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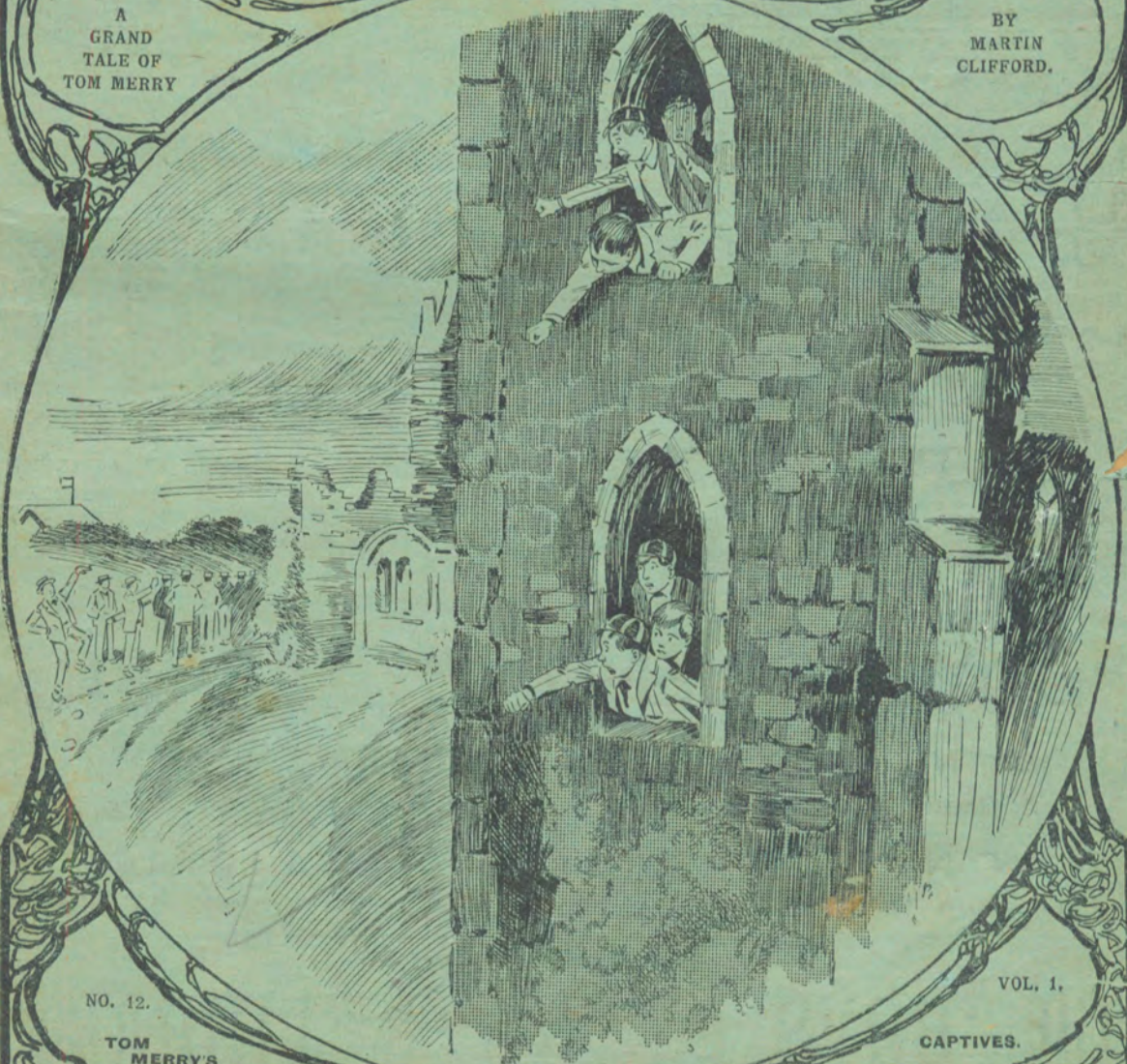
(NEW SERIES.)

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ST. JIM'S LEADS.

A
GRAND
TALE OF
TOM MERRY

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



NO. 12.

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MERRY'S

VOL. 1.

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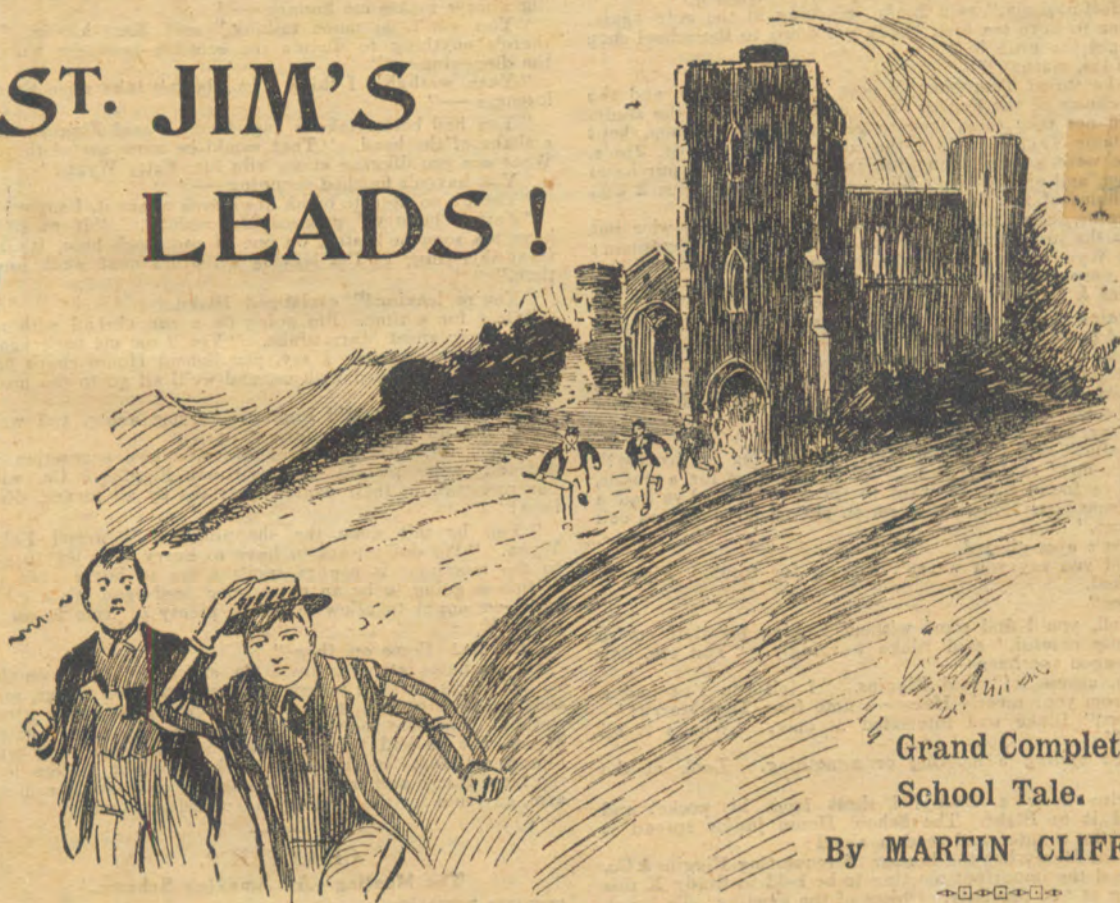


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CHAPTER I

An Invitation from Tom Merry.

TOM MERRY has the honour of requesting Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy to attend the important meeting to be held in Study X this evening at 6.30 precisely. Object of the meeting: To knock the Grammarians into a cocked hat."

Jack Blake, of Study No. 6 in the School House at St.

Jim's, read that polite note aloud to his chums, and then sniffed expressively.

"What do you think of that, kids?" he asked, looking round.

"Cheek!" said Herries tersely.

"My word!" said Digby. "After the way the Grammar School retters have been giving Tom Merry fits lately, I like his nerve!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, nodding

ANOTHER TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 12 (New Series).

his head so emphatically that his eyeglass dropped off and hung at the end of its cord. "Yaas, wathah, deah boys! Tom Mewwy certainly takes the bun for nerve. He has nevah weally tweated me with pwopah wespect. When I suggested to him that he should wotire fwom the leadaship of the School House juniars in my favah, he called me an ass. He did weally!"

"Well, he was about right there," Blake remarked. "But fancy his cheek in calling us to a meeting! If there's any meeting held with the view of knocking the Grammar cads into a cocked hat, it ought to be called by us, and held in this study."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally considah—"

"But perhaps they are going to ask us for our assistance," suggested Herries. "You see, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther have been licked to the wide lately by the Grammarians. They may want us to help them out."

Blake sniffed.

"That's likely! You know the reception they gave us when we went to their study and made them that very offer."

"They cut up wuff," said D'Arcy. "I had an eyeglass bwoken on that occasion. Mannahs twod on it with his gweat hoof, you know. I wegard Mannahs as a—"

"Still, we'll go," said Blake thoughtfully. "May as well see what the bounders have to say for themselves. Of course, Tom Merry has had good ideas sometimes. With a little help from us, he may be able to do something yet. If he has a good wheeze to propose, we may help him out, or take the matter out of his hands and manage it on our own."

"Good idea!" said Digby heartily. "We'll go!"

"Half-past six," said Blake, glancing at the note again.

"Time to have tea first. Let's get down to the school shop and get the grub in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake thrust Tom Merry's note into his pocket, and the four chums of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's left the study. It did not take them long to get to the school shop, kept by Dame Taggles within the ancient walls of St. Jim's. There were a good many juniors there, making purchases for tea, and among them Blake soon spotted Figgins & Co., the chums of the New House.

Figgins, long-limbed and muscular, the best bowler but one in the junior cricket eleven; Kerr, the canny Scotsman; Fatty Wynn, and Marmaduke Smythe, the heir of millions, they were the four juniors known all over St. Jim's as Figgins & Co.

Figgins glanced round as the chums of Study No. 6 came in and came towards them.

Blake and his companions drew a little closer together. Blake pushed back his cuffs. But the expansive grin on the face of Figgins showed that it was not a House row that he was thinking of just then.

"I say, Blake—"

"Hallo!" said Blake pleasantly. "Looking for trouble?" "Oh, no!" said Figgins. "I was looking for a duffer, and I've found him. I want to speak to you. I've had a note from your House—that rotten old casual ward you call a House."

Blake's eyes glistened.

"Did you say you weren't looking for trouble, Figgy?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, you'll find some without looking for it if you're not jolly careful," said Blake warningly. "You see, you long-legged specimen—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins. "I tell you I've had a note from your measly House—a note from Tom Merry!"

"Oho!" Blake was interested at once. "What's it all about?"

"He's calling a meeting or something. Look at the note."

Figgins drew a crumpled sheet from his pocket and handed it to Blake. The School House junior spread it out on the counter and read it aloud:

"Tom Merry has the honour of requesting Figgins & Co. to attend the important meeting to be held in Study X this evening at 6.30 precisely. Object of the meeting: To knock the Grammarians into a cocked hat."

Digby gave a whistle.

"Why, both notes are just the same!"

"Have you fellows had one, too?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, look here!"

Figgins grinned as Blake showed him his note.

"Tom Merry's holding a general meeting, it seems," he remarked. "I hope there won't be any more there. Eleven in a study is a squeeze. If there are any more at the meeting I shall slide off!"

"So you're going?" said Blake.

"Oh, yes! Of course, it's absurd to suppose that any of the School House fellows have any good wheeze for knocking the Grammarians into a cocked hat. It's not in you. But the Terrible Three may be able to make some rough suggestion that we can knock into shape, you know," explained Figgins.

"There's a rough chivvy that will get knocked out of shape if I have much more of your cheek," said Blake darkly.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Figgins as a—"

"Oh, keep your wool on!" grinned Figgins. "We're coming to the meeting. The Grammarians have given us the kybosh lately, and it's about time we pulled together to give them something back. If Tom Merry really has anything to suggest, we're ready to back him up, and House rows are off. I suppose it's the same with you?"

"Well, yes, to a certain extent; if Tom Merry doesn't have the cheek to take the lead. But we'll go, anyway, and give him a chance. Fair play's a jewel!"

"There's one thing I don't like about that note, though," Fatty Wynn remarked.

"What's that?"

"The time fixed for the meeting—6.30. That means that tea will be over. My idea is that if Tom Merry calls a general meeting, he might at least make it a feed to start with. I suppose it's mere thoughtlessness on his part."

"Ha, ha! He forgot Fatty!" chuckled Blake. "But I'll tell you what, Wynn. You can take some sausages in your pocket in case you get hungry, and—"

"I shall have a jolly good tea," said Fatty Wynn. "Talking always makes me hungry."

"You won't do much talking," said Kerr kindly. "If there's anything to discuss the sensible members will do the discussing—"

"Yaas, wathah! I think I had better take some throat lozenges—"

"You had better take a gag, Gussy," said Figgins, with a shake of the head. "That would be more useful to you. What are you digging at my ribs for, Fatty Wynn?"

"You haven't finished shopping—"

"There's no need to break one's neck about it, I suppose."

"Fatty's hungry," grinned Marmaduke. "If we don't have tea soon he'll start on one of us. Look here, it's my treat this time, as I'm leaving St. Jim's next week for a time."

"You're leaving?" exclaimed Blake.

"Only for a time. I'm going on a run abroad with my pater," explained Marmaduke. "You'll see me back again all right, never fear. I say, you School House chaps had better come and feed with us, and we'll all go to the meeting together."

"Good wheeze!" said Figgins. "Come along, and we'll try to put up with your faces."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Marmaduke's suggestion as distinctly appropwiate. Let us honah Figgins & Co. with our pwesence in their wotten quartahs by all means, deah boys!"

"You haven't done the shopping yet!" urged Fatty Wynn. "We don't want to have to hurry over tea to get to the meeting. It always spoils a tea to hurry over it. If this is going to be an extra good feed—and it's a good idea—we ought to allow ourselves plenty of time to do it justice."

"Ha, ha! Come on, then!"

Five minutes later Figgins & Co. and Study No. 6, on the best of terms, left the tuckshop laden with good things, and that tea in Figgins's study in the New House was a great success. The time for the meeting came too soon for Fatty Wynn, but he had "done himself" pretty well, and was almost satisfied. In the April dusk the eight juniors left the New House and marched across the quadrangle arm-in-arm, en route for the meeting in Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 2.

The Meeting—An Amazing Scheme.

TOM MERRY glanced at his watch.

"Half-past six," he exclaimed. "Time they were here."

Manners closed his "Magnet," and Lowther took his feet from the mantelpiece and rose from the armchair. The chums of the Shell were ready for the meeting.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were looking very earnest. There was no doubt that things were coming to a crisis in the history of St. Jim's. True, the Head and the masters seemed to be unaware of it. The seniors, too, went on their way as if no crisis were at hand. But to

the juniors it was perfectly clear that, unless something was done, the old school was in a very bad way.

The rivalry between St. Jim's and the neighbouring school was keen. And of late it could not be denied that the Grammar School boys had gone ahead. St. Jim's prided itself on taking the lead. But of late, as Lowther remarked, it had taken nothing but lickings.

Something had to be done, and the juniors of St. Jim's had to do it. And Tom Merry had a plan. It was a plan which the Terrible Three could not carry out without assistance; hence the notes calling the rival parties of St. Jim's to a friendly meeting.

"Time they were here," Tom Merry repeated.

"The clock hasn't gone yet," said Manners.

"My watch says—"

"There it goes!"

The half hour chimed out from the school tower. Before the sound had died away footsteps were heard in the passage. Lowther glanced out of the door.

"Here they come!"

"Which?"

"Oh, the lot!"

Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. presented themselves at the door in a body.

"Come in!" said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "We had some notes from you. We've come!"

"Good!"

"Oh, yes, we've come!" said Figgins. "If there's anything we can do to give the School House a leg-up we're willing to do it."

"Rats!" said Lowther.

"Pax!" said Tom Merry. "Go easy with the chipping, all of you. This is a most important meeting, and is held with the object of—"

"We had all that in the note," Blake remarked.

"With the object of—"

"It's no good repeating yourself, Tom Merry. Time's valuable!"

"With the object of knocking the Grammarians into a cocked hat."

"Well, it would be a bit of a change," Kerr remarked.

"Have you any suggestion to make, you kids?"

"We shall be very pleased to consider any suggestion, Tom Mewby."

"Oh, come in and shut the door! We don't want a crowd round. Sorry I can't offer you all seats, you know, but some of you can sit on the table, and then there's the coal-locker and the window-sill."

"Oh, I'll lean up against the cupboard!" said Fatty Wynn carelessly.

"You needn't," said Lowther. "There's nothing there; it's as bare as Mother Hubbard's."

Fatty Wynn turned rather red.

"I wasn't thinking—"

"Ha, ha! Make yourselves at home, kids—"

"Certainly," said Blake, seating himself in the arm-chair. "Now, if you've got anything to propose, Tom Merry, we're willing to consider it."

"That's not the question. I'm chairman of this meeting. If all of you will kindly shut up, I'll explain—"

"Will it take you long?" asked Digby.

"About five minutes."

"Well, we can give you five minutes," said Figgins generously. "We don't want to be mean. Silence while Tom Merry talks for five minutes!"

"Silence, kids! Tom Merry is going to talk for five minutes," said Blake, taking out his watch, "and I'm going to time him!"

"Ha, ha! Go ahead, Merry!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gentlemen of the Shell and the Fourth Form, I have called you together on an important occasion—"

"I should leave all that out, Merry, if I were you," said Blake, in a tone of friendly counsel. "It takes up time, and there's nearly a minute gone already."

"Oh, shut up, old chap!"

"Order!" shouted Lowther, thumping on the table with a dictionary. "Order! Silence for the giddy chair!"

"Gentlemen of the School House and the New House—"

"Excuse me," said Figgins. "The New House takes precedence. You should say, the New House and the School House—"

"Order!"

"Shut up!"

"I'm only pointing out—"

"Order!"

"Gentlemen, you are all aware that we have suffered some reverses lately at the hands of the Grammar cads—"

"Speak for yourself," said Blake. "You have, Tom Merry, but we haven't. We've kept our end up pretty well."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"So have we," said Figgins. "The reverses have all fallen on this rotten School House. You can't say that—"

"Order!"

"Well," said Tom Merry, "when the Grammarians flew a kite over the school, with 'Down with St. Jim's!' scrawled on it, I fancy that was one in the eye for the lot of us."

"Well, there's something in that."

"Anyway, we're all agreed that the Grammar School has got to be put in its place, and the Grammarians made to sing small."

"Hear, hear!"

"I have a plan for accomplishing that important—that important—important—" Tom Merry paused for a moment.

"Desideratum," suggested Blake.

"Oh, any old thing will do!" said Figgins. "Get on with the washing."

"I have a plan. You know, the Grammarians have an idea that they can play cricket."

"Ha, ha! So they have!"

"It's a curious delusion, and we're going to knock it out of them when we meet them in the Junior match later on," said Tom Merry. "But that's not the point now."

"Then don't drag it in," said Blake. "You've only got another two minutes."

"Look here, Blake—"

"Can't. I'm looking at my watch."

"What I say is, that I've got a plan for kyboshing the Grammar cads in first-class style," said Tom Merry. "It's owing to my getting information about their cricket fixtures. You see, I have been scouting—"

"Only another minute."

"Order!"

"To-morrow afternoon, Wednesday—which, you know, is a half-holiday at the Grammar School as well as with us—Frank Monk and the Grammar eleven go over to Carbrooke to play the town team there."

"Blessed if I see what that's got to do with us!" said Figgins.

"Do you ever see anything, Figgins, till it's pointed out to you?" said Digby.

"Order!"

"I don't see it, either," said Blake. "Half a minute more, Tom Merry."

"The Grammarians have arranged that fixture entirely by post. You know that Carbrooke is a good distance, and it is the first time the Grammarians have played them. I know that the Grammar cads are unknown there, and haven't met any of the Carbrooke lot—"

"He's wandering in his mind, poor chap!" said Kerr, tapping his forehead significantly. "He couldn't have any other reason for investigating the natural history of the Grammarians like this."

"Order!"

"When I learned this, an idea came into my head," said Tom Merry. "So I made it a point to learn all I could on the matter. The Grammarians haven't met any of the Carbrooke lot. They will have to introduce themselves when they get to Carbrooke to-morrow for the match. They are leaving the Grammar School at two sharp, in their brake."

"Oh, are you thinking of an ambush on the road?"

"Something like that—only more—"

"Time's up!" said Blake. "You've had your five minutes, Tom Merry."

"Order!"

"Order yourself! Tom Merry has had his five minutes, and there's nothing more to be said. What I say is—"

"I tell you, I've got a ripping plan—"

"You've—"

"For knocking the Grammar cads—"

"Rats—"

"Put it to the vote!" exclaimed Manners. "Hands up for Tom Merry to explain his plan."

The juniors were curious to know what that important plan was. Nearly every right hand went up, and Blake's slowly followed the rest.

"Well, go on," he said. "We'll give you a chance. But if it isn't a good wheeze, kids, we'll bump him on the floor and wreck the study, as a punishment for wasting our time."

"Good idea!" said Figgins, with alacrity. "That's understood, then. Go on, Tom Merry."

"Listen, then, you duffers! We know when the Grammarians are going in their brake, and the road they will take. There can't be more than twelve or thirteen in the

brake, and we could take two or three dozen chaps to ambush them if we liked—"

"That's so!"

"We can collar them, and capture the brake. You know the old tower in the ruins in the wood. Once a fellow was shoved in there and locked up, he couldn't get out till we chose to let him go."

"Bai Jove, that's wight!"

"It would be a screaming joke on the Grammar cads—"

"But what about the Carbrooke lot?" said Figgins.

"We've got nothing up against them, and it would be a shame to disappoint them of their game."

"I'm not thinking of disappointing them."

"Eh? You say we can shut the Grammar cads up in the old tower—"

"Yes, and keep them there."

"Then who will play the Carbrooke eleven?"

"We shall."

"What?"

Eight voices uttered the exclamation in chorus.

"We shall," said Tom Merry calmly. "My idea is to take the Grammar School caps, and go on to Carbrooke in their place, and play the game for them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be about the completest 'do' we have ever worked off on the Grammarians."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They've never got up anything like that against us. What do you think of the wheeze?"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Blake.

Figgins rushed at Tom Merry, hugged him round the neck, and waltzed him round the study. There was a general yelling as the impromptu waltzers trampled on feet and toes.

"Ripping!" roared Figgins. "Splendid! I wonder I didn't think of it myself! Ripping! Great!"

"Leggo, you ass!"

Figgins plumped Tom Merry into Blake's lap, and then sat himself upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's knees.

"Great," he gasped—"simply great!"

"Pway get off, Figgins! You are 'wumplin' my twousahs—"

"Great!" repeated Figgins. "Gentlemen, I hereby announce third and adopt Tom Merry's resolution, and Figginit passed unanimously."

"One ear, hear!"

Fatt
th

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry Takes the Lead.

TOM MERRY smiled with satisfaction. The rival parties in the school were as a rule inclined to carp and criticise, and it was agreeable to be backed up heartily by Study No. 6 and Figgins & Co. together.

"You all like the idea?"

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard it as weally gweat."

"Ripping!" said Blake.

"First chop!" said Kerr.

"Grand!" said Marmaduke.

"It's very good," said Fatty Wynn, "and it would be a good idea to have a big feed afterwards, to celebrate the kyboshing of the Grammarians. Don't you think so?"

"Good!" said Lowther heartily. "You hear that, chaps? Fatty Wynn wants to stand a feed to the whole team to celebrate the occasion—"

"I didn't mean that exactly, Lowther."

"There's one wathah important question not settled, though," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, with an air of reflection.

"What is that, Gussy?"

"The ewicket captain has not been selected—"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly.

"I'm captain of the School House Junior Cricket Club."

"And I'm vice-captain," said Blake.

"Yaas, I know, but—"

"Gussy's quite right," said Figgins. "I see what he means. On an important occasion like this, he thinks I ought to be captain—"

"Not at all, Figgins!"

"Then what are you getting at, you ass?"

"I was thinkin' that on a weally important occasion like the pwsent both you and Tom Mewwy ought to be willin' to stand down in favah of a weally capable leadah—"

"And who's that?" demanded Blake. "Are you referring to me?"

"Certainly not. I am weferrin' to myself. I am the last fellow in the world to put myself forward in any way, but on an important occasion like this I feel bound to speak out for the good of the coll. You see—"

"Yes, we see an unspeakable ass!" said Figgins. "Ring off, Gussy, for goodness' sake!"

"I wufuse to wing off—"

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Blake. "Can't you see you make us all tired?"

"I certainly shall not dwy up—"

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" said Manners. "If you don't cheese it, Gussy, you'll go out of this study on your neck!"

"If you wefuse to adopt my suggestion—"

"Hands up for Gussy as cricket captain," grinned Tom Merry.

Not a single hand went up. D'Arcy adjusted his monocle and looked round the study in surprise.

"Bai Jove! You chaps certainly don't know how to take a good offah," he said. "But I yield gwatefully to the opinion of the majowity."

