart! Blow you! But I got the right pig by the ear now!"

He glared at Leggett.  
 "Where's that brass liard?" he demanded.

"The—the brass liard?" stammered Leggett blankly.

"Don't you tell me any more lies, young Leggett!" said Mr. Bright ferociously.  
 "That fat fellow told me he sold it to Leggett for sixpence. That fat fellow Maflin! You're Leggett! You put me on to the wrong cove—but you're Leggett, and you've got that brass liard what what belongs to me! Now, then, where is it?"

"Oh grand!" gasped Leggett. "I—I'd let you have it if I had it—I would, really—but—but I've sold it!"

Something like a roar of wrath broke from Mr. Bright. Fatty Maflin had sold the brass liard when Mr. Bright collared him. Now Leggett had sold it when he collared Leggett. Really, Mr. Bright seemed destined by a cruel fate to come along too late!

"If I'd known that was what you wanted, I'd have let you have it!" gasped Leggett. "Oh dear! But I've sold it now—sold it this afternoon—"

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed the exasperated Mr. Bright. "Are you blooming ashamed to see at Rockwood a blooming set of blooming shopkeepers! The other bloke had sold it; now you say you've sold it! I don't know why I don't push your blooming features through the back of your blinking 'ead!"

Mr. Bright made a movement towards Leggett, as if disposed to release himself by administering that push. Leggett squirmed in sheepish fear.

"I—I say, keep off!" he gasped. "I never knew—I say, I'll try to get it back! I—I'll do anything—"  
 "You'll say anything, you mean, to get out of my 'sard!" said Mr. Bright savagely. "Now, you tell me the truth! Who's got that brass now?"

"My Ferra master, Mr. Dalton!" gasped Leggett.  
 "Oh, smokes! And what does a blinking schoolmaster want with a blinking pig like that?" demanded Mr. Bright contemptuously.

"It's a paper-weight, isn't it?" said Leggett. "Dalton always uses a paper-weight in his study."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Bright. "Yes, I remember—old Innon had it in his window, marked, 'Very old brass paper-weight—ten shillings.' So your schoolmaster's got it for a paper-weight, has he? Blow you!"

Bright glared at the Modern junior wilyly. The brass liard, the secret evidently still unsuspected, was in the hands of a Ferra master; which seemed to put paid to Mr. Bright's chance of getting hold of it again. Certainly, Mr. Dalton was not likely to carry a paper-weight with him in his walks abroad; even if Bright had thought of venturing to tackle Mr. Dalton as he had tackled Leggett. The "pigeon" points seemed farther off than ever from the hapless prisoner.

"I—I say—" stammered Leggett.  
 "Take that!" snarled Bright. "And that—and that—"  
 "You—er—er!" roared Leggett as he took the hefty swipe, and he scrambled to his feet and dashed frantically towards the lane. Mr. Bright, apparently finding consolation in it, followed him, smacking his head as he went. Smack, smack, smack, smack!

Leggett plunged down the lane, polling. After him came Bright, still smacking. The police Leggett almost ran into four juniors who were coming down the lane from the school.

"Help!" he yelled, as he sighted Jimmy Silver & Co.

"Ow! Help! Ow!"

"My hat! That Nigger Bright again!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Collar him!"

Bright stopped at the sight of the First Four. He made



Mr. Bright went headlong into the ditch. There was a splashing of black and green mud followed by a horrified howl!

a jump back, but Jimmy Silver & Co. were upon him before he could escape. Why he had been handling Leggett they did not know; but they were going to make it clear to Mr. Bright that he could not smack Rockwood heads.

Leggett had on down the lane, leaving Mr. Bright in the grasp of the First Four. There was a ditch beside the lane. The summer sun had dried up most of the water, but it had left a deep bed of rich ooze.

Bright, struggling and yelling, with his arms and legs flying wildly, was hooked towards the ditch.

Splash!  
 Mr. Innon's late assistant went in headlong. There was a splashing of black mud and green slime, and a horrified howl from Bright. He set in the deep ooze and splattered. Mud and slime plastered him like a garment when he struggled to his feet, and the acents that he disturbed from the bottom of the ditch were not aromatic. He glared moodily at the signs of Rockwood and gurgled horribly.

