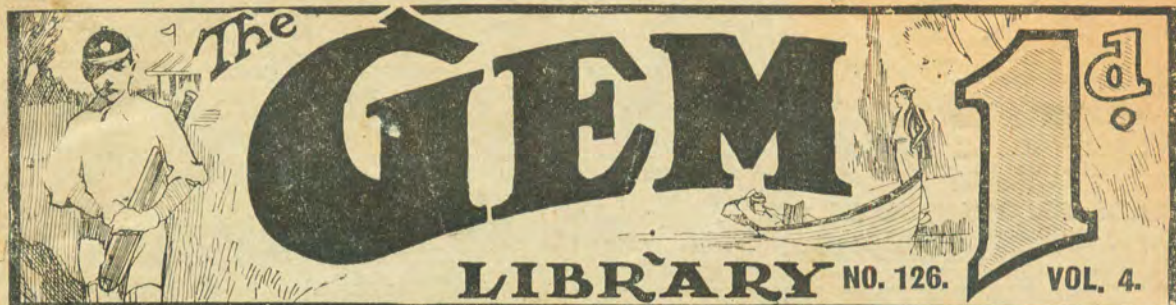


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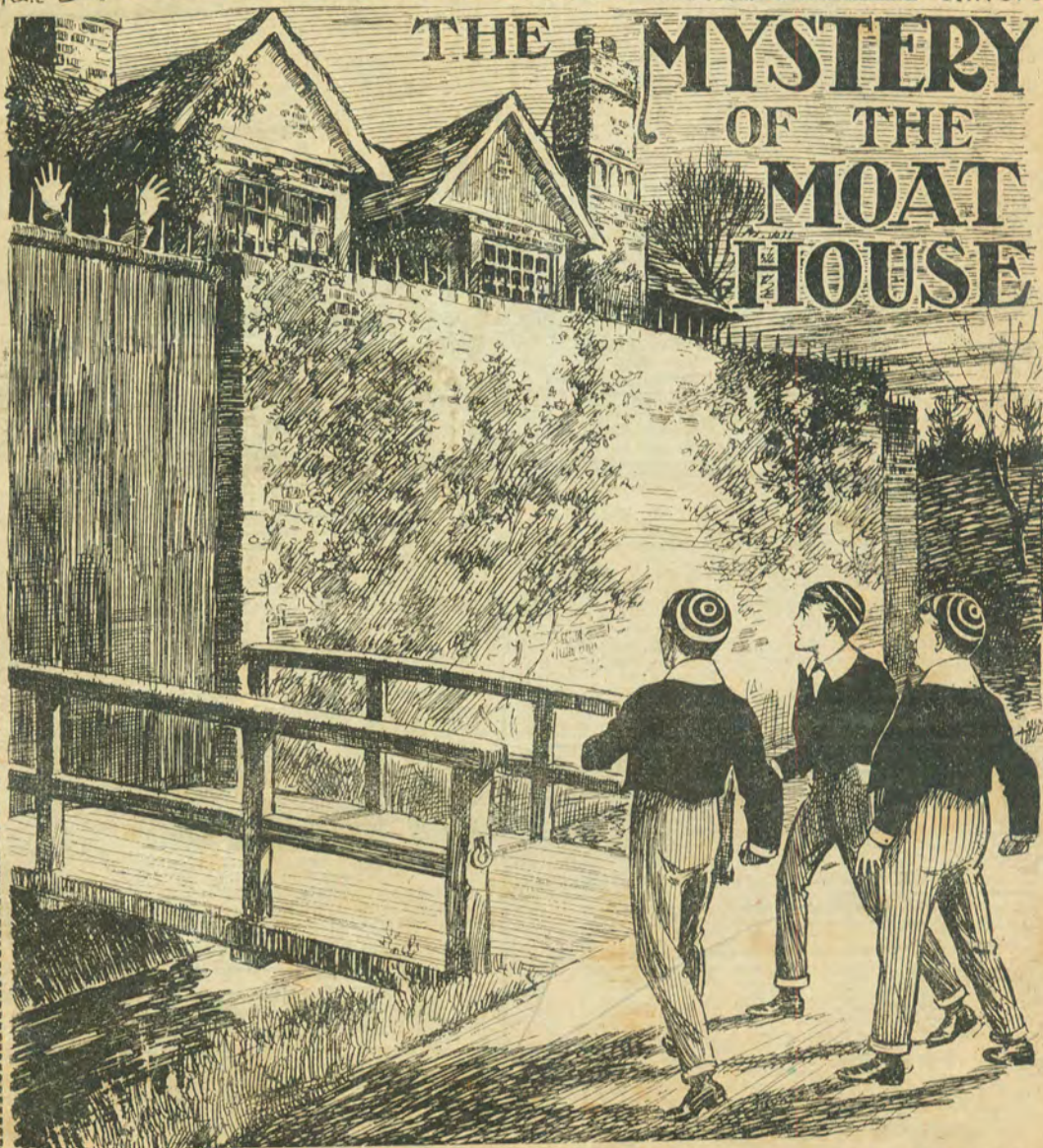


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Tale

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.

THE MYSTERY
OF THE
MOAT
HOUSE



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A Thrilling, Long, Complete School Tale
of TOM MERRY & CO.

... BY ...

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

D'Arcy in a Hurry.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, pedalled up to the school gate upon his bicycle at top speed. It was seldom that D'Arcy scorching, for he did not regard scorching as elegant; but he was scorching now with a vengeance. His face was excited, and he was leaning over his handle-bars with his aristocratic nose nearly touching them, and his legs going as if by machinery. His eyeglass was streaming behind him at the end of its cord, unnoticed.

There were several fellows standing at the school gates in the sunset, and they stared at Arthur Augustus in surprise as he came scorching up.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell had been exchanging badinage with Blake, Herries, and Digby of the Fourth, when the sight of the excited swell of St. Jim's drew all their attention to him.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What's the matter with Gussy?"

"He's scorching," said Blake.

"Yes, I'd noticed that. But what's he scorching for? Can't be any of the Grammar cads after him."

"Can't see any."

"My word! He's making the pedals fly," said Digby.

"Gussy! Hallo, Gussy!"

"Ease off!"

"Mind where you're going."

But the excited cyclist did not hear.

He was too busy in extracting the utmost possible speed out of his machine.

With his nose on the handle-bars he came whizzing on, straight for the gate, and Tom Merry & Co. jumped to right and left to avoid a collision.

"Look out!" roared Tom Merry.

"Back water, you ass!"

"Where are you running?"

"Fathead!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

He jammed on the brake, and tried to stop his machine. But it was too sudden, and he went whirling, and as the bicycle collapsed, he threw his arms round Tom Merry's neck to save himself, and they went to the ground together.

"Oh!" roared Tom Merry.

"Gweat Scott!"

"You ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom Merry sprawled on the ground, with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sprawling over him. He rolled D'Arcy off, and sat up. D'Arcy sat up too, blinking at him dazedly. The bicycle had curled up on the ground.

The juniors gathered round the swell of St. Jim's with wrathful faces. Monty Lowther helped Tom Merry to his feet. Tom was covered with dust from head to foot, and gasping for breath as he rubbed the back of his head, which had come into contact with the ground with considerable violence.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Bai Jove!"

"You champion ass!" exclaimed Blake. "What the dickens do you mean by charging into a crowd like a—mad bull?"

"I wefuse to be compared to a mad bull."

"A mad donkey, more like," growled Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"What were you scorching for?" demanded Manners.

"I suppose the Grammarians aren't after you. I can't see them in the road."

"I twust you do not imagine that I should be likely to wun away from the Gwannah cads," said D'Arcy, with dignity, or as much dignity as was compatible with sitting in the dust and gasping for breath.

"Then what's the trouble?"

"What were you playing the giddy goat for?"

"I was not playin' the giddy goat. I was in a feahful hawwy."

"What's happened?"

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

NE. 26 (New Series.)

Copyright in the United States of America.

"I have had a most remarkable adventure, deah boys."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"You've come jolly near having a most remarkable licking," growled Tom Merry, still rubbing his head.

"I should wefuse——"

"Look here, what's happened?" demanded Blake, seizing the swell of the Fourth Form by the shoulders and jerking him to his feet.

"Ow! Pway don't be a wuff beast."

"What were you scorching for?"

"I have had a most remarkable adventure," D'Arcy groped in his pocket. "I have a lettah here—a most remarkable lettah, unless I have drowped it."

"What was the adventure?"

"A most remarkable one. Bai Jove, how feahfully dustay I am! I weally think it was most inconsidewate of you fellows to get in the way and cause me to fall ovah."

"Well, of all the cheer——"

"Pway pick up my bike, Dig. I am afwaid it may be damaged. I will pwoceed to the dorm and change my clothes——"

"What has happened?"

"I will explain when I have changed my clothes. I am vewy perspiwin' and dustay, and I cannot talk in this condish."

"You ass——"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"What's happened?" roared the juniors in chorus.

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Explain!"

"Yaas, wathah, but——"

"Expound!"

"Yaas——"

"Explicate!"

"You see——"

"Come to the point!"

"It's wathah a long, long stoway," said D'Arcy; "and I must weally get a wash and a bwush down befoah I welate the remarkable cires."

"Never mind the wash——"

"Never mind the brush——"

"Get to the cires."

D'Arcy groped for his eyeglass and jammed it into his right eye. Then he shook his head. The shake of the head shook the eyeglass out of its place, and it dropped to the end of its cord. The swell of St. Jim's carefully replaced it.

All this was done with the greatest deliberation; the elegant junior was never in a hurry. It had a most exasperating effect upon Tom Merry & Co.

They knew that something remarkable must have happened, for Arthur Augustus to come scorching back to the school in that way, and they were curious. They wanted to know what it was.

But D'Arcy had remembered that excitement was not quite in accordance with the repose which should stamp the caste of Vere de Vere, and he was quite calm again now.

"Are you going to explain?" asked Blake in ominous tones.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then go ahead."

"Yaas, when I have bwushed down and——"

"Explain!"

"Weally——"

"Oh, collar him!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We'll bump it out of him."

"Weally, deah boys——"

"Bump him!"

D'Arcy made a wild rush to escape. He dodged half a dozen clenching hands, and fled at top speed towards the School House, with the excited juniors in hot pursuit.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy.

He glanced over his shoulder. The juniors were running as if in a race and pounding along at top speed.

D'Arcy put on a big spurt, and dashed up to the steps of the School House.

He just escaped Tom Merry's grasping hand as he reached the steps and sprang up. He rushed into the School House, and the juniors rushed after him.

"Oh!"

"Hallo!"

"Got him!"

"Look out!"

"Hands off, you young rascals!" roared the well-known voice of Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's.

"Oh!"

"Leggo!"

"Phew!"

Kildare had been just coming to the door. D'Arcy had dodged past him and escaped upstairs, and Tom Merry & Co. had fallen upon Kildare hip and thigh.

The captain of the school went crashing to the ground under a heap of juniors scrambling like monkeys over him.

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CHAPTER 2.

Pax!

KILDARE struggled under the scrambling juniors in angry amazement. He thought at first that it was a jape, and the thought of being japed by Fourth Form fellows was enough to make him "wathy." The head of the Sixth, and captain of the school, was far too lofty a personage to be japed.

"You young rascals!" he shouted. "Get off!"

"Sorry, Kildare."

"Get off him, Lowther!"

"Get off, Manners, you ass!"

"Ha, ha! Sorry!"

Kildare staggered to his feet. His handsome face was crimson with wrath.

"You young sweeps——"

"Sorry, Kildare," said Jack Blake. "We were after Gussy, and we didn't see you. It wasn't a jape."

"Honour bright," said Tom Merry.

Kildare's face cleared a little.

"Well, you'd better be a bit more careful next time," he growled. "You ought to have a licking all round."

And he went down the School House steps, leaving the juniors very relieved that matters were no worse.

"By George!" said Monty Lowther. "Some seniors would have cut up very rough. Kildare's a brick."

"Yes, rather."

"It's all Gussy's fault," said Blake. "He's always doing these things. Where has the young boulder got to?"

"Let's look for him."

"We'll bump him for this."

The juniors hurried upstairs. They looked into the Fourth Form dormitory, but the swell of the School House was not there. They went along to Study No. 6, which D'Arcy shared with Blake and Herries and Digby.

The door was locked.

Blake rapped on it.

"You here, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!" came a voice from within.

"Open the door!"

"Wats!"

Blake breathed hard through his nose.

"He knows what to expect," he remarked. "I wonder what's happened. It must have been something exciting to make Gussy scorch home like that."

Tom Merry kicked at the door.

"Let us in, Gussy."

"Yaas, if you make it pax!"

"Rats!"

"Then I shall wefuse to open the door."

Tom Merry laughed.

"We'd better make it pax," he remarked. "Gussy won't open the door till we do."

Blake nodded.

"All serene."

"It's pax, Gussy," called out Tom Merry, through the key-hole.

"Wight you are, deah boys!"

"Open the door, then."

"Yaas, wait a bit till I've finished bwushin' down and changin' my collah."

"Open the door!" roared Blake.

"Pway don't be impatient, deah boy."

"You ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"How long are you going to be?" roared Manners.

"Only a few minutes, deah boys."

The juniors waited wrathfully. They were more curious than ever, but it was evident that they would have to wait till D'Arcy was ready to speak.

"Dear me," said a voice, as a youth with a big bumpy forehead and big spectacles came along the passage. "Is anything wrong here?"

And Skimpole of the Shell blinked at the waiting juniors.

"Yes," growled Blake, "Gussy's locked us out."

"Dear me! Can't you get the door open?"

"Do you think we should be standing here waiting like a lot of giddy sheep if we could?" roared Blake.

"Really, Blake——"

"Oh, buzz off, Skimmy!" said Herries. "You make me tired."

"I should be very pleased to open the door for you," said Skimpole, who was the scientific genius of the Shell. "If you have a piece of strong wire about the length of nine inches could contrive——"

Blake snorted.

"Yes, I generally go around with a piece of strong wire nine inches long in my pocket," he said sarcastically.

Skimpole rubbed his bumpy forehead thoughtfully.

"Well, there is another way of destroying the lock," he remarked. "If a sufficiently powerful current of electricity



"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, springing up the School-House steps with the excited juniors pounding after him at top speed.

were directed upon it, it could be reduced to a cinder. All I require is a powerful battery."

"Have you got one?"

"No, I haven't got one, certainly; but if I had——"

"Any more brilliant ideas?" asked Monty Lowther. "Perhaps a battering-ram would do, if we had one, or a cannon, if there was one here."

"Really, Lowther——"

Click!

The door opened, and D'Arcy, nicely brushed and clean, beamed upon the juniors.

"Come in, deah boys."

The dear boys came in. They looked very much inclined to "go for" the elegant junior, and restore him to his previous dusty state; but the fact that they had made it "pax" restrained them.

Skimpole blinked into the study.

"Now, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "I will proceed to unfold the mystewy. Bai Jove! Pway twavel along, Skimnay!"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Pway kick that duffah out, deah boys!"

Blake took Skimpole by the ear, and led him into the passage, and closed the door after him.

Skimpole blinked in an astonished way at the door, and then shook his head seriously and went down the passage.

In Study No. 6 the juniors fixed grim looks upon D'Arcy.

"Well?" said six voices at once.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye.

"I have had a most wemarkable adventure, deah boys," he said.

"We've heard that before."

"Get to bizney."

"Pway don't intewwupt me. I intended to tell you chaps," went on Arthur Augustus; "but I had not thought about tellin' Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah. Howevah, I am quite willin' to do so, but, of course, the whole affair is a swiet seawet."

"Go hon!"

"I shall wequire the help of you fellows."

"Our help?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What for?"

"For the wescue."

"The what?"

"The wescue."

"The rescue?" said Tom Merry. "What are you drivelling about now?"



"I decline to have my remarks chawactewised as dwivellin',
Tom Mewwy."

Blake tapped his forehead significantly.

"He's off at last," he remarked.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Right off," said Digby sadly.

"I decline to listen to these disrespectful remarks. If you fellows do not choose to take an intewest in the mattah, and help me, I will go ovah to the New House, and ask Figgins and Co.," said D'Arcy, in his most stately way.

"Ask them what?"

"To help me."

"In what?"

"The wescue."

The chums of the School House looked at D'Arcy and at one another.

"He must be off his rocker," said Monty Lowther; "but let's give him a chance to explain. Get on with the washing, Gussy."

"Vewy well. I have a most remarkable lettah here."

"Ladle it out, then."

"It is witten by a young man who is impwisoned by a wicked uncle."

"What?" roared Blake.

"A young man who is impwisoned in the Moat House by his wicked uncle," repeated D'Arcy firmly. "He contrived to get this lettah to me, and I am goin' to wescue him."

The juniors stared hard at D'Arcy.

"The question is," said Blake, "whether Gussy is being taken in by the New House chaps, or by the Grammarian rotters."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Of course, it is as clear as daylight that somebody's pulling his leg," Tom Merry remarked.

"Oh, yes!"

"Quite clear."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Let's get on to the wicked uncle," said Lowther. "This is as good as a six shilling novel. There are hoaps of wicked uncles in six shilling novels. They shut up their nephews in moated granges in order to succeed to the title and estates. It's quite a common occurrence—in novels."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust, Lowthah, that you will take this mattah sewiously."

"Go ahead."

"Let's have the history of the mystery," said Manners;

"then we'll have some tea."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Go ahead!" shouted six voices.

And thus urged, D'Arcy went ahead.

CHAPTER 3.

The Mysterious Letter.

"YOU fellows know that I went out for a wide," Arthur Augustus remarked. "I went wound by Wayland, and came home by the south woad, because it's a bettah woad. You chaps wemembah the Moat House on the south woad?"

"Yes; it's a jolly old place," said Blake. "It's been unoccupied for years."

"It is occupied now, deah boy."

"I wasn't aware of that. There was nobody there a fortnight ago when I passed it," said Tom Merry.

"There was when I passed it to-day," said D'Arcy.

"Who was it?"

"I didn't see him."

"Then how do you know he was there?"

"Because he thwew me a lettah."

"This is getting interesting," Monty Lowther remarked;

"but I am waiting for the wicked uncle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, deah boys. I was widin' slowly along the wall of the Moat House when somethin' stwuck me on the head."

"Good!"

"I was wathah suwpwised, of course. I looked up, and saw the ivy on the wall movin', as if somebody had been leanin' ovah, and I thought I heard the sound of a voice. The thing that had stwuck me had fallen into the woad, and I got down to see what it was."

"Go ahead."

"It was a packet, tied up with stwing. I unfasted the stwing. It occuwved to me, you know, that some chap had thrown it to me for some weason, and I wanted to see what it was about."

"That shows how a really brainy chap can reason a thing out," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Yaas, wathah! Well, I unfasted the paper, and there was more papah inside, and more, till I began to think that it

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ANOTHER LONG SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY.

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was simply a bundle of papah, and the chap, whoever he was, was pullin' my leg, you know. I wegarded it as a faithful cheek."

"Awful!" said Blake. "Fancy anybody having the nerve to pull Gussy's noble leg."

"Terrible!"

"Pway don't wot. Wight in the middle of the bundle I discovahed this lettah. You see, the chap must have fastened it up like that to pwevent it bein' blown away by the wind."

"Gussy, you beat Sherlock Holmes; you do, really."

"Let's get to the letter," said Tom Merry. "It ought to be interesting."

"Of course it's a jape," said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, let's see it."

Arthur Augustus spread the letter out on the table. The juniors gathered round it, and lool'ed at it with considerable interest.

Their interest deepened as they read it. It was a strange enough letter.

It ran as follows:

"Whoever may pick this up is implored to help the writer. I am kept a prisoner in the Moat House by my uncle, who is enjoying my fortune while I am imprisoned here.

"Help me, but help me in secret; for if anything is done openly, I shall be concealed in a secret chamber, and the most thorough search would fail to find me.

