

THE HYPNOTIST OF ST. JIM'S

Extra Long
Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.

THE GEM LIBRARY

VOL. 3
No. 65.

1^d



SCHOOL & WAR STORIES.

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Complete Tale by

MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



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THE HYPNOTIST OF ST. JIM'S.



A Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

The Terrible Three's New Pet.

"ALL right, make the beastly thing yourself, then!"

"Right-ho, I will!"

"That you jolly well won't!"

Monty Lowther glared at Manners, and Manners returned the compliment with interest.

After a brief spell of silence, Manners opened his mouth to say something, and shut it again—in silence.

Monty Lowther did not observe the golden rule, but opened his mouth and gave utterance to one word, short and very expressive.

"Fathead!"

"Fathead yourself!" retorted Manners angrily.

"Same to you!" rejoined Lowther.

"Look here, I'll—"

"So will I!"

"No, you won't!"

"Yes, I will!"

"What?"

Monty Lowther looked surprised and hurt. The suddenness of the inquiry popped at him by Manners caught him unawares, and found him incapable of adequate retort, and he relapsed into a glum contemplation of the table, littered with bits of wood and a collection of carpentering tools.

Breezy little passages at arms and occasional outbursts of wordy warfare were by no means uncommon in Study No. 1, and if things got a bit dull, the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Monty Lowther, and Manners—generally contrived, as Tom Merry tersely expressed it, to make things hum.

The present occasion, however, seemed likely to develop into something more than a temporary and friendly breeze. Manners was showing signs of temper, and Lowther was feeling anything but amiable.

It was all over a cage. Monty Lowther wanted to make it his way. Manners insisted that it should be done his way.

"Never you mind what I shall do," muttered Lowther at last. "You leave the thing alone."

"Sha'n't!" retorted Manners sharply. "It was my idea

ANOTHER DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

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in the first place, and I don't see what the dickens you want to interfere for at all."

"Oh, dry up!" interrupted Monty Lowther. "You——"

"Sha'n't dry up!" shouted Manners. "You——"

The pair shut up abruptly as the study door was suddenly flung open, and a curly haired junior bounced in.

"What the policeman!" exclaimed the leader of the Shell, regarding the flushed faces of his chums and study mates quizzically. "You chaps having a row?"

"Manners——" commenced Monty Lowther.

"Lowther," interrupted Manners, "thinks no one but himself can——"

"Nothing of the sort," grunted Lowther. "You know very well that——"

"Shut up!" shouted Manners. "You——"

"Peace, peace, my children!" cried Tom Merry. "If there's any trouble, you two had better trot round to the gym. and work off steam with the gloves. There's nothing like a dust up to clear away any misunderstanding. But what's all the fuss about? Don't, for goodness' sake, start jawing both at once, or I shall have to take the two of you on myself!"

Manners sniffed. He had cooled down a little since the entrance of Tom Merry, but his temper was still very raw and ruffled.

"Anything the matter with your nose?" inquired Tom Merry, with a grin.

"Yes, it's a jolly sight too long," snapped Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Tom's grin developed into a ringing laugh. "You are a funny set of asses!" he cried. "Of all the disagreeable, disgruntled objects I ever saw, you two are fair specimens. Come, chuck it!" he went on seriously. "The old Co. have a reputation to keep up. It's all very well to rag for a while, but you don't want to make a beastly serial story of it."

A smile stole over Manners's face.

"It strikes me," he said, "that you're doing the talking act very well. Got any more remarks, 'cos if so, I'm going out?"

Monty Lowther's bad humour vanished on the instant. He was quick to appreciate the indirect offering of the olive branch, and his look of annoyance was superseded by his accustomed expression of good humour.

Tom Merry gave a quiet chuckle at the signs of peace, and ignored Manners's question.

"What'er—what's all this mess?" he demanded.

"Oh, I—Lowther," said Manners quickly, "is making a cage."

"A cage?"

"Yes; we got hold of a cavy, a ripping little chap, at old Simkins' in the village, and we—that is, Manners—is making a cage for him," explained Monty Lowther.

"Oh, you can make it!" exclaimed Manners.

"No, I don't want to; you can."

"Ha, ha, ha! I think I'd better do it," cried Tom Merry.

"While you two chaps are scraping and bowing to one another, I could get the thing done."

"No you don't!" shouted Manners.

"Not if I know it!" howled Monty Lowther.

"All right, then; keep your wool on!" replied Tom.

"What was it you said you'd got—a—a——"

"Cavy!"

"What's that—a guinea-pig?"

"No fear!" exclaimed Manners indignantly. "Guinea-pig, indeed! It's a cavy—a-v-y. A white one, pink eyes."

"Oh! Where is it?"

Manners and Monty Lowther glanced at each other in dismay. In the heat of the discussion the cavy had been forgotten.

"He—he was on the chair," said Manners.

"Yes, I put him there myself," exclaimed Lowther.

"Perhaps he's flown out of the window," suggested Tom Merry seriously.

Manners eyed the leader of the Shell with a fine air of contempt.

"I said it was a cavy, not a chicken."

"Indeed! Then I infer that the cavy in question hasn't any wings."

"Don't be a silly ass!" exclaimed Manners, going on his hands and knees. "Why can't you look for the little beast instead of making stupid remarks."

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Just now I'm looking for a cavy," snapped Manners.

"Where the dickens has he got to?"

"Goodness alone knows!" muttered Monty Lowther, peering into every corner of the room.

"Must be here somewhere," grumbled Manners from under the table. "He can't have—— Ow!"

"Have you got him?" cried Tom Merry excitedly.

"Got him? No!" retorted Manners, rising from the floor

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65,

with a very red face. "I've got a beastly tin-tack in my hand, if that's anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's it, cackle! Hallo, what silly ass is this?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, known to his chums as Gussy, stood in the study doorway, and looked at Manners with a severe expression.

"Are you alludin' to me, Mannahs?"

"Yes, fathead! Shut the door!"

"I abso——"

"Shut the door!" howled Manners.

The swell of St. Jim's stood stock still, and screwed his monocle firmly into his eye.

"Will you shut the door?" yelled Manners. "Here, come out of the way, you image! He'll escape!"

"He—what escape?" gasped Arthur Augustus, as the junior whirled him away and slammed the door. "What is the meanin' of this outrageous conduct?"

"Oh, rats! Don't I tell you he'll escape?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry and Lowther howled with laughter at the expression of bewilderment on D'Arcy's face.

The question of his personal dignity was always of paramount importance to Arthur Augustus, but Manners' strange and jerky series of exclamations drove the outrage to his dig. from his mind, and he turned to Tom Merry with a look of inquiry.

"From what I can make out, Gussy," said Tom Merry very seriously, "these chumps have let a wild animal escape, and he's hiding somewhere in this study."

"Eh—oh!" The swell of St. Jim's looked alarmed, and hastily glanced around. "Bai Jove! A wild animal, Tom Mewwy?"

The swell of St. Jim's was no coward, but he shifted uneasily, and his mind conjured up the picture of some savage little beast suddenly springing upon him from behind.

A queer sort of gurgle came from Tom Merry. It was a vain attempt to stifle a laugh, but Arthur Augustus gave an involuntary jump. Wild animals were not to his liking, and he remembered the shock he had received when Clifton Dane—the Anglo-Indian—snakes had been left in his study, and he looked round quickly for a place of retreat. The door of the study was close to hand, but it was quite opposed to his sense of dignity to retire in so obvious a manner.

"Is it a weptle?" he inquired.

"No," said Manners sarcastically, "it's a wild, raging hippopotamus. I believe you've got your foot on him."

"Pway don't wot, Mannahs! I shall have to administah a fearful thwashin'."

"M'yes," said Monty Lowther, with a laugh, "something like you did at the Zoo when the unicorn escaped."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of St. Jim's flushed with indignation. It was a sore point with him that adventure, and his aristocratic cheeks fairly burned as he recollected how he had been taken in by the invention of the story of the escaped unicorn, and his ears tingled as he also remembered that he had mistaken the hoot of a wheezy motor-horn sounded in the outer circle of Regent's Park for the mythical animal's cry of maddened rage.

"Wun, wun like anythin'!" muttered Manners. "Where can that little beast have got to?"

"I considah you a wank outsidah, Mannahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I wequest you to come with me to the gymnasium."

"My aunt!" said Manners, poking a singlestick behind the bookcase. "Another invitation to the gym. Three in one afternoon!"

"Are you comin'?" inquired D'Arcy severely.

"Oh, rats!"

"I shall chastise you on the spot, Mannahs!"

"Which spot?" inquired the junior mildly.

"Don't—Oh!"

"Hip, pip!" howled Monty Lowther, fishing a wriggling little animal from the back of the coalscuttle. "I've got him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"What a queer little beggar! I thought you said he was white!"

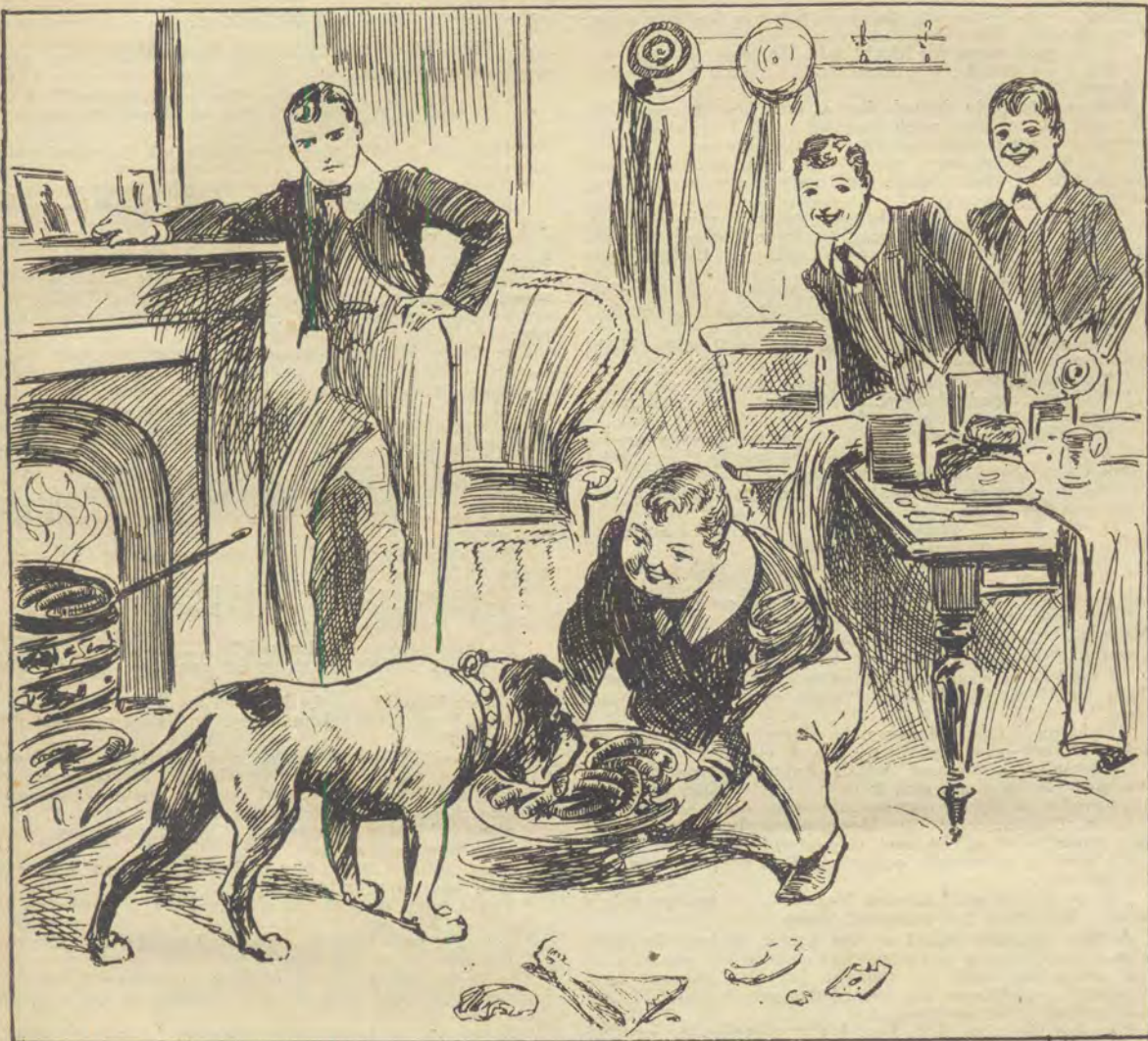
"Ha, ha, ha! He was when we bought him," explained Monty Lowther, holding the squirming and protesting cavy at arm's length. "Ow, wow!"

Week, week!

Lowther tucked a bleeding finger under his arm, and squeaking with indignation at being captured, the grimy little animal scuttled across the floor, scrambled over the fender, and nibbled a cinder.

"My eye!" cried Tom Merry. "He's a bit of a terror!"

"Savage little beast!" mumbled Lowther, stuffing his injured finger into his mouth.



Still under Clifton Dane's hypnotic influence, Fatty Wynn slowly stooped and placed his precious sausages on the floor in front of Towser.

"What a wippin' little animal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, is he a 'wippin' little beast!" snorted Monty Lowther. "I don't think!"

"He's vewy spiwited, Lowthah," observed Arthur Augustus, as he crossed the study to the fireplace.

Monty Lowther regarded the swell of St. Jim's with a suspicious eye. Was it possible that D'Arcy was taking a rise out of him?

"Did you say he was black or white?" inquired Arthur Augustus, as he examined the little rodent through his eyeglass.

"I said he was white," replied Manners tartly. "I should think that anyone with half an eye could see that he isn't white now."

The swell of St. Jim's ignored the acidity of the junior's voice, and poked an inquisitive forefinger at the cavy's ear. A shrill "Week!" caused him to hurriedly withdraw his finger.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry bent over interestedly.

"He's a what-you-call-it—a pugnacious little beggar!" he observed. "What does he eat?"

"Oh, carrots and stuff!" replied Lowther vaguely.

"It seems to me he's rather partial to fingers," said Tom Merry. "The little beggar looks just like an owl. Look at him now!"

"Bai Jove, yes!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "But look at him now! He's got his hair stickin' straight up, and looks moah like a—a cockatoo than a little wat."

"He's nothing like a rat," said Manners.

"I beg your pardon, Mannahs," replied D'Arcy, with dignity, "but he belongs to the family of wodents."

"Rodents my hat!" retorted Manners, whose ideas respecting the genus cavy were rather vague. "I don't care what blessed family you like to say he belongs to, he's one of us now. What?"

"Rather!" chorused Tom Merry and Lowther.

"Wats! A family of wats!"

Again Lowther scrutinised the impassive face of Arthur Augustus, and this time, the remark being somewhat general, it drew the attention of Tom Merry and Manners; but the Terrible Three were baffled, and although surprised and uneasy, the placid countenance of the swell of St. Jim's told them nothing.

"Look here, Gussy," exclaimed Tom Merry, after a prolonged silence, "are you trying to be funny?"

The eye turned upon the leader of the Shell expressed nothing but innocent surprise.

"I fail to comprehend your wemark, Tom Mewwy. Pway—"

"Oh, never mind," said Tom Merry; "we'll let that slip. What shall we call the new member of the Co.?"

Week, week, week!

"Oh, we can't call you week, week!" said Manners, as the object of the discussion scrambled back over the fender and nibbled at his boot. "What about naming him after the old col.?"

"What! St. James?" inquired Lowther. "Poor little beast, we can't give him a name like that!"

"What's the matter with Jim?" suggested Manners.

"Or Jimmy?" said Tom Merry.

After some discussion, the new pet was baptised after Tom Merry's suggestion.

"Jolly good name for him!" said Manners.
"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.
"Jimmy!"

Jimmy promptly bolted for a dark corner, and the Terrible Three shook with laughter as D'Arcy sniffed disgustedly at the reception of his friendly advances.

"Let him alone for a while," said Tom Merry. "He'll get used to the place, and he can't come to any harm so long as we keep the door shut."

"We'll have to lock it when we go out," said Manners, "or else some silly ass will come in, leave it open, and then it will be good-bye to Jimmy—especially if Herries' tyke gets hold of him!"

"We'll see to that," replied Tom Merry. "By the way, what did you come in for, Gussy? Study 6 chaps only allowed on special occasions, you know."

"I came about my wing," replied the swell of St. Jim's, with dignity.

"Your wing?"

"Wing!" gasped Manners. "My aunt, you don't mean to say you've been sprouting?"

"My wing," repeated Arthur Augustus, holding up his left hand. "I have lost or mislaid the beastly thing, and I think I shall have to offah a weward."

"It's his ring he means!" cried Lowther, bundling the tools into their box.

"O—oh, I see!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "And you're going to offer a reward? How much?"

"Bout a thousand?" suggested Manners, with a grin.

"Wubbish!" said the swell of St. Jim's. "I shall offah ten shillings. I absolutely wewuse to give more!"

"My eye! Don't you throw your money about?" said Manners. "Put my name down as the winner," he added gravely. "Enlist me at once as a wing-finder."

"I shall be extremely delighted to hand you the half-sov., deah boy," replied D'Arcy, "when you weturn me my wing."

"Hold on!" cried Manners, in alarm. "I haven't got your old ring—you wait till it's found, old son!"

"Mannahs," exclaimed Arthur Augustus, "my wing is not old! My gov'nah sent it to me last spwing, and it is engraved with my monogwam and cwest, don't you know?"

"Yes, I know," said Tom Merry promptly, "and we will endeavour to get on the track of your ring at the—"

"I shall be extremely delighted, deah boy, to hand you the half-sov—"

"Here, half a sec!" shouted Manners. "That ten bob is mine! You know you promised, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus gazed at the junior in bewilderment. The loss of his ring had somewhat clouded the clearness of his perception, and he thought for the moment that Manners' anxiety over the reward was genuine, and D'Arcy was nothing if not generous.

"Udah the circs, deah boy, I will incwease the weward to a sov."

"Go hon! A whole sovereign?"

"Yaas, weally!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The seriousness with which the swell of St. Jim's treated the matter made Tom Merry and Lowther roar with laughter.

The brow of Arthur Augustus creased to a portentous frown.

"Oh, you are a funny kid, Gussy!" cried Tom Merry at last. "Serious as an owl, and as blind!"

"Mewwy!"

A volume of expressiveness was in D'Arcy's single exclamation, but the juniors only laughed the louder.

"My eye!" gasped Manners, the tears running down his cheeks. "Look here, Gussy; if we find your ring, you shall stand a study feed!"

"But—"

"Oh, get on with you," cried Tom Merry; "you're getting mixed in your old age! We don't want your reward. Manners was pulling your leg!"

"Pullin' my leg?"

"Yes, image. Getting at you; trying to take a rise out of you; having a game; getting you on a bit of string. Ha, ha, ha! Is that clear, or shall I give you some more variations? What, going?"

"You are a set of wottahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as he made for the door. "I shall cease to wegard you in the light of fwiends! I shall wewire and wewort the mattah to Blake!"

"Oh, Gussy!" Manners pulled out his handkerchief and sobbed as the swell of St. Jim's stalked off. "This—this is too much!" he wailed.

"Chuck it, fathead," exclaimed Tom Merry; "he's gone!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Discovery of Clifton Dane, Hypnotist.

"POOR old Gussy!"

For some time after the door had closed on the swell of St. Jim's the Terrible Three chuckled with glee.

"That was a jolly nice ring of his, all the same!" said Lowther.

"Yes," agreed Tom Merry. "Though I don't see what a kid like him wants with a ring at all for. But Gussy always did have his funny little ways!"

"Oh, yes," said Manners, "but we may as well have a hunt for it!"

"Rather! I expect the silly ass has left it in the bath-room, or some stupid place or other," remarked Lowther.

"I expect so," said Tom Merry. "Hallo, here's Jimmy again!"

The three juniors watched their new pet with eager interest. He presented a piebald appearance, most of the coal-dust having been rubbed off in patches, leaving the rest of him a dirty grey that served to show up his ruby red eyes. Squeaking, and, for an animal not as big as a rat, kicking up a rare noise, the cavy nibbled at the juniors' boots.

"I believe he's hungry!" exclaimed Manners.

"Why, of course he is!" cried Tom Merry. "Why, you are a pair of noodles! Fancy starving the poor little beast!"

"Who's starving him?" said Manners, going to the cupboard. "My eye!"

"What's the matter?" inquired Lowther.

"Why, we haven't anything for him!"

"What? Nothing at all?"

"No, only sausages and bread."

"Well, it's certain he won't eat sausages—try him with bread."

Manners brought out the loaf and cut a huge slice.

"Jingo!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "What's that for—you or Jimmy?"

Manners disdained to answer, and laid the slice of bread on the floor under the nose of Jimmy. A nibble or two was all that Jimmy gave, and then he started again—and this time his shrill squeak plainly betokened urgency.

"Sh-s-s-s!" hissed Tom Merry. "You little beggar, you'll bring Railton down on us!"

Jimmy refused to "Sh-s-s-s," and between his cries attacked Tom Merry's toe-cap.

"You'll have to get him some carrots or greenstuff of some kind, Manners."

The junior pulled out his watch and made a wry grimace.

"Too late—gates are shut."

The three looked at one another in dismay. Jimmy's insistent cry arose and spoke eloquently of carrots, and there were none!

"Better ask the housekeeper for some," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Who shall I say they're for—you?" inquired Manners sarcastically.

"Never mind about trying to score just now," said Tom Merry. "The fact of the matter is just this. You'll have to get carrots, and how are you going to do it?"

"Break bounds, and slip down to the village," muttered Manners.

"Look here," exclaimed Tom Merry, picking up his cap from the table, "we'll all go!"

"No fear!" cried Manners. "You two stay where you are—I sha'n't be a tick! Besides, it'll take the two of you to keep Jimmy amused. So-long!"

