

THREE GRAND COMPLETE STORIES INSIDE!

The Penny Popular

NUMBER 204.

3 Grand
Complete
Stories.



HURRAH FOR THE NEW CAPTAIN!

(A great scene from "The Prefects' Revolt," one of the three magnificent long complete stories contained in this issue.)

THE DUPED DETECTIVE!

A Magnificent Long, Complete
Story Dealing with the Further
Amazing Adventures of

SEXTON BLAKE, the World-Famous DETECTIVE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Kidnapped Baby—Sexton Blake's
Promise.

THAT'S the worst of a free country, my lad," Sexton Blake observed, laying down the morning paper. "Just because England is noted for its general regard of the law, precautions that would be taken in other countries are dropped here. It is simply asking for trouble."

"Talking about the millionaire baby, I suppose, sir?" Tinker asked.

Sexton Blake shrugged his shoulders, and lit his after-breakfast pipe.

"What else is there other than the war and that to talk about?" he answered. "I really think that a study of this fresh case has saved me from going into a lunatic asylum."

Sexton Blake turned again to the item in the paper that had attracted his attention. It was headed:

"STOLEN!

"THE MILLIONAIRE BABY!

"ALL-NIGHT SEARCH!

"Reliable information reached us last night that the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Duncan, of New York, was spirited away by kidnapers.

"It will be remembered by our readers that the parents arrived with the child only a week ago in England, and at once proceeded to the country seat of Sir Ralph Hershman, who is related to Mrs. Duncan. It can readily be understood that this baby, who is less than a year old, would naturally receive the attention of kidnapers, as it is estimated that it will inherit a fortune of not less than thirty millions from its father alone.

"In America the most extraordinary precautions were taken to prevent anything of this kind happening, but after the arrival in England some of the safeguards appear to have been relaxed, with the disastrous result related above.

"We are given to understand, at the time of going to press, that Scotland Yard officials have already reached Hershman Castle.

"One of the most remarkable features of the disappearance is that two plain-clothes men were engaged to watch the child's room, and it is not yet known how the kidnapers contrived to evade them.

"Fuller details will appear in special late editions of the paper."

Vague enough, but still explicit enough to interest Sexton Blake. He remembered plainly the excitement that the THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 204.



A ragged girl of about fifteen, who held a baby in her arms, let out a scream of fright, and nearly let her burden drop to the floor.

arrival of the thirty-million-pound baby in England had caused, and the detailed description of the precautions taken in America to guard it. They had seemed to him, at the time, rather unnecessary; in fact, he had been inclined to regard it all as one of the freaks of an advertisement-mad millionaire.

"Whoever did it knew his work," he said thoughtfully. "I have read four papers on the subject, and so far as I can see they have not left a solitary clue. The whole affair must have been thought out for months, with not a detail left to chance, and only a pause until the right moment to act arrived."

"That's the worst of being a kid with such a lot of money," Tinker remarked. "Fancy anyone taking the trouble to pinch me—my aunt!"

"Money has its disadvantages," Sexton Blake said drily. "Known it useful, though, sir."

But Sexton Blake paid no heed to the remark. He was thinking of the extraordinary kidnapping outrage, his brain working quietly round the few facts given in a way that was a habit with him. It was quite unlikely that his assistance would be asked, but even then he liked to form his own theory, and then wait and see whether he was right or wrong. It may be added that he was usually right.

"One thing is pretty certain," he murmured, "no help was given by anyone connected with the child. It is notorious that the nurses, and everyone connected with him, are magnificently paid, as a precautionary measure, so that it would not be in their interest to be anything but honest. There's one thing I'd like to know—where were those two plain-clothes men?"

"Having a drink, sir," Tinker suggested with a grin, but he did not know how near he was to the truth.

"And where was the nurse?" Sexton Blake continued. "It is certain that the child would not be left for a moment unguarded under ordinary circumstances. If she was——"

The hoot of a motor-car came from the street, then there was a wild knocking at the front door.

HAND THIS ISSUE INTO YOUR POST OFFICE—THEY WILL SEND IT OUT TO THE FRONT FREE!

"See who it is, my lad," Sexton Blake ordered quietly, and the boy hurried from the room.

"Mr. and Mrs. Charles Duncan," Tinker announced a few seconds later.

The famous detective was not in the habit of showing surprise, but just for an instant a gleam of excitement came into his eyes. It was cases of this kind that he loved, that gave him a chance to display the remarkable powers that he possessed.

A tall man hurried into the room, and behind him followed a slightly-built woman. Even if their names had not been announced, Sexton Blake would have recognised them as Mr. Charles Duncan, who had inherited fabulously rich oil-wells from his father, and his wife, for the papers had been full of their portraits on their arrival in England. Mr. Duncan was a man of under forty years of age, with dark hair turning grey, clean-shaven, and with the rather high cheekbones that so many Americans have. He was dressed carelessly, and his tie was all awry. Mrs. Duncan was a little woman, some years younger than her husband, and pretty in the best American style.

"Mr. Blake," Mr. Duncan said, in a quick voice, with only the faintest touch of an American accent, "I guess you've got to come right along to Hersham now."

The multi-millionaire spoke with the manner of a man who is used to giving orders and being obeyed, but he did not realise the type of man to whom he was speaking. Sexton Blake was only too ready to take up the case, but his natural pride forbade him to be ordered to do so in such a manner. "Please sit down," he answered indifferently.

"There's no time for that," the millionaire persisted. "I want you to get along at once."

"Scotland Yard is already at work, I understand," the detective answered non-committally. "It will be quite time for me to help if they fail. I am really rather busy—"

"Busy!" Mr. Duncan cried, snatching a notecase from his pocket. "See here! I want you, and I'm going to have you, to find that baby of mine! I'll pay you the biggest fee man ever had! I'll pay you enough that you won't reckon to have to work for the remainder of your life if you'll bring him back to me!"

There was something in the man's voice that was terribly earnest, and the detective forgave him for his previous manner.

"You must do it, Mr. Blake!" Mrs. Duncan put in, with tears in her eyes, and with her lips trembling. "He's all we've got, and—oh, I love him so!"

Sexton Blake bowed, and there was a softness about his face that was not often seen there.

"Have other attempts been made to kidnap the child?" he asked.

"Yes; twice in America, but they failed."

"And on account of that, I presume that you took special precautions for his safety?"

"The baby might have been a convict, he was so closely guarded," Mr. Duncan answered bitterly. "I engaged a special staff of detectives, all at salaries that would make nothing but a very large bribe worth their while to take. In the streets the poor little chap's bassinette had, instead of the ordinary hood, a solid steel cage, the keys of which the detectives in charge carried. Even in his bed-room we reckoned that he was not safe, and when he played there it was behind bars that it would have taken an expert burglar hours to get through. Besides that, there was always at least one nurse in the room, and a detective on guard outside the door."

Sexton Blake nodded, and his eyelids drooped more than ever.

"And in England?" he asked. "Did you bring all these contrivances with you?"

"Why, no!" Mr. Duncan admitted. "My wife has always hated the whole business, and she reckoned that things were not so bad over here. We left the detectives and the steel-caged bassinette behind, and engaged two detectives when we came to England."

"What happened to the detectives while the kidnapping was going on?"

"They weren't there!" the millionaire answered savagely. "I forced it out of them that they made a habit of running down to the village at nine at night. They were there when the baby was taken."

"The cage?" Sexton Blake inquired.

"That's one of the most curious things," Mr. Duncan replied quickly. "We had brought that over from New York, so that the baby's cradle could be closed in at night, but somehow it got mislaid on its way to Hersham, and all inquiries have failed to bring its whereabouts to light."

Sexton Blake nodded, and sat in silence for some seconds. Then his eyes opened, and he rose to his feet.

"Tinker, the car—the sixty-horse power!" he ordered. "Then you will come at once?" Mr. Duncan cried eagerly. "Hersham is thirty miles away, I believe," the detective answered. "I shall be there inside forty minutes."

"You will find my baby—you will not give in until he is found?" Mrs. Duncan asked hysterically.

"Madam," the famous detective answered coldly, "I am not in the habit of giving up cases until they are completed."

His lips were pressed into a thin, straight line, and his eyes were cold and hard.

"I shall find him," he added.

Ten minutes later Sexton Blake's great car swept out of Baker Street, the detective himself driving, Tinker and Pedro, the bloodhound, in the back. It swept towards the corner at a speed that made the policeman on duty sharply raise a hand. The next moment he recognised Sexton Blake, and touched his helmet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. On the Trail—Curious Clues.

SEXTON BLAKE'S car dashed up the broad avenue of trees that led up to the entrance to Hersham Castle, pulled up with a skidding of wheels, and the detective jumped out. He had done the journey in exactly thirty-five minutes, and it was now eleven o'clock in the morning. More than twelve hours had passed for the scent of the kidnapers to grow cold, and few bloodhounds except Pedro would have been of any use after such a period had elapsed.

"Who do you want, sir?" asked a man at the door.

Within a very short space of time Inspector Martin, big and burly as ever, came swaggering forward. Judging by the expression of his face, one could not have said that he was best pleased at the arrival of Sexton Blake.

"Morning!" he said shortly.

"Good-morning, Martin!" Sexton Blake answered affably.

"Found out anything of importance yet?"

Inspector Martin drew himself up, and assumed his most official air.

"I regret that it is impossible to answer your question," he replied coldly. "Scotland Yard is not in the habit of divulging its movements. May I ask how the matter concerns you?"

"Why not?" Sexton Blake answered lightly. "Mr Duncan has been foolish enough to consider it worth while to engage my services over this affair, that is all."

"Oh, has he?" Inspector Martin growled, his face going red. "Perhaps he would like the Yard to retire from the case?"

Sexton Blake shrugged his shoulders carelessly. He knew Inspector Martin to be a thoroughly good fellow and a very capable man, though rather hampered by the methods that had been drilled into him at Scotland Yard.

"That is a question for Mr. Duncan," he murmured. Then his tone changed to the brisk one that was always his when at work. "Look here, Martin," he said. "There is no need for us to bandy words. You will work your way, I shall work mine, and we need not clash. If you win, very well; if I win, I don't suppose you will be out of it at the finish."

This was quite true, for Inspector Martin knew that in every case in which he had been more or less opposed to Sexton Blake the latter had always made a point of allowing him to make the arrest.

"All right," he said gruffly. "What do you want?"

"Merely that you shall instruct your men not to interfere with me," Sexton Blake explained. "That is all."

"I'll see to it," Inspector Martin agreed shortly, and turned on his heel.

"Given him a bit of pain in the temper, hasn't it?" Tinker chuckled. "What's the first move, sir?"

Sexton Blake shook his head reproachfully, and took Pedro's lead from his young assistant.

"I am afraid that your powers of deduction are not developing as well as I had hoped, my lad," he answered. "You will observe that I have brought Pedro with me, and you know that the kidnapped baby most probably was taken away through the window—the conclusion is obvious."

"Oh, all right, sir; you needn't be so rough on a chap," the crestfallen Tinker said. "I'll bet you didn't learn everything in a day."

Sexton Blake laid a hand kindly on the boy's shoulder, for he had not really meant to hurt him.

"There are plenty of things that I have not learnt even yet," he said quietly.

"Like to know what they are," the boy chuckled, with a grin that showed that he was quite himself again.

Sexton Blake, with Pedro pulling on the lead, made his way along the terrace that fronted the castle, across the moat, which was now empty of water, and so to the garden that

stretched away from the wing of the castle from which the millionaire baby had been stolen. That the child had been removed by way of the window the detective had not a shadow of doubt, for to have taken it through the house there would have been the greatest risk of running into servants or guests.

The kidnapers had thought out their plan well, and had worked it equally well, and it seemed to Sexton Blake that it was likely that he would have by no means an easy task to track them down.

He paused by the ornamental lake, from which the cry for help had come, and looked at the window that the kidnapers had used.

"One thing is certain," he said, in a thoughtful tone. "There were two, if not three, men in the job."

"Why, sir?"

"The window is just too high for a man to clamber up without help," Sexton Blake explained; "and it is more than unlikely that a ladder would be used. One man would clamber on to the shoulders of his comrade, and the rest would be simple."

"But why the third man, sir?"

Sexton Blake shook his head reprovingly; but, nevertheless, he answered the boy's question.

"Because every second counted," he said, "and therefore the men who actually did the kidnaping would be crouching under the window, ready to do their work the instant that the nurse rushed from the room to give the alarm. At the utmost she would be gone less than a minute, so you can understand that they would have no time to waste."

The detective led the great bloodhound forward to the window, and in his eyes was the smallest trace of excitement. If Pedro was able to pick up the right scent all might be well, but what with police, servants, and guests having been over the spot, he feared that the wrong trail would be struck.

He stooped to touch the ground right beneath the window, but stopped before doing so. The police were sure to have been over that spot, looking for footprints; and, besides, it was not likely that the kidnapers would have crouched directly beneath the window.

Sexton Blake moved to the left, and placed his hand on the ground, close to the wall.

"Find, Pedro!" he ordered. "Find—good lad!"

The bloodhound needed no further instruction. He dropped his muzzle to the ground, a look of intelligence in his blood-shot eyes, and sniffed. But no bay broke from him—there was no scent there.

Three times Sexton Blake touched the ground in different spots, working back towards the right, but avoiding the place directly below the window. A fourth time he endeavoured to get Pedro on the scent, and then a low bay broke from the bloodhound, and, after sniffing at the ground, he turned to the left, tugging at his lead.

"Good old Pedro!" Tinker cried. "He's a jolly sight better than hunting for footprints with a magnifying-glass!"

Sexton Blake did not answer. Pedro was on a scent, sure enough, but there was nothing at present to show that it was the right one.

The bloodhound pulled so hard at his lead that Sexton Blake broke into a trot, and he could not help thinking that the scent must be too recent to be the correct one. If it had been the track of his master, or someone he knew well, that would have been different.

Pedro kept close under the wall of the castle, as the kidnapers would undoubtedly have done, until the corner of the wing was turned, and from there he struck off across the garden and in the direction of the fields.

"It's the right track!" Tinker said, and the same thought was in his master's mind.

Over a hedge they went into the fields beyond, and Pedro doubled sharply to the left, and reached the road. Straight along it he led until the gate giving admission to the grounds was reached, and there he checked.

"Look, sir!" Tinker said excitedly, pointing to the ground. And even Sexton Blake caught his breath in sharply as he saw the marks indicated.

There were the tracks of two cycles there. Only shallow tyre-marks from the gate until almost the centre of the road, and then heavier impressions, showing that the men had mounted.

"Only two!" Sexton Blake muttered. "And how the dickens did they take the child away on a cycle?"

Pedro gave a sudden tug at his lead, almost dragging it from his master's hand, and trying to get away in the direction of the village.

"The third man," the detective muttered. "They must have separated. But the question is, who took the child?"

"I reckon we'd best try the man on foot, sir," Tinker put in, and his master nodded.

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Down the road went Pedro, Sexton Blake and Tinker going at a run, and they were quite close to the village before the bloodhound checked again, sniffing at the hedge and bounding up to it.

With a grim smile on his lips, Sexton Blake lifted him over.

"It's our man!" he said.

Across the fields, and so skirting the village, went Pedro, then swung round and made again for the road, stopping at the hedge. Once more he was lifted over, and almost at once he stopped. At the same moment a cry broke from Sexton Blake, and he handed the lead to Tinker.

"Keep him there!" he ordered.

Sexton Blake dropped to his hands and knees, first peering at the road, then at the grass border at the side of it, also at a patch of oil that still showed on the dust. When he rose to his feet his face wore a puzzled expression. He could read on the road and the bank a story as plainly as if it were in print.

A motor-car had been waiting beside the road for some time—the patch of oil showed that—and to it had come the man Pedro had tracked. A violent struggle had followed, and then the car had been driven away.

All that was plain enough, but the reason for it was not so simple to arrive at.

Why had there been a struggle? Had a passer-by recognised the child and tried to rescue it, or had the kidnapers fallen out among themselves? Then the two who had ridden away from the castle grounds had to be considered.

The case was beginning to grow complicated; but of one thing Sexton Blake was pretty certain—the child had been taken away in the motor-car. The detective was still turning these facts over in his mind when Tinker called to him.

"The trail seems to run on from here, sir," he said.

Sexton Blake turned, and saw that Pedro was tugging at his lead, trying to get away down the road. That he wanted to follow the same scent the detective was certain, for he had never known the hound leave one trail for another, however many times the original one had been crossed.

It had seemed likely to Sexton Blake that the man with whom the motorists had struggled had been taken away in the car, if only to keep him quiet, but now he changed his mind. For some reason the man had been left behind.

"We must follow, he muttered. "The track of this man may lead us on to the trail of the others."

Taking Pedro's lead again, Sexton Blake ordered him forward, and, without hesitation, he led the way down the road. Before going far, however, he checked by the hedge.

"Took to the fields!" Tinker said triumphantly. "My aunt, what a chase!"

Over into the field went Pedro, Sexton Blake, and Tinker, and there was no hesitation about the bloodhound. Straight on he led, keeping for the most part under the shadow of the hedge. Between two and three miles he covered before stopping at the side of a narrow stream. His master at once led the way across; but although Pedro nosed round, it was soon plain that he had lost the scent.

"Curious!" Sexton Blake muttered. "Why should the man have tried to hide his trail unless he thought that he might be tracked by bloodhounds, and that isn't often done? Whoever he is was no fool, and he must have been directly connected with the kidnaping, or he would not have acted in this way. Why was he attacked by the motorists, and why did they leave him behind? If it was to have one less to divide the baby's ransom among they would be taking a tremendous risk of him splitting on them, and—"

Sexton Blake threw away surmise. There was one tangible clue to follow, and that was the trail of this man. If he was run to earth, it was probable that the capture of the others would be considerably simplified.

