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Vol. 8.

1913



"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM!" A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete Tale of School
Life and Adventure contained in this issue.

NOTE!
FOR COMPLETION OF
THIS GAME
see cover page iii

THE RIVALS' RACE



Designed by H. A. HINTON.]



HOW TO PREPARE THE GAME.

First of all detach very carefully from the rest of the pages this page together with cover page iii. Then with a pair of scissors cut out the two separate parts of the game, keeping to the outside of the line border. Now paste the two parts on to a piece of stout cardboard, seeing that the design is joined neatly together at the centre.

The three discs which will be found at the bottom left-hand corner of this page, and the three at the bottom right-hand corner of page iii of cover must be cut out and pasted on separate circular pieces of cardboard—each piece being neatly trimmed round. The game will now be ready for use.

FOR HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED see page iii of cover

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING.



COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM!

*A Magnificent New 50,000-word Long, Complete School Tale, Dealing
with the Adventures of Tom Merry & Co. at Eastwood House.*

Specially written for the Grand Winter Number of THE GEM Library.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The illustrations by R. J. MACDONALD.



In the sudden flood of light, the man was seen at the paneled wall, his hand seeking the secret spring—to escape! But there was no escape for him! (See Chapter 20.)

CHAPTER 1.

Waiting for the Feed.

STUDY No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, presented an unusually festive appearance.

There was holly on the walls, and mistletoe over the door, and a spotless tablecloth gleamed upon the study table. And upon the tablecloth gleamed an enormous array of cups, saucers, and plates—mostly of different patterns. It was evident that the owners of Study No. 6 had borrowed, or raided, crockeryware from all quarters, in preparation for a "spread" of unusual dimensions.

The kettle sang on the hob, and the fire burned brightly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, spotlessly arrayed

as usual, stood with his benignant smile of welcome upon his aristocratic face, to receive his guests. All seemed to be ready for a really first-class feed—excepting the provisions. Of eatables there was not a sign in the study. But so far as decorations and crockeryware and smiles of welcome went, everything was in the best possible order for the feast.

The study was already a little crowded. Blake and Herries and Digby, D'Arcy's study-mates, were there, as a matter of course. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther, the Terrible Three of the Shell, were the first guests to arrive from outside. Then Kangaroo had come in, and then Reilly of the Fourth. Other guests were expected, and, of course, the feed could not begin till all had arrived.

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But some of the guests who were already on the scene were wondering a little at the absence of the feed itself. It was very pleasant to look upon the Christmas decorations of Study No. 6; and the array of crockeryware was certainly imposing—and the spotless state of the tablecloth could not fail to strike all observers. But, after all, something more solid was required for a feed, and some of the guests could not help wondering where it was.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the son of a noble lord, was generally rolling in money. It had been his idea to stand a really stunning feed in Study No. 6, to celebrate the breaking-up for the Christmas holidays, now close at hand. A good many of his chums were going home with him to Eastwood House for the Christmas holidays, but not all of them could go, so it was really an excellent idea, and all of them were willing to do their best to make it a success, by piling in with the greatest goodwill into the good things provided by the swell of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy received his guests with a genial smile of welcome; and yet a close observer might have traced a slightly worried look upon his noble brow.

The mingling of a genial welcoming smile with a thoughtful worried frown, had quite a peculiar effect upon his face, which his guests politely did not notice.

There were footsteps in the passage, and three juniors came into the study doorway—Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House.

They all wore their best smiles—such things as House rivalry and rraging were not to be thought of, of course, on an occasion like this. Fatty Wynn, especially, had a face like a full moon, so broad and beaming was his smile. His glance went mechanically to the table, and a slight shade came over his fat face as nothing but crockeryware met his eyes.

"Pway come in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, smiling with an effort. "Pway come wight in!"

"I hope we're not late," said Figgins.

"Not at all, Figgay!"

"I tried to make Figgins come earlier," said Fatty Wynn. "But he was finishing some silly letter or other, and he wouldn't move. I hope we haven't kept you fellows waiting."

"Not in the least, deah boy!"

"Well, we're all here now," remarked Tom Merry.

"I haven't had any tea, so as to do justice to the spread," said Fatty Wynn confidentially. "That is, practically no tea—only some ham and eggs and cake and a few tarts."

"Glad to hear it, deah boy!"

"I'll help get the feed ready, if you like," hinted Fatty.

"Thank you vewy much!"

Blake and Herries and Digby looked out of the window, seemingly greatly interested in an early fall of snow that had powdered the quadrangle with white. For some reason, the colour was deepening in the aristocratic visage of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Well, are we all here?" asked Kangaroo—otherwise Harry Noble of the Shell.

D'Arcy did not reply; he seemed busy with his thoughts.

"All here?" repeated Kangaroo, in surprise.

Arthur Augustus started.

"Sowwy, deah boy! Did you address me?"

"Yes; I asked you if we were all here!"

"Not quite—I'm expectin' my minah, you know."

"Isn't Wally here yet?" said Figgins. "He's generally on time when there's a feed. Better wait for him."

"Well," said Fatty Wynn, very thoughtfully, "I don't know about waiting for Third Form fags, you know. Fags don't count!"

"Oh, let Gussy wait for his minor!" said Monty Lowther generously.

"Certainly!" said Kangaroo.

"Yaas, wathah—I mean pway don't mench—that is to say—ahem!" Arthur Augustus's thoughts were evidently wandering. "Vewy warm wathah for this time of the year, isn't it?"

"Warm!" said Kerr, with a stare. "It's snowing!"

"Is it weally? Yaas, that's what I meant to wemark—it's wathah cold, isn't it?"

Kerr closed one eye to Figgins, and tapped his forehead in a significant sort of way; perhaps meaning to imply a belief that the swell of the Fourth was a little loose in that region.

"You fellows been playin' footah?" asked D'Arcy, with a great effort to make conversation.

"Yes!" said Kerr seriously and solemnly. "We generally play footer after dark, in the snow, you know."

"Do you weally?" said D'Arcy, who—troubled by some mysterious inward trouble—was too preoccupied to notice that Kerr's reply was in a sarcastic vein. "How good! I twust you have had a good game?"

"Ripping!" said Kerr, still sarcastic. "Figgins scored fifty runs, and Fatty Wynn potted the red, and I made a grand slam."

"Did you weally?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That burst of laughter from all the fellows in the study recalled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to himself. He jammed his eyeglass a little more tightly into his eye, and blushed.

"Ahem! I meant to wemark—"

"I say, Wally will be pretty peckish when he gets here," said Fatty Wynn. "Suppose we get the feed all ready for him. I don't mind helping. I like making myself useful, you know."

"Yaas!"

"Well, shall we get it ready, then?" said Fatty Wynn, puzzled.

"Yaas!"

"Where's the grub?"

"The—the gwub?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes, where is it?"

"I suppose you fellows haven't seen the postman?" asked Arthur Augustus, changing the subject with startling abruptness.

"Yes, I have!" said Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove, that's good—then he's come—"

"Yes, he's come, and gone!" said Lowther blandly. "It was this morning that I saw him, you know."

"You—you uttah ass, Lowthah—"

"Thanks! Are you always as polite as that to your guests, Gussy?" asked Monty Lowther imperturbably.

"Ahem! Sowwy, deah boy! I forgot! You see—"

Arthur Augustus was interrupted by the arrival of three somewhat inky juniors of the Third Form. They were Wally D'Arcy, Gussy's minor, and his bosom pals, Jameson and Curly Gibson. D'Arcy had not asked the latter two, as a matter of fact, but Wally had calmly assumed the right to bring his friends with him.

"Here we are!" said Wally, as he marched in. "All ready, eh?"

"Yaas!"

"Good! I'm hungry. So's Jameson, so's Curly. Why, where's the grub?" demanded Wally, staring round the study. It was evident that the manners and customs of D'Arcy's minor were not modelled upon those of his elegant major.

"The—the gwub?" stammered D'Arcy.

"Yes; where is it?"

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, who had been staring into the dusk of the quad. "Here's the giddy postman."

Arthur Augustus breathed a deep, deep sigh of relief. "Pway excuse me a few minutes, deah boys, while I run down and see the postman," he exclaimed. "I'm expectin' a letter twom home!"

"Right-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "We'll get the feed ready while you're gone. Ow! Yow! What are you treading on my foot for, Figgins?"

Figgins gave his chum a ferocious glare, and Fatty Wynn comprehended. It dawned upon him that the great celebration depended upon the timely arrival of the postman. Arthur Augustus had hurried out of the study, and the juniors waited for his return.

He returned in two minutes.

He came back empty-handed, and with a really rich colour in his cheeks.

"Well?" said Blake.

"Well?" said Herries and Digby.

"Well?" echoed Fatty Wynn, with a dreadful foreboding.

"Well?" growled Wally.

"I—I—I—I'm awfully sowwy, deah boys," stammered Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing to be sorry about," said Fatty Wynn anxiously.

"It's all right—let's go on with the feed!"

"I'm awfully sowwy—but—but—"

"But what?"

"But there won't be any feed!"

G

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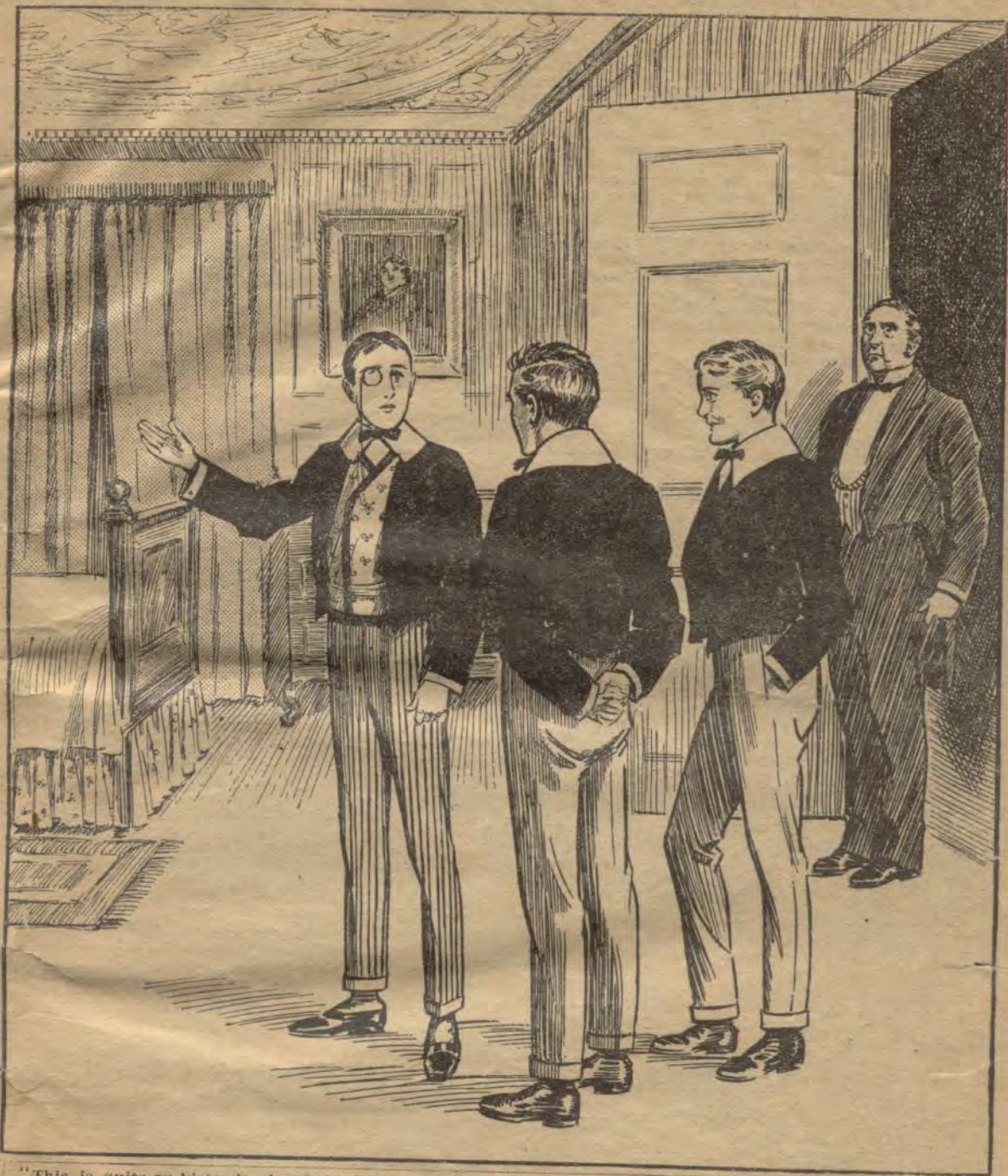
(See column 2, page 46 of this issue.)

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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
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Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.



"This is quite an histowie chambah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glancing round the Painted Room. "The Lord Eastwood in the weign of George the Third was found dead in the woom, so they say, killed by a sword-thwust, and the door was locked on the inside." (See Chapter 5.)

CHAPTER 2. Startling News!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY pronounced the words in a faltering tone.

A dreadful silence followed.

It was broken by Fatty Wynn.

He groaned.

He did not mean to; but he really could not help it. He had been saving up his appetite, so to speak, for that extra special feed; he had been nourishing a first-class hunger for the special occasion. And now there wasn't to be any feed, and the feeling of emptiness and disappointment combined brought that involuntary groan to the lips of Fatty Wynn.

The other fellows felt the blow also.

Wally followed up Wynn's groan with a snort. He had brought Jameson and Curly Gibson to the study for a feed, for something extraordinary in the way of feeds, but not for a faltering explanation that there was to be no feed. Jameson and Curly were already glaring at him. Wally felt exasperated.

"Something gone wrong?" asked Monty Lowther, with elaborate politeness. Lowther could always be depended upon for sympathetic urbanity at dreadful moments like this.

"Yaas."

"So sorry!" murmured Manners.

"Too bad!" said Figgins.

"I weally can't undahstand it," said Arthur Augustus, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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and will contain a splendid long complete story entitled:

whose aristocratic countenance was assuming the hue of a well-boiled beetroot. "I have nevah known my patah fail me in this extwaordinary way befoah. But the fivah has not come."

"Oh!"

"It was pwomised for this mornin'," said D'Arcy. "It was not merely a fivah that I asked for extwa, you know; if it had been, I shouldn't have counted on it. But the patah pwomised to send me this fivah to weach me to-day—two days befoah bweakin' up for the Chwistmas holidays. It ought to have awwived this mornin'."

"Oh!"

"But it didn't—nor this aftahnoon, eithah. I considahed that there was probably some delay owin' to the crush in the Chwistmas post, you know, and that it would awwive for certain by this post, but it hasn't."

"Oh!"

"I know it's wotten," said D'Arcy feelingly. "I am extremely sowwy to disappoint you chaps. It's weally wotten. I feel that I am to blame, but it is weally most inexplicable that my governah should fail me in this way. He knows I was goin' to stand a partin' feed befoah bweakin' up, and yet he has not sent the fivah."

Wally snorted again.

"You ass, Wally, bringing us here to hear your blessed major gas!" murmured Jameson, in a stage whisper that was heard all over the study.

"And young Frayne will have wolfed all the sardines by this time," said Curly, with an unhappy grimace. "I thought we shouldn't want the sardines, but now—"

"Let's get out," said Wally.

"I am sowwy, you youngstahs—"

"Oh, rats!" said Wally. "You're an ass, Gussy."

"Weally, you young wascal—"

"Br-r-r-r-r!" said Wally. And he marched indignantly out of the study with the other two fags, and Curly Gibson closed the door with unnecessary force.

"I am weally awfully sowwy, you chaps," said D'Arcy.

"Don't mench," said Figgins politely. "Accidents will happen in the best regulated studies. I hope your father isn't ill!"

Arthur Augustus frowned in a worried way.

"The fact is, deah boy, that I'm afraid he is, or else that there is somethin' wrong at home, or he wouldn't have left me in the lurch in this remarkable way."

"Might have forgotten all about it," suggested Kangaroo.

"Imposs. I wote to him yestahday, and, besides, it would be imposs. undah the cires for a D'Arcy to forget a pwomise."

"The D'Arcys," said Lowther solemnly, "have first-class and well-established memories, which they brought over with the Conqueror."

"Sure, and it's hungry I am," remarked Reilly. "I've got a five-shillin' bit, and anybody who feels inclined to come to the tuckshop with me can come."

And Reilly left the study, promptly followed by Fatty Wynn of the New House, Kangaroo followed, and then P-ffern and Owen and Lawrence melted away. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's distress was so evident that they forbore to give any expression to disappointment or indignation.

"If you chaps feel inclined to come over to the New House," said Figgins hospitably, "we've got half a tin of sardines and two rolls."

Figgins's generous offer was not jumped at. Figgins and Kerr took their leave. The Terrible Three remained alone in the study with the Fourth-Formers, and the imposing array of crockeryware—no longer wanted.

"It's weally wotten," Arthur Augustus repeated.

"Horrible!" said Blake. "You must excuse us, you fellows. Gussy is always putting his blessed foot in it, and this is only once more."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Tom Merry. "I only hope it's only a case of forgetfulness, and that there is nothing wrong at Eastwood House."

"I fear there is somethin' wrong," said Arthur Augustus.

"But your mater would let you know," said Tom.

D'Arcy shook his head.

"The matah's away," he explained. "My eldah bwothah, Conway, is abroad with the matah, at Cannes. But Pilkington ought to have informed me."

"Who's Pilkington?"

"The butlah—our new butlah, and a weally reliable old chap," said Arthur Augustus. "I should certainly have expected to heah fwom Pilkington if the patah was ill. I weally think I will send a wiah to Pilkington and ask him what is wong, if you fellows will excuse me."

"Hold on," said Tom Merry. "You can send young Lynn or Toby with the wire. We're not quite stony in our study, and if you fellows would care to come to tea—"

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"THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday.

"Hear, hear!" said Blake heartily.

"Now you're talking," said Herries, with equal cordiality.

"Corn in Egypt!" said Digby. "I hope it won't be another feast of the giddy Barmecides like this—with nothing to eat."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Our board is frugal, but all are welcome," he said. "Better bring some of the crocks along with you—you've got all ours."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will wite out the telegwam, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "But once more pway allow me to apologise for the wotten fiasco—"

"Oh, that's all right."

"You get the giddy wire ready, and I'll call young Lynn," said Blake.

"Wight-ho! I trust some of you fellows can lend me some tin to pay for the telegwam; I am weally stonay, you know."

"Heaps!" said Tom Merry cordially.

"It will be a wathah long telegwam," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully, as he sat down to the table and drew pen and ink and a sheaf of impot paper from the drawer. "I must explain to the patah the weally awkward posish he has placed me in. Howevah, as you are comin' to Eastwood with me for the Chwistmas holidays, I will settle up with you at home, deah boy."

And Arthur Augustus wrote out his telegwam. His chums grinned as they read it over his shoulder.

"Dear pater,—I was very much disappointed at not receiving the remittance as promised for to-day. It has placed me in a very awkward position, as I had invited quite a number of friends to tea, and there was no feed. I really cannot understand it at all, unless you are ill, which I trust is not the case. Will you kindly telegraph me a fiver, and at the same time inform me whether there is anything wrong at home.—Your affectionate and anxious son, Arthur."

"You're going to telegraph all that?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Yaas; I have compressed it into as few words as poss., so as to save money, as we're in such beastly low funds, deah boy."

"Lucky you didn't write it at full length, then," said Tom Merry. "You would have had to wait for the fiver to come before you could telegraph for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Lynn, the boot-boy, was despatched with the telegwam and a half-sovereign to pay for it. There was not likely to be much change.

Then the chums of the School House adjourned to Tom Merry's study.

Under the cheering influence of tea and toast and poached eggs their spirits revived, but a cloud remained upon the noble brow of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

He persisted in thinking that the non-arrival of the fiver meant that there was something seriously wrong in the household of Lord Eastwood, his noble pater.

The other fellows considered it quite probable that Lord Eastwood had forgotten all about the matter—indeed, as Manners feelingly remarked, they had all been through such experiences themselves.

But Arthur Augustus was not to be convinced.

He explained to his grinning hearers that it was utterly impos. for a D'Arcy to forget any engagement that he had made.

And he waited with anxiety for a reply to his telegwam. But the reply did not come.

Tea in Tom Merry's study lasted a good while, but when it was over the reply to the telegwam had not arrived.

"Somethin's happened to the patah!" said D'Arcy, with conviction.

"Then the telegwam won't be opened," said Blake.

"Yaas; his secwetawy will attend to it, and weply," said D'Arcy. "Or Pilkington. One of them ought to weply at once."

After tea the juniors descended to the doorway of the School House to wait for the expected reply. Tom Merry & Co. were curious, though they did not quite share Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's anxiety.

In the winter dusk a lad in the Post Office uniform was seen at last coming across the quad, through the powdered snow, and he was heading for the School House.

"Heah he is, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy.

"Master D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, it's for me. Hand it ovah!"

Arthur Augustus opened the telegwam. Then he gave a sudden start and uttered an ejaculation.

"Gweat Scott!"

"Bad news?" exclaimed all the juniors together, with real concern.

"It's extwaordinawy!"

"But what is it?"

"It is vewy wemarkable——"

"What's the news, you ass?" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

Blake jerked the telegram away from the swell of St. Jim's and held it up for all the juniors to read. And they read it with wonder. It ran:

"Lord Eastwood disappeared three days ago. Am sending car to fetch you home at once.—PILKINGTON."

CHAPTER 3.

Arthur Augustus in Distress!

"DISAPPEARED!"

"Lord Eastwood!"

"Three days ago!"

"Great pip!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his famous monocle into his eye and stared blankly at the telegram. His aristocratic face had gone quite pale. Although he was sometimes a little severe upon his noble pater for shortcomings in the matter of sending fivers, he was deeply attached to his father, and the news was a shock to him.

"Disappeared!" he murmured. "The poor old patah! I told you there was somethin' wrong, deah boys! This is weally tewwible!"

"But—but how could he disappear?" said Tom Merry. "There must be some mistake. I suppose your man Pilkington isn't a practical joker, is he?"

"Certainly not! He is a vewy gwave and weliable butlah—quite a pawagon of butlahs! What can possibly have happened to the patah? The poor old patah!"

There was a break in Arthur Augustus's voice.

"It's rotten!" said Tom sympathetically. "But he must be found. Blessed if I can understand how he could disappear! You'll hear all about it from the chauffeur when the car arrives."

Arthur Augustus nodded, and moved away by himself. He was very much upset, and he did not wish to show it. The Co. discussed the matter with great excitement. When the school broke up they were to go home with D'Arcy to Eastwood House for the Christmas holidays, but under the circumstances the holiday was not likely to be the cheerful time they had anticipated. But they did not think of that. They were thinking of the distress of their chum.

The news was soon all over the School House. Arthur Augustus had retired to Study No. 5, not wishing to be the object of curious glances and questions.

Almost all the fellows were sympathetic. Levison, of the Fourth, suggested that Lord Eastwood had disappeared of his own accord, pointing out that he was director of several City companies, and that City directors sometimes found it convenient to disappear. He suggested that a telegram should be sent to the Argentine Republic to inquire for the missing earl. But Blake promptly bumped Levison on the floor, and Herries trod on him, and the cad of the Fourth ceased to make humorous suggestions.

In the absence of all particulars it was difficult to guess what had happened, or what was the state of affairs at Eastwood House. But the fellows who were to spend their Christmas holidays at Eastwood House consulted about the matter. Manners suggested that, under the circumstances, D'Arcy might not care to be bothered with them.

"Possibly," Tom Merry agreed. "On the other hand, we might help him look for his pater. If he's really disappeared, the police must be looking for him. But I dare say we could do it a little better."

"Hear, hear!" said Monty Lowther.

"Let's put it to Gussy and see," suggested Figgins.

And the prospective guests of Eastwood House proceeded to Study No. 6 in a body. There was quite a party of them—the Terrible Three and Kangaroo and Figgins & Co., of the New House. The seven juniors found Arthur Augustus pacing up and down the study with a pale and distressed face, and his eyeglass dangling forlornly at the end of its cord. Never had they seen their noble chum in such a state of distress.

"Cheer up, Gussy!" said Figgins kindly. "I dare say it won't turn out to be so serious when you know about it. The car must be here soon."

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"Pway excuse my bein' in this wotten distwacted state, deah boys!" he said. "But I am weally vewy much distressed about the poor old patah!"

"What do you think about our coming down to Eastwood?" said Tom Merry bluntly. "If you don't care for it under the circs., don't mind saying so. We shan't mind."

Arthur Augustus looked quite alarmed.

"My deah chaps, you're not goin' to desert me in this wotten posish?" he exclaimed.

"No fear! But if we should be in the way——"

"But pawwaps you would not care for a vacation at Eastwood House undah these misewable circs.," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It would spoil your Chwistmas holiday. Of course, until the patah is found it won't be vewy jolly there. If you would wathah not come I shall not be offended."

"Rats!" said Blake.

"It's not that," said Tom Merry. "We'd like to come and help you look for your pater."

"Yaas, that's just what I was thinkin', deah boys," said Arthur Augustus eagerly. "If he has disappeared for three days the police must be lookin' for him, and as they haven't found him, it shows that it's time somebody else took the mattah in hand. If you fellows don't mind sacwificin' your Chwistmas holidays on my account, I should vewy much like you to come and help me."

"Done!" said Lowther.

"Right-ho!" said Kangaroo. "We're coming, then. And depend on it, we'll find Lord Eastwood all right. If he disappeared at Eastwood he can't be very far away, and we'll find him all right. It's a pity we can't come with you to-day!"

"I was thinkin' of askin' the Head to let you come back with me in the cah, deah boys."

"Hurrah!"

"If you think it a good ideah, I will pwoceed to the Head at once and make the request."

"I'm afraid he won't see it, but there's no harm in asking," said Tom Merry. "Buzz off now, and if he says yes, we'll get our things ready to start."

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus left the study to proceed to interview the Head. Tom Merry & Co. waited anxiously for his return. He came back in about ten minutes with the cloud still on his brow.

"Well?" demanded all the juniors eagerly.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Dr. Holmes is vewy much concerned," he said, "but he thinks that the police must be lookin' for the patah, and that they can handle the mattah bettah than we can. He says I can take two of my fiends with me, but he weally cannot give permish for so many fellows to leave the school befoah bweakin' up."

"Only two?" said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Yaas; two fellows in my own Form."

"Oh!" said the Terrible Three, with one voice. As they were in the Shell, that barred them out.

Herries and Digby and Blake exchanged glances.

"I'll tell you what!" said Herries. "I'll come and bring Towser with me."

"Towsah!"

"Yes; my bulldog, you know. You know what a splendid ripper Towser is at following a trail. He'll smell out what's become of Lord Eastwood in next to no time," said Herries confidently.

"Ahem!"

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake politely. "He'd never smell out anything but a steak or a red herring. Of course I'm one of the two, Gussy?"

"Yaas, deah boy."

"Then I'll be the other," said Herries. "I'll bring Towser, and——"

"Excuse me!" said Digby. "Under the circs., I think I'd better be the other. You see, Gussy will want looking after——"

"Yes; I'll look after him," agreed Herries.

"Now, look here, Herries——"

"Look here, Digby——"

"Toss up for it!" suggested Kangaroo.

"Yaas, that's a good ideah, deah boys."

And Herries and Digby tossed up for it; and Arthur Augustus was observed to breathe a sigh of relief when Digby won the toss. He had not been overjoyed by Herries's kind offer to bring Towser. As Arthur Augustus often remarked, Herries's bulldog had no respect whatever for a fellow's trousers.

"It's Blake and Dig," said Tom Merry, while Herries grunted. "Get your bags ready, you chaps; the car can't be long now."

ANSWERS

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price 1d. and will contain a splendid long complete story entitled:

Zip-zip-zip! Hoot! Hoot!
 "There it is, in the quad!" exclaimed Blake.
 And Arthur Augustus rushed downstairs to meet the Eastwood car.

CHAPTER 4.

Levison Eats His Words.

THE big Daimler car stopped outside the School House, and the chauffeur stopped down, as Arthur Augustus came dashing out. The chauffeur touched his cap to him. Arthur Augustus caught him by the arm in his excitement. In his anxiety for his father, the swell of St. Jim's had quite lost the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"What has happened to my patah, Wuggles? Pway tell me at once!"

Ruggles was looking very grave.

"Lord Eastwood disappeared three days ago, Master Arthur," he said. "Nothin' has been heard of him since. The police have been at Eastwood House, looking for him—and they're still looking for him; but he ain't been found."

"Bai Jove! I ought to have been informed befoah!"

"Mr. Pilkington did not wish to worry you, sir, as you could not do anything," said Ruggles. "But when your telegram came to-day, he sent me off with the car to fetch you."

"But how did the patah disappeah? Was there an accident?"

"Nothing is known, sir. Lord Eastwood stayed up in the library after the rest of the house had gone to bed, and he was missing in the morning. His bed had not been slept in. A door was found open, and that was all."

"Gweat Scott! And has no trace of him been found?"

"Yee, sir—his hat was picked up in a field nearly a mile from Eastwood House. Excepting for that, there is nothing known."

"Then he must have left the house of his own accord, Wuggles?"

"So the police suppose, sir—but what became of him afterwards, nobody knows. Only—only—" The chauffeur hesitated.

"What—what? Quick, deah boy!"

"The servants say that the Eastwood ghost has been seen, and heard, since Lord Eastwood disappeared, sir. That is all!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus shuddered.

"What's that about the ghost?" said Tom Merry. "Don't let that worry you, Gussy. Pull yourself together."

"I—I—I don't let it wowwy me, deah boy, but—but—" Arthur Augustus faltered. "You don't know the ghost story in our family, you see. There's a legend in Eastwood House that when the ghost of Sir Bulkeley D'Arcy walks, it means the death of the head of the family. Of course, there's nothin' in it—but—but—my patah has disappeahed."

Blake squeezed his arm affectionately.

"Buck up, old son—we'll find him soon enough," he said. "We'll be ready in a jiffy, and get off in the car. Come and get your coat."

"Yaas, wathah!"

It did not take the three juniors long to get ready. Wally had gone off to the village tuckshop with Jameson and Curly, and, so far, he knew nothing of the strange news from Eastwood House. Blake and Digby and D'Arcy came out in their coats and mufflers, and their bags were placed in the car.

"Send us a wire to-morrow to tell us how you're getting on," said Tom Merry hopefully; "and the day after to-morrow we shall be with you, you know."

"And I'll bring Towser with me," said Herries.

And the chums shook hands and parted.

The car drove away, and disappeared in the gloom, leaving Tom Merry & Co. in a state of great anxiety and excitement.

They would greatly have preferred to accompany their chum, and help him in the attempt to solve the mystery of his father's disappearance; though, as a matter of absolute fact, it was not likely that they would succeed where the police had failed.

What had happened to Lord Eastwood?

Well the juniors remembered the stately, kind-hearted old gentleman, who had welcomed, more than once, his son's chums to holidays at Eastwood House.

Would they ever see him again?

Had there been some terrible accident, and was the body of the kind old gentleman hidden under some frozen stream—or had he been kidnapped? One of the two theories seemed certain—but which—and how—and why? It was an impenetrable mystery.

Their anxiety for their chum threw a cloud over the spirits of the School House fellows, and Figgins & Co. fully shared their feelings.

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The Terrible Three were discussing the matter in their study an hour later when Wally burst in. Wally was in a state of great excitement.

"Look here, what's all this about?" he exclaimed. "What's this about my governor disappearing? I've just heard it from Levison. Levison says there's news that he's sloped with the funds of the South American Bank."

"The rotter!"

"I dotted him on the nose," said Wally, who showed signs of conflict. "I knew he was lying, of course. But what has happened? You chaps know, of course."

Tom Merry explained all he knew.

D'Arcy minor listened breathlessly.

"The poor old governor!" he exclaimed. "How rotten that I wasn't here when the car came. And it's too late for a train to-night! But I shall jolly well buzz off in the morning, and see what's going on, you bet!"

And Wally, looking much more serious than was customary with the reckless scamp of the Third, walked out of the study.

A little later, when the Terrible Three had finished their preparation and were coming downstairs, they heard the sound of uproar from the junior common-room. Wally's voice could be heard raised in tones of angry indignation, amid chuckles from other fellows. The chums of the Shell hurried into the room.

Levison, of the Fourth, was standing before a paper placard pinned up on the wall of the common-room. A number of fellows were grinning over the placard. It bore the words in Levison's hand:

"NINEPENCE REWARD!"

"WHEREAS Lord Tomnoddy* has Mysteriously Disappeared with the Funds of the Bank of which he was director, and whereas the Police have been unable to trace him:

"The above REWARD will be paid to anybody giving information leading to his discovery and conviction!"

"BY ORDER."

Wally was crimson with fury, and he was trying to get at Levison, but Crooke, of the Shell, and Mellish, of the Fourth, were holding him back.

"You cad!" roared Wally. "You rotten outsider! You worm! Leggo! Lemme get at him! I'll smash him! I'll—"

"What's the matter with you?" grinned Levison. "Lord Tomnoddy isn't a relation of yours, is he, young shaver?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean that for my father, you rotten cad!" howled Wally, struggling to get away from Crooke and Mellish.

"Cap fit, cap wear," chuckled Levison. "If your pater has disappeared with the bank funds, of course that might apply to him. But you said he hadn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lemme go—I'll smash him—"

"Take that rubbish down," said Kerraish, of the Fourth. "It's a dirty, caddish thing to make jokes about what's happened to D'Arcy's pater."

"Mind your own business," said Crooke.

The Terrible Three came in, and they marched upon the scene at once. Tom Merry caught Levison by the shoulder.

"You'll take that paper down, you cad!" he said.

"I won't!" said Levison.

"Yes, you will," said Tom, grasping him by the back of the collar, and swinging him to the wall where the paper was pinned. "You're a lying cad, and you know that isn't true. You're going to eat your words. Take it down."

"Grooh! Leggo my collar!" mumbled Levison. "You're choking me, you idiot!"

"Will you take that paper down?"

"No!" howled Levison.

Tom Merry raised his right boot, and it came into violent contact with Levison's trousers. There was a roar of anguish from the cad of the Fourth.

"Ow! Oh! Yarooop!"

"Now take it down!"

Levison was helpless in the powerful grip of the captain of the Shell. Sullenly he grabbed the placard down from the wall.

"Now you're going to eat your words," said Tom Merry grimly.

"What do you mean?" snarled Levison.

Tom Merry pointed to the paper with his disengaged hand.

"There are your lies, written on that paper. Eat them!"

"Eat that paper? Are you dotty?"

