

Tom Merry!

A 26-PAGE Tale
of the Famous Juniors.

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VOL. 4.

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Tale

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
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A Splendid Tale of
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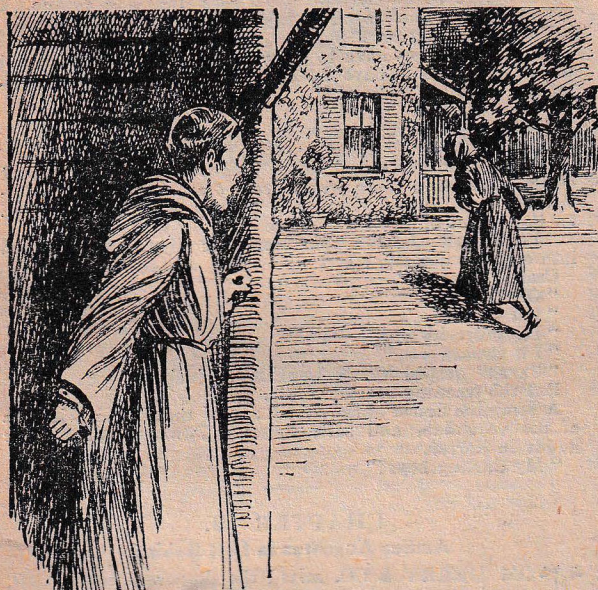
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CHAPTER 1.

Ruined Trousers.

"MONTE CARLO to-morrow!"

It was Tom Merry, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, who spoke. He addressed a group of juniors belonging to the old school.

There were Blake, and D'Arcy, and Figgins, and Kerr, and Wynn of the Fourth, and Tom Merry and Monty Lowther of the Shell, sitting round the tea-table on the verandah.

It was six o'clock, the hour at which the juniors usually had tea at St. Jim's, and they were having tea now, but amid strange surroundings.

The verandah afforded a view, across a wide garden bright with mimosa blossom and orange-trees, of the Promenade des Anglais of Nice, and of the wide bay beyond, and the blue Mediterranean rolling placid in the distance.

Tom Merry & Co. were in Nice, on the shores of the sunny Mediterranean, and they had enjoyed the wild delights of the Carnival. The Carnival was almost over now, much to the regret of the juniors of St. Jim's, who had entered keenly into the fun of going out in mask and domino, and pelting all and sundry with confetti in the streets and squares of Nice.

Dusk was falling upon the sea and the shore, and the moon was glimmering up over the Maritime Alps.

A silver glimmer fell upon the bay, and lights gleamed from the jetty, where through the glass walls the gambling-tables could be seen in full blast, each table surrounded by a crowd of keen players attracted by the rolling ball like moths attracted by the flame of a candle.

It was the last day of the juniors' holiday in Nice; but before going home to England and St. Jim's, they were to pay a visit to Monte Carlo.

And they were naturally looking forward to it very much.

"Monte Carlo to-morrow," said Tom Merry, again.

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thought-

TOM MERRY AT MONTE CARLO.

A Grand, Long Complete
School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

BY

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

fully. "Do you know, I wathah think I shall like to twy my luck there."

Jack Blake sniffed.

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Kids are not allowed in the gaming rooms," said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"We shall see the terrace, and the bay, and the scenery, and the outside of the casino," said Tom Merry; "but chaps under age are not admitted, so it's no good thinking of going inside."

"Wats!"

"My dear ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass, Tom Mewwy, and I certainly shall not be satisfied with bein' excluded fwm the casino at Monte Carlo. I shall insist upon goin' in."

"You'll get chucked out."

"I should wefuse to be chucked out."

Tom Merry laughed.

When Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth Form of St. Jim's, got an idea into his head, it was usually very hard to get it out again; and somehow or other, D'Arcy generally contrived to have his own way. But he was not likely to get his own way in this case. The officials of the casino at Monte Carlo were no more likely to admit a boy of fifteen to the gambling-rooms, than D'Arcy was to break the bank if he got admitted.

"I say——" began Fatty Wynn, looking up from his plate, which he had emptied for the sixth time in the course of that tea.

"Hallo, Fatty!"

"I've got a suggestion to make——"

"Vewy good," said Arthur Augustus. "If you can suggest a way of gettin' into the casino without makin' a fuss, Wynn——"

"Blow the casino!" said Fatty Wynn. "I wasn't thinking

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

of an old casino. I was going to suggest that somebody should get some more cake."

"Weally, Wynn—"

"I feel rather tired, I've been doing a lot of—"

"Eating," suggested Monty Lowther.

"Certainly not. I've been doing a lot of walking," said Fatty Wynn. "I've walked more than a mile to-day altogether. I think Gussy might go in and get some more cake."

"Wats!"

"You, then, Kerr—"

"Rubbish!"

"I say, Blake—"

"Go and eat coke."

"Tom Merry—"

"Poof!"

"Wouldn't you like some more cake, Lowther?"

"Yes," said Lowther. "I'm jolly well not going to move, though."

"Oh, don't be cads!" said Fatty Wynn pathetically. "It's rotten to make me get up when I'm settled so comfortably in this chair. These garden chairs are ripping. The maids can't hear us from here. You'd only have to step in and touch the bell."

"Rats!"

Fatty Wynn heaved a sigh.

At St. Jim's he was wont to complain of scarcity of provisions, though he always managed to get through three times as much as anybody else. In Miss Fawcett's villa at Nice he had done himself what he considered justice. He revelled in a land of plenty. Now he had been eating cake in large chunks, and, as a matter of fact, it required an effort on his part to move. Besides, he was deeply embedded in a soft, deep garden chair, and his knees were under the round table upon which the tea-things reposed. The other juniors were sitting round the table, and he could not move without disturbing all of them.

"Better go, one of you," murmured Fatty Wynn.

"What a glorious sunset," said Tom Merry, gazing away through the palm-trees of the garden towards the crimson glow over the Cape of Antibes. The sky was red and blue and yellow, with a wave of bronze green in it, colours the juniors had not seen in an English sky.

"Blow the sunset!" said Fatty Wynn. "What's the good of a sunset when a chap's hungry. You can't eat sunsets."

"Who's for a trot on the esplanade?" said Tom Merry.

"Good ideah, deah boy."

"You might call for the cake—"

"It's against my principles to encourage laziness," said D'Arcy, carefully brushing a crumb from the knee of his immaculate trousers.

"Ass!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"I suppose I must go," said Fatty Wynn, with a reproachful glance round at the ring of juniors, who only grinned heartlessly.

"I suppose you must," agreed Figgins.

"Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fatty Wynn put his hands on the arms of his chair to raise himself. He rose from the chair, and his knees knocked against the tea-table, and it reeled.

"Hallo, look out!" gasped Fatty Wynn.

But the warning came too late.

The crockery danced on the table as it reeled, and the tea-pot rolled fairly off—right into the lap of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The lid came open, of course, and the contents of the pot streamed out over the knees of D'Arcy's trousers.

There was a wild yell from the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ow!"

"Great Scott!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus sprang up wildly.

He caught the edge of the table as he did so, and sent it reeling back towards Fatty Wynn. And it was the fat junior's turn to yell then, and a shower of clattering crockery came pouring over him.

"Oh!" roared Wynn. "Oh! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Ow!"

"Scalded, Gussy?" exclaimed Blake.

"No! Ow! No! My twousahs! Ow! They're ruined! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right," said Monty Lowther. "There's no harm done. It was only a fresh lot of water I had put in the pot—the tea was all gone. So it doesn't matter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Bai Jove! What pvice my twousahs!"

"Seven-and-six," said Lowther, pretending to misunderstand.

"Lowthah! You uttah ass!"

"Well, eight-and-six."

"I weward you as an impertinent beast, Lowthah. You know I was not alludin' to the pvice of the twousahs at all."

"My dear duffer—"

"I decline to be called a duffah. Fatty Wynn, you ass."

"Ha, ha! Perhaps Fatty declines to be called an ass."

"He is an ass, you know, and that makes all the difference. The uttah ass has soaked my twousahs with tea."

"I'm smothered," gasped Fatty Wynn, who was helplessly reclining in the chair, with upset tea and bread and butter and rolls, and broken tea-cups all over him. "I'm—I'm in a horrid state. There's a pat of butter on my neck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My waistcoat's soaked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass!"

"You frightful dummy!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"You frabjous cuckoo!"

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a fwabjous cuckoo. I weward it as addin' insult to injury."

"You burbling ass!"

"I am sowwy to have to delay changin' my twousahs, but undah the cires I have no alternative but to give you a feahful thwashin', Wynn."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Pway put up your hands."

"Ass!"

Arthur Augustus seized Fatty Wynn, and yanked him out of the chair, and there was a fresh crash. The fat Fourth-Former of St. Jim's closed with D'Arcy, and they struggled on the verandah.

"Look out!" shouted Tom Merry, as Wynn's foot crashed into a flower-pot.

Crash! Smash!"

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I'll pulverise you."

"I'll thwash you!"

"Cave!" gasped Monty Lowther suddenly.

But the warning came too late.

A feminine figure appeared at one of the French windows of the verandah, and Miss Priscilla Fawcett held up her hands in horror.

"My darling boys!"

CHAPTER 2.

Arthur Augustus is Left Behind.

TOM MERRY & CO. seized the desperate combatants, and dragged them apart. Miss Fawcett was gazing upon the scene in amazement and horror. Behind her appeared the portly form and beetroot complexion of Major Figgins, Figgy's uncle.

"My dear boys!"

"Huh!" granted the major. "Young rascals!"

"Bai Jove! Leggo, Wynn!"

"Rather!"

They let go each other—all the more willingly because the juniors were dragging them apart. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was whirled away from his adversary, and sent crashing into the palms, and Fatty Wynn sat down on the broken china.

There was a howl of anguish, and Fatty Wynn jumped up even more quickly than he had sat down.

Miss Fawcett came towards them.

"Fighting!" she exclaimed. "Is it possible?"

"Bai Jove!"

"My darling children—"

"Huh! Young rascallions!"

"My dearest boys—"

"It's all right, dear," said Tom Merry. "Wynn and D'Arcy were trying a new—new game. They have been soaking one another with tea, and—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"And they've really quite enjoyed it."

"Bless my soul," said Miss Fawcett. "It really looked as if they were fighting."

"Well, not exactly fighting," said Tom Merry. "They were simply—simply contending to—lick one another, you know."

"Indeed! I am so glad they were not fighting," said Miss Priscilla.

"Bai Jove!"

"I hope D'Arcy knows better than to fight in the presence of ladies," said Monty Lowther. "We are bound to take it for granted that he was only funning."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"But the dear boys' clothes are quite wet," said Miss



The cab-driver brandished his fists and poured out a string of impolite expressions; but Kerr turned upon him coolly. "If you want a dot on the nose, you've only got to ask for it," said the Scottish junior, pushing back his cuffs.

Fawcett. "You must go and change them at once, my darlings."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Certainly, ma'am."

"Mind you place the dry things next to your skin!" called out Miss Fawcett anxiously, as the two juniors went in.

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the soaked juniors disappeared.

"Dear me, the tea-table seems quite upset," said Miss Priscilla. "But I do not mind a little damage, if the darling boys amuse themselves."

Tom Merry kissed his old governess affectionately on the cheek.

"You are a dear!" he exclaimed. "You are giving us a ripping holiday, and you let us do what we like. You—you are a brick!"

"Yes, rather," said all the juniors together.

Miss Fawcett smiled.

"I only wish to make you happy, my dear children," she said, "and—and you may break as much crockery as you please."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I suppose you have seen nothing of my nephew?" said the major, glancing at the boys.

Figgins grinned.

"Here I am, uncle."

The major grunted.

"I don't mean you, you young rascal! I mean Archie. Have any of you seen anything of Archie Hilton to-day?"

"He was at the jetty yesterday, sir," said Tom Merry.

"I haven't seen him since then. That was in the evening."

"Gambling as usual, of course," grunted the major.

Tom was silent.

"Well, well, you needn't tell me—I know well enough," said Major Figgins. "I haven't seen him at all to-day, either. I suppose he will turn up, like the bad penny. Miss Fawcett, would you care to take our usual little walk on the promenade?"

"With pleasure, major."

"I wait for you, then."

The juniors set the table up, and replaced what of the crockery was not broken. Major Figgins and Miss Fawcett went down the garden-path, towards the gate that opened upon the Promenade des Anglais, the great esplanade of Nice.

"We may as well have a run out, too," Tom Merry remarked. "Let's go and get the dominos."

"Right you are."

And the juniors went in, and ascended the wide staircase to the large room they occupied in common. There were

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NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S

COMET!"

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

seven beds in a row in the room, and it reminded the juniors of the dormitory at St. Jim's in far-off England.

Tom Merry & Co. had worn their dominos at the various functions of the Carnival, and they had found great fun in the disguises. They soon had the dominos and masks on. Fatty Wynn and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were in the room, changing their things. Changing did not take Fatty Wynn long, and he was ready to get into his domino in a few minutes; but with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy it was another matter.

"Buck up, Gussy," said Tom Merry, as he slipped the elastic string of his mask over the back of his head, and adjusted the velvet to his face. "We're ready."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We shall have to be home to dinner, you know; we're going out again afterwards."

"Yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn. "It would be absurd to miss dinner, of course."

"Good old Fatty! Catch him missing dinner!" grinned Kerr.

"Well, really, you know—"

"I sha'n't be more than a quartah of an hour," said Arthur Augustus. "There was a splash of tea on my shirt, you know, and I shall have to change that too. That involves tyin' my necktie afresh."

"Hang the shirt!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"It won't be noticed under the domino, anyway."

"I twust, Tom Mewwy, that you do not think I could be slovenly, because it would not be noticed undah the domino," said D'Arcy, with a great deal of dignity. "You might as well say that a chap need not wash his neck because it wouldn't be noticed undah his collah."

"Will you get on?" shouted Blake, for the swell of St. Jim's, in his usual way, suspended his occupation while he was talking.

"I am explainin' to Tom Mewwy—"

"Look here, we shall go without you."

"I twust you will not be so weckless. You would be bound to get into some scwape or othah."

"Will you buck up?" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Pway don't be unweasonable, deah boy. How can I buck up when I am talkin'?"

"Leave off talking, then."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"How long will you be?" asked Blake, breathing hard through his nose, and with difficulty restraining himself from committing assault and battery upon the spot.

"About a quartah of an hour."

"Good-bye, then!"

"I might make it ten minutes."

"We'll give you ten seconds."

"Pway don't be an ass!"

"Au revoir!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

But the dear boys were gone. Their footsteps died tramping away down the staircase, and there was a slam of a door below. They were gone. Arthur Augustus gave a dissatisfied sniff.

"I wegard that as unfriendly," he murmured. "But I certainly lost my huddy myself. Wathah not."

And the swell of St. Jim's proceeded to deal with his necktie in the most leisurely way in the world.

CHAPTER 3.

The Gambler.

TOM MERRY & CO. went down the garden in a crowd. They had no doubt that the swell of St. Jim's would buck up, and follow them, and if he didn't, that was his own look-out. The sun had sunk now behind Cap d'Antibes, and the dusk was thickening over the sea and the shore. Coloured lights flashed and gleamed along the front and in the streets of Nice, and gay crowds of revellers poured along the esplanade. The Jardin Public was gaily illuminated, and the Casino Municipal and the Jetee were a blaze of lights. Tom Merry & Co. left the gate, and mingled in the crowd.

A figure in a black domino was standing near the gate, looking towards the sea, across the promenade. The face was masked, but it struck Tom Merry for a moment that there was something familiar in the figure.

As Tom glanced at it, the man in the domino moved, and walked quickly along the path towards the jetty. That was the direction in which the juniors intended to go, and they followed.

Alone, the black domino was inconspicuous in the darkness; but in the crowd it stood out in relief, for almost all the revellers wore bright colours—mostly pink and black, the Carnival colours for the year.

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The black domino remained under the eyes of the juniors as they went on. It suddenly detached itself from the crowd, and stopped, at a seat facing the sea, where two pedestrians had sat down to rest and gaze at the last rays of the sunset. They were not masked, and Tom Merry recognised Miss Fawcett and Major Figgins.

Then the identity of the man in the black domino flashed upon him.

It was Archie Hilton, the major's nephew.

Tom Merry had seen little of Archie Hilton during his stay in Nice, but that little had convinced him that the major's anxiety about his elder nephew was not unfounded.

Hilton was a desperate gambler, and Tom Merry had seen him losing large sums of money at the gambling-tables in the casino, in the jetty, and at the kursaal.

The young man, who was weak and good-natured, had been kind enough to the juniors, and they liked him very well, but they could not help seeing that he was ruining himself.

He played for high stakes, and played hard, in the desperate hope of retrieving his losses, and the natural result was that he lost more and more money.

Hilton had been the major's ward, and the major still kept an eye on him; but the young man was master of his own fortune now, within certain limits, and all the ready money he could raise was spent at the gaming-tables as fast as he could raise it.

The public gaming-tables, the scandal of the Riviera, had been his ruin, as they have been the ruin of thousands of visitors to the sunny south coast, and to thousands more of the natives of the towns where they are allowed to flourish.

Tom Merry knew that Hilton had tried to borrow money from his uncle, and that fact alone was proof enough that his losses had been heavy. The major had grimly refused to lend him anything for the purposes of gambling.

An eddy of the great crowd, pushed back by the soldiers to allow a procession to pass, jammed in a crowd round the seat, enclosing the major and Miss Fawcett and the black domino. The juniors were crammed against the seat, and for some minutes they could not move.

The young man in the black domino tapped the major on the shoulder. Major Figgins looked up sharply, annoyed by what he supposed to be a liberty taken by a Carnival reveller.

"Uncle!"

"Hallo, is it you, Archie?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Where have you been all day?" growled the major.

"I've seen nothing of you."

Hilton shrugged his shoulders.

"At the casino."

"Playing, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"With the usual result?"

"I had bad luck."

"Do you ever have good?" snorted the major.

"Yes—sometimes."

"And does it last?" asked Major Figgins sarcastically.

"It must change soon."

"Not before you are ruined."

"Uncle, I want you to help me. Excuse me, Miss Fawcett, for speaking about this before you."

"My dear boy—"

"Uncle! If you lend me a thousand louis—"

"I will not."

Tom Merry & Co. moved uncomfortably. Hilton and the major did not know them in their dominos, and the young man was speaking in his usual tones, naturally supposing that all the people round him were French—or perhaps little caring. But the crowd wedged them in, and the juniors could not get away.

"You might, uncle!"

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"Never!"

"Then let me realise my own money," exclaimed the young man passionately. "By my father's will I cannot dispose of Hilton House without your consent."

"Your father was a wise man."

"I want to sell my property—"

"And throw the money into the maws of these foreign thieves," said the major grimly. "Never, with my consent."

"But—"

"Never I say."

"It's my own fortune, and I suppose I can do as I like with it," said Hilton; and the part of his face that showed below his mask was white with anger.

"That's where you're mistaken," said the major. "You cannot. I'm going to prevent you from ruining yourself, whether you like it or not."

"I know the luck will change."

"Nonsense!"

"If I had had a hundred louis this afternoon at the casino, I could have changed it into a thousand."

"Huh!"

"Besides, I am going to throw up la boule, the game they play here; it's an unfair game, anyway," urged Hilton. "I am going over to Monte Carlo to play roulette instead. That's a fairer game, as you know."

"Huh!"

"Give me a thousand louis to try my luck, and I will not sell Hilton House."

"You won't sell it anyway, Archie. When you're a little older you'll thank me for having saved you from making a fool of yourself."

"Don't drive me to desperation, uncle," said the young man, in a low, concentrated voice.