"Seems to me we'd better try down-stream, sir," Tinker suggested.

"Why?" his master queried, for he had been wondering which way it would be best to go.

"The man was going up-stream when Pedro lost the trail, sir," the boy answered, "and he'd expect us to search that way."

"Good, lad!" Sexton Blake agreed, patting his young assistant on the back. "I shall have to take lessons from you yet."

"I don't think!" Tinker muttered, and added: "I'll take the other bank, as there may be bootmarks in the mud."

Down-stream they went, Pedro sniffing at the bank all the way, knowing well what was required of him. He had seen this game played before, and he pulled away eagerly at his lead, anxious to pick up the trail that he had lost. A couple of hundred yards was covered, with Tinker proceeding along the opposite bank, but at the end of that distance no trace of the man had been found.

"We'll go as far as the trees, and then turn back," Sexton Blake said.

Before fifty yards had been covered, however, a cry of triumph came from Tinker.

"Here we are, sir!" he said excitedly.

Sexton Blake waded through the stream with Pedro, and bent over the mark on the muddy bank to which the boy was pointing. It was the imprint of a bare foot, quite plain in the mud. It was so plain that it could be seen that one of the toes was what is commonly known as hammer-toe.

"We'll get him yet, sir!" Tinker cried. "Whether he kept his boots off or not, Pedro will follow him."

Without a word, Sexton Blake put the bloodhound on the track again, and he led off at once across the fields. In the distance a line of telegraph-poles showed where a railway ran, and it was in this direction that Pedro led. Straight for the lines he made, and on to them; but there he checked, and once more Sexton Blake's face wore a worried expression.

"Why was he so afraid of being tracked by a bloodhound?" he mused.

"May be a man you've nabbed before, sir," Tinker suggested, and it seemed to his master that that explanation was probably the correct one.

Pedro was nosing round in a circle, whimpering as he endeavoured to pick up the trail; but it was not until he had gone nearly a hundred yards down the line in the direction of London that he stopped at one of the sleepers and bayed. He started from it, but stopped again, raising his eyes questioningly to the face of his master.

Sexton Blake led the way to the next sleeper, and as Pedro nosed it, once more he bayed.

"I thought as much," the detective said, with a touch of triumph. "Our man did a thing that I have seen many a platerayer do to avoid walking between the sleepers. He stepped from a sleeper to the line with his left foot, and was so able to reach the next one with his right."

"My word, but he did take trouble!" Tinker observed.

"Where d'you think he was making for, sir?"

"A railway-station," Sexton Blake answered. "I think we shall be safe in making for the nearest one. As far as I can see, there's one a matter of a mile ahead."

Without attempting to pick up the scent, the detective hurried along the side of the line, but left it when he drew near to a small country station, and took to the road, so as to approach the place in the ordinary way. The station proved to be Little Darvil, and from the look of it it could be judged that not many travellers were likely to go from there. In that case, the wanted man had made a mistake, for his departure would be bound to be noticed. But then he had probably reckoned that by then he had put anyone off his trail.

Sexton Blake strolled into the station and on to the platform, where a sleepy-looking porter was very leisurely cleaning the oil-lamps with which the place was lighted.

"What time is there a train to London?" Sexton Blake inquired.

"Doo now," the porter answered phlegmatically.

"And the last one at night?"

"Twelve-thirty—milk train," the porter answered.

Sexton Blake paused to light a cigar, with the air of a man who is in no hurry.

"Not many passengers by it, I suppose?" he asked, in a casual tone.

"No; that there ain't," the porter assured him; and his tone was brighter as he saw that Sexton Blake had dipped his hand into his pocket. "Can't say as I remember one till last night."

"Wonder if that can have been a friend of mine?" the detective mused. "I rather fancy he was going up from here."

Sexton Blake now held half-a-crown in his hand, and the sight of it appeared to bring unusual intelligence to the porter's brain.

"Big, heavy man, sir," he said. "Reddish hair and whiskers. 'E didn't seem very well. Said he'd 'ad a fall, and I brushed him down."

The expression of Sexton Blake's face did not change as he slipped the coin into the man's willing hand.

"I suppose he could have got up to London a different way by changing?" he suggested.

"Not 'im, sir," the porter replied, with conviction.

"Sides, 'e specially wanted to know the time 'e arrived in Lunnon, an' that's three o'clock."

Sexton Blake nodded, and turned away towards the booking-office.

"Tinker," he said, with a little smile on his lips, "kindly take tickets for London! I am rather interested in this man who travelled up by the milk-train."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Driver Who Knew—The End of the Trail.

SEXTON BLAKE and Tinker alighted at Victoria Station, after a tedious journey up from the little country station, and it was then close upon five in the afternoon. Naturally, there was the usual crowd about, and the detective realised that in the station, at least, it would be asking Pedro too much to expect him to pick up the trail.

He paused in the entrance, shaking his head at the offers of cab-drivers, and his brows were knit close together. For the moment his tracking had come to a dead halt, but that was not to be the case for long. At three in the morning, he realised, it would be impossible for the man he wanted to get anywhere except by cab or by walking. Even at that hour it was not unusual for cabs to be about, and under those circumstances it was more than likely that the man had reached his destination in that manner.

But how to find the cab, that was the question.

Sexton Blake thought of the coffee-stall which stands at night close by the station, but the man would not be taking up his pitch for some hours yet, so that it would be impossible to question him, unless he found out where the man lived, and that would mean a delay. Then the detective remembered that there was a policeman on point duty all night at the junction of Victoria Street and the road running down to Vauxhall Bridge.

"Let me see," he mused. "If he was on duty at three, he would have come on at two o'clock, and that means that he would be relieved at six. Then there is eight hours off, so he would be on again at two in the afternoon, and that means that he will be on duty now."

Sexton Blake stepped briskly from the station, followed by Tinker and Pedro, and went round to where the trams that run over Vauxhall Bridge start from. There was a policeman on duty there, right enough—a smart-looking, youngish man, who turned civilly to the detective as he approached.

"Were you on duty here at three o'clock this morning?" Sexton Blake inquired.

"Yes, sir," the man answered, looking surprised. "I hope there's nothing wrong."

"No," the detective assured him. "The fact is, I ought to have been at the station to meet a friend of mine who was to arrive by the milk-train from Kent at three o'clock, but I missed him—"

The constable moved away to stop a heated dispute between the driver of a dray and the chauffeur of a taxi-cab.

"Unfortunately, I do not know his address," Sexton Blake continued, when the constable returned. "I thought that at that time in the morning you might have noticed him pass—a big man, with reddish hair and whiskers—unless there was a cab about, and he took that."

The policeman pulled thoughtfully at his moustache, then his eyes lighted up.

"Now I come to think of it, there was a gent who took a cab," he said. "It was just passing me to go home when a man hailed it. I remember, because the driver wouldn't have taken him unless he was going the same way."

"Would you know the driver?" Sexton Blake asked, and he could not keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"No sir," the constable answered, with conviction; "but I can tell you where the cab came from. It was one of the red ones that belong to the garage at Kennington."

"Thanks, very much, sir!"

Sexton Blake moved away, and his eyes were glinting.

"With luck, we're on the right track again, my lad," he said. "There's just a chance that we can find the chauffeur at Kennington."

"Why not try the 'phone, sir?" Tinker suggested. "If he's not at the garage, they might know his usual stand."

"Good for you, lad!" his master agreed.

And he hurried into the station. In a few minutes he had looked up the number of the garage at Kennington, and was quickly through.

"Can I speak to the timekeeper who was in charge between three and four o'clock this morning?" he asked.

And for all his natural self-control, he could not keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"Who are you?" the answer came back.

"I am sorry to trouble you, but you would not know it," Sexton Blake said. "The fact is, I am very anxious to trace a friend of mine who arrived in London in the early hours of this morning, and I know that he took one of your cabs. You will fetch the timekeeper? Thanks, very much!"

Sexton Blake waited impatiently in the telephone-box, his nerves tense and quivering. If this clue failed him, he knew that his work would be infinitely harder, and then—

"No; don't ring off!" he cried frantically. "Hallo!"

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Yes; I am the man who rang up just now. You're the time-keeper? Good! Can you tell me how many cabs returned to the yard between three and four this morning? Only one!"

Sexton Blake could not keep the hand that held the receiver from trembling.

"Is he out?" he asked.

"Off duty just now, sir," the timekeeper answered. "He'll come on duty about six, I expect."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Of course!"

"Then I'll give you a sovereign if you'll send for him," Sexton Blake said quickly, "and one for him if he'll come to Victoria Station, South-Eastern side, as quickly as possible. He'll know me, because there's a boy and a bloodhound with me. Good! Don't lose a minute!"

With a sigh of relief, Sexton Blake hung the receiver up. One more step in the pursuit had been taken, and with ordinary luck it should prove to be an important one.

"All right, sir?" Tinker asked eagerly.

"Yes," his master answered simply.

For half an hour the detective and Tinker paced up and down outside the entrance to the station, and shortly after that a red taxi came rapidly up, and although the flag was down, showing that it was not for hire, there was no one inside it.

The driver touched his cap as he caught sight of Sexton Blake, and stepped from the seat.

"Was it you who 'phoned, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," Sexton Blake answered quickly. "I want to know about the man you drove from here early this morning—a big man, with reddish hair and whiskers."

The driver's face fell, and he rubbed thoughtfully at his chin.

"I did pick up a gent just outside, sir," he agreed, "but he hadn't got hair like that. He was darkish, and going grey."

"Done!" Tinker muttered.

But Sexton Blake only smiled. It was only too likely that the wanted man had been disguised, and that he had removed the disguise in the train.

"Where did you drive him to?" the detective asked.

"Camberwell, sir," the driver replied promptly.

"Good! Take me to the exact spot where you dropped him—the exact spot, mind you!" Sexton Blake ordered, and stepped into the taxi, to be followed by Tinker and Pedro.

The cab moved off, swinging out of the station, and round into the Vauxhall Bridge Road. At that hour the traffic was dense, but the driver, probably with the sovereign in view that Sexton Blake had promised him, lost no time. Over the bridge he went, round to the left under the arch, and along the turning that leads to Kennington.

In ten minutes he had reached Camberwell Green, and he turned up along the tram-lines that run up Denmark Hill until they turn past the station to go down to Dulwich.

Sexton Blake sat back in the cab, and there was a thoughtful expression on his face. He was remembering how eagerly Pedro had followed the scent, and a vague idea, which he had once put from him, came to him.

By the music-hall that stands at the corner on the right, where Coldharbour Lane branches off, the cab stopped, and the driver alighted from his seat and opened the door.

"It wasn't a yard from here, sir," he said, with conviction.

"Good!" Sexton Blake answered, slipping the promised sovereign into the man's hand. "I suppose you know which way he went?"

"Up the hill, sir. I was surprised he stopped here, for he walked like a man who was either drunk or hurt. Anything else, sir?"

"No, thank you!"

There were plenty of people about at that time of the evening, and more than one looked curiously at the great bloodhound; but Sexton Blake had no time or inclination to worry about them. Too many hours had passed already for the scent to be good, especially—considering the number of feet that must have passed over it, and even if he attracted a crowd, the detective meant to get to work at once.

"Find!" he ordered, as the taxi drove away; and Pedro dropped his muzzle to the kerb.

To Sexton Blake's amazement, the hound almost immediately bayed in a way that showed that he had struck the scent. Great though his powers were, his master had only dared to vaguely hope that he would be able to pick up the scent after being off it for some hours, yet here he was finding it without delay. Perhaps it might prove to be the wrong one.

"It licks me, sir!" Tinker said, with the same thought in

his brain. "I could understand if he was following either of us, but this is a fair knock-out!"

Whatever it was, Pedro was on it without a doubt. Up the hill he led the way, past the shops on the right, and bore round the bend on to the upper part of Denmark Hill. Straight on he went, without a check, and turned into the drive of—

Mr. Spearing's house!

"What the dickens!" Tinker gasped, as Pedro broke loose from the lead, and dashed straight up to the front door, where he stood whimpering to be admitted.

Sexton Blake stared from the bound to the door, and back again. Then a smile curled his lips, broadened into a grin, and a peal of laughter broke from him.

"It's too funny!" he gasped.

"It's w-what?" Tinker gurgled, catching the infection.

"F-funny!" Sexton Blake spluttered, with an absence of control unusual with him.

Pedro turned his solemn eyes to the distorted face of his master, then broke out into a loud barking.

"Oh, stop it!" Tinker gasped, for his laughter was growing worse as it partially dawned upon them why Sexton Blake had been seized in such a manner.

The door of the house opened, and Mr. Spearing stepped out on to the step. At sight of Sexton Blake his face, which was paler than usual, went quite white.

"What's the game?" he growled huskily.

"W-where's the baby?" Sexton Blake spluttered.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Spearing Tells the Truth—Two on the Trail.

MR. SPEARING stepped back with a staggering motion, as if he would have fallen, and the sweat stood out on his brow.

"The what?" he managed to ask.

Sexton Blake made a frantic effort to recover himself, but he was still shaking with suppressed laughter as he wiped the tears from his eyes.

"Charles Duncan, junior," he explained, still choking—"the millionaire baby!"

Mr. Spearing was making a great effort to pull himself together, but his attempts could not have been described as a complete success.

"Fail to understand!" he jerked.

Sexton Blake moved towards the door, and there was still a broad smile on his lips.

"My dear old friend," he protested, "why waste time in trying an impossible bluff? Master Charles Duncan, the millionaire baby, has been kidnapped by you—oh, wait a minute!—and I have been engaged to restore him to his fond parents. I should hate to have you arrested, but I am afraid that I shall have to, unless—"

"What!" Mr. Spearing cried, his face going purple.

"Have you arrested," Sexton Blake repeated calmly. Then he rose to his feet, and placed a hand on Spearing's arm.

"You can help me, and I can help you," he said quietly, "if you will only tell me the truth. I can guess that in some way you have been fooled—I am sorry to have to use the word, but it is the only one that I can think of for the moment—and you want to keep it dark."

Mr. Spearing's face became absolutely funereal in expression, and he groaned softly as he touched the bruise at the back of his head.

"You didn't see her," he said dismally. "Tears in her eyes—very beautiful—wanted to kiss my hand—"

"To what!" Sexton Blake cried, then once more broke out into a fit of laughter.

"Kiss my hand," Mr. Spearing repeated, with great dignity, but nevertheless looking very foolish. "Wouldn't let her, of course."

"You might as well have," Sexton Blake said drily. "One of the worst failures I ever had was through a woman—and that not so very long ago. We're all human, old man, so why not own up?"

Mr. Spearing stood in silence by the window, and Sexton Blake did not try to hurry him, knowing that he would have to give in.

"All right," he said at last. And bit by bit, rather jerkily he told how a person named Mrs. Drummond had declared the baby was hers, and had eventually prevailed upon him to kidnap it, Sexton Blake stopping him at the point where he described how, after he had succeeded in kidnapping the baby, he was attacked, and recognised one of his assailants to be Gentleman George.

"You are sure of that?" he demanded.

"Ought to be," Mr. Spearing growled; "I've had him through my hands twice. Make it three times soon," he added grimly.

Sexton Blake rose to his feet and paced up and down the room—his hands clapping and unclapping behind his back, a

heavy line between his eyes. When he at last stopped, he held out his hand to Spearing, and there was the little smile on his lips that always meant business.

"Then we work together?" he asked.

"If you'll have me, after being such a fool," Mr. Spearing answered. And their hands met in a firm clasp.

Sexton Blake sank into a chair again, and the tips of his fingers beat together.

"It's a game worth playing," he muttered. "Gentleman George has always been a hard fish to land, and he'll be harder with the chance of a fortune awaiting him."

"What's the first move?" Mr. Spearing asked.

"To get on the track of Gentleman George," Sexton Blake answered, without hesitation. "We need have no fear that he will try and leave the country with the child, for we can trust our friends at the Yard to prevent that. Besides, London is big enough for a man like that to hide in."

"Might wait until he makes his offer to give the child up—at a price," Mr. Spearing suggested.

"I think not," Sexton Blake answered shortly. "Inspector Martin & Co. will be waiting for that, hoping to nab him then; but they are not likely to get their chance yet.

You rest assured that Gentleman George will lie low for some time, until the Duncans are in such a state that they will agree to anything. It is that that I am afraid of, and I am going to write them to-day, asking them not to offer a reward, large or small, for the return of the baby."

"Humph!" Mr. Spearing growled doubtfully. "What's the first move?"

"A meal," Sexton Blake answered coolly, "if Mrs. Spearing can manage one without inconvenience, and then a call on Barney Moss. If any man can help us, he can."

"If he will!" Mr. Spearing jerked.

"He will," Sexton Blake assured him. "You will remember that Barney decided to run straight after his last little affair with the police—and you may also remember that I assisted him to start a small business. I think that out of gratitude he will do as I ask him."

A little man, in a very large overcoat, which had obviously not been made for him, sat perched on a stool in the saloon-bar of the Yellow Dragon public-house, which, it may be explained, lies not very far from the Elephant and Castle. Apart from being small, there were things about the man that would have attracted the attention of any observant person. His face was thin to the point of emaciation, his mouth was broad and narrow, and his eyes, that looked out of peculiarly deep sockets, were bright as a bird's. But it was his hands that were curiously out of place in such a man. The fingers were exceptionally long, and the nails were uncommonly well-kept for a person of his class.