"About the question of captain," said Figgins. "The poet certainly ought to come to me—"

"Undoubtedly," said Kerr.

"You see, you want a New House fellow to lead on an occasion like this."

"Now, look here," said Lowther. "Tom Merry was captain of St. Jim's Juniors during the football season, and he's going to be captain during the cricket season."

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

"That's all very well—"

"If you win the House match, when it comes off, we'll change over," said Tom Merry. "That's only fair, Figgins."

Figgins nodded.

"Good! I'm agreeable to that. Now about the details of the plan."

"We take about twenty fellows along, and waylay the Grammar School brake in the lane," said Tom Merry.

"We capture the Grammar cads—"

"There will be a fight."

"That doesn't matter. We capture them, and drive them off to the old tower, and shut them up there. You know, nobody ever goes to the ruins; they won't be able to get help or to get out. We take our cricketing things along with us, and borrow the Grammar School caps. We drive over to Carbrooke in the brake and play the Townies, and beat them—"

"Oh, of course. That goes without saying."

"That's all wight, Figgins. I shall be playin', you know."

"We beat them," said Tom Merry. "After the match, on our way home, we set the Grammarians loose, and give them their brake back. And if that doesn't make them sing small, you can use my head for a football!"

"It's simply ripping, if it works out all right," said Figgins; "but there are difficulties, you know. You are sure the Grammarians haven't met the Carbrooke Townies?"

"Quite sure on that point."

"Suppose some Grammarians go over to see the match?"

"Well, it's not an important match, and it's a jolly long way," said Tom Merry. "If any go, I expect they'll go in the brake, and we shall have them with the team."

"That's so. Is there likely to be a master with them?"

"Not at all. A senior will very likely go with the team—"

"Well, we can collar him with the juniors."

"Exactly."

"Yaas, wathah. If he's a bit too big for you chaps, you can leave me to deal with him, deah boys."

"It's a ripping wheeze!" said Figgins again. "Now, about the team. I suppose we shall make up the eleven ourselves?"

"Yes. There are eleven of us, and we are about the best cricketers in both houses," said Tom Merry.

"Excuse me. Some of the New House fellows can knock spots off—"

"Off anything but a wicket, I expect," said Blake.

"Anyway, we're the eleven," said Tom Merry. "We'll take Skimpole along as our umpire. Walsh and French and Jimson can come along, too."

"Good! We had better take a big crowd to waylay the brake. We can't afford to leave anything to chance."

"There will be ourselves. We can take a dozen more fellows, if you like—Gore, and Jones, and Pratt, and White, and some more. Mind, we shall have to play the game carefully. I shall be Frank Monk, the Grammarian captain, Figgins will be Lane, and Blake Carboy. We can settle

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about the others when we see the Grammar School team. We shall have to keep it up."

"Ha, ha! Frank Monk and his lot will want to kick themselves over this, I fancy."

"What about the diwivah of the bwake, deah boys?"

"He will have to be shut up with the Grammar kids, of course!"

"Good! I can dwive ovah to Carbrooke in first-wate style—"

"Rats! Catch me trusting my neck to your driving," said Figgins. "I shall drive, of course!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Come, no rot!" said Blake. "I'm a jolly good driver."

"I drove Cousin Ethel from Wayland in a trap," said Figgins. "After that, I should think I could be trusted to drive a pack of youngsters."

"Oh, never mind who drives!" said Tom Merry. "We haven't captured the brake yet. We can have another jaw over this, and settle details. I think—"

"There's one thing you oughtn't to forget," said Fatty Wynn thoughtfully.

"What's that, Fatty?"

"The Grammar cads will be shut up in the old tower a jolly long time—"

"A good six hours," said Figgins.

"We can't let them starve," said Fatty Wynn, who had a ready sympathy for anybody who was hungry. "We must take a lot of sandwiches for them."

"Good for you, Fatty. I never thought of that."

"It's a rather important point, Merry. I myself get awfully hungry in this April weather."

"I don't think the weather makes much difference to you, Fatty. Still, that's very thoughtful of you. We shall have to stand the Grammarians a feed. Now, I think that's about all. We'd better get our things ready for to-morrow, and decide what fellows we are going to take along for the ambush."

"Equal number of New House and School House fellows?" said Kerr.

"Oh, yes; if you like."

And the meeting in Tom Merry's study broke up.

CHAPTER 4.

The Ambush.

"W HOA, there!"

It was a sunny Wednesday afternoon, nearly the end of April. A brake drove up to the great red-brick buildings of Rylcombe Grammar School, and stopped. Immediately a crowd of Grammar School juniors poured out.

Frank Monk, an athletic lad of about fifteen, captain of the Grammar School team, jumped into the brake, and pitched his bag there.

"Come on, kids! No time to waste. It's a long journey."

"Right-ho!" said Carboy, following him into the brake.

"What glorious weather! It's more like the middle of May. Good for the match."

"Rather!" said Lane, as he climbed in. "I hear the Carbrooke Townies are in fine form, but I think we shall lick them."

"Not much doubt on that point," said Frank Monk cheerfully. "And when we've got our hands in, we'll give St. Jim's the licking they've been asking for for a long time."

"Rather!"

The Grammarian cricketers crowded into the brake. There was room for four beside the team. Frank Monk looked at the open door anxiously.

"I say, where's Hake? Isn't he coming?"

"The Head said he was," said Carboy.

A Grammar School senior came out of the house. He was not a pleasant-looking fellow. Hake was the bully of the Grammar School, and the juniors did not anticipate any pleasure from his company in the brake. But Hake was a monitor, and the Head of the Grammar School considered it advisable to send a senior with the young cricketers, who were going on a very long drive for the out-match. Hake looked up at the lads in the brake.

"I say, there's no time to lose, Hake," said Frank Monk.

"You can start without me," said Hake. "I've got to go down to Rylcombe first."

"But—"

"Oh, that's all right! I shall come over on my bike. I don't want to crawl four miles in a slow old brake."

"Just as you like," said Frank Monk cheerfully. "There's none too much room here. We'll see you at Carbrooke later, then. So-long, you kids!"

"Good-bye, and good luck!" shouted the Grammarians.

And the brake rolled away. A cheer followed it as it

turned out of the gates, and took the road for the distant scene of the cricket-match.

The afternoon was fine, sunny, and mild. A drive in a brake was pleasant enough, and the anticipation of a keen match was pleasant, too. And pleasant, also, was the reflection that the Grammar School of late days had more than kept its end up in the constant warfare with the neighbouring school. That was the topic of conversation in the brake as the vehicle rolled under the shady trees of Rylcombe Lane.

"The Saints have been singing small lately, and no mistake," Monk remarked. "We haven't heard anything from them since the kite affair."

Carboy chuckled.

"That was a ripping wheeze!" he exclaimed. "'Down with St. Jim's!' flaunted in their faces, and they couldn't do anything."

"Ha, ha, ha! I fancy Tom Merry & Co. will have to shut up business pretty soon. We have licked them all along the line!"

"We have, by Jove!"

"Tom Merry's motto was 'St. Jim's leads!'" chuckled Monk. "He will have to change it now to 'St. Jim's gets licked!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll give them a final licking on the cricket-field," Monk remarked. "When we've done that, I don't see how even Tom Merry can maintain that we're not top school. I say, what is that ass stopping for?"

"I say, driver, what are you stopping for?"

The driver of the brake had pulled in his horses.

The Grammarians all looked to see the reason, and it was plain enough to be seen. A junior of St. Jim's—at once recognised by his cap—had run across the road, trailing a long, thick rope behind him. The rope had been instantly tied to a tree, and was about breast-high across the road. The brake could do nothing but stop.

Frank Monk stared at the taut rope in wrath and amazement.

"My hat! Of all the cheek!"

"That was a St. Jim's kid!" said Lane. "I think it was Herries."

"Yes; I saw him," said Carboy. "It's a little joke on us. Get down and cut the rope, somebody."

One of the Grammarians jumped down into the road. It would not have taken him long to saw through the rope with his pocket-knife, but he was not given time.

There was a rush from both sides of the lane, and in a moment the brake was surrounded by a crowd of youngsters in St. Jim's caps.

Twenty-five juniors at least were there, led by Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins. Frank Monk looked a little uneasy.

"I say, what's the little game?" he exclaimed.

"Cricket," said Tom Merry.

"What are you up to, ass? You can't stop us, now—"

"Looks to me as if we've done it."

"We've got to get to Carbrooke—"

"Sorry; but it can't be did."

"What do you mean? We've got a cricket-match on there."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "I don't care whether you've got a cricket-match, or a matrimonial-match, or a lucifer-match—you're not going on!"

"That's it," said Figgins. "We love you too much to part with you thus, Monkey."

"You asses!"

"Hold the horses, some of you!" rapped out Tom Merry. Herries, Digby, and Manners rushed to the horses' heads. The Grammarians set up an indignant whoop.

"Let those horses alone!"

"Get out of the way!"

"Give them the whip, driver!"

"Lay it about them!"

"If he does, we'll have him down in a jiffy, and duck him in the pond yonder!" said Tom Merry. "Better remain neutral, driver."

The driver of the brake grinned.

"I ain't doing nothing with my whip," he remarked. "It ain't no blessed business of mine. No offence, Master Monk."

"Oh, hang it!" said Monk. "We can fight our own battles, I suppose. If you St. Jim's wasters don't shift and let us pass, we'll jolly soon shift you!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Come and shift us, then."

"Do you think we can't?"

"I'm jolly sure you can't!"

Frank Monk made a move to jump down. Lane caught him by the arm.

"Don't be an ass, Frank! There are more than two to one of the rotters! We've got no earthly in a scrap!"

Frank Monk hesitated.

"But we can't let them stop us."

"Let's see what their little game is first, anyway."

Monk nodded.

"Oh, all right! Look here, Tom Merry, this is no time for rows. We've got a match on at Carbrooke, and stumps are pitched at three o'clock. There won't be any too much time for playing, anyway. We want to get on."

"Sorry it can't be allowed."

"Do you mean to muck up the match?" demanded Frank Monk, in amazement. "Do you call that playing the game?"

"We shall call it playing the game when we get to Carbrooke," grinned Tom Merry. "Now, all you fellows get down into the road, please!"

"Sha'n't!" howled the Grammarian cricketers.

"Then we shall have to come and fetch you."

"You'd better not try!"

"Now, don't be silly asses!" exclaimed Figgins. "We've brought enough fellows along to eat you. Jump down, as you're told!"

Frank Monk gave a helpless glance up and down the road. Figgins's words were quite true. The odds on the side of St. Jim's were simply overwhelming. The Grammarians had simply no chance in a fight. And the Saints, under the command of the astute Tom Merry, had selected the loneliest part of the road for their ambush. There was no chance of help coming.

"Come on, now," said Tom Merry persuasively. "Jump out."

"We don't want to hurt you," said Blake sweetly. "But you must really get out, like good little boys."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come, now—"

"Sha'n't!" roared Monk. "If you want us out of this brake you'll have to get us out!"

"We'll jolly soon do that!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Come on! Buck up, St. Jim's!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Figgins. "Down with the Grammar eads!"

Tom Merry rushed to the attack. The Saints followed him quickly, and in a moment the halted brake was the scene of a wild and whirling conflict.

CHAPTER 5.

A Big Capture.

"BUCK up, Grammar School!" shouted Frank Monk.

"Sock it to them!"

The Grammar School did buck up. They stood shoulder to shoulder in the brake, hitting out right and left as the St. Jim's juniors swarmed to the attack.

The Grammarians had the advantage of position, and it was not easy to get at them. But the Saints swarmed over the back, and clambered on the wheels and the step, and they seemed innumerable.

Tom Merry was down on his back in the road, and jumped up again covered with dust, and clambered into the brake.

Frank Monk clutched at him, and he clutched at Frank Monk, and, locked in a deadly embrace, they bumped into the road.

Monk was the first of the Grammarians to go. But Lane, in the grip of Figgins and Kerr, soon followed, and then Carboy was grasped and dragged down by Blake and Digby.

Marmaduke fetched out the next victim "on his own," and four Grammarian prisoners writhed in the grip of the Saints in the dusty road.

Tom Merry had not come unprovided with the necessary materials for securing his prisoners. There was a coil of rope, and it was quickly cut into suitable length for binding the wrists of the Grammarians.

Once the prisoners were secured their captors rushed into the fray again. One by one the Grammar School juniors were dragged from the brake.

The driver sat in his seat grinning hugely. He had not the slightest disposition to interfere with the juniors from St. Jim's. If he had done so, he would soon have been tied up with the Grammarians, and he knew it.

Prisoner after prisoner was added to the dusty, exasperated group in the country road, and the number of the defenders of the brake grew steadily less.

At last, amid a wild hurrah from the Saints, the last struggling Grammarian was hurled from the brake by the muscular arms of Figgins.

The juniors fastened him up with the rest, and the victory was complete.

"Hurrah!"

The woods rang with the victorious shout of the St. Jim's juniors.

"Hurrah!"

"You rotters!" howled Monk. "We'll make you sit up for this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beasts!"

"Hear us smile!" cackled Figgins. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters! We've got to play Carbrooke!"

"That's all right, kid," said Tom Merry comfortingly;

"Carbrooke won't be deprived of their game."

Monk brightened up.

"You're going to let us go?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Not much."

"What do you mean, then?"

"Oh, we're going to give Carbrooke a game!"

"You? What? How?"

"We're going to play Carbrooke."

"You're going to—play Carbrooke?"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah a wippin' ideah, ien't it, deah boy?"

"But you're off your rocker!"

"I am not off my wockah!"

"Tom Merry, what are you getting at? Carbrooke won't play you? They're expecting a team from the Grammar School, and—"

"And they've never met you before."

"I know that; but—"

"And they don't know you by sight."

"What difference does that make?"

"Only that we're going in your place—as a team from the Grammar School."

"What!" roared the Grammarians.

"Don't you think it's a good idea?" asked Tom Merry sweetly.

And the Saints roared with laughter.

Frank Monk was speechless. The audacity of the plan fairly took his breath away. The Grammarians were crimson with rage.

"The cheek!" gasped Carboy.

"The nerve!" muttered Lane.

"You can't do it!" broke out Monk at last—"you can't!"

"Ha, ha! You will see!"

"I tell you it can't be done. Even if the Carbrooke fellows don't smell a rat—"

"They won't! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Hake is coming over on his bicycle!" exclaimed Frank Monk excitedly. "He's the monitor sent with us, only he's coming later. He'll show you up!"

"Oho! That's worth knowing!" grinned Figgins. "We'll know how to deal with Hake when he comes, won't we, kids?"

"We'll keep one eye open for Hake," laughed Tom Merry.

"Meanwhile, I think we'll get out of the public road."

"Bundle these kids into the brake," said Digby. "We shall have to walk. There are too many of us to get in."

"Good! Chuck 'em in!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"Sorry, but there's no time for talk," said the St. Jim's captain blandly. "You see, we've got to buck up to get to Carbrooke in time. Stumps are pitched at three o'clock."

"You—you—"

"Sling 'em in!"

"Shove 'em in there, and buck up!"

"Look here, Tom Merry—"

"No time! Hurry up, there!"

The bound and helpless Grammarians were bundled into the brake. Half a dozen Saints got in to keep them in order. Tom Merry and Figgins sat one on either side of the driver.

"Now, then, for the old tower!" exclaimed Blake.

Tom Merry gave the driver his directions. The man hesitated for a moment.

"Oh, I'll drive, if you like!" said Tom calmly. "Lend a hand here! Tie up this chap with the rest!"

"Oh, I'll do as you tell me, sir!" said the driver hastily.

"Buck up, then!"

The driver set the horses in motion. The brake turned off the road at the first opportunity, and under the guidance of Tom Merry, approached the wood, in the shady depths of which the ruined chapel lay.

The Grammarians were absolutely furious. But they were helpless. There was nothing to be done but to submit to destiny. They had japed the juniors of the rival school often enough. Now their own turn had come, and they had to take it.

The St. Jim's juniors were in high spirits. They had succeeded so far, and their success was a good augury for the remaining and more difficult part of the scheme.

The whole crowd of them followed the brake, and replied to the threats of the Grammarians with endless chaff.

The vehicle stopped at last at the commencement of the footpath leading through the wood to the ruined chapel. There the Grammarians were taken out of the brake.



There was a terrific "biff" as the running batsmen met in full career, and then they measured their length upon the sward.

"March them along," said Tom Merry. "Mind none of them slips away. Bring the driver, too."

"Here, I say—"

"No talk. You've got to come!"

"But—"

"Collar him! We're going to give you five bob, my man; but you've got to be shut up with the rest. We can't risk the secret getting out."

"Oh, that's all right, young gentlemen! I don't mind, if you put it that way," grinned the driver. "It's five bob each earned."

"Glad you're satisfied. Some of you stay with the brake. It has got to carry us over to Carbrooke yet."

"Here, you'll be responsible for them horses, young gentlemen—"

"We'll be responsible. Don't be afraid!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now march those kids along!"

The furious Grammarians were marched along.

Of the ruins in the wood little remained intact save the old tower. Of that edifice the thick stone walls still defied the ravages of time. The windows were long gone, and the openings stared like sightless eyes from the clinging ivy. The door was of thick, strong oak barred with rusty iron. Blake ran forward and shoved open the stiff, creaking door.

"Here you are! All's ready! Have you got those sandwiches, Fatty Wynn?"

The Falstaff of St. Jim's gave him a reproachful look.

"Do you think I'm likely to forget a thing like that, Blake?"

Jack Blake laughed.

"Well, no, Fatty, I don't! To do you justice, I don't think you're ever likely to forget anything in the grub line."

"Well, where are they?" said Manners. "Hand them over, Fatty. They're for the Grammarians. Frank Monk can take charge of them."

Fatty Wynn turned a number of paper packages out of a bag he carried slung by a strap over his shoulder.

afternoon

to me that if w

Blake looked at them suspiciously.

"Where's the rest?"

Fatty Wynn turned rather red.

"What are you driving at, Blake?"

"Where's the rest?"

"The rest?"

"Yes. Don't you understand plain English!" said Blake pleasantly. "R E S T, rest. Where's the rest of the sandwiches?"

"Aren't they all there?"

"No, they're not all here. There are about two-thirds of them here."

Fatty Wynn's blushes deepened.

"Why, the greedy image!" exclaimed Herries. "He's eaten them."

"Eaten the sandwiches?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! The greedy young wottah has been scoffin' the sandwiches intended for the Gwammah wottahs, deah boys."

"I haven't," said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I just took a snack while we were waiting for the brake in the lane."

"A snack!" exclaimed Reilly. "A jolly big snack, I should say!"

"Nothing of the sort!"

"Well, where are the rest of the sandwiches?" said Blake.

"They're all there, except for the snack I took."

"You horrid young cannibal! You've wolfed a third part of them. Figgins, I call upon you to make Fatty Wynn produce the sandwiches."

"Eh?" said Figgins, who was busy urging the Grammarians to enter the old tower. "What's that, Blake?"

"Fatty Wynn won't give up the sandwiches."

"Won't he?" said Figgins, hurrying to the spot. "Now then, Fatty, what's the little game? Where are the sandwiches?"

"Here!" said Fatty, laying his hand upon the third button

KIMPOLE'S NEW IDEA.

A long tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

THE SWOOP OF THE HAWK.

A Story of
Alan Wayward.

NEXT
THURSDAY: **SK**

of his waistcoat. "It was only just a snack I took while we were waiting in the lane. Blake exaggerates!"

"He's been scoffin' the beastly grub, Figgins!"

"It wasn't beastly," said Fatty Wynn, with a reminiscent smack of the lips; "it was jolly good! Perhaps I took one or two more than I intended!"

"You—you young villain!" said Figgins. "You've been eating the grub intended for the prisoners of war. Now, if they die a horrid death by famine, or eat each other like cannibals, it will be all your fault!"

"Oh, don't rot, Figgins! There's enough there for them, and they won't be many hours in the old tower."

"There's only one thing to be done," said Figgins, with a solemn shake of the head. "Fatty Wynn has scoffed the grub, so we'll leave Fatty with them, and they can start on him if they get famished. They'll get the sandwiches that way."

"Good!" exclaimed Kerr heartily. "Shove Fatty in along with the Grammar cads!"

"Here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in alarm, as some of the grinning juniors hustled him towards the tower. "Don't be such silly asses! I say, Figgins, I'm sorry I wolfed the sandwiches, but I got so jolly hungry waiting in the lane. You see, I was so excited at breakfast time that I ate hardly anything—only some bacon and eggs, and half a pound of sausages, and a pie and a cake and some nuts and apples and a few jam-tarts!"

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry sympathetically. "He must have been as hollow as a drum after that little lot!"

"I always get so hungry at the end of April," said Fatty out. "You see—"

"Wh, stick him into the tower!" said Figgins. "In with you me!"

"But you want me to play this afternoon!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, who did not know whether his leader was in earnest or not.

"We'll play Reilly instead; he's a jolly good cricketer!"

"Now, look here, Figgins—"

"The Grammar cads are all in," said Manners, coming up. "They don't seem to take it very calmly, except the driver. How are you going to fasten the door?"

"Pegs in the ground," said Tom Merry. "Give these sandwiches to Frank Monk. Upon the whole, we'll let Fatty Wynn off. He must have been so famished after that mean breakfast that it's a mercy he had the sandwiches with him. He might have taken a bite out of Figgins, if he could have found any flesh on his bones!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You let my bones alone!" exclaimed Figgins, who certainly was slim. "It's time we were off!"

"Here's your grub, Monk! We're not going to starve you, you see."

"You can't leave us tied up like this all the afternoon!" growled Frank.

Tom Merry rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"N-no. Perhaps we had better leave Fatty Wynn in the tower, after all, to untie the rotters after we have fastened up the door. Perhaps D'Arcy would be better, though; we shouldn't miss him!"

"I should certainly wefuse to do anythin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy!"

"Now, look here, Gussy—"

"I wefuse! I weward the mere suggestion as impertinent! What would become of the ewicket, I wondah, if I were not on the spot?"

"Well, it wouldn't make any difference to the number of runs, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I wish you would not cackle like that! It is unmusical, and it encourages Tom Mewwy in his impertinent wemarks!"

"We'll set one of the rotters loose, and he can untie the rest," Tom Merry decided. "Now then, which is the smallest of you lot of shrimps?"

"I'll give you shrimps!"

"Rats! Pick out the smallest specimen!"

"Afraid to let me loose?" suggested Frank Monk.

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's it, Monkey! Can't you see us all trembling! We're afraid you would wade in and knock our twenty-five heads off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The youngest Grammarian was untied, and then the heavy door was slammed. The freed Grammarian began to loosen his comrades in feverish haste, in the hope of getting at the door before the Saints could fasten it. But there was no chance of that. The door opened outwards, and a couple of strong wooden pegs driven into the ground secured it against anything but a battering-ram from within.

The Grammarians were hammering upon the inside of the door a couple of minutes later. Tom Merry laughed gaily.

"They won't get out of there in a hurry," he remarked.

"And as nobody by any chance ever passes this way, they

can't be let loose. Nobody ever comes here, except perhaps a poacher in the night-time, and they will be let out before dusk."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake. "There's Monk!"

From one of the little window-openings, high up in the ancient walls of the tower, the head of the Grammarian leader was projected.

Tom Merry waved his hand to him.

"Hallo, Monkey! Feel all right up there?"

"Let us out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'll make you squirm for this some time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words were evidently useless. Frank Monk shook his fist in helpless wrath. The windows were too high up, and the stone walls too smooth, for the Grammarians to even think of escaping from their prison that way.

They were helpless, and had no choice but to remain where they were until the Saints chose to come back and release them.

"Time we were off!" said Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry looked at his watch.

"Good! We've time, if the brake hurries, and it will!"

You collected the Grammar School cricket caps, Manners?"

"Yes, here they are."

"Then let's get to the brake."

The St. Jim's juniors turned to go. The windows of the old tower were crammed with Grammarian heads and furiously-shaking fists.

The Saints waved their hands as they marched off, laughing gleefully.

"Good-bye," called out Tom Merry, "or, rather, au revoir!"

"Say au revoir, but not good-bye!" trilled Figgins, waving his hand to the infuriated Grammarians.

Then the St. Jim's juniors passed on and disappeared from the sight of the trapped enemy. The Grammarians were safely disposed of for the afternoon. The Saints hurried back to the spot where the brake had been left, and Tom Merry and his team, with as many more juniors as could be crammed into the vehicle, rolled off, on the road to Carbrooke.

The rest of the youngsters, not to be done out of the fun, followed on foot. They would not arrive in time for the start, but they would see the finish of the game, and they would be on hand in case of trouble. And, as they all knew, it was quite possible that there would be trouble.

CHAPTER 6.

The Impostors.

NEVER had a brake borne along a jollier party than the contingent from St. Jim's. The juniors were all highly elated by the success which had attended the trapping of the Grammarians, and it seemed that the "jape" was certain to be a success now. Only Hake, when he arrived on the Carbrooke ground, remained to be dealt with. But after what had been done, that was a trifle.

