

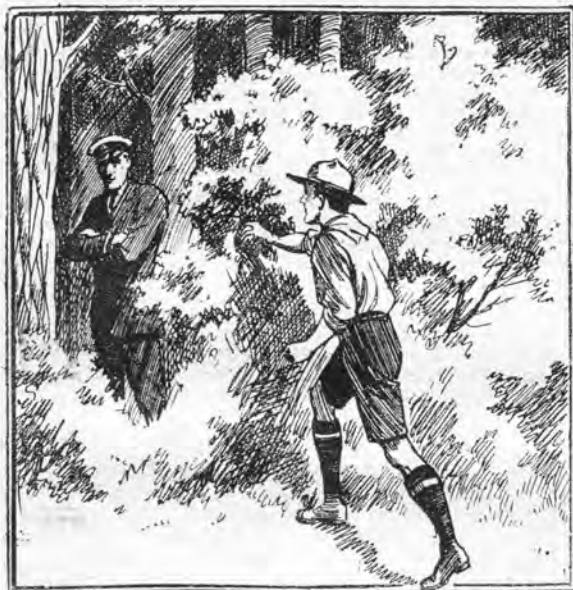
Our Free Score-Sheets on Pages iii. & iv. Cover

Every

Wednesday.



Complete Stories for All, and Every Story a Gem.



TOM MERRY'S DISCOVERY!

A Splendid New, Long, Complete
School Tale of the Chums
of St. Jim's.

... BY ...

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

First Aid.

"**A**RE you weedy, deah boy?" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, asked the question. He looked into the Shell dormitory through his famous eyeglass.

"Sha'n't be a tick, kid!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Wight-ho!" said D'Arcy. "The fellows are waitin' in the quad, you know. You were a feahful ass to get lines this affahnoon, Tom Mewwy, when we're goin' out on a scout wun!"

"Ass?" said Tom Merry politely, as he plunged into his Boy Scout garb. "I didn't ask old Linton for the lines! But I shall be ready in a tick."

It was a glorious April afternoon, and a half-holiday at St. Jim's. Down in the quadrangle a crowd of juniors in Boy Scout costume were waiting for Tom Merry, their leader. Tom had been detained to do lines, hence the delay. But he was changing now at lightning speed; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, standing in an elegant attitude at the door, watched him through his eyeglass with great admiration. Changing clothes was a long and painstaking operation with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Pway don't bweak your neck about it, deah boy," he remarked. "I'd wathah wait a few minutes extwah, than huwwy a fellow in changin' his clobbah. I'm afwaid your tie is wathah cwooked."

"That's all right."

"You have laced your boots wathah iwwegulahly."

"Go hon!"

"How long are you going to keep us waiting, Tom Merry?" came Monty Lowther's voice along the passage from the stairs.

"Ready!"

Tom Merry jammed on his wide-brimmed hat, picked up his staff, and rushed for the door. It had not taken him

three minutes to change. He charged playfully at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with his staff held like a lance, and the swell of St. Jim's hopped through the doorway in a great hurry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" he protested.

"Come on, Gussy! Don't keep the fellows waiting!"

And Tom Merry linked his arm in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's, and rushed him along the passage. Tom Merry was in great spirits. He was overjoyed at getting out of the Form-room after his detention, and at a prospect of a run in the woods on a bright, fresh April afternoon. He rushed Arthur Augustus down the passage towards the stairs at top speed, in spite of the protests of that elegant youth. Arthur Augustus gasped for breath, and strove in vain to get his arm away.

"Pway welease me, Tom Mewwy!"

"Come on!"

"You are throwwing me into quite a fluttah, you awful ass! Pway welease me! We shall wun into somebody!" shrieked D'Arcy, as he was whirled along at top speed.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"All the worse for somebody, then!" he said.

And he led Arthur Augustus downstairs three steps at a time.

"Bai Jove! Weally—I—oh!"

As they dashed round the landing at the bend of the staircase, Levison and Mellish of the Fourth were coming upstairs. Levison and Mellish did not belong to the Boy Scouts' organisation at St. Jim's, and they were not taking part in the run that afternoon. The two wasters of the School House were more likely to be found smoking cheap cigarettes in the box-room than taking part in any healthy outdoor exercise. Levison and Mellish did not care for exercise in any form, but they received some now, that was as sudden as it was violent. The two scouts rushed right into them, and they went flying. Levison caught hold of the banisters, and just saved himself, and held on for his

Next Wednesday:

"THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS!" AND "SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!"

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life, and Mellish went flying downstairs with a wild yell. He had grabbed wildly hold of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's rolled down with him. Tom Merry sat down violently on the stairs.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Bump! bump! bump!

"Ow!"

"Bai Jove!"

D'Arcy and Mellish rolled on the mat at the foot of the stairs. The swell of the Fourth sat up gasping, and groping wildly for his eyeglass. But a boot had crashed upon that famous monocle and it was destined never again to be jammed into the aristocratic eye of the swell of St. Jim's.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry breathlessly, as he sat on the stairs.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Ow!" groaned Mellish. "Yow! My legs are broken! Yow! You're sitting on my chest, you silly chump! Gerroff!"

"Pwax excuse me, deah boy. I weally didn't notice it," said Arthur Augustus, scrambling off Mellish. "I am sowwy."

"Oh! You silly ass!"

"Weally Mellish—"

"You dangerous fathead! I'm injured! Ow! What do you mean by rushing into a fellow on the stairs—yow! You ought to be locked up in a lunatic asylum—grooh! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, there is nothin' to laugh at. My eyeglass is bwoken, and Mellish says his legs are bwoken. I shall have to go to my studay and get a new eyeglass."

"Ha, ha! You'd better get Mellish some new legs, too, if they're broken."

"Ow!" groaned Mellish. "I shall complain to the Head! Ow!"

Tom Merry rose and came downstairs, at a more moderate pace now. Mellish was still groaning on the floor. He had had a most unpleasant bump, and he was not the kind of fellow to take it good-humouredly.

"Can't you get up?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Ow! No."

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Jack Blake, coming in from the quad.

"Mellish has fallen downstairs and his legs are broken, and he can't get up," explained Tom Merry.

Blake grinned. He knew that Percy Mellish was malingering, in order to make the most of his mishap, and Blake had no mercy on malingerers.

"Well, if Mellish is crooked, it's up to us as Boy Scouts to render first aid," he said.

"Yaas wathah!"

"Ow!" groaned Mellish.

"You can't get up?" demanded Blake.

"Ow! No! Ow!"

"Then what you want is first aid." Blake grasped his scout's staff and poked the fallen junior in the ribs with the end of it. Mellish gave a roar.

"Hallo! His lungs aren't injured, at any rate," said Tom Merry. "Can you move now, Mellish?"

"Oh! Leave off! Yow!" roared Mellish, as Blake prodded him in the ribs again.

Blake shook his head.

"I'm not going to leave off when I'm administering first aid to an injured person," he replied. "You'll be able to get up as soon as I've prodded you thoroughly. You'll see!"

Prod, prod, prod!

"Yaroooh!" yelled Mellish. "Ow, you beast!"

He leaped to his feet.

"There!" exclaimed Blake triumphantly. "I told you so! Completely restored by a simple administration of first aid!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish scowled savagely and went upstairs. Levison was waiting for him on the landing. Levison was scowling savagely, but he did not care to venture within reach of the scout's staves. On the mat where Mellish had been lying a little packet lay, and Jack Blake picked it up with a sniff of contempt.

"Cigarettes!" he said scornfully.

"The rotters!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Mellish stopped on the stairs and scowled down at the scouts.

"I'm going to complain to Mr. Railton about your knocking me downstairs!" he growled. "You silly set of guys! You'll jolly well get licked!"

"Don't forget to mention that you've dropped your cigarettes, you rotter, when you make your complaint!" said Blake, holding up the packet.

Mellish started.

"Give that to me!" he shouted.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 275.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
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"Can't be did!" he replied. "It's against the rules, you know, and very bad for the wind. These smokes are confiscated, and I'm going to chuck them into the first ditch I come to. Ta-ta!"

"That packet's my property!" yelled Mellish. "Give it to me!"

"Come and take it," suggested Blake.

Mellish did not accept that invitation. He scowled furiously, and the scouts laughed and went out into the quadrangle.

"Here you are at last!" said Manners. "We've been waiting for you, you duffers. Are you all ready now?"

"Gussy! Where are you going, Gussy?"

"It's all wight, deah boy. I shan't be a few minutes. I've got to get another eyeglass."

Blake grasped his elegant chum by the arm and dragged him out into the quad.

"This isn't an eyeglass brigade," he said. "Come on!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Besides," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "you'll be able to scout better if you don't have a pane in your eye, Gussy."

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"We're all here," said Tom Merry. "The New House bounders are waiting over there by the gate. Come on!"

And the scouts started across the quad. Arthur Augustus's face showed signs of the most acute distress. Blake kept a tight grip on his arm, apparently oblivious of his chum's efforts to release himself.

"Blake, deah boy, I must have my eyeglass, you know."

"Can't you see without it?" demanded Blake.

"Yaas; but—"

"But rats!" said Blake cheerfully.

And the School House fellows joined the New House crowd, who were waiting at the gates for them, and the whole party went streaming down the road. And then the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy lighted up suddenly as he groped in his pocket.

"It's all wight!" he exclaimed.

"What's all right?"

"I've got another in my pocket."

And Arthur Augustus jammed the monocle in his eye, and walked on cheerfully.

CHAPTER 2.

A Sudden Surprise.

It was a glorious afternoon. The sun glinted on the green leaves of the wood and fell in golden pools on the greensward under the trees. The St. Jim's Scouts were in great spirits. The dim recesses of the wood echoed with their merry voices.

Tom Merry called a halt in a deep green glade.

"Now, you fellows know the programme," he said.

"Gussy and I have got to have five minutes' start, and then you track us down. If we keep out of your hands and get back to St. Jim's, you're beaten. Remember that we are giddy foreign spies, scouting in advance of an invading army, and do your best."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys! And wemembah the motto of the Boy Scouts: 'Be pwepared—'"

"Oh, you won't get through!" said Jack Blake confidently.

"We shall have to fix up something else after this. We shall lay you by the heels in ten minutes after the start."

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I don't think you will," he remarked. "We shall give you plenty to do all the afternoon, I think, and when you get back to St. Jim's you'll find us having tea in the study."

"Rats!" said Blake promptly.

"The contest closes at five o'clock," continued Tom Merry.

"If you haven't caught us by then, you go back to the school. But if you see us outside the school gates we're still liable to capture. That clear?"

"Clear as mud!" said Monty Lowther genially.

"Who's going to be left in command, though?" asked Figgins of the New House.

Blake smiled.

"I don't think there's much doubt on that point," he said. Figgins nodded.

"Well, I suppose not," he agreed. "Of course, it will have to be a New House chap."

"Now, don't be an ass, Figgys!"

"Well, don't you be a fathead!"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "I'm Scout-leader, I think, and you chaps have to obey orders. I name the commanding officer."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm willing to give anybody a thick ear who says it ought not to be a New House chap!" said Figgins generously.

"Order! I leave Blake in command—"

"Oh, don't be funny!"

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

"Against the rules for a scout to tell his leader not to be funny," said Kerr of the New House. "Especially when he can't help it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" roared the commander-in-chief. "I leave Figgins second in command. Now, no House rows while I haven't got my eye on you, you know. Five minutes' start, and then you've got to track us down with giddy bloughounds. Ready, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!"

And Tom Merry and D'Arcy disappeared into the wood.

Figgins took out a big silver watch to time the start. Two or three other fellows took out watches. Fatty Wynn of the Fourth took out a packet of sandwiches. Meanwhile, the two "hares" plunged into the depths of the wood.

"Pway be careful not to leave any twacks, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, as Tom pushed through a clinging mass of brambles.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "You've left two big hoof-marks here! Look!"

"Bai Jove! I didn't observe that the gwound was so soft!"

"Use your eyes!" said his leader severely. "Now, follow me."

Tom Merry swung himself into the lower branches of a big tree. Arthur Augustus fastened his eyeglass in his eye and looked after him in surprise.

"Bai Jove! There's no time for playin' twicks now, Tom Mewwy!" he expostulated.

"Ass! Follow me!"

"What for?"

"We're going this way for a bit, to puzzle the pack."

"Bai Jove! It will be howwidly wuff on our clothes!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "And those bwanches are vewy dirtay to take hold of."

"I see you've forgotten your kid gloves," said the Chief Scout sarcastically. "Don't you remember the motto—'Be prepared'?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you stand there talking much longer, the pack will be on the back of your neck," said the Shell fellow pleasantly. "The time's up now, and they've started."

Arthur Augustus sighed. His Boy Scout costume was a picture to behold—so clean and neat and elegant it was. But evidently it had to be sacrificed; and D'Arcy, remembering that he was training himself to defend his native land some day, heroically nerved himself for the sacrifice. With his eyeglass fluttering loose at the end of its cord, he swung himself into the tree.

Tom Merry worked along the branch, where it penetrated the branches of the next tree, and swung himself from one to the other. The trees grew very thickly in this part of the wood, and progress was easy for an active lad with plenty of nerve. Tom Merry had plenty of nerve; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy feared nothing but soiling his hands. But suddenly Tom Merry found that his companion was stopping behind.

He turned his head and peered through the foliage. He could see an elegant leg among the leaves; but that was all that was visible of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Why don't you come on?" he called out, in a suppressed voice.

"I'm caught, deah boy."

"Caught! What's the matter?"

"My beastly monocle has caught in the bwanches!"

"Jerk it."

"If I bweak the stwing the glass will be lost."

"Lose it, then, fathcad! What does it matter?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Buck up, you chump! The pack are looking for us now!"

"Pway wait a minute!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"You fearful ass!" he murmured.

"I wufuse to be called a feahful ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Will you come on?"

"Yaas, when I've welaased my eyeglass."

"Don't jaw; they may hear your voice."

"Vewy well, deah boy, I won't say a word. Undah the cires., it would be more pwudent not to speak to one anothah, deah boy. Don't you think so?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently, as he struggled with his refractory monocle.

"You chump! What are you doing now?"

"Extwactin' my eyeglass."

"Will you come on?"

"Pway don't call out like that, Tom Mewwy. It would be much more cautious not to uttah a word. I think we had bettah keep our mouths shut, deah boy, as sound twavels vewy fah in the open air, you know, and they may heah us. It would be aw'f'y wotten to be caught in the first quartah of an hour, deah boy. I think—"

"Shut up!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Certainly, deah boy! That's what I'm wecommendin'," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "I considah—"

"You awful ass! Keep your silly head shut, and come on!"

"It's all wight now."

And the eyeglass having been rescued, Arthur Augustus crawled along the branch, and joined the leader in the next tree. Tom Merry eyed him grunly.

"Now, buck up, deah boy!" said D'Arcy briskly. "Mustn't waste time, you know. And be sure you don't talk. I think—"

"If you don't shut up," breathed Tom Merry, "I'll hammer you! Do you understand that?"

"I should wufuse to be hammahed, deah boy. I—"

"Coo'ey!"

The signal cry rang through the distant woods. Tom Merry started.

"That's Kangaroo!" he exclaimed. "They're getting near. I fancy they lost our track when we got into the tree."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on!"

"Where are we goin'?"

"We're going to make for the Poacher's Glade first, and lie low for a bit till they're quite off the track. Shut up, and come on."

The juniors worked their way along the thick, heavy branches, pushing through the twigs and foliage. D'Arcy had put his eyeglass in his pocket now, so he was not caught again by the string, and the two scouts made good progress. Tom Merry dropped to the ground at last, in a track that wound through the heart of the wood. They pressed on fast, treading lightly in order to leave no tell-tale tracks for the pack to pick up.

Deep in the heart of the wood was a deep depression of the ground which was called the Poacher's Glade. There was a story that a poacher had been shot there upon some occasion, and superstitious people in the vicinity had fancied that his shade had been seen revisiting the glimpses of the moon in the spot where he had met his death.

But the juniors did not trouble their heads about the ghost story. The two scouts pressed into the glade, down the steep declivity clothed with young trees and thick bushes.

Arthur Augustus gave a dismayed glance sometimes downward at his clothes. They listened keenly as they pressed on for sounds to indicate whether the pack were near. Far in the distance came faintly the cry of the Australian junior:

"Coo'ey!"

"Good way off," said Tom Merry. "They're spreading out to keep us from getting out of the wood towards Wayland. They're bound to beat this glade for us as they come through, I think, but they won't find us. We're going to lie low here."

"In covah, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather! They'll miss us, and when they're past we'll simply get out and walk back to the school," chuckled Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove!"

"It'll be good exercise for them, beating the wood from end to end," grinned the Shell fellow. "And when they get back they'll find us having tea. This way."

Tom Merry knew the wood like a book. He paused at a spot where heavy thickets clothed an abrupt rise in the ground. The acclivity was at least fifty feet, and almost as steep as the wall of a house. Tom Merry seemed to be scanning the thickets for a passage through, and Arthur Augustus tapped him on the arm.

"You can't get thwough there, deah boy," he said.

"Why not?"

"The gwound wises on the othah side. It's a wegulah hill."

Tom Merry snorted.

"I know that, ass! There's a hollow there like a cave. I found it by accident one day, and I remember it's close here somewhere. Hark!"

A sudden sound came through the wood, close at hand in the thick trees. It was a low, musical whistle—evidently a signal.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy looked at one another in surprise. "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That doesn't sound like one of the fellows. I've nevah heard that whistle before."

"It was a signal."

"Yaas, but—"

"Might be other scouts practisin' here," said Tom Merry. "Might be the Grammar School bounders. Anyway, they won't find us. Here's the cave."

He drew aside a heavy mass of foliage, and a dark opening in the hillside was revealed. There was a slight sound behind the bushes, and D'Arcy uttered an exclamation.

"There's somebody in there, Tom Mewwy."

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"Only a rabbit or a stoat."

Tom Merry plunged in through the thicket, and D'Arcy followed him. The great mass of foliage fell back into its place, and completely concealed their retreat. It would have been difficult for any searcher to guess that anybody had passed through that mass of vegetation into the apparently impenetrable hillside.

It was very dim in the hollow under the hill, and to the juniors, fresh from the daylight, it seemed densely black. Tom Merry stumbled over a trailing root, and fell forward on his hands and knees. As he did so a hand gripped his collar from the darkness, and the junior, with a sudden start and a thrill like ice in his veins, felt a keen steel point against his neck, and a voice, soft and low and hissing, muttered in his ear in some strange tongue he did not understand:

"Silenzio o la morte!"

CHAPTER 3.

An Amazing Encounter.

"**S**ILENZIO!" The word was hissed again, and the sharp point penetrated a fraction of an inch into Tom Merry's skin. The junior did not attempt to rise. The grip that was upon him was like iron, and the knife was at his throat; and although he did not understand the words that were spoken, he understood what they implied.

He remained quite still.

D'Arcy came stumbling after him into the cave.

Then the grasp upon Tom Merry was relaxed as his unknown assailant saw that he had two to deal with.

"Bai Jove!"

A dark figure leaped up, and Arthur Augustus was grasped and hurled into the cave. He stumbled against the damp earthen wall.

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

The dark figure was between the two juniors and the narrow opening of the earthen cave. In the dim light they vaguely saw a powerfully-built man with a swarthy face—swarthy but strangely pale. His eyes seemed to burn in their sockets; and they saw, with shudders, that there was a streak of red across his cheek—a stain of blood. There was a glimmer of steel in his right hand, and the hand was raised in menace.

The man was evidently a foreigner—a Spaniard or Italian. And the two amazed juniors, utterly astounded as they were, recovered confidence a little as they saw that the man was in a state of greater fear than they could be.

As he stood, barring them from the entrance with uplifted weapon, his head was thrown back, and he was listening with painful intensity for some sound from the wood.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

The foreigner made a fierce gesture.

"Silenzio, sotto pena della vita!"

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

The juniors were silent. It was easy enough to guess what "silenzio" meant. It was still easier to read the threat of the shining steel in the dusky upraised hand.

From the wood came a low, penetrating sound—that soft, clear whistle which the juniors had heard while they were outside the hidden cave.

At the sound of it the Italian's face blanched yet whiter, and the hand that held the knife trembled.

"Silenzio!" he murmured, but his voice now was shaken, and more pleading than threatening in its tone.

The juniors stood mute. They were lost in wonder.

Tom Merry had expected to find the hidden cave in the hillside untenanted, unless, indeed, by some animal of the wood. He was utterly astounded at this encounter. Foreigners were not common in the quiet neighbourhood of Rylcombe, and to find a foreigner, evidently wounded, armed with a deadly weapon and in a state of mortal fear—that was a surprise the juniors could not easily recover from. They stood and stared at the Italian in blank wonder.

The man was evidently being searched for by enemies. That was the meaning of the signal whistle. Who were they? Who was he? What did it all mean? What tragic mystery had the two Boy Scouts suddenly stumbled upon?

"Silenzio! Silenzio, ragazzi!"

There was a sound of footsteps in the glade outside the cave, a brushing of the thickets, a murmur of indistinguishable voices.

Closer the voices came.

The Italian lowered his upraised hand. He bent his head towards the juniors, and pointed to the screen of thickets.

"Silenzio, signorini. Sono morto se trovato."

The juniors could not understand the words, but they were in no doubt as to what the man meant. And, in spite of the rough reception he had given them, they did not feel hostile

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towards him. A man in fear of his life could be excused for a little roughness. And the man clearly was in fear for his life.

The voices came nearer. The juniors were silent save for their hurried breathing. The Italian seemed hardly to breathe. Every nerve in his body seemed to be bent upon listening. The voices could be heard now, speaking in a tongue the juniors could not understand, but which was evidently quite clear to the ears of their strange companion:

"Non e qui."

"E sicuro?"

"Per bacco! Ho cercato, Pietro—non e qui; andiamo."

"Andiamo!" responded the second voice.

And the footsteps passed on.

The sounds died away in the glade. The Italian maintained the same attitude till every sound was still. Then he drew a deep breath, or rather a sob. The knife was trembling in his hand.

"They're gone whoever they are," said Tom Merry.

The man started. It seemed as if, in his mortal terror, he had forgotten the presence of the juniors. He fixed his fierce black eyes upon them now.

"Siete soli qui?" he demanded.

"I don't understand you."

"Bai Jove! He's speakin' in Italian," said Arthur Augustus. "I know some words of Italian from singin' songs in it, you know. Pewwaps I can pitch it to him in his own lingo."

"Try," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Questi e quella per me pari sono," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully to the Italian.