Jimmy Silver & Co. chuckled and walked on their way. Ephraim Bright crawled out of the ditch, gasping and gurgling. Mr. Bright was beginning to feel that he would have earned those pined pearls by the time he got his hands on them.

CHAPTER 4.

A Thief in the Night!

**B**ULEBLEY of the Sixth started. It was dark in the Rockwood quad. Bulebley had been over to the Modern Side to see Kewster on a matter of cricket. "Cricket jave" had kept him rather late, and he was hurrying back to THE GUN LANE.—No. 123.

the Classical Side, his duty being to see lights out for the Classical Fourth that night. It was now just on bed-time for the parsons, so Bulkeley came striding rapidly along the path that ran under the old beeches.

The summer evening was fine and clear enough, but under the thick branches of the beeches the shadows were deep. Bulkeley, coming swiftly along in the deep gloom, almost ran into a lurking figure.

He stopped, with a startled exclamation, just in time. The half-crow figure gave round, equally startled, and for a second Bulkeley had a dim glimpse of a face with small, piggy eyes, before it vanished in the shadows.

There was a swift patter of feet in the darkness under the spreading branches, and then silence. Bulkeley stared round him.

"Who's that?" he called.

There was no reply.

Bulkeley walked on to the House at last. He was puzzled by the incident, and a suspicion crossed his mind that the lurking figure he had started under the beeches did not belong to Hookwood at all. He resolved to walk round the ground, with Neville and Jones major, and make sure, after he had seen the Fourth off to their dormitory.

"Bulkeley's late," Arthur Edward Lovell was remarking, with his eye on the clock, when the Hookwood captain arrived at the door of the junior Common-rooms.

"He's gone over to Masters' House," remarked Paddy of the Fourth. "Let's hope he'll be late."

"Rather an aim to target the time!" said Lovell.

"Thank you, Lovell!" said Bulkeley, at the door.

"Oh!" ejaculated Arthur Edward. "I—I—I didn't see you, Bulkeley."

"Probably not," agreed Bulkeley. "Now you are not, get off to your dorm. You may bring me fifty lines of Virgil after tea to-morrow."

Arthur Edward Lovell made a grimace, and the other fellows grinned. The Classical Fourth marched off to their dormitory, where the Hookwood captain duly saw lights out, and left them to repose.

In a quarter of an hour or so all the Classical Fourth were asleep, with one exception. That exception was Reginald Muffin.

Muffin, as a rule, slept as soon as his helmet head touched the pillow. He did not find it easy to keep awake. But Tubby was in a very determined mood now. He was after the brass lizard!

Until ten o'clock Tubby propped his heavy eyelids open. But it was useless to think of sneaking down to Dalton's study till eleven at least. Tubby decided—rather bitterly—that he would wait with his eyes shut till the hour of eleven boomed from the clock-tower. A minute later his eyes were glued in slumber.

In a waking moment Muffin would not have recognized his eyes till the ringing bell rang out, in the summer recess. But, soundly as he slept, his piggy mind was haunted by the sense of something unclean and he awoke at last and rubbed his eyes. Through the silence of the night came a deep boom from the clock-tower. One!

Tubby sat up in bed, gawping fat knuckles into sleep. He realized that he had dropped off to sleep. It was one o'clock in the morning now.

But it was better late than never. Tubby was strongly disinclined to leave his comfortable bed. But the thought of two whole pounds to spend on tuck at Sergeant Keeble's shop spurred him on. He rolled out of bed, groped for his clothes, and dressed in the dark.

"You fellows asleep?" murmured Tubby.

Only steady breathing answered him. Nobody in the dormitory was likely to be awake at one in the morning.

Tubby crept to the door. Silently he opened it; silently he closed it behind him. Outside, the passage was dim, with faint starlight glimmering in at high windows.

Tubby shivered. He did not like dim and deserted passages and staircases at a late hour. But he was for it now; and he rolled resolutely on. He started and slithered again as the stairs creaked under his cautious tread. Tubby did not believe in ghosts; and he had no reason to suppose that laughter were in the House that particular night. But he eyed every shadowy corner with great nervousness as he made his way to the masters' studios. The preparation was thick on his piggy brow as he reached Mr. Dalton's study door at last.

