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"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

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- - BY - -

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Why the Music was Interrupted.

TOM MERRY laughed. Now, Tom Merry, of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, had a very pleasant laugh, which was very agreeable to hear, but certainly just then, the moment was not judiciously chosen for laughing. The other fellows were grinning, but they looked surprised when Tom Merry laughed.

There were nearly a dozen of the St. Jim's fellows present. Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, had taken the little party home to tea. Glyn's father had a house near the old school, and Glyn of the Shell frequently took a little party of juniors home. On the present occasion, there were nearly a dozen of them—Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, of the Shell, and Blake and Digby and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, and Figgins and Kerr and Wynn, the famous "Co." of the New House at St. Jim's. Tea was over, and the lights gleamed from the windows of Glyn House into the wide grounds. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing at the piano, a sheet of music in his hands, his head thrown back, and a tenor solo—or at all events a solo that was supposed to

be tenor—proceeding from his aristocratic vocal organs. Glyn's sister, Edith, was at the piano, accompanying him, and keeping pace with the tenor solo in a really wonderful way. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tenor solo was in full blast, so to speak, when Tom Merry laughed.

It was really too bad.

Of course, the fellows always grinned when D'Arcy started on a tenor solo. That was only to be expected. He was accustomed to that. But when Tom Merry laughed, the swell of St. Jim's paused in the tide of melody, and looked round with an extremely indignant expression. A sheet of music fluttered to the floor as he groped for his eyeglass, which he proceeded to jam into his eye, in order to take a scornful survey of the hero of the Shell.

"Weally Tom Mewwy—" he began warmly.

Tom Merry turned pink.

"Sorry Gussy," he exclaimed, "I—I wasn't laughing at—the tenor solo! I'm so sorry I interrupted."

"Weally—"

"It's too bad!" said Jack Blake, with a shake of the head. "I'm surprised at you, Tom Merry."

"Look here, Blake—

"There's no excuse," said Blake. "You've interrupted D'Arcy's song. Now, it will be all the longer before he gets finished. It's too bad."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rotten!" said Monty Lowther.

"If you are alludin' to my song, Lowthah—"

"Ahem!"

"I'm so sorry!" said Tom Merry penitently. "I know it's hard on you fellows—I—I mean, I know it's hard on you, Gussy—"

"I wegard you as an ass, Tom Mewwy."

Next Thursday:

"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!" AND "WINGS OF GOLD!"

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"But—but, you see, I couldn't help it. Begin again, Gussy, there's a good chap."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Figgins. "You ass!"
Miss Glyn looked round on the piano stool.

"It is really too bad to interrupt D'Arcy," she said severely. "Now, begin again, Arthur. Begin at the beginning."

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove! Where's my music?"
Bernard Glyn picked up the music and handed it to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's turned back to the first verse with an air of great dignity. Miss Glyn's slim fingers ran over the keys again. Edith Glyn was a good pianist, and, as Monty Lowther had remarked in a stage whisper, she needed to be, to accompany D'Arcy. D'Arcy had a way of bucking up and slacking down at the most unexpected moments, and accompanying him was something in the nature of an acrobatic performance.

"So sorry!" murmured Tom Merry. "I—I wasn't thinking of the song, Gussy—honour bright—it was something else—really—and I'm sorry."

Arthur Augustus bowed stiffly.

"Vewy well, Tom Mewwy, I accept your apology. But pway don't let it occur again. When I am intewwupted, it spoils the song—and I weally considah that you might pay a little attention. You do not often have the opportunity of heavin' a tenah solo fwom a Wagnah opewah weally pwoahly wendered."

"Never, in fact," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Did you speak, Lowthah?"

"Get on with the washing," said Lowther. "I mean, get on with the tenor solo. I'm so fond of these songs in Italian."

"You uttah ass! This is in German."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway shut up, deah boys! You're puttin' me out."

"Are you ready?" said Miss Glyn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"On the baw!" murmured Lowther.

"Order!" said Bernard Glyn. "Now, cut in, D'Arcy."

And D'Arcy "cut in."

Once more the tenor voice of the swell of St. Jim's rose upon the air. He was singing the song of Walter in the "Meistersinger"—Arthur Augustus was nothing if not ambitious. And the juniors grinned cheerfully to one another as he re-started after the interval, so to put it.

"Am stillen Herd,

Im Winterzeit,

Wenn Berg und Hof mir erschnit—"

It was certainly a beautiful song, but whether Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rendered it beautifully was another matter. But the juniors bore it manfully, and Tom Merry did not laugh again. Tom Merry was sitting by the French windows which were open, and, as a matter of fact, he was looking towards the shrubberies in the garden, and not at D'Arcy at all. It seemed as if something or other in the garden chained Tom Merry's attention, to the exclusion of that magnificent solo.

Outside, in the wide grounds of Glyn House, the moon was rising over the trees, and a soft light fell upon lawns and shrubberies. As Tom Merry looked from the open window, a shadow moved in the shrubberies, and he nearly laughed again. But this time he managed to subdue the expression of his inward merriment to a soft chuckle. Bernard Glyn glanced at him curiously, and came across to him.

"What's the joke?" whispered Glyn.

Tom Merry made a gesture towards the garden.

"He's there," he murmured.

"Who is?"

"Romeo, of course—Owney-owney, you know."

The words were mysterious, to anyone not in the secret. But Bernard Glyn evidently understood, for he burst into a sudden roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus broke off at once, and looked round indignantly.

"Weally, Glyn—"

"Oh, sorry!" exclaimed Glyn. "I—I—I—"

"Bernard!" said Edith Glyn gently. "It is too bad to interrupt D'Arcy in this way. It is really not the way to treat a guest, you know."

Glyn turned red.

"I—I'm sorry!" he stammered. "I—I didn't mean it; but—but Tom Merry said something funny. I—I— Do begin again, Gussy! After all, the more we get of the song, you know, the better we like it, and the first verse is—ripping."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy smiled again. That was really a very nice way of putting it, and the clouds cleared from the amateur singer's brow at once.

"Vewy well, deah boy," he said graciously, "but I weally think you might weserve your jokes for a more appropwiate occasion, Tom Mewwy."

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"Sorry!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, it's all right! I'll begin again. Would you mind turnin' back to the first page, Miss Glyn?"

"Not at all," said Edith.

And once more the swell of St. Jim's started at "Am stillen Herd."

By this time the whole of the youthful company knew that something was "on." The juniors all gathered round Tom Merry and Bernard Glyn at the window. Even old Mr. Glyn, who had been dozing in his armchair, looked a little curious, and wondered what there could be in the moonlit garden to excite so much interest among the juniors. Arthur Augustus, unconscious of everything but the Wagner solo, warbled on at full pitch.

"What is it out there?" whispered Blake.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Never mind now—quiet, or Gussy's solo will go on for ever."

"But what—"

"There he is!" murmured Bernard Glyn.

The juniors all looked from the open window.

In the moonlight, half-hidden by the shadows of the deep shrubbery, a man's figure could be seen—a figure that stood motionless, regarding the house with a steady gaze.

CHAPTER 2.

Struck Down.

TOM MERRY chuckled softly—he did not laugh this time. The juniors grinned—they understood.

Bernard Glyn seemed to be going into some inward paroxysm. He glanced at his elder sister, sitting unconscious at the piano, and then, a little uneasily, at his father on the other side of the room.

"Quiet!" he murmured. "Don't let the pater guess."

Tom Merry became grave at once.

"Right-ho! Don't look out of the window, you chaps," he murmured. "We don't want to get Romeo into a row."

"Rather not," said Figgins.

"Why don't you bring up your Housemaster to be more sensible, Figgy?" murmured Blake. "The Romeo and Juliet business is out of date."

Figgins chuckled.

Tom Merry glanced from the window again, the dim figure in the shrubbery had disappeared. He was glad of it, for old Mr. Glyn, his curiosity awakened, was coming over towards the window. Mr. Glyn glanced out into the garden, but saw nothing but the lawns and the shrubberies—merely that and nothing more.

He looked inquiringly at the juniors, but their faces were quite solemn now, they seemed to be listening to D'Arcy's tenor solo, and to be thinking of nothing else in the world.

They realised that they had come near to betraying a secret, and they were being very circumspect now, rather late in the day.

But they could hardly help grinning at the thought of that figure in the garden, watching the lighted window from the shadow of the shrubbery.

It was an open secret at St. Jim's that Mr. Wodyer, the new Housemaster of the New House, was attached to Glyn's sister.

Mr. Wodyer had lately come to St. Jim's, in the place of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, who had gone away on a long holiday.

The new Housemaster, who had also taken the position of master of the Fourth Form—Blake's Form—was very popular at St. Jim's. He was a young man to hold such a post, but he fulfilled his duties well, and he had shown that he was quite as much at home in the playing-fields as in the Form-room. A master who could kick a good goal was certain to be popular at a school like St. Jim's—and Figgins & Co. were very proud of their new Housemaster—and they contrasted him with old "Ratty," very much to Mr. Ratcliff's disadvantage.

That Mr. Arthur Wodyer was in love with the sister of Glyn of the Shell, seemed a very pretty romance to the juniors. It amused them a little; being in love was not much in their line, and they were inclined to look upon it as a sort of youthful weakness on the part of the Housemaster. The course of true love, the poet assures us, never did run smooth, and such was the case with Mr. Wodyer and Edith Glyn. For old Mr. Glyn was a millionaire, and was generally supposed to roll in money—and Arthur Wodyer, M.A., had nothing but an Oxford degree and his salary as a master at St. Jim's—and even his post there was only a temporary one. The match was, therefore, very unequal, and Mr. Glyn was not likely to give his consent to an engagement—Bernard Glyn was willing to give his, because Mr. Wodyer was a jolly good fellow and a real sport, but these qualities did not appeal to the millionaire so much as to his son.



A young man, with pale face and flashing eyes, dashed in at the door of the dining-room. He did not stop to speak. He sprang at the two ruffians like a tiger, and a crashing blow from his fist, landing under the ear, sent one of them reeling to the floor. The other, releasing Mr. Glyn, sprang to meet his new foe. (See Chapter 15.)

Mr. Wodyer, of course, had never spoken a word to the juniors on the subject. But Bernard Glyn knew all about it, and he kept his schoolfellows informed. Glyn was of opinion that Mr. Wodyer was good enough for anybody, and the other fellows agreed with him. Indeed, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had seriously suggested arguing the matter out with Glyn senior. D'Arcy had great faith in his persuasive eloquence; but the other fellows hadn't, and they had threatened him with instant slaughter if he attempted anything of the sort.

It was "rotten for Wodyer," as the juniors agreed, and they took a very kindly interest in the matter.

And Glyn had discovered that, as Mr. Wodyer could not meet Edith excepting upon very rare occasions, he had developed a habit of strolling past Glyn House and watching her window—a little way common to lovers at all periods of the world's history. Glyn often went home to see his people, as his home was so near St. Jim's, and so he had come upon Mr. Wodyer more than once doing the "Romeo act," as he humorously termed it.

Therefore, when Tom Merry saw the silent figure in the shrubbery watching the window, he had no doubt that it was Mr. Wodyer playing Romeo once more.

That was the cause of the sudden laugh which had had such disastrous effects upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's tenor solo.

Tom Merry was wishing now that he had not allowed his risible faculties free play; but he had been taken by surprise.

It was evident that Mr. Glyn was suspicious. The old gentleman was a little crusty in temper, though extremely kind-hearted, and very good to his son's chums at St. Jim's. But it was known that he was very much "down" upon an almost penniless suitor for his daughter, and if he found that Mr. Wodyer was in the habit of haunting his grounds in this Romeo-like way, it was pretty certain that there would be trouble.

Tom Merry tried to avoid the old gentleman's eye. But Mr. Glyn dropped into a chair beside him with the evident intention of speaking.

"Der ist mein Meister gewesen."

The song was over.

Arthur Augustus looked round for applause. The juniors applauded him—whether for the solo or for getting it finished they did not state.

"Oh, ripping!" said Glyn.

"Very ripping—awfully like ripping canvas—very tough canvas," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Up with you, Blake!" said Bernard Glyn. "You're going to give us the Territorial song!"

Blake rose.

"I don't mind if I do," he said modestly.

And the music of the famous Territorial song, "What's the Matter with England?" was put on the piano, and Miss Glyn's slim fingers ran over the opening chords. Blake had a brother in the Territorials, and that was his favourite song.

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"You chaps have all got to join in the chorus, you know," said Blake.

"Yaas, wathiah!"

Mr. Glyn leaned towards Tom Merry as Blake began to sing.

"You were looking at something in the garden, I think, Merry," he remarked, in a low tone, under cover of the music.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Yes, sir!" he stammered.

"Did you see someone there?"

"I—I—"

"I wish you to tell me."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Well, I—I thought I saw someone," he said reluctantly.

"Who was it?"

Tom Merry was silent.

"Please tell me who it was, Merry," said Mr. Glyn, with unmistakable firmness in his tones. "I want to know."

"Well, sir, you—you see, I couldn't possibly see his face in the dark," said Tom Merry. "I only just caught a glimpse of him."

"Who was it?"

"I couldn't possibly recognise him at that distance, sir."

"But you know who it was?"

No reply.

"You know who it was, Merry?"

"I could guess, sir."

"And whom did you guess that it was?"

"As I couldn't recognise him, sir, it might have been anybody, and so it wouldn't be fair for me to mention any names."

Mr. Glyn compressed his lips.

"Very well!" he said.

He crossed the room again to his armchair, and sat down and seemed to doze again; but Tom Merry knew that he was not dozing. The old gentleman's suspicions had been aroused, and Tom Merry's reticence had of course made them stronger. The hero of the Shell felt very much distressed; and Bernard Glyn, who had heard all that his father had said, was dismayed.

"My word," he murmured, "this is rotten! It was idiotic of Wodger to come into the grounds; when I've seen him about here before, he was in the road. It's a bit thick coming into the grounds when the pater is against him."

"Oh, chaps in love are always like that, I believe!" said Tom Merry. "You jolly well never know what they're going to do next."

Glyn nodded thoughtfully.

"I'm afraid the pater may catch him at it, and then there will be a scene," he whispered, "that would be jolly unpleasant for everybody—especially for poor old Edie. I can't get out without the pater noticing, but—but could you slip out into the garden, Tommy, and warn him off? Tell him the pater's got his eye open."

Tom Merry whistled softly.

"I—I say," he murmured, "that's rather thick. Wodger doesn't really know that we know anything about it, you know."

Glyn grinned.

"I know; but—it's better than risking having a scene—if you wouldn't mind. It was reckless of him to come into the grounds like this."

"Well, you're right. I'll go."

"Slip out while we're yelling Blake's chorus."

"All serene!"

"Chorus!" exclaimed Figgins.

The juniors' voices rose into a roar:

"What's the matter with England?"

Who cares for the foreign drum?

From counter and farm at the first alarm,

The Territorials come!"

As the chorus rang out, Tom Merry slipped quietly through the French windows into the garden. The moonlight lay dim upon the lawn and shrubbery. The Shell fellow remembered just where he had seen the dim figure, but he did not make direct for the spot. He knew that Mr. Wodger would withdraw into cover if he imagined that he was discovered, and then the warning could not be conveyed to him. Tom Merry slipped quickly along the terrace, and dived into the shrubbery at some distance from the drawing-room window. He knew the grounds of Glyn House well, and he turned into a path among the rhododendrons that would bring him behind the spot where the dim figure had been standing. He trod very cautiously now; he did not want to alarm the solitary Romeo. He paused abruptly—he had caught sight of the dim figure again. There it was, crouching in the cover of the shrubs, watching the house

with a stealthiness that seemed strangely out of keeping with the character of a Housemaster. Tom Merry felt an uneasy sensation; the man's attitude was more like that of a cracksman watching a crib he intended to crack, than of a lover looking for a glimpse of his lady. The junior came on softly and tapped the stooping figure on the shoulder.

"Mr. Wodger—"

There was a hoarse, startled cry. The figure leaped up, and in a flash a savage blow was struck, and Tom Merry staggered and fell!

There was a faint rustle in the shrubbery as the dim form fled, and Tom Merry lay stretched upon the ground, the moonlight glimmered upon his face, upturned, white, and streaked with red that oozed out from under the thick hair.

CHAPTER 3.

A Mystery.

FROM the open lighted window came the ringing chorus of the juniors. In the shrubbery all was silent. The dimly-seen watcher had fled. Tom Merry lay motionless upon the earth.

He was insensible. The minutes passed.

The lighted window in the distance was darkened for a moment by a form, as Bernard Glyn looked out anxiously, wondering what was keeping Tom Merry in the grounds so long.

It was ten minutes before the unfortunate junior moved.

Then he stirred and groaned.

Tom Merry's eyes opened, and he sat up, his hand going unconsciously to his head.

"What—what—"

His head was reeling—he stared about him blankly. The chorus in the house had died away, and there was silence. The moonlight fell coldly upon the shrubs. Slowly recollection came, and Tom Merry staggered to his feet, dizzy and sick.

What had happened?

Who had struck him that cowardly blow?

It could not have been Mr. Wodger, after all, who had been crouching there in the shrubbery; surely the Housemaster, however angry and surprised, would never have struck out in that savage manner!

But if it was not Mr. Wodger, whom had it been?

Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl.

It must have been Arthur Wodger. He had been surprised, alarmed, at being found there, and he had supposed, perhaps, that someone had been spying on him, and he had not meant to hit so hard.

That must be the explanation.

Tom Merry looked at his hand, where it had pressed his forehead and started. There was a glimmer of red upon his fingers in the moonlight.

It was blood.

He could not go back to the house in that state. He knew what amazement, what inquiries would follow.

He remembered that there was a fountain in the grounds, and he made his way slowly towards the sound of the tinkling water.

He stooped over the marble basin and dipped his handkerchief into the cool water and bathed his forehead.

"Tom Merry!"

He started and swung round, as his name was uttered. It was Bernard Glyn. The Shell fellow came up quickly, anxious and amazed.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What's the matter, Tom?"

Tom Merry wiped his wet forehead.

"Did you find him, Tom?"

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"Yes."

"But what—what happened?" panted Glyn.

Tom Merry's lips moved in a painful smile.

"He knocked me down."

"Knocked you down!" ejaculated Glyn, in blank astonishment.

"Yes."

"Was it Wodyer?"

"I suppose so."

"Good heavens!"

"Don't say anything about this in the house," muttered Tom Merry quickly. "Not a word! He must have been surprised—excited—and he couldn't have meant to hurt me like this. Don't say a word!"

Glyn stared at him blankly.

"Why, it's horrible!" he muttered. "He must have been a brute to hit you like that. It was not like old Wodyer. Are you sure it was Wodyer?"

"Who could it have been?"

"Well, that's so."

"It's all right," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "Don't say a word about it—here. I'll be all right in a minute."

"Let me bathe your forehead." There was a cut on Tom Merry's forehead under the hair, where hard knuckles had struck cruelly. It had ceased to bleed now, and Glyn wiped away the traces of it. Tom Merry was very pale, but he was himself again now.

"Better get back to the house," he said. "They will be wondering."

"It's jolly queer, Merry!"

"Yes—but come on."

Glyn nodded, and they went back to the house. Figgins was singing now, a sentimental song of a child and a rose. He was just finishing when the juniors came in, and Blake was looking at his watch.

"Time we were off, my sons," said Jack Blake. "We shall find the gates locked at St. Jim's if we don't buck up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mr. Glyn looked curiously at Tom Merry as he shook hands for good-bye. Quiet old gentleman as he was, he was very keen, and he could see that something had happened in the garden which the junior did not care to allude to. But he asked no questions. Edith Glyn seemed to be the only one who had noticed nothing. She said good-night to the juniors in her sweet, kind way, and they went down the drive in a cheerful party to the gates. It was not till they were outside the gates of Glyn House that the juniors asked questions.

"Did you see Wodyer in the garden?" asked Figgins.

"I think so."

Figgins stared.

"Don't you know?" he demanded.

Tom Merry explained.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Kerr. "It couldn't have been Wodyer."

"Impossible!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If it wasn't Wodyer, I don't know whom it could have been," said Tom Merry. "Who else could have been hanging about in the shrubberies watching the window?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"We'll see when we get back to St. Jim's," said Figgins slowly. "If it was Wodyer, we'll jolly soon find out. If he'd acted in that way, we've been mistaken in him, that's all. I thought he was a decent chap."

The juniors were very thoughtful as they walked home to St. Jim's. The matter was a puzzle. The action was utterly unlike anything that could have been expected of handsome, kind-hearted Arthur Wodyer. But if it had not been Wodyer, whom could it have been?

"There used to be another chap who was moony in the same way—a naval chap," Bernard Glyn remarked. "Edie was almost engaged to him once, but it came to an end. But that chap is at sea, and—he wouldn't act like that, anyway. I'm blessed if I can understand the thing at all."

They reached St. Jim's, and Taggles, the porter, snorted as he opened the gates for them. Taggles would have been pleased to report them for coming in so late, only he knew that they had passes out, to visit Glyn House. Figgins paused as the other fellows went in to speak to the porter.

"Has Mr. Wodyer just come in, Taggles?" he asked.

"Ow should I know?" said Taggles. "Mr. Wodyer 'as a key to the private gate, Master Figgins. 'Ow should I know?"