The man stared, as well he might. D'Arcy's words were the first line of an operatic solo, and they meant "This and that one are the same to me." But they were Italian, at all events, and the best that D'Arcy could do under the circumstances.

"Non capisco," muttered the man.

"Bai Jove! The chap doesn't understand his own language!" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Don't you speak English?" asked Tom Merry.

"Speak little English," said the man, with evident difficulty. "English spoken—yes. Me Italian. Me Marco Frulo."

"Marco Frulo!" repeated Tom Merry. "What are you doing here?"

The Italian waved his hand towards the screen of thickets before the cave.

"I nemici!" he said.

"That means enemies," said Arthur Augustus. "He means that he's got enemies who are looking for him."

"Yes, so it seems," said Tom Merry. "But I'm blessed if I understand it. I don't see why he can't apply to the police for protection!"

"Chi e Lei?"

"Eh!"

"Who—you—are?" articulated the Italian, grappling bravely with the difficulties of the English language. "Me honest man—tutto onesto. Me Marco Frulo. Un marinaio."

"That's a sailor!" said D'Arcy, delighted at being able to comprehend. "He's a sailorman, Tom Merry. We're schoolboys, my dear chap—we belong to a giddy school—"

"I don't suppose that he'll understand what a giddy school is!" grinned Tom Merry. "We belong to a school near here."

"Scuola?" said the man, evidently understanding.

"Buono! Why you come?"

"He wants to know what we've come heah for, dear boy."

"We're Boy Scouts!" explained Tom Merry. "Having a run in the woods. We didn't know you were here."

"Haden't the slightest ideah, you know."

"We wouldn't have disturbed you, if we'd known," said Tom Merry. "You'd better put that knife away, my man. People are not allowed to carry knives in England."

"Wathah not; and you might cut somebody with it, you know."

The man looked at them in a puzzled way, and then put the knife into his belt.

"You no stay 'ere?" he asked.

"No; we'll get out," said Tom Merry.

"You say nozzing?"

"He wants us not to mention that we've seen him," said

ANSWERS

D'Arcy. "I suppose we can undertake to do that, deah boy."

Tom Merry hesitated.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Me Marco Frulo, Italiano di Livorno."

"Italian fwom Leghorn," said D'Arcy, in the role of interpreter. "I dare say he came in a ship fwom Leghorn to Southampton—lots of Italians do. But I weally cannot guess how he got here."

"Zey look for me—cercare," explained the man. "Look for to kill—capite?"

Tom Merry started.

"Those fellows are looking for you—to kill you?" he exclaimed.

"Si, si, signorino," Marco Frulo nodded violently. "Si, si, certo!"

"Who are they?"

"I miei nemici!"

"His enemies, he means," said D'Arcy. "Yaas, I suppose they must be enemies if they're lookin' for the poor chap to kill him. I should certainly wegard it as unfriendly, to say the least."

"Ass!" said Tom Merry.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Why don't you go to the police for protection?" asked Tom Merry.

The man shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Non sarebbe—what you say—no good," he replied.

"Non capite—you no understand."

"No, I'm blessed if I do!" said Tom Merry. "Are you going to stay here?"

Marco Frulo nodded.

"Have you got anything to eat?"

"No."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"Non so."

"What on earth does that mean?" said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"He means he doesn't know," said D'Arcy.

"Oh, but you can't stay here without food!" said Tom Merry.

"You'd better go to the police."

"Non pno restare qui senza mangiare," said D'Arcy, grinding out Italian with as much difficulty as Marco Frulo found with the English. "You can't stay here without something to eat!"

Frulo shrugged his shoulders again. Evidently hunger had no terrors for him in comparison with the mysterious

"nemici," who were seeking him in the recesses of Rylcombe Wood.

"Shall I go to the police for you, and tell them how you're fixed?" asked Tom Merry.

Frulo shook his head energetically.

"No, no, signor. Ecco! Go way viz yourself and say nozzing—zat is all zat I ask of you. You do zat, or it is zat I—"

He touched the knife in his vest.

Tom Merry looked at him sternly.

"You needn't threaten us," he said. "We're not afraid of your knife."

"Wathah not!"

"Knife or no knife, you wouldn't find it easy to handle the two of us," said Tom Merry, grasping his staff.

"But if you're an honest man, we don't want to do you any harm. If you choose to stay here in hiding, I suppose it's your own business, and we'll say nothing about having seen you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You say nozzing?"

"Yes."

"Grazie, signorini, grazie—tanto grazie!"

"That means many thanks, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with the gentle smile of superior knowledge. "It's all wight, my man. We'll keep mum."

"Zen you go?"

"Yaas, we're goin'."

"Buono, and say nozzing—nozzing!"

"Nozzing!" said Tom Merry.

"Ah! Venti ore!"

"Twenty hours!" said D'Arcy.

"Have you had nothing to eat?"

"Niente!" said Marco Frulo, with a shake of the head.

Tom Merry drew a packet of sandwiches from his wallet.

The man's eyes fastened upon them with a hungry gleam.

Tom Merry held them out to him, and he seized upon them with avidity, and devoured them with evident hunger.

"Grazie, grazie!" he murmured.

"I wish I had some more to give you," said Tom Merry pityingly. "Look here, are you going to stay here to-night?"

"Si signor!"

"And to-morrow?"

"Si signor!"

"But you'll starve?"

"No morri di fame—I not die of ze hunger," said Marco Frulo.

"By Jove! Look here, you can't stay here without any grub," said Tom Merry uneasily. "What do you say, Gussy?"

"It would be vewy wuff, deah boy," said D'Arcy sympathetically.

"He looks to me like an honest man," said Tom Merry, a low voice. "The men looking for him weren't police, anyway—if he had done anything against the law, it wouldn't be Italians who would be looking for him, but English bobbies. I dare say it's some row—some giddy vendetta, you know—they go in for that kind of thing in Italy. If the poor beast is going to stick here over to-morrow, he ought to have something to eat. It's up to the Boy Scouts to help strangers in distress."

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The Italian grinned.

"The signorini is good—much good," he said. "But non possible—if zey see him zen he come—"

"They won't see me," said Tom Merry. "Look here, I'll come back after dark and bring you some tommy."

"Che cosa e tommy?" asked the Italian, puzzled by that word.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I mean food—something to eat."

"Qualchecosa per mangiare," explained Arthur Augustus.

"If ze signor be so good—so kind—me tank—tank—tank so much!"

"All right!" said Tom Merry. "It's settled. Good-bye!"

"A riverderci!" said Marco Frulo.

"That's an wevoir," said D'Arcy. "Au wevoir, deah boy!"

And the juniors plunged through the thickets, and the Italian, within the cave, carefully closed again the screen of bushes that had saved him once more from his enemies.

"Nothing!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors moved towards the screen of thickets at the mouth of the cave. Then Tom Merry turned back. In the pallid, troubled face of the Italian, he thought he could read that the man had suffered, and his impression of him was that he was an honest man.

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"Twenty hours!" said D'Arcy.</

"I should jolly well say so," said Tom Merry. "I hope we haven't undertaken to help a rascal—but he looked like an honest man—and he was hurt, too. It's up to us to see that he doesn't starve in that blessed cave, anyway."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry scanned the trees round them.

"I wonder where the fellows are—"

"Cooley!"

"Bai Jove! That's Kangawooh!"

"Cooley!"

Tom Merry looked round anxiously.

The Cornstalk junior's signal was answered from different directions, and Tom Merry realised that during the time they had been in the earth-cave the scouts had been closing in on them. They had left the place of concealment now, and could not return to it, and they had to take their chance.

"Bettah wun for it," said Arthur Augustus. "We musn't be beaten, deah boy. It was beasty unfortunat wunnin' into that foweyn chap just now!"

"Can't be helped. This way!"

Tom Merry led the way through the wood. He advanced very cautiously, peering through the foliage as he advanced. The enemy were close at hand now, and some of them might be sighted at any moment. A figure passed before Tom Merry's eyes on the other side of a bush, and he stopped suddenly, and made a signal to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's halted behind him in the underbrush, breathing hard.

"Is it one of the boundahs, deah boy?" he whispered.

"It's somebody; I can't see."

"Might be one of those Italian chaps—"

"I'm going to see."

Tom Merry cautiously parted the leaves before him, and looked. A man had halted within six paces of him, knee deep in ferns and bracken. He was a powerfully-built man, in the garb of a sailorman, with an officer's peaked cap. He had a very keen face, and a very sharp and prominent nose, and little grey eyes set close together. He was looking full towards Tom Merry, and the junior felt for a moment that the man must see him, but he did not. The leaves and twigs hid the St. Jim's junior from sight. The sailorman was looking about him keenly, too. Tom Merry wondered whether he had anything to do with the party who were seeking Marco Frulo.

"I guess he's vamoosed!"

The man uttered the words aloud, with a savage snapping of the teeth. They were enough to enlighten Tom Merry as to his nationality.

"Bai Jove! He's aftah that chap in the cave, too, Tom Mewwy!" D'Arcy murmured, in the Shell fellow's ear.

"Yes—hush!"

The man swung on again through the wood, trampling down the thick ferns, and brushing against the bushes. There was a sudden yell, and three or four figures came leaping through the bracken.

"Got one of them!"

"Collar him!"

"Hurrah!"

The first voice was Jack Blake's; the second was Figgins's. The St. Jim's juniors fairly leaped upon the American sailorman, and bore him with a bump to the earth. In the thick underbrush they had not seen him clearly, and they had acted rather hastily, under the hurried impression that he was one of the "hares." They had not expected to meet anybody else in the shady depths of the wood.

There was a startled yell from the sailorman as he went down, with three or four juniors sprawling over him.

"Marco Frulo! It's you, you swab! Why—what—"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Figgins. "It's not Tom Merry—or Gussy, either. It's a man!"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

Tom Merry chuckled softly in the concealment of the bushes, and D'Arcy smiled. They were very silent; the scouts did not guess how near they were.

"You young scoundrels!" roared the sailorman, sitting up in the grass and ferns, and glaring and blinking at the juniors. "You—you—lucky for you I didn't draw a bead on you!"

"Well, you are an ass, Blake, to make a mistake like that," said Figgins.

"Didn't you make the same mistake, you fathead?" demanded Blake.

"Oh, don't argue!" said Figgins loftily. "I say, sir, we're sorry we bumped you over. We took you for somebody we're looking for."

"Don't often see strangers in this wood," explained Kerr. "We're Boy Scouts at scouting practice, looking for some chaps. We're sorry."

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"Yes, rather, sir!"

The man regained his feet with a scowl, muttering angrily. But his expression changed suddenly, and he spoke civilly to the scouts.

"Well, I guess it's all right, if it was a mistake. Who might you be looking for here in this wood?"

"Some other scouts, who're dodging us," explained Figgins.

"Oh! Have you seen any strangers about here by any chance?" asked the American. "I'm looking for somebody, too—a friend. Have you seen anybody?"

"Not a soul, excepting ourselves," said Figgins.

"Not any Italians?"

"Italians!" said Jack Blake, in astonishment. "No fear! Don't see many Italians in this part of the country."

"Thank you, my lad! Never mind about knocking me over; accidents will happen. So long!"

And the American sailorman plunged away through the wood.

"Well, that was a sell!" said Blake. "You are an ass, Figgins."

"Awful sell," said Figgins. "You are a chump, Blake."

"You're a pair of chumps, if you ask me," said Monty Lowther.

"Well, we didn't ask you," said Blake. "Now, don't waste time jawing; we've got to find those bounders before five o'clock. It would be too bad to let them dodge us."

"Can't let 'em dodge us," said Manners; "especially that ass Gussy; it would be too rotten—"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

Manners jumped.

"Hallo!"

"Why, he's here!" roared Blake.

Tom Merry bestowed a glare upon his companion. Arthur Augustus, by his involuntary remark, had given the game away with a vengeance. Blake & Co. were rushing into the thicket, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy were surrounded in a moment. The scouts set up a yell of victory.

"Got 'em!"

"Here they are!"

"Hurrah!"

"Well caught!"

Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Well, you've got us," he said good-humouredly. "If anybody wants to boil Gussy in oil, I won't say no!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What did you give us away for, you ass?" roared Tom Merry.

"I wufese to be called an ass. I spoke because Mannahs made use of an opprobrious expression concernin' me—"

"I only called you an ass," said Manners cheerfully.

"Under the circumstances, I withdraw the word ass—"

"Vewy good!"

"And substitute the words blithering idiot!" went on Manners calmly.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I sav, I'm getting pretty peckish," remarked Fatty Wynn.

"Let's get back to tea. We've caught the hares, and I'm hungry. Didn't you have some sandwiches with you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Fatty."

"Have you eaten them?"

"No."

"Going to eat them?" continued Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Then you can hand them over to me," said Fatty Wynn.

"I'm awfully hungry. I always get extra hungry in this April weather, you know."

"Sorry, Fatty—"

"Oh, dash it all, you can hand the sandwiches over if you're not going to eat them!" said Fatty Wynn warmly.

"Don't be a giddy dog in a manger!"

"Haven't got them now," said Tom Merry.

"Well, my hat! Do you mean to say that you've lost them—lost good beef sandwiches!" Fatty Wynn exclaimed, in horror and disgust.

"No, not exactly lost them. You see, I—I gave them away."

Tom Merry coloured a little as he spoke. He did not intend to mention the man hiding in the earth-cave in the Poacher's Glade, but already he was finding out the difficulties of keeping a secret.

"Gave them away!" said Fatty Wynn, in dismay. "Well, you must be an ass!"

"Let's get back to the coll., deah boys," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's vewy neahly tea-time now."

And the scouts started for St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 5.

A Secret to Keep!

TOM MERRY wore a very thoughtful expression as he came into his study for tea, after the return of the Boy Scouts to St. Jim's. He could not help thinking of the man hidden in the earth-cave in the wood. The pale, scared face, the burning eyes, the shaking hand with the knife in it, seemed to haunt him. He had promised to help the man, and he did not regret having made the promise. But it would be a difficult one to keep, he knew that. For he had promised to keep the whole matter a secret; and it was not easy to keep secrets from Manners and Lowther. The Terrible Three, of the Shell, were inseparable, and they were almost always together, and Tom Merry knew that it would not be easy to get out without Manners and Lowther knowing all about it. And they would naturally expect some information on the subject.

Once before he had had a secret from them—when he was mixed up in a very unpleasant business with Cutts, of the Fifth; and at that time he had resolved never to have another. But this affair had happened unexpectedly, and he could not refuse the fugitive's plea to him to keep the secret of his hiding-place from all.

But the knowledge that he was keeping a secret from his chums weighed somewhat upon Tom Merry's mind.

How was Arthur Augustus likely to keep the secret, too? Arthur Augustus was the soul of honour, of course, and incapable of breaking his word. But although he prided himself upon being a fellow of tact and judgment, he was not by any means a good hand at keeping a secret. He was far more likely to show by his manner that he had a secret to keep, and to keep it with such elaborate care that everybody would soon be on the track of it.

"Aren't the eggs good?" Monty Lowther suddenly asked, as Tom Merry was helping in the preparations for tea in the study.

Tom started.

"Yes, they're all right, Monty," he replied.

"And the saveloys—are they all serene?"

"I think so."

"Nothing wrong with the tarts?"

"Not that I've noticed."

"Tea all right?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, puzzled. "What on earth are you getting at, Monty?"

"Then if the grub's all right, what are you scowling about?" demanded Monty Lowther.

"Was I scowling?" asked Tom Merry mildly.

"You were!"

"Well, I didn't mean to be."

"Perhaps it was a thoughtful frown," conceded Monty Lowther. "It looked like a scowl, but it may have been simply a thoughtful frown. What were you thoughtful-frowning about?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"The eggs are done," he said, turning them out of the frying-pan.

"Nothing gone wrong, Tommy?" asked Manners.

"Nothing at all."

"You haven't spoken for a quarter of an hour, that's all," said Manners, with a glance at the clock.

Tom Merry coloured.

"Never mind; I'll talk nineteen to the dozen now, and make up for it," he said. "You wouldn't have caught us to-day if Gussy hadn't given us away like a champion ass—"

Monty Lowther wagged a warning forefinger at his chum.

"Looks suspicious, changing the subject like that!" he said. "Tommy, Tommy, my infant, are you keeping secrets from your kind uncles again?"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry.

"Are you getting mixed up again with Cutts, of the Fifth, and his dead certs and sure snips, and information straight from the horse's mouth?" demanded Lowther.

"No, ass; I haven't spoken to Cutts."

"Well, that's all right, then," said Manners. "Can't have our only ewe lamb going and getting himself into trouble again—"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Tom Merry. "Tea's ready. Let's have tea, and not so much gas!"

And the Terrible Three sat down round the tea-table cheerfully. The setting sun was glowing on the window, and the old quad. looked very green and picturesque outside. Fellows were coming in from the cricket-field with their bats under their arms, talking cricket.

The Terrible Three talked cricket, too, discussing the match with Greyfriars School. A tap at the study door interrupted them. The door opened, and an eyeglass gleamed into the room. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy nodded affably to the Terrible Three.

"Pwaw excuse me, deah boys! I didn't know you were havin' tea!" he remarked.

"Come in, my son," said Monty Lowther; "there's enough for four, and you are as welcome as the flowers in May, or the flowers in a mill."

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy, but I've had tea in No. 6," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I just looked in to speak to Tom Mewwy, that's all."

"Well, you can speak to him—no law against that."

D'Arcy shook his head.

"It's all wight," he said. "I'll come in again."

"Oh, pile in!" said Manners. "I can eat while you talk—I don't eat with my ears, you know. Same with Lowther."

"Just the same," said Lowther solemnly.

"Pwaw excuse me, deah boys, but I have a little mattah to discuss with Tom Mewwy all by himself," D'Arcy explained.

"Hallo! Secrets again!" growled Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"What trouble have you been getting into?" demanded Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I have not been gettin' into any twouble at all, and I fail to compwehend the dwift of your wemark."

"Tommy is not allowed to have secrets from his kind uncles," Lowther explained.

"Oh, rot!" said Tom Merry. "Don't play the giddy goat, Lowther. Gussy, old man, you ought to have a prize medal for putting your foot in it."

"I am sowwy if I have put my foot in it," said D'Arcy, in surprise. "I have not said a word on the subject so far."

"Oh, dear!"

"And I shall be vewy careful not to do so, you may be sure," said D'Arcy, "a pwomise is a pwomise, Tom Mewwy."

Tom Merry groaned. The fact that there was a secret to keep was out now, and that was the first step, and half-way towards the secret itself being out.

Manners and Lowther were looking very peculiar. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made the chums of the Shell a graceful bow, and retired from the study. Manners and Lowther fixed their eyes upon Tom Merry in a way that made him feel very uncomfortable.

"More blessed secrets," said Lowther.

Tom Merry turned very red.

"It's really nothing," he said. "Gussy is an awful ass, that's all!"

"Nothing to do with Cutts of the Fifth this time?"

"Nothing—honour bright!"

"I don't want to be inquisitive," said Manners. "But really, Tommy—"

"Yes, really, Tommy—" said Lowther.

Tom Merry shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"It's really nothing," he repeated. "Only—only it happens to be a secret. But it's not any kind of trouble—not for us, anyway. It—it's connected with a chap outside the school—only I can't tell you about it, because I promised. See?"

"No, I don't see," said Monty Lowther. "But never mind, let it drop! But you're not to go round looking for trouble again."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I sha'n't do that!" he said.

And the subject dropped, and no more was said about it as the chums of the Shell went on with their tea. But the Terrible Three were feeling constrained—they never had secrets from one another, and this one cast a shadow upon their spirits. Tom Merry would have given a great deal to be able to explain to his chums, but his promise to the man in the cave held him bound, and he could say nothing. Tea in Tom Merry's study finished in uncomfortable silence.

CHAPTER 6.

D'Arcy Keeps the Secret.

JACK BLAKE fixed his eyes upon Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and watched him with growing curiosity. Arthur Augustus seemed quite unconscious of it. The swell of St. Jim's was sitting at the table, turning out his pockets. He was extracting coins from various pockets, and piling them up before him, and counting them. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was in an unusual state of hard-upness, as a matter of fact. A late remittance from his "governor" had been destroyed in the post by a Suffragette raid, and it had not yet been replaced, and Arthur Augustus's funds were in very low water. Money, to put it in financial language, was very tight in Study No. 6 in the School House.

"Thwee shillin's!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who never was good at arithmetic. "Two sixpences—that's one shillin'—and nine pennies and four halfpennies—that makes thwee and fourpence—no, it doesn't, it makes one and ninepence halfpenny!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's, By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

Arthur Augustus glanced up from the distressing problem.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why don't you work it out in algebra?" asked Digby, grinning. "A is the shilling, B is the sixpence, and C is the nine pennies, and X is the sum you arrive at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If A, added to B, equals C, then A C and B Z equal X J and K H," said Blake solemnly. "Then you add four, and take away the number you first thought of, and there you are."

"You uttah ass, Blake!"

"What are you adding up your cash for?" demanded Blake. "This is the first time I've seen you playing the giddy miser."

"I twust you do not wegard me as a misah, deah boy. I am twyn' to make out exactly how much money I've got, because I want some money for a vewy particulah purpose."

"Well, keep on counting it, and it may grow more and more," said Blake. "If you keep on all the evening, you'll have enough to buy a motor-bike by the time you've finished. Is it a motor-bike you want to buy?"

"No, you duffah. I want to go to the tuckshop, and get as much gwub as I can for the money I've got. It's extremely awkward that I should be short of weady money at a time like this."

"At a time like what?" demanded Herries.

"This, deah boy."

"But what is there very particular about this special time?" asked Blake, puzzled. "We've had tea."

"I was not thinkin' of tea in this studay, deah boy."

"Well, if you're thinking about tea to-morrow, something will turn up," said Blake. "In fact, I feel like Mr. Micawber—I have every confidence that something will turn up, my dear Copperfield. I'm expecting a remittance to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late. I must get in the gwub to-day."

"You don't mean to say that you're standing a feed outside the study, at a time when the finances are in such low water?" Blake exclaimed indignantly.

"Not exactly a feed, deah boy."

"Then what—"

"Two shillin's and two sixpences—that's two shillin's, isn't it?" said D'Arcy. "Suppose you add eight ha'pennies, and a threepenny-piece, then—"

"Then how many apples would the farmer have left?" said Digby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway don't intewwupt me with fivulous wemarks, Dig. I am not vewy good at awithmetic," D'Arcy confessed. "It is much simplah to pay for things in gold, and then the people give you change, you know, and they have to do all the weekonin'. That is a vewy simple method, you know. If a man's sellin' you somethin', it's up to him to do all the weekonin', I considah. But it comes awkward, you know, when you wun short of money."

