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TALE OF
TOM MERRY

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.

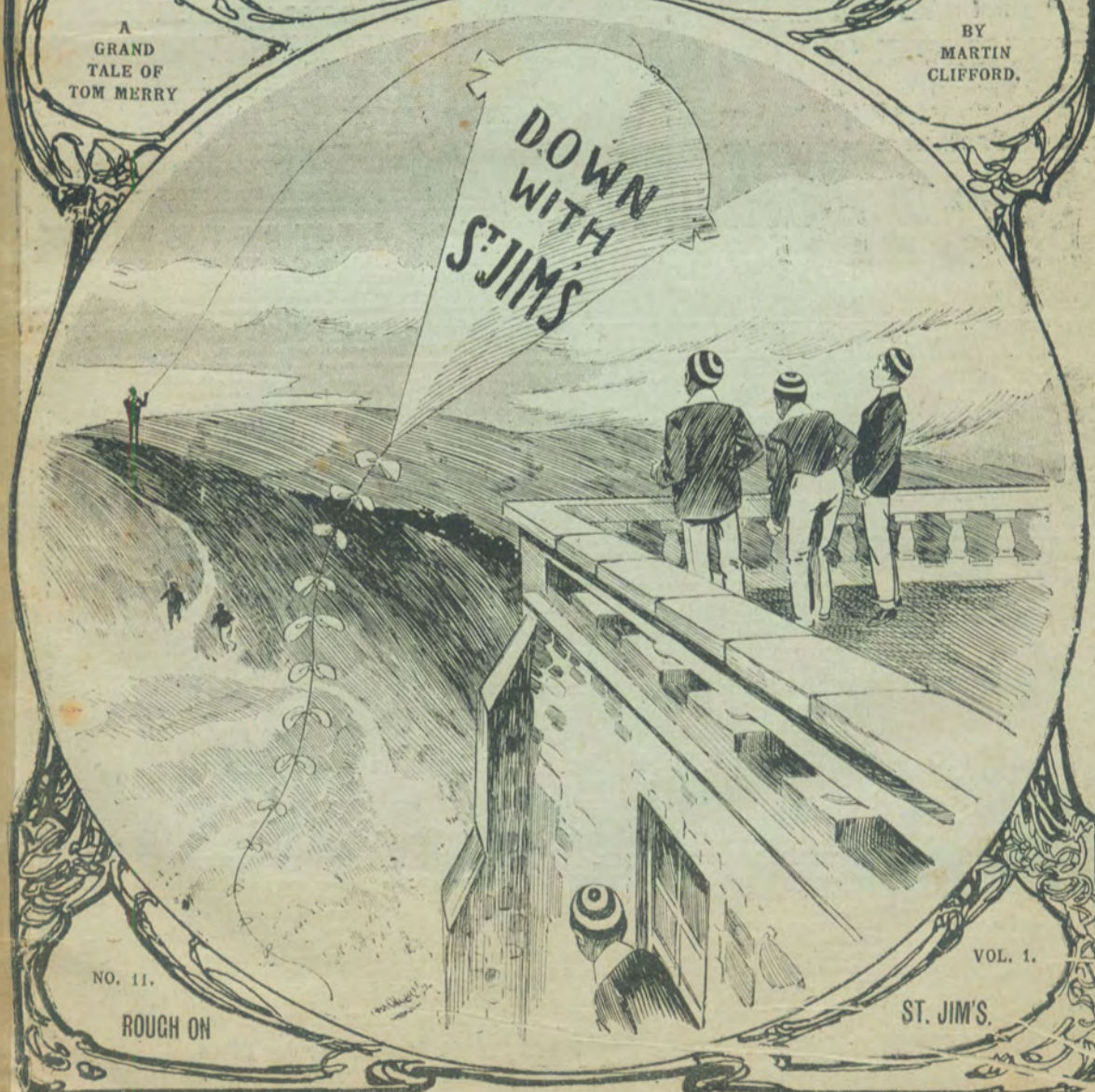
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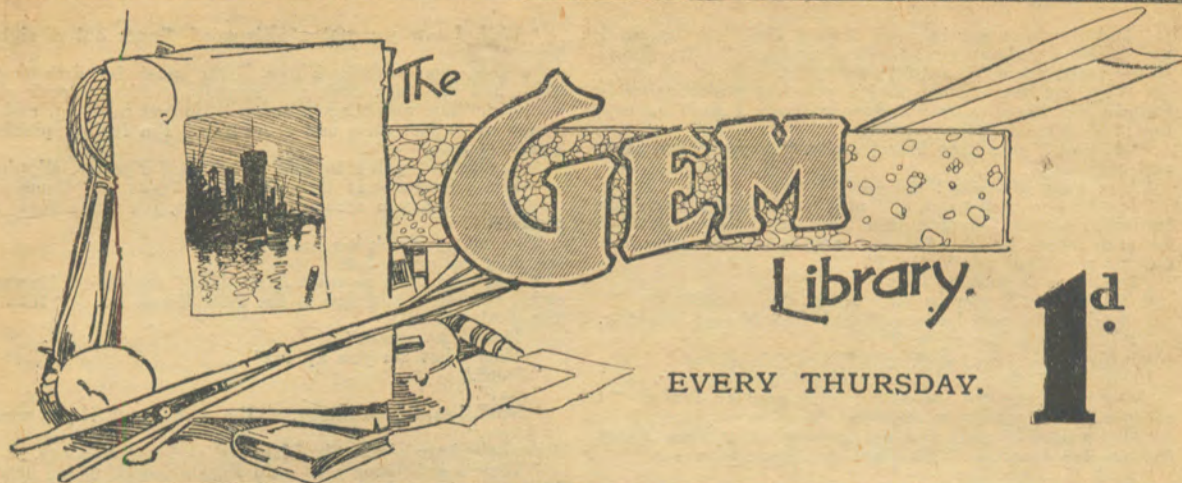
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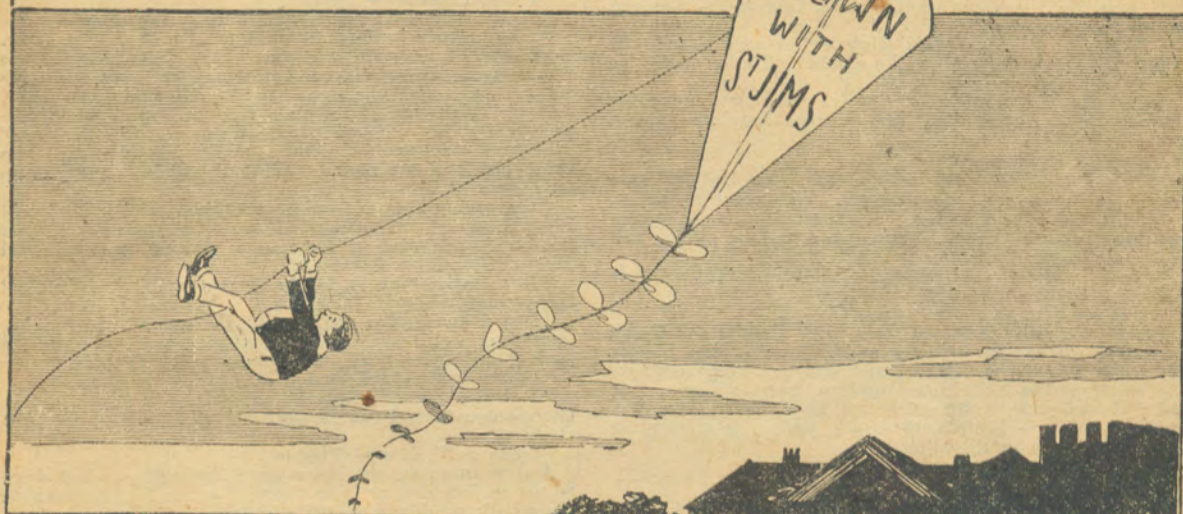
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TOM MERRY'S STRUGGLE.

A Splendid Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Something On!

"COMING down to the cricket, Tom Merry?"

It was Blake, of Study No. 6 in the School House at St. Jim's, who asked the question. It was Wednesday—a half-holiday at St. Jim's—and a bright, keen April afternoon.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Can't."

"Why not? Not detained?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then why are you not coming down to the cricket?" demanded Blake, rather warmly. "You know very well that we've got a lot of important matches coming on soon,

and there's no excuse for neglecting practice—and you setting up as cricket captain of the School House juniors, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House. "I wegard Tom Mewwy's neglect of the gwand game as extwemely wepwehensible!"

Tom Merry grinned.

"My dear kids, I shall be busy this afternoon——"

"Busy in Rylecombe tuckshop, I suppose?" said Blake suspiciously.

"Oh, no!"

"Then what are you up to?"

"Oh, I shall be busy!" said the hero of the Shell, rather vaguely. "I should advise you Fourth Form kids to get some cricket practice, though. You need it more than I do, of course——"

"Well, of all the cheek——"

ANOTHER TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 11 (New Series).

"And if you're not in good form I shall have to think very seriously about giving you your caps for the junior House team," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Why, you ass, it's not settled yet that you're going to captain the House team; and very likely I shall be captain!" exclaimed Blake excitedly.

"Oh, bosh!" said Tom Merry airily. "Anyway, run away and play now!"

"Run away and play! I'll—"

"I refuse to run away and play until Tom Merry has explained himself," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "What do you mean by this shockin' neglect of the important cricket practice, you wottah?"

"I tell you I shall be busy!"

"But what will you be busy about, deah boy?"

"Minding my own business," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Weally, Tom Merry—"

But Tom Merry was walking away, still laughing. Blake and D'Arcy looked at each other wrathfully. "The boulder's got something off," growled Blake. "I can see that as plainly as anything."

"Oh, wathah!" said D'Arcy, looking after Tom Merry through his eyeglass. "He's got an Eton suit on—"

"Ass! I didn't mean—"

"I am afraid, Blake, that I must refuse to be chawactised as an ass—"

"Oh, rats!" said Blake, walking away and joining Herries and Digby, who were coming out of the School House in flannels with their bats under their arms. "I say, kids, do you know what wheeze Tom Merry has got on for this afternoon?"

"Blessed if I know," said Digby; "or care either, old chap! I'm going down to the cricket. The ground's as dry as anything, for a change."

"Right-ho!" said Herries. "Get your bat and come down, Blake. Never mind Tom Merry. Let him go and eat coke!"

"He's got something on—"

"He'd find it jolly cold in this wind if he hadn't," said Digby. "Never mind Tom Merry. We've got to get in form for the cricket season. I expect it's something up against the New House, if he's got a wheeze going, and it doesn't matter to us. Come on!"

"Oh, all right!" said Blake, rather reluctantly. "Wait till I get my bat."

"You can join us on the ground."

Blake went into the School House, and Herries and Digby walked down to the junior ground. Most of the juniors of St. Jim's had streamed in that direction. Figgins & Co., the chiefs of the New House juniors, were coming out of their House arrayed for cricket. Tom Merry, who was strolling along with his hands in his pockets, met them as they came down to the pitch.

Figgins stopped and looked at him.

"Hallo! Not in flannels, Tom Merry?"

"No," said Tom carelessly.

"Aren't you coming down to the cricket?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I'm busy this afternoon."

"Now, loc' here," said Figgins, wagging a warning forefinger at Tom Merry. "Don't you be an ass! I hear that you are going to be cricket captain of your House juniors—"

"Very likely."

"Well, then, don't neglect your practice," said Figgins. "We're going to lick you in the House match, when it comes off, anyway. We don't want the match to be a mere walk-over. If you can't put up anything like a fight, what's the good of licking you? What?"

Tom Merry laughed his merry laugh.

"I think we shall give you as good as we get, Figgy."

"You School House bounders always say that, but it never comes off," said Figgins, with a superior smile. "I want you to be in as good form as possible. We want a little credit for the trouble of licking you, you see."

"Just so!" chimed in Kerr, the Scottish partner in the New House Co. "I really advise you to get down to the practice, Tom Merry."

"I tell you I'm busy!"

"Rats!" said Figgins. "What are you busy about? Is it a feed?"

"A feed?" Fatty Wynn pricked up his ears. "Is it a feed, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, cheese it, Fatty!" said Figgins, with a withering look at the Welsh partner in the Co. "You're always on the scene of grubb!"

"I get so hungry in this April weather," said Fatty Wynn plaintively; "and we don't get any too much to eat in the New House—"

"Well, I saw you put a jolly good dinner out of sight, anyway!"

"That you didn't, Figgy. You must be dreaming! All I had was some steak and potatoes, and half a pork pie, and some ham and tongue, and a little suet pudding, and a dozen or so jam tarts and some nuts. I'm feeling peckish again already—"

"You're not going to feed now," said Figgins, slipping his arm affectionately through Fatty Wynn's. "Come on to the ground, you cormorant. Besides, it's not a feed, is it, Merry?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; it's not a feed."

"You might tell us what it is, then?" exclaimed Marmaduke, the latest addition to the New House Co. "What's the giddy secret?"

"There's no secret."

"Then what are you up to?"

"Snuff."

"Eh?"

"Snuff," said Tom Merry. "I'm up to snuff, if you want to know."

And the hero of the Shell laughed and walked away.

"There's something up," said Figgins, shaking his head. "It's not up against us, though, or he wouldn't have said a word. Anyway, we've got to play cricket now. Come on!"

Fatty Wynn seemed to linger.

"Come on, Fatty! What are you hanging about for?"

"I say, Figgins—"

"Well, what is it?" demanded Figgins impatiently.

"I am rather inclined to think it is a feed, you know. Tom Merry's an awfully decent chap. I know we're the rivals of the School House, but there are times when it's right to—to extend the right hand of fellowship, you know. I really think that if there's a feed on, we ought to join Tom Merry, just to show that there's no real ill-feeling—"

Fatty Wynn broke off with a yell, as Figgins seized him by the back of the neck. "What the dickens are you up to, Figgins?"

"I'm taking care of you, as a member of the Co.," said Figgins calmly. "Come on! I'll see that you don't neglect your cricket practice for the sake of sucking up to a School House rotter for a free feed."

"But, really, Figgins, I didn't mean anything of the sort! I only meant—"

"Yes, I know what you meant. Come on," said Figgins, propelling Fatty Wynn along with a grip of iron on the back of his neck. "Help him along, will you, kids?"

"Certainly!" said Kerr and Marmaduke at once.

"I—I don't want helping!" gasped Fatty Wynn, as the Co. planted their boots forcibly behind him. "I—I—I—Ow!"

"Come on!" shouted Figgins.

And in this style the unfortunate Fatty was rushed down to the cricket-field, and the vision of a free feed faded from his mind's eye like a beautiful dream.

CHAPTER 2.

In the Hands of the Foe.

TOM MERRY entered the School House and went upstairs to the study which he shared with his chums in the Shell Form—Manners and Lowther. There was an expression of anticipation upon the sunny face of Tom Merry, which showed plainly enough that Blake and Figgins had been right in their surmise. There was something "on."

Manners and Lowther were both in the study, and if Figgins could have seen what Tom Merry saw as he entered, he would have known at once what was "on."

The chums of the Shell were busy giving the finishing touches to a huge kite. It was an imposing affair. The tail, which Lowther was busy with, was not yet attached, but for the rest the kite was complete. Manners fastened the cord to it as Tom Merry came in. He looked up with a grin of satisfaction.

"Looks all right, doesn't it?"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry enthusiastically. "We shall get some fun with that on Rylcombe Common."

"I expect so."

"Those kids in Study No. 6 were awfully curious to know what we were going to do this afternoon," grinned Tom Merry. "I thought they had better get down to the cricket practice. They will have to be in good form if we are going to play them against Figgins & Co. when the House match comes off!"

"Ha, ha! Yes!"

"And we don't want to take a crowd along with the

kite," said Lowther. "We don't want to get into a row with the Grammarians if we can help it."

"No. There's a time for all things," agreed Tom Merry. "A half-holiday doesn't seem exactly a half-holiday without a row. I know; but we want to fly the kite this afternoon. Is it finished?"

"Yes, it's finished now."

"Good! Those kids are all busy at the cricket, and we shall be able to get it down to the gates without being spotted. We don't want them on our track. When you have a fight over a kite, the kite is apt to get damaged."

"We're ready," said Manners.

"You can shove the tail in your pocket, Lowther, and we'll fix it later," said Tom Merry. "Wind up the cord, Manners. Now let's get along."

The chums of the Shell left the study, Manners carrying the kite.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Gore, meeting them in the passage.

"What have you kids got there?"

"Something like your chivvy," said Lowther pleasantly.

"Eh?"

"Well, you know, everybody says you've got a face like a kite—"

"Oh, cheese it! That's rather a good kite. I'll come and show you how to fly it, if you like," said Gore.

The Terrible Three looked very grateful.

"Will you really?" said Tom Merry. "That's awfully kind of you, you know."

"Oh, that's all right," said Gore. "I don't mind doing a fellow a favour."

"He's too generous," said Lowther, shaking his head. "I shouldn't feel justified in taking advantage of his generosity, for one."

"Nor I either," said Manners solemnly. "Gore, old fellow, we're not going to impose on your kind heart."

Gore scowled savagely as it dawned upon him that the Terrible Three were poking fun at him.

"Look here, you rotten bounders—"

"Let's get by, Gore, will you?"

"I wouldn't fly your kite for you now if you asked me."

"Then it's no good asking him, chaps," said Tom Merry. "Let's get along."

The chums left the School House. The juniors of St. Jim's were busy on the cricket ground, and nobody paid any particular attention to the Terrible Three. They passed out of the gates, and in the road the keen breeze caught the kite, and almost jerked it from Manners's hands.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"All right, I'm holding on."

"May as well let it up now," said Tom Merry. "There's a good wind. We'll run it along to Rylcombe Common. I really hope we sha'n't meet any of the Grammar School kids. We don't want a row on our hands with a kite to look after."

"That's so."

"Stick the tail on it, Monty."

"There you are!"

"Now then, Manners!"

Manners let the cord loose. There was no difficulty about getting the kite started. The difficulty was rather to keep it in hand. The kite rose buoyantly, and Lowther let go the end of the tail. Up it sailed.

The Terrible Three watched it sail with great satisfaction, keeping up a good pace along the country road. They had made the kite with their own hands, and it was a huge success.

Manners let out the cord to its full length, and took a turn of the end round his wrist to make sure of it.

"By Jove, how it sails!" exclaimed Tom Merry, stopping to look up again. The kite was little more than a speck in the blue. The juniors were now about half a mile from St. Jim's, and in the keen interest of flying the kite they had forgotten all about the possible danger of falling in with the youths from the Grammar School, the deadly rival of St. Jim's.

"Good!" said Manners. "Didn't I tell you we could make our own kites, and save a lot of money?"

"You mean I told you," said Monty Lowther. "You must remember, Manners—"

"Oh, come, Monty, don't you lay claim to the suggestion—"

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Cheese it!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "As a matter of fact, it was I who first suggested making the kite—"

"Why, you remember I said—"

"You mean that I said—"

"That I said—"

There was a sudden interruption in the argument, which was growing warm. From the trees which bordered the road in this spot came a ringing shout.

"Go for 'em!"

"Buck up, Grammar School!"

And there was a sudden rush of feet.

The Terrible Three were taken completely by surprise!

They whirled round at the shout, but it was too late—the enemy were upon them!

Half a dozen Grammarians, headed by Monk, Lane, and Carboy, the chiefs of the Grammar School juniors, rushed upon the Terrible Three, and had them over in the road in a twinkling.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther went down in a struggling heap, fighting desperately.

"Collar 'em!" roared Frank Monk.

"Sock it to 'em!" yelled Carboy.

"You rotters!"

"You Grammar cads—"

"Lemme gerrup—"

"Ha, ha! Collar them!"

The three St. Jim's juniors were seized and dragged to their feet. Each was held in the grip of two pairs of hands, and against such odds they were helpless. Frank Monk grinned at them genially.

"Hallo, Tom Merry! How are you getting on?"

Tom Merry grunted.

"Feeling pretty fit, Manners?"

Manners growled.

"I hope I see you well, Lowther?"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! They seem to be annoyed about something," grinned Monk. "Hold 'em tight. They might be troublesome, as they look so shockingly bad-tempered. Perhaps it would be safer to tie their hands up."

"Good!" said Carboy. "I've got a whipcord here."

"Fasten them up, then!"

"Look here—"

"No time, Tom Merry, even for looking at your charming chivvy."

"I tell you—"

"Rats! Merry first, Carboy, and mind you make it safe."

"Trust me!" grinned Carboy.

The Terrible Three struggled desperately. They had had a similar experience once before at the hands of the Grammarians, and they knew instinctively that there was worse to come.

But they were helpless in the hands of the enemy.

Tom Merry's wrists were secured with Carboy's whipcord. Then Lowther's necktie was jerked off, and knotted round his wrists. Manners's wrists were fastened up with a double shoelace, quite strong enough for the purpose.

The Terrible Three stood bound and helpless, and looking extremely red and flustered. The Grammarians stood in a circle round them, grinning.

Frank Monk took hold of the cord fastened to Manners's wrist, and began to pull in the kite. The St. Jim's chums watched this proceeding wrathfully.

"Look here, you're not going to have our kite!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Oh, we'll make you sit up for this some time."

"We'll take all the sitting up you can give us!" grinned Frank Monk, steadily drawing in the cord. "Take this cord, kids, and fasten them together. They're so fond of each other that it's a shame to separate 'em. United they stand, divided they fall, you know. Don't spare the knots!"

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Carboy heartily.

The cord was a thin but strong one. Trebled and knotted, it was strong enough to resist the united strength of the Terrible Three. The grinning Grammarians wound it about them and knotted it.

Frank Monk pulled in the kite, and caught hold of it. The chums of the Shell watched him in mingled wrath and anxiety. They had taken a great deal of trouble over that kite, and it would be too bad for it to fall as a trophy of victory into the hands of the rival school.

"Look here," said Tom Merry desperately, "you're not going to have our kite. We'll—we'll ransom it."

"Ha, ha, ha! What ransom?"

"Anything you like!"

"A little document, attesting the fact that the Grammar School is top school, and that St. Jim's is nowhere!" asked Frank Monk blandly.

"No!" roared the Terrible Three.

"I'm afraid there's nothing else we could accept."

"Then keep the kite, you rotters, and we'll have it back some time, and give you the licking of your lives into the bargain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll fly it back to the Grammar School," said Carboy, with a grin.

Frank Monk shook his head.

"We haven't a cord," he said, "and we've used up this one on these St. Jim's bounders. Besides, we don't want

their old kite. I really think we had better let them take it back to St. Jim's with them."

"But—"

"They can't carry it very well, with their hands bound," said Monk thoughtfully. "We shall have to fix it on them somehow."

"Ha, ha! Bash it on their nappers—"

"That's just what I was thinking of, Lane."

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

"Oh, you dry up! You're dead in this act! Put it over their heads, kids!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Grammarians quickly carried out their leader's instructions.

The big kite was put over the heads of the Terrible Three, their heads being thrust through the paper of it.

The aspect of the chums, and especially the wrath in their crimson faces sent the Grammarians into yells of laughter.

"My hat!" said Frank Monk. "They do look a treat! Is there anything else we can do for you, kids, before we say au revoir?"

"I say, you're not going to leave us like this—"

"My dear kid, we are compelled to leave you, though it breaks our hearts," said Monk. "We have to get back to tea presently, you know."

"And call at Rylcombe tuckshop first," said Carboy. "We shall have to love you and leave you, you know."

"Take this kite off—"

"But how are you going to carry it, then?"

"You—you can have it, if you like."

"Ha, ha, ha!" giggled the Grammarians. They knew the reason of Tom Merry's generous offer. The Terrible Three would never hear the end of it if they returned to St. Jim's in that fashion.

Frank Monk shook his head.

"Now, that's what I call really generous of you, Tom Merry!" he exclaimed. "But we won't deprive you of your kite. You look very nice as you are."

"You howling rotters—"

"Now, that's ungrateful. We might take your kite away if we liked, and we're not going to do it. We've fixed it up so that you can carry it back to St. Jim's in the most comfortable possible manner. What more can you want?"

"Some fellows are never satisfied," said Lane.

"Still, we might have expected better things of Tom Merry," said Monk sadly. "Merry, I'm disappointed in you."

"You rotter—"

"Oh, come, Merry, you shock me!"

"You—you Grammar beast—"

"I can't stay here and listen to this," said Frank Monk.

"It's time we were off, too, or we sha'n't have time to call in at the tuckshop."

"Look here, let us loose, and—"

Frank Monk laughed.

"My dear kid, do you think we have taken all this trouble for fun? Well, yes, it was for fun, in a way. Ha, ha! But we haven't done it all for nothing, anyway. I am afraid we must leave you as you are."

"Grammar beast!"

"Ha, ha! You have the consolation that you look very—very—well, unique. I think anybody must admit that they look very unique, kids."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"There's no improvement I can suggest," said Lane. "Let's be off!"

"Come on, then. Good-bye, youngsters!"

"Good-bye, sweetheart—good-bye!" trilled Carboy.

The Terrible Three made no reply. Their feelings at that moment were too deep for words.

The Grammarians, shouting with laughter, trooped off down the lane towards Rylcombe, and disappeared.

The chums of the Shell were left alone. They looked at one another. In that lonely lane they were not likely to find anyone to release them until they got near St. Jim's. What was to be done?"

CHAPTER 3.

A Painful Ordeal.

TOM MERRY was the first to break the silence.

"My only hat!" he said feelingly. "I don't think we've ever been in a worse fix than this, kids, in all our natural!"

"My aunt, no!"

"How are we to get out of it?"

"I'm waiting for you to say," said Lowther pleasantly. "You're captain of this concern, you know."

"That's right," agreed Manners. "What are we going to do, Tom?"

Tom Merry grinned faintly.

"I'm as much in the dark as you are. We can't get loose. We can't get out of the kite. We've got the choice of walking on to the village, or walking back to St. Jim's. There doesn't seem to be much to choose between them."