There was evidently no information to be had from Taggles. The juniors separated in the quadrangle, the School House fellows going over to their own house, and Figgins & Co. going to the New House. As they entered the New House, the trio stopped, and exchanged glances.

"We ought to find out if that was Wodyer," said Figgins. Kerr and Wynn nodded assent.

"I'll go to his study," said Figgins. "I've got some lines to take to him, and that will make a good reason for going."

"Good egg!"

Figgins fetched his lines down from his study, and knocked at Mr. Wodyer's door. There was a light under the door, showing that the New House master was at home.

"Come in!" called out Arthur Wodyer's cheery voice.

Figgins entered.

The young Housemaster was seated at his table, with a pen in his hand, but he looked up kindly at Figgins. Figgins gave him a very keen look. Arthur Wodyer was a handsome fellow, well-built and athletic, and as much addicted to "games" as the most sporting fellow at St. Jim's could desire. He looked the picture of health and good nature.

"I've brought my lines, sir," said Figgins awkwardly.

"Put them on the table, Figgins." Mr. Wodyer looked sharply at Figgins as the junior lingered. "Is there anything else, Figgins?"

"No—yes!" stammered Figgins.

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"That is a very curious reply, Figgins," he said. "I can see that there is something on your mind—what is it?"

Figgins flushed. He was a very bad hand at keeping a secret. Whenever there was anything on Figgins's mind it was pretty certain to be reflected in his honest, rugged face.

"We've just come home from Glyn House, sir," said Figgins.

"Yes?"

"That's all, sir."

"I hope you had a pleasant evening there, Figgins," said the Housemaster genially.

"Oh, yes, sir! Gussy sang, but it was all right otherwise."

Mr. Wodyer laughed.

"I hope all are well there?" he said casually.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Very good."

"We—we thought we saw you there, sir, that's all," blurted out Figgins, his face growing as red as a beetroot.

Mr. Wodyer knitted his brows.

"You thought you saw me there," he repeated.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Well, you were mistaken," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I was not there. I have not been out of the school since noon. But if you had seen me there, Figgins, it would have been no business of yours. It would not have been a matter for you to take any interest in at all. You must be careful, Figgins, not to take an interest in matters that do not concern you or any junior at St. Jim's. You may go."

"Ye-es, sir," stammered poor Figgins.

And he went.

CHAPTER 4.

A Very Troublesome Invalid.

TOM MERRY sat in the armchair in his study, in the Shell passage in the School House. His face was a little pale, and the cut on his forehead was bleeding again slightly. Round the broken skin a big black bruise was formed, and it hurt the junior considerably. Manners and Lowther were very sympathetic, and they were persisting in regarding him as an injured person who was not to do anything, somewhat to Tom Merry's exasperation. He had all a healthy lad's dislike of being considered an invalid. The role of "lame duck" was not agreeable to him. Manners had lighted the fire, and put the kettle on to boil, and Lowther was laying the table. The juniors had had tea at Glyn House, and a generous and ample tea it was. But they had had a walk since then, and they considered that supper was the best thing under the circumstances. They had done their preparation, and Lowther and Manners insisted upon Tom resting while they prepared the supper. Lowther cut up bread for toast, remarking that buttered toast was a jolly good thing for a fellow who was not well, a statement that elicited an indignant snort from the invalid.

"Look here, you ass!" said the invalid ungratefully. "I'm quite well. A bump on the napper is nothing to grouse about, I suppose?"

Lowther shook his head solemnly.

"It's a bad bump," he said.

"Oh, rats! I'm not made of putty!" growled Tom Merry. "I suppose I can stand a bump, even a bad bump, without making a fuss."

"Yes, we're going to make the fuss," said Manners cheerfully. "Now, don't get out of that chair, or we shall have to shove you back again!"

"Wait till I've made the toast, Lowther. It will do you good, and some nice hot tea."

"I'm all right!" howled Tom Merry.

"Yes, yes, of course," said Manners soothingly. "Only don't shout, or you'll make it worse."

"You ass!"

"Quiet, old man! Don't excite yourself, or it will begin to throb."

"It's throbbing now, you silly cuckoo!"

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"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"All the more reason why you should keep quiet."

Tom Merry settled back into his chair, and growled. His head was aching, and the bump was really throbbing very painfully. The blow had been more severe than he had thought at first.

There was a tap at the door, and Blake of the Fourth came in. Blake had a little roll in his hand, and a very serious expression upon his face.

"I've got this from Mrs. Mimms," he explained.

"What is it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Bandage!"

"Bandage, you ass!" said Tom Merry sulphurously.

"What is it for?"

"To tie up your napper!"

"Fathead!"

"Well, I must say that's grateful," said Blake.

"Ass!"

"He's like that!" explained Lowther. "He won't admit that there's anything the matter with him, and that he wants looking after. Of course, we're not going to stand any nonsense of that sort."

"I should say not," said Manners emphatically. "The silly ass is not going to have brain fever for want of a little looking after."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Now, let me bandage it up," said Blake persuasively. "I learned first aid in the Boy Scouts, you know, and I know how to shove a bandage on a busted napper. Let me—"

Tom Merry reached for the poker, and Blake stepped back hastily.

"Keep off, you chump!"

"But, I say—"

"Now, look here, Tommy," began Manners and Lowther together.

Tom Merry snorted.

"I'm not going to be bandaged up like a giddy hospital case," he roared. "I tell you I'm all right. I've had a clip on the footer-field before now as bad as this."

"A clip on the footer-field isn't so bad as a clip on the head," said Monty Lowther, who never could restrain the impulse to be humorous.

"Fathead!"

"Now, you've got to have it bound up," said Manners. "Why, there's the claret running down the side of your silly nose now."

Tom Merry dabbed at it with his handkerchief.

"It's all right now," he said.

"It isn't," said Blake. "Look here, it's rotten when a chap's studied how to give first aid to a busted napper not to give him a chance. Be reasonable."

"I'm not going to be tied up like a turkey."

"If you don't jolly well let me tie it up I'll go to Mrs. Mimms about it," said Blake determinedly. "And very likely she'll report it to Railton, and you'll have to go into the sanatorium for a couple of days. You know what beggars the Housemasters are for sending a chap into sanatorium if they have half a chance."

"Oh, go ahead!" said Tom Merry.

And Jack Blake triumphantly bound up the cut.

"Don't put it over my eye," roared the invalid. "There's nothing the matter with my eye."

"I'm not finished yet."

"Or over my ear, you ass! My ear's all right."

"Look here! Who's tying this bandage on, you or me?" demanded Blake warmly. "Just sit still, and I'll fix you up."

Tom Merry growled. Blake finished the bandaging. He was very liberal with the bandage, winding it several times about Tom Merry's head, but he spared the eye and ear. Tom Merry certainly looked a great deal more seriously damaged by the time he was bandaged, but Blake seemed satisfied.

"There!" he said. "Now you're all right. You can't say that your friends are not doing their best for you when you're laid up."

"I'm not laid up!" shrieked Tom Merry.

"Hush! Don't get excited."

"I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Quiet, old man!" said Manners soothingly.

"Yes, do take it calmly," urged Blake. "You might get brain fever, you know, if you've got any brains to get it with, or something of that sort. We're going to take proper care of you, and keep you out of sanatorium if we can. Gussy's bringing you in something nice for supper."

"Blow Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" It was the voice of the swell of St. Jim's at the door. "Weally, you know, that is wathah ungrateful, you know. But I suppose a chap who's laid up on his beam-ends would be wathah watty."

Arthur Augustus deposited a parcel on the table.

"I'm not on my beam-ends, you ass!" growled Tom Merry.

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"I'm all right. It's only these silly asses playing the giddy goat!"

"Yaas, keep your peckah up, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "It's only wight of you to make light of it, but, of course, it's the duty of your friends to look aftah you. You fellows can come in, but tread lightly."

Herries and Digby of the Fourth, looking very sympathetic, came in on tiptoe. They might have been coming into a sick chamber by their manner. Tom Merry glared at them under the ample bandage.

"What are you toddling about like that for?" he demanded. "Are you practising walking like hens on hot bricks?"

"We don't want to disturb a chap who's ill," said Herries.

"I'm not ill!"

"Hush!" said Manners.

"Fathead!"

"Is he always cross like this when he's ill?" asked Digby, looking at Manners and Lowther. "I remember Miss Priscilla Fawcett said that he was always good-tempered when he had the measles, or the mumps, or whatever it was."

"Are you going to shut up?" roared Tom Merry.

"Speak in a whisper!" said Lowther.

Tom Merry clenched his hand.

"If you chaps are looking for thick ears, you're going the right way to work!" he growled. "Is any other silly idiot coming in here to play the giddy goat?"

"Pway don't take any notice of his tantwums, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus gently. "I say, look here, Tom Mewwy! I've brought you a nice wabbit-pie."

"And some baked potatoes," said Digby.

"And a cake," said Herries.

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Bettah not talk, deah boy! It may make you fevewish!" said D'Arcy. "Now, don't move; we'll push the table up to your chair. That's wight! Make the tea, Mannahs!"

Tom Merry glowered; but the rabbit-pie was tempting, and he was hungry. He allowed himself to be helped to a generous portion. As he began his supper, there was another tap at the door, and it opened to reveal Figgins & Co., of the New House. Figgins & Co. were looking very anxious.

"Tom Merry all right?" asked Figgins.

"Yes, ass!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Oh, I say—"

"He's a little peevish, deah boys; but you must expect that of an invalid," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gently.

"I'm not an invalid, you silly ass!"

"Looks to me like the symptoms of brain-fever!" said Kerr anxiously. "I say, Merry, old man, calm yourself!"

"Fathead!"

"I've brought you an apple-pie," said Fatty Wynn, depositing a bag upon the table. "There's nothing like it, you know!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Sit down and make yourselves at home," said Monty Lowther hospitably. "Tom Merry mustn't talk much, as he's ill, but we ought to talk and cheer him up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm not ill, you silly ass!"

"Have you seen Wodyer?" asked Manners.

Figgins nodded.

"Yes. It's all right. He says that he wasn't out of the school this evening, so it couldn't have been he who gave Tommy that biff on the topknot."

"I suppose we can take his word?" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I should wufuse to doubt anybody's word, unless I knew him to be a wottah!" said D'Arcy.

"Quite right," said Figgins. "I believe him, for one. Besides, it wasn't like him to biff a chap for nothing. He's straight as a die."

"I quite agree with you, Figgy, deah boy! It was a wathah peculiah bizney, the way he came to St. Jim's, but he's all wight."

Tap!

Tom Merry sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Another of 'em, I suppose!" he growled.

"Come in!" sang out Monty Lowther.

Bernard Glyn came in, looking very serious. He glanced at Tom Merry, and his look grew more serious still as he saw the bandages.

"Just looked in to see how Merry is," he remarked.

"Pretty bad," said Lowther; "but we're looking after him."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm not bad!" shouted Tom Merry, starting up from his chair. "I'm all right! I'm not an invalid, and I'm not going to be treated like one! Now—"

"Hush!"

"Quiet!"

"Sit down!"

"Weally, deah boy——"

The juniors all gathered anxiously round Tom Merry. But Tom Merry declined to sit down. He was fed up, as he would have expressed it. He jerked a cricket-stump from a shelf.

"Buzz off, all of you!" he roared. "I'm fed up! I've had enough! I'm not going to be coddled and sympathised with! Buzz off!"

"But, I say——"

"Weally, you know——"

"Outside!"

Tom Merry brandished the cricket-stump recklessly. The juniors retreated in alarm to the door. One sweep of the stump sent tea-cups and tea-pot flying off the table, with a terrific crash to the floor.

There was a roar of remonstrance.

"Hold on!"

"Chuck it!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's fever!"

"He's got it!"

"Hold him!"

"Make him sit down!"

"Collar him!"

"Oh! Yow!"

Tom Merry, in a state of great excitement, lashed out with the stump, and the juniors had to go. They crowded into the passage in great alarm, and Tom Merry slammed the door and locked it on the inside. Then he pitched the stump into a corner and laughed.

"I say, Tommy!" came Lowther's voice through the key-hole.

"Hallo!"

"Let us in, old chap!"

"Rats!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Bai Jove!"

"But you're ill, you know!"

"I'm not ill!" yelled Tom Merry. "And if you say I'm ill again, I'll come out there and wipe up the passage with you!"

"But, I say——"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Open the door!"

"Rats!"

And Tom Merry, deaf to remonstrating voices in the passage, whipped off Blake's bandage and threw it into the fire, and then sat down at the table to finish his supper in solitary state. Nor did he unlock the study door again till it was time for the Shell to go to bed. By that time his chums had made up their minds that they weren't going to waste any more sympathetic attentions upon the invalid.

CHAPTER 5.

Giving Woddy the Tip.

THE next morning Tom Merry's bump was still very much in evidence, although he arranged his thick hair to cover it as much as possible from view. The juniors had thought a great deal about that peculiar happening at Glyn House, without being able to arrive at any solution of the mystery. They had to give it up as a puzzle, though they could not help thinking about it at times. But it seemed pretty clear to their minds that it could not have been Arthur Woddy, M.A., whom the Shell fellow had surprised in the shrubbery in the moonlight.

After morning school, Tom Merry came out into the quadrangle. He knocked off Arthur Augustus's silk hat, in response to an inquiry how he felt, and left the swell of St. Jim's with the impression that the invalid was still very peevish—very peevish indeed. Monty Lowther and Manners did not inquire how he was. They caught a gleam in his eye which warned them that they had better not. Tom Merry did not want to be an invalid; but if they made him into one, he was likely to be a very trying one.

"I wonder——" Monty Lowther began.

Tom Merry looked at him quickly. But Lowther went on: "I wonder whether Glyn's pater will have anything to say about last evening? I know he thought that Romeo Woddy was in the grounds there."

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"I shouldn't wonder!" he said. "Glyn says he cuts up very rusty about Woddy knowing Edith. It's rough on poor old Woddy, and it will be rotten if Glyn senior should come here to see him about it!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Here's Glyn! Perhaps he knows!"

The Liverpool junior joined the Terrible Three. He was wearing a rather troubled look. He had been gazing out of the gates of St. Jim's—perhaps with the same uneasiness in his mind that the Terrible Three were feeling.

"The pater's coming!" he said, gloomily.

"Coming!" repeated Tom Merry.

Bernard Glyn nodded in a glum way.

"Yes; I've just sighted his car in the road. I was afraid he would! He's coming here to see Woddy!"

Monty Lowther gave a soft whistle.

"Rotten for Woddy!" he said.

"Yes. The pater comes down heavy when he does come down!" said Glyn. "I've been there—I know! It's beastly!"

"Suppose we were to give Woddy the tip?" Manners suggested.

Tom Merry looked very grave.

"He might take it as interfering!" he remarked.

"Glyn could do it," said Monty Lowther, "as his prospective brother-in-law."

Glyn grinned rather ruefully.

"I don't know about that," he said. "But I might. I'm sorry for Woddy. You see, Edie and old Woddy seem to have come to an understanding when they were in Liverpool, before they thought anything about the pater. The pater thinks that Woddy is after the millions, you know, and I'm sure he's never given them a thought. It's rotten all round! I like Woddy!"

"Then go and give him the tip!" said Tom Merry.

"I will!" said Glyn, with sudden resolve.

He walked away to the New House. Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn were standing in the doorway, and they made a movement as if to surround the School House fellow. But they remembered what an excellent tea Glyn had stood them the previous evening, and they relented, and did not bump him.

"Woddy in?" asked Glyn.

"Yes; in his study," said Figgins.

"Thanks!"

Glyn entered the House, and tapped at the Housemaster's door. That study had been a room the juniors dreaded to enter, in the reign of Mr. Ratcliff. Under Mr. Woddy's milder sway, its terrors had vanished. But Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, was feeling very uneasy as he tapped at the door. He did not quite know how he would be received.

Glyn had been willing to accept Mr. Woddy as a future brother-in-law, and to take him under his wing, so to speak—and, in fact, to give him tips generally; but Mr. Woddy had unexpectedly developed a reserve which kept his intended fiancée's brother quite at a distance. It surprised Bernard a little, and perhaps exasperated him. The chap ought to have been glad to have a friend at court, the junior considered, and surely his approval was worth something! He was all ready to approve, and the Housemaster unexpectedly acted as if he didn't care whether he approved or not. It was quite enough, as Glyn confided to his friends in the Shell, to make a chap turn against him, and decide not to have him in the family at any price, only he was sorry for Woddy, and meant to back him up.

"Come in!"

Glyn, of the Shell, opened the door and entered. Mr. Woddy nodded to him kindly enough, but he treated him exactly as he treated any other junior at St. Jim's. Perhaps he was afraid of being suspected of favouritism.

"Yes, what do you want, Glyn?" he asked.

Glyn did not see why Mr. Woddy couldn't call him Bernard, under the circumstances. He had several times debated in his mind whether to call Mr. Woddy, Arthur; but somehow or other he had never been able to make up his mind to it. It was really too bad to have to bottle up all his friendly sentiments in this way, the junior thought, with a considerable sense of injury.

"Well, Glyn?"

"Ahem!"

"Do you want to speak to me?" asked Mr. Woddy, with a puzzled look.

"Ahem!"

"I must ask you to come to the point, Glyn," said Mr. Woddy, with a glance at his papers. "I— My time is of value."

"Certainly, sir! You see——"

"Yes," said Mr. Woddy, more and more puzzled.

Glyn grew very red.

"The pater's coming!" he blurted out at last.

Mr. Woddy did not move a muscle.

"Are you alluding to your father, Glyn?" he asked quietly.

"Ye-es, sir."

"He is coming to the school!"

"I've just seen the car in the road, sir."

"Indeed! What has that to do with me?"

"He—he's coming——"

"To see the Head, doubtless—perhaps about you," suggested Mr. Woddy.

Bernard Glyn started, and his flush deepened to scarlet. That possibility had not occurred to him.

"I—I don't think so, sir," he stammered.

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"Indeed!"

Mr. Wodyer did not seem to be at all interested in the matter. Bernard Glyn's exasperation grew. It was too bad to be kept at arm's length in this way, when he had come there specially to do Wodyer a favour.

"I think he's coming to see you, sir," he blurted out.

"Indeed! I shall be very happy to see your father, Glyn," said Mr. Wodyer, without—as Glyn described it afterwards—turning a hair.

"Oh!" said Glyn.

"Have you anything else to say to me, Glyn?"

"N-n-no, sir," stammered the junior.

"Very well; you may go."

Bernard Glyn quitted the study with a very red face. He closed the door behind him, and murmured something under his breath. Certainly Wodyer was a kind of fellow whom it was very difficult to be chummy with. Bernard Glyn began to think that Arthur Wodyer, M.A., would not be so very desirable as a brother-in-law after all. He was feeling distinctly exasperated as he emerged into the quadrangle.

"Hallo! Had your hair combed?" asked Figgins affably.

"Oh, rats!" replied Glyn.

He tramped away angrily. The big motor-car of the Liverpool millionaire had come up the drive, and stopped before the New House. It was evidently for that House that Mr. Glyn's visit was intended. The millionaire was stepping out, when he caught sight of his son, and beckoned to him.

"Bernard!"

"Hallo, dad!"

"I suppose I shall find Mr. Wodyer here?" said the millionaire, with a nod towards the New House.

Bernard Glyn grinned.

"Yes; he's in his study, dad."

"Very good!"

Mr. Glyn turned away to ascend the steps of the New House. Bernard Glyn touched him upon the sleeve.

"I say, pater—"

"Yes, my boy," said Mr. Glyn.

"Give it him hot, pater!"

"Eh!" ejaculated the old gentleman, in astonishment. "What did you say, Bernard?"

"Give it him hot!"

And Bernard Glyn vanished before his father could ask for an explanation. The old gentleman looked after him in surprise, and then mounted the steps, and entered the New House.

CHAPTER 6.

The Superfluous Young Man.

MR. WODYER did not preserve his impassive air after Bernard Glyn had left the study. The moment the Liverpool lad was gone, the Housemaster rose to his feet, and his look of cool indifference slid like a mask from his face. He was too proud, and too reserved, and had too keen a sense of propriety, to show his feelings before the junior; but his feelings were very deep, and they were very much disturbed just now.

He stepped to the window, and a shadow crossed his handsome brow as he saw the Liverpool millionaire alighting from his car in front of the New House.

"Then the visit is for me!" he muttered.

He quitted the window, and paced to and fro in the study, a deep wrinkle in his brow.

He did not look like the Housemaster of the New House now; and the fellows of his House would hardly have known him. He looked like what he indeed was—a young man very much in love, and anticipating with disquieted feelings a probably painful interview with the gentleman he had selected for a father-in-law.

There was a heavy step in the passage—a step that sounded like Mr. Glyn. It was the firm and unhesitating step of the man who had made his way in the world, chiefly by his own efforts, and who didn't mean to stand any nonsense from anybody.

Mr. Wodyer felt a little quiver within him.

But his voice was calm and firm as he called out "Come in!" in reply to a knock at the study door.

The House page opened the door.

"Gentleman to see you, sir—Mr. Glyn, sir!"

"Kindly step in, Mr. Glyn!"

Mr. Glyn kindly stepped in.

The page drew the door shut and departed, leaving the millionaire and the Housemaster alone.

There was a moment's silence.