He passed there, his plump heart thumping. All Hookwood had long since gone to bed; the coast was clear. But Tubby's feet slid trembled as he turned the knob and opened the door.

He stepped into Mr. Dalton's study. There was a glimmer of starlight from the window. Outside, the ground was a sheet of silver. But it was very dark in the study; and Tubby realized—rather late—that he would have done well to provide himself with a candle, or at least a box of matches. He dared not switch on the light.

The Gem Library—No. 1211.

Still, as Dalton was using the brass lizard as a paper-weight, it was not likely to be far out of sight. Reginald Muffin peered and groped over the Form master's table. There was a light shed on something tall over under his groping hand, and he started and gasped. The thing was hidden by a mass of trinkets; and Tubby guessed that he had upset the ink. There was another shed as a book fell from the table to the floor.

"Oh dear!" gasped Tubby.

Geil Adolphus Reginald Muffin had never been designed by nature for the burglar's profession, that was clear. He remained a few minutes inquiring with thumping heart. Then he resumed his search for the brass lizard. A pale glimmer in the starlight caught his eye, and he gasped at it. It lay on a pile of papers on the table, pinning them down.

"Oh good!" breathed Tubby.

The sought-for article was in his fat clutches at last. Tubby was turning towards the door when suddenly his very blood seemed to freeze in his veins, and he stood rooted, his dilated eyes staring at the window.

One of the windows had suddenly swung open and the fresh breeze of night blew on Tubby's half-closed figure. A dark figure blocked the sunlight.

Tubby's eyes almost started from his head. He could not move. He could not even shriek. He could only gaze with dazed eyes at the dark figure that slipped silently in through the opened window.

That it was a burglar was certain. The movement had been opened from the outside. The invisible figure dropped silently into the study and Tubby heard a deep, hurried breath in the dimness. For a long moment the figure remained by the window, the head bent, listening. And in that moment, Tubby Muffin saw in the glimmering starlight a long face with little piggy eyes and two teeth missing from the mouth. The figure moved at last, and a husky muttering voice reached Tubby's ears.

"This 'ere is the room! I saw him at the window—it must be the room! I know his blooming phiz—it's Dalton's room all right! If I don't 'ave my 'ands on that blinking thing in 'arf a no—"

A flash of light came from a pocket torch. It wavered round the study and dashed on the ceiling, terror-stricken face of Reginald Muffin.

There was a startled exclamation from the thief in the night. The sudden sight of Tubby Muffin standing there fairly lifted the hair on the head of Ephraim Bright. For some seconds, he stood as if paralyzed, while Tubby's terrified eyes blinked.

Then, with a husky muttered oath, Bright leaped towards Tubby. Tubby uttered a shriek of sheer horror. It rang through the silence of the House. A hand was on his hip; and Tubby, hardly conscious in his terror of what he did, struck out frantically with the brass lizard in his hand.

A fearful howl from the burglar followed. Bright was there to get the brass lizard—and he got it now, on the nose, with all Tubby's best behind it. The man with the missing teeth staggered back and set down with a bump, yelling.

The brass lizard slipped from Tubby's fat hand unheeded. He made a wild rush for the doorway.

"Help!" yelled Tubby. "Oh crikey! Burglars! Help! Yargh! He's got me! Ow! Ow! Help!"

Hookwood was sleeping. But Tubby's wild yells would have awakened the soundest sleeper in the wide world. There was a calling of voices—hurried footsteps—flashing lights. Tubby, still yelling with terror, found Mr. Dalton's hand on his shoulder, shaking him.

"Muffin! What are you doing—out of your dormitory? What—"

"Ow! Help! Burglars! Help! That man!" howled Tubby. "The man Bright! Ow! Help! He's in your study—ow! Help!"