"We can't go to the village. It's full of the Grammarians on a half-holiday. And those rotters Pilcher, Craggs, and Grimes would be sure to spot us."

"That would be worse than ever!"

"But I don't see how we're to get to the school, either, in this state. We shall be chipped to death."

"There's nothing else to be done."

"I suppose so," grunted Lowther. "Nice sort of a leader you are, Tom Merry! First thing we do when we get back to St. Jim's will be to elect a new captain for the Shell."

"My dear chap, it's no good grumbling."

"I'm not grumbling. I'm stating a fact."

"Blow your facts! Let's get along. No good taking root here. And it's cold standing still in this wind, too."

There was evidently no help for it.

The Terrible Three, in the direst fix of their career, walked and stumbled along the lane in the direction of the school.

Tom Merry hoped that before the school was reached they would meet someone who might be prevailed upon to release them. But it was probable that the only fellows they would meet would belong to St. Jim's. And it was a question whether they would perform the required service or not.

"Hallo, there's a school cap!" exclaimed Lowther hopefully, catching sight of a cap coming round a bend of the lane.

Tom Merry gave a grunt.

"It's Blake!"

Blake it was, and Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were with him. Cricket practice was evidently over for the time, and they were going down to the village. The chums of Study No. 6 stopped in blank amazement at the sight of the Terrible Three, and then burst into a yell of laughter.

"My only Panama aunt," roared Blake, "what is it?"

"A remarkably curious-lookin' object, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle and staring at the crimson faces of the Terrible Three. "I think I recognise Tom Mewwy."

"Ha, ha!" shouted Digby. "How did you get like that, kids?"

"It was the Grammar kids," said Tom Merry reluctantly. "They took us by surprise."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get us loose, there's good chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hold on, Gussy," said Blake, pulling back the too-obliging swell of St. Jim's. "Just wait a minute, old dear."

"But Tom Mewwy has requested me to release him."

"I dare say he has, but—"

"My dear Blake, I cannot refuse to be obligin'—"

"Cheese it, Gussy, and let me think a minute."

"I have no objection whatever to your thinkin' a minute, Blake, if you have the necessary appawatus," said D'Arcy; "but, weally—"

"I say, let us loose, you kids."

"Who are you calling kids?"

"I mean cads—that is to say, chaps! Do get us out of this rotten fix!"

Blake shook his head slowly.

"I'm afraid it can't be did, Tom Merry. You see, I was quite willing to take you under my wing this afternoon, and look after you, but you weren't taking any."

"I should say not, you cheeky kid!"

"Then you must take the consequences," said Blake loftily. "As a matter of fact, you fellows look too funny for me to spoil the joke."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, Gussy! Those fellows look such awful asses that I suppose you have a fellow-feeling for them; but they're not going to be untied—only on one condition. If they like to admit that the Shell is played out and no good, and the Fourth the top junior Form, and promise not to be so cheeky in the future, I may be inclined to deal with them more leniently."

"Good!" said Herries and Digby together, and D'Arcy chimed in with, "Yaas, wathah!"

"I'll see you hanged—"

"Now, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"As a matter of fact, we're going to eat tarts," said Blake. "I really think you ought to show up at St. Jim's like that as a punishment for your cheek. But I tell you what we will do. As you fellows in the Shell can't deal with the Grammarians, we'll look for them and give them a hiding."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Look here, Blake—"

"I'm afraid we must be getting on, old chap. Ta-ta!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 walked on, laughing.

The Terrible Three looked at each other in dismay.

"There's a chance gone," said Tom Merry. "Really—But it's no good grumbling. Let's get on to the school."

The unhappy heroes of the Shell stumbled on towards St. Jim's. As they came in sight of the gates, four familiar figures issued from them. Tom Merry gave a groan as he recognised Figgins & Co.

Figgins caught sight of the three strange figures at the same moment.

"My hat! Look there!" he exclaimed.

The Co. gave a yell of laughter.

"I say, Figgy—"

"Why, it's Tom Merry! Been flying a kite, Merry, or has the kite been flying you? What sort of asses do you call yourselves, anyway?"

"We've had a tussle with the Grammarians."

"You look like it," said Kerr.

"The odds were on their side."

"Yes, I've noticed that you have a peculiar faculty for walking into traps," said Figgins, with a nod of assent. And the Co. cackled.

"I say, Figgins, let us loose, there's a good fellow!"

Figgins shook his head.

"My dear Merry, you look too funny to be set loose. The sight of you will be good for the school, it will banish care and destroy the blues, as the patent medicine advertisements say. Come on!"

"Let us alone, you New House rotter!"

"We're going to see you safe to the School House," grinned Figgins. "Help them along, chaps. We take them under our wing."

"Ha, ha! Good idea! Come along!"

"You—you New House wasters!"

"Bring them in," said Figgins. "Hallo, fellows! Look here! Oyez, oyez, oyez! Behold the Terrible Three returning in triumph from war. Oyez, oyez, oyez! This is how the School House fellows lick the Grammarians!"

And the Terrible Three were hustled in at the gateway, and marched across the quad. It did not take long for a crowd to gather, and yells of laughter greeted the appearance of the heroes of the Shell.

School House fellows as well as the New House crowd seemed to be highly amused by the peculiar aspect of the Terrible Three, and loud laughter greeted them on all sides.

"Oyez, oyez, oyez!" roared Figgins, in the manner of a town crier. "Come forth and behold the Terrible Three—three terrible asses! This is how the Shell lick the Grammarians! Behold! Oyez, oyez, oyez!"

"Let us loose, you rotters!"

"Come and look at them!" roared the Co. "Behold Tom Merry, the great chief of the Terrible Three!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth is all that noise about?" exclaimed Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, pushing his way through the throng. "Why—what—Merry—Manners—Lowther—what are you doing with your heads through that kite?"

"We—we—we—"

"I—I—I—"

"You—you see—"

"Ha, ha, ha! I suppose this is a Grammar School joke?"

"Ye-e-e-es."

Kildare laughed heartily.

"Some of you had better release them," he said, walking away.

"You hear that!" exclaimed Manners. "Some of you had better—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Take them to the School House!"

"Some of you had better—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three were hustled on, up to the steps of their own House. The steps were crowded with laughing lads.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oyez, oyez, oyez! Here are the Terrible Three asses, returning from victory over the Grammar cads!" yelled Figgins.

"Rescue, School House!" yelled Tom Merry.

There was a movement among the School House fellows.

"Here, come on!" exclaimed Skimpole. "Kick these New House rotters back to their own side of the quadrangle!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Walsh. "Come on!"

And the School House fellows moved towards Figgins & Co. The New House juniors were not inclined to retreat, and a general scrimmage ensued. Tom Merry's friends tried to get at him to release him, while Figgins & Co. and their backers closed round the Terrible Three to keep them prisoners.

In the midst of the swaying, scuffling crowd, Tom Merry and his chums were whirled and knocked hither and thither, and finally they went down in a heap, smashing the kite, and bumping one another on the ground.

In the midst of the uproar Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, came out upon the steps of the House, with a cloud upon his brow.

"What does—"

There was no need for the housemaster to finish his sentence. The fighting juniors melted away like snow in the sunshine at the sound of the master's voice.

The Terrible Three were left wriggling on the ground in the midst of their bonds and the broken kite. Mr. Railton looked at them in utter amazement.

"Who are you? What does this mean? What do you mean by appearing in the quadrangle in that utterly absurd state, Merry?"

Tom tried to struggle to his feet.

"If you please, sir, we couldn't help it!"

"Who tied you up in this ridiculous manner?"

"Some—some fellows we met in the lane."

Mr. Railton's face relaxed into a smile. Tom Merry would not give the Grammarians away, in case of getting them into trouble, but the School House master knew well enough that this was a little joke by the rival school.

"Ahem! I think you had better get yourselves released."

"We've been trying to, sir."

"Walsh, come and set Merry free at once!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Walsh briskly.

And in a few minutes the Terrible Three were untied, and they regained their feet, rumpled and dusty and breathless. Mr. Railton looked at them with a grim smile.

"You had better go and get yourselves cleaned, I think," he said; and he turned and disappeared into the School House.

"My hat!" said Tom Merry. "I think he's about right. Come on!"

And the dusty and dishevelled juniors followed the housemaster in. From the distance came a final yell from Figgins & Co.

CHAPTER 4.

The Grammarians Catch It.

"HAVE you seen Tom Merry?"

Frank Monk asked the question, as the chums of Study No. 6 at St. Jim's entered Mother Murphy's tuckshop in the village of Rylcombe.

The three Grammarians were there by themselves, having left their companions in order to call at the tuckshop for the materials for a feed at the Grammar School. They wanted to get in by tea-time, so Frank Monk had lost no time about giving his orders, and his purchases were piled on the counter when the boys from St. Jim's came in.

The Grammarians might be in a hurry, but they could not resist the temptation to chip the juniors from the rival school.

"Have you seen Tom Merry?"

Blake looked at the Grammarian leader.

"Yes, I think I've met a fellow of that name," he said, with an air of reflection.

Frank Monk grinned.

"You know what I mean!" he exclaimed. "If you've just come from St. Jim's you must have met him on the road."

"Of course they must!" said Carboy. "They've met him, and they know how we've dished the Horrible Three. Lemme see, is it the Horrible Three you call them?"

"The Terrible Three!" chuckled Lane. "Terrible duffers, if you like."

Blake turned rather red. Keen enough might be the rivalry between the chums of the Shell and the Study No. 6 "gang" at home at St. Jim's; but out of the school one "Saint" always stood up for another.

"What are you three asses cackling about?" he asked politely.

"Well, I never heard asses cackle," said Frank Monk, in a thoughtful way. "I thought asses brayed."

"Well, you ought to know," said Digby. "You ought to know all about the manners and customs of your relations!"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard that as wathah funnyay, Dig."

"And how do you regard yourself, Gussy?" demanded Frank Monk. "I fancy you're about the funniest specimen that ever funned."

"Weally, Fwank Monk—"

"But really," exclaimed Monk, "what did you think of the way we did up your Horrible Three? First-chop, wasn't it? When we get time we're going to give all you St. Jim's fellows a thorough licking, to put you in your place."

"You'd better start now!" said Blake.

"Haven't time. We've got to get back to tea," said Monk loftily. "Another time, my boy. Come on, chaps; we can't waste any more of our valuable time on these kids!"

And the three Grammarians began to collect up their

purchases. Blake exchanged a significant glance with his comrades, and they moved to intercept the Grammarians' passage to the door.

"Good-bye!" said Frank Monk. "Here, get out of the way! We want to pass."

"You don't say so!" said Blake.

"You're jokin'!" said D'Arcy, screwing his monocle into his eye, and taking a bland survey of the Grammarians.

"You are weally funnin', deah boys!" explained Digby.

"You have dared to lay your dirty Grammarian paws on the sacred persons of St. Jim's juniors!"

"And now you have got to climb down!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, look here—"

"Put those goods back on the counter!"

"Sha'n't!"

"You'd better; they may get damaged."

The Grammarians thought they had better, also. The purchases were dumped down. There was a bag of new-laid eggs among them, and they were breakable in a scrimmage.

"Now, then—" exclaimed Monk.

"Exactly!" said Blake. "Now, then, if you stand us a feed, and act as waiters, so as to show that you take second place, and acknowledge our immense superiority, we may possibly be inclined to let you off."

"Yaas, wathah! As a mattah of fact, I would wathah not pwoceed to violence, as I disappwove of it on pwinciple, and I don't want to soil my beastly gloves, you know. If the Gwammah cads choose to acknowledge our undoubted supewiowity—"

"We'll see you further first!"

"Now, weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, cheese it, Adolphus!"

"My name is not Adolphus, and I wegard the application of that name to me as simply widiculous. I must we mark —"

"Now, then, what are you going to do?" demanded Blake. "I have told you—"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Blake!"

"Dry up a minute, Gussy!"

"I must wefuse to dwy up! You see—"

"Yes, I see a silly ass! Now, Frank Monk—"

"What are you going to do?" demanded Digby. "We haven't much time to waste over you microbes, you know!"

Frank Monk exchanged a quick glance with his chums.

"Rush them!" he muttered.

"What-ho!"

The three Grammarians made a desperate rush.

"Sock it to 'em!" roared Blake.

There were four Saints to three Grammarians. Singly they were probably equally matched, but the odds made all the difference. Monk, Lane, and Carboy were stopped; they were hurled back, and down they went, with four Saints scrambling over them and pinning them to the floor.

"Hold the brutes tight!" panted Blake. "We'll give 'em socks!"

"Hurrah! Collar them!"

"Bwavo! Down with the beastly Gwammah School, deah boys! Huw-wah!"

The Grammarians were down. Each had a St. Jim's junior kneeling on his chest, and Blake rose to his feet, leaving his comrades to hold the prisoners. Monk, Lane, and Carboy struggled desperately, but without avail. They were pinned down, and Blake stood quite ready to "chip in" if he were wanted.

"Bai Jove, we are victowious, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "But I find it wathah exhaustin' work holdin' this boundah Lane. Pway be quiet, Lane! You are wumplin' my attire. Blake, will you pway be quick, and decide what is to be done with these Gwammawian wottahs?"

"Dry up, Gussy!"

much longer I shall make my twousahs baggy at the uncomfy situation. I am afwaid that if I kneel on Lane much longer I shall make my twouseahs baggy at the knees."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is no laughin' matter, Blake! I must uttably wefuse to make my beastly twousahs baggy at the knees!"

"Really, young gentlemen," said Mother Murphy, from behind the counter—"really—"

The good dame was accustomed to the little raws of the rival schools, and she did not dream of interfering. Her only anxiety was for her stock, which might suffer in the event of a scrimmage.

"Really, young gentlemen—"

"It's all right, Mrs. Murphy," said Blake reassuringly. "We're not going to shed their blood, if it can be helped. If Monk keeps on wriggling, Herries, jam his head against the floor, and see which is the harder!"

"Right-ho!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"Rats!"

Is this what you call playing the game, four to three?" shouted Frank Monk.

But Blake only grinned.

"How many of you were there on to the Terrible Three?" he asked. "I know jolly well you'd never have tied them up if you'd only had man to man."

And Frank Monk had to admit the soft impeachment.

"Will you pway buck up, Blake, and allow me to wise, as I am sure that my twousahs—"

"Oh, hang your trousers!"

"I nevah hang my twousahs. I always place them in the pwess on wetirin'."

"Ha, ha! Keep that rotter safe!"

"The wottah is wumplin' my attire!"

"Never mind—"

"I have a howwid feelin' that my necktie is cwooked!"

"My hat, that chap keeps on for ever!" exclaimed Blake. "Take in a night in your jawing-tackle, Gussy. We haven't a kite we can put these kids' heads through, and we haven't any rope to tie them up. We sha'n't be able to treat them as they treated Tom Merry. Still, we must avenge the insult to St. Jim's somehow. Perhaps if we were to anoint them—"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"A pound of treacle, please, Mother Murphy!" said Blake. "Pour some salad-oil into it, and a few bottles of ink!"

"My goodness!"

"Now, buck up, dame!"

"But—but what do you want it for, Master Blake? It—it won't be fit to eat. It would poison you!"

"Ha, ha! I don't want to eat a mixture like that!"

"Then what—"

"It's for anointing purposes. You see, Frank Monk is a great chief, and great chiefs have to be anointed. Give us the treacle!"

"Don't!" roared Frank Monk. "I—you—he—"

"Shut up, Frank Monk!"

"Sha'n't! I—you—"

"Bang his napper on the floor, Herries!"

"Right-ho!"

And Frank Monk's head was solemnly bumped on the floor. He roared and wriggled, but Herries was in deadly earnest. And there was no escaping from the burly junior.

Mother Murphy, greatly amazed, made up the horrible concoction Blake had ordered, and it was served in a basin. Blake cocked his eye at it thoughtfully. The three Grammarians were looking extremely apprehensive. After the way they had served the Terrible Three, they could hardly complain; but the prospect was not pleasing.

"Gimme a ladle, please," said Blake.

Mother Murphy handed over the ladle. Blake dipped it into the basin, and approached Frank Monk. The Grammarian wriggled spasmodically.

"Don't! I—Ow!"

"Are you willing to sing small, and admit that the Grammar School is a rotten old show, and that St. Jim's takes the lead?" asked Blake.

"No!" roared Monk.

"Then I am afraid I shall have to anoint you."

"You—you rotter! I'll make you sit up for this! Ow—ow—gerrrooch!"

"Some of it is bound to go in your mouth if you keep on opening it," said Blake. "Don't blame me!"

"I—Ow—oooooch!"

"There you are! I warned you, and yet you will keep your mouth open. Some fellows will never learn sense! Keep it shut, old chap!"

"Ow—ow—ow—ow!"

"I don't quite follow. Are you talking in Esperanto or Cherokee?"

"Ow—ow—ooooch!"

"There, I think that will do," said Blake, surveying Frank Monk with great satisfaction. "Have you had enough?"

"Ow—ow—ow— Yes, yes!"

"I think it will do. What do you say, Dig?"

"Ha, ha! Yes! You won't have any left for the others if you give him any more."

"True. That will do, then."

Frank Monk thought it would do, too. His face and hair were smothered with the fearful mixture of treacle, salad-oil, and ink. Blake had done the anointing with a really liberal hand.

He turned to Lane. Lane struggled frantically. The sight of Frank Monk's treatment made him desperate.

"Hold him, D'Arcy! Sit tight!"

"I'm twyin' to," gasped D'Arcy. "But weally, the boundah wiggled feahfully. Lane, I insist upon your

keepin' still while Blake anoints you. You are simply ex-haustin' me by all this beastly stwugglin'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway stop cacklin', Blake! I am getting annoyed. This stwugglin' thwows me into quite a fluttah! Lane, you howwid wottah, keep still!"

"Lemme gerrup!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort. Blake, I think I have him safe now, and you can pwoceed to anoint the howwid wottah."

"Right you are."

Blake ladled out the mixture. Lane shuddered as he felt it trickling over his head, and made a tremendous effort to escape. D'Arcy reeled, though he still clung to the Grammarian, and they whirled to and fro. The ladle, nearly full of the horrible compound, came in contact with D'Arcy's face, and the contents were bestowed upon the features of the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus gave a fearful yell.

"Ow! Blake, you ass! Ow! Bai Jove!"

"I'm—ha, ha!—sorry! Ha, ha! Why did you get in the way of the ladle? Never mind, Gussy, hold him!"

"Bai Jove! I am in a howwid mess. I wefuse to hold him till I have wiped this howwid stickiness off my beastly face!"

"Don't let him go!"

"I must clean my face!"

"Ass! Hold him! Oh, you image!"

D'Arcy had taken out his pocket-handkerchief, and was wiping his face. Lane made a heave, and hurled the swell of St. Jim's off, and D'Arcy rolled on the floor as the Grammarian sprang to his feet.

"Hurrah! Go for them!" yelled Frank Monk.

Lane sprang at Blake. Blake hurled the contents of the basin at him, and the sticky mass caught Lane in the face. He gave a terrific whoop, and staggered back gasping. Blake howled with laughter. He threw down the basin, and collared the half-blinded and choked Grammarian, and had him down again in a twinkling.

"Got him!"

"Pway lend me your handkerchief, Blake. My own is sticky all ovah, and I shall have to throw it away. My face is not clean yet."

"Hang your face!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort—I mean, pway don't be a wude beast, Blake. Will you have the kindness to lend me your beastly handkerchief?"

"No, you image! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Digby, will you lend me your beastly handkerchief?"

"Rats!"

"Hewwies, pway—"

"Go and eat cokel!"

"I am afraid that it will be impos, for me to any longah weward your wude boundahs as fwends—"

"Oh, blow your face, Gussy! It's not much of a face, anyway, so you needn't trouble about it. Come and hold this rotter, Lane!"

"I am afraid I cannot turn my attention to any twivial mattahs until I have cleaned this howwid mess off my face, Blake. I am twuly sowwy, but it is impos. Mrs. Murphy, do you think you could lend me a dustah or somethin'?"

"I tell you—"

"Pway don't bothah me now, Blake. I feel howwid! My face is dirty, my necktie is cwooked, and my twousahs are baggy at the knees!"

"Ladle up some of that stuff, and shove it on Carboy, if you won't come and hold this beast and let me do it!" roared the exasperated Blake.

"Have you got that dustah, Mrs. Murphy?"

"Here it is, young gentleman."

"Thank you, vewy much. I—"

"D'Arcy!"

"I think I shall soon have my face clean—"

"Do you hear me, D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, I hear you, Blake, but it is impos. for me to pay you any attention at pwsent. I must attend to the more important mattah first."

"Oh, you—you image!"

Blake was furious, but there was nothing to be done. It was difficult enough to hold down the wriggling Grammarians, and there was no way of getting at D'Arcy without releasing one of them. Gussy took his time, too. He carefully wiped his face on the clean duster, and then took out a pocket-mirror to examine his features and make sure that the last speck was gone.

"There! I think that will do," he remarked, at last.

"I think it will!" hooted Blake. "Oh, why didn't somebody suffocate you years ago, you howling image?"

"I wefuse to be alluded to as a howlin' image, Blake."

"Ladle up that stuff—"

"You have applied a most oppwobvious epithet to me!"

"Do you hear me?"

"I am willin' to make allowances for the stwess of excitement, but I cannot consistently with my dig., allow you to chawactewise me as a howlin' image."

"You—you—"

"If you care to withdwaw that obnoxious expwession, I shall be glad to help you in any way; but othahwise, I shall walk off, and cut your acquaintance in the future."

"I—I—"

"I am waitin' for your decision, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

Blake gasped.

"I—I withdraw the expwession," he murmured. "Oh, you dummy, I'll make you sit up for this! Pray, D'Arcy will you kindly ladle some of that sticky stuff over Carboy?"

The swell of St. Jim's beamed again.

"Certainly, deah boy! Anythin' to oblige."

He picked up the ladle, and scooped up the mixture from the floor. Carboy watched him apprehensively, and wriggled.

"Don't! You rotter, don't! I—"

"I am afraid it is impossible to please all parties, Carboy. Blake has wewuested me to ladle this ovah you, and I cannot wefuse a fwend who has just tendahed me an apology. I am afraid the ladin' will have to go on."

"You—you—Ow!"

D'Arcy calmly spread the sticky mixture over Carboy's countenance. The Grammarian gasped and was silent, keeping his mouth tightly shut.

"That will do," grinned Blake. "Now I think they have had enough. I really think we have taken the Grammar rotters down a peg or two this time. Let them go and get themselves cleaned."

The three Grammarians were allowed to rise. They were furious, and they looked inclined to go for the Saints again on the spot.

But the odds were against them, and they were feeling in no condition for a struggle. Monk picked up the purchases from the counter, and the Grammarians strode to the door. A yell of laughter from the Saints followed them.

"Weally, I weward that as bein' distinctly funnny!" D'Arcy remarked. "I weally considah that I have managed this affaih pwetty well."

"You have!" ejaculated Digby. "Well, my hat!"

"They look extwemely comical," said D'Arcy, going to the door and gazing out after the Grammarians. "I say, Fwank Monk—Owowowow!"

An egg from outside flew into the doorway, and broke upon D'Arcy's nose.

Blake burst into a roar. It was evidently hurled by the Grammarians, and was a Parthian shot from the defeated enemy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow—ow—ow!"

"You've got it this time!" grinned Blake. "Serve you right! I was going to wipe up the floor with you, but I think I shall let you off. What are your orders, kids? I'm standing treat this time!"

"Pway lend me another dustah, Mrs. Murphy."

"Jam-tarts," said Digby.

"Cream-puffs," said Herries.

"Pway lend me a dustah!"

"Good! Jam-tarts for Dig., Mrs. Murphy, and cream-puffs for Herries. I'll have some currant-cake, and D'Arcy will have a duster."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You unfeelin' wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 5.

A Grammarian Raid.

DUSK was falling upon St. Jim's—the dusk of a fine April evening. The boys were coming into their houses, but Tom Merry's study remained dark and deserted.

Dusk was falling upon St. Jim's—the dusk of a fine April evening. The boys were coming into their houses, but Tom Merry's study remained dark and deserted.

The quadrangle was growing deserted. Taggles, the school porter came out to close the gates, and dimly caught sight of three figures that flitted in through the gateway and disappeared across the quad towards the School House.

Taggles gave a grunt.

"Young rascals!" he muttered. "Just in time! Another minute and they'd have been shut out, and I shouldn't have opened the gate under a bob each!"

And Taggles proceeded to lock up the gates.

Little did the school porter of St. Jim's dream whom the three lads were who had flitted so rapidly from his sight. He had not clearly seen them in the dusk, or he would have known that they were not St. Jim's fellows.

"Stop a bit, you chaps!"

The voice was the voice of Frank Monk! The three figures halted under the shadow of an elm-tree, with a soft chuckle.

"We're safe in, at all events!" grinned Lane.

"We've got to get out yet," Carboy remarked.

"Easy enough," said Frank Monk. "We have the rope, and one of us can bunk the others up on the wall, and then we can let the rope down—"

"That's right enough!"

"But the first thing is to get into the School House. I've got the mallet and pegs here, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll look at Blake's quarters first; I'd rather settle with him, after what happened this afternoon. But if not—"

"No good."

"What do you mean, Lane?"

"Look up there," said Lane, pointing to a lighted window. "That's Study No. 6—Blake's study. I know it well enough! You can see they've got the gas burning."

Monk nodded.

"True! Tom Merry's study will do, if we get a chance at it!"

"I don't know his window, but a good many of them are dark. Yes, that's his window, now I come to think of it, with the flower on the sill. I remember Manners pointing it out to me when we were over here for the sports."

Frank Monk chuckled gleefully.

"There's no light, so the study's empty. We shall have to dodge up pretty quickly."

"It will be touch and go."

"I don't know. Most of the fellows will be at tea, and I don't suppose many of them will be hanging about the passages."

"Something in that."

"Besides, it won't take us a minute; and once we're in the study—"

"We can lock the door."

"Exactly!"

"Come on, then; no good wasting time!"

"Follow your leader!" grinned Frank Monk.

