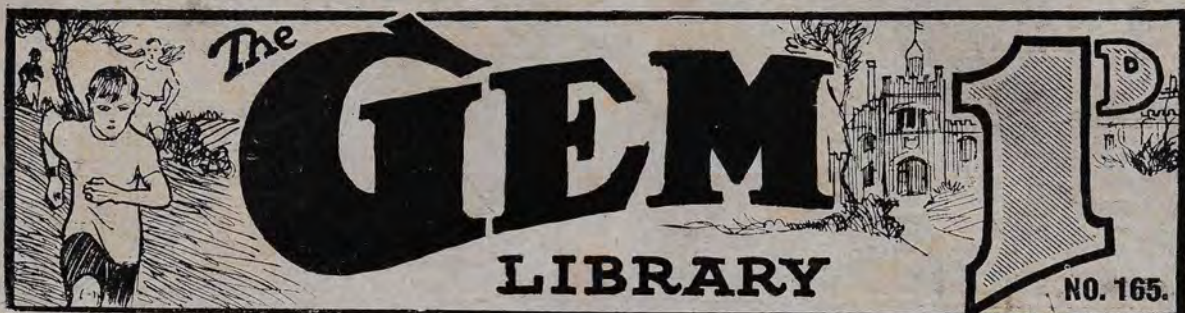


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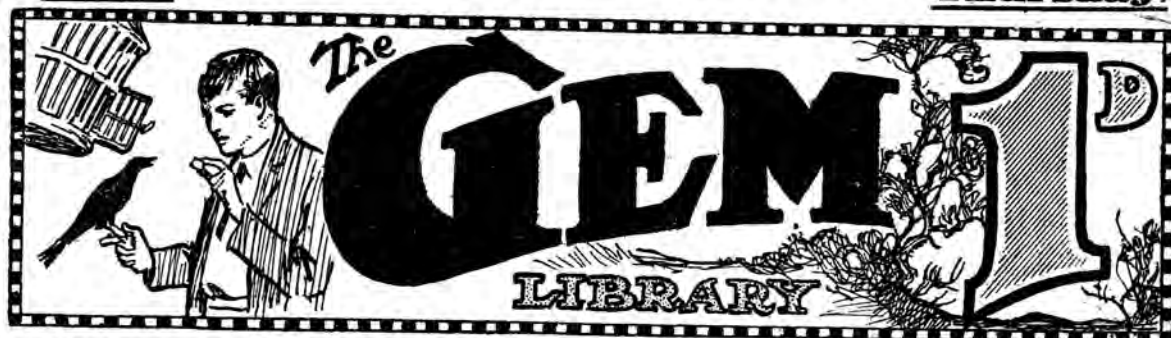
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JOE'S CHAMPION.

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale
of TOM MERRY & CO. and the
. . . Waif of St. Jim's . . .

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Time Limit for D'Arcy.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY polished his eyeglass with great care, and jammed it into his right eye in an emphatic way. Having adjusted it there to his satisfaction, he glanced round Study No. 6 through it, and coughed.

The cough passed unnoticed.

Perhaps it was because the fellows in the study were busy. Jack Blake, Digby and Herries were talking all at once, as a matter of fact, and as Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were in the study, too, all talking, there was plenty of conversation going on. Under the circumstances, it was not surprising that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's little cough was not observed.

D'Arcy coughed again.

"Ahem!"

"You see," said Tom Merry, of the Shell; "you see, it stands to reason that as I have been footer captain for the junior club, I shall be cricket captain now that cricket is coming on. Of course!"

"Of course!" said Manners and Lowther together. They had not thought out the matter, but Tom Merry was their chum, and that was quite enough for Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three always backed one another up.

"Ahem!" said D'Arcy.

"Well, I think it's rot," said Jack Blake emphatically. "The fact that a Shell chap has been footer captain is quite sufficient reason for a Fourth-Form chap to be cricket captain. That stands to reason."

"Hear, hear!" said Herries and Digby heartily.

"Now, don't be an ass, Blake," said Tom Merry.

"Don't you be a fathead."

"Look here, you Fourth-Form young bouncer——"

"Look here, you Shell duffer——"

"I tell you——"

"I tell you——"

"Ahem!" coughed D'Arcy. "Hem! Ahem!"

Blake turned irritably upon his elegant chum.

"I wish you'd get something for that cough, Gussy!" he exclaimed. "You've been barking away for the last five minutes, while I have been trying to explain thing to this Shell duffer!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Why can't you take some medicine, if you've really got a cough?" demanded Blake.

"You uttah ass, I haven't a cough!"

"Then what are you barking for?"

"You ass! I wasn't barkin'——"

"Well, grunting, then."

"Weally, Blake——"

Jack Blake turned to Tom Merry again.

"We'd better get this question settled!" he exclaimed. "You Shell bounders never will listen to reason. Why, even Figgins of the New House, though he's an ass, as a rule, agrees that a Fourth-Form chap ought to be cricket captain this season!"

"That's because Figgins is in the Fourth——"

"Oh, rats! Figgy is a jolly sensible chap in some things. The only point where he goes wrong is that he thinks he ought to be captain, whereas——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Ahem!"

"Gussy, will you stop that barking, or take something for it?" shouted Blake, exasperated.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Why don't you try some cough mixture, or a bronchial lozenge, or something, if you've got something the matter with your silly gullet?"

"I haven't, you ass——"

"Then stop grunting. Look here, Tom Merry——"

"Ahem!"

"Will you dry up?" roared Blake.

"Certainly not, dear boy!" replied Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with dignity. "I have a remark to make——"

Next Thursday:

"THE WAIF OF ST. JIM'S" AND "THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON."

"About the cricket?"
 "Wathah not!"
 "Then dry up! Look here, Tom Merry—" **Ahem!**
 "Gussy, you ass—" **Ahem!** Weally, you know—" **Ahem!**
 "We'll leave it to the junior cricket club, and have an election then," said Tom Merry, laughing. "That will settle the question." **Ahem!**
 "You chump, Gussy—" **Ahem!** I have a remark to make. It is a wathah important mattah, deah boys, and I twust you will give me your attention."
 Blake snorted.
 "I suppose it's some more of your bosh!" he said disparagingly.

"Weally, Blake—" **Ahem!**
 "Is it anything about cricket or footer?" Digby demanded.
 "Certainly not!"
 "Then ring off—" **Ahem!**
 "Anything about my dog, Towser?" asked Herries.
 "Towsah? Certainly not!"
 "Then we don't want it. Ring off!"
 "Weally, Hewwies—" **Ahem!**
 "As for an election," said Blake, "I'm willing to leave it to that; but it should be more graceful on your part, Tom Merry, to propose me as cricket captain!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You cackling ass!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Ahem!"

"Gussy, you ass, if you don't leave off grunting—" **Ahem!**
 "I wefuse to have my remarks chawactewised as gwuntin', Blake! I have somethin' wathah important to mention."
 Blake groaned.

"Oh, I suppose we sha'n't have any rest till it's over!" he said. "Get it off your chest, dummy. Quick!"
 "Weally, Blake—" **Ahem!**
 "Get ahead!"
 "Undah the cires—" **Ahem!**
 "Look here, I'll give you a time limit," said Blake, pulling out his big silver watch. "You can have two minutes to talk, and if you haven't finished by then, it's understood that you're to shut up. That's fair, you fellows?"
 "Hear, hear!" was the unanimous response.
 "Weally, deah boys—" **Ahem!**
 "Twenty seconds gone!" said Blake, keeping a business-like eye on the dial of his watch. "You'd better go ahead, Gussy!"

"Undah the cires—" **Ahem!**
 "Forty seconds!"
 "Weally, Blake—" **Ahem!**
 "Nearly a minute!"
 Arthur Augustus dropped his eyeglass from his eye, and polished it, and jammed it into his eye again. Then he took a survey of Blake, beginning at his feet, and travelling up to his head. By the time he had finished that scornful survey, Blake rapped out:

"One minute gone!"
 "You uttah ass!"
 "Ten seconds!"
 "You feahful chump—" **Ahem!**
 "Twenty seconds!"
 "I wefuse to be tweated in this widiculous mannah. I have a vewy important observation to make concernin' the welfare of a youthful friend. I uttably wefuse to have my remarks set to a time limit in this way!"

"Minute and a half!"
 "I wegard you, Blake, as a fwabjous chump, and you othah fellows as a set of gwinnin' asses!" said D'Arcy.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Twenty seconds more; that's all! You'd better buck up, Gussy, or your interesting remarks will be lost to the human race for good!"

"Weally, Blake—" **Ahem!**
 "Ten seconds more! Mind, if you talk after the time limit has expired, we shall sling you out! Five seconds more!"
 "You silly ass—" **Ahem!**

The juniors were roaring with laughter, and the swell of the School House was crimson with wrath. Only Blake kept grave, watching the dial with a serious eye. He closed the watch with a sudden snap.

"Time's up!" he exclaimed.
 "Weally, Blake—" **Ahem!**
 "Ring off!"

"I wefuse to wing off! I—" **Ahem!**
 There was a sudden sound of racing footsteps in the passage, and the juniors turned towards the half-open door.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

The juniors heard the beating footsteps and gasping of

breath. From the distance came a sound of heavier footsteps, evidently in pursuit.

D'Arcy made a step towards the door.

As he did so, a diminutive figure came rushing wildly into the study, panting and breathless.

Biff!

Right into D'Arcy he ran, knocking the swell of St. Jim's flying backwards, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gave a tremendous yell and sat down on the floor. The new-comer, unable to stop himself, fell upon him, and clasped him round the neck for support.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "Joe, you young ass—" Tom Merry was interrupted. A crowd of wrathful juniors crammed the doorway of the study, and there was a roar.

"Here he is!"
 "We've got him!"

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble!

TOM MERRY stepped quickly towards the door. Monty Lowther and Manners stepped with him, and the Terrible Three stood in the way of the excited juniors. What the trouble was about the juniors did not know. But they did not intend to let the study be rushed by the excited crowd from the passage.

"Hold on!" said Tom Merry quietly.

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy struggled in the grasp of the lag who had fallen upon him.

It was Joe Frayne, Tom Merry's protegee—the new fellow in the Third Form at St. Jim's—the "slummer," as some of the fellows called him, who had been rescued from his slum by Tom Merry, and whose fees at St. Jim's were paid by Tom Merry's uncle.

Joe was panting for breath. He did not seem to know where he was, or what he was doing, so breathless and excited was he.

"Crikey!" he gasped. "Oh, crikey!"

"Bai Jove! Gewwoff me, you young wascal!"

"Oh, Master D'Arcy—" **Ahem!**
 "You feahful young ass! You are wumplin' my waistcoat, and cwumplin' my collah feahfully! Gewwooff!"

"Sorry, Master D'Arcy—" **Ahem!**

"Gewwooff!"

Joe scrambled breathlessly off the swell of St. Jim's.

He stood up, gasping for breath, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose slowly to his feet. The swell of the Fourth was very dusty. He groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye, and gave Joe Frayne a look of wrath.

"You feahful young ass!" he panted.

"I'm sorry—" **Ahem!**

"You silly chump!"

"I—I kim 'ere to—to get outah their way!" gasped Joe. "I'm sorry! I didn't see you when I run into you, Master D'Arcy. They was after me!"

"Wats!"

"You see, sir—" **Ahem!**

"Oh, all wight!" said D'Arcy. "Nevah mind, if you're sowwy! Take that clothes-bwush, deah boy, and bwush me down!"

"Yes, sir!"

The pursuing juniors, jammed in the doorway, were viewing the scene bursting with wrath. They could not get into the study while Tom Merry & Co. were lined up to defend the doorway, but they were evidently very anxious to get hold of Joe Frayne.

Gore, and Mellish, and Crooke, were among them, all of them cads; but there were some decent fellows in the throng, too, for Tom Merry recognised Kerruish, and Hancock, and Macdonald, and Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane.

"Have him out!" roared a voice from behind.

Tom Merry held out his hand warningly.

"Easy does it!" he exclaimed.

"Rats!"

"Have him out!"

"Kick those Shell bounders out of the way!"

"Rush 'em!"

"Have him out!"

Tom Merry & Co. stood shoulder to shoulder. They looked so grim that the boldest of the invaders paused.

"Cheese it!" said Tom Merry coolly. "You're after Frayne, are you?"

"Yes, we are!"

"What's he done?"

"I ain't done nothin', Master Tom!" said Joe eagerly.

"Explain, Kangy!" said Tom Merry, to Noble, of the Shell. "You're the most sensible chap here. What's Joe done?"

Kangaroo was as flushed and excited as the rest.

"The cheeky young beggar—" he began.

CHAPTER 3.

Kildare Takes the Matter in Hand.

There was a roar.
 "Rush 'em! Have him out!"
 "Hold on!" exclaimed the Cornstalk. "Let me explain to Tom Merry—"

"Hang Tom Merry!" exclaimed Mellish, of the Fourth. "Who's Tom Merry? Let's have the young boulder out, and rag him!"

"Oh, shut up, Mellish!" said Kangaroo.

"Have him out!"
 "Shut up, I tell you! Look here, Tom Merry, that young villain has got us all into a row—nine or ten of us—"

"I ain't!" exclaimed Joe.
 "Shut up, Joe, and let Kangy speak," said Tom Merry.
 "Yes, Master Tom."

"We were in Herr Schneider's detention class," said Kangaroo. "We had German papers to do, and we did 'em, and left 'em on his desk. Then that unspeakable young villain went and daubed them all with ink!"

"We got 'em to do over again!" yelled Gore.

"Yah! Rag him!"

"Have him out!"

"It was a rotten trick, whoever did it!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "But how do you know it was Frayne? Did you see him?"

"Well, no—"

"Then how do you know?"

"Mellish saw him sneaking past the Form-room—"

Tom Merry sniffed.

"I wouldn't take Mellish's word against Joe," he exclaimed. "Mellish has always been against him, and you know Mellish doesn't tell the truth."

Some of the ragers chuckled. Tom Merry had a way of speaking out in the plainest of plain English—he always hit straight from the shoulder.

"Look here—" began Mellish.

"But that isn't all," said Kangaroo. "I don't see any reason to doubt Mellish's word in this case, but that isn't all. Frayne had no right in the Form-room at all—it was in the Shell Form-room that old Schneider had his detention class. There weren't any of the Third in it. Well, the young rascal left something of his in the Form-room—Gore found it in the grate—an ink-bottle with his name on the label."

"Phew!"

"Was Gore alone when he found it?" asked Jack Blake, with a distrustful glance at the cad of the Shell.

Gore sneered.

"No, I wasn't," he exclaimed. "Kangaroo saw me take it out of the grate, and so did Dane, and so did Hancock."

"Right-ho! So we did!"

Tom Merry turned a troubled look upon Joe Frayne. He had stood that lad's friend steadily and truly ever since he had brought him to St. Jim's. The snobs of the school had been dead against Joe, but Tom Merry had always been true.

"Joe," he exclaimed, "you wouldn't play a rotten trick like this, would you?"

Joe shook his head earnestly.

"I wouldn't, Master Tom!" he exclaimed. "I swear I wouldn't. Some of them chaps 'ave been werry 'ard on me—specially Master Mellish and Master Levison—but I wouldn't do no 'arm to their work, sir. I never thought of such a thing!"

"Have you been in the Shell-room since lessons?"

"No, I ain't!"

"Liar!" said Mellish.

"It's true, Master Tom!"

"You haven't inked the detention papers?"

"No, Master Tom. I never knew there was a detention class in the Form-room at all, or that Herr Schneider had given out papers to be done, and I wouldn't 'ave 'urt 'em, anyway!" said Joe, with a look of great distress.

Tom Merry turned to the crowd of juniors.

"You hear what he says?" he said.

"He's lying!"

"Blessed slum boulder—of course, he's lying!" said Crooke.

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wergad it as extremly bad form to doubt a chap's word with-out absolute pwof—"

"It's proved!"

"Ring off, D'Arcy!"

"Have him out!"

Kangaroo advanced into the study.

"He jolly well mucked up our detention papers," he exclaimed, "and we're going to bump him for it. If you stand by him, Tom Merry, there'll be trouble."

"Then there'll be trouble."

"Look here—"

"Get aside!"

"Rush 'em!" yelled Mellish, from behind.

And the excited juniors made a rush.

"SHOULDER to shoulder!" sang out Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Buck up!"

"Have him out!"

There was a wild struggle inside the doorway. Tom Merry & Co. stood as firm as rocks, hitting out. The rush of the attackers bore them back into the study, but they did not separate, standing firmly together and hitting out hard.

Kangaroo and Dane rolled on the floor, and Gore rolled over them. Blake and Digby fell, too, and several more juniors stumbled over the fallen ones and went down.

Kangaroo struggled up furiously. As a rule, he was on the best of terms with Tom Merry & Co. But he was too excited to think of that now.

"Come on!" he roared.

"Hurrah!"

"Sock it to 'em!"

The rush was renewed, and this time force of numbers broke the line, and Tom Merry & Co. were mixed up with their assailants, and the study was full of fighting, scrambling juniors.

The din was terrific.

The table went flying, and the chairs were knocked over, and there was a crash of glass as someone put his shoulder through the bookcase.

Crash! Bang! Yell!

The juniors were too excited to hear loud footsteps and voices in the passage; but when Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, and Darrel, the prefect, appeared in the doorway, with red and angry faces, they realised that the noise they were making had been heard from afar.

"What's this row about?" roared Kildare. "Stop it at once!"

"Cave!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Stop, I tell you!"

The fighting ceased.

The juniors, very dusty and crumpled and breathless, stood gasping, and looking at one another like a crowd of ill-tempered dogs, ready to begin again at a moment's notice.

Kildare looked at them grimly.

"I suppose you think it's fun to turn the Fourth-Form passage into a bear-garden!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, ladle out the lines!" said Blake resignedly.

"Weally, Kildare—"

"I'm not going to give you lines," said the captain of St. Jim's sharply. "Unless you can give me a good explanation of this row, I shall march every fellow here to Mr. Railton to be caned!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh!"

"Now, then, what's the row about?" demanded Kildare.

The juniors looked at one another. Lines would have been bad enough, but a caning for a study row was too bad. True, the study row had been more in the nature of a riot, and very likely Mr. Railton himself had heard it in his own quarters.

"You see—" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, you know—"

"I'm waiting for an explanation!" said Kildare.

"Well, we came here to rag Frayne," said Kangaroo desperately. "That's how it was. Tom Merry stood up for the young larrikin!"

Kildare frowned.

"Oh, you came here to rag young Frayne, did you?" he exclaimed. "Am I to understand, Noble, that you are one of the fellows who have persecuted Frayne because he came from a poor place to this school, and is paid for by Tom Merry's uncle?"

Kangaroo flushed crimson.

"No, I'm not," he exclaimed indignantly. "Tom Merry—Blake—any of the fellows will tell you that I've been against treating Frayne badly on that account."

"It's werry true, sir," said Joe. "Master Noble has been werry good to me. He ain't like Mellish or Gore."

"Then why were you after him?" asked Kildare.

Kangaroo hesitated.

"You've got to explain; get ahead."

"I—I—we—"

"You see—" began Hancock.

"Well?"

"Master Noble thinks I mucked up the detention papers, sir," said Joe. "I never 'eard of 'em till jest now, sir. I jest come into the 'ouse, sir, and they swooped down on me, and I ran. I ran into 'ere because I thought Master Blake would 'elp me, sir."

"Quite right," said Jack Blake, who was caressing an extremely swollen nose.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you didn't know why they were going for you, Frayne?"

"No, sir."

"It's a lie!" said Mellish.

"Hold your tongue, Mellish!" said Kildare, who had no good opinion of the cad of the Fourth. "You say that Frayne has damaged your detention papers, Noble?"

"Yes; I may as well out with it, as he's told you himself," said Kangaroo. "We've been detained for German, and Herr Schneider set us papers in the Shell-room. He left us to do them, and we left them on the desk when we had finished, each of us putting his papers there when we went out. We never imagined anybody would be rotter enough to go and damage them and get us into a row."

Kildare's brow darkened.

"Do you mean to say that somebody did, Noble?"

"Yes, Kildare. We've just been called up by Herr Schneider," said the Australian junior. "He was in a raging temper. He showed us the papers. They were blotted and smudged all over with ink. He thought we had left them like that out of defiance, and he wouldn't listen to a word. We've got the papers doubled to do over again."

There was a gasp of wrath among the raggers. German was not a favourite subject with most of them, and impositions were never popular. And to have an imposition doubled, after it had been once done, was simply unforgivable.

Kildare understood perfectly the feelings of the juniors. He had been a junior himself, and not so very long ago. His brow was dark and stern as he turned towards Joe Frayne.

"Frayne!" he rapped out.

Joe faced him, still holding the clothes-brush with which he had been brushing down the swell of St. Jim's. Joe's face was dismayed. After Tom Merry, he regarded Kildare as the finest fellow breathing; and he was not far wrong. But Kildare was evidently very angry now, and Joe trembled.

"Ye-es," faltered the little ragamuffin.

"You say you did not damage the detention papers?"

"I didn't, Master Kildare."

"You're on bad terms with most of these fellows, I believe?"

"Some of 'em, sir," said Joe. "Master Mellish, and Gore, and Crooke, and Levison have been werry 'ard on me, sir. They don't like a slum chap comin' to the school, sir. But I wouldn't do them no 'arm."

"Yaas, wathah! Quite wight, Joe."

"Silence, please, D'Arcy!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Silence! The other fellows, Joe—"

"Master Noble 'as been werry good to me, and Master Dane, too," said Joe. "I 'ope they won't think so bad of me as to think I'd play such a rotten game on 'em, sir. I ain't no call to do it, 'cause they ain't been rotten to me like Mellish."

