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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.
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A Splendid New, Long, Complete
School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.,
at St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

A Meeting in No. 6.

STUDY NO. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, was crammed.

That study belonged to Blake, D'Arcy, Digby and Herries, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. It was a pleasant and cosy room, with a sunny window looking on the old quadrangle. But it could not be called commodious. When, as sometimes happened, each of the four fellows who shared the study brought a friend in to tea, it was only by mutual concessions and great politeness that the party found room to move.

It was not tea-time just now, and more room had been made in the famous study by standing the table on one end in a corner. But the capacity of the study was taxed to its utmost limits. For not only were the four owners of the study there, but a gathering of Fourth Formers and Shell fellows had squeezed in. It was an important occasion—in fact, a very important occasion.

Outside in the quadrangle the summer sun was blazing. From the distant cricket-field could be heard the click of bat and ball. The Sixth were at practice there, getting into wonderful form for the match with Loamshire, which was coming off on Saturday. Those of the juniors who were near the window glanced out sometimes towards the white-clad figures on the senior ground, and watched Kildare at the wicket, or Langton with the ball.

The window-sill was occupied by the Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell. They were sitting in a row, jammed together so tightly in the limited space that there was no danger of their falling out. Blake and Herries and Digby stood in a row on the hearth. Reilly and Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, leaned against the wall

opposite them. Kangaroo and Glyn, of the Shell, found another wall to support them. Figgins, Kerr, Wynn and Redfern, of the New House, had disposed themselves wherever they found enough room, or nearly enough. In the middle of the study Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was standing upon a chair, the cynosure of all eyes.

The door was open, and several more fellows had added themselves to the study meeting, but had to accommodate themselves in the doorway or the passage. There were Brooke, and Lawrence, and Owen, of the Fourth, and Thompson and Dane and Gore, of the Shell, and several others behind them.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, raised on high above the maddening crowd, so to speak, adjusted his eyeglass in his eye and glanced over the assembly. The juniors looked very warm. The afternoon was very summery, and with so many fellows crowded into so small a space they were bound to be heated a little. Fatty Wynn suffered most, and he fanned himself energetically with a sheet torn from an exercise-book, and panted. Only Arthur Augustus looked cool, and as clean and neat as a new pin, as usual.

"Gentlemen," said the swell of St. Jim's.

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Merry.

"I know you are heah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, "and now you are heah, I have a few words to say. It is a most important occasion. I have already resolved what I am goin' to do, but I want you fellows to give me your advice."

There was a chuckle.

"You want us to advise you to do what you've made up your mind to do?" suggested Tom Merry.

"Exactly, deah boy. If your views agree with mine, I shall know that you are quite in the wight, and sensible chaps."

Next Thursday:

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"And if they disagree—"

"Then I shall be compelled to regard you as silly asses, I am afraid. But it's all wight; I'm sure you'll agree that I'm quite wight. Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Undah the cires—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway don't intewwupt me, deah boys."

"Hear, hear!" roared the meeting.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway—"

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus paused. The meeting grinned. The juniors had all come together at the request of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to hold an important meeting in Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage. But if the swell of St. Jim's had not been so preoccupied in his great scheme, whatever it was, he might have observed that the meeting was taking itself in a humorous spirit.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!"

"I am vewy much gwatified by these signs of appweciation, but if you shout all the time I shall not be able to address you—"

"Hurrah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—give a chap a chance. Play the game, you know!"

The appeal did not pass unheeded. Tom Merry raised his hand as a signal to the gathering to leave off cheering.

"Go ahead, Gussy!"

"On the ball, old chap!"

"Vewy well, deah boys. You are aware that a very important cricket match is comin' off on Saturday."

"No, it isn't," said Tom Merry. "The Grammar School have scratched, owing to half a dozen of their fellows being laid up with influenza."

"I was not alludin' to a juniah match, Tom Mewwy."

"My hat! And what important matches are there here excepting junior matches?" demanded Tom Merry warmly.

"I was speakin' of the Loamshire match. Although we are most interested in juniah matches ourselves, the Loamshire match with the First Eleven is a vewy important one. Loamshire is a county team, and it is a big featiah in the cap of St. Jim's to play them. Kildare is workin' like a niggah to get his team into form to play them. It will be wathah a big oradah."

"Yes, rather!" said Jack Blake with a nod. "I don't think the Sixth will pull it off, either. Kildare has bitten off more than he can chew in tackling Loamshire."

"I don't know," said Tom Merry. "I thought so at first, but since Langton has turned out such a demon bowler, I think the school's got a good chance."

"If they want a good bowler they can't do better than play Fatty!" said Figgins.

"Hear, hear!"

"Catch 'em playing a junior!" grunted Blake. "I wouldn't mind batting for the First Eleven, if it comes to that."

"The First Eleven might mind!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Lowther, you ass—"

"Pway give me a chance to speak!" remonstrated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I called this meetin', you know. I've been thinkin'—"

"No!" exclaimed several voices in astonishment.

"Pway don't be silly asses, deah boys. I've been thinkin', and I think that Kildare ought to be asked to play a juniah in the School Eleven."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He played Tom Mewwy once—"

"That was a special occasion," said Tom Merry, laughing. "It's not likely to occur again. Not that I wouldn't be glad of the chance."

"That's what I've called this meetin' about," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with dignity. "I think the Lowah Forms ought to send in a wound wubin to Kildare, pointin' out to him that a School Eleven ought to wewesent the school, and not only the two top Forms. What do you fellows think?"

"I think I want some ginger-pop!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "I'm dry as dictionaries!"

"Jolly warm in here, isn't it?" said Redfern. "Next time you call a meeting in this study, Gussy, don't forget to have an electric fan."

"What do you think of my ideah, deah boys?"

"Oh, rotten!"

"Weally—"

"Rotten!"

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"You uttah asses—"

"If I'd known Gussy was going to talk this piffle," said Fatty Wynn with emphasis. "I wouldn't have come! I might have been eating ices all the time. Yah!"

"Weally, Wynn—"

"My dear chap," said Tom Merry, "if you propose that to Kildare, he will sling you out of his study."

"I should uttally wufuse to be slung out of his studay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, I want all you fellows to sign a wound wubin for me to take to Kildare," said Arthur Augustus impressively. "In a case like this the New House and the School House ought to stand shouldah to shouldah, for the honah of the Lowah Forms. If all you fellows will sign, we shall get up a wound wubin wewesenting the leadahs of ewevy section of the Lowah School."

"But, my dear ass—"

"I wufuse to be called an ass!"

"Kildare will only grin."

"Let him grin. I ask you all as a special favah to sign a wound wubin, and I will take it personally to Kildare," said Arthur Augustus with dignity.

The juniors looked at one another. Arthur Augustus had about as much chance of being selected to play for the First Eleven, as he had of being chosen to captain a Cup-final team at the Crystal Palace. The idea of asking the captain of the school to put a junior into the First Eleven, on the occasion of the most important match of the whole cricket season, was an idea that could only have emanated from the swell of St. Jim's. The juniors could not help chuckling at the thought of D'Arcy presenting that round robin to the astonished Kildare. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was very much in earnest; and there was no doubt that he would go to Kildare, whether he was armed with the round robin or not.

"I twust you will not wufuse me when I ask you a personal favah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"But, my dear duffer—"

"Good egg!" said Bernard Glyn. "I vote for signing the round robin. I've got a fountain-pen here, and we can get it done at once. I'll begin."

Bernard Glyn, the schoolboy inventor, drew a handsome fountain-pen of his own manufacture from his pocket. "And there was a chuckle from some of the juniors. They knew that fountain-pen; it was supplied with Bernard Glyn's famous invisible ink. If the round robin were written out with that fountain-pen, the sheet, by the time it reached Kildare, would present a surface of beautiful blankness. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was surprised by the chuckle that suddenly swept through the study.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Here's a sheet of paper. Now, then!"

D'Arcy stepped down from the chair.

"Gentlemen, I thank you—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Pway hand me the pen, Glyn, deah boy, and I'll draw up the papah for you to sign."

"Hear, hear!"

Arthur Augustus took the paper, and rested it upon the bookcase to write, and took the fountain-pen from the schoolboy inventor. And the juniors, suppressing an almost hysterical desire to chuckle, stood round and watched him.

CHAPTER 2.

The Round Robin.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY wrinkled his aristocratic brows thoughtfully.

The round robin would require wording very carefully, of course. Kildare, the head of the Sixth, chief prefect of the School House, and captain of St. Jim's, was a very great and important personage. Arthur Augustus felt it his duty to point out to Kildare what he ought to do. But it was only judicious to point it out politely and tactfully. If D'Arcy had known as much about that fountain-pen as the other fellows knew, he might not have been so particular. For whatever he wrote upon the paper, it would be all the same by the time it reached Kildare.

"Deah Kildare—" began D'Arcy.

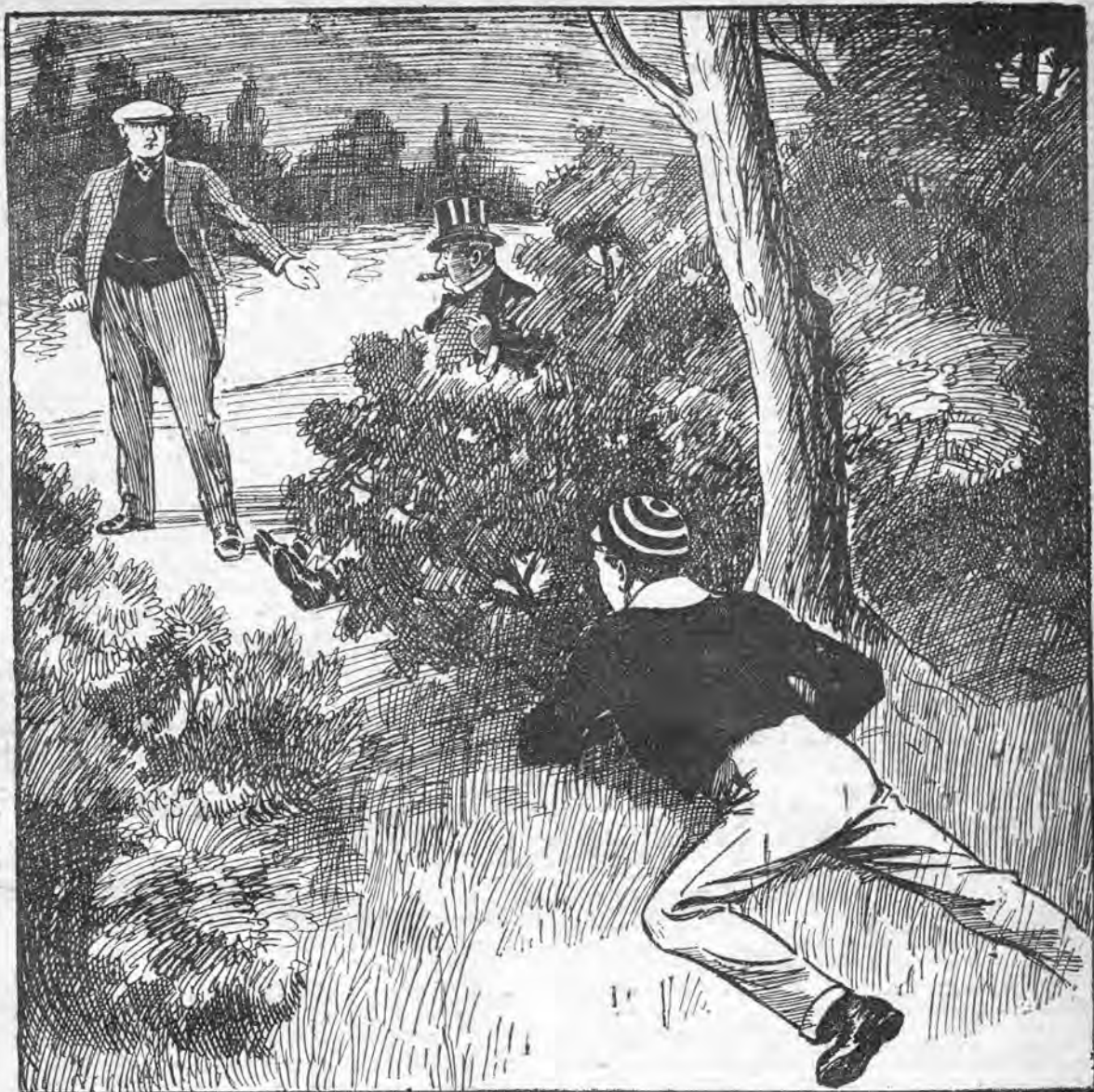
"Hear, hear!"

"We, the undersigned juniahs of both Houses of St. Jim's, wegard it as only wight and pwopah that on such an important occasion the whole school should be wewesented in the eleven meetin' Loamshire. We therefore call upon you to play at least two juniahs in the eleven—one from the School House, and one from the New House."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah, I see nothin' whaterah to cackle at."

"Of course not!" said Tom Merry severely. "Shut up, Lowther! Don't mind him, Gussy. He goes off like that, just like a cheap American alarm clock. Get on with the washing."



"Loamshire will win!" came the tones of the bookmaker addressing his rascally associate. "There's one of the school team I can do jest as I like with—he's under my thumb, and I'm goin' to make it worth his while to lose the match!" "Good heavens!" muttered Tom Merry, almost stunned by the discovery he had made. A St. Jim's fellow—one of the first eleven—had been found base enough to sell the most important match of the season! (See Chapter 7.)

"I think that's all wight," said Arthur Augustus, with a thoughtful look. "Will you fellows sign it?"

"Certainly!"

"Yes, rather!"

And the juniors squeezed their way to the mantelpiece one after another, and took the fountain-pen in turn, and signed the paper.

The signatures were placed in a circle round the body of the letter, so that it could not be told who had signed first, in the manner of a round robin.

One after another the juniors signed, with Bernard Glyn's famous invisible ink. The ink was visible enough so far.

Then the fellows in the passage squeezed in to sign.

Some of them, who did not know the secret of the fountain-pen, looked astonished, but a wink from Bernard Glyn was enough to enlighten them.

The circle of signatures round the paper grew very large. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watched the progress of the round robin with great satisfaction. It was his idea, and it was being carried out, and the fellows were signing with great enthusiasm.

"There you are!" said Jack Blake. "That's all right, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus glanced at the paper.

"Yaas, wathah! Bai Jove, that is a vewy pale kind of ink in your fountain-pen, Glyn!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Glyn easily. "Better put that in an envelope and seal it up; it will look better to deliver it that way."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake discovered an envelope in his desk, and D'Arcy carefully folded the sheet, and placed it in the envelope, and fastened the flap.

"That's all wight!" he remarked. "Now I'll go and hand this to Kildare. Undah the circs., he is bound to take notice of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Kildare's at the cricket now," said Blake, grinning. "I shouldn't recommend handing him a round robin on the cricket-field. He might lam you with his bat."

"I should wefuse to be lammed with his bat. But pewwaps upon the whole I had bettah wait for him in his studay."

"Kildare and Darrel are going to have tea with Langton, after the practice," said Digby. "I've been tea-fagging for

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them, and young Frayne is in Langton's study now making the toast."

"Vewy well; I will wait in Langton's study."

"Good wheeze!" said Tom Merry blandly. "And take particular notice how Kildare looks when he opens that letter."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus, bestowing the sealed-up round robin carefully in an inner pocket of his elegant Eton jacket, quitted the study.

Then the juniors roared.

Arthur Augustus heard the sounds of laughter as he departed down the passage, and he gave a sniff.

"The uthah asses!" he murmured. "I wegard it as a duty to stand up for the Lowah Forms, and I don't see any reason why Kildare should not do the sensible thing. Anyway, we'll see what effect the wound wobin has on him."

D'Arcy walked down the Sixth Form passage, and found Langton's door open. Frayne, of the Third, was kneeling before the fire, making toast, of which there was already a mountain in a dish on the fender. The fag looked up with a crimson and perspiring face as D'Arcy stopped him.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "I thought that was Langton. Have you come to take a turn at making the toast?"

"No, deah boy; I'm goin' to wait here for Kildare."

Frayne grunted.

"Well, you can keep an eye on this toast, then, and see that nobody sneaks it before Langton comes in," he said, rising to his feet. "That's the last round."

"Vewy well, Fwayne."

And the fag quitted the study, leaving the swell of St. Jim's in sole possession. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked to the window, and looked out into the green old quad. Past the elm-trees, he could see the great cricket-ground. Three matches were going on at the same time, but D'Arcy only looked at the Sixth Form play. Kildare was still at the wicket, and Langton, of the Sixth, was bowling. Even as D'Arcy looked, Kildare's wicket went down, and there was a shout that was heard as far as the School House.

"Bravo! Oh, well bowled!"

"Bai Jove, Langton is a wippin' bowlah!" murmured D'Arcy. "I weally don't think I could have done that myself."

The Sixth Formers did not seem to intend leaving off practice just yet, though it was past tea-time. Darrel took the wicket, and then Rushden, and each of them fell at the first ball from Langton. There was no doubt that the latter was a wonderful bowler. It was only lately that he had come out strong as a cricketer. The time was not long past when Langton's amusements had been of a far more shady character, and his evil associations had very nearly caused him to be expelled from St. Jim's. But that time was over now, and Langton was as keen and clean a sportsman as any in the old school. And his reform had given the First Eleven the most valuable recruit it had ever secured for a match.

There was a tap at the study door, and Arthur Augustus turned from the window. The door opened, and a boy of about ten or eleven looked in. He was a village lad, from Rylcombe, and he held a letter in his hand.

"Is this Master Langton's study?" he asked.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I got a note for 'im."

"He isn't here now," said D'Arcy. "You can leave it heah if you like, and I will see that he has it when he comes in."

The boy hesitated for a moment, and then laid the letter on the table.

"Werry well!" he said.

And he departed.

The envelope the boy had laid there was soiled with thumb-

marks. Arthur Augustus hardly glanced at it; he only noted that the words "Master Langton" were written across the envelope, in a coarse and careless handwriting.

Then he resumed his watch at the window.

A bunch of seniors were coming towards the School House now, Kildare with his bat under his arm. They were chatting very cheerfully, as if very satisfied with the result of the cricket practice.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy felt in his pocket for the round robin.

There was a trampling of feet in the Sixth-Form passage, and Langton and Kildare and Darrel came into the study together.

CHAPTER 3.

Very Surprising.

LANGTON glanced at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy inquiringly. Kildare and Darrel threw down their cricket-bats and seated themselves at the table. Arthur Augustus coughed.

"Hallo!" said Langton cheerfully. "What do you want, D'Arcy? Have you come here to fag instead of young Frayne?"

"No, deah boy. I want to speak to Kildare," said Arthur Augustus, with dignity.

Kildare grinned.

"Well, now you're here you can fag," he remarked. "Make the tea."

"Weally, Kildare—"

"Good egg!" said Langton. "Make the tea. I see the toast is made ready. Don't spill the water over the fender."

"Weally, Langton—"

"And buck up!" suggested Darrel.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put the round robin back into his pocket and made the tea. The three seniors were seated round the table, making inroads on the toast and boiled eggs. Arthur Augustus lifted the teapot to the table. Langton caught sight of the envelope addressed to himself, which the messenger from the village had left for him, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo! When did this come?"

D'Arcy glanced at it.

"A young person bwrought it for you, deah boy," he said. "He is gone now. Kildare, will you be kind enough to glance at this."

And the swell of St. Jim's brought the famous round robin out of his pocket and passed it to the Sixth-Former. Kildare took it, and glanced at the envelope with a puzzled expression.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There is a lettah inside for you," said D'Arcy. "A wound wobin, as a mattah of fact."

Kildare stared.

"A round robin?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Some rot of the juniors, I suppose," said Kildare.

"It is fwom the juniahs, certainly," said D'Arcy stiffly, "but it is not wot. I should be much obliged if you would open it and wead it, deah boy."

Kildare slit the envelope.

He drew out the folded paper within, unfolded it, and looked at it. An expression of astonishment came over his handsome, sunburnt face.

"What on earth—"

"Pway wead it, deah boy."

"Read it!" exclaimed Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah!"

The captain of St. Jim's jumped up and seized the swell of the Fourth by the collar. D'Arcy's eyeglass jerked out of his eye and fluttered to the end of its cord. Kildare shook him.

"You cheeky young ass!" he roared.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!"

"Is this your idea of a joke?" demanded Kildare. "By George, I'll teach you not to jape the Sixth!"

"Ow! Pway welease me! You are wumplin' my collah!"

"What is it?" asked Langton, who had his own letter in his hand unopened.

"A new idea in japes," said Kildare wrathfully, still shaking the unfortunate swell of the School House. "The young ass has given me a blank sheet of paper to read."

"My hat!"

"Ow! Bai Jove! It isn't a blank sheet of papah!" gasped D'Arcy. "It's a wound wobin."

"Lend me your cane, Darrel."

"Certainly."

"Ow! I wefuse to be caned! Weally, Kildare—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"Undah the circs.—"

Kildare grasped the cane with one hand and D'Arcy's collar with the other. He had thrown the round robin on the table.

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Arthur Augustus looked at it, and his eyes almost started from his head as he saw that the sheet was indeed blank. It had been covered with writing when he folded it and put it into the envelope, but there was no trace of writing upon it now.

The expression of almost idiotic amazement upon D'Arcy's face disarmed Kildare. He laid down the cane.

"Didn't you know that the paper was blank, D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"Bai Jove! Wathah not!"

"It's a jape on the young ass himself, I suppose," said Langton, laughing.

Kildare laughed, too.

"Well, in that case, I'll let him off," he said, releasing the swell of St. Jim's. "Cut off, D'Arcy. You can get out."

"But, weally, Kildare—"

"Get out!"

"I—I don't compwehend this at all. That was a wound wobin when I put it in the envelope, and now there is no writin' upon it!" stuttered Arthur Augustus. "It is wearnakable!"