The door closed on the junior, and before he had been gone half a minute it opened again.

"What, back again! What—oh, it's you!" said Tom Merry.

"Come in, Dane!" cried Lowther. "We've got something that'll lick your snakes hollow!"

Clifton Dane's dark, handsome face lighted up with interest as he advanced into the study.

In various ways Dane had made his presence felt in the old college. Since his coming he had not distinguished himself in any particular fashion. He was not remarkable either for his prowess in sport, or his learning in class, but of late a tendency had grown among the juniors to refer to the Anglo-Indian boy in many matters, and some even went so far as to preface their remarks with: "Dane said it was so," or "Dane won't like it," and so on.

All this did not betoken any great popularity—it merely showed that Clifton Dane was in some way a remarkable personality. No one could have said quite what it was about him, but there was no question that immediately he entered a study attention seemed to centre itself upon him.

In Study 1 Clifton Dane was always a welcome visitor,

and he never forgot how the Terrible Three had done their best to make his arrival and his first weeks in the college run easily. Under the special protection of Tom Merry & Co. the animosity of Gore and his toadies had been successfully overcome, and although the Indian said little, his gratitude was none the less.

"Shut the door!" shouted Tom Merry.

"What——" commenced Dane.

"Stop him!" cried Lowther.

"Stop what?" exclaimed Dane. "I—oh!"

Jimmy darted between his feet, but, quick as he was, Tom Merry reached the door in a bound and shut it in time.

"Did you that journey!" he said.

"What the dickens is it?" cried Clifton Dane. "What a queer little beast!"

"My eye!" said Lowther, with a laugh. "I think we shall have to write out his family history, pedigree, and so forth, and pin it on the wall! I can't fancy repeating the whole rigmarole to every silly ass that comes in! Here goes, though—I suppose you'd better be put in full possession of the facts!"

Monty Lowther plunged into his subject and rattled on at a breathless rate.

"Hold on!" cried Dane, when the Fourth-Former stopped to take a breath. "Suppose you leave his past history for a minute and let's have a look at him?"

"Half a tick—I'm telling you! He's a native of—wow!" Jimmy, dissatisfied with boot polish, nibbled at the talkative Lowther's ankle.

"That's stopped you, anyway!" cried Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther glared and nursed his foot.

"You mind he doesn't bite a lump out of you!" he growled, as Dane deftly caught the animal. "He nearly chewed Manners' thumb—my aunt!"

The chums stared in astonishment at the sudden change in Jimmy. He nestled in Dane's hand, and while the Anglo-Indian murmured some unintelligible words in a soft tone of voice their pet changed his shrill shriek to a contented little twitter, not unlike the chatter of a bird.

"Well, I'm blest!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"He's a beastly lion-tamer!" said Lowther. "Just look at him!"

Dane smiled as Jimmy clambered up his coat-sleeve and hunched himself into a fluffy ball on his shoulder.

"He'll bite your ear—look out!" cried Monty Lowther.

"He's got teeth like chisels!"

"No, he won't," replied Dane calmly.

"I believe he's hypnotised the little beggar!" said Tom Merry.

It was a random remark of the junior's, but a strange expression came into the dark eyes of the Anglo-Indian. He fixed his glance abstractedly on Lowther, and the junior found himself returning the gaze with a curious fixity.

"Here," he said at last, "none of your old tricks with me! What are you up to?"

"Sorry!" exclaimed Clifton Dane. "I—I was thinking!"

"Well, you jolly well look at the door-knob, or Tom!" said Monty Lowther. "I don't want to go off into a beastly sleep and wake up and find myself somebody else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry roared with laughter. The idea of Lowther talking of Dane as being a mesmerist struck him as being distinctly funny.

"I don't see what you're cackling about!" said Lowther. "You stare into his eyes for a minute and see if you don't get a creepy sort of feeling down the middle of your back!"

The leader of the Shell burst into a hearty laugh at the serious expression on his study chum's face.

"I don't suppose there's much danger of Dane doing anything in the mesmerising line. I believe that sort of stuff is all rot. What?"

"I don't think so," repeated Clifton Dane quietly. "In fact, I'm sure that there is such a thing."

"What, d'you mean to say that you could send me into a trance, and make me eat candles, and generally act the fool? Get away with you! You're joking!"

"All right, then," said Dane, with a curious smile, "we'll leave it at that."

Tom Merry eyed the Anglo-Indian with an expression of astonishment.

Jimmy was still bunched up contentedly on his new friend's shoulder, and had apparently forgotten his hunger.

"D'you believe in it, Monty?" exclaimed Tom Merry, at last.

"Well, it's mighty funny," replied Lowther. "I don't know much about it, but I certainly believe this beggar has something funny about his eyes. He's a beastly hypnotist, and don't know it."

"I do."

"What?"

"Go on with you!"

"D'you mean to say you can mesmerise?"

The juniors fired a fusillade of questions at Clifton Dane.

"Well, all I can say is," said Tom Merry, "if you really can do the 'fluence business, then you'd better start on somebody else. I'm out!"

"By Jove, though," exclaimed Monty Lowther, "that's not a bad wheeze! Let's get up a giddy s-s-sea—"

"Seance," suggested Tom Merry.

"I'd have got it in a minute," retorted Lowther. "Yes, we could have some rare fun!"

Clifton Dane sat on the edge of the table and regarded the enthusiastic Fourth-Former quizzically.

"Where do I come in?" he inquired.

"Why, you're the hypnotist, of course."

"Oh, am I?"

"Yes; you said you could."

"I said I believed in it."

"Well, it's the same thing, anyway," said Monty Lowther. "You can start with Gussy, or Fatty, and—"

"Why not commence with the Head right away?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Ha, ha, ha! You could throw him into a trance, and make him give us halves every day. That's a ripping idea. Then you could have a go at Ratty, and everything would be jolly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The picture called up before the juniors' eyes of Mr. Ratcliff doing the amiable, sent them in a fit of laughter that evoked a squeal of protest from Jimmy.

Two New Readers. See what happens next week.



"Joking apart, though," said Tom Merry, "d'you really think we could get up a show? It would be a lark, even if you couldn't quite manage to convince Gussy that he was a turnip or a steam-roller. Ever tried your hand?"

"Once or twice," admitted Dane, with a slow smile. Tom Merry stared.

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle of triumph.

"There you are! What did I say? I told you so!"

It was not often that the leader of the Shell was at a loss, but the calm affirmative of Dane's came as a surprise.

"Well, I'm blest! This is getting beyond a joke!" he gasped.

"I told you so," muttered Monty Lowther.

"Mind, I don't say that I can exercise any influence on a strong-minded person, or that I could do anything against a person's will; but—"

"My eye!" interrupted Tom Merry. "This is getting quite learned and interesting! Go on!"

Clifton Dane grinned at the evident impression he had made.

"It's a bit risky."

"What? Why?"

"Well, suppose I managed to send D'Arcy off, and couldn't wake him up again?"

"My eye!" ejaculated Lowther.

"That would be a bit awkward," admitted Tom Merry.

"But surely you could do it all right?"

The fun of the thing loomed large in the minds of Tom Merry and Lowther, and they thought little of the risk.

"Well, I'll let you know," said Dane, at last. "Keep it dark until to-morrow, and we'll see. I'll tell you then."

With this the juniors had to be content.

Dane refused to budge from his decision.

"All right, you stubborn old fossil!" grunted Lowther.

"Stay to tea, and we'll try the soft persuasion of a bath bun."

"You're getting quite funny in old age, Monty," said Tom Merry. "Look out, fathead! What's the matter with you?"

Monty Lowther was staring out of the study window into the quad. It was still twilight, and the gates were just visible. Something interesting was evidently going on, for a stream of water was trickling-unheeded from the kettle he held in his hand.

"Fathead! Hold it up!" cried Tom Merry. "Here, let's have a look!"

"Manners!" muttered Monty Lowther, as the leader of the Shell seized the kettle from his unresisting fingers.

"Jingo, that's rough luck!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he peered over Lowther's shoulder and distinguished the figures of Mr. Lathom and Manners standing at the gates.

"What's the matter with him?" inquired Clifton Dane.

"Can't you see, fat— Oh, I forgot! You don't know anything about it! Poor old Manners! It's a fair catch! Lathom's got him right enough this time. He went down to the village for carrots, and I s'pose Lathom will ask all sorts of questions. Here he comes!"

CHAPTER 3.

Tom Merry's Money Box.

THREE eager and excited juniors gathered round the door as the sound of Manners' footsteps coming along the corridor reached their ears.

Six hands grabbed him directly he came in.

"Have you got them?" shouted Lowther.

"What did Lathom say?" cried Tom Merry.

"Did you tell him about Jimmy?" demanded Lowther.

"Here, chuck it!" shouted Manners, wrenching himself free.

The junior was hot with his run, and his encounter with Mr. Lathom at the gates had left him burdened with an impost that would take a couple of hours to wipe off.

"Of course I've got them!" he snapped, banging a handful of carrots on the table. "You don't suppose I went all that way for nothing? Hallo, what's up with Jimmy? He's mighty quiet!"

"Yes; Dane's been mesmerising him," said Lowther.

"Mesmerise my hat!" retorted Manners. "Here, Jimmy!"

Jimmy showed at once that whatever influence Dane may have had over him, he was not proof against carrots, and he woke from his doze to a state of lively expectation. In his anxiety to get at the carrot, he nearly broke his back; but Manners deftly caught him as he fell, and deposited him on the hearthrug.

"It strikes me it's Jimmy that's doing the trick," laughed Manners. "My word, he's fairly putting that carrot through it."

"What did Lathom want?" inquired Dane.

"Oh, just to pass the time of day!" replied Manners

airily. "Lathom and I are rather pals, you know, I don't thi— Sorry!"

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Fork out! Lemme see, that's nininepence to-day!"

Manners dropped a penny into the box thrust under his nose.

"I don't think," he shouted, "that—"

"Here," interrupted Tom Merry, "what's that you said?"

"What?"

"Why, you said, 'I don't think!'"

"That's a bit too th—much!" cried Manners. "Why, that wasn't slang!"

"All right, we'll let you off that time. You nearly put your foot in it again, though; you were going to say thick. I know!"

"Oh, do you?" grunted Manners. "Well, let's have some tea!"

"What's the wheeze?" inquired Clifton Dane curiously.

"What's the giddy box for?"

Manners sniffed.

Tom Merry and Lowther grinned delightedly.

"It's like this," said Tom Merry. "You see—"

"It's this way," interrupted Monty Lowther. "There's such a fearful lot of—"

"After you, Lowther!" cried Tom Merry. "We'd better make it a penny fine for bad manners as well as—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who are you calling names?" demanded Manners, rising suddenly from the grate, and banging his head on the mantelpiece. "Ow! Wow!"

"Chuck it!" shouted Tom Merry. "You'll—"

Manners and Lowther made a wild and simultaneous dash for the "fine" box.

Lowther got it, and jangled its contents in their leader's ear.

Manners rubbed his head, and executed a war dance.

"Come on!" roared Lowther "Put a penny in the box!"

"What for?"

"You know; no backing out, now! In with it!"

"I don't see that 'chuck it' is slang," grumbled Tom Merry.

"Oh, no, of course you don't!" shouted Manners.

"Look who said it!"

"All I can say is, I hope visitors are excepted," said Dane, with a laugh. "I can see you chaps ruining one another. I'm surprised that you should have let your tongues run away with you to the extent of requiring such a drastic method of putting the stopper on. Of course," he went on seriously, "bad language is a terrible thing, and—"

"Who's talking about bad language?" howled Manners. "You've never heard us use words that we need be ashamed of, have you now?"

The junior's question was quite unnecessary, but in the excitement of the moment he was carried away, and, besides, he had just given up coppers that were precious.

"M'yes," said Dane, very seriously, "I dare say you're right, but you can't be too careful, you know. You never can tell how a bad habit will grow. Seeing that there was a likelihood of you chaps becoming a disgrace to the old col—"

Clifton Dane shut up his harangue very suddenly, and made a bee-line for the door.

The look in Tom Merry's eye had been unmistakable, but the Anglo-Indian had left it too late. He was a good yard from the door when the Terrible Three swooped down upon him.

There had been no signal given, but the simultaneousness of their attack left nothing to be desired.

Dane was a well-built, sturdy youngster, but so were the Terrible Three, and he went to the floor with a bump that shook the study window till it rattled.

"I'll teach you to—to be a b-b—a gasbag!" gasped Manners, sitting on the captive's head. "Hold his legs, Monty, and we'll frog-march the beggar!"

"P-p-pax!" spluttered Dane. "Pax, you maniacs! Merry, get—gerroff my chest, you—you—"

"Shall we let it be pax, chaps?" inquired Tom Merry. "It's jolly comfy sitting here!"

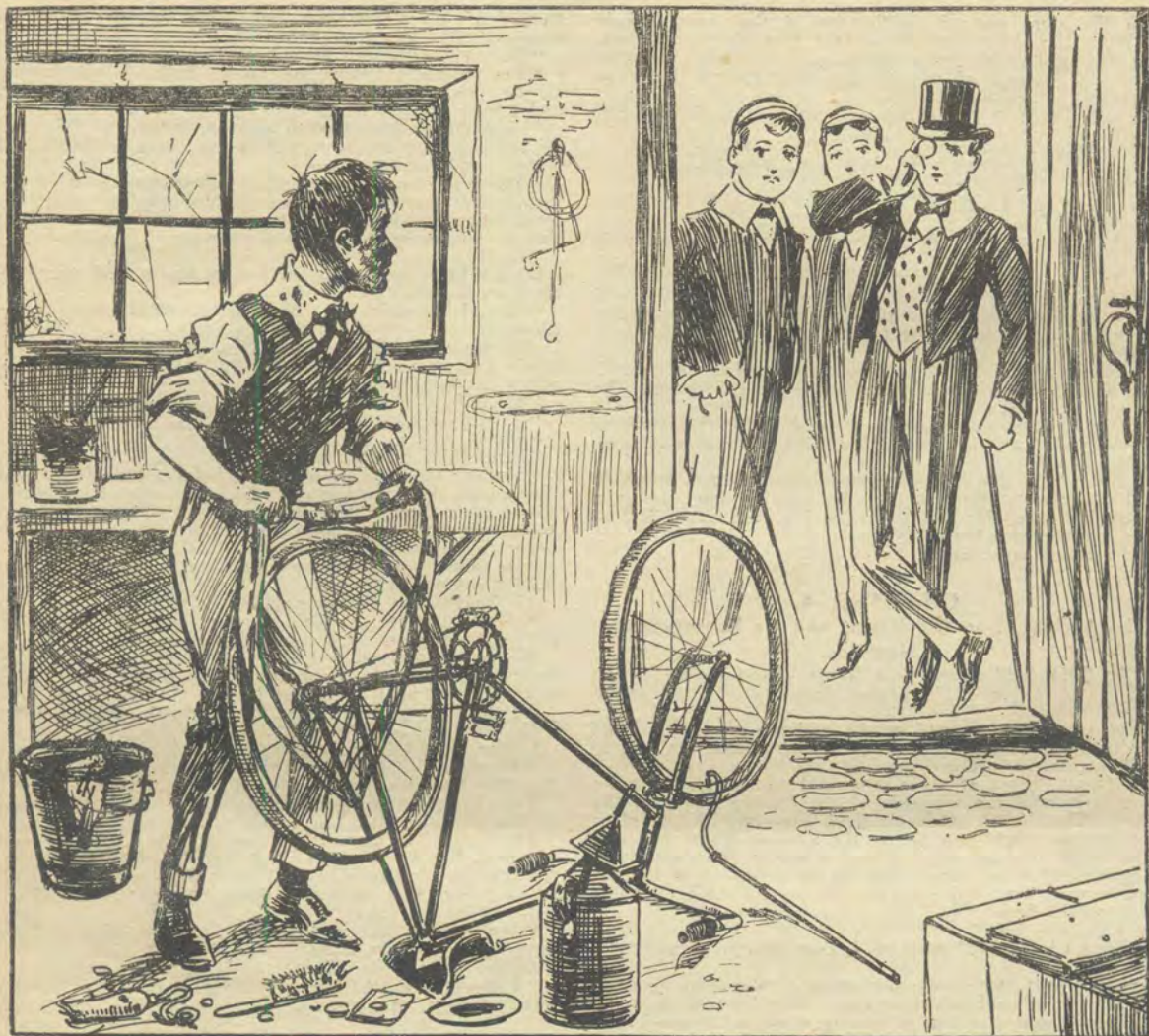
"Do you apologise for your libel?" inquired Lowther, seizing Dane's ankles, and playing a tattoo with his heels on the edge of the fender.

"No—yes—yes!" spluttered Dane. "Yes, fathead!"

"Oh, naughty!" cried Manners, gently rubbing Dane's nose on the carpet. "Mustn't say things like that, you know. Going to take that back, too?"

"Yes—yes!" grunted Dane. "Anything you like!"

"Pax it is, then!" said Tom Merry. "You can get up now and help get the tea!"



"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "Is that really you, Tom Merry?"

Dirty and crumpled, Clifton Dane scrambled to his feet. He grinned cheerfully as he tenderly felt his nose.

"Glad you haven't take the skin off, Manners!"

"Not much fear of that," replied the junior quickly. "Don't want to spoil the pattern of our carpet, you know!"

Clifton Dane burst into a hearty laugh.

"My word! We are getting tart!"

"Oh, Manners always does after dumplings!" said Tom Merry.

"Dumplings?"

"Yes; they're unsuetafable for him, and he always ends up by getting the dumps! Ha, ha!"

Clifton Dane looked more mystified than ever.

Lowther and Manners observed a chilling silence.

Puns of the pudding order were not in favour at Study 1, and it was seldom that the head and leader of the Shell committed himself so atrociously.

However, the deed was done, and Tom Merry faced the situation with characteristic promptness.

"What's the matter with you two silly asses?" he inquired.

Manners and Lowther instantly came to life, and the latter rattled the fine-box in front of Tom Merry.

With a nicely-assumed air of reluctance the culprit dropped in his penny, but a little smile curled the corners of his mouth at the success of his simple ruse to divert his chums' thoughts about his pun.

The manoeuvre was not lost upon Clifton Dane, but he did not say anything; and they all sat down to rather a frugal tea.

"It's the best we can do, Dane," said Tom Merry.

"Funds won't run to extravagances. When the butter runs out we'll have to go to jam, and then—well, we shall have to fall back on cheese. It's a good job we haven't got Billy Bunter to feed. I believe he's worse than our prize fat one."

"Yes; it's a long time since we had a real feed," said Manners. "I s'pose we shall have to wait till some kind friend sends us a postal-order. If things go on like this, Lowther, you'll have to take photographs of all the chaps at threepence a time."

"Ugh!" grunted Lowther, with his mouth full. "I can— Where's Jimmy?"

Manners laid down his teacup with a bang.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed. "I'd clean forgotten all about him. You had him last, Dane. Listen! I can hear him nibbling something."

Monty Lowther sprang to his feet with an air of alarm.

"My camera!" he cried.

Now the juniors were silent the sound as of a rat nibbling a piece of wood could be plainly heard, and Lowther made a dart for the corner where he usually kept his precious camera.

There was a scuffle and a shrill squeal, and, kicking and struggling, Jimmy was deposited none too gently on the hearthrug.

Monty Lowther brought his camera to the light.

"No damage, I hope?" said Clifton Dane.

There were signs of consternation on the faces of Tom Merry and Manners.

Monty Lowther's camera was an expensive luxury that had cost many a little self-denial, but it was something more

than the mere cost of the instrument that caused their anxiety. It was not for nothing that Tom Merry, Manners, and Monty Lowther were chums, and anything likely to upset the feelings of one or the other always drew the sympathy of the other two.

Monty Lowther turned his camera over carefully, and scrutinised every corner.

"Nothing serious, old chap?" said Tom Merry.

"It's all right, isn't it, Monty?" echoed Manners.

"Yes."

A sigh of relief went up.

"That's a good job!"

"He's chewed a bit off the corner, that's all. I'll put it out of harm's way."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums laughed merrily as Monty Lowther dragged his chair from the table to the bookcase, and carefully placed his camera on the top of the biggest piece of furniture in the study.

"That's better," he observed, as he jumped to the ground. "If Jimmy can climb up there, I'll—I'll let him eat the camera, lens and all!"

"Don't you be rash, Lowther!" said Dane. "There's no knowing what a weird little animal like that will do. Look at him now!"

"It's a good job he's not much bigger than a teacup," said Manners. "He's wolfing the edge of our rug at a pretty big rate. He'll start on the bookcase next. Hallo! Was that someone knocking?"

The juniors were silent.

CHAPTER 4.

The Arrival of an Old Friend and the Departure of a New One.

"COME in!" roared Tom Merry. "C-o-m-e i-n!"

"Come in!" shouted Manners. "Don't stand there!"

The study door opened gently, and the edge of a large hat trimmed with bunches of pink roses caused the four to pull themselves together abruptly.

At least three of them managed to assume attitudes consistent with the tea-table of the leading study of the Shell. The fourth—Manners—had his chair tilted at a comfortable angle just before the arrival of the hat and pink roses, but the surprise sent a shiver down his back. He wriggled spasmodically, but his heels went up in the air, and he went over with a crash, and banged the back of his head on the floor.

"I beg— Oh!"

"Miss Cleveland!" exclaimed Tom Merry, springing to his feet.

"Come in! Don't take any notice of Manners; he often does that! It's only his little way! Won't you sit down?"

Flushed, and conscious of having made a fair-sized idiot of himself, Manners got to his feet, and shook hands with their visitor.

Cousin Ethel greeted the junior with an admirable air of unconcern, as if the occasion of her entry was usually met with someone falling over backwards.

Manners glared at Tom Merry, but the presence of D'Arcy's cousin caused him to swallow his wrath.