Mr. Dalton rushed to his study and switched on the light. The movement was wild enough—but the room was empty. On the floor lay the brass lizard. Mr. Bright had not stopped to look for it before he fled. As Tubby's wild yells awakened the House, the man with the missing teeth had scrambled out of the window and he was now clambering in frantic haste over the school wall into the road. Mr. Dalton stared round the study. There was an open inkpot—a fallen book, and a paper-weight on the floor—and an open window! But the burglar was gone. Ephraim Bright, running through the darkness, with a severe pain in his nose, was as far as ever from the brass lizard and the perished pearls.

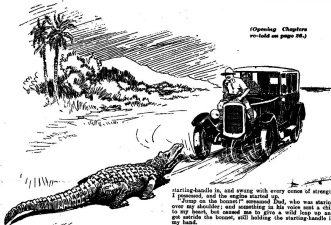
was met.

(Mr. Bright's quest is no nearer the end now than it was before. Will he ever get the lizard? See "LIMBERLOAF EXPLORE," next week's splendid new complete Hookwood page.)

YOU ARE CERTAIN TO BE THRILLED BY OUR SERIAL.

# THE ISLAND CASTAWAYS!

(Opening Chapter  
re-told on page 28.)



## The Skeleton in the Sand!

THE preparation was standing out in little beads on my brother's forehead, and the hand in which he held an adjustable spanner was trembling as he gained my side.

"Could the brute get at us in the car, Barry?" he asked hoarsely.

I told him that I didn't know how a crocodile, used to the quiet life of an uninhabited island, would react to a Moon-beam saloon, but that as I'd once seen a picture of a crocodile, apparently much smaller than our brute, making a nasty mess of a tidy-sized boat by a mere flick of its tail, it struck me that . . . we got the engine going the better.

Dad pulled himself together and unfastened the nut above the filter.

"Let's hope this is where the trouble is," he said. "If it's a jet or a sparking plug we're— Look!"

He had fished out the gauge filter, and it was lugged up with what looked like particles of shavings.

I got out my knife. That dirty, nasty, horrible-looking thing was clear of the swamp now, and moving rapidly on to the firm sand; but Dad seemed much less windy now he had discovered the trouble. He took my knife and hurriedly began to clean out the choked filter, saying that he'd often had similar trouble with new cars, as the packing in which a tank was sent to the works sometimes got in at the filter cap, and wasn't spotted.

I could hear that heavy thing moving on the sand now—a sort of writhing squeal—and scarcely dared look round. Dad shoved the filter back, tightened the nut, and hopped into the car, giving me the starting-handle.

"Give her a swing, Barry! I don't want to run down the starter. Look slippy!"

There was no need to tell me that. I shoved the

starting-handle in, and swung with every ounce of strength I possessed, and the engine started up.

"Jump on the bonnet!" screamed Dad, who was staring over my shoulder; and something in his voice sent a chill to my back, but caused me to give a wild leap up and get outside the bonnet, still holding the starting-handle in my hand.

Whooooooy!

Dad was in the reverse, and the car seemed to scream as the engine revved nearly all out on such a low gear. I heard a vicious snap behind me, and then realized how mighty close that crocodile must have been when Dad had called to me to jump on the bonnet, evidently realizing that I had not time to get to the door.

It must have been a weird sight. Our glimmering Moon-beam, gleaming under the tropical sun, moving swiftly backwards on a stretch of firm, white sand beside a sapphire blue sea, with windily palms and coconut-trees in the background, with a windy young man at the wheel, a still more windy youngster perched the immaculate bonnet, and the largest size in crocodiles still in pursuit.

It was a scream really, but I never saw a chap look so surprised as Dad did when I burst out laughing.

Once we were well clear of the area, Dad stopped the car, I got in with him, and we made back for the camp. We knew by our speedometer that the distance from the camp to the place we christened Crocodile Creek was three miles, and the only thing to do was to make a fresh start, and head out how far the creek was in the opposite direction. It was tantalizing to think that it might only be a few hundred yards round the bend on the other side of the camp.

As we approached we saw another landing towards us, and she looked pale and agitated.

"Boys, quick!" she cried. "Drive along that way as fast as you can get! Jill set off walking that way, and just now I heard a most frightful scream!"

That gave us a nasty shock, but old Dad evidently saw mother was a bit hysterical, and I suppose he thought she had been imagining things, for he refused to get rattled.

