

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TOM MERRY STORY.

Contents of
this Grand
Christmas
Double
Number.

**"THE
GHOST OF
ST. JIM'S!"**

A Splendid, New,
DOUBLE-LENGTH
School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co.,
by Martin Clifford

**"CAUGHT
RED-
HANDED!"**

A Thrilling Com-
plete Detective
Tale of
Frank Kingston,
by Robert W.
Comrade.

**"BILL
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An Amusing
Complete Tale of
the Great Spy
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**"DEEP-SEA
GOLD!"**

A Thrilling Adven-
ture Story, by
Reginald Wray.

Also
JOKES,
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TRICKS, etc.

Number 197.

Vol. 6.



"Look! Look! The Ghost!" gasped Tom Merry. "The White Monk of St. Jim's!"



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CHAPTER 1.

A Mystery of the Night.

SNOW—thicker and thicker! The white flakes were falling incessantly. Walls and roofs at St. Jim's were gleaming white, and the old quad. was wrapped as in a winding sheet. Through the dusk of the winter evening, the leafless elms stood up gaunt and spectre-like, the white branches stretching ghostlike against the dim sky.

From the windows of the School House ruddy light gleamed out into the quadrangle. Bright and cosy the interior of the School House looked, by contrast with the cold and wind and the falling flakes without.

At the door of the School House several juniors were standing, straining their eyes into the gloom of the quad.

There were footprints in the snow on the School House

steps, footprints on the drive—rapidly becoming obliterated by the fast-falling flakes.

"How long is he going to be, I wonder?"

Jack Blake asked the question impatiently. He drew back his head from the open door as a gust of wind blew snow-flakes into his face.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, rubbed the mist from his eyeglass, and adjusted it in his eye. He peered out into the quad., but even with the aid of his famous monocle he could see nothing but snow and leafless branches. Far away, across the quad., glimmered the light from the school tuckshop, but it was invisible to the juniors standing at the door of the School House.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "He's takin' his time, you know. I wuddy don't think I shall wait here for Goah any longer."

Next Thursday:

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No. 197 (New Series). Vol. 8.

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"No; it's getting jolly cold," remarked Tom Merry, of the Shell.

"I wasn't thinkin' of the cold, deah boy, but of my twousahs," said D'Arcy. "The wind is blowin' the beastly snow on my twousahs, and—"

"Oh, hang your trousers!"

"I nevah hang my twousahs, deah boy. It spoils the shape. I always put them in the pwess before goin' to bed—"

"My hat!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, shivering. "Where on earth can Gore have got to? It's all rot—it's not five minutes across to the tuckshop—even in the snow—"

"Yaas wathah! Pewwaps he is stoppin' for some w-fweshment—"

"We'll bump him if he does!" growled Tom Merry. "He knows jolly well that we're waiting for the grub to have tea."

"Yaas, wathah! It would weally be most inconsiderate of Gore. Pewwaps we had better go and look for him," D'Arcy suggested. "He may have lost his way in the dark."

"Ass! He could see the School House lights half a mile away."

"I wefuse to be called an-ass—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Tom Merry, holding up his hand.

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors stood suddenly stricken silent.

From the deep gloom of the quadrangle came a sudden peering shrike.

Loud, sharp, clear, it rang through the air, and echoed from the darkness with a chilling sound, upon the hearts of the listening juniors.

The juniors looked at one another.

Their ears were strained to hear, but not a sound came from the snowy quadrangle—not a sound save the soft moan of the winter wind, and the almost imperceptible fall of the flakes.

"Good heavens!" Blake muttered, breaking the icy silence at last. "Wh-what was that?"

"B-bai Jove!"

"It—it couldn't have been Gore!" muttered Tom Merry.

"Good heavens!"

Darkness and silence in the old quad, and it seemed to the startled juniors that that terrible cry must have been a wild fancy of their own, so still was the quad now.

Who had uttered it?

George Gore, of the Shell, had volunteered to cross the snow-driven quad, to the tuckshop, to make the purchases for a study feed. He had been a long time gone, but there was no reason to suppose that anything untoward had happened in the old quad, of St. Jim's.

What could happen there?

There were no pitfalls for the unwary—there was no danger of any kind. From the farther corner of the quadrangle the flare of lights from the School House could be seen, to guide Gore upon his return.

Nothing could have happened. Yet—

Yet what did that terrible cry mean?

"It—it must be a rotten jape!" Monty Lowther muttered.

"It's a jape of the New House fellows, perhaps. They may have collared Gore and the provisions—"

Tom Merry drew a breath of relief.

"Of course!" he exclaimed.

"That's it," said Blake, with conviction. "That's it."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was as if a hard tension had been suddenly relaxed. The rivalry between the two Houses at St. Jim's—the School House and the New House—had been keener than ever of late, at the approach of the Christmas holidays. The rival juniors were anxious to prove beyond doubt which was the cock house at St. Jim's, before they broke up for Christmas and departed on their various ways to the four corners of the kingdom. And this was a jape of Piggins & Co., they felt sure of that. Gore and the provisions had been captured by the New House raiders. But—

"But that yell?" said Manners.

"It was howlid!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a shudder. "I suppose it was one of the New House bounders, but—"

"I'm going to see!" exclaimed Tom Merry abruptly.

"If the New House chaps are out for a raid in this weather, we can get out, too—we're as tough as they are."

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on!"

"Wait a minute, deah boys, while I fetch a wain-coat—"

"Oh rats!"

Tom Merry ran out of the School House. He slipped in the snow on the steps, and slid to the bottom, smothered with snow. He picked himself up at once, panting, and dusted the flakes from his face.

"Come on!" he shouted.

"We're coming!" said Blake.

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

is the title of the Splendid, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on sale. Six pence.

Blake and Lowther and Manners were dashing after Tom Merry. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy hesitated a moment, in doubt whether to go upstairs for his rain-coat, and then dashed after them. He objected very much to getting snow upon his elegant Etons, but he did not mean to be left out if there was a fight. As D'Arcy was never tired of explaining to the juniors of St. Jim's it was a D'Arcy's place to lead.

Tom Merry dashed on into the quad.

The gloom was thick, save where it was lightened by the ridges and drifts of snow. He ran towards the old elms that hid the tuckshop from sight. Suddenly he stumbled.

"Look out!" exclaimed Blake. "My hat! You seem to have falling fits this evening, Tom Merry—"

"Stop!"

"What's the matter?"

"Heaven knows! Stop!"

The juniors halted struck by the horror in Tom Merry's voice. Tom Merry had stumbled over something that lay in the snow—something that he knew, without looking at it, was a human form!

He dropped on his knees in the snow beside the inanimate figure. The other juniors gathered round with horrified faces.

"Good heavens!" muttered Manners. "What—who is it?"

"It must be Gore!"

"Oh!"

"A match!" muttered Tom Merry. "Quick!"

Blake, with a hand that trembled violently, struck a match. The wind caught it and blew it out.

"Under my cap!" muttered Lowther.

Blake struck a second match in the shelter of Lowther's cap. The light flickered upon the face that Tom Merry had dragged out of the snow.

It was a white, set face, with closed eyes, a face the juniors knew. The white, lifeless face was that of George Gore—Gore, of the Shell.

For an instant the juniors gazed upon it in horror.

Then the match flickered out.

Tom Merry found his voice—but it was so broken and husky that he hardly knew its tones himself when he spoke.

"It's Gore!"

"Is he—"

Blake faltered. "Tom Merry, is he—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Is he dead?"

CHAPTER 2.

An Unknown Danger.

TOM MERRY's teeth clicked together—not so much with the cold, as with the horror that was gripping his heart.

Dead!

Was it possible? It looked like it. Gore made no sound—no motion. What had happened to the Shell fellow in the darkness of the old quad, of St. Jim's?

It was Gore who had uttered that terrible cry—the juniors knew that now. But why—why? What had struck him down? What terrible and unseen danger lurked among the shadows of the beloved old quadrangle?

At the thought, the juniors looked round them apprehensively. What had happened to Gore might happen to themselves.

"Bai Jove! It's howwible!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

"Let's get him in."

"Yes—quick!"

Blake struck another match. In its momentary glimmer, Tom Merry and Manners took Gore up from the snow, Tom Merry taking his shoulders, and Manners his feet. Monty Lowther lent assistance, and among them the Shell fellow was carried towards the House.

There was a crowd of fellows in the open doorway now.

That shriek had been heard in a good many of the studies, and some of the fellows in the hall had seen Tom Merry & Co. rush out. Something was "up," and a crowd was gathering to see what it was.

There was a general exclamation as the juniors came in sight, bearing the Shell fellow in their midst, leaving a deep track in the snow behind them.

"What's happened?"

"Faith, and what's the matter with Gore intirely?"

"I guess he's fainted."

"Make room!" said Tom Merry abruptly.

Gore was carried into the hall. He was laid upon the couch there, and Monty Lowther ran to Mr. Railton's study door, and opened it without even knocking, in his haste and agitation.

Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, gave him a stern look.

"Lowther! What does this mean—?"



It seemed to the bewildered Skimpole to be raining footballs. They whizzed in from all sides, as he staggered back in the goal. There was a roar from the footballers. "Goal! Hurrah!"
(See Chapter 15.)

"Oh, come, sir—quick!"

"What is the matter?"

"Gore, sir—I don't know—dead, I think!"

"Good heavens!"

With one bound the School Housemaster was out of his study, pushing the terrified Lowther aside.

He ran towards the spot where Gore lay on the couch, his head supported by Tom Merry. The boys made room instantly for the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton stooped beside Gore.

He breathed a deep breath of relief as he examined him.

"He is not dead!" he exclaimed.

"Thank goodness, sir!"

"He has fainted. Carry him up to his bed at once; he must be put to bed, and a doctor sent for. Kildare—Darrel—take him up to the Shell dormitory, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

The two stalwart Sixth-Formers lifted the insensible Shell fellow in their arms, and bore him upstairs. Mr. Railton tapped Tom Merry on the shoulder.

"Go and help undress Gore, and get him to bed—while I telephone."

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry ran upstairs after the seniors. Mr. Railton had a telephone in his study, and he hastened to it at once. In two minutes he was calling the local medical man to the

aid of the unfortunate Shell fellow. Dr. Hall replied that he would come at once, snow or no snow. Mr. Railton left the telephone, and hurried up to the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry had already undressed Gore and got him into bed. Gore showed no sign of returning to consciousness. He was blue with cold, and Mr. Railton directed hot water-bottles to be placed at his feet and blankets to be piled on him. The Housemaster's face was dark with anxiety. Gore was not one of his favourites by any means; but Mr. Railton had a keen interest in all the boys in his House, and to all of them he was like an elder brother.

"How did this happen, Merry?" he asked, when all had been done for Gore that could be done.

Tom Merry shook his head dazedly.

"I don't know, sir."

"Tell me what you do know."

"We were going to have a feed in the study, sir," said Tom Merry, in broken tones. "Gore volunteered to go to the tuckshop and fetch the things. Of course, nobody wanted to go across the quad, in the snow. We were waiting for him to come back, when we heard a shriek—"

"I heard it," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I did not understand what it was. Well?"

"We didn't know anything had happened to Gore, sir, but we went out to look for him," said Tom Merry. "We found him lying in the snow, sir like—like that!"

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"FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE!"

A Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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Mr. Railton wrinkled his brow in puzzled thought. "Unconscious?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"He was alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"He had gone out alone?"

"Yes, alone. There was not much to carry, only a bag of grub—I mean, things from the tuckshop, sir," said Tom Merry, colouring.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Did you find the bag with him?"

"I never thought of looking for it, sir."

"Is it possible, do you think, Merry, that this is some more of the absurd rivalry between the Houses—that the New House juniors have somehow frightened Gore in this way?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Figgins & Co. wouldn't do a thing like that, sir."

"But some of the others—"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Gore must have been frightened. He shrieked, and then fainted."

"I suppose he was scared in some way, sir."

"You have no idea how?"

"No idea at all, sir."

"Gore is not usually troubled with nerves, is he?"

"Oh, no, sir! He's as strong as a horse—I mean, he's very strong, sir."

"It is very curious."

"I can't understand it at all, sir. It's just as if Gore had seen a ghost; but, of course, we know he hasn't."

"No, that is hardly likely. But it is certainly very singular."

Mr. Railton was turning to the bed again.

Tom Merry looked at Gore.

The Shell fellow's cheeks showed a trace of colour now, and his eyes were open, but there was no understanding in them. His lips were moving, and low, broken words came forth.

Mr. Railton stooped to hear.

"Oh, save me—save me!"

Then the pale lips were silent again.

The Housemaster rose with a stern brow.

Tom Merry silently quitted the dormitory.

The other fellows were waiting for him downstairs to hear what he had to tell.

"Gore is still unconscious," said Tom Merry. "It looks to me as if he's going to be ill. I can't understand it at all."

"Bai Jove, that's sewious!"

"He was frightened somehow," said Blake.

"I suppose so."

"Could it be a New House dodge?"

"I hardly think so."

"Let's go and see Figgins, and ask him," Monty Lowther suggested.

"Good egg!"

And Tom Merry & Co., putting on their coats and caps and scarves, and turning up their trousers, left the School House, and tramped through the snow across the wide quadrangle to the New House of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 3.

A Little Mistake.

TOM MERRY & CO. kept close together, and looked round them sharply in the gloom as they crossed the quad. They had to pass close to the spot where Gore had been found lying in the snow. What had happened to Gore? They could not tell; but what had happened to him might happen to themselves, and they were on their guard. It was as if some mysterious, unknown, undreamed-of danger lurked in the shadows of the familiar old quad. of St. Jim's.

The sough of the wind, bearing the soft flakes of falling snow, sounded in the old quad., and the creak and rattle of the elm branches. Suddenly Monty Lowther paused, and caught Tom Merry's arm.

"Stop!" he muttered.

Tom Merry halted.

"But what is it, Monty?"

"I heard something."

The juniors halted in a group, with beating hearts. They were close to the spot where Gore had fainted in the snow, and the gleaming lights of the School House seemed very far away. Round them was the wide, solitary quadrangle, with the gaunt elms, and the never-ceasing snow that was covering the ground and the buildings with the same spotless winding-sheet.

They listened with intent ears.

Tom Merry was as plucky as any lad could be, but he

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felt his heart beating harder and harder as he stood there in the shadow of the elms.

The juniors were very silent.

The only sound that came from them was the low, tense sound of quickly drawn breath. In the gloom their faces were pale.

What had Monty Lowther heard?

Blake suddenly clutched Tom Merry by the arm.

"Look!" he muttered.

Dimly through the gloom, shadowing the white snow, a dark figure detached itself from the darkness of the elms.

It came on noiselessly towards the juniors.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy inaudibly.

The boys clenched their hands hard.

What was it?

The dark figure, bleak and shadowy from head to foot, glided on. The juniors stood spellbound.

Tom Merry made a sudden movement. Ghost or human, he did not intend to let the shadowy figure pass him.

"Back me up, you fellows!" he whispered tensely.

"But—"

"I'm going to collar it, whatever it is."

"But—"

"Stand by me!"

Tom Merry said no more.

The dark figure was close now, and if it was human, the thick snow under the feet deadened all sound of footsteps.

Tom Merry made a sudden spring.

Right upon the strange figure he hurled himself, and there was a sudden, startled cry in the darkness, and the figure and Tom Merry went down into the snow together.

The cry and the solid body in his grasp convinced Tom Merry that the figure was human, if he had had any doubts of it.

"Help!" he shouted. "I've got him!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Pile on!" shouted Blake.

"Collar him!"

The juniors sprang to the aid of the hero of the Shell.

The figure was struggling violently under the grasp of Tom Merry, but the Shell fellow was on top, and he kept his prisoner pinned down in the snow.

The other fellows grasped the prisoner fast, and his struggles were unavailing. There was no escape for him. All the time he struggled he was gasping out words choked by the snow in which he was half-buried.

"Got you, my man!" said Tom Merry triumphantly.

"We'll teach you to play ghost! Now, who is it? It's not Taggles; it's not big enough."

"Not one of the fellows; it's too big."

"Some giddy outsider."

"Release me!"

The words came sharply, bitterly from the stranger as the juniors dragged him up to a sitting position and he had a chance to speak.

And at those sharp, incisive tones they instinctively released him, and shrank back in alarm and dismay.

For they knew the voice.

It was the voice of Mr. Selby, the master of the Third Form at St. Jim's.

"How dare you! Release me—release me instantly! You shall be flogged for this, all of you! Hands off me at once, you young rascals!"

Their hands were off the Form-master quickly enough.

"My hat," said Monty Lowther, in a low tone, "we've made a bloomer this time, and no mistake! Oh, my only Uncle Peter!"

"It wasn't our fault," muttered Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"Mr. Selby!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes. You shall pay for this outrage! You—you—" The Third Form-master choked with rage. His temper was never good, and such an attack and bumping in the snow was likely to try the sweetest temper. "I will report this to the Head!"

"Oh, sir—"

"Weally, deah sir—"

Mr. Selby staggered to his feet. He refused the helping hand proffered by Tom Merry. He was smothered with snow, and he shook it from him with angry movements. His face was pale and his eyes gleaming with rage.

"You—you young rascals!"

"We're sowwy, sir!"

"We didn't know it was you, sir," said Tom Merry quietly. "We—we took you for a chap playing ghost, sir."

"Don't tell falsehoods, Merry! Why should you take me for anything of the sort?"

Tom Merry flushed crimson. A hot reply trembled on his lips. He did not care to have his word doubted, even by a Form-master. But he remembered himself in time, and answered quietly and calmly.

"Gore has been frightened into a faint, sir, by somebody, playing ghost, or so we believe," he said. "He's lying in the School House now, unconscious. It happened just here, and when we saw you coming, we—we—"

"What?"

"We're awfully sorry, sir!" said Blake.

"You say that someone has been playing ghost," said Mr. Selby, in a strained voice, "and that Gore has fainted?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is—very strange. I shall look into this, Merry, and ascertain whether you have told me the facts," said Mr. Selby harshly. "You will hear from me again."

And the Third Form master strode away towards the School House.

Tom Merry & Co. watched the dark figure disappear towards the distant lighted windows, and did not make a remark till Mr. Selby was quite gone.

"Bai Jove," said D'Arcy, at last, "it is not respectful to tell a mastah what you think of him, but weally I should like to give Mr. Selby my opinion of a man who doubts a fellow's word!"

"Yes, rather!" said Tom Merry, with a gleam in his eyes. "But Selby always was an outsider."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we've made a giddy bloomer this time!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "It's the first time I've rolled a Form-master in the snow! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors tramped on towards the New House.

CHAPTER 4.

The Ghost of St. Jim's.

"SAUSAGES!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Yes."

"And bacon!"

"Yes."

"And jam tarts to follow!"

"Oh, good!" said Figgins and Kerr together.

There was a cheerful fire burning in Figgins's study, in the Fourth Form passage in the New House at St. Jim's. The table was laid for tea, and there were good things on the table. Fatty Wynn had just unpacked a basket, and he was cleaning out the study frying-pan with an old newspaper. Figgins and Kerr had put their work away, to lend a hand in preparing tea.

"The sausages are good," said Fatty Wynn, "and the bacon is prime! As for the jam tarts, they've been fresh made to-day."

"Oh, good!"

"We're entitled to a little extra feed," Fatty Wynn remarked, as he smeared butter over the interior of the frying-pan. "Christmas comes but once a year, you know."

"It hasn't come yet, Fatty."

"Well, it's coming. We shall be breaking up for the Christmas holidays before we know where we are," said Fatty Wynn. "I say, Kerr, I wish you wouldn't use this frying-pan for making toffee, not unless you scrape it out afterwards. It's always bound to give the sausages a flavour."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Kerr cheerfully. "It will only make the flavour a little richer. I've made up a good fire. Go it!"

"You fill the kettle, Figgy."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins.

Figgins filled the kettle at the tap at the end of the passage. The tap was kept continually running—against the strict instructions of the prefects—because the water was freezing at St. Jim's. The Form passages were cold and windy, and Figgins, with his full kettle, was glad to get back to the warmth of the study. Very bright and cheerful the study looked, with its gleaming fire, and the white tablecloth, and the neat curtains and tasteful wallpaper.

Figgins & Co. were justly proud of their study. There was now a very cheerful smell in it, as well as a very cheerful look. Fatty Wynn was frying the sausages and bacon, and he was a wonderful cook. Whatever Fatty Wynn turned out of his frying-pan was certain to be done to a turn.

Figgins pulled back the curtains for a moment and looked out into the quadrangle. In the darkness he could dimly perceive the snow-clad branches of the old elms, and the flakes whirling in the wintry wind.

"Jolly cold out there," he remarked.

"Yes, makes a chap feel hungry to look at it," said Fatty Wynn. "You want a bit of an extra feed in this weather. I always think that. Christmas is a great institution. Just the word makes you think of turkeys, and geese, and puddings—"

"And indigestion," suggested Kerr.

"Rats! I never have indigestion! Indigestion comes of eating too little, in my opinion!" said Fatty Wynn, with a sniff.

"Ha, ha, ha! You're not likely to suffer from it, then!" roared Figgins.

"I've a healthy appetite," said Fatty Wynn modestly. "I'm not one of those chaps who pretend they can't eat. No fairy appetite rot about me. I'm not greedy, but I like a lot. And the way to make yourself fit is to lay a solid foundation."

"My word, those sassingers smell prime, though," said Figgins.

"Oh, ripping!" said Kerr.

Fatty Wynn beamed over the frying-pan. The fat Fourth-Former was never so happy as when he was engaged in culinary or gastronomic duties. The sausages were served up rich and brown, and the bacon was done to a turn. The three chums of the New House settled down to their tea with very cheerful faces. Figgins had made the tea, and he poured it out steaming hot. The moan of the wind in the old trees outside mingled with the clatter of knives and forks in the study.

"The wind's getting up," Figgins remarked. "Doesn't it howl! Like the ghostly monk of St. Jim's in the legend."

Kerr grinned.

"Yes, it's time for that giddy monk to be on the prowl now," he remarked. "He goes his rounds at this time of the year, so they say. That's the best of a jolly old school like St. Jim's. It has its legends. Not like your blessed new red-brick schools like Rylcombe Grammar School. The Grammar School chaps can't pretend that they have a ghost in a place that has only been built two or three years."

"No fear. And we have a variety of them at St. Jim's."

Figgins remarked, laughing. "There's the spectre who taps on the walls—tap, tap, tap!—and then there's the bloodstain in the old library, which always becomes crimson and fresh at Christmas-time, only nobody's ever seen it do so. Then there's the White Monk of St. Jim's, the giddy ghost who walks from the moment the snow falls on the ground."

"It's the first fall to-night," Kerr remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha! Time for the White Monk to put in an appearance," said Figgins. "I don't suppose we shall see him, though. Pass the sassingers."

"Here you are, Figgy."

"It would be rather a dodge to get up a sham White Monk, and give the School House bounders a turn!" said Kerr, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tap!

Figgins started.

But it was only a tap at the door; and the door opened the next moment, and half a dozen juniors, in a considerably snowy state, came into the study. They were Tom Merry & Co., from the School House; and the conduct of Figgins & Co. was peculiar as soon as they saw them. Kerr took up the teapot, evidently for use as a defensive weapon, if necessary. Figgins picked up a cushion. Fatty Wynn made a strategic movement towards the grate, to get the poker within easy reach. The School House juniors and the juniors of the New House were generally upon fighting terms, and Figgins & Co. suspected a raid.

But Tom Merry & Co. had come with peaceable intentions.

"It's pax," said Tom Merry.

Figgins laughed.

"Oh, all serene!" he said. "Pax with pleasure. Sit down, my sons, and warm yourselves. You look cold."

"Bai Jove, it is cold!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, polishing his eyeglass, which had become misty as he entered the warm study. "It's wotten weathah!"

"Oh, it's Christmassy!" said Kerr.

"Yaas, but it isn't Christmass yet, and I object to this wotten snow!"

"Have it stopped immediately, then."

"Weally, Kerr—"

"You fellows come to tea?" said Figgins. "I'm sorry there's not much left. But you're welcome to what there is."

"Yes, rather," said Fatty Wynn, with an inward heroic effort of self-denial. "Have the last soss between you."

Tom Merry grinned.

"Thanks, we won't rob you," he said. "We haven't come to feed. We've come to ask you some questions."

"Fire away!"

"Have any of you chaps been playing ghost in the quad?"

Figgins started.

"No!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, honest Injun! Why?"

Tom Merry explained.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Figgins, when he had finished.

"And hasn't Gore come to himself yet?"

"No!"

"It's jolly odd," said Kerr. "Gore isn't a coward like Mellish, for instance. He wouldn't be frightened without a reason, I should think. He must have seen something."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'd like to know what he saw. As a matter of fact," said Figgins frankly, "it had just occurred to me that the first fall of snow is the time when the White Monk is supposed to walk, and I was saying to Kerr that we might work off a ghost wheeze on you chaps. But we haven't done it."

"Somebody else in the House may have thought of it, and done it," Blake remarked.

"It's possible, but—"

"But you don't think so?"

"Well, I don't," said Figgins. "Where did Gore see the ghost, or whatever it was?"

"Well, we found him in the snow in a dead faint under the elms," said Tom Merry. "You can see the place from this window."

He pulled the curtain aside.

Figgins and Kerr looked out of the misty window. Fatty Wynn went steadily on with the last sausage. The ghost of St. Jim's did not interest him so much as that beautifully-browned sausage.

Tom Merry pushed up the sash of the window. Through the falling snow a few stars were twinkling dimly, and the juniors could make out the distant row of elms.

Figgins strained his eyes in the gloom.

"That's where we found Gore," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"My hat!" muttered Figgins.

"What's the matter?"

"Look! Can't you see something? Look! Look!"

Figgins clutched Tom Merry's arm with one hand, and pointed with the other. Tom Merry strained his eyes.

Was it a vision, a wild fancy, conjured up by the gloom, the gleaming snow, and his excited and feverish imagination, or did he see a strange, ghostly figure, in monkish garb of the olden time, but white as the driven snow, glide for a moment from the shadow of the old elms?

"Good heavens!" muttered Tom Merry.

The form, if form it was, disappeared in a moment.

Figgins let the curtain fall back into its place.

In the lighted study, the juniors gazed at one another with faces as pale as death!

CHAPTER 5.

Gore Speaks!

"THE ghost of St. Jim's!"

Figgins muttered the words in a low, husky voice. Tom Merry nodded.

For a moment he could not speak.

That, then, was what Gore had seen—that was what had caused that terrible shriek, which seemed still to ring in Tom Merry's ears—that was what Gore had seen, at close quarters, alone in the dark! Perhaps it had touched him! Tom Merry shuddered at the thought. No wonder the Shell fellow had shrieked—no wonder he had fainted!

What did it mean?

For one moment—one dizzy moment—it seemed to Tom Merry that perhaps the old legend was true—that the ancient walls of St. Jim's were haunted by the phantom of the murdered monk.

"Good heavens!" Tom Merry muttered again.

"Bai Jove!"

"Did you see it, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And you, Blake?"

"Yes," said Blake, in a low voice.

There was a long silence. Fatty Wynn had finished the sausage, and he left the last rasher of bacon. Even his appetite was a little affected. The study seemed cold, and its cheeriness was gone. Figgins closed the window sharply, and stirred the fire.

But Tom Merry recovered himself quickly.

"I can't understand it," he said; "but I do not believe in ghosts."

"Of course not. It's all rot!" said Manners, but his voice was less steady than usual.

"It's imposs., deah boys!"

"But what was it?" said Figgins.

"I suppose it wasn't a mere fancy?" said Tom Merry dubiously.

Figgins shook his head.

"I saw it," he said.

"Then it was somebody playing a trick!"

"I—I suppose so."

"But who?"

"Some silly young ass," said Figgins, forgetting for the moment that the same thought had passed through his own mind. "He ought to be jolly well licked for it, too!"

"I didn't see it clearly, but it was too big to be a junior," said Tom Merry.

"Ye—es."

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"HIS LAST MATCH!" is the title of the splendid, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

"Surely we can't imagine that a senior—a Fifth or Sixth fellow—would be idiot enough to play such a trick."

Figgins was silent.

"It might be somebody from outside," said Blake slowly.

"How could he get in?"

"Well, it's jolly odd."

"Bai Jove, it's a howwid mystery! I—I don't weally feel much inclined to cross the quad, again to-night, you chaps," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, we've got to do that," said Blake. "But—but I think we'll avoid that—that special spot. We can go round."

"We ought to report this to Mr. Railton," said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We'll come across with you, if you like," said Kerr.

Tom Merry shook his head. None of the School House juniors felt inclined to cross the quad, again in the dark. But they would never submit to such a slur as being accompanied by New House fellows because they were nervous. That would be too much of a descent for the dignity of the School House.

"We'd better be off," said Tom Merry. "Good-night, you chaps!"

"Good-night!"

The elms of the School House tramped downstairs. At the doorway of the New House they halted. But they made up their minds to it, and, after a moment's pause, they tramped out doggedly into the shadowy, snowy quadrangle.

They might be excused for avoiding the spot where the strange figure had been seen. They were no cowards, but they felt a natural reluctance to face that terrible apparition, whatever it was. Ghost stories in the daylight might seem ridiculous, but in the darkness and silence of the quadrangle their aspect was different. Glad enough would all the juniors have been to get into the shelter of the School House without the tramp across the quadrangle first.

But they tramped on doggedly.

They were near the School House, walking with continual backward glances, when Tom Merry paused suddenly and listened.

"What was that?"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy's eyeglass fluttered at the end of its cord, and he started.

"Bai Jove, Tom Mewwy, I wish you wouldn't speak so suddenly! You have thrown me into quite a fluttah—"

"Hush!"

"Weally—"

"It's only the wind!" said Blake uneasily. "Let's get on."

Doubtless it was only the wind moaning about the old roofs—but it seemed like a wild and demoniac howl to the throbbing ears of the juniors.

They increased their pace—the walk became a trot—finally a run. They ran on hard through the snow, and came up, breathless, to the doorway of the School House.

A group of juniors were there, looking out into the falling snow. They stared as Tom Merry & Co. came charging up the slippery steps.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Kangaroo of the Shell. "Have you seen it?"

"What is it?"

"The ghost!"

"N-no," said Tom Merry, turning rather red. "We—we were in a bit of a hurry, that's all."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wally D'Arcy—D'Arcy minor of the Third. "Ha, ha, ha! My only Aunt Jane! They were in a bit of a hurry—that's all! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Wally—"

There was a roar of laughter among the juniors. Tom Merry was crimson, and so were his comrades. On second thoughts, they wished they had crossed the quadrangle with a slow and stately stride. But it was too late now.

"Where is Mr. Railton?" Tom Merry asked.

"In the dorm. with Gore."

Tom Merry went up to the Shell dormitory. The doctor had not yet arrived, and Mr. Railton was seated by Gore's bedside. There was more colour in Gore's face now, and his lips moved at intervals, it was evident that he was coming to himself.

Mr. Railton looked at the hero of the Shell inquiringly.

"We've just been across to the New House, sir," said Tom Merry. "I—I went to ask Figgins if any chap there had been playing ghost. He says no."

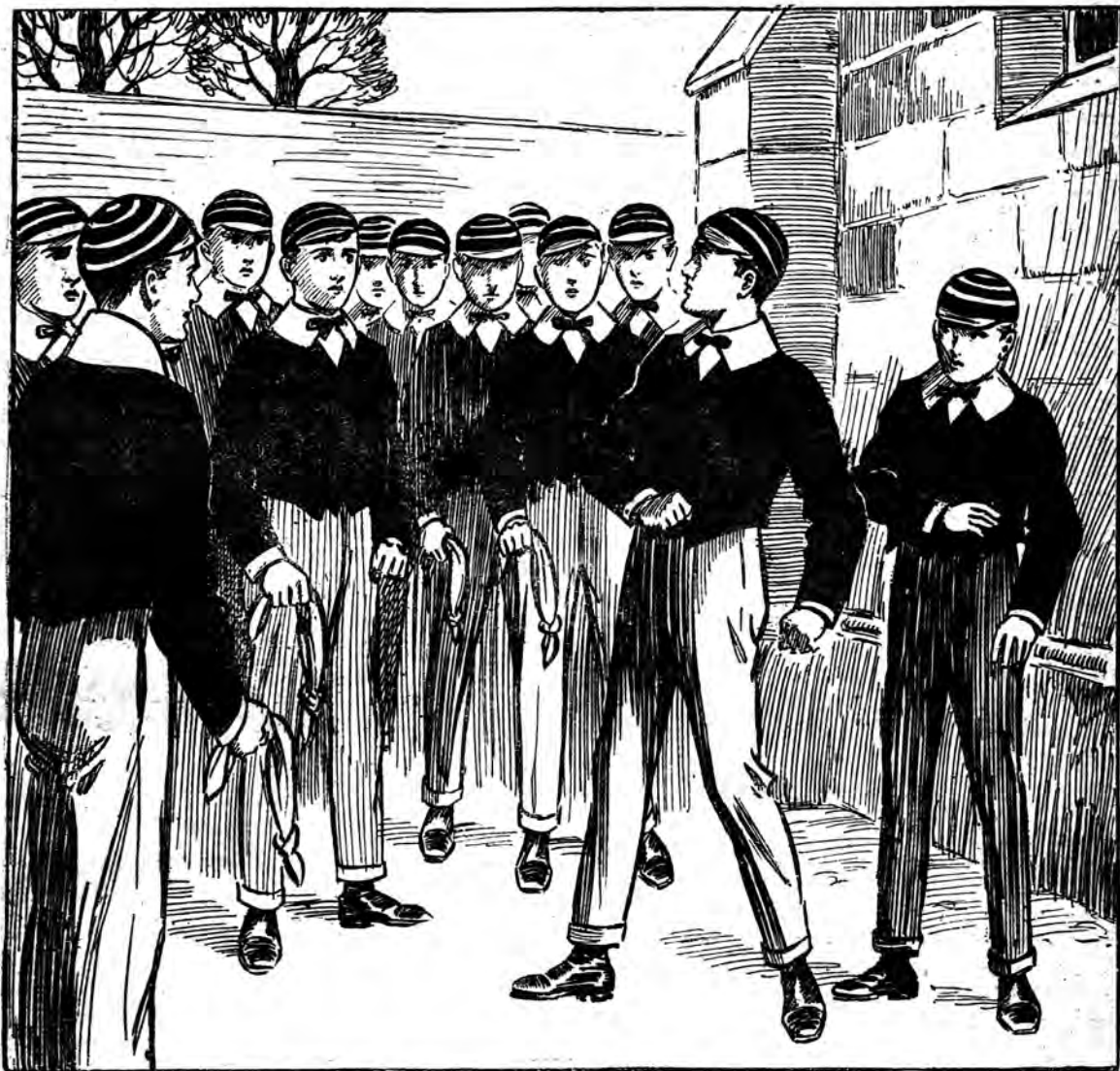
"I am glad to hear that," said the Housemaster quietly.

"Such a trick would be very foolish and very dangerous."

"We—we saw something in the quad., sir," faltered Tom Merry.

Mr. Railton gave him a sharp look.

"What did you see, Merry?"



Tom Merry threw himself between the raggers and their intended victim. "Before you rag Wally, you'll have to rag me!" he said coolly. And there was a pause! (See Chapter 21.)

"From Figgy's study window, sir—just for a minute—it—whatever it was, sir, it looked like the engravings of the White Monk in the school library, sir. A—a figure dressed like a monk, but all white—"

"Are you sure you saw this, Merry, or was it a trick of the imagination?"

"Figgins saw it as well, sir, and Blake, and D'Arcy! I thought I ought to mention it to you, sir, under the circumstances."

The School Housemaster nodded.

"Quite right, Merry! If you saw this, as you suppose, it is undoubtedly some foolish fellow playing ghost, having heard of the legend of the White Monk. But hush!"

Gore's eyes had opened wildly.

He fixed a terrified stare upon Mr. Railton and shuddered. His white lips moved, and muttering words came forth.

"Save me! Save me! Oh, the ghost!"

"Gore, my poor boy, you are quite safe here," said Mr. Railton soothingly.

"The—the ghost!" muttered Gore, shuddering violently. "What did you see in the quadrangle, Gore?"

"The ghost—the White Monk!"

And Gore's eyes closed again.

CHAPTER 6.

Doubting Thomases!

TOM MERRY & CO. were in the common-room in the School House when Gore came down late in the evening. Gore was still looking very pale, and there was a harassed expression upon his face. Evidently he had not yet fully recovered from the shock he had sustained in the quadrangle. But he was able to explain what had happened, and the juniors gathered round him eagerly to hear what it was.

Gore shuddered a little as he explained.

"It was the White Monk," he said, in a low voice. There was a general exclamation of incredulity.

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"If it wasn't it was somebody dressed up and playing ghost," said Gore. "It was a monk, but all in dead white, with a cowl over the face—and it came suddenly out of the shadows, without a sound, and almost touched me!"

He broke off, shuddering.

"Bai Jove, it must have thrown you into a fluttah, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sympathetically.

"I—I think I fainted."

"You jolly well did!" said Jack Blake. "You had gone off when we found you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No wonder!" said Tom Merry. "You can chuckle if you like, Levison—but I expect you would have done the same!"

Levison, the cad of the Fourth, sneered.

"It was some shadow or other, of course!" he exclaimed.

"Gore was frightened by a shadow!"

"Rot!"

"Do you think it was the ghost, then?" sneered Levison.

"No, I don't think that," said Tom Merry slowly. "But it must have been somebody playing ghost."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Levison, we saw it ourselves from the windows of Figgy's study!" said Blake hotly.

"Imagination, my boy!" said Levison loftily. "When fellows are in a state of nerves they see all sorts of things."

"You cheeky cad—"

"Don't argue with him, Blake, deah boy!" said D'Arcy. "I am quite sure that if Levison saw it he would've been like anythin'!"

"Like you fellows did!" grinned Levison.

And there was a laugh.

Arthur Augustus turned red.

"You're afraid of a giddy shadow on the snow!" remarked Mellish of the Fourth. "Of course, it was snow drifting on the wind, or something like that."

"Wats!"

"It was great to see you come pelting in at top speed!"

Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Levison.

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye and regarded the cads of the Fourth Form with a withering glance.

"I may be afraid of ghosts, but I am not afraid of you!" he exclaimed. "And if I have any more disrespectful remarks, Levison, I shall give you a fearful thrashing!"

Levison shrugged his shoulders, and walked away with Mellish.

But the laugh was certainly up against Tom Merry & Co. Their little run across the quadrangle was not likely to be forgotten in a hurry.

Gore was not much inclined to talk about what had happened. The horror of it was still strong upon him.

The Terrible Three discussed the matter, but without coming to any satisfactory conclusion. That somebody was playing ghost seemed the most feasible theory; but who he was, and why he should do it, remained mysteries.

"But one thing's jolly certain!" said Jack Blake, grinding his teeth. "He's got to be bowled out."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"And we've got to do it," said Blake.

Tom Merry nodded.

"What about a ghost hunt?" suggested Digby of the Fourth.

"The prefects have searched the quad, already with most of the masters," said Manners. "Mr. Railton ordered them. They haven't found anything. I saw Latham and Selby and Railton himself with Kildare and Darrel and most of the prefects going out with lanterns. We shan't find more than they did."

"But it must be somebody in St. Jim's—and he can be found!" said Monty Lowther. "The question is—how to get hold of the rotter."

And it was a question which seemed likely to remain unanswered.

There had been a thorough search of the quad, and the out-buildings for anybody who might have been there playing ghost.

But no one was found, and footprints, if they had been made, had been covered up and hidden by the fresh-falling flakes.

The matter was enveloped in complete mystery.

There were not wanting many fellows who ascribed the whole matter to Gore's nerves in the first place, and to the lively imagination of Tom Merry & Co. in the second. The old legend of St. Jim's had it that the spectre monk commenced his walks abroad at the first fall of snow on the old school, and the knowledge of that had scared Gore, and made him take a shadow for a spectre.

Gore was still too much upset by his experience to take notice of or to resent the jokes on the subject; but they exasperated Tom Merry & Co. sorely.

And when the fellows heard that Tom Merry & Co. had

collared Mr. Selby in the dark, in mistake for the ghost, their merriment knew no bounds.

Tom Merry went to bed that night in a somewhat cross mood—not usual with him—and his temper was not improved by the chatter in the dormitory after lights out. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, put the lights out; and as he went out of the dormitory Crooke of the Shell called after him, in anxious tones:

"Kildare! I say, Kildare!"

The prefect turned back in the doorway.

"What is it? What do you want?"

Crooke whimpered artistically.

"I—I—I'm afraid of the dark!" he said stammeringly.

"Would you mind leaving the light on to-night, Kildare?"

The senior laughed.

"Don't be an ass!" he replied.

"But it's Christmas time, you know, and there's been a fall of snow, and ghosts come out at St. Jim's just like worms after rain," said Crooke.

There was a chuckle all along the row of beds, and Kildare himself laughed.

The Terrible Three turned crimson with rage in the gloom.

"I—I think a prefect might come and sit up with us, anyway," said Kangaroo. "Would you mind sitting by my bedside and holding my hand all night, Kildare?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare went out and closed the door. There was immediately a yell from Crooke.

"Ow!"

"Shut up, you ass!" growled Bernard Glyn.

"The ghost!"

"Where?"

"In Tom Merry's mind's eye, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I feel so frightened!" murmured Crooke. "I wish the St. Jim's ghost was like the chap in the song, who couldn't come home in the dark. A really decent ghost would always go about in the daytime, not upset a fellow's beauty-sleep like this!"

"Oh, dry up, do!" growled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, dry up; he wants to listen for the ghostly footsteps!" chuckled Kangaroo.

And the whole dormitory roared.

It was a long time before the badinage ceased, and by that time the Terrible Three were furious, and longing to discover who had played ghost in the quadrangle, that they might take summary vengeance upon him.

CHAPTER 7.

The Woes of Wally.

THE next morning, in the clear, cold, wintry daylight, Tom Merry & Co. felt somewhat sheepish about the ghost story. Even Gore wondered at the effect the mysterious figure in the quad, had had upon him, and coloured with confusion when little jokes about it were made in his presence. In the calm light of day, Tom Merry wondered whether his imagination had deceived him in the strange form that had appeared for a moment under the elms in the old quad.

All supernatural feelings, of course, departed with the night. If the White Monk had really been seen, it was some practical joker dressed up in ghostly garments.

Tom Merry & Co. were certain of that.

But they were still puzzled to guess whom the practical joker might be. Tom Merry had looked into the matter, and it seemed to be clear that all the School House fellows had been indoors at the time. He compared notes with Figgins, and Figgins was of the belief that the New House boys had all been indoors, too. Truly, the weather had been bad enough to keep them indoors that evening.

