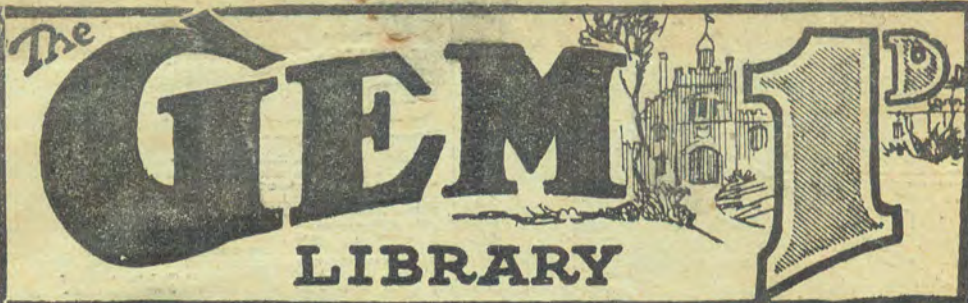


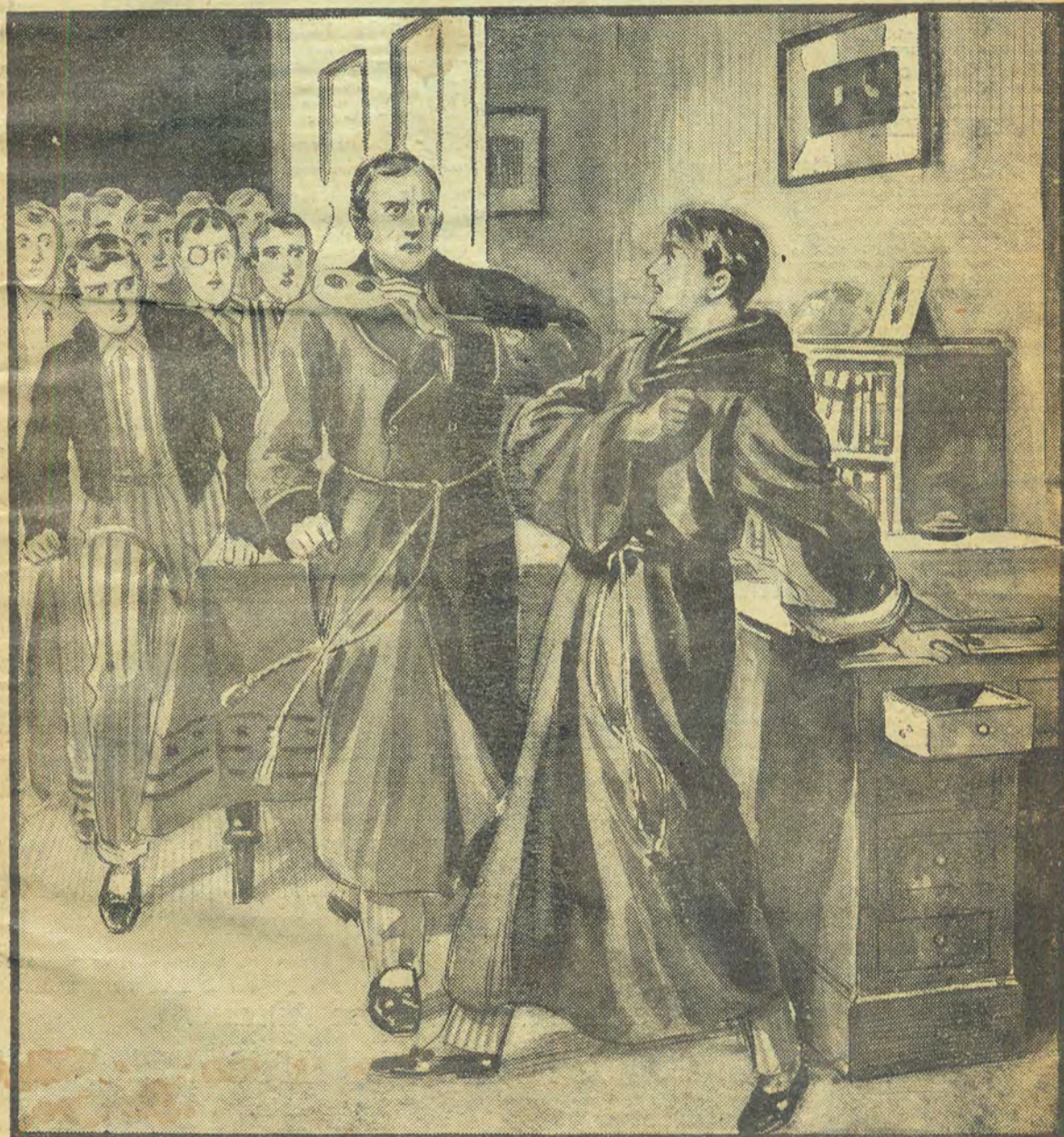
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By MARTIN CLIFFORD.