"I suppose you went there to spoil Gore's and Mellish's papers, and did the lot while you were about it," said Kangaroo. "But goodness' knows I don't want to be hard on you. I never thought you'd deny it; but if you say you didn't do it, I'm willing to believe you."

"Same here!" said Clifton Dane.

"Rats!" said Gore. "He did it right enough."

"Of course he did!"

"Cad!"

"Sweep!"

"Rotter!"

Kildare held up his hand for silence. Joe was looking so distressed that the captain of St. Jim's could hardly but believe the statement of the little ragamuffin. Joe had not impressed him as a fellow who would wantonly play such a cruel trick, and it seemed too much to believe that he had intended to spoil the papers of the boys he hated, and had from sheer wantonness spoiled those also of fellows who had been kind to him. It was hard to believe that, after looking at little Joe's earnest and distressed face.

"What reason have you to suppose that Frayne did this?" Kildare asked. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this matter. If he did it, I shall know how to deal with him in the future—very differently from in the past. But I shall not believe it without proof. What proof have you?"

Gore held out an empty ink-bottle. On the label was written the name "J. Frayne." The fags of the Third generally wrote their names on their property, for in fag society property was held very much in common if a locker was left unlocked. Kildare took the ink-bottle.

"Is that yours, Frayne?" he asked.

"Yes," said Joe.

"I found it in the grate in the Shell class-room," said Gore. "After the row with Herr Schneider, we went back there to see if we could get a trace of the chap who had mucked up the papers. I found that."

"We all saw him," said Kangaroo.

"You were all together at the time?" Kildare asked.

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"Yes."

"And I saw the young cad dodging near the Form-room door, about a quarter of an hour before we were called in to be ragged by old Schneider," exclaimed Mellish.

"I—I wasn't there!" exclaimed Joe.

"I saw you."

"You didn't, Master Mellish. You've made a mistake."

Kildare looked keenly from one to the other.

"When did the last of you leave the Form-room, leaving the papers there?" he asked.

Kangaroo reflected.

"I left about five," he said. "Which of you chaps was the last out?"

"I was," said Hancock. "It was a quarter-past five."

"When did Herr Schneider collect the papers?"

"He called us into his study at six, so I suppose he had just got them from his desk in the Form-room."

"Then the ink was spilt on the papers between a quarter-past five and six o'clock."

"Yes, certainly."

"Very well," Kildare turned to Joe. "You say that you did not go into the Form-room, Frayne?"

"I swear I didn't, sir."

"Very well. Where have you been the last hour?" asked Kildare quietly. "If you did not go into the Shell Form-room, you were somewhere else. Where were you?"

Every eye was turned upon Frayne, of the Third. Kildare's question was a "clinger," as the juniors would have called it. If he had not touched the detention papers, he should have no difficulty in proving an alibi.

But could he?

Joe was silent, with crimson cheeks, and his eyes fixed upon the carpet. There was a long, grim silence in the study.

CHAPTER 4.

Nothing to Say.

TOM MERRY broke the silence in Blake's study. Joe's friends were standing silent, with uncomfortable looks.

Kangaroo and the rest, their belief strengthened and confirmed by Joe's silence, looked at one another. There was no longer the slightest doubt in their minds that Joe was guilty; and Tom Merry & Co. were beginning to waver, too, in their belief in the little waif's innocence.

"Speak up, Joe!" said Tom Merry, in a strained voice.

"Speak up! The question's easy enough to answer, kid."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy. "Speak up, Joe!"

Joe was silent, with downcast looks.

Kildare's lip curled.

"Have you nothing to say, Frayne?" he asked.

"Ye-es, Master Kildare."

"You were not in the Form-room between a quarter-past five and six o'clock?"

"No, sir."

"You say that Mellish did not see you near the Form-room?"

"I know he didn't."

"Then where were you?"

"I—I was 'out, sir," faltered Joe.

"Out in the quad?" asked Kildare. "I suppose somebody saw you there, then? Were you with your friend D'Arcy minor?"

"N-n-no; I ain't seen Wally since classes."

"Was anybody with you?"

"No."

"But somebody in the quad. would have seen you?"

"I—I wasn't in the quad."

"Do you mean that you had gone out of the school?" asked Kildare, while some of the juniors grinned derisively at what they regarded as the helpless floundering of a liar caught in his own toils.

"Yes, sir."

"Had you a pass out of gates?"

"N-n-no."

"Then you broke bounds?" asked Kildare sternly.

"Ye-es."

"Can you prove it? If you went out or came in by the school gates, Taggles would have seen you. Are you willing for the school porter to be asked?"

"E never saw me."

"How so?"

"I got over the wall under the elm-trees, sir."

"Why?"

"I didn't want to be seen goin' hout, sir."

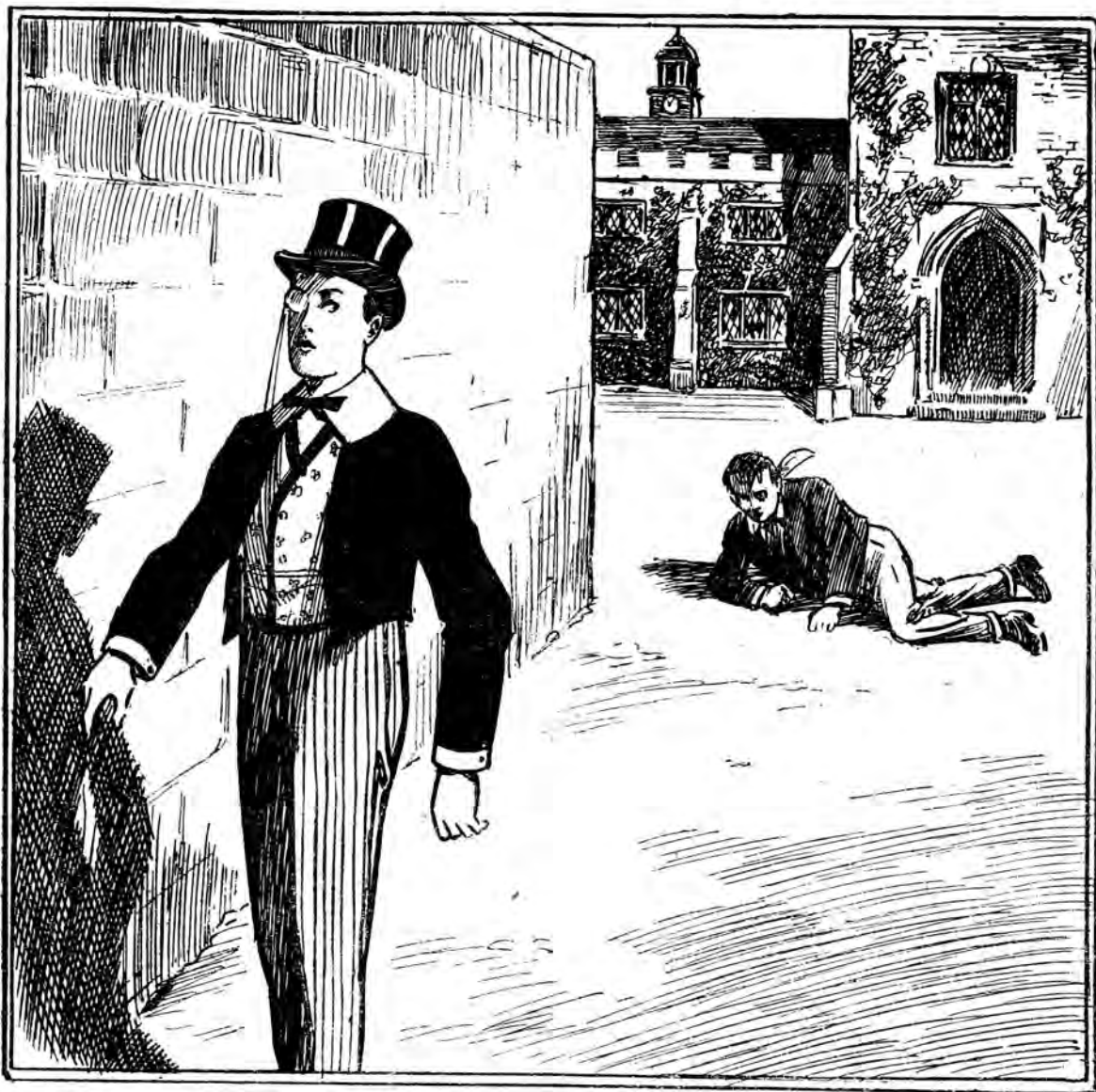
"Oh! Where did you go?"

"Down the lane, sir."

"What for?"

Joe was silent.

Again there was a deep and significant silence in the study. Why did not the waif of St. Jim's reply? To most of the



D'Arcy walked away—not with the least swagger, but with the air of a fellow who has satisfactorily performed a painful but necessary duty. Mellish lay on the ground, still on his elbow, looking after him as well as he could through his darkened, half-closed eyes. (See page 13.)

fellows present it seemed only too clear that he had been blundering on from one lie to another, and was now driven to his last ditch, as it were.

"Well, Frayne," said Kildare, "answer me! What did you go out of the school for?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

"Why not?"

"I—I don't want to."

"Come, come, that won't do, Frayne. I order you to explain."

Joe's lips set obstinately. Tom Merry looked at him with deep anxiety. Was it possible that Joe, after all, had been lying? Tom Merry would never have believed it of him. Yet—

"Speak up, Joe!" said Tom Merry.

"I hain't nothin' to say, Master Tom."

"You can tell Kildare what you went out for."

"I—I can't."

"Why not?"

"I—I can't, Master Tom."

There was a look of such deep distress in Joe's face that it went straight to Tom's Merry's heart. He pressed Joe's shoulder.

"You needn't be afraid to tell Kildare, Joe," he said softly.

"Kildare is only thinking of getting at the truth, not of punishing you for breaking a school rule."

"That is true," said Kildare.

But Joe did not speak.

Kildare waited a few minutes; and then, as Joe did not speak, the captain of St. Jim's went on, in a harder and colder voice:

"You cannot explain where you were, then, Frayne?"

"N-n-no, sir."

Kildare smiled scornfully.

"And you expect me to believe that you did not go into the Form-room, when you refuse, for no reason whatever, to say where you were at the time?"

"I—I—I—"

"Well?"

"I ain't got nothin' to say, sir."

"Very well, Frayne! It is perfectly clear to me," said Kildare icily. "You did exactly as these juniors suspect, and you have been lying about it."

"I ain't, sir."

"I cannot allow them to rag you," said Kildare, in a hard voice. "But if ever a fellow deserved ragging, I think you do."

**NEXT
THURSDAY:**

"THE WAIF OF ST. JIM'S."

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"Hear, hear!" said Gore.
 "But I can cane you for performing a cowardly and ill-natured trick, and for lying about it," said the St. Jim's captain; "and I will. Follow me to my study."

"Yes, sir," said Joe heavily.
 "I say, Kildare!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Excuse me, but—but I wish you'd let him off, you know. I've been telling you what happened, and if you cane him it puts me in the position of sneaking. You made me tell you."

Kildare hesitated.
 "Very well!" he said, after a pause. "I will let Frayne off. Mind, you fellows, understand that you're not to take the matter into your own hands. Not one of you is to lay a finger on Frayne, or I shall let him hear of it. Remember that. As for you, Frayne, I let you off because Noble has spoken up for you, not because you do not deserve a sound caning, you young rascal. Mind, no more row here, or you'll hear of it! Come on, Darrel."

Darrel paused a moment. He dropped a hand on Joe's shoulder.

"If you've got anything to say, kid, why don't you say it?" he asked kindly. "There's no need to keep a secret, surely."

"I ain't nothin' to say, sir," said Joe.
 Darrel said no more. He followed the captain of St. Jim's from the study.

Kangaroo fixed his eyes upon Joe.
 "It's pretty clear about you!" he exclaimed. "You're a disgraceful young scoundrel, and you ought to be ragged bald-headed!"

"Let's rag him!" exclaimed Gore.
 "You heard what Kildare said!" replied Kangaroo sharply. "We're not going against that. Let the young cad off! I shouldn't care to be in his shoes, anyway."

"I suppose even Tom Merry won't stand up for the little cad now!" sneered Mellish.

Tom Merry did not speak.
 Kangaroo strode from the study, and the rest of the raggars followed him, most of them hurling some sneer or gibe at Joe as they went.

Jack Blake closed the door after the last of them.
 "Well, my only hat!" Blake exclaimed.

CHAPTER 5. The Eavesdropper!

JOE FRAYNE stood silent in the study. The eyes of the chums of the Fourth and the Shell were turned upon him, but he did not appear to be able to meet them. His cheeks were burning, and there was a glimmer of moisture on his eyelashes; but his lips were set and very firm.

"Bai Jove," ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, breaking an uncomfortable silence, "this is a most unfortunate occurrence!"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"Beastly!"

"I must say that I should never have thought it of Frayne," Digby remarked.

"Nor I," said Herries. "I thought Frayne was decent. I let him feed my bulldog one day, and Towser seemed to like him. I'm very much disappointed in Frayne."

"Weally, deah boys—"

"It's rotten!" said Manners. "You shouldn't have done it, Joe."

"I suppose the poor little chap's not to be blamed," said Tom Merry, with a shake in his voice. "You know how he was brought up. I thought I had cured him of telling lies. But I suppose he doesn't really understand."

Joe gave a sharp cry.
 "Master Tom!"

"Well, Joe?"

"I ain't told any lies."

Tom Merry bit his lip.

"How can I possibly believe you, Joe? I wouldn't take Mellish's word about his seeing you near the Form-room—I know Mellish is a cad, and that he's got a spite against you. I wouldn't even pay much attention to the ink-bottle being found there—somebody might have put it there. But, if you weren't in the Form-room, where were you?"

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "Of course, you might have chosen that very time for breaking bounds. But where did you go—and why? Why can't you explain?"

"I—I can't!"

"Why not?"

"I can't tell you."

Tom Merry's face hardened.

"Do you mean to say, Joe, that you were doing something outside the walls of the school that you can't possibly explain to your own friends—something disgraceful?"

"N-n-no."
 "Then how were you occupied?"
 Joe did not answer.
 "You can't tell me, Joe?"
 "No, sir."
 Tom Merry made a weary gesture.
 "You'd better go, Joe. It's no use talking to you, I can see that."

Joe gave a gulp.

"Very well, Master Tom. But it's—it's 'ard you should think so bad of me. But it can't be 'elped, I s'pose."

Joe moved slowly to the door.

Not a word was uttered as he opened the door, passed slowly out of the study, and closed the door behind him.

His footsteps died away down the passage.

There was silence in the study. The juniors weren't in a humour to discuss a question of cricket, as they had been doing before Joe entered. All the cheerfulness was gone out of their faces.

They had always backed Joe up, they had always frowned down the snobs who had endeavoured to excite feeling against the waif of the slums.

It was a shock to discover that the snobs had been in the right, and that they themselves had been in the wrong—and that was what it looked like now.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very silent, with a deep shade of thoughtfulness upon his aristocratic brow. The swell of St. Jim's was evidently thinking the matter out very seriously.

"I suppose there's nothing more to be said about it!" Blake exclaimed at last. "Are we going to settle that cricket question now, Tom Merry?"

The hero of the Shell shook his head.

"Hang it all, no!" he exclaimed. "I don't feel inclined to talk cricket now—and it will keep, anyway. Look here, this is a rotten affair. It's made me feel utterly rotten. It looks as if there can't be any doubt about it; but I don't like to give up my faith in Joe. The poor little chap was brought up to lie as naturally as he breathed; and I suppose it was no use thinking of a few weeks making much difference to him."

"I suppose not."

"Pway listen to me, deah boys—"

"Oh, go ahead, Gussy!"

"You may wemembah, before Joe wushed into the studay in that weckless way," said the swell of St. Jim's—"you may wemembah that I was about to make a wemark, and that Blake intowupted me in his wude way. That wemark—"

"We'll be going, I think," Monty Lowther remarked.

The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyegless upon the Shell fellow.

"Pway wait till I have finished, Lowthah!" he exclaimed.

"It will be bed-time in three hours," said Lowther blandly.

"Can't be done."

"Weally, you ass—"

"Oh, wire in, Gussy, and get it over!" said Tom Merry.

"I was about to wemark, as I have before observed," said D'Arcy—"I was about to wemark that Joe was in need of a fiwend to look aftah him. That is the wemark I was goin' to make, when Blake took out his watch and diswpectfully suggested a wotten time limit. It appeahd to me that Joe wasn't being pwopahly looked aftah."

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Joe was looked after as well as I could look after him," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, that is vewy twue. But what is wequired in a mattah of this sort is a fellow of tact and judgment," D'Arcy explained. "As a mattah of fact, I had decided that I was the pwopah person to look aftah Joe, you know. In mattahs of personal attire, and that sort of thing, you know, I am the wight and pwopah person to guide the youthful mind, and teach the young ideah how to shoot."

"How to shoot his linen?" asked Lowther.

"Pway don't be a widdlewous ass, Lowthah. I was already thinkin' that I was the pwopah person to take young Fwayne in hand; and what has happened makes no diffewence to my wewolve. I'm goin' to take him up."

"After what has happened?"

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Yaas, wathah! If he is such a feahful young fibbah as appeahs, he will need a firm guidin' hand to keep him to the stwaight path. It's not the place of a fiwend to desert a chap when he's goin' w'ong, is it? That's the time when a chap should cling closer."

Tom Merry gave the swell of St. Jim's a slap on the shoulder.

"Bravo, Gussy!"

"Ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ow! You ass! You have cweased my jacket, and thrown me into quite a fluffah! Pway don't be such a wuff ass! Look here, I am goin' to take young Fwayne up. As a mattah of fact, deah boys, I believe him."

"What?"

"I believe in his statements. I fancy he has some widiculous reason for not tellin' us what he was doin' outside St. Jim's, and pewayps he will explain. I am goin' to see him, and if he gives me his word of honah that he has told the twuth, I shall believe him."

"Good old Gussy!"

"I shall also endeavor to cleah him of suspish," said the swell of St. Jim's. "You fellows know how keen I am when I bwing my bwain down to a thing."

"Yes, rather! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe Mellish was lyin'—"

Jack Blake gave a sudden start, and stepped quickly and quietly to the door and flung it suddenly open.

A stooping form outside the keyhole almost rolled over in the sudden surprise.

It was Mellish!

The juniors uttered an exclamation of disgust.

Mellish had been listening at the keyhole. In a moment the eavesdropper was upon his feet, and would have dashed away down the passage, but Blake caught him by the shoulder and swung him into the study.

"You cad!" he said.

"I—I was just goin' to knock!" stammered Mellish haltingly.

"Don't lie!" said Tom Merry contemptuously.

"I—I—"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his monocle upon Mellish. "Bai Jove, you uttah wottah! You were listenin' at the keyhole!"

"I—I—"

"Bai Jove! I pwopose makin' an example of that uttah wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "As he is so fond of keyholes, fasten him to the keyhole and leave him standin' there, so that the fellows will know what he has been doin'!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!"

"I—I won't stand it!" shouted Mellish. "I—I—"

"You jolly well will!" exclaimed Blake, grasping the cad of the Fourth as he attempted to break away. "Mind, you'll get hurt if you struggle!"

"I tell you—"

"Shut up! Get a thin cord, Dig—a blindcord will do!"

"What—ho!"

Mellish's wrists were bound together promptly with the cord. Then it was passed through the keyhole from outside, and fastened to the handle of the door from within, and the door was shut on Mellish.

The cad of the Fourth stood outside the study door, helpless to go—helpless to unfasten the cord. His face was pale with rage as he stood there.

CHAPTER 6.

Wally Wants to Know!

WALLY—the younger brother of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, came along the Fourth-Form passage, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, and a smudge of ink on his nose. He stopped, and uttered an exclamation at the sight of the eavesdropper outside the door of Study No. 6.

"My only Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Wally.

Mellish gave him an eager look.

"Untie me, D'Arcy minor!" he exclaimed.

"Who tied you up?"

"Tom Merry and Blake."

"What for?"

"Because—because they've got a spite against me."

"Rats!" said Wally. "If Tom Merry had anything up against you, he'd have it out with you. You've been up to some rotten trick—that's what's the matter with you."

"You young hound!"

Wally opened the study door, and looked in. The chums of the School House were still talking over the late occurrence, careless whether Mellish heard them or not. It was not that they cared for his eavesdropping. It was, as Blake remarked, for the principle of the thing that they made an example of Mellish.

"Hallo!" said Wally, in his cheerful, cheeky way.

"Weally, Wally—"

"Now, don't you begin, Gussy!" Wally remonstrated. "I know my face isn't up to the mark, and my collar waits changing, and my jacket is dusty. No need to go over ancient history, you know. I'm not going to listen to you unless you put on a new record."

"You uttah young wascal!"

"Where's Joe?" demanded Wally, looking round the study. "I've been looking for him ever since afternoon school, and somebody said he was here, having a row."

"Haven't you seen him since lessons?" asked Tom Merry keenly.

"Not a hide or hair of him."

"Has he been out of the school, do you know?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know whether he has been in the Shell Form-room?"

"Not much. I've been punting a footer about with Jameson and Gibson," said Wally. "I'm looking for Joe to have tea. Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"What's happened?" demanded Wally, in his businesslike tones. "If you've been doing anything to Joe, you'd better look out for me, I can tell you."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, keep off the grass, Gus! What's the matter, anyhow?"