The three Grammarians hurried on through the dusk towards the School House.

They entered and ran up the stairs in a second or two; fortunately for their purpose, without being spotted. The passage above was not yet lighted, and, though a couple of fellows passed them, they were not recognised in the gloom.

Lane and Monk both knew the way to Tom Merry's study. As a matter of fact, Study No. 6 was unoccupied, although the light was burning there. D'Arcy had been last out of the study, and he was thinking about the bagging at the knees of his trousers, and had had no time to think of such a trivial matter as turning down the gas. The three Grammarians, however, were not aware of that, and they made directly for Tom Merry's study.

Monk opened the door cautiously. The room was in darkness, and was evidently empty. Monk entered.

"Come in, kids; it's all serene."

Lane and Carboy followed him in.

Frank Monk closed the door and felt for the key, but there was not one in the lock. Lane lighted the gas.

"Better light the door, Frank," said Carboy.

"Can't; there's no key here. I suppose Tom Merry's got it in his pocket, or they've lost it. Never mind; we'll soon have the door fast enough!"

Monk drew a peg from his pocket and a small mallet from under his coat. To drive the peg under the door with a few sharp blows occupied only a minute.

Monk rose to his feet with a laugh.

"They won't get in now!"

"Better make all safe!" grinned Lane. "Shove another peg in, and then nail a piece across the doorpost where the door opens—or rather where it won't open!"

"Ha, ha! Good!"

The knocking of the mallet attracted no attention. There was frequently a great deal of noise in Tom Merry's study, so there was nothing unusual in that. While Frank Monk was busy with the mallet, Lane and Carboy were not idle. Across the walls of the study they scrawled in letters of imposing size:

"DOWN WITH ST. JIM'S!"

Frank Monk turned from the door and grinned as he read the inscription.

"I don't think they'll get in now!" he remarked.

"Ha, ha! No."

"I don't think they'll shift this door with anything short of a battering-ram! Hallo, here's somebody coming!"

"Time we were off!"

"Yes, rather! Open the window. If we got our retreat cut off there, we should be in a pretty fix!"

"That's happened to us once before here!"

"We don't want it to happen again! Buck up!"

Lane opened the window. Monk tied the ends of his rope together and looped it over a leg of the table, which he shoved to the window. The rope was allowed to fall out, and Monk got out on the sill.

There was a tap on the study door.

"Just in time!" grinned Monk.

He slid down the doubled rope. Lane and Carboy followed him swiftly as a second and louder knock came at the door of the study.

"We're well out of that!" chuckled Monk. He unfastened the knotted end of the rope, and then it was an easy matter to pull it from its hold in the study. "Come on!"

Three figures melted away in the gloom towards the school wall.

Meanwhile, the knocking at the door of Tom Merry's study was growing louder.

CHAPTER 6.

Pegged Out.

"MERRY! Open this door immediately!" It was the voice of Mr. Linton in the corridor, and it was growing angry. The master of the Shell knocked at the door again.

"Merry! I command you to open this door!"

There was no reply from within the study. Mr. Linton's brows contracted.

He had come back to the study because he thought it very probable that the Terrible Three had neglected his order to take themselves and their books to the Shell class-room, in company with Study No. 6, for fighting over some trivial matter in the study.

Finding the door fastened, he jumped to the angry conclusion that Tom Merry had locked it against him, and he was naturally angry at the idea. He thumped angrily on the oak panels.

"Merry! Will you open this door?"

Still dead silence.

Setting his lips very hard, Mr. Linton walked away to the Shell class-room. He would make sure that the Terrible Three had disobeyed his orders before he took any further steps in the matter.

To his surprise, there was a glimmer of light in the class-room, and a scratching of pens audible as he came to the door.

He looked into the room.

Seven juniors were writing away industriously at their Latin exercises; that industry being the effect of their having heard the footsteps of Mr. Linton coming along the passage.

"Ah, you are here, Merry!"

Tom Merry looked up in surprise.

"Yes, sir; you told us to come here!" he said.

"Quite so. I have just been to your study, however, and, as I found the door locked, I surmised— But it is nothing. I shall look in again soon."

And Mr. Linton, with this warning, left the juniors to their task. He imagined that Tom Merry had locked his door after leaving his study, and, of course, there was no fault to be found with that. But he left the hero of the Shell in a puzzled frame of mind. Tom left off writing as soon as the Form-master's footsteps had died away, and glanced at his chums.

"Did you hear what he said, chaps?"

"Rather!" said Manners. "Somebody's locked our door while we've been here doing this rotten scrawling!"

"Yes, but how? You know the key of our study's not in the lock. You remember we are going to have duplicate keys made, so as to have one each, and the key was taken down to the locksmith in Rylcombe?"

"By Jove, yes! How has anybody locked the door without a key?"

"Curious!" said Lowther.

"Very curious," said Tom Merry. "Some joker has been up to something there, I suppose, as a matter of fact. We'll look into it as soon as we get away from here."

"Some kid from the New House," suggested Blake; "Figgins, very likely."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors resumed their weary scribbling. Before the hour was up Mr. Linton looked into the class-room and told them they might go.

Gladly enough the juniors took advantage of that permission. They trooped out of the class-room and made their way up the School House stairs. Blake and his chums went into Study No. 6, while the Terrible Three kept on along the corridor to their own study.

Tom Merry tried the door. It refused to budge. There was a glimmer of light underneath it, showing that the gas was alight. Tom kicked at the door.

"Hallo! Who's in here?"

There was, of course, no reply.

"Who's in here?"

Still dead silence.

"My hat," said Tom Merry; "I'll make them sit up, whoever they are! I wonder how they've fastened the door without a key?"

"Shoved a chair back under the lock, perhaps," suggested Manners.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"The door would give a little in that case, and you can see it's as fast as if it were screwed shut."

"Perhaps it is screwed. You remember Blake screwed us up in here once," Monty Lowther remarked. "It certainly wasn't Blake this time, but Figgins may have—"

"I shouldn't wonder! But the rotters must be still there, then!"

Tom Merry kicked at the door.

"Will you open this door, you beasts? We'll snatch you bald-headed when you do open it! Do you hear, you New House rotters?"

Still silence reigned.

Manners dropped on his knees and looked through the key-hole. He could catch a glimpse of the table and the fire, but not of any occupant of the study.

"See anything?"

"No; I don't believe there's anybody in the study."

"But how did they get out, then?"

"By the window, perhaps."

"They must have," said Lowther, "if they came from the New House. It's too late now for a junior to be out of his House."

"True. They've fastened up the door and bolted," said Tom Merry wrathfully. "My hat! I wish we had been in time to catch the rotters!"

"We shall have to bust the door in."

"Can't be did! It would make too much row, and old Linton will be on the look-out for anything in that line."

"What the dickens are we going to do, then? I suppose we can't remain out here in the passage all the beastly evening."

"No, we can't do that. The only thing is to get in at the window, I suppose."

"We're not allowed out of the house at this time—"

"Of course, we never do anything, we're not allowed to do," grinned Lowther.

Tom Merry laughed.

"We shall have to sneak out and borrow Taggles's long ladder," he said. "There's nothing else to be done."

"That means two bob to Taggles—"

"We can stand eightpence each."

"I suppose it's the only thing to be done. My hat! I wish we could get at Figgins & Co. and make them squirm a bit. That would be some comfort."

Tom Merry gave a start.

"So we can!" he exclaimed. "If we're going to have the ladder, what price having a look in at Figgins's study with it first?"

Manners and Lowther burst into a laugh.

"Good wheeze!"

"I should say so. We can stick the ladder up to their study window—same as we did that night we boned the feed—only this time we sha'n't go in—"

"Hardly! We could take our squirts—"

"There wouldn't be time to use them. Figgins & Co. would be upon us in a second after we had the window open."

"Well, what's the idea, then? I suppose we're not going to take the trouble of getting the ladder to the window just to look in and say good-evening," Monty Lowther remarked sarcastically.

"If you'll let me speak for a second—"

"Oh, get on!"

"I was thinking of taking a tin of cayenne pepper—"

"My hat!"

"It would need more than a sweep of the hand to send a shower of it over Figgins & Co.," grinned Tom Merry. "Then we could be off."

"We should have to be off jolly sharp, or we should get pitched off," grinned Lowther. "Can you get the pepper?"

"I can get it easily enough at the school shop."

"It's closed—"

"It won't be the first time Dame Taggles has served me after the shop's closed. You two fellows can go and negotiate with Taggles over the ladder, while I get the pepper."

"Good wheeze!"

And the Terrible Three lost no time in putting the plan into effect. They had not the slightest doubt that Figgins & Co. were responsible for the fastening up of the study-door,

never dreaming of the Grammarian raid within the walls of St. Jim's. It was not difficult to slip out of the house without attracting attention, and once in the dusk of the quadrangle they were safe.

"Get the ladder and take it towards the New House," murmured Tom Merry. "I'll be after you in a jiffy with the pepper. Mind you don't get spotted."

"What ho!"

Taggles, the school porter, made some difficulty about the loan of the ladder. He had been called over the coals for lending it to the juniors on a previous occasion. But the sight of a half-crown softened his heart, and he consented. Manners and Lowther carried off the ladder, and in the shadow of the New House Tom Merry rejoined them.

"Got it?" whispered Lowther.

Tom Merry chuckled and held up a tin.

"Is it cayenne?"

"Yes, and jolly strong."

The ladder was run up under Figgins's window. Tom Merry ascended, leaving his chums holding the ladder at the bottom. Up he went, till he could look in at Figgins's lighted window.

CHAPTER 7.

A Little Mistake.

F IGGINS & Co. were having tea. The New House study looked very comfortable, and Figgins & Co. looked very comfortable, too. The kettle was singing away on the hob, there was a clean cloth on the table, and an unusually good supply of provender was spread there. Fatty Wynn was carving a large steak-pie, with an expression of ecstatic anticipation upon his plump features.

Tom Merry grinned as he looked in through the window, the thin white muslin curtain only slightly obstructing the view.

Figgins & Co. were "doing themselves" well this time, doubtless in celebration of the jape upon the School House chums. They had not the slightest suspicion of the face at the window.

Tom Merry felt the sash cautiously. The window was open a few inches at the top, as was the custom in Figgins's study. Tom Merry felt the bottom sash, and found that it worked easily. He raised it about half an inch by tiny degrees, so as to get his fingers under it.

There was a slight creak, and Figgins looked round.

"Hallo! What's the matter with the window?"

"Why, it's open," said Kerr, staring at it in amazement.

"I'll swear I shut it down tight at the bottom when we came into the study."

"You couldn't have."

"I tell you I'm certain—"

Kerr broke off with a gasp as the bottom sash was flung suddenly up. Figgins & Co. sprang to their feet in amazement.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry, looking into the study with perfect coolness.

"Tom Merry!"

"As large as life!" said Tom Merry coolly. "I've come to return your visit."

"Eh? What are you talking about?" said Figgins.

"Our visit?" said Marmaduke. "We haven't visited you."

"Well, perhaps not; but you visited our study, at all events," grinned Tom Merry. "I've come to return the compliment. Do you like pepper?"

"Pepper? I'll pepper you! Catch hold of his ears, kids, and yank him in. We'll dust up the fire-grate with his top-knot for his fearful cheek!"

"Good! Collar him!"

The Co. dashed towards the window.

Tom Merry grinned.

Up came his hand with the opened pepper-tin in it, and with a jerk of the wrist, he sent a cloud of the stinging pepper into the faces of Figgins & Co.

"Ow!" roared Figgins.

He staggered blindly back, knocking heavily against Kerr, who reeled upon the table. There was a smash of crockery. Marmaduke yelled and clapped his hands to his face. Fatty Wynn rolled on the floor in anguish. A pandemonium of sneezing and coughing awoke every echo in the study.

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"ST. JIM'S LEADS."

A Double-length Tale of
Tom Merry's Schooldays.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Perhaps you wish you hadn't plugged up our study-door now, you New House wasters!"

"I—ow—ow—tchoo—tchoo—"

"Groo—gerroooh—choo—atchoo—"

"Atchoo—atchoo—atchoo—"

"We'll skin you—we'll—choo—choo—atchoo—"

"We'll break your neck—we'll come and—choo—choo—atchoo—"

"You rotter! You beastly choo—choo—atchoo—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go for him! Rush him and choo—choo—choo—"

Tom Merry slid down the ladder.

Four furious faces, red with excitement and sneezing, glared down upon him. The chums of the Shell, convulsed with laughter, dragged the ladder away from the window.

"You rotters!" roared Figgins. "I'll—choo—choo—atchoo—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You can choo—choo—atchoo—as much as you like, Figgy. Keep it up, old chap! We don't mind!"

"Beasts!" shrieked Kerr. "Ow, I feel as if my nose were coming off! Choo—I'll—gerroooh—choo—atchoo—"

"Stick it out, old chap!"

"Go it!"

"I'll—choo—choo—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, get the ladder away!" murmured Tom Merry.

"This row will be heard. It would be no joke to have old Ratty drop on us."

"By Jove, no!"

"Come on! Off you go!"

Tom Merry crammed the nearly empty pepper tin into his pocket, and the chums of the Shell seized the ladder and rushed it away. Four faces blocked up the window of Figgins's study, with gasps and frantic sneezes.

The chums of the Shell were laughing so much that they could hardly carry the ladder. But they brought it up to the School House wall, and set it against the window-sill of Tom Merry's study.

Still, across the quad on the still air, came the faint distant sound of sneezing.

"My hat!" exclaimed Lowther. "Figgins & Co. have had a warm time, and no mistake. There's nothing like a little cayenne to make a chap sit up."

"By Jove, they're keeping it up, too!" said Tom Merry, listening. "I expect Figgy would give a week's pocket-money to get to close quarters now. Well, here goes!"

Tom Merry was quickly up the ladder. He pushed up the window and scrambled into his study, and Manners and Lowther swiftly followed him. The gas was burning clearly, and the chums of the Shell had a clear view of the raiders' work as they entered at the window.

Tom Merry gave a gasp.

"My only hat!"

"Down with St. Jim's!" read out Lowther, from the wall, in bewilderment. "What on earth does that mean? Figgy wouldn't scrawl that there—he would say 'Down with the School House.'"

"It couldn't have been Blake, either," said Manners, in equal amazement. "He was with us all the time in the class-room; and, besides, he wouldn't have put up an inscription like that. Who the—what the—"

"Asses!" said Tom Merry witheringly. "Where have your brains got to? It was the Grammar cads, of course!"

"The Grammarians!"

"Who else?"

"By Jupiter, you're right! They've been here!" gasped Manners.

"Well, they could hardly have scrawled that cheeky stuff up there without being here," said Tom Merry. "It doesn't need a Sexton Blake to deduce that. They've been here—and they're gone, too!"

"Yes, they're gone; no doubt about that."

"The rotters! If we could have caught them—"

"Well, we did once, and made them eat their words!" grinned Tom Merry. "This time they've done us. I say, there's no need to tell the whole House about this. We're getting chipped enough as it is."

"Right! Mum's the word!"

"We'll keep it dark till we've got our own back on the Grammar cads—"

"That's right. Let's get that beastly door unfastened before anyone happens along," exclaimed Manners briskly.

"Good! There's a hammer in the locker, and you can soon get the pegs out. But—I say— Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter?"

"Figgins & Co. We've peppered them—ha, ha, ha!—and they were innocent all the time. They haven't been here."

"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Figgy! He must have been astounded when I said I had come to return his visit!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Never mind! It was a good jape, and up against the New House, so it doesn't matter. Get that door undone."

It did not take Manners long to get the door undone. As he unfastened it, there were footsteps in the passage, and a knock at the door.

The Terrible Three started.

"I say, whoever it is mustn't see that inscription on the walls!" exclaimed Lowther hastily.

"By Jove, no! Cover it up with something!"

"What with?"

But the door was opening. Tom Merry, with great presence of mind, reached up and turned out the gas. There was a remonstrating voice at once.

"Bai Jove, the beastly place is all dark, you know. Tom Mewwy, you wottah, what have you just turned the wotten gas out for, you boundah?"

"We're not receiving visitors this evening," said Tom Merry, through the gloom. "Run away and play, there's a good Gussy."

"I wefuse to wun away and play—"

"What's all this rot?" broke in the voice of Blake. "We want to speak to you fellows. Light that beastly gas."

"Can't be did. Clear off!"

"Rats! We've come to talk it over with you seriously, and without a row. You're not going to provoke us. St. Jim's has got to lead, you admit that—"

"I don't admit anything—and especially I don't admit asses into this study. Travel along, before we shift you!"

"We shall want some shifting," said Digby.

"Oh, pway keep the beastly peace, deah boys! We shall have our respected mastahs on our twack if there is any more wow."

"That's right, Gussy. Blessed are the peacemakers! Tom Merry, we've not come here to row. Light the gas and talk it over."

"Oh, go and talk in your own study! You make me tired!" said Tom Merry plaintively.

"The conversation of these kids does give one that tired feeling," Monty Lowther remarked. "It's rather rough on us."

"Why don't you light the gas?"

"My dear chap, you've got plenty of gas—"

"Ha, ha! Bai Jove, I weward that as wathah funny—"

"Oh, leave off cackling, Gussy! I suppose you're not setting up in business as an alarm clock?" said Blake crossly. "Look here, Tom Merry, what's the giddy mystery? What is it you don't want us to see? There's something going on here."

"I tell you—"

There was a smell of gas in the room. Then the scratch of a match, and a flare of light. While the talk was going on, the astute Digby had silently groped for the gas-burner, and this sudden illumination was the result.

The juniors blinked in the sudden light. Then Blake gave a yell.

"Look there!"

The Terrible Three looked dismayed. The eyes of the Fourth Formers were fixed upon the tell-tale inscription on the wall.

"Down with St. Jim's!" read out Blake. "So that's the giddy secret. The Grammarians have been here, and bearded the lion in his den."

"Bearded the donkeys in their shed, you mean!" said Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well," said Herries, "I always said that Tom Merry would let the school down, but I never looked for anything like this. I really never did."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry uncomfortably. "How on earth could I help it? The rotters sneaked into the study while we were detained in the class-room."

"All through you kids coming here and making a row," said Lowther.

"It's really Blake's fault," Monty Lowther remarked. "I hold Blake responsible."

"Rats, and many of 'em!" said Blake scoffingly. "You've been done in again—done brown, beaten hollow, licked to the wide! Yah!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

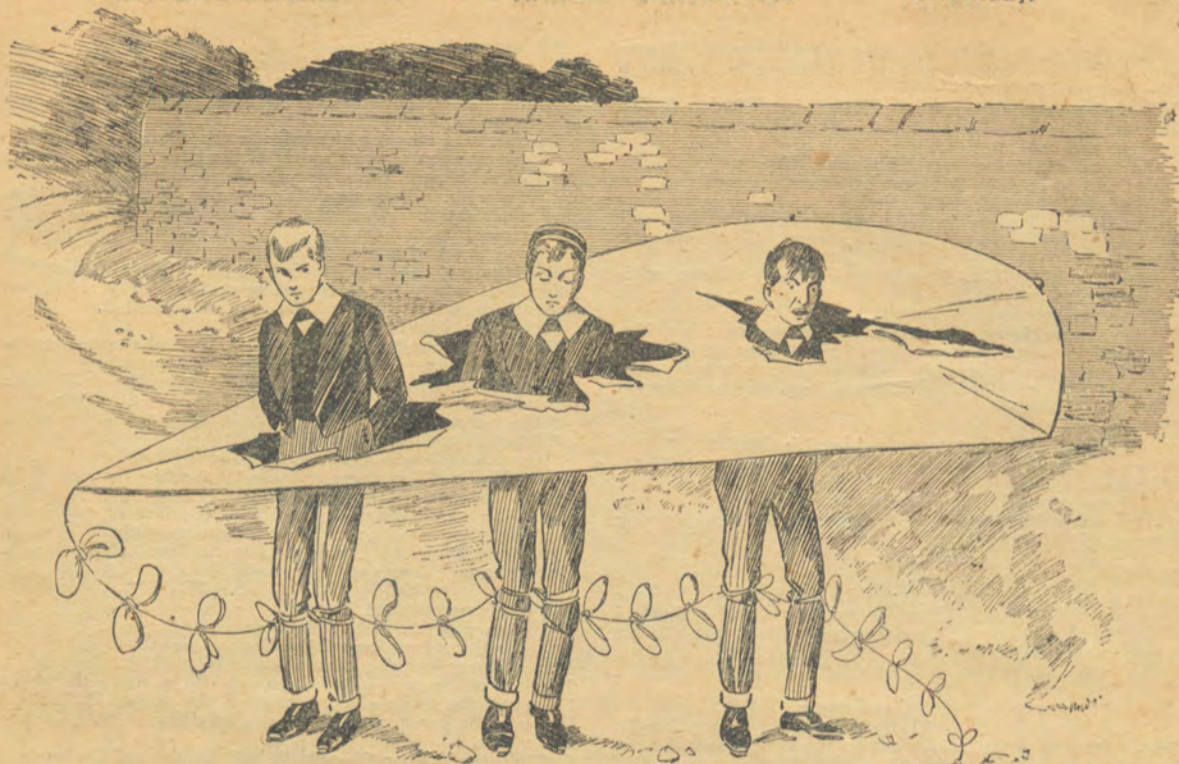
"These chaps set up to be leaders of the School House juniors," said Blake witheringly. "They're not fit to lead a girl's school."

"Nor an infants' class!" said Digby.

"Nor a lot of white rabbits!" Herries remarked.

"Are you going to get out?" roared Tom Merry. "We're getting rather fed up with your cheek, you youngsters."

"Oh, come along!" said Blake, going to the door. "We must let the whole House know about this, and get this boulder Merry lugged down off his perch."



Tom Merry was the first to break the silence. "My only hat," he said, feelingly. "I don't think we've ever been in a worse fix than this, kids, in all our natural!"

"Rather!" said a voice at the door, and Gore looked into the study. "This is the joke of the season, I think! Down with St. Jim's! Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you sniggering about?" demanded Blake, changing his tone. "Don't go gassing this all over the place, Gore. The New House rotters would never let us hear the end of it."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's too good to keep!"

"Look here—"

But Gore was gone—gone to spread the news of the latest Grammarian jape through the House.

"Well, it serves you jolly well right," said Blake. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Tom Merry. We'll think about it, and get up some stunning wheeze to take the Grammar cads down, and let you help us. That will give you a leg up."

"Oh, get out!" said Tom Merry ungratefully.

"Bai Jove, undah the cires, I considah that wemark wathah wude, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry picked up a cricket stump.

"Are you going?"

"Oh, come along!" said Blake. And the chums of Study No. 6 went down the passage, grinning, leaving the Terrible Three staring at one another in dismay.

CHAPTER 8.

The Last Defiance.

TOM MERRY expected the whole School House to ring with the Grammarians' latest exploit—and he was not disappointed. That night the whole House knew the joke, and the next morning it was almost the only topic among the juniors.

The chipping the Terrible Three had had to endure over their late adventure with the kite had been severe. But this raid on their own quarters brought on a fresh and more severe attack.

Allusions to the incident were made every moment, sometimes to the chums of the Shell, sometimes "at" them.

The New House fellows soon came to hear the story, and naturally they made as much as possible of it.

Figgins & Co. came over towards the School House before breakfast, in the hope of falling in with Tom Merry and making him some slight return for his visit of the previous night.

They met Gore first, and learned the story from him, and the truth dawned upon Figgins. And when he met Tom Merry a little later he was merry instead of warlike.

"Hallo, Merry!" he exclaimed, in a friendly way. "I hear that your House is giving you the sack as junior captain."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" grunted Tom Merry.

"I hear the Grammarians have been in your quarters, and left you all sorts of flattering messages," said Figgins. "You thought it was us, didn't you?"

Tom Merry grinned.

"Well, yes. By the way, how do you like cayenne?"

Figgins almost sneezed at the recollection.

"It was hot," he said—"very hot! If you could only have japed the Grammarians like that instead of us—"

"Well, you New House kids want keeping in your places, you know," Tom Merry remarked.

"I'll tell you what," said Figgins, unheeding. "I don't like to see a St. Jim's crowd put down like this by the Grammarians—"

"It makes us all look small," Kerr remarked.

"That's it," said Figgins, with a nod. "It makes us all look small; and as cock House at St. Jim's we're bound to take the School House under our protection a bit. So I'll tell you what, Tom Merry. If you and Manners and Lowther care to obey orders, and do exactly as we tell you, we'll let you into the Co., and give you a chance of getting your own back on the Grammar cads."

"Thank you for nothing!"

"It's a good offer," said Figgins persuasively. "I'm not running you chaps down. You've got pluck, for instance. With a New House fellow to direct you, and tell you just what to do, there's no reason why you shouldn't make the Grammar cads squirm."

"Good!" said the Co. together.

"I'll make you squirm if I have any more of your cheek," said Tom Merry. And he walked away whistling, leaving Figgins & Co. grinning hugely.

Morning school came as a relief for the Terrible Three from the torrent of chaff they had to bear. But at dinner-time it recommenced. The Terrible Three had six separate fights on their hands before afternoon school. In the Shell class-room during the afternoon there were nods and winks and whispers.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the chums came out when the Shell were dismissed. "It's not all lavender being a leader, blessed if it is. The silly owls expect you to take the cake every time. I for one can't see anything very funny in the Grammar cads dodging into our study—"

"Then you're the only one that can't," grunted Monty Lowther. "The whole House is cackling over it like a giddy farmyard!"

"The whole school," growled Manners. "Figgins & Co. will never let us hear the end of it. The Grammarians have scored on our own ground."

"We can't expect to down them every time—"

"Yes, but to be done in in our own quarters—"

"I know it was a bit rough—"

"Yes, I should say it was. I wonder whether they will ever leave off chipping us? Hallo, Gore! What are you sniggering at?"

"Three terrible idiots!" sniggered Gore. "Down with St. Jim's! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I say, Tom Merry, if you want to resign for a bit, I'm quite willing to take your place," said Gore generously. "The House would be quite willing to give you a rest. I've asked a lot of fellows, and they all say they're willing—more than willing."