Mr. Wodyer remained standing. Mr. Glyn showed no desire to sit down. The Housemaster did not offer to shake hands; it was pretty clear that his hand would not have been taken by the irate old gentleman.

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Mr. Wodyer broke the silence; with a faint smile curving the corners of his lips, in spite of his inward misgivings.

"Good-morning, Mr. Glyn!"

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"I did not come here for polite formalities, Mr. Wodyer," he replied gruffly.

"No," said Mr. Wodyer calmly. "May I offer you a chair, sir?"

"I prefer to stand."

"Very well; please yourself, Mr. Glyn, by all means," said the master of the New House pacifically.

"I intend to do so, sir, and in more matters than one," said the millionaire grimly.

Mr. Wodyer bowed, without replying. He did not seem to think that Mr. Glyn's remark called for any reply.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Glyn, "I am going to speak to you very seriously."

Mr. Wodyer bowed again.

"Thank you!" he said. "But won't you sit down?"

Mr. Glyn had deposited his silk hat and umbrella upon the table. Upon second thoughts, he decided to sit down. The calmness of the athletic young man before him seemed somehow to disconcert the portly gentleman.

"I suppose you know why I have called, sir?" he said, as he settled himself down at last upon a chair.

Mr. Wodyer looked at him steadily.

"I will not pretend to be ignorant of your reason, sir," he replied quietly. "I presume that it is in connection with my suit for your daughter's hand."

Mr. Glyn flushed with anger.

"I refuse to admit that there is anything of the sort in existence!" he exclaimed. "Suit for my daughter's hand, by Jove! What have you to offer my daughter?"

Mr. Wodyer did not reply.

"Yourself, I suppose," said the old gentleman sarcastically.

"Yes."

"Anything else—of higher value?"

Mr. Wodyer coloured.

"I am an honest and decent man, and I love your daughter," he said calmly; "that is all I have to say for myself."

Mr. Glyn seemed a little impressed.

"Well, that is straightforward, at all events," he growled. "But I suppose you admit that a penniless schoolmaster is not a suitable match for a millionaire's daughter."

"I hope to be able to support Edith, if she chooses to marry me," said Mr. Wodyer. "And I do not think that riches bring happiness. I do not even think that I should care to be a very rich man, and I am sure Edith does not care for wealth."

Mr. Glyn smiled grimly.

"She may think she does not," he said. "She spends in hats more than you get in a year as your salary here."

"Perhaps she might be content to wear old hats as my wife," Mr. Wodyer suggested.

"Her last Pomeranian dog cost as much as your quarter's salary."

"The same dog will last a long time, I hope, sir," said Mr. Wodyer imperturbably. "I shall be able to afford to pay the licence."

The millionaire burst into a laugh.

"Well, you are a cool young rascal!" he exclaimed half admiringly. "If you were fitted to be a match for my daughter, I don't know that I should object to you. My son speaks of you very highly, too. But—but you must see, Mr. Wodyer, that since I have become a millionaire, a very large number of young men have thought it would be easier to live on my money than to make some for themselves. I have encountered quite a number of these superfluous young men—but I have always known how to send them about their business."

"I am glad to hear it, sir."

"And I am quite equal to dealing with one more," said the millionaire significantly.

"Then you regard me as a fortune-hunter?"

"How am I to regard a young man who has nothing, who pays court to a young lady who is heiress to a millionaire?"

"I should think that Miss Glyn herself might be supposed a sufficient reason."

"Well put," said the millionaire, again half admiringly.

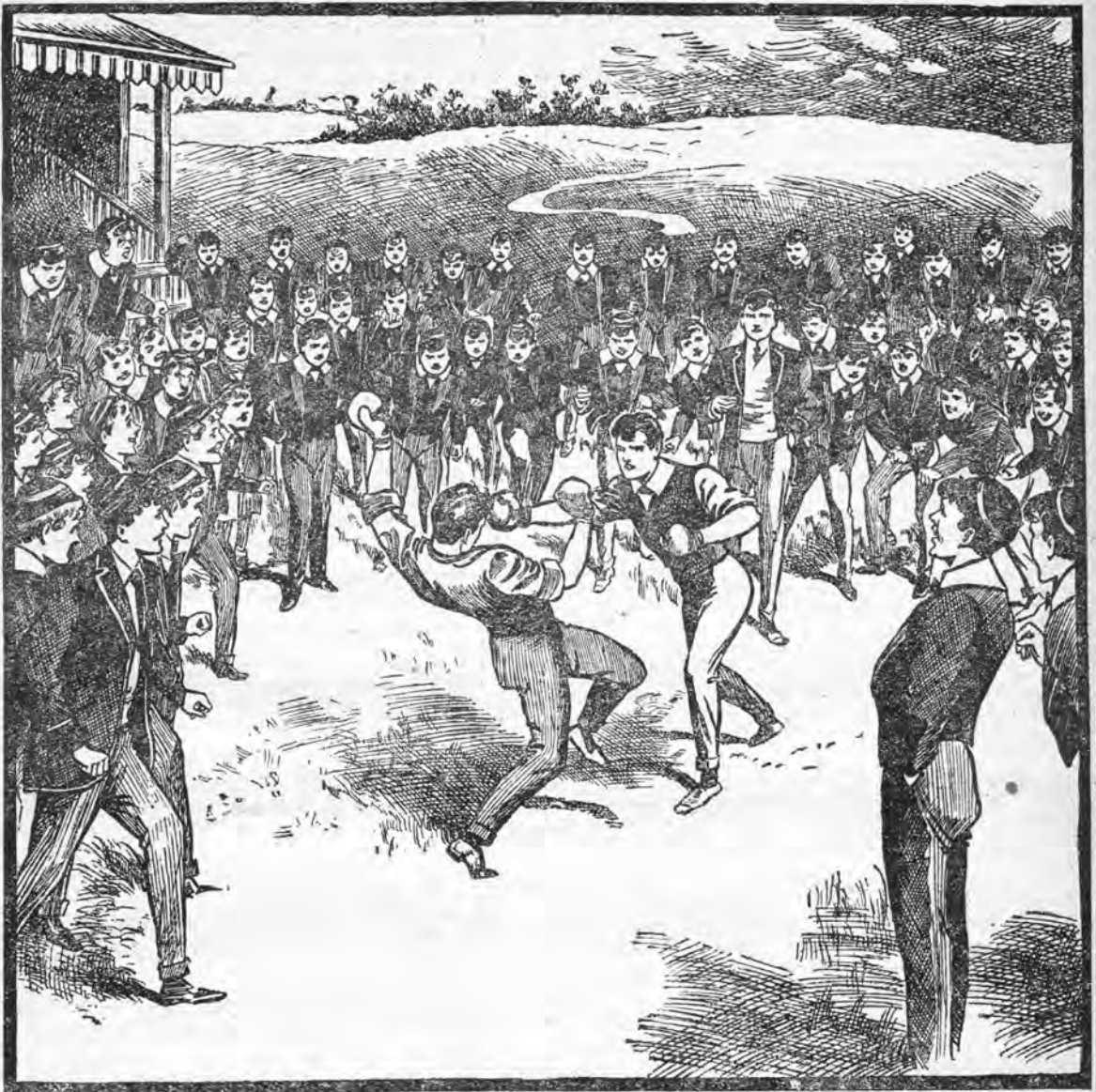
"But it won't do. That's the long and the short of it—it won't do! When I found how matters were going, I told Edith it wouldn't do—and I told you so. That settled it."

"Miss Glyn has told me that she could not think of marrying without your consent, sir," said Mr. Wodyer quietly.

"I bow to her decision. I hope some day to have a position to offer that will not be unworthy of her—and I hope to convince you that I am not a mere fortune-hunter."

The millionaire made an impatient gesture.

"It is not only that you are poor," he said. "Edith will



It was the tenth round of that terrific fight, when Wharton got in a crashing drive that seemed to lift the big Highcliffian fairly off his feet. The ground itself seemed to shake as he crashed down upon his back, where he lay motionless while he was counted out. "Hurrah!" roared the juniors. "Wharton wins! Wharton's captain of the Remove!" (For the above incident see the grand, long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars, entitled "THE FIGHT FOR THE CAPTAINCY," which is contained in this week's issue of our grand companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. On sale at all newsagents. Price One Penny.)

have money enough, so far as that goes. But—well, I want a son-in-law who has the right stuff in him; a man with real grit in him, sir, who will be able to take care of my daughter and her money. Prove yourself to be that kind of man, and I might consider it. But what are you—what have you done? What place have you made in the world? At your present age, you are filling a post temporarily—and after that, what are your prospects?"

Mr. Wodyer flushed.

"I hope—"

"Hopes are nothing. What definite prospects have you? None! You cannot look after yourself, and you expect to be allowed to look after my daughter! It won't do, Mr. Wodyer. You must prove that you have real grit in you

if you want me to think of you, even, as a son-in-law; not that I'm ever likely to look upon you in that light. In the meantime, I must remind you of what I said at our former interview—you are not to see my daughter—not to meet her, I mean."

"I think that is very hard upon me, sir, but I have obeyed you."

"You have—what?"

"I have obeyed you," said Mr. Wodyer quietly. "I repeat that I think your decision hard upon your daughter and myself, but it was Edith's wish that I should obey you, and I have done so."

Mr. Glyn flushed angrily.

"You call coming into my grounds and hanging about

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under the windows obeying me!" he exclaimed. "Is that your idea of keeping your word?"

Mr. Wodyer looked at him in surprise.

"Certainly not," he said. "I should not regard that as keeping my word. If I have, in passing Glyn House, sometimes looked up to see Miss Glyn's window, I do not regard that as a contravention of the agreement. I have done no more than that."

"You have entered my grounds."

"That is a mistake. I have done nothing of the sort."

Mr. Glyn shook a fat forefinger at the young man.

"Do you deny that you were in the grounds of Glyn House last evening, listening to my daughter playing, and watching the drawing-room window from the shrubbery?"

Mr. Wodyer looked astonished.

"Most decidedly!" he exclaimed.

"You were not there?"

"I could easily prove that I did not leave the school last evening, sir, if it were necessary, but I expect you to take my word," said Mr. Wodyer coldly.

The millionaire looked at him long and hard.

"I will take your word," he said. "I cannot think that you would lie. But it is very extraordinary; there was certainly someone there, and I am assured that the juniors, who were in the room, thought that it was you."

Mr. Wodyer coloured.

"The impertinent young rascals—"

"Oh, they did not say so! I questioned Merry, but he was very reticent—so reticent that it was clear that he had something to conceal," said Mr. Glyn. "I was certain that it was you. But if you declare that it was not, the matter is at an end, and I have come over here this morning for nothing."

"Well, it certainly was not me."

"It is very extraordinary!" Mr. Glyn rose to his feet. "I will say good-morning to you now, Mr. Wodyer, and I must ask you to excuse me for having doubted you; but I certainly thought it was you in the shrubberies last evening."

"One word more, sir," said the young Housemaster. "I take it that your only objection to me as a son-in-law is on the score of money."

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"And what that implies," he said, "I made my way in the world. I expect my son-in-law to do the same. Money is the proof of it. That's all. Not that I would not be willing to accept any other proof that you have grit in you. If you were worthy of Edith you should have her. But I don't think you are."

Mr. Wodyer smiled.

"And Miss Glyn's wishes count for nothing?" he asked.

"Oh, Edith will do as I tell her!"

"H'm! And if I could convince you that I am worthy of being considered—"

The millionaire smiled grimly.

"Then I will consider you," he said.

"And the only way—"

"You had better become a millionaire," said Mr. Glyn.

"Good-morning!"

And he quitted the study. Mr. Wodyer remained staring after the millionaire, and then staring at the door that had closed behind him, and shut off the portly figure from view. Then he thrust his hands deep into his pockets and paced up and down the study.

"Rotten!" he muttered. "Poor Edith—poor me! But I suppose it was only what I might have expected!"

He threw himself into a chair, with a wrinkled and worried brow. It was a deep problem that was before him—a problem that seemed too deep for the superfluous young man.

CHAPTER 7. Glyn's Advice!

"BERNARD!"

"Shurrup!"

"Br-r-r! Don't talk!"

Bernard Glyn of the Shell was in his study. Glyn of the Shell was an inventive genius, and he had made many wonderful contrivances, which had sometimes got him into trouble with the school authorities. He was busily engaged upon an object which seemed to be chiefly composed of twisted wires and little bells, when a tap came at his door, and his sister's pretty face looked into the study. Miss Edith frequently visited St. Jim's; she was a friend of Mrs. Holmes, the Head's wife, and she generally gave her brother a look in when she came. But Glyn of the Shell was too busy with his mechanics just now to attend to visitors.

"Bernard!" repeated Miss Glyn.

"Shurrup a minute, Edie! I can't leave this!"

Miss Glyn looked at the weird contrivance on the table. A wire ran from it to an electric battery on the floor.

"What is it, Bernard?" she asked, with a smile.

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"Electric burglar alarm."

"Dear me!"

"New invention of mine," said Glyn proudly. "It will make quite a revolution in burglar alarms, if it works. And I think it will."

"Put it away now—"

"What!" roared the youthful inventor.

"I want to speak to you, Bernard."

The inventor of St. Jim's groaned, and shut off the current.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Come in—there's a chair!"

What's the matter, Edie? Pater in one of his tantrums at home?"

"No, Bernard," said Miss Glyn severely; "and you must not speak of your father like that!"

Glyn gave a grunt.

"Well, he looked rather tantrummy this morning when he came here to that ass Wodyer," he replied.

"You must not call a Housemaster names."

"Oh, he's only Housemaster of the New House, you know. The New House doesn't really count. School House is cock-house at St. Jim's, you know."

"I thought you liked Mr. Wodyer, Bernard," said Edith reproachfully.

"Too much cheek," said the junior.

"Bernard!"

"Well, I do like him, then," said Glyn. "He's all right. What's the matter?"

"Father came over here this morning," said Edith, in a low voice. "I am sure that he came to see Arthur—Mr. Wodyer, I mean."

"Yes, he did."

"He has not spoken to me about it," said Edith, with a look of distress. "Do you know what was the matter, Bernard?"

"I suppose it was the Romeo act," said Glyn thoughtfully.

Miss Glyn looked astonished.

"The—the what?" she exclaimed.

"The Romeo act—Woddy hanging about the show, looking up at the windows, and sighing to the moon, and that sort of thing," explained the junior.

Miss Edith turned crimson.

"I shall box your ears, Bernard—"

"Well, you asked me," said Bernard, backing away round the table.

"Mr. Wodyer has done nothing of the sort."

"There was somebody in the grounds last night, watching the window while you were playing," said Bernard, with a grin. "We all thought it was Woddy—and I suppose the pater tumbled. That was all."

"I am sure it was not Mr. Wodyer."

"Well, I don't know. I know he's been in the habit of passing the house, and looking up, and I thought he might have come into the gates for once. That's all. But if it wasn't Woddy, it was somebody. I know what the pater thought. I went in to warn Woddy when the pater was coming to-day," went on Glyn indignantly, "and he was cheeky."

"He was—what?"

"Cheeky!" said Glyn obstinately. "I'm not going to stand cheek from a Housemaster, especially a blessed New House master. Look here, Edie, I don't care for Woddy as much as I did. Better chuck it!"

"What!"

"Girls can't do better than listen to their brothers' advice," said Glyn sagely. "My advice is, chuck it. There's that sailor chap who used to come mooning round—he's worth two or three of Woddy. Now, my advice is—Where are you going, Edie?"

Slam!

Miss Glyn was gone, and the study door had been closed with quite unnecessary emphasis.

Glyn stared at the door in astonishment. He did not know what there was for his sister to be excited about.

"Blessed if I shall ever understand girls," murmured the junior, very much puzzled. "I was giving her some jolly good advice, which would save a lot of trouble all round, and she flies into a temper like that! Girls are queer fish!"

And, giving up girls as an insoluble problem, Bernard Glyn turned to his invention again, and was soon deep in it, forgetting Mr. Wodyer and Edith and his father and everybody and everything else.

He was still deep and busy when Tom Merry came in. The bump still showed under Tom Merry's thick hair. Glyn did not look up.

"Busy?" asked Tom Merry cheerfully.

Glyn grunted.

"I've got something to say to you, Glyn, special."

"Br-r-r!"

"But look here—"

"Gerrouit!"

"It's important, Glyn, old man!"

"Rats! Can't you see I'm busy? Gerrouit!"

"What's that thing?" asked Tom Merry, undisturbed.

"New thing in burglar alarms."

"Oh, might come in useful just now!" Tom Merry remarked. "I've just come in to talk to you about burglars."

"Don't! Gerrouit!"

"Bosh!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Now, you may as well listen, as I'm going to talk. It's about what happened at Glyn House last evening."

"Oh, I'm fed up with that! I've had that from Edith."

"But it's important. I've just seen the paper," said Tom Merry. "There have been two burglaries in the neighbourhood of Rylcombe and Wayland the last week, and the police think there is a gang of cracksmen working the vicinity."

"Let 'em work!"

"But—don't you see—"

"No, I don't!"

"Now, look here, Glyn, be serious. There was a chap in the grounds of Glyn House last night watching the place, and when I surprised him in the shrubbery he struck me down like a rotten ruffian. It wasn't Wodyer—we know that now—and only a rotten brute would have hit a chap like that. What was that man watching the house for, Glyn—and who was he?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"It wasn't Wodyer—and it was some ruffianly brute," said Tom Merry. "When I heard about these burglaries, the idea came into my mind at once. It was one of the cracksmen, Glyn—he was watching the house with the idea of burgling it, and we took him for Wodyer."

Glyn looked up. His interest was roused at last.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "I shouldn't wonder. If the rotters are working this neighbourhood, they wouldn't be likely to miss my pater's house—everybody knows that he's a giddy millionaire."

"That's what I was thinking," said Tom Merry. "I think you ought to give your pater the tip. There may be nothing in it, but there may be a lot—and you ought to let your pater know, in case of accidents."

"I'll run over on my bike this evening," said Glyn.

"Now, buzz off and let me get on with my work."

And Tom Merry laughed and quitted the youthful inventor's study.

CHAPTER 8.

An Alarm in the Night.

SILENCE reigned over the great pile of the School House.

The Shell dormitory was buried in slumber. One of the fellows was awake—and only one. It was Tom Merry!

Perhaps it was the throbbing of the bump upon his forehead that kept him awake; perhaps the thought of the burglaries in the vicinity of the school had worked upon his mind. It was a disturbing thought that perhaps the man who had struck him down in the grounds of Glyn House was a member of the desperate gang of cracksmen who were becoming the terror of the neighbourhood.

Who they were and whence they had come the police did not know; but it was certain that the robberies that had lately taken place were not the outcome of local talent, as the Wayland inspector humorously put it. Some gang of expert cracksmen from London, in all probability, were "working" the neighbourhood; and as it seemed impossible to detect them they were not likely to rest content with the two or three robberies they had successfully performed. Glyn House would be a rich prize if they could make a haul there. And St. Jim's, too; it was only too probable that the school might receive a visit.

Tom Merry could not help thinking so as he lay awake in the deep, still hours of the night. His mind was uneasy from the dull throbbing of the bump on his forehead; and at night the thought of burglars, like the thought of ghosts, seemed more probable than in the daytime.

Tom Merry unconsciously found himself listening; and there was plenty to listen to in the night in the old School House—the creaking of the old elms in the quadrangle, the brushing of twigs against the window-panes, the scampering of rats in the wainscot, the groaning of the chimney-cowls in the wind.

Glyn was fast asleep. He had ridden over to his father's house that evening and conveyed Tom Merry's warning to the millionaire; but Mr. Glyn had pooh-poohed the idea of an emissary of the cracksmen having been watching his house. Probably, in spite of Mr. Wodyer's denial, some suspicion lingered in the old gentleman's mind that it had been the superfluous young man.

Tom Merry listened.

More than once it had seemed to his uneasy mind that he

had heard sounds that could not be accounted for by the wind and the old elm-trees. He was in a state of nerves—a very unusual state for the healthy junior.

Midnight had tolled out from the clock-tower of St. Jim's, and he was still awake. Now the hour of one boomed out duly upon the still air of the night.

Boom!

The deep sound echoed and died away.

Tom Merry turned his head upon the pillow. He knew that he would be fatigued and unfit for work in the morning if he did not sleep. But slumber refused to come. His eyes opened again and sought the glimmering square of the moonlit window.

Deep and steady breathing proceeded from the other beds in the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry was the only fellow who was awake, and he felt a strange sense of solitude and desertion.

Suddenly he started.

Amid the faint, weird sounds of the night there had come another sound. He was sure of it this time.

He sat up in bed, every nerve in his body tingling with suppressed excitement, his ears strained to listen—straining so hard that they buzzed again.

What was it that he had heard?

He could hardly tell; but he felt that it was something unusual—a dim sound that had come to his ears in the silence. He did not hear it again—or he could not be sure; but he stepped quietly out of bed and hastily drew on his clothes. He did not wake the other fellows. If he had been mistaken there was no need to disturb them; and he shrank from the possibility of being thought nervous.

He stepped softly to the door of the dormitory, and opened it without a sound. A chill draught blew along the passage, and there was a faint sound behind the old oaken wainscot—but it was only a scuttling rat. Dim bars of moonlight fell into the passage from the high window at the end.