"I shall be rich when I am free, and I will pay any reward to whoever shall help me to escape. Help, help!"

"VERNON DE COUREY."

The juniors read the letter through, and then looked at one another.

In spite of its strangeness, there seemed to be a strain of sincerity in it, as if the writer were really in earnest.

What did it mean?

"Blessed if I can understand it!" said Tom Merry.

Blake shook his head.

"It must be a jape," he said.

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's curious," said Digby; "but it really doesn't seem to me like a jape. The chap writes as if he meant it."

"So I think."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But it's impossible," said Monty Lowther. "A chap imprisoned by a wicked uncle is all right for a novel, but—"

"Well, even novel incidents have sometimes been known to happen in real life," said Tom Merry. "I wonder—"

"If it's possible?"

"Yes."

"Vernon de Courey," said Herries. "It sounds like a blessed novel name, too."

"Still, there are De Coureys."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It's jolly odd, that's all."

"Well, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, "I suppose you agree with me that the mattah ought to be looked into?"

"I—I suppose so," said Tom Merry hesitatingly.

"You see, the chap will have to be wescued, and we weally can't let an appeal like this pass without twyin' to do somethin' for him."

"Yes; but—"

"If there's anything of that sort going on, it ought to be made known to the police," Manners remarked. "They're the proper persons to look into it."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"The police are all vewy well," he remarked; "but I suppose Inspector Skeet, of Wyleombe, isn't such a brilliant specimen that we can twust a mattah of that sort into his hands. He would wegard it as a jape, anyway."

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"Most likely."

"Besides, you see what the chap says about a sewet chambah. If he were shoved into a sewet chambah, the police couldn't discovah him."

"And the Moat House is full of secret chambers, I've heard," said Blake. "It's one of the oldest buildings in the county; dates from the reign of Edward the Fourth."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No; I suppose it wouldn't do to take this note to the police-station, especially as the chap asks us not to," said Tom Merry slowly. "But—"

"But what, deah boy?"

"We shall have to go slow, and be jolly careful—that's all. If it's a jape, we don't want to be shown up to all St. Jim's as a set of duffers."

"Wathah not; but—"

"The New House fellows would never let us hear the end of it."

"That's so," said Blake; "and if it's a jape, Figgins & Co. are most likely at the bottom of it."

"Yes, rather!"

"We should have to be jolly careful, or the wicked uncle would get on the scent," said Arthur Augustus. "My ideah is that we should scout wound the Moat House, and make quite certain whethah there is a pwisonah there. If there is, it shows that the thing is genuine, and then we can wade in and wescue him."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Good! If there's a prisoner there, that will make it all right. Nobody has a right to keep a prisoner in a private house, that's certain. If there's a giddy prisoner, we'll rescue him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's settled," said Blake.

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy; "we'll get there aftah dark. No good goin' in the daylight, or the wicked uncle and his myrmidons—"

"His what?"

"Myrmidons," said D'Arcy firmly. "You know that the vascals who help a wicked uncle to impwison a nephew are always called myrmidons."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pray be sewious. If we go in the daylight, the wicked uncle and his myrmidons will spot us, and the game will be up, you know."

"We shall have to go after dark, of course. That will mean breaking bounds."

"It's in a good cause, deah boy."

"Oh yes, of course; we shouldn't dream of breaking bounds, except in a first-class cause," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

"Pway don't be an ass! Will you fellows be weady this evenin' aftah lights out—say half an hour aftah?"

"Good!"

And so it was arranged.

CHAPTER 4.

Figgins & Co. are Surprised.

"HALLO!"

"What's the matter?"

"Stop a minute."

"Blessed if I'm going to stop!" said Figgins. "We've got to get into St. Jim's before dark, and it's jolly well dusk now. Come on, Fatty."

"But—"

"Yes, come on, Fatty," urged Kerr; "you can stop and contemplate the landscape or bolt the sandwich another time. We don't want to be ragged for being late for calling-over, you know."

"But—"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Figgins and Kerr together.

"Hold on, I tell you!" said Fatty Wynn.

Fatty Wynn had stopped in the road, and Figgins and Kerr turned back. The three juniors of the New House at St. Jim's were tramping back to the school after a visit to the market town of Wayland, and they had some distance yet to go. They had been putting speed on, for they did not want to be hauled over the coals for being late; but Fatty Wynn had suddenly halted, for no apparent cause.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" exclaimed Figgins, exasperated. "I knew you wouldn't be able to keep up the pace if you had those tarts at Wayland. Why couldn't you be satisfied with the sausage rolls?"

"It wasn't that."

"Then what is it?"

"I was jolly hungry when we left Wayland," said Fatty Wynn indignantly; "I had only four sausage rolls, the ham and eggs, and the beef-steak pie, besides the tarts. I don't see—"

"My hat! he's going to stand there and talk all night," said Kerr resignedly. "We may as well sit down on the bank and take it comfortably."

"Look here—"

"Oh, come on, Fatty!"

"Yes; but—"

"What are you stopping for?" howled Figgins.

"What's that chap waving to us for?" said Fatty Wynn, replying by another question.

"Eh; what chap?"

"Look at him!"

Fatty Wynn pointed. The three chums had been tramping along the road where it bordered the wall of the Moat House.

That house, unoccupied for many years, was one of the loneliest and most forbidding in the countryside. It was surrounded by a high wall and a deep moat, the latter fed by the waters of the Ryll; and only in one spot was the moat crossed by a little bridge, which gave access to the gate.

At the gate, looking out on the bridge, was a young man. The gate was high, and the young man was evidently standing upon, or clinging to, something within, to be able to look over the top.

He was waving his hand excitedly to the juniors of St. Jim's, evidently earnestly desirous of attracting their attention. Fatty Wynn had been the first to see him. He was waving frantically, yet he was not calling out; which was curious, for the juniors were within easy sound of his voice, if he had chosen to call.

The three juniors stared at him.

"What the dickens does he want?" muttered Kerr.

"He wants to speak to us, I suppose," said Fatty Wynn. "Let's go and speak to him; he looks as if there was something wrong. There may be somebody ill."

The juniors hurried towards the little bridge over the moat. Access to the bridge was easy enough, but the gate at the end was high, and the top of it was adorned with a row of sharp spikes, through which the young man was peering at them.

As they drew nearer the juniors started at the sight of his face. It was deadly pale, and there was a strange hunted expression in his eyes, as if the young man were in incessant fear of observation.

Figgins and Co. stopped under the big gate and looked up.

"Anything wrong?" asked Figgins.

"Help!"

"Eh?"

"Help me!" said the man above, in an eager, thrilling whisper. "I am a prisoner here. Help me!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors looked at him blankly.

They had felt, from the young man's looks and his strange position at the gate, that there was something amiss; but they had not been prepared for an announcement like this. For the moment they could only stare.

"I am kept a prisoner here," said the young man, in low, tense tones. "I have been allowed to walk in the garden to-day, and I climbed up here in the hope of attracting the attention of a passer-by. But it is a lonely road."

"My only hat!" muttered Figgins.

"Listen!" said the other hurriedly. "I want you to help me. I am rich, and can give you any reward you choose to name."

"Rats!" said Figgins. "If you're a prisoner, we'll help you, certainly; but we don't want any money. But, look here, you're not japing us, I suppose?"

"Do I look like it?"

"By Jove—no!"

"I may be seized any moment," said the other tensely.

"Listen! my name is Slavonski—Prince Slavonski—and I am kept a prisoner here by a villain in the pay of the Nihilists!"

"My hat!"

"I may be murdered if I am not rescued!"

"Phew!"

"We'll buzz off to the police-station," said Fatty Wynn.

The young man made a gesture.

"No, no! If I am sought for by the police, I shall be hidden in a secret chamber—this old place is full of them—and they will never find me. I may even be murdered and hidden beneath the waters of the moat!"

"Oh!"

"If I am rescued, it must be secretly. If you could get me a rope, so that I could descend from the wall, and help me to cross the moat afterwards, all would be well."

Figgins & Co. looked serious.

They were so utterly astounded by the strange information that they hardly knew what to think or to say, but their chivalry was aroused.

If the man was a prisoner in the Moat House, he was certainly entitled to his liberty, and they were just the fellows to help him get it.

"Will you help me?" breathed the man above.

"Yes!" said Figgins resolutely.

"Oh, thanks, thanks! You are a noble lad. Mind, do not let Dr. Ferrers catch sight of you, or hear a word of it."

"Dr. Ferrers!"

"The man who lives here and keeps me a prisoner. He is not really a doctor, that is only to deceive the public." "Oh!"

"He could easily deceive the police, too, if they were called in. You will be careful?"

"Yes. But—"

"Come to-night, after dark, and—"

There was a sound in the gardens inside, and the young man uttered an exclamation. He turned his head, and the next moment his hands disappeared from the spikes, and it was clear that he had been pulled down from inside.

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances almost of horror. It seemed like a terrible dream to them. But they realised that it was better for them not to be seen, and they scuttled back into the lane at once.

It was certain that they would not see the prisoner of the Moat House again, and they turned their faces towards St. Jim's once more, utterly puzzled and very much excited by what they had heard.

"It's jolly curious," said Figgins. "The Moat House has only been taken a few days—but though I wondered who was going to live in such a jolly lonely place, I certainly never guessed anything of this sort."

"I don't see how it could be a jape, either," said Kerr thoughtfully. "The chap was certainly pulled down from that gate, from inside."

"No doubt about that."

"And—he says he is a prince."

"A Russian prince," said Kerr. "I believe they're nearly all princes and counts. Still, it will be something to rescue a giddy prince. Of course, we don't want any blessed reward, but there's the catch."

"Besides," said Fatty Wynn, "of course we don't want any reward, but the chap could hardly do less than stand a decent feed, I should think."

"Trust Fatty to think of the feed," grinned Figgins.

"Well, I should think that would be a jolly good way for him to settle with us," said Fatty Wynn. "A good feed is—"

"Get a move on," said Figgins. "We shall belate for calling-over."

The chums of the New House broke into a run. But they were late for calling-over, and they received lines; but they did not care very much for lines just then. They were thinking of the prisoner of the Moat House, and planning his rescue, and what were lines at such a time?

CHAPTER 5.

A Little Misunderstanding.

TOM MERRY & CO. had plenty to think about that evening. It was a serious matter to break bounds after lights out, and they knew it; and the punishment was certain to be heavy if they were discovered. But the risk had to be run.

Not a word was said to the other fellows on the subject. Even Kangaroo and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn were not let into the secret. Seven juniors were quite enough to undertake the adventure; and if there was trouble, there was no need for others to be dragged into it.

Indeed, the Terrible Three were of opinion that three fellows would be quite enough, and they suggested to Blake & Co. to stand out of the enterprise: a suggestion that was received with scorn by the Fourth-Formers.

At bedtime, the juniors were thinking of the coming adventure, and of nothing else. The Terrible Three went up to bed with the Shell, looking as unconcerned as possible. Skimpole tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder in the dormitory.

"I suppose you would like me to assist you, Merry," he remarked.

Tom Merry started.

"Eh!"

Skimpole blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I am quite willing to do so, if you like," he said.

"But what—"

"As a sincere Socialist, I am always ready to oblige," explained Skimpole. "I am quite at your service in the matter."

"Has D'Arcy been speaking to you?" asked Tom Merry, in surprise.

"D'Arcy! Certainly!"

"Does he want you to help?"

"He referred me to you."

Tom Merry scratched his curly head.

"Trust Gussy to jaw," he remarked. "You oughtn't to have been told a word about it."

"Really—"

"Mind you keep it dark."

Skimpole blinked at him in astonishment.

"Keep it dark?"

"Yes, ass."

"But why?"

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"Because it's a secret, chump. We don't want the School House buzzing with it."

"I really fail to see the reason for any secretiveness," said Skimpole. "However, I will certainly keep it a secret if you wish. I suppose I had better help. A fellow of my brain power will be very useful, and I am quite willing."

"You can come," said Tom Merry dubiously. "You won't be any use, of course."

"Really—"

"You're certain to be in the way, as a matter of fact."

"Yes, rather," said Lowther, pausing in unfastening his collar. "Skimmy will muck the whole thing up, as sure as a gun."

"Really, Lowther—"

"Oh, let him come," said Manners. "It will keep him quiet, at any rate. But I expect he will be snoring at half-past ten."

"Half-past ten?" said Skimpole.

"Yes, that's the time."

"To-night?"

"Yes, ass—do you think we're going at half-past ten to-morrow morning?"

"I should certainly think that more appropriate," said Skimpole. "I fail to see the reason for going at night."

"It's to keep it dark, fathead."

"But they will be closed for the night."

"Of course they will. We shall have to get in secretly, if we're to do any good," said Tom Merry.

Skimpole blinked at him in great astonishment.

"Get in secretly," he repeated.

"Yes, certainly."

"But—but—"

"Did you think we were going to march up to the front door and ring the bell?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

"Yes, I certainly thought so," said Skimpole. "Of course, I will assent to any arrangement you make, but it seems to me very strange."

"Ass!"

"Shall I bring my article with me?" asked Skimpole.

"Your what?"

"My article on Socialism, for the current number of the 'Weekly.'"

The Terrible Three stared at him. They were accustomed to Skimpole talking in a rather random way, but this abrupt change of subject surprised them.

"Your article for the 'Weekly,'" repeated Tom Merry.

"Certainly."

"What on earth good would that be?"

"My dear Merry! I hope it will have the effect of converting all St. Jim's to Socialism, and helping on the great movement of reform. The toiling millions—"

"Blow the toiling millions!"

"That is heartless, Lowther. Think of the millions toiling day and night while you are rolling in luxury on the marble floors of—"

"Never rolled on a marble floor in my life," said Lowther, with a yawn. "If you're going to begin Socialism now—"

"He's not," said Manners. "I'll biff him if he does."

"Well, I suppose I had better bring the article," said Skimpole.

"It is finished, and I shall be able to give it to the printer to put into type."

"To the printer."

"Certainly."

"But we sha'n't see any printer," said Tom Merry dazedly.

"What the dickens are you talking about, Skimmy?"

"I don't suppose he knows," said Lowther, with a shake of the head.

Skimpole blinked at them.

"I don't quite understand you fellows," he said. "You are really most extraordinary. You propose to visit the printer at half-past ten at night, instead of by daylight—"

"The printer!" roared Tom Merry.

"Yes; the printer of Tom Merry's 'Weekly,'" said Skimpole, in wonder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What is the joke?"

"Ha, ha! Did you think we were going to see the printer?"

"Certainly. I asked D'Arcy about it and he referred me to you," said Skimpole in wonder. "It will be necessary to see the printer if the idea is to be carried out of enlarging the 'Weekly' by two pages. I think I had better take my article with me, because it has run a little longer than usual this week, and I want to make sure of its all being put into type."

"Ha ha ha!"

"Really—"

"Ha ha ha!"

The Terrible Three roared, and Skimpole blinked at them in amazement.

He evidently did not understand the cause of the merriment.

"Really, you know," he said, at last. "I cannot understand where the joke comes in. What is it that amuses you?"

Tom Merry wiped his eyes.

"Oh, it's all right," he exclaimed; "a slight misunderstanding,



"You are heartless, Lowther," said Skimpole. "Think of the millions toiling day and night while you are rolling in luxury on the marble floors of—" "Never rolled on a marble floor in my life!" interrupted Lowther.

that's all. You see, we're not going to see the printer at all. I had forgotten all about the alteration in the 'Weekly,' and we're not bothering about that now, anyway."

"But what—"

"It's all right, Skimmy; we'll see the printer to-morrow. Go to bed."

"But—"

"Good-night!"

"But where are you going at half-past ten to-night, then?" asked Skimpole. "You are going somewhere—you said so yourself."

"Never mind that; go to bed."

"But—"

"Ring off; here's Darrel."

Darrel, the prefect, looked into the dormitory, and the juniors lost no time in going to bed. Skimpole was still in a state of great surprise.

After lights were put out, and the prefect had retired, Skimpole

sat up in bed, and blinked through the darkness at Tom Merry's bed.

"Tom Merry!"

"Hallo!"

"I have been thinking—"

"Oh, draw it mild."

"And although you are not going to the printer's to-night—"

"Dry up!"

"And I do not know where you are going—"

"Cheese it!"

"I am perfectly willing to come with you, as I am afraid you will be getting into mischief, and—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry.

"But I want to help you. A fellow of my brain—"

Biff!

A boot suddenly whizzed through the air and caught Skimpole on the chest, and he lay down again rather suddenly.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Shut up and go to sleep," growled Tom Merry.
 "I regard that as brutal, Merry."
 "Rats!"
 "And under the circumstances—"
 "More rats!"
 "I shall refuse to come with you now, if you ask me."
 "Hurrah!"

And the indignant Skimpole put his head upon his pillow. But he had already let out the secret, and half the Shell dormitory had heard it.

"So there's an expedition on, is there?" grinned Kangaroo. "Br-r-r!"

"Where are you going, Tom Merry?" sang out Gore.

"Rats!"

"What's on?"

"Don't ask questions."

"I'll jolly well stay awake and see," grinned Clifton Dane.

"We can't have you lads getting into mischief."

"Rather not," said Bernard Glyn.

"Oh, don't play the giddy goat!" said Tom Merry. "Go to sleep."

"Bosh!"

And half the dormitory, at least, determined to remain awake and learn what was going forward.

As Kangaroo remarked, it was like Tom Merry's cheek to keep a secret from the Shell, and the Shell meant to know all about it.

CHAPTER 6.

After Lights Out!

"GROO-OO-OO!"

Jack Blake made that remark as half-past ten chimed out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

He sat up in bed, yawning portentously.

"Half-past ten," he said. "You fellows awake?"

There was a sound of regular breathing, and a snore or two. Nobody was awake in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House, with the exception of Jack Blake himself.

Blake stepped out of bed, and shook Digby and Herries and D'Arcy in turn. They sat up, rubbing their eyes.

"Taint rising-bell," grunted Herries.

"It's half-past ten, though."

"Oh!"

"I say," Digby remarked, in a thoughtful and reflective way, "has it occurred to you, Blake, that it will be jolly hard to find one's way about that giddy Moat House in the dark?"

"Well, I don't expect it to be easy," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"But wouldn't it be a good wheeze to leave it till—till morning?" suggested Digby. "We could get up very early, and—"

"Out you come!"

"Of course, I—I'm willing to get up, you know, but I—I thought it would be a good idea, and—and—ow! Beast!"

And Digby rolled out of bed with a bump, with Jack Blake's sinewy hands grasping him.

He picked himself up and growled.

"Don't make a row," said Blake warningly. "I suppose you don't want to wake up half the dorm. Shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Cheese it! Are you getting out, Gussy?"

"Ya-a-s," said D'Arcy hastily. "I was just stoppin' to think a moment whethah it wouldn't be a good ideah to do as Dig suggests—ow!—yow!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rolled on the floor.

"Blake—"

"Shut up!"

"I wegard you as a beast."

"Good! Get into your togs."

"I wefuse to wegard you as a friend."

"Hip-pip! Dress yourself."

"You uttah wottah—"

"Are you going to talk all night, Gussy?"

"Hallo! What's that row?" came a sleepy voice from Reilly's bed. "Faith, and who's that jabberin'?"

The chums of the Fourth were silent at once.

"Dry up!" whispered Blake.

Reilly was asleep again in a minute or two.

The Fourth-Formers dressed quietly, and Blake led the way to the door. They did not speak again till they were outside in the passage.

Jack Blake closed the door softly.

"Lucky to get out without alarming the whole dorm," he said. "Of course, Gussy could be relied upon to give us away if possible."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Cheese it! This way."

"I insist—"

"Rats! We're going to meet Tom Merry at the end of the passage, I think. Don't make a row."

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"Who's making a row?"

"Quiet!"

"Look here—"

"Dry up!" grunted Blake.

They went quietly along to the end of the passage. There the starlight streamed in through a high window, and revealed dimly the walls and the linoleum. But there was no sign of the Terrible Three.