"Nonsense! Enough of this, Archie. I will never advance you a penny to gamble with—never. The gambling thieves here get enough English money, without your ruining yourself to make them richer. Have sense!"

"I tell you—"

"Enough of all that, I say. This is not a discussion to be held in a lady's presence. You are distressing Miss Fawcett."

"I must have money."

"I am surprised at you, Archie. If I were your father I'd pack you off to England to-morrow. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The young man made a fierce gesture.

"Then that is all you have to say?"

"Yes."

"Very well."

Hilton turned away. The wedged crowd loosened then, and he was able to stride away from the spot. Tom Merry followed him a few paces anxiously. But Hilton was going in the direction of the major's villa, which was next door to Miss Fawcett's, on the Promenade des Anglais, and Tom felt relieved. Without money, Hilton could not gamble, and he was evidently going home.

The juniors moved on their way as soon as the crush permitted, and were soon in the midst of the laughing, confetti-scattering crowd in the Jardin Public.

But some of them—and Tom Merry at least—could not forget Archie Hilton, and the desperate tones of the young man rang in Tom Merry's ears as he moved amid the merry crowd. What did Hilton intend to do?

Tom Merry asked himself that question without being able to answer it, and it troubled him strangely.

CHAPTER 4.

The Black Domino.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY proceeded with his changing in a leisurely way, in the blissful belief that the St. Jim's juniors were waiting for him below in the garden. He was rather surprised at not being called again; and as he was not called, he took more and more time. The result was that it was a half-hour or more before he finally descended the stairs, and went out through the verandah into the garden.

The sun was quite gone now, but there was a silver glimmer of moonlight on the garden, silvering the feathery fronds of the palm-trees.

Arthur Augustus looked up and down with a puzzled expression. There was no sign of the juniors of St. Jim's.

"Tom Mewwy!"

Silence!

"Blake!"

No answer!

"Tom Mewwy! Weally, deah boys—"

Only the echo of D'Arcy's voice among the palms and mimosas answered him, and he was forced at last to the conclusion that his friends had gone.

"The wottahs!" murmured D'Arcy. "Fancy goin' with-

out a chap, when I was only goin' to keep them about a quartah of an hour—or half an hour at the most. I wegard it as absolutely wotten. I doubt whethah I can continue to wegard such wank outsiders as fwiends."

The swell of St. Jim's was undecided what to do. He could join the merry-making crowds on the esplanade, but he was not likely to find his friends among the masked revellers. He adjusted his mask carefully over his eyeglass once more. That was the chief trouble the Carnival had brought to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—the velvet mask on his face had a way of pushing his eyeglass out of place.

The eyeglass needed polishing, apparently, and D'Arcy sat down in one of the garden seats on the verandah to polish it.

The house was not lighted up yet, and it was very dusky on the verandah.

The swell of St. Jim's was quite invisible to anyone entering the garden, while on his part he could see the garden clearly, with the silver glimmer of moonlight falling upon it.

He was looking into the garden, and he gave a sudden start as he observed a black shadow flit across the gleam.

He knew what it was at once—a black domino.

The swell of St. Jim's carefully replaced his eyeglass, and stared at the domino.

The movements of the wearer were so stealthy that he could not help seeing that the man was paying a surreptitious visit to the Villa des Fleurs.

Who was it?

So far as Arthur Augustus knew, no one of the party belonging to the villa wore a black domino; and, besides, the stature of the masked man was that of a fully grown-up person. It was certainly not that of a junior.

Who was it?

A very natural suspicion flashed into D'Arcy's mind.

The house was deserted. Miss Fawcett was out, and the juniors were all out—with the exception of D'Arcy. Most of the servants had been given leave to go out and join in the festival, and those who had not been given leave had taken advantage of Miss Fawcett's absence to go without it. D'Arcy knew that from the silence of the house. Only in the kitchen was there a light, where the cook was preparing dinner.

What an opportunity for a thief to visit the house! A rascal, perhaps, who had watched the villa and learned the habits of its inmates.

The Carnival allowed a law-breaker to go about the streets masked without attracting any attention, as almost all were masked.

D'Arcy's heart beat faster.

In the gloom, the black domino was almost invisible. Only when it came out into the gleam of the moonlight could the junior see it.

It disappeared into the shrubbery close under the verandah.

D'Arcy remained motionless in the chair. He was as brave as a lion; but he was a boy, and the masked visitor was a man, and the junior was not likely to get the best of a tussle. D'Arcy's idea was to watch, in the hope that help might come. There was no doubt now of the intentions of the domino.

He meant to enter the house.

D'Arcy knew that he was watching the verandah keenly through the holes in his mask, from the shadow of the shrubbery. The junior remained quite still. He was sitting in deep darkness, and had no fear of being seen.

The silence and darkness of the verandah seemed to reassure the nocturnal visitor.

D'Arcy heard a rustle as he emerged from the shrubbery, and a stealthy footstep on the wide steps of the verandah.

He did not stir.

The black domino loomed for a moment into view, passed him unseeing, and disappeared into the open doors.

He was in the house!

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet, trembling with excitement.

The robber was in the building itself now—and what was to be done? D'Arcy, with a shock, remembered that there was a large sum of money in the house. Miss Fawcett had taken a large sum from the Credit Lyonnais that morning, and the juniors had escorted her home with it, for the expenses of the journey to Monte Carlo, and to settle the accounts at Nice before leaving. D'Arcy remembered that there must be three hundred louis in Miss Fawcett's desk—and he remembered the desk, too—an exceedingly flimsy thing for a sum of money to be deposited in.

"Bai Jove!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's.

The black domino evidently knew that there was money in the house. After all, it had not been carefully kept secret. D'Arcy remembered that at lunch the previous day

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Miss Fawcett had mentioned her intended visit to the bank that morning, and Hilton, who was present at lunch with the major, had cautioned her not to let the servants know that she had so much money there.

But the black domino evidently knew. He might have watched the old lady visit the bank and leave it, and waited for his opportunity ever since.

D'Arcy followed the stealthy visitor into the house.

He trod on tiptoe, making no sound. In the darkness of the interior the black domino had disappeared, but Arthur Augustus moved in the direction of Miss Fawcett's little sitting-room, where the old lady kept her account-books and transacted her business. The desk was there, and if the thief intended to visit it, that was the direction he would take.

In the lower hall the moonlight fell into a wide window, and in the patch of light D'Arcy caught a glimpse of the black domino.

He was on the right track.

The black domino paused at the door of Miss Fawcett's room, and entered. The door was not even locked.

It closed behind the thief.

D'Arcy reached the door in turn, and hesitated. Should he follow the man in? What use was it for a boy to tackle a man?

In that quiet room, far from help, a stunning blow would stretch him helpless on the floor, and the villain would escape with his booty. He might be armed, too!

D'Arcy paused in thought.

He was determined that the man should not plunder Miss Fawcett and escape, but the question was, how to prevent him. There came a faint crack from the interior of the room.

The thief was breaking open the desk.

What was to be done? To wait for the man to come out—to fling himself upon him and yell for help—that was all D'Arcy could think of. But what help was likely to come—who was likely to hear him, at the length of the great garden from the public road, and in the interior of the house?

Better wait till the man was out of doors again—there was more chance of being heard and helped then when he tackled him.

Then a bright idea flashed into D'Arcy's brain.

The door of Miss Fawcett's room opened inwards. The key, of course, was on the inside, and D'Arcy could not obtain it. A few feet away was another door, with the handle on the side nearest Miss Fawcett's door. If those two handles were tied together neither door could open, and the thief would be a prisoner in Miss Fawcett's room.

D'Arcy was wearing a cord sash with his domino. He whipped it off in a twinkling, and doubled it, and then fastened one end on the handle of Miss Fawcett's door, and, pulling it tight, fastened the other end to the next handle.

It did not occupy the swell of St. Jim's a minute.

But the door could not open now, unless the man within could exert sufficient force to break the cord—which was not likely, for it was strong, and doubled.

Arthur Augustus chuckled softly. There was another loud crack in the room. The thief was forcing open another drawer.

He little dreamed of the trap he had fallen into.

Arthur Augustus stole quietly out of the house, and took up his station under the window of Miss Fawcett's room.

The room looked out over the garden, from the first floor, and the drop from the window to the ground was about fifteen feet.

It was a pretty steep drop for the thief to take—if he took it; but there was no other way for him to escape.

D'Arcy stood there ready to tackle him when he dropped, and undoubtedly he would have an advantage in doing so, for the man was certain to roll over when he touched the ground, and the junior would be able to spring upon him before he could recover himself.

Arthur Augustus smiled softly under his mask.

He prayed inwardly that his chums might return, or that the major might bring Miss Fawcett home before the thief finished his robbery and tried to escape.

In the stillness of the night, broken only by the distant shouts on the esplanade, and the murmur of the sea, Arthur Augustus could hear the sounds the thief made in the room, as he broke open drawer after drawer in the desk.

The window was dark, for the man dared not show a light; he was working in the darkness or the faint glimmer of moonlight.

The sounds ceased at last.

Had he found what he wanted? Arthur Augustus grinned. A surprise waited for him when he tried to get out of the room with his plunder.

Three or four minutes passed in anxious silence. Then a black shadow appeared at the window, it was thrown open, and a black domino appeared in the moonlight.

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CHAPTER 5.

Almost Caught.

D'ARCY kept carefully in the shadow of a great mimosa, and the keen, anxious eyes that swept down into the garden did not discern him standing there. He watched the window. Outside it was a small balcony, the same width as the window, with an iron trellis. The windows opened in the French fashion upon hinges. The black domino stepped upon the little balcony, and glanced down feverishly into the garden. Up and down the garden his wild, alarmed gaze swept, and D'Arcy caught the glitter of his startled eyes through the holes in his mask.

The man had evidently tried the door and found it fast. He had come to the window after vainly trying to open the door.

Doubtless, after discovering the door fastened, he had expected to find the window watched. He was looking for the watcher, but could not see D'Arcy.

The junior waited silently.

He heard a muffled expression above. It was caused by the sound of footsteps in the garden.

D'Arcy heard a cheery voice.

"I wonder if that ass has gone out?"

Jack Blake was speaking. The reference to D'Arcy was not complimentary, but D'Arcy had never been more pleased to hear the voice of his chum in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

He stepped out of the shadow and shouted.

"Blake! Tom Mewwy! This way!"

"Hallo!"

"Where are you?"

"Heah, you ass! Quick! Burglahs!"

"Now, then, don't be funny!"

"Ass! Burglahs, honah bwight!"

"Phew!"

Every word rang out clearly in the still air of the evening. The man on the balcony above did not lose a syllable.

He lost no more time in hesitation. With a crowd below his chances of escape would be cut off for good. He swung himself over the iron trellis with his hands, and lowered himself as low as he could, and dropped.

His feet were about nine feet from the ground when he dropped. They crashed upon the earth, and he rolled over.

D'Arcy was watching for him.

He leaped upon the rolling form at once and clutched it, yelling to the chums of St. Jim's for help.

Tom Merry & Co. were already dashing through the palms towards the spot. They were fully aware that D'Arcy was in earnest now.

The black domino struggled desperately.

Arthur Augustus held to him gamely, but the man was desperate. D'Arcy was forced back and hurled to the ground with stunning force.

The masked man sprang to his feet.

The juniors of St. Jim's were rushing up, and they had caught sight of him now.

"There he is!" yelled Figgins.

"Collar him!"

"Wescue, deah boys!" gasped D'Arcy feebly.

"Go it!"

"Collar the cad!"

The black domino hesitated a moment, and then dashed among the palms. He eluded some of the juniors, but three or four sprang to stop him. Tom Merry grasped the domino, but a crashing blow on the chest sent him to the ground.

He crashed down, and the man leaped over him and ran.

Behind him came Figgins and Monty Lowther and Blake. The three were close to him. Blake grabbed the fluttering domino and wrenched; the silk parted, and he was left with a great fragment in his hand, and he reeled back and fell with his own effort.

"Oh!" he gasped.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet.

"Aftah him! He's got Miss Fawcett's money!"

"Collar him!"

The juniors all dashed in pursuit, but the black domino was going down the garden like lightning, and only Lowther and Figgins had a chance. They were close upon him. Monty Lowther caught his foot in a trailing root and went down with a heavy bump. His chance was gone.

But Figgins?

Figgins's long legs had never stood him in such good stead, even on the football field at St. Jim's. They seemed to go like lightning. He was gaining—his outstretched hand touched the fluttering domino.

But he did not grasp that as Blake had done. He waited till he could get a securer grip. Closer—closer! The other juniors behind gave a shout. Figgins had him!

The fugitive was almost at the gate. Once on the promenade, among the crowd of dominoes, he would be safe.

But Figgins was upon him.

Closer—closer—and almost at the gate Figgins sprang. His hands fastened upon the shoulders of the black domino, and the man went heavily to the earth, with Figgins on top of him, grasping him and pinning him down.

"Got him!" gasped Figgins.

"Hooray!"

The juniors came racing up.

The black domino made a desperate effort, but Figgins had him tight. The man was face downwards, and Figgy's knee was in the small of his back.

There was no chance for the black domino now—unless Figgins chose.

"I've got you!" said Figgins cheerfully. "No good struggling! I've got you, you blessed Nice rotter! Parlez-vous Anglais?"

"Let me go!"

Figgins started at the English voice.

And then occurred what astounded Tom Merry & Co. beyond measure.

They were within a dozen paces of the two, captor and captured, when Figgins rose from his prisoner, and the black domino sprang up and whipped out of the gate and disappeared.

Figgins leaned against a tree, panting.

Tom Merry came breathlessly up.

"Figgins! You—what—why—"

Figgins only panted.

"Aftah him, deah boys!" shouted D'Arcy.

The juniors, without stopping to inquire into Figgins's strange conduct just then, dashed out of the gate upon the Promenade des Anglais.

But the black domino had disappeared.

A group of revellers hurled a shower of confetti at the juniors, and danced on. Among the endless dominos of all colours the torn black one was not to be discovered.

The juniors searched for a few minutes, and then gave up the quest as hopeless. The black domino was gone, and he had taken Miss Priscilla Fawcett's three hundred louis with him.

Tom Merry & Co. returned in silence to the garden.

"What on earth did Figgins let him go for?" exclaimed Blake. "He had him safe, and we should have been up with him in another second or two."

"Can't understand it."

"Figgins must be hurt," said Kerr anxiously, and he ran towards his chum, who was still leaning against the tree in the shadow.

"What's the matter, Figgy?" asked Lowther.

"Nothing."

Figgins's voice as he replied seemed very strange.

"Bai Jove! Aren't you ill?"

"No."

"Hurt?" asked Kerr.

"No, I'm not hurt."

"Hungry, I suppose?" said Fatty Wynn sympathetically. "Of course, when a chap's hungry he's not fit for anything. I warned you to have some more cake at tea-time, Figgy."

"I'm not hungry, ass!"

"Then why did you let that Fwench wascal go?"

"He wasn't a Frenchman."

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, some English bounder, I suppose, on the make here during the Carnival," said Tom Merry. "There are a lot of them here, I know. But English or French, the thief ought to have been arrested, Figgy. I can't understand you."

"Besides, he had Miss Fawcett's money," said D'Arcy.

Figgins started.

"I—I didn't know that," he said stammering. "How do you know he had Miss Fawcett's money?"

"He had burgled her room, you see."

"Oh!"

"Thwee hundwed louis," said D'Arcy. "I suppose he had it. He was twyin' to escape, you see, and I had fastened the door of the woom. He must have wobbled the desk before he twied to get away, of course."

"I—I don't know."

"I called out that he had the money, deah boy."

"I didn't hear—I—I mean I didn't notice—I—I never thought! Oh!"

The last exclamation was almost a groan. The chums of St. Jim's looked at Figgins in surprise and concern.

"Don't take it like that, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "It can't be helped now. You were not to blame, anyway. I suppose you couldn't help letting him go."

Figgins was silent.

"It's wotten, though."

"Perhaps the money isn't really gone," said Figgins eagerly. "Let's go and see. He may have taken the alarm before he had time to get it."

"Huh!"

"Dear me! What is the matter, my dearest children?"

Miss Fawcett and the major had returned.

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins is Mysterious.

FIGGINS did not speak. He kept his face in the shadow; he knew that it was white. The mask did not conceal all of it. The major and Miss Fawcett looked at the excited and somewhat dishevelled juniors in surprise.

"What has happened?" exclaimed Miss Priscilla, alarmed at once.

"It's all right," began Tom Merry.

"But what has happened?"

"Don't be alarmed, dear. Someone came here to rob the place while we were all out—"

"Oh, dear; oh, dear!"

"Nobody is hurt—"

"Thank goodness!"

"But I'm afraid the money's gone," said Tom Merry. "The thief must have seen you go to the bank this morning, and dodged in here to lift the tin."

"Huh!" said the major.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear!"

"I feah that the money is gone, Miss Fawcett," said Arthur Augustus. "I did my best to collah the wascal. We all did our best."

"My dearest children," said Miss Fawcett, "I am only glad you were not hurt. You might have been murdered. If there should be another burglar, you must not touch him. Your precious lives are more valuable than the money."

"Weally, Miss Fawcett—"

"But we're not sure the money's gone," said Kerr.

"Let us ascertain at once," said Major Figgins.

They proceeded at once into the house. Kerr dropped behind, and touched Figgins on the sleeve. The Scottish junior was curiously concerned.

"Figgy, old man—"

"Yes, Kerr?"

"You let that chap go on purpose."

"For goodness' sake—"

"You can rely on me, old chap."

Figgins groaned.

"You know, then?"

"I guess," said Kerr quietly. "It's beastly! But I had noticed a black domino before, this evening, and I couldn't help putting two and two together. But are you sure?"

"Yes," groaned Figgins.

"I'm sorry, old chap."

They entered the house. The desk in Miss Fawcett's room was broken in half a dozen places. Several drawers were standing open, and had evidently been hastily ransacked.

Miss Fawcett uttered a little cry.

"It is gone!"

"The money?" said the major.

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"It was in this drawer," said Miss Fawcett. "There were a bundle of bills, and a rouleau of gold. Everything is gone."

"I suppose you had the numbers of the bills?" said the major, with a business-like air.

"I—I had not; but they will have them at the bank, of course."

"Then I will look into the matter for you. I will go to the bank—it's closed now, but that doesn't matter—and get the numbers, and communicate with the police."

"Oh, thank you so much, major!"

"Not at all. I hope we shall be able to recover them."

The major strode towards the door. Figgins went out quickly after him.

"Uncle!"

"Yes, lad, what is it? Quick—there is no time to lose!"

"You are—going to the police?"

"Yes, at once, as soon as I have the numbers of the notes."

"But—but—"

The major looked at him in astonishment.

"What is the matter with you, boy? What are you stammering about? There is no time to lose. I want to prevent the circulation of the notes."

"Yes, but—"

"Come, come!"

"I—I—"

The words died on Figgins's tongue.

"You are over-excited," said the major. "You're not yourself, my lad. Go to bed."

"But—"

"Come, don't detain me!"

And the major strode from the house.

Figgins stood silent, motionless. He was evidently stricken with utter dismay, though only Kerr understood the reason.

Miss Fawcett was w

ontent to leave the matter in the

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By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

hands of the major. The robbery, and the thought that her darling Tom might have sustained some injury in the struggle—though, as a matter of fact, he had not sustained any—had quite upset her.

The old lady decided to go to bed at once, her faithful Hannah attending her, and the juniors dined alone, at a later hour than usual.

Figgins ate hardly anything, and was very silent. The others tried to comfort him, but without much success.

"It wasn't your fault the chap got away, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "It's no good worrying over it."