Tom Merry explained in a few words. Wally listened, with his cheerful face growing long and serious.

"Oh, that's wotten!" he exclaimed.

"Yaas, watah! But—"

"But I don't believe Joe did it," said Wally, with a shake of the head. "I don't know what he's playing the giddy goat for, but I don't believe he did that rotten trick. Anyway, I'll soon have it out of him. I'll put it to him like a man and a brother, and make him own up about it, or punch his head. You leave it to me."

And Wally quitted the study.

"Untie my hands, D'Arcy minor!" Mellish begged.

"Don't do anything of the sort!" called out Blake.

"We've stuck that cad there for listening at the keyhole. He's going to have enough keyhole before he's finished."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Wally hurried off without taking any notice of Mellish. He went away in search of Joe Frayne.

But the waif of St. Jim's was not easy to find. Wally looked in the Third Form-room first. It was nearly time for evening preparation, and the fags were gathering there, but Joe Frayne was not among them.

"Seen Frayne?" Wally called out.

"I haven't," said Curly Gibson. "I hear he's been mixed up in a row with Kangaroo in the Fourth-Form studies."

"Yes, but since then—"

"Haven't seen him."

"Chaps are saying he mucked up some detention papers," said Hobbs, the leader of the snobs in the Third who were "down" on Joe. "I expect it's true. The little outsider would do anything mean."

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Picke.

Wally snorted.

"You shut up!" he exclaimed. "If I had time, I'd knock your silly nappers together. But I haven't. Yah!"

And Wally quitted the Form-room.

He looked round in the darkening quad., and in the passages and common-rooms, for Frayne, but did not see him.

Joe seemed to have disappeared.

Wally paused at last, in dismay.

He remembered how Joe, after being treated severely by his Form-master on one occasion, had run away from St. Jim's. He had been found, and brought back again, and on that occasion he had been pardoned.

Had he run away again?

It was possible! The little waif had lost Tom Merry's friendship and confidence, and he might well have made up his mind to get out of the school where no one wanted him.

But on that other occasion he had promised Mr. Railton solemnly that he would never run away from school again!

Wally believed that he would keep his word. But he was

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feeling very uneasy, as his search lengthened without success.

"My only aunt! There's the dorm." Wally muttered.

He had not thought of looking there. He could see no reason why Joe should go up to the dormitory. But as everywhere else had been drawn blank, it was worth while to look, at all events.

Wally hurried upstairs.

He approached the Third-Form dormitory, and opened the door. All was shadowy within, a glimmer from the setting sun falling in at one of the windows glimmered on the white beds.

On one of the beds was to be seen a dark figure extended.

Wally ran forward. He had found the waif of St. Jim's at last! Joe Frayne had not heard him coming. The little waif was extended across the bed in an attitude of utter dejection, his face buried in his hands, and his whole body shaken with sobs.

Wally was strangely affected as he looked down at him.

The scamp of the Third was not one of the crying kind himself, and he could but dimly understand tears in others. He regarded a fellow who "blubbed" as "soft." But Joe, too, was a tough little rascal, as a rule, and Wally did not remember ever seeing him "blub" before. When a fellow like Pickle or Mellish "blubbed," it was all "gammon," and there was nothing in it. But when Joe cried, Wally felt a profound uneasiness, a feeling as if things generally were out of joint.

He hardly knew what to do, as he gazed down at the grief-stricken figure of the little waif. He dropped his hand upon Joe's shoulder at last, and shook him gently.

"Joe!" he said.

Joe gave a violent start, and a shiver ran through him. He looked up quickly and miserably at Wally.

"Who is it?" he muttered.

"It's me—Wally."

"Oh!"

"What's the matter, Joe?"

"Nothin'."

Wally sat down on the bed.

"It's no good telling me that nothing's the matter, my son, when you're blubbing like a blessed old woman," he said. "Better make a clean breast of it."

Joe was gasping for breath, trying to control his emotion. He had not expected to be tracked to the dormitory, and he was ashamed of having been discovered with the tears running down his cheeks. He wiped them away with his sleeve, keeping his face half-turned from D'Arcy minor as he did so.

"I—I wasn't exactly blubbin'," he said cautiously.

Wally chuckled.

"You young ass! Think I haven't got any eyes? Now, then, what's the matter? I've heard about it all from Tom Merry, of the Shell. It seems that the chaps suspect you of mucking up the detention papers, and you can't explain where you were—can't prove an alibi."

"Ye-es, Master Wally."

"Why don't you explain?"

"I—I can't!"

"Why not?" demanded Wally magisterially.

"I—I can't tell you."

"Look here," said Wally, "I'm your friend, ain't I?"

"Yes!"

"Then tell me."

"I can't!"

"Do you want a thick ear?"

"N-n-no!"

"Then tell me," said Wally impressively. "I'm your friend, and you'll get a prize thick ear if you don't confide in me. Go ahead!"

"I—I don't care," said Joe miserably. "Master Tom doesn't believe me, and I—I don't care for anybody or anything else!"

CHAPTER 7.

Wally's Way.

JOE sat miserably on the bed as he spoke. Wally snorted with wrath. To Wally's mind he was a much more important personage than Tom Merry, in this case. Wasn't he Joe's own chum in the Third, a fellow who had stood by him in a hundred rows?

"Look here, kid!" he exclaimed. "Never mind Tom Merry! I'm the chap you've got to think about. If I think you didn't do what you're accused of, it's all right. Tom Merry can go and eat coke."

Joe did not reply.

"You were somewhere else, and not in the Form-room at all, eh?" said Wally.

"Yes."

"Where were you?"

"Out of the school."

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"Then what were you doing? You've only got to explain that to make everything clear," said D'Arcy minor.

"But I can't!"

"Why not?"

"I can't."

"Mind, you needn't explain to Tom Merry," said Wally. "You needn't explain to anybody but me. But if I'm going to stand by you, and stick to you, I shall have to know. I can't stand by a chap who does such a dirty trick as spoiling detention papers."

"I didn't do it, Wally."

"Then explain."

"I can't!"

Wally pushed back his cuffs.

"Stand up!" he said.

"What for?"

"I'm going to give you a hiding!"

"Oh!"

"It's for your own good," said Wally. "I can't have this rot, you know. Stand up, and take your licking!"

Joe did not move.

"Are you going to stand up!" roared Wally.

"I can't fight you, Wally. And there's nothing to fight about. It's rotten enough as it is," said Joe, with a gulp.

"Bosh! Explain yourself. Do you think you're going to be allowed to have mysterious secrets like the hero of a newspaper serial?" demanded Wally angrily.

"I can't help it."

"You jolly well can help it, and you shall."

"I can't explain."

"You've got to, or I shall give you a licking for your own good," said Wally. "Now, are you going to explain?"

"I can't!"

"Then stand up!"

"I won't!"

"My only Aunt Jane! I'll soon see about that!"

Wally was in deadly earnest. Wally had his own way of doing things, and this was it. He had found few difficulties in his career that could not be overcome by punching somebody's head. He grasped Joe Frayne by the shoulders, and yanked him off the bed, and stood him upon his feet.

"There you are!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, Master Wally!"

"Now put up your hands!"

"No, I won't!"

Rap, rap, rap!

Wally's knuckles came hard upon Joe's nose. It was dusk in the Third Form dormitory, but quite light enough for the purpose. Joe staggered, and gave a yell. The raps on his nose began to rouse the fighting blood in the waif of Blucher's Buildings.

"Look 'ere!" he roared. "You stop it! You 'ear me?"

Wally chuckled.

"I hear you!" he said. "Come on!"

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, rats! Come on!"

"I tell yer—"

Rap, rap, rap!

Wally was not hitting hard, but hard enough. Joe put up his hands, and guarded, and hit out in return.

Then, in a few seconds more, the two fags were "going it" hammer and tongs.

Wally was the better boxer of the two, but Joe was wiry and strong, and had plenty of pluck; and he had picked up some knowledge of using his hands, too, since he had been at St. Jim's.

They seemed well matched as they tramped and panted to and fro, guarding, lunging, punching, and dodging.

Joe had forgotten his grief by this time, and forgotten apparently, that Wally was his closest chum.

Both of the fags had their fighting blood up, and they might have been the deadliest enemies, by the way they slugged at one another.

"Ow!" gasped Wally suddenly, as Joe's fist landed in his left eye, and he went sprawling across a bed in the dusk. "Yow!"

Joe stood back, panting.

"I'm sorry, Master Wally!"

"Rats!"

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, come on!"

Hammer and tongs again! Wally had a gleam in his eyes now, and he was pressing hard. One of the left-handers for which Wally was famous in the Third Form caught Joe under the chin, and the waif of St. Jim's went staggering back.

He dropped with a crash on the floor of the dormitory.

Wally panted.

"My only Aunt Jane! Are you coming on again?"

Joe scrambled up.

"Yes, I am!" he yelled. "You see! 'Ere goes!"

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"Good!"

Hammer and fongs again! Pummel and punch, tramp and gasp! To and fro, round and round went the combatants, breathing fury.

Much punishment was given and taken on both sides, and both faces showed traces only too plainly of it.

The darkness was thickening in the dormitory, and by mutual consent the combatants had edged off towards a window, where the last glimmer of light fell in.

In the deepening gloom they fought hard.

Joe was giving in now.

His training had not made him so hard as the scamp of the Third, and he could not outlast the stern tussle so well.

Wally drove him back against a bed.

"Now then," he gasped, breathless himself, "have you had enough?"

"Ye-es."

"Are you going to explain?"

"No!"

"You—your cheeky young beggar!" gasped Wally, in astonishment. "I—"

"I give in!" said Joe sulkily. "I'm licked! Now lemme alone! I ain't goin' to tell you nothin'."

Wally dropped his hands.

"Now, look here, don't you be a sulky young beggar!" he exclaimed. "I've licked you fair and square, and now you ought to explain."

"I ain't going to!"

"You young boulder! It would serve you right if I kept on, and hammered you till you couldn't breathe!" said Wally indignantly.

"I ain't explaining nothin'!"

"It's not playing the game. You ought to explain now, now that I've licked you."

"I ain't goin' to!"

"Then you're a rotter! And I've jolly well done with you!" Wally exclaimed indignantly. "If you want to speak to me again, you'll explain about that bizney; and until then you can let me alone."

"I'll let you alone."

"Look here, Joe—"

"I don't care!"

"Oh!" said Wally, very much nettled. "If you don't care, I don't care, and that's all there is about it."

And Wally strode from the dormitory.

Joe sat down on a bed. He was dizzy from the fighting, and feeling miserable and utterly despondent. As he sat there, the school clock chimed the hour. It was eight o'clock.

Joe started up. He had missed evening prep. in the Form-room, and there would be trouble with Mr. Seiby over that—for himself and for Wally. But that was not all! There was another thought in the mind of the little ragamuffin.

He hastily sponged his face at a washstand, put his collar straight, and left the dormitory.

He ran for his cap, and left the School House, heedless of a voice that called after him from the door.

"Joe, deah boy!"

CHAPTER 8.

Bolted!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY had been looking for Joe.

He had looked nearly everywhere excepting in the Third Form dormitory, and so he had not found the waif of St. Jim's. But he caught sight of the lad as he left the School House after the combat with Wally.

Arthur Augustus hurried to the door as he saw Joe leave the house, and called after him into the dusk of the quadrangle.

"Joe! Stop, deah boy! Stop!"

Joe heard, but he did not heed.

He ran on, instead of walking, pretty evidently desirous of escaping the attention of the swell of St. Jim's.

But D'Arcy did not see it. He imagined that Joe had not heard him, and he shouted after the outcast of the Third.

"Joe! Weally, Joe! Joe, you know—"

Joe Frayne disappeared in the dusk.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The young boundah must be gettin' quite deaf! Bai Jove!"

But D'Arcy was not to be beaten. He stepped out of the School House, and ran after Joe. The little ragamuffin had disappeared, but Arthur Augustus ran in the same direction, and in a few moments he heard Joe's footsteps.

The quadrangle was deserted now, the fellows having all gone in at dark. D'Arcy increased his pace, and the diminutive figure of Joe Frayne came in sight.

"Joe, deah boy!" D'Arcy called out.

Joe started.

He had his own reasons for not wishing to see the swell of St. Jim's just then, and he ran on at an accelerated speed, much to D'Arcy's astonishment.

"Joe, I want to speak to you!"

Joe dashed on.

"Bai Jove! He must be off his wockah!"

D'Arcy ran after Joe. The little ragamuffin had disappeared again, but D'Arcy heard a tell-tale sound of scraping and hard-breathing in the darkness under the slanting oak close to the school wall.

He dashed up and caught Joe half-way up the wall, evidently climbing it with the intention of breaking bounds. Joe gave a gasp of affright as D'Arcy ran up, and endeavoured to drag himself over the wall, but the swell of St. Jim's caught him promptly by the ankle. D'Arcy could be very quick sometimes.

"Joe, deah boy!"

Joe panted.

"Lemme go, Master D'Arcy, please!"

"You are goin' to bweak bounds, you young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"I wefuse to allow you to do anythin' of the sort. As your eldah, deah boy, I wequest you to come down immediately."

Joe's only reply was an attempt to drag himself to the top of the wall. But the swell of St. Jim's had a tight hold upon his ankle, and he could not.

"Joe, you young boundah!"

"Please let go, Master D'Arcy!"

"But what are you doin'?"

"I'm goin' out."

"That's bweakin' bounds, Joe."

"I—I can't help it, Master D'Arcy! I can't!"

"What are you goin' out for?"

"I—I must!"

"But you have a weason, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes."

"What's the weason?"

"I can't tell you."

"Look here, Joe, you young ass! You are altogethah too mystewious lately," Arthur Augustus exclaimed. "I weally do not understand you in the least."

"Please let me go!"

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort! I am afwaid you are gettin' into vewy bad habits, Joe. Of course, I know you don't mean to wun away fwom school again, because you have promised not to. But I cannot have you bweakin' bounds in this weckless way."

"I must go!" moaned Joe.

"Are you goin' to meet somebody?"

Joe did not reply.

"Pway get down, Joe, and let us talk this mattah ovah quietly," said D'Arcy.

Joe clung convulsively to the coping of the wall. His arms were beginning to ache, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy showed no signs of relaxing the grip upon his ankle.

"Lemme go!" Joe pleaded.

"Imposs., deah boy!"

"I—I—I must!"

"Wats!"

Joe Frayne began to struggle. D'Arcy tightened his grip.

"You cannot get away, Joe," he said. "As your eldah, I cannot possibly allow you to go. Pway descend at once."

"I can't! I won't!"

"You will, deah boy. Othahwise, I shall have no wesource but to pull you down," said Arthur Augustus calmly.

"Do let me go, Master D'Arcy!" Joe cried out. "You can't understand, but I must go."

"I shall undahstand if you explain."

"I can't explain."

"Wats! Pway do not imagine for a moment," said D'Arcy, with stately dignity, "that I wish to pwy into your pwivate affaish, Joe. Nothin' of the sort. I twust I am incapable of such wotten bad form as inquisitiveness. But I wegard you as bein' a youngstah undah my pwotection, you see."

"Please let me go!"

"Imposs.!"

The fag struggled again. Arthur Augustus changed his grasp from Joe's ankle, reaching up with both hands, and seizing him round the body. Then, with a jerk, he drew Joe from the wall, and landed him on his feet.

Joe stood trembling, D'Arcy's hand still upon his shoulder, in case he should attempt to bolt.

"Now, Joe, deah boy," said D'Arcy, in his kindest tone, "I want you to undahstand that I am your fwend, deah

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boy—I wathah think, at the pwsent moment, the only fwiend you have. Pway confide in me, Joe."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"I can't."

Joe repeated the words miserably, hopelessly. There was a keen distress in his quavering voice that went straight to D'Arcy's heart.

"My deah kid," said the swell of St. Jim's, "I know vewy well that you are in some twouble, you know."

"Yes, yes; I am, sir."

"Why won't you tell me what it is?"

"I can't, sir."

"I will not pwees you, Joe. You can please yourself about tellin' me. But I am your fwiend, Joe, and you are undah my pwotection. You cannot bwreak bounds affah dark, Joe. I could not allow it."

"I must go."

"Imposs,!"

They stood for a moment, silent. Then Arthur Augustus linked his arm in Joe's, and drew him towards the School House.

The swell of St. Jim's felt keenly for the little waif; but he felt, too, that he could not allow Joe to leave the school. It was clear that the waif was in some trouble, and D'Arcy knew what kind of trouble came of breaking bounds after dark. It was impossible to let Joe break bounds.

Joe did not plead any longer.

He seemed to yield to his fate, and he walked quietly, almost sullenly, beside the swell of St. Jim's, in the direction of the School House, where the lights were gleaming from the windows out upon the shadowy quadrangle.

But it was only in seeming. Joe was desperate.

"You will think bettah of this, Joe," D'Arcy said consolingly. "You will see that I am quite wight, upon wefection, deah boy."

"Yes, sir."

"Come into the house now, Joe."

Frayne walked on as meekly as a lamb, but the moment D'Arcy's vigilance relaxed the little waif made a desperate wrench at his arm and tore it away. In an instant he had darted off into the darkness.

D'Arcy stood for a moment dumbfounded; then he ran after Joe, shouting.

"Joe! Stop! Come back!"

There was no reply from the fag, but D'Arcy knew where he would be, and he dashed on towards the slanting oak at the school wall. There was a sound of scraping, of desperate breathing.

Joe was climbing the wall. D'Arcy dashed up breathlessly, but this time he was a second too late. The desperate fag had not lost a second, and his heels vanished over the wall just as Arthur Augustus made a clutch upwards at him.

D'Arcy heard Joe pant as he dropped into the road on the outer side of the school wall.

"Joe!" shouted D'Arcy.

There was no answer from Joe. All the sound that came back was the sound of running feet, dying away in a few moments into the silence of the night.

CHAPTER 9.

Arthur Augustus Rallies Round.

"BAI JOVE!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stood staring at the school wall in dismay.

The little ragamuffin's footsteps had died away into the night, and it was clearly useless to pursue him. It would be the easiest thing in the world for him to dodge a pursuer in the shadowy lanes.

That was useless. D'Arcy stood staring blankly at the wall for a few minutes, and then he turned slowly back towards the School House.

"Bai Jove!" he said again.

He met Wally as he entered the School House. Wally had been bathing his face, but he had not been able to bathe away the signs of the conflict in the dormitory. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy forgot Joe for a moment, as he gazed in horror at the disfigured countenance of his minor.

"Wally! What ever has happened?"

Wally grinned, with a peculiar effect upon his swollen nose, his twisted mouth, and his half-closed eye.

"What do you think?" he replied.

"You have been fightin'!"

"Well, I certainly haven't been reading 'Good Little George' and 'How He Loved His Kind Teachers,'" said Wally sarcastically. "That wouldn't make my chivvy in this state."

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"You young wascal——"

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

"You look a feahful young wepwobate. But weally, Wally, I twust you are not hurt vewy much," said D'Arcy anxiously.

"Oh, that's all right! I've been through this before."

"Whom have you been fightin' with?"

"Oh, a chap in my Form!" said Wally evasively.

"I twust you licked him?"

"Yes, rather! Hollow!" said Wally, with a grin.

"You have not been lookin' affah young Fwayne vewy well, Wally."

Wally chuckled.

"Haven't I? I was devoting a lot of attention to him in the dorm. about a quarter of an hour ago."

"Well, there is somethin' up. He has just bwoken bounds."

"Oh, has he?"

"Yaas, wathah! There is somethin' vewy odd about him, Wally. I don't believe that he nucked up those detention papahs in the Shell Form-room."

"Who did, then?" demanded Wally.

"Weally, I could not say."

"Why doesn't he own up where he was at the time?"

"Imposs. for me to say, deah boy!"

"Well, then, so long as he won't explain, even after a chap has hammered him for his own good, he can't expect anything but the cold shoulder."

Arthur Augustus started.

"Have you been hammewin' him, you young wascal?" he asked.

Wally looked dogged.

"I made him a fair offer," he replied. "I meant to treat him as a friend, and I gave him the chance of explaining or being licked. He chose to be licked, and even then he wouldn't explain!" said Wally indignantly.

"You wuffianly young boundah!"

"Well, I like a chap to be reasonable," said Wally.

"Hang it all, a chap can't do more than I've done, I think. But I don't care. If Frayne wants to keep rotten secrets, he can keep them without my help. I'm done!"

And Wally walked away with his hands in his pockets, whistling. Arthur Augustus wore a very thoughtful expression as he proceeded on his way. He could see that Joe had quarrelled seriously with Wally—not for the first time. Rows were not of uncommon occurrence among the cheerful spirits who formed the Third at St. Jim's. But it was specially unlucky for Joe at this moment, when he required all his friends to rally round him.

"Howevah, I shall stick to him, though he has tweated me in a most diswespectful mannah," Arthur Augustus murmured, as he went on to the common-room.

Blake and Herries and Digby were there. They looked round at the swell of St. Jim's as he came in.

"Well, have you found him?" asked Blake, with a grunt.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where is he?"

"Nevah mind at the pwsent moment. I have been thinkin' deah boys——"

"What with?" asked Digby.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Digby with a scornful glare.

"I wefuse to weply to that widiculous question, Dig. I have been thinkin' that this is a time for Joe's fwiends to wally wound him."

"Eh?"

"You see, the poor kid is suffewin' undah an unjust accusation——"

"How do you know it is unjust?"

"Well, I think it is."

"Say you think so, then!" said Digby tartly. "As a matter of fact, there doesn't seem to be any doubt about it in my mind."

"Weally, Dig——"

"Nor in mine," said Herries, in his slow way. "It looks to me as if the case is quite made out. That's my opinion."