"Not at all! You're going to eat it," said Tom Merry determinedly. "It won't be nice—it's never nice to swallow one's own rotten lies—but you've got to do it. Wally, there's Gussy's cane in the corner. Get it!"



"Hallo, Henry, old son," said Wally, giving the stately footman a dig in the ribs by way of greeting. "Where's Pilky?" (See Chapter 9.)

Crooke and Mellish had released Wally—under forcible pressure from Manners and Lowther. Wally grinned, and ran for the cane. Tom Merry exerted his strength, and twisted Levison over on the hearthrug, face downwards.

"Now thrash him, till he eats his words," he said.

"What-ho!" grinned Wally.

The cane rose and fell with vigorous lashes.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Levison. "You—ow! Crooke—Mellish—Gore—lend me a hand, you cads! Rescue! Ow!"

But Crooke and Mellish and Gore did not lend him a hand.

And the other fellows stood round grinning, not at all disapproving of the punishment of the cad of the Fourth.

Whack, whack, whack!

"We're waiting!" said Tom Merry.

Levison made a desperate effort, but he could not get loose, and still the dust rose from his nether garments under the lashes of the cane. Wally was putting all his energy into it.

"Ow, ow, ow! Leave off!" yelled Levison. "I—I—I'll eat it—yoow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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And he grabbed the paper and stuffed it into his mouth, amid roars of laughter from the fellows looking on. Wally suspended operations while the cad of the Fourth furiously masticated the extremely unsavoury article of diet. Not until he had fairly eaten his words—with the paper they were written on—was Levison released.

"Now, you buzz off, and keep your funny little jokes for a more suitable occasion," said Tom Merry, shaking a warning finger at him.

And Levison, choking with rage and with his unpleasant morsel, limped away. And there were no more jokes from Levison of the Fourth upon the subject of Lord Eastwood's mysterious disappearance.

CHAPTER 5.

D'Arcy's Homecoming.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was silent as the big car rolled swiftly through the gloom.

Through long, dark roads, under shadowy, leafless trees, the motor-car rushed on, the acetylene-lamps gleaming out far ahead through the darkness.

Blake and Digby were silent, too.

They tried at first to cheer up their companion with hopeful words; but it was useless. Arthur replied only in monosyllables, and at last the two juniors ceased their good-natured attempts.

The swell of St. Jim's wrinkled his brows in troubled thought. His anxiety for his father was keen, and always there was a dread in his breast that something terrible had happened, and that he would never see him again.

If he were still living, where was he? How could he have been spirited away from his own home? If he had left the house of his own accord, as the finding of his hat in the field seemed to indicate, where was he now, and why had he not returned? If he had been taken by force, then by whom—for what reason? Arthur Augustus tried to puzzle out those questions as the car rushed on at breathless speed.

Mile after mile flew under the racing wheels, but the pace seemed slow to the anxious junior.

Would he never be home?

Easthorpe at last—the village near Eastwood House—where the juniors were to play the village team in a football match during the holidays. Arthur Augustus was not thinking much about football now. Unless his father was found, his Christmas holidays were not likely to be happy ones. The car slackened down in the village street. Outside the Eastwood Arms, Mr. Boker, the fat village constable, touched his helmet to Arthur Augustus as the car ran by, and, worried as he was, Arthur Augustus did not fail to raise his hat politely in acknowledgment of the salute. Then on up the road to Eastwood House—a pause at the park gates—and then up the drive, and Arthur Augustus was home at last.

The swell of St. Jim's jumped out of the car.

A stout, imposing, florid-complexioned gentleman in whiskers came forward to meet him as he alighted. It was the inestimable Pilkington. Upon Pilkington's florid face was a look of gravity and concern, which matched his stately manner and his respectable whiskers.

"Has anythin' been heard yet?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hastily.

The butler shook his head.

"I am sorry to say not, Master Arthur," he said sadly.

"There has been no news."

"The police—"

"They are not here now, sir."

"And nothin'—nothin' has been heard—or discovered—nothin' at all?"

"Not yet, Master Arthur; but the detectives have hopes of finding his lordship soon," said Pilkington, with respectful sympathy. "Mr. Dodder of Scotland Yard is in charge of the case. He has been here several times, and I have taken the liberty, sir, of offering him a room."

"Quite wight, Pilkington. Has my bwothah been told?"

"Lord Conway was informed by wire, sir," said Pilkington. "But Lady Eastwood is not at present in sufficiently good health to be informed, and Lord Conway has therefore not started for England."

"All wight, Pilkington," said Arthur Augustus wearily. "Have some wooms got weady for my fwends, will you—the othah chaps are comin' to-morrow."

"Certainly, sir."

"Come in, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was hopin' you'd come undah wathah more cheewy cires, you know; this is wathah wotten for you."

"Don't mench!" said Blake. "We're here to make ourselves useful. We're going to start on the hunt at once."

"Yes, rather!" said Digby emphatically.

They were in the hall when they made those remarks. Pilkington turned round and glanced at them curiously.

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But it was only for a second that the stately Pilkington allowed so common a feeling as curiosity to influence him. Then his face was wooden and expressionless again.

"The Painted Room has been prepared for you, Master Arthur," he said.

"Good! The next two wooms will do for my fwends, then, as they join. Come up with me, deah boys!"

And the juniors went upstairs.

Pilkington turned on the electric light in the Painted Room. It was a large and handsome bed-room, with a balcony that gave a view of Eastwood Park in the daytime. The walls were of panelled oak, and the ceiling, which was of wood, was painted in the Italian style, with a blue sky and a scene from mythology. It was an old room, and its decoration dated from the days of Charles II. In the centre of the ceiling, amid the grouping nymphs, a fat and jolly-looking Bacchus reclined under clusters of ripe purple grapes—a figure more than life-size, with lips that seemed to grin, and eyes that seemed to wink, over the enjoyment of the foaming goblet he held in his hand. Round the figures and the grape-vine was painted the blue sky of Greece, and it was from that ceiling that the room derived its name.

"This is a jolly room, Gussy!" said Blake, glancing up at the painted ceiling. "You've changed your quarters. You weren't in here the last time we came down."

"No; why have you changed the woom, Pilkington?" asked D'Arcy. "Why didn't you get my old quartahs weady for me?"

"I am sorry, sir, but your old room is out of repair," said Pilkington. "There has been a fall of plaster from the ceiling, and the chimney is also out of order. Under the cigeran stances, sir, I had this room prepared."

"Vewy good, Pilkington; it's all wight. This is quite an histovie chambah, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus. "The Lord Eastwood in the weign of George III. was found dead in this woom, so they say, killed by a sword-thrust, and the door was locked on the inside, and nobody knew how the othah chap got away. Of course, that's all wot—unless he let himself down with a wope from the balcony. Pway have suppah pwpared, Pilkington!"

And the butler departed.

On either side of the Painted Room were doors communicating with the next apartments, and those were the rooms Blake and Digby were to occupy; but the rooms were not prepared for them yet, their arrival with Arthur Augustus that night being unexpected.

It had occurred to Jack Blake that the respectable Pilkington was not overpleased to see their arrival with Arthur Augustus; perhaps not wishing to be bothered by guests in the house during the period of anxiety that followed Lord Eastwood's disappearance. But as Pilkington's wishes in the matter were not of any consequence, Blake did not allow that to trouble him.

Supper was ready for the juniors when they came down, and both Blake and Digby were ready for it.

Arthur Augustus had very little appetite; indeed, he would not have eaten at all had not Jack Blake ordered him to do so, with all the authority of the leader of Study No. 6 at St. Jim's.

"You've got work before you, if we're going to find your pater," said Blake, "and you've got to eat. You know what Fatty Wynn says—lay a solid foundation."

Arthur Augustus smiled faintly.

"I feel wathah upset," he explained.

"You'll feel still more upset if you don't eat," said Blake. "Now, pile into that chicken, and I'll watch you."

"I'd wathah not—"

"Under the present circumstances, Gussy, especially as your guest, I should be very sorry to give you a thick ear," said Blake. "But I shall certainly give you one if you don't start on that chicken at once."

And Arthur grinned a little and started on the chicken.

It did him good, too, and a glass of wine after it brought the colour back to his cheeks.

Pilkington himself waited upon the juniors, and he did it superbly. There was no doubt that Lord Eastwood had a treasure of a butler in Pilkington.

During supper the juniors asked him incessant questions concerning the amazing disappearance of his master, and Pilkington gave them all the information that was known.

Lord Eastwood had stayed up writing in the library. The rest of the household had gone to bed. Pilkington understood that his lordship had been busy with some papers relating to the Anglo-South-American Syndicate, an enterprise of which he was a director. Papers relating to the syndicate had been found on the library table in the morning. His lordship had not gone to bed.

His room had been found unoccupied, his bed unslept in, by his valet in the morning.

But Pilkington had found a door open, which had certainly

been locked as usual overnight, and so it was evident that Lord Eastwood had left the house.

As he did not return, the household became anxious for him, and when his hat was found at some distance from Eastwood House, Pilkington called in the aid of the police.

The local police discovered nothing, and Mr. Dodder, a prominent detective from Scotland Yard, came down to investigate.

Lord Eastwood's eldest son, Lord Conway, was kept informed by telegram, and he gave instructions for what was to be done.

That the earl had left the house of his own accord seemed certain, for how could he have been taken away by violence without a sound being heard?

But where he had gone since—what had become of him—was a mystery.

His colleagues of the Anglo-South-American Syndicate were very anxious about him, and from them, and from many other gentlemen, Pilkington had received a whole sheaf of telegrams of inquiry.

It seemed that the affairs of the syndicate required Lord Eastwood's presence urgently.

"And is there no theory as to what has happened?" asked Arthur Augustus. "What does Mr. Doddah think?"

"That he has not confided to me, sir," said Pilkington, and if it had been possible to suspect the stately butler of sarcasm, Blake could have sworn that there was a sarcastic inflection in Pilkington's voice.

But Arthur Augustus did not notice it. He would never have dreamed of suspecting Pilkington of impertinence.

"But what do other people think?" asked D'Arcy. Pilkington coughed.

"There have been some unpleasant suggestions, sir, by persons unacquainted with his lordship's character," he admitted.

D'Arcy flushed.

"Whatevah do you mean, Pilkington?"

"Please do not make me say any more, sir. It would be an impertinence even to repeat the unpleasant suggestions that have been made."

"Tell me at once, Pilkington."

"Ahem!"

"I am waitin'," said Arthur Augustus sharply.

"If you insist, sir—"

"Yaas, I do—pway get on, and don't waste time."

"Ahem! Well, sir, it has been suggested—I hardly like to continue—"

"You are wastin' time."

"Ahem! Well, sir, it has been whispered—people will talk scandal, sir," said Pilkington apologetically—"that—that—"

"That what?" demanded Arthur Augustus, exasperated.

"That Lord Eastwood has disappeared of his own accord, sir," said Pilkington reluctantly, "that it has something to do with the affairs of the Anglo-South-American Syndicate, sir, and that he could return if he wished. Of course, it is an infamous suggestion, and I am sorry you have compelled me to mention it, sir."

"The wotahs!" said Arthur Augustus, breathing hard through his nose. "The uttah wotahs! But I only wish I could think it was true, and that the putah was weally safe and sound all the time."

"We're going to find him," said Blake determinedly. Pilkington's eyes turned upon him.

"You, sir!" he said, and then added, at once. "Pray excuse me, sir, for speaking."

"That's all right," said Blake. "We're going to find him. Tom Merry and the rest will be here to-morrow, and we'll simply ransack the whole county for him, if necessary."

"I trust you will be successful, sir," said Pilkington respectfully. "It would be very gratifying to Mr. Dodder if you could assist him."

This time Blake felt certain that the serious and solemn Pilkington was speaking sarcastically, and he felt an inclination to bestow his boot upon the stout and stately person of the butler.

He had an uncomfortable feeling that Pilkington, under his solemn reserve, and almost obsequious respect, was laughing at him in his sleeve. Such a thought would never have occurred to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who simply could never have realised that a servant could be capable of making fun, to himself, of his master, or his master's friends. If Arthur Augustus had had any experience of the servants' hall he would have been very much enlightened on that point.

"Let's begin," said Blake abruptly.

"Yaas, wotah! You can go to bed now, Pilkington, if you like," said Arthur Augustus. "We're goin' to start lookin' for my putah."

"Ahem! To-night, sir."

"Yaas, at once."

"Perhaps I can be of some assistance, Master Arthur,"

Pilkington suggested respectfully. "If you will allow me to help, it will be very gratifying to me."

"Vewy good," said D'Arcy. "Come on, deah boys! We will go to the libwawy first, and begin at the beginning."

And the juniors rose from the supper-table to begin their quest.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Dead of Night.

PILKINGTON led the way to the library.

Exactly what they were going to do, or how they were going to do it, the chums of St. Jim's did not know.

But one thing was certain. They could not rest until they had made an attempt, at least, to penetrate the mystery of the disappearance of Lord Eastwood.

The discovery that idle tongues were gossiping about his father's disappearance made Arthur Augustus keener than ever.

The household were all in bed at that late hour, with the exception of the butler and D'Arcy and his guests.

How to begin the quest they did not know. As D'Arcy said, they had to be guided by "circs." Arthur Augustus prided himself a little on his abilities as an amateur detective, and he had a vague hope of finding a clue of some sort.

The library was a vast apartment, book-lined from floor to ceiling, and where there were no books, the walls were of panelled oak, that gleamed in the electric light.

Pilkington stood in an attitude of respectful attention while the juniors began to search for clues.

"Undah such circs, Sherlock Holmes genewally finds the ash of a cigawette, or somethin'," said Arthur Augustus hopefully.

"H'm!" said Blake.

No such clue was discovered in the library.

After ten minutes of looking about them and pondering, the juniors had to admit that nothing was to be discovered there.

In spite of themselves, they were growing discouraged.

Lord Eastwood seemed to have vanished without leaving a trace behind, and without a clue to follow. How could they hope to discover what had become of him?

"By the way, what was that Wuggles was sayin' about the ghost?" Arthur Augustus exclaimed suddenly. "Tell us about that, Pilkington."

The butler allowed himself a slight smile.

"It was some nonsense, sir, of Henry's."

"Who's Henry?" asked Blake.

"The second footman, sir."

"Good! Go on. What did Henry see?"

"I am afraid he saw nothing, sir, but he fancied he did. It was the night after his lordship's disappearance, sir, and it seems that Henry was uneasy, and came down to ascertain that all the doors and windows were locked. He asserts that he saw a dark figure in this room, that passed so close to him that he felt it breathe; but as he turned on the electric light, it vanished."

"That sounds like wot," said D'Arcy.

"I fear so. Henry's nerves must have been disturbed by the strange disappearance of his lordship."

"I will speak to Henry in the mornin'." So it was in this room that he fancied he saw the ghost?

"Yes, sir."

"No trace of him left," said D'Arcy. "Let's see the door that was found open. There might be finger-prints or something. They find out lots of things at Scotland Yard through finger-prints and things."

"Yaas, come on."

Pilkington led the way again. They passed from the library into the picture-gallery, where fine old paintings glimmered from the walls, and the faces of a hundred dead and gone D'Arcys looked down upon their descendant.

At the end of the picture-gallery was a door giving on a balcony, where there were steps to the terrace.

"This door was found unfastened, sir," said Pilkington. "His lordship must have left the house this way, as most convenient at the time."

The three juniors examined the door attentively. Pilkington stood with an expressionless face while they did so. He seemed to have no desire, but to be respectfully useful, and yet Blake was certain that he was secretly regarding the whole proceeding as a foolish fancy of boyish minds.

And, indeed, if Pilkington looked at it in that light, it was not without some reason, Blake had to confess. What could they hope to discover, where a Scotland Yard detective had failed to find any clue?

Certainly they found nothing here. Arthur Augustus looked doubtfully at his chums.

"You fellows gettin' sleepy?" he asked.

"THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"No fear!" said Digby, manfully stifling a yawn.
 "We're going to see this through," said Blake.
 "Wight-ho! Then we'll get a lantern, and go to the place where my patah's hat was found. Is it fah fwom heah, Pilkington?"

"About a mile, sir."
 "You fellows willin'?"
 "Yes, rather," said Blake; and Digby nodded assent.
 "Ahem! It is considerably past midnight, sir," hinted Pilkington. "Perhaps in the morning, Master Arthur—"
 "You can go to bed if you like, Pilkington. Just tell us where—"

"Not at all, sir. I was not thinking of myself," said Pilkington in a grievous tone. "I was thinking of your health, sir. I should be very pleased and gratified, sir, to have the honour of guiding you to the spot."

"Then get a lantern, please."
 "At once, Master Arthur."

Pilkington departed, and returned in a few minutes with a lighted lantern. Then the four left the picture-gallery, and descended the stone steps to the terrace, and the butler led the way across the grounds. They quitted the park, and followed the course of the river beyond, along the towing-path by the frozen stream. Pilkington, holding the lantern with the light gleaming out before him, turned from the river into a field.

Under a group of frosty, leafless willows, he stopped.

"It was here, sir," he said.

Arthur Augustus drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then it was some distance fwom the wivah?" he said.

"Certainly, sir."

"Then—then—it is imposs., that—that—"

"The river was frozen, sir, and the ice was unbroken," said Pilkington. "It was quite impossible that his lordship could have fallen into the river, sir."

"But what on earth could he have wanted in this lonely field?" said Blake, puzzled. "I mean, if he came here of his own accord."

Pilkington coughed.

"Have you any ideah about it, Pilkington?" asked D'Arcy sharply.

"None, sir."

"You were thinkin' somethin'—what was it?"

"Ahem! The gossip I mentioned, sir. There is a road on the other side of this field, and the traces of a motor-car were found there. I am quite sure that it was a motor-car with which his lordship had no connection whatever; but you know how idle tongues will gossip, sir."

Arthur Augustus compressed his lips.

He understood that everything pointed to a voluntary disappearance on the part of Lord Eastwood. Across the field was a short cut to a lonely road, where a motor-car might have been in waiting.

"Bai Joye, there are footpwwts!" said Arthur Augustus suddenly, scanning the ground in the light of the lantern.

"Yes, sir; nearly all the villagers have been here out of curiosity," said Pilkington gravely.

"Oh!"

There was evidently nothing to be done.

"Let us return, deah boys," said D'Arcy heavily.

And they walked back through the dark night to Eastwood House.

Pilkington carefully closed and locked the door of the picture-gallery, and put out the lantern.

"The young gentlemen's rooms have been prepared, sir," he said.

"Yaas. I suppose we'd bettah go to bed, deah boys; there's nothin' more to be done to-night."

And the juniors went upstairs.

Bright fires were burning in the wide, old-fashioned grates in the three adjoining rooms. Arthur Augustus threw himself into an armchair before his fire.

"Not going to bed?" asked Blake.

"I—I don't feel sleepy, weally," said Arthur Augustus.

"You chaps go to bed, and I'll turn in as soon as I think I can sleep."

"Better turn in," urged Dig.

But D'Arcy shook his head.

"We'll sit up with you," said Blake.

"Wats! It's fwightfully late now, and we've got to be up early in the mornin' to start again. I shall be all wight. Good-night, deah boys."

And Blake and Digby, who were very tired and sleepy, went to bed.

The doors on either side of the Painted Room closed upon them, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left alone.

The swell of St. Jim's sat before the fire, watching the leaping flames among the logs, and thinking.

What had become of his father?

That was the question that hammered in his brain, and

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drove away all thought of sleep. He was tired, and heavy, but he could not sleep.

The house was still and silent.

It was past one o'clock, and still Arthur Augustus sat in the deep, old chair, watching the dying embers.

The room was brilliantly-illuminated by the electric light, the old panelled walls glimmered and gleamed in it. Arthur Augustus's gaze wandered to the painted ceiling, and he idly watched the graceful forms of the nymphs delineated there, and the jolly face of Bacchus, crowned with vine-leaves.

The face of the god of wine seemed to grin at him, and the eyes to watch him with a derisive smile. Suddenly Arthur Augustus gave a violent start. It seemed to him that the painted eyes of the Bacchus had actually moved—that they were actually living, and were watching him.

"Bai Joye, I suppose I'm gettin' dweamy!" he murmured.

He watched the painted figure in a fascinated way.

Was it imagination?

Could an eye painted by human hand gleam at him in that manner—watching him—watching him!

A shudder ran through D'Arcy's limbs.

The stillness of the house was oppressive. He wished that Blake and Digby had been with him still. What was the matter with him—was he half-asleep and dreaming, or—what was it? With a tremor running through him, and a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, D'Arcy, reclining in the deep chair, gazed upward at the painted ceiling—gazed at the painted eye that was watching him, and suddenly he sprang to his feet with a cry.

"It is alive! It is alive! Good heavens—"

The light suddenly went out, and the room was plunged into darkness.

CHAPTER 7.

Missing!

BLAKE sat up in bed and yawned.
 The clear, wintry sunlight was streaming in at the windows of his room.

It was morning—a cold, clear winter morning. There was frost on the windows, and outside the trees were powdered with white.

"My hat, it's late!" Blake exclaimed.

He looked at his watch.

"Ten o'clock! Great Scott!"

He jumped out of bed.

The juniors had intended to rise very early that morning to recommence the search for the missing man. But they had gone to bed so late and tired that it was not surprising they had slept late in the morning. D'Arcy had given Pilkington instructions to knock at his door at seven o'clock, and he had intended to call his chums. But apparently sleep had calmed him.

Blake, shivering in his pyjamas, ran to the communicating door, and opened it. He half-expected to see Arthur Augustus asleep in the chair before the fireplace, but the chair was empty.

"Gussy, old man, wake up!"

But the bed was empty.

Blake whistled.

"The young ass! He's gone out without calling me. I wonder whether Dig's up?"

He went into Dig's room. Digby was fast asleep in bed, sleeping the sleep of the just. Blake awoke him by the simple process of jerking off the bedclothes. Digby gasped, and awakened immediately.

"Groo! I say, 'tain't rising-bell?"

"You're not in the Fourth Form dorm, now, fathead!" said Blake. "Wake up! It's past ten o'clock, and Gussy has gone out without us."

"Ow!" said Dig, rubbing his eyes. "All serene. Touch that bell for me."

"Where is Master D'Arcy?" Blake asked the servant who brought the hot water; but the man did not know.

The juniors hurried through their toilet, and went downstairs. They were both a little anxious about D'Arcy. Their chum had been so disturbed the previous night, and so unlike his usual calm self, that they did not like his getting out of their sight like this.

"Just like Gussy to let us have our snooze out, but I wish he had called us," said Blake. "He will be getting into some trouble if we don't look after him."

"Blessed if I know where he can have gone to," said Digby. "He must have slept in his clothes last night, a thing he's never done before, you bet. Poor old Gussy must have been awfully upset to sleep in his clothes."

Pilkington, grave and urbane as usual, bade the juniors a respectful good-morning in the breakfast-room.

"Where's Master D'Arcy?" Blake asked.

"Ho has not come down yet, sir."



Towser seemed inclined to go to sleep, but Herries jerked at his leash and showed him D'Arcy's handkerchief. Towser made a grab at it, and, with an expression of disgust, closed his eyes again. (See Chapter 10.)

Blake jumped.

"Not come down!"

"No, sir. I knocked at his door at seven o'clock this morning, as he desired; but as he did not reply, I concluded that he did not wish to rise. He retired at a very late hour last night, sir, as you are aware," added Pilkington, with a respectful smile.

The juniors stared at him.

"Do you think D'Arcy is still in his room, then?" exclaimed Blake.

Pilkington looked surprised.

"Why, certainly, sir."

"But he isn't!" exclaimed Blake excitedly. "His bed hasn't been slept in. He didn't go to bed last night at all."

"Good gracious, sir!" said Pilkington.

"I thought he had slept in the chair, and gone out early this morning, and not come in," said Blake.

"I suppose he must have done so, if he is not in his room,

sir," said Pilkington. "But it is certainly very odd, for I do not think he has been seen downstairs. Perhaps I had better question the servants, sir."

"Please do," said Blake.

The two juniors sat down to breakfast, while Pilkington went away to make inquiries for Arthur Augustus.

Blake and Digby were very uneasy.

It seemed hardly possible that anything had happened to D'Arcy. Yet—

Of course, he must be about the house or the grounds somewhere, they reasoned. But after the mysterious disappearance of Lord Eastwood, D'Arcy's vanishing in this way made them feel very disquieted.

Excellent as the fare was on the breakfast-table, the two juniors did not enjoy it. They were too worried. They had nearly finished their breakfast when Pilkington came back, looking graver than ever.

"It is extraordinary!" he said.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"

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Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price 1d. and will contain a splendid long complete story entitled:

"Where is he?"

"No one has seen Master D'Arcy this morning, sir. I have asked all the servants, and also the gardeners, and everybody about the house, but he has not been seen. Is it not curious that he should go out in this way without leaving a word? I presume he is searching for some trace of his lordship."

Blake felt his heart sink.

"Something's happened to him," he said, with conviction. "He wouldn't go off like that without leaving a word, or telling us. It's impossible."

"Something's happened," repeated Digby.

"I have ordered the servants to look for Master D'Arcy, and have also spoken to the head-keeper," said Pilkington. "Perhaps he may be found further from the house. I think he had some intention of revisiting the field where his lordship's hat was found."

"We'll look there first," said Blake.

"Come on!" exclaimed Dig, jumping up from the table, and leaving his rashers and eggs unfinished. "I know something's happened."

"You can find the place, young gentlemen?" asked the butler.

"Well, no," said Blake, "I don't know the way. Get somebody to show us."

"I will have that pleasure myself, sir."

"Come on, then."

In a quarter of an hour they were in the field they had scanned the previous night. But there was no sign of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was possible that the swell of St. Jim's was among the willows, examining the ground for tracks. They knew he had great faith in his powers as a Boy Scout.

But Blake and Digby searched through the frosty trees, and they did not find the swell of St. Jim's. But Dig uttered a sudden exclamation, and stooped and picked something from the ground.

It was a handkerchief, marked with D'Arcy's monogram in the corner.

"That's Gussy's!" exclaimed Dig.

"Might have dropped it here last night," muttered Blake. But even as he spoke he shook his head. He knew that D'Arcy had not been on that precise spot while scanning the ground the night before.

"He's been here since," said Dig.

"Then where is he?"

There was no sign of him. They searched along the river, and through the fields and the park, anxiously calling to their chum. Pilkington, looking very disturbed and anxious, left them, and returned to the house. It was possible that Arthur Augustus had some reason for his sudden departure, and would return. But, under the circumstances, Pilkington declared that he had better telephone to the police in Easthorpe, and the juniors fully agreed with him.

All through the morning the search for the swell of St. Jim's went on.

The local police from Easthorpe, the gamekeepers, and others joined in the search, and about lunch-time Mr. Dodder of Scotland Yard arrived.

But the search was in vain.

Blake and Digby, tired out, and almost haggard with anxiety, gave up the search at last. There was no doubt about it—Arthur Augustus had mysteriously disappeared, even as his father had disappeared. The same mysterious fate had fallen upon both father and son. Pilkington wired to Lord Conway at Cannes, and Blake determined to send a wire to Tom Merry at St. Jim's. He felt a keen desire to have his chums with him now. D'Arcy must be found, and the more there was to help in the search the better. Blake wrote out a telegram, and asked Pilkington to send it to the post-office.

The butler took the form, and hesitated.

"Pardon me, Master Blake," he said respectfully. "Under the circumstances, is it desirable for a number of schoolboys to come here? Pray excuse my making the suggestion, but really—"

Blake stared at him. He did not like Pilkington, and he did not intend to be interfered with.

"You shouldn't have looked at my telegram," he said brusquely.

The butler made a deprecating gesture.

"Pray excuse me, sir. I really could not help seeing it as you handed it to me. If I may venture to suggest—"

"You mayn't," said Blake curily. "I want the fellows to come, and as quickly as possible."

A slightly obstinate look came over Pilkington's face.

"Excuse me, sir," he said smoothly. "But, by Lord Conway's orders, I am in charge of the house during my

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master's absence. I fear that the presence of a number of young boys holiday-making in the house would be inconvenient at such a time, as well as—if I may be allowed to say so—somewhat unseemly."

Blake flushed with anger.

"Do you think we shall feel much inclined for holiday-making?" he broke out. "We're going to look for D'Arcy, and find him."

"I think, under the circumstances, it would be better not," said Pilkington firmly. "I beg to repeat that I have Lord Conway's authority for taking the head of affairs here. I was even about to suggest that perhaps you two young gentlemen might prefer to return to your school, or to your homes, until this matter is cleared up."

Blake bit his lip hard.

He was greatly inclined to plant an angry fist upon Pilkington's ample waistcoat, but he restrained himself. The man was acting within his rights, even if he was making himself unpleasant; and it was easy, too, to understand that the staid and solemn butler would have been glad not to have the house crowded with schoolboys, under the present distressing circumstances. Blake and Dig were there as D'Arcy's guests. But D'Arcy was gone now. If Pilkington, as he stated, and as was doubtless correct, was placed in charge of affairs by Lord Conway, he certainly had the right and the power to exclude the Christmas party, unless some member of the D'Arcy family came on the scene.

And at that thought, Blake remembered Wally.

Lord Eastwood was gone, his eldest son was at Cannes, with Lady Eastwood, and now Arthur Augustus had disappeared. But Wally, though only a fag in the Third Form at St. Jim's, was a person of importance at Eastwood House in the absence of all his relatives. Wally would soon put this cheeky butler in his place; and Wally was just the person to do it.

Blake's troubled and thoughtful silence lasted some minutes. Pilkington was the first to speak. Digby was looking on helplessly.

"At what hour shall I order the car for you, Master Blake?" he asked.

"You needn't order it at all," said Blake. "I'm not going. And to-day, too, Miss Cleveland will be here."

"Yes, Gussy said Cousin Ethel and her aunt were coming here to-day," said Digby.

Pilkington remained impassive.

"I have already wired to Miss Cleveland that, under the circumstances, it would be as well to delay her arrival," he said calmly.

"What!" ejaculated Dig.

"It seems to me that you are taking a jolly lot on yourself, Pilkington!" said Blake hotly. "Do you understand that we are here as your master's guests?"

"Quite so, sir—quite so. And I am grieved if you think that I have exceeded my duty," said Pilkington. "I hope I shall be able to explain satisfactorily to Lord Conway on his return, if you should feel compelled to complain of my conduct, which I trust will not be the case."

"When is Lord Conway coming?" asked Blake abruptly.

"At present his lordship is unable to leave Lady Eastwood, as her ladyship is far from enjoying good health," said Pilkington. "The date of his lordship's return is uncertain."

Blake set his teeth.

"Well, we're not going, and our friends are coming," he said. "So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Cheeky Butler! Go and eat coke!"

And Blake marched out of the room indignantly, followed by Dig, leaving Pilkington looking considerably annoyed. The two juniors left the house, Blake leading the way.

"Where are we going?" asked Dig, as he followed his chum.

"Post-office," said Blake shortly.

"You're going to send that wire yourself?"

"Yes."

"But I—I say. Can they come, if that fat chap is really in authority in the house?" said Dig, hesitating. "We don't want to—run another man's house for him, you know. Lord Eastwood mightn't like our disregarding his butler. And—"

"I know. But I'm not going till Gussy's found. Pilkington's a fat old fool, and he doesn't like boys about the place, that's all. I believe he's glad of an excuse to get rid of us. Only he's jolly well not going to get rid of us so easily. And this afternoon there'll be a crowd of us to worry him, too!" added Blake, with satisfaction.

And ten minutes later the telegram was despatched. And then the juniors walked back to Eastwood House, regardless of all the Pilkingtons in existence.

CHAPTER 8. The Plot Thickens.

TOM MERRY & CO. came out of the dining-room in the School House.

They were looking unusually subdued.

Arthur Augustus had promised to send them a telegram to tell them how he was getting on at home, but the telegram had not arrived yet.

Figgins & Co. joined them in the quadrangle, looking very grave, too.

"Any news yet?" asked Figgins.

"No!" said Tom.

"Time Gussy wired," Kerr remarked. "I wish the Head had let us go with him yesterday. Still, we break up to-morrow morning."

"Wire may be coming now," said Kangaroo. "Let's get down to the gates and look for the post-office kid."

They strolled down to the school gates. It was close upon time for afternoon-lesson when the telegraph boy came in sight. He knew Tom Merry, and as he saw the captain of the Shell, he took a telegram out of his wallet.

"This is for you, Master Merry!" he said.

"Thanks! News at last, you fellows!"

The juniors gathered round eagerly. Tom Merry opened the telegram, and they all read it together.

Then there was a general shout of consternation. For the telegram ran:

"Gussy disappeared last night! No trace. Come down at once, and bring Wally. Butler cutting up rusty, so Wally must come. Urgent.—Blake."

"Gussy disappeared!" ejaculated Figgins. "Well, this is getting thick!"

"Gussy, too!"

"What on earth does it mean?"

"It can't be a joke," said Tom Merry, staring blankly at the telegram. "Blake wouldn't play such a joke as that. But how on earth can Gussy have disappeared?"

"It simply puts the lid on," said Kangaroo. "Anyway, one thing's certain—we've got to go, and at once!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Queer, that about the butler cutting up rusty," said Kerr thoughtfully. "I suppose that's why Blake wants Wally, to keep him in order!"

"Let's find Wally!"

Wally was found on the football-ground, showing Jameson and Curly Gibson and Frayne of the Third what kicking for goal was really like when it was well done. He looked considerably muddled.

"Wally!" called out Tom Merry.

D'Arcy minor came up at once, as he saw the telegram in the Shell fellow's hand. He was anxious for news from home.

"Wire from Gussy?" he asked.

"No; read it!"

Wally read the telegram, and gave a long whistle.

"Well, that beats it!" he ejaculated. "That fairly beats the band! What on earth has become of Gussy?"

"Come with us to the Head," said Tom Merry. "We've not to get leave to-day instead of to-morrow, and you've got to come."

"What ho!" said Wally. "I'll jolly soon put old Pilkington in his place, if he's making things unpleasant. He's a solemn old codger, you know, and he don't like boys—never was a boy himself, I believe. I never liked him. He complained to the pater once about Pongo getting into the music-room and chewing up the music—poor old Pongo! I'll get some of this mud off, and we'll go to the Head!"

The juniors lost no time in presenting themselves in the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes looked at them inquiringly.

"If you please, sir, we want to leave to-day instead of to-morrow," began Tom Merry. "We are wanted at Eastwood House, sir!"

"Ahem!" said the Head.

"Something's happened to D'Arcy, sir—he can't be found," said Monty Lowther.

"And we want to help look for him," said Kangaroo.