"You couldn't help it, Figgy," said Blake.

"Weally, Figgy, I wouldn't wowway, you know."

"It's all right!" said Figgins.

"Then cheer up, old chap!"

"I'm not bothering about that," said Figgins. "It's something else."

"You've been too long without your dinner," said Fatty Wynn, with a shake of the head. "It has a dispiriting effect on me, too. Try some of this pintade."

"I don't want any."

"The cauliflower is ripping!"

"Rats!"

"Figgy, old man—"

"Oh, don't bother; I'm not hungry."

Fatty Wynn stared at him.

"You're ill," he said; "that's what's the matter with you—you're ill. You'd better have a good square meal, and then go to bed."

"I should recommend a quiet stroll on the front, to soothe your nerves, Figgy. I will come with you, if you like, and recite my 'Ode to the Moon,' which I have written specially for 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' It begins—"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"Don't bother!"

"Bai Jove!"

Figgins was evidently not to be cheered. He suddenly started up from the dinner-table, a new thought came into his mind.

"Anybody got a time-table?"

"I have!" said Kerr, who always had a time-table, always up to date; and what was more remarkable still, could understand it, and find out the times of trains from it.

"Here you are, Figgy!"

"Trains from Nice to Monte Carlo in that?"

"Yes."

"Look out the next train, will you, Kerr?"

"Right you are!"

Kerr opened the time-table, and scanned the columns of figures. The other juniors stared blankly at Figgins.

"We're going to Monte Carlo to-morrow, Figgy," said Tom Merry. "You're not thinking of going over to-night, surely?"

Figgins shook his head.

"Then what do you want the time of the train for?"

"I—I want to go to the station and see it out."

"What on earth for?"

"Oh, I want to, that's all."

Tom Merry looked very serious. The thought came into his head that Figgins had been so upset by the struggle that he was not quite himself.

"Better stay in, Figgy," he said. "You see—"

"I can't!" said Figgins. "Found the train, Kerr?"

"Yes; it leaves in a quarter of an hour."

"Good! We can take a cab to the station. You're coming, Kerr, old man?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Shall we all come?" asked Tom Merry, who did not want Figgins to go out of his sight in his present curious mood.

"Oh, no; don't trouble to come."

"But—"

"We shall be all right."

"We're going out somewhere," said Blake. "We might as well come to the station with you."

Figgins turned red.

"Look here, I—I'd rather go with Kerr. Don't mind me."

"I—I'm worried just now. But I'd rather go with Kerr."

"Oh, all right!"

"I'll finish my dinner unless you want me specially," said Fatty Wynn, looking up from his tenth plate.

"That's all right, Fatty; stay and finish."

"Good!"

Figgins and Kerr left the dining-room, and donned coat and cap, and hurriedly left the villa. The juniors left behind looked at one another in great astonishment.

"Blessed if I understand Figgy!" said Blake.

"He must have got over hungry, and it's upset him," said Fatty Wynn.

"Oh, bosh!"

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"Look here—"

"Seems to have something on his mind," said Monty Lowther. "I suppose he's bothered because he let that burglar chap go."

"He said it wasn't that."

"Then I don't savvy."

"He may have some idea of catching the burglar at the station," said Tom Merry thoughtfully, "if the man stole the three hundred louis to gamble with at Monte Carlo. But I don't see how Figgins could know, either."

"Nor I."

"Bai Jove! We ought to go along, too, in case—"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No. Figgins doesn't want us, for some reason. It's all right. Let's finish our dinner."

And they finished it.

CHAPTER 7.

Black Suspicion.

"WHAT have you got there, Blake?"

The juniors were having their coffee after dinner on the verandah, in the moonlight. Jack Blake was carefully turning over a fragment of cloth in his hands, as if he hoped to discover something from it.

He did not immediately reply, as Tom Merry asked the question. Tom set down his coffee-cup, and looked curiously at the Fourth-Former.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "They can make coffee in Fwance, I will say that. They are a centuw or so behind us in ewevythin' else, but they can make coffee."

"Yes, rather!"

"You haven't dwunk your coffee, Blake."

"No," said Jack Blake absently.

"What are you moonin' about, you duffah?"

"I was thinking—"

"Wats! Dwink your coffee, and come out for a stroll," said Arthur Augustus. "I was thinkin' of lookin' in at the Jetty Casino this evenin'—not to gamble, of course. But it's a wathah cuwious studdy watchin' the gamblahs. It's so surpwin' that there can be so many silly asses collected in one place, you know."

"It's curious," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "These places make enormous profits out of the gambling tables—all out of the losses of the players. They'd have to shut up if they gave the players a chance of winning. And yet people go there and play. It's curious."

"It's much the same on the turf at home," said Lowther. "The races and the bookmakers and armies of touts are supported out of what? The losses of chaps who think they can win on horses. There are silly asses everywhere."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I wonder—" said Blake.

"What is that chap moonin' about?" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon his chum.

"You see this," said Blake, holding up the fragment of black silk.

"Yes," said Tom Merry. "I asked you what it was, but with your usual Fourth-Form politeness you didn't answer."

Blake grinned.

"I was thinking—"

"Oh, of course, upon an occasion like that, I can pardon a little inattention!" said Tom Merry gracefully.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Do you know where I got this rag?"

"I don't know. At a remnant sale?"

"Ass! It's a rag I yanked off the domino of that chap who burgled Miss Fawcett's desk. I caught hold of the domino, you see, and he jerked it away, and left this much in my hand. I fell down."

"It was wathah careless of you—"

"Don't interrupt, Gussy. Now, this rag—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"This rag may be a clue to the blessed burglar," said Blake seriously. "If we could find a chap in a black domino with a big piece missing—"

"Bai Jove! That's a wathah good ideah!"

"But there are such a giddy crowd of dominos here," said Tom Merry doubtfully. "I suppose there are ten thousand going up and down the streets of Nice at the present moment."

"But black ones aren't so common."

"Wathah not!"

"The Carnival colours this year are pink and black—pink, with black edging or ribbons, you know," said Blake. "Nine-tenths of the people are in those colours. Black dominos are not seen very often. In fact, I've no doubt that's why the chap wore a black domino, because it would help him to sneak about in the dark without being seen. Of course, a pink domino would show up anywhere and be seen a hundred yards off."

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"Now, a black domino——"

Blake paused suddenly, a very queer look coming over his face.

"I wemembah seein' only one domino of that colour to-day," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I wemembah Hilton went out in a black domino."

"H'm!"

"That's so," said Fatty Wynn, looking up from the pear he was carving. "You remember when we saw him talking to the major on the seat, Tom Merry, bothering him for a thousand louis, he was in a black domino."

"I remember," said Tom constrainedly.

"Bai Jove!"

The same thought that had occurred to Blake was in Tom Merry's mind, and as D'Arcy looked at their startled faces, it occurred to him also.

Monty Lowther glanced from one to another.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Tom Merry.

"Nothing," said Blake.

"Nothin', deah boy," said D'Arcy. "It's imposs."

"What is?"

"Nothin'."

"Well, of all the giddy asses!" exclaimed Lowther wrathfully. "Have you any idea what they are driving at, Wynn?"

"No," said Fatty Wynn; "unless they think they would like some of these pears. If they do, they can ring for some more; I can manage these five."

"Weally, Wynn——"

"Are you thinking of going out and looking for a chap in a black domino," said Lowther, looking at the chums.

"N-no."

"What's the trouble?"

"Nothin'."

"You don't think—— My hat!" Monty Lowther gave a soft whistle. "My hat!" he repeated. "Why did Figgins let the chap go? He could have held him if he liked."

The same question was in every mind. Even Fatty Wynn looked up from the big ripe pears, interested and startled.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "I can see you all think the same. It's imposs., of course. But why did Figgins let him go?"

"The man spoke to him," said Lowther.

"In English," added Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"That's why Figgy is so concerned about the matter," said Tom Merry, with a slow shake of the head. "He thinks the chap is making for Monte Carlo, and he's gone to the station to stop him. It looks like it."

"Bai Jove! It's wotten!"

"It's the only way to account for Figgy's conduct. Poor old Figgy! What a blow for him—his cousin!"

"Wotten!"

"That's how he knew the money was there, and exactly where to look for it," said Tom Merry restlessly. "It's plain enough now. He came back in this direction after leaving the major, you remember—and he had said that he was desperate."

"Bai Jove!"

"It seems awful," said Monty Lowther, in a low voice. "But it was the gambling; he wasn't himself, and of course he intends to pay it back."

"I suppose so."

"I suppose the gaming tables here are responsible for scores of such happenings," said Tom Merry bitterly. "This isn't the first case, and won't be the last. But—but can we be certain about it? I think we ought to make certain somehow, because——"

"Bai Jove! We might pwetend not to know, and——"

"But the major has called in the police."

"Phew! I nevah thought of that."

"I remember now Figgy seemed to want to stop him," said Tom Merry miserably. "But he couldn't tell the major. He would be savage. But—but if our suspicion is correct, the police mustn't have a hand in it. It would be a fearful disgrace for the poor chap, and for Figgy as his cousin—and the major. I believe the major would go ahead and let him be punished; he's as hard as nails. But——"

"But it wouldn't do."

"Exactly. If it was—the chap we suspect, I shall ask Miss Fawcett to let the matter drop," said Tom Merry.

"But would she? It's a large sum of money," said Blake doubtfully.

"She would, at least, if I explained. But, of course, we must have proof. A mere suspicion's no good; she would scout the idea."

"True!"

"If we could find the domino——"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Blake suddenly. "That's how he disappeared so quickly. I thought he had vanished marvellously suddenly, though the crowd was thick. While the chaps out there were in our way, and chucking confetti at us, he whipped into the next garden—the major's garden."

"Why, of course."

"And, if we're on the right track, I'll wager that the domino is in his room now, and he's gone out in his ordinary clothes."

Tom Merry rose to his feet.

"We'll jolly soon see."

"Can we get in, do you think?"

"We must!"

Tom Merry led the way to the garden gate that joined the two gardens. The others followed him in silence. Tom Merry suddenly held up his hand.

"Look!"

They looked over the gate. From the major's house a form had emerged—a man in an overcoat and a bowler-hat. He was striding down the path towards the gate. The juniors did not need telling who it was.

"Hilton!" muttered Lowther.

The figure disappeared.

CHAPTER 8.

Tom Merry Asks a Favour.

HILTON had not seen the juniors at the side gate. He was looking straight before him as he strode down the garden towards the gate upon the Promenade des-Anglais. He disappeared, and the juniors heard the sound of a gate closing.

Tom Merry gave a sudden start.

"After him—quick—he——" Then he paused. "No—no! We are not sure yet."

"But——"

There was a sound of wheels in the road. Hilton was gone now. It was too late, even if the juniors had been sure.

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"And he must have had the money on him," muttered Lowther. "That is, if——"

"If he was the thief," said Blake.

"We are not sure," said Tom Merry. "A moral certainty isn't enough to accuse a man on. If we had collared him and searched him, and let him know that we suspected him, and he turned out to be innocent."

Blake shivered.

"It would be too rotten."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But one thing's certain," said Tom Merry. "We can get into his room, and look at the domino. It will be there; and that will show."

"Good!"

"Come on, then."

The juniors knew Hilton's room. It opened upon the verandah with French windows, and the young man had just come out that way. The house, like most, was deserted for the Carnival. There was a light below stairs, but that was all. The juniors crept cautiously upon the verandah, and stopped outside Hilton's window.

It was unfastened. Like most of the French windows in Nice, it fastened on the inside, and could not be secured from without. Hilton had closed it, but it opened readily to Tom Merry's touch.

There was little likelihood of Hilton returning. He was gone to one of the gambling dens of Nice, or to the station for Monte Carlo. The juniors knew that. They entered the room, and Tom Merry closed the window and pulled the blind across it.

Then he switched on the electric light.

He had little doubt that he would find the black domino there. If Hilton was innocent, he would naturally leave it there—there would be no need to conceal it. If it were concealed, that was a sign of guilt. But Hilton was not likely to conceal it—he never dreamed that he was suspected—save by Figgins, who knew. As for the tear in the domino, Tom Merry doubted whether Hilton would be aware of it.

Tom was right.

Almost the first object that met his eyes as he turned on the electric light was the black domino, lying across the bed, whither Hilton had carelessly thrown it after taking it off.

The juniors gathered round it.

For some moments they did not care to touch it. That domino would prove everything. If a fragment were missing, it was clear that Hilton's domino was the same domino as that worn by the thief at the Villa des Fleurs—in a word, that Archie Hilton was the man who had robbed Miss Fawcett of three hundred louis.



Tom Merry picked up the domino at last. He held it up to the light, and there was a general exclamation.

"Bai Jove!"

"My hat!"

"It's true!"

There was a great gash in the back of the silk domino, and a fragment was missing.

"Blake!"

Jack Blake nodded, and drew the fragment from his pocket—the piece that had been left in his hand as the thief broke away.

He fitted it to the gap in the domino.

It fitted exactly.

There could be no further doubt.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "This is howible! The fellow is a thief!"

"It's settled now."

"And he must have had the money on him," said Fatty Wynn.

"Certain enough."

"Bai Jove! It may not be too late to stop him now!"

"Let's get out of this," said Tom Merry abruptly. "I'll take the domino with me, as well as this piece. It may be necessary to bring Hilton to his senses, and this will be a handle. If he gets out of this scrape he sha'n't get into another."

"Wathah not!"

Tom Merry rolled up the domino, with the fragment inside, and thrust it inside his coat. Then the juniors switched off the light, and quitted the room.

They returned to Miss Fawcett's garden, and paused in the shadow of the trees there to hold a whispered consultation.

"The point's settled now," said Tom Merry. "Hilton is the thief! He's either gone to one of the Nice casinos, or to the station. From what he said to the major, I should imagine it's to the station, to take the train to Monte Carlo. It's pretty clear that Figgins thinks so, too."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Besides, he's buzzed off just in time to catch the train, too," said Lowther.

"Exactly."

"Bai Jove! He ought to be stopped!"

"Figgins and Kerr are at the station before this," said Tom Merry quietly. "They'll stop him if he goes there. My idea is that we ought to make sure that he doesn't spend the money in Nice. He may try to do so if he scents Figgy at the station."

"Vewy likely."

"Then we ought to get out and go to the places and watch for him," said Tom Merry. "He usually gambled at the Casino Muneipal or the Jetea. We'll separate, and go to both places and look for him."

"Good!"

"You fellows start first—I want to speak to Miss Fawcett. Cut off, in case he doesn't go to the station. If you see him, give him some plain English, and make him bring the money back."

"Right-ho!"

And the juniors, waiting only for their coats and caps, hurried off. Tom Merry went up to Miss Fawcett's room, and tapped. Miss Fawcett had gone to bed, as her nerves were very much upset; but she was not asleep. When Hannah informed her that Tom wished to speak to her, he was admitted at once.

"What is it, my darling?" asked Miss Fawcett. "Has the major returned?"

"Not yet, dear."

"Are you not going out with your friends?"

"Yes," said Tom. "But—but I want to ask you a favour first."

"Yes, dear. You know you may ask me anything."

"I—it's a rather peculiar one," stammered Tom, turning red.

Miss Fawcett smiled her sweet smile.

"I am sure you would not ask anything I could not grant, Tommy dear," she said. "But go on, and tell me what it is."

"I want you to tell the major to stop the police looking for the burglar."

Tom Merry blurted out the words. Miss Priscilla looked at him in blank amazement.

"Tommy!"

"Yes, I know it's odd," said Tom Merry, reddening, "but—but I've a reason. Will you do it, dear?"

"But the bad man has taken three hundred louis—more than two hundred and fifty pounds, Tommy darling," remonstrated Miss Fawcett. "I cannot afford to lose so much money. I do not wish the wicked man to be punished, certainly; but the money—"

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"I think it might be recovered without the police, dear."

"I fear not."

"Dear," said Tom Merry, "I am to have some money when I am of age—a great deal, I believe. I should like to make up the loss out of that, and—and let this matter drop."

Miss Fawcett smiled again.

"Of course, that would be impossible, Tommy dear. It is a great sum of money, and I cannot imagine what is your reason for wishing to let the thief escape."

"I will tell you if you like," said Tom slowly, "but I would rather not."

"My dear child—"

"But I will explain. Suppose a silly young fellow—not much more than a lad—was driven desperate by losing all his money at gambling, and took this money to try again?" said Tom Merry. "Of course, it would be stealing—he would be a rotten thief—but not like an ordinary criminal, dear. Suppose there was a chance, too, of getting the money back without a fuss?"

"Tom, do you know this to be the case?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

Miss Fawcett was silent for a full minute.

"I do not see how you can know," she said, at last. "I do not fully understand, Tom dear. But I know you are the soul of truth. I will do as you wish. As soon as the major returns, I will tell him the matter is to be dropped."

"Thank you so much," said Tom Merry, kissing the old lady's cheek. "I only hope it is not too late. Good-night, dear."

And Tom Merry hurried out, and a couple of minutes later was striding along the Promenade des Anglais towards the Jetty, to rejoin his chums.

CHAPTER 9.

Catching the Train.

FIGGINS jumped out of the cab as it rattled up to the P.L.M. Station at the head of the Avenue de la Gare.

Kerr followed him out, and Figgins thrust a two-franc-piece into the hand of the driver, and ran up the steps of the station. The driver waved his hand in wild gesticulation. He saw that he had English boys to deal with, and he was not inclined to let them escape so cheaply. Figgins had given him half-a-franc over his fare, but that was not enough for a Nicois cabdriver in dealing with a youthful foreigner.

Figgins did not even turn his head. He was afraid that he might be only just in time for the Monte Carlo train, and he was in a hurry to get on to the platform. But Kerr, who knew that there were at least six or seven minutes to spare—even if the train were not late, turned back to speak to the driver.

The man waved the two-franc-piece at him.

"Pas assez?" asked the Scottish junior.

"Pas assez!" said the driver, with a nod.

"Not enough, eh?" said Kerr, with a sweet smile. Kerr was a canny Scot, and he had his own way of dealing with the innumerable swindlers who live upon the simplicity of the English and American visitors to the Mediterranean.

"How much, then? Combien?"

"Cinq francs," said the driver.

"Five francs, hey?"

"Cinq francs, m'sieu."

Kerr fumbled in his pocket with one hand, and held out the other for the two-franc-piece to be returned to him. The driver handed it to him, nothing doubting that he was about to receive a five-franc-piece in exchange.

Kerr took it, and carefully extracted a franc and a half-franc from his pocket, and placed the two coins in the astonished driver's hand.

The man stared at the franc and a half.

"Monsieur!"

"That's your fare," said Kerr coolly. "You've lost half-a-franc by trying to extort, my dear chap. That's your fare!"

"Monsieur!" gasped the driver.

"Oh, buzz off!"

"M'sieur!"

Kerr turned to go up the steps. The driver sprang down furiously, and brandished his fists. He poured out a string of impolite expressions with a strong Nicois accent. Kerr turned upon him coolly.

"If you want a dot on the nose, you've only got to ask for it," he said coolly, pushing back his cuffs.

The driver looked at him and mounted his box again, driving off with a string of abuse. The crowd of porters who had gathered round, grinned, and Kerr grinned too, as he walked into the station.



"Don't drive me to desperation, uncle," said Archie Hilton in a low voice. Tom Merry & Co. moved uncomfortably, but the crowd wedged them in, and they could not get away.

Figgins was at the barrier, trying to gain admission to the platform, and a sturdy porter on guard there was stopping him.

"He wants a ticket," said Figgins, as the man repeated the word "billet." "I'm trying to make him understand that I haven't a ticket, and that I want to go on the platform to see a chap, but it's no good."