In short, they were the hands of a man eminently fitted for delicate work, and as they belonged to Barney Moss, ex-crook, the police could have informed you that some of the delicate operations that they had performed—notably on safes belonging to other people—could not have been accomplished by many criminals in the world. In fact, it was just this individuality in his work that had eventually got Barney into trouble on more than one occasion, until he had finally decided that a straight life would be better for him—especially as he was getting to an age when prison-diet and work did not altogether agree with him.



Mrs. Duncan started forward, her eyes shining, her arms stretched out. Suddenly a terrible cry of dismay broke from her, and her arms dropped limply to her sides. "It is not—my child!" she moaned, and reeled back in a dead faint.

It was not often that Barney Moss journeyed so far from his general shop in the East End, but in his pocket was a telegram from Sexton Blake, making an appointment at the Yellow Dragon, and that had been quite enough to cause him to close up his shop an hour earlier than usual, and repair to the place mentioned, for the ex-crook was not without gratitude.

The clock struck nine o'clock, and Barney Moss took the telegram from his pocket, and looked at it with his twinkling eyes.

"Time!" he muttered.

He had scarcely made that remark before the door of the bar opened, and Sexton Blake and Mr. Spearing entered. He at once rose to his feet, a smile on his thin lips.

"Well, how are you getting on, Barney?" Sexton Blake asked quietly, shaking hands.

"All right, thanks to you, sir," the man answered. "Found it a bit slow at first, but it's marvellous how you can get used to a thing." His voice dropped to a lower key, and he chuckled. "Don't believe I'd lay a finger on the Crown Jewels now if I only had to crack an egg-box to get 'em!"

"Hope not!" Spearing growled, for he had not a great belief in reformed characters.

"We need not discuss that," Sexton Blake said, after glancing round to see that there was no one near enough to overhear the conversation. "You once said that you were grateful to me, and though I don't usually ask for that sort of thing, you can prove it now, and get well paid into the bargain!"

"I'll do it, sir," Barney Moss answered eagerly. "But there's no need to talk about payment; I've had that already. Just let me know what it is, and you can reckon that it's done!"

"Good!"

No more of importance was said while three men entered the bar and had drinks, but the conversation was resumed the moment they had departed.

"You know Gentleman George—his proper name is Ned Allam?" Sexton Blake asked.

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"You bet!" Barney Moss agreed. "He did that hunt ball business three years ago!"

"Exactly," Sexton Blake continued. "You must have read in the papers about the kidnapping of the millionaire baby from Hershaw Castle—"

"So it's George's work, is it?" Barney Moss chuckled. "I had an idea it was his sort of game, though the way in which he got the kid away—if the evening papers are correct—seems clumsy for him!"

"Call it smart!" Mr. Spearing snapped, turning red.

"Well, I don't," the ex-crook persisted. "I reckon I could show him ten ways better than that. But that's not the point. Where do I come in?"

"Simply that Gentleman George has got to be located," Sexton Blake explained. "I'm pretty sure that he's in London, and also that he won't let the child far out of his sight. It's too precious a thing for him to run the risk of his accomplices playing tricks with him!"

Barney Moss removed his battered felt hat, and rubbed thoughtfully at his thin grey hair.

"That's likely enough, sir," he agreed, "but it's not much to go on. Shouldn't be surprised if George is disguised, and then—"

"Wait!" Sexton Blake interrupted. "There is more than what I have already told you to go on. Gentleman George's partner in this game is most probably an American, who would know all about the steel cage in which the child was usually kept, and therefore saw that it went astray in England. There is also a woman in it, young and pretty—I think I am right in saying she is pretty, Spearing?"

"Very," the ex-official assented, his face redder than ever.

"What I want you to do is simply this," Sexton Blake continued. "You can get a score of lads to work—more, if you like—and I will give the one who brings me the right clue twenty pounds, and every other man a sovereign for his trouble. Is that enough?"

"Quite, sir," Barney Moss answered. "If you offer more they'll twig it's a game worth money, and they may try taking a hand in it on their own account, though I'll do my best to see that they don't do that. I'll start 'em to-night, and I'm open to bet that if George is in London, they'll spot him inside a couple of days!"

Sexton Blake rose from his stool, and there was a little smile of satisfaction on his lips.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Hopeless Mother—News from Barney Moss.

COME at once to the Hotel Imperial.—CHARLES DUNCAN.

Sexton Blake read the telegram, and frowned.

"Anything fresh, sir?" Tinker asked.

"Order the car round," his master answered briefly.

Sexton Blake looked distinctly moody as he stepped into his car, and his face was hard and stern as he alighted at the Imperial Hotel. He inquired for Mr. Charles Duncan, and was at once conducted to a suite on the first floor.

"You are expected, sir," the servant announced. "I have orders to show you in at once."

The room into which Sexton Blake was taken was one of the most beautifully-fitted apartments in an hotel noted for its magnificence. It had ever been the abiding-place of millionaires, and hence it was natural that in Mr. Charles Duncan, perhaps the biggest millionaire of all, should take up his residence while in London.

Yet Charles Duncan, multi-millionaire, appeared to be one of the wretchedest men living. His thin face was drawn until the cheeks looked terribly hollow beneath their high bones, and the marks about his eyes should not have been there in the case of a healthy man. Even his hair appeared to have gone greyer in the past few days.

"I guess there's nothing new?" he asked drearily, and the fingers that fidgeted with his tie trembled.

"No," Sexton Blake admitted. "We are waiting for one clue, and until we have that we can do little."

A low, sobbing sound came from behind a door on the left of the apartment, and Mr. Duncan caught his breath in sharply as his eyes turned in that direction.

"You hear?" he said hoarsely. "It's just killing her!"

Sexton Blake did hear and understand, but he still waited to learn why he had been sent for so hurriedly, though he believed that he could guess.

"I am sorry that no more can be done," he answered quietly.

"That's where you are wrong," Mr. Duncan said, and the hesitating note had left his voice. "I'm going to admit myself beaten, and advertise that I will pay a hundred thousand pounds for the return of the child, and no questions asked."

"You are not," Sexton Blake said coldly.

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"Why?" the millionaire demanded, almost fiercely.

"For the best of reasons—the child would be kidnapped again," the detective replied. "If you paid the money, he would never be safe, and you would merely have thrown out a bait for every crook in the world to bite at."

Mr. Duncan passed a shaking hand across his face, his emotion overcoming him for the moment.

"I had not thought of that," he said wearily. "What can be done?"

"Nothing but have patience," Sexton Blake answered quietly. "I am working night and day to find your child, and Mr. Spearing is helping me. Between us we cannot fail for long."

"You are sure of that?" the millionaire asked hoarsely.

Sexton Blake looked towards the door of the bed-room, and the expression of his eyes was very tender.

"That is enough to make me sure," he answered softly.

"I have worked with the biggest fees ever offered to a detective dangled before me as a reward, but a detective may also be a man, and I want nothing more for this than to bring happiness to a mother."

Mr. Duncan held out his hand, and Sexton Blake held it firmly for a second.

"Thank Heaven I went to you," the millionaire muttered.

Feeling more determined than ever, if that were possible, to bring the case to a successful conclusion, Sexton Blake hurried down to his car, and was soon on his way to Baker Street. He tried hard to think of a new plan of working, but so far as he could see, the one that he had adopted was the only feasible one. If it failed, there was practically nothing to do but wait for the kidnappers to make a move.

Sexton Blake was still pondering the matter when he reached Baker Street, but he looked up sharply as Tinker, his face alive with excitement, met him in the hall.

"Barney Moss has been here, sir," he announced, "and Spearing—he was here when Moss arrived—has gone down to Wapping. They've struck a clue, and Spearing thought he'd better go there at once."

"Any message?" Sexton Blake asked sharply.

"Yes, sir," Tinker answered. "You are to go disguised to a little public-house called the Finches, in Lemur Street."

Sexton Blake's manner had been listless until this news, but now it was very different. With a nod of his head, he walked briskly into his bed-room.

"And now for me," Tinker chuckled, hurrying away to his own room.

Five minutes later Sexton Blake emerged, and his dearest friend would have found it difficult to recognise in the rather grimy navy the famous detective of Baker Street. He had scarcely stepped into the consulting-room before Tinker also appeared, and his disguise showed him to be a good pupil of his master's. He was dressed like a street arab, and a tiny scrap of plaster fastened to his right eyelid gave him the appearance of possessing a distinct squint.

"Will I do, sir?" he asked, with a grin.

"Who told you that you were going?" Sexton Blake demanded, with a great outward show of sternness.

"Who told me?" Tinker gasped. "Did you think I was going to let you go down there alone?"

The ghost of a smile curled Sexton Blake's lips, for the boy's enthusiasm for his work always pleased him.

"All right," he answered, "but don't be seen with me! It's not likely that Gentleman George or his pals would recognise me in this get-up, but if they saw a boy with me, they might jump to conclusions."

"I'll cut you dead, sir!" Tinker sniggered.

In a room on the second floor of one of the dingy row of houses that go to make up the left side of Lemur Street, which is down Wapping way, were two men, and one of them, at least, was distinctly out of place in the dingily-furnished room. His lounge-suit was of good material, but of a cut that suggested an American tailor, and on the little finger of his left hand was a diamond-ring of considerable value. His clean-shaven face, that of a man between forty and fifty years of age, was harsh, and lined by vicious living, and his eyes were cruel to a degree.

The police of America would have told you that this was none other than Eli Cook, one of the most notorious crooks in America. They could have told you that, but they would have had to add reluctantly that, despite the fact that they knew of a dozen swindles in which he had been mixed up, that they had never been able to get evidence against him on which there would have been a chance of a conviction.

His companion was dressed as an artisan, and his face was adorned by a short beard, which more or less successfully disguised the features of Ned Allam, alias Gentleman George.

Both men were standing by the window, over which the cheap cotton blind was drawn, and they were peering through two small holes in it at a public-house that lay across the road.

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"I told you not to be such a fool as to come here," Gentleman George growled. "If we get nabbed, it'll be all your confounded fault. Why couldn't you lie low, as I told you?"

"I guess I'm not taking too many orders just now," the American answered, with a pronounced drawl, "and I don't reckon that I'm so struck on your morals that I'll trust you further than I can see you."

Gentleman George looked ugly, and his hands clenched; but Eli Cook only laughed as he saw his attitude.

"Oh, quit on it!" he laughed. "You don't raise me as easy as that!"

He spoke lightly enough, but there was a menace in his voice that cooled the other man down.

"I reckon that you're not so sure, either, that the men over yonder are who you say," he added.

"Oh, aren't I?" Gentleman George sneered. "I tell you that the old man in the pub is Barney Moss, a crook who's turned nark; and the other's Spearing. I had reason enough to know him when he was at the Yard, and I'm not likely to forget him so easily!"

There was something in the man's manner that impressed Eli Cook, and his face hardened.

"We've got to quit with the kid, then," he said slowly, "or prove that we haven't got it here."

"How?" Gentleman George snapped.

"Can't we put a plant on them?" Eli Cook answered. "Clara's upstairs with the kid, and I guess that at any moment our friends opposite may risk a raid. We could out them, sure, but that game's too risky."

Gentleman George stood biting his finger-nails, and suddenly a gleam of triumph came into his eyes.

"Got it!" he cried.

"A real cinch?" the American asked doubtfully.

"A cert!" Gentleman George chuckled. "Just listen."

By the time that the man had unfolded his plan, Eli Cook was chuckling, too.

"I'll quit by the backway," he said; "then you get to work. Ride-me-on-a-rail if I thought you had so much brain, George! I guess it must tire you at times."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Raid—The Marking on the Dress—Mr. Spearing Has a Rough Time.

SEXTON BLAKE, disguised as a navy, a dirty little clay pipe stuck out of one corner of his mouth, lounged along Lemur Street, with the manner typical of the man who hasn't got any work to do, and does not particularly want any. Outside the Finches he paused, thrust his hand into his pocket, glanced at the coppers that he produced, and thrust open the swinging door. Anyone seeing him would never have guessed that he was anything different than he appeared to be, especially after observing his little ruse with regard to the money.

It was a dirty little bar, the sand on the floor littered with pipe-ash, matches, and scraps of paper; and at that hour of the day it was empty, save for two men, who had been there a considerable time.

The shabby little man was, of course, Barney Moss, and the burly individual was easily recognised as Mr. Spearing, as he was not disguised. When Moss had brought the news to him that Gentleman George, in disguise, had been spotted in Lemur Street, he had thought of nothing but getting to the spot at once. It had been through him that the millionaire baby had been captured, and his one ambition just now was to restore it to its parents. He would then be able to feel that he had done all in his power to rectify the terrible mistake he had made.

It had been sheer luck that Sexton Blake had not been at home at the time of Barney Moss' call; and though Mr. Spearing had felt it his duty to leave the message that he had, that had not prevented him being first on the scene.

"Pint," Sexton Blake said laconically, banging down two-pence on the counter. And, having served him, the potman returned to his task of cleaning pots at the other end of the bar.

"Anything fresh?" the detective asked, in a low tone, but in his natural voice, without turning towards Mr. Spearing and Barney Moss; and the former nearly fell off his stool in blank amazement.

He had seen Sexton Blake disguised many times, but this particular one he certainly had not penetrated.

"Be careful!" he growled. "Didn't think wise to speak to you when you first came in."

Sexton Blake chuckled, and sipped at his beer. Then he drew a ragged and soiled paper from his pocket, and pretended to read. In this manner he effectually prevented the potman from seeing that he was holding a conversation.

"Gentleman George is in the house opposite," Mr. Spearing explained triumphantly. "There's a baby there. I've seen it."

Sexton Blake's face set grimly as he still stared at the paper.

"There can be no mistake?" he asked.

"I'd know Gentleman George anywhere, disguised or not, sir!" Barney Moss answered, with conviction. "He's in the house over the road, sure enough."

Sexton Blake was silent, pondering what had best be done. To enter the house would be to run considerable risk—not so much to their persons, but if they proved to be wrong. It was not as if Spearing was still attached officially to Scotland Yard, for it would then have been possible, taking into regard the well-known character of Gentleman George, to have entered on suspicion.

"Wouldn't it be wise to let Inspector Martin in on this?" he suggested.

"No!" Mr. Spearing snapped. "We've done the work, and we'll get the credit for it."

Sexton Blake glanced through the window at the house opposite, and as he did so the blind on the second floor was drawn up by a grimy-looking girl who held a baby in her arms.

"There you are!" Mr. Spearing whispered excitedly. "Don't suppose the woman of the gang would be there; too dangerous."

Sexton Blake's doubts vanished, for he had noticed one thing when he had caught a glimpse of the baby. It was gowned in what appeared to be a nightdress, and the lace and frills on it certainly looked out of place on a child in such a neighbourhood.

"All right, we'll risk it," he said. "May as well all cross together; it will make no difference."

Curiously enough, it was Mr. Spearing who hesitated, an expression of doubt on his red face.

"Look here," he jerked, "don't want to make arrest!"

Sexton Blake could not help smiling as he realised the reason for this. An arrest would mean that Gentleman George and his confederates would be placed on trial, and then the part that Mr. Spearing had taken in the actual kidnaping would become public property.

"Why not?" Sexton Blake answered. "It seems to me that if we let them go we shall be aiding and abetting."

"Then we'll have to!" Mr. Spearing snapped. "Only arranged to get the child back—that's all!"

Sexton Blake said no more, but rose to his feet and led the way from the bar. A glance up and down the street showed him that it was practically deserted—a fact for which he was thankful, as he knew that in such a neighbourhood the inhabitants are not always on the side of law and order.

As he stood for a moment on the kerb, Tinker came ambling by, whistling a popular ditty. He stopped, apparently, to adjust the piece of string that served as a lace for one of his dilapidated boots.

"Get a cab at the end of the street at once," Sexton Blake ordered. "Anything will do, but be quick!"

The boy hurried away, and Sexton Blake and his companion crossed the road, Mr. Spearing unconsciously reverting to the official swagger of his Scotland Yard days. They found the door of the house ajar, and did not hesitate to enter.

"Look for trouble!" Mr. Spearing growled. "It's the front room, second floor."

No one appeared to check the men's entrance, and they proceeded cautiously up the rickety staircase. They had no means of telling whether Gentleman George and his confederate were there; and if that did prove to be the case, a surprise would be advisable and certainly safer, for Barney Moss would scarcely count if it came to a fight.

The first floor was reached, and as the detectives mounted towards the next one, the crying of a child reached them. Outside the door of the front room they paused, and just for a moment hesitated—as men will who are just about, with their eyes open, to take a big risk. Then Mr. Spearing's fingers gripped the handle, and he thrust the door open and leapt into the room beyond, the others close at his heels.

A ragged girl of about fifteen, who held a baby in her arms, let out a scream of fright, and nearly let her burden drop to the floor.

Otherwise, the room was empty.

"In luck!" Mr. Spearing chuckled, for he had dreaded the kidnapers being present, for reasons already stated.

With the natural pertness of self-assurance of the true East-End, the girl quickly recovered herself.

"Now, then!" she cried shrilly. "What are you after? Don't you try coming no games with me!"

Mr. Spearing fixed his most official glare upon the girl.

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and, it must be regretfully stated, she stuck her tongue out at him.

"Whose child is that?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Smiff's, I s'pose," the girl answered truculently; "though, as far as I know, it mayn't be. A cove called me in from the backyard to keep an eye on it while 'e went aht!"

Mr. Spearing positively beamed as he stepped forward.

"Don't be a fool!" he growled, as the girl moved backwards. "Have reason to believe this is a kidnapped child. Must examine it!"

The girl's face went blank with awe, and she made no further resistance, especially as the manner of the burly man had suddenly convinced her that he was what is known in the dialect of the part as a "slop."

Mr. Spearing took hold of the child's nightdress, and turned to the part where the name is usually to be found. He was not disappointed, for there, quite plain and large, was written "Charles Duncan."