The other juniors slept on, unconscious of the apparition. Tom Merry sat up in bed, frozen, staring at it. Then suddenly from the mysterious figure came a low, thrilling voice. "Tremble!" (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 1.

Laying the Ghost.

"GRO-OH! It's cold!"

Tom Merry sat up in bed. It certainly was cold. Outside, the winter wind was whistling among the old elms in the quadrangle, and the leafless branches creaked and groaned. In the Shell dormitory in the School House, all was darkness and silence.

Faintly, through the high windows, came a glimmer of starlight.

Tom Merry pulled the blankets round him as he sat up in bed, and blinked sleepily up and down the dormitory. He was wondering what had awakened him.

"You awake, Lowther?" he called out softly.

No reply.

"You awake, Manners?"

A slight snore.

The other fellows were evidently fast asleep. Tom Merry gave another look round the shadowy dormitory. Something had awakened him, he knew that; and the thought came into his mind that it might mean a raid from the Fourth-Formers. The serenity of slumber in the junior dormitories

was sometimes disturbed in that manner. Tom Merry shivered a little as he gazed into the gloom—not only with cold. There had been talk in the junior common-room that evening of the ghost that was said to haunt the ancient buildings of St. Jim's, and it came back into Tom Merry's mind now. Of course, he did not believe in ghosts, but, in the shadowy dormitory, at the hour of midnight, somehow the thing seemed different. And he knew that he had heard something!

"M-my hat!" muttered Tom Merry suddenly.

A pale, phosphorescent light gleamed in the darkness of the dormitory.

Tom Merry stared at it transfixed.

Dimly, in the pale, ghostly glimmer, he made out a dark form, enveloped in a robe, such as the monks of old had worn when St. Jim's was a monastic establishment.

The hood was thrown back, and Tom Merry made out the face—dim, and pale, with wildly staring eyes.

For some moments the junior gazed at the awesome figure spell-bound.

Tom Merry was no coward, but the horrible-looking apparition, starting out of the darkness so suddenly, almost froze the blood in his veins for the moment.

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The silence was terrible.

The other juniors slept on, unconscious of the apparition—Tom Merry sat in bed, frozen, staring at it.

The right hand of the figure was raised, pointing at him with a solemn gesture. Tom shrank back a little, fearful of the contact of an icy finger. His eyes were almost starting from his head.

From the mysterious figure came a low, thrilling voice.

"Tremble!"

But Tom Merry did not tremble.

He gave a sudden gasp of relief.

For the voice that proceeded from the ghostly figure was accompanied by something that was certainly not ghostly; nothing more or less than a scent of onions. It was impossible, of course, to suppose that a ghost had been eating onions—but Tom Merry remembered that Levison of the Fourth had been frying onions for his supper in his study. The whole passage had known it, in fact; the knowledge had been unavoidable.

Tom Merry clenched his hands.

He knew now that it was not the ghost of St. Jim's that stood before him—but a junior playing a foolish and dangerous trick—a trick that might have had serious consequences if played upon a person with weak nerves.