"Weally, Hewvies——"

"And I can't help thinking the same," said Jack Blake, with a shake of the head. "If Frayne didn't touch the detention papers, who did?"

"I wathah think we ought to find out, deah boy."

"Then the first step is for Joe to prove an alibi. If he wasn't in the Shell Form-room, Mellish was lying when he said he saw him there—and Mellish could only have one reason for lying about it."

"Yaas, wathah; it was Mellish who did it."

"But Joe could prove that right up to the hilt by proving that he was somewhere else. He says he was somewhere else. Why doesn't he say where?"

"I weally do not know."

"Well, then, he's placed out of court till he explains," said Blake sharply. "I know Mellish is a cad, but I don't see why we should accuse him of lying, when it's pretty clear that it's the other party that's telling the lies."

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"In makin' up a chap's mind on a mattah like this, what a chap wants is tact and judgment," he remarked. "I weally think that Joe is all wight, you know—twue blue!"

"Rats!"

"At a time like this, I think his fwiends ought to wally wound him—"

"Let him prove first that he deserves to have friends," said Blake.

"Yes, rather!"

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass round upon the Fourth-Formers, with a slow and rather aggravating stare.

"Weally, deah boys, I am surprised at you!" he exclaimed.

"What are you surprised at, ass?"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I am surprised at your not seein' that Joe is quite innocent, though circs. are against the poor chap."

"Fathead! Let him explain."

"I decline to be called a fathead. I wegard it as a wotten, oppwobvious expwession. I should think that, in the mattah of Joe, you fellows might take my word for it," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity.

"Take your word?"

"Yaas, wathah! I suppose a fellah has a wight to expect his fwiends to take his word?"

"Ass!" shrieked Blake. "Of course, we'd take your word in anything you knew about, but you're only guessing now. You don't know anything more about it than we do."

"As a fellah of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, rats! Piffle!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, cheese it, Gussy, you make me tired!" said Digby.

"Let Joe explain before he expects us to stand up for him."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake, with emphasis.

"Wats! I wegard this as a time to wally wound Joe, and if you chaps won't wally wound him with me I shall wally wound him myself," said D'Arcy, with dignity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys, I wegard this laughtah as fwivolous. I am goin' to wally wound Joe and stand up for him like—like anythin'."

And Arthur Augustus walked away with great dignity. He left the chums of the Fourth half laughing and half angry. D'Arcy's loyalty to the little waif was just like Gussy, but it was a little exasperating to the chums of the Fourth. It made them feel as if they were unjustified in the attitude they had taken up, and they had been feeling very justified indeed.

"Bai Jove! I'm surprised at those chaps!" Arthur Augustus murmured, as he departed from the common-room with his nose in the air. "I wegard this as too bad! It's wathah hard if a chap's own fwiends can't wely on his judgment. I suppose I had better see Tom Mewwy about it. I twest he will have more discretion."

And Arthur Augustus went up to the Shell quarters. As he reached the head of the stairs a burst of rough laughter greeted him, and he glanced along the passage and saw Mellish and Gore and Crooke.

Arthur Augustus coloured. He would have walked on, however, without taking any notice of the cads of the School House, but Crooke called out to him.

"Been looking after your giddy protegee, Gussy?"

The swell of St. Jim's paused, and jammed his monocle into his eye, and fixed a withering stare upon the cad of the Shell.

"My name is D'Arcy," he said haughtily. "I am only called Gussy by my fwiends, Cwooke, and I do not include you in the numbah."

Crooke grinned.

"Well, I don't know that I'm anxious to be put on a list that includes slum bounders and young pickpockets," he remarked.

"Do I undahstand you to allude to my fwiend Fwayne?" asked D'Arcy, with chilling dignity.

"You know he's a pickpocket, and the son of a convict or something," said Crooke, with a sneer.

"Yes, rather!" said Mellish. "Didn't I see him talking at the gate the other day with a filthy tramp—an old friend of his from what I could make out?"

"Nice for St. Jim's, I must say!" said Gore. "I don't envy Gussy his friends."

D'Arcy took no notice of Gore or Mellish. His eyes were fixed upon Crooke, who was looking uneasy under his steady stare.

"I will twouble you to take that wemark back, Cwooke."

said D'Arcy. "I do not allow anybody to allude to my personal fwiends as boundahs."

"Rats!"

"Will you withdwaw your diswespectful allusion to my young fwiend Fwayne?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then pway put up your hands, deah boy!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs and advanced upon the cad of the Shell in a very warlike way.

CHAPTER 10.

The Only One.

CROOKE receded a pace or two, his face changing colour. He was more than a head taller than D'Arcy, but he had not D'Arcy's unbounded pluck or D'Arcy's physical fitness, for in spite of his elegant ways Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was clear steel all through. There were few more regular attendants at the gym, and the footer ground. D'Arcy could have knocked out two Crookes quite easily without dropping his monocle, and Crooke realised it—a little too late.

He put up his hands in a clumsy way, and Arthur Augustus sailed in.

Biff—biff—biff!

Right and left, left and right.

Crooke staggered back, and measured his length upon the linoleum in the passage.

"My hat!" murmured Gore, stepping back.

He had no desire to interfere. Mellish was already walking away, with an air of exaggerated nonchalance.

D'Arcy's eyes gleamed down at the fallen cad of the Shell.

"Have you had enough, deah boy?" he asked.

Crooke did not reply, but he made no motion to rise, and D'Arcy had to take silence for an answer. He turned away from the savage-faced cad of the Shell, and glanced at Gore for a moment. Gore stepped further back.

"You will oblige me by not speakin' diswespectfully of my fwiends, Goah," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy very distinctly. "I wegard Joe Fwayne as suffewin' undah a gweat injustice, and I am wallyin' wound him. Any chap speakin' diswespectfully of my young fwiend will be wequested to put up his hands."

And D'Arcy walked on to Tom Merry's study without a glance behind.

The swell of St. Jim's tapped at Tom Merry's door and went in. The terrible Three were having tea rather late for once, and there was a pleasant scent of toast and tea in the study, but the chums of the Shell were not looking so cheerful as usual. The affair of Joe Fwayne was weighing upon their minds. Tom Merry was bitterly disappointed in the waif of St. Jim's, and his mood had communicated itself to the other two.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "Had tea?"

"Yaas, some time ago, thank you, deah boy. I have looked in to speak to you about young Fwayne. At a time like this," said Arthur Augustus, in a stately manner, "I wegard it as the duty of all young Fwayne's fwiends to wally wound him."

"But he's acted rottenly," said Manners.

"Not at all, deah boy. I wegard him as innocent."

"I wish I could think the same, Gussy," said Tom Merry, with a sigh.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"You're a good little chap, Gussy," said Monty Lowther, "but you're off the mark this time. Joe did it."

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a good little chap. Lowthah, I wegard the expwession as wotten and patwonisin'. Speakin' of Joe, I considah him quite innocent, and as you fellahs can't see the mattah in the same light, I think I'm entitied to expect you to take my word for it."

Tom Merry smiled.

"I wish I could, Gussy. But—"

"Weally, deah boy, as a fellah of tact and judgment, I weally think I have a wight to ask you to wespect my opinion in the mattah."

Tom Merry shook his head. He liked D'Arcy all the better for his faith in Joe, but he could not share it.

"I wegard it as a time for all Joe's fwiends to wally wound him," said Arthur Augustus. "Blake, I am sowwy to say, takes the same asinine view of the mattah that you take—"

"What?"

"But I had hoped to be able to make you see sense. I may wemark that, if all Joe's othah fwiends dwop him, I shall wally wound him by myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for wibald laughtah, Monty Lowthah. The question is, are you fellahs goin' to wally wound young Fwayne?"

"I wish we could, but—"

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"Pway wely on my judgment."

"Rats!"

"Weally, Lowtah—"

"Can't be did!" said Manners.

D'Arcy swept his eyeglass round at the Terrible Three in an extremely dignified manner.

"Then there is no need to pwolong this intahview," he said.

And the swell of St. Jim's quitted the study.

D'Arcy paused in the passage to reflect. He was feeling just a little downhearted. Of all Joe's friends he seemed to be the only one who still believed in the little ragamuffin or was inclined to stand by him.

But his face brightened up suddenly.

"Aftah all, the Third will stand by him," he murmured. "Wally is bound to wally wound. I will put it to them pwopahly, and they cannot fail to wally wound."

And D'Arcy went down to the Third Form-room. Evening preparation for the Third was over, and the fags were mostly in the Form-room, some of them cooking various unappetising things at the big grate, and others talking or indulging in the horseplay with which fags commonly passed their time. General attention was attracted by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he entered.

"Hallo, Wally, here's your tame major!" said Jameson.

Wally grunted.

"Where did you get that necktie?" asked Curly Gibson.

"Where did you dig up that face?" asked Fane.

"Got your hair cut?"

"Yah! Fourth-Form cad!"

"Get out!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy took no notice of those polite remarks. He walked on into the Form-room with a dignified stride.

"My deah young fwiends—" he began.

His dear young friends interrupted him with a howl worthy of a tribe of dear young Red Indians.

"Yah! Fourth-Form cad!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Oh, buzz off, Gussy!" said Wally, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "You know it's rotten for a chap to have his major hanging about the Form-room in this way."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Buzz off!"

"Clear!"

"Outside!"

"I have come here to speak upon a vewy important mattah, which weally concerns the honah of the Third Form at St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

And then the fags were silent from sheer astonishment.

"My hat!" said Curly Gibson. "What's he babbling about now?"

"Oh, he'll jaw; there's no stopping him!" said Wally resignedly. "He always goes on for a certain time when he starts. Let him rip!"

"My deah young fwiends, a membah of your Form stands accused of actin' in a caddish way, and I wegard this as a time for all his fwiends to wally wound him."

"Oh, young Frayne," said Jameson. "He's been mucking up the detention papers. A rotten, caddish trick, I call it, though, of course, the Shell cads deserve it."

"Just like that guttersnipe, though!" sneered Hobbs.

"I wegard Joe as bein' perfectly innocent—"

"Oh, rats!"

"He did it!"

"If he didn't why doesn't he explain where he was at the time?" said Wally. "I've stuck to him as long as anybody, but there's a limit."

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"I wufuse to wing off. I wegard this as a time for Fwayne's fwiends to wally wound him and show that they twust him."

"But we don't trust him!" said Jameson.

"Not an inch!"

"Oh, travel along, Gussy!"

"Buzz off!"

"I decline to buzz off. I am here to explain!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Give him the frying-pan, Pickle."

Pickle was cooking a herring in a frying-pan and a sea of butter, at the Form-room fire. He jerked the pan off the fire, and advanced towards Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Keep off, you young wascal!" shrieked D'Arcy.

There was a yell from the Third.

"Go it, Pickle!"

"Give it him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy backed away towards the door. D'Arcy would have faced fearful odds as courageously as The GEM LIBRARY.—No. 165.

Horatius of old, but he could not face the risk of having his elegant attire swamped in fishy butter.

"Go it, Pickle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grease him!"

"Spoil his bags!"

"You uttah young wascals! Oh!"

D'Arcy retreated step by step to the Form-room door. Pickle, grinning, followed him up, with the frying-pan extended.

The swell of St. Jim's reached the door, and retreated from the Form-room. A yell of laughter followed him into the passage. Jameson kicked the door shut.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the fags.

"The silly ass!" said Pickle. "As if I would have wasted my melted butter on him, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked away somewhat disconsolately from the Third Form-room. It was evidently of no use seeking to get the Third Form to rally round Joe Frayne. All the rallying that was to be done would clearly have to be done by D'Arcy himself—Joe's only champion.

CHAPTER 11.

Well Licked.

THE next morning D'Arcy looked for Joe Frayne as soon as he came down. It was a bright, fresh, clear morning in spring, and most of the juniors were out in the quadrangle before breakfast. Joe Frayne was walking alone under the elms, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy bore down upon him. The wait of St. Jim's seemed inclined to bolt, but he stood his ground, watching D'Arcy with a peculiarly harassed expression in his eyes.

"You're here, you young wascal!" said D'Arcy.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy," said Joe humbly.

"Some of the fellows were sayin' last night that you were goin' to wun away fwom the coll. again, Fwayne."

"I wouldn't do that, sir."

"I know you wouldn't, Joe, as you pwomised not to," said Arthur Augustus. "I did not have any doubts on that point, deah boy. Were you found out for bweakin' bounds last evenin'?"

"No, sir."

"You got back all wight?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"And you're keeping the bizney a secwet?"

Joe flushed uncomfortably.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"Vewy well," said Arthur Augustus. "I do not approve of this keepin' things secwet, but all the same, I'm goin' to stand by you, deah boy. I don't believe that you mucked up the detention papahs, and I'm goin' to stand by you like—like anythin'."

"You're werry kind, sir," said Joe, with a moisture in his eyes.

"Not at all, deah boy; it's a mattah of dutay. If you evah feel inclined to confide in me, I'm quite weady; and, anyway, I'm goin' to look into this mattah, and clear you of suspish, if I can."

"You're werry good to me, sir."

D'Arcy waved his hand gracefully, and sailed away. Joe drove a grubby knuckle into his eye. Kindness to the little vagrant always touched him deeply, and Joe had been through some sore trials of late.

The little fellow was feeling very isolated and miserable. He was suddenly brought out of a gloomy reflection by a hand grasping his shoulder. He was swung round, and he found himself looking at Mellish of the Fourth.

There was a disagreeable grin on Mellish's face. Mellish would not have been bad-looking if his face had worn a pleasanter expression than it ever did. But there was always something mean and sly in Mellish's mind, and it was reflected in his face, as such feelings generally are.

"Smivelling, hey?" said Mellish, with a sneer.

Joe removed his knuckle from his eye.

"Wot's that got to do with you?" he asked roughly. "It ain't your business, I suppose, Master Mellish."

"None of your cheek, you rotten little ragamuffin," said Mellish. "I think you've got it in the neck this time, you cad. It was like Tom Meriy's cheek, plantin' you here in a respectable school, and from the first I never meant to stand it. I think this will mean the kick out for you."

Joe looked at him sullenly.

"I dessay you fixed this on me, if the truth was known," he said.

Mellish gave a sneering laugh.

"Any proof of that?" he asked.

"Master D'Arcy is goin' to look into it," said Joe, who had an unbounded admiration for the swell of St. Jim's. "If you did it, I dessay he'll find you out."

"You young cad!" said Mellish; and he gave Joe a smack upon the face that rang like a pistol-shot. "And if you give me any more of your cheek, I'll—"

Mellish broke off.

A grip of iron was upon his shoulder, and he was swung round to face Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's was quite pale with anger.

"Ow!" exclaimed Mellish. "Let go!"

"You uttah cad!"

"Let go! I—"

"Yaas, wathah. I'll let you go, but you are goin' to put up your beastly hands," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, releasing Mellish. "You can wettire, Joe, and leave this uttah wottah to me."

"Yes, sir," said Joe, and he retired obediently; but only to a spot from which he could see what was taking place. Joe did not mean to miss the fight.

D'Arcy took off his silk hat and his handsome well-fitting jacket, and dropped his monocle from his eye.

"Are you weady, Mellish?" he asked.

The cad of the Fourth breathed hard.

"I'm not going to fight you," he said huskily. "I've no quarrel with you, D'Arcy."

"Wats, deah boy! You have assaulted a friend of mine in the most brutal and unpwoked way."

"Look here—"

"I warned you yestahday that any wottah who touched young Fwayne would have to answah for it to me," said D'Arcy. "Are you weady?"

"I tell you—"

"Pway put up your hands, deah boy!"

"I won't!" snarled Mellish.

"You may as well, as I am goin' to lick you in any case," said the swell of St. Jim's calmly. "You can wesist or not, as you like, but you are goin' to have the lickin'."

"You—you—"

Smack!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's open palm came with a ringing report across Mellish's cheek. The cad of the Fourth drew a quick, hissing breath, and sprang at D'Arcy like a tiger.

"Come on, deah boy!" said D'Arcy.

And they were at it, hammer and tongs, in a twinkling.

Mellish had little courage, but a rat will fight when driven into a corner. Mellish had to take the licking. D'Arcy was determined upon that. The cad of the Fourth felt that he might as well fight as take it lying down.

Take it he certainly did. The swell of St. Jim's was in fine form that morning, and he simply played round Mellish.

Right and left he drove in the blows, and the cad of the Fourth reeled to right and left.

Once or twice his savage hands came home upon D'Arcy—punching, claving, even scratching, and the elegant junior was hitting fairly all the time—nothing would have induced him to imitate his opponent's cowardly tactics.

But nothing would serve. Mellish was driven round and round, till finally a heavy right-hander swept him off his feet, and he dropped in a heap on the ground.

D'Arcy stood back, breathing hard. Mellish did not move. He lay gasping.

"I am waitin' for you, Mellish," said Arthur Augustus at last, quietly.

"Ow!"

"Are you goin' to get up?"

"No, hang you!"

"Have you had enough, you wottah?"

"Hang you! Yes."

"Vewy well," said D'Arcy, quietly putting on his jacket and hat. "If you have had enough, Mellish, I will let you off. But pway wemembah that you are not to be wude to my friend Fwayne again, or I shall be obliged to give you anothah feaful thwashin'."

Mellish made no reply. D'Arcy walked away—not with the least swagger, but with the air of a fellow who has satisfactorily performed a painful but necessary duty. Mellish lay on the ground, still on his elbow, looking after him—as well as he could through his darkened, half-closed eyes. The cad of the Fourth felt too thoroughly licked to do anything but lie there and grunt.

CHAPTER 12.

A Third-form Raid.

"H E'S coming!"

It was Curly Gibson of the Third who uttered the warning. Curly Gibson was posted at the head of the stairs in the School House, and he called out the words in a shrill whisper as the elegant form of Augustus D'Arcy was seen mounting the stairs.

There was a sound of scuffling feet further along the passage, and several fags came hastily out of Study No. 6, the famous apartment belonging to Jack Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

D'Arcy was coming upstairs, quite oblivious of the fact that there had been fags in his study, and that they had been very busy there.

He reached the head of the stairs, but by that time the fags had profited by Curly Gibson's warning, and they were all in the passage.

D'Arcy glanced at them.

"What are you young wuffians doin' here?" he asked.

The fags chuckled.

"We came to see you," said Jameson.

"Weally, deah boy!"

"It's all right," said Fane. "We've left a message for you in your study."

And the fags roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

D'Arcy looked at them in surprise. He did not quite see what there was in Fane's remark to make the fags yell with laughter.

"Weally, I do not quite compwehend," he said.

"You see, we came to explain things to you," said Jameson.

"In what way, Jameson?"

"You've interfered in the affairs of the Third," said Jameson. "We're down on young Fwayne, and we're down on you. We don't approve of Fourth-Formers bothering with our bizney, do we, you chaps?"

"Rather not!" chorussed the fags.

"Weally, you young boundahs—"

"You can stick up for that young burglar if you like," went on Fane. "But you're not going to swank into our Form-room to do it."

"Not much!"

"No fear!"

"We came to tell you so," said Jameson blandly. "We found you out, and left a message, that's all. You'll find it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you young wascals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to allow you to cackle in this wotten way, you young scamps! I twust you have been gettin' up to no twicks in my studey. If you have, I shall have no alternative but to administrah a feaful thwashin' all round!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky young beggahs—"

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

D'Arcy turned pink with wrath. He made a movement towards the fags, but they melted away, dodging down the stairs and the passage. From safe distances they sent back exasperating yells of laughter.

D'Arcy hurried on to his study, feeling decidedly uneasy. He had come up to change his collar after the fight with Mellish. His collar had not been damaged, but there was a speck on it, and Arthur Augustus was always a picture of elegance. Even specks were not allowed upon his attire.

He could not help suspecting that he had surprised the scamps of the Third in a raid on his study; and he trembled for his property.

D'Arcy had a chest of drawers in the study, and hat-boxes and tie-boxes and collar-boxes galore, and he could not help a shudder as he thought of what they might have suffered at the hands of reckless Third Form fags.

He fairly ran along the passage, and opened the door of Study No. 6, and burst into the room.

"Gweat Scott!"

D'Arcy staggered back with an exclamation of utter dismay. Truly, it was a jape of the Third Form. The fags had been there—and they had left signs of their presence in the study. "Bai Jove! Oh! The feaful young wottahs!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He gazed at the scene of havoc in dismay. The study was in the wildest disorder. It was only D'Arcy's property that had been touched: Blake's and Herries' and Digby's things had been left alone.

But havoc had been wrought with D'Arcy's property. Boxes were opened and drawers turned out, and shirts and ties and socks and collars sprawled over the floor.

Silk hats—several of them—lay about, and presented an appearance as if hasty attempts had been made to convert them into concertinas.

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A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

ANSWERS

NEXT
THURSDAY:

"THE WAIF OF ST. JIM'S."

Standing by the chest of drawers was a broom with some of D'Arcy's clothes arranged upon it in absurd imitation of D'Arcy—a pair of trousers and a jacket pinned over a cross-piece of wood; with a collar and tie, and a battered silk hat stuck on the top of the broom-handle.

On the wall was scrawled a rough representation of the swell of St. Jim's, in the best style of Third-Form art.

In case the unfortunate junior should not know that he was being caricatured, the japers had signed their work, so to speak. Like the ancient Greek gentleman who wrote "This is an ox" below his picture, the fags did not mean that there should be any mistake upon the subject.

A cardboard was pinned across the breast of the absurd figure on the broom, bearing the legend "This is Gussy!" By the figure on the wall were scratched the words "D'Arcy Esquire."