Blake grunted again as he looked round.

"They're not here," he said.

"Wathah not."

"I've got a good idea," Herries remarked thoughtfully.

"We may get into a tussle at the Moat House, you know, and we ought to be prepared."

"Better take a cricket stump apiece," agreed Blake.

"I was thinking of Towser."

"Towser!"

"Yes. Towser will be awfully useful, and if they should bung the prisoner chap into a secret chamber Towser would nose him out in next to no time," said Herries confidently. "You know what Towser is on a scent."

"Yes; he can track down a kipper, if it's scenty enough," Blake agreed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" said Herries wrathfully. "Do you want me to get Towser, or don't you want me to get Towser, you cackling duifers?"

"We don't," grinned Digby.

"Hardly," said Blake. "Towser would be rather too much of a good thing, I think."

"Yaas, wathah! Towser has no wespect whatevah for a fellow's twosahs."

"Towser is dead in this act," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "But where is Tom Merry? I'll bet Gussy's new Sunday topper that he's not woke up."

"We'd better go and wake him, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on," said Blake abruptly.

The Fourth-Formers made their way in the dim passage to the door of the Shell dormitory. Blake opened it cautiously and peered in.

"Tom Mewwy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Quiet, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass!"

"You'll wake the lot of them up."

There was a chuckle in the darkness of the dormitory.

"It's all right," said the voice of Kangaroo, "we're awake! My hat, the whole family's in it! Are you getting up, Tom Merry?"

"Phew!" said Blake.

A candle-end glimmered out in the dormitory. Clifton Dane had lighted it. Half the Shell fellows were sitting up in bed grinning. The Terrible Three sat up, too, looking very sheepish. Skimpole, the cause of the mischief, was fast asleep, and his musical snore was audible from one end of the long dormitory to the other.

Blake blinked in the light.

"Well, you are an ass, Tom Merry!" he remarked. "The whole blessed dorm. awake! Why don't you kids go to sleep?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We want to know what's on," remarked Glyn.

"What's the little game?"

"What are you playing the giddy goat for at this time of night?"

Blake snorted.

"This is what comes of letting Shell chaps into the bizney," he exclaimed. "You can go to sleep, the lot of you, and we'll go on our lonesome."

"You'll go, eh?" said Kangaroo. "Where are you going?"

"Mind your own bizney."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a giddy expedition to the tuck-shop, and they're going to keep it all to their little selves," grinned Dane.

"Cheek!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, go to sleep!" said Blake crossly.

"Yes, go to sleep," said Tom Merry, slipping out of bed. "Don't be inquisitive about the bizney of your elders, and—"

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter with you, Gussy?"

"Somebody's coming."

"Phew!"

"Cave!"

Blake looked anxiously down the passage. There was a glimmer of light and the sound of footsteps from the direction of the stairs.

"My hat! Quick!"

Blake drew his companions into the dormitory and closed the door quickly. The footsteps came along the passage towards the door.

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CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus Asks a Question.

JACK BLAKE breathed hard.

To be discovered out of their dormitory at that hour by a master or a prefect meant trouble. It also meant abandoning the expedition for that night.

Tom Merry glanced at the Fourth-Formers anxiously.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"Somebody's coming along the passage."

"My hat!"

"It's bound to be a blessed master or a prefect," said Blake.

"It's just our luck! Get into bed; he may look in here."

"But you—"

"We'll have to get out of sight."

"Bai Jove! Let's get undah the beds, deah boys!"

"If he's suspicious he'll look there," said Monty Lowther.

"You may have been missed from your dorm."

"Oh, great Scott!"

"Get into the beds," said Manners. "You can hide under the clothes."

"That's a good idea."

The footsteps in the passage were audible now to all, and they were evidently coming towards the Shell dormitory.

The Fourth-Formers popped into the nearest beds, D'Arcy slipping in with Tom Merry, and causing that youth to grunt as he jammed a boot upon his bare ankle.

"You clumsy ass!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Shut up!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Put that light out, Kangy!"

"Right-ho!"

The dormitory was plunged into darkness.

"Quiet!" whispered Blake. "Not a sound!"

"What-ho!"

"Yaas, wathah! Tom Mewwy, pway give me a little more woom. I shall woff off the edge of the bed."

"There you are."

"Weally—"

"Quiet!"

"Yaas, but—"

"Put your head under the clothes."

"But I shall be suffocated, deah boy."

"You ass!" breathed Tom Merry. "Do you think anybody could look into the dorm. without seeing your fat head unless you cover it up?"

"I wofuse to have my head alluded to as a fat head."

"Shut up!"

"I—"

"Put it out of sight!"

"But—"

The door was opening now, and a light was glimmering into the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry pushed D'Arcy's head down into the bed, and drew the clothes over it. The swell of St. Jim's murmured inaudibly.

Knox, the prefect, looked into the dormitory.

Tom Merry groaned in spirit.

Had it been Mr. Lathom, the Fourth Form-master, or even Mr. Linton, the wool might have been pulled over his eyes. Had it been Kildare, or Darrel, matters wouldn't have been so bad. But Knox was bad-tempered and fault-finding, and always glad of a chance of catching Tom Merry & Co.

Knox looked in, and then stepped in and held up his lamp.

There was a sound of regular breathing, reinforced by Skimpole's steady snore, and nothing else was to be heard in the dormitory.

A sneering smile crossed the prefect's face. He switched on the electric light, and the long, lofty dormitory was flooded with the bright illumination.

Knox's glance swept up and down the room.

"You are awake," he said. "You can't take me in, you young rascals. I saw the light in the dormitory window, from the quad."

There was no reply.

"Tom Merry!"

Silence.

"Lowther!"

No reply.

Knox crossed over to Tom Merry's bed. If anything against the rules had been going on in the Shell dormitory, the prefect was pretty certain that Tom Merry had had a hand in it. He stood and looked down upon the hero of the Shell.

Tom Merry's face lay upon his pillow, and the half of it that Knox could see was quite placid, the eyes closed, the breathing regular.

But Knox had been a junior himself once upon a time, and he knew juniors. He wasn't in the least satisfied that Tom Merry was asleep.

"Merry!"

No answer.

"You may as well own up, Merry."

Silence.

The prefect frowned, and leaning over Tom Merry, shook him by the shoulder. Tom Merry started very naturally, and opened his eyes.

He looked at the prefect, blinking in the light.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed.

"You were not asleep, Merry."

"Warn to-night, isn't it?" said Tom Merry. "I suppose you can't sleep, and you're taking a stroll round the dormitories."

"You were not asleep just now."

"It's a good idea to take a walk for insomnia," said Tom Merry, as if he had not heard. "I should recommend a stroll in the open air, though."

"Merry! You were not asleep!"

"Of course, I suppose you've got some reason for coming here and disturbing us," said Tom Merry. "Anything wrong?"

Knox breathed hard.

"I saw a light in the dormitory window," he said. "I was taking a turn in the quad, and I saw the light, only a few minutes ago."

"Really?"

"Yes. Had you a light here?"

"Yes, when we went to bed."

"Since then?" snarled Knox.

"I shall have to think it out," said Tom Merry calmly.

"You had a light. You have been up to some pranks," said Knox. "I shall report this to your Form-master in the morning."

"Just as you like," said Tom Merry affably.

"I believe the others are awake here."

"We couldn't very well sleep with you chirping like that," remarked Kangaroo. "I shall complain to Mr. Linton about being disturbed."

"So shall I," said Glyn.

"It's too bad," said Monty Lowther. "When Knox has been dreaming things, he ought to go and tell 'em to the Sixth, not to the Shell."

Knox was red with anger.

He was not quite certain that he had seen that light now; it might have been a reflection of the starlight on the panes of glass, and it was quite possible that he had unjustly suspected Tom Merry & Co. In that case, a report to the Form-master would not be wholly a success.

He stood for some moments silent and angry.

In the silence of the dormitory a half-suffocated voice made itself audible from the depths of Tom Merry's bedclothes.

"Bai Jove! has he gone?"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

CHAPTER 8.

Blake Does as he is Told.

TOM MERRY groaned.

In another minute, or less, the prefect would have been gone, and all would have been safe; but Knox was not likely to go now.

He started as he heard the voice buried under the bedclothes, and then grinned.

"Who is that?" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry did not reply.

Knox grasped the bedclothes and threw them back, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was revealed.

He sat up, blinking in the light.

"Gweat Scott!" he ejaculated.

Knox stared at him.

"What are you doing here, D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"Sittin' on Tom Mewwy's bed, deah boy."

D'Arcy slid off the bed, groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye. Jack Blake, Herries, and Digby turned out of their places of concealment. It was useless to remain in hiding longer, and they did not want to leave D'Arcy alone to bear the brunt of the punishment.

Knox's eyes glittered as he surveyed them.

"Four of you," he remarked. "I might have guessed it! You will follow me to your Form-master at once."

"Bai Jove!"

"What did you come here for?" demanded Knox.

Blake gave a shrug.

"We'll explain that to the Form-master, as we're to be taken to him," he remarked. "Lead on, Macduff."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry," said Kangaroo. "It was all the fault of the duffer who lighted that candle."

"Can't be helped," said Blake. "Come on, kids."

And the Fourth-Formers disconsolately followed the prefect out of the dormitory. The light was shut off.

"Well, this is rotten," said Tom Merry. "I suppose it's all over for to-night."

"I suppose so," said Manners.

"What's all over?" asked Gore.

"Never mind."

"It's really all your fault, Tom Merry, for being so precious close about the thing," said Kangaroo. "Why couldn't you explain?"

"Rats!"

"It was all Skimpole's fault," said Monty Lowther wrathfully.

"If that ass hadn't jabbered it all out——"

"If Tom Merry hadn't let it out to Skimpole, he couldn't have jabbered it out," said Manners. "It's Tom's fault."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "I only let it out because I thought he knew."

"Yes, it was through your starting thinking," growled Lowther. "What the dickens did you want to start a new thing like that for at your time of life?"

"Br-r-r!"

"Fathead!" said Manners.

"Rats!" said Tom Merry.

And with that polite interchange of compliments, the chums of the Shell settled down to go to sleep again.

Meanwhile, Blake & Co. followed the prefect down the passage, and down the stairs. There was a light under the door of Mr. Lathom's study.

Knox tapped at the door.

"Come in!" said Mr. Lathom.

The prefect, with a spiteful glance at the juniors, led the way into the study. Little Mr. Lathom looked up in surprise, and adjusted his spectacles and looked again.

"Dear me!" he said. "What are you doing out of the dormitory at this time of night, my dear boys? What is the matter?"

"They were in the Shell dormitory, sir," said Knox. "I found them there. I brought them here for you to deal with, sir."

"Thank you, Knox," said Mr. Lathom, who did not appear very grateful for being disturbed, however. "Thank you."

The prefect left the study.

Mr. Lathom glanced severely at the juniors.

"How comes it that you were out of your dormitory?" he said severely.

"We—we came out, sir," stammered Blake.

"You went to the Shell dormitory?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"For the carrying out of some foolish scheme, I suppose," said the Form-master—"some absurd jape, as I think you call it."

"Well, we had a little scheme, sir," admitted Blake.

"You must learn to abide by the rules of the school," said Mr. Lathom. "You will take fifty lines each."

"Oh, sir!"

"I shall expect those lines to-morrow. Now go back to your dormitory at once, and go to bed."

"Yes, sir."

"Close the door after you, please."

The Fourth-Formers retired.

They passed Knox in the passage, and the prefect looked disappointed, as he saw that they had evidently not been caned.

"Hold on a minute, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, pausing. "I want to make a few wemarks to Knox."

"Come on!"

"Wait a minute. I want to explain to Knox what I think of him."

Blake seized his chum by the arm and dragged him onward.

"You're not going to do anything of the sort," he remarked. "You can slang me, if it will relieve your feelings, but it's too dangerous to slang a prefect. Come on!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Come on, ass!"

And Blake dragged the swell of the School House upstairs. D'Arcy submitted reluctantly. They entered the Fourth Form dormitory, and Blake closed the door.

"I suppose it's all up for to-night," Herries remarked.

"Get into bed," said Blake.

"But——"

"Get in, and don't wake the fellows."

"I don't see that it matters about waking the fellows now," remarked Digby. "The game's up, as far as to-night's concerned."

"Get into bed."

"All wight, deah boy."

"Don't undress."

"Eh?"

"Then you mean——"

"Look here," said Blake. "We've got to do what our Form-master tells us. He's told us to get back to the dorm. and go to bed."

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"He didn't say anything about undressing, so we needn't undress. He didn't say anything about not getting up again, so we can get up if we like."

"Ifa, ha, ha!"

"He didn't say anything about not breaking bounds, either, or paying a visit to the Moat House."

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"So we're going?"

"Yes, as soon as Knox has left off prowling."

"Good!"

"A little later won't hurt. We'll wait a quarter of an hour, and then try again."

"Good egg!"

And the chums of Study No. 6 went to bed in their clothes, to wait for the stipulated time to pass. Eleven strokes boomed out from the clock-tower.

Blake slipped out of bed.

"Now, you fellows——"

"Bai Jove! I was almost dwoppin' off to sleep."

"Up you get!"

"Wight-o!"

"Are we going to call Tom Merry again?" asked Digby.

"Not much!"

"But——"

"We should find the duffers all awake, and have another blessed show-up," said Blake. "Tom Merry can go and eat coke. The four of us are enough to pay a visit to the Moat House, I imagine."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, and be quiet."

And the chums of the Fourth crept from the dormitory, and down the passage. Knox was evidently gone to his room now, and the coast was clear.

Five minutes later Blake & Co. were in the quadrangle, and hurrying towards the school wall that bordered the lane.

CHAPTER 9.

Figgins & Co. to the Rescue.

"THIS way!" said Figgins.

While the juniors of the School House were falling foul of the prefect, and getting into trouble generally, Figgins & Co. were equally wakeful, and more fortunate, over in the New House.

They had left their dormitory without mishap, and reached the quadrangle, glimmering in the rays of the stars, and of a moon that was just peeping over the branches of the elms.

Outside the house was quiet and darkness, relieved only by the stars, and only a few windows, bars of light, glimmered into the quad.

With quiet steps, the three juniors made their way towards the school wall, where stood the slanting oak which had aided them in crossing the wall more than once before.

"Here we are," said Kerr.

"Good! You up first, Fatty, as we shall have to shove you."

"Wait a minute."

"Look here, you can't sit down and rest now," said Figgins, peering at the stooping form of his chum. "Buck up!"

"You ass! I'm not sitting down to rest."

"What are you up to, then?"

"I've dropped the sandwiches."

"The what?"

"Sandwiches."

"You ass!" grunted Figgins. "What do you want with sandwiches now? Get up that tree and over the wall."

"Well, you don't know whether we might be delayed," said Fatty Wynn argumentatively. "And you know that the night air makes you hungry. As a matter of fact, I always get specially hungry about this time of the year."

"Get up!"

"Hold on a minute."

"Leave the blessed sandwiches there. Taggles's mastiff will find 'em."

"Will he?" said Fatty Wynn indignantly. "They're jolly good sandwiches, I can tell you, Figgins. Mrs. Taggles made them under my own eye, and——"

"Will you buck up?"

"All right; here they are."

And Fatty Wynn recovered his packet, and thrust it into a pocket, and began to climb the tree.

Figgins and Kerr gave their plump chum a "bunk," and with many a gasp and grunt Fatty Wynn reached the top of the wall and clambered upon it.

"All right?" said Figgins, in a cautious whisper.

"Yes," gasped Fatty.

"Come on, Kerr."

"After you."

The active juniors clambered up. Fatty was sitting astride of the wall, eating a sandwich. Figgins glared at him.

"At it already!" he exclaimed.

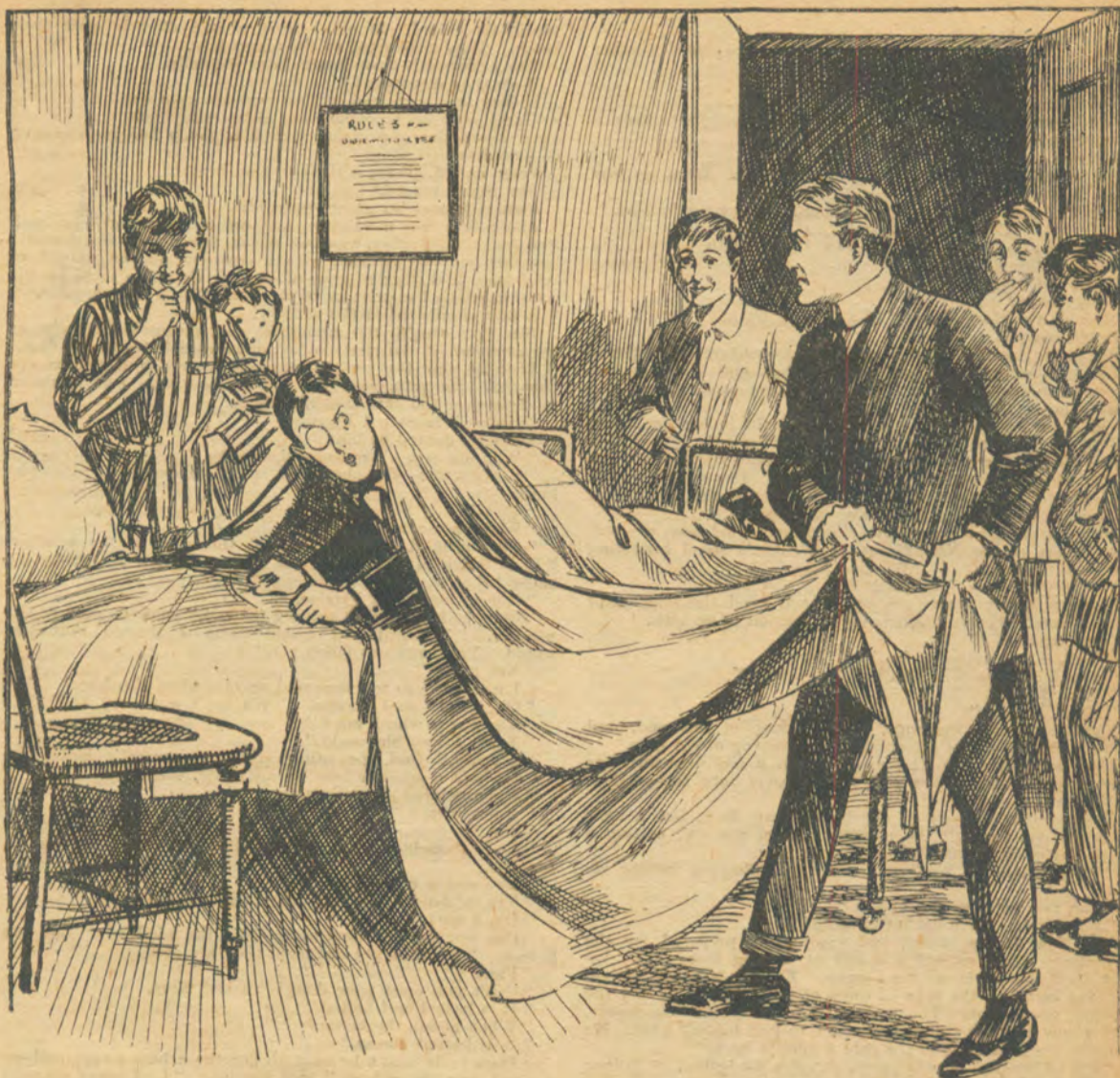
"Well, you see, Figgy, I—I might get hungry, and——"

"Jump down!"

"Wait till I've finished the sandwich."

"Rats!"

Figgins gave his fat chum a shove which made it necessary for him to jump off the wall or roll off, and he chose to jump.



"Gwent Scott!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as Knox grasped the bedclothes and threw them back.

