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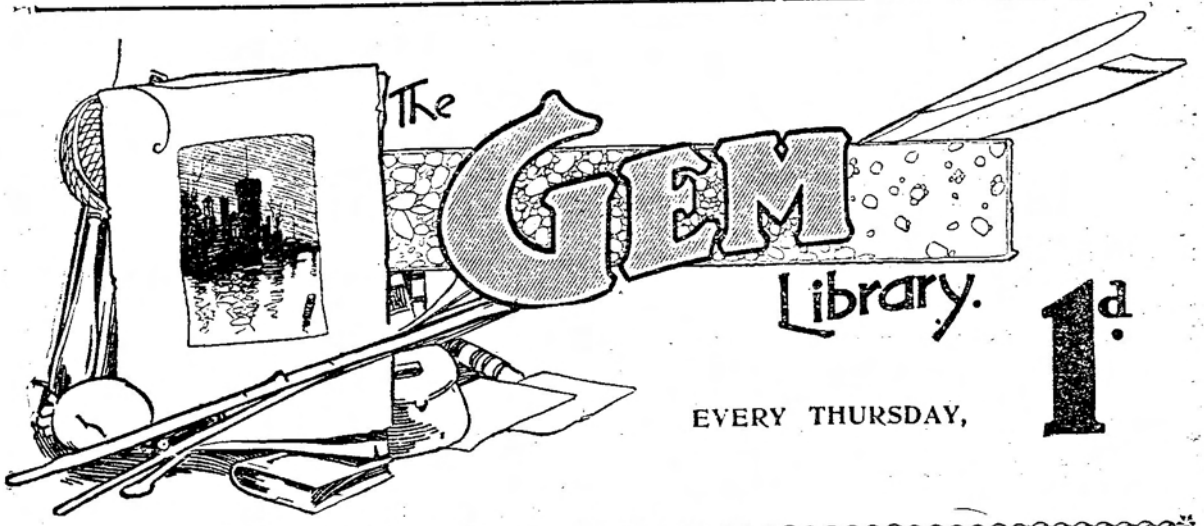

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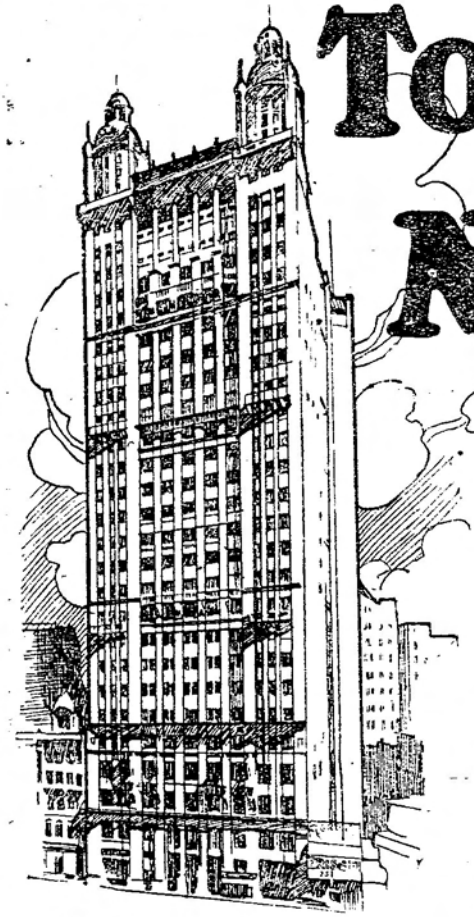

TOM MERRY IN NEW YORK!

A Splendid Complete Tale of the Boys of St. Jim's.

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.
A New World!

"TOM MEWWY!"

There was a buzz of voices and a clatter of footsteps on the deck of the liner Ethiopia, as the huge vessel steamed on slowly towards New York harbour. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, now on his first voyage to America, came up the companion staircase, and looked round anxiously as he made his way through the crowded passengers.

"Tom Mewwy!"

But there was no reply from Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus looked round, and walked fore and walked aft, and his eyeglass was turned in every direction, while the anxiety upon his aristocratic countenance increased.

"Tom Mewwy! Wally! Skimpole! Bai Jove, they will get lost!" murmured D'Arcy. "If I don't keep them in sight when we land, I may nevah find them again in New York. I wegard them as bein' undah my pwotection, at least until we meet Mrs. Stuyvesant. Tom Mewwy! Weally, Tom Mewwy!"

There was a mist on the waters, and the land was wrapped in dimness. Through the mist ghostly trees loomed up to view on the port side.

"That's Staten Island," said somebody.

"Tom Mewwy!"

"Hallo, Gus, so you're here!"

A DOUBLE LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

Arthur Augustus staggered under a sounding slap on the shoulder. His eyeglass jerked off, and he gave a gasp as he swung round and looked at Tom Merry.

Tom Merry's merry face was happy and smiling.

"Here we are at last," he exclaimed. "New York's just ahead. That's Staten Island yonder, only you can't see it. Long Island's on the other side. Keep near me, old chap. I don't want to lose you."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and gave Tom Merry a withering stare.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You see I've been looking for you already. I missed you on deck."

"I went below to change into a new toppah. I was afwaid you were lost in the cwowd. Pway keep near me, Tom Mewwy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard myself as being wesponsible for you until we meet Miss Fawcett's fwiend, Mrs. Stuyvesant. I have been feeling quite nervous about you. Where are Skimpole and young Wally?"

"There they are, looking for the Statue of Liberty. They can't see it."

"Bai Jove, so they are! Wally, pway keep near me."

"Rats!" said Wally D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor of the Third Form at St. Jim's—without turning his head.

"Wally, I insist upon your keepin' near me. I am wesponsible for you, and the matah particulahly impwessed upon me to take care of you. I considah——"

"I can't see the blessed statue," said Wally, interrupting his elder brother without ceremony. "We ought to be able to see Liberty Enlightening the World now, but the blessed thing has done a bunk."

"What an extwemely vulgah expwession, Wally!"

"Oh, rats! Is that New York, Tom Merry?"

Wally cast a disparaging glance towards the huge buildings that were beginning to loom out of the mist. New York, in that weather, was not cheerful to look upon.

"That's New York, my son," said Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove, Skimpole; what are you doin', deah boy?"

Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's, was trying to rest a notebook on D'Arcy's shoulder while he jotted down something with a pencil. Arthur Augustus, who was afraid of having his coat rumpled, promptly moved, and Herbert Skimpole's notebook went to the deck.

"Dear me! That was very careless of you, D'Arcy."

"Weally, Skimpole——"

"I wished to make a few notes of my first impressions of New York. I am going to keep an exhaustive diary during our American travels, and write a book on the subject when I get home," explained Skimpole. "Everybody who visits America writes a book about it. It is an almost universal custom. I think my book will be something out of the common, however."

"Yaas, but pway don't use my shouldah for a book-west," said D'Arcy. "I like a fellow to have some wespect for a fellow's clothes. What are you gwopin' down there for, Skimmy?"

"I am trying to find my notebook."

"There it is undah your nose, you duffah."

"Dear me, so it is."

And the short-sighted junior picked up his book. He adjusted his spectacles and recommenced his notes. The Ethiopia was gliding along to the wharf.

"New York—first impressions," murmured Skimpole. "Very misty—but this doubtless due to the weather. Buildings seen from the ship very high, probably on account of their extensive size. Huge crowd on deck——"

"Probably due to the great number of passengers," said Tom Merry gravely.

"Really, Merry——"

"Bai Jove. I think we are stoppin', deah boys."

"Looks like it."

The four juniors of St. Jim's looked about them with great interest as the steamer glided up to the wharf. It seemed marvellous to see the huge ship settle so easily to her berth. The buzz on deck increased in volume, the gangway was run out, and the passengers poured ashore. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked round anxiously for his companions. He was afraid they would get out of his sight when his attention was taken off them.

"Pway keep close to me, deah boys."

"It's all right, Gussy, I've got my eye on you."

"You misunderstand me, Tom Mewwy."

"I won't lose you; don't be nervous."

"You are labouwin' undah a misappwehension——" Arthur Augustus broke off as someone shoved against him in the crush. "Bai Jove, I weally wish you would be a little more careful, sir—— Ah, it is that wascal Puntah!"

It was Captain Punter, of the Poppleywallah Fusiliers—the steamer sharper who had attempted to get the boys into his clutches during the run across the Atlantic, and who had been bitterly exasperated by his failure. He gave Arthur Augustus a very unamiable look as he heard his words.

Captain Punter had spent a great deal of time and trouble on the boys, and it had all ended in nothing, for they were not to be taken in. And Captain Punter would have been very glad of an opportunity of getting his own back.

"Pway keep your distance, Puntah," said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "I wegard you as a gamblin' wascal, Puntah!"

The Indian captain passed on without replying. But there was a curious glint in his eyes that the boys remembered afterwards.

"There doesn't seem to be anyone coming to meet us," Arthur Augustus remarked, as the crowd began to clear.

Tom Merry shook his head. It had been arranged that a friend of his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, should meet the boys in New York, and accompany them on their journey westward as far as Chicago. But there was no sign of Mrs. Stuyvesant, and as a matter of fact, Tom Merry & Co. had a preference for entering New York "on their own." Tom Merry would quite willingly have undertaken the journey to his uncle's ranch in the Far West without any protector at all, but Miss Fawcett's anxiety for his safety would not allow that.

"The Ethiopia is a couple of hours late," Tom Merry remarked. "It's on account of the mist. Mrs. Stuyvesant is no doubt waiting at the Asdorf Hotel till she hears it is in—and we can get there as soon as a messenger."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's no good coming to the land of hustle to stand still," remarked Wally. "I'll get Pongo from the steward and we'll go ashore."

"What about the luggage?"

"You mean the baggage," said Wally.

"Weally, Wally, I fail to see any gweat distinction between luggage and baggage," said Arthur Augustus. The younger scion of the house of D'Arcy chuckled. He had chummed up with several Americans during the voyage, and had learned—as he proudly announced—to talk the American language.

"That's where you miss your guess, Gus."

"Where he whats his which?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Misses his guess. That's what Americans say. You ought to study the language of a country you're going to travel in," said Wally, with a smile of conscious superiority. "As for luggage, it's never heard of on this side of the Atlantic. It's baggage over here."

"But there is weally no diffewence."

"There's no difference between a railway and a chemin-de-fer," said Wally. "But when you're in France you say chemin-de-fer, don't you? When you're in America you say baggage. And you don't get into a train or take a train either—you go aboard it, as if it were a ship."

"Bai Jove!"

"We'll give Wally a job as interpreter," said Tom Merry, laughing. "Go and get your mongrel, my boy."

"You don't say my boy in America—you say sonny."

"Then go and get your mongrel, sonny, and let's out."

"You don't say out—you say get—or absquatulate."

"Then go and get your mongrel, and let's get—or absquatulate."

And Wally grinned and went in search of the steward who had had charge of Pongo during the voyage. The three other juniors stood looking on at the crowd going over the gangway, Skimpole busily taking notes. There was a rather wistful look upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's face for a moment.

"Bai Jove, I wish Blake were here," he remarked. "I should awfully like old Jack to be along with us, you know. He would help me to look aftah you youngstahs——"

Bow-wow-wow-wow!

"Keep that wotten mongwel away fwom my twousahs, Wally."

"You keep your trousers away from my dog."

"Oh, let's get ashore," said Tom Merry, laughing. "The crowd is thinning down. Mind that dog, Wally. I don't know whether a brute is allowed one free bite in America the same as in England; better keep on the safe side."

"What about the custom-house, Tom Mewwy? We shall have to take our luggage——"

"Baggage," said Wally.

"Luggage——"

"Baggage——"

"Oh, that's all right. It can be sent ashore, and sent up to the hotel afterwards. I believe it takes a fearfully long time to get through the custom-house."

"If you think it will be safe——"

"Oh, come on."

"I shall decline to take the wesponsibility——"

"Come on."

"Vewy well, but undah the circs——"

"Come on."

And they pressed over the gangway and went ashore—and curious enough it was to the juniors of St. Jim's to feel their feet upon American soil—to know that the New World was under their tread.

CHAPTER 2.

The First Adventure in New York!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY jammed his eyeglass into his eye and looked round with a comprehensive stare as the four juniors left the wharf. He seemed to be utterly unconscious of the amused attention of which he was the centre. Arthur Augustus's attire was so very elegant, and his manners were so very dignified, that he could hardly fail to attract some attention. He had been the darling of the saloon passengers on board the Ethiopia, but to the youthful Americans now staring at him he probably seemed a very curious product of a foreign clime.

"Bai Jove, I must say I don't think vewy much of Amewicah so fah," said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head.

"You can't see very much of it yet," grinned Tom Merry. "Give the continent a chance, you know."

"Pway call a cab, somebody——"

"Rats! Cabs are too expensive in New York, and there are trams——"

"Street cars, you mean," said Wally.

"Yes, street cars, if you like. They are cheaper, as the luggage——"

"The baggage!"

"As the baggage is being sent on afterwards. This way, and we'll get a tram."

"A car!"

"A car, easily enough."

And the four juniors moved off, Skimpole stopping in a couple of minutes to drag out a big notebook and wet his pencil. Tom Merry jerked him by the arm.

"Come on, Skimmy."

"Wait a minute, Merry, please. I wish to make a note upon the——"

"You can make a note upon the car, old man. You can't stand here like the statue of a howling ass to ornament the thoroughfare, you know. Come along."

And Skimpole was hurried on. But he was hungry for notes, with his book of travels looming in his mind's eye. On the car he made polite enquiries of the conductor, a gentleman with a strong Tipperary accent.

"Excuse me," said Skimpole, tapping the conductor on the waistcoat, much to his amazement. "Can you give me a rough estimate of the number of people who use these cars during the year?"

The conductor gave him a pitying look, and retreated to his platform. Skimpole looked after him in astonishment.

"Dear me, is this American politeness to strangers?" he murmured.

"Bai Jove, I wegard you as an uttah ass, Skimpole."

"I was asking a very ordinary question——"

"The conductor's all right," said Wally. "He's letting Pongo stand there beside him. What the dickens do you care about the number of passengers who use these cars during the year, you duffer?"

"I wish to make notes for my book of travels."

"I guess I can help you," said a young man who was sitting beside Skimpole in the car. He was a tall young man with thin limbs and a thin face, and light grey eyes with a curious gleam in them. "I'm always willing to oblige a Britisher, I guess."

"Dear me," said Skimpole, "you are very kind; but how did you guess I was not an American?"

The young man seemed about to choke for a moment, but he restrained himself.

"I guess I can enlighten you," he said. "The cars in this end of New York carry exactly two millions three thousand four and a half passengers every day. Multiply that by three hundred and sixty-five, and there you are, I guess."

"Dear me!"

"If you would like any particulars as to the average number of accidents——"

"Certainly, my dear sir."

"There are fifty people killed every morning, and a hundred every evening. We don't take much stock in accidents here. The dead bodies are usually piled on the side-walk till the dust-carts come round."

"Dear me; is not that rather brutal?"

"I guess we get accustomed to it, you know. Why, we live too rapidly to think about trifles like that, you know. The accidents are specially heavy some mornings. Then the rails are so slippery with blood that the cars run backward at times—fact."

"Dear me."

The young man had to leave the car at this point, or Skimpole would have received some more surprising information as to the barbarous manners and customs of New York. He was eagerly jotting it all down in his notebook, while his companions were laughing. But Skimpole was used to seeing people laugh when he brought his notebook out.

The juniors alighted from the car, and Tom Merry looked round him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sucked the gold head of his cane.

"I weally think we had bettah get a cab, Tom Mewwy!"

"Rats! I've got the directions all right—we want a cross-town car from here."

"Hold on—where's Pongo?" exclaimed Wally.

"Haven't you got the brute on a chain?"

"Well, he was so quiet that I let him off. Hold on a minute while I find him. If he were to get lost in New York we should have to stay here till he was found, and we have only allowed two days for New York."

"Yes—catch us waiting."

"Well, I should wait," said Wally. "Can't you help a fellow look, instead of jawing? He must be here somewhere. Pongo—Pong—doggie!"

But no answering voice came from Pongo. The street-corner was crowded with people changing cars, but Wally did not allow a crowd to incommode him. He ran hither and thither in search of Pongo. A sudden terrific yelping came to his ears, and he burst through a crowd into the roadway, just in time to see Pongo elevated upon the boot of a big, rough-featured policeman. Pongo had apparently got in the way, and the policeman was "booting" him out of it. Wally's eyes blazed as he ran forward to the rescue of his favourite.

"You brute!" he shouted.

The policeman stared at him in blank amazement. New York policeman are monarchs of all they survey, and Wally came as a surprise to this particular member of the force. Wally snatched up Pongo by the collar, and a dark scowl came over the face of the policeman. He saw his authority defied, and he promptly avenged it. His heavy hand descended upon the collar of the junior. Wally struggled in his grip.

"Let me go, confound you!"

The policeman smiled grimly.

"Yes, I'll let you go, I guess, when you're in a stone cell," he snapped, and he dragged the boy forcibly along the pavement.

Wally, too angry to be a armed, struggled harder.

"Will you come quietly,!" shouted the policeman, "or do you want me to club you?"

"Let me go, confound your cheek!"

Tom Merry ran up breathlessly.

"What are you doing with my friend? Let him go."

"Stand outer the way."

"Let him go!"

"I guess you want me to take you too!"

Tom Merry set his teeth. He had heard something of police methods in New York, but he had not expected to come across anything of this sort so soon. A helpless feeling came over

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him: this brute was backed up by all the forces of the law. If he chose to arrest Wally, and Tom too, there was nothing to stop him. The policeman dragged Wally along, his boots clinking on the side-walk, and Tom Merry stood for the moment irresolute.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder.

"A couple of dollars would fix it, you young fool."

Tom Merry started. The advice was not politely put, but it was well-meant. The boy plunged his hand into his pocket. He had changed a considerable portion of his money into American currency on board the steamer, and he was well-supplied with "greenbacks." He ran after the policeman, a new idea in his mind. The thought of bribery was repugnant enough to him, but anything was better than signalizing the arrival of the party in New York by the arrest of one of their number. And—almost impossible as it seemed—the policeman was in earnest. Wally was arrested.

"Please," panted Tom Merry, catching at the policeman's hand, "please let him go! He did not mean any harm."

The man was about to shake off his hand roughly, when he felt a couple of greenbacks squeezed into his palm. The notes disappeared instantly—where and how Tom Merry did not see. A genial grin replaced the frown on the face of the policeman.

"I guess he's a cheeky young cub," he said.

"He—did not mean——"

"Well, get!"

Tom Merry knew enough of the American language to know that this meant that he was to go. He caught Wally by the arm and dragged him away. The hero of the Third Form at St. Jim's was furious. He wanted to stay where he was and slang the policeman, and treat him to some of the most expressive epithets current at St. Jim's. But Tom Merry dragged him away quickly.

"Don't be a young ass!" he exclaimed. "Do you want to be locked up."

"Rats!" said Wally. "He was only bluffing."

"You're a young ass! Come on."

"Well, if he wasn't bluffing, why did he let me go?"

"Because I shoved a couple of bills into his hand, fathead."

"My only Aunt Jane!"

"You weren't worth it," said Tom Merry. "For goodness' sake keep out of mischief, kid, and do remember that this isn't London!"

They rejoined D'Arcy and Skimpole, who were anxious and excited. Wally kept a tight grip on Pongo now. Skimpole wanted to know the details of the affair for putting down in his notebook, but Tom Merry rushed the party off, and they did not linger by the way again.

CHAPTER 3.

To Tip, or Not to Tip?

TOM MERRY pushed at the great revolving door and the juniors entered the hotel. It was something new in hotels to the boys from the Old Country. It towered into the sky till the juniors, straining their necks to see the top, had fancied that the topmost storey must soar into the clouds. How many storeys there were to the hotel they did not even try to count, but there were certainly more than fifteen. The gigantic building was a hive of life. Skimpole jerked a rule out of his pocket, and wanted to take the exact measurements of the vestibule, but Tom Merry kept hold of his arm. The clerk in the bureau, to whom Tom Merry found his way, proved to be a somewhat supercilious young man, who did not regard the juniors with an approving eye. Tom Merry explained that they had just landed from the Ethiopia, and expected to find Mrs. Stuyvesant at the hotel.

"And I am wathah weady for lunch, too," Arthur Augustus remarked. "Pway huwwy up and tell us where Mrs. Stuyvesant is, my deah fellah!"

The hotel clerk turned away, and did not look at the boys again for a couple of minutes, and Tom was beginning to think that he had forgotten their existence. But he was only consulting a list, and he turned back presently with a drawling air.

"Fifteen, nine," he said.

"Eh?"

"Fifteen, nine." And the clerk turned away to talk to a gentleman who had just come up to the desk. Tom Merry glanced at the man; it was Captain Punter again. Punter avoided the boy's glance, and, in fact, did not appear to see him.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's that wascal Puntah again!"

"Will you tell me where to find Mrs. Stuyvesant, please?" said Tom Merry.

The clerk did not appear to hear until Tom had repeated his question. Then he looked round with an irritated air.

"Fifteen, nine."

"What do you mean?"

"Fifteen, nine. There's the elevator."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Tom Merry, colouring. "What do you mean by fifteen, nine?"

The clerk muttered something under his breath.

"Fifteen, nine," he said. "Ask the elevator man." And he pointed with his pencil, and then turned away and began to talk with Captain Punter.

Tom Merry looked annoyed.

"What the dickens does he mean by an elevator man?" he said. "By Jove, I'll make him answer or——"

Wally chuckled irrepressibly.

"It's all right, sonny," he said. "A lift is an elevator in New York. Come over here."

"Oh!" said Tom Merry.

They crossed to the lift. There were several other people entering it, but the boys found ample room. The lift, or elevator, whizzed upwards, and stopped at floor after floor, taking in and discharging passengers. Tom Merry & Co. began to look amazed as they passed ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth floor.

"My only hat!" murmured Tom. "This looks like going up into the clouds. I suppose we shall reach the summit some time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Skimpole had his notebook out. He was making a frantic attempt to jot down each floor as it passed, but the elevator was too quick for him, and he was soon hopelessly confused.

"Which floor, sir?" asked the elevator attendant, looking at Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Do you know what fifteen, nine means?"

The man grinned.

"Number fifteen on the ninth floor, sir."

"Oh, I see. Then we've passed it."

"Put you out going down, I guess."

"Very good," said Skimpole. "I shall be glad to complete the journey to the top, in order to make my notes. I suppose there is a top."

The lift whizzed on. It stopped finally at the sixteenth floor, but even this was not the top. But its business was concluded at that storey, and it descended again.

Tom Merry looked out for the ninth storey as he came down. Tom was feeling a little puzzled as to whether to offer the liftman a gratuity. He had been told that in America the Republican institutions had developed an independence of character which scorned the "tip." Tom would have been very sorry to offer a tip to any man whose Republican independence would have been offended thereby; but at the same time he could not help thinking that there was an agreeable obligingness about that elevator man which hinted of expectation.