"What was the round robin about?" asked Darrel.

"It was to point out to Kildare that it is his duty to play some juniahs in the school team against Loamshire—"

The three Sixth-Formers burst into a roar. Kildare threw himself into a chair and laughed till the tears came.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I see no cause whatevah for laughtah," said Arthur Augustus, smoothing out his rumpled collar with one hand and jamming his eyeglass into his eye with the other. "I wegard this as a sewious mattah."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I cannot undahstand the w'itin' fadin' away like this—" "Oh, get out!" gasped Kildare. "You'll be the death of me yet! Look here! If you had brought me a round robin to that effect I should have caned every young ass who signed it. I suppose that's why they gave you a blank sheet to bring to me. Now buzz off!"

"But, weally, Kildare—"

"Kick him out, somebody!"

Langton rose to his feet, and D'Arcy executed a strategic movement to the door, with the unfortunate round robin in his hand.

"I protest—" he began.

Langton raised his boot, and D'Arcy stepped hurriedly out of the study. The door was closed behind him with a slam, and in the study he could hear the three seniors roaring with laughter.

"Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, as he looked at the paper in his hand. "This is uttably amazin'! I simply cannot compwehend it at all!"

And he hurried away to Study No. 6.

Tom Merry & Co. were still there, most of them, and they greeted the swell of St. Jim's with a joyous chuckle and a chorus of inquiry.

"Did you give Kildare the round robin?"

"What did he say?"

"Is he going to let you skipper the school eleven against Loamshire?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I cannot undahstand it!" gasped D'Arcy. "You chaps all wemembah signin' the papah, don't you?"

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"And you saw me put it into the envelope?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, when Kildare took it out the paper was quite blank!" said Arthur Augustus impressively.

He expected to be met with incredulity. But the juniors were not incredulous. They yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, deah boys—" "Let me see the paper," said Bernard Glyn gravely.

"Here it is, deah boy."

Glyn took the paper and stooped down before the study fire, and held it to the heat. In a few minutes the words that had disappeared became visible again.

"It's all right now!" said Glyn blandly.

Then D'Arcy comprehended.

"You—you feahful wottah!" he gasped. "That wotten fountain-pen had wotten invisible ink in it."

The juniors shrieked.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his monocle more tightly into his eye and surveyed the hilarious juniors with a glance of great scorn.

"You uttah wottahs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard this as a wotten twick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuse to look upon you fellows as fwends any longah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus turned upon his heel, with his aristocratic nose very high in the air, and strode from the study. He closed the door behind him with a sounding bang. From Study No. 6 came sounds which seemed to indicate that Tom Merry & Co. were dangerously near an attack of hysterics.

CHAPTER 4.

The Shadow of the Past.

IN Langton's study, the three Sixth-Formers were laughing over the invisible round robin as heartily as Tom Merry & Co. in the junior study. It was some minutes before they could settle down to toast, and ham, and eggs. Langton had forgotten, for the moment, his unopened letter, and it was Kildare who called his attention to it.

"You haven't read your letter yet, Langton," he said. "Don't mind us."

"Only from a local tradesman, I expect," said Langton. "It's been delivered here by hand. But I'll look at it, if you don't mind."

"Go ahead!"

Langton opened the letter.

The healthy, ruddy hue of his face died away as he read it. A strange, hunted look came into the senior's eyes, and the hand that held the letter trembled. Kildare and Darrel glanced at him curiously.

"No bad news, I hope," said Kildare.

"No—yes!" said Langton, in a troubled voice. "I—I say, will you excuse me, you fellows? Do you mind if I don't have tea with you just yet?"

"Something wrong?"

"Well, in a way, yes."

"Please yourself, old fellow."

Langton nodded, and rose from his seat. Without looking at his two companions, he quitted the study and closed the door behind him. Kildare and Darrel exchanged glances of amazement.

"Poor old Langton!" said Kildare. "I hope that doesn't mean that he's got somebody sick in the family."

"Especially with the Loamshire match coming off on Saturday," said Darrel.

And the two seniors looked very thoughtful, and a good deal less cheerful, as they went on with their tea without Langton's company.

Langton's face was strangely pale as he went down the Sixth-Form passage. He wanted to be alone at that moment, and it was unfortunate that Kildare and Darrel had been with him when he received that letter. He turned into the Form-room passage, and entered an empty room, and closed the door behind him. There, with a shaking hand, he unfolded the letter again and read it through once more.

It was written in a rude handwriting, and with ill-spelt words. It was a hand that Langton knew well—he had received notes in that hand in other days, and had not been displeased to receive them. But that was all over now—at all events, Langton had hoped and believed that it was all over.

But the past was not so easy to get rid off. The shadow of the past had fallen again upon the fellow who had sinned and repented.

"Dear Langton,—I want to see you very apeshul. Come to the old place to-nite at seven, and I'll be there. If you can't come, I'll come up and see you at the skool.—Yours truly,

"S. LEVY."

Langton understood the bitter irony of the last sentence. If he could not come to the appointment, Levy would come and see him at the school. It was more than enough to ruin him at St. Jim's to receive such a visitor.

Langton crushed the letter in his hand.

"The hound!" he muttered. "The beastly, bookmaking cad! What does he want to see me for?"

He strode up and down the Form-room with pale face and knitted brows.

What did Simeon Levy want to see him for?

He had broken with all that set. He had confessed to the Head, and he had been forgiven, and had been given a chance to set himself right again. His old visits to the Green Man in Rycombe had ceased; he had never seen Joliffe, the landlord, or any of his friends there since. But with Levy he had not been able to break at once, for he owed the man money that he could not pay immediately. It was money lost in betting; but the man had to be paid. Langton had strained every resource to raise money to pay off that debt, to get rid of the last of his old associates. He had stinted himself in every way, and he had been able to send the book-maker enough money to keep him quiet. He still owed Levy some four or five pounds, but that he hoped to pay off before the end of the term. The man had seemed satisfied, so far, and had given no trouble. It could not be that he was anxious about the last few pounds of the old debt. What did

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he want to see Langton for? Was it an attempt to get the former black sheep of St. Jim's back into his old set? Otherwise, what did he want?

"I won't go! I won't go!"

Langton muttered the words over and over again, between his teeth.

But even as he said them, he knew that he must go. Until he had finished paying his debt to Levy, the man had a hold upon him.

And if Levy came to St. Jim's asking for him—

Langton shivered at the thought.

He had promised the Head that he would amend his ways, and he had kept his promise. But he knew that Levy, if he chose, was capable of any falsehood. It was in his power to ruin the Sixth-Former of St. Jim's, if the Head should pay any attention to his statements. So long as he was not paid—

He must be paid.

That was the only gleam of light that Langton could see. He quitted the Form-room, and returned to his own study. Kildare and Darrel were gone. Langton stepped along to Kildare's study, and tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called out the captain of St. Jim's, in his deep, pleasant voice.

Langton entered the study. Kildare looked in surprise and concern at his pale and harassed face.

"Great Scott! What's happened to you, Langton?" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"Will you help me, Kildare?"

"Of course I will! What can I do?"

"I want some money."

A harder look came over Kildare's face.

"Langton! You don't mean to say that you've been beginning that old game over again, after what you promised the Head—and me?"

"I haven't—honour bright."

"Then what is it?"

"When I got clear of those rotters, I owed money to one of them, and I haven't finished paying him yet, and he's written to me. If I could pay the brute off, I could snap my fingers at him."

Kildare wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"How much?" he asked tersely.

"Four-pounds-ten now."

"You want me to lend it to you?"

"If you could, I could get rid of him. I could pay it back before the end of the term. When I owe him nothing, he can't have any hold on me."

Kildare looked at him keenly.

"Will you give me your word, Langton, that this debt was before the time you professed to break off with that set, and that you haven't had any dealings with them since?"

Langton looked him full in the eyes.

"I give you my word of honour!" he said.

"Good! That's enough. I can lend you the money, if you like. I've got a five-pound note here that I had on my birthday, and I'll lend it to you with pleasure," said Kildare.

Langton's eyes were wet for a moment.

"You're awfully good, old chap," he said falteringly, "I shan't forget this. You shall have it back this term."

"That's all right. Does this see you clear?"

"Quite clear."

"Has that man got any paper of yours?"

"Yes, for that amount."

"Dated?" asked Kildare quietly.

Langton laughed miserably.

"Yes, dated before I broke off with them. If you saw it, you'd be satisfied that it wasn't since that time."

"That's all right then. The fellow can't do you any harm—if the Head saw that paper, he'd know by the date that you hadn't contracted the debt since the affair came out."

"Yes, I know. But I want to keep him away from here—I want to get rid of him, and have nothing more to do with him. It's the only hold he's got on me, and I want to break it, and have done with it."

"Good!" said Kildare. "Give me ten bob change, if it's four-ten you want."

"Thanks, old man!"

And Langton quitted the study with the five-pound note in his pocket. He had the wherewithal to pay the man now—but his heart was not at ease. If Levy were paid, the man had no further claim. But—but a wretched fear was haunting Langton's heart, that the money was not all that his old associate wanted. Yet when the money was paid, what hold could the man have upon him? None—and yet the senior was not easy in his mind, and he looked forward with a feeling of almost sickening apprehension to the time when he had to meet the bookmaker.

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DON'T MISS "TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!"

CHAPTER 5.

Friend or Foe.

TOM MERRY & CO. were on the steps of the School House, in the pleasant sunset of the summer evening, when Langton came out at a quarter to seven. The juniors detached themselves from the stone balustrade, and lined up in Langton's path. Langton was, as a rule, the most good-tempered of the School House prefects, and the juniors could always venture to take little liberties with him that they would not have ventured to take with Knox, or Carruthers, of the Sixth.

"Langton old man," said Tom Merry.

"Halt!" said Monty Lowther.

"A boon, great chief!" said Manners.

Langton paused, frowning. He was thinking of his coming interview with Simeon Levy, and the cheerful salute of the Shell fellows jarred upon him.

"What do you want?" he said, with unusual roughness in his voice.

"A pass out of gates for three," said Tom Merry promptly. "We want to go down to Rylcombe to see about a new bat—"

"I can't give you a pass!"

"But we should be back before dark," urged Monty Lowther. "If you're going out, you could have the inestimable advantage of our company. We would talk to you nicely all the way, and help you with your French verbs—"

"Don't be an ass! You can't have the pass!"

And Langton pushed roughly by the three Shell fellows, and strode away across the quadrangle. The Terrible Three looked after him in amazement.

"What's wrong with old Langton?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "He certainly doesn't seem to be in a good temper."

"Pain in his little inside, perhaps," grinned Monty Lowther. "But we're not going to stay in because he's got a pain in his little inside. We're going out."

"Better ask Kildare for a pass," said Tom Merry reflectively. "I'll do it—I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle!"

"Don't mention you've been refused by Langton, then," said Tom Merry laughed.

"No fear!"

The hero of the Shell returned in a few minutes, armed with the written pass. The Terrible Three had leave out of gates until dark. Langton had been gone ten minutes when the three Shell fellows strolled out of the gates of St. Jim's, and took the road to Rylcombe. They stopped at the stile in the lane, and took the short cut through the wood, which brought them into the village near the river and the old mill.

Tom Merry paused as they came out of the trees, to glance up the river, rolling and shining in the red sunset, and reflecting the colours of the sky. It was a beautiful scene, but after one glance Tom Merry had no eyes for the scenery.

Two figures on the river bank near the old mill had caught his eye. One of them was Langton, of the Sixth, and the other a short, squat man with a thick black moustache and a big diamond pin, and rings on his fingers, and a silk hat set on oily locks.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry, in amazement.

Monty Lowther whistled softly.

"That's Levy, the racing tout!" he said.

"Yes, rather!" said Manners. "And that's why Langton was so ratty about giving us a pass. That's the man he came out to meet."

Tom Merry face was very grave.

"That looks rotten," he said. "We all know that old scandal about Langton and the betting set in Rylcombe, but that was supposed to be all over. But I suppose it's no bizney of ours. Let's get on!"

And the Terrible Three went on their way. It was no business of theirs, certainly, but they could not help thinking about it as they walked on.

Langton had not seen them.

The bookmaker was sitting upon a grassy bank, and the Sixth-Former of St. Jim's was standing before him, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his eyes fixed upon the dark, oily face of Levy.

Levy had a cigar between his teeth, and was smoking and emitting little clouds of a strong-smelling tobacco. He had waved a fat hand, loaded with cheap rings, when Langton offered him the money he had brought.

"That isn't what I want," he said.

Langton looked surprised and uneasy.

"But I owe you the money," he said.

"Keep it!"

"I don't want to keep it," said Langton, more and more surprised. "I owe you the money, and, as a matter of fact, I've borrowed this of Kildare to square you. I want to pay up, and have done!"

"There's no hurry!"

"There is a hurry!" said Langton sternly. "I tell you I want to get this finished with! Give me back my I O U, and take the money!"

Levy shrugged his shoulders.

"All serene!" he said. "I don't mind, if you like. Here's your paper, and ten bob change for the five. Is that right?"

"Yes."

Langton looked at the scrap of paper Levy handed him. It was his own—the last of the many little papers Mr. Levy had held to his disadvantage. He tore the paper into tiny fragments, and scattered them upon the gleaming surface of the river. Mr. Levy stowed away the five-pound note into a fat pocket-book, which contained several more of them, and then watched Langton with a sardonic smile.

"That's done!" said Langton.

"Oh, quite!" said Mr. Levy.

"Well, good-bye!"

"Going?" asked Mr. Levy, with a peculiar grin.

"Yes; our business is ended now!"

"Not quite," said the bookmaker coolly. "I've told you that I didn't want to see you about that little account. That was nothing."

"There was nothing else to see me about!" Langton exclaimed abruptly.

"I want to talk to you!"

Langton made a restless movement.

"Look here, Mr. Levy," he exclaimed, "I may as well be frank! I want all my connection with the old set I used to meet to end. I've done with that kind of thing for good. Dr. Holmes knows all about it, and he's forgiven me, on my promise to have no connection with anything of the sort in the future. I mean to keep my word to him. I intended never to meet any of you again. That's why I've sent you your money from time to time by post. It was rotten of you to make me meet you here like this! If I were seen talking to you, it would do me a lot of harm at the school. I've got to live down the past, and I don't like having it raked up in this way!"

"The past ain't so easy to live down, Master Langton," said Mr. Levy. "You'll find that out before you're 'arf as old as I am! Fellars can't get into a thing, and get out of it again, jest as they choose. It's easy enough to get in, but it's 'ard to get out."

"I've got out of this."

"Pr'aps not!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Langton fiercely. "Do you mean to say that you want to keep up my acquaintance against my will?"

"Pr'aps!"

"Then I won't have it! I'll never see you or speak to you again!"

"I might come up to the school!"

Langton gritted his teeth.

"If you do, I'll go straight to the Head, and tell him plainly that you are persecuting me, and trying to get me back into your set, and he will jolly soon bring you to your senses!"

"But wot would he say if he knew that you had had transactions with me since the time you promised him to reform?" said the bookmaker shrewdly.

"I haven't had any, excepting to pay my debt to you. That paper you just handed to me bore an earlier date, and it's gone now. You have nothing of mine to show, and you wouldn't expect the Head to take your word against mine. He will believe me when I tell him I've kept my word—as I have."

The bookmaker laughed—a cold, peculiar laugh that made Langton start. The senior of St. Jim's felt that somehow—he could not tell how—he was still in the power of the sporting tout, and that Mr. Levy was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse.

"But if he believed that you had had dealings with me lately?" said Mr. Levy.

"He wouldn't believe it!"

"But if he did?"

"He would expel me, I suppose, and I should jolly well deserve it if I had broken my word to him!" said Langton. "But I haven't—and you can't make the Head believe a rotten slander, without a shadow of proof."

"Perhaps I could!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Langton breathlessly.

"Do you mean to say that you would forge my name?"

The bookmaker laughed.

"No; you wouldn't find me running a risk like that, even if I could do it. But it wouldn't be necessary, Master Langton. I've got your signature, right enough!"

"You must be mad!" exclaimed Langton, in amazement.

"How have you got my signature? I kept a record of all the papers I gave you, and that one I just destroyed is the last. Besides, the dates would show."

"I've got several of a later date."

"You are dreaming!"

"Look, then!"

The bookmaker took out the fat pocket-book again. He selected a sheet of paper from it, and handed it to Langton. The Sixth-Former looked at it in amazement. It ran:

"Dear Mr. Levy,—I enclose three pounds as promised.—L."

"That was what I sent you with a postal-order off the debt," said Langton.

"Exactly! You have dated it May 20."

"Yes."

"I've got the envelope it came in, too, with the postmark on it," said Mr. Levy. "Yes; you can tear that sheet up, if you like—I expected that—but I've got four more—all dated, and the envelopes they came in, with the postmarks, and I reckon your headmaster would know your handwriting."

"I should not deny my handwriting, whether he knew it or not," said Langton. "But these letters are quite innocent. I wrote when sending you money off my debt to you."

"How are you going to make the doctor believe that?"

"What!"

"Suppose," said Mr. Levy, with slow emphasis—"suppose I deny that you ever owed me any money?"

"What! What!"

"Suppose I take it that the money you sent me was for laying on horses?" said the bookmaker. "And suppose I make up a claim against you for money lost in bets, and come to your headmaster to complain because you haven't paid me?"

"You couldn't!"

"I could—and would—if you forced me to it," said the bookmaker coolly. "Them letters would prove that you 'ad dealings with me right up to last week—even arter your promise to Dr. Holmes. You could try to make him believe, if you liked, that you had only written about paying off an old debt. I don't think he'd believe it."

Langton's jaw dropped, and he stared at the bookmaker with a ghastly face. He realised clearly how utterly he had placed himself in the power of the unscrupulous rascal. The letters—even the post-marked envelopes—would prove that he had been in communication with the bookmaker. What would his explanation be worth?

"Good heavens!" Langton muttered.

The bookmaker grinned.

"I don't say I'm goin' to do it," he said. "I only warn you that it won't be safe for you to quarrel with me, Mister Langton. I'm willing to be your friend, if you don't make me your enemy. It's for you to decide—friends or foes."

There was a long pause.

Langton broke it at last, and his voice was dry and husky when he spoke.

"You villain! What do you want?"

CHAPTER 6.

What Mr. Levy Wanted.

MR. LEVY seemed in no hurry to reply. He lighted a fresh cigar and blew out little streams of smoke, while Langton stood with his fingers twitching and his features working.

"What do you want?" repeated Langton hoarsely. "You haven't told me this for nothing, I suppose? You want to get something out of me. What is it? Money?"

"I don't reckon you've got much of that."

Langton laughed bitterly.

"You are right. I'm in debt, and shan't be out of it till next term. You certainly won't be able to get much money out of me. This five I've brought with me this evening was borrowed."

"Do you think I want your schoolboy ha'pence?" said the bookmaker contemptuously.

"You've had a great deal of them, anyway."

"Well, it isn't that."

"What is it, then?" demanded Langton. "I know there's something."

The bookmaker removed his cigar from his mouth.

"You are playing in the St. Jim's First Eleven on Saturday," he said.

Langton looked amazed.

"Yes. But what does that matter to you?"

"I've seen you at practice, and I've heard about you," said Mr. Levy, unheeding the question. "They are depending on your bowling for their chance of pulling off a win."

"To some extent, yes."

"I suppose you know that there's betting on the match?"

"I hadn't thought of it."

Mr. Levy grinned.

"Well, there is—and plenty of it! Football and cricket run racing pretty close for that these days. The St. Jim's match with Loomshire is a big thing, and a good many Loomshire men have been making bets."

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"Rotters, to bet on cricket matches," said Langton. "That kind of thing might be kept for the racecourse." "That's your opinion; but it ain't everybody's. The news about St. Jim's chances looking up in this way has leaked out—some keen sharpers in Wayland get hold of it before I did," said Mr. Levy. "Loamshire are not up to their usual form; but a county team ought to be able to lick any school team, and I've been putting money on Loamshire. I was glad to find men to back your college. I took all the bets I could get, and gave almost any odds against St. Jim's. And if St. Jim's lose, I stand to win a hundred pounds."

"Then I hope you won't get it." "And if St. Jim's win, I stand to lose a good many hundreds," said Mr. Levy. "You see, in some cases I've taken very big odds—I've given six to one in tenners against St. Jim's in one case."

Langton was silent. "Then I heard about the new bowler St. Jim's had got," went on Mr. Levy calmly, "and I learned that the new bowler was yourself. I made it a point to watch you at practice one afternoon, and I saw that you were wonderful form—better than half the county bowlers I've seen this season."

"Thank you," said Langton grimly. "Oh, I'm not flattering you—I'm dealing in facts. I wish you had been a rotten bowler; I shouldn't have had to bother my head about you then. But as the matter stands, St. Jim's look like winning."

"We all think so at the school. Loamshire are not up to their usual form, and we're right at the top of our form," said Langton.

"Exactly! That's what I want to talk to you about." "I don't see that there's anything to talk about," said Langton uneasily. "The match will be played on Saturday, and the best team will win. If you've betted on it, you must take your chance."

"That's just what I don't want to do." "I don't see that there's any alternative." "Then I'll point it out to you," said Mr. Levy coolly. "St. Jim's must not win."

Langton stared at him. "Do you mean that you want me to drop out of the team?" he exclaimed hotly.

"No." "What then?" "I want you to bowl to give runs, instead of to take wickets."

Langton started back a little, clenching his hands hard. For a moment it looked as if he would hurl himself upon the scoundrel before him.

"You villain!" he gasped at last. "Fancy names don't hurt me, and don't do you any good," Mr. Levy remarked. "I want you to lose the match for St. Jim's."

"You must be mad to suggest such a thing," said Langton hoarsely.