"The great thing is," Tom Merry remarked, as he shook the reins, "that we've trapped a whole Grammar School eleven and three other Grammarians—fourteen rotters in all—and made them prisoners, and we're going to play their game of cricket instead of them. That's the thing!"

"Rather!" said Blake heartily. "And I must say, chaps, that Tom Merry has done us proud on this occasion. It was his idea, and we own up to it."

"It was!" said Figgins magnanimously. "It was Tom Merry's idea, and it was a regular ripper! If it only all turns out as well as this part."

"I don't see what can happen."

"Well, there's Hake."

"He's bound to come, I suppose?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "I wish he had been in the brake with the others."

"It would have been no joke kidnapping a senior," Lowther remarked.

"Oh, we'd have had him along with the rest! Hake is a beastly bully, and a licking would have done him heaps of good!"

"But he wasn't there, you see," Figgins remarked. "The question remains—how are we going to deal with him on the Carbrooke ground when he turns up?"

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think, deah boys, that you had better leave that to me," said D'Arcy. "What you wequire to deal with a situation like that is a fellow of gweat tact and judgment. You can safely leave the mattah in my hands!"

"And what's your plan, ass?"

"I object to bein' called an ass!"

"Well, what's your plan, fathead?"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a fathead!"

"Well, what's your plan, anyway?"

"Oh, I haven't one!"

"Eh? You say we're to leave you to deal with it?"

"I should be guided by circe," explained D'Arcy. "I'm the kind of fellow that is nevah taken at a loss, you know. Some brilliant idea would be certain to flash into my bwaïn at the cwitical moment, and it would be all wight."

"It would be ripping!" assented Tom Merry, laughing. "But there's a bare possible chance that the brilliant idea might not come along."

"Not at all, deah boy!"

"Or it might come late."

"I should be guided by circe."

"Still, I don't think we'll depend on Gussy. I've got a plan—"

"As a mattah of fact, Tom Mewwy, your plan is not wequired. What is weally wanted is a fellow of tact and disewetion to take the lead."

"Kill him, somebody! I've got a good idea, kids! When Hake comes on the scene, we'll denounce him as an impostor!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, that's a weally wippin' ideah! We'll denounce the boundah as a wotten impostah, deah boys!"

"As a fellow from St. Jim's, coming there to make trouble," grinned Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he bothers us, we'll frog-march him off the field, and get rid of him," Tom Merry went on. "I think that will work all right. Hake mayn't like it, but we can't expect to please everybody."

"Yaas, wathah! That is the vewy ideah that would have flashed into my bwaïn; I am sure of that, Tom Mewwy!"

"It's a good wheeze," said Blake. "Tom Merry seems to have turned over a new leaf, and got some new ideas lately. I can't account for it."

"Suppose you go and do likewise, instead of trying to account for it?" Monty Lowther suggested.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo, there's the Carbrooke ground!" exclaimed Tom Merry, pointing with the whip to a flag waving in the distance over the trees.

"Good! I say, Merry," said Figgins anxiously, "I think I'd better take the reins now, old chap."

Tom Merry stared at him.

"Eh? I can manage all right, Figgins, thank you!"

"Yes, but we're getting close to Carbrooke now—"

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, we want to come up in good style," said Figgins. "We're playing the part of the Grammarians, and we ought to try to do them credit. I think we ought to bring the brake up to the ground in the best possible style."

"Well, you image—" began the indignant driver.

"Figgins is quite wight," said D'Arcy. "It is vewy thoughtful of him to make the suggestion, and if you will kindly hand the dwivin' ovah to me, Tom Mewwy—"

"To you!" said Figgins, with a withering glance at the swell of St. Jim's. "What are you talking about, Gussy?"

"I'm talkin about bwingin' the bwaïe up to the cwicket gwound in the best poss. style," said Arthur Augustus. "Why, you were suggestin' it yourself."

"I was suggesting that Tom Merry should hand the reins over to me."

"Wats! I weally think, Figgins—"

"I'm not going to hand the reins over to anybody," said Tom Merry. "I drove horsea before you were born."

"You must have started jolly young, then!" said Figgins sarcastically. "You're about seven days older than I am, aren't you?"

"Well, that's a figure of speech—"

"And that's a figure of fun, your driving," said Figgins. "I really think—"

"Rats! If you knew anything about it—"

"Anything about it! Didn't I drive Cousin Ethel over in a trap from Wayland Station?" demanded Figgins, rather excitedly.

"Yaas, wathah, and it made me twemble when I heard of it," said D'Arcy. "It was a feahful wisk for Ethel to wun, Figgins."

"I'll risk you! I'll—"

"Cheese it!" said Kerr. "Here's one of the Carbrooke chaps to meet us."

A lad in a Carbrooke cap was coming up the road. The ground was in sight now, and the juniors in the brake could see over the wall into the green field, where the yellow stumps were gleaming in the sun. There was a goodly crowd on the ground, which showed that the Carbrooke folk took a deep interest in the play of the local cricket team.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, we shall have to play up this afternoon!" exclaimed D'Arcy suddenly. "It has occurred to me that if we get licked, the joke will be on the othah

side, you know, and the Gwammah cads will do the laughin'."

"My hat!" said Lowther. "I should think they will."

"Then you know what you've got to do," said Tom Merry. "The Townies are a decent team, and we've got to play up like Internationals."

"Like county cwacks," said D'Arcy.

"Hallo!" said the Carbrooke lad, waving his hand. "You're the lot from the Grammar School at Rylcombe, aren't you?"

"Weren't you expecting us?" said Tom Merry, who was never known to tell a lie, and consequently had a rather difficult part to play that eventful afternoon.

"Of course we were. I'm Pilkington."

"Oh, you're Pilkington, are you? Jolly glad to make your acquaintance, Pilkington."

"Same to you. You're Monk?"

"I'm the captain of this little lot, of course."

"Fisher's expecting you. Fisher's captaining us this afternoon," explained Pilkington. "He's rather surprised at your coming so close on time, and I came down to have a look along the road for you. The game is timed to start in less'n five minutes."

"Five minutes is all right."

The Carbrooke lad was keeping pace with the brake as he spoke. He was a finely-built lad in spotless flannels, and evidently in good form. If he was a specimen of the Carbrooke team, St. Jim's certainly had no walk-over in front of them.

"This way in," said Pilkington. "Rather a queer idea driving the brake yourself, isn't it, Monk?"

"Oh, I'm fond of driving," said Tom Merry carelessly. "I suppose I can find somebody here to look after the horses?"

"No difficulty about that, if you tip him," grinned Pilkington.

"No difficulty about that, either."

"Well, come in. Don't run the brake into the gate-post."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Think you'd better let me have the reins?" said Figgins, in an anxious whisper.

Tom Merry laughed. He brought the brake into the wide gateway in excellent style, quite as well as Figgins could have done it. The St. Jim's cricketers clambered down, and the next moment Tom Merry was shaking hands with Fisher, the Carbrooke captain, who greeted him as Frank Monk of the Grammar School.

CHAPTER 7.

The Cricket Match.

"SUCCESS!" said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. The Saints were in their dressing-tent. There were only a few minutes to spare. The Carbrooke fellows were not particular about keeping them up to time, but as Tom Merry said, late starters were generally late all round. It was always best to keep to an arrangement; although in this case, as a matter of fact, it was somebody's else's arrangement the St. Jim's juniors were keeping to.

"Success, rather!" grinned Blake. "Not a suspicion!"

"Not the ghost of one!" said Figgins cheerfully.

"Of course, they naturally wouldn't dream of looking for such an unheard-of jape," said Tom Merry. "They've got nothing to grumble at, so long as we give them a good game. The Grammarians will want to kick themselves, that's all. Keep an eye open, all of you, for Hake when he materialises."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hallo!" Fisher of Carbrooke looked into the tent. "Don't hurry, but—"

"We're ready."

"You see, stumps have to be pulled at six, to give you time to get back to school," said Fisher. "We could play as long as the light was fit, for that matter."

"Not much time to finish, if it runs to four innings," said Digby.

Fisher stared at him.

"How can a single innings match run to four innings?" he asked.

"My word!" murmured Tom Merry. "And I never knew it was a single innings match even! Jolly glad I found it out."

Digby turned red.

This was only one of the many little difficulties that were certain to crop up, but it was only possible to be alert and carry matters with a bold face.

"You forgot that, Dig," said Tom Merry.

"Oh, you never mentioned it," said Digby.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Come to think of it, I didn't tell you," he said. "You're

quite right. Well, we shall have time for the two innings comfortably, I hope."

"I hope so," grinned Fisher. "You see, we don't intend to let your innings be a very long one, if we can help it."

"Ha, ha! And we mean the same towards you. Well, we're ready."

"Then let's toss for innings."

Out on the green cricket field it was very bright and sunny. The white flannels contrasted vividly with the green, and the bright hats and dresses of a number of the Carbrooke fellows' sisters and cousins added a dash of gay colour to the scene.

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled as he looked over the field.

The athletic figures of the Townies showed that they were a strong team, and that St. Jim's would have their work cut out to win.

But the prospect of a good hard game was enticing to the stalwart young cricketers from the good old school.

Tom Merry and Fisher of Carbrooke tossed for choice of innings, and the Carbrooke captain won the toss.

The Townies elected to bat first, and Tom Merry led his merry men out to field.

As he assigned his eleven to their places, he cast a quick glance over the field, wondering whether Hake was anywhere near at hand yet.

There was no sign of the Grammar School senior.

It was probable that he would be in no hurry to get to the scene; doubtless he was only coming at all because he had been asked to do so by the Head of the Grammar School, and he would not turn up, in all probability, till the match was half over.

All had gone so swimmingly so far that Tom Merry devoutly hoped that Hake would not appear to make fresh difficulties.

Fisher and Pilkington opened the innings for Carbrooke, going to the wickets amid a cheer from their friends who were gathered round the ropes.

D'Arcy tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder as they stood at the entrance of the tent.

"I say, Tom Mewwy—"

"What is it?" asked the young cricket captain, rather brusquely. "Quick!"

"I see no gweat weason to huwwy—"

"You ass, they're waiting for us! Shut up—"

"It's important—"

"Well, what is it?"

"The bowlin' is goin' against Fisher's wicket—"

"Yes; what about it?"

"He looks a wathah dangewous batsman—"

"I know he is."

"Then pewwaps you had better let me bowl the first ovah. You see, he's a wathah twoublesome fellow at the beastly wicket, and if we get wid of him at the start, it will discourag the othahs."

Tom Merry grinned.

"And if he makes a century in the first over, it will encourage them," he remarked.

"It is absolutely imposs. to make a century in a single ovah, Tom Mewwy—"

"Well, he'd get as near it as possible if he had your bowling to help him," said Tom Merry. "Here, Figgins, go on first!"

"Right-ho!" said Figgins, catching the ball.

D'Arcy poked the young skipper in the ribs.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, dry up now, old chap!"

"I must wese to dwy up until I have explained to you that you are, in all pwob. throwin' away the beastly game. If anybody can shift Fisher, I'm the chap. I'm the last person in the world to put myself forward in any way—"

"Yes, you sound like that. Get out!"

"Then I am not to bowl?"

"Certainly not!"

"Vewy well, I wash my hands of the whole mattah," said Arthur Augustus. "If we return to St. Jim's a licked team, don't say I didn't warn you."

"I won't," promised Tom Merry. "Now shut up, like a good fellow."

"Where am I to field?" asked D'Arcy, in a tone of patient resignation.

"Oh, anywhere you like, so long as you keep out of the way."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Cover-point, and look sharp!"

"Oh, very well. I have explained—"

"Exactly! Clear!"

D'Arcy cleared. The fieldsmen took up their places, and Fisher clumped his bat on the crease. Figgins went on to bowl, with a tight grip on the ball, and a determined look upon his rugged, pleasant features.

"Buck up, Figgins, old fellah!" called out D'Arcy.

Figgins did not appear to hear those kind words of encouragement. He was measuring the pitch with his eye. He took a little run, and turned himself into a catherine-wheel, and then the ball came down.

Click!

The round red ball was soaring away the next moment, and there was a yell.

"Look out, cover-point!"

"Buck up, Eyeglass!"

"I wondah if they are addresssing me?" murmured D'Arcy.

"Catch, you idiot—catch!" screamed Tom Merry.

The ball dropped at D'Arcy's feet as he adjusted his eyeglass. There was a yell of laughter from the crowd, and a gasp of relief from Fisher. He had given cover-point an easy catch with the first ball of the over, but the fieldsmen had muffed it.

Figgins looked unutterable things at Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry ran towards him, and picked up the ball. He sent it in before Fisher had a chance of running, and then he jerked off Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass, and put it in his pocket.

"Tom Mewwy, I insist—"

"Ass! If you play the duffer again I'll order you off the field!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up!"

Tom darted back to his place. Arthur Augustus looked indignant for a moment, but then his face cleared. He realised what a crime he had been guilty of.

"Nevah mind," he murmured; "I will catch the next ball."

But he had no more chances. Fisher batted well for the rest of the over, and finished with 12 runs to his credit. Then Pilkington put up 8.

Blake relieved Figgins of the bowling for the second over, and then Fatty Wynn had a turn. The stout little Welsh partner in the New House Co. was almost as good a bowler in the summer game as he was goalkeeper in "soccer." He had a peculiar way of taking a run, which Blake declared was like a barrel rolling along the grass, and then sending down a ball which made the batsmen open their eyes.

The Welsh junior was the first to take a wicket for his side, and it was the Carbrooke captain's wicket that he took.

Fisher did not seem much afraid of Fatty Wynn when he began to bowl, but he changed his mind after a couple of balls, very slow and very dangerous. He played carefully for the next slow one, but it turned out to be an express-speed ball, and before Fisher knew where he was his baile were down.

There was a shout from the Saints, and from the St. Jim's fellows who were now arriving on the ground.

"Bravo, Fatty!"

"Good old Welsh rabbit!"

"Hurrah!"

Fisher carried out his bat for 12. The white figures on the score-board were rather a disappointment to the Carbrooke crowd. They had expected 30 at least of their leader. The Saints, too, knew that the home skipper had been disposed of for much less than they might have expected. They cheered Fatty Wynn till the plump member from gallant little Wales blushed all over. Tom Merry gave him a cordial slap on the back.

"That will do, Fatty! We're proud of you!"

"I'm jolly glad, Merry!" said Fatty Wynn modestly. "It ain't so bad to get rid of him for 12, I know. But, I say—"

"Yes?"

"Bowling does make you jolly hungry, doesn't it?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You'll have to wait for a feed, I'm afraid, Fatty. We can't spare you."

"Yes, it was lucky I scoffed those sandwiches, after all, wasn't it?"

"Ha, ha! Awfully lucky!"

The new batsman was in, and Fatty Wynn finished the over. He did not take another wicket, but there were no runs for the Carbrooke fellows off his bowling. At the end of the over, when the field crossed, Figgins gave him a slap on the back that made him stagger.

"Good old Fatty!"

"Ow!" said good old Fatty. "You shouldn't do that, Figgins; it might injure me, when I'm hungry. Have you got any toffee, or anything in your pocket?"

Figgins thrust a packet of butterscotch in his hand.

"There you are, Fatty. You deserve it."

"Thanks awfully, Figgins!"

Jack Blake bowled the next over, and Pilkington's wicket fell to his third ball. But the Carbrooke score had crept to 30 by this time for the two wickets. The home side were doing very well.

CHAPTER 8.

The Carbrooke Innings.

"WELL hit!"

"Bravo!"

It was a ringing shout from the Carbrooke crowd. Fourth man in was a short, thick-set, jolly-featured fellow, a Carbrooke mechanic, and evidently a first-rate batsman for a junior team.

He was hitting out in fine style, and Blake, Figgins, and Fatty Wynn had tried their skill on him in vain. He was piling up the runs, too, the Carbrooke score having leaped to 50 while he was at the wicket, and he showed no sign of going under.

"I say, Tom Mewwy," exclaimed D'Arcy, as the field crossed after the over which had brought the Carbrooke score up to that figure, "I weally think you had bettah let me twy."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally—"

Tom hesitated for a moment. D'Arcy was a pretty good fieldman when he was on the alert, and he could keep up his end at the wickets. His bowling was not considered dangerous, excepting to the field. But there is such a thing as "fool's luck," and Tom Merry was inclined to try the effect of Arthur Augustus for an over.

"Take the ball," he said.

"Good! Where is my eyeglass?"

"In my pocket, and it's going to remain there."

"Wats! I want it to assist my beasty vision, deah boy."

"Your beasty vision will have to do without it, and if you don't go on and bowl instantly I'll give the ball to Fatty again."

"Oh, vewy well; anythin' to oblige."

D'Arcy went on to bowl. Harding, the latest batsman, had taken an odd number for the last ball, and so still had the bowling. D'Arcy took a grip on the ball, and faced the batsman.

He hardly troubled to run before bowling, and he sent the ball down in a very airy way. The Carbrooke mechanic out it away through the slips for 2. The second and third balls gave Harding a boundary and a 2 respectively, and by this time he was grinning.

He evidently regarded D'Arcy's bowling as being something in the nature of a farce, and he meant simply to swipe out at it. That was where he made his mistake.

Fourth ball of the over gave him 2, and the fifth he stopped dead on the crease. The sixth ball looked as easy as the rest, but it was not. As much by luck as anything else, it had the twist on it that was required to elude the rather careless swipe of the bat, and, to the amazement of the whole field, there was a clatter of a wrecked wicket.

There was no doubt about it. One of the stumps was down, and there were the bails on the ground. There was a cheer mingled with laughter from the Saints.

"How's that?" yelled Figgins.

And the umpire said, "Out!"

D'Arcy smiled in a contented way.

"What did I tell you, Tom Mewwy? I can tell you, chaps, that there are vewy few bowlers in county teams like me."

"I can quite believe that," Tom Merry assured him.

Blake slapped D'Arcy on the back.

"Good old Cussy!" he exclaimed. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread, but they get there sometimes all the same."

"If you mean that wemark in a diswapagin' sense, Blake—"

"Nothing of the sort. Who could disparage a bowler like the one and only Gus? Of course, you hadn't the faintest idea that the ball was going to hit the wicket, but that makes no difference. The man's out."

"Yaas, wathah! When we get home, Blake, I will take you down to the nets, if you like, and show you my system of bowlin'," said D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha! Thanks awfully! Hallo! Man in!"

Figgins took the over. It gave the Carbrooke men a dozen runs, but cost them a wicket at the finish. The field crossed, and D'Arcy held out his hand for the ball.

Blake, who had it, looked at the outstretched hand as if it were some zoological specimen submitted for his inspection.

"Rather dirty!" he said. "I'm surprised at you, Cussy!"

"Wathah dirty! What do you mean?"

"Weren't you holding out your hand to be examined?"

"I was holdin' out my hand for the ball," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Then you can go on holding it out."

"But aftah the way I have bowled, of course Tom Mewwy intends to give me all the bowlin' he possibly can."

"Of course he doesn't!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Blake takes the over."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Miracles never happen twice in the same day," said Tom Merry, with a shake of the head. "You can field, Gussy."

"Oh, vewy well; you naturally do not want me to put the whole team in the shade, I suppose; though weally you ought to think of the game first—"

"Get into your place!"

"Certainly, deah boy; but pway don't huwwy me. It is a vewy warm aftahnoon, and I find huwwyin' wathah exhaustin'."

The Carbrooke innings continued, the wickets falling to the St. Jim's bowling for a fair average of runs. Tom Merry bowled a couple of overs himself, but did not take a wicket. Tom was a great man with the bat, but at bowling he knew very well that Figgins was his better, and Blake his equal, and there was nothing conceited about the hero of the Shell.

He was the last fellow in the world to think of using his position of captain to put himself forward in the public eye in any way. His maxim was to give the work to the fellow who could do it best.

A wicket, however, fell to Tom Merry's fielding, a very fine catch coming off at mid-wicket, and sending a Carbrooke batsman out for a duck's-egg. At last the welcome word passed round.

"Last man in!"

The Carbrooke score was at 98. Tom Merry tossed the ball to Fatty Wynn.

"Now, then, Fatty, don't let them pass the hundred!"

"Not if I can help it, Merry," said the Welsh partner in the Co. cheerily. "It's not only keeping the score down, I'm thinking of—"

"What the dickens else are you thinking of, then?"

"I'm gettin' so jolly hungry, and I can see there's no chance of a feed till the Carbrooke innings is over."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, get them out, and you shall have a penny bun."

"A penny bun!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "I could eat a horse. I used to think that football made me hungry, but I'm blessed if cricket doesn't give an edge to the appetite that's positively torture."

And, with the vision of the promised feed in his mind's eye, Fatty Wynn went on to bowl in a mood to conquer Fry or Hayward.

Thrice the ball was stopped, and then came the catastrophe—for the Carbrooke side. Fatty Wynn threw all he knew into that ball, and it was a little too much for the batsman. There was a clatter of falling bails, and a shout from the crowd.

"Well bowled!"

"Bravo, Fatty!"

All down for 98.

The Carbrooke innings was over, and the field cleared. Fatty Wynn made a dive for the tent, his mouth watering. There was a buzz from the Saints in the field.

"Tom Merry! Look out!"

Tom Merry started.

"It's Hake!" muttered Figgins.

Hake it was. The Grammar School senior had just ridden his bike into the field, and jumped off. He came striding towards the crowd of St. Jim's boys with an almost idiotic expression of bewilderment on his face.

CHAPTER 9.

Hake Comes and Goes.

TOM MERRY drew a quick, deep breath.

"It's Hake, chaps! Careful now!"

Arthur Augustus nudged the captain of St. Jim's juniors.

"I say, Tom Mewwy, pway leave the talking to me," he whispered. "We shall be in a feahful fix if you give us away, you know."

"Cheese it!"

"It is extremely pwob. that the Carbrooke chaps may wipe up the groud with us for takin' them in like this!"

"Choke him, Blake!"

"I wefuse to be choked. Undah the cires., as we are in such a cwitical situation, I considah that the mattah should be placed in my hands, as the pwopah person to deal with it."

Blake jerked the swell of St. Jim's away, and Tom Merry faced Hake, as the Grammarian monitor arrived upon the scene. Hake was looking angry as well as amazed. The crowd, seeing that something was wrong, gathered curiously round. The pitch was being rolled, ready for the second innings. The Carbrooke cricketers looked on with interest, too, as Hake came up with a red and angry face.

"What does this mean?"

"Are you speaking to me?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes. Where are the fellows from my school?"

"Eh?"

"Where are the boys from my school?" shouted Hake.

"There were no arrangements for any fellows to come from St. Jim's," said Tom Merry innocently.

"I know there were not. What are you doing here, then?"

"Off his dot," said Figgins, tapping his forehead significantly. "He ought to know we've got a cricket fixture here."

"You! What do you mean?"

"Oh, go back to St. Jim's!" said Blake.

"Eh? What's that about St. Jim's?"

"Don't be an ass! Get off the ground! We don't want any rows, but it's like your cheek to come and pick a row with a Grammar School crowd!"

"With a—a what?" stammered Hake helplessly.

"With us," said Tom Merry.

"You—you— Where are the boys from the Grammar School?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"That's a curious question to put to me," he remarked.

"Rather," said Fisher, of Carbrooke. "Who are you, anyway, and what are you getting at?"

"I'm Hake!"

"He means cod," said Blake. "I don't believe he's hake. If he's any sort of fish at all, I believe he's cod. He's trying to cod us."

"You young villain!"

"Anyway, Fisher is the chap to deal with a fish," said Monty Lowther. "Will you have him kicked off the ground, Fishy?"

"I'm Hake—"

"I don't care if you're hake, or cod, or mackerel," said the Carbrooke captain. "What do you want making a row here for?"

"I'm Hake—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"I'm Hake, from the Grammar School. I'm the monitor sent over by Dr. Monk with the Grammar School cricketers."

"Who didn't you come with them?"

"I followed on my bike."

"Well, then, here you are, and no harm done," said Fisher. "If you're from the Grammar School, you're welcome. You look hot. Come and have some lemonade."

"I'm Hake. I—"

"We shall know that soon," Lowther observed. "Anyway, he's a fishy customer."

"Where are the Grammar School boys?" howled Hake.

"I tell you I'm responsible for them, and I want to know where the young rotters are."

Fisher stared at him in amazement.

"Don't you know them?" he exclaimed, with a sweep of the hand, indicating the St. Jim's juniors. "You can't be from the Grammar School if you don't know your own team."

"What do you mean? These boys are not from the Grammar School."

"Oh, get off!"

"They are from St. Jim's!"

"Look here, Hake, or Whiting, or Mackerel, or whatever you are, you may be considered a funny man in the family; but don't come working off your little jokes here," said Fisher. "Travel along."

"I tell you—"

"You've told me some big whoppers already."

"I'm Hake—"

"Are you going?"

"I tell you these boys are from St. Jim's, and the Grammar School team isn't here."

Fisher laughed. He was justified in laughing for Hake's statement did, indeed, seem to be wildly improbable, especially as the St. Jim's juniors seemed to be taking it as a huge joke. They were sure of their ground, and they were all laughing now.