"Pull yourself together, mother," he said a little sharply. "When we left here Jill was on the wreck with the gas'lor, and—"

"I know, I know!" panted mother. "She came off in the bucket just as you'd gone. Your father is working on something right down below, and her idea was to go with you. When she saw you drive off she set off in the opposite

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direction, calling out to me that we was going to walk along and meet you and give you a pleasant surprise. Then a few minutes ago I heard the scream. I couldn't make your father hear, and then I saw you coming back. Oh, do hurry! I've seen something dreadful has happened to Jill!"

"Slip over and get your revolver, Barry!" said Dad sharply; and I hurried to him in making a dash for my pocket, and then hurried back to the car with it.

Dad had ordered another hit, but she was still looking frightfully worried as we drove off. Neither of us spoke a word. We were wandering just how far away Crocodile Creek was from our camp.

There was no sign of Dad on the Maglo. We could see Jill's footprints in the sand, and that gave me an idea almost as frightening as the crocodile theory, that I felt certain from the expression on Dad's face he shared with me. It reminded me of the footprints Jill had seen, the fact that we were not alone on the island.

Dad had flattened out. If another had heard a scream Jill could not have been far away, and we roared for the land beyond a mass of trailing vines with gorgeous flowers, and as we reached it we saw Jill coming running towards us looking frightfully waxy.

Dad pulled up. "The brown man!" pointed Jill. "I saw him!" "The scent of your womanfolk is that you get so heavily excited," said Dad coolly, as he lit a cigarette. "Now get up to the boat and tell us just what happened."

I must say that I think if Dad had been put in a job where part of his duty had been to soothe amiable women he would never have achieved his wonderful record for getting the sack. Jill got into the car, still a bit shaken and panting, and told us how she had not off to meet us. Seen after standing the boat she had seen a brown man running from the sea to the jungle. He had crossed the stretch of sand at an almost incredible speed, and disappeared into the tangled growth of the jungle.

"And you screamed!" "Yes," admitted Jill, a little ashamed. "Well, you put the breeze up the water, and up the breeze goes well, by the look of it. You're a trucker, Jill."

"I thought I had a look at his footprints." "There was no doubt about Jill having seen a man, far from the sea to the edge of the jungle his footprints were clear enough even to me, and we got out of the car to examine them, and Jill gave a startled cry.

"It's the man with the missing toes." "I think he's rather clevering," he said. "There can't be a race among two toes, or, anyway, it's very unlikely, so it looks as though you'd picked the same sportsman both times, and a reasonable deduction from that is that either the man is alone on the island and a spy on us, or he's a wanderer from the tribe keeping an eye on us."

Jill shuddered and glanced nervously towards the jungle. "That's the awful part, Dad! I feel that we're constantly being watched—watched and waited for!"

"Don't be an anxious bird!" said awkwardly. "Look here, we'd better get back and tell mother it's all right. We mustn't mention the brown man. You must say you got windy at being alone, and let off a yell."

"And if you're a good girl you can come with us and see some nice specimens of crocodile who put the breeze up us."

As we drove back to the camp we told Jill what had happened at Crocodile Creek, and on finding I'd got my revolver she was quite keen on the trip, which would tell us just how big the island was. Since I'd shot that snake she had a more flattering opinion of my marksmanship.

It was only a matter of a few minutes to turn the car and get back to the camp, and mother was so relieved to find that Jill was all right that she didn't ask her anything about the scream. Carefully noting the sidewalk on the speedometer, we started off again, past the coral reef, the wreck, and the footprints of the man with the missing toes.

Although some of the novelty of driving along the sand had worn off and the scenery appeared much the same, in a sort of groove in the jungle we saw a fallen tree covered with twisting vines, on which were the most wonderfully coloured flowers, with gorgeously coloured butterflies flitting round. Then, just as we had covered nearly the same miles from our camp, we reached a pretty sharp bend and saw the slightest swamp ahead of us.