He alighted in the road with a clatter, and the half of the sandwich in his hand flew through the air and disappeared. Figgins and Kerr joined him in the road.

"This way, kids," said Figgins.

"Hold on, I've dropped my sandwich."

Figgins linked his arm in Fatty Wynn's, and marched him on. The fat Fourth-Former submitted with a grumble.

"I shouldn't wonder if we're jolly hungry before we get back," he exclaimed.

"Rats! Come on."

They tramped down the shadowed lane. Figgins cast a glance behind at the school, but all was dark and silent there. It was clear that the New House juniors had succeeded in getting out without giving the alarm to master or prefect.

"Good luck!" said Figgins. "I'm not so sure how it will turn out at the Moat House, but we'll do our best for the prince."

"Yes, rather!"

"It will be one up against the School House, too," Figgins remarked with a chuckle. "Tom Merry will be ready to kick himself when he hears about it. It's a bigger thing than those chaps have ever dreamed of—rescuing a prince."

Kerr wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"It's awfully odd," he remarked.

"What's odd?"

"About the prince. Prince Slavonski must be a Russian,

I suppose—but that chap looked English enough, and spoke good English."

"Well, I daresay he's lived in England a lot. He may belong to the Russian Embassy. I shouldn't wonder if this affair gets into the papers, and we get a lot of kudos."

"H'm!"

"What are you h'm'ing about, Kerr?" demanded Figgins warmly. "I suppose you're not going to throw cold water upon the whole thing?"

"Well, no, but—"

"But what?"

"Well, look here, as a matter of fact, I can't help thinking there's something fishy about it all," said the Scottish junior.

"What's fishy?"

"I don't know," said Kerr frankly. "But it doesn't seem to me to be quite in order. It's too much like a giddy novel."

"Well, novels are founded on real life."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, blow your buts!" said Figgins. "It's as straight as a string, in my opinion. Didn't we see the prince looking over the gate?"

"Well, yes."

"Wasn't he pulled down from inside?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't that prove it's all straight?"

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NEXT
THURSDAY.

"D'ARCY'S BANK-BOOK."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I suppose so."

"It's pretty clear that he's a prisoner, I suppose, whether he's a prince or not?" said Figgins.

Kerr nodded assent.

"Yes, that's pretty clear."

"Well, then," said Figgins, "nobody has a right to keep a prisoner in a private house in England."

"That's true."

"And we're jolly well going to rescue him. What do you think, Fatty?"

"Eh! I think this is jolly good ham in these sandwiches."

"My hat! He's eating again."

"The last sandwich," said Fatty Wynn, with a sigh. "I wish I had brought some more with me now, instead of leaving them in the dorm."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"Here's the Moat House," said Kerr.

The three juniors halted.

In the dim moonlight the Moat House loomed up before them. The high wall, topped with sharp spikes, and the masses of ivy upon it, and the roofs and square tower within, stood out blackly against the silvered sky.

The house was dark and silent, as far as the juniors could see.

They stopped at the end of the wooden bridge over the moat. Below the planks the moat ran dark and deep, murmuring faintly in the silence of the night. It was fed by the Ryll stream, and there was a current through the moat, that rustled the rushes growing thickly on its edges.

Over the bridge the gate was closed, and, doubtless, secured. The juniors of the New House at St. Jim's stood hesitating for some moments.

"I'll try the gate," said Figgins.

He trod lightly across the bridge and tried the high, solid wooden gate. It would not budge a fraction of an inch.

"It's fastened!"

"Well, it was bound to be," said Kerr.

"Yes, I suppose so. You've got the rope."

"Here it is."

"Hand it over."

Figgins uncoiled the rope, made a loop at one end, and skilfully lassoed one of the spikes along the top of the gate.

Then he climbed up the rope, and in a few moments was holding on to the spikes and looking over into the gardens of the Moat House.

Most of the windows of the house were dark, but a light streamed out through the curtains of one window, casting a broad bar of illumination into the gloom.

"They're still up, some of them," said Figgins, turning his head.

"Can you get over the spikes?"

"I think so. Give me the sacking."

The New House chums had come fully prepared for the adventure. Kerr extracted a roll of sacking from under his coat, and passed it up to Figgins. Figgins jammed several big, flat corks on the tops of some of the spikes, and laid the sacking over them. The spikes were no longer dangerous, and it was easy for the active junior to pull himself over. He hung on the inner side of the gate a minute later.

"It's all serene," he whispered, through the spikes. "Follow your leader."

"Right-ho!"

Figgins dropped to the ground.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn climbed the rope, and threw it over on the inner side of the gate, so that it would be available for their escape when the time came.

Then they dropped down into the garden and joined Figgins.

In the gloom of the garden the three juniors stood silent, with wildly beating hearts. It did not occur to them that their adventure was anything in the nature of a burglary, but if a policeman had found them there, there would probably have been a painful misunderstanding on the subject. But they were intensely excited; for if the prince were really kept prisoner by desperate Nihilists, who knew what dangers they might be running into?

"Come on!" said Figgins abruptly.

There was no alarm, no sound from the house. The juniors, with the skill and caution they had learned as Boy Scouts, took their way towards the gloomy building without a sound.

CHAPTER 10.

Behind the Bars.

"HIST!" Figgins uttered the warning suddenly, catching hold of his chums and stopping them.

"What is it?" muttered Kerr.

"I heard something."

"Ah!"

"Listen!"

In the silence of the night the three juniors listened intently. There was a sound of an opening window; of a sash being

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cautiously raised. It came from almost directly over their heads. They were close to the house now.

The juniors felt their hearts beat painfully.

Were they discovered?

If they had been seen getting over the gate—and they could see, now, that the moonlight was glimmering upon it, and would have shown them up in full view if anybody had been looking in that direction.

They waited, silent, with thumping hearts.

The sound ceased.

Figgins turned his glance upward.

Above him was a window, and across it he could see dark iron bars. The other windows of the house were not barred; but this one was guarded with a cross-bar and an upright of solid iron, and Figgins guessed at once that this must be the room in which the prisoner of the Moat House was confined.

A face glimmered at the window.

The eyes caught the moonlight, and gleamed strangely, as the occupant of the room looked downward between the bars.

That he saw the juniors was clear; but Figgins was not alarmed. He recognised the young man who had appealed for help over the gate that afternoon.

"Hallo!" muttered Figgins.

The eyes glinted at him.

"Who are you?" murmured a voice.

"I'm Figgins—the chap you spoke to over the gate, you know."

"Oh!"

"We've come to help you."

"Oh, splendid, splendid!" said the man at the window. "It is brave of you. You are sure you have not given the alarm?"

"Not so far," said Figgins.

"Good! I have been waiting for you," said the man at the window. "I hoped you would come—I trusted that you would. You have not failed me."

"Not much."

"I will give you ten thousand roubles when I'm free."

"Oh, rats!" said Figgins. "We don't want any tin."

"You know who I am?"

"Yes; Prince Slavonski."

"Exactly," said the other, after a moment's hesitation. "I am kept a prisoner here by my uncle, who—"

Figgins uttered an exclamation.

"Your uncle?"

"Yes."

"I—I thought you said the Nihilists," said Figgins, in surprise.

There was a moment's pause.

"Yes, of course, my lad. My uncle is a Nihilist."

"Oh, I see!"

"Can you get the bars away from the window?" said the prince. "I cannot get out until they are gone."

"Phew!"

"Can't you open your door?" asked Kerr.

"It is locked and bolted."

"What about the chimney?"

"It is barred across."

"Phew! It won't be easy to get those bars away, and we haven't any file with us," said Figgins. "I—I never thought of that, you know. It would take hours to file through the bars, too."

"It must be done."

"Ye-es, I suppose so. Give me a bunk up, Kerr!"

"Right-ho!"

Figgins climbed on Kerr's shoulders, and reached the window-sill. He felt over the bars with his hands. They were thick and strong, and clamped to the stone window-frame, not set in the stone. It was evident, even in the moonlight, that the bars had only recently been added to the window.

Figgins's face was very close to the prisoner's face now. The latter was very eager and excited, and his panting breath fanned Figgins's cheek.

"I think these bars could be wrenched away, if I had a jemmy, or something of that sort," said Figgins doubtfully.

"Is there anything in your room I could use—a poker might do?"

The young man shook his head.

"I have nothing here that could serve as a weapon."

"No, I suppose not. Look here, we shall have to get away, and come again, and I'll bring something with me to get at the bars," said Figgins.

"No, no! You must not leave me here!" exclaimed the young man, in an agitated voice.

ANSWERS

ANOTHER LONG SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY.

"But——"

"Do not desert me."

"We won't desert you," said Figgins. "Look here, I'll buzz down to the village and get some tools, and get back here in an hour. The other fellows will wait here."

"Yes, that is a good idea."

"I'll go now."

"Hush!"

"What is it?"

"I can see a light under my door. They are coming to my room," said the young man, in a hurried whisper.

"Great Scott!"

Figgins dropped to the ground again.

The three chums stood in the shadow of the shrubbery under the window, still and silent. They saw a bar of light fall from the window above.

The window was still open, and they heard the murmur of a voice from the room.

Then the prince's voice was heard.

"Why do you disturb me?"

A low and rather pleasant voice replied, in tones too low for the juniors to catch what was said.

"Well, I want to sleep," said the young man.

"But you are not in bed."

The juniors heard the voice now; the speaker had evidently noticed that the window was open, and crossed towards it.

"Well, leave me!"

"Your window is open."

"You need not be afraid; the bars are still there," said the young man bitterly. "I shall not fly."

"Come, come!"

"Why will you not set me free? I will pay you ten thousand roubles, from the revenue of my estate in Moscow, for my freedom."

There was the sound of a soft laugh.

"Twenty thousand roubles, then!"

"We won't talk about that now," said the pleasant voice. "You should be in bed, my dear fellow!"

Figgins ventured a glance up to the window.

He caught a glimpse of a stout man in a frock coat standing there in the light, and he wondered if this was "Dr. Ferrers."

The window was closed down, and the juniors heard no more. A few minutes later the light was gone from the room.

Figgins & Co. stole out of the shrubbery, and made their way silently towards the gate. Under the trees within the high wall they paused.

"I'll get down to Rylcombe as quickly as I can," Figgins whispered. "You fellows stay here. I won't be long."

"Right you are," said Kerr.

"Keep on the watch for me. I'll sprint all the way. I think I should be able to manage those bars with a jemmy and a chisel."

Figgins climbed the gate, and swung himself over.

He threw down the sacking and the corks and the rope to Kerr, in case they should be discovered and thus betray the presence of the juniors.

"Mind you wait for my whistle," he said.

"Right-ho."

And Figgins dropped upon the wooden bridge and ran out into the lane, and set off for Rylcombe at a fleet run that could have been equalled by very few other juniors at St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 11.

D'Arcy does not Want to be Helped.

"BAI JOVE!"

"What's the trouble?"

"Look there!"

Four juniors were tramping steadily along to the Moat House, and had just come in sight of the gloomy building, when D'Arcy halted.

He jammed his monocle into his eye with one hand, and pointed towards the Moat House with the other.

"My hat!" said Blake softly.

A figure had just dropped from the gate, crossed the bridge, and darted up the lane.

The chums of the School House had only a momentary glimpse of it, as it flitted away in the moonlight.

They noted that the figure was long and slim, and moved with great swiftness, but whether it was that of a man or a boy, they could not tell.

It disappeared in a twinkling.

"My word!" said Digby. "That was somebody coming out of the Moat House."

"Looked like it."

"It may have been the prisoner escaping."

"That's odd," said Herries. "I don't see how anybody could get over those blessed sharp spikes. Look at them!"

Blake looked, and shook his head.

"It couldn't be done," he said.

"Wathah not!"

"Then who was that chap?" said Digby.

"Somebody trying to get in, perhaps, and gave it up as a bad job," said Blake thoughtfully. "I don't quite catch on. Anyway, it can't have been the prisoner escaping. De Courcy couldn't get over those spikes—that's what they're there for."

"That's so."

"We've got to get in, you know," said Herries. "I don't see how we're to get over the spikes, either, for that matter."

Blake grinned serenely.

"Didn't I tell you I knew a way?" he demanded.

"Yaas, wathah! Go ahead, deah boy."

"The spikes are over the gate, but they don't go along the whole of the wall," said Blake. "At the back of the house they used to depend on the moat to keep people out. Of course, it's too deep and broad to get across easily, and as the wall rises sheer from it——"

"It will be imposs. to get over there."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"I've got a wheeze," said Blake. "I've been in the Moat House grounds before, ass. That was when the place was empty, and some of us went in to clear the raspberry bushes in the season. There are lots of them there, and the fruit was never gathered when the house was unoccupied—except by us. There's a way of getting over the wall at the back."

"Good!"

"Then let's get on," said Digby. "We might be spotted any minute standing here. If Clump, the bobby, came along, he would want to know what we were doing out of school this time of night."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This way," said Blake.

He clambered over a fence into a field along the lane, and led the way through the bushes in the darkness without once failing.

He knew the ground well, and he never hesitated a moment, and the others followed him in silence, brushing through the bushes.

"Stop here," said Blake.

They stopped on the edge of a stream of running water, near the bank of the Ryll. Arthur Augustus put up his eyeglass and looked round him in surprise.

"Did you say stop here, Blake?"

"Yes, ass."

"I wefuse to be called an ass; and I fail to see why we should stop heah. This is not the moat."

"It's the canal that connects the moat with the Ryll, duffer."

"Yaas; but——"

"And if you had the sense of a chip of wood," said Blake genially, "you'd see that there's a plank bridge across it, that the labourers use to get from one field to the other."

"Yaas; but we don't want to get fwom one field to the othah, deah boy."

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Lend a hand here."

"But weally——"

"We're going to borrow the plank," said Blake. "That's what we're going to get across the moat with."

"Oh! Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that, you know!"

"You wouldn't," said Blake.

"Weally, deah boy——"

"Dry up, and lend a hand."

The four juniors grasped the long, broad plank that lay across the cutting, and easily lifted it from its place.

They carried it between them through the bushes towards the moat, in the rear of the dark, silent house.

On the edge of the moat Blake paused, and carefully surveyed the high stone wall that rose on the other side.

He gave a grunt of satisfaction as he caught sight of a patch of creepers that hung in a mass over the wall.

"That's the place."

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon it.

"What is there, Blake?"

"That's where we can climb the wall. The stones are broken away, and the creepers cover it up, but it's quite easy to climb if you know the place."

"Jollay good!"

"We can push the plank out across the water, and rest the end on a chunk of stone where the wall is broken away."

"Good!" said Digby. "Sure?"

"I've done it before."

"Oh!"

The juniors pushed the plank out carefully over the water. It floated on the dark surface of the moat, and the end touched the wall opposite them. Blake scanned the base of the wall in the darkness, and at last found the right spot, and the plank was elevated a little, with some exertion, and the end found a resting-place in an interstice of the wall.

Then it lay firm, about three inches above the water.

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"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "That's wippin'! I'm glad I brougtht you with me, Blake."

"Go hon!"

Blake led the way across the narrow bridge.

The plank was not more than twelve inches wide, and it was wet and slippery. Jack Blake trod across it with great care.

He reached the wall, and held on to the creepers.

"Mind how you go," he whispered across the moat. "It's slippery. Mind, Gussy. You'd better let Dig hold your arm."

"Wats!"

"Look here——"

"I am quite capable of lookin' aftah myself, deah boy. I will hold Dig's arm, if he likes, if he does not feel safe."

Dig sniffed.

"I should feel a jolly lot safer without your holding my arm," he remarked.

"Weally, Dig——"

"You'd better help Gussy, Dig," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be helped."

"Well, be careful, then, ass."

"I decline to be called an ass, Blake. I should be sowwy to intewwupt the pwesent pwoccedin's by givin' you a thwashin', but——"

"Are you going across the plank, Gussy?" asked Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! I——"

"Then you'd better start. You're keeping us waiting."

"I was explainin' to Blake——"

"You can do your explainin' some other time," said Digby.

"Do stop jawing, old chap, and get a move on."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Shove him into the moat if he won't move," said Blake.

"I wefuse to be shoved into the moat. I'm comin'."

"Come on, then, fathhead!"

Arthur Augustus stepped on the plank, and trod gingerly enough towards the wall. He was in the middle of the plank, when his eyeglass escaped from his eye and fluttered to the end of its cord.

He made a grasp at it, and his foot slipped on the wet plank.

"Look out!" gasped Blake, as the elegant junior staggered.

"Catch him!"

But it was too late.

There was a sudden splash, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy disappeared into the dark waters of the moat.

CHAPTER 12.

On the Scent.

"MY hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"He's done it now!"

"G-w-w-w-w-oooh!"

Arthur Augustus came up in a moment, and grasped the plank. His face, thick with mud and green goze, looked decidedly peculiar in the moonlight as he blinked at the chums.

"Ow! Yow! Gwoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors could not help it.

At the risk of alarming the inmates of the Moat House that burst of merriment escaped them. The aspect of the most elegant junior at St. Jim's was irresistible.

"Bai Jove! Pway help me out, deah boys!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you know——"

"My only hat!" gasped Blake. "I should like you to do that again, Gussy! It's as good as a circus."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Help him out," said Blake, wiping his eyes. "Oh, dear! I know Gussy will be the death of me some day."

Digby and Herries, chuckling, crept along the plank, and helped the swell of St. Jim's to clamber upon it.

There was a terrible squelching as the soaked junior stood upright.

"Ow!" he mumbled. "I feel howwid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My boots are full of beastly mud."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm drenched to the beastly skin, you know."

"Oh, dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I uttably fail to see anythin' to laugh at. I wegard the whole mattah as bein' a sewious one, and not in the least comie."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally——"

"Oh, come on!" said Blake. "You can't stay there all night, Gussy. Think you had better cut back to St. Jim's and get yourself dried, and we'll attend to this affair without you."

"I decline to entahtain the suggestion for a moment."

"You may catch cold, you know."

"Wats!"

"You'd better cut back," said Digby. "I think——"

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

"Well, come on," said Blake resignedly. "Don't tumble into the water again, old chap. There's no time for it now."

"Do you think I tumbled in on purpose, you uttah ass?" demanded Arthur Augustus, in a suppressed voice.

"I really don't know why you did it. Why do you do these things?"

"You feahful ass!"

"My word!" said Digby. "Gussy's dug up some fearful smells out of the moat. I'd rather you keep a bit further off, if you don't mind, Gussy."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Talk about ancient kippers," said Blake, sniffing. "Gussy could give them all points, and beat them hollow."

"Weally, Blake——"

"Look here! Don't you come too near."

"I——"

"Get off!"

"You uttah ass!"

"Stand out there on the plank till we've got over the wall," said Blake. "You've no right to dig up these awful smells and plant them on us."

"I wefuse."

"Br-r-r-r!" said Blake. "Scrape yourself down while I'm climbing the wall."

Blake groped in the creepers and began to climb.

The wall was broken and ragged here, the openings in the shattered stonework being concealed by the heavy creepers.

The wall was easy to climb, and in a couple of minutes Blake was at the top.

There were no spikes here, and the junior sat on the wall, astride, and lent a hand to Digby and Herries to climb.

Then D'Arcy held up his hand for aid.

Blake sniffed.

"Look here, Gussy, hadn't you better stay out here and keep watch?" he asked. "You will be able to whistle if there's danger, and——"

"I wefuse to stay out here and keep watch."

"It will be safer, and——"

"Pway, help me up!"

"You're so awfully whiffy, you know."

"I wegard you as a wottah, Blake. Help me up."

"Well, if you must, you must," said Blake. "I really think you might be more careful in the way you pick up scents, though."

And he dragged the swell of St. Jim's to the top of the wall. Arthur Augustus was certainly odorous. There was a slow current through the moat, but the water was almost stagnant, and as it was never cleaned out huge masses of fungus and smelly mud had accumulated. D'Arcy had covered himself with it, and the scent was strong and decidedly unpleasant.