He put his hand in his pocket; but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, foreseeing his intention, tapped him on the arm.

"Pway don't, Tom Mewwy!"

"But we don't want to be mean," murmured Tom.

"Yaas, but you wemembah we are in a Wepublic now, and——"

"Oh, very well!"

"I guess this is ninè," remarked the liftman.

They stopped and walked out upon the ninth floor of the hotel.

"Thank you," said Tom Merry.

The liftman looked at him curiously. The lift descended, and the attendant's face was not so agreeable as he disappeared from view.

"He ought to have had a tip," said Wally. "You are a soft mark, Tom Merry."

"I'm a what?"

"A soft mark—that's a mug."

"Weally, Wally, you must wemembah that we are in a Wepublic now, where centuwies of fweedom have developed a wugged independence of chawactah," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I have been told so by sevewal Amewicans, and I suppose Amewicans ought to know something of the mannahs and customs of their own country."

"All the same, that chap wanted a tip."

"I wegard it as impwob."

"Well, it's too late now," said Tom Merry. "We've got on nine, so let's look for fifteen. That over-dressed ass downstairs said fifteen, nine."

"Let's get, by all means," said Wally.

They moved along a wide corridor, and an hotel attendant came round a corner and nearly ran into them. He stopped and looked at Pongo.

"I guess that animal ain't allowed up hyer, gentlemen," he said.

If they had been in England Tom Merry would have been sure at once that another tip was wanted, but being in a free Republic he had his doubts as before. Wally promptly gathered up Pongo into his arms.

"I guess I'm freezing to Pongo," he said.

The man grinned. He could see, of course, that the quintette were fresh from the Old Country, and Wally's Americanisms seemed to amuse him.

"I'm afraid, sir——"

"Can you tell us where number fifteen is?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, sir, it's Mrs. Stuyvesant's suite. Can I show you the way?"

"Thank you, please do."

Leaving Pongo alone, the man showed the way, and the juniors were soon at Mrs. Stuyvesant's door. Then the attendant lingered.

"This is the suite, I guess, sir."

"Thank you," said Tom Merry.

He knocked at the door.

"I guess you might have been a long time finding it, gentlemen," said the man.

"Yaas; I wegard that as pwob," said D'Arcy. "We are extwemely obliged to you."

The man looked at him, and then walked away.

"Well, of all the mugs," chuckled Wally.

"Weally, Wally, I wish you wouldn't use those vulgah expwessions. I suppose you think that person wanted a gwatuity, too?"

"Of course he did."

"Wats! His mannah was simply the extweme obligingness of a citizen of a fwee Wepublic. What do you think, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I rather think I agree with Wally," he replied.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I cannot give you my permish to insult the susceptibilities of fwee Amewican citizens by the humiliatin' pwoffah of a gwatuity."

"The free American citizens will jolly soon insult our susceptibilities, then," grinned Wally.

Tom Merry knocked at the door again. A voice bade him enter, and the juniors walked into a sumptuously appointed apartment, where an extremely stout lady was sitting at a table with a pen in her hand.

CHAPTER 4.

In Comfortable Quarters.

MRS. STUYVESANT—for the juniors knew that this must be she—was a lady of the amplest proportions, and very richly dressed. She did not turn her head as the boys came in, being very busy at her writing-table.

"Pray excuse me a few minutes," she said, without looking round. "I must really complete this note."

The juniors waited, a little astonished at their reception. They glanced round the room. It was elegantly and splendidly furnished, and might have been a drawing-room in a large mansion. It was difficult for the juniors to believe that they were on the ninth floor of an hotel.

There were several papers scattered near the stout lady, who was evidently very busy. She was murmuring aloud as she wrote, and the boys caught some of her words.

"Fido—a warm bath at nine—milk and water, and his dear hair combed——George Washington to be painlessly asphyxiated immediately."

Tom Merry looked amazed. George Washington, according to his knowledge of American history, had been dead some time already, but in any case, why should the father of his country be painlessly asphyxiated?

Mrs. Stuyvesant finished her note at last, and rose and looked at the boys.

"Dear, dear!" she exclaimed. "I thought it was some attendant. Pray excuse me! Is it possible that you are——"

"Yaas, wathah, my deah madam," said Arthur Augustus. "Pway allow me the honah of intwoducin' myself and these youngstahs. This is Tom Mewwy, of the Shell at St. Jim's, and this is Skimpole. I am Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and this is my youngah bwothah, Waltah Adolphus."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "I am very much surprised." She fanned herself. "I have already sent Louis twice to see if the steamer were in. How could you possibly find your way from the steamer?"

"We managed to do so, ma'am," said Tom Merry.

"Dear, dear! Wonderful! And you are Tommy, the dear little boy of whom Miss Fawcett has told me so much in her letters," said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "You may kiss me, Tommy."

Tom Merry kissed the stout lady on her plump cheek. Mrs. Stuyvesant shook hands with the others, and bade them be seated. She asked them pleasantly enough about their voyage, and about their baggage, which she said Louis would attend to. The juniors wondered whom Louis might be, but did not ask. Mrs. Stuyvesant suddenly caught sight of the black muzzle of Pongo peeping from under Wally's jacket, and uttered an exclamation.

"Dear, dear! Let me see the dear little creature."

"He's a jolly little bounder, ma'am," said Wally, letting Pongo go. "He'll gnaw up anything in the room, but——"

"Ah! As soon as Louis comes I will send him to Professor Styx. I will add a postscript to my note—what is the dog's name, please?"

"Will you come quietly?" shouted the policeman to Wally, "or do you want me to club you?"

"Pongo, ma'am."

"Very good. Pongo to be painlessly asphyxiated——"

"Eh?" cried Wally.

"I am giving instructions for the unfortunate creature to be painlessly asphyxiated," said the stout lady, beaming. "You may not know that I am President of the Association for Asphyxiating Superfluous Dogs. Stray animals are taken charge of and put out of their misery in the most painless way

possible. This dear creature will be asphyxiated in one second by Professor Styx's new process."

"Will he?" said Wally. "If I catch Professor Styx asphyxiating Pongo I'll——"

"Pway be quiet, Wally. If our wespected fwiend wishes to asphyxiate Pongo, I suppose you would not be wude enough to wefuse."

"Oh, don't you begin, Gus!"

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "Perhaps I am under a misapprehension. Perhaps you did not bring the dog in to be painlessly asphyxiated."

"He's my dog, ma'am."

"I regarded him as a waif and stray."

"I've brought him from England," said Wally, suppressing his wrath. "You've only got to look at him, ma'am, to see that he's got some breed in him."

"In that case I will cancel this postscript," said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "Pongo shall certainly not be asphyxiated if he is your own dog. I was under a misapprehension. I frequently have animals brought to me to be subjected to Professor Styx's new painless process. Ah, here is Louis!"

Louis proved to be a young Frenchman, with a waxed moustache and a complexion like a doll; a confidential servant of Mrs. Stuyvesant's, and as Tom Merry soon discovered, her right-hand man in carrying on the humane work of the Asphyxiating Association.

"Ah, Louis! It is you."

"Oui, madame," said Louis, spreading out the palms of his hands and shrugging his shoulders. "Oui, madame, I look for zem, and I ask ze captain—monsieur le capitaine—but zey are gone."

"They have arrived, Louis, and they are here now. Pray show them to their rooms, and make every arrangement for the comfort of my guests, Louis."

"Oui, madame."

"And then take this note to Professor Styx."

"Oui, madame."

"I wish you to see particularly that Fido has his warm bath and his milk-and-water, and that George Washington is painlessly asphyxiated."

"Oui, madame."

"That is all, Louis."

"Oui, madame."

"You will follow Louis, please, my dear little friends," said the stout lady. "He will show you to your rooms, and then you will join me at lunch. We shall lunch downstairs, and you will descend in the elevator. I hope you will be quite comfortable while you remain in my charge. I shall do my best. We start to-morrow for Chicago, and I shall see you on your way as far as that city, where I also have business to do in connection with the Association for the Asphyxiation of Superfluous Dogs. Louis, you will attend in every way to the comfort of the young gentlemen."

"Oui, madame."

And the juniors followed Louis. They had heard from Miss Fawcett that Mrs. Stuyvesant was a very rich woman, and her quarters in the palatial hotel quite bore it out. Preparations had evidently been made for the arrival of the party from England.

In a large room four beds were arranged, looking very cosy and inviting, and the appointments of the room were all that even the fastidious Arthur Augustus could desire.

The polite and obliging Louis showed them every consideration, and when he left them the boys proceeded to make their toilet after their journey with much satisfaction.

"Bai Jove, this is weally like home!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I am gettin vewy weady for lunch, you know. I——"

"I say, where's Pongo?"

"That's all right," said Tom Merry. "Louis has taken Pongo."

D'Arcy minor looked alarmed.

"If he begins asphyxiating my dog——"

"He's taken him away to feed him. You can't look after Pongo here as you did at St. Jim's, and you can't feed a horrid mongrel with dog-biscuits in a lady's drawing-room," said Tom Merry severely. "Buck up there, and let's get down to lunch! I'm jolly hungry."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Still, I don't like this asphyxiating business," growled D'Arcy minor. "It's all very well to associate for the purpose of asphyxiating superfluous doge; but Pongo isn't superfluous."

"I have often wegarded him as distinctly superfluous, Wally."

"Yes; but you're an ass, you know."

"I object to bein' addwessed as an ass——"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "Aren't you ready, Skimmy?"

"Certainly, Merry; but I am making a few notes as to the dimensions of this hotel. I shall not keep you more than a quarter of an hour."

"You will not keep me more than a quarter of a minute," said Tom Merry, taking Skimpole's notebook away and stuffing it into his pocket. "Come on! You can have this rubbish back after lunch."

"Really, Merry, it is not rubbish. I——"

"Are you coming?"

They went out in search of the lift. A touch of the electric button was sufficient, and the lift glided to the ninth floor. The attendant did not look so obliging as before. The lads stepped into the lift, and the man set it in motion.

"Ground floor," said Tom Merry.

The attendant grunted.

"And if you will accept——" Tom Merry pressed a dollar into the willing hand of the free American citizen.

D'Arcy waited for the catastrophe.

But the liftman did not arise in the wrath of a free Republican and crush the daring youth under the scorn of a high-souled freeman.

He slipped the coin into his pocket, and simply said:

"Thank you, sir."

"Bai Jove," murmured Arthur Augustus, "I wegard the Amewican Wepublic as a swindle!"

And the juniors stepped out on the ground floor and made their way to the luncheon-room.

CHAPTER 5.

A Night in New York.

TOM MERRY & CO. enjoyed that lunch. It was a ripping one—ripping in both quality and quantity. Mrs. Stuyvesant, who had forgotten the superfluous dogs for the moment, was very kind and hospitable. The room was a very extensive one, with almost endless tables laid for lunch, and the waiters moved about with noiseless feet. Tom Merry thought of Fatty Wynn at home at St. Jim's, and how he would have enjoyed that lunch. Arthur Augustus was also thinking of chums at home.

"Bai Jove, I wish Blake had been able to come!" he said. "It would be much more wippin' with Blake along with us. Of course, it would be another youngstah for me to look aftah, and I have my hands pwetty full at pwesent."

"Rats!" said D'Arcy minor.

"Pway be silent, Wally, if you must use those vulgah expwessions. You know, deah boys, Blake has an uncle in Wyoming, and I advised him to cable to the old gentleman and get an invitation out here. And he did."

Tom Merry laughed.

"And what was his uncle's reply?"

"He hadn't weceived it when we left. But if it was a favowouble one Blake intended to come by the next steamah."

"My hat! Then he'd be here to-morrow!"

"Yaas. Wouldn't that be wippin'?"

"It would, my son; but I hardly expect to see Blake."

Mrs. Stuyvesant asked Tom about his journey, and expressed great interest in his uncle in Arizona, who had sent for him so suddenly. Tom told her about St. Jim's and the life there, and the lunch passed very pleasantly. After lunch Mrs. Stuyvesant ordered her carriage, and took the boys for a drive in Central Park.

The juniors, as a matter of fact, would have preferred to plunge into the crowds of New York and see the city for themselves, but they appreciated the good lady's kindness, and they really enjoyed the drive.

After Central Park, which occupies the centre of Manhattan Island, upon which New York stands, Mrs. Stuyvesant drove to the house of an acquaintance on Fifth Avenue, and showed the boys with her, and they obtained their first glimpse of that magnificent thoroughfare. Even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was impressed, and admitted that it was "wippin'." Skimpole wished to take out his rule and measure the width of the avenue, but was restrained in time.

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The boys returned to the hotel hungry enough, and they had tea with Mrs. Stuyvesant in her own rooms. Wally inquired anxiously of Louis as to the welfare of Pongo, and Louis assured him with many gestures that the "chien" was quite well and happy.

After tea Mrs. Stuyvesant informed the boys that she had a meeting of the association to attend while she was in New York, and so would have to leave them till dinner, but she had arranged for Louis to take them out and show them some of the sights of New York.

"You are very kind, madam," said Tom Merry. "Perhaps, though, we're taking up too much of Louis's time? I think we could manage——"

The stout lady shook her head decidedly.

"My dear boy, you do not know the dangers of New York," she said. "Besides, you will need a guide. Louis will show you everything, and will relieve my mind of anxiety by taking every care of you."

"Very well, ma'am."

"Louis will take you to the various sights of the city," said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "I do not know them myself; but Louis will get a guide-book and show you everything. I hope you will enjoy yourselves, my dear boys."

"Oh, we shall do that, ma'am."

And Tom Merry & Co. sallied out with the invaluable Louis. Louis, with imperturbable Gallic politeness, took on the task with cheerful alacrity, and his manner to the juniors was very polite and respectful. He showed them a great many places—the Metropolitan Museum, the great Riverside Drive on the Hudson, and then southwards they went into the giant stream of Broadway. This street, extending from Central Park to the Battery, at the southern end of the island, is the great artery of New York, and the boys, who had, of course, heard much about it, gazed about them with great interest; and Skimpole made rapid notes. When, after looking at the City Hall, Louis pointed out the street leading to the famous "Bowery," the juniors all looked eager. They had heard much of the Bowery, and they wanted to see it. But Louis rolled his eyes and shrugged his shoulders at the idea.

They proceeded further south to see the huge Brooklyn Suspension Bridge, which unites New York with her sister city on the opposite side of the East River, and then it was time to turn homewards. They had done a great deal of sightseeing in a short space of time—sightseeing on the American plan, as was proper, Tom Merry remarked, in America. How much money Louis had spent it was impossible to guess; but they guessed that Mrs. Stuyvesant gave him carte blanche.

'Well, Louis is awfully obligin', you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, as the patient Frenchman piloted them back to the hotel. "But weally, I think this evenin' we will slip out and have a look at the place for ourselves."

Tom Merry grinned.

'That's just what I was thinkin'."

"I have wead that Bwoadway is a wippin' sight of an evening, and I weally want to see New York at its best. As for any dangah in goin' out alone, I wegard that as wot. I shall be lookin' aftah you youngstahs all the time."

"And I can take Pongo," Wally remarked.

"Wats! That beast will get us into twouble again."

"He will be useful if we get down into the Bowery," said Wally. "Suppose we get into a row with the toughs——"

"You mean the wuffs."

"No, I don't; I mean the toughs—they call them toughs here, not roughs. I guess I can talk the language some."

"Oh, hang Pongo!" said Tom Merry. "You ought to keep him chained up till we get to Arizona. There will be room for him to have a run there. I say, we haven't much time left to dress for dinner."

"Bai Jove, we must make ourselves look decent, deah boys!"

They hurried to their quarters, and quickly changed their clothes. Mrs. Stuyvesant greeted them with a smile as they joined her. The juniors dined in great style—either the air of New York or the exercise they had had giving a keen edge to their appetites.

After dinner the question was how to escape the kindly attentions of Mrs. Stuyvesant and her faithful Louis. The boys naturally desired to have a little run "on their own," but it was no use taking the good lady into their confidence on the subject. It would have needlessly alarmed her; yet, at the same time, they did not wish to appear neglectful. Fortunately, the difficulty was settled for them. Mrs. Stuyvesant, who had only come to New York to meet the boys, found many things to attend to while she was there in connection with the Asphyxiating Association, and she wished to devote that evening to the business; and so Louis was deputed to take the boys to a theatre. Seats had been taken at the Lyceum—a name that had a pleasant sound of home to the boys' ears—and after dinner they drove there, and the faithful Louis left the four juniors safe—as he thought—in a box. Then he left them, to come again when the play was over and fetch them home. Doubtless the good Louis went to repose and solace himself with a cigar after his arduous labours as a walking Baedeker.

But as soon as the boys found themselves alone their spirits rose.

"Bai Jove, now's the time!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I weally do not wish to see this play to the beastly finish Tom Mewwy."

"Nor I," laughed Tom. "I'd rather see New York."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Same here," said Wally. "I wish I had foreseen this, and I would have brought Pongo with me."

"Oh, hang Pongo! Let's go for a trot. We can have a look at New York and get back here in time to go home with Louis when he comes with the carriage."

"I will stay here, I think," said Skimpole, blinking at them through his spectacles. "I shall be very busy during the next hour."

"All right, you can see the play——"

"I am not going to look at the play. I have my notebook to make up. Can you remember how many people are killed on the cars every morning, Tom Merry?"

"How the deuce should I know?"

"Surely you remember that obliging gentleman in the car telling us?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove, you are an ass, Skimmy! The fellow was only wottin'."

"I hardly think so, D'Arcy. He naturally wished to give information to one in search of it, and I regarded his action as merely polite."

"Well, Skimmy can stay here and make up his notes," grinned Tom Merry. "We will go for a trot. If we should lose each other——"

"Oh, that's all wight! I am goin' to keep an eye on you deah boy."

"Ass! If we——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"If we should lose one another," bawled Tom Merry, "we're to come back here singly; but we must keep together if possible."

"Yaas, wathah! But you need not be afwaid——"

"I'm afraid you will play the giddy ox some way."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Oh, come on! Put on your coats, it's cold."

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and Wally donned their coats over their evening clothes, and left the box. D'Arcy gave a start as he caught sight of a gentleman in conversation with an attendant near the door of the box.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy——"

"What's the matter?"

"It's that wascal Puntah again."

"My hat! So it is. Don't take any notice of the rotter. We don't want a row here."

"Quite wight. I shall tweat him with contempt."

The boys walked on. Arthur Augustus held his nose well up in the air, and they passed the captain, who did not turn his head. He did not seem to see the boys, but his eyes glinted as they passed. It was curious how the adventurer seemed to haunt their footsteps. They had not expected to see the baffled sharper again after leaving the steamer, but he seemed to turn up everywhere.

"Blessed if I know why he's sticking to us," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "He can't expect to make anything out of us now. But it can't be by accident that we keep on running against the fellow."

"Pewwaps he intends to wob us if he gets a chance, deah boys."

"H'm! Well, we know he is a sharper."

"You mean a crook?" said Wally.

"A which?"

"A crook. They're crooks out here."

"Good! You'll be able to compile an American dictionary when you get home. Now, get along, or we sha'n't have time to look round before we have to get in. We mustn't miss Louis, or Mrs. Stuyvesant will be anxious. Grown-up people have such a curious idea that boys cannot take care of themselves."

"Yaas, it is very cuwious. But as I am with you——"

But Tom Merry hurried on, and D'Arcy had no time to finish. The juniors were soon in the broad glare of Broadway, with an exhilarating sense of freedom at being out on their own responsibility.

"I weally wish I had foreseen this," muttered Arthur Augustus. "I should have felt much safah about you fellows if I had bwought my twusty wevolvah with me."

"Jolly good thing you haven't, ass. You would get into some trouble with it."

"I object to bein' called an ass, Tom Mewwy."

"Well, we've had trouble enough over Wally's mongrel, without having you carrying a revolver. The safest place to keep a revolver is at the bottom of a trunk, and the trunk locked."

"But I want to go and have a look at the Bowewy, and it is not safe to go into the Bowewy without a twusty wevolvah."

"I think we'd better keep out of the Bowery," said Tom Merry seriously. "I don't know anything about that part of New York, except that it's a good place to keep out of if you're a stranger."

"But with me lookin' aftah you——"

"Oh, ring off!"

The juniors employed a pleasant hour sauntering down Broadway. The street, and the cross streets for the most part, seemed alive with light and motion and colour. The evening was a fine one, after the mist of the morning, and everybody seemed to be out of doors. The sky was dark and serene, with stars ablaze in it; and Tom Merry, as he glanced at it, remembered that New York, for all its Anglo-Saxon aspect, was many degrees south of London in latitude.

The boys sauntered down town. New York, being sprawled over a long and narrow island running north and south, is naturally divided into two portions—down and up town. The elevated railroads, running over the avenues, convey a vast concourse of business people down town in the morning, and up town in the evening. Then the elevated trains are packed as full as they can hold, so full that the London Metropolitan at its worst seems a joke to them.

Unacquainted with the city, and anxious only to see the sights, the juniors naturally wandered far, and presently they found themselves near the gigantic suspension bridge over the East River. Thence they walked on, finding themselves in less cheerful surroundings, and when Tom Merry wished to return to the lights of Broadway he did not find the task easy.

"Weally, I twust you chaps haven't lost yourselves," said Arthur Augustus. "I have been leavin' it to you, Tom Mewwy, you know."

Tom Merry looked round him. Warehouses were on one hand, and mean houses and sheds on the other. Now that he recalled it, Tom remembered that he had heard many stories of the East River region in New York. Like many great cities, New York has its worst side to the river front, and the aspect of the people he passed did not encourage Tom Merry to ask them for information.

There was a sudden raucous roar of voices, and a crowd of drunken men, some of them in sailor garb, came pouring out of a brilliantly-lighted saloon.

"Get back!" muttered Tom Merry.

The three juniors crowded back to the wall as the crowd came reeling past, shouting some wild bacchanalian song.

But the crowd filled up the narrow, ill-set sidewalk, and in a moment the boys were being whirled away in the midst of them.

Tom Merry struggled out of the press, and caught Wally by the arm, and dragged him away from a burly Norwegian sailor with whom he was disputing. Wally had trodden on the man's foot, and the rough fellow had retorted with a buffet that made the junior reel, and Wally was going for him hotly when Tom Merry dragged him off.

"Lemme go!" growled Wally. "I'm going to dot him on the boko."

"You're not. Come away."

"Hallo! What's up?"

"Tom Mewwy! Help!"

It was a faint cry from the distance, and it was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry started.

"Gussy! D'Arcy! Where are you?"

There was no reply.

The crowd had cleared from the street now, and the sidewalk round the juniors was clear. Tom Merry looked round anxiously for Arthur Augustus. But the swell of St. Jim's was not to be seen.

"D'Arcy! D'Arcy!"

But no voice replied to Tom Merry's calling. Arthur Augustus had disappeared!

CHAPTER 6.