"Cheese it!"

"Not only willing, but eager," chimed in Mellish. "As a matter of fact, I'd give my vote for Skimpole or D'Arcy rather than a chap who goes out looking for lickings, and gets lickings from Grammar cads in his own study."

The Terrible Three walked on with very red faces, leaving Gore and Mellish giggling.

"Nice, ain't it?" said Lowther.

"Jolly nice!" said Manners.

"Awfully!" said Tom Merry, with a wry face. "I've a jolly good mind to take them at their word and resign! I wonder what sort of a show they would make against the Grammar cads without us?"

"Not much worse than we've made."

"Oh, don't croak, Monty!"

"I don't want to croak. What I say is—"

"You'll tire your voice, old chap," said Tom Merry kindly. "Don't say any more. Let's get to the study, that's about the only place where we sha'n't be chipped to death; and if Blake comes along there again, we'll snatch him bald-headed."

The Terrible Three took refuge in their study.

Tea was not a very cheerful meal in Study X on this occasion. The chums of the Shell had a weight on their minds. The April sunlight was still falling brightly into the quadrangle, but the Terrible Three for once did not feel inclined to go out. It was some time before a loud shouting in the quad attracted their attention.

Tom Merry gave a start at last, and set down his teacup.

"What's all that thundering row about, kids?"

"Somebody's shouting in the quad, that's all."

"It's more than somebody! Hark! It sounds as if the whole school were shouting there!" exclaimed Tom, rising to his feet.

The roar of voices from the quad rang into the open window of the study. The Terrible Three left the tea-table and hurried to the window. They looked out upon a goodly portion of the old quadrangle, shut in by ancient buildings and still more ancient elm-trees. A crowd moved across the quad in their view, with their faces turned upward, most of them shouting. They were evidently watching something in the sky, but what it was the chums could not see from the window, owing to the thick foliage of a big elm-tree in the way.

"What on earth can it be?" muttered Tom Merry.

"A balloon, perhaps."

"They wouldn't be getting so excited about a balloon passing over the college."

"Then what the dickens can it be?"

"Blessed if I know!"

Tom Merry called out to Blake, whom he discerned in the crowd below:

"Blake! I say, Blake!"

Blake glanced up at the window.

"Hallo! Have you seen it?"

"Seen what?"

"Oh, of course, you're out of this!" said Blake. "Nothing for you to do here. You're dead in this act. What can you do against the Grammar cads?"

"The Grammarians! They're not here, are they?"

"Haven't you seen the kite?"

"Kite! What kite?"

"The Grammarians' kite. It's floating up over the School House now!" yelled Blake. "It has got something written on it. We haven't quite made it out yet; but it's something cheeky, of course!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"There it is!" shouted Figgins. "I can make it out now! 'Down—' There, I made one word out! It was 'down,' with a capital D!"

"I think we can guess the rest," said Kerr.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry turned to his chums.

"I think we can guess the rest, too," he remarked. "This is rather cool of the Grammar cads, and no mistake. Where are you going, Monty?"

Lowther was crossing hurriedly to the door.

"I'm going out to get a squint at the kite."

"So am I!" said Manners, following Lowther.

"Wait a bit. Blake says it's going over the School House. You won't see it. We shall have a better chance by getting on the roof."

"Good idea! Come on!"

The chums of the Shell hurried out of the study, and swiftly made their way to the stair leading up to the trap in the flat roof. Tom Merry unbolted the trap and lifted it.

"Come on, kids!"

He pulled himself up through the trap, and stepped out on the roof. Manners and Lowther followed quickly.

As they emerged they heard a shout from the quadrangle far below, ringing up over the ancient roofs of St. Jim's.

"The rotters!"

"Where are they?"

"Outside the walls somewhere!"

Tom Merry did not need to look for the kite, as soon as he was on the roof of the School House. Borne upon the wind, it was floating above the school, and the face of it bearing the inscription was turned towards the chums of the Shell, as they hurried towards the parapet in the front of the House. Plainly enough they read the words:

"DOWN WITH ST. JIM'S!"

Tom Merry snapped his teeth.

"Down with St. Jim's!"

It was the old war-cry of the Grammarians.

Tom Merry looked out for the enemy, and by following the direction of the cord attached to the kite he made them out.

Beyond the walls of St. Jim's, on the School Hill, stood Frank Monk, recognisable even at that distance, with Carboy at his side.

Monk was holding the cord in both hands, and Carboy had the end of it. The kite was a large one, very large, and the wind was strong. The wind, blowing from the hill towards the school, had carried the kite exactly where the Grammarians wanted it; and Monk knew, of course, that at that hour the grounds would be thronged with boys let out of the class-rooms, and so the defiance would be hurled in the teeth of the whole of St. Jim's.

"My hat!" muttered Lowther. "Of all the cool cheek! And we can't do anything!"

"Nothing!" said Manners. "Down with St. Jim's! My hat!"

The boys in the quadrangle were shouting excitedly. The inscription on the kite had now been read, and shouted from one to another, and the Saints were burning with wrath.

Many of the seniors were in the crowd—most of them laughing, however—and some of the masters had been drawn out into the quad by the noise. All were staring at the great kite borne by the wind over the old school.

"Nice state of affairs you School House kids have brought us into!" exclaimed Figgins, glaring at the chums of Study No. 6.

The next moment Figgins and Blake were staggering about in deadly embrace. Their chums on either side were not slow to join in. Several St. Jim's fellows had bolted out of the gates, and were running up the path on the hill, though there was little chance of getting at the Grammarians. It was impossible to get at the kite or the enemy, and so School House and New House found vent for their wrath in getting at each other. A terrific scrimmage was raging in the quad.

Tom Merry looked down at it from the roof of the School House, and smiled.

"Those kids are hammering each other," he remarked. "I don't see how that will improve matters much, but I dare say it will relieve their feelings. I say, chaps, this is about the cheekiest, coolest jape the Grammarians have ever worked off on us."

"What are we going to do? We can't get hold of the kite."

"No chance of that. Monk is taking in the cord now. We can't get hold of the kite, but we can make the Grammarians sing small."

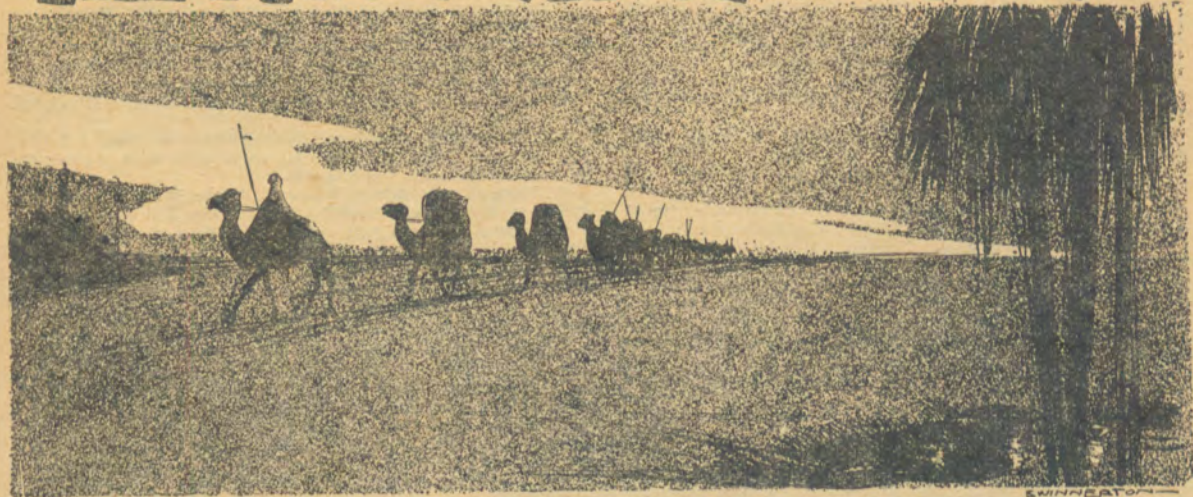
"How?"

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"That's the question. We've got to think of a wheeze, or life won't be worth living at St. Jim's. Study rows and House rows are off now, kids. We've got to settle the hash of the Grammarians, and our motto has got to be 'St. Jim's leads!'"

But how the St. Jim's juniors "got their own back" on the Grammarians is another story.

("St. Jim's Leads!" and Alan Wayward next Thursday. Please order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

A Wonderful Story.**THE FIRST ADVENTURE****OF ALAN WAYWARD.****By Innis Hael.****CHAPTER 1.
Over the Traces.**

THE senior conveyancing clerk of Messrs. Damit and Claw, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, put his head round one of the baize-covered doors in the long corridor, and looked into the room.

"Mr. Wayward!" he called sharply.

"What is it?" was the reply from a young fair-haired, blue-eyed, square-shouldered giant, who, with his chair tilted backwards, and his toes gripping the long table, was examining, or pretending to examine, an abstract of title, which he had made himself, and now could make neither head nor tail of.

"Mr. Claw wants you, at once," said the senior clerk, in a tone of asperity that brought something like a grin to the fine cut lips of Alan Wayward.

The senior clerk did not like articulated clerks at the best of times; but one who took the law in the "devil-may-care" fashion that distinguished Alan Wayward, provoked him to a kind of bilious rage.

"I said, at once!" he snarled, as Wayward, without budging, resumed his reading.

"You'll go' a col' in dyour 'ead," mocked Wayward, "if you stay in that bassage, Stebens."

Stevens withdrew, mute with wrath, and aware, from two years' experience, of the futility of bandying words with his tormentor.

"Better get along, old man," advised Dawson, who, like Wayward, was under articles to the firm. "Claw's about as amiable this morning as a parboiled tom-cat."

Alan Wayward rose to his feet, flung the abstract on the table, and smothered a yawn.

"I suppose I better had," he said gloomily. "It'll be the same old jaw over again, for a dead cert.; and I'm getting more than a little full up of it."

Dawson watched him, as he strode out of the room, then turned and winked at Lambton, the third of the articulated clerks, to whose use the room was sacred.

"Fancy shoving a fellow like that in the law," he said. "A chap who captained the rugger and cricket at Marlborough, and takes about as naturally to law as he did to Greek irregular verbs."

"Spouse he made his own bed," snapped Lambton. "Why did he come into it, if he wasn't going to like it?"

"Hadh't got your sapient way of looking at to-morrow,"

said Dawson, cheerfully. "He took it on, like he'd have taken a move up from one class to another. Besides, his pater panned out, and left him with about three hundred quid to start life on, and with old Claw for a little tin god to act as guide, counsellor, and friend."

"So Claw shoved him into articles, and stuck on to the 'oof?" queried Lambton.

"Exactly!" assented Dawson. "Just the kind of smart thing you'd expect from Claw, isn't it?"

"But how does the beggar live?" cried Lambton.

"Oh, the firm give him twenty-five bob a week, and he digs out somewhere in Bloomsbury—attic in Doughty Street, I fancy."

"I wonder he doesn't cut it and go to the Colonies," said Lambton.

"That's what he wants to do," replied Dawson. "But the little tin god is also the god of the tin, my boy. He's got Wayward in durance vile, and he means to keep his nose to the grindstone."

Meanwhile the object of their discussion was having an even warmer time than he had anticipated.

Mr. Claw received him with a stony calm that, of itself, was ominous enough in one enjoying so well-founded a reputation for nagging.

"I sent you, yesterday, Mr. Wayward," he commenced, "to pay over seven hundred pounds to Mrs. Buller, and to take her signature to the conveyance of that property in Hampshire to our client, Mr. Hawkins. I find here the deed unsigned; and I learn from Mr. Stevens that you returned the money to the accountant last night, without explanation. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain to me."

"Certainly, sir!" said Wayward, getting rather red. "Mrs. Buller was awfully upset about it, sir. She didn't want to sign, as she had heard that Mr. Hawkins had got an offer for two thousand for the same property."

"What's that got to do with you, you young idiot," snapped Mr. Claw. "We are not her solicitors, except for this matter; we are the solicitors for Mr. Hawkins!"

"Well, she started crying about it," explained Wayward. "And, after all, she was a widow, and had only us to advise her."

"And, I suppose," sneered Mr. Claw, "that you advised her! Advised her probably not to complete the transaction?"

"As a matter of fact," said Wayward, coolly, stung by the sneering accents, "I did point out to her that if she smashed her

**NEXT
THURSDAY:****"ST. JIM'S LEADS."****A Double-length Tale of
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contract, she'd only have to pay the penalty-clause, which she could easily afford if she sold at the higher price."

For a moment Mr. Claw glared at him, panting audibly.

"You become a solicitor!" he snarled. "You're not even fit for the office of a philanthropist. Confound you, sir. Do you realise that your maudlin sentimentality might have lost me a valuable client? It's fortunate her contract time does not expire till to-night, and that Mr. Stevens will know how to frighten her into keeping her obligations. Where are the papers?"

"You have them there, sir," replied Wayward.

"The contract isn't here," snapped Mr. Claw.

"Oh, the contract!" said Wayward. "As we were acting for her as well, and as she didn't want to conclude, I gave the contract back to her."

"You what?" gasped Mr. Claw, sitting suddenly rigid, with his large eyes nearly bulging out of his head.

"Gave it her back! Returned it to Mrs. Bulter," said Wayward.

Mr. Claw's face grew suddenly crimson, and he fairly ran at his clerk, seized his coat in the two hands, and shook him.

"You fool!" he shouted. "What did you do that for? Answer me!"

"Well, she was our client, just as much as Mr. Hawkins," said Wayward stubbornly, releasing himself from the frenzied grasp. "And I didn't see why we should be a party to letting that beast Hawkins do down a poor little widow for thirteen hundred pounds."

"Idiot! Fool! Thief!" foamed Mr. Claw, shaking his two fists in the young man's face.

"Stow that!" cried Wayward, becoming suddenly pale. "I'm not a thief. If anyone's the thief, it's yourself. I'm not a slave either. And I never will be. If you want to do dirty work, do it yourself. But don't ask me, for I shan't do it."

"Get out of my office!" screamed Mr. Claw. "Get out, confound you! I'll tear up your articles. I wash my hands of you. Get out!"

"I'll be jolly glad to get," said Wayward. "But you'll jolly well hand over my three hundred pounds first."

"Not a penny! Not a penny!" foamed Mr. Claw, rummaging among some papers in his open safe. "There!" he continued, in a voice shrill with malice, as he tore a parchment to shreds and flung them at Wayward's feet. "There are your articles. You are no longer clerk of mine—go!"

"You'll give me my money first," said Wayward, in a tone dangerously quiet.

"I'll give you nothing! I owe you nothing!" snarled Mr. Claw. "If you think I do, you can sue me for it."

"I'll sue you for it," said Wayward grimly, as he strode to the door.

"Do, you puppy, do!" sneered Mr. Claw, thinking he had gained the victory.

The next moment, however, sufficed to undeceive him. Wayward paused at the door just long enough to lock it; then turned, and with one bound, had Mr. Claw's throat in his grasp, and Mr. Claw's wrists helpless in his muscular hand.

"Now, you miserable, blood-sucking, toad-eyed extortioner," he said, through his set teeth. "I'll sue you in my own fashion. I've had two years of something like hell under you; and I'm glad it's finishing this way. You've one minute to choose. Will you pay me what you owe me, or will you go head first into the street?"

"It's obtaining money by violence," gurgled Mr. Claw, whose flabby visage was the colour of shallow sea-water. "It's a felony!"

"You commit felonies every day," said Wayward coolly. "I'm not afraid of one like this—without witnesses. Minute's up. Which is it? Pay? Or out?"

He lifted the fat little man up as if he had been a child, and poised him arm-high.

Mr. Claw thought of the spikes on the area-railings, two flights below, and squirmed in an ecstasy of dread. He thought Wayward had gone mad, and realised suddenly that he had always hated him.

"I'll pay!" he gasped.

"Cash?" queried Wayward.

"Cash! Curse you, yes!" panted Mr. Claw.

Wayward whisked him to his feet in a whirl that left the solicitor dizzy; and retaining a grip on his shoulder, he led him to the door of the safe.

"If you attempt to raise any alarm," he said quietly, "you go out of that window, before anyone can come near you. Count out the money in fivers."

Mr. Claw obeyed him.

Wayward pocketed the notes, and pushing the solicitor to his desk, removed the call-bell out of reach of his hand.

"Write out an acknowledgement," he commanded, "that you have this day repaid to me the sum of three hundred pounds, on the cancellation of my articles."

For a moment, Mr. Claw squirmed. But the hand tightening on his shoulder made him think better of it.

He wrote out and signed the paper; and Wayward, reaching his shoulder, blotted it, and transferred it to his pocket.

"Now, you scum," he said; "you can get on with your dirty work as fast as you like."

He released him, picked up the torn articles, which he also placed in his pocket, and walked towards the door.

He had nearly gained it, when Mr. Claw, livid with rage, and with a certain conviction of power in the silent fury seething in his baffled eyes, glided in between him and the door, and pointed a perspiring forefinger at the young man's breast.

"Alan Wayward," he said, in a low, level voice, that was the more sinister and arresting for its very lack of all emotion, "I hated your father before you; and he died regretting it. I'll make you live to regret it. Now, you can go."

He unlocked the door himself, and flung it open, and pointed the way out.

Alan Wayward paused and looked down on him, a frown, clear-cut as a horseshoe, gathering on his wide brow, a curiously intent scrutiny in his brooding eyes.

"I have often wondered," he said, "who it was hounded my father to his grave. Now I know. When I find the proofs, I shall come and see you again. Till then, God guard you, Mr. Claw."

He passed out, and walked down the corridor towards the room he had lately quitted, a sombre air on his usually carelessly happy countenance, and an extraordinary insistent feeling of foreboding at his heart.

"Hullo!" cried Dawson, as Wayward entered. "If your phiz is a register, Alan, my boy, you've been getting it hot."

"Giving and taking," said Wayward, with a reminiscent grin. "I'm off. Articles cancelled. Money returned."

"Articles cancelled, I understand," said Lambton, half ironically. "But money returned! And from Claw! How ever did you manage it?"

"A little lofty persuasion," rejoined Wayward, with a broad smile.

Dawson looked at him curiously.

"You were always a rum beggar, Alan," he said, "especially for getting your own way. What was it all about?"

Wayward explained the turn he had given to the Buller conveyance, and as he justified his action with some show of warmth, Dawson and Lambton swayed to and fro, with stifled shrieks of laughter.

"My hat!" gasped Dawson. "You're a perfect daisy. It must nearly have killed old Claw. There goes his bell for you, Lambton. Wish you joy."

"What are you going to do?" he went on, as Lambton hastened from the room.

"I hardly know," replied Wayward, with a grimace. "School mastering, or Colonies, I expect. Australia from choice, if I can get a decent show of going up-country."

"You're your own master, anyhow," said Dawson enviously.

"Absolutely!" replied Wayward. "There never was but my pater and I, as long as I can remember. No uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers. I'm on my lonesome. You might come and grub with me to-night, Hal, and we'll chow-chow over the morrow."

"Right you are," replied Hal Dawson. "There goes his bell for me. I must be off."

"So long then," said Wayward. "Meet me at the Cri-entrance. Seven o'clock."

Alan Wayward got into his hat and coat, and looked round the room, with an eye that saw it from a curiously new point of view.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "To think that I've spent two years of miserable slavery in this mouldy hole! Well, it's the end. There'll be no more slavery for me. I don't mind work. But I'll be my own master."

He opened the door, and stood for a second in the passage, buttoning a glove. From Mr. Claw's room, the telephone bell was tinkling imperatively, and through the half-open door the sound of the solicitor's voice could be distinctly heard.

"Yes. I'm Mr. Claw. Is that you, Mr. Saponyadi? Good! I want to see you on urgent business. Yes, twelve o'clock will suit me very well. Good-bye, till then."

"Up to some more villainy with that greasy old Greek," was Alan Wayward's comment, as he made his way down the stairs and, turning his back for ever on the law, passed out into the bright March sunshine, feeling free as air, master of a small fortune, and arbiter of his own destiny.

CHAPTER 2.

The Spider and the Web.

MR. CLAW was never long at a loss to devise a vengeance. It was his boast that no man had ever got the better of him without regretting it bitterly later.

In the present instance he was even less time than usual in hitting on what he sardonically dubbed "a happy idea," for it was supplied by the sight of Alan Wayward's athletic figure, as the young man swung with his easy stride and graceful carriage down the corridor. Mr. Claw's eyes glittered balefully as he noted the square shoulders, the muscular symmetry of limbs,

the well-poised, almost defiant set of the head, the strong back, and into his tortuous, fury-twisted brain there echoed suddenly, like a whisper cackled from some tempting demon, Alan Wayward's own words of a few moments since: "I am not a slave. And I never will be."

A light of infernal triumph glowed for a moment in Mr. Claw's slate-coloured eyes. Then he turned and rang the bell that summoned Lambton.

"I have cancelled Wayward's articles," he said brusquely, as the clerk entered, "and dismissed him from my employ for gross incompetence. You and Dawson will have to take over his work for the moment, till I replace him. Did he tell you what he intended to do? Unfortunately, I am still his guardian. But I was really too annoyed with him to think of asking."

"He didn't say," replied Lambton. "He may have told Dawson."

"He's not sure," reported Dawson, completely taken in by Mr. Claw's natural explanation of his interest, which that worthy took care to emphasise as soon as Dawson appeared in answer

and I shouldn't care to be in Wayward's shoes if he's really made an enemy of him."

"Which he probably has," laughed Dawson; "seeing that he wrung the three hundred out of him. But bah! what can the old idiot do?"

"I dunno," growled Lambton. "But I remember a chap called Eyre, who came here about five years ago. Kicked up a deuce of a row over some tin he swore Claw had chiselled him out of. Gave Claw the thrashing of a lifetime. Left him his address in case he wanted to prosecute. And a week later he vanished off the face of the earth. Never been heard of since."

"You don't mean to say," began Dawson, in a horrified accent.

"I mean to say nothing," snapped Lambton. "I'm simply stating a coincidence. But what makes the coincidence the more impressive is that on that occasion, immediately Eyre had left the office, old Claw telephoned to Saponyadi, same as he's done now. That's all."



"What for? What for?" was the question booming in Alan Wayward's brain.

to the call-bell. "He spoke of going in for school-mastering, or emigrating to Australia."

"Um!" grunted Mr. Claw. "Just the kind of thing a fool like him would think of doing. Well, he must go his own way. I bear him no malice. And if he gets a tutorial position he can send to me for a reference. You'll probably be seeing him. You may tell him so. By the way, what paper does he take?"

"Daily Mail," as a rule," said Dawson, with an air of surprise. "But I've seen him with others."

"Oh, well, it's of no moment," said Mr. Claw carelessly, as he stretched his hand out to the telephone receiver, and rang up Mr. Saponyadi, the Greek merchant and shipowner.

"That will do," he said to the clerks, when he had made the appointment with the Greek. "You can go. And if you take my advice, you'll have as little as possible to do with young Wayward."

"I wonder what little game he's up to?" queried Dawson, as he and Lambton regained their room.

"Give it up," said Lambton shortly. "But he's too oily to be wholesome. He's a deep and rancorous devil, is old Claw:

"I'll jolly well put Alan on his guard," said Dawson. "I'm dining with him to-night."

"You'll do well," said Lambton drily, and turned to his work.

Alexis Saponyadi was punctual to his appointment. A big man, standing well over six feet, broad of shoulder, lean of hip, rather loose-kneed, he had the head of a Grecian statue, a nose very slightly hooked, black curly hair above a brow that would have done credit to a Darwin, and a chin that suggested a will of adamant. The picture was completed by lips thin, bloodless, and cruel, and small, black, glittering eyes. He evidently regarded Mr. Claw as one of his most intimate friends; for, after carefully closing the door, he greeted him with an effusive warmth that Mr. Claw seemed to reciprocate in like measure.

"I need not beat about the bush with you, Saponyadi," said Mr. Claw, on whose sallow cheeks two hectic spots were burning. "I have been grossly outraged, and I want your assistance in making the author smart for it."

The Greek rubbed his hands together, as if he would wring oil from them.

"Something in the Eyre line again?" he asked.

"Hush!" whispered Mr. Claw, casting a fearful glance around. "Don't let us mention names. By the way, did you ever hear what—er—became of that person?"

"Buried!" said the Greek laconically. "The work killed him. He stuck it out three years. Oh, but three years, my dear, of honest hard work. Idrin Pacha doesn't feed his plantation slaves for doing nothing. Oh dear me, no!"

"The dog merited it!" snarled Mr. Claw. "But this one must not die, Saponyadi. He must live for a long time—a very long time. He is young, barely nineteen, six feet high, strong as a horse, and weighs at least thirteen to fourteen stone."

"Phew!" whistled the Greek. "Not an easy customer to keep quiet. We can't manage him like the other; it would make too much noise."

Mr. Claw smiled a superior and very crafty smile.

"There will be no need to use force," he said. "With a little care we can spread a net into which he will walk with open eyes."

"You have a plan?" asked Saponyadi.

"An excellent, and, I fancy, an infallible one," assented Mr. Claw. "Tell me, have you any ship parting at an early date for any Black Sea port?"

"Yes, the Maid of Athens," replied the Greek, after a moment's thought. "She's a brigantine, and is due to sail any day towards the end of the month. Cargo for Sinope, Trebizond, and Sevastopol."

"Excellent!" said Mr. Claw. "I do not think you have ever met my late clerk, Alan Wayward?"

"Not to my knowledge," answered Saponyadi.

"He is the youth in question," said Mr. Claw smoothly. "He is without relations; has three hundred pounds, and is looking for a place as schoolmaster, or an adventurous opening in the Colonies."

"I don't see where the plan comes in," said the Greek.

"I said, 'he is looking for a place,'" emphasised Mr. Claw. "I propose that he should find one that will embrace both the objects dear to his thick skull and brutal muscles. For, instance, a glittering advertisement in various papers for a young gentleman to act as travelling companion and English tutor to a Russian nobleman in the Caucasus. Fond of sport. First-class salary, and all expenses. I think such a bait would find Alan Wayward nibbling within twenty-four hours."