Kerr chuckled.

"He means that you're to get a platform ticket," he said. "It's all right. Here's a half-franc I've saved for you."

"Eh?"

"I had an argument with the driver, and I've saved it. A half-franc saved is a half-franc earned. Shove it in your pocket."

Figgins mechanically obeyed. Kerr slid two dix-centime pieces into a slot-machine near the platform gate, and extracted two tickets. They gave him admission to the platform, and the man at the gate grinned and allowed the juniors to pass in.

Figgins looked anxiously up and down the platform.

"I don't see him here," he said.

"You wouldn't," said Kerr. "Even if he's here, he's not on this platform."

"Why not?"

"I suppose he's not going to Marseilles? It's the other side for Monte Carlo—l'autre cote, as they call it."

"Oh, good!"

"Come with me!" said Kerr. "You're rather wool-gathering just now, Figgy. This way."

Figgins pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I'm not quite myself," he said. "It was a horrible shock, Kerr."

Kerr nodded.

"I suppose there's no doubt, Figgy?"

"None at all. I hadn't the faintest idea, of course, that it was he, when I brought him down. But he recognised my voice, and—and he asked me to let him go."

"It's rotten!"

"What else could I do?" muttered Figgins. "He's my cousin."

"Nothing, I suppose," said Kerr. "It's rotten, though!"

"Of course, I didn't know at the moment about his having the money on him," said Figgins. "I don't know if it would have made any difference if I had known. He's my cousin, and I thought of the disgrace. It's awful!"

"It's all right if we stop him in time."

"Yes, that's so."

"Come on, Figgy!"

Kerr led the way, and they crossed the line to the side

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S COMET!"

where the Monte Carlo train was to come in. It was time now for the train to be in the station, and Figgins looked down the line towards Marseilles, but there was no sign of the train there.

Figgins wrinkled his brow anxiously.

"Ask one of the porters whether the blessed train's gone, Kerr," he said.

Kerr shook his head.

"It's all right, Figgy."

"But it's late, then."

"French trains are always late, old chap. I don't suppose anybody in Nice has ever had the experience of seeing the Monte Carlo train start at the time printed in the time-table. If such a thing happened, it would give the whole staff a shock they would never recover from."

Figgins grinned faintly.

"Well, I don't care, so long as we haven't missed it," he remarked.

They waited in silence. The crowd of people gathering on the platform indicated with sufficient clearness that the train had not, indeed, gone yet. There was a rumble down the line at last, and it rolled in.

It was five minutes late.

But the people on the platform—the trottoir—seemed in no great hurry to take their places. Perhaps they knew there was plenty of time yet. As, indeed, there was. Figgins looked anxiously up and down the platform. The train did not start, and three minutes had elapsed.

A voice was heard on the middle platform of the station.

"L'autre cote, m'sieur. Vous avez temps."

"Somebody in a hurry, trying to get in on the wrong side of the train," grinned Kerr. "Lots of time yet—the train's only eight minutes late, and that's nothing for a French train."

"It may be Archie."

"Very likely."

"Look!"

A man came quickly round the end of the stationary train, upon the platform where Figgins and Kerr were standing. He came along quickly towards the nearest door on the train, in too great a hurry to see the juniors.

It was Archie Hilton!

CHAPTER 10.

Figgins Puts It Straight.

F IGGINS and Kerr ran forward at once. Hilton had reached up to the handle of the carriage-door, and was swinging himself up the steep steps of the train, when Figgins's grasp fastened upon his arm.

The young man gave a violent start, and his face went white as he looked round.

He gave a gasp of relief as he saw that it was his cousin. The flash of terror in his eyes did not escape Figgins, and the junior knew that for a moment Hilton had dreaded to find himself in the grasp of a gendarme.

"Figgy! You?"

"Yes, Archie."

"Don't stop me—I'm catching this train!"

"I must stop you—you're not catching this train," said Figgins quietly. "Come back, Archie. You're not going to Monte Carlo to-night."

"I must!"

"You cannot!"

Their eyes met. Figgins's were determined—Hilton's wavering and irresolute. But he clung to the handle of the door, and expostulated with his foot on the step.

"Figgy, I must go! You don't understand!"

"Yes, I do. Come back!"

"I can't!"

"You must!"

"I won't, then!" said Hilton savagely. "Let me go!"

Figgins's lips set.

"You'll come back, Archie, if I have to drag you! Lend a hand here, Kerr!"

Hilton ground his teeth.

"Are you mad?" he muttered. "Do you want to make a row here, in public? You're attracting attention already!"

"I don't care! You're coming back!"

"I cannot, I tell you!"

"Better get off the step," said Kerr, in his quiet tones. "The train's nine minutes late, and it may start any minute now."

"Let me go!"

"Come back!"

There was a shriek from the engine. A porter ran along the platform, wildly gesticulating to Archie Hilton. The young man made an effort to drag himself away from Figgins; but the long-limbed junior held fast to him.

"Kerr! Quick!"

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Kerr laid hold of Hilton. The young man was dragged off the step of the train, and he came down on the platform with a bump, the juniors sprawling beside him.

The train started.

Hilton sprang to his feet. He made a dash for the train, but an excited porter made a dash to intercept him, and they met in collision. Hilton staggered back. The train was gone. It was the last train for Monte Carlo that night.

The young man muttered something under his breath. His face was dark with anger. Figgins and Kerr sprang up, breathless and dusty—but successful. Archie Hilton had lost the train!

Figgins was at his cousin's side in a few seconds.

"Archie—"

"Hang you!" muttered Hilton savagely—"hang you! I've lost the train!"

"And saved your honour!"

"Bah!"

"Come into the waiting-room," said Figgins. "I've got to speak to you—plain English."

"I won't!"

"Do you prefer me to speak out here? Some of these people will understand English."

Hilton bit his lip.

"All right, I'll come," he said. "I may as well, now the train's gone. There's no getting to Monte to-night. Hang you!"

Kerr exchanged a glance with Figgins, and waited outside the door of the *salle d'attente*. He could guess what Figgins had to say to his cousin, but he did not want to hear it. But Kerr had a suspicion that Hilton was a slippery customer, and he leaned in a careless attitude against the door to wait, determined that Hilton should not pass him if he gave Figgy the slip.

Hilton's face was sullen as he went into the waiting-room with Figgins. As a train had just gone, the room was almost empty, and they easily found a quiet corner.

"Well?" said Hilton sullenly.

"You know what I've got to say," said Figgins, who was very pale. "I let you go when I had you down in the garden, Archie. I acted on impulse!"

"Well?"

"But I didn't know then that you had Miss Fawcett's money in your pocket."

Hilton laughed sneeringly.

"Why did you think I had gone into the villa, and was running, then?"

"I didn't have time to think."

"And you would have captured me if you had known?"

"I don't know," said Figgins dubiously. "I hope so. Anyway, it's not too late now. You used to be an honourable chap, Archie. I would never have believed you capable of a thing like this if I hadn't found you out myself!"

Hilton was silent. The sneer was gone from his face now, however, and there was a flush in his cheeks.

"Archie, how could you? You—a thief!"

"I'm not a thief!"

"You've taken three hundred louis belonging to Miss Fawcett."

"I—I am going to return it. You can't imagine that I meant Miss Fawcett to lose the money, Figgy!" said Hilton hoarsely. "It was merely a loan—only, of course, I couldn't ask her to lend me money. I took it—I had to have it."

"Why?"

"Oh, you know very well!"

"You were going to Monte Carlo with it."

"Well, what then?"

"You stole it to gamble with!"

Hilton's face flushed.

"You'd better be careful what you say!" he broke out passionately. "I'm not a thief, and you sha'n't call me one! I am going to return the money, of course!"

"Do you know the major has already taken the numbers of the notes to the police?"

"The meddling old fool!"

"Archie! Our uncle—"

"It was all his fault!" said Hilton savagely. "If he had lent me the money I wanted—"

"You would have gambled it all away by now, and would want more," said Figgins. "What's the good of trying to deceive yourself, Archie? You know you would!"

"Oh, it's no use talking! I must try my luck again!"

"Not with stolen money!"

"It's only borrowed. I shall repay Miss Fawcett every penny."

"What if you lose?"

"I am not a beggar. I can raise the money ten times over next year, or the year after. I have property, only it's tied up so that I cannot touch it all at once, as you know."

"And jolly lucky for you, too!" said Figgins. "You've

blued all you could turn into money. You'll lose this, and you won't be able to repay it."

"I shall win. I have a feeling that——"

"Bosh!"

Hilton bit his lip, and was silent. There wasn't much politeness about Figgins's answer, but it came straight from his heart.

"It's disgrace enough already, even if the money is returned," said Figgins. "I'll keep the secret. Kerr knows, and he'll keep it, too. If the other fellows suspect anything, and they may, they'll keep their mouths shut. Uncle need never know. Miss Fawcett need never know. But the money must be returned."

"I tell you——"

"Besides, think, Archie! The police know the numbers before this, and they'll be on the look-out for anybody passing the notes."

Hilton smiled faintly.

"That's nothing, Figgy. One plays for notes at Monte Carlo, as one plays for francs at the casinos here. Do you think the croupiers even look at the numbers of the notes, when they are taking in dozens of them every few minutes? The notes may be discovered in a day or two in the coffers of the bank, but who's to know who played them on the roulette table? Nobody!"

"But——"

"That's if I lose—there's no danger. But if I win——"

"Oh, rats!"

"If I win, I shall return Miss Fawcett exactly the same notes."

"You wouldn't win."

"Anyway, the money would be restored in time."

"That won't do!"

"It must do!"

"You ought to leave this place, Archie. It's the ruin of you. You were a decent chap in England," said Figgins, almost aghast; "and now you're discussing playing with other people's money like—like a blessed burglar!"

"Oh, don't preach to me!"

"The money's got to be returned, Archie, and at once! Can't you see that if I let you go with it, I should be a thief, too—your accomplice?"

"Don't use that word to me Figgy. I've been very patient, but——"

"What other word do you want?"

"You know how I look at the matter——"

"Yes. Like a fellow who's lost his senses by gambling, and doesn't know right from wrong," said Figgins angrily. "Look here, that money is going straight back to Miss Fawcett. Do you understand?"

Hilton rose to his feet.

"I'm going," he said.

"Where—to the Villa des Fleurs?"

"No."

Figgins came closer to him.

"You will come with me, Archie?"

Hilton gave him a dangerous look.

"Careful, Figgy."

"Will you come with me, or shall I send for a gendarme?" said Figgins resolutely.

Hilton gritted his teeth.

"Do you mean that, Figgy?"

"Yes—you'll find that I do."

"I'll come with you."

"Come on, then!"

Hilton's face was dark with rage. He followed Figgins from the *salle d'attente*, and they joined Kerr. The Scottish junior looked at his chum inquiringly.

"We're going back to the villa," said Figgins abruptly.

"Right—oh!"

They left the station. Hilton walked between the two juniors. They crossed the road, and a tram came clanging along. Figgins and Kerr quickened their pace to get out of its way. Hilton suddenly dodged back.

"Look out!" shouted Kerr, on the alert at once.

But the tram, for the moment, was between Hilton and the juniors. They ran round it, and caught a glimpse of a pair of legs disappearing round the nearest corner.

"This way!" gasped Figgins.

They ran to the corner. But Hilton was gone. There were three or four ways he might have gone, and the crowd was thick—pursuit was hopeless.

Figgins set his teeth hard.

"The cad! He was deceiving me all the time—well, it's the police now!"

Kerr grasped his arm.

"Hold on, Figgy—give him a chance! He's not himself now, you know—give him another chance. He can't get to Monte to-night—the last train's gone, and if he went by road, he wouldn't arrive before the roulette tables were closed."

"Then he'll gamble in Nice instead."

"We can look for him in the casinos."

Figgins hesitated a moment, and then nodded. The thought of disgracing his cousin in public was hard to him; but to let him escape and gamble with Miss Fawcett's money was impossible. But he would give him another chance.

"All right, Kerr!" he said. "Come on!"

"The Casino Municipal first, then."

"Right!"

And the two juniors jumped upon a tram, and went rapidly down the Avenue de la Gare toward the Jardin Public, where the brilliantly-lighted facade of the Casino Municipal fronted the mimosas and the palm-trees.

CHAPTER 11.

Caught!

TOM MERRY came along the Promenade des Anglais, into the flare of lights from the Casino de la Jetee. He looked out over the jetty, and through the glass walls he could see the "la boule" tables, surrounded by crowds of gamblers, with the croupiers standing in their places, rolling the eternal ball.

The junior paid his two francs, and entered. He looked round for his chums, and found Monty Lowther and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy there.

"Have you seen him?" was his first question.

"No, dear boy! He's not here yet."

"How did you get on with Miss Fawcett?" asked Lowther.

"Oh, that's all right. It's to be taken out of the hands of the police, or as far as possible," said Tom Merry. "I suppose we'd better stay here for a bit. If Hilton tries to get away at the station, Figgy will stop him, and it will be later when he gets here."

"That's so."

The juniors sat down at one of the little tables and had coffee. There was a music-hall entertainment going on in the Jetee, and the songs from the stage, and the blare of the orchestra, mingled strangely with the "Faites vos jeux" and "Les jeux sont fait" of the croupiers.

The music-hall was not particularly edifying, but as songs and patter were in colloquial French, rattled off at express speed, the juniors understood little of them. But they paid little attention, anyway. Their thoughts were elsewhere.

From where they sat, they had a view of the entrance of the jetty, and they could see anyone who came up the carpeted steps into the cercle.

Crowds of people were pouring in now.

Men and women in masks and dominos—the masks being removed or lowered as they came in—crowded up the stairs, and spread among the coffee tables or surrounded the green cloth where the never-resting croupiers were at work.

It was an interesting sight enough to the juniors from St. Jim's—had not recent experience brought so keenly home to their minds the sin and wickedness, the misery and dishonour, caused by those green tables where the round ball rolled so merrily.

Tom Merry gave a sudden start.

"Look!"

A man had come quickly up the carpeted stairs. Without stopping for a glance round him, he made straight for the nearest gaming-table.

The crowd round it was two or three thick, and players were placing their "mise," or stake, over one another's shoulders, some of them hardly having time to put the money on the green cloth, so rapid was the game.

The new-comer made an effort to reach the table, but before he could get near enough to play, the "Ne rien" of the croupier rang out.

It was Hilton!

He had evidently eluded Figgins at the station, but had been prevented from going to Monte Carlo. The fact that he had come here to gamble proved that he had not restored the purloined money, and had not been deprived of it. Tom Merry was not likely to see it lost under his eyes. He crossed over towards Hilton, with Lowther and D'Arcy at his heels.

Tom tapped Hilton on the arm.

The young man looked round hurriedly. He looked angry, and then forced up a smile, as he recognised Tom Merry.

"Good-evening!" he said absently.

It was clear that he did not know that Tom knew all.

"You are going to play?" asked Tom.

"Yes."

"Hilton"—Tom Merry lowered his voice—"you'd better come away. I had better speak out, I see. I know who took Miss Fawcett's money—we all know!"

Hilton started convulsively.

"Then Figgins has——"

"Figgins has said nothing."

"Then—then——"

"We discovered it ourselves. You left a part of the black

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

domino in Blake's hand when you tore yourself away, and—

Hilton recovered his coolness with a powerful effort. "You are talking riddles," he said. "I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about. Has Miss Fawcett lost any money?"

"She has lost three hundred louis, which you took from her desk at the Villa des Fleurs, and which I believe you have about you at the present moment," said Tom Merry sternly. "You cannot bluff me. I know it."

"Do you dare—"

"You left part of your domino in Blake's hand when he seized you. We found your domino in your room, and the fragment Blake had fitted it exactly where it was torn."

"You—you have spied—"

"We had to make sure—for your own sake chiefly. We could have placed the fragment of the torn domino in the hands of the police, and allowed them to search your room."

Hilton turned pale.

"Tom Merry!"

"We want to keep it dark—for Figgy's sake, for your uncle's sake, and for your own sake," said Tom Merry. "But the money must be given back."

"I—I haven't—"

"Do you mean that you have lost it already?"

"Yes," said Hilton, white to the lips.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "That's wotten! We're too late, Tom Mewwy!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I do not believe it," he said.

"You doubt my word?" said Hilton furiously.

"A man who would steal would lie, I suppose?" said Tom Merry quietly. "You have not had time to lose the money yet. Besides, you were just going to gamble—you must have the money still, or, at all events, some of it. Be reasonable, Hilton. You can see that we are trying to spare you."

"Mind your own business."

"Will you come to the villa with us?"

"No."

"Then I shall stay here and watch you, while Lowther fetches a gendarme," said Tom Merry resolutely.

Archie Hilton gave him one keen look, and read the grim determination in his face. His own weak face looked surrender at once. If Tom Merry meant business, he could not gamble there. And Tom Merry evidently did mean business. He nodded.

"I'll come!"

And with the three juniors round him, he walked out of the Jeteé.

CHAPTER 12.

Tricked!

HILTON walked down the Promenade des Anglais with the three juniors. He could not resist; but he was looking all the time for an opportunity of escape. Tom Merry understood his glances to right and left, and he kept close to him, and Monty Lowther did the same. Arthur Augustus followed behind. A keen wind was blowing from the sea, and D'Arcy was more occupied in keeping his eye-glass from blowing off, than in watching Hilton. But they reached the Villa des Fleurs, and stopped at the major's gate, next to Miss Fawcett's. Hilton gave the juniors a furious look.

"Well, we are home," he said.

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, we are here."

"And what now?" said Hilton savagely. "You have brought me home—what next?"

"You have Miss Fawcett's money in your pockets!"

Hilton gritted his teeth.

"Give it to me and you can go," said Tom Merry. "I will take it back to Miss Fawcett, and merely tell her that it is recovered, without explaining any of the circumstances."

Hilton did not speak.

"Come, Hilton! You were a decent chap. I should never have suspected you of being dishonourable, but for this," urged Tom Merry. "I think you are not yourself this evening. Let the money be taken back, and no more said about the matter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Better be sensible, chappy," said Monty Lowther.

Still the young man was silent. In the grip of the demon of gambling, all his sense of honour, and all his self-respect, seemed to have left him.

"Well, what do you say?" said Tom Merry at last.

"Mind your own business."

"You refuse to give it up?"

"I refuse to say anything—to admit anything."

"That's not necessary; we have proof enough. You will end the matter, and save your name, by doing as I suggest."

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"I have nothing to say."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Bai Jove! I wegard you as an obstinate ass, Hilton."

"Let me go, confound you!"

"You cannot go with Miss Fawcett's money," said Tom Merry quietly. "I don't quite know what to do with you. I suppose I can only wait till Figgins comes back, and let him decide. It's his business."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you are going to watch me?" said Hilton savagely.

"Yes."

"Oh, I—I will punish you for this!" cried the young man, clenching his hands. "You had better not drive me too far."

"Listen to me," said Tom Merry. "I know that you intend to escape us if you can; but, remember, the numbers of the stolen notes are already known all over Nice. If you pass them at any gaming table here, you are too well known to the croupiers not to be recognised as the man who passed them. You understand? If you gambled with those notes to-night, you would be arrested in the morning."

Hilton's face blanched.

He had evidently not considered the matter in that light.

"I shall not play in Nice," he muttered.

"At Monte Carlo, I suppose, you might pass the notes safely," said Tom Merry. "But I shall see that you have no chance to get to Monte Carlo."

"Hang you!"

Tom Merry looked at Hilton in great disquietude. Could this unscrupulous, savage-tempered fellow be the kind-hearted, decent young man he had met only a week or two before? The change was amazing. But Hilton was not himself. The fire of gambling was in his veins, as intoxicating and demoralising as that of strong drink.