Mr. Spearing took the child from the girl's arms, and the action roused her.

"'Ere! What are you a-doin' of?" she demanded shrilly.

"Be quiet!" Mr. Spearing snapped. "This child has been kidnapped, and we are going to take it back to its parents."

"Oh, are yer?" the girl cried. "I'll see what Mrs. Smiff thinks abahit it first."

Before she could be stopped she had made a bolt for the landing.

"Mrs. Smiff!" she shouted. "'Ere's some coves stealin' the kid!"

Out into the street Mr. Spearing went, with the baby in his arms; and, caring nothing for the strange spectacle that he presented, he hurried towards where a taxicab was waiting at the corner.

The vehicle was not to be reached without trouble, however.

The ragged nurse-girl emerged on to the pavement, and her shrill voice rang out again:

"Mrs. Smiff! 'Ere's some coves pinchin' the kid!"

"Quick," Sexton Blake ordered, "or we'll have the whole neighbourhood after us!"

But Mr. Spearing needed no spur of that kind. Already he had broken into a run, and it was with a gasp of relief that he scrambled into the taxi, the door of which was held open by Tinker. Sexton Blake and Barney Moss entered behind him.

They were none too soon, for already windows had been thrown open in answer to the girl's cries, and a couple of men had appeared from some mysterious place.

"The Imperial Hotel—quick!" Sexton Blake ordered.

"Not so fast!" the taxi-driver answered. "I want to know what the trouble is! I'm not goin' to be mixed up in any kidnapping!"

"You fool!" Mr. Spearing roared. "This is the child that was kidnapped—the millionaire baby. It's a sovereign if you get out of here at once!"

It may have been Mr. Spearing's tone of authority, or it may have been the offer of the sovereign; but, anyway, the taxi-driver hesitated no longer. His cab moved forward with a jerk, but only just in time to avoid the grab that a man made at the handle of the door. A second man tried from the other side to reach the cab, but Spearing's arm shot out of the window, his hand caught the man full in the chest, and sent him sprawling into the roadway. The next second all danger of pursuit was past.

Sexton Blake paused before the door of Mr. and Mrs. Duncan's apartments at the Imperial Hotel, and motioned Mr. Spearing to keep back.

"It will be best if I break the news gently to her," he said. "Wait outside until I call you."

"Don't be long!" Mr. Spearing growled. "Feel such a fool if anyone passes!"

As a matter of fact, the entrance of the detectives with the baby had already aroused the curiosity of the guests lounging in the lobby of the hotel, especially as they naturally knew

the story of the kidnapped child, but a tactful servant politely stopped them from following upstairs.

Sexton Blake knocked at the door of the room, then entered, closing the door behind him.

Mr. Duncan, who had been sitting in an attitude of dejection by the window, looked up wearily, but at sight of the detective's face he leapt to his feet.

"There is news?" he cried.

"Yes," Sexton Blake answered quietly. "Perhaps I had better speak to Mrs. Duncan."

The millionaire ran like a boy to the door of the bed-room and jerked it open.

"Alice," he cried excitedly, "there is news!"

From the inner room came a gasp of joy, then Mrs. Duncan, her pale face alight with hope, faced the detective.

"The child is found," Sexton Blake said quickly, seeing that it would be kindest to speak right out.

"Thank Heaven!" Mrs. Duncan gasped. "Oh, where is he?"

Sexton Blake turned towards the door.

"Spearing!" he cried.

The door opened, and Mr. Spearing, trying to keep a broad grin of triumph from his lips, entered with the baby in his arms.

Mrs. Duncan started forward, her eyes shining, her arms stretched out, then a terrible cry of dismay broke from her, and her arms dropped limply to her sides.

"It is not—my child!" she moaned, and reeled back in a dead faint.

Mr. Duncan stood quite still, his face ghastly, holding the still form of his wife in his arms, and for the space of five seconds or more no one spoke.

Spearing's jaw had dropped foolishly, and he held the child so loosely that it looked as if he might drop it at any moment. Even Sexton Blake was dumbfounded, though the paint with which his face was still partly covered hid his pallor, for he had not had time to wipe it all off in the cab. Still, he was the first to recover himself.

"You had best take Mrs. Duncan to her room," he said in a low voice.

And Mr. Duncan mechanically obeyed, to return a few seconds later with the dragging walk of an old man.

"There is some terrible mistake," he said huskily.

"We have been fooled!" Blake said, between his teeth. "We might have known that Gentleman George would not be beaten so easily."

He squared his shoulders, like a man ready to go into a fight again, and faced the millionaire.

"There is no need to give up hope," he said quietly. "We, at least, have a clue now, and I can assure you that it will be followed to the bitter end. We know where the child has been, and we must pick up the trail from there."

Mr. Duncan nodded, too moved to speak, and the detectives went quietly from the room, leaving him to his sorrow.

Out in the passage Mr. Spearing paused, his face still foolish with astonishment, and looked down at the child in his arms.

"What do with this?" he jerked.

"Take it back," Sexton Blake answered simply.

"Do what?" Mr. Spearing gasped.

"Take it back!" Sexton Blake persisted. "There'll be trouble if you delay."

"There'll be trouble, anyway!" Mr. Spearing said dismally.

"Why can't you take it?"

"For the simple reason, my friend," Sexton Blake answered, "that if Gentleman George and his friends are on the watch they might recognise me, and that's the last thing that I want. They know you're in the game, so you don't count."

"Thanks!" Mr. Spearing growled. "Don't know Lemur Street as well as I do!"

THE END.

(Next week's story, entitled "The Unwritten Law!" forms a splendid sequel to this week's yarn, and from it you will learn how Blake succeeds in turning the tables against Gentleman George. Don't miss this exciting sequel, but make quite sure of securing your copy of next Friday's PENNY POPULAR by ordering it in advance.)

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of St. Jim's.

- BY -

MARTIN
CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Eve of the Election.

UPON the notice-board in the hall of either House at St. Jim's a paper was pinned, bearing a brief announcement that was intensely interesting to all the fellows at St. Jim's, seniors and juniors alike, and even fags in the Second Form.

The notice in the New House was in the handwriting of Monteith; that in the School House in the hand of Darrel.

But the two announcements were identical in wording. They ran as follows:

"NOTICE!

"The post of captain of the school being vacant, owing to the regretted departure of Kildare of the Sixth, an election will be held to-morrow—Tuesday—at 7.30 p.m., in the School Hall, to fill this post.

"The candidates for election are George Rushden of the Sixth and James Monteith of the Sixth. Votes will be taken at 7.30 precisely."

Tom Merry & Co. and their chums, Jack Blake & Co. of the School House, eyed the notice wonderingly.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Blake. "Where's Kildare gone?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No."

"His mother's ill," explained Tom Merry, "and he's been called home suddenly."

Blake pulled a long face.

"That's rotten, isn't it?"

"It is a bit," admitted Tom Merry; "but it's no good being miserable about it. We shall have to back up Rushden at the election. We don't want a New House bounder bossing the show."

"Certainly not!"

"Bai Jove, deah boys! I've got an ideah!"

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther, turning round. "You here, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I'm heah, and, moreover, I've got a weally wippin' ideah!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Monty Lowther held up his hand.

"Silence for Gussy's idea!" he exclaimed. "It's the first he ever had, and he wants to work it off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Go it, Gussy!" said Tom Merry encouragingly.



"As captain of St. Jim's," said D'Arcy from the steps of the School House, "I shall do my best to wun things in the most wippin' mannah possible. I shall not stand any nonsense fwom anybody, but I twust I shall always act like a fellah of tact and judgment."
"Hurrah!" exclaimed the juniors!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, deah boys, I think it is generally agweed heah that it is quite impos for Monteith, or any othah New House chap, to be captain of St. Jim's!"

"Yes, rather."

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Monty Lowther, with an exact imitation of D'Arcy's own beautiful accent, and there was a roar of laughter.

"But there are many cires to be urged against Wushden's election," went on Arthur Augustus. "He's a splendid chap."

"Hurrah for Rushy!"

"But theah are fellahs in the School House more suitable for the bizney."

"Darrel can't put up," said Blake. "He's crocked for the rest of the term!"

"I was not thinking of Dawwel."

"Who then? Not North?"

"Certainly not!"

"Lefevere of the Fifth?" hazarded Digby.

"Oh, wats! Look heah, you fellahs, my ideah is a wippin' one! I wegard it as wotten that the captain of the school should always be selected fwom the Sixth."

"Better than the Fifth!" said Glyn.

"I am not thinkin' of the Fifth!"

"Why, what—"

"Why shouldn't a junjah be captain of St. Jim's?" demanded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy boldly.

It was out now!

For a full five seconds sheer astonishment held the juniors dumb.

Then there was a roar!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy jammed his monocle a little more tightly in his

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eye, and surveyed the hilarious juniors indignantly. He did not see anything to excite mirth in the suggestion. But the other fellows did, evidently. They roared!

"Look here, you silly asses——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors did not leave off laughing till they were hoarse. Then the tears ran down their cheeks.

"What juniors were you thinking of, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, as soon as the laughter had lulled a little.

"Myself, of course!"

"Of course!" grinned Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Captain Gussy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard it as a wippin' ideah, and I dare say you chaps will aftah you have had time to think it ovah," said Arthur Augustus. "What is wequired for captain of the school is a fellow of tact and judgment, a fellow who will always back up the School House, and give the New House chaps the kybosh, and so on. There are othah points, too, such as havin' a decent taste in dwess, and doin' the school cweedit in that way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Tom Merry humorously.

"If we vote for a junior at all, Gussy, we'll vote for you."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake. "You can have our votes if we vote for a junior at all!"

"Great Scott!"

And Arthur Augustus walked away with his nose very high in the air.

He left the crowd of juniors almost in convulsions. The idea of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as captain of St. Jim's tickled the least humorous of the fellows. And they had further cause of merriment when, a half an hour later, they returned to the notice-board, and saw pinned there a new notice, carefully written out in the elegant handwriting of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"NOTICE!"

"A. A. D'Arcy, Esq., of the Fourth Form, having nominated himself as a candidate for the post of captain of St. Jim's, the juniors of the School House are invited to rally round him, and vote for him on Tuesday, at 7.30 precisely.
(Signed) ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

The juniors read the notice, and laughed till their sides ached. When, an hour or so later, D'Arcy passed the notice-board and glanced at it, there was still a fresh paper pinned up, this one in the unmistakable handwriting of Monty Lowther of the Shell. The new notice ran:

"A. A. D'Arcy, Esquire, being a candidate for Colney Hatch, the juniors of the School House are invited to rally round and subscribe the cash to buy him a strait-waistcoat.

"(Signed) A FRIEND IN NEED."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Thunderbolt!

THE next day the talk of St. Jim's was all upon the subject of the election.

The election was to be held at seven-thirty that evening, and there were three candidates in the field—Rushden and Monteith of the Sixth, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

D'Arcy was not taken seriously at all, though by this time a number of irresponsible fags had announced their intention of voting for him. Two score of votes had been promised to Arthur Augustus by fags in the Second and Third, and D'Arcy had made careful notes of the names in his Russia-leather pocket-book. He hoped that the list would increase greatly during the day.

He was rather exasperated

because his chums did not take his election more seriously. But they didn't. All their electioneering was done for Rushden of the Sixth. It was in vain that D'Arcy appealed to their loyalty to their Form, their loyalty to their study. They only laughed.

Between Rushden and Monteith the contest was likely to be closer, and Monteith's chances certainly were enhanced by D'Arcy's action. For a couple of score of votes made a great difference.

But a good many of the seniors in the School House were not displeased at the prospect of the vote being split. For although they would dearly have liked to see a School House man captain of St. Jim's, most of the Sixth realised that Rushden was not exactly the fellow for the position. He was a much pleasanter fellow than Monteith to get on with, but he had not the gift of ruling as captain. That was evident to his best friends.

If it had been Darrel, the Sixth would have plumped for him almost to a man. But Rushden, kind and good-natured, easy going and easily led, was not the man to captain a school like St. Jim's, and captain the First Eleven in tough footer matches. Most of the School House seniors backed up Monteith because they had no doubt whatever that he would make the better captain of the two.

That proceeding made the juniors extremely indignant; they were not disposed to listen to argument on the subject. To them it appeared clear that a School House fellow ought to be captain of St. Jim's, and they were prepared to fight tooth and nail to keep the New House candidate out. That was as far as they looked in the matter.

Some of the fellows wondered whether a fourth candidate would present himself; but no one suspected the surprise that was coming.

It was after morning school that the thunderbolt fell upon the School House.

There was a meeting in Rushden's study after morning school; the juniors knew that. Tom Merry & Co. had seen Rushden go into his study with a very thoughtful expression upon his face, and had seen Sixth-Formers drop in by one and two and three.

Rushden came out of his study after about half an hour, looking a little gloomy, but with an expression of resolve upon his good-natured face. He had a paper in his hand, which he proceeded to pin up on the notice-board. Then he retired.

There was a rush round the notice-board at once. The fellows who saw Rushden's action concluded that he had written out some stirring appeal to the patriotism of School House electors—some clarion call to crush the rival House.

But he hadn't.

Stupefaction fell upon the juniors as they read the notice. It was written in Rushden's own hand, and they had seen Rushden himself pin it up, so there could be no doubt about its genuineness. They would have doubted it if they could.

"NOTICE!"

"The undersigned has withdrawn himself as a candidate for election.

GEORGE RUSHDEN."

The juniors stared at the paper. "It's impossible!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath.

"Rotten!"

"Can't be true!"

"He's dotty!"

"He's a silly ass!"

"He sha'n't do it!"

"We won't stand it!"

"It's mean!"

"Rotten! Caddish!"

The voices rose to a roar. Five minutes earlier, George Rushden had been the popular candidate. Now——

"Let's go and see him!" exclaimed Blake, exasperated. "He'll have to give us some explanation, anyhow."

"My deah boys——"

"Oh, shut up, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to shut up, Goah! I wegard it as extwemely pwob that it has occurred to Wushden that it is time a juniah was captain of St. Jim's, and he has therfoah gwacefully withdrawn from the contest. I considah——"

But the fellows did not wait to hear what Arthur Augustus D'Arcy considered. They swarmed away towards George Rushden's study.

Rushden was doubtless expecting the visit. He was standing up, leaning on the mantelpiece.

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looking rather disturbed and thoughtful, when a dozen knocks sounded at once on his door. North and Darrel were with him. "Come in!" said Rushden.

The door was flung open, and Tom Merry & Co. crowded in. Behind them the passage was seething with juniors—crowds of the Shell, and the Fourth, and the Third. Nearly all the juniors belonging to the School House seemed to be bent upon getting as near Rushden's study as they could.

"Hallo!" said Rushden. "What do you kids want?" He knew well enough.

"We want an explanation!" roared Blake.

"Yes, rather!" "What do you mean by it?"

"You're not going to resign!"

"We won't let you!" Rushden flushed, and held up his hand for silence.

"I'm sorry you chaps are disappointed," he said. "I've consulted all the Sixth fellows in the School House, and I've thought it out carefully myself. I should like to be skipper of St. Jim's, but it seems to be the general impression that Monteith is the best man after Kildare."

"Rot!" "He's a New House chap!"

"His House doesn't matter," said Rushden. "We want the best captain we can get for St. Jim's. I'd rather it were a School House man, but if Monteith's the best man available, let him have it. We ought to think of the school."

"He's not the best." "It's rot!"

"Darrel agrees with me," said Rushden. Darrel nodded.

"I've helped Rushden come to this decision," he said. "I think it's for the best. I think Rushden's done splendidly in standing out of the election, for the good of the school."

Darrel was too much respected by the juniors for him to be interrupted. But the looks of the disappointed youngsters showed that for once one of the most popular seniors in the House failed to make the slightest impression upon them.

"So, you see, it's for the best," said Rushden, with rather an effort, for he was a little disappointed himself. "You kids had better stand up for Monteith."

"Rats!"

"Now then, no cheek!" said Rushden. "Buzz off, and be Bosh!"

quiet!"

The juniors obeyed the order to "buzz off," but they were far from quiet. In the Sixth Form passage the throng swelled and surged. Tom Merry raised his hand.

"Fellows—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Chaps, the Sixth have betrayed us!"

Groans for the Sixth.

"Even if we get another senior candidate, we can't tell whether he may not desert the cause at the last moment, and leave us dished."

Groans!

"Gussy was right!" shouted Tom Merry excitedly.

"Oh!"

"Gussy said it was time that a junior was captain of St. Jim's, and he was right. A junior wouldn't have been talked over into giving us away to the enemy like this."

"Bravo!"



The Terrible Three came along the passage, looked in at the open door, and grinned and saluted D'Arcy with great respect. "All hail mighty captain!" "Oh, don't be an ass, Tom Mewwy!" "All hail, long may you reign!" said Monty Lowther, who never could be restrained from making puns.

"Gentlemen, I am going to vote for a junior captain of the school. I invite you all to follow my example." There was a roar.

"Hurrah! Hurrah for Captain Gussy! Hurrah!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Election.

ELECTION night!

There had been elections before at St. Jim's, and they had always caused excitement; but there had never been such singular issues at stake—never before had so much turned upon an election of a captain of the school.

With two candidates, one a senior and the other a junior, the election was a new thing in the annals of St. Jim's.

Hardly a single fellow was likely to stay away from the poll. Keen electioneers on both sides urged and drove the fellows into Big Hall as seven o'clock came round.

Figgins & Co. and a compact phalanx of the New House juniors marched in by one door, and the School House fellows entered by another. This had been arranged, in order to prevent possible collisions while feeling ran so high. Not that there was any real ill-feeling on the subject between the juniors of the rival Houses. But they were highly excited, and somewhat in the state of a powder magazine, requiring only a match to be dropped into it.