"And afterwards?" said the Greek. "He would be more difficult to noble in the Black Sea ports than in London. Your beastly consuls, my dear sir, have a most confounded knack of getting wind of these little things, and making a most almighty racket about them."

"You are not your usual subtle self," said Mr. Claw, with a scarcely veiled sneer. "The cub must have no suspicion from start to finish. You will interview him at some hotel, in another name, as representative of the Russian nobleman. Arrange a passage for him on board the Maid of Athens, and give him a letter which he is to deliver to your emissary at, say, Constantinople, or Sinope. At Trebizond, your agent, whom you will, of course, instruct in advance by mail, will propose a short expedition inland. Young Wayward, after the confinement of the voyage, will jump at it. If, unhappily, he be captured by Kurds, and be sold in the slave-market at Foliat, I do not think even a British consul will be any the wiser."

The beady eyes of the Greek glistened evilly.

"Idrin Pacha is still governor of the Van vilayet (province)," he said. "He would give a hundred pounds, or even two, for a strong Englishman. He hates them so dearly. Mustapha, the silk merchant of Foliat, would receive the youth, and make all arrangements necessary for his capture. Oh, it is a very clever and neat little plan you have devised, my dear friend!"

"I will pay all expenses," said Mr. Claw, in his thin, unmoved voice. "And the day I see Idrin's contract of sale and purchase, I will pay you two hundred pounds."

"It is quite understood," pursued the Greek, "that your young friend is not to die?"

"He must not die," said Claw viciously. "He must live a long, long time. He is very independent and high-spirited. The bastinado from time to time will be very beneficial to him. I want to think of him at work in the slave-gang, awake in the slave-compound!"

There was a concentrated intensity of malevolence in the level accents of the solicitor that made the Greek, hardened villain though he was, shrink away, shivering.

"I will write to Mustapha to-night," he said, "and arrange for all. You will see to the advertisements."

Mr. Claw nodded, his eyes fixed absently on a sheet of blank paper. He was seeing Alan Wayward toiling as a slave under the whip of a Turkish driver.

"Yes," he said suddenly, "that will do. I think it will succeed without a hitch. Yes, I will see to the advertisements. I can rely on you for the rest?"

"As always, my dear friend," said Saponyadi, rising. "You will let me know when I am to meet your young protege, if he bites at the bait."

Mr. Claw's lips parted in a dry little cackle.

"Oh, he will bite!" he said. "I know too well the food he likes to make any fault in preparing the bait."

"And what of his three hundred pounds?" asked Saponyadi, as Claw accompanied him to the door.

"To the captor the spoils," said Mr. Claw, with a shrug of the shoulders.

During the ensuing ten days, the "Baron Ivanovitch," at Karl's Hotel in the Strand, opened some three thousand letters in answer to the advertisement which appeared, day after day, in various morning papers. But none bore the signature of Alan Wayward.

Truth to tell, Wayward was having the time of his life. He had come straight from Marlborough College to Mr. Claw's office, and he had seen as little of the life of the great world-metropolis as if he had spent his ways in the West-country. To look up old friends, to visit galleries and theatres, to wander dreaming through the rustle of vivid life in the streets and parks, was to Wayward an inexhaustible mine of pleasure and delight, from which he was only awakened by the startling discovery that he had spent more than half of all he possessed.

"Gee-whizz! This won't last for ever," he reflected sombrely. "I'd better get on the track of something to do."

The process proved as discouraging as it well could be. School-agencies asked for his degrees, and smiled him politely out when they found he had none.

"I'll take the next boat to Australia, and chance my luck on getting there," was his reflection, on arriving at his lodgings in Doughty Street, after a wearying day of information-hunting at the offices of various Agents-General.

"A Mr. Stevens to see yer," interrupted a "slavey," whose Phil May-esque visage bore the visible marks of a hasty and altogether inadequate attempt of cleaning. "'E's bin 'ere, orf an' on, the last two 'ours. Sour sort o' bloke, 'e looks, too. Shouldn't wonder if it's a summons as 'e's got fer yer."

"Oh, tell him to come up, Lizzie," said Wayward, cutting short her eloquence, and wondering what on earth Stevens could want of him.

"You forgot to give Mr. Claw a receipt for that three hundred pounds," explained Mr. Stevens, when he entered. "He sent me round with it. If you'll just sign it."

"Oh, certainly," said Wayward, and affixed his signature to the paper.

"Been amusing yourself, I hear," said Mr. Stevens, in a tone that for him was surprisingly friendly.

"A bit," said Wayward laconically.

"Well, I'm old enough to advise you, Wayward," said the chief clerk; "and three hundred don't last for ever. Why don't you get a billet and put the other money by?"

"Easier looked for than got," laughed Wayward. "When you came in, I'd just made up my mind to book a passage in the next boat for Australia."

"The Colonies are not what they used to be," sighed Mr. Stevens. "I should have thought a mastership or tutorship more in your line."

"No degree, no go," said Wayward shortly. "And tutorships don't go begging."

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Stevens. "I've noticed one advertisement in the 'Times' for the last fortnight, asking for a companion-tutor, for the Caucasus. Which seems to prove that whoever put it in has not been able to get suited. Well, I must get along. Good-night."

"Good-night," returned Wayward, adding, as the other left: "I never thought that beggar could make himself so agreeable. I'll have a look at that advertisement."

He did, over his dinner that night, and at first glance his eyes kindled. This is what he read:

"Wanted an English gentleman (public school man preferred), to act as companion and tutor to Russian nobleman's son in Caucasus (aged eighteen). Must be young, tall, good all-round sportsman, and fond of outdoor life. £500 and expenses to right man. Write in first instance to Box 65a, Willings."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Wayward. "It might have been made for me!"

His excitement was intense, and leaving his dinner almost untasted, he hastened to his lodgings, and spent the next three hours in concocting half a dozen letters. It was one o'clock in the morning before he was able to devise an epistle that satisfied him, and fearful lest it should miss the first post, he sallied forth with it himself, determined to place it in the box at Willings'.

Absorbed in dream-vistas of the life that might be lying before him, he never noticed that, as he drew the door to after him, a figure lurking on a neighbouring doorstep rose and silently padded in his wake. Nor did he notice, either, as he reached the end of Doughty Street, and turned to cross Theobald's Road, another figure, lurching along towards an automobile that stood opposite the black opening of a mews.

Mr. Claw, on receiving Stevens' report, and learning of Wayward's project to go to Australia, had been seized by a panic of fear that his prey was about to evade his clutches. He had conferred with Saponyadi, and the Greek, whose spies had

been watching Wayward's movements for days, had prepared for him an ambush, arguing that as Alan had lately returned home about one or two in the morning, he would do so again.

Wayward was nearly abreast of the automobile before he was aware of anything out of the ordinary. Then, suddenly, he found his way barred by two stalwart vagabonds.

"Give us the price of a bed, mister!"

"Ain't had a meal to-day, guv'nor!"

The whine was simultaneous. Alan, ever easily generous, albeit not in any way deceived, fumbled in his pocket for a coin. It was the moment waited by the footpads. With one accord, they fell on him, hustling him rapidly towards the motor-car, the door of which had silently opened.

But they had reckoned without their host. The old rugger captain of the best team Marlborough had ever put out, was too hefty a man to be surprised for more than a moment by such unscientific, if powerful, tackling. He wrenched one arm loose, and with a fierce, swinging undercut lifted its assailant fairly asprawl between the wheels of the car.

At the same moment he caught the ankle of his other tackler a quick, savage side-kick, accompanied by a right-hand clout under the ear, that bowled him base over roof into the gutter. But his troubles were not ended, for with the fall of their henchmen, two men sprang from the interior of the car, and rushed at him. One he recognised in a flash as Gorlias, the famous Greek wrestler; the other, a man of his own height, enveloped in a fur coat, and heavily masked in crape, he could not divine. But as Gorlias rushed him he leapt aside, dashed his fist into the fur-coated stranger's face, then, as Gorlias wheeled, with a cunning "coup de savate" in which he was not a little expert, he landed a terrific blow with his heel into the wrestler's ribs, that sent him curled up and gurgling strange blasphemies into the area railings.

By this time, however, the two first tacklers had gathered themselves together, and were preparing with the masked man to rush him.

Wayward did not like the look of it. He made a feint to charge, and as the others stood waiting, he dived to the rear of the automobile, bolted across the street, and sprinted at his best quarter-mile speed for Gray's Inn Road. He reached it breathless, without having dared to lose a yard by turning; and when now he turned, it was to see the tail light of the car disappearing at a rapid rate down Theobald's Road.

"Phew!" he gasped. "That was a near shave. Smells like one of those little tricks Dawson warned me Claw might be up to. Anyhow, they got a rattling they won't forget. I guess I'll send Scotland Yard after Mr. Gorlias, as soon as I've shoved my letter in the box."

CHAPTER 3.

In the Toils.

THE BARON IVANOVITCH will receive Mr. Alan Wayward, in reference to his application for the post of companion-tutor, at five o'clock this, Thursday, evening, at the Karl Hotel, Strand."

So had run the note received that afternoon by Alan Wayward, and now, as he stood in the sumptuously-furnished private room awaiting the baron, his heart beat fast with excitement, and his hopes ran high.

"No more drudgery at the beastly routine of an office," he thought; "but a life of freedom, of congenial work, of pleasant companionship. It'll be ripping good fun."

His reflections were interrupted by the arrival of the "baron"—a large man, with an immense black beard, heavy black moustaches, and wearing a black silk bandage over his left eye. The interview was as brief as it was cordial; and it said something for Savonyadi's power of acting that Wayward really felt it to be cordial, for the Greek's eye was aching furiously from the forceful buffet it had received early that morning, and he could cheerfully have strangled his visitor all the time he was smiling on him.

"I have taken up your references by telegram," said the pseudo baron. "They are satisfactory. You are just the man I want. If the terms suit you, you may consider yourself engaged."

"The terms suit me very well, thank you, sir," said Alan, scarcely able to conceal his joy. "May I ask when I should be required to start, and to whom I am engaged?"

"Naturally," smiled the baron. "Your employer is the Duke Paul, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Caucasus. You will be met at Constantinople by one of his dragomen, a Mr. Rastan, who will accompany you to Batoum and conduct you to the governor's palace. When can you be ready to start?"

"I am ready now," said Wayward. "The time to pack—that is all I require."

"Good!" said the baron. He paused a moment and looked steadily at Wayward. "You seem to me a young man in whose discretion one can place every confidence."

"I hope so," said Wayward, flushing a little.

"You will have observed that the honorarium attached to

this post is very large—comparatively speaking," pursued the baron. "I may as well tell you at once that there are reasons, reasons of State, why the Duke Paul does not, for the present at least, desire it known that he is engaging an English tutor for his son. Am I right in supposing that a sea-voyage would not incommode you?"

"I should enjoy it immensely," replied Alan.

"I congratulate myself on having met you," said the baron urbanely, waving his hand to a litter of letters on a table in the corner. "His Excellency has at present in London a small trading vessel, which is due to depart to-night, direct for the Black Sea. I understand that you have no calls on you here. If you will convey your baggage to my hotel, we will dine together, and I will accompany you later on board the brigantine, and introduce you to the captain. Will that suit your convenience?"

"It's very kind of you. I shall be delighted," murmured Alan.

"At half-past seven, then," said the baron, bowing his visitor out. "Come just as you are. Do not dress. But do not be late, for I have one of the attachés from the Russian Embassy coming, who wishes to entrust to your care a personal message to the duke."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Saponyadi in his throat, as the door closed on Wayward's bright eyes and smiling face. "If I don't pay you for that smack in the eye you gave me, my friend, before you are much older, may I be eaten by leeches!"

Then he turned to the telephone, and ringing up Damit & Claw's, asked for the senior partner.

"That you, Claw? Yes? Right! The tutor's engaged. I accompany him aboard to-night about ten. Yes, off Gravesend—she's there now, with tug in attendance. What's that you say? Pity I got a black eye for nothing? Curse your funniness—I've not finished with him yet! You intend to see the last of him? Well, be careful. So long!"

Meanwhile, not the faintest suspicion of the truth clouded the joyous exuberance of Alan Wayward's spirits, as he hurried back to Doughty Street, and slung his belongings into a couple of bags. He had been inclined for a moment to fancy the procedure a little bit hurried, and the manner of his departure a little bit mysterious. But the masterly mention of the Embassy attaché had dissipated such doubts before they had time to take shape. And the urbanity of the attaché, who was simply one of Saponyadi's tools, and his easy chat over dinner of the "Duke Paul," put Wayward completely at his ease. Nor was his vanity insensible to the flattery when the attaché declared that he must really see him aboard, and he found himself seated in a "clinking" Mercedes, racing through the night towards Gravesend.

It was eleven o'clock, and a light mist was hanging over the estuary, when at last the gig pushed away from the wharf, and pulled the three towards the Maid of Athens, that loomed spectrally out of the fog in mid-stream.

"I am afraid, my young friend," said the baron, as they approached the brigantine, "that you will find everything rather dirty and in disorder, till you get fairly away. But Captain Harvey will do all in his power to make you comfortable, and you will not mind what you call roughing it, eh?"

"Rather not!" said Wayward cheerfully.

Nevertheless, something very like a foreboding seized him as he followed the baron and the attaché on to the brigantine's deck, and noted the lowering, cut-throat visages bent over the taffrail, and the air of indescribable squalor and litter that pervaded everything.

"Ah, Captain Harvey," said the baron, addressing a heavy-shouldered, brutal-faced man, who advanced to meet them. "This is your guest, Mr. Wayward, who is to meet Mr. Rastan at Constantinople, and go on with you to Batoum, to the duke. I will leave him in your care."

Wayward could hardly repress a shudder of disgust as the captain's clammy fin was thrust into his hand. But he followed him with a firm step into the little saloon, and observed with a sensation of relief that the cabin reserved for him was spotlessly clean. Here, for a moment, he lost sight of the baron, as the attaché buttonholed him, and in his impressive, silken way, went over again the messages he was to deliver to the duke. Yet Wayward would have been considerably edified could he have followed the baron and overheard that worthy's conversation with a burly giant of a sailor.

"You understand, Boris," Saponyadi was whispering, "he is not to be injured. You are to do nothing till Rastan comes aboard. But then, if you see half a chance to thrash him till he can't stand, I'll give you a month's salary on your return."

"Consider it done, patron," said the sailor.

"Now, my young friend, we must bid you adieu," said the baron, joining the two in the cabin. "The captain is impatient to get off with the tide. Bon voyage, and may you arrive safely at your destination."

Their boat had scarcely quitted the side, before the anchor was swung aboard the Maid of Athens, and she glided down the stream in the wake of the screaming tug.

For a long time Alan Wayward stood leaning over the

taffrail, gazing at the distant panorama of lights, like one in a dream. It seemed to him almost impossible to realise that he was actually afloat towards a new life, bound to a land of which he knew nothing, and to people of whom he knew even less. The thought that last night he had been in London, with not so much as the faintest conception of the voyage he had now commenced, struck him as fantastic; and all the strange sounds around him, the wash of the waves, the creaking of cordage, the patter of bare feet on the decks, and the hoarse cries issuing from the darkness and, as it were, caught up in the darkness beyond—all combined to confuse and numb his faculty for thinking, and make him like a child looking at his first pantomime, and all the gorgeous bewildering reality of a transformation scene.

It was nearly dawn before he "turned in," drunk with dreams, and dazed with the unreality of fact, to sleep the deep, untroubled, visionless sleep that only comes to man when destiny has drawn him into the sluice that will whirl him later into her mills.

It was mid-day when he awoke, and five minutes past before he could realise where he was. He made short work of dressing then, and hurried on deck, to stand still, with a gasp of wonder and sheer delight. Above, the sky was blue as a harebell. The tug was gone. A cloud of canvas, white and belling full, strained on the rigging. Far away to the right, a faint streak of grey marked the English coast, and all around the grey, keen waters of the Channel sung and danced, hummed and raced; while beneath his feet, the decks that last night had seemed so nauseating, now, swabbed and holystoned, gleamed white as any housewife's kitchen dresser in the far West-country.

"Had a good sleep, mister?" said the gruff voice of Captain Harvey at his side. "You'll be ready for a bite, I reckon?"

"I rather think I am," assented Wayward, with a square look at the rugged, heavy features confronting him.

Even the morning light, and that difference in dignity which makes Jack afloat such a better man than Jack ashore, could not alter the fact that Captain Harvey had, strictly speaking on the face of it, a brutal visage. But, seen now, beneath his peaked cap, after a morning tub and shave, and a tingle to the crisp thrill of wind and sunlight, there was something in it that attracted—a straight staunchness about the unflickering eyes, a set back of the stubborn shoulders, a certain way of holding the chin, high and level, that, despite the general aspect of the man, corrected first impressions, and inspired confidence. Alan Wayward, sizing him up, felt that he might be violent, but that he would never be mean.

A feeling akin to friendship grew between the two men as the days went on. To the Marlborough athlete, after his two years' confinement in a London office, the voyage was one long pleasure. The north-west wind bowled them down Channel, and spanked them across the Bay of Biscay at a good twelve knots; and the sixth day out of port saw them scudding past the Rock, driving eastward with a free wind on the port quarter. The Maid of Athens proved herself a flyer; and ten days after leaving Gibraltar, Captain Harvey, joining Wayward on deck one evening after dinner, pointed to the coast-line lying, like an impassable reef, far ahead of their bows.

"Yon's the Dardanelles," he said gruffly; "and I'll not be surprised, when the pilot comes aboard, if this Mr. Rastan as you've got to meet comes along of him."

"I shall be sorry when the voyage is over," said Wayward. "I've enjoyed myself immensely."

The captain grunted, and stared steadily at an invisible point beyond an invisible horizon. He was very exercised in his mind. He was rough gold at heart, and his only standard of honour, or, for that matter, of common honesty, was fidelity to the house-flag he was drawing pay under. Saponyadi was not a man to take more people than necessary into his confidence when he had a dirty and dangerous trick to play. The captain had been told nothing, save that a Baron Ivanovitch would bring down a Mr. Wayward, who was to join Duke Paul at Batoum, after picking up a Mr. Rastan at Constantinople, or before. But Harvey was no fool, and the "baron" had not been on his deck five minutes before the captain had spotted him as Saponyadi. What his game might be he did not know, but that there was more than a little devilry in it he was quite sure. And he had grown to like young Wayward.

"There's no flim about the youngster," he had said to his mate. "He's a straight Britisher. And I'll be dog-garned if I stand by and see any foul play."

Loyalty to his employer had kept his lips sealed hitherto; but as they approached the Straits and sighted the lantern sail of the pilot-boat slipping swiftly towards them, Captain Harvey solemnly spat into the water and made up his mind.

"You dinna know this Mr. Rastan?" he asked, without moving his gaze from the invisible spot in the void.

"Not from a crow," answered Wayward. "He's dragoman, I understand, to the Duke Paul."

"They're a cursed treacherous lot, every mother's son of 'em," said Harvey. "You'll do well to keep your eyes skinned till you get safe to your billet."

"Can't see what he'd want to gain by playing tricks with me," said Wayward, with a quick glance and a light laugh.

"You never do see aught in these parts till it's no use," pursued the captain drily. "You'll be all right, long as you remain aboard here," he went on, with a sudden startling emphasis. "I'll see to that. But if you go ashore, you may be all right, or, again, you may be the biggest fool as ever put his head in a noose he could never get it out of."

He did not await Wayward's reply, but, swinging on his heel, walked forward and joined his mate.

Alan was more startled than he cared to own, even to himself. There had been a significance in Captain Harvey's voice that was more convincing than the mere import of the words. For a moment it seemed as if the veil of fifteen pleasant days that had just passed was violently rent aside, and he was looking once more on Theobald's Road, seeing himself again in the grasp of that strange, inexplicable attack, hearing again Dawson's advice to beware of Claw and fight shy of Saponyadi.

"Oh, rats!" he said to himself, shaking off the uneasy feeling of foreboding and strolling over to the side where the pilot was clambering aboard. "Rats! The skipper's pulling my leg. Who the dickens could have any interest in nobbling me? And, anyhow, I'm fairly able to look after myself."

He laughed low as he stretched his arms and felt the muscles ripple. Throughout the voyage he had amused himself by taking an active share in hauling on sheets and skylarking aloft whenever there was a sail to be reefed; and in wind and limb he had never felt more fit.

He had no time to reflect further on the matter, as he felt his arm touched, and turned, to encounter the smiling face and outstretched hand of the completest specimen of a dandy he had ever seen.

"Mr. Wayward, I am sure," said the dandy, with a flash of pearly teeth. "I am Mr. Rastan, and have the honour of conveying to you the hearty greetings of his Excellency Duke Paul."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Rastan," answered Wayward. "I have a letter for you from the Baron Ivanovitch, which I was to hand to you in exchange for a letter of introduction on your part."

The dandy bowed, and, producing a letter, handed it with a flourish to Wayward, who, with a feeling of amusement he was careful to conceal, led the way down to the saloon. It struck the vigorous young giant as exquisitely comical that Harvey should have warned him so seriously against the newcomer. For Rastan was little more than five feet two, slender as a girl, with curly, black hair, oiled and perfumed, a face clear cut as a cameo, with olive skin, eyes like sloes, and delicately chiselled lips. He was dressed in the latest Bond Street fashion, wore an eyeglass attached to a single riband of black, watered silk, and half a dozen jewelled rings flashed on his slender, tapering fingers.

"Lord!" thought Wayward, "I could fold him up and put him in my pocket."

Rastan proved a charming companion, and even Captain Harvey was compelled to yield to his fascination. His store of knowledge was inexhaustible, and was only excelled by his fund of stories and bon-mots. He laid himself out to be agreeable to Wayward, and he succeeded so well, that when, after battling contrary winds for four days, the Maid of Athens lay off Sinope, it was Alan himself who proposed a trip on shore.

"Oh, mon cher!" said Rastan, with a shrug of his frail shoulders, "it is such a beastly hole! Moreover, the country is very unsettled. I really think we are better here."

Alan cast a quizzical glance at the captain, a glance that was not lost on Saponyadi's wily agent; but Harvey made no reply, and when he rose from the table—they had been at lunch—and was almost immediately followed by Rastan, Wayward sat on, somewhat moodily cracking walnuts. The reefed sails, the cessation of motion, the noise and clatter from the shore boats that came off to them from the port a mile distant, made him suddenly aware that there was not room to stretch his legs aboard.

"I'll go and have a look round myself," he said, rising at last. But on gaining the deck, he found, to his annoyance, and no little to his surprise, that not only had Rastan departed for the shore—summoned, so said the captain, to the Russian consulate—but that there was neither boat nor crew available to put himself ashore. It was in vain he fumed and raved. Captain Harvey was too busy with cargo consignees to pay any attention to him; and at last, in sheer exasperation, he thrust his hands in his jacket pockets and, making his way forward, stood moodily in the bows, his eyes scanning the distant array of flat-roofed, white houses, from among which, here and there, a mosque thrust up its cluster of cupolas and minarets.

"Here, get out o' this!" snarled a sullen voice suddenly. "We're too busy to want swells round here."

He turned sharply, to recognise the Russian sailor, Boris, who, more than once during the voyage, had manifested an unspoken hostility towards him that Wayward had ever been at a loss to account for. He had never been particularly distin-

guished, even at Marlborough, for a slow temper under insult. As easy-going and sunny-natured as a lamb under anything like legitimate "chipping," he had something of the quick, untamed anger of the lion in him when deliberately and wantonly baited. The very eminence he had reached in his school life was of itself calculated to make him as intolerant of downright insolence as he had been impatient of authoritative routine in the office of Messrs. Damit & Claw.

He eyed Boris curiously, noting the fellow's challenging gaze and loose, impudent mouth.

"I suppose you've been drinking," he said quietly. "But you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head, or you'll get a lesson to help you."

He had had proofs, and to spare, of the sailor's bull-like strength and bullying manners, but in his present mood he would have taken on double the bulk without thinking.

Boris cast a stealthy glance towards the break of the poop. But the captain was no longer there. Cargoes had been exchanged, and the skipper was below, settling accounts with the agent. The sailor thrust his face forward, and before Alan could even divine his intention, Saponyadi's ruffian had spat full in his face. For a moment the young man was so stupefied with amazement, that his only thought was to wipe off the foulness. Boris saw his opportunity, and, obedient to the orders, he followed up his offensiveness by smiting Alan a blow across the mouth that nearly sent him overboard. But that was as far as Boris got, and almost as much as he remembered; for, next second, he felt as if a hurricane had been let loose on him. Against the steely muscles and trained driving power of the public schools heavy-weight champion, the burly, clumsy strength of the fo'e'sle scrapper served only to protract his time of punishment. Wayward's heart was in his work, and his left driving into the Russian's face like a piston-rod, was followed by a furious right-arm crook that sent Boris to the deck with a crash. But he was up again in a second, and came on, rushing like a bull, while the fore-castle and waist emptied itself of the crew, who gathered pell-mell to watch the fray.

Wayward, side-stepping to the rush, brought his left in a swinging upper-cut into the Russian's bent face, following it with a fearful right-hand drive that, catching Boris fair in mid-jaw, cracked the bone as if it had been glass, and sent him hurling and howling to the deck. But the man was "seeing red" now, and was insensible to punishment. He reeled to his feet, and seizing a pike, rushed at Alan. The latter leapt aside, dodging the murderous blow. Boris leapt after him, wielding the weapon in his two hands, and raining blows furiously. Unarmed as he was, and unable now to get a blow in, matters were beginning to look serious for Wayward, when there was a sudden patter of feet across the deck, the throng of sailors drew back, and Mr. Rastan, dapper, cool, unmoved, but with a strangely sinister light in his purple black eyes, pushed his way between the assassin and his victim.

"You dog!" he said, in his soft, silken voice.

The weapon, poised in air, trembled slowly downwards, and into the face of Boris a grey fear crept. He lifted the back of his hand to his mouth, and sidled backwards.