But to imagine that some outsider had clambered over the school walls, in the darkness and the snow, to play ghost, was difficult. Besides, the ghost, if a practical joker, could not have been certain of being seen—he could not have known that the juniors were looking out of Figgins's window. And that a fellow would play ghost for his own amusement solely, and hang about the quad, in the snow on the chance of somebody coming out to be scared, was a theory that both Houses laughed at, and it seemed extremely improbable to the chums themselves.

What to think about the matter they did not know.

Fortunately, Mr. Selby had taken a lenient view of the attack upon him, and the juniors did not have that to answer for. The master of the Third did not refer to it again. But his temper was sharper than usual about this time, as Wally & Co. found to their cost. Wally D'Arcy, the scamp of the Third, was generally in trouble when Mr. Selby's temper

was bad, and Mr. Selby had only too many just grounds for complaint. Wally regarded lessons and masters as necessary evils, and was not careful to disguise his opinion; and it frequently brought him lectures and lines from Mr. Selby, who had the enviable task of driving knowledge into the head of D'Arcy minor.

Wally came out of the Third-Form room that morning the richer by a hundred lines, and two or three sharp reprimands, and there was a frown upon his brow.

"Beast!" Jameson, of the Third, remarked, patting Wally on the shoulder. "Bigger beast than ever to-day!"

Wally grunted.

"I wonder what's the matter with him," said Carly Gibson. "I suppose he feels some bad effects from being bumped in the snow last night! Ha, ha, ha!"

"He hasn't said a word to those silly asses about it," said Wally.

"No; he's letting us have the benefit of it."

"Blessed if I'm going to stand his beastly temper!" said Wally with a growl. "I'd like to wipe up the floor with him, only—"

"Only you can't," suggested Fane.

"Oh, rats!"

"Perhaps that sick relation of his is bothering him," Carly Gibson remarked. "It must be a bit of an effort to Selby to look after a sick relation. He's about the last man in the world to do it, I should think."

"But he is doing it," said Jameson.

"Yes; and I suppose it gives him a pain somewhere, and he's taking it out of us," said Gibson. "I wish we could get our own back. But we can't."

Wally snorted.

"Don't be too sure of that," he said mysteriously.

"If you've got a wheeze, Wally, we'll back you up!" said Jameson eagerly. "But Selby's a downy old bird, you know."

"What price the ghost of St. Jim's?"

"What?"

"Those fatheads in the Fourth and the Shell have been seeing things," grinned Wally. "It would scare old Selby into a blue funk if he saw them, too. What?"

"Phew!"

"If he came on the White Monk in the passage after dark, he'd go green," said Wally, "and it would be easy enough. There are a lot of old monkey things in the school museum, and it would be perfectly easy to get a monk's robes and cowl, and make them up with chalk."

"Jolly risky business," said Gibson.

"Jameson's the biggest chap, so we can get him to put the things on," Wally remarked. "Jameson is just the chap to do it."

"Is he?" said Jameson warmly. "That's where you're off-side, Wally. I'm not doing any ghost business, thank you."

"It's a ripping idea—"

"Well, make up as the giddy monk yourself, then."

"You see, I'm not big enough—"

"And I've got too much sense," said Jameson.

"Look here, Jameson—"

"Look here, Wally—"

"We've got to down old Selby somehow," said Wally determinedly. "Of all the crafty and bad-tempered old birds, Selby is the beastliest. I'd change him away, even for Fatty of the New House. I bar Selby!"

"What!" exclaimed a terrific voice.

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" groaned Wally.

He swung round as if he had been electrified.

Mr. Selby had come quietly out of the Form-room, and he was within two paces of Wally when the hero of the Third made his unfortunate remarks.

Mr. Selby was quite white with anger; only a red spot glowed on either cheek, and on the end of his somewhat prominent nose.

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Yes, sir? I—I—"

"You bar Selby!" said the Third-Form master. "May I inquire if I am the person you allude to in that vulgar, abusive and disrespectful way?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Follow me to my study, D'Arcy minor!"

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Selby stopped him with a gesture.

"Follow me!" he thundered.

Jameson and Carly Gibson bestowed glances of deep sympathy upon D'Arcy minor. Wally followed the Form-master to his study. Sounds came from behind the closed door in a few moments—a sound of swishing, and muffled sounds of pain.

When Wally came out, he was looking very flushed, and he had his hands tightly squeezed under his arm-pits.

"Ow!" he groaned.

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Jameson.

"No. I'm doing this for fun!" said Wally sarcastically. "Ow! Yow! The beast can lay it on! Groo! Don't I wish I were a six-footer! Yow! Wouldn't I give him a left-hander under his nose! Yaroooh!"

And Wally walked away with a peculiarly serpentine walk, owing to the manful efforts he was making to suppress the pain in his hands by squeezing them under his arms. He almost ran into his major in the passage. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy halted, and surveyed the scamp of the Third through his monocle.

"Bai Jove, Wally! What's the mattah, deah boy?"

"Licked!" growled Wally.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Old Selby! Horrid old bounder!" growled Wally. "I wish he were your form-master, Gussy! Yow!"

"You must not speak of your Form-mastah in that disrespectful way, Wally," said the swell of St. Jim's severely; "as your eldah bwothah, I disapprove of it. I—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Cheese it!" roared Wally.

"Why, you disrespectful young wascal—"

"Oh, rats!"

Wally bestowed a powerful dig in the ribs upon his major and marched off. Arthur Augustus staggered, and caught his foot in the mat, and sat down in the passage with considerable violence.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the swell of St. Jim's. "Bai Jove, Wally, I shall give you a faithful thwashin'! I—come back, you young wascal! I am goin' to thwash you."

But Wally apparently did not consider it good enough. He was gone!

CHAPTER 8.

Knocks for Knox.

TOM MERRY looked out of the doorway of the School House, and growled.

The quadrangle was a sheet of white.

The snow was not now falling; but all St. Jim's was in a mantle of it—roofs, and trees, and walls, gleamed with snow.

"No footer!" growled Tom Merry.

Blake grunted.

"Doesn't look like it, does it?" he said.

"Bai Jove! No!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "However, it looks vewy Chwistmassy, deah boys, and that's somethin'!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"There's going to be a thaw," Monty Lowther remarked.

"The ground won't be fit to play on."

"Dear me," said Skimpole of the Shell, joining the chums of the School-House at the door. "I am very sorry to hear that."

The juniors grinned as they looked at Skimpole. Skimpole's big forehead wrinkled up with a worried expression as he looked out at the sheet of snow in the quadrangle and the playing-fields. Skimpole was the genius of the Shell, and what he did not know about Evolution, Determinism, and kindred subjects was not worth knowing, either, for that matter. Skimpole did not indulge in sports or outdoor pastimes; but sometimes he would bring his scientific brain to bear on the subject, with startling results.

"Taking up footer, Skimmy?" asked Monty Lowther sarcastically.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"Not exactly, Lowther. I have little time to waste upon football and such games. But I have been thinking that I should like to try an experiment. I have a feeling that a truly scientific mind, if brought to bear upon insignificant subjects, will grasp even those, as no common brain can grasp them. I should be glad to demonstrate the truth of this theory to you fellows. I believe that, if I were placed in goal, for instance, I could keep the ball out, on purely scientific principles, without the least practice or previous knowledge of the game. Such is the result of an intimate acquaintance with science."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing whatever to laugh at, you fellows," said Skimpole reprovingly. "You are not aware of all you owe to science. To science we owe the factory system. Thousands and thousands of children in the north of England would be going to school now instead of labouring in factories, if science had never shed its light upon the earth. Thousands of people would be living in ignorance of the fact that the human race developed, in the first place, from a speck of rotting jelly in a primordial sea. This important and gratifying knowledge has been won for us by science."

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and although it cannot be proved, still that is nothing to a truly scientific mind."

Tom Merry gently took the scientist of the Shell by the shoulders, and turned him round.

"Do you mind if I make a scientific experiment, Skimpy?" he asked.

"Certainly not, Tom Merry. Can I assist you?"

"You can."

"I will do so with the greatest pleasure," said Skimpole. "What is the nature of the experiment?"

"I wish to demonstrate to these fellows that if a boot, with a foot in it, is applied behind an idiot, the idiot will be projected directly forward with a speed in direct ratio with the force exerted by the foot—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Tom Merry—"

Biff!

"Ow!"

Tom Merry's boot was planted with considerable force behind the scientific youth.

Skimpole shot forward.

He staggered six or seven paces, and dropped upon his hands and knees and gasped.

There was a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bravo, Skimpy!"

Skimpole wriggled up to a standing posture, and blinked at the juniors.

"Really, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The experiment is a complete success," said Tom Merry seriously. "Come here, and I will try it again, Skimpy, and see if it answers just as well a second time."

"Ahem! Upon the whole, Tom Merry, I cannot believe that you are seriously attempting to indulge in scientific research. You appear to be approaching the profound questions of science in a frivolous spirit," said Skimpole, shaking a bony forefinger at Tom Merry. "I must decline to continue the discussion."

And Skimpole drifted away.

The juniors laughed loud and long. The scientific junior was generally hard to get rid of, but Tom Merry had evidently found a way. The laughter died down as Mr. Selby, the master of the Third, came down the passage. Mr. Selby had no direct authority over fellows of the Fourth and the Shell, but laughter was seldom heard in Mr. Selby's presence, and smiles were seldom seen. The habitual frown upon the Third Form-master's face forbade cheerfulness. Mr. Selby descended the steps of the School House with great care, and tramped through the snow across the quadrangle.

"Seems to have quite forgiven us for last night," Tom Merry remarked, glancing after the thin figure of the Form-master.

"Looks like it," said Blake.

"He's been waggin' Wally this mornin'," D'Arcy observed. "I weally think he is a vewy bad-tempered man. I have sometimes thought of wemonstwatting with him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows—"

"He can't be all hard nuts, though," Blake remarked thoughtfully. "He's looking after that relation of his, and I suppose that's kindness of heart."

"Perhaps he's down in the will," Monty Lowther suggested, with a grin.

"Oh, rats! Mr. Wynde doesn't look rich, anyway."

"I haven't seen him," said Tom Merry. "Hallo! There are Figgins & Co.! Let's go and snowball the bounders."

"Good egg!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins and a crowd of New House juniors had come over quite near the School House, evidently with the intention of provoking a conflict.

The School House juniors were never slow to accept a challenge of that sort.

The fall of snow barred footer, but it gave them a chance of a snow fight with the New House juniors, and that was some consolation.

A crowd of fellows followed Tom Merry into the quad., where they were greeted with whizzing snowballs by Figgins & Co.

"Go it, School House!"

"File in, New House!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Hurrah!"

The battle was soon fast and furious. Snowballs crashed upon the windows and broke there, falling in fragments. Masters looked out of their study windows and smiled indulgently, not at all disposed to interfere with the sport of the juniors. Knox of the Sixth, prefect of the New House, was less patient. He opened his study window to shout to the juniors.

"Stop that, you young fools!" he shouted. "You'll break the windows next."

Knox's voice was not even heard. The New House fellows were driving the School House back, and quite a crowd had collected under Knox's study window. The snowballs whizzed faster and thicker, and the yell rose louder.

"Give 'em socks!"

"Buck up, School House!"

Knox waved his hand and yelled.

"Get off at once! I'll come out with a cane—"

Biff! Squash!

Accidentally or not, a snowball whizzed right at Knox, and caught him full in the mouth as he shouted from the window.

"Groo-oo-ough!" gasped the prefect.

He staggered back into the study. There was a yell of laughter from the quad., and three or four more snowballs whizzed into the room. One caught Knox in the eye, and another in the ear. Another swept a vase from his mantelpiece with a crash.

The prefect, gritting his teeth with rage, snatched up a cane and ran from the study. He came out furiously into the quadrangle.

"Cave!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Back up!" shouted Figgins.

By common consent the snow fight stopped, and both parties gave all their attention to Knox. Snowballs from all sides whizzed at the prefect. His cane came down with a slash across the shoulders of French of the New House, and French yelled. But it was the only blow the prefect had time to strike. A shower of snowballs whizzed at him, and he reeled back, and lost his footing in the snow. As he sat down violently snowballs showered upon him from all sides.

"Ow!" he roared. "Groo! You young scoundrels—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him beans!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Whiz—whiz—whiz!

The prefect sprang to his feet, and fairly ran for his life. Whizzing showers of snowballs followed him to the very doorway of the School House. He dashed in, gasping for breath and smothered with snow, and almost ran into Kildare.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed the captain of St. Jim's, in wonder.

"Those—those young scoundrels!" gasped Knox, stuttering with rage. "They've been snowballing me! They—they—"

"Oh, well, why couldn't you let them alone?" said Kildare.

And that was all the comfort Knox received.

And the juniors, New House and School House, in great spirits at having put their common enemy to rout, fraternised in the friendliest possible way, and celebrated their victory with deep draughts of hot lemonade at the school tuckshop.

CHAPTER 9.

A Strange Guest.

M R. SELBY crossed the quad. with gingerly steps.

Taggles, the porter, was engaged in sweeping the drive, but it was a long task, and Taggles was not industrious. Mr. Selby did not like walking in the snow, and he was afraid of slipping over. He paused to speak to Taggles, in his usual manner.

"You should have had the path clear by this time, Taggles," he said harshly. "It has not snowed since early this morning."

"Begging your pardon, sir!" said Taggles, developing deafness, as he frequently did when he did not choose to hear what was said to him.

Mr. Selby frowned.

"You should have had the path clear by this time, Taggles," he bawled.

"Ho!" said Taggles. "I'm sorry, sir! If I had three pairs of arms, sir, I'd be only too pleased to do three men's work, sir. 'Aving honly one pair, sir, I can't do it, sir, begging your pardon."

"Don't be impertinent, Taggles!"

"Ho!" said Taggles.

He leaned upon his broom, and Mr. Selby walked on frowning. Taggles spat upon his hands, and resumed his sweeping at a more snail-like rate of speed than before. Taggles cast a look after the Form-master which showed that he shared the feelings of the Third Form at St. Jim's towards Mr. Selby.

"Ho!" growled Taggles. "You are a nice man, I don't think! Which I ain't under your horders, and don't you think it! Ho!"

Taggles took care not to make that remark till Mr. Selby was out of hearing. The master of the Third tramped on gingerly through the snow and reached his destination, a

wing of the Head's house, with a door opening upon the quadrangle, under a big, leafless elm. St. Jim's—the older part of it—was a mass of irregular buildings, and all sorts of doors and windows and rooms cropped up in the most unexpected places to a stranger. The Head's house was a portion of the old School House, and attached to the Head's house were several other buildings, all parts of the ancient abbey that formed the nucleus of the great mass of buildings that formed St. Jim's. Mr. Selby entered a deep, stone porch, shadowy even in the broad daylight, and knocked at an arched door and opened it. He stepped in, into a flagged passage, with two rooms opening off it, one on either side.

He coughed as he entered the passage.

A voice came from one of the rooms.

"Who is there?"

"It is I, Wynde."

"Come in, Selby."

Mr. Selby entered the room.

It was a comfortably-furnished room, with a bright fire burning in the grate. On a sofa near the fire a man, clad in a loose, flowered dressing-gown, was seated, half reclining. A book was open upon the table before him—a book of great age, to judge by the yellowness of the leaves and the peculiar form of some of the letters.

The man looked up, and motioned towards a chair. Mr. Selby sat down, and regarded him with a far from complacent expression.

The man upon the sofa returned Mr. Selby's steady look with one equally steady. He was not a common-looking man. His cadaverous face, his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, his utter want of colour, told of the sick man, yet he seemed to be well in body. His eyes, deeply sunken, were very bright, and seemed like diamonds glittering from dark hollows. He had a quick, peculiar way of moving his lips without speaking. His hands, which were long and white and thin, seemed never at rest, the fingers moving and moving like the restless claws of a bird.

"How are you to-day, Wynde?" said Mr. Selby.

The other smiled.

"The same," he said.

"You do not feel better?"

"No."

"Or worse?"

"No."

"St. Jim's is very cold now," Mr. Selby remarked, "for one so weak as you are in health, Wynde. It is not a judicious place to select as a residence."

A peculiarly ironic smile came over the pale face.

"Do you wish me to go, Selby?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the Form-master hastily. "I—I was thinking of you. I—I, of course, shall be the better pleased the longer you stay."

"Then you will be very pleased, as I am going to stay a long time," said the other cheerfully. "You are very kind."

Mr. Selby bit his lip.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

Wynde pushed the book towards him.

"A very interesting old book," he said. "A history of St. James's College, Sussex, with its legends. Printed in 1740. Quite an old book."

"Stuffy nonsense!" said Mr. Selby peevishly, pushing the book away from him. "What interest can you find in it?"

Wynde laughed.

"I am interested in such subjects—but our tastes never were similar," he said. "I have been reading the story of the White Monk of St. Jim's. The legend seems to be as old as the school. It is a curious story."

"It is an absurd story, and has given rise to absurd fancies among the boys here," said Mr. Selby peevishly. "Never mind the White Monk of St. Jim's. I want to speak to you about yourself, doctor."

Wynde nodded.

"You have kept me very much in the dark," pursued Mr. Selby. "When I first obtained my appointment here I was in need of money, and you advanced me a hundred pounds. Without that, as you know very well, I might not have been able to take up my position as master at this college."

"Exactly."

"I hope I am grateful," said Mr. Selby, without however looking very grateful. "Any service I can render you in return I am willing to render."

"Thank you!"

"I have not been able to repay the money, and am not yet in a position to do so; and I admit that if you pressed me for it, it would make matters very awkward for me here," said the Form-master, flushing. "For those reasons—and out of friendship, of course—I acceded to the extraordinary request you made me a few days ago."

"Pure friendship, I am sure," said the other, with the same peculiar ironic expression upon his face.

Mr. Selby made an impatient movement.

"But I am entitled to know what it all means," the Form-master exclaimed, his voice rising a little. "I detest mysteries, and I dislike being kept in the dark. When I knew you before, you were a prosperous surgeon, wealthy, and well-known, and the last man in the world, I should imagine, to indulge in a freak of this kind. Now you suddenly come to me, and ask for shelter, without explaining why you have left your practice, and your home, and your relations—without explaining anything."

"Quite so."

"Dr. Holmes kindly placed these rooms at my disposal, when I represented to him that I wished to have a sick relation stay here for a time," said the Form-master, flushing again. "He has asked me no questions. He has passed no remarks upon your protracted retirement. It is understood that you are an invalid; but he has not referred to the fact that you never see a medical man. But he must wonder."

"Possibly."

"It is placing me in a most invidious position," said the Form-master, "and the longer it lasts, the more invidious my position becomes. You have forbidden me to write to any of your connections asking for information—you have, to put it plainly, threatened to claim the money that is due to you, and which it is not convenient for me to pay, if I fail to observe your wishes. I have observed them in every way; but I say again, I have a right to an explanation. Why are you thus in hiding—for that is what it amounts to?"

The other was silent.

"You have left everything, and buried yourself in the country, and you do not even venture outside the gates of this school. Why?"

No reply.

"Is it possible, Wynde, that you have broken the law in some way, and that you are wicked and unscrupulous enough to place me in the position of sheltering a criminal from justice?" Mr. Selby explained, in a trembling voice.

Wynde burst into a strange laugh.

"No," he said. "I have broken no law."

"What have you done, then?"

"Nothing."

"Then why—"

"I have already stated my reasons—my health threatened to break down under hard study and overwork, and I required a change and complete rest. I have hung over my experiments till my brain was dizzy and my senses swimming. Here I find repose."

"And is that all?"

"That is all."

"Then why should I not communicate with your friends?"

"Because I do not wish to be disturbed, or to receive troublesome letters."

"But your relations—"

"I desire to be left alone."

There was silence in the room for some minutes. Mr. Selby bit his lips, and Dr. Wynde turned the crackling, rustling pages of the old book. The Form-master rose to his feet at last.

"I suppose I must believe what you have told me," he said at last. "But I do not understand it—and I hate mysteries. I hope that you will explain to me; but I see that you are not in the humour to do so now. That is all."

Wynde did not reply. He watched the Form-master with a strange look as the latter quitted the room. Then he threw himself back upon the sofa, with a sigh, and stared into the fire with a strange, restless gleam in his eyes.

Mr. Selby, with a frowning brow, strode away towards the School House. He was in an irritable and capitious temper; and he indemnified himself for the annoyance his curious guest had caused him, by boxing the ears of two juniors as soon as he entered the School House. Then he went into his study, leaving fury raging in the bosoms of Jameson and Curly Gibson.

CHAPTER 10.

No Offers.

BANG! It was a kick at the door of Study No. 6, in the Fourth-Form passage in the School House. The time was evening, and Blake, Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy were at their preparation in that famous apartment.

D'Arcy started, and shot a shower of blots from his pen upon his foolscap, as the door flew open under that tremendous kick.

Wally, of the Third, walked in.

"Hallo!" he said coolly.

"You weekless young wascal!" exclaimed his major. "Look what you have made me do! I have spoiled this exhaire now."

Wally looked at it and nodded.

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"Yes, it looks as if you have!" he remarked, with perfect calmness. "But I didn't come here to talk about exercises. I want—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Oh, don't you begin, Gussy!" said his minor imploringly.

"I came here—"

"You cheeky young wascal—"

"I want some assistance—"

"How much?" asked Arthur Augustus.

Wally laughed.

"Not tin this time, Gussy—though now you speak of it, I'll have half-a-crown," he said.

D'Arcy silently laid the coin upon the table.

"Good!" said Wally cheerfully. "But what I want is help. I want a big chap to help me, and Herries would do rippingly."

"Oh!" said Herries, rather flattered. "What is it? Somebody been ragging you?"

"Yes."

"Who is it?"

"Selby!"

"Your Form-master?" exclaimed Herries, in surprise. "You're not going to ask me to lick a Form-master, surely?"

Wally chuckled.

"Well, no," he said; "I should draw a line at that. I leave bumping Form-masters to you fellows, when you get scared with giddy ghost-stories—"

"Weally, Wally—"

"I've got a dodge for making up a White Monk, and giving Selby a scare," said Wally. "Will you let me dress you up for the part?"

Herries stared at him.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated.

"You see, it would scare Selby no end, and— Ow! What are you doing? Let my ear alone!" yelled Wally, as Herries grasped him by that appendage.

Herries led him into the passage by the ear, and released him there.

"Now, you buzz off!" he said impressively. "And don't bring any more of your rotten Third-Form wheezes to this study."

"Why, you fathead—"

"Buzz off!"

"You chump! You burbling ass!"

The study door closed, in the midst of Wally's Third-Form eloquence, and he ceased. He gave the study door a terrific kick, expressive of his feelings, and tramped away in the direction of the Shell passage.

He bestowed a fresh kick on the door of Tom Merry's study, but a gentler one, and opened the door and looked in.

The Terrible Three were doing their prep, and they all looked up as the door flew open. Wally chuckled softly.

"It's all right—it's not a ghost!" he said reassuringly.

"You cheeky young beggar—"

"I want some of you chaps to help me—"

Monty Lowther reached for the inkpot. Wally kept a wary eye on it as he proceeded.

"I'm not big enough for the wheeze, myself, so I want a chap who's bigger, though with less sense, and any of you fellows would do."

"What do you want us to do?" asked Tom Merry good-humouredly. "Don't waste that ink, Monty. And Wally's got enough ink on his fingers and collar already."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Wally. "Look here, we're going to give Selby beans—"

"Your Form-master?"

"Yes. He's been rattier than ever lately, and we bar him," said Wally. "I'm blessed if I know what's the matter with him, unless his sick relation is getting on his mind. But I'm not going to be ragged and caned for any of his old relations. It ain't reasonable. We're going to give him the kabosh."

"Honour your pastors and masters," said Manners severely.

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "Look here, we're going to rig up a White Monk, and give him a scare. There isn't a chap big enough in the Third."

"My hat!"

"Do you see we're in a fix?" explained Wally. "Will one of you chaps help me out?"

Monty Lowther jumped up.

"Certainly!" he exclaimed.

He proceeded to help Wally out—though not in the sense in which the scamp of the Third Form meant the words. Monty Lowther used his boot—and Wally was helped out of the study—and he retired roaring into the passage.

"You—you dangerous ass!"

"I'm helping you out," said Lowther blandly.

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

"Ow! Yow! Chuch it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Tom Merry.

"You cackling asses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroor!"

Wally ran down the passage at last, and Monty Lowther returned into the study breathless and laughing, and sat down to the table again.

"I think we've put the stopper on those young duffers playing ghost," he remarked.

"Ha, ha! Yes, rather!"

And the Terrible Three went on with their preparation. Wally, feeling considerably sore, in body as well as in mind, retired from the Shell quarters with a frowning brow. His search for a recruit seemed likely to prove quite unavailing. As he went downstairs, he encountered Gore, of the Shell, on the first landing, talking to Skimpole. Skimpole was blinking at Gore through his big spectacles, and Gore was shaking his fist within an inch of Skimpole's nose.

"Hallo! Trouble in the family?" said Wally.

"You champion ass!" roared Gore, approaching his knuckles to Skimpole's nose till they nearly touched it.

"You fearful chump!"

"Really, Gore—"

"You—you—you—"

"I appeal to D'Arcy minor," said Skimpole, turning to the Third-Former. "D'Arcy minor, is not it universally admitted that Christmas is a time for charity and kindness of heart?"

"Certainly," said Wally.

Gore seems to be somewhat excited, because I have been exercising the charity suitable to the season of the year—"

"He's given my steak pie to a tramp!" roared Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The tramp said that he was hungry," said Skimpole mildly. "I think his statement was correct, because he certainly looked as if he had not done any work for a considerable time. I gave your steak pie to him, Gore, on the principles of Socialism. His need was greater than yours, and for the sake of upholding my principles, Gore, I would give away many steak pies, who-soever they belonged to."

"You—you—"

"You are excited, Gore," said Skimpole soothingly. "Pray—"

Biff!

Gore certainly was excited, and his excitement had got the better of him at last. His knuckles came hard upon Skimpole's nose, and the philanthropist of the School House sat down suddenly upon the landing.

"Ow!" he gasped.

Gore stalked away.

"Ow! Gore is extremely violent!" said Skimpole, rubbing his nose. "Ow! Of course, as a sincere Determinist I cannot blame Gore. He has acted from the influence of his heredity or else his environment, and therefore— Ow! But my nose experiences considerable agony, all the same, Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, D'Arcy minor, it is no subject for laughter. Ow! A violent impact on the nasal organ, causing a suffusion of blood, has none of the elements of humour about it, so far as I am able to observe. Your risibility is misplaced."

"Go hon!" said Wally. "Skimmy, old man, you're the chap I've been looking for. I want you to help me."

"Ow!"

"Will you come and let me dress you up as a ghost?"

"Dear me!"

"It's only a jape, Skimmy."

Skimpole staggered up, still holding his nose.

"At present, D'Arcy minor, I must attend to my nose, which seems likely to bleed with considerable profusion. And indeed, I fear that it will be impossible for me to lend my aid to absurd and juvenile tricks."

"Br-r-r-r!" said Wally.

And he walked away. It really looked as if the Third-Formers would be left to carry out their jape themselves, without any assistance, after all.

CHAPTER 11.

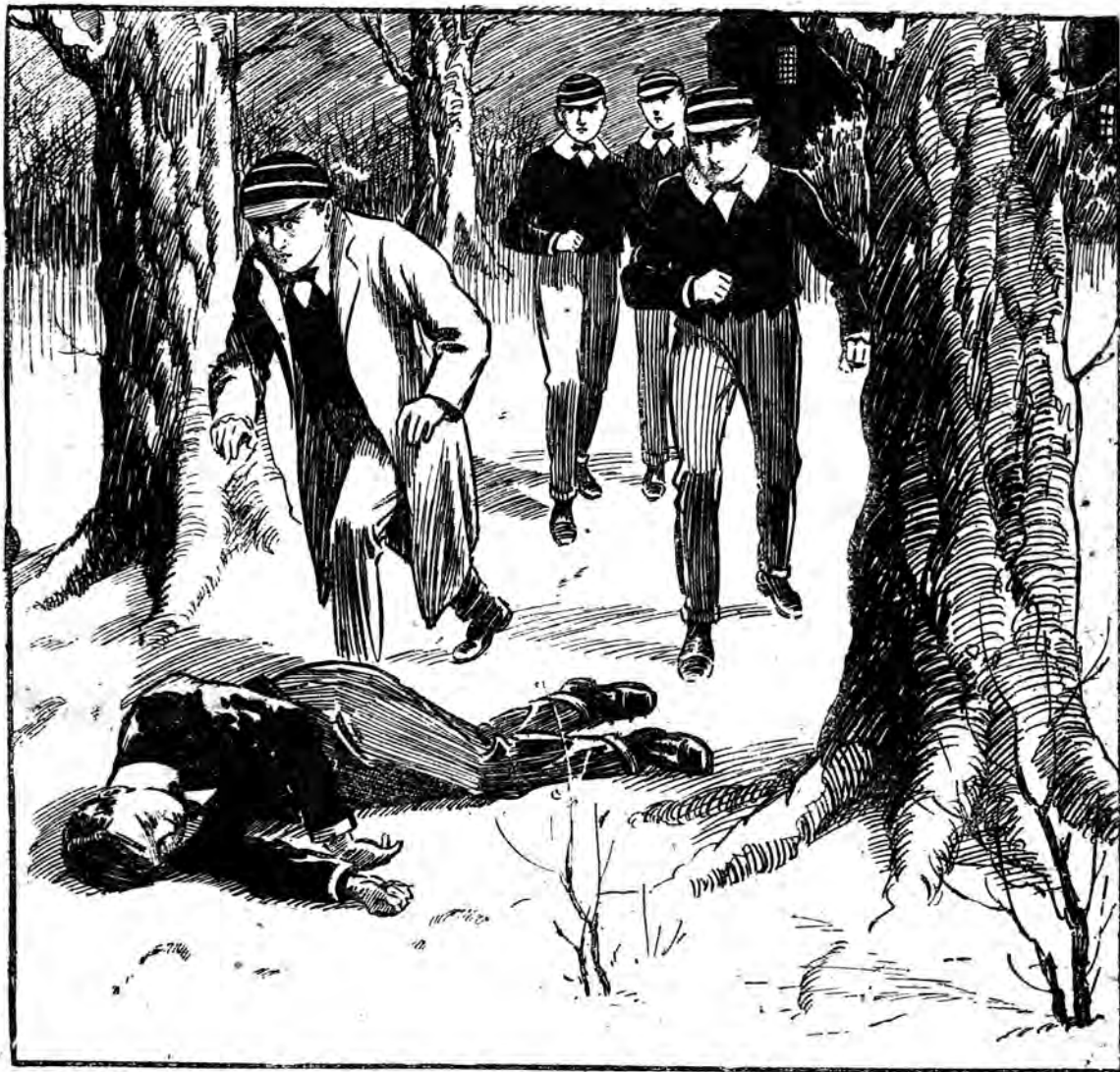
No Luck!

WALLY was frowning as he came into the Third Form-room. The fags were all there; evening preparation was over, and they had the room to themselves. Jameson, who was making toast at a blazing fire, to the accompaniment of a frequent crackling and an incessant smell of burning, looked round with a ruddy face as Wally came in.

"All serene?" he asked.

Wally grunted.

"No. I can't get any of the silly asses to lend a hand. It's a jolly good jape, too."



Tom Merry stumbled over something that lay in the snow—something that he knew, without looking at it, was a human form, "Good Heavens!" muttered Manners. "What—who is it?" (See Chapter I.)

"They're all jealous of the Third Form," remarked Fane.
 "I shouldn't wonder."
 "You'll have to do it after all, Jimmy."
 Jameson shifted uneasily.
 "Look here, Wally—"
 "You're big enough," said Wally—"big enough and old enough to be in the Fourth, for that matter. Besides, there's no risk."
 "Oh, I suppose I could do it," said Jameson ungraciously.
 "But where are we going to get the monk's clothes?"
 "From the school museum."
 "They will be missed."
 "Let 'em be missed."
 "There may be a row."
 "Let there be a row."
 "That's all very well, Wally."
 "My dear chap, we're going to work this jape," said Wally. "I want to see old Selby turn green and pink. You needn't be afraid."
 "I'm not afraid," roared Jameson.
 "Or nervous, then."
 "I'm not nervous."

"What's the matter with you, then?" demanded Curly Gibson.

"Nothing," growled Jameson. "I suppose I can work the wheeze. But if we can't get the monk's clothes—"

"We can get them easily enough," said Wally.

"Well, we'll go presently," said Jameson, with a considerable lack of enthusiasm. "Will you have some of this toast?"

Wally shook his head.

"The sooner we go the better," he said. "The library will be shut up soon. Come on, Curly; and you, too, Jim."

"I'm making toast."

"Frayne will look after your toast."

"Certainly!" said Joe Frayne.

Jameson reluctantly relinquished the toast and the toasting-fork to Frayne.

"Mind you don't burn it."

"Crikey," said Frayne, "I'm blessed if I see how it can be burned much more."

"Come on, Jimmy!"

And Wally & Co. went out of the Form-room. Wally and Gibson were quite keen about the matter, perhaps because

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they were not going to play ghost. Jameson did not seem at all keen; in fact, he was inclined to throw obstacles in the way all along. Perhaps he was thinking what a poor protection a monk's robe would afford if Mr. Selby started on him with a cane.

"I shouldn't wonder if there ain't any monk's duds there," he exclaimed, as the juniors quietly entered the school library, and Wally switched on the electric light. "There's a lot of old armour and stuff, but—"

"I remember there was one robe and cowl hanging up there last time I went to the cupboard," said Wally solemnly. "That was the time I borrowed a helmet for the private theatricals, when I was Jim the Fireman."

"Yes, and a pretty ass you looked, playing fireman in a giddy Crusader's helmet," sniffed Jameson.

"More like a fireman than if I had worn a school cap or a silk hat, I suppose," said Wally warmly. "Look here, Jameson—"

"Don't argue, you chaps," said Curly Gibson. "If we're found here, some giddy prefect will want to know what we're doing here."

"Yes; shut up, Jamey!"

"You shut up!" said Jameson crossly.

"Look here—"

"Here's the cupboard," said Curly Gibson.

In one corner of the old library was a deep recess, and in that recess a deep cupboard where various lumber of some historical interest was kept. Fragments of old armour, and helmets, old dented battleaxes, and many dusty garments that had belonged, or were supposed to have belonged, to the old monks of St. James's Abbey—the original institution which had occupied the site of St. Jim's—in the days before King Henry VIII. had found an easy source of income by despoiling the monasteries.

Wally struck a match, and blinked into the depths of the cupboard.

"Get it out," said Curly.

"Blessed if I can see it!"

"Oh, rats! Look again!"

"It's gone," growled Wally, striking another match.

"Some ass has put it away, I suppose. I remember hearing Railton say that the things here ought to be sorted out and labelled, and put somewhere where visitors to St. Jim's could see them. Blessed if I know why Housemasters can't let well alone!"

Jameson did not seem so disappointed as Wally.

"Well, it's all right," he said; "the jape's off."

"It isn't," said Wally crossly. "I can't find the monk's robe, but we can rig up something else. Look here, Jimmy, I suppose you haven't hidden it yourself, to get out of this jape?"

"Of course I haven't!" said Jameson indignantly.

Wally sniffed.

"You don't seem very keen about it," he said. "Well, perhaps we should have got into a row for chalking it white, even if we'd found it here."

"Very likely," grinned Curly. "But what are we going to do?"

"Oh, we can rig Jameson up in a white sheet instead."

"Can we?" said Jameson significantly. "Not if Jameson knows it, my son. If you're going to have a ghost in a white sheet, size is no object, and you or Curly can take on the job."

"Look here, Jameson—"

"I tell you—"

"Rats!"

"I'm not going to —"

"I say—"

"What are you rascals doing here?" exclaimed a sharp voice, as Kildare, of the Sixth, came into the library.

The three fags had left the cupboard, and were standing in the library as they argued. They ceased suddenly, and looked in dismay at Kildare.

"Hallo, Kildare!" said Wally feebly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Search of knowledge," said Wally, recovering himself. "Contemplating the works of the master minds of the various ages."

Kildare laughed.

"I suppose you were up to some mischief," he exclaimed.

"Oh, Kildare!" said Wally, looking shocked.

Kildare pointed to the door.

"Get out!" he said tersely.

The fags were only too glad to obey. Kildare switched off the light and followed them.

Wally & Co. returned to the Third Form-room, Wally in a very dissatisfied mood. He frowned as he sat down, and put his boots on the fender; and Jameson frowned when he saw the toast that Frayne had finished for him.

"Do you call that toast or cinders?" he roared.

"Cinders!" replied Frayne cheerfully.

And then he dodged away out of Jameson's reach.

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"I suppose we're chucking up the wheeze on Selby?" said Curly Gibson gloomily.

Wally grunted.

"I'm not," he said. "I'm going to make the old bird sit up, you bet. Jameson is going to scare him in a white sheet."

"No fear!" said Jameson.

"Look here, Jameson—"

"No white sheets for me," said Jameson decidedly. "You or Curly can take it on, if you like. I don't raise any objection to that."

"Well, perhaps it would suit Curly just as well," said Wally, with an air of consideration. "Yes, perhaps Curly had better do it."

"Perhaps," said Curly; "but it's a jolly big perhaps. I'm not playing ghost at my time of life—not much!"

"Now, don't be a funk, Curly."

"You take it on yourself, D'Arcy minor."

"Well, you see—"

"Yes, you take it on!" exclaimed Jameson warmly.

"Let's see you do something beside jaw."

"Good!" said Curly Gibson. "It's settled; Wally takes it on. Good!"

"Look here—" began Wally.

"Of course, if you're afraid, we might ask Frayne or Pike," said Jameson sarcastically.

"I'm not afraid," howled Wally, "and I'll take it on. Yah!"

"Good!" said Gibson and Jameson together solemnly.

"We'll watch you from a distance. Good!"

Wally snorted. He did not seem to think that it was so good as Jameson and Curly Gibson supposed.

CHAPTER 12.

Wally Catches It.

TOM MERRY looked out of the window of the Shell dormitory, when the juniors of the School House went to bed that night. It was a dark, cold night, but the quad was less white with snow. There had been a thaw, and it was melting, and the walls and the trees were weeping with thawed snow. Dimly the gaunt trees glimmered through the gloom of the night. Tom Merry turned back from the window, and found more than one grinning face turned towards him.

"Looking for the ghost?" asked Kangaroo.

Tom Merry coloured.

"I don't suppose he'll walk to-night," remarked Clifton Dane. "According to the legend, he walks when there's snow on the ground."

"And there's a thaw to-night," grinned Bernard Glyn.

"The ghost will most likely keep indoors."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sleep in peace," said Crooke. "Of course, if Tom Merry likes, we could keep a candle alight, to watch over his baby slumbers."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Gore. "If you'd seen what I saw in the quad last night you wouldn't jaw about it."

"What was it—a shadow?" asked Crooke.

"Or a tree?" grinned Kangaroo.

"Or Taggles's cat?"

"Or Taggles himself?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or old Selby taking a walk?" Clifton Dane suggested.

"He seems to trot round the quad, at all hours, visiting that sick relation of his."

"Or perhaps it was the sick relation going out for a stroll in the snow," said Crooke.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gore did not reply to the jokes of the Shell fellows. He grunted, and settled down to sleep. The Terrible Three looked very red. The more time that passed without their hearing anything of the ghost, the more they began to think that perhaps their imagination had played them tricks. Unless something more was seen of the White Monk, the chums of the Shell were not likely to hear the end of the jokes on the subject until the school broke up for the Christmas holidays.

"Good-night!" said Kildare.

"Good-night, Kildare! Could you stuff up the keyhole, to keep the ghost out?" asked Crooke.

Kildare laughed, and retired. The talk ran on ghosts for some time. The Terrible Three were sick of the subject, but they could not stop it, and they could not close their ears. Crooke related a blood-curdling ghost story, describing a horrid spectre with clanking chains and rattling bones, and several voices asked Tom Merry if that was anything like what he had seen. Tom Merry only grunted in reply.

In the midst of the chatter there came a faint sound from

the passage outside. It was the creak of a board under a stealthy tread.

There was silence in the dormitory at once.

"Hallo!" said Lowther. "Who's prowling round, I wonder?"

"Hark!" muttered Gore.

It was a faint rustle from outside. In the dead silence of the dormitory the juniors heard it plainly. It sounded like the swish of some loose garment on the floor.

There was no sign of laughter in the dormitory now. Crooke put his head under the bedclothes.

"It's only somebody prowling," said Manners.

"Look out of the door, Crooke, and see who it is," said Monty Lowther maliciously.

"Go it, Crooke!"

"You're not afraid of ghosts, you know."

"Buck up!"

Crooke made no reply. But he did not make any movement to leave his bed. Wild horses would hardly have dragged Crooke out of his bed at that moment.

Tom Merry jumped out of bed, and crossed the dormitory to the door. Whatever might be in the passage, Tom Merry was not afraid.

Tom Merry opened the door softly. A glimmer of white in the dusky passage struck him; but at the same moment a whispering voice, from further up the passage, came to his ears, and effectually dispelled any thought of ghosts.

"That's ripping, Wally!"

Tom Merry laughed softly. He understood now.

Wally & Co were carrying out their plan of playing ghost and scaring Mr. Selby. The figure in white that loomed up before him was Wally with a sheet over his head. Evidently the fag had not been able to obtain the monk's garb he had intended to wear.

Tom Merry made one spring at the white figure.

There was a startled yell from D'Arcy minor.

"Yaroo!"

"This way."

"Ow!"

"Come in, my son!"

Tom Merry dragged the fag into the dormitory, and shut the door. Wally was struggling desperately, but he was enveloped and almost suffocated in the folds of the sheet, and he was helpless in Tom Merry's powerful grasp.

The Shell fellows were turning out of their beds on all sides now.

"What is it?"

"Who is it?"

"What's the row?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"It's D'Arcy, minor, playing ghost," he said. "Strike a light!"

Matches flared out. Candles were lit, and a crowd of the Shell fellows gathered round the unfortunate spectre. Wally extricated his head from the folds of the sheet, and turned a crimson and furious face towards the juniors, gasping for breath.

"Lemme go!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass, Tom Merry!"

"You're caught in the act," grinned Tom Merry.

"I wasn't coming here; I was going to give old Selby a scare!" howled Wally. "What did you want to interfere for?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It's a rotten dangerous trick," he said. "Supposing you had met a housemaid on the stairs, or in the passage? You might have scared her into a fit."

"H'm! I didn't think about that. But—"

"Or suppose you had met Crooke, here, you'd have sent him into hysterics," said Monty Lowther. "He's only just taken his head out from under the bedclothes now."

Crooke scowled angrily.

"I'm going to scare old Selby; he's coming up to bed soon."

"You're not," said Tom Merry.

"Look here—"

"You're going to promise, honour bright, never to play ghost," said Tom Merry impressively.