"Bai Jove! The uttah wascals!"

D'Arcy dropped on his knees before the open chest of drawers and picked up a handful of ties. They were streaming with ink.

"Oh, deah! Bai Jove! Wotten!"

The swell of St. Jim's rose to his feet.

He gazed round at the wreck and havoc in the study, with feelings too deep for words.

The Third-Form raggars had done their work well.

"The wottahs!"

There was a tramp of footsteps in the passage, and Blake and Digby came in.

They stopped just inside the study, staring.

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

D'Arcy turned towards them almost with tears in his eyes.

"Look at that, deah boys!"

"Well, my only chapeau!" exclaimed Blake, in astonishment. "What have you done that for, Gussy?"

"What?" yelled D'Arcy.

"What have you done it for?" asked Blake innocently. "If you wanted to get rid of your old clothes, you might have found a neater way of doing it."

"You uttah ass!"

"Well, I must say I agree with Blake," said Digby. "It isn't the thing to chuck your props about the study in this way, Gussy."

"You feahful chump!"

"What did you do it for?"

"You fwabjous ass! I didn't do it!" shrieked D'Arcy. "The studay has been waiked by the fags, you silly ass!"

"Oh, I see!"

"Bai Jove! My shirts are thwown about, and my toppahs are wuined. My ties are uttably inkay!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in despair.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You feahful ass; there is nothin' whatevah to laugh at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, I suppose it doesn't seem funny to you," Blake said, wiping his eyes; "but it is rather comic, all the same. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha ha, ha!" yelled Dig.

"I wegard you as a pair of cacklin' asses! Look heah. I'm goin' to make those young boundahs sit up for this!" D'Arcy exclaimed hotly.

Blake rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"Well, I don't know!" he exclaimed. "You see, they may have thought that you gave too much attention to clothes, you know, and that this would be a lesson to you. What do you think, Dig?"

Digby nodded solemnly.

"Very likely," he assented. "I think that Gussy should give the Third credit for good intentions, at all events."

"You feahful asses! Are we going to have the studay waiked by Third Form fags?" shrieked Arthur Augustus excitedly.

Blake gave a whistle.

"By George, I didn't think of that!" he exclaimed. "No, it would never do! We can't let them make a—a—What do you call it, Dig?"

"A muck?" asked Digby.

"No, you ass! A—a—a—"

"A dust?"

"No, you chump! A—a—What do you call it when a thing is done that's done over again because it's been done once?"

"A pancake?"

Blake gave his chin a glare of immeasurable scorn.

"No, you frightful ass!" he yelled. "Not a pancake; nothing of the sort! Trust you to think of something to eat! I mean a—a legal expression—something that means that if a thing's done once it can be done over again—a—a sort of—something that's referred back to you see—"

"A ledger?"

"Ledger! You ass! Oh, a precedent," said Blake; "that's the word! If we let the fags rag a Fourth-Form study, it will create a precedent, and they'll be doing it over again, you see! We can't have that!"

"Yaas, watah!"

"We'll give 'em jip!" said Blake. "Not because it's wrong to raid Gussy's togs—it's right—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Shut up, Gussy—but because we can't have a Fourth-Form study raided by fags—we can't allow such a precedent to be established. We'll—"

Hallo, there's the bell for brekker!"

"Pway lend me a hand tidyin' up, deah boy—"

"Bad form to keep brekker waiting, Gussy—besides, I'm hungry. Better tip the maid to put the things straight—you couldn't do it in two hours."

And D'Arcy finally decided to do so. But vengeance hung over the forces of the Third—brooding vengeance, as a novelist would say!

CHAPTER 13.

Joe Requires a Fiver.

"JOE! Joe, deah boy!"

Joe did not seem to hear. He was going along the Shell passage with a deep and gloomy frown on his brow, and he did not even hear Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's watched him in surprise, and saw him enter Tom Merry's study.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The Six Winners of the . . .

GEM Free Hampers

who were marked with a X on the back page of the GEM Library, No. 161, have not been identified by our Special Representative at the time of going to press. We are, therefore, compelled to hold over the publication of the prize-winners' names and addresses until next Thursday's issue.

THE HAMPERS WILL BE DESPATCHED IMMEDIATELY THE IDENTITY OF THE WINNERS IS SATISFACTORILY ESTABLISHED.

SIX MORE FREE "GEM" HAMPERS GIVEN AWAY NEXT WEEK.



The swell of St. Jim's turned slowly round and round, surveying himself in every possible aspect in the glasses. "Bai Jove!" he exclaimed. "I think that's all wight!" (See page 18.)

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "That young boundah looks as if he had all the twouble in the world on his shouldahs."

Tom Merry thought so, too, as Joe came into the study. There was a grim and hunted look on the fag's face.

Tom Merry was alone in the study. Afternoon school was over, and Tom Merry had not joined Lowther and Manners and the other Shell fellows on the playing-fields. As a matter of fact, he was thinking about Joe.

He looked at Joe sadly as he came in. Tom Merry had thought over the matter again, and he could not help thinking that the other fellows were right—that Joe had done what he was suspected of.

It was a heavy blow to Tom Merry. He had protected the lad, and believed in him—only for this!

"Well, Joe?" he said, with an effort, as the boy came in.

Joe looked at him from under his brows.

"Master Tom—" he choked and stopped.

"Yes, Joe?"

"You believe I did that—still?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"I ain't come 'ere to argy about it, sir," said Joe, with a gleam of pride in his eyes; "but if you didn't believe it, it would make what I'm goin' to say easier."

"What are you going to say, Joe?"

"You told me to come and arsk you if I needed anything, sir."

"Of course."

"I want some money, Master Tom."

Tom Merry simply stared.

Joe was not particularly careful with his money; he generally managed to get through the allowance Tom Merry's uncle made him. But he had never asked Tom Merry for money before. Tom Merry had bidden him to do so, if he ever needed any, but he had not. His request came as a surprise to the hero of the Shell. But he answered quickly:

"Yes, Joe! How much?"

"Five pounds, sir."

The Shell fellow started. He had expected Joe to say five shillings, perhaps ten! Five pounds! He doubted if he had heard aright.

"Five pounds, Joe?"

"Yes, sir."

"My dear kid," said Tom Merry, half-smiling and half-pained; "I can't do it! I haven't as much money—half of it, either. I don't have fivers like Gussy, you know."

Joe made a hopeless gesture.

"Do you really need the money?" Tom Merry asked.

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"Straight I do!" said Joe.
 "What for, Joe?"
 The waif did not answer.
 "What do you need it for, Joe? Do you owe somebody some money?"
 "Oh, no, sir!"
 "You haven't been getting into debt?"
 "No, Master Tom."
 "You want to buy something very much?"
 Joe shook his head.
 "Now, look here, Joe," said Tom Merry. "I don't pretend to feel towards you the same as I did before that happened about the detention papers. But I'm your friend as long as you stay at St. Jim's. Tell me what you want this money for?"
 "I can't!"
 "Why not?"
 "I can't!"
 "Have you got mixed up in bad company outside the school, Joe?"

Joe's face grew haggard, but he did not speak. Tom Merry could see that his shot had struck home. His handsome face hardened a little.

"Make a clean breast of it, Joe, and I'll give you my word that I'll do my best to help you out," he said.
 "I can't!"

"You won't tell me what you want the money for?"
 Another shake of the head.

"Then I couldn't let you have it, Joe, even if I had a fiver in my pocket," said Tom Merry. "But I haven't—I haven't more than a few shillings. If you wanted the money for any necessity, or anything you could explain, I would raise it among the fellows, and pay them back afterwards."

"I can't tell you nothing, sir."
 Joe turned blindly to the door.

"Joe!" called out Tom Merry.
 But Frayne did not stop.

He left the study, closing the door behind him, and went slowly down the passage. He was looking crushed and broken, like a fellow whose last hope had failed him.

He passed Study No. 6 without seeing Arthur Augustus D'Arcy standing in the open doorway.

"Joe!" said D'Arcy softly.
 The waif started, and turned his head.

"Yes, Master D'Arcy," he said huskily.
 "Come into my study!"

Joe came in, and D'Arcy closed the door. The swell of St. Jim's pointed to the armchair.

"Sit down!" he said.
 Joe Frayne sat down.

"Now, tell me what's the mattah?"
 Joe shook his head. But the tears welled over from his eyes, and ran down his cheeks. The waif of St. Jim's was choked with feeling.

D'Arcy's own eyes moistened.
 "I'm afraid there's somethin' vewy w'ong with you, Joe," he said. "I wish you would explain what's the mattah. In a case of this sort, what you want is a fellow of tact and judgment to help you, you know!"

The little waif groaned.
 "You couldn't 'elp me, sir!"
 "But what's the mattah!"

"They're all down on me," said Joe miserably. "Master Wally has dropped me, and even Master Tom has turned agin me. I don't care what 'appens now!"

"You have a friend left in me, deah boy!"
 Joe looked up eagerly, his eyes glistening through his wet lashes.

"You mean that, sir?" he asked.
 "Yaas, wathah!"

"Will you lend me some money, sir?"
 D'Arcy laughed.

"Is that all that's the mattah, Joe?" he asked. "Of course I will. How much?"

"Five pounds, sir!"
 Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had very large and liberal ideas about money; but a request for five pounds from a fag in the Third Form startled him. But he did not falter. D'Arcy's money was always at the disposal of his friends.

"Bai Jove! How vewy fortunate!" he exclaimed. "I had a fivah frowm my governah this mornin', Joe, and I will lend it to you with pleasure. Here you are!"

"I'll pay it back out of my allowance, sir, a bit at a time," said Joe, scarcely believing his eyes as his fingers closed on the crumpling, crackling banknote.

"That's all wight, deah boy. I know you will pay it back if you can. I should not wegard you as a friend if I did not considah you to be an honourable chap."

"Oh, thank you, sir; you're—you're splendid!" said Joe.

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"But what do you want the tin for, Joe?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I—I can't tell you, sir, if you don't mind."
 "I don't want to be inquisitive, deah boy!" said D'Arcy gravely. "But that is a great deal of money for a kid like you, you know."

"I—I can't tell you. You can take the note back if you like, sir," said Joe forlornly, and he half held it out. He seemed unable quite to hold it out, lest D'Arcy should take it.

The swell of St. Jim's waved it away with a graceful gesture.

"Not at all, Joe. I've lent it to you—that's all wight. I twust you are not gettin' into any mischief outside the school, Joe."

"I—I 'ope it will soon be all right, sir," said Joe.
 And he left the study, leaving the swell of St. Jim's considerably puzzled by his last remark.

CHAPTER 14. A Roland for an Oliver.

"OUTSIDE!"
 Joe Frayne started. It was in the Third Form-room, shortly after evening prep. was over. Joe had not missed prep. this evening—he had been caned by Mr. Selby for missing it the previous evening. Worried as he was in his mind about his unknown trouble, Joe had managed to scrape through preparation without incurring the fresh wrath of Mr. Selby. The wrath of Mr. Selby was more trouble to Joe than the wrath of Achilles was to the Greeks of old. Mr. Selby had quitted the Form-room with rustling gown and frowning brows, and the fags were left to themselves. When they had the Form-room to themselves, the Third generally proceeded to turn it into a bear-garden. This evening was no exception—and the Third had an additional motive for riot—their indignation about the Form outcast.

"Outside!"
 A dozen voices shouted out the word.

That it was addressed to him, Joe Frayne did not realise for the moment. He had as much right in the Form-room as anybody else in the Third. But the fags did not appear to think so.

Wally walked out of the room. He would not take part against his old friend; but thinking what he did of him, he could not defend Joe.

The other fellows gathered round the waif of St. Jim's in a body. Then Joe realised that he was the object of their general attention.

"Wot's the row now?" he asked.
 Hobbs pointed dramatically to the door.

"Outside!" he said.
 "Houtside! Wot for?" said Joe.

"Yes, houtside!" said Hobbs, with an imitation of Joe's pronunciation that made the fags yell with laughter. "Hout-side, Frayne, if you prefer it like that."

"Why, Master 'Obbs?"
 "Because we don't want you here."

"Outside, you cad!"
 "I ain't doin' nobody no 'arm," said Joe.

"You're a disgrace to the Form," said Jameson. "I pass over where you came from—we agreed to overlook that—"

"I didn't!" said Hobbs.
 "You shut up, Hobbs. I s'pose the chap can't help it if his father is a burglar, or something—was it a burglar, Frayne?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You mind your own business," said Joe.

"But we draw a line at having the parental habits copied here," said Jameson. "You're not going to follow in your father's footsteps at St. Jim's."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 The Shell are a set of swanking cads, but you're not going to sneak into a Form-room and muck up a chap's detention-papers. You're not going to receive your slum friends at St. Jim's. We draw a line at that.

"Yes, rather!"
 Joe started.

"I ain't—" he began.
 "Oh, lots of us saw him the other day, and we saw Kildare chuck him out," said Hobbs. "It was a rotten tramp, and he knew you, and you knew him!"

"An old friend, of course!" sneered Picke.
 "I couldn't 'elp it," said Joe.

"It's enough to bring disgrace on any school; I suppose you'll admit that?" said Hobbs.

"I suppose it is, Master 'Obbs; but wot can a feller do?" said Joe hopelessly. "I wanted to run away, and they wouldn't let me."

"They didn't want you to muck up the detention-papers, I suppose!" sneered Picke. "You weren't bound to do that."

"I didn't do it!"

"Now he's telling lies!"

"Ring off the crammers, kid!"

"Look 'ere—"

"We're looking," said Jameson. "You're a mean rotter! I was willing to overlook the slum, for one. But if you must play dirty tricks, you can keep out of our Form-room!"

"Outside!"

"We don't want you here, young Sikes!"

"Even Wally has gone back on you," said Curly Gibson. "Wally's the most obstinate chap I know, and he can't stand you. You can't expect us to stand you. Get out!"

Joe cast a haggard look round upon the hostile faces.

"I don't want you to stand me, that I know on!" he exclaimed. "I ain't so 'appy 'ere that I want to stay. I'd leave the school, with pleasure, if Master Tom would let me."

Hobbs gave a sneering laugh.

"And go back to Burglar Bill—eh?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Hobbs!" said Jameson, rather unreasonably. "Let him get out; that's all we want!"

"Outside, you rotter!"

"I'll get hout fast enough," said Joe.

He walked to the door, and went out quietly into the passage. Some of the fags looked a little uneasy.

"After all, we don't want to be too hard on the kid!" Jameson remarked.

"Rats!" said Picke. "He got the Shell chaps into a row."

"Well, yes, there's no doubt about that."

"And Wally has been like a bear with a sore head ever since the row, too," said Curly Gibson. "There's no standing Wally now; and it's all Frayne's fault!"

Jameson nodded without replying.

"Hallo! What's this?" exclaimed Hobbs suddenly, as the Form-room door opened.

The door was thrown back, and the doorway appeared blocked with juniors. They were all Fourth-Formers, and their looks showed they were on the warpath.

Jack Blake was at the head of the party, and after him came Herries and Digby and D'Arcy and Hancock and Reilly and Kerruish and Macdonald, and others—in fact, nearly all of the School House portion of the Fourth Form.

The fags stared at them in dismay.

"What do you want?" demanded Jameson.

The invaders did not reply. They marched on, to the number of over a score, and the Form-room door was closed behind them.

"Look here," blustered Jameson, "you get out of our Form-room! You hear?"

"Get out, you Fourth Form cads!"

Blake chuckled.

"Explain to them, Gussy," he said.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his monocle, and surveyed the surprised and uneasy fags of the Third.

"We have come here to tweek you as you deserve," he remarked. "You have had the fearful check to waid a Fourth Form studay—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"You must not suppose that I bear any malice personally for your wotten conduct," went on D'Arcy loftily. "It is a mattah of pinciple with me. You will have to be put through it, to keep up the dig. of the Fourth Form."

And the Fourth waded in with a vengeance. They went through the Third Form room like wreckers, leaving ruin and havoc to mark their course.

The fags clustered together, and put up a desperate resistance. But of what use was a fags' fight against the heroes of the Fourth. The Third were driven and chased up and down the Form-room, while a group of the Fourth stood on guard at the door, and another contingent raided the Third Form property.

Lockers were opened, and the contents strowed in ruin on the floor, desks burst, and books and papers scattered. Fags were rolled, yelling, in ink and ashes.

Before the Fourth-Formers had been at work five minutes the Third were howling with wrath and dismay.

"I wathah think that will do, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking a calm survey of the wrack and ruin through his monocle. "Pway chuck it!"

Blake shook his finger at the furious fags.

"Look here," he said. "You mind your p's and q's, my sons, and don't cheek a senior Form in the future! We're letting you off lightly."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, chaps! I think we're about done here."

It was certainly time the Fourth were done. They

marched out of the Form-room laughing, leaving the Third almost in tears with rage.

The fags looked at one another with sickly expressions. The Fourth had swept the Form-room like a cloud of locusts.

"Whose rotten idea was it to raid D'Arcy's study?" grunted Picke at last.

"That's right, pile on me!" said Jameson.

"Well, you were an ass!"

"A chump!"

"A fathead!"

"Hallo! Here's Wally!"

Wally entered the Form-room. He stopped, and gave a whistle of astonishment at the sight of the general havoc.

"My only Aunt Jane! What's been happening here—an earthquake or a cyclone?"

"The Fourth-Form rotters!" howled Curly Gibson.

"They've raided us!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Wally. "What did you let them do it for?"

And then Wally stepped out of the Form-room. Only just in time, for if he had remained ten seconds after that remark, he would have been reduced to a worse state than any fag in the room.

CHAPTER 15.

The Rotters!

WEGARD it as wotten that a chap can't wely on his friends!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made that observation in a caustic tone in Study No. 6 the next day. There were six fellows in the study with him. It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, and Tom Merry and Blake and the rest had met together in Study No. 6 to discuss cricket matters. Blake was as far as ever from admitting that the captain of the footer eleven ought to captain the cricket eleven, and Tom Merry declined to think that any other solution was possible. So things had not progressed very much. It looked as if there would be no way of settling the matter but an election. The meeting was therefore breaking up, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy added his remark.

The chums all looked at him with patient expressions, worked up for the amiable purpose of exasperating him.

"My dear Gussy, you want all the limelight!" said Blake venemstratingly. "I think we've stood by you jolly well. We wrecked the Third Form-room just to please you last night."

"That was to keep up the dig. of the Form."

"What's the matter now, then?"

"I think it's vewy hard if a chap can't wely on his personal friends."

"Stony?" asked Tom Merry.

"Certainly not!"

"Then what's the trouble?"

"You may not be aware of the fact that I have just weceived my new Eton jacket fwom my tailah," said D'Arcy stiffly. "I should like to have a chap's opinion on the fit, if I could get you to pay some attention to an important mattah for a few minutes, when you have finished with swivulous subjects."

"Oh, don't be sarcastic, Gussy!" implored Monty Lowther. "You don't know how you make us writhe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally. Lowthah—"

Jack Blake winked at Tom Merry, and the hero of the Shell caught on. In a moment all the juniors in the study understood.

"Let's see the jacket, Gussy," said Blake. "I hope it will be a splendid fit. Look here, there's only one glass in this study, you know, and you can't see yourself properly in that. When a chap is trying on a new jacket, what he really wants is to see himself under every possible aspect."

"Exactly!" said Tom Merry gravely.

"Just what I was thinking," Manners assented.

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

The swell of St. Jim's looked surprised. He had not expected the chums of the School House to enter into the thing in this hearty way.

"You are vewy good, deah boys!" he said. "I with-draw my remark about your not backin' me up, if you are weally scwious."

"Well, I suppose nobody would be ass enough to be anything but serious on a subject like a new Eton jacket," said Blake.

"Rather not!"

"Impossible!"

"My idea is," said Blake, with a solemnity worthy of

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any judge—"my idea is—it's just occurred to me—that if each of us chaps got a glass, and held it for Gussy at every possible aspect, he would be able to see himself all over, and really make up his mind about the fit of the Eton jacket."

Tom Merry reached out, and shook Blake by the hand. "Excuse me," he said; "I can't help it! A chap ought to be proud to know you, Blake. You seldom meet a chap with ideas like that."

"Bai Jove, Blake, deah boy! It's a wippin' ideah!"

"Then we'll do it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors rushed out of the study. D'Arcy remained alone. He unfastened a large cardboard box, in which the new jacket was packed in tissue paper. He took the new garment out with a tender and loving hand.

"Bai Jove! It weally looks wippin'!" he murmured, as he unfolded it. "Blake's ideah is weally splendid! I nevah suspected Blake of havin' so much sense."

Tom Merry & Co. re-entered the study.

They might have been executioners just going on duty, from the solemnity of their visages. Each of them carried a large or small glass, standing glass, or hand-glass. They filed into the study seriously and solemnly.

D'Arcy nodded with great satisfaction.

"Bai Jove, deah boys, that is wippin'!"

"Ready, Gussy?"

"Pway lend me a hand on with the jacket, Tom Mewwy! Mind you don't wumple me undah the sleeves."

"Right-ho!"

D'Arcy insinuated himself into his new jacket. Certainly it was a beautifully-cut jacket, and a splendid fit.

The swell of St. Jim's stood in the centre of the circle of juniors, and they raised their glasses on high for him to view himself.

Their faces were perfectly grave when D'Arcy saw them. But behind the shelter of the mirrors some of them indulged in gentle grins.

The swell of St. Jim's turned slowly round and round, surveying himself in every possible aspect in the glasses.

"Bai Jove! I think that's all wight!" he said, with satisfaction. "What do you think, deah boys?"

"Ripping!"