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Very well, my boys; under those circumstances, you may leave by the afternoon train," he said. "You may go now and pack."

"Thank you, sir!" said Tom Merry joyfully.

And the juniors hurried away to pack.

"I'm going to take Towser," Herries announced, when they came down in caps and coats ready for the journey. "We shall need him to look for Gussy."

"Well, keep him away from Pongo, that's all!" said Wally, with a grunt. "Bring the beast if you like. Not that he could track out anything that wasn't eatable."

Wally took leave of his friends; Frayne and Curly were

going home with Jameson on the morrow. The juniors started for the station, Pongo and Towser glaring and sniffling at one another en route. Towser and Pongo were not good friends. Tom Merry stopped in the village to wire to Blake, and then they caught the train. They started off, far from being in the high spirits that usually accompanied breaking-up for the Christmas holidays. Their anxiety about D'Arcy was keen. The local train to Wayland crawled, and seemed to crawl more slowly than ever, to the impatience of the juniors. But at Wayland they changed into the express, and dashed away at rattling speed through the frost-bound country-side.

Even now they could hardly credit the startling news of Blake's telegram. How had Arthur Augustus disappeared—in his own home, with his chums with him? It was amazing, almost staggering.

It seemed an age to the juniors before the express ran into Easthorpe at last, and stopped. And as they poured out of the train, the first persons they saw were Blake and Digby, who were waiting for them on the platform.

CHAPTER 9.

Wally Puts His Foot Down.

BLAKE scudded across the platform to greet his chums. His face was pale and lined with trouble, showing only too plainly how deep and keen was his anxiety for his missing chum.

"Jolly glad you've come!" Blake exclaimed, with almost a gasp of relief. "Jolly glad you've brought Wally, too!"

"Yes, rather!" said Digby. "We shall have to walk to the house, though. Pilkington wouldn't send anything to meet you."

Wally snorted.

"You leave Pilkington to me!" he exclaimed. "I'll jolly soon settle his hash! Have you fellows been doing anything to him?"

Blake shook his head.

"No; only I fancy we get on his nerves!"

"Butlers haven't any right to nerves, in business hours," pronounced D'Arcy minor oracularly. "I'll give him something to stop all that. Hiss Ethel come down yet?"

"No; Pilkington's wired to her, or to her aunt, I don't know which, to suggest her not coming yet awhile."

"The awful nerve!" ejaculated Wally.

"He says Lord Conway has constituted him head-cook-and-bottlewasher, while your pater is away," said Blake ruefully.

"Well, I dare say that's so—the pater and old Conway have endless confidence in him," said Wally. "He hasn't been with us very long, but they think a lot of him. But I don't like him—you see, Pongo doesn't like him, and when Pongo doesn't like a man, you can rely on it that there's something wrong with that man!"

"Same with Towser," agreed Herries. "I always know if a chap's a rotter, because if he's a rotter, Towser wants to bite him."

"Well, if we've got to walk, let's walk!" said Kangaroo.

"Wait a minute," said Wally. "I'm going to send another wire to Cousin Ethel, after Pilky's. Like his cheek to wire to her. I'll let her know it was a mistake, and that we're expecting her."

"Jolly good idea!" said Figgins heartily.

And they stopped in the post-office for the telegram to be sent. Then they walked to Eastwood House, through the frosty air. The trees in the park were glistening with frost, and the lake was frozen over. Under other circumstances, the juniors would have gazed round them with enjoyment, and thought of the pleasant hours of skating on the frozen lake. But they were not thinking of holiday-making now. The dark mystery of their chum's fate had to be unravelled, and until they knew that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was safe and sound, they were not likely to think of enjoyment.

The footman who opened the door to them had a slightly peculiar look upon his wooden face. He knew of the rift in the lute between the butler and his master's guests. As a matter of fact, that was as much talked of in the servants' hall as the strange disappearance of Lord Eastwood and his son. The general opinion in the servants' hall was that Pilkington would have his way. Mr. Pilkington was a very authoritative personage in the little world below stairs, and was regarded with much awe by the rest of the household.

"Hallo, Henry, old son!" said Wally, giving the stately footman a dig in the ribs by way of greeting. "Where's Pilky?"

"Mr. Pilkington is in the housekeeper's room at present, sir, torkin' to Mrs. Wipps," said Henry, with a gasp.

"Tell him to come here!" said Wally.

"Yessir!"

Henry departed.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price 1d. and will contain a splendid long complete story entitled:

"You fellows watch me," said Wally. "I'll settle him!" And the juniors waited with great interest to see Wally settle the imposing Pilkington. Henry came back with a subdued grin upon his face, which he tried in vain to make as wooden as usual.

"Well?" rapped out Wally. "Where's Pilks?" It seemed to amuse the scamp of the Third Form at St. Jim's to make playful variations on the butler's stately name.

"Mr. Pilkington begs that you will excuse him, Master Wally, as he is busy!" said Henry.

Wally reddened. In spite of Mr. Pilkington's civil message, it was evident that he simply refused to come, which meant that he declined to recognise the authority of the youngest member of the D'Arcy family.

"You buzz back," said Wally impressively, "and tell Pilky that he's to come here, or I'll come and fetch him!"

"Yes, Master Wally!" Henry swam off once more. Tom Merry & Co. waited with great interest. The contest between Master Wally and Mr. Pilkington was growing exciting.

It was three or four minutes before Henry came back, and now the grin on his face was less subdued. The grin, in fact, had almost entirely vanquished the wooden expression which Henry had been carefully trained to wear.

"Well?" snapped Wally. "Mr. Pilkington is sorry he is too busy to come, sir," said Henry.

Wally breathed hard through his nose. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"Mr. Pilkington is with Mrs. Wipps, sir." "Come with me, you fellows!" said Wally. "I'm going to rout the old rascal out!"

"Hear, hear!" said Kangaroo. Wally led the way to the housekeeper's room. Mr. Pilkington was taking tea with a stately, silver-haired old lady, who rose and greeted Wally with a bright and affectionate smile. Mr. Pilkington carefully placed his tea-cup in his saucer, and rose to his feet and bowed profoundly to Master Wally. He had never been more urbane, or more imposing, or more respectful in his manner.

"Now, then, Pilks, what's the little game?" demanded Wally.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Pilkington respectfully. "May I ask to what you refer, sir?"

"Do you happen to have bought this house while I've been at school?" Wally asked sarcastically.

Pilkington shook his head.

"No, Master Walter. I could not afford to do so; and the house of your honoured father is not for sale," he replied.

He spoke with profound gravity, as if quite unaware of the sarcastic nature of Wally's question.

Wally felt baffled. The respectful urbanity of the obnoxious Pilkington was like a garment of mail it was difficult to penetrate.

"I hear that Gussy has disappeared," pursued Wally.

"Master Arthur left the house last night or this morning, and has not returned," said Pilkington. "Mr. Dodder is here now searching."

"And we're going to search, too," said Wally. "Gussy being gone, I'm top dog in this show, do you understand?"

"I trust I shall always treat my honoured master's son with becoming respect, Master Walter."

"Oh, not so much gas!" said Wally. "Look here! I want the room got ready for these fellows—at once!"

"Your orders shall be obeyed, Master Wally."

"Also Miss Cleveland's room, and her aunt's. I've wired absence of Lord Eastwood?"

"Very well, sir."

"And if you forget your place and cheek my friends again, you'll get into trouble," said Wally warningly.

"May I respectfully mention, sir, that Lord Conway has placed me in full charge of Eastwood House during the absence of Lord Eastwood?"

"Old Conway hasn't placed you in charge of me! And I'd jolly well punch his nose if he did!" said Wally. "Don't be an ass, Pilky!"

The butler winced.

"My name is Pilkington, sir."

"Blow your name!" said Wally. "Have those rooms got ready at once, and order a feed for us! We're hungry!"

"Yes, rather!" murmured Fatty Wynn involuntarily.

"Is my room ready, Pilks?"

"No, Master Walter."

"Then I'll take Gussy's. Come on, you fellows! You can take your coats off in poor old Gussy's room!"

And Wally led the way upstairs.

"Gussy was in the Painted Room last night," Blake explained. "His old room is out of order—undergoing repairs or something. Dig and I have the rooms on each side."

"Look here, Wally, under the cires, we'd better keep

together, I think. We don't want to disappear after Gussy. Suppose you have some extra beds shoved into those three rooms, and we can keep together?"

"Jolly good idea!" said Wally.

"But Gussy didn't disappear in the house, did he?" asked Kerr.

"Blessed if I know!" said Blake. "We found his handkerchief in a field nearly a mile away, so I suppose he must have gone out."

"He must have been kidnapped," said Figgins. "There's no other possible way he can have disappeared like that. And that means that Lord Eastwood has been kidnapped, too!"

"Looks like it!" agreed Wally. "Some rotter trying to get money out of the pater, perhaps! I'll tell Pilks about the rooms."

He did so, and the butler received his lordly commands with unbroken urbanity and respect. It was quite certain that Mr. Pilkington did not want the juniors there; but he had apparently given up the contest. He could not turn them out of the house, nor could he refuse to obey his master's son, so he was evidently decided to make the best of it.

The early winter darkness had already set in.

The juniors were hungry after their long journey, and they sat down with keen appetites to a well-spread board. Mrs. Wipps, the housekeeper, saw to it that they were well provided. That kindly old dame evidently did not share Mr. Pilkington's prejudice against boys, and it was plain that she was very fond of Master Wally.

Fatty Wynn's plump face grew quite cheerful as he surveyed the varied and plentiful viands. He was as anxious about D'Arcy as the other fellows; but, as he remarked, they could not help poor old Gussy by going hungry. It was necessary to keep up their strength if they were going to hunt for him; and, indeed, the most judicious thing they could possibly do was to lay a solid foundation, Fatty Wynn considered.

They proceeded to lay the solid foundation; and, meanwhile, they discussed their plans.

Their plans were necessarily a little vague. Arthur Augustus had to be found, and he had to be hunted for; but where and how was the search to begin? That the swell of St. Jim's had been seized and taken away by force seemed certain. But by whose hand? And where could he be concealed?

By that time he might be miles from Eastwood House; while it was equally likely that he was hidden somewhere quite near at hand. Only Herries was quite sure of a method for beginning well. He proposed to take Towser to the spot where D'Arcy's handkerchief had been found, and to set him on the track.

"You see, if we show Towser the handkerchief there, and make him pick up the trail, he will lead us directly to the place where Gussy is now," Herries explained, evidently regarding it as the simplest matter in the world.

"Quite simple!" said Blake, with a snort.

"Yes, quite simple," said Herries emphatically; "and I really think you fellows might be a bit more keen about it, considering that Gussy must be in the hands of some awful rascals who are keeping him a prisoner!"

"We're keen enough about finding Gussy, but not about putting your blessed bulldog through his tricks!" growled Blake. "However, I'll take you fellows to the place, and it won't do any harm if Towser comes along!"

"Might be useful," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"Blessed if I see it! Do you think he can track down anything but a red herring or a dog-biscuit?"

"I tell you—" began Herries warmly.

"No," said Tom. "But if there's trouble, Towser's teeth will be useful. If we should succeed in finding Gussy, there may be a fight. Whoever it is that has collared him must cut up rusty, you know, and we may have a scrap on our hands. Then Towser will come in useful!"

"Well, that's true enough," admitted Blake. "And, considering that, we may as well take some sticks along with us, in case there's a scrap. If we do find Gussy, we're going to rescue him—I know that!"

And in the deep dusk the juniors started out, Blake and Digby leading the way. Blake carried a lantern, and Herries led his famous bulldog; and Herries observed quite confidently, as they started, that it was a matter of an hour or so now, that was all.

CHAPTER 10. Towser on the Track!

DAWK and gloomy looked the river and the fields adjoining as the juniors came up the path. The leafless willows rustled in the winter wind. Tom Merry & Co. halted by the willows, and Blake showed where the handkerchief had been found. That Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had been there, the clue of the handkerchief seemed

to prove, to the minds of the juniors. Kerr had not expressed an opinion; he was still thinking it out.

"Give me the hanky!" said Herries.

Blake handed it over.

Then the juniors watched Herries's proceeding.

Towser had sat down, and seemed inclined to go to sleep; but Herries jerked at his leash, and woke him up again. When he showed him the handkerchief, dabbing it on Towser's nose.

Towser made a snap at it, apparently under the impression that it was something to eat. Then, with an expression of disgust at finding it uneatable, he allowed it to drop in the grass, and closed his eyes again.

"Well?" said Monty Lowther, "what's the next act? Are we going to watch Towser understudying the Sleeping Beauty in the wood?"

"You wait a bit," said Herries crossly. "Towser hasn't quite got the scent yet."

"There isn't any," said Digby. "Gussy never uses scent!"

"Ass! I didn't say there was any scent on the handkerchief!" growled Herries. "Towser will pick up the scent of Gussy soon, and follow the trail. If Gussy has been here, Towser will follow his trail!"

"Ahem!"

Herries exerted himself to interest Towser in the handkerchief. He dragged at the leash, and forced the bulldog to keep awake, at all events. Towser seemed to understand at last that he was expected to move, and he ambled off.

Herries brightened up at once.

"Now he's on the track!" he exclaimed.

"Br-r-r!" murmured Blake.

"Stand back, you fellows! Don't get in Towser's way!" Herries exclaimed excitedly. "Keep behind, and follow me!"

As there was evidently nothing more to be done upon the spot, the juniors had no objection to following Herries.

Towser, having once started, kept on steadily.

Herries gave him plenty of rope, so to speak, keeping back from him with the leash loose. Towser turned into the path along the river, and loped off towards Eastwood House. The juniors followed.

Herries turned an excited glance upon them.

"He's going back!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Looks like it," said Manners. "So are we."

"Oh, ruts! You watch Towser."

Towser loped on to the park palings, and then round to the gates. Herries's excitement grew as he entered the park.

"We're right on the trail!" he exclaimed. "This shows that Gussy came back to the house after he dropped his handkerchief there."

Towser kept on up the drive.

Tom Merry & Co. followed. No one but Herries had the slightest belief that Towser was on the track, but Herries's faith in the powers of his bulldog was touching. Along the dark drive, powdered with snow, the crowd of juniors went, Towser leading the way.

In front of the house Towser paused.

He blinked at the great facade of Eastwood House, and waited for some moment, Herries watching him breathlessly.

"It's a bit parky here!" Fatty Wynn hinted.

"Shush!"

"What?"

"Shurrup! If you talk you may disturb Towser. He's thinking it out."

"Make him buck up, then, for goodness' sake!" said Blake. "I'm getting cold in this blessed wind!"

"Shush!"

Towser started off at last. Apparently he had made up his mind not to go into the house. He started off along the terrace, and led the way round the house to the stables. The St. Jim's juniors followed him into the stable-yard.

Towser trotted into the stable, and paused again.

"Watch him!" said Herries, in a hushed voice. "Gussy must have come to the stables for something. Towser's right on the track, you can see that."

The juniors grinned.

At St. Jim's, Towser always had a fancy for going to sleep in the stables when he could get off the chain, and it was pretty clear that Towser had simply smelt his way to the stables to look for a comfortable bundle of straw.

The bulldog made his way into a corner and laid down.

His eyes closed.

"Second act of 'Sleeping Beauty,'" murmured Lowther.

"I fancy he thinks better with his eyes closed," said Herries. "There are people like that, too, you know. Towser is thinking it out."

But in a few minutes it became quite evident that Towser was fast asleep, and Herries jerked crossly at the leash and woke him up again.

"Get on, Towser, old boy!" said Herries encouragingly. "Go on! Smell him out!"

Towser rose and trotted out of the stables. He led the way into the garage, where Ruggles was cleaning a car in the electric light. Ruggles touched his cap to the juniors, and regarded the bulldog with some curiosity. Towser rolled up in a corner and closed his eyes again.

"I'm getting fed up!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Anybody but Herries could see that Towser is simply looking for a place to go to sleep."

"Yes, rather!"

But Herries, though he was beginning to have his doubts, perhaps, would not admit anything of the sort, even to himself. He jerked Towser out of his repose, and the bulldog, with a reproachful blink to his master, trotted off again. This time he went into the house.

In the hall they met Pilkington, who eyed the bulldog with keen disfavour. The butler did not like bulldogs, especially inside the house.

"May I request you young gentlemen not to bring dogs into the house?" Pilkington asked smoothly.

Wally sniffed.

"No, you mayn't!" he said.

"We're following D'Arcy's track," explained Herries. "Towser is smelling him out. We have found out that D'Arcy came back here."

Pilkington stared at him. Then he smiled.

"Indeed!" he said respectfully. "I am very gratified to hear it, sir. I sincerely trust that you will find Master Arthur, sir."

"Depend upon it, I'll find him right enough," said Herries. "Hallo, Towser! What's the matter with you, old boy?"

Towser had given a deep growl.

His eyes were fixed upon the butler, and he made a sudden movement towards him, and jerked the leash out of Herries's hand.

Pilkington turned quite pale.

"I—I hope that dog does not bite, sir!" he ejaculated.

"He only bites people he doesn't like," said Herries.

"Towser—Towser! Hold on!"

But the bulldog was rushing right at Pilkington.

Probably he would not have bitten him very severely, but he would certainly have nipped Pilkington's ample calves if he had got at him.

The butler made a wild spring for the stairs, with an activity surprising in so solid and stately a person.

"Keep him off!" he yelled. "How dare you set your dog on me! Call him off!"

"G-r-r-r-r!" came from Towser.

He was after the butler like a shot.

Pilkington, with amazing activity, clambered on the broad balustrade of the staircase, and clung there astride, the bulldog glaring at him from the stairs and snapping up at the legs that were out of reach. Pilkington's calm repose had vanished now. His face was white with fury and terror as he clung on the balustrade.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally. "Towser doesn't like you, Pilks."

"Call him off, sir!" shrieked the butler. "Please call him off, sir! I shall fall! Oh dear! Pray call that dog off, sir!"

"G-r-r-r-r-r!"

"Call he beast off, Herries, old man!" gasped Blake. "Don't let him bite Pilks."

Herries dashed on the stairs after Towser, and recaptured the leash, and dragged the bulldog down into the hall again. Towser went reluctantly. Evidently he desired very much to bury his teeth in the plump legs of the butler.

"Take that dog out of the house!" Pilkington gasped. "I insist upon it! Master Wally, pray have that dog taken out of the house!"

"Oh, I'll take him out," said Herries. "Sorry he went for you, but Towser has these fancies sometimes. He wouldn't have hurt you very much—only a nip!"

"Take him out!" roared Pilkington.

Herries led Towser away. The trial had come to an end on the staircase of Eastwood House. According to Herries's theory that Towser was following Gussy's trail, the swell of St. Jim's should have been found sitting on the stairs, as Lowther observed humorously. But he wasn't, and Herries led his bulldog away greatly disappointed. Not till Towser was safely out of the house did Pilkington venture to descend from the balustrade, and his face was still white as he disappeared downstairs, and his voice might have been heard, later, soundly rating Henry the footman, who had committed the sin of grinning at the sight of the stately butler perched on the banisters.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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CHAPTER 11.

What Henry Saw.

TOM MERRY & CO. spent the rest of the evening in their futile search.

The hopelessness of the quest was only too evident to them from the start. There was not the slightest clue to follow.

They thought the matter over without ceasing, discussed it and talked it over under every possible aspect, but they got no nearer to the solution of the mystery.

Where was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy? Where was Lord Eastwood? Had they been taken to a great distance by their unknown captors, far from the radius of the search? These were questions the juniors tried to find an answer to, without success. Amid the endless discussion, Kerr said very little. The Scottish junior always thought more than he talked, and he was now thinking the matter over, and was content to listen to the wild theories and impracticable schemes of the other fellows, without delivering an opinion of his own.

Mr. Dodder, the man from Scotland Yard, was at Eastwood House again during the evening. He talked to the juniors a little, asking questions about Arthur Augustus, and questioning especially Blake and Digby as to D'Arcy's movements of the night before. He did not confide in his impression of the matter to them, but they could see for themselves that the detective was as puzzled as they were. There was simply nothing to account for the disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His father might have disappeared of his own accord, for some unknown business reasons in connection with the Anglo-South-American Railway Syndicate, as some ill-disposed gossips suggested. But Arthur Augustus could not be supposed to have disappeared of his own accord.

Evidently the swell of St. Jim's had been kidnapped by force.

Why? Was it possible that in searching for his father he had fallen upon the right track, and the kidnappers had been compelled to make him a prisoner too, in order to keep their secret? If so, it proved that Lord Eastwood was held a prisoner within easy distance of his own home.

Tom Merry guessed that Mr. Dodder was thinking something of the sort, for the Scotland Yard man remained at Eastwood House, and spent his time in the grounds or in the vicinity. It was hard to imagine any other reason for which Arthur Augustus could have been kidnapped. Mr. Dodder frowned a little sometimes when he encountered the juniors engaged also upon the futile search. It was pretty clear that he did not like the schoolboys invading his province, as he doubtless regarded it, and fully sympathised with the butler's desire to get rid of them. It probably appeared to the Scotland Yard gentleman as cheek on the part of Tom Merry & Co. to take up the search upon which he was officially engaged, but to the juniors Mr. Dodder's opinion was of no more consequence than Mr. Pilkington's. They intended to search for their missing chum until he was found, however their action might be regarded from the standpoint of professional dignity.

Tom Merry & Co. stayed up later that night than their usual bedtime at St. Jim's. But about ten o'clock, tired out by their long and useless searching, they went up to bed.

Wally's bed was in the Painted Room, occupied the previous night by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Eleven beds were wanted for the whole party, and Wally had ordered them to be placed in the three communicating rooms.

The disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had made the Co. determine to keep together. Somewhere—perhaps near at hand, for they could not know—were the enemies into whose hands Lord Eastwood and his son had fallen.

True, it seemed that the kidnapping had taken place at a distance from the house—but who could tell whether the rascals might not penetrate into the house itself, to deal with the other fellows as they had dealt with Arthur Augustus?

To wake up in the morning, and find that a member of the party had vanished, as D'Arcy had vanished, would not be pleasant. For that reason the juniors intended to keep always together, a very wise precaution.

The three rooms were very large, and there was more than ample accommodation for the beds placed in them. But as they came into the Painted Room, the juniors observed that there was only one bed there. There were five each in the two adjoining rooms.

Wally frowned as he noted it.

"Pilkie must be off his dot," he exclaimed, "or Mrs. Wipps must be—as she must have looked after putting the beds here! I don't want to sleep by myself in this room—I want some of you chaps in here, too."

"Three or four in each room, certainly," said Tom Merry. "We don't know what might happen to-night."

"That's it! I'll go and see Mrs. Wipps."

Wally went downstairs, and found Mrs. Wipps in the house.

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keeper's room. Mrs. Wipps explained that the beds had been so placed by the special instructions of Mr. Pilkington. Whereupon Wally grunted, and remarked that it was like Pilkie's cheek to interfere, and directed a rearrangement.

While the beds were being changed, Mr. Pilkington made his appearance in the Painted Room, where the juniors were gathered before the sparkling log-fire on the broad hearth, chatting.

"Pray excuse me, Master Walter!" murmured Pilkington, as he glided in. "I am sorry the arrangement I made did not please you."

Wally grunted.

"What did you want to interfere with Mrs. Wipps for?" he demanded.

"I thought you would prefer an apartment to yourself, Master Walter," said Pilkington suavely. "I am very sorry!"

"Oh, it's all right!" said Wally. "It doesn't matter now."

"But I am very sorry indeed," murmured Pilkington contritely. "I was trying to please you, Master Walter."

"You'll get over it in time," said Wally unsympathetically. "When you go down, send Henry up here. I want to jaw to him."

"Yes, Master Walter."

Henry, the footman, made his appearance soon afterwards. He stood in a respectful attitude before Master Wally, his face beautifully wooden in expression.

"You can squat down, Henry," said Wally, pointing to a chair.

"Thank you, sir," said Henry, making no movement, however, to sit down.

"It was you saw the ghost the other night, Henry?"

Henry shivered involuntarily.

"I—I did not say it was a ghost, sir," he stammered. "But—but it was very strange. I do not believe in ghosts, sir, but—but they say that Sir Bulkeley D'Arcy does walk at Christmas-time, sir."

"Jolly cold time to choose for walking," said Wally. "Tell us just what you did see, Henry. You told me you wanted to hear about it, Kerr."

"Just so!" said Kerr.

"Kerr did!" said Figgins, in surprise. He would never have suspected his practical, hard-headed chum of taking any interest in ghost stories. "Well, let's hear it."

"Pile in, Henry!" said Wally encouragingly.

Henry obediently piled in.

"It was the night after his lordship's disappearance, sir," he said. "I was very uneasy. I thought his lordship was kidnapped, and I feared that it might mean that some robbery was intended, as there are many valuable articles in the house. I came down in the night to make sure that all the doors and windows were fastened."

"What time?" asked Kerr.

"It must have been about two o'clock in the morning, sir."

"Good! Go on!"

"I finished in the picture-gallery, sir. You remember that the door of the picture-gallery was found unfastened in the morning, after his lordship's disappearance. Then I came into the library. Of course, it was very dark, and I was feeling my way to the electric-light button to turn it on, when—when—" Henry's voice faltered, and he cast an uneasy glance about him. "It—it was quite horrible, sir."

"But what happened?" asked Kerr.

"There was a dark figure, sir, somewhere in the room. We had been talking about the story of Sir Bulkeley's ghost in the servants' hall, sir, and perhaps I was feeling a little nervous. But I would swear in a court of law, sir, that a dark figure brushed by me in the library. I could really feel it breathing, sir—and I was so startled that I stood quite still for some moments."

"If it was breathing it wasn't a ghost," said the practical Kerr. "Ghosts don't have lungs, and don't need to breathe, if there are such things as ghosts."

"Yes, sir, so I thought, after the first moment's shock, sir, and I thought it was a burglar, perhaps, and I turned on the electric light at once. But the room was empty."

"Empty!"

"Yes, sir," said Henry, his wooden face growing quite pale with the recollection. "There was no one in the room excepting myself, sir. I was so startled I hardly knew what to do—but I examined all the windows—they were fastened. The door was shut, and it could not have been opened without my hearing it—indeed, without my touching it, as I was standing close to it at the time."

"Perhaps the figure dodged into the picture-gallery?"

"I searched the gallery, sir, from end to end. It was empty, and the doors and windows were fastened."

"Might have dodged out by another door, and shut it quietly?" Kerr persisted.



Pilkington, with amazing activity, clambered on to the broad balustrade of the staircase, and clung there astride, while the bulldog glared at him, and snapped up at the legs that were out of reach. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wally. "Towser doesn't like you Pilky!" (See Chapter 10.)

Henry shook his head.

"I did not leave the matter at that, sir. I determined that the house should be searched. I hurried away to Mr. Pilkington's room to call him."

"And what did Pilkington do?"

"I could not awaken him, sir. His door was locked, and he is a very sound sleeper, and he did not hear me knock. So I called the other footmen, and we searched through the house, looking in every place where anybody might have been hidden. But there was no one—and all the doors and windows were fastened. No one could have got out without opening them, and he could not have fastened them on the inside after him, if he had gone out. Besides, it was a rainy night—and yet there was not a trace of mud or wet on the floors any-

where. I am quite certain, sir, that no one had come in from outside."

"Might it have been another servant who had come down just as you had done?"

"I asked everybody in the house, sir. It was not that."

"You did not awaken Pilkington?"

"No, sir; he knew nothing about it till the morning, and then he laughed and—and—and—" Henry paused.

"What else did he do?" asked Wally.

"He called me a coward, sir, for being frightened over a ghost story, and said I must have fancied it, and ordered me never to come down in the night again, if I wished to keep my place. Mr. Pilkington was quite angry, sir."

"And you've never been down in the night since?" asked Kerr.

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"Oh, no, sir! I should not like to repeat that awful experience, and besides, Mr. Pilkington has ordered me not to do so. He thinks that Lord Eastwood would be displeased to have ghost stories told about his house."

"And that's all, Henry?"

"That is all, sir."

And Henry respectfully took his leave.

Kerr's brows were wrinkled in thought, and the other fellows looked at him curiously. They all had a very great respect for Kerr's judgment; but they wondered a little at his interest in a ghost story told by a frightened footman.

"Well, what do you think of it, Kerr?" asked Figgins at last.

Kerr smiled.

"I haven't finished thinking yet," he said. "But—"

"But what?"

"I've got something to think about, that's all. And I jolly well wouldn't sleep alone while we're here for any price."

"My hat! You're not beginning to believe in ghosts in your old age—and you a blessed Scotchman, and as canny as they make 'em!" exclaimed Kangaroo, in surprise.

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't believe in ghosts, but I believe in that dark figure that Henry saw in the library," he replied quietly.

"You don't think he fancied it."

"No, I don't."

"Pilkington does," said Blake. "He said so; and I suppose he knows Henry better than we do."

"Oh, Pilkington!" said Kerr, with a curious smile. "Never mind Pilkington. He wasn't on the spot, you see, being such a sound sleeper that Henry couldn't wake him. Henry didn't imagine that ghostly figure, I think. You see, if he had imagined a ghost, he would have imagined something in white, or at least something in the stock ghost line. But he wouldn't imagine a dark figure breathing near him. If there was somebody in the library at two in the morning, when Henry got there, that's exactly what he would seem like in the dark."...

"You think there was somebody there?"

"Yes."

"Then where did he get to when Henry put the light on?"

"That's what we're going to find out," said Kerr quietly. Tom Merry shook his head.

"We're here to look for Gussy, not to look for the ghost," he said. "After Gussy's found we might amuse ourselves with a ghost-hunt. But not till then."

"We might find them both together," said Kerr.

"What?"

"By Jove!"

"You don't mean to say—" began Figgins.

"Yes, I do," said Kerr. "I mean to say that there seems to me to be a connection between Henry's ghost and Lord Eastwood's disappearance."

"In plain words, that the dark figure was the kidnapper, or one of them!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Yes."

"But it was the night after Lord Eastwood's disappearance that Henry saw the ghost, not the same night," said Fatty Wynn.

"I know that!"

"Well, the kidnapper wouldn't come back twenty-four hours later, just for the sake of trotting round the library in the dark, would he?" said Blake warmly.

"Jolly queer proceeding, if he did," said Herries.

"The whole business is queer," said Kerr. "I'm going to have a big think before I go to sleep, and I'm going to turn in now—but not alone. And Wally specially must not sleep alone, or be left alone."

"Mo!" ejaculated Wally.

"Yes, you!"

"Why me specially?"

"Because you're in more danger than any of us," said Kerr coolly.

"Oh, come, Kerr, old man!" said Fatty Wynn. "How can Wally be in more danger than us—and how are we in danger, either, if you come to that?"

"I think that Wally's in danger of joining his father and his major, if the kidnapper gets a chance at him," said Kerr, unmoved. "And I think that if Wally slept alone to-night, he would stand a jolly good chance of seeing the dark figure that Henry saw in the library—and that he wouldn't get away from it so easily."

Wally looked rather uneasy.

"I say, you're piling it on, you know!" he remarked. "Blessed if I think I shall go to sleep to-night at all, after that!"

"There will be three of us in the room with you," said Tom Merry, nodding towards the three extra beds that had been placed in the Painted Room, "Blake and myself and—"

"And myself!" said Kerr.

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"Just as you like!" said Wally.

And the juniors, considerably impressed by what Kerr had said, turned in, with uneasy thoughts in their minds of the long hours of the night.

CHAPTER 12.

An Alarm in the Night.

KERR sat for some time in the easy-chair by the fire, as the embers grew duller, and the flames died down.

As he sat there, leaning back, his keen and restless eyes wandered over the room.

He scanned the panelling of the old walls, almost black with time, and the painted figures and the old blue of the ceiling.

From the centre of the ceiling, Bacchus, grinning under the vine-leaves in his hair, seemed to wink at him.

Tom Merry and Blake and Wally turned in, Wally taking the bed that should have been occupied by Arthur Augustus D'Arcy the previous night, but which had not been slept in. Kerr remained in the chair some time, while the fire died down. Tom Merry watched him from his pillow curiously.

"How long are you going to sit there, Kerr?" he said.

"You said you were going to turn in!"

"So I am," said Kerr, "when the fire's a bit lower."

"Can't you sleep in the light? I'm tired enough to sleep anywhere," yawned Blake.

Kerr nodded, and crossed to the electric light switch and turned it out. The room was filled with shadows immediately, moving on the glimmering old walls in a ghostly way as the dying firelight rose and fell.

Lower and lower the fire died out.

"You fellows asleep?" asked Kerr.

"I'm not," said Tom Merry. "Those blessed shadows look like goblins. Why not have the light on all night? What do you say, Blake?"

Blake did not answer; he was asleep.

"Wally, are you asleep?" asked Kerr.

"Not yet," said D'Arcy minor uneasily. "I say, it's not a bad idea to have the light on all night."

"The electric light can be turned off downstairs," said Kerr.

"But it never is," said Wally. "The light's always left all night, in case it's wanted. Pilky won't start turning it off to-night."

"I'd rather have it off, if you fellows don't mind," said Kerr.

"Oh, just as you like!" said Tom Merry at once.

"Same to me," said Wally.

"I've locked the door, and the doors of the next room are locked," Kerr remarked, as he began to undress.

"Safe as houses!" yawned Tom Merry. "We don't want the light. Tumble in!"

The fire was nearly out now.

Kerr turned into bed by the last gleam of light, but he did not sleep. His wakeful eyes watched the grate till the last red ember had died out among the logs.

Then there was black darkness in the Painted Room.

And then Kerr moved. He slipped quietly out of bed, and made his way to Wally's bed, and whispered:

"Wally, old fellow—quiet! Whisper!"

Wally started up.

"What's the row?" he whispered, considerably startled.

"I've got an idea—never mind what it is now—but will you change beds with me?" said Kerr, in a low whisper barely audible.

"Not a word—just do it!"

"But—"

"I've got a reason."

"You think—"

"Don't jaw, old kid—just do it."

"Oh, all serene!"

Wally turned out of bed, and slipped into Kerr's bed. Kerr took Wally's place, and drew the bedclothes lightly over him. Within easy reach of his hand he placed a heavy walking-stick he had brought up to bed with him. He lay resting lightly on his elbow, but he did not sleep.

The deep and steady breathing of Tom Merry, Blake, and Wally, soon showed that they were in the land of dreams.

But the Scottish junior did not once close his eyes.

He was tired, like the other fellows, and his eyelids were heavy, but he kept awake by sheer force of will.

The communicating doors between the three rooms had been left wide open, and from the adjoining chamber Kerr could hear Fatty Wynn give an occasional snore. Fatty Wynn had made a remarkably good supper, and he was in a deep and heavy sleep, dreaming of the tuckshop at St. Jim's, and Mrs. Taggles's jam-tarts and rabbit-pies.