"I don't see it. It's no more than arranging with a jockey to pull a horse, and I s'pose you know that's common enough. I've squared goalkeepers to let the ball through, and forwards to kick wild. There's nothing new in that."

"Not to you!" said Langton bitterly.

"It's as easy as rolling off a log," said Mr. Levy. "And don't you see what a splendid thing it is? The news is getting round that St. Jim's have every chance of beating Loamshire hollow. Men are willing to give odds on the school. I could book any number of bets in Wayland to-night, three to one against Loamshire. If Loamshire win, I could make a cool thousand out of it."

"Loamshire won't win."

"And I'll put on twenty-five quid for you at three to one," said Mr. Levy. "That will be seventy-five quid for you to touch after the match. What do you think of that?"

"I wouldn't touch it."

"Seventy-five quid ain't to be sneezed at, and I'd secure it to you; you needn't trust me," said Mr. Levy. "You must be mad! I'd rather beg in the streets than make money by selling a match," said Langton hoarsely. "I suppose you can't understand. But what you suggest is impossible. I'd better be going."

"Hold on!"

"There's nothing more to be said."

"There's a great deal more to be said, my buck," said Mr. Levy coolly. "You can blow off all the steam you like, but you'll have to come round. You'll lose the match for St. Jim's on Saturday, or—"

"Or what?"

"Or you'll be sacked from the school."

Langton clenched his hands till the nails dug into his palms.

"You mean that you will go to the Head and show him THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 225."

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my letters, and tell him that they concern betting transactions with you?"

"Exactly!"

"Every word you utter will be a lie!"

"You'll have to make the doctor believe that," Langton groaned.

"He wouldn't believe me—I couldn't expect him to."

"Naturally he wouldn't. He'd simply think that you'd been hoodwinking him. You'd better take my offer."

"I can't!" cried Langton. "Man, are you insane? Do you know what you're asking me—to sell my friends, to betray my captain who depends on me, to act as a rotten traitor and thief? Are you mad?"

"You'll be mad if you refuse. St. Jim's has got to lose the match," said the bookmaker stolidly. "You can make a good thing out of it yourself, too. Seventy-five quid ain't to be sneezed at. I'll put the money on for you; and if you choose to take it, it will be there ready for you after the match. You'd better think about it. Anyway, it's that or the sack! If you let me down over this match I'll ruin you. It ain't only the 'undred I stand to win—I could afford to miss that. But if I lose, I lose at long odds—five 'undred quid wouldn't cover it; and that means—bust! Do you savvy? If St. Jim's wins this match I've got to disappear—I've got to be marked as a defaulter. I ain't got the money to meet the bets. I thought I was workin' on a dead cert—and so it is a dead cert if you do wot I want. But if you ruin me, I'll ruin you. You can't expect nothing else."

Langton knew that he could expect nothing else from Mr. Simeon Levy, at all events.

He groaned again. This was what his resolutions had come to! He was deeper in the mire than ever, and he was utterly at the mercy of the bookmaker. The shadow of the past was still dark and heavy upon his life.

Mr. Levy watched him keenly out of his narrow eyes. For all his assumption of coolness, the bookmaker was anxious himself. He was accustomed to running risks in his peculiar profession; more than once luck had saved him from catastrophe—luck, or cunning, or both. He had plunged recklessly this time, believing that the school had no chance, and that its backers were reckless plungers. And all the time they had been leading him on, knowing that the county had no more than a sporting chance of winning.

Mr. Levy had been "played," as he would have expressed it, by sharpers sharper than himself. And he had only one resource—to effect by foul play what he could not effect by fair. If St. Jim's lost the match, he was lost, too—his career as a betting man would come to a sudden termination. Langton was his only hope—and Langton realised that, and realised that if he failed the bookmaker in this extremity the man would not spare him. But to do what was asked—that was horrible and impossible!

"Well, what do you say?" asked Mr. Levy at last.

"I can't do it."

"Better think it over."

"There's no need to think it over," said Langton, in dry and husky tones. "I've done enough thinking it over. I simply can't do it, and that's the long and the short of it. You must take your chances."

Mr. Levy smiled unpleasantly.

"You know what that means for you?" he asked.

"You can do your worst; I won't do what you want."

"You'll think it over," said the bookmaker, rising. "I'll see you agin on Friday night."

"I won't see you."

"I'll wait for you 'ere," said Mr. Levy, unheeding.

"You'll come and tell me what you've decided on. That's all now. Good-night!"

He walked away without another word. Langton stood staring after him silently, almost stupidly. It was some minutes before he pulled himself together, and walked away in the direction of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 7.

Tom Merry Makes a Discovery.

"WE shall have to hustle!" Monty Lowther remarked. The Terrible Three had finished their business in Rylcombe; the important matter of the new bat had been fully discussed, and settled to their satisfaction. Unfortunately, it had taken time; and as the chums of the Shell came down the village street, they found that the shadows were lengthening, and the lights were already on in some of the shops in the old High Street. Then, a little later, they remembered that they had to be within gates by dark.

"All serene!" said Tom Merry. "We can take the cut through the wood, and along the towing-path, and run for it."

"Hallo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

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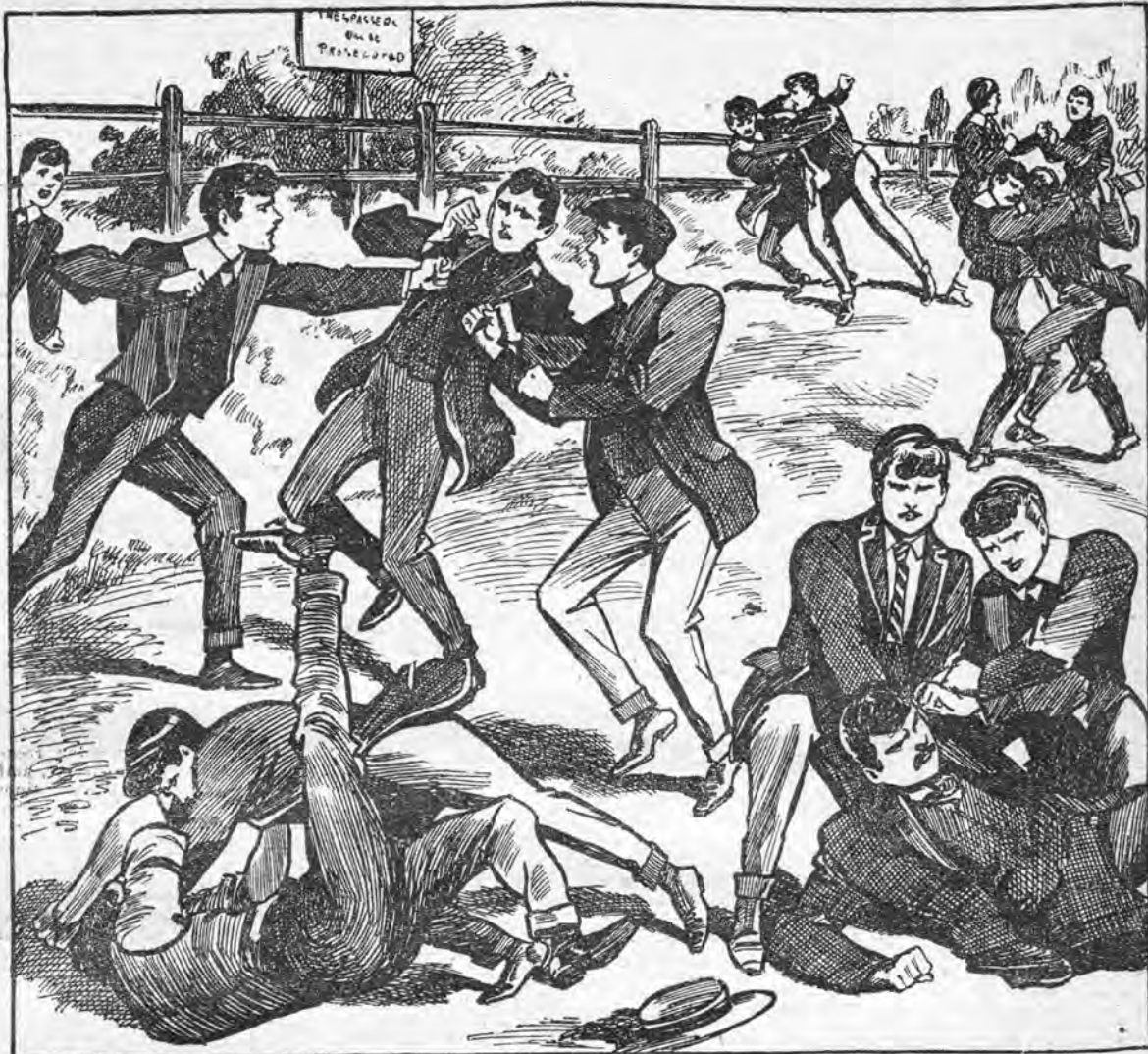
"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

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"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"

"Hullo! 'Ware Grammar cads!"



In a moment a wild and whirling conflict was raging along the fence. The combatants were about equal, and the Fourth Formers found, somewhat to their astonishment, that the factory lads knew how to use their hands. "Go for 'em!" yelled Temple. "Down with the factory cads!" "Go for 'em!" yelled Jack Blunt. (For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "OUT OF BOUNDS," by Frank Richards, which is contained in our popular companion paper, "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on sale, price one penny.)

Half a dozen juniors in mortar-board caps had come out of the tuckshop, just in time to meet the Terrible Three. They were Gordon Gay & Co., of Ryloombe Grammar School, and they had stayed unusually late in Mrs. Murphy's little establishment. But as soon as they caught sight of the St. Jim's fellows, they forgot all about locking up at the Grammar School. They spread out on the pavement to intercept the Saints, grinning cheerfully.

"Good-evening, my sons!" said Gordon Gay. "What have you come here for—thick ears or fat noses?" "Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tom Merry. "We've got to get in. Buzz off!"

"Well, we've got to get in, too," remarked Frank Monk. "But we've got time to bump you first. Take it in turns and get it over."

And the Grammarians, chuckling, advanced upon the Terrible Three.

The St. Jim's fellows backed away. "Better cut for it," said Manners, in a whisper. "If we have a row now we shall be in late, and that will mean lines. Besides, Kildare expects us."

"Separate, then, and cut," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

"We'll see you another time, Gay, and give you a licking," said Tom Merry. "We're in a hurry now. Ta-ta!"

And the chums of the Shell darted away.

"After them!" shouted Jack Wootton.

"After which?" grinned Gordon Gay.

"Tom Merry; never mind the others. I've got a bag of jam-tarts here, and we'll anoint him and send him home jammy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And three or four of the Grammarians dashed after Tom Merry.

The hero of the Shell ran down a side street, and into a lane, and then into the footpath in the wood. In the wood he looked back, and caught sight of Gay and Monk and Wootton hot on the track. Tom Merry grinned cheerfully. He had no doubt of being able to get away. But as he ran on again, Gay gave a shrill whistle, and Tom Merry knew that that meant that there were other fellows from the Grammar School near at hand. The whistle was answered from the wood.

Tom Merry halted again in dismay.

"My hat! The whole family's on the scene!" he muttered.

It did not take him long to decide what to do. The noise he made brushing through the thickets was guiding the Grammarians. Tom Merry dropped on his hands and knees, and crawled into the thickets. He crept along as silently as he could in the direction of the river, till he could see the towing-path, and the gleaming river beyond. Then he stopped, and lay close.

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The shouts of the Grammarians rang close at hand.

He heard the pursuers go crashing by within a dozen yards of him, and then there were more shouts and whistles.

The junior grinned silently.

So long as he remained still, the Grammarians had very little chance of finding him, in the growing dusk and the thickness of the wood.

There was a shout close at hand, and he recognised Gordon Gay's voice.

"Have you found him?"

"No!" hallooed back another voice.

"Some of you watch the footpath, and I'll go ahead and see that he doesn't cut off towards St. Jim's."

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry lay close.

The dusk was deepening, and he knew that he could not now be back at St. Jim's before dusk, whatever speed he made. As he had missed looking-up in any case, he was in no hurry. He remained where he was, stretched under the thick cover of the bushes by the edge of the towing-path. The Grammarians were welcome to search for him as long as they liked; they were not likely to find him.

The whistles became fainter in the distance. But Tom Merry did not stir; he guessed that there were still some of the Grammarians on the footpath, waiting quietly in the hope that he would show himself. And his retreat in the direction of St. Jim's was cut off till the Grammarians gave up the quest.

Five minutes more passed, and then there was a sound of footsteps on the towing-path, and a murmur of voices. Tom Merry fancied for a moment that it was a party of the Grammarians, but a strong smell of tobacco undeceived him. Two men came from the direction of the old mill, and one of them sat down upon a log within two yards of the concealed junior. The smell of his cigar came strongly to Tom Merry's nostrils, and almost made him cough.

"Levy!" he murmured.

It was the fat bookmaker whom he had seen in conversation with Langton of the Sixth. But Levy's companion was not now the Sixth-Former of St. Jim's. Tom Merry could not see him clearly, but he knew the stubby, ungraceful figure. It was Mr. Joliffe, the landlord of the Green Man, and the most disreputable blackguard in Rycombe. The pair were very well matched.

In the distance in the wood Tom Merry could hear Gordon Gay's whistle. But it did not seem to disturb Mr. Levy and his companion. Mr. Joliffe leaned against a tree, and pulled at his pipe.

"I don't see it," he said. "I tell you, I don't see it."

"It's as safe as houses!" was Mr. Levy's reply.

"The county are bound to lose," said Mr. Joliffe. "I tell you I've seen them at practice, and they never were in such weak form. And the school have got a team that could beat a good many counties."

"I know that."

"Then what do you mean?" exclaimed Mr. Joliffe angrily. "Look here, Levy, it's not good enough. You've been very mysterious about all this, but I don't see anything in it. The county will be beaten, and yet you're giving me the county as a sure snip. If I put my money on Loamshire, I shall lose it."

Tom Merry made a movement of repugnance. He knew that the two rascals were discussing bets on the Loamshire-St. Jim's match, and he did not want to lie there and hear about it. But it was not quite possible for him to retreat now. If he left his refuge, it would only be to fall into the hands of Gordon Gay & Co.

"The county will win!" said Mr. Levy. "Look here, Joliffe, I owe you fifty quid. I know it, and it ain't convenient to settle just now. I've been 'ard hit. But I'm putting you on to a thing that may be worth a couple of hundred to you. You've only got to book bets on Loamshire, and the thing's done."

"Loamshire will lose, I tell you; everybody's putting money on St. Jim's since it got out what form they were in."

"I know that."

"Then what do you mean?" said Mr. Joliffe savagely.

"I mean what I say. St. Jim's look like winning now—but they will lose."

"Why should they lose?"

"Because they've been got at," said Mr. Levy, sinking his voice, but not so low that Tom Merry could not hear every word.

The junior of St. Jim's started.

Mr. Joliffe seemed as surprised as Tom Merry felt. He took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Got at?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Impossible?"

"It ain't impossible—it's true!" grinned Mr. Levy. "I

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tell you there's one of them that I can do jest as I like with—he's under my thumb, and I'm goin' to make it worth his while to lose the match, too!"

"Straight?" asked Mr. Joliffe.

"Straight as a die. You can look at my betting-book if you like. You'll see that I'm in it right up to the neck."

"Who's the fellow?"

Mr. Levy chuckled.

"That's my secret," he said. "Don't you ask me any questions, and I won't tell you any lies. But you can look at the book I've made on the match, and then you'll see that I stand to lose a cool thousand if St. Jim's win. You know what that would mean for me."

"The kybosh," said Mr. Joliffe.

"Exactly; the kybosh. And I ain't getting it in the neck like that if I can 'elp it. And I can 'elp it. One of 'em—one of their best—is going to give the match away. He's going to lose his wicket in both innings. He's going to bowl to give Loamshire runs, and he's a bowler they depend on. You can guess the rest."

Mr. Joliffe drew a deep breath.

"Then it's a dead cert.?" he asked.

"Safe as houses! You take my tip. And it's agreed, if you clear a cool hundred over my tip, you wipe off the fifty I owe you. That's fair?"

"Fair enough," said Mr. Joliffe. "I'll have to look at your book first, though, to make sure it's straight business."

"Come along to my quarters, and I'll show it to you."

The two men moved away.

CHAPTER 8.

A Puzzle for Tom Merry.

TOM MERRY lay still.

He was feeling almost stunned.

It seemed to him almost like a dream. But he could not doubt the earnestness of the bookmaker. He had said that he had one of the St. Jim's team under his thumb, and that he had made it worth that player's while to lose the match for the school.

It seemed horrible—impossible! For a St. Jim's fellow to sell a match—and the most important match of the season—seemed unbelievable.

But it was so.

Mr. Levy had made a "book" on the match, and he would be ruined if St. Jim's won. That was clear, and it was clear that he meant what he said—that he had arranged for St. Jim's to lose the match. A St. Jim's fellow—one of the First Eleven—had been found base enough to sell the match.

"Good heavens!" murmured Tom Merry.

The junior felt unable to move. He could only lie there and think it out, almost overcome with horror and disgust at the black treachery he had discovered by accident.

Which of the eleven was it?

Not Kildare, not Darrel—that would be impossible! Rushden, Baker—Monteith! Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was in the First Eleven, and Tom Merry did not like him. Monteith had many unpleasant ways. But he would surely be incapable of treachery like this! Langton—Was it Langton? Such an action was directly opposed to all that Tom Merry knew of Langton's character. It was impossible—and yet, only an hour or so before he had seen Langton in conversation with the bookmaker.

Tom Merry shivered.

He rose at last from his cover. All sounds of the Grammarians had died away. They must have returned to their school by this time. Tom Merry hardly thought of them as he left his cover in the thickets. He was thinking of this discovery that he had made, and of what he ought to do.

What should he do?

He could not remain silent, and leave the match to be sold by the unknown traitor. But if he told Kildare what he had heard, was the captain of St. Jim's likely to listen to him? Kildare would laugh to scorn the mere suggestion that a St. Jim's fellow could be found base enough to sell the county match.

Besides, even if he believed, what was he to do, when Tom Merry could give no hint as to the identity of the traitor?

The match had to be played, and the whole eleven could not be "sacked" on suspicion.

Tom Merry resolved to consult with his chums. His mind was in a whirl as he tramped back to St. Jim's. It was long since dark when he reached the school gates, and the gates were closed and locked. Manners and Lowther were waiting for him outside.

"Hallo, here you are!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Did the Grammar cads get hold of you?"

Tom Merry shook his head.

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"Then what made you so long?" asked Manners.
 "I had to take cover."
 "We got away all right," said Lowther. "We were here before dark, but we waited for you. Sink or swim together. Better ring Taggy up now."
 He rang a loud peal at the bell, and Taggles, the school porter, came down, grumbling, to the gates.
 "What's the matter with you, Tom?" Manners asked abruptly. "You say the Grammarians didn't get hold of you?"

"No."
 "But something's happened?"
 "Yes."
 "I thought you looked queer. What was it?"
 "Wait till we get into the study."
 Taggles growled and opened the gate.
 "Nice goings hon!" he muttered. "I'll report yer."
 "Report away, old son," said Tom Merry, as he entered.
 "Come on, you fellows!"
 "Wait a minute," said Monty Lowther. "I want to give Taggy a tip."

The frown vanished from the hard features of the school porter. Taggles could look almost agreeable when he made a very big effort; and the mention of the word "tip" made him look almost agreeable.

"Thank you kindly, Master Lowther!" he murmured.
 "Not at all," said Lowther blandly. "You don't mind taking a tip from me?"

"Not er tall, Master Lowther—not er tall!"
 "Very well. Here's the tip. Go easy on the gin-and-water," said Lowther calmly, and he walked on after his comrades across the dusky quadrangle.

Taggles gazed after the Terrible Three with feelings too deep for words. It was certainly a good tip that Lowther had given him, but it was not the kind of tip that Taggles had expected. The school porter tramped into his lodge and closed the door with a slam that could be heard across the old quad.

Monty Lowther chuckled as he entered the School House with his comrades.

"I think I took a rise out of old Taggy that time!" he murmured. "Now, Tommy, what is it you have got on your chest?"

"Come up to the study."

Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were waiting for Tom Merry in his study.

"Here the boundahs are!" said Arthur Augustus. "We've been waitin' for you to come in. I've been thinkin' of doin' an article on the Loamshire match for the next numbah of the 'Weekly,' and—"

"Blow the 'Weekly'!" said Tom Merry, closing the study door. "I'm glad you fellows are here. You may as well hear about it."

"About what?" asked Blake.

"About a discovery I've made."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry's handsome face was looking very troubled. The juniors looked at him curiously. They could see that something very unusual had happened.

"I took cover in the wood to get away from the Grammarians," Tom Merry explained. "While I was in the bushes, two fellows came and jawed on the towing-path. They were Joliffe, of the Green Man, and Levy, the book-maker."

"Awful wottahs!" commented D'Arcy.

"I needn't explain to you fellows that I didn't mean to listen. I was in cover, and they only talked for a few minutes. I couldn't help hearing what they said. Levy told Joliffe it was a good tip to back the county against St. Jim's in the cricket match on Saturday. He's got an awful lot of money on Loamshire himself."

"Silly ass!" said Blake. "St. Jim's will win. We've got every chance of beating the county this time. Everybody knows at the last day or two. Most people believed the county would win—up to a few days ago. Now they don't. Just like those blackguards to bet on a cricket match, as if it were a rotten horse-race!"

"That isn't all," said Tom Merry. "Levy is certain St. Jim's will lose."

"What he doesn't know about cricket would fill books," said Manners.

"He's taken measures to make us lose."

"Eh? How?"

"He told Joliffe he had squared one of the best St. Jim's players to sell the match!"

There was a general exclamation of amazement.