"Any more fairy-tales to tell?" asked Fisher sarcastically.

"I tell you I'm Hake, and I came here to look after the Grammar School team."

"And these are not the team?"

"No, they're not."

"Then where are they?"

"That's what I want to know."

"Did they leave the Grammar School?"

"Yes, a long while before I did."

"Then, if these are not the fellows, where are they?"

Hake rubbed his forehead hard. It was a poser! If the Grammar School team were not on the ground, where were they? They could not have vanished into thin air.

"I—I don't know. That's what I want to know. These

fellows are from St. Jim's, the rival school—they've done something with the Grammar School team!"

"Better look in our cricket-bags," suggested Monty Lowther. "Or perhaps we've got them in our waistcoat-pockets."

"You young scoundrel!"

"Better language, please. My belief is that you're some tramp who has stolen some decent clothes," said Lowther severely. "I judge by your talk and manners."

"You—you—you—"

"He looks as if he'd been drinking," Herries remarked thoughtfully.

"Yaas, wathah! The fellow beahs evewy appearence of havin' been dwinkin' to gweat excess," said D'Arcy. "I wegard him as an intoxicated lunatic, deah boys."

"I am Hake—"

"Then swim away, Hake," said Fisher. "It's perfectly clear to me that you're an impostor, and you're here for no good. Get out!"

"I sha'n't!"

"Oh, we'll look after him!" said Figgins. "The fact is, Fisher, there's some rivalry between the Grammar School and St. Jim's, and we're often bothered by obstreperous fellows from the other place. This is only a sample of their tricks. You mustn't take this rotter as a specimen of St. Jim's, however. He's a rotter, an absolute rotter, and the worst rotter there wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole. He's a rank outsider. We had better put him outside."

Hake made a dash at Figgins. Words were not strong enough to express his feelings. Figgins did not dodge. He closed with Hake, and Kerr and Marmaduke dashed to his aid. In a moment Hake was on his back with the New House juniors scrambling over him.

"Lend a hand, kids."

The St. Jim's juniors lent a hand right willingly.

Hake was hustled and bundled towards the gate, and plumped out into the road. Digby ran his machine out after him, and it was laid across him as he was left squirming in the dust. The Carbrooke fellows looked on laughing.

Hake pushed the bicycle off, and staggered to his feet. The bully of the Grammar School was not a pretty sight. His clothes were caked with dust, his collar was torn out, and his necktie hanging loose. The gate was crammed with grinning faces. It was evidently useless for the Grammarian to linger.

He shook his fist furiously at Carbrooke and St. Jim's fellows alike, mounted his machine, and pedalled away down the road, a sadder if not a wiser individual.

The St. Jim's juniors laughed loud and long.

They had disposed of Hake, and the last danger was gone. Tom Merry turned to Fisher with a look of regret on his face.

"I'm sorry this scene should have occurred on your ground, Fisher," he said.

"Oh, that's all right!" said the Carbrooke captain cheerily. "The bouncer's kicked out, and serve him right! Fancy trying to take us in with a yarn like that! He's gone! Like his cheek to come here!"

"Yaas, wathah! Those Gwammah cads are—"

Blake's hand on D'Arcy's mouth stopped him in time. Fortunately the Carbrooke captain had not noticed D'Arcy's remark. He walked away, and D'Arcy gave Blake a withering look.

"Blake, how dare you treat me in such a beastly wuff way?"

"You ass! You nearly gave the whole show away," said Tom Merry wrathfully.

"That is no reason why Blake should act in a mannah unbecomin' a gentleman," said D'Arcy frigidly. "I weally considah—"

But what D'Arcy really considered was never known, for no one stayed to listen to him. It was close upon time for the St. Jim's innings.

CHAPTER 10.

St. Jim's Wins.

"PLAY up!"

It was a shout from the St. Jim's juniors in the crowd as Tom Merry and Blake went out with their bats to open the innings for St. Jim's.

Pilkington bowled the first over for Carbrooke. But he made no impression upon Tom Merry's wicket. The innings that followed impressed the Carbrooke fellows with a very deep sense of respect for the supposed Grammarians.

For Tom Merry's wicket was impregnable.

Pilkington, Fisher, and Knight, the best bowlers of the Carbrooke team, plied him with every variety of bowling, but in vain.

They could not move him from the wicket, and all the time the runs were piling up steadily. Blake, too, was keeping his end up in noble style. His individual score was at

20 when he was caught out at point by Pilkington. His was the first wicket down, and Herries came in to take his place.

Herries had bad luck. His wicket went down for 2, and Digby, who followed, was dismissed for a duck's egg. Then came Fatty Wynn. It was probable that Fatty had eaten a little too much during the rest between the innings, for his movements were very slow and sluggish. Or perhaps he felt that he had done enough as a bowler. Anyway, he was out for 6 to a ball from Knight. Figgins was still more unfortunate. He was caught out at point for a duck's egg.

Five down for 45. Tom Merry's batting had sent up the score, assisted by the good figure Blake had made. Now Kerr came in to join him, and the Scottish partner in the Co. showed the stuff he was made of.

It was really beautiful to see Tom Merry and Kerr at the wickets. They dealt splendidly with every ball that came down, and they piled up the runs between them.

Kerr put on 23 for his side, when he was stumped in a gallant attempt at five.

D'Arcy had been watching the innings rather anxiously. He confided to Herries that he was a little nervous for St. Jim's, and wished he were at the wicket.

"I weally ought to have opened the innings, to give the side confidence," he remarked. "It was watah thoughtless of Tom Mewwy to leave me out like this."

"Which side did you want to give confidence to?" asked Blake.

D'Arcy stared.

"Our own side, of course, deah boy! What a widiculous question!"

"Then you ought to be the last man in," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Hallo, there goes Kerr's wicket! Stumped! He's played up jolly well. Bravo, Kerr! Hurrah for old Scottie!"

"Hurrah!"

Kerr carried out his bat.

"Next man in!" said Marmaduke. "You're next, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, bai Jove, you're quite wight! Where are my beasty battin' gloves, you know?"

"Ass! Don't keep the game waiting!"

"I suppose you don't want me to bat without gloves, and make my hands wuff and dirty!" said D'Arcy. "Ah, here are the beasty gloves. Will you swap my pads, Blake?"

"You young villain, not to be ready!"

"My deah kid, it weally doesn't mattah. You know you always have a long wait for the next man in, in county cwicket."

"This isn't county cricket. Oh, why didn't somebody painlessly suffocate you years ago? There you are! Go on!"

"Thank you, Blake. You need not have been so wude about it. I wegard wudeness as inexcusable undah any circes."

"Next man in!" howled a dozen voices.

"Bai Jove, how eegah they are to see my battin'!" said D'Arcy. "All wight; I'm just comin', deah boys!"

And D'Arcy, buttoning his glove, marched out to the vacant wicket. St. Jim's score showed six wickets down for 80 runs, and the Carbrooke bowlers were looking grim. They did not mean their score to be passed if they could help it.

Arthur Augustus took his position at the wicket. Pilkington sent him down a ball, and the swell of St. Jim's swiped it away.

Then he started to run. Tom Merry ran, too, and passed him on the pitch. Then a second run. Then a yell from Blake.

"Don't run! Gussy, get back!"

But D'Arcy was determined upon a third run, and he thought there was time. Tom Merry waved his hand frantically.

"No!" he yelled.

But D'Arcy was running. Tom Merry set his teeth and ran, too. There was a roar from the Saints.

"Gussy! Ass! Fathead! Sweep! Dummy! Oh, fat-head!"

D'Arcy seemed surprised. He swerved and looked round to see what the shouting meant, and ran full tilt into Tom Merry.

There was a terrific biff as the running batsmen met in full career, and then they measured their length upon the sward.

Tom Merry's wicket was at the mercy of the ball, but fortunately the leather was already whizzing in to D'Arcy's wicket. There was a clatter of falling balls as the swell of St. Jim's scrambled to his feet. Tom Merry was up in a flash and speeding on to his wicket. D'Arcy arrived at his scattered stumps, and looked indignant.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he called out

"Out!" said the grinning umpire.

"Out!" roared the field. "Get off the ground, fathead!"

D'Arcy looked round indignantly, and then put his bat under his arm and marched off to the tent. Last man 0, was the figure on the score-board.

"I weally wegard that as—" began D'Arcy, as he approached Blake. But he met with scant sympathy from the chief of Study No. 6.

"Oh, shut up!" said Blake crossly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Cheese it; you make me tired!"

"Next man in!"

Monty Lowther went out with his bat. Monty was looking forward to a good innings with Tom Merry; but it was not to be. Fisher bowled against the St. Jim's captain's wicket with a deadly determination that was not to be denied. Tom Merry had taken his thirty-fifth run, when Fisher's skill proved too much for him at last. There was a clack of ball on stumps.

"How's that?" shouted the delighted Carbrooke Townies.

"Out!"

Tom Merry carried out his bat for 35. The St. Jim's total was creeping up to the Carbrooke figure. Manners was next man in. Both Manners and Lowther batted cautiously, putting on a run here and a run there, and taking no risks. St. Jim's were at 94 when Lowther was caught out by Pilkington.

"Last man in!"

Marmaduke picked up his bat. Tom Merry gave him encouraging clap on the shoulder.

"Only five wanted to win, Marmy!" he said. "Play up!"

"Yaas, watah! I weally wish I could go in again instead of you, Marmy; but as that's imposs., pway do your best deah boy."

"That's what I mean to do," said Marmaduke cheerily "I can't do worse than Gussy, in any case; that's on comfort."

"Weally, Marmaduke—"

But Marmaduke was going down to the wickets.

Manners gave him a nod as he came in. Upon these two depended now the fate of the match; but they were good reliable batsmen, and only five runs were wanted to.

But the Carbrooke bowlers were determined that five runs should not be taken.

Pilkington and Fisher bowled an over each, with the result of sending up the score to 96. Then came a ball down to Marmaduke, which the heir of millions let himself go at.

Clack! rang the ball on the bat, and it soared away on a long journey; and the batsmen ran, and ran again!

Twice they crossed the pitch, and Tom Merry breathed a sigh of relief. It was 98 now, and, whatever happened, St. Jim's had not lost. But a tie would not content them, and they anxiously watched the running figures. The batsmen were trying for a third; but the ball had already been fielded by Knight.

"Send her in!"

"Run, you beggars, run!"

The batsmen were running. They knew the ball was coming in; they knew nothing else, except that the innings depended upon their pace. It was coming in to Marmaduke's wicket! The yell of the crowd told Marmaduke so. He set his teeth and put on a terrific spurt. He stumbled; he fell. There was a gasp of dismay from St. Jim's.

"Out!" groaned Figgins.

"No!" roared Tom Merry. "Look!"

The ball whizzed in; there was the crash of a falling wicket. But the end of the bat was on the crease, with a couple of inches to spare. It was a narrow escape, but a miss was as good as a mile!

The umpire shook his head.

"Not out!"

There was a roar. St. Jim's had taken the ninety-ninth run, and won the game!

The level green was swarming with figures the next moment. St. Jim's juniors were cheering frantically. Marmaduke was thumped on the back till he was sore.

St. Jim's had won!

CHAPTER 11.

Neck or Nothing!

THE excitement lasted some time. It had been a close match, but St. Jim's had won, and they were happy. They made preparations for the return journey.

Tom Merry changed and went to see about the brake. Blake wore a thoughtful expression as he buttoned his collar.

"Have you anythin' on your mind, Blake, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy. "I hope you are not wowwyin' about your wudeness to me a short time ago. I have weally quite

forgiven that, as I recognise the fact that you spoke in the excitement of the moment."

Blake grinned.

"No, I'm not worrying about that, Gussy. I was thinking that when we're gone we ought to leave some sort of explanation for the Carbrooke Townies. They'll get to know he facts in time from Frank Monk, you know. We also ought to commemorate the fact, on the spot, that we've one the Grammarians."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anybody got a chalk?"

"I have," said Figgins; "here you are. What do you want it for?"

"I think I'll leave a little message on the score-board," grinned Blake. "That will about meet the case, I think."

"Good!" said Figgins. "Wait till the brake's quite ready to start, though, to avoid having to make explanations."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The brake was not long in getting ready in the road. The St. Jim's team mounted into it, with the exception of Blake. The Carbrooke fellows gathered round to give them a parting cheer. It was then that Blake made for the score-board. A good many of the St. Jim's juniors who were not in the team, and were not going in the brake, followed him curiously.

"What are you up to?" asked Reilly.

"Look, and you'll see, my son!" said Blake.

And he chalked on the board, in glaring letters:

"ST. JIM'S LEADS!"

here was a general chuckle.

"St. Jim's leads! Ha, ha!"

Blake cut off to the gates and clambered into the brake. He was shaking hands with Tom Merry. The home side had been beaten, but they were good sportsmen, and they had only friendly feelings towards the victors.

"Hope we shall see you again," said Fisher.

"I hope so!" said Tom Merry. "You're a jolly good lot of sportsmen, and we're jolly glad to make your acquaintance. I'd like to fix up some matches with you; but I'll write to you about that, and explain."

"There's a message for you on the score-board," said Blake with a grin. "When you write to the Grammar School again, just mention it."

The brake rolled off, leaving the Carbrooke Townies considerably mystified by Blake's last words. When they saw the notice on the board, they were more mystified still—for a time. Of course, in time the explanation came, and the Carbrooke Townies laughed as heartily over the audacious joke as anybody.

The brake rolled on its way, followed by a cheer from the Carbrooke fellows. The Saints chuckled as they went rolling down the road, the brake "tooled" along by Figgins, who had taken the driver's seat on his own recommendation. But Tom Merry did not mind.

"Well, everything comes to an end," said Blake. "We've got to let the Grammar kids have their brake back to take them home. I wonder what the other chaps at the Grammar School will say to them? Ha, ha!"

"We'll leave the brake in the lane, with the horses tethered," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Then a few of us will go and let the Grammarians out, and we'll tell them where the brake is."

"Better pick out the best runners, then," said Figgins. "The Grammar kids will be as wild as a set of lunatics when they get out of the tower!"

"You and I and Blake can go," said Tom Merry; "three will be enough; and you other fellows can get on to St. Jim's and be in time for calling-over. We shall do a sprint after letting the Grammar kids out, and we may get in in time."

"Pewwaps I had better let them out, Tom Mewwy, if a weally good spwintah is required!"

"Rats! I think we may as well leave the brake here," said Tom Merry, looking round; "it's near to the ruins."

"Right-ho!"

The St. Jim's juniors left the brake. Tom Merry fastened the reins to a fence, to secure the horses from bolting, then the juniors set their faces towards St. Jim's and marched on in high spirits; while Tom Merry, Blake, and Figgins took the footpath through the wood to the ruins.

The April dusk was falling over the woods when they came in sight of the old tower. A shout from one of the windows showed that they were spotted.

"Go and pull the pegs up, Blake, while we're talking to them," said Tom Merry. "We don't want too sudden a rush. It will be a run, anyway!"

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

Tom Merry waved his hand to Frank Monk, who was shaking his fist from the lowest window. In a minute all the casements were crammed with savage Grammarian

faces. The rivals of Tom Merry & Co. did not seem to have enjoyed their afternoon in the old tower.

"Hallo, Monkey!"

"You—you—you—"

"Have you had a good time in there?"

"Wait till I get hold of you!" roared Monk.

"Certainly! It will be a long wait, I expect, but I don't mind! Have you eaten the sandwiches?"

"I'll—I'll—"

"We've left your brake tethered under the big oak in Rylcombe Lane. You'll find it all right, Monkey, and you can go back to the Grammar School in it. Our fellows have gone on, and they're at St. Jim's by this time. We've had a nice afternoon! You don't ask us how the match has gone!"

"Have you really played the Carbrooke Townies?" demanded Monk, in mingled fury and incredulity.

"Honour bright; and beaten them, too! You really ought to be glad," said Tom Merry seriously. "They gave us a hard tussle, so it stands to reason that they would have knocked your lot into a cocked hat! We've upheld the honour of the Grammar School for you, while you've been having a nice rest and wolfing free sandwiches in a nice old tower, with romantic and picturesque surroundings!"

"Yet he doesn't look happy!" said Figgins. "There's no satisfying some people!"

"You rotters!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Now, Monkey, own up! Hasn't it been a really ripping jape, old chap—and haven't we done you brown?"

Frank Monk grinned in spite of himself.

"Well, perhaps you have," he said, "but we'll get our own back! You've got to let us out, and when the door's unfastened—"

Blake rejoined his comrades.

"I've got the pegs out," he said. "The door will be open as soon as they push it."

Tom Merry waved his hand to Frank Monk.

"The door's unfastened!" he called out.

Monk disappeared from the window in an instant.

"Come on," muttered Tom Merry; "it's neck or nothing now, and no mistake! If they get us, they'll scalp us!"

And the three juniors darted away. There was a yell, and the door of the tower swung open, and the long-imprisoned Grammarians came streaming out.

"After them!" shouted Frank Monk.

The Grammarians broke into a desperate run. If they could only capture the three leaders of the St. Jim's juniors and make an example of them, it would be some comfort, and the laugh would not be wholly against them.

"Come on," gasped Tom Merry; "I verily believe Monk's gaining! It will be neck and neck! Shove it on!"

"Right-ho!" panted Blake.

They ran on fleetly. Behind came the pattering feet of the determined pursuers.

St. Jim's at last!

The great school loomed up against the sky. There was the ancient gateway—refuge at last!

"One spurt more!"

They dashed up to the gate. The Grammarians were closer behind. Frank Monk was running desperately, as if for a wager, and his outstretched hand was very close.

Home at last!

The three juniors dashed in, and Tom Merry caught the gate to swing it shut. Monk, ahead of his comrades, sprang in the way; but the ready fist of Figgins was there, and Monk went staggering back into the road before a mighty thump on the chest.

Tom Merry clanged the gate shut, Blake shot the nearest bolt. Frank Monk recovered himself in a moment or two and hurled himself at the gate—too late. His followers were on the scene now, and they rushed straight at the gate, but the bolt held it fast. But it had been a narrow shave!

Tom Merry kissed his hand to the furious Grammarian between the iron bars.

"Done!" he said sweetly.

"Diddled!" said Blake, with a breathless grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins. "Hear us smile!"

And the three juniors smiled—loudly. The Grammarians shook the bars of the gate in helpless wrath.

"Good-night!" said Tom Merry. "Good-night, kids; and remember—St. Jim's leads!"

And the St. Jim's juniors walked away arm-in-arm, and the baffled Grammarians slowly took their homeward route.

"St. Jim's leads!" grinned Figgins. "There's no getting out of that! St. Jim's leads!"

And there was not the slightest doubt that it was so!

THE END.

(Two splendid stories again next week, entitled, "Skimpole's New Idea," a tale of St. Jim's, and "The Swoop of the Hawk," a story of Alan Wayward.)

Splendid New Series.**THE LONG ARM
OF THE PASHA:**

A STORY
NARRATING
THE ADVENTURES
OF
**ALAN
WAYWARD.**

By Innis Hael.

CHAPTER 1.**An Interrupted Wedding**

"**A**RT thou bewitched, my son, that thou shouldst dance thus, like a mad dervish, and utter strange cries in thy throat?"

The Sheikh Jelaluddin sat erect on his mattress, and fixed benignant, curious eyes on the young Englishman, Alan Wayward, who, stripped to the waist, was doing a kind of wild Scotch reel, while his hands were making spasmodic slaps at his bare skin.

The two had arrived at the village of Melazgherd, on the borders of the roaring torrent of the Euphrates, in a savage yet lovely gorge between the lower spurs of the Bingol Dag and the towering peaks of Sipan Dag, whose red crags overlooked the salt waters of Lake Van, and faced the lofty, snow-clad ridges of Mount Ararat.

Nearly a week had elapsed since Alan Wayward had been rescued from the treacherous clutches of Idrin Pacha by his companion of the present hour, and in their slow progress afoot from farm to village the young Englishman had had ample opportunity of observing that the sheikh, whose fortunes he had pledged himself to follow for the thousand-and-one days customary to novitiates, was regarded with a superstitious veneration by all classes of Mohammedans, with the greatest respect by the Armenians, and with something like a fearful suspicion by the Greeks.

On the evening of the previous day there had come to the two a message from Melazgherd, begging them to be present the following dawn as guests at the marriage of Zillah—known through all the valley as the Rose of the Dawn—to Ahmed, the Armenian who had shared Alan's flight from the slave-compound of Idrin Pacha at Changeri. They had travelled through the cool of the first starlit hours of night, and, arriving late at the village, had sought the headman's odagh, or guest-house, whose open door offered hospitality to all who desired it.

"Bewitched!" echoed Alan Hayward. "I'm eaten alive, man! Idrin's compound was bad enough, but it was nothing to this for liveliness and vigour."

"Behold how useful to thee is discipline!" said the sheikh gravely, as he stroked his long white beard. "To a great fight thou girdest thyself like a man, and pride grows in thee; yet for a flea-bite thou art humbled, and knowest

thyself of little account. Let us seek the stream and make our ablutions."

After a dip in the icy, snow-fed waters—a proceeding over which the sheikh shook his head, as he dabbed his face with the tips of his fingers—Alan did full justice to the breakfast of honey, fried eggs, and curdled milk, which had been prepared for them in Ahmed's house. It was a lightning meal, however, as the wedding ceremony was to be early, and presently Alan found himself, with the sheikh, loitering outside the great stone church, waiting for a glimpse of the bride, and watching the merry faces of the Armenian men and women, as they thronged into the building. For, unlike Mohammedans, the Armenians do not veil their womenfolk.

"They are wise to take their arms with them," said the old sheikh, suddenly lifting his long nose towards the bleak range of the Bingol Dag, "for I smell blood."

Alan scanned the mountainside anxiously. He had more than once urged on the sheikh the advisability of moving from a neighbourhood where he might well expect some vengeful trick on the part of Idrin. But Jelaluddin had obdurately opposed such a course.

"What is written, is written," he would say, with his irritating calm. "It may be that thou art the staff by which Allah will correct that evil man."

A sudden series of bark-like whoops, which in those parts does duty for a cheer, drew his attention from the sheikh's gloomy words to the approach of the bride.

"The Rose of the Dawn," said Alan. "She's well named—eh, sheikh?"

"A comely maiden," assented Jelaluddin, "and more fitted to a true believer than to an infidel."

"Rats!" murmured Alan. "Ahmed's all right!"

Zillah, who had heard of the part the young Englishman had taken in restoring her lover to his home, cast on him a shy and grateful glance in passing, which from that moment made Alan her devoted and rapturous adherent. And, in good truth, she was pretty and winsome enough to inspire a like feeling in even slower blood. Fair as an English girl, with eyes as blue as the cornflower, her dainty form was clad in a gown of shimmering white, coming just below the knees; white trousers, trimmed with golden fringe; white stockings, and white shoes; white waistcoat, bordered with golden braid, and fitting like a glove from waist to throat;

and a garland of white, starry flowers on wavy brown hair, completed the picture.

"Stay here! Watch!" whispered the sheikh, as Alan made a movement to follow the bridal throng into the church.

After the first glance at the blushing Rose of the Dawn, the keen eyes of the Turcoman sheikh had wandered again to the gorges of the Bingol Dag. The sun, smiting on their snow-covered flanks, sent up a vibration of dazzling mist, that made it difficult to distinguish tree from tree.

Alan Hayward, impressed by the imperative accents, made a telescope of his hand, and gazed steadily at the point where the pass debouched into the forests clothing the lower spurs.

"What do you see?" asked the sheikh.

"Unless it's the effect of this giddy atmosphere," Alan replied slowly, "it seems that there's a little plantation of firs taking a morning stroll."

"Even so," assented Jelaluddin. "But behind the firs there are the men of Idrin. Behold! It is three days since word went to him that I had departed with thee for Bagdad. For this, also, my son, is wisdom. If thy enemy be a liar, it is inexpedient to waste truth on him; yet, because thou must not lie thyself, it is fitting to seek one who cannot speak truth to bear unto thy enemy the news by which he shall be deceived to his hurt, and so learn that Allah is just."

"Hadt't we better warn the fellows inside?" asked Alan.

"They are sheep!" said the sheikh contemptuously. "They will not come out to fight. Nevertheless, warn them. Moreover, it is time; for see, at the end of the village under the flames arise. Idrin has sent another force by the Ertesch Dag."

Alan's eyes followed the direction of the sheikh's pointing hand, and saw a red tongue of flame bursting from a roof on the northern outskirts of the village, which, running north and south, was flanked on the west by the swift torrent of the Euphrates, beyond which lay the Bingol Dag. As if the flame had been a signal, the men on the mountain beyond the river threw down their cover, and raced for the wooden bridge spanning the torrent.

"They have three miles yet to come," said the sheikh calmly. "There is time to throw down the bridge."

Alan waited for no more. On entering the village the night before he had noticed that a gang of workmen were engaged in making a stockade in a clearing commanding the approach to the bridge, and, with a shout to the sheikh to warn the others, he raced off.