The night grew older.

Save for the breathing of the juniors, the Painted Room was plunged into a deathlike stillness. Long ago the last

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door had closed below, and the last light had been extinguished. Kerr could not see his watch in the dark, but he guessed that it was about two in the morning, when a slight sound in the stillness startled every nerve in his body, and caused him to strain his ears to listen.

It was an indefinable sound—merely a break in the stillness—but though Kerr did not know what it was, it was a proof of one thing—that all in Eastwood House were not plunged in slumber, as they should have been at that hour.

Who was moving in the darkness—and where?

The unknown dark figure that had breathed close to Henry in the library, was "it"—whatever it was—near now to the Painted Room?

In spite of his nerve and courage, Kerr felt a strange thrill run through his limbs.

The ghost of Eastwood House did not seem so absurd at that hour of darkness and stillness as it seemed in the time of light and wakefulness.

He listened intently, the blood throbbing to his heart.

Another sound!

It was like the creak of a moving door; a sound faint, and yet quite distinguishable in the deadly stillness of the Painted Room.

Kerr silently sat up in bed, and grasped with a firm and steady hand the stick he had placed in readiness.

Ghost or no ghost, the figure, if it came near him, would feel the weight of the stick. Kerr's eyes glinted in the darkness, and his teeth were hard set.

A stealthy sound—as of cautious creeping on the floor in stocking feet!

It was approaching Kerr's bed—the bed that would have been occupied by Wally D'Arcy, if he had not changed with the Scottish junior after the light was out.

And then Kerr became aware of a strange, soft, sickly smell in the room, hovering as it were over his bed.

All his senses were on the alert.

He knew what it was!

He had been in a hospital ward, and he had smelt that sickly odour there, and in the laboratory at St. Jim's.

It was the smell of chloroform.

The smell, which evidently proceeded from some wad soaked in the drug, hovered over the head of the bed, just above the pillow, where the face of the sleeper would have been if a sleeper had been there.

That the chloroform wad was held in a human hand was certain; and from the fact that it approached where the face of the sleeper should have been, Kerr was able to judge of the position of the holder.

He drew back the heavy stick silently, and calculating the distance that must intervene, he slashed out suddenly in the darkness.

The slashing stick came into contact with something—and the wild, mad yell that followed showed what the something was.

It was a human face.

The yell of agony rang through the Painted Room, and it awoke the juniors, who started up in bed with exclamations of alarm.

"What's that?"

"What is it?"

"Who the—"

"Get a light!"

Kerr had already leaped from the bed on the other side. He was springing towards the switch of the electric-light.

His hand found it, and he pressed it—and the room was flooded with light.

Kerr glanced round him quickly.

Tom Merry and Wally and Blake were sitting up in bed, and the two open doorways were crowded with the other juniors, alarmed by the sudden yell.

But there was no one else to be seen in the room!

CHAPTER 13. A Dreamer of Dreams!

TOM MERRY jumped out of bed.

"What is it, Kerr? Did you call out?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"He did!"

"He! Who?"

"Whoever it was that came here, to chloroform Wally, and take him away," said Kerr grimly. "He found me instead."

"What!" gasped Wally.

"Do you mean to say that anybody has been here?" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Yes."

"Who?"

"The ghost of Eastwood House!" said Kerr, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But he was a pretty solid ghost—you

heard the yell he gave when I caught him across the chivvy with my stick."

"It was the ghost that yelled?" said Figgins.

"It was."

"My hat! I—I say, Kerr, it wasn't a nightmare, was it?" said Figgins doubtfully. "You see, old chap, there's nobody here, and the outside doors are locked."

"Let's look at them," said Lowther.

The juniors examined the doors on the corridor without. They were still locked on the inside. The windows were secure. It was evident that no one had entered the Painted Room, or the adjoining rooms, by way of door or window.

The juniors gathered round Kerr again. They had seen nothing, so far as that went. They had all heard the wild yell in the darkness, but—

They could not help a suspicion coming into their minds that Kerr had been sleeping, and that he had yelled out in the grip of a nightmare.

"Tell us just what happened?" said Tom Merry.

"I stayed awake to watch," Kerr explained.

"Then you haven't been asleep?"

Kerr smiled.

"I haven't been dreaming," he said. "I did not go to sleep at all. I waited for the rascal to come. That's why I changed beds with Wally."

"I didn't know you had changed beds with Wally," said Tom, puzzled. "You changed after the fire was out, then?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

Kerr did not reply. He seemed to be plunged in deep thought. The juniors regarded him with amazement and curiosity.

"Look here, Kerr, old man, tell us just what happened," urged Figgins. "Of course, we know you were awake if you say you were, but—"

"But you might have fallen asleep without noticing it," said Manners.

"And dreamed about the ghost!" said Herries.

Kerr did not reply.

"Come on, let's have it," said Tom Merry, puzzled by his silence. "Look here, you can see that there's no one in the room but ourselves, can't you, Kerr?"

"It looks like it," said Kerr.

"Look under the beds," said Wally.

They looked under the beds, and in the wardrobes, and in every recess where an intruder might possibly be hidden.

But no one was discovered. It was only too clear that there was no one but themselves in the Painted Room, and the adjoining chambers.

"Now, you can see there's nobody here, Kerr," Digby remarked. "Tell us what you think happened."

"Quite sure there's nobody?" asked Kerr, with a discouraged look.

"Quite sure!"

"We've hunted in every blessed corner," said Figgins. "There wasn't anybody here, unless he got out of the key-hole!"

Kerr hesitated.

"Well, I could have sworn that there was somebody," he said. "I sat up in bed and hit him with this stick."

"You didn't see him?"

"I couldn't see anything in the dark, of course!"

"Did he touch you?"

"No."

"You might have biffed something else with the stick," suggested Kangaroo. "If you landed out in the dark, it might have been the bed you hit, or the chair."

"Of course, it might!" confessed Kerr.

"You thought you hit somebody's head?" asked Tom Merry.

"I thought so!"

"But you can see now you didn't, old man!" said Figgins sympathetically. "It was only a nightmare, you know."

"But who yelled?" asked Kerr.

"You did, when you woke up, of course," explained Figgins kindly. "You see, you fell asleep without noticing it, and dreamed that you were hitting at the ghost. People often call out in their sleep when they're getting the giddy nightmare very bad. I've heard Fatty yell out about the School House bounders raiding a feed in the dorm, at St. Jim's. You remember one night he yelled out: 'Stop him—he's got my tarts!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't remember it!" growled Fatty Wynn.

"Well, you were asleep, so you wouldn't!" said Figgins. "But I remember it all right. You recollect I chucked a boot at you."

"Yes; I recollect that, you ass!" said Fatty Wynn, rubbing his chin reminiscently. It was upon the chin that Figgy's boot had caught him on that occasion.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"That's what's happened now," said Figgins, grinning. "You see, Kerr, old man, you dreamed you were tackling the ghost, and you yelled."

"But I was awake," urged Kerr, appearing, however, to be overcome by Figgins's explanation. "At least, I don't remember going to sleep. I intended to keep awake all night!"

"You wouldn't remember going to sleep," laughed Tom Merry. "You just dropped off, you know. Then you had the giddy nightmare, through thinking about Henry's giddy ghost."

"But—but—"

"But what, old chap?" asked Figgins.

"Well, it seemed real enough," said Kerr. "If we had found somebody in the room—"

"But we haven't!"

"You're sure the windows and doors are all fastened?" asked Kerr.

"We've examined every one."

"And—and nobody hidden in the rooms?"

"Nobody!"

"I—I—I'm sorry I've disturbed you chaps," faltered Kerr. "Of course, if I'd known it was a nightmare—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You wouldn't be likely to know it was one till it was all over."

"No; I suppose not. But—but I don't remember calling out," said Kerr. "It's queer that I should yell out, you see, without knowing it. I seemed to hear the yell myself."

"You were asleep when you yelled, and it awoke you," said Figgins. "You gave the pillow a biff with that stick, that's all. Never mind, old man, this only comes of thinking about the ghost story too much. It's all right!"

"Well, I've woke you all up," said Kerr, who looked very discouraged. "If that was a nightmare, I'm blessed if I shall ever trust my nerves again."

"Oh, don't worry about it," said Tom Merry comfortingly. "We don't mind being woke up; and it might have been somebody, you know."

"Better get back to bed, I think," Kangaroo remarked, with a shiver. "It's jolly cold here in pyjamas."

"The ghost won't come again!" grinned Monty Lowther. "It's quite safe. If the ghost was walking, he's gone home to the churchyard now, and he's off duty till to-morrow night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't rub it in!" said Kerr. "I suppose I've made a pretty ass of myself. Let the blessed matter drop!"

"Only too jolly glad to!" yawned Herries. "I'm cold. I'm going back to bed. If you dream again, try to get over it without yelling, will you?"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Figgins warmly, quick to defend his chum. "If we get to the bottom of this blessed mystery, it will be Kerr who thinks it out, I know that!"

"Thanks!" said Kerr. "But Herries is right—I oughtn't to have disturbed all you fellows for nothing. Let's turn in, and we'll leave the light on."

"But the ghost has vanished," chuckled Lowther.

"Leave the light on all the same!"

"Anything for a quite life. Tumble in, you chaps."

The juniors returned to bed. When first the alarm had been given, they had hoped that something definite had happened, and it was a great disappointment to find that it was merely a nightmare of Kerr's. They had not the slightest doubt on that point. Kerr had not actually owned up to it, but he had as good as admitted it. And whether Kerr had admitted it or not, the juniors would have had no doubt about it. The fact that no one was discovered in the rooms settled the matter for them.

They returned to bed, and were soon fast asleep again. But Kerr did not sleep. He took a book to bed with him, and read till the morning light was streaming into the windows.

CHAPTER 14.

Cousin Ethel Arrives.

TOM MERRY was the first to rise in the morning. He found Kerr still awake, yawning over his book. "Haven't you been asleep?" exclaimed Tom, in great surprise.

Kerr shook his head.

"I prefer not to sleep," he explained.

"Afraid of another nightmare?" grinned the Shell fellow.

"Well, yes."

"But you'll be a wreck all day after missing your night's rest," said Tom anxiously; "and we want you, you know."

"Yes, rather," said Figgins, putting his head into the room. "You're the chap who's got to think out the giddy problem for us, Kerr."

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"And imagine ghosts and things of a night," grunted Herries.

"Oh, let's hear the end of that," said Kerr. "People have had nightmares before, I suppose, and yelled out."

"Your nerves want seeing to," grinned Wally.

"Rats!"

"Cheese it, for goodness' sake," said Figgins. "Let Kerr alone. He's got more brains than the lot of us put together, even if he does dream dreams. I say, Kerr, you'd better take a snooze, hadn't you, or you'll be fagged out all day."

"I'm going to. I'll come down with you chaps, and I'll take a snooze while you kids go out. Cousin Ethel and her aunt arrive this morning, you know, and you'd all like to go down to the station and meet them."

"Yes, rather," said Figgins.

"I'll take a rest while you're gone. Ethel will want to help us in hunting for Gussy, and we'll all start together after lunch."

"Good enough," said Tom Merry, "but why not stop in bed, Kerr; you'll sleep more comfortably in bed."

"I'd rather not."

"I say, that nightmare does seem to have upset your nerves old chap," said Fatty Wynn. "It is because you don't want to stay up here by yourself?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Well, a good feed will set you right again," said Fatty.

"I shall be all right," said Kerr.

The Scottish junior looked a little pale, and heavy about the eyes, but he freshened up after a cold bath, and he looked very nearly himself when he went down with the rest of the party. The juniors made a good breakfast. The keen winter air sharpened their appetites, and they did full justice to the excellent breakfast provided by the care of Mrs. Wipps. Fatty Wynn especially following his own advice to lay a solid foundation for the day.

After breakfast, the party prepared to go down to the station to meet the train by which Cousin Ethel and her aunt, Miss Drusilla Cleveland, were to arrive. Wally ordered Ruggles to bring the car round. Pilkington had not been seen when the juniors prepared to start, and Wally asked Henry where the butler was. There was a lurking grin on Henry's wooden face as he replied:

"Mr. Pilkington 'ave 'ad a little accident, sir."

"An accident?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, sir. He fell down the stairs goin' to the 'ouse-keeper's room, sir," said Henry. "I 'eard him fall, and ran up, sir. He was 'urt."

"Sorry!" said Wally. "Much hurt?"

"Yessir; badly out about the face," said Henry.

"Poor chap!" said Tom Merry, with some compunction for the dislike he felt towards the butler. "I'm sorry! Tell him we're sorry, Henry."

"Certainly, sir."

"Is he keeping his room?" asked Kerr.

"Yes, sir; he went straight to his room."

"Did you see him before he fell down?" asked Kerr.

Henry could not help a little surprise creeping into his expressionless face at that question.

"No, sir," he replied. "It was werry early in the mornin'."

Mr. Pilkington was down first, sir."

"Oh, I see. And his face is cut?"

"Yes, sir."

"Poor Pilky!" said Wally.

"The doctor 'ave been to see him, from Easthorpe, Master Walter," said Henry. "His face is all banged up now, sir."

It might have been noted that Henry did not seem much cut up at Mr. Pilkington's misfortune; indeed, a suspicious person might have supposed that he was pleased. Perhaps Henry had not forgotten the rating he had received from the butler on the subject of his ghost story.

"You're not coming, Kerr?" Figgins asked, as the juniors were about to start, Ruggles having brought round the big Daimler.

"No," said Kerr. "I'll take a snooze here."

"Not in bed?" grinned Lowther, and the other fellows chuckled. Kerr had had to bear a considerable number of allusions to his nightmare, but he bore them with perfect equanimity.

"No, not in bed?" said Kerr calmly. "I'll take a snooze on this lounge. Can I have your bulldog, Herries?"

"Certainly," said Herries, somewhat flattered that Kerr wanted his bulldog. "What do you want him for?"

"To keep with me while I'm asleep."

"To keep off the giddy nightmares," chuckled Lowther.

"By Jove, you are getting into a state of nerves, Kerr," said Digby sympathetically. "I'll stay with you, if you like."

"I—I'll stay if you like, Kerr," said Figgins heroically.



The light gleamed upon D'Arcy and upon the stone walls, reeking with damp. But it did not reveal the features of the man who held the lantern; his face was covered with a black mask. "You scoundrel!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. (See Chapter 10.)

He wanted very much to be one of the first to greet Cousin Ethel, but he was loyal to his chum. But Kerr shook his head.

"No, that's all right, Figgy; you buzz off. Towser will look after me. Pilkington won't be able to make a fuss about his being in the house, now he's laid up."

Herries fetched his bulldog at once. Kerr wheeled a large soft lounge near the open French windows of the breakfast-room, and tied the bulldog's chain to the leg of the lounge. Towser lay contentedly to sleep, but he slept in the manner of bulldogs, with one eye open. If Kerr feared an enemy more solid than the nightmare, it was quite certain that he was safe while Towser was there. Though what enemy was to be expected in the daylight, in a large house full of servants, was a puzzle. The other fellows attributed it all to Kerr's nerves, upset by the nightmare. Figgins, in fact, was quite concerned about his chum. He saw Kerr comfortably bestowed, with a rug over him, before he left the breakfast-room.

Big as the Daimler car was, it was not quite big enough for all the party, and half the juniors walked down to Easthorpe. It was a pleasant walk, in the keen winter morning. The Fourth Formers walked, the Terrible Three

and Kangaroo being in the car. It was understood that Figgins was to be in the car coming back, Figgy's special rights to Cousin Ethel's society being tacitly recognised.

"Blessed if I quite know what to make of Kerr," Figgins remarked to Fatty Wynn. "I never knew he had any nerves at all, and now he seems all nerves. Jolly queer that a ghost story should upset a hard-headed chap like old Kerr."

"He didn't have enough supper last night," said Fatty with a wise shake of the head. "I tried to get him to take some more of the goose, but he wouldn't. You have to keep pretty well fed up to keep your nerves in order, you know."

"Your nerves must be in a ripping state, then," grinned Blake. "But really, I'm rather sorry about Kerr. He's the last chap I should have expected to get into a state of nerves. But he's got it, and no mistake."

And Figgy's face was quite clouded till they arrived at the railway-station.

The juniors crowded on the platform, waiting for Cousin Ethel's train to come in. When it came in, and they caught sight of the girl's bright face at the carriage window, they waved their caps enthusiastically. There was a rush to help Cousin Ethel to alight. Miss Drusilla Cleveland was the

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first to descend, and she accepted Figgins's helping hand, and Monty Lowther helped out Cousin Ethel. There was a general handshaking, and Figgins gained possession of Miss Ethel as they walked out to the car.

Cousin Ethel was looking as fresh and charming as ever, but her sweet face was unusually grave. She had been very much concerned about her uncle, Lord Eastwood; and the news of Arthur Augustus's disappearance, following his father's, had been a great shock to her. She was so serious and grave that Monty Lowther suppressed a whole series of little jokes he had intended to entertain her with, on the subject of Kerr's weird nightmare; and those jokes were never uttered.

"You have not heard anything of Arthur?" was Cousin Ethel's first question.

"No," said Figgins, "we're hunting for him."

"Is there not a detective at Eastwood House searching for him?" asked Aunt Drusilla.

"Yes, but he hasn't found anything out. We hope to find Gussy."

Aunt Drusilla smiled. Perhaps she did not think it extremely probable that the juniors of St. Jim's would succeed where the police and the Scotland Yard detective had failed.

"It is terrible," said Ethel, with a quiver of the lips, as she sat in the car, bowling along towards Eastwood House. "Poor Arthur! Of course, he must have been kidnapped."

"No doubt about that," said Figgins, "and we've got to find the scoundrels. Kerr's thinking the whole bizney out, you know, and Kerr's an awfully deep chap. I think he will hit on something or other."

"I hope he will!" said Ethel, but the tone implied that she did not share honest Figgy's conviction on the subject.

"Well, he's frightfully deep, you know," said Figgins.

"Kerr isn't with you now?"

"No. He was awake most of last night, and he's taking a nap," confessed Figgins.

"Dear me! What was he awake all night for?" asked Aunt Drusilla.

"Watching for the giddy kidnapper," grinned Blake. "He found a nightmare, and that was all. Then he wouldn't go to sleep again."

Ethel looked at him quickly.

"That is not like Kerr," she said. "I always thought he was very practical. It is very strange if he should be frightened by a nightmare."

"He's not frightened," said Figgins. "Kerr is as brave as a lion. It's just a case of nerves, you know—simply that. Kerr's a bit run down, that's all."

Ethel asked many questions as to what the juniors had done since their arrival at Eastwood House. They had little to tell, but they told it. The car stopped at last before the house, and they came in, in good time for lunch. Cousin Ethel and Miss Cleveland went to their rooms, and Figgins looked in the breakfast-room for Kerr. The Scottish junior was still fast asleep on the couch, and Towser, with one eye open, was watching and dozing beside him.

Kerr woke up as Figgins came in, however, and sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Nearly lunch-time," said Figgins. "Had enough snooze?"

"Yes; I'm all right now," said Kerr, throwing off the rug and getting up. "I'm starting with you fellows after lunch."

"Starting?" asked Figgins, in surprise. "Where?"

"We're going out."

"Well, we're ready. But where?"

"Into the park."

"The park!" said Figgins, puzzled. "What good are we going to do by going into the park, Kerr, old man?"

"I'll explain when we get there," said Kerr. "Let's get to lunch now."

Cousin Ethel and her aunt joined them at lunch. The meal would have been very merry but for the shadow that hung over all, owing to the unknown fate of their chum. Tom Merry & Co., like Figgins, were surprised by Kerr's idea of beginning operations in the park, not having the faintest idea what was to be done there. Kerr did not explain; but as no one had any better suggestion to make, Kerr had his way, and it was agreed that the search should begin in the park. And Cousin Ethel, of course, was to be in the party, and when lunch was over they started.

CHAPTER 15. Awfully Deep.

THE park of Eastwood, with its big, leafless trees rimed with frost, was cold and chilly and desolate as the St. Jim's juniors came into it from the terrace, Tom Merry & Co. were following Kerr's lead, but they were puzzled and

wondering. Indeed, they were almost inclined to suspect that the strange affair of the night had disturbed Kerr's nerves more than they had at first supposed, and that he was not quite himself. Figgins was very anxious about him.

"Old Kerr isn't quite the same as usual to-day," he confided to Cousin Ethel. "He seems to have queer ideas. I suppose he had an awful nightmare, and then missing a night's sleep has knocked him up, you know."

Cousin Ethel glanced at the healthy face of the Scottish junior.

"Kerr doesn't look knocked up," she remarked.

"No; he looks as fit as a fiddle," Figgins agreed. "Of course, he may have some scheme in his head—he's awfully deep, you know. But I admit that I'm blessed if I see what we're going to do in the park. There's nobody here but ourselves."

Kerr had stopped, and he caught the last words, and looked back with a smile.

"That's why we've come, Figgy," he said.

"Because there's nobody here?" asked Figgins.

"Yes."

"I—I say, Kerr, you're not wandering in your mind, are you?" asked Herries.

"I think not," said Kerr calmly. "Let's get on to that seat by the lake, and Miss Ethel can sit down while I'm talking to you. I've got to explain to you chaps what happened last night."

"What happened last night?" repeated Merry, in wonder. "But that was explained in the Painted Room, Kerr, old man. Don't you remember?"

"I remember well enough."

"You had a bad nightmare, old man," said Figgins gently, really alarmed now for the state of his chum's mind.

Kerr laughed.

"I didn't have a nightmare," he said. "I let you fellows say so, for a reason you would have guessed if you'd had a bit more sense."

"Thanks!" said Tom Merry. "And what was the reason?"

"I didn't want to be overheard," explained Kerr.

"Overheard!" exclaimed all the juniors at once.

"Exactly."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Wally. "Who could have overheard you? There was nobody but ourselves in the room, and nobody outside in the corridor listening, I suppose?"

"The person who could have overheard me was the person who came into the Painted Room, and whom I struck with my stick in the dark," said Kerr calmly.

"But—but you didn't, you know," said Figgins. "You owned up that it was a nightmare."

"I didn't, Figgy. I simply let you chaps say so, because I knew that the fellow, whoever he was, was listening to every word that was said in the Painted Room."

"You—you know that?"

"Yes; and I didn't want to tell him what I'd found out," said Kerr calmly. "So I let you call it a nightmare, and that fellow went away thinking that I was satisfied that it was a nightmare. See?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Tom Merry.

"Didn't I tell you old Kerr was awfully deep?" exclaimed Figgins, in great admiration. "This beats the band!"

"I don't quite see it, for one," said Herries, unconvinced.

"We know jolly well that there wasn't anybody in the room but ourselves, and the Painted Room is so big that anybody at the door couldn't have heard what was said. It seems to me that Kerr is still dreaming."

"Where was the chap if he was still listening?" asked Tom Merry.

Kerr shook his head.

"I don't know yet. We've got to find him out. But listen, and I'll tell you exactly what happened. After we put the light out, and the fire had gone out, I changed beds with Wally. I had my reasons for thinking that Wally was in danger of going after Gussy and his pater if the rascal got a chance at him. I didn't go to sleep. I did not even close my eyes once. About two in the morning someone was in the room."

"But how?"

"We've got to find out how. Someone was there, and he came to Wally's bed—where I was, of course—and the fact that he came to the bed where I was showed that he was after Wally."

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally.

"I don't see it quite," said Kangaroo. "How could anybody outside the household know which bed Wally had taken?"

"I didn't say anybody outside the household knew," said Kerr calmly.

There was a general jump.

"You mean that it was somebody belonging to the house

who came into the room!" Wally exclaimed, in great amazement.

"Draw it mild, Kerr, old man!" murmured Fatty Wynn. "Don't pile it on too thick!" said Monty Lowther. "There's a limit, you know."

"Let Kerr go on," said Cousin Ethel, with an encouraging look to the Scottish junior. "I am very interested. Tell us what happened, Kerr."

"I repeat that, whoever it was, he came to the bed where Wally had lain down. Wally had changed out after the room was quite dark, and so if a watch had been kept the watcher could not know that Wally had changed out."

"A watch!" said Manners. "How could anybody watch us there. Through the keyhole, do you mean?"

"Through some opening, at all events," said Kerr.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Blake. "You're piling it on, you know."

"Well, whoever it was, he came up to the bed, hardly making a sound," said Kerr. "Then I smelt chloroform."

"Chloroform!" said Cousin Ethel.

"Yes; I know the smell well enough. I had my stick ready in my fist. I judged the distance as well as I could in the dark, and brought the stick down on the chap's head. I think it caught him across the face. You all heard the yell he let out."

"But it was you that yelled out in your nightmare, you know," said Herries obtusely. "You as good as admitted it last night."

Kerr did not trouble to reply to that observation. He continued:

"I put on the light as quickly as I could, but the man was gone. I had had some hope of catching him, but I knew that he might be too quick for me, knowing the secret of the room and I not knowing it. But I counted on marking his face with my stick so that I should know him again."

"Oh, my hat!" said Figgins. "Didn't I say he was as deep as a well?"

"But how did he get out?" yelled Wally. "Did he go up the chimney, or vanish into thin air, or what?"

"That's easy to work out," said Kerr. "The doors were all locked, and the windows were all fastened. The chimney has iron bars across it inside. Yet the man had come in and gone out again. The obvious conclusion is—"

"That you dreamed it," said Herries.

"Fathead!" said Kerr politely. "The obvious conclusion is that there's a way of getting in and out of the Painted Room without using doors or windows."

"Vanishing through the ceiling?" suggested Monty Lowther humorously.

"I noticed that the walls are panelled," said Kerr. "And the room is very old—one of the oldest parts of the house, I should say."

"That's so," said Wally. "I know the ceiling was painted in the reign of Charles the Second."

"Those old panelled rooms in ancient houses often have secret doors," said Kerr. "They were common enough at the time the houses were built. Men often had to dodge out of sight in the time of Jacobite conspiracies. Isn't there a story that one of the lords of Eastwood was found dead in that room, and the doors fastened, and his murderer had escaped no one knew how?"

"That's only a yarn," said Wally.

"It might easily be true, if there's a secret door in the room. Have you ever heard of such a thing, Wally?"

D'Arcy minor shook his head.

"Never! If there was a secret door, the pater didn't know anything about it, either. Nobody knew. There was a sliding panel in the picture-gallery, once, but it was screwed up in my grandfather's time."

"Then it is known that such things have existed in Eastwood House?"

"Yes, so far as that goes."

"Depend upon it, there's one in the Painted Room," said Kerr, "and that's how the rascal got in and out."

There was a short silence.

Tom Merry & Co. hardly knew what to think.

If there was a secret panel in the Painted Room, by which the possessor of the secret was enabled to enter and leave as he pleased, certainly the affair of the previous night was explained, without supposing that Kerr had been the victim of a nightmare, unusually realistic. And if the rascal had escaped by the panel, and yet remained within hearing, it had shown great presence of mind on Kerr's part to allow the matter to be talked of and disposed of as a nightmare. It was, as Figgins admirably declared, very deep indeed. But—

"You fellows still think that it was a dream?" said Kerr, with a quiet smile, glancing round at the silent juniors.

"Well," said Tom Merry hesitatingly. "You see—"

"I see! I might have dreamed the dark figure. I might have dreamed the yell, but do you think I could have dreamed this?"

Kerr held up the stick he carried in his hand.

"That was the stick I had last night," he said quietly. "Look at it. Can you see a stain?"

The juniors, with awed looks, gazed at the deep dark stain on the wood. It was there, right enough, and they could not doubt what it was.

"Blood!" said Tom Merry, in a hushed voice.

Kerr nodded.

"That came from the nose, I think—or the face somewhere. I think I caught him right across the face with the stick."

"Great Scott!"

"And if I dreamed that," grinned Kerr, "do you think that I could have dreamed this?"

He took his handkerchief from his pocket. It was wrapped round something. The juniors watched him with breathless interest as he unrolled the handkerchief. A cotton wad was disclosed, from which came a faint, sickly smell.

"Chloroform!" said Manners.

"Chloroform! My hat!"

"Where did you get that?" asked Cousin Ethel.

"I picked it up on the floor of the Painted Room. The man dropped it when my stick caught him across the chivvy."

"Oh!"

The juniors gazed at the chloroform pad. There was no doubt about that, and Kerr's story was proved beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Do you think that I dreamed it?" asked Kerr.

"No," said Tom Merry, "it happened; but—but it rather takes my breath away!"

CHAPTER 16.

The Suspect.

THE St. Jim's juniors were impressed at last

The stain upon the stick was convincing enough, and the chloroform pad finished the matter. There was no other way it could have come into the Painted Room than in the way Kerr had described. Someone unknown had visited the Painted Room in the hours of darkness, with the intention of chloroforming Wally, and taking him away, as his father and brother had been taken. And the chloroform explained something that had puzzled them very much before—how Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus had been captured without being able to give the alarm. Evidently they had been chloroformed by the kidnapper.

Wally's face was quite white as he gazed at the pad. But for Kerr's foresight the previous night that pad would have been pressed over his face while he slept, and he would have awakened from a drugged sleep to find himself—where? Where his father and his brother were now kept prisoners by the mysterious kidnapper.

"I—I say, Kerr, old man, you've done me a jolly good turn," said the fag, in a faltering voice. "They'd have had me, sure enough."

"I think they would—or he would, rather, there was only one," said Kerr, as he carefully wrapped up the pad again, and restored it to his pocket.

"It's settled, then," said Tom Merry. "There's a secret way of getting into the Painted Room, and the kidnapper knows about it."

"Exactly."

"And we've got to find it out."

"That's right."

"We'll ask all the household," said Wally. "Pilkington may know something about it, as he's lived in the house for a year or more."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors stared at Kerr, as he burst into an involuntary laugh. They did not see anything comical in D'Arcy minor's remark.

"What's the joke?" asked Blake, puzzled.

"Nerves again?" demanded Herries.

"Oh, leave my nerves alone," said Kerr. "Last night it wasn't my nerves, but your brains that were at fault."

"Right enough," said Figgins. "Quite so!"

"I couldn't help laughing at Wally's idea," grinned Kerr. "Don't you see? Anybody outside Eastwood House couldn't know anything about the secret panel, and couldn't get into the house to use it, anyway. It must be somebody inside the house. If we say a word in the house about this discovery, we shall simply warn the kidnapper that we are up to his little game."

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane," said Wally, aghast. "That's so, too!"

"Somebody in the house," said Cousin Ethel slowly. "Then you suspect that it was one of the servants, Kerr?"

"Naturally. As there is no one else in the house."

"Which one?" asked Figgins. "Go on, Kerr, I'll jolly well bet that you've got an idea which Johnny it was!"

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"That's asking rather too much," said Tom Merry.

"Figgy's right!" said Kerr.

"What! You know which one it was?"

"I don't know, but I suspect. Let's take the facts in order," said Kerr, who was always very precise. "We've established the existence of the secret door. An outsider couldn't know anything about the secret door in the Painted Room. It was one of the household staff. We've got to find the one that other circumstances point to."

"But there ain't any other circumstances," said Herries.

"At least, I can't see any."

"I dare say you can't," said Kerr. "But I hope to be able to worry out one or two."

Figgins grinned.

"You leave Kerr alone," he said. "He'll think it out. Besides, it takes a New House chap to handle a problem like this."

"Oh, rats!" said Herries warmly. "If you come to that, I had found out already that there was something fishy in the house."

"You had!" exclaimed Figgins.

"Yes. You know Towser followed Gussy's track back to the house," said Herries. "We thought at the time Towser was off the scent. Now it's quite clear Towser was on the track of the kidnapper. He came straight back to Eastwood House from the willows, and if we'd had sense enough to understand, we should have known that he was leading us to the kidnapper. Towser's all right."

"Ahem!" said Kerr. "Not quite right, because Gussy never was in the field under the willows at all the night before last, after the time he went there with Blake and Digby."

"His handkerchief was found there," said Herries.

"So was Lord Eastwood's hat; but Lord Eastwood was never there. I believe that both of them were kidnapped in the house."

"In the house!" said Cousin Ethel, with a deep breath.

"Yes, chloroformed and kidnapped under their own roof. Naturally the kidnapper wanted to make it appear that they had left the house of their own accord. He didn't want to have Mr. Dodder and the policemen searching Eastwood House for secret doors and things. It was quite easy for him to take Lord Eastwood's hat, and Gussy's handkerchief, and drop them in a field a mile away. That put the police on the wrong scent at once. And it was quite easy for him to leave the door of the picture-gallery unfastened to give the impression that Lord Eastwood had gone out that night."

"Of course!" said Figgins.

"But the pater was in the library, not in the Painted Room," said Wally.

"The library has panelled walls, like the Painted Room," said Kerr. "There is another opening panel there, of course. Don't you remember Henry's ghost? I am quite sure that Henry really saw that dark figure in the library, by the time he got the light on the man had vanished through the wall."

"Oh!"

"I believe that Lord Eastwood was taken in the library and Gussy in the Painted Room," said Kerr. "I can fancy the kidnapper sneaking behind Lord Eastwood's chair, while he was writing at his table, and suddenly dabbing the chloroform pad over his face from behind. Everybody else in the house was in bed. He carried Lord Eastwood, insensible, through the secret panel, and that was all."

"The poor old pater," said Wally, clenching his fists. "I'd like to get within hitting distance of the rotter, wherever he is."

"You've been within hitting distance of him, I fancy," said Kerr, with a grin.

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"Who do you think it is, then?"

"I'm coming to that. You fellows"—Kerr glanced at Blake and Digby—"you supposed that Gussy had slept in his clothes and gone out in the morning to look for traces of his father without calling you."

"Well, what were we to think?" said Blake, a little aggressively.

"Quite so. You thought that. His handkerchief was found under the willows, and what could seem more natural than that Gussy had gone there, and had been kidnapped there?"

"It looked reasonable enough," said Digby. "I believe Dodder thinks that Gussy found out something, and the kidnappers collared him to keep him quiet."

"Just so. But, as a matter of fact, Gussy was kidnapped in the Painted Room, just as Wally would have been last night if I hadn't chipped in."

"It looks like it—now," admitted Blake.

"And now we're coming to the point," said Kerr. "The kidnapper meant to kidnap Gussy all the time, and put him along with his pater. If he is holding Lord Eastwood to ransom, Gussy is another trump in his hand to make his lordship pay up. And there's another reason why he wanted Gussy—the same reason that he wanted Wally."

"And what's that?"