"I jolly well won't!" roared Wally.

"Get a blanket off my bed, Monty."

"Right-oh! Here you are!"

"Four of you take hold of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, what are you up to?" shouted Wally, legging it to struggle again. "What are you going to do?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm going to chuck you into that blanket," he said.

"You're going to be tossed in the blanket, my son, as a warning to you not to play rotten japes."

"Hold on! I— Oh!"

Wally bumped into the blanket. He struggled ferociously to get out. Tom Merry turned him over on his back.

"Lemme gerrout!" roared Wally.

"Better lie still, or you may take a tumble," suggested Manners. "Now then, all together! Heave ahead, my hearties!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The blanket swung up, and Wally was tossed high. He had sense enough to lie still now; it was the only safe way to be tossed in a blanket. A struggling victim might easily turn over in the air, and come down in a most uncomfortable manner, or even miss the blanket and alight upon the floor.

Wally sailed up, and swooped down, and came into the blanket. He gasped for breath, and glared at the Shell fellows. There was a shout of laughter.

"Up again!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

Up went the hero of the Third. He came down gasping harder than ever. Tom Merry gave him a cheerful grin.

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Ow!"

"Will you promise not to play ghost again?"

"No!" roared Wally.

"Up with him!"

Whiz! Bump!

"Yaroo!"

"Will you promise?"

"No! Yes! Yaroo! Ow!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yow! Yes!"

"Right-oh! Roll him out!"

Wally was rolled out on the floor. He picked himself up, panting for breath, and glared at the juniors. They grinned at him.

"You—you—you—" gasped Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hero of the Third tramped out of the dormitory, and slammed the door. The Shell fellows, chuckling, returned to bed. In the passage, Wally bumped into two shadowy forms. Jameson and Curly Gibson had crept as near as they could venture, to learn what was going on.

"Ow!" murmured Jameson. "You're on my foot, Wally."

"Br-r-r! Keep your silly foot out of the way!"

"What's happened?"

"Oh, don't jaw!"

"I suppose we're going on with the jape?" said Curly Gibson.

Wally snorted.

"I suppose we're not!" he said. "Let's get back to the dorm., and get to bed. We shall get our death of cold here. Playing ghost is a mug's game, anyway!"

"Look here, Wally—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Wally crossly.

"But—"

"Cheese it!"

And Wally returned to the Third Form dormitory, followed by his two comrades, who were wondering much at their leader's change of mind. It was not till the morning that they learned his reasons, as Wally did not condescend to explain. They learned the facts from the Shell fellows, and they laughed so much that Wally chased them down the Third Form passage in a state of great exasperation, and they did not venture to approach him for some hours afterwards.

CHAPTER 13.

A Startling Encounter.

JACK BLAKE looked out of the School House door after morning lessons, and sniffed the fresh, keen air. A wonderful change had come over the aspect of St. Jim's. The snow had melted, the mantle of white was gone, and the ground was weeping with dampness. But a bright sun had come out, promising favourable weather for the afternoon.

"The ground will be in a rotten state this afternoon," Herries remarked. "Just our rotten luck, to have the ground rotten on a half-holiday!"

Blake nodded.

"We'll put in some practice, all the same," he said. "I believe it's going to snow again, as a matter of fact; this is only an interval. We can practice, whatever state the ground's in, I think—better than nothing."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Quite so, my sons," said Tom Merry, joining them, cheerfully. "Seen or heard anything more of the White Monk?"

Jack Blake shook his head.

"No," he said. "I'm beginning to think it was fancy, after all. I heard a row from your dorm. last night, I believe—"

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A SPECIAL STORY "FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE!"

NEXT WEEK:

A Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. ORDER EARLY!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes. We caught a ghost; but it was a fag in a white sheet."

"Bai Jove! The young wascal! I twust that you inflicted a wopwah chastisement upon the weckless young wascal, Tom Mewwy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Yes, rather—we did!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We tossed him in a blanket, and made him promise never to play ghost again."

"Jollay good, deah boy! I quite appwove!"

"Thanks, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "I had been feeling quite anxious about that, but now my mind's at rest."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"By the way, which fag was it?" asked Blake.

"D'Arcy minor."

"Wally! The young ass!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon Tom Merry.

"Did you say it was my minah, Tom Mewwy?"

"Yes, old son."

"I twust you did not have the feahful cheek to toes my minah in a blanket, deah boy?" said D'Arcy, in his most stately manner.

The Terrible Three chuckled together.

"That's exactly what we did have," said Monty Lowther. "Of course, we were trembling all the time with fearful apprehension."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you wottahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus pushed back his cuffs in a warlike way. Monty Lowther gently tipped his silk hat over his eyes, and ran down the School House steps. Tom Merry and Manners followed him, laughing. D'Arcy rescued his silk hat, and set it straight, and jammed his monocle into his eye furiously.

"Bai Jove! The wottahs! I—I—"

He ran down the steps, slipped on them, and finished his journey down in a sitting position. He jumped up in the quad., with a big patch of mud showing upon his beautiful trousers, and dashed in pursuit of the Terrible Three, leaving the juniors at the School House door yelling with laughter.

"Stop, you wottahs!" bawled D'Arcy, holding his eyeglass with one hand and his silk hat with the other, as he rushed in pursuit of the chums of the Shell. "I insist upon your stoppin' immediately! I am goin' to thwash you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three, apparently in a state of the greatest terror, ran on. They dodged round the Head's house, and under the big, leafless elm in front of the door of the little dwelling occupied by Mr. Selby's strange guest. Arthur Augustus rushed round the tree in pursuit. As it happened, the strange guest of Mr. Selby stepped from the deep porch at the same moment, and D'Arcy ran right into him.

There was a sharp exclamation from Dr. Wynde, and he went whirling, and fell upon the ground before the porch. D'Arcy stopped at once, just saving himself by a grasp on the tree trunk.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped.

His eyeglass flew in one direction, and his silk hat in another. For the moment he could only stand and stare breathlessly at the fallen stranger.

Wynde struggled to his feet.

Even at that moment no colour came into his pale cheeks—he was white and sickly in look; but his deeply sunken eyes gleamed with a strange and savage light. He advanced towards the swell of St. Jim's, with his eyes gleaming and his hands clenching, the fingers working convulsively.

D'Arcy, alarmed by his look, shrank back against the tree. He had expected the man to be angry, but there was an expression in Wynde's eyes, strange and unfathomable, that startled and alarmed him.

"I—I am vewy sowwy, my deah sir!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It was quite an accident, I assure you!"

The man's grasp was upon him the next moment. He was dragged away from the tree, and swung to and fro in a powerful grasp. It was surprising that the thin, frail, white-faced doctor could exert so much strength.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy. "Help! Wescue, deah boys!"

The Terrible Three had stopped, and were looking back. At the sight of Arthur Augustus vainly struggling in the grasp of the strangely incensed man, they ran back towards the spot. Tom Merry grasped the man by the arm, and Lowther and Manners drew the breathless swell of St. Jim's from his hold.

"Bai Jove," gasped D'Arcy—"bai Jove! He's as stwong as a horse! He must be mad, I think!"

Tom Merry looked indignantly at the man.

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

"How dare you drag a fellow about like that!" he exclaimed. "His running into you was an accident."

The doctor stared at him without replying. His fingers worked convulsively, and there was a strange red gleam in the depths of his sunken eyes. It seemed to Tom Merry, as he watched him, that the man was making terrible efforts at self-control. Why he should be so fearfully excited was a mystery to the juniors. The strange scene suddenly ended. The man turned and strode into the porch of the House, and the juniors heard the door slam, and a key turn in the lock.

They gazed at each other in amazement. Arthur Augustus smoothed out the many creases and wrinkles which the man's grasp had made in his Eton jacket.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry at last.

Manners whistled softly.

"He must be rocky in the crumpe!" he said, in a low voice. "I never saw a sane man look like that! Is it possible—"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Looks as if he's not quite right," he said. "I suppose he's a bit loose in the rocker, and that's why Selby is taking care of him. Queer, isn't it?"

"I wonder if the Head knows?"

"Bai Jove, it's wotten, you know! I feel sowwy enough for the poor chap, if he is weak in the wockah, but he has wumpled my clothes feahfully, and—"

"Well, you bumped him over," grinned Lowther. "Why do you do these things, Gussy?"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

The Terrible Three walked away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, forgetting his intended vengeance, returned to the School House to get his hat brushed and to change his jacket. As he ruefully confided to Blake, that jacket would want pressing before he could wear it again. When the Terrible Three came in to dinner, Arthur Augustus gave them a particularly severe look, at which the chums of the Shell smiled sweetly.

CHAPTER 14.

With the Gloves On.

"SEEN any more ghosts?" Crooke, of the Shell, asked the question, with his usual unpleasant smile. Gore was standing in the passage, with his hands in his pockets and a wrinkled expression upon his forehead. He started as the cad of the Shell spoke, and his eyes gleamed. Gore had not yet recovered from the shock of that strange encounter in the darkness of the quad., and most of the fellows had left off chipping him, reserving their little pleasantries for Tom Merry & Co.

"Oh, shut up!" growled Gore.

Crooke chuckled.

"Blessed if you mustn't have been in a blue funk, to make a ghost out of a giddy shadow!" he remarked.

"You were in a blue funk yourself last night when we heard D'Arcy minor in the passage!" retorted Gore, "I remember you put your head under the bedclothes."

There was a laugh from the juniors in the passage. Crooke had not been suffered to forget that little incident by the fellows who had seen it. The cad of the Shell flushed red.

"I didn't!" he exclaimed. "I knew all along that—"

"Rats!" said Gore. "You shoved your head under the bedclothes at the first sound. Tom Merry saw you as well as I!"

"He saw nothing of the kind, and you didn't!" said Crooke. "If he says so it's a lie!"

"Better tell him so," grinned Gore.

"Do you think I'm afraid to tell him so?" roared Crooke.

"Yes; I know you are."

Smack!

Gore staggered back against the wall as Crooke's open hand caught him across the face. The next moment he was rushing upon Crooke, and the cad of the Shell met him with right and left, and Gore went down in a heap.

"Hold on, you cad!" exclaimed Clifton Dane. "Let him alone! Gore's not fit for a tussle now! Hands off!"

Crooke gave him a savage look.

"Quite so," said a quiet voice, as Tom Merry came down the passage. "If you are spoiling for a fight, Crooke, you can come into the gym with me."

Crooke backed away a little.

"I don't want a row with you," he said sullenly.

"I dare say you don't!" said Tom Merry, with a curl of the lip. "You only want a row with a chap who's not fit. But you're going to have it, whether you want it or not. Come into the gym!"

"I won't!"

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Gore staggered to his feet. There was a red smear on his nose, and he was blinking painfully out of one eye.

"Leave him to me," he muttered. "I—"

Tom Merry pushed him back.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm looking after Crooke.

Are you coming into the gym., Crooke?"

"No," said Crooke, with a scowl. "I'm not!"

"Then I'll help you along. Lend a hand, Manners."

"What—ho!" said Manners.

Crooke tried to back away, but the chums of the Shell had hold of his arms in a moment, and he walked out of the house. A crowd of juniors followed. A fight with Tom Merry in it was always worth seeing, and there were few of them who would not have been glad to see Crooke get the licking he deserved.

With a crowd of juniors round him, Crooke was walked into the gym., and the juniors formed a circle. The cad of the Shell looked sullen and savage. He was quite ready to encounter Gore, especially as Gore was out of condition; but tackling Tom Merry was quite another matter. But Crooke had no choice left.

"Will you have the gloves on?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, hang you!"

"Chuck them out, Blake, my son."

"Here you are!"

"I shall be vewy pleased to be wewewee, deah boys, if you like," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, taking out his big gold watch. "Two-minute wounds and one-minute wests!"

"Perhaps Crooke would prefer one-minute rounds and two-minute rests," suggested Monty Lowther, with great gravity.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crooke scowled as he put on the gloves. But he was fairly in for it now, and he meant to put up the best fight he could. He was bigger than Tom Merry by a good inch, and he had some knowledge of boxing. But in fitness and in courage he was far from being the equal of the hero of the Shell.

"Time!" said D'Arcy. "Time, deah boys!"

"Walk up, gents!" said Blake.

"Go it!"

And the adversaries faced one another.

Crooke started with a fierce and slogging attack. His size and weight drove Tom Merry round the ring, and round again, and D'Arcy was looking at his watch, when the hero of the Shell suddenly seemed to wake up, as it were, to new life.

He stood his ground, and as Crooke came on he drove the cad of the Shell's guard up, and brought in his left with a sounding thump upon his chest.

"Ow!"

Crooke gave a gasp like steam escaping, and dropped in a sitting posture on the floor of the gym.

"Time!"

"Hurray!"

Levison came forward and picked the cad of the Shell up. Mellish made a knee for him, and Crooke sank upon it, gasping.

Tom Merry did not trouble to rest. He stood in the ring, waiting for the cad of the Shell to come on again.

"Time, deah boys!"

Crooke stepped up again. His face was savagely angry now, and anger and hatred displaced the place of courage. But he was more cautious in his attack now, and Tom Merry received some of the punishment.

Biff—biff—biff!

The thick padded gloves crashed upon face and chest, and both the combatants looked hard hit and breathless when Arthur Augustus called time again.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated the swell of St. Jim's. "I neval weally thought that Cwooke had it in him, you know!"

"Order!" shouted Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Referees and timekeepers are not allowed to make remarks upon the fight," said Jack Blake, with great severity. "I'm surprised at you!"

"Weally—"

"Order!"

"Time!" said Bernard Glyn.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"It's time, you ass! Why don't you call time?" shouted Digby.

"Weally, Digby—"

"Time, you fathead!"

"Time, you duffer! Why don't you call time?"

"How can I call time when you are intewwuptin' me?" demanded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "I insist upon you chaps keepin' quiet!"

"Time!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Time! Time!"

"I wewee to allow the fight to pwoceed until I have called time! Weally—"

"Well, call it, then, ass!" roared Blake.

"I wewee to be called an ass!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh. Crooke was gasping on his second's knee, and apparently not at all averse to having an extra rest.

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye, and gave the grinning juniors a withering look.

"Pway keep ordah!" he exclaimed. "I wewee to allow the fight to pwoceed undah wiotous conditions. Are you weady, deah boys?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"Yes!" growled Crooke.

"Time, then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the third round commenced.

Crooke rushed in, attacking hard; but Tom Merry did not give ground. He met the slogging attack with a perfect defence, and Crooke exhausted himself in vain in striving to get through his guard.

Then suddenly Tom Merry's right came out, and it caught Crooke on the point of the chin, and his left followed it as Crooke's hands flew wildly up.

Crash!

Crooke dropped upon his back, and lay gasping and dazed.

"Time!"

The minute ticked away. Arthur Augustus looked at his watch again, and then turned his eyeglass upon Crooke, of the Shell.

"Time!"

Crooke did not move.

"He's done!" grinned Herries.

"Clean as a whistle!" said Kangaroo.

"Time!" repeated D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "How many times are you going to say time?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Chuck it!"

"I wish to give Cwooke ewewy chance. The wewewees has powah to modify the wules if he considahs it judicious. I considah it judicious. Time!"

"I'm done!" growled Crooke.

"Sure you wouldn't like to go on, deah boy?"

"No, ass!"

"Weally, Cwooke—"

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

"Cwooke, you uttah wottah, that is not the way to address a wewewee!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly.

"I wegard you as a wank outsidah."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Crooke staggered to his feet, and peeled the gloves off, and flung them into a corner. Tom Merry removed the gloves in his turn.

"Bai Jove, if Tom Mewwy had not already licked you, I should wegard it as my duty to give you a feahful thwashin', Cwooke!"

Crooke did not reply. He strode away, scowling, with Levison and Mellish; and the juniors raised a cheer for the victor.

"Hurray!"

"Yaas, huwway, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, patting Tom Mewwy on the shoulder. "I wegard you as havin' put up a vewy good fight. I wegard Cwooke as a wottah. I wegard—"

But the rest of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's regards were lost as the juniors trooped away.

CHAPTER 15.

Skimpole Keeps Goal.

JACK BLAKE joined Tom Merry as he walked out of the gym. Tom Merry was looking a little flushed, and there was a slight swelling on his nose, but, otherwise, he looked none the worse for his encounter with the cad of the Shell.

"We can get in some practice this afternoon," Blake remarked. "Figgins & Co. are on the ground already."

"Good," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "We shan't have much more footer before Christmas, I expect."

The juniors walked down to the football field. Skimpole, of the Shell, joined them on the way. Skimpole dug a bony knuckle into Tom Merry's ribs, in the objectionable way he had.

"You are going to play football, my dear Merry," he exclaimed.

"We're going to practise some shooting at goal," said Tom Merry. "The ground's not fit for a match."

"Very good. I have been waiting for this opportunity," the genius of the Shell explained. "As I mentioned to Blake, I regard it as the simplest thing in the world to keep goal on purely scientific principles. Previous training is quite unnecessary."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, get out of goal, Fatty!" shouted Monty Lowther. "Skimpole is going to keep goal on purely scientific principles."

Fatty Wynn grinned. The New House juniors were doing some shooting practice, and Fatty Wynn, the champion goalie of the Lower School, was between the posts. He came out cheerfully to make room for Skimpole. The juniors had been practising with a number of old footers, keeping Fatty Wynn incessantly bombarded, and the fat Fourth-Former had proved himself equal to the test. It was not likely that Skimpole, of the Shell, would be able to give an equal proof of skill, however.

"Hallo, what's the little game?" demanded Figgins.

"I am about to demonstrate the feasibility of keeping goal on purely scientific principles, my dear Figgins," said Skimpole, blinking at the chief of the New House juniors through his big spectacles. "I have long held that a truly scientific mind, if brought to bear upon the most paltry subjects, will prove itself far beyond the ordinary brain in power. Such a—"

"Is footer a paltry subject?" asked Figgins sweetly.

Skimpole smiled indulgently.

"Of course, to a scientific brain, all these games are mere trifling," he said. "The time you fellows waste in playing football, I devote to research into the origin of the human race. When my book is published—I have not advanced with it very far, only three hundred chapters—but when it is finished and published, it will demonstrate beyond all reasonable doubt that the human race originated in a speck of decayed fruit, and not in a fragment of jelly as has hitherto been supposed, even by so eminent an authority as Professor Balmeyrumpet. Therefore—"

"Stop him!" gasped Figgins. "If he isn't wound up, and going by machinery, stop him!"

"Really, Figgins—"

"Get into goal, Skimmy!" bawled Blake.

"Certainly, my dear Blake."

And he took his place in front of goal and blinked at the juniors.

A grin went round. Comical enough at all times, the weedy junior cut a most laughable figure in such a position. He was quite confident, however, of his powers.

"I am ready, you fellows," he said, adjusting his big spectacles.

"Right-ho!" grinned Tom Merry.

And the captain of the Shell dribbled in front. The intent look with which Skimpole watched his evolutions set the chums roaring. Skimpole, with that cocksureness of little-experienced people, thought that Tom Merry meant to shoot in the corner to which he was dribbling the ball. Tom Merry, of course, sent the ball with a side punt under his left foot to the other side of the goal. There was a yell of laughter as the ball buzzed against the opposite goal-post. Skimpole blinked for a moment at the muddy patch the ball had made on the white of the post.

"My methods preclude any real accuracy, anyway, Tom Merry," he said, apparently satisfied.

"Rather!" said Monty Lowther. "Keep him out, Skimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you fellows—"

"If you don't mind throwing the ball out of the back of the net, I'd like to have another try, Skimmy!" interrupted Tom Merry.

"Oh, really! I beg your pardon, Tom Merry!"

And Skimpole, disdaining the methods of ordinary goalies, missed the ball by a foot in his attempt to kick the leather to the captain of the Shell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look out!" grinned Tom Merry, as Skimpole was preparing to argue the matter out in words.

Skimpole "got down" to it in a fashion that made the chums laugh more than ever.

Sogg!

Tom Merry shot good and true. Skimpole shot out a hand. But the ball did not come that way.

"Oh!" he gasped, as the sphere filled up his face. "Really, Tom Merry!"

And as he sat down in the mud with a black patch on his face, all round his mouth and nose, the chums roared again. Tom Merry leaned up against the posts, and the merriment broke out louder than ever when he assisted Skimpole to rise.

"Would you really use so much force in a match, Tom Merry?" asked Skimpole.

"I should jolly well think I would," said the captain of the Shell. "Had enough?"

"Oh, no! I am confident my methods will prove successful in the end, thank you, Merry!"

"Of course," said Monty Lowther. "Let Figgy have a go now. There's nothing like variety."

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"Will you oblige me, Figgins?" said Skimpole.

"What-ho!"

And Figgins, dribbling about in front of the goal until the juniors nearly burst with laughter, at last sent in a fearful drive. There was a gasp, and as Skimpole got it right under his chin, he seemed to be lifted in the air for a moment before he dropped with a squelching sound into the mud. But Skimpole saved, nevertheless, for the ball was deflected over the top of the net.

"You didn't score, I believe, Figgins," said Skimpole, sitting up and blinking about for the ball. "There's something in my methods, you see!"

"Rather!" said Jack Blake, with a wink round the circle in front.

And Skimpole, wiping his hands on his trousers, intimated to the juniors that the wonders of scientific goal-keeping were yet to be revealed.

"My turn, now, Skimmy, I suppose?" said Jack Blake, affectionately keeping up a passing bout with Digby and Monty Lowther.

"Certainly, Blake," said Skimpole. "I should be pleased if you will try your science against mine. I think you call it combination, don't you?" concluded the would-be goalie to Lowther and Digby.

"That's it," said Blake, as he and Monty and Digby bore down on the goal.

Skimpole placed himself on what he evidently considered the alert. As the three passed and repassed really cleverly in front of goal, Skimpole darted, always in the wrong direction, like a cat on hot bricks.

"Really, you know!" gasped Skimpole. "This is absurd!"

"Rather!" grinned Jack Blake, putting the ball neatly in through Skimpole's outstretched shins. "Perfectly silly, Skimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" said Skimpole, turning round to look at the ball reposing quietly at the back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The opportunity had been too much for Manners to resist. As Skimpole turned his back, the Shell-fellow sent in an unerring shot with one of the other balls. The shot caught Skimpole beautifully in the back, and lifted him head-first into the back of the net.

The scientific goalie struggled to his feet. As he did so a shot from Herries caught him under the ear. Skimpole gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all in the game, Skimmy!" explained Monty Lowther. "You must be prepared to take a shot from anywhere."

"Really, Lowther?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I have not been so—so successful as I expected!" gasped Skimpole. "I still hope, however, to prove to you that upon purely scientific principles—"

"Let him have the lot together," murmured Digby. "He may be able to work a scientific principle on each ball!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors tossed the old footers to one another. Skimpole gasped for breath, and set his spectacles straight, and blinked at the juniors.

"I am ready!" he panted.

"Quite ready, Skimmy?"

"Yes, indeed! On scientific principles, I can stop anything—"

"Except jawing," suggested Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, Figgins—"

"Go it!" yelled Blake.

And the footballers "went" it.

Footers rained in from every side upon Skimpole.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Oh, really—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whiz whiz, whiz!

Crash, crash!

It seemed to the bewildered Skimpole to be raining footers. They came in from all sides, whizzing in like the pips from an orange. One caught him on the nose, another under the chin, another on the chest, and another between the knees. He staggered back in the goal, and three or four balls plumped upon him, and sent him right into the net.

There was a roar.

"Hurrah! Goal! Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skimpole sat and blinked at the yelling juniors. He crawled out of the goalmouth at last, among the scattered footers.

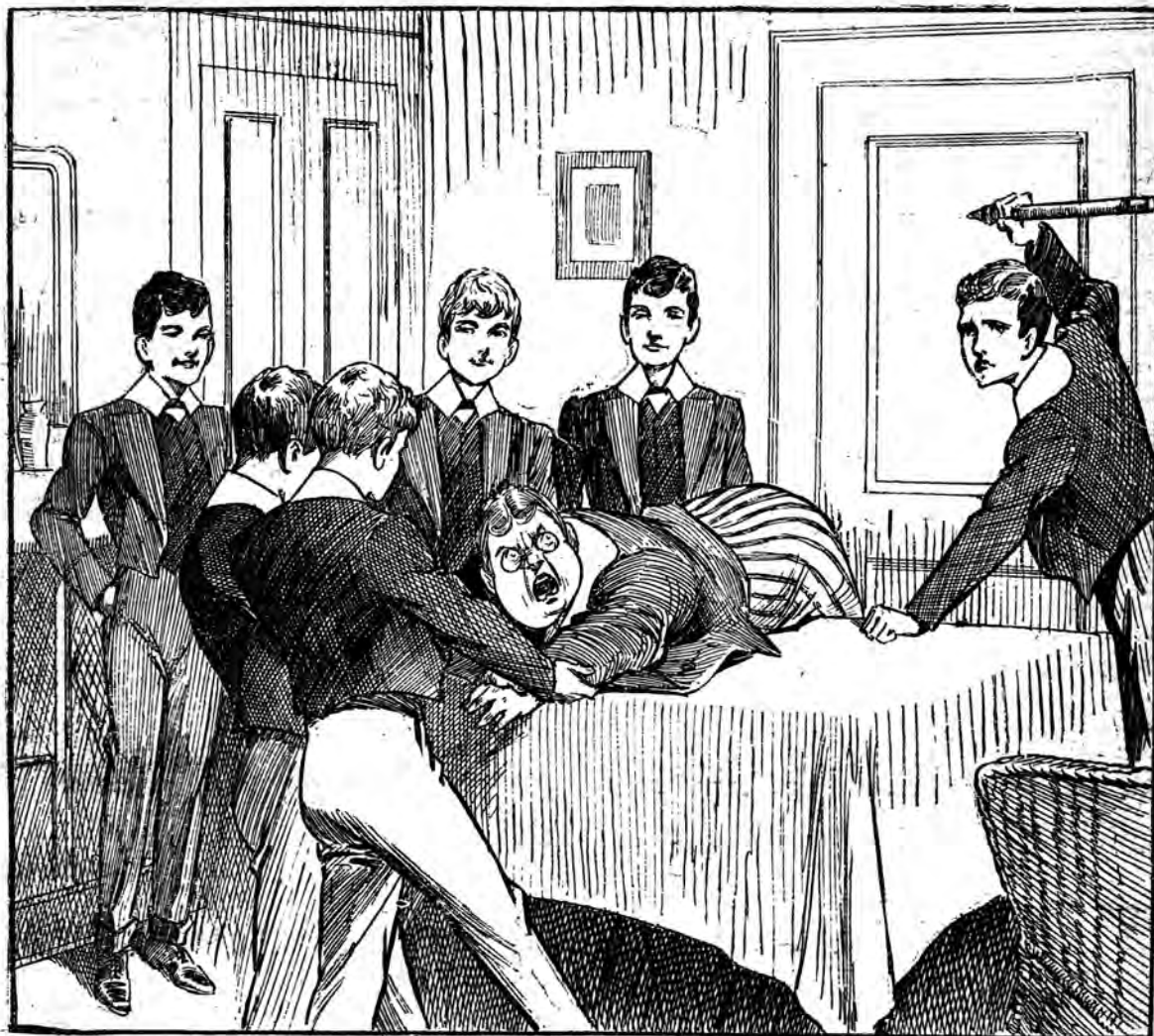
"Not finished?" exclaimed Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Ye-es, I think I have finished!" gasped Skimpole.

"HIS LAST MATCH!"

is the title of the splendid, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. One Penny.



Thwack! thwack! thwack! Bulstrode uttered an admonishing word at every whack, and the dust rose from Bunter's trousers. "Yow! Yow! Yow!" Billy Bunter's yells kept time with the whacks. (An incident taken from "HIS LAST MATCH," the splendid, long, complete tale of Greyfriars School, by Frank Richards, contained in this week's number of our grand companion paper, "THE MAGNET" Library. Don't miss this splendid school tale. Buy a copy of "The Magnet" Library at once! Now on Sale. Price one Penny.)

"Upon the whole, I regard football as being quite beneath the notice of a scientific chap. Ow!"

And Skimpole limped off the football-field, followed by a yell of laughter. Fatty Wynn resumed his place in goal, and kept goal on less scientific principles, perhaps, but certainly with more success.

CHAPTER 16.

Pax!

TOM MERRY & CO. came in after the footer practice, as the early winter dusk gathered over the old quad, of St. Jim's. They were very cheerful, and very ruddy and very hungry. Toby, the School House page, met them at the door, with a letter in his hand.

"For me, of course?" said Blake.

Toby grinned.

"Master D'Arcy, sir," he said.

"Hand it ovah, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus took the letter.

"Sure it's not for me, Gussy?" said Blake. "Our names are very much alike, you know; and it's time I had a fiver. You had one last week."

"Weally, Blake—"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Blake generously. "I'll toss you whether you or I have it, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, deah boy. This letter is fwom my

governah, and I twust there is a firah in it. The governah has been getting wathah close since the Budget, but I should wathah think that he would come out stwong at Chwistmas time."

"Oh, open it!" said Monty Lowther. "Buck up!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Buck up!" roared Monty Lowther.

"Weally, what is the huvwyy—"

"Of course, there's a hurry!" said Monty Lowther indignantly. "If there's a fiver in the letter, we're coming to tea with you."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, vewy well, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus gracefully. "Undah those cires., I will open the lettah at once, if someone will lend me a penknife. I left mine in the pocket of one of my othah waistcoats."

"I'll lend you my thumb," suggested Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Open it with your paws, ass!"

"I wefuse to have my fingahs, chawactewised as paws, Mannahs, and I uttally decline to open a lettah in that slovenly way. If you will lend me a knife—"

"Here you are, fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Open the letter!" roared all the juniors in chorus.

"Oh, vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus slit open the envelope. He opened the letter, and a crisp, rustling fiver came into view.

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"Bai Jove! The patah is playin' up all wight, you see!"
 "Good!" said Lowther. "I'd give you a couple of uncles and an aunt for your pater, Gussy, if you ever feel inclined to swop."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Buzz off to the tuckshop," advised Blake. "I'm as hungry as a hunter, and I want my tea. Buck up, Gussy! Run!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I don't mind helping you with the shopping, you chaps!" said a modest voice.

"Hallo! Here's a New House bounder, on the respectable side of the quad!" exclaimed Tom Merry indignantly.

Fatty Wynn grinned propitiatingly.

"Pax!" he exclaimed.

"That's all very well—"

"Yes, of course it is!" assented Fatty Wynn, with an amiable smile. "I believe in stopping all these blessed House rows at a time like this—"

"When Gussy has a fiver!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn indignantly. "I mean at a time like Christmas of course, you fatheads. House rows are all very well at other times—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"It's all wight, Fatty, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Come with me ova to the tuckshop, and we'll change the fivah, and you shall get tea in the studay."

"Good!" said Fatty Wynn. "I'll whistle to Figgins and Kerr."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Figgins and Kerr, having been apprised of the intended feed, and, having graciously accepted the invitation, Fatty Wynn walked across to the tuckshop with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The dusk was falling in the old quad, thickly, and with the approach of night the snow was coming back. Thin feathery flakes fell round the juniors as they crossed to the tuckshop, and floated on the keen, wintry wind.

"Bai Jove, we're goin' to have more snow!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Upon the whole, I think I had bettah get an umbrellah, deah boy."

"Oh, rats!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Weally, Wynn—"

"You can buzz in!" said Fatty. "I'll change the fiver for you, and do all the shopping, if you like. You can depend upon me to get a really ripping feed."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hand over the fiver, then."

Arthur Augustus politely handed it over. There was no doubt about the correctness of Fatty Wynn's statement. When he had unlimited supplies of cash, he could certainly be depended upon to lay in a really ripping feed. But whether he could be depended upon to leave much change out of the fiver was another matter. Courtesy, however, was D'Arcy's strong point, and he relinquished his fiver into Fatty Wynn's hands, and hurried back to the shelter of the School House. Fatty Wynn ran into the tuckshop. As he had a great deal of shopping to do, and as he was pretty certain to have a few little "snacks" en passant, he was likely to be there for some time.

Arthur Augustus reached the School House as the snow began to fall more thickly. Levison and Crooke and Mellish met him in the doorway. His friends had gone upstairs, and D'Arcy had no desire to stop and talk to the cads of the School House. But Levison stopped him with a polite grin.

"I hear you're getting big remittances," he remarked.

D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the cad of the Fourth.

"I have had a wemittance," he replied. "It was not a big one—only a fiver."

"My hat! You are standing a feed, of course."

"Yaas!"

"Going to ask all your friends, I suppose?"

"Yaas!" said D'Arcy grimly.

"Good; we'll come!"

"You won't do anythin' of the sort, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I do not wedard you fellows as friends."

"Oh, come now, Gussy—"

"I'm sure nobody could regard D'Arcy with more admiration than I do," said Mellish.

"Wats!"

"We'll come and help you do the shopping," Levison suggested.

"Fatty Wynn is doin' the shoppin' alweady, and I do not want your assistance," said the swell of the School House; "and, as a matter of fact, I should take it as a favah if you would not address me."

And Arthur Augustus walked on, and marched upstairs.

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to Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage. Crooke and Mellish scowled angrily; but Levison was grinning, and there was a peculiar gleam in his eyes.

"Blessed if I can see anything to grin at!" growled Crooke.

"Didn't you hear what he said?" demanded Levison.

"Yes—we're out of the feed."

"I don't mean that. He said that Fatty Wynn was doing the shopping," Levison waved his hand towards the quad. "It's dark already."

"Well?"

"Well, Fatty Wynn will come straight across the quad, with the grub when he's got it," said Levison. "What price our laying for him—under the elms—and collaring it as he comes by?"

"My hat! Splendid!"

"Wynn is a beastly hard litter in a row," said Mellish uneasily.

"Poo!—we're three to one! But we can get some more chaps—we'll let them think it's a House raid—and the stuff is Fatty Wynn's own!"

"Good egg!"

Levison lost no time in carrying out his idea. It was easy enough to get recruits for a House raid—especially when a convoy of provisions was to be captured. Reilly and Hancock, of the Fourth, and several other fellows, joined the trio at once, and quite a little party tramped out in the darkness and the falling snow to lay in wait for Fatty Wynn under the elms.

CHAPTER 17.

The White Monk Again.

"UGH! It's cold!"

"Gree!"

"He can't be long now!"

"Confound the fat bounder! Why doesn't he buck up?"

"Hush!"

"Oh, rats!"

"I think I hear him coming."

The juniors were silent.

Levison and his band of raiders were ensconced in the deep shadows of the old elms in the old quad, of St. Jim's. Early as the evening was, it was pitchy dark in the quad, save where the lights from the distant windows gleamed out upon the falling snow. The wind was blowing very keenly, and the juniors, waiting under the gaunt trees, shivered as it whistled round their ears and their legs.

In the distance gleamed the little, diamond-paned window of the tuckshop. There was Fatty Wynn sorting out and selecting supplies, and doubtless taking a good many snacks in the process. Probably he was not in a hurry, but the raiders under the leafless trees were growing keenly impatient.

"Are you sure he's coming this way?" growled Hancock.

"Yes," muttered Mellish.

"Faith, and why should he? This isn't the way to the New House," said Reilly.

"Look here, I know he is—and that's enough!"

"Faith, and I—"

"Hush!"

"Sure, and what for should I hush, then?" said Reilly peevishly.

"I think I heard something."

"It wasn't Wynn!" growled Kerruish. "His steps are loud enough to be heard, with all his blessed avoirdupois over them."

"Yes, rather!"

"The snow's getting thick," said Crooke. "That will deaden the sound. I wish I could see! I think I heard something, too!"

"Faith, it might be the ghost!" grinned Reilly.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Be jabbers," said Reilly, looking round a little uneasily.

"I never thought of it before, darlings, but this is just the place where Gore saw the ghost the other night! Look here, I'm not going to wait much longer for Fatty Wynn!"

"I'm not either!" said Mellish, with chattering teeth. "What do you want to begin talking about ghost stories now for, you fathead? Ugh!"

"You chaps were laughing at Gore's story—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"I—I heard something!" muttered Kerruish.

"It was the wind."

"I—I—I saw something move just then!" murmured Jones minor.

"Rats!" said Levison uneasily.

"I—I— Oh, look!"

Mellish grasped Levison's arm so hard in his agitation that the cad of the Fourth uttered an exclamation of pain.

"You ass—"

"Look!" shrieked Mellish.

"Good heavens!"

A simultaneous shriek of horror burst from the juniors. From the darkness came that strange figure which Tom Merry & Co. had seen two nights before from the window of Figgins's study.

It was the White Monk!

The ghastly form loomed up in the darkness, advancing towards the juniors; and with one accord they turned and ran for their lives.

Helter-skelter through the falling snow they dashed towards the School House.

The figure stopped.

But what became of it the terrified juniors did not pause to see. They dashed into the School House at top speed, panting with terror, out of breath, flecked all over with flakes of snow.

"Good heavens!" gasped Mellish, sinking upon an oaken seat in the hall. "Good heavens! Then it's real!"

"Oh!"

"Great Scott!"

"Faith, and it's a spectre intirely!" muttered Reilly, between his chattering teeth.

Crooke set his pale lips.

"It's a rotten trick!" he muttered.

"Ye-es," muttered Kerruish. "Somebody's playing ghost!"

"Of course!" said Crooke.

"Then go out again and see who it is," said Reilly.

But that Crooke evidently had no intention of doing.

"What's the matter with you kids?" exclaimed Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, coming out of his study.

"The ghost!"

"The White Monk!"

Kildare smiled.

"That story again!" he exclaimed. "Who has seen it?"

"All of us!" said Kerruish.

"It must be a trick, of course," said Levison, who had now recovered his coolness. "Some ass playing a practical joke on us. This must be the same thing that Gore saw the other night—he did see it, after all!"

Kildare frowned.

Without replying, he strode out into the quadrangle and towards the distant gloomy elms. The juniors gathered in the doorway to watch him. The sturdy figure of the captain of St. Jim's disappeared into the darkness and the whirling flakes.

"Jolly plucky!" muttered Jones minor.

"Well, it's only a trick, of course," said Crooke.

"Why don't you follow him, then?"

Crooke was silent. Trick or not, he had no inclination to investigate the ghostly apparition.

The juniors waited anxiously for Kildare to return. He was not alone when he came back. Fatty Wynn, carrying an extremely large and well-laden basket, was with him. Kildare had met him in the quadrangle, but he had met no one and nothing else.

"Not seen the ghost, Kildare darling?" asked Reilly.

Kildare shook his head.

"No, Reilly. You must have been thinking of the ghost story, and been frightened by a shadow," he replied.

"It was rare enough, Kildare!"

"Stuff!"

"What were you chaps doing out there at all?" asked Fatty Wynn suspiciously.

"Yes, what were you doing?" said Kildare. "It was very queer for you to be out in the snow there, without even your coats on. Were you playing some trick yourselves?"

Reilly coughed.

"Sure, we were looking for Fatty Wynn!" he said. "We—we were going to help him carry the grub in, you know—save him a lot of—ahem!—trouble about eating it."

Kildare laughed.

"Well, it served you right to get a scare, then," he replied. And he went back into his study.

Fatty Wynn gave the School House juniors a wrathful glare.

"So that was your little game, was it?" he exclaimed.

"Faith, and we thought that you were taking the grub to the New House," said Reilly. "Levison told us so. We didn't know—"

"It's Gussy's feed."

"Oh!"

"Levison was lying, of course," said Macdonald. "He generally is!"

Levison bit his lip and walked away. His little scheme had failed.

Fatty Wynn carried his cargo up to Study No. 6 in the Fourth-Form passage. Levison, Mellish, and Crooke met in the study of the Shell fellow.

"No go!" said Crooke, with a grunt. "That rotten ghost

spoiled the whole bizney! We were asses to bolt like that! It must have been a trick!"

"Of course it was!" said Levison savagely. "I lost my nerve. As a matter of fact, I shouldn't care to go out there again now—though I know it was a trick. And I suppose you fellows feel the same about it. But I think I know whom to jump on for scaring us like that."

"Who was it?"

"D'Arcy minor!"

"Young Wally?" exclaimed Mellish and Crooke together. Levison nodded.

"Yes. Don't you remember the wheeze he was talking about yesterday—of getting the monk's clothes and whitening them, and scaring old Selby? He's worked it off on us instead."

"My hat!" exclaimed Crooke.

Mellish gritted his teeth.

"We'll make him sit up for it!" he exclaimed.

"But young Wally gave Tom Merry his word that he wouldn't play ghost again," Crooke remarked slowly.

Levison sniffed contemptuously.

"That makes no difference," he said.

"Well, I suppose not."

"Of course not! It was D'Arcy minor—and we'll make him smart for it," said Levison savagely.

And in that the other two fully concurred.

CHAPTER 18.

Something Like a Slide!

"FREEZING, by Jove!"

Jack Blake uttered that remark, as he looked out of the window of the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House next morning.

Arthur Augustus put his head out of bed and sneezed.

"Bai Jove, you're wight, deah boy!"

"It's jolly cold!" said Herries. "Must get up, I suppose. Blow that bell! I believe Taggles gets up earlier and earlier every morning to ring it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've got to take Towser for a run before brekker," said Herries. "Buck up, you fellows, and come round the quad. with me."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, turn out, you slacker!" said Herries, jumping out of bed.

"I wefuse to be called a slackah," said Arthur Augustus, sitting up in bed. "I shall be vewy pleased to have a wan wound the quad. with you, Hewwies, but I bah Towseh. That wotten bulldog of yours has no respect for a fellah's twousahs."

"Go out in a blanket, then," suggested Digby.

"Weally, Digby—"

"Faith, and I'm going for a slide, anyway!" said Reilly, jumping out of bed. "This is the first time it's frozen, and it will be thawing again soon intirely."

The juniors dressed, and went down in the cold, clear winter morning. The quadrangle was a sheet of white, and freezing hard.

The Shell were already down, and they would probably have greeted the Fourth with snowballs if the snow had not been too hard. The Third Form, too, had turned out early. Wally & Co. were making a slide under the windows of their Form-rooms, and were engaged upon it with loud shouts, the fags falling over as often as not as they slid to and fro.

"That's not a bad idea!" said Jack Blake, stopping and looking on at the Third Form slide. "What do you fellows say?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm going to get Towser," said Herries. "I think it would be splendid exercise for Towser to buzz along a slide with me."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, blow your bags, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to slide with that beastly bulldog!"

"Rats!"

"Aren't you afraid Towser may catch cold, Herries, old man?" asked Tom Merry, with great solicitude for Towser.

Herries snorted.

"Towser's not soft!" he exclaimed. "Towser can stand anything. He can stand Gussy. When I had him in the study—"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

But Herries did not stay to listen. He was marching off to fetch his unpopular favourite.