"I came to find my cousin," said the girl. "Have you seen him? I've been to Study 6, but there's no one there."

"Why, he was here only a little while ago!" replied Tom Merry. "I'll go and find him."

"Thank you! He did not expect me, you know."

Tom Merry ran off, and the others made their welcome visitor as comfortable as possible.

Lowther made a fresh cup of tea, and carefully cut some thin slices of bread-and-butter.

Cousin Ethel sipped the tea, and made no comment on its strange quality, which left much to be desired, since Monty Lowther had forgotten to empty away the old tea-leaves.

The wish for the deed went a long way with Cousin Ethel, and with feminine tactfulness she pleaded the excuse that she had already had tea.

Any one of the juniors would have promptly said something about "rotten stuff," but their simple directness would not have made Lowther's brew any better, and Cousin Ethel's tact certainly saved his pride from downfall. So that, after all, it is just possible that the candid friend who so prides himself on his bluntness is responsible for a number of useless and undeserved heartburnings.

"Been having any larks—I mean, any fun—lately?" said Manners, anxious to stir up the flagging conversation, which showed signs of dwindling into a negligible quantity.

A faint look of astonishment came over the girl's face, but it soon vanished.

"No; I've been having a very quiet time. We went over THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65,

to Arthur's place last week, but it was very— What do you call it?"

"Rotten?" suggested Dane.

"Yes; that's it! Slow, you know. Dull. It was raining all the time, and there was nothing to do except needlework, and I hate needlework."

"So I should think," said Manners fervently. "It must be awfully slow swatting with a tea—with a needle and cotton! Why didn't you—"

Whatever Manners was about to suggest was never known, for at that moment Jimmy, who had scuttled under the table when Cousin Ethel came in, reached the conclusion that she was quite harmless, and came out to investigate.

"Oh!"

Cousin Ethel sprang to her feet in alarm, and promptly stood on her chair.

"Oh! It's a rat! No. What is it? What a horrid little thing!"

"Jimmy's all right!" said Manners, a little huffily. "He won't hurt you. I'm sorry he startled you, though," he added as an afterthought.

"What is it, though?"

"A cavy—a kind of guinea-pig."

"Oh!"

Cousin Ethel resumed her chair.

"I'm not afraid of a guinea-pig," she announced. "I—I thought for the minute it was a rat. I'm sorry I called it a horrid little thing. What a dear it is! What pretty eyes and lovely coat! Oh, do let me hold him!"

The juniors looked at each other doubtfully.

"He might—" commenced Lowther.

"He might nibble your finger," said Manners.

"I thought you said he wouldn't bite?"

"Well, I meant— Well, you see, he won't exactly bite. He's not really savage, but he might think that—"

Manners broke off. He was getting into a hopeless muddle, and there was something very disconcerting in the blue eyes fixed upon his flushed face.

"I don't quite understand," said Cousin Ethel quietly. "He bites, but he doesn't bite. What's this for?"

Clifton Dane held out a piece of carrot.

"If you'll give him this," he said, with a smile, "you'll find that Manners is right, after all."

Then the Anglo-Indian took Jimmy from Manners's unwilling grasp and laid him on the girl's knee.

There was a moment of anxiety for Lowther and Manners, but Jimmy showed no signs of temper. Indeed, the big fur muff carried by Cousin Ethel was very much to his liking, and he nestled down close to it and refused the proffered carrot.

"My word!" muttered Lowther. "You seem to have tamed him properly, Dane."

Clifton Dane smiled slightly, and shook his head.

"I don't think that has anything to do with it. He wasn't hungry, that was all."

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"Bai Jove!"

"Here he is, Miss Cleveland!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as he followed the swell of St. Jim's into the study. "My word! You've made friends with Jimmy!"

"That howwid little beast!"

"Arthur!"

There was admonishment in Cousin Ethel's voice. She quite ignored the fact that she had herself applied the same term to Jimmy only a few minutes before.

Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass, and bowed with an air of finality.

The swell of St. Jim's was on his dig., and, besides, he could not very well argue the point with a lady.

"I think you are perfectly horrid!" said Ethel with cousinly frankness. "He's a dear little thing. I wish he was mine."

The Terrible Three looked at one another.

Cousin Ethel's words had been uttered on the spur of the moment, and she had no intention of asking for the chums' pet.

It was an opportunity not to be lost, however, and Tom Merry acted on the expressive glances of Manners and Lowther.

"We—we shall be very glad if you care to take him," he said.

"Yes, rather!" said Monty Lowther.

"Do! He's taken a liking to you!" said Manners.

"Oh, but I don't like to! I didn't mean—"

"No, of course not!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We know that; and we shall be jolly glad if you care to have the little beggar. I don't suppose we could keep him very long in here. And, besides, he'll be much better off with you."

Cousin Ethel smiled with pleasure. She had taken a great fancy to the little animal.

"Since you put it so nicely, Tom Merry, I will; and thank you, all. I think we had better be going now, Arthur. Will you come with me? Will you carry Jimmy for me?"

There was a roguish look in the girl's eyes, and D'Arcy visibly stiffened.

"Thanks, Ethel," he said, "I'd wathah not! Besides, you're only wotting!"

"Perhaps I am," replied Cousin Ethel. "I'm not sure that I should care to trust the dear little thing with you. You might drop him."

A subdued chuckle came from the Terrible Three.

"My ey—my word!" murmured Manners. "Poor old Gussy is catching it!"

Poor old Gussy stalked to the door, and, with as much frigidness as his genuine admiration for his cousin would allow, held it open for her to pass.

"Ta!" said Clifton Dane calmly, as he followed. "I must get on with some work now."

"Wotah!" muttered the swell of St. Jim's. "I am not in the habit of holding doors open for—"

"Arthur!"

The swell of St. Jim's left the rest of his sentence unfinished, and rejoined his cousin.

"Rats!" whispered Clifton Dane, as he turned with a chuckle in the direction of his study.

"You're not cross with me, are you, Arthur?" inquired Cousin Ethel, as they walked in strained silence to the housekeeper's quarters. "I hadn't time to let you know I was coming down. I shall have to go back to-morrow. Of course, if you don't want me to come and see you, I won't!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, deceived by the oblique reference to himself. "Cwoss? Wathah not!"

"I'm glad of that! Good-night!"

The swell of St. Jim's was left standing outside the housekeeper's door, a look of perplexity on his aristocratic countenance.

After a slight pause he wandered off, thinking deeply. He was conscious that, somehow or other, he had been played with; but exactly how, he could not tell.

As for Cousin Ethel, she retired triumphant, and highly delighted with her prize.

Perhaps she owed a good deal to her pretty face and dainty ways; and if at times she gained more than perhaps was casually calculated to be her due, it must be admitted that the juniors also benefited considerably by her visits to St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes was not very far out when he confided to Mr. Ralston that all boys that were worth their salt were more or less untutored savages, and the Head, wise in his thirty years' experience of boys of all kinds, also knew that the occasional presence of D'Arcy's cousin at the college had a refining influence on his charges.

"Well, we've soon lost our pet," said Tom Merry, when the door had closed on their visitors. "But," he went on, with a sly glance at Manners and Lowther, "there's one

good thing, we sha'n't need to build cage for him. Ha, ha, ha!"

Manners and Lowther looked at one another with a guilty expression; and then the humour of the situation when they were squabbling earlier in the evening struck them, and they burst out laughing.

"What a silly ass you were!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Same to you!" retorted Manners, with a cheerful grin.

"We shall have to get the one and only professor, Clifton Dane, on your track when you get obstreperous!"

"My aunt!" gasped Lowther. "You'll crack your jaw if you use those expressions. What are you doing, Tom?"

"Prep.," said Tom Merry laconically. "Days may come, and days may go, but prep. goes on for ever."

"Oh, you go and boil yourself!" said Manners, raking about for his pen.

"Cue!"

The juniors looked at Tom Merry's bent head intently; but the chief of Study 6 went on with his work assiduously, and soon the Terrible Three's pens were all racing and scratching over their exercise-books.

The Terrible Three had not been at work long before a loud bang came at the door.

"Oh, all right!" whispered Tom Merry. "They can't come in, whoever they are; I've locked the door."

Bang!

"Who's that?" shouted Lowther.

"Me! I—me! Us!" came a muffled voice.

"It's Jack Blake and the rest of them," said Manners.

"You can't come in!" shouted Tom Merry. "We're busy; and Manners has a little batch to do for Lathom!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Jack Blake's voice. "So long, then!"

The Terrible Three listened to the sound of retreating footsteps, and then resumed their prep.

"I say!" said Manners, looking up suddenly, after an uninterrupted silence of five minutes. "What's all this about Dane?"

"What?" inquired Lowther.

"Why, you said something about hypnotism, or something or other."

"It must have been the other," muttered Tom Merry.

"Oh, don't rot!" exclaimed Manners.

"Hand over the box, Monty."

Nothing loth, Lowther obeyed.

Manners scowled. The sight of the box was getting on his nerves.

"Sha'n't!" he muttered. "Keep your beastly old box!"

"Tuppence!" said Tom Merry, without stopping his work.

"You go and eat coke!"

"Threepence!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Fourepence!"

"Oh, dry up, for goodness' sake! The beastly thing's a—"

"Fivence!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Sixpence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther howled with laughter.

"What are you cackling about?" demanded Manners.

"Sevenpence!" chanted Tom Merry.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Manners glared and gulped.

"Sevenpence!" repeated Tom Merry, in a monotonous tone of voice. "Sevenpence!"

With a gurgle of laughter, Lowther pushed the offensive box nearer to the angry junior.

"Sha'n't! Won't!" declared Manners.

"Eightpence—ninpence!"

"You're a pair of silly asses!"

"Tenpence!"

"Dry up! Go and eat coke!"

"Eleven— Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Very red in the face, Manners got up from his chair, and thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Here, you," he said, banging a handful of coins on the table. "I've done with the wretched thing! Fines are off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When you've quite finished cackling," observed Manners at last, calming down a little, "I'll finish my prep."

"Right you are!" said Tom Merry, glad that the matter was going to end there, for he saw that his chum had been getting really angry. "After all, it's rather rot; for as far as I can see, it only leads to more slang than ever."

"Go hon!" said Lowther. "You're joking!"

"Yes; and I wouldn't mind saying that you two have

said a good many words that ought to have brought in fines," said Manners.

"That's more than likely!" replied Tom Merry, with a laugh. "I dare say I could remember some of Monty's, if I tried."

"Oh, could you?" retorted Lowther. "If you do, I wonder how many pennies I can put down to your little account? Anyhow, I'm jolly glad it's over! It did get a bit nerry now to be able to call you two a pair of silly asses. I suppose if we'd gone on with it, we should have had to substitute a new set of words? Instead of telling you to eat coke, I should have had to say something about masticating the residue of coal."

"And we should then address you as a half-demented specimen of a biped," added Tom Merry.

"Come to think of it," put in Manners. "I expect you'd think it jolly sarcastic of me if, instead of saying 'Dry up!' when you're cackling too much, I said: 'Please, do not talk so much!' or some long-winded thing or other."

"It strikes me that you'd get a thick ear!" said Tom Merry. "You chaps finished? It's time we went to by-bye."

"Right-ho! I'm ready!" said Monty Lowther.

"But what's the mystery about Dane?" said Manners, returning persistently to the subject.

"You wait till to-morrow, old son!" replied Tom Merry. "Don't worry now. We'll let you into the secret when we get to the dormy."

CHAPTER 5.

Skimpole Loses His Spectacles.

CLIFTON DANE entered the study which he shared more or less—mostly less—comfortably with Gore, the cad of the Fourth, Mellish, his toady and lieutenant, and Skimpole, the amateur Socialist and propagandist. When Dane entered he was still smiling over his little rag with Arthur Augustus, but the scene that met his gaze soon altered his expression.

Gore and Mellish were passing the time in baiting and teasing the amateur Socialist to their heart's content. There was about as much sense of funniness in the make-up of the pair as one would expect to find in a monkey—not to libel the monkey—and their japes and fakes invariably degenerated to some form of cruelty.

On this particular occasion, Gore had hidden Skimpole's spectacles, and the efforts of the short-sighted junior to discover his property made the pair hold their sides with laughter.

Without his glasses, Skimpole might as well have been in a pit, and just as Dane came in he stumbled and caught his head with a bang against a sharp corner of the chimney-piece that brought water to his eyes, and reeled back half-stunned with the shock and force of the blow.

Dane caught the junior, and Gore and Mellish stifled their cackle of merriment.

"You—you pair of rotters!" exclaimed Dane, as he swung the little junior into a chair. "This is some of your doing!"

"I don't—it was my own fault, Dane," said Skimpole, in a faint voice. "I took off my glasses, and laid them down somewhere on the table, and—"

"You couldn't find them," finished Dane. "Not to be wondered at, either, with cad Gore about."

"Who are you talking to?" blustered Gore. "What do you know about it?"

"I'm talking to you," retorted Clifton Dane, with a straight glance from his flashing eyes at the bully that caused Gore's pale eyes to flicker from side to side; "and what's more, you've got to hand over those glasses straight away."

Clifton Dane had made a bold guess at the true state of affairs, and events proved that he had hit the bull's-eye first shot.

"It was only a joke," said Gore, trying to muster up a laugh. "Of course, you would poke your nose into what doesn't concern you!"

"I'll attend to your nose in a way you won't like if you don't keep your mouth closed!" said Dane sharply. "Ah, that's better!"

The cad of St. Jim's laid the spectacles on the table, and searched his thoughts. Previous experience had taught him to respect the Anglo-Indian when he was roused, and Dane had long ago realised that the only way to make his own life tolerable in the study was to keep a tight rein and a sharp tongue on Gore.

Skimpole lost no time in putting on his glasses, and he blinked reproachfully at his study mates.

"I think that was rather a mean sort of trick," he said. "As a sincere Socialist, I—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Gore rudely. "We're not going to listen to your silly cackle. Let's get out of this, Mellish."

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65.

Followed by his crony, the cad slouched out of the room, and expressed a little more of what he dared not put into words by slamming the door.

"How do you feel, Skimmy?" inquired Dane, ignoring the banging of the study door. "I should say you've got a nice headache."

"Nothing to speak of, thanks," replied the amateur Socialist, who, if he was not an athlete, was certainly a sportsman. "I'll get on with some work. I've reached the six hundred and seventy-ninth chapter of my book on Socialism."

Skimpole went to his desk, and Clifton Dane settled himself comfortably with a book. Prep, was well advanced, so he could afford the luxury of half an hour's enjoyment.

Tom Merry & Co. would have opened their eyes if they had seen the title of the volume Clifton Dane perused so diligently. It was the "Science and Practice of Hypnotism."

For a time there was silence in the study, and, what was more to the point, there was peace and comfort. Gore and Mellish had gone, and were having a confidential chat in the privacy of the box-room.

Presently the sound of footsteps came from the corridor, and halted outside the study door.

Bang!

Skimpole uttered a startled exclamation, and dropped a blot of ink on page 1,465 of his manuscript.

Clifton Dane put his book in his pocket, and looked up.

"Come in!" he said.

The study door was flung wide open, and three juniors crowded in.

"Hallo!" cried Jack Blake, looking round. "All on your little lonesomes? Where's the gentle Gore? Gone a-plotting, or have you chucked him out?"

"Something like it. That's near enough," replied Clifton Dane. "What are you chaps after?"

"Oh, nothing in particular. We're looking for Gussy, that's all. Seen him?"

"Why, he was in Tom Merry's study."

"We've just come from there."

"What, just now?"

"Yes. He's not there. They're all swotting away, with the door locked."

"But I left him about half an hour ago. He was going to see Miss Cleveland to the housekeeper's—"

"What!" shouted Jack Blake. "Cousin Ethel?"

"He never said a word about her coming!" exclaimed Digby.

"Well, I'm blest!" muttered Herries. "Fancy him keeping it dark like that!"

"I thought he'd gone off to look for his beastly ring!" grumbled Blake. "Won't old Figgy be wild when he finds out he's been done in the eye!"

"Who's been done in the eye?" inquired a voice.

"Why, who—"

"What are you New House chaps doing over here this time of night?" demanded Digby, eyeing the rival Co.

"Never you mind what we're doing," said the long-legged leader of the New House. "What was that Blake was gassing about?"

"Nothing much," said Blake off-handedly. "Miss Cleveland came over, that's all."

Figgins's plain face flushed.

"Oh, is that all?" he said lamely.

"Yes, that's all," replied Blake. "What d'you want?"

"Prowling round to see what they can find!" cried Digby. "I know 'em," he went on delightedly. "Look at Figgy's face; it's like a blessed sunset!"

"We—we came over about the cricket fixture," explained Figgins hurriedly. "It's a half to-morrow, and we haven't settled who we're to play."

"Lemme see," replied Jack Blake reflectively. "There's the Grammar crowd, and the Wingfield bunch, and the Codicote scratch lot. No, I think to-morrow's a non-fixture."

"Besides," he went on mischievously, "Miss Cleveland is not returning till to-morrow evening."

"Good-night!" said Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn looked as if he would like to have stayed in the hope of getting something to eat, but it was dangerous to remain in the rival camp alone, so he waddled after his leader.

The chums of Study No. 6 chuckled hugely over Figgins's sudden departure, and Jack Blake's little bit of teasing needed no explaining to Dane or Skimpole. The latter was usually occupied with abstract speculations, but the obviousness had long been apparent, even to his short-sighted vision.

"Well, Figgins isn't Gussy," said Jack Blake. "You haven't got him, and Tom Merry & Co. haven't, so where can he be? Hope to goodness the silly chump hasn't gone and lost himself."

"Are you wewfewing to me, Blake?" inquired the swell of



Skimpole's left leg went up, then his right; and, with short, mincing steps, he sailed gaily across the study.

St. Jim's, suddenly stepping into the doorway. "Because if so, I must ask you to address me in a moah wespectful mannah!"

"My hat!" Jack Blake gasped. "Is this a sort of Jack-in-the-box turn? First Figgy and then you. I shall begin to think you've been hiding. What do you mean by popping up like that, and startling us?"

"I absolutely wefuse to wegard your wemarks as sewious," said Arthur Augustus. "I've been thinkin' and—"

"Goodness!" muttered Digby. "Thinking, my eye!"

"Digby, I shall be compelled to administrah a feahful fwashin'. I wegard you with contempt."

"Where have you been to?" demanded Jack Blake.

"I've been havin' a stwoll," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"A what?" inquired Herries.

"A stwoll—a stwoll in the quadwangle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"My hat!"

"A woll in the wangle," mimicked Digby. "Oh, Gussy, we shall have to shut you up with Reilly for a week, so that you can pick up a few of his extra r's and mangle wangle in rangle!"

"Here, you're getting too funny for words, Dig!" cried Jack Blake. "Have you found your ring, Gussy?"

"Bai Joye, no!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's. He had clean forgotten his loss. "Bai Joye, I shall have to inwease the weward!"

"Let me see. You've already offered five thousand, haven't you?" inquired Dane.

Arthur Augustus turned on his most freezing glance.

"You surpwise me, Dane. The weward I offahed was half a sov. I have already inweased it to a sov., and undah the cires. I shall pwobably offah anothah half a sov."

"How much will that be, then?" inquired Digby innocently.

"Two sovs., of course, deah boy!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Ah, I see! You worked that out very well."

"You are a set of wottahs!" cried Arthur Augustus, as a general laugh went up.

"Yes, and I know another," said Jack Blake, as a sudden thought ran into his mind. "I've got a bone to pick with you, my son. Why didn't you tell us Miss Cleveland was coming over? Keeping it dark like that!"

The suddenness of the inquiry took the swell of St. Jim's by surprise, and he gazed at his chums without uttering a word.

"I call it a rotten trick!" said Blake.

"So do I," said Digby.

"Beastly low down," muttered Herries.

"I didn't think you would do a thing like that, Gussy," went on Blake. "I really didn't, did you, Dig?"

"No," replied Digby promptly.

"But—"

"No buts," said Blake, interrupting, and warming to his subject. "I think it most ungentlemanly. I do, indeed!"

The swell of St. Jim's went scarlet.

Clifton Dane had all he could do to keep a reasonably straight face.

"But—"

"Let him go on," said Jack Blake, with an air of resignation. "We may as well hear what he has to say."

"I ask you to withdraw your opprobrious expressions," said D'Arcy, with fine dignity. "Until you do so, I refuse to have anythin' moah to say."

"But you know it was not the kind of thing—" commenced Jack Blake.

"Do you withdraw?"

The leader of Study No. 6 eyed him chum closely.

"There's more in this than meets the hi," he muttered. "Do we withdraw, chaps?" he said aloud.

Digby and Herries looked astonished, but gave their assent.

"You withdraw? Wight! I will explain to you wotahs that I was unawah that my cousin was coming, and of her awwival."

The three looked duly abashed at D'Arcy's announcement, and even Skimpole glanced up from his pile of manuscript, and blinked at Dane's roar of laughter.

"Hear me smile?" murmured Jack Blake. "Sorry, Gussy, but you might have told us that you didn't know she was coming, and then we should have known that you didn't know. If we had known that you didn't know, then we should have—have known—see?"

This little bit of word juggling came at an opportune moment, and, as Blake afterwards confided to Digby and Herries, "it just saved Arthur from getting a swelled head."

As it was, the swell of St. Jim's was bundled out of the study before he could recover his puzzled wits, and Study No. 5 retired noisily to bed.

"Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

"Not so much row, you youngsters," said Kildare, coming to his study door.

Four voices instantly shouted "Good-night!" and the captain shut his door rather quickly.

"Can't very well give us an imput, for saying good-night," said Jack Blake, with a chuckle of delight. "Come on, Sussy, leave thinking until the morning, and we'll help you. You mustn't lose your beauty sleep."

Arthur Augustus walked down the corridor in dignified silence, but when they were all in bed he sat up suddenly.

"Blake!" he whispered. "What did you mean by saying if you had known that I—oh, wats!"