Tom Merry did not move; but he groped softly behind him for his pillow.

His grasp closed upon it, and then, with a sudden bound, he leaped from the bed, straight at the awesome figure, smiting.

Biff! Biff! Biff!

"Yaroooh!" roared the ghost. "Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow! Ow!"

It was the voice of Levison of the Fourth. The practical joker was tangled in the monkish robe, and he could not escape. He rolled on the floor, and the pillow descended upon him again and again in mighty swipes.

Biff! Biff! Biff!

The whole dormitory was awake now. Levison's wild yells could be heard far and wide. Fellows started up in the beds on all sides, and there was a babel of voices.

"What's the matter?"

"Who is it?"

"Burglars!"

"What the dickens—"

"Great Scott!"

Monty Lowther jumped out of bed and struck a match. Kangaroo followed his example.

The light of the matches gleamed upon an unhappy practical joker rolling on the floor, tangled in a dark robe, and yelling under the mighty smites of the pillow.

"It's all right," panted Tom Merry. "It's the ghost—and I'm laying it!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Nothing like good swipes with a pillow to lay a ghost!" said Tom, belabouring the yelling and wriggling Fourth-Former with all the strength of his arms.

"Ow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Who is it?"

"The ghost, I tell you! He told me to tremble, and he breathed fried onions over me. I'm not trembling, though—I'm lathering him instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow, ow! Help! I'm Levison! Leave off!"

"Rats! You're not Levison—you're a ghost, and I'm going to lay you!" said Tom Merry. And the pillow descended again.

"Yaroooh!"

"Good egg!" chuckled Kangaroo. "If a fellow plays ghost, he must expect to be laid. But you'll lay him out for good if you keep on much longer."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Yaroooh! You know I'm not a ghost, you beast! I'm Levison of the Fourth! Ow—yah—oh!"

Swipe! Swipe! Swipe!

"I say, you'll have the prefects here if you keep on," grinned Lowther. "The silly ass is making enough row to wake the house."

"I just heard a door open," said Bernard Glyn.

Levison wriggled out of the robe at last, and picked himself up and fled. Tom Merry rushed after him, still swiping with the pillow, and a final swipe sent Levison whirling through the open door, and he bumped in the passage outside. He picked himself up and ran, and Tom Merry turned back into the dormitory panting.

"I don't think that cad will play ghost again in a hurry," he said breathlessly.

"Ha, ha! No!"

"He's left his rig behind him!" grinned Kangaroo. "That's the monk's robe out of the school museum—he must have boned it. And look at that!"

It was a cardboard mask, with glass eyes, and rubbed with phosphorus, which Levison had evidently worn over his face when he came into the dormitory. The pillow had swiped it off.

"Cave!" exclaimed Manners.

There was a gleam of light in the passage, and a sound of footsteps. The juniors dived back into bed at once, and assumed an innocent appearance of sleep. They knew it was Knox of the Sixth who was coming—they could already hear him grumbling to himself as he came. And Knox, the bully of the Sixth, was the most unpopular prefect in the School House—with a special "down" on Tom Merry & Co.

Knox strode into the doorway, and held up a lamp, and glared into the dormitory. His face was dark and frowning. The noise in the Shell dormitory had awakened him. It was Knox's turn to look after the Shell that week, and he had to come. He had brought a cane with him, with the firm intention of indemnifying himself for his trouble by making things warm for the juniors.

He sported as he saw the row of quiet faces, with closed eyes, on the white pillows. The Shell fellows seemed to be sleeping the sleep of the just.

"Don't pretend to be asleep, you young sweeps!" said Knox angrily. "Who's been making that fearful row?"

No reply—only a sound of steady breathing—varied by a slight snore from Monty Lowther. Knox strode in scowling. He caught his feet in the monkish robe on the floor, and stumbled. Tom Merry had kicked the cardboard mask under a bed, but there was no time to conceal the robe. Knox gritted his teeth as he nearly fell.