The Disappearance of D'Arcy!

TOM MERRY stood in the dimly-lighted street, with the waters of the East River glimmering near on the right, almost dazed for the next few moments.

Where was D'Arcy? The bacchanalian crowd had passed on, but it was absurd to suppose that they had borne D'Arcy along with them. They had crowded into another lighted saloon a hundred yards down the street, and the roar of a brutal chorus came from the open door. But where was D'Arcy?

There were many byways and nooks into which he could have gone, but why should he have left the spot?

What meant his cry for help, except that he had been hurried away forcibly? But how—by whom—why?

Tom Merry pressed his hand to his head. He felt dazed—amazed—bewildered! What had happened to Arthur Augustus? Where was he?

Wally was looking pale and scared. Much as he chipped his elder brother, the thought that something had happened to him cut the lad to the heart.

"What—what's become of Gus, Tom?" he muttered.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Heaven knows! Gus! Gus! Gus!"

The street echoed to Tom Merry's shouting, but there came no reply from the missing junior.

"They can't have taken him with them," muttered Tom Merry. "But I'd better go and have a look. Stick to me, Wally."

"Yes, rather," muttered Wally.

They hurried along into the glaring saloon into which the crowd of revellers had poured. Tom Merry looked into the open door, and almost sickened at what he saw. He did not know it, but he was in one of the "toughest" parts of the riverside region, and the sights to be seen there were not sights for young eyes. He was looking down a passage, at the end of which was another open door, which gave entrance into a large, garishly-lighted room. There was a bar in one corner, and seats scattered about the walls, and the floor was occupied by dancing couples, many of them in a state of semi-intoxication.

"You wait here a minute, Wally, while I——"

"Buck up, then."

Tom Merry tiptoed along the passage, and looked into the lighted room. The music came from three wheezy fiddles, and thirty or more couples were dancing to it, while men and women were seated at the little tables drinking together. There was no sign of Arthur Augustus in the room. Tom caught sight of the big Norwegian sailor with whom Wally had quarrelled whirling in a clumsy waltz with a girl whose hair was streaming over her shoulders. The boy took only one look into the room, and then went quietly back into the street.

Wally's eyes met his with mute inquiry, and Tom shook his head.

"Not there?"

"No."

"Then where——"

"Heaven knows!"

The juniors left the place, and returned to the spot where they had missed D'Arcy. Up and down and round they went, looking for him. Wally uttered a sudden sharp exclamation.

"Look here!"

It was D'Arcy's glove. Tom Merry knew the glove at once—a delicate one in lavender kid—no one else was likely to have dropped such a glove in such a place.

The glove lay at the entrance of an alley, branching off from the street behind a rambling building. Had D'Arcy gone down that utterly black opening, where not even a lamp glimmered?

If so, why—how? Who could have forcibly dragged the unfortunate boy away, and why had it been done?

Tom Merry and Wally looked at one another.

"He's been kidnapped," said Wally, in a low, awed tone.

"But how—why—by whom?"

Tom Merry felt helpless. He realised only too clearly that he was in a strange land among strange people. In London, he would have dashed off to Scotland Yard at once, with every confidence—but here? His first experience of New York police methods, that very morning, had not given him confidence.

"What's to be done?" muttered Wally.

"I'm going after him," said Tom Merry resolutely.

"Then I'm coming with you!"

Tom hesitated. The alley looked black and threatening—it seemed of little use to go; and yet how could he abandon a chum to his fate?

"Come on, then, old chap," he said. "We'll sink or swim together."

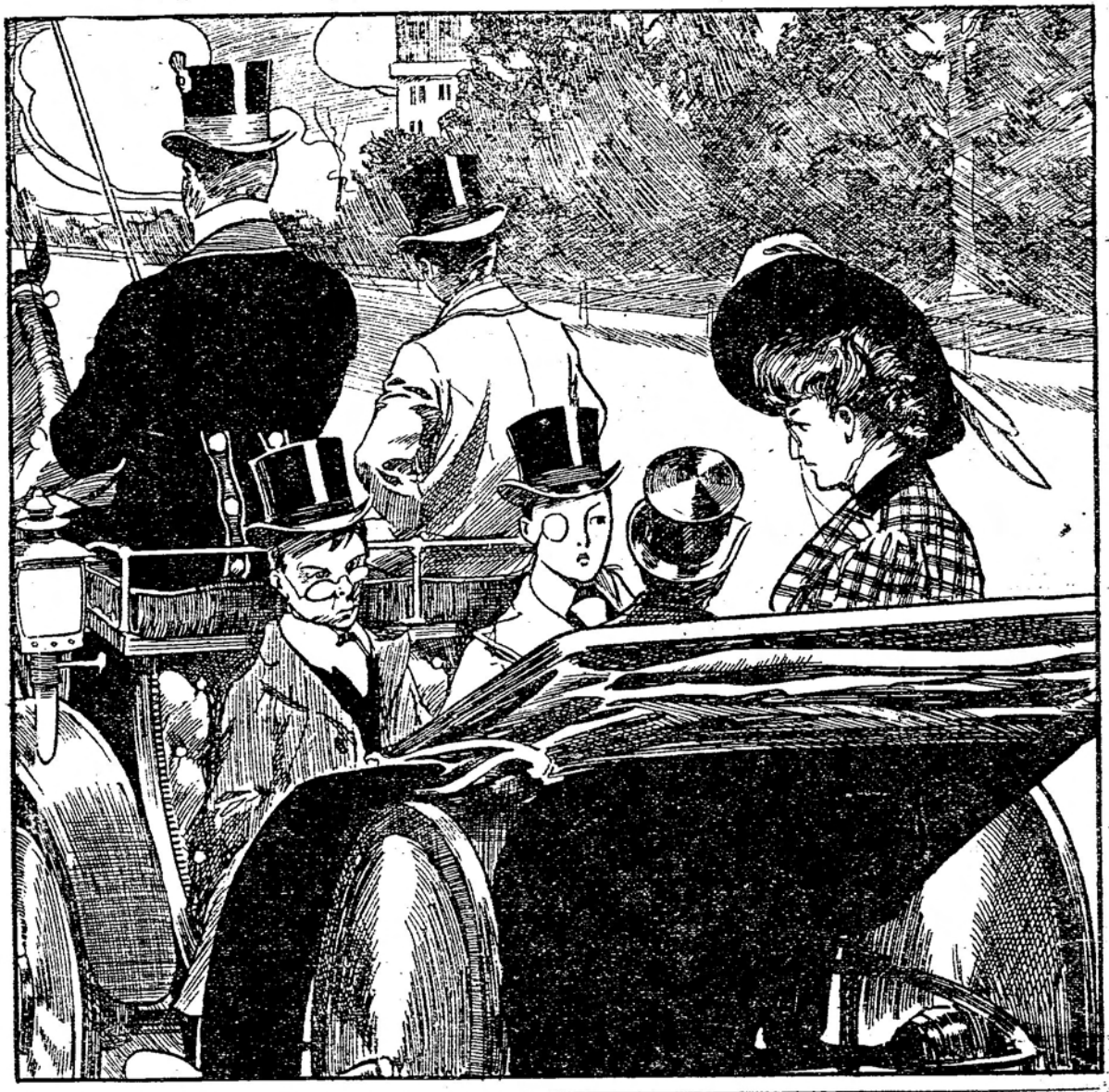
The juniors plunged into the blackness of the alley.

They had not taken a dozen steps when invisible hands clutched them in the darkness. They attempted to struggle, but they could hardly move a limb. Hands went through their clothes, quietly and thoroughly removing every article of value from their pockets, until they were denuded of the last cent. Watches, tie-pins, chains, everything went, and the boys were unable to move a finger in the defence of their property. All the time they caught not one glimpse of their assailants—the blackness was complete.

It was a strange, eerie feeling that came over them; it seemed as if they had descended like Dante into the blackness of the Inferno, and there had been seized by the shadowy dwellers of the infernal regions.

They were stripped of everything of any value, and then they felt themselves dragged along, and suddenly hurled away with great force.

They clattered down upon the road—at the spot where they had entered the alley. The sound of a faint chuckle floated through the darkness.



The St. Jim's juniors would have preferred to plunge into the crowds of New York and see the city for themselves.

Tom Merry sat up.

He was aching from the fall, and his wrist was bleeding where it had struck the hard stone. Wally was jamming his handkerchief to his nose.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

He staggered to his feet.

"My only Aunt Jane!" murmured Wally, picking himself up. "I guess we're not quite up to the toughs of New York."

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

"Hang them! We must see the police about it—though goodness knows whether it will be of use."

A policeman was standing outside the saloon Tom Merry had walked into. The two juniors approached him, and he eyed them very suspiciously. Tom Merry stated that they had been robbed, and that their companion had been taken away.

"More fools you for coming here!" said the policeman.

Tom Merry's heart sank.

"Can't you help us?" he said.

The policeman looked at him searchingly.

"Is this straight goods you're giving me?" he demanded.

Tom Merry was puzzled.

"I—I don't quite understand," he faltered.

"He means are you gammoning him," whispered Wally.

Tom Merry turned red.

"I'm telling you the truth," he said. "My friend has disappeared, and when we tried to follow we were seized and robbed."

"You'd better come to my captain, I guess."

The policeman tapped on the pavement with his club. Tom Merry watched this proceeding with surprise. The tap, tap rang clearly through the night. The juniors learned afterwards that this is the method by which a New York policeman summons a comrade, as a London policeman uses the whistle.

Tap, tap!

A minute more and a second policeman came into view. The two policemen spoke together in low tones, looking often at the boys, and then the second man told them to follow him. The juniors followed him in silence, with heavy hearts. The unknown fate of Arthur Augustus was weighing heavily upon their minds, and the confidence they had in the power of the New York police to find him was nil. But there was nothing else to be done!

CHAPTER 7.

Kidnapped!

MEANWHILE, what of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy?

The swell of St. Jim's had been separated from his chums by the crowd of disorderly revellers, and he had been looking round for them when a pair of arms suddenly clasped him round the neck from behind. Utterly amazed by the attack, D'Arcy struggled frantically, and the next thing

he knew—and the last—was that a heavy fist smote him behind the ear.

He came to himself with an aching head, and a curious sensation of tightness and discomfort in his limbs.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy, stirring uneasily. "What has happened?"

He remembered in a few minutes the mishap in Water Street, and the blow he had received. From that moment all was blank.

Where was he now?

He tried to rise, and then the tightness in his limbs was explained. He was bound hand and foot.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the junior, in utter dismay. "I am a pwisonah!"

There was no doubt about it. The swell of St. Jim's was a bound prisoner—where he could not guess.

He looked round him with startled eyes.

Darkness enshrouded him, but after a time he could make out the form of a window, closed with a shutter. Here and there a pale gleam came in, but it was not the gleam of daylight. However long he had been insensible, it was still the night.

The swell of St. Jim's was utterly puzzled.

He could have understood it if he had been robbed, but why anybody in New York should want to make him a prisoner passed his comprehension.

He stirred again, and tried to rise to a sitting posture, but in vain. His ankles were tied together, and his wrists fastened behind his back, and his head was still swimming from the blow he had received.

He could only wait till his captors should choose to visit him and explain. It was weary waiting there but, as it happened, it was not for long.

A gleam of light penetrated the darkness.

Arthur Augustus started, and looked round him. The gleam came in a flat line on the floor, and evidently from under a door. Someone was coming to the room.

The junior's heart beat a little faster.

There was the sound of a key scraping in a lock, and the door swung open.

A man entered the room, with a lantern in his hand. Arthur Augustus looked at him, and his heart sank.

Never had the junior seen a personage so hideous and forbidding.

The man had a squat figure, and a face tinted to the hue of copper by strong drink. His eyes were deeply sunken, and had a hawkish glitter in them, and his hair was dirty and frowsy. A coloured neckerchief was twisted round his neck in a knot. His clothes were filthy, and stained in many places with liquor.

He looked at the bound junior, and an evil grin flickered over his coppery visage.

"He's awake, captain!"

The man's voice was harsh and rasping, and in keeping with his brutal visage.

Another man looked in at the door, and D'Arcy could not restrain the cry of amazement that rose to his lips.

"Puntah! You wascal!"

It was Captain Punter!

The steamer crook looked coolly at D'Arcy, and signed to the coppery-visaged rascal to stand down the lantern so that the light fell on the boy.

"You can get, Mick," he said.

Mick grinned.

"If ye're wanting me, captain, I'm not far away," he said.

"That's all right."

Mick went out and closed the door. Captain Punter advanced into the room. D'Arcy was watching him with glowering eyes.

"I pwesume," said Arthur Augustus, with as much dignity as was compatible with his extremely uncomfortable position—"I pwesume, Puntah, that I owe all this to you—you feahful wascal!"

The captain nodded, with a smile.

"Yes, I think you can safely presume that," he assented.

"You—you wascally wuffian!"

Captain Punter laughed. He seemed to find something very amusing in the situation. He pulled a stool out from the wall, sat down, and opened his cigarette case.

"I should be vewy much obliged," said D'Arcy, "if you would have the extweme kindness to welease me from these wotten wopes."

"Not just yet."

"My posish is extwemely uncomfy."

"Yes, I suppose that cannot be called the last thing in comfort," assented the captain. "If you remain here, I think I can release you from the ropes, though it depends upon yourself whether you are released from the place."

"I demand to be weleased immediately!"

Captain Punter laughed again. He selected a cigarette from his case, and lighted it with great care.

"I wish my hands were fwee," said Arthur Augustus. "I should certainly give you a feahful thwashin'. Pway what is your purpose in bwingin' me here? I shall have you locked up when I get fwee, you wascal."

"No, you won't!"

"Why not, you extwemely beastly wottah?"

"Because that will be part of the agreement," said Captain Punter coolly. "I haven't brought you here for a joke, my boy. You will go out on my conditions, not yours. You had the better of me on board the Ethiopia——"

"I know you were a gweat wascal."

"Exactly. You had the better of me there, but it soon occurred to me that if I could not make anything out of you in one way I could in another."

"I weally do not quite compwehend."

"Before you landed in New York I had laid my plans," resumed the captain. "Captain Mainwaring warned you against me on the steamer, but I thought my chance would come ashore. I have not lost sight of you since you landed. This foolhardy expedition of yours to see New York without a protector, has placed you in my hands more readily than I could have expected."

"I wish I had bwought my wevolvah."

"Ha, ha! A revolver would not have helped you much. That disturbance in Water Street gave me my chance. Mick and I were ready, and we whisked you off as easily as we could have wished."

D'Arcy gritted his teeth. The swell of St. Jim's did not often lose his temper, but he was very angry now. He realised, at last, that the sharper had been coolly watching the party all day, waiting for his opportunity to come, and that they had unwittingly given it him themselves.

"Bai Jove, I would give somethin' to give you a feahful thwashin', you wascal," he muttered wrathfully.

Captain Punter blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"Now, I suppose you don't want to stay here," he remarked. "We may as well discuss terms at once, and then I'll leave you to your night's rest."

"Are you goin' to keep me here all night?"

"I am afraid that is imperative. You see, we have to cable to England before you can be released."

Arthur Augustus opened his eyes wide in amazement.

"Cable! To England!"

"Certainly. I suppose you don't think I've brought you here simply for the purpose of holding a conversation with you? You want your liberty. You will have to pay for it."

"You—you wascal! You think you are goin' to hold me to ransom!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's, in blank astonishment.

"If you think that is a new thing here, you don't know much of New York," grinned the captain. "That is certainly my intention. I am going to have a thousand pounds—five thousand dollars—for your freedom, or you will never see the outside of this room again—till you are thrown into the East River with a sack over your head."

D'Arcy shuddered.

"You—you would nevah dare!" he gasped.

"You don't know New York," said the captain, with a smile. "There are worse things than that done in this part of the city. You are in the toughest house in the toughest part of the Bowery, and you have only one chance of getting out alive—by paying over five thousand dollars."

"Wats! I haven't a tenth part as much money with me."

"That is why I am going to cable to your father."

"My—my father!"

"Yes. You are the son of Lord Eastwood, as I learned on the steamer. I know that Lord Eastwood is rich. He would willingly, I should think, pay a thousand pounds rather than say good-bye to any chance of seeing his son again."

Arthur Augustus could only stare at the rascal in horror and dismay. The captain spoke so calmly, in such a matter-of-fact way, that it was hard to realise that he was in earnest. But D'Arcy felt the bonds cramping his limbs, and he looked round at the shuttered window and the filthy walls of his prison, and it was borne in upon him that all this was in deadly earnest.

Captain Punter puffed out little blue clouds of smoke and watched the startled face of his victim with a cool smile.

"Now you understand," he remarked. "You are a prisoner in Bowery Mick's shebang until your pator shells out to the tune of a thousand pounds."

"He will do nothin' of the sort."

"Then you will never see him again."

"I will wisk that. I will wisk anythin' wathah than allow my governah to be plundered by a feahful wascal like you!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus excitedly.

"I will give you until I have finished this cigarette to think it over," said the captain calmly.

"You need give me nothin' of the sort! I despise you too feahfully to have any dealin's with you! I would wathah go to a watewy gwave in the East Wivah," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You can do your worst, you wottah!"

The captain calmly smoked his cigarette.

"If I had the cash in my pocket now, I would wefuse to

hand it to you as a wansom," went on D'Arcy. "I will not cable to my governah, and I will not w'ite any lettahs, and I will not consent to be wansomed even if anybody wishes to wansom me. I uttahly wefuse to be wansomed undah any circs."

"You will write a letter to Mrs. Stuyvesant, and she will cable for the money."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."

Captain Punter threw away the stump of his cigarette.

"I expected this at our first interview," he said, rising. "You will change your mind, I think, by to-morrow morning."

"I shall uttahly wefuse to change my mind."

"Mick! Mick!"

The ruffian re-entered, and Punter pointed to D'Arcy. Mick cut the cords that bound the swell of St. Jim's: but the boy's limbs were too cramped by the confinement for him to move at the moment. The captain took up the lantern, and left the room without giving him another glance. Mick followed, but as he left the room he looked round with a leer that sent a chill to D'Arcy's heart.

The door closed, and the boy was left alone, in darkness.

CHAPTER 8.
In Search of D'Arcy!

TOM MERRY'S first evening in New York was one of the most miserable that he could remember. The disappearance of Arthur Augustus weighed upon his mind; and Wally, usually in the highest spirits, was nervous and depressed. That D'Arcy had been kidnapped admitted of no doubt now; but how, and by whom, remained a mystery. And Tom Merry felt with a sickening sense of helplessness that the police could not help him. He had done all that he could in that direction. The boys had been taken to the police headquarters in Mulberry Street, where they had related all they knew, and had been told that the matter would be looked into at once. From Mulberry Street the boys returned to the theatre, in the faintest of faint hopes that D'Arcy might have returned there. Tom remembering the arrangement that he had made with his comrade before leaving the place. The last act of the play was drawing to a conclusion when Tom Merry re-entered the box, and Skimpole was sitting there, still busy with his notebook. He looked as if he had not shifted his position since Tom Merry left him last.

Tom looked eagerly round, but there was no sign of D'Arcy. His heart sank; the faint hope died quickly away. He tapped Skimpole on the shoulder, and the genius of St. Jim's looked up with a start.

"Dear me! Is that you, Merry?"

"Have you seen D'Arcy?"

"D'Arcy! What an absurd question, Merry. He was here with you only a short time ago."

"Dummy! Has he been back since I left?"

"I really have not noticed. I have been very busy with my notes. I really think my book of travels will be a success when we get back to England. I shall mention you all by name and make you as famous as myself."

"You are sure you haven't seen D'Arcy?"

"Yes, of course, Merry. I have almost completed my first chapter——"

"Oh, ring off!"

Even Skimpole noticed that something was wrong at last. He asked what was the matter, and Tom briefly told him. Skimpole's big forehead was wrinkled in thought.

"Perhaps he has been sandbagged?" he suggested.

"Eh—what?"

"You probably know that it is a common custom with New York roughs to sandbag people," said Skimpole. "They hurl the sandbag from behind, you know, and it knocks you over, and perhaps kills you."

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"I think it highly probable that D'Arcy has been sandbagged. It is possible, too, that he has been robbed and thrown into the East River."

Tom Merry took the cheerful genius by the throat, and banged his head forcibly on the wall.

"Now shut up!" he said.

Skimpole rubbed his head ruefully, and looked at Tom Merry as if he wondered whether Tom was demented. He could see no harm in his cheerful suggestions. The waxed moustache of Louis appeared in the door. The curtain had fallen, unnoticed by the juniors in their preoccupation.

"Ze carriage is ready, messieurs," said Louis.

He looked round the box, and rolled his eyes. The muddy and dishevelled state of the two juniors caught his eye, as well as the absence of Arthur Augustus.

"Is it zat ze accident have happen?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," said Tom Merry shortly. "Let's get home."

"But Monsieur D'Arcy——"

"He is not here."

"But——" Louis spread out the palms of his hands, and excitedly shrugged his shoulders up to his ears "Mais, monsieur, but——"

"He is lost!"

"Lost! Mon Dieu!"

"Let's get back," said Wally. "Mrs. Stuyvesant will have to know."

Tom Merry groaned. He instinctively felt that there would be a painful scene with the stout old lady as soon as she learned that Arthur Augustus had disappeared in a low quarter of New York. But there was nothing else to be done. Mrs. Stuyvesant would have to know. Bitterly enough Tom now regretted that little excursion down town "on their own." Yet it had not been possible for him to foresee the disaster.

There was nothing for it but to return to the hotel and inform Mrs. Stuyvesant. They entered the carriage, and drove homeward gloomily enough. The muddy state of Tom Merry and Wally attracted a good deal of attention in the hotel, crowded at that hour of the evening. But the boys hardly noticed it. They ascended in the elevator to the ninth storey, and stepped out, Louis following them with long face and despairing gestures. Mrs. Stuyvesant was just dismissing two visitors—young men in black, who were probably connected in some official way with the Asphyxiating Association—and Tom Merry waited till she turned to him. The stout lady looked at the juniors with a beaming smile upon her plump face.

"Dear, dear! I hope you have been amused at the theatre, my dear children," she said. Then the state of the juniors caught her attention. "What has happened?"

Tom Merry unwillingly explained. Mrs. Stuyvesant's face grew grave and pale as she listened. Tom Merry had expected a scene, but he was agreeably disappointed. Mrs. Stuyvesant had some curious ways, but she was an American business woman, after all. Her manner grew decisive.

"This is very unfortunate," she said, and she did not reproach the boys with word or look for having gone upon that unlucky excursion. "You have no idea, then, what has become of Arthur?"

"None, ma'am. I am very sorry we——"

"Of course, you could not foresee that anything would happen," said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "D'Arcy has evidently been taken away for some purpose, and it is impossible to suppose that it was by a chance ruffian in Water Street. Someone who intended to do this must have been watching his opportunity, and you unfortunately gave it to him by going to that low locality."