If a row once started, there was no telling where and when it might end. The prefects, armed with canes, perambulated the hall to keep order.

The rival juniors exchanged yells and catcalls of defiance across the hall, undeterred by the frowns of the prefects. They had many things to say to one another, chiefly of an uncomplimentary nature.

The entrance of the masters put an end to the uproar. When Mr. Railton took his seat upon the dais, the juniors

ceased to yell and catcall, and contented themselves with whispering and buzzing. Mr. Railton had no part in the proceedings, but he was there to keep order, and Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, joined him there. Two prefects, one of the School House and one of the New House, had been appointed tellers.

When the votes had been counted, once by each teller, they were to compare notes, and the candidate who counted the greater number of "voices" would be declared duly elected captain of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had come into the hall in the midst of his special chums. Blake and Digby and Herries were round him, and he was also supported by the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Glyn and Reilly. There was no doubt that the School House juniors were united on the point of getting D'Arcy in. They marched in with him in a sort of triumphal procession.

"Here he is!" roared Tom Merry, waving his handkerchief.

"Here he is!" roared Wally, waving a handkerchief which was not quite so white as Tom Merry's. "Hooray for the People's Candidate!"

"Hooray!"

Mr. Railton held up his hand for silence, and the cheering died away.

The School House master had risen to his feet. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stepped upon the dais, and Monteith passed up the hall, and stood near him there. Monteith's expression was curious. If his adversary had been Rushden, he would have shaken hands with him; but a prefect could not acknowledge a junior so far as to shake hands with him before the assembled school. D'Arcy made a graceful bow, but Monteith barely nodded.

"No bad feelin', deah boy, I hope," said D'Arcy blandly.

Monteith frowned.

"You young ass!" he replied.

"Weally, Monteith—"

"Boys," said Mr. Railton, "the election of a new captain of the school, in the place of Eric Kildare, is about to take place. There are—ahem!—two candidates, and I trust that the electors will use judgment in giving their votes!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the whole hall.

Mr. Railton sat down. Then Baker of the Sixth jumped up and proposed Monteith, a move to which Tom Merry rather precipitately responded by jumping up and proposing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There was a yell.

"Order!"

But that yell was from the seniors. From the School House juniors came a roar that almost drowned it.

"Bravo!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Silence!" said Mr. Railton. "The votes will now be taken. Darrel and Baker, you will kindly take the votes for Monteith."

"Yes, sir."

"Hands up for Monteith!" called out Darrel.

Quite a forest of hands went up. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round him with an eye that was gleaming rather anxiously through the eyeglass.

The New House to a man voted for Monteith. Every member of the Sixth of either House voted for him. Some of the Fifth who belonged to the School House did not vote at all. They did not want a New House captain, and they did not intend to vote for a junior, so they refrained from voting at all.

The tellers counted, and then compared notes. The result was announced by Baker, who demanded whether the other party wanted a show of hands. The hands for James Monteith numbered ninety-six.

"Want a show of hands?" roared Jack Blake indignantly. "I should say so! We could beat that total off our heads!"

"Silence!"

Wally gave Jameson of the Third a fierce glance.

"You wait till we get into the Form-room, Jimmy!"

Jameson grinned uneasily.

"Must stick by the House," he replied.

"Show up, the School House!" roared Kangaroo.

"Hands up for Gussy!"

"Hands up for the People's Candidate!"

"D'Arcy and liberty!"

"Hooray!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Count the votes for D'Arcy, please!"

Darrel and Baker proceeded to their task. It was noted that they were longer over the counting, and that augured well for the School House. Darrel's face was quite immovable when they finished, but Baker was looking decidedly grim. They compared notes, and spoke to Mr. Railton, who looked very grave.

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He rose to make the result known. There was a breathless hush.

"Boys, the total number of votes for D'Arcy of the Fourth is one hundred and seventeen!"

There was a buzz.

"D'Arcy of the Fourth has a majority of twenty-one votes, and I have therefore no alternative but to declare him duly elected captain of St. Jim's."

It was not an enthusiastic way of putting it. Mr. Railton evidently was not delighted with the result of the voting.

But the School House fellows did not notice or care for that. All they cared for was the announcement itself.

Captain of St. Jim's!

Duly elected!

There was no doubt of it. The impossible had happened. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form, was captain of the school.

And the School House juniors burst into a roar of cheering that made the old rafters shake.

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The New Captain of St. Jim's.

"B AI Jove, you know, I wegard it as wippin'!"

That was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's modest remark.

But the School House juniors were wildly enthusiastic.

Heedless of the presence and the frowns of masters and prefects, they made a rush for the junior candidate, and surrounded him.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was raised shoulder-high by the cheering crowd, and the juniors swept out of the big hall with D'Arcy borne above, like a frail craft on the crest of a wave.

"Bai Jove! Weally, you know, deah boys—"

But D'Arcy's protests were not listened to.

D'Arcy was the hero of the hour. He was the captain of St. Jim's—the first junior in the history of the school who had attained to that exalted honour.

It was incredible, but it was true.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was captain of St. Jim's.

No wonder the juniors hurrahed!

Even the fellows who had been most doubtful about the wisdom of electing a Fourth-Former to that important post gave way to the enthusiasm of the moment in the pride of the knowledge that a fellow of their own standing was college captain.

And after all, why not?

There was no why, as Blake remarked.

D'Arcy was going to inaugurate a new era at St. Jim's. He was going to make a new place of it—perhaps get juniors in as prefects—and then, as Blake said gleefully, they'd let the Sixth and the Fifth see what was what!

"Hurrah!"

"Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Speech!" roared Kangaroo.

"Hurrah! Speech—speech!"

The enthusiastic crowd had carried D'Arcy up and down the passage, then round the quad, and then they halted on the steps of the School House. In the radius of light cast into the dusky quadrangle from the windows and doorways of the School House there was a sea of upturned, excited faces to be seen. D'Arcy, somewhat hustled and breathless, stood on the top step, setting his necktie straight. That characteristic action was the cause of another ringing cheer.

"Hurrah!"

"Speech!"

"Gentlemen—" began D'Arcy.

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, on this auspicious occasion I have but few words to say—"

"Hurrah!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Go on!"

"On the ball!"

"Gentlemen, you have elected me captain of St. Jim's!"

"Good old St. Jim's!" roared the crowd.

"The task of choosin' the best man for the job was before you, and you have performed that task with perfect success."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hurrah!"

"As captain of St. Jim's I shall do my best to wun things in the most wippin' mannah possible. I shall not stand any nonsense frowm anybody, but I trust I shall always act like a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Hear, hear!"

"Fellows will be expected to play the game. Anybody not playin' the game will get a feahful thiwashin'."

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"Hurrah!"

"I have no more to say——"

"Hurrah!"

"Exceptin' that I am vewy gwateful for the honah you have done me, and that I shall take it as a personal favah if evvey gentleman here pwesen't will come ovah to the tuck-shop with me and ordah what he likes at my expense."

"Hear, hear!" roared Fatty Wynn. "That's something like a skipper! Monteith wouldn't have done that! Come on!"

And Fatty Wynn led the way.

The juniors, laughing and cheering, followed, and D'Arcy was hoisted upon new shoulders—Figgins' and Thompson's this time—and carried in the crowd across the quad.

Dame Taggles' little shop was soon crammed.

D'Arcy was borne into the midst of the swarm of fellows there, and he turned a flushed but good-tempered face upon the old dame.

"I am captain of St. Jim's now, Mrs. Taggles——"

"Good gracious, Master D'Arcy!"

"I'm standin' 'tweat to these fellahs. I have a fivah heah frowm my governah, and if it wuns to more than that, Mrs. Taggles, I twust you will have no objection to puttin' it down to my account, to be settled on Satabday," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

Mrs. Taggles took the crisp and rustling fiver.

"No objection at all, Master D'Arcy."

"Then go ahead, deah boys!"

"Hurrah!"

Fatty Wynn was already going ahead. He had a good place at the counter, and he was helping himself. He looked up for a moment from a pork-pie.

"Jolly lucky the election took place to-day!" he remarked.

"Why?" asked Kerr.

"Because Mrs. Taggles' pork-pies are fresh in to-day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try one," said Fatty Wynn.

Outside the shop was a swarm of fellows who could not get in. Good things were passed out to them in the most liberal way. By the time that splendid feed was ended Mrs. Taggles' shop was like Mother Hubbard's celebrated cupboard—it was looking decidedly bare.

There was no doubt that D'Arcy had begun his term of captaincy well.

When, after the feed, the juniors returned to their own House, D'Arcy was a little breathless, but looking very cheerful and happy. Blake slapped him on the shoulder as they went into Study No. 6 to do their prep.

"It's ripping!" he exclaimed. "I'm jolly glad, old fellow!"

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy! I wish Cousin Ethel were here!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I wish she were! Captain Gussy! Sounds well, doesn't it?"

"I think it sounds wippin'."

The Terrible Three came along the passage and looked in at the open door of the study and grinned, and saluted D'Arcy with great respect.

"All hail, mighty captain!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"All hail! Long may you reign!" said Monty Lowther, who never could be restrained from making bad puns.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know——"

Knox, the prefect, the bully of the Sixth, stopped in the passage with a scowl.

"Not so much noise there, you kids!"

Tom Merry turned upon him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Do you know that you're talking to the captain of the school?"

"Oh, rats!" said Knox disrespectfully.

"Weally, Knox——"

"You young ass!" said Knox.

D'Arcy drew himself up to his full height. The tall and slim swell of the Fourth was very nearly as tall as the bully of the Sixth, and he was certainly more graceful, and a great deal more dignified.

"What did you say, Knox?" he asked, in a stately manner.

"Young ass!" said Knox.

"Do you realise that you are addressin' your captain, Knox?"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!"

"It is against all the wules, w'ritten and unw'ritten, for the captain of the school to be chawactewised as an ass," said D'Arcy firmly. "I call upon you to withdraw that remark, Knox, and apologise for it."

"Rats!" said Knox. "Don't play the giddy goat!"

D'Arcy raised his hand commandingly.

"Thwov that rebellious wottah down the passage, you youngstabs!" he said.

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry & Co., with one voice.

"If you dare to lay a finger on a prefect——" began Knox.

"Captain's orders!" said Tom Merry. "Out you go!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Knox gave a roar of rage, and began to hit out. But half a dozen sturdy juniors fastened upon him, only too eager to obey the new captain's orders so far as laying hands on the unpopular prefect was concerned. Knox was whirled off his feet, and dragged along the passage, and rolled down the stairs, almost in the twinkling of an eye. A crowd of juniors in the lower hall cheered enthusiastically as Knox was rolled among them, dusty and dishevelled and wild with rage.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had performed his first act of authority as captain of St. Jim's, and there was not a junior in the School House, with two or three unimportant exceptions, who was not prepared to back him up through thick and thin.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Some Changes in the First Eleven.

AFTER morning lessons the next day Arthur Augustus lingered a few minutes behind the Fourth in the Form-room to write out a notice, which he pinned up on the board in the hall with perfect gravity.

Seniors and juniors gathered round to read it, with great curiosity.

"NOTICE!"

"The members of the First Eleven are requested to attend in Study No. 3, 6th Form, to discuss the Topcliffe match.

"(Signed) A. A. D'ARCY, Capt."

Notices signed "Kildare, Capt.," had been common enough on the board. "D'Arcy, Capt.," was something new. There was a growl from Knox.

"I jolly well sha'n't attend any blessed meeting of that blessed young ass!" he remarked.

"You needn't," said Tom Merry. "You're not in the First Eleven, or likely to be, unless you change your manners and customs."

Knox grunted, and strode away.

D'Arcy went into Kildare's old study, which he had decided to occupy on important occasions like this. It would certainly have been infra dig, if the prefects had been called upon to attend a meeting in a Fourth Form study. To Kildare's old room they could take no exception; and D'Arcy, firm as he was to maintain his rights as captain, was careful to be delicate and considerate upon all possible points.

One by one the prefects and other Sixth-Formers concerned in the Topcliffe match dropped in. Most of them hardly knew what to do, but they had followed Darrel's lead, and Darrel had accepted the peculiar situation like a sensible and cool-headed fellow.

Arthur Augustus bowed gravely to the seniors as they came in in turn. They nodded in reply; some of them grinned, but their grins died away under the elegant junior's look of chilling dignity.

"All the membahs of the team heah?" asked D'Arcy, looking round through his eyeglass, as he stood in an elegant attitude by the mantelpiece.

"Yes," said Monteith shortly.

Monteith was feeling very sore about the result of the election, and he hardly took the trouble to conceal it.

"Vewy good! P'way be seated."

"About the Topcliffe match——" began Rushden.

"Of course," said North, a little uneasily, "you are going to ask Monteith to captain the team for the match?"

D'Arcy shook his head.

"I twust I shall nevah ask anothah fellow to do my dutay for me, when I am perfectly able to perform it myself," he replied.

"You—you don't mean——"

"You can't mean——"

"Look here!"

"Who's going to captain the First Eleven?"

D'Arcy adjusted his monocle carefully in his eye, and replied, in the coolest of tones and without the flicker of a muscle:

"I am!"

"You are!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You are!"

"I have already wemarked, yaas."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not see anything to be excited about. But the prefects in Kildare's study looked excited and dismayed. Of course, Arthur Augustus was acting strictly within his rights as captain of St. Jim's. He had the right and the power to captain the First Eleven. And since he had full confidence in his ability to do so, why should he delegate the task to another? Why, indeed?

Darrel, the senior prefect, had made up his mind to take this queer business in a businesslike way. But even Darrel was disturbed.

"D'Arcy," he exclaimed heatedly, "you can't mean it!"

"Why not, deah boy?"

"Come now, you can't captain a senior team——"

"My deah Dawwel, that is where you are quite mistaken. I have long been convinced that what the First Eleven wants is to be bucked up by havin' some juniars in it."

"What?" yelled the seniors.

"The First Eleven ought to be wepresentative of the whole school, in my opinion," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I am thinkin' of puttin' in two fellows of the Shell, and two of the Fourth, beside myself."

"Oh!"

"That will make it a more wepresentative team."

"My hat!"

"Poor old St. Jim's!"

"Nice day for Topcliffe."

D'Arcy frowned.

"I have not the slightest doubt that we shall beat Topcliffe," he replied. "Look at this papah! I have sketched out the eleven already. Fatty Wynn of the Fourth in goal——"

Darrel's face cleared a little.

"Wynn of the Fourth kept goal for the Sixth once before, and did it jolly well!" he exclaimed. "I don't complain about that."

"Vewy good! I wespsect your judgment vewy much, Dawwel, and I am glad you agwee," said D'Arcy. "Backs, Lefevre of the Fifth and Wushden."

"That's all right!"

"Halves, Bakah and North of the Sixth, and Thompson of the Shell."

"Ahem!"

"In the fwont line, Tom Mewwy of the Shell, Blake of the Fourth, myself, and Monteith and anothah seniah. I leave him to you."

Darrel whistled.

"Well, it's a team that might win," he said. "Only your front line will be rushed all over the ground by Topcliffe seniors."

"Wats!"

"Eh?"

"Excuse me, Dawwel—I mean I don't agwee! I wathah think that a team with juniars in it will do St. Jim's gweat cwedit. At any wate, I will now pwoceed to post this list up in the hall."

And the swell of St. Jim's quitted the study.

He left the seniors looking at one another in silence.

"Well, this beats the deck!" said Baker, at last.

Monteith laughed angrily.

"Better give the young cub a hiding, and end it!" he said.

"It can't be done," said Darrel quietly. "He's captain of St. Jim's, and the juniors would back him up. We don't want a general riot between the Sixth and the Lower School, in which the Sixth would get the worst of it."

And all but Monteith agreed with Darrel. Monteith was still feeling sore over his defeat in the election.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pinned the paper up in the hall, and the notice-board was immediately surrounded by a crowd of eager readers.

There was a chirrup of satisfaction from Jack Blake. He slapped the captain of St. Jim's on the shoulder very heartily.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed. "Your front line is splendid, Cussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed D'Arcy. "What do you think, Tom Mewwy?"

"Ripping!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I could suggest a slight improvement," said Kangaroo thoughtfully.

"What is that, Kangy, deah boy?"

"Put me in as centre-forward," grinned the Cornstalk.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wcally, Kangy——"

"Nothing like selecting the best man available," suggested Kangaroo.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply. His own name was down as centre-forward. Upon the whole, the list gave the Lower School great satisfaction. There were five juniors, so the seniors still had a majority. But it was unheard of for five juniors to have played in the First Eleven. The seniors, of course, were expecting a wholesale licking from Topcliffe, excepting Darrel and one or two others. Darrel saw that D'Arcy had well selected his team, and he would not have been surprised at a victory. He thought that such a team might pull off a win once, but not twice.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 204.

But D'Arcy had no doubts.

Needless to say, there was a big crowd on the ground when the time approached for the Topcliffe match.

Topcliffe seniors were a strong team, and the St. Jim's fellows were very curious to see how D'Arcy's mixed eleven would face them.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Win for St. Jim's.

TOPCLIFFE seniors were grinning as they began that remarkable match.

Probably they regarded the remodelled First Eleven of St. Jim's in a comical light. But they soon woke up to the fact that the eleven, mixed as it was, was quite up to their form.

Tom Merry and Blake and D'Arcy certainly were rather light against the big Topcliffe fellows, but they were very nimble and very quick. And the St. Jim's goalkeeper was a marvel. With Fatty Wynn in goal it was never easy to score, and Fatty Wynn was on his best form now, and ready for anything.