"Because while there isn't any member of the family in the house he is safer from a search. You remember that Pilkington wanted to get rid of Gussy's guests. Without a D'Arcy in the house he is head of affairs there, by Lord Conway's instructions."

"Yes, that's why we wanted Wally to come especially," said Blake, with a nod. "Pilk was trying to get rid of us. But you don't mean that the kidnapper has got any influence over Pilk to make him play his game for him?"

Kerr smiled.

Tom Merry gave a sudden shout.

"Pilkington!"

Kerr nodded.

"You suspect the butler?"

"Yes."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"I've thought it out," said Kerr steadily. "Gussy was kidnapped in the Painted Room. Now, how did he come to be in the Painted Room at all?"

"Oh, that's simple enough!" said Blake. "His own room is under repair, and Pilkington had the Painted Room got ready for him instead."

"I fancy that Gussy's old room was out of repair on purpose, and that Gussy was planted in the Painted Room simply because he could be kidnapped there, and nowhere else," said Kerr. "Look at the facts! If Gussy hadn't been in the Painted Room he couldn't have been taken—at least, not so easily. Who caused him to be put there?"

"Pilk," said Wally.

"That's a coincidence, to say the least. Last night when Mrs. Wipps arranged the beds for us in that room, Pilkington interfered with the arrangements. He tried to work it for Wally to sleep alone in that room."

"So he did," said Wally—"so he did! The rotter!"

"That's coincidence number two," said Kerr. "Then there's the fact that Pilkington wanted to get rid of us chaps. Of course, we know all about his being a precise old codger, who doesn't like boys, and so on, and doesn't like being disturbed. But that wouldn't make him so cheeky to his master's guests without a good reason. He had led the police on a false scent a mile from Eastwood House. But

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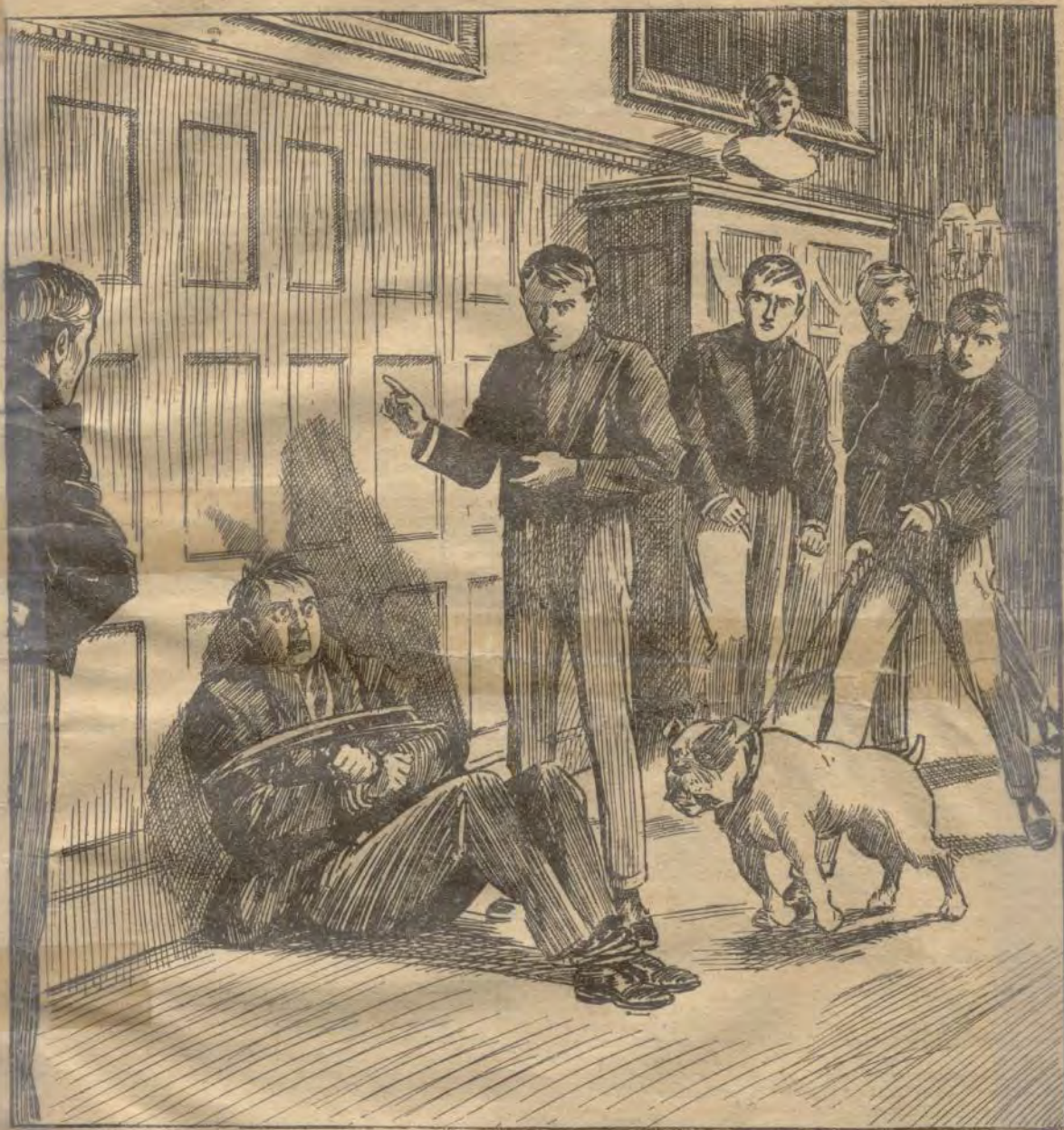
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"You have exactly five minutes to make up your mind, Pilkington," said Kerr coolly. "At ten minutes to three, if you have not decided to show us the secret panel, I shall tell Herries to let his bulldog loose! You know what will happen then!" (See Chapter 21.)

we were in the house—a crowd of us—and we were pottering about looking for Gussy and his pater. We might have hit on something at any time, and it was safest to be rid of us. If he had captured Wally last night he would not have had any member of the family to stop him, and he would have tried his hardest to get us out. And, under the circumstances, I don't quite see how we could have stayed, as he has authority from Lord Conway."

"The rotter!" repeated Wally. "The awful rotter! It's clear as daylight!"

Blake shook his head. "I don't like Pilky, and I admit that it looks suspicious," he said, "but it isn't proof."

"I've got proof," said Kerr coolly.

"Oh! And what is it?"

"I marked his face last night with my stick. Whoever came into the Painted Room last night has got his face marked this morning."

"Great Scott! Then we've only got to look at him and see—"

"Hold on!" said Herries. "It happens that Pilkington fell downstairs this morning and hurt his face. I heard Henry tell Wally so."

Kerr laughed.

"He had to account for the damage to his face somehow, you ass!"

"Oh!"

"But Henry heard him fall down!" objected Dig.

"Of course Henry heard him fall down! You remember I asked Henry if he'd seen Pilky this morning before he fell down? He hadn't; nobody had. Pilkington came down early, and tumbled down the stairs specially for Henry to hear him. Before anybody had seen him he arranged that little accident to account for his damaged chivvy. He could tumble down the stairs without hurting himself much, and he did it with Henry within hearing to make it quite convincing. But the damage to his chivvy was done by my stick last night, not by his tumble on the stairs this morning."

"Why, of course," said Figgins—"of course! If his face

was damaged, he had to account for it somehow, and that's just what he would think of."

"Anyway, it's a wonderful coincidence that Pilkington's face is damaged this morning and the face of the kidnapper was damaged last night," said Kerr. "Put two and two together and you'll come to the facts. It was Pilkington who came into the Painted Room last night to kidnap Wally."

The juniors were silent.

Kerr had certainly worked the problem out in a very convincing manner.

It was difficult to suspect the staid and imposing butler of being a secret schemer and kidnapper certainly, but every circumstance pointed to the correctness of Kerr's theory.

Pilkington had put D'Arcy in the Painted Room, and he had been kidnapped there. Pilkington had tried to get Wally to sleep alone in the same room, and there had been an attempt to kidnap Wally. Pilkington's face was damaged in the morning, and the face of the kidnapper had been damaged during the night. Pilkington had tried to get rid of the schoolboys from the house, and the kidnapper, of course, would be much safer when they were gone. The chain of circumstantial evidence was complete.

"What do you think, Cousin Ethel?" asked Figgins, breaking the silence.

"I think Kerr is very clever indeed," said Ethel. "I am quite sure that he is right. All the circumstances point to the same thing."

"Thanks, Miss Ethel!" said Kerr. "I am quite sure, too, as a matter of fact. I fancy that Pilkington discovered the secret panels, and that very likely put the whole scheme into his head. He must have known of the screwed-up panel in the picture-gallery, and from that he reasoned out that there were others—and found them. Then he laid his plans, and so far he has scored."

"But we've got him now," said Blake. "We've only got to give information to the police and have him arrested, and make him tell where Lord Eastwood and Gussy are hidden."

"No fear!" said Kerr promptly. "In the first place, we've got no proof. The police would not take much notice of what I could tell them. They might even think it was a jape to score off Pilkington. Even if they searched for a secret panel, they wouldn't find it. But even if they took it all in, and arrested Pilkington, that would be the worst thing that could possibly happen."

"I don't see that."

"They can't put Pilkington to the torture, you know, in these days to make him own up what he's done with Lord Eastwood. And if Lord Eastwood and Gussy are never found, Pilkington would have to be released for want of evidence."

"Yes, but—"

"And if Pilkington is in prison, he will keep silent for his own sake. And then what will happen to his prisoners? They may starve to death in their hiding-place before they're found."

"Good heavens!" murmured Wally.

"If Pilkington is doing all this alone—and I think he is—there would be nobody to take food to the prisoners if he were arrested," said Kerr. "We've got to consider that. Not a word to the police or to Mr. Dodder. We've got to handle this matter ourselves—if we don't want to risk being the cause of Lord Eastwood's and Gussy's death."

"It is quite true," said Cousin Ethel.

"But where are they?" exclaimed Figgins. "Can you make a guess about that, Kerr?"

"Yes, I can. Lord Eastwood has been a prisoner for five days now, Gussy for more than twenty-four hours. They are kept somewhere hidden, and they must be supplied with food; that goes without saying. Pilkington must keep them alive. Only Pilkington can be taking food to them, and as Pilkington is never long absent from Eastwood House, the conclusion is they're not far away."

"True!"

"Now we come to Henry's ghost again. The dark figure in the library was Pilkington. You remember that Henry couldn't wake him—his door was locked—when they searched the house that night. As a matter of fact, Pilkington wasn't in his room at all. He was hiding behind the moving panel in the library while the servants were searching for the mysterious dark figure."

"But what was he doing there?" exclaimed Herries. "Why should he be in the library at all? It was the night after the kidnapping, not the same night."

"Exactly! I've said that Pilkington must have taken food to his prisoner. Naturally, he would choose the night to do it, when everybody else was in bed. It would be the only safe way. My idea is that he had visited Lord East-

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wood, and was coming back when he ran into Henry in the library in the dark. Of course, he didn't expect Henry to be downstairs, and you can understand now why he rated Henry for being so jolly zealous, and forbade him ever to come down in the night again."

"My hat! That's so!"

"That means," said Tom Merry slowly, "that Lord Eastwood and Gussy are kept prisoners in some secret place in Eastwood House itself, and that Pilkington goes to them by way of the secret door in the library to take them food."

"That's it," said Kerr.

"This beats Sherlock Holmes," said Figgins. "You ought to be a giddy detective, Kerr."

"Now I'm coming to my plan," went on Kerr.

"Oh, you've got a plan!" said Tom.

"Certainly. Pilkington must visit his prisoners, I should think, at least once in every twenty-four hours, to take them food, if for no other reasons. He goes by way of the secret door in the library. I dare say he could go just as easily by way of the Painted Room, but we happen to be there. Now, if we keep watch in the library to-night, unknown to Pilkington, we've got a chance of spotting the secret panel."

"Oh, good!"

"The difficulty is, that he's a keen rascal, and we may be spotted," said Kerr. "I believe he's a thoroughly dangerous villain. I think I pulled the wool over his eyes last night in the Painted Room, by letting you fellows convince me that it was a nightmare," Kerr grinned. "But I can't be sure. That's why I had Towser along with me this morning while I was having my nap. But for that, I think I should have disappeared before you came back from the station, and I should know exactly where Gussy is, because I should be shut up along with him, with Wally to follow later. While I was napping in the breakfast room this morning, Towser growled and woke me up—Pilkington was looking in at the door, with his face bandaged. But he couldn't come near Towser."

"Why couldn't you let some of us stay with you, you ass," said Figgins uneasily.

"Towser was all right. Towser doesn't like Pilkington," smiled Kerr. "If the butler had come within reach of his teeth, the whole house would have heard it."

"Good old Towser," said Herries. "I know perfectly well that Towser spotted Pilkington as a rascal at the very start. You remember how he went for him."

Tom Merry looked round.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" he said. "I suggest that we appoint Kerr leader, and obey his orders, until Gussy is found."

"Hear, hear!" said Figgins heartily.

And the motion was carried unanimously. Kerr had proved his ability to take the lead, and the whole Co. were more than willing to follow him. Kerr accepted the position with becoming modesty.

CHAPTER 17.

The Eye of Bacchus!

TOM MERRY & CO. strolled round the frozen lake, in a state of great, but suppressed, excitement.

Kerr had been elected leader, and Kerr had given his instructions.

The juniors loyally promised to carry them out.

In the first place, not a word was to be uttered upon the subject inside the house, in case it should be overheard. It was a case, literally, of walls having ears.

In the second place, the juniors were to be exceedingly careful to show no change in their manners towards Pilkington, so that he should not have the slightest chance of guessing that he was suspected.

In the third place, for the purpose of throwing dust in the rascal's eyes, Kerr advised that the fellows should seem to slack down in their search, and give up as hopeless the task of finding the missing junior.

The Co. were eager to search in the library and the Painted Room for the secret panels, in the hope of thus finding the way to the hiding-place of the kidnapped father and son; but Kerr's advice was followed. It was pretty certain that if they made such a search, Pilkington would soon discover them at it, and then he would be instantly aware of how much they knew and suspected.

It was quite possible that, in that case, he would contrive some means of removing his prisoners to a safer place, so that even if the secret door was discovered, the discovery of the prisoners would not follow.

Indeed, a darker and more terrible possibility was hinted at by Kerr; if the rascal found himself in danger of discovery, with the prison looming before him, it was possible that he might secure himself by a more terrible crime than kidnapping. Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy

might disappear for ever from the knowledge of men. They were utterly at the mercy of their captor, and he held their lives in the hollow of his hand. If he felt himself driven to it, for his own safety, it was quite possible that he might sacrifice their lives to his security.

The juniors realised that Kerr was right, and they promised to follow his instructions; and they faithfully kept their word.

If Pilkington observed them during the afternoon, as he undoubtedly did, he could not fail to receive the impression that they had lost heart in the search for their missing chum.

They skated on the frozen lake, apparently thinking of anything but the disappearance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and appearing to enjoy themselves with schoolboy zest.

Indeed, though as concerned as the rest for Gussy, Figgins had a very pleasant hour or two piloting Cousin Ethel over the frozen surface of the lake.

It was dark when the juniors came in, and they came in red and rosy from their exercise, and over dinner they talked of a football match arranged for the morrow with the village team. That match had been arranged by Arthur Augustus with Boker, the son of the village policeman, who was captain of the Easthorpe Ramblers. The juniors discussed the matter with great keenness, and asked Henry about the form of the village footballers.

They did not see much of Pilkington.

The butler kept to his own room the greater part of the time; and when he was seen downstairs, he had a bandage over his face.

The part of his face that could be seen was pale, and his eyes gleamed over the bandage, showing very little of the professional calmness that had always characterised Mr. Pilkington.

But he kept out of sight as much as he could. His nose was very much swollen, and the doctor from Easthorpe came to see him again in the evening. When the medical man came downstairs, Kerr met him in the hall, and asked after Pilkington.

"We're very much concerned about Mr. Pilkington," Kerr explained. "Was it a very bad fall that he had, sir?"

"Very bad," said the doctor. "Mr. Pilkington's face is badly bruised. His nose must have come into violent contact with the stair or the floor."

"No other injuries, I hope, Dr. Williams?"

"No; curiously enough, all the damage is done to the face," said the doctor. "Mr. Pilkington must have fallen flat on his face, a very curious thing in falling downstairs. He was fortunate to escape with a bruised face, under the circumstances."

"Quite right," Kerr remarked, after the doctor had gone. "Under the circumstances—which the doctor hasn't really been told about—Pilkie was lucky to escape with a swollen nose. Perhaps next time it will be a bit worse."

Herries made a gesture of caution.

"No talking inside the house," he said, in a stage whisper.

"Shurrup, Herries," muttered Blake hastily.

"Well, I was only giving Kerr a warning," said Herries. "If he talks inside the house, you know, we may be—"

But Blake dragged his chum away before he could give any more opinions on the subject.

During the evening, the party adjourned to the music-room, and the appearance of careless forgetfulness on the subject of Arthur Augustus was very well kept up.

Indeed, in the knowledge that they were on the track, and that there was a chance now of rescuing their chum, the juniors were feeling very much more cheerful; and so the jollity was not wholly assumed.

Only the thought of D'Arcy, languishing in some hidden corner, a helpless prisoner, marred their pleasure, and prevented them from enjoying themselves.

Cousin Ethel sang to Manners' accompaniment, Manners being an excellent pianist. Figgins rendered the famous football song, "On the Ball," with great gusto. It was past ten o'clock when the party broke up.

Cousin Ethel's face was pensive as she said good-night to Figgins, last of the juniors. Figgins was looking a little anxious. It was not likely that any danger threatened Ethel, but Figgins could not help feeling uneasy.

"I can't help thinking of poor Arthur," said Ethel, in a low voice. "I wish I could take part in the search for him."

Figgins shook his head at once.

"Oh, no, Ethel! You couldn't! There may be danger—besides, Miss Drusilla doesn't know anything about the matter, you know, and she wouldn't let you stay down."

Ethel nodded.

"I know! But—but don't run into danger, Figgins, and—the others, too. Don't do anything rash."

"That's all right," said Figgins confidently. "Kerr's leader, you know, and he'll see the bisney through. Trust old Kerr."

"There may be danger," said Ethel uneasily.

"I'm thinking about you," said Figgins. "You won't forget to lock your door, will you? And—and I'm glad you're in the same room with Miss Drusilla. I can't help feeling a bit uneasy, you know."

The girl smiled.

"There is no danger for me," she said. "That wicked man can have no object in trying to injure me. I only hope that no one else will be hurt."

"Rely on us!" said Figgins. "Come down as early as you can in the morning, and we'll tell you if we've found out anything."

"I shall be down very early," said Ethel.

And she went upstairs with Miss Drusilla.

"Bedtime," said Tom Merry, and the juniors made their way to the Painted Room.

What plans Kerr had made for the night they did not yet know; and in the Painted Room, of course, it was impossible to discuss anything. From behind the secret panel the kidnapper, if he were there, could hear every word.

But Kerr was equal to the occasion. He drew a packet of Christmas cards from his pocket as he sat before the fire.

"Look at these cards, you chaps," he said.

The juniors gathered round him to look at the cards. Upon one of them Kerr wrote:

"It won't be safe for a lot of us to keep watch. We shall be spotted. I'm going down by myself."

Figgins and Wynn looked at him reproachfully; and the rest of the juniors looked very uneasy.

But they had agreed that Kerr was to be leader, and they loyally kept the bargain.

What he had written was true enough. It would be very difficult for any of them to escape Pilkington's sharp eyes, and certainly a number of them could never have kept watch in the library without discovery.

But the fellows felt a natural anxiety at the idea of Kerr taking on the task by himself.

But there was nothing to be said. Kerr had made up his mind, and the plan was undoubtedly the best, and most likely to lead to success. And it was impossible to discuss the subject while the enemy might be lurking within hearing of their voices.

Kerr slipped the card he had written upon into his pocket, and after keeping up a pretence of scanning the cards, the juniors prepared for bed.

It was curious and eerie to feel that probably, from some concealed spyhole in the room, they were being watched by keen eyes.

Yet if the kidnapper really had access to the house, and could watch them if he chose, it was pretty certain that he was there at the spyhole, to satisfy himself as to their proceedings. Whether he would have the nerve to make another attempt upon Wally they could not guess, but it was likely enough. It was understood that in each room one of the juniors was to keep awake all the time.

Kerr's keen eyes had scanned the walls of the room many times, without appearing to do so, in search of a possible spyhole.

But there seemed to be no trace of anything like an opening in the old, time-blackened panels.

The Scottish junior stretched himself in the easy-chair before the blazing log-fire, and leaned back with eyes half closed, as if dozing.

But he was not dozing.

In that attitude he was scanning the ceiling, lit up in every corner by the bright illumination of the electric light.

It was more than likely that if the spyhole existed, it was in the ceiling, where the painting in heavy colours would help to conceal it.

The sprawling Bacchus, crowned with vine-leaves, amid the attendant nymphs, grinned down at the junior as he gazed upward at the painted ceiling.

Suddenly a thrill ran through Kerr's limbs, in spite of himself.

He could have sworn that the right eye of the Bacchus had gleamed like a living eye, that it had moved as no painted eye could move.

He kept quite still.

Through his half-closed eyelids he watched the painted face on the ceiling.

Yes, there was no doubt about it.

The left eye of the painted figure was lifelike enough, but it had not that moving gleam that he detected in the right eye.

Kerr understood.

There was an opening in the painted eye, and from above the spy was watching the room. When he placed his eye

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By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

close to the little aperture, it caught the gleam of the electric light beneath.

Not the slightest hint did Kerr give in his manner of the discovery he had made. He closed his eyes, and seemed to doze.

Figgins shook him and roused him up.

"No good going to sleep in the chair, Kerr," said Figgins. "Better turn in."

Kerr yawned, and rose.

"Right you are, Figgins."

And he went to bed with the rest.

CHAPTER 18.

The Watcher in the Dark.

THE light was out in the Painted Room and the adjoining chambers.

The log-fire on the wide stone hearth was dying low. Strange lights and shadows danced in the room and played upon the polished old oak walls.

Not one of the juniors closed his eyes.

It had been arranged for them to stay awake by turns, in case of a visit from the hidden enemy; but, as a matter of fact, not one of them felt he could sleep. Even Fatty Wynn, who had greatly distinguished himself, as usual, at the supper-table, only dozed a little occasionally. As the fire-light died down, they lay awake and watchful.

The red embers died into blackness.

It was past eleven o'clock now.

At half-past eleven the last spark had expired. It was very nearly time for Kerr to take up his post in the library. True, he did not suppose that the kidnapper, if he visited his prisoners that night, would go before midnight, probably not till considerably after midnight. It was about two hours after midnight that Henry the footman had encountered the ghost in the library.

But it was only cautious to be on the spot early enough. As soon as the room was quite dark, and he was safe from the eyes of a watcher, Kerr slipped out of bed and dressed himself.

He put on a pair of rubber-shoes, in which he could move noiselessly, and drew a dark muffler about his neck over his collar, in order to be quite invisible in the darkness.

Then he slipped into his pocket a short, stout stick, which he had whittled during the day for the purpose.

Now he was ready.

In spite of his coolness and courage, the Scottish junior's heart was beating hard as he stepped towards the door of the Painted Room.

He had seen to that door himself when the juniors came up to bed. He had made a sound of locking it, but he had turned back the key with the same movement, and so the door had really been left unlocked, to allow his exit without a sound.

Kerr opened the door cautiously, noiselessly, and stepped out into the corridor.

The whole household was in bed, and not a single light gleamed in the whole of the vast pile of Eastwood House.

Kerr drew the door of the Painted Room softly shut behind him.

He waited for a few moments to listen.

But there was no sound in the great house. Only faintly from outside came the wail of the winter wind in the leafless trees of the park.

So silently had Kerr gone, that the other juniors hardly knew that he had started. Only Tom Merry had seen a faint shadow pass his bed.

Kerr crept cautiously towards the stairs, and, stopping every moment to listen and to peer into the darkness, he descended silently in his noiseless shoes.

He reached the great hall on the ground floor, where figures in ancient armour loomed up in the gloom around him.

There was hardly a glimmer of light, the windows being covered with blinds excluding the wintry starlight.

Kerr waited in the hall for several minutes to listen, and to make quite sure of his bearings. He had studied the lay of the building carefully in the daytime, and he knew where he was going, but an accidental collision with one of the armour-clad figures would ruin everything.

But he reached the library door at last.

The big, heavy oaken door opened softly to his touch, and he stepped into the vast apartment.

Within was the densest blackness.

Not the faintest glimmer of light from the windows carefully veiled in blinds. Kerr grinned as he reflected that Pilkington had taken care of that. The kidnapper did not want to run the risk of being seen by chance.

Kerr closed the library door.

Black as the darkness around him was, he felt his way along steadily. During the day he had decided upon his

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place of concealment. It was possible, though not likely, that Pilkington might turn on the light when he came to the library, and in case of that Kerr had to be concealed from sight.

Close by one of the wall-cases was a large screen shutting off a recess of the wall, and behind that screen Kerr ensconced himself.

If the light was turned on he would be concealed, and might be able to peer out and watch the enemy.

If the light was not turned on he would have to depend on his hearing for a discovery.

He waited.

Midnight passed.

The junior had taken the precaution of coming down very thickly clad, for the cold; but, well-clad as he was, he felt the cold keenly as he stood there, motionless, silent, waiting. But he set his teeth and bore the discomfort quietly.

He had no means of telling the time. He had left his watch in the Painted Room, lest its ticking should betray him, and in any case, of course he could not have ventured to strike a light.

The deadly dull minutes of watching passed slowly, heavily, and always there was the dispiriting thought that perhaps it was in vain, that the man would not come that night.

And yet, Kerr reasoned, he was almost certain to come. He could not keep his prisoners without food and drink, and he would want to satisfy himself from time to time that they were safe. It was pretty certain that he would visit them at least once in the twenty-four hours, and he would choose the night-time as safest—the dead and desolate small hours when Henry had encountered the ghost.

Kerr did not know the time, but he knew he had been in the library, shivering in the darkness, at least two hours, when his vigil was rewarded.

All his senses started into alertness at the faint sound of an opening door.

Someone was coming into the library.

Faintly, almost inaudibly, the door closed again, and Kerr, hardly daring to breathe, strained his ears to listen.

There was the faint, indefinable sound of someone crossing the room, treading lightly, and picking his way in the darkness.

Kerr put his head round the screen and strained his eyes to see, but the darkness was too intense. He could see nothing.

Click!

Faint and almost inaudible as that sudden sound was, it struck upon the junior's straining ears with the startling force of a pistol-shot.

For he knew what it meant. The secret panel had opened. The unseen prowler had passed out of the dark library by the secret door.

Click!

The same sound again—the secret door had closed.

And Kerr had seen nothing.

Unseen, weird, and eerie in the dense darkness, the unknown had passed within a dozen paces of him, and vanished.

He was gone.

But if Kerr had seen nothing he had heard, and he could depend upon his ears. That faint, tell-tale click had come from the wall between two of the large bookcases that extended from floor to ceiling—a space that was filled by panelled oak, with a large picture hanging at equal distances between the two cases.

Somewhere in the space of about eight feet in width the secret panel existed, which had opened at the pressure of the unknown finger.

Kerr waited five minutes or more, to make sure that the man was gone, and then he crept out from behind the screen.

He groped his way to the wall between the cases, and felt carefully over the panels with his hands, going over every inch of the surface within his reach.

In that careful examination, his hand must have passed over the secret panel; but he did not discover it. The hidden spring that worked the panel was too well hidden for him to find it. After ten minutes of careful search, the junior gave up the attempt as hopeless.

But his face was smiling with satisfaction in the darkness. He had discovered enough. He knew where the panel was, and, if necessary, it could be forced on the morrow. Kerr crept out of the library, and returned silently to the Painted Room.

He entered the room, and there was a faint whisper in the darkness—the voice of Tom Merry.

"Kerr, old man!"

And Kerr whispered back:

"Get up! Wake all the others, and dress quickly. But not a word—not a word."

"One word—you've found out—"

"Yes."



The Painted Room was filled with shadows as the dying firelight rose and fell. "You fellows asleep?" asked Kerr at last, from his chair by the fire. (See Chapter 12.)

"Good egg!"

And in a few minutes the juniors, breathing hard with excitement in the darkness, were dressed and ready—and Kerr led the way.

CHAPTER 19. In Dungeon Deep.

"GWOOH!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy murmured that exclamation. A sudden light flared upon his eyes as he opened them and sat up.

Where was he? That was the question he had been asking himself continually for forty-eight hours, without being able to find an answer.

Grim, cold stone walls shut him in. It was a stone cell—where? The heaviness of the air and the intense darkness, made it certain that it was some distance below ground. On

the floor were some old rugs, and wrapped up among the rugs for warmth, the swell of St. Jim's had been sleeping. There was a clank of metal as he started up. Round his waist was a locked ring of iron, and to the iron ring was fastened a rusty chain, in its turn secured to a bolt in the stone wall.

Clank, clank!

Long centuries before, hapless prisoners had been shut up in the grim dungeon, and had pined away their lives in the grip of those rusty old chains. Hundreds of years had rolled by since then. And now the stone-walled dungeon and the rusty iron chains found their use again. And the prisoner they held was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

In a heap of rugs and old blankets, on the cold, stone floor, Arthur Augustus had slept by night and huddled by day for warmth.

And he was not the only prisoner.

For from the adjoining cell, entered by a low-arched doorway that one had to stoop to pass through, came occasionally the clank of another chain.

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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Another prisoner was there. D'Arcy had not seen him—thick stone walls intervened. But he knew that it was his father.

He had solved the mystery of Lord Eastwood's whereabouts, only by sharing his imprisonment in this mysterious recess.

Where was he? He did not know. In some ancient dungeon far beneath the old building; he knew that.

Was he under Eastwood House? There was an old story that dungeons existed under the old house, but had long since been walled up and forgotten. Had they been brought into use again for this? But then, who could know of them—who could have access to them? Who was his mysterious kidnapper?

Arthur Augustus, as he rose from the dirty rugs on the floor, with the chain clanking and clinking about him, looked at the man who had entered the dungeon.

The man held an old-fashioned lantern in his hand—probably one of the lanterns that had been used by the gaolers in days long since past and gone, and left where it had been last used.

The light gleamed upon D'Arcy, and upon the stone walls, reeking with damp. But it did not reveal the features of the man who held the lantern. His face was covered with a black cloth, fastened over his head, and provided only with opening slits for the eyes and the mouth and the nose. The black visage looked grim and terrible, with the eyes gleaming and glistening through the slits. The unseen man was clad in a long dark coat that covered him from chin to feet, completely concealing him. Even his hands were covered with black gloves, as if he feared to allow a fraction of his person to be seen, lest it might be known.

Arthur Augustus stared at him, his hands clenching, and his teeth coming hard together. He would have been glad to have been at close quarters with this scoundrel; but the door took care not to come within the length of the chain.

It was the second visit Arthur Augustus had received since his capture; and on the previous occasion, his captor had presented the same dark, impenetrable appearance. Who he was, and whether he had ever seen him before, D'Arcy could not possibly guess. For the kidnapper had been clad and masked in the same way on that terrible night in the Painted Room, when D'Arcy had been seized and carried off.

The junior had vague and oppressive recollections of that fearful experience—of the living eye that had watched him through the orifice in the painted eye on the ceiling—of the sudden extinguishing of the light—then of a grasp in the darkness, the pressure of a chloroform pad upon his face—

How had the assailant entered the Painted Room, when the doors and windows were fast? How had he conveyed his prisoner to this place? D'Arcy did not know. From the moment when the chloroform pad was pressed upon his face all knowledge had vanished. He had awakened sick and dizzy—here, in this black and gloomy dungeon, and he knew no more.

"You scoundrel!" was Arthur Augustus's greeting to the man in black.

There was no reply.

The man in black stooped and placed a small basket on the floor near the wall of St. Jim's. It contained a loaf, a chunk of cheese, and a bottle of water. That was the fare of the prisoner in the dungeon.

"You wascal!" said Arthur Augustus. "I wish I could get near you. I should like to give you a fearful thwackin'!"

No answer.

"Who are you, you scoundrel?" the junior exclaimed, exasperated. "What are you keepin' me hear for? How dare you treat me like this? Do you understand that you will be sent to prison when my friends find me?"

Still no reply.

The man moved on towards the low arched way leading into the adjoining cell. Arthur Augustus made a spring towards him, but the chain tautened, and the iron ring round his waist stopped him short. He gave a gasp of pain.

"Oh, you wascal! You uttah wottah!"

Still without replying, the man in black passed into the next cell, and the light disappeared with him. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was left in darkness.

In the adjoining cell a man lay upon a heap of old rags, his face pale and worn, and showing signs of exhaustion and emaciation.

He did not rise as the man in black came in, but fixed his eyes upon him. He had not been sleeping.

The man in black placed a second supply of food within reach of his second prisoner; the same fare—a loaf, and cheese, and water. Upon the floor lay the unfinished remains of a similar meal.

"You have not finished your last meal, Lord Eastwood!" said the man in black, speaking in a strange guttural voice.

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evidently adopted for the purpose of disguising his real tones.

"Rascal!" said the earl, his eyes burning as they were fixed upon the impenetrable masked visage. "How long will you dare to keep me a prisoner here?"

"Until you come to my terms, my lord!"

"That will never be."

The man in black shrugged his shoulders.

"You can remain obstinate, and remain here as long as you like, my lord," he said. "But you are aware that your son is now sharing your privations."

"I know it."

"Does that make no difference to you?"

"None—so far as yielding to you is concerned," said Lord Eastwood firmly. "I will die in this dungeon rather than yield to the infamous demands of a kidnapper!"

"You will certainly die in this dungeon if you do not yield," said the man in black coolly. "When you have exhausted my patience, I shall simply cease to visit you. Then you will die of famine here in the darkness."

"Better that than making terms with a scoundrel."

"And your son will share your fate?"

A spasm passed over the white face of the prisoner. It was evident that he felt more keenly the sufferings of his son than his own. The eyes of the man in black glittered through the holes in the mask, as they watched the face of the prisoner.

"Does not that move you, my lord?" he asked mockingly.

"It does," said the earl, in a low voice. "Yet I will not give in. You do not understand a scruple of honour. But you may believe me when I tell you that I will never add to your demands."

"What is it to you, what I ask—ten thousand pounds for life and liberty?" said the man in black. "You have plenty, I have none. You can afford to pay for your liberty, and you shall pay my price. Your cheque for ten thousand pounds is the price. Once it is safely cashed, you are free."