"I suppose it does," agreed Blake, with a grin. "I could suggest a better method still. Pay for everything in five-pound notes, and don't stop for the change. That would be beautifully simple, and it would make you popular with the tradesmen."

"Yaas; I dare say it would!" agreed D'Arcy unsuspiciously. "But a chap would have to be awfully wick to do that, you know, though it certainly would save a lot of twouble. The twouble now is that I want to buy some things and I haven't enough money. It's a doocid awkward posish, you know. It stwuck me that it must be simply fivightful to be a vewy poor chap, and to have to work these problems out ewvery day. Suppose, for instance, you have to work for your livin'. Lots of chaps do. You get, say, a pound a week, and you have to pay went and wates and income-tax and things, as well as those blessed stamps that Lloyd George has invented for all the servants you keep. It must be a feahful problem for a chap with a wegulah pound a week, and without a govannah to wite to for money."

Blake gurgled.

"It would be rather a teaser," he admitted. "But chaps on a pound a week do not usually keep more than three or four servants, at the most, and they don't have to pay the super-tax, you know. And they get an old-age pension at the age of ninety-five—or a hundred and five. I forget."

"Pewwaps you wouldn't mind countin' up the money for me, Blake, and tellin' me how much it is, deah boy."

"Certainly!" said Blake, with a grin. And he performed the great feat with perfect ease. "You've got three shillings and nincence-halfpenny."

"Bai Jove, that's not vewy much! But I dare say Tom Mewwy's got some, and it's as much up to him as to me."

"What is?" asked Blake and Herries and Digby together.

"Gettin' the gwub, you know."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 275.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

"You and Tom Merry are standing a feed to somebody?" asked Blake, mystified.

"Yaas, in a way."

"Who is it?"

"It's a—a—a person, you know."

"Go hon! What kind of a person?" demanded Blake.

"First, second, or third person, and singular or plural?"

"Weally, you ass—"

"If you are not wandering in your mind, would you mind explaining what all this is about?" asked Blake politely.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I'm afwaid I cannot, deah boy."

"Why not?"

"It's a secwet."

"You're keeping a secret from this study?" demanded the three juniors together.

"Yaas."

Blake rose to his feet.

"There's only one thing that will meet the case," he said, "and that's to bump our noble friend for his cheek. Collar him!"

"Pway don't be a wuff ass, Blake! It is a wathah important matiah, and I'm sowwy I can't take you fellows into my confidence; but I've given my word, you know—honah bwright! I can't possibly tell you about it, or I would, you know, at once. I pwomised the man not to say anythin', and so did Tom Mewwy. You see, we were both awfly sowwy for him, especially as he's in a stwange countwy, and can't speak English."

"He! Him! Who?" roared the perplexed Blake.

"The man, you know."

"What man?"

"That's a secwet."

"And he can't speak English?" asked Blake, diplomatically, feeling that he would learn more by drawing D'Arcy out than by bumping him.

"Hardly a word, deah boy."

"Then what language does he speak?"

"Italian, of course, as he's an Italian," said D'Arcy in surprise. "You wouldn't expect him to speak Wussian or American, I suppose?"

"It's the Italian organ-grinder in Wayland, I suppose," said Digby. "They're going to give him a leg-up. Blessed if I see any reason to make a mystery of it!"

"It is not the Italian organ-gwindah in Wayland, Dig. He is a complete stwangah in this part of the countwy, and Tom Mewwy and I were vewy surprised to see him there—vewy much indeed."

"Where?" asked Blake.

"In the wood, you know, this aftahnoon."

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake. "You and Tom Merry have met an Italian in the wood this aftahnoon, and you're going to take him grub, and you haven't said a word about it!"

"Couldn't, deah boy! We pwomised to keep it a secwet, and I'm jollay well not goin' to say a word about it, eithah!" said Arthur Augustus sagely. "When you've got a secwet to keep, it's wisah not to say a single word on the subject."

"Gussy, you talk like a giddy oracle," said Blake solemnly. "When I have any deadly secrets to keep, I shall hand them over to you to keep—I don't think! It would be as good as advertising them in the papers, and cheaper."

"Weally, Blake," expostulated D'Arcy, while Digby and Herries chuckled—"Weally, you know—"

"What's the Italian's name?" asked Blake.

"That's a secwet, deah boy. In fact, I think it is bettah not to wufer to the fact that we met an Italian at all," said D'Arcy. "Pway don't ask me any questions, and I shall not have to wufese to ansawah. I will get down to the tuckshop now, before Mrs. Taggles closes, as I must have the gwub to-night."

"Why to-night? You can't see the giddy Italian again till to-morrow, I suppose, can you?" exclaimed Blake.

"I am afwaid I can't confide any details to you, deah boy. I am sowwy. But, you see, a pwomise is a pwomise. Besides, I don't know how you youngstahs would keep a secwet!" said Arthur Augustus, with a shake of the head. And the swell of St. Jim's gathered up the coins he had so carefully collected and left the study. Blake and Herries and Digby looked at one another expressively.

"Well, if this doesn't take the cake!" said Jack Blake, with emphasis. "Tom Merry and Gussy have met an Italian in the wood, and they're going to take him grub to-night! That means breaking bounds after lights out. What sort of idiotic trouble are those two duffers getting themselves mixed up in? One thing's jolly certain: Gussy's not going to break bounds at night, and get himself sacked from the school, to go and see any old Italians, not while his Uncle Blake is here to look after him. No fear!"

"No fear!" said Herries and Digby, with equal emphasis.

"We'd better go and see Tom Merry, and see what all

this rot is about," said Blake, rising. "If he keeps secrets as carefully as Gussy, we shall know the whole story soon."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Fourth quitted Study No. 6, and proceeded in search of Tom Merry, whom they ran to earth in the junior common-room.

CHAPTER 7.

Arthur Augustus is Surprised.

TOM MERRY was standing by the fire by himself. Manners and Lowther were still in the study, but Tom Merry had not cared to remain with them. He had a very uncomfortable sense of awkwardness with his chums. It was not long since he had got into serious trouble through keeping a secret from them, and though this was quite a different matter, they could not know that. Tom Merry was thinking it over, with a wrinkled brow, when Blake and Herries and Digby came into the common-room, and marched up to him at once.

Tom Merry nodded to the Fourth-Formers.

"What's all this rot?" asked Blake, coming to the point at once.

The Shell fellow looked surprised.

"What rot?" he asked naturally.

"Gussy is keeping some idiotic secret," said Blake, "and you're mixed up in it. We're not going to let Gussy play the giddy goat. Now tell us the whole story, like a good chap, and let's know what kind of trouble the ass is getting himself into."

Tom Merry turned red. He had not had much confidence in D'Arcy's powers of keeping a secret, and evidently his uneasiness had been well-founded. The proverb of the East says that whosoever would hide a secret, should hide that he has to hide it. But that was apparently beyond the powers of the elegant Fourth-Former. D'Arcy kept his secret with such elaborate precautions that he might as well have confided it to the whole School House at once.

"Ha! He blusheth!" said Digby, watching Tom Merry's reddening face.

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Tom Merry uneasily. "What has Gussy been telling you?"

"He hasn't been telling us anything—he's been keeping a secret," said Blake. "Keeping it so carefully that we've got about half of it, so far. It seems that you and he met somebody in the wood this afternoon while we were hunting you."

"The ass!"

"An Italian, it seems. Chap who can't speak English."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"It's true, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's true."

"And Gussy has been counting up his cash, with a view to providing a feed for the man," said Blake. "What is it—some foreign tramp you want to help?"

"Not exactly that."

"Then what?"

"Don't jaw about it here," said Tom Merry hastily. "There's Mellish listening with all his ears. He's only pretending to read."

Jack Blake made a sudden dive for the poker in the grate, and whirled round towards Percy Mellish. Mellish made a jump out of his chair, and fled across the common-room in alarm.

"There, that's all right!" said Blake. "Mellish can't hear now. And if Levison comes any nearer I'll prod him with the poker. Now go ahead and explain!"

"I can't very well," said Tom Merry. "As Gussy has let out so much, I may as well tell you that we've seen a man who's in trouble, and we're going to take him something to eat."

"Good Samaritans up to date!" grinned Blake. "No harm in that. But why break bounds at night to do it? Why couldn't you give him the tin to buy the grub for himself?"

"Well, you see—"

"No; the trouble is, that I don't see," said Blake affably. "But I dare say I shall see when you explain. Go ahead."

"I can't explain. The man doesn't want to show himself, and we've promised to keep dark about having seen him," said Tom Merry desperately. "Gussy oughtn't to have said a word. He's a silly ass. As he's blabbed to you, it's up to you to keep it dark. The man's in trouble, and is hiding; that's the fact of the matter."

Blake whistled softly.

"Then he must be a criminal or something; no need for an honest man to hide," he said.

"No, it isn't that. He's a foreigner, and—and the men who are looking for him are not bobbies," said Tom Merry. Blake shook his head.

"It sounds to me as if you've got mixed up in something jolly queer," he said. "I don't like these mysteries, I must

say. If you've promised the man, of course you can't tell me about it; but I'm not going to let Gussy break bounds and get himself into trouble."

"No need for that. I'd rather go alone."

"Then you're going?"

"Well, yes."

"Bad bizney, Tommy my boy," said Blake. "Suppose a prefect spots you breaking bounds?"

"I shall be careful."

"Bounds on the bound sometimes get spotted, however careful they are. You remember Lumley-Lumley, when he used to play the giddy ox? He was very careful, but he was spotted."

Tom Merry turned crimson.

"Hang it all, Blake; you don't think I'm going out to do anything that I should be ashamed to have known, do you?" he exclaimed.

"No, I don't. I think you're going to play the giddy goat and get yourself into some fix; that's all," said Blake.

"Well, if I do, I'll get out of it somehow by myself."

"Which is a polite way of telling me to mind my own bizney," said Blake imperturbably. "Well, I'll do it. I suppose you can play the giddy goat if you like. But I'm going to keep an avuncular eye on Gussy. Hallo, here he is!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into the common-room with a bag in his hand. He joined the group at the fire.

"I've been lookin' for you, Tom Mewwy," he said. "I went to your study to tell you that I'd got the gwub, and you weren't there, and Mannahs and Lowthah were quite inquisitive. Of course, I didn't tell them anythin'."

"You ass! You're a nice fellow to keep a secret!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, I twust a secwet is quite safe in my keepin', especially when I've given my word of honah!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly.

"Oh, your honour's all right; it's your fatheadedness that worries me!" said the captain of the Shell.

"I wefuse to be chawatewised as a fathead, Tom Mewwy. I hope you have not been givin' the secwet away to these inquisitive youngstahs?" said D'Arcy, with a severe glance at Blake and Herries and Digby. "They have been pumpin' me, the boundahs, but I have been extwemely careful not to let anythin' out."

The Fourth-Formers chuckled.

"You've let out about there being an Italian in the wood, and about our going to take him grub," said Tom Merry tartly.

"Weally, deah boy, I must say that that is a vewy impwudent wemark," said D'Arcy. "These chaps will tumble to the whole bizney soon if you keep on like that. Pwavy be more careful, old fellow, or you will be givin' Marco Fwulo entirely away."

"Marco Frulo?" murmured Blake.

"The poor chap is confidin' in us, you know," D'Arcy went on, with great severity. "If you gas like that, Tom Mewwy, it won't be much use his keepin' hidden in the cave—"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I weward you as havin' given away the whole show," said Arthur Augustus. "It is vewy hard cheese on Fwulo. Howevah, we can wely on Blake and Hewwies and Dig not to let it go any furthah. Bai Jove, there is that cad Levison listenin' to what I'm sayin'! Levison, you wottah!"

Levison grinned.

"What blessed rot are you talking?" he asked. "Who's the giddy Italian hiding in a cave? What are you romancing about?"

"There! You see what you've done, Tom Mewwy! Levison's got hold of it now—"

"Shut up!" roared Tom Merry, exasperated.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy, aftah givin' away the secwet like that, you might—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "Gussy, you're worth your weight in gold. You'd better ring off now. You'll have a crowd listenin' to you."

Tom Merry strode out of the common-room with knitted brows. There wasn't very much left of the secret now. With Levison and Mellish, the two tell-tales of the School House, in possession of it, the secret might as well have been cried from the housetops.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and gazed after Tom Merry more in sorrow than in anger.

"I am weally vewy much surprised at Tom Mewwy," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vewy much surprised indeed!" repeated Arthur Augustus, with emphasis. "Of course, I know he meant to keep the secwet, as he had pwomised, and he is a fellah of his word. But I must say that he has been vewy, vewy careless. Chap who has a secwet to keep can't be too careful!"

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's, By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

and I must remark that Tom Mewwy has been fidgettily careless. Evewy boundah in the House will know about it now."

"They will if you run on," said Blake, grasping his chum by the arm and dragging him out of the common-room. "For goodness' sake, shut up, Gussy!"

"Yaas; but I must wepeat that I am vewy surprised at Tom Mewwy."

Meanwhile, Levison and Mellish foregathered in a corner of the common-room. They compared notes with suppressed excitement. Levison and Mellish were afflicted with a born incapacity for minding their own business, and they always wanted to know what was going on; and they generally succeeded, not being very scrupulous about the way they gained their object.

"There's something awfully fishy about this," said Levison, in a low voice. "You know that story there was about Tom Merry going to pubs, and so on? They explained it away all right, but I had my doubts all the time. It looks to me as if this is some more of it—something pretty bad, I think."

"Quite so," agreed Mellish. "Going out at night to meet a foreign chap in the wood—well, it takes the cake!"

"I'm jolly well going to know what it all means!" said Levison determinedly. "If Tom Merry is doing something to disgrace the House he ought to be bowled out and shown up."

"Ahem! Quite so!"

"He can hoodwink the masters and the prefects and the other fellows," said Levison, "but he can't hoodwink me. I'm on to this, and I'm going to have it all out."

"How are you going to do it? He'd punch you if you asked him questions."

"I'm not going to ask him questions. I'm going to find out for myself. If Tom Merry goes out to-night, I suppose I can go too?"

Mellish started.

"Follow him?" he said breathlessly.

Levison nodded coolly.

"Certainly! You can come too."

Mellish shifted uneasily. He was as inquisitive and as ill-natured as his friend, but he lacked Levison's nerve.

"H'm! I—I don't think I'll do that," he said. "You— you see, we might be spotted by some rotten prefect—Kildare has his eyes wide open, you know—and—and—"

Levison sniffed contemptuously.

"Then stay in if you funk it," he said. "I'm going, and I'll jolly well have the whole story, and if Tom Merry is disgracing the House I'll show him up!"

"Good for you!" said Mellish.

And when the Fourth Form went to bed that night there was one fellow in the dormitory in the School House who remained awake—very wide awake indeed. It was Levison.

CHAPTER 8.

Shadowed!

"TOM MEWWY, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus tapped Tom Merry on the arm as the Shell fellow was going up to the dormitory. Manners and Lowther looked at him and sniffed, and passed on with the Shell juniors. It was some more of the secret, they could see that, and Manners and Lowther were getting "fed up," as Monty expressed it, with that secret.

"Well, what is it, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry wearily.

"Pway step into my studay for a while. I want to speak to you."

"Oh, all right!"

Tom Merry followed D'Arcy into Study No. 6. Blake and Herries and Digby had already gone up to the Fourth Form dormitory, so the study was empty. Arthur Augustus closed the door very carefully.

"I'm afraid the chaps have got on to somethin', Tom Mewwy," he said.

"Go hon!" said Tom sarcastically. "I'm surprised at that!"

"It was owin' to your want of care, my deah boy. I don't want to wepwoach you," said Arthur Augustus kindly.

"The damage is done now, and it can't be helped. But weally you are a pweicious fellow to keep a secwet, I must say! However, it's no good waggin' you about that. The twouble is that Blake and Hewwies and Dig have tumbled to it somehow that I'm goin' out to-night to take gwub to that Italian chap in the wood, and they've got their eahs up about it. Blake declares that he won't let me go out, and if I try to get out of the dorm. they're goin' to stop me. Of course I should uttably wufese to be stopped. Although they are my fiwends, I should give them a feaful thwashin' if they twied anythin' of the sort. But—"

"It's all right, Gussy. No need for two to go; and I shall manage ever so much better without you."

"That's just what I'm afraid of, Tom Mewwy; you are The Gem Library.—No. 275.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

ovah-confident in yourself, and I don't know how you'll gde on without me to guide you," said Arthur Augustus dubiously. "Do you think you could manage it without me?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"You see, I should thwash Blake and Hewwies and Dig if they twied to stop me, but that would make a wow and wake up the othah fellahs, and Mellish and Levison are in our dorm., you know, and they are already suspicious owin' to what you let out in the common-woom this evenin'—"

"You stay in bed, Gussy, and leave it to me," said Tom Merry, in great relief.

"Do you think you can manage all wight?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I twust you will not make a muck of it," said D'Arcy.

"I have anothah suggestion to make. Suppose you come to my dorm. atfah lights out, and get into my bed, and I will slip out quietly. You can pwetend to be me—"

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be up to that, Gussy. Better let me go. You can give me instructions before I start," said Tom Merry solemnly.

"Yaas, that's a good ideah," said D'Arcy with a nod.

"I've got the gwub here, in this bag, and you can come into the studay and take it, you know. Pway be vewy careful. Don't go till after half-past ten, as the pwefects go to bed then. And mind you don't wun into any twouble, deah boy."

"I will be awfully, frightfully careful."

"You are quite sure that you couldn't slip into my bed and pwetend to be me, so as to keep Blake quiet?" asked D'Arcy anxiously.

"Quite sure!"

"Then pawayps—"

Monty Lowther opened the study door and looked in.

"Are you coming up to bed?" he asked. "Kildare is waiting in the dorm., and he may possibly get ratty in the course of time."

Tom Merry laughed.

"I'm coming! Good-night, Gussy!"

"Good-night, deah boy!"

Tom Merry went up to the Shell dormitory with Lowther. Lowther did not speak, and they went into the dormitory in silence. Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, looked at Tom Merry grimly.

"I'm waiting to put the lights out, Merry!" he said.

"Sorry, Kildare! I won't keep you a minute!"

"Buck up!" said the Sixth-Former tersely.

Tom Merry tumbled quickly enough into bed. The lights were put out, and Kildare quitted the dormitory. There was a buzz of talk among the Shell fellows after Kildare had gone, and Tom Merry joined in it, the fellows chiefly discussing the cricket match with Greyfriars School—an event of some importance in the junior cricket world. One by one the Shell fellows dropped off to sleep, and silence reigned in the dormitory.

Tom Merry did not close his eyes.

He was tired enough, after the run with the scouts in the afternoon, but there was to be no sleep for him for the first part of that night, at all events.

He had his promise to Marco Frulo to keep.

The man was hiding in the hidden cave in the wood, and he would be expecting Tom Merry with the promised aid. Tom could not help feeling that he had made a rash promise in the kindness of his heart. But a promise was a promise, and it had to be kept. Tom Merry was not experienced in the ways of the world, but he had a quick eye for an honest face, and he was convinced that the man in the cave was honest enough—though what his quarrel might be with the other men Tom could not guess. The thought of the poor wretch hiding there, in cold and darkness, without food, was quite enough to solace the junior for the unpleasant prospect of leaving his warm bed and taking the risk of breaking bounds after lights out.

Tom Merry lay awake listening to the slow chimes from the old clock-tower of St. Jim's.

Eleven o'clock!

The junior sat up in bed at last. Most, if not all of the Sixth, would be in bed at that hour, and there was little danger of falling in with any watchful prefect. Most of the masters, too, would be gone to bed; early hours were kept at St. Jim's. Tom Merry slipped quietly out of bed, and dressed himself quickly in the dark.

There was no sound in the dormitory but the steady breathing of the other Shell fellows. His chums were fast asleep.

Tom, taking his boots in his hand, crept silently to the door, and let himself out into the passage.

He closed the door softly behind him.

All was dark in the passage. Lights had long ago been

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turned out there. Tom Merry put his boots on silently. He had just finished, when he gave a sudden start, and bent his head to listen. From the blackness of the passage he had caught a sound as of a sudden movement.

"Anybody there?" he called out softly.

It had occurred to him for a moment that D'Arcy might have turned out after all. The sound was from the direction of the Fourth Form dormitory. But there came no reply to his cautious call, and the silence was unbroken.

"It was only a rat!" murmured Tom Merry. "My hat! I'm getting into a state of nerves!"

He went down the passage on tiptoe.

It did not take him many minutes to get the bag of provisions from Study No. 6, and then he made his way to the lower box-room.

The window opened silently, and Tom Merry climbed out on the roof of an outhouse below, and closed the window behind him.

Then he dropped lightly to the ground, the bag in his hand.

Without a glance behind, he hurried across to the school wall, which bordered the lonely road to Rylcombe.

A minute later the box-room window was cautiously reopened, and a face glimmered in the darkness as it looked out.

A gleam of starlight fell upon it, and disclosed for a moment the features of Levison of the Fourth.

But Tom Merry was hurrying away under the shadowy old elms of the quadrangle, and he did not see it, and he did not know that Levison had climbed down from the box-room window and dropped to the ground—that the cad of the Fourth was following him at a cautious distance across the quadrangle, and that when he dropped over the school wall into the road Levison dropped after him only a minute later. He did not know that as he tramped in the darkness down the lane towards Rylcombe Levison of the Fourth followed him, treading silently, and taking advantage of every shadow to conceal his pursuit.

CHAPTER 9.

Levison's Night Out!

LEVISON caught glimpses of Tom Merry on the dark road. He saw the Shell fellow plainly as he passed the lamp at the cross-roads. Levison crept by in the shadows of the trees in case Tom Merry should glance back to where the lamp glimmered. Tom Merry did not glance back, however; he had not the faintest suspicion that he was followed. He strode right on to the stile, and clambered over it into the footpath. Levison reached the stile, and passed it in his turn, and then he paused.

If Tom Merry had gone down the footpath, it would be easy enough to follow him; if he had taken to some track through the black woods, the pursuit would not be easy—in fact, it would be next to impossible.

Levison listened keenly.

His curiosity was roused to the highest pitch; he intended to know where Tom Merry was going, and what he was going to do.

He heard a rustle in the wood, and started in that direction. Under his feet was a narrow trodden track, invisible in the darkness of the trees. But Levison knew the path, and he knew that it led through the heart of the wood, and past the deep glade where, according to the legend, the poacher had met his death. He knew that it was near the Poacher's Glade that Tom Merry and D'Arcy had been captured by the scouts that afternoon; he had learned that from the talk of the juniors. He thought he could guess Tom Merry's destination now, and he pressed on with more confidence.