Wally & Co. glared round at the juniors as they came up to the slide. That slide had been started in the first place by some diminutive fags of the Second Form. Wally & Co. had descended upon them, and driven them off, and triumphantly taken possession of the slide. And it occurred to Wally

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that perhaps his elders entertained some idea of the same sort as they came up with grinning faces.

"What do you want here?" asked Wally, not very amiably.

"If you want a slide, make one for yourselves."

"Yes, rather!" said Jameson, with emphasis. "You're jolly well not coming on our slide, I can tell you!"

Blake grinned.

"Cheek of these fags, to want a slide to themselves," he remarked. "Come on, you chaps! This slide just about suits my weight. Follow your uncle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get off!" yelled Wally.

But the Fourth-Formers and the Shell fellows did not get off. They came on. A roar of indignation rose from the Third.

"Get off our slide!"

"You cheeky young imps!" grinned Jack Blake.

"We'll jolly well shift you if you don't, anyhow!" went on Wally.

"We will that!" said Curly Gibson.

"Go somewhere else," said Jameson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We won't wear the thing out, you know," said Herries, coming back with Towser. "Quiet, Towser!"

"Ah, good idea, Herries!" said Blake. "You can leave Towser at the beginning of the slide to keep those young beggars off!"

"Catch me! He's coming on the slide with me."

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Oh, yes, I know all about your trousers, Gussy," grinned Herries, running towards the slide.

As Towser came on the slide after him, the Third-Formers scattered right and left.

"Buck up, ass!" exclaimed Blake.

"Weally, Blake," said Arthur Augustus, who had been viewing the advent of Towser with marked displeasure through his monocle, and keeping the other fellows waiting, "I must protest against Hewwies' wretched animal being introduced on the slide—"

"All right!" said Blake, brushing past him.

"Weally, Blake—"

But Jack Blake and Digby were sailing merrily down the slide to accompanying howls from the outraged Third-Formers.

"Rotters!"

"Fourth Form cads!"

"Weally, Wally—"

"Yes, I meant you as well!" said Wally. "Get off our slide, you—you tailor's dummy!"

"You young beggar—"

"Look out, Gussy; you're in the way!"

Arthur Augustus turned an indignant gaze upon Herries, who, with Towser in advance, was bearing down on the slide again. The swell of the School House just managed to avoid Towser, but he collided with Herries just as that junior reached the beginning of the slide. In a moment Blake and Digby, to say nothing of Gussy and Herries, were in a heap on the snow. Wally & Co. were not slow to seize their opportunity. Hastily making snowballs, they pelted the Fourth-Formers unmercifully. Arthur Augustus seemed to have a snowball in his eye in place of his monocle for quite five minutes. But the strength of the Fourth told in the end, and Wally and his friends had to give way. When Blake, Herries, and Digby really set about them, they had very little chance, and realising that they had loved and lost, they vacated the position, as military men say.

But not without a round of jeers and booing and hooting and cat-calls, that rang far and wide.

Arthur Augustus eyed Herries severely as the Fourth returned from the "chase."

"I don't mind being friends, despite your wuffianly conduct, dear boy," he said; "but I bar that wotten animal—"

"All right, Gussy!" agreed Herries. "Bar away. He'll go home all right, if you tell him nicely—I don't think!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Jack Blake & Co. were on the slide again in a moment, leaving Arthur Augustus a picture of outraged propriety. But the swell of the School House was as keen on winter sport as any of his chums. He made up his mind to compromise by going last. But Blake & Co., expecting something of the sort, waited for him at the far end. D'Arcy was only aware of it when he was half-way down the slide, and he also realised with a shock that Herries was encouraging Towser to stand in front. Arthur Augustus shouted in expostulation, lost his balance, and finished his trip on his hands and knees.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a ring of laughter from behind. "Do it again, Gussy, old kid! Manners didn't see it! Ha, ha!"

And to the disgust of Jack Blake & Co., the Terrible

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

Three came down the slide at full pelt. Even Arthur Augustus recovered his equilibrium sufficiently to appear virtuously indignant at the intrusion.

"Ripping slide!" commented Manners.

"Get off!" roared Blake.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Oh, dry up and share it!" exclaimed Tom Merry laughingly.

"I refuse—"

"All right!" said Monty Lowther. "I thought you would."

And the Shell fellows ran back for another trip. Blake & Co. followed in hot pursuit.

Voices were raised in no uncertain fashion. Argument went by noise on both sides. But still, Tom Merry & Co. seemed to be having their own way. Blake & Co. did not seem to be able to stop them. In the midst of the hubbub a voice rang out from an upper window over the quad.

But neither the Shell fellows or the Fourth heard it. They had settled down into a compromise, and the slide was being made better every minute.

"Go it! Hurray!"

"Buck up, there!"

"Look out in goal!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Weally, dear boys—"

"Keep that bulldog off, Herries!"

A window above was thrown violently open. Mr. Selby's head appeared in view, and again the master of the Third shouted to the juniors. But in the hubbub of voices they did not hear him. The Third, making up their minds to share the slide, joined in, and Shell, Fourth, and Third were sliding away merrily, many of them tumbling over amid yells of laughter.

Mr. Selby retired from the window. He could not make his voice heard. He stayed only to catch up a cane, and then he came down. Other masters had been disturbed by the terrific uproar, but they endured it good-humouredly. But Mr. Selby was seldom good-humoured, and on this particular morning his temper was worse than usual.

He came dashing out into the quad, cane in hand, to take summary vengeance upon the disturbers of the peace.

"Boys! I—I—"

Mr. Selby did not notice the slide. He was too angry and excited. The juniors had gone down it in a long line, and were all at the other end when Mr. Selby ran towards them. The master stepped on the slide without knowing that it was there.

The next moment it seemed to Mr. Selby as if earthquakes and hurricanes had descended upon St. Jim's.

His feet flew away from him, without his knowing what caused it; the ground seemed to rise and smite him; his cane flew in one direction, and his hat in another! He flew along the slide at a terrific speed.

"Oh!" he gasped.

But he had no breath left to say more. The juniors stared at him for a moment, surprised to see Mr. Selby joining in their boyish sports in this way. For the moment they did not see that Mr. Selby's slide was involuntary, and they burst into a shout of admiration and encouragement.

"Bravo, sir!"

CHAPTER 19.

Many a Slip.

MR. SELBY did not even hear the cheer.

His head seemed to be turning round, and he was waving his arms somewhat after the fashion of the sails of a windmill in wild efforts to stop himself.

But the slide was well made and smooth, and as slippery as glass. Mr. Selby's feet shot along it in spite of himself, and his efforts to stop only resulted in his overbalancing himself.

One leg shot forward, and the other dropped behind, and Mr. Selby slid on in that manner, and the juniors shouted warning to him.

"Look out, sir!"

"That's not the way!"

"Keep your feet together, sir!"

"My hat!" gasped Jack Blake. "Fancy old Selby joining in a game like this! I never thought he had it in him."

"Wathah not!"

"Hurray!"

"Go it, sir!"

"Bravo!"

The juniors dashed back to follow the Form-master on the slide.

Mr. Selby was on his knees by this time. But the slide was so smooth and slippery, and his impetus so great, that he had no chance of stopping himself. He shot forward like an arrow from a bow, on his knees—and a terrific

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"Here he is!" gasped Blake. Tom Merry & Co. looked at the strange figure, but the wildly-gleaming eyes were not turned upon the juniors. They were fixed in a wild, set gaze upon an empty corner of the room, where the juniors could discern nothing. "Take it away—take it away! Heaven help me!" came the muttered words from the weird figure in monkish garb. (See Chapter 23.)

effort on his part only changed him into a sitting posture, and he still slid on fast.

"Buck up, sir!"

"Follow your leader!" yelled Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The juniors came buzzing down the slide at a speed exceeding that of Mr. Selby, and they gained on him, fast as he was.

Mr. Selby reached the end at last. His slide had been rapid, but it seemed like an eternity to the astounded and bewildered Form-master.

He could not stop himself.

He rushed on, in a sitting posture, right into a heap of snow at the end of the slide, and his head and face were deeply buried in it in a moment.

"My hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove!"

The juniors came whizzing on, as Mr. Selby struggled out of the snow and sprawled across the slide. Digby tumbled over him and brought Blake down after him, and then all was wreck and confusion.

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Look out—grugh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Gerroff!"

"Yowp!"

Junior after junior piled upon the heap amid yells and shrieks of wild laughter. Mr. Selby gasped and groaned under a heap of struggling humanity.

"Gerroff!" yelled Blake. "Ow!"

"You're cwushin' me, deah boys—"

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

"Faith, and I—"

"Yarood!"

Three or four seniors came dashing up to the aid of Mr. Selby. Kildare and Darrel and Rushden, of the Sixth, tossed the juniors to right and left, and dragged the unfortunate master of the Third to his feet.

Mr. Selby was smothered with snow, half-suffocated, and so shaken up that he hardly knew where he was.

He gasped and gasped for breath.

"Not hurt, I hope, sir?" said Kildare.

"My word!" murmured Digby. "Kildare must be awfully sanguine if he hopes that."

And the juniors grinned.

Mr. Selby found his voice at last.

"Hurt?" he barked. "Hurt? Yes, I am hurt! Oh, dear! Oh!"

"Sorry, sir—"

"Oh! Oh! Young rascals—wretches—scoundrels—"

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Tom Merry, rubbing the snow out of his eyes, and blinking at the gasping and enraged Form-master. "Oh, sir! We couldn't help it, sir. If you had kept your footing on the slide, sir, it would have been all right."

"It wants practice, sir," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, sir."

Mr. Selby almost raved.

"You—you young rascals!"

"Oh, sir!"

"Weally, Mr. Selby—"

"It all comes through sliding without practising a bit first, sir," said Manners.

"You—you—you—"

"If you'd like to try again, sir, we'll hold you, and you'll soon catch on to it," said Kangaroo, of the Shell.

The Third Form-master almost choked with rage.

"Do—do—do you think that I was—was sliding for pleasure—that I intended to enter into that wretched amusement?" he managed to articulate.

"Why, of course, sir."

"Yaas, wathah, Mr. Selby."

"Didn't you want to slide, sir?" asked Herries, in astonishment.

"No, sir, I did not!" roared Mr. Selby. "I did not! I stepped upon the slide by accident. I did not know it was there!"

"Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, dear!"

"We're sorry, sir—"

"It was a trick," shouted Mr. Selby—"a miserable trick! You had that wretched trap prepared for me. I am assured upon that point."

"Oh, no, sir—"

"Not at all, my dear Mr. Selby. I assuah you—"

"We thought you were joining us, sir—"

Mr. Selby glared at the juniors. They were evidently speaking the truth; but that they should have imagined that he meant to enter into a juvenile sport in that way seemed to him like adding insult to injury. It was a healthy and invigorating sport, for that matter, and there would have been nothing derogatory to his dignity in joining in it; but Mr. Selby had peculiar ideas of his own dignity. And his temper was far too sour for him to enter into any sport at all.

"You—you—you—" he gasped. "I—I will deal with you later. For the present, break up that slide at once—do you hear? It is to be destroyed immediately."

And the Third Form-master limped away into the house.

The juniors stared at one another in dismay. No other master at St. Jim's, excepting perhaps Mr. Ratcliff of the New House, would have interfered with their sports in this way. But a master's word was law.

"You heard what Mr. Selby said," exclaimed Kildare. "You must break up the slide. But it's nearly breakfast-time—you would have had to chuck it soon, anyway. Don't scowl about it."

"Right-ho, Kildare!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Yaas, wathah, take it smilin', you fellows," said D'Arcy.

And the fellows took it as smilingly as they could. But they confided to one another in tragic whispers that they would have liked to have Mr. Selby on the slide once more—just for a minute—and if they could have had their wish, certainly Mr. Selby would have had reason to complain of his injuries when they had finished with him.

CHAPTER 20.

Mr. Selby Has a Shock.

MR. SELBY looked decidedly cross at the breakfast-table, and the Third-Formers who had the honour and pleasure of breakfasting at his table were on their very best behaviour. Mr. Selby's temper was never very good, and since his peculiar guest had been staying with him, it had been noticeably worse.

There was a feeling of deep indignation among the Third-Form fags. They did not see the justice of being "ragged" by Mr. Selby in the Form-room, because his mysterious relation was worrying him—that was how Wally worked it out. They already had to endure the painful results of Mr. Selby's indigestion.

Mr. Selby suffered very much from that painful complaint, chiefly due to want of outdoor exercise; and when he had indigestion, his nose was accustomed to turning to a crimson hue. That crimson "beak," as the fags disrespectfully called it, was a danger signal in the Third Form-room, like the red light on a railway.

When Mr. Selby came into the Form-room with a nose very red, the Third Form forgot that they were the most unruly set of young rascals in St. Jim's, and acted with the tameness and meekness of pet rabbits—though that did not always save them from the wrath of their Form-master.

On this special morning, Mr. Selby's nose was flaming. His usual complaint was troubling him, and to that were added the effects of his adventures on the slide. Even Wally, reckless young rascal as he was, sat up at the table with a demure meekness that would have done credit to the famous Eric in his best days. Good little Georgie, in the story-book, might have taken Wally for a model, and would then have been in danger of being gored by a mad bull, or burnt alive in a flaming house, or suffering any of the unpleasant fates reserved for bad little boys—in story-books. But Wally's extraordinarily excellent behaviour did not save him. Mr. Selby's dark and rolling eye lighted upon him; and the very goodness of the scamp of the Third appeared to have an irritating effect upon the Form-master.

"D'Arcy minor!" rapped out Mr. Selby.

"Yes, sir," said Wally meekly.

"You are spilling the egg on your waistcoat."

"I'm sorry, sir."

Wally was not spilling egg on his waistcoat, but he knew that it was useless to deny it. Mr. Selby's word was law at his own table.

"You are dirty and slovenly, D'Arcy minor."

"I am sorry, sir."

"Take fifty lines."

"Yes, sir."

"And go and clean yourself at once," said Mr. Selby. "I cannot have a slovenly boy sitting at this table."

"Yes, sir," said Wally, with unbroken meekness, though he was trembling with rage.

He retired from the table with his breakfast unfinished. Fellows looked at him from the other tables as he went, with sympathetic glances. They knew what was the matter with Mr. Selby, and they were sorry for his victims. The Third Form-master was not satisfied yet. He glanced at Jameson.

Jameson made himself as small as possible, and ate sedately, though Mr. Selby's freezing glance almost took his appetite away. Jameson had a painful remembrance of the fact that he had jammed his elbow into Mr. Selby's ribs when falling on the slide, and perhaps he had a guilty remembrance that he had jammed it a little harder than was strictly necessary.

"Jameson!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"You are the most slovenly and ill-behaved boy in the Form, with the exception of D'Arcy minor. Keep your feet still," said Mr. Selby harshly.

"I wasn't moving them, sir, if you please."

"Don't contradict me, Jameson! Take fifty lines."

Jameson glared murderously at the plate before him. He was thinking what he would have done if he had been Jack Johnson, and could have induced Mr. Selby to put on the gloves with him.

"Don't look sullen, Jameson. Keep your feet still!"

"Ye-es, sir."

"I will have order kept at this table," said Mr. Selby. "I will not have this table disgraced by the manners of hooligans."

The Third-Formers writhed under Mr. Selby's bitter tongue. But they were not allowed to reply, and they ate in silence. Mr. Selby was gradually reducing the cheerful table to a state of anger and sullenness, an effect he frequently had upon his Form.

"Gibson, do not guzzle your tea in that manner! If you cannot drink your tea decently, do not drink it at all."

"Very well, sir," said Curly, with an effort.

"Fane, do not shift on your chair like that!"

ANSWERS

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

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"Certainly not, sir."

"And take fifty lines for impertinence."

"Oh, sir!"

"Frayne, I am sorry to see that your early training still shows in your bad manners at table. Will you keep your feet still, sir?"

"Yes, sir," said Joe Frayne.

Mr. Selby looked up and down the table. Every fag there was very careful not to catch his eye. Their feeling, when they were under the Form-master's eye, was a great deal like that of the spectators in the Roman arena in the days of Caligula, when that humorous ruler sent his soldiers among the audience, to seize and fling to the lions chance victims, who had done nothing to offend. But Mr. Selby was satisfied now. He had made the whole table as uncomfortable as himself, and he went on with his breakfast in a more placable state of mind.

When breakfast was over—a relief to the hungriest of the Third-Formers—Mr. Selby quitted the dining-hall of the School House, and put on his coat and hat. He crossed the cold, windy quad, picking his way through the snow, with a moody brow. A group of fags watched him with gloomy looks.

"Nice, cheerful old gentleman, ain't he?" said Wally, who was still hungry. "His family must love to have him by the fireside at Christmas—I don't think!"

"Beast!" said Jameson.

"I wish we could get him on the slide, again!" sighed Fane.

"What-ho!"

"He's gone over to see that man, Wynde," said Wally thoughtfully. "I suppose his relation is getting on his nerves. That must be it—he's been rattier than ever since that chap has been staying here. Queer beggar, too—queerer than Selby. He never comes out—and he hasn't been to dine with the Head, or anything, since he's been here. Blessed if I can make the chap out, or why Selby has him!"

"Selby will come back soon," Jameson remarked. "He will pass within easy range of the box-room window as he comes."

"What about that?"

"Snowballs."

"Oh!"

"We can get plenty of snow from the window-sills," said Jameson, in a whisper, after a glance round. "What price giving him some of his own back? He'll never spot who does it—before he can pick himself up, we can be in the Form-room, in our places—as good as gold."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What-ho!" said Wally. "Anyway, if he bowls us out, he can't be much rougher on us than he is now—that's one comfort."

And the young rascals stole away cautiously to the upper box-room.

Meanwhile, Mr. Selby, unconscious of the schemes of vengeance that his harshness had provoked among his victims, crossed the quadrangle with gingerly steps in the direction of the quarters of his mysterious guest. He entered the little porch, and went into the house, and found Dr. Wynde in the same room as before. The man was looking strangely pale and harassed, and he was buried in so profound a reverie that he did not hear the master of the Third enter the room.

Mr. Selby coughed loudly.

Still the doctor did not move. Mr. Selby came towards him and touched him on the shoulder. Then, with a sudden convulsive movement, Gerald Wynde sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing so strangely that the Form-master started back in surprise and alarm.

"Hands off!" said Wynde, in a low, thick voice. "It's a lie—it's a lie! I tell you it's a lie! There's nothing of the kind the matter with me! Merely a little fatigue from overwork—that is all! Lies, I tell you, lies!"

"Wynde!"

The man gave a start. He seemed to be making a tremendous effort to collect himself, as if he knew that his faculties had been wandering.

"Oh! Is that you, Selby?"

"Yes, it is I," said the Form-master irritably. "What do you mean? What are you talking about, Wynde?"

"I—I—I—"

"Why did you look at me like that when I came in?" demanded Mr. Selby abruptly.

"You—you startled me."

The man sank down into his seat again before the fire, and turned his gloomy gaze upon the glowing embers. Mr. Selby watched him uneasily.

"What do you want?" said Gerald Wynde abruptly.

"Why do you disturb me?"

"I have had a letter."

Wynde started.

"From whom?"

"From a friend of yours."

Wynde turned a fierce look upon the Form-master.

"You have written, then—you have broken your compact with me—"

Mr. Selby made a gesture.

"I have not written. I have received a letter—it is merely a letter asking me if I know anything of you. Your friend and partner, Dr. Murray, has remembered that I knew you in former days, and it has occurred to him that I may know something of your present movements."

"Well?" said Wynde, avoiding the Form-master's gaze.

"He tells me that you have disappeared from your home—"

"You knew that!"

"That you abandoned your practice and your experiments, without a moment's warning—"

"Well?"

"That your friends are all anxious and alarmed about your disappearance."

"Well?" said Wynde, for the third time.

"And he asks me if I have heard anything of you."

"You must tell him nothing," said Wynde harshly.

"What am I to reply, then?"

"Anything—or nothing—but do not mention me."

"Why not, Wynde?"

"Because I do not choose."

"What have you done?" said the Form-master, in a low, anxious voice. "Wynde, you cannot any longer disguise from me—I cannot disguise from myself—that you are in hiding. What have you done?"

"I have done nothing."

"I—I know that you have made many risky experiments," said the Form-master, "I know that you have been a cruel and un pitying vivisectionist, but I always understood that you would have sense enough to keep within the law. Is it possible, Wynde, that you have been mad enough to transgress it?"

"Mad?"

"Foolish enough, then," said Mr. Selby. "You have told me of experiments that have made me shudder with horror, and I am not a tender-hearted man; I am generally considered hard. Have you done anything—anything so horrible that you have had to fly from the law?"

Wynde looked at him strangely.

"No."

"Then why are you in hiding, for that is what it amounts to?"

"You cannot guess?" asked Wynde, with the same strange look fixed upon the face of the Form-master.

Mr. Selby made an impatient gesture.

"How should I guess?"

"Then I have nothing to tell you."

"But—but—"

"Suppose I have enemies?" said Wynde slowly, but with a strange wild tone in his voice. "If I have enemies, who threaten my liberty, what then?"

"But—but how can your liberty be threatened if you have committed no crime?" the Form-master exclaimed.

"It is possible."

"But how?"

"Are only criminals confined, then, in this country?"

"Only criminals and—lunatics," said Mr. Selby.

Wynde did not reply.

Mr. Selby gave a start, and fixed a glance full of horror upon his guest. He made a movement towards the door, and Wynde burst into a harsh laugh.

"You have guessed, then?"

"Wynde! Good heavens! I—I—I—"

Wynde made a gesture.

"You need not be alarmed; I am not mad," he said.

"But it was simply the result of over-study, of too keen and protracted experiments—a touch of brain fever. But they would have placed me under restraint. Temporary restraint, they called it," he added fiercely. "But I was not mad; it was lies—lies—lies! I am as sane as any other man; and if I hear in the night sometimes the shrieks of animals that have died in my experiments, that is simply the effect of over-strained nerves. Do you think I believe in phantoms and spectres? I might as well believe in the ghost of the White Monk of St. Jim's." And he laughed strangely and wildly.

"Wynde!"

"I tell you I am sane. You will say that this has come as a judgment upon me for my cruelty to dumb and defenceless animals. Bah! I tell you I laugh at such stories. I am sane—I am sane! But—if they seized me—if they thrust me into a cell—who knows what might happen? Selby, you will not abandon me!"

"Good heavens!"

"Promise me, not a word to Murray—not a word to any of them."

"I—I promise!" gasped the Form-master.

"I shall be well soon—well, quite well, soon," muttered Gerald Wynde, passing his hand over his brow. "You believe me, do you not?"

"Yes, yes!"

"It is nothing—it is temporary—it is passing now. But—sometimes in the night I—I have strange fancies. There is the White Monk; I have seen him."

"What!"

"It is fancy, is it not? I dreamed last night," muttered the man—"I dreamed that I was a spectre, haunting the shades of the woods. The trees were peopled with the eyes of the animals that I have watched dying. Oh, their eyes—their eyes!" He broke off with a shudder. "Bah! Why do you put these morbid fancies into my mind? Leave me in peace."

Mr. Selby rose to his feet. He backed out of the room, keeping his face towards the strange man, and closed the door quickly when he was in the passage.

As he strode out into the snowy quad, once more, Mr. Selby's face was as white as the snow that lay thickly around him, and his eyes were fixed and set with horror.

CHAPTER 21.

Wally Does Not Run the Gauntlet.

"HERE he comes!"

Wally muttered the words.

The four fags were at the open window of the box-room. They had gathered the snow from the sill outside, and kneaded it into snowballs. Mr. Selby's coated figure could be seen coming towards the house.

The fags grasped the missiles. However risky it was, the pleasure of taking that little vengeance upon the tyrant of the Third was not to be resisted.

Wally leaned out of the window, and calculated his aim. The figure of the Third Form-master was a great distance below, and the wind had to be allowed for.

"Hold on!" muttered Jameson suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"Look at his chivvy!" said Jameson, in a low voice. "Hold on, Wally! There's something the matter with him, I think."

Wally paused.

He scanned the face of the Third Form-master far below. The whiteness of Mr. Selby's face, the fixed expression upon his features, struck the scamp of the Third. He lowered the hand with the snowball in it.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he muttered. "What's the matter with Selby?"

"He looks as if he's had a shock," said Fane.

"Painful interview with his giddy relation," grinned Curly Gibson.

But the others did not laugh. The strange, fixed look upon the Form-master's face struck them with a chill.

"Let him pass," said Wally irresolutely. "Never mind the snowballing now. My aunt! He looks as if he's got some trouble on his mind."

"Yes, rather!"

"Shut the window and come down," said Wally abruptly. And the fags followed Wally from the box-room.

Mr. Selby had by that time passed under the shelter of the portico, and could not be snowballed in any case. Wally wondered what was the matter. That something was the matter could not be doubted; but the fags were far from guessing the terrible doubts and fears that were preying upon the mind of the master of the Third.

They watched him uneasily in the Form-room that morning. They expected bursts of savage temper, which the scene at the breakfast-table had prepared them for.

But Mr. Selby appeared less irascible than usual. In fact, he was so deeply buried in evidently painful thoughts, that he gave very little heed to his class at all.

The grossest blunders were made in construing, without eliciting a word of reprimand from the Form-master, whose tart tongue was ready generally to visit bitter words upon the slightest fault.

"He's blown steam off this morning at brekker," Frayne remarked, in an undertone.

Wally nodded.

But he did not agree with Joe Frayne. Mr. Selby never quite blew steam off. He was always ready to nag and rag, as a rule. What was the matter with him now was a mystery. Not that he was good-tempered now. Whenever he gave any attention to his class, his tones were snappish and sour.

But he gave them hardly any attention. The Third Form did very much as they liked that morning; and when the time came to dismiss them, the dismissal was evidently a greater relief to Mr. Selby than it was to themselves.

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The fags discussed the strange conduct of their Form-master in the passage with great freedom. Some of them stated their opinion to be that "old Selby" was going off his "rocker"; and Fane averred that if it made him better tempered, the sooner he went completely off his rocker the better.

Wally was puzzled, and did not know what to make of it. But the mystery of Mr. Selby's strange change of manner was driven from Wally's mind ere long. Crooke and Mellish and Levison and several other fellows were looking for Wally. Levison & Co. were firmly convinced that it was Wally, in the guise of the White Monk of St. Jim's, who had scared them the previous night, and they intended to take summary vengeance upon the scamp of the Third.

Wally was unfortunately alone when the crowd of Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows came upon him. He did not suspect their hostile intentions until they ran up and surrounded him.

He backed up and put up his fists.

"Hallo! What's the row?" he exclaimed.

"Here's the young cad!" exclaimed Crooke.

"Collar him!"

"We'll teach you to play ghost, you young rotter!" said Levison, between his teeth.

Wally stared at him.

"What are you talking about?" he exclaimed. "Who's been playing ghost?"

"You have—last night in the quad."

"Rats! I haven't!"

"We're jolly well going to make you run the gauntlet for it, anyway," said Mellish.

Wally's eyes blazed.

"I tell you I have done nothing of the sort," he exclaimed. "I gave Tom Merry my word I wouldn't play ghost any more. Hands off, you cads! I shall hit out if you put your paws on me, so I warn you."

The juniors burst into a mocking laugh.

"Collar the young beggar!" exclaimed Crooke.

"I'd like to see them do it," said Wally.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try it, that's all, you rotters!" said Wally, nothing daunted.

And he clenched his fists hard, and waited for Mellish, Levison, and Crooke to come on. They did not seem too ready to tackle the plucky Third-Former. They contented themselves with twisting their handkerchiefs into harder knots.

Wally kept up a lively look-out for means to escape. He could not hope to defeat all three of his adversaries, but he meant to make a real fight of it.

"Why don't you come on, you wasters?" he said scornfully.

"Shut your jaw, or we'll give it to you worse than you expect," said Levison.

"Rats!"

"What have you been acting the ghost for again?" demanded Mellish.

"I haven't," said Wally stoutly.

"You don't expect us to believe that, D'Arcy minor, surely," said Crooke angrily.

"I don't care a button whether you do or not."

"Of course he did it," said Levison. "And we'll take it out of the little beggar now."

"I didn't play the ghost. I gave my word—"

"Your word, eh?" interrupted Mellish. "Come, that's very rich!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally went red. The thought of having his word doubted was enough. But the laugh that suggested that he was capable of breaking his word was more bitter still.

"You rotten cads!" he exclaimed, almost on the point of beginning active hostilities himself. "If I only had Curly and Jameson here—"

Mellish laughed.

"But you haven't, D'Arcy minor," he sneered; "so we're safe. Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally looked round desperately; but there was not a soul in sight except his tormentors.

They put themselves in line, whirling their pocket-handkerchiefs, in anticipation of the "fun" to come. Wally did not move. He was determined not to run the gauntlet as they wanted him to do. He preferred to wait till they attacked him.

"You'd better take the chance, you silly kid!" said Levison, grinning. "It'll soon be over. We're letting you off lightly. Don't funk it."

"I'm not finking anything," said Wally. "But you rotters are not going to do as you like with me."

"Aren't we?" said Mellish. "We'll jolly soon see about that, you young cad!"

"No!"

"We'll see about that!" said Crooke. "Come on!"

And suiting the action to the word, Crooke ran at the Third-Former. Wally stepped to one side quickly. Crooke did not expect the manoeuvre, and in trying to recover his balance he slipped.

Wally made no mistake about letting him have a beautiful upper-cut.

"You little pig!" roared Crooke, as he fell to the ground.

"Anything to be distinct," said Wally, stepping back nimbly and waiting for the others.

"This has gone on long enough!" growled Levison. "Collar him! Come on!"

And Mellish and Levison made round to right and left of the Third-Former to take him in the rear. Wally saw the idea, and easily outwitted it. He rushed boldly at Levison and surprised that worthy by a terrific drive full on the nose. "Collar him, Mellish!" he bellowed, holding his hand to his nose.

But Wally, taking advantage of the fact that Mellish was standing with his back to the prostrate Crooke, made a rush at him; and, as Levison shouted, Mellish was struggling in a heap with Crooke.

"You clumsy ass!" yelled Crooke.

"It wasn't my fault!" shouted Mellish.

"Oh, shut it, and after him!" snapped Levison, dashing off after Wally, who had made a dash for liberty.

Mellish and Crooke needed no further encouragement. Being knocked over by a Third-Former had not sweetened their tempers. They put on all the speed they could command, and came up with the fugitive just as Levison managed to head him off in their direction.

"Collar the little boulder!" yelled Levison.

"I'd like to see the rotters lay their hands on me!" panted Wally.

Crooke and Mellish ran at him, but Wally easily dodged them again, and they crashed into one another. They glared at one another and breathlessly continued the chase.

Wally was making a good fight of it. But he saw, himself, that he could not break away. Unless assistance came speedily he must be cruelly beaten.

"Now we have him, you fellows!" suddenly yelled Mellish.

And the other two cads saw, with relish, that Wally was pinned up in a corner at last.

"We'll give you beans for all this, now, you little beggar!" said Levison, closing in upon the Third-Former.

"Take that, you cad!" said Wally.

Mellish and Crooke drew back, so fierce was Wally's defence. But not so Levison. Stung with the pain of the blow he had received, he was up again in a moment and rushing on Wally.

He grasped the scamp of the Third and bore him back against the wall.

"Now then, you fellows!" he shouted.

And Crooke and Mellish rushed to back him up. The other fellows, who had been left behind in the chase, were now crowding up. All the juniors, who had been scared by the ghost the previous evening, were following Levison & Co., and Wally was quickly surrounded once more by a crowd of Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers.

"We've got him!"

"Yank him out!"

"Cheeky young cad!"

"Make him run the gauntlet!"

"Buck up!"

"I won't!" roared Wally.

"We'll soon see whether you will or not!" grinned Levison.

Wally was dragged away from the wall. The juniors had formed up in two lines, with twisted caps and knotted handkerchiefs. Wally gasped.

"I won't—I won't!"

"Faith, and ye've got no choice!" exclaimed Reilly.

"Pile on, darling!"

"I won't!"

"I'll stick a pin in him till he does!" said Mellish, with a chuckle.

"Good egg!"

"We'll teach him to play ghost!"

"Now, then—"

"Hold hard!"

It was a sharp voice, as Tom Merry came dashing up. In a moment the hero of the Shell had thrown himself between the raggers and their intended victim.

"Now, then, what's the row?" he exclaimed cheerfully.

There was a yell.

"Get out!"

"Stand aside!"

"We're going to rag him!"

Tom Merry faced the raggers.

"Before you rag him, you'll have to rag me!" he said, coolly.

And there was a pause.

CHAPTER 22.

A Baffling Mystery.

WALLY was gasping for breath, almost exhausted by the struggle and the chase. But he drew closer to Tom Merry and put his fists up. If there was to be a scrimmage, the scamp of the Third was quite prepared to take his part in it, and to back up his champion. But the raggers drew back. No one there cared for a fistful encounter with Tom Merry if he could help it.

"Look here," growled Levison. "Mind your own business! We'll—"

"Oh, you dry up!" said Tom Merry unceremoniously.

"What is it, Reilly? What's the matter? You can talk sense."

The Irish junior grinned.

"Faith, and the young omadhaun has been playing ghost!" he exclaimed.

"That's what he's been doing!" said Crooke savagely.

"And we're jolly well going to rag him for it, too!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry gave Wally a sharp look.

"You haven't broken your promise to me, Wally!" he exclaimed.

"No, I haven't!"

"He's lying!" said Mellish. "He played ghost last night in the quad, dressed up as the White Monk, and he knows he did!"

"I didn't!" said Wally.

"He did—he did!"

"How do you know he did?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Was it at the time when you fellows waited for Fatty Wynn to raid him?"

"Faith, and it was!"

Wynn told me about that," said Tom Merry, laughing. "So you saw the White Monk, did you?"

"We saw somebody dressed up as the White Monk," said Hancock. "It was that young boulder, of course!"

"Faith, and so it was, intirely."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"It certainly wasn't!" he said. "I was in Blake's study to have tea when Fatty Wynn came in with the grub, and Wally was there. D'Arcy had asked his minor to come to tea, and he was there all the time."

"Be jabbers!"

"Oh!" said Jones minor. "If you give us your word for that, Tom Merry—"

"Well, I do."

"That settles it intirely," said Reilly, untying his handkerchief. "If D'Arcy minor was in the study with Tom Merry, he couldn't have been playing ghost in the quad. Sure, and I'm sorry I doubted yer word, D'Arcy minor!"

Wally grunted.

"Perhaps you'll have more sense next time!" he suggested.

"Faith, ye young cheeky spalpeen—"

"Well, I'm sorry, too!" said Hancock.

And the raggers dispersed. It was clear to all that Wally had not been guilty—on that occasion, at least—of playing the ghost. Crooke, and Mellish, and Levison, looked very puzzled. They knew perfectly well that Tom Merry's word was not to be doubted; but if Wally had not played the ghost, they could not imagine who had. In the daylight they did not believe for a moment that it was a real ghost. But certainly, the mystery of the White Monk was a baffling one.

Wally pulled his cuffs down, and rubbed his nose, which looked a little swollen.

"I gave them a good tussle!" he remarked, with considerable satisfaction.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Thanks for chipping in as you did," said Wally. "The silly chumps were going to rag me and inquire afterwards! Not that Levison or Crooke cared much whether I'd done it or not. They wanted to rag me, the cads!"

Tom Merry looked at him keenly.

"Somebody seems to have played the ghost last night," he said.

Wally sniffed.

"Oh, they were afraid of their giddy shadows!" he said carelessly.

"They must have seen the same thing that I saw—and Figgins and Blake as well," said Tom Merry slowly.

"Imagination, my son!" said Wally patronisingly.

The Shell fellow smiled.

"Look here, Wally, I know you wouldn't break your word, and I know you didn't play ghost last night, anyway; but do you know who did?"

"My only Aunt Jane! How should I know?"

"You remember the idea you suggested to us?" said Tom Merry quietly. "You wanted to take the old monk's robes out of the school museum, and chalk them white, and play the Phantom Monk, to scare Mr. Selby."

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"Couldn't be done, if I wanted to."

"Why not?"

"Because the monk's togs ain't there now," said Wally. "Before we did that sheet bizney, we went to look for them—Jamerson, and Curly, and L. They were gone."

Tom Merry started.

"Are you sure, Wally?"

"Of course I am!" said Wally crossly. "You don't think I should have gone out as a spectre in a giddy sheet, do you, if I had been able to get the proper ghost's clobber? The things have been put away."

"But they were always kept in that cupboard."

"Well, they ain't there now."

Tom Merry nodded, and walked away very deep in thought. It was quite possible that the Third-Formers had been careless in their search in the cupboard, and had overlooked the garments, and Tom Merry went straight to the school library to look for himself. But he found that Wally's statement was quite correct. The old priestly robes had vanished.

Kildare was in the passage when Tom Merry came back to the School House, and the captain of the Shell stopped to speak to him.

"You know the ghost appeared again last night, Kildare?" he asked.

"Yes. Do you know anything about it?" asked the captain of St. Jim's sharply.

"The monk's clothes are missing from where they were always kept," said Tom Merry.

"Oh! Are you sure?"

"Yes. Have they been put away into another place?"

Kildare shook his head.

"Not that I know of," he said. "There has been talk of all those old things being sorted out and arranged and labelled in the museum, but it's never been done. If the monk's robes and things have been taken, it's for a joke of some sort."

"By the chap who's been playing ghost?" said Tom Merry.

"I suppose so."

"I thought I'd better mention it to you, Kildare," said Tom Merry. "Whoever it is, ought to be stopped. Gore's never been quite himself since he had that shock."

Kildare nodded.

"Have you any idea who it is?" he asked.

"Not the least in the world."

"It must be a junior, of course!" growled the captain of St. Jim's. "A senior would have too much sense to play the giddy goat like that!"

"It isn't a junior," said Tom Merry quietly.

"How do you know?" demanded Kildare.

"Because the things are too big to be worn by a junior—they would mop all over him," said Tom Merry. "It would have to be a senior, and a pretty good-sized one, too, to wear them. And the thing I saw from Figgins's window was certainly a good deal bigger than any junior at St. Jim's."

Kildare looked puzzled.

"But it can't be a senior!" he exclaimed. "It's ridiculous to suppose a fellow in the Fifth or Sixth would play such a trick!"

"Well, it certainly can't have been a junior," said Tom Merry. "That's sure!"

"It's all rot to suggest that it might have been an Upper Form fellow! You might as well suggest that it was a master," said Kildare sharply.

To that Tom Merry made no reply. Kildare walked away with a frowning brow. In spite of his unwillingness to believe that the practical joker was in a high Form at St. Jim's he knew very well that the unknown could not have been a junior.

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CHAPTER 23.

Wally is Astonished!

"BAI JOVE, Wally! What's the mattah, kid?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy asked the question in tones of concern. He had come upon his minor in the passage, after school, standing by himself in the shadow, and squeezing his hands upon his arms. Wally's face was quite pale with pain, and his eyes were gleaming, as though it required an effort on the fag's part to hold back the tears.

"Oh, it's Selby again!" muttered Wally.

"Licked, deah boy?"

"Yes."

"What for?" asked Arthur Augustus.

As a rule, although Wally had a very generous allowance of impots and canings, he did his best to deserve them.

"Nothing."

"H'm!"

Wally snorted.

"You can sniff as much as you like, Gussy. I tell you it was for nothing, and I'll make the brute smart for it yet!" he exclaimed.

"Weally, Wally—"

"He said I talked in class, and I didn't," said Wally. "He ought to have taken my word. Any decent man would."

"Yaas, wathah! It was decidedly bad form of him not to take your word, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

Wally gritted his teeth.

"I'll make him sit up!" he said.

"Weally, Wally, I cannot extend my approval to any scheme for makin' your Form-master sit up, as you wathah coarsely expwess it," said D'Arcy.

"Lucky I can get on without your approval, then, isn't it?" he remarked.

"Weally, Wally—"

Wally walked away without waiting for his stately major to finish. D'Arcy shook his head seriously. He was sorry for Wally, and very much annoyed with Mr. Selby, but he could not see that anything was to be done.

But Wally could. Wally was feeling very sorry that he had spared the Third Form-master the snowballs. Whether it was his sick relation who was troubling him or not, Mr. Selby had no right to visit his worries upon his boys in the form of canings. But a scheme to make a Form-master "sit up" was only likely to end in disaster for the schemer, and

Arthur Augustus hastened after his brother, and laid a brotherly hand on his shoulder.

"Wally, my deah kid—" he began.

"Oh, don't begin again, Gus!" said Wally imploringly.

"Weally, Wally, I want to speak to you. Your Form-mastah is vewy much bothahed just now, and you had bettah be patient. I stwongly suspect that that wvelation of his is off his wockah, you know. It's wathah a wowwy, I should think."

"I don't care! He's not going to cane me for it."

"I wecommend you—"

"Oh, rats!"

And Wally went into the Form-room, and left his major to waste his eloquence upon the desert air. Arthur Augustus, considerably nettled, walked away with his aristocratic nose high in the air. Wally looked out of the Form-room and grinned. As soon as his major was gone, the minor walked quickly in the direction of Mr. Selby's study.

He tapped at the door. He had an excuse ready if the study was occupied; but it was vacant. There was no reply, and Wally entered quickly, and closed the door behind him.

He glanced round the study. The fire was laid ready for

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Wally D'Arcy sailed up, and swooped down into the blanket again. "Now, will you promise not to play ghost again?" demanded Tom Merry. "No!" roared Wally. The blanket swung, and up went the fag again. (See chapter 12.)

Mr. Selby, but it was not yet lighted. It was Wally's kind and amiable intention to stuff the grate with jumping-crackers, to afford a little surprise for Mr. Selby when he came in and put a match to the fire.

But the scamp of the Third had no time to carry out his nefarious plan. He had just lighted the gas when there was a touch on the handle of the study door.

Wally made one jump behind a bookcase that stood across the corner of the room. The next moment the door opened.

From where he stood, Wally could see the reflection of the newcomer in the glass over the mantelpiece. He expected the reflection to be that of Mr. Selby. But it was not. He

started a little as he recognised the white, strained, strange face of Mr. Selby's mysterious guest, Gerald Wynde.

So far as D'Arcy minor knew Dr. Wynde had never entered the School House up till now. Yet now he came into the Third Form-master's study with as much assurance as if the place belonged to him.

Wally was bitterly exasperated. He guessed that the sick man had come there to see Mr. Selby, and it was very probable that he would remain in the room until the Form-master arrived. In that case, Wally's imprisonment was likely to be a long one. As for revealing himself, that was not to be thought of for a moment.

He heard the newcomer close the study door, and then there was silence. What was the man doing?

Wally knew that he would have heard him if he had sat down. Yet could he be standing up, motionless, silent, in the light of the half-turned gas?

A peculiar creepy feeling came over Wally as he crouched behind the bookcase with bated breath. The silence in the study was so dead, that he felt as if he must be alone in the room, and yet he knew that the stranger was there. What was he doing in that dead silence? What could he be doing?