A particularly healthy snore came from Jack Blake's bed. Arthur Augustus broke off in disgust, flopped down again, and very wisely laid his own head on his pillow, and, although he did not know it, was sound asleep long before any of the others.

CHAPTER 6.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy is Mysterious.

AN hour later, to anyone gifted with the tread of a cat, the power of a mind-reader, and the wisdom of a Henry James, the dormitories of St. Jim's would have presented an interesting study, and the book of life would have been laid open.

The juniors slept in various strange attitudes, and their faces revealed their characters in language unmistakable as the printed word.

Tom Merry lay on his side, and his face showed nothing but a little more frankness and openness than in the daytime, when some piece of mischief generally occupied his mind, and conveyed an idea that the owner was fun-loving, rather than of a serious disposition. The serious side of life for Tom Merry had yet to come, but the power to grapple with it was well defined in the firm lines of the jaw that lay half-hidden by the bedclothes.

Clifton Dane showed even more power. For in some way—not in years—he was older than Tom Merry, and even in sleep his face showed resolute purpose.

Blake, Digby, Herries, D'Arcy, the chums of the New House, Skimpole, Reilly, Wally, Jameson, Curly Gibson of the Third, and several others, all showed their true selves and could have withstood scrutiny, but there were certainly two that would have caused a feeling of anxiety for their safety had there been a mysterious and kindly visitant going the rounds and taking note.

Gore was one, and Mellish the other.

Their faces and their unconscious attitudes betrayed them. Perverted strength of character in the one and weakness in the other.

The cad of St. Jim's frowned and muttered in his sleep; Mellish turned uneasily and huddled himself in a heap, as if in dread of a blow.

No secrets were revealed that night, however, and the juniors slept on, through the darkness and dawn, until the sound of the first bell woke them one by one to the fun or the care of a new day.

Gore greeted the morning sunlight with a bad-tempered grunt, and turned over with a muttered sneer at Tom Merry, who had already got one foot out of bed.

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65.

Manners, who occupied the next bed, eyed him with a speculative look.

"Let him alone," said Tom Merry; "he always wakes up in a bad temper."

"Yes, and keeps it up all day," said Monty Lowther, trying to ram his left foot into his right boot.

"Oh, well, he can't help it," replied the leader of the Shell; "it's the nature of the beast! What shall we do? If we're sharp, we can have a run round before brekker!"

This proposal was readily agreed to, and most of the Fourth followed the Terrible Three into the sunny quad.

Gore and Mellish were left to their own devices.

The Fourth-Formers were not the only early ones, for a small party of Third-Formers greeted them with derisive howls.

"Yah!" shouted Wally minor. "Think you're the only ones that can crawl out of your snug little nests?"

The swell of St. Jim's made a grab for his young brother, but the younger D'Arcy dashed off. Unluckily he did not look where he was going, and plunged into Manners' ready arm.

"Here's an early bird that's caught a worm, anyhow!" cried the Fourth-Former. "You little brat!"

By a skilful twist, Wally released himself and scampered off, with a whoop of defiance.

Manners looked after him longingly, but felt it incumbent upon his dignity not to provide the rest of the school with the spectacle of a lordly Fourth-Former chasing a kid of the Third. Wally's well-known nimbleness may have had something to do with Manners' decision, but that cannot be made known.

"If Glyn were here, we could get him to bring out his latest wheeze in aeroplanes," said Jack Blake, as they strolled round the grounds.

"Well, he's not here, and won't be back till Saturday next," replied Tom Merry; "so it's no good talking about what we might do, or what we might not. Can't you think of something else?"

"Yes, I can," said Blake promptly. "I can think of taking a certain clever person down to the gym, and having a round or two with the gloves."

"Who's going to help you?" inquired Tom Merry.

"I don't want any help," retorted Blake. "Coming?"

"Who—me?"

"Yes, you!"

"Not me!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I'm off gloves for a time. It's too ripping a morning to start knocking your head off. I'm going to stay out in the sun and grow freckles. Try Gussy, instead; he's spoiling for a dust-up!"

Jack Blake laughed good-humouredly, and the Terrible Three and Study 6 managed to get along for the next ten minutes without any fireworks.

Figgins & Co. strolled up just before the breakfast-bell went, and the rest of the Fourth had the edification of seeing the three rival Co.'s together without any signs of bloodshed.

Signals of warfare between them were beginning to loom up when the bell went, but as they had to obey its incessant clang, no one outside the inner circle was aware that an outbreak of hostilities had been imminent.

"What about the giddy seance?" inquired Lowther, as he went into the breakfast-hall with Dane. "Is it coming off?"

"I think so."

"Good! When, this afternoon?"

"I can't be certain yet. I want to make sure. Shut up, now, Railton's got his optic cast this way."

Breakfast and the short interval afterwards went all too quickly, and morning classes dragged along with leaden slowness. But at last the bell went for dinner, and school was over for the day.

A sprinkling of imputs, were showered on some too impatient juniors, but either by luck or an unusual attentiveness, the rival Co.'s escaped very lightly.

Immediately after lunch Figgins & Co. made their appearance in the quad, and it was clear that the Head's house had some unusual attraction for Figgins in particular.

The three were observed from the window of Study 1, and it was not long before Blake & Co. also appeared at their own window.

"Herries," said Jack Blake reflectively, "I think we might get up something in the way of an impromptu picnic for Miss Cleveland, eh?"

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Digby.

ANSWERS

"I'm afraid, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, "that you are a bit too pwevious!"

"How's that?"

"Well, you see, my cousin is weturin' by an early twain, and a—picnic is out of the question."

"My hat; that's a pity!" replied Blake. "Never mind, we'll all go and see her off!"

There was a pause, and Jack Blake looked rather surprised when Arthur Augustus did not reply.

The swell of St. Jim's unconcernedly turned over his latest consignment of ties.

"How d'you like this?" he inquired, holding up a most gorgeous affair in yellow spots on a pea-green background.

"I think it's wathah swaggah!"

"So do I," muttered Jack Blake absent-mindedly. "I don't quite like the cut of it, though."

"The cut, deah boy?"

"Oh, sorry! I thought it was a waistcoat you were holding up!" replied Blake. "What's your little game?" he went on abruptly.

"I am selecting a tie, deah boy," replied Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, I know that!" retorted Blake impatiently. "But you've got something up your sleeve!"

"Bai Jove! I assuah you I have only my w'ist and arm, deah boy!"

This sort of thing was quite unusual from the swell of St. Jim's, and Jack Blake's suspicions deepened, but he said nothing about it for the time.

Digby and Herries shared their leader's uneasiness, and while they were silently regarding one another Tom Merry & Co. came in.

"Anything on?" inquired Tom Merry. "I was thinking we might get up some little surprise for—"

"Cousin Ethel?" finished Jack Blake.

"Yes, How did you know?"

"It's not difficult to guess. But surprises are off—Miss Cleveland is going home by an early train."

The Terrible Three showed their disappointment.

"But we can see her off from the station," went on Jack Blake, keeping a watchful eye on D'Arcy.

"All right," said Tom Merry, blissfully unconscious of the rift in the lute and Blake's black suspicions. "I tell you what. Let's get our bikes, and one of us can take her down in a trailer. We can easily hire one in the village."

Tom Merry's idea was voted A1, the only silent one being Arthur Augustus, who seemed to have unusual difficulty in deciding on his tie.

"Who's going to take her, though?" said Digby.

"Oh, we can easily fix that afterwards!"

"What about your jigger?" cried Blake. "You've not used it this year—it must be in an awful state!"

"Oh, soon put that to rights!" said Tom Merry. "I'll go and see to it now. What train is Miss Cleveland going by?"

"The founah-ten, deah boy," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Good! Will you see to the trailer, Manners?"

"Can't, Merry. You know Monty and I must finish off those lines for Latham."

"Bother! You'll have to see to it then, Blake," said the leader of the Shell. "Cut down to the village and bring it up to the shed. I'll soon hitch it on to my jigger."

"Will you?" muttered Jack Blake. "Oh, yes, I'll cut down to the village! You coming, Gussy?"

"I'm goin' to dwess, deah boy," replied Arthur Augustus.

"What! You don't want to dress up to ride a dirty old bike!"

"I'm not goin' to wide my jiggah, Blake; it's such a beastly fag! I think I shall west for a while!"

Very reluctantly the three went out.

"I'm sure he's up to something or other," said Jack Blake. "Blest if I know what it can be, though!"

"Oh, Gussy's all right!" exclaimed Herries. "He's too much taken up with his new ties to think of anything else!"

"Hope you're right," said Jack Blake laconically.

CHAPTER 7.

Cousin Ethel's Send-Off.

TOM MERRY opened the shed door with an air of pleased expectation. His idea for escorting their girl chum to the station pleased him immensely, and he whistled a lively tune.

"Hallo!" he muttered, when he got the door open. "Where's my jigger?"

The junior peered round in the gloom, but there was no sign of his last year's machine. At length he caught sight of a handle-bar sticking out of a pile of rubbish.

"My word!"

The leader of the Shell had in a rash moment set himself a task that was likely to tax both his patience and ability.

From behind the pile of broken boxes and odds and ends of rubbish, after strenuous exertions, he managed to drag forth his bicycle.

It was covered with a thick layer of dust; and this did not prove to be the worst, for beneath the dust the plated parts were rusted, as was shown when he applied a finger to the top of the forks, and a dark red roughness was revealed.

"My eye," he muttered to himself, "this is a tough job! Both tyres down, of course! I hope to goodness the rubber hasn't perished! I suppose I ought to have taken the beastly things off, and covered them with chalk, and smeared the rest of the parts with vaseline."

Tom Merry carried his machine—it was too badly off to wheel—nearer to the door of the shed, and turning it over on to handle-bars and saddle, whipped off his coat.

While he turned up his shirt-sleeves, he eyed his jigger, once so bright and spick and span, with a calculating eye.

"Blest if I know where to start first!" he said aloud. "I never thought the thing would get into this fearful state. I shall have to look sharp, too!"

Without, all was sunshine and freshness. The shouts of his schoolmates sounded from the playing fields.

Within the shed all was gloom and dust and mustiness, and some of the gloom seemed to settle on Tom Merry's usually bright face.

"This won't do!" he went on, after a silent survey. "Must make a start somehow. Jingo, I've a good mind to chuck it back! I'm blest if I will, though I can just see old Blake cackling for a week. Come on!"

Tom Merry grasped a pedal, but it refused to "come on." It stuck fast, and it was only after an extra strong pull that he succeeded in starting it.

The chain groaned and creaked and rode on the top of the cogs, strained to breaking point with the accumulated rust. The back tyre chafed dismally against the back stays, and the back hub creaked as if at every half turn it would crack with the strain.

With a very red face Tom Merry gave up turning the crank, and pushed his sleeves up a little further.

"This is just about the limit!" he growled, as he wiped his moist brow. "Oh, well, it's not the least bit of good grousing! Wonder if I can find some oil?"

His search was rewarded by the discovery of a can of paraffin on a shelf in a far corner of the shed.

"This'll do the trick!" he muttered, as he daubed the handle-bars, chain-wheel, pedals, and hubs with a rag soaked in paraffin. "Now we sha'n't be long! My eye, that's done it!"

An end of the rag dangling loose had liberally deposited a stream of oil on the front tyre, and the junior knew full well that oil spelt disaster to pneumatic covers.

In his despair he rammed his oily, dust-begrimed fingers through his curly hair, and then seizing an old toothbrush he had thoughtfully brought with him, he rammed the handle between the tyre and the rusty rim, and after some exertion ripped off the cover. He gave a grunt of disgust and despair as he saw that the inner tube was adhering to the cover. Then he gave a gentle tug, and the rubber parted in a long, uneven slit.

Tom Merry dropped the tyre and stepped back.

"This beats everything!"

The junior was hot, and, above all, thoroughly disgusted with himself for having been so ready to take on the job.

For five minutes he sat on an upturned box, with his head propped between his dirty hands, and tried to recover his spirits. Then he jumped up and attacked the back tyre.

He wrestled with it in grim, determined silence, and at last succeeded in getting the cover off without injury to the inner tube.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry looked up, and saw the swell of St. Jim's, spick and span, Digby, and Herries watching him with interest.

"Bai Jove, is that you, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes. Who d'you think it is," retorted the leader of the Shell, "the boot boy?"

It was an unfortunate remark, for Tom did not know the condition of his face, and the three laughed heartily.

"What the dickens are you cackling about?" he demanded.

"Bai Jove, have a look!"

Arthur Augustus held out a dainty little pocket mirror, and Tom Merry gave a howl of dismay.

"What's the time?" he roared, flinging his dismantled machine away. "Has Blake come back?"

"It's half-past three, deah boy."

"Blake's waiting in the quad," shouted Herries, as Tom Merry sprinted off to have a wash.

The leader of the Shell washed and made himself present.

able in record time. It was twenty to four when he came up to Blake.

"I've sent down to hire you a jigger," said the leader of Study No. 6.

"That's jolly good of you, Blake!" exclaimed Tom Merry gratefully. "So you're going to have the honour," he went on, pointing to the trailer bolted to Blake's bicycle.

"My yes!" replied Blake doubtfully.

"What's up?" inquired Tom Merry. "Hallo, here's Figgy and Binks with my jigger! Good! Where's Gussy?"

Just at that moment the swell of St. Jim's came through the big gates, and, looking at his watch, strolled leisurely across the quad.

"Where the dickens is the image going to?" muttered Jack Blake. "He's going through the Head's garden!"

"There's Miss Cleveland!" said Tom Merry.

The front door of the Head's house opened, and D'Arcy's cousin came out, and stood talking to the doctor on the steps. Jimmy was comfortably ensconced inside her muff.

"You'd better look sharp, Blake," said Tom Merry. "Go and make your best bow. I suppose she was going to walk it. I don't see any signs of the Head's turn-out."

The assembled juniors followed Jack Blake in a body, and Cousin Ethel looked at them in some surprise.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "I suppose the boys are going to ride with you to the station. Your cousin is late. Ah, here he is!"

The last few words reached the ears of Jack Blake, and he stopped abruptly.

There was a rattle of iron and a stifled howl from someone in the rear as the cavalcade came to a sudden halt.

Then there was a hurried scurry at the sound of hoofs coming round the drive from the doctor's stables, and the juniors just managed to get clear of the gravel as a trap swung round the corner.

"My hat!"

"Gussy!"

"Sold!"

The swell of St. Jim's totally ignored the crowd of juniors, and drew up smartly at the porch.

"You've no time to lose," said the Head, as he assisted the smiling girl to the seat beside Arthur Augustus.

"I wathah think we shall have plenty of time, sir," said the swell of St. Jim's. "I have dwiven this mare before, and she can do a good fourteen in the hour."

"All right, D'Arcy; only be careful," said the Head, with a smile. "Good-bye, Ethel!"

While this little conversation was going on, the juniors hid their diminished heads, slunk out of the gates with all speed, and when the swell of St. Jim's turned his horse to go, not a bicycle was to be seen.

"I wonder where the others have gone to?" said Cousin Ethel, in surprise. "I— Oh, there they are!"

Arthur Augustus eyed the little band of cyclists riding slowly along in front with disfavour. He cracked his whip, and tried to sweep past them, but he could not shake them off.

Jack Blake rattled along behind, with the empty trailer bumping in the air at every stone, and Cousin Ethel gave him a smile that fully compensated for his grievous downfall.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy handled the ribbons in grand style, and the discomfited juniors, mounted on their bicycles, flitted past with an air of not being at all put out by the swell of St. Jim's success.

"A weally wippin' aftahnoon for a dwive, Ethel," he observed, as he swerved round the winding lane. "Bai Jove, I considah dwiving much bettah than widin' a beasty bicycle! Don't you, Ethel?"

"Oh, I don't think it's any better, Arthur," replied Cousin Ethel, with a demure smile. "I ride a bicycle at home, you know."

"Yes; oh, yes, of course!" replied Arthur Augustus. "But it's wathah diffewent for a girl, don't you know?"

"No, I don't."

"But it's moah—"

"Suitable for girls?"

"Yea, wathah!"

"But you don't think Tom Merry or—or Figgins at all girlish, do you?"

There was a roguish look in Ethel's eyes that escaped the notice of D'Arcy. Just at that moment the attention of Arthur Augustus was divided between driving, consciousness that Digby was riding close beside the splashboard, scowling up at him, and Cousin Ethel's pouter. To make matters worse, Figgins came pedalling up on his near side, and Cousin Ethel leaned out of the trap and laughed merrily at his bashful attempts to explain the meaning of the empty trailer.

"I think you've been very horrid, Arthur," said Miss Cleveland, as they drew up at the station. "Why didn't

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you tell them that you were going to drive me back to the station?"

This savoured of black ingratitude to the swell of St. Jim's, but he managed to gasp out the actual unadorned truth.

"I wanted to dwive you."

The simple statement drew the sting from Cousin Ethel's next remark, but, all the same, there was a hint of resentment in her voice.

"I don't think it was quite nice of you," she said, "but thank you for driving me. Good-bye!"

Figgins was waiting to help Cousin Ethel to descend, and Arthur Augustus looked round wildly for someone to take charge of his horse.

"Don't trouble to get down, Arthur," said his cousin. "Besides, my train is just coming in."

"Blake! Hewwies! Blake, Hewwies, Digby!"

A sudden attack of deafness seemed to have suddenly come over the juniors of St. Jim's, and D'Arcy's frantic appeals passed unheeded.

One after another they followed Figgins and Cousin Ethel into the station. Even Patty Wynn lumbered along in the rear, without turning his head.

A shrill whistle rent the air as the London train rattled into the station, and D'Arcy's steed gave a sudden jump that luckily landed the driver plump into the seat. This only served to startle the mare still more, and she pranced about with flattened ears that spoke eloquently of wickedness, and an imminent desire to bolt.

Under less skilful hands there would most likely have been trouble, but the control of anything in the shape of a horse was second nature to Arthur Augustus; and after a few nervous starts, the animal stood quieted.

As the train puffed out of the station and over the bridge, the swell of St. Jim's pulled round, and kept level with the engine.

He heard the juniors' shouts of good-bye, and eagerly scanned the carriage windows, as one by one they crept past. He had almost lost all hope, when suddenly a face appeared at one of the windows, and a white handkerchief fluttered in the breeze.

At the risk of being run away with again, Arthur Augustus sprang to his feet with a yell of delight.

"Bai Jove! Bai Jove! Bai Jove!"

The first expression was one of pleasure, the second surprise, and the third should have been fright, for the mare was going at a gallop; but the swell of St. Jim's merely balanced himself in the swaying vehicle, and apostrophised the frightened mare with a shrill:

"Wun, wun like anythin', you bwute! Wun, Polly!"

The admonition was scarcely needed, for Polly pounded along at a pace that kept her level with the train, which was ascending a slight gradient.

Cousin Ethel waved her handkerchief violently, and then with a roar and a rattle the engine plunged into a tunnel.

Arthur Augustus at once turned his attention to Polly, and thanks to a wrist steady and stronger than his appearance suggested, reduced his pace to a trot, and finally to a halt.

"Bai Jove!" he said to himself as he eyed her heaving flanks. "We must have a west!"

Ten minutes later Polly's head was turned in the direction of Rylcombe, and by the time they came in sight of the station, neither the swell of St. Jim's or his charge showed any signs of their race with the train.

"We were just coming after you to collect the bits," shouted Jack Blake, as their scholfellow reined up.

"You're a lively sort of chap! There's a wire just come from your cousin. Nice sort of fright you gave her! What d'you mean by it? Look here!"

The message had been received by the stationmaster from the first stopping-place, and ran:

"Arthur run away with. Please wire Euston."

"Wun away with! Wats!"

"That's all very fine!" exclaimed Figgins. "How was she to know that you wouldn't come a cropper?"

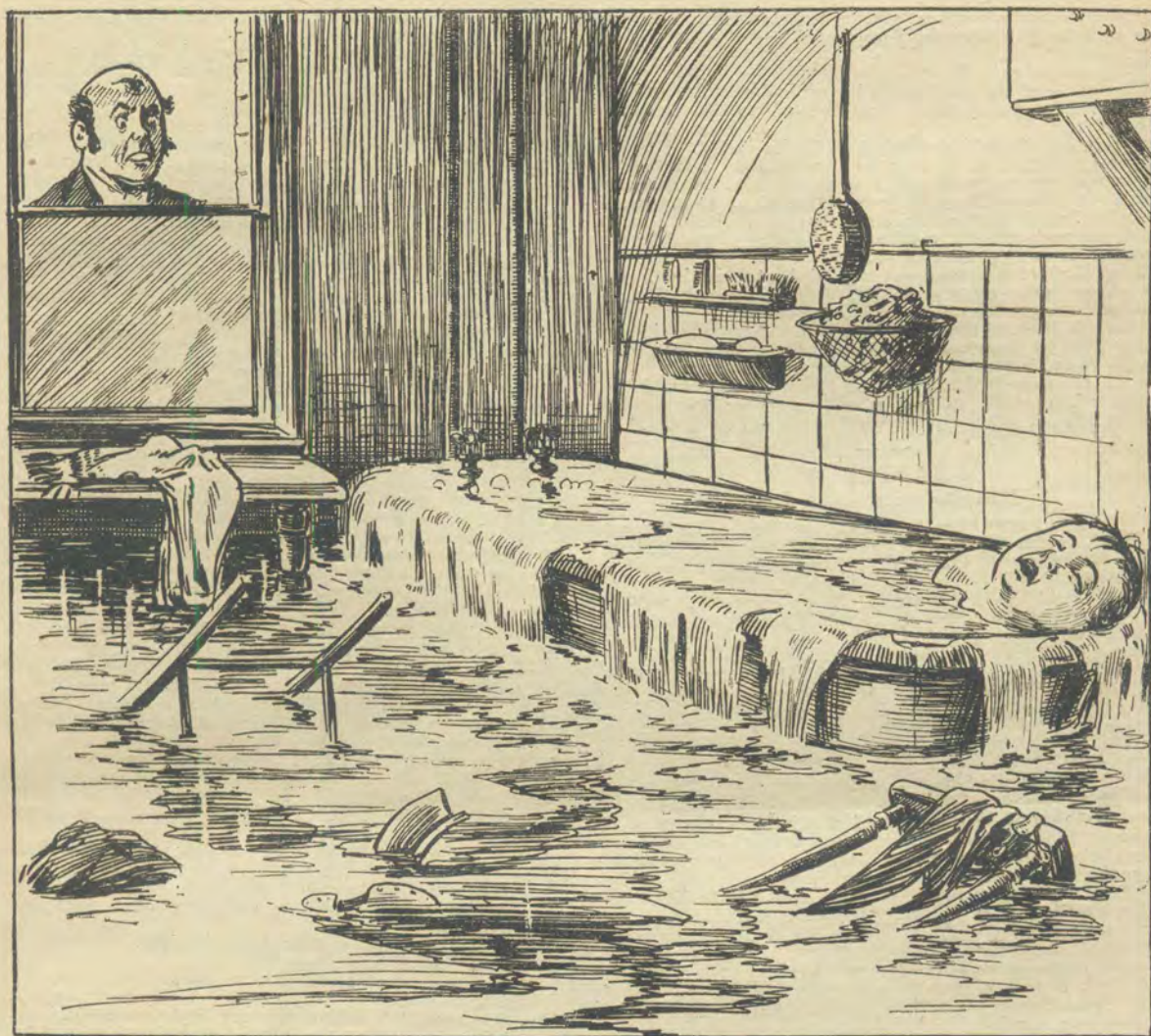
"I can dwive like anythin'—"

"Yes, and act the goat," cried Tom Merry. "Fancy frightening a girl like that! You ought to be boiled in oil!"