"Who brought this here?" he exclaimed.

Silence.

"You young rotters! Do you think I believe you're asleep?" howled the prefect. "Tom Merry, I suppose you're at the bottom of this! Do you hear me?"

Apparently Tom Merry did not hear, for he breathed on gently, his eyes closed, and a gentle smile on his face. Knox glared, and raised the cane in his right hand, and brought it down with a sounding thwack across the shoulders of the captain of the Shell.

"Yaroooh! Oh, crumbs! Yah!"

Tom Merry woke up then!

CHAPTER 2.

A Blow in the Dark.

"YAROOH! Chuckit! Ow!"

"Oh, you're awake now, are you?" grinned Knox. Tom Merry sat up in bed and glared at the prefect.

"You rotter!" he roared. "Ow! You beastly bully! Yow!"

Knox chuckled.

"I want to know what the row was about here," he said. "What's this rag on the floor? That's been taken from the school museum? Has one of you young rascals been playing ghost—what?"

"No, hang you!"

"Then what was the row?"

"A silly ass came here playing ghost, and I swiped him with my pillow," said Tom Merry. "and if you touch me with that cane again, Knox, I'll swipe you, prefect or not prefect."

"Who was it?"

"Find out!"

That was not a very respectful reply to make to a prefect of the Sixth, but Tom Merry's shoulders were smarting with the lash of the cane, and he was reckless. Knox scowled, and the cane rose in the air again.

"Do you want some more?" he demanded.

G

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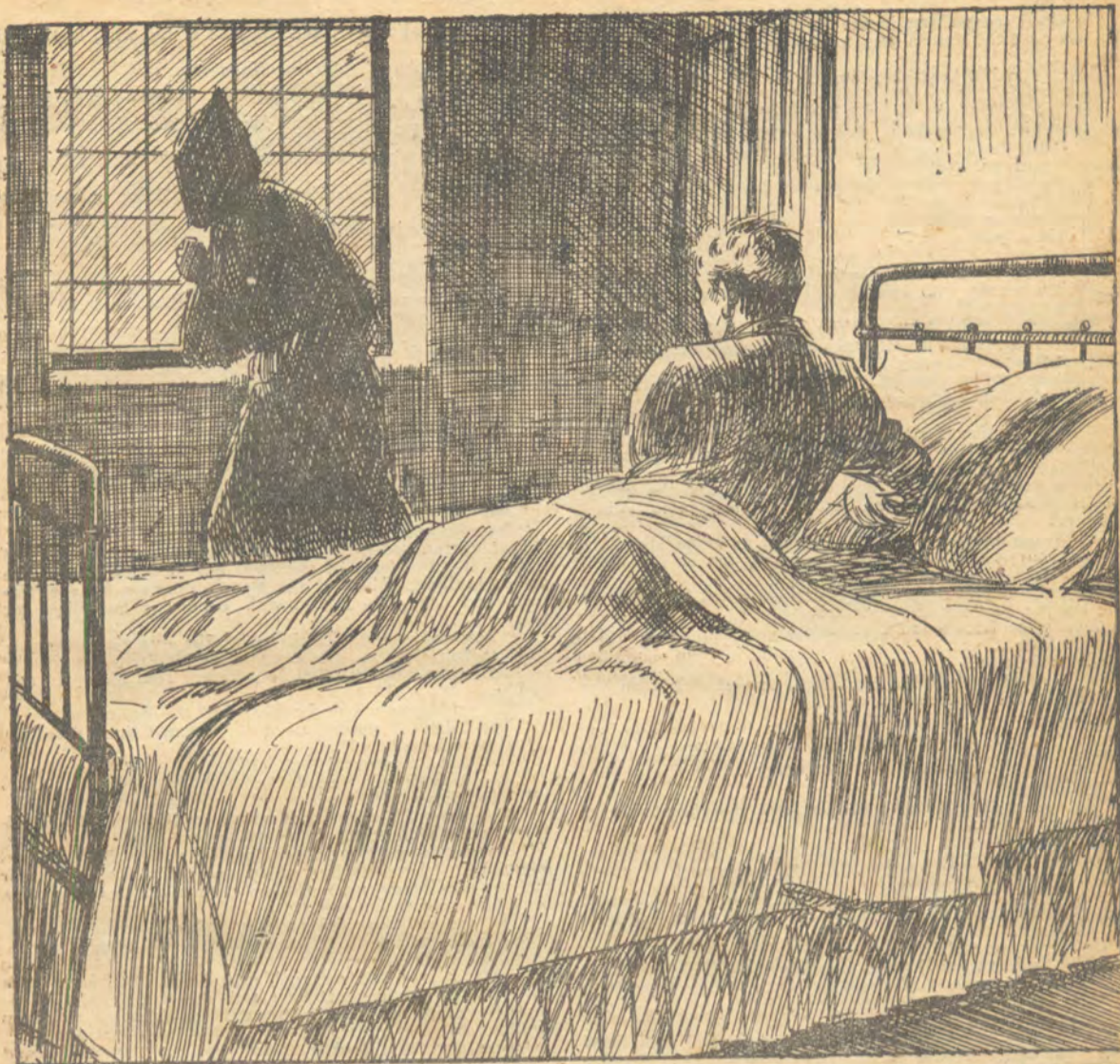
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A cold thrill passed through Tom Merry as he sat quite still, huddled up in the bedclothes, scarcely breathing. The figure was advancing slowly and silently towards his bed—with no sound save the slight rustle made by the old monkish robe. (See Chapter 12.)