"Impossible!"

"Rot!"

"Quite imposs., deah boy!"

"I'd like to believe that it was impossible," said Tom

Merry. "Only from what they said, there isn't any doubt about it."

"Bai Jove!"

"The question is, what's to be done?"

"Let's hear the whole story first," said Blake abruptly.

Tom Merry detailed all that he remembered of the talk between the two rascals. The juniors listened with deep attention.

"The unspeakable rotters!" said Blake. "They ought to be ducked in a horse-pond! I say, this is a jolly serious bizney!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"It can't be allowed to go on," said Monty Lowther decidedly. "But the worst of it is, that you have no idea who the chap is."

Tom Merry looked very troubled.

"You remember whom we saw talking to Levy this evening?" he said, in a low voice.

Lowther started.

"Langton, by Jove!"

"Langton!" said Blake.

"You know he used to be mixed up with the bookmakers and that rotten set at the Green Man," said Tom Merry.

"It all came out, and Langton owned up to the Head, and he was let off being expelled. But we saw him talking to Levy this evening. I don't know that there was anything in it. It wouldn't be fair to put this on him. But—but one can't help feeling uneasy. Anyway, Langton or not, somebody's going to sell the county match unless he's stopped, and the question is, what's going to be done?"

"There's only one thing to be done," said Blake decidedly. "You'll have to warn Kildare. He's the only person to deal with this."

"He'll laugh at the idea," said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I'm afraid he will. I know I should laugh if anybody came to me and said that a member of the junior team was going to give a match away. I wouldn't listen to him for a moment. Blessed if I like speaking to Kildare about it!"

"But you must!" said Blake seriously. "Kildare might be able to spot the rotter, and boot him out of the team, in time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I suppose it's the only thing to be done," said Tom Merry.

And the others agreed that it was.

"Then I'll go and speak to Kildare now, and get it over," said Tom Merry. "You fellows keep this dark. Not a word to a soul, you know. It's bad enough as it is, without having the school disgraced by its getting out."

"Quite wight, deah boy!"

And Tom Merry left the study, and went in search of the captain of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

Kildare's Opinion.

KILDARE was in his study, hard at work, when Tom Merry knocked at his door. Kildare was a hard worker, at lessons as well as on the cricket-field. He rapped out "Come in!" without looking up from his table. Tom Merry entered the study, and closed the door behind him.

The captain of St. Jim's went on writing, and Tom Merry coughed. Kildare looked up.

"Hallo, what do you want?" he demanded. "I'm busy."

"I want to speak to you, Kildare."

"Buck up, then."

"It—it's rather important," said Tom Merry, with a very troubled look. "It's about the Loamshire match, Kildare."

Kildare's right hand slid towards a ruler.

"Are you coming here with a round robin, like D'Arcy?" he demanded.

"No," said Tom Merry, smiling, in spite of his trouble. "No, it isn't that. Look here, Kildare, this is serious; there's danger that the match may be given away."

Kildare started.

"The match given away?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes."

The St. Jim's captain frowned darkly.

"Do you mean to say that you accuse a member of the St. Jim's First Eleven of intending to give the match away?" he exclaimed, in mingled anger and amazement.

"Yes, Kildare. Don't get waxy," said Tom Merry hastily. "It isn't a nice thing to have to say, and I've only come to tell you so that you can look out."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you—"

"It's nonsense—utter nonsense!" said Kildare sharply.

"I know every chap in the eleven, and there isn't one who is capable of doing anything of the sort. If this is some silly prejudice against one of the New House players—"

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"It isn't that, Kildare."

"Then it's a School House senior you are accusing?"

"No, not exactly."

Kildare stared at him with knitted brows.

"It must be either a School House or a New House fellow," he said. "What is his name, anyway? Who is it?"

"I—I don't know."

"What!" Kildare rose angrily to his feet. "You don't know! You tell me that some member of my team is going to give the match away, and you don't know who it is? Have you come here to be funny?"

"I wish you'd listen to me," said Tom Merry. "It wasn't pleasant for me to come here and tell you this. But I know it for a fact. Somebody in the team has been got at by a bookmaker."

"A bookmaker!"

"Yes; a rotter's who's been betting on the match."

"I know there's a lot of betting on the match going on in Wayland," said Kildare. "The blackguards will bet on anything. But to say that a bookmaker could get at a member of the St. Jim's team is to talk pure nonsense. You ought to have more sense. How do you know anything about it, anyway?"

"I heard the man say so?"

"You heard the bookmaker say he had got at a member of the team?"

"Yes."

"And how did you come to hear him say so?" demanded Kildare sharply. "I suppose he wouldn't say such a thing in your presence?"

"He didn't see me."

Kildare's lip curled.

"Do you mean to say that you were listening?"

Tom Merry flushed crimson.

"I didn't mean to listen—" he began.

"But you managed it all the same," said Kildare sarcastically; "and you heard this precious rascal bragging that he had got at a member of our team. It was brag, and nothing else. You really ought to have had too much sense to believe anything of the sort."

"But—don't the way he put it—"

"I didn't care how he put it. It wasn't true, and couldn't be true. Very likely he knew that you were listening, and was pulling your leg."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's impossible; he couldn't see me."

"You ought not to have listened, in any case," said Kildare curtly.

"I couldn't help it; they came along while I—"

"H'm! Well, my opinion is that he knew you were there all the time, and jawed at you to make a fool of you," said Kildare. "And he seems to have succeeded, too. I've no time to waste listening to this rubbish. You can get out."

"Then you won't—"

"I won't take any notice of this nonsense, if that is what you mean," said Kildare. "For goodness' sake get the nonsense out of your head, and buzz off! When you've thought over it, you'll realise that you've been made a fool of."

"But I tell you—"

"You've told me more than enough. You'll take a hundred lines for running down the Sixth," said Kildare harshly. "That's what you want. I've a jolly good mind to cane you, too."

"But I say, Kildare—"

"If you say another word I'll lick you!"

Tom Merry looked at the St. Jim's captain's angry face, and he realised that it was useless to persist. He turned to the door.

"And look here," exclaimed Kildare, "don't jaw this rot over the school. If I hear a word of it, mind, I shall know whom to trace it to, and I'll see that you have a record licking for starting such a silly scandal. Now get out!"

Tom Merry left the study without another word, and closed the door. He walked away with a gloomy face to his own quarters. He had done his duty by speaking to the captain of St. Jim's; but he had done no good, and he knew that he had lowered himself in Kildare's opinion. He had a very heavy heart as he rejoined his chums in his own study. They met him with a chorus of inquiry.

"Well?"

"It's no good," said Tom Merry. "Kildare wouldn't even hear me out. I've left him in a ratty temper. It was just what I expected."

"Pewpaws I ought to have gone," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "In a delicate matter of this sort, what is required is a fellow of tact and judgment."

"Oh, rats!" said Blake. "I guessed that Kildare would cut up rusty. You couldn't expect him to swallow such a yarn."

"You believe it?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Well, yes," said Blake, with a slight hesitation. "Of THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 225.

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course I believe every word you say, but I think perhaps your conclusion is mistaken. The rotter may have been gassing."

"He said he stood to lose a thousand if St. Jim's won."

"Might have been gas."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I believe every word of it," said Tom Merry quietly.

"It's not a pleasant thing to believe of any St. Jim's fellow, but it's true. And as Kildare won't even think about the matter, I'm going to keep my eyes open, and see whether I can spot the fellow. If we could prove it against him before the match—"

"Not likely!" said Blake, with a shake of the head.

"I'm going to try, anyway. This match is the biggest thing of the cricket season, and it's a feather in our caps all round if St. Jim's beats the county. It would be rotten if the match were lost owing to a cad selling his side."

"Bai Jove! Yaas, wathah!"

"It seems too thick, somehow," said Blake. "If it were Knox, of the Sixth, I could imagine it. But Knox isn't in the eleven. And all the chaps in the First Eleven are decent. The only one I don't like is Monteith; and Monteith isn't the chap to do anything of that kind."

"Wathah not!"

"I don't know which one it is," said Tom Merry. "But Levy has one of them under his thumb, and he believes, at any rate, that the chap is going to sell out the match. And I'm going to keep my eyes open, and see if I can find out who it is."

"No harm in that, of course."

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows. It was no wonder that Kildare had been incredulous, for Blake and D'Arcy were incredulous, too; and even Manners and Lowther had a slight hesitancy in their manner. They could not rid themselves of the suspicion that Tom Merry had been deceived.

But Tom Merry knew that he had not been deceived; and he felt, too, that the result of the county match rested upon him now—that if he discovered the traitor in time, the match might be saved—and that, otherwise, it would be a defeat for St. Jim's; and a defeat of the most disgraceful kind, brought about by the treachery of one of their own players. And what chance had he of making a certain discovery—of finding proof that would convince Kildare? As he thought over the matter, he had to acknowledge that the chance was very, very slight.

CHAPTER 10.

Under Suspicion!

TOM MERRY thought over the matter a great deal on the following day. After school, the First Eleven went down to cricket practice, and half the school went to watch them. The coming county match filled St. Jim's with growing excitement. The good prospect of the school beating a county team delighted every fellow in the old college, from the captain down to the youngest fag.

Few of the juniors shared D'Arcy's opinion that a junior ought to be played in the First Eleven. But all of them were very keen about the match, and took as much pride in the progress of the senior eleven as Kildare did himself.

And as Tom Merry stood watching the First Eleven playing a scratch team of Fifth and Sixth fellows, he had to acknowledge that Kildare's men were in wonderful form.

All of them seemed to be at their best; and even without the latest recruit to the eleven, they would have had a sporting chance against the county.

But with Langton in their ranks, not a fellow at St. Jim's doubted that they would give Leamshire the "kybosh."

Langton was certainly marvellous.

His batting was first-class, and he could keep his wicket up against Kildare's bowling; but it was with the ball that he excelled. There were many famous county bowlers who could have taught Langton nothing in handling the leather.

The crowd round the ropes cheered Langton again and again as he bowled, with a scope and variety of bowling that gave the batsmen no rest.

"He's ripping!" said Figgins, of the Fourth. "Simply ripping!"

"Yaas, wathah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "Did you see him bring down the sticks for Wushden? I couldn't have done that!"

To which Jack Blake sarcastically replied:

"Go hon!"

Tom Merry watched Langton thoughtfully.

Was he the fellow Mr. Levy had been speaking of in his talk with Jolliffe? Tom Merry had no reason for connecting him with the bookmaker's plot, excepting the fact that he had seen him in talk with the shady rascal. That was a suspicious circumstance; but it might be explained away.

If it was Langton who was to betray the team, certainly he was the fellow who could do it most easily and completely.

He had only to fail in the bowling that was wanted of him,

and he could find a thousand excuses for being off colour on the day of the match.

And if he did not bowl as St. Jim's expected, the school would be beaten.

There was no doubt upon that point. Eric Kildare had always been the mainstay of the team, but even his batting was not so important as Langton's bowling.

Was it Langton?

As he looked at the Sixth-Former, keen and flushed, and evidently enjoying the cricket practice, and the shouts of applause, Tom Merry could hardly think so.

Langton had been reckless once, but even in his recklessness he had never been an utter cad—he had never done anything so base as betraying fellows who depended upon him? And his recklessness, at that old time, had been expiated by the fact that he had confessed freely to save another fellow who was in danger of suffering for him. Surely a fellow who could do that could not betray his side in a match?

But if it was not Langton, who was it?

Was it possible that the bookmaker had been deceiving Jolliffe, or deceiving himself, and that Kildare's opinion was correct—that it was all nonsense, and not worth thinking about for a moment?

Tom Merry almost began to believe so.

At all events, there was nothing the captain of the Shell could do, excepting to keep his eyes open, especially on the day of the match.

Langton was looking keen and well, so long as the practice lasted. But when the dusk fell, and the cricketers came off the field, Langton's cheeriness seemed to drop from his face like a mask.

Kildare clapped him on the shoulder as they walked back to the School House in the gathering shadows.

"You bowled splendidly," said Kildare heartily. "Blessed if I knew I was getting such a treasure when I picked you out, Langton, old man. Bowl like that to-morrow, and the county will get the licking of their lives."

Langton nodded.

"Keep yourself fit, too," said Darrel. "If you should go off colour, we should be dished. We're depending on you, Langton. And I've noticed you looking worried lately. You ought to shove everything out of your mind excepting cricket."

"Yes, yes," said Langton absently.

"We all rely on you," said Rushden.

"I wish you wouldn't!" said Langton almost irritably.

"Why?" asked Kildare, in surprise.

"Well, I might lose my nerve, you know. I've never played such a big team as Leamshire County before. I don't want to feel too much responsibility on my shoulders."

Kildare laughed good-humouredly.

"Oh, that will be all right!" he said. "You won't suffer from stage-fright. Come into my room to tea, Langton?"

"Thanks, no. I think I'll have a stroll before tea."

"Right-ho!"

Langton stopped outside the School House when the others went in. He strolled under the old elms with his hands in his pockets, his brow dark and frowning under his cricket cap. All the light had gone from his face now, and he was worried and miserable. It was Friday evening, and Mr. Levy would be already waiting at the place of appointment. If Langton did not meet him on the towing-path by the old mill, Mr. Levy would know that the St. Jim's senior did not mean to carry out his orders.

What was he to do?

Defy Levy, and let the man come to St. Jim's to lay his cunning proofs before the Head? Langton certainly would not play in the county match then, for he would be expelled from St. Jim's. He had no hope that the Head would believe his explanation. He knew, or, rather, felt that the mere fact that he had been in communication with the bookmaker at all would condemn him in Dr. Holmes's eyes.

If Levy came to see the Head, he was ruined, and St. Jim's would miss him on the morrow. The county match would be played without him; and Kildare had said plainly that if the match was played without him, even if he were off colour when he played, the match would be lost. It would be no worse for St. Jim's, then, if he played to Mr. Levy's orders.

It was a kind of sophistry with which he tried to dull his conscience, and which showed that the thought of yielding to the demands of the bookmaker had already come into his mind.

The clock in the old tower struck.

He started.

It was half-past seven. Mr. Levy must have been waiting a long time at the rendezvous now—might be already on his way to St. Jim's!

The thought filled Langton with a sudden terror.

He must go—he must see the man, and prevent him from coming to the school, at any cost. He could promise him money—promise him anything—beg for a respite! With a white face, and his heart wildly beating, Langton hurried towards the school gates. The Terrible Three were there.

It had occurred to Tom Merry that if Mr. Levy was right, and there was a member of the team in his pay, that member might have to see the bookmaker before the match came off. There would be no time on the morrow, for the stumps would be pitched very early for a one-day match. And so Tom Merry had determined to keep his eye on Langton that Friday. The chums of the Shell saw Langton as he hurried down to the gate, and they could not help noting the white, scared expression upon his face, in spite of the dusk.

"Looks as if he'd seen a ghost," murmured Manners.

Tom Merry felt a sudden conviction.

"That's the man," he said.

And Monty Lowther nodded.

Langton came down to the gates, but they were closed for the night. As a prefect, Langton had a key to the side gate, and he felt in his pocket for it. The Terrible Three came over towards him.

"Going out, Langton?" said Monty Lowther genially.

"Yes," muttered Langton.

"Like us to walk with you?"

"No, hang you!"

"Lonely walking along all alone, unless you're going to meet somebody?" suggested Monty Lowther.

Langton turned upon him with a startled expression.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed angrily. "Hold your tongue!"

He went out, and locked the gate behind him. The Terrible Three exchanged significant glances.

"Well, what do you fellows think?" said Tom Merry, in a low voice.

"Looks to me as if we've found the man!"

"And to me, too!"

"Chap would be almost justified in following the boulder and seeing where he's going," Monty Lowther remarked tentatively.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"I don't quite like that idea, Monty, old man."

"Well, I don't, either, for that matter," said Monty Lowther; "and I daresay he would give us the slip, too. But if he's the man, he's going to see Levy—to arrange about selling the county match to-morrow."

"Rotter!" muttered Manners.

"We've got no proof," said Tom Merry quietly; "but we'll watch him to-morrow when the teams are playing, and if he fails St. Jim's—"

"What then?"

"We may be able to stop him," said Tom Merry.

CHAPTER 11.

The Last Struggle.

QUITE unconscious of the dark suspicions working in the minds of the chums of the Shell, Langton hurried down to the river and broke into a run upon the towing-path. All the day he had been saying to himself that he would not go to meet Mr. Levy. And now that the time had come he was hurrying to meet the bookmaker in his anxious terror lest the bookmaker should keep his word and come to St. Jim's.

It never occurred to Langton that he was suspected. He had been too engrossed in his miserable reflections to notice anything outside himself. Had he known that Tom Merry & Co. suspected him of treachery it would have been an added pang in his present misery, but probably it would have made little difference in his actions. He was in the power of the bookmaker, and he had not the moral strength and courage to defy him. He was paying a bitter price for the recklessness of the past; once he had suffered for his sins, and now he was suffering without sinning. Was the shadow of the wretched past to darken the whole of his life?

His brow was dark and his thoughts were bitter as he hurried along the towing-path. In the dusk a fat, unwieldy

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figure came dimly into view, and he caught sight of the red end of a cigar. He knew that fat figure and the smell of rank tobacco. It was Simeon Levy, and he was coming to the school.

Langton stopped.

The bookmaker came right on, and apparently not noticing the senior in the dusk, he was about to pass him, when Langton spoke.

"Mr. Levy."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said the bookmaker, halting, and taking his cigar from his mouth. "You was late, and I thought you wasn't coming. I was coming on to the school."

"I—I want to speak to you."

Mr. Levy grinned under his thick, oily moustache.

"Werry well; you're only just in time," he said. "Nother ten minutes, and I should 'ave been calling on the 'Ead. We can talk 'ere. I waited for you a hower."

"I—I'm sorry."

"Oh, it's all right, so long's you've come to your senses, and decided to do the sensible thing," said Mr. Levy. "Seventy-five quid is a big sum, and you can touch it for the asking."

"I don't want it."

The bookmaker shrugged his fat shoulders.

"You can please yourself about that, Mister Langton, so long as you keep the rest of the bargain," he said.

"Mr. Levy."

"Well?" said the bookmaker.

"I can't do it."

"You can't do what?"

"Lose the match," said Langton, in broken, hurried tones. "I can't do it. You don't understand what it would mean to me if I did."

"I understand what it would mean to you if you don't."

"It's impossible."

"Was you coming to meet me to tell me that?" asked Mr. Levy, with a disagreeable laugh.

"Ye-es."

"Nothing else?"

"N-no."

"Then you needn't 'ave troubled to come. If you'll kindly stand outer the way, Mr. Langton, I'll get on."

"Where are you going?" said Langton hoarsely.

"You know where I'm going—to the school."

"Stop! Listen to me! I—I'll do anything else you ask me," said Langton desperately. "I'll do anything—anything, but I can't do what you ask."

"I don't want you to do anything else."

"Kildare was saying to me an hour ago that they rely on me. They all trust to me. The match depends on me—they all said so," muttered Langton.

"All the better," said Mr. Levy coolly. "That makes it easier for you."

Langton clenched his hands.

"I suppose that's how you'd look at it," he said scornfully.

"You don't understand these things—how should you? You look on cricket as if it were the same as racing—a trick for getting money out of duffers. You ought to be put in prison for making bets on the game—you and all your rotten gambling crew."

Mr. Levy smiled unpleasantly.

"Is that all you've got to say?" he asked.

"I can't do what you've asked. You ought to know that it's impossible. How could I ever look the fellows in the face again?" said Langton hoarsely.

"That's not my business. Give me a plain yes or no."

"No, then!"

"Very well! I'll see that you don't play to-morrow, anyway!" said the bookmaker savagely. "You'll be sacked from St. Jim's to-night!"

He strode on.

"Stop!" exclaimed Langton,

in agony.

"Bah!"

Levy strode on without a pause. Langton stood on the towing-path, a terrible struggle in his breast. What was he to do? He could not face it. He ran after the bookmaker and caught him by the arm.

"Stop!" he muttered.

"Let me go!"

"Mr. Levy, I—I beg of you!" muttered the wretched senior hoarsely. "Let me off this—I'll do anything else for you."

"There's nothing else you can do."

"I can't sell my side."

"Then let go my arm."

"Hold on! Give me time to think!" cried Langton, burying his face in his hands. "Oh, what shall I do?"

Levy stopped, and regarded the wretched boy with a cold, sarcastic grin. Langton's agony of mind did not move a single throb of pity in his breast. He was thinking of the betting-book in his pocket—of the sum he stood to win if St. Jim's lost the match—of the ruin that stared him in the face if St. Jim's won. He had no compassion to spare for the boy he was dragging to shame and remorse.

"I—I can't do it!" groaned Langton. "Give me time to think! I—I'll let you know to-morrow."

"You must let me know now."

"After all, if—I play badly," muttered Langton, "they— they would not suspect the reason."

"Of course they wouldn't!" said Mr. Levy. "I've seen good players go off colour in big matches and nobody suspected them of selling out. There won't be any suspicion, and it will be seventy-five quid in your pocket."

"I don't want it—I wouldn't take it!"

There was silence for a few moments.

"Leave it as it is," said Langton at last. "I—I'll see what I can do. I can't say more than that."

The bookmaker grinned. He had been pretty certain of his victim before—he was quite certain of him now.

"That's all right," he said. "Play to lose, that's all I want. After all, it's no more than dozen of others do."

Langton groaned.

"Take it cheerfully," said the bookmaker. "Do as I ask you, and you'll find that it will pay you. But if you ruin me, I'll ruin you, and you can bet your socks on that! Good-night, Mister Langton!"

The bookmaker walked away down the towing-path.

Langton stood and stared dazedly after him.

He clenched his hands hard. A terrible thought had come into his mind of striding after the fat, unwieldy scoundrel and knocking him off the towing-path into the gleaming waters that flowed among the rushes close at hand. Almost scared by his own thoughts, Langton turned and hurried away.