"And how do I know that you will keep your word, and that you will not demand a second bribe, after the first is secured?" exclaimed Lord Eastwood.

"You must take my word for that—I promise you."

The earl's lip curled.

"The promise of a kidnapper, a blackmailer, a thief! Even if I were base enough to yield to your threats, I should not be so foolish as to trust you."

"Perhaps a few more days in this dungeon will cause you to change your mind. I am in no hurry. I shall give you another week before I take sterner measures."

"And then?"

"Then I shall visit you once in forty-eight hours, instead of once in twenty-four; and you will be upon half-rations. If you do not yield by then, once in every third night. And if that does not cure your obstinacy, I shall fasten up the door of your dungeon, and visit you no more. You will perish miserably of hunger here, with no sounds but the dying groans of your son!"

"I think, perhaps, you are capable of such villainy," said the earl, in a low voice. "But I shall not give way to you. You must be discovered, and condemned, even if it is at my death."

There was the sound of a mocking chuckle under the black hood.

"I have not been discovered yet."

"But you must be. You say you have my cheque-book. How did you obtain it? My secretary will miss it. It will be searched for. You are not so safe as you think."

"Your cheque-book is in its place, Lord Eastwood. I can obtain it when I choose—that is all."

"Who are you?" burst out the earl. "How is it that you have secret access to my house?"

"That is my secret!"

"You have some accomplice in Eastwood House," said the earl, his eyes searching the black-hooded face. "Perhaps you are even a member of my household. No one else could have such access to my house and my belongings."

"Perhaps!"

"You do not dare to show me your face, you scoundrel!"

"I do not choose to. But enough words. Are you prepared to sign the cheque I have asked for?"

"No!"

"Then good-night. I shall see you again in twenty-four hours."

"Villain!"

The man in black disappeared with the light.

He left black darkness behind him—darkness, cold, despair. The hope that had upheld Lord Eastwood in the four days of his imprisonment had sunk almost to zero now. He had not been found. He knew that he must be searched for, and yet the searchers had not succeeded in finding him. How could they guess the existence of this hidden dungeon?

How were they to penetrate to that recess in deep darkness? The light of hope flickered and almost expired.

Lord Eastwood called out, his voice sounding hollow and eerie in the silence and deep darkness.

"Arthur!"

Faintly from the next cell came the voice of the swell of St. Jim's in response.

"Yaas!"

"Arthur, my boy, do you wish me to yield to that scoundrel, and pay him what he asks?"

And the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was firm as he replied:

"No dad! It's up to us to stick it out—honah first."

"You know what it may mean, my boy?"

"Yaas; and I'm not afraid. Besides, the fellows will be searchin' for us, dad. They won't give it up till they've found us. Nevah say die!"

And then there was silence again.

CHAPTER 20.

Laying the Snare.

TOM MERRY & CO. followed Kerr silently down the broad stairs.

Hardly a word had been spoken in the Painted Room, and then only in the faintest of whispers. It was not likely that the kidnapper was watching the juniors then, but Kerr left nothing to chance.

But the Scottish junior halted on a lower landing, and spoke in a whisper. In that spot there was no shadow of danger of being overheard.

"I think we've got a chance of the rascal at last! Any-way I've found out something."

"What have you found out?" whispered Tom Merry.

"He came into the library—it was too dark to see him, but I heard him—and I heard the click of the panel opening."

"Good!"

"That makes it clear that Lord Eastwood and Gussey are hidden somewhere quite near, perhaps in some unknown dungeon underneath this house," said Kerr. "The man wouldn't go to town that way unless they were in some place connected with this house."

"Right enough!" said Figgins.

"There used to be dungeons under the house, so they say," Wally said. "They were walled up more than two hundred years ago."

"If necessary, the walling-up can be taken down, and we can get at them that way," said Kerr. "But that would be a bad resource. I can't find the panel in the library wall, but I know just where it is—within a few feet. The rascal must come back that way. And we're all going to be in the library ready for him."

"Good!"

"There are more than enough of us to collar him as he comes through," said Monty Lowther. "We shall make sure of him, I think."

"Have the light on, and then he can't possibly get away," said Harries.

"Yes. There may be some spy-hole in the library; the same as there is in the Painted Room, and then he won't see the light as he came back, and take the alarm."

"St. Matt! You think of everything, Kerr, old man," said Figgins.

"He's a jolly cunning and slippery bird, and we can't take any chance with him," said Kerr.

"Then we're to wait in the dark?" asked Kangaroo.

"That's it."

"He might give us the slip," said Manners.

"We must do our best. If we have the light on, I don't believe we shall see him at all. We shall hear the panel click when it opens, and then we can rush on him and collar him. One of us can be standing by the electric light switch. I'll call out as soon as I've got my hands on the rascal, and Figgies can switch on the light—"

"Right, boy!" said Figgins.

"Good!" said Blake. "Once we've got our hands on him, he won't be able to dodge back behind the panel, as he did the time when Henry spotted him and took him for a ghost."

"Exactly!"

"Come on, then," said Tom Merry; "we don't know how soon he may be back."

"Follow me—and not a word, now."

They crept downstairs. The library was dark and silent as they entered it. Harries bumped into a chair, and muttered, but that was all. Kerr, taking his companions in turn, led them in the darkness to the panelled walls between the book-cases, where the secret door was situated. By that way the rascal must come. And in the darkness the juniors waited for a sign, ready to seize him.

They waited!

The darkness was so dense that they could not even see one another. It was agreed that Kerr was to make the first movement, and a call from him was to be the signal for attack.

Their hearts thumped as they waited in the gloom.

In a short time now, the kidnapper, returning from his visit to his prisoners, must walk right into their hands. And then the secret of the panel would be known, and they would have but to follow the passage to the prisoners, and find them in their hiding-place. If the rascal closed the panel before they seized him, they would make him reveal the secret of it. They were prepared to adopt the roughest possible measures for that. There was no need to stand upon ceremony with the kidnapper of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and his father.

In the dead silence the juniors could almost hear their hearts beating as they waited. When would the man come?

He had been absent a long time now. Perhaps he had to thread long, dark passages to some hidden recess in the depths under the ancient house. Perhaps he was parleying with his prisoners, endeavouring by threats to extort from them the price of their liberty—for there was little doubt that his object was to hold them to ransom.

The juniors thought of their chum, shut up in some cold, dark recess underground, and they longed to get their hands upon the kidnapper.

When would he come?

Their hearts throbbed harder than ever as there came a slight sound in the darkness. Figgins, on the other side of the room, had his hand upon the switch of the electric light—ready!

As soon as the rascal was seized, the room would be flooded with light, and then he would have no chance of escaping recognition. Figgins waited with pulsing heart for the signal from Kerr.

Click!

The juniors all knew what that sound meant. The secret panel had opened. Within a few feet of them, now, in the dense darkness, was the unknown man. They could not see him—and they were invisible to him—and they hardly breathed.

Click! again.

The panel had closed, and the man was in the room, with the secret door shut behind him, and at the mercy of the juniors!

Then Kerr, with the spring of a tiger, was upon him.

Kerr's hands, clutching in the darkness, closed upon a human form, and at the same moment he yelled to Figgins:

"The light—the light!"

There was a gasp from the unseen man—a gasp of terror and rage—and Kerr was flung furiously off. The other juniors stumbled over him as they swarmed to the attack. Even then the man might have escaped. But Figgins had obeyed the signal. The switch was turned. The vast apartment was flooded with light.

And in the flood of light the man was seen at the panelled wall, his hand seeking the secret spring—to escape!

But there was no escape for him!

Three or four of the juniors leaped upon him, and he went to the floor, with his assailants sprawling over him, clutching and grasping, in a silent and deadly struggle.

Kerr staggered to his feet, panting a little, and looked with a cool and grim eye upon the burly man struggling madly in the clutch of the juniors.

"Pilkington!" he said coolly.

And as he spoke the butler's struggles ceased, and he collapsed under his swarming foes, and lay, gasping, on the floor, with the juniors heaped on him.

CHAPTER 21.

Fairly Caught.

PILKINGTON it was!

There was no doubt about his identity now.

The stout, florid butler, no longer grave and respectable and imposing, lay on his back on the library floor, panting, exhausted, his face aflame and his eyes blazing with fury.

"Pilkington!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Pilk!" said Wally, with a chuckle. "And caught in the giddy act!"

"The scoundrel! We've got him!"

"The rotter! Sit on him!"

Pilkington stared up at his captors, rage and terror in his face. But even then the nerve and presence of mind of the rascal did not desert him. With an effort he regained something of his calmness.

"Young gentlemen!" he exclaimed, with as much as he could muster of his old smooth and calm voice. "Young gentlemen! What does this mean?"

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I fancy you know what it means well enough!" chuckled Kangaroo. It means that we've caught you in the act!"

"You're a downy bird, but you've been caught at last!" grinned Figgins. "There was a giddy Scotchman on your track, you see, and you really hadn't an earthly!"

"I don't understand, young gentlemen. Pray let me get up! I am quite breathless!"

"So am I," said Blake. "But you're not going to get up, you rascal. We've got you!"

"Yes, you have got me," said Pilkington; "that is certainly the case, Master Blake. But I do not understand why you have assaulted me in this extraordinary manner. I shall certainly complain to Lord Conway."

"Well, of all the nerve!" ejaculated Tom Merry, in amazement. "Are you trying to brazen it out, you rascal? Can't you understand that you're bowled out?"

"I cannot understand you. If I had known that it was you young gentlemen I should not have struggled," said Pilkington calmly. "I found myself attacked in the darkness, and imagined that it must be burglars."

"Oh!"

"I suppose this is a joke of you young gentlemen, but really it is too rough and violent for a man of my age. What have you done it for?"

The juniors gazed at him in astonishment. Having caught the rascal in the very act of coming through the secret panel, they never dreamed that he would attempt to brazen it out. His nerve was superb. He did not mean to throw up his hand while he had a card left.

"Well, you are a cool customer!" said Blake. "But we've got you! Can't you get that into your head? We've got you!"

"Fairly got you by the short hairs!" chuckled Kangaroo.

"And now we want you to guide us to Lord Eastwood and D'Arcy," said Kerr quietly.

Pilkington smiled.

"Is that another little joke?" he asked.

"You won't find it a joke if you don't do as we tell you!" said Kerr. "We're not going to stand on ceremony with a kidnapper!"

Pilkington looked astonished.

"I suppose this must be a joke," he said. "Why do you call me a kidnapper, Master Kerr? I do not understand you in the least."

"Oh, my hat!" said Blake.

"I appeal to you, Master Wally, not to let your honoured father's servant be treated in this outrageous manner," said Pilkington.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Wally. "He simply takes the cake!"

"If Master Walter will not interfere, and you refuse to release me, I shall be compelled to call for help," said Pilkington.

"Will you?" said Kerr grimly. "We'll nip that in the bud. Lock the door, Figgins!"

"What-ho!" said Figgins promptly; and he carried out the instructions at once. The juniors did not intend to have any interference in their dealings with Mr. Pilkington.

The butler made an effort to rise while the doors were being locked, but the juniors held him fast.

Fatty Wynn had taken a comfortable seat upon his chest, and that alone was enough to keep him securely pinned down. Fatty Wynn was not a light weight.

"Now," said Kerr, "we want to know where Lord Eastwood and Gussy are."

"And we want to know at once," said Tom Merry. "You'll be good enough to open that panel in the wall, Pilkington."

"What panel?" asked Pilkington, looking astonished.

"The secret panel."

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"I am sure, Master Merry, that if there is a secret panel in the wall, I am quite unaware of it," said Pilkington. "I have certainly never heard of such a thing."

"Then you came through it just now without hearing of it?" grinned Blake.

"You are joking, of course. I have just come down from my bed-room," said Pilkington.

"What?"

"I was nervous, and could not sleep," explained the butler. "I thought I heard a noise. Perhaps some of you young gentlemen made a noise here. I came down, thinking that perhaps it might be burglars, and then you attacked me in the dark."

"Ananias was a fool to this chap," said Blake, with conviction.

"Look here, Pilkington," said Kerr quietly "it's no good. I'll explain to you. You got those marks on your face from my stick last night, when you came into the Painted Room and tried to chloroform me in mistake for Wally. I knew you were listening to all we said through the hole in the eye of the painted Bacchus on the ceiling—"

Pilkington gave a violent start. His glance was murderous for a moment as he looked at the Scottish junior. Kerr had succeeded in surprising him out of his composure. But in a moment he was smooth and suave again.

"I am sure I do not understand you, Master Kerr. My face was hurt in a fall down the stairs this morning."

"That may do for Henry, but it won't do for us. I spotted you, Pilkington, and I was on the watch in this room when you went through the panel more than half an hour ago."

"What?"

"Then I fetched the fellows down, and we've been waiting here for you—waiting for you to come through the panel, do you understand? As soon as you'd come in, and we heard the panel closed, we jumped on you. It's no good lying about having come down from your bed-room. We've been in this room a quarter of an hour or more before you came back through the wall waiting for you."

Pilkington's face grew deadly pale.

He understood now, for the first time, how much the juniors knew, and a hunted look came into his eyes. He knew that he was caught. But the expression on his face was obstinate and unyielding.

"I don't understand you," said Pilkington, "and I know nothing about a secret panel. I insist upon being released immediately. Mr. Dodder is in his room, and I am willing for the matter to be placed before him, as an officer of the law, if you care to call him."

"That's piffle! You're leader, Kerr. What are you going to do with him?"

Kerr reflected.

"I suppose you fellows all agree that we're justified in using pretty rough means, to make this scoundrel tell us what he's done with Gussy?" he said.

"Yes, rather!"

"Very well! Herries, will you get round to the kennels and fetch Towser?"

"Towser!" said Herries.

"Yes. Towser has a special fancy for biting Pilkington. If Towser once got fairly at him, Pilkington would feel it, I think."

"No doubt about that!" grinned Herries.

"Then fetch Towser, and we'll see if Towser can persuade this scoundrel to open his mouth and tell us something besides lies."

"Right-ho!" said Herries.

And he hurried away. Pilkington's face was very white now. He had a terrible dread of the bulldog, and he did not know to what length the determination of the juniors might carry them. He made another effort to get loose as Tom Merry felt over the wall; but he could not find the secret panel.

"He's got to be tied up!" said Kerr. "Tear his things into strips, and tie him up!"

"What-ho!"

The struggling, furious man was soon bound, hand and foot. His own tie and his coat, wrenched into strips, served for the bonds. He lay on the floor a helpless prisoner, glaring furiously at the juniors. Then there was a pause, and silence till Herries came back. In ten minutes, Herries came in, leading Towser, and the library door was locked once more. Towser's eyes gleamed at the sight of Pilkington on the floor, and he made a spring towards him, and the chain clinked. But Herries held him in.

"Let him come within a foot of the rotter," said Kerr.

"But hold him in till I give the word!"

"Right you are!" said Herries.

Pilkington's face was livid with terror as the great jaws of the bulldog gleamed within a dozen inches of him. Towser was evidently anxious to get to business. Towser had his

likes and dislikes—and he disliked Mr. Pilkington very much. The gleam in his eyes sent a chill of terror to the butler's very soul.

"Take out your watch, Figgy!"

Figgins took out his watch.

"What time is it?"

"Just a quarter to three!"

"Good! Pilkington, you have exactly five minutes to make up your mind. At ten minutes to three, if you have not decided to show us the secret panel, I shall tell Herries to let the bulldog loose. You know what will happen then."

"You dare not!" yelled Pilkington.

Kerr's teeth set grimly.

"You will see! You have five minutes!"

Figgins laid the watch upon the table!

CHAPTER 22.

Towser Does it.

THE minutes ticked away.

Pilkington lay upon the floor, his eyes fixed upon the bulldog, and the juniors stood round with their eyes upon Pilkington.

The rascal could not move—he could only lie and wait.

His face was white as death, and great beads of perspiration broke out upon his forehead and rolled down his colourless face.

Towser made a movement from time to time, but Herries's hand was firm upon his collar.

"Three minutes more!" said Kerr, breaking the dead silence.

Pilkington turned a haggard look upon him.

"You dare not!" he muttered. "You dare not!"

Kerr shrugged his shoulders.

Pilkington's eyes searched his face, searching for a sign of wavering. But there was no such sign to be seen there. The Scottish junior's face was hard as iron. The trapped rascal asked himself desperately whether the boy could be in earnest. If he was in earnest, the rascal had to give in—he dared not face the crunching teeth of the bulldog. A braver man than Pilkington might have shrunk from that. But was he in earnest? He looked as if he were.

Even the juniors did not feel sure that Kerr was in earnest. But one thing was certain—they would not interfere. The rascal before them had betrayed a kind master, had kidnapped the man whose bread he ate, and was keeping their chum fastened up in some dark, hidden den. There was hardly any step they were not prepared to take to rescue D'Arcy; and the obstinacy of a rascal and criminal should not stand in their way.

"One minute more!" said Kerr.

Dead silence!

Kerr had his eyes on the watch, his face grimly set. He looked up from it at last, and fixed his eyes upon the colourless face of Pilkington.

"Twenty seconds!" he said. "Are you going to show us the panel?"

"No!"

"Very well! Stand back, you fellows. It won't be a pretty sight."

"You mean it?" muttered Figgins.

Kerr's eyes gleamed.

"Are we going to leave D'Arcy, our chum, shut up in a cellar somewhere, because this scoundrel doesn't choose to tell us the way to find him?" he asked.

"No!" said Figgins, between his teeth.

"No!" said Tom Merry firmly.

"It isn't a case of acting on suspicion—he is caught in the act. He wants to gain time, to have a chance of moving D'Arcy and his pater to a safer place, where we can't find them. I believe he is capable of murdering them, to cover up his tracks, and save himself from prison," said Kerr quietly. "I think that their lives may be at stake. We are entitled to use any means against that scoundrel. Pilkington the time is up. Are you going to show us how to work that panel?"

"No!"

Pilkington snarled out the words desperately.

"Then it's finished. Let the dog go, Herries!"

Herries withdrew his hand from Towser's collar.

The bulldog made one spring, right at the man on the floor, his eyes ablaze, his teeth gleaming in the light.

Pilkington gave a wild yell of terror; he had no further doubts as to whether the juniors were in earnest or not. He rolled madly away over the floor.

"Call him off—I'll show you—I'll show you!" he screamed. But Towser was upon him.

Herries and Kerr made a rush to stop him, and caught the bulldog by the collar and the leash—but Towser's teeth were gripping Pilkington's arm. Fortunately for the rascal, he

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had surrendered in time—the bulldog had not had time to get a grip, and only the cloth of his coat was in the jaws of Towser. But Towser refused, after the manner of bulldogs, to let go his grip, and the piece of cloth came out in his teeth as the juniors dragged him off by main force. Towser growled with disappointment. Pilkington, who had felt the teeth graze his skin, rolled on the floor, panting with fear.

"Take him away! Take him away!"

"Hold him in, Herries!"

"Untie one of the rotter's hands, and let him open the panel," said Kerr.

Pilkington was dragged to his feet, and one hand was freed. He cast a glance of furious hate at the juniors.

"Open the panel!" said Kerr.

Pilkington hesitated one moment. But his experience at close quarters with Towser had been enough for him. His free hand glided over the panels in the wall, and touched the cunningly concealed spring.

Click!

A section of the wall slid back silently, and a dark opening was revealed. In the light that shone through from the library, the juniors, as they stared curiously through the opening, could see the top of a flight of spiral steps, set in the thickness of the huge old stone walls.

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry, with satisfaction. "That's the way Lord Eastwood was taken. We'll make the villain guide us—and Towser can come along, in case he shows any more obstinacy."

"What ho!" said Herries.

"We shall want a lantern!" said Jack Blake.

"That's all right!" said Kerr. "There's one here!"

Kerr had stepped into the cavity in the wall. He picked up an old-fashioned lantern—still warm, showing that it had been recently used. Close by it, on the floor, lay a dark coat, and a black hood with eye-holes in it. Kerr picked them up, and the other fellows examined them with much curiosity.

"The rotter puts these things on when he goes to take food to the prisoners," said Kerr. "That's to prevent their recognising him. Why, after he'd done what he kidnapped them for, he could go on being butler here—all ready to play another trick like it again, if he wasn't bowled out. But he's come to the end of his tether now."

"Bring him along!" said Blake.

Pilkington's legs were freed, both his arms being tied again. The juniors did not intend to give him the slightest chance of escape. Arthur Augustus and his pater were not found yet, and Pilkington might yet be wanted. Kerr lighted the lantern, and led the way, and Tom Merry and Blake followed, holding the butler by either arm. Herries came next with Towser, and the growl of the bulldog was sufficient to spur Pilkington on when he hesitated. The rest of the juniors brought up the rear.

There was plenty of room to move in the cavity in the vast thickness of the wall. From the level of the library another spiral stair led upward, disappearing into blackness, and the juniors did not need telling that it led to the Painted Room. By that dark stair Arthur Augustus had been brought down, it was very easy to guess.

The downward stair led away into damp and chilly darkness. Kerr stepped cautiously down the steps, holding the lantern before him.

Down and down and down!

They were far beneath the foundations of the house, and the stone walls about them were reeking with damp.

And it was in this dismal recess that Arthur Augustus was held a prisoner. The juniors, as they thought of it, were almost sorry that Towser had not been allowed to have his way upon Pilkington. There was hardly any punishment that the conscienceless rascal did not deserve.

Lower and lower, till they stood in a square stone chamber, without a sign of a door. It seemed that they had reached the end of a blind alley. Kerr turned to Pilkington.

"Show us the way!" he said curtly.

Pilkington hesitated a moment, and at that moment Towser growled. Without a word, the rascal stepped to one of the cold, slimy walls, and thrust his hand into a recess in the stonework, and a block of stone slid back, with a creak of rusty hinges. Beyond was a vaulted passage. Wally uttered an exclamation as they advanced through it.

"The old dungeons!" he exclaimed. "They've been walled up for hundreds of years. Nobody knew that there was a secret way of getting into them."

"But Pilkington found it out!" said Tom Merry, "and used it for kidnapping his master and keeping him a prisoner. We're at the finish now."

From the vaulted passage, low-arched openings gave admittance to the horrible dungeons where wretched captives had pined in the "good old times." And as they advanced,

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from one of the dungeons came a clink of iron—the sound of a moving chain! It struck a chill to the hearts of the juniors as they realised the means Pilkington had used to keep the kidnapped prisoners secure.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry, in a low voice.

They passed through the low arch.

The light gleamed into the dungeon, and a haggard figure sprang from the rugs on the floor, blinking dizzily in the lantern light.

"You scoundrel! Have you come back? I— Bai Jove! Tom Mewwy!"

The juniors gave a shout.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 23.

Rescued at Last.

"Gussy!"

"Gussy, old man!"

They were round him at once, shaking his hand, patting him on the back, with exclamations of joy and satisfaction.

Arthur Augustus blinked at them in a dazed way. Very different he looked from the elegant swell of St. Jim's they knew so well. His face was white and haggard, his clothes reeking with mud and slime; but it was Arthur Augustus—found at last!

Pilkington stood with a sullen, lowering face while the juniors joyfully greeted their chum.

"Bai Jove, you fellows!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I'm jolly glad you've found me, you know. I told the patah lots of times you would manage it somehow. Bai Jove, this is simply wippin'!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yaas, wathah! Huwway, deah boys!"

"Is your father here?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas; in the next cell—chained up, the same as I am."

The juniors pressed through into the next cell, taking Pilkington with them. Lord Eastwood had heard their voices, and he was upon his feet, his face flushed with hope.

"My dear boys!" he exclaimed, as they crowded in. "You have found us!"

"Yes, sir; and jolly glad to!" said Tom Merry. "We'll soon have you out of that. Pilkington, you scoundrel, unfasten that chain!"

Lord Eastwood gazed at Pilkington in blank amazement.

"Pilkington!" he exclaimed. "Has Pilkington helped you to find us?"

"Yes, in a way—not of his own will, though," said Tom Merry.

"It was that scoundrel who kidnapped you, dad!" said Wally, with a ferocious glare at the cowed and sullen rascal.

"Surely that is impossible!" exclaimed the earl.

"Oh, we bowled him out, sir!" said Herries. "My bulldog spotted him first, and then Kerr worked it out."

"But—but—"

"You didn't see who captured you, dad?" asked Wally.

Lord Eastwood shook his head.

"No. I was seized suddenly from behind at a late hour in the library, and I was made insensible with a chloroformed cloth pressed over my face," he replied. "I came to myself in this place, without knowing how I was brought here, or who had brought me. I did not think of Pilkington in connection with the outrage—"

"You've only seen him here toggled up in black clothes, with a black mask on his face?" asked Kerr.

"Yes—exactly."

"We've found the outfit," said Kerr. "We made Pilky guide us here as soon as we bowled him out, sir. Now we'll make him let you loose. Do you hear, Pilky? Towser is still here, and he's anxious to get at you."

Pilkington, with a muttered curse, drew a rusty iron key from his pocket, and unlocked the iron ring that was fastened round Lord Eastwood's waist.

The earl stood free at last.

"Now for Gussy!" said Tom Merry.

"Bring that rascal along!"

They crowded back into D'Arcy's dungeon. Pilkington unlocked the junior's irons with the same key. Arthur Augustus chirruped with joy and relief as the irons fell away from him.

"Bai Jove, that's bettah!" he exclaimed. "So it was Pilkington? You awful wascal, Pilkington!"

"The beastly rotter!" said Wally. "He'll go to prison for this!"

"Yaas, wathah! I've had a wotten expewience, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus pathetically. "My clothes are uttaly ruined! And—"

"The rotter collared you in the Fainted Room, I suppose?" Blake asked.

"Yaas. I found somebody watchin' me through a hole in the ceilin', you know—"

"The eye of the Bacchus," said Kerr.

"Yaas; so you have found it out, too. I was feafully alarmed, and I jumped up, you know—and then the light went out. Thinkin' ovah that, I wealised that the wascal must have some confedewate in the house, as he must have had a switch placed somewhah to contwol the electwic light in the woom. Befoah I weally knew what was happenin', I was collahed, and a chlowoform wag was pwessed on my chivvay, you know, and aftah that I didn't know what happened. I didn't have time even to call out and wake you chaps. It was howwible, to feel the chlowoform overcomin' me, and not to be able to cwyt out, though Blake and Dig were quite close to me." Arthur Augustus shuddered. "Thank goodness, it's all ovah!"

"All over for you—but it's just beginnin' for Pilky!" grinned Wally. "He is going to have a taste of prison himself, and he won't get out of it quite so quick."

"Wathah not!"

"Let's get out of this," said Kangaroo. "Take my arm, sir," he added.

Lord Eastwood was tottering with exhaustion.

"Thank you, my boy!"

And they left the dungeons, Lord Eastwood leaning heavily upon the arm of the sturdy Cornstalk. Blake and Digby helped Arthur Augustus, who was also in an exhausted state.

The juniors followed with their prisoner. Pilkington was maintaining a sullen silence. He had no hope now, and his face was livid with hate and fury and despair. His cunning scheme, which had seemed so near to success, had been foiled, and he had been baffled by the juniors of St. Jim's, and he knew that he was ruined. By his rascality he had lost a good place and a kind master, and the prison gates were already yawning for him.

In ten minutes more they were in the library of Eastwood House.

There Lord Eastwood sank into a chair.

Wally hurried away, and returned with a decanter, and a glass of wine brought a faint flush of colour into the wan cheeks of the earl.

"I wathah think that bed's the word now," Arthur Augustus remarked.

"That miserable rascal must be taken care of first," said Lord Eastwood. "He must be placed in safe hands."

"There's a Scotland Yard detective in the house, sir," said Tom Merry. "He's here to find you, sir. He can take charge of Pilkington. You can make a charge against him, and give him into custody."

"Pray call him!" said Lord Eastwood.

Tom Merry hurried away to call Mr. Dodder. In ten minutes the gentleman from Scotland Yard, hurriedly dressed, and looking very amazed, was in the library. He almost fell down at the sight of Lord Eastwood and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Lord Eastwood raised his hand, and pointed to Pilkington. "I give that man in charge, for kidnapping and attempted blackmail," he said. "Please take every care that he does not escape, Mr. Dodder. I am Lord Eastwood."

"I am glad you have been found, sir, though I did not succeed myself," said Mr. Dodder, producing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "I may say that, with the clues I had succeeded in—in discovering, I should have found you in a very short time—a very short time, indeed, I hope. In fact, I expected to bring the case to a conclusion early in the morning—very early in the morning. I am glad, however, that these young gentlemen have been before me. I will relieve you of this rascal at once."

The handcuffs clicked upon Pilkington's wrists.

Then, with the detective's grip upon his arm, he was marched out of the library, and a quarter of an hour later Ruggles was driving away the car, containing Mr. Dodder and his prisoner, to the police-station. Pilkington was gone to await in a prison-cell his trial and his condemnation, and then to retire from the world for three years, with ample opportunities for meditating upon his sins, in the intervals of breaking stones. At Eastwood House, the juniors who had baffled his rascality gave him no further thought.



THE END.

CHAPTER 24.

A Merry Christmas.

COUSIN ETHEL had a surprise the next morning. She came down very early, as she had promised Figgins, in order to learn what success the juniors had had in the night.

Little did she anticipate how complete that success had been.

She could scarcely believe her eyes when she came down, for one of the first persons upon whom they rested was—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The swell of St. Jim's, beautifully clean and elegant as usual, looked little the worse for his painful experiences of the last forty-eight hours, save for a slight pallor in his aristocratic face.

Ethel stopped short in amazement, with a little cry:

"Arthur!"

Arthur Augustus's monocle dropped to the end of its cord as he ran forward to greet his cousin.

"Ethel, deah gal! Heah I am!"

"My dear Arthur! I am so glad! Then you succeeded, Figgins?"

Figgins grinned.

"I didn't," he said. "Kerr did. Kerr did it nearly all."

"And Pilkington—"

"In prison," said Tom Merry.

"And my uncle," said Ethel eagerly—"you found him, too?"

"Yaas, wathah, deah gal! The patah's in bed. He hasn't come down yet. He can't stand these things as I do, you know," said Arthur Augustus; "and he's had more of it, too. I don't think he'll come down to-day. But he's all wight."

"Oh, I am so glad!" said Ethel. "We shall have a merry Christmas, after all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Over a very cheerful breakfast-table Cousin Ethel learned all the particulars of the adventures of the night. Aunt Drusilla held up her hands in amazement, but pronounced that Kerr was a very dear, clever boy—an opinion in which Cousin Ethel and all the juniors heartily concurred.

"The clouds have walled by now," Arthur Augustus remarked, as he rose from the breakfast-table, "and we're goin' to have a wippin' time, deah boys!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

And they had!

That afternoon they played the village team on the football ground, and Tom Merry's eleven had the satisfaction of a victory to start the Christmas holidays with. Arthur Augustus stood by with Cousin Ethel in the crowd that watched the match, favouring Ethel with his valuable opinion on every point in the game, and cheering loudly every goal for St. Jim's.

"Figgins is in good form," Arthur Augustus remarked, as the long-legged New House junior came dashing down the field with the ball at his toes. "See how he got the leathah away from young Bokah. He's weally playin' up well!"

"Yes, isn't he?" said Ethel, with a very bright smile.

"Yaas, wathah! Bwavo, Figgay! That was a vewy neat goal! Bai Jove, Ethel, I couldn't have done bettah than that myself, you know!"

"No, I don't think you could," Ethel agreed smilingly.

"Thwee goals to one," said Arthur Augustus, when the match was over. "I wegard that as vewy cweeditable, considewin' that I was not in the team. I considah that you have done wemarkably well, Tom Mewwy!"

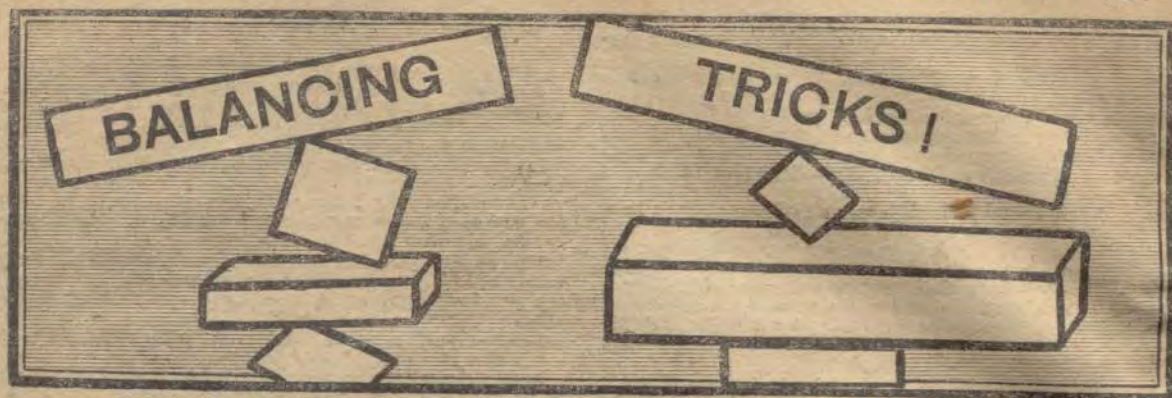
"Than which," said Monty Lowther solemnly, "there can be no higher praise."

To which Arthur Augustus replied cheerfully:

"Oh, wats!"

The Christmas holidays, which had started under such grim auspices, turned out very merry and happy, now that the clouds—as D'Arcy put it had rolled by. Seldom had Tom Merry & Co. had so cheery a Christmas.

And when Arthur Augustus rose at the festive board to propose the health of Kerr, for having been the means of causing the clouds to "woll by," in a speech of considerable length, there were loud cheers from every member of D'Arcy's Christmas party.



SOMETHING TO PRACTICE FOR THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

FOR HOT PLATES

After-dinner tricks with knives and forks and other table requisites are always popular at Christmas-time. Here is a simple one which has been entitled a Novel Table Mat. It is constructed of six articles—three knives, and three glasses of equal size. Arrange the glasses upside down in the form of a triangle, as shown in Fig. 1 of the accompanying illustration, and on each rest the handle of a knife. Cross the blades of the knives so that the one first laid down crosses over the second, and the second over the third, the latter passing over the first. The blades will thus sustain themselves, and anything, such as a dish, may be placed upon them without any fear of a collapse. Before fixing up this ingenious table mat, study the diagram well. It is sufficiently clear without any further details being needed.

A NOVEL COIN TRICK.