The clearing was deserted, but the tools lay scattered about, and it did not take Alan long to select a heavy-hafted axe. The bridge was a rough affair, consisting of three great tree-trunks built into supports on either side, and planked transversely. But, if rough, it was tough, and the experience he had gained during his three months' work in timber-felling in Idrin's slave-gang, sufficed to tell Alan, after the first bite of his axe, that no man could hope to hew through those seasoned logs in less than half a day.

He looked round in despair, wondering if there might be some way of blocking the bridge, and an exclamation of delight broke from his lips as his gaze fixed on a small barrel of tar lying near the palisade, and by it a keg of petroleum. It was the work of two minutes to roll the tar-barrel down the incline, on to the bridge, bash in both its ends, and strew its contents oozing well into the middle of the footway. The keg of petroleum followed it, and suffered like treatment; and after it, armful after armful of heaped-up shavings he piled on to the inflammable base. Then, standing well back, he flung half a dozen lighted sulphur matches in among the shavings.

There was a crackle, a splutter, and next moment a roar of flame swept the bridge from end to end. He watched it for a few minutes fascinated, till the ping of a dozen bullets in the palisade at his back, and the crackle of rifles from the heights opposite, warned him of his danger.

He flung himself to the ground, and wormed his way forward till his retreat was covered by the angle of a mud hovel. Then, with a last glance at the flaming bridge, he raced for the church.

The sheikh had not been wrong in his conjecture that the Armenians would stick to the building, and when Alan arrived, he found the church in a state of the greatest confusion. The old priest had hastily finished the marriage ceremony; women and children were huddled, trembling and wailing, round the altar; and the men were running aimlessly to and fro, some planting themselves at the windows, others seeking means to barricade the doors. Only the sheikh seemed unmoved, and that despite the hostile glances ever and again bent on him.

Cries of joy arose as Alan explained how he had destroyed the bridge; and as the Armenians realised that they had only to deal with half, and probably a small half, of their dreaded invaders, their courage began to return. They were still babbling with excitement when a herald arrived from

the attacking force. Alan, peering over the shoulders of those at the door, recognised in the herald the smooth face and unctuous speech of Saponyadi, the Levant merchant, and at his side Rastan, the treacherous Greek who had betrayed him into slavery. But it was a Rastan very different to the dapper, cameo-featured dandy who had met Alan on the Maid of Athens, for Ali's smashing blow had left the Greek for nose little more than a deformed scar, with two flattened blobs at the end—an effect which lent to the Greek's face a curiously sinister look that was far from inspiring confidence.

"Listen, O headman!" cried Saponyadi. "We come in peace to claim in the name of Idrin and the Padiechah, our due. Surrender that man"—he indicated Alan, whose broad shoulders topped the mob—"Ahmed, and one Zillah, and we leave thy village in peace. Refuse, and ye shall all be blotted out!"

"Moreover," said Rastan, "we will pay to the family of the maiden ten thousand piastres."

The sheikh suddenly rose from his seat, and thrust his way through the crowd, Alan at his side.

"Go, tell Idrin," he cried, his voice ringing out in wrath, "that he is forsworn! The curse of Jelaluddin be on him! I have spoken! Go!"

For answer, Rastan's hand leapt from his garment, and, pointing a revolver straight at Alan, he fired.

But, quick as his movement was, the sheikh was quicker. The great oaken staff he carried darted out and up, and even as Rastan's finger drew on the trigger, the staff descended with a thwack on his wrist, hurling the revolver to the ground. The Greek danced with pain, and, nursing his wounded arm, was dragged off by Saponyadi.

At the same moment a great cry rose from the interior of the church, followed by the shrieks of women and the wild discharge of firearms.

The embassy of the two Greeks had been but a ruse to cover the stealthy approach of the soldiers to the door giving into the chancel, and as Rastan had discharged his revolver twenty of Idrin's troopers, bearing between them a huge log, had charged the door, battered it in, and, bursting into the church, had surrounded the bridal-party. In an instant Zillah was torn, shrieking, from the arms of her husband, and Ahmed himself was struggling in the grasp of four soldiers, who were hurrying him after his bride towards the door.

Alan leapt for the church, followed by the sheikh, into whose usually benignant eyes a light of anything but philosophy had crept. At the same juncture a troop, a hundred strong, rode charging at the main entrance, pouring in a volley as they came. The Armenians, after a scattered discharge, flung to the door, and while some feverishly piled up barricades, others dashed to the aid of their comrades who were engaged in preventing the egress of the captors of the bridal party.

Alan, with the thrill of that smile of the cornflower eyes still on him, had made a bee-line for the girl. The crush was suffocating, the whirl of rifle-butts hard to avoid. But his height and reach served the Englishman in good stead, and the driving of his fists did more execution in a less time than was attained by all the howling and indiscriminate riot around. The old rugger captain knew his way through a "scrum," and he took it now. Before Zillah's captors knew what was among them, two of them had been lifted on to their backs by a clean right and left drive, and the other two, caught by the nape of the neck, had met nose to nose and brow to brow with a crashing embrace that left them sick and suffocated under the trampling of surrounding feet.

Next moment, with the Rose of the Dawn encircled firmly by one arm, Alan, swinging aloft a chair, was fighting off a savage rush of the zaptiehs. Above the mob and riot he could see that the sheikh had already done as much for Ahmed. Around him the soldiers were being rapidly beaten down, and though they fought like demons, numbers were beginning to prevail, when a rattling volley from the open door took the defenders in the rear.

Alan's eyes blazed as he poked a chair-leg half down the throat of a burly Turk, and sent another reeling with a well-placed kick on the kneecap. But his strength was beginning to fail him, and the half-fainting girl on his arm hampered him terribly. He looked round for the sheikh, but could not see him, and his heart misgave him, as he feared that he had fallen.

"Fight in retreat round the corner of the altar," whispered a voice in his ear; and a half glance over his shoulder showed him the calm, venerable visage and gleaming eyes of the old Armenian priest. He hurled his chair into the face of a rushing soldier, passed the girl into the arms of the priest, and, seizing a Turk who leapt at him by the middle, slipped his hold to the knees, and for a moment held back the rush, wielding his living club with an ease and ferocity that kept his opponents for some seconds halted in dismay.

"Come!" called the voice of the priest.

Alan dashed the whirling Turk into the middle of his comrades, and as he leapt round the corner of the altar a volley from the Armenians poured into the disarrayed ranks of the soldiery.

But of the ensuing fight, and of how the Armenians held their own, and drove their invaders, decimated, back, he knew nothing till long afterwards. For in the recess behind the altar, the approach to which was guarded by a triple row of the stalwarts of the village, he found the sheikh and Ahmed, with Zillah in his arms, and the ancient priest pointing to an open sarcophagus, where were visible steps cut in rock, and descending apparently into the earth.

"Go!" said the priest. "Ahmed knows the way. It leads by a tunnel into the Sipan Dag. There in the mountains you will be safe."

Ahmed, bearing his bride, was already descending.

Alan stood for a moment irresolute.

"I'd sooner see it out!" he said stubbornly.

"Wilt thou ever be headstrong, impatient one," said the sheikh, seizing his arm. "When the Imam here shall tell them thou hast fled by the window, will the men of Idrin not depart to seek thee?"

Alan grinned, and followed the sheikh down into the gloomy depths, the impenetrable blackness of which was suddenly intensified, as the priest replaced the lid of the sarcophagus.

The steps soon gave place to the sloping floor of a tunnel, in which they overtook Ahmed and his bride, who, recovered now from her faintness, was engaged in lighting the horn-lantern Ahmed had lifted from a ledge. Alan jumped as a great grey bat flitted past his face, and a little ripple of laughter from Zillah made him glad that the darkness hid his flushed cheeks.

"The tunnel is long," said Ahmed, "and none know when or why it was built, though once an old German, who wore great spectacles, and loved rubbish-heaps, said it had been built by Christians many hundred years ago."

"The main point," said Alan, "is to know where it leads to, and what you intend to do when we get there."

"It leads into a gorge of the Sipan Dag," said Ahmed. "There is a farmer there, a relative of Zillah's. He will befriend us, and lend us at least an ass. So we will travel to your English Consul at Van, and put ourselves under his protection, and with the next caravan go to Trebizond. For I dare no longer stay in this country, where, sooner or later, Idrin Pacha would seize me, and Zillah, too. I will go to England, the country of the free."

"I thought you had no money?" said Alan, who knew that when Ahmed had been seized as slave all his property had been destroyed.

"That is true," replied Ahmed. "But my friends have helped me with a little, and Zillah has many jewels."

"In that case," said Alan, "you've jolly well got to divide with me! When I escaped in Saponyadi's clothes, I took with me the money he brought to bribe me into being blackmailed out of my heritage. I have it now, a good thick wad of English banknotes. And before we go a step further you'll take half."

They were ten-pound notes, and in the feeble ray of light he separated ten of them, which he thrust into his pocket, and handed the remainder to Ahmed.

The Armenian's eyes glistened hungrily, but he held back. "My lord gave me life and liberty," he said. "But money!"

"Turn not from the gifts of Allah," said the deep voice of the sheikh. "The young man hath not yet learned wisdom; but thou, in profiting thereby, may teach him much. Wherefore take the gift, and postpone all women's talk, and hasten."

"That's the idea," said Alan. "Get a move on!" And he thrust the wad into Ahmed's trembling hands, little guessing in what strange way the gift was to turn the scale of his destiny in after-life.

They pressed on after that, swiftly and in silence, and in an hour's time greeted again the daylight among the fragmentary ruins of what had probably been some ancient Christian church. A few minutes' walk brought them to the outskirts of the farm Ahmed had mentioned.

A cry of dismay broke from Ahmed's lips as, rounding a low spur of rock, he led his companions face to face with a blackened ruin, over which the smoke was still hovering.

"Alas!" he cried, pointing to the empty cattle-sheds, and to a rigid form lying stark in front of the smouldering homestead. "Alas! The Kurds have been here, unless, indeed, Idrin's men have passed this way!"

Alan looked to his weapons, while the sheikh frowningly plucked at his beard.

"What's to be done, sheikh?" he asked. "Will I go forward and scout? Perhaps some of the rascals are about still."

"Nay, leave us not!" cried Ahmed. "Rather let us hasten for the pass, and gain the consulate at Van."

"Rest ye here," said the sheikh. "I will go forward and explore."

"Stir not, on your life!" interrupted a harsh voice, coming apparently from the skies.

Instinctively the eyes of the four turned upwards. They had been standing in an elbow of the spur they had turned, and immediately beneath a wooded ledge. And now, as they looked up, they saw the gleam of a dozen rifles covering them, and glowering down on them the black-bearded face and grim, cruel eyes of a great Kurd, a giant full six feet four in height, dressed in white, baggy trousers, with a gaudy-coloured sash at the waist, a waistcoat tight laced round his massive chest, with a shaggy cape of bearskin hanging round his broad shoulders.

"Kasim Beg, the Haideranli bandit," said Jelaluddin calmly, as he helped himself to an enormous pinch of snuff.

"Put down your weapons, my son," he went on, in a low tone to Alan, "and leave all to me."

Kasim, after leering for a long moment into the fair face of Zillah, turned to his followers.

"Lead out the mules," he commanded. "Mount the maiden on one, and tie the men on others, and lead on to the stronghold."

The order was executed with a celerity and in a silence that spoke volumes for the authority of the robber chief; and in a few minutes Alan and Ahmed were disarmed and mounted on mules, with their hands strapped behind their backs, and their feet lashed beneath the mules' belly, while Zillah, proud and defiant, rode on in front.

The sheikh, however, proved more intractable. For as two Kurds approached him, his staff thwacked right and left on their pates, felling them to the ground, and his voice thundered out:

"Ye sons of dogs, would ye lay impious hands on the prophet of Allah?"

The tribesmen drew back, looking from their scowling chief to the dauntless blazing eyes of the "prophet." Cut-throat bandits and outlaws though they were, they none the less reckoned themselves good Mohammedans, and they stood almost in more fear of the sheikh's curses than they did of their chief's wrath.

Kasim, however, was equal to the occasion.

"Go in peace, holy one," he said, in a slightly ironical accent, as he pricked his horse forward to the sheikh's side. "I war not with thee."

"Not so," said the sheikh disdainfully, as he sprang lightly into the saddle of the mule the men had brought forward. "Ye have seized my disciple and my guests. Wherefore, I go with them. For what treatment ye give to them, ye give to me; and I would see with my own eyes if the men of the tribe of the Haideranli dare offer outrage to the guests of Jelaluddin, Sheikh of Bagdad and prophet of Allah."

Kasim bit his lips and cursed in his beard. None knew better than he the force of the dilemma in which the cunning old sheikh had placed him. For whatever laws he might defy and violate, even he dared not outrage the unwritten law of hospitality, which through all Asia Minor makes the guest of your guest a person for whose safety you must risk goods and home, and even life itself. And now that Jelaluddin had deliberately elected to go with him, and openly thrown himself on his hospitality, Kasim knew well enough that not even the most depraved Tartar in his hand would lift a little finger to assist him in any act of treachery against either the sheikh or his companions.

"Cut those men free," he ordered suddenly, after a long minute's pause. "Restore their arms, and let them go their way."

"Nay; but we are hungry," interposed the sheikh. "We will accompany thee to thy abode, and eat salt with thee. Afterwards thou shalt forward us on our way, and much merit shall be thine."

Kasim glared, nodded surlily, and, digging his spurs into his horse, rode forward to the head of the column, and led the way up to his stronghold.

"You're a holy wonder!" said Alan, as the sheikh rode up alongside.

"Did I not promise thee that thou shouldst learn wisdom?" replied Jelaluddin complacently.

CHAPTER 2.

A Treacherous Plot.

THE stronghold of the bandit chief was situated on an almost inaccessible plateau, a hundred feet above the narrow defile where ran the only pass through the Sipan Dag to the shores of Lake Van. Many an expedition had the Bey of Bitlis, on the western shore of the lake, sent against Kasim, only to tear his beard over the remnants that returned. For save by a path but wide enough to allow

a led mule to mount, there was no way to reach the robber-haunt, which, moreover, was surrounded on every side by a perfect maze of abysses and precipices.

A few mud hovels were scattered along the edge of the plateau, but served more for guard outposts than for dwellings; for the band, some three hundred strong, lived in the maze of caverns that ran under the precipitous cliff, sixty feet high, in which the plateau terminated.

It was to one of these caverns, roomy, dry, and bright with a great fire of blazing logs, that Kasim conducted his guests. His ill-humour had apparently departed; and as he squatted with his guests on the skin-carpet surrounding the foot-high table, he proved himself a delightful host. A succulent broth was followed by the appearance of a whole lamb, roasted to a turn, and stuffed with rice, almonds, raisins, and pistachios, into which the guests in turn thrust a curved thumb, hanking out the portion they most fancied. A delightful beverage of tamarind water was then served out in great goblets that had been part of the spoil from an Eastern-bound caravan. As the feast proceeded, it was noticeable that Kasim's fierce black eyes turned ever and again to the fair face of Zillah, to wander contemptuously past the gentle features of Ahmed, and to return broodingly to the sheikh's grave, benignant countenance.

"Had it but been thou," he growled suddenly, turning to Alan, who sat on his left, "I would have fought thee for her, as man to man; for thou hast the bearing and the sinews of a warrior. But that yon dove-eyed lath of a boy should bear away so fair a houri is not fitting."

"How wouldst thou fight, O Kasim?" asked Alan, sizing up the chief's great shoulders, lean flanks, and rippling muscles. "A gun-shot is in the hands of the gods. With the sword, I should be but as a babe before thee. Yet hand to hand, I would fain try a tumble with thee."

"I should hurt thee, boy," said Kasim contemptuously. Alan flushed, and bit his lip; but, meeting the calm, ironic eyes of the sheikh, he choked back the swift retort. "Knowest thou, Hassan, overseer to Idrin Pacha, O bey?" asked Ahmed, leaning forward.

"Assuredly," answered Kasim. "Champion wrestler of the bazaars was he many years. Twice I tried a fall with him, and, gaining one, was satisfied not to try a third."

"Yet did he, whom thou hast just taunted as boy," said Ahmed, "try two falls with Hassan, and, gaining the first, did break his back in the second, so that Hassan lies even now at Changeri, a useless cripple."

"Pah! Harem-chatter!" sneered Kasim.

"It is true," said the sheikh.

For a moment the bandit's eyes gleamed at Alan, then sought Ahmed's defiant gaze.

"Then by the Prophet," he cried, "make him thy champion, and that fair maid the stake, and I will try a fall with him myself!"

Ahmed smiled disdainfully, as Zillah clung suddenly afraid, to his arm.

"All thy goods, thy life included, bey," he said dauntlessly, "could not weigh against her."

"Armenian dog!" shouted the bandit, his face suddenly dark with fury.

"Nay, but forget not he is my guest," said the sheikh calmly. "If thou must be violent, try now a fall with my disciple, in all good fellowship, though I fear greatly thou wilt regret it."

"As ye will," said Kasim, with an easy laugh. "Yet will we wait a little till the heat be passed, and our dinner lies less closely at our belts. What wouldst thou, Selim?"

The question was addressed abruptly to a handsome youth, whose face seemed strangely familiar to Alan, and who had entered the doorway of the cavern, and had been standing for two minutes still as a bronze statue, waiting till he was spoken to.

"Messengers from Idrin Pacha crave audience of your Excellency," answered Selim.

"Let their eyes be bandaged, and lead them to the outer chamber," answered Kasim; and as the messenger departed, the chief's eyes flickered for a moment with a strangely-furtive gleam in them, over the four of his guests.

"What can the old toad Idrin want of me?" he muttered half aloud.

"He seeks my guests, O Kasim," said the sheikh, raising his voice so that it could plainly be heard by the tribesmen loitering about the open doorway. "By Allah and the Prophet, Idrin swore the vow of freedom to my disciple whom by foul treachery he had ensnared and enslaved. And Idrin, false to his vow, pursues him again. Wherefore have I cursed him, and he is accursed; and thou, whose bread we have eaten, thou and all thy men, perforce must lend us all thy aid to baffle that foul and perjured jackal."

The murmur of assent and anger that rose from the doorway was not lost on the robber chief. The news of Ahmed's flight, and the manner in which Alan had held at bay the pursuers, had reached him some time back. And at the first

mention of an embassy from Idrin, his crafty mind had sidled towards a device which, in placing Ahmed and Alan in Idrin's power, would rid him of the sheikh. But no trace of his purpose was revealed on his smiling face as he rose to his feet.

"Be not afraid," he said. "While Kasim and his men can hold a gun or wield a sword, none shall seize thee or thy guests from under the safeguard of his hospitality."

He girded on his scimitar, and strode through the doorway.

Alan exchanged a swift glance with the sheikh.

"Will he betray us?" he asked.

"Craft is in his soul, and covetousness in his blood," said the sheikh; "yet I think that he will not dare to surrender us openly. Come thou with me; we will see how far he trusts his guests, and so measure our trust of him."

He rose, and, followed by Alan, strode to the doorway. But here their egress was blocked by four sturdy riflemen, who, crossing their weapons, barred all progress.

"The chief begs ye will await his return," said one of them, with ironic politeness.

To the left of them Alan noticed the messenger who, a while ago, had interrupted their feast; and as the sheikh was about to use his authority to thrust the man aside, Wayward touched his arm.

"Call him whom Kasim named Selim," he said. "We may learn something from him of this embassy."

Selim, grave and diffident, drew near to the sheikh's call. But to all questions as to the visitors he had announced, or the number of men with them, he opposed a blank silence. Alan regarded the youth closely, puzzling in vain to fix the man's face in his memory.

"He is not like these other men," he said to the sheikh. "Of what race is he?"

"He is of Bokhara," said Jelaluddin, "and probably is an escaped slave."

Selim's eyes flashed and he threw his head back, with a sudden gleam of his strong, white teeth. The gesture solved Alan's perplexity on the instant.

"Ah, now I know you!" he cried. "Have you not a brother Ali; a man tall as I, with a hooked nose, and a great scar on his cheek?"

Selim came a step nearer, an eager light aflame in his sombre eyes.

"Even so," he said. "But how knowest thou Ali?"

"He called me lord and protector," said Alan, "and I looked on him as my friend."

Selim looked at him through suspicious, narrowing lids.

"Ali calls no man lord," he said; "except, maybe, one who had given him life."

"For which reason he called me 'lord,'" said Alan quietly. "For when a leopard was ravaging on his back, I plucked it from him and slew it with my hunting-knife."

There was nothing of the braggart about the old Marlborough boy; he was working for a purpose. For, in the tight hole in which they all were, a friend in camp might be worth a regiment outside.

"When was this?" asked Selim suspiciously.

Alan recounted the incident and Rastan's treachery in all its details, giving so exact a description of Ali that Selim was obviously struggling with conviction.

"Wouldst thou proof?" he said.

Selim nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"If I mistake not," pursued Alan, making a shot in the void, "the man who brings Idrin's word is a small man, dark, with a smashed nose. Is it not so?"

"Even so," grunted one of the soldiers. "And with him is a big man, with a face like a greased bladder."

"It was thy brother Ali, O Selim," said Alan, "who smashed the Greek dog's nose with a back-hand sweep of his gun, as Rastan leapt on him in the darkness to slay him. Go, then, ask of the broken-nosed one if Ali the Bokharian has recovered from the leopard wounds. His answer shall satisfy thee."

Selim gave the young Englishman a long, level glance; then, without a word, swung on his heel and departed.

"It was well said, my son," approved the old sheikh. "Verily, thou art learning that a man's strength lieth not altogether in his sinews!"

Meanwhile, in the Cave of Audience, Kasim Beg was playing his wits against the remnant of his honour. He had not become bandit from choice, but by accident, as it were. A few years previous he had been a captain of regulars in the Sultan's army; a man marked alike by his courage and capacity for high honours. But misfortune had thrown in his way a truculent German professor, who, garbed as an Armenian, had disturbed the captain in his enjoyment of a private foray. The German had been left for dead on the roadside, but with Teutonic stubbornness had recovered; and his Government had made such capital of the incident, that Kasim had to choose between a painful and speedy

death, or a free life in the fastnesses of the mountains. But he sighed still for the "fleshpots" of the valleys—the gay life of the cities. And the embassy of Idrin Pacha made it speedily evident that they were no strangers to his unspoken ambitions.

It took them nearly half an hour to approach the business in hand; for, after the manner of the East, they talked fluently and fervidly of everything save their real errand. Nor was it till after the coffee had been drunk, and a vast quantity of cigarettes had been consumed, that Rastan—ever conscious of his spoilt beauty—came to the point. And by that time Selim, silent as a shadow, was standing, rigid as the rock against which he leant, at the entrance to the cave.

Kasim's authority and wrath were too well known and dreaded for any of the passing band to dream that Selim had not been ordered to occupy his otherwise mortal post. And the dusky skin and aquiline features of the Bokharian revealed nothing of what was in his heart. For with him a feud was a sacred trust, and, if this stranger's tale were true, then it devolved upon him, the brother of Ali, to take up and continue the blood-feud, whose monument was Rastan's broken nose. So he stood motionless and listened.

"It is known to me, O Kasim," said Rastan, "that thou hast here an Englishman and the Sheikh Jellaluddin, also Ahmed, an Armenian, with Zillah his bride. The sheikh, though he be a pestiferous beast and ought to die, concerns us not; nor do we seek to rob thee of thy rights on the maid; but Ahmed and the Englishman are runaway slaves, belonging to Idrin Pacha. Therefore, hear the word of Idrin. Deliver now the Englishman and Ahmed—do what thou wilt with the woman—and Idrin pledges thee his word that he will gain thy pardon from the Padschah, and thy reinstatement in command of thy old regiment."

"Fair words and no guarantee!" grunted Kasim.

"Between honourable men no guarantee is needed," said Rastan. "But Idrin rests with Hadir Bey at Bitlis, and when we lead there that ghaour and Ahmed, Idrin will make thy peace with Hadir, or risk thy vengeance. And in faith of this have we not two pack-mules on the borders of the lake, loaded with rifles and ammunition, and furs from Erzerum!"

"Ye are come at an evil moment," said Kasim gloomily. "True is it that those of whom you speak are here, but they are my guests, and sacred. I may not harm them, and am pledged to put them in safety on the lake on their way to the ghaour effendi at Van."

"And what shall hinder thee from so doing?" asked Rastan, in his oiliest tone. "Let it suffice to thy pledge to put them on the lake and return hither. We will lie in wait for them on the way to Van. If that mad dervish Jellaluddin be drowned, it will only prove that Allah hath no further use for him. Ahmed and the Englishman we will take. What sayest thou?"

The eyes of Kasim gleamed, and an evil grin swept his countenance.

"Thou art a subtle dog," he said, "and stinkest prettily of thy false master Idrin. Yet, as thou hast said, let it be done. This evening will I forward my guests on their voyage. See that the pack-mules await my men. And if ye deceive me, then let Idrin have a care to himself. Ho! Selim! Selim!"

The young Bokharian took some calling before he appeared, calm and impassive, in the doorway.

"Eh! puppy from Bokhara!" snarled Kasim. "Was it to call thee twice I selected thee as my shadow?"