It was not surprising that his chums preferred to give him a wide berth.

Blake clambered down the inner side of the wall.

Herries and Digby and D'Arcy followed him.

"HARRY WHARTON'S PERIL."

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PRICE ONE PENNY.



"What the dickens does he want?" muttered Kerr, as the three juniors looked towards the Moat House and saw a young man waving his hands frantically.

Only D'Arcy lost his footing as he descended, and landed on the grass with a bump and a gasp.

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurt?" asked Blake.

"It's nothin' of any consequence, deah boy."

"Come on, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake peered towards the house.

It loomed up among the trees, black and gloomy. There was not a single light to be seen in any of the rear windows. Blake led the way towards the house.

The rescuers were on the spot now, and the next step was to effect an entrance into the house and find the room where Vernon de Courcy was imprisoned.

That was likely to prove more difficult.

The juniors halted near the house and observed it. Suddenly from the darkness came a brilliant glare of light.

Blake uttered a suppressed exclamation.

It was a lantern flashing through the gloom as a man came round the corner of the building from the front.

"Cover, quick!" whispered Blake.

The rays of the lantern were not turned upon the juniors; but, if they had been, the quartette would have been shown up at once.

Blake plunged into the ragged thickets that grew by the house wall, and the others followed him quickly, breathing hard.

In the dense shrubbery they were concealed, and they lay low, waiting with beating hearts.

The lantern came nearer.

"Hark!" whispered Blake.

A voice was audible in the garden.

"In this direction, you think, Larkin?"

"Yes, sir," said a deep, gruff voice.

Blake peered out of the shrubbery.

Two men had halted close to the thicket, and in the lantern light he could see them both.

One was a stout gentleman with a fat face, in a frock coat, with the unmistakable stamp of a prosperous medical man about him.

The other was rougher in appearance, and might have been a porter or a lodge-keeper, evidently a servant of some sort.

This man was holding the lantern, and he threw the rays round in every direction, peering into the gloom on all sides. Blake popped back into cover as the light swept towards him.

The stout gentleman was peering to and fro through his glasses.

"You are sure, Larkin?"

"I know I 'eard something, sir."

"What sort of a sound was it?"

"Sounded like somebody laughing and talking, sir, and then I 'eard a bump."

"H'm! It is very strange. What?"

The two men came nearer to the shrubbery, and the porter cast the lantern light over the thicket. The juniors scarcely breathed.

"It seemed to me that there was something afoot when I went into my lodger's room," the stout man remarked. "He had the window open, and it seemed to me that I heard him speaking as I came to his room. He might have been talking to Larks, but—"

"Looks to me as if there's somebody in the grounds, sir."

"Make a thorough search, Larkin."

"Yes, sir."

"Dear me," went on the stout gentleman, sniffing, "what a curious smell there is here! Do you notice it, Larkin? What?"

Larkin sniffed.

"Yes, sir."

"Is it the decaying vegetation? The gardens have been very much neglected, I know. I shall have them seen to if I enlarge my establishment here, as I expect to do. But this smell seems like—like—"

"Like a ditch when it's stirred up, sir."

"Exactly, Larkin."

And both of them sniffed again.

The juniors barely breathed.

They knew very well what scent it was that had caught the noses of the occupants of the Moat House. It was the scent of the mud that D'Arcy had raked up from the depths of the moat.

Would it lead to their discovery?

"I can't make it out, sir," said Larkin. "I think I'll take a look through the shrubbery, sir."

"Do, by all means. I will stand here."

Blake gave an inward groan.

All was up now!

Larkin came tramping into the shrubbery, casting the light of the lantern to and fro, and he uttered a sharp exclamation as he caught sight of the crouching forms.

"I've found 'em, sir—OH!"

Larkin broke off suddenly. Blake, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him!

CHAPTER 13.

Hunted!

JACK BLAKE had acted suddenly and without stopping to reflect. He bounded straight at the porter, and Larkin, powerfully-built man as he was, reeled back under the sudden and unexpected attack, and crashed to the ground.

The lantern smashed into the shrubs, and was instantly extinguished.

There was a sharp cry from the stout gentleman.

"Good heavens! What is it? What is it, Larkin?"

"Help, doctor!"

Blake rolled the porter into the bushes, and tore himself up. But the man was grasping at him, and he was dragged down again.

"Help, you chaps!" he gasped.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Pile on!"

The juniors piled on.

Larkin was wrenched away from Blake and sent whirling into the bushes by three strong and determined pairs of hands.

The doctor was hurrying towards them, peering in the darkness, and he walked right upon Larkin and stumbled over him.

In a moment the porter's grasp was fastened upon him, the excited man taking him for one of his assailants in the darkness.

The doctor, under the same impression that he was grappling with an enemy, fastened upon Larkin, and grappled with him fiercely.

The rustling in the bushes, and the fierce and hurried breathing of the two men, warned the juniors of what was taking place.

Jack Blake gave a breathless chuckle.

"Come on," he muttered.

"Yaas, wathah!"

They plunged away into the bushes. As they went, they heard the excited and gasping voice of the doctor.

"Surrender, you scoundrel!"

"Oh, sir!"

"What!"

"Oh!"

"Is it you, Larkin?"

"Is it you, sir?"

"Bless my soul!"

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"My word!"

"I—I thought I had seized one of the scoundrels——"

"I thought I 'ad 'old of one of them, sir."

"Dear me! They will be escaping!" exclaimed the doctor, rising hastily to his feet. "Light the lantern, Larkin."

"Ave you got any matches, sir?"

"No, no."

"I ain't, either, sir. I'll run into the house and get a light."

Blake and his comrades, chuckling softly, plunged away, and finding themselves in a gravel path, ran quickly round the house.

Here, safe for a moment at all events, they stopped to breathe.

"Bai Jove, this is wotten!" Arthur Augustus muttered.

"We've given the alarm."

"You have, you mean," growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"It was your blessed smelliness that gave us away."

"Weally——"

"Never mind that now," said Herries. "The question is, what are we going to do? If you had let me bring Towser——"

"Oh, blow Towser!"

"Towser would have——"

"Br-r-r! I'm fed up with Towser. What the dickens are we going to do, that's the giddy question?" growled Blake.

"They'll be hunting for us now we've given the alarm."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"They're bound to find us if they hunt long enough," said Blake, "and goodness knows what will happen. They may have revolvers."

"Gwoat Scott!"

"Perhaps we'd better slide out while we've got the chance," said Digby.

"Weally, Digby, I regard that suggestion as wotten. We came here to rescue Vernon de Courcy from his wicked uncle."

"We shall want rescuing ourselves soon," growled Digby.

"We're not going," said Blake decidedly. "Not unless we have to, anyway. Look here, they are certain to search the grounds from end to end."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then there's only one place where we've got a chance."

"Where's that?"

"In the house."

"Bai Jove! In the house!"

"Yes," said Blake resolutely, "we came here to get in, and we're going to do it; and it's the last place they'll look for us in. Besides, we may have a chance of finding De Courcy and setting him free while they're buzzing through the gardens."

"Yaas, that's poss."

"Come on, then."

Blake's idea was a bold one, but the juniors did not hesitate. Blake led the way towards the house. The door was open, and a blaze of light came from the lighted hall into the gardens. They saw Larkin issue from the door, with a lighted lantern in his hand, and hurry round the house towards the spot where he had left the doctor.

"Shall we dodge in at the door, deah boys?" asked D'Arcy.

"No, ass!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"There's certain to be somebody else inside, duffer!"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"Of course you didn't," growled Blake. "We're going to get in at a window, and here's one that will suit us."

Blake paused close to the side wall of the house. A window above was open at the top, and the room within was dark. A good many of the house windows were open at the top, doubtless to air the empty rooms.

There was a rain-pipe up the wall beside the window. Blake grasped it.

"Give me a bunk up and I'll try it," he said.

Blake was bunted up.

He climbed the rain-pipe easily enough; it was a large, rough one, fastened to the wall with great iron clamps that afforded him an extra hold at intervals.

In a couple of minutes he was upon the window-sill, and had pushed up the lower sash of the window.

He stepped into the darkness of the room.

The other juniors followed him quickly, clambering one after another into the little window. Blake shut down the sash.

"Look!" he whispered.

The juniors peered through the glass into the garden.

Round the building came a gleaming of light. It was the lantern in the hand of Larkin. The doctor followed him.

They passed on, searching the gardens, without a glance upward at the window from which the chums of St. Jim's were looking.

The light vanished.

Jack Blake drew a deep breath of relief.

"All serene," he muttered.

"Hark!"

There was a shout in the garden, followed by a crashing of bushes and scuffling of feet, and all the sounds of a struggle.

CHAPTER 14.

The Wrong Party.

KERR and Fatty Wynn, in cover among the trees near the gate, had been patiently awaiting the return of Figgins, when the sound of voices and the flashing of the lantern warned them that something was afoot. That the School House chums were at the Moat House they had not the faintest idea, and they watched the moving light in wonder and with some anxiety. Kerr guessed soon enough that the occupants of the Moat House were searching the gardens.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "This is rotten, Fatty."

"Eh?" said Fatty Wynn.

"We're in a fix."

"Yes, we've been waiting a long time," said Fatty Wynn. "The worst of it is, that I've finished the sandwiches. Got any toffee about you?"

"You porpoise! We're in danger."

"I shall be in danger of getting ill if I don't have some supper," said Fatty Wynn. "I don't see what other danger there is."

"Look at that light."

"It's a lantern," said Wynn.

Kerr sniffed.

"Yes, ass, it's a lantern, and they're searching the grounds!"

"Phew! I don't see why. We haven't made a sound."

"Perhaps Slavonski has given us away somehow. Hang it all, they're coming in this direction."

"By George!" said Fatty Wynn, waking to a sense of his peril and Kerr's at last, and forgetting for the moment that he was hungry. "They'll bowl us out."

Kerr watched the moving light.

The searchers were certainly coming towards the clump of trees.

If they searched the trees, the discovery of the New House chums could not fail to take place.

There was no other cover into which they could dodge, near at hand, without going out into the open, when the moonlight would infallibly betray them.

They could only wait in tense anxiety.

The light came nearer.

At that moment, as if by fatality, came a sound of a faint whistle outside the gate.

Figgins had returned.

Kerr gritted his teeth.

The whistle sounded low but clear through the deep stillness. It evidently reached the ears of the two men who were searching, for the movement of the light was suddenly arrested. The two men stood still and listened.

Kerr dared not reply to the signal whistle.

To do so would have been to betray himself immediately to the searchers, who were not a dozen paces away from the clump of trees.

Figgins was evidently puzzled by the silence.

He repeated the whistle, a little more loudly this time.

The light moved on towards the gate. Kerr caught a glimpse of the stout doctor and the porter Larkin.

"It is a signal," he heard the doctor say.

"That's certain, sir."

"It is an accomplice outside the gate."

"Looks like it."

The whistle sounded again.

Kerr and Fatty Wynn remained silent. The doctor and his servant were close to them now, and they hardly dared to breathe.

There was a sound of a heavy body against the gate. Figgins had made a spring up, and caught the top of the gate, between the spikes, in his hands.

Hanging on by his hands, Figgins peered through the spikes into the gloom of the garden, trying to make out his chums there.

The gleam of the lantern dazzled his eyes as he caught it.

"Kerr!" he whispered. "You ass! What have you got a light for?"

There was no reply.

"Throw up the rope, Kerr! I can't get in over the spikes without the coaks and the sacking, too."

The doctor gave a soft chuckle.

He stepped quickly to the gate and unbolted it, and threw it open. In a moment Figgins was swinging in on the opening gate before he knew what was happening. He was still half under the impression that it was Kerr there, having as yet no suspicion that the Moat House was alarmed.

"I've got you, my fine fellow!"

Figgins gasped.

He dropped from the top of the gate, and rolled on the ground, and at the same moment the doctor seized him.

Figgins struggled hard.

He grasped the fact at last that the Moat House was awake and alert, and that he had run into the hands of the enemy.

"Rescue!" he shouted. "Kerr! Wynn! New House to the rescue!"

Kerr and Wynn were already dashing from the trees.

All was discovered now, and they had no thought but to

rescue Figgins and escape. The rescue of Prince Slavonski would have to wait.

Figgins fought hard for his freedom, but the doctor, stout as he was, was a muscular man, and the athletic junior was no match for him.

Figgins was held in a grasp of iron, in spite of his struggles.

"I've got you," said the doctor coolly. "You may as well give in."

"Rescue!" panted Figgins.

Kerr and Wynn rushed up. Larkin had placed the lantern on the ground, and he met the rush of the New House juniors.

Fatty Wynn was bowled over by a drive on the chest, and fell with a bump on the ground, every ounce of breath knocked out of his plump body.

Nothing daunted, Kerr went for the burly porter, hitting out fiercely; but a powerful grasp was laid on him, and the lad was hurled down beside Fatty Wynn.

Then Larkin collared them both, and each was pinned to the ground under the weight of a powerful knee.

"Gr-r-ro!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "M-m-m-mind, you ass! You'll suffocate me!"

Larkin grinned.

"I've got them, sir."

"And I've got the other one," said the doctor grimly.

Figgins gave in at last.

He was an athlete, but no match for a muscular man, and his chums being prisoners now, there was no chance of rescue.

The struggle ceased; and the sounds, to which Blake & Co. had been listening with intent ears, died away.

The four School House juniors wondered what had happened; but they little dreamed that Figgins & Co. were so close at hand.

Had they known it, it is extremely probable that they would have forgotten the intended rescue of Vernon de Courcy, and rushed to the rescue of Figgins & Co.

But they did not know it!

The three New House juniors, helpless to escape, gasped for breath in the grasp of their captors.

The doctor picked up the lantern, holding Figgins with the other hand. He flashed the light upon the boys.

Then he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"They are not burglars," he exclaimed. "They are only boys."

"Burglars!" ejaculated Figgins. "You rotter!"

The doctor smiled.

"I think the mistake was natural," he said. "You seem to be schoolboys, by your dress, but this is hardly the time and place for you to be out. What are you doing here?"

"Trying to get my breath," said Figgins.

The doctor laughed. It was a pleasant laugh, and it struck Figgins what an awful villain he must be to be able to laugh so pleasantly, when he was a wicked uncle, and in league with Nihilists.

"You are pleased to be humorous," said the doctor. "I suppose you came here for some reason."

"I think I know, sir," said Larkin.

"Oh, you know, do you?"

"They belong to the school, sir—the big school up the road. The kids used to come here and take the fruit when the house was empty, sir. They mayn't have known there was anybody living here now."

"Ah, that is probably it."

"I think so, sir," said Larkin.

The doctor looked keenly at Figgins.

"Is that the case, my boy?" he asked.

"Find out!" said Figgins.

The doctor frowned.

"That is not the way to speak to me, my lad," he said reprovingly. "I am Dr. Ferrers, and the tenant of this house."

"I know that, and I know you," said Figgins warmly.

"Indeed! I do not know you."

"Don't jaw too much, Figgy," said Kerr.

"Right-ho—mum's the word."

"I really do not understand you," said Dr. Ferrers, puzzled.

"I suppose you boys came here for what you would call a lark?" The juniors were silent.

"Come, answer me."

"I've nothing to say," said Figgins doggedly.

"I suppose you know," said Dr. Ferrers slowly, "that I could hand you over to the police if I chose, for breaking into my premises like this."

Figgins's heart thumped. It had not occurred to him before, but what the doctor said was perfectly correct.

"I shall not do so," went on Dr. Ferrers, much to the juniors' relief. "I should not like to punish a foolish, boyish freak so severely. I think, however, that it will be my duty to acquaint your head-master with what has happened. What is your name?"

"Figgins."

"You belong to the school—St. Jim's?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come here?"

Figgins did not speak. He did not intend to give it away that they had come for the rescue of Prince Slavonski. That, above all, must be kept very dark, if they were to have a chance of rescuing the prince.

"Who is your head-master?" asked Dr. Ferrers, after a pause, during which he waited in vain for a reply from Figgins.

"Dr. Holmes."

"Very well, I shall call upon Dr. Holmes in the morning," said Dr. Ferrers. "I think it my duty to do so."

"Just as you like," said Figgins doggedly.

"I do not see what else I can do. Why will you not explain to me exactly why you came here?" said the doctor. "If it was a boyish freak, I should not wish to be hard upon you. If you were looking for the fruit, I would allow you to come in daylight and fill your pockets, if you liked."

"My hat!" said Fatty Wynn. "That's jolly decent, Figgy. Look: here, I believe he's a good sort, and not such a villain, after all."

The doctor started.

"Shut up, Fatty," said Kerr.

"Yes, but—"

"Shut up, you fathead."

"So you thought me a villain?" said the doctor. "I am a stranger in this locality; but may I ask what you have heard about me?"

"You may ask," said Figgins grimly.

"But you will not tell me?"

"No."

"I do not understand you," said the stout gentleman. "You are very strange boys indeed. You may go, and I will consider whether to call upon your head-master. I do not desire to get you severely punished, but at the same time I cannot have my ground disturbed at night like this, and myself insulted. Let them go, Larkin."

And the three juniors were bundled over the bridge, and the gates closed and locked and bolted behind them.

They went out into the road in dismay.

"Well, this is a ripping ending, I must say," growled Kerr.

Figgins grunted.

"How did you come to give the alarm?" he asked.

"We didn't."

"Then how—"

"I don't know. They started searching the grounds; something else must have alarmed them, or else it was a guilty conscience," said Kerr. "Perhaps they're always on their guard in case of a rescue, and they may search the grounds every night."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"We'd better get back to St. Jim's, I suppose," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm awfully hungry, and—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins.

"Well, there's nothing more to be done here to-night, I suppose."

"Fatty's right," said Kerr. "Let's get back."

Figgins grunted again.

"Oh, all right."

And they tramped disconsolately back through the dark lane towards St. Jim's. Figgins & Co. had certainly had hard luck. Blake and his chums had given the alarm, and Figgins & Co. had taken the consequences; and Dr. Ferrers and his man, as they returned to the Moat House, had no suspicion that they had discovered the wrong party, and that the other party were, even at that moment, within the walls of the Moat House.

CHAPTER 15.

Fatty Wynn is Fallen Upon.

"TOM MERRY!"

"Groo-oh!"

"Merry! Tom Merry!"

"Yaw-aw!"

"Tom Merry! Wake up!"

Tom Merry opened his eyes, and blinked round him. A man holding a lamp was standing by his bed, and shaking him by the shoulders.

It was Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth Form, and Knox, the prefect, was near him. Tom Merry sat up in bed and stared at them in amazement.

"Mr. Lathom!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. Wake up, Merry!"

"I'm awake, sir."

"I want to ask you a question, Merry," said the little Form-master.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where Blake is?"

"Blake!"

"Yes; and Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries."

"Digby, D'Arcy, and Herries," murmured Tom Merry dazedly.

"Yes. Do you know where they are?"

"In bed, I suppose, sir."

"They are not in bed."

"No!"

"Listen to me, Merry," said Mr. Lathom severely, as the hero of the Shell looked at him in blank astonishment. "Knox reported these four juniors to me for being in the Shell dormitory after lights out. Before going to bed, I looked into the Fourth Form dormitory, to make sure that they were in their proper places. Their beds were empty."

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

The truth rushed into his mind in a flash.

Blake & Co. had not gone to bed after all, but had left St. Jim's upon the expedition to the Moat House, by themselves, without calling the Terrible Three again.

"They are gone somewhere," said Mr. Lathom, "as they came to the Shell dormitory in the first place, I suspected they might be here, and Knox thought so."

"I quite expected to find them here, sir," said Knox.

"Quite so."

"They're not here, sir," said Tom Merry.

"No, I can see that they are not, now," said Mr. Lathom. "The question is, where are they? They are not in their dormitory."

"Indeed, sir."

"Do you know where they went after they left this dormitory, Merry?"

"I thought Knox took them to your study, sir."

"Yes, yes; but after that?"