"Come in with us, Hilton," he said. "I shall leave Figgins to deal with you. It is for you to decide whether you will keep up appearances or not."

Hilton nodded sullenly, and they entered the garden of the Villa des Fleurs.

Tom Merry ordered coffee to be brought upon the verandah, and they sat down in the moonlight to drink the coffee and wait for Figgins.

Hilton sat in gloomy silence for a long time. The juniors were silent and depressed also. The wretched affair was casting a gloom over their holiday on the sunny shores of the Mediterranean.

Hilton broke the silence at last, suddenly and fiercely.

"Will you not listen to me?" he exclaimed. "I am absolutely certain of bringing off a big coup at Monte; there is not the slightest doubt of it. The system I have thought out is simply infallible."

"Bai Jove!"

"In a couple of hours' play I can turn three hundred louis into ten thousand, and then repay what I have borrowed—"

"Borrowed!"

"Yes," said Hilton fiercely. "Borrowed. You boys cannot understand; but I have worked it out so that I simply cannot lose."

"Your past record at the tables doesn't look like it," said Monty Lowther drily.

"One gains experience by losing."

"Bai Jove! Expewience is said to make fools wise, but there seems no chance of its havin' that effect in this case," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"What do you say?" exclaimed Hilton, with an eager look. "Will you give me a chance?"

"Impossible!"

"I tell you—"

"It is impossible."

The young man ground his teeth, and was silent.

They drank their coffee and waited. Miss Fawcett was already gone to her rest, and the major was in his own quarters, so there was no one to see that the juniors went to bed. The hour was late when their chuns came in. Figgins and Kerr, Fatty Wynn and Jack Blake came up the garden path together at midnight. They had met at the Casino Municipal, and waited there till the tables closed, without, of course, meeting Archie Hilton. Figgins uttered an exclamation of relief as he caught sight of his cousin on the verandah in the silver moonlight.

"Archie!"

Hilton looked at him sullenly.

Figgins gave Tom Merry an uncomfortable look. Blake had already explained to him that the juniors all knew the circumstances of the case.

"He is here, Figgins," said Tom quietly.

"You know all about it?"

"Yes."

"It's beastly," said Figgins, with very red cheeks. "I'm



D'Arcy leaped upon the rolling form of the man in the black domino, yelling to the Chums of St. Jim's for help.

horribly ashamed. Archie is mad, I think. He was always decent before, so far as I know."

Hilton sat pale and sullen.

Figgins turned to him.

"Archie—"

He broke off suddenly. A strange change had come over Archie Hilton. His look became fixed, and he leaned back heavily in his chair, his eyes closing. Figgins sprang towards him with a look of alarm.

"Archie, what's the matter?"

"Bai Jove! He's ill!"

The juniors gathered round Hilton quickly and anxiously. He seemed to be unconscious, and his face in the moonlight was white and haggard.

"It's a fit," said Kerr anxiously.

"Good heavens!"

"He's not been himself all day," said Figgins miserably. "Poor old Archie. Oh, those gambling hounds ought to be hung up in a row outside their rotten casinos."

"Get some water, quick!"

Lowther was already bringing a carafe of water. Tom Merry dashed some of it in Archie Hilton's face.

He gave a groan.

His eyes slowly opened, and he turned them to the juniors with a wild stare.

"What—what has happened? Where am I?"

"It's all right, Archie, old man," said Figgins. "You went off, that's all."

"What!"

"You fainted."

"Fainted! I—"

Hilton staggered to his feet, and glanced wildly round him. He held on to one of the pillars of the verandah for support.

"What—what's the matter?" He passed one hand over his brow. "I—I feel queer! How did I come here, Figgys? What's happened?"

The juniors exchanged glances.

Hilton seemed to be waking from a black dream. Had all the deeds of that day been done under the influence of a feverish excitement which had taken him out of himself, and had all recollection passed, with his recovery? It seemed so—it was so, unless Hilton was a clever actor.

Figgins hardly knew what to say. If Hilton had lost all recollection of the theft, he did not care to bring it to his mind; not just then, at all events.

"Figgys, what's the matter?"

"You—you're ill," muttered Figgins. "That's all. Let me help you to your room."

Hilton laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"I—I feel queer," he muttered. "As if I'd had a touch of sunstroke. I suppose I haven't."

"No."

"I think I'll lie down. Lend me a hand. And—and you might stay with me to-night, Figgy, if you don't mind. I feel horribly rocky."

Tom Merry looked relieved.

Although he was far from suspicious, the possibility that Hilton was acting could not fail to present itself to his mind. But the proposal that Figgins should remain with him was conclusive enough, at least, to the minds of the St. Jim's juniors.

"Yes, rather!" said Figgins.

He gave Hilton his aid into the next garden, and waved his hand for good-night to Tom Merry & Co., as he disappeared into the French windows of Hilton's room.

Tom Merry glanced at his comrades.

"What do you think of that?" he muttered.

"The poor chap is wathah wocky," said Arthur Augustus feelingly. "He's been ovah-doin' it, you know, and he wasn't himself to-day. Undah the circs., I don't think we are justified in wegardin' him as a thief at all."

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

"I hope it's genuine," said Kerr.

"Bai Jove! It's genuine enough, deah boy. You can wely on my judgment in a case like this."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Kerr——"

"Well, Figgy is with him," said Blake. "We are bound to leave it to Figgy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"He seems to be ill," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"He looks it," remarked Fatty Wynn seriously. "This is what comes of getting interested in that rotten gambling, you know, and sticking at the tables and missing your meals. Lots of them do it, and it runs a fellow down."

"Well, we'd better get to bed. We've got an early train to catch to Monte Carlo in the morning."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the juniors went up to their room.

Meanwhile, Figgins had taken Hilton to his room, and the young man sank upon the bed without undressing. Figgins did not wish to disturb him, so he allowed him to sleep in his clothes.

Hilton appeared to fall fast asleep at once, and Figgins was glad to see it. Figgins was keen enough in most matters, but he was naturally a simple-minded fellow, and he never suspected anybody of trickery until the fact was brought home to his mind in the plainest possible way. It never even entered his head that his cousin might be shamming.

Figgins threw himself upon a sofa near the window to rest.

He was not in a sleepy mood himself.

Tired as he was, he was worried and troubled about his cousin, for whom he had a strong regard—all the stronger, perhaps, because of Archie's weakness of character, which made the affection of others so necessary to him.

The thought that Archie was ill, and might need his care at any moment, was enough to keep Figgins awake for a long time.

But Hilton was lying very still, and apparently sleeping soundly enough.

The dawn was in the sky, however, before Figgins closed his eyes. The birds were singing among the mimosa in the garden when he slept.

When once he slept, he slept soundly.

He did not awaken till there came a tap at the window, and then he started out of slumber, and glanced in that direction. The sun was blazing in, and outside the glass stood the form of Tom Merry.

Figgins opened the French window.

"Hallo!" he said, rubbing his eyes.

"Time to get a move on," said Tom Merry. "How's Archie?"

"Still asleep? My hat!"

Figgins turned his glance towards the bed.

It was untenanted.

Archie Hilton was gone.

CHAPTER 13.

In Pursuit.

FIGGINS stood staring at the bed like a fellow in a dream. Tom Merry followed his glance, and his brow grew very stern. He understood at once. Hilton had been acting all the time; he had waited for his opportunity, and he had escaped—and taken with him the three hundred louis belonging to Miss Priscilla Fawcett. Tom Merry could have kicked himself. He had allowed the wool to be pulled over his eyes in the most facile way.

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Figgins looked at him helplessly.

"He's not here, Tom."

"I can see that," said Tom Merry curtly.

"It's all right, though," said Figgins, recovering himself a little. "He's just gone out of the room, I expect—he will be in the house."

"I shall be surprised if he is."

Figgins started.

"You don't think he—he——"

"I think he's gone."

"But—but he was ill——"

"I'm afraid he was spoofing us."

"Oh!"

"See if he's still in the house, Figgy."

Figgins nodded, and hurried out of the room. He came back in five minutes, with a dismayed and worried face.

"He seems to be gone, Tom."

"I thought so."

"But—but he couldn't have been shamming," said the bewildered Figgins. "He—he fainted, you know, and he had forgotten all about stealing the banknotes."

"I'm afraid we've all been taken in, Figgy," said Tom Merry quietly. "Hilton is simply insane about gambling now, and it's like dealing with a madman. I haven't the least doubt that he will take the next train to Monte Carlo."

"We must follow him, then," said Figgins, between his teeth.

"Come on, Figgy."

Figgins followed Tom Merry through the garden to Miss Fawcett's house. The other juniors were at breakfast. Miss Fawcett had not come down yet. Tom Merry explained in a few words what had happened, Figgins standing shame-faced and dejected.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That's wotten, you know."

"Yes, rather!"

"I suppose he's gone to Monte Carlo?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We are going after him," said Figgins. "I say, I'm awfully sorry to drag you fellows into a disgraceful affair like this. You can stick out of it if you like, and leave me to look after my cousin——"

"Wats!"

"Yes, rats!" said Tom Merry emphatically. "We're going to help you, Figgy, and we'll save Hilton yet, in spite of himself. We've got to get to Monte Carlo at once. We were going over with Miss Fawcett to-day. But there is an earlier train, and I think we ought to catch it. I'll explain to Miss Fawcett in a note. As Major Figgins is accompanying her to Monte Carlo, she will not need us, and we may as well go first."

"Good!"

"She won't be up for some time yet, but I will leave a note for her with Hannah. That's the simplest way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buck up with your breakfast," said Kerr, looking at his time-table. "There's a train from the Gare for Monte Carlo in a quarter of an hour."

"Bai Jove!"

"Shove something into you, Figgy," said Fatty Wynn quickly. "You haven't had anything to eat."

Figgins shook his head.

"I don't feel like eating, thanks."

"Oh, rubbish! You'll be ill!"

"It's all right, Fatty."

"It's not all right!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn warmly. "I'm not going to have you getting ill, Figgy. That won't do anybody any good. Look here, just squattez-vous and eat this fish-cake, and then a few eggs."

"But——"

"Oh, go ahead!"

Figgins smiled faintly, and bolted a few mouthfuls, but he felt all the better for it. Kerr poured him out a cup of coffee, and Figgins drained it, and the hot liquid brought a flush into his cheeks.

"I haven't washed yet," he said, rubbing his sleepy eyes.

"I——"

"Wash on the train."

"Oh, good!"

"I'll send a maid for a voiture at once."

In five minutes more the note for Miss Fawcett was written, and delivered to Hannah, and the juniors were rolling away for the station before the train was timed to depart, and so naturally had five or six minutes to wait before it started. They found a carriage to themselves, and Figgins at once went down the corridor for his wash. He was feeling the natural soiled and dilapidated feeling that comes of sitting up late and sleeping in one's clothes.

He was looking much better when he returned to the carriage.

"Bai Jove, that's wathah an improvement," said D'Arcy,

turning his eyeglass upon the New House junior. "I cannot say, however, that you improve clothes by sleepin' in them. I must remark, Figgins, that your twousahs are badly in need of pwessin'."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"We're really off," said Kerr, looking at his watch. "The train is only eight minutes late. Good!"

And they rolled out of Nice Station.

CHAPTER 14.

Off to Monte Carlo.

"**B**AI JOVE!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, looking out of the train window. "This is wippin' scenery!"

"Jolly good!" said Kerr.

"It's as good as some parts of Somerset and Devon," said Figgins, who hailed from that part of the world. "Not better."

"Oh, no!"

"Still, it's very good," said D'Arcy. "Look at that—Ch!"

The train plunged into a long tunnel, and the scenery was blotted out.

"Bai Jove!"

"Lots of tunnels on this line," said Kerr. "You catch glimpses of scenery between the tunnels. If you want to see the scenery, it's better to come along the coast by tram. It takes a jolly lot longer, though."

"We'll go back by tram one day," said Tom Merry.

"What was that station we just passed, Kerr?"

"Eze," said Kerr.

The train rushed on. It kept up a pretty good speed. The morning was fine, and the juniors had a good view of the coast scenery as the train sped along, excepting when it plunged into a tunnel, as was frequently the case.

They gazed with great admiration at the beautiful bay of Villefranche when they passed it, and D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye to gain the last possible glimpse of it.

"Bai Jove! That's good!" he exclaimed, dropping his eyeglass at last.

"Go hon!"

"It's weally good. Look at— Oh!"

The train plunged into another tunnel.

"Bai Jove, this seems to be an underground railway!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "The tunnels don't smell vewy nice, eithah."

"Close the window, then, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

Jack Blake jammed up the window. There was a sudden yell from Arthur Augustus, who had his hand on the frame.

"Oh, you ass!"

"Great Scott! You've shut his hand in it!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Phew!"

"I'm sorry, Gussy! Are you hurt?"

"Oh! You ass!"

"You see—"

"Didn't you see I had my hand there, you duffah?"

"You see—"

"Let's look at your fingers," said Tom Merry anxiously.

"If they're injured—"

"Oh, it's all wight," said D'Arcy calmly. "My hand wasn't caught in the window, you know. It's all wight."

They glared at him.

"Then what on earth were you yelling about?" demanded Tom Merry indignantly.

"I wasn't aware that I was yellin'."

"You utter ass!"

"I decline to be chawactewised as an ass. I uttached an ejaculation because I was startled by Blake's closin' the window so suddenly, and it thwew me into quite a fluttah," said D'Arcy. "I wefuse to admit that I was yellin'."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I say," interrupted Fatty Wynn, who had been looking very thoughtful, "is there a grub department on this train, Tom Merry?"

"I don't know."

"Good old Fatty! It's nearly half an hour since breakfast, so he must be famished," remarked Monty Lowther.

"Nothing of the sort. I may be a little peckish, but I was really thinking of Figgins. He ate next to nothing at brekker."

"I'm all right," said Figgins.

"That's all very well, Figg; but you can't be allowed to make yourself ill," said Fatty Wynn argumentatively. "I'm not going to stand by and see you do it. You'll need

to keep up your strength, too, if you're going to look after that cousin of yours. You had better come along to the restaurant car if there is one, and have a feed."

"I don't want one."

"You ought to have one. I'll come with you to keep you company, and just take a bite or two with you."

"Rats!"

"You had better come," said Fatty, getting up.

"Bosh!"

"Well, I'll go, and I'll bring you back something solid," said Fatty Wynn.

And he stepped out of the carriage into the corridor.

"Don't be gorging there when we get to Monte," said Kerr. "You can get carried on to Vintimille if you are."

"I shall be back in a jiffy. I shall just stop to get something to eat, and then I shall bring Figgins some sandwiches."

"Yes, we know you."

Fatty Wynn deigned no reply to that remark. He went down the corridor in search of the restaurant car. The others sat and watched the scenery, Figgins with a puckered brow. He was wondering whether he would be in time to prevent Hilton from losing the stolen money at the gaming tables in the casino.

"That's Monaco," said Kerr, as the train stopped. "Last station before Monte Carlo. This is where the prince has his diggings. Somebody told me that you see his palace from the train."

"Bai Jove, is that so?"

"I suppose so."

The train was passing the palace on the hill where the prince of the smallest principality in Europe dwells in sight of the quarter from whence he draws his revenue. Monaco is a strange principality. Independent—on sufferance—it flourishes, a mere spot surrounded by foreign territory. From the Casino Company the prince draws a huge yearly revenue, and the company pays, besides, his "army," and all the local taxes. And after that, the casino pays a profit to its lucky proprietors of considerably over a million pounds sterling per annum.

A profit of a million sterling, and huge expenses—all met out of the losses of the gamblers who visit the casino for the purpose of "trying their luck," and perchance "breaking the bank."

The train rushed on towards the town of Monte Carlo.

It stopped in Monte Carlo station.

"My hat! Where's that ass Wynn?" exclaimed Kerr.

"The duffah! He'll be cawwied on!"

"I'll go for him."

"By Jove! Huwwy, deah boy!"

Kerr and Blake rushed off down the corridor. The other juniors alighted down the steep steps of the train, and waited on the platform for them.

Blake and Kerr rushed into the restaurant car, and found Fatty Wynn seated at one of the little tables, doing full justice to coffee and sandwiches, the only provender he had been able to obtain.

He was raising the coffee cup to his lips when Blake grasped him by the shoulder.

"Come on Wynn."

"Ow!" gasped Wynn.

His arm jerked as Blake grasped him, and the coffee streamed over his chest.

He jumped up with a howl

"Oh, you frabjous ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George! I'll—I'll—"

"Come on!" shrieked Kerr. "This is Monte!"

"Oh!"

"You'll be taken on to Italy, ass!"

"Phew!"

The three juniors rushed down the long car. There was a wild shriek from the garcon in attendance, and he rushed after them.

"M'sieur! Messieurs! Ah! M'sieur!"

"My hat! I forgot! I haven't paid him!"

"Let him follow, then!" said Kerr grimly. "You're not going on to Italy to pay him!"

"But—"

"Buzz off!"

Kerr slung Fatty Wynn down the steps, and followed him off the train. Jack Blake jumped down after them. The garcon shrieked after them.

"Payez! Payez, m'sieur!"

"How much?" demanded Fatty Wynn, looking up from the platform. "Pitch it to him in his lingo, Kerr."

"Combien?" asked Kerr.

"Cinq franc."

"My hat!" said Blake. "You must have done justice to the sandwiches, if it comes to five francs. But there's no time to argue."

"But—"
 "Pitch him the five francs."
 The train began to move.
 "Payez!" shrieked the garcon, who seemed to be about to have a fit. "Payez!"
 Fatty Wynn tossed up a five franc piece.
 "Catch!"
 The garcon caught it. But he still gesticulated.
 "Pourboire, m'sieur."
 "What does he say, Kerr?"
 "He wants a tip," grinned Kerr.
 "Oh, he can go and eat coke! He's charged me a franc or two too much as it is."
 "Pourboire—"
 "Poof!"
 The train was moving out. The garcon waved his hand despairingly. From along the line, as the train glided on, came the faint echo of his voice, dying away in the distance.
 "Pourboire, s'il vous plait."
 Then he was gone.

CHAPTER 15.

No Admittance.

FATTY WYNN snorted.
 "They're not backward in asking for what they want in this blessed country," he remarked. "They expect tips in England, but they don't demand 'em like that. I think all visitors to the Riviera ought to form a Non-Tipping League."

"Bai Jove! That would be an awfully good ideah!"

Fatty Wynn made a mental calculation.

"When I come to work it out, it comes to exactly five francs," he remarked. "It's surprising how the sandwiches go! I might have given him twopence. Never mind."

"This way out!" said Tom Merry.

"Ascenseur! Ascenseur!"

It was a sing-song voice at the end of the platform.

"That means a lift," said Kerr. "Are we going out of the station by the steps, or up in the lift?"

"In the lift," said D'Arcy immediately. "It is no use makin' an unnecessary effort, deah boy."

"Right-ho!" said Blake. "Gussy shall pay!"

"Weally, Blake—"

The station of Monte Carlo lies very low on the shore of the bay. The casino and the hotels are high up, and can be approached by the steps cut in the hillside, or by the lift. Arthur Augustus had chosen the lift, and the juniors marched in it, passing through a refreshment bar en route for the lift shaft.

Fatty Wynn lingered behind.

"Half a mo', you chaps—"

"Oh, come on; the lift's just going to start!"

"I was thinking that a few of these tarts—"

Kerr and Figgins took Fatty Wynn by the arms, and marched him on into the lift. The uniformed attendant closed the gates, and the lift mounted. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paid thirty centimes each for the seven passengers, and bade the lift attendant keep the change out of a five franc piece—a little generosity which made the attendant take off his cap and bow three times to the very floor of the lift.