Mr. Rastan raised a whistle to his lips and blew three shrill notes, which were immediately answered by the appearance of four Turkish police, who came swarming over the side.

Boris, with trembling lips and shaking knees, dragged himself nearer to Mr. Rastan, and broke into a volley of Russian, in which Wayward could distinguish nothing but the name of Saponyadi.

Saponyadi's agent did not make even the pretence of listening to him.

"Take him away," he said softly to the policemen. "If he wants to talk give him the bastinado. I will attend to him on my return."

Boris made no resistance. The fear in his face had given place to a dull despair. As he was hustled over the side, Mr. Rastan turned to Alan.

"I am so grieved, so distressed," he said. "I trust you are not hurt."

"Oh, I'm all right!" replied Alan shortly. "The brute spat at me and struck me in the mouth. May I ask what that was he was saying about Saponyadi. Is he an agent of Saponyadi? Do you know him?"

Mr. Rastan shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. "It is possible," he said. "Saponyadi has agents everywhere. He is a very clever man and very unscrupulous. Everyone in the Black Sea littoral knows, or knows of, Saponyadi. Are you a friend of his?"

The answer was so easy, so entirely devoid of embarrassment, that Wayward's suspicions vanished on the spot.

"Hardly," he laughed, and, accompanying Rastan aft, he recounted to him the tale of Dawson's warning, and the incident by which it had been provoked.

"It is fortunate I arrived at so timely a moment," Rastan cooed. "That fellow certainly said something about having orders from Saponyadi. But I did not pay much attention. Go, my friend, and bathe your face. Then, if you will join me in the saloon, we will have a bottle of the champagne I went

ashore especially to get in your honour. The captain's English beer makes me sick."

He accompanied Wayward to his cabin, and as the door shut on him, Rastan sank on to a chair in the saloon, and faintly mopped his brow with a perfumed morsel of lace-embroidered cambric.

"Phew!" he muttered. "What a shave! How fortunate he does not understand Russian!"

CHAPTER 4.

Snared.

"NOW, mon cher, as we must stay two days here, we will, if you like, arrange a little hunting-party."

It was three days later, and the Maid of Athens was lying alongside a wharf at busy Trebizond.

Mr. Rastan, as he spoke, lighted a cigarette, and smiled pleasantly up into the face of the man he was betraying.

"If I like!" echoed Wayward, starting to his feet. "I should rather think I do like. I'm beginning to feel as if this ship was a cage."

"Then let us start at once," said Rastan. "While the dawn is yet fresh we can travel in comfort."

If any echoes of Captain Harvey's warning still lingered in Wayward's ears, they were dissipated and entirely forgotten during the first half hour ashore. The scene itself was sufficient to lure his thoughts from any sense of foreboding. The strange, narrow streets, with the white, flat-roofed, windowless houses; the jostling crowd of Russians, Turks, Armenians, Kurds, and tribesmen from the distant Khanates of the Caspian; the glow of colour in the diverse costumes; the tinsel and glitter and indescribable din of the bazaar—every corner, and every foot of the way was alive with new interest to the young Englishman. He had picked up a good bit of the Turkish patter current in the Euxine ports on the voyage out, and his knowledge of it enabled him to gather easily enough the obvious fact that Rastan was everywhere treated with a marked obsequiousness that was not devoid of a certain air of anxiety.

"A couple of horses and a guide is really all we want," said Rastan, as he stopped before a low archway, through which could be seen a medley of animals, mules and asses, camels and horses. "We can have an escort of soldiers if you like," he went on in a gently ironic accent. "But it costs much, and it is quite unnecessary. What do you say?"

"Oh, bother the escort!" said Wayward. "We shan't get so far inland in a dozen hours, I suppose, as to run any particular risks?"

Rastan emitted one of the little silken chuckles that served him for laughter.

"Risks!" he echoed. "You don't catch me taking any risks."

Half an hour later they were cantering past the last hovels on the outskirts of Trebizond, and mounting the slopes of the wooded range that lay between them and Erzerum. Their guide, a huge Bokharian answering to the name of Ali, rode some way in front, leading a pack-mule bearing their guns and provisions, a tent, and blankets. Rastan's ready tongue beguiled the way, and Alan hardly noticed how rapidly they were travelling till the ridge of the range was reached at mid-day, and he saw behind him Trebizond, glittering like a tiny disc of silver in the sunshine; while in front, far away to the left, the snow-capped shoulder of Mount Ararat gleamed coldly against the unclouded blue of the sky.

"That is Erzerum far away to the left," said Rastan. "But we have not time to visit it. We will cross the plain and see what sport we can get in that forest on the right there."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to lunch first," laughed Wayward. "This bracing air has made me peckish."

Rastan assented cordially, and it was not till two hours later that they cantered down the long slope of the mountain and went at a rattling gallop across the sandy, sparsely-grassed plain. Ali had already dismounted and tethered his animals by the time they reached the fringe of the forest which Rastan had pointed out. It spread over a rugged and broken spur of the hills, and was cloven in two by a turbulent, rushing stream that leapt from one level to another in a series of glittering waterfalls.

They pushed into the gloomy recesses of the wood on foot, Ali leading them with assured strides ever upward.

"Big game is not very plentiful now," said Rastan, "but Ali says that a couple of leopards have been ravaging the flocks in the neighbourhood lately, and have been spooed to a cavern further up."

It was a little later that Ali turned and held his hand to his lips. They halted, listening, and peering into a dense thicket, whence a scarcely audible rustling issued. Beneath the dark foliage of the firs and cedars the gloom was intense, and it was with a thrill that tingled through every vein that Alan suddenly realised that he was looking straight into a pair of gleaming amber eyes not fifty yards distant.

"Your shot," whispered Rastan at his elbow. "Draw steady, and take him right between the eyes."

Alan raised his rifle and took steady aim.

"Good!" cried Rastan, as with the sound of the report the beast leapt high in the air and rolled clawing and writhing for a second in the small clearing in front of them.

"A true shot," grunted Ali a moment later, as he bent over the rigid form of the leopard, "and a beautiful skin!"

"It's the male, too," said Rastan. "You'd better skin it, Ali, while we sponger round for his mate."

Ali set to work, and Rastan indicated a track in the thicket to Alan.

"Take that path," he said, "and keep your eyes and ears open. I'll take this path to the left, and work upwards to the right."

Alan nodded, and stepped into the thicket. He had not gone a dozen paces before he caught a glimpse of a moving yellow patch slinking through a clump of brushwood towards the spot he had just left. With his gun at the ready, he padded softly back, keeping a parallel line with the moving beast. The intervening brushwood prevented him getting any sight of a mortal spot; but the great cat was moving so slowly, and so closely crouched to the ground, that Alan had no difficulty in following it. He had almost reached the fringe of the thicket, when he was startled by a sudden roar, and next moment saw the lithe beast spring into full air, and came out straight as an arrow for Ali, who, his back to the thicket, was kneeling over his task. Mechanically, Wayward took a snapshot, his bullet plugging fair into the brute's belly in mid-air, but too late to stay its course or thwart its object. Next moment it had landed on Ali's shoulders, and was tearing and ravaging at his back. Ali gave a yell of pain and terror, and strove in vain to reach the brute with his knife as he rolled over, fighting with all the force of his great muscles.

Alan rushed forward, loading as he ran. But fire he dare not. The man and the beast were so inextricably mixed up, and presented such a wriggling, writhing mass, that a shot might well have missed the leopard and found Ali. For a moment the young Englishman was at a loss. But only for a moment. As he rolled round, Ali's eye, agonised and pleading, met his; and next instant Alan, throwing aside his rifle, drew his hunting-knife and sprang forward. The eye that had been sure at cricket was sure now, as, with his left hand, he seized the ravening brute by the scruff of its neck and drove the nine-inch blade with unerring exactitude through spine and throat. It was a mortal stroke, and the leopard writhed over, biting the dust in a foam of blood.

Ali, though badly mangled, was still conscious, and his trembling hand indicated to Alan where he could find water. But as there was nothing in which to carry it, the young athlete picked the Bokharian bodily into his arms, hoisted him as comfortably as possible over his shoulder, and bore him across the glade to a ravine where the water, crystal-clear, gushed from the ground. The Asiatic had got off better than might have been thought, and though he bore one or two ugly fang-marks, and two deep claw-gashes that looked as if they had been made by a blunt pair of scissors, the wounds were not deep, and had not torn the muscles. Alan had brought with him a small pocket-case provided with scissors and lint, plaster and needles. And, after thoroughly washing the wounds, and stitching one and plastering the other, he was able to assure Ali that he'd be none the worse for it. The man looked at him with eyes in which gratitude seemed to be struggling with something like fear and cunning. He was about to speak, when suddenly his expression changed, and his face took on the sullen aspect it had worn all day.

"His Excellency comes," he said, through lips that never moved. "Let my protector and lord beware that he drink not coffee to-night."

When Rastan came up running, Ali was lying back, apparently in a dead swoon; and Wayward, if somewhat pale, showed nothing of the emotion the guide's words had awakened in him.

"Ma foi, mon cher!" cried Rastan, when Alan had narrated what had happened. "You are a hunter indeed. We must get this fellow down to the horses somehow."

"I can walk, Excellency," said Ali, suddenly sitting up. "But first I will finish skinning the beasts, for verily it is not fitting that so great a hunter should leave his spoils for the jackals and wolves."

Night had come on them before they reached their horses—the night of the East, that comes like the dropping of a purple curtain over the first flush of the sunset, to be followed in a few minutes by cluster after cluster of golden stars that seem to hang tremblingly just out of hand-reach.

Alan Wayward watched Rastan covertly as their evening meal proceeded. He could hardly bring himself to believe that the Greek was treacherous. It seemed so utterly fantastic to imagine that there was any connection between the portly, choleric, spiteful little solicitor of Lincoln's Inn Fields and this courtly, polished, friendly gentleman, who had made the last week pass so pleasantly. He had indeed no excuse for refusing the coffee Rastan set about making at the conclusion of the

meal, for during the last six days the Greek had insisted on making it aboard himself, vowing that nothing would induce him to touch the "mud" served by the Levantine cook; and Alan had more than once declared him to be a past-master in the art.

"Let us sit outside," said Rastan, as he poured out the coffee in two silver cups. "The plains at night are full of dreams and poetry."

"Right you are!" said Alan, whose eyes had never quitted the cups.

He stretched out his hand to take his cup, but Rastan was before him.

"I'll bring the cups," said the Greek. "You bring along the stools."

He turned his back as he spoke, and preceded Alan out of the tent, and none but the stars saw the movement of his fingers, as one hand crossed the other, and dropped into one of the cups a pinch of brown powder. The movement had been so instantaneous and so covered, that Wayward, receiving his cup and planting the stools, banished Ali's words as the raving of a man in delirium; and he would have sipped his coffee without a qualm had it not been that, as he raised the cup to his lips, he felt Rastan's eyes fixed on him, and was aware that the Greek was holding his breath.

His suspicions came back to him, and he placed the cup on the rock by his side.

"I am tired," he said, flinging aside his stool, and stretching himself on the ground. "Your coffee is bitter to-night, Rastan. Did you bring the sugar out?"

"No. But I will get you some, mon cher," said the Greek, with alacrity.

He rose, placed his cup on the ground, and strolled into the tent. He was not gone a minute, but it was long enough to allow Alan to make a transfer of the cups, placing his where Rastan's had been, and taking Rastan's in his hand.

"One or two?" said the Greek, returning with the sugar-dish.

"One, thanks," said Alan lazily, holding out the cup.

"Truly, Rastan," he said, after he had slowly drained his cup to the last drop, "no one can make coffee like you."

"You spoil it, mon cher, with the sugar," replied Rastan lightly, as he in turn sipped his coffee, and tossed the cup inside the tent.

They sat for another half-hour talking—or rather, Rastan talked, while Wayward listened, and wondered whether the man, with his gentle solemn voice, his friendly manner, could indeed be a dastard and a traitor—and wondered, too, what, if he had really intended to drug him, he hoped to gain by it. And while he wondered, he watched. And little by little suspicion grew into certainty, as Rastan began to lose the thread of his easy chatter, to nod drowsily, to pluck himself together with a jerk, only to find his chin falling forward again. Then suddenly the end came. Rastan stopped in the middle of a sentence, rolled from his stool, and lay like a log on the ground.

Wayward sat silent, his elbows on his hunched-up knees, his chin in his hands, his face white and rigid, staring at the pale, delicately-chiselled features of the Greek.

"What for? What for?" was the question booming in his brain.

Presently he reached forward, and shook the sleeper gently, then violently. Rastan's head wagged to and fro; but his eyes never opened, and his deep, stertorous, laboured breathing never wavered. Wayward dragged him inside the tent, and flung him on to the couch of skins prepared for him. Then he went out into the night, and sought the place where Ali was lying near the tethered horses.

"I changed the coffees," he said abruptly; "and he drank what he meant for me, and sleeps like a dead man."

The eyes of Ali gleamed through the darkness, and he chuckled grimly.

"I was watching, and I saw," he said. "It was well done, my lord."

"Why did he wish to drug me?" asked Alan coldly.

"Let my lord follow me," said Ali, rising stiffly, and stepping to a little plateau beyond the fringe of trees. "See," he went on, pointing to the east.

Alan looked, and far away in the plain, beneath the moonlight, he saw a slow-moving line of pack-camels and bullock-waggons, with a screen of horsemen riding loosely at either side, winding its way towards them.

"A caravan?" he asked.

"Even so, my lord," said Ali. "They come from Erzerum, and go to Foliat. At midnight they will pass below here, and those will come to whom his Excellency Rastan Pacha was to deliver thee, helpless."

"What for?" queried Wayward impatiently.

"The reason I know not, my lord," answered Ali. "But the end was to lead thee to the slave-market at Foliat, where Idrin Pacha, Governor of the Van vilayet, might send and buy thee to work on his plantations."

"The slave-market!" gasped Alan. "For me! He would not dare!"

"England is far," said Ali, with a shrug of his shoulders. "And here, when Rastan Pacha commands, men obey or die."

"And you were here to help him?" cried Wayward.

"Even so, till my lord saved my life," said Ali phlegmatically. "Wherefore, now I risk my life."

For a long time Wayward was silent, gazing like one fascinated on the moonlit, sinister approach of the caravan, and wondering, almost stupidly, how Claw had either the malice or the power to compass so dastardly an act of vengeance. Ali, motionless and mute at his side, stood like a figure carved in bronze, his keen eyes sweeping the plain, and measuring the distance.

Neither of them had seen, or even dreamed of looking for, the face that peered under the lifted side of the tent—Rastan's face, cold, calculating, graven with an indescribable air of menace and resolve. And so absorbed were they, that neither of them heard the faint rustle of the dry grass, as the Greek writhed on his belly through the woods, till once out of sight, he rose to his feet, and made stealthily for the plain where the horses were tethered.

It was not without reason that in a land where every breath covers an intrigue, Rastan of Chios was feared by high and low. With the first sip of his coffee he had recognised the slightly acrid flavour, and divined Alan's ruse. But he had realised also that his treachery was itself divined, and, as he looked at the athletic form of the Englishman, his soul had grown sick with fear. But craft and cunning were as second nature to him, and out of his very fear came the plan to outwit the cause of it. He had pretended to sip his coffee. But each time he had taken up his cup, he had tilted a little out, till the sleepy earth had absorbed it all. Then, feigning the sleep of opium, he had watched and waited.

It did not take him long to reach the horses, nor to lead them one by one into the forest, and with a single skilled thrust of his long hunting-knife to slay each one as he led it out of earshot. That done, he crept back to the tent, took Alan's rifle and revolver, and his own, and stole back into the woods till he reached the watercourse, into which he tossed the rifle. Then, retracing his steps, he gained the trees immediately behind the plateau where Alan and Ali stood, and, sheltered by the bole of a giant tree, watched them, a sardonic smile on his thin lips, as their words came distinctly to his ears.

"It is time, my lord," Ali was saying, "to take to horse."

"Right," said Alan. "Go you and saddle up. I go to search that Greek dog, and see if he has any papers that will clear up this mystery."

They separated, Alan going towards the tent, and Ali striding to the thicket where he had left the horses. Once the Bokharian stopped and peered into the gloom of the woods, thinking he had heard something moving.

"Bah! Some toad or snake," he muttered, and resumed his way.

The words were near to being his last, for before he had gone another three paces, Rastan leapt from the thicket, and aimed a vicious sweeping blow of his hunting-knife at the guide's back. But the *alerie* of the previous moment had been sufficient to make the ears of the old woodsman phenomenally sharp, and, even as the murderous blow fell, he wheeled round, swinging his gun by the barrel. The stock caught Rastan full on the nose, smashing that treasured feature flat to the face, and hurling him senseless to the ground. At the same moment a shout from the tent was followed by the appearance of Wayward, running as hard as he could pelt towards the guide.

"He's tricked us!" he yelled, as he caught sight of Ali, standing grim and erect. "He's gone, and he's taken my weapons as well! Are the horses safe?"

"I know not, my lord," replied Ali, as Alan hurried up. "But behold his Excellency. I knew not that it was he who leapt at me from the thicket, and I smote. Now my life is forfeit indeed; for Rastan the beautiful will never forgive him who has spoilt his beauty for ever."

"See to the horses," said Wayward. "There are men galloping over the plain now. We have wasted too much time."

As Ali turned off, Alan knelt by the wounded man, and ran through his pockets. In the clear atmosphere the light of the full moon was amply sufficient to enable him to decipher the contents of Rastan's pocket-book. A letter from Saponyadi, in English, and a contract of sale by which Mustapha, of Foliat, contracted to buy a white slave, Alan Wayward, for the sum of two hundred English pounds, left him no further room for doubt. Moreover, Saponyadi's letter was explicit; for it not only gave the detailed reasons for Mr. Claw's enmity, but referred also to the last transaction of which Eyre had been the victim. Wayward pocketed the incriminating documents, relieved Rastan of his arms, and, unwinding the silken cummerbund the Greek wore, bound him hands and feet. He had scarcely finished when Ali came running up.

"My lord," he cried, "we must fly on foot! That dog has

slain the horses. And in half an hour the men of Mustapha, the silk merchant of Foliat, will be here."

"Right-ho!" said Wayward cheerfully. He was beginning to feel the exhilaration of battle on him, and the first-fruits of victory were coursing like sparkling wine through his blood.

"Lend a hand with this boulder," he said. "We can't leave him here, for it would give us away. Do you know a way through the mountains by which we can give them the slip?"

"There is no way to Trebizond save by the plain," said Ali.

"But we can hide in the forest here till Mustapha's men be gone. There is the cavern of the leopards up above. None will think to seek us there."

"Let's get, then," said Wayward. "Pass by the pack-mule, and bring along some grub. We don't want to starve."

In silence they made their way through the darkness of the forest, choosing the stonier ground, and now and again crossing and recrossing the torrent, and sometimes even walking many yards in the icy water. It was two hours before they reached the cavern, and laid Rastan, mute, with lurid eyes, on the hard rock. Little more than a crevice marked the entry to it, though inside it was some fifteen by twelve feet.

"Will they track us here, do you think?" asked Wayward.

"Inshallah (if God wills)," replied Ali phlegmatically. "Man can but do his best. Mustapha's hunters are old dogs. Many a slave have they tracked, and few have they missed. Moreover, when they see the tent and the slain horses, they will smell out somewhat of the truth; and so may be they will search till they find."

"And when they find, dog of a slave," snarled Rastan suddenly, "they will flay thee alive!"

"Be at peace, oh, Rastan, thou broken-nosed spawn of ugliness!" said Ali calmly. "Thou shalt not live to see it. For thy own dagger shall go down thy throat before Ali is caught."

Wayward let the two wrangle on, and gave no heed. He was busy at the entry to the cavern, in writing a letter, in which he was exposing all the circumstances of his engagement to the "Duke Paul," and Rastan's treachery. When he had finished he wrapped the paper round those he had taken from the Greek, and addressed the packet to the British Consulate at Trebizond. Then he summoned Ali.

"You've got to track," he said shortly, "and to look smart about it. You are too old a craftsman in wood lore to need advice from me. But here's my idea. Mustapha's men will certainly not seek the woods till dawn. By following the ridge you can make a detour, and reach the range we crossed this morning. Take this to the British consul. Here is money. Bid him send troops at once to my rescue."

"My lord, let me stay?" pleaded Ali.

"Go, if you wish to serve me," said Wayward. "I can hold out here for twenty-four hours, even if they find where I am. And in that time you should be back. For you will surely be able to get a horse at some of the farms we passed."

He stood outside, watching the guide till the darkness swallowed him up. Then, re-entering the cave, he sat down facing the entry, and stared into the silent mystery of the night. Presently the fatigue and emotion of the day had its way of him, his head nodded forward, and he slept.

It seemed to him that he had only just drowsed off, when he was awakened by a wild scream of terror from Rastan. He sprang to his feet, and instinctively kicking out, was aware of his foot catching something solid, elastic, and moving. There was a low snarl, and next moment in the grey light he saw two shapes bound past him, and vanish through the entry.

"My Heaven, man—quick!" screamed Rastan. "Cut me loose. Didn't you see? They were leopards—two of them! For the love of heaven cut my bonds! You can't leave me to be devoured alive by those brutes."

As if to confirm his words a low snarl came from the entry, and Alan saw the gleaming amber eyes of a couple of leopards shining into the cave. Moved by a sudden inspiration, he stretched out his hand towards the provisions, and seized the bag containing the pepper. Half-emptying it into his hand, he made a swift leap towards the entry, and dashed the pepper into the eyes gleaming there. The roar of rage that followed assured him that he had gained at least a respite; and, looking out, he saw the two brutes rolling over and over, snarling and biting, pawing at their eyes, and dragging their faces to and fro in the thick mould.

"Wayward, for Heaven's sake loosen me!" shrilled Rastan. "They will come back. It's dawn; and a leopard will fight to the death for its lair. If you'll let me free I'll swear to be true to you. I'll send away Mustapha's men. I'll do anything you like!"

"Oh, shut your jaw!" said Wayward angrily. "It makes me sick even to look at you. Do you suppose I'm built like you?"

He strode over to the bound man, and cut free his thongs.

"Stay where you are," he said. "If you cry out, or give any signal, you sign your death-warrant, whatever happens to me."

"But give me some weapon," snarled Rastan. "They'll

come back, I tell you. Look at my face. When I screamed out one of the brutes was licking the blood off me. Look! They're coming now!"

"Stand back!" growled Alan. "Your chances are mine. I've more pepper for them, and some mustard too. Hand us that pan and the water gourd."

As Rastan obeyed Alan emptied the remainder of the pepper and half a packet of mustard into the "billy," and, half filling it with water, stirred the mess round with his hand. Then he stood, half-crouched, against the wall to the left of the entry.

As Rastan had said, the leopards were returning. Wayward stood motionless, and waited till the heads of the two beasts were thrust through the crevice. Then, swiftly and surely, he emptied his tin, giving an impartial dose to each.

It was something like a somersault that the leopards turned in their backward leap. And as Alan watched them bounding madly away, he felt tolerably sure that they had seen the last of them. He was so absorbed in following their flight that he never noticed Rastan's stealthy approach to the spot where he had propped the Greek's rifle. He was stooping down, his face on the level of the opening, as Rastan gripped the barrel and swung it aloft.

"That's the last of Mr. Leopard!" he laughed, indrawing his head.

"And of you, dog of an Englishman!" snarled Rastan, as he whirled the weapon downwards.

The stock caught Wayward full on the head, and he pitched backward against the wall of the cavern, and fell huddled up and senseless to the ground.

Rastan bound him with feverish haste, then going outside fired three shots rapidly from his revolver.

The echoes had not died away before a volley of shouts came from below.

"This way! This way!" yelled the Greek, letting off another shot.

Next minute half a dozen Turks clambered into view and ran towards him.

"It's his Excellency!" called the leader, as he drew near. "And wounded!"

"It is nothing," snarled Rastan. "Your man is in there—senseless and bound. In with you—quick! Bear him down. He must be got off on our swiftest camel without delay. That dog Ali has turned traitor, and is gone to Trebizond to warn the consul. Let a couple of men go down at once and send out a dozen horsemen to cut him off."

He was obeyed with alacrity. And an hour later, while ten horsemen scoured the plain northwards, three fast dromedaries were spurning the desert towards the south, with Rastan on one, an enormous Nubian on another, and on the third, attached by leads, a wiry Arab, with Wayward strapped face downwards, across his knees, bound for the slave market at Foliat.

CHAPTER 5.

"I Never Will be a Slave."

MUSTAPHA, the silk merchant of Foliat, stood by Alan Wayward's side and gazed anxiously into the face of a large, enormously fat man, who, garbed in light-pink baggy trousers, a purple, gold-embroidered jerkin, and a high fez, with a long golden tassel, was squatted on a divan, looking reflectively out of his little pig-eyes at the athletic Englishman.

"Three hundred English pounds I paid for him, Excellency," lied Mustapha, "without counting the expense and the trouble. Nor do I hide from your heavenly wisdom that he has cost me two faithful servants—yea, two of my strongest—having broken the back of one and cracked the arm of the other. He hath the strength of a buffalo, oh justice. And I am a poor man."

Alan returned the gaze of Idrin Pacha, Governor of Van, with a glare of defiance.

It was five days since his capture, and he had never thought that a lifetime could contain so many hours of misery and humiliation, for the twelve hours after he had reached the house of Mustapha, at Foliat, he had lain like one dead, all his body racked with anguish after the fearful ten hours' punishment of that ride, strapped across the camel.

Of Rastan he had seen no more, though he had gathered from the chatter of his gaolers that the Greek was sick of a fever brought on by his wound. Only once had an opportunity of escape presented itself, and that when they had loosed his bonds to make him change his clothes. Then for three short minutes he had fought like a demon, only to be dragged down and overpowered by sheer weight of numbers.