Tom Merry started. He had not thought of that himself, and he had certainly not looked for such a display of American cuteness on the part of the lady president of the Asphyxiating Association.

"But—but whom?"

"It is probably some attempt to extort money," said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "Such things have happened many times in New York. I am very sorry it should have occurred while you were in my charge."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Stuyvesant!" exclaimed Tom Merry remorsefully, "it was all our own fault! We——"

"Never mind: we will not apportion the blame at present," said Mrs. Stuyvesant, with a smile. "You have acquainted the police with the matter?"

"Yes, we have been to the headquarters."

"Very good; I will ring them up and tell them to send me a detective here at once. Louis, ring up police headquarters! And now, my boys, you had better go to bed, and I hope I shall have some good news for you in the morning."

Tom Merry & Co. would gladly have stayed up, for they felt that they could not sleep; but they went to their room without a word. They did not feel much in the humour for talk there, either, and they went to bed; but it was long before slumber visited their eyelids. Even Skimpole, who seldom came down out of the clouds, was silent and worried. When he fully realised that D'Arcy had disappeared, and that he might be in danger, he felt it as keenly as the others.

The detective came promptly enough at the call of Mrs. Stuyvesant. A quarter of an hour after the telephone bell rang he was bowing to the stout lady, hat in hand. The name and wealth of the President of the Asphyxiating Association were well known in New York, and in that great city the mere reputation of dollars works wonders. Mrs. Stuyvesant was very crisp and business-like with the detective. As an American, she knew the only possible way to go to work. A hundred dollars in hand, and a promise of five hundred more as soon as the boy was found, put Mr. Bright on his mettle, and he assured that lady that the missing boy should be found if he had to personally hunt through every "dive" in the Bowery.

Mrs. Stuyvesant felt assured that he would earn the five hundred dollars if he could, and she hoped for the best.

Tom Merry & Co. were up at an early hour. They had slept little, and they rose feeling despondent. That day they were to have taken the train on the Erie Railway westward for Chicago, en route to Tom Merry's uncle's ranch in the Far West. But while Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's fate remained in doubt it was, of course, impossible for Tom Merry to leave New York

He would rather have sacrificed his uncle's promised millions, than have taken a step before D'Arcy was rescued.

Tom Merry and Wally hardly spoke; and Skimpole's face was very gloomy as he made an early morning note in his notebook.

They breakfasted with Mrs. Stuyvesant, and the good lady's face as they joined her warned them that there was no news yet.

"I am sorry I have nothing to tell you, my dears," said Mrs. Stuyvesant gently. "I have had no news yet. But I am employing one of the best detectives in New York, and he is doing his best to earn the reward I am offering him. I have every hope that poor Arthur will be found to-day."

And with that crumb of comfort the juniors were compelled to be content.

They made a very poor breakfast, and Wally even forgot to ask Louis how Pongo was getting on. Breakfast was no sooner over than a card was brought in to Mrs. Stuyvesant. She glanced at it and looked puzzled.

"Dear, dear! I do not know the name—but it may be news of poor Arthur! You may show the gentleman in, Louis."

"Oui, madame."

And Louis showed the gentleman in—and Tom Merry started up as he saw the "gentleman."

For it was Captain Punter!

CHAPTER 9.

Captain Punter Makes Terms.

CAPTAIN PUNTER bowed to Mrs. Stuyvesant over his silk hat, and cast a glance out of the corner of his eye at Tom Merry.

"Good morning, madam. I have called on important business."

"In connection with the Asphyxiating Association?" asked Mrs. Stuyvesant.

The captain coughed.

"Hem—no! In connection with the disappearance of a boy I believe to have been in your charge—of the name of D'Arcy."

Tom Merry could hardly restrain a cry.

In an instant it flashed into his mind that Punter had had a hand in the disappearance of Arthur Augustus. He stepped quickly forward.

"You—you!" he exclaimed. "You know what has become of him."

"Tom!" said Mrs. Stuyvesant, in surprise.

Tom Merry turned to her excitedly.

"You don't know this man, ma'am, but I do. He was on the steamer we came to New York in—the captain of the steamer warned us against him. He is a sharper, and he tried to make us smoke and gamble on the steamer. He has done something with Gussy out of revenge. It was Gussy who first found out his true character."

Captain Punter smiled agreeably.

"When our young friend is finished, we will talk business," he said.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "Kindly explain how you know that Master D'Arcy has disappeared, Captain Punter?"

The captain grinned.

"All New York knows it by this time, madame," he said. "Look at this."

He opened a copy of the early morning edition of the "New York Tabard," and showed a glaring headline that made the English boys stare in surprise. Mrs. Stuyvesant, who knew the little ways of the newspaper men of her native land, was not surprised. The leaded head ran as follows:

"STARTLING DISAPPEARANCE IN NEW YORK!
ENGLISH EARL'S SON VANISHES IN BROAD DAYLIGHT!
MURDER, SUICIDE, OR KIDNAPPING?
IS THIS ANOTHER MADDISON CASE?"

The rest was in smaller print, and filled a column. The inaccuracies of the news equalled the startling appearance of the headlines. D'Arcy had not disappeared in broad daylight, but after dark; but the more sensational words appealed more keenly to the imagination of a New York reporter.

Tom Merry could only stare at the paper.

The detective employed by Mrs. Stuyvesant, or else another at police headquarters, had imparted the information to a newspaper man for a consideration, and the "Tabard" was the first paper to announce the disappearance of Arthur Augustus. But during the day it was certain to glare forth in every New York paper, and would probably be telegraphed to London before noon. What news for Lord Eastwood and for D'Arcy's mother! Tom Merry had not thought of them before, secure in the feeling that a wide ocean lay between New York and home. He had forgotten the newspapers and the telegraph.

"I have gained all my knowledge of the case from this announcement," said the captain blandly. "But I think that from my knowledge of New York I can be of use to you, madam."

"I quite understand you, sir," said Mrs. Stuyvesant. "Tom, please go to your room for a little while, while I speak with this—gentleman."

"Yes, madam."

The three juniors quietly left the room, the captain's bland glance following them out. Then Mrs. Stuyvesant pointed to a chair.

"Please sit down, and speak out," she said. "We are quite alone here; there are no witnesses, and we can be frank. What do you want?"

It was American business with a vengeance! Captain Punter only smiled.

"I thought I would look into this matter, when I saw this news," he said. "I have been singularly favoured. I have learned that this lad has been kidnapped by a certain party, who intends to hold him to ransom."

"Quite so. And now——"

"I am willing to help you recover the lad, but I must be paid for my time and trouble. I would gladly serve so charming a lady for nothing, but this is a hard world, and as a business woman you will, of course, look at the case from a business point of view."

"Exactly; you have kidnapped D'Arcy, and the only question now is, how much do you want to restore him?"

"You put it rather crudely, madam; and I am afraid you wish to entrap me into making dangerous admissions," smiled the captain. "I prefer to state the case in my own way. I have learned that a certain character is holding this boy a prisoner. He intends to cable to England, to Lord Eastwood, asking a thousand pounds for his release."

"Preposterous!"

"Yes," the captain agreed readily, "the whole thing is preposterous; but such is his intention, which he will carry out, preposterous or not. Now, instead of troubling Lord Eastwood and alarming Lady Eastwood as to the safety of her son, I have thought that you would rather employ me to rescue the boy. I ask nothing if I fail."

"I quite believe that you know where to put your hand on him," said Mrs. Stuyvesant, scornfully. "How much do you want?"

"Ah, now we are coming to business! Naturally, I shall expect as much as the character I was speaking of expects from Lord Eastwood."

"I will give you five hundred dollars."

"You are joking, I presume. I shall be happy to rescue Master D'Arcy and restore him to your arms for five thousand dollars."

"Absurd!"

"That is the sum the kidnapper intends to demand from the English nobleman, and I have no doubt Lord Eastwood would refund the money to you, madam."

"I shall not pay anything like that sum."

"Then you will doubtless cable to Lord Eastwood for the money."

"Certainly not."

"Am I to understand that you refuse to deal with me?" said the captain, with a dangerous glitter in his eyes.

"On those terms, yes!"

"Then may I ask what you offer?"

"Five hundred dollars, when the boy is returned safely to this hotel."

The captain rose.

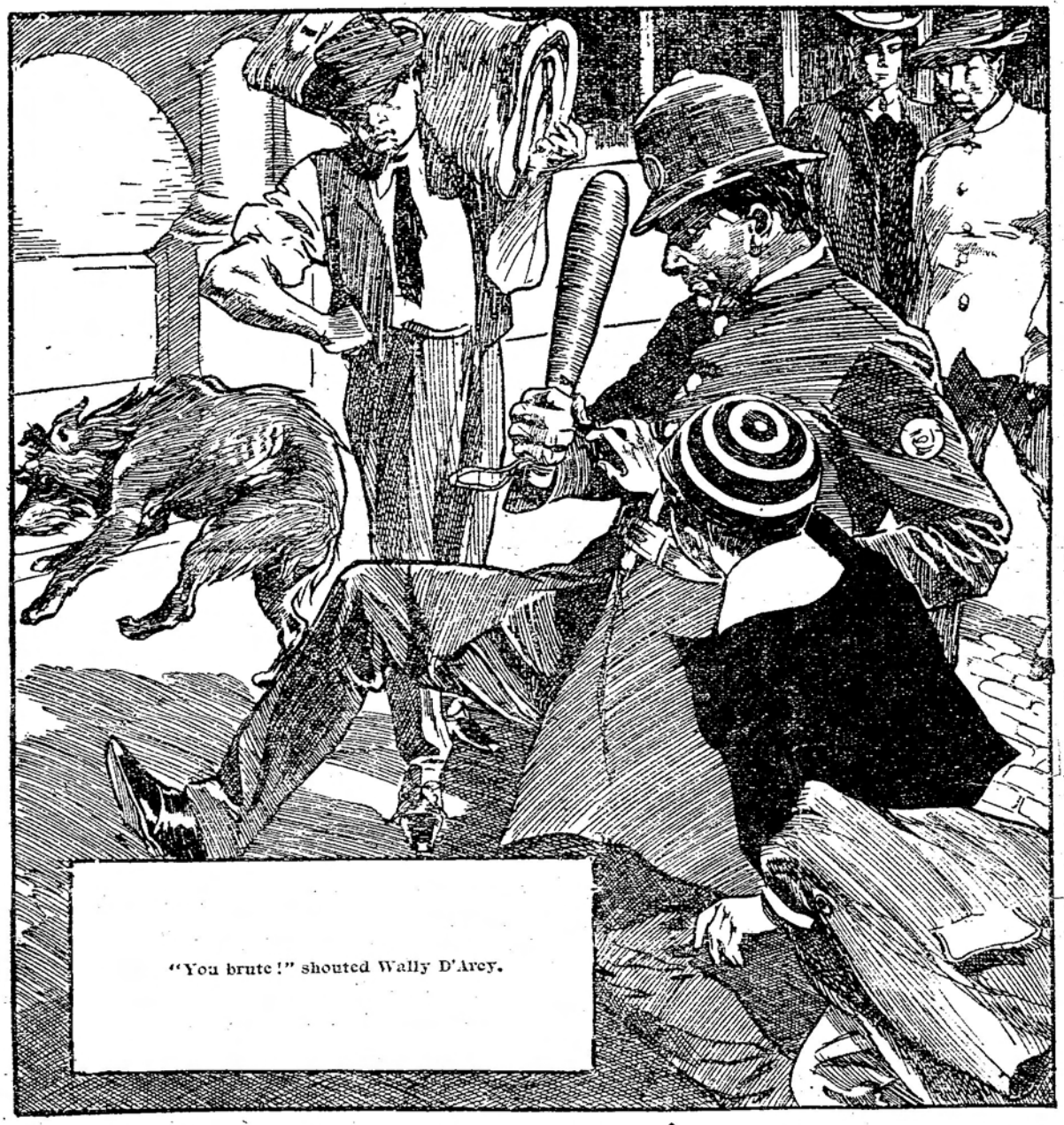
"It is useless for us to prolong this discussion, madam," he said. "Perhaps you will change your mind later—doubtless, you wish to give the New York police a chance to recover the boy. I may warn you, however, that the character I have spoken of is hand-in-glove with influential persons in the police department, and that his house is not likely to be searched. They may search the houses on either side of his place, but I shall be greatly surprised if they enter his house—even if they discover that the boy is there. You understand me, madam—you must know something of the New York police and their methods."

"We shall see."

"Certainly; take your time, by all means," said the captain gracefully. "I have not the least objection; and I am in no hurry. I will ring you up on the telephone this evening to ask whether you have changed your mind, and decided to employ me."

Mrs. Stuyvesant hesitated for a moment.

She knew that the captain's statement was probably correct; she was aware that many lawless dens in New York were run by paying a regular rent to the police who came in contact with them for protection. If the kidnappers of Arthur Augustus were in such a secure position, it was indeed hopeless to think of recovering him through the efforts of the detectives. But



"You brute!" shouted Wally D'Arcy.

t was quite possible that the adventurer was simply "bluffing." He might be "solid" with the police—but, on the other hand, he might not have paid one dollar for their protection. It was worth while to give Mr. Bright a chance.

The captain waited, hat in hand, for a few moments, but Mrs. Stuyvesant did not speak, and he turned to the door.

"Good-morning, madam," he said. "My next pleasant conversation with you will be over the telephone wires."

And he left the room.

There was a smile upon Captain Punter's face as he walked lightly along towards the elevator. It was the smile of a man who felt himself secure, and certain of gaining his point.

The smile vanished, and he rapped out a startled oath, as there was a sudden rush of feet, and he was seized from behind by two pairs of hands.

Before he could struggle, he was bumped on the back of the knees, and dragged over—and, as he sprawled down, he was dragged rapidly along, whisked into a room, and a door was slammed, and the key turned.

Dazed and bewildered, the captain struggled furiously, but a knee was on his chest and he was pinned to the floor. He looked upwards into the face bent over him, and gasped:

"Tom Merry!"

CHAPTER 10.

Catching the Captain.

TOM MERRY it was. His knee was planted on Punter's chest, and his weight held the rascal down, and his grip was on the collar of Captain Punter. Wally was grasping his wrists, and pulling his arms above his head, so that he was completely helpless.

The captain would probably have fared badly in any case in a struggle with the two sturdy and determined juniors; but, taken at a disadvantage as he was, he had no chance at all.

Skimpole was standing by with a heavy metal vase in his hand, holding it ready to smite if the adventurer got loose.

As a blow from the heavy metal would probably have brained him on the spot, Captain Punter kept a wary and uneasy eye on Herbert Skimpole.

"Now, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry, between his teeth.

"Shall I stun him, Tom Merry?" asked Skimpole, poising the heavy vase over Captain Punter's head with both hands.

"No! No! Hold on!"

"Perhaps it would be safer to stun him."

"Keep him off," panted the captain. "You dangerous idiot. Take it away!"

"I should prefer to stun you," said Skimpole. "If, however,

Tom Merry does not wish it I will let you off, but I shall certainly stun you if you attempt to escape. As a Socialist, I am opposed to violence, but under the circumstances I shall have no hesitation in striking you with sufficient violence to stun you."

"Keep him off!"

"Hold on, Skimmy, till I give the word. Now, Captain Punter, we've got you."

"You'd better let me go," said the captain threateningly. "I will shout for help."

"In that case I should certainly stun you," said Skimpole.

"You had better keep your tongue between your teeth, I think, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry grimly. "We aren't playing with you. You have kidnapped our chum."

"How are you going to prove that?"

"I am not talking of proving it. We know you have done it. I knew it the moment I set eyes on you this morning. That is why you were dogging our steps all over New York yesterday. We gave you a chance by going to that place, but you would probably have managed it somehow, anyway."

"Are you going to let me up?" said Captain Punter, who had now quite recovered his coolness. "You ought to be aware that this assault is illegal."

"Not yet. Where is D'Arcy?"

"I really do not know."

"Do you deny that you have kidnapped him?"

"I have nothing whatever to say on the subject."

"Shall I stun him, Tom Merry?"

"Hold on! You have kidnapped D'Arcy, you scoundrel, and we are going to find him. Search him while I hold him, Wally, and we may find a clue."

The captain smiled blandly.

He had come to the hotel that morning prepared for all eventualities, and he had been careful to carry nothing on his person that could be of the least use if he came to grief.

"Good!" said Wally. "I'll jolly soon go through him! Hold the rotter!"

And Wally searched the captain as thoroughly as any detective could have done.

But nothing in the nature of a clue rewarded him. There was nothing about Captain Punter that was not of the most harmless and innocent description.

"Are you finished?" asked Punter, with a yawn.

Tom Merry gritted his teeth.

He had hoped to discover something by searching the adventurer, but he saw now that even in this Punter had been too clever for him.

"You had better let me go now," remarked Punter. "I dare say you know that I could give you into custody for assault and robbery."

"Oh, don't try that with us!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "You dare not do anything of the kind, even if you could. You don't want to have too much to do with the law, I know that; but if I was going to be arrested the next minute I should still make you tell me what you have done with D'Arcy."

"Indeed, and how are you going to make me?" asked Captain Punter agreeably.

"I am going to thrash you."

The captain started.

Tom Merry spoke so coldly and quietly that it was impossible to doubt that he meant what he said.

The junior took a cane from the corner. It was a cane that belonged to D'Arcy, one of his extensive variety. It was thick and flexible.

Tom Merry grasped it with a grasp that meant business.

The captain eyed him nervously. What Tom Merry was going to do could not be called exactly a lawful method of persuasion, and, like many rascals who live by habitually breaking the law, Captain Punter had a great respect for the law when he required it for his own protection.

He eyed the junior very nervously.

"You—you dare not!" he panted. "If you touch me——"

"Are you going to tell me where D'Arcy is?"

"I don't know."

"Liar! Will you tell me?"

The captain set his teeth hard, and began to struggle. Skimpole aimed the vase at his head, and was about to bring it down with tremendous force when Tom Merry caught his arm and stopped him.

"Better let me stun him, Merry," said Skimpole, blinking at Tom. "It will be safer to stun the scoundrel."

"Sit on his legs instead."

"Oh, very well!"

Captain Punter was rolled over on his face, and Skimpole sat on his legs and Wally on his head.

Tom Merry planted a knee on his back.

The captain struggled, but in vain.

The cane sang through the air.

"Now, then," said Tom Merry, between his teeth, "are you going to tell me where D'Arcy is, you wretch?"

"Hang you!"

Thwack!

The cane came down with all the force of Tom Merry's arm, and the captain writhed and gave a terrific yell.

"Stuff your handkerchief into his mouth, Wally."

The captain was fighting like a wild cat now. But the three juniors were too strong for him. He tried to shout, but Wally stuffed the handkerchief into his mouth with his fist behind it.

But the captain's first yell had been heard, and a hand tried the door, which Tom Merry had locked.

"Vat eez it zat eez ze matter?" asked the voice of Louis through the keyhole.

"It's all right!" called out Tom Merry. "Buzz off!"

"But I hear a cry viz my ears."

"Buzz off!"

Louis's steps were heard going along the passage. There was another door to the large room further along, and unfortunately it was not locked. It opened, and Louis's startled face looked in.

"Messieurs——"

Louis broke off, and his eyes nearly started from his head as he saw the captain wriggling in the grasp of the juniors.

"Messieurs, vat is it—a burglar?"

"Something of the sort. Get!"

"I vill cry for help. I vill shriek!"

"Don't!" yelled Tom Merry. "It's all right. Don't make a sound."

But the excitable Frenchman had already rushed into the corridor, and was shrieking.

Captain Punter made a desperate effort, and wrenched himself loose, and sprang to his feet. Tom and Wally sprang at him, but the rascal eluded them, and dashed into the corridor.

"After him!"

Captain Punter ran into Louis and bowled him over. The Frenchman rolled on to the floor and lay gasping. Punter did not attempt to escape. He had no mind to run from the hotel with a crowd of messengers and attendants yelling "Stop thief!" on his track.

He ran quickly along the corridor, and entered the room where he had interviewed Mrs. Stuyvesant.

The good lady looked up in surprise, her surprise increasing as she noted the captain's dishevelled appearance.

"What do you want?" she said coldly.

"Nothing, madam," said the captain, in his old airy manner.

The rascal's coolness was wonderful.

"I should like you to request your charming boys to allow me to pass without hindrance, that is all. Tom Merry seems to have the idea that I am in some way responsible for the disappearance of his friend, and he has assaulted me. I presume you are not a party to it?"

"Tom, you should not have done this. Let Captain Punter go. You must not lay a finger on him."

And Captain Punter, having adjusted his collar and dusted his trousers, walked airily away to the lift, the juniors raising no hand to stop him.

Mrs. Stuyvesant looked grieved and surprised, and Tom hastened to explain.

A twinkle came into the lady's eyes, and a slight smile hovered upon her plump face as she learned of the drastic method Tom had used to make the kidnapper speak.

"You must not do anything of the sort again, Tom," she said gently. "I understand your feelings, but I am afraid that this is not exactly the way to go to work. You must remember that you are not at St. Jim's now."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tom Merry, hanging his head.

All the same, Tom Merry felt that his method, irregular as it might be, would have turned up trumps if Louis hadn't come in and spoiled everything.

"You should really have let me stun him," said Skimpole as they went back to their room. "If I had stunned him he could not have yelled like that."

This was indubitably the case, and Tom did not argue the point.

To remain within doors, awaiting the slow movements of the police, was impossible to Tom, stretched as he was upon the rack of anxiety.

Leaving Skimpole making up his notebook, Tom and Wally left the hotel to tramp New York in search of the missing junior, though with only the slightest hope of finding a trace of him.

Mrs. Stuyvesant raised no objection, as she saw that the boys were fretting themselves into a fever with anxiety, and she had no doubt that they would be careful this time.

Careful enough they were, and through the long hours of the day they went up and down and to and fro in New York, but never finding a trace of their missing chum.

CHAPTER 11.

Rough Quarters.

"BAI Jove! I nevah felt more inclined to give somebody a feahful thwashin' in all my life!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy addressed that remark to space. He was pacing up and down the narrow garret in the unknown building in the Bowery of New York in which he was confined.

In spite of his situation D'Arcy had slept pretty soundly through the night, and he had been awakened in the morning by the man Mick, who brought him a bowl of porridge for his breakfast.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was hungry, having had nothing to eat since dinner the previous evening, but there were more important things than hunger in the estimation of Arthur Augustus.

"Pway, where am I to bathe?" he asked, jamming his monocle into his eye, and turning an inquiring glance upon Bowery Mick.

The man stared at him without replying. Perhaps he was too much surprised to reply.

"Did you hear me addwess you?" said D'Arcy, raising his voice a little. "I uttahly object to bein' kept in this wascally place, but if I am to wemain here, I pwesume that you do not wish me to wemain in a state of personal uncleanliness. I must insist upon havin' a bath."

"Wall, carry me home to die!" said Mick—that apparently being an ejaculation expressive of extreme astonishment.