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed dangerously.

"Keep that cane away," he said. "You'll be sorry for it if you touch me again!"

He grasped his pillow, and Monty Lowther and Manners and Kangaroo did the same. Glyn and Vavasour followed their example. The juniors were quite ready to turn out and pile on the bully of the Sixth, at a word from Tom Merry, and risk the consequences. Knox realised it, and he lowered the cane again. Any punishment administered to the Shell fellows afterwards would not compensate him for being ragged and run out of the dormitory by a crowd of angry fellows.

"You'll take a hundred lines for impertinence," said Knox. "I'll take this robe away with me to be returned to the museum, and report the matter to your Form-master. And if there's any more row in this dormitory, I'll send Mr. Linton up to see you."

And Knox retired, taking the lamp with him. Tom Merry rubbed his shoulders ruefully.

"Hurt?" inquired Manners sympathetically, as Tom growled with pain.

"Ow! No—it was nice!" groaned Tom Merry. "I'm only doing this for fun! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Levison ought to be ragged baldheaded for playing such a rotten trick," said Monty Lowther. "A chap with weak nerves might have been frightened into a fit. I think Levison ought to have a lesson."

"Well, I swiped him pretty well!" growled Tom Merry.

"Hallo, who's that getting up?" called out Glyn.

"I am," said Lowther cheerfully.

"What for?"

"I'm going to see Levison."

"You'll run into Knox!"

"Oh, blow Knox! One good turn deserves another, and I'm going to see how Levison likes being woke up by a ghost," said Lowther. "What's sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander. I'll give him a turn."

And Monty Lowther chuckled and quitted the dormitory.

It was pitchy dark in the passage outside. Knox had gone back to his room, and his light was out; and the School House was plunged into darkness and silence.

Lowther made his way cautiously along on tiptoe in the direction of the Fourth Form dormitory.

Suddenly he paused.

He was close to the head of the stairs, when from the darkness and silence below he heard a faint sound.

Lowther drew a quick, deep breath, and stopped, peering down into the darkness of the great staircase.

Someone was there!

"Levison!" muttered Lowther. "He hasn't gone back to bed, the rotter. He's going to play some more tricks, I suppose. I'll give him tricks."

Making no sound in his socks, Lowther crept down the stairs, feeling his way in the darkness along the banisters.