Tom Merry left the dormitory quietly and drew the door shut behind him. He moved along to the staircase on tiptoe.

The House was very still—the whole school was in bed.

Tom Merry paused on the staircase and listened again.

His heart was beating violently.

From the darkness below came a low sound—a sound that he found it hard to recognise at first—a faint, grinding sound, as of a hard instrument upon glass.

After a few moments' pause he stepped quietly down the stairs, listening intently as he went. He reached the lower hall of the School House, and stopped before the window that looked out into the porch by the steps. The blind was down, and only a faint streak of moonlight came under it and formed a straggling bar on the floor.

The sound came from the window; and he knew now what it was. It was a diamond grinding a slow, sure passage through the glass—a diamond in a strong and steady hand without.

The junior shivered.

Someone, kneeling on the window-sill outside, was working away at the glass, to remove a fragment of it, to allow a hand to be inserted to unfasten the catch.

He knew that now; and he remained for a moment, undecided. As he stood, with tense ears and strained nerves, he heard a faint crack, and he knew that the circle of glass had been taken out.

The blind rustled faintly.

He heard a slight sound, and then the creaking of the moving catch. Thiefish fingers had been inserted in the opening, and were holding the catch, and in a minute more the window would be open.

Tom Merry clenched his hands. If he dashed to the House-master's room, or to Kildare's, the burglars would be in the house before he had succeeded in rousing them and bringing them to his aid.

The catch was open now, and the sash was being raised. The blind fluttered and rattled in the wind from the quadrangle.

Tom Merry was standing close by an oaken chair in the hall, and his hand rested upon the back of it to steady himself.

A sudden thought came into his mind, and he grasped the chair with both hands and raised it in the air.

His eyes were gleaming, and his nerves were steady now. He raised the chair above his head, and stood ready.

There was a slithering sound as the spring blind was gently raised by the hand from without, and a flood of moonlight fell into the hall from the uncovered window.

In the square of the window a kneeling form was visible on the sill, and he could see the head of a second man standing without.

The burglar on the window-sill knelt there, listening. Tom Merry could hear his low, hurried breathing.

In another moment he would have leaped down into the House.

But in that moment the junior acted.

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"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

Whiz!

Right at the window the heavy oaken chair flew; and the next instant there was a terrific crash of breaking glass and breaking sash, a wild yell, and a heavy fall in the quadrangle without.

The window was clear, and the jagged glass showed up in the moonlight. The cracksman had disappeared. Outside savage muttering was heard, subdued curses.

"Help!"

Tom Merry shouted at the top of his voice.

His shout rang through the silent School House, echoing along the empty passages with a sound like thunder.

"Help! Help!"

A face—white, furious, with a red splash across the cheek—glared in at the window. It was the face of the cracksman who had been hurled from the sill by the whirling missile. It seemed as if the ruffian, in his rage, would clamber in, although the alarm was now given, and the chance of robbing the House was gone.

Tom Merry's heart turned cold within him.

But he did not retreat. He shouted again. And now doors were opening and voices were calling above stairs.

"Help! Help!" shouted Tom Merry. "Burglars! Help!"

A hand from without fell upon the cracksman's shoulder, and he was dragged away by his comrade.

Tom Merry heard a muttering voice.

"Don't be a fool, Badger! Cut for it!"

The cracksman disappeared again.

Tom Merry heard the hurried sound of retreating footsteps in the quadrangle. He shouted again:

"Help!"

"What is it? Who is that?"

It was Mr. Railton's voice on the stairs. The master of the School House was hurrying down, half-dressed.

"Is that you, Merry? What has happened?"

Tom Merry reeled against the banisters.

"Burglars, sir!" he muttered huskily.

"Good heavens!"

Tom Merry clung to the banisters for support. Now that the crisis had passed he felt sick and giddy with the reaction.

CHAPTER 9.

The Hero of the Hour.

LIGHTS were gleaming in the School House now; voices called and shouted. Kildare of the Sixth came dashing downstairs.

Mr. Railton was already at the window, looking out. He caught a glimpse of two shadowy figures in the moonlight, but they vanished in a moment.

"What is it, sir?" cried Kildare.

Mr. Railton had turned on the electric light, and the hall was flooded with it. It showed up Tom Merry's face, white and strained.

"Burglars!" said Mr. Railton quietly. "Open the door, Kildare. They have not got away yet, and there may be a chance—Remain where you are, Merry."

Mr. Railton and Kildare dashed out into the quadrangle together. Taggles's voice could now be heard across the quad, and the barking of his mastiff. There was a loud, furious barking from the dog, and Mr. Railton ran up and found the mastiff dashing up and down excitedly by the school wall. It was easy to guess that that was the way the cracksman had gone.

"Gone, sir?" asked Kildare, coming up, panting.

"Yes," said the Housemaster shortly.

"Nothing to be done, then?"

"No, not to-night."

The whole school was in an uproar now. Half the fellows in the School House were down, half-dressed; and lights blazed in the windows of the New House across the quad. The door of the New House opened, and Mr. Wodyer came out in his shirt and trousers.

"What is the matter?" he called out.

"Burglars!" said Mr. Railton. "But they have escaped."

"By Jove! How was the alarm given?"

"Merry appears to have come down—I do not understand it yet."

Mr. Railton and Kildare returned to the School House, and the New House master accompanied them.

Tom Merry was the centre of a crowd of amazed and inquiring fellows, seniors and juniors.

"How did this happen, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton.

Tom Merry panted.

"I heard a noise, sir—I was awake—and—and I came down to see what it was. I had been reading about the cracksmen burgling near Wayland."

"And you found them getting in?"

"Yes, sir. They had cut out a piece of glass in the window, and got it open. And I buzzed the chair at them, sir, and knocked down the chap who was on the sill."

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"It was very plucky of you, Merry. Bless my soul, the house might have been robbed without any of us waking up!" said the Housemaster.

"Bai Jove, it was vewy plucky, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, from the stairs. The swell of St. Jim's was in his pyjamas; he had not had time to stop for his trousers, but he had not forgotten his eyeglass. "Quite wippin', deah boy! We might all have been wobbed and murdered in our beds!"

"I suppose you were quite sure there were burglars, Merry?" said Kildare doubtfully. "It wasn't a case of nerves? I saw nothing."

"Quite sure, Kildare! I saw them!"

"I saw two shadows in the quadrangle," said Mr. Railton. "And you can see that the window is open—it was wide open when the chair struck it. And there is blood on the sill."

There was no doubt about that. Either the chair or the broken glass had cut the cracksman badly, and he had left the tell-tale stains on the white stone of the window-sill. There could be no doubt on the subject now.

The Head had appeared on the scene now. He heard the account of what had happened very gravely, and praised Tom Merry warmly.

"It is a pity the scoundrels were not caught," he said; "but I am only too glad that they have gone without doing damage. You might have been hurt, Merry. I wish you had given the alarm instead of coming down alone."

"I wasn't sure I heard anything, sir, till I came down and found them at the window," said Tom Merry. "Then—then I thought that anything was better than letting the brutes get into the house."

"Yes, yes, assuredly! I suppose you did not see them clearly enough to be able to give any description to the police?"

"No, sir; they were very shadowy. But one of them called the other by name, sir—I heard that. He called him Badger."

"Very good," said the Head. "That may be a clue for the police. Return to your dormitory now, Merry; you have done very well—very well, indeed!"

Manners and Lowther linked arms with their chum to march him back to the dormitory. Mr. Wodyer, who had been looking keenly at Tom Merry, made him a sign to pause.

"The burglars did not touch you, Merry?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"You have a bad bruise on your forehead. I thought, perhaps—"

Tom Merry's hand went to the bruise, and he coloured. He could not help thinking just then of his first impression that it was the hand of the New House master that had caused that bump.

"Oh, that was done yesterday evening, sir."

"Oh!" said Mr. Wodyer. "An accident?"

"I had a knock, sir."

"It must have been a hard knock," said Mr. Wodyer. "You were at Glyn House yesterday evening, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

The New House master said no more. There was a sudden call from Darrel of the Sixth, who had gone outside the window to look for traces of the burglars, with a lantern in his hand. He had thought that in their confusion the ruffians might have left something behind them that might afford a clue, and he was right.

"Look here, sir!"

The Head and Mr. Railton hurried to the window.

"Have you found anything, Darrel?" asked Dr. Holmes.

"Yes, sir—these."

Darrel handed in two objects. One was a burglar's diamond, evidently the one that Tom Merry had heard grinding through the pane. The other caused a start and a thrill of excitement as it was seen. It was a six-chambered revolver, and Mr. Railton, as he took it and glanced at it, said quietly:

"Loaded!"

Tom Merry caught his breath.

He realised now what a fearful risk he had run, and as he remembered that the injured ruffian had been about to clamber in at the window when his more prudent companion dragged him back, he shuddered. What would have happened if the enraged scoundrel had got in with that deadly weapon in his hand.

"Bai Jove!" murmured D'Arcy. "You've had a nawwow escape, old man!"

Tom Merry was quite pale as he went up to the dormitory with the juniors. Manners and Lowther glared at him in the Shell dorm.

"You ass!" said Lowther. "What do you mean by going down without waking us?"

"I wasn't sure—"

"Oh, rats!" said Manners. "Bosh! You ought to have woken us up in any case."

"Of course!" said Monty Lowther warmly. "You boulder, keeping a thing like this to yourself! You might have got potted with that revolver."

"You've had a jolly narrow escape," said Bernard Glyn. Tom Merry shivered a little.

"I know I have," he said. "It makes me feel rather sick now. The chap who was cut was going to clamber in, and the other stopped him. I don't know what would have happened if he'd got inside—he seemed mad with temper."

"No wonder, after being biffed like that," said Gore. "Lucky for you he didn't pot you from the window as it was."

"And you didn't recognise him in any way?" asked Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"No; but—but—"

"But what?"

"As I saw him kneeling on the window-sill it came into my mind that he looked like—very like—the man I saw kneeling in the shrubbery at Glyn's pater's house last evening."

"My hat!" said Glyn.

"Of course, it was only an impression," said Tom Merry slowly. "I suppose a man kneeling in the dark looks much like another chap in the same way. But the idea came into my head."

"Phew!" said Glyn. "I'll get my new burglar alarm fixed up at home to-morrow, if I can get the pater to agree to it. He doesn't seem to care much for my inventions about the house; he seems to consider they ought to be kept here in my study."

"No wonder!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Oh, rats!" said Glyn. "I'll jolly well jaw him into letting me fix this up at home, anyway."

The Shell fellows returned to bed, but it was a long time before they slept. Into the small hours of the morning they remained talking in subdued tones of the attempted burglary, and the dawn was creeping in at the windows of the dormitory before they were all asleep.

CHAPTER 10.

Mr. Wodyer is Anxious.

THERE was only one topic in St. Jim's the following morning—the attempted burglary of the previous night. Tom Merry was the hero of the hour. The police visited St. Jim's early in the morning, and Tom Merry was interviewed by the inspector from Wayland and a detective. He told them all he knew, and they made a note of the name he had heard, which appeared to interest them very much. Tom Merry gathered that "Badger" was a nickname known to the police as that of a well-known cracksmen. The inspector took the revolver and the burglar's diamond away with him, and both the visitors departed looking very wise and serious, expressing no doubt whatever that they would soon lay the two scoundrels by the heels. But no news came to St. Jim's during the day of any arrest, and the juniors took the liberty of doubting whether the police were as sure of making one as they had supposed.

Figgins & Co., of course, came over to hear the whole story, along with a crowd of New House fellows. Tom Merry had to relate his experiences again and again, and after morning school he was called upon for fresh recitals, till he began to weary of the subject. There was only one fellow who was not talking about it, and that was Bernard Glyn. The inventor of St. Jim's was spending every spare moment in his study, perfecting the wonderful invention which was to make burglaries impossible—or so he hoped. Glyn's inventions were generally fearfully and wonderfully made, and they did not always turn out exactly as the inventor intended.

After dinner, Redfern of the Fourth, a New House junior, came over to see Tom Merry. The Terrible Three were chatting in the hall, where a glazier was busy mending the window which had been shattered by the Shell fellow's exploit in the night.

Redfern came in cheerily, and nodded to the chums of the Shell. Tom Merry held up his hand warningly.

"Shut up!" he said, before Redfern had a chance to speak. The junior looked astonished.

"Eh? What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"No more."

"No more what?"

"No more jaw about the burglary," said Tom Merry. "The subject's done in. I haven't any more items to give, and I'm tired to death of it. Keep off the grass!"

Redfern laughed.

"I wasn't going to ask you about your giddy exploits as a window-smasher," he said. "I've got a message for you."

"Oh! Some other ass wants to know about it, eh?"

"I don't know," grinned Redfern. "The ass who sent me over is our Housemaster, Woddy, and he wants to see you in his study."

Tom Merry grunted.

"Oh, dear! It means the whole history again from the beginning, I suppose! Go back and say I'm ill!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better say he's dead," said Monty Lowther; "that will make sure."

"Oh, come, and don't play the giddy-ox," said Redfern.

"You're a giddy hero, and you're getting your laurels now!"

"Blow the laurels!" growled Tom Merry.

But he walked over to the New House with Redfern. Bernard Glyn was just wheeling his bicycle down to the gates, and they stopped to speak to him. The inventor of the Shell was looking a little tired, but very well satisfied with himself.

"Finished?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes," replied Glyn. "I'm going over to see the pater now, and to get him to consent to having the burglar alarm fitted up at home. I shall get Mr. Linton to let me off lessons this afternoon to fix it up there, if the pater agrees."

And he mounted his bicycle and pedalled off to Glyn House. Tom Merry went into the New House smiling. He knew that Glyn senior objected to his son's inventions on his own premises, and he did not think that Bernard Glyn would get the necessary permission to instal his fearful and marvellous contrivance under the parental roof.

"Come in!" called out Mr. Wodyer, as Tom Merry knocked at his door.

The School House junior entered the study. The master of the New House greeted him very genially, but there was a troubled and thoughtful expression upon his face, which Tom Merry could not help noticing.

"Sit down, Merry," said Mr. Wodyer. "I want to speak to you about what happened last night."

Tom Merry tried not to make a grimace.

"Yes, sir," he said, as he sat down dutifully.

Mr. Wodyer looked at him curiously, and Tom Merry knew that he was scanning the bump on his forehead. It had gone down a little in size, but it was still quite visible.

"I want you to be quite frank with me," said Mr. Wodyer, after a pause. "The evening before last you were at Glyn House with a party of juniors from here?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry, in some trepidation.

"There was someone in the gardens watching the house, and you supposed, for some reason best known to yourself, that it was me?"

Tom Merry coloured, and was silent.

"I am not angry with you," said the Housemaster quietly; "but I learned this from Mr. Glyn, who called upon me yesterday."

"I did not tell him so, sir."

"No; he seems to have gathered it from you without your telling him," said Mr. Wodyer. "You saw someone in the grounds watching the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"You thought it was I?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Tom Merry.

"I will not ask your reason," said Mr. Wodyer, with a faint colour showing in his cheeks for a moment. "But it was about the same time that you received the blow that caused that very bad bruise, Merry. How did that happen? I want to know all about it."

There was no help for it, and Tom Merry explained. Mr. Wodyer listened very attentively. His brows had contracted a little when Tom Merry finished.

"Surely, Merry, you could not think that, if it had been myself, I should have acted in such a cruel and brutal manner?" he exclaimed.

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Well, I knew it wasn't like you, sir," he said; "but—but I didn't know what to think. I had felt certain it was you, and I crept out to give you the tip, and—and then it happened. We talked it over, and we felt that it couldn't have been you, sir, and when I heard about the burglary in the neighbourhood, sir, I thought it was very likely one of the cracksmen spying out before they tried to rob the place."

Mr. Wodyer started.

"Ah! You suspected that, too?" he exclaimed.

"Then you thought of it?" asked Tom Merry.

"It came into my mind, certainly, after what happened last night, and that is why I wished to know all about it from you," said the Housemaster.

"I told Glyn, sir, and he warned his father, but I don't think Mr. Glyn thinks anything about it," said Tom Merry.

Mr. Wodyer nodded.

"Do you think that the man you saw in the grounds of Glyn House, Merry, might have been one of the rascals who attempted to enter the School House last night?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I feel almost sure that it was the man I saw on the window-sill."

"Very good. Thank you, Merry! You may go."

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"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

Tom Merry quitted the study. Mr. Wodyer remained buried in deep thought. After some time, he moved to his table, dipped his pen in the ink, and wrote. The letter he wrote to Mr. Glyn, and it ran:

"Dear Sir,—There is every reason to believe that the man who was in your grounds the night before last was a confederate of the gang of cracksmen who have been disturbing this neighbourhood lately. In my mind there is no doubt upon the subject. You will have heard about the attempted burglary here last night, and that one of the villains dropped a loaded revolver in his flight. Under the circumstances, I take the liberty of suggesting that you should take every precaution at Glyn House, as the gang are undoubtedly still in the neighbourhood; and in case of an attempt upon Glyn House there might be danger for one whose safety must be as precious to you as to me."

Mr. Wodyer read over the letter, signed it, and enclosed it in an envelope. Then he called Redfern of the Fourth into the study.

"Will you take this note to Mr. Glyn, at Glyn House, for me, Redfern?" he asked. "I will excuse you if you are late for me in returning."

"Certainly, sir!" said Redfern cheerfully.

He departed with the note. He had not returned by the time the bell rang for afternoon lessons, and the Fourth went into their Form-room minus Redfern. Bernard Glyn came in just in time to go in with the Shell, and Tom Merry met him at the door of the Shell-room, and found him looking very discontented.

"Going to fix up the alarm at home?" he asked.

Glyn snorted.

"The pater won't have it at any price," he said.

"Hard cheese!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "I suppose he thinks it might go off at any minute, or explode, or something?"

"Oh, rats!" said Glyn. "It's simply a ripping invention. But the pater is obstinate. You know what these blessed paters are. They will listen to reason. I tried to argue with him. I even pointed out that he'd no right to have the house robbed, even if he wanted to, because I was his heir."

"Ha, ha, ha! What did he say to that?"

"He said he'd box my ears if I didn't clear out," said Glyn, in a very injured tone. "So I cleared. There's no arguing with the pater."

And Glyn went into the Shell Form-room, looking very disappointed. He consoled himself with the reflection that it was said of old that a prophet cannot expect to be honoured in his own country, and during afternoon lessons he thought out a scheme for fitting up the burglar alarm in the School House instead of at home. He was not likely to get permission to do so; but this time he wisely decided to fix it up first, and leave the question of permission until afterwards.

Meanwhile, Redfern returned from Glyn House. He brought a letter for Mr. Wodyer, which he handed to him in the Fourth Form-room, and then went to his place. Mr. Wodyer opened the letter, and read it, and his brows came darkly together. The millionaire's reply to his warning note was very brief, and very much to the point.

"Sir,—I am quite capable of looking after my own property, and after my own family in every way.—Yours truly,

"R. GLYN."

The word "every" was underlined.

Mr. Wodyer bit his lip. He thrust the letter into his pocket, and the lessons went on in the Fourth Form-room. But there was a cloud upon the master for the remainder of the afternoon.

CHAPTER 11.

The Burglar Alarm.

BERNARD GLYN looked into Tom Merry's study that evening. He had a mysterious-looking bundle under his arm, and a very serious expression upon his face. The Terrible Three had the boxing-gloves on, and the furniture was shoved back into the corners to leave them room for a boxing-match. Tom

Merry had just driven Manners into a corner, when the Liverpool lad looked in.

"Playing the giddy goat?" said Glyn. "Look here, will you fellows come and help me?"

Tom Merry looked round with a glowing face.

"What's up? Got lines?" he asked.

"Lines! No; I'm going to fix up my burglar alarm."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Oh, it's jolly near bedtime!"

"That's why I want to get it done. Suppose there's another giddy burglary to-night?" said Glyn. "You won't be awake this time, and the school may be robbed. They might get into my study, and take some of the things. They're jolly valuable."

"Yes. I can see a gang of cracksmen walking off with electric batteries and bottles of rotten chemicals and test tubes and things," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, there's nothing like making all safe, you know."

"They won't come again," said Manners. "Taggles is keeping his mastiff loose of a night until they're arrested, I hear."

"Blow Taggles and his mastiff! What we want is a really good and reliable burglar alarm."

"Where are you going to fix it?" asked Tom Merry.

"Well, it ought to be fixed at all the lower windows, of course," said Glyn. "But if I put it there, the blessed prefects will see me, and they will stop me. Prefects don't understand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to look after our own quarters, you see," Glyn explained. "I'm thinking of putting the burglar alarm up in the dormitory passage. That window at the end of the passage is easy to get in. We've got out of it often enough, you know, and any burglar worth his salt could climb up the ivy and get in. I'm going to put the giddy alarm there. I think that's the best place for it. If it stops a burglary to-night the Head may give me an order for a whole set of the things, you know, and excuse me from lessons while I make them."

The Terrible Three roared.

"Yes; I think I can see him doing that," grinned Tom Merry. "But we'll come and help you if you like."

The chums of the Shell peeled off the boxing-gloves, and the four juniors ascended to the dormitory passage. The gas was turned low there, and the passage was dim. It wanted a quarter of an hour to bedtime yet, and the place was quite deserted.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther watched Glyn with great interest as he unfolded his mysterious package. It seemed to consist chiefly of wires and metal clips and electric bells, with a dry battery attached.