"If it is imposs. for me to have hot watah, I am quite willin' to take my bath in cold watah," said D'Arcy, with the idea of meeting the situation in the most conceding spirit possible.

"Wall, burn my body and boots!" said Mick.

"Do you mean by that vulgah wemark to imply that it is imposs. for me to take my usual bath?" asked D'Arcy.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"In that case I am willin' to wash myself in a hand-basin if you will kindly bwing me one," said the swell of St. Jim's. "Pway, take particulah care to bwing me a clean towel. I could stand anythin' but a dirty towel."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Pway let me have my watah and towel as soon as poss."

"Haw, haw, haw!" said Mick again, as he left the room, and locked the door on the outside, and as he clumped down the creaky stairs D'Arcy heard his hoarse chuckling die away in the distance.

"Weally, I wegard that wottah as an utter bwute," said D'Arcy. "I suppose I shall not be able to clean my teeth, even if I get a wash. And there was somethin' in the man's mannah that stwuck me with a howwid forebodin' that I shall not be allowed to wash at all."

D'Arcy's foreboding was realised. No one entered his room again that morning, and he was driven by hunger to eat his porridge without having either washed or cleaned his teeth.

Arthur Augustus felt extremely uncomfortable, and to add to his discomfort there was the extremely bad form of being in evening clothes in the morning.

"The wottahs!" murmured D'Arcy, again and again. "The uttah wottahs!"

During the morning the imprisoned junior examined his room with the faint hope of discovering some means of escape.

It was a small garret, furnished with the barest necessaries for habitation. The bed consisted of a bundle of rags and old coats on the floor in a corner. There was a stool and a bench and a washstand. But the washstand was minus a jug and

any washing materials. D'Arcy had slept in his clothes from necessity, and this also gave him an extreme sense of discomfort.

Noon came, but D'Arcy had not discovered any way out of his prison, neither had he received any further visit from his gaoler.

There was only one door to the garret, which was locked on the outside, and only one window, which was secured by a shutter, barred, and padlocked. Arthur Augustus attempted to pick the padlock, to get the bar away, when the shutter would have come open; but the attempt was a hopeless failure. The only light that came into the room was a glimmer round the shutter, and he could not see into the street. Through a crack he caught a glimpse of a smoky chimney a short distance away, and his view of New York was confined to that.

The swell of St. Jim's paced the room with angry strides. It was very cold there without a fire, and it was only by keeping in motion that he could keep warm. He might have wrapped himself in the ragged bedclothes, but he had made a discovery in regard to that bed which removed any desire to get near it. The last occupant of the rags had not been a cleanly person.

On the bare floor D'Arcy's footsteps rang as he walked to and fro, expressing his feelings in a frequently ejaculated desire to "thwash" somebody.

The dreadful monotony made him welcome the sound of footsteps at last on the creaking stairs, though it should only be Captain Punter or Bowery Mick who was coming.

The key clicked in the lock, and Captain Punter appeared. Mick followed him with a tin platter in his hand, upon which was a chunk of bread and another of cheese. Arthur Augustus was hungry, and he welcomed the sight of the food.

The captain gave him a cheery nod.

"Here's your lunch," he remarked.

"Wascal!" said Arthur Augustus scornfully. "I have a great mind to give you a feahful thwashin' on the spot!"

Captain Punter laughed.

"You ought to be glad to get a lunch, sonny. It is my humanitarianism. Mick here would keep you without a bite till the ransom was paid."

"I guess so," said Mick.

"I wegard you as a pair of wascals!" said D'Arcy. "I have been wobbed as well as kidnapped. My tickah is gone, and it was one my govehnah gave me for a birthday pwesent. I twust I shall soon see you both awwested."

"Your ticker is safe. After your ransom is paid and you are released, it will be returned to you at a reasonable figure."

"You scoundwel!"

Mick set down the platter on the bench and turned to the door. He whispered something to the captain as he went, and Punter nodded.

"Yes, the next room will do," D'Arcy heard him say in low tones, which he did not know reached the boy's quick ear. "Mind there is no fuss."

"I reckon."

And the ruffian left the room. Captain Punter looked at D'Arcy, who was beginning on the bread and cheese.

"I suppose you have found these quarters pretty uncomfortable after what you have been used to," the captain remarked pleasantly.

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard the whole place with howwah. I feel extwemely dirty, and I weally think I could forgive you if you could give me watah and soap and let me have a decent wash."

"Ha, ha! You will not find any of those conveniences in a slum in New York," grinned the captain. "I fear that you will not wash again until your ransom is paid."

"You—you uttah wascal!"

"Are you inclined yet to write to Mrs. Stuyvesant, asking her to cable to your father?"

"Wathah not!"

"Your obstinacy will cause your parents a great deal of anxiety."

"Wats! They cannot know anything about it!"

"My dear fellow, look here."

D'Arcy glanced at the paper the captain held out, a midday edition of a well-known New York daily. The swell of St. Jim's read the staring headline in amazement.

NO NEWS YET OF THE VANISHED VISITOR.

RUMOURED DISCOVERY OF BODY IN THE HUDSON RIVER.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You see, all New York knows about it," laughed the captain. "The news was cabled to England this morning, and will be in the first editions of the evening papers. All London knows by this time that you have been kidnapped in the Bowery of New York."

"Bai Jove!"

"Lord Eastwood at this very moment is probably wondering what has become of you, and cabling here for information," pursued Captain Punter. "Don't you think it would be cheap at a thousand pounds to relieve his mind.

"You uttah wottah!"

"Will you write the letter to Mrs. Stuyvesant?"

D'Arcy's lips set resolutely.

"No!"

Captain Punter shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well; I shall see you again this evening! I am in no hurry."

He left the room and locked the door. Arthur Augustus finished his bread and cheese meditatively. The captain's information had made him aware of what he had not before suspected. His disappearance was known in England, and he could guess the state of distracted anxiety into which it would throw his mother, and doubtless his father, too.

Might it not be worth while to write the letter the captain demanded? Yet if the ransom were paid, what guarantee had he that the villain would keep faith with him? D'Arcy shook his head resolutely.

"Tom Mewwy will be lookin' for me," he muttered. "The police will be huntin' for me, too. I won't pay the wascal anythin'!"

It was weary waiting in the garret in the faint hope of rescue. Arthur Augustus paced the room while the afternoon light waned.

No one came to him, and he was too high up for any noise to reach him from the street. Faint sounds came from below in the house, and once he heard raucous voices raised in savage quarrel. That died away, but soon after dark there was a tramping on the creaking stairs. D'Arcy heard the tramping feet enter the next room to his, and then go down stairs again. Then silence!

Darkness set in black and impenetrable. Only a faint glimmer came in round the shutter from the broken window. No gleam came under the door, no sound from below. The prisoner could not see his hand before his face.

He sat down or walked about with growing restlessness and misery.

This was the second night in New York. What were his friends doing? What were they thinking of his disappearance?

He knew how keen their anxiety must be, how keen that of his parents. Perhaps it would be better to take steps to get the ransom paid! If only he could be sure that the kidnapper would keep faith. Perhaps the scoundrel had some guarantee to give him. He could hardly expect to be trusted.

The monotony, the throng of painful thoughts grew unendurable. The swell of St. Jim's longed to hear the footsteps of the kidnapper on the stairs. But he heard nothing.

Captain Punter doubtless knew exactly what was certain to pass in the mind of the kidnapped boy, and he was leaving D'Arcy to get into a mood to agree to anything for his liberty.

D'Arcy could stand it no longer at last. If the captain did not come of his own accord, he must be brought somehow, that terms might be discussed. The boy hammered on the door with his fist. The thuds rang with a hollow sound through the garret.

Thump, thump, thump!

But there came no reply to the thumping. Perhaps it was not even heard below. The silence of the place was broken now by noises downstairs, and D'Arcy distinguished the sound of music and a thud-thud that could only be made by clumsily dancing feet.

The Bowery "dive" was waking up to the life of the night. No reply came, no sound of footsteps on the stairs.

Arthur Augustus desisted at last, gnawing his lip. In the silence that fell in the garret he heard a sudden and unexpected sound.

Rap, rap!

Arthur Augustus started. The rapping, which seemed as if it were made with bare knuckles, sounded on the wall of the room, the wall separating him from the next room which he had heard the heavy footsteps enter a short time before.

Rap, rap!

"Bai Jove! Who can that be?"

D'Arcy's thoughts worked rapidly. It could hardly be anybody belonging to the house who was rapping on the wall. Bowery Mick or any of his gang would have come to the door. Was it possible that the den held another prisoner like himself?

D'Arcy crossed to the wall and tapped in reply. Promptly enough came the answer from the other side!

Rap, rap, rap!

CHAPTER 12.

A False Alarm.

TOM MERRY and Wally saw much of New York that day, but they were in no humour for seeing the sights of the strange city. Up and down and round about, but never a sign of Arthur Augustus. If Tom had fallen in with Captain Punter again he would have been greatly inclined to try over again the drastic measures of the morning; but the adventurer was not to be seen.

As they walked the streets or rode in the cars of the huge city, the juniors realised the hopelessness of their task; but

they could not return to the hotel and rest. So long as D'Arcy remained undiscovered, they must search for him, if only to fill up the hours of suspense and distract their thoughts.

In the evening they returned at last to the hotel, fearing that their kind friend would be anxious about them. They took the Elevated Railway uptown. It was their first experience of the elevated lines of New York, and in spite of their troubled minds they were interested.

In New York, as in London, there is a morning rush to the business centres of the city, and an evening rush outward. Tom and Wally had entered the elevated station on Sixth Avenue in the midst of the homeward rush, and it amazed them.

Passengers in the trains were as thick as bees, and not only was every seat taken, but the standing-room was closely packed, and the platforms between the cars, where the conductors stood, were so crammed that accidents seemed inevitable. Yet the expected accidents did not happen. The New Yorkers seemed to be accustomed to this extreme of strap-hanging methods of travelling, and the overcrowding, which was greater than anything ever seen in London, was taken with remarkable good humour.

It was curious to the juniors to be wedged into a thick, perspiring throng of humanity, hardly able to move a limb; while the trains thundered along the overhead lines, far above the streets of the great metropolis. The overhead railway was a novelty to the boys, and the experience was somewhat exciting. How to get out at the station was a puzzle; it seemed impossible to fight their way through the passengers crowded as thick as sardines in a tin. Yet, here again the accustomedness, so to speak, of the New Yorkers stood them in good stead. People who wanted to get off were somehow squeezed through by general effort, and popped out of the trains.

Tom Merry and Wally, a good deal rumpled and flustered, escaped from the Elevated Railway, with an inward determination not to use it again at that time of the day. They returned to the hotel, and dined there with Mrs. Stuyvesant, who had no news for them. Mr. Bright, the detective, had sent in a report that he was doing his best, and hoped to have news shortly; but the boys, as well as Mrs. Stuyvesant, knew what that meant.

Nothing had been heard of D'Arcy save through the medium of Captain Punter, and Mrs. Stuyvesant was already turning over in her mind the advisability of yielding to the rascal's demand.

After dinner Tom wished to go out again. Mrs. Stuyvesant was a little uneasy; but the boy pleaded hard, and she let him go. After what had happened to D'Arcy, Tom felt that he could not go without full permission; but he felt, too, that if he remained idle indoors the suspense would worry him into distraction. Mrs. Stuyvesant saw that it would be better to let him go, and he went.

Wally, of course, went with him. He had recovered Pongo from the care of Louis, and he led the dog with him on a chain. Tom Merry looked askance at the mongrel, but Wally, as he caught his glance, assumed an obstinate expression.

"How do you know Pongo won't help us to find Gus?" he said. "He's a jolly cute dog, and he can scent out anything."

Tom Merry smiled faintly. Wally's words recalled Herries and his bulldog at St. Jim's, and Towser's boasted powers of tracking. But Pongo would do no harm if he did no good, so he raised no objection.

"Come on, then," he said.

They walked down Broadway with no definite object in view. A newsboy rushed past them crying his papers.

"Speshul! Disappearance of English lord! Mutilated remains 'scovered in East River! Speshul!"

Tom Merry felt an icy hand grip his heart. His eyes met Wally's, and the two boys stopped in utter horror and dismay. Was it possible? Could it be possible!

Tom called after the newsboy, but he was gone. But another was coming along, and Tom caught a paper from him, throwing him a quarter in exchange. The boy stared at the coin, and grinned as he walked away. Tom drew aside from the crowd, and glanced anxiously into the paper. The glaring headlines, which he had already learned to be a feature of the Yellow Press of New York, caught his eyes with stunning force:

"LORD D'ARCY STILL MISSING!"

"MUTILATED BODY FOUND IN EAST RIVER!"

"IS IT THE BODY OF D'ARCY?"

"Oh, heaven!" muttered Tom Merry.

"It—it can't be!" stammered Wally, white to the lips. "Old Gus—it can't be! It's a lie! It can't be true!"

Tom Merry felt hot drops burning his eyelids. If it should be true—if Arthur Augustus had gone to his death that night in New York, if the boys were no more to see in life the chum they had so often chipped, but who was very dear to them all the same! Was it possible?

Tom looked hastily down the column under the startling headlines.

It seemed to be true that a body had been found in the East River, but so far as Tom could gather from the paper, there was not a particle of any kind of evidence to connect it with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He drew a deep, almost sobbing breath of relief as he realised that the connection between the mutilated body and the vanished junior existed only in the fertile imagination of a sensational American journalist.

"It's a lie, isn't it?" said Wally, between his teeth.

"It's New York journalism," said Tom Merry bitterly. "I suppose bodies are found in East River in New York every day, just as they are found every day in the Thames in London. There's no reason whatever given to suppose that it was Gussy, this is only shoved in for the sake of the headline."

Wally clenched his fists.

"My only Aunt Jane! I'd like to get near the chap who put that in, though," he muttered.

Tom Merry crushed the paper in his hand, and hurled it away.

"It's all lies," he said. "There's no news of Gussy. But no news is good news, old chap." And the two juniors went on their way.

It was an hour later that they found themselves in Water Street again, near the spot where Arthur Augustus had disappeared the previous night. They had not set out with the especial intention of going there, but a kind of fascination seemed to draw their footsteps thither. If D'Arcy was to be found, it was in that quarter of the city. It was almost certain that he was kept near the spot where he had been kidnapped. Tom Merry looked into the dark and noisome alley into which the juniors had entered with such ill-results the previous evening. It was not likely to be guarded by the kidnappers now. Was it worth while to make another attempt? A hand fell heavily upon Tom Merry's shoulder.

He started, and swung round with clenching fists, half expecting to have to tackle some Bowery tough. But it was a man in a check suit of clothes and a soft Homburg hat who was beside him, and Tom recognised Mr. Bright the detective.

"Oh, it is you, sir!" he said, in relief.

"Yes. What are you boys doing here?"

"We were looking round."

The New York detective smiled a little.

"Water Street is not a safe place for you," he said. "Do you know that that alley leads into a quarter where even the police only go three at a time? You had better get back to your hotel, I guess."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"We can't stay indoors, sir—it's too horrible. I suppose we can't do much good looking for D'Arcy, but it's something to do."

"I should advise you to keep to the lighted streets, I guess," said Mr. Bright. And, with a shake of the hand, he left them.

Tom Merry and Wally stood irresolute. After all, the detective was right; it was madness fror a well-dressed boy to venture into the district into which D'Arcy had certainly been taken. Yet——. Tom Merry started with a sudden thought as his eyes fell upon a low slop-seller's shop a dozen doors from the saloon whence the rowdy crowd had issued the previous evening. It was a place where cheap, ready-made clothing was sold to sailors and emigrants, and the cut of the coats hung up on view would have made Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shudder. But these coats, hideous as they were, had suggested an idea to the hero of St. Jim's.

"Come along, Wally."

Wally followed, though he did not yet understand. A boy was minding the shop outside, and he looked curiously at the two English lads. He was a typical New York gamin, with a face older than his years, an insouciant manner, and eyes like gimlets. He closed one eye as the English boys came up, and grinned at them impudently. Evidently he did not expect visitors so decently dressed to prove customers.

"I want some coats," said Tom Merry.

The boy winked.

"Come off," he remarked, that apparently being the New York equivalent for "get out." "Don't you bluff your uncle!"

Tom Merry could not help smiling.

"But I really want a couple of overcoats," he said. "Come in, Wally."

"Oh, if it's straight goods," said the boy, "come in. I guess dat we can suit you hyer, genelmen. Dis is the cheapest shop for de money on de east side. Walk in. I guess Moses is to hum."

Mr. Moses proved to be at home. He was as surprised as his youthful assistant had been, but he willingly sold the boys two large overcoats of a rough, coarse material, large enough to be worn over the natty coats they were then wearing. He also supplied them with two caps of a true Bowery cut. They donned them, putting their own caps into the pockets of the coats.

Mr. Moses surveyed them with great admiration.

"It ish lufly!" he said. "Der caps suit your complexion, ain't it, and der coats fit you like der paper on der vall."

"Thank you," said Tom Merry. And he paid the exorbitant price charged for the clothes, and the juniors left the shop.

The boy outside winked at them as they came out.

"I guess dat you satisfied," he said. "Cheapest shop in dis line on de east side."

"Quite satisfied," said Tom, laughing. "Thank you."

"You mind where you go," said the boy. "De Bowery ain't a safe place for young dudes, I guess, even with a spoof overcoat on."

Tom Merry walked on without replying. The boy had guessed his intention of penetrating into the purlieus of New York slumdom, and of covering up his decent attire for the purpose. Wally understood without explanation.

"It's a good idea," he said.

Tom Merry nodded with some satisfaction.

"Yes, I rather think it is," he said. "These coats cover us nearly down to the ankles, and it's cold enough to have the collars turned up. Nobody can see that we are decently dressed. I fancy we can walk about anywhere in safety now."

"Right-oh! Come on, Pongo!"

And the two juniors, assuming as careless an air as possible under the circumstances, were soon walking through low, filthy streets, ill-paved, ill-lighted, where from the rickety tenements garbage was thrown into the foul gutters, and the faces that looked out were dirty and rough and suspicious, and where frequently rang the hoarse tones of quarrelling men, and the screams of shrewish women. The two boys walked on with hearts that grew heavier with every step.

CHAPTER 13.

An Amazing Meeting.

RAP! Rap!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rapped again, and again the rapping came back from the other side of the wall. The heart of the junior beat hard. He had little doubt now that the sound was a signal from some other prisoner in the den of the kidnappers, and hope sprang up in his breast. Escape dawned into his mind as a possibility again; what one could not effect, might be possible to two.

Rap! Rap!

Arthur Augustus put his lips close to the wall and called out:

"Are you there?"

There was no reply. The stranger did not hear. D'Arcy strained his ears, and he caught a faint "Hallo!" through the wall.

"Hallo!" he called back.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

Rap! Rap!

"Can you hear me?" called out D'Arcy, more loudly this time.

"Yes," came back a voice, faint and muffled by the intervening wall, yet with a tone in it strangely familiar to the ears of the swell of St. Jim's, "I can hear you. Are you a prisoner here, too?"

"Yaas, I have been a pwisonah since last evenin'."

"My hat!"

The voice went on, but D'Arcy lost the rest of the words. There was a renewed rapping on the wall, and D'Arcy heard the sound of falling plaster. He guessed what the other prisoner was doing, and he set to work to help him. Taking up the stool, he banged hard on the wall.

The blows made a great deal of noise, but D'Arcy's previous efforts to attract attention from below had been in vain, and he had no fear of being interrupted. If the kidnappers had not taken notice of his terrific thumping on the wall, they were not likely to heed the present noise.

Crash! Crash!

Arthur Augustus, in spite of his dandified ways, had muscles and limbs well developed by exercise on the football field and in the gymnasium at St. Jim's, and his blows were doughty ones.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Plaster flew from under the crashing stool, and the bare laths were revealed.

Arthur Augustus paused for breath.

"Bai Jove, this is warm work!" he murmured. "Hallo, deah boy—are you there?"

"Yes, rather!" came back the voice, less muffled than before but still somewhat indistinct. "I'm here right enough. Are you knocking the plaster down?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good! I'm getting on on this side. We'll have a hole made jolly soon. Are you game for a try to get out of this den?"

"I should wathah say so. I have been a pwisonah all day, and have not even been allowed to wash."

"Rotten! I've been here a few hours, I think—blessed if I quite know, as I was knocked on the head."

"Bai Jove, are you hurt?"

"Not very much—there's no bruise. I think the scoundrels must have used a sandbag. I was stunned."

"Are you an Amewican?"

"Not much. I landed in New York this afternoon from the liner Egyptia from Southampton. You belong to England too, don't you?"

"Yaas, wathah! I am quite a stwangah in New York, really. I have been kidnapped and held to wansom by a wascal named Puntah."

"I was brought here by some toughs," said the voice of the unseen individual on the other side of the wall. "I had just got off the steamer, when a chap came up and said he was sent by my friends to meet me. I expected to find some friends in New York, you know, but I didn't know they knew I was coming, and I was awfully pleased. The chap was an Englishman, and spoke well, and it never occurred to me that he was gammoning. But he led me through a quiet street, and then I was sandbagged. Rotten, wasn't it?"

"Yaas, wathah! But I must say you were wathah simple, deah boy. I shouldn't have been taken in quite so easily as that."

"Do you want a thick ear, Mr. Whoever-you-are?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then you had better speak a little more respectfully when we've finished making this hole, or you'll get one."

"I should uttahly wefuse to get anythin' of the sort."

There was a moment's silence, and then the muffled voice from the next room went on in a somewhat changed tone.

"I say—it's impossible, I suppose—but it seems to me as if I know your voice. I believe I have heard it before."

"Bai Jove, I was just thinkin' the same thing myself!"

"Curious. Will you tell me whom you are?"

"Yaas, wathah! My name is D'Arcy—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. I belong to the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, in Sussex."

"My only hat!"

"Who are you, pway?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard laughtah undah the circs as widiculous and wathah wude," said D'Arcy. "I myself cannot see anythin' at all to laugh at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know——"

"How did you get here, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to be addwessed as Gussy by a fellow I don't know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at, you howwid duffah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, growing exasperated. "I am gwowin' gweatly inclined to administah a feahful thwashin' to you when I see you."

"Ha, ha, ha! But how did you get here?"

"I was kidnapped by Puntah. We took the wisk by walkin' in a dangewous quartah of this wotten city, and I was woped in by Captain Puntah."

"I must say that you are rather simple," came back the voice. "I shouldn't have been taken in like that, you know."

"I wefuse to have my wemarks pawodied in this widiculous mannah."

"Ha, ha, ha! Get to work, old son, and let's make a hole through."

"You have not yet told me who you are."

"You'll see soon, Gussy, my son."

"Your voice sounds vewy familiah, and I must say that your mode of addwess is extwemely familiah."

"Ha, ha, ha! Get on with the washing!"

"Bai Jove, I'm certain I've heard that voice before!" murmured D'Arcy. "I wish I could hear it more clearly now. It seems to wemind me of the old school, somehow."