Several times he heard a rustle of displaced twigs in advance, which showed that he was still on the right track. Suddenly the sound ceased.

He listened intently, but he could hear nothing.

He paused for a full minute, and then trod cautiously on the path again, peering ahead of him with watchful eyes.

He caught sight suddenly of the junior he was tracking—standing in the middle of the track, and looking intently back.

Levison had just time to draw back into the darkness under a tree and conceal himself; another second, and he would have been in full view of Tom Merry.

His heart was thumping now.

He understood what had happened. He had been guided on his way by the rustling Tom Merry made in moving along the narrow track among the bushes, and Tom Merry on his side had heard Levison's movements behind, and was thus warned that he was being followed.

Tom Merry stood quite still for several minutes, looking intently back along the path he had come by.

The Shell fellow felt certain that someone had been following him from the rustling he had heard; but he was not thinking of the cad of the Fourth. He was thinking of the men who had been seeking Marco Frulo. Might they still be in the wood, searching for the hidden Italian? It would be the worst of services he could render the hidden man if he unintentionally guided his enemies to his hiding-place.

Levison remained perfectly still, scarcely breathing.

Tom Merry resumed his way at last. But he no longer followed the track. He plunged into the thickness of the wood, confident of his ability to find his way, in spite of the darkness. Extensive as the wood was, Tom Merry knew every glade in it, from the constant scout-practice of the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's. But Levison was by no means so well versed in woodcraft, and when he reached the spot where Tom Merry had turned from the track, the cad of the Fourth paused in dismay.

Levison ground his teeth as he stood there in doubt and indecision.

"Hang him!" he muttered. "Hang him! He's guessed that I'm after him. Hang him! I shall lose myself if I get into the wood at this time of night. Hang him!"

He remained there for several minutes, listening for some sound to guide him. Minute after minute passed; he heard nothing. The rustling Tom Merry had made had died away, and Levison was not even certain of the direction the Shell fellow had gone in. He debated in his mind whether he should make directly for the Poacher's Glade, in the chance of catching sight of Tom Merry there again. But he was not certain that that was the Shell fellow's destination. Levison ground his teeth with angry disappointment. It looked as if he had left his bed and taken the risk of breaking bounds at night for nothing—for nothing but a weary tramp in the darkness.

Then suddenly he started, and pricked up his ears.

There was a sound in the wood—a murmur of voices. As Levison listened, he distinguished a foreign voice speaking in a strange soft tongue. He could not distinguish the words—he could not have understood them if he had distinguished them. But it was easy for him to guess that it was an Italian speaking; and he knew—or suspected, at least—that Tom Merry had come to the wood to meet an Italian. His eyes glittered with triumph; he had run the junior down after all—with his unknown companion. Levison did not hesitate. He stole cautiously through the underwoods in the direction of the voices.

The voices ceased.

Had the speakers heard him? He paused, hesitating, and as he hesitated, there was a rustle in the underbrush, and a hand grasped him, and he was dragged down to the ground.

Levison uttered a sudden, startled cry.

That grip of iron that was laid upon him could not have been given by a junior's hand. He was in the grasp of a man—and a powerful man. Who was it—into what danger had he stumbled in his spying on Tom Merry?

The iron grasp forced him down to the ground, and Levison did not even think of resisting. His dazzled eyes caught a gleam of steel. That gleam of steel in the darkness of the wood sent a shudder of terror through Levison's whole body.

There was a crashing in the underwoods, and two or three dark and sinewy figures came plunging to the spot.

"Have you got him?" It was a sharp, metallic voice in English. "Tu l'hai trovato, Beppo?"

"Ho trovato qualcuno!" growled the man who was holding Levison down.

"I guess—but—non e Frulo!"

"Credo che non!"

"Bring a light here!"

Levison lay palpitating with terror under the grasp of the Italian. He did not understand what was said, excepting the words in English, which were spoken with a strong American accent.

Into whose hands had he fallen?

What gang of rascals was this, haunting the dark shades of the wood, in the quiet English countryside?

They could not be poachers—there would have been no foreigners in a poaching gang. Who were they—what were they? At the thought that his life was in danger, Levison almost fainted with fear.

There was a glimmer of a lantern in the darkness.

The light was turned upon Levison's face, dazzling him with its brightness.

He closed his blinded eyes for a moment.

There was an exclamation of annoyance and disgust from the American.

"I guess you've got the wrong pig by the ear, Beppo. That is a schoolboy!"

Levison opened his eyes again, and blinked at the dark faces bent over him.

It was a strange and terrifying scene.

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The man Beppo had a knee planted on Levison's chest, pinning him down in the damp grass. A swarthy Italian held a lantern with the rays directed upon the junior's face. A powerfully-built man was looking down at him in the light—man with a long, keen nose like a knife-blade, and sharp eyes set close together.

"Who are you?"

The American rapped out the words savagely.

Levison panted.

"I—I'm not doing any harm here," he said.

"Who are you?"

"I—I—I'm a schoolboy. I belong to St. Jim's."

"What's that?"

"A public school near here—near Rylcombe."

The big man grunted angrily.

"Another of that crowd I met here to-day, playing the fool at scouting, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes! I—"

"Go slow," said the American sailorman. "Tell me the truth! I guess there's something fishy about this, and you may know something of what we want to know. I suppose they don't allow boys out at midnight in your school, hey?"

"N-n-no!"

"But you're out, I guess?"

"Ye-es!"

"What are you doing here, then?"

"I—I—I—"

"Do you know anything about a man hiding in the wood here—an Italian man?" asked the sailorman, bending over him.

"I—I—"

"I guess you do," went on the adventurer, reading Levison's face with perfect ease. "This may turn out a good catch after all, Beppo. Il piccino sa qualche cosa—capite?"

"Si, si, Signor Finn!" grinned Beppo.

"And I guess he's going to tell us, or my name's not Hiram Finn!" grinned the Yankee. "Now, my young buck, you're going to tell us what you're doing here—savvy?"

"I—I—I—"

"What did you come into the wood at this time of night for?"

Levison hesitated a moment. Hiram Finn made a sign to Beppo, and the Italian advanced his revolver, so that the lantern-light gleamed upon the barrel. Levison shuddered with terror.

"I—I'll tell you!" he panted.

"I guess you'd better!"

"I—I came here to—to follow a chap!" stuttered Levison. "One of our fellows—he sneaked out of the school, and—and I followed him. I knew he was going to meet an Italian—a foreign chap hiding in a cave, and to take him food—"

Hiram Finn uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Gee-whiz! Now you're talking! Go on!"

"I—I lost the track in the wood!" faltered Levison. "I—I thought it was him when—I heard you! I—I—that's all!"

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

"Where did he go?"

"Into the wood."

"Which direction?"

"I couldn't make out in the dark."

"So he's going to take food to an Italian hiding in a cave," said Hiram Finn, with a chuckle. "I guess that doesn't leave much doubt on the matter. I guess we're going to find this young gentleman who plays the good Samaritan in the middle of the night—some! You know what part he was making for, hey?"

"I—I don't! I—"

"I guess you do. I guess you're going to guide us there, and if you fail, there will be a dead youngster lying in this wood in the morning," said Hiram Finn.

"You—you wouldn't—you daren't—"

"I reckon there's not much Hiram Finn would stop at, on the track of a hundred thousand dollars," said the big man. "I've wrung the necks of whipper-snappers like you before breakfast in the morning, to give me an appetite. Savvy?"

"I—I—"

"Let him get up, Beppo, but keep hold of his fin. You keep behind him, Pietro, and if he tries to run, give him six inches of your knife. Capite?"

The Italians nodded and grinned; they evidently understood English, although they did not speak it. Beppo dragged the trembling Levison to his feet. The cad of the Fourth was white with fear. He would have given a great deal at that moment to be safe back in his bed at St. Jim's; and would willingly have undertaken never to spy into another fellow's affairs again. But it was too late to think of that now.

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"Now I guess you're going to guide us, cocky," said Hiram Finn. "March on!"

"I—I—"

"'Nuff said—get on!"

"I—I'm not sure about it!" panted Levison. "I think Tom Merry was making for a place here called the Poacher's Glade. I know there's a cave in the hillside there; I found it one day. But I—"

"I guess that'll do; you're wasting time. Lead on!"

Levison was silent, and led the way. The big American walked with him, and Beppo kept hold of his arm. Pietro walked behind. The lantern was extinguished now, and darkness reigned in the wood again.

Levison stumbled on, inwardly anathematising his bad luck. He had not dreamed of any encounter of this sort when he left St. Jim's to follow Tom Merry to the wood. The three men were evidently desperate characters, and if he failed them, there was no telling what might happen to him. He did not even think of trying to escape. It would have been useless; Beppo's fingers were grasping his arm like an iron band, and the gleam of the revolver was ever before the junior's eyes, whether he could see the actual weapon or not.

He stumbled on, weary and perspiring. The three adventurers did not waste time, and they kept Levison going at a good speed, in spite of his efforts to slack down. He was feeling done up by the time they entered the dark shades of the Poacher's Glade. Through the opening in the trees overhead, starlight glimmered down into the glade. The mass of the hill rose black and solid, clothed with underwoods.

"Where is that cave you mentioned?" asked Hiram Finn, looking about him doubtfully. "If you've been fooling us—"

"Give me time to find it. I know it's somewhere here—"

"Quick, then. We don't want to alarm our bird!"

Levison stopped at last before the mass of foliage that hid the opening of the cave. He pointed to it—wondering whether in truth a hidden man lay behind the dark mass, or whether he had led the searchers on a wild-goose chase. Hiram Finn grasped his revolver, and drew aside the mass of leafy screening.

A low voice came from the interior darkness.

"Ecco! Is it you zen, signorino?"

"I guess it's an old friend of yours, Marco Frulo!" said Hiram Finn. "Here he is, boys—seize him!"

There was a cry of alarm in the cave. Hiram Finn and the two Italians rushed in, crashing through the breaking branches and twigs.

There was the sound of a terrible struggle in the blackness—trampling feet, sharp exclamations, hurried breathing, and muttered oaths. But Levison did not stay to listen. His captors had forgotten him, and Levison did not lose the opportunity. He turned and sped back the way he had come—running, stumbling, picking himself up and running again—panting painfully, but never pausing, till he was out in the Rylcombe Road again, with St. Jim's in sight. Levison had had more than enough of adventures for one night.

CHAPTER 10.

A Narrow Escape.

TOM MERRY emerged from the wood into the deep glade, and glanced round him cautiously. He had made a wide detour through the wood to throw off the track whoever it was that had been tracking him, and had reached the Poacher's Glade by a roundabout course. The glade was dark and deserted, and Tom Merry was reassured. He came through the damp ferns and bracken towards the cave; and then suddenly stopped, with a start. A light was gleaming through the foliage there; a lantern was burning in the hidden cave.

"The awful ass, to burn a light here!" muttered the junior. "If those fellows are still looking for him—"

He broke off.

From the hidden cave under the hill there came a murmur of voices. Marco Frulo was not alone.

Tom Merry remained quite still for some moments, and then he cautiously crept towards the cave and listened.

The thought had come into his mind now that Marco Frulo's enemies had found him. The man who was hiding in fear of his life would hardly have been imprudent enough to betray his presence by burning a light in the cave. And the voices—what did that mean? As he drew closer, Tom Merry heard a voice in English—a voice with a strong American accent—a voice he had heard before. It was that of the man with the knife-blade nose, whom Blake and Figgins had captured by mistake in the afternoon.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

All was clear now. Marco Frulo's enemies had found him, and they were in the cave now. What had happened to the Italian?"

The foliage before the cave had been torn and trampled, and no longer concealed the opening completely. Tom Merry could see through into the interior; and as he peered through the twigs and leaves, a strange and startling scene met his gaze.

Marco Frulo lay upon the ground, bound hand and foot, with the lantern light gleaming upon his pale and hunted-looking face.

The big American was seated upon a mound close to him, with his hand resting on his knee, and a revolver in his hand.

Two Italians were standing close to the captured man, and one of them was wiping away blood from a knife-cut across the face. Marco Frulo had evidently not been captured without resistance.

The Yankee was speaking.

"I guess we've got you now, Marco Frulo; I guess we've got you where your hair is short. What?"

Marco Frulo muttered something indistinctly, but did not reply.

"Has he hurt you much, Beppo?"

The wounded Italian growled.

"Per Bacco! I am hurt!"

"We're going to make him pay for it," said Hiram Finn. "He's going to pay a hundred thousand dollars—eh, Marco, my old chum?"

Frulo was silent.

"I guess you'd better go and get that cut seen to, Beppo," said Hiram Finn, looking at the deep slash in his follower's face. "You can get it bound up in Wayland. Let the surgeon think you got it in a row with the bargemen on the river. I guess I can look after our friend Marco now that's he's tied up. Some!"

"I bleed like vun stuck peeg!" growled Beppo.

"Now, Marco, my friend, you are going to talk," said the Yankee adventurer. "I guess you can hear me. This is where you yaup! Savvy?"

"Non parlero!" grunted the man lying on the ground, making a sudden effort to break loose from his bonds.

Hiram Finn chuckled.

"I guess you can't get loose, Marco, old chum. You won't get loose easy when Hiram Finn has tied you up with sailor's knots. I guess not!"

"Non parlero—non parlero!"

"That means that you won't speak, I guess. I reckon we shall make you speak, Marco. You are coming down to the coast with us—you are coming on a ship, Marco—and between here and Venice you will talk—what? I guess you know how I shall persuade you, if you don't talk, my man. What?"

"Bah! Non parlero!"

"You can go and get that cut tied up, Beppo, and bring back the trap—you and Pietro. Get it as near the wood as you can, and then come back here. I'll look after our friend Marco till you get back. Don't forget the sacks in the trap, to cover him with."

"Si, signor!"

Tom Merry drew back hastily, and took cover in the trees. The two Italians emerged from the cave, and strode away, Beppo groaning and grunting as he went. They disappeared into the darkness.

Tom Merry drew near the cave again when they were gone.

The Yankee sailorman was still speaking; and Tom Merry, as he saw the thin, keen face in the gleam of the lantern-light, almost shuddered at the expression of cold and cruel determination upon it.

"I guess you are going to talk, Marco," said Hiram Finn. "You are going to talk, and you are going to write it down, every word. I'm going to have that hundred thousand dollars. Eh?"

"Non mai!"

"Never's a long word," said Hiram Finn; "a very long word! We've hunted you out, Marco. You gave us the slip at Southampton; you've given us the slip since. We nearly had you once; now we've got you. Savvy? Now we want the dollars—a hundred thousand dollars, Marco; though it's not in good American money. But we'll change all that when we lay hands on the dubs, Marco. The secret that you got from the drunken sailor in Leghorn; you're going to pass it on to me and my pals, Beppo and Pietro. What?"

"Non mai!"

"When you've got a cord tied round your head, Marco, squeezing tighter and tighter till your eyes bulge out, you'll change your tune, I guess."

Tom Merry shuddered.

"You know where the money is, Marco—on one of the islands in the Lagoon of Venice, I guess. You're going to tell us."

"Non parlero!" repeated the bound man. "La morte, ma silenzio!"

"Death, but silence!" grinned Hiram Finn. "We'll

change your tune for you, Marco, when you're on board the schooner. You will see! Beppo and Pietro will be back in half an hour, and then you're going away, Marco, wrapped up in a bundle of sacks, in case any inquisitive policeman should look into the trap; and when you're on the schooner—"

The Italian groaned. He evidently realised his helplessness in the hands of his relentless enemy.

Tom Merry's heart beat fast.

In half an hour the two ruffians would return, and then the bound man would be taken away a helpless prisoner.

There was nothing to stop them.

Tom Merry thought of the police; but he could not have reached the nearest police-station. And then, the local policemen would not have been able to deal with this desperate gang, armed with deadly weapons, and only too clearly prepared to use them.

What could he do?

He had come there to help the unfortunate fugitive, and he had proof enough now, if he had wanted it, that Marco Frulo was a man pursued by remorseless rascals; that the right was on his side.

To let the man be taken away by that gang of scoundrels—it was impossible.

But what could the junior do?

If he waited till Beppo and Pietro returned, he would have three enemies to deal with. If anything was to be done, it must be done now, while the American sailorman was alone with the prisoner.

But to tackle that powerful ruffian—Tom Merry, strong and athletic as he was, would have been but an infant in the grasp of Hiram Finn.

The thoughts raced through his head. What could he do? He would not abandon the Italian to his fate. But what could he do?

The Yankee sailorman yawned, and rose from his seat. He came towards the opening of the cave, and Tom Merry crouched back in the darkness. The American came through the screen of bushes, and lighted a cigar. He meant to wait for the return of his associates in the open glade.

The big man, his tall form shadowy in the darkness, moved to and fro. At intervals Tom Merry heard him give a faint chuckle. The man was in a state of gleeful triumph, as his chuckling indicated.

Tom Merry made up his mind.

He could not tackle the big ruffian by himself, but if he could get Marco Frulo free, between them, they might handle him. Tom Merry, crouching in the dark shadows, watched the sailorman pacing to and fro as he smoked his cigar. And when the man's back was turned, and he was a dozen paces away, the junior made a sudden dash and passed through the thickets into the cave.

Whether the sailorman had heard him or not, he did not know. He bent over Marco Frulo, opening his pocket-knife with hurried fingers.

The bound man's eyes gleamed up at him with new hope.

"Amico—mio amico il ragazzo!" he breathed.

Tom Merry cut through the cords that bound him with hasty slashes of the pocket-knife. Outside, he heard the sailorman humming a tune. The man had not seen or heard the junior; he did not suspect for a moment that anyone else was in the lonely glade at that hour. Levison had told him that Tom Merry had left the school to carry food to the Italian in the cave. But Hiram Finn was not thinking of the unknown boy who had caused Levison's presence in the wood. He had captured Marco Frulo, and his mind was busy with his success.

"Quiet!" whispered Tom Merry.

A few more slashes of the knife, and Marco Frulo was free. The Italian sailor, lithe and active as a panther, leaped to his feet. His sharp, black eyes searched round the cave, evidently for a weapon. His knife had been taken away, and Tom Merry was glad of it. Villain and ruffian as Hiram Finn clearly was, Tom Merry did not want to look upon a scene of bloodshed in the lonely wood that night.

Some sound had apparently fallen upon Hiram Finn's keen ears. He came back to the entrance of the cave and looked in.

As he peered through the broken branches, a glare of rage came into his eyes, as he saw Marco Frulo free, and the junior standing by his side.

His hand went into his pocket—Tom Merry knew what for. The junior was desperate, and he acted quickly. He snatched up the lantern, and hurled it into the face of the ruffian.

Crash!

There was a yell of pain from the Yankee sailorman, as the lantern smashed into his face, and he staggered back blindly. The lantern was instantly extinguished. Tom Merry grasped Frulo by the arm.

"This way!" he muttered.

He led, half-dragging, the startled man through the thicket

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before the cave. He could hear Hiram Finn cursing in the darkness, as he rushed the Italian towards the trees. In a moment they were in the shelter of the wood.

"Run for it!" panted Tom. "He's got a pistol! Run!" Crack!

It was a sharp, ringing report. The American had fired. But it was a shot at random. In the darkness he could not see the junior or Frulo. Tom Merry grasped Frulo's arm, and ran with him blindly through the wood.

CHAPTER 11.

The Secret.

TOM MERRY ran, and ran, his companion panting along by his side.

For a few minutes they ran blindly, at random; then Tom Merry remembered the way, and they followed a beaten track, where progress was easier.

Frulo ran without a word, only breathing heavily.

They came out on the footpath at last, and then over the stile into the road. Tom Merry led his companion up the road for a short distance, and through a gap in the hedge on the opposite side, and into a dim building. It was an old barn now disused, which the junior knew well. There he stopped, panting.

"All right now," he gasped. "We're a good two miles away, and I'll bet that chap won't be able to follow our giddy tracks."

Frulo leaned against the wall, breathing hard.

"Grazie, signorino—grazie."

Tom Merry knew that that meant thanks.

"That's all right," he said; "I was jolly glad to get you out of the hands of that rotter. What did he want with you?"

"Il segreto!"

"The—the what?"

"What you say—secret—secret of ze oro—ze gold," said Marco Frulo.

"I am tell by ze sailor who die in Leghorn—and he know—he would find. Capite?"

"I think I understand," said Tom Merry. "They want to rob you?"

"Si, si!"

"Well, you're out of their hands now."

Frulo breathed hard.

"I brought you some grub, as I promised," said Tom Merry ruefully. "But I dropped the bag in getting you away. I'm sorry. Of course, I didn't expect to find those rotters there. But look here, you won't be able to go back to the cave again, now that they've found it."

"E' giusto."

"You'll have to bunk?"

"I go!" said Marco Frulo heavily. "But I zink—I zink—how you say—I not get away perhaps from zem. But I fly. Listen to me, ragazzo. You save my life. Zey kill me on ze ship, for I tell zem nozing."

"The rotters!" said Tom Merry. "You can go to the police for protection, Frulo. We've got law in England, you know."

"Zat non good. Zat man, zat Finn, he is il diavolo himself. Listen to me, zen—you are all ze friend zat is to me now. Suppose zat I am kill. I not vish zat ze gold lose itself. Capite?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I give you a paper," said the Italian, in a low, hurried voice. "You have carta—what you say—carta per scrivere?"

"Carta!" said Tom Merry, puzzled. "Oh, paper! Yes. If you want to write, I've got a pocket-book, and you can have a leaf; and I've got a pencil. But—"

"Datemi—give to me."

Tom Merry, in wonder, took out his pocket-book, and tore out a leaf, and handed it to the Italian, with a pencil.

Marco Frulo stepped to the door of the barn.

Clear starlight fell into the field outside, and it was light enough to write.

The Italian spread the leaf upon the cover of the pocket-book, and wrote rapidly with the pencil.

Tom Merry did not see what he was writing, but he knew that it must be in Italian. He could not have read Italian, of course; but he did not say that to Marco Frulo.

The man was in a state of intense agitation, and Tom Merry wisely decided to let him do as he chose without contradiction.

The Italian wrote with feverish haste, in the clear and beautiful calligraphy which even uneducated Italians generally use. He finished, and folded the sheet in two.

"Take zat!" he said.

Tom Merry took the paper.

"Listen, zen," said Frulo, in a low voice. "I have write zere where it is zat ze money is. Capite?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, guessing the meaning of the word "capite" easily enough, "I understand."

"Zat is all mine—for I have il segreto—how you say—"

"The secret?"