Kildare met him as he came into the Sixth-Form passage at St. Jim's. The captain of St. Jim's started at the sight of the senior's white, drawn face.

"Great Scott, Langton, what's the matter with you?" he exclaimed.

"I'm feeling a bit seedy, that's all," said Langton, in halting tones. "I say, Kildare, would it put you out very much if I didn't play to-morrow?"

Kildare stared.

"It would muck up everything," he said anxiously. "You're our only chance against the county. What are you thinking of, Langton?"

"I don't feel very fit."

"You were fit enough to-day," said Kildare. "What has happened since this afternoon?"

"Oh, nothing! But—"

"You'll be all right," said Kildare comfortingly. "It's just the thought of playing a big club like Leamshire that's getting on your nerves a bit. You'll be all right, old man. Pull yourself together, and think of beating Leamshire."

Langton nodded, and went into his study. For long hours the wretched boy paced his room, thinking—thinking. What was he to do?

He knew what he ought to do. He knew that he ought to defy the bookmaker, and take the consequences. But he knew, too, that he had not the nerve for it. The conviction was borne in upon his mind that all his struggles were but the twistings and windings of a bird in the meshes of a net, and that when the time came he would do exactly as his taskmaster had ordered him.

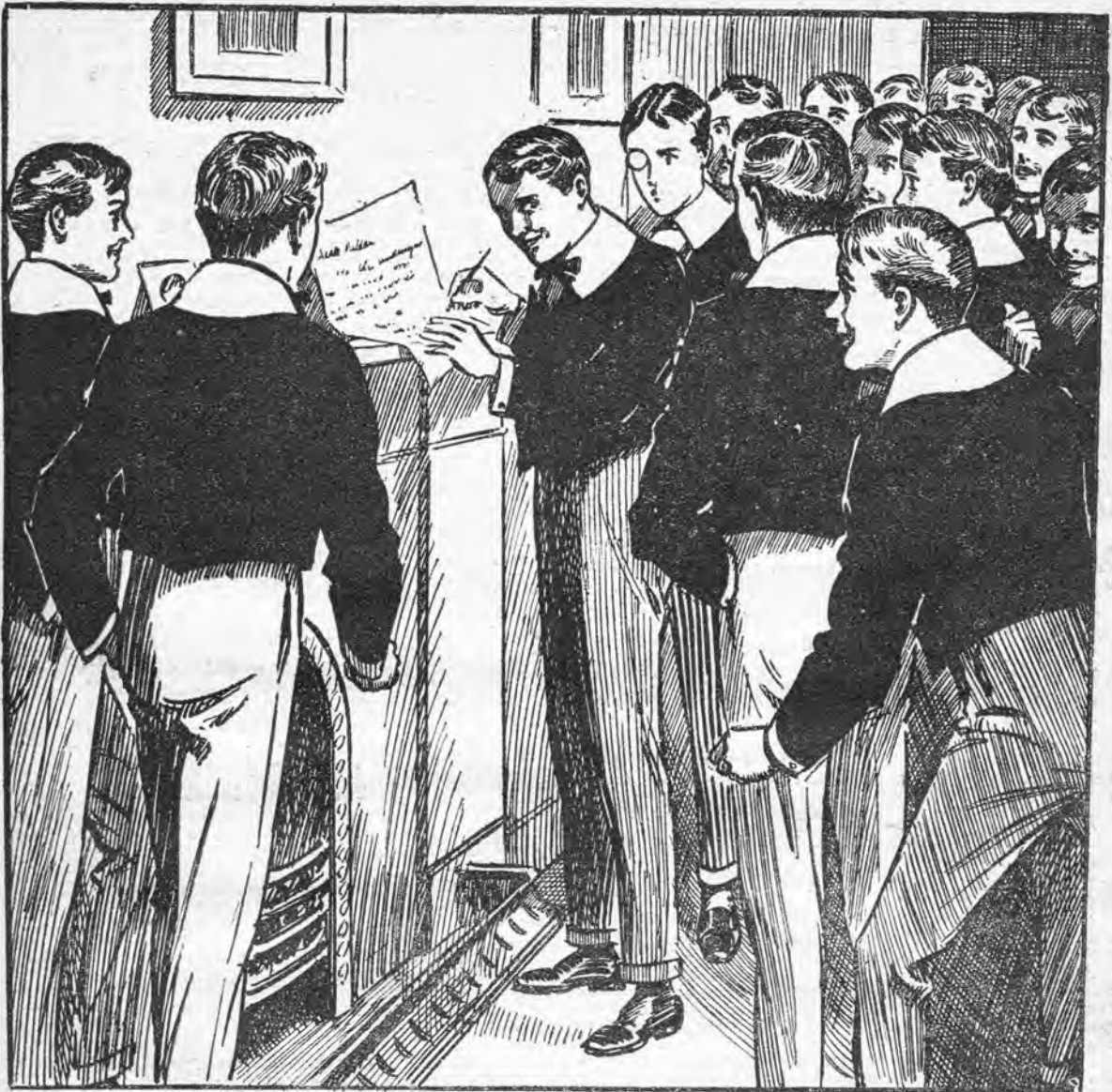
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One after another the juniors signed D'Arcy's famous round robin, using Glyn's invisible ink, which was, however, visible enough so far. "That's all wight," remarked Arthur Augustus, with great satisfaction. "I'll take this to Kildare, and undah the cires, he's bound to take notice of it!" (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 12.

Mr. Linton is Surprised.

SATURDAY morning dawned clear and bright. Saturday was a half-holiday at St. Jim's, but on such an important occasion as a match with a county team the Head was more than willing to stretch a point. The day had therefore been made a whole holiday for members of the First Eleven, and the county match would begin early in the morning, while the rest of St. Jim's were grinding away in the Form-rooms. It was an arrangement that suited the cricketers very well, but the juniors did not feel satisfied. A whole holiday for the whole school would have suited them better.

"I wegard this as wathah dewogatory to the dignity of the Lowah Forms, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked before morning lessons. "I wathah think the Head might have given us all a whole holiday."

"Suppose you send him a round robin?" suggested Monty Lowther.

"In invisible ink!" grinned Blake. "Glyn will lend you his fountain-pen with pleasure, I'm sure."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wefuss to do anythin' of the sort. Howevah, I cer-

tainly think that we ought to have a whole holiday. I shall ask Mr. Latham in the Form-room. We want to watch the match fwom beginnin' to end."

When the Fourth Formers went into their Form-room, and little Mr. Latham undertook his daily task of driving knowledge into their unreceptive heads, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rose in his place and talked to him, as Blake remarked, like a Dutch uncle.

"Pway excuse me, sir—" he began.

Mr. Latham peered at him through his spectacles.

"What is it, D'Arcy?"

"To-day is Satahday, sir—"

"I am quite aware of that, D'Arcy," said Mr. Latham in surprise.

"The Loamshire county team are comin' to play the First Eleven, sir."

"Yes, I know."

"We should like to watch the match, sir."

"You may do so after morning lessons."

"May I venture to beg, as a particulah favah, sir, that you will welease the Fourth Form fwom duty this mornin', sir?" said the swell of St. Jim's, in his most persuasive tones.

Mr. Latham looked at him.

"Certainly not!" he said.

"Weally, sir—"

"You may sit down, D'Arcy."

"But, sir—"

"Take fifty lines."

"Oh, sir! You see—"

"Take a hundred lines."

"Bai Jove!"

"Silence, please."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat down, in a state of suppressed indignation.

"I wegard Mr. Lathom as failin' to play the game!" he murmured to Jack Blake, and Blake chuckled softly in response.

Mr. Lathom found that his class was somewhat inattentive that morning. They had one ear for Mr. Lathom, so to speak, and one ear for sounds from the cricket-field. It was the same with the Shell. The Terrible Three had gone very reluctantly into their Form-room, but they did not venture to ask Mr. Linton, their Form-master, for a morning off. Mr. Linton was not the kind of master to be asked little favours of that kind. But the Shell were very keen about the county match, and Tom Merry was especially worried. For he wanted to watch Langton's progress in the game, and learn from it whether the great St. Jim's bowler was the fellow who had arranged with Mr. Levy to sell the match. What he would do if he found Langton betraying his side Tom Merry did not know, but he was determined to do something. He would not see St. Jim's betrayed without saying a word.

Mr. Linton's eyes were on Tom Merry's thoughtful face several times, and he frowned. He spoke to the captain of the Shell without obtaining an answer, and then he frowned more darkly.

"Merry!" he rapped out.

Tom Merry started out of a brown study.

"Ye-es, sir?" he stammered.

"Why did you not answer me?"

"D-d-didn't I, sir?"

"You did not!"

"I'm sorry, sir."

"You will take fifty lines for inattention, Merry."

"Ye-es, sir."

A few minutes later there were loud sounds in the quadrangle. A brake had arrived, and the juniors knew that that meant the arrival of the county team. There was a general movement of interest in the Shell Form-room.

"The Loamshire men!" murmured Manners.

"Like to give 'em a cheer," muttered Tom Merry.

"Not here!" grinned Lowther.

"Rotten that we can't have a squint at them," said Kangaroo.

Tom Merry glanced cautiously towards Mr. Linton. The master of the Shell had turned his back to the class, and was chalking on the blackboard. He was likely to be engaged for some minutes. Tom Merry determined to risk it. He rose silently from his place, and stood upon his form, and then stepped upon his desk. From this coign of vantage he could look through the Form-room windows into the quadrangle.

His view was chiefly of the branches of elms, but he could see the brake rolling in from the gates, laden with the cricketers of Loamshire county.

Monty Lowther jumped up, and joined him on the desk, and Manners followed his example, and then Kangaroo and Gore and Thompson mounted. Mr. Linton, deep in the problem he was inscribing upon the blackboard, heard nothing, and did not turn his head.

One by one the rest of the Shell fellows stood up on the desks to look through the windows and see the county cricketers arrive.

"They look a ripping set!" whispered Lowther.

"Splendid!"

"But we shall beat them."

"Oh, yes; rather!"

"There's old Kildare, shaking hands with Dalton, the Loamshire skipper."

"Good old Kildare!"

"Langton's with him—he looks seedy."

"Oh, Langton's all right—he'll surprise the Loamshire chaps when their sticks go down. Good old Langton!"

Mr. Linton turned round from the blackboard.

He started.

The whole of his class, instead of sitting in their places like good little boys, were standing on top of their desks with their backs turned to him, looking out of the Form-room windows.

Mr. Linton stared blankly at them for some moments, too astounded to speak.

He passed his hand over his eyes, as if doubtful whether his vision had deceived him. Certainly such an extraordinary

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sight had never been seen in a Form-room at St. Jim's before.

Mr. Linton found his voice at last.

"BOYS!"

He thundered out the word.

The Shell fellows jumped, and Thompson, startled by the sudden roar, lost his footing on the sloping desk, and slid down, and bumped on the form, and then rolled to the floor among the desks and lay there gasping.

"Ow!" gasped Thompson. "Yarrah!"

"Boys!" shouted Mr. Linton. "What—what does this mean!"

The Shell fellows swung round to look at their Form-master.

"Oh!"

"Get down at once!" roared Mr. Linton. "How dare you play such a trick in the class-room? How dare you?"

"Oh, sir!"

The Shell fellows jumped off the desks and sat down, looking very sheepish and crimson. Mr. Linton was red with anger.

"This is—is extraordinary!" he exclaimed. "It is disgraceful! I have never beheld such an absurd trick before! I shall detain the whole class for an hour after dinner."

The Shell sat dismayed.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Tom Merry. "We—we're sorry, sir. We—we didn't mean— You see, sir, the county cricketers have just arrived, and we—we wanted to see them, sir, and—and—"

"Oh!" said Mr. Linton, understanding. "In that case, if this was not meant for impertinence—"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Very well, I shall excuse you the detention," said Mr. Linton, revealing himself, somewhat to the surprise of the Shell, as not destitute of human feelings. "You will take fifty lines each, which may be done to-night. Now give me your attention, please."

And the Shell gave Mr. Linton their attention. The mere thought of being detained that afternoon, when the county match was on, made them feel cold all over. Mr. Linton had never had such an attentive class as he had that morning.

CHAPTER 13.

The County Match.

GLAD enough were the juniors of St. Jim's when the welcome word of dismissal came at last. The Form-room doors opened, and crowds of juniors came streaming out into the passages. The Terrible Three made a break instantly for the cricket-field, with a crowd of other fellows at their heels, and it was a race to the ground. They wanted to know which side was batting, and how the score ran.

St. Jim's had won the toss and gone in to bat first. The St. Jim's first innings was just ended, when Tom Merry & Co. arrived upon the scene.

"Ninety for the innings," said Monty Lowther, consulting the score. "My hat! I thought Kildare would do better than that."

"It's not bad against a county team," said Manners.

"It's not a winning score, anyway."

"Well, no."

"What was Langton's figure?" asked Tom Merry anxiously.

He soon knew.

Langton had been clean bowled by Dalton, the county captain, and his score had been a big round nought—the famous duck's egg.

Tom Merry's face darkened as he learned that.

Langton had lost his wicket for nothing—had he done so on purpose? Certainly, the duck's egg might have happened to anybody. There was another batsman who had failed to score—Hodson, of the Fifth. Langton had done no worse than Hodson. But in his case it was grimly suspicious.

Tom Merry looked at Langton, as he stood in the group of senior cricketers.

Langton was very quiet and subdued.

There was none of the cheeriness about him that was to be observed in the rest of the team.

The other cricketers did not seem to notice it; but it was only too plain to Tom Merry that Langton had a weight on his mind.

Langton was the man.

Tom Merry felt more certain than ever about it. Langton was the traitor upon whom Mr. Levy counted for success in his betting operations. Langton was the player whom the bookmaker had "squared" to lose the match. And he had begun by throwing away a wicket for his side.

The Terrible Three, with Blake and D'Arcy—the five juniors who were in the secret—drew aside to consult.

"It looks bad, I know," said Blake, with a thoughtful nod, "but another chap's got a duck's egg, too, you know. Upon the whole, it may have been chance."

"Yaas, wathah! It's wotten to suspect a chap of throwin' away a wicket."

Tom Merry set his lips.

"I know it may be chance," he said, "but it looks rotten bad. Look here, there's no doubt now that Langton's the chap Levy was speaking of."

"I agree with you there," said Lowther.

"The only question is, whether he means to do as Levy's ordered him, or whether he'll be decent enough to play up, in spite of Levy."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The only thing is to keep an eye on him when he begins to bowl, and see," said Manners. "If he bowls badly—"

"Then we're going to interfere."

"But how?"

"I shall speak to him about it," said Tom Merry determinedly.

"Bai Jove!"

It was evidently the only thing to be done. But there was no time to talk about it further. Figgins & Co. of the New House joined them.

"Hallo! What are you fellows confabbing about?" asked Figgins genially. "What do you think of the match so far?"

"Oh, so-so!" said Tom Merry.

"Loamshire are going to begin their innings before lunch, I hear," said Fatty Wynn. "There is time for an hour's batting. I rather think they'll be surprised when Langton starts bowling."

"St. Jim's may be surprised, too," said Tom Merry grimly.

"Langton doesn't seem very bright just now," said Figgins.

"Looks as if he feels he isn't up to a county match. Hallo, they're going on. Come on, and let's get good places! There will be a crowd round the ropes."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Where are you going, Fatty?" bawled Figgins.

"Only to get a sandwich," called back Fatty Wynn, and he escaped before Figgins and Kerr could collar him.

The juniors looked on with great interest as Kildare placed his men to field. All St. Jim's were on the ground now, and many strangers had come in to see the county play.

On important occasions like the present, St. Jim's cricket-ground was open to the local public, and there were a great many Loamshire folk present.

Among the spectators who did not belong to the school, a fat man in a silk hat could be seen, and the fellows who noticed him recognised him as Mr. Simeon Levy.

But no open notice was taken of the bookmaker's presence. He was standing quietly as a spectator among the others, and apparently doing no harm, and although his presence was not appreciated, no one felt inclined to interfere with him. If he had attempted any betting transactions, of course, he would have been "booted" off the precincts of St. Jim's at express speed. But the bookmaker was too cunning for anything of that sort.

The crowd cheered as the St. Jim's men went on to field. They looked a very handsome and very fit set of fellows, too. Kildare tossed the ball to Langton for the first over, against Dalton, the Loamshire captain.

There was a buzz of expectation among the Saints.

They expected great things of Langton, and they had no doubt that the champion bowler of St. Jim's would open the eyes of the Loamshire men, in the very first over.

But they were disappointed.

Langton opened the over with very mediocre bowling. It was neither good nor bad, but quite ordinary—so ordinary that, as Monty Lowther remarked, it was extraordinary.

Dalton had heard of the great bowler of St. Jim's, and he had been looking for trouble. But he did not find any. He knocked away the first two balls with ease, and let himself go at the third. The ball sailed away to the boundary, and there was no need for the batsmen to run.

"Four!" grunted Blake.

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

He looked hard at Langton. The Sixth-Former was pale, composed, and seemed to be holding himself hard in hand. Tom Merry could guess that he was labouring under some secret emotion. If he had resolved to sell his side, it could not be pleasant to him to do it, and Tom Merry guessed that he must be suffering inwardly.

Kildare cast an anxious glance at Langton.

"Go it, old fellow!" he called out.

Langton flushed.

He sent down the fourth ball of the over with a vim, and Dalton's wicket had a narrow escape. The Loamshire captain just saved it, and there were no runs. The St. Jim's crowd gave a cheer. Langton was waking up to his work.

Tom Merry looked across at Mr. Levy as the crowd cheered.

He saw the bookmaker's eyes gleam, and his jaws close like a vice. As well as if Mr. Levy had told him, Tom Merry knew that the bookmaker was there to see Langton betray his side, and that he was following the fluctuations of the game with anxious interest.

"The hound!" muttered Tom Merry.

Langton finished the over without event.

The field crossed over, leaving Dalton still at his wicket. Darrel took the ball for the second over, against Scott, a Loamshire batsman with a reputation for slogging. Scott knocked the leather all over the field, and the Saints had a great deal of leather-hunting. And the runs went up on the board.

Langton bowled the third over. The tameness of it astonished St. Jim's. The over gave Loamshire eight runs, and cost them nothing in wickets.

Kildare looked amazed.

He had depended on Langton for brilliant bowling and falling wickets, and here was his champion delivering mediocre bowling that could have been equalled by a dozen fellows in the Fifth Form. Fatty Wynn, of the Fourth, could have done better, and every fellow on the ground knew it.

When the field crossed over again, Kildare spoke to Langton.

"You haven't got into it yet, Langton," he said anxiously.

"I don't seem to feel quite up to it," Langton confessed.

"It's the first time I've played against a county team, you know."

"That's all very well, I know. But if you could only bowl as you've bowled at the nets, you'd give them the kybosh."

"I'll try, Kildare."

"For goodness' sake, do," said the captain of St. Jim's.

"We can't equal them in batting, as you know; we can't expect to. If you don't take wickets, they will walk over us. We are all relying on you, Langton."

Langton coloured.

"Well, I'll do my best," he said.

He spoke as if he meant it. But if he did his best, his best was very poor. For not a single wicket fell to his bowling. Runs piled up on it, and that was all. Darrel and Monteith both accounted for wickets, and Kildare caught out a batsman. But when the time came to stop play for lunch, only those three wickets had been lost, and the county team had scored fifty runs for them.

A feeling of deep disappointment settled over the St. Jim's crowd.

Fifty for three wickets!

If that kind of thing continued, the match was over, bar shouting. Langton, the champion bowler—Langton, the sheet-anchor of the School Eleven, had failed them. Whether he was not in form—or whatever the reason might be—Langton had failed his side.

"He may buck up after lunch," Darrel remarked hopefully to Kildare.

Kildare nodded without replying.

His heart was heavy. He had placed so much faith in Langton, and Langton had done nothing whatever to justify it in the county match. Kildare saw clearly enough that the school was booked for a licking, and he was terribly disappointed and worried. What was the matter with Langton? Kildare could not guess; but there was one fellow on the ground, at least, who knew, and that one was Tom Merry! And when the cricket knocked off for lunch, Tom Merry made up his mind what to do.

CHAPTER 14.

"Play the Game!"

"LANGTON!"

The Sixth-Former was standing by himself, leaning against the wall of the cricket pavilion, after lunch. Langton preferred to be alone just then. He had withdrawn from the other fellows while they were still lunching with the county cricketers. Tom Merry had had his dinner in the School House, looking very thoughtful and worried all the time, and as soon as it was over, he had looked for Langton. He was glad to find him alone. He had something to say to Langton which it was not advisable for anybody else to hear.

Langton started and looked round as Tom Merry spoke his name.

"What do you want, kid?" he asked.

"I want to speak to you."

"Well?"

"I want to make an appeal to you," said Tom Merry quietly. "I've been watching your bowling."

Langton smiled faintly.

"I suppose the fellows are disappointed?" he said.

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"Yes."

"Well, it's hard cheese, but it can't be helped."

"Perhaps it can be helped," said Tom Merry quietly. "Look here, Langton, this won't do. St. Jim's can't be beaten this way. You can't give the match away to the county."

Langton started violently.

If he had had a clear conscience, it would hardly have been safe for a junior to speak to him in that way. Any other Sixth-Former would have replied to such words not verbally, but with a heavy hand. But Langton's conscience was not clear. The only thought that flashed into his mind now was that he had been found out.

"Wh-what do you mean?" he stammered.

"I mean what I say. You are giving the match away,

and I want you to stop it."

Langton's face was like chalk.

"You dare to suspect me—" he began.

"I don't suspect—I know," interrupted Tom Merry crisply.

"I know what Simeon Levy is here watching the match for. I know he's fixed it with you to sell the match."