"Ah!" interrupted Rastan, a sudden flush mounting his sallow cheeks. "Thy man is from Bokhara? And if there be anything certain in this land of unstable hours, it is that each Bokharian rests in touch with the men of his native place. I am most eager to find a man of Bokhara, one Ali, a big man, with a scar from temple to lip, and the nose of a hawk. Knowest thou such a man, fellow?"

"I know him," said Selim shortly, after a swift glance to his master and a responsive nod.

"Knowest thou where he is?" asked Rastan, scarcely veiling his eagerness.

"He was at Trebizond," answered Selim; "and departing thence with two ghaours to hunt, was reported to be slain by a leopard."

"It is false!" cried Rastan. "That cursed Englishman you have here pulled the leopard from him and slew it. Wherefore this same Ali betrayed me, his master, to serve the Englishman?"

"I said it was reported," pursued Selim calmly. "Yet I know that he lives. Moreover, I heard that one of the ghaours strove to slay him treacherously, and was smitten by Ali so that his nose was altogether broken."

"Look you," said Rastan slowly. "Find me that man, and I will give thee one thousand piastres in good gold the day thou deliverest him into my hands."

"Was it then thou, effendi, whose nose Ali smashed?" asked Selim, in a tone so impertinently familiar that Rastan, with an oath, sprang to his feet, drawing his revolver.

But before he could point it, the back of Kasim's scimitar had caught his fingers in an upward sweep that sent the revolver spinning to Selim's feet. The Bokharian, with a winty smile, stooped and picked it up, and thrust it into the gaudy sash around his waist.

"Dog of a Greek," growled Kasim, "thou wilt do well to restrain thyself under my roof! Go, Selim," he went on, "bid my guests prepare for their voyage, and send men down to the lake to get ready a boat for them."

With a long, mocking look at Rastan, Selim departed. The bandit chief rose, and accompanied his visitors from the cave.

"They part an hour before sunset," he said. "Get ye gone, and fail me not!"

CHAPTER 3.

Battling for a Friend.

"WE are ready," said the sheikh, answering the query of the bandit chief, whose great figure blocked the doorway of the cavern. "And we thank thee, Kasim Beg, for thy hospitality. Yet one other favour would we beg of thee, who still art noble of the Haideranli. Give unto us now thy 'shadow,' Selim, that he may conduct us, as under the cover of thy cloak, to Van. So no man shall molest us by the way."

It was a request so natural, yet so disconcerting, that the bandit stood for a moment without a word to say.

The sheikh, wily old diplomat, versed in every subtlety of the Eastern brain, read his hesitation, and chuckled inwardly.

Selim had had little time in which to make known to the "lord" of his brother Ali the confirmation of his tale. For Kasim had been close on his heels. Yet the time had been sufficient for the Bokharian to whisper, "Be on your guard. Treachery on the lake. Ask Kasim for me as guide."

To Alan, or even to Ahmed, the warning, so swift and unexpected, might have proved more dangerous than profitable. But the Sheikh Jellaluddin smiled in his beard, and muttered blessings on Allah, who had given to him much understanding, and a face that, like a tombstone, told only what he chose to leave written on it.

"I have for ye sturdy rowers," said Kasim at last. "Selim, I cannot spare, since he must go on a mission for me, that none but he can fulfil."

The sheikh fixed his deep-sunken, cunning old eyes for a moment on the bandit's face, then flashed a glance at Alan.

"Oh, lord of the Haideranli!" he said, in a highly ironic accent, "what is one boy to thee? Behold, against thy Selim I will pledge this jewelled toy, that my disciple shall safeguard for me in a fall with thee."

He produced from some hidden fold of his robe, a long stiletto-like dirk, with a blade two feet in length, and a haft some eight inches long, set with rubies, emeralds, and onyx.

"It is of the finest steel of old Damascus. See!" he went on, bending the point of the blade backward over the haft till it touched and completed the circle.

"A pretty toy," said Kasim coldly. "But ye cannot have Selim. For he has already departed. And for trying a fall with yonder boy, let him first grow a man. Then if he will return, I will deal with him. But Kasim cannot break the back of striplings."

"Oh, I'll probably return, all right!" said Alan, looking up with a straight glance. "If it's only to see this dog of yours!"

He had been caressing a huge wolfhound, which had entered with Kasim, after he had dismissed Rastan, and remained behind when the bandit chief had departed for an hour with Selim. Alan, ever a lover of dogs, and quite unconscious of the big brute's reputation for intractable savageness, had at once crossed over to it, patted its head, pulled its ears, and treated it with that negligent air of assured companionship which makes a true Englishman and a true dog good comrades all the world over.

For a moment, as Kasim looked on him, and noted his calm handling of the great hound none but himself had ever dared before to lay hands on, his heart repented of the treachery he was meditating. Then his eyes drifted to Zillah, and his repentance was overwhelmed in covetousness. Yet he liked the young Englishman, with the instinctive liking a savage of the mountains ever has for one in whom he recognises the kindred virtues of strength and fearlessness. To him a dog was just a dog—a beast to use and kick at will. It struck him with a sense of relish that the

hound, if he gave it to the gjaour, might prove a very thorn in the side of the Greeks who were trafficking for his capture.

"If the beast please thee," he said, "thou art welcome to keep him—if thou canst hold him for the space of two minutes while I summon him."

Alan shot a glance from the mocking, stern face to the great shoulders and long, lean, muscular flanks of the hound.

"A man can but try," he said. "Call him when thou wilt." And his hand fastened tightly on the creased skin on the dog's neck.

A grin went round the circle of swarthy, bearded faces at the door, as Kasim, half turning to the entry, gave a shrill whistle.

The hound leapt forward as from a catapult, to halt straining against the left hand that Alan suddenly thrust against its throat. It turned its head, baring its long, cruel fangs, its bloodshot eyes looking mingled inquiry and menace at this new friend of an hour, for all the world as if in schoolboy parlance it would say, "You image! Don't you see I'm wanted?"

For answer Alan tightened the grip of his left a little, and shifting his right to the hound's shoulders, switched its loins between the grip of his bending knees.

Again the shrill whistle called, this time from the outside. The wolfhound, rearing backwards, released its loins with an incredible suppleness of movement, and hurled itself against Alan, its eyes now glinting like chips of live charcoal, its fangs bared in real earnest.

It was a movement that Alan had expected. Reared as it was, the dog was almost his own height. His left grip had been shifted by the movement from a hauling hold, to a backward leverage, with the thumb down, and well planted against the larynx. His right he now let slip from the shoulder, and circling the hound round the small of the back, he caught it a sudden clutch against the hip he thrust forward. The grip brought one forepaw under his left arm, the other above his right shoulder, and deprived the hound altogether of the use of his steel-clawed hind feet; while the strangling, vice-like hug round its spine numbed beyond all use the immense leverage power of its hindquarters. It was now a contest between the left forearm of the man and the stubborn, vast strength in the writhing muscles of the dog's shoulders and throat.

Again the whistle shrilled, angrily this time, and accompanied by the sudden discharge of a gun.

But in vain the hound writhed; in vain its teeth gnashed at the stern, set face a foot away; in vain it tried to use the paralysed muscles of its forepaws. Alan's grip grew firmer and more relentless; the dog's tongue lolled; its hindquarters hung helpless; its snarl grew into a rattle.

Kasim appeared at the entry, his gleaming eyes wide with amazement.

"Hoo! It is well done!" he said. "The hound is thine!" Alan drew the dog's face to his and kissed its front. Then very gently he released his grip, and forcing the great hound down between his knees, laid both his hands on its head.

The dog looked up at him from twitching, bloodshot eyes. "Whistle him again," said Alan softly.

Kasim complied; but the wolfhound, beyond a swift, furtive, sideways glance, never budged.

"Hoo, hoo!" came in a chorus from the open door.

"Verily, thou art a man!" said Kasim, with a sudden stride forward; he stretched out his hand, clasped Alan's, and embraced him swiftly. "The dog is thine. But the sun sets, and if ye would reach Van, ye must depart without delay."

He waited a moment by Alan's side, till the sheikh, followed by Ahmed and Zillah, had gained the entry. Then, with his hand still on Alan's shoulder, his eyes fixed on those in front, he bent suddenly and whispered: "I guarantee thee only to the lake. Idrin Pacha loves thee not!"

"And thou art twice forsworn," thought Alan, as he followed his host's swift stride to the door, where Zillah and Ahmed were already mounted, and the sheikh stood still and observant, awaiting his beloved disciple.

"We shall not reach the lake before the after-glow," said Ahmed, as, their leave-taking over, they followed their guide down the mountain-side, whereon the tips of the great pine-trees seemed to be aflame with the vermilion fire of the sunset that slanted through the purple gloom of the forest's silent chancels.

"All the better," replied Alan, with a glance to the great wolfhound that lurched along by the side of his mule. Beyond the single command "heel," the young Englishman had given no overt sign of interest in the dog. Yet there was that in voice, in hand, in gesture, that told the canine heart of a change in masters, and with no more than a

sidling look at its late indifferent tyrant, the hound had obeyed the behest of this new strange being who had gripped it so fearfully, and treated it with so great comprehension of all a dog likes.

The sheikh, silent and frowning, rode apart, offering no reply to any remark addressed to him. It was only when they reached the lake, six thousand feet below the stronghold they had quitted, that Jelaluddin seemed to awake as from a dream and take any interest in what was being done.

Then, indeed, his interest was as inquisitive as the nose of a ferret on the edge of a rabbit-burrow. Not an inch of the boat, hauled half-afoat among the bordering reeds, escaped his attention. Satisfied at last, he rose erect, and turned to the waiting boatmen.

"Ye can go, slaves!" he said curtly. "We have no need of thee!"

It was in vain the boatmen clamoured that Kasim had bidden them row his visitors to Van. Jelaluddin, tiring of commands, turned on them with his staff, driving them dismayed into the bush, while Ahmed and Zillah followed Alan into the high-sterned, flat-bottomed tub. The great wolfhound leapt after his new master to a snap of the fingers and curled himself contentedly at the feet of the Rose of the Dawn. His eyes, alert and watchful, never quitted the calm, rugged face that had conquered him; and in them was an expression that seemed to say that he knew the old life of kicks and bones was finished, and a new life begun with a master who would be a friend. Returning from his rout of the boatmen, and scattering blessings instead of bakshish among the grinning escort, the sheikh shoved the boat easily into the fuller water and leapt aboard. Alan, who had the strange, pole-like oars unshipped and afloat through their leathern rowlocks, looked inquiry at him.

"Go we east to Van?" he asked.

"Allah knows!" returned the sheikh placidly. "I am sure that Kasim betrays thee. Losing his hound, did he not embrace thee? Wherefore, between us and Van, no doubt, Rastan lies with men of Idrin to take thee and Ahmed, and, perchance, bear the maiden shrieking to Kasim."

"Go not towards Van," said a voice that appeared to rise from the waters. "Nor, as ye value my life and your own, turn your eyes from the boat. Am I not Selim, brother to Ali, whom the gjaour saved from Idrin's jackal?"

Alan, shooting a glance over the gunwale, and restraining the wolfhound's low snarl, saw, peering over the edge of a rough float made of a stretched goatskin, the face of the Bokharian.

"Turn thy prow to the south," went on Selim. "Till we are beyond the sight of the eyes on the shore, I will hold to the gunwale here. Towards Van, Rastan awaits ye; for Kasim hath betrayed ye. Row, then, lord of Ali and my lord, till the blackness covers us!"

Alan obeyed as best he might. These oars, that resembled Indian clubs, were no more to his taste than the scoffing chuckles of the sheikh at his back. Yet, by dint of sheer stubbornness, he managed to get into the rolling knack of them, and drive the boat little by little away from the shore. He was hardly aware that Selim was aboard, before the Bokharian whispered in his ear:

"Let my lord bend forward and lie flat. So shall I take the oars."

The next quarter of an hour passed in silence, as Selim awayed to the oars and Ahmed steered with a long pole. The shore was gradually enveloped in darkness, while in front of them there grew up the faint outline of the promontory where the long, northern neck of the lake cranes westward, before the coast-line swings abruptly into the bay where Van stands.

"It is under cover of that headland that Rastan waits with Idrin's men," said Selim, with a jerk of his head to the east. "Now we will turn, if my lord wills, and beaching south of Alchilai, above Bitlis, gain the Karzan Dag, and descend on Mush, where also is an Angeliz effendi."

Alan nodded, and, the boat's prow slurring round, the voyage continued in silence. They had passed the flickering lights of Alchilai, and were forging into a deep cove where the mountains, covered with forest, rose stern and precipitous on either hand, when the wolfhound pricked his ears and growled low in his throat.

"We are pursued," said the sheikh. "Pause, Selim, a moment and hearken!"

Selim obeyed, and over the still, black waters could be heard the swishing beat of oars in rhythm, and Rastan's shrill voice urging the rowers on.

"We have but half an hour to reach the beach," said Selim coolly, as he swung again to the oars. "Let my lord sit aft with his rifle. Behold, the moon is rising, and one good shot will cause much disorder in the rowers."

Above the black fringe of the mountains the moon was struggling through a bank of purple cloud, lighting up the

surface of the lake, and revealing, not a mile behind, the pursuing boat with four men at the oars, and a crowd of armed men in the high stern.

"If they shoot too," said Alan, "we are in for a warm time."

"Bah!" snarled the sheikh. "Whoever saw a zaptieh shoot straight? Moreover, the moon is in their eyes."

The boat, in spite of its burden, was overhauling them rapidly. Alan had no mind to take life unnecessarily, and as the distance separating them decreased to about 1,000 yards, he took careful aim, and dropped a bullet well on the water-line of the crankily-built craft. He plugged two more in about the same spot before the Turks thought of replying. But their volley went wide and short, and the sheikh and Selim grunted in chorus as they saw the pursuers suddenly cease rowing and tear off turbans to stop the increasing leakage.

Selim paused, and snatching up Ahmed's rifle, took a sniping shot into the crowd at the prow. As Rastan's ill-luck would have it, his impatience had made him go forward, and the bullet found his cheek, scoring a great wound along the cheekbone, and carrying away half of one of his shell-like ears. His rage and dancing materially delayed the work of stopping the leakage, and as Selim took to the oars again Alan and Ahmed poured in volley after volley, riddling the hull of the hide-covered craft till it visibly began to settle lower and lower in the water.

Then a wisp of black cloud swept over the moon, blotting out the boat. But the ensuing silence assured the fugitives that the pursuit was effectually checked, though it was not till later they learned that Idrin's boat had barely succeeded in beaching at the village of Alchlai. By that time, Selim had guided their craft into a shallow creek, and was leading the way by a narrow goat-track up the lower spurs of the Karzan Dagh.

It was not easy marching, for, though the snow was crisp and scarcely yielded to the feet, the incline was steep, the cold numbing, and the darkness the more trying for the spectral, blinding whiteness of the track. Zillah happily was insured to the life of the hills, and marched as well and bravely as any man. As they advanced their difficulties increased, for the wind began to howl round them, at first blowing the spin-drift of the frozen snow in blinding eddies round their faces; then, as they struggled higher and higher, enveloping them in a very blizzard of snow, that fell in great, thick whirling flakes that made it impossible to distinguish each other's whereabouts.

Selim appeared to have the eyes of a wolf, and never faltered from the now indiscernible track. Linking hands, they plunged on, silent, desperate, dogged. But the storm increased in violence, and presently Selim, with a grunt of disgust, halted, and pointed to a yawning, black hole on the side of the track.

"If my lord wills," he said, addressing Alan, and carelessly oblivious of anyone else's wishes, "we may shelter in this cavern and eat."

"The shelter part of it is all right," said Alan cheerfully. "But as for the eating, Selim, unless you have brought provisions, we are like to go hungry. For Kasim did not think of offering us food for our journey, and we looked to be in Van before now."

Selim swore softly under his breath.

"I have nothing, my lord," he said.

But the halt in the comparative warmth of the cavern was none the less comforting, and if Alan was disposed to laugh when he saw Ahmed tenderly scrubbing the nose of his bride with a handful of snow, he was thankful enough to take the hint and treat his own frozen extremities to a like cordial.

"We had better camp here for the night," proposed Ahmed. "The storm shows no signs of breaking. Rastan will hardly persuade his men to pursue us in this weather. And, anyhow, the snow will have covered our tracks."

"As to that," growled Selim; "there is but the one pass over the Karzan Dagh, and I can lead ye blindfold. They will guess we take the way to Mush. Yet I think not they will pursue us before the dawn."

It was a cold and famishing vigil that they passed, and the first grey streaks of daylight did not tend to reassure them. Even Selim, for all his boast of finding the track, looked with dismay on the white expanse of powdered snow. A good eight inches had fallen during the night, and though it had now ceased, the wind had obliterated every trace of a path, and the danger of drifts was one that could not be treated lightly.

"We must wait awhile," said Selim, after a long survey. "For a little way, I will go on and see whether the drifts will bear. Let my lord await my return."

They watched him for a while as his tall, athletic figure swung over the glistening snow, till a jutting scarp of rock hid him from sight.

Alan, looking at the pinched face and blue lips of Zillah, was stirred to pity and not a little fear.

"She will die if we do not get food," he murmured to the sheikh. "Are there not goats or wild sheep on these ranges?"

"Perchance," said the sheikh. "Yet, after the storm, they will be difficult to find."

"Well, I'm off to have a scout round," said Alan. "When Selim returns he can follow in my tracks. And, anyhow, I shall have no difficulty in following back my own spoor."

He called to the wolfhound, picked up his rifle, and went out into the snow. The cold was intense, but the air was electrically vivifying, and the sky a clear vault of steel-like blue. For half an hour he followed the crest of the ridge, under which their cavern lay; but, though his eyes were keen, not a sign of life greeted them.

"We'll try a lower spur, doggie—eh?" he said, his eyes searching a deep gorge on the right, where a sudden movement among the tops of some young larches seemed to suggest a prey of some kind.

He picked his way in that direction carefully, keeping well to windward. As he approached the spot, and made to round a jutting crag, he noticed that the wolfhound's ears were pricking forward, his lips drawing back over bared fangs, his every muscle trembling with excitement. He rounded the crag warily, to stand for a second spellbound, while the dog crouched, tense and quivering, ready for a spring.

For there, on its hind-legs, scratching with its fore-paws at the tops of a young larch, was a great brown bear, not ten feet from the barrel of his gun.

Bruin seemed almost as surprised as his visitor, and for a long second the two gazed at each other. A low enarl from the wolfhound broke the spell, and, with a sudden winking of his little malignant eyes, the bear dropped on all-fours and shambled swiftly forward, its red mouth slobbering, its great tusk-like teeth cruelly expectant.

For a moment, Alan felt inclined to make a bolt for it. There was something so sinister and so powerful in that sure, shambling attack, that the recoil from it was almost automatic and instinctive. But a glance at the great wolfhound braced his nerves. The dog was waiting, still crouched, its haunches drawn up, its red eyes a gleam with the joy of battle.

It was the emotion of the fraction of a second, the recoil and the bracing. Then, almost without realising what he had done, Alan raised his Martini and took steady aim, and fired just as the bear, with a snarling growl, rushed in. The bullet caught bruin fairly under the left eye as he reared himself for a grab, and at the same moment the hound leapt, fastening its fangs in the furry neck, bearing the massive brute to the ground. But the shot had done its work, and before the beating paws could smite at the ravaging hound, the bear, with a last convulsive shudder, lay suddenly still and rigid.

Alan felt a glow of triumph as he pulled the dog off and surveyed the great beast. He set to work at once to skin it, and was still engaged in that occupation when Selim, attracted by the shot, came racing up.

"Hoo! My lord, what a prize!" he cried.

It did not take the two of them long to finish their task, and cut off several portions of steak, which an hour later the sheikh served hot and succulent in the cavern.

"Now, my lord," said Selim, when the meal was concluded, "it would be wise to push on. The drifts will bear. We can take the rest of the meat, and I will carry the skin."

So, cheered and warmed by the timely, if somewhat gamey meal, they followed Selim down the trail which they fondly hoped was leading them to safety.

CHAPTER 4.

The Guilelessness of the Sheikh.

SOUND travels far over crisp snow. And Alan's happy shot, if it provided them with a life-saving meal, was destined to provide them also with about the warmest quarter of an hour the fugitives had yet experienced.

As Ahmed had rightly divined, Idrin's zaptiehs—men bred to the plains—had flatly refused to take up the trail over the Karzan Dagh on so wild a night. And had they had to deal with a man less obstinate, or less influenced by a very fury of rancour than was Rastan, the Turkish soldiery of the Pacha of Changeri might well have abandoned altogether a pursuit so little to their taste. But Rastan, once nicknamed "the Beautiful" in the cafes of Constantinople, did not nurse the spirit of vengeance in any cradle of futile oaths.

His broken nose had been outrage enough, and now that there was added to it the insult of his mutilated ear, his

venomous spite had assumed the force of an obsession. He put down all to the account of the young Englishman, who had emerged so victoriously from the toils of his treachery. He wanted Alan Wayward badly. His very dreams were seamed with visions of the tortures the Englishman should suffer at his hands—tortures nameless, lingering, satisfying even to his insatiate cruelty.

And Saponyadi was no less backward than his whilom lieutenant. With the papers Alan had entrusted to Ali safe in the hands of the British consul at Trebizond, the wealthy merchant saw himself for ever condemned to fly the pleasures of European capitals, and lead the life of an adventurer in the wilds round Van, where at least he might pick up the threads of his commerce, evade pursuit, and bleed Idrin Pacha.

So while Alan and his companions were descending the Karzan Dag into the gorges of the Tigris, on their way to Mush, Rastan and Saponyadi, by force of bribes and threats, had mustered ten men to take the trail, and guided by a villager of Alchlai, were hot in pursuit, when their attention was attracted by the sound of Alan's shot.

It was easy for their experienced guide to locate the spot, and, once there, the skinned bear and the blood-flecked trail to the cavern, and the still smoking embers of the sheikh's fire, told their tale all too eloquently.

The pace of the fugitives had been retarded by the necessary and difficult task of finding the snow-covered track. But the pursuers had only to follow their spoor, and they did so at a sturdy trot that brought them ever nearer and nearer their unconscious quarry.

By noontide Selim had called a halt in a narrow defile, one side of which fell sheer into the yellow torrent of the Tigris, a hundred feet beneath, while the other rose in craggy, wooded galleries a thousand feet up. It had been a perilous task to negotiate the pass at all, for half-way down a great boulder thrust out into the footway, leaving but a space of twenty inches between its ice-covered cheek and the abyss beyond. But Selim had passed it like a goat, nor had the sheikh shown less ease at the task. They, linking hands, had helped the others round, and Selim had promptly profited by the difficulty of the access to suggest a meal, urging that if there were pursuit they could not hope to find a better place in which to withstand it.

Nor did the issue belie his mountain-craft.

The wolfhound was the first to give notice of danger, as, looking up from a hunk of raw meat, he uttered a low, menacing growl. Selim sprang to the boulder, and, craning his neck round, took a glance up the pass. He stepped back quick as a startled goat as a bullet "pinged" against the rock.

"It is Rastan of the broken nose," he said, "with ten or twelve men."

With a glance at Ahmed and the girl suddenly trembling on her husband's arm, Alan drew his revolver, his mouth setting grimly. He had no liking for bloodshed; but it required no words to tell him what would be Zillah's fate were she to fall into the hands of Rastan's savage crew. And as they wanted a fight, he was resolved that it should not be one-sided.

"There is the danger," cried Selim, pointing upwards. "See, my lord, that gallery up above there, not ten feet beyond us, runs above the pass on the other side of the boulder. If the zaptiehs think of that, we are caught like rats in a trap."

"Not yet," said Alan, between set teeth, as he leapt to the face of the cliff, and held his rifle stretched above his head by the two hands. "Up you get, over my shoulders, Selim. With a spring from my rifle, you can gain the ledge, and help up Ahmed and Zillah, who will aid you to pelt those ruffians with rocks so that they cannot climb."

Selim was up on the ledge almost before Alan had finished speaking; and if the young Englishman felt his cheeks tingling as Zillah was lifted on to his shoulders, none but the snow, and perhaps the girl, saw the flush. Ahmed followed, light as a cat.

Alan, looking up, saw Selim's face looking down inquiring, and he turned to find the sheikh at his side.

"Go thou, too, my son," said the sheikh. "It is the post of most danger, and therefore thine. I am an old and guileless man, not expert in the use of war. But verily it seems to me that lying there by the boulder, I can, with my unarmed staff, prick the oncomers over the precipice. Get thee gone while there is time, for behold the hand of the first who comes."

He pointed to a hand clawing round the face of the rock, set his back to the wall, and stood rigid.

Alan did not hesitate, and next moment stood with his companions crouching in the thicket on the ledge. For a moment he watched breathless, as the sheikh softly padded over the snow, and poised his oaken staff. The great wolf-

hound had followed his master in one flying leap, clean and sure as a leopard, and now lay crouched at his side, with eyes blinking now at Alan's face, now at the meal he had left.