"Si, si, signorino—ze secret, I have him from ze sailor who die in Leghorn. I zink I find him, but perche—perche—vat you say—perhaps zat demonio—zat Finn—he find me first—and he kill. Capite?"

"Yes; but—"

"But zen, I give him to you."

"The secret?"

"Si, si. If I no come to you vizin, say, four day—four day—quattro giorni—you say four day—"

"Yes, four days," said Tom Merry.

"In quattro giorni—four day—I come or I send; but if I do not, I give him to you, because zat you save my life, amico. If I do not come for him it is because zat I am dead. Capite? Zen he is yours, signorino, because you good friend to Marco Frulo. But for quattro giorni—four day—you no read—you no look at ze carta."

"I understand. If you do not ask for the paper back in four days, it belongs to me," said Tom Merry.

"Certo!"

"And I'm not to read it or look at it for four days?"

"Si, si!"

"I give you my word!" said Tom Merry.

"Buono, buono! I trust you. You are onesto ragazzo,"

NUMBER 2.

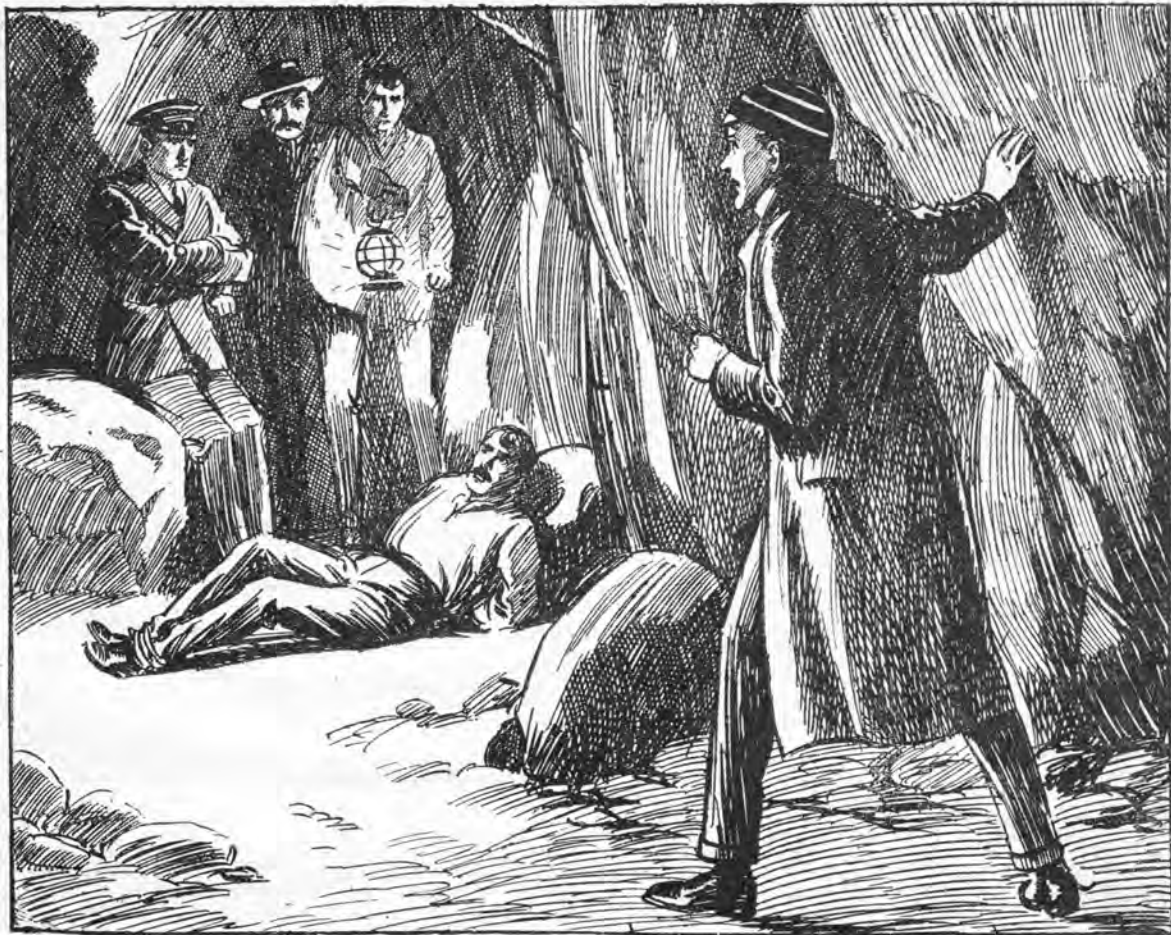
"THE GEM" LIBRARY PORTRAIT GALLERY.

No. 3. NEXT WEDNESDAY.

George Figgins, Frank Kerr, and Fatty Wynn.



1. ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY.
2. JACK BLAKE.
3. GEORGE HERRIES.



Tom Merry could see through into the interior; and as he peered through the twigs and leaves, a strange sight met his eyes. Marco Frulo lay upon the ground, bound hand and foot, while the Yankee was speaking! "I guess we've got you now, Marco Frulo!" (See Chapter 10.)

said Marco Frulo. "It may be I live—zen I send to you; ozzewise, you keep and you find! Zat is yours!"

"But I say—"

"Now I go—I fly! Zey look for me again—"

"But look here, I can't let you go away into danger like that," said Tom Merry, in great distress. "Why not let me take you to the police-station—"

Frulo shook his head.

"I go!" he answered. "You keep promise—you guard carta—ze paper—four giorni—zen he is yours if I no send. Now addio!"

"But look here—"

"Must go!"

"Hold on," said Tom Merry, "I've left in the wood the grub I brought for you, but I've got some money, if that's any good. Have you got money?"

The Italian shook his head.

"Leetle," he said. "Italian money."

"That won't be much good to you here," said the junior. "I'll give you all I've got—you can pay it back when you come for the paper, if you like. I've got nearly two pounds—it will help you on your way."

The Italian sailor took the money eagerly enough. Then he held out a dusky hand, and Tom Merry grasped it.

"If you will go, good luck to you," said Tom Merry. "And, mind, I'm keeping this paper for you, and even if you don't claim it in four days, I shall still consider it your property. Good-bye, and good luck!"

The Italian pressed his hand, and vanished into the darkness of the road.

Tom Merry stood watching him till he was gone. Then he turned his steps in the direction of St. Jim's, utterly amazed by the strange events of the night.

What was the paper the Italian seaman had given him?

From what the man had said, it was apparently the clue to some hidden hoard of money—somewhere in the isles and lagoons of Venice!

More likely it was some wild tale of a sailorman, which had deceived Marco Frulo—for he evidently believed what he said.

Yet the keen-faced American, Hiram Finn, must believe it, too, since this was the secret for which he was pursuing Frulo.

And Hiram Finn did not look the kind of man, certainly, to be taken in by a wild tale. He was cool and cunning and calculating, by no means the kind of man to be led away upon a wild-goose chase.

Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl as he hurried back to St. Jim's.

Would he ever see Marco Frulo again? If he did not, the paper was his—for what it was worth. Was it worth anything? he wondered.

The junior reached the old school. In a few minutes more he had climbed in at the window. He made his way silently to the Shell dormitory, and as he entered the voice of Monty Lowther fell upon his ears:

"Well, where have you been?"

CHAPTER 12.

Caught in the Act!

TOM MERRY started.

He had left his chums fast asleep in the Shell dormitory in the School House when he left the dorm.; and Monty Lowther's voice startled him, coming suddenly in the darkness. He had expected to find all the fellows asleep as he had left them.

"Where have you been, Tommy, you ass?"

It was Manners' voice this time. Both the members of the Co. were awake.

"Shut up!" murmured Tom Merry. "Don't wake the whole giddy school."

"You've been out?"

"Yes."

"Breaking bounds?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"For about two hours," said Tom Merry, with a chuckle. It was a humorous reply in Monty Lowther's own style, but it did not please Monty Lowther just then.

"Oh, don't be funny!" he growled. "Look here, you've broken bounds, and if a prefect had caught you you'd have got into trouble. We're not having it, are we, Manners?"

"No fear!" said Manners.

"You got into trouble once through keeping secrets from your pals," said Lowther. "We're not having any more of it."

"Don't jaw, old chap; you'll wake the dorm."

"I'll wake the whole blessed House if you don't explain," said Monty Lowther determinedly. "I tell you we're not standing it."

"Not a little tiny bit," said Manners.

"I can't explain now—the fellows will wake up," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "But I'll tell you in the morning. The secret isn't a secret any longer—not from you two, anyway. The man's gone."

"Well, that's better," said Lowther. "So you had to keep a secret about a man who was in hiding here somewhere, and now he's gone it's not a secret?"

"That's it."

"I'm afraid you've been getting mixed up in something fishy, all the same," said Lowther, "and I'm not going to wait till morning, for one."

"Same here," said Manners.

"Hallo!" came a sleepy voice from Crooke's bed.

"Who's that jawing?"

"There's Crooke waking up," said Tom Merry, in low tones. "Do shut up, you fellows! We don't want all the Shell to get on to it."

"Shurrup, and let a chap go to sleep!" mumbled Crooke. "You're going to explain to-night," said Monty Lowther calmly. "If you don't want to jaw here, we'll come down to the study."

"But I say—"

"There or here—take your choice."

"You are an obstinate ass, Monty! Come down to the study, then."

Monty and Lowther turned out of bed and quietly slipped into their clothes. Then the Terrible Three left the dormitory. There was a scuttling sound in the passage, and the chums of the Shell paused in alarm.

"There's somebody about!" muttered Lowther.

"Only a rat," said Tom Merry. "I heard the same sound when I came out of the dorm. Buck up, and don't make a row."

The chums of the Shell descended quietly to the study. The House was very still and silent. Tom Merry lighted the gas, turning on a mere glimmer so that the juniors could just see one another. Lowther closed the door carefully.

"Now then; the giddy history of the mystery!" said Manners.

Tom Merry explained concisely.

His promise to the Italian, of course, was only in force so long as the man was remaining hidden in the cave in the Poncher's Glade. Now that Marco Frulo had taken to flight there was no need of further secrecy. Tom Merry explained to his amazed chums the meeting with the Italian in the cave during the scout run in the afternoon, and his promise to take him food. The chums of the Shell listened with still keener interest to Tom Merry's account of that night's strange happenings.

"My only hat!" said Lowther at last. "Sounds like a giddy romance. You're sure you didn't go sleep-walking, Tommy, and dream it all?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes, I'm sure. I've got the paper."

"A giddy treasure!" said Manners thoughtfully. "Most likely it's some sailor's yarn with nothing in it."

"I shouldn't wonder; but this man Frulo believes in it—and that Yankee, Finn, must believe in it; he was running a lot of risk doing what he did to get hold of Frulo. He wouldn't do that for nothing. I heard him say that it was worth a hundred thousand dollars."

"Quite a tidy little sum," grinned Lowther; "and it belongs to this man Frulo. But if he doesn't come back for the paper—"

"Then it's mine," said Tom Merry, with a smile. "Not that it would ever be of any use to me. We couldn't get so far as Venice on a half-holiday to look for it."

"Ha, ha! No."

"Of course I shall keep my word, and not look at the paper for three days," said Tom Merry. "After that, if Frulo doesn't turn up, I shall read it, and take a copy of it in case of accidents. But I sha'n't regard it as my property."

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Frulo might change his mind afterwards—if the poor chap gets clear away—and want it back; and I shouldn't dream of sticking to it. I can't really think that his life is in danger—that's rather too thick, you know. He can have his document again when he wants it. And we'll keep the secret among ourselves. And Gussy, of course, Gussy's in it."

"Where's the paper?"

Tom Merry took the paper from his pocket.

It was folded so that the writing could not be seen. The chums of the Shell looked at the paper with great curiosity. Through the paper some trace of the writing could be seen, but it could not be read without unfolding it; and that, of course, the juniors never thought of doing.

"Well, take care of that," said Lowther. "Even if it's all moonshine it's jolly interesting, and I want to read that paper when the time's up. Did he write it in English?"

"He couldn't have. He doesn't know English."

Lowther whistled.

"My hat! Have you got a giddy document in Italian, then?"

"I suppose so."

"Then you won't be able to read it yourself."

"No, I couldn't read it. But we can get it translated somehow. Lots of chaps know Italian. Young Brooke, of the Fourth, does; about the only fellow at St. Jim's who does, I fancy. He goes in for languages, you know. Brooke's a good sort. He'd translate it for us, and keep mum, if we asked him. But, of course, I'm going to put it away safely till the four days are up."

"Mind Levison & Co. don't get on the track of it," said Manners. "Levison wouldn't stop short of boning it. He's jolly curious about that man in the wood already."

Tom Merry sniffed.

"The rotter! He won't get on to this, though. I—What on earth are you doing, Monty?"

Monty Lowther had risen to his feet, and was stepping cautiously on tiptoe to the door. Monty Lowther had not forgotten that scuttling sound in the dormitory passage, and he had very sharp ears, and a slight sound outside the study had awakened his suspicions. He opened the door suddenly.

The figure of a junior kneeling outside was revealed.

It was Levison, of the Fourth.

He had evidently been kneeling there, listening at the key-hole to the talk of the Terrible Three. So taken by surprise was he by the sudden opening of the door that he remained kneeling where he was for some seconds, staring blankly into the study.

Tom Merry's face darkened with anger. Lowther made a spring at the cad of the Fourth. Levison leaped up then, and would have darted away; but Monty Lowther's grasp was upon him, and he was whirled into the study.

Levison was sent whirling across the room, and brought up, gasping, against the opposite wall. Lowther closed the door again.

Levison stood gasping and panting and glaring at the chums of the Shell. He had been caught in the act, and lying would not save him now. And his looks were very apprehensive.

"You cad!" said Tom Merry. "You were listening."

Levison panted, but did not speak.

"What are you doing out of your dorm. at this time of night, Levison?" asked Monty Lowther quietly. "You see he's dressed, you chaps—even to his necktie?"

"And he's been out," said Manners. "Look at his boots and his bags."

There was no doubt about it. Levison's boots were stained with the mud of the woodland paths, and his trousers were damp with dew. The cad of the Fourth had been out, that was clear, and the Terrible Three were not long in guessing how matters stood.

"You've been out, Levison?" asked Tom Merry grimly.

"What if I have?" said Levison defiantly. "I suppose I can break bounds as well as you?"

"You knew I was going, and you followed me?"

"I didn't."

"Have you been in the wood?"

"No."

"Then where did you pick up that mud?"

Levison was silent.

"You followed me," said Tom Merry. "I know now. It was you I heard in the passage when I got out of the dorm. I thought it was another kind of rat. And you came in before me, and you've been hanging about watching for me in case you could find out anything more. You've been listening to all that we've been saying."

"I've heard it all," said Levison sullenly. "You know I have, so there's no good denying it. You shouldn't have secrets if you don't want 'em to be found out. I meant to get to the bottom of it, and I've done it. And I can tell

you you'd get into a jolly row if the Head knew what you've been doing this night."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"You're a rotten cad!" he said. "You've found it all out, but I don't see that it will do you any good. If you tell the fellows, they'll only think you're romancing; and they know you to be a liar. I've a jolly good mind to give you a hiding now, though, for spying on me."

"If you lay a finger on me, I'll yell and wake up the whole House," said Levison, between his teeth. "Then you can explain to the Housemaster what you're doing out of the dorm."

"You cad!" muttered Manners.

"Look here," said Levison, "there's no need for us to quarrel. That paper you've got is valuable. I'm quite willing to keep the secret, and to go Co. with you. I saw that Yankee chap Finn in the wood, and I know jolly well that he's not the kind of man to get after a thing unless there was money in it. There's money in this. That paper you've got might make us all rich. I'm willing to go Co., and keep the secret. I can get it translated for you tomorrow."

"If you've heard what I've been saying, you know that I've promised not to look at it for four days," said Tom Merry.

Levison grinned.

"Of course, that's all rot!" he said. "If there's a fortune in it, I don't see any sense in giving the paper back to that Italian chap. We've got it now, and we can keep it. I'll get it translated, and if there's any money to be got, we can get at it. If Frulo comes back you can denounce him as an impostor, and kick him out."

Tom Merry looked steadily at the cad of the Fourth.

"I won't hit you, Levison," he said, "because I don't want to make a row at this time of night. But get out of this room; you make me ill."

"Then you won't—"

"Get out!"

"I think you're a fool!" said Levison savagely. "I think—"

Tom Merry made a movement towards him, and Levison hurriedly departed from the study. The Terrible Three exchanged glances.

"That rotten knows the whole story now," said Lowther.

"He will be trying to get hold of that paper, Tom."

"The cad! I'll take care of it. Let's get back to bed."

The chums of the Shell returned to their dormitory. Tom Merry slept with the precious paper in his pocket-book under his pillow for the rest of that night.

CHAPTER 13.

Levison Means Business.

CLANG! Clang! Clang!

Tom Merry yawned and sat up in bed as the rising-bell clanged out in the fresh morning air.

Morning sunlight gleamed in at the high windows of the Shell dormitory in the School House.

Tom Merry did not feel so fresh as usual that morning. He had had very little sleep the previous night, and the excitement had told upon him, too. He would have been glad enough of an extra couple of hours in bed.

As he turned out, he wondered for a moment whether it had all been a dream—his visit to the cave in the wood, and the strange adventures that had befallen him. In the clear light of dawn, in the familiar surroundings of the dormitory, the whole adventure seemed strange, bizarre, improbable.

He felt under his pillow and took out the pocket-book, and glanced at the paper in it to make sure that it was there. It was there, safe enough, folded as he had left it. It was no dream! There was the clue, such as it was, to the supposed treasure of the Italian sailorman. Tom Merry put the pocket-book into an inside pocket as he dressed. In the cool light of day he was less inclined than ever to believe that there was anything in it; but for honour's sake he was bound to take every care of that paper until Marco Frulo either reclaimed it or the four days had elapsed.

Tom Merry was rubbing his eyes as he left the Shell dormitory. He felt the loss of sleep, and he was very drowsy. But a run in the keen air in the quadrangle enlivened him. The first person he met there was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form. D'Arcy was down very early, very eager to know what had happened to the captain of the Shell on the previous night.

"Was it all wight, deah boy?" he asked, as he joined Tom Merry in the quadrangle.

Tom Merry shook his head.

"No; it was all black," he replied.

"Eh! I asked you if it was all wight last night?" said D'Arcy, puzzled.

"And I answered that it was all black," said Tom Merry seriously. "How could you expect it to be all white on a dark night?"

"You uthah ass!" said Arthur Augustus. "I said all wight—not all white. Pway don't give me any of Monty Lowthah's secondhand gags, deah boy. Did you go to the cave?"

"Of course I did!"

"Then tell me what happened, and don't make wotten fivulous jokes, deah boy."

Tom Merry laughed, and told Arthur Augustus what had happened. The swell of St. Jim's listened with the keenest interest.

"Bai Jove! It sounds like a story!" he said. "I twust you've got that papah quite safe, Tom Mewwy."

"Quite safe!"

"If you can't look at it for four days, that will be Monday," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It will be wisky cawwyin' it about for four days with that cad Levison on the track. I think you had better twust it to me, Tom Mewwy."

"Go hon!"

"Well, it's wisky, you know, and it wequires a fellow of tact and judgment to take pwopah care of it," said D'Arcy, with a shake of the head. "You had better place it in my hands."

"Rats!" said Tom Merry cheerfully.

"Levison will be twyin' to get at it. Pwaywaps the best thing, first of all, would be to give Levison a feahful thwashin'. I twust you will be weasonable about that papah, Tom Mewwy. Suppose you leave it in your jacket when you change for cwicket, for instance, Levison is quite cad enough to sneak it, and wead it, you know."

"I know he is!"

"Then pway hand it ovah to me."

"Rodents!" said Tom Merry.

"What! What do you mean by wodents, you ass?"

"I mean rats!" explained Tom Merry.

"Weally, you ass—"

"Hallo, there's the bell for brekker," said Tom Merry; and he walked away towards the School House.

"I suppose I can tell Blake and the west about it now, Tom Mewwy?" said D'Arcy, hurrying after him. "They have been wowwyin' me fwithfully about keepin' a secret, you know. No harm in tellin' them the whole stowy now."

"None at all, Gussy! You can relieve their little minds now."

And Tom Merry went in to breakfast.

Before going to the Form-room for lessons, Tom Merry locked the precious paper up in his desk in his study. He felt that it would be safe there. During morning lessons he was thinking a great deal about the Italian sailorman. What had happened to Marco Frulo? Had the man succeeded in escaping?

It was most likely, for he had a good start of his enemies, and they could not know in which direction he had gone. Tom Merry hoped sincerely that Frulo had succeeded in getting away—though he could not think that the man's life was really threatened. He felt that Hiram Finn, unscrupulous ruffian as he was, would stop short of that crime. If the man had escaped, he would only have to write to Tom Merry for the paper. He knew the boy's name, and where he lived. If he did not write or come, would it mean that he had been kidnapped by the Yankee, and could not; or—There was always the darker possibility. Tom Merry drove that thought from his mind. But he was very much preoccupied during morning lessons, and Mr. Linton gave him lines twice.

After lessons, Tom Merry expected that he would find the story of the Italian talked of among all the juniors. He had not expected Levison to keep his own counsel in the matter. Tom Merry did not intend to answer any questions on the subject. But he was relieved to find that none were asked. Levison had kept silent. Doubtless he had confided the matter to his chum Mellich, but they were not spreading it about the House. Levison undoubtedly had his own reasons for holding his tongue.

The Shell were dismissed about five minutes later than the Fourth that morning. After chatting in the passage for a few minutes, Tom Merry went up to his study for his cricket bat.

The study door was closed, and as he opened it there was the sound of a quick movement in the room. Tom Merry knew that Manners and Lowther were downstairs, and the thought of Levison came into his mind in a moment. He entered the study quickly.

"You cad!"

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WEDNESDAY: "THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS!" A Magnificent, Long Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Levison was standing over his desk, which was open. Tom Merry's eyes blazed with anger as he looked at him.

"Levison, you rotter!"

Levison backed away.

"Hands off!"

"You rotten cad! You are trying to steal that paper!"

"I—I—"

"Have you found it?"

"No, I haven't!" growled Levison. "I—I didn't want to take it. I only wanted to read it—just out of curiosity."

"I'll teach you not to be so curious in my study, you cad!"

"Hands off!" yelled Levison.

But Tom Merry's grasp was upon him.

He whirled the cad of the Fourth to the door, Levison struggling fiercely in his grip.

Bump!

Levison flew through the doorway, and landed in the passage outside with a terrific concussion.

"Ow! Ow! Grooh!"