Curiosity, and a strange eerie feeling of alarm, induced Wally to take the risk of peeping out from behind the bookcase. He caught a glimpse of the back of the man's head—the man had his back towards Wally. The fag ventured to look out more boldly, and then he almost cried out aloud in his amazement.

The stranger was standing in front of the looking-glass on the mantelpiece, regarding his reflection in it. Wally could see the reflection as well as the man, and he saw that the man was making strange grimaces at his face in the looking-glass.

He rolled his eyes, and twisted up his lips, and wrinkled his forehead, in a series of hideous and meaningless grimaces, which indicated an unbalanced state of mind as clearly as anything could do.

Wally was rooted to the floor. He forgot that if he could see the man's reflection in the glass, the man must also be able to see his reflection, if he cast his eyes in the right direction.

The fag stared blankly. Was the man mad? What was he making those horrible grimaces for, in the dead silence of the study? Wally felt his very flesh creep.

Suddenly Wynde gave a start.

Wally shivered. He knew that the man had caught his reflection, peeping from behind the reflected bookcase, in the depths of the mirror.

The man swung round with a hoarse exclamation, and Wally gave a faint cry and sprang out of his place of concealment, ready to make a desperate run for the door. But in that single moment Gerald Wynde collected his wandering mind with a powerful effort, and assumed a perfectly natural manner.

"Dear me!" he said in an easy voice. "You startled me! Did you come here to see my friend Mr. Selby?"

Wally could only stare.

Was this quiet, easy man the same man whom he had witnessed grimacing madly and horribly at his own reflection in the glass? It seemed impossible! It seemed as if those wild grimaces had been the work of the fag's imagination.

"I—I—" stammered Wally.

Mr. Wynde laughed.

"Ah! Some junior trick, I suppose?" he exclaimed.

"I—I—"

"Don't be afraid! I will not betray you to Mr. Selby," said Gerald Wynde. "You need have no fear, my lad."

"Th-thank you, sir!" muttered Wally.

The door opened, and Mr. Selby came in. He gave a slight start at the sight of Wynde and the fag of the Third. He had expected to find his study empty.

"Wynde—you here?"

"Evidently," said Mr. Wynde.

"And D'Arcy minor—"

"I was whiling away the time talking to this extremely interesting youth," said Gerald Wynde, with a smile. "I have been quite entertained while I have been waiting for you, my excellent friend."

Mr. Selby frowned.

"You may go, D'Arcy minor!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir."

Wally left the study gladly enough. He heard a murmur in the room as he closed the door and departed, but it never even occurred to him to stay and listen. Wally was not an eavesdropper. But he was in a state of amazement, mingled with alarm. What kind of a man was this Dr. Wynde? What did those strange and horrible grimaces in the glass mean? D'Arcy had said that he suspected Mr. Selby's relation of being "off his rocker," and to Wally it seemed as if the man must be mad. What did it all mean?

CHAPTER 24.

The Unwelcome Guest.

MR. SELBY fixed his eyes on his strange visitor when the door had closed behind D'Arcy minor.

The puckering of the Third Form-master's brow, the glitter in his deep-set eyes, showed how angry he was, and how hard he found it to keep his anger in control. But his voice was quiet enough as he spoke.

"What did you come here for, Wynde?"

Wynde watched him with a strange, cunning look.

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"To see you, and speak to you," he said.

"I could have come over to you."

"I preferred to come here. I suspected that perhaps you would not come."

Mr. Selby shifted uneasily.

"Why?" he muttered.

"I suspected that after what you discovered to-day, that you might write to Dr. Murray, or to my relations."

The Form-master was silent.

He stood near the door, and showed no disposition to come nearer. Wynde saw it, and burst into an angry, mocking laugh.

"You are afraid of me!" he exclaimed.

The colour waved in Mr. Selby's face.

"N-nothing of the sort!" he stammered. "I—I—What an absurd idea!"

"You think I am mad,"

"My dear Wynde—"

"But I am not," said Wynde, speaking very rapidly and thickly. "I assure you on that point. Hallucinations I may have had; I may hear noises; see strange things sometimes—" He paused, and cast a peculiar glance about the study. "But I am sane—as sane as you are!"

The perspiration was thick upon Mr. Selby's brow. He was not a man of courage, or of steady nerves.

"Yes, yes—or course," he muttered.

"Strange fancies—fancies, mind you—do not make a man mad," said the doctor. "Do you dare to say that they do?"

"No, no!"

"And even if I were—say, aberrated, then, what harm? You do not imagine that I should be excitable—violent."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Then what harm does it do you, or anyone, if I have hallucinations? Not that I have them, mind you. I may have—in some moments. That is all. It is simply a case of over wrought nerves."

"I—I know it."

"Do you see that dog—"

Mr. Selby started violently.

"What dog?" he gasped.

"The one that is sitting there beside the bookcase, with the hole in its neck," said the other. "You see it, do you not?"

"There is no dog there," muttered Mr. Selby, down whose pale cheeks the perspiration was now pouring.

The other made an irritable gesture.

"Nonsense!" he said. "I should think it is plain enough! I have seen that brute every night—every night since—No matter! If I had my time again I should not make the experiments I have made. But it is too late to think of that. I wish that I did not see that dog wherever I go."

"My Heaven!" muttered the Form-master.

"There! It is gone!" said Wynde thickly, and with a relieved look. "You see that it is gone now. Would you call that a hallucination?"

"It was a hallucination!" panted the Form-master. "For goodness' sake, pull yourself together, Wynde, and do not let these strange fancies take possession of your mind! That way madness lies."

Wynde nodded.

"I know it!" he said. "I know it! I try to keep myself in hand. What I require is rest—complete rest. When I am in health again I shall see that horrible dog no more. I know that! Yet one has the strangest fancies. I was reading in the book of that old monk—the White Monk of St. Jim's—"

"Do not speak of that."

"I had the strangest fancy. It seemed to me that he rose into my view out of the musty old pages of that book, and that his soul passed into my body and animated me," said Wynde, in a low, strained voice. "Strange, was it not?"

"For goodness' sake, do not say such a thing!"

"You fear that someone might hear?"

"If they heard, you would be supposed mad, and—and taken away," said Mr. Selby. "You would be supposed—"

"Mad!"

"Heaven help you! Yes."

"They would have shut me up. But I eluded them! But you will not betray me?"

"No, no!"

"You will let me remain here in safety?"

"Yes, yes!"

"In this house—in your room?"

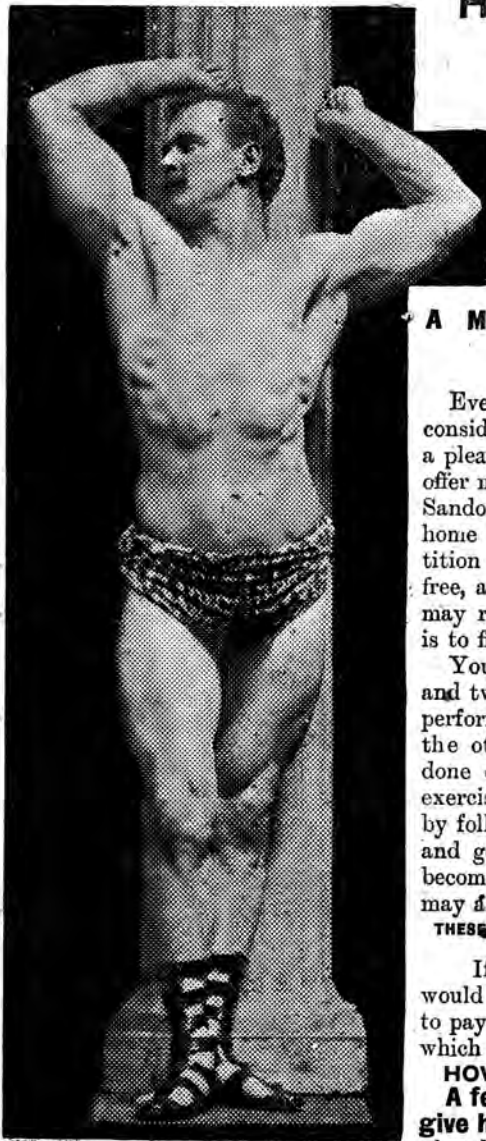
Mr. Selby started.

"Is not your own room—your own quarters—comfortable enough?" he muttered huskily.

"They might take me from there without your knowing," said Dr. Wynde, in a low, cunning voice. "Do you understand? And you might betray me. Who knows? I prefer to remain here. I can share your bed-room to-night."

Mr. Selby shuddered.

(Continued on page 32.)



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Free Trial. *Please cross out sizes not required.

"The room next to mine is vacant," he said. "I will obtain that for you. I will have your things sent into it."

"Thank you, Selby! You are a true friend to me. Mind, all my things—and without having the bags opened."

"Certainly!"

"I shall be more at ease here."

"Yes—yes. But, for mercy's sake, keep in the study, and do not let anybody see you. They would think—"

The man smiled cunningly.

"I shall be careful," he said. "I shall be all right when—when I have had a rest—complete rest. That is all I need. I worked too hard—too hard! Perhaps I was cruel. If I was I have paid the penalty of it, Heaven knows! I have had my punishment!"

He sank into a chair.

Mr. Selby left the study and closed the door after him. In the passage he paused to wipe his damp brow with his handkerchief.

"Oh, Heaven!" he muttered. "What am I to do—what shall I do? I—I have had to break my word to him—to write to Dr. Murray that the man is here! He is mad—mad! But—but Murray cannot be here till to-morrow. I shall endure mental torture for twelve hours yet! Yet I should have guessed this at the first! Who but a madman would have acted as he has done! I was blind to what was obvious!"

He started out of his bitter reverie. Two fags came dashing along the passage. They were Jameson and Curly Gibson. They stopped at the sight of Mr. Selby; but it was too late.

"Jameson! Gibson!"

"Ye-es, sir?"

"Come here!"

The two culprits reluctantly approached. In his present state of mind, torn with anxiety and fear of he hardly knew what, Mr. Selby was about as safe to approach as a tiger. He glared at the fags.

"How dare you race about the passages in that manner!" he exclaimed.

"If you please, sir—"

"Take a hundred lines each!" said the Form-master harshly. "Were you going to my study?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Mind that you do not!" said Mr. Selby. "Tell the others that they are not to go to my study this evening under any pretext whatever. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Jameson and Gibson together, in wonder.

"Now go!"

They went gladly enough.

In the Form-room passage they found Wally in talk with his major. Jameson tapped the scamp of the Third on the shoulder.

"Seen old Selby?" he asked.

"Yes. What about it?"

"He seems to be going dotty, that's all," said Jameson. "He says that nobody is to go to his study this evening on any excuse whatever. What's the little game?"

"He's got his precious friend there," said Wally.

"Oh, the sick man?"

"Yes. And I reckon his sickness is in the brain, rot in the body," said Wally. "I watched him making horrible faces at himself in the glass."

"Great Scott!"

"He's as mad as a hatter!" said Wally. "And Selby is afraid the fellows will see him. Nice state of things—ch?—bringing lunatics into the House! Blessed if I should go to sleep to-night if that chap were staying in the School House!"

"It is remarkable!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy thoughtfully. "Vewy remarkable! Mr. Selby certainly seems not at all himself since that man came."

"He seems to be simply potty!" said Jameson crossly.

"The man's his relation—it runs in the family!" said Wally, with a grin.

D'Arcy gave his minor a severe look.

"Weally, Wallay, it is your duty to tweek Mr. Selby with gwent respect and considewation, undah the peculiah cuics of the case," he said.

"Oh, rats!"

"Weally, Wallay—"

"Come on, kids! Gussy will go on talking all night!" said Wally cheerfully.

"You cheeky young wascal—"

The Form-room door banged and cut short Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's remarks.

In the Third Form-room the fags listened, with exclamations of wonder, to what Wally & Co. had to tell them. And the heroes of the Third made up their minds at once upon two points—that Mr. Selby's friend was "off his rocker," and that Mr. Selby himself was not in a much better state. Which would have been very gratifying to Mr. Selby if he had heard it!

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

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CHAPTER 25.

The Ghost Walks.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY gnawed the end of his pencil and glanced over the pages in his notebook, where he had been scribbling. He was in the junior common-room, and it was getting near to bedtime.

"I think that is about complete, deah boys!" said D'Arcy.

"What may it happen to be?" asked Blake.

"A list of fwiends I am invitin' to Eastwood for Chwistmas, when we bweak up," said D'Arcy. "My governah has given me special permish to have a few fwiends for the Chwistmas holidays." He glanced at the paper again. "Of course, you are comin', Blake?"

"I might be induced to do so, Gussy."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake! And you are comin', Hewwies and Dig?"

"If our fares are paid," replied Digby.

"Please don't talk out of your hat, Dig. Tom Mewwy and Mannahs and Lowthah, I twust I shall have the pleasuah of seein' you at Eastwood for the Chwistmas vas?"

"Your trust will not be misplaced, Gussy," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Vewy good!" D'Arcy closed the book. "I shall ask one or two more chaps, I think. My governah said a few—and I suppose that means ovah a dozen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kildare looked into the room.

"Bedtime, you kids!"

"Weally, Kildare—"

The captain of St. Jim's pointed to the clock.

"Half-past nine!" he said.

"I am not objectin' to the time, but to the expvession 'kids,'" explained Arthur Augustus. "I weally considah—"

"Buzz off!"

"You are intewwuptin' me, Kildare—"

"Exactly! Go to bed!"

And the St. Jim's captain walked away, laughing.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon his companions, who were grinning.

"I can see nothin' whatevah to gwin at, deah boys!" he said.

"Go hon!" Monty Lowther rose and yawned. "I wonder if the ghost will be walking to-night?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Tom Merry. "I suggest that Gussy wraps himself up in a blanket and keeps watch in the passage all night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

The juniors trooped out of the common-room. They passed Mr. Selby in the passage. The master of the Third did not look at them; he was going towards his study, with a dark, troubled frown upon his brows, and his eyes on the floor. The chums of the School House looked at him in wonder.

"Look at the effect your young brother has on a Form-master, Gussy," Tom Merry remarked.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"He does look bothered, and no mistake," said Blake. "I wonder what the row is? It's since that sick friend of his has been staying here that he's looked so rotten; and Wally says he's been a perfect cannibal in the Form-room all the time. I've seen the man, and I don't see what there is in him to worry old Selby so much."

"Selby may be vewy anxious about his fwiend's health, deah boy."

"Yes, he looks the kind of man to worry about whether other people are well or not—Selby does!" Blake agreed sarcastically.

"The chap may be sticking here without being wanted," Levison remarked.

"I guess that's the case," observed Lumley-Lumley of the Fourth. "I guess Mr. Selby would get rid of him if he could, to judge by his looks."

"Then why doesn't he?"

"Owes him money perhaps," said Lumley-Lumley.

"Bai Jove!"

"The man seems harmless enough," said Manners. "I've seen him several times in the school library and museum, and he seems amused by looking over the old manuscripts and the relics of the abbey of St. Jim's. That's a good taste in a man."

"Yes. You'll be a dusty old bounder like that when you grow up," said Lowther, with a yawn. "Chap who starts photographing at your age is bound to come to that. I think—"

"No, you don't!" growled Manners. "You can't! Good-night, you Fourth Form kids!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

And the Shell fellows went on to their own quarters. They

turned in, some of them discussing the ghost of St. Jim's and the probability or otherwise of his reappearance. Gore did not take part in the discussion. Although Gore had come to the conclusion, like the rest, that the ghost he had seen was a practical joker in ghostly guise, the subject always made him silent and nervous after dark. But to the juniors who had not seen the White Monk the subject was not awe-inspiring.

"I jolly well wish the ghost would walk!" said Crooke. "I should like to get a chance at it again!"

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther unceremoniously. "You had a chance in the quad,—and you bolted!"

"Same as you did!" sneered Crooke.

"Yes, just the same!" agreed Lowther cheerfully. "I dare say most fellows would bolt at the sight of a giddy ghost in the dark. But after all your swank on the subject you ought to have tackled it. You got under the bedclothes when young Wally was playing the giddy goat the other night. You'd do the same now if you heard a footstep in the passage! Rats! Do shut up, and don't talk rot!"

"Look here, Lowther—"

"Oh, rats!"

And Crooke subsided, with a scowling face, into bed. Kildare came into the dormitory, and glanced along the row of beds.

"Now, then—all in?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

The light went out, and Kildare quitted the Shell dormitory. In the darkness the juniors did not feel so inclined to talk ghosts. They talked football instead, and Christmas holidays, till one by one they dropped off to sleep.

Outside, the wind was moaning through the leafless branches of the elms, and the flakes of snow were silently, steadily falling.

As the wind rose, the old gaunt branches brushed against the panes of the windows, and the flakes were whirled in white masses on the glass.

There was a glimmer of moonlight over the old clock-tower, gleaming upon the white mantle of snow that stretched over the quad, and the roofs of St. Jim's.

Perhaps it was the wind that awakened Tom Merry.

He started from his slumber, and lay in his bed listening, wondering what had broken his sleep.

The low moan of the wind, the creaking of the branches, came from the quadrangle, and sometimes a faint, thudding sound, as a mass of snow rolled from a slanting roof down into the quad, below.

There was a gleam of moonlight upon the panes of the dormitory windows, but the long, lofty room was in deep darkness.

Tom Merry closed his eyes again.

Creak!

He started, and his eyes came open again at once. Whether it was that sound that had awakened him before, he did not know; but decidedly there was no doubt about it now. He knew that creak of the loose board in the dormitory passage.

It was a footstep.

Tom Merry sat up in bed.

The White Monk—the Ghost of St. Jim's—rushed into his mind at once.

He shivered for a moment.

His eyes were strained in the gloom towards the dormitory door.

Was that door about to open and give admittance to the ghostly form. The boy shivered at the thought.

What was the hour? Were the elders of St. Jim's in bed, he wondered? In answer to the unspoken thought, there came a chiming from the clock-tower.

The four quarters, and then the hour!

Twelve!

One after another the deep strokes boomed through the night, and died away into silence, until the last had sounded. Midnight!

All St. Jim's was sleeping, then!

Who was it that had passed the door of the Shell dormitory when the rest of the school was wrapped in slumber?

Hark!

Creak!

Tom Merry caught his breath.

There was a faint sound at the door, and he knew that it was opening. The boy sat still in bed, with growing terror. What did it mean? Who was coming into the dormitory? Good heavens! What was going to happen?

His straining eyes were fixed upon the black aperture which was the doorway. The door was open now. The draught of cold air told him that.

Dimly, faintly, terribly in the gloom, a white figure loomed up.

Tom Merry uttered a cry.

Faint as the cry was, it sounded through the dormitory, and awakened several of the other juniors.

There was a creak as the door closed.

The figure was gone.

Tom Merry sprang out of bed.

"Wake, you fellows! Wake up!"

"What is it?"

"What's the matter?"

"I've seen it!"

"Seen what?"

"The White Monk! Wake up!"

CHAPTER 26.

The Ghost Hunters!

"BAI Jove, you know!" Arthur Augustus murmured the words in slumber, as he felt himself shaken by the shoulder, without being fully awakened.

"Pway don't shake me, deah boy. It is not wisin' bell yet, and I wefuse to be disturbed. Pway go away."

"Gussy!"

"Weally, you know—"

"Wake up, you ass!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opened his eyes wide.

He blinked in the darkness of the Fourth-Form dormitory. A shadowy figure was beside him, and a hand was gripping his shoulder. He could not make out the face above him, but he knew the voice.

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

"Yes."

"What's the mattah?"

"The ghost is walking."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I've come to call you chaps," said Tom Merry, in a low, determined tone. "The ghost is walking, and I think it ought to be followed and shown up, whatever it is. I had a frightful scare. It looked into the dorm."

"Bai Jove!"

"What did you do?" asked Jack Blake, who was already out of bed.

"Nothing."

Blake chuckled softly.

"It vanished when I gave a cry," said Tom Merry. "Then I came along here, with Manners and Lowther."

"My hat, I shouldn't have cared to go out into the passage, I think!" said Hancock, with a shudder.

"We thought we'd call you chaps to help us."

"Right-ho!" said Blake.

"Yass, wathah!"

"B-b-but," stammered Digby, "I—I—"

"You're not going to funk it, Dig?"

"N-no! B-b-but it's c-c-cold, and—"

"Rats! Get up!"

"Let's have a light," said Herries.

"No, no!" said Tom Merry hastily. "Somebody is playing ghost, and if we're going to catch him, we shall have to be careful. If he knows he's being looked for, he's only got to whip off his disguise, and he's safe. We've got to catch him in the act."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I—I say, I suppose you are sure it's not a g-g-ghost?" muttered Levison.

"I suppose so."

"That's all very well, but there are things we don't understand, and—"

"Rats!"

"Well, I'm not going out of the dorm, anyway," said Levison.

"Same here," remarked Mellish.

"You're not wanted," said Tom Merry. "You can stay here, and put your heads under the bedclothes, if you like. Go and eat coke."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Hark!"

The juniors stood quite still, listening tensely.

There was a creak from the passage. Tom Merry had left the door open when he came in with Manners and Lowther, and the sound was clearly heard by all who were awake in the dormitory.

Creak!

Someone was passing in the passage!

Every waking eye in the Fourth-Form dormitory was fixed upon the open doorway, a blacker space than the wall in the darkness.

Did they see, for a moment, something that was white and glimmering pass the doorway, with a faint rustle as of ghostly robes?

They could not be sure!

If so, it was gone in a second.

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A SPECIAL STORY "FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE!" A Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. ORDER EARLY!

NEXT WEEK:

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, under his breath.

"I—I think I saw something," muttered Manners.

"And I," said Monty Lowther, in a shaking voice. "I can't be sure, but I—I think I did."

Blake set his teeth to keep them from chattering.

"Let's go after it," he muttered.

"Ya-a-a-s, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus, but in a hesitating tone.

"I guess I'm coming," said Jerrold Lumley-Lumley.

"Come on, then," Tom Merry said firmly. "It must be a trick—it simply must be! It can't be anything else. Come on!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co. moved silently and cautiously towards the doorway. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy and Reilly and Lumley-Lumley, made up the party. The other fellows preferred to remain in bed. But there were enough of them to tackle the ghost, if it proved to be of human flesh and blood. If it proved to be otherwise—in the daylight they would not have entertained for a second the theory that it could have been anything but flesh and blood. But in the eerie silence and darkness of the night, matters seemed changed.

The darkness, the chilly wind, the glimmer of snow through the windows, the silence, all seemed to lend a colour to the possibility that a phantom might be haunting the dim old passages of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry reached the doorway, and paused as he looked out into the passage.

Darkness met his gaze.

Up and down the passage he looked, but there was nothing to be seen—nothing to be heard!

At the further end of the passage, a glimmer of moonlight through the window dispersed the gloom to some extent, and the darkness was broken.

Tom Merry gave a sudden start as his eyes turned again in that direction.

There was a glimmer of white in the gloom.

With starting eyeballs, the hero of the Shell looked. There was a deep breath from the juniors round him—they could see what he saw!

From the darkness the figure emerged into dim view—the figure of a monk of the olden-time, with the cowl covering the face, and white—white as are the dead!

In full, clear view, the strange and terrible form passed before the vision of the juniors. Then it vanished into the darkness.

CHAPTER 27.

Run to Earth!

FOR a full minute there was a dead silence among the juniors.

All of them were pale, stricken with a strange horror by what they had seen.

The phantom had appeared soundlessly, and had disappeared again, leaving no trace behind. What was it? Whence did it come? Where was it gone?

What did the horrible mystery mean?

Tom Merry was the first to recover himself.

He made a movement to leave the dormitory; but Monty Lowther caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, Tom!" he muttered.

"Come on, Monty!"

"Look here!"

"The thing's gone down the side-passage," said Tom Merry. "We can follow it."

"Bai Jove!"

"Just a minute," muttered Lowther; "I—I feel a bit shaken up. Hang it all, Tom, I don't know that I want to get at close quarters with that horrible thing! Suppose—"

"Suppose what?"

"Well, suppose—"

"Don't be an ass, Monty," said Tom Merry in low, steady tones. "A real ghost wouldn't make the floor creak in the passage."

"I—I suppose not! But—"

"I'm weedy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy firmly. "I'm quite weedy, deah boys. I am quite sure that it is only a wotten jape."

"You ready, you chaps?"

"Ye-es!"

"Come on, then."

Tom Merry led the way from the Fourth Form dormitory. There were few of the juniors who would not rather have remained in the dormitory; but they did not fail to follow Tom Merry's lead.

Tom Merry led the way up the passage, running quickly. He reached the corner where the ghost had disappeared. It was not in sight.

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Darkness surrounded him, and nothing more. The juniors gathered round him again. All was dark and silent; the spectre monk had vanished, as if for ever.

"Bai Jove, it's gone, you know!" murmured D'Arcy.

"Come on!"

"Going to follow it?" muttered Lumley-Lumley.

"Yes."

The juniors tramped determinedly down the passage. Through that passage, and several others, they sought the ghostly figure.

But no trace of it was seen.

Angry and disappointed, and with a peculiar creepy feeling of nervousness, they returned to the dormitory passage.

"It's vanished," Manners muttered.

"Gone downstairs, perhaps," said Blake.

"Or melted into thin air," said Monty Lowther, and he was not wholly joking.

Tom Merry set his lips.

"If it's finished for to-night, we can't find it," he said angrily. "But—oh!"

"Oh!"

"Good heavens!"

"Run!"

It was the White Monk!

From the darkness the white, ghostly figure had suddenly emerged, close to the juniors, and was advancing swiftly upon them.

In the sudden alarm they forgot that they were hunting for the ghost, and were anxious to encounter it.

With startled cries they bolted back into the dormitory.

They rushed in, and amazed cries from the other fellows greeted them, in answer to their own startled and terrified ejaculations.

But the phantom did not follow them into the dormitory. It vanished.

"Gweat Scott!" gasped D'Arcy. "I—I think I've had enough of ghost-huntin', deah boy. I—I have been thwown quite into a fluttah."

"What's the matter?" shouted Jones minor.

"The ghost!"

"The White Monk!"

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove!"

"Oh, dear!"

Tom Merry burst into a laugh, half amused and half exasperated. The sudden ending of the ghost hunt had been ridiculous enough.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I do not see anythin' to cackle at!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in indignant surprise.

"Well, I do," growled Tom Merry. "We went out to hunt the ghost, and as soon as we saw it, we ran like a lot of frightened rabbits."

"I wefuse to be called a fwrightened wabbit—"

"Look here, come on—and no more funking—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I didn't funk—"

"What did you do, then?"

"Well, I was startled, you know—"

"Yes, and you ran—"

"Not exactly ran," said D'Arcy cautiously. "I wewtreated—a stwategic movement, you know; not what you would call wunnin' away."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, come on, and mind there are no more strategic movements!" he exclaimed. "We're jolly well going to stop the ghost walking!"

"I'm ready!" growled Blake.

"Come on, then."

Tom Merry & Co. moved towards the doorway once more. They were in an angry and resolute mood now, and not likely to run again. But the ghost was not to be seen in the passage. They scanned the passages up and down, but there was no glimmer of white in the darkness. Blake uttered a sudden suppressed exclamation.

"Look!"

"Where?"

"On the stairs!"

"Ah! Loo-ki!"

In the dense darkness of the big staircase there was a glimmer of white. The juniors crept towards it, noiseless in their socks.

The white figure fitted down the stairs.

It made no noise, and it was so phantom-like in looks and movements that a weird and eerie feeling came over the ghost-hunters.

But they followed it bravely.

The phantom paused on the landing.

The juniors passed on.

They drew nearer and nearer. And then the strange figure appeared to become aware of their presence.

It fitted on in the gloom, when they were almost within reaching distance of the ghostly, rustling, white robes.

Tom Merry set his teeth, and ran towards it as it reached the foot of the staircase on the lower passage.

His hand brushed against the floating, monkish robes, but they glided through his fingers, and the phantom fled on.

Click! A door had closed, and the phantom fled on.

A moment more, and the juniors were outside the door that had hidden the White Monk of St. Jim's from their sight. They did not open it. Breathless, panting, they paused there in the darkness.

"Whose room is it?" muttered Blake.

"I don't know."

"Either Mr. Selby's or the next one to it," muttered Monty Lowther.

"Strike a match—who's got one?"

"I have," said Herries.

"Hold on," muttered Lumley-Lumley. "It will make a row—I've got my electric torch here!"

"Good!"

Lumley-Lumley pressed the tiny pocket-torch, and a little gleam of brilliant light shot out. He turned it upon the doorway and the wall above, and they could see the number of the room. Tom Merry pointed to it.

"It's not Mr. Selby's room," he said; "it's the next—the vacant bed-room, you know."

"Bai Jove!"

"What's the matter, Gussy?"

"The bed-room is occupied now, Tom Mewwy. I wemembah seein' the maids gettin' it weady this evenin'!"

"Oh!"

"Mr. Selby's friend has moved into it."

"I—I didn't know that," muttered Tom Merry. "I—"

Lumley-Lumley uttered a startled ejaculation.

"Let me look at your hand, Tom Merry."

"My hand?"

"Yes. Did you touch the ghost?"

"I just touched him; that was all."

"And he was solid—"

"His clothes were, at any rate."

"I just caught the light on your hand," said Lumley-Lumley, switching the gleam on again. "It looked white! Yes—look yourself."

All the juniors looked at Tom Merry's hand as the electric light gleamed on it. The fingers were white with chalk.

"Chalk!" muttered Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's what makes the ghost white," said Tom Merry with a slight smile. "He has taken the monk's robes out of the school museum and chalked them all over the outside. It's an easy way of making up as a ghost."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was quite certain now. That the phantom of St. Jim's was a practical joker the juniors were now assured, and all fear of the supernatural had vanished from their minds. Yet they hesitated to enter the bed-room, outside the closed door of which they stood in a hushed group.

"We must go in," said Tom Merry at last. "If Mr. Wynde wakes up, we can explain. The rotter, whoever he is, has dodged into this room to escape us, and he may frighten Mr. Wynde to fits if he wakes up and sees him. He is not in good health, you know."

"Yaas, wathah! As a matter of fact, Mr. Wynde is a little off his wockah already, and a shock like that might send him right off!"

"Yes. We'll go in—"

"What is that? Who is there?"

It was a sudden, sharp voice from behind the juniors.

"Bai Jove! That's Selby!"

CHAPTER 38.

The Ghost is Laid.

M R. SELBY was half-dressed, and he had a candle in his hand, that glimmered upon the pale faces of the juniors and upon his own paler countenance. The Third-Form master had not slept that night. The burden of Dr. Wynde's secret upon his mind was more than sufficient to banish slumber. The whispering voices in the passage close to his door had reached his ears, and he came out with an angry and frowning brow. He stared at the group of Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows in amazement.

"What are you boys doing out of bed?" he demanded sternly.

"The ghost, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

"We have seen it, sir," said Tom Merry quietly.

"Really, Merry—"

"It is someone playing ghost, sir—he has the old monk's robes, and has chalked them white," said Blake eagerly. "Some of the chalk came off on Tom Merry's hand when he touched him."

"Oh, indeed! And do you know where the trickster is now?"

"He went into this room, sir."

Mr. Selby started.

"In that room—the room next to mine?"

"Yaas, wathah, sir!"

"Impossible!"

"We saw him, sir."

"But—but my friend, Dr. Wynde—I—I mean my relation, is in that room, and—"

"The ghost went in there, sir."

A strangely-startled and scared look came over Mr. Selby's face. It seemed as if a dark and terrible suspicion had entered his mind. The candle fluttered in his hand—the wavering light threw long and grotesque shadows upon the wall.

In the silence a sudden sound came from the room outside which the juniors were grouped.

"Take it away! Take it—take it away!"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

The words could convey only one meaning to his mind—that the occupant of the room had awakened, and had seen the ghostly figure, and was crying out in terror at the sight.

Quick as thought, Tom Merry threw the bed-room door open. Mr. Selby shouted to him.

"Stop, stop! I forbid you to enter!"

But it was too late.

Tom Merry had dashed into the room.

Blake, the first to follow, felt for the electric switch inside the door as he entered, and turned it on.

There was a sudden flood of light in the room.

It disclosed a strange and startling scene.

The bed was unoccupied. Its appearance showed that it had not been slept in. There was but one occupant in the room.

It was the White Monk!

The gaunt figure, in trailing, monkish gown, with the cowl hiding the face with the exception of two gleaming eyes, stood before the juniors, so close that they could have touched it. But in the glaring electric light it did not look ghostly.

The robes, the cowl, the figure, were all evidently solid, and in the light the juniors could see that the white was caused by chalk thickly daubed over the outside of the cowl and the gown.

"Here he is!" gasped Blake.

"But—but—" Tom Merry staggered in surprise. "Where is Mr. Wynde—he is not here! There is no one in the bed."

Mr. Selby, in the doorway, heard the words, and groaned. They confirmed his suspicions. But it was too late to conceal the truth from the juniors—and from others, too; for the noise had been heard, and doors were opening and voices were calling.

Tom Merry & Co. looked at the strange figure.

Their only thought, at first, was that they had run down the practical joker who had scared the school, and they thought only of unmasking him.

But as they looked at him now, their hands dropped to their sides, and they fell back further from him.

It was not a phantom. But there was something weird, something terrible, in the figure in monkish garb, and in the wild, unnatural gleam of the eyes that shone under the ghostly cowl.

The eyes were not turned upon the juniors.

They were fixed in a wild, set gaze upon a corner of the room—an empty space, where the eyes of the juniors could discern nothing but the floor and the wainscot.

But to those wildly-gleaming eyes something else was evidently visible—made visible by the impelling power of a diseased imagination.

"Take it away—take it away! Heaven help me!"

The muttering words came from under the cowl.

"Good heavens!" muttered Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

"Who is he?"

Tom Merry stepped desperately forward, and dragged back the cowl from the man's face. There was a cry of astonishment.

"Great Scott!"

"Wynde!"

"The sick man!"

Mr. Selby groaned.

"Gerald Wynde! I guessed it! And he is mad!"

"Mad!" muttered the juniors, in hushed tones of horror.

"Mad! Oh, heavens!"

They retreated instinctively to the doorway, their eyes upon the face of the insane doctor. Gerald Wynde was still staring fixedly at the empty corner of the room.

"Take it away! Mercy!"

He muttered the words thickly, through white and quivering

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A SPECIAL STORY "FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE!"

NEXT WEEK:

A Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. ORDER EARLY!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

lips. He seemed to have forgotten that he was playing the ghost of St. Jim's. That strange and morbid fancy had given place to another in his unsettled brain.

"What is it?" muttered Tom Merry, and his voice was shaking in spite of himself. "What is it you fear?"

"The dog!"

"There is no dog there?"

"You lie! Can you not see his eyes—his eyes—oh, Heaven! Take him away!" The man swung suddenly round towards the juniors, his gleaming eyes turning upon them wildly. "What do you want here? I am not mad—I am not mad! I am sane—quite sane! It is all lies—lies!"

"Go!" muttered Mr. Selby, in a trembling voice. "Go—at once! I will look after him."

The juniors moved quietly away.

Mr. Selby entered the room, and closed the door after him. With silent footsteps, Tom Merry & Co returned to their dormitory.

"Bai Jove!" D'Arcy murmured, as they reached the dormitory passage. "I undahstand it all now. That's why that chap was keepin' so close—and why Selby was so worried about him—because he was weally off his wockah!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"He's as mad as a hatter," he said. "I think it's been getting worse with him—he certainly wasn't like that before. It's horrible, but I'm glad we've laid the ghost. The lunatic might have done some harm if he had not been stopped."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Good-night, you kids."

And the Shell fellows went on to their own dormitory. But, there was little sleep for them that night.

The ghost of St. Jim's was laid!

With hushed breath the juniors told the story the next day, and the strange, eerie tale thrilled all St. Jim's. There had been a ghost—not a phantom visitor from another world—but a victim of a diseased and deluded imagination, who was evidently not responsible for his insane actions.

The sick man, studying the old manuscripts of St. Jim's in his dull hours of leisure and idleness, had come upon the story of the White Monk, with strange old woodcuts illustrative of the story, and it had taken a hold upon his diseased imagination. With the peculiar tendency to cunning trickery that is characteristic of diseased minds, he had made up the

ghostly garb. Yet while he was playing ghost at the school, he was haunted himself by phantoms still more terrible—phantoms that were conjured up only by his own wild fancy, but real and fearful to him.

In the morning came Dr. Murray, and the strange guest of St. Jim's departed in his care—and though many of the fellows felt sorry for him, they were glad enough when he had quitted the school.

And Mr. Selby, too, breathed more freely when he was gone. The presence of the unwelcome guest had been a burden upon his mind, which he had not been able to escape, and for which the unfortunate Third Form had suffered.

When the man was gone at last, it was noticed in the Third Form-room that Mr. Selby's temper had undergone a decided improvement.

"Not that he's good-tempered," Wally confided to his major. "Of course, it's no good expecting miracles. But he's better. He doesn't rag us half so much—and upon the whole, I'm not going to give him any fireworks in his fire, after all."

Figgins & Co. came over from the New House to see the ghost-hunters, and to hear the wondrous tale, with great interest.

"Look here!" said Fatty Wynn, when the story was told. "I've had a postal-order from my uncle in Anglesea, and it's a whacking good one. I was just wondering what we could celebrate, when I heard about your ghost-hunting. I think we'd better celebrate that—with a feed, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea!" said Jack Blake. "What do you fellows say?"

And all the fellows said:

"What-ho!"

And the little celebration—which proved to be rather a big celebration—was duly celebrated; and over the festive board the juniors drank merry toasts in ginger-beer, and especially a Merry Christmas to themselves and to everybody else, including the Ghost of St. Jim's!

THE END.

(Next Thursday—"For His School's Sake," another splendid, long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. Also a long instalment of "Deep Sea Gold." Please order your copy of next week's "GEM" Library in advance. Usual size and usual price, 1d.)

JOKES and CONUNDRUMS.

THE DIP DELIGHTFUL.

The bad boy of the family was always up to something. If it wasn't stoning cattle it was smashing windows; if it wasn't smashing windows it was stealing apples; if it wasn't stealing apples it was cream. It was cream this time.

Alone in the pantry he was having a simply splendid time. First he dipped his finger into the jug and then into his mouth, and then he dipped it into the jug again.

So for fifteen minutes, till his maternal parent appeared unnoticed in the doorway, and stood grimly watching the proceedings.

Dip, suck—dip, suck!

"Jim!" rapped out mother suddenly. "I don't like that!"

He looked up calmly. Then he dipped again. Then:

"Well," he responded, sucking, "you don't know what's good for you!"

WHICH ONE WAS FISHING?

"Massa, massa!" cried black Sambo. "I've got a bite!"

His master started across to his assistance, for sport had been slow that afternoon, and he could not afford to lose any chances. If Sambo's fish turned out to be a big one it would be useful in his own all-too-empty basket.

"Quick, massa, quick!" shouted the nigger. "Dis yere fish am tuggin' harder'n my ole woman! Help, massa! I'm goin' in!"

And in he went.

With a grunt of annoyance his master waded in after the struggling mass of black, caught hold of the kicking limbs, and pulled their owner out.

"You've lost it, idiot!" he exclaimed.

"I knows dat, massa," blinked the negro, shivering. "Dat ain't boderin' me at all. Wot's boderin' me is, is de nigger fishing, or was dat fish a-niggering?"

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is the Title of the Splendid, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. appearing in this week's "MAGNET" Library. Now on Sale. One Penny.

CONUNDRUMS.

Why are clouds like coachmen? Because they hold the reins (reins).

When does a ship tell a falsehood? When it lies at a wharf.

Why may a beggar wear a short coat? Because it will be long enough before he gets another.

Why is the opening of a letter like a very queer method of entering a room? Because it's breaking through the sealing (ceiling).

Why does a sailor know there is a man in the moon? Because he's been to sea (see).

When can donkey be spelt with one letter? When it's "U."

Why is a sculptor's death more terrible? Because he makes faces and busts.

What part of a fish weighs most? The scales.

Why is a policeman like a rainbow? Because he rarely appears until the storm is over.

When is a clock on the stairs dangerous? When it runs down and strikes one.

Why is a watch like a river? Because it won't run along without winding.

Why is a well-trained horse like a benevolent man? Because he stops at the sound of wo(e).

What is taken from you before you get it? Your portrait.

When is a silver cup most likely to run? When it's chased.

Why would a compliment from a chicken be an insult? Because it would be fowl language.

If you were to ride upon a donkey, what fruit would you resemble? A pear (pair).

Is there any difference between a bee-hive and a bad potato? No. Because a bee-holder is a bee-holder, a bee-holder is a spect'd'tatur, and a speck'd'tatur is a bad potato.

What is the most dangerous time to visit the country? When the bull-rushes out, the cow-slips about, and the little sprigs ara, shooting all around.

MORE THAN TRUE!

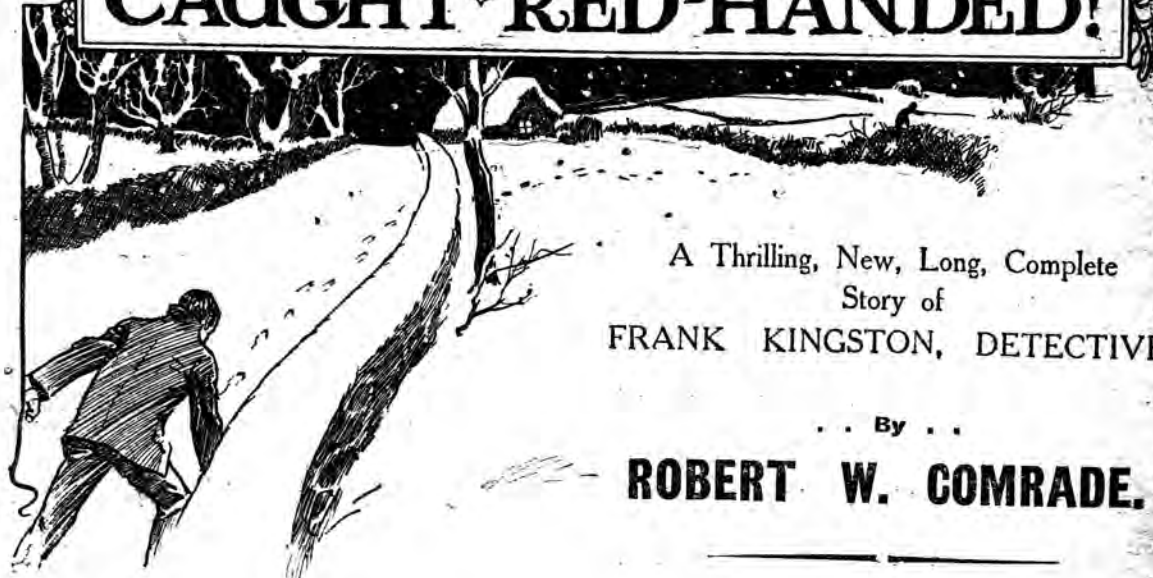
BILL (an ardent reader of THE GEM) to Tommy, who has just been hauled out of the river: "Say, Tom! Why are you like THE GEM?"