Mustapha had tried no more tailoring after that, but had brought the "untamed lion," fast bound in a litter, straight to Idrin at his country residence in Changeri, a vast estate lying in a valley of the wild mountain range known as Bingol Dag. Alan's heart had sunk within him as they left the towns behind and entered into the sparsely inhabited country,

and he saw ever and again groups of hopeless-faced men working in vineyards or in forests under the eyes of armed soldiers. Nor did Mustapha lose the opportunity of informing him that all the people he saw were Idrin's people, whom he was destined to join.

"Very good!" said Idrin at last. "I will give you the three hundred and fifty pounds you ask, Mustapha. It is a lot of money; but he looks strong, and he will have to repay it by work. Go to my treasurer and make out the writing."

"You are wasting your money," said Alan firmly. "I am an Englishman, and no slave. I will do no work for you."

The fat Pacha beamed at him.

"You are not the first Englishman I have taught to work," he said, speaking in excellent English. "And I hope you won't be the last. But as I am a just man, I will warn you. If you do not work you will be whipped. If you try to run away I have a pack of bloodhounds, and I very much enjoy hunting with them. Take him to Hassan, and let him be put in the forest gang," he concluded, addressing the four stalwart Nubians who stood at Alan's back.

Wayward snapped his teeth together, choking back the rush of angry words. That resistance was at once useless and puerile was only too obvious to him. He had seen enough to be aware that Mustapha had exaggerated nothing when he narrated that Idrin Pacha, on his own estate of Changeri, was more absolutely lord of soil and souls than the Sultan at Constantinople. A thousand soldiers were at his disposition. The swift flood of the East Euphrates cut off escape to the south. To the east lay the bleak and savage wastes of the Bingol Dag, and for twelve miles north and west the watch-towers of Idrin rose, scattered far and wide, commanding a view of every road a fugitive might take.

As Alan was led away by the thong attaching his wrists, his face set hard, and his heart, stout though it was, quailed for a moment, and he shuddered, as he realised that despite resistance, rebellion, or even death, he was in fact and in grim reality a slave, and in the instant the scene seemed to fade from before his eyes, and he saw again himself standing, scornful, facing Mr. Claw, and heard again his own voice saying "I am not a slave—and I never will be."

His gorge swelled at the thought, and he could feel the veins knotting in his temples as he perforce followed the Nubians across the tiled courtyard, past the grinning, curious faces of the palace guard, and up a narrow path leading to a great forest on the lower spur of the Bingol Dag. But he choked back his rising fury, and, as it were, held in a vicelike grip the riotous resentment that was shaking him. He had too often played an uphill game of footer, too often kept an impassive face when the runs were piling up against him, not to know that victory can only be wrung out of defeat by staunchness, patience, and an eye that misses nothing.

It was a two hours' march before they reached the gang in the forest—a gang that consisted of some thirty men engaged in felling the timber.

The Nubians led Wayward to the overseer, a Turk of huge bulk, massive muscles, and a long, rectangular, brutal face. At the moment he appeared to be working himself into a fury against a youth who stood facing him—a youth whose oval face, clear, patient eyes, quivering nostrils, and inflexible lips immediately appealed to Alan.

On passing the gorge which gave on to the shoulder of the hill where the work of felling was in progress the Nubians had paused a moment before a group of six soldiers, who, after taking steady stock of the new slave, had nodded and waved him onwards. Thereon, his gaolers had slipped off the noosed thong that had been twisted round Alan's wrists, grinningly informing him that he had only to run to find how fast a bullet could travel.

But Wayward had no idea of running. The hurry of Mustapha, his obvious anxiety to clinch the bargain as quickly as possible, had confirmed the captor in his hope that Ali had got through to the consulate, and in that case he felt sure that his delivery was only a matter of hours. He was therefore resolved to support unmoved any momentary humiliation, and to that end to lend himself at any rate with a show of cheerfulness to any work imposed on him.

He had not counted on the craft of Idrin, nor on the caprices of the destiny into whose mills he had been sucked.

At the moment of his arrival in the clearing the overseer's paroxysm of rage reached a crisis; and as the Nubians halted Alan some ten paces from the two, Hassan seized the lad in a brutal grip and began belabouring him with the short-handled, heavy-lashed whip that had been hanging at his belt.

"It's Ahmed, the Armenian of Melazgherd," said one of the Nubians.

"He who was torn from his bride two days ago," laughed another. "She was a clever jade to escape. But Idrin will trap her yet. The prettiest houri in Georgia cannot long be hid."

"Look!" cried a third. "Does Hassan mean to kill the boy?"

In their excitement the Nubians gathered together, forgetting



their prisoner, and discussing Hassan's ungoverned fury. The overseer had seized Ahmed by the throat now, and with his lash gathered into a triple thong, was beating him mercilessly over the head. The soldiers, leaving their rifles piled, had strolled forward, curious, impassive. The slaves, pausing in their work, were looking on the scene with fearful eyes; some sullen, some menacing.

For a moment Alan Wayward stood alone, forgotten. His heart was boiling within him, his fingers itching. From the time he had been a kid in the Lower Fourth bullying had ever stirred him to a wild revolt and a generous wrath that disdained caution as it contemplated consequences. Now, as Hassan, repeating for the twentieth time his formula, "Dog of a Christian," lifted his whip aloft for another blow, Wayward, with a light leap, caught his wrist and shoulder and swung him from his grip of the Armenian.

"You brute!" he said in his broken Turkish.

A gasp of amazement broke from the circle of onlookers. Hassan enjoyed a reputation as a wrestler that had long ensured him a respectful immunity from either opposition or interference. And there was something in the flashing eyes, the taut muscles, the athletic frame of this young stranger-slave that held the throng for a moment fascinated. Yet of all those present none seemed more stupefied by surprise than Hassan himself. Wayward's forceful swing had sent him reeling against a tree, and he still stood with his back to it, his little eyes blinking, his mouth agape, his hands half-advanced as for a catch.

The whole scene had been the affair of seconds; and after the first gasp of astonishment the Nubians and a couple of soldiers hurled themselves on Alan; but before they reached him a voice of thunder bade them halt, and Hassan, his face now purple with rage, strode forward till he was within a pace of the Englishman.

"Who is this dog," he cried, "who has dared to lay hands on me?"

The Nubians hastened to explain; and the eyes of the overseer gleamed with a savage exultation as, uncoiling his whip, he lifted his arm.

"Bah!" said Alan, fixing the Turk's eyes with a steady, contemptuous gaze. "You are not a man; you are a hog! You dare only use your master's arm. You ought to drive bullocks; not men. It was easy to hurt that slender child. But I flung you down, big brute as you are. If you were a man, and not a stuffed hog, you would throw away your whip and fight me. And the best man would win. But you are a coward as well as a hog. Why, your own soldiers are laughing at you, as brave men always jeer at cowards."

For a moment it seemed as if Hassan, under the lash of this strange discourse, would have a fit. He swayed to and fro, his face contorted, his thick lips mouthing inarticulate curses, his eyeballs, injected with blood, starting like half-held marbles out of his head. His domination had been so long assured and uncontested, the taunts and scathing jibes of this stranger, hitherto undreamt of in his philosophy, had been so trenchant and provocative, that to even his infuriated intelligence there was no mistaking the grin of derisive delight that ran like a retreating wave from face to face.

"Chuck him on his head, oh champion of the Bingol Daghi!" cried a sallow-faced corporal.

"If thou can'st!" jeered another.

"Thou hast found thy master, Hassan of the bowed neck," jibed a third.

Hassan glared around him, breathing heavily. His eyes flickered back to Wayward, gleamed for a moment as through a red haze, then he leapt.

Wayward was ready for him. He was not reared in the West-country for nothing, and keen though he had been at cricket and football, there had been no sport he loved so well as the single contest of man to man, when muscle grimly gripped muscle, chest heaved against chest, and strength waited on wit.

He had been standing easily erect, his hands at his side, a picture of inexperience and indecision, as Hassan rushed forward, and he laughed in his soul as he heard the contemptuous grunts of the onlookers.

But the grunts suddenly drifted into a gasp, followed by a tense silence, as Hassan, deceived by his foe's inert attitude, came headlong with grabbing hands at him, for the Englishman had leapt aside from the rush with a lightness and sureness of movement that a cat might have envied; and before Hassan could stay his precipitate course, Wayward's left hand had descended like a snapping rat-trap on the nape of the Turk's neck, his right hand had passed like lightning beneath the Turk's chest, to fasten in a grip of steel just above Hassan's right elbow, and the next moment the overseer was heaved through the air in a complete somersault, and stretched with stunning force on his back.

In all Europe there are no keener sportsmen, where wrestling is concerned, than among the Turks.

A shout of incredulity and admiration rent the air, driving into Hassan's black heart all the throbbing pain that was pulsing through his bruised body.

He had been living for some years on his reputation, and he had grown fat on it. The fall had been severe; but though the shock of it left him breathless, and more than a little stupefied with amazement, he had in him, over and above the fury and the spite of the baffled bully, the courage of his race which fights to the death and never admits defeat.

He gathered himself to his feet slowly, and took more careful stock of the Englishman, conscious that he had his end up against something quite out of the ordinary.

But he was no scrapper, like Boris of the Maid of Athens, and his trophies had been gained and upheld in every bazaar from Smyrna to Diebekir, or from Sinope to Aleppo.

As he sported round his new slave, watching for a handhold, a kind of sick fear grew into his heart, and he cursed his labouring breath and corpulence as he noted the keen vigilance of eye and hand opposed to him, and measured almost to a half-inch the depth of chest, the long, clean sweep of arm.

If only he could get a fair girth-grip on him, that old grip of his that first half strangled his foe, and then hoisted him, and hurled him still clasped to the ground, with him in all his weight falling across his loins, crippling him for ever.

Wayward had seen just the same malicious, hateful look once before in the eyes of a beaten Cornish miner, and he knew that he was up against all that foul play could hope to win. The very play of the man, the clawing of his hands, the feints—clumsy ones to the trained senses of the British lad—all told him clearly enough the hold for which the Turk was scrambling, and the use he meant to put it to.

As he circled round his quick eye noted that a dozen of the more stalwart slaves had sidled round till they stood between the soldiers and their weapons. There was no mistaking their expressive glances, as two by two they planted themselves behind each of the guard.

A thrill of excitement ran like liquid fire through Alan's veins. If he floored the Turk—floored him by a knock-out fall—there lay before him freedom—freedom for himself, for that circle of fellow-sufferers beyond. Dare he let the Turk get the hold he was craving? Dare he invite him to it, and then put on him the stop he knew so well, but put it on with a mortal force that none would ever dare in a civilised ring?

He shrank from it, yet this was no platonic contest. It was a struggle to the death. Well, he would moderate the force of that killing stop, which, if used to the limit of power, could snap a man's neck. He would chance the grip, moderate the stop, and take occasion as it might come afterwards.

He played his game warily, by little and little countering more widely, and even more widely, the constant tentative dabbling of the Turk's great hands; then, as Hassan's right fell thudding on his hips, he made pretence of letting both his hands lock on the Turk's left shoulder. In an instant, with a snort of triumph, Hassan's mighty arms had closed round his middle, grabbing him in an embrace of death.

It was the moment waited for. The very wind seemed to lie hushed among the trees.

The necks of the spectators craned forward, their mouths set in a thin line, their eyes red and fierce.

Slowly, surely, the broad back of the Englishman seemed to yield to the herculean pressure of the Turk's constraining muscles; but as slowly, and just as surely, Wayward's two-hand grip on Hassan's left shoulder bent the Turk's head more and more to the right.

It was then that the Englishman's grip suddenly shifted, and drew a gasp of excitement, of dismay, of wonder, from the onlookers. It had been so swift, that sudden violent jab of the right forearm into the Turk's swelling throat, that simultaneous swiveling clout of the left on the nape of Hassan's neck. And with it Hassan's grip had broken, splaying right and left, as, with a hoarse rattling in his thorax, he reeled backwards, his arms grabbing the suffocating air.

He had never time to recover, not time even to realise how that famous grip of his, hitherto invincible in the bazaars, had got up and kicked him, as it were, in his own throat, for Wayward's hands had closed like steel round his right wrist, and, before he had gained the use of his breath, the Turk felt Wayward's body sway round in a half turn, saw the Englishman's head jerk like a released catapult forward to the very ground, and the next minute was conscious that his own unwieldy bulk was flying through the air. Then something, whether tree, or comet, or rock, he never knew, seemed to leap out of the sky, smite him in the small of his back, and hurl him into an eternal blackness.

As a matter of fact, it was the bole of a giant elm. Alan's cross-buttock had catapulted the unfortunate Turk with all the power of which the young Englishman was capable, and, unluckily for the bully, the elm had stood in the line of his flight. He crashed into it backwards, and fell among the roots senseless and useless, with three little bones in his spine crushed to pulp, a paralytic for the rest of his days.

Wayward, unconscious of the extent of the man's injuries, cast a swift glance round. Now, if ever, was the moment for a bold dash for freedom; and, even as his glance swept the circle, a dozen hands were stretched out to seize the guard.

But fate was against them. Before a single hand had touched its object, there clattered into the glade Idrin Pacha himself, followed by twenty troopers.

The little pig eyes of the Governor of Van viewed the scene, and took in all its significance, from the fallen figure of Hassan to the erect, defiant form of Wayward; from his unarmed guards, to the menacing couples at their elbows.

He glanced at the captain of his troop, and in an instant twenty carbines were covering the slaves, who, under that chilling persuasion, scuttled back to their deserted tasks.

"How came Hassan in that state?" demanded the governor, addressing the trembling corporal.

"The foreigner taunted him to wrestle," explained the soldier, "and Hassan was as a child in his hands."

"Ah!" said the pacha softly, and for a long time he sat rigid on his horse gazing at Alan.

Hassan had been a very useful man to him, and one glance at the limp, huddled mass he now was had convinced the governor that his use had been effectually spoilt.

He had come to the clearing in the anticipation of enjoying a little sport, for he thought that the Englishman would be sure to give trouble, and that it would be amusing to watch Hassan break him in. The result surprised him, and gave him food for reflection.

His mind moved tortuously, for he liked the bye-paths of evil. He bore an ulcerous hatred for all Englishmen, and Saponyadi, his friend and panderer, had recommended this one to him very specially.

He turned to his captain.

"Place these six men under arrest," he said, in his smooth, oily voice. "If we had not arrived they would have been overpowered. Leave six of your troop here. Put a thong on that English dog's neck, and bring him at your stirrup to the palace. The bastinado will perhaps make him tamer."

There was no room for resistance. From the moment the pacha had appeared the Nubians had closed round their prisoner. Alan gritted his teeth together as a running noose was passed over his neck and attached to the captain's holster, while his hands were tied behind his back.

It was a journey at once painful and humiliating to the proud spirit of the old public schoolboy, this return to the palace, for the cavalcade proceeded at a trot.

Alan, unless he wished to be strangled like a dog, was perforce obliged to put out his best pace, and trot alongside the captain's horse, while Idrin, ambling at his side, amused himself by picking out the tenderest spots in him with his long-lashed whip.

In spite of his trained muscles and perfect wind, Alan Wayward was more dead than alive when at last the cavalcade halted before the great gateways of the palace.

It had been an eight mile run, and his muscles seemed to be like bands of fire eating into his bones; his breath an exhaust-pump, pounding heart and brain into one pulped, grating red sea of mist.

As the captain halted with a jerk, and loosed the attaching lead, the Englishman lurched forward, reeling blindly, and sank half unconscious to the ground.

"Bring him in," said Idrin placidly, as he rode through the porch.

The Nubians, who had followed afoot, obeyed, grinning, dragging him by the collar into the great courtyard.

They were accustomed to such scenes, and, before Alan realised what was happening, his feet had been stripped of boots and socks, and his ankles were firmly clamped across a wooden rest some eighteen inches high.

His mind was too dazed to think, and he stared stupidly around him, as the pacha squatted on his divan, and two slaves, bearing a bundle of long, light, flexible rods, appeared, and knelt on either side of his bound feet.

"Proceed!" said Idrin suavely, his little pig eyes fixed on the face of Alan.

Two long rods swished through the air and fell on the bare, upturned soles of the Englishman's feet, sending a stinging, intolerable pain shooting up the very inside of his bones till it seemed to curl back and grip on the edges of his heart. Again the rods rose and fell, and again, and yet again.

"Fifty," said Idrin, licking his fat lips, as he noted the sudden grim set of the Englishman's jaw, the iron-hued defiance that seemed as it were to veil the blueness of his eyes.

The rods were lifted for the seventh time, when the clatter of a horse at full gallop was heard approaching the gates. And as the seventh blow fell, a messenger covered with dust came running into the courtyard, and falling prostrate before the governor, blurted out:

"Excellency, the English effendi, Carlton, rides here from Trebizond with a firman from the Padischah (the Sultan's title), to seek one Alan Wayward. A hundred soldiers come with him. So fast has he come that he is even now at my heels."

"It is well," said Idrin, without so much as a wrinkle of his fat face showing the agitation he felt.

He made a sign with his hand, and instantly the torturers, picking up their rods, scuttled through an archway and vanished;

the bonds were cast from Alan's legs; he was lifted up by the four Nubians, who stood silently waiting the pacha's command.

Not a sound broke the tense silence in the courtyard. All ears were bent to listen to the distant, yet growing "pid-a-pad-pud" that spoke eloquently of a troop galloping in measured rhythm.

A slow smile wrinkled round the corners of Idrin's fat mouth and slithered oilily into his eyes.

He beckoned to an attendant standing near.

"Accompany these men, with that dog of a slave," he said, "into the house. Do not take him into the selamluk (men's quarters). It may be that I shall have to allow a search there. But even the firman of Zil-Ullah* cannot violate the seclusion of the harem.† Tell Yussuf to send the women to their rooms. Bear this slave into the harem, and lock him safely in the court of the baths."

The attendant salaamed, and next moment Alan was hurried under the archway into the interior of the house. He was borne rapidly down the long corridor that in all Mohammedan houses separates the selamluk from the harem, and halted at the great door, where Yussuf, the Ethiopian eunuch, had his lodge. Five minutes later, he was lying, bound hand and foot, and with a gag thrust in his mouth, on the white-tiled pavement that surrounded a shallow basin of perfumed water, listening to the retreating footsteps of the Nubians, and straining his ears to catch the muffled clatter of the troop then riding into the courtyard.

Then a great silence settled down, and something like a sob was choked back in his throat, as he realised that all Ali's effort, and all the consul's rapid coming would achieve, would be the future immunity of the crafty pacha, and the perpetuity of his own doom to an endless, hopeless slavery.

He rolled over on his face, and with his head against the white marble, wept.

CHAPTER 6.

A Bold Dash.

THREE months had passed since the visit of Carlton Effendi, British Consul at Trebizond, had turned the page on Alan Wayward's hopes of freedom. As he had divined, the craft of the pacha had been more than sufficient to outwit the English official's claim, supported though it was by the evidence Ali had brought of Rastan's treachery and Saponyadi's complicity. Idrin laughed at them; put his house and estates at the disposition of the consul, and withdrew into the harem till the search had finished and the visitors departed baffled.

But the pacha had been frightened none the less. Carlton was a grim man of few words, and he understood the East. And none knew better than the slippery Idrin that his tenure of office would be worth a brass farthing if the British Embassy at Constantinople cared to stir the hornet's nest that is ever beneath the pillow of all the Sultan's lieutenants. For a moment he was inclined to pass Alan by the bowstring and have done with it. But he reflected that Saponyadi was just as powerful in his way as the British minister; and Saponyadi had laid great stress on the necessity of sparing the young man's life. Moreover, Saponyadi was due to pay him a visit presently. It would be time enough then to settle definitely what should be done with this awkward slave.

So, in the meantime, Alan, if he gained nothing else, was spared the remainder of his punishment. He had been returned to the forest gang, whose escort in his honour had been doubled, and in sheer desperation he had laid himself to whatever work came to hand. The new overseer, mindful of Hassan's fate, had treated him with marked respect, and even among the soldiery there was many a manifestation of friendliness and cordiality, that if it did not alleviate, at any rate did not stick pins into his misery. Save for the humiliation of it, and that eternal, unquenchable revolt instinct to every free soul against enslavement, the work was congenial enough, and no more arduous or less healthy than that done by any pioneer in the backwoods of America or Australia.

It was the nights in the slave compound that most distressed Alan. A great quadrangle was the compound, surrounded on all sides by a high, impassable palisade of hewn logs built round an avenue of the long-spiked thorn-tree of the East. The only gateway giving into it was flanked by two lodges, each containing its ten guards. The cabins in which the slaves were berthed were indeed little more than forecastle bunks—eight feet by six, unlighted, built of mud and lath, and roofed with reeds, and alive with a countless generation of various insects. The surrounding filth and squalor was to the Englishman nauseating to the point of suffocation. But there was no escape from it, and no relief. And daily Alan Wayward's soul had grown more sullenly morose, more broodingly rebellious.

* The Shadow of God: one of the Sultan's titles.

† The women's quarters, into which none is permitted to enter save the husband and immediate, unmarried male relatives.



Had it not been for Ahmed, the young Armenian whom he had saved from Hassan's brutal lash, Alan would more than once have "run amok" among his captors, courting the release of death.

But Ahmed interested him.

The old rugger captain had an eye for a man. And there was something electric, convincing, and altogether manly about the way the slender, soft-eyed Armenian lad bore himself, face to face with tasks above his strength. Squatted in front of his hut in the compound, Alan learnt little by little the history of this youth of eighteen.

He had been torn from his home at Melazgherd, beyond the Bingol Dagh, by a raid of Idrin's troopers. Their chief object had been to lead to the pacha's harem the girl who, in the Melazgherd valley, was known as "the Rose that greets the Dawn." Zillah was her name; and Ahmed had been dragged away as slave at the moment when he was celebrating his betrothal to her. The old Armenian priest who had been present, had been cunning enough to smuggle the girl away into hidden gorges; but Ahmed's heart was none the less wrung by fear of the future, and the ceaseless suffering of his present state.

His patience, and the contrast of their lots, had worked on Alan like a tonic.

"Cheer up, kid!" he had said one evening, after three months of constant intercourse had rendered them as intimately chummy as schoolboys. "One of these days we'll get an opportunity to clear out, and we'll manage it together. Hallo, what's on now?"

His exclamation was provoked by a sudden commotion at the entrance.

"Visit!" yelled a stentorian voice; and as the guard turned out, the overseers ran round the hovels, whipping out the slaves, to stand to attention lined up at their various doors. Ahmed's hut was next to that of Wayward's, and as the two looked curiously towards the entrance, they saw Idrin Pasha, accompanied by a tall stranger, whose figure seemed strangely familiar to Alan, enter the compound.

"The Baron Ivanovitch!" gasped Alan, as a glint of gold in sunshine fell full on the heavy black moustache and great sweeping beard of the pacha's companion.

He watched them as one fascinated, as, escorted by two soldiers, the visitors made the round of the hovels. His eyes burned into Ivanovitch's face as the two halted opposite him. During the last three months he had little by little unravelled the riddle of his kidnapping, and recognised that the so-called Ivanovitch had been none other than Saponyadi, the partner of Claw's crimes, and his aggressor in the attack in Theobald Street. And he had promised himself that if ever he stood again face to face with the arch hypocrite, he would exact from him measure for measure of all he had suffered. Nor was he left in doubt as to his visitor's identity.

"There, my dear Saponyadi," said Idrin Pasha. "You see for yourself how carefully the Duke Paul has looked after his son's tutor. He is one of our strongest and best workers. He almost makes me esteem the English race."

Alan gritted his teeth, saying nothing. He could not believe that Saponyadi had come all the way from London to Changeri for the mere pleasure of gloating over him. Nor was he deceived, as the slippery merchant's words immediately proved.

"So, my young friend," he said sleekly, "we meet again. Ha, ha, ha! You will pardon me smiling. But you were so very verdant. I am charmed to see you looking so well. Mr. Claw bade me give you his warmest regards, and to assure you that he treasures still the memory of his last interview with you."

"You do not answer!" He paused mockingly, a Alan, with lips set like a chisel-edge, choked back the passion of anger and of hatred in his heart, and forced a marble calm into his eyes. "Yet I have much to say to you. Much that may be of interest to you."

"I think it is agreed, dear pacha," he went on, turning to Idrin, "that if our young friend accepts the terms, he may go free—on conditions."

"At your pleasure," snapped Idrin. "But the stench here makes me sick. If you will confer with the dog, let a couple of soldiers bring him to the house. Moreover, I have an important matter to settle in the harem before sunset. You must excuse me. I leave him at your disposition."

The Turk, with a large gesture of his fat, flabby hands, turned on his heel, and fairly bolted.

"A la bonne heure," chuckled Saponyadi. "You will come with me, my friend, and have a little chat."

He addressed a few words to the soldiers, and next moment they had fallen in alongside of Alan, and were marching him after Saponyadi, through the compound-gate, and under the great avenue of acacias that run for nearly two miles right up to the open clearing surrounding the pacha's walled palace.

A word from Saponyadi whispered to the guard immediately gained them admittance. And though the Levant merchant had been careful to whisper low, Wayward, whose hearing had been rendered keener by his life in the woods, caught the soft breathing, and in his mind pigeon-holed the fact that "Zil-

Ullah" was the password at the pacha's gate. He followed Saponyadi through the courtyard that had witnessed his bastinadoing, and into the selamluk. At the fifth door on the right of the great corridor, Saponyadi entered, and turned to the soldiers.

"One of you will remain outside," he said, "and within call. The other will go to the stables, and prepare me two horses, of the fastest."

"Your Excellency knows that the troops ride at midnight?" said one of the soldiers.

"No, I didn't know," said Saponyadi. "Where do they ride? On my road? For in that case I may as well delay my journey."

"Nay, Excellency!" said the soldier. "But for Melazgherd, to sack the rebel village, and capture 'the Rose that greets the Dawn.'"

"Oh, well, that does not concern me," laughed Saponyadi. "Go, do my bidding!"

The zaptieh salaamed and departed, shutting the door to and leaving Alan alone with the merchant.

Saponyadi, with a swift gesture, removed his beard and moustache.