There could be no doubt about it being the same, for

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across the muddy swamp, with its unpleasant occupants, we could see the marks of the tyres in the white sand, so we pulled up. The swamp had no attraction. We had been right round the island, and established that it was approximately seven miles in circumference. Dad said that so far as he was able to judge from the coast line it was shaped something like the Isle of Wight on a much smaller scale. This swamp represented the River Medina in the north, and our camp was on the south side, about the position of Shanklin on a map of the Isle of Wight. The mountain, which certainly looked volcanic, was in the centre of the broadest part, and the rest appeared to be a tangled jungle.

"I shall make a map," said Dad. "It's pretty thrilling when you come to think of it."

Jill gave a little shiver. "I wish I hadn't that terrible feeling that someone was spying on us in the jungle."

Dad turned the car, and just as we were approaching that wonderful grove I pulled to him to stop.

"Want to ask the pretty Brown?" he asked mockingly, as he took his foot off the accelerator and gently applied the powerful hydraulic brakes.

"No," I said a bit sheepishly. "There's something sticking up in the sand there which looks like an old shoe."

"I've seen 'em washed ashore before."

Dad was grinning, and Jill laughed, but what I saw was right up against a tangle of grass, far above high-water mark, and it rather pricked me, and jumping out of the car I made for it.

I was right about it being a shoe, a large, broad, black shoe sticking out up from the fine white sand. It was in the style of over a century ago, and there was a big tarnished silver buckle on it, and as I stooped and heeled it from the sand I gave a little jolt of horror.

The crumbling skeleton of a foot dropped from it!

#### The Last of the Maglo!

"WHAT'S bitten you, Barry?" asked Dad, strolling up, putting at his cigarette. "You look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

"I have in a way," I replied shakily, and handed him the shoe. "The whole heap of dust and bone in the foot has been inside it."

Then made old Dad sit up. He lost his superior air, and started to lean forward for the rest of the skeleton, but I had no strength for it. The discovery wasn't cheering.

I walked back to where Jill sat in the car, shaking of my poor consternation on the island perhaps a hundred years or so ago.

Of course, he might not have had our luck with provisions, he certainly hadn't got a six-cylinder car, and the vessel not I hoped to get into working order soon, but he'd not got away, and there was something lamentably horrible about that little dusty heap of bone that seemed to grip and rather choke me.

"What's up?" asked Jill, as I joined her.

"Oh, I spotted that shoe, and old Dad is searching round for the skeleton of the owner!" I said, with a carelessness I did not feel. I thought it would choke Jill off, and that she would sit quietly in the car until Dad was ready, but she was not in a funk, and examining the shoe Dad had put down on the sand, while he talked away with his hands.

"It's thrilling!" she cried excitedly. "It's just the sort of shoe pirates were in the old days, the sort that goes with crimson, red handkerchiefs, and walking the plank!"

Dad grinned. "Go on!" he said. "Make a map out of it!"

But Jill was frightfully well. "It would be a well-known fact that pirates buried their treasure, and if you'd found the remains of a dead pirate the chances are that there was treasure buried on Necessity Island."

I thought that was a jolly thrilling idea, though there seemed a lot of grasshopper about it, but Dad only laughed.

"Then all we've got to do is to search and dig to find a fortune which will make us rich for life!" cried Jill.

"And hope that Harveys Bank will have opened a branch here by the time we've found it!" said Dad, in that cynical voice he adopts when he's feeling frightfully grown-up.

Jill made a grimace.

"And that's as likely as for you to find anything just scratching about in the mud like some old hen!" she laughed.

Marking the place where I'd found the shoe with a couple

#### THE OPENING CHAPTER.

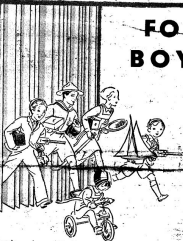
FROM BARRY MATHE is on his way to New Zealand aboard the Maglo with his father and mother, BUCKLEY, his elder brother, and JACK, his sister, are also with them. Barry is twelve years in the Pacific the ship strikes a coral reef and the party are stranded on a strange island, which they christen *Spectator Island*. Searching the coast, Barry and Dad strike a car together with some provisions. Later Barry and Dad set out to leave the island in the car, a storm hits the way, and the car breaks down just as a huge crocodile comes out of the swamp towards them.

(This continues the story, as told by Barry.)



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