The ascent occupied only a few moments, and then the attendant threw open the lift gate, and the juniors stepped out upon the terrace.

The man took off his cap again and bowed to the ground, and Arthur Augustus took off his silk hat and bowed in reply, in the politest possible manner.

Then they walked up the terrace into Monte Carlo.

There are few more beautiful sights in the world than the surroundings of Monte Carlo. The juniors gazed out over the lovely bay, and away towards the Alps.

"Wippin'!" said D'Arcy.

"You can see Italy from a part of this terrace," said Kerr, looking round. "We're not going to Italy, so we may as well have a look at it."

"I'd rather look for my cousin just now," said Figgins.

"Sorry, old man! Come on!"

They walked on, and passed under a long, covered way, and came out in sight of the casino, the gardens, and the Cafe de Paris.

It was a cheerful and inspiring sight on a sunny morning.

There were crowds of well-dressed promenaders, and some of them glanced curiously at the group of juniors. Perhaps they were surprised to see a party of fellows, evidently schoolboys on a holiday, without any elder in such a place.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and looked round.

"Betiah ask somebody the way," he remarked. "We ought to go straight to the casino."

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"Ass!"
 "Weally, Kerr—"
 "What on earth do you want to ask the way for? Come on!"

"But—"
 "Oh, come on!"
 "But I insist upon inquirin' the way, Kerr. It will save time—"

"Duffer! There's the casino under your nose."

"Bai Jove! Is that the casino?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass. I wish it to be undah-stood, once for all, that I absolutely wefuse undah any circs. to—"

"Come on!"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Tom Mewwy!"

"Exactly! Come on!"

The juniors marched on towards the steps of the casino, and D'Arcy frowned indignantly and followed them.

They came up to the handsome building where so many millions are won and lost yearly, and ascended the broad flight of steps leading to the entrance vestibule.

Two men in uniform were at the open doors, and they immediately closed up to prevent the entrance of the St. Jim's juniors.

Tom Merry stopped, and looked at them. Both the men shook their heads, but in a quite polite way.

"We want to enter," said Tom Merry.

The man replied in rapid French.

"What is he saying, Kerr?"

"He says that boys are not admitted."

"My only hat! I'd forgotten that."

The juniors gazed at one another in dismay.

In the excitement of the chase after Archie Hilton, they had completely forgotten the most rigid rule of the casino at Monte Carlo—that persons under age are not admitted to the gambling-rooms on any pretext whatever.

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, this is rotten!"

"We are looking for a friend," said Tom Merry appealingly. "Nous cherchons un ami."

The man shook his head.

"Il est defendu, m'sieur."

"What does that mean, Kerr?"

"It means that it's forbidden."

"Explain to him that we don't want to gamble, and that we're only looking for a chap we know, and want just to speak to him."

Kerr explained in fluent French. The man before them listened politely, and shook his head.

"Non, m'sieur—non!"

"Suppose you tip the beast?" suggested Blake.

"No good."

"Ask him to let us see someone in authority," said Tom Merry desperately. "We simply must go in. There must be a superintendent or something or other whom we could explain to."

"Well, I'll put it to him, if you like."

Kerr raced on again in French. The man hesitated. Finally he said something to his companion, who retired into the vestibule, and passed into an inner room on the left. A number of curious people were gathering on the steps by this time, and the St. Jim's juniors found themselves the centre of attraction.

They waited with uneasy hearts.

They were already a considerable time after Hilton, and they felt that if there were much delay the last chance would be gone of stopping him from gambling with the money he had taken from Miss Fawcett's desk. And if they were not admitted at all—

The attendant who had gone in returned with a little Frenchman in a black frock coat, immaculate shirt, and Dundreary whiskers. He was a dry and formal-looking little man, and appeared none too well pleased at being disturbed.

"You speak English?" asked Tom Merry.

The little gentleman shook his head impatiently. A larger man, with a fat, ruddy face, came and joined him, and the little man muttered to him. The ruddy man turned to the juniors and spoke in English. He was evidently the interpreter.

"What do you want?"

"We wish to go into the rooms—"

"Impossible! It is forbidden. Boys cannot enter."

"We do not wish to play?"

"Why, then, enter the rooms?"

"A friend of ours is there—"

"He will doubtless come out when his business is done."

"We want to see him very particularly."

"You wait, then."



"You young ass, Wootton! What are you doing, striding off like a blessed ostrich?" came the wrathful whisper from the disguised Monk. "Anybody can tell you aren't a girl a mile off!"

(A laughable incident from the tale entitled, "Gordon Gay's Team," in "The Empire Library." Out to-day. Price One Halfpenny.)

"But——"

"Monsieur, you cannot enter. It is the rule. It is defendu—forbidden—for enfants to enter. That is enough."

"But——"

"I have no more time."

The interpreter and the little gentleman in whiskers retired into the vestibule. The attendants blocked the path.

"Bai Jove! I wegard this as weally wotten!"

"It's beastly!" growled Blake.

"Suppose we make a wush for it?" suggested D'Arcy.

"We could give these chaps a feahful thwashin', you know, and go in all the same."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Are you ready to thrash about a hundred attendants?" demanded Blake.

"I am weady to twy."

"Oh, come away!"

"But——"

"Ring off, Gussy. We have to think what's to be done."

And the juniors walked away, followed by curious glances from the crowd of promenaders and loungers. They strolled disconsolately into the wide gardens, and sat down on one of the long wooden seats to discuss the plan of campaign.

CHAPTER 16.

D'Arcy's Brilliant Ideas.

TOM MERRY was frowning.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "We've got to get into the blessed place somehow—that's settled?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then how's it to be done?"

"Bai Jove! That's a puzzle!"

It was indeed a puzzle. The juniors could find no solution to it. Admittance was refused to all comers under age, and there was no getting over a difficulty like that. The doors were impassable. What was to be done?

"Gweat Scott!"

"Oh, do ring off, Gussy, while we think!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Cheese it!"

"I've got an ideah!"

"Rubbish!"

"I wegard that as a wude wemark, Blake. If there were time at the present moment, I should feel called upon to administah a feahful thwashin'. Howevah, I will ovahlook it! I've got an ideah!"

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Tom Merry, not very

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"SKIMPOLE'S COMET!"

Hopefully. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had a way of propounding the most astounding plans, generally impracticable.

"You wemembah the time when Kerr dwessed himself up at St. Jim's as somebody? I think it was as Skimpole—"

"What on earth—"

"It was weally that that made me think of the ideah."

"How? What?"

"Why, if a chap like Kerr could dwess himself up so as to take people in, it stands to weason that a fellow like myself could do it wippingly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah, Blake."

"Ass! Are you thinking of dressing yourself up as Skimpole?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then what's the rotten idea?"

"It is not a wotten ideah."

"Frabjous ass!" shrieked Blake. "If you've got any idea at all, get it off your chest, before I dot you on the boko."

"I should uttally wefuse to be dotted on the boko. How-
evah, I will pwocceed to explain, if you will have the gweat kindness to leave off intewwuptin' me. I was thinkin' that as only chaps ovah age are admitted to the gamblin' wooms, I could disguise myself as a ggrown-up chap."

"My hat!"

"Good!"

"Ripping!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy beamed upon his chums, greatly pleased by the reception his brilliant idea had met with.

"Weally, deah boys, you are very complimentary," he remarked. "Of course, it is a wippin' ideah, I know, and I'm just the fellow to cawwy it out."

"Rats!"

"Eh?"

"Rats—and many of 'em!"

"Weally—"

"It's a good idea," said Blake. "But you're not the chap to carry it out. If you tried it on, you would be carried out yourself, by the attendants."

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Gussy deserves a vote of thanks for his suggestion," said Kerr. "But, of course, we can't allow him to try it."

"Of course not."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Kerr's the chap," said Figgins. "Kerr can impersonate anybody. And, of course, there is a costumier in this town. They have lots of fancy-dress balls and theatricals among the people here, and there's bound to be a costumier."

"That's so."

"Well, if you chaps think so, I'll try willingly," said Kerr modestly.

"Weally—"

"Now, don't be an ass, Gussy! I suppose you remember the time you went in disguise to the Grammar School, and were bowled out at once?" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"That was the fault of the othahs."

"Rats!"

"Lowthah, I insist upon—"

"Bosh!"

"Tom Mewwy—"

"Rubbish!"

Arthur Augustus swept the faces of his comrades with his eyeglass. He was extremely indignant, and meant that look to shivel them up—but it didn't.

"Weally, deah boys, I must insist upon bein' allowed to cawwy out my own ideah," he exclaimed. "What's the good of pwopoundin' a wippin' ideah, if you chaps immediately pwocceed to muck it up?"

Tom Merry patted him on the shoulder.

"You wouldn't be any good, Gussy. Your beautiful accent would give you away at once, for one thing. We shall have to pass that chap with the whiskers again."

"Yaas, but—"

"Kerr's the chap," said Figgins.

"Oh, yes!"

"Yaas, wathah. But—"

"Kerr's the chap."

"Well, to be quite frank," said Kerr, "when there's a Scotsman in the party, he ought to be given any very delicate and difficult business to perform. You see, with the superior intellect, which is a national characteristic, a Scotsman—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"I wegard your wemarks as wot, Kerr!"

"Yes, rats, and many of 'em!" said Blake. "But Kerr is the chap, all the same. But what I think is, that Kerr can't go in alone, and it's as easy to disguise two as one. Then Kerr is a New House chap, and it stands to reason that there must be a School House chap on the job. I had better go with Kerr."

"Well, you're right on one point," agreed Tom Merry. THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 112.

"There ought to be somebody with Kerr. But I think I ought to go, as a member of a higher Form."

"Couldn't trust a thing like this to a Shell fellow," said Blake, shaking his head.

"Look here—"

"I was thinking that perhaps I ought to go with Kerr," said Figgins. "You see, I'm the tallest of the party, and shall make up as a man much better."

"I don't think you've got much start of me," said Lowther.

"About two inches—"

"Bosh!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Rats!"

"Let's measure, then," exclaimed Figgins, jumping up. "Shove your back against mine, and we will see, you School House bouncer!"

"We jolly well will."

"Here, you look, Tom Merry—"

"Oh, don't waste time rotting—"

"I tell you we're going to measure. If I haven't got two inches the start of Lowther, you can use my head for a footer!"

"Rubbish!" said Monty Lowther.

"Measure, Tom Merry—do you hear?"

Tom Merry rose from the seat. He put his hands on the two juniors' heads to bring them together.

"Put 'em close together, and measure," said Figgins. "If I haven't—"

"Rats!" said Lowther.

"Why, you ass—"

"You dummy—"

Crack!

Tom Merry brought their heads together, with a biff that rang through the gardens. Figgins and Lowther gave a simultaneous yell, and staggered apart. Figgins threw up his hands and clasped the back of his head, and Lowther did the same.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Yaroo!"

"O-o-och!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You frabjous ass!" roared Lowther. "What did you do that for?"

"You dangerous lunatic!" shrieked Figgins. "What did you do that for?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"What did you—"

"To teach you not to waste time at an important moment," said Tom Merry severely. "If you begin to jaw again, I'll knock your heads together again, you duffers!"

"Why, you waster—"

"You lunatic—"

"Dry up! Now, then, as these duffers have done, we'll consider the question," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it's agreed that I'm going into the casino with Kerr?"

CHAPTER 17.

In Disguise.

THERE was a chorus of protest at once. Kerr did not make any remark, but the other juniors did—loudly.

"Bosh!" said Blake.

"Rubbish!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Stuff!"

"Piffle!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I wegard you as an ass! Of course, I am the fellow to go in with Kerr, especially as it was my ideah in the first place."

"But, you see—"

"Besides, what is required at a time like this is a fellow of tact and judgment," said D'Arcy, looking round. "I pwesume that no one can dispute my claim."

"Then your presumer's out of order," said Blake. "I'm the very chap to go."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Figgins ought to go," said Kerr. "He's Hilton's cousin, and, of course, will have most influence over him. He ought to be there."

"Yes, rather," said Figgins. "I never thought of that."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"Well, there's something in that," he admitted; "but when you come to think of it there ought to be three in the party—Figgins and Kerr and myself."

"Pewwaps four would be bettah, and I will come."

"Make it five," said Blake sarcastically.

"Or seven," said Fatty Wynn.

"Impossible! Three is the limit," said Tom Merry decidedly. "If a crowd go in, they'll attract attention, and that's just what we want to avoid. You know, we shall all

have to get billets of admission in the vestibule, and pass the monsieur with the whiskers."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's no good wasting time. Figgins and Kerr are to go, and we'd better toss up for the third man."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's fair," said Blake.

Tom Merry took out a dix-centime piece. He tossed with Blake, and Blake lost. Then D'Arcy tossed with Lowther, and Lowther lost. Then Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and Fatty Wynn tossed for odd man, and Tom Merry scored.

D'Arcy looked very serious and thoughtful.

"I take the cake," said Tom Merry.

Fatty Wynn looked round quickly.

"The cake! Where's the cake?"

"Ha, ha! I was speaking figuratively."

"Oh!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Upon the whole, deah boys—"

"We'd better go and look for a costumier now," Tom Merry remarked.

"Upon the whole, deah boys—"

"Come on," said Kerr; "no time to lose."

"Upon the whole, deah boys, I wathah think we're w'ong to toss up for it," said Arthur Augustus. "Tossing up money is immowal."

"Yes, ass, if you're doing it for gambling, to keep the money, but to decide a doubtful point, there's no other way, duffer."

"I wefuse to be called a duffah."

"Are you coming?"

"Yaas; but I wegard all tossing up, upon the whole, as immowal. Therefore, I think it would be bettah for Tom Mewwy to wesign in my favah."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!" said Blake. "It's settled now, unless Tom Merry cares to let me go instead—for the good of the cause, of course."

"More rats!" said Tom Merry.

And the juniors left the gardens, and proceeded to look along the shops of Monte Carlo. There were many fine, handsome shops, and after a search the juniors found what they wanted—a hairdresser and costumier's. They poured into the shop, and a fat Frenchman, with a shiny smile and a moustache like a brigand, came forward to meet them.

He spread out his fat hands and bowed. There was no one else in the shop. He waved his hand to a glass door.

"Ze saloon," he said.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"My hat! He thinks we want a shave."

D'Arcy looked at himself in a glass, and ran his hand over his chin.

"Bai Jove! I wondah if I had bettah have a shave, you know."

"Ha, ha!"

"Don't you think there is wathah a wuffness on my uppah lip?"

"Yes, about as much as there is on a billiard ball," said Tom Merry. "Pitch it to this chap in French, Kerr, and tell him what we want. Only don't mention about getting into the casino—that's a dead secret."

"What-ho!" said Kerr.

Kerr poured out a stream of French. His comrades listened in great admiration. He could pitch out French, as Blake had remarked, just as if he understood it. Kerr's gifts as a French scholar came in very useful now, as they had before. The fat gentleman looked surprised at first, but when Kerr showed a banknote, his surprised expression gave place to a beaming and benevolent smile, and he led the juniors into a room at the back of the shop, and was soon producing his disguises for their needs.

"What have you told him, Kerr?" asked Blake.

"That we're going to disguise ourselves for a joke on somebody," said Kerr. "That's strictly true. It will be the biggest joke of the season, I think, if it comes off. We shall be the only kids who have ever got into the casino."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The Frenchman had spread out a wonderful assortment of wigs and beards and moustaches on the table. It was evident that he did a good deal of business in this way, doubtless for private theatricals among the wealthy residents of Monte Carlo in the season.

Kerr explained that they wanted to be made up to look like fully grown-up persons, and the Frenchman nodded and set to work.

Figgins, Kerr, and Tom Merry submitted to his hands, allowing him to do as he liked, and he worked a change in their appearance with marvellous rapidity.

Figgins was changed into a gentleman of about fifty, of a somewhat sanctimonious cast. Kerr was brought up to the age of twenty-five or so, and the costumier suggested that he might pass for Figgins's son. Tom Merry looked about forty

when he was finished. Their comrades looked on in the greatest astonishment.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, at last. "Why, I shouldn't know you myself, deah boys."

"These blessed beards feel awfully odd," said Figgins. "And the stuff he sticks them on with tickles."

"If you like, Figgay, I will go instead."

"Thank you for nothing."

"You see, it would be more successful, and—"

"Bosh!"

The disguises were finished at last. Then there was a change of clothes—for of course the boys' clothes did not suit their new appearance. The costumier had clothes of all shapes and sizes, and he made the three juniors look their parts wonderfully well. Tom Merry looked like a somewhat small gentleman, Figgins a good-sized one, and Kerr a young man with a ruddy complexion.

The fat Frenchman rubbed his hands, and beamed when all was done.

"Magnifique!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "C'est magnifique."

"Yaas, wathah! I think you'll pass, deah boys!"

"I think we shall," said Tom Merry, surveying himself in the glass. "My hat! If I met myself in the street like this, I shouldn't know myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, let's get off," said Kerr. "We've got to run the gauntlet at the casino yet. You fellows had better not come out with us. No good being seen together."

"That's so."

And the juniors settled with the costumier, and left a considerable amount as a deposit for the clothes they had borrowed, and then the three disguised adventurers quitted the shop, and bent their steps once more in the direction of the casino.

CHAPTER 18.

Into the Casino!

TOM MERRY'S heart beat as he came out into the sunny street. It seemed to him that the disguise must be apparent in the sunlight, and that the passers-by would see through it at once. He glanced at Figgins, and saw that the long-limbed junior was just as excited as himself. Kerr was as cool as an iceberg.

"For goodness' sake don't stride along like that, Figg!" said Kerr. "A man of sixty wouldn't take steps as long as that."

"By Jove!"

"And don't walk with your hands in your pockets, Tom Merry. You have to consider appearances a little more at forty."

"By George!"

"And if you could make your voices a little deeper it would be better."

"Good!"

"Don't talk, if you can help it," said Kerr. "Leave the jabberjee part to me. I can sling it to them in French, and you chaps can be fellows who don't speak the language. See?"

"Right-ho!"

In spite of Tom Merry's apprehension, no one glanced at them curiously in the street. The disguises were evidently passing muster.

They came in sight of the casino again.

Their hearts beat as they mounted the broad, stone steps. The crisis was coming now—the next few minutes would decide.

The uniformed doorkeepers did not even glance at them.

They were the same two men who had stopped the juniors from entering the casino a short time before; but they were completely deceived this time.

Tom Merry, Figgins, and Kerr entered the great vestibule. They could not help exchanging a glance of triumph as they walked in.

The first line of defence, so to speak, was passed in safety. But they still had to obtain tickets of entry into the casino, for at Monte Carlo entrance is impossible without that preliminary. The authorities of the casino are very careful as to whom they admit. The rule for the exclusion of minors is so rigid, that particularly youthful-looking men of twenty-five and twenty-six have been excluded, on the mere possibility of their being under age. After a few visits, when one becomes known to the officials, a season-ticket is granted, but for the first few visits the formality of obtaining a "billet d'entree" is indispensable.

Tom Merry glanced about him in the vestibule. He had been told that billets of entry were to be obtained in the ante-room on the left as he entered, and he immediately made for the room.

It was an apartment of no great size, with a long table, or, rather, counter, along each side, at which the casino clerks

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sat in a row. The gentleman with the whiskers, who was evidently an official of authority, was there, and he was treated with great respect by the others. Kerr, who was the spokesman of the party, addressed himself to one of the clerks sitting on a stool behind the table on the left.

The man glanced at him, and drew out a little card, and dipped a pen in the ink.

He asked the names, residence at home, residence in the Riviera, and occupation of the juniors.