"How does it work?" asked Manners.

"I've got it all mapped out," said Glyn. "I fasten these clips on the window, you see. When the window is opened, it pulls this wire, you see, and that brings the terminals into contact, and a current is set up. All these bells begin ringing at once."

"They'll make a jolly row if they do."

"That's what they're intended to do, ass! They'll make enough row to wake the whole house, if they go off."

"Well, it's simple enough," said Tom Merry.

"I've got another dodge in my mind, of a steel trap to catch the burglar, but I haven't worked that out yet," said Glyn. "Now, lend a hand!"

"Hallo! What are you chaps up to?"

Blake of the Fourth had just come upstairs. He stood staring in surprise at the chums of the Shell and the wonderful burglar alarm.

"Glyn's burglar alarm," said Lowther. "If a burglar comes in and rings the bell, we know he's here. We're going to put up a notice on the window—"

"Please ring the bell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Glyn crossly. "Lend me a hand to fix it!"

"Suppose Knox should be breaking bounds to-night, and comes in by that window?"

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Tom Merry caught up a cricket stump and brandished it recklessly. One sweep sent the cups and teapot flying off the table with a terrific crash to the floor, while the juniors retreated in alarm to the door; "Buzz off!" roared the invalid. "I'm fed up! I'm not going to be coddled! Buzz off!" (See Chapter 5.)

asked Blake, with a grin. "You'd catch him instead of a burglar."

"Serve him right if he does!" said Glyn.

"Oh, yes, that's all right! Well, go ahead."

Blake walked on, grinning. He went into the Fourth Form dormitory, and his grin grew into a laugh, and his laugh into a roar. Some extremely comical idea seemed to have occurred to the Fourth-Former. Glyn frowned as he heard the laughter from the dormitory.

"Blessed if I know what that silly ass is cackling about," he said. "Lend me a hand, and let's get this fixed up before any other silly asses come up!"

"Right-ho!"

The Shell fellows set to work. The clips were fastened upon the window and upon the ledge inside, and the dry battery was put into the corner, where it was scarcely visible in the dusk. There was no doubt that if the sash of the window was raised, it would set the electric bells buzzing, and certainly nobody could enter that window without giving the alarm in the dormitory passage.

"There," said Glyn triumphantly, as it was finished, "that's all right!"

"Better try it, and see if it works," said Lowther.

"Oh, good!"

Glyn unfastened the window, and pushed up the sash. The juniors waited for the buzz of the bell, but it did not come. The Terrible Three chuckled.

"Something gone wrong with the works?" suggested Monty Lowther.

Glyn snorted.

"Ass! You've jerked this wire off the battery, you chump! You've broken the connection, you silly ass! This is what comes of having duffers to help a chap. Br-r-r!"

Glyn wound the loose ends of the wire upon the terminals of the battery again, and at once a steady buzzing broke upon the silence of the passage. Tom Merry jammed his fingers in his ears.

"Stop it, for goodness' sake!" he exclaimed. "What a frightful row! I think I'd rather have a burglar."

Glyn pushed down the sash of the window. The connection was broken, and the buzzing of the electric bells ceased at once.

"There you are!" exclaimed the schoolboy inventor. "What price that?"

"Jolly good!" said Tom Merry. "If anybody comes in there, we shall hear him, that's a cert! I only hope it won't be some chap who's breaking bounds."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were coming up to bed now, and the Shell fellows left the scene of their operations. In the dimness of the end of the passage, the contrivance did not catch the eye of anyone who passed. The Fourth and the Shell came up in a crowd, without noticing Glyn's burglar-alarm.

Glyn was looking very satisfied as he went into the Shell dormitory. If the cracksmen came again, and if they came by that window, the alarm would certainly be given. If they came by any other window that would not be Glyn's fault.

Jack Blake was still chuckling when the Fourth came in to

bed. He was sitting on his bed, examining something he had taken from his box, and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy came round to see what it was. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and surveyed Blake with surprise.

"What on earth is that, deah boy?" he asked.

Blake held it up.

"That's a dry battery, price two bob," he said, "and this is a coil of wire, double. Glyn isn't the only chap in the School House who understands electricity, my son."

"But what is it for?" asked D'Arcy.

"My burglar alarm."

"Your what?" ejaculated Digby.

"Burglar alarm. Glyn has fixed up a burglar alarm at the passage window," Blake explained. "If anybody opens the window it starts the bells buzzing."

"Bai Jove!"

"It seems a shame that he should fix it up for nothing," continued Blake. "When a chap goes to the trouble and expense of fitting up a contrivance to wake him up in the middle of the night, it seems rotten that he shouldn't be woke up, don't you think so?"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"So I'm going to run this wire along the passage to his bell," Blake explained cheerfully. "Two loose ends connected with his bell and the other ends connected with this dry battery, and I can start his bell ringing without getting out of bed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not a word!" grinned Blake. "I'll lay the wire after lights out. Hush! Here's Knox!"

Knox, the prefect, came in to see lights out for the Fourth Form. Blake put the battery and coil of wire out of sight, and the juniors turned in. Knox put the lights out and retired, and two minutes after he was gone Blake was up again. He sat on his bed in the glimmer of light from the window, and uncoiled his wire. There was a sound of chuckling from the other beds.

"Bai Jove, I wergard that as fwightfully funnay, you know!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it seems rotten that he shouldn't be alarmed, if he likes," said Blake. "I only want to do him a good turn and show him that there's something in his giddy invention."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet, you chaps!"

Blake slipped out of the dormitory. The light had been turned out in the passage now, but there was a glimmer of the moon at the end window. Blake glanced up and down cautiously, and then ran quickly along the passage to the window. There was light enough to show him what to do. He had scraped clear the loose ends of the double wire, and he fastened them to the terminals of one of Glyn's electric bells, which had been placed under the thick oaken window-ledge, out of sight. Then he uncoiled the wire and ran it along the passage, pressing it down close out of sight along the bottom of the wall. The dormitory passage was covered with linoleum, and Blake was able to press down the wire between the linoleum and the wall, quite out of sight. He ran it along under the edge of the linoleum as far as the Fourth Form dormitory, and twisted it in under the door, cutting a gash in the linoleum with his pocket-knife to give it free room.

Then he closed the dormitory door, leaving it about an inch ajar—partly in order to avoid a pressure upon the wire, and partly to leave a view of the passage so that the juniors would be able to see the fun when it started.

"Is it all wight, Blake, deah boy?"

Blake chuckled.

"Right as rain!" he replied.

He ran the wire across his dormitory to his bed, and fastened one of the loose ends upon the dry battery. When the other end was brought into similar contact it would, of course, set up a current, and the bell in the passage would ring. Blake had only to take the dry battery to bed with him and make the contact whenever he chose, and ring the bell in the passage as often as he liked. He slipped the dry battery under his pillow, and got into bed.

The Fourth-Formers were not thinking of sleep just then. They were all wide awake, prepared to enjoy the little joke upon the Shell.

CHAPTER 12.

In the Dead of Night.

TOM MERRY & CO. did not remain awake. As Glyn said, they could sleep in peace with his burglar alarm fastened up at the passage window. They could probably have slept in peace in any case, however. One by one they dropped off, sleeping all the sooner by reason of the description Bernard Glyn was giving of a new and more complex burglar alarm he was planning. Glyn's inventions seemed to have a soporific effect upon them.

"So, you see," Glyn was saying, "all I shall require is a wire from A to B, connecting the terminals C to D, and then in case of a pressure upon the point X, there will be a loud and continuous ringing at Z, and the steel arms J and K will move at once at the same time as the bell and close upon the points P and Q—"

But a succession of emphatic snores made the only reply, and the enthusiastic inventor ceased at last and laid his head upon the pillow to sleep.

Ten o'clock struck; half-past ten chimed out! Then suddenly Bernard Glyn gave a start and awoke. He sat up in bed, with all his nerves in a twitter. The dormitory was silent, save for the steady breathing of the juniors, and only a faint glimmer of moonlight came in at the high windows into the gloom. Glyn's ears were strained to listen, but he did not need to strain them; the sound he heard was clear enough.

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z!

It was the loud, steady buzz of an electric bell. The sound proceeded from the dormitory passage, and there was no mistaking it. It was the buzz of the electric burglar alarm at the passage window.

"My hat!" muttered Glyn, his heart thumping. "Jolly lucky I put it up! I knew the rascals would have another try."

He sat up in bed. His heart was beating hard. In his mind's eye he could see the window opening and a savage face looking in. He could see the mask and the bludgeon and the revolver of the desperate cracksmen. He slipped out of bed, and shook Tom Merry by the shoulder.

"Groo!"

"Wake up, Merry!"

"Ge-r-r-r! 'Tain't rising-bell; 'tain't light yet!" murmured Tom Merry sleepily.

"Wake up!"

Glyn shook Tom Merry roughly. The Shell fellow's eyes came wide open, and he sat up in bed, so suddenly that his head came into contact with Glyn's, and there was a loud crack.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"You ass!"

"You fathead!"

"You—you chump!" growled Tom Merry, rubbing his head. "What the dickens—"

"Get up, you fathead!"

"What's the matter?"

"Burglars!"

"What!"

Glyn grasped his shoulder.

"Listen!" he said.

Tom Merry listened, and gave a start.

"By Jove! The alarm!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The window must be open, then," muttered Tom Merry.

"Yes; and they're getting in. Jump up!"

"What-ho!"

Manners and Lowther and several other fellows were awake by this time. Kangaroo, the Cornstalk junior, jumped out of bed. Clifton Dane and Gore followed his example.

"It's my burglar alarm," Glyn explained in a hurried whisper. "It's fixed at the end of the passage, and it rings as soon as the window's open."

"Then the window must be open now," muttered Kangaroo excitedly.

"Of course!"

"We'll capture the scoundrels this time, if they're inside," Tom Merry whispered. "We've got some cricket stumps here, in case they were wanted. Take one each, and let's get out of the dorm. You fellows game?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Come on, then!"

Staying only to drag on their trousers over their pyjamas, the juniors grasped the cricket stumps and stole silently towards the door of the dormitory. The whole of the dormitory was awake now, and half of the fellows were out of bed. Tom Merry opened the door and put his head out into the passage.

Buz-z-z-z-z-z-z!

(Continued on Page 18.)

ANSWERS

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(Continued from Page 16.)

The ringing of the electric bell was louder and clearer now that the door was open. The juniors drew a deep breath. They remembered the revolver that had been left behind by the burglars on the previous night, and they knew there might be fearful danger. But the idea of being the instruments of effecting the capture of the cracksmen was irresistibly attractive. And seven or eight sturdy fellows with stumps in their hands should surely be a match for a gang of cracksmen.

They stepped out silently into the dormitory. They peered along the passage, but they could see nothing but a glimmer of pale moonlight at the window. The bell ceased ringing. It was almost as if somebody had been listening for the faint sound of the dormitory door opening, so suddenly did the buzzing of the bell cease.

"They've shut the window again!" Glyn murmured. "The bell would ring all the time it was open."

The juniors shivered a little. "Then they must be inside the house," muttered Manners.

"Yes, rather!"

"There doesn't seem to be a sound."

"Let's go and see," said Tom Merry resolutely.

He led the way along the passage, grasping his stump firmly. There was no sound in the passage, no sound on the stairs. They leaned over the banisters and listened, and not a sound came from below. The window was a glimmering square, and was shut. There was no shadowy form visible there.

"Better yell and wake the house!" murmured Gore. "The prefects won't be gone to bed yet, and Railton will be in his study. Better yell—"

"Hold on!" murmured Lowther. "It's jolly queer the burglars coming so early; there must be lights in some of the windows still."

"Oh, that's their cunning," said Glyn. "They think they won't be expected early, and the mastiff won't have been let loose yet."

"H'm! But—"

The moon drifted behind a bank of clouds, and all was blackness. The window was blotted out from view; the juniors could not see one another in the passage. They waited with tense nerves.

"Perhaps they opened the window and heard the bell and shut it again," Monty Lowther whispered. "They may be gone."

"Very like. I think—oh, listen!"

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z!

It was the buzz of the bell again, coming so suddenly that it startled the juniors, and they fairly jumped.

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z!

"There it is! Listen!"

"The window must be open again."

"Come on!" muttered Tom Merry. "Let's tackle the scoundrels as they get in."

"Right-ho!"

The juniors rushed pluckily down the passage. They reached the window, with the cricket stumps ready to strike. The moon came out from behind the clouds and shone upon the window, and showed it still closed and shut. There was no sign of a burglar. But the bell was still ringing.

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z!

"My hat!"

"What the—"

"I—I—I can't understand it," gasped Glyn, in bewilderment. "The bell can't ring unless the window's open! It can't!"

"But it is ringing, fathead!"

"I don't care; it can't, I tell you!"

"You ass!" said Tom Merry wrathfully. "It's not burglars at all; it's only something gone wrong with your rotten invention."

"You ass, Glyn!"

"You fathead!"

"You chump!"

"I—I don't understand it," gasped Glyn. "I tell you the bell can't ring unless—"

"Fathead!"

"Stop the blessed thing! We shall have the whole giddy house up here soon," muttered Monty Lowther. "Yank it down, you ass!"

"But I—I—I—"

"Fathead!" yelled Tom Merry. "Stop it, can't you!"

Glyn, lost in bewilderment, stooped down over the battery in the dim corner, and disconnected the wires. Then, if any time the bell should certainly have stopped ringing. But it didn't.

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Buzz-z-z-z!

Glyn staggered back.

"It's—it's haunted!" he gasped.

"Disconnect the wires, you idiot—"

"I—I have—"

"What!"

"Look for yourself," stammered Glyn.

"Great Scott!" Tom Merry felt over the battery with his fingers, there was no doubt that it was disconnected. Yet the bell was ringing away as merrily as ever.

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z!

"My only hat! What the—"

"It must be haunted!"

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z!

CHAPTER 13.

Merely a Jape.

BERNARD GLYN staggered against the wall of the passage. The Shell fellows backed away from the window in creepy alarm.

Burglars they could have understood. But they couldn't understand this. Glyn had disconnected both terminals of the battery. And yet that unearthly bell went on ringing, as if it possessed a demoniac energy of its own.

Glyn's inventions had sometimes gone wrong before. But he had never known a case of an electric bell ringing of its own accord without any current being applied.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Either I'm dotty, or the thing's haunted! I—I suppose we're not dreaming."

"Stop the blessed thing, Glyn!" growled Kangaroo. "We shall have the prefects up here soon."

"I can't! It won't stop! It's ringing of its own accord! I—I must be dreaming! One of you fellows pinch me, and I shall wake up."

"Oh, all right!" said Lowther.

"Yaroorh!" roared Glyn.

"What's the matter?"

"You—you idiot! You've taken a lump out of my leg," yelled Glyn.

"Well, you asked me to pinch you—"

"You—you—you—"

Buzz-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z! The bell was buzzing on cheerfully, as if nowhere near the end of its energy yet. It was weird.

"The horrible thing's got to be stopped," exclaimed Tom Merry. "We shall have— Oh, my hat! Here they come!"

There was a gleam of light on the stairs, and Kildare, of the Sixth, hurried up with a lamp in his hand. The captain of St. Jim's was looking amazed and alarmed, and he had a stump in his right hand. The lamp gleamed upon the Shell fellows before they had time to run. Kildare stared at them.

"What are you doing out of your dormitory?" he demanded.

"Looking for burglars!" gasped Tom Merry.

"What, have they—"

"No, they haven't; but they ought to have, by rights. Glyn put up this giddy electric burglar alarm here, and it fetched us out of bed by ringing—and it's ringing yet. It was booked to ring when the window was open, and it's gone off of its own accord."

"You young ass! Disconnect the thing at once, and go back to bed," said Kildare, laughing in spite of himself.

"But—but it is disconnected."

"What!"

"Look, there's the battery!"

Kildare turned the lamplight upon the battery. The loose ends of the wire were inches from the terminals. The connection was undoubtedly broken.

"It's ringing of its own accord," gasped Bernard Glyn, "without any current. I can't understand it. It's unearthly."

"Rot!" said Kildare. "A bell cannot ring without being connected up with a battery."

"But it is, you see—"

"There must be another battery here."

"No, there isn't. I—I—"

"How many batteries did you use?"

"Only one—this one."

"Then somebody else must have connected up another," said Kildare; "a bell can't ring without any current, anyway."

He knelt down and examined the bell under the window-ledge. It was still buzzing away furiously, with an incessant buzz. The lamplight showed what the juniors had not been able to see in the dark—the two new wires connected with the bell, which disappeared along the window-ledge out of sight, and ran down the corner of the wall and vanished again under the linoleum.

"Where do these wires lead to?" demanded Kildare.

"What wires?"

"This double wire, it goes under the linoleum——"

"There isn't one there."

"Look, you young ass!"

Glyn looked, and jumped.

"I—I didn't put that wire there!" he roared. "Some other ass—I mean some ass has shoved that there. I don't understand——"

Kildare burst into a laugh.

"I suppose it's a jape of some other young rascals," he said. "Anyway, we'll follow this wire and see where it leads. Hold the lamp, Merry, and show me a light."

Tom Merry held the lamp, and Kildare moved along the passage, jerking the wire out of its place of concealment under the edge of the linoleum. It led them to the doorway of the Fourth-Form dormitory, and there disappeared under the door.

The Shell fellows looked at one another sheepishly.

They understood now.

"My only hat!" murmured Manners. "Blake, of course. The young villain has put a new wire to the bell, and he's been ringing it from the dorm. here."

"The—— You awful fraud!"

Kildare pushed the door of the Fourth-Form dormitory open. The bell ceased ringing suddenly, and as the lamp-light was flashed into the dormitory, it showed a row of beds with juniors in them apparently fast asleep.

Kildare smiled grimly.

"Blake!" he said.

No reply.

"Jack Blake!"

Snore!

"Blake! Answer me!"

Snore!

"Pull the bedclothes off him, Gore!"

Blake appeared to wake up suddenly. He sat up in bed, and blinked at the light. Some of the other fellows seemed to wake up at the same time.

"Hallo!" said Blake sleepily. "Is that you, Kildare?"

"Yes, you young rascal!"

"Anything the matter?" asked Digby.

"Which of you has been ringing that bell?"

"What bell?"

"You know very well what bell," said Kildare, coming towards Blake's bed. "Ah, I see the wire runs to your bed; you have a dry battery in there, I suppose!"

Blake grinned. The game was up now. He had not expected Kildare to be brought into the matter, and he had to face the music. He slipped his hand under his pillow and brought out the dry battery.

"Here you are, Kildare!" he said meekly. "Don't smash it, it cost two bob."

"You—you rotter!" shouted Bernard Glyn. "I'll——"

"Shut up!" said Kildare. "It serves you right for fixing up a silly contrivance without asking permission first."

"It wasn't a silly contrivance!" howled Glyn. "It was a jolly good invention, a simply ripping idea, and——"

"Well, you'll take it down first thing in the morning, anyway," said Kildare gruffly. "As for you, Blake——"

"Oh, go it gently!" said Blake. "It was a good jape, wasn't it?"

Kildare laughed.

"Well, perhaps it was," he said. "You will take fifty lines for making a disturbance. Now, go to sleep, you young rascals!"

And Kildare left the dormitory, and he saw Tom Merry & Co. to bed, before he went down, and cautioned them as to what would happen if they left their beds again that night, burglars or no burglars. In the Fourth-Form dormitory there was a sound of prolonged and joyous chuckling.

"I don't think the Shell have ever been so beautifully drawn before," Blake chuckled. "I don't mind the lines. Any other prefect would have made it two on each hand. Kildare's a brick. And I think we're finished with Glyn's burglar alarms for a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 14.

Mr. Wodyer is Mysterious.

"POOR old Woddy!"

It was Tom Merry who made the remark, as the Shell fellows strolled out of the School House after morning lessons the next day or two later.

Mr. Wodyer had come out of the Fourth-Form-room, and crossed the quad to the New House. The chums of the Shell, who felt very friendly towards the New Housemaster, could not help noticing how pale and out of sorts he looked. He looked as if he had passed a very sleepless night, and there were dark lines under his eyes.

"Yes, he does look seedy," Monty Lowther remarked.

"Poor old chap!" said Manners. "This is what comes of being in love, you know. Keep off the grass—oh, my young friends——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Gussy's the only one of us who's ever been in love. But he never looked so bad as Woddy about it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——" began the swell of St. Jim's, who was standing on the steps of the School House, and overheard the remark. "I must say——"

"I remember Gussy being off his feed," said Blake, with a shake of the head. "It used to keep him awake of a night, as bad as—as tummy ache——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Or a burglar alarm," said Digby.

The chums of the Shell turned pink. It was two or three days since the testing of Glyn's invention, but the juniors of the School House had not ceased chipping the Terrible Three about it yet.

"Oh, rats!" said Glyn. "But Woddy does look bad, really. Upon the whole, I'm going to overlook his cheek, and take him up more carefully."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's your pater," said Monty Lowther.

"The pater's as hard as nails," said Glyn confidentially.

"You should have seen how obstinate he was about that burglar alarm—and he's more obstinate still about poor old Woddy. And Woddy's the right stuff, you know, only the pater won't believe it, as he's got nothing to show for it."