"Hoo! The guileless one!" grunted Selim, as the sheikh's staff suddenly darted out, and caught the first zaptieh a prod in the thorax that sent him headlong into the torrent below. Then, leaning outward and forward, Jelaluddin's staff whirled on to the pate of the second zaptieh, who, with a shriek of dismay, followed his comrade into the abyss.

From their vantage point, those on the ledge could see the zaptiehs on the other side of the boulder, crowd, dismayed, round Rastan, who, fuming with rage, and cursing them for cowards, urged them to charge. It was Selim who disturbed at once the reluctance of the zaptiehs and the eloquence of the Greek. And he did it with a sharp-edged rock, that he hurled with sure aim at this new-found foe of his brother Ali.

"That for Ali of Bokhara, from his brother Selim!" he yelled, as the missile caught Rastan fair in the mouth, laying open his lips to the gums, and felling him to the earth.

"You idiot!" said Alan angrily. "You have shown them the way."

"We can hold it," said Selim sullenly. And lifting another rock the size of his head, he sent it hurtling on to the shoulders of a zaptieh who was making a back for a comrade to gain the ledge. For a few moments the bullets fell thickly about the fugitives. But it was impossible to see them in the thick undergrowth with its curtain of snow-clad larches, and by continuously keeping on the move, and sustaining their hail of stones, Alan and his comrades not only escaped injury, but speedily threw into disarray the little troop beneath.

"Round the boulder, ye cowards!" shrieked Rastan. "Divide! There are but five of them!"

Saponyadi drove four of the zaptiehs towards the boulder, while Rastan, clambering on to the held rifle of a soldier, swarmed on to the ledge. It was a movement that increased his mortification, for as he sprawled, clambering over the edge, the wolfhound, at a sign from Alan, caught him by the shoulders and pinned him to the earth, while Selim and Ahmed heaving at a great mass of rock, sent it hurtling on to the living ladder beneath.

With their leader down, and themselves cruelly wounded by the flying rocks, the zaptiehs had no stomach for further fight, and turned and fled, save two whom the staff of the guileless sheikh had poked into eternity.

Saponyadi stood alone in the pass, looking about him like a man distraught. Then seeing Rastan's legs still hanging over the ledge, he made a leap for him, caught him by the heels, and by sheer force of weight tore him from the restraining grip above.

"Capture—capture!" yelled Selim, as Rastan, jerked groundwards, fell back, striking Saponyadi's face with his head, and rolling with him to the ground.

"Good wheeze!" agreed Alan; and as the Greeks were in the act of disentangling themselves, they reeled backwards, half stunned beneath the fierce impact of the leap of Selim and the Englishman, Selim indeed landing with his heels fairly between Saponyadi's shoulders, and knocking him completely senseless.

Nor was Rastan in better case, as the wolfhound, leaping after his master, stood with bared fangs above his dazed face, as if defying him to move so much as a finger.

To strip the fallen men of their arms, and bind their hands with their own sashes, was the work of a second; and though it was more difficult to persuade them to grip the sheikh's staff, and so negotiate the perilous footway round the boulder, Selim, prodding hindwards with the cold argument of a hard rifle-barrel, overcame their reluctance.

"Allah is great," said the sheikh simply, as the fugitives and their captives all stood in the pass. "With an oaken staff and a few stones we have routed the impious men of war. What do we with these dogs of unbelievers? Verily they are an eyesore to me."

"Tie them together," growled Selim, "and send them into the Tigris!"

"No you don't, you bloodthirsty ruffian!" interposed Alan, placing himself between the captives and the Bokharian, who seemed inclined to put his suggestion into immediate effect. "These men must go with us to Mush, and be handed over to the English consul. This is my quarrel, and I must see it out in my own way."

"It is a great waste of time, my son," sighed the sheikh; "but if it must be, let us push on."

"Lash the prisoners arm to arm, and drive them before thee, Selim!" said Alan.

The Bokharian obeyed with a grin. He had Saponyadi's rifle on his shoulder and Rastan's in his hand, and the

revolvers of the Greeks bristled in his sash. He was feeling in his element again, and as they wended their way down the pass towards the skirt of the upland plain where Mush lies, he kept up a running fire of commentary that kept the two Greeks in a boil of impotent fury.

Perhaps it was this savage exultation to which he abandoned himself that made him, experienced hillsman though he was, forget to take his bearings. He recognised the fact quickly enough, after they had left the track a mile behind; but, unfortunately, he had all the colossal vanity of the mountaineer, and he would have bitten off his tongue rather than own that he, Selim of the Sipan Dag, had mistaken his way on the hills, like any village maid.

So, in spite of the gradual slant of the light, as the sun sank in a glory of purple and crimson behind the distant peaks of Muzur Dag, Selim kept on the rugged way till the spurs gave on to farmlands, and the twinkling lights of Hazro gleamed in the far distance of the night-swathed plain.

"Thou son of nothingness," said the sheikh, turning on the guide after a long, hawk-like glance around, "thou hast missed the way, and brought us into the vilayet of Bitlis, where that friend of Idrin's, Hadir Bey, dwells!"

"Wouldst thou have had me lead thee by the way to Changeri?" answered Selim sullenly. "Surely we should have been trapped by Idrin's men. Mush or Diabekir—what matters? Is there not an Ingliz effendi at Diabekir also?"

"Let's get to the nearest farm," interrupted Alan. "Ahmed's wife is fainting from fatigue. We can lie there for the night, and, buying horses or a waggon, start at early dawn."

"It is wisely said," assented the sheikh. "Moreover, near here there is one Yusuf, who grows apricots, and is a great miser. He will be very content to turn out his wife and daughters into the barns, that we may sleep in peace and warmth, especially if he think to cheat us out of a few piastres in selling some old, rotten waggon."

Jelaluddin's forecast proved no less than literally exact, for when, after an hour's tramp, they reached a collection of miserable mud-hovels, the hospitable Yusuf drove his spouse and children to finish their slumbers among the cattle, and placed at the disposal of his visitors the rooms and beds thus vacated.

Such gentle courtesy, however, was not for the prisoners, any more than the meal of eggs and rice and stringy, half-cooked lamb, by which it was inaugurated.

The Greeks, under the supervision of Selim, were trussed up to an empty manger, and left, with many an injunction, to the surveillance of the women-folk.

Two hours later the fugitives, now assured of safety, were sleeping the sleep of utter fatigue, careless and unconscious to the fact that Rastan and Saponyadi were using all the arts of their slippery eloquence on their female guardians.

Nor did their arguments lack the force that appeals to any woman of the East.

"Thrust thy hand into my bosom," said Rastan, coming at last to the conclusion of his appeal. "Thou shalt find there a little sack full of gold pieces. Cut then our bonds; let us bind you; so shall we take horses, and get away, and the gold will be yours, and ye will say to your lord in the morning, 'How could we help it? They were devils, and overcame us.' But if ye take the gold and do not release us, behold we shall tell Yusuf in the dawn, and he will seek it of you, and you will gain nothing."

It was an unanswerable argument, and it held the imperious charm of "getting back one" at Yusuf. Rastan repeated it for two hours before it succeeded; but at last it did succeed. The treacherous spouse of Yusuf pocketed the gold, and cut the bonds of the Greeks, who in turn bound the three women.

"But you must gag us also," cried Yusuf's wife, "else will Yusuf ask why we did not cry out!"

Rastan complied, and, whispering to Saponyadi to get ready two horses, he bent a moment over the complacent, stupid face of the housewife.

"Gold is not good for women," said the Greek, with a grin, as he regained possession of his bag. "Moreover, thou art very stupid, and my throat aches with talking to thee."

It was in vain that Madame Yusuf cursed him to ten generations of his maternal ancestors. The words died in her throat, and her bonds held fast, as the two men drew the reluctant horses through the doorway, mounted, and rode softly into the darkness.

And only Alan Wayward turned uneasily in his sleep, as the wolfhound's low growl disturbed him, to drop off again into a dream, in which the soft pid-a-pad-pud of galloping hoofs seemed to be beating out a cradle-song soothing as the lap of waves on a moonlit beach.

CHAPTER 5.

A Disagreeable Surprise.

"A WAKE, my lord! Treachery! Awake!"

The words seemed to boom from a thousand throats, as Alan stumbled to his feet, and, clutching at his arms, stared through sleep-sealed eyes at Selim's fierce face.

"Eh—what's up?" he asked, as he buckled on his belt. "The Greeks have escaped!" growled Selim. "And though the women lie with brazen faces, yet I tied them, and I know their bonds were cut, and the women have let them go for money, though they swear they knew nothing till the men had bound and gagged them sleeping."

"Ah," said Alan, "I half woke in the night, thinking I heard horses!"

"Would that it had been I!" said Selim. "For it was they; and now we are like to be caught like rats, for from Bitlis comes the dust of many horsemen riding this way. Let my lord come forth and look."

Beneath the white, clear light of the dawn a glance sufficed to show how true were Selim's fears. Alan glanced at Zillah, and shivered. The girl was standing erect as a spear-blade, her face as white as the dawn-light, and her eyes like stars dying in the morning mist.

"Is there no way of escape?" he cried, looking from the sheikh to Yusuf, who stood wringing his hands and trembling like a man with ague.

"If we are found here," said the sheikh, with a searching look at his host, "Yusuf will be sold as a slave in this world, and certainly be damned in the next."

"Master," cried the miserable Yusuf, "it is true that I have two camels; and very fast are they—dromedaries of the best Arab race. Yet they are not mine, but belong to the Bey of Diabekir, for whom I pasture them. Nevertheless, take them. A man can die but once, and in saving thee and thy friends, surely Allah will relieve me in Paradise of that miserable wife of mine by whose treachery and covetousness this evil hath befallen. And to think, master, that she hath not given me even a piastre of the price!"

"Lead us to thy camels, son of avarice," said the sheikh; "and bid thy partner in treachery hasten with the cradles!"

Yusuf led the way up the hillside to an outlying shed, and, his wife hurrying up with the rough hide-lined cradles, he had soon the camels saddled.

"Go thou, Selim, with Ahmed and the woman!" commanded the sheikh. "I and my disciple will take the other."

They mounted into the uncomfortable seats, and Yusuf, with an imploring gesture, surrendered the bridles.

"I am ruined!" he cried. "Two horses and two camels in one day!"

"If thou hast spoken truth," said the sheikh, "thou shalt be repaid. If not, thou hast merited more."

Then he shook his bride, and followed Selim over the plain, heading for the distant roof of Hazro, on the road to Diabekir, the great halting-station on the caravan route from Aleppo to Bagdad.

Yusuf had certainly not lied over the capacity of the camels. They were real fliers, and as their long strides quickened, Alan clung on to the wooden sides of the cradle and gasped. He had not got the easy knack of the sheikh, whose body seemed to sway in perfect rhythm with the movement; and as his ribs jolted again and again on to the hard framework, and the chuckle of the sheikh was mingled with the silvery ripple of Zillah's laughter, he almost wished he was in the place of the dog, racing with long, easy strides, on their left.

That it was to be a race for life was soon made obvious. For hardly had the camels got free of the farm, when the dust-cloud, from the direction of Bitlis, resolved itself into a troop of Lancers, whose long spears glistened in the sunshine.

"They are at least sixty strong," said Alan. "Will they catch us up, do you think, sheikh?"

"Inshallah (if Allah please)," answered Jelaluddin. "They are well mounted, and while one party pursues us, another will try and head us off."

"They can hardly do that on a bee-line," said Alan.

"Forgettest thou the snowstorm of yesternight?" asked the sheikh. "Between us and Diabekir lies a feeder of the Tigris, and only Allah knows if we may find a ford, since the stream will be turbulent, and very swift with the weight of the mountain snows."

"They are gaining on us!" cried Alan. "They ride like the wind!"

"No man hath better horses than Hadir, Bey of Bitlis," assented the sheikh.

The pace was now terrific, yet as Alan swayed to and fro, with his eyes ever fixed eastward, he could see that, as mile after mile swept by, the line of horsemen in the rear were growing more and more defined.

"The river!" shouted Selim suddenly, waving his rifle ahead. "To the right! To the right!" he yelled again, as he guided his camel. "The ford is higher up!"

But, in truth, it was a sorry-looking ford they looked on, as the two camels thundered down the incline, and halted at the water's brink. For the stream, swollen and yellow with piled up snows, was racing in a roaring torrent bank-high. No persuasion could bring the camels even to face it. They turned their wall-like visages sullenly in every direction but that of the whirling flood, and all the time from behind came the increasing mutter of the pursuing, pounding hoofs.

"On! On!" shouted Jelaluddin. "Ride up the stream! If we cannot make Diabekir, we must needs make Mush."

They wheeled the camels, rode back up the incline, and raced northward. A yell of derision greeted them from the extended line of the pursuers—a yell not difficult to understand. For already the furthest horse of the pacha's riders overlapped the line of their flight northwards, and every minute saw more and more cavalry intercepting their way; while from the rear the thunder of hoofs, the wild whoops of the savage riders, bespoke only too plainly their certainty of capture.

The sheikh forced his camel alongside that of Selim's, and at his word of command they both halted.

"We are overlapped!" he said calmly. "Come in hither, thou Ahmed and Zillah. For thee, Selim, ride on to Diabekir. Alone thou mayest win through. Get thee to the Ingeliz effendi there, and tell him of our strait. He will surely find means to rescue us."

The exchange of passengers made, Selim slung overboard the falling cradle, and urged on his camel, that, lightened of its load, seemed fairly to skim the desert, outpacing in every stride the indrawing horn of cavalry.

"It is well! He will win through!" said the sheikh, after a few minutes.

Then he calmly turned the camel's head, and rode slowly towards the pursuing troop.

It was a manoeuvre that seemed to disconcert them, for they slackened their speed to a walk, and at last to a halt.

Jelaluddin was nothing if not imperturbable. He continued unmoved on his way, singling out with sure eye the lieutenant in command.

"Greetings!" he said quietly, halting the camel in front of the officer. "Wouldst thou speak with Jelaluddin, the prophet of Bagdad, O officer, that thou ridest so long and so hard after him and those who are under the shield of his hospitality?"

"The prophet of Bagdad! The prophet of Bagdad!"

The murmur ran from mouth to mouth, as the troopers circled their horses to a ring around the camel. There were few in all the wilds of Kurdistan who did not hold in superstitious reverence the name and reputation of the majestic-looking old sheikh, who, with the uplifting of his hand, could have raised a jihad (holy war) that would have put fifty thousand fanatic mountaineers at his beck and call.

It was a name to conjure by, an authority to treat warily. And the officer had only to cast one glance around the faces of his men to confirm his own belief.

"Was it for this that Greek dog bade us ride?" growled a white-haired, brick-faced son of the desert.

"Even so, my son," said the sheikh smoothly. "We spared the life of that Greek dog, though he lifted his hand against the prophet of Allah. And he betrayed our hospitality, and, stealing horses in the night, fled to raise up lies against us."

A growl of anger went round the troop.

"This is too grave a matter for me to judge," said the officer, with quick wit to turn the circumstance into the way of his orders. "Since the Greek hath evidently committed robbery in the village of Bitlis, to Bitlis must ye come, there to lay the matter before the bey."

"Even so; for that is just," said the sheikh.

So to Bitlis they turned their heads, the soldiers riding at respectful distance at either hand.

"Be at ease, my sons," said the sheikh, addressing his companions. "And you, daughter, fear not. It is true that Hadir Bey is a dog, and the son of a dog. Yet Allah is all-powerful, and will open a way to our feet, if the bey meditate injustice towards us. Yea! And surely my soul is blithe within me, for something tells me that we shall smite him sorely, so that he shall be humbled and learn wisdom."

But, despite Jelaluddin's cheering words, it was anything but cheerfulness that his companions felt, as they clattered through the stony, ill-paved streets of Bitlis, over a draw-bridge into a large courtyard of the great frowning castle, whose moss-covered walls, flanked by numerous round or octagonal towers, hang high and precipitous above the roofs of the houses and shops bordering the river. Nor was it less evident that the authority of the sheikh was sensibly

diminished in the eyes of the officer, once his captives were safe inside the castle gates.

He bade them curtly descend and follow him, and led the way into an inner courtyard, overlooked by the windows of the governor's apartments. Here he was joined by a gaudily-uniformed officer, who heard his report, and scanned the prisoners with interest.

"His Excellency will see you at once," he said. "But, first, you must give up your arms."

Resistance was useless, and indeed hardly had the order passed his lips before the escort of soldiers had relieved Alan and Ahmed of their rifles and revolvers, and were urging them forward under the gloomy portal into a wide corridor.

"Whose is that dog?" asked the officer, as the wolfhound pressed on after his master.

"It is mine," said Alan.

"A noble beast," rejoined the officer. "But it may not enter the audience-hall. Two of you fellows throw a cord round its neck, and tie it up outside!" he concluded, addressing a group of zaptiehs.

The zaptiehs hurried to obey; but as they approached the wolfhound, they halted before its savage snarl and gleaming fangs, and cast a look of apprehension at the officer.

"You cowards!" said this last. "Kick the beast forth!"

"By your leave!" said Alan, planting himself before the dog. "He is savage and strong. But he will remain quietly here, if you will permit it, and none annoy him. So shall I find him after the audience."

"Pek ala (very well)," assented the officer, with a shrug of his shoulders, as Alan bade the dog lie down. "Enter!" he added, as the door where they had halted was suddenly opened, and revealed a beckoning, swarthy Arab, in the gorgeous Hodjaz blue-and-red striped uniform, with a scarlet turban circled by broad green twisted cords.

"Ho! Beni Mahmood!" said the sheikh, in a joyful tone. "Glad am I to see thee again, old wolf of the desert!"

A flash of surprise leapt to the black eyes of the Arab, as he recognised the sheikh, and returned his salutation with a deep salaam. But further exchange of courtesies was prevented by a sharp voice from the interior of the room, inquiring what meant the delay. And next minute Alan, with Ahmed and Zillah, were hustled through the door in the wake of the sheikh, who, unconcerned and undismayed, his hand resting on the Arab's shoulder, was whispering swiftly to him in Arabic.

The escort led them straight up a long and lofty hall to a great table at the other end, where they deposited the prisoners' weapons, and fell back to attention to right and left of them.

At the other side of the table Alan saw a wizened and blear-eyed Turk, seated on a divan, stroking his weasel-like face with a lean, cruel-looking hand. His eyes, after one further glance that embraced the sheikh, Alan, and Ahmed, rested fixed on Zillah for a long minute.

He fumbled with some papers, whispered to an officer at his elbow, who promptly disappeared behind a curtain at his back, then glanced again at Alan.

"Thou art a runaway slave, the property of Idrin Pacha," he said.

"I am an Englishman, and no slave," answered Alan.

"Your papers—your passport?" snapped the governor.

"I have neither. All I had were robbed from me by Rastan the Greek," answered Alan, "who treacherously stunned me, and sold me to Mustapha, of Foliat, as a slave."

"Thou art a teller of fairy-tales!" snarled Hadir. "And Idrin warned me of thee. As for thee, Armenian dog," he went on, turning to Ahmed, "dost thou deny also that thou art a runaway slave of Idrin?"

"I am a freeman of Melazgherd," retorted Ahmed. "Idrin's men snatched me from my home, but I escaped. I am no slave."

"And that woman. Art thou named Zillah?" asked the bey.

"Even so," answered Ahmed. "And she is my wife, and under the sworn protection and hospitality of that holy man of Islam," and he indicated the sheikh.

"Exactly," pursued the bey, disregarding the appeal to Jelaluddin. "And because she is thy wife, and thou art slave to Idrin, therefore, Idrin claims her also. Yet am I not sure that Idrin shall have her," he concluded musingly.

At this juncture the officer returned.

"Idrin Pacha awaits thee in thy private room, Excellency," he said, in an audible whisper. "And with him are Saponyadi and Rastan."

"The audience is suspended for a little," snapped the bey, clambering down from the divan, and wadding towards the curtain, which the officer held back for him, revealing an interior beyond, with Idrin in deep conversation with the two Greeks.

No sooner had he vanished than the sheikh stepped to

Alan's side, while the Arab, who evidently occupied a high position, beckoned the escort surrounding the prisoners to come and confer with him. The captives, thus left alone for a few minutes, gathered round Jelaluddin.

"Hearken," said the sheikh. "The matter is forejudged, for Idrin hath heavily bribed the bey, and he intends to give ye up. Yet Beni Mahmoud, who himself is a sheikh of Petrea, is my friend, and thus doth he counsel. Let Hadir Bey render his unjust judgment. You, my son, will call aloud that he is bribed, and that you appeal to the Padischah and your embassy. Then, flinging aside your guards, you and Ahmed will seize your weapons, and follow me. Beni will thwart the pursuit long enough to let us gain the door. Once outside, we will turn into the castle, and, fleeing up the stairs, will reach the armoury, and there hold ourselves till help comes from the consul at Diabekir, whom Selim has doubtless reached."

"It's a tall order to throw aside eight guards!" murmured Alan.

"Nay, but they also will expect it, and but feign resistance," said the sheikh. "Nevertheless, be vigorous, and spare them not. But when ye hear me say, 'In the name of Allah!' then strike mightily and act swiftly."

"Right you are!" assented Alan, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. It seemed a forlorn kind of hope, and anything but convincing.

"They seem to be having a rare old row behind that curtain," he said.

And, in fact, for the last two minutes the sound of shrill voices raised in discussion had been growing louder and more vehement.

"I tell ye"—Idrin's shrill voice could be heard through the room—"that the girl shall go with the man! Her husband is my slave, and she must share his lot."

"It is impossible!" shrilled Rastan. "You will risk all for a miserable girl. She is promised to Kasim. He made us swear. It was his price."

"Let Kasim hang!" screamed Idrin. "He shall not have her!"

"Nay, the matter is in my judgment!" shouted Hadir Bey. "Am I not judge in my own vilayet? Kasim shall not have the girl. Let Idrin take his slaves, and go. The girl shall remain here till I decide what shall be done."

"Then I stay here, too!" came Idrin's reply, in a voice obviously choking with passion.

Next moment the curtain was flung violently back, and the escort had only just time to form up again round the prisoners before Hadir Bey strutted into the room, his sallow face purple with rage, his little eyes gleaming.

Idrin Pacha waddled after him, with a visage even more purple than his host's, while Saponyadi and Rastan stood in the entry glaring at the prisoners.

"This is my award!" panted Hadir, as he plumped on to his divan. "These two men"—he indicated Alan and Ahmed—"being runaway slaves belonging to Idrin Pacha, are forthwith delivered to him, to be punished as he will. The sheikh, their companion, not being of our jurisdiction, is free to go. The woman remains here under our august protection till inquiry be made into her actual status."

"Nay, but she is Ahmed's wife!" interrupted Idrin wrathfully.

For a moment the two men glared at each other as if they would come to blows.

"If judges quarrel," said the sheikh coolly, "then indeed must the accused rely for justice in the name of Allah!"

As the words left his lips, Alan's arms shot out right and left, knocking down the guards nearest him. Like lightning he turned on the others, who rushed, or seemed to rush at him.

Following the sheikh's advice, he smote, and spared not; while Ahmed, tripping two of the guards, dashed forward, seized the weapons, and hurried Zillah after the sheikh, who had started with great strides for the door.

Alan, whose driving right and left had bowled over the guards like ninepins, made a rush after them, snatched his rifle and revolvers from the hands of Ahmed, and, with a six-shooter in each hand, turned and covered the two pachas.

The whole thing had been the affair of a second, and both Hadir and Idrin were too utterly stupefied with rage and amazement to do more than gape and choke.

Only Saponyadi and Rastan sprang forward, but somehow as they passed Beni Mahmoud, the butt of the Arab's long lance got mixed up with Rastan's feet, while the flat blade of it jogged hard under Saponyadi's chin, with the result that, while the former fell heavily on his face, the latter reeled and pitched, pate foremost, into the stomach of Idrin, who, in his effort to save himself, grabbed at the air, clutched Hadir Bey's wagging neck, and dragged him backwards to the floor.

By the time Beni Mahmoud, grave, and evidently deeply concerned, had assisted the officer in attendance, who could

hardly restrain his convulsive mirth, to disentangle the infuriated pachas and lift them to their feet, Sheikh Jelaluddin, followed by his companions, had calmly opened the door, brushed aside the zaptieh on guard, and, breaking into a run, was heading for a stairway at the end of the passage.

They had a good two minutes' start, but they did not know that, and they travelled on the chance of having a second's margin. Even so, their course was in danger of being arrested, as from a room at the bottom of the stairway there stepped forth the lieutenant of the cavalry who had arrested them, and with him the officer who had introduced them.

The sheikh and Ahmed, with Zillah between them, were almost abreast of the officers as they stepped forth, and their capture seemed a matter of certainty when Alan, who was bringing up the rear, panted to the wolfhound coursing at his side, "Suh, boy! Bring 'em down! At 'em!" at the same time pointing to the officers.

The dog, trained in Kasim's remorseless school, obeyed like an arrow loosened from its string. Straight through the air he launched out, his great weight landing square on the shoulder of the lieutenant, and bowling him head-first into the portly girth of his superior officer.