"Splendid!"

"Wonderful!"

"Amazing!"

"Unheard of!"

"Oh, weally, dwaw it mild, you know!" said D'Arcy.

"My dear chap, you must make allowances for our emotion when we see a jacket like that on a figure like yours," said Monty Lowther solemnly.

D'Arcy looked at him suspiciously for a moment. But Monty Lowther's face was as serious as that of any stone image. The swell of St. Jim's took a final survey of himself in the circle of glasses.

"Bai Jove! I think that's all wight! I think I'll go and ask Kangawoo his opinion!" he exclaimed.

"Good idea!" gasped Tom Merry, who was almost expiring from a wild desire to yell with laughter. "Good! Go it!"

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went with his graceful walk from the study.

Then the long-repressed merriment burst forth.

The august Gussy had had his leg pulled in the most stupendous way, without the slightest suspicion of the fact.

Blake closed the study door, and the juniors threw themselves into chairs or on the carpet and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake rolled on the hearthrug in hysterics. Monty Lowther collapsed into the armchair. Tom Merry sat on the table and wept. The six juniors were in a paroxysm of mirth, when the door suddenly reopened, and D'Arcy stepped in.

"I forgot Kangawoo has gone out—" he commenced, and then he stopped.

It was too late for the juniors to compose themselves. They were still yelling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah boundahs—"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Blake. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you uttah wottahs! Then you were wottin' all the time!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed the swell of St. Jim's. He departed, and slammed the door. He left the juniors in a state of uncontrollable hysterics. From Study No. 6 a wild yell followed him down the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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CHAPTER 16.

Joe's Trouble.

"T'S 'im!"

Joe Frayne uttered the exclamation in low, scared tones, while every vestige of colour fled from his face. A thick-set, coarse-featured man with a skin coppered in hue by the continual use of strong liquors, had reeled into the open gateway of St. Jim's.

In the pleasant weather of the afternoon nearly everybody was out of doors. Many fellows were in the playing-fields, others strolling about the quadrangle. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther and Blake and D'Arcy had been batting in turn, and were "out," and were standing near the gates, talking, when the unkempt, ill-looking figure appeared.

Joe was the first to sight it, however. The little waif stared at it as if fascinated. To some of the juniors it was also familiar. More than one of them had seen the tramp hanging about the gates of St. Jim's, when, on a previous occasion, he had spoken to Joe Frayne, and had been kicked out by Kildare, the captain of the school. It was the drunken, evil-faced vagrant who called himself the Weasel.

The man had been drinking now—that was clear, from the flush in his cheeks and the unsteadiness in his gait—but he was not intoxicated. He was quite sober enough to be keen and alert, in spite of his unsteadiness.

"Who on earth's that?" exclaimed Lowther.

"Look at Joe," muttered Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Joe knows him!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Joe had fixed his eyes upon the ruffian. The Weasel came towards the little waif, a threatening scowl on his face.

"You see I'm 'ere!" he said, with a leer. "I said I would come, didn't I?"

"You villain!" said Joe.

Tom Merry strode forward.

He planted himself in the ruffian's path, and, lad as he was, there was something in his look that made the Weasel halt.

"Who are you?" Tom Merry exclaimed sharply. "And what do you want here?"

"I'm the Weasel," said the man, with a leering smile; "and I've seen you afore, my young shaver, and you've seen me. I've seen you out in the streets, picking pockets with the captain! He, he!"

Tom Merry looked at him hard.

Dimly to his memory came the evil, coppery face. He had seen it before, in the days—not so long ago, yet seeming very far back—when he had been alone in London, and had been fain to obtain shelter in Blucher's Buildings—where little Joe Frayne had befriended him, and their strange friendship had begun.

"I've seen you before," he said. "What do you want here?"

The Weasel pointed to Joe.

"I want 'im," he said.

"Joe? You want Joe?"

"Yes. And I'm goin' to 'ave him!" said the Weasel threateningly. "I'm going to take 'im to his father, I am!"

"His father?"

"Yes—Bill Frayne!"

Joe made a choking sound in his throat.

"It can't be 'elped, Master Tom!" he said. "I've got to go! It can't be 'elped!"

Tom Merry stared at him.

"What do you mean, Joe?" he exclaimed.

"I've got to go!"

Fellows were gathering round from all sides now. Wally was one of the first to arrive, and the scamp of the Third was seen to range himself along with Joe and push back his cuffs. He had apparently forgotten that he was on bad terms with the waif of St. Jim's.

"The uttah wottah is certainly not goin' to take you away, Joe!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He cannot have any wight to do so."

Joe shook his head hopelessly.

"It's no good, Master D'Arcy. He's got me under his thumb, he has. Ever since he found me here by accident he ain't gone away; he's been hanging round the school, making me go out and meet him and take him money—"

Tom Merry uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Was that what you wanted the five pounds for, Joe?"

Joe's head drooped.

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Bai Jove!"

"He's had all I had, and all Master D'Arcy gave me," said Joe. "I've given him a lot of my things, too, to pawn. He's spent it all in drink."

Tom Merry's face was pale with distress.

"Joe, why did you do this?"

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"Yaas, wathah! Why did you do it, deah boy?"

Joe Frayne groaned.

"He'll toll you."

The Weasel chuckled.

"I'm goin' to take 'im to his father," he said. "Can't a nuan 'ave his own son if he likes? You come with me, young shaver!"

"I paid 'im the money to let me alone," said Joe wildly. "He took all I could give 'im, and wanted more. He told me if I didn't bring 'im another five pounds to-day he'd come here and show me up before the fellows, and take me away with him. He said I could steal the money if I hadn't got it."

"Bai Jove!"

"The scoundrel!"

"He said I was used to it," said Joe miserably. "He said I was a burglar's son, and could follow my father's trade. And so I might 'ave, once, Master Tom; but since I've been 'ere it seems different somehow. I couldn't steal."

"My poor kid!"

D'Arcy squeezed Joe's arm. His heart was too full for words. Wally rubbed his eye, as if some dust had got into it, and cast a fierce glance round as if to challenge anybody who might suppose that it was anything but dust in his eye.

"I can't keep it dark any longer," said Joe, with a gulp. "That villain is going to tell you all—he said he would if I didn't bring him some more money. My father's Bill Frayne, the burglar—the same who tried to break into Greyfriars School, that you've heard about. The police are looking for him now, and that villain is going to tell you about it. I don't care. I can't 'elp wot my father was, can I? I suppose nobody won't speak to me now—but I'm getting used to that! The best thing that can 'appen is for the 'Ead to let me go, even if I don't go with this chap."

"You sha'n't go with him!" said Tom Merry.

"Who says he won't?" demanded the Weasel fiercely.

"I do, you scoundrel!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm goin' to take 'im to 'is father," said the Weasel.

"If he won't come, Bill Frayne will come for him 'imself. 'Ow would he like that?"

Joe groaned.

"I must go, Master Tom! If my father came 'erc, he would be seen—and caught—and sent to prison again—and I can't stand that! I don't care what he is—he's my father."

"He won't come here," said Tom Merry quietly. "Do you think your father's ass enough to get himself arrested, for the sake of claiming you? Bill Frayne will keep far enough away from here, Joe."

"But—"

"As for this scoundrel, how do you know that he comes from your father at all? It may be all a lie to frighten you. He may not even know where your father is to be found."

"I know where he is!" said the Weasel fiercely. "I know—"

"You know where Frayne, the burglar, is?" rapped out Monty Lowther.

"Yes!" said the Weasel defiantly.

"Then you're liable to arrest for not informing the police," said Lowther promptly. "You are aiding and abetting a criminal to escape justice. Collar him, lads, and we'll telephone for the police."

The Weasel's face turned as pale as the inflamed colour of the skin would allow. He gave a wild look at the juniors, who were already closing round him, and then he made a dash towards the gates.

The Weasel ran wildly for the gates. But the light-footed juniors were swifter. They gained on the ruffian, and overtook him as he ran into the road. He yelled and squirmed as their grasp closed upon him.

"Leggo!" he yelled. "Let me go, young gents! I don't know anything about Bill Frayne—I swear I don't! I won't speak to Joe again. I was only frightening him! It was only because I was 'ard up! Let me go!"

"Duck him!" shouted Blake.

There was a deep-flowing ditch on the opposite side of the road. The juniors dragged the Weasel towards it. He struggled furiously, but in vain. Headlong into the ditch they hurled him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ruffian rose to the surface of the water, smothered with mud and drenched with water. He was gasping and spluttering frantically.

"Oh! Ow, ow! Help! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pelt him!" said Blake.

And the juniors pelted the rascal till he dragged himself out of the ditch on the opposite side, clambered over a fence, and fled madly across country. Then they returned to the school in high good-humour.

The Weasel had been disposed of, and he was not likely to darken the gates of St. Jim's again.

Meanwhile, Joe Frayne had stood like one in a dream. It seemed impossible to the lad that he was relieved of the nightmare that for the past week had been weighing so heavily upon his mind and spirits.

The unfortunate lad had allowed himself to be frightened by the Weasel's threats—and no wonder! But his terror seemed to be dissipated now. The dreadful truth was told—all St. Jim's knew it! But it only made his friends the firmer; and as for the snobs, they had always suspected something of the sort, and it could not make them worse than they had been.

"Buck up, Joe, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "It's all wight! You won't see that howwid wascal again! You're as safe as a bank, old son!"

Tom Merry pressed Joe's arm.

"Joe," he said, "answer me this. And listen, you fellows. You've been outside the school to meet that villain and take him money."

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Was that where you had gone when the detention-papers were mucked in the Shell Form-room?"

"My hat!" murmured Kangaroo.

"Yes, Master Tom," said Joe simply.

"And this was why you couldn't explain—because you couldn't tell the fellows about this chap and your father?"

"Yes, Master Tom."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and turned a pardonably triumphant look upon the juniors.

"I hope I'm not the sort of chap to say, 'I told you so,'" he remarked. "But I twust you fellahs will wemembah that I told you this all along! I knew that Joe hadn't done it!"

"I never did do it, sir."

"I believe you, Joe," said Tom Merry. "What do you fellows say?"

"The same thing, I expect," said Blake.

"Yes, rather!" said Kangaroo. "I'm sorry I suspected the young larrikin; but, after all, it was his own fault for not explaining. But look here, somebody mucked up the detention-papers, and put Joe's ink-bottle into the Form-room grate. The fellow who did that, did it to get Joe into trouble."

"Yes—and pretended that he saw Joe near the Form-room at the time, too," said Tom Merry quietly. "We now know that Joe couldn't have been there, as he was out of the school dealing with that scoundrel."

"You mean Mellish never saw him?"

"He couldn't have. And he had only one motive possible for lying—he was the chap who mucked up the detention-papers," said Tom Merry. "It's clear enough now. The cad did it out of spite, and to bring Joe into trouble."

"I'm going to ask Mellish about it," said Blake quietly.

"You explain to Kildare, Tom Merry."

Quite a number of juniors went with Blake to ask Mellish about it. The cad of the Fourth tried to fence at first; but he lost courage, and stammered out the truth—it was, indeed, of little use for him to do otherwise now. He had not counted upon Joe's being able to prove an alibi after all. And when Blake & Co. had done with Mellish the cad of St. Jim's had had a stern lesson to impress upon his mind the fact that the way of the transgressor is hard.

As the crowd of juniors in the quad, broke up Wally slipped his arm through Joe's. The waif of St. Jim's gave him a peculiar look.

"It's all serene now," said Wally coolly. "Of course, you ought to have explained to me from the first, and you jolly well deserve another licking, but I'm going to let you off. Look here, I'll let bygones be bygones, and we'll go on the same as before."

Joe could not help grinning. As Wally had not been the injured party, it was not clear what he had to let Joe off for; but Joe was not disposed to be critical. He was only too glad to be on chummy terms with Wally again.

"You—you know about my father now, Master Wally," he said hesitatingly.

"Oh, blow your governor!" said Wally. "After all, my governor is a bit of a trouble at times, so is my major—we all have our troubles. Never mind your governor, so long as he doesn't come burgling in the Third Form dorm. Let's get to the tuckshop! Come on, Gussy, old son, you deserve a gingerpop for standing up for Joe."

"I'm vewy pleased to see you good fwriends again—"

"Yes. Come on, don't jaw!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Here we are. Three fingers, Mrs. Taggles."

And the gingerpops were consumed with great cordiality by Wally and Joe and Joe's champion.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry and Co. next week, entitled "The Waif of St. Jim's," by Martin Clifford, and a thrilling instalment of "The Brotherhood of Iron." Order your GEM Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE WAIF OF ST. JIM'S."

[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and no reference or allusion is made to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A Thrilling Tale of Modern Adventure.



By ROBERT W. COMRADE.

INTRODUCTION.

Frank Kingston, a young Englishman, is engaged on a secret campaign against a criminal society called the Brotherhood of Iron. His aim being to ruin the society by ruining the members of the Inner Council. He has the assistance of Miss O'Brien, an accomplished young lady, Professor Graham Polgrave, a clever scientist and inventor, Carson Gray, a detective, Fraser, his man, and a lad named Tim.

Kingston has brought eight prominent members to book, and is proceeding to ruin the ninth—a certain Dr. Julius Zeetman. To do this, however, it is necessary to explore an asylum where Zeetman is in charge. Kingston manages to get in the asylum grounds, but before he has walked many yards he is confronted by a huge gorilla. He runs for his life, and manages to escape unhurt. Kingston comes to the conclusion that the animal must be got out of the way for a time before he can enter the building, and thinks out a scheme to accomplish this. Another idea also occurs to him, and he sets out to visit Professor Polgrave.

(Now go on with the story.)

Kingston Pays the Professor an Early Visit.

The curious old hermit welcomed Kingston warmly, and hurried him down into the laboratory. Kingston was rather surprised to see that Polgrave was fully dressed and had already started work. He slept very irregularly, working, as a matter of fact, at all times of the day and night. So it was more by chance than anything else that the professor happened to be at work when Kingston called.

"I am afraid, professor," he exclaimed, "I shall prove rather a nuisance to you, in spite of your continual denials!" "Not at all, my brave rescuer," cried the professor heartily, "not at all! When I say a thing I mean it. For, did I really think you a nuisance, I should not hesitate a moment to tell you that fact."

"Well, professor, I shall not detain you long on this occasion. My time is very limited, as you yourself know. Much has to come to pass this morning, and I must certainly be back at the Cyril by nine o'clock."

"You require something of me?"

"Well, in a way I do," replied Kingston. "It struck me last night that the most fitting way of punishing Dr. Zeetman would be to cause him to become, himself, a senseless lunatic. It would be, if such a thing could be accomplished, a first-class climax to the case."

Polgrave stroked his beard thoughtfully.

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"I agree with you, Kingston!" he exclaimed slowly. "A better way of dealing with Zeetman could not be thought of. But," he added, looking up, "what is your idea? How do you propose effecting the change in the doctor's mental condition?"

"Well," exclaimed Kingston, "I have heard that there are certain Oriental drugs which have such an effect upon a person. My main object in coming to you was to ask you if you can tell me where I can procure such a drug. Being a scientist yourself, I thought it pretty certain you would know."

The professor raised his hand and pointed to a shelf.

"The stuff you require," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, "is not very far away. That phial you can see on the shelf contains enough to drive a hundred people mad—permanently mad—in five minutes."

"By Jove, professor," laughed Kingston, "there seems to be nothing missing in your laboratory! Everything I ask for you can produce at a moment's notice!"

"This especial drug, however," replied the professor, "is one which I cannot claim to have invented. It is an Eastern drug, as you say, but I have made certain modifications which cause it to act upon the brain practically instantaneously, whereas, before I altered its nature, its action did not take place until the lapse of at least three hours. You can have some of it with pleasure, for to cause the doctor to become insane would be, indeed, a splendid plan. It would dispose of him very effectively, and absolutely eliminate him from the Brotherhood. But how do you intend to administer it?"

"I shall not decide that point until I have gained admission to the asylum," replied Kingston. "Once there I shall be able to form my plans according to circumstances, and I have no doubt at all that a favourable opportunity will very soon arise."

"Good!" murmured Professor Polgrave. "I will not keep you a minute, quite realising how valuable your time is this morning. I am already conversant with your other arrangements, and so will not trouble you by asking questions."

The professor stepped forward and approached the shelf, on which could be seen a small phial containing the liquid Kingston required. Polgrave reached up, and found that the phial was just within his grasp, for he was of slight build.

"Now," he said, "being not one of my own manufactures, this liquid is not given to the victim by means of an hypo-

dermic syringe, but is taken internally. It will be quite a simple matter to place it in any of Zeetman's beverages, for it is of such a nature that it could not be detected."

"I presume, then, that it is flavourless?"

"Practically so Kingston—practically so. What taste there is is so slight that ordinary drink—such as tea or coffee—would instantly drown it and so render its presence unnoticeable."

Polgrave handed the phial to Kingston.

"Take it," he said, "and do as you like with it. If you wish to make Dr. Zeetman insane for a period of one year only, or less, you have only to give him an eggspoonful, roughly speaking. But, as you intend his insanity to be permanent, it will be necessary to administer at least four times that amount. It will act on the instant, and will in no way impair the doctor's health. Its effect is to cause the mind to become unhinged, and as the years go on, instead of the effect wearing off, it will grow more pronounced."

"I feel perfectly justified in taking this course!" exclaimed Frank Kingston grimly. "Were Zeetman to receive his just deserts he would ascend the scaffold, for I know for a fact that several of his patients, while generally supposed to have died of brain fever, and other mental maladies, have, in reality, died from a very different cause. Therefore I shall be letting Zeetman off very lightly indeed if I at once succeed in making him helpless and of no further use to the Brotherhood, from which he will, of course, be expelled. The only fear I have is, that he will talk about the Brotherhood after the effect of the drug has become established."

"You may set your mind at rest on that point without delay. The poison will cause your victim to forget all his past life, and think only of his surroundings. He will, in fact, become as a child. At first there will be no sign of violence, but later on, perhaps, he may become a little awkward to manage."

"Thank you, professor. I never come to you in vain," said Kingston, pocketing the phial, and shaking the professor heartily by the hand.

The latter's visage was simply a mass of creases as he smiled at his companion. He took a keen delight in helping Kingston, and it afforded him the greatest pleasure in the world to supply the latter's wants.

"Good-bye, professor, and expect to see me again in something less than a week!" exclaimed Kingston as he opened the door of the laboratory preparatory to departing. "There is heavy work before me, I imagine, but I go to perform it with a light heart, for the ruin of the Brotherhood is my sole object in life, and the more rapid the action the better I like it!"

"Good luck to you, brave friend," cried Polgrave—"good luck to you! I have no fears for your safety, for knowing what you have already accomplished, it is practically self-evident that you will complete this task as satisfactorily as you have done the others. Farewell!"

"As straight as a die right to the backbone!" Kingston told himself as soon as he got outside. "Eccentric as he is, the old fellow has got as good a heart as beats in any breast to-day! A true friend, and a valuable one—yes, an extremely valuable one!"

It was close upon nine when he arrived at the Cyril again, and the very first thing he did was to stow away a considerably hearty breakfast. Having performed that very necessary operation, he set to work. In the privacy of his bed-room he rapidly changed his clothes. When he had finished he was attired in well-made, though distinctly old-fashioned, tweeds. The boots he donned were of the elastic-sided variety, and his collar and tie were similar to those worn years ago.

His next action was of a much more delicate character, namely, that of disguising his features so that they resembled those of an old gentleman of sixty-five. Not one atom of make-up did he use, his whole transformation having been accomplished by the use of the professor's marvellous preparations.

The muscles of his face had altered their appearance completely, and his ears had become extremely prominent. This was not all, for while his brow had been clean and open before, it was now wrinkled, and his eyebrows were lowering and prominent. The colour of the eyes had changed to a pale blue, giving him a peculiarly vacant appearance.

A pair of spectacles completed the disguise, and to imagine that this decrepit individual was, in reality, Frank Kingston, seemed too utterly absurd to bear suggestion.

"By Jove," thought Kingston, surveying himself in the looking-glass—"by Jove! I cannot imagine what I should have done without the professor! My admiration for him is unbounded, and it was a lucky day for me when I rendered

him that slight assistance in Piccadilly Circus. Now I think I am quite ready."

From the corner of the room he produced an umbrella of extremely bulky proportions, and, grasping this, he hobbled out of the room, his whole appearance being a masterpiece of disguise and superb acting. Arriving in his study, he rang the bell for Fraser.

"Ah," he exclaimed, when the latter appeared, "is Mr. Kingston in, if you please? If not, kindly tell him that Mr. Meredith Hall is waiting to see him."

Kingston's voice was disguised so magnificently that Fraser had not the slightest suspicion that it was indeed his master who stood before him. Kingston's voice came in an asthmatic wheeze, and he appeared to have some difficulty in gaining his breath. Fraser looked at him curiously.

"I didn't hear you knock, sir!" he exclaimed, half suspiciously.

"No, my man. I gained admittance by other means," wheezed Kingston, secretly enjoying himself. "I have been here—in these rooms—for at least half an hour, and I really must see Mr. Kingston at once!"

"You've been 'ere half an hour, sir? Why, I was in this very room myself only five minutes ago. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to explain, sir."

"Quite right, Fraser—quite right!" laughed Kingston, suddenly standing upright. "What do you think of my get-up?"

"The gov'nor!" gasped Fraser in amazement. "By gosh, sir, I shouldn't ha' known you in a hundred years!"