"Don't know."

"Because you're not a bit dry."

The Second Long, Complete Story contained In this Issue.

CAUGHT ♦ RED-HANDED!



A Thrilling, New, Long, Complete
Story of
FRANK KINGSTON, DETECTIVE.

... By ...

ROBERT W. COMRADE.

CHAPTER 1.

The Audacity of Ambrose Seton.

"FRANKLY, my dear Redmayne, I half admire the fellow. His audacity is a thing to wonder at, his skill little short of marvellous."

"But, after all," protested the Earl of Redmayne, "you can't get away from the fact that he is a criminal—a menace to the British public. Personally, I think Scotland Yard ought to have caught him long ago."

Sir Banister Henson puffed at his cigar with a sage nod.

"Ah, that's because you don't know what a slippery eel the man is," he replied. "He snaps his fingers at Scotland Yard, and treats the whole police-force with the finest contempt. Oh, I tell you, Redmayne, Ambrose Seton has made a name for himself!"

The pair continued their way along the snow-covered and frozen road for a moment in silence, the earl thoughtfully flicking the soft snow with his walking-cane. Then he smiled.

"Ambrose Seton, eh?" he repeated. "By Jove! So he has the cheek to possess an aristocratic name! How long has the beauty been known to fame? There was nothing heard of him six years ago, when I left England."

"Not even a whisper," agreed Sir Banister. "No, my boy, Seton sprang into prominence about three years since, and the police have never so much as smelt him. He sets to work in his own way, and carries out his plans with apparently the most consummate ease."

A few small snowflakes were commencing to fall, and the keen wind blew them about in eddying circles. Overhead the sky was dull and overcast, giving promise of a further heavy downfall. The Earl of Redmayne and his companion were walking up from the village to Redmayne Hall, two miles distant.

The morning was a splendid one for a brisk stroll, and both the baronet and his friend had preferred that method of reaching their destination to driving. Sir Banister Henson was Redmayne's nearest neighbour, living at Colgate Priory, three miles further on. The two families had been the closest friends for generations past, but Sir Banister was exceptionally genial to-day, for he had not seen his friend for close on six years.

For the Earl of Redmayne had only just returned from a long exploration trip in Central Africa. And during his absence the Hall had been silent and empty, with the exception of a caretaker. Now, however, the old house was, as formerly, filled with a whole host of servants.

Redmayne had returned the previous day, but this morning was his first meeting with Sir Banister. At first the baronet had hardly recognised in the bronzed, dark-haired man of thirty the slight, youthful figure who had left six years previously.

Redmayne would have returned years before, but while out in Africa he had been attacked by natives and kept

prisoner for many months. When, on regaining his liberty, and making preparations for returning home, he fell a victim to fever, he had been delayed for a further year, for on that occasion he had been very near to losing his life.

"That would have been a pity," he had laughingly remarked to a friend, "for you see, I'm the last of our family, and I should hardly have liked to peg out in that manner, so far away from home."

Yes, this tall, lithe figure walking briskly along the frozen road was indeed the only person to bear the name of Redmayne still living. The young earl's parents had been dead for years, and he was the only child. As a matter of fact, he had gone to Africa for the express purpose of enlivening his existence somewhat, for it had been a lonely life at the Hall after the old folks had gone.

And now that Redmayne had returned he had much to learn of what had happened during his absence, and Sir Banister Henson was simply brimming over with information. He had been exceedingly fond of the young earl, and his regard had been in no way lessened by the long parting.

He was a large man—large in the sense that there was plenty of him, for although Sir Banister was not tall, he made up for any deficiency in that direction by possessing an extremely broad figure. Polite people said that he was muscular, but those less refined stated quite openly that Sir Banister was unconformably stout.

Nevertheless, on a chill day such as this he could easily manage to keep up with the earl's brisk strides.

"Yes," exclaimed the latter, "Mr. Ambrose Seton has certainly been making things lively, according to all I hear. I can't quite understand, however, why he broke into my place. I understand he took several of my most valuable pictures, including an almost priceless Rubens. Now, Henson, what on earth did he do a senseless thing like that for? He can't possibly get rid of the things, for—"

"Ah, Redmayne, you don't understand," interrupted the baronet, throwing his cigar savagely into the snow. "I tell you I'm considerably angry about that theft, for although the pictures weren't mine, it doesn't alter the fact that they were treasures. You may not believe it, but Seton took those pictures to add to his own collection."

"To add to his own collection?" echoed Redmayne, in surprise.

"Precisely!" snapped the other. "The scoundrel is audacious enough for anything. But you must not think that you are the only victim. Several other prominent families in England have lost their best and most valuable pictures at the hands of this man."

The Earl of Redmayne laughed.

"Well, upon my soul, the fellow must lead a charmed life. Surely Scotland Yard has some inkling as to where his headquarters are, and who he works with? It's inconceivable—"

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"That's just it!" put in Sir Banister quickly. "It is inconceivable, Redmayne, but it's the perfect truth! Ambrose Seton is a genius, and he simply delights in mystifying everybody. No one has ever seen him—no one knows what he is like. He's a kind of myth— But here we are at the lodge, and unless I'm mistaken we shall just get indoors in time to miss a regular smotherer."

"It'll be an old-fashioned Christmas, at all events," commented the earl as the two hurried up the drive to the Hall. The snow was descending much faster now, and by the time the pair were wiping their feet in the huge entrance-hall their great-coats were smothered with soft, clinging snow.

"Ah, that looks cheerful, and no mistake!" cried Sir Banister nodding to a roaring wood fire which blazed in the hall grate. "You don't know how pleased I am to see the old place inhabited once again, Redmayne. So you'll be all alone for the next day or two, eh?"

"Yes, although I shall be lively enough at the end of the week, when the members of the house-party begin to arrive. I mean to have a jolly Christmas this year, Henson, if I never have one again. The last five have been spent in the most infernal heat and under blazing skies, and I'm longing for a change."

They were soon divested of their overcoats and hats, and the earl was for making for the smoking-room. His portly neighbour, however, would have none of it.

"You must come along to the picture-gallery," he cried, grasping Redmayne by the arm. "I want to show you the bare places—the bare places left by that confounded Seton! And there's something else, too," he added—"something that will surprise you."

Sir Banister would not be denied, and the earl laughingly accompanied him up the wide hall to the corridor which led to the gallery. When they arrived there the air struck chill and cold.

"There you are!" exclaimed the baronet, waving his hand. "Look at that, Redmayne—just look at that!"

The other did as he was directed, and saw that the walls of the lofty room, instead of being completely covered by pictures, were in certain places quite bare. Eight pictures had disappeared altogether, and their absence was very noticeable.

"It's a pity!" said Redmayne thoughtfully. "Still, I can get some more to replace them. The beggar's taken the frames and all, I see. He might have had the decency to leave them."

"Look here, my boy!" said Henson mysteriously. "I told you I had a surprise for you. This will show you what sort of a man Ambrose Seton is."

The baronet walked up to one of the largest pictures and swung it aside and outwards, so that the wall behind was visible. Redmayne came closer, and stared for a moment in silence. Then he turned to Sir Banister.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he exclaimed. "What a nerve the fellow must have!"

He looked at the wall again. The colouring was light, and quite glaringly the following words, written in red crayon, stood out:

"THANKS!—AMBROSE SETON."

"Every house Seton has burgled," explained Henson, "has received some such message as that. It is always in red crayon, and always in the same handwriting. Another thing about him is that he very often writes a letter to a prospective victim explaining that he would like certain articles—"

Sir Banister was interrupted by a sudden peal of the bell. It sounded urgent, and the two men glanced at one another.

"Might be something important by the sound of it," said the earl, lighting a cigarette. "Suppose we see for ourselves?"

But when they arrived in the hall they found that a footman had already answered the summons. He held a letter in his hand.

"It is for Sir Banister Henson, my lord," he said, to Redmayne. "One of the Priory footmen brought it and said it came by special messenger. As it was marked 'urgent,' he thought he would bring it along."

"Quite right—quite right!" said Sir Banister, taking the envelope. "What on earth it can be, though, I can't imagine." He paused, and sniffed at the letter. "Scented!" he exclaimed. "Yet the handwriting doesn't look like a lady's," he added, as he tore the flap open. The pair passed into the library, and Redmayne carelessly sauntered over to the window and stood looking out upon the snow-swept landscape. Suddenly he heard a gasp behind him, followed immediately by a pronounced thump.

He turned swiftly, and beheld Sir Banister sprawled back in one of the easy chairs with a look on his face which expressed amazement, incredulity, and anger. The letter he had just received lay on the floor, and for a moment he seemed unable to speak.

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"Great Scott, Henson, what's the matter?" cried Redmayne, in alarm. "No bad news, I hope?"

The baronet recovered himself somewhat, and with surprising agility, considering his bulk, sprang to his feet. His face was now red and his eyes blazing.

"Bad news?" he echoed, with a splutter. "No, not the kind you mean! But— Good heavens, it's unbelievable! The fellow must be mad—raving!"

"If you will tell me who the fellow is and what makes you think he is raving, I shall be better able to understand," said the earl calmly. "I—"

Sir Banister picked the letter up and banged it down on the table.

"Read that!" he roared furiously.

Quite coolly Redmayne picked the letter up, but not without a considerable amount of curiosity expressed on his bronzed features. The letter was short, and written in a handwriting which Redmayne seemed to remember.

"My dear Henson," it commenced—"For a long time past I have envied your magnificent collection of old Chinese porcelain, which I understand is valued at about fifty thousand pounds. Now, as I require the collection—especially the pieces of the Kien-Lung Dynasty—to add to my own, perhaps you will be good enough to see that they are placed in readiness for me when I call at Colgate Priory to-night—December 12th—at about 12.30.—Yours very sincerely,

"AMBROSE SETON."

For a moment the Earl of Redmayne looked at the amazing communication with wide-open eyes; then he laid it on the table, and flung himself into a chair.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "By Jove, Henson, that's altogether too funny for words!"

"Funny!" cried the baronet, gesticulating wildly. "Good heavens, man, you don't know what it means! My porcelain! It's the finest collection in the county, and—and—"

Sir Banister's words refused to come, and as he mopped his brow with something like a despairing gesture, Redmayne rose to his feet, serious in a moment.

"But you don't take it seriously?" he cried, in surprised accents. "It's a joke, pure and simple. Some misguided friend of yours has done it to give you a turn. And, by Jove," he added, with a half smile, "he's succeeded!"

"I tell you it's not a joke!" persisted Henson quickly. "Look here, Redmayne, Seton's done this trick before, exactly the same, and he's carried out his words to the letter. What shall I do?" he went on, pacing up and down the library floor. "Good heavens, I daren't let the matter slide! The police, too, are— Ah, the very thing!"

"You've thought of a way out of the difficulty?" inquired Redmayne, who still thought that the letter was a huge joke.

"Yes," replied Sir Banister, a hopeful light in his eyes, as he sat down at the desk. "A telegraph form—quick! I'm going to send a wire to Great Portland Street—to Carson Gray!"

"Carson Gray, the detective?"

"Yes, the man who helped Frank Kingston in his crusade against the Brotherhood of Iron. If anyone can save my porcelain from falling into Seton's hands it's Carson Gray!"

CHAPTER 2.

Frank Kingston gets to Work—So does Ambrose Seton.

CARSON GRAY, attired in a thick fur coat and soft felt hat, stepped briskly along Great Portland Street. He was looking extremely pleased, and seemed in a considerable hurry. He mounted the steps of a certain house, and a moment later was inside, ascending to his rooms.

On the landing he met the landlady.

"Goodness, sir, I thought you was never coming back!" she exclaimed. "If you haven't been away for five whole days! Where to goodness 'ave you been—"

"If you particularly wish to know," smiled Carson Gray. "I have been in Scotland. Even now I shall only be at home for a few minutes. The case I am on is most important, and I'm off to-night for Paris."

"I 'ope you have time to see the gentleman who's waiting for you," put in the landlady. "He came about ten minutes since."

Carson Gray frowned.

"I can't possibly see anybody—"

"But it's Mr. Kingston, sir," commenced the woman. "I thought—"

"Kingston! By Jove!"

Without another word Carson Gray strode across the landing to the door of his consulting-room. The apartment was empty, so the detective concluded that his visitor was in the sitting-room, which adjoined. He opened the door, and then uttered a cry of welcome.

"Gad, Kingston, this is an unexpected pleasure, and no mistake!"

The occupant of the sitting-room had been lolling comfortably in the easiest chair, leisurely scanning the contents of a newspaper. He was dressed in the height of fashion, and, to judge by appearances, was something of a fop. His face, too, was lazy-looking, while his eyes seemed extremely languid.

He rose now and took Carson Gray's outstretched hand warmly.

"You told me you would be back this morning, Gray," he drawled, with a smile. "And as I had nothing particular to do, I thought I would run in and see how you were getting on. I'm genuinely interested in that case you're working at."

"The Edinburgh murder?" replied Gray, removing his coat and hat. "Yes, it was a puzzler, but I'm getting to the bottom of it, Kingston."

Frank Kingston certainly did not look very interested; but then Gray did not judge by appearances where Kingston was concerned. Gray always saw his friend as he really was; he brushed aside all outward appearances, and saw the man. In Carson Gray's opinion Frank Kingston was the cleverest detective in existence—notwithstanding the fact that Gray himself was known throughout the length and breadth of Europe.

"Yes, I'm getting to the bottom of it," he repeated, as he loaded his pipe and stood with his back to the cheerful fire.

"The clues were hard to find, Kingston, but I've got on the right scene at last. This afternoon I start for Paris."

"You won't be there long, I hope?"

"I shall be back to-morrow or the next day," replied the detective between the puffs of his briar. "But, by Jove," he went on, smiling through the haze of smoke, "these cases of mine seem almost childish when I think of the work you completed a short time back—when you exterminated the Brotherhood of Iron."

"My dear Gray, you seem to have an altogether wrong opinion," smiled Kingston languidly. "I've told you time after time that I should have been helpless without the assistance of yourself and Professor Polgrave—to say nothing of Miss O'Brien and the others."

Carson Gray laughed.

"It's no good talking like that to me, my dear fellow," he exclaimed. "All the real work was accomplished by yourself. We simply did the bidding. But look here," he went on eagerly, "I want to know what you've decided about that question I asked you—whether you will set up as a private detective? Of course, it's all against myself, but it's simply wicked for you to remain idle. Why, man, with your powers, you can do almost as you like!"

"Well, as I said before," replied Frank Kingston, "the occupation would certainly be to my liking. My battle with the Brotherhood of Iron was, at any rate, a good start."

"A good start! Why, Kingston, you'd have all the business you could cope with, without having to wait a day! Your name has been talked of everywhere, and your whole history has been read throughout Great Britain—in fact, throughout the whole civilised world."

Again Frank Kingston smiled.

But before he could proceed further there was a knock on the door of the outer room. Gray muttered an impatient exclamation, and answered the summons. It proved to be a telegram, and the detective tore the flimsy envelope open as he once more took up his former position on the hearthrug.

"It's no good," he growled, tossing the white form to Kingston. "I can't possibly go. Seems urgent, too!"

Kingston read the wire:

"Can you come to Colgate Priory, Woodbridge, Suffolk, immediately? Matter of grave importance. Wire reply.—HENSON."

"Yes, it does seem rather pressing," remarked Kingston thoughtfully. "But who may Henson be?"

"Oh, I remember looking into a burglary case for him several years ago," replied Gray. "He's Sir Banister Henson, a wealthy landowner, and lives close to—er—you know the chap—" The detective snapped his fingers to assist his memory. "Ah, yes, close to the Earl of Redmayne's place. I remember it because Redmayne's just returned from Africa."

"So you'll wire back that you can't go," he murmured lazily, as he lay back in the chair with closed eyes. "Well, poor Sir Banister will be disappointed—"

Kingston paused and opened his eyes as Carson Gray's fist descended with a thump on the table, causing the pens and inkpots to dance violently. His gaze rested on his companion's face, and he saw that Gray was looking excited.

"By jingo!" he cried. "By jingo!"

"A happy thought?" ventured Kingston with a smile.

"A veritable gem!" declared Carson Gray. "Look here, old chap, Henson sha'n't be left in the lurch after all. I can't possibly go, but—"

"But what?"

"But you can, Kingston! No," went on Gray hastily, "don't object. You've simply got to go, man, whether you like it or not! I know for a fact that you're not busy, so you haven't got the slightest excuse. And when Sir Banister knows that you will help him instead of myself, he'll jump for joy!"

Kingston sat in his chair without replying. But for a second Carson Gray's keen eyes saw something like a sparkle of anticipation kindle in Kingston's sleepy ones.

"Since I understand that excuse is useless," smiled the man who had overthrown the Brotherhood of Iron, "I will surrender unconditionally, and do as you request, Gray. To tell the truth, I want livening up a little."

"Good!" cried Carson Gray with satisfaction. "Then I'll pop round to the post-office and send a wire. Let me see, what shall we say?"

He sat down at the desk and jotted a few words on an old envelope.

"How's this?" he queried.

"Quite impossible to come personally. Mr. Frank Kingston, however, will be with you this evening.—CARSON GRAY."

"That's all right," replied Kingston. "There's no necessity for you to take it, though. Before leaving for Woodbridge, I shall have to pay a visit to the Cyril, and I can despatch the wire on my way there."

"Good!" said the detective again. "Gad, Kingston, at last I've started you off! I don't know what this case of Henson's is, but I've no doubt as to what the result will be."

Carson Gray was feeling exceedingly satisfied, for it seemed such a pity to him that a man possessing powers which no other man in the world could lay claim to, should not use those powers against the world's wrong-doers. For Gray had feared that once Kingston finished his work with the Brotherhood, he would retire into private life.

Such, however, was not the case.

Had Gray only known it, Kingston was simply delighted with his friend's suggestion. The prospect of getting to work again was extremely alluring, and when he left Carson Gray's rooms, although his face was as languid and immobile as ever, he was, in reality, anxious to get to the scene of action.

In London it was snowing just as violently as it had been in the vicinity of Redmayne Hall, and Kingston strode off towards the nearest post-office with his usual extraordinarily rapid gait—a gait which seemed commonplace enough, but with which he covered the ground in a remarkably short space of time.

A man who had been quietly strolling along Great Portland Street a moment before Kingston appeared, quickened his pace, and followed in the latter's rear at as great a distance as the falling snow would allow. He found his quarry's speed rather trying.

The man was, to all intents and purposes, a gentleman, for he was attired expensively, and with considerable taste.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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Frank Kingston's shadow, stepping out on to the footboard, edged his way along until he felt the handle of the next compartment in his grasp. (See chapter 2.)

His face, too, was that of a well-bred man. When Kingston turned into the post-office, a half smile flickered across his face; and he paused, apparently interested in the contents of a jeweller's window, next door.

But his eyes were watching the door of the post-office, and the very instant Kingston emerged he walked quickly into the shop. There were two boxes in which to write telegrams, and one of them was occupied by an old lady. The shadower swiftly glanced at the block of forms in the other compartment.

As he did so, however, he caught sight of a screwed-up envelope on the floor. Quite carelessly he picked it up, and, unfolding it, scanned the few words which were written on the back. It was the draft of the wire Kingston had just despatched to Sir Banister Henson.

"Phew! This is a bit of luck!" murmured the man with a chuckle. "So Frank Kingston's going down, eh? He's a smart chap, but I must say I don't think much of the way he's started!" he added, as he glanced at the envelope. "No mention of any train, confound it! That means I shall have to be on the watch at Liverpool Street."

Nevertheless, the gentlemanly-looking individual was highly pleased with his discovery, and marched off down Oxford Street, with springy strides.

Meanwhile, the object of his recent attentions was aboard a taxi bound for the Hotel Cyril, in the Strand. To see him lolling back there one could scarcely credit all the stories which the papers had been circulating during the last three or four weeks concerning his recent sensational campaign. Yet those accounts had not been exaggerated in the slightest degree.

When Kingston arrived at his suite of rooms in the famous hotel, the time was close upon one o'clock. Tim Curtis, the little Cockney lad Kingston had discovered some few months back, met his master in the vestibule.

"My word, sir!" exclaimed the youngster. "Ain't the snow comin' down thick? I reckon you're glad you ain't got to be out in it, sir!"

"I'm not so certain, young 'un, that I sha'n't have to be," replied Kingston, with a smile. "I'm leaving for the country immediately after lunch—on business."

Tim's eyes opened wide.

"Not—not on a case, sir?" he gasped. "You ain't—"

"Yes, Tim, Mr. Gray has asked me to take his place for a short while. Of course, I may be going to Suffolk for nothing—I do not know what the case is—but if I want any help I shall certainly send for you and Fraser. Don't be disappointed, though, if you are not required."

Tim, eager and excited, rushed off to find Fraser, Kingston's valet and assistant, and impart the news to him. Kingston, meanwhile, changed his clothes and then partook of luncheon. While eating he looked up the trains to Woodbridge, and finally decided to catch the 3.20 from Liverpool Street.

His only luggage was a small bag, and as he left his apartments he paused for a moment in the corridor.

"Shall I run along the passage and tell Dolores?" he thought. "No, she might be out, and, after all, it's not necessary. I'll get right off."

Dolores was the name by which he knew Miss Kathleen O'Brien, the clever girl who had done so much towards wrecking the Brotherhood; Dolores being a name she had used on the stage before her retirement from professional life.

Kingston arrived at Liverpool Street with plenty of time to spare, and as he passed the barrier the man who had followed him along Great Portland Street stepped forward with the other passengers and interestedly watched Kingston's proceedings.

The latter, having deposited his bag in an empty first-class compartment, approached the guard. The result was that Kingston re-entered the compartment, and the liberally-tipped official locked the door.

And the shadower repeated this programme exactly, and was locked into the compartment next to Kingston's. As it happened, the train was by no means crowded, so the guard saw no reason why he should not make an extra few shillings on his own account.

The train steamed out to time, and as it left the brilliantly-illuminated station on its non-stop run to Ipswich, the murkiness of the sky seemed more apparent. Night was falling rapidly, and by the time Romford had been passed the train was rushing through utter darkness.

Under ordinary circumstances it would have been twilight, but the snow-laden sky caused night to fall prematurely. Kingston, in his first-class compartment, was glancing through the pages of a popular magazine. His next-door neighbour, however, was too busy with his thoughts to read. He sat puffing jerkily at a cigar, smiling to himself every now and again with anticipation.

He knew that the task before him was difficult, and pro-

bably dangerous, but he did not feel the least bit nervous. At last he rose, and after undoing his bag, he quickly adjusted a false beard and moustache. This, with the addition of a close-fitting cap, effected a rough disguise.

Then he sat down and waited until the train slowed down somewhat on an ascent. He lowered the window and looked out into the night. The snow, was descending heavily, and the light from the carriages showed that it lay thick on the embankments.

"Now!" he murmured, opening the door. "Steady, my boy! There's a tough job before you, but it's got to be done. It was rather a crack-brain idea of the gov'nor's to warn Henson before the robbery. Still, Seton will have his little joke!"

With the utmost sangfroid the man stepped out on to the footboard. He closed the door behind him, and the snowflakes whirled into his face with biting force. After the warmth of the carriage, they stung like the lash of a whip. But Frank Kingston's shadower was indifferent to this inconvenience. He edged his way along the footboard until he felt the handle of the next compartment in his grasp.

It was impossible to see through the glass, owing to the smears mistiness on the panes. So, with no further hesitation, he swung the door open and stepped into the compartment.

Then he uttered a low, derisive laugh. For, although his revolver had been ready, the precaution was not necessary, for Frank Kingston, having apparently grown tired of the magazine, lay back in his corner seat, fast asleep.

"Frank Kingston, the most wonderful man in the world!" murmured the intruder sneeringly, as he pocketed the revolver. "Great Scott, the man's as easy to catch napping as the average village constable! Now, my fine friend, I am afraid I shall have to prolong your sleep a trifle. It's a lucky thing for you it's snowing—the fall won't be half so violent!"

He chuckled again, and drew from his pocket a small phial and a pad of wadding. And Frank Kingston still lay quietly sleeping in his corner, his breath coming with quiet regularity.

And then the intruder received a startling shock, for a lazy, drawing voice struck his ears.

"My good man," it said languidly, "if I were you I should really put those things back in your pocket! No, on second thoughts, keep your hands where I can see them. A revolver in my right-hand coat-pocket is pointed exactly at your heart; and it may interest you to know that my finger is on the trigger!"

And the shadower, turning with a curse on Frank Kingston, saw the latter's lids slowly raise themselves, and allow a pair of sleepy eyes to gaze into his own startled ones.

CHAPTER 3.

The Scene of Action—The Chinese Porcelain.

FOR a moment the two men did not move. Frank Kingston had not altered his position an inch, but still lolled back in his corner with an amused smile on his face. His companion, however, was not so much at his ease. The first look of amazement had died from his eyes, to be replaced by one of fury and chagrin, intermixed with fear.

The suddenness of this interruption—the abrupt discovery that his quarry was, after all, very wide awake, came as a shock. Frank Kingston's shadower had been so confident that for a moment he could only stare at those sleepy eyes before him. Yet he knew perfectly well that Kingston was in earnest; for the voice, although lazy and drawing, was extremely compelling.

"You—you—" "Good heavens!" gasped the man, finding his voice at last. "How did you know I was coming? By George," he added, gaining confidence. "Two can play at your game. I've got a revolver in my pocket—"

"Where it is going to remain," interjected Kingston blandly. "Or, perhaps, on second thoughts, it would be safer—from my point of view—on the seat. Kindly place it there at once. And hold it by the barrel," he added, as an afterthought.

"No, by thunder—" commenced the man savagely.

In a second the sleepy expression died from Kingston's eyes, and a cold, impelling glitter seemed to shoot right into the intruder. As if mechanically, he thrust his hand into a pocket, and flung the revolver on the cushions.

"Now we can talk far more comfortably," murmured Kingston, crossing his legs and producing from his pocket a weapon similar to his companion's. "I don't often use these things, but they're surprisingly persuasive at times!"

"Hang you!" snarled the other. "You've got the better of me, Frank Kingston, but it'll be your turn soon—"

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"We will confine ourselves to the present if you don't mind. To begin with, I really am surprised at you for being so thickheaded; I gave you credit for more sense!"

The man glared.

"You made a great mistake in supposing that I was unaware of your intentions," continued Frank Kingston easily. "You supposed, right from the start, that you were smarter than I. Without boasting, I think I can claim to have got the better of you. I saw you in Great Portland Street, and purposely left that envelope at the post-office so that you should know where I was bound for."

"You fiend!" snarled the scoundrel.

"No, I'm merely a human being," smiled Kingston. "I saw you at Liverpool Street, and waited in this corner until you paid me a visit—as I knew you would. Now I'm rather curious to know who you are, and why you wish to prevent me going to Sir Banister Henson's."

"Then you'll remain curious," growled the shadower. "You've won so far, Kingston, but you won't get a word out of me regarding who I am or where I come from."

"It is surprising how opinions differ, for I really think I shall," drawled Kingston calmly. "Sit down," he added, with a change of tone—"opposite to me. Thanks! That's very much better!"

"Why don't you quit this fooling? You can talk now that you've got that revolver to protect you. Say what you're going to do, and be done with it!"

"Very well, then. Firstly, this weapon here is quite harmless; I evidently forgot to load it," exclaimed Kingston, tossing it on the opposite seat. "Sit still," he continued, as the man made as if to rise—"sit still and listen. You're going to answer my questions!"

The baffled villain seemed to shrivel up under the other's gaze. Kingston's will-power was enormous, and by sheer force of it he could compel any ordinary man to say things he would cut out his tongue rather than reveal.

"Your name?" he demanded curtly.

"I'll be hanged—Samuel Meyer," replied the man impotently.

"Very well, Samuel Meyer," continued Kingston relentlessly. "I now want to know the reason of this visit. I want to know why you wished to delay me, and who you are working for."

"I had orders to prevent you reaching Woodbridge," replied Meyer, between set teeth, wild with fury at having the information literally dragged from him. "My boss, Ambrose Seton, is on a most important job at Henson's to-night."

"At what time is this burglary to be committed?"

"Twelve-thirty exactly."

"Very good," replied Kingston, still gazing at Meyer with eyes that glittered like points of fire. "The next thing is, what are Seton's plans? What—"

With an almost superhuman effort Samuel Meyer sprang to his feet and threw the spell of Kingston's will-power from him.

"By Heaven!" he cried. "You won't get me to give the gun'v'or away, whatever else you may do!" And, before Kingston could spring to his feet, the man had acted in an altogether unlooked-for manner. He grasped the door-handle furthest from Kingston, flung the door open, and jumped clean from the train.

"By Jove!" murmured Kingston, in genuine surprise.

He crossed to the door, and gazed out a second after Meyer had disappeared. Only one glimpse he caught of the shadower, and that was as he rolled over and over in the foot-thick snow down the embankment.

Meyer, in his wild rage at having to reveal to Kingston all his plans, had acted on impulse, and would certainly never have thrown himself out of the train otherwise. But his object had been gained, nevertheless. The most important information had been left unsaid.

"Upon my soul," thought Frank Kingston. "I most decidedly did not expect that move on Meyer's part! At all events, he seems loyal to his master, and I should be sorry to think he has injured himself. But that's hardly likely, for the train is going fairly slowly, and the snow is thick on the embankment."

He seated himself and pocketed the two revolvers.

"So the man I am pitted against is Ambrose Seton, eh?" he mused. "I've heard a lot about that fellow, and if it's within my power I'll bring him to justice. Pity I could gain no further information from Meyer, but what I've got may come in useful."

At Ipswich he noticed the guard and stationmaster pass his compartment with grave faces. They stopped next door, and presently passed down the platform again carrying a small handbag.

"Meyer's property, evidently," Kingston told himself. "I don't suppose the beauty had anything incriminating in it or I'd make inquiries. But as I don't want to be delayed I'd better hold my tongue."

So he picked up the magazine again and soon became interested. The remainder of the journey was comparatively slow, and when he arrived at Woodbridge he found Sir Banister Henson's big Rolls-Royce landaulette awaiting him.

"Sir Banister thought you'd come by this train, sir," explained the chauffeur, when he learnt Kingston's identity. "So he sent me down to meet you. It's five miles to the Priory, sir, and the motor's quicker than driving."

"An excellent idea, my man," replied Kingston, stepping into the car. "I can snap my fingers at the elements now."

But although the snow was descending fairly fast then, it ceased, and the sky cleared before Colgate Priory was reached. The latter was one of the oldest historical mansions in the county, and for architecture could claim superiority over Redmayne Hall.

The Rolls-Royce swept in at the massive gates of the Priory, and pulled up before the huge front door. Kingston noticed as he stepped out of the car that the paths round the building had been swept clear of snow. The house was well illuminated, and as the door was thrown open by a footman, the wide hall, with its pictures and hunting trophies, looked very cheerful. As was the case at the Hall, a bright fire burned in the open grate.

Sir Banister Henson's portly form bustled out of one of the doorways.

"Ah, Mr. Frank Kingston!" he cried genially. "I had an idea you would come by that train. Delighted to meet you, sir!" he went on, shaking hands vigorously.

"I am sorry that Mr. Carson Gray could not personally respond to your request," replied Frank Kingston, as he took off his overcoat. "Mr. Gray, however, conceived the idea of sending me down in his place. I only trust that you are not disappointed."

"Disappointed!" cried Sir Banister. "My dear sir, I was overjoyed when I received the wire, for I have heard so much about you in connection with the infamous Brotherhood of Iron that I can trust my case in your hands with the utmost confidence—with all respect, of course, to Mr. Carson Gray."

"I am afraid the newspapers have exaggerated my exploits," replied Kingston, in his customary drawl. "And you must not forget, Sir Banister, that Mr. Gray helped me a lot during my campaign."

"Ah, that is just the word!" replied the baronet, as the two made their way to the library. "Mr. Gray helped you—and that, I argue, shows that you are by far the ablest detective. Gray is not a man to play second fiddle to any one less clever than himself."

Before Kingston could reply to the compliment, Henson, who seemed quite recovered from his agitation of the morning, opened the library door and ushered the visitor in. The Earl of Redmayne stood on the hearthrug, puffing leisurely at a cigarette.

"This is the famous Mr. Frank Kingston, my dear Redmayne!" Sir Banister cried. "I am sure you will be pleased to meet him!"

"Well, rather," replied the earl heartily. "I've been keenly interested in the accounts concerning yourself, Mr. Kingston, and I am sure there is no one more capable of dealing with this affair than you are."

Sir Banister placed a chair before the fire for Kingston's benefit, and when they had seated themselves, the baronet took from his pocket the letter he had received that morning.

"Now, Mr. Kingston," he exclaimed, "I have heard that you are a man of action, so I presume you are anxious to hear my troubles. To tell the truth, nothing has happened so far, but—well, this letter will explain a good deal to you."

"From Ambrose Seton, I presume?" murmured Kingston, lying back with languid ease. "Probably stating that he is paying you a call at half-past twelve to-night."

The earl raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"How the dickens did you know that?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, how on earth did you?" cried Sir Banister amazedly. "I haven't breathed it to a soul. Nobody knows of it, in fact—"

Frank Kingston smiled.

"I have no wish to pose as a magician," he drawled quietly, "so perhaps I'd better explain a little incident which occurred on my way down here."

He did so, and Redmayne and Henson listened with great interest. When he had finished the former laughed amusedly.

"By Jove, Kingston, you must find that powerful will of yours very handy! So this man Meyer was one of Seton's lieutenants? Rather a pity he escaped so soon, eh?"

Frank Kingston looked into the earl's steady, brown eyes.

"Yes," he replied slowly, "perhaps it was."

Sir Banister explained to Kingston how the letter had been delivered to him that morning at Redmayne Hall, three miles distant.

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"The wording of it is quite characteristic of Seton," smiled the detective—for Kingston was now undoubtedly entitled to be so termed—"and he writes as if taking it for granted that the porcelain will be ready for him to remove."

Sir Banister puffed at his cigar furiously. "But it won't be," he declared. "I've telephoned to Woodbridge for four constables, and they'll be here shortly after nine. Redmayne, too, has come over to lend assistance. Ha, ha, my dear Kingston"—Sir Banister rubbed his hands together—"I am afraid Mr. Seton has overstepped the mark this time. If he gets my Chinese porcelain—well, I'm hanged if he doesn't deserve to keep it!"

The others laughed as Henson rose to his feet. "But come and have a look at it," he went on. "It is in the drawing-room, at present unguarded, for the room is unoccupied. You see, Lady Henson and my daughters are in London for a few days. Rather fortunate," he added, "under the circumstances."

Kingston and Redmayne followed their host from the room, the former thinking deeply. The case was decidedly a peculiar one, and Kingston was puzzled over several points.

"It almost seems too ridiculous to be regarded seriously," he remarked to the earl, "for Seton surely expects elaborate precautions to be taken. He cannot take it for granted that he will be able to walk in unmolested."

"Of course not," replied Redmayne, a smile of amusement on his sunburnt face. "But the scoundrel has done the same before. You take my word for it, Kingston, he knows what he is about, and in my opinion Sir Banister will have to keep a very sharp eye on his porcelain."

The lights in the drawing-room were turned full on, and Sir Banister Henson pointed proudly to a superb cabinet in one corner.

"There it is," he said; "the finest collection in this county, sir, and one of the finest in England. It is scarcely surprising that Seton covets it; but by the time midnight comes, it will be quite secure."

Kingston silently looked round the room, taking scarcely any interest in the priceless porcelain. The apartment was a large one, with windows on two sides. In addition, there were two entrances, one leading from a conservatory.

"There are four police-officers coming?" asked Kingston suddenly.

"Yes." "And here there are two doors and four windows," murmured Kingston thoughtfully. "H'm! Rather an easy place to get into. I—"

"Excuse my interrupting," put in Redmayne suddenly, "but a rather good notion has struck me. I've no wish to intrude—"

"I shall be glad to hear your suggestion, my lord."

"Good. Now why shouldn't all the porcelain be shifted out of here—it could be packed in a couple of boxes—into the library? For one thing, the room has only two windows, side by side, and one door. Besides this, Henson, I remember seeing a large cupboard where the cases could be stowed out of sight. And with somebody in the room all the time, I'd defy a whole army to get away with it without our knowledge."

Sir Banister shook his head.

"No," he said decidedly; "the porcelain remains here."

"But that's absurd!" protested Redmayne quickly.

"Think how accessible this place is in comparison to the library. You simply must get it out of here."

"I tell you I don't want it moved," commenced Sir Banister.

But Frank Kingston intervened. He turned to the baronet.

"Have I a free hand in this affair?" he asked quietly.

"Absolutely, Mr. Kingston!"

"Then I agree with Lord Redmayne with regard to removing the porcelain to the library cupboard. I have seen the two rooms, and I undoubtedly think that this one would be far more difficult to guard than the other."

"Very well since the two of you are against me, I give in," smiled Sir Banister, who regarded his porcelain lovingly.

"If the collection is to be placed in cases, however, it will need very delicate handling, and I shall have to personally superintend its removal."

Kingston smiled at the baronet's anxious tone. Sir Banister's hobby was very dear to him, and it was hardly surprising that he was taking so much trouble to protect his treasures.

"There is one thing that is rather puzzling, which needs some explaining," said Kingston thoughtfully, looking at the earl's bronzed face steadily.

His lordship was in the act of tapping a cigarette on his thumb-nail.

"And what's that?" he inquired carelessly.

Kingston turned to Sir Banister.

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"I understand that no one besides our three selves is aware of the contents of that letter from Ambrose Seton? I take it that no outsider knows that it even came from that notorious individual?"

"Quite correct, Kingston—quite correct!" replied Sir Banister.

"Then the question that needs an answer is this," said the detective evenly. "Since only our three selves knew of that letter, how did Ambrose Seton become possessed of the knowledge that you had communicated with Mr. Carson Gray? In other words, how was it that one of Seton's men was watching the house in Great Portland Street when I left?"

For a moment the three men looked at one another in absolute silence.

CHAPTER 4.

The Police Arrive—What Happened at Twelve-Thirty.

THE EARL OF REDMAYNE laughed easily.

"At first thought your question was a puzzler, Kingston," he exclaimed, "for it would seem as though someone got to know of Sir Banister's intentions this morning! Of course, such a thing is possible, but—"

"Good gracious, Redmayne," put in Sir Banister, "you don't suppose that one of your servants is in Seton's employ! That he overheard my conversation with you when I said I should send for Carson Gray!"

Kingston looked at Redmayne inquiringly.

"No," replied the latter. "What I should think is this: Seton guessed that when you received that letter, you would resort to some such expedient. Therefore, he took the precaution to have the rooms of Carson Gray carefully watched."

"But he had no means of knowing that I should apply to Mr. Gray!" protested the baronet.

"But he knew that Gray was one of the smartest detectives in London, and had the place watched on chance," said Redmayne. "Of course, it's all through Seton's ridiculous action in warning you beforehand."

Kingston said nothing, although his thoughts were very busy. Sir Banister wasted no time, but forthwith called a couple of housemaids to assist him in packing the Chinese porcelain.

Redmayne and Kingston watched interestedly as the precious collection was carefully stowed away in a couple of large travelling-trunks, each piece being separately wrapped in cotton-wool.

Suddenly the earl gave a laugh.

"By the way he's getting to work," he murmured in Kingston's ear, "one would think he were complying with Seton's request, and packing the stuff up for departure."

"If I remember rightly," replied Kingston, with a smile, "the suggestion came from you, my lord. Nevertheless," he went on, nodding to the travelling-trunks, "it would take a clever burglar all his time to get clear away with such 'swag' as that."

"Yes, it could hardly be stowed away in his waistcoat pocket," remarked the earl flippantly. "Have a cigarette?" handing his case to Kingston.

"Thanks all the same, but I don't smoke! I did at one time, but during my exilement on the Iron Island I got clean out of the habit."

"By Jove, that reminds me!" cried Redmayne, grasping Kingston's arm. "I want to have a chat with you about that Iron Island. Come along to the library!"

And Kingston filled in the half-hour before dinner in telling the earl of his experiences. By the time the dinner-gong boomed out the two trunks had been deposited in the cupboard, and Sir Banister was pacing up and down the library, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction.

Dinner was a quiet meal, for the three men were the only diners, and the conversation was strictly limited to commonplace small-talk in the presence of the servants. Kingston, indeed, kept the others thoroughly entertained, but there was a certain feeling of expectation in the air the whole time.

Suddenly there came a loud peal at the front door, and the diners, who had distinctly heard it, glanced at one another.

"The police from Woodbridge," declared Sir Banister, laying down his knife and fork. "Jennings," he added, to the butler, "request the men to step in here. They will probably welcome a glass of something invigorating on a night such as this."

"Very good, sir," replied the staid and portly Jennings—almost as portly as Sir Banister himself.

He walked slowly from the dining-room, and a few minutes later ushered in a quartette of burly, country policemen, one of whom proved to be a sergeant. They all seemed uneasy, and stood awkwardly fingering their helmets.

"Make yourselves comfortable, my men!" cried Sir Banister genially. "This is an exceptional occasion, and we won't stand on ceremony. You're not local men, I observe."



The room was in a state of the most complete disorder, and on the hearthrug, bending over some object, knelt Sir Banister Henson. A glance told Kingston that the object was the unconscious form of the Earl of Redmayne, who lay pale and motionless. (See chapter 4.)

"No, sir," replied the sergeant, wiping the melted frost from his abundant crop of whiskers. "You see, there weren't enough men round Woodbridge—not to spare, sir—so we was sent for. We come from Ipswich, sir, and," he added, unconsciously extending his chest, "I'm Sergeant Wilcox."

"Ah, quite so! I daresay you and your men can do with a little something to warm you up," he said, with a twinkle. "How's the weather outside now?"

"That's wonderful clear now, sir, arter what it has been," replied Sergeant Wilcox, sitting on the extreme edge of an easy-chair. "Although I wouldn't say as some more snow don't come, and afore long, too! What do you say, Clarke?" he added, to one of his companions.

"That do fare to look loike it," replied Clarke, with a sage shake of his head. "Them clouds over at the north look suthen' thick, though they might pass off altogether. Then again, they mightn't, arter all!"

And with this intellectual remark, P.-c. Clarke lapsed into silence, his eyes closely watching a decanter in Sir Banister's hand.

Dinner over, the trio adjoined to the cosy library, Sergeant Wilcox accompanying them to receive orders. The time was getting on for half-past nine.