If Tom Merry had had any doubt before as to the correctness of his conclusions, he could have had none now. Langton's face was ghastly. He staggered back against the pavilion wall, and held on to it with his hands to keep himself from falling. He stared at Tom Merry with wide-open, hunted eyes.

"How—how do you know anything about it?" he panted.

"Because I heard Levy telling Joliffe so the other day."

"Oh!"

"He said that he had squared a player in the St. Jim's eleven to give the match away," said Tom Merry. "You're that player."

Langton groaned.

"I didn't mean to say a word," said Tom Merry, feeling a sentiment of compassion for the wretched senior, in spite of himself. "If you had decided at the last minute to do the decent thing, and play up for St. Jim's, I shouldn't have spoken a word. I know you're a decent chap, Langton, and I don't know what hold that villain has over you. But think, man. Suppose you kept on, and did this, what would you feel like afterwards? You'd never be able to look a decent fellow in the face again."

The wretched Sixth-Former groaned again.

"You've got to defy that scoundrel," said Tom Merry. "Play up for St. Jim's, and show him that you don't care for him."

"You don't understand."

"I understand this much—that it's dirty and cowardly and blackguardly to sell a cricket match, and that you can't do it!" exclaimed Tom Merry, with flashing eyes.

"Have—have you told anybody else about this?" asked Langton, almost in a whisper.

"Five of us know."

"And—and—"

"We shan't say a word if you play up for the school," said Tom Merry. "We shan't disgrace you, or disgrace St. Jim's by letting it out—that is, if you play up! But if you keep on as you've started, you'll get it in the neck! That's plain English!"

"You don't understand," muttered Langton. "I'm in that man's power—he can get me expelled from the school if he chooses."

"Do you mean that you owe him money?"

"No, no; it isn't that!"

"He's offered you money to do this?"

"Yes; but I've refused it."

"Then why are you doing it?" demanded Tom Merry.

"He can ruin me by going to the Head."

"But how—if you kept your word to the Head and haven't had any dealings with him since that last affair?"

"He's got letters from me," groaned Langton. "Innocent enough, but—but you see, I wrote to send him money I owed him, to get rid of him. But he's going to use those letters to make out that I've been betting with him, up to a few days ago. Do you see? He's got me under his thumb. He's only got to go to the Head and show those letters, and I'm done for."

"And he's asked you to throw this match away—that's his price for letting you off?"

"Yes!" groaned Langton.

Tom Merry's brow was very stern.

"And you consented?"

"No, no!"

"But you're doing it?"

Langton shifted restlessly.

"I—I don't know what to do. I tell you he can ruin me. I asked Kildare to leave me out of the team, but it was no good. If St. Jim's beat the county, I'm ruined."

"Better to be ruined honourably than to save yourself by

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acting like a dirty cad and traitor," said Tom Merry scornfully.

"That's easy enough to say," muttered Langton.

"It is easy enough to do, if you make up your mind to it. Look here, suppose you do as this villain wants, how can you stay here afterwards? I shall tell the fellows what you're doing. You can't expect me to become a party to your dirty treachery. The whole school will know you've played the traitor, and you'll be hooted out of St. Jim's. That will be as bad as being sacked by the Head."

"You—you won't do it!"

"Won't I?" Tom Merry eyes blazed. "Do you think I'm going to stand by and see you betray the school, and let us all down and disgrace us, and not say a word? If you don't promise me now to play up, and keep your word, the whole school will know the truth before the Leamshire innings is over."

"Oh! What shall I do?" groaned Langton.

"I'm sorry," said Tom Merry, more gently. "But you've got to play the game! No one ever did any good by being a cur and a traitor! Play the game!"

Langton was silent.

The tense pallor in his face showed how bitter a struggle was going on in his breast.

He had never dreamed of this! Hitherto, the struggle had been between his sense of honour and his fear of the bookmaker's revenge. Now he understood that the position was changed. If he betrayed St. Jim's, his secret would be known. He would be despised and condemned by the whole school—he could not remain! He could, certainly, deny Tom Merry's allegations; but his peculiar play would bear them out—and he knew that he had not nerve enough, not wickedness enough, to tell bold lies and stand by them. He would blurt out the truth in the midst of his lies, if he started to lie. He knew it!

What was he to do?

"Play the game!" said Tom Merry.

That was good counsel—always good counsel, whatever the consequences might be. But it was hard to follow—very hard! Langton thought of the final interview with the Head—of the hard, crushing words—"You are expelled from this school!"—and he groaned. And yet—was that worse than to act the traitor, and then be held up to public contempt and scorn?"

"Buck up!" said Tom Merry. "Goodness knows I don't want to be hard; but if you do the decent thing to-day, you'll be glad of it afterwards—I'm sure of that."

"Leave me alone," said Langton huskily. "Leave me alone now—I've got to think it out."

"Play the game, then, and I shan't mention the subject to you again."

"Yes, yes; but go!"

And Tom Merry went.

Langton was left alone—left to fight out the battle with himself, and to choose which of the paths he would follow—the two paths of honour and dishonour, both of which, seemingly, would lead to the same goal—his own ruin!

What would he do?

Even when the time came for the resumption of the Leamshire innings, the wretched Sixth-Former had not yet decided.

But as Darrel handed him the ball to open the bowling, and his fingers closed round the red sphere of leather, a sudden resolve came to Langton.

It was the resolve to follow Tom Merry's counsel, and play the game! And with that resolve came a sudden sense of peace and rest. There was grim determination in Langton's heart as he went on, with the eyes of all the St. Jim's crowd bent anxiously upon him.

CHAPTER 15.

"Well Bowled!"

DALTON, the Leamshire captain, was still batting after the lunch interval. He had lost three partners himself, but he was still going strong. There was great confidence in his manner as he faced Langton's bowling again.

Tom Merry & Co. looked on with anxious eyes.

Tom had told his comrades what he had done, and they hoped for the best. But whether Langton would have the courage to do his duty was still a question. The chums of the School House could only wait and see.

There was another spectator who watched Langton keenly, but without much anxiety now. It was Mr. Levy.

The bookmaker was quite at ease. Langton had been playing into his hands, and the St. Jim's match was booked as a loss. The bookmaker, indeed, had thought of leaving the ground to get his lunch, and he only waited to see the batting recommence.



As only one word was required for the notice-board, there was plenty of room for it, and Harry Wharton painted the letters a foot high. "RATS!" That was all, but it was enough. It was considered by the Removites a full and sufficient reply to Mr. Hardinge, Jam-manufacturer. (The above is the reproduced cover of our popular companion paper, "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, containing a splendid, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "OUT OF BOUNDS." Now on sale at all newsagents). Price one penny.

He looked on with fat satisfaction as Langton bowled an over. The over was unbroken by a single run, but it led to nothing. Langton was not in form.

Mr. Levy grinned, and walked off the field, feeling that he could safely leave his dupe and victim to wreck the St. Jim's prospects. He had only to return later to make sure that the school had been beaten—in fact, to witness their defeat, and to be in at the death, as he expressed it to himself. But the sporting tout would not have sauntered away so contentedly if he had known what was to follow his departure.

Tom Merry looked on grimly. Darrel took the second over, and the Loamshire batsman scored five runs for it. Then Langton bowled again, and again there was nothing to record.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"He's doing better, anyway!" said Blake. "They're not running."

"Looks as if he's bucking up," said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Well, I want to give the chap a chance," he said. "If he does his best, that's all we can ask. And I dare say he's feeling pretty rotten."

"Wait and see, anyway."

Three more overs were bowled by Langton. He took no wickets. But it was noted that not a single run was taken off his bowling, and the confidence of the Saints in their great bowler began to revive.

"You watch him!" said Lefevre of the Fifth confidently. "That's what I say! You watch him and you'll see things."

And Lefevre proved a prophet.

Langton took the ball again against Dalton's wicket. The Loamshire captain faced the bowling with care. He was beginning to see that Langton was dangerous; but how dangerous he did not yet realise.

Langton took a little run. His face was somewhat flushed now, his eyes were gleaming, and his lips were tightly set. He was in the mood to do great things; he had succeeded at last in banishing every thought from his mind but the thought of duty. He was going to "play the game."

The ball came down, and Dalton swiped at it. But the willow never found the leather. The bat whistled in empty air. And then there was a crash.

And then came a roar from all St. Jim's: "Out!"

There wasn't much doubt about it. Dalton's middle stump was lying on its back, and the bails were on the ground.

The Loamshire captain gazed down at his wrecked wicket for a moment, as if disinclined to believe the evidence of his eyes. The surprise in his face brought a chuckle from the spectators who were near enough to see.

"Well bowled, Langton!"

"Bravo, St. Jim's!"

Dalton strolled off to the pavilion with his bat under his arm. Another man came out to take his place. He faced Langton's bowling, and he was very careful. But he was a

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little too careful. At all events, he failed to block the ball, and his leg stump was whisked out of the ground.

And St. Jim's roared:

"Well bowled!"

"Two down for Langton!" roared Kangaroo. "This is going to be the hat-trick! Hurray!"

"Hurray, Langton!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwway!"

Loamshire sent another man in. The late batsman warned him to be on the look-out for a ball which looked simple to start with, but broke in in a mysterious way from nowhere in particular. The new man tried to bear that somewhat puzzling warning in mind, but it did him no good; for the next ball broke in from a new quarter and slid under his waving bat as if it were alive, and the next instant the balls were on the ground.

St. Jim's yelled:

"The hat-trick!"

"Hurray!"

"Hip-pip! Good old Langton!"

Kildare's eyes danced. While the defeated batsman was going out Kildare rushed up to Langton and thumped him on the back.

"Good for you!" he shouted. "Oh, this is gorgeous! Keep it up, Langy, old man!"

Langton laughed.

"I don't know about keeping it up," he said. "But I'll do my best."

"Oh, pile in! I thought you'd gone to sleep; but you're waking up now, and no mistake. Give 'em jip!" said Kildare jubilantly.

For a moment before Langton's eyes the evil face of the bookmaker seemed to swim, and a pang went to his heart. He was playing the game—but at what a price!

Then he drove the thought from his mind. It was for the sake of his side—the side that trusted him and relied upon him! What a coward he had been! But that was over! St. Jim's should win, if he could bring it about—and he could! He felt that he could! It seemed as if the scales had fallen from his eyes! After a long struggle in darkness he had reached the light! That was how it seemed to him. And he was in a mood to conquer!

St. Jim's watched him keenly, delightedly, as the next batsman took up his stand. Was the hat-trick to be outdone? Were there more painful surprises in store for the Loamshire men? They hoped so—and they watched.

Crash!

A flying wicket, and a roar from the school:

"How's that?"

"Four giddy wickets!"

"Well bowled! Oh, well bowled, sir!"

It seemed as if the Saints would go mad with joy. They roared and yelled and howled and tossed up their caps, not caring whether they ever came down again.

The Loamshire men were looking very serious now. They wondered where the school had dug up this demon bowler, as Dalton expressed it. Matters were looking serious for Loamshire now; for they had lost four wickets for no runs, and their total was now seven wickets for less than 60.

The over finished without the fall of another wicket, and Loamshire breathed again.

But they were not done with Langton yet.

Ten minutes later he took another wicket; and a few minutes after that Kildare caught a man out off Langton's bowling.

Then the word passed round:

"Last man in!"

St. Jim's were jubilant.

"Last man in—and they've got only 65 to their credit!" grinned Figgins of the Fourth. "My sons, we're going to beat the county!"

"Nother innings yet, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Nother innings—rats! If we beat 'em in the first, we'll beat 'em in the second!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah! Quite wight, Hewwies, old man!"

"It's ripping!" said Blake.

Tom Merry's face was very bright.

He needed no further evidence that his talk with Langton had had the desired result. Langton was playing up wonderfully; he was doing all that had ever been expected of him—and more. He was risking everything for the sake of his side—and that was as it should be!

St. Jim's was a winning team!

Both St. Jim's and Loamshire watched the finish eagerly. The end came suddenly—a man caught out by Darrel—and the innings ended for 65 for Loamshire. And the Saints had scored 90 in their first innings! No wonder the crowd were jubilant—no wonder they roared!

Kildare linked arms with Langton as they walked off the field at the finish of the Loamshire first innings. Kildare

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could have hugged him. The value of Langton to the team was more than ever apparent now. His failure at first had plunged St. Jim's into despair; his bucking-up had raised the hopes of the school sky-high. Langton was the hero of the hour, and fellows pressed forward to clap him on the shoulder and congratulate him.

Langton took it all very quietly.

For at the back of his mind—though he strove hard not to think of it—was all the time the haunting knowledge that he was playing for the success of St. Jim's, and for his own ruin! But that knowledge, though it might torture him, could no longer make him act the coward and the traitor. The die was cast!

CHAPTER 15.

The Winning Side.

WHEN Mr. Levy came sauntering back upon the cricket-ground of St. Jim's the second innings of the school was well under way. Mr. Levy read the score casually—five wickets down for 40. St. Jim's was enjoying a fairly average innings.

Mr. Levy was a little surprised. It was yet early in the afternoon, and he had fancied that the Loamshire innings would still be going on. But no doubt Loamshire had declared! That was his first thought.

When he discovered the facts Mr. Levy had a most unpleasant shock.

Loamshire had not declared—Loamshire had been dismissed for 65 runs!

Loamshire had been 15 runs behind St. Jim's on the first innings.

The bookmaker could scarcely credit it at first.

"The bowling must have bucked up a lot," he remarked to a bystander.

"It did," grinned the spectator. "Langton of St. Jim's beat the hat-trick—he took four wickets at a run, and one afterwards."

Mr. Levy turned yellow.

"Langton!"

"Yes; that fellow who's batting now for the school!"

"Four wickets," said Mr. Levy faintly.

"Yes; as neat as you please. That kid is a colt for the county; he'll be playing for Sussex some day."

Mr. Levy moved away without replying.

It took him some minutes to realise it. Langton was not playing to orders after all; he was playing for his side. So far, the county lagged behind in runs; and if Langton played up to the finish the county was beaten.

Mr. Levy ground his yellow teeth!

His dupe and victim seemed to have developed a will of his own. Had he determined to defy the bookmaker for the sake of the side, then? It looked like it. Mr. Levy longed for a chance to say a word to Langton. But there was no chance. Langton was at the wicket; he had just gone on. Mr. Levy got as close to Langton's wicket as he could, and tried to catch the player's eye.

Unfortunately he succeeded. Langton happened to glance round—or perhaps some instinct warned him of the evil eye that was bent upon him.

He met Mr. Levy's glance—he read the spite and malice and savage threatening in it—and he started, and changed colour. He turned his attention to the bowling a moment too late—the ball crashed into the wicket.

"Out!"

It was another duck's egg for Langton!

His bowling had been wonderful; but in batting he had achieved the "pair of spectacles" so dreaded by cricketers.

"Never mind, old man," said Kildare, as the batsman came out. "It's your bowling we want; a chap can't do everything."

Langton nodded, and passed on without replying, and threw down his bat in the pavilion.

Kildare went in to take his place at the wicket.

Langton stood leaning against the pavilion, unnoticed in the throng, as every eye was turned upon the field of play.

The face of the bookmaker had brought back everything to his mind—all that he risked, all that he would lose—with terrible clearness.

His heart throbbed painfully.

He was not sorry that he had played up for St. Jim's. But the dreadful certainty of the consequences came to him now, more clearly than ever, and he ground his teeth to keep back a groan of misery.

The fat bookmaker came over towards him. Mr. Levy's features were working with rage and malice. He could not speak to Langton without being observed; but there was no time to think of that now. He had to speak to him, and bring him to time, or all was lost—from the bookmaker's point of view.

"What do you mean by it?" the fat bookmaker muttered, in a voice thick and trembling with rage. "What have you been doing?"

Langton met his eyes.

"Playing the game!" he replied firmly.

Levy gave a savage, scoffing laugh.

"You ain't been playin' your own game," he said. "Do you know what this means? If you bowl like that again, the county will lose."

"I'm going to help beat them if I can."

"And what about your arrangement with me?"

"I made no arrangement with you," said Langton desperately. "I promised you nothing. I told you all along that I couldn't do what you wanted."

"You started doing it."

"I know I did—like a coward and a villain," said the Sixth-Former passionately. "Well, I've stopped it; I'll risk everything rather than betray my team! Is that plain enough for you?"

Mr. Levy clenched his fat hands till the blood seemed about to start from the stubby finger-tips.

"Take care!" he muttered. "You'd better take care, Mister Langton. You know what this means to me—and you know what it'll mean to you."

"I don't care!"

"I'll ruin you, you fool!" hissed the bookmaker. "I'll

"Here he is!"

It was a shout from Tom Merry. Five juniors had detached themselves from the crowd that eagerly watched Kildare's batting—Tom Merry, and Lowther, and Manners, and Blake, and D'Arcy. Tom Merry had spotted the bookmaker, and he knew what the rascal was speaking to Langton about. Whether he would be able to influence the Sixth-Former again Tom Merry did not know; but he did not mean to leave anything to chance.

"Collar him!"

"Yaas, wathah! Collah the

wottah, deah boys!"

Simeon Levy started back.

"Ands off!" he said fiercely—

"ands off! I— Oh!"

The five juniors ran right at him.

Mr. Levy's silk hat went flying, and

the fat bookmaker rolled on the

ground under the sprawling juniors.

They were up in a moment, with the

sporting tout struggling like a fat

worm in their grasp. But his

struggles were of little avail against

Tom Merry & Co.

"Yank him along!"

"Kick him out!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Ow!" gasped Mr. Levy. "Elp!

Ow!"

He was rushed along in the grasp

of the juniors towards the school

gates. They intended to hurl the

bookmaker off the precincts of St.

Jim's, taking the law—and the bookmaker—into their own

hands.

"What is this? Stop at once!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry. "The Head!"

It was the Head of St. Jim's.

Dr. Holmes had been coming down towards the cricket-

ground, to watch the batting of his boys, when the juniors and

their prisoner almost ran into him.

Tom Merry & Co. dropped Mr. Levy as if he had suddenly

become red-hot.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Blake.

The Head's brow was very stern.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed, regarding the

juniors and the gasping, breathless bookmaker alternately.

"How dare you treat this man in such a way?"

"It's Levy, the bookmaker, sir," said Manners.

"Indeed! I am sorry he should be here. But whatever

he is, you have no right to lay hands upon him," said the

Head severely.

"You don't know what the awful rotter has been doing,

sir," said Tom Merry, in a burst of wrath. "He's been

trying to make one of our side sell the match, sir, because

he's got his rotten bets on it."

"Bless my soul!"

"He's been threatening the—the chap I'm speaking of,

sir. He's making up some lies or other to tell you about him,

if he won't give the match away."

"Bless me!"

Mr. Levy sat up, gasping and spluttering.

"Ow! I'll 'ave the law of yer! I— Yow!"

"Pewwaps we had bettah see him off the premises, sir," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "He has been usin' vewy disgustin' language, sir, and he is an awful wottah!"

"Pray conduct him to the gates," said the Head faintly.

"Use no violence, but insist upon his immediate departure."

"Certainly, sir!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And the five juniors grasped Mr. Levy again. They allowed

him to walk this time; but he had to walk very quickly. He

was marched out of the school gates at top speed, and dumped

down in the dust in the middle of the road. He sat there

dazedly, his collar torn out, and his coat split up the back, and

his hair wildly ruffled.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

Tom Merry shook a warning finger at him.

"Now you buzz off!" he said impressively. "Don't you

dare to show your nose on our ground again, or we'll duck

you in the fountain next time."

"Yaas, wathah! If it were not for the howwid disgwace

of soilin' my hands upon such a person, I should give you a

feahful thwashin', you wottah!"

And the juniors turned away, leaving Mr. Levy sitting in

the dusty road, and saying things.

The bookmaker staggered to his feet, pumping in breath—

and dust! But he did not venture to return to the St. Jim's

cricket-ground. Anxious as he was to know the result of the

match, he did not care to venture within reach of Tom Merry

& Co. again.

CHAPTER 16.

Out of the Depths!

ALL down for a hundred, was the result of the St. Jim's second innings. Then came an interval for refreshments, and both sides took a well-earned rest. There was still ample time for another innings; play during the

day had been quicker than was anticipated.

The county team had come to

St. Jim's expecting to have to declare

first innings—but as it happened,

they hadn't had to do anything of the

kind—and it was considerably

doubtful whether their second innings

would pull the game out of the fire

for them. All really depended upon

one man—upon whether Langton's

bowling remained up to the mark.

St. Jim's had no doubt about it—

and the whole school was joyously

anticipating a victory over the

county.

After tea, when the county went in

to bat for the second time, the crowd

was more numerous than ever, and

the stately form of the Head of St.

Jim's could be seen outside the

pavilion.

The Head had been a keen

cricketer in his youth, and he was

keenly interested in the historic

battle between St. Jim's and Loam-

shire County. And there was another matter he was

interested in, too. He had called Tom Merry to him, and

was observed to be speaking earnestly with the hero of the

Shell.

But when fellows asked Tom Merry afterwards what he

had been talking about, Tom Merry seemed to develop a

sudden attack of deafness, and the curious inquirers were un-

satisfied.

But, as a matter of fact, the St. Jim's fellows had little

attention for anything but the finish of that exciting match

with the county.

One name was on every lip—that of Langton! Langton's

bowling was the theme of endless and enthusiastic comment.

"Well bowled, Langton!"

The roar rang out again and again.

Langton was playing up wonderfully. He seemed to have

cast every consideration from his mind but one—that of win-

ning the match for his side. And he was doing it. The St.

Jim's crowd roared as the hat trick was repeated, and three

helpless Loamshire batsmen went bootless home. And then

came a batsman caught and bowled Langton, and the crowd

roared again.