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He could see nothing in the blackness, but he knew that he was near the unseen person who had moved in the darkness.

A low sound of breathing came to his ears, and he held his own breath.

He had reached the first landing, and he was close to the unseen lurker in the dark. But the sound of breathing suddenly stopped, and Lowther groped in vain for the fellow he knew was there.

"Levison, you rotter!" he muttered. "I know you're there. Where are you?"

There was no reply.

"Levison, you worm!"

Dead silence.

Lowther groped round in vain. But suddenly his hand came into contact with a form, and he made a grasp at it.

"I've got you!"

There was a quick gasp, and the form eluded him.

Lowther sprang after it, and collided with the wall, and staggered back with a cry.

"You rotter!" he howled. "Wait till I get a light!"

He fumbled in his pockets for a matchbox.

Scratch!

He heard a sharp, hissing breath, and even as the match scratched, a fist lashed out of the darkness, and caught him full between the eyes.

The match dropped unlighted to the floor, and the match-box followed it with a clatter, and Lowther staggered back.

Crash!

Before the dazed junior could think of guarding himself, a fearful blow caught him on the forehead, and he fell like a log.

One gasp of pain escaped him, and he rolled helplessly on the landing, and lay there—stunned!

There was a faint sound of retreating footsteps, but Lowther did not hear it.

Silence followed.

In the silence, Lowther lay silent, too—stretched on the landing in the darkness—insensible!

CHAPTER 3.

A Startling Discovery!

BOOM!

It was the stroke of one from the clock-tower of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry started out of the doze he had fallen into.

He had intended to remain awake till Lowther came back; but Lowther did not come, and Tom had dozed off.

But he was only half-asleep, and the boom of the hour of one made him wide-awake again. He sat up quickly in bed.

"Lowther!"

There was no reply.

"You fellows awake? Has Lowther come back?"

"Hallo!" murmured Manners sleepily. "What's that?"

"Has Monty come back?"

"Haven't heard him!"

"He's been gone more than half an hour," said Tom Merry uneasily. "He must have come back, surely. Lowther!"

But there was no answer, and Tom turned out of bed, and groped for Lowther's bed in the dark. It was empty. Tom uttered a startled exclamation.

"He's not here."

"Where on earth can he be?" exclaimed Manners, wide-awake now. "He can't have stayed all this time in the Fourth Form dorm."

"Perhaps they've caught him, and kept him there," suggested Kangaroo.

"I'm going to see," said Tom Merry, slipping on his clothes hurriedly in the dark. "He may have tumbled downstairs, for all we know. I wish he hadn't gone."

"I'm coming, too," said Manners quietly.

"They may be ragging him in the Fourth Form dorm," said Kangaroo. "I'll come along."

The three juniors dressed quickly. Tom Merry was feeling vaguely alarmed. Monty Lowther was not the kind of fellow to be so clumsy as to fall downstairs in the dark, but it might have happened. The three Shell fellows left the dormitory, and hurried down the gloomy passage.

The Fourth Form dormitory was dark and silent when they reached it. There was evidently no ragging going on there. Tom Merry opened the door and looked in. All was dark within, and there was no sound save the regular breathing

of the Fourth-Formers, and the wail of the wind in the old elms outside.

"He's not here," muttered Kangaroo.

"I'll ask Blake if he's been here."

Tom Merry struck a match. The light flickered in the Fourth Form dormitory, and Manners shook Jack Blake by the shoulder and awakened him.

Blake sat up and blinked at the three Shell fellows in sleepy astonishment.

"Hallo, what on earth's the matter? House on fire?" he demanded.

"No. Where's Lowther?"

"Lowther! Isn't he in bed?"

"No. He came here half an hour ago."

"That he jolly well didn't," said Blake promptly. "I should have heard him if he came here. What on earth makes you think he came here?"

"Are you sure he didn't?"

"Of course I am."

Tom Merry set his lips. It was pretty clear that something had happened to Monty Lowther now. The match went out.