Biff! Biff! Biff!

Tom Merry's boot made rapid play upon the sprawling junior, and Levison picked himself up and ran.

Tom Merry, with a flush in his face after his exertions, turned back into the study.

He hurried to his desk.

The paper had been placed in a secret drawer where Tom Merry kept the funds of the junior cricket club.

Tom opened the drawer; the paper was still there, quite safe! Levison had not succeeded in finding it; but Tom Merry took the paper out again. The secret drawer would have baffled a casual search; but if Levison had time, he would unearth it, Tom Merry felt sure of that. The Shell fellow put the precious paper in his pocket again, and, picking up his cricket-bat, left the study.

CHAPTER 14.

Blake's Little Wheeze.

JACK BLAKE grinned at Tom Merry as he came out of the School House. Blake and Herries and Digby were in full possession of the secret now.

"Been having some trouble with Levison?" he asked. "I heard a bump—"

"Yaas, wathah, and Levison was cwawlin' away as if he was hurt!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

"The cad was at the desk in my study," he said. "I had locked the paper up there. He was after it. I chucked him out!"

"Good for you," said Blake. "He didn't get the paper?"

"No; that's safe."

"I have already remarked that the papah will be safah in my keepin', Tom Mewwy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"And I have already remarked rats!" said Tom Merry politely.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"I'm going to carry the paper round with me now," said Tom Merry. "It won't be safe in the desk, or anywhere else I can put it. Levison will be bound to nose it out."

Jack Blake chuckled.

"Kids, gentlemen, and fatheads," he said. "I've got an idea—a wheeze for pulling the esteemed leg of our friend Levison, and keeping him off the scent. That paper's written in Italian, isn't it, Tommy?"

"Yes."

"Then Levison couldn't read it?"

"No; he could get it translated, though. There's an office in Wayland where they do translations—it doesn't cost much."

"Good! Now, my idea is to let Levison have that paper—"

"What?"

"Not exactly that paper, but another paper like it," explained Blake, lowering his voice, and with a cautious glance round. "If he wants a paper written in Italian, why shouldn't he have one? Any old paper will do."

Tom Merry laughed.

"But I can't write in Italian," he said. "I could make up a spoof paper easily enough, if I knew Italian, but—"

"Tommy, my son," said Blake sorrowfully, "you are not up to snuff this morning. No need to know Italian to write in Italian."

"Weally, Blake, I don't see how a chap can w'ite in a language he doesn't know, you know," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Blessed if I see it, either," said Monty Lowther. "Perhaps Blake will condescend in his superior wisdom to explain."

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"Easy enough!" said Blake airily. "Have you ever heard of an apartment in the school where books and bookworms most do congregate?"

"Do you mean the school library, fathead?"

"Exactly. You've got it first shot," said Blake. "You're brightening up, Lowther. It shows what education will do for a chap."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" growled Lowther. "Get on with the wheeze, if you've got one, and let's get down to the cricket."

"Have you ever observed that there are books in the library?" asked Blake.

"I suppose so, fathead!"

"Among them the Head's volumes of Dante?"

"Dante?" said Herries. "Who's that?"

Blake gave his chum a pitying look.

"Dante was an Italian poet," he said. "He wrote a poem called the 'Divine Comedy'—I forget what it is called in Italian; in fact, I know only two Italian words myself—'ice cream.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Dante was a poet, and wrote poems and things—a jolly long poem. If they paid 'em by the thousand words in those days, he must have made a good thing out of it. I haven't read it myself," said Blake. "But I've heard that it's a great work—one of those great works everybody admires and nobody ever reads, you know. Well, the chief beauty of it is that it's in Italian, and if you want to write some Italian, all you've got to do is to get out a volume of Dante, and copy down the first verse, say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if Levison gets hold of the paper, he won't know, as he can't read Italian. He won't know he's been spoofed until he's paid for the translation—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry clapped Blake on the shoulder.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "Look here, you can go and get the paper ready, as Levison is keeping his eye on me. Let me have it after lessons."

"Good egg!" chuckled Blake.

And the chums of the School House grinned gleefully as they went down to the cricket. Levison and Mellish were watching them from a distance.

"Look at the rotters!" growled Levison. "They're going to keep that paper to themselves, if they can, and keep us out of it."

"Do you think there's anything in it?" asked Mellish sceptically.

"I know there is."

"Blessed if I see how you know!"

"I know because that man Hiram Finn is after it. He's a keen Yankee, and there's no nonsense about him. He's after the dollars, and he's taking a lot of risks. It's not an easy thing to kidnap a man in England, and not safe, either. Hiram Finn might jolly easily find himself doing penal servitude for it. Do you think he would take all that risk for nothing? Of course he wouldn't! I don't know how the money got to be where it is, but I know jolly well that that Yankee firmly believes it's there to be taken, and he's taking big risks to get hold of it. That settles it for me! I believe whoever gets that paper gets a fortune."

"But it belongs to Tom Merry, doesn't it?" murmured Mellish.

Levison laughed scoffingly.

"Rot! It belongs to whoever gets hold of it. That chap Frulo got the secret from a sailor who died in Leghorn—how do we know it belonged to him? Or that Frulo was entitled to have it from him? If it wasn't his he couldn't give it to Tom Merry? In a case like this, when there's money hidden somewhere, it belongs to the chap who finds it, and if I could get hold of that paper, I'd have a try."

"But it wouldn't be in England," said Mellish.

"No; somewhere in Italy more likely."

"Well, you couldn't go to Italy!" said Mellish, with a stare.

"Why not?" said Levison coolly. "My father's got business connections in France and Italy, and he goes to Milan regularly every year. I could work it to go with him in one vacation. Of course, he wouldn't take any stock in a tale of this sort; he's too jolly hard-headed to listen to it. But I shouldn't tell him. I should pretend to be wanting to learn up the business, ready for the time when I'm old enough to take part in it—see? That would butter him up, and he'd take me—and in Italy I'd soon get hold of this money, if it's there. You bet!"

Mellish looked at his chum admiringly.

"Well, you're pretty deep," he said. "Only I'm in this with you, you know; you'd have to take me in as a partner."

Levison nodded.

"That's understood—we're sticking together. Think of

counting home rolling in money—richer than D'Arcy or Lumley-Lumley!"

Mellish's eyes gleamed.

"It would be ripping!" he said. "We've only got to get hold of that paper, that's all! We'd have a jolly good time if we got the money."

"What-ho!" said Levison.

The two unscrupulous young rascals walked down to the cricket-field. Tom Merry had not changed for practice, as there was so little time before dinner.

"He'll change after school," said Levison, in a whisper, "and he'll leave his jacket in the pavilion as sure as a gun. Then—"

"Good egg! Mum's the word!"

Tom Merry & Co. took apparently no notice of Levison as they came off the cricket-field. They went in to dinner. When the time came round for afternoon lessons, Jack Blake, who had disappeared from view for a considerable time, joined Tom Merry outside the Shell Form-room and slipped a paper into his hand.

Tom Merry nodded and grinned, and slipped the paper into his pocket without looking at it.

The incident passed quite unnoticed. Blake went on to his own Form-room, and Tom Merry went in with the Shell fellows.

Levison and Mellish waited impatiently for lessons to finish that afternoon. It seemed to them that Mr. Lathom would never have done. They had banished every scruple from their minds, if they had had any scruples, about getting possession of the paper. The thought of untold wealth to be had for the taking simply dazzled their minds. Neither of them was rich; both of them were covetous, and had expensive tastes. They thought of the figure they would cut at St. Jim's if they had money—of the new and pleasant respect with which they would be treated by a large number of the fellows, at least—of the splendid feeds they would stand—of the little gambling excursions to a certain public-house in the vicinity—of stolen visits to the races! The prospect was really dazzling to the two black sheep of the Fourth. With such joys in store if they could obtain possession of the precious paper, Levison and Mellish were not likely to stop short at anything.

The two young rascals were thinking of their schemes, to the exclusion of everything else in class, and several times they were called to order by Mr. Lathom, and Levison was cued at last for inattention.

But lessons were over at last, and they were released from the Form-room.

They did not go out into the quadrangle with the cheerful stream of juniors. They waited about in the passage till the Shell came out.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther and Kangaroo came out together, and walked into the quadrangle without a glance at Levison and Mellish.

The two Fourth Formers strolled after them.

"Come and get into your flannels, kids!" Levison heard Tom Merry say to his companions. "We're doing some practice with Figgins & Co. till tea."

Levison gave Mellish a quick look.

"He's going to change in the dorm," he said. "What a chance! Ten to one he won't think of taking the paper out of his pocket!"

"Good luck!"

Kangaroo and Lowther and Manners went upstairs. Tom Merry paused in the doorway of the School House, with a thoughtful expression on his face. Apparently he was quite oblivious of the fact that he was being observed by the spies of the school. He felt in his pocket, and took out a folded paper, and looked over it, and then, with a nod as of satisfaction, replaced it, and followed his chums.

"That's the paper!" muttered Levison.

"Seems mighty careful about it," said Mellish.

"I'll have it sooner or later, if I don't get it this time, but I fancy I shall get it. He won't think about a chap going through his pockets in his own dorm."

The cads of the Fourth waited in the quadrangle till the Shell fellows came out. Tom Merry and Manners, Lowther and Kangaroo, came out in flannels, with their bats under their arms, and walked away towards the cricket-ground.

"Now's the time!" murmured Levison.

"What-ho!"

"You wait at the end of the passage, and whistle if any Shell chap comes along. I'll go into the dorm."

"Right-ho!" said Mellish.

They hurried upstairs. Mellish posted himself at the end of the passage to keep watch; Levison ran on quickly to the Shell dormitory. He hurried in; his eyes gleamed as he saw Tom Merry's clothes lying carelessly on the junior's bed. Levison was at the bedside in a second, and his hand

was groping in the pocket in which he had seen the Shell fellow replace the paper.

Had Tom Merry left it there, or had he removed it to a place of safety? After Levison's attempt upon his desk, Tom Merry might have suspected. But no; here it was! Levison felt a paper crumple in his fingers. He drew it out; it was a sheet torn from a pocket-book, and folded in four. With trembling fingers he unfolded it, too eager to wait till he was safe out of the dormitory. He caught a few words—"nel mezzo del cammin"—it was evidently written in Italian. Levison did not wait to read more; he thrust the paper into his pocket, and hurried out of the dormitory.

He was panting with excitement when he rejoined Mellish at the end of the passage. Mellish gave him an eager look.

"Got it?" he breathed.

"Yes."

"Oh, good! Let's clear!"

And they cleared.

CHAPTER 15.

Not a Clue.

NOT until they were at a safe distance from the School House did the two young rascals pause. Levison led the way into the ruined chapel—a secluded spot, where they were not likely to be observed. Most of the fellows were out of gates, or on the playing-fields, in the fine weather. The two juniors stopped, breathless, in the ruins, and Mellish turned eagerly to his companion.

"You've really got it?"

"Yes."

"What splendid luck!"

"I shouldn't wonder if Tom Merry remembers it, and comes back to look for it in his pocket in the dorm.," said Levison, with a grin. "He'll be too late if he does."

"He'll guess who's had it."

"Let him guess! He can't make me give it up; he's got no proof. He wouldn't dare to complain to the Head, either. He can't own up that he broke bounds in the middle of the night, and got the paper from some Italian ruffian after a row. That isn't the kind of yarn he could tell Dr. Holmes."

"Ha, ha! No. Let's see the paper, though."

Levison drew the paper from his pocket. He unfolded it, and the two juniors looked at it eagerly. They could read it, but they could understand nothing of it, excepting that it was in Italian. It ran as follows:

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, che la diritta via era smarrita."

Levison drew a deep breath.

"It's Italian, right enough," he said.

"No doubt about that."

"I suppose you can't guess what it means?"

Mellish shook his head.

"No. Can you?"

"Blessed if I can!" said Levison ruefully. "Via means way—I know that. Selva must mean wood or forest, as it's so like the Latin word. Blessed if I can make out any more of it, though."

"Something about a way in a forest," said Mellish thoughtfully. "That's something to know. I suppose the money's buried in the forest, and this paper explains the way to it."

"Most likely," Levison examined the paper more carefully. "It's queer, but it seems to me that I've seen writing something like this before. It may be a copy that Tom Merry has taken. He said he was going to make a copy—"

"But he wasn't going to read the paper for four days."

Levison laughed scoffingly.

"Oh, that's all rot! He must have looked at it. Wouldn't you have?"

"I dare say I should. But Tom Merry has queer ideas, you know."

"Oh, rot! Come on; we've got to get this translated. Accidents happen, you know; and we've got to get it put into English, and learn it by heart, before we've had a chance of losing it."

"But who—"

"There's a business office in Wayland where they do type-writing and translating and all that kind of thing. They'll do this for us—charge us about two shillings."

"Got the two bob?" asked Mellish.

"It'll be a bob each!" said Levison pleasantly.

"Ahem!" said Mellish. "I—I'm rather hard up at present." Mellish was a decidedly business-like youth. The prospect of untold gold in the future did not make him willing to part with ever such a small sum of ready money in the present.

Levison grunted.

"You can stand your whack, or you can keep out of the biznez altogether," he said. "Take your choice."

"Well, I—I think I've got a bob," said Mellish reluctantly.

"Then dry up, and come on."

And the two juniors left the ruined chapel, and hurried down to the gates. Tom Merry and his friends were playing Figgins & Co., and had no eyes for them. There was a short cut through the wood to Wayland, but Levison did not take it. He had too lively a remembrance of his last night's adventure in the wood to want to enter it again, and he was by no means sure that Hiram Finn was not still in the vicinity.

The juniors walked down to Rylcombe Railway Station, and took the local train to Wayland—a further expense to which Mellish was compelled to contribute, with an inward groan.

The train stopped in Wayland Station, and they jumped out. Levison's excitement was almost breathless by this time.

"The place is near the station," he muttered. "We shan't be a few minutes now. Got your money ready? May have to pay first."

"Yes," growled Mellish.

"It may be more than two bob—"

"I've only got a bob!" said Mellish sullenly.

"Oh, rats!" said Levison, in disgust. "Come on! If there's anything in this, you mean toad, we're both going to be rich!"

"But if there isn't, it means that I'm stony until Saturday."

"Oh, rats!"

In a few minutes they were outside their destination. It was a new office, which had been quite lately opened in Wayland, next to the Hotel Royal. A sign outside announced that typewriting was done at a moderate charge, and that translations could be obtained without delay for an infinitesimal fee. Levison marched in, and found a bald-headed man in charge of the office, and a young lady sitting at a typewriter, which was clicking away at top speed.

"I want a—a letter translated, please," said Levison. "I suppose you can do it for me here?"

The bald-headed gentleman rubbed his hands.

"Certainly!" he said. "Translations made in any language while you wait—English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Hungarian, Turkish—"

"This letter is in Italian."

"Very good. That is my branch, and I can do it at once."

"How much do you charge?"

"Is it a long letter?" asked the bald-headed gentleman, looking at Levison over his gold-rimmed glasses.

"No; only a few lines."

"Two shillings."

Levison laid two shillings on the desk.

"Here's the letter," he said. "I want you to translate it into English, and give me a written copy, and say nothing about it afterwards. As a matter of fact, it is a bit of a secret, and—"

"Confidential matter may be confided to this office with the utmost reliance," said the bald-headed gentleman pompously.

"Well, here's the letter."

Levison spread the paper out on the desk gingerly enough. He did not like trusting anybody with the secret, but evidently he had to allow the paper to be read by the man who was to translate it for him.

The bald-headed gentleman adjusted his glasses, and looked at the paper. A change came over his face as he read the lines. He glanced curiously at Levison, and then glanced at the paper again.

Levison trembled with excitement.

The translator had evidently been struck by what he had read on the paper.

"You can read it?" said Levison eagerly.

"Yes, certainly."

"Then translate it for me."

"Quite easily; but I do not understand—"

"No need for you to understand it," said Levison. "It's just a thing you're to translate, and then you can forget all about it. See?"

"I understood you to say that it was a letter you wished translated—"

"Never mind whether it's a letter or not."

"But are you sure you have given me the right paper?"

"Yes, yes!"

"It is extraordinary that you should bring me these lines to translate," said the bald-headed gentleman, as he picked up the two shillings and slipped them into his waistcoat-pocket.

"However, as you have paid for the translation, I have no objection whatever to making it. It happens also that I know the lines by heart."

Levison jumped.

"You—you what—"

The bald-headed gentleman smiled genially.

"I suppose that everyone who knows Italian has read these lines," he said. "Even those who have not read the whole of Dante, have generally read the first verses, if they know the language."

Levison staggered.

"Dante! Who's Dante? What are you talking about?"

The bald-headed gentleman stared at him in surprise.

"Did you not know that these lines are from Dante?" he asked.

"From—from—from Dante?" stammered Levison.

"Certainly. If you did not know it, why did you come here to have them translated?"

"I—I— Look here, don't you try to fool me!" exclaimed Levison. "Tell me what those lines mean. I've paid for a translation."

"With pleasure. 'Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita—'"

"Well, what does that mean?"

"That means 'In the middle of the journey of our life—'"

"Oh! Get on!"

"Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura, che la diritta via era smarrita. That means—'I found myself in a dark wood where the right way was lost.'"

Levison stared blankly at the translator. He could not doubt his statement. A wild idea had come into his mind for a moment that the bald-headed gentleman had learned the secret of the treasure from the paper, and wanted to keep it for himself. But that was evidently not the case. The translator pushed the paper back towards Levison, wrote out a translation, and handed that to the dazed schoolboy.

"Good-afternoon!" he said blandly.

Levison staggered rather than walked out of the office. Mellish followed him in silence. Mellish's look was most unpleasant. In the street again, Levison clenched his hands and ground his teeth with rage.

"The first verse of a rotten poem by Dante!" he muttered thickly. "And we've come over here and paid two bob to have 'em translated! Oh!"

"You can let me have my bob back," said Mellish. "I wasn't going to pay for any foolery like that. I suppose that Italian chap was taking Tom Merry in, and planting a rotten joke on him; and you've been taken in, too."

Levison snorted.

"You silly ass! Can't you see that this isn't the right paper? Tom Merry has fooled us. I wondered he was so careless as to leave it in his pocket after changing. It's a spoof paper, to pull our leg!"

"Oh!"

"Hang him!" said Levison, between his teeth. "I'll have the right paper yet—hang him! I'll get hold of it somehow. What are you sniffing at, you rotter?"

"Oh, I'm fed up with the blessed thing!" said Mellish.

"I don't believe there's anything in it; and I want my bob!"

Levison glared at him for a moment, and then, putting all his rage and disappointment into one blow, he knocked Mellish down. Mellish fell on the pavement with a yell, and Levison thrust his hands into his pockets and strode away.

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CHAPTER 16. Too Much Italian!

TOM MERRY & Co. were lounging in the old gateway of St. Jim's when Levison came back from Wayland. Levison came back alone, Mellish having parted company with him; there was a rift now between the two cads of the Fourth. Levison was looking sullen and savage as he came tramping up the road; and Tom Merry & Co. smiled as they saw him. Undoubtedly he had had the translation made, and had had the inestimable benefit of learning the first lines of Dante's great poem.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry genially. "Nel mezzo del cammin—"

"Di nostra vita!" chuckled Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison looked at them with a savage scowl.

"Did you see anybody go to my dorm. after I changed my clothes there, Levison?" asked Tom Merry blandly. "I've missed a paper from my jacket-pocket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'd know it if you saw it, Levison; it was written in Italian, and it began—'Nel mezzo del cammin—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison thrust his way through the crowd of juniors, and stalked on towards the School House, followed by a yell of laughter.

"Bai Jove! I wegard this as funpay!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Fancy that silly ass goin' ovah to Wayland to have some lines of a poem by Dante translated! Ha, ha, ha! There is a twanslation in the libwawy if he wanted one."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you have still got the owiginal papah quite safe, Tom Mewwy."

"Quite safe, thanks!"

"You don't think that you had bettah twust it into my hands?"

"No, thanks!"

"Fwightfully obstinate chap you are, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "Howevah, I wash my hands of the mattah now, and I wefuse to be responsible if you lose it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, all take note that Gussy isn't responsible for Tom Merry's actions, any more than he is for his own!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison had tramped into the School House. He went up to his study in a furious temper, and kicked the door open. Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth, who shared that study with Levison and Mellish, was there. He looked up with a grin at Levison.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

Levison scowled.

"Joke! What joke? What are you talking about?"

"Well, you don't look very jokey, that's a fact," said Lumley-Lumley, with a cool stare at Levison's scowling face. "But I suppose it's a joke. Lowther left this for you. He said it was to be given to you when you came in, so here it is. Blessed if I know what it means! I suppose it's some more of his funny bizney."

He pushed a newspaper across the table to Levison. Levison looked at it. In a column of advertisements, one was scored round thickly in pencil. The advertisements ran:

"Lessons in foreign languages, French, Italian, etc. Lectures on Dante and the Early Italian Poets."

It was an advertisement of a professor in Wayland. Levison looked at it, and gritted his teeth. He crumpled the paper up in his hand, and hurled it into the fire with a savage exclamation.

Lumley-Lumley stared at him in astonishment.

"I guess it is a joke, and it's up against you," he remarked. "What the dickens—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Are you taking up Italian as a study?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, I must say you're civil," said Lumley-Lumley. "Has it ever occurred to you that you might get a thick ear for talking like that?"

"Oh, hold your fool tongue!" shouted the exasperated Levison.

Lumley-Lumley jumped up.

"My hat! I'll hold your fool ear, more likely—"

Levison whipped out of the study. He did not want a fight with Lumley-Lumley. That junior hurled a book after him and slammed the door.

Levison stamped down the passage in a more towering rage than ever. Reilly, of the Fourth, met him in the passage, and stopped him.

"Oh, here you are, Levison; sure I've been looking for you! I've got it."

Levison glared at him.

"Got what, you fathead?"

"Sure, ye're polite to a chap who's done you a favour, must say!" said Reilly, in astonishment. "Sure, I've asked Mr. Railton, and I've got the permit for you."

"Permit! What permit?"

"To study the Italian books in the school library—"

"What!" yelled Levison.

"Sure Lowther said—"

"Lowther! Hang Lowther!"

"Hang me if you like, me darling, but he said you were taking up the study of Dante, and would I ask Mr. Railton for a permit for you to have out the Italian books, so—Faith, and phwat's the matter with him entirely?" concluded Reilly, as Levison stamped furiously away down the passage.

D'Arcy minor, of the Third, was in the lower hall, and as soon as he saw Levison he ran towards him, holding out a paper.