"I absolutely wufese." The swell of St. Jim's stopped. It suddenly dawned upon him that it was not quite the thing to startle a lonely girl. "I must send a wreply at once. I—"

"We've sent it," interrupted Jack Blake. "We spotted your giddy turn-out a mile away, and as there is not another image like you about, it was not necessary to wait till we could hear your dulcet tones to make sure that you hadn't broken your silly neck."

The swell of St. Jim's gathered up his reins with an air of offended dignity.



Fatty Wynn dreamed he was alone at the festive board, and there were none to deprive him of a single currant, and the Head was serving him with huge glasses of foaming ginger beer.

"Not so fast," said Blake. "There, you hold her head, Figgy."

"Yes, we not going back to the col. before we've straightened out things a bit," cried Tom Merry.

"I wefuse. I—"

"You stop where you are," retorted Jack Blake. "That is till we choose to yank you out of it. Drive, indeed!" he added with fine scorn. "Why, you ought to push a perambulator! Much safer."

"Yank him out!" cried Manners. "Making us look a set of silly asses!"

"You shut up!" said Blake with a warlike glance. "Don't you interfere in family affairs. Gussy's going through it right enough, but he's our meat not yours."

Digby and Herries ranged themselves suggestively beside the leader of Study 6.

"Oh, all right! Chew him up, then!" cried Monty Lowther.

Jack Blake ignored the various suggestions for "putting D'Arcy through it" with a lofty unconcern.

"Now, then, Gussy, explain yourself. What d'you mean by making fools of these chaps?"

"Speak for yourself!" shouted Kerr.

"Welcase my mare," said Arthur Augustus, flourishing his whip. "I—"

"Are you going to answer?"

"I—we—"

"Yank him out, then!" roared Jack Blake.

A dozen hands stretched out to grab the swell of St. Jim's.

"Wait—oh, wottahs!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Take him by the left leg and fling him down the stairs!" roared Digby.

"Fathead! D'you think we're going to carry him to the station?" cried the literal-minded Lowther. "Ow!"

The din was resented by Polly, and she started to prance about in a way that showed Figgins that there was trouble of a different kind in front of them.

"Hang off a minute!" he yelled. "I can't hold her! She'll kick the thing to bits!"

Figgins hung on to the mare's head valiantly, but he could not stop her hind legs, and three of the juniors went sprawling as the trap flew up, and her hoofs crashed into the floor of the vehicle.

The swell of St. Jim's still clung desperately to his seat.

"You wottahs! You'll bweak—you'll—"

"Hang off a tick, you chaps!" cried Blake, who saw that there was every likelihood of there being no trap left at all if Polly started. "We won't be done, though. We'll take the giddy mare out and harness Gussy in her place. What?"

"Ha, ha ha!"

The juniors roared with glee.

A howl came from D'Arcy, and he waved his arm frantically.

"What's that you're yapping about?" shouted Jack Blake.

"You wottahs!"

"That won't do," said Blake, wiping his brow. "That's no explanation. Why didn't you tell us you were going to drive your cousin to the station?"

"Bai Jove! You nevah inquired!"

Jack Blake gasped.

"What's that?" howled Manners.

"D'you mean to say that you never asked Gussy what he was going to do?" shouted Tom Merry.

"I—I—"
"Oh, go and eat coke!"

The leader of the Shell turned away indignantly, and all the wrath of the juniors was diverted to the chief of Study 6.

"Well, look here!" shouted Jack Blake at last. "I'm a silly ass; in fact, we're all a lot of silly asses, and there's an end of the matter; and I want my tea. If anybody wants a thick ear, I'm willing to oblige when we get back. Besides, I don't see that it's altogether my fault!"

"It's a mess-up all round," said Tom Merry, "and I vote we chuck it and get back to tea."

Tom Merry's proposal was seconded at once by Fatty Wynn, and after some grumbling and interchange of compliments, the juniors got on their machines.

The ride back to the college was marked by several skirmishes, but by the time they all reached the gates they had cooled down, and some sort of a truce was declared.

"All the same," declared Jack Blake as he entered the study, "I'm going to keep a sharp eye on that young Gussy, he's not so beastly unsophisticated as I imagined."

CHAPTER 8.

Skimpole's Strange Antics.

"SO you call it fun?" said Clifton Dane as he listened to the Terrible Three's combined and involved account of the fiasco. "Blest if I can make head or tail out of it!"

"Oh, can't you!" snapped Monty Lowther. "Well, p'raps you can see some fun in this? When's that hypnotism coming off?"

Dane looked rather serious.

"I think I can manage it," he said after a pause; "but I don't quite like the idea of fooling about, it's a bit risky if you send a chap off and can't wake him up."

"Oh!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It wouldn't be a laughing matter, Merry."

"No, I know that, but I couldn't help picturing Gussy doing a cake-walk. What?"

"The thing is to get hold of a suitable subject," said Dane. "If Skimpole would let me try. He's an easily-led sort of chap, and wouldn't be likely to assert his will under hypnotic influence and refuse to wake up."

"Blest if I can make it all out," said Monty Lowther. "It's a queer sort of wheeze. Why not ask Skimmy?"

"I have."

"What's he say?"

"Oh, in the cause of science, you know!"

"Well, if he's willing, let's go and find him at once," said Tom Merry promptly. "You're all right; besides, you've done it before."

"Yes, I know that, but it was some time ago, and I hardly knew that I possessed any power at all."

"Well, you know now, and I should say it's a jolly sight less risky."

After some argument the Anglo-Indian consented, and they trooped to his study.

Skimpole was engaged on his book, but he promptly laid down his pen when the matter was explained.

"A most interesting subject, and when I have finished my book on the reformation of the social and lower classes, I shall make a study of it; and I have no doubt that I shall discover much that is at present quite unknown."

"In the cause of science," went on the amateur Socialist, getting up from his chair, "I have no objection to placing myself at your disposal, Dane. But, at the same time, I really consider that you will fail to render me subject to your will. Mesmer himself was a man of great strength of mind, and as I am aware that my brain is of unusual order, I really think that you will be wasting your time in trying to conquer a greater power by a lesser. I—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake cut it short, Skimmy!" entreated Tom Merry. "What is it, a beastly speech, or are you turning into a gramophone?"

Skimpole waved his bony hand as if to dismiss the subject.

"Discussion is unnecessary," he observed calmly. "I am ready."

"Right-ho!" said Dane with a grin. "Hang on to this, will you? Hold it in your right hand."

"This is extremely curious," exclaimed Skimpole. "What is it? A button—a brass button? Are you having a joke, because?"

"It's not a joke," said Dane; "I'm serious enough. Just you fix your eyes steadily on that button, and endeavour to make your mind a blank."

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65.

"That ought not to be at all difficult," muttered Tom Merry in an undertone.

A subdued giggle greeted this remark, but the amateur Socialist was too interested to take notice of anything apart from the matter in hand. He turned the button over in his fingers and peered at it closely.

"An ordinary brass button," he observed.

"Of course," said Dane with an amused laugh. "What did you expect? Did you think I was going to hand you a brass band? Now—he went on—"if you've quite finished twiddling the thing about, we'll get on."

"Certainly," said Skimpole with a start. "What shall I do?"

"Oh, swallow the button, and tickle the top of your head with your left foot!" suggested Manners.

A frown came to the amateur Socialist's bumpy forehead.

"Manners, you're joking," he observed.

"Joking!" exclaimed Manners. "Joking! Good gracious, what can you be thinking of, Skimmy? Joking, indeed! Why, I never joke, I—"

While Manners had been talking, Skimpole had fixed his gaze on the shining bit of brass, and Dane had made one or two mysterious passes.

"He's off!" he said quietly.

"Off his what? Off his onion?" inquired Lowther. "Go on with you!"

"My eye!" gasped Tom Merry, startled at the suddenness of the occurrence. "Why, you must be a marvel!"

"He practically sent himself off," said Dane.

"What's he standing there like that for?" muttered Manners with a shiver. "Skimmy!"

Skimpole did not move. He stood with his glazed eyes fixed on the button.

"Make him do something," said Monty Lowther. "I don't like this. I suppose it's all right?"

"Right as rain!" replied Clifton Dane confidently. "I feel quite certain of myself now. What shall I suggest?"

"Make him fetch that pile of books," said Tom Merry.

The amateur hypnotist barely looked at Skimpole before he moved towards the table.

"Where shall he put them?" whispered Dane.

"Over by the door. On the floor."

Skimpole gathered up the books, and just as he turned, Tom Merry's remark about the cake-walk flashed across Dane's mind.

Instantly the amateur Socialist's left leg went up, then his right; and with short, mincing steps, he sailed gaily across.

The Terrible Three gazed at him with fascinated eyes.

"This beats Glyn and all his inventions," muttered Manners. "My—"

A startled exclamation came from the door.

The four juniors turned quickly.

Mr. Lathom peered from them to Skimpole.

"What!"

For a moment the sudden entrance of the master had distracted Dane's attention, but he had all his wits about him, and he swiftly concentrated his thoughts. He succeeded.

Skimpole had not taken three steps since Mr. Lathom had opened the door, and the books dropped to the floor with a crash.

The sudden noise broke the spell, and he came to his normal condition.

"I thought you had gone mad," said Mr. Lathom. "Do you usually dance when you are carrying a pile of books? Where's Gore?"

"I—I—" Skimpole looked about him in bewilderment.

"I—"

"Where's Gore?" repeated Mr. Lathom sharply.

"He's not here, sir," said Manners.

"Of course not. I can see that! Have you seen him?"

Almost before Manners could answer, the irritable little master had gone.

"I—I was looking at a button," said Skimpole feebly.

"What are all these books I—"

Clifton Dane explained what had occurred.

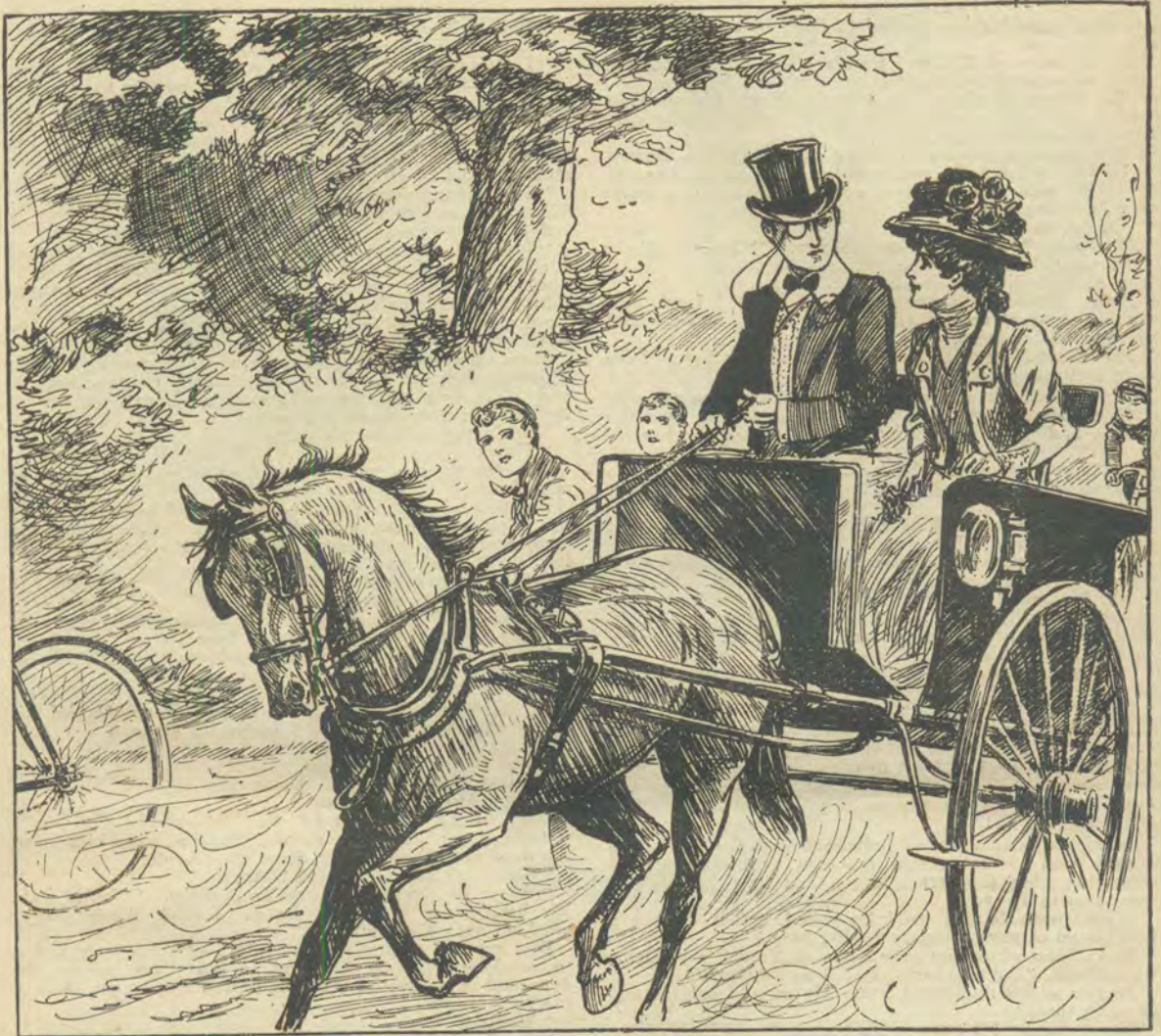
"You were only under my influence about three minutes," he concluded.

"But I didn't feel anything," objected the amateur Socialist, only half convinced that he really had been hypnotised.

"Didn't expect you would," said Dane, with a laugh. "There's not much to make notes about, I'm afraid—not from your point of view."

"I fear not," replied Skimpole, gathering up the volumes, and then resuming his chair. "I think, for the time, I shall devote my attentions to social problems."

"Queer little bird, isn't he? Didn't seem a bit surprised!" exclaimed Lowther, as they left the amateur Socialist to his labours. "Look out! Here's Herries and his tyke!"



"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, turning to his cousin, "this is weally a wippin' aftahnoon for a dwive, isn't it?"

Gr-r-r-r!
"Keep that beast away!" said Manners. "I won't have it near me!"

"Don't look at him, and he'll be all right," said the New House junior calmly. "Towser can't bear to be looked at, that's all."

"Ugh!"
Manners' expression was terse, but spoke volumes.

"Look here," said Tom Merry, "you'd better let Dane mesmerise the beggar."

"Eh?"
Herries looked puzzled.
"Hypnotise—send to sleep for ever and ever."

"Bosh!"
"It's not bosh. You should have seen Skimmy just now, doing a giddy cake-walk."

The Terrible Three eagerly narrated an account of the affair.

"That may be," said Herries sceptically, "but you're not going to play any tricks with Towser. It's all very well for a lunatic like Skimpole, but Towser is a sensible dog. Have a go at Fatty. He's over the road."

"Fatty!"
"Good wheeze!" cried Tom Merry. "I should like to see old Fatty eating candles and soft-soap. Come on! It's all practice."

Followed by Herries, as a safeguard against any attack for invading the rival Co.'s ground, the four made straight for their prey.

An odour of cooking swept into their faces directly they opened the door.

"Sausages again!" grunted Herries. "Towser, come here!"

CHAPTER 9.

Fatty Wynn's Benevolence.

"WHAT d'you want?"
Fatty Wynn looked up from his plateful of sausages, and his glance at once caught the dark magnetic eyes of Dane fixed upon him.

The Falstaff of St. Jim's wriggled uncomfortably, and then a sickly sort of smile crept over his face. His little eyes seemed to lose their expression, and become vacant and set.

The juniors looked in silent astonishment at this new development of Clifton Dane's power, and Tom Merry gave a low whistle, as Fatty, his eyes still glued to Dane's, picked up his plate, and with a strange stiffness and jerkiness of movement, got up from his chair.

"What the dickens is he up to?" muttered Herries. "Here, Towser! Lie down!"

"Let him go!" whispered Dane, without removing his eyes from Fatty.

Wonderingly, the juniors obeyed, and the bulldog stood on his hind legs, and sniffed eagerly at the plate of sausages.

For a moment Fatty Wynn stood stock still, the plate held

in front of him, his face turned to Dane, as if waiting for some directions.

The intensity of Clifton Dane's stare grew, and the unspoken command went forth.

Fatty Wynn slowly stooped and placed his precious sausages on the floor in front of Towser, who, nothing loth, gulped them down with avidity.

A feeling of tension had been growing upon the juniors, but the spectacle of Fatty depositing his meal in front of the bulldog was more than they could stand, and they burst into a fit of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My aunt!" gasped Tom Merry. "I— What! Haven't you done yet, Dane?"

The Anglo-Indian shook his head.

By now Towser had finished his unexpected feast, and gave his stumpy, broken tail a wag of satisfaction, and looked round for more.

"Not to-day!" grunted Herries. "I'm not going to have you turned into a beastly tub!"

Towser licked his chops, and cocked his head on one side as if he quite agreed with his master's remark, now the sausages had gone, and curled himself up on the hearth-rug.

Fatty Wynn picked up the plate, and replacing it on the table, seated himself, and took up his knife and fork as if he had never moved.

The juniors watched him with fascinated eyes. What was the next move to be?

For the first time Clifton Dane shifted his position. He walked across the study till he was beside Fatty. Then he brought his hands together sharply close to the boy's ears, and turned swiftly away.

Fatty Wynn started sharply, and the look of comprehension returned to his eyes.

"Can't you chaps let a hungry chap enjoy his supper?" he muttered. "What? Where—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors howled with laughter. Towser growled, and Herries nearly got a piece bitten out of his leg.

"This is too good to keep to ourselves!" cried the New House junior. "I'll take Towser down, and find Figgy and Kerr. You four can take care of yourselves and comfort Fatty. Ha, ha, ha!"

The Welsh partner waxed indignant over the loss of his sausages, and his fat cheeks quivered with even greater indignation when they tried to convince him that he had given them to Towser.

"D'you mean to tell me," he yelled, "that I gave a whole pound of pork sausages to that beast?"

"Don't know what they were made of, Fatty," said Dane, with a laugh, "but you certainly did as I wished."

"As you wished!" snorted Fatty Wynn. "I can see myself doing that!"

"Never mind. I'll get you six pounds," said Tom Merry at last.

After this the Falstaff of St. Jim's was a little comforted, but he still refused to be convinced that he had been hypnotised.

They were still trying to make things clear to him when Herries, Figgins, and Kerr came in, followed by Blake & Co.

"Why don't you bring the whole coll. with you?" said Dane, laughing. "Now, I suppose we've got to go over the whole thing again? Fatty won't be convinced, so I don't know how you chaps will take it."

Blake & Co. took it very excitedly.

"My hat!" cried Jack Blake. "There's no end of fun in this! Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Fatty!"

"With all due respect to you, Dane," observed Arthur Augustus, "I considah it wathah wot, you know."

"Why?" inquired Tom Merry.

"Well, it is obvious, my dear Mewwy, that Dane can only influence the weak-minded and—"

"Who're you calling weak-minded?" shouted Fatty Wynn, forgetting his emphatic refusals to believe he had been mesmerised by Dane. "I'll show you!"

"Hold him back!" said Blake, with a meaning glance at the swell of St. Jim's. "Gussy is going to land himself nicely; I'll bet," he added, in a whisper.

"As I was sayin'," went on Arthur Augustus, when Fatty Wynn had been reduced to silence, "it's uttah wot! It would be absolutely imposs. to mesmewise me."

"I don't think so, D'Arcy," replied Clifton Dane, with a look of amusement at Jack Blake's delighted grin.

"Quite imposs."

"Look here, Gussy," shouted Jack Blake, "will you let Dane have a try? If he can't make you eat your hat—I mean if he can't influence you—will you stand a study feed?"

"Wathah!"

"Look at me, then," said Clifton Dane sharply.

"I absolutely wef—"

"How the dickens can you expect a chap to have a fair chance if you don't look at him?" cried Blake. "You'd better take that pane of glass out of your eye."