Topcliffe made two or three rushes up the field, and Yorke, the captain, slammed the ball in twice, but each time Fatty Wynn fisted it out with perfect ease, and the St. Jim's crowd roared approval.

At length Tom Merry, who was playing outside-right for St. Jim's, captured the ball, and bore it along down the touchline, and as the Topcliffe backs closed on him, he sent it in to Jack Blake, who centred to D'Arcy just as he was tackled.

Blake rolled over under a charge with a bump that shook every ounce of breath out of his body. But D'Arcy had the ball, and was speeding on with only the goalkeeper to beat.

With his eyeglass jammed in his eye, and his cheeks glowing pink, the swell of St. Jim's sped on, and the Topcliffe goalie grinned, and prepared to receive boarders.

D'Arcy's right foot whisked out, and the goalie sprang to save, and D'Arcy changed his feet with lightning quickness, and kicked into the further corner of the net.

The ball missed the goalie by a yard or more, and lodged in the net, and the Topcliffe custodian ceased to grin.

There was a frenzied yell from the St. Jim's crowd.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Gussy!"

"Bravo, skipper!"

"My only hat!" said Yorke, as the Topcliffians lined up again, after the goalie had tossed out the leather. "We shall have to keep an eye on that young bounder."

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Hurrah!"

D'Arcy lifted his cap most gracefully, and bowed to the acclamations of the crowd. Then the ball was kicked off again.

Topcliffe fought hard to equalise during the remainder of the first half, and they succeeded just before the whistle went. Yorke put the ball in, and when Mr. Railton blew his whistle the score was equal.

"One to one!" said Jack Blake, when the teams moved off the field for their brief rest. "I don't think the old eleven would have done any better."

The second half commenced with vigour. Topcliffe were trying kick-and-rush tactics, and they succeeded in breaking through the St. Jim's defence more than once, but Fatty Wynn in goal was always up to the mark.

Again and again the leather was slammed in upon the fat Fourth-Former; but no matter how it came, he always sent it whizzing out again.

A good save by Fatty Wynn sent the ball out to mid-field, and Arthur Augustus captured it and sped off down the centre.

Tackled by the enemy's halves, he passed out to Monteith, who was at inside-left. Monteith kept the ball, and ran on, hoping to score, D'Arcy keeping pace with him down the centre.

Both the Topcliffe backs closed on Monteith, and the smallest fag in the crowd round the ropes could see that Monteith should have centred to his captain.

D'Arcy had scored once before from a similar pass, and he had every chance, while if the winger kept the ball he had not the ghost of one.

But Monteith did not pass; he dribbled the ball on.

"To me!" shouted D'Arcy.

The prefect did not heed.

"Do you hear?" shrieked the swell of St. Jim's. "To me!"

"Pass!" roared the crowd.

"Pass, you duffer!"

"Pass, you ass!"

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"Pass—pass!"

But the New House prefect did not pass. His lips set obstinately over his set teeth, and he rushed on with the ball and kicked from a distance as the backs rushed on him. The kick was lassy and ill-judged, and the ball bounced against the goalpost and shot off into play again. A second later one of the backs had cleared, and the play surged away into mid-field.

D'Arcy was pale with anger.

Monteith's direct disobedience and indiscipline had cost his side an almost certain goal; and worse than that, it had given the foe a chance.

For the Topcliffians were rushing the ball on; the St. Jim's forwards were nowhere. And before the defence could rally, shots were being rained in on Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn was splendid, but he was not invincible. A shot found the net, and there was a yell from Topcliffe.

"Goal!"

Yes, it was goal! Monteith bit his lip hard. He felt that he had gone too far, and his captain did not mean to leave any misapprehension upon the point.

Arthur Augustus strode up to the New House prefect, his eye gleaming behind his monocle, and his hand raised.

"Monteith!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled the prefect.

"Get off the field!"

"What!"

"I ordah you off the field!" said D'Arcy, his voice trembling with anger. "You have thwown away a goal, and given the enemy one. You are worse than useless in the team! I'll finish the match a man short. Get out!"

"You young fool—"

"Go!"

Monteith clenched his hands passionately. He had provoked his junior captain too far, but he did not mean to obey such an order as this.

"You cheeky cub!" he said, between his teeth. "I sha'n't stir a step!"

"Get off the field!"

"Oh, rot! Hold your tongue!"

"If you don't get off, Monteith, I'll have you thwown off!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Blake, Tom Mewwy! See Monteith off the ground!"

"Get off, Monteith!" said Mr. Railton sharply. "How dare you remain when your captain has ordered you off?"

Monteith glared at Mr. Railton, but he could not dispute a referee's order, and he could not argue with a Housemaster. He thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his football shorts, and traipsed off the field, his face black with rage.

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"Man short, Gussy!"

"Bettah than playin' that cad, deah boy."

"Oh, right-ho!" said Blake.

D'Arcy lined his team up again. The Topcliffe fellows met the kick-off with careless coolness. They had not the slightest doubt of winning now. They were a goal up, and the home side were playing only ten men.

But the great game of football is full of surprises, and that game was more surprising than most.

Fatty Wynn in goal was a tower of strength. He saved with machine-like precision, and every attack of the Topcliffians, however hard pressed, was stopped when it reached the citadel manned by the Welsh junior.

And when Rushden, who had been moved into the front line, scored, there was a roar of relief and delight from St. Jim's.

"Goal!"

"Equal now!" grinned Jack Blake. "Now for the odd goal!"

Both sides fought hard for that odd goal. Two to two was the score, and there were yet ten minutes to go.

A determined attack by Topcliffe put the St. Jim's goal in danger, but Fatty Wynn was not found wanting. The attack petered out, and then the Saints swept the leather goalwards in their turn. Tom Merry kicked for goal on the stroke of time, and the goalie was beaten by a hair's-breadth. To the immense delight of the Saints, on the field and off, the leather lodged in the net.

Phip!

The shrill note of the whistle was almost drowned by the roar that broke from the crowd.

"Goal! Hurray! St. Jim's wins!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

St. Jim's had won!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Hand of Authority.

THE enthusiasm of the juniors of St. Jim's, after the defeated Topcliffians had departed, knew no bounds.

They had won!

A match which had been regarded as a tough one by Kildare, had been won, with a junior captain and three junior players in the First Eleven.

It was enough to make the juniors enthusiastic.

Needless to say, there was a celebration of the glorious victory.

Tom Merry & Co. pooled their funds for the purpose, and a big feed was held in Study No. 6, to which, of course, came Figgins & Co., from the New House.

Arthur Augustus was the hero of the hour.

There was a sharp rap on the door while the merriment in Study No. 6 was at its height, and a fag of the Second Form put his head in, with a cheeky grin.

"Knox says you're to stop that row, or he'll come up to you!" said the fag, and vanished. He did not care to remain near Study No. 6 after delivering that message.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned red with wrath.

In olden times, certainly, Study No. 6 had received messages like that many a time, and they had found it expedient to obey the orders of a prefect.

But the case was changed now. D'Arcy, at all events, was no longer under Knox's orders, but Knox was under his. The impertinence of the message was unbounded.

"Bah! Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy at last.

"The cheek!" said Figgins indignantly. "Fancy sending a message like that to the captain of the school!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Make an example of him, Gussy."

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye.

"I shall certainly speak to him vewy vewahly," he said. "Go and tell Knox to come to me at once, Lowthah!"

Monty Lowther hesitated.

The captain of St. Jim's certainly had a right to send a Shell fellow on messages, if he liked, but that was an aspect of D'Arcy's captaincy which struck Lowther as less agreeable than the aspect he had hitherto observed. Besides, the bearer of such a message to Knox, the prefect, would be putting his head into the lion's den.

"Oh, I say—" began Lowther.

"Pway go at once, deah boy!"

Monty Lowther ceased to argue, and quitted the study. He made his way to the Sixth Form passage, and cautiously approached the door of Knox's study. Although he was backed up by all the authority of the captain of St. Jim's, Lowther knew better than to venture within reach of the bully of the Sixth when he delivered his message.

Knox's door was shut. Lowther tapped at it, and opened it. There was a sound of voices in the study, and Lowther saw Knox in consultation with Setton of the Sixth, and North and Pelham and another prefect. Knox looked at him savagely.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I've got a message from the captain," said Lowther, keeping his hand upon the handle of the door, ready to slam it and bolt at a moment's notice.

"From that cub D'Arcy, do you mean?" asked Knox harshly.

"From the captain," said Monty Lowther firmly—"from Captain D'Arcy. You're to go to his study at once."

"What?" yelled Knox.

"You're to go to his study immediately, and report yourself."

"My—my—my only aunt!" ejaculated North.

Knox made a spring towards the door.

Slam!

Monty Lowther sped at top speed down the passage. Knox dragged the door open, but the active Shell fellow was already at the end of the passage. He fled for the Fourth Form quarters at top speed.

He burst breathlessly into Study No. 6.

"Is Knox coming?" asked D'Arcy.

"He was when I lost sight of him!" gasped Lowther.

"Is he after you?" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yes, rather!"

"Vewy well!" said Arthur Augustus. "We shall see!"

And Arthur Augustus stepped into the open doorway of the study and waited.

But Knox did not appear. He did not care to pursue Lowther as far as the junior passages.

D'Arcy waited in vain, with the light of battle gleaming behind his eyeglass.

"He isn't coming," said Kerr.

"Wathah not!"

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"He wouldn't care to venture here, I expect," said Tom Merry.

"If the mountain will not come to Mahomet, deah boys, Mahomet must go to the mountain," said D'Arcy.

"Gussy—"

"Knox has wufused to obey his skippah's ordahs," said D'Arcy. "It is my dutay to punish Knox."

"Eh?"

"I am now going to his studay. You fellahs can follah and back me up if you like."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked out of the study with a stately tread.

The chums of St. Jim's followed D'Arcy, Figgins & Co. quite as keen as the School House fellows on backing up the junior captain. And a crowd of other fellows, seeing them march and learning what was on, joined them. Quite a little army marched into the Sixth Form passage, and some of the more prudent and thoughtful of the juniors had caught up walking-sticks or cricket-stumps or rulers, in case there was trouble.

D'Arcy knocked at the rebellious prefect's door. D'Arcy might be angry, but he was always polite.

"Come in!" roared Knox.

D'Arcy opened the door and walked in.

Knox glared at him.

Behind D'Arcy the juniors crammed themselves in the doorway and in the passage, which was simply a sea of heads.

"What!" yelled Knox. "You!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You've got the cheek to come here—"

"I have come here to weceive an explanation of your impertinent message, Knox, or else an apology!" said D'Arcy, with perfect calmness.

And he jammed his monocle a little more tightly into his eye and surveyed the half-dozen prefects in the study without turning a hair.

"Are you going to stand this kid's impertinence, Knox?" said Monteith, with a sneer.

D'Arcy turned upon Monteith at once.

"I'll have no interference from you, Monteith!" he exclaimed. "Go back to your own House at once!"

"What?"

"I give you two minutes to leave the School House!" said D'Arcy.

Monteith sneered.

"And if I don't go?" he inquired.

"I shall ordah the pwpfects to throw you out."

The half-dozen prefects burst into angry laughter.

"Do you think we shall do it?" asked North.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you're mistaken; we sha'n't do anything of the sort!" shouted Pelham.

"Will you wufuse to obey your skippah?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Vewy well! I call upon the school to back me up!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with stately dignity.

"The juniahs, at all events, are not lost to all sense of what is wight and pwopah. Chaps, please cleah out this studay, and put these fellahs in their places."

"What-ho!" roared Blake. "Come on!"

The juniors needed no more.

Long had they been eager to try conclusions with Knox and Sefton, and they were by no means unwilling to come down heavily upon the other prefects. The time had come to show that a junior was as good as a senior any day.

Tom Merry & Co. rushed into the study.

"Get out!" roared Knox.

"Hurray! Down with the cads!" shrieked Wally, of the Third.

"Biff the bounders!"

"Bump 'em over!"

The rebel prefects hit out desperately. A dozen juniors were knocked sprawling, and others stumbled over them—but there were swarms of them. The prefects were overwhelmed, as by the tide—the juniors were innumerable. They crowded into the study until there was no room to move, hardly room to breathe, certainly no space to struggle. The seniors were

dragged down, and upon each of the sprawling prefects three or four juniors rolled and clutched.

In five minutes the struggle was over, and the rebels were extended upon the floor, with two or three juniors sitting upon each senior and keeping him down.

"Hurray!" roared Wally.

"Thank you vewy much, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his eyeglass with one hand, and dabbing red from his nose with his handkerchief held in the other. "Blake, Tom Mewwy, Mannahs, take Monteith and dwop him out of the window."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hold on!"

It was Darrel's voice. The prefect had forced his way through the crowd, and his face was very excited.

"Hold on, you kids—"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass calmly upon Darrel.

"I am sowwy, Dawwel, but I cannot allow you to intah-feah heah. No one but the Head has the wight to intah-feah with the captain of the school—and, unless Kildare returns to St. Jim's, I am captain of the school. Pway wethere."

"But I tell you—"

"I am sowwy, I have no time to listen, Dawwel—"

"Kildare's come back!" roared Darrel.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

For a moment even the swell of St. Jim's was taken aback. From the passage rang a loud cheer, ringing loudly from D'Arcy's most ardent supporters.

"Hurray! Kildare! Hurray!"

A stalwart form came striding up the Sixth Form passage; Kildare's handsome face looked into Knox's study.

"Kildare!"

"Bai Jove!"

The old captain of St. Jim's nodded and smiled.

"Yes, here I am," he said. "I've come back."

"For good?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, for good."

"Hurray!"

For a moment there was a struggle in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's breast—but only for a moment. He had pledged himself to resign the captaincy if Kildare returned to claim it, and he was a fellow of his word. It was only for a moment that the swell of St. Jim's was silent; then he joined in the cheer.

"Huwway!"

The dusty and dishevelled prefects were allowed to rise. They were so much relieved by the return of Kildare that they felt hardly angry.

"Kildare, deah boy, I am vewy glad you've been able to come back, aftah all!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "I twust your matah is bettah?"

"Thank you!" said Kildare. "She took such a turn for the better to-day that the doctor has every hope of a quick recovery. Under the circumstances, and considering how things were going on here, according to a letter I had from—never mind whom—I've come back."

"Vewy good! You are aware that I am captain of St. Jim's now—"

"Yes," said Kildare grimly, "I'm aware of that."

"I wesign the captaincy into your hands again with a great deal of pleasure," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gracefully.

And, with a nod, a smile, and a graceful bow, the late captain of St. Jim's retired from the study and departed with his friends.

"There's a lot of the feed left," Fatty Wynn remarked.

"We may as well finish that."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good egg!"

And they did!

Kildare remained, and filled his old position; and even D'Arcy admitted that the school thrived under his sway. But for a long time the juniors recounted with great gusto the thrilling incidents that had occurred under the short but eventful rule of Captain D'Arcy.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER. The River Steamer— Pete and the Crocodile— The Captain's Proposal.

THE waters of the Euphra flowed cool and clear beneath the burning rays of the Arabian sun now in the zenith. Palm-trees and ferns lined either bank, and on the bosom of the stream lay the Water Lily, its pure white now somewhat marred with age and streaks of black grease.

It smelt of bad cooking and tobacco-smoke, mingling pleasantly with engine-oil; for, as the astute reader has already surmised, the Water Lily was a steamboat, and not a flower.

She was very old, and the way she groaned and panted against the tide gave the impression that she required new engines, the clang and crash of which could be heard half a mile away. She also wanted new boilers, as was evidenced by the hiss of escaping steam; but, as her owner and captain, Silas G. Karn, said, there was no reason why they should burst, seeing they had never burst yet; besides, her engineers were Arabs, and he guessed they did not count much.

She also required a new hull; but as she was a business venture, Silas G. Karn guessed that he was not going to spend money on her. His guess was perfectly correct, too, for the simple reason that he had already spent the only money he had in making the purchase.

Her passengers consisted chiefly of Arabs, with a sprinkling of Turks. They looked hot and extremely dirty. They were both.

Suddenly a roar burst forth, and Karn glanced anxiously towards the engine-room. He thought the boiler was going to burst, and that one of the engineers had noticed it, and was uttering those howls by way of warning. But as the howling was repeated, Karn glanced towards the bank from which it appeared to come, and there he saw three men. The howling one was a negro, and his name was Pete. Beside him stood his comrades, Jack and Sam, while the dog Rory was hunting for water-rats along the edge of the river.

"Stop de vessel, old hoss!" bawled Pete.
"You will have to guess again, strangers. This craft don't stop for the King of Egypt and all his wives."
"De King ob Egypt ain't in dis country."
"I know he ain't, Snowball; but it would be all the same if he was."
"We want to bring upwards of five hundred pounds aboard, and—"



"Good-morning, old hoss!" said Pete. "Nice sort ob day, don't you tink so?" "I'm hungry!" came a deep voice.

worse. He pitched against the rail of the bridge, which, being old and rotten, gave way with the impact of his weight, and he went sprawling on the top of an elderly passenger, who was seated on a camp-chair just beneath.

Perhaps this was fortunate for the passenger, who had been calmly reading a paper. He fell to the deck amongst the ruins of his chair, with the weight of Silas G. Karn on the top of him. He spoke in Turkish. Karn spoke in American, such "as she is spoke" in the Bowery; and the extraordinary part of the thing was that he swore at the passenger for getting in his way. You see, when a man has pitched from a vessel's bridge, and hurt himself considerably, he is apt to lose his temper, and when Karn did that he always blamed someone, whether guilty or as innocent as the dear little lambkin we eat in the spring.

There were only two things that could have made Karn's temper worse. One was Pete's howls of laughter, and the other the engineer's action.