"I supposed they were gone back to bed, sir."

"Then you have seen nothing of them since?"

"Nothing, sir."

"They have not been back here?"

"Certainly not."

"Thank you, Merry. It is very strange. I shall wait up for them," said Mr. Lathom; "and I shall have something very plain to say to them."

And he left the Shell dormitory with the lamp.

Half the other fellows were awake now, and Monty Lowther and Manners were sitting up in bed.

"Well, this is a nice go," said Manners. "The young bounders went out after all."

"And without calling us," said Lowther.

"Like their cheek!"

"Yes, rather."

"They've been bowled out," said Tom Merry. "It will mean an awful row. It's a serious business getting out of the school at night, and a chap generally does it for a rotten motive; and Blake can't very well explain the facts."

"My hat! No; it will be rotten for them!"

"Still, it was like their cheek to go without us," said Lowther. "It's just what they might have expected, Fourth Form duffers trying to manage a thing like this by themselves."

"Just so," agreed Manners.

"What the dickens is it all about?" demanded Kangaroo.

"What's the row?"

"Don't be inquisitive, old son, and you'll hear no fairy tales," said Monty Lowther.

"Exactly," said Tom Merry. "It's not our secret, as a matter of fact."

"Oh! Are you getting up?"

"Yes."

"Going out?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm going to sleep," said Kangaroo, with a yawn.

"Best thing you can do," said Manners. "You've made bother enough by staying awake, I think."

"Oh, rats!" said the Cornstalk.

And he closed his eyes and was sleeping in three seconds.

The Terrible Three dressed themselves.

Until Mr. Lathom woke Tom Merry to question him, the chums of the Shell had had no suspicion that Blake & Co. had gone on with the adventure after all.

But now that they knew the Fourth-Formers were out, the Terrible Three meant to be out too.

They were firmly convinced that the party from Study No. 6 would make a mess of the matter without their valuable assistance, for one thing.

But besides that, there was their natural determination not to be left out.

Tom Merry opened the dormitory door and peered out.

The passage was dark.

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry.

The three juniors stepped into the passage, and Tom closed the door softly. He crept to the head of the stairs and listened. There was a light below.

"Careful!" he muttered. "Lathom's going to sit up and wait for Blake—nice for Blake when he comes in."

"Yes, rather."

"Still, we can warn them, and they can get in at the back, and go to their dorm. without Lathom seeing them, perhaps."

Lowther chuckled.

"It would be rather funny for him to sit up all night, and find them in the dorm. in the morning," he remarked. "He'd think he'd dreamed it all."

Tom Merry laughed softly.

"We shall have to get off at the back, and without going downstairs," he remarked. "The rain-pipe from the bath-room is the place."

"Right-ho."

The chums crept away with silent feet.

To descend from the bath-room window to the ground was not difficult, and in a few minutes they were standing under the stars.

Tom Merry led the way to the slanting oak.

Several windows were still glimmering with light into the gloom of the quadrangle, but there was no one to see the chums of the Shell as they flitted away.

One after another they climbed the slanting oak to the top of the school wall. In the shadow of the big tree there was no glimmer of moonlight; the darkness was intense.

Tom Merry crossed the wall, and hanging on with his hands for a moment, dropped into the road.

The drop was not a formidable one, and Tom Merry expected to land upon his feet, as he had often done in making that drop before.

But the unexpected happened.

Instead of dropping down to the road, his feet landed upon something soft, and he went wildly reeling, to crash into the road on his back.

There was a yell from the soft object he had dropped upon.

"Great Scott!" muttered Lowther, from the top of the wall. "Who's that?"

Tom Merry lay dazed in the road.

"Ow! I—I'm squashed!" came a rumbling voice. "Yow! Yaroo! Somebody's dropped on me!"

"Fatty Wynn!"

"Hallo, that's Lowther's voice!"

"And that's Figgins," said Lowther.

"What are you Shell rotters doing out here at this time of night?"

"What are you New House bounders doing?"

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

"Did I fall on Fatty Wynn?" he gasped.

"Ow! Yow! Yes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you ass! I'm squashed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was just bunking Fatty up," said Figgins. "It was just his luck for you to be dropping off the wall at the same moment."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther and Manners dropped into the road, Figgins & Co. taking care to give them room. Tom Merry peered at the New House chums in the gloom.

"What are you chaps doing out-of-doors?" he asked.

Figgins chuckled.

"That's a giddy secret."

"Rats!"

"Well, it is. What have you come out for?"

"That's a secret."

"Tit for tat," grinned Figgins. "All right."

"Have you seen anything of Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

Figgins whistled.

"Is Blake out, too?"

"Yes, rather. And Dig and Herries and Gussy. Have you seen anything of them?"

"No. Where have they gone?"

"Where we're going," said Tom Merry mysteriously.

"And where are you going?"

"That's a secret."

Figgins laughed.

"What do you say to swapping secrets?" he suggested.

"Right-ho," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It really isn't our secret, but we can let you into it if you promise to let it go no further—honour bright."

"Honour bright," said Figgins.

"Right! We're going to the Moat House."

Figgins jumped.

"The—the—the Moat House!" he stammered.

"Yes."

"But—but that's our secret, too!" exclaimed Kerr. "We've just been to the Moat House."

"My hat!"

"You're not going to rescue a prisoner, by any chance?" said Figgins.

"But we are!"

"Great Scott!"

The juniors stared at one another in amazement. It was a great surprise on both sides.

"Well, this beats cock-fighting," said Figgins at last. "May as well have the whole story out now. We were going to rescue

a prisoner who's kept there by a villain in the pay of the Nihilists; but it hasn't been a success. Sounds like a giddy novel, doesn't it?"

"You're not rotting, I suppose?"

"Honour!"

"Isn't that your prisoner?" asked Kerr.

"No; we were going to rescue Vernon de Courcy."

"Vernon de Courcy?"

"Yes; chap kept a prisoner there by his wicked uncle, who wants to inherit his title and estates."

"My hat! That sounds like another giddy novel."

"But it's straight enough."

"It's jolly curious," said Kerr. "Then there are two prisoners at the Moat House."

"I suppose so."

"My word!" said Figgins. "That chap Ferrers must be a double-dyed villain. He must run a regular business at keeping people prisoners."

"Looks like it."

"But are Blake and the others at the Moat House?" asked Kerr.

"So I believe."

Tom Merry explained matters. Kerr uttered an exclamation as a light dawned upon his mind.

"Oh, that explains!"

"Explains what?"

"It must have been Blake and his lot who gave the alarm. And the doctor and his man dropped on us instead of them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We got the order of the boot," grinned Figgins. "Look here, are you chaps going to the Moat House now to look for them?"

"Certainly."

"Then we'll come back with you."

"Right-ho; come on."

And the School House and New House juniors started down the lane together. That Blake & Co. were at the Moat House they felt certain; and, in view of the character of Dr. Ferrers, there was no telling what danger they might be in. To help the Fourth-Formers, and to effect the rescue of the two prisoners, that was what the juniors meant to do; but how it was to be done was another question.

CHAPTER 16.

In the Lion's Den.

"**P**WAY be quiet, deah boys!"

"Shut up!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Don't jaw, Gussy old chap."

"I—"

"Silence!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and gave Blake a withering stare. The juniors were dimly visible to one another in the moonlight that glimmered in at the window of the room.

D'Arcy felt called upon to keep his comrades in order, but Blake was evidently not inclined to be kept in order.

"Blake—"

"Cheese it, Gussy," said Digby. "I say, I can't hear anything!" Digby was listening at the door of the room.

"Weally, Dig—"

"They've come back into the house," said Blake. "I heard the door close downstairs."

"Yes, I heard that."

"I wonder what the row was about?"

"Blessed if I can guess. Either some other party had got into the ground, or else Vernon de Courcy may have got out of his room, and they had to capture him."

"Yaas, that's poss."

"I think we can begin looking for him now," Blake remarked, listening at the door. "The house seems quite quiet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"How shall we know which room he's in?" said Digby.

"We ought to have brought Towser," said Herries regretfully. "He'd have nosed him out in next to no time."

"Blow Towser!" said Blake. "I suppose De Courcy's door will be fastened on the outside, if he's a prisoner. We shall know it by that."

"Good."

"Yaas, I nevah thought of that."

Blake opened the door.

It gave access to a passage of great length, with several side passages opening from it. At the end was a staircase dimly lighted.

"There's a light in the hall," said Blake.

"Then they're not gone to bed."

"No. Quiet!"

"Yaas, quiet, deah boys!"

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"Don't talk, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, gag him somebody! Come on!"

The juniors crept out into the passage.

A dozen or more doors opened on either side of it. The Moat House had been a large country house in the old days. The rooms, though small, were numerous.

There was the sound of a voice below.

"Good-night, sir!"

"Good-night, Larkin!"

Then heavy steps ascended the stairs.

Blake frowned.

"It's that porter chap coming up to bed," he growled.

"Pop into one of the rooms while he passes."

"Good!"

Blake reached to the nearest door. It did not open to his touch, and, feeling over it hastily, he found that it was locked and bolted on the outside. The key was there in the lock, but he did not turn it.

He uttered a low exclamation.

"My hat!"

"What the—"

"This is the prisoner's room!"

"Phew!"

"Get into another, quick! That chap will be here in a minute."

"This way!"

Exactly opposite the locked door in the passage was another door, and this yielded to Blake's touch as he tried it.

The juniors stepped hastily into the room, and Blake silently closed the door again. They stood in complete darkness. A blind was down at the window, shutting out every ray of light.

"Not a word," muttered Blake.

They stood dumb.

The heavy footsteps of the porter came along the passage, and stopped—at the door close to which the juniors were standing with beating hearts.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy.

Blake's heart almost ceased to beat.

Had the porter stopped simply to examine the prisoner's door, to make sure that it was secure, or—

Or had the juniors taken refuge in the very room which Larkin was about to enter?

It was more than likely.

The porter had his choice of rooms in the great empty house, and he would naturally occupy one directly opposite the door of the prisoner's room in order to keep a better guard over the captive of the Moat House.

Blake was not left many seconds in doubt. A hand tried the door of the room, and it turned, and the door came open, knocking against the juniors as they stood there.

They hardly breathed.

The door closed again, and then a match flared out.

The porter had entered, but he was stepping straight towards the centre of the room where the gas-jet was suspended from the ceiling, and he did not see the juniors for the moment.

That he would see them the instant he lighted the gas was certain, and he was already turning the gas on.

Blake exchanged a desperate look with his comrades.

There was only one thing to be done, and they were ready to do it.

The porter put the match to the gas, and it flared alight. He threw the match into the grate. At the same instant the four juniors sprang upon him, and he was borne heavily to the floor.

CHAPTER 17.

Success at Last.

"HOLD him!"

Blake panted out the words.

The porter, taken utterly by surprise, went down unresistingly, and the juniors were sprawling over him at once. The man was too dazed by the sudden attack to even cry out, and Blake was on his guard against that.

As Larkin crashed to the floor Blake put a hand over his mouth, and as the porter, recovering himself a little, opened his mouth to call for help, Blake rammed a handkerchief into it.

A low gurgle came from the porter.

He struggled almost silently but desperately in the hands of the juniors, his face inflamed with rage. For two of them he would have been fully a match, and probably for three, but four were too many for him. Besides, the surprise had given the juniors a great advantage, and they did not lose it again.

Larkin was on the floor under their weight, and his greatest efforts could not throw them off.

Digby clung to one of his arms, and Herries to the other, and he could not get his hands free, and Blake sprawled on his legs, and D'Arcy sat on his chest.

He was almost helpless.

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Yet he fought hard, and it was not without difficulty that the chums of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's secured him.

But his strength was expended in vain efforts, and exhaustion followed, and he lay gasping powerlessly under the weight of the juniors.

"Mind he doesn't get up!" gasped Blake. "He's got to be tied up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The porter made an effort to speak; but no word, only a faint gurgle passed the crammed handkerchief that filled his mouth.

Blake glanced round for something to tie him with, and jerked a sheet from the bed in the corner, twisted it into a rope, and bound the man's ankles fast together. Then a pillow-case torn into strips furnished bonds for his wrists, which were bound fast, in spite of his resistance.

Then the juniors ventured to rise and leave him alone.

They stood panting for breath, almost as much exhausted as their prisoner, for a few minutes.

Larkin glared at them.

He was evidently in a fearful rage, and he tried hard to expel the gag from his mouth, but he did not succeed. He could only glare his feelings.

But if looks could have killed, the juniors of St. Jim's would have fallen lifeless round the bound man.

"My hat!" gasped Blake. "We've got him! What a strong beast, too!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The doctor hasn't heard?"

"I think not."

Blake opened the room door an inch or two and listened.

If Dr. Ferrers had heard anything of the struggle, he would certainly ascend the stairs to see what it was about; but there was no sound of his coming. The struggle had been fierce, but not noisy, and the room was too far away from the ground floor for the master of the Moat House to have heard anything.

Blake closed the door again.

"It's all right," he said.

"Bai Jove! We're in luck!"

Jack Blake chuckled softly as he glanced round the room. It was a bed-room, and evidently the porter's own room, in which the juniors had taken refuge.

"Queer that we should have got in here," said Blake. "But it turned out all right. As for this chap, we'll leave him here. The police can have him in the morning."

The bound man gave a sort of jump and blinked at Blake. The junior's words seemed to surprise him.

He made a great effort to speak again, but the gag choked his utterance. He could utter no sound but a faint murmur.

Blake grinned at him.

"You can't yell out," he remarked. "You're not going to fetch up the precious doctor, and any other rascal there may be in the house."

"Wathah not."

"We'd better tie him to the bed, and make sure of him," said Digby. "I'll put a bit of string round that gag, too, and make all safe."

"Good egg!"

The man was lifted upon the bed. Another sheet, torn into strips, was used as rope to fasten him there, spread-eagled, the prisoner submitting helplessly.

"Now we're going to get your prisoner out, you confounded rascal," said Blake.

A look of alarm came over Larkin's face, and Blake chuckled.

"You didn't think we knew anything about that, did you?" he asked.

The bound man shook his head, still looking very alarmed. He made a great effort to speak, but Dig was tying the gag with twine round his head, and the effort was even more ineffectual than before.

"Well, we do know about it," said Blake. "When your precious doctor finds you, you can tell him that some of the St. Jim's fellows have bowled him out, and we've taken De Courcy away. You can look out for the police soon, you scoundrel. We'll telephone to them from St. Jim's, and they'll come here for you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake turned out the light.

"Come on, chaps!"

The juniors left the room, and Blake closed the door.

They listened for a moment in the passage.

There was no sound from below.

"All serene," said Digby, with a chuckle.

Blake gave a soft tap at the locked door on the other side of the passage. There was the sound of a movement within.

Blake unlocked the door, and drew the bolts softly.

Then he threw the door open.

A man's form loomed up in the gloom before him.

Blake struck a match.

As Blake held up the match the juniors saw a young man, fully dressed, with a pale face and strangely bright eyes, looking at them from the darkness of the room.

"Here he is," said Blake.

The match went out; but the moonlight was streaming in at the window, casting the shadow of the bars in the form of a cross upon the floor.

"Who are you?"

"We're fellows from St. Jim's," said Blake. "We've come to rescue you."

"What?"

"We picked up the note that was chucked over the wall this afternoon," said Blake, "or rather, Gussy here did."

"The—the note?"

"Yes. I—I suppose you're the chap we're looking for," said Blake, slightly puzzled. "You are kept a prisoner here, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes."

"Who are you?" asked Digby.

"I am Lord Mount-Aracat," said the young man, in a hurried whisper. "I am kept prisoner here by my nephew, who wishes to inherit my estates."

"Groat Scott!"

"By George!" said Blake. "This place is a nest of 'em! Look here! We came to look for a chap named De Courcy, who was kept prisoner by his wicked uncle."

The young man shook his head.

"He is not here."

"Not here?"

"No."

"Has he been taken away?"

"No."

"Then—then what—"

The young man bent forward, and lowered his voice to a thrilling whisper.

"Shall I tell you the secret—the fearful secret?" he whispered.

"Ye-es."

"He has been murdered!"

CHAPTER 18.

Tom Merry to the Rescue.

JACK BLAKE jumped. D'Arcy uttered a slight exclamation. Digby and Herries shuddered violently. They were all taken aback by the terrible statement.

"Murdered!" muttered Blake.

"Yes."

"By—by whom?"

"By Dr. Ferres! He was murdered this afternoon!"

"Good heavens!"

"Prince Slavonski was murdered, too."

"Prince Slavonski?"

"Yes."

"Was—was he a prisoner here?"

"Yes; he was murdered this evening."

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I say, this is horrible!" muttered Digby. "Let's get out, for heaven's sake!"

"For goodness' sake, let's go!" muttered Herries.

Blake was shuddering. He could hardly believe what the young man told him; it all seemed so horrible and unreal!

Yet there seemed no reason to doubt the statement. This man, at all events, was a prisoner in the Moat House—the locked and bolted door proved that.

"Are there any—any other prisoners here?" stammered Blake.

"None now."

"Were there any?"

"Yes."

"Have they been—been—"

"Murdered? Yes."

"Oh!"

"I should have been murdered to-night," said the young man, in a hurried whisper. "You have saved my life by coming here."

"Let's go out!" said Digby, in a stifled voice.

"Come on!" muttered Blake.

He took the young man by the arm and hurried away. They reached the stairs. The hall below was dark now; the doctor had evidently retired to his room, if not to bed.

"This is most extraordinary!" D'Arcy murmured, as they felt their way downstairs in the gloom.

"Yes, rather," muttered Herries; "and it's horrible!"

"I have heard of Lord Mount-Awawat before, you know."

"Have you—where?"

"In a play."

"A what?"

"A play," said Arthur Augustus. "Lord Mount-Awawat is a chawawetah in one of Gilbert and Sullivan's opewas."

"Oh!"

"I remember now," muttered Blake. "I never knew it was a real title before."

"And I didn't," said D'Arcy. "And I wathah think I know the Bwtish peeewage pretty well, you know."

There was no time to discuss the matter then, however. They had reached the door. It was bolted and locked, but the key was in the lock, and it was easy for the juniors to open it, though there was a sound of grating as it swung open.

They passed out into the gardens. They felt refreshed as the cool night air blew on their faces.

"Do you feel up to climbing a wall?" Blake whispered to the rescued prisoner, who was walking along beside him like one in a dream.

The young man started.

"Yes, yes!" he muttered.

"Good! This way."

Gr-gr-r-r! Yowl!

"My hat!" muttered Digby. "It's a dog!"

"Bai Jove!"

Gr-r-r-r!

There was a sound of growling and barking, and of the brushing of a heavy body among the irregular bushes in the garden.

The juniors halted in dismay. It was evident at once that there was a dog loose in the garden. Doubtless the animal had been turned loose in case of a return of Figgins & Co.

Gr-gr-woof!

A large animal bounded into view in the moonlight.

"Down, dog!"

"Get off, you beast!"

The juniors waved their hands threateningly.

The dog scuttled back, not offering to attack them; but he barked more furiously than ever, and the gardens rang and echoed with it.

"Prince! Prince!"

It was the doctor's voice calling to the dog. The animal barked furiously in response.

"So they've come back!"

The juniors heard the doctor's exclamation.

"Bowled out again," muttered Blake. "We shall have to run for it."

And they ran.

As soon as they started running the dog dashed at them, with open mouth and teeth that gleamed white in the moonlight. Blake turned round and kicked out, and the animal retreated again, barking loudly.

There was a crash of a door flung open, and the form of the doctor appeared in the moonlight. He had a stick in his hand.

"Prince! Prince!"

The dog barked back. His barking guided the doctor, and the juniors heard him running in pursuit. There was every sound of disturbance in the Moat House now. Lights flashed from several windows, and doors were opened and voices called.

Blake gritted his teeth.

"It's all up now, unless we get out!" he muttered. "They're all awake!"