This unfortunate remark caused a considerable delay, but the swell of St. Jim's was eventually brought to a calm state of mind by an abject apology from Jack Blake.

"Now, then," said Dane, "look straight into my eyes. What's the matter now?"

A strange expression crossed D'Arcy's face.

"I wish to observe," said the swell of St. Jim's, "that I absolutely wefuse to have any twicks played. I think it quite imposs. that you should be able to weduce me to anythin' appowching the mesmewick state, but I wequiah your word of honah that there shall be no twicks, an' I am to be weweased in not moah than thirty sees. Do you agree?"

More than one of the juniors tried to conceal their looks of disappointment, but as neither Blake & Co., nor Figgins and Kerr had seen an exhibition of Dane's power, so Arthur Augustus carried his point.

Tom Merry took out his watch.

"Time!"

The ten juniors were as still as mice, and silent as microbes.

For five minutes Arthur Augustus stared mournfully into the dark, mysterious eyes of the hypnotist, and then the study seemed to melt away. He heard the faint strains of low, sweet music, and his body stiffened.

Clifton Dane dropped his hands.

"He's off!" he said simply.

"Time him!" said Jack Blake in an awestruck voice.

"Ten, fifteen, twenty," muttered Tom Merry.

"Push that door to, Clif," whispered Jack Blake.

"There's a beastly—"

"Thirty!"

At thirty seconds to a fifth, Clifton Dane clapped his hands together, then things began to happen in rapid succession.

Digby banged the door to.

Someone gave a howl in the corridor.

Arthur Augustus woke up.

"My wing!" he muttered.

"Who's that outside?" shouted Figgins, wrenching open the door and disappearing down the corridor.

"My—my wing!" repeated D'Arcy.

"Wing, be jiggered!" cried Jack Blake. "You've lost! My hat, you're a marvel, Dane! Hallo! What's Figgy got hold of? Yank him in!"

Kicking and squirming, but with something very like a come-along grip on his arm, a snivelling junior was deposited in a heap on the floor by the long-legged chief of the New House.

"Mellish!"

"Spy!"

"Sneak!"

"He was listening!"

"What were you doing there?"

Mellish eyed the ring of hostile faces with faltering glance.

"I wasn't doing anything."

"Funny thing you should have a bump on your forehead, then!" said Jack Blake. "Don't be such a mean, lying little beast! That's where Digby marked you when he shut the door."

During this tirade of the chief of Study 6, Clifton Dane had been observing Arthur Augustus closely. The swell of St. Jim's was frowning in deep thought.

"What was that you said about your ring?" inquired Dane in a low voice.

Arthur Augustus started out of his reverie.

"My wing!" he repeated. "I distinctly remember laying it down on the shelf in the bath-room. It came back to me when you were stawing at me, and—"

"Yes?" said Clifton Dane eagerly. "What else?"

"Why"—the swell of St. Jim's hesitated—"that wotten little boundah Mellish was there at the time."

With a curious expression on his face Dane turned away without a word and pushed his way in front of Mellish.

"Do you remember being in the bath-room one day—let me see—last Monday?"

The cad of the Shell went a sickly pale-green, and moistened his parched lips.

"I—I—"

"Do you remember?" repeated Dane, fixing his eyes upon the junior. "Yes or no?"

"My hat!" muttered Jack Blake. "He talks more like a Sixth-Former than a kid of the Fourth!"

"Yes. I—I—"



Mellish bumped along the corridor, and the juniors ahead were not too particular how they took the corners.

"Do you remember taking a ring from the shelf?"

Mellish did not answer, and a growl of anger arose as the juniors saw the evidence of guiltiness betrayed by his attitude.

"Have you got it now?" went on Clifton Dane, ignoring the junior's failure to reply to his preceding question.

"Yes, yes; I've got it," muttered the wretched Mellish. "Hand it over, Sneak!"

Mellish drew back a step. His assumption of bravado melted away before the scorn in Clifton Dane's eyes.

"It—it was only a joke," he muttered at last. "I was going to put it back. I—" He broke off, and a spark of genuine indignation shone in his eyes. "You don't suppose I meant—I meant to steal the thing, do you?"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Tom Merry generously. "We, none of us believe that; but the fact that you took it just shows that you wanted to play Gussy a mean trick. It's carrying the wheeze beyond a joke to hide a chap's ring for several days, and for all you knew and cared the thing might have got lost altogether."

Mellish started to snivel, and an expression of disgust came over the leader of the Shell's face.

"Here!" he cried sharply. "Stop that! At least, show courage enough to face the outcome of your own rottenness. We've had a specimen of your cowardice before, when you and Gore started the Rival Co. Drop it!"

From beneath his lowered lids Mellish eyed Tom Merry with furtive glances. Apparently he thought it wise to change his tactics.

"What do you want me to do then?" he said sulkily

"Clear!" said Dane briefly. "That's about the best thing you can do."

"Half a tick!" cried Figgins. "We'll see him out of this house. This is our show now. Chuck that old tablecloth over, Fatty. We don't want a thing like this to be seen prowling about our corridor. That's the ticket!"

For the next minute or two the New House Co. were quite busy, and Mellish was tied up like a bundle of washing.

"Now a strap, or a cord of some kind," cried Figgins. "Good! Any of you chaps like to help?" he inquired.

"What's the wheeze? Oh, I see! Catch hold, Monty!"

A bunch of juniors grabbed hold of the rope, and the wriggling tablecloth went sailing across the floor, out of the study door, and bumped along the corridor; and they were not too particular how they took the corners.

Mellish, tablecloth and all, was deposited in the quad. and left to get free as best he could.

"That's a good thing got rid of," said Figgins, as they returned to the study. "How about that feed of Gussy's?"

The swell of St. Jim's came down handsomely, and a raid was made on the tuckshop.

It was decided to hold the supper in Blake & Co.'s study, and such a spread as the juniors got together had never been equalled.

Tables and chairs were commandeered, and the sight of the spread nearly reduced Fatty Wynn to a state bordering on collapse.

"My—my goodness!" he gasped, as he stood in the doorway when all was completed. "My—"

"Here, you come out of that," cried Jack Blake, "you

young cormorant! We're going to do prep. first, and grub at seven-thirty. Out you come!"

Fatty Wynn was heaved out, but when Blake & Co. departed with the Terrible Three to Study No. 1, with the laudable intention of doing the work first, the Falstaff of St. Jim's lingered behind.

Tear himself away from the vicinity of Study No. 6 he could not.

The short, blissful moment that he had spent in gazing upon the gorgeous "feed" had thoroughly disturbed his customary placid and contented frame of mind. From sausages his mind dwelt on cream-tarts and ginger-beer, and as he waddled mechanically down the corridor he conjured up each separate plate and dish piled with good things.

The well-known effect of a small boy eating a lemon in front of a cornet-player was as nothing compared to the tantalised condition of Fatty's palate, and when he reached the locked door of Study No. 6 he bent his portly form with a grunt, and pressed his stubby nose close against the lock.

First one eye and then the other he applied in turn to the keyhole, and although the range of his vision was limited, he gathered satisfaction from the sight of the leg of a plump chicken, and the top of a particularly large beef-steak pie.

Fatty looked and longed, till he got a crick in his neck, and the draught through the keyhole made his eyes water and obscured his vision. Then, with a deep, regretful sigh, he ambled away.

A glance at his watch brought forth another sigh, despairing and sad.

"Another whole hour," he murmured. "I am hungry!" For the next ten minutes the Falstaff of St. Jim's did a tortoiselike sentry-go up and down the corridor, his little twinkling eyes never left the door of Study No. 6, and not a fly could have entered unseen.

Presently a shrill whistle sounded from the corridor running at right angles to the one Fatty was guarding, and a look of expectation came over his face. Could it be possible that Jack Blake, who had charge of the key, was returning!

Fatty skipped nimbly to the corner and gave a gasp, not only of disappointment, but of physical pain.

A hard elbow prodded him in the waistcoat, and a brogue that was unmistakable sent his hopes down to zero.

"W-woo! Why don't you be careful?" "Bedad, an' it's careful you ought to be yerself!" exclaimed Reilly, his keen, humorous, blue eyes taking in the lugubrious expression on Fatty Wynn's face. "Sure an' it's your own funeral you must be attending, for the soight av yer face is enough to make the very daisies droop their pretty heads. Pwhat's the matter wid ye?"

Fatty Wynn grunted something about clumsy Irishmen, and turned his back.

A grin came over Reilly's face.

"Pwhat's the matter wid ye?" he repeated.

In moments of excitement Reilly's accent always came out in patches, and he talked in a mixture of soft Irish and correct English; doubled his r's, and toned his w's with p's. At least, that is how some impression is given of his speech, but no letters of the alphabet can adequately convey to the ear the limpid, sonorous tones of the children of the Emerald Isle.

"Is ut starving that ye are, Fatty darlint?" he added, in a wheedling voice.

A chuckle followed this remark, as Reilly noted the indignation expressed in the set of Fatty Wynn's round shoulders.

"Sure an' ye're lookin' awful thin. Maybe ye'll be havin' some more to eat by to-morrow."

This reference to his most tender feelings effectually drew Fatty Wynn, and he came lumbering back.

"Are you looking for a thick ear?" he demanded.

"Sure I'm not," replied Reilly sweetly. "I'm after findin' Tom Merry."

"Well, you won't find him here," retorted Fatty Wynn.

"He's in his study."

"Sure, ye're not angry wid me, are ye? It's the foine rosy apples that me grandmither has sint me."

The look of annoyance faded from Fatty Wynn's face like dew before the morning sun.

"Apples? Where? When?"

"Sure an' I'll be telling ye in a minute," said Reilly, edging past the unsuspecting Fatty.

"Where are they? When did..."

"Me grandmither sint me a basketful last year!" shouted Reilly, as he darted away. "I'll be after findin' ye a pip."

A snort of disgust came from the fat junior as the sound of the Fourth-Former's feet died away in the distance, and he stared about him aimlessly.

"I think I'll have a bath," he muttered, consulting his watch for the twentieth time. "There's still a good three-

quarters of an hour. It'll be something to do, and I can always eat better after a hot bath."

Ten minutes later the youngster was wallowing like a porpoise in the bath sacred to the chums of the Shell.

"This is not half a bad idea," he murmured. "It's a jolly sight better than waiting about in a draughty corridor or swatting at prep."

After a little while a feeling of languor stole over the fat junior. He lolled back luxuriously in the water.

Although the Falstaff of St. Jim's was unaware of the fact, he was emulating the example of the feasters in the days of the Roman Empire. True, the bath was not scented, neither were the surroundings carried out in the same lavish style. But hot water is the same in school or palace, and it had upon Fatty Wynn a soporific effect. The nape of his neck rested on the rounded edge of the bath, and his body bobbed gently up and down. A trickle of hot water from the tap kept the temperature exactly at the right degree, and gradually the fat one's eyes closed.

The junior's watch, lying on the chair, loudly ticked off the seconds, and presently a gentle snore revealed the fact that Fatty was sound asleep.

The junior had exchanged cold reality for the entrancing delights of dreamland. An ecstatic expression moulded his fat cheeks. Fatty was consuming unlimited piles of cakes and oceans of ginger-beer. He was alone at the festive board, and there were none to deprive him of a single currant, and the Head was serving him with huge glasses of foaming ginger-beer.

The water trickled steadily into the bath, and as steadily rose.

Presently a series of little rivulets crept over the side and trickled on to the floor. Then Fatty Wynn brought his foot down on the tap, and the trickle developed into several small cascades.

The floor was soon covered, and various articles of apparel took a bath on their own account.

Still Fatty slept, and it began to get dark.

Taggles, the house-porter, came down to light the lamps. The stream of water silently creeping along the dim corridor from the bath-room door escaped the porter's notice. But it broadened considerably just outside the bath-room door, and Taggles uttered a startled exclamation as his feet went splashing.

"Some little varmint," he growled, rattling the handle of the door, "'as left the tap hon! Bust, and me all done for the day! A nice mess for a 'ard-working man wots run off 'is legs hall day to 'ave to clear hup! Bust, the door's locked! Come hout!"

There was no reply.

Fatty Wynn had one ear in the water, and the other was too dulled by sleep to cause him to wake.

Taggles grunted, and splashed his way back and out into the quad.

With the help of a short ladder he reached the bath-room window, and looked in.

He nearly fell off the steps with surprise and horror.

"'E's dead!" he gasped. "Died of a fit, that's wot! No, he ain't, though; I saw 'is foot waggle!"

At that moment Fatty Wynn woke with a yelp. His foot had slipped under the hot water, and he thought he had been stung. Then he saw Taggles' face at the window, and the shock caused him to open his mouth to its fullest extent. This was unfortunate, for his head slid off the bath, and before he wallowed up again he had consumed a full half-pint of warm water.

This and the sight of Taggles making frantic gestures at the window made him feel sick, but the memory of the feast flashed across his mind, and he made a dive for his watch.

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A groan came from his lips. Then the flooded condition of the bath-room dawned upon his bewildered brain, and he made a dart for the plug.

"Hi'll report you for this 'ere mess!"

The porter's muffled voice next called for prompt attention, especially as he was descending his ladder.

Fatty Wynn made wild and eloquent signs, and Taggles eyed him through the steam-covered window with a speculative eye.

The fat junior held up a damp coin.

It was half-a-crown, and he heaved a sigh of relief as the porter looked less sour.

Half-a-crown was a lot of money, but Fatty Wynn reflected that it was worth it. He could take it out of the feast if—and it was a very big "if"—he was in time.

He shuddered with the bare idea of such a catastrophe, and scrambled into his clothes. In his frantic haste he put one article of clothing on the wrong way round, and a precious minute was lost in rectifying the mistake.

Taggles banged at the door just as Fatty Wynn completed his dressing.

It was a record, but the hungry junior did not wait to brag or explain. He thrust the coin in Taggles' willing palm, and bolted as if he was being chased by a wild bull.

Puffing and blowing like a grampus Fatty scrambled up the stairs, and pounded down the corridor. He burst into Study 6, and stopped, petrified.

The feed had disappeared. Not a crumb could be seen.

Jack Blake looked up from his table.

"Hallo, Fatty!" he said genially.

"Hallo!" said Digby.

"What are you after?" inquired Herries.

Fatty Wynn's eyes bulged out of his head.

"Fe—the feed!" he gasped.

"Fe-feed!" repeated Jack Blake seriously. "What's the matter with you, Fatty—ill? Hold him, Dig; I believe he's going to faint!"

The Falstaff of St. Jim's found his voice.

"You rotters!" he howled. "You—you greedy bounders! You've wolfed the lot!"

Jack Blake grinned cheerfully.

"Oh, you're referring to Gussy's treat! Why, that was timed for seven-thirty; it's now past eight! Where have you been?"

"I went to have a bath, and fell asleep!" muttered the fat junior.

"A bath!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn grunted, and, with a very red face, turned away, with suspiciously-shining eyes.

Jack Blake instantly relented.

"Hang on a minute, Fatty; I believe we kept a bun for you! Didn't we, Dig?"

Fatty Wynn half-turned back, and cast a suspicious glance at Blake as he went to the cupboard and threw open the door. The sight that met his eyes was almost beyond belief.

The second shelf was piled with enough tarts, pies, cold sausages for six ordinary boys.

"This is jolly good of you chaps!" said Fatty at last.

"I—I'm awfully sorry I was so rat—"

"Never mind about that, old son!" interrupted Blake, clapping him on the back. "Get on with the washing!"

"Ha, ha, ha! This'll make up for the sausages you gave Towser!"

Fatty Wynn needed no second bidding; in fact, he made a start before Jack Blake had finished his speech.

Tom Merry & Co. came in while he was still eating, and the six watched him with mingled feelings.

"If it hadn't been for Dane, you'd never have had such a chance in your natural," said Manners. "My eye! You'll bust if you go it like that!"

Fatty Wynn did nothing of the kind. He waded steadily through the collection of good things to the very last crumb, and then waddled slowly and sleepily over to the New House to bed and dreams of more "feeds."

"We must certainly keep this new wheeze of Dane's quiet," said Tom Merry, as he turned in. "It's too good to be made common property!"

The others heartily agreed, for Clifton Dane's discovery of his strange power had led to much fun and amusement, and was also the indirect means of recovering D'Arcy's ring. And while the juniors speculated largely as to future jokes and japes, not one in his wildest imaginings ever guessed what would be the outcome of the Indian boy's wonderful gift of hypnotic influence.

None could see into the future, and none could tell of the closely-guarded secret that was to be brought to light by the influence of those sombrely-flashing eyes.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of Tom Merry & Co., "The Form-Master's Secret," in next Thursday's "GEM" LIBRARY. Please order your copy in advance. Price One Penny.)

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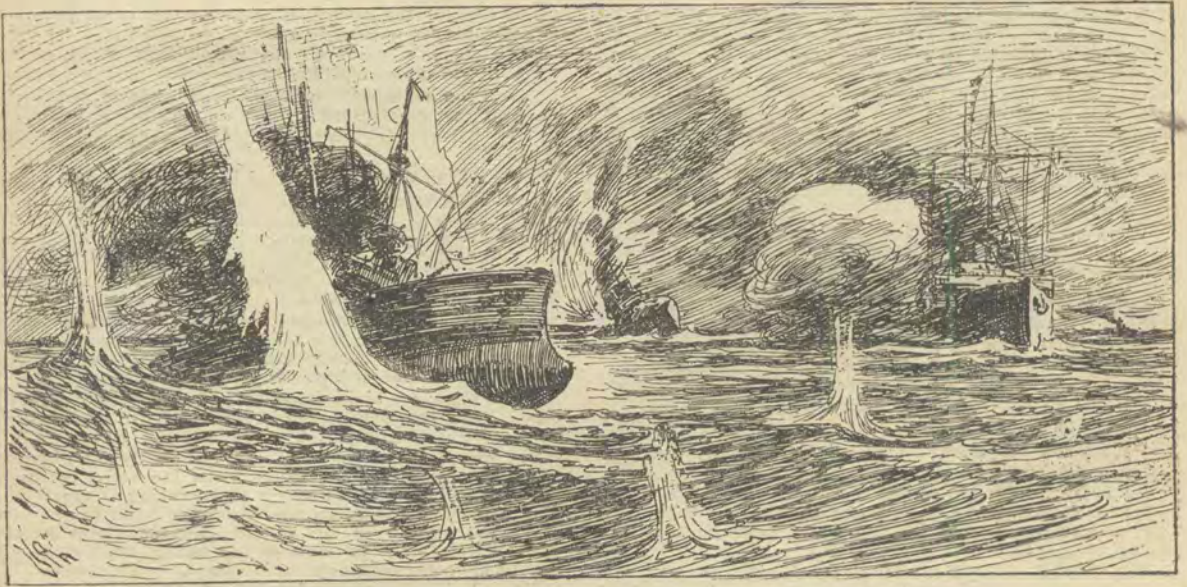
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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Sam and Stephen Villiers, two cadets of Greyfriars School, by a combination of luck and pluck render valuable service to the British Army during the great German invasion. They are appointed special scouts to the Army, which is forced back on London by Von Krantz, the German commander.

At the time when this account opens,

LONDON HAS BEEN BOMBARDED AND CARRIED.

Von Krantz had entered the City with his troops, and from the flagstaff on the Mansion House the German flag floated, where none but British colours had been since London was built. London Bridge was blown up, and across the great river the remainder of the British troops and the half-starved millions of London waited in grim silence for the next move.

Sam and Stephen are chafing at their enforced inactivity, when Ned of Northey, a young Essex marshman, and an old friend of theirs, sails up the Thames in his smack, the Maid of Essex, with a despatch he has captured from a German. This contains useful information of the landing of another German Army Corps, and Sam, having shown it to Lord Ripley, is given permission to go down river.

The boys have many exciting adventures, and one day Sam finds himself, together with a Lieutenant Cavendish, who has lost his torpedo-boat in destroying two German battleships, called to an interview with Admiral Sir Francis Frobisher.

The two are complimented on their performances, and the admiral offers Sam the task of running the steamer Blaine Castle, laden with provisions, from France, past the blockade into London. Sam agrees to make the attempt, and eventually reaches London.

Hearing that there are some crippled German warships at Sheerness, Sam has the Blaine Castle laden with cement, and with his brother and three or four men as crew, the vessel is taken to the mouth of the Medway, and then sunk—thus effectually blocking in the German ships.

Sam and Steve narrowly escape capture, but manage to land at Sheppey, where they intercept a German despatch-riding. The German, who is thrown from his horse, dies, and they hide the body.

(Now go on with the Story.)

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65.

The Deserted Hut.

"But will he be found here?" said Stephen.

"I hope not," said Sam, "for the poor chap's dead an' not stunned, as you can see for yourself. So it matters little to him whether he's found, but everything to us and to the work we've got to do. Come away back among the trees while I make out this despatch, which is a deuce of a puzzle, an' yet bears big news. By gum, it puts a stopper on our gettin' back to Kent!"

Stephen followed briskly, alert at the idea of a new quarry, and Sam sat down on a log just inside the coppice and went through the despatch twice with great care.

"Just listen to this," he said; and he read out from the paper, turning the words into English:

"To Captain Schmidt, Imperial Engineers, Barrowsbrook.

"Squadron having retired northward, possibility of attempted attack on Sheerness by British cruisers. Keep careful look-out on the flood tide, and be ready to work Ooze Deeps mines. Must be stopped at any cost. News to hand, projected attack."

"K. VON WEISSHAUS,

"Colonel in Command,

"Sheerness."

"What's it mean?" exclaimed Stephen. "The German squadron's gone North down the Swin—we know that. It'd be a fine chance for some of Frankie's fast ships to nip here an' do some damage, sure enough."