Thud! thud! thud! sounded from the other side of the wall.

Arthur Augustus took up the stool again, and resumed his work.

Crash! crash!

The laths crashed through, and a hole appeared at last. A few more crashes, and the hole was large enough for a head to pass through. Arthur Augustus put down the stool. A pair of eyes glimmered at him through the opening, but in the darkness he could not possibly make out anything of the face.

"Hallo, are you there?" said a cheerful voice.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!" A match glimmered out, and was held up beside the face that was looking through. The amazed swell of St. Jim's stared at the face in blank astonishment. "Bai Jove, Jack Blake!"

CHAPTER 14.

A Fight for Liberty.

JACK BLAKE chuckled.

The match went out, but Arthur Augustus still stared in blank amazement at the two glistening eyes in the opening in the wall.

"Jack!" he repeated amazedly. "Jack Blake!"

A hand came groping through the shattered opening in the wall.

"Give us your fist, Gussy, old son!"

The chums shook hands, and glad enough were they both to feel the grip of friendship.

Blake chuckled again.

"You didn't expect to see me, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! Wathah not."

"I had a cable all right from my uncle, and I followed you in the next steamer," said Blake. "I intended to meet you in New York, but I didn't expect the meeting to be in such a palatial dwelling as this."

"Bai Jove!"

"But I'm jolly glad to see your old chivvy again," said Blake cheerfully. "The Fourth Form at St. Jim's sends you its kind regards, and hopes that you are showing the New Yorkers how to dress with real elegance and taste."

"Weally, Blake——"

"And instead of that you're kidnapped and poked away in a corner, and not allowed even to wash," grinned Blake. "How have you survived it?"

"It is no jokin' mattah, Blake."

"Ha, ha, ha! Not for you: but I can see something comic in it, you know. But, I say, I'm jolly glad we've met! I don't quite know what I'm here for. I've been robbed, of course, but I think they have something more to make. I daresay they want to extort money from my friends, or else to get rid of me quietly, so that there won't be any inquiry after what they've stolen. But now we're together——"

"Yaas, wathah! I'll look aftah you, deah boy."

"Rats! I'm going to get you out of this scrape."

"I shall insist——"

"More rats! Look here, do the beasts ever come to see you?"

"Yaas, that wascal Puntah will be up soonah or latah to pwopose his wascally terms."

"Good! That's our chance."

"How do you mean, deah boy?"

"I've examined my room, and there's no earthly chance of getting out of it. This is the only lath wall—it's just a partition. The other walls are brick, and we couldn't make any impression on them, and we couldn't jump into the street if we could get through. I suppose your room's the same?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"When this Punter man comes we shall have a chance. We must make this hole big enough for me to get through. When he comes in I'll get behind the door; and he's bound not to see me, and you can hold his attention while I garrotte him."

"Bai Jove!"

"Don't you think it's a good wheeze?"

"Yaas, wathah! But what is wanted for a job like that is a fellow of tact and judgment, you know. I weally think you had bettah hold his attention while I gawwotte him."

"Ass! If he sees me in your room it will spoil the whole show and give the alarm at once."

"Bai Jove! You know, I nevah thought of that."

"Make the hole bigger, and don't jaw, old chap!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Oh, get a move on! The rotter may come any minute."

D'Arcy obeyed. The hole was easily enlarged, and Jack Blake, with some assistance from Arthur Augustus, forced his way through. He dropped into D'Arcy's room, and gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"That's all right."

"Yaas, wathah! I wish the wascal would come."

"Oh, he'll come some time! And when he does——" Jack Blake snapped his teeth and clenched his fists in a very expressive way.

"Bai Jove, you know, I forgot to mention that he usually has a big wuffian with him when he comes—a vewy big and wuff-lookin' wascal."

"Just like you, Gussy——"

"Weally, Blake, he is not in the least like me, and I must waise an objection to any compawison bein' instituted."

"Ass! I mean it was just you to forget a point like that. Never mind; we must tackle the pair of them. You have the stool ready to bash the ruffian, while I tackle the other chap."

"Vewy good."

And now the juniors waited anxiously for the sound of footsteps. They talked in low tones, of St. Jim's, of the voyage, and of the adventures in New York. They had much to tell one another, and the time did not hang heavily.

But the sound of footsteps on the stairs was very welcome to their ears.

Jack Blake broke off suddenly, and held up his hand in the darkness.

"Hush! I can hear them!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake crept on tiptoe to his place. The opening of the door would completely conceal him from the sight of anyone who entered, and unless the newcomer noticed the gash in the wall, his suspicions were not likely to be aroused until Blake had had time to spring upon him. And he was hardly likely to notice it until he was fairly in the room.

The stairs creaked, and then the bare boards of the landing, and then a light glimmered under the door. The key turned in the lock, and the door opened.

Bowery Mick appeared with a lantern in his hand. He carried a plate of bread-and-cheese in the other, and a cup of cold water was on the plate. That was to be Arthur Augustus's frugal supper. Behind the squat figure of the Bowery tough loomed Captain Punter, well-dressed and agreeable as usual.

"Dat's your supper," grunted Mick, exhaling a strong scent of rum with the words. "And mighty lucky you are to get dat, you mug."

Arthur Augustus was trembling with excitement, but not with fear. Captain Punter stepped into the room, and the next moment Blake sprang upon him behind like a tiger.

"Oh!"

The captain was taken utterly by surprise.

Blake's strong arm was round his neck behind, Blake's knee was on his back, and the adventurer went over with a crash that shook the floor-boards.

The crash on the planks dazed him, and ere he could struggle Blake's knee was grinding on his chest, and the junior's grip was on his throat, choking back his attempt to cry out.

"Go it, Gussy!"

Bowery Mick had swung round at the fall of the captain, in blank amazement, and the plate and cup had fallen to the floor and shattered into a hundred pieces.

The ruffian had inadvertently turned his back to the swell of St. Jim's, and D'Arcy did not lose his opportunity.

He grasped the heavy, wooden stool with both hands and swung it into the air.

Bowery Mick whirled back the next moment, on his guard at once, but Arthur Augustus was springing at him.

Mick sprang away, feeling for a weapon—the natural weapon of the ruffian, the knife—but D'Arcy was too quick for him.

The heavy stool descended, and crashed on the side of the tough's head, and Mick gave a low groan and pitched to the floor.

He stirred for a moment, and then lay quite still, with a thin streak of blood running from under his hair over the stubbly cheek.

Arthur Augustus gasped for breath.

Captain Punter was making desperate efforts to rise, and Blake had all his work cut out to hold him down.

"Buck up, Blake," panted D'Arcy, "I'll bwain him."

He rushed forward excitedly, with the heavy stool brandished in the air. The swell of St. Jim's was so excited that it was probable that he would really have brained the rascal, but Blake pushed him back.

"Don't, you ass! Do you want to kill him?"

"Bai Jove! no."

"Is that other scoundrel safe?"

"Yes, wathah! He's stunned."

"Then fasten this rotter up somehow, while I hold him."

Captain Punter struggled furiously. But a knee was on his chest and two strong hands gripped his throat mercilessly.

"Keep quiet, you cur!"

Captain Punter had no choice about keeping quiet. D'Arcy, who was fluttering with excitement, carried out Blake's directions hardly knowing what he was doing. He took off Bowery Mick's belt and bound the captain's arms with it, and then he tied the captain's ankles together with his necktie. Jack Blake jammed a lump of plaster into the rascal's mouth to keep him quiet. Then he rose gasping to his feet.

Almost miraculously as it seemed, the two chums had gained the victory, by luck and pluck. The first round, at all events, was theirs. They still had to escape, but the first blow had been successfully struck.

CHAPTER 15.
Friends in Need.

JACK BLAKE breathed hard for a minute. The struggle had been an exhausting one. Bowery Mick stirred and moaned faintly: somewhat to the relief of D'Arcy, who had begun to fear that he had struck too hard.

"All right, so far," muttered Blake. "Nobody seems to have noticed the row—they're making row enough downstairs."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'd better cut off without losing a second. Come on."

"Wait a moment, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus stooped over Bowery Mick, and began to go through his pockets. Jack watched him impatiently.

"What the deuce are you doing?"

"This wascal, I believe, has my gold tickah. It was a pwesent fwom my governah, and I should be sowwy to leave this place without it."

"Oh, buck up, then."

"Bai Jove, this looks like it."

D'Arcy jerked a little buckskin bag from the ruffian's inside pocket, and poured the contents out on the floor. A quantity of coins, several watches, and some rings glistened in the lantern-light. Among the watches was D'Arcy's twenty-five guinea "ticker," the famous present from his "governah." The swell of St. Jim's put it back into his waistcoat pocket.

"Now I am weady, Blake."

"Come on, then, duffer."

"I object to bein' called a duffah! I should be sowwy to have to pause at this cwitical moment to give you a feahful thwashin', Blake, but weally——"

"Will you come?"

Blake blew out the lantern and left the room. D'Arcy promptly followed him. He felt for Blake's arm in the dark, and kept close to him. From the room they had left came a faint moan from Bowery Mick, and a curious gurgling sound from Captain Punter, who was trying to chew away the plaster gag.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "It is wisky goin' down-stairs unarmed. I wish I had my twusty wevolvah."

"Don't jaw, and come on."

Blake gripped D'Arcy's arm, and they went down the creaking stairs with cautious footsteps. From below came the sounds of wheezy fiddles and dancing feet and raucous laughter, and the clinking of glasses. At the bottom of the stairs was a narrow passage leading into the street, and a door was open upon it, letting out the glare and noise of the dancing-room. To reach the street the juniors had to pass the door, and in the lighted doorway a couple of men were lounging, smoking pipes—a couple of the "toughest" characters D'Arcy had yet seen.

The juniors paused in the shadows, and waited a minute or so. They hoped that the men would move, but they did not. They were talking in a slang which made their remarks utterly unintelligible to the juniors.

"It's no good," muttered Blake. "We must make a run for it. I can hear somebody moving upstairs; if that beast comes to before we're clear of the house, we're done in."

"Yaas, wathah."

"Come on."

They ran down the passage.

The two men in the doorway of the lighted room turned their heads to look at them, but they had no time to do more. The juniors reached the street door, and found it ajar. To tear it open and rush into the street was the work of a moment.

There was a shout behind them.

"Stop, dere!"

They ran on breathlessly. They found themselves in a street lighted only by the glare from the saloon, which they had quitted by a side door. Without a pause they ran on, the shouts from the house showing that the alarm was given.

"Wun!" panted D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!"

Blake gave a groan.

"Stop! Look there!"

It was a blank wall of a house, stopping up the street—they had reached the blind end of a cul-de-sac. For a moment they stood gasping; then they raced back the way they had come; it was the only thing to be done, but it took them into the full glare from Bowery Mick's saloon again.

There was a yell!

"Quick, Gussy—for heaven's sake!"

"Ya-a-as," gasped D'Arcy, "wathah."

They dashed on. Captain Punter sprang from the circle of light and clutched at them; he had evidently somehow contrived to get free, or Mick had recovered and released him. Blake tripped up the captain, and he reeled, and the juniors dashed on. On—into shadow and darkness—stumbling over rough stones—they knew not where—guided by chance.

There was a roar behind them. Captain Punter was running like a deer, and half a dozen toughs were in pursuit. The sight of two boys running hard, one of them in tattered evening dress, was enough to attract attention. Twice or thrice the fugitives desperately eluded clutching hands or feet outstretched to trip them by. A broadly-lighted street loomed up ahead, and they put on a spurt. Surely there they would be safe!

Two rough-coated and capped figures started up before them from the shadows. Captain Punter's voice rang out behind.

"Stop them!"

The juniors halted. The next second Punter and a burly tough had overtaken them, and they were borne to the ground. Too breathless to struggle, the hapless fugitives were crushed to the ground under the weight of their assailants.

"Help!" gasped D'Arcy faintly.

The two rough-coated figures ran forward and joined in the tussle. But they did not attack Blake and D'Arcy, they attacked Captain Punter and the tough. The two scoundrels were dragged off, and hurled aside with smashing blows, and Blake and D'Arcy found themselves dragged to their feet, and rushed on at breathless speed by their unknown rescuers.

Too amazed to even think, they rushed on, following the guidance of their unknown friends, and the yells of pursuers died away behind. The sight of a policeman's uniform at the corner of a street assured them of safety, and they slackened down. Blake reeled breathless against a wall, and D'Arcy hung on the arm that was supporting him.

"Bai Jove!" he panted.

"But who?" gasped Blake. "My only hat! Tom Merry!"

"Bai Jove! Wally!"

Tom Merry and Wally laughed breathlessly as they stripped off the great coats and caps which had so effectually disguised them. The meeting had been a fortunate one, and the juniors were jubilant.

"Tom Mewwy! This is weally most surpwisin'!"

"Blake! How on earth did you get to New York?" demanded Tom Merry. "I recognised Gussy running, but I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you."

Blake chuckled.

"Let's get out of this; I'll tell you over a good supper."

The way was clear enough now. The re-united chums lost no time in getting to the hotel, where Mrs. Stuyvesant received them in utter amazement. But her satisfaction equalled her amazement. Detective Bright had lately called in to report progress, and to accept fifty dollars for current expenses. The return of the juniors followed the departure of the detective.

"Dear, dear," said Mrs. Stuyvesant, as she kissed Arthur Augustus on both cheeks, "It is amazing, my dear children. And how fortunate that Master Blake is with us, too. To bed now, my dears, and we shall leave New York by an early train in the morning, before anything further happens. I will cable Lord Eastwood at once."

The juniors were glad enough to go to bed, after a good supper, and they slept like tops till the morning. Bright and early they awoke and packed their belongings to accompany Mrs. Stuyvesant to the Erie Railroad depot, where they were to take the westward-bound train. Of Captain Punter, they saw no more in New York, and they never expected to see the rascal again.

Under the care of Mrs. Stuyvesant and the faithful Louis, the five juniors and Pongo stepped aboard the train on the Jersey City side of the Hudson River, and as the train rushed westward the juniors, easily forgetting their perilous adventures in New York, looked forward with eager eyes to greet the new scenes that were unfolding before them.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY! NEXT THURSDAY!

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

The Greyfriars School Cadet Corps, commanded by Captain Sam Villiers, scout, are standing about in small groups, talking anxiously, when the clattering of hoofs is heard, and a young farmer from one of the homesteads on the cliffs comes galloping in on a sweating horse, and reins up hastily.

"The furriners are on us!"

he cries. "There's a whole fleet o' tugs an' barges an' ships o' war headin' in for Frinton Gap, wi' thousands o' men aboard! They're Germans, an' they're goin' to land!"

Captain Sam Villiers was at his side in a moment.

"How far off are they?"

"Four mile out when I left, an' comin' in fast. I seed the men aboard 'em wi' my owd telescope, an' the sun glintin' on their helmets; an' I've tried to send messages at the telegraph-offices, but none can't get through. They tells me all the wires is cut. Let me go! I must push on!"

. . . . . .

Nearly all the boys are killed or captured when the first German column attack and capture the school.

However, Sam Villiers and his brother, Steve, manage to escape and gain the Colchester garrison, who have turned out and entrenched themselves for the defence while the main forces come up.

The boy scouts tell their story to the British general, and, after a good sleep, go out and reconnoitre.

Sam Villiers is able to capture the German plans, and thus saves the British forces from a terrible defeat.

General Sir Sholto Nugent retires with his men, and manages for a time to keep the Germans in check.

Hearing that their home, mother and sisters, are in danger, the two boy scouts hasten with all speed to Cotehall Towers. Helped by a fisherman named Ned, they manage to defeat a troop of Uhlans who attack Moat House, the lodge to Cotehall Towers.

Later on the women escape; but Ned is captured, and to save him from being shot Sam and Steve persuade their father, who is colonel of a Yeomanry regiment, to come to the rescue.

(Now go on with the Story.)

Yeomanry to the Rescue!

The Yeomanry troop came thundering along on their heavy, powerful beasts; Sam and Steve riding beside their father, for their light horses were still fit for another bout.

"Thank the powers for this! I was afraid you might be ordered away, father," said Sam, as they rode.

"I was bidden to wait till noon, but the hour's struck," returned Villiers, hitching up his sword-sling; "and the chief knows nothing of this seizure of Moat House, to the south of us. We'll save Ned, if it can be done."

Sam told his father the whereabouts of the outpost that had shot at them as they came, and instead of passing wide the troop was led straight at it this time. The result was that, though the Germans emptied three saddles, the Yeomen were upon them before they could retreat, cut them down, and rode on through them, leaving not one to tell the tale. Eight Hanover riflemen were left dead on the sward, and the troop dashed on till the ruins of the Moat House were in sight. They came suddenly upon them over the crest of the slope from the back, and at the moment nothing could be seen of any Germans.

"They've shot Ned and gone," said Stephen, with a sob in his throat.

"Unless there's a squad of them left the other side of the house," said Sam grimly. "If so, we'll avenge him!"

The tall, ragged walls of the wrecked house were between them and the park, and the troop made little noise as it rode swiftly over the soft, mossy turf leading to the moat. They were over the wide plank bridge like a flash, and swept like a whirlwind round the corner of the wrecked wall.

A wild cry broke from Sam's lips as he heard a harsh order in German, and saw the scene upon which the Yeomen suddenly swooped like hawks as they cleared the wall.

The Germans had posted no sentry to the northward of the house, believing there was not a British force within miles of them; and Villiers' Yeomen came down on them like a thunderbolt.

"Ned! Ned!" shouted Stephen. And the next moment he came down with a crash, as he dashed between the

prisoner and the firing-party, his horse doubling up beneath him like a shot rabbit.

In the whirl and crash of the fight Sam found himself snapping off his revolver till the back-spit blackened his hand, and three tall Uhlans went down before him. So short was the distance that the Yeomanry had scarcely come into view round the wall than they were upon the Germans like a thunderbolt.

One of the firing-party's carbines squibbed off just as Stephen dashed in between them and Ned; but as the boy came down headlong the others turned, with a cry, to meet the attackers, and the Uhlans hurriedly did the same.

There was hardly time to raise a weapon when the Yeomanry were into them. The great country horses dashed upon them like steam-engines, and in a moment all was dust and clashing and wild outcry.

The Germans had the advantage in numbers, but they were taken by surprise, and it was less a struggle than a rout. The Yeomen went clean through their ranks like fire through stubble, leaving a swathe of spilt horses and men behind them, and then, quickly wheeling, dashed at the enemy again.

There was no resisting the attack. In riding down scattered infantry the Uhlans are a terrible corps, and that is what they are meant for, but in such a sharp attack their long lances were of little use, and the whistling swords of the Yeomen were dyed red before the fight was ten seconds old. Captain Villiers met the Uhlan lieutenant as he spurred forward, and, rising in his stirrups, the big English squire dealt a blow that bit through collar-bone and tunic to the centre of the German's chest, and Ned's captor dropped from his horse, his own horse barely touching Villiers' shoulder.

Two fierce, sweeping attacks, a few minutes' fighting between scattered combatants, and then the Uhlans were in full flight across the park, leaving two-thirds of their number on the trampled ground before the wrecked house.

Sam threw himself from his horse, and ran to his fallen brother, who was lying pinned down by his own mount, that lay dead upon him. Ned, despite his bound hands, was doing his utmost to get the boy free.

"Are you wounded, Steve?" cried Sam anxiously.

"No; only the horse—he was shot under me, poor beast! Can you get him off my leg? I can't get up."

"Here, Ned, turn round!" said Sam; and in a moment he cut the young marshman's arms loose. "Now, get a heave on the horse's quarters. That's it! You can't hurt the poor brute—he'll never move again."

"Gosh, I believe he got the shot that was meant for me!" exclaimed Ned, gripping both the boys by the hand as Stephen rose to his feet. "You saved me when I'd given myself up for a dead man. How in the world did you manage it!"

"Hard ridin' did it, that's all," said Sam. "We saw your capture through the glasses, an' we went for the governor-troop. Only just in time; but a miss is as good as a mile."

"How am I to thank you?" cried Ned. "I owe you both my life, an' never——"

"Rot! We're only quits! You saved ours at Northey!" put in Stephen. "How was it they caught you?"

"Through not obeyin' Master Aubrey's orders," said Ned penitently. "I went out to see how it had come off."

"That was a juggins' trick, if you like, when all the Uhlans were rushin' round just after the explosion," said Sam. "If you'd stayed inside you'd have been all right. However, it's all ended well, an' we've mopped up this lot properly. Here's the dad! Father, this is Ned of Northey, who saved our lives, an' they were just goin' to shoot him!"

"I would ride a long way to serve anybody who did that for my boys," said Captain Villiers, shaking the embarrassed Ned warmly by the hand. "Well," he said, with a sigh, "they've done for the old Moat House; it's a pretty good wreck."

"We did that, dad," said Sam—"or, rather, Ned did. There was nothing else to be done, for they'd captured it, an' were making a base of it."

"In that case, all's for the best," said his father, brightening up, "as long as these Prussian ruffians didn't do it. But we've got to get out of this, and to the northward again," he added, as a shot or two began to whistle overhead, and Pilnitz's forces were seen moving towards them from the distant plain.

"A quick dash in, cut 'em up, an' dash out again—that's Yeoman's work. Form up, there! Mount!" he cried to his men. "Parker, bring those two spare horses here!"

Several horses of the fallen Uhlans had been caught, Stephen and Ned were quickly mounted, and, as the bullets began to fly thick, the troop cantered round the side of the house, cleared the moat again, and were away out of range down the next valley in no time.

"We've only lost two men dead, poor chaps!" said the colonel; "an' there are five slightly wounded, who are with us. We had the beggars before they could do us much damage. Whose was that force that was coming up just now? Do you know?"

"Pilnitz's engineers an' a battalion of Hanover infantry," said Sam. And as they rode along at an easy canter, he told his father all they had done since the beginning, including the last piece of scouting work round Pilnitz's force.

"Good heavens, you've done all this since you left Greyfriars!" exclaimed his father. "Why, they'll have to give you both the D.S.O., Sam!"

"General Nugent did say something about it," said Sam, laughing, "but I reckon it'll be a long time before things are quiet enough to think about rewards. Blow the D.S.O., I say, as long as we get plenty of sport! Of course, we've had the dickens' own luck, you know, dad: an' besides, we know this country as few people do, an' that gives us all the advantage. Scoutin's a useful thing."

"You're a useful couple to have on hand. The family's turned out good soldiers and leaders since England first began, but you seem as well as any of them."

"It's in the blood, I expect," chuckled Stephen; "no credit to us. Sam's a very nippy chap—he ain't called Sam Slick for nothing. But I thought you'd be pleased at our saving Cotehall, dad."

"Pleased! The farmer told me, and I couldn't believe it. Well, if everybody does as well as you, my lads, the Germans won't have much chance."

"How are things going? We only know the news round our district," said Sam eagerly.

Captain Villiers looked grave.