He spoke without the slightest suspicion that he was addressing boys, and Kerr replied with perfect coolness.

He stated the exact truth. The names were given as Kerr, Figgins, and Merry, friends travelling on the Continent. The home addresses were given correctly, and the address in Nice—Villa des Fleurs, Promenade des Anglais. Occupation—none; and certainly the juniors had no occupation, unless going to school could be called one.

The replies were satisfactory, and the cards of admission were written out, and signed, and the juniors wrote their names upon them.

"C'est tout," said the clerk; and he turned indifferently to a big American, who was loudly inquiring for a ticket.

"That's all," said Kerr. "Merci, monsieur!"

And the juniors walked out of the ante-room.

"Then it's all right?" asked Figgins.

"Right as rain!"

"Let's get in, then."

They entered the inner vestibule—a great apartment, with a bar at one end, and the entrance doors of the casino proper at the other.

Officials stood on guard at the entrance of the gaming-rooms, and they stopped the juniors. Tom Merry's heart sank.

Was it to be a failure, after all?

But Kerr quickly explained.

"We have to leave our hats in the cloak-room, and the coats," he said. "They're more particular here than in the casinos at Nice."

"Oh, is that all?" said Tom Merry, greatly relieved.

"That's all."

"Where's the cloak-room?"

"Over yonder in the vestibule."

The juniors deposited the borrowed hats and coats in the cloak-room, and received a tin billet for them, and then strolled towards the entrance doors again.

This time the doorkeepers allowed them to pass, with bows and smiles, and the doors swung open, and Tom Merry and his comrades entered the famous gaming-rooms of Monte Carlo.

The door swung to behind them.

A close atmosphere, a subdued hum of voices greeted the juniors.

From the nearest roulette tables came a clear, metallic voice.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs!"

A pause; then:

"Les jeux sont fait!"

Another pause.

The roulette ball was whizzing on its course.

"Rien ne va plus!"

The ball dropped into a slot.

"Cinq rouge impair et manque!"

CHAPTER 19.

In the Rooms.

TOM MERRY and his comrades walked slowly up the vast apartment.

There were roulette tables on all sides, arranged in rows of three, and each was attended by half a dozen or more croupiers, and surrounded by eager players.

Early as the hour was, the casino was crowded.

Round each roulette table chairs were placed for the players, and they were all occupied; but outside the chairs players were standing in rows two or three deep. When the casino was very crowded, the rows round the tables are sometimes four or five deep, and there is a struggle to throw one's stakes on the board, and sometimes a still keener struggle to get possession of one's winnings. For players are frequently unscrupulous, and a gambler favourably placed for capturing a stake will sometimes coolly take possession of it; and unless the croupier is very keen, and has been watching, he will keep possession of it, too, in spite of the rightful owner. Hence frequent scenes at the roulette tables—scenes which are quieted as quickly as possible by the croupiers.

Persistent annexers of other people's stakes find themselves marked in the long run by the casino's detectives, and refused admission. But the temptation to a losing player

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to seize another gambler's winnings is very strong, and the mere act of gambling loosens the restraints of honour. And the confirmed gambler, when his own money is gone, is always firmly convinced that with one more chance he would win back all his losses, and come out ahead of the bank.

The sight was not a pleasant one to the juniors. With their wholesome minds and clean ideas, the sight of men buried in the intent interest of gaming could not be either pleasant or edifying.

But it was curious and interesting, and apart from their mission there, they were glad of an opportunity of seeing one of the most remarkable sights of Europe.

They stopped at the first roulette table, to look at the game, and to see if Hilton were among the crowd of players.

The roulette wheel was still revolving, the ball in the slot opposite cinq—five. Cinq was one of the numbers coloured red. It was an odd number, and it was below eighteen, which explained the croupier's exclamation as the juniors came in: "Cinq rouge impair et manque!"

The croupier in charge of the wheel picked the ball out of the slot. He glanced up and down the table.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs!" "Make your game, gentlemen."

And the crowded gamblers commenced placing their stakes.

The money thrown on the table was a surprise to the juniors.

Most of the play, certainly, was in five-franc pieces, the smallest coin that is accepted at the gaming-tables.

But many were playing with gold louis, and some with five-louis pieces, and others with banknotes. Almost all the heavy players used banknotes.

A man was sitting at the end of the table, beside the end croupier, playing on the even chances—red and black, or pair and impair, or passe and manque, and playing the limit every time. The limit on even chances is 6,000 francs, or £240. The juniors could not help staring as they saw it. For a man to be putting £240 on the chance of a turn seemed amazing to them; yet he was perfectly calm about it.

"Les jeux sont fait!"

"The stakes are placed."

Still some coins were thrown on, and the croupier took the ball in his finger and thumb. With one hand he sent the wheel spinning, with the other he threw the ball upon the wheel, to revolve in the opposite direction.

The ball spun round so fast that it looked like a circular streak of white. Still the players were placing their stakes upon the green cloth.

The croupier's keen eye detected the moment the ball showed a sign of ceasing to revolve, and of falling into the slots.

Then his warning rang out:

"Rien ne va plus!"

"Nothing goes any more," literally—a warning that no more stakes were to be placed on the table.

The ball clicked into a slot.

"Dix-sept noire impair et manque!"

"Seventeen, black, odd, and below eighteen."

Tom Merry glanced at the player of the limit. He had placed six thousand francs on red—six banknotes for a thousand francs each.

They were swart away with the rest.

The player did not move a muscle.

From a great heap of banknotes before him on the table he selected another bunch for his next stake.

The juniors turned away.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry. "Hilton isn't here!"

"By Jove," said Figgins, "I can understand the fascination of this bizny! If you win on a number they give you thirty-five times what you stake—about eight louis in return for a five-franc piece."

"Yes, but there are thirty-six numbers and zero," said Kerr. "The chances against your number winning are thirty-six to one."

"Yes, but—"

"And the casino doesn't make a profit of a million and a quarter a year out of its losses," added Kerr.

Figgins grinned.

"I suppose not."

"Anyway, we're not going to play," said Tom Merry. "Come on!"

"Right you are!"

The juniors walked down the great series of apartments, looking at each of the roulette tables in turn in search of Archie Hilton.

He was not to be seen.

In such an immense and crowded place it was, of course, difficult to find anybody, and if Hilton was changing his table, or had gone for a coffee, or was taking a rest, the task of discovering him would be endless.

He was certainly not at any roulette table as the juniors



"Look!" The juniors saw a figure emerge from the major's house, and stride down the path towards the gate. They did not need telling who it was. "Hilton!" muttered Lowther.

came to it, but it was possible that he had just reached one they had left.

After making a tour of the roulette rooms, the juniors turned back, and looked at each table on the way to the exit.

Still Hilton was not to be seen.

"There are the trente-et-quarante tables," said Tom Merry. "He may be there. Let's try the gold tables."

"Good!"

They went into the trente-et-quarante rooms.

The game of trente-et-quarante is played with cards, and is very different from roulette. There are only even chances in the game. Only gold is allowed at the trente-et-quarante tables, so it is impossible to stake less than a louis d'or.

The facility with which a fortune may be lost may be understood from that circumstance.

The juniors stopped at the first trente-et-quarante table they came to.

The dealer of the cards was just laying out a row of them. He finished a row, and said:

"Quatre!"

Then he laid out another row.

"Cinq! Noire gagne, et le couleur."

"What on earth does he mean?" asked Figgins.

"The first row represents black, and the second red," explained Kerr. "The row nearest to thirty in number of points wins. Black row was thirty-four, red row thirty-five, so black wins."

"Oh, I see!"

The stakes were gathered in or paid, according to whether the players won or lost, and then the cards were thrown aside, and a fresh pack dealt from.

"Trois!"

"Quatre!"

"Black wins again," said Kerr.

Tom Merry nodded. He was not much interested in the game; he was looking round for Hilton.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"Look!"

At the further end of the trente-et-quarante table stood a form they knew well—it was Archie Hilton.

His face was very pale.

He had evidently had a stake upon the green cloth, and from the expression of his face it was equally evident that his stake had been swept away by the croupier.

The juniors drew back from the table, and moved along quietly towards Hilton.

CHAPTER 20.

A Scene at the Roulette Table.

HILTON did not look at the juniors. Had he done so, he would certainly not have recognised them. He had not the faintest idea that Tom Merry & Co. were near him.

Doubtless he guessed that Figgins and his friends would follow him from Nice to Monte Carlo, but knowing how rigidly boys were excluded from the casino there, he did not dream for a moment that they could follow him past the portals.

Tom Merry & Co., therefore, were not in his mind at all. He was thinking wholly of the game, and his worn and jaded look showed how intensely he was feeling the chances of the cards, and how deeply he felt his losses.

Losses, it was clear, he had already had. How much of Miss Fawcett's three hundred louis was left was a question.

Tom Merry, Figgins, and Kerr looked at one another. Exactly how to act they were uncertain. As they hesitated, Hilton moved away from the table, and, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, sauntered along to the roulette rooms.

Perhaps he had had enough of trente-et-quarante for the time, and was inclined to try his luck at the silver tables. The three chums followed him.

"Blessed if I know exactly what to do!" Tom Merry remarked. "If we were to collar him, it would make a scene here."

"He's got to be stopped," said Kerr.

"That's certain!"

"He may come out quietly if I speak to him, and avoid trouble," said Figgins. "We must not lose sight of him again. He may be done playing, though, and if he's going to leave, we can quietly follow him out."

"Good!"

Hilton strolled along the crowded rooms, and entered one of the side apartments where tea-tables were ranged in rows. He sat down at a table, and ordered black coffee.

He drank three black coffees in quick succession, evidently for the purpose of bracing his nerves, and threw a five-franc piece on the table, and did not wait for any change.

He left the tea-room, passing three coffee drinkers at an adjoining table, without giving them a glance, and little guessing how keenly they were watching him. Tom Merry & Co. wanted to avoid trouble if possible. But if Hilton recommenced playing, they meant to stop him.

They followed him into the roulette rooms again.

As they stopped at the table, Hilton looking on over the shoulders of the players, there occurred one of the little scenes which diversify life at Monte Carlo.

The croupier had just made the announcement "Quatre noire pair et manque," which meant that the number four, the colour black, the even numbers, and the "less than eighteen" had won.

The players who were close enough to the table to get their stakes took them up as the winnings were paid out, but those who were standing back had to wait for the money to be handed out to them by the croupiers.

A little old lady in black, with a keen face, a pointed nose, and tightly-closed lips, calmly took a stake and winnings off a "carre," including the number four, the carre being four adjoining numbers. If any number in the carre wins, ten times the stake is paid. The lady in black calmly bagged the carre, apparently oblivious of the fact that her own stake had been a number further down the board, and that the carre belonged to a tall Frenchman who was standing behind her chair, and could not reach his stake.

There was an excited exclamation from the owner of the carre.

"Madame!"

The old lady pretended not to hear.

"Madame! Madame!" the tall man gesticulated.

"Madame! C'est a moi!"

The old lady shook her head, and her hand closed like a claw over the heap of pieces she had so coolly annexed.

"Madame!"

"Monsieur!"

The Frenchman poured out a stream of wild French, and the old lady sat as unaffected as a stone. The unlucky player tapped the head croupier on the shoulder, but the croupier only shrugged. He had not seen where the stake was placed, or by whom. With a hundred or more stakes on the green cloth, he could not see everything.

The Frenchman seemed as if he would become insane with excitement. His voice rose to a shriek, and he waved his hands like the sails of a windmill.

The croupiers strove to pacify him, and reconcile him to his loss, but in vain. Players looked round impatiently on all sides at the noise. The fresh rolling of the ball was delayed till the matter should be settled.

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There were impatient looks on all sides.

Fellow-feeling among the players is an unknown quantity in the Riviera casinos. Every player runs the risk of being robbed of his winnings, yet every player except the actual robbed one, shows only impatience and annoyance at the interruption, when a fuss is made.

"Finish, now."

The excited man still raved.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."

At those words, which showed that a new round was to commence, and that there was no chance of the "mistake" being rectified, the deprived one waved his hands wildly in the air, and stamped away.

The old lady in black sat with a face like stone.

Two or three of her neighbours must have seen that she had taken the pieces that did not belong to her, but no one said a word. It was not their business.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on with scarcely concealed disgust.

Such incidents would have been sufficient to sicken them of the business, if they had had a taste for gambling—which they had not.

Calm was restored at last, and the game went on.

"Rien ne va plus."

Hilton had made a movement, but it was too late. He paused and watched the outcome.

"Dix-sept noire impair et manque."

It was seventeen again.

A player who had just put a thousand franc bill—his last—on red, rose from a chair close to Hilton, and departed. Hilton immediately took the chair. A place at the gaming table is not easily obtained, and in the busy hours there is keen competition for the chairs.

Hilton sat down, and drew out a pocket-book. The three juniors of St. Jim's drew close behind his chair.

Hilton turned the money out of his pocket-book. The juniors saw it all. There were four notes for a thousand francs each, and fifteen notes for a hundred francs—five thousand five hundred francs in all, or two hundred and seventy-five louis. That was evidently all he had left of Miss Fawcett's money, but it was the great part. He had lost only twenty-five louis at the trente-et-quarante table before the arrival of Tom Merry & Co.

Tom Merry was glad to see it. The twenty-five louis might be made up somehow, and the money yet returned. The juniors had not been so far behind Hilton, and the loss was not irreparable—if he were stopped from gambling now.

And he should be stopped, upon that the juniors were determined. Tom Merry and Kerr looked at Figgins, and the long-limbed junior nodded and bent over Hilton's chair.

He tapped the young man on the shoulder. Hilton looked round with an irritated expression.

"Archie, old man!" whispered Figgins, forgetting for the moment that he was in an unrecognisable disguise.

"Archie!" Hilton stared at him in blank amazement.

"Archie—"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Figgins!"

"Are you mad?"

"Oh, I forgot! I got into this rig to get in here," explained Figgins. "They don't admit fellows under age, you know."

Hilton stared at him, as if he were not quite able to believe his eyes.

"Figgins!" he muttered.

"Faites vos jeux, messieurs."

Hilton turned quickly to the table. Figgins caught him by the shoulder and forced him to turn back.

"Archie—"

"Let me alone!"

"Don't play!"

"Get back!"

"Don't play, Archie!"

"Fool! Let me alone!" said Hilton fiercely.

Figgins's lips hardened.

"Archie, that money's not yours. You can't play with it."

"I will."

"You won't."

Hilton made a movement to thrust a banknote upon the last carre—the dernier carre, and Figgins forcibly jerked his arm back. The banknote fluttered upon the table.

"No, you don't!" said Figgins grimly.

Hilton was white with passion.

"Hang you! Go away!"

The nearest croupier was looking curiously at Hilton. He took him to be a reckless young man of whom an elderly relation had come in search, to save him from losing his money.

Such a scene was not at all in accordance with Monte Carlo etiquette. The casino asked no one to enter. If a

man came in, he was supposed to be old enough to know his own business best. Anxious relations looking for reckless young men did not fit into the picture at all, so to speak. The croupier's lip curled, and several players along the table began to grin.

"I won't go," said Figgins. "Not till you come with me."

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry.

Hilton started at the new voice. He realised that Figgins was not alone. His weak face was red with rage now.

"Get away!" he muttered.

"I won't!"

"Listen! If you don't go immediately, I will call one of the attendants, and tell him who you really are," said Hilton fiercely. "When they find you are in disguise, you will be thrown out of the casino at once."

"You'll be thrown out, too, then," said Figgins, "for I jolly well shan't let go of you."

"Figgins—"

"I mean business."

"Do you mean to say that you'll make a scene here, hang you?"

"I'd do more than make a scene to prevent one of my family from being a thief!" said Figgins sturdily. "Besides, what does it matter? For all the side they put on, it's only a blessed gambling den, after all."

"Get away!"

"You'd better come; they're looking at us already. If you don't want a scene, now's your chance to slide out quietly."

"Will you let me alone?"

"No!"

Hilton clenched his hand convulsively.

"Go!"

"I won't!"

The next moment Figgins staggered back under a furious blow.

"Take that, then!"

CHAPTER 21.

Thrown Out!

THERE was a general exclaiming at once. Disputes were common enough at Monte Carlo, and the croupiers sometimes had plenty to do in smoothing down excited disputants. But matters seldom proceeded as far as blows. The croupier near Hilton sprang up, and two or three burly attendants rushed to the spot at once.

"Messieurs!"

Hilton was on his feet, quivering with anger. Tom Merry had caught Figgins in time to save him from falling. Figgins seemed dazed by the sudden and furious blow.

"You cad!" exclaimed Kerr fiercely.

Hilton gritted his teeth.

"Let me alone, then, you interfering puppies! Get out!"

Figgins recovered himself.

"You are coming with us, Hilton."

"I will not."

"Collar him!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

The attendants laid hands upon the disguised juniors. A "row" was the one thing that is intolerable at Monte Carlo. It disturbs the serenity of the gamblers, it gives the casino a bad "tone." The attendants are always ready to rush up at a hint of a row. The disguised juniors were seized.

Without ceremony, they were dragged towards the exit. They struggled furiously.

In the tussle, their beards and moustaches came off, and there were exclamations of amazement from the attendants and the crowd gathering round, mingled with laughter as the trio were recognised to be boys.

Such a trick had probably never been played upon the casino before, and all were astounded, and the laughter was general.

"Mon Dieu!"

"Sont garçons!"

"Ha, ha!"

Tom Merry wrenched himself loose, and grasped Hilton. Hilton resisted fiercely, but the champion junior athlete of St. Jim's was not to be disposed of easily.

"You're coming, too!" he exclaimed.

Hilton struggled.

"Let me go! Let me go!"

"Un autre!" exclaimed the croupier.

The mistake was a natural one. Hilton was taken for another boy in disguise, and he was immediately hustled by the attendants.

His wild expostulations were taken no notice of. He was allowed just time to collect up his money and return it to his pocket, and then he was marched out of the casino between lines of grinning people.

Straight down the long room, past the roulette tables, and out into the vestibule, they went.

The attendants watched them grimly while they obtained their coats and hats from the cloak-room, and then marched them out of doors and down the steps, and left them.

The juniors were in a strangely tattered state now. Fragments of their disguises clung about their heads and faces with a curious effect.

Hilton was panting with rage.

"Hang you!" he exclaimed, heedless of the gathering crowd of curious idlers. "Oh, I hate you all! Now I shall not be allowed to enter the casino again."

"All the better for you," said Tom Merry.

"Hang you!"

"Bai Jove! What does this mean?"

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The St. Jim's juniors had been waiting outside the Cafe de Paris, opposite the casino, for their friends to come out. They had hardly expected them to come out in such a fashion.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass critically upon the dishevelled juniors.

"Gweat Scott! Have you been thwown out?"

"Doesn't it look like it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But it's all right, we've got Hilton."

The young man was making a movement to go. Figgins slipped his arm through his cousin's. He tightened his grip as Hilton strove to throw it off.

"You're coming with us, Archie?"

"No," said Hilton, between his teeth.

"You must!"

"Hang you!"

"If you want to go alone you must hand over Miss Fawcett's money," said Figgins quietly.

The crowd gazed at the group, passing free remarks in French. Hilton's face was crimson. He made a gesture of assent, and walked away with the juniors.

"Let's get back to the costumier's, and get these things off," said Kerr.

"Good."

"Come with us, Archie."

"I'm in your hands," said Hilton sullenly.

Figgins made no reply. They walked to the costumier's, and the fat Frenchman soon had the three juniors relieved of their disguises, and they washed off the paint and stain, and donned their own clothes.