"I am afraid your patah looks upon the mattah in a somewhat commercial spiwit, Glyn, deah boy," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy observed. "I weally considah that it might do some good if I have him a-talkin' to——"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Woddy would jump on your neck if you interfered," said Glyn. "You should have seen how rusty he was to me when I tried to be nice to him, and I'm Edith's brother. But——"

"Hallo, Figgy!" said Tom Merry, as the chums of the New House came out. "You're not looking after your giddy Housemaster. Woddy wants bucking up."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Figgins grinned ruefully.

"He does look off colour, doesn't he?" he remarked. "He seems quite to have gone off his feed, you know. He was awfully absent-minded in class this morning, and he fell asleep over the maths."

"No wonder—mathematics make me sleepy," said Blake feelingly.

"But it shows he's queer," said Figgins. "Fancy a Form-master falling asleep over a lesson, you know! Shows he's in a bad way."

"Yaas, wathah! He wants buckin' up somehow!"

And the juniors all nodded their heads sympathetically. They were all very much concerned about the popular young master, though it is extremely doubtful whether Arthur Wodyer, M.A., would have appreciated their sympathy if he had known about it.

"It's simply rotten," said Kerr thoughtfully. "Woddy is a ripping chap. He's such a change after old Ratty as a Housemaster, you know, that we can't help liking him. I don't like to see him going off colour like this."

"He hasn't much appetite, either," said Fatty Wynn, in a tone of deep feeling. "When a chap begins to go off his feed, you know, there's something radically wrong."

"We ought to back him up, somehow," said Redfern.

The juniors all agreed to that. Fourth Form and Shell, School House and New House, agreed cordially that Mr. Wodyer was a ripping chap, and that he ought to be backed up. But it was not quite clear what his friends in the Lower School of St. Jim's could do to help him.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn strolled away together. As New House fellows, they regarded Mr. Wodyer as being, to some extent, under their special protection. Figgins & Co. had been on the worst of terms with their late Housemaster, Mr. Ratcliff, but Arthur Wodyer had been very kind to them from the beginning, and they liked him very much. It was much more comfortable for them to have him in the New House, in the place of the gentleman whom they generally alluded to disrespectfully as "old Ratty." And, taking such an interest in him, it was natural that they should be concerned about him.

"I wouldn't say anything about it before the School House chaps," said Figgins, in a low voice. "Least said soonest mended. But I'm afraid Woddy is taking this very much to heart; and he's not going the right way about it."

"Missing his meals, do you mean?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"No, ass; something more serious than that!"

"But there isn't anything more serious than that!" exclaimed Fatty Wynn, in astonishment.

Figgins sniffed.

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"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

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"Look here, I got it from Taggles," he said. "You know how Taggles jaws. Woddy goes out of a night."

"What!" ejaculated Kerr.

Figgins nodded.

"It's a fact," he said. "You remember one night—it was the night after they tried a burglary here—we heard a row, and went down, and found that it was only Woddy coming in."

"Yes; it was queer," said Kerr thoughtfully. "It must have been three in the morning."

"He's been more careful since then, and we haven't heard him," said Figgins.

Kerr looked at him.

"Do you mean that he goes out—"

"Every night," said Figgins quietly. "I got it from Taggles. You know the masters have keys to the side gate, and let themselves in. But Taggles hears them, if he's awake; and ever since the burglars came here, he's had his dog loose of a night. The mastiff always barks when the gate's opened, and Taggles hears him, and I heard him grumbling about it. And—last night I heard the dog barking, and got up and looked out of the dorm. window—and there was Woddy, plain as anything in the moonlight, coming in. It was five in the morning."

"Phew!"

"It's jolly serious," said Figgins. "A master has no right to go out every night, and stay away practically all night. The Head would be rattled about it if he knew. Of course, we shan't say a word; but Taggles is bound to jaw. It will get out, and it will get Woddy into trouble. As a matter of fact, it isn't quite respectable."

"But what does he do?" asked Fatty Wynn, in amazement.

Figgins shook his head.

"Ask me another," he said. "It looks as if he's taking to a wild life, to drown his troubles, you know; but—"

"Woddy's not that kind of bouncer," said Kerr decidedly.

"Well, no, I don't think he is," agreed Figgins. "But what the dickens does he go out every night, and all night, for?"

"The giddy Romeo act, perhaps," said Fatty Wynn. "Watching the light in the lady's window, you know, and all that."

"But Miss Glyn can't keep a light burning all night, for a giddy ass to watch from the road," said Kerr, laughing.

"Ambling up and down the lanes, perhaps, making up poetry," said Wynn. "I remember Gussy used to make up poetry when he was in love—rot about moon and boon, and light and night, you know."

"Woddy isn't that sort of idiot, either," said Figgins. "I don't catch on to it myself, but I only hope that Woddy won't get into trouble."

And Figgins looked very serious and thoughtful as he went in to dinner. Dinner was served in the dining-room of the New House, and all the fellows came in, but one person was absent—the Housemaster. Monteith, the prefect, called to Figgins.

"Go to Mr. Woddy's room, and tell him dinner's ready, Figgins."

"Yes, Monteith."

Figgins hurried to the Housemaster's room. He knocked at the door, but there was no reply from within. Figgins knocked again, and opened the door. Mr. Woddy was sitting at his table, and his arms rested upon it—his head had fallen forward upon his arms, and he was fast asleep.

Figgins stood for some moments undecided, listening to the heavy, steady breathing of the Housemaster. But it would never do to return to Monteith, and tell him that the Housemaster was asleep in the middle of the day; it would excite too much curiosity. Figgins touched Mr. Woddy gently upon the shoulder.

Mr. Woddy started at his touch, and lifted his head drowsily. He saw Figgins, and straightened up at once, frowning.

"Figgins! What—"

"Dinner's ready, sir."

Mr. Woddy rose to his feet, flushing deeply.

"Dear me!" he said. "I—I must have fallen asleep. Thank you, Figgins!"

Figgins hurried away. Mr. Woddy rubbed his eyes, and looked into the glass, and rubbed them again, blinking in a tired way.

"This won't do!" he murmured. "Hang it! But—but there's no help for it. The old man is silly and obstinate, and won't take any precautions; and I cannot risk harm coming to her. But—but I shall have to be careful."

And Mr. Woddy went very thoughtfully into the dining-room.

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CHAPTER 15.

Grit!

"NONSENSE!"

Mr. Glyn uttered that expressive word in a tone of finality.

Dinner was over at Glyn House. Dusk had fallen on the wide gardens and shrubberies, and was deepening into night. Bernard Glyn, of the Shell, had dined at home that evening, having permission from his Housemaster; and he was sitting in a corner of the long drawing-room, wishing that some of his chums were with him, when his father's voice disturbed his reading. He looked up from his book, and glanced across sympathetically at his sister.

Edith was silent, and a little pale. She had been speaking in a low tone, when her father silenced her with that remark.

Glyn rose, and put his book down, and strolled out upon the terrace with his hands in his pockets. He was going to stay the night at his home, and return to St. Jim's in the morning, as he sometimes did. He had a workshop in the house, and he often occupied himself there with contrivances that were too extensive for the study at St. Jim's. At his home, his inventions had to be kept strictly within the limits of his workshop.

"Poor old Edie!" he murmured, as he strolled out upon the terrace. "Fancy trying to reason with the governor! Only a girl would think it possible. I may as well leave them to fight it out."

Edith Glyn glanced round as her young brother disappeared through the French windows. Mr. Glyn settled himself back in his chair, and selected a cigar from his case. When he was in a bad temper, Mr. Glyn smoked cigars in the drawing-room, as a sort of warning to the household generally that his anger was to be feared. He lighted his cigar and snorted. Edith looked at him.

"Papa—"

"Nonsense!"

"But, my dear papa—"

"Nonsense!"

The girl smiled a little.

"But won't you let me speak?" she said. "It is very, very hard of you not to let me see Arthur."

"Nonsense! What's the use of seeing him, when it is impossible for anything to come of it? Why couldn't you be satisfied with a naval officer, for instance?"

Edith coloured.

"But I really care for Arthur," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"There is nothing against him—"

"And nothing in his favour," growled the millionaire.

"Impertinent young puppy, to think that he could marry a millionaire's daughter! Ugh!"

"He would care for me just as much if I were poor," said Edith.

Mr. Glyn grunted.

"Possibly," he said. "I don't doubt that he is fond of you. Even your old father is fond of you, though you bother him to death with your nonsense. But—"

"And Arthur is not so very poor. He is in a good position now," said Edith. "He will probably remain a Housemaster at St. Jim's."

"And you could become a Housemaster's wife, and look after the House accounts, and see clean linen served out to the boys, and so forth, after what you've been used to," said Mr. Glyn sarcastically.

"Yes; I think I should be very happy. Arthur does not want your money, papa, and he is able to look after a wife. I think it is very cruel that mere money should come between me and happiness."

"Mere money! Wait till you can't afford to buy a new summer hat," growled the millionaire. "Women are always ready to face poverty—till the poverty comes! But it isn't the money. If there were anything in that young man, if he had any real grit, I shouldn't object. You have money enough, goodness knows! It isn't a question of money, but you want a man for a husband—a man who can do things—not a young popinjay in a Master-of-Arts gown, with no ideas in his head above Greek irregular verbs, and no courage for anything better than a game of football."

"I am sure Arthur is quite able to distinguish himself, if he had any opportunity," said Edith. "But—"

"He should make an opportunity, then. I did."

"But we cannot all be millionaires, papa. There would not be enough money to go round," said Edith, smiling.

"I don't ask him to become a millionaire, but to do something to show that there's some quality in him. All he's done is to write me an idiotic note about danger from burglars. I'm an old man, but I'm not afraid of burglars. He's a young man, and he's as nervous as an old hen," growled the millionaire.

"But it would be only prudent to take precautions—"

"Prudent! When I was a young man I wasn't thinking of prudence. Young men in our days are too prudent; I prefer a little courage."

And Mr. Glyn tossed his half-smoked cigar into the fire, and walked out of the room, to cut short the argument.

Edith Glyn sighed.

"It's no good, Edie," said Bernard, looking in at the window. "The governor's a giddy mule—simply a mule. I've tried to reason with him, and it won't work. I've had to give up my burglar alarm, and you'll have to give up Woddy."

"Don't be silly, Bernard; go to bed!"

"All right. Good-night, old girl; but you'll see—the governor will never be reasonable. Unless," Glyn added thoughtfully—"unless I could make some invention for doing it by electricity, somehow."

Edith smiled.

"Good-night, Bernard!"

Glyn went to bed. Glyn House was an early household, and by half-past eleven there was not a light burning. Edith Glyn looked from her window into the shadowy grounds ere she extinguished her light. The stars were in the sky, and they glimmered over the wide shrubberies, and the row of elm-trees that marked the road beyond the garden walls. A shadow moved under the trees, and the girl's eyes caught it for a moment. Her heart beat quickly at the thought that it might be one she cared for.

The last light went out.

Darkness lay upon the house—silence and slumber.

Silence in the wide, lonely grounds. But when the hour of one had passed, if anyone had been awake in the house, he might have heard a faint sound at the French windows of the dark drawing-room. In the deep shadows on the terrace outside, there were crouching forms—and a faint, incessant sound came softly through the stillness.

It was a sound similar to that which Tom Merry had heard that exciting night at St. Jim's; the sound of a diamond eating its way slowly but surely through a pane of glass.

"This 'ere will be an easy job, Badger!" whispered the man who was standing, and leaning over the ruffian who handled the diamond. "Easier than the other!"

Badger gritted his teeth.

"I'll be even some time with the brat who chucked that chair at the window!" he muttered, stopping his work for a moment to pass his hand across his forehead, where a deep cut would have shown if there had been any light. "But this job is safe enough!"

"And it will be a big 'aul!" whispered the other. "The old man's a millionaire, and the plate—"

"Thousand quid at least, Jerry!"

"Mebbe twice that!"

"Keep your ears open!"

The man Jerry moved along the terrace a little, and looked and listened. But the house was silent and dark, and the grounds still as death. He returned to the window. There was a faint crack, and a section of glass came out in the hands of the burglar.

"Done it, Badger?"

"All serene!"

A minute more, and the French window was open. Two burly ruffians stepped into the dark and silent room.

"Show a glim for a tick, Jerry—just a glim."

An electric pocket-lamp glimmered out for a few moments, sufficiently to allow the two ruffians to take their bearings. Then all was dark again.

"Hark!" muttered Badger suddenly.

The two ruffians listened. A sound as of a rustle in the shrubbery came wafted upon the night wind through the open window.

"Wot's that?"

"Only the wind, Badger."

They listened for a few moments. The sound died away, and was not repeated.

"I s'pose it was only the wind," muttered Badger.

"That's all, ole pal! Kim on!"

"The dinin'-room's on the left," muttered Badger. "I see 'em at dinner this evenin', from the garden. And the plate's there, I reckon."

Jerry chuckled softly.

"We'll make the haul without waking a soul," he murmured. "But if they wake—"

The Badger set his teeth.

"It will be the worse for anybody who tried to stop me makin' a 'aul like this!" he muttered. "We're makin' this part of the country too 'ot for us, Jerry, and we've got to clear; but a big 'aul first!"

"You bet!" murmured Jerry.

The Badger opened a door silently, and they stepped out into a hall. Across the hall was the door of the dining-room, and they opened it and passed in. The Badger crossed to the windows and drew the blinds carefully, and then the electric

lantern was turned on again. Jerry placed it upon the table. As he did so, the Badger gave a violent start, and his hand went into his pocket for a weapon.

"Wot's that?"

Jerry, the less desperate ruffian of the two, turned pale.

What the Badger had heard was a step in the passage, and the next moment there was a glare of light as the electric lamps were turned on. The figure of an old man in a dressing gown and slippers appeared at the open door.

"The old cove!" muttered Jerry.

Mr. Glyn stared into the room.

"You scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "I thought I heard a noise! You scoundrels!"

The Badger's desperate face became murderous in its expression. Mr. Glyn had awakened and come down—recklessly enough; but he did not seem to feel fear. The Badger's hand came up with a jemmy in it, and he leaped savagely towards the old man. Mr. Glyn started back, but the cracksmen's grasp was upon him, and he was dragged into the room. He fell, the ruffian's knee upon his chest.

"Quiet!" hissed the Badger. "Quiet! Give the alarm, and I'll smash your skull!"

"You scoundrel! Help—"

The jemmy descended. Mr. Glyn tore his head aside, and the blow almost missed; but it struck him slanting, and the blood gushed under the white hair. The Badger's hand rose again, and Jerry called out hoarsely:

"Badger! Don't make it a 'anging job, you fool!"

Mr. Glyn, half-stunned as he was, caught the ruffian's wrist, and held back the blow.

"Help!" he cried faintly.

"Jerry, lend a 'and, you fool!"

The second ruffian seized upon the millionaire. There was a crash of rapid feet in the house, in the hall, and a figure dashed in at the door of the dining-room. It was a young man, with a pale face and flashing eyes. He did not stop to speak. He sprang at the two ruffians like a tiger, and a crashing blow from his fist, landing under the ear, sent Jerry reeling to the floor.

The Badger sprang to his feet, releasing Mr. Glyn to face this new foe. His calculations were out. The burglary had been planned after long and careful watching of the house, and he knew that this young man did not belong to the household. He had no time to wonder who he was. He leaped at him, with a curse.

The young man caught his wrist, and with a twist sent the jemmy whirling away. Then his grasp was upon the ruffian. They struggled furiously, and the cracksmen, burly as he was, found that he had met quite his match. His hand slid into his pocket, and came out with a revolver in it.

"Hang you! Take that!"

Crack—crack!

"Ah!"

There was blood upon the young man's face now. But he held on to the cracksmen, and he wrenched the pistol away. There was a crash of breaking glass as Jerry leaped through the window and disappeared. The whole household was up now. Lights were flashing, and women's voices were shrieking. The Badger fell heavily, with his antagonist on top of him, and the back of his head crashed hard upon the floor. A shiver ran through him, and he lay limp and still. He was stunned.

Startled servants were rushing in now. Bernard Glyn was first of the new-comers, and he had a cricket-stump in his hand. The young man, with his hand to his head, reeled away to a chair, and sank down.

"Take care of that scoundrel!" he gasped. "Bind him! He will recover!"

The servants threw themselves upon the stunned ruffian. Bernard Glyn stared blankly at the young man, upon whose ghastly face the red streak showed up grimly.

"My hat! Mr. Woddyer!"

Mr. Glyn staggered to his feet. He was bleeding from his blow, but he was not seriously hurt. But the case of his rescuer seemed more serious.

"Woddyer," he muttered—"Arthur Woddyer!"

The young man smiled faintly.

"How did you come here?" gasped Mr. Glyn.

"He's wounded!" muttered Bernard Glyn. "Good heavens, somebody buzz off for a doctor! Let me tie it up, sir—"

"Arthur!"

It was Edith's voice. The girl, white as a ghost, came in. Arthur Woddyer tried to sit upright as he heard her voice, but he sank back into the chair with a groan. His senses were reeling.

"Edith! Don't worry! I—I'm all right!" He smiled faintly again. "You will admit that I have a little grit now, sir?"

"Forgive me!" muttered Mr. Glyn, brokenly.

But Arthur Woddyer could not hear. His eyes were closed.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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CHAPTER 16.

The New Master's House.

ARTHUR WODYER was placed in Bernard Glyn's bed, and the Shell fellow dashed off at full-speed upon his bicycle to fetch a doctor and the police. The Badger, tied hand and foot, was guarded by the servants until the police arrived, and then he was taken to the station. Meanwhile, Arthur Wodyer's injuries were seen to.

The cracksmen had had no time to take aim when he fired, but the shots had gone terribly close. One of them had grazed Arthur Wodyer's head, tearing away a strip of skin under the hair. He would bear that scar to his grave; but it was not a dangerous hurt. But the second bullet was buried in his shoulder, and it had to be extracted. The surgeon shook his head over it.

Mr. Glyn, with his head bound up, was in the room. And so was Edith—calm, but white as a statue.

It had all come out now, from what Arthur Wodyer had muttered when he was laid upon the bed. He had been fearful of harm coming to Edith, and every night he had left the school to keep watch and ward outside her house till the small hours of the morning. Every night had found him at his post, and so he intended to watch, either until the danger came, or he was sure that the danger existed no longer. And it had come, and it had found him ready. It was not Edith upon whom the peril came, as the lover's uneasy fears had dreaded, but her father. If the second blow of the cruel jimmy had reached the old man's head, he would never have risen from the floor in life again.

Arthur Wodyer had saved his life, but it was doubtful for a long time whether he had not given his own in exchange.

The millionaire's remorse was bitter.

"Can you forgive me, my boy?" the old gentleman muttered, when Arthur came to himself the next day.

Arthur Wodyer smiled faintly.

"I have nothing to forgive," he said. "How am I? The doctor won't tell me."

"Bad!" said Mr. Glyn. "I know I can tell the truth to a good plucked one like you. Bad! But we shall pull you through! And Arthur"—Mr. Wodyer started. The millionaire had not called him by his Christian name before—"Arthur, my lad, you remember what I told you—if you showed that you had grit. I've no objection? And you've showed it plainly enough. Heaven knows! You've saved my life, my boy, and I'm not the man to forget that! You are a noble lad, and I was wrong! Get well, my boy, get well; and as soon as you're well enough, there's Edith!"

The girl's hand slid into Arthur's. He pressed it.

"Thank you, sir!" he said. "I shall get well, never fear, and I'll try to be worthy of my happiness."

At St. Jim's the excitement was great. Bernard Glyn had gone back to the school and carried the news. For days St. Jim's talked of nothing else. Figgins was stricken with remorse when he heard it.

"That's why old Woddy was out of a night," he said to Kerr and Wynn. "I ought to have guessed it. He was watching Glyn House, in case the burglars came there. Of course, we ought to have known that!"

"I don't quite see how we could have known it," Kerr said. "But it was just like Woddy! He is a splendid chap!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn.

"He's getting better," said Figgins. "The worst of the business is, that he's going to be taken abroad for his health, and Edith Glyn's going to marry him and take him, and we shall lose our Housemaster! Old Ratty will come back!"

"Well, it's hard cheese," said Kerr, "but I think we ought to be glad that he got what he wanted at last!"

"Oh, yes, I'm jolly glad!" said Figgins heartily.

"Bai Jove, you know," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, "I'll wish to my governor for a fivah, and we'll get up a subscription, and buy him a wippin' weddin' present on his weddin'-day, you know, inscribed with best wishes from all the juniors of St. Jim's!"

"Jolly good idea!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Simply ripping! What shall it be?"

"A lunch-basket, with silver fittings, and—and plenty of grub ready packed in!" Fatty Wynn suggested, thoughtfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Wodyer did recover, and he was not so long about it as had been expected, either. A strong constitution and the habit of keeping fit had pulled him through. When he came back to St. Jim's for the first time, the fellows—seniors and juniors—gave him a rousing reception. And, sorry as they were to lose him, the whole school wished joy to the man who had won a wife by real grit.

THE END.

(Next week's grand, long complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., at St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford, is entitled "A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!" Order your copy of "The Gem" Library, now. Price One Penny.)