"An' you bet he'll take it, if he knows. He don't mind taking risks—he likes 'em, though he can't spare more than one ship, I should say, as he's holdin' the mouth of the Channel. But does he know? This Von Weisschaus chap at Sheerness seems to think he may. P'raps Frankie sent a torpedo-boat up here, scoutin'."

"It's no good guessin' at that," said Stephen. "What's meant by the Ooze Deeps mines, that's what I want to know!"

"Why, what can it mean, except that the Ooze Deeps is mined? With fixed torpedo-mines, of course; so that no ship can come through. The Ooze Deeps is the channel between the shoals, just off Sheppey here, leadin' to the Nore an' the Thames."

"Ah! So that, if any British ship comes up from the

Straits, she'll strike a mine an' be blown up. Gosh, what a fix! Is there any way we could warn her?"

"That's not it," said Sam quickly. "they won't be mines that are exploded by ships strikin' 'em. They'll be electro-contact mines, with wires leadin' to the land, and fired from a station somewhere ashore. Else they'd be as dangerous to the German ships as to ours."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"It says in this despatch, 'Work the mines.' If they weren't connected with the shore, there'd be nothing to work."

"What, the Germans lay mines and wires all that way since they've been here!"

"Either that or they've captured one of our own secret mine-stations. The Thames is mined nearly up to Gravesend even in times of peace. There are little huts an' cellars in the marshes that nobody knows the secret of except those who have the charge of them. Some German spy may have found this one on Sheppey before the war, an' now they're usin' it against us. But even if the Germans did it themselves it's no odds to us now. We've got to set our wits to work an' find the place the mines are worked from!"

"Will it be down at the eastern end of the island, where those troops are gathered?" said Stephen eagerly. "Suppose they're guardin' it—"

"Not a chance—it'll be some out-of-the-way shanty at the back of Never-never Land—a station that not even a marsh-man'd suspect of bein' anything particular. I've never seen one, of course, but I've heard what they are. Even their men wouldn't know where it is, for if a thing like that ain't secret it's no earthly good."

"How are we to find it, then?"

Sam sat down and thought it over gloomily, with his head in his hands. It was evidently no use to go tramping about the island "on spec" looking for it. He was silent for some time, during which Stephen took the despatch from him and glanced through it.

"Barrowsbrook," he read from the top—"isn't that the gap running in from the sea, where we used to camp out when we came sailin' round here, two years ago?"

"Yes," said Sam, "about a mile east of the place where we dosed last night."

"Precious lonely spot. We used to shoot grey plovers there along the shore. Remember the old fisherman's hut, back in the gully, among the bushes."

Sam nodded absently.

"Not a bad place for a mine-station, that'd be," remarked Stephen.

Sam jumped to his feet and clapped his brother on the shoulder.

"What a fool I am!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's the likeliest place all along the Sheppey shore—an' plumb opposite the end of Oaze Deep, too! It's jolly well worth tryin' anyway! Come on, let's hurry!"

"We never found much in it except old nets and rubbish," said Stephen, as they started off. "Recollect that grumpy old longshoreman who came and cursed us, an' ordered us away?"

"I do. I'm just beginnin' to think that longshoreman had more to do with Government than fishin'. You've just struck the right idea, Steve; an' I'm only hoping it's going to turn up trumps. I wish that horse hadn't got away. If he goes back to the lines it may be awkward for us."

"The despatch-rider must have known where the hut is."

"That's not certain at all. He might deliver his message somewhere else close by. Only we'll have to go straight to the place itself."

"Whom d'you reckon Captain Schmidt is?"

"The man in charge of the mine-stations, one of the Prussian Imperial Engineers, as the despatch says. They're the corps who work this sort of thing. We've got to look out how we cross these fields here. It'd be sickening to get dropped on now."

"Got any idea what we're goin' to do when we reach the place?"

"Not much. We'll have to skin our eyes an' see how the land lies."

It was not more than half an hour's journey, allowing for stops and detours, to Barrowbrook, though the Uhlan patrols had to be dodged once more. Presently they were out of the line by which passed the Germans who were going from Shellness to Sheerness and vice versa, and no more foes were seen. While still a quarter of a mile from the destination, however, Sam redoubled his precautions, and the last stage became an absolute crawl through the brushwood and round the edge of the downs, the boys going with the stealth of Red Indians, and taking the utmost care not to let themselves be seen.

"There are probably watchers on the look-out, even though

we don't see them," murmured Sam; "but there's the old place at last."

They lay flat on their stomachs at the edge of a brambly bluff, which afforded a view over the sea and looked down over a gully opening through the earthy cliffs, something like the place the boys had slept in the night before, but wider and still more remote.

On the farther side, upon a bushy slope that reached away to the distant beach, an old, tarred shed stood, half hidden among the gorse. Though ancient, it was evidently strong and in good condition, but it looked innocent enough.

Before the invasion, all this part of the shore from Warden Point to Sheerness had been War Office property, guarded as such, and Sam and Stephen had once got into trouble for coolly landing and camping on it. The sudden descent of the Germans on the coast, however, before war had been declared, had wrested Sheerness and Sheppey Island from the reduced garrison that was stationed there, and now the island was entirely in German hands.

"Yes, that's the place," said Stephen; "an' if we're right about it, I wonder we didn't get it in the neck more than we did, for pokin' round here that time two years ago."

"They didn't want to rouse too much suspicion an' make a fuss, I suppose. The question is, how are we goin' to make sure now?"

Stephen had no suggestions to make. Sam stared thoughtfully at the hut for some time, and mused to himself in a low voice.

"If it's a mine-station, where's the apparatus for connectin' up the circuits of the wires? Where do they do it? It can't very well be under ground, because they wouldn't be able to watch what was passin' at sea not even with a gyroscope."

"I s'pose there's a sort of arrangement like a signal-box somewhere in it," whispered Stephen, "only with batteries an' accumulators an' switches, an' that sort of thing."

Sam nodded.

"It might be underground. The ground slopes, an' if there was a cellar under the hut—"

"More likely there's a double front in the hut itself. It looked small inside—I remember now—in comparison with its bulk outside. But there's no makin' sure of that from here. We've got to go an' see. By gum, if we can take the place an' do something to scotch it, what a score it'd be!"

"Take it!" said Stephen, with a silent whistle. "What, by ourselves?"

"Why not? It seems to me it's our duty to try. There may be only one man—two or three at most. We ought to be able to crawl up, under cover of the bushes, till we're nearly at the door."

"Precious likely to do that without being spotted," grunted Stephen.

"I don't see why. After all, they're not likely to be keepin' a look-out for any attack on the place. They know their troops hold the whole island, an' they'd be warned at once if any of our soldiers landed. They'd be as likely to expect Old Nick himself as a British Service-man who knew anything about their place."

"Well, I'm on to try it if you are, although I must say it looks like walking into a rat-trap, an' if we make a mess of it we sha'n't have gained anything by grabbing that despatch. They'll be able to do as they like. I s'pose it's no good getting away an' warnin' somebody who can make sure of tacklin' it properly?"

For answer, Sam pointed meaningly to a smudge of smoke on the horizon, eastward over the sea.

"Here's a steam-vessel coming in now. It's like as not she's one of Frankie's cruisers. Long before we could get away an' plant our news, she'd be blown to bits by those mines. We're not goin' to sit by an' see a British warship sent to the bottom an' two hundred bluejackets drowned without making a bid to save them."

"My aunt!" murmured Stephen, glancing seaward.

"Rather not! You're right. Come on; I'm with you!"

They crept back from the edge of the bluff, and Sam led the way round to the head of the small valley, down which they crept, as much under cover as possible. Whether there would be any watch kept behind the hut, Sam was unable to guess. But, half-way down, his eye lit on a rusty old broken bar of iron from the hoop of a tawl. He stopped, lifted it critically with one hand, and then drew his revolver and handed it to Stephen.

"You take this," he whispered, "an' directly there's need, you use it quick and sure, without waitin' to think. I can do with this lump of metal."

Stephen would have demurred; but Sam, giving him no time, pushed onward, and crept the last few hundred yards, through the prickly gorse, to the back of the barn.

They both halted and listened, hidden in the furze within a few yards of the barn, and a little way to one side.

The single door of the hut was nearly shut, but not quite. Sam noticed that a good many visits must have been paid to the place, for quite a path was worn. He had little doubt now that they had found the mine-station.

He wondered how many men were in the place, and whereabouts they were. There was no chance of finding out without exposing himself, and no time for waiting. Stephen had spoken the truth when he said it was uncommonly like walking blindfold into a trap.

Sam quickly made up his mind that the only thing to do was to dash straight in and trust to luck. He whispered briefly to his brother, and then, bounding to his feet, ran swiftly across the intervening space, with Stephen close behind him.

How Sam Proved the Use of Mines.

With one kick Sam sent the door flying back, and sprang inside. There was a startled German oath, as a big, burly form rushed at him. The iron bar came down with crushing force, and the man dropped limply.

Out of the very floor itself, a yard or two further, the head and shoulders of a uniformed German poked up with a startled cry, and a revolver cracked loudly. Stephen's pistol banged viciously at the same moment as a bullet whizzed past his ear, and the half-hidden man dropped back through the floor with a choking gurgle and disappeared.

"Look out!" cried Sam, springing to the trapdoor in the boards through which the man had appeared. "There may be more! Shoot if you see as much as a tuft of hair!"

He stood just clear of the trapdoor, his bar of iron gripped and raised to strike, but not exposing himself so that a shot would reach him from below. Stephen watched, with revolver cocked, and ready for a snapshot.

For a few moments they waited, and the gasping of the stricken man below gave way to silence. There was not a sound of anybody else, and presently Sam, reaching across, took Stephen's revolver from him, and jumped straight down through the trapdoor.

"All right!" he called up a moment later. "Nobody here but the fellow you got! How's the other man?"

Stephen looked at the one whom Sam had killed. He had never stirred since he went down, and his stiffening hand still grasped the revolver at his belt, which he had been in the act of drawing.

"Dead!" said Stephen briefly, for it was easy to see the man would never move again.

"Anybody in sight from the door?"

"Not a soul," replied the boy, after he had looked all round outside.

"Come down here, then!"

Stephen lowered himself through the trapdoor. It was cunningly made, for the lid, now lifted back, was grooved to fit accurately to the floor-planks, which were strewn with dead bracken and straw when the trap was shut.

The boy dropped down through the opening, and found himself beside his brother in a long but very low compartment or cellar, quite sufficiently lighted by a small window in front. On the wall below the window were ranged six large electric-switches, each with a couple of termini, to which were attached insulating-wires that disappeared through the wall. Over each switch was a delicately-made electric-bell.

On a shelf below the switches were other pieces of apparatus, and beneath the shelf a number of long black-japanned metal boxes, with wires reaching up, and connecting with the switches.

"You were right," said Sam, "and I was wrong. The whole thing's worked from underground—and here we are! Help me hoist this fellow up into the hut."

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Stephen. "Is this the mine-station? It looks like a bell-hanger's shop. What are those handles?"

"The switches to fire the mines by. They are all numbered, don't you see? You connect the battery, push one of those handles over, and the current fires the sunken mine out in the Ooze Channel. As to which one it fires, I'm blessed if I know! But let's get this German out, for the poor wretch isn't pretty company. Your shot got him clean through the forehead."

"We'd better pull them both out of the way where they won't be seen," said Stephen.

And Sam, mounting an upright set of steps that made it easier to get out of the trapdoor—which was only a bare six feet overhead—climbed through. Between them, they passed up the body of the German engineer into the barn.

"I wonder if this is Captain Schmidt?" said Stephen pensively. "He'd probably have plugged me, only it was an awkward position to fire from, an' his bullet just grazed my ear. That pistol of yours throws high. I thought I'd

got him in the breast. There's a side-room there; we might put them both in."

"We can think ourselves lucky to have surprised them as we did," said Sam grimly. "If they'd had any inkling that we were about, they could have bagged us easily," he added, as they quickly laid the two bodies in a sort of cupboard that opened on one side of the hut. "A lesson—to always be on guard when you've invaded a peaceful country. Hurry, now, for we've big work to do below, and little time to spare!"

Stephen possessed himself of the Service six-shooter from the holster of the man Sam had killed, and then hurried below, where Sam had already returned, and was peering anxiously through the window.

"How's this window come to be here, if the place is a cellar?" asked Stephen, puzzled.

"The ground slopes so sharply below the hut that they've been able to put one in. It's preciously cleverly arranged, for though it's as much a skylight as a window, it's at such an angle that you can look straight out," said Sam. "See, it's screened by bushes so as not to be seen from the outside! And yet the bushes are so pruned that from inside here you can get a glimpse right away to sea. Look!"

"It's like a sort of peephole, only it gives you a wider view," said Stephen, realising how ingeniously the underground mine-station was planned. "I can see right away to the Ooze Deep, an' nearly to Essex beyond 'em; an' to seaward, as well. Uncommonly clever contrivance! Some German spy must have discovered it, though, or they could never have found an' used it. There comes that steamer in from seaward; she's much nearer now. I believe it is one of Frankie's."

"Thank Heaven we're here in time to save her!" said Sam, who had turned from the window, and was hunting busily among the apparatus, examining every part. "Keep a watch on her, an' tell me when she's near."

"Right!" said Stephen, gluing his eye to the spot that gave him the best view of the incoming vessel, which was so far out on account of the Sheppey shoals that she looked very small. "I wonder they haven't rigged a better dodge than this for watchin', though. It's a bit awkward! What are you tryin' to do?"

"I wish I could find which of these things are which, and exactly how they work. We've got to put the place out of action, an' prevent it doin' any more harm."

"Smash up the batteries, an' tear the wires off," said Stephen, still watching through the screened window.

"That ain't enough. They could soon fit new ones. We've got to explode the mines themselves."

"Before the cruiser passes?"

"No, it's better done after. She can't explode them by passing over them. I wish to goodness I knew just how the mines are placed, though, an' where. They must be somewhere opposite us; but, of course, the operators here must know the exact place, or they couldn't tell exactly when the ship was over them," said Sam, ransacking the place, and bursting open two or three drawers below the shelf.

He turned through some leather-bound pocket-books rapidly. Most of them were full of figures and formula, which meant nothing to him; but in a bound portfolio he found a couple of flat maps, which he scanned eagerly.

"By Jove, here's the very thing! I thought they must have it somewhere. Chart of the Ooze Deep, on a large scale, with the mines an' wires marked in."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Stephen. "Let's see!"

"No; you keep your eye glued to that cruiser. This is gorgeous! It's as clear as print! There are six mines, reachin' right across the deep-water channel from the East Spile buoy to the Ooze Sand. Number one's the northernmost; that's the first switch here on the left, for it's marked '1.' The three in the middle of the channel are closest together. Good! How's the cruiser now, Steve?"

"Gettin' near; but she's nearly end-on, an' I can't quite make her out. She don't look like a cruiser to me."

"Can't be a battleship," said Sam, still eagerly studying the chart.

"She hasn't the look of a man-o'-war at all. I wonder these chaps haven't some way of makin' vessels out better, considerin' the distance it is from here to the Ooze Deep. Ain't there a pair of glasses somewhere? Now she's turnin', and showin' her broadside. By gum, Sam, it isn't a cruiser at all—it's a big steamship!"

"Eh?" cried Sam. "Let's have a look. So she is! It can't be another Britisher runnin' the blockade in broad daylight, surely? She'll only be torpedoed."

"Here's the thing we want!" exclaimed Stephen, darting to the side of the window, where a revolving upright roller was set in the wall, with a small but powerful telescope fixed in it.

The telescope, passing right through the wall by a hole in the roller, was thus able to be moved sideways to any degree.

"Why didn't we spot this before? We might have known there'd be something of the sort," he added, quickly focusing the telescope. "Now we can see her as well as if we were aboard her. Good glass, this! Gosh, she's a big ship! Quite five thousand tons, an' deep laden. She's no Britisher; she's a German!"

"What!" exclaimed his brother. "Let me come!"

The powerful glass seemed to bring the vessel within a bare hundred yards or so. She was a great, red-sided, rusty-plated twin-screw steamship that had evidently once been a cargo-liner, and it needed but one glance to tell her nationality.

There was a company of Hamburg infantry aboard her, and she was loaded down to her sea-marks.

"You've struck it!" said Sam. "She's a German transport—probably bringin' ammunition an' food for the troops. She's come down from the norrard, an' that shows the Germans still hold that part of the North Sea."

He stepped back from the telescope, and his jaw set doggedly.

"She's come at a handy time," he said, with a grim laugh. "Now we'll test this ingenious arrangement here, an' see if it's efficient."

"Gosh!" said Stephen. "D'you mean to—"

"Send her to the bottom—yes! If I've mastered these mine-switches enough to work 'em. Now, you keep a close watch on her, an' warn me when she's nearin' the East Spile."

"Great James!" muttered Stephen. "We've struck it rich to-day! But isn't it a bit awful—launching that big vessel into eternity from this hole in the ground? I suppose we're—"

"She's helpin' to ruin England!" said Sam sternly. "Her freight's provisions to feed the men who are starvin' and butcherin' our fellow-countrymen—an' bullets to shoot them down with. They came here like thieves in the night, an' if I could send every German ship afloat to the bottom with one stroke of my hand, I'd do it. Watch her!"

"Right!" said Stephen, setting his teeth. "An' so would I! She's a third of a mile off the buoy yet, Sam, and nearest the middle so far."

"It'll be more or less guess-work, even now, judgin' when she's over the mines; but I'll do my best!" muttered Sam. "I wonder—"

Ting-r-r-r-r-r-r!

An electric-bell at the other end of the cellar suddenly rang out with a whirr, startling both the boys.

"By the great Hook-Block, I see now how it's done!" cried Stephen. "That's the warnin' that a ship's approachin' the mines. She's touched off a circuit somehow, an' it rings that bell. It's the signal to stand by, an' when she touches either of the mines the bell over the switch will ring."

"What a fool I've been!" exclaimed Sam. "You've beat me hollow. The current won't take more than a fraction of a second to reach us an' ring the bell when she touches," he said, thinking rapidly. "I think we've got her now!"

"She's still about two hundred yards off the spot, an' comin' straight up the middle," said Stephen, watching intently.

Sam stood, alert and ready, at the switches. He could see the distant steamer himself, though far less clearly than Stephen. She was steaming at full speed.

The strain became intense, and dead silence reigned in the narrow room, save for a dull, far-away mutter that seemed to shake the place gently. It seemed to come from somewhere in the outside world, and might have been distant thunder, save that the sky was clear.

"What's that?" said Stephen, in a low voice.

"Big guns. The German squadron from Sheerness in action with our ships away to the north, I expect."

Silence fell again, except for that distant mutter. For some seconds neither of the boys spoke. Stephen could see the thick-set German skipper on the big transport's bridge, and the Prussian linesmen pointing at the English coast as they talked together on the foredeck.

"She's nearly on it now!" said Stephen, in a tense voice.

Ping-r-r-r-r-r-r!

The bell over switch No. 3 rang out sharply. With one jerk Sam pulled the handle across, and sent the current racing through the wires.

A feathery mushroom of white water seemed to envelop the distant ship, and Sam's heart gave a bound as he saw it. Far off as it was, he knew the stroke had succeeded.

To Stephen's eyes, through the telescope, a much more thrilling sight presented itself.

He saw, as if at close quarters, the huge mass of water dashing up against the sides of the ship; saw her reel and stagger like a cockleshell as the terrible explosion buckled her and broke her amidships, as if she were made of paper.

The men on her were hurled across her decks, and as the commotion of the sea subsided, she was left, broken and sinking, in a turmoil of yeasty water.

"She's got her death-blow!" cried Stephen.

With swift motions of his hand, Sam pulled each of the other switch-handles across, and one after the other five more explosions rent the sea, leaping from one side to the other of the Ooze Deep.

Before the torn water was calm again, nothing was to be seen of the German transport but two masts, black with the struggling figures that were trying to swarm up them.

"So much for Barrowsbrook mine-station!" said Sam; and seizing the battery cases from under the shelf, he stamped them in with his foot. "They will never be able to lay fresh mines this campaign, but we'll wreck the works for them!"

He tore the switches down and crushed them under his heel, and with savage blows of a small hatchet, that had been hanging on the wall, he set to work to smash every piece of apparatus in the place.

Stephen, fired with the lust for destruction, started to help him.

"Leave it to me! You nip up above an' keep watch!" cried Sam. "The Germans'll be down on the place to see why their transport's blown up, but we should have half an hour clear, an' I'll finish this shop for 'em, then for a—"

He broke off with a cry, for suddenly, just as Stephen was getting through the trapdoor, there was a violent commotion up above and a rush of heavy-booted feet.

Trapped!

The younger cadet had scarcely raised himself through the opening when he was met by three burly Germans, who dashed in through the door with rage and anxiety on their faces.

Stephen's hand flew to the pocket where his revolver was. But before he could draw it, a swift blow from a clubbed rifle, which he half-guarded with his left arm, knocked him spinning.

A squad of Germans poured into the place, and in an instant Stephen was seized and pinioned.

Sam, below in the cellar, dropped his hatchet and whipped out his revolver, taking a quick snapshot at an officer who came to the edge.

The German sprang back, and the shot missed. A command rang out, and Stephen was jerked to his feet and a rifle levelled against his breast.

"Surrender, you below there," cried the officer fiercely. "or your comrade will be instantly shot dead, and your fate will soon be his!"

Sam stopped short and winced as his foot touched the ladder, for he saw the Germans' move. They knew he would be able to account for the lives of several of them before they took him in that narrow place. He pictured the scene in the barn above.

And Stephen's voice rang out:

"Let 'em have it, old boy! Shoot! Never mind me!"

But Sam lowered his weapon with a groan. After a moment's pause he tossed the revolver up through the trapdoor, and it fell on the floor of the barn with a clatter.

"They'll shoot me," he thought, "anyhow; but if I give myself up, maybe they'll let Steve off, seeing he's so young. I'll tell 'em it's all my work. They may execute me, if they please, but, by gum, we've had the better of them!"