Hilton, meanwhile, sat silent and sullen, evidently in deep and troubled thought. He could not escape, for Blake and the others were with him. What to do was a question the young man could not answer.

The fever of gambling seemed to have blotted out in his mind every restraint of honour, but even with money Monte Carlo was closed to him now. After the outrageous scene in the casino, and his ejection from the place, he would never be allowed to re-enter.

The game was up for him, as far as Monte Carlo was concerned.

True, there remained the casinos of Nice, and Mentone, and San Remo, and the other places along the Riviera where the plundering of innocent strangers forms a great part of the local source of wealth.

But at Monte Carlo all was up for him, and his brow was dark with anger at the thought. All chance of breaking the bank, of making a great coup, was gone.

He had never had a chance, as a matter of fact; but he had believed that he had.

He glanced at Figgins as the long-limbed junior came out of the inner room, washed and cleaned, and in his own clothes, and looking himself again.

"Well?" said Figgins.

Hilton gave a nod.

They left the shop, and in the street Hilton handed over his pocket-book to his cousin.

"There is all I have," he said.

Figgins thrust the book into his pocket.

"Very well," he said, "I will get the balance somehow, and return it all to Miss Fawcett. You ought to be thankful, Archie, that you're saved from becoming a—thief."

Hilton shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want to ever speak to you again," he said bitterly. "I will never see you again if I can help it."

He turned away.

Figgins's face was very gloomy. He had a strong regard for his cousin, and in all that he had done, he had only done his duty. But it was too much to expect that Hilton would look upon it with a friendly eye.

Hilton strode away towards the railway-station. There was a sudden exclamation, as a gentleman and a lady came up the path from the station.

"Hallo, Archie! You here."

It was Major Figgins, and with him was Miss Priscilla Fawcett.



CHAPTER 22.

Hilton Turns Over a New Leaf.

MAJOR FIGGINS clapped his nephew on the shoulder as he spoke, and there was no escape for Hilton. He would gladly have got away from the major, but it was impossible.

"Come to the hotel, Archie. I shall be staying at the Imperial, and Miss Fawcett and the boys will be there," said the major. "We'll have a walk round the rooms later."

"I'm done with the rooms," muttered Hilton.

"Good. I'm glad to hear you say so. You'll come to lunch."

Hilton hesitated. But it occurred to him that he was actually penniless, and that in Nice he had borrowed to the full limit of his borrowing powers. His only possessions at the present moment were comprised in the return half of a railway ticket, and a few francs in silver.

"Thank you, uncle," he said.

"Come along, my boys," said the major, with a genial nod to the juniors. "What do you mean by slipping off to Monte Carlo before your friends, eh?"

"You see—" began Tom Merry.

"My dear boy left a note for me," said Miss Fawcett. "He said he had hopes of recovering the stolen money in Monte Carlo."

The major laughed.

"Well, the police in Nice haven't very high hopes," he remarked. "All they know so far is that the notes have not been passed in Nice. They may very likely find their way over here, but I don't think Tom is likely to get on their track. Ha, ha, ha!"

"We have recovered them, sir," said Figgins.

"What!"

"Dear me!" said Miss Fawcett.

"Here they are!"

Figgins took out the pocket-book, and turned out the contents. Miss Fawcett received her money back in complete astonishment.

The major looked like a man in a dream. Archie Hilton, gnawing his lips, stared in another direction, apparently greatly interested in a motor-car that was snorting up the road from Monaco.

"Huh!" ejaculated the major.

"My dear boys," said Miss Fawcett, "I—I do not understand."

"There's twenty-five louis short," said Tom Merry. "We will get that later, dear, and make up the whole sum."

"My darling Tommy,"

"Huh! But how did you recover the money?" exclaimed the major, in blank amazement. "Tell us that, you young rascals."

"We—we recovered it," said Tom Merry, stammering a little.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My dearest boy explained to me his theory last night that the money was not taken by a common burglar," said Miss Fawcett. "He thought it was taken by some young man who was a victim to the dreadful mania for gambling which is so common here."

Major Figgins gave a violent start.

"He thought he might be able to recover it, and he has succeeded," said Miss Priscilla, with a fond glance at her ward.

"Huh!" said the major.

"If dearest Tommy does not wish to tell us more, I am sure we shall not question him," went on Miss Fawcett.

"Huh!"

"I—I'd rather not answer any questions about it," said Tom.

"Huh!"

"I didn't recover the money any more than the others—in fact, most of the credit is due to Figgins," said Tom Merry.

"Huh!"

Hilton carefully avoided meeting his uncle's glance.

"Take Miss Fawcett to the hotel, Tom," said the major.

"I want to speak to my nephew very particularly just now. You will excuse me for a few minutes, my dear lady."

"Certainly, major."

Miss Priscilla and the juniors moved on, and the major remained behind alone with his nephew. Hilton stared at the sea. The major stared at Hilton. As the young man did not speak, the old soldier broke the silence.

"Well?" he said grimly.

Hilton looked at him furtively for a moment.

"Well," he said, forcing a smile.

"Have you anything to say, Archie?"

"About what?"

"About this matter—the matter of the robbery from Miss Fawcett?"

Hilton changed colour.

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"What should I know about it, uncle?"

"You should know nothing," said the major; "but I'm pretty certain that you know a great deal. Why I did not guess the truth at once I cannot tell. How did Tom Merry find you out?"

"Find me out?"

"Yes."

"You are insulting," said Hilton, turning deadly pale.

"Do you mean to imply—"

"The truth," said the major coolly. "I ought to have guessed it. That is why Tom Merry asked his governess to take the matter out of the hands of the police. That is how he has recovered the money by finding you at Monte Carlo. It is useless to deny it. I knew that pocket-book that Figgins had the money in. It is yours."

Hilton's lip trembled.

"Uncle!"

"My dear lad," said the major, more kindly, "I don't want to be harsh with you. I have feared something of this sort for a long time, and I am only glad that those lads have succeeded in saving you from crime."

"It was your fault. You would lend me nothing."

"No. This won't do, Archie. Listen to me. You are my sister's son—the son of my sister and my oldest chum. I can't let you go to the dogs without an effort to stop you. Stay with me, and I'll see you through your expenses on the Riviera while you stay here, but no more gambling. Then leave this coast, not to return. I will help you, and help you for the next year or two till your property recovers from the strain you have put on it."

Hilton's face softened.

"That's kind of you, uncle. But—"

"If you refuse, I shall have to consider whether it would not be better for you to be in prison than haunting gambling dens," said the major sternly. "I have only to make this matter public, and—"

"Uncle!"

"I will not be uncle to a gambler and a thief. Unless you reform you are no nephew of mine, and I will have no mercy on you. Try to be decent, and you will find me a true friend. You can take your choice."

"It seems to me that I haven't much choice left."

"Then what do you say?"

"I will do as you wish."

The major's rugged, wrinkled face lighted up.

"That's right, my boy—that's right, Archie. That's like a man. You won't be sorry for it, either, I think."

And the major looked more satisfied than he had looked for some time as he walked on to the hotel with his nephew.

It was easy for Tom Merry & Co. to see that something had passed between the major and Hilton when they rejoined the party.

But they did not know what it was, and they did not think of inquiring; but that Hilton had decided to lead a new life for some reason they soon knew.

He haunted no more gambling-dens, and he gradually reassumed the old lightness of spirits that had been so long overcast by the wretched infatuation.

The change was welcome to the St. Jim's juniors.

In their excursions round about Monte Carlo, up and down the Maritime Alps, round about La Turbie and Villefranche and Eze, they found Archie Hilton a pleasant companion.

By common consent the unpleasant incident of Nice was never mentioned. Hilton had not been himself then, and it was tacitly agreed that bygones should be bygones.

And, needless to say, the juniors of St. Jim's enjoyed their holiday at Monte Carlo, and all the more because of Hilton's change of ways and pleasant companionship.

But that holiday, like all things, came to an end at last.

The day came when Tom Merry & Co. had to bid farewell to Monte Carlo, and to board the train that was to bear them back to the northward, through France, and Paris, to England, home, and school.

And though they were by no means sorry to see the old country and the old school again, it was not without regret that they bade farewell to the beautiful Riviera, the towering Alps, and the sunny shores of the Mediterranean.

"It's a ripping-place," said Fatty Wynn. "For its size, there are more first-class grub-shops than in any place I've ever been in. I shall come back here again some day to—"

"To have a flutter at the casino, you reckless young bouncer?"

"Oh, no! To have another feed at Ciro's."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the train rolled away, and in a couple of days more the juniors were in their old quarters at St. Jim's, and their excursion to Monte Carlo was a pleasant memory.

THE END.

(Another splendid 26-page story of the Chums of St. Jim's next Thursday, entitled "Skimpole's Connet," by Martin Clifford. Order your copy of "The Gem" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

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By Lieutenant Lefevre.

READ THIS FIRST!

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, whom peculiar circumstances have forced to become a highwayman, one night holds up the carriage of Admiral Sir Sampson Eastlake. He is overpowered, however; but the good old admiral offers him a chance of serving the King in the Navy instead of handing him over to justice. Oswald, therefore, joins the frigate Catapult as a midshipman, under the name of John Smith. Oswald soon "smells powder," as the Catapult engages the French man-o'-war Amadee, which is consorting a captured Indiaman. Under the direction of Mr. Fryer, the first lieutenant, the Catapult has victory within grasp, when the captain, who is under the influence of drink, takes command, and steers the ship out of the fight. Infuriated by his cowardice, the crew threaten mutiny, and Mr. Fryer is hastily summoned by the now frightened captain to quell the rising storm.

(Now go on with the story.)

In Action.

Fortunately for the Catapult, the men on the Bombay Castle had not allowed sufficient deflection to the guns to counteract the great height of their vessel, and the charge of grape and canister went screeching over the heads of the crew of the Catapult, bringing a few ropes and spars about their ears, but doing little harm else.

The frigate had now sternway, and Mr. Fryer was watching the French line of battleship narrowly.

"Now!" he shouted. And like a roll of thunder the whole broadside was poured into the Amadee for the second time.

Almost simultaneously the Amadee, on her part, let fly her first broadside.

The din was terrific. A vast cloud of white smoke blotted out all view of the contending ships. From the sides of the Catapult white splinters flew into the air.

One shot from the Amadee entered one of the frigate's portholes, dismantling a gun, and smashing the man who worked it into a mass of flesh and blood.

For a moment Oswald, who had seen it, was conscious of a deadly feeling of nausea. The deck at his very feet was splashed with the unfortunate man's blood, and he turned away dizzily; but as he did so, his eyes fell on the white and terror-stricken face of the second lieutenant.

Somehow the sight of this man's terror inspired Oswald with fresh courage, and, turning back, he saw that Maxwell and half a dozen other sailors had rushed to the overturned gun.

The shot had not damaged it, beyond turning it on its side, as Maxwell was quick to see.

"Levers, my lads! We must right it!" he shouted out.

And the men rushed off, to return in a few moments with iron bars to lever the gun up again.

Oswald, too, bore a hand at the work; but the gun was heavy, and the muscles of the workers stood out under the glistening flesh as they strained their utmost.

They had almost forced the gun into position, when a

roundshot crashed into the bulwarks, a few feet above the port, leaving a great gap in the side. The ball then struck a man, who was standing at the breach, in the shoulder, hurling him a dozen yards away, as at the same moment a huge jagged splinter of wood torn from the vessel's side, flew through the air, and, like an arrow, pierced deeply into the bared chest of one of the sailors.

Staggered for a moment, the others relaxed their efforts. "Heavens! Mind, for your lives!" shrieked Maxwell, but too late.

The gun, not yet set up again, lurched over, and fell for the second time with a deafening crash, crushing two men under its immense weight, Maxwell himself only escaping by a miracle.

At this moment Brabazon came up; his pale face had turned a fiery red, and from his lips poured oaths and curses.

"Leave the gun, you young fool! This is what comes of your meddling!" he cried, with a volley of oaths. "Get back to the quarter-deck to your duty, the pair of you!"

To overcome his terror, he had worked himself into a passion, and instead of wreaking his rage on the enemy, he preferred to expend it on Maxwell and Oswald.

"You did your best, Maxwell," said Mr. Fryer, as the two lads went up on to the quarter-deck. "No man can do more."

The breeze had now freshened considerably, and Mr. Fryer, putting up the helm, passed between the Amadee and the Bombay Castle, giving them both a raking broadside as he passed.

The Amadee's guns were silent, for her captain knew that to fire at the Catapult would expose the Indiaman to considerable risk; but the Indiaman, less thoughtful, let fly with her deck guns, which were, as before, aimed too high.

The result was as might have been expected. The shot whistled harmlessly over the heads of the Englishmen, and crashed through the bulwarks of the Amadee, driving across the decks of the Frenchman, and hurling many of her crew to destruction.

"When thieves fall out, honest men will get their due," shouted Mr. Fryer, with a laugh.

By this time the Catapult had fired half a dozen broadsides, of which the Amadee had received the brunt of the fire, and in return had only experienced the effects of one herself.

Several holes had been smashed in the Catapult, but above her waterline, so they occasioned no anxiety, for the present, at any rate, and eight of her crew had been killed with six more wounded, more or less seriously.

Some of the overhead gear had been a little damaged, and this represented the Catapult's condition at the present moment. But matters were far worse on board the Amadee. Mr. Fryer had directed his men to aim low, with the result that several holes had been stoved into the big ship below her water-line.

Of the Bombay Castle he had not taken any particular notice, his whole efforts having been directed towards the Amadee, for he knew that there could only be a small prize-crew on the Indiaman, and the striking of the colours of the

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**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"SKIMPOLE'S COMET!"

**By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

line-of-battle ship would be the signal for the Indianman to strike too.

"We'll wear," cried Mr. Fryer triumphantly, "and give her one more broadside, and then if she does not strike, we will board her and carry the decks. The Amadee is ours, my lads, and the Bombay Castle, too. There'll be prize-money for some of you to spend in Plymouth soon!"

The men greeted this announcement with a ringing cheer. "Starboard, Mr. Fid," ordered Mr. Fryer.

"Starb'd it is, sir!" sang out the bo'sun; and at that moment, for the first time during the engagement, Captain Burgoyne came up on deck.

One glance at his superior told Mr. Fryer that the man was drunk. He could see it by the rolling eyes, the lurching gait, and the flushed face.

"What this? What are you doing, running frigate into danger?" he roared, interlarding his speech with a volley of furious oaths.

"The Catapult is in no danger yet, sir. In a few minutes I hope to carry the Amadee," said Mr. Fryer quietly.

"You hope—you hope, do you? And who the blazes is captain on board here? Whose orders are going to be obeyed—yours, or mine? Port your helm there, curse you, port hard!"

An angry murmur rose from the men below. Was it possible, now that victory was almost in their grasp, that this drunken brute should force them to give up the fight and the prize.

Old Fid at the helm pretended not to hear the order.

"By thunder, if you don't do as I tell you I'll shoot you dead!" roared the captain, with an oath. "What does this mean, Mr. Fryer? Are you inciting the crew to mutiny? By heavens, I'll have you court-martialled for this! Port!" he yelled in a voice of fury, "Port—or—"

A fierce, angry murmur rose from the men who, for the last hour, had worked so hard and who had shed their blood to gain this victory, as Fid obeyed the order, and the Catapult fell away from her foes.

"We have but to press the fight and the Amadee must strike, sir," said Mr. Fryer.

"Don't you dare instruct me, sir, I know my duty," said the drunken and infuriated captain. "Mr. Brabazon, come up on the quarter-deck, if you please. Now, sir, what do you think, am I doing right, or ain't I?"

"I think you are doing perfectly right, sir," said Brabazon.

Captain Burgoyne turned on Mr. Fryer with a look of triumph in his bleary eyes.

"You hear that!" he shouted, with an oath—"you hear that! Now, what have you got to say?"

"What I said before, sir. It is not too late yet, even. Wear the ship!"

The captain interrupted him with a volley of oaths.

"Go below—go below! You've done mischief enough as it is. Ten minutes more, and the Catapult would have gone to the bottom. You ain't fit—you ain't fit!"

He choked with rage, and Mr. Fryer, pale, but with his head erect, turned his back on his superior, and strode off the quarter-deck.

"Curse the coward who runs from an enemy, say I!" shouted a man forward.

The voice reached the quarter-deck quite distinctly, and Captain Burgoyne gripped the rails and glared forward.

"Who said that? Let that man stand forward!" he shouted in a voice that trembled with rage.

Not a man stirred, but from half a hundred throats rose a low growl like that of angry beasts.

"The blackguards all side with Mr. Fryer. It is he whom you have to thank for insubordination and mutiny," murmured Brabazon in the captain's ear.

"Who was that man? Let him stand forward, or I'll flog every man jack of the ship's company!" roared the captain.

Still there was no answer, and the men stood glaring defiance and rage at the captain.

Captain Burgoyne turned towards Brabazon.

"I'll bring this home to Fryer, curse him! I'll have him court-martialled for this—for this, and for running the ship into danger during my absence below. I'll—"

"Curse the drunkard who robs honest men of their due!" again sang out the defiant voice, clear as a bell.

The captain staggered as if he had been shot. Then drawing out a pistol, levelled it at the heads of the men below him.

"Who is that man? Let him stand forward, or by James I'll fire!" he yelled, in a frenzy of rage.

The little group of men who were covered by the pistol stood steady and firm, glancing up at the maddened bully above them.

"Let him stand forward before I count three, or I fire. By Heaven, this is mutiny," shouted the captain. "One—two—"

There was no mistaking the furious gleam in his eye; he would be as good as his word. Even as he uttered the word "three" it was drowned by the report of the pistol. But the bullet flew up into the rigging harmlessly over the heads of his destined victims. At the critical moment his arm had been knocked up, and turning with the look of a demon on his face, he saw Oswald standing at his elbow.

"You—you," he gasped. "You—"

"It would have been murder!" said Oswald calmly.

"When you are sober—"

With a snarling growl the captain leaped at him, and grasped the young man by the throat. So sudden and unexpected was the attack that Oswald reeled back.

The madman, for he was nothing less, shook his victim, and forced him backwards, never relaxing for a moment the cruel grip upon his throat.

"You cursed pirate—you thief—you highway robber!" he shouted. "I'll teach you to interfere with me! I'll—"

"Shame! Shame!"

It was not one voice this time, but the voice of every man of the crew raised as one. "Shame! Leave the lad be! Shame on ye!"

With a final shake the captain hurled his victim to the deck, senseless.

"By heavens! Brabazon, this is mutiny—you hear that?—mutiny!" he gasped.

Brabazon shrank back appalled by the anger on the faces beneath him.

By this time the Amadee and the prize were very far astern, and on board the former ship they were making good use of the unexpected reprieve to repair the damage that the Catapult's guns had wrought.

The men had seen their prize slip through their fingers; this alone had raised their anger, but the behaviour of the captain had awakened a perfect fury in their breasts.

Brabazon, who was sober, saw the danger of irritating them further; even the captain, muddled as he was with drink, read danger in the stern, angry faces that glared at him.

The shock of it almost sobered him; the heated flush died out of his face, leaving it pale and frightened-looking, for it was only when in drink or when he was dealing with one weaker than himself that Captain Burgoyne was a brave man.

"Maxwell, go below and desire Mr. Fryer to come on to deck at once," he said.

Maxwell flew to obey. He knew that Mr. Fryer was the one man on board who was capable of quelling the rising storm.

"It would serve him right now if Fryer refused to interfere," he muttered to himself. "The cur!"

"The captain wishes you to come on deck instantly, sir," he said to Mr. Fryer, whom he found seated in his cabin.

The first lieutenant rose. "There is nothing wrong, Maxwell?" he asked hastily.

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