Long after that match St. Jim's fellows loved to relate how

Langton of the Sixth had made hay of the county batting,

and how astounded the Loamshire men had looked at the

summary dismissal of their best bats.

Seven down for 50—that was a score of which Loamshire

could not be proud, but which made the Saints yell with

delight.

Dalton, the tower of strength on the county side, had been

dismissed for 8 runs. And it was Langton who dismissed him.

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"Langton! Langton!"
"Bravo!"

"Bravo!"

If ever a cricketer was a hero in the eyes of his school-fellows, Langton was at that moment. His "pair of spectacles" in the St. Jim's innings were forgotten. That was nothing—less than nothing. The Saints only thought of the way he was taking wickets. And he seemed tireless. Fellows who had remarked that he seemed out of sorts and out of condition at the beginning of the match, observed now that he was all life and all fire.

"Can you do another over?" Kildare asked him, laughing, as the announcement ran round that the County were last man in.

Langton laughed.

"A dozen if you like!" he said.

"I think one will be enough!" grinned Kildare.

And it was. For in that over the deadly bowler took a wicket first ball, and the match—the great match between St. Jim's and the Loamshire County—was over! Loamshire were all down in their second innings for 82; total, 167 for Loamshire, and 190 for St. Jim's. St. Jim's had beaten the County by 23 runs!

Beaten the County!

It was a magic word.

No wonder the field was swarmed as the last wicket fell; no wonder Langton was caught up by wildly-enthusiastic fellows and carried off the field in triumph!

"Hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Good old Langton!"

"Bwavo!"
"Hamba!"

"Hurrah!"

They bore him back to the School House, and set him down there—flushed, excited, joyous. But when he had retired to his study, the hero of St. Jim's was changed. The flush died out of his face, the excitement died from his eyes. It was over now—he had won for St. Jim's—and now he had to pay the penalty. He had risked everything for the sake of his side—and now was the time to face the music.

Langton did not join in the celebrations which followed the victory of the school over the County. He pleaded fatigue, and stayed in his study. He felt like a condemned prisoner in a cell. The only question was, when would the blow fall? Mr. Levy would know that the County had lost very soon after the conclusion of the match. He would have to fly, for he could not meet his engagements. Would he come to St. Jim's first, or would he write to the Head, with his lying accusations and his lying proofs? Probably he would write. In that case it might be hours before the blow fell. Langton felt that he could not endure the suspense—he was tempted to rush to the Head's study, and tell him everything—and yet a faint hope that the bookmaker might have held his hand lingered in the unhappy lad's heart.

Darkness had long fallen. Langton paced his study in the

gloom, with misery in his breast. How long would that rack-
ing suspense last? There came a knock at the door.

Langton started, and stopped his feverish pacing. He guessed that it was someone who had come to summon him to the Head's presence.

"Come in!" he called out, in a shaking voice.

The door opened.

"Why are you in the dark?"

Langton trembled. It was the Head's voice. It was Dr. Holmes who had come to his study.

He struck a match and lighted the gas, but he hardly dared to look at the Head. Dr. Holmes's glance rested upon the senior's white, tortured face.

"Langton," he said, "I have something to say to you. I have received a letter, accusing you, and enclosing what the writer declares to be proofs that you have had betting transactions with him up to last week, in spite of your promise to me. What have you to say?"

"I expected it, sir," said Langton dully. "It's no good telling you the man is lying. You won't believe me."

The Head's look was kind and compassionate.

"On the contrary, Langton," he said quietly, "I shall not doubt your word. I have learned some things this afternoon from Merry of the Shell. Is it correct that this man, Levy, tried to induce you to betray the County match?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you refused?"

"I gave in at first, but afterwards—I—I couldn't do it!" muttered Langton. "Kildare says I've won the match for the school. That's enough for me. I can face the rest; anyway, I've done the decent thing. If you believe that man

"I do not believe him," said the Head. "I think you have been very careless, and very foolish, Langton. I believe nothing more. Your conduct, in defying this man and doing your duty convinces me that you have been guilty of nothing worse than that. I believe that you have kept your promise to me—I believe it because you have played the game to-day!" Langton staggered. The relief was too much.

Langton staggered. The relief was too much.

"Oh, sir!" he gasped. It was all he could utter.

"This letter that I have received, I shall burn, and take no other notice of it, Langton," said the Head. "Let me warn you in future to be careful to have no dealings, even of the most innocent nature, with bad characters—that is all. I have no doubts of you, Langton; you never stood higher in my opinion than at the present moment. Look to the future, my boy, and forget the past—and shake off its influence. That is all, my dear lad!"

Langton sank into a chair. The Head was gone.

The Sixth-Former's face dropped in his hands, and the tears rolled down his cheeks—tears of relief and thankfulness. He was saved—and he was saved because he had played the game that day, and done his duty for the sake of the side.

THE END.

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OUR GRAND SERIAL STORY.

WINGS OF GOLD!

The Story of the Most Terrible and Amazing Journey Ever Made By Man.

Edited from the Notes of Maurice Fordham, Esq.

By SIDNEY DREW.

CHARACTERS IN THIS GRAND STORY.

MAURICE FORDHAM and **LANCE MORTON**—Two healthy and wealthy young Britons, owners of the yacht *Foamwitch*, and the wonderful aeronef, *Wings of Gold*.

PROFESSOR LUDWIG VON HAAGEL—The famous German scientist, also noted for his clumsiness.

CROOKS—The ship's cook.

JOSEPH JACKSON or **SHOREDITCH JOSE**—A Cockney member of the crew, whose constant companion is a game bantam named the *Smacker*.

TEDDY MORGAN—Ship's engineer.

WILLIAM TOOTER—The hairy first mate.

The *Foamwitch* is on an expedition with the object of exploring the strange land which is believed to lie beyond the barrier of eternal ice near the South Pole.

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 civilised man.

Once the aeronef is wrecked; but, by dint of much in-

genuity 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 through a ravine in the mountains, and the crew find themselves flying over a large inland lake, surrounded by the vast, unknown mountains. They encounter such fearful creatures here that they decide to go back and return to the *Foamwitch*; but investigation reveals that the ravine is now blocked up, and they are prisoners in that vast enclosure.

Their tinned provisions have all gone bad, and the adventurers are in a bad case, when, cruising gently along, they come upon first an isolated human being, a jet-black giant nine feet high, and then upon a whole city, which they name the City of Triangles from the way it is laid out. Suspicious at first, the race of black giants and their king soon become well-disposed towards *Wings of Gold*, Crooks particularly making a great impression. A native servant is given to him, and is at once christened Tarrytop. One day the king receives a message telling him that a hostile tribe is advancing to attack the city, driving a herd of huge mastodons, or mammoths, before them to break down the city walls. The adventurers agree to stand by their native friends at whatever cost, and *Wings of Gold* is hastily stripped of her forward screw, to enable her to be used as a battering-ram in case of need.

(Now go on with the story).

The Enemy Draws Near—The Regiment of Mastodons—A Terrible Fight—Wings of Gold Uses Her Ram.

Dawn very quickly became broad daylight, and after breakfast had been despatched, the crew of *Wings of Gold* waited anxiously for the attack of the enemy. Morgan was busy with notebook and pencil, and it was evident that he was writing a description of certain parts of the complicated machinery, so that should they smash in the impending encounter, he would have something to help him in his work.

Daylight revealed the natives lining the walls of the city; but it showed no signs of the recent fight. Dead and wounded, both friend and foe, had been removed from the streets, and, save for the armed men lining the walls, no scene could have been more peaceful in appearance.

"They may be wrong," said Lance, after an hour had passed without a sign of the enemy; "it was probably only a scare."

"We'll hope so," said Fordham; "but it doesn't do to be too certain. To tell the truth, it would be rather rough to have no fight after the trouble we've taken."

"Yet I'd be content to let it slide, sir," Morgan remarked grimly. "Heaven knows what'll happen if we fouled the houses."

A far-away sound, deep and low, like the murmur of the sea against the rocks, reached the ears of the intrepid adventurers. Morgan looked inquiringly at Lance, who nodded. A lever was pulled back, the great screws whirled, and *Wings of Gold* whirled from the ground.

There was no need for the airship to ascend to any great height, for by the time it had risen a hundred feet, the surrounding houses were left far below, and the country lay clear to the sight on all sides. The scene was one to make the blood of the coolest man run faster through his veins, and to set his heart beating with unpleasant hardness. On the lake there was nothing. On the two sides the great forest slopes stretched away unbroken, but the remaining sides held

enough to atone for all. Here the trees were swaying wildly, now and again one falling to the ground.

"A glass!" Lance said hoarsely.

And Crooks dived below, returning shortly with one.

"They're coming," said Lance, in a low voice, the glass levelled at the spot where the trees seemed most agitated. "Hundreds of men—mastodons—a score of them! One has just torn down a tree!"

"They shall be killed!" Von Haagel growled. "I do to them one owe!"

Before five minutes had passed, all that Lance could see through the glass was visible to the naked eye. Between the wall of the City of Triangles and the wooded slope was a tract of open land, and out on to this burst a score of huge mastodons, bellowing furiously, while behind them rushed hundreds of the enemy, waving their spears exultantly, urging the great brutes, which they evidently had under some kind of control, on to battle.

"They're making for the gates!" Fordham cried.

"Gates being ways in, yes," murmured Crooks, "also being ways out, and—"

"Keep over them," Lance ordered, speaking over his shoulder to Morgan.

"We'll give Tooter a chance before we take to ramming."

Wings of Gold moved away sharply, Morgan driving her stern screw with all possible power until she had crossed the moat and was right over the great brutes, which were making unhesitatingly for the water. As the airship stopped, the first of the colossal elephants plunged into the water, swam across, and charged straight at the gate.

Tooter, who was shouldering the Maxim, looked questioningly at his young commander.

"Yes, try it," Fordham answered grimly.

With a sharp splutter, the Maxim spoke, and the first discharge of bullets churned the water close to the great brute's flank. Tooter's hand moved slightly, and the mastodon jumped like a bucking horse as the bullets struck his hide;

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but he scrambled up the back, and charged at the gate, which shook beneath the charge.

"No good, Tooter," said Lance hoarsely. "It'll be the ram after all."

"Which I calls heathenish," the hairy one remarked, wiping his mouth with his hand as if to remove an unpleasant taste. "What's the good of animiles that won't be shot? It ain't natural."

"But you are right, mein good Tooter," said Von Haegel enthusiastically. "They should be dead."

"Which, not being the case, ain't logic," Crooks remarked. "They are alive, likewise kickin', which must be stopped. Why not?"

Half a dozen of the great brutes had succeeded in crossing the moat by this time, and were thundering at the gate. One of them charged so madly that he snapped a tusk; and now he seemed to be urging the others on with frantic bellowing.

Before this furious onslaught the gate gave way with a crash, and the mastodons charged in, the whole score of them, the enemy following close behind.

Flights of arrows were discharged at the great beasts; but none of them stopped.

"They'll wreck the city," Lance said, between his teeth.

"That's evidently the enemy's idea," said Fordham quietly, "for then their superior numbers would count. Morgan, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then tackle the great bull that seems to be leading them."

Wings of Gold darted forward, passed over the wall, and hovered over the first of the triangular streets, in which a scene of wild confusion was being enacted. The mastodons were charging wildly here and there, the walls of the houses going down before them like card castles. One great brute invariably led the way, trumpeting loudly, his hide bristling with arrows until he looked like a colossal hedgehog.

Morgan's hand played among the levers. Wings of Gold dropped until she hung only within a few feet of the ground. The mastodon, seeing the strange thing approach him, stood stock still, his head lowered, his trunk raised high in the air. He stood thus until the airship was within twenty yards of him, then, with a furious bellow, he charged to meet it.

"Hold tight!" Morgan yelled.

The warning came none too soon. With a crash, Wings of Gold and the mastodon came together, and the former started back as if stung. A wild bellow of agony rang out, the airship passed on, and the mastodon lay dead on the ground, his skull crushed in.

"Hurrah!" shouted Lance. "That's number one!"

"Hoch-hoch!" Von Haegel shouted, dancing about the deck. "We shall wipe them out, the pigs!"

The fall of their leader had an extraordinary effect upon the rest of the mastodons. They halted, forming a barrier right across the stretch, and bellowed threateningly.

"Will she go through 'em?" Lance asked excitedly, turning to Morgan.

"We can try her," Morgan answered coolly. "Hold fast for your lives!"

Wings of Gold darted round and went straight at the wall of mastodons. The risk was a terrible one, but not a man aboard the ship quailed.

Through the Mastodons—Victory.

"Hold on!" Morgan yelled, as Wings of Gold swept towards mastodons.

On all sides fighting had ceased, and friend and foe stood watching the airship in open mouthed wonder.

With a force which threw the crew of Wings of Gold off their feet, the aeronef struck one of the mastodons, flinging him down, a great gaping wound in his side. Only for a second did she slacken, then darted forward at the second row, her ram catching another of the huge brutes in the head and braining him. The path lay open. A way had been forced through the mastodons, and the airship darted forward.

By a quick movement, Morgan sent her upwards, or she must have inevitably fouled one of the houses, and so come badly to grief.

"Three!" Lance cried. "Bring her round, and we'll settle a couple more!"

"With you, sir," Morgan answered, as he shifted the wheel.

"It is to me der goodest thing I have seen, gehabt!" Von Haegel cried. "There will soon no more be, for they will of themselves corpses have made soon!"

"Better let Tooter pip 'em as we pass," Crooks suggested. "The noise may frighten them, which, bein' desired, should be aimed at."

"Crooks is right," Fordham agreed quickly. "Can you manage the gun, Tooter?"

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"Bet on it, sir!" the hairy one answered, with a grin. "Just give me a hitch to the bulwarks wi' a rope, and I'll teach 'em!"

"You think she'll stand it, Teddy?" Lance queried, as the engineer made preparations to charge again.

"Ay, sir! What she's done twice she'll do again!"

The remaining mastodons were gathered round their fallen comrades, bellowing dismally, and trying to lift them with their trunks. The fight between the natives had been resumed; but the enemy, disheartened by the fall of the animals to which they had implicitly trusted, were already showing signs of breaking.

"Hold on!" Morgan shouted. "I'm taking her sideways, to try and hit three of 'em!"

"Large orders is best," Crooks murmured. "for, bein' more profit on 'em, are worth more. Why not?"

Wings of Gold, as if stung by a spurred heel, leapt forward towards the mastodons, who looked up, bellowing fiercely as the airship swept towards them. When within a score of yards of them, Morgan moved the wheel, and his ship veered to the right.

"Mind the house!" Lance cried hoarsely, fearing that the engineer would run his craft a bit too far.

But Morgan knew to a fraction how far he dared go. Wings of Gold turned sharply to the left, just missing the nearest of the houses with her ram, and rushed again at the mastodons. One of the great brutes was caught clean in the side and flung down, and another fell with a crushed skull, and a third had his huge trunk cut off as cleanly as by a razor. Round came the aeronef, to hang motionless a few yards from the fallen beasts.

Tooter had been busy with the Maxim, pouring a perfect hail of lead down upon the mastodons; and even now he did not relax his efforts. Already the survivors showed strong signs of turning tail, and as Morgan sent Wings of Gold forward once more, they swerved round and bolted for the gate.

At the sight of this a great yell of triumph rose from the defenders. They threw still greater vigour into their fighting, driving the enemy before them towards the gate.

Morgan ran the airship right over the mastodons, occasionally darting her down and catching one or two of the great brutes a nasty smack on the back.

"They must not let go be!" Von Haegel shouted excitedly, dancing about in the bows. "Hit them, mein goot Teddy!"

And Teddy hit them with a vengeance, while the professor leaned over the bulwarks and cheered him. Unluckily, carried away by his enthusiasm, Von Haegel leaned over too far, and the jerk caused by the ship striking one of the mastodons, threw him from the deck right amongst the survivors of the herd.

"He's a goner!" yelled Tooter in horror, rushing with the others to the side.

"Not yet," Crooks answered; "a goner bein' a dead 'un, and the professor not bein' dead."

Crooks spoke the truth. By a marvellous chance, Von Haegel, instead of falling under the feet of the great brutes—when he must undoubtedly have been trampled to death—alighted clean on the back of the nearest animal, and was now sitting tight, hanging on to its ears for very life, while the mastodon tore on without noticing its burden.

Lance roared with laughter, and Fordham followed his example; but both Crooks and Morgan looked anxious.

"Funny so far, gentlemen," said the former sharply; "but what follows? May be safe, may be t'otherwise. Why not?"

The laughter of the two lads ceased promptly. They had never thought of Von Haegel being in danger before, but now they realised the full peril of his position. If he fell over he would probably be killed by the feet of the other mastodons; and if he succeeded in hanging on he would probably never be able to find his way without falling a victim to the savage pterodactyl or some other horrible animal.

"We must try to noose him up, sir," said Morgan quickly. "Get a rope!"

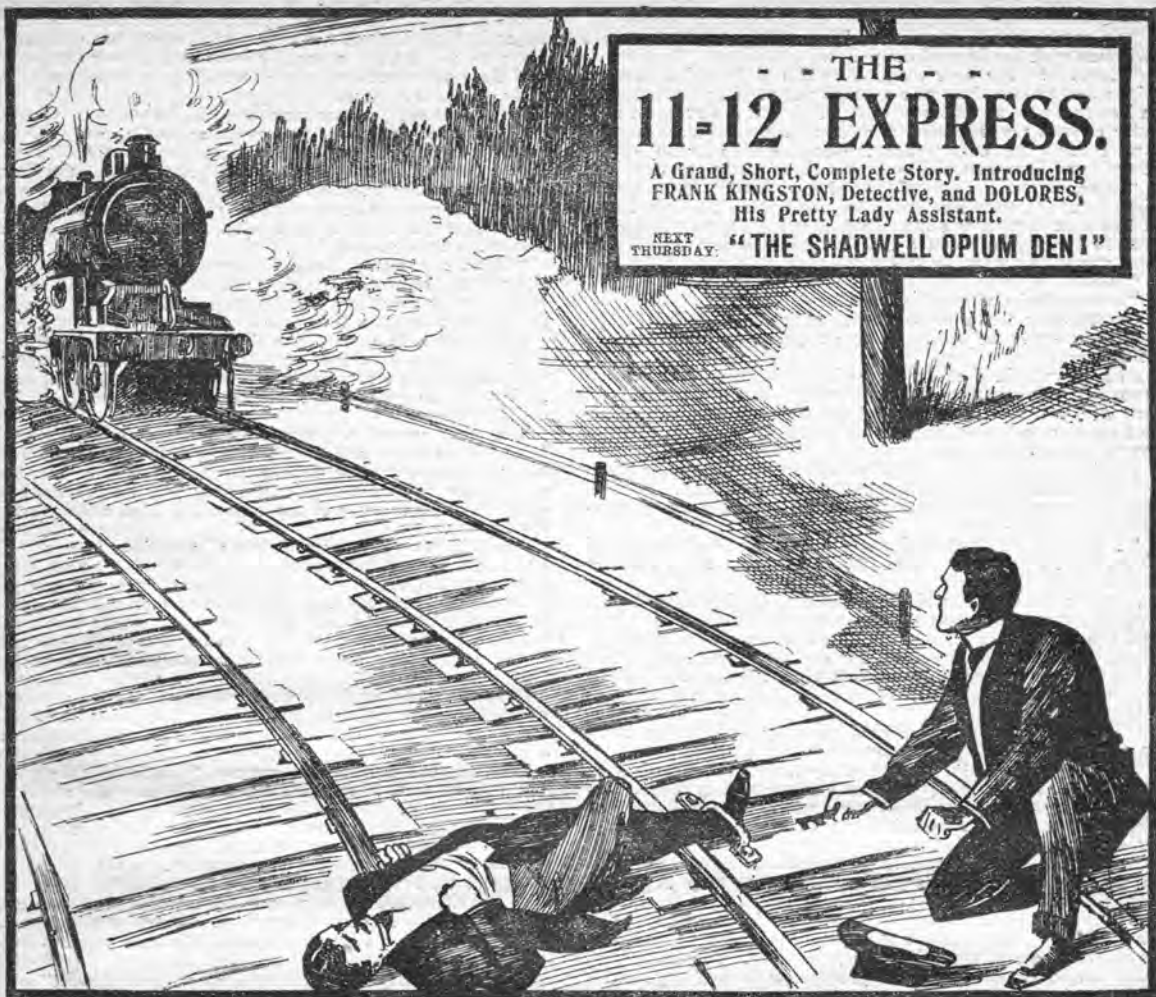
Lance snatched up a coil and quickly formed one end into a running-noose. With this in his hands, he leant over the bulwarks, waiting for an opportunity of dropping it over Von Haegel's head. The airship moved slightly to one side, guided by Teddy Morgan's hand, and the professor, still clinging for life and death to the mastodon's ear, was right underneath.

(Another instalment of this adventure serial in next week's issue of "THE GEM" Library. Next Tuesday's number of our popular companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, will contain the opening chapters of another thrilling serial by Sidney Drew, entitled "Twice Round the Globe." Order a copy to-day. Price 1d.)

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CHAPTER 1

Carson Gray's Call—The Arrival at Leammarsh.

"CARSON GRAY! Why, my dear fellow, I haven't seen you for weeks!"

Frank Kingston shook hands warmly with his friendly rival. Lately, the Great Portland Street detective had been very much occupied, and even now he was apparently in a hurry.

"No, Kingston, I've been very busy lately," he answered.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that—" began Frank Kingston.

"Ah, it hasn't been all honey!" interjected Gray. "I've completed one or two cases successfully, but others haven't panned out so well. The affair I'm engaged upon at present— Look here, are you busy?" he ended up abruptly.

"Not particularly, though—"

"Splendid! Be a good chap, and lend me a hand!" said Carson Gray briskly. "My train leaves at 6.50 from Paddington. Will you come?"

"But you haven't told me anything."