He called up through the trapdoor:

"I surrender to the officer in command!"

The moment Sam showed himself above the trapdoor six rifles were levelled at his head. He took no notice of them, but bowed curtsy to the spruce-looking commander who stood beside them.

"Search him for weapons!" said the officer briefly.

And Sam was at once seized and searched, and at the same time four men went below into the cellar at their commander's order.

While this was being done, a senior officer of Uhlans, flushed with hard riding, strode into the barn.

The first officer saluted.

"I found these two below, sir, and made them prisoners," he said. "It is plainly they who had to do with Grunberg's death and who have done the mischief out yonder. Is it your wish that I should draw up a firing-party outside?"

"No; the matter is too serious. They must go before Colonel von Weisshaus first," said the senior officer impatiently. "Bring them outside!"

"I presume," said Sam in English, "that as I've surrendered on this officer's conditions, my comrade here will be spared any question of the death penalty?"

"I make no promises of any sort!" said the senior officer, looking savagely at the boys. "As to sparing you," he added drily, "you may save yourself the trouble of hoping anything of the kind! Captain Blaufeldt, let a couple of horses be linked up for the prisoners; we must get them to Sheerness with as much speed as possible! Send a galloper ahead with the news!"

The boys were led outside while a short but thorough search of the barn and cellar was made. It did not take the senior officer long to understand all that had happened in the place, and when he came out he looked more savage than ever, and glowered at the prisoners so viciously that it was plain to see he wished he could shoot them out of hand. But German discipline, at least, is strong.

"Start at once!" he growled, striding to his horse.

The squad were all mounted, but two troopers were left behind on foot, and the boys were forced to mount their horses.

Each prisoner's horse was sandwiched between two other horses, its bit linked on each side to the bits of the others by long straps, and a couple of Uhlans rode in front and two more behind, their carbines ready.

In this manner the troops set out at a canter as soon as they reached the level ground above, and Sam thought it was the most efficient guard he had ever seen in charge of a prisoner, for, indeed, escape was absolutely impossible.

The brothers had no chance to speak to each other on the long ride to Sheerness; and dismal enough journey it was, for they knew they had nothing to hope for, and that nothing but a firing-party awaited them at the other end.

But every time Stephen felt his thoughts growing more melancholy he cast a glance seawards, where the masts of the great German transport stood up forlornly far out in the Ooze Deeps, and it gave him heart.

He caught Sam's eye, and saw that his brother was deriving the same cold comfort. A grim smile passed between them. They had learned how to look death in the face by now, and to keep a stiff upper lip whatever befell.

But they realised that at last the end had come. There could be no escaping the vigilance of their enraged captors this time.

In Durance Vile.

Sheerness came in sight, but they were evidently not bound right up to the town. A large German field force was encamped to the eastward, and it was here that the officer in command had his headquarters.

The prisoners were taken to the rising ground some way back from the shore, and after passing several outposts and sentries found themselves halting before a large, but very low-built fort of earthworks and masonry, on the seaward side of which many guns peeped, like lurking watch-dogs, through slits and emplacements.

It was the very opposite of the old-fashioned forts, like the martello tower, for instead of being a big built-up edifice that could be knocked to pieces by modern guns, it was a low, moundlike arrangement that seemed not much more than a swelling in the ground, in spite of its strength, and could hardly be seen from seaward.

At the back of it, however, there was a whole company of Engineers at work, with several officers in charge, and Prussian artillerymen in large force occupied the fort itself. A wall of thick masonry, with shot-proof doors, lined the hindmost part, opposite which the troop halted. It was evidently the centre of the Sheerness defences in German hands.

The sentries presented arms, the guard turned out, and a stout, white-moustached major of artillery came forward, whom the Uhlan officer saluted.

"Have you captured the authors of this infernal disaster?" said the major quickly.

"Yes, sir. We found the mine-station in the hands of the two prisoners here—British spies, as was supposed. My galloper brought you the news? The transport Breslau is sunk!"

"We are not spies!" broke in Stephen hotly. "We hold the King's commission, and we did our—"

"Silence, brat!" said the major, in a voice of thunder. "You will be silent for good and all soon enough, so till then hold your peace! Are these the only prisoners, Captain Schnell?"

"There were but two, sir. Shall I now hand them over to you, or—"

"Do so. They must await the return of Colonel von Weissshaus, who has gone into Sheerness, but is on his way back. When he has seen them, and heard the report, there will be no need of further formalities. The colonel, my dear Schnell, has a short way with spies. Set the prisoners down!"

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 65.

Sam and Stephen were dismounted, and a corporal and file were called up at once.

"To the east guard-room!" said the major harshly.

And the boys were at once marched off. They went in silence, and soon they were thrust into a wide stone cell that had once had a gun mounted in it; but the aperture in the front was now only a narrow, open slit, giving a sideways view over Sheppey and a part of the sea.

The boys were in no mood to concern themselves with the outlook. Sam threw himself down on a stone bench.

"I deserve this, for not getting you to keep watch in the barn while I handled those switches. What a fool I was! We should have had time to get away, and now I've brought you to this, Steve! Pah!" he said bitterly. "I wish they could shoot me twice, and let you go!"

"Rot!" returned Steve. "It wasn't your fault, Sam. They were down on us before we'd any reason to expect them, you see."

"The fault's mine, an' but for me we shouldn't be here!" muttered Sam.

"Isn't it worth it? We've done our work. As for the capture, it's no fault of yours, old boy. We've that confounded horse to thank for it. You heard what the Uhlan said? Of course, when he galloped back into the lines with no rider an' the stirrups flyin', they soon rode out to find what was become of the messenger."

"Yes; there's no doubt they traced the hoof-marks back, an' searched round till they found the despatch-rider's body in the bushes, with his neck broken," said Sam. "When they found his wallet empty, of course, they'd strike out for the mine-station jolly quick, to see if anyone had got there. They arrived not five minutes after we blew up the transport."

"Well," said Stephen pensively, "we've wiped out so many of 'em to-day, that I suppose we oughtn't to grumble at bein' wiped out, too. We did it for our side, an' now they'll do it for theirs. We've had a long run for our money, and now it's at an end."

"I'd rather have pegged out fighting," said Sam, with a sigh. "It's what they call the fortune of war, this."

"How long are they likely to keep us here?"

"Till this Colonel von Weissshaus comes back. We sha'n't have long to wait then," said Sam, with a shrug. "He's a ruthless beggar, as I've heard. Doesn't that sound like an officer and guard coming along the alleyway now? If so, our time's short."

Outside in the echoing passage was heard the sharp tramp of many feet, in military boots, and they grew louder till they halted at the guard-room door.

"Open!" said a deep voice harshly.

There was the ring of rifle-buts being grounded on the stone flags, the key grated in the lock, and the door swung slowly inwards.

The Bulldogs of the Sea.

Into the guard-room, accompanied by the Uhlan captain and a staff-officer, strode a tall, powerful man with a square-cut face and a pitiless eye. It was Colonel von Weissshaus, the German commander of Sheerness.

He stood for a moment or two, looking savagely at the boys, and pulling at his iron-grey moustache. What his thoughts were when he saw how young the prisoners appeared to be, there is no saying.

"So," he said at last, in a grating voice, "it was you who fired the mines in the Ooze Deeps?"

"Yes," replied Sam briefly. "Or, rather, I fired them. My companion here—he did not say 'brother'—had no hand in it!"

Which was true, indeed, for Stephen had not touched the switches with as much as his little finger.

"They were caught red-handed, sir, and certainly both were concerned in it!" said the captain of Uhlans.

"Of course," returned Von Weissshaus curtly.

He looked the boys over again, as if wondering privately how two lads in their teens had contrived to do so much damage. Through the window-slit the far-distant masts of the German transport were just visible, as silent witnesses to the fact.

"Anything to say?" asked the colonel shortly.

"No," replied Sam.

And Stephen gave the same answer.

"It is enough!" returned Von Weissshaus. "You know the punishment awarded to spies, of course?"

"Spies!" said Sam hotly. "We are not spies! Both of us belong to the British Service, and I hold the King's commission!"

The German commandant looked over the worn riding-breeches and tattered khaki jackets of the boys with a swift, scornful glance.

"What corps?" he said coldly.

"The Greyfriars Cadets," said Sam, for their fate was certain enough, and it had to come out, "attached to the Volunteer Battalion of the Essex Regiment."

"Names?" said the colonel, lifting his eyebrows with fresh interest.

"Lieutenant and Sergeant Villiers."

"Indeed!" returned Von Weisshaus, with a quick glance at the staff-officer. "I have some recollection of your names," he said grimly. "It is you, then, that we have to thank for the closing of Sheerness Harbour by the wreck of the steamer, and also some other little items that occur to me as having happened?"

Sam smiled politely.

"Curiously wide duties the Greyfriars Cadets seem to have," continued the German, with a sneer; "they appear to comprise a good many branches. Don't you think so?"

"Whatever we find to do, we do it as thoroughly as we can," said Stephen quietly, "that's all."

The Uhlan and the staff-officer looked very black, but Von Weisshaus's hard features did not change.

"You know what we've done, apparently," said Sam. "I suppose you don't want a list of all our commissions since the campaign started?"

"The other matters are not my affair," said Von Weisshaus briefly. "I propose to deal with you at once with regard to the raiding of the mine-station under my charge. As to your claim to be considered members of the British Army, or any other service, you mention a corps we do not recognise, and you are evidently under no proper discipline. You will therefore be considered as civilians bearing arms against the Kaiser's forces, and, in this case, as spies."

"You can do as you like, I suppose," retorted Sam, whose patience was chafed through by this time. "All that we've done has been fair play, and according to the laws of war. No civilised nation would do what you propose, but, of course, you're able to have us shot if you choose. We're in your hands, and we can't help ourselves."

"You are evidently unacquainted with the methods of discipline on Sheppey Island," said Von Weisshaus coldly. "I do not shoot spies; I hang them!"

Stephen drew a sharp breath, and Sam's temper deserted him altogether at this.

"Hang them! Yes, I should say you do hang prisoners of war, by the look of you!" he burst out hotly. "You enjoy the hangman's game, no doubt; and the uglier it's done the better!"

"Shut up, Sam!" muttered Stephen.

"Hang away, then, Jack Ketch!" continued Sam, with savage bitterness. "Perhaps you'd like to have us burnt instead? Don't stand at trifles like that! Try the thumb-screws! Give us twenty dozen with the cat before we're turned off, you butcher! Nobody expects to find officers and gentlemen in the Kaiser's service, of course. Now you've got a couple of prisoners, just enjoy yourself!"

The other two officers grew crimson with rage at Sam's tirade, and could scarcely contain themselves. But Von Weisshaus never moved a muscle. He showed no concern one way or the other; his hard, cruel face remained as calm as if nothing had been said.

"Are the arrangements for the execution ready, according to my orders?" he called out.

"Yes, Herr Colonel," replied a sergeant, stepping into the doorway and saluting.

"Remove the prisoners, and let the sentence be carried out."

A file of six men tramped in, with fixed bayonets, and took the boys in charge. They were marched through the door and out into the passage.

Suddenly there was a loud ringing of bells, that resounded through the whole fort and earthworks. Sharp commands were heard, the running of feet, and a voice called hurriedly down the passage to the colonel, whose grim countenance suddenly hardened still more.

"To quarters!" he cried, in a voice like a trumpet. "Breitman, get to your post! Lock those prisoners back in the guard-room! Man the batteries!"

To the amazement of the boys they were thrust roughly back into the stone room again, the door was slammed and locked, and Von Weisshaus and his fellow-officers were heard departing swiftly down the passage.

Orders flew like hail. A bugle was sounded loudly somewhere outside, booted feet were running along the stone gangways, and everything seemed to be hurry and rush, though there was no disorder.

"What on earth is it?" cried Stephen.

"The deuce knows," said Sam, as puzzled as his brother; "an alarm of some sort. Wonder what it can be? Not British troops—that's impossible; there ain't any for fifty miles, and all the island's guarded."

"Outbreak of fire, p'raps?"

"Not in an artillery fortress; fire couldn't break out at

all. I didn't hear what that fellow shouted to Von Weisshaus—did you?"

"No. Could it be a mutiny?"

The prisoners were altogether at a loss what to make of it. The only thing certain was that they had a brief respite from the shameful execution that hung over them, but even that was almost forgotten in the excitement of the moment.

Stephen looked out through the narrow embrasure on the seaward side, stared for a moment, and then called excitedly to his brother:

"Sam! Here! Are those British ships?"

The showers of the morning had given place to a regular downpour, and through the shroud of rain over the sea to the eastward two long, grey, dashing-looking warships came forging along at an amazing pace, their bows turned towards Sheerness. They looked as if they had suddenly sprung up from the mist and the rain, bristling with guns.

"By the Great Hook-Block, they're two of Frankie's armoured cruisers," exclaimed Sam, "the Orion and the Denbigh! They've seized the chance of the German battleships bein' away north to run in an' strike for the Nore!"

"Hurrah for 'em!" cried Stephen. "What are they goin' to attack, think you?"

"Why, Sheerness an' the forts, you bet! They'll have time to play Old Harry with Von Weisshaus before the squadron drives 'em out. There goes the first gun!"

Boom!

The leading gun of the fort opened fire. The place quivered with the shock of it. The boys could not see the gun, but they saw a little white fountain spurt up from the water just short of the foremost cruiser. The two ships came straight onwards at their utmost speed, without answering the shot.

"They must have passed through the Ooze Deeps!" cried Stephen. "By gum, if we hadn't had the luck to spot the mine-station, they'd both be at the bottom now, with all their crews! I swear it's worth bein' hanged for!"

"Wonder what they thought of the sunken transport?" said Sam, his eyes following the ships eagerly. "They're turning now! They're goin' to bring their fore-barbettes into action for a start!"

"But won't these forts smash 'em up?" asked Stephen anxiously.

"I'll back the cruisers. They belonged to the Nore Squadron once, an' you can bet they know just how these two forts lie, an' how to give it 'em hot. They're captured British forts; not German ones. The captains 'll know 'em, though there ain't much to be seen of 'em from seaward. An' the cruisers can manoeuvre; but the forts can't."

Suddenly from the fore-barbette of the Orion sprouted a feathery puff of smoke—all that came from the great charge of powder, called "smokeless"—and very nearly so—that backed the shell. The huge projectile came roaring through the air with a great whirr, that seemed to shake the pit of one's stomach. Then there was a splitting crash somewhere behind the fort as it burst.

It was the sighting shot. The fort loosed off at once, and the sharp banging of the mounted guns seemed opened with a deadly rattle.

Boom, boom, boom, boom! came the reports from the heavy guns of the cruisers, and the sky was filled with the deep song of the shells. There were two crashes that deafened the boys, and made the very stones tremble in the walls, and then a third that threw up an enormous cloud of earth from the breastworks, but that they were unable to see. Most of the hits were at the other end of the fort, so far, but the shocks were tremendous.

"Gosh, don't Frankie teach his ships to shoot!" exclaimed Sam. "They've got the range to a hair! I sha'n't be surprised if they knock this place into a mud-pie!"

"My aunt, there's precious little chance for us, then!" said Stephen. "Never mind, it's a better death than hangin'! I hope that gimlet-eyed beast, Von Weisshaus, gets wiped out—or perhaps he's hooked it back to the troops? Phew, that was a smasher!"

A shell burst right in front, nearly stunning the boys with its noise, and the splinters dashed against the sloping earthy bank that covered the outside of the wall like spray settling on a window-pane. When the yellow smoke cleared, they saw the cruisers pounding away furiously, their grey sides vivid with the flashes from the guns, while the fort seemed to be throbbing like an engine with the continuous roar of its own weapons. But first one and then another ceased and was silent.

Sam had spoken the truth as to the chances of the battle. The ships knew to an ace where to plant their shells, and they were movable; the fort was not. They came dashing past, backwards and forwards, at full speed, fire flashing from every muzzle in the armoured casements and barbettes.

The German artillerymen were not very practised shots at such swiftly-moving marks, while the gunners on the British ships could shoot as true when steaming at twenty

knots as when standing still. Moreover, the garrison guns in the fort were 4.7's, whereas the Denbigh carried four 7.5's in her great barbettes, and each of these could fire five 200-lb. shells a minute, while the Orion bristled with fourteen rapid-firing 6-inch guns.

"You're right! The fire from the fort's slackening!" exclaimed Stephen, shouting at the top of his voice to make himself heard above the din. "A lot of the guns must have been dismounted. Aren't there any big siege-pieces in the fort?"

"I heard our men managed to spoil the biggest guns before the Germans got possession here on the night of the raid," said Sam. "Wish we were on the Denbigh instead of here! Hallo, look there! Torpedo attack, by Jove!"

Racing down from beyond the Nore came four long German destroyers, their funnels streaming the smoke dead aft as straight as a bar. They were thirty-knot boats, all of them, bent on the destruction of the British cruisers; and the boys watched with tense anxiety as they approached.

The cruisers met the crisis readily. They had sighted the enemy long before torpedo range was reached, and the heavily-gunned ships were quite able to deal with them.

Both the British vessels turned away from the land, so as to present a full broadside to the destroyers, while they still pounded at the fort with their starboard batteries. The full power of their port broadside was thus delivered upon the German boats, and the Orion in particular turned on the hail of her multitude of quick-firers.

Not one of the destroyer flotilla got within torpedo range. Any mistake in manœuvring, or any fault in gunnery would have meant the destruction of the British ships. But handled in the way they were, they made a swift and fatal example of the four German craft. Two were shot to pieces and sent to the bottom amid a hail of powerful shells that absolutely withered them up; another was left motionless and slowly sinking; and the fourth, badly crippled, wobbled desperately into Sheerness, and had to beach herself at Garrison Point. The cruisers applied themselves with full vigour to the forts once more.

They were battered and pounded by the guns of the Germans ashore, their smoke-stacks as full of holes as a fire-pail, and the thick reek of the shells hung all round them. Their upper-works were shot away, but the 4.7 shells could not pierce the armour or wreck the barbettes, whereas the damage their great guns were doing to the forts was terrific, though the whole bombardment occupied very little time.

"They're knocking the place into bricks!" cried Sam. "I knew they would! Three cheers for 'em, even though they kill us!"

In their narrow prison the boys could see but a small part of what was going on. The open slit that served as a look-out only gave a restricted view. But almost immediately after Sam's cry of triumph the noise seemed to redouble, and even to hear oneself shout was impossible. The fire of the Denbigh was now concentrating itself on the side of the fort which they were. Gun after gun was dismounted, and even in the guard-room the boys were almost shaken off their feet by the concussion. The acrid, stinging smoke from the burst shells drifted in through the opening, and made them choke.

"We're near the end," thought Sam. "It can't last at this rate—the place'll be blown to dust!"

The strain was maddening. It was like being shut in a cellar while the world was coming to an end up above. Both boys crouched in the farthest corner of the inner wall, huddled close, their hands tight pressed to their heads to try and keep out the brain-splitting crashes and shocks. Then came a thud that made the whole place tremble, followed by a devastating boom close overhead, and tons of earth

and masonry came thundering into the guard-room from above, as if the fort were collapsing into itself like a telescope.

Half stunned and choking, smothered in dust, Sam lay for some time, scarcely knowing if he were dead or alive. The shock had shaken every fibre in his body, and he felt half blinded.

As his wits came slowly back to him, he felt Stephen crouching close beside him, gasping and damaged. Neither of them realised what had happened, nor could they have told how long they remained so. Stephen was the first to speak.

"Are you there, Sam? What is it? Are we buried alive?"

The place was nearly dark, though the dust had settled, and they could scarcely see each other.

"Don't know," said Sam, coughing huskily. "Looks like it. Are you hurt?"

"Don't know that either yet. Don't know anything!"

The transformation was too sudden for them. The first thing they realised was that the terrible uproar had ceased altogether, and the whole place was quiet. They could hear a far-away, muffled sound of guns, but none were being fired from the fort, nor did there seem to be any shells bursting. The sudden silence gave them the idea, for some moments, that they were buried alive!

Presently they began to see what had happened. There was no light from the window-slit—it was blocked up by a great pile of earth and masonry which nearly filled the whole place, and reached nearly to the corner where they were. The only light now came from a glimmer overhead, a narrow opening, up to which the pile of debris reached.

"Half the roof's fallen in, that's what it is," said Sam; "but it's blocked the place up, an' there's so much stuff that I don't know whether we can get out on this side of it, an' we can't get round the pile of rubbish. There's still the roof over the corners. Wonder where all that stuff can have come from?"

"Never mind where it came from, as long as it didn't squash us flat. I'm all right, Sam, I ain't hurt. Let's try and scratch a way out. I suppose they'll nab us as soon as we appear, but come on. The rest of the place may fall in."

"It strikes me the whole show's wiped up," said Sam. "Help me make a way up this pile, an' be careful, or we shall have some of these blocks rollin' on top of us."

It was difficult work clearing a way over the debris, though the roof was low. They had to move one or two large broken blocks and dig away a quantity of loose earth with their hands, after which they found themselves just below a large gap, through about five feet of earth and stone, in the roof.

"Gosh! It must have exploded a magazine to have done all this," coughed Sam, "or else two or three of the biggest shells lit here together. Hold on while I look through."

He raised himself, stand-
on the pile of debris, and
peered cautiously out. All
round him was a smooth
level of grass, sloping
sharply away on three sides,
but from where he stood it
was impossible to see much.

"Phew!" he said, stoop-
ing down again. "I do be-
lieve the whole blessed
place is wrecked and done
for. There ain't a gun in
action, an' the ships aren't
firin'. I can't see beyond the
breastworks, but we'd
better get out of this be-
fore we're looked for. Don't
suppose it's much good, but
climb out an' roll down the
side. We'll try it."

They crept out, keeping
flat, and let themselves roll
down the grassy slope at a
venture.

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