In order to accomplish this trick, a strip of cardboard about six inches long must first of all be cut, and the extremities fixed together with some sticky substance so that a ring is formed. Balance this cardboard circle carefully on the edge of a bottle, or decanter, and on the top of the cardboard exactly over the opening in the bottle, place a sixpence or some other small coin. The trick to be accomplished is to remove the cardboard circle so that the coin falls straight into the open mouth of the bottle. This is done as follows: On the inner side of the cardboard circle give a sharp knock with the thumb and forefinger in the same manner as if you were shooting a marble. This will cause the cardboard ring to fly off and the coin to fall into the bottle. (See Fig. 2.)

AS EASY AS WINKING.

Here is another after-dinner balancing trick. The idea is to balance a coin on the edge of a tumbler by means of a couple of forks. Fig. 3 shows how this feat may easily be accomplished. The coin must rest horizontally on the brim of a tumbler, and must rest on the glass only by its extreme edge. Take a five or four-shilling-piece, and place it between the prongs of a couple of dinner forks, covering each other. Then place the coin on the edge of the glass and draw the handles of the forks together, or widen them until the coin and the whole are perfectly balanced.

THE CORK WALK.

The illustration on this page—Fig. 4—shows a very ingenious trick which may be easily accomplished. Stick a couple of knives in a cork exactly opposite each other on

the same level in order to form a balance. Then, in the bottom of the cork at an equal distance, insert two stout pins sufficiently deep so that they will not bend under the weight which they will have to support. Next rest the points of the pins on a slightly inclined flat ruler, so as to give a slight balancing movement. First of all, the whole weight of the cork will rest on the pin A; then the knife placed at the side will knock against the ruler and cause the weight to be transferred to the other pin. Then this performance will be repeated, causing each pin with each movement to shift a short distance down the ruler. The walking cork will thus continue to travel until it reaches the bottom of its support.



A HANGING BALANCE.

Fig. 5 shows a novel balancing feat which can be accomplished in the following manner by the help of a key-ring, a cork, two forks, a carving-knife, and a piece of string. First of all very carefully pierce the cork through with a carving-knife, allowing the point of the knife to stick through so that the key-ring can be slipped on. Then stick the prongs of the forks into the side of the cork, as shown in the diagram. Tie a piece of string on to the ring, and adjust the point of the knife until the whole contraption balances properly when you are holding a foot or two of string-length.

ANYBODY CAN DO THIS TRICK.

In a soup-plate place a coin; beside the latter an inverted glass; then pour water into the plate just to cover the coin. You then inform the spectators that you will withdraw

the coin from the plate without wetting your fingers. You will meet with a great deal of disbelief from many of your friends looking on. Leave them in doubt as to the success of your operation. Cut a round piece off a cork, on the top of which place some pieces of paper and matches; push the whole underneath the glass, light the matches, and wait. As soon as the combustion is over, you will see the water leave the plate and enter the glass, wherein it rises, leaving the coin absolutely dry at the bottom of the plate. You can then execute what you offered at first—take out the coin without wetting your fingers.

Of course, all tricks can be made more amusing if the trickster takes the trouble beforehand of learning a little light patter, so that the spectators can be kept in a good humour in the event of the "trick" not being carried off successfully at the first effort. However, the tricks described on this page should be practised to perfection beforehand so that there should be no risk of failure.

Our Second Long, Complete Story in this Issue.

THE SHOWMAN'S DOUBLE!

A Splendid Long, Complete Tale of Life in the Circus Ring.



Marco chuckled softly as he glanced at the helpless signor. "I'll show you that I'm a good impersonator and quick-change artist!" he said. "Perhaps you'll give me a job then!" (See Page 33.)

CHAPTER I. A Cool Customer.

SAY, guv'nor, can you give us a job?" Signor Tomsonio, proprietor of Tomsonio's World-Famous Circus and Hippodrome, was just running up the little flight of wooden steps leading to the door of his caravan, when he was arrested by this plaintive appeal.

The time was close on a quarter-past seven in the evening, and the signor, having superintended the final arrangements incidental to the circus performance, was returning from the big marquee in haste to his caravan to don the elaborate evening-dress which he always wore as he strutted into the ring in his capacity as ring-master punctually at half-past seven.

As he heard himself addressed he turned, with his hand on the latch of the caravan door.

"Who's that?" he called sharply.

A man stepped forward into the ray of light which came from the caravan's tiny window, so that the circus-proprietor could see him.

"It's me, guv'nor! Can yer give me a job?" the fellow repeated, in a whining voice which ill-suited his appearance. The signor scanned him closely, and frowned, as if what he saw did not particularly please him.

The fellow was tall and burly, as big as the signor himself, and he looked as strong as an ox.

The signor knew him by sight as a man who had been hanging round the circus encampment for some days, as if unable to make up his mind to ask for a job; and the circus-proprietor, suspecting that he was after no good, had intended to ask Samson the Strong Man to keep his eye on him. And now, apparently, the man had made up his mind to "pop the question," as it were.

But, unfortunately, he had chosen a most inopportune moment.

"Can't you give a chap a job, guv'nor?" he repeated a third time, coming a step nearer to the caravan.

"Job!" said the signor sharply. "No, I can't! Clear off, sharp!"

The man advanced a step nearer.

"Don't be hasty, guv'nor," he said, in a voice which showed that he had at least been fairly well educated. "I'm sure you can take me on if you will."

There was something insolent in the fellow's tone which made the signor flare up with anger.

"I can take you on if I will, can I?" he roared. "Why, you insolent vagabond, what the dickens do you mean?"

"That you can if you will," retorted the man coolly.

"Well, I won't, then!" roared the signor. "I won't, then! What?"

"If you only knew what I can do——"

"I don't want to know what you can do, you insolent rascal! Be off, or, by Jingo, I'll——"

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price 10. and will contain a splendid long complete story entitled:

"You'll take me on," finished the man calmly.
Signor Tomsonio gave a howl.
"Take you on!" he yelled. "Take on a cheeky ruffian like you! Why, blow me tight, if I wouldn't rather do all the turns myself! What?"
"Rot!"

The signor gave a gasp. Could he believe his own ears? Had the fellow really dared to say "rot" to him, Signor Tomsonio, the absolute autocrat of his circus, whose lightest word no one dared—with the possible exception of the signora—to question?

It was impossible!

But there was no doubt about it.

"Rot!"

The man repeated the offensive monosyllable firmly and distinctly.

The signor gasped again, speechless.

"If you could only see Marco, the Quick-Change Artist's famous act, you would engage me on the spot!"

The cool assurance of the fellow seemed to paralyse the signor.

"Clear out!" he stuttered. "G-git, you s-scoundrel!"

Then, suddenly remembering that he had no time to spare if he was to be ready for the performance at the right time, the signor did what he would have done before had he not been loth to leave such a fellow to wander about outside at his own free will. He wrenched open the caravan door, and disappeared inside.

But the enterprising Marco, as he called himself, had apparently anticipated this move on the signor's part.

With one bound he was up the caravan steps, and, before the astonished signor had realised the situation, he had slipped inside the caravan and shut the door.

"Why—what—"

The circus-master struggled to speak, but wrath and indignation almost choked him.

But Marco seemed quite unmoved.

He coolly bolted the door on the inside and looked the signor straight in the face.

"Now," he said, "you've got to see what I can do as a quick-change artist!"

"You dare—" broke out the signor furiously.

But the man went on, ignoring the interruption:

"You have only got about five minutes in which to change for the performance, I know; so you would be wiser not to make any more fuss. All I want you to do is to give you a sample of my performance while you are changing."

And the man opened a black bag which he had been carrying, and proceeded to draw from it a number of wigs and moustaches.

The signor glared at the fellow, for once in his life at a loss what to do.

He realised that what he said was quite correct—in five minutes the ring-master was due to open the performance with his customary dialogue with Joey the clown.

What would happen if he wasn't there the signor found it hard to imagine. And as the thought of such a calamity crossed his mind, he was nearly acquiescing in Marco's cool proposal.

Rather than run the risk of being fearfully late for the performance he would consent to allow the fellow to show what he could do.

But even as the signor was about to tell the intruder what was in his mind, a sudden wave of rage came over him. After all, he would rather anything should happen—anything—than that he should give way to this insolent rascal.

The scoundrel! What did he mean by it?

Besides, would not Joey Pye or someone be round in a minute or two to see what had become of him?

"You impudent ruffian!" roared the signor, hurling himself upon the man with a suddenness which might have taken him unawares, but didn't. "You unmitigated scoundrel! Get out of my caravan, or, by James, I'll throw you out head first!"

The man smiled grimly, and whisked round on the instant to meet the signor's attack.

The two closed, and then it was that the signor saw that he had made a mistake. The man was enormously powerful, and the stout circus-proprietor, though no chicken himself, was as a child in his hands.

Displaying a strength far greater than his appearance would seem to indicate, Marco caught the signor round his ample waist, and laid him without much difficulty full-length on the floor of the caravan.

Kneeling on him there, he reached out and took a necktie from his bag, and, turning the signor over as if he were a child, proceeded to tie his hands together behind his back.

"You ruffian!" gasped the signor, who did not at all appreciate such usage. "I'll have you flogged out of the circus! Help!"

"Shut up, you old fool!"

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"Help!"

"If you don't shut up I shall have to gag you!"

"You ruffianly robber! They'll be here in a minute to see where I am."

"I know they will—that's why you've got to shut up!"

While he had been talking, the man had been rapidly tying the signor's legs together with his own braces, and now he proceeded, in spite of the prisoner's threats and expostulations, to thrust a sock into his mouth and tie it loosely there with a handkerchief.

The unfortunate signor could now only produce choking and gurgling sounds, but his furious face furnished a perfect indication of the sentiments these were intended to convey.

The man grinned at the helpless circus-master, and then began to don, with marvellous celerity, the elaborate ring-master's evening-dress, which lay ready for the signor to put on.

The signor's face, as he watched this move, was a study.

In what must have been only a few seconds, Marco was arrayed in the wonderful clothes, which fitted him quite passably well, as he was of much the same figure as the signor, except that he was much less stout.

Deftly padding himself in the necessary place, however, he soon remedied this defect, and then the clothes looked as if they had been made for him.

But it was his next move which caused the signor's eyes to bulge from his head with indignation and astonishment.

Marco stood before the looking-glass hanging on the caravan wall for perhaps a couple of minutes, fumbling in his bag at intervals. Then he turned round and faced the signor with a sardonic smile.

He was the living image of the signor himself! The signor could hardly believe the evidence of his own eyes.

Often and often had he glanced with a self-satisfied smile into the mirror when arrayed in those gorgeous dress-clothes, and what he had seen might have been a reflection of what he saw before him now.

There were the fine Kaiser moustache, of which he was so vain, the ruddy complexion, the busy eyebrows—everything!

Marco watched the effect of his little surprise on the signor, and what he read in his eyes seemed to please him.

He chuckled softly.

"I'll show you that I'm a good impersonator and quick-change artist!" he said. "Perhaps you'll give me a job now?"

The glare with which the signor met this suggestion plainly indicated the spirit in which he received it, and rendered speech quite unnecessary.

"I see you do not take to my suggestion," went on the audacious impersonator. "Well, I shall have to prove my capabilities further, that's all!"

The signor groaned in spirit, and writhed impotently in his bonds. He could foresee the most awful possibilities if this outrageous impostor carried his impersonation any further.

Why, the show would be ruined, and the people, as likely as not, would wreck the circus in their wrath!

At this moment a gleam of hope shone in the signor's eyes. There was a shout from outside the caravan:

"Hi, signor, what the dooce are you up to? It's half-past, an' the people are beginning to shout for us!"

It was Joey Pye's voice!

The signor prepared to produce as many groans, muffled though they must be—as possible.

Surely Joey would suspect that something was wrong, even if he did not hear the groans, he thought.

But without an instant's hesitation, and in tones marvelously like the signor's own, Marco answered the little clown:

"It's all right, Joey! I'm just coming!"

"It's not all right!" came Joey's voice again, with a distinct note of surprise in it, for the signor was never late.

"What are you up to?"

"It's all right, I say, you fat duffer! I'm just coming!"

"Well, you'd better buck up, then! Hark at the row the audience are kicking up!"

The noise of tumultuous hand-clapping, stamping of feet, and catcalls from the big marquee was plainly audible within the caravan, and Signor Tomsonio groaned in desperation.

Marco grasped the long ring-master's whip from the corner of the caravan, and, bestowing a grin and a wink on the helplessly-raging signor, coolly opened the door and went out, shutting and locking it on the outside with the signor's key, which he afterwards slipped into his pocket.

CHAPTER 2.

A Bad Time for Joey.

JOEY PYE gave a grunt as the signor, or, rather, a figure he naturally supposed to be the signor's, came down the steps of the caravan.

"Nice time you've been to-night, I must say!" he

growled. "Blessed if I ever knew such a fat old slow-coach! Come on!"

And Mr. Pye led the way, grumbling, to the big marquee, within which the uproar was now terrific.

Marco's eyes glittered in the darkness when Joey applied the term "fat old slow-coach" to him, and he determined to get his own back on the little clown for that before the evening was much older.

Joey led the way hastily into the marquee by the staff entrance, and passed right through the back part of the tent, where the circus company were anxiously waiting, and into the ring, closely followed by the bogus signor.

There was a yell from the impatient audience as the two made their appearance, partly derisive, and partly of welcome, and the usual dialogue between clown and ring-master was at once begun.

Marco was obviously no stranger to the circus-ring, for if he had not quite the same indescribably dignified way with him as the real Signor Tomsonio had, yet he was quite at his ease.

His sallies and the chaff which he exchanged with Joey brought forth the usual meed of applause, and to most of the circus company all seemed to be going on as usual.

Closely as he imitated the signor's voice, however, Marco found it very hard to keep it up, and once or twice Joey looked at him curiously.

The little clown was very far from suspecting the real state of affairs, but an occasional expression or inflection of the supposed signor's voice struck him as peculiar.

The ring-master was leaving out all the usual "business," too, which he and the clown were accustomed to do together night after night, and was substituting new "gags," many of which Joey had never heard of before.

"The signor seems queer to-night. I wonder what's up?" he muttered to himself more than once.

The time which the ring-master and clown dialogue usually occupied drew to a close, but the bogus signor showed no signs of retiring in favour of the next turn.

The audience began to grow restive.

Signor Tomsonio flattered himself that he could always judge the temper of his audience to a nicety, and immediately his watchful eye noted signs of impatience in the sea of faces round him, he always signalled on the next turn at once.

Joey Pye could read the signs, too, and he wondered more and more at the signor's disregard of the very plain danger-signals which the audience now displayed.

"Stow it now, man!" he whispered hurriedly. "They've had enough! Give the signal for Clotilde!"

But the ring-master did not seem at all perturbed.

"It's all right!" he whispered back. "They only want livening up a bit. Give 'em a few more of your lightning somersaults and handspings."

Joey stared at the ring-master in amazement, but with a shrug of his shoulders he turned to do as he was bid.

The audience were by now shouting:

"Next turn! Next turn!" in a sort of chant, and the rest of the circus company were watching the supposed signor aghast.

But the worthy Marco had not yet had a chance of getting his own back on the little clown for the opprobrious remark he had made to him, and he was determined to do so in spite of the audience, and regardless of the fact that the remark was intended for someone else, anyway.

"Houp-la! Over you go!" he shouted suddenly, and with a crack of his long whip he made a sudden rush at the little clown.

Before Joey had time to realise what was happening, the long lash of Marco's whip hissed through the air, and curled round his legs with a stinging crack.

Joey gave a fiendish yell.

"Ow, wow!"

Crack! Crack!

The ring-master chased round the ring as he somersaulted, dealing him sounding cracks with the long lash at every yard.

The audience stopped shouting and began to laugh.

This sort of thing seemed very funny to them apparently.

Crack! Crack!

Joey could stand the stinging lash no longer.

With a howl of mingled rage and surprise and also pain, he sprang to his feet and rushed wildly round the ring to get away from the cutting whip.

But the bogus signor was not to be eluded so easily.

With what seemed to the amazed circus company phenomenal agility for one so stout, he pursued the fleeing clown all over the ring, lashing away energetically, and shouting.

"Houp-la! Over you go, you lazy villain!"

This way and that the two dodged, Joey Pye in a state of absolute bewilderment, and bent only on escaping the whip, and the bogus signor apparently enjoying himself immensely.

The audience broke into a roar of laughter.

"Help! Help!" panted the little fat clown, as he passed the place where the circus company were watching from behind the scenes. "Help! He's mad!"

On he flew, stumbling and gasping for breath, and on after him fled the signor, still plying the lash, and keeping up the pursuit untiringly. The audience fairly shouted.

"Go it!"

"Buck up!"

"Give him beans!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

From the spectator's point of view it looked like an extremely realistic bit of "business," and it was applauded accordingly.

The audience laughed so much that they forgot all about the next turn, and at the back of the big marquee, behind the scenes, Clotilde, the signor's girl-rider, the Queen of the Ring, and one of the chief attractions of Tomsonio's Circus, was looking dismayed.

The time for her to make her entrance was long past, and yet the ring-master had made no sign to her.

What could be the matter with the signor?

Clotilde looked absolutely bewildered, as well she might.

She never remembered such a thing ever happening before.

"Jack, what can it mean?" she asked anxiously of Jack Talbot, the handsome young tiger-tamer, known to the circus-going public as Jungle Jack.

"I don't know what to think, Clotilde."

"What can be the matter with the signor?"

"Blessed if I know, unless he has realised that he has been going on too long, and wants to make the audience really laugh before finishing up."

"Yes; but—"

"He's making 'em laugh, too," put in Jim Carson, the Handsome Man, whose performance on the high trapeze was one of the chief items on the programme. "Ha, ha! It's one of the funniest things I've ever seen!"

And Jim Carson, who bore no love for Joey Pye, nor, for that matter, Jack Talbot either, laughed unpleasantly.

Clotilde gave him a half-frightened glance.

"But he's hurting Joey! Oh, I'm sure he is!"

"Ha, ha! Very likely!" grinned Carson, with a shrug of his shoulders. "The signor's a very fine showman, and he knows how to make people laugh."

"Yes—oh, yes; but—"

"You see, he's turned the audience round already! They're as pleased as Punch now, instead of shouting for the next turn. The whole performance will go well after this."

Carson was thinking of his own performance. He was inordinately vain, and applause was as the breath of life to him.

Meagre recognition of his exhibition on the trapeze in the form of scanty applause made him furious, while a generous reception and ovation from the audience delighted him, and put him in a good temper—for him—for days.

And to give him his due, Carson's performance earned the hearty applause which he usually got, for he was a trapezist of exceptional skill and nerve.

It was usually only in those places where he was known and disliked for his bad temper and ill-natured disposition, that he was coldly received.

Clotilde turned from the Handsome Man scornfully, and patted the glossy neck of Mahomet, her beautiful black Arab, with hands that trembled slightly.

What was the signor doing? she asked herself almost tearfully.

The audience were in a good humour now, as the Handsome Man had said, but how long they would remain so, if the signor went on playing his extraordinary tricks?

Jack Talbot, too, was looking absolutely bewildered.

Was the signor mad or drunk? he asked himself.

At any cost he must be stopped before he went any further. The circus company in general, too, were beginning to murmur.

"Joey's right! He's gone mad!" said Sampson, the Strong Man, with conviction.

"More likely drunk!" said Carson, with his hateful laugh.

The signor in the ring was still chasing Joey Pye up and down like a madman, while the little clown was flying before him for his life.

The audience, too, had stopped cheering, and it was evident that they were becoming weary once more of what had at first struck them as highly amusing.

"If he doesn't stop it soon, there'll be a row," said Jack Talbot anxiously.

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" will be the usual price 1d. and will contain a splendid long complete story entitled:

"I'll go into the ring and stop him myself in a minute," growled Samson, who, usually the best tempered of men, was a particular friend of the little clown's.

But the threatened interference of the Strong Man proved to be unnecessary, for at that moment, unable to stand it any longer, Joey Pye, with a howl of exasperation, bounded in amongst the group of performers behind the scenes, and rolled utterly exhausted right at the feet of Jack Talbot and Clotilde.

CHAPTER 3.

An Eccentric Ring-Master.

"JOEY, are you much hurt?" Clotilde bent anxiously over the little clown who was rolling about on the ground gasping.

"Joey, are you hurt?"

The little clown stopped rolling about, and lay quite still on his back, still gasping, with his eyes fixed on Clotilde's face with a comically woebegone expression.

Jack Talbot bent down and grabbed him by the arm.

"Get up, Joey," he said. "You're all right now."

Joey Pye sat up, aided by a vigorous tug from Jack, and glowered at the tiger-tamer indignantly.

"All right!" he panted, in a voice shrill and trembling from the depths of his feeling. "I—I'm black and—blue all—over!"

"Oh, poor Joey!" exclaimed Clotilde sympathetically. "I'm so sorry. But what's the matter with—"

The girl was interrupted by a shout from two or three of the performers.

"Miss Clotilde! You're wanted to go on! The signor's signalling for the next turn!"

Clotilde hastily ran over to Mahomet, the black Arab, which was being held for in readiness.

"Help me up, please, Jack! Quick, they're waiting for me."

Jack hastened to take her dainty little foot, and assist her to mount, and the next minute there was a shout of approval from the audience as she cantered into the ring.

She cantered straight up to the ring-master as usual, so that he might take Mahomet's bridle and lead her forward to announce her as "Clotilde, Queen of the Ring," according to his nightly custom.

But, to her surprise, the signor appeared to have forgotten this custom to-night.

He advanced towards her with a smile and a nod.

"Good-evening, my dear! Now, round you go!"

And he gave his long whip two or three sharp cracks, making Mahomet rear and paw the air in excitement.

Clotilde opened her eyes wide at the signor's unusual behaviour.

"But—" she began, in astonishment.

Crack—crack!

"Round you go, my dear!"

Clotilde gasped.

"But—but aren't you going to announce me to-night, signor?"

The signor looked confused for a moment.

"Oh, of—of course!" he said hurriedly. "I—I forgot that for the moment. How stupid of me!"

Muttering to himself something that the astonished girl-rider did not catch, the signor took hold of Mahomet's bridle, and marched towards the front of the ring. The audience, impatient at the delay, began to shout, and this seemed to make the signor still more confused.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he exclaimed, "this is—the—er—the Queen of the Ring. This is—"

The ring-master stopped, while Clotilde sat motionless on Mahomet, her face, scarlet.

For the life of him, Marco could not remember Clotilde's name. He had seen it on the circus bills, and knew that he ought to announce it; but, to his horror, he found that it had slipped his memory. But the audience had seen the circus bills, too.

The signor's lavish advertising had made them familiar with the name of the wonderful girl-rider.

At the mention of the Queen of the Ring there was a shout of approval.

"Hurrah for the Queen of the Ring. Clotilde, Queen of the Ring!"

The bogus signor heard the name shouted, and though he did not quite catch it, he made a bold plunge to save the situation.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he shouted again, "allow me to present to you the famous girl-rider, Matilda, Queen of the Ring!"

There was a yell from the audience, though whether it was of amusement, approval, or amazement, the bogus signor had no idea.

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He released Mahomet's bridle, and stepped back, cracking his whip, and waving Clotilde round the ring.

Clotilde started to canter round almost mechanically. She felt stunned.

What had the signor said?

What on earth could be the matter with him?

Matilda, Queen of the Ring! Why, it was ludicrous, absurd!

Matilda was a good-enough name, of course, but as a circus name in conjunction with the high-sounding title of Queen of the Ring, it was ridiculous.

Clotilde felt hurt and angry, as well as perplexed, as she galloped round the ring. What could be the explanation of the signor's extraordinary behaviour unless he were indeed mad or drunk?

The girl went through her turn with her mind pre-occupied with a thousand conflicting thoughts, and it was not surprising that she made more than one mistake, a thing most unusual with her.

In spite of this, however, the excellence of her performance quite won the hearts of the audience, and she was applauded to the echo.

In the meantime, Joey Pye, behind the scenes, was holding an indignation meeting. He was in a state of the greatest excitement, and protested vigorously that the signor was both mad and drunk, and that he, Joey, would not enter the ring again that night for a pension.

There was some excuse for the little clown's excitement, as he had been considerably hurt by the ring-master's long whip.

Loyalty to the circus and long training had kept Joey in the ring long after his common-sense urged him to leave it, and thus escape the stinging lash.

But the bogus signor carried his little joke too far, and it became more than human flesh and blood could bear to stay in the ring, and be lashed round like a dog for the amusement of the audience, who, of course, regarded it merely as a piece of realistic horse-play.

The other circus performers sympathised with Joey, of course. But they could not agree with his decision not to enter the ring again that night.

They all agreed that, in his present state, the signor must be got out of the ring if it were possible to entice him out.

Ring-master or no ring-master, he must not be allowed to ruin the performance. And no one knew what he might do next. The consternation of the company when they heard Clotilde announced as "Matilda, Queen of the Ring," may better be imagined than described.

Jack Talbot was especially indignant.

"You must go in, Joey!" he exclaimed. "The signor must be dotty! Go in and persuade him—anyhow—to come out of it. Samson or someone must take his place as ring-master."

"The old fool will ruin the whole show in a minute!" muttered the Handsome Man savagely.

For some time Joey was obdurate. But he was the only one who could enter the ring at any time without exciting any comment from the audience, and at last he reluctantly consented.

He waited until Clotilde, amidst thunders of applause, galloped out of the ring, anxious and upset, and then, with a semblance of lightheartedness he was very far from feeling, he somersaulted agilely into the ken of the audience, who welcomed his reappearance with a cheer.

At the same time Count Smelowiski, whose turn came after Clotilde's to-night, entered with his troupe of performing monkeys.

Smiling and bowing, as if he had already done something very wonderful, and with his monkeys skipping and chattering along at his heels, the count advanced to the centre of the ring, and stood there waiting.

Joey Pye, with a cautious glance at the long whip, up-righted himself at the side of the ring-master.

The bogus signor grinned as he saw him.

"Hallo! You here again, you duffer?"

"Yes. No more of your silly games, you owl, Dick!"

The signor's eyes gleamed, and he took a business-like grip of his whip.

"Look here—"

"Aren't you going to announce the count, signor?"

"The count?"

"Yes. He's waiting."

"Er—oh, yes—of course!"

"Then do it! The people are waiting."

"Er—of course. Did you say the count, Joey?"

Joey stared at the ring-master in amazement.

"Off his nut—clean off!" he muttered to himself.

Then aloud:

"Of course I did, you duffer! Count Smelowiski's waiting to be announced!"

"Ah, Count Smell—Smell-o'-whisky? Of course."

The bogus signor hastened over to the centre of the ring. "Ladies and gents," he said loudly, "the next turn will be given by the world-renowned troupe of performing monkeys, under the supervision of their talented trainer, Count—er—Count Niffs-o'-Brandy!"

The count gave a convulsive start, and there was a roar from the audience.

Joey Pye simply gasped.

The bogus signor mopped his brow with the real signor's big coloured handkerchief.

"Get on with it!" he exclaimed to the transfixed count.

"Here, Joey!"

The count, as one in a dream, began to put the monkeys through their tricks.

Joey approached the signor cautiously.

"What do you want, signor?"

"Come here a minute."

"I—I don't feel strong enough."

"Come here, you ass! I want to speak to you."

"Ye-es; but—"

The little clown eyed the long whip warily, and did not move.

"You silly duffer!" exclaimed the signor impatiently. "I sha'n't hit you! Come here!"

Joey came slowly towards him, still keeping his eye on the whip.

With the signor in his present extraordinary mood, the little clown thought it quite likely he might forget the promise he had made.

The signor watched him impatiently as he slowly approached.

"Buck up, you fat slug!" he exclaimed suddenly, stepping hastily forward to meet him.

The effect was electrical.

Joey Pye skipped back like a flash, emitting a gasp like escaping steam.

The signor stamped his foot and glared. Then he broke into a grin as he looked at the little clown standing just out of reach, in a state of nervous "jumpiness," and obviously prepared to make a bolt for the curtain exit at the first sign of a hostile move on the part of the ring-master.

The bogus signor threw down his long whip in the tan.

"Now, you fat duffer, will you come here! I only want to speak to you, an' I don't want to have to shout it out, and distract the audience's attention from old Reek-o'-Spirits."

Joey Pye came forward haltingly.

"What do you want, signor?"

The signor leaned towards him and whispered something, which caused the little clown to give a violent start.

"Get you a drink, signor?" he exclaimed, in horrified tones.

"What, now?"

"Of course, you fat duffer!"

"Bring a drink into the ring? Oh, rot!"

"Rot! What d'you mean? You buzz off and get it. I'm as dry as a bone."

Joey Pye fairly gasped.

For a man of strict business, and one who was so careful of the name and reputation of his circus as Signor Tomsonio was known to be, to order a drink to be brought into the ring in full sight of the audience was absolutely and utterly incredible.

"You—you can't mean it, signor!"

"Mean it? Of course I do, you ass! I can go close to the back curtain, and you can hand it out to me from there. What?"

"B-but why can't you come out of the ring a minute and have it?"

The signor had his own reasons, as we know, for not wishing to leave the ring. Even if his imposture was known by now behind the scenes, as long as he stayed in the ring he was safe. He knew that Signor Tomsonio would avoid anything like a scene at all costs. But he also knew that if he once ventured behind the scenes, out of sight of the audience—

"Oh, I—er—I can't leave the ring, you know! It's impossible. Buzz off and get it now!"

Joey Pye, who knew very well it was quite possible for the ring-master to slip out for a moment or two without being noticed, if he so desired, blinked at the bogus signor in amazement.

"Buzz off and get that drink, will you!" whispered Marco excitedly.

Joey edged away from the supposed signor.

"Should think you've had almost enough already, ain't you?" he muttered.

"Buzz off!" hissed the ring-master, almost dancing with rage.

"But—but—"

Marco whisked round, and made a grab at his whip, which was lying in the tan behind him.

"By jingo, I'll—"

But the little clown had fled.

The thought of that whip's long curling lash was too much for him after his trying experience earlier in the performance.

With two bounds he reached the curtain exit, and bolted through it "like a young rabbit," as Marco said to himself, with a grim smile.

Joey dashed right into the group of performers gathered just inside the curtain, sending them flying in all directions.

There was a chorus of exclamations:

"Ow!"

"Oh!"

"Stop the duffer!"

"Stop him!"

"What's the matter, Joey?" gasped Samson, the Strong Man, stretching out a hand as big as a ham to stop him. "What's up?"

With a wriggle, the little clown avoided Samson's outstretched hand.

"He—he wants a drink now!" he gasped, without checking his headlong career.

Samson fell back in astonishment.

"A—a drink!"

"My hat!"

"Phew!"

"Why, the old fool's drunk already!" exclaimed Carson, the Handsome Man, in savage disgust.

"Here, Joey! Stop! Don't go!" shouted Jack Talbot.

But, with a shrug of his shoulders, the little clown dashed on out of the tent and away in the direction of the canteen.

CHAPTER 4.

Signor Tomsonio Gives In.

FOR a full five minutes after Marco had slammed and locked Signor Tomsonio's caravan door, the circus proprietor lay on his back, blinking vacantly up at the roof of his little room in sheer bewilderment.

His wrists and ankles were securely tied, and he suffered no little pain when, after recovering from the first shock of the indignity of the affair, he made a violent effort to break away from his bonds.

The sock which Marco had thrust into his mouth, necessitated the signor breathing heavily through his nose, and, naturally, he was unable to call for help.

Thump—thump!

Signor Tomsonio kicked on the floor with both heels.

Bang—bang!

He persisted in his kicking for some time, and then lay on his back, listening.

Somebody passed the caravan, whistling a popular air, and the signor renewed his kicking.

"I wonder if the fool will hear?" he thought.

Bang, bang, bang!

Once more the signor paused to listen; but the whistling sounded further away, and he knew the passer-by had not heard—or, hearing, had not attached any importance to the banging.

The sock had not been thrust into Signor Tomsonio's mouth so effectively as it might have been, and after a time he was able to move it slightly.

"I'll do it!" thought the circus proprietor. "I'll do it yet!"

He rolled over on to his chest, and opened his mouth still wider.

"Gr-r-r-r!"

The sock unfolded gradually, and at last the signor, with a gasp of relief, rid himself of the objectionable gag.

"Help!" he shouted, rolling on to his back once more.

His deep, bass voice sounded strangely odd in the small room, and he paused to listen.

"Help! Rescue!"

Joey Pye, on his way to the canteen, stopped outside Signor Tomsonio's caravan in astonishment.

"Help!"

In spite of the coloured paints on Joey Pye's face, it puckered up so strangely that nobody would have recognised in him the jovial clown of the world-renowned circus.

"It's the signor's ghost!" he gasped.

"Help!"

Mr. Pye stared around him in alarm.

"Who is it?" he cried, hardly able to stutter out the sentence.

"Is that you, Pye?" shouted the circus proprietor.

"I'm Joey," replied the clown, in astonishment; "but who on earth are you?"

The signor gave a distinct snort of rage.

"Who am I?" he shouted. "You scoundrel, Pye! You know who I am right enough; and if I'm not out of this caravan in half a shake, you're sacked!"

(Continued on page 46.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



TIPS TO WIN MATCHES

BY
WILLIAM HIBBERT
of
Newcastle United.



Somebody will probably be ready and willing to point out that the first tip towards the winning of football matches is to have footballers of ability. That is a little matter which I am not going to deny. In football, as in other things, it is ability which counts in the end. On the other hand, it is not always the side with most ability individually which wins most games—there is such a thing as collective ability—as men working together for the common good of the side, and that sort of thing.

Moreover, when two teams of equal ability meet on the field of play, what is it which determines the winner and the loser of the contest? It is the little things—the outside considerations, if I may call them so.

The first thing which a team desirous of winning matches wants is confidence in its own ability to win. Many a team to-day is losing matches, not because the players are not good enough, but having struck a bad patch they have lost confidence in themselves. In a word, they go on the field half-expecting to be beaten, and as sure as anything if they expect that, they will have their expectations fulfilled. That this is true can be seen week after week by watching some of our big teams.

A side strikes a winning patch. Their players are nothing out of the ordinary, but thanks to one or two wins—which they may have obtained luckily—they have no end of confidence in themselves, and it will be seen that week after week they can do no wrong. They beat teams containing men with bigger reputations. They are living on their confidence almost.

A striking case was provided by Sunderland last year. At the beginning of the season they had the men; but, somehow, they could not win their matches—in fact, if I remember right, they had played about seven or eight ere they met with their first victory. Once they got started on the winning patch, however, all that was changed. They went from victory to victory, until, as everybody knows, they finished high and dry as champions of the League, with more points than has ever been obtained by a side before in one season. Don't lose heart, then, or you will lose your matches.