"I do not doubt your word, Fraser," laughed Kingston drily, laying his umbrella against the wall and seating himself in one of the easy-chairs before the fire. "You will realise, of course, that I have been enabled to disguise myself to such perfection as this with the aid of Professor Polgrave's chemicals. I am quite sure you would never have known me, had I not revealed myself. Now, Fraser, in a very few minutes I am expecting an elderly lady to call. Show her in without question, for, although you will be unable to detect it, she is, in reality, Miss O'Brien. You understand?"

"Quite, sir," replied Fraser, an eager expression entering his eyes. "Gum, but you're goin' into it in earnest this time! It's about time that old brute Zeetman was brought to light."

"The door, Fraser!" interrupted Kingston suddenly, as a slight tap was heard outside.

The valet left the room quickly, and a moment later ushered in "Miss Sarah Thurston!"—a spare, old-fashioned-looking lady of about fifty. She wore a bonnet, and though dressed expensively, there was, nevertheless, a dingy appearance about her, clearly proclaiming her to be an old maid.

The resemblance to the beautiful Dolores was absolutely nil, and it would have been a remarkably clever man—or woman, for the matter of that—who succeeded in fathoming the disguise. Fraser was looking at her curiously, and he needed no telling that she had used the same materials as had Frank Kingston. The one great point about the professor's discovery was the fact that it left no mark whatever upon the person who used it. And, as there were no greasy paints to be used, Dolores welcomed the new method eagerly.

"By Jove, Dolores," exclaimed Kingston, when Fraser had left the room, and as he shook his companion by the hand, "your disguise is absolutely perfect!"

"Whatever my disguise is, Mr. Kingston, it cannot possibly be better than your own," replied Dolores, with a smile—although it was nothing like her own, try as Kingston would to detect it.

"Yes, I think we shall both pass. The real business starts now, Dolores, and I am quite confident that you are eagerly looking forward to playing your part as eagerly as I am looking forward to playing mine!"

Dr. Julius Zeetman Comes to London.

Dolores seated herself.

"Yes," she said, in answer to Kingston's remarks, "I am indeed eagerly awaiting for this new game to commence. The thrill of being once more in the fight has taken possession of me. But I am wasting time. There is news to tell you."

"You have carried out the plans as arranged?"

"Exactly, Mr. Kingston. Last night I disguised myself as you now see me, and took rooms at a boarding-house in Fulham, from which address I despatched the letter to Dr. Zeetman, telling him that my cousin, Mr. Meredith Hall, had become incapable, and I therefore thought it best that he should be placed under the doctor's care. I asked him

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to wire before eleven o'clock should he decide to come up himself, and now, of course, I am awaiting that wire. I have already told the landlady at the boarding-house, and she is expecting you to return with me preparatory to starting for the asylum."

"Good!" exclaimed Kingston. "I have no doubt at all that Zeetman can come up personally. You will, of course, explain to the doctor when he arrives that you have taken care of me for many years, for I am supposedly incapable."

"Yes," replied Dolores, "I shall certainly explain that. You mean to start right away now, I suppose, for the sooner we are in Fulham the better?"

"I have a few words to say to Fraser before we depart. I have paid a visit to the professor this morning, but for what reason I will explain as we travel to Fulham. It was necessary that you should come here, as if to fetch me, for I could never have arrived at the boarding-house alone. But about Fraser."

Kingston's summons was immediately answered.

"Fraser," he exclaimed, "you are well acquainted with the business at present on hand. To-day I and Miss O'Brien are travelling down to the Grange Private Lunatic Asylum, and it is the first step towards the undoing of Zeetman. It is almost certain that I shall require your assistance, and that of Tim, but at present I am not quite certain of my plans. Therefore, Fraser, I want you to travel to-night disguised, on a hired motor-car, to the spot you dropped me at last night, near the asylum. Take Tim with you, and the rope-ladder. When you arrive, send Tim to the asylum, and tell him to wait outside the walls from twelve o'clock until one. If nothing happens by one, he is to go back to you, and you are to simply return home. Repeat this performance every night until you hear from me to the contrary."

"Very good, sir. I will do exactly as you say."

"You understand thoroughly, Fraser? I can trust you to carry out those orders explicitly."

"To the very letter, sir!" exclaimed Fraser, with a gleam of excitement in his eyes. "I don't need no second tellin', sir, an' everything shall go off as you say."

"Excellent, Fraser! I know I can trust you," said Kingston. "Good-bye for the present. Any further orders you shall receive via Tim."

"Right, sir! Good-bye, sir!" And Fraser touched his cap to both Kingston and Dolores, and left the room. Kingston did not hesitate to leave the matter in Fraser's hands without further instructions, for he had every confidence in the latter's ability.

"There is now no necessity for us to remain longer," exclaimed Kingston, rising, and placing an old-fashioned silk hat on his head. "Come, we shall have to be careful in entering the corridor, for I think it would be rather unwise for both of us to be seen leaving these rooms; although, of course, an observer would merely think we were visitors."

They passed into the little hall, and so out into the broad corridor, which, fortunately, was deserted. Kingston's attitude was the same as formerly—bent, and shaking. He looked every inch the character he was supposed to portray. Dolores, too, had every appearance of the elderly maiden lady, and a more simple-minded and innocent-looking couple would be hard to find.

It was not a taxi they drove in this time, but one of the few handsome cabs which still exist in the London streets. The boarding-house in Fulham was of the higher-class variety, and stood a little back from the road.

"Miss Sarah Thurston" led the way up the garden path, having hold of "Mr. Meredith Hall's" arm with considerable pressure, this being to keep up the appearance of incapability on his part. The landlady welcomed them in the hall, but Dolores did not linger more than a minute or two.

She had hired the best sitting-room in the house, and it was into this apartment she led Kingston, who had taken no notice of the landlady at all, but was muttering audibly to himself about money matters, repeatedly asking Dolores why she had not given the cab-driver a five-pound note. The landlady had smiled sympathetically, and set him down as a harmless crank, and felt rather glad than otherwise that he was to be in the house for a few hours only.

A cheerful fire blazed in the sitting-room, and Dolores led her charge to a couch near by. On this Kingston seated himself with many mutters and grunts, gazing about him meanwhile with a vacant stare. Not that there was any real necessity for him to act in this manner, for the room contained only himself and Dolores, but Kingston believed in doing a thing properly, and he told himself it was all practice.

"Ah," said Dolores, with a swift glance round the room, "the telegram has already come."

She picked the buff-coloured envelope from the table and tore the flap open. Then a smile appeared on her face as she read the contents of the wire out.

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"Zeetman is coming," she said, looking over to Kingston. "Listen to this: 'Thank you for letter. Will be at your address not later than eleven-thirty.—ZEETMAN.' There is plenty of time," continued Dolores, "for it is not eleven yet."

"I thought your letter would fetch him," murmured Kingston, in a low tone, this being merely precaution in case the conversation was overheard. "Well, we can easily pass the half-hour away by discussing our plans. They will not deteriorate by being talked over—everything is capable of improvement."

The time passed quickly enough, and Dr. Zeetman was prompt to time. In fact, he put in an appearance at twenty minutes past eleven. He was shown up by the landlady, who evidently regarded him as a very important personage indeed. Certainly Zeetman had an imposing carriage and a suave manner.

He was a tall man—tall and thin—and his age might have been anything from fifty to sixty-five. He wore a beard—if a little tuft of hair under his lower lip could be called a beard—but no moustache. This gave him an appearance decidedly foreign, but his conversation showed no sign of foreign accent.

"Miss Thurston?" he murmured, as he shook Dolores by the hand. "I received your letter first thing this morning, and decided to come up immediately, for I always do everything in my power to meet the requirements of my clients."

"I am glad you have come, doctor," replied Dolores, trying hard to repress an expression of loathing entering her eyes, for Zeetman's oily manners and soft voice seemed to remind her irresistibly of a venomous serpent. Had she not known the man's true record she might not have had this sensation so markedly pronounced. But, knowing Zeetman's character as she did, she found it impossible to regard him as the average person would have done.

"Who is that?" wheezed Kingston suddenly, gazing at Zeetman as though he were some peculiar animal. "Sarah, why have you not introduced me? I must know who it is at once, for I have many financial questions to discuss with him."

Dolores bent closer to Zeetman.

"He is the possessor of a large fortune," she whispered, "and it was that which drove him to his present pitiable condition. He is, of course, incapable of managing his own affairs, so I have perforce to do it for him. His sole thought is of his money."

"Quite so," replied Zeetman professionally. For an instant a gleam came into his eyes as he heard Dolores' words—words which had, of course, been specially prepared to make the Inner Councillor decide, at all costs, to have Mr. Meredith Hall in his asylum.

"He is quite beyond seeing after himself," explained Dolores, looking at Kingston, who was busily engaged muttering to himself, and evidently making calculations, for he was counting on his fingers ceaselessly.

"Have no fear about that, Miss Thurston," said the scoundrelly doctor. "He will be well looked after at my establishment."

"I am afraid you misunderstand me, doctor," said Dolores. "My cousin has been used for the last ten years to being attended by myself, and it would be out of the question for me to leave him now. I shall, of course, accompany him to the asylum, and see after him as is my usual custom."

Dr. Zeetman rose to his feet suddenly, and shook his head. "I am afraid, Miss Thurston," he said, "that I could not allow you to accompany Mr. Hall. I have other patients who are quite well looked after by my own nurses. Besides, it would be impossible for you to live in such surroundings—quite impossible!"

"Then I am afraid, Dr. Zeetman, that it is useless our further discussing the question," exclaimed Dolores, who was quite prepared for this contingency. "There are other private asylums in the country, but having been recommended to you, I naturally turned in your direction first. What objection you can have to my presence in your asylum is a puzzle to me."

Dr. Zeetman realised that he had made a slip, and hastened to correct it.

"Of course," he said, "I may, under exceptional circumstances, allow you to accompany your cousin. I may add that it is quite against my usual custom to admit sane persons into the Grange."

"I wish you to quite understand, Dr. Zeetman, that Mr. Hall goes nowhere without myself accompanying him. He has been accustomed to it for years past, and I could not think of leaving him now. I would prefer, of course, to live in apartments or in a house of my own, but he has periodical fits of violence which make that utterly impossible. At present he is quite harmless and easily manageable."

"Well, considering everything," replied Zeetman thoughtfully, "I think I may stretch a point on this occasion, and



the asylum, where all the attendants were common members of the Brotherhood, he realised that it would be foolish to refuse this offer.

"Yes," he said, "I will accept your terms, Miss Thurston, and should like to have a month's fees in advance. It is my usual custom."

"Certainly," said Dolores. "I have the money with me now, so there will be no delay."

She opened her purse and withdrew from it a sheaf of banknotes. Kingston had ceased his calculations, and was watching his two companions with apparent interest, although there was still a vacant stare in his disguised pale-blue eyes. Suddenly he bent forward.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Money! That is it, Sarah! Give it to him—give him as much as he wants! A thousand pounds will not be a penny too much—not a penny!"

"Hush, my dear!" said Dolores, turning round, and lifting her finger sternly, as though addressing a child. "This gentleman has promised to take us into his house, where you will be quite comfortable."

"That is very good of him," wheezed Kingston. "Let him have free access to my cheque-book."



Suddenly the table and chair creaked as Kingston exerted his strength. For a moment the tension was great, then came a snapping crackle, as of breaking woodwork, and the ponderous skylight was forced clear of its bolt. (See page 23.)

allow you to see after your cousin as usual. You thoroughly understand, however, that the fees will be increased—"

"I was about to discuss that question myself, doctor," said Dolores, looking across at the visitor through her eyeglasses. "Mr. Hall is a very rich man, and I may say that I shall be willing to pay double your usual fees if I am allowed to do as I want. I should require a room near to his, and also a private sitting-room in which we can have our meals, for Mr. Hall is, as a rule, quite capable of attending to his own wants in that respect, and is sometimes even sane enough to be able to converse. It is only when the fits attack him that he gets beyond control, and it is for that reason only that I have come to you. Happily, these fits are infrequent."

Dr. Zeetman stroked his little beard for a moment. He was thinking of this large fortune Dolores spoke about, and although he did not like the idea of having a stranger in

"He is quite insane on that one subject," murmured Dolores, so that Kingston would not hear her, "and is constantly telling me to give money away as though it were water. Indeed, had I not charge of it for him, he would present hundreds of pounds to anybody who liked to ask for it."

"I understand precisely. He is no unusual case. Thank you!"

Dr. Zeetman picked up the money Dolores had laid on the table and made out a receipt for it. Looking at her, he could not help thinking that she would hold a very close hand upon her cousin's money. Yet that simple look about her caused him to make up his mind that he would gain, if possible, possession of at least some of the money. Never a breath of suspicion that everything was not as represented entered his head, astute as the doctor was.

Had he really known what was to come of this interview,

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he would have given a good deal more than a thousand pounds to keep "Mr. Meredith Hall" out of his establishment. But he did not know, and so the first step towards his downfall was taken.

"You understand," said Dolores, "that we shall want to take up our residence at the Grange this afternoon? I mentioned it to you in the letter. So you have, perhaps, made arrangements?"

"With the exception of preparing a room for yourself, I have," replied the Inner Councillor. "There is a train back at about four o'clock. I have other business to attend to in London, so if you will be ready by three-thirty, I will call with a carriage, and we can all travel down together. The first thing I do will be to telegraph to my head nurse to have a bed-room prepared for you, in addition to the sitting-room."

"That plan will suit me nicely, doctor," said Dolores; "so if you call at the time arranged, I will have Mr. Hall quite ready for departure."

A few more words of conversation, and Dr. Julius Zeetman departed to attend to his other business, decidedly pleased that he had succeeded in securing these new clients.

"His other business in London," murmured Kingston, when he and Dolores were alone again, "is undoubtedly that of paying a visit to Lord Mount-Fannell. Zeetman is a man who has great belief in his own capabilities, and who has an idea that he would make a much better chief than Mount-Fannell. I know him almost well enough to talk to, having met him in the Council Chamber on the various occasions I have paid visits to that apartment in disguise as other members."

"There is something about him which seems to show his true character immediately!" exclaimed Dolores. "But perhaps that is because I know his true character."

"Very probably," returned Kingston. "He seems to be fairly popular, however, among his fellow-councillors. I was certain he would accept me as a patient when he heard about the money. In his desire to gain a little extra wealth, however, he will find that he has commenced to traverse the road which will lead to his destruction!"

The Arrival at the Grange.

At about three-thirty, as Dolores was looking out of the window into the street, she saw a closed landau, drawn by a pair of beautiful horses, stop in front of the boarding-house.

"Zeetman evidently believes in keeping up appearances," she observed. "The carriage which has just drawn up outside is really a splendid equipage!"

"Yes," agreed Kingston, coming to her side, and speaking in that same wheezy voice—he had been doing so for the past two hours, so that he would become thoroughly accustomed to it. "Zeetman has the idea that a first good impression is the main thing. In this way friends and relations of a patient get the notion into their heads that he is a very great man indeed. I am not so sure that it is not a good plan in his class of work."

A few minutes later the tall form of Dr. Zeetman was ushered into the sitting-room. He found the patient quite ready to depart so there was no delay in getting off. Kingston was particularly quiet, saying a word only now and again, and quite inconsequently when he did so. He did this so as to give Zeetman the impression that he was very little trouble.

The latter, in spite of his sinister character, was a good conversationalist, and kept Dolores entertained throughout the journey. Indeed, had she not known the man's awful profession, she would have become quite enthusiastic in their discussions. Knowing all, however, she took practically no interest in what he said, and merely treated him with polite courtesy, as befitted the character she was portraying.

At the quiet country station where they alighted, they found a large, ugly-looking coach, very different from the landau which had taken them to the station in London. It was dull black in colour, and there were merely two small windows in either side. A man in uniform sat on the seat at the top, and altogether the vehicle looked very much like a prison-van, though decidedly smaller.

The doctor led the way into it, without a word of comment, and neither Dolores nor Kingston—the latter was not to be considered, anyway—thought it worth while remarking upon it. Nevertheless, Dolores thought it unwise on Zeetman's

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part on this occasion, when she, a perfectly sane person, was travelling to his establishment. But Kingston thought otherwise. He knew perfectly well that Zeetman meant to gain possession of the supposed money—that he did not intend "Miss Sarah Thurston" to see the outer world again, but to keep her imprisoned in the asylum as a lunatic herself. That, though, would not be thought about until she had been at the Grange a month or two. And before then—well, much would have happened before then.

At last the gates of the asylum were reached—those gates Kingston had stood beside only the night before. They were wide open now, and in the dull, diminishing light of the spring afternoon, the straggling building, and its surrounding lofty wall, seemed more like a prison than ever. The sky had become clouded a little, and Kingston was perfectly sure that before the night was out a stiff gale would be blowing. He could tell this quite plainly.

A man, attired in uniform—Dolores thought it looked like that of a prison warder—opened the door of the coach and helped its inmates to descend. There were two trunks on the top—trunks containing clothes, etc., packed especially for appearance sake. These were taken inside and set down in the hall.

The room into which Zeetman led his visitors was a fairly cheerful one, and was what he chose to call his consulting-room, though it was very seldom indeed he had occasion to consult anybody. A meagre fire burned in the grate, and dispersed but little warmth into the room. The furniture was dingy, and Dolores was not at all impressed. Hardly a sound could be heard from the other side of the door, and it was very evident that the asylum part of the building—the portion where the lunatics were quartered, as it were—was some distance away.

"If you will wait here a moment," exclaimed Dr. Zeetman, with his hand on the door, "I will see if your rooms are prepared. If so, I will send someone to show you the way to them. I am sorry I cannot stop, but my patients must be attended to; some of them require me every hour of the day, so I must go now and give them some little consolation."

He smiled in his best manner, and withdrew. All this time Kingston had never once ceased motion with his hands, which he constantly waved about in his assumed pantomimical manner. He was for ever muttering out his calculations, never for an instant forgetting the part he was playing.

Both Dolores and Kingston knew perfectly well that it would be risky to talk there, where their words might be overheard by some servant. Therefore Dolores merely spoke a few words to him suited to the occasion, and he, in reply, ordered her to go outside and give the driver of the coach a five-pound note. It was not so much the words, but the way in which Kingston said them; the superb manner in which he acted.

Before they had been alone five minutes a woman, dressed in the uniform of a nurse, put in an appearance. There were several such nurses in the asylum, but none of them were, of course, aware of the Brotherhood of Iron's existence. As a matter of fact, they were all women who had served some sentence or other in prison, and who had been engaged by Zeetman personally. All they knew was that the doctor was a scoundrel, and that they received extra high wages for keeping still tongues in their heads.

"If you will follow me, madam," said the woman who had entered the consulting-room, "I will show you to your apartments. You must be tired after your journey, and I will let you have some tea as soon as possible."

"Thank you so much!" exclaimed Dolores, giving the nurse a pleasant smile—although she knew the woman to be bad to the core. Dolores' object was to get on good terms with all the keepers and nurses, and so lost no time in making the first advances. She could see well enough that Zeetman had given instructions that these visitors should receive special attention.

Outside the room a long hall led to the back of the house—the original building. Out from this had been erected a long, double line of apartments, and it was this which gave the place so monotonous an appearance. Arriving at the end of the hall, the nurse opened a heavy oaken door, and Kingston and Dolores found themselves entering upon a dingy corridor, narrow and lofty. The light was obtained through the little skylights in the roof, which showed that they were in the new wing—that part of the establishment where all the lunatics were housed.

"Your rooms are at the extreme end, Miss Thurston," said the nurse, "and I am sure you will find them quite comfortable and quiet."

As the new arrivals walked along this passage they could not help again realising how prison-like was this sinister house. The floor over which they were walking was of bare concrete, and the walls merely distempered in a dark-red shade. On either side were little doors—very strong doors, with bolts on the outside—and on each a number was painted

in white letters. Above the portals a little grating could be seen, and as Dolores walked along she distinctly heard sounds emanating from some of these latter. Altogether the passage had left an unpleasant impression on her mind, and she thought she felt a chill come over her.

"And to think these poor people have been here for years," she thought to herself. "How glad they will be if Mr. Kingston succeeds in setting them at liberty! For they are not all insane! No, I am sure that quite two-thirds are in full possession of their mental faculties."

Arriving at the end of the passage, the nurse opened another door similar to the one at the further end.

"You see," she explained, "you are quite shut off from the rest of the wards. There will always be a man on guard on this side of the door, so should you want anything, it will be very easy to draw his attention, by knocking on the door."

"Then it will be locked?" Dolores asked.

"Yes, Dr. Zeetman considers it will be the safest way. But come through. You will find these rooms quite to your liking, I am sure."

They passed through the doorway, and found themselves now in a kind of hall, or lobby, which, although carpeted and furnished, still obtained its light from the roof. There were three other doors besides the one they had just closed behind them—one exactly facing, and one on either side.

"To the left is Mr. Hall's private room," said the nurse, "and to the right is your own, madam. That in front is the sitting-room, where you will have your meals."

"And is there no other outlet?"

"No, madam. The only way into the other part of the house, or into the grounds, is by means of the passage we have just passed along. You are quite private here, and, I am sure, will be very comfortable."

The sitting-room proved to be an extremely cheerful apartment, after the gloominess of their other surroundings; for, despite the absence of windows in the walls, the skylight was of large dimensions, tastefully draped with curtains. A bright fire burned in the grate, and the table was laid for tea. Dolores could see that the room had been hastily improvised, but it had been done thoroughly, and the result was far better than either she or Kingston had expected. Clearly Zeetman wished to retain this patient.

"This is very nice indeed!" exclaimed Dolores, genuinely pleased. "I should not have thought such a pleasant room as this could have existed after all those dull passages. But the other rooms?"

"I will show them to you now, madam."