"They've got a big foothold, and a tremendous and perfectly-trained army well among us. I believe in our driving them back, but the wisest daren't say yet which way it will go. Only one thing's sure—it'll be one of the biggest struggles in history, and rivers of blood will be shed and countless lives lost before the flag of the winner goes up for good.

"But here's our ground for the bivouac, and the first thing to be done is to get your news about Pilnitz through to General Nugent. That's one of the best bits of work that you've done, and most important, for we've no scouts down that way. He must know without delay."

"I'll ride on with it," said Sam thickly, though it was all he could do to hold his head up.

"You're not fit for it," said Villiers, with a keen glance at him. "You are dead-beat, Sam, and so is your horse. There's no need to risk the news like that; set it down briefly on paper, and I'll send my best man and fastest horse on with it to Layer de la Haye. There are no Germans between there and here—it's only a matter of riding."

"All right, then, in that case I'll do it," said Sam. "It's a fact, we're rather too done to make sure of gettin' there, for we were ridin' all last night, and most of to-day."

It spoke well for the fitness of the two cadets that they had kept up so long, and now the stress of the excitement was over they came near collapsing. A mug of strong, black coffee, given by willing hands at a cottage near by, revived Sam long enough to get his report down in a pocket despatch-book, and away went the lightest rider with it at once, bound for General Nugent's camp.

Almost before the despatch-rider was in the saddle, Sam was sleeping like the dead in the barn of the cottage—before he preferred to sleep outside the house—and as for Stephen, he had been snoring like a tired hound for twenty minutes.

It was but four in the afternoon when the boys began their rest, and it was seven the next morning when they awoke with a raging hunger, and found the Yeomen still at hand, and Captain Villiers awaiting eagerly the orders he was bidden to attend to. The horses had been fed and watered, and the men were at breakfast, which was brought out to them only too gladly by the tenants of the farms and cottages round about.

There was no need to fall back on emergency rations, and the boys, who were already made heroes of by the troops, laid in the best meal they had had since first the Germans landed at Frinton.

"This is all very well," said Captain Villiers fretfully; "but I wish to the dickens they would let us loose, or gather us in! I hate this waiting! But for your affair we should have sat here since yesterday morning. I sent a report to Barrington, and he tells me to sit tight."

"Who?" said Stephen, with his mouth full.

"Brigade-Major Barrington, who is holding Chelmsford and Danbury. I suppose he wants me here to cut off patrols and scouts; but there are none, so far," said Villiers, who was a pure fighting-man, and no strategist. "It can't be helped."

"Any news from Nugent?" said Sam.

"No. It looks as if the messenger was kept there. But there are rumours that Nugent's either fighting a great battle, or soon will be. And I've got to sit here on my tail and wait. You two young rips don't know how lucky you are in

having a free hand," said their father, looking so enviously at his sons that the boys could not help laughing.

"Discipline's the great thing, dad," said Sam, with a wink at his brother. "I taught my cadet corps that. After all, it's the rank an' file, marchin' stolidly ahead, who win battles."

"While young night-hawks like you get all the fun!" growled his father, "and most of the rough-and-tumble fighting. What does a company-officer see of a war, packed in with the rest, and firing through the smoke?"

"There's a wild strain in the Villiers—they like to be out on the prowl," chuckled Sam. "But you've nothing to complain of, dad, with a fine, nippy Yeomanry troop like this. There aren't any Germans north of Cotehall, are there?"

"Not hereabouts," said Captain Villiers; "but the scouts I sent out report that they're dribbling in from all directions, out to the eastward from here, between the Crouch and Blackwater rivers. I would ride in and cut some of them up, but for these beastly orders."

"I say, Sam," said Stephen, suggestively, "suppose we go out that way, an' find what's up?"

"Good idea, young'un!" said his brother. "We've nothing to report to the general at present, an' it's no use ridin' all that way on the chance that he's got a big fight on. Besides, we aren't much use in big fights, an' we're not wanted."

"Shouldn't be surprised if we're in time for it, after all," said Stephen. "But come on, and let's start. Father," he said slyly, "we'll have to leave you here guardin' the village."

"Does your chief let you please yourselves about where you go?" said his exasperated sire.

"I don't know that we've got any chief, sir," said Sam, grinning. "Nobody thinks we're worth troublin' about. We're only cadets, you see, not real, hairy Service men."

"It's enough to make a man wish he was a cadet instead of a beastly Yeomanry officer!" said Captain Villiers impatiently. "You ought to be at home, doing sums instead of—no, I don't mean that, my lads. You've done splendidly. Go on and prosper; do your utmost for the colours, and pity your wretched father, who's liable to sit here for a week, doing nothing."

The boys took a quick but affectionate leave of their father—there was no saying in these times whether kindred would ever meet again after parting—and left the bivouac, after ensuring that their horses were stored at a neighbouring farm. It was a job to be done on foot, as Sam said. Ned, the marshman, was still snoring under a tarpaulin, so tired out by the previous thirty hours that he had not awakened, and the brothers left him undisturbed, and departed.

"Ned'll be mad when he wakes to find we've gone without him," said Sam; "but we couldn't go in a gang. And he's in plain clothes, and'll get shot if he's caught."

"The governor's pretty mad, too," said Stephen.

"He's staunch to his orders, the dear old dad. It's rough on him being kept back while the enemy's in front. He's a real fighting-man, and hates a waiting game. Did you see him cut down that Uhlan lieutenant yesterday? There isn't another man in Essex could have struck a blow like that," said Sam proudly.

"Ned said it was the man who caught him, an' wanted to hang instead of shootin' him. Have you got your field-glasses on you? There's a good look-out from the hill there."

They made as good a survey of the country before them as they could, and saw what appeared to be a party of the enemy in the far distance; but Sam decided they must push much farther to the eastward before any good could be done, and they accordingly did so.

As they drew on towards Woodham and Battlesbridge, taking every care not to fall into any sort of trap, the signs of the enemy were plain enough, but only on a small scale.

There were scattered pickets and little parties of Germans here and there, and the boys, thanks to Sam's knowledge of the country, were able to play at hide and seek with them with very little risk of being seen or caught; but no amount of watching seemed to teach them what the Germans were there for, since there did not appear to be any force, big or little, beyond them.

"It's just as dad's scouts reported," said Sam. "They're dribblin' in by twos an' threes from across the Blackwater, an' it looks as if they were gettin' ready to move across this way. All these little forage-parties are up to something."

"I tell you what, we'd better ask among the farm people if they've had any trouble with the Germans," said Stephen; "and we might snatch a meal if we can get one, instead of usin' up our emergency rations. I'm famished again."

"All right; only the good folk spin such yarns," said Sam. "If they see a corporal an' file they call it an army corps. Let's try Hooker's Farm, down below."

They did so, and the ruddy-faced old husbandman came out like an angry bull, an old fowling-gun in his hand, and a bulldog at his heels.

"Hold up, farmer!" laughed Sam. "We aren't the Kaiser's men."

"By glory, I thowt you was the Germans!" cried the old man, his face changing. "An' if you had been I'd ha' sent one o' you to his last account, though the rest hanged me in my own orchard! Look what they've done!" he roared, pointing to the open door of his stables. "Swept off every one o' my horses while I was up the fields—took 'em as if they owned 'em!"

"What, commandeered your stock, have they!" exclaimed Sam. "I thought they didn't do that with non-fighters."

"They gave my wife summat they called orders for payment on the German paymaster!" said the farmer bitterly. "I tore 'em up, an' threw 'em down the dead-well—would I sell my beasts to these dirty Dutchmen to fight agin our lads! Ay, an' they've took a-many things they needed hereabouts without offerin' even the papers, too! Not that I reckon any Essex folk'd touch their money!"

"I expect some of their men have broken out an' started looting," said Sam to his brother; "they're brutes when they're turned loose. I'm sorry for this farmer; but these are rough times for us all. We won't worry you for any food as——"

"Nay, come in!" cried the farmer. "It does my heart good to see a British coat again! Sons of Squire Villiers are ye? Three times welcome, then! The squire he's out fightin' with his Yeomen, they say. Wish I'd joined 'em, that I do!"

The boys could only stay to snatch a very short meal, answering the farmer his questions about the fighting meanwhile, and soon they left, after a hearty farewell, and hurried on.

"I wish father were down here with his troop," said Sam, when they had covered a mile from the farmhouse, and were looking out sharply for the enemy; "he'd soon make hay of these beggars who are helping themselves. If we —— Hallo!"

They came suddenly round the corner of a cottage, and there, among the pigsties and hencoops, they heard a shrill, angry outcry, and found themselves face to face with a foraging German.

The boys stopped dead, and each had his weapon to the fore in a twinkling. Then, after a second's pause, both of them burst into a roar of laughter.

Within five yards of them was a huge, six-and-a-half-foot Prussian Guardsman, heavily loaded with loot. His hands were so full that he could do nothing, and he pulled up short, and gaped at the boys in dismay as he met their ready weapons.

Under one arm he held an enraged young pig that struggled and squealed furiously, while under the other was a leg of mutton, and from the hand below swung four squawking hens, held by the feet. An infuriated, bony woman from the cottage was dancing after him with a long broom, making even more noise than the animals.

"You great, long, hudderin' good-for-nowt!" she yelled, brandishing the broom. "Who give you leave to come here an' take my pigs an' hens? I'll make pork of you, by glory, I will!"

With mouth wide open, the dismayed Prussian stared at the muzzles of Stephen's carbine and Sam's revolver; though the boys laughed so much their weapons were rather unsteady, for the Guardsman seemed as much afraid of the woman behind him as the cadets in front.

"What shall we do with the beauty?" said Stephen.

"We can't take prisoners back across country," said Sam, "and we can't well butcher him. He's no account, anyhow—let him go."

"Bail up, Hans!" called Stephen. "We've got the drop on you. You jolly well give back to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, or I'll bore holes in your hide."

"Drop those things and get out of it!" said Sam sharply, in German. "Thank your stars you get away alive! Tell your mates the next looter will be hung for a thief!"

"Are ye goin' to let him go, the scaramouch!" cried the woman, seeing the prisoner about to make a beeline for safety.

"Unless you'd like him, dame," said Sam; "I'll make you a present of him."

"Me! I wouldn't have the dirty rapscallion if you paid me!"

The Guardsman, overjoyed at his release, dropped the pig and fowls, that scattered screeching in every direction, and took to his heels like the wind. The bony woman, with a whoop of triumph, whirled the broom round her head, and hurled it after him with such good aim that it hit him in the back of the neck and sent him sprawling. He scrambled up again with a desperate grunt, and fled till he was out of sight, while the boys sat down on the pig-trough and laughed till they cried.

"Oh, my only aunt!" gasped Sam, wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his tunic. "That was worth lettin' the beggar go, only to see!"

"It was a lovely shot," said Stephen, as soon as he could speak. "He got it where the chicken got the axe. I tell you what, I wouldn't be a cockshy for that elderly dame if you paid me a pound a minute. But it's a pity we had to let him go."

"Can't march him back ten miles across country, anyhow."

"If he'd shown fight——"

"It's a good job he didn't. If we'd had to plug him it's likely the rest of his corps would come an' revenge themselves, an' burn the place down—the good woman'd come off badly. One's got to think of these things."

"Suppose he comes back an' does it now?"

"No jolly fear. He'll keep it quiet that he was put to flight by an old woman, an' knocked head over heels with a broom. We'd better be moving along, for he may tell 'em about our bein' here; an' they're beastly keen to get their hands on us. Come on!"

The lady of the cottage, having prudently recovered her broom, strode back towards the boys.

"Well, my little men, who are you?" she snorted.

"Officers in his Majesty's Service," said Sam, bowing.

"An' a rare plucky little pair o' bantams ye are," said the fierce dame. "We made that scaramouch pop off quicker than he came, between us, didn't we?"

"The credit's all yours, madam," said Stephen. "I'd back you to rout a whole patrol with that broom."

"Are there any more like you about here?" said Sam. "Because, if you'd raise a ladies' corps, an' call it the Broom Brigade, there'd be an end to the war in no time. Nugent'd jump at it. That fellow who came after your fowls——"

"D'ye think he'll send any more of his lot?" said the lady. "Not that I wouldn't swat a dozen of 'em, an' be thankful for the chance!" she added, making the broom whizz through the air as she swung it.

"If they should turn up an' do any harm to your place," said Sam, more gravely, "we'll make it right for you as soon as things are quiet. We're sort of responsible for what's happened, and I'll promise you a fresh cottage an' stock for what you lose. Cotehall shall make it good."

"Cotehall! Then you be Squire Villiers' sons, that we've heard so much about, an' who struck the first blow at these German brutes when they landed?" cried the woman. "Glory be! Come in an' make free o' my cottage, for the best I've got's yours——"

"It's good of you, and we're grateful, but we've got to push on," said Sam; "there's little rest these days. Good-bye; don't forget we'll put you right, an' if they burn you out, take refuge at Cotehall, for they won't touch that."

"Heaven's blessin's on ye both, an' all the rest who're strikin' for the old country!" cried the woman, as the boys departed; and, with a hearty farewell, they left her waving the broom above her head.

"Cheery old lady," chuckled Stephen. "Funny thing, they seem to know our names everywhere round, as if we'd done something big."

"Wish they didn't, especially the Germans," grunted Sam; "they're much too keen on gettin' hold of us, an' we shall get pretty short shrift when they do. I suppose it's Von Adler and Pilnitz who've had their little dignities hurt, an' want to wipe it out."

"Yes; they aren't sportsmen like our chaps. Come to think of it, we must have been rather a nuisance to 'em."

"An' we'll go on doin' it as long as we've legs to move on," said Sam. "It all comes of knowin' the country well. Let's get up on the hill by Purleigh there, an' see if there ain't something to be spotted. We've had some sport, but we haven't got much to go on, an' it's near time for moving back westwards."

If the boys had not much solid result to show for the morning's work, so far, there was a great change as soon as they were lying on the crest of the hill, and Sam had got his field-glasses to work. The young scouts had been conscious of a sort of distant mutter in the air, like far-off thunder, all the morning. Now that the Blackwater was in view, like a broad ribbon away to the northward, they saw hosts upon hosts of German soldiery moving south towards them from its banks.

"My eye!" said Sam. "They're gettin' across in small steamers an' lighters by the hundred! That's a rum idea. Wonder what it's for?"

"That rumbling noise must have been artillery," said Stephen; "I thought it was thunder. If it was near Colchester, though, we should have heard the guns plainly."

"Not with a strong breeze blowin' the other way, like there is now," said his brother. "Hold on; we've got to see what troops they are, and how many."

"The whole German army corps that was attacking General Nugent, by the look of them," said Stephen. "I can see them without the glasses. Jolly smart of them to get across the estuary like that. I say, Sam, it looks as if they meant goin' south towards the marshes, where Colonel Pilnitz was messin' about with his Engineers yesterday!"

"Just what I think," said Sam, shutting up the glasses after another ten minutes' watching. "Look here, we've got to get back an' let our chaps have the news like one o'clock!"

"They'll know it already, I should say," said Stephen. "Nugent's got good scouts, an' his war-balloon was up to-day—they'd see the whole thing from that. Anyhow, let's get back."

Descending the hill, the boys went warily till they were clear of the district haunted by the foraging-parties, and then made all speed back towards Stock.

They reached it to find Captain Villiers's troop gone, save for a corporal and four troopers left behind to transmit orders, and along the road, marching rapidly south, came battalion after battalion of General Nugent's men, well thinned-out, and showing the signs of a severe engagement. The boys made eager inquiries to learn what had happened.

"Cap'n Villiers has been sent on eastwards to ride down the foragin'-parties, sir," said the corporal to Sam. "General Nugent's won a great victory over the Germans near Colchester, an' now he's pushin' south, sir."

"Hurrah!" cried the two cadets, and flung their caps into the air. "Sam," exclaimed Stephen, "ain't those the Fusiliers comin' down the road? Devine'll be with them."

"If he isn't killed!" said Sam. "No, by gum! I can spot him there, with his arm in a sling. Let's go an' get the news from him!"

They hastened off at once, and the men of the battalion, tired as they were, raised a welcoming cheer, as they recognised the boys, who saluted in reply, and were soon alongside their friend the adjutant.

"Hallo, kids!" said Devine cheerily. "We've had 'em this time—had 'em proper!"

"Have you whacked 'em?" cried both the boys at once.

"Rather! Neatest thing in the campaign. The general had a lot of reinforcements in during the night—eight regiments an' six batteries. He'd got a fine position at Layer Marney, an' the Germans were waiting for their Third Corps to come up before they attacked, but he didn't give 'em the chance. He attacked 'em himself—which they never expected he'd do—at daybreak, an' he gave 'em their breakfast, I promise you. Awfully neat it was, the way he got 'em. They'd still more men than we, but we outflanked their side, an' knocked blue blazes out of 'em. They've six battalions wiped clean out, an' three batteries captured, losin 'a heap of men as well. Our losses were small, considerin'. They were fairly broke an' hooking it before noon. Good for the Old Brigade!"

"Do you know they're retreating south across the Blackwater?" exclaimed Sam.

"Yes. Rather smart of 'em, that! The old man was tearin' his hair—or he would if he'd got any—because he hadn't enough men to trap 'em on the other side. You've no idea how slow they are gettin' our reserves out. Everything is confusion, as usual. The general hasn't been able to find out yet how many have got across; it's been pretty quick work."

"We can give him that," said Stephen quickly. "We were out that way, an' saw 'em."

"Well, you'd better ride out an' give him the details. His scouts had a long way to go, an' aren't back yet. Our main columns are movin' down the high-road. You'll find him there. Didn't you send in a message last night, by the way?"

"Yes."

"I fancy it must have been that that determined him to make the attack. Important news, wasn't it? No, I'm not damaged much; only a flesh-wound in the forearm. Cut along an' report. See you later."

The boys made a bee-line for the cottage stable where their horses had been left, and soon were making across the fields for the high-road.

"I say, Sam, think what we've missed!" groaned Stephen.

"Never mind; we've done well. Shouldn't have seen much of it—a big fight spread over miles of country in the early morning. Smoke an' rifle-firing, that's all we should have seen."

"But look here, if the Germans wanted to be on this side of the Blackwater, why didn't they come here first?"

"Should say they didn't want to if they could help it. It was a clever line of retreat in case they got a setback. They're nearer London now, an' they'll be able to hold those entrenched marshes like anything, an' hang on till the swarms of 'em farther north move down this way."

"Then they're better off than ever?" said Stephen gloomily.

"They ought to be as well off, an' I reckon they think so. But there's just one thing, it seems to me, Pilnitz hasn't thought of."

"He's supposed to be the best engineer in the Kaiser's army," said Stephen doubtfully—"better than any of our men."

"So he may be. I don't know anything about engineerin', but I do know the River Crouch as no German does. You know what I mean. I didn't see him takin' any account of that when we watched him yesterday."

Stephen nodded.

"Let's get to headquarters, an' you can tell the general that if he'll listen. I don't see how it can be done, but perhaps he will."

They found the main forces of the Colchester division passing along the high-road, moving Londonwards, and hailed several friends; but there was no getting at the general then.

There was no help for it; they had to ride with the columns and await their chance. Nor was it till the evening, when Cotehall was passed, that the line was halted and a position taken up, the great importance of which made it impossible for the general to attend to anything else.

When this was done, the British forces were entrenched and in a position on a hillside south of Cotehall, their batteries placed, and facing the remainder of the German troops they had routed that morning.

The latter, still more than equal to the British in numbers, despite their losses, had been able to move south to place themselves in the immensely strong position Colonel Pilnitz had prepared for them.

They were settled in the trenches on the dry marshes, with their guns on the higher ground at the side.

There, then, were the two great forces facing each other, each in a strong position, and neither able to move against the other without the practical certainty of being wiped out before they could close with their adversaries.

The night was falling, and the British corps was like a watchdog sitting before the cave of a wolf.

General Nugent and his men stood between the invader and the road to London, and there for the time the two foes were fixed.

Sam and Stephen expected to find General Nugent in the best of spirits over his victory and the loss inflicted on the enemy; but when they were admitted to the old soldier's tent they found him graver and more grim-looking than usual.

"Ah, boys!" he said, returning their salute as punctiliously as if they were brigade-majors. "So you have come through the fire again? I wonder how long your luck will hold? You added a great score to your record when you sent me that news last night—greater than you knew."

The boys flushed with pleasure.

"There is no one else I would say as much to," said the old warrior, looking at them kindly with his fierce grey eyes; "but it is partly owing to that that I was able to pin the enemy here so promptly. It goes to your credit at headquarters, be sure."

"You won a splendid victory at Layer Marney, sir!" said Stephen, blushing at his own temerity.

"More men—I wanted more men!" muttered the general, half to himself, as he strode up and down the tent. "With a couple more regiments of light cavalry I could have cut them up after the rout. They'd never have got across the Blackwater. But Plimsoll's column is engaged against the Second German Army Corps outside Beccles, the reserves are not properly mobilised, and my hands are tied. However, enough of this! You have a report for me?" he said, turning sharply to the boys.

"Yes, sir," said Sam; and as shortly as possible gave him an account of what they had seen that morning, and the forces that had moved south.

"Very good indeed!" said the general. "I could not stop for this before. My scouts have let me know much of it, of course, but you were on the spot at the time, and your report is fuller and better, as I now have details of all the troops entrenched yonder. Thank you, my lads! You have done well, as usual. And now you may go. I shall not forget you."

The boys saluted.

"Is there anything else?" said the general, as Sam seemed to hesitate. "Speak, my boy, if you've anything to say, only be quick, for there is much to do. I have learned it is worth while listening to you."

"It's a very strong position the Germans have there, sir?" said Sam.

"As strong as my own," muttered the general to himself. "Neither of us can advance as we are now: and if they get reinforcements from seaward London will be in the gravest peril, for then they will be able to move straight ahead. But where they are now no gun-fire can do them much harm."

"Water might do it, sir, perhaps?" said Sam, rather timidly.

"Water! What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, sir, I've lived here all my life, and I know those marshes. They're below the level of the Crouch estuary, which is half a mile wide, and runs through them."

"Yes, well?"

"When the tide comes up the Crouch, sir, the water of the river is high above the marshes, only it's kept in by the embankments that bound the river—the sea-walls, as they call them about here. If the embankments weren't there at high tide the marshes would be flooded for miles, though not very deeply."

"Go on!" said the general, who had stopped short in his walk up and down.

"The Germans have cut deep trenches in the marshes for their men, sir, as you know. The biggest of the trenches all run nearly up to the river-wall, at right angles to it. If the embankment were broken down opposite the ends of these trenches when the tide is high, every big trench would be flooded out by the torrent pouring through them from the river."

"Gad!" muttered the general, biting his moustache. "What a scheme! What an idea!"

"It's the one thing Colonel Pilnitz has forgotten, sir, I think. You see, he's not a local man. The Crouch marshes are a queer place."

"He would never dream it could be done, even if he knew all about it!" mused the general.