"Now, Mr. Kingston," said the baronet, "you have charge of this affair, so, of course, you must decide how the men are to be placed. I suggest— But no, I will leave it to you."

Frank Kingston was sitting in his chair with a thoughtful expression on his immobile features. The earl was watching him, and to his mind there was nothing to be puzzled about—everything was straightforwardness itself. But although the others could not see what was passing in the detective's mind, in reality Kingston was wrestling with a startling problem.

Suddenly he looked up, and his smile was as languid as ever.

"It is rather early yet!" he exclaimed. "But perhaps it will be as well to leave nothing to chance. Seton may arrive sooner than he said in the letter, to catch us off our guard. Our object is to make the theft of the porcelain impossible—"

"Absolutely impossible!" interjected Redmayne emphatically.

"Therefore I should suggest placing ourselves in the following manner," went on Kingston quietly. "Let two policemen keep watch outside these windows—one at each, another at the corner of this house where the drawing-room is situated, and the fourth—yourself, sergeant—to remain outside this door in the hall."

Sergeant Wilcox nodded emphatically.

"The very idea, sir!" he declared, in full agreement. He had been made aware of what was in the wind, and had had thoughts of being forced to remain out in the cold atmosphere for three or four hours on the watch. Therefore Kingston's plan was entirely to his liking.

"In that manner," continued Carson Gray's substitute, "it will be quite out of the question for anyone to attempt an entry. We three, ourselves, shall be inside this room, so that in the event of anyone springing up through the floor, or dropping from the ceiling," he added, with an amused smile, "we shall be ready to welcome them."

Sir Banister and the earl laughed at Kingston's jocular remark, and the sergeant looked at the ceiling almost as if he thought someone would even then drop through it.

"Then I'll make haste and give the men my instructions," he said, addressing the baronet. "I don't know where the drawing-room is, sir, but—"

Redmayne tossed his cigarette-end into the fire.

"That's all right, sergeant!" he exclaimed. "I know this house as if it were my own—I spent half my time here as a boy—so I'll come and show you where the officers are to be placed."

Kingston looked up.

"Thanks!" he said. "That's a job I couldn't undertake myself."

He looked at the earl and Wilcox as they passed out of the room, and then turned to Sir Banister.

"Well," he smiled, "do you think we shall foil Mr. Seton's little scheme?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Kingston," cried the other heartily. "I'm absolutely convinced of it! Why, my dear sir, we can laugh at the threat now—simply laugh at it!"

And Sir Banister suited the action to the word, and chuckled with satisfaction. He was extremely pleased with himself for having sent for the police. In the event of anything unexpected happening, they would be much more useful than his own manservants could have been.

In a few minutes the Earl of Redmayne returned, and told the others that the constables were in their allotted places.

"Now, as the time isn't yet ten," he suggested, "I propose we pass the time by having a game of cards—that is, if you play, Kingston."

"Certainly!" was the reply. "An excellent idea!"

Very soon the trio were seated round a card-table, which had been drawn before the fire, engrossed in a game of solowhist. They were all good players, so hardly a word was spoken except at a re-deal, when one of them would pass a remark concerning the game.

On the mantelpiece a marble clock quietly ticked the time away, and eleven o'clock had passed before the players realised it. The fire had burnt low, so Redmayne bent down and piled a few more logs on.

Outside, the occasional crunch of gravel could be heard, as the watching policemen marched up and down to keep warm. Sometimes the faint murmur of their conversation would make itself heard, and Kingston noticed that his two companions had not their whole attention on the game.

As a matter of fact, Kingston himself was very wide awake as to what was passing around him. The slightest unusual sound reached his ears, and his eyes followed the hands of the clock as it neared the hour of midnight.

The time-piece struck twelve just as a round was finished, and Sir Banister paused to cross to his desk and produce a box of cigars. He glanced at the clock in surprise.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "It is getting near the appointed time."

He laughed lightly, although Kingston detected just a trace of uneasiness in it. Sir Banister pulled one of the blinds aside, and gazed out into the night.

"It's dark," he announced—"black as pitch, and a few flakes of snow are beginning to fall, I think. By George, I'll warrant Seton's given up this job!"

He crossed over to the card-table, and, having lit a cigar, seated himself. The next round was soon in progress, and Kingston could not help noticing that the baronet kept shifting in his chair jerkily, while his cigar was burning all down one side, with being rectified.

The earl, too, was showing some signs of the tension which seemed to fill the atmosphere. The silence in the room seemed extremely intense, and the occasional snap of the blazing log caused Redmayne to start and look round.

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Frank Kingston himself, however, was quite unaffected. He was prepared for anything that might come, for although he said nothing, he knew that something was coming—something totally unexpected—something which Sir Banister had never calculated upon.

And as the time passed so the tension seemed to get more acute. At twenty-past twelve exactly, the host flung his cards down in the middle of the game, and rose to his feet.

"It's no good keeping up this farce," he exclaimed, hurling his half-smoked cigar into the fire. "I can't tell whether I'm playing a heart or a spade. It's perfectly ridiculous, of course, for nothing is going to happen. Our guard is too strong for that. What could possibly happen?"

Sir Banister spoke as though the others had contested the point.

"It's all rot!" agreed the earl candidly, carelessly lighting a cigarette. "In my opinion, the whole thing was a practical joke from beginning to end, and we've had all this trouble and anxiety for nothing. Not that I care a jot, for it's a bit of excitement, and—"

Redmayne's yawning remarks were suddenly cut short by a sudden sound of excited voices out in the hall. The three men in the library sprang to their feet, and gazed at the door. The next second it burst open, and Sergeant Wilcox's massive form lumbered in.

"They're 'ere!" he cried hoarsely. "Quick, gentlemen, they're tryin' to git in at a winder next door to the drawin'-room! Clarke's just rushed in an' tol' me!"

"Good heavens!" cried Sir Banister. "You must not let them escape! Come on, we will see for ourselves!" he added, rushing for the door in his excitement.

"The fellow must be mad!" exclaimed the earl, without moving. "He can't possibly have entered the grounds without seeing the police. It must be some ruse or other."

"Precisely!" agreed Kingston imperturbably. "And for that reason I shall remain here."

"No," cried Redmayne, "you mustn't do that, Kingston. Don't forget that this case is in your hands, and if the man escapes you'll be partly responsible. Make haste, man," he added, as Sir Banister and the sergeant disappeared, "or you'll never find your way!"

Kingston looked at his companion, and hesitated.

"I'll stop here!" exclaimed the earl. "Don't you see, man, that with your running flowers you can catch the fellow if he bolts for it? I can look after the porcelain. You needn't be anxious about me."

Kingston came to a decision.

"Very good!" he replied sharply. "I'll see what's the matter the other side of the house, and get back to help you in case anything should crop up. Seton's a man who delights in surprises."

Without another word Frank Kingston turned round and ran up the hall. The hall-door stood wide open, and he dashed outside into the cold night. The snow was descending a little faster now, and Kingston made straight for the left side of the house, the opposite direction to that taken by Sir Banister and the sergeant.

Once round the angle, he came in sight of the library windows, standing out brilliantly in the surrounding darkness. For ten seconds he stood perfectly still, gazing at the sight before him with a grim smile on his lips. Then he turned, and dashed back the other way.

"By Jove," he thought, "it's lucky for me these paths have been swept! I've made some slight tracks, but they'll be covered up in a moment, thanks to this fresh snow."

He ran at amazing speed, which proved that he was in as good a form as ever. Round the stately old building he dashed, and a moment later saw, with that singularly acute vision of his, the two bulky forms of Sir Banister and the sergeant. They were talking to P.-c. Clarke, who looked something of a wreck.

Kingston took a swift glance round him, and saw evident signs of a struggle.

"Darn me, sergeant," Clarke was gasping, "the feller took 'ole o' me like a sack o' chaff! I never see sech strength!"

"Hang you," roared the sergeant, "where's he gone?"

"Over there," replied Clarke, looking round for his helmet, and pointing at the same time to a set of tracks which led to a thick plantation. "E run like a blessed 'are!"

"Then why the dickens didn't you chase him?"

"Because you come up, an' started astin' my foolish questions," snapped Clarke crossly. "That was afore I picked meself up."

"Enough of this!" said Frank Kingston briskly. "Come along, Clarke, we'll go after this unknown man together. You, sergeant, go in and see if everything is all right; while I should advise you, Sir Banister, to get indoors out of this frosty air. You'll catch a cold without a hat."

Sir Banister started. In the excitement he had overlooked such a trivial thing as a cap; but now, as Kingston started off at a run with the constables, he hurried in, Sergeant Wilcox accompanying him.

Meanwhile Kingston found that P.-c. Clarke could run fairly well.

"This way, sir!" he panted, pointing down to the tracks. "The scoundrel passed along 'ere not a minute ago, an' we can't miss the way."

Kingston gave a short laugh as he ran.

"Quite so!" he said, in a peculiar tone. "The scoundrel—probably yourself, my friend—made those tracks over half an hour ago."

And before Clarke could make any move, Kingston grasped him by the coat collar, and flung him in the snow. A second later the detective was sitting astride his prisoner, and the sharp snap of handcuffs sounded on the clear night air.

"What—Darn it, sir, what's the idea?" gasped Clarke, gazing at the handcuffs on his wrists in amazement. "You ain't gone off your chump, 'ave you? That burglar chap's escaping—"

"Silence!" commanded Kingston. "You may as well give in immediately, Clarke, and not keep this farce up. Come on, march before me, and don't struggle. I think you will realise it's useless doing that. I brought you out here because I wanted Wilcox to imagine I was in ignorance of this deception."

"But—"

Kingston yanked the man to his feet, and literally pushed him along before him, taking no notice of his protests and ejaculations. As they returned to the house they passed along the same set of footsteps, supposed to have been made by the fugitive. Kingston chuckled.

"That's where you made a big mistake, Clarke," he exclaimed. "You said that the man knocked you down and then took to flight. These footprints were made at least half an hour ago, for there is quite a respectable layer of snow at the bottom of them."

"You—you meddling cur!" snarled Clarke, in a quite different tone, and without a trace of his former dialect. "Great heaven, you must have eyes like an owl's to see in this darkness!"

"Ah, you've come to your senses!" said Kingston, as they neared the front door. "Now we'll see what's happened during my absence."

In the hall Kingston ran into a group of footmen and other servants.

"Take this man and see that he doesn't escape."

Before the amazed servants could reply he was hurrying to the library. The door stood wide open, and for a moment Kingston remained there gazing at the scene before him.

The room was in a state of complete disorder. The blinds were up, and the windows stood wide open. Most of the furniture was out of its place, and many chairs were overturned. But Kingston was looking at the hearthrug. There, bending over some object, was Sir Banister Henson, and the object was the unconscious form of the Earl of Redmayne, who lay pale and motionless.

CHAPTER 5.

Vanished!—Ambrose Seton at Last.

SIR BANISTER turned a pale face towards Kingston. "Thank Heaven you have come!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Poor Redmayne has been knocked senseless, the porcelain is gone, and—and—Great powers, I can't realise what has happened—I can't think I—The scoundrels—the dastardly scoundrels!"

Frank Kingston dropped to his knees by Redmayne's side.

"Calm yourself, Sir Banister," he said, after a moment. "The earl is quite unhurt, and will recover in a few minutes." He bent down and sniffed. "Chloroform!" he announced. "Chloroform! What can have happened? Oh, my porcelain!"

"You say it is gone?" questioned the detective, springing to his feet and looking at the cupboard. "Yes, by Jove, both the trunks have vanished! Tell me, Sir Banister, what was the room like when you entered?"

Henson wiped the cold perspiration from his brow.

"The same as it is now," he cried. "The sergeant delayed me for a few moments in the hall. I, knowing nothing of what was going on in here, was fool enough to stay with him. They were frauds, Kingston; those constables were substitutes. Good heavens, it seems incredible!"

"I knew it almost from the first," was Kingston's surprising statement, "and I purposely left the house in Redmayne's charge. No, Sir Banister, please ask no questions, but let me hear everything."

"There is nothing to tell you," said Henson, pacing agitatedly up and down the library. "I'm muddled up, Kingston; my head's in a whirl. You say you knew all the while that the police were bogus, yet you designedly left the house, containing my precious porcelain, in charge of an inexperienced man like poor Redmayne. Good gracious me, you must be mad! See the result of your—"

Kingston caught Sir Banister by the shoulder.

"Please calm yourself," he said sternly. "I had a reason for my action which I will explain later. Of course, I did not think the earl would be harmed, but it is not serious. And as for the porcelain, Sir Banister, you shall have that back to-morrow without fail."

"Well, Kingston, you know best, I suppose," gasped the baronet. "I'm upset. When I saw this room I nearly cried out. Redmayne was lying there, and for a moment I—I thought he was dead. But they've got my porcelain—the scoundrels have got my porcelain!"

Sir Banister sat in a chair and tried to compose himself.

With calm face and steady hand Kingston knelt beside the unfortunate earl, and poured a few drops of brandy down his throat. At first it had no effect. Five minutes elapsed, in fact, before Redmayne recovered his senses. And during that five minutes Sir Banister suddenly sat upright.

"Good gracious, Kingston," he cried excitedly, "we haven't set anyone to chase those bogus policemen! They can't have got far, hampered with those heavy trunks. And Seton—ten to one Seton himself was among them!"

The baronet rose to his feet and started for the door.

"Please don't waste your men's time," said Kingston calmly, looking over his shoulder. "Those brutes are clear away by now, as I intended they should be; but you needn't have fears about your porcelain. That can be recovered."

Sir Banister pointed to the earl.

"He is coming round!" he exclaimed quickly. "Quick, some more brandy! Perhaps he will be able to tell us how this terrible catastrophe came about, for I'm in a complete fog at present."

Redmayne was showing signs of consciousness, and, acting on the baronet's suggestion, Kingston administered a few more drops of brandy. The effect was immediate, for with a sigh the young earl opened his eyes. For a moment he looked into Kingston's face stupidly.

"What—By Jove, where on earth am I?" he murmured. "My head's spinning round like a top, and—and—"

He closed his eyes again, and lay back in Kingston's arms. The latter and Sir Banister were looking on anxiously, but after a minute Redmayne again roused himself, this time with much more effect.

"What's up?" he asked lazily, and a sudden light of recognition entered his eyes, as their gaze rested on Sir Banister. "Ah, of course," he went on, struggling to sit up, "I was keeping watch when—That's it; the blackguards were on me before I realised it!"

"How do you feel, my boy?" asked Sir Banister anxiously. "Upon my soul, I hardly know what I'm doing! Can you tell us what happened after we left the room? Can you—"

The earl scrambled to his feet, and stood for a moment swaying in Kingston's arms. Then he passed a hand before his eyes, and tried to shake the stupor from him. He smiled at the other two faintly.

"By jingo," he murmured, "I never realised that chloroform was such rotten stuff! My head feels as thick as a log of wood, and I'm absolutely certain I can see two of you, Kingston. By the sound of that you might think I was drunk," he added, with a laugh.

"Of course—of course!" said the baronet. "But what occurred, Redmayne? That's what we want to know. The porcelain has vanished—utterly vanished. Did you see them take it?"

Redmayne glanced swiftly at the cupboard.

"So they succeeded after all our precautions," he said regretfully. "That Seton must be a wonder, and no mistake! But you want to know what happened? Well, I'm hanged if I know myself!"

"But you must know something," urged Kingston.

"Well, as soon as you had cleared out of the room," was the response, "I went over to the cupboard with the object of taking a look at the trunks. Before I could open the door, however, I was grabbed hold of behind, and a beastly pad of wadding was shoved in front of my nose."

"Well?" inquired Sir Banister quickly. "Well?"

"I struggled, you can be sure, and caught a glimpse of police uniform. A moment later I was unconscious, but I remember before going off that a realisation of the truth flashed across my mind. Those bobbies were frauds!"

"We have found that out for ourselves," replied Kingston, with a smile. "But is that all you can tell us? Surely you must have heard the windows being opened behind you when you walked towards the cupboard?"

"Not a bit of it, my dear chaps; didn't hear a sound. Those men of Seton's are well trained—you can tell that by the way they acted their parts—and took jolly good care they didn't give me a chance to yell out."

Sir Banister thumped the table impatiently.

"But all this gets us no further," he cried. "You may not know it, Redmayne, but Kingston was aware the whole time that those police were bogus ones. And he deliberately left you here, at their mercy. I cannot understand it."

The earl gave Kingston a surprised look.

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"Do you mean to say that you spotted them from the first?" he queried. "I've heard you've got eyes like microscopes, Kingston, but really I'd no idea they were so sharp. But of course you had some reason for bunking out of the way?"

"Most certainly I had a reason for 'bunking out of the way,' as you term it," returned the detective. "Of course, I had no idea you would get into the wars, and I'm thankful to find that you are not hurt. My object was to let Seton carry the job through, and get clear away with the booty."

"But what for," cried Sir Banister—"what in the world for?"

"Because by that means I hope to trap him," replied Kingston quietly. "You may take it from me, Sir Banister, that your porcelain is quite safe."

Redmayne was carelessly brushing himself down.

"There's nothing like confidence, anyhow," he remarked. "You'll tell us next, Kingston, that you know where the porcelain is at the present moment."

"No, I do not know that," replied the other quietly; "but I do know that it will be in its accustomed place again to-morrow, in spite of a hundred Ambrose Seton's."

"You speak so positively that I'm almost beginning to regain my spirits," put in Henson. "Your actions have certainly seemed extraordinary. Mr. Kingston, but as you evidently know what you are about I will say no more."

With great suddenness the door burst open, and a man entered. He was covered with snow, and seemed excited. He was a small man, thin, and with bristly hair and beard.

"Ah, Sir Banister!" he exclaimed, in a thin, high-pitched voice, now almost cracking with excitement. "I observe you are here!"

"That's not very difficult to discover," murmured the earl, with a sidelong look at Sir Banister's bulk. "I hope you're not another member of the bogus brigade?" he added, as he observed the man's uniform.

"No, Redmayne. This is Inspector Penney, of the Ipswich Police," said the baronet. "Well, inspector, what's the trouble? You seem somewhat agitated."

"Agitated, sir?" replied Inspector Penney. "Bless my soul, I expected to find you far more agitated than I! What has happened? The four policemen who came to your house to-night were some scoundrelly impostors! The real constables were found an hour or so ago in an old barn five miles from here!"

"Drugged, I presume?" put in Kingston.

"Exactly, sir—exactly. They were drugged, as you say. But this room seems strangely out of order," he went on, glancing about him. "Kindly let me know, Sir Banister, if anything serious has occurred?"

"Merely that Seton has succeeded after all," said the baronet grimly. And he explained to the inspector everything that had occurred.

When he had done, Penney took a keen glance at Frank Kingston, who was sitting in a chair thoughtfully tapping the tips of his fingers together.

"So Mr. Kingston is responsible for this affair?" he said, with a trace of unpleasantness in his voice. "Pardon me, sir," he added, turning to the detective, "but if you knew what was going to happen beforehand, why didn't you prevent it? Bless my soul, sir, why didn't you prevent it?"

"I've already explained my reasons to Sir Banister," replied Kingston, without looking up. "Doubtless my theory would seem absurd were I to reveal it at this stage."

"Very probably, sir," declared Penney, cuttingly. "Now, from what I hear, the affair is clear from beginning to end, in my mind. Ambrose Seton relied wholly on substituting his own men for the real constables. It was quite a simple matter for one of them—probably the man calling himself Wilcox was Seton himself—to dash into this room and get it cleared so that they could do their dirty work. Of course, my lord," he added deferentially to Redmayne, "you were in no way to blame for what occurred."

"I have told myself that already, inspector," smiled the earl. "But what do you intend doing? Probably you have already formed a complete theory—"

Inspector Penney gave a sudden start.

"Bless my soul!" he cried. "It must have been so! I thought at the time that I recognised the car as belonging to the Priory. Yes, I have hit it! I have certainly gained a point!"

Kingston opened his eyes and looked up.

"You are probably referring to one of Sir Banister's cars, which no doubt passed you a few miles away," he said questioningly. "It contained three of the scoundrels who committed this burglary."

"How do you know that, Mr. Kingston? Yes, it was close on three miles away that a car suddenly dashed out of the darkness and nearly ran me down. It was an open vehicle, and was being driven at breakneck speed—"

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"My Daimler!" cried Sir Banister.

"I heard the sound of it as I marched Clarke across the grounds," explained Kingston, in his customary drawl. "I knew immediately what it purported, but really, the matter was not worth mentioning. I suppose you did not by any chance see a couple of large trunks aboard the car?" he added, with a twinkle.

Inspector Penney scratched his head.

"Trunks—trunks?" he repeated. "Ah, I presume—The porcelain! Bless my soul, yes; the porcelain was packed in them, and the burglars would certainly remove them intact!"

"That undoubtedly seems likely," smiled the earl, "for they would not take the trouble to unpack the pieces and bundle them in a sack, would they?"

"That remark, my lord, was scarcely necessary!" snapped Penney, with a frown. "But let me think. Were those trunks on the car? I don't remember them, and yet, when I glanced back at the retreating motor, I seemed to observe something protruding above the tonneau. Yes, Sir Banister, I think it highly probable that the trunks were aboard. In fact, they must have been!"

"Haden't you better wire and have the car stopped?" said the baronet anxiously. "I have a telephone here, and it will be a simple matter for you to communicate with the Ipswich Police-station."

Kingston looked up.

"And after that," he suggested languidly, "wouldn't it be advisable for you to take a look at the footprints, inspector? Pray don't forget that the snow is making your work much more difficult."

Inspector Penney frowned.

"There is no necessity for you to remind me of my duty, Mr. Kingston," he said, in his high-pitched voice. "I intended examining the prints the very next thing—that is, after I have communicated with headquarters."

And with another aggressive stare at the calmly seated form of Frank Kingston, the fussy little inspector departed with Sir Banister. Redmayne remained where he was, and slowly extracted a cigarette from his case.

"I don't know whether this'll do my head any good," he remarked, "but I mean to chance it. The smoke will, at least, drive the smell of chloroform from my nostrils."

He struck a match deliberately and watched Kingston as he rose and approached the fireplace. There was something in his eyes which Redmayne had not seen there before.

"We are alone, my lord," commenced Kingston.

"Well, I believe so," smiled Redmayne, glancing round him. "Nothing private to say to me, I suppose?"

"No, not exactly private," replied the detective grimly. "Merely a single question I should like to ask you."

"Ask away, my dear fellow."

"Well, Mr. Ambrose Seton," replied Frank Kingston, looking straight into the other's steady, brown eyes, "I want to know what you've done with Sir Banister Henson's Chinese porcelain?"

CHAPTER 6.

• Bluff—Kingston Makes Investigations.

FOR one second a look of startled fear and amazement flashed into the Earl of Redmayne's eyes, then they resumed their normal expression, and gazed calmly into Frank Kingston's face. But the latter had seen that flash of fear, and knew that he had made no mistake.

The man before him was Ambrose Seton himself.

"A joke, I suppose, Kingston?" questioned the earl carelessly. "Of course, jokes are all very well in their place, but—"

"I expected you would take up this attitude," interjected Kingston calmly, "although, in the end, you will not escape the justice you deserve. Please don't think I am making this accusation entirely by guesswork. I am absolutely positive."

Redmayne puffed at his cigarette with great enjoyment.

"You don't say so?" he murmured. "It would be interesting to hear how you made such discoveries—how you found out my wicked secret! By Jove, man, it's quite amusing!"

For a moment their eyes met, and there was a challenge in Redmayne's—a challenge which Kingston immediately accepted. It was evident that the earl intended playing the game out to the very finish. He knew very well that he was trapped—that Kingston had got the better of him. But as to admitting defeat—never!

Kingston rather admired his opponent, for in taking up this attitude he proved himself to be no ordinary criminal. He was a man well worthy of being pitted against the destroyer of the Brotherhood of Iron.

"Perhaps it is just a little too amusing," replied that remarkable individual, "for both Penney and Sir Banister

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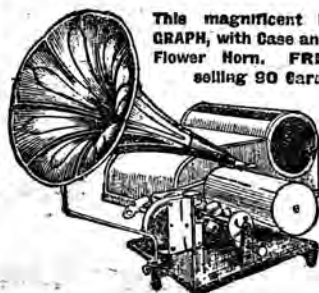


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will express incredibility when I state the facts. You ask me how I found you out. Well, I can hardly tell you in so many words, but after I had been with you an hour or two I knew very well that you had never spent six years in hottest Africa."

Redmayne laughed lightly.

"You cannot prove it," he said, with a yawn. "You cannot prove anything. And no one will believe your accusations. My dear Kingston, you have certainly given me a great surprise, but I don't think you will catch Mr. Ambrose Seton quite so easily as you imagine."

"You admit, then—"

"I admit nothing."

"That is, perhaps, as well," smiled Kingston in reply. "I may tell you straight off that at present I have no proofs, and I shall therefore say nothing until I obtain them. Nevertheless, I am quite convinced in my own mind. Firstly, you are the only man who could have contrived to get a message through to your agent in London—Meyer—in time for him to shadow me."

The earl gave another yawn.

"You have worked things very cleverly, on the whole," went on Kingston, smiling involuntarily as the earl bowed. "But after I had decided to myself that you were not Redmayne, several minor incidents became particularly noticeable."

"And they were?"

"For one, it was your suggestion to place the porcelain in this cupboard," replied the detective. "You looked just a little alarmed when Sir Banister at first refused to have the collection moved; but I, wanting the thing to go through, came to your assistance."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," murmured Redmayne derisively.

"Another point was that you took care to have a few minutes' private conversation with Wilcox, when you probably gave him your instructions. And, most important of all," concluded Kingston, with an air of finality, "when I stated my intention of remaining in this room after Wilcox had burst in with his almost farcical story, you became positively frantic, although you took care to show very little sign of it; for of course, had I insisted on stopping, your well-laid scheme would have ignominiously failed."

"Really, Kingston, you are getting quite humorous!" laughed the earl mockingly. "Whatever put the idea that I am friend Seton into your head, I can't imagine. Why, I've got proofs galore that I am the earl—"

"But they will avail you nothing in the end," declared the other grimly. "You are not aware that after I left this room to follow Wilcox, I took a glance into the library windows, for the blinds were then up."

Again that look of alarm leapt into Redmayne's eyes. Then he calmly turned and threw his cigarette-end into the fire.

"And what did you see?" he inquired, as though genuinely interested.

"I saw you, Seton, in the hands of your two confederates. And you were quietly submitting to being drugged. Oh, yes, it was not a bad scheme; but it was a pity that Samuel Meyer did not do his work better!"

"Of course, nobody was with you when you looked into the library?"

"No; I was alone."

Redmayne heaved an exaggerated sigh of relief.

"Thank Heaven for that!" he murmured fervently. "I really thought for a moment that you were getting the handcuffs in readiness!"

Kingston could hardly help smiling at his opponent's mockery. The earl was undoubtedly making light of a very awkward situation. Before he could speak again the door opened, and Inspector Penney, followed by Sir Banister, entered.

"Ah, gentlemen," cried Redmayne, in a jocular tone, "what do you think Kingston's latest joke is?"

"Joke?" Inspector Penney glanced at the clock. "I should think joking is hardly the thing on such an occasion as this," he said severely—"and at such an hour!"

"Well, whether it is or not," chuckled Redmayne. "Kingston has just informed me that I am the notorious burglar, Mr. Ambrose Seton! That I am responsible for all this evening's work, and that I can lay my hands on the Chinese porcelain! By Jove, I thought it was very funny!"

Inspector Penney glared, and Sir Banister gave Kingston a quick glance.

"I am afraid I cannot understand what Redmayne means!" exclaimed the baronet, addressing Frank Kingston.

"Without appearing impolite, Sir Banister, I am afraid I can make no statement at present," replied the detective gravely. "You heard what his lordship said, and can conclude what you will."

"But, my dear Kingston," protested Sir Banister, looking

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from Kingston's grave face to Redmayne's laughing one, "this is most—"

Penney snapped his fingers with impatience.

"Why waste time in trifles?" he snapped. "These gentlemen may joke, but that does not assist us in the least. Bless my soul, the scoundrel has more wit than I imagined! He has foiled us at every point!"

"You 'phoned to Ipswich, I presume?" inquired Redmayne innocently.

The inspector made a sound that resembled a snort.

"Yes, we made an attempt!" he ejaculated furiously.

"But the wire's cut, my lord. Seton meant to get clear away!"

"Evidently," replied Redmayne; "and he didn't intend you to follow him, either. He's a cunning dog, is that Ambrose Seton!"

And the earl gave a quick glance at Frank Kingston—a glance of amusement more than anything else. The latter caught the glance, and again their eyes met in a challenge.

Inspector Penney was getting to work in earnest. For ten minutes, while the baronet and Redmayne talked matters over, he made a thorough examination of the library. He looked at the windows, and scanned them in search of fingerprints; he looked at the cupboard, and made the startling announcement that the trunks must have been dragged into the room.

He even said he could see the marks caused by them on the carpet. On the whole, the worthy inspector was rather dissatisfied. The only arrest that had been effected had been made by Kingston. As for Seton himself, he was miles away, and the Chinese porcelain was with him.

Penney had despatched a couple of ostlers on horseback to Woodbridge, with messages for the inspector in charge, and felt that he could do no more. His duty was to remain here on the spot, and make investigations.

Presently Kingston rose and crossed to the cupboard. He walked in, and, producing his powerful pocket-lamp, he commenced a minute examination. Every inch of the floor he searched, using sometimes a magnifying glass. Penney looked on once, and went away with a smile of derision on his lips.

But when Frank Kingston emerged an expression of triumph was in his eyes, although when the others looked at him they were every bit as languid and sleepy as usual. The fire had been made up, and the earl and Sir Banister were talking and smoking. Sleep was never thought of.

"If you will excuse me for a few minutes, I should like to make a few investigations outside," exclaimed Kingston quietly.

The inspector looked up.

"I have already made an examination!" he said sharply.

"Thank you, inspector, but my search will be in quite a different direction," replied Kingston. And he passed out of the room, feeling absolutely certain that Penney was looking after him with aggressive eyes.

"Seton does not mean to give in easily," thought the detective, as he swiftly passed down the deserted hall. Most of the servants were in the rear portion of the building excitedly discussing the night's doings. "By making that statement to the others, he only made his position more secure. But I think the last link will now be provided," Kingston added as he paused for a moment.

When he had said "outside," he had not meant out of doors. No, he knew exactly where he wanted to go, although he was unfamiliar with the house. Moreover, he wished to meet no one on his way.

But Kingston was blessed with a keen sense of direction, and very soon he found himself at the foot of the cellar stairs. All was pitch darkness, except for the beam of light thrown from Kingston's electric torch.

"Now, unless I have miscalculated, the library lies about fifty yards to the left," he murmured, as he passed the wine-bins. "Ah, just what I expected!"

He had halted before a low, arched doorway, a relic of the Priory before the cellars he had just passed through had been added. This was the door of the old Priory vaults, probably several hundred years old, and strictly left alone by the servants.

The door was one huge slab of stone, whilst the lock must have weighed at least half a hundredweight. The builders had intended the vaults to be burglar-proof, at all events. Kingston noticed that the door was slightly ajar, so he pushed it open and passed through, at the same time extinguishing his light.

"Now, I shall have to go with extreme caution," he told himself grimly. "Seton's men are probably down here at the present moment, and on no account must I allow myself to be seen first."

He stood perfectly still for a moment, and, quite distinctly to his acute ears, came the sound of low voices. The darkness was intense, and to anyone the least bit nervous the

experience would have been far from pleasant. For in those old stone vaults the voices echoed mysteriously, reaching one's ears at last in a ghostly undertone. Indeed, the voices seemed to be within a dozen feet of Kingston, so strangely were they echoed.

But when he switched on his light he found that he was quite alone in the apartment. It was a fairly large vault, with an arched roof. The walls dripped with moisture in places, and a musty odour filled the air. Up the further end was another doorway, and Kingston quietly tip-toed his way to it.

Through it was another vault, and as he turned the light off he could distinctly see a glimmer further on.

"The house is simply honeycombed with these cellars," he thought. "By Jove, Seton knew what he was about when he decided to steal that porcelain! It was a chance in a thousand that he would be discovered. But the mistake he made was in thinking he was clever enough to carry it to success after warning Sir Banister that he was coming."

As he passed through another vault still, the light suddenly grew distinct, and he saw that it was emanating from a narrow doorway on the further side. The voices were no louder than before, but they were sufficient to drown his approach.

"Hands up!"

In a second he stood framed in the doorway, a revolver in each hand. Before him stood two startled menservants too amazed and frightened to utter a sound. The vault itself was similar to the others, but at the far end, clearly visible in the light of a bright acetylene gas-lamp, was a rough structure of wood, made in the form of a lift. On the floor round this were masses of bricks and plaster, which clearly showed that the work had been only recently accomplished.

And, as Frank Kingston had expected, in the centre of the floor were the two travelling trunks containing Sir Banister's Chinese porcelain! The men had even then been in the act of unpacking it!

"Put your hands up, and keep them there!" commanded Kingston, in a voice that demanded obedience.

"Good heavens," gasped one of them, in sheer amazement, "it's Kingston, Sam! How did he find out—how did he know—"

"How I knew doesn't concern you!" replied Kingston sharply. He was in a hurry, and meant to stand no nonsense. "You," he added to the one who had spoken, "pick that coil of rope up, and bind your companion!"

The man hesitated, but as Kingston shifted the revolver just a trifle more in his direction, he hastened to do as he was told. Three minutes later the other scoundrel was trussed up securely—Kingston saw to that—while his companion stood beside him now trembling with fear. There was not much fight in either of them.

"Tell me exactly how this work was done," he said curtly. "You need not hesitate, for I am quite aware that the Earl of Redmayne is, in reality, Ambrose Seton."

"You know!" gasped the men. "You—"

"Get on with it!"

"There's nothing to say, sir," whined the scoundrel, after a few moments. The knowledge that his master was exposed seemed to crumple him completely up. "Seton arranged that we should get jobs here as menservants, and I came six weeks ago, while Sam there joined me a fortnight later. We did this work," he went on, with a glance at the structure, "at nights, after every one was in bed."

"Ah, you were quite safe from detection," commented Kingston, "for nobody ever dreamed of penetrating so far into these vaults, even if they entered them! Of course, overhead is the library cupboard, the floor of which has been made into a kind of rough lift."

"That's it, sir," said the other eagerly. "We were only doing Seton's work for him, and he's responsible. I'll tell you everything."

Kingston, who had lowered one of his revolvers, produced a sheet of paper and a fountain-pen, meanwhile looking at the scoundrel before him with fine contempt. He had intended to obtain a confession, but never dreamed that he could do it so easily. The fellow was ready in a moment to give his master away in order to save his own skin.

"Write down on this paper, as briefly as possible, that you can prove that the so-called Earl of Redmayne is, in reality, Ambrose Seton!" said Kingston curtly. "I dare say it will mean a considerable lightening of your own sentence, although you deserve to have it doubled for the ready manner in which you turn traitor."

"Every man for himself, sir," whined the other in a trembling voice, as he set about the task. "I knew this business would lead to disaster right from the first. All the other jobs Seton's done have been straightforward ones, not a crack-brained, muddle-up like this!"

In five minutes the confession was made. Kingston could see that he would have had much more difficulty with the

man who lay bound, for he was swearing at his companion with great violence.

The latter seemed almost dazed, and made no attempt to escape when Kingston left the vault. Suddenly, he turned and went back, remembering that if he left the man there he might, out of sheer spite, smash the Chinese porcelain to ruins.

So, with a curt command, he bade the traitor march before him out of the vaults. There was not a second to lose, or he would have roped him up in a similar manner to his companion. But all this time Ambrose Seton was at liberty to get away, and Kingston had taken a big chance when he left the library.

Without ceremony he bundled the man up the cellar stairs, and so through into the servants' hall. Here there were a number of other male servants talking wisely over the night's events.

"Another prisoner for you!" said Kingston sharply. "No, no questions; but you, Jennings, see that he is securely bound and put with Clarke."

The servants gaped, but while they were still doing so, Frank Kingston turned and left the room. He hurried to the library, and a smile fitted across his features as he heard Redmayne's yawning voice within.

"Now, Mr. Ambrose Seton," he murmured to himself, as he laid his hand on the door knob, "I think you'll admit that I hold the trump card!"

CHAPTER 7.

A Bid for Liberty—Frank Kingston Wins.

"WHY, here's Kingston again!" cried Ambrose Seton, otherwise the Earl of Redmayne, as Frank Kingston strode into the library. "Come in front of the fire, man, and get yourself warm. You look perishing!"

Kingston even at that moment admired Redmayne's courage more than he had ever admired any other criminal's. For although Seton was a scoundrel, he committed his crimes in such a pleasant manner—with no bloodshed of any description—that he could not be looked upon as an ordinary evildoer.

"Yes, Redmayne, it is decidedly cold outside, although I have not been out there to see for myself," replied Kingston casually.

Inspector Penney stared.

"Not been out!" he snapped. "Excuse me, Mr. Kingston, but you seem to be playing a peculiar sort of game. The case is plain as a pikestaff. Yet you don't seem to realise it. I've completed my investigations, and it is quite clear to me that Seton was one of the three pseudo-policemen who escaped in Sir Banister's motor-car. He and his confederates have the porcelain with them, but by this time they have probably been arrested."

"I think not, inspector," replied Kingston gently. "Ambrose Seton is a little nearer to you than you imagine. And the porcelain is not much further off. Both, in fact, are in this house."

Sir Bannister and Penney gazed at Kingston as though he had taken leave of his senses, while the Earl of Redmayne lolled back in his easy-chair and puffed, with supreme nonchalance, at his cigarette. He seemed utterly indifferent to all that went on around him.

"Bless my soul, what are you talking about, sir—what are you talking about?" demanded the inspector crossly. "This is no time for joking, Mr. Kingston, and I must beg of you to explain yourself. I tell you that Seton has escaped. If not, where is he? Yes, sir, where is he?"

"At the present moment," Kingston said, "he is loling in the easy-chair before the fire! That man," he added, pointing grimly at Redmayne, "is Ambrose Seton himself!"

The earl puffed a huge mouthful of smoke into the air and grinned at Sir Banister. The latter rose to his feet angrily.

"Look here, Mr. Kingston," he said, with some warmth, "this is going altogether too far. The joke, if joke it is, seems utterly pointless, and I must ask you to apologise. Redmayne is my guest, and I cannot have him insulted—for your words certainly are insulting!"

"Hear, hear!" murmured Redmayne lazily. "Give it to him hot, Sir Banister!"

The earl's composure was extraordinary, and even Kingston was surprised at it. He knew the man to be a cool head, but this exhibition was amazing. Had Redmayne known what was coming he might not have been so self-possessed.

"I was never further from joking in my life than I am at this moment, Sir Banister," declared Kingston gravely. "I again state that the man you have known to-day as the Earl of Redmayne is in reality an impostor—Ambrose Seton."

The latter individual foused himself from his loling position and stood upright. He foresaw that matters were getting warm, and realised that it was quite time for him to be prepared for action.

"You say that I am this fellow Seton?" he exclaimed. "Well, where are your proofs? Remember, your unsupported word will be quite useless!"

"I quite realise that," replied Kingston calmly. "Look here, Seton, the game is up, and you're fairly and squarely cornered. I've found you to be an exceptional criminal, and I credit you with having enough sense—"

"Your proofs, man—your proofs!" repeated the earl mockingly.

"I have them here," replied Kingston, pulling the confession from his pocket. "Knowing your character, Seton, I left this library a short while ago, feeling quite certain that you would not take the opportunity and escape."

"Well?"

"I made my way to the vaults below," continued Kingston, noticing that the other two occupants of the room were listening in open-mouthed amazement, "and found my surmise to be correct. For I knew—absolutely knew—that I should find the porcelain there. But I also found your two confederates, and one of them, of his own free will, has turned King's evidence and made a confession. I think—"

Redmayne glanced round him, with a sudden change of demeanour. In an instant his languid indolence had dropped from him like a cloak, and he stood there, brisk, alert, and ready for instant action.

"The snivelling cur!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "So he has turned round on me, has he? Yes, gentlemen, I admit it now. I am Ambrose Seton, and I realise that my scheme has panned out the wrong way. Kingston had me on toast right from the very first hour he entered the house! I tried to prevent his getting here, but I might as well have tried to stop the train he travelled on! Kingston," he added, with a smile, "I take off my hat to you!"

The detective had been on the alert for any sudden move on Seton's part, but he was not prepared for what followed.

With an aim that was amazing, Seton fired the revolver he had produced from seemingly nowhere at the electric light wire, and the electric light crashed to the table heavily, plunging the room into pitchy darkness.

In a second Penney's voice filled the air. But while he was yelling out instructions there came a sudden crash at the window.

"He's jumped clean through it!" cried the inspector excitedly. "This way!"

Kingston stood perfectly still, knowing Seton would never make such a clumsy exit. He was right, for, while Penney and Sir Banister dashed to the window, the door swiftly opened.

Unfortunately, Kingston was at the other side of the room—the whole incident had not occupied more than five seconds—and a muttered exclamation of annoyance escaped his lips as he heard the key turn in the lock.

For a second he thought swiftly.

"The lock must go!" he decided. "The door opens outwards, so it won't matter! Once Seton gets out of sight he'll get clear away!"

So, with no ceremony, he placed his shoulder against the door and exerted all his amazing strength. The lock was a stout one, but without the least delay it gave under the terrific pressure.

Kingston dashed out into the hall, saw that the front door stood wide open, and promptly turned in the direction of the servants' quarters, guessing that the open door was a ruse.

He met Jennings in the passage.

"The earl?" he inquired sharply. "Where is he?"

"The earl, sir? Why, his lordship's just gone out by the side door yonder," answered Jennings. And as Kingston left him at a run he shook his head sorrowfully. All this excitement was not to his liking.

The side door stood wide open; and Kingston, dashing out, found that the snow was still falling, but that, if anything, the night was not so dark. The snow, too, was to prove invaluable.

Quite distinctly the trail made by the earl could be seen in the freshly-fallen snow.

Kingston followed it like a bloodhound, bending low, and never making a false step. His eyesight must have been truly wonderful, for he simply flew over the ground.

Across two lawns he went, then he found that Seton had burst his way through a hedge, and so out on to the park.

By this time Kingston's eyes had grown more accustomed to the darkness, and he could see the sloping meadowland before him quite distinctly. And for a second he caught sight of a dark form rushing along a hundred yards or more ahead.

"It's no good, Seton!" he murmured, not the least bit winded. "You might as well give in straight away, and not act the fool any longer!"

But Seton kept straight on. The snow lay before him in an unbroken expanse of white, and he kept on at breakneck speed, his pursuer growing nearer every minute.

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

And then, with startling suddenness, a splintering crack rang out, followed almost immediately by a plunge.

Frank Kingston pulled up sharply, for he realised that the sudden dip in the snow was the edge of a lake.