The doctor's footsteps were crashing through the thickets in pursuit. The juniors reached the wall and stopped.

To climb it was not difficult, but it was slow work, and it was perfectly clear that the doctor would overtake them before they could get over.

How many other occupants of the Moat House there were, the juniors did not know; but it was clear that they would all be upon the scene before the party had succeeded in climbing the high wall and escaping into the fields beyond.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "We're done!"

"Hang it!"

"Look here, you fellows, cut and wun, and I'll tackle the doctah," said D'Arcy. "I'll stop him long enough for you to get clear."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"This way; we'll try the gate. We can get it open from inside, I expect."

"Bai Jove, I nevah thought of that!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake, grasping the arm of the young man. "This way!"

The rescued prisoner burst into a wild laugh.

"Free!" he exclaimed. "Free!"

"Yes if you buck up."

"Free! Free!"

He started off at a pace that Blake had some difficulty in equalling. They dashed round the house with the doctor and his dog in pursuit, and reached the gate.

Blake dragged at the fastenings. The gate was bolted and chained, but it required only a couple of minutes to find the fastenings and drag them open. The gate swung back, creaking and grating on its hinges.

There was a shout in the distance.

"There they go!"

The dog dashed up, making the night ring with his barking.

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The fugitives crowded out upon the wooden bridge. There was a rush of rapid feet behind them.

Dr. Ferrers, running wonderfully well for so stout a man, was close behind, and with him came Larkin—evidently discovered and set free by the other servants of the Moat House—and another powerfully-built man, half-dressed. In the distance, by the lighted door, two female servants could be seen, shrieking and gesticulating.

"There they are!" gasped the doctor.

"Run for it!" gasped Blake.

"Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

And they ran.

But the pursuers were upon them, and even as they dashed away they were seized, and there was nothing for it but to fight.

"Line up!" roared Blake. "Give 'em socks!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Then came a shout from the shadowed lane.

"Rescue, St. Jim's!"

It was the voice of Tom Merry!

CHAPTER 19.

An Astounding Piece of Information!

TOM MERRY & CO. had arrived in the nick of time. As they drew near to the Moat House, they had seen the lights moving, and heard the barking of the dog and the excited voices, and they did not need telling that the Moat House was alarmed, and that Blake and his chums were in trouble.

They had dashed up at top speed to render aid, and they arrived just as the four juniors were collared outside the gate of the Moat House.

They did not stop to ask questions. Without pausing a second they threw themselves into the tussle, and Dr. Ferrers and his two assistants were seized and hurled away.

The odds were hopelessly against them. The three men were no match for ten sturdy juniors, all in desperate earnest. Dr. Ferrers, Larkin, and the third man were hurled to the ground, and left there in a dazed state as the juniors streamed away towards St. Jim's, with the late prisoner in their midst.

"Buck up!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "I see you've got him, Blake?"

"We've got him!"

"Ripping!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Wun, deah boys; there may be more of those bwutes!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on, prince!" exclaimed Wynn, catching the arm of the young man, who, after the excitement, seemed to have fallen into a dazed state.

He started.

"Yes, yes!" he muttered. "Free!"

"Free as air!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "You'll be as safe as houses as soon as we get you to the school!"

The juniors dashed away.

They did not pause till the walls of St. Jim's loomed up before them. They would not have been surprised to hear revolver shots ringing out in the darkness behind them. From what the rescued prisoner had stated, Dr. Ferrers was evidently a criminal of the deepest dye.

But there was no shooting, and the sound of pursuit had died away. No doubt the doctor and his myrmidons had had enough of the struggle against such odds.

The juniors stopped at the gates of St. Jim's.

"Better ring the bell," said Tom Merry. "Lathom knows you're out, and he's waiting up for you, Blake."

"Phew!"

"Anyway, it's all right now," said Digby. "When we show them the man we've rescued, they can't blame us. Of course, it would have been impossible to keep it secret if we wanted to; the police will have to be sent to the Moat House."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Manners pulled at the bell, and a loud peal rang out on the silence of the night. But Taggles, the school-porter, was not in a hurry to get out.

Manners rang again and again, and it was not till five minutes had elapsed that there was a glimmer of a light within, and the sound of somebody coming down to the gates.

It was Taggles, half-dressed, with a lantern and a bunch of keys in his hand, and a decidedly displeased expression on his face. Taggles was wont to soothe his nerves to slumber with a plentiful allowance of gin-and-water, and waking up suddenly found him in a very irritable state.

He peered at the juniors through the bronze bars.

The school-porter almost dropped the lantern when he recognised a crowd of St. Jim's juniors standing in the road.

"Crumbs!" he ejaculated, in blank amazement.

"Open the gate, Taggy."

"Master Merry!"

"Yes; open the gate."

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"Where 'ave you been?"

"Open the gate."

"Which this is fine goings-hon!"

"Open the gate, you duffer!"

"Which I'll hopen the gate, and report yer to the 'Ead, too!" growled Taggles, as he inserted the great key in the lock. The gates swung open.

The juniors crowded in. Taggles cast the light of the lantern upon them, and stared at the sight of the rescued prisoner.

"Who's that, Master Merry?"

"Friend we're bringing in," said Tom Merry airily. "It's all right, Taggles."

"All right, is it? I wonder if the 'Ead will say so."

Tom Merry laughed as he led the way to the School House.

There was a light in the hall, and the door was open. Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, was standing in the open doorway, and behind his athletic form was the more diminutive figure of Mr. Lathom.

They had evidently heard the loud pealing of the bell, which had echoed through the still quadrangle of St. Jim's.

"They're ready for us," murmured Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You'd better drop behind, Gussy."

"Why?"

"You're still awfully smelly. No need to give them too great a shock at once."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come in!" said Mr. Railton, in a quiet, ominous voice, which boded little good to the breakers of bounds, unless they were able to furnish a remarkably good explanation of their conduct. "Nine—ten—of you—including New House boys! Come in! Why—what—who is this?"

He broke off in amazement as the stranger walked in.

The rescued prisoner gazed about him vacantly.

The juniors came in quietly.

"I know this must seem rather strange to you, sir," began Tom Merry.

"It seems very strange to me, Merry."

"Let me explain—"

"Bettah leave it to me, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I think I can put it a little bettah to Mr. Wailton!"

"Shut up," whispered Blake.

"I wufuse to shut up!"

"Ring off, you ass!"

"Silence, D'Arcy!" said the School House-master. "I am waiting for your explanation, Merry. In the first place, who is this man?"

"He's Vernon de Courcy, sir."

"Eh!" said Figgins. "There's a mistake somewhere. He's Prince Slavonski, sir."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He's nothin' of the sort. He's Lord Mount-Awatat!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir?"

"This is no time for jokes. I—"

"I was not jokin', sir. This chap says he is Lord Mount-Awatat."

"He said so, sir," said Blake.

"I do not understand this," said Mr. Railton. "How comes he here at all?"

"We've rescued him, sir."

"You have—what?"

"Rescued him," said Tom Merry. "He was kept a prisoner in the Moat House, sir—the old house down the lane that was empty so long, and was lately taken by a Dr. Ferrers."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes, sir. He threw out this note, and we went to rescue him."

Tom Merry handed Mr. Railton the note that D'Arcy had brought back to St. Jim's in such a hurry that afternoon.

The House-master glanced at it, and an expression of great amazement came over his face.

He glanced at Tom Merry, and then at the young man, who had not said a word.

"This is astounding, Merry."

"Yes, sir. But it's true. We thought we ought to rescue him, sir, under the circumstances, and I think you will excuse us, sir."

"I cannot understand this at all. Did you write this note?" demanded Mr. Railton, turning to the young man.

A vacant look came over the man's face. He did not reply.

"He—he couldn't have, sir," said Figgins, in bewilderment and dismay. "He's not De Courcy, sir—he's the Prince Slavonski, or, at any rate, he told us so this afternoon, when he appealed to us to rescue him from the Nihilists."

"The Nihilists!" ejaculated Mr. Railton.

"Yes, sir. He was kept a prisoner in the Moat House by his wicked uncle and the Nihilists."

"What rot!" said Jack Blake. "That doesn't agree with what he told us in the house when we got him out. He said he was Lord Mount-Ararat."

ANOTHER LONG SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY.

ANOTHER LONG SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY.



This illustrates an amusing incident in the splendid, long complete story of Jack Rhodes, entitled: "In Custody," by Alfred Barnard, contained in "The Empire" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Halfpenny.

W. H. HOLMES.

"Blake!"

"He said so, sir."

"You must know that Lord Mount-Ararat is a character in a comic opera, and that there is no such title in any existing peerage."

"Well, he said so, sir."

Mr. Railton turned a stern glance upon the stranger.

"Will you kindly tell me who you are?" he said curtly.

The young man nodded.

"Certainly," he said.

"Then who are you?"

"I am the Tsar of Russia!"

CHAPTER 20.

The Amiable Lunatic.

MR. RAILTON almost staggered.

He was prepared for almost any statement but that.

The juniors gasped.

The young man did not seem to be aware of having made any extraordinary remark.

He smiled at the juniors and at the House-master, and nodded, in the most genial way in the world.

"My only hat!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"What does it mean?"

"Has he been pulling our leg all the time?"

The thought made the juniors turn quite cold.

If they had been japed—if the whole business was a stupendous joke devised by this young man with a very singular sense of humour—what would the consequences be?

What did it all mean?

Mr. Railton recovered his voice.

"What did you say?" he exclaimed.

"I am the Tsar of Russia."

"Are you joking—or are you mad?"

"Mad," said the other cheerfully.

"Eh!"

"My hat!"

The stranger smiled.

"Mad," he repeated. "Surely you were aware of that!"

"Dear me!"

"Gwreat Scott!"

"At least so they say," went on the young man, with a charming smile. "I have some doubts about it myself. My view is that I am quite sane, and that the rest of the world is mad. What do you think?"

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NEXT
THURSDAY.

"D'ARCY'S BANK-BOOK."

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Bless my soul!"

"One always has to suffer for being in a minority," went on the extraordinary youth. "I am in a minority of one in this matter. Yet why should not I be perfectly sane? It is called a delusion that I have—this curious change of identity that is constantly taking place in me. Ordinary men go through life with but a single identity. John Brown remains John Brown all his life; Tom Robinson remains Tom Robinson. With me it is different. I have as many as three or four different identities in a single day. If I see a play, the identity of the chief character becomes mine. If I read a novel, I borrow the identity of the hero. When I read newspaper reports, I become identical with the greatest criminals."

"Bless my soul!"

The juniors stared in silence at the man they had rescued from the hands of Dr. Ferrers. That he was insane, though in a harmless, babbling way, was evident. His good-humour and self-satisfaction were striking.

"This afternoon," went on the young man, "I was Vernon de Courcy, imprisoned in the Moat House by my wicked uncle."

"Gwent Scott!"

"I wrapped up a note in a paper, and threw it into the road, just as the imprisoned hero of a novel always does."

"Bai Jove!"

"I was in hopes that it would fall into the hands of someone stupid enough to take it seriously, and help me to escape from the private asylum."

"Asylum!" murmured Tom Merry. "Oh, what frajulous asses we've been!"

D'Arcy's face was a study in scarlet.

"Fortunately, it fell into the hands of such a person," said the amiable lunatic.

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"Then these young gentlemen saw me," went on the young man, with a nod towards Figgins & Co. "By that time my identity had changed, and I was Prince Slavonski, imprisoned in the Moat House by the Nihilists."

"Oh!" murmured Figgins.

"My word!" muttered Fatty Wynn.

Korr sniffed.

"I said it was fishy all along," he growled. "Didn't I?"

"Then I was rescued this evening," went on the young man cheerfully. "My identity had changed once more, and I had become Lord Mount-Ararat. I was Lord Mount-Ararat when I was brought here."

"My dear sir——"

"But there has been another change, and I am now the Tsar of Russia. If I can make you a present of a million roubles, or banish anybody to Siberia for you, I shall be only too happy to oblige."

Mr. Railton gasped.

"Tom Merry! Blake! Figgins! I hope you realise now what you have done."

"Oh, sir!"

"You have been taken in in the most absurd way by a lunatic's cunning, and have broken into a medical man's house and released his patient."

"Oh!"

"I do not know what view the law will take of the matter," said Mr. Railton. "I only hope that Dr. Holmes may be able to placate the man who has suffered at your reckless hands, and that a public scandal may be avoided."

The juniors stood dumb.

They had been expecting élat and congratulations, a regular triumph, at the triumphant issue of their remarkable adventure. The truth came upon them like a thunderclap.

They had been taken in by a harmless but cunning lunatic, who had been imprisoned in the Moat House simply because his relations had placed him in the care of a private doctor instead of consigning him to a lunatic asylum.

The truth was terrible and crushing.

There was only one consolation to the juniors, and that was, that fellows of both Houses were in it, so neither would be able to grin at the other.

Tom Merry felt very glad that Figgins & Co. were in the party, and Figgins was particularly pleased that Tom Merry and Blake were there.

Their dismay and discomfort were so great that the House-master, deeply annoyed as he was by the whole extraordinary affair, could not but take pity on them.

There was a sudden sound in the silent quadrangle—the furious ringing of a bell. Tom Merry started. He guessed that Dr. Ferrers had arrived.

A few minutes later there was a thundering of rapid hoofs and wheels on the drive.

A trap dashed up to the School House with gleaming lights, and Dr. Ferrers jumped excitedly out of it.

The doctor had evidently guessed that his patient might be at St. Jim's, where he knew the juniors belonged, and he had followed them as fast as he could in his trap, and he had not been long behind them.

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The stout gentleman ran up the steps, and burst into the hall like a hurricane. He was wildly excited, and gesticulating so furiously that it really seemed for a moment that he was less sane than his escaped patient.

The patient seemed to shrink back at the sight of the doctor. He made a movement as if to go, but the juniors were round him. They did not mean to let the lunatic escape.

The doctor waved both hands wildly in his wrath.

"Ah, you are here!" he shouted. "What?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry.

"Young rascals! Villains!"

"We're sorry, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! We——"

"Are you a master here?" roared the doctor, turning to Mr. Railton, who was vainly trying to make his voice heard.

"Yes, I see you are! What?"

"My dear sir——"

"My house has been broken into!" roared the stout gentleman, crimson with rage. "My servant has been assaulted and bound in his own bed-room!"

"My——"

"A patient of mine—a lunatic—has been taken away from my care!"

"He——"

"Ah, I see he is here!" exclaimed the doctor. "Larkin!"

"Yes, sir."

The Moat House porter, looking extremely surly, had followed his master into the School House.

At sight of the dismayed faces of the juniors, however, his surly expression had given place to something like a grin.

The doctor waved his hand towards the lunatic.

"See that Thompson does not escape again," he said.

"Yes, sir."

The porter crossed to the young man, and linked arms with him. The patient tried to draw his arm away.

"You forget yourself, fellow!" he exclaimed.

The porter grinned.

"That's all right, sir."

"How dare you lay your vile hands upon a De Courcy?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is to say, a Romanoff," said the young man. "I suppose you are aware that I am the Tsar of Russia this evening?"

"Ain't you the Kaiser, sir?" said Larkin, with a grin.

The young man started.

"Dear me! Now I come to think of it, you are perfectly right!" he exclaimed. "I am the Emperor of Germany."

"My hat!" murmured Blake. "Mad as a hatter."

"Worse than Gussy," said Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Unhand me, vile wretch! Dare you lay a hand upon your Kaiser! Unhand me, or dread the mailed fist!"

But the porter did not unhand the emperor. He tightened his grasp, and the young man made no active resistance.

Dr. Ferrers turned fumingly to Mr. Railton.

"Have you any explanation to make, sir, of this extraordinary conduct of your pupils?" he exclaimed tightly.

Mr. Railton handed the letter to the doctor.

Dr. Ferrers started a little.

"This is Thompson's writing!" he exclaimed.

"Thompson!" murmured D'Arcy. "Oh, the fearful fraud!"

"Read it," said Mr. Railton.

Dr. Ferrers read the letter.

He stared at first in blank astonishment; then his frown relaxed, and his fat face melted into a grin.

The grin became a laugh, and finally a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton smiled too.

"That is why my boys interfered," he said. "They found that letter, and took it seriously, sir."

"Dear me! Ha, ha, ha! Is it possible that any boy could be so stupid as to take such a letter seriously?" ejaculated the doctor.

"Weally, sir——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the stout medical man laughed himself into a good humour. The juniors did not mind his laughter; they were only too glad to see the clouds breaking, as it were.

CHAPTER 21.

All's Well That Ends Well.

DR. FERRERS laughed, and laughed again. He seemed to be unable to get over his amusement. He became partly serious at last.

"This is too utterly absurd!" he exclaimed. "This young man's name is Thompson. He is the son of a respectable tradesman in Lewes, and his head, always very weak, was furthered by reading absurd novels and newspaper reports. suffers from absurd delusions, but is quite harmless—fortunate."

ANOTHER LONG SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY

ANOTHER LONG SCHOOL TALE OF TOM MERRY & CO. NEXT THURSDAY

for the boys who have released him from his confinement. He is under my charge by the wish of his relations, who fear that he may do himself some mischief in one of his insane fits. He attempted to drown himself on one occasion, in the belief that he was Ophelia."

"Bai Jove!"

"As he is harmless, I allowed him the freedom of the grounds," went on the doctor. "I never imagined that he would be guilty of an absurd device like this—some childish trick he has picked up from a novel or a newspaper. But—"

"But under the circumstances you will see that there is some excuse to be made for the boys," Mr. Railton remarked.

The doctor laughed again.

"Oh, yes, certainly! They have been deceived certainly. I must say also that it was very brave and generous of them to undertake the rescue of a stranger from a supposed villain's hands: but it is a pity that their courage and their generosity are not directed by a larger allowance of common sense."

"Oh, pile it on, sir!" said Tom Merry. "We deserve it. We know we've played the giddy goat, sir."

"Yaas, wathah! I considah that a most humble and sincere apology is due to Dr. Ferrers," said D'Arcy, in his most stately way.

"Hear, hear!"

"Fortunately, no harm has come of it," said the doctor. "I think I shall enjoy telling the story, and I will take that as a compensation for the trouble I have been put to. Some compensation should be made, I think, to my porter, who has been handled in the roughest manner."

"Yaas, wathah! I wopose a whip wound for Mr. Larkin."

"Good!"

"That's all right."

Larkin grinned.

"Thank you kindly, young gentlemen. I bear no malice. I sees it was all a mistake, and it was plucky of you, anyway; though I don't see how you could think as you did of Dr. Ferrers, for there ain't a kinder-hearted man in the county."

"I am sure of that," said Tom Merry. "He must be a very kind man indeed if he forgives us for having made such awful asses of ourselves."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Dr. Ferrers laughed heartily.

"Well, after that I suppose I must forgive you, to keep up my reputation," he said. "I hope, sir, that you will take a lenient view of the scrape these young rascals have got themselves into."

Mr. Railton smiled.

"Since you are so kind as to intercede for them, Dr. Ferrers, I will do my best for them with the head-master," he said.

"Thank you. Now I will take my leave, first warning these young gentlemen to be very careful how they place credence in incidents that occur only in six-shilling novels and newspaper rumours."

And the doctor turned away.

The juniors had made a hasty collection, to which Augustus D'Arcy contributed a glistening piece of gold, and a sum of a little over two pounds was put into Larkin's hands—a little present which he received with great good-humour, and which he evidently regarded as a full compensation for the usage he had been subjected to.

Then he led the lunatic to the trap, and helped him into it.

Thompson made no objection or resistance. He seemed quite willing to return to the Moat House after his little adventure.

The doctor shook hands with Mr. Railton.

"I am starting a private asylum at the Moat House," he remarked. "Thompson is my first resident patient. If you have any relations or friends who require similar treatment, I shall be very pleased to quote reasonable terms."