Abou was his name, and it took a lot to trouble him. He looked as innocent as a camel, and as meek as sterilised London milk. His brother Ras was a man with a doubtful temper; yet Abou ruled Ras with a rod of iron made red-hot.

"Something has happened," murmured Abou, smudging some black, oily waste across his brow by way of cooling it. "The vessel makes no headway. Heap on more fuel, you

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lazy camel. I'll make headway against this tide, or I will burst her boilers!"

Abou spoke in Arabic, but this was the gist of his words. "The beastly skipper is howling at you," murmured Ras. "Let him howl," observed Abou, who neither feared Karn nor a personage who was much worse than he, but who shall be nameless. "What is the sense of him making that noise? Stop, I will screw down the safety-valve. Mind that loose bolt! It might fly out with the extra pressure. How these accursed-engines rattle! It is enough to drive a man mad. Hark at the silly vagabond's howls, and I know exactly what he wants me to do. I wonder why he does not speak down the tube. Fury! There goes the gauge-glass. Turn off the cocks, you lazy beast!"

Now Ras was afraid of his brother. He generally obeyed his orders, and never dared openly to disobey them; but he was not going to obey an order like that. Steam was hissing from the upper cock; boiling water from the bottom.

"I'm going to have a fit!" yelled Ras. "Give me air!" No one gave him air, perhaps because he took it, by rushing up the iron ladder on to the deck; and Abou made a good second.

The scenes which followed on board the Water Lily were ludicrous in the extreme. Everybody seemed to be getting into everybody else's way, and no one knew exactly what to do. The vessel was stranded in the mud, and it looked as though a good deal of time would have to elapse ere it would be got off.

Pete turned to his comrades. "Well, boys," he said, "I don't know how long they will be in getting that vessel off the mud, but I know dis. I'm not going on board until de old boat is afloat again. What do you say to a little shooting? We can enjoy ourselves far better on land than on that old tub."

"Yes," said Jack. "I'm inclined to agree with you. They look a pretty rough crowd on board, and we might just as well wait until the vessel is ready to start again."

"Hi, you dere," bawled Pete to the captain of the vessel. "Just give us a call when you are ready to start. We sha'n't be far away, and are sure to hear you."

"See you here," shouted Karn, who was in a vile temper, "I'll—"

"Dat's all right, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, not giving the man time to finish his sentence. "Don't apologise for running de boat on de mud. We don't mind waiting a little while. Come on, Sammy; let's see you bring a few birds down."

Sam put his rifle to his shoulder, and brought down three birds with as many shots before they had proceeded many yards. Unfortunately the birds fell into the water. Pete, however, was not going to lose them for the sake of a ducking. He scrambled down the bank, and waded breast-deep into the water.

Jack and Sam had a view of the scene, so had the passengers aboard the vessel, and what followed seemed to make the hearts of the former stand still, while it greatly surprised and excited the passengers.

Pete was standing waist-deep in the water, and close to him lay an enormous crocodile, its hideous jaws gaping open as though ready to seize its prey.

"Good-morning, old hoss!" cried Pete, in a voice that must have been distinctly audible to those on the vessel. "Nice sort ob day, don't you tink so, and—"

"I'm hungry!" came a deep voice. Jack and Sam, of course, knew that the voice was due to Pete's ventriloquism, although it appeared to come from those awful, gaping jaws.

The passengers knew nothing of the sort, and when they saw Pete talking and smiling at a crocodile, they were naturally surprised. They listened spellbound, and this is what they heard:

"Hungry, are you, my poor old hoss? Den why not go and catch some shrimps, and—"

"I prefer niggers."

"Well, dey ain't no good for eating purposes. Jack and Sammy are nice and tender. Don't fire, Sammy, 'cos you would make him come at me, and I like to be friendly wid de poor old hoss. I ain't got time to talk to you any more, my

dear. I can tell dat you are a lady crocodile by your beauty, de same as you can tell dat I am a gentleman nigger by my beauty. Good-bye, my dear!" added Pete, stroking the awful-looking reptile's head. "Eber seen de trick ob putting your head into de jaws ob a crocodile, Sammy? Here goes!"

A cry of terror rose from the passengers aboard the vessel as Pete actually placed his head into those gaping jaws; then he withdrew it, kissed his hand to the crocodile, and came ashore.

Of course, there are sceptical persons who will not believe that this happened. All the same, it did. Jack and Sam would not have believed it, had they not seen it with their own eyes. They hurried to the spot just as Pete was scrambling out of the water, and then they suddenly turned and fled, for at least twenty yards, while Pete followed them, smiling.

"My eyes!" gasped Jack. "How awful!" "Oh, dat's nuffin', Jack!" observed Pete. "You only want to know de correct way to train a crocodile to be able to do dat."

"Phew!" gasped Sam. "I should say you want to know the correct way to bury that crocodile! I don't like the smell of a live crocodile—it's too musky—but I draw the line at one that has been dead for weeks."

"Golly! I'm sorry you noticed de smell, 'cos it sort ob gibs de show away!"

"Noticed the smell!" gasped Jack. "How could any living man help noticing it. I believe a stench like that would poison the inhabitants of a chemical town."

"Funny ting, but I noticed it when I was in de water!" observed Pete, pulling out his pipe. "I came to de conclusion dat de insect was dead, and, finding dat he was dead, and, by his smell, had been dead for a considerable time, I thought I would gib you all a free circus show widout any risk."

"I reckon you have run de risk of typhus fever," said Sam. "Well, you see, Sammy, I held my breaif. I only got one smell ob de insect, and den I found dat quite enough, so I held my breaif during de circus performance. Let's get away from dis part. I didn't bring de ducks, 'cos somehow I didn't seem to tink we would relish dem after dey had been floating about in dat water."

"Perfectly right, Pete," said Jack, "and I only hope that the Water Lily is not drawing drinking-water from this part. Come away, boys! If we are to do any more shooting, we will do it in another part. I am perfectly certain that if the wind shifts in the wrong direction from our point of view, that all aboard will get some sort of fever. I must say, Pete, that it was a very plucky thing to put your head into that crocodile's jaws. Perhaps not quite so venturesome as we thought at first, when we imagined that the reptile was alive. All the same, it was a brave deed, and we shall not give the show away, though I think a change in the wind will."

Jack was frequent. The wind did change, and it did so with a suddenness frequently met with in the tropics.

Perhaps the reason why they did not smell the crocodile when they went aboard was because the wind was blowing too hard. It came on all of a sudden, and before many minutes the sunlight disappeared, while the heavens grew overcast.

No man aboard that vessel understood the weather half as well as Abou, her engineer. He guessed what was coming, and so he got up steam, and before he had done so what he had foreseen arose.

Thunder rolled across the heavens, and the rain came down in a manner never seen outside the tropics.

Jack, Sam, and Pete, after having interviewed Karn, sought the cabin which the captain had apportioned to them, and had their dinner there. They were quite determined to have all their meals there until the rain had ceased. It found its way through the rotten deck of the vessel, and it found its way through the roof of the cabin, but it only came through that in drops and trickles. Those on deck, who had not sought shelter in time, were drenched to the skin ere they had time to rush below. The rattle of the rain was as though small bullets were being dropped upon the deck.

Probably there was only one man aboard the Water Lily who was glad, and he was Karn. He knew that, at last, there was a chance of getting his vessel off, for a very few minutes of rain like that would certainly raise the level of the river, which drained a very large tract of country. He was correct. Before long the freshet came rolling down, and the Water Lily was in foaming waters. Abou pulled the whistle out of his end of the speaking-tube, and when he felt the vessel moving, he waited with his hand on the reversing-gear, not knowing which way the engines would be put.

"Stand by, there!" roared the skipper's voice. "Ay, ay, sir!" answered Abou, by way of letting Karn know that he was attending to his duties promptly for once in his life.

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"Easy ahead! Full speed ahead!"

And at full speed the engines went, though the Water Lily went very slowly because of the rush of the current.

In parts where the full fury of the torrent caught her, she scarcely moved; but she was gradually forging her way ahead, and the rain ran down Karn's oilskins in large streams, while the man at the helm got so hopelessly drenched that he cared no longer how hard it poured.

The downpour, which was accompanied by thunder and lightning, did not last for more than five hours, but the amount of rain that fell in that space of time must have surely been abnormal. Jack and his comrades found it a hard matter to obtain shelter from the rain even in their cabin, and Abou was compelled to start the pumps. She always required a lot of pumping, and the rain pouring through her deck rendered pumping more necessary than usual.

Then the downpour suddenly ceased, and in a few minutes the sun was shining so fiercely that it seemed that rain was quite unknown in that country.

"Well, I must say dis change is an improvement in de state ob affairs," observed Pete, as they went on deck. "You see, boys, a river voyage is all right, but it becomes rader monotonous when you run on a mudbank, and hab to wait dere for six months or so. M'yes, I tink dis a decided improvement. Hallo! Who's dat knocking at de door? Come in, old hoss!"

The door opened, and in walked Karn.

"What do you want, old hoss?" inquired Pete.

"I have come to see you on a very important matter," said Karn. "I saw your action some time ago. It was indeed very brave of you to put your head in the crocodile's mouth. Not one man in a thousand would do such a thing. Would you care to face another terrible danger?"

"Golly! What do you want me to do?"

"Well, it's like this," explained Karn. "For the last two nights a ghost has appeared in my cabin. I have tried my utmost to get my hands on it, but without success. Now, being a plucky man, I feel sure you will sleep in my cabin for one night, and capture the miscreant."

"M'yes! I might do all dat. But if you could not collar de ghost, how do you expect me to do it?"

"Well, you might have a try," said Karn.

"All right, old hoss! You leave it to me. I hope your cabin is nice and comfortable, 'cos it's like dis—I prefer a nice comfortable bed, so that I can sleep soundly."

"Oh, I can supply you with a comfortable bed!" said Karn. "Will you take it on?"

"Might as well," said Pete.

And that night Pete slept in the captain's cabin.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Ghost—A Desperate Struggle—Karn Wants to Get at the Ghost, and Pete Gives Him Facilities—A Sad Sequel.

THE skipper's cabin was the most comfortable one aboard the Water Lily, although this was not saying very much for it.

In the first place, it was far from clean, and, amongst other ornaments, it was decorated with numerous spirit-bottles, all of which were empty. The full ones he kept under lock and key, for obvious reasons. Even then he sometimes missed one, and, although Abou knew where it went to, he never told.

Pete did not lock the door. It occurred to him that if he were expected to lay the ghost, the best thing to do would be to give it every facility to enter the place.

What he intended to do was to keep watch, and what he really did was to go to sleep and snore.

He had been doing this for a considerable time, when he started from a pleasant dream, in which he thought he was

being hanged, and he discovered that his dream was not so far from the truth as most dreams are, for a terrible grip was upon his throat.

Pete always had a useful weapon at hand in the shape of his left fist. He used it now with such effect that the ghost took two or three backward leaps, then fell heavily to the floor.

Pete was out of his berth in an instant, and, groping his way to the door, for the cabin was in entire darkness, he shut and locked the door.

"Now den, old hoss!" he cried. "Dere's going to be a fight between us. I dunno weder ghosts understand de laws ob boxing. You can go as you please, if you don't. I'm going on de free minutes' round cistern. Golly! Where are my matches now? Hellup! Dere's someting sticking into me! I tink de ghost has frown a knife! I wonder where dese matches are?"

As Pete was groping about for the lost matches he received a blow on the head with a chair, that would have stunned a white man. He found it very painful, and struck out with all his strength. Then he uttered another yell, for his fist came in contact with the side of the cabin, and his knuckles were hurt as well as his head.

"Seems to me dat I'm getting de worst ob dis fight," he growled. "Hellup! De ghost is on my back now!"

His assailant had sprung on his back with a suddenness that caused him to sprawl forwards, catch his shins against some obstacle, and measure his length on the floor. Then he received a few more blows on the head, and they felt as though they were being driven with something harder than a fist.

Flinging his assailant from him, he was on his feet in a few moments, and then he struck out with all his great strength. But this time he only hit the air.

"Dat's de worst ob dese ghosts," growled Pete. "Dere's no substance in dem to hit at. You can't hurt dem, while I'm mighty sure dis one has hurt me. I tink we will try a little silence, and a change ob position."

Pete now remained in absolute silence, peering into the blackness. Then he thought he heard the deeply-drawn breath of his assailant, but he could not locate the exact position.

Some moments passed, and then there was a banging at the door.

"I'm busy wid a ghost!" growled Pete. "Go away, I can't attend you now!"

"Open the door, you silly owl!" cried Sam. "We have a light!"

"Open it wid your shoulder, Sammy, and mind de ghost does not escape."

Sam sent the door flying inwards, and directly there was a light in the room Pete's assailant leapt upon him with mad fury.

Desperate though the struggle was, it did not last for many moments. Pete hurled his foe heavily to the ground, then knelt upon his chest.

"Now look here, Massa Ghost, dis ain't de way to behave. You ain't— Why, it is Ras!"

"The reptile!" yelled Karn, rushing at him, and giving him a very vicious kick in the ribs. "Let me get at him!"

"All right, old hoss!" answered the obliging Pete. "If you'm so anxious to get at de man, you are at liberty to do so; but I ain't habing any man kicked while I'm holding him down."

"Perdition!" howled Karn, as Ras leapt upon him, and commenced to hammer his face in a most painful manner. "Hold him back, you silly brute of a nigger!"

"Well, dere you go!" exclaimed Pete. "First ob all you want me to let you get at him, and directly I do dat you

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want me to pull him off. I dunno what you do want wid all dese orders. Yah, yah, yah!"

Ras hurled the skipper to the floor, and, seizing him by the throat, rattled the back of his head on the floor in a manner that brought forth spasmodic yells.

"Yah, yah, yah!" Scuse me laughing at you, Karn, but you ain't making much ob dis fight. Here, come off, old hoss! Ghosts ain't expected to fight like dat. De part ob a ghost is just to mouch about and frighten people a little. Now you'm doing a lot more dan frightening dat man. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you hab hurt him. Just lend me a bit ob cord, Sammy, 'cos I would like to tie dis man's hands and legs. He ain't de safest ghost dat I hab eber come across."

Ras' eyes were gleaming, and he was foaming at the mouth, while his struggles were so terrific that even Pete had all his work cut out to hold him.

Karn sat on the floor and groaned, while Sam got the rope.

In a few seconds Ras was powerless to do further damage, but he had already done a good deal to the skipper and his cabin.

Karn's face was considerably torn, and as he groaned he kept rubbing the back of his head.

"Dere you are, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "You hab got to be very tankful dat de ghost ain't hurt you in any way."

"Not hurt me!" hooted Karn. "The reptile has nearly murdered me. But won't I pay him for tiffs! Here, send for that villain Abou! I'll teach him to let the brute loose on me!"

"Suppose you go for Abou yourself, old hoss?" suggested Pete. "I ain't habing dat man ill-used, and I hab de impression dat you would rader like to get some ob your own back, now dat de man is helpless."

"Let me kill him!" snarled Ras. "You be quiet, you silly maniac!" said Pete. "You'm foaming at de mouf like a mad dog. Can't you hab a bit ob sense? I'm ashamed ob you, Ras, acting like dis!"

Karn soon brought Abou into the place, and it would be imagined that that worthy would be considerably perturbed at what had happened.

But there was not the slightest change on Abou's calm face. He gazed at his dear brother much as he might have looked at a puppy with the distemper that he did not want to die.

"It's quite simple," he murmured. "My dear brother occasionally goes mad. He is subject to epileptic fits, and he frequently goes mad before he has one. He is going to have one now. I can tell by his rolling eyes. He is perfectly harmless, and—"

"Harmless be hanged!" howled Karn. "He has nearly strangled me and dashed my brains out!"

"Merely his excitement in his madness. See, I told you he was going to have a fit. They are most annoying things. My dear father used to have them, but I never do. It won't last above five minutes or so, and then he will be all right for stoking purposes. He always declares that these fits make his head acho; but I always make him stoke, because he is so untruthful, and will assert anything to get off work."

"What can we do for him?" gasped Jack. "It is a terrible sight to watch a man in an epileptic fit, but Abou was accustomed to it."

"There is no need to do anything, sahib. He will get all right presently. You must just cut his bonds."

"I'll be hanged if I shall!" howled Karn. "But Pete did so, and the poor creature struggled and foamed at the mouth."

Jack had pulled out a cigar, but he flung it on the floor. Abou picked it up, and calmly lighted it, while he gazed sideways at his struggling brother.

"He is getting on nicely," he murmured. "This is quite a mild fit. The madness is the only risky part about it, because there is no telling what he may do, and he always wants to go for the skipper. However, I dare say he won't have another attack for some time to come."

"I'll take thundering good care he does not have another one on this vessel. Directly the brute gets out of that fit he's going ashore."

"Then I'll go with him, sahib. I will not desert my brother. He is a troublesome brute, but I promised my dear mother that I would never desert him, and I never will. I am the only one who can manage him properly."

"I believe he is dying," said Jack.

"Oh, dear, no!" answered Abou, enjoying Jack's cigar. "He is getting on very nicely. He will gurgle and kick a bit more yet; but it is nothing. He often has one of those fits down in the engine-room, but I don't mind so long as he does not go mad. Sometimes he goes mad before them, at others after them, and sometimes he does it both ways."

"Then chain the brute up!" yelled Karn, who would not get within two yards of the struggling man.

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"It is not necessary," murmured Abou. "I don't think he will go mad again."

"Fury! I'm not going to risk it!"

"Of course, if you wish to chain the man up, you can do so, sir."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack. "I wish we could do something for the poor creature. But I will take good care he does not receive rough treatment. I suppose he is really in a fit, Abou?"