Ambrose Seton had unwittingly dashed upon it, and the comparatively thin ice had given way under the strain. Kingston could plainly hear the other gasping in the icy water; and then a voice reached him.

"I say, lend a hand, old man!" gasped Ambrose Seton. "I'm absolutely puffed, and in half a minute I shall be—"

Before he could proceed further the ice he was grasping hold of gave way, and once more he plunged into the water.

Without hesitation, Kingston dashed forward and plunged into the black, gaping hole.

"Hold on to me!" he said grimly, as the "earl" came to the surface.

"Right you are!" gasped the other, with chattering teeth. "You're a brick, Kingston!"

The water was deep, and the ice too thin to bear a man's weight, yet thick enough to make the task of breaking the edge away almost impossible. But Kingston seemed quite unaffected by the terrible cold. He set to work deliberately and, with Seton hanging on to him, slowly made his way to the bank. Having run at the lake, the ice had not given way until several yards had been covered.

At last the pair crawled upon the bank.

"Will you give me your word of honour not to attempt to escape?" asked the detective, feeling that he could trust his prisoner.

"Yes, I give my word of honour!"

"Very well, we can run home without being hampered! Mind, Seton, I trust you!"

"Thanks, awfully! I may be a thief, Kingston, but I'm not a liar."

Chilled to the bone, the pair ran back on their own tracks, the snow having completely ceased to fall.

"Yes, you've got me," said Seton, as they ran. "And, by Jove, Kingston, I deserve to be caught! I could have got that porcelain as easy as pie if I hadn't elected to do the job myself, and in the personality of the earl. But the temptation was too great; I gave in."

"A word about the earl—the real earl?"

"Oh," laughed Ambrose Seton, as they ran along, "I'll tell you about that in a few words! Two years ago I happened to be passing through Africa, and whilst in a native village I came upon the Earl of Redmayne. He was stricken with fever, and dying."

"Is this true—absolutely true?"

"Absolutely, Kingston—on my word! Before I left the village the poor chap was dead; and I saw no reason why I shouldn't come to England and step into his shoes. I looked a bit like him in face, and the rest I've done by careful training. Even Sir Banister, knowing the real earl six years ago, was deceived. Of course, he reckoned on seeing a changed man; and if it hadn't been for you I could have gone on being the earl for years. As it is, my little game's done in on the first day."

Five minutes later the two men, with their clothes frozen as hard as boards, entered the library. Sir Banister and Penney were there, excitedly talking to one another.

"You've got him, Kingston?" cried the inspector, in an ecstasy. "Bless my soul, man, this is better than I dared hope for! Now, you scoundrel," he added roughly to Seton, "you've got to wear these bracelets!"

Kingston waved the inspector back.

"On the contrary," he replied, "Seton's going to do nothing of the sort until he's changed his clothes. And even then there's no need for handcuffs. He's given me his word of honour to go quietly, and—"

"You believe him?" cried Inspector Penney derisively.

"Yes," replied Frank Kingston, "I do."

And while Penney and Sir Banister gazed at Kingston in surprise the exposed and defeated Seton bowed low.

"You're a gentleman, Kingston!" he exclaimed fervently. "And, by Jove, I should be a miserable cur if I took advantage of your leniency! You've saved my life to-night, and some day perhaps I shall be able to repay you!"

Sir Banister Henson looked excited.

"Good gracious me!" he cried. "What on earth does it all mean? Saved your life, Redmayne?" he went on, forgetting himself. "How—"

"By lugging me out of your lake!" replied Ambrose Seton, shivering as the recollection came back to him. "I gave him my word of honour not to escape, though I could have done it a dozen times if I'd taken a mean advantage."

And he drew from his pocket a fully-loaded revolver and laid it on the table.

THE END.

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CHAPTER 1.

A Halt by the Wayside.

"HALT!" Signor Ricardo poked his head out of the little window of his caravan, and howled out the word at the top of his naturally powerful voice.

"Halt!"

Ricardo's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome was on the march, with the caravan of the signor himself at the head of the long line of waggons, caravans, and carts which were necessary to transport all the impedimenta incidental to a travelling circus.

At the signor's command the long procession clattered to a halt, the word being passed along to the end of the line.

A buzz of voices immediately arose.

The circus-folk had been expecting the order to halt for some little time now, and all knew what it meant.

All day the circus had been on the road, on their way to the town of Porthampton, where the signor had arranged to take up his pitch next.

It was now about seven o'clock in the evening, and the last town before Porthampton—Woolminster—had just been left behind. The procession had wound slowly through its narrow, brilliantly-lighted streets, without any halts save those necessitated by the town traffic, and now out on the open road again, had at last stopped for the purpose of taking a much-needed rest and the evening meal.

The signor had hurried on all day, making but very brief halts by the wayside, in order to take up his pitch at Porthampton in good time.

But misfortune had dogged him all the way.

First the big traction-engine which pulled a train of huge waggons containing some of the heaviest of the baggage, had broken down, and there had been a long wait while all the hands turned to and helped the engineer to put things right.

Next, two of the horse-drawn waggons got their wheels interlocked somehow, and in spite of the most vigorous "nigger-driving," as the circus clown elegantly expressed it, on the part of the signor, a valuable half-hour was wasted in freeing them. The passage through Woolminster, too, had taken a long time, so that even now that he had at last called a halt, the signor did not intend to make it a long one. The spot had been well chosen for a wayside rest.

The road was broad and straight, with a deep border of grass on either side, upon which the line of waggons was partially drawn up. Also, and it is possible the astute signor took this fact into consideration in choosing the spot, there was a cosy-looking inn of fair size lying a little back from the road up a side lane, just about opposite to where the signor had pulled up his own caravan.

The signor glanced at the cosy red windows of the inn with

much satisfaction, as he swung down from the steps of his caravan.

The clatter of pots and pans, and the strong smell of savoury cooking which came from the long line of caravans stretching down the road, and the clouds of smoke which rolled from every one of the little chimneys, went to show that the circus company and baggage hands lost no time in getting to work on the preparation of their evening meal.

The champing of many pairs of equine jaws, muffled by as many well-filled nosebags, showed also that the horses had not been neglected.

The signor took all this in, familiar as all the sights and sounds were to him, as he made his way from his caravan to the one immediately following it. This was occupied by the signor's worthy wife, together with his daughter, known to the circus-going public as Isabella, Queen of the Ring.

Signor Ricardo mounted the little flight of steps leading up to the door of the second caravan, and knocked softly.

"Hallo, there! May I come in?"

"Come in, Dick!"

The signor opened the door, and looked in without actually entering. He gave the occupants of the cosily-fitted caravan a cheery nod.

"Getting on all right, Matilda, my lass?"

"Quite, Dick, my dear, thank you!"

"And you, Puss?"

"We are very comfortable, thanks, signor," answered Isabella, with a smile. "How long are you stopping here?"

"Not long, my dear; we must be on our pitch at Porthampton, by nine o'clock, or else we shall lose it. And Porthampton's eight miles if it's a foot. What!"

Signora Ricardo sighed softly.

"I shall be glad when we get there, sha'n't you, Dick? We've come a long way to-day."

"Yes, we have, my dear. We shall all be glad to get there. But I am just going to run over to that inn over there for a snack. Are you coming? What!"

Signora Ricardo smiled.

"No, thanks, Dick, we're very comfortable here, aren't we, Isa?"

"Perfectly!" replied Isabella contentedly.

The signor gave a jovial laugh.

"That's good, then. What! I'll buzz off now. Will look in again later! Ta-ta!"

And he hopped down the steps of the caravan and made his way over towards the Fox Inn without further parley.

There he was quickly served with an excellent dinner, after which he made his way into the coffee-room, in a very contented state of mind.

The first people he saw as he entered the room were two members of his own circus company—Herr Dummkopf, the

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German owner and trainer of the circus tigers, and "Count" Bitoffski, the monkey trainer, who was commonly supposed to be of Russian extraction.

The two were sitting over cups of coffee, chatting affably, and with a great deal of gesticulation, in very broken English.

The signor's quick eye noted at once that Herr Dummkopf, who was not noted for particularly temperate habits, seemed to be gesticulating the most—a fact which was perhaps accounted for partly by the presence by his coffee-cup of a small glass, which looked as if it might have contained a liqueur.

"Ach! Signor Ricardo, welcome!" he exclaimed warmly, as the signor entered the coffee-room.

"Ze signor! Ah, coom in, and zit wiz us!" added the count, with equal heartiness.

The signor grinned slightly as he pulled up a chair next to the two foreigners. The two were always amusing apart, but together, as Mr. Nutts, the clown, frequently remarked, they were "as good as a play."

"Tat you trinks with me, signor!" exclaimed Herr Dummkopf hospitably. "Here, Kellner!"

He beckoned to the innkeeper, who was watching the three with a curious expression. The man came forward slowly.

"Vat trink you, signor?"

But here Count Bitoffski, not to be outdone in politeness, interposed.

"Zat you trinks wiz me! Vat vill you haf?"

The signor laughed.

"Hold on! I can't drink with both of you at once, you know! I'll just have a cup of coffee—what!"

The landlord was retiring to fulfil the signor's order, when Herr Dummkopf bawled after him:

"Tat you brings mein cognac, ain't it?"

The signor looked at the Herr disapprovingly.

"Look here, Dummy, stow it!"

"Ach, I am dursty mit meinsel!"

"How many goes have you had already?"

"Ach, vun or two!"

The signor frowned.

Herr Dummkopf was one of the best-hearted fellows in the world, but he was unfortunately a slave to drink.

"You've had enough, Dummy, you ass!"

"Ach, tat is not so! I am dursty mit meinsel, I say!"

"That may be, but you've had enough, hasn't he, count? What!"

Count Bitoffski grinned.

"The Herr is vat you call merry, is it not?"

"Ach, I am ver' comfortable! I tinks tat I stop here all night!"

"You 'tinks' that, do you, you fat Dutchman?" shouted the signor, aroused by the German's calm proposition.

"Well, I 'tinks' you're mistaken. We are going to start in ten minutes. What!"

"I tinks I comes on to-morrow, after!"

"I tell you, you can't stop here! We must push on immediately!" shouted the signor excitedly.

The innkeeper had re-entered the room with the refreshments meanwhile, and he was just putting the coffee down by the signor's side, his face still wearing the curious expression, as if he were intensely anxious not to miss a word of the conversation, when, at the signor's last words, he gave a violent start.

There was a terrific yell from Herr Dummkopf.

"Ach, Himmel! Mein gootness!"

The unfortunate German had received the whole of the brandy which he had ordered down the back of his neck.

In his unaccountable agitation, the innkeeper had tilted the tray he was holding just over the Herr's head, and the glass of brandy had emptied itself neatly down the German's neck.

"Ach! Ow! I am vet! Gerool!"

The Herr sprang up in a state of wild excitement, and the innkeeper backed away hastily.

"I—I'm very sus-sorry, sir! I—I—"

"Peast! Prute! Pounder!"

The enraged German shook his fist at the dismayed host, and pranced towards him like an angry bear, with drops of spirit dropping from his shaggy black hair.

The signor sat back in his chair and grinned.

"Stow it, Dummy, it was an accident!"

"Ach, I am vet down te pack of mein neck, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha! I should say you were!"

"Donner und blitzen! Der man is vun glumy idiot!"

"Ha, ha! Sit down!"

But the Herr was becoming more and more excited.

He pranced up to the alarmed innkeeper, making weird and wonderful passes in the air with his fists.

"I tinks tat I licks de glumy pounder, ain't it?" he exclaimed violently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"HIS LAST MATCH!"

The signor gasped with merriment at the spectacle the excited German presented. Count Bitoffski chuckled, too.

"He he, he! It is ver' vunny!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the innkeeper did not seem to think it a joke. He seemed, the signor thought, unaccountably alarmed, in fact, and beat a hurried retreat out of the coffee-room, banging the door to after him.

The German bounced across the room and wrenched open the door, but the passage outside was empty.

The innkeeper must have skipped away with the utmost celerity, once he was the other side of the door.

Herr Dummkopf shook his fist down the empty passage.

"Prute, come out! I tinks tat I trashes you, ain't it?" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the signor.

"Peast, come out!"

"Ha, ha! Chuck it, Dummy!"

"Pah! Coward! Pounder! I tinks I gif you a hiding mit meinsel, after!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on and sit down, Dummy! You've put mine host to flight for the evening, I guess! What!" chuckled the signor.

The German closed the door with a grunt, still looking decidedly warlike.

"Ach, I tinks te pounder is vun coward, ain't it?"

"He, he! He is ze poltroon, is it not?"

"Ha, ha! That's it!" said the signor, with a grin, turning to his coffee. "But come on now, and sit down again, Dummy! We shall have to be going in about five minutes."

"Ach, but where is meif trink? Tat pounder of a landlord has spilled him all!"

"Well, I doubt if you will get him in here again now," grinned the signor. "He looked frightened half out of his wits about something."

"Himmel! Put I am dursty mit meinsel, ain't it?"

"I dare say it is; but you should not have got so excited, and frightened the chap away."

"Perhaps he come ven you call heem!" suggested the count.

"I don't think," murmured the signor, under his breath.

"Ach! I am more durstier tan efer before, I tinks!" exclaimed Herr Dummkopf, with feeling. "Where is ten te pounder? Hi, there! Come out!"

"Ha, ha! Go it, Dummy!"

"Come here! I vant vun trink!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Pounder, come here!"

But Herr Dummkopf shouted in vain. The "pounder" was evidently understudying the celebrated Brer Fox, and lying low.

CHAPTER 2.

Foreign Spies.

M R. WILLIAM HIGGINS, landlord of the Fox Inn a mile outside of Woolminster, on the Portsmouth Road, was a man with a vivid imagination, and a great reader in his spare time, of which he had a good deal, of literature of the sensational type.

He was also an eager reader of the local newspapers, and consequently he knew all about the disquieting rumours of foreign spies, sent to make plans of the barracks and fortifications of Woolminster, which had been very rife of late in the garrison town.

He had made a point of entering into conversation with every soldier he met, and so had learned that every effort was being secretly made by the police and the military to arrest the said spies, and that all foreigners whatsoever should be looked on for the present, at least, with the greatest suspicion by all patriotic Britons.

Consequently, he had looked askance at Herr Dummkopf and Count Bitoffski directly they had entered his door, and had determined to keep them under the strictest surveillance all the time they remained under his hospitable roof.

When a third gentleman, with a high-sounding foreign name joined the two, the worthy landlord's suspicions were increased tenfold, and he kept his ears open wide to every word of their conversation, ready to pounce on the first unguarded sentence which might betray to his eager mind the slightest indication of their nefarious work.

The signor's mention of the impossibility of the three staying at the inn for the night, and the necessity for starting off again very shortly, was construed by him into certain corroboration of his suspicions.

The alarming behaviour of the excited German was the last straw. On leaving the coffee-room, with Herr Dummkopf in pursuit, Bill Higgins had fled along the passage like a deer, in spite of his somewhat corpulent figure, and had burst into the public bar, where the potboy was

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washing beer-mugs, like a hurricane. The bar happened to be empty for the moment, and John, who was dezing over his work, experienced a severe shock to his system at the sudden entrance of his master.

"Why! What!" he gasped.

But Mr. Higgins cut him short.

"Quick, John, get your bike and scoot off into Woolminster and get the police—two or three of 'em! Quick, man! Run!"

"The—p'lice!"

John's eyes fairly bulged from his head.

"Yes, the police, man!" almost hissed the landlord, sinking his voice to a hoarse whisper. "Quick, or you'll be too late!"

John's blood ran cold at his master's tone.

Visions of wholesale murders with red-handed murderers, with revolver-bulged pockets, flashed through his none too quick-working mind, and his hair fairly rose on his head.

"W-w-w-why, w-what—" he stammered.

"Spies!"

Bill Higgins hissed out the words in such a tragic tone that the beer-jug he was wiping fell from John's nerveless fingers and splintered on the floor with a crash.

"S-s-spies!"

"Yes, foreign spies! Three of 'em in the coffee-room! I've heard 'em talking, and I know all about it now! Quick! Get the police!"

"R-right; but—"

"Quick, man! They'll be gone in a minute! I'll try and keep 'em here till you come back!"

John stayed to parley no more.

With his head in a whirl, he dashed round to the stable-yard, dragged out his bicycle, and pedalled down the lane in the direction away from the main road, where the caravans were lined up, the lane being a short cut into Woolminster.

Meantime, the worthy Mr. Higgins, in a state of wild, though suppressed, excitement, hastened back towards the coffee-room, whence the voice of Herr Dummkopf was still audible, howling out for a "trink."

The landlord, with a wildly-beating heart, opened the door cautiously, and looked in.

"Did you call, sir?"

Herr Dummkopf gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Ach! Goot! Ja, ja! I vos called you fery loud. Bring me vun trink—vhiskey this time. I am dursty mit meinself, before!"

Signor Ricardo looked at his watch with a grunt.

"We're late already. I shall have to send someone on ahead, I think, to fix up about the pitch. This has got to be your last drink, Dummy."

"Ach! Tat you go on mit yourself and leaves me and Bitoffski here!"

The signor snorted.

"Yes, I don't think! Why, you'd be here all night, you blessed old whisky-swilling Dutchman! Five minutes more, then out you both come!"

The signor knew the Herr too well to leave him and the count alone in the Fox. He felt very thankful that he had accidentally discovered them there as it was.

Herr Dummkopf spread out his hands, and shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of protest.

"Tat we comes on vun fery little time after, ain't it?" he said.

"No, it ain't, and that's flat!" growled the signor.

"Where's that villain of a landlord?"

Mr. Higgins was not hurrying himself, on purpose. He meant to detain the three spies until the police could have time to arrive, and while he was puzzling his brains about how to bring this about, he did not find it necessary to hasten much over the task in hand.

He dared not linger too long, however, and inspiration proving elusive to his somewhat dull brain, he was forced to return to the coffee-room without a definite scheme in his head.

But as it happened, he might have spared his brain all effort.

For just as the signor was exhorting the big German to "drink up and come along," there was a rush of feet in the passage, the door of the coffee-room was burst violently open, and John, the potboy, dashed into the room, closely followed by, not the police, but a burly sergeant of dragoons and four troopers.

Mr. Higgins was almost as surprised as the three circus men at this unexpected apparition, but he quickly recovered.

"This way!" he shouted excitedly. "You're just in time! Seize 'em!"

The sergeant, who, like most of his garrison, knew the landlord well, stepped forward quickly, his eyes blazing with excitement, as he took in the obviously foreign appearances of the signor and his companions.

"What's this, Bill Higgins? Are these the—"

"Spies!" shouted Bill. "Furrin spies, that's what they are! Seize 'em!"

The signor and his two companions gazed open-mouthed at the excited landlord, unable for the moment to grasp the situation. The sergeant turned to his men, who were all looking eager and excited.

"You're sure of what you're saying, Bill?"

"Certain sure!"

"Then it was right what John told me?"

"Pufflicky, sergeant! Seize 'em, quick! They was just going to bolt."

All his doubts thus set at rest, the sergeant gave the order sharply:

"Seize 'em, men! And look out for knives!"

If Mr. William Higgins had stopped to ask what exactly it was that John, the potboy, had told the sergeant, he would not have been so ready to corroborate it.

John was in such a state of excitement when he had run into the dragoon picket, only a couple of hundred of yards or so down the lane, that he had made some of the most amazing statements in his anxiety to enlist their aid.

"Ere! 'Elp! Quick! Coom at once!" he had gasped. "Ther's a hull crowd o' furrin spi s up to the Fox. Master's keeping of 'em till 'ee coom! Saw 'em looking at plans of the fortifications, 'e did, and 'eared 'em talkin'! Quick!"

The sergeant, who had special orders to be on the look-out for suspicious-looking foreigners, had followed him without hesitation, and, during the short journey back to the inn, John, in high feather at being the bearer of such important tidings, had drawn on his imagination freely, in his desire to supply further sensational details.

CHAPTER 3.

Arrested.

AT the order "Seize 'em," the four dragoon troopers advanced with alacrity, and grasped the three unfortunate circus-folk with no gentle hands.

At the first touch on his arm, the signor had awakened to the true position of affairs.

And then the fireworks began, as Bill Higgins afterwards expressed it.

"You—you scoundrels!" howled the signor. "Keep off, will you? What are you doing, you fools?"

"Come on, none o' that, now!" said one of the two burly dragoons, who were devoting their attention exclusively to him, leaving Herr Dummkopf and Count Bitoffski to the other two. "Stow it, or you'll git hurt!"

"You ruffians!" yelled the signor, struggling frantically, and catching one of his would-be captors a terrific crack on the nose. "Leggo! Lemme alone!"

"Come on!"

He was seized roughly, and dragged struggling to the door.

"I tell you it's all a mistake!" he howled. "That fool of an innkeeper is mad!"

"Come on, and stow that!"

"I'm no more spy than you are, I tell you!"

"Rats!"

"You—you fools, I'm Signor Ricardo, of—"

"We know all about that! Come on!"

"You—you—"

"Come on, will yer?"

The signor resisted in vain.

In the hands of the burly dragoons he was as helpless as a child.

Herr Dummkopf and Count Bitoffski protested no less vigorously to the rough treatment to which they were being subjected.

"Peasts! Pounders! Keep off, ain't it?" shouted the Herr, waving his arms about like the sails of a windmill. "Keep off, or I biffs you!"

"Keep back, or I giffs you te hard blow!" gasped the count, doubling his fists and putting himself in an attitude of defence which would have made a boxer weep. "Keep away!"

"Ach! Take that, ain't it?"

"Poltroon, I giffs you a plov of fist!"

The two excitable foreigners landed out right and left, but with more vigour than science.

Most of their blows wasted themselves on the empty air, but one or two smothered yells from their assailants showed that not quite all of them were of none effect. But the unscientific defence of the two foreigners was not likely to check the two burly dragoons for more than a few seconds. The cavalymen went in with a rush, and in less time than it takes to tell, the unfortunate Herr and count were being hustled shrieking and gesticulating out of the inn into the yard, where the signor had already been dragged.

The latter was positively stuttering with impotent fury.

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while the sergeant was regarding him in the grasp of the two big dragoons, with a look of stern authority.

"Stow all that!" he said severely, as the signor grew almost incoherent in his protest. "You're accused o' bein' a foreign spy, and— What's all that? Not a spy? Ah, so you've said before; but we'll see about that when we get you before the colonel! Not foreign? H'm, well, I admit you don't talk foreign-like. What did you say your name was?"

The signor hesitated.

His real name was Dick Richards, but for show purposes he had altered it to Signor Ricardo, and to be addressed by any other name made him furious.

He chose to be Signor Ricardo, he was wont to say, and Signor Ricardo he was going to be.

In this case, he knew it would be wiser to acknowledge his own plain British name, but his stubborn pride and obstinacy stepped in in defiance of common-sense.

"My name's Ricardo!" he shouted violently. "And I say you've no right to touch me, you blockheaded lout of a military lobster!"

The sergeant laughed grimly. The signor was hardly tactful for a man pleading for release.

"Ricardo—eh? Sounds English, I must say! Perhaps you'll say your friends here ain't foreigners either?"

The sergeant indicated the now silent and sullen Herr and count with a wave of his hand, an expression of intense sarcasm on his rugged face.

At the reference to themselves, the two unfortunate foreigners broke out again into violent protests and abuse.

"Feast!" howled Herr Dummkopf. "Release me instantly, at vunce, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha! No, it ain't!" grinned the sergeant.

"Pounder! Schwein-hupf!"

"Ah, poltroon! Let me that I go!" claimed in the count shrilly. "It 'ees that I have you locked up eef you do not!"

"Locked up, eh? It isn't me that'll be locked up, and so I tell you!" said the sergeant, with a grim laugh. "Williams, take the horses on at a walk!"

The trooper mounted one of the horses, and leading the others, two on either side, walked them out of the yard, bestowing a wink in passing on the grinning John, and turning down the lane in the direction of Woolminster, that is, of course, away from the main road.

"Now, you others, march after the horses! March!"

The other troopers, each gripping a prisoner by the arm, stepped smartly forward.

The signor tried to wrench his arm away from his captor.

"I protest!" he shouted violently. "This is an outrage!"

"Silence!"

"I tell you, I must get on—"

The sergeant gave a bellow.

"Quick march! Follow the horses, and if the prisoners give any trouble, draw your swords!"

The three troopers hustled their prisoners out of the yard, and down the road after the horses, and the signor gave up attempting to protest, in rage and despair.

"You'd better come along with us, Bill," said the sergeant to the landlord, as the three troopers and their prisoners turned out of the gate. "We shall want you to give evidence before the colonel, you know."

Bill Higgins looked a little blue.

He was beginning to feel a little nervous now at the responsibility he had taken on himself.

An awful thought came to him, making him feel a shaky sensation in the region of his knees.

Suppose he had made a ghastly mistake, and the men were not foreign spies at all.

"I—I—" he stammered.

The sergeant looked at him quickly.

"Eh?"

"I—I— Do you think I need come, sergeant?"

"Why?"

The sergeant felt a shaky feeling at the knees himself.

"You—you see—"

"Do you mean to say, Bill Higgins, that you aren't sure of your ground?" almost shrieked the dragoon.

"You—you see—"

"Why, man alive—"

"Of course, I—"

"Great Scott!"

Bill Higgins pulled himself together.

After all there could be no doubt about it—none whatever. Why should these three men, foreigners, be in such a hurry to get away if they weren't spies?

He began to recover his assurance.

"Why, of course, I'm sure of my ground, sergeant," he said boldly. "You don't think I would make an accusation like that unless I was certain, do yer?"

"I hope not," said the sergeant, in rather a grim tone, but obviously relieved. "I hope not, Bill, I'm sure!"

"Of course not, sergeant! And if you'll wait half a mo'—"

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while I get my 'at, I'll come right along with you now to the colonel."

"Right."

The sergeant and Bill Higgins tramped along into Woolminster behind the prisoners and their escort—Bill unsuccessfully trying to persuade himself that his inward trepidations, as the interview with the colonel got nearer and nearer were without foundation.

Into the big, gloomy barracks marched the procession, eyed curiously by everyone who met it, and straight to Colonel Travers, of the Dragoons, did the sergeant convey his precious prisoners.

Colonel Travers, a fine, grey-moustached officer, with a stern face, but humorously twinkling eyes, listened to the sergeant's tale with an immovable countenance, asking a few sharp questions here and there, and refraining from all comment.

Bill Higgins was examined next, and before the stern eye and mercilessly-pointed questions of the colonel, the worthy landlord of the Fox Inn made a very poor show indeed. He stammered and stuttered, floundered and corrected himself again and again to the sergeant's intense dismay, until at last the colonel cut him short with a curt:

"That will do, Higgins!"

Then at last came the turn of Signor Ricardo.

The signor had hard work to restrain the interruptions of Herr Dummkopf and Count Bitoffski, who wished to corroborate, with excited gesticulations and exclamations, every word he said, but he told his tale without a word of interruption from the colonel, whose smile only grew a little broader as the signor proceeded.

When the circus master had finished, Colonel Travers looked up with a face that was practically expressionless.

"Thank you, signor," he said quietly. "I do not think we need inquire further into the matter. Higgins, you are a crass fool—a fool of the first water—whose hopeless stupidity—I might almost say idiocy!—is only equalled by your unparalleled audacity in coming to me with such a cock-and-bull story as this. Get out, before I kick you out!"

The last words were spoken with a sudden energy, and the colonel half rose in his chair.

Bill Higgins gave one prolonged gasp, and bolted for his life.

The colonel sat down with a twinkle in his eye.

But the twinkle was quite absent when he turned to the sergeant, who seemed petrified by the turn events had taken.

"As for you, sergeant, you can go, too. I shall have something to say to you later."

The sergeant saluted and retired as one in a dream.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, Colonel Travers leaned back in his chair and roared with laughter for a full minute—laughter which was so infectious that the signor and his two companions had perforce to join in it.

"Ha, ha! Excuse me, but this affair is too absurd for words!" gazed the colonel at last, wiping the tears from his eyes. "What a pair of hopeless fools those chaps were! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, colonel, I agree with you," said the signor; "but in the meantime I am left in the dickens of a hole. My circus is waiting for me on the road, and I shall be much too late in at Portsmouth to take up my pitch. I am absolutely stranded! What?"

"Ach! Tat is so, pefore!" assented Herr Dummkopf.

The colonel became serious in a moment.

"My dear signor, I cannot say how sorry I am that this has happened," he said earnestly. "It is indeed a serious matter. But stay—I have it!"

"What's that, sir?"

"Bring your circus back here again, and pitch it in the barrack square! I'll make it all right for you, and some of the men can help you fix the things up. What do you say?"

"Camp in the barrack square, sir?"

"Yes. Why not? I insist, my dear signor."

"But—but—"

"I won't hear of any objections. You can give a performance there to-morrow, and I will send the whole regiment, if you're room enough."

"You're too good, sir."

"Not at all. You have been grossly wronged and insulted. I am only too glad to be of service to you. Then you'll come?"

The signor held out his hand, which the colonel grasped and shook heartily.

"You're a gentleman, colonel. What? Yes, I'll come!"

(Next Thursday, "FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE," a splendid, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford; and "DEEP SEA GOLD," a thrilling tale of adventure beneath the sea, by Reginald Wray. Order in advance. Price one penny as usual.)

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The Opening Chapters of "DEEP SEA GOLD," specially re-written for this number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY.

Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde, chums of Weltsa College, are bathing in the sea early one morning, when they are suddenly seized by enormous octopus-like tentacles and dragged swiftly down beneath the surface of the water.

They are pulled aboard a submarine motor-car, and are soon introduced to Captain Flame, the captain of the Octopus, as the strange craft is named.

The crew consists entirely of boys, with whom Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are soon on good terms.

The chums learn that Captain Flame is bound for the Pacific with the express intention of searching for Dick Dauntless's millionaire father, who was a friend of his, and whose yacht the Morning Star, has long been reported missing.

They make for that dreaded mass of floating weeds known as the Sargasso Sea, and there, stuck fast in the midst of the weeds, they find both the Morning Star and the tug that had been sent out to aid her. While investigating, the Octopus is attacked by a body of Tankas—huge men who dwell in the crater of an extinct volcano. They defeat these, but have to make for an island where the repairs to the submarine can be properly attended to. Dick Dauntless and Jack Orde are sent to the Island of Rest for chemicals, but on arriving at their destination, they find that the prisoners who are kept on an adjoining island, the Island of Lost Hopes, have rebelled. The boys escape with the chemicals, but when they arrive at the island on which the Octopus was grounded, they find it buried beneath a mass of lava. The two boys discover an underground world, and while walking through a forest in this strange land, are attacked by gorillas. One throws itself at Jack Orde, but Dick Dauntless, ever on the alert, shoots it.

(Now go on with the story.)

Dick Dauntless Finds His Father.

A wild cry of terror, anger, and horror burst from the slain creature's companions; then, as Jack Orde in turn discharged his rifle, they fled in all directions, terrified by this strange death which had stricken down one of their number.

The boys glanced at their fallen foe, then turned from him with horror and loathing, so human, and, at the same time, so beast-like, was he.

At another time they had climbed into the branches of a tree to allow a body of troops, guarding sledges drawn by the fishermen, to pass, when they were deafened by a fearful drumming on the ground behind them.

In a moment the troops were halted. The spearmen gathered around the convoy. The foremost rank knelt, and the rest stood four deep behind their comrades, their spearheads pointing threateningly outwards.

Barely had the boys ceased to admire the precision with which this movement was executed, ere a huge form crashed through the undergrowth.

Its body was covered with long, red hair, its trunk was short and thick, and its ivory tusks curled upwards until it almost reached its head, and Dick recognised it as a mammoth, the largest beast that ever lived.

Trumpeting angrily, the brute hurled itself upon the soldiers, crushing them beneath its enormous feet, and making a lane through their closely-packed ranks as an iron-clad would through a fleet of pleasure craft.

But those and many similar incidents became of almost hourly occurrence, and the boys managed to pursue their journey unperceived, until at length they paused on the brow of a hill, and looked down in wonder upon a large, walled-in city.

A city of palaces it seemed from the distance, but a city from whence there could be no escape once they passed through its enormous gates, for soldiers paced its high walls, every entrance had its guard of gigantic warriors.

Beyond the city lay a well-tilled plain dotted with numberless villages.

From the city of palaces a road, lined on either side by

similar statues to those which had guarded the stairway by which they had entered this strange land, led to a magnificent temple on the edge of a black, forbidding chasm.

As the jungle ran in this direction the boys worked their way towards it.

Creeping to the edge of the chasm they looked down, to see beneath them a seething, foaming stretch of water, which seemed to come from the very bowels of the earth.

As the boys glanced wonderingly at the constantly-moving waters, Dick Dauntless's attention was attracted to a strangely-shaped rock immediately beneath the temple wall, which overhung the pool.

He was about to call Jack Orde's attention to it, when, to his amazement, the rock moved, and a fearful head protruded from what he now saw were the folds of an enormous serpent.

As the repulsive head rose clear of the water it displayed a red mane, reaching a dozen feet down its enormous body.

Fascinated with horror, the boys watched the serpent rear on end, its huge nostrils opening and closing.

Suddenly it seemed to locate the spot where the boys were crouched, and it threw back its head as though in the act of striking.

They would probably have fled headlong on to the road leading from the city, but just as they were about to burst upon the undergrowth, a blare of trumpets reached their ears, and they saw a magnificent procession emerge from the city gates and turn towards the temple.

First came a dozen heralds, blowing long golden trumpets, then a guard of warriors, twelve deep, surrounding a richly-moulded litter of gold, in which was seated a tall form shrouded from head to foot in a blood-red cloak.

At first the boys deemed the one on the litter some important chief, or priest, but as it passed by, they saw that which caused their hearts to beat rapidly in their bosoms.

The naked arms of the cloaked figure, which, being chained to the side of the gilded seat, were exposed to view, were as white as their own.

So excited were the boys by this discovery, that they scarcely glanced at a huge mammoth, its shaggy frame covered with rich trappings, and bearing on its broad back a howdah, glistening with precious stones, in which was seated the chief, whom they had last seen a prisoner in the Octopus.

He was clad in rich embroidered robes, and crowned with a sparkling diadem.

Behind the king came a body of white-robed priests, headed by the same grey-bearded figure Dick had seen once before on Crater Island.

As the procession neared the temple, the blowing of trumpets ceased, the soldiers wheeled to right and left, holding up their spears in salute as the litter bearing the red-cloaked figure, the king, and the priests, entered the building.

"What does it mean, Dick? Who was the unfortunate man hidden beneath the red cloak?" whispered Jack Orde as the gates of the temple clanged to behind the priests.

Dick Dauntless shuddered.

"It is horrible—horrible!" he muttered.

"What is horrible? What do you mean, Dick?"

"Don't you see, Jack, what those brutes are about?" asked Dick, in hoarse tones. "The man in the litter is to be sacrificed to that loathsome creature in the pit! And, Jack, I may be wrong, but as my eyes fell upon the litter something seemed to tell me that the prisoner was my father!"

Then ere Orde could reply, he wheeled round, his face grim with a sudden determination, and retraced his steps to the spot from whence they had beheld the serpent.

Glancing down the precipice, the boys saw the serpent sped moving swiftly backwards and forwards.

Dick looked to his left, and noted a spot where a jutting promontory promised a full view of the temple.

Beckoning Jack to follow, he plunged once more into the jungle, to find himself a few minutes later on the jutting point he had before noted, the trees and rank-growing vegetation upon which would, he hoped, screen them from view.

Eagerly he looked towards the temple.

Filling the air with a low, solemn chant, the priests marched on to the platform.

Immediately behind their king came three men, two of whom were sword-armed priests, the third the white-bearded figure Dick had seen in Crater Island.

Between them walked the man in the red cloak.

Leading their victim to the edge of the platform, the priests stood aside, raising the red cloak from off their victim.

The rifle dropped from Dick Dauntless's hand. His worst fears were realised. The doomed man was his father!

(Owing to great pressure of space, this week's instalment of "DEEP SEA GOLD" has had to be considerably shortened. Next Thursday, however, there will be the usual long instalment.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 197.

A SPECIAL STORY "FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE!" NEXT WEEK.

A Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD. ORDER EARLY!

OUR NEW WEEKLY FEATURE

**To All My Chums.**

Once more the cycle of the seasons has revolved, and the most festive time of all the year is at hand. The time for mirth and jollity, happiness and good fellowship, and last but not least, the time for Double Numbers.

Following the example of last year, **THE GEM** Grand Double Number appears in good time, and, as I am confident my readers and chums will agree, in better form than ever. By the time you read these few lines from your Editor's pen, however, you will no doubt have formed an opinion as to this for yourselves, and I will only therefore record my sincere and earnest hope that this opinion will be an enthusiastically favourable one. Also I will take this opportunity, early as it is, of wishing every one of my readers

A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS

and

A BRIGHT AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.**Next Week's Story.**

Next Thursday's number of **THE GEM** Library will be of the usual size and price, and will contain a magnificent, complete story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled

"FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE."

by Martin Clifford. This is a school story of a type that you will thoroughly appreciate, and in which Martin Clifford can be said with truth to excel himself. You will do well to make sure of not missing

"FOR HIS SCHOOL'S SAKE,"

by ordering your copy of next week's **GEM** Library **WELL IN ADVANCE.**

Easy Tricks for Christmas.

This is a very simple experiment which is very perplexing to those who have never attempted it. Procure a small tapering-glass, the largest diameter of which is just larger than the diameter of a five-shilling piece. Place a sixpence in the bottom of the glass, and the larger coin above it. Then, with your lips a few inches from the rim of the glass, blow downwards obliquely, but smartly, upon the edge of the five-shilling piece within the glass. The force of air will turn the larger coin upon its own axis, and, at the same time, will force the smaller coin right out of the glass.

Mind-Reading.

Allow your confederate to leave the room, while one of the company gives you a word for him to find out. Then call him in, and talk to him on any subject you can think of, acquainting him with each letter of the chosen word by beginning your sentences with them in rotation, except vowels, when a rap on the floor signifies the first vowel, two raps the second, and so on.

A boy with a glib tongue can mystify the whole audience by his cleverness.

Some Things You Cannot Do.

You cannot stand rigidly still for five minutes if you are blindfolded.

You cannot stand at the side of a room with both your feet touching the wainscoting lengthwise.

You cannot crush an egg placed lengthwise between your hands—that is, if the egg is sound, and has an ordinary shell.

You cannot get out of a chair without bending your body forward, or putting your feet underneath it—that is, if you are sitting squarely upon the chair and not on the edge of it.

You cannot break a match if the match is laid across the nail of the middle finger, and pressed against the third and first fingers.

Birds, Beasts, and Fishes.

This is a most amusing game. The party being seated round the fire, one of them throws his or her handkerchief at another of the party, and, at the same time, asks him or her, to give the name of a bird, beast, or fish before he can count ten. Should any of those asked be unable to give an answer in the required time, or should a bird, beast, or fish be twice named the offender must then stand up and ask the question, until another player is unable to answer. After a time the fun gets fast and furious.

The Bottle and the Candle Trick.

A very simple trick, but one which will utterly baffle nine out of every ten people, is the following:

Place an empty bottle on the floor, then take a lighted candle in one hand, and an unlighted one in the other. Sit down on the bottle so that the neck points towards your feet, and cross your left leg over the right. Only one heel must rest on the floor. Then try to light one candle with the other. It is advisable to wear your very oldest clothes whilst attempting this task, or else to cover the knees with a newspaper or piece of cloth, as a considerable amount of grease is sure to be spilled.

The Fifteen Match Trick.

Take fifteen matches, bunch them so that they cannot be easily counted, lay them on the table, and tell some person that you will allow him to start the game by drawing from the pile one, two, or three matches—but no more. Tell him that you have the same privilege, and that you intend that he shall draw the last match—or, at least, that you will leave the last one for him to draw.

If you watch your turns carefully you will succeed perfectly, unless, of course, your opponent is acquainted with the system—and very few persons are.

If he should first draw one, you draw one. If his second draw should be three, then you draw one again. Observe now there are six drawn. In order to assure yourself of winning, make certain that this is the case, either at your first or second draw—get six off the board. Then there are nine remaining. The next time you draw let it make four with what he draws, leaving five still to be drawn. Now, if he draws three, you take one; if he draws two, you take two, etc. You will thus see that the last match is left for your opponent.

He will now surely want to try it again. This time you begin the drawing by taking one, as he did at first, making a remark to that effect. Whatever number he takes he cannot make the six. But should he follow your example and take but one, you still must be careful, and trust to luck and careful computation, taking only one more at your second draw, which will make three off. The chances are small that he will take the remaining three to make six off. But if he does, it is an evidence that he is "getting on," and he may possibly, but not probably, beat you.

THE EDITOR.

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TO READERS
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"THE GEM"
IN ALL PARTS
OF THE WORLD.**

The Editor.

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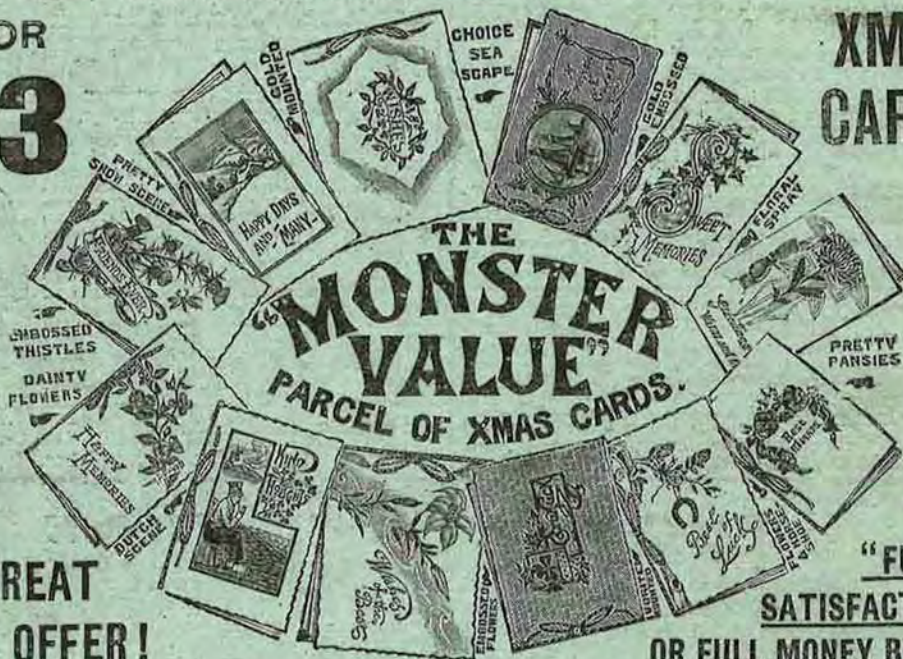
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