"I'll do that in the train!"

Frank Kingston laughed.

"Oh, very well!" he agreed. "I'll go with you, Gray. What's the time now? Half-past six? By Jove, we shall have to hustle!"

And in a few minutes, Kingston and Gray were seated in a taxi, being driven swiftly towards Paddington. It was a delightful May evening, with prospects of a brilliant star-lit night. Kingston rather welcomed the idea of a trip into the country.

The Great Western terminus was reached, and the train caught with several minutes to spare. Notwithstanding the many passengers, the two detectives managed to get a first-class compartment to themselves.

"Now," smiled Kingston, as the train steamed out of the station, "you've got to explain the reason for carrying me off like this, Gray."

Carson Gray lit a cigar.

"Certainly," he said cheerfully. "To begin with, a week ago I was commissioned to investigate a rather ugly murder. The village constable at Leammarsh—a village four or five miles from Hungerford—was found on the common frightfully knocked about and stone dead. No motive could be found for such a crime, for Leammarsh seems to be a particularly virtuous village. For a time I was rather puzzled."

"But you weren't baffled?" put in Kingston interestedly.

"Oh, no, it would take more than that to baffle me," said Gray. "I was down there in the personality of a holiday-maker, and before long I got on the scent, without letting the murderer even suspect that he was being tracked."

"I won't weary you with details, but will get to the point straight away. Not a soul suspects anything—the police are still in the dark; but I have succeeded in proving my case against a Mr. Robert Howell, a gentleman who is generally supposed to be an author by the villagers. He lives at Croft House, a mile from Leammarsh, and, in reality, is a receiver of stolen property!"

"Rather curious he should choose to live in a country village, isn't it?" commented Kingston.

"No, it's not curious," answered Gray, "for Howell isn't an ordinary 'fence.' He only receives the settings of valuable jewels—articles he can bring from London in his hand-bag. These he melts down into small ingots, and disposes of them through a confederate. He's got a big business, and has been doing the work for years. The police haven't a suspicion against him, although it's apparent the poor chap who was killed smelled a rat, and, probably, in his zeal, ran into danger. Howell killed him, and is under the impression he's quite safe."

"Now, I came to you because I want you to help me to-night. You're as good as three ordinary men, Kingston, and between the two of us we ought to nab Howell as easy as winking. There's some other chap with him, supposed to be his secretary—Ransome his name is—so I couldn't have done the trick myself."

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Kingston looked thoughtful.

"Of course not," he replied; "but you could have raided the place with the help of the police."

"Could I? My dear chap, Howell's surrounded himself with spies, and the instant a quartette or so of police appeared in Leammarsh he would know of it. I've had the greatest difficulty to gain my information without being captured myself. And I know for a fact that the only safe way to secure Howell and Ransome will be to pay them a surprise visit."

"Well, Gray, I suppose you know best," said Frank Kingston. "I shall be pleased to give you all the help I can. If this man Howell is a murderer, it will give me great pleasure to knock him about a bit. But you mentioned just now that you didn't want to weary me with details."

"Well?"

"I want to be wearied, please."

Carson Gray threw his cigar-end away and laughed.

"Oh, I see!" he said. "I've no objection to telling the whole yarn."

And he explained at length to his companion how he had managed to bring the murder home to Robert Howell, and how he had found out the supposed author's real occupation to be that of a high-class receiver of stolen property. Kingston was greatly interested.

At last the train came to a standstill at a small station three miles from Leammarsh, which was not on the railway. A small motor-car was waiting outside—a Star, the only one procurable in the little town.

"I wired for it before I came to your place," explained Gray. "It's four miles to Croft House, and a car's better than a trap. Quicker!"

It was a two-seater, and the chauffeur, having been tipped, went his way. Kingston and Gray clambered into their seats, and the little car started. Two head-lamps showed the way along the dusty country lane, for darkness had fallen. The three miles to Leammarsh was a slow ride, for the road was all corners, and very narrow.

Gray was disgusted.

"I forgot this confounded road when I wired for the car!" he growled. "Still, it will come in useful later on."

The detectives' plans were already made. Both of them had decided that boldness was the best attitude to adopt. No prowling about getting in at windows in an effort to take Howell by surprise; no waiting and watching.

"Go for them bald-headed—that's the way!" Gray declared. "Once you're certain of your birds, there's no sense in hanging about. While you're doing that they might fly away!"

So the little car drove straight through the star-lit night to Croft House. The gates were open, so Carson Gray drove right in and pulled up before the front door. The house was fairly large, modern, and the grounds were well-kept, obviously the home of a well-to-do gentleman.

Several lights gleamed, and when Kingston's ring was answered, the door opened and disclosed a neat maid-servant. Had not Gray been quite positive, Kingston would have felt doubts. He handed his card in.

"We should like to see Mr. Howell, please."

"Yes, sir," said the girl. "Will you step inside?"

The two callers did so. Needless to say, Kingston's card bore a false name, and he and Gray were shown into a well-furnished reception-room, where a lamp was burning. Two minutes later, the door opened, and admitted the master of the house—the murderer of Jakes, the village constable.

CHAPTER 2.

An Easy Capture—The Tables Turned—On the Railway Track.

MR. ROBERT HOWELL was a large, loose-limbed man, of about forty. He wore a dark brown, pointed beard, and waxed moustache. A cigarette was between his lips, and he looked inquiringly at his visitors as he entered. It is scarcely to be wondered at not a soul suspected him, for Howell looked every inch a gentleman. He advanced into the room.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, in a pleasant voice, "to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"My friend and myself thought we should like to make arrangements to look over the house to-morrow," replied Kingston coolly.

"Look over the house?" ejaculated Howell in surprise.

"Exactly. We should want it during the months of July and August, if suitable. The rent, I think, was £10 per week, furnished, in the advert—"

Howell burst into a laugh.

"Pardon me," he interrupted, "but I am afraid there has been some mistake. This house has never been advertised as being to let—Ah, what the—You scoundrels, I'll—"

Further words were impossible, for, without the slightest warning, Kingston and Carson Gray had flung themselves

upon Howell. The few moments' conversation about the house had put him off his guard, and he was not prepared for the attack. In three seconds he was on his back on the floor, and Gray was pressing a pad of wadding, saturated with some drug, over his nostrils.

"He's asleep," he announced.

"If the other fellow is caught as easily, we shall have nothing to grumble at," smiled Kingston calmly. "We had better leave Howell here, Gray, and search the house. Ransome is bound to be about. But, by Jove, if your proofs weren't so positive, I should feel just a little uncomfortable. We're in a gentleman's house, and the first thing we do is to knock the owner down."

"Don't you worry," said Carson Gray. "Howell's one of the greatest scoundrels unhung, and Ransome is just about as bad! I'm anticipating trouble with Ransome, for we sha'n't catch him unawares."

They carefully opened the door, and passed out into the hall. It was deserted, so Kingston, leading, cautiously stepped towards a corridor which branched off at right angles. It was darker here, and suddenly Kingston halted.

"There's—"

The next second a heavy stick descended with stunning force on his head, and he fell to the floor. Then two men flung themselves upon Carson Gray, and before the latter could even raise his hands, he, too, had been knocked insensible. The turning of the tables had been dramatic in its suddenness.

The fact was, Ransome, being of a curious turn of mind, had heard the visitors arrive, and had stood listening outside the door. He had heard everything, and knew that the game was up. At first he had been greatly startled, but he had plenty of nerve, and had crept away. Another man named Swain—the confederate who disposed of the ingots—happened to be in the house, and he and Ransome had laid in wait for the intruders.

Even they, themselves, were surprised at the manner in which Kingston and Gray had fallen. But the detectives had stood no chance; the attack had been unexpected and decidedly violent.

"By James," muttered Ransome, "that's laid the pair of 'em out, anyhow! But it's all up, Swain; we shall have to—"

"What about the servants?" asked the other man anxiously.

Howell's servants were as much in ignorance as anyone else as to their master's true character. He kept two day girls, and did not commence operations in his "library" until they had departed. A large safe, let into the wall, was really a furnace. But Howell always kept the key of the safe, and there was no fear of prying eyes seeing that which was not intended for them.

"The servants?" echoed Ransome. "Great Scott!"

He disappeared, and returned after a minute.

"It's all right," he announced with relief. "They've both gone for the night. Look here, you look after these while I rouse Howell. He'll know what to do."

And Ransome hurried to the front room. Five minutes later, after a liberal dose of brandy, Robert Howell came to himself. His confederate told him everything. Howell was furious at being found out, but very thankful that the interfering detectives had been made prisoners.

Both Kingston and Gray were carried outside to a workshop, where Howell spent a lot of his time. They were laid on the floor, and Howell looked at them with an angry frown. Then he bent forward.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "that fellow is Carson Gray! I couldn't see it in the dimmer light, but here he's easily recognisable. The other man I don't know. One of Gray's assistants, probably."

He looked at Frank Kingston. The great detective lay still, and his features were utterly unlike his own. In some strange manner, since his blow on the head, his appearance had altered so that Gray himself wouldn't have recognised him.

"There's only one thing for it," said Howell firmly. "You and I, Ransome, were responsible for that fool of a policeman's death, and to be secure we must desert this house at once and go to London."

"To-night?"

"Yes, to-night," answered Howell, with set teeth. "The game's up here. Both of us have got different personalities in London, and we can step into them without any danger. To remain down here now would be suicidal. But we're not going to let this infernal Gray track us down. We'll leave him here, and give the police another mystery to puzzle them."

"Murder him?" asked Swain hoarsely.

"Why not? Oh, not you! You needn't be in it at all," said Howell, as Swain shrank back. "Ransome and I will do the trick. We may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Eh, Ransome?"

"By James, yes!" snarled Ransome. "Carson's Gray's a thorn in our side, and it'll be a relief to get rid of him. And we can do it now without risk. What's your plan, Howell?"

The greater scoundrel briefly outlined his scheme. Carson Gray was to be killed, and King-ton—thought to be his assistant—left at Croft House for the police to discover. By the morning the scoundrelly trio would be in London, where they would be quite safe from detection. And Carson Gray would be out of the way. Had Howell known that the assistant was none other than Frank Kingston, he would have killed him in preference. But he didn't know.

Swain was left to look after Kingston, and Howell and Ransome lifted Gray's inanimate form, and carried it out into the night. Right to the bottom of the garden they went, and through a small gate. A footpath led downwards to the main railway-line, which ran within a couple of hundred yards of Croft House.

"The express which gets to Reading at eleven-twelve passes here in about fifteen minutes' time," said Howell, as they progressed. "We shall just have time to place him on the metals before it arrives."

And the two carried their burden down the path until they stood upon the railway track.

CHAPTER 3.

Kingston Becomes Active—The Fight on the Permanent Way—Just in Time!

"TOO risky, to my mind!"

Swain muttered the words as he sat in the workshop. He was thinking of his associates' terrible mission, and shuddered a little. Murder wasn't in his line at all. He was smoking a pipe, and occasionally looked at the form of Frank Kingston.

The detective was securely roped up and fastened to a huge vice, which was affixed to a bench. Even Kingston would have experienced much difficulty had he been compelled to free himself. Certainly, he could not have done so in less than thirty minutes.

Swain's pipe suddenly dropped with a crash to the floor.

The accident was unavoidable, for his jaw dropped involuntarily, and allowed the pipe to slip out. But the cause of it? Swain had just looked at Kingston, and he saw, instead of the senseless form, an erect individual, with calm features and still calmer eyes.

"You've smashed it!" said Kingston, nodding to the pipe. Swain gasped.

The man he was looking at was utterly unlike the one he had seen a minute before. As a matter of fact, Frank Kingston had been in full possession of his senses nearly all the time. The blow he had received had been a stunning one, but he had recovered after the elapse of a minute. Instantly he had realised that his best course would be to affect insensibility, and so discover his captors' plans. Therefore he had altered the set of his features, so that he would not be recognised.

Now, two minutes after the departure of Carson Gray, he opened his eyes. Swain looked straight into Kingston's eyes. And as he did so the calm seemed to disappear, and a terrible fire burned in them. In an instant it seemed as though the detective's eyes had been converted into points of fire.

But Kingston was only exercising his wonderful will-power. His eyes seemed to eat right through the cowering Swain. "Come here!" he ordered, in a stern voice.

Swain advanced, held fascinated by that wonderful gaze. Kingston had him entirely under the influence of his will. Their two pairs of eyes seemed glued to one another.

"Untie all these ropes," said Kingston.

Instantly Swain commenced to obey the order. With unsteady fingers he unfastened the ropes. In five minutes Kingston stood free, and Swain was tied to the vice in his place. The fire had died from Kingston's eyes now, and he picked up his hat and made for the door.

"You will be safe enough there, my friend," he said; and before Swain could utter a word, had gone.

Meanwhile, Howell and Ransome were carrying out their dastardly scheme. On the line lay the still form of Carson Gray. He had received a harder blow than Kingston, and as yet had not recovered. One of his feet was securely fastened down to a sleeper by an iron bar, and Howell was just about to tie his head to the other rail. In that position

Gray would be utterly helpless, even if he recovered consciousness.

"Well, I'm hanged!" muttered Ransome suddenly. "We've got him in wrong!"

"What do you mean?" asked Howell.

Ransome pointed. In the semi-darkness the scoundrels had fastened Gray so that his head rested on the up-rails, and therefore only one foot would suffer when the train dashed past. Howell uttered an oath.

"Unfasten the bolts!" he said quickly.

He picked up a spanner, and commenced turning one of the bolts which secured the iron fastener to the sleeper. Gray had only to be reversed to make matters right. But at that moment a figure came leaping down the embankment. Howell looked up with a fresh frown of annoyance.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens do you want to come down here for, Swain? You know positively well—"

"Look out!" cried Ransome, in alarm. "It's the other fellow!"

Howell rose to his feet, and the next moment both he and Ransome flung themselves at Frank Kingston. Neither scoundrel had lost his nerve; all they knew was that the prisoner had somehow escaped Swain's attention, and was now before them.

They went for Kingston with fierce energy, and the latter, stepping back, slipped on a boulder. He fell heavily, and the next instant Howell was upon him. It looked for a moment as though the detective would get the worst of the fight, but his enormous strength manifested itself before ten seconds had passed.

Howell was flung aside like a feather, but he fell on his feet, and came to the attack again with a snarl. Ransome, meanwhile, was tugging his revolver from his pocket. Kingston saw him, and before Ransome knew what had happened the weapon was flying through the air.

And all the while, though the combatants did not hear it in the struggle, the hum of an approaching train made itself heard.

It was the express!

And Gray had recovered consciousness. He realised the horror of his position, and watched the fight with eyes that started with apprehension. His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "Kingston's going to be too late!"

But that remained to be seen. Once again, now wild with fury, Ransome and Howell flung themselves at Frank Kingston. The great detective didn't move an inch, but out shot his fist. It struck Howell fairly between the eyes, and the man fell like a log. Kingston had heard the train now, and he was desperate. A terrific upper-cut finished Ransome, and after a second's delay, to make sure that neither of the villains would escape, Kingston turned and raced up the line to where Gray lay, for the fight had taken him twenty yards away.

And as Kingston ran the train appeared round the bend! "Great Scott!" murmured Kingston.

He bent over Gray, and saw the iron clamp which fastened him down. Beside it was a spanner, and Kingston took this in his hand. Then he looked up the line; the train was within a couple of hundred yards!

There wasn't fifteen seconds in which to act!

"It's no good!" groaned Carson Gray. "You'll get killed—"

"Not a bit of it!" said Kingston quickly. "Turn a somersault backwards when you feel yourself released."

The roar of the train sounded terrific, but Frank Kingston calmly grasped the clamp, and wrenched at it with all his amazing strength. Fortunately it had been loosened by Howell, and with a splintering of wood, it came away.

"Now!" roared Kingston.

The express was upon him. In one lightning-like movement the famous detective flung himself backwards—anywhere, so long as it was out of the way of the train. He landed on his back with a crash, and the train shot past on its way. The wind nearly lifted the detective up as he lay there.

Five seconds later the express had passed, and Kingston looked across the line.

He found Carson Gray staggering to his feet. Their eyes met.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed both, in one voice.

Half an hour later the three prisoners were securely locked up in the workshop, and the police were telephoned for. Carson Gray was shivering badly, and he looked ill. And even Kingston, man of iron nerve as he was, seemed just a little pale.

The experience the two detectives had been through was one they prayed they would never have to meet with again.

THE END.

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N.B.—The simplest way of obtaining this is to give your newscast the order for next Thursday's GEM now.

A Splendid New Adventure Serial.

Next Tuesday's issue of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, contains something super-excellent, which I should be very sorry indeed for any single one of my readers to miss, namely, the opening chapters of a wonderful serial story from the pen of that amazing author, Sidney Drew. The title of this grand story is "Twice Round the Globe"—admittedly the finest story ever penned by Mr. Drew—and no lover of fiction, young or old, can help being fascinated by the thrilling incident and boundless interest of this wonderful tale.

The experiences and adventures of Ferrers Lord, Ching-Lung, Gan-Waga, and the rest of the famous company, as related in "Twice Round the Globe," far excel anything that has befallen them hitherto, both in strangeness and excitement, and as a result this amazing story touches the high-water mark of excellence. The rush of orders for next Tuesday's issue of "The Magnet" Library has already begun, and to safeguard themselves against disappointment my chums should, one and all, order their copies of No. 226 of our wonderful little companion paper at once. Thousands of extra copies are being printed of this epoch-making number of "The Magnet," which also, by the by, includes a grand, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., but it is only by receiving the newscast's orders well in advance that the publishers are able to estimate accurately the enormous demand, and so take the necessary steps to save from disappointment every would-be reader of "Twice Round the Globe"—the most thrilling and wonderful story ever written.

"A Ray of Sunshine."

The above is the description applied to THE GEM Library by a reader signing herself "A Girl Friend," and writing from New Zealand. My "Girl Friend's" whole letter so well expresses the feeling with which she regards her favourite paper, that I think I cannot do better than to print it in full, so here it is:

"New Zealand.

"Dear Editor,—Seeing in THE GEM every week so many girls' letters, I thought I had stayed out in the cold long enough, so I, too, am writing to congratulate you on your grand papers.

"They come like a ray of sunshine in this far-off place, and many an hour's pleasure I have had in reading them.

"It seems to me when you are reading THE GEM as if you were with Tom Merry & Co., invisibly playing their games, and enjoying all their japes and sports, and even glowing over the lines they have to do.

"Hoping you will find time to read this letter among your numerous others, and wishing you and your papers every success, I remain, yours truly,

A GIRL FRIEND."

Many thanks for the bright and cordial letter, my New Zealand "Girl Friend." It gives me the greatest pleasure to receive such pleasant and enthusiastic letters from the far-off places of the earth. As for the last paragraph in your letter, I must remind you that I personally read every letter addressed to me by any readers, no matter how heavy the postbag is, and it is heavy sometimes, I can tell you!

Back Numbers Offered and Wanted.

H. O. Smith, of 46, Baldslow Road, Hastings, wishes to obtain Nos 117, 118, and 121 ("Britain Invaded," "Britain At Bay," and "Britain's Revenge.")

W. C. Baragwanath, The Maples, Alcester Road, Moseley, Birmingham, wishes to obtain No. 190, of THE GEM Library, ("Under Sealed Orders").

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R. J. Conlon, care of E. M. Collins, Esq., Wicklow, Ireland, wishes to obtain "Wingate's Downfall," of "The Magnet" Library.

A. Crawley, 40, Earlsmead Road, Willesden, N.W., has Nos. 187-213, of "The Magnet" Library for disposal at half price.

W. E. Payne, 27, Cranworth Road, Worthing, wishes to obtain back numbers of THE GEM Library.

The Care of Acetylene Cycle Lamps.

As a short run on a main road any fine night will prove, acetylene lamps are becoming increasingly popular among cyclists, and there is no doubt that lamps of this type give far more light than any others, at a very small cost. Calcium carbide, however, from which the acetylene gas is produced by the action of the water, is a somewhat messy substance.

The first and great essential with an acetylene lamp is cleanliness, without which the various parts will soon get clogged up with particles of used carbide, and the lamp will either burn unsatisfactorily, or refuse to burn at all.

Good carbide only should be used, in pieces about the size of small hazel-nuts, or less; and when filling the carbide chamber, care should be taken that none of the pieces fall into the central tube. Remember that the carbide chamber should only be filled three-quarters full, as used carbide occupies a larger space than before it is used. The carbide container should be screwed up tight, to prevent any leakage of the gas. The water should be turned on gradually, when the gas should begin to flow through the burner in about a minute's time. When the cycle is in motion, the vibration will cause the water to flow somewhat faster, so that the water-valve should be turned off a trifle from the saddle. As the charge becomes exhausted, the flow of water may be gradually increased. The water, however, should not be allowed to flow too freely at any time, or the burner will flare up, and the surplus gas generated will force its way out via the water-valve, causing a very unpleasant odour; also, the light will go out, owing to drops of condensed steam forming in the burner-tube, and cutting off the supply of gas.

When the lamp has been used, it should be taken to pieces at once, the used carbide thrown away, and every part of the lamp thoroughly cleaned and dried. If the lamp is left a day or two, the job of cleaning becomes a more difficult one, as the carbide residue dries into hard masses. Should the burner become choked, a few sharp strokes of a cycle-pump, held to the end, will probably free it. If not, a piece of fine steel wire must be passed through the burner.

After the water has been turned off, the flame of the lamp should never be allowed to die down and go out of its own accord, or the burner will become carbonised. When the flame is low, it should be blown out, and the remainder of the gas allowed to escape unburnt. To do this, the lamp must, of course, be left out of doors until the last particle of the gas has passed away, as acetylene gas, besides being evil smelling, is very explosive, and highly dangerous, therefore, in the neighbourhood of naked lights.

THE EDITOR.