"They worry me," he said, smiling his most cordial smile at Alan, as he somewhat ostentatiously laid on the table two revolvers. "But they only know me bearded here. With you, I need no longer wear disguises. You have had a rough time. But your future is now in your own hands. Would you be free and rich?"

"Assuredly," answered Alan calmly. His heart was aflame, and in his mind an audacious project was forming. But he held himself well in hand, resolved to know all there was to learn.

"It has transpired," went on Saponyadi, seating himself at the table and arranging some papers, "that your late father was heir to a considerable fortune; in fact, to some sixty thousand pounds. I have the papers here"—tapping on the documents outspread before him—"but they are useless without signature."

What do you want me to do?" asked Alan, in the same level tone.

"I am glad you are so reasonable," smiled Saponyadi. "Here is the proposition. You will sign these papers, and this power of attorney to Mr. Claw to administer the property on your behalf; also an engagement not to return to England, so long as Mr. Claw allows you, say—er—one thousand pounds a year. Your signature given, you will be free to go where you like, and I have here the first thousand pounds. Is it a bargain?"

There was a sudden glow in the young Englishman's eyes. His wild project had suddenly crystallised. Saponyadi thought the eyes expressed assent, and laughed softly.

"I will sign," said Alan abruptly, advancing round the table to the side of the Greek.

Saponyadi bent over the papers, arranging them.

Alan's hand glided to the revolver at the Greek's elbow, grasped its barrel, swung it suddenly aloft, and brought it down with smashing force on Saponyadi's temple.

Without moan or cry the Greek lurched forward, his face falling on the table, and lay inert and senseless.

Alan stepped swiftly to the door and barred it. Then, returning to Saponyadi, he gagged him with his own slave-cap, and rapidly, feverishly, stripped him of his clothes and divested himself of his own garments. Then he drew on the Greek's clothes—the baggy trousers, the topboots, the long-pleated frock-coat, the riding forage-cap. Coolly and methodically he searched among the Greek's baggage till he found the bottle of adhesive he was looking for. Then he donned the great black moustache and beard Saponyadi had discarded, and looked at himself in the mirror. He laughed grimly at the resemblance. The sun was sinking, and he felt tolerably sure that in that guise he would pass muster well enough in the darkness to be taken for the Greek and honoured guest of the pacha. Alert and sure, he bound Saponyadi hand and foot, rammed the gag faster in his mouth, and, picking him up in his arms, bundled him under the bed.

Then he paused for a moment, reflected, grinned as he might have grinned over a wheeze in the old Lower Fourth, and went to the door. The soldier outside saluted.

"Go to the compound," he said, "and bring me hither Ahmed, the Armenian of Melazgherd."

He accompanied the order with two pieces of Saponyadi's gold, and the delighted zaptieh * fled on his errand.

Alan occupied the interval in going through the Greek's baggage and in producing a spare suit of clothes, which Saponyadi had evidently had on hand for a dragoman. Ahmed was introduced while he was still engaged on this task. He opened the door to the soldier's knocking, admitted Ahmed, and bade the guards—the other had returned—wait.

"By the way," he said, putting his head through the door, "where have you left the horses?"

* Zaptieh is equivalent to the French gendarme.

"At the entrance to the archway, in the courtyard, Excellency," answered the soldier.

"Zil-Ullah remains the password, I suppose?" he asked in an indifferent tone.

"Till sunset, Excellency," was the reply. "After sunset it is Padischah."

"Good!" said Alan. "Wait for me!" And he shut and gently bolted the door. "Quick, my friend!" he said, turning to Ahmed. "We have no time to waste. Get into those things. We are going to escape."

"You!" gasped Ahmed.

"Quick!" rejoined Alan. "I'll explain later. Throw your things off. Stick these on. You're my dragoman, see?"

Ahmed, quick witted like all Armenians, was not slow in obeying, and in less than five minutes he stood transformed. A forage-cap of black cloth, embroidered with amber lace, sat jauntily on his head. A purple waistcoat, with gold trimming, was drawn close over a long skirt-like garment, which fell below his knees. White stockings shone beneath the crimson edging that braided the knees of his sky-blue knickerbockers, and a sash of yellow and green silk enveloped his waist.

Alan chuckled as he handed him one of Saponyadi's revolvers and his rifle, and stuck the other in one pocket, while emptying a box of cartridges into the other. His heart was pounding like a piston-rod, but his head was cool and collected. He surveyed the room carefully, pocketed the papers on the table, and turned to the door.

"I can get rid of one of them," he said. "Stand by to collar the other."

Opening the door, he handed a note to the zaptieh he had already tipped.

"Take that to the commander of the guard, in the compound," he said. "I wait an answer."

He watched the fellow off, and beckoned to his comrade to enter. The man did so, unsuspiciously; and the next moment his legs were knocked from under him, a table-cloth was rammed into his mouth, and while Alan's hands gripped him by the throat Ahmed bound him hand and foot.

"Come on!" said Alan coolly, though his eyes were blazing, as he turned to Ahmed, after shoving the soldier beneath the coverlets of the bed. "You know the way to Melazgherd?"

"Through the forest clearing, where we work," said Ahmed, "then to the left through a pass half-way up the mountain."

"Then follow me," said Alan. "Mount your horse, and say no word. Here are ten pieces of gold. Throw them to the soldiers at the gate as I pass through."

Wayward felt his heart beating in his throat, as he opened the door, closed and locked it behind him, pocketed the key, and strode down the corridor, closely followed by Ahmed.

They found the horses at the archway as the zaptieh had reported, mounted them, threw a piece of silver to the slave in attendance, and trotted lightly to the gate.

The guard had seen Saponyadi pass and repass many times that day with their master, and in the black darkness following the sunset no suspicion of Alan's identity crossed their minds.

"You ride far, Excellency?" said the captain, as Alan pricked his horse through the gateway.

"Padischah," said Alan, with a laugh. "Ashiga Bagdad uzak deyl dir." *

"Pass, and bon succès," laughed back the captain, as Ahmed sent the gold pieces broadcast among the peering guard.

Next minute they were outside, mounted, facing the mountains, free.

For a moment the blood raced madly through the Englishman's head. He felt inclined to stand erect in his stirrups and send out a ringing cheer of liberty and defiance. But he curbed his emotions, and, keeping himself and his horse on a steady rein, took the path for the mountains at an easy canter. For the first three miles the road ran in full view of the gates they had just quitted, and for that space they never quickened their pace. But then the route took a curve to the left, and a clump of acacias blotted out the barracks.

Alan dismounted under cover of it, tightened the girths of his own and Ahmed's steed, and stood for a second listening.

"Nothing is discovered yet," he said. "The captain of the compound will keep the man I sent. No one will think of looking for Saponyadi till Idrin Pacha wants him for dinner. Let us push on quickly. They will ride after us like demons once the trick is discovered. Moreover, to-night the pacha sends out his troops to raid your native village, Ahmed, and capture your betrothed bride." And as he mounted again, and pricked his horse forward, he explained to the stupefied Armenian boy all that he had done and learned.

"My protector, my lord, my saviour!" babbled Ahmed, weeping with joy. "You have given me life and liberty and paradise. You thought of me in the hour of your hope. Some day, perhaps, the good God will give to Ahmed the power to repay."

* "To the lover it is no far cry to Bagdad"—a Turkish proverb.

"Right-ho!" said Wayward cheerily. "We can think of that later. Let's press on steadily. Save the gees as much as we can. If they pursue us it wouldn't be a bad idea to have as much go in hand as possible. So we may as well dismount now and run a bit."

The two of them were as hard as nails and as agile as goats. The path was steep and broken, and as they trotted up it, leading their horses, Alan laughed aloud in recollection of the last time he had trotted down the same road with a thong round his neck. For three hours they toiled on and upwards through the black, impenetrable forest. Ahmed had taken the lead once they had passed the clearing where for three months they had worked in slavery side by side. For bred and reared among the forests, he had of them the same inexplicable instinct that will enable a wild beast to roam there at will, and at will find again any spot once visited.

The moon was rising, bright and unclouded, as they reached at length the ridge, along which they must ride to gain the pass, leading by wild precipices and bleak gloomy gorges to the steppes where Melazgherd lay six thousand feet below, asleep and unconscious of the peril threatening it. The pass was yet five miles away, and they could just discern it lying like a pair of folded scissors in the sheath of shadows surrounding it.

They had mounted their horses again, and Alan, reining in his arab, looked back at the plain they had left. The moonlight lifted each detail of it into black relief.

"Look," he cried, "Idrin's troop are riding out now! They little know that Melazgherd will be warned in time. It is strange we have heard no sounds of pursuit. I never thought that Saponyadi would have remained undiscovered for more than an hour at most."

"Hst! Listen!" said Ahmed, holding up his hand.

The two sat like graven images on their motionless horses, their heads bent sideways, their breathing suspended, their faces the pallor of ivory in the white, ghostly wash of the moonlight.

From below there rose a faint murmur, that second by second grew more defined and distinguishable, till the tramp of hoofs, the crackle of brushwood, the short, sharp call of man to man, came clearly up on the light, crisp breeze, and among all, pervading every sound, the low, monotonous, sinister chorus of whimpering dogs.

"The bloodhounds!" whispered Ahmed, through chattering teeth.

"The pursuit," said Wayward. "So much the better. I was getting afraid of traps in front."

There was a gleam of battle in the eyes of the Englishman, a set about his jaw, a new earnestness of his form in the saddle, that instilled new life into the Armenian.

"Order! I obey!" he said simply, his boyish face, and almost girlish eyes, alight with confidence and enthusiasm.

"Loose rein and gallop!" said Alan. "You know the way! Lead! At all costs, we must reach the pass first. They are not four miles away—probably not three. They must have ridden hard."

Along the broken ridge, made doubly difficult by the play of shadows, the two rode for life and freedom. Mile after mile swept by. The trees seemed to slip like ghosts to either side of them. The monstrous rocks glided from their path; yet ever in between the "pid-a-pad-pud" of their horses' feet, there came wafting nearer, clearer, stronger, and more sinister, the chorused whimper of Idrin Pacha's famous pack of bloodhounds, the hoarse shouts of soldiers, the crashing of broken thickets.

"The pass!" shouted Ahmed, turning in his saddle, and waving a hand forward.

It was a fatal movement, for his horse, yielding to the pressure of his knee, made a false step, put its foot in a hole, and came down with a crash, to lie helpless with its fetlock broken, while Ahmed picked himself up, half-stunned and dumb with consternation.

One glance at the suffering steed sufficed to show Alan that its use was ended.

"They are two miles away yet," he muttered, looking back on the track, and turning again to gaze into the narrow gorge in front of them, where the pass ran sloping downwards.

He leapt from his horse, and, leading it into the mouth of the pass, tethered it to a tree. His mind was made up on the instant. Whatever destiny held for him, Melazgherd, with its 3,000 Christian inhabitants, must be saved; and to that end Ahmed must go forward on his errand of warning, while he held the pursuit in check. And, indeed, it did not seem such an impossible task. Ten paces down the pass the mountain bulged outward, so that there was not room for more than two men to march abreast along the rough rocky way. Above, the mountain was unscalable, precipice piling on precipice, and peak on ragged peak. Below the narrow ledge which served as foot-way, the cliff fell away in a drop of four or five hundred feet.

One determined man might hold that angle for hours against any four, if he had some protecting bulwark and sufficient ammunition. Idrin Pacha was not likely to bring more than

twenty or thirty men to hunt the runaway slaves; and Alan had in his pocket a hundred good cartridges.

"Get a move on," he said laconically to Ahmed. "We must drag that horse of yours into the pass and block it."

It made him feel sick to stab the beautiful creature; but there was no help for it, and he reflected that, anyway, it was the most merciful thing to do. It took the two of them nearly a quarter of an hour before they had dragged the dead horse into the pass, piled above it such boulders as they could detach, and interlaced them with young larches and firs they feverishly uprooted from the scanty soil; and by that time the cries of the pursuers were close, their words plainly audible, and the whinny of the hounds was broken over and again by a wild, silver-tongued bay.

"Now," said Alan, as he contemplated his work, "give me your revolver and get!"

"Never!" said Ahmed. "I die with you. You are my friend."

"And your betrothed?" said Alan harshly. "And the people of Melazgherd? Would you sacrifice them, too? You've got your duty to do, kid, and I've got mine. I'll win through, you'll see, and I'll come to your wedding, too! Don't waste time jawing sentiment. I understand. You've got to go, so get!"

He fairly lifted Ahmed on to the tethered horse, snatched revolver and rifle from the Armenian's trembling hands, and gave him a long, steady look.

"Good-bye!" he said. "Ride carefully, and don't fail!"

"God be with you!" sobbed Ahmed, dashing the tears from his eyes. Then, without another word, he dug his heels into the horse and clattered headlong down the pass.

Alan turned with a grim smile to his barricade, examining his weapons.

He was only just in time, for, even as he reached it the foremost of the hounds hurled itself over the barrier.

"Crack!" went the revolver, and the hound, hit full in the throat, rolled into the abyss and vanished.

Alan was at the barricade now, and before the next hound sprang, the revolver spat again, and the hound rolled over with a bullet in its heart. Its body spoiled the spring of the great brutes following it; and again the revolver rang out, and yet again, and again, and again, as the remainder of the pack—there were seven in all—came racing up. The light was good, the range short, and Alan's hand was as steady as his eye was sure.

By the time Idrin Pacha galloped up, closely followed by Saponyadi and a dozen guards, he found four of his treasured dogs lying dead, one missing, and two writhing with broken spines.

He turned with a gesture of rage to his soldiers; but, before he could speak, Alan's revolver had cracked out again, and the pacha's horse, shot through the heart, reared and crashed over the precipice, Idrin only saving himself by rolling off in the nick of time. Saponyadi's horse fell next, blocking the path again, and rolling the Greek, pinned beneath its weight, on to one of the dying bloodhounds, which, frenzied with this added outrage, fixed its teeth in its death-agony into Saponyadi's flanks.

"Bang! Crack! Bang!" Alan's revolver went spitting out shot after shot into the horses massed above him. Half a dozen fell, rendering the narrow footway more and more impassable. Then panic seized on Idrin, and he bolted for cover of the ridge, followed by his troop, while Saponyadi screamed in vain for help, the fallen horse lying on his chest, the ravening hound tearing and gnashing at his limbs.

Alan wiped his face, reloaded, and peered through the barricade. He felt sorry for Saponyadi, and though he was not going to risk capture for the sake of releasing him, he sent a bullet through the brain of the dying bloodhound.

"With my compliments, Saponyadi!" he called out. "I'm afraid even Mr. Claw's friendship will never compensate you for this!"

A volley of bullets whistling about his head drove him to cover. Through a loophole in his barricade he watched the soldiers. Six of them were drawn up, kneeling at the top of the pass, pouring in volley after volley, while half a dozen others were creeping flat on their stomachs down towards him.

His teeth clenched, and he gripped his weapons. He had meant to avoid bloodshed of human life, anyhow, if he could. But in view of this new move it seemed impossible. Of one thing he was resolved—he would not be taken alive, and, if he had to die, he would sell his life in a way that would make the fat pacha chary of kidnapping Englishmen again.

He picked up his rifle and took a long, steady aim at Idrin.

"Halt!" he called suddenly, his voice ringing out with startling clearness. "One step forward, and Idrin Pacha dies! If you move, pacha, I fire!"

For a long moment a silence as of death reigned in the pass, a silence broken only by Saponyadi's moans.

"Give him his freedom, Idrin!" the Greek shrilled suddenly. "Give the English devil his freedom, and release me! I am being crushed to death! Give him his freedom, I tell you! I will pay all!"

Idrin Pacha stepped forward and marched direct on the barricade.

"I take Allah and the prophet to witness," he said, raising his hand, "that I give you freedom and safe conduct to Trebizond, Alan Wayward, on condition that you lay down your arms and leave this pass."

For a moment Alan hesitated. He felt tolerably certain that Ahmed had long since reached the plains, and would be now past all pursuit; but he did not feel any peculiar confidence in the sudden conversion of the pacha.

"What guarantee have I?" he asked.

"Mine!" said a deep, solemn voice, that seemed to drop from the skies.

On the instant the eyes of all—Alan's, Idrin's, the soldiers—were turned upwards, to gaze amazed at a tall gaunt figure, standing on a ledge some fifty feet above the spot where Alan was confronting Idrin across the barricade. A tall fez was on his head, a green robe enveloped him from neck to feet, and was gathered in at the waist by a crimson girdle of twisted cord.

"You have my guarantee, Englishman," said the voice again.

"The Sheikh!" murmured Idrin, backing a pace.

"The Prophet of Bagdad! The voice of Allah! The Prophet!" clamoured the soldiers, falling on their knees, and bowing their faces till their foreheads touched the rock.

Slowly the sheikh descended from the rock by a path that a goat might have trembled to take, till he stood by the side of Alan. Then, throwing a fold of his robe over the young man's shoulder, and placing his hand on his head, he faced Idrin.

"Allah and the Prophet have heard thy vow, O Idrin, of the lustful life," he said, in accents so stern and frigid that the pacha, shrinking back a pace, planted his foot in his agitation fairly over the mouth of Saponyadi. "I, Jelaluddin, Sheikh of Allah, take this youth under my protection. Get thee gone, Idrin, to thy house, and turn back the men of blood thou sendest against the innocent of Melazgherd. Behold, they are warned! Go, lest I curse thee and thine, thy flocks, and thy harvests."

He pointed a horny finger at the pacha, who, after a moment's irresolution, turned brusquely, and strode up the pass, bidding his soldiers, as he went, release and bring along Saponyadi.

The Greek was a pitiable object when, at last, he was dragged from under the horse, and borne away, moaning and cursing.

Alan gazed with wonder at the silent, departing troop, half incredulous still at this sudden change in his fortunes.

Then, as the last sound of the departing hoofs died away, he turned and gazed at his rescuer.

"I saw thy act," said the sheikh, in his grave, deep voice. "when thou didst give thy life to save the innocent of Melazgherd. Thou art a brave man and a good, albeit not yet disciplined, as thy eye doth plainly show. Behold, thou art free!"

"Free!" echoed Alan Wayward, with a long, deep breath.

"Free to go or to stay," went on the sheikh, fixing Alan's eyes with a gaze strangely dominating and thrilling. "If you will return to your people, I will send you under sure charge to your consul at Trebizond. If you will stay with me, you will learn much, and especially that mastery of men which begins in mastery of self. Which will you? Will you return to your people? Or will you stay with me for the thousand and one days, and, as the disciple of Jelaluddin, learn wisdom, even though thou must seek it through much suffering."

Through the sweet scent of the pines, through the mystic stillness of the moonlight, there came to Alan, as it were, the murmurous echo of the London streets, the odour of the old lodgings, and of Claw's musty office. He looked round, taking in the illimitable spaces, the wild savagery of the scene, its mystery, its thrill; then, turning, he faced the eyes of the gaunt old sheikh.

"I will stay with you!" he said.

"Allah be praised!" said the sheikh.

And so together they wended their way down the mountain pass, towards the saved and sleeping village of Melazgherd.

THE END.

(Two splendid stories again next Thursday of Tom Merry and Alan Wayward. Please order your copy of the "Gem" in advance.)

Another Tale of Alan Wayward

NEXT

THURSDAY.



TEMPEST HEADLAND

The Only New and Original School Tale.
By S. CLARKE HOOK.

READ THIS FIRST.

Billy Barnes, Cyril Conway, and Snowy White Adonis Venus are three great chums at Tempest Headland School. Dr. Buchanan, the headmaster, finds them very troublesome pupils; as does also Herr Ludvig, the German master. Venus is a black boy, and is taken as a fag by Graft. Cyril is one half-holiday confined to the class-room, as a punishment, under promise not to leave it. But observing from the window an open boat drifting out to sea, and recognising Lily, the doctor's daughter, as its occupant, Cyril breaks his promise and rushes out to Headland Cliff, determined to dive into the sea to the rescue.

(Now go on with the story.)

Conway—hero!

Ten paces Cyril ran back; then, setting his teeth, and with one glance at the heavens, he ran forward, and, leaping far into space, dived headlong down the height.

The wind shrieked in his ears, and his heart throbbed violently. Lights flashed in his eyes, and it seemed as though something were choking him; then a green mass appeared to be rushing at him, and the next moment he felt a heavy blow, though it caused him no pain.

Now a singing sound was in his ears, and a grey mist appeared before his eyes. This appeared to last for minutes; then the sunlight burst upon him.

He had risen to the surface unharmed, and he saw the boat quite close to him, with Lily crouching on the seat, and her hands clasped before her eyes.

"All right, Lily!" bawled Cyril, striking out for the boat. "I'm as right as rain. Sha'n't be long in reaching you."

"Swim for the shore!" cried Lily. "I shall get back directly."

"Yes, I know you will, with a little aid. We will try a little side-stroke, 'cos I can go faster that way."

Cyril gained the boat with ease, but to get her back was a more difficult matter, seeing that there were neither oars nor sails in her.

Cyril used the floorboards, but even that was a difficult task. However, the sea was calm, and within half an hour he had worked the boat to the mouth of the gully, which led to the top of the cliff.

"Oh, Cyril," exclaimed Lily, "you are the bravest boy I have ever known!"

"I wish you were my sister, Lily."

"Why?"

"Because I would kiss you."

"How dare you? The idea! And just as if you would care to do so!"

"I believe you are the prettiest girl living," declared Cyril, "and if I weren't so jolly wet—"

"Sea-water never gives me cold, Cyril," observed Lily, smiling at him.

"Oh, how dare you!"

"Oh!"

Cyril went floundering back into the water. The rocks, covered with slimy seaweed, proved his undoing, and there was a roguish smile curving the girl's lips as he scrambled to his feet.

"Now take me back to the college!" cried Lily, choking back her laughter. "The worst of it is, I ought not to have come out, but Miss Spartin was so horrid, and she went to sleep. You won't tell, Cyril?"



How do you do?

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Our tale of Tom Merry next Thursday will tell how the terrible three get their own back, good and well.

There will also be another story of

"ALAN WAYWARD,"

and I shall be glad to hear how you like these new adventure tales.

THE EDITOR.

P.S.—A postcard will do.

"Honour bright. Dead horses sha'n't drag it out of me."

"I wanted to have got back before she wakes. The poor old thing always gets sleepy in the afternoon, and then she always pretends that she has a headache. She's so strict, too, Cyril. Look here, I will run across through the garden, and you can go the other way. Promise me you won't tell. I sat in the boat, and watched the waves burst round it, and all of a sudden it went off; then I found there was no oars in it. Stupid to leave a boat like that!"

"Absolutely absurd!"

"Good-bye, Cyril!"

"Good-bye, Lily!"

"You are the dearest and bravest boy living!" cried Lily, darting away.

But Cyril was a fast runner, and Lily was a very pretty girl. Their lips met, and then they fled in opposite directions, and half an hour later Cyril, in a different suit of clothes, was seated in the class-room rattling off his task.

He had just finished it, when Dr Buchanan entered the room, and he held a cane in his hand, which was rather an unusual thing, especially on Saturday afternoon.

"Is your task finished, Conway?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"I am informed by the porter that you broke bounds. Give me your reason."

"I fear I cannot, sir."

"You admit you did break bounds?"

"Yes, sir."

"The penalty for doing so is a caning. You know it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come, Conway, you are a lad of honour! I have the feeling that you would never tell me a lie. You pledged your word; I took it. You must have some excuse. Follow me into my study."

Cyril did so, with the impression that he was in a tight corner. The caning he did not mind. He had received many, and would certainly receive many more; but that the doctor should think that he had told a deliberate lie was rather much for Cyril's feelings.

"Now, my lad," exclaimed the doctor, "had you broken bounds when no promise was given, I should merely have caned you. This is a very serious matter. I have such faith in your word of honour. Let me find that I have no reason to doubt that honour."

"I have nothing to say, sir, except that I wish Mopps had not seen me."

"Then you would have acted a lie?"

"I expect so, sir."

"You astound me, Conway! I would have trusted to your honour as readily as I would have trusted to the honour of the captain of this college. Do you refuse to tell me why you broke bounds?"

"I can't tell you, sir. I would if I could. My word is pledged not to tell."

"Well, in that case, you leave me no alternative but to cane you. It is a rule of the college, and all the scholars know it. If they choose to take the risk, they must take the penalty. It is only justice."

The doctor caught Cyril by the shoulder and raised his cane, and then Lily rushed into the room.

"Father!" she cried. "Stop! Whatever are you doing? It was all my fault. You had better cane me, and have done with it."

"Young ladies are not caned!" exclaimed the doctor, pitching his lethal weapon across the study, and sinking into his easy-chair.

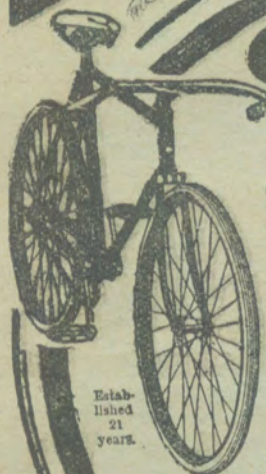
"Why not, father?" inquired Lily, raising her eyebrows, while she glanced sideways at Cyril. "I'm sure they deserve it much more than boys—at least, they do when they get as old and nasty as Miss Spartin."

"That is not the way to speak of your governess, Lily. Now, why did Conway break bounds?"

(Another instalment next Thursday.)

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The Grip Dumb-Bells are sent **post free**, securely packed, with **fully illustrated Charts, containing the Fundamental Exercises of the Sandow System**, in addition to a quantity of other valuable information, with hints on how, when, and where to exercise.

In conclusion, we would remind you that these Dumb-Bells build up organs as well as muscular strength. Their use enriches the blood, and they are an absolutely safe and speedy cure for any diseases resulting from a sedentary life. They make you as strong as Sandow, and enable you to excel at Football, Cricket, and all the games that have made Great Britain the leading nation upon earth.

The Springs being removable, they can be adjusted to suit the weakest invalid or the strongest athlete, and are a perfect and complete Physical Culture outfit.

Address all Communications to Room 78,

Sandow Hall, Burleigh Street, Strand, London, W.C.