"Here, this is yours, Levison," he said.

Levison, in surprise, took the paper.

"Blake gave it to me. He said it belonged to you, and asked me to find you and hand it to you," said Wally. And he walked away.

Levison looked at the paper. Upon it were scrawled the words he was beginning to know by heart:

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita.

"Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura.

"Che la dritta via era smarrita!"

Levison tore up the paper and stamped away. But he controlled the rage in his face, as he met Mr. Railton in the passage. Mr. Railton signed to him to approach, and Levison calmed himself with an effort. The School House master did not have a high opinion of Levison; but his manner was unusually kindly at the present moment.

"Ah, Levison," he said, "I hear you are taking up the study of Italian—"

Levison almost exploded.

"I have given Reilly the permit necessary for you to take out the Italian books in the library," said Mr. Railton.

"He has given it to you?"

"N-no—yes."

"I wish you every success in your new study, Levison. You are a very clever boy when you choose to work, and the study of Italian is very valuable and very enlightening, and you will find it very useful when you are older. I am very glad to see that you are changing your idle habits, Levison, and putting your spare time to such a good use."

"Th-th-thank you, sir!" stammered Levison.

And he went out into the quadrangle, white with rage, in an almost murderous temper.

CHAPTER 17. The Document.

TOM MERRY did not run any further risk with the precious paper. After a great deal of thought on the matter, he sewed it up in a corner of his handkerchief, and kept that handkerchief always in his pocket. Levison was not likely to look there for it; and he would have had no chance of getting hold of it if he had looked. But Levison seemed to have lost some of his interest in the matter now. He was growing "fed up" on the subject of Italian.

The next day passed, and the next, and Tom Merry did not hear anything of Marco Frulo. He wondered a great deal about the man, and what had become of him.

On Saturday afternoon the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's had another run in the wood, and Tom Merry & Co. visited the earthen cave in the Poacher's Glade.

But in the cave, and the wood, they did not find any signs of the strangers who had been there on the previous Wednesday. Marco Frulo was gone, and Hiram Finn and his followers had gone, too—perhaps in pursuit of the Italian, or perhaps having given up the chase.

Tom Merry thought a good deal about the Italian sailor-man, to whom he had taken a liking in their short acquaintance.

If he did not hear from Marco Frulo by Monday, he was to read the paper.

Then, according to what the Italian had said, the secret would be his—if it was worth anything. But Tom Merry did not take that too seriously. He was very doubtful whether there was anything in the story at all; and if there proved to be a treasure, he would still regard it as belonging to Marco Frulo, if the Italian ever came back to make his claim. If his enemies were close on his track, the Italian might go into hiding, and not be able to reclaim the paper for weeks—and then Tom Merry would be perfectly prepared to give it

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 275.

to him. But there would be no harm in reading it, when the four days had elapsed—and he was very keen to know what it contained.

Sunday passed without news of the Italian.

On Monday morning Tom Merry inquired eagerly for letters. There was one for him, but it was from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess. That was all.

"Nothing from the giddy Dago?" Monty Lowther remarked.

"Nothing," said Tom Merry.

"Then you read the paper to-day?"

"Yes, if I don't hear from him to-day."

"Give him a chance till after lessons," said Manners.

Tom Merry nodded.

"That's what I thought," he said.

He thought a great deal about the paper that day. Glad enough he would have been to receive a letter or a telegram from Marco Frulo, to say that he was safe. But no word came.

After lessons that day Tom Merry's chums gathered round him eagerly as he came out of the Form-room. Manners and Lowther, and Blake and Herries and Digby, were equally eager to see the precious paper.

"Time!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Are you sure you've still got the papah safe, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously. "I have been feelin' vewy uneasy about it."

"I've got it tied up in my handkerchief—sewn up, in fact," said Tom Merry.

"Have you had it sewn up there all the time?"

"All the time!" said Tom.

"Bai Jove! Must have been a feahful twial for you, not to change your handkerchief for four days, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus sympathetically.

"Ass! I've had two handkerchiefs—one with the paper sewn up in it, and the other not," said Tom Merry. "The paper's safe as houses. If you fellows want to see it—"

"What-ho!"

"Come up to my study, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about getting it translated?" said Blake. "The only chap I know who knows Italian, is Brooke, of our Form."

"Brooke's the chap I was thinking of," said Tom Merry. "He'll do it for us, like a shot. He's always an obliging chap."

"But he's a giddy day boy, and he'll be gone," said Blake anxiously. "My hat! If he's gone home, we shall have to wait till to-morrow for the translation."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"Look for him, then," said Tom Merry quickly. "If he's started home, collar him and bring him back. Tell him it's important, and carry him if necessary. He's got to come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Herries ran away in search of Brooke, of the Fourth. Dick Brooke was a day boy, and he generally went straight home after lessons. Brooke had the peculiar distinction at St. Jim's of being the only boy there who earned his own living—doing his work in the evening after getting home from school, and on half-holidays. In spite of that, however, he found time for many studies the other boys had no time for. Still, he was not what the fellows called a swot, being always ready to take part in the sports—though, as he was already beginning to suffer a little from short sight, he was not of so much use in the cricket-field as he had once been. But Brooke, much as he had to do, could always be relied upon to help anybody out; and Tom Merry knew that he would work the translation willingly enough, and could be depended upon to keep the secret afterwards if necessary.

The Terrible Three proceeded to their study, with D'Arcy and Digby, while Blake and Herries went in search of their fellow-Former.

Levison watched them in the passage, with a scowl. Monty Lowther paused to make a pleasant remark to him.

"Getting on all right with the study of Italian, Levison?" he inquired. And the juniors grinned.

"Go and eat coke!" growled Levison.

"Nel mezzo del cammin—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Levison. "Look here, Tom Merry, to-day's Monday—"

"Thanks. I saw in the calendar that it was," said Tom Merry.

"I mean the four days are up!"

"Go hon!"

"You haven't read the paper yet?" asked Levison.

"Are you asking for a thick ear?"

"Well, if you haven't, I suppose you're going to read it to-day?" said Levison.

"Yes, we're just going to."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 275.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
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"Will you let me see it?"

"No, I won't!" said Tom Merry promptly.

"I'd like to see it," said Levison. "Look here—"

"You're jolly well not going to," said Tom Merry coolly. "It doesn't concern you in the least. You wouldn't know anything about the paper at all, if you hadn't spied and listened like a rotter."

"If you want something to fill up your spare time, Levison, and it must be Italian, I should recommend Dante!" said Monty Lowther solemnly. "You'll find the first verses of the 'Inferno' very good; they begin—'Nel mezzo del cammin—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Levison swung away scowling. The grinning juniors entered Tom Merry's study, and he took out the handkerchief in which the precious paper was sewn up. The fellows stood round the table and watched him eagerly. Tom Merry snipped through the threads with his penknife, and took the paper out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and regarded it with great interest.

"Bai Jove! Now we're gettin' to it!" he remarked.

Tom Merry hesitated as he held the paper in his fingers.

"I suppose we can read this?" he said. "I mean, get it translated. It's doing the fair thing by poor old Frulo, isn't it?"

"I think so," said Manners. "He told you plainly what you could do. It's horrible to think that he may have been done in—"

"I don't think that's likely. I heard Finn talking, you know, and he had made his arrangements for kidnapping Frulo, and taking him to Venice to make him point out where the money was buried. Finn knows nothing at all about this paper having been written; he can't even suspect its existence. If Frulo hasn't got away, I suppose he's a prisoner in that rascal's hands—may even be on his way to Venice with them. Finn was a sea-captain, from what I could make out, and had a schooner at Southampton. Look here, you fellows, if Frulo's been kidnapped, and taken to Italy, to be forced to point out where the tin is, the best thing we can do for him is to read this paper. Then if there's anything in it, we may be able to get some of our people to take it up, and look for the stuff, and get it into safety before that Yankee can get his claws on it."

"Good egg!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! We might go and look for it ourselves," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You wemembah we did go on a treasure hunt once—though it ended in wathah a fwoat. I should be vewy pleased to take you youngstahs to Venice, if we could get permish fwom the Head and fwom our patahs—"

"Good wheeze for the vac., if we could go," said Digby. "Lots of fellows go to Italy for the vacation. So why shouldn't we?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, let's look at the paper," said Lowther. "We can't read it until young Brooke gets here, but we can have a squint at it."

"Yaas, I am weally cuwious about it, deah boy."

Tom Merry opened out the paper. The writing upon it, in pencil, was easy enough to read; the agitated hand of the Italian had scored the lines deep. And this, as the juniors looked at the strange document, was what they read:

"La cassa di danaro e sepolta fra le rovine della capella di Santa Maria dell'isola, presso Burano, nella grande laguna di Venezia. La pietra e segnata d'una croce rossa."

"MARCO FRULO."

"Well, my only summer chapeau!" said Monty Lowther. "What does it mean?"

"Ask me another!"

"Yaas; I can't wead it," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, scanning the document through his famous monocle. "I can see that it's good Italian, and I can make out some words. 'Capella' is a chapel, and 'cassa' is a box, and 'Burano' is an island near Venice, deah boys. 'Cwoce wossa' means a wed cwoos."

"'Croce rossa'—red cross," said Tom Merry. "Good! We're getting on. But what does the whole bizney mean?"

"I weally don't know."

"Where's that ass Blake? Why doesn't he bring Brooke—"

"Here they come!"

CHAPTER 18.

The Great Secret.

BROOKE, of the Fourth, had just passed out of the gates of St. Jim's when Blake and Herries sighted him and bore down on him.

"Brooke!" roared Blake.

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Every Friday.

Dick Brooke turned his head. He paused as he saw the two juniors dashing after him at top speed.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he gasped.

"You're wanted!" gasped Blake.

"Oh! What have I done now?"

"Ha, ha! It's not a master wants you; it's us!" said Blake, linking his arm in Brooke's. "You're wanted in Tom Merry's study."

Brooke shook his head.

"You must excuse me, you fellows. I've got some work to do—"

"No excuses allowed," said Blake. "Come on!"

"But, I say—"

"It isn't a tea-fight," explained Herries. "We want you to help us with a translation, that's all. We won't keep you long."

"Oh, all right!" said Brooke cheerfully.

And he returned to the School House with the Fourth-Formers. Blake and Herries marched him up to Tom Merry's study.

Levison was still in the passage in a curious and uneasy frame of mind. He seemed to be unable to drag himself away from the vicinity of the Italian document, though he certainly had no chance now of seeing it. He made an appeal to Blake as the juniors passed him.

"I say, Blake, old man—"

"Hallo! How long have I been an old man?" asked Blake.

"Look here, old fellow—"

"Mighty affectionate Levison is getting in his old age, isn't he?" grinned Blake. "It's quite touching. How much do you want to borrow, Levison?"

"I don't want to borrow anything. I—"

"Then what are you calling me 'old fellow' for?" demanded Blake.

Levison bit his lip.

"Look here, you might let me come in with you and see that paper—"

"Tain't my paper," said Blake. "It's Tom Merry's."

"Well, I've asked him, and—"

"And he's told you to go and eat coke, I suppose?" grinned Blake. "If it's any satisfaction to you to know it, I should say exactly the same in his place. Or, if you prefer it in French, allez et mangez du charbon. I'm sorry I can't put it into Italian for you, as you're so fond of that language—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you rotter—" began Levison savagely.

"Oh, come on!" said Herries. "We're wasting time talking to that worm; and Brooke wants to get the translation done."

"Oh!" said Levison, with glittering eyes. "So Brooke's going to translate it for you, is he?"

"Yes," said Brooke.

"Come on," said Blake; and he marched Dick Brooke onwards, and the three of them disappeared into Tom Merry's study, and the door was closed upon the furious and disappointed Levison.

"Here you are at last!" said Tom Merry. "Does Brooke know what's wanted, Blake?"

"Yes; I've told him," said Jack Blake.

"You want help in a translation," said Brooke, looking round. "What is it—Latin prose?"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We haven't fetched you up here to ask you to help us with our lessons."

"Wathah not!"

"What is it, then?"

"Italian."

"Italian?" said Brooke, in surprise. "You chaps taking up Italian?"

"Not much."

"We've got a paper in Italian we want translated," explained Tom Merry. "I think Brooke had better know about it, you chaps. He can keep a secret."

"Certainly," said Brooke.

Tom Merry explained the history of the Italian document in concise words. Dick Brooke listened with his eyes growing wider and wider in astonishment.

"Well, my word!" he exclaimed. "It beats a novel! And that's the paper you want me to translate?"

"That's it, my infant."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"

"I'll do my best," said Brooke. "You know, I'm not so well up in Italian as in French and Latin. It's a study I've taken up for pleasure, not for profit, and I haven't been able to give much time to it—"

"Queer idea of pleasure some fellows have," murmured Herries.

Brooke laughed.

"I'll do my best with the paper," he said. "If I can't

manage it I've got an Italian dictionary, and I'll work it out with that. But let's see the paper."

Tom Merry handed him the paper.

Brooke fixed his eyes upon it, and as he read his eyes grew wider and he gave a low whistle. It was evident that he was reading easily enough the words that looked so utterly mysterious to the rest of the juniors.

It was curious to see him standing there reading what to the other fellows present was totally incomprehensible.

"Well, my hat!" said Brooke at last.

There was a general shout of inquiry.

"You understand it?"

"Yes."

"All of it?"

"Every word; it's quite easy."

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boy! You know, I couldn't possibly wead that," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with the air of a fellow making a very impressive and singular statement.

"Go bon!" murmured Blake.

"Let's have the translation," said Tom Merry. "This is ripping of you, Brooke!"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries. "Good thing to have a giddy genius in the Form, though he does miss catches. Write it out, Brooke, old man."

Tom Merry handed the Fourth-Former a pen. Brooke sat down to write. He read the paper over again, and then wrote out the translation easily enough:

"The box of money is buried among the ruins of the chapel of Santa Maria of the Island, near Burano, in the Grand Lagoon of Venice. The stone is marked with a red cross.
MARCO FRULO."

The juniors gazed at the words as they ran from under Brooke's pen in breathless interest. There was a buzz as his pen ceased to travel.

"The box of money! By Jove!"

"Buwied, deah boys! A wegulah buwied tuesday!"

"Near Burano, in the Lagoon of Venice!"

"Hurrah!"

Brooke rose to his feet.

"Looks to me as if there is something in it," he remarked.

"If that Italian chap doesn't claim the paper again, Tom Merry, you are in for a good thing!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No more mysterious documents to translate?" asked Brooke, with a smile.

"No, thanks. Awfully obliged."

"That's all right. So long!"

And Dick Brooke quitted the study. He hurried down the passage, but a hand upon his arm stopped him as he reached the landing. He turned his head, and found Levison at his side. The cad of the Fourth looked at him anxiously.

"Hold on a minute, Brooke—"

"What is it? I'm in a hurry," said the junior.

"I want to speak to you. Have you translated that paper for Tom Merry?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what's in it?"

"Of course I do."

"I suppose you could remember what's in it well enough to make a copy, if you did it at once?" asked Levison.

"Quite easily."

"Will you give me a copy?" asked Levison, in a low voice. "Look here, that secret is worth a lot of money. If—"

"It's not my secret," said Dick Brooke coldly. "I've promised Tom Merry to say nothing about it, too."

"That needn't make any difference—"

"What?"

"Promises are like piecrust, you know—made and broken," said Levison, with a sarcastic curl of the lip. "I tell you that secret's worth a lot of money, and I don't see why Tom Merry should keep it to himself. Give me a copy of the paper, and I'll get my father to take both of us to Italy in the vac, and we'll find the stuff. There's very likely enough to make us both rich. That Yankee chap said there was a hundred thousand dollars; that would be twenty thousand pounds. You're not a rich chap, Brooke; you can't afford to play the fool. Look here. Stand in with me, and— Ow, ow! You beast! Ow!"

Smack!

Brooke's open hand smote Levison across the face, and the cad of the Fourth staggered back against the wall.

Brooke looked at him with blazing eyes.

"You cad!" he said. "Now come on, if you want to!"

Apparently Levison didn't want to. At all events, he did not come on. He looked at Dick Brooke with eyes that seemed to burn, but did not speak or move. Brooke swung

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

round and walked away. Levison, setting his teeth hard, went into his study. It had been his last chance, and it was gone.

CHAPTER 19.

Good News for Gussy.

IN Tom Merry's study the juniors read over the paper with great jubilation.

The mere idea of a buried treasure appealed very much to their imaginations, and a buried treasure upon an island in the romantic Lagoon of Venice was, as Monty Lowther put it, especially ripping.

And they had no doubt about it now.

The words Marco Frulo had written down so hurriedly to give to Tom Merry before his flight were true!

Far away in the blue Adriatic, in a ruined building upon an isle, lay the buried treasure—for the sake of which the unfortunate Frulo was hunted down by the Yankee adventurer, Hiram Finn.

And the sum? Hiram Finn had said a hundred thousand dollars—that would be twenty thousand pounds in English money. The mere thought was dazzling to the juniors.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would be wippin'! If that chap Frulo doesn't turn up again, the money is yours, Tom Mewwy!"

"I hope he will turn up," said Tom Merry.

"But if he doesn't?" said Blake.

"If he doesn't," said Tom Merry gravely, "I think it's because he's fallen into the hands of Hiram Finn and his gang, and they've kidnapped him. The best thing we can do is to get this box of money removed from where it is now, so that Finn can't get his hands upon it."

"Bai Jove! I wish we could go!"

"Why shouldn't we?" said Tom Merry. "The vacation's close now, and we shall be away from St. Jim's. Some of us can get away, at all events, and we can make up a party to pay a visit to Venice. Dash it all, Cook's tourists go there in crowds every year! These places aren't so far away as they used to be. You get to Venice in three days by train; and then—"

"Bai Jove! I'll write to my governah at once, and put it to him."

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther. "I'll write to my uncle. To raise the exes, however, I shall have to make a personal call upon my uncle—another uncle. I'll take your gold tucker with me, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the humorist of the Shell in astonishment.

"I fail to comprehend you, Lowthab," he said. "How would it make any difference if you took my watch when you called upon your uncle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, your watch is worth two or three pounds—"

explained Lowther.

"You uttah ass! My watch is worth twenty-five guineas!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It was a birthday present from my patah, as you know vewy well."

"And it isn't rolled gold?" asked Lowther, with a look of astonishment.

"You—you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the better," said Monty Lowther blandly. "My uncle is all the more likely to lend me something on it."

"You frightful ass! I did not know you were alludin' to that kind of an uncle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry picked up the two papers, and pinned them together. Then he tied them both up in a corner of his handkerchief, and restored them to his pocket. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass rather anxiously upon the Shell fellows.

"Those papahs are awfully valuable, Tom Mewwy!" he remarked.

"Worth their weight in gold!" said Lowther facetiously.

"Pewwaps you had bettah hand them ovah to me to be taken care of, Tom Mewwy. They are weally vewy valuable, and a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Now, you fellows, we've got to the bottom of the giddy mystery, and the only thing to be done now is to make up a party for the search as soon as the vac. begins. All of you write to your paters and kind uncles, and tell them it's specially necessary for you to have a holiday in Venice this vac., and that you expect them to come down handsomely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors left the study in great spirits.

The idea of an excursion in the wonderful city of Venice, the Queen of the Adriatic, during the coming vacation was

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pleasant enough; the only difficulty was, that it might not come off.

Some of the fellows were already booked for the holidays; others were very doubtful whether their parents would allow them to go upon an excursion so far afield.

There were a good many letters written during the following days.

On Wednesday evening, as the Terrible Three were sitting down to tea in their study, the door was thrown open, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed in with a letter in his hand. The swell of St. Jim's was in a state of great excitement, and had completely forgotten the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"It's all wight!" he exclaimed.

"What's all right?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Huwway!"

"What the dickens—"

"I've written to my governah, and he's witten back—"

"Well, that's happened before, and no harm come of it," remarked Monty Lowther. "Has he sent you a tenner instead of a fiver this time, fathead?"

"Weally, Lowthab—"

"What's the news, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"Listen to this, and I'll wead it out," Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the letter in his hand. "'Sent too many fivahs lately—' Ahem! That's not the place. 'Money wasted—' Ahem! ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't found the place yet, deah boys. Oh, here it is! 'My dear Arthur,—I wegard your suggestion of a holiday in Italy as quite sensible. Your former tutor, Mr. Mopps, is about to proceed to the North of Italy to collect materials for a book upon which he is engaged. If you and your friends wish to spend a part of the vacation in Italy, I can arrange with Mr. Mopps to take charge of the party, and I hope you will find the excursion enlightening as well as amusing. Italy is a country peculiarly rich in historical associations—' That's all the part that's intwestin', deah boys. The patah wuns on about Italy to a vewy gweat length, but I won't wead that out, as he isn't your patah, and you're not weally called upon to stand it. What do you think of the ideah, deah boys?"

"Hooray!"

What the Terrible Three thought of it could be heard at the end of the Shell passage.

"Mopps makes it all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "He's an Oxford man, you know—an M.A., and a vewy tame and quiet little chap; stutters, and talks awful wor, you know, and thinks gweat guns of himself. Wegular Oxford man, you know. He won't be the least twouble to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I fancy we may be a trouble to him."

"Don't explain that before we start, or D'Arcy's pater may alter his mind," grinned Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus shook his head wisely.

"Wathah not! You can wely on me to be diplomatie! It wequires a fellow of tact and judgment to deal with a patah, you know. But weally I think the patah is playin' up splendidly this time. He's a wegulah bwick! Though he is gettin' wathah close with the fivahs. I wegard this as a wippin' lettah! What do you think?"

"Good egg!"

"Ripping!"

"Gorgeous!"

And the Terrible Three, jumping up from their chairs, clasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in their arms and waltzed him round the study, in the exuberance of their spirits.

"Weally, Lowthab—weally, Tom Mewwy—Ow! Bai Jove! Yawwoh!"

Crash!

The waltzing juniors waltzed into the tea-table, and there was a terrific crash as the table went flying, and tea and tea-things shot in a stream to the floor.

Crash! Crash!

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rolled over, and sat up in the midst of broken crockeryware. He sat there in a graceful attitude for a decimal fraction of a second, and then leaped to his feet with a wild yell.

"Bai Jove! I'm hurt! My twousahs are wuined! Ow!"

"Never mind, Gussy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You've mucked up our tea, but we'll come and have tea with you in Study No. 6."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose feelings were really too deep for words at that moment, was led away by the Terrible Three; and it was quite a quarter of an hour before he recovered the repose which, upon all occasions, ought to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere.

THE END.

SIR BILLY, OF GREYHOUSE!