"Thank you," murmured Mr. Railton. "I—I really—"

"You may have a brother, or a father, a little weak—"

"Not at all—"

"Or a cousin or a friend. I make a reduction for a large number, and—"

"I—I'm sorry, but I really have no lunatics in my family," stammered the School House master.

"Oh, very well. In case of anything of the sort you know where to find me," said the medical gentleman. "It sometimes happens that the stress of a schoolmaster's work has a weakening effect on the brain. In the case of that sort of happening, you will find a reliable friend in me."

Mr. Railton turned very pink.

"Thank you!" he said hastily. "Good-night."

"Good-night."

The doctor stepped into the trap. Thompson made a sign to Tom Merry, who came up to the vehicle as Dr. Ferrers gathered up the reins.

"I want to speak to you," whispered Thompson. "I suppose you know that I am the King of Italy, and am kept out of my kingdom by my wicked uncle. I expect to be restored shortly, and then if you would like a holiday in Rome I should be very pleased to receive you in my palace. That is all. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Tom Merry, smiling. "And thanks."

The trap drove away.

"And now," said Mr. Railton grimly. "I think that perhaps you juniors had better go to bed."

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry & Co. meekly, with one voice. And to bed they accordingly went.

The next morning there was an interview with the Head—an interview to which Tom Merry & Co. looked forward with considerable, and very natural, misgivings.

But it turned out better than they had dared to expect.

Dr. Ferrers's intercession had not been in vain, and the Head of St. Jim's took a lenient view of the matter, and dismissed the juniors after a very severe lecture.

"Well, we've got off pretty cheaply, I think," Tom Merry remarked, when they were outside the Head's study again.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think so," Figgins remarked. "That Moat House doctor is a brick."

"Vewy twue, Figgins. I wegard him as havin' acted awfully decently," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "And I twinst that you duffahs will be a little more careful in future, and not get into a wotten scrape like this again. It makes me feel an awful ass, you know. A fellow has to considah his dig, so I weally hope you will be a little more careful."

And the swell of St. Jim's strolled away.

Tom Merry did not reply; and the others did not speak—they couldn't. D'Arcy had taken their breath away. By the time they recovered their voices the swell of St. Jim's was out of hearing.

THE END.

NEXT THURSDAY!

"D'ARCY'S BANK-BOOK."

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READ THIS FIRST!

Oswald Yorke, a youth of eighteen, joins the Navy under peculiar circumstances, becoming a midshipman aboard the frigate Catapult under the name of John Smith. The frigate is wrecked, and only a mere handful of survivors are picked up by a slaving-brig. Kester, the captain of the brig, has them well looked after, but on discovering that Captain Burgoyne, the Catapult's former commander, is related to a bitter enemy of his in England, his attitude changes, and the party are treated as prisoners. One night five of the brig's crew are sent to bring the prisoners on deck, Manuel, a rascally half-breed, explaining that he has orders to cut their throats if they make the slightest noise.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Capturing of a Government Schooner.

There was no doubt about it but that Manuel was in grim earnest, and that he would not have the slightest hesitation in carrying out his instructions was evident from the significant way he handled his keen-looking blade.

Marshaled between the five men, the prisoners were marched up on to the deck of the brig.

It was a bright, starlight night, with a fresh breeze blowing off from the shore.

They could see numerous lights gleaming among the trees of the island, and could even now and again catch the faint strain of music, borne towards them by the wind.

There was no moon, but the night was very clear, so they had no difficulty in making out the schooner, which lay under bare poles, swaying gently on the dark swell of the sea.

On board the brig all was activity. The crew came and went silently, like spectres, diving down into the hold, and reappearing on deck laden with various articles, which were neatly stowed away in the boats. They were acting under the instructions of the negro Bimby, but of Kester there was nothing to be seen.

"It looks as if they mean to desert the ship," whispered Maxwell to Oswald.

Manuel made a suspicious movement, and Oswald thought it wiser to make no reply.

Presently one of the boats was lowered, and a dozen of the crew, armed to the teeth, silently descended into it, and pulled away noiselessly from the brig.

Another boat was lowered, and more of the crew descended into it, and pulled away.

The boats containing the cargo that had been taken from below were now let down over the side, but for the present were allowed to remain floating under the brig's counter.

There were about ten men now left on the brig, including Bimby and the negroes, who were guarding the prisoners.

Dr. Telford looked anxiously about the deck in search of Captain Burgoyne, but there was no sign of him. Meanwhile Bimby and the rest had been anxiously watching the shore, as though for some signal, which presently appeared. For the fraction of a moment a pale-green light appeared on the foreshore.

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Bimby gave a quick order in an undertone, and instantly those who had remained on deck descended into the boats.

"Get down into de boat!" whispered Manuel. "And if you make one leetle noise I cut your head off!"

Assisted by their gaolers, the four men and two boys were lowered into a boat; but, to their surprise, Manuel and the others did not accompany them, but entered another boat lying alongside.

"If yo' make one shout at anything you see, my order am to stove a hole in de bottom ob your boat and send yo' all to de bottom!" said Manuel, in a hoarse whisper.

"Will you tell me one thing?" asked Dr. Telford, in a low whisper. "Where is Captain Burgoyne?"

"Ask me no questun, and you get no lies!" said Manuel promptly.

They now became aware of the fact that a boat had put off from the shore and was pulling rapidly towards them.

It continued on its course for some time; then suddenly it was joined by two other boats, evidently those which had put off earlier from the Black Rose, and the three in company made off in the direction of the schooner.

"I wonder what the dickens their game is?" muttered Maxwell, under his breath.

"Do you think they are going to attack the schooner?" whispered Oswald.

"I shouldn't be surprised, I believe—Hark!"

They sat in silence, straining their ears; then from the direction of the schooner came the sound of a voice. Someone evidently had seen the approaching boats, and was hailing them.

A reply was made, and then for a few minutes longer silence followed. The next sound that reached their ears was the report of a pistol, which was followed instantly by the confused murmuring of voices.

The schooner was too far off for them to hear anything with distinctness, but it seemed to them that a struggle of some kind was going on on the deck.

Then gradually the sounds died away, and about half an hour later the same blue light which they had seen previously on the shore appeared for a moment in the rigging of the schooner.

It was evidently for this second signal that Bimby and the rest had been waiting, for the negro instantly gave an order, the oars dipped to the water, and the boats started out from under the brig's counter and pulled rapidly towards the schooner.

"Good heavens, what does it all mean?" exclaimed Dr. Telford.

Their own boat had been left behind, and still lay in the shadow of the brig.

"It means," said Fid, "that them villains have surprised the crew of the schooner, and taken possession of her and deserted their own craft. That's what it means, as sure as I'm an Englishman!"

"I believe you are right," said Mr. Pringle; "in fact, I am sure of it; but they have left us behind." Then he suddenly uttered an exclamation: "They have scuttled their own brig! She is sinking, as sure as fate. We must manage to get away from her somehow, or we shall be sucked under!"

"Do you think it is possible that they have scuttled their ship and left Captain Burgoyne on board?" cried Dr. Telford.

"See!" cried Fid suddenly. "They are hoisting their sails, and gettin' up anchor!"

It was true. With almost lightning-like rapidity, the sails of the schooner were unfurled, and in a few minutes she was moving slowly through the waters and standing out to sea.

"That is it. Beyond a doubt, they have stolen the schooner and abandoned their own vessel!" said Dr. Telford excitedly.

"And I feel convinced that the wretches have left Captain Burgoyne on board the brig!"

There was not the slightest doubt about it now. The brig was settling down. Every minute, as the water rushed in through the breach the crew had made before leaving her side, the brig sank perceptibly lower and lower.

"We must get our boat out before she goes down, or we shall be sucked under!" cried Mr. Pringle.

"But the captain?" cried Dr. Telford.

"We must think of ourselves!" said Lieutenant Brabazon. "If he is left on board, so much the worse for him. It is better that he should die than that we should all go to the bottom!"

Then up spoke Fid:

"I ain't got no cause to love him, seein' as it's through him we come by all our trouble; but, if there's a chance of him bein' left on board the brig, then may my vitals wither up if I don't make a bid to save him!"

"Well said, my lad!" cried Dr. Telford. "We can't leave him in this peril, and I feel assured that he is still on board. Captain, or no captain, he is a man, and we can't leave him to die like a rat on a sinking ship!"

"It's all very fine talking, but with our hands—" began Brabazon.

He was interrupted by an exclamation from Oswald.

"Wait! I am sure I shall succeed. Wait a moment!" he cried excitedly.

He had been straining the handcuffs that bound his wrists, and at last, with a violent effort, he dragged one hand free, leaving the empty handcuff dangling by its chain to the other.

"The brig can't float another quarter of an hour!" cried Maxwell.

"Long enough for me to find Captain Burgoyne, if he is on board!" sang out Oswald, as he caught at a rope and knifed himself up again on the brig's deck.

The schooner now, with every inch of canvas set, was swooping down to the mouth of the bay. She passed the brig within pistol shot, and as she flashed by someone yelled to the form on her deck. The other schooner that had been lying at anchor left her moorings, and was standing out to sea in close company with the first.

For a few moments Dr. Telford thought that the second schooner was standing in chase with the first; but this did not seem possible, as not a shot had been fired from either vessel, though the hindmost schooner could easily have brought her bow gun into play. A few minutes after the first schooner had passed, the second went by like a tall, black shadow straight out to sea, in the wake of the rising moon.

Meanwhile, Oswald had hurried down into the cabin of the sinking brig. He paused at the bottom of the companion-way to listen, but heard no sound except the gurgling of the water that was fast filling her.

"Captain Burgoyne!" he shouted.

Then paused again. No answer.

Turning to the right, he ran down a narrow passage. It was very dark. Once he caught his foot against something, and, stumbling, fell against the wall.

"Captain Burgoyne!" he shouted again.

No answer. No; the captain could not have been left on board the brig. Probably the pirate—for the captain of the brig could be nothing else now—had taken him with him on to the schooner.

Oswald was just turning to retrace his steps to the deck, when a faint sound that was not the gurgling of the water caught his ears. He paused for a moment, and listened intently.

Yes; there was a sound like someone tapping. He called again, and listened, but there was no answer; only the tapping was continued vigorously.

It seemed to come from another part of the vessel, and he hurried in the direction of the sound. Suddenly it ceased, and Oswald stood still to listen. As he did so, a stream of water came trickling down the narrow passage, rising over his feet.

"Captain Burgoyne," he shouted desperately, "if you are here, go on hammering!"

The tapping at once recommenced, and, guided by the sound, Oswald ran through the fast-rising water.

Louder and louder grew the sound. He must be rapidly approaching the spot where Burgoyne was confined. At last

he paused outside the door of a small cabin, and listened. Yes, it was from the interior of this that the noise came.

Then suddenly, like a flash, it dawned on him. In this room, a prisoner, awaiting death, lay the man who was his most dangerous enemy—a man who had shown him nothing but ill-feeling; who would, if he had been able, have accused him of a crime that would have sent him to the gallows!

He knew that this man was incapable of a generous thought, of a good action. He knew that, though to-night he might save his life, to-morrow Captain Burgoyne would forget the service. How easy it would be to go back and say that he had failed to find him; that he could not have been on board!

A few minutes now, and the brig must go down, and Captain Burgoyne, a prisoner, and helpless in this cabin, would never trouble him more. For one moment Oswald hesitated; then, flinging himself against the door, forced it open and rushed in.

Full length upon the floor Burgoyne lay, bound hand and foot, and gagged.

What could he do? The first thing that struck him was to remove the gag, which he did in a moment; and Captain Burgoyne drew a breath of relief.

"Who is it? Who has come?" he demanded.

"I, Os—I, Smith, sir!" said Oswald, almost forgetting himself in the moment of excitement.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, get me out of this! I can't move!"

"The brig is sinking, sir. The slavers have deserted it!" cried Oswald.

"Hang you! Don't stand talking! Help me!" shouted Burgoyne, in a frenzy of fear. The water was streaming over the cabin floor, and as he lay there he could feel it rising round him. "Haven't you a knife?"

Yes, Oswald had a knife. He stooped down and felt Burgoyne's bonds. They were ropes, not chains.

The next moment he opened his knife, and with two swoops had cut the ropes through.

But still, the danger was not passed. Captain Burgoyne shrieked with pain of it as the blood—the circulation of which had been for long impeded by the tightly-bound ropes—circled again through his veins.

For some time he lay there powerless to move, while Oswald went down on his knees in the fast-rising water, and chafed the numbed limbs.

At last, with an effort, Burgoyne staggered to his feet, and, leaning heavily for support on Oswald, staggered to the door.

The water had risen in the passage as high as their knees. Before they reached the companion-way, it was to their waists. They reached the deck, now flooded with the silvery light of the moon, and hastened, as fast as Burgoyne's numbed limbs would let them, to the brig's side. Then Oswald uttered a cry of horror. The boat containing the others had gone!

Gone? Yes; there was no sign of it. He rushed to the port side and looked over, but no sign of the boat could be seen.

And now the brig lurched heavily. She was settling down fast, and in a few minutes it would all be over.

"What are you waiting for? Why don't you help us?" shouted Burgoyne, with an oath.

"They have gone! I cannot see them!" cried Oswald.

"Gone? Left us to drown? Hang them!" shouted Burgoyne. "Curse them, the villains, the cowards—curse them! Oh, my heavens, the brig is going down, Smith—she is going down! We shall be drowned! There is no help for us!"

Oswald glanced anxiously up and down the deck, then made a rush forward, and came back staggering under the weight of a grating.

With its aid one of them might be kept afloat, but not both. In a moment Burgoyne saw the chance of safety, and grasped it.

Seizing the grating, he thrust Oswald aside, and, throwing the grating into the sea, leaped after it.

"Coward! Cur!" muttered Oswald under his breath.

Again that brig gave a sudden lurch. Her deck inclined to starboard, flinging Oswald down on his hands and knees.

In a moment he had sprang up, and, leaping on to the bulwarks, sprang far into the water.

Left to their Fate.

The water closed over Oswald's head as he went down; then he struck out and rose, gasping for breath, to the surface.

He was a good swimmer, but to reach the shore was a feat far beyond his endurance.

He could see the lights gleaming from among the trees on the shore; he could even hear sounds carried towards him

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by the wind across the water. Then he glanced over his shoulder, and saw that the hull of the brig had vanished, and only her masts were standing out of the water.

Swimming round and round slowly in a circle, he watched the two masts standing out above the surface of the water, then slowly swam towards them, and, grasping the rigging, pulled himself up out of the water.

He did not dream for a moment that this would be anything but a temporary respite from death; but minute after minute passed, and the masts remained standing.

Was it possible that the water of the bay was so shallow that the keel of the brig already lay on the bottom, or had the brig settled down on some rocks?

A rush of hope entered his breast. He climbed up higher, and seated himself in the cross-trees, and watched the water swirling round the masts.

There was an iron band around the mast just where the water reached, and as minute after minute passed, and he watched this iron band, he saw that the water never hid it from his sight, and knew that something must be stopping the hull from settling lower in the water.

For the first time since he had dived from the deck of the brig he shouted, then stopped to listen; and a moment later there was an answering shout.

It was a very feeble cry—the cry of a man in great distress. Oswald shouted again, and the answer was repeated.

"Help—help! I cannot hold on much longer!" came the voice.

It was Burgoyne's.

"Where are you? I cannot see you!" shouted Oswald.

"Here—here! Can't you help me? For Heaven's sake, come! I can't hold on. My arms are numbed!"

"Can't you swim to the masts? They are still standing!" Oswald cried.

"No. I haven't the strength. Smith, for Heaven's sake, don't let me drown!"

The appeal was more than Oswald could stand. For the second time he resolved to risk his own life to save that of the man who had seized upon the only chance of safety that offered, and had left him to drown.

Oswald slipped down from his perch, and struck out in the direction of Burgoyne's voice.

"Where are you?" he cried, raising himself in the water.

"Here—here! Hurry, or you will be too late! I can't hold on. My fingers are slipping."

A few desperate strokes brought Oswald in sight of the floating grating, to which Burgoyne was clinging for life.

"Wait a moment!" he shouted cheerily.

But at that moment Burgoyne's grip on the grating relaxed, and he slipped back into the water, which instantly closed over his head.

A moment later and Oswald dived, and, seizing Burgoyne by the hair of his head, dragged him up again to the surface.

But now his own strength was ebbing fast, and he knew to swim back again to the masts with the captain's heavy body would be far beyond his strength.

Turning over on his back, he gripped Burgoyne's head between his knees, and, so keeping the unconscious man's face above water, he floated, supporting himself with his hands.

Overhead the moon shone brightly down upon him from a cloudless sky. He could hear the faint, murmuring sound of the waves against the distant shore. He shouted, and there was no answer. He shouted again and again, but in vain.

The Rescue—The Wilsons.

By-and-by, strange shapes seemed to rise up out of the sea and float in mid-air between Oswald and the moon—shapes through which the moon shines as through a dark veil. Hideous faces mouth at him; long, bony fingers seem to beckon to him; and some of

the faces have a grotesque likeness to old Maydew, the usurer. There is one that is more like Maydew than the rest, a hideous spectre that floats in the water by his side.

Strangely enough, he can see the mouthing face distinctly, though he does turn his head; he can see—feel even now the bony talons that are trying to drag him down. It is like some hideous nightmare; more awful still because he is not sleeping; because he knows that the dangers are not imaginary, but real.

The bony fingers steal about his throat, tightening their clasp. He is choking. A wild scream of terror bursts from his lips, and he flings his arms out to thrust his enemy away, and then something dark comes gliding over the water towards him—something that is no intangible shadow; and a voice that is very real and very human indeed says:

"Ho, ho! What dis—what dis? What hab we floatin' here? Two dead corpses, as I see a gen'leman!"

And then Oswald knows no more until he opens his eyes again in broad daylight, and sees a number of faces peering down on him. Some of the faces are familiar, some are strange.

There is Maxwell and Mr. Pringle; and surely it is Dr. Telford's voice that is saying:

"He will do all right now. And now for a look at my other patient."

Oswald sat up and looked about him. He was in a small room, bare of all furniture except a bed, on which he was lying. Walls, roof, and floor were all of wood unadorned, and at the foot of his bed was a large window, which commanded a view of the sea, which lay shimmering and sparkling in the morning sunlight.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he asked. Then, as recollection came back to him, he went on: "The captain—"

"Oh, he is safe enough!" said Maxwell. "He was not born to be drowned!" he murmured under his breath.

"Hold your tongue, sir!" said Mr. Pringle sternly. "That's not the way to speak of your captain."

"I beg pardon. Didn't know that I was speaking, sir," said Maxwell. "I was unconsciously uttering my thoughts aloud."

"Do you think he can tell us anything more than we already know?" asked a strange voice.

"I am afraid not," rejoined Mr. Pringle. "You see, he was with us until almost the last minute. He went back on board to search for the captain, and he was so long gone that we felt assured that something had happened to him, so we were obliged to put off to save being swamped when the brig went down."

The other speaker turned away with a muttered groan:

"My poor ship's crew!"

The others withdrew to the window, and stood there talking in undertones; and then the sunlight, and the murmuring voices, the bare walls around him, all faded away into nothingness, and Oswald fell into a sound sleep.

It was evening when he woke. A cool breeze was blowing in through the open window, through which the red light of the setting sun streamed.

"Well, you have had a long spell, old chap!" cried Maxwell's familiar voice. "How are you now, pretty comfortable—eh?"

Oswald sat up in his bed. "What's this place?" he asked.

"This is the house of Mr. Wilson, the planter," said Maxwell.

Oswald shook his head. "Never heard of him!" he muttered. "Is—is that man—that big captain?"

"Gone, and taken a Government schooner with him. I tell you, the poor luff who has got left, has taken it badly. It'll mean a lot to him. It'll put him back for many a year; and the poor chap knows it. I say! That big captain turns out to be the notorious Captain Kestor, the pirate!" added Maxwell.

(Another instalment of this thrilling series will appear next Thursday.)

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