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As soon as the first land is reached the construction of the aeronef, Wings of Gold—which has been carried in pieces on the Foamwitch—is proceeded with, and in it begins a wonderful voyage into the heart of the Antarctic.

Fearful creatures, thought to be extinct since prehistoric times, are encountered when the adventurers reach a mysterious mountain country never before trodden by the foot of man.

Once the aeronef is wrecked; but, by dint of much ingenuity and hard work, is repaired, and her head is turned towards the North. A terrific wind, however, springs up, and Wings of Gold is forced to run before the storm and continue the voyage still farther South. At night, when calmness reigns again, Crooks is left in charge of Wings of Gold, which is sailing just above a vast inland lake. Suddenly the cook notices that the water is alive with weird creatures, and, even as he looks, a terrible monster rises into view, its great ivory-lined jaws open as if to swallow the aeronef.

"Good heavens!" gasps the voice of Lance. "The ichthyosaurus!"

(Now go on with the story).

The Submarine Volcano—Once More in Peril—Morgan meets with a Mishap.

"It was a submarterean explosion. Why not?" growled Crooks. "Explosions are bursts—and bursts is bad. Why not?" The cook's single glittering eye roved the wheelhouse in search of someone to contradict his assertion, but there was no one to contradict him.

Suddenly the air grew darkened, a grey mist enveloped everything. Crooks could see nothing but a baffling, impenetrable mist. A dreadful stillness had followed the roaring of the waters and the strange hissing sound which had succeeded it—a quiet so immense and perfect that for one brief second even Crooks felt a sensation of awe, almost fear. But the lion-hearted cook was not long daunted; fear was unknown to him.

"Silence is quiet, and quiet ain't good. Storms follows quiet—and storms is bad. Why not? Things which is bad ain't healthy, an' I'm fond of health. Why not?"

His musings, uttered half aloud, came to a lightning end. Upon the quietude there broke a sullen roar, which every second increased in volume, until it seemed to the one wakeful member of the Wings of Gold that the very earth had at last come to its destruction—one great, frightening volume of sound, so awful, so violent, that Crooks felt his brain would burst did it last a second longer. And then it ceased almost as suddenly as it had started, to be followed by a giant scream, fear compelling, and maddening as of some enormous animal in the throes of colossal pain.

Wings of Gold gave a lurch. Crooks placed his hands upon the steering-levers and braced himself for the shock which he felt instinctively would come. Before he could think the aeroplane began to lift to the accompaniment of a frightful hissing as of a thousand exhaust pipes flinging out escaping steam simultaneously—or, rather, of a million snakes spitting out their venom at the same moment.

Crooks strained his solitary eye through the wheelhouse lights, but nothing save the grey, impenetrable mist fell upon his gaze.

The airship flew upwards. Crooks flung over the levers that stopped the suspensory screws. Another second and they would have snapped.

"Good!" cried a voice; and Teddy Morgan stood in the doorway. "Crooks, you genius, you did the right thing! They would not have stood another second of this."

Crooks's one eye fixed itself upon the figure in the doorway.

"Men don't run backwards, and screws is men. Why not?"

But Morgan had disappeared, a wild cry on his lips. Wings of Gold had lurched to one side in her upward flight, and Morgan, taken utterly unawares, had been thrown against the starboard rails.

Like a flash of light Crooks flew out of the wheelhouse, and made a wild dive after the engineer. Not a tick too soon. The engineer's head and shoulders and half his body were hanging over the side of the airship, and in another moment he would have gone for good. Crooks's long, wiry arm shot out; he gripped Morgan's right ankle like a vice, and, clinging to the rail with the other hand, hauled the hapless engineer on deck.

Morgan was unconscious.

From his forehead the blood trickled in a thin, scarlet stream down his face. He had a bad cut over his left temple, where it had come into violent contact with the iron rail. Wings of Gold was in deadly peril. It seemed as if she was in a boiling sea that hissed and bubbled about her—in truth, she was riding on the top of a giant jet of water flung up by a submarine volcano. The jet had almost reached its topmost height, and the air vessel, now in danger of losing the supporting column of water which had carried it up, was on the verge of sliding off, and likely to topple down into the immense lake of salt water—to fall to a certain and horrible fate.

"Only one man left now. Morgan was a man, but he has got a knock-out. All the rest is babies! Him and me was men. Why not?" muttered Crooks.

Then, picking up, as though he had been a merest feather-weight, the prostrate, senseless form of the engineer, Crooks leapt into the wheelhouse; it was his only chance, with the aeroplane aslant to reach it. He laid the engineer gently in a corner, and then as his solitary eye blazed with concentrated energy and determination, he set himself the task of freeing Wings of Gold from the frightful peril in which she had rested.

The list of the airship increased with a jerk. A few more degrees and she was bound to turn turtle; then nothing, not even the giant efforts of the undismayed Crooks, could save her and her plucky crew from a disastrous finale.

The upward movement of the vessel had finished. Crooks seized upon this crucial moment to set the starboard suspensory screws going; then he jammed sharp over the driving lever, and the stern screw shrieked as it flew round at full pressure. Wings of Gold made a gallant effort to right herself. For a second a gleam of relief shone in Crooks's one optic; but no, the air vessel was still in the grip of the water column. Another moment and she would go down.

Quick as a lightning flash the cook shoved into its clutch and secured it there, the auxiliary rear driving screw of the aeroplane, the one which Morgan had providentially added to the equipment of Wings of Gold before she had started on this fateful and peril-laden expedition. Crooks could hear it whirling as it flew round; he felt the air vessel quivering, like a human being in distress, under the pressure he was putting upon her.

For one brief moment his face set—set with the courage of resignation to his fate, as it broke in upon him that they were, after all, doomed to destruction; but there was still no fear in his gaunt features, only stern resolve to meet his fate as a brave man should meet it—boldly and with courage.

But the end was not to be yet. Wings of Gold gave a jump—the auxiliary screw had done it—and, with a jerk, the airship moved off from the colossal column of water which the subaqueous volcano had flung up, and sailed slowly into the air. In a second Crooks had the port-screws working also, had let the engines slow down, and had set the aeroplane steering slowly, but surely, for the distant range of mountains, on the other side of which lay liberty and their comrades on the store-ship, the Foamwitch. For the time

being, thanks to the imperturbable, resourceful Crooks, Wings of Gold was safe.

The cook's eye fell upon the form of Teddy Morgan.

"Teddy is sick. Brandy is good for sick men. I'll get some. Why not?" said Crooks. And as there was no one to gainsay him, after a preliminary glance round, to see that the aeroplane was keeping her course and all was safe and snug, he left the wheel-house and made for the hatch leading to the saloon.

Morgan stirred uneasily.

"A nip will put him right," said Crooks, glancing at his companion. "Nips is bad, but one nip isn't. Teddy shall have one. Why not?"

In the saloon an extraordinary sight met his gaze. Lance was just sitting up, rubbing his eyes, and evidently not quite able to fix matters.

"Hallo, Crooks! What's up?" he muttered.

For a moment Crooks did not answer. His solitary eye took in the scene which the saloon revealed. Everything movable had been flung to the starboard side of it. Von Haegel, Tooter and Jackson were mixed up in the middle of it in a heap. Maurice Fordham was in his bunk, and so had not come in for the general accident.

"Wings of Gold is up. Why not?" he replied. "Brandy and Morgan is down. I want brandy. That's why I'm down. Why not?"

"Don't be a fool, Crooks! Talk straight for a second! What's up? What's the matter with Morgan? Don't say he's hurt!"

Crooks did not reply; but going to a locker, poured out some spirit in a glass.

Lance was on his feet in a moment, and before Crooks had finished pouring out the medicinal spirit, was half-way up the companion which led to the deck.

Crooks followed closely behind.

"Teddy has hurt his head. Heads is softer than iron, and iron wins. Why not?" he said, as he stepped on to the deck on the heels of Lance.

In a moment Lance was kneeling beside Morgan. The engineer of Wings of Gold opened his eyes and looked about him in a dazed fashion.

"Did ye pull her through, Crooks?" he asked, staring at Lance, and evidently mistaking the latter for the one-eyed chef.

Crooks poured the spirit down the engineer's throat, and in a few seconds Morgan was himself again.

Crooks went below, and left Lance and Morgan to look after the ship.

"Ach, mein freund! What it was dot happened? We was like peas all shake up in ze bag! Mine gracious! It was de great shake!"

"Shakes is shakes, and shocks is shocks! The airship slipped, and you got a shock. Why not?" replied Crooks, helping the professor to his feet, and at the same time sticking his toe into the ribs of Tooter.

"Now then, there's 'air! Show a leg! If not a leg, why not a face? Too much 'air ain't good for a face! Why not? 'Cos if it's a face, show it! If it ain't a face, but a visage, Tooter owns it! Why not?"

"Go an' 'ang yerself, you long piece of barge-pole! If I had your face, I'd sell it and give the change to a orphan to buy breakfasts wiv'!"

Crooks eyed Tooter solemnly with his gleaming orb.

"Tooter, too much 'air makes madness! You're all 'air and no brains! Why not? Show a leg, and don't argy!"

"Go and cook your head, lamp-post!" growled Tooter.

"Ain't we had a time—not 'alf! Go and chase yerself, one-eye!" chipped Jackson.

"Animiles is brutes. Brutes ain't got no grattitood. You're an animile! Why not?" retorted the cook. "Put the saloon straight! I'm going to get a drink!"

"Dot Crooks was ein marvel very great! He some time will a great man make!" puffed Von Haegel. "I will mine Shagsbeare on the subject consult. He was der great consoler, me tear lads. I vos shleepy, and I go to shleep!" And Von Haegel disappeared into his bunk.

"Shakespeare be blinked!" muttered Jackson. "This journey is a hot 'un! I wonder what'll happen next? Here, Tooter, catch!" And the Cockney heaved a cushion at the hairy one.

Tooter caught it—in the neck.

"Bust yer!" growled Tooter, good-naturedly. "Yer think yer can take liberties 'cos you're ill!"

Up on deck in the wheel-house, Morgan, Lance, and Maurice, who had joined them, were discussing the position of affairs. All of them were mystified by Teddy's accident.

"How did it happen, Teddy?" asked Lance.

"I don't know much about it, except that I woke up from my sleep by feeling the aeroplane flying upwards in a cloud of mist and steam. We were going up, too, and no mistake—on the top of an enormous waterspout! Crooks was handling

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the aeroplane. Crooks knows how to, too! Wonderful chap, that! Only one eye, but he's got four brains. He can manage Wings of Gold as well as I do, only he doesn't boast about it. He's a marvel, too! He never wants sleep. But I do now. Tell Crooks to call me."

The rest had gone below again. Only Crooks and Lance were on deck. Suddenly the mist cleared over the lake. Wings of Gold was once more near to the surface. Out of the water again rose an ammonite, and a great black, scaly back—a vision of wild horror—rose from the bitter, salt lake. A great splashing wave lurched up and kicked the keel of the ship, fluttering it as a boat is fluttered on the bosom of the sea. The lake looked like an ocean angered by a storm. The waters swirled and raced before them. Crooks and Lance gazed at the sight in horror.

Out of the seething swirl immediately beneath a second terrible reptile raised its great armoured back, and lashed the water until the spray was dashed into the faces of Lance and the cook. Then both the horrible things sank into the depths, and the troubled waters slowly subsided into calm. The nightmare vision was passed. Lance rubbed his eyes and breathed hard.

"Why not?" muttered the stolid cook. "Wonders will never cease; but them was awful! Do I sleep, or do I dream? No! They was there, but they was not there now! Why not? Because they was gone!"

His eye was very large, bright, and round. Lance shuddered.

"This beats all!" he said, rather loosely.

"What did you call 'em, sir?" inquired Crooks.

"Ichthyosaurus."

"What do that mean?" inquired the cook.

"Fish-lizard."

"Fishy, was they?" growled the cook, shaking his head.

"Yes, they was fishy! Why not?"

Lance remained gazing at the lake for the grim monsters to reappear, but he was disappointed. Crooks went below to refresh himself at the tap, leaving Lance in charge. He returned with a heavy tread, wiping his mouth.

"Boards should be stuck up ordering 'No bathing!'" he said solemnly. "Why not? It was dangerous bathing down there. If one of them ikkey things said 'Come inside,' who could refuse? Why not?"

"I'd rather not sail even a fifty-ton yacht on that lake!" said Lance. "The fish-lizard was the largest and most savage of all the brutes. It's a good thing we can fly."

Crooks thought so, too, but did not trouble himself to say so. What they had seen was enough to strike an ordinary mortal with terror. They paced the deck together silently.

"You'd better turn in an' sleep. Why not, sir?" growled the cook at last.

"I don't feel like it. Where's Teddy?"

"He was a-snorin'," answered the cook. "He will be a-snorin' a little while longer when I shall be a-snorin'. Why not? Just turn in, sir, and have a nap, and don't worrit about them there big mackerels."

Lance laughed. His eyes were declining to remain open. He went below and dropped into Von Haagel's chair, and, like Teddy Morgan, he was soon "a-snorin'."

Crooks kept silent watch.

He noticed a change in the sky. The stars looked more dim, and there was still another ring round the moon. The night seemed to have turned colder, and the plates were wet with dew. There was nothing in the weather, however, to alarm the tall, thin chef.

He aroused Morgan, as arranged, and the engineer rolled out of his bunk.

"I feel better for that, by thunder!" he said, stretching himself. "Nothing further has happened—eh?"

"Nothing, except that we saw some little fishes!" growled Crooks. "They was werry little. Why not? They could nearly swallow the ship. Don't fall overboard, Teddy, is my last advice."

A thin drizzle came on about an hour later, wrapping the aeroplane again in a white mist, and hiding the lake. Nothing happened, and a wet morning dawned. They gathered on the deck, anxious to see where they were; but the aggravating mist refused to lift.

"Breakfast!" growled Crooks, through the speaking-tube. And they hurried below.

"That fog is quite maddening!" said Maurice, as he skimmed a piece of toast at the bantam. "Where are we?"

"We're here," said Lance, "and I know how we got here."

He shivered at the thought of that nerve-shattering ride. "Dear lads," puffed the professor, "and I have thought of it when awake. We dink we gannot pass der peaks. It is most wonderful! Der storm whirl us away we know not where, but it blow us to a place where we come through the mountains. Phut! How we come down dot awful slope!"

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Ach, I am sore all over, and I ache most dreadfully! And now we are through the mountains, and der is ein teufel of ein fog. We nodings shall see for him! Ach, how I hate der fog!"

Von Haagel's theory was the only feasible one. The storm had flung them through some gap in the wall. Tooter lost his appetite at the news.

"Ow are we going back, sir?" he asked dismally.

"Oh, cheer up, little Willie!" said Maurice. "We came over, and we can surely go back again. We are not going to stop here very long, you may bet your eyebrows on it! Pass the butter, and look happy!"

"Blackbirds," thought Tooter, "look happy—eh? I'm like the chap in the song, who never smiled again. I don't want to do much smiling, nor eating."

Jackson had been so shaken that he was unable to leave his bunk. At midday the mist was still dense and heavy. Von Haagel perspired with impatience. He was longing to see an ichthyosaurus, and he grumbled at the weather in forcible German and excited English.

The sun struggled with the mist, but it was a long time before they could make out their surroundings distinctly. The lake was completely circled by mountains of vast size. Away to the left they noticed a dark streak, and Morgan turned the aeroplane towards it.

"That's the way home, by thunder!" he said.

Von Haagel was so intent upon examining the landscape through a pair of huge binoculars that he failed to notice that the aeroplane was in motion. All at once he understood, and rushed to the wheelhouse.

"Shaf!" he roared. "Where are we going?"

"Home, we hope!" said Teddy Morgan.

"What is dot? We go home?" cried Von Haagel, aghast.

"Isn't it time, dad?"

"No, it is not time!" panted the professor. "Lance, dear lad, you gannot mean dot. You would not so cruel be. I shall not go. It is not vair. I shall not go mit you. I shall not go mit you unless I first see der ichthyosaurus."

"Well, dad," said Lance, "you needn't get stubborn. I can't call up one of the brutes for your especial benefit, or I'd do it at once."

The professor folded his arms tragically, and looked tearful. "Ach, it is unbearable!" he sighed. "It is not kind of you!"

Von Haagel's expression of misery made the engineer grin. The professor was heartbroken. He argued and raved and protested. Maurice and Lance would have given way, but Morgan was inflexible. He said "No!" emphatically. In despair, Von Haagel clutched his Shakespeare and went to bed in his clothes.

"I wish one of the beasts would come up for a blow," said Lance. "I'm sorry for dad, though, of course, Teddy is right. We must try all we know to get away."

"There's where we came over," said Fordham, pointing upwards.

"My stars!" said Lance. "What a drop!"

The aeroplane began to ascend. The precipice was fully a thousand feet high, and its flat top was covered with snow. Beyond it towered the peak, with a vertical black slit, which their glasses showed to be a ravine.

"What's the noise?" asked the engineer.

"Look out—look out!" shrieked Tooter.

A mass of snow, hundreds of tons in weight, toppled over the edge of the cliff, and hurtled down so close to the aeroplane that their very hearts stood still. Morgan sent her flying back, and none too soon. With a roar and a crash a dozen great boulders leapt into space, and dropped into the lake.

"Look—look!" panted Fordham. "An avalanche!"

Tens of thousands of feet of snow were peeling away from the cliff like white paper. The great mass curled up and piled itself together. The noise was deafening. The avalanche rushed down the slope, filling the ravine and surging over it. Like a vast cascade of white and brown it poured over the cliff. The lake surged as if lashed by a hurricane. Mingled dust and snow rose like smoke, hiding the peak and darkening the air. It cleared away.

"I guess the professor has a chance of seeing his ichthyosaurus after all," Morgan said, biting his lip.

"Why?"

"Because our luck is just dead out, Mr. Maurice," said the engineer. "I suppose we got blown through that cavern, but we sha'n't get blown through it again in a hurry. Where is it? Can you see it?"

There was no ravine—no pass! The avalanche had cut off their retreat by filling the cleft to the very brim with millions of tons of snow, sand, and rock.

(This grand serial story will be continued in next week's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order now, Price 1d.)

The Stolen Biplane



CHAPTER 1.

Mr. Douglas Colyer makes an Amazing Discovery.

"BY Jove, Robinson, the atmosphere's simply perfect! Couldn't wish for a better day!"

Mr. Douglas Colyer, the famous British aviator, stepped from his car and puffed at his cigarette with keen pleasure, looking round him at the same time. The spot was a deserted one, for no houses were in sight save a large wooden erection inside the field close to the spot where the car had stopped. This was the hangar where Mr. Colyer kept his biplane.

As he had remarked to his mechanic, who accompanied him, he couldn't have wished for a better day, for the spring sun was shining gloriously, and not a breath of wind stirred the fresh green leaves which were already protruding from the hedge-tops. The aviator preferred having a ground of his own to practise on, rather than fly at a crowded aerodrome, such as Brooklands.

The gate was opened, and the car drove into the meadow and came to a halt beside the hangar. Colyer flung his cigarette away and approached the wooden building.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Somebody's been messing about with this lock. Look here, Robinson, what do you make of it?"

The mechanic looked at the lock curiously. It had certainly been roughly treated, for now it was utterly useless, and the door stood just a trifle ajar. It was a small door in the side of the shed—the large sliding doors were secured by bolts from inside—and admittance could only be gained in this way.

"That's rummy, if you like, sir!" said the man thoughtfully. "I know positively well I locked the door all right last night. There's been somebody fooling about here during the time we've been away—boys, likely as not!"

"Well, it's a confounded nuisance, and I shall make inquiries—Good heavens!"

Mr. Colyer uttered the last words in a tone of consternation and amazement. He had stepped forward into the building. Under ordinary circumstances there would have been just sufficient room for him to squeeze past the lower plane of his machine and reach the bolt which secured the sliding doors. Now, however, the shed was absolutely empty!

His biplane had disappeared!

"What— Good gracious, Robinson, the machine isn't here!" he cried blankly. "The machine isn't here! What on earth does it mean?"

The mechanic could hardly believe his eyes.

"Not there, sir?" he cried, peering into the shed incredulously. "But it was here when we left last night, and— Somebody's taken it, sir!" he broke off.

"That's very evident," said Colyer, looking round him uncertainly. "Can it be a joke? Upon my word, it is most extraordinary! Open those doors, man, and we'll be able to see to better advantage!"

In a few moments the large doors, which formed one side of the shed, were open, and the bright sunlight streamed in. But it revealed nothing: the large biplane had utterly disappeared. What was the meaning of it? Robinson, the mechanic, was flabbergasted.

"I never heard anything like it, sir!" he exclaimed. "Somebody's been here and flown off with it during the night. They couldn't possibly have taken it to pieces and carried it by road. The police—"

"The police be hanged!" snapped Colyer worriedly. "What's the good of police here? There's not a single clue for them to work on! It's not as if it were a jewel robbery. Ah, how about—" He paused, thinking. "Yes, he's the very fellow, I should say. We'll return to London immediately."

The hangar was situated in a meadow near Rensdale, in Essex, and in a very few minutes the motor-car was whirling Londonwards, bearing in it two extremely-puzzled men. Straight through the East End and on to No. 100, Charing Cross, the address of Frank Kingston, the famous young detective, it went, and Tim Curtis opened the door.