*A Splendid Serial Story
dealing with Public-
School Life.*

By R. S. WARREN BELL.



WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

Sir William Percival Travers, Bart.—to give him his full title—is a slight, fair lad of twelve when he is first sent to "Fighting Greyhouse" by his guardian. His Form-fellows in the Lower Fourth are considerably older than "Sir Billy," as the youngster is soon nicknamed, and he has to put up with a good deal of bullying. His great hero is Wardour, the captain of the school.

One day a boy of No. 3 dormitory, named Hunter, discovers that Mr. Kitt, who is a far better musician than he is a schoolmaster, is paying frequent visits to the vicarage at the neighbouring village of Meadowdene. The word goes round that Mr. Kitt is in love, and there is great activity among the amateur artists of Greyhouse. "It's one of the Croft girls he's after," confides Hunter to his chum Parfitt; "but I can't say which one it is yet."

(Read on from here.)

"Artistic No. 3."

"I suppose it won't be long before you know which one it is?" inquired Parfitt.

"You bet it won't," grinned Hunter, as he lounged out to see how the artist of No. 3 was progressing with his drawing.

Now that it was known that Mr. Kitt's destination was actually Meadowdene Vicarage, the interest in his almost daily visits to the little village increased tenfold.

Cartoons representing Mr. Kitt serenading the Croft girls were issued in great numbers by the artist of No. 3, and the wags of No. 3 made much play with their wit when Hunter discovered the name of the beloved one. "Maggie," otherwise Margaret, was the Miss Croft favoured by Kitt; Maggie it was whose fair presence caused him to trot off to Meadowdene on every available occasion, bearing books and flowers, and dressed in his best attire. Hunter didn't get to know which particular girl Maggie was, because the Crofts were comparatively recent arrivals at Meadowdene.

But Maggie was enough to go on with, and the artist of No. 3 promptly prepared a beautiful new picture for little Mr. Kitt's delectation, and quite eclipsed his previous efforts with the drawing he executed according to a design roughed out by Hunter.

The scene was the lawn of Meadowdene Vicarage; by the tennis-net stood the vicar (regarded by the size of the net he must have been eight feet high), and before the vicar knelt Mr. Kitt and a young lady, Mr. Kitt looking very fat in white flannels, and holding a tennis racquet—of a new and original shape—in one hand, whilst he embraced the young lady with his disengaged arm. The sketch was underlined "Asking Papa!" and it was considered—by No. 3—to be a triumph of draughtsmanship, and exquisitely humorous. All the exquisite humour of the thing was, of course, claimed by Hunter. Subsequent events did not encourage anybody to contest his claim.

The sketch was shown about, and so much admired—especially by those unruly spirits who had spent weary hours writing lines for Kitt—that Hunter conceived the idea of bringing it immediately before Mr. Kitt's notice by sending it to the music-master through the post. He carried out this idea with promptitude, printing the name and address on the envelope in crude capitals, and scribbling the word "Maggie" in the corner.

Letters arrived early at Greyhouse, as the post-office was only a stone's throw away. The master on duty at the 7.30 roll-call generally found his letters awaiting him on his desk.

It was a bright April morning. Dame Nature has her full share of feminine inconsistency, and you may have noticed that, after drenching the land with a series of wet days, and threatening overnight to drench it again on the morrow, she often sends sunshine and a cloudless sky, and thus baffles barometers and weather prophets to her own and everybody else's high satisfaction. So on this occasion. The papers said, "Rain at intervals"; but the sun rose with a laugh, and shone radiantly all day. The sun often shines its brightest on our saddest days.

Pretty nearly every fellow had observed that there were three letters awaiting Mr. Kitt; those in the know chuckled at the sight of Hunter's jocular missive. Little did they guess what one of the

other envelopes contained.

One minute before the half-hour Mr. Kitt entered, and proceeded to his desk. Hunter's letter he examined with some curiosity, but he opened the others first.

He had been looking pale and anxious of late, and the few who were his friends had wondered what could be preying upon him as he inspected his correspondence.

On opening the first letter, Mr. Kitt's face turned a rosy red. He perused the document it contained several times ere he put it down. That it was a piece of very welcome intelligence everybody could see.

Then he opened the second letter.

It was a short letter—this second letter—not extending beyond the first page. Mr. Kitt read it and laid it down. Then, his elbow on the desk, he shaded his eyes with his hand. He remained in this attitude until the monitor calling over the roll reached "Smith," a name borne by no less than seven Greyhouse fellows at that period.

Mr. Kitt roused himself and sat up. As he did so, his eye fell on Hunter's letter.

Anticipating, perhaps, the nature of its contents, he tore it open and drew forth the pictorial gibe which the envelope contained.

One glance was enough; he pitched it away carelessly, and it fluttered on to the floor. Then he sank back in his chair, and sat gazing absently before him.

Presently, when the monitor was calling out the last name on the roll, Mr. Kitt rose and walked, with bowed head, out of Big School.

The monitor of the week gazed irresolutely after Mr. Kitt's retreating form. Generally, the master on duty dismissed the various Forms to their class-rooms after early roll-call. The monitor was nonplussed. To his relief, Wardour left his seat and proceeded to the desk Mr. Kitt had just vacated. There was a dark look on his face. He knew Mr. Kitt better than anybody.

"Sixth Form!"

The monitors went out, and the two Fifties followed. Hunter did not venture to open his mouth until he got into the passage. Then he laughed in a forced way.

"Well, I didn't think Kitt would crumple up like that!" he observed.

But nobody laughed in chorus with him. Hunter's fellow-wags, vaguely uncomfortable, were wondering what news the second letter had brought.

As Greyhouse thronged into Hall for breakfast the fellows caught sight of Mr. Kitt walking down the drive. He passed through the gates and turned sharp to the left. In that direction lay Meadowdene.

A note was handed to Wardour during breakfast. All that day Mr. Kitt was absent; he took one of the Lower Forms in English subjects, besides teaching music. On this day, however, Wardour took his Form for him.

A Lesson For Hunter.

The summer term was well on its way towards the holidays when the school played the M.C.C. Of course, there was a big muster in the fields; all the masters, the Head and his

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
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"THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS!"

wife, the chaplain and doctor with their wives, and the masters' friends in the district, making a goodish crowd in and about the pavilion and tea-tent.

Mr. Kitt, as regards his friends, contributed an elderly clergyman with the cut of an old athlete about him, and one of the most charming girls Greyhouse had ever set eyes upon. There couldn't be two opinions about her; even that eminent critic of womankind, Gregory, of the Sixth, admitted that she was A.1.

When the fellows weren't looking at the play, they were looking at the pretty girl Kitt had brought; and as the M.C.C. stonewallers took a long time to get out, the pretty girl with Kitt received a lot of attention in one way and another, what with the masters and the Sixth and the dull cricket.

There was a proprietary air in Kitt's manner towards the pretty girl, and the fellows didn't fail to note it.

"By the way, Kitt," said Mr. Croft presently (you will have guessed that the clergyman came from Meadowdene Vicarage), "the son of an old Oxford friend of mine is here, I believe. Hunter—ah, that's the man! I should like to have a chat with him, if he's about."

"I'll bring him up," said Kitt.

The bright particular star of No. 3 was duly unearthed, and approached the group very sheepishly. Croft pater shook him warmly by the hand, and hoped he would come over to Meadowdene one Sunday. In the conversation that followed, Croft pater did not find Hunter very entertaining—in fact, Hunter seemed unusually embarrassed—and so turned him over to his daughter.

Hunter shook hands with Miss Croft and muttered something inarticulate; Miss Croft cast a curious glance at him, and suggested that he should take her to have some tea.

To the disappointment of a number of other seniors—who had been hoping to have this honour—Hunter conducted the pretty visitor to the tent where the tea was.

Here, away from the crowd, he felt more at his ease.

Miss Croft, as she sipped her tea, made herself very agreeable indeed to Hunter. She asked him all sorts of questions about Greyhouse, and said some nice things about his skill at "footer." Hunter wondered how on earth she knew he was in the Fifteen, and he began to go hot and cold by turns when he found that she also knew what Form and dormitory he was in.

"Someone's been giving me away," he thought.

He was right; someone had. He forgot that half a dozen of the juniors in the school choir had recently been "lent" to swell the village choir on the occasion of a confirmation at Meadowdene, and he did not know that this Miss Croft had herself regaled those small auxiliaries with tea and cake at the vicarage after the service. Mrs. Croft and her other daughters had looked after the bishop and clergy, so that this Miss Croft had been able to give all her time to the Greyhouse contingent and ask them a lot of questions; she made such friends with them, indeed, that they eventually told her all they knew of a matter in which she happened to be much interested.

Hunter feared the worst—and the worst came. She began to talk about Kitt.

She told him that, whilst she herself was abroad early in the year, Mr. Kitt had been engaged by her father to give her youngest sister music lessons. The little girl and Mr. Kitt became great friends, and when she was taken ill, and was unable to receive any more music lessons, Mr. Kitt made a practice of going over to the vicarage several times a week to talk and play to the little invalid.

As, in a lowered voice (for there were some other people in the tent), the lady by his side progressed with her story, Hunter would have rejoiced had the ground beneath him opened and swallowed him up. There was no reproach in what she said, her story being told in a way calculated to save Hunter's feelings as far as possible. Miss Croft was one of those English girls, beautiful in face, and form, and nature, whose like the whole world beyond our shores cannot produce. Thrice blessed is the man who wins such a woman for his wife; little Mr. Kitt, glancing towards the tent from his seat in front of the pavilion, had reason, in spite of his thorny existence at Greyhouse, to consider himself the happiest man on earth.

Miss Croft told Hunter that Mr. Kitt's visits helped the little sufferer to forget her pain. She would listen for his step and talk of him for hours after he had gone.

"By coming to see her," said Miss Croft gently, "he sacrificed time which he should have been devoting to his work, for he was finishing an oratorio which he had been commissioned to compose for a musical festival. But he never disappointed Maggie, and would not have been able to finish the oratorio had he not been unexpectedly granted an extension of time."

She paused a moment. From outside came sounds of

much clapping. The school innings was just commencing, and Wardour and Hallam were going to the wicket.

"When my little sister died," continued Miss Croft, "I was summoned home. I then met Mr. Kitt for the first time—"

"My dear," said Mr. Croft, putting his head into the tent, "you are missing all the cricket."

"Of course," she said, bending down to Hunter as she rose from her chair, "you didn't know all this, but I thought you would like to know it. Good-bye! Don't forget that we shall hope—really hope—to see you at Meadowdene next Sunday."

She smiled brightly upon him, and went back to the pavilion with her father, while Hunter, who had learned a lesson he was destined never to forget, strolled away to a part of the fields where there weren't any fellows to ask him questions.

A Late Caller.

"Mary Anne" was the sarcastic nickname applied to H. Browne, otherwise Browne major. He was a big fellow of seventeen or so, soft all over, and even Browne minor used to cheek him. That will explain what sort of a fellow Mary Anne was considered to be until—

Well, that's the story. Mary Anne belonged to Middle House, which wasn't cock-house in athletics, but took the lead in matters intellectual, always winning most prizes, chiefly because Mr. Donnithorne, the Housemaster, was a regular slave-driver as regards prep., etc., but serenely indifferent about his House coming out top in games. Those parents who were of the same way of thinking as Mr. Donnithorne sent their sons to his House, and among those parents was the Rev. Henry Browne, father of the aforesaid Mary Anne.

Now Mary Anne was as bad at his books as he was clumsy at games, so he had a pretty hard time of it. First he was badgered out of doors and in school, and then, when he got to his House, he was lectured by Donnithorne, who had an idea that he was incorrigibly idle. Thus it came about that one exceedingly warm night in the summer term, Mary Anne found himself—by Donnithorne's command—stewing up his Euclid long after all the other fellows had gone to bed. Mary Anne's father had decided to take him away from school, and wanted him to do as well as possible his last term. Thus it came about that Mary Anne was sitting up late that night, yawning and twitching about, ruffling his shock head of hair, and alternately nodding and waking up with a start.

During one of these dozes the captain of the House came in.

"Here, clear off to bed, Browne!" he said, turning out the gas. "If you want to cram, get up in the morning."

Mary Anne gave a drowsy mumble, and the monitor, thinking no more about him, quitted the class-room. So dead fagged was Mary Anne, however, that, instead of obeying the order, he settled his head more comfortably on his elbow, and went bang off to sleep. Soon he was snoring as soundly as any fellow in the House.

The clock in the tower boomed out eleven—Mary Anne slept on. Donnithorne himself took a last look round, and then strolled off to bed. Although the class-room door was ajar, he never imagined that anyone was in there, the gas being out. Soon Middle House was in complete darkness. Everybody was fast asleep—including Mary Anne.

The tower clock solemnly tolled the hour of twelve. All was silence in Middle House; Mary Anne's intermittent snoring alone disturbed the stillness of midnight.

The cord of the lower sash was broken, and so, some hours previously, Mary Anne had propped the window up with a cricket bat. A slight breeze sprang up, and, coming through the open window, fanned Mary Anne's shock head of hair; the breeze was kind and gentle, and Mary Anne sighed softly as he slumbered.

Presently—as the tower clock struck a quarter to one—something appeared at the open window. Mary Anne didn't see it because just at that moment he was scooting away for dear life from his chief tormentor—in his dreams, of course. The something grew larger, and finally took the shape of a man's head and shoulders—a round, close-cropped head and burly shoulders. Then appeared two arms, a waist, and two legs.

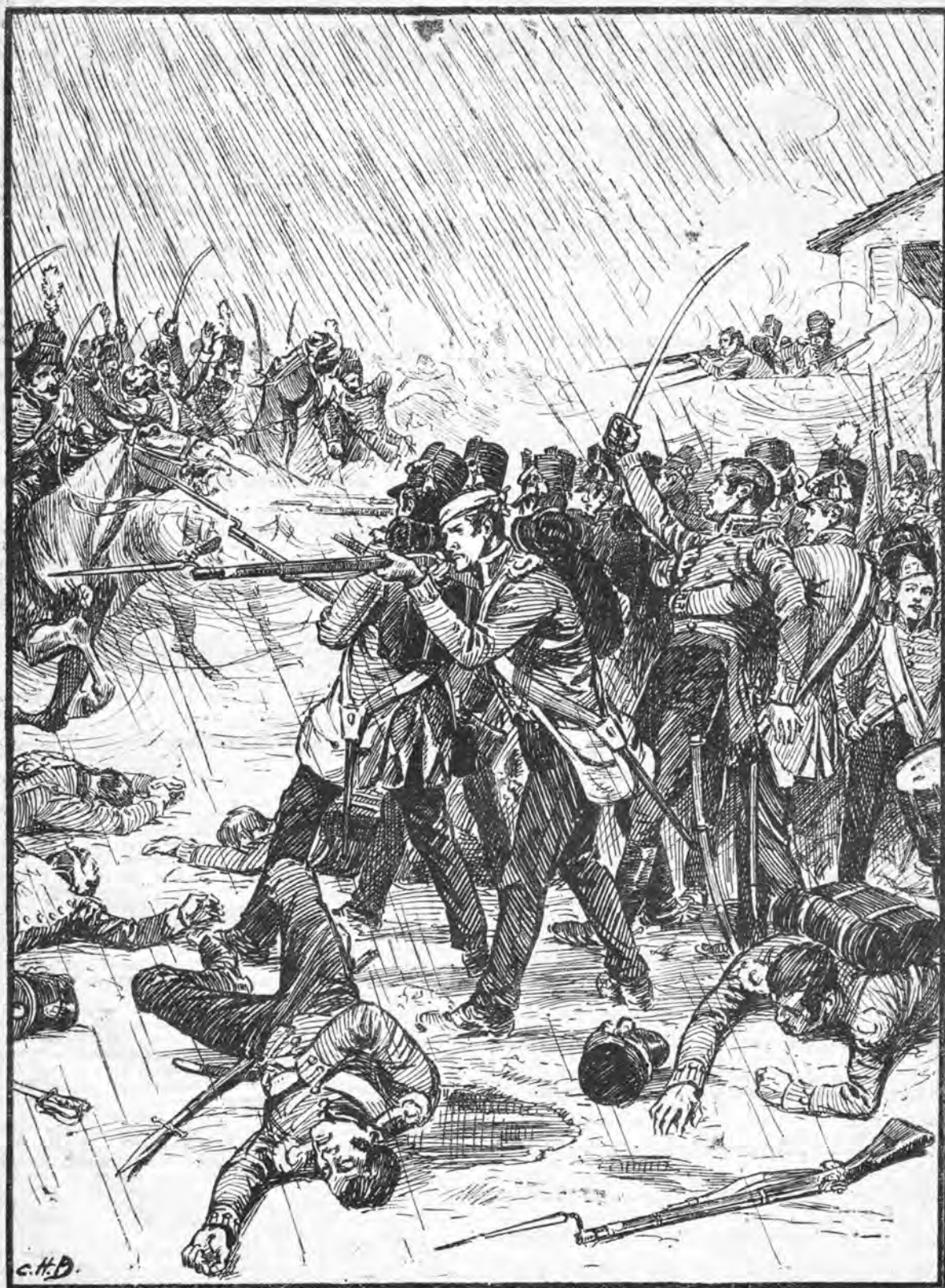
It was, in short, a man—the sort of man that frequently enjoys His Majesty's hospitality. And what curious clothes he had on, to be sure. What were those broad-arrow marks on his stockings? Truly a quaint get-up!

(To be continued in next Wednesday's issue of "The GEM Library." Order Early.)

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR"
Every Friday.

FAMOUS FIGHTS FOR THE FLAG. No. 2.

Specially drawn for "THE GEM" Library, by C. H. Blake.

The above depicts one of the most desperate fights ever waged for the honour of the Union Jack. On May 16th, 1811, during the Peninsular War, the 57th Foot, at Albuhera, were hard pressed on all sides, when Colonel Inglis, himself mortally wounded, cried out: "Die hard, my men! die hard!" The regiment lost 23 officers and 400 men out of 570. It was thus the 57th Foot gained their glorious title of "Die Hards!" The regiment is now known as the Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment).

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



For Next Wednesday.

"THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS."

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

This splendid, extra-long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. deals with the strange adventures which the chums of St. Jim's are led into in the course of the quest for treasure buried in a foreign land. The clue contained in the plan which was entrusted to Tom Merry by the mysterious Italian leads the chums from the quiet surroundings of St. Jim's into the strange new scenes of the picturesque city of Venice, where more than one curious and exciting experience falls to their lot. Naturally, the party includes the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose escapades abroad add considerably to the liveliness of

"THE ST. JIM'S ADVENTURERS."

Don't miss the grand story of Tom Merry & Co.'s interesting, amusing, and exciting trip to Venice.

POPLETS—THE LATEST CRAZE!

Our latest companion paper, "The Penny Popular," is simply booming again this week! The splendid new competition,

POPLETS

has caught on like wild-fire; and everybody is saying, too, that the complete stories are better than ever.

The general consensus of opinion seems to be that the new

POPLETS COMPETITION

is the most fascinating and attractive competition ever organised by any weekly story-paper. I hope my readers will all try their hands at winning one of the

CASH PRIZES

offered for POPLETS in this Friday's grand number of "The Penny Popular."

A READER'S TRIBUTE.

George S., of Southsea, who has on several previous occasions favoured me with specimens of his poetry, contributes the following excellent verses on the subject of our famous little companion paper "The Penny Popular."

When you're feeling out of temper, or confronted with the "blues,"

When your games begin to bore you and there's nothing to amuse,

Don't look at things disdainfully, or let your spirits drop,
 But take a quiet corner-seat and read "The Penny Pop."

When the rain comes down in torrents, and the sun has ceased to shine,

And you say: "There's no existence half so miserable as mine,"

If only you will take the hint, your sighing soon will stop;
 Just let the weather take its course, and read "The Penny Pop."

When you've read the "Magnet" stories, and have laid the "Gem" aside,

And have asked yourself the question, "Now, what shall I read beside?"

And think that nothing else will do, for they are at the top,
 Just make a note: that Friday brings the welcome "Penny Pop."

If your chum takes "Gem" and "Magnet," and has read them through and through,

If he's fond of Harry Wharton, and admires Tom Merry, too,

Inform him where they both appear—of course, decline to "swap"—

And add another reader to the famous "Penny Pop."

I congratulate you, George S. You are quite a poet!

HOW TO WRITE A PICTURE PLOT.

By a Successful Photo-Playwright.

No. I.—The Scenario.

What is a picture plot? Putting it roughly, a picture plot is a story which can be enacted without the use of conversation or words to explain the action. That means that you must only write about such actions as can be represented either by facial expression, gesture, or the occasional use of sub-titles which explain the more elaborate parts of the plot—the passage of time, for instance, which no amount of gesture could indicate.

If you would learn to write a picture plot worthy of production, I would ask you first to get the idea out of your head that it must be set out correctly, scene by scene. That is all very well afterwards. But what really matters is the plot construction. Get a good plot, and leave the other things to come afterwards.

What do I mean by a plot? Well, probably you already have an idea. This is mine: A plot is a series of events closely connected together, following one another in proper sequence, and leading to what is called a climax.

Your picture plot must first of all be true to life—you must not make your characters do impossible things—and there must be a reason for every action and development in the play. There is no one more critical than the average picture-goer, and he will very quickly say, "That's silly! No one would do that in life," if your plot is unreal.

The question, then, is: Where do I get my material? First of all, study the characters, the actions, and the peculiarities of your friends and those whom you know fairly well, and ask yourself why they do this or that thing; and take one characteristic from this person, and one from another, blending them together to form quite an interesting and unique character, then surround that character with interesting events and original settings, and you are on the way to making a good photo-play.

Then you should read all the periodicals you can get hold of, and cut out those incidents which seem likely to you, such as queer adventures, and items of remarkable interest, and paste all these in a scrap-book, ready for future reference.

Suppose, then, you have what you consider a good idea for a picture plot, are you to sit down, dash it off into a plot, and despatch it to the producer right away? Certainly not! For if you do, the chances are that it will soon come romping home again with a polite rejection slip. No, having the idea, weigh it well, ask yourself is it original, is it holding, would it appeal to a scenario editor, who handles hundreds of plots daily, as something out of the common run and well worth producing? If you are satisfied on all these points, then work on the idea, worry it, stick to it night and day, till you have looked at it from every point of view; and when you feel satisfied that the plot is good, write it down briefly, just as you first conceived it.

All this may seem a lot of hard work, but remember that two guineas is considered the lowest price for a good scenario. And surely the trouble is justifiable if a small amount of spare-time work is going to bring you in a guinea or two.

(Another one of this splendid series of articles next Wednesday.)