"There's one thing more, sir," said Sam quietly. "It's high tide in the Crouch at daybreak to-morrow."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite, sir. I hope I haven't been talking rot, sir," he added humbly. "I don't know anything of engineering, or if it could be done, but I thought perhaps you'd like to try——"

"Try!" exclaimed General Nugent. "Here, you boys, retire for an hour. I'll send for you then. Lieutenant Vere," he called sharply to his aide-de-camp, "send Colonel Duncan, of the Engineers, to me at once, and Major Deenes!"

"Good biz!" said Sam to his brother, as they quickly took themselves out of the tent and out of hearing. "The old boy bites. He's gettin' to work. I only hope the job's possible."

"That's his chief staff-engineer, Deenes, goin' in now!" said Stephen excitedly. "And Colonel Duncan's a first-class man, too!"

"Yes, they're goin' to consult about it. I wish I wasn't so beastly ignorant of that part of the game. I can blow up a case of powder with an electric battery; that's all I'm fit for!" he added bitterly.

"Bar scoutin'!" chuckled Stephen. "Sit tight! p'raps they'll forget all about us now."

But they did not. In half an hour the boys were summoned back to the tent, where the two distinguished officers glanced at the boys with keen, interested eyes.

"Smart pair of pups!" muttered Duncan, pulling his moustache. "Can hardly believe they thought of a game like that."

"Cadet-lieutenant Villiers and Sergeant Villiers, attend to me!" said the general crisply. "I thank you in the name of my staff for the information you have given. You are not full members of the regular forces, and so I ask you if you are willing to volunteer for a service of great danger, in which your local knowledge will be most useful. It is to act as guides to the Engineers, who will make the attempt at daybreak to blow up the embankment next the German trenches. Are you willing?"

"Yes, sir," said both the boys at once.

The general nodded.

"I knew you would not shrink from it, though it is a forlorn hope that I send. If it succeeds, the service to Britain will be immense. Now listen to me, for you will need to understand the scheme.

"Six sappers will take with them each a couple of high-power explosive petards. These will be timed to explode at a certain minute, so that they will go off nearly simultaneously. The men, provided with inflated air-belts, will

ANSWERS

have to swim across the Crouch estuary from the south bank, and place these petards in position on the riverside of the embankment, each opposite the six chief German trenches.

"The explosions will take place about four. Probably some of the men will be caught, but if one or two succeed it will be enough, as the trenches connect throughout with each other, and the flood will reach all. You understand?"

"Yes, sir!" said Sam eagerly, his heart beating fast; and Stephen echoed him.

"As you know the river so well, and have reconnoitred the trenches at closer quarters, you are chosen to guide the men to the spot without fail."

The boys saluted, and withdrew.

"This is a gorgeous game!" said Sam, when they were alone. "One of the best we've played—an' the riskiest."

"If we succeed, the beggars'll be washed out like rats," said Stephen; "an' if not—we shall be shot—that's all. What are you goin' to do now?"

"Get a nap before we start. There's five hours yet, an' the dickens knows when we'll get another."

It spoke volumes for the boys' nerves, and the hardness of their condition, that they were able to sleep soundly as tops. They curled up under a waggon, and knew no more till a keen-looking Engineer officer, Captain Grafton, woke them at a quarter to two. They had reported themselves to him before they turned in.

"Time we were starting, youngsters," he said. "You look small for guides, but if all I hear about you is true, we ought to pull off this job."

Five other men of the Sappers were at hand, and the little expedition set off on its perilous errand.

Little was said, as Sam and Stephen, keeping with Grafton at the head, piloted them down the hedges and byways. Of the long journey through the darkness there is not much to be told; for few, if any, Germans were south of the Crouch. At last the greasy embankment was reached, and the dark estuary came in sight.

The boys had refused the rubber lifebelts, which had to be inflated, feeling freer without them, but the Engineers, weighted with the heavy petards—which, of course, were water-tight—could not do without them. The swim across the estuary was no great affair, for the tide was high and slack, and the Crouch is much narrower than the bigger Blackwater, and before long the eight dark forms were crouching at the edge of the saltings on the farther side.

"Now comes the rub," whispered Sam. "Keep low, and wade as quietly as you can."

It was no easy task, for the mud was soft under the water. Very cautiously they made their way, till the brothers, consulting, knew they were opposite the point where the first German trench began. Leaving a man here to fix his petard in the embankment, Sam led the way past each trench in turn, and a man was left at every one. The boys went on with Captain Grafton to the last one, which was nearly half a mile from the first.

The chief difficulty was the sentries that tramped the top of the embankment. The Sappers were almost out of sight from it as they went under the edge of the saltings and kept low, but they had to crouch till little more than their heads were above water, whenever a sentry passed.

This made progress slow, and the stars were growing pale as the last position was reached. Sam and Stephen crouched in one of the creeks, chilled by the muddy water, while Grafton crept to the embankment and laid his mine. All this while the embankment itself had hidden them from any view of the German forces on the other side of it.

"There goes one of our men, poor chap!" whispered Sam, as a rifle spat viciously, far back along the wall. "They've dropped on him."

"An' there's another," said Stephen.

Captain Grafton came silently back towards them across the saltings.

"Thank Heaven, that's done!" he said, under his breath. "Good for the old R.E.! An' now for a swim! We're done 'em now, even if they catch us——"

A rush of helmeted figures over the embankment cut him short, and a hoarse German voice shouted:

"Stand!"

Grafton's hand flew to his revolver as if by instinct; but instantly three rifle-shots rang out, and he dropped on his face—dead!

"Up with your hands, Steve!" cried Sam, dashing his brother's carbine out of his hands, and throwing his own palms up as the rifles were levelled at the boys. "We surrender!" he shouted in German.

The next moment they were in the midst of six big Prussian Grenadiers, who disarmed them roughly.

"Boys," said their sergeant gruffly; "in uniform, though, and armed! Donnerblitz! What if they are the ones we were warned to look out for! Bring them along to the trench."

The captives were marched over the embankment, th grim guardians around them. The dawn was growing light and before them was the whole German Army Corps, e trenched on the wide, dry marshes.

Close to the embankment lay the sixth of the great ma trenches, crammed with Prussian and Hanover infanti From the distant hill, where General Nugent was encampe came the first vicious shots of the British guns, opening t day's fighting, and the Germans in the trench were deliveri a long-range rifle fire at the hill.

Right down into the trench the boys were marched, n rowly missed by a British shell on the way. They fou themselves in a sort of huge trough filled with Germa and they were taken up to a fierce-looking, grizzled offic who was pacing the back of the trench behind the rifleme To him the sergeant reported the capture.

"Ah, British cadets!" said the officer, looking grimly the boys. "Put them behind the firing-line—they will dealt with shortly!"

"It's all up with us, Sam," said Stephen gloomily. "P they didn't shoot us on the saltings, an' get it over."

"Is it?" said Sam, as a distant church-tower tolled the ho of four. A queer smile curled about his lips. "Stand for a swim, young 'un. Not that it'll be much use, I afraid."

"What do you mean?" said Stephen, looking surpris "Swim! Where?"

Before Sam could answer, a heavy muffled explosion sho the ground. The river embankment at the head of t trench leaped into the air in chunks, and through the g burst a mighty torrent of muddy water.

Before any man could move from his place it came roari along the trench like an avalanche, sweeping Germa prisoners, and guns before it like straws.

Down With the Ebb-Tide.

"Stick to me! Keep close together!" shouted Sam abo the turmoil of the waters. And the next moment he a Stephen were swept off their feet, and whirled under, t salt flood roaring in their ears.

Coughing and gasping, they came to the surface a doz yards further on, and Sam panted out his warning afres It was easier said than done, for the confusion was awful a swimming almost impossible; but both the boys struck out well as they could, and kept their heads above water, t breath nearly knocked from their bodies by the objects th came swirling against them.

Through the roar of the torrent came a wild medley oaths, cries, and gurgles as the Germans were hurled alon and just after the water first broke through came three mo dull, tearing explosions that rang above the voices of t waters as the other petards exploded in the distance, and l the floods through upon the trenches behind.

These were hardly heard by the boys, for the whole affa seemed one vast nightmare of rushing water and drowni men, and the two cadets felt like straws being swept alo a mill-race. Stephen kept fast hold of Sam as they we borne onwards, and what was happening he scarcely kne except that his clothes seemed to weigh a ton, and that had swallowed a pint or more of muddy salt water.

The trench was only six feet deep at the rear side, a four in the front, but to get any foothold was utterly i possible, because of the strength of the flood, with the whc weight of the pent-up estuary hurling it along. Here th were swept into a choked-up mass of struggling men, a were driven through on the other side, bruised and ha drowned.

There they were washed up against an entrenched Maxi and tried to cling to it, only to be swept from their hold. large number of riflemen had gone under, having no noti of how to keep their heads above water, and Stephen hi self was badly winded by the shocks he received.

"I can't keep up long, Sam," he spluttered. "This awful!"

"Better than bein' shot," was all Sam's reply. A Stephen thought they had as good a certainty of that ever, if they escaped drowning. "Look out, there! A would you?"

A floundering Prussian, as helpless in the water as a fi out of it, came rolling up against them, and made a despera grab at Stephen, as a terrified man will, and dragged hi under. It looked like being the end of the younger boy campaign; but Sam, reaching over, took such a grip of t Prussian's throat, that the man's grip relaxed. The soldi was left behind, and the boys were swept on. It was ever one for himself in that desert of raging waters.

The whole disaster had not lasted more than a minu when the boys found themselves dashed to the end of the b trench, and whirled round the corner. An officer who h got a foothold was clinging to the bank, and shouted as

saw the two British uniforms; but no German in sight could concern himself about prisoners at such a time.

The officer drew his revolver, and fired at the boys, but the effort cost him his hold, for the current tore him away again, and Sam and Stephen suddenly found themselves swept into a new danger—a medley of kicking hoofs and great floundering bodies. They had been whirled right into one of the horse-trenches of a cavalry troop.

"Look out, or you'll get smashed betweem 'em!" gasped Sam. "Get hold of one by the (gurgle) mane!"

Stephen, now dead-beat, clung like a limpet to the first horse he was swept against, and knotted his fingers into its mane, and his brother did the same. There was a terrific snorting and floundering, and then one of the other horses, by luck or instinct, came upon the sloping outlet of the trench. It was a huge Flemish gelding, such as the heavy cavalry ride, and with a snort and a mighty struggle it heaved itself up on to the marsh above.

Naturally, all the others followed as sheep follow their leader, and the boys were dragged up, too. Struggling on to their horses' backs before the beasts were fairly out, they found themselves out on the open marsh, being carried along in the midst of a wild stampede.

"Crouch as low as you can! Never mind the stirrups!" cried Sam.

There was little need of the precaution just then, for a half-drowned army, swamped out of its trenches, has no time to fire at fugitives. All the dykes were blotted out now, and the water was over everything; but on the level marshes it was only a foot deep, and there was no boggy land about.

To steer their mounts was impossible. All the boys could do was to let themselves be carried along in the midst of the maddened beasts, which flung up a blinding spatter and spray as they flew down the levels towards the embankments of the Crouch, neither knowing nor caring where they galloped.

"Great guns, are we going to get clear, after all?" cried Stephen, the whistling wind blowing the words back in his teeth.

"Don't crab the luck! Sit tight an' stop crowin'. It's still fifty to one against us!"

These words were hardly spoken when there was a tumble and a wallow, and the horses blundered into a dyke at the foot of the embankment, hidden by the waters, and the shock flung both the boys forward. The dyke was narrow, however, and they managed to scramble out and up on to the grassy slope of the river wall itself, where they lay, panting and exhausted.

They were a long way now from the breach in the wall by which the trench had been flooded, and both of them lay as flat as they could, and tried to get back their breath, for the strain had been heavy. Had a single Prussian come upon them then, he could have taken them without resistance; and they were unarmed. For some time they lay with closed eyes and dead-white faces, buried in the grass, motionless and dripping.

Well for them that they did, for a file of five Germans, who had not been caught by the flood, and were hurrying excitedly along the wall, passed within ten yards of the boys, and did not give them a second glance, supposing them to have been drowned and cast up by the waters. Neither of the boys even saw them.

As their wind came back to them, and their pulses grew steady, the brothers felt their strength returning, and Sam raised his head.

"We've got to swim the Crouch if we're to stand a chance of getting away," he said huskily. "The ebb must be running, an' it'll carry us well down. Are you up to it, Steve?"

"I'm pretty nearly scuppered," returned Stephen; "but you can bet I'll have a jolly good shot at it!"

"Get up over that embankment as quietly as you can, then, or you'll be seen against the skyline. Hold on! Let's see if we're clear this side."

One comprehensive glance over the marshes did Sam take, and an extraordinary sight it was. Covered by the flood far and wide, while through the shallow waters whole regiments and battalions and batteries were wading and splashing in their hurried retreat to the higher ground to the north-east.

From the hills to the westward General Nugent's guns were opening a heavy fire that dealt destruction among the retreating Germans, while the biggest trenches were choked at their ends with men and horses that had perished in the flood. So great was the rout that it appalled Stephen, who now saw war in its most terrible aspect.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Sam, it's almost awful to think we've helped to bring this about!"

"I shall think it much more awful if we get shot," said Sam, ever practical. "Hurry your stumps now, young 'un! Great Scott, there's a crowd of men on the wall, an' they've spotted us! Over with you, an' into the river!"

For the first time Sam caught sight of the file of Germans, who were now some five hundred yards away. They were the ones who had passed the boys for dead, and now, looking back, they caught sight of the supposed corpses crossing the wall.

The boys dashed down over the saltings as the Germans turned and raced back towards them, and Stephen plunged into the estuary with Sam close behind him. Both of them struck out with all the strength they had left, and the Germans, pulling up short, opened fire with their rifles.

The vicious, stinging cracks rang out, and the bullets began to throw up spurts of water round the boys as they swam. Had they been in a placid, fresh-water river their doom would have been sealed, but a strong breeze was singing along, and when the wind blows against the tide there is always a short, choppy sea on the Crouch. The boys' heads bobbed up and down as they rose and fell over the little waves, and thus they made a small and uncertain mark at long range.

Knowing that every second might be their last, the brothers fought ahead bravely. Two or three of the Germans came running along the wall for a nearer shot, while their companions came back to fire; but the ebb was now running hard, and it swept the boys well down. The abandoned watch-vessel that guarded the oyster-beds was moored out in the tide, and, swimming round this, and keeping it between them and the riflemen, the cadets were able to get nearly as far as the opposite shore under its cover.

A bullet dashed its spray into Sam's face as he reached the saltings that lined the southern bank, and another grazed Stephen's shoulder; but once they landed they wormed their way quickly up the salting-creeks, bent double, and keeping below the banks out of sight of the sharpshooters till they reached the river-wall. One quick dash over it, and they had gained the safe side.

Gasping for breath, and aching in every limb, they struggled across the meadow beyond, out of sight and sound of the Germans now; but they would not remain in the open. The last of their strength took them to a little copse, where they flung themselves down among the brushwood and lay like logs, too exhausted to stir.

"Thank Heaven!" said Sam fervently; and Stephen echoed him.

It was a shock to find they were not alone, for voices suddenly broke upon their ears, and three muddy and weary-looking men came hastily towards them. Sam's first thought was that they were Germans, and that the desperate flight had been made uselessly after all, till he saw that they were three of the engineers for whom the boys had acted as guides—a lieutenant and two sappers.

"Hallo, youngsters, is it you?" said the lieutenant. "Jolly glad to see you get away! You did us proud—the job came off beautifully!"

"How many of your fellows are safe?" said Stephen eagerly.

"Only us three—and you. They got the rest of us. Where's Grafton?"

"Grafton's gone," said Sam gravely. "They shot him when they found us."

"Poor chap! He did his work, though. We couldn't all expect to get away. I didn't think any of us would. It was a gorgeous success! The German Army Corps is simply scragged. Four of our mines went off—the other chaps were caught before they'd laid theirs. As soon as mine was off I swam back, an' these chaps did the same. We've been resting here a bit before starting back, for we're all done up. There aren't any Germans this side—an' there won't be, now. How did you young 'un's fare—you say they shot Grafton?"

"We surrendered," said Sam. "It wasn't pleasant to do it, but I reckoned we shouldn't be there long, as they were bound to take us into the trenches, an' would soon have their hands too full to look after prisoners. It was a pretty rough time," he added. And he told the lieutenant what had happened when the embankments broke.

"My Christian uncle," said the lieutenant, with a whistle, "but you kids are seein' life, and no mistake! I reckon you thought you were goners when the water came in! And the whole marshes are flooded, you say? We didn't stay to see that!"

"Every foot," said Stephen. "The whole corps is clearing out eastward, an' our guns are makin' hav of 'em!"

"By Jove, it's a knock-out! What?" said the young officer. "The old Grey Fox'll be uncommon pleased. Are you young 'un's rested? We'd better get back to camp."

It was a weary walk that lay before them, tired as they were, but at least there was nothing to fear from the Germans now, and before they had gone far along the road

they fell in with a carrier's cart, driven by an old countryman. He was plying his ancient vehicle as peacefully as if no such thing as war were heard of in the country, just as he had done, between village and village, for forty years past. He did not even seem interested in the news the five tired travellers told him, but he gave them a lift in his cart to within a mile of General Nugent's camp. It was off his beat to go farther, he said, and not love or money would tempt him to do it; but the sappers and the boys were glad enough to get any lift at all, and they laughed heartily afterwards at the driver's cool unconcern.

At last they reached the camp, and answering the sentries' challenge, passed in under the thunder of the British guns that were still hurling their deadly messages after the discomfited enemy. And finding they were not called on to report to their chief at once—for which there was certainly no need—the boys passed in, welcomed by a rousing cheer from each regiment they went by, and made for the Red Cross tents down in the valley.

There they demolished a camp meal that was given them by an orderly, and, curling up under an ambulance waggon, they dropped off to sleep like logs before their heads touched the ground, and not all the booming of the batteries from the hill above could wake them.

A Strange Rumour!

When Sam and Stephen opened their eyes again, all was silent in the direction of the bivouac, and the horses were being hitched to the ambulance-waggons.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Sam, scuttling out from under the wheels. "How long have we been here?"

"'Bout four hours. It's two o'clock now," said the R.A.M.C. orderly, who was hitching up the horses.

"Where the dickens are the troops?" cried Stephen in alarm, for the hill above was deserted, and the batteries were gone.

"They've pushed on after the retreatin' Germans, to follow up the attack an' give Von Adler ginger!" was the reply. "Bin gone three hours. There was one of the general's aides-de-camp rode down after you."

"And you never woke us, confound you!" cried Sam, in despair. "They might have wanted us to report, an' we shall get a fearful wigging!"

"Keep your hair on, my giddy young scouts," said the orderly, grinning. "The aide saw you, an' he said: 'Let 'em sleep; they've earned it.' That was the general's message. He seemed pleased about somethin'. He was too busy to worry about you, I reckon, though! O' course, it was silly of him to think he could pound the enemy without your 'elp! He——"

"Look here," said Sam sharply, drawing himself up, "that'll do! I command the Greyfriars Cadet Corps, an' though it's wiped out I'm still Lieutenant Villiers, and hold the King's commission!"

"Oh, beg pardon, sir!" said the orderly, bringing his feet together and saluting. "No offence meant, sir!"

"Not so much old buck, then!" said Stephen. "Come on, Sam, let's get our gees an' see if we can't catch 'em up!"

"I could kick that cheeky beggar for not having waked us!" growled Sam, as they strode off. "However, we've had a good rest, an' needed it, an' we'll soon catch 'em up. How d'you feel?"

"Fit as a flea, after the grub an' sleep!" said Stephen. "Let's hurry!"

They went away southward to the barn where they had left their horses—for they did not care to trust them in the cavalry lines, when remounts were so keenly looked out for.

"We fairly won our gees, an' we'll stick to 'em!" said Sam, as he swung himself into the saddle, after paying the cottager liberally for feeding the beasts; for he had supplied himself with fresh funds at Cotehall.

"Roll your tail an' ride, or we shall be late for the fun!"

Away they cantered across the hill, and when they mounted the next rise, the rearguard of the British troops was seen no great distance away to the eastward. By riding hard the boys came up with the main force in half an hour, and found it had pitched its quarters again on a hill that commanded the whole tract of country between the two estuaries. The boys soon fell in with Devine, the adjutant, who greeted them cheerfully.

"Here you are again, my young bucks!" he said. "Well, we've got 'em nicely now! They can't get past us this way, the sea's beyond on their front, an' they lost nearly all their pontoons an' gear this morning. They couldn't cross the rivers, anyway."

"Then the Kaiser's whacked!" cried Stephen.

"Couldn't say that," returned Devine. "There are huge forces attackin' us at Leeds, Hull, an' Lowestoft, an' we don't seem to be doin' well up there. But these two army corps—there isn't much more than one now, since the losses, for they got it frightfully hot this morning—are pretty well bottled up here for the present; and they were the chief danger, bein' within a march of London itself. They couldn't help themselves, either. There was nowhere else for them to retreat to."

"I say," said a company officer, coming up, "have you heard the news? The general's got it by field-telegraph, and four scouts have come in. He hasn't given it out, of course, but the report sounds queer."

"What news?" said Devine. "I've heard nothing."

"Why, that Von Adler in front of us is bein' reinforced."

"How? Out of the sea?" said Devine sarcastically. "That's all he's got beyond him."

"That's just it. It's said a fresh squadron of lighters and tugs have reached the mouth of the Crouch, an' brought a lot more Germans!"

"What!" exclaimed Sam. "What the dickens is our Fleet doin' to let 'em?"

"The Fleet's said to have doubled round Scotland, and is hammering the German Navy off Berwick. A torpedo-boat flotilla of ours caught this squadron of barges, though, an' played havoc with them, sinking any amount; but there were two sections of the Germans, an' one lot got through, an' landed ahead here. That's the rumour, anyhow. We don't know how many fresh troops Von Adler's got from 'em, though."

"It's a bad look-out if he's got many," said Devine, "for it may turn the tables again, an' London will be in a deuce of a fix if they're strong enough to sweep over us. It's the one thing that could save Von Adler. Here comes the general's aide. P'r'aps he's got news."

But the aide-de-camp, without giving any news, addressed himself to the cadets.

"Hi, lieutenant and sergeant," he said, grinning, "the general wants you!"

The brothers hurried off at once, and were soon before Sir Sholto in his newly-pitched tent.

"Well, my lads," he said, "you did your guide work splendidly this morning, and I have heard of your marvellous escape in the trenches. But more than that. You need not fear it will be forgotten that the scheme itself was yours. It is largely to you we owe this position."

"We aren't looking for rewards, sir," said Sam, saluting.

"You'll get them, none the less. But it is no time to talk of deeds already done, and I did not call you here for that. I wish to know if, in your recent scouting expedition, you saw any signs that might lead you to expect a new German landing?"

"No, sir," said Sam frankly. "We didn't get any farther yesterday than about the point where your camp is now."

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