And the nurse, who seemed remarkably polite, led the way into the lobby once again. She evidently knew of Mr. Hall's supposed wealth, and was on her best behaviour in the hope of liberal gratuities to come.

The two bed-rooms were nicely furnished, and in good taste, and Dolores was handed the key of Kingston's, for she was, of course, Kingston's nurse. But, although nobody in the establishment knew it, this innocent-looking couple were to be, before very long, the cause of a general breaking-up of the whole establishment.

"There is a bell in the sitting-room," said the nurse, "which is connected with the nurses' room on the other side of the heavy door. So, should you want anything, please ring."

"Thank you. And the tea?"

"That will be brought to you in a few minutes, madam," replied the nurse. "Afterwards Dr. Zeetman will pay a visit and examine your patient."

The woman left them, and a few moments later they were in the sitting-room, Dolores having led Kingston to an arm-chair and seated him in it. The necessity for great precaution was very evident. Without a word, Dolores left the room, and examined both of the others. Everything she looked at—the doors, the skylights, and the lobby outside. Finally, she was quite satisfied that they were alone, and that no one could possibly overhear what they said.

Kingston looked up sharply as she entered.

"It is all right," said Dolores, "we are quite by ourselves."

"Good! Then I can drop this monotonous pretence. Jove, Dolores, but it's been a tedious task keeping it up all this while."

"It must have been, Mr. Kingston. But what do you think of the room?"

"Better than I expected," replied Kingston, looking round him, "although, had we not known the facts, it would have been rather a puzzler why we should have been put in this corner of the building practically under lock and key. Zeetman was told I was not violent, and so could easily have given us rooms in the other part of the house. The old scoundrel has an object in placing us here as though we were both insane."

"Yes, he must have," said Dolores. "And that object is, now I come to think of it, to keep us both here, imprisoned."

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as long as we live. Dr. Zeetman is under the impression that we are very simple folk to deal with, and that it will be the easiest matter in the world to gain possession of the money I am supposed to control."

They both laughed silently at the situation.

"By acting in this manner, Zeetman is putting his own head in a noose!" exclaimed Frank Kingston. "This is the very part of the building I wished to be in more than another. It is the spot where all the so-called lunatics are housed, and I can reach them better from this place than I could from any other. But we will not talk of our plans now, but wait until tea is brought in, so that we can be sure of being alone."

That this was a wise action on Kingston's part was proved a minute afterwards, for the nurse appeared bearing a tray, which she set down on the well-laid table.

"You will find everything here you need," she said. "I will come again in an hour's time to clear away and take any further orders."

"Thank you, nurse. And please tell Dr. Zeetman to come as soon after that as possible, for my patient is in the habit of retiring not later than seven o'clock."

"Very good, madam."

Once more they were alone, and neither had any fault to find with the meal provided. Kingston knew this to be unusual, but then, of course, the doctor wished to create a good first impression.

"Now, Dolores, with regard to the plans!" exclaimed Kingston, standing with his back to the fire. "I do not mean to waste a single moment, but to start operations this very night."

"But, Mr. Kingston, I do not see how you can."

"I will tell you. I am enjoying this episode remarkably, and I mean to give Zeetman a little mystification before dealing with him personally. As you know, more than half of the patients in this establishment are as sane as I am myself. Well, what I mean to do is to release these, one by one, and convey them to London. I shall set one at liberty to-night, one to-morrow night, and so on until the whole sixteen are rescued. That is the number, I think. And, on second thoughts, I think it would be best, after going on for three nights, to set the rest at liberty in two batches, departing with the last lot ourselves, and leaving Dr. Zeetman behind, locked in one of his own cells, a hopeless imbecile."

"Your plan sounds simple enough at the present moment," smiled Dolores, "but I cannot possibly see how you are to carry it out. It is quite impossible to take these people out of the cells—Dr. Zeetman calls them private rooms—as though there were no keepers about. And, although it might be easy to release the first two, after that there would be a strict watch kept both inside and out, and it would be out of the question to carry out your object."

Kingston polished his spectacles thoughtfully.

"I think you know me well enough, Dolores," he drawled, in his old, languid voice, "to realise that I shall do as I say. However impracticable it sounds now, it shall be done, and although the risks are great, I shall take them with the lightest of hearts, and I know that you will help me to the very best of your ability."

"You may be sure of that, Mr. Kingston. I will say nothing further about the matter, but wait and see how events turn out."

"The bulk of the prisoners—for they are nothing else—are men, and the three women I shall require you to see after personally, Dolores. That will not be until the last night, however, when the denouement takes place."

Kingston glanced up at the skylight.

"The way these rooms are arranged is admirable," he chuckled. "The skylights are infinitely better than windows for my purpose."

"There is one thing I should like to know, Mr. Kingston," said Dolores thoughtfully. "How do you know which are the sane persons and which the insane?"

"I do not know. But, after I have retired for the night—at seven o'clock—I want you to express a desire to look over the building. It will be no unusual request, and the doctor will assuredly comply with what you ask."

"I am afraid I am dense, Mr. Kingston."

"Not in the least, Dolores. If you look at the matter in my light, however, you will grasp my meaning. Reckoning purely by logical inference, the doctor will show you only those patients who are really insane. There are six of these, and I want you to take note of the numbers and positions of the rooms they occupy. I am practically convinced that Zeetman will do as I say, for it would be rather risky were he to take a stranger such as yourself into a cell where there was another sane individual."

"I follow your meaning, and it undoubtedly sounds logical. Once you know the cells the real lunatics occupy, you will also know that the others contain the people you are intent upon setting free, and who are eking out an existence far worse than a criminal in prison, for while the latter knows he is being justly punished, the former lives on with no hope of deliverance or escape. Even if one tries to explain his terrible position, no notice is taken, for who will listen to a person who is out of his mind? It must be truly a terrible predicament."

"It is, Dolores, and I have nothing but the most sincere pity in my heart for these unfortunate people. Some of them have been here for over ten years, and by now have become resigned to their fate. For what hope have they? What hope can they have? In time they will almost imagine themselves to be insane. A convict knows when his time is up, but people under Dr. Zeetman's care, know that they are prisoners for life."

"And now they are going to be rescued," said Dolores, her eyes shining a little. "What rapturous feelings of joy they will experience when they find themselves free—free to do as they like—free to go back to their relations. I cannot help thinking, Mr. Kingston, that this will be the best work you have done since you came from the Iron Island!"

"I will not say that, Dolores, but—"
Kingston broke off suddenly, darted to his easy chair, and commenced mumbling to himself as before. Dolores was a little surprised, for she had heard nothing. Nevertheless, Kingston had. His singularly acute sense of hearing had detected the sound of a bolt being shot with unusual quietness. The next second there came a tap at the door.

"Come in," said Dolores, giving Kingston a quick glance.

The door opened, and Dr. Julius Zeetman entered. The doctor stood for a moment just inside the room looking, with smiling face, at his two visitors. Then he quietly shut the door, and advanced towards Dolores.

"The nurse told you I was coming?" he asked. "I told her to. And how do you like your rooms, Miss Thurston? There was not over much time in which to prepare them, but we did our best."

"Oh, they are quite all right, thank you," replied Dolores. "I like them because they are quite out of the way of everything. But you have come to examine my cousin?"

"That is the object of my visit, Miss Thurston," replied Zeetman, in his usual oily tones. "I shall be only a few minutes, for I am sure Mr. Hall will not prove in any way troublesome."

"Oh, no. It is very seldom indeed that he has fits of violence," agreed Dolores. "There is, however, a necessity for an examination, for I should like you to tell me exactly what you think of my cousin's case."

For the next five minutes there was scarcely a word of conversation in the room, for Dr. Zeetman was busily engaged in examining Kingston's skull, his eyes, etc. Kingston affected to dislike the attentions of the doctor, for he became snappy and cross. Zeetman took absolutely no notice, however, but continued his work unmoved.

The questioning he submitted Kingston to resulted in nothing whatever, for the patient persisted in telling Zeetman that if he got out of the room he would give him a cheque for £500. Every query was answered in the most absurd manner, and the doctor finally gave it up as a bad job. His brow was somewhat clouded.

"Your cousin's case is somewhat puzzling," he announced finally. "To tell the truth, I can make neither head nor tail of it. So far as I can see his brain is quite normal, yet there is no shadow of doubt that he is quite out of his mind. His eyes, as you will have noticed, are quite vacant and expressionless."

"Do you think you can succeed in curing him?"

"That is a difficult point to answer, Miss Thurston. Frankly, I do not. But tell me, has he had, at any time, a heavy fall, or a knock on the head, or—"

"No," replied Dolores immediately, "not that I am aware

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of. His insanity simply seemed to develop. It has been my constant hope that as soon as he was placed under your charge he would begin to improve."

"Then I am afraid, Miss Thurston, that you will be disappointed. From the short examination I have made I can only say that Mr. Hall will never recover from his present state of insanity. I should say, seeing he has received no blow, that, being such a rich man, his money has been the cause of this unfortunate state of affairs. His very actions tend to prove my words."

"I think you must be right, doctor," said Dolores gravely. "I am sorry you can give me no hope, but before many months have passed perhaps your attentions may have the looked-for result."

"I earnestly hope so, Miss Thurston," agreed the doctor, in what seemed the most sincere tones. His words with regard to Kingston's recovery were, of course, uttered to further his own ends, for, even if he could have "cured" Dolores' "cousin" within a week, he would have told Dolores that there was absolutely no chance of recovery.

"There is one thing I should like to ask you, doctor," said Dolores smilingly. "Mr. Hall retires very shortly now, and I should like, if you have no objection, to see round the building. I have never been in an asylum before, but have often wondered what it is like. The glimpse I had when coming to these rooms was, of course, hardly enough to satisfy my curiosity."

The doctor looked up sharply.

"My dear Miss Thurston!" he exclaimed. "Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to take you round, and show you the other patients. Afterwards you might like a walk in the grounds. I assure you, despite the bleak nature of the surrounding country, the garden itself is, in the twilight, a decidedly pleasant place."

"Thank you so much, doctor," said Dolores. "After my journey there is nothing I should like better."

"Then I will call at half-past seven if that will suit you?" exclaimed Zeetman, with his hand on the door.

"That will do nicely, thank you!"

A moment later Zeetman had gone, leaving Dolores and Kingston looking at one another, their eyes displaying the satisfaction they felt. They heard the heavy dividing door close, and knew that the scoundrelly doctor had departed. Before speaking, however, Dolores made sure by going out and listening for a moment. When she returned, Kingston was standing on the hearthrug, with his back resting against the mantelpiece.

"I was convinced he would accede to your request," he said quietly. "Our plans are working smoothly. Dolores, and before the night is out one of the patients will be safely away in London. Zeetman little guesses that your innocent request is to have the most startling results."

"Even now I cannot see how you will affect the escape, Mr. Kingston. The task appears to my mind, quite impracticable. When I return from my walk in the grounds we shall both be locked in this part of the house for the night."

"Which is the very thing I wanted, Dolores. Having locked that door, the keepers will trouble no further, knowing that it is the only way out. I shall now retire to my room, and begin my preparations. I shall rely on you to thoroughly memorise the numbers and positions of the cells which Dr. Zeetman shows you."

The next hour or so passed rather slowly for Kingston, for his work was soon completed. Everything was in readiness for his night adventure. And, although he looked as cool as ever, he was feeling somewhat elated at the smoothness with which his scheme was working. He sat silent and motionless in an easy-chair before the fire. There was no light in the room whatever, and he passed the time away by thinking over all the marvellous happenings which had come to pass since his escape from the Iron Island.

He could not help realising how the Brotherhood of Iron was at his mercy. He, working in absolute secrecy, could strike at them with practically no fear of retaliation. It was one man against many, but that one man held all the trump cards. And when it is realised that the man was Frank Kingston, it is also quite easy to realise that the Brotherhood never had the slightest chance.

Just before nine o'clock he heard the sound of the heavy door being opened, and knew that Dolores was returning. Somehow, he felt sure that she had succeeded in her object. There was a light tap on the door—the tap he had arranged she should give.

"Come in!" he called softly.

The door opened, and in the dim firelight he could see the graceful figure of Dolores step into the room. She closed the door quietly, and then advanced towards him.

"You have succeeded?" he murmured, after one glance at her smiling face. "Good! Tell me all about it, will you?"

"How you could tell that, Mr. Kingston, is a puzzle," said Dolores lighting the lamp which stood on the mantelpiece.

"Nevertheless, it is true. I have gained possession of all the facts we required."

She looked at his languidly-reclining figure for a moment, then seated herself in the chair opposite.

"There is nothing much to tell you!" she exclaimed. "Merely that Zeetman took me round exactly, as you said he would. He was geniality itself all the while. But I could tell quite easily that he disliked doing so. The wards are very small apartments, something after the style of this."

She looked round at the bare walls, the plain furniture screwed to the floor, and the heavy iron fireguard which was placed as a protection for the patient. The room was very lofty, the skylight being quite out of reach, the space beneath it devoid of all furniture.

"The other rooms are smaller than this, and instead of a fire, are heated by means of hot water pipes. The skylight is similarly inaccessible. Indeed, they are about as cheerless as they could possibly be."

"And he showed you the whole six?"

"Yes. And they are all men," replied Dolores. "There can be no doubt as to their insanity, for they are all extremely violent cases. I only had a glimpse into each, but it was quite sufficient."

"And do you know the numbers of these rooms?"

"Every one of them, and I think it would be as well to put them down on a piece of paper before I forget. The numbering is commenced from the far end, on the left-hand side, and as there are thirty apartments, it will be quite easy to find out their positions."

"You have done splendidly, Dolores. Somehow I felt sure that Zeetman would act in this manner. You made some remark, of course, about the occupants of the other rooms?"

"Of course," agreed Dolores. "And the doctor informed me that while most of them were empty, others were occupied by lunatics of the most violent description. The six I did enter are dotted about at intervals along the corridor, so it appeared as if he took me into them just by chance."

"And these are the numbers of them?" asked Kingston, looking at the piece of paper on which Dolores had jotted the figures. "Did you by chance get to know which cells are occupied by the three ladies?"

"They are the last three," replied Dolores—"Nos. 28, 29, and 30. But you will not trouble about these until later on?"

"No. I shall leave you to attend to those. Exactly how it will be done need not be discussed now. I have all the information I want in my hands. Now, the time is only just after nine, and at about half-past I should like you to ring the bell for something, and warn the nurse, when she comes, to step quietly, as I have fallen into a deep sleep. Tell her you are about to retire yourself, and then make a pretence of doing so. This will give the nurse the impression that everything in this portion of the house is quiet, and its inmates settled down for the night."

"You will, I suppose, make no move until about half-past eleven?" said Dolores, rising to take her departure.

"Not a moment before. Until then I intend immersing myself in a story I saw this morning. The magazine is on that table, yonder, so if you will pass it to me you will save me the trouble of rising."

Dolores smiled at the unconcerned manner in which he spoke, and handed him the magazine as requested. She wondered how he could read peacefully at such a time as this, how he could transfer his thoughts from the work in hand to such a trivial thing as the reading of a magazine story.

The tale proved a very interesting one, and the time passed swiftly for Kingston. Indeed, it was eleven-thirty, almost, before he realised it. He glanced at the clock suddenly as he slowly turned the pages of the magazine over.

"By Jove," he thought, "it's time I was on the move! Ah, I was sure the wind would rise!"

He glanced up at the skylight, and could see through the somewhat dirty panes the occasional twinkle of a star. Thin clouds were scurrying swiftly across the sky, and the whistle of the wind plainly made itself heard. Now and again a gust would come which shook the doorway and caused a cloud of smoke to blow in from the fire.

"A rough night, and although it has its disadvantages, it also has its compensations. There is less likelihood of my being heard with all this wind shaking the building. Ah, I was expecting it! Come in!"

A very faint tap on the door had attracted his attention, and in answer to his whispered summons Dolores entered once more. She closed the door softly.

"Everything quiet," she murmured, "and I am sure we need have no fear of interruption. Now, Mr. Kingston, since it is impossible for you to escape by the big door, will you tell me how you mean to get out? I have thought of the skylight, but that seems equally as impossible as the door."

"Not at all, Dolores," replied Kingston, buttoning his coat up and pulling a close-fitting cap over his head. "It

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is merely a question of strength, and I imagine will soon be overcome."

"But the noise?" asked Dolores. "Such a thing cannot be done silently."

"That is where the wind will help us, for it will practically drown any sounds I may make. All I want you to do, Dolores, after I am gone, is to lock this door on the outside, and retire to your own room. Should anyone come—although such a thing is, of course, extremely improbable—you must refuse to let them enter this room. Zeetman is the only person who would do this, but I think we can dismiss such a contingency from our minds. It is as well, however, to take precautions."

"That is the one secret of your great success, Mr. Kingston," murmured Dolores, looking at his tall form admiringly. "I do not remember one instance of your failing to take the most complete and thorough precautionary measures before attempting a risky project."

"It costs nothing, Dolores, and you know me well enough to understand that when I undertake a task I always endeavour to do it perfectly. Under these conditions I cannot see how anything can go wrong, for, with everything prepared beforehand, I am practically ready for anything that may crop up. But we are wasting time. Tim will be outside at twelve o'clock, and I have yet to make my exit."

"Will you do so here, or in the sitting-room?"

"The sitting-room, Dolores," replied Kingston, taking a step towards the door. "The three skylights are identical, so it makes no difference which I choose. But while the furniture here is screwed to the floor, in the sitting-room it is quite ordinary. Turn that lamp out before you come, will you?"

He waited with his hand on the door-knob while she did so, and then they both crept out into the lobby. Nothing could be heard save the sudden gusts of wind, but for a moment Kingston paused and listened, with his ear to the heavy door which divided the rest of the building from them.

"Everything is quiet," he whispered. "Either that or this door is so solid that no sounds can pass it. If that is the case, it will be all the better for us."

In a moment they were both in the sitting-room, where the lamp had been left burning. The furniture here was of the commonplace variety, and seemed solid and strong. Kingston looked from the table to the skylight many feet above.

Without loss of time he picked up the strongest chair the room contained, and placed it in the centre of the table, which was situated immediately below the skylight. Dolores watched him with interest as he climbed upwards and stood on the chair. He looked down and smiled.

"Not high enough," he murmured. "I shall have to requisition the side-table after all. It is unfortunate—it is such a strong one of its kind."

He clambered down noiselessly, and at the expiration of a few seconds the pile seemed more precarious than ever. Nevertheless, Kingston climbed to the top with apparent ease.

"Ah," he exclaimed, in a low voice, "this is much better! As I thought, there is no catch on this side. The skylight is bolted from the roof, and seems, at first sight, quite immovable."

"Do you think you can raise it without breaking the glass?" asked Dolores.

"There is not much fear of that happening, Dolores," whispered Kingston, in reply. "You see, the panes are small ones, each fitted into its separate division, and my shoulders will force themselves against the heavy woodwork without touching the glass at all."

Dolores watched his movements with anxiety as he proceeded to carry out his plan. Suddenly the tables and chair gave a creak as he exerted his strength. For a moment the tension was great, then came a snapping crackle, as of breaking woodwork, and the ponderous skylight was forced clear of its bolt.

Although Dolores had not known it, the strength Kingston exerted was abnormal, and indeed, for a moment, he had thought the chair would not stand the strain. In the silence of the room, the noise created by the bursting of the bolt from its wooden socket sounded tremendous, and for a moment both Kingston and Dolores listened intently.

"It is all right," murmured the latter. "Even if you were heard the crash would be attributed to the force of the wind. Have you got everything you require?"

"Everything," replied Kingston. "Do you think you could manage to put the furniture back in its place? It would never do for Zeetman to see it piled up in this fashion."

"I can do it quite well, Mr. Kingston," replied Dolores. "You need not worry about that. How long will you be?"

"An hour at the outside. Good-bye, for the present!"

"Good-bye!" she answered, as she watched him clamber through on to the roof. She stood there motionless until the skylight was gently lowered into its place again, then, with a little sigh of apprehension for his safety, she lowered the chair and table and placed them in their original positions.

Meanwhile, Kingston, with the aid of a tiny electric torch, was crouching down over the skylight, examining the damage he had wrought. The one large bolt had forced its way clean out of its socket, the latter being the outer framework into which the skylight fitted. It was considerably splintered, but after five minutes' work Kingston made it appear, to all intents and purposes, the same as formerly, so that at a glance, or even a cursory examination, it would seem to be quite strong and untouched.

In addition, he arranged it in such a way that he could raise or lower it at will, the bolt now being nothing more nor less than a dummy fastening. But Kingston was quite sure that, had it not been for his colossal strength, he could never have forced the skylight up as he had done.

He stood upright and gazed about him for a moment without moving. Ahead he could see the numerous skylights

of the thirty apartments, which were, in reality, almost as dismal as prison-cells. Some of them were illuminated, others in pitchy darkness, and Kingston noted that the one occupied by the man he had decided to rescue that night was among the first named.

He pulled out his watch, and read the face in the semi-darkness.

"Ten minutes to twelve," he murmured. "Good! I shall just be outside the grounds by about twelve! I'll warrant Tim will be there to the minute!"

He drew from his pocket a long coil of rope with a silk ladder attached.

"No sign of my friend who was so attentive on my last visit," he thought, gazing down on to the ground below. "He is, doubtless, roaming about somewhere, and it is now my intention to find him out and give him a little surprise."

The chimney-stack which carried off the smoke from the three fires below was close at hand, and he wound the rope tightly round this, and threw the rope-ladder to the ground. Then, without wasting a moment of time, he swung himself over the gutter and descended to the ground beneath.

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