In your football team you must have nothing but real hard triers—players who will neither spare themselves nor think of themselves. They will have the welfare of the club at heart, and be willing to do anything which will further the interests of the side. One or two selfish players are losing matches for many a side. Far better have players who are whole-hearted for the team, even if they are not such clever footballers, than have players who do not care very much about the team itself so long as they themselves get plenty of praise.

In the same way the side will not get on unless there is good feeling between the members of it. There must be no quarrelling, and if you happen to have a player in your team who is not popular with the rest of the side, and those players do not give him the ball as they should, then you will not win many matches.

Now we come to actual winning tactics on the field of play. "A good start is half the battle," has been said many times, and it applies to football as much as to anything else. If you possibly can, get a goal early in the game, and with this end in view crowd on all your energy and ability at the beginning. Once you have got a goal to the good, it will mean the other side has to score two before they can win. This goal will have a wonderful stimulating effect on

the team, too, while it will not be at all surprising if it throws the other fellows off their game.

I have seen many a match won in the first few minutes, and not by the best team either, so far as general public opinion has been concerned. But the supposed weaker side has crowded all its resources into the first few minutes of the game, and having secured an early goal has stuck to its advantage like grim death.

Especially does this striving after the first goal prove of value in Cup-ties. When the next lot of English Cup-ties come to be played, look carefully down the reports, and see how few of the matches are won by the team which has been in arrears. One of the big Cup-ties was won last year by a goal in the first minute of the game. Right from the kick-off one side swept down, and before the other quite realised what was happening they were a goal to the bad, and try as they would they could not pick it up.

When you have got the lead, however, do not make the mistake of playing entirely on the defensive as many teams do. Remember always that attack is the very best defence. So long as your forwards are worrying about the other goal, there is not much danger of your side losing the lead, but once the other fellows start putting on the pressure—well, you never can tell what will happen.

I have often been asked whether, so far as the forwards are concerned, it is better from a match-winning point-of-view to play either the short or the long passing game. It is, however, difficult to give a definite answer.

At Newcastle, we generally play the short passing game, and, provided the men are good enough to do it, it is often very effective. Even we at Newcastle, however, are prepared to admit that the short passing game has its disadvantages. In the first place, there is a big temptation to do too much of it. If this can be resisted, then it should work out all right.

On the other hand, there are, of course, things to be said for the long passing game—it keeps the defenders scattered over the field, but here, again, there are disadvantages. The long passing game is so apt to develop in a kick and rush affair. The very best idea for winning matches is a side which can vary its game—now long passing, and now making headway by means of short, quick passes. That sort of thing keeps the defenders wondering. They never quite tumble to what you are likely to do next, and to get them hesitating is to get them lost.

It can never do any harm to talk over a plan of campaign before the match commences. If there is somebody in the side who knows the players of the opposition—knows where they are strong and where there is a weakness, it will be well if he will impart that information to the whole side, and then the team can play to the weakness, or avoid playing to the stronger portion of the opposition, as the case may be.

Too many teams just go on the field knowing that they are going to kick the ball about, but as for knowing how they are going to play, it never occurs to them to think about it.

One other match-winning tip. Be fit. When teams of equal merit meet on the football-field, it is the side which is in the best condition which pulls through, as a rule.

W. Hibbert.

THE CORINTHIAN.



A Magnificent New Story of the Old-Time Prize-Ring.

By BRIAN KINGSTON.

READ THIS FIRST.

Hilary Bevan, a sturdy young Britisher of gentle birth, who has been living in the country, walks to London

TO SEE HIS FATHER,

Sir Patrick Bevan, whom he has not met for three years. Arriving at his father's house, Hil learns that the latter has been absent for three days at the house of Sir Vincent Brookes, one of the leading bucks of the time. He also learns that Sir Patrick has earned the nickname of

"PLUNGER" BEVAN,

and is heavily in debt, having dissipated his fortune.

Bending his steps to Sir Vincent Brookes' house in Grosvenor Street, Hilary

FINDS HIS FATHER AT THE GAMING-TABLES,

where he has been for three days and nights.

Sir Patrick rises from the table an utterly ruined man. Hilary's next act is to accept a challenge offered in the prize-ring at Moulsey Hurst. Hil, fighting under the name of Harley, wins his battle and awakens the interest of a young Corinthian named D'Arcy Vavasour.

HIL DECIDES TO ADOPT THE PRIZE-RING AS A CAREER,

and at a supper which is attended by the leading patrons of "The Fancy" Vavasour matches him for a thousand guineas against any boxer that Sir Vincent Brookes may select. The fight takes place at No Man's Land, in Hertfordshire, and after a terrific mill, Hil is victorious.

Sir Vincent, hard hit by his losses, vows vengeance on Hil. He seeks out Sir Patrick Bevan, and, posing as his friend, persuades him to come forth from his retirement.

While Sir Patrick is at Sir Vincent's house, the latter informs him that he has news of Hil, and suggests that he should write and beg him to visit his father. Thus it comes

about that Hil receives a letter from his father just as he is about to go to a supper at Lord Alvanley's house with his patron.

Hil hastens to his father's cottage, only to find it empty, and realising that he has been tricked again, he returns to Vavasour's house. Here he finds a note awaiting him from "Sky Blue" Brayne, a notable Corinthian.

(Now go on with the story.)

Hil Agrees to Fight.

"Now what on earth can Mr. Brayne want with me?" was Hil's wonder as he broke the seal—a very florid one. Then he said to the valet:

"Mr. Vavasour is at home, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir!"

Hil was well acquainted with Vavasour's habits, which included the keeping of his bed until eleven in the forenoon—except in cases of urgency—no matter at what hour he had retired to rest; and although the contents of Mr. Brayne's letter certainly astonished him, the lad's sense of politeness forbade him disturbing his friend before his accustomed hour.

This was the letter:

"Ned Harley. Sir,—It will be greatly to your advantage to call upon me immediately after receiving this letter, on a matter of the greatest importance. I have embarked upon a matter for which I require your services. A refusal is impossible. EDWARD BRAYNE."

"What did you say?" asked Hil. The valet had made a remark while he had been reading.

"I wished to know, sir, if you desired I should acquaint my master of your return."

"No; do not trouble Mr. Vavasour. I hope to see him when I return," Hil said.

He left the house immediately, making his way to where

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"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Mr. Brayne lived. The tone of the letter had not pleased him; it was too peremptory—too much of the order of a master to his servant—and by no means relishable by one of Hil's independence of character. Yet he felt he would not be doing well to neglect the note. For a professional boxer to earn a living it was necessary that someone should be willing to act as his backer, and so help him to the making of matches; and it occurred to Hil that D'Arcy Vavasour might have put in a word in his favour at the supper-party overnight.

So long as he fought honourably, so long as nothing was asked of him that conflicted with his feelings of honour and fair play, it really mattered very little who his pugilistic patron might be.

He found "Sky Blue" Brayne sitting up in bed, wrapped in a wonderful silk dressing-robe of his favourite colour. The young man looked washed-out, tired, as though his share in the gaiety of the night before had not agreed with him; and there was an anxious expression in his large, pale, and somewhat vacant-looking face.

Perhaps he was already regretting his rashness of the previous evening. His first words showed that this was the fact.

"I have been waiting hours to see you," he said in a fretful, yet supercilious, voice. "Why were you not here sooner? You may sit down." And he waved his hand languidly towards a chair with what he believed to be the manner of a D'Arcy Vavasour.

"What is it you wish to see me about?" asked Hil bluntly. And in a very few words Brayne explained. The one point he had overlooked in his excitement of twelve hours earlier was that he had no certainty that the person chiefly concerned in the match he had been so ready to make would give his consent to it.

The doubt had worried Brayne greatly. Like most absurd persons, he was particularly sensitive to ridicule, and he knew only too well how thoroughly he would be laughed at if Ned Harley declined flatly to allow himself to be matched as he had arranged. He would be laughed out of society, and the fear of this awful blow to his vanity had kept him awake half the night.

"Well, and what d'ye say?" he asked at the end of his recital.

Hil stared at his white face and anxious eyes thoughtfully. "Against any man in England," the lad repeated. "And you have wagered ten thousand guineas upon me winning."

"Ten thousand to five. And the challenge has been taken up."

"You are asking much of me, is it not so?" asked Hil. "And there is no limitation of weight?"

"I saw you fight Fennel," put in Brayne eagerly, "and I sincerely believe all I have claimed for you."

"The risk is a great one."

"But I would pay you well to take it," hurried out the other—"a fifth of the wager, if you help me to win it—one thousand guineas." His light-coloured eyes were almost pleading. "A fifth—no, half if you win the match."

"And my likely opponent?"

"It is not settled. Carter or Bully Power—one or the other—so said the taker of the wager."

Of the first Hil had heard. Power's name was unknown to him. But he made no answer, and Brayne's hopes sank.

"You must win—I must win!" he cried loudly. "Five thousand guineas if you win the fight! Why, man, no fighter was ever offered such terms before."

And none but an empty-headed fool, with more money than he knew what to do with, would have offered them, he might have added.

"I was not thinking of the money," Hil said stiffly.

And yet the thought of winning such a huge sum could not but appeal to him. With so much money his father's lost position might be regained—a comfortable life for him at least insured.

And then the pride of youth asserted itself. This was expected of him. This would be, at least, attempt. Had not Jem Belcher been champion of England when but little older than himself?

"Very well; I agree," he said quietly. Brayne threw himself eagerly forward, as though unable to believe he had heard aright.

"You agree? You will not back out later?" he cried.

"I give you my promise," Hil answered proudly. "I agree to the match you have made on my behalf, and I will do my best to win. You need have no fear," he added, a trifle contemptuously.

"The other details we will settle later," said Brayne, with a sigh of genuine relief, sinking back in his bed. "And now leave me. I am quite worn out—exhausted. The training—the expenses—date—all will be settled later. I can do no more now. My health—"

This was the conversation that Hil had to detail later when in D'Arcy Vavasour's dressing-room, and the story of the fruitless journey to Horsham had been told and listened to without comment.

"And so you have agreed, Ned? Do you think to win?" asked Vavasour after a long pause, his fingers playing with the ears of his favourite spaniel.

"I hope to win, sir. I shall do my best. I can do no more," said Hil. "I can assert Mr. Brayne shall have nothing to complain of."

"And did Mr. Brayne inform you who it was accepted the challenge he was—if you will permit me—so ill-advised to make last night?"

"No; nothing was said as to that. But the fact can make no difference. I presume, sir"—and Hil smiled—"he is no person on whose account you would wish that I might not succeed?"

To this query Vavasour made no answer.

"You have given a definite promise, Ned?" he asked.

"Absolutely, sir."

"Without hope of retracting it?"

There was some meaning in Vavasour's tone that Hil could not comprehend, but he answered firmly:

"No hope whatever—not honourably. But why do you ask that?"

"Because, Ned—no, it is Hil I ought to call you—I fear you will regret having so bound yourself."

"For what reason, sir?"

"Because, my boy, the man who accepted Mr. Brayne's bet is your father."

"My father!"

The surprise was so staggering, the shock so great, that Hil, frankly incredulous, could but stare.

"Sir Patrick Bevan," said D'Arcy Vavasour. "He was present at Lord Alvanley's supper last night."

Vaguely, as one not seeing clearly, Hil moved across the room and dropped into a chair. The solid floor seemed slipping from under his feet.

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The Way Out.

They had talked the matter over at length, considered each point, and comprehension of the astounding puzzle in which he was involved was as far from Hilary and his friend as at the beginning.

Of one fact Hil felt certain, and he clung obstinately to it—Sir Vincent Brookes had had a hand in creating the situation. But how, or to what extent, he admitted he could form no idea.

By what means had Sir Patrick been brought to Lord Alvanley's? What possible consideration could have induced him, a ruined man, to risk the chance he had? Supposing Brookes was concerned, in what possible way was the schemer to profit?

How Hil was affected was only too plain. Did he fight, did he win—and he pledged himself to Brayne to do his utmost—his own father stood to lose five thousand guineas; and, so far as Hil knew, he was not the owner of five thousand farthings.

"You know this Power, sir?" asked Hil, and Vavasour nodded affirmatively. "What chance, think you, have I of beating him?"

And Vavasour replied:

"Accidents apart, Hil, you should thrash him with greater ease than you licked Fennel. I have seen him fight. He is a big Irishman, three stone heavier, maybe, than yourself. A clumsy giant of a man, but without science, and, it has been said more than once, without much heart. Assured of a fair fight, I would have been willing to wager on you. In my opinion, Carter would be a more dangerous opponent."

There was a long silence, Hil sitting moodily thoughtful. Only too well he comprehended now the fatal hold that the passion for gambling had over his father. This match might have seemed to him to offer a gambling chance. He had not heard of Ned Harley, but no doubt he was ready to believe that a novice, a twelve-stone man who had fought but two fights, a boxer unknown until within a few weeks since, could have no possible chance against a seasoned pugilist such as Carter or a herculean bruiser such as Bully Power. Brayne had offered the chance, and he, Sir Patrick, had taken, as he had a legitimate right to do, advantage of it.

If he were assured of winning the wager, the fact of inability to pay his debt as a loser would not weigh with him.

But if Hil won! Why, then all men would deem his father's name stained by an act base and dishonourable.

"Yours is an unhappy position, my dear lad," Vavasour broke the silence. "You win, and your father, my friend, loses the name of a man of honour. You lose, what will be his feelings as a father? "What grieves me most sadly," he went on, "is that I feel I am greatly to blame. I should have spoken last night. I should have found some means to inform your father of Ned Harley's real identity. But I kept silent. I wish to Heaven, Hil, you had seen me before going to Mr. Brayne and committing yourself."

If only Hil had not been so scrupulous in not disturbing his friend! It had been a trivial thing, but the consequences were great and far-reaching.

"No, sir; you must not blame yourself," cried Hil. "My father is a proud man, and he would have been grateful to no one who publicly proclaimed his son as a professional fighter."

Vavasour thought privately that Sir Patrick's pride might well have preserved him from many of the follies responsible for his present position, but he said nothing.

"What will you do, Hil?" he asked.

"What is to be done?" the lad rejoined drearily. "I have given my word to fight, and I must keep it. I must win if I can. My father cannot withdraw from the match. I think"—and a bitterness entered his voice—"I think all I can do is to pray that Bully Power may prove a better man than I am."

"If he tries to win," said Vavasour.

There was something so significant in his voice that Hil looked at him sharply.

"What is it you mean?" he asked.

"That he may not be allowed to win—if he can. That the cunning brain that has hatched this plot, as I believe it to be, may have the intention Power shall lose the fight."

"But—"

"In which case," went on Vavasour, "your father is faced with the payment of a sum wholly beyond him, being already shamed—as you have said—by beholding his son fighting in the prize-ring. To what man would such a spectacle be most gratifying?"

"You mean Sir Vincent Brookes?"

"It would be a scheme worthy of his subtle brain. But this is no more than a conjecture, barely a suspicion. We have no proofs, no evidences it is so. And yet I would wager

even the recipe presented to me for preserving the immaculate whiteness proper to linen garments that in a few weeks' time Sir Vincent will be surreptitiously accepting all the wagers against your beating Power that he can obtain."

"If this be Brookes's handiwork," said Hil, clenching his fists, "it will prove the worst day's work he ever did in his life. I'll proclaim to all the world the scoundrel that he is, and no honest man shall so much as recognise him. His name shall be posted at every club, and if right and truth count for anything, he shall be hounded from all honourable society."

"That will not be difficult, Hil. More easy than contriving that which shall be of benefit to your father," said Vavasour.

"And why should I not find my father," Hil cried, "and make plain to him the plot of which he, just as much as myself, has been made the victim?"

"Certainly you might do so. But do you think it will produce much good?" asked Vavasour. "What happens? You go to your father—the opportunity should not be difficult, for since the making of this match he is likely to be a popular man in London. You let him know that you are the Ned Harley against whom he has wagered so large an amount. Do you think, Hil, that would be advisable? Relinquish the agreement into which he has entered he would not. I and you know him too well to believe that. What follows? Why, that from now onwards he will be a miserable man."

"He must know the truth at last."

"True. But why render him unhappy before it is necessary?"

And Hil agreed that Vavasour had given good advice. Instead of seeking his father, he must do all possible to keep from being seen by him until concealment was no longer avoidable.

"It is your best course, Hil, and, if you choose, I will assist you," offered Vavasour. "Leave London for your training. I have a small property near Chippenham to which you could go if Mr. Brayne be agreeable. Your father will have little chance of seeing you there. The longer the truth is withheld from him the better."

"Yes, Mr. Vavasour, I agree with you. And when it can be no longer hidden—Ah!"

Suddenly Hil sprang from his seat, the gloom from his face and his eyes alight with pleased excitement. The load of trouble he had carried was lifted.

"And what happy thought has come to you, Hil?" asked Vavasour.

"Why, sir, one that disposes entirely of my fears for my father. I have just recollected the amount promised to me by Mr. Brayne if I win. And I must win—I shall win! It was for the need of the money I fought the Jew. This time the need is even greater."

"And may I ask what is promised, Hil? Mr. Brayne will certainly be generous."

"Five thousand guineas. Just the amount that will pay my father's debt—the amount that my victory will cost him."

"Five thousand guineas!" repeated Vavasour. "Then, Hil, I feel bound to do something I never expected to have occasion for—congratulate Mr. Brayne. Never before, and I dare swear since, will he have spent so large a sum to such good purpose."

So, with a light heart, Mr. Brayne having agreed to the suggestion, Hil went down to Croft Park, near Chippenham, for his training, and D'Arcy Vavasour went with him. And there no means were neglected to bring him as fit as possible for the date of the battle, fixed for six weeks later. Bouts with the muffers, long tramps and steady running, wrestling with the village athletes—only too pleased to give their services—were taken to strengthen his muscles and increase his endurance for the most important battle ahead.

And all sporting London was agog with excitement. The rashness of "Sky Blue" Brayne, the magnitude of the wager, and the return of Sir Patrick Bevan, contributed to invest the match with an interest that exceeded even that provoked by the triple match between D'Arcy Vavasour and Sir Vincent Brookes.

And meanwhile, this last, apparently but an interested looker-on, was engaged in putting the finishing touches to his great idea, the development of which could not have progressed more to his satisfaction.

Again and again the baronet congratulated himself. Fortune had played him more than one scurvy trick of late; this time she must be favourable. Sir Patrick Bevan and his son had been delivered into his hand.

(Another long instalment of this splendid story will be contained in next Wednesday's Number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY. Order EARLY.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!" — By — MARTIN CLIFFORD.

The Showman's Double!

(Continued from Page 41.)

Joey Pye gasped in bewilderment.

"Look here!" he said. "If you're the signor, how is it the signor is in the ring?"

"But he isn't in the ring!" roared the circus proprietor. "It's a scoundrel masquerading me! A thieving rascal named Marco!"

"My only fat aunt!" gasped Mr. Pye.

"Let me out, Joey!"

"Right-ho!" answered Joey. "We'll have you out in no time!"

Mr. Pye rushed away, returning in a few moments with Samson, the Strong Man of the Circus, to whom he had briefly explained the amazing situation.

Samson made short work of breaking in the door of Signor Tomsonio's caravan, and the raging signor was soon free of his bonds. He rushed off at once to the big tent, bent on instant vengeance.

But here a new difficulty confronted him. Marco, of course, took care to remain in full sight of the audience, where the signor, who had a natural horror of anything like a "scene" in front of the house, could not tackle him. Indeed, in his dishevelled state and minus his smart dress-clothes, which now adorned the person of the audacious Marco, the signor dared not venture into the sight of the audience at all. He had to content himself for the time being, therefore, with shaking his fist from the shelter of the curtain at his cool double in the ring.

Marco was not long in noticing Signor Tomsonio's presence behind the scenes, but he did not seem to be in the least bit disturbed. To the frantic and threatening gestures which the enraged Tomsonio directed at him, he responded at first only by a bow and a smile.

But as Count Smelowiski and his monkeys held the attention of the audience, the ring-master carelessly approached the back curtain.

"So you've got out, have you, signor?" he remarked pleasantly, in a low voice. "May I ask what you propose to do now?"

"You—you scoundrel!" stuttered the signor. "Wait till the show's over! Just you wait——"

"But I don't intend to wait," interrupted Marco, with a smile. "If you insist on a row, we will have it here in the sight of our friends the public."

"What!" roared Tomsonio.

"Certainly, signor! When old Brandyniff has finished I shall announce a special turn—The Rival Ring-masters' Roaring Knockabout Turn."

"You scoundrel!" groaned Tomsonio.

Such an announcement would be fatal to the dignity of a ring-master, which was almost sacred to the old showman.

"Well, you know the alternative," said Marco. "Take me on as a quick-change artist, and I'll make a pot of money for you. Otherwise—well, I'm a desperate man——"

"I'll see you hanged first!" exploded the signor, almost dancing with rage. "I'll—I'll——"

"Very well," said Marco, turning away. "The count's just finished. Ladies and gentlemen," he continued, in a loud voice, "I have now great pleasure in announcing——"

"Stop!" shrieked the signor, shaking the curtain frantically. "You—you——"

"In announcing a grand special turn——" went on Marco, in a sonorous voice, half turning his head towards the curtain, but otherwise giving no sign that he was listening to the signor.

Signor Tomsonio gave a deep groan. He was beaten.

"I'll take you on!" he hissed. "Six months' contract at twelve pounds a month!"

"Good!" muttered Marco, sotto voce. "Honour bright, signor?"

"Honour bright!" groaned the signor.

"Namely, Jungle Jack, the World-renowned Tiger Tamer!" finished Marco, with a flourish of his whip and a deep bow to the audience.

During the burst of applause that greeted this announcement, the signor uttered a sigh of relief, while Marco smiled to himself. He knew the signor's word could be relied on. He had played a daring game, and he had won.

And that was how it came about that Marco, the World's Most Marvellous Quick-Change Artist, appeared as a "star-turn" upon the bills of Tomsonio's World Famous Circus and Hippodrome.

THE END.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
Every Monday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

A NEW FREE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

The only names and addresses which can be printed in these columns are those of readers living in any of our Colonies who desire Correspondents in Great Britain and Ireland.

Colonists sending in their names and addresses for insertion in the columns of this popular story-book must state what kind of correspondent is required—boy or girl; English, Scotch, Welsh, or Irish.

Would-be correspondents must send with each notice two coupons, one taken from "The Gem," and one from the same week's issue of its companion paper, "The Magnet" Library. Coupons will always be found on page 2 of both papers, and requests for correspondents not containing these two coupons will be absolutely disregarded.

Readers wishing to reply to advertisements appearing in this column must write to the advertisers direct. No correspondence with advertisers can be undertaken through the medium of this office.

All advertisements for insertion in this Free Exchange should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The Gem' Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C."

H. Henning, P.O. Box 399, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 15—16.

Miss L. Booth, 1002, Dana Street, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers.

E. Kemp, P.O. Kingaroy, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in East Dulwich. (If this catchword of Miss C. M. Bennett, of 26, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, would she please write to this reader.)

C. Maclear, "The Residency," Molteno, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers in Australia, age 15.

H. B. Sleeman, P.O. Box 897, Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 16—18.

A. M. Aikin, 15, Municipal Square, Stylish Lane, Dicks Cove, West Africa, wishes to correspond with readers.

J. Luke, 73, Corrie Street, Fairview, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in England.

H. Blake, P.O. Box 255, S. A. R., Bloemfontein, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 18—20.

G. Taylor, 3, Wilkinson Street Gardens, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 15—17.

A. Foster, 89, Browning Street, Fair View, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 16—17.

V. G. Reitz, 24, Orange Street, Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in the British Isles, age 15—17.

C. Wolfe, P.O. Box 3692, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a Jewish girl reader, age 16, living in England or Scotland.

W. Donnelly, P.O., North Sydney, New South Wales, wishes to correspond with a reader living in America, age 14—15.

J. Leonard, P.O., Gormiston, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a Welsh or Irish girl reader, age 15—18.

G. Pearce, Hurdley Street, Timaru, South Canterbury, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in the British Isles, age 15—16.

L. Howell, P.O. Box 1476, G.P.O., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the British Isles, age 17.

J. Watts, "Cromona," Beaconsfield Road, St. Kilda, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a reader in England, Africa, or New Zealand, age 15—17.

L. G. Dawson, Mead Street, Peterhead, Adelaide, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16—17.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

WHOM TO WRITE TO :
EDITOR,
"THE GEM" LIBRARY
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE,
 FARRINGTON STREET, LONDON, E.C.

OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
 EVERY MONDAY
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
 EVERY FRIDAY.

For Next Wednesday,

"THE SCHOOLBOY RAIDERS!"
 By **Martina Clifford.**

IN presenting this, our Grand Winter Number, to my chums, I feel that the high traditions of the good old GEM Library, upon which it has built up its phenomenal success, have been worthily upheld. All lovers of the famous Tom Merry stories will be constrained to admit, after reading "The Mystery of the Painted Room," that popular Martin Clifford has never shown his marvellous powers as a master of the art of school-story writing to greater advantage, while the numerous other Special Features contained in this Number without doubt mark it as the greatest issue of THE GEM Library ever produced. Certain as I am of this, my mind is equally at rest upon that other important point. In other words, I am confident that my chums will appreciate the fare provided for them in this Number, and they will not, I think, be slow in showing that appreciation by giving the good old GEM Library, and their Editor, a "leg-up" whenever possible.

HOW TO MAKE A USEFUL PASTE.

As all my chums will be wanting to cut out the grand

For Instructions as to How to Use This Scoring-Chart see above.

new Schoolboy Game which is presented with this Number, and to paste it upon cardboard according to the directions given, it may not be out of place to give here a simple recipe for making the ordinary household paste. Mix a little ordinary flour or ground rice with cold water, and work it up to a smooth batter. Then add boiling water, stirring all the time, until the paste thickens to the required degree.

When cool this paste will be quite sufficiently strong for ordinary purposes; but if a little hot, clear glue be added while the paste is still hot, the strength of the paste will be greatly increased. The paste should be strained and applied with a brush or a piece of old sponge.

HOW TO USE "THE GEM" LIBRARY SCORING-CHART.

The scoring-chart printed below has been specially designed for use with our Free Game—"The Race to the Tuckshop"—to obviate the use of dice or of a tictotum.

Armed with a pencil, penholder, or similar instrument, each player in turn, momentarily closing his eyes, or turning his head away from the chart, brings down the pencil haphazard upon the chart, counting as his score the number contained by the square in which the point of his pencil alights.

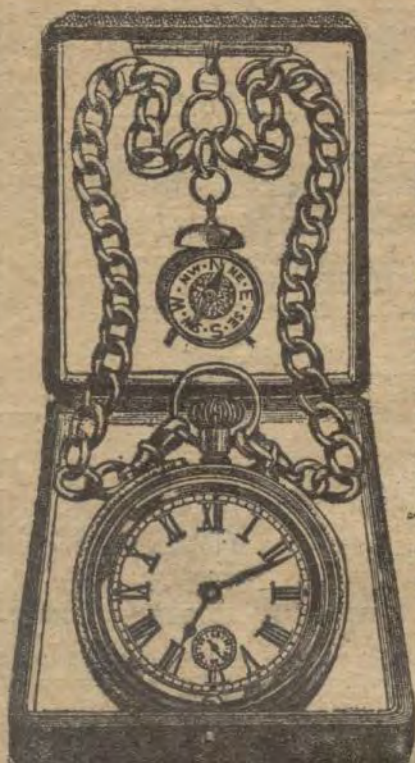
YOUR EDITOR.

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3	1	2	3	5	2	3	4	1	2	1	2	5	3	1	6	3	1	2	1	3	5	6	1	1	2
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4	1	2	3	5	2	2	3	2	6	4	3	2	1	2	2	4	2	5	6	2	6	4	2	2	4
3	2	1	5	2	4	3	1	3	5	1	5	3	1	1	5	1	2	4	1	3	2	5	2	6	2

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 302.

THIS SCORING CHART IS GIVEN IN CONNECTION WITH THIS WEEK'S GAME ON COVER PAGES II. & III.

FREE FOR SELLING 12 BEAUTIFUL XMAS CARDS AT 1d. EACH. SEND NO MONEY.



As an advertisement we give every reader of this paper a splendid present absolutely **FREE** simply for selling **12** Cards at **1d.** each. (Gold-mounted, Embossed Folders, Glossy, etc.) Our up-to-date Prize List contains hundreds of different kinds of free gifts for everyone, including **Ladies' and Gents' Gold and Silver Watches, Ostrich Feathers, Cycles, Telescopes, Chains, Rings, Accordeons, Cinemas, Gramophones, Air Guns, Engines, Toys, etc., etc.** All you need do is to send us your name and address on Coupon below (a postcard will do) and we will send you a selection of Lovely cards to sell or use at 1d. each. When sold send the money obtained and we will immediately forward gift chosen according to the Grand List we send you. **Start Early.** Fill in Coupon or send a postcard now to—



THE ROYAL CARD CO.
(Dept. 5), KEW, LONDON.

Foreign and Colonial Applications invited.



FILL IN THIS COUPON.
ROYAL CARD CO. (Dept. 5), KEW, LONDON.

DEAR SIR,—Please send me a Selection of Xmas and New Year Cards and latest List of Free Gifts as mentioned above.

Name.....

Address.....

TO THE TUCKSHOP!

NOTE!
FOR COMPLETION OF
THIS GAME
see cover page 11



[Copyright.

HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED.

1. Any number up to six can join in the game of "The Race to the Ticketshop."

2. Each player must take a character by using one of the six discs and, starting at No. 1, must aim at getting to No. 60 before any one of his opponents.

3. Players are confined to one move at a time—the moves being taken with the chart as given with instructions on page 47 of this issue of "The New" Library.

4. To win, a player must get the exact number to place him on No. 60. If he gets more than the exact number required, he remains stationary until his next turn.

FOR HOW TO PREPARE THE GAME see page II of cover.



PAIN BROTHERS' XMAS PARCEL 1/3

POST FREE

PAIN BROS'.
XMAS PARCEL,
THE 1913

"BIG-
VALUE
PARCEL."



1/3
FREE
GIFTS
IN EVERY
PARCEL.

13 FREE GIFTS

of lovely Xmas Cards (all 25 are Booklets), & will be sent by return, post free, on Approval, for 1/3 Postal Order, or 1/4 in Stamps. Satisfaction or Money Back. Don't miss this Bargain! The "Biggest Value" on "Earth." Just fancy! All the following Art Treasures: Nos. 1 & 2. TWO REAL CELLULOID CARDS, ALONE WORTH REALLY HALF THE 1/3, both Beautiful Floral Designs. No. 3. Sparklingly Jewelled & Gold-mounted Masterpiece. No. 4. Charming View of Country Cottage, etc. No. 5. Quaint Old English Design. No. 6. Embossed Pantry Design. No. 7. Lovely Picture-Mounted Design. Nos. 8 to 11. Four Beautiful Floral Designs of charge 13 FREE GIFTS of Xmas Cards (making 25 Cards in all—the 1/3 alone being worth more than the small amount charged for the entire parcel & include Delightful Floral, Choice View, Superb Gold-mounted, Artistic Gold-embossed, etc. Designs.)

ALL 25 ARE GUARANTEED GOOD & HAVE reasonable greetings, mostly in gold, & well-chosen Verses or Quotations, also spaces for writing names. Several are the favourite Art-Parliament Cards, & all are different. There are cards for all tastes.

FREE ENVELOPES.—To save you trouble & expense, envelopes are included free, for all cards that will not go in envelopes of ordinary size. (FOR A FURTHER ASSORTMENT OF XMAS CARDS, write for Illustrated Catalogue, post free.)

IT'S YOURS FREE.

Yes, it's yours free for the asking—our NEW BARGAIN CATALOGUE (with PRETTY ART COLOURED CALENDAR for 1914—Boy & Banner Design), illustrating Thousands of the Biggest of "Big Bargains by Post," for Now, Xmas & After, from 6d. to 45 each. Reliable Watches from 2/6. Reliable Clocks from 2/6. Jewellery, Musical Instruments, including latest Improved Gramophones at Half-Prices, from 2/6. & Double-sided Reprods from 1/6. Plates, Cutlery, Domestic Articles, Novelties, Fancy Goods, Toys, Xmas Cards, Picture Post-cards, Albums, etc., etc. It also contains TESTIMONIALS & PRESS OPINIONS. Drop us a letter or post-card to-day for this GUIDE TO BARGAIN BUYING & we will send it by return, post free, to any address "On Earth." It will repay you a thousandfold. A few typical examples of our GREAT VALUE are here shown. We guarantee safe delivery (by return post) of all goods to your door, & take all risk—YOU RUN NO RISK.

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With all goods we supply we send A Signed Guarantee to Return Your Money in Full, if goods are not in every way satisfactory to you.

BARGAIN NP165. The "Brite-Lite" Powerful Electric Pocket Lamp, new, large & improved shape, imitation crocodile leather body, with nickel-plated ends & a large Powerful Bulb, gives 3,000 brilliant flashes. Guaranteed. Size 2 1/2 by 4 1/2 in. 10/6, postage 2d. extra. Worth 2/6. No fill batteries, 6d. each, post free.



BARGAIN NP87. Pretty "Bird & Ivy" Brooch. Length 1 1/2 in. Best silver, 1/2; silver with real gold mounts, 1/2; all gold, 4/6. (For a Further Assortment, write for Illustrated Catalogue, post free.)



BARGAIN NP177. The "Bright-Time" Half-Price Ladies' Watch. (GENTS' Keyless). Extra strong works, dust-proof cap & Bright Nickel-Silver Case. The cheapest reliable watch made. Priced by the house. Cash price, 2/6; only, post free. LADY'S Nickel-Silver "Bright-Time" Keyless Watch, cash price, 3/3; post free. Warranted Perfect Timekeepers. (For a Further Assortment, write for Illustrated Catalogue, post free.)

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BARGAIN NP112. Gent's strong Pinkish leather Purse (tan), has 6 safety pockets & 3 patent fasteners. Size 4 1/2 by 2 1/2 in. when closed. 1/4 post free. Worth 2/6. Will wear for years.

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'QUEEN'
OF
DOLLIES

(See description to left of illustration.)



BARGAIN NP148. Writing Case, made to stand up (as shown), dark green imitation crocodile leather, lined with Scotch paper. Envelopes, Postcards, Pen & Blotting Pad. Size 10 1/2 by 2 1/2 in. when closed. 1/3 post free. Worth 2/6.



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BARGAIN NP168. The "Astonishing" Five of Hearts Jewellery. In full-size articles, all Gold-plated (like Gold) & well-finished. Watch Chain, Medal, Pencil Case, Links & Studs, Tie Pin, Tie Clip, Safety Tie Pin & Expanding Ring. 1/4 post free. Wonderful value!

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