"No doubt about that. A man can't sham a fit like that. He tries sometimes when I work him rather hard, but I can tell the difference directly. I am quite accustomed to seeing him in them, and they are remarkably simple. You will think he is choking directly, but that never happens."

Abou was the only calm one in the cabin. He must have had some sort of affection for his unhappy brother, but he certainly appeared to be utterly callous, and he disgusted the comrades, for there could be no doubt that Ras' fit was real.

Presently he ceased to struggle and foam at the mouth, and then the poor creature lay in an exhausted condition, while there was a glazed appearance in his eyes.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself, Ras," exclaimed Abou, "making all this disturbance in the dead of the night, and waking me from my sleep?"

"Have I had a fit?"

"You have, and you have given the skipper fits."

"I am sorry."

"So is he, and he is going to put you ashore."

"You will come with me, Abou?"

"You don't deserve it. It is a shameful thing that you should wake me from my sleep like this. Why do you not have your fits in the day like a respectable man. Now, come with me, and just you take care that you do not have another. I won't put up with this behaviour. I have a good mind to tell you that I will leave you, and let you have your stupid fits alone in the desert. Oh, it is no use crying! That won't alter my determination. You must take care not to have any more, and then I shall not leave you, though I must say I think you deserve it!"

"Look here, Abou!" cried Karn. "I won't have this sort of thing aboard my vessel!"

"I am not answerable for my brother's fits. He is a good stoker. If you want to get rid of him, you can; but I shall go with him."

"You must keep him under control. He has nearly murdered me!"

"He would do. I don't doubt it for a moment; but it is not at all likely to occur again—until he has his next fit. He might go for weeks without one, or he might have another to-night. He is most inconsiderate when he has them, and no reliance can be placed upon him. Good-night, gentlemen! Come along, Ras, and don't walk as though the bones of your legs were taken away!"

"Come 'long, boys!" growled Pete. "I 'spect Abou means to be kind, but I must say he has got a funny cistern ob showing his affection to his brudder!"

"Here, you had better stay in my cabin and make a night of it now!" exclaimed Karn. "I've got a couple of bottles of whisky, and—"

"We don't drink whisky dis time ob night," answered Pete.

"Who wants you to, you silly brute of a nigger!" snarled Karn. "I'll warrant your friends will, and you can go and drown yourself for all I care!"

Karn was wrong, though. They all left his cabin without even saying good-night.

Karn placed a bottle of whisky on the table, made sure that his revolver was loaded, in case of another attack from Ras; then, having locked the door, he uncorked the bottle, and spent the night with his light burning.

The comrades held a short discussion as to their future movements, and then they turned in, and slept comfortably till the morning.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Fire—How Pete Extinguished It—And the Passengers—Karn's Last Trick—How Pete Foiled Him.

RAS behaved remarkably well during the next few days. The poor wretch spent the time in the stokehold, which, as may be imagined, was fearfully hot, while the heavy work was not at all suited to his complaint.

However, Karn did not care for that. So long as the engines drove the vessel against the tide, and he did not get strangled, he was quite satisfied. It would not have troubled him if Ras had died at his post, provided he could get any other man to take his place.

On one afternoon the heat was so terrible that the pas-

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sengers lay aft under any shade that they could get. They were all in very bad tempers, because of the intense heat; but, beyond a few quarrels, all went well.

Presently Pete, who had finished his doze, sat up.

"I dunno weder you people mind it," he observed, "but I'm 'most sure dat, by de smoke coming up here, dat eider dis vessel is red-hot, or else she is on fire! I rader tink she's on fire, by de smell ob it. However, as it can't make it much hotter dan it is at present, why, we sha'n't mind in any way!"

Pete's words caused every passenger to leap to his feet, while a wild yell arose. Karn turned quickly to see what was the matter; then the cry of "Fire!" rang out, and the excited passengers dashed about in a manner that was ridiculous and useless.

"Rig the fire-hose!" howled Karn; and he accompanied his order with a little strong language, in the hope that it would expedite it.

Smoke was pouring up the aft hatchway, and every now and then a spurt of flame told that the fire had already got a firm hold.

The passengers howled to be put ashore; but Karn was only thinking of his vessel, which was not insured.

"Take that hose below!" roared Karn. "What is the use of squirting from there, you silly villains! Go down, one of you, and find out exactly where the fire is!"

It was quite a simple and sensible order, but to obey it was another matter. It looked very much as though the man who ventured down would be suffocated, and the Arab who was directing the branch mentioned that he would see the skipper boiled alive in oil before he would go down!

"Here, let me hab a look round, old hoss!" said Pete, taking the branch from his hands. "Don't 'spect dere's much ob a fire, after all, although it is likely to be a pretty big-sized one de rate you are putting it out!"

"That's right!" shouted Karn. "Get well at the seat of the fire, and mind it doesn't get to the powder-magazine. There is a cargo of powder aboard, and if that once catches we shall be blown to atoms. Will you hold your yelling, you cowardly brutes! I am not going to put you ashore! I have other matters to attend to!"

"We shall be blown to atoms!" shouted one.

"I can't help that. I dare say they will be able to collect the pieces for burial purposes. That nigger is worth a dozen of you. If it had occurred later I should have said that he was the cause of the fire with his smoking in bed. I expect it is that mad villain Ras!"

Pete fought his way as far into the suffocating smoke as it was possible to go, and the torrent of water he poured on the flames gradually began to take effect.

"How are you getting on?" inquired Sam, for he had come down with Jack.

Rory preferred to remain on deck.

"Well, I dunno dat de fire ain't getting on rader better," answered Pete. "All de same, I don't tink dere is quite as much heat, dough I must say dere is enough to go on wid. I'm rader anxious 'bout dat powder, 'cos although de old hoss told me to keep de flames from it, he forgot to tell me where it was!"

"We must chance that," said Jack. "Possibly he only said that to make you work all the harder."

"Den all I can say is dat it was a mighty silly sort ob ting to say, 'cos dat was one ob de principal reasons why I was tinkin ob working at swimming ashore. You know, it's a mighty unpleasant sensation to be blown up wid gunpowder!"

"I reckon you have never tried it."

"Dat's true enough, Sammy, and I don't seem to care 'bout trying it now. Ebery time dere is a fiercer crackle it sends a sort ob 'start frough my cistern. Dat powder is making me so nervous dat I don't seem to know what I am doing, one way and anoder. Dis may be a bery pleasant way ob travelling, but I'm rader inclined to tink dat we are paying rader too much for all de luxuries ob dis voyage!"

"Get on with your work, and stop your grumbling!" said Sam. "I think you are getting it out now!"

"M'yes! De crackle don't seem so fierce as it was; but, you see, de fire may be just burning at dat magazine. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if dat powder isn't nearly red-hot. I dunno how hot you can make it before it goes off. Do you, Jack?"

"No; but don't bother about the powder. It won't go off!"

"Shouldn't care for a bet on de subject."

"Well, it would not much matter whether you won or lost, for if he really has a cargo of powder aboard, it is certain that we should all get blown to atoms, and there would be no time for payment of the bet!"

"Well, I neber tought ob dat; but it seems to me dat we can squirt at dis fire from de deck just as well as we can from

here, and we shall hab de advantage ob being able to breathe widout choking ourselves. You go up first, boys, and I will go backwards so as I can keep squirting at de flames!"

Jack and Sam did so, and when Pete came on deck and reported that they had got the fire under the passengers ventured to crowd round him.

"Keep on playing on it!" roared the skipper.

"Dat's what I'm doing, old hoss," said Pete, turning round. "Look here, Jack and Sammy—why, what's happening now?" he added, as the most extraordinary yells burst forth.

Pete was carelessly holding the hose in his hand, and as he turned the branch turned with him, and one of the men got a torrent of water in the chest that knocked him head over heels. Then another passenger got the stream in his face, and it nearly tore his whiskers off.

"What are dey making all dis row——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't guffaw at me like—— Golly! De water is coming de wrong way, and—yah, yah, yah!—it has knocked de skipper off de bridge now."

"Hellup! Turn the other way!" yelled Sam, dodging behind Pete, who was simply sweeping the decks. In less than a minute he had simply drenched all the passengers, and as they firmly believed that he had done it on purpose—which was quite a mistake—they were very furious.

Pete directed the hose straight up in the air till he got it to the hatchway, and then he went on with his fireman's work, and it appeared as though another terrific downpour was taking place, for the passengers received the return torrent from the hose.

"I can quite see dat dese are tings dat you want to be bery careful wid," observed Pete, not troubling himself concerning the wetted passengers. "Dey appear almost as dangerous as a gun, and——"

"Look out!" cried Jack. "Here comes Karn armed with a marlinespike."

"You dastardly nigger!" howled Karn, rushing at him.

"How's dat, old hoss?" inquired Pete, turning round, and, despite his previous experience, turning the hose with him. "I ain't done—— Hellup! De man has got knocked ober again!"

So he had. The rush of water caught Karn in the face, and beyond nearly drowning him, it knocked him over backwards, causing him to severely bump the bruised part of his head on the deck. Then the language he used was so horrible that Pete deliberately squirted at him as he crawled away on his hands and knees; and he kept going down like a shot rabbit, except that unlike the rabbit he rose again.

"Yah, yah, yah!" roared Pete, turning his attentions once more to the fire, and drenching the passengers again as he did so. "Ain't dat man made himself mighty wet. Ain't you feeling well, old hoss?"

"I have a good mind to shoot you!" roared Karn, drawing his revolver.

"Yah, yah, yah! Look here, old hoss. I tell you what we will do. We will hab a duel. You shall hab five shots at me, and I will use de hose like so. Fire!"

It may have appeared an unequal duel to the spectators. At any rate, they thought that it was a dangerous one, and they scattered in all directions. It was both.

Karn, even if he had wanted to fire, had not the slightest chance of doing so. When the rush of water caught him in the face he scarcely knew where he was. He dropped his revolver and bolted; while during his retreat he was twice knocked over by the torrent. Then, with the branch of the hose dangling in his left hand, Pete walked to the revolver, and, having picked it up and flung it overboard, he walked back to his self-imposed duties, and every time he turned he swept the decks.

"Here, you image," exclaimed Sam, "just you be careful where you are squirting to! No. I don't want you to turn to argue the point with me. Keep your mind on the fire, and try to put it out. Don't turn to answer me."

"But I am trying to put it out."

"You will never do so by squirting at the skipper and the passengers."

"But you see, Sammy, I——"

"Never mind! Don't talk. I don't want you to slew round with that beastly hose in your hand. You are more dangerous with it than a child with a gun."

"You see, Sammy, you want to get accustomed to dem before you can handle dem properly. Dey are de most awkward tings I eber came across. First dey squirt one way, and den anoder. Still, we seem to be getting de fire out, and dat's a great ting, seeing dat dere is a lot ob powder aboard. I ain't at all fond ob gunpowder during a fire."

The passengers took particular care to keep up in the bows of the vessel. Karn kept out of the way altogether, and kept sending Bill to report progress. Pete wanted to be quiet

certain about the powder, and while smoke was coming up, water continued to go down.

"I rather think you can stop now, Pete," said Jack.

"But you see de smoke is still coming out, Jack."

"Probably that is only steam. The fire must be out by now. If you stop that water we will go down and see."

"You just run down, Jack, and I will squirt ober your noddle."

"Not if I know it," laughed Jack. "You can squirt ober the top of Sam's head if he likes, but you are not going to squirt over mine. You are too deadly dangerous with that hose-pipe."

Sam did not like, so, having turned off the water, they went down to make their examination, and found that although the fire had done a very considerable amount of damage, it was now quite out. When they went on deck they met with a very hostile reception.

The passengers forgot the good that Pete had done, and only remembered the duckings he had given them. One ragged-looking individual, whose clothes could not have been worth five shillings, vowed he would have five pounds compensation for the damage to them.

"But dey ain't damaged, old hoss," said Pete. "De washing dose clothes hab had will do dem all de good in de world. Nunno, you ain't come to any harm, and you look as dough a good washing would be ob some sort ob benefit to you. But see here, you don't look so mighty rich, so put dat sovereign in your pocket, and buy yourself a new rig-out when you get ashore."

This only made the others more eager. They all sent in claims, until at last Pete said he would settle the matter by dividing twenty pounds equally between them; and, strange to say, there was only one man aboard who would not participate. His name was Fatty—at least, that was what the crew called him.

"He has done us all a good turn," he declared. "As for the ducking—well, that's a lot better than getting blown up with gunpowder. And, look here, boys, we are not so very far from home now. I hope you will come there to spend a day or so, and I can give you some good big game shooting. I want my wife to see that dog perform, and to hear Pete's ventiloquism."

The comrades at once accepted the invitation, as they were getting rather sick of that voyage, but when Karn heard of it he did not like it at all. They were bringing him in six pounds a day, and he did not want to lose money, although he would gladly have lost the comrades.

"I guess if you get off this craft in the middle of the voyage you will have to pay double fare," he said. "I'm not going to be rogued in this way. Here, I've had my clothes spoiled by that nigger, and now he wants to rob me of your passage-money."

"But look here, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "Fatty tells me dat we shall reach his home to-morrow. Bery well, you will get anoder six pounds, and dat will be all we owe you. I don't see where do robbery comes in."

"I'll soon show you what I will do!" cried Karn. "In the first place, I want five pounds for my damaged clothes."

"Well, dere you are, old hoss," exclaimed Pete, "dough I must say dey didn't look wof it."

"Now I demand fifty pounds compensation!"

"Bery well, you can keep on demanding it," said Pete.

"We ain't going to pay you anoder penny in any shape or form, except de six pounds dat will be due to-morrow night, but we shall pay you when we get off de vessel."

"You will, will you!" cried Karn. "Then I tell you what it is. You sha'n't get off the vessel unless you swim for it, and if you attempt to do dat you may as well bear in mind that there are crocodiles in the river. As for that Fatty, he will have to come to the end of the voyage now, and he will have to pay his double fare, besides paying in advance for every bit of food he eats. He sha'n't have so much as a biscuit or a glass of water unless he pays a couple of shillings for it. I'll show you who is master on this vessel! I guess you think you can play the fool with me, you beast of a nigger; but you will find yourself mistaken, and so you will discover to-morrow when I run past the landing, for I vow I won't stop!"

"Look at dat, now!" exclaimed Pete calmly. "Did you

eber hear anything so sad. What is de lump sum you will take to land us at Fatty's home?"

"Fifty pounds."

"It is gross robbery, and I wouldn't pay a penny!" cried Fatty. "The rascal has swindled you far too much already."

"Well, see here, Karn," said Pete. "I will consider de matter, and let you know to-morrow what de decision is. Buzz off, old hoss! You ain't pleased me!"

"Do you think as you've pleased me, you black dog? Why—"

"Here, buzz off to your kennel like a well-behaved dog!"

"I sha'n't! You have no right to this cabin, and—"

"Are you going to buzz off?"

"No, I'm not!"

"I dunno," exclaimed Pete, picking him up and flinging him through the doorway, "I rader tink you are! You can come in again if you like, 'cos it's too hot to close de door; but if you do, I shall clump you ober de napper, and send you out again. We hab had 'bout enough ob your nonsense."

Karn thought it best to slink away; then Pete paid About a visit, after that he had a chat with the crew.

The following day was one to gladden the heart of man, but Fatty appeared to be very anxious. He was very much behind time already, and if he were kept on that boat for a week or so he knew that his wife would become terribly alarmed. He even suggested to Pete whether it would not be better to try to compromise matters with the skipper.

"Nunno, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "You leabe de matter to me, and we shall be at your home to-day. Dat skipper only needs someone to take de upper hand wid him, and den he will climb down like any oder monkey."

"I fear you are wrong," groaned Fatty. "Yonder is the landing-stage. We shall be past it in a few minutes."

"Well, de next best ting to do is to get up your luggage, and we will go and get our tings. Den you come on deck, and see what is going to happen."

"It's an awful state of affairs!" groaned Fatty, obeying.

Karn grinned, and kept the vessel in the centre of the river. Fatty was the first one up, and he begged of the skipper to put back, for they were past his destination now. He even went so far as to offer him five pounds if he would do so. But Karn vowed that he would not take a penny less than fifty pounds, and that even that would not pay him.

"You are the only one who gets off here, and you will have to do it on our return voyage," declared Karn.

At that moment Pete came up in a very leisurely manner, and he went on the bridge, whither the three other interested parties followed him.

"See here, old hoss!" exclaimed Pete. "You hab passed de landing-stage!"

"I know I have, you black beast!"

"Well, just put back again."

"Sink me if I will!"

"In dat case, ob course I can't make you; but it will be a mighty easy ting for me to do it. Just chuck dat man out ob de road, Jack, and go and take de helm. You will know how to run her in. We may as well run stern first, I tink, seeing dat dere ain't much room to turn."

The man at the helm pretended to make a resistance, but Pete had already arranged matters with the crew.

"Ease her! Stop her! Turn her astern!" bawled Pete, down the tube. Karn howled out contrary directions, and Pete gave him a slap on the head that made him see stars.

"Easy astern!" was Pete's next order. Then he and Jack skilfully brought the vessel to the landing-stage.

"Make fast!" bawled Pete, in a voice that sounded very much like the skipper's, whom he gripped by the back of the neck. "I shall increase dat pressure like so if you utter a sound!" murmured Pete.

"Now den, old hoss," he exclaimed, when the vessel was made fast, "you see quite well dat two can play at de game ob taking de law into deir own hands. Silence! I'm speaking to you, and not you to me! We'm going, and p'r'aps dis will be a lesson to you to be careful how you behave in future, else you might get yourself hurt."

Then the comrades leisurely left the vessel, and they went to spend a very pleasant day or so at Fatty's home, subsequently leaving him the best of friends.

THE END.

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