"Mr. Kingston in, sir? Yes, sir!" he exclaimed briskly. Tim was Kingston's page, and often assisted him in his cases. "Only just in time, though," he added; "the gov'nor was just going out."

A moment later Douglas Colyer was ushered into the detective's consulting-room. As Tim had said, his master was on the point of going out, for he already had his hat and gloves on.

"Good-morning, Mr. Colyer!" he exclaimed, in his usual quiet voice. "On a bright morning such as this I should have imagined you flying across-country somewhere on your new biplane. According to the newspaper reports you've been doing wonders with it!"

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"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

"It's a splendid machine, Mr. Kingston!" cried the aviator, "but something unprecedented has happened. The machine has been stolen!"

Frank Kingston removed his gloves and hat.

"Stolen?" he repeated, lifting his eyebrows in surprise. "That sounds rather strange, Mr. Colyer; an aeroplane is a huge thing, and easily recognisable. If your machine has been flown off by somebody it could, I should imagine, be very soon traced."

"I am not so sure of that," declared Colyer. "The thief could have been on the Continent in less than an hour, and once there he could have descended unnoticed—it must have been taken in the very early morning, remember—and hidden it in a shed."

The worried airman told Kingston all he knew.

"One point is clear," said the detective musingly. "The man who took your machine, Mr. Colyer, must have been an experienced aviator; and aviators, as a rule, are not poor men. Therefore, I argue that your aeroplane has been taken, not because the thief wants it for himself, but because he wishes to prevent you using it."

Colyer sprang to his feet with an exclamation.

"By James, I believe you've hit it, Mr. Kingston!" he cried. "What a noodle I have been not to think of it! I'm competing in the Paris-Berlin race next week, and, without boasting, I am positive my machine would romp home an easy winner. In fact, all the aviation papers have already declared that the race is mine."

"Then, depend upon it, Mr. Colyer, the machine has been stolen to prevent you competing!" exclaimed Kingston confidently. "Is there anyone you could name as a likely culprit—anyone who would be practically certain of winning if you were out of the race?"

"Why, yes, of course; Gustave Hettzel!" cried Colyer. "His monoplane is a splendid machine—his own design—but it hasn't the speed of my own, which is the fastest biplane in the world. Hettzel has been boasting that he will win the race; your theory is certainly the likeliest explanation to the mystery. Do you think you can recover the machine for me, Mr. Kingston?"

"I will do my very utmost," replied the great detective quietly. "You say your hangar is situated at Rensdale, in Essex?"

"Yes—right on the marshes."

"Does the building stand quite by itself?"

"Quite, Mr. Kingston. There is no house within two miles."

"Thank you!" said Kingston thoughtfully.

"You will commence operations, I suppose, by telegraphing to the Continent. There is not the least doubt that Hettzel is the culprit. Where he is you'll find my biplane, Mr. Kingston!"

"Perhaps," replied the detective, as his visitor rose to go; "but I really don't think so, Mr. Colyer," he added, under his breath—"I really don't think so!"

CHAPTER 2.

On the Scent—Surprised.

"TIM," exclaimed Frank Kingston, a few moments later, "tell Fraser I shall want the car in about ten minutes' time."

"Right you are, sir!"

And Tim Curtis went off on his errand. Meanwhile Kingston was busy at the telephone, talking to Sir Nigel Kane, chief of Scotland Yard. Kingston had formed a theory, but in the event of it fizzling out he meant to be prepared—to have other strings to his bow.

Fraser was round with the Rolls-Royce landaulette to time, and his master did not keep him waiting. The first stop was at the Hotel Cyril, where Kingston was soon talking to Miss Dolores O'Brien, his fiancée, and assistant in very many cases. He told her of Colyer's visit, and of the stolen aeroplane.

"Colyer thinks the machine has flown over to France or Germany," he drawled, as he lay back comfortably in an easy-chair. "But, Dolores, I am far from being certain of that."

"Then what are you going to do, Frank?" asked Dolores interestedly. "How are you going to set to work?"

"I am going straight to Rensdale and make a thorough examination of the hangar. Gustave Hettzel may be a scoundrel, but he's certainly not a magician. In my opinion no man could take a strange aeroplane out of its shed and fly it straight away."

"But it must have flown away, Frank. There wasn't time to take it to pieces, and carry it by road—and it couldn't be hidden anywhere near, for there's nothing but open marshland, according to Mr. Colyer."

"That is the point which is giving me just a little trouble, dear. But don't you worry your head about it," he added,

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rising. "I dare say I shall come to some solution before many hours have passed."

Shortly afterwards he was reclining in the driver's seat of his Rolls-Royce, Fraser sitting beside him. Kingston enjoyed driving now and again, and Rensdale was reached in due course without incident. The time was then about three o'clock in the afternoon, and the spring sun was still shining with quite unusual brilliance. Kingston looked round him as the car came to a halt, close against Douglas Colyer's hangar.

"Not a house in sight!" he exclaimed. "By Jove, Fraser, I don't think Mr. Colyer need trouble much when he is practising; he could fly here all day without disturbing a soul."

The flat marshland stretched out on all sides, and only a haystack dotted here and there could be seen above the level ground. Kingston was soon in the hangar, having left Fraser in the road with instructions to wait there until his master returned.

"H'm, not much here, I'm afraid," murmured Kingston thoughtfully. "Now, I'm positively certain that Hettzel, if he has anything to do with the case at all, could not have flown the biplane away during the night. The only other solution is that it was wheeled away!"

Although the theory seemed ridiculous Kingston stuck to it. To him it seemed the only possible solution. Taking that for granted, then, the machine was actually within sight! But how could it be? The detective could not answer the question—as yet.

To commence with, he thoroughly examined the ground close about the hangar. Then, without hesitation, he commenced a tour round the wire fences of the meadow, Fraser watching him from the road, considerably puzzled.

"Now, the police, if they saw me, would say I was a crank," murmured Frank Kingston, as he carefully examined the fence. Ah, what's this?

He paused at the extreme bottom of the meadow, and stared at the rough wooden poles which were stuck in the ground to take the barbed wire. To all appearances they were the same as their companions. Two in particular interested Kingston.

"Both of them were taken up very recently," he told himself decidedly. "The earth is clearly disturbed. What does it point to? That the wire was removed temporarily to allow the aeroplane to pass out of the meadow!"

It was a distinct clue, and the detective's eyes sparkled with satisfaction. In a moment he was on his hands and knees, examining the ground beneath the grass. It was not long before he found what he was searching for.

"That mark was made by a tyre—the pneumatic tyre of Colyer's biplane," he muttered, looking at a little smudge on the hard earth. "Proof beyond question that my theory is not so absurd as it seems."

He nimbly jumped the high wire fence and made his way round a little clump of bushes and trees. The meadow he was now in was very similar to the other, with the exception that its other three sides were bordered with high hedges. A little stream ran through it, and a large haystack stood up in one corner.

"The machine couldn't have been lifted over those hedges," thought Kingston, puzzled. "Yet it isn't here. By Jove, I must have been mistaken after all! Confound it! All this journey—Great Scott!"

He uttered the exclamation in a tone of extreme surprise.

He was looking straight at the haystack.

"The machine's there, right enough!" he declared, hurrying across to the stack. "What a splendid idea! By jingo. I call that neat!"

Kingston spoke as though he was positive that the stack concealed the aeroplane. As a matter of fact, he was positive; for he knew that it could not be anywhere else. The notion seemed mad-brained, but, Kingston argued, if the lost biplane was nowhere else, it stood to reason that it was in the stack.

The latter was very much the same as any other haystack, only it seemed a little untidy. Apparently it was solid enough, but Kingston was confident that such was very far from the case. He commenced to pull the hay energetically away from one corner. At first nothing occurred, then an exclamation escaped his lips as he saw some rough poles.

Next minute he was pulling at a wooden framework. This swung back, and Kingston found himself looking into a rickety shed-like structure. Mr. Douglas Colyer's biplane was before him, unharmed and safe. Kingston stood gazing at it with a smile on his face.

The haystack was, of course, a fake. A very cleverly constructed framework of poles was piled up with the hay, thus forming a kind of shed, inside which the aeroplane stood. A fourth side was then fixed, and hay placed round it. Then the whole was trimmed up, the result being an untidy but substantial haystack. Who would possibly have guessed that it contained the stolen property?

Kingston squeezed into the peculiar structure and examined the biplane. He understood flying-machines as well as most people, and was keenly interested in this one. For five minutes he remained there; then walked out, having decided to call Fraser to assist him in getting the machine back to its proper hangar.

"Now, then—quick! Good!"

Before Kingston could quite realise what was happening two men sprang upon him. Evidently they knew his great strength—Frank Kingston was as strong as five ordinary men—for a drugged pad was thrust against his nostrils, and in a moment he sank to the ground unconscious.

He came to himself after the lapse of ten minutes, and his tremendously strong will enabled him to grasp full possession of his faculties without a minute's delay. He saw two men before him, smoking and talking; then he realised his own position. It was a fearful one, although Kingston did not turn a shade paler. Instead, he gave a slight cough to draw the men's attention.

"Good-afternoon!" he murmured, with the utmost sang-froid.

"So you've come to yourself, have you, Mr. Clever Kingston?" sneered one of the men, a tall, thin individual, turning swiftly to the detective. "Hang you, you've nosed out where we hid the machine, but we don't mean to let you off easily."

"So I gather from my present predicament," replied Kingston calmly. "Do you mean to start the engine with me in this position?"

He was bound with thick rope to the huge, eight-foot propeller which was fitted to Colyer's aeroplane. There was no possibility of his getting free.

"We certainly do!" chuckled the other man, a middle-aged man with only one eye. "We've been waiting for you to wake up so that you could enjoy the show. You thought you were all alone, didn't you? We saw Colyer arrive this morning, followed him up to London, and saw you start out for this place. We'd no idea you'd jump to it, and we must admit we were disappointed."

"I give you all credit," smiled Kingston; "it was a splendid hiding-place."

"Thanks!" sneered the tall man. "Now, then, Melrose, for our bit of fun. Are you all right your end?" he added, as the other man leaned over towards the control levers.

"Sure!"

"Then off she goes!"

The tall man grasped the propeller in readiness to swing it round, and so start the engine. In one second, if something did not turn the tables, Frank Kingston would be whizzing round at a thousand revolutions a minute.

CHAPTER 3.

Dolores to the Rescue.

"THERE he is!"

Dolores murmured the words to herself as she saw the form of her lover step across the pavement into the waiting motor-car. Kingston had just left her, as already related, to journey to Rensdale. The girl stood there watching with a smile on her face until the large landaulette was in the stream of traffic.

Then her attention was diverted to another car across the road. The driver was frantically tugging away at the handle in front, endeavouring to start the engine. At last he succeeded, and another man, who was in the car, pointed in the direction taken by Frank Kingston. Next moment the second car was darting through the traffic recklessly; its object was unmistakable.

"Those men are following Frank!" Dolores told herself quickly. "Can it be that they are enemies? They must be, or they would have spoken to him as he left the hotel. Oh dear, whatever shall I do?"

Dolores stood at the window looking after the smaller car. She knew that her lover was in danger—something told her so—and she made up her mind to help him, to follow him to the little Essex village, and warn him that his movements were being watched.

The girl had any amount of courage and resource, and in less than ten minutes was dressed ready for the journey. Meanwhile her maid had instructed Crawford, Dolores' chauffeur, to go round to a garage near by and hire a motor-car. Dolores' own electric brougham would not be equal to the journey.

So, fifteen minutes after Kingston had left the Hotel Cyril, Dolores stepped aboard a powerful Napier, and was soon following fast on the track of the other two cars. Unfortunately Crawford was unused to that make of car, and when a slight mishap occurred he was fully ten minutes before he put it right. But at last Dolores arrived at the spot where Fraser sat in the Rolls-Royce landaulette.

"Haven't you seen any other car, Fraser?" asked the girl quickly. "When you left the Cyril you were followed, and I came to warn Mr. Kingston. Where is he?"

"Over by that clump of trees somewhere, miss," replied Fraser, waving his arm towards the little plantation which completely hid the haystack. "He left me about twenty-five minutes ago."

"Oh, Fraser, I feel sure he's in danger!" cried Dolores. "Come along; we will hurry across and see if we can see anything of him."

So, together with Fraser and Crawford, she hastened across the meadow towards the spinney. The girl was all impatience, and ran swiftly, her companions having some little difficulty in keeping pace with her.

"Straight through the trees, miss!" panted Fraser, when they reached them.

The bushes were thick, but it did not take them long to force a way through to the other side. Already Dolores had her little revolver clapped in her right hand, and as she pushed aside the last bush and came into the open, a sharp little cry escaped her lips.

There, fifty yards distant, stood Douglas Colyer's biplane. It had been pulled out of its curious hiding-place, and stood under the warm light of the afternoon sun. But what made Dolores draw her breath in quickly was the sight of Frank Kingston tied securely to the huge tractor-screw propeller which projected from the front of the machine.

The figure of a tall man was even then grasping the propeller to start the powerful engine. Dolores' agony of mind in that minute was awful. What could she do? If she shouted there would be no good purpose served, for before her voice could reach so far the engine would be started.

So she made up her mind in the fraction of a second.

Even as the tall man gave the propeller a huge thrust, she levelled her revolver and fired. She was a splendid shot, but the chances now were against her object being achieved; in addition, Kingston himself stood in imminent peril of being shot by mistake.

Crack!

Almost the same second as the sharp report rang out a cry rent the air, and the tall man pitched forward on his face. Dolores' aim had been true, and her bullet had landed in the scoundrel's left leg. With terrified eyes Dolores stood as if petrified while the huge propeller twirled round for half a revolution.

But there it stopped. As often happens at the first attempt, the engine had not fired. But the rescue had only just been in time; another ten seconds and Frank Kingston's life would have been forfeit.

"I really don't think they meant to kill me," exclaimed Kingston, later in the day, as he sat in his consulting-room at No. 100, Charing Cross with Dolores and Mr. Douglas Colyer. "They were furious at having their plans spoiled, and meant to have their revenge upon me. They did not realise that it would have meant my death."

"But who were they, Mr. Kingston?" inquired Colyer interestedly—"who were they? That's what I'm trying to get at."

The great detective smiled.

"I think we both owe Monsieur Gustave Hettzel an apology," he drawled. "That worthy gentleman had nothing whatever to do with the case. The real culprits are a couple of well-known Australian outlaws. It seems they got hold of a bit of money, and came to England. Here one of them stole the designs of an aeroplane, and had it built. It was a big success, and he announced his intention of competing in the Paris-Berlin race. You must know the man—Oliver Milne he called himself."

"Why, yes, of course!" cried Colyer. "The man the papers have been saying so much about."

"That's the fellow!" replied Kingston. "He was absolutely certain of winning the race if your machine was scratched. And as there was no possibility of that, he hit upon the idea of losing it for you until the race was over."

"However you managed to find it in that haystack is more than I can imagine," put in Dolores. "It was a splendid hiding-place, Frank!"

"It was; and I only hit upon it because, in my opinion, there was no other hiding-place possible. I dismissed the theory of the machine having been flown away, and there was nowhere else but in the haystack to look, impossible as it seemed."

"Well," laughed Douglas Colyer, as he lit a cigar, "I don't think I've ever heard of a snarier dodge. Of course, the beggars had prepared the thing days before. I'm glad it's turned out all right, and more thankful than I can say, Mr. Kingston, that you yourself have come to no harm through it."

"I'm afraid I should have been in a very different place to this had it not been for Miss O'Brien," replied Kingston quietly. "I have been in very many tight corners, but never in a tighter one than I was this afternoon."

THE END.

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Please Order Your Copy Early.

Next Thursday's Grand, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL!"

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Thursday.

"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL."

Next week's long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's is one which will appeal especially powerfully to all my readers whose sympathies have been enlisted so strongly by the various vicissitudes of little Joe Frayne, the erstwhile waif of St. Jim's. The simple and faithful nature of the little fag has been more than once exemplified, but this time it gets him undeservedly into serious trouble. Fortunately, however, for little Joe, Tom Merry & Co. are at hand, ready to help, as usual, with the result that chiefly through their kind offices their little friend is saved from the stigma of being regarded as

"A DISGRACE TO THE SCHOOL."**From a Critical South African Reader.**

One of my South African readers writes me a long letter, part of which I publish below. My reader begins by suggesting certain lines on which he would like to see *THE GEM* conducted, and on such matters I am always willing to listen to all my readers' views. After this, however, my correspondent goes on to make certain statements to which I take very great exception. This is what he says:

"Another important thing is that no instruction is taught to the reader of *THE GEM*."

"Fielding says, in his essay 'On Taste in the Choice of Books': 'When a book is written solely for amusement it is unworthy of the perusal of the greatest of men, for no moral, no lesson, nor instruction is conveyed to the reader.' Now, don't you think that if something instructive is introduced into your paper it would become more popular? Parents out here think that the kind of stories printed in *THE GEM* are not fit to be read by their sons. It teaches them nothing, and spoils their taste for literature. I am beginning to think they are right, especially as regards *THE GEM*."

"The author only gives the bright side of the heroes' characters and the bad side of the 'bouders' characters. Why cannot this be changed, so as to teach a lesson to your readers that even the best are not perfect? I am sure that most of your readers would agree with me."

Personally, "South African Reader," I am sure that most of my readers would do nothing of the sort. Your statement that "no instruction is taught to the reader" seems to me to be absolutely unfounded—indeed, directly contrary to the actual facts. I fail to understand how you or anyone else, whoever they be, can read *THE GEM* regularly, and seriously assert that they have not found "anything instructive" therein. In almost every one of Martin Clifford's popular stories a very sound moral can be found underlying the amusing and interesting narrative by anyone who makes any attempt to seek it. As regards the passage from Fielding which you quote, no one can be a greater believer in the truth of his words than I have always been, and I think that my readers will bear me out by a large majority when I assert that the point upon which you have laid so much stress is just the very one upon which *THE GEM* Library and its adherents particularly pride themselves.

In regard to your suggestion of a special competition for Colonials, I may say that I have this matter already under consideration.

Replies in Brief.

Arthur W. (Oxford).—Your suggestion that readers using the "Correspondence Exchange" should state whether they are Mr., Mrs., Master, or Miss, is an excellent one, which I hope will be complied with in the future. If you wish to correspond with the young lady you mention, please write to her direct. Her full address was published with her letter.

"Tyneside" (Newcastle).—Thanks for your letter. In reply to your query, I must inform you that up to the present no arrangements have been made to supply bound volumes of *THE GEM* Library from this office.

Blanche R. (Stoke Newington).—Thanks for your letter and suggestion, which I am afraid I cannot see my way to carrying out.

"Devoted Reader" (Acton).—Thanks for your letter. Yes, a copygraph can be used for a dozen or more different letters, &c., before it needs to be melted down afresh, provided it is washed clean with a damp sponge immediately after each lot of impressions have been taken. Your request for a correspondent will be inserted in the "Exchange" if you will kindly send it in again, this time attaching your correct name for publication.

P. T. I. (Cardiff Docks).—Thanks for your letter and offer of information. I will consider your suggestion, but you must bear in mind that I receive hundreds of requests from readers, begging me to allow Tom Merry & Co. to visit their particular corners of England. Naturally, I cannot possibly accede to all these requests, or Tom Merry & Co. would never be at St. Jim's at all!

Hints for Handy Readers.**No. 3.—How to do Your Own House-painting.**

Having whitewashed the ceiling and repapered the walls, in accordance with previous hints given on this page, of the room in your house you have undertaken to redecorate, it is not a difficult matter to finish off the job thoroughly by repainting the woodwork with paint of a smart colour to match the new wallpaper.

The first care to be observed in setting about this task is to wash the whole of the paintwork with pumice-stone and water in which some common soda has been dissolved. This operation must be done very thoroughly, all corners being carefully scraped and brushed out, and every scrap of dirt and grease being removed before the new paint is applied. Then fill up any holes in the woodwork with putty, when all will be ready to receive the new paint.

The paint should be obtained in a can ready mixed for use from the nearest oilshop or house decorator's, or it can be had in sealed tins, when it is sometimes rather too thick. To thin it down it is only necessary to add a little turpentine.

The next consideration is the brush—or brushes, rather, as two or three should be obtained of different sizes, for use on mouldings, panels, etc. The proper brushes are round ones, from a quarter of an inch to three inches in diameter—the large ones, of course, being for large surfaces, the small ones for more delicate work.

Begin painting by taking a small quantity of the paint on the end of the brush and working the latter in cross directions over the woodwork, covering each part equally and evenly. The final stroke of the brush over the newly painted surface should be given carefully in the direction of the grain of the wood. This is called by professionals "laying off." In all wood-painting the object of the painter must be to obliterate as far as possible the marks of the brush.

In going over the mouldings of panelled doors or on the windows or suchlike fine work, a small brush called a "fitch" is necessary, and in using it better results can be obtained by taking a small quantity of the paint on a palette than by dipping the brush each time in the paint-can.

One coat of paint will generally be sufficient for work that has been painted before, but in some cases two coats will be found advisable to give the best appearance and finish to the work.

"GEM" CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.—A list of readers desiring to exchange Correspondence with fellow-readers will be found on the back cover of this issue.

THE EDITOR.