Before either of the enraged and outraged gentlemen could pick themselves up, the fugitives had gained the turn in the staircase, and were going up three at a time, with Zillah hanging like a vine-tendrill in the clasp of the sheikh's arm, and Alan and the dog bringing up the rear.

The staircase went round and round, narrowing as it got higher, till it gave at last on to a short gallery some forty feet in length, ending in a great oaken door, whose enormous iron key, with a handle carved into the device of a griffin, stood in the lock.

Next moment the sheikh had flung the door open, deposited Zillah on the floor, and as Alan and the dog pelted in, followed by a couple of revolver-shots from the pursuing officers, Jelaluddin "sporting the oak," turned the key in the lock, and beamed at his companions.

"Verily, Allah is the protection of the weak, and the judge of the unwary," he said, with pious complacency.

"I'm sorry for those zaptiehs," laughed Alan. "I'm afraid they'll have some pretty bruises on their diales in the morning."

"That is of no account, my son," reproved the sheikh solemnly. "Great is their merit, and in the Land of the Blessed their bruises shall shine as sapphires."

"They'll be fairly blue and rainbowy by night, as far as that goes," grinned Alan, with reminiscences of those days at Marlborough that now seemed so strangely distant and unreal.

"It was rotten luck, those officers spotting us," he went on, as a sudden battering at the door awoke them to the fact of their position. "But for them, those johnnies down below might have looked for us for a good many hours without imagining we were here."

"Luck!" snarled the sheikh wrathfully. "Verily, my son, thy wisdom smakketh of the wild ass that kicketh up its heels against young barley and rejoiceth its nose in thistles! Luck! Say not the word to me again!"

"I don't know what else you call it, then," said Alan stubbornly.

"Is not Allah all-wise as well as all-powerful?" thundered the sheikh, with a wave of his staff that just missed Ahmed's dodging head. "And if it please Allah to save the life of such a miserable worm as thou, is it not for the correction of those jackals who would pursue us, and for thy better instruction in wisdom? Use, then, thy wits, my son, not in futile and asinine words, but in acts of war fit to protect us from the attack that is surely hastening."

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Alan flushed a little uncomfortably. He was getting more accustomed to what he had at first called "the old fanatic's one-eyed view of things," and learning, too, that there was a remarkable fund of sound, practical sense behind his singleness of vision that ascribed everything to the slightest detail of life to a deliberate design of Providence.

Moreover, there was a certain majesty about the old sheikh that robbed his tritest remarks of the sting they often contained; and it was with something like a Fourth-Form boy's internal grin that Alan realised how he was learning to brook mildly comment and dictation that four months ago would have provoked him to a passion of revolt and wrath.

"Pek ala!" (all right) he said cheerfully. "But we seem to have got into a jolly tight corner to allow even such a miserable worm as I room to turn in."

"My son," said the sheikh, beaming on him, "thou hast said well. Humility is the shield of glory. Meditate on the achievements of the warriors of thy race, whom men say are versed in all the cunning wiles of war. For a little while Beni Mahmoud will hold back pursuit. Behold here are weapons in plenty, and many cases of cartridges—yes, and tubs of the stuff wherewith the quarry-workers blast the rocks!"

"We can't fire through an inch and a half of oak," said Alan gloomily. "Once the zaptiehs get up here, they can batter this door down, and riddle us with bullets like rats in a trap."

"Here is an auger!" cried Ahmed. "Couldn't we bore holes in the door, and so command the passage that none can approach?"

"Good wheeze!" said Alan, looking over the Armenian's shoulder into the contents of a great tool-chest. "There's another one, too. What luck—Er—I mean, thanks be to Allah!" he concluded quickly, catching the sheikh's frown midway.

The seasoned oak proved tough, and it took them a good five minutes to drive a couple of holes apiece in two panels, one hole on a level with the eye, the other at elbow level.

"It will be snapshooting," said Alan, as he surveyed the corridor through his peephole. "But in aiming low and level we shall be pretty sure of getting a fair stomach average. We're just in time, too, for I hear our friends the officers urging their men up the stairs. Wait till they get round the corner, Ahmed, and their heads show on the staircase; then we'll give the beggars a couple of warning shots. Now, fire high!"

The reports of the two revolvers rang out simultaneously, the shots flying above the heads of the zaptiehs as they crowded up the narrow turning stairway.

"That's surprised them more than a little," laughed Alan, as he saw the soldiers duck their heads, and heard their exclamations of astonishment.

"Fools!" yelled the voice of the lieutenant. "Up and charge before they can shut the door again!"

"But the door is shut!" shouted back one of the zaptiehs, who was crouching under cover of the first step. "They have fired through the door!"

"Thou art mad!" returned the lieutenant. "Let me pass!"

"Don't fire, Ahmed!" whispered Alan. "Let him come up and try the door; then we'll parley with him."

The lieutenant made no fuss about it. He was a brave man, and had no two ideas about duty. He walked straight up to the door, and calmly inspected the two revolver-barrels covering him.

"Hearken inside there!" he called. "Will you fight an army? One or two men ye may kill; but I have fifty there, and they hoist up even now a battering-ram that shall make splinters of the door before ye can empty your revolvers. Surrender, before blood lies between us!"

"Can't be done!" replied Alan Wayward. "We shall fight this thing cut to the end. Moreover, your life is in our hands. Halt! If you move, I fire!"

The lieutenant, who had half turned to beat a retreat, promptly halted.

"Will you bear my word to Hadir Bey," asked Alan, "and call a truce till we have his answer?"

"It is useless," replied the officer. "The governor is as a maniac with rage. The best ye can expect is the bastinado. Nevertheless, speak on; and I will bear thy word, and call the truce ye ask."

"Say, then, to Hadir Bey," said Alan, "that my messenger is even now at Diabekir, with letters to the English consul there, who will telegraph to Stamboul that an Englishman is prisoner to Hadir, who seeks to sell him as a slave to Idrin. Ere sunset the consul will be here, and with him all the authority of the Padischah. Wherefore, let Hadir reflect."

"I will bear thy message," said the officer; and, turning

on his heel, he strode down the passage and the staircase, taking his troop with him.

"What think you, sheikh?" asked Alan, in whose head a project was busy working. "Will Hadir cry down?"

"Rather will he slay the officer," replied the sheikh. "For now fear will be added to his rage. And if thy consul finds thee living, surely the days of the governing of Hadir and Idrin are altogether finished. But if thou and we are buried ere thy consul arrives, Hadir will laugh in his face. Wherefore, now will he use all his effort to exterminate us quickly."

"Then we'll give him a warm time of it," said Alan. "Quick, Ahmed," he went on. "Get your auger again, and bore holes in your lower panel, while I do the like in mine. About three inches apart, and just big enough for a cartridge to be jammed in lightly. We'll make a battery that will startle them."

They worked hard, and the minutes slipped away all too fast. Nevertheless, when the sound of the officer's returning footsteps were heard mounting the stairs, they had twelve holes bored in each of the two lower panels.

"Hi, within there!" called a voice from without.

Alan, glancing through the peephole, saw the face of the officer, to whom the lieutenant had delivered them on their arrival.

"Where's the other man?" he replied.

"Before a court-martial, for treating with rebels," was the grim reply. "My orders are final. Will ye surrender, or must I force the door?"

"We shall not surrender," said Alan quietly. "And all your garrison cannot take the door!"

"We shall see," said the officer; and, stepping swiftly out of range of the two revolver-barrels, he waved his hand towards the staircase.

As if by magic, twenty men, who had crept noiselessly up the stairs, leapt into the corridor, and in the twinkling of an eye, dragged up a huge beam, hoisted by twenty hands from below.

"Fire away," said Alan, through set teeth. "It's they or we now. For if they get that battering-ram on to us, the door won't stand two shocks of it."

He fired as he spoke, aiming low into the grouped legs at the top of the stairs, Ahmed following his example.

The execution was tremendous, and the beam was dropped almost as soon as it was picked up, while yells of pain and rage mingled with the thundering volley of the soldiers and the spatter of bullets against the stout oak.

"It'll get a bit thick presently," said Alan coolly, as he reloaded his revolver and dodged a splinter.

"You keep on peppering them, Ahmed," he went on, "and tell me when they begin to get a move on that beam."

He ran, as he spoke, to the tool-chest, and, selecting a hammer with a straight point, a pair of nail tweezers, and a box of Martini cartridges, returned to the door. It was a matter of moments to insert and jam tight the cartridges in the augured holes; and meanwhile Ahmed's revolver was keeping the legs of the attacking party on a lively dance.

Alan, having got his battery ready, resumed his post at the peephole. At the end of the passage he saw the officer standing cool and undaunted among the flying bullets, engaged in putting some order into his men's efforts. The beam had been shoved forward some ten feet, and a couple of lines of zaptiehs formed, one passing down the wounded, the other replacing them. But with the resumption of shooting by Alan, the confusion among the enemy reasserted itself. The range was too short, and the practice too deadly for flesh and blood to stand against it. For as each revolver was emptied, and withdrawn, the sheikh and Zillah passed up others ready loaded, so that something like two hundred bullets a minute were rattling round the legs of the bey's raging and impotent troop. Five minutes had not elapsed, before such as were still unwounded, turned tail and bolted into cover of the staircase.

The officer was the last to leave, and as Alan and Ahmed, moved by a common respect for his bravery, had carefully avoided aiming at him, he was still unwounded. But he turned on them a face scarlet with shame and mortification, and, shaking his fist at them, shouted:

"Wait! I will return!"

"Hoo!" said the sheikh. "Did I not say that Allah, the All-wise and the All-powerful used the weak for the correction of the evil?"

CHAPTER 6.

A Close Finish.

"WE shall be in rather a ghastly fix," said Alan, "if they rush us at night. They only have to sneak up quietly, for the corridor will be black as pitch. Besides, I'm hungry as a starved wolf now, and my throat feels as if it was made of an old doormat."

The hours since noon had dragged slowly on without the captives being disturbed, and now that the short after-glow

of the sunset bronzed the gleaming barrels round the walls of their prison, the courage of the four was beginning to feel the strain. There is no test more cruelly wearing than the waiting for a relief that does not come. Again and again Alan had discussed with the sheikh the chances of Selim having won through, the time it would take the consul to arrive, the probability of his being hoodwinked when he did arrive. The very silence in the corridor and on the staircase seemed to portend some impending disaster. Nor, since the miserable meal of the preceding night, had any of the party touched food or drink.

"It will be as Allah wills," said the sheikh placidly. "Perhaps the English effendi has come, and gone away, deceived by Hadir's lies."

"In that case," said Alan gloomily, "we shall stay here till we are starved out or have to crawl out to be butchered."

"He who lives will see," rejoined Jelaluddin, quite unmoved.

Alan cast a look at Zillah, who, with her head buried in her arms, was huddled between two cases of ammunition, sound asleep.

"You seem to find that view pleasant," he said presently, addressing the Armenian, who for the last ten minutes had been leaning out of the narrow casement.

Ahmed drew in his head and looked at Alan with gleaming eyes. He descended slowly from the pile of cases on which he had been standing, and, leading the two men to a corner remote from Zillah, drew their heads down to his.

"We are trapped," he said. "As I was watching, I saw ride away from the castle the Effendi Hamilton, consul at Van. Doubtless, he of Diabekir has telegraphed to his colleague. And Hadir Bey has outwitted him with lies, for he has ridden away, he and his dragomen, and two officers, one in the uniform of a colonel. They rode towards the American Mission School, and then dismounted and sent away their horses. For a surety they will eat there."

"You juggins!" cried Alan angrily. "Why didn't you let off your revolver to attract their attention? They would have had us out in a quarter of an hour."

"Nay; for they would not have distinguished me, so thick are the vines about the embrasure," replied Ahmed quietly.

"Then we may as well make up our minds to die," said Alan savagely. "And I, for one, am not going to die like a rat in a trap. I'll take that battle-axe there, and fight my way through, or fall in the attempt."

"Yet wait a little while," said Ahmed. "For long did I study the wall beneath the window. It is old, and many stones have crumbled, and the vines are thick as a man's wrist. Sure am I that in the dark I may climb down, and, running to the Mission School, warn Hamilton Effendi that ye are here."

"It is very perilous," protested Alan. "Though if my shoulders could squeeze through, I'd try it myself."

"I am light, and very sure-footed," said Ahmed. "The moon is not yet risen. And Zillah sleeps. I will go now. Only first swear to me that whatever happens, ye will not let Zillah fall alive into Hadir's hands."

"Trust me," replied Alan solemnly. "If the worst comes to the worst, she shall die painlessly at my own hands."

"Thou art a man," said Ahmed, turning abruptly away.

For a long moment he paused, gazing at his sleeping bride. Then he stepped softly to the window, passed his legs through the narrow casement, and wriggled out into the darkness. Alan, watching him from above, held his breath in suspense. The night was black and bleak, a light drizzle driving before a cutting wind. Half a dozen feet from the window, the form of the Armenian was no longer distinguishable, and nothing but the quiver of the vine, and the swaying of the bushy creepers below marked his safe progress.

"He must have the nerve of a lizard," thought Alan, as his eyes strained through the darkness. It was a full hundred feet to the flat roof of the shops above the street, and it seemed to Alan hours before a flutter of white from the street below warned him that Ahmed had successfully reached the bottom.

"He's done it!" he cried, turning to the sheikh. "It's the pluckiest thing I—"

The rest of his sentence was lost in a thundering crash at the door that made the stout oak quiver, and seemed to set the very framework rocking.

"By Jove, they're on us!" cried Alan. "Quick, sheikh! A revolver at each of the holes, and fire low! I'll start the battery!"

As Jelaluddin proceeded, in his phlegmatic, unhurried fashion, to the door, the Englishman flung himself on his knees, and seized the hammer. The room was lighted by the yellow glimmer of a wick, set in a little box of grease, which the sheikh had produced from one of the mysterious pockets of his garment. But it was sufficient to gleam on the brass ends of the cartridges, and before the

troop outside could swing the beam for another blow, Alan's hammer fell in steady succession on one after the other of the central pins. The effect of the low-level discharge was deadly, mowing through calves, and knees, and thighs like the passage of a scythe. Clang went the beam on to the stone floor, and as yells of pain and execration went up, the light of torches flickered in the corridor. Working like a demon, Alan twitched out with the tweezers the empty cartridges, and rammed tight fresh ones.

"Bravo, Zillah!" he said, as he saw the girl, pale as a ghost, flit past him, hand two freshly-charged revolvers to the sheikh, place two more at his feet, and with two in her own hands, take her post at the loopholes lately occupied by her husband.

"You know Ahmed has gone to the consul," said Ahmed. "He got down safely."

"I saw him go," said the girl. "But I pretended to sleep, lest, thinking I was watching, he should grow nervous and fail. The soldiers have borne away the wounded. They are lifting the beam again."

The two revolvers spat out death into the torch-illuminated savage faces in the corridor, and Alan's battery belched its ploughing missiles among the lower limbs of the howling zaptiehs. But this time the beam was caught ere it fell, by a fresh body of soldiers held in reserve, and though half a dozen fell, the ram was hurled against the door by fifty arms, starting the lock, and wrenching loose the top hinges, just as Alan had renewed again his battery.

A yell of exultation rose from the soldiers as they noted the tilting inward of the door, and again they swung the beam. But again the battery ticked out its leaden hail, more venomous this time, by very reason of the new angle, which changed the range from knee to loins and stomachs.

But though twenty men dropped shrieking, though Zillah and the sheikh poured in their deadly never-ceasing rain of bullets, enough were left to send the beam hurling again at the door. The lock flew, broken, back; the centre beam hung splintered, and the door, toppling inwards, swung round on one hinge, to lie transversely half in and half out, blocking the hinge side completely, but leaving space on the other side for one or even two men to pass.

With a howl of fury, Hadir's men, maddened by the long resistance, rushed forward. To shoot was virtually impossible for them, as the press behind spoiled all aim for those in front, while those at the back could not fire, save through their comrades.

At the first yielding of the door Alan had leapt at the great battle-axe he had already noted, and after hurrying Zillah into shelter in a corner, now took his stand by the sheikh, who had already thrashed his staff across the eyes of the first zaptiehs whose nose had thrust round the door.

Whack! Crash! went staff and battle-axe, as, with a sudden dash, four men gained the floor inside, only to roll dead or stunned across the entry. But it was a game of "t'other come up as one goes down," for the men were past all care of death, and came on like wolves. But neither staff nor battle-axe faltered or wavered, and the ghastly heap before the doorway was piling ever higher, when shrill and startling above the din rose the bugle-call, sounding the "retreat."

For a moment, despite their discipline, the Turks hesitated, reluctant. But the imperious call rang out again, and as its echoes died away, the voice of the officer in charge thundered out the order: "Right about! March!" The flare of the torches gleamed for a moment round the group detached to carry off the dead and wounded, flickered down the passage, sent up a final flare from the stairs, and then suddenly the corridor stood desolate and dark, and only the yellow glimmer of the lamp lit up the haggard, bloodstained faces of the two men and the crouching figure of the terrified girl.

"A good fight, sheikh," said Alan, in what he thought was a cheerful tone; but was, in fact, a shredded whisper. "I never thought we'd get through it!"

"Give praise to Allah," said the sheikh. "For surely Hadir Bey hath gained a name that will stink from Bagdad to Stamboul this day, for behold a youth, a maid, an Armenian boy, and an aged prophet have routed his hundreds—yea, and slain and mutilated many so that they shall fight no more."

"That's all right," said Alan. "But we'd better think of fixing that door before they come back. Lend a hand, sheikh. I hear someone coming up now."

"Nay," said the sheikh. "Hitherto have I held my peace, being a guileless man, and not expert in war, and having in my heart the desire that Hadir Bey might learn wisdom by correction. But it is enough. Now will I go forth, even I, alone, and by my authority of prophet will I call on all true believers to hang that dog and son of a dog. Stay thou here, with Ahmed's wife, and wait for me."

He slipped past Alan's restraining hand, and, erect and

tranquil, stalked down the corridor. But at the head of the stairway he halted, for mounting it was Beni Mahmoud, and at his side a colonel of the Turkish garrison from Van.

"Ha, old wolf!" said Jelaluddin. "Is it thou at last?"
 "Praise be to Allah thou art safe!" grunted Beni. "That treacherous dog, Hadir, made me prisoner in my own room, and it is only now that I am free, and have learnt what straits ye have been in, and wondered at your deeds. Knowest thou that two hundred of Hadir's men are sorely wounded, and many dead?"

"So I computed," replied the sheikh.
 "And thy companions?" snapped the colonel. "The Englishman and the Armenian woman? Is the Englishman safe and unwounded?"

"Both," answered the sheikh. "He suffers in naught save thirst. Also, I believe, he is very hungry."

"Well, that's soon cured," said the colonel, as he followed the sheikh through the crazy door.

"My compliments, Mr. Wayward," he said, in excellent English. "You seem to have proved an enterprising handful for Hadir Bey. Your consul is below, and would be glad if you will accept our escort to join him."

It was though a grim and silent line of soldiery that Alan, with Zillah on his arm, accompanied the colonel and the two sheikhs into the Audience Hall that had witnessed his first confronting with Hadir Bey. The governor was seated on the same divan, and if his sallow face was somewhat more sallow with fear of what might be in store for him, his eyes had lost nothing of their virulence and malignity. Behind him stood a row of bodyguards, and at his side Idrin Pacha, in gorgeous dress, was seated, with Saponiyadi and Rastan at his elbow. As Alan entered, followed by the great wolfhound, a slim, square-shouldered, brown-eyed Englishman stepped forward, and wrung his hand.

"I'm glad I'm in time, Mr. Wayward," he said. "I've heard of you from Carlton, of Trebizond. And I promise you your wrongs shall be amply avenged. But at present," he added, in a lower voice, "I shall have all my work cut out to get you safely out of this."

He turned towards the table, at the other side of which sat the pachas.

"Your Excellency deceived me this evening," he said coldly. "I shall report the whole of this matter to my ambassador at Stamboul, who will lay the case strongly to your master, the Sultan. Meanwhile, I claim this man as a British subject; also his companion as the wife of a man now under my protection."

"Your Englishman you can take," said Hadir Bey, in an icy tone. "The woman is a Turkish subject, and amenable to my court for complicity in an armed attack on my authority. And I shall not allow her to go."

"Oh, won't you!" said Hamilton Effendi coolly.

He crossed to Zillah, and faced the boy.

"I'm taking this lady to my consulate," he said, "and Mr. Wayward and the Sheikh Jelaluddin are accompanying me. And by Heaven, sir, if you dare to lay so much as a finger on her, I promise you that in a month you'll be the most laughed at convict from Akaba to Adrianople."

He turned, and walked slowly towards the door.

Hadir Bey, purple with passion, rose to his feet, and with a violent gesture motioned to his guards, who, as one man, sprang forward.

But they had scarcely gone two paces, when they were arrested by the voice of the old sheikh, who, with staff outstretched, and head erect, blocked their way.

"In the name of Allah," he cried, "cursed be the man who wields sword or gun for Hadir Bey, who this day hath outraged Islam in striving to compass the death of the prophet of Bagdad. Blessed be the man whose spear empties his false heart! I have spoken!"

"Hoo!" grunted Beni Mahmoud. "Great need have I of blessing!" And before any of the stupefied guards could so much as divine his intention, the Arab chief's long spear had darted out, and pricking through ribs and heart of Hadir Bey, had whirled him, screaming out his last breath, full across the face of his shivering colleague.

Then Beni, joining the sheikh, the two stalked triumphantly unopposed from the hall, and followed the consul and his companions down to the quay. Three minutes later, seated in the stern of a steam-launch, they were racing across Lake Van, bound for the repose and security of the British consulate.

"Ouf!" said Alan, as the cold air of the midstream swept his fevered face. "I think I've had enough excitement in the last forty-eight hours to last me for a considerable stretch!"

"Inshallah!" grunted the sheikh in his most prophetic tone.

THE END.

(Another Tale of Tom Merry and Alan Wayward next Thursday. Please order your copy of the "Gem" Library in advance.)



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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. He breaks his word, however, and, rushing from the school, dives from Headland Height to the rescue of Lily, the headmaster's daughter. Cyril refuses to explain his action to Dr. Buchanan, and is just about to receive castigation, when Lily rushes into her father's study.

(Now go on with the story.)

Lily explains to the doctor.

"You won't be angry, father dear! I know you won't be angry with me!" said Lily, seating herself on her father's lap. "I'm not a bit afraid of you, you know."

"Heaven forbid!"

"But Cyril is."

"Afraid of me?" gasped the doctor.

"Well, he holds you in awe, and will probably have the same feeling till he dies. I expect you held your master in awe, and I know I hold Miss Spartin in awe; in fact, she's awful."

"I must ask you to come to the point. Why was it your fault that Cyril Conway lied to me? I put it very plainly, Conway, but I will add this. It is the first time that I have ever known you to tell me a falsehood; and even now I believe that there was some good cause that boyish prejudice—"

"He's not so boyish, either, father," said Lily. "He was quite manly in his behaviour this afternoon—I mean—well, when a boy dives off Headland Height, and saves the daughter of a doctor of a great college, he oughtn't to be blamed, though I dare say Miss Spartin will do so, because she sees a lot more than was intended for her to see, and—"

Well, she doesn't understand how brothers and sisters act; and it's very mean for a governess to go to sleep in the afternoon, and then wake up and watch out of a window, and then to say that she is going to tell you all that has happened."

As Lily made this little speech, which was somewhat incoherent to the doctor, he rose to his feet, and gazed in wonder from his daughter to Cyril, who looked perfectly calm and meek, though he really felt uncomfortable about what Miss Spartin had seen, and quite agreed with Lily that it was very wrong in a governess to see things not intended for her vision.

"Cyril Conway dived down Headland Height?" gasped the doctor. "You did that, my lad? You dared—"

"It was only to save my life, father, and you ought not to cane him for that," said Lily; "and I don't see that there was the least harm in what the Spartan saw."

"I wish you would not refer to your governess in that disrespectful manner, Lily," said the doctor. "What did Miss Spartin see, Lily?"

"All my fault, sir," Cyril murmured. "Lily was very much annoyed, and—"

"Oh, Cyril, I never said so!" exclaimed Lily, blushing all over her fair young face. "He only considered me as his sister; and, you see, father, he had a perfect right in doing so. A boy who will dive down Headland Height to save a girl, has a right to consider her as his sister; and you will hear all about it from the—I mean, Miss Spartin. And I made Cyril promise not to tell, and he never would, and I wouldn't have told all if the Spartan had not been spying."

Dr. Buchanan seated himself in his chair again, and then he got such parts of the story as Lily and Cyril thought it advisable to tell, but nothing was said about those kisses. Miss Spartin was bound to say enough about that, seeing she had viewed the last one from the window.

(An extra long instalment next Thursday.)

EDITOR'S NOTE.

In addition to the favour of ordering your copies of the "Gem" Library in advance, I shall be glad if you will drop me a postcard criticism of Tom Merry and Alan Wayward.

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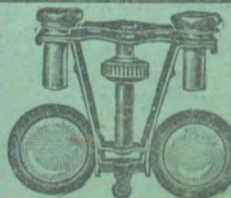
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