"Bai Jove," said a voice from the darkness, the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the School House, "what are you Shell boundahs doin' heah? Is it a wag, you wottahs?"

"Lowther left the dorm, half an hour ago to come here, and he hasn't come back," said Tom.

"Bai Jove!"

"Something must have happened to him," said Manners.

Blake scrambled out of bed and found a candle-end and lighted it. The faces of the Shell fellows were pale in the flickering light. Most of the Fourth-Formers were awake now, and sitting up in bed with wondering and inquiring looks.

Levison was awake with the rest. His eyes gleamed spitefully at Tom Merry. He was still aching from the licking he had received in the Shell dormitory. Tom Merry turned to him.

"Do you know where Lowther is?" he demanded.

"No, I don't!" snarled Levison. "And I don't care!"

"Has he been here?"

"Not that I know of."

"You haven't seen him?"

"No, I haven't!"

"How should Levison know anything about him?" asked Herries of the Fourth.

"Levison came to our dorm, playing ghost," Tom Merry explained. "I swiped him with my pillow, and Knox heard the row and came up. Then Lowther left the dorm, to come here to give Levison a turn."

"Oh, did he?" sneered Levison. "Well, he hasn't been here. I dare say the silly ass has fallen downstairs. Serve him right if he has!"

"I say, this is jolly serious!" said Blake. "If Lowther's fallen downstairs he must have hurt himself, or he'd have come back, or called out, anyway. We'd better look for him."

"Yaas, wathah!" said D'Arcy.

"We're going to look for him," said Tom Merry.

"We'll come with you. I've got a bike lantern here. Wait a minute till I light it. We shall have to risk being spotted."

"Right-ho!"

Blake and Herries and Digby and D'Arcy hurriedly pulled on their trousers. There was a buzz of voices from bed to bed. Only Levison looked quite indifferent, evidently not caring in the least what might have happened to Monty Lowther.

The anxious juniors quitted the dormitory, the bike lantern gleaming in Blake's hand. They proceeded the whole length of the dormitory passage, but there was no sign of Monty Lowther there. They stopped at the head of the stairs, and the light of the lantern gleamed down. There was no sound from below.

"He can't have gone downstairs," said Tom Merry, in a low voice, "unless—"

"Unless he fell!" muttered Manners.

"Yes."

"Let's look!"

"Hark!" muttered Blake.

From the darkness of the stairs came a low sound that sent the blood chilling to their hearts.

It was a faint groan.

Tom Merry dashed down the stairs, Blake hurrying after him with the lantern. On the lower landing Tom Merry almost stumbled over a still form, half dressed, stretched there in the darkness. He uttered a cry.

"I've found him!"

"Bai Jove!"

Blake flashed the light upon the motionless form.

Monty Lowther lay before them. There was a black

ANSWERS

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bruise and a streak of red on his forehead. He was still partly unconscious, but he groaned again as the juniors gathered round with scared faces and stared down at him. Tom Merry knelt by his side.

"Lowther! Monty, old man!" he whispered huskily. Lowther's eyes opened wildly.

"The coward! He hit me in the dark!" he muttered.

"What! What did you say, Monty?"

Lowther groaned.

"Oh, my head! He must have had a stick or something! He hit me in the dark!"

Tom Merry's face set sternly.

"Who did, Monty?"

"Levison."

Lowther muttered the name, and then his eyes closed again. He was unconscious once more.

Tom Merry's eyes were burning.

"Let's get him to the dorm.," he said. "We can deal with Levison afterwards."

"Oh, the awful wottah!" muttered D'Arcy.

"The villain!" said Blake between his teeth. "Lowther must have spotted him before he got back to the dorm., and then—"

"That bruise couldn't have been made with a fist," said Kangaroo.

"Help me," said Tom Merry.

They raised the unconscious Shell fellow in their arms and carried him up the stairs and along the passage to the Shell dormitory.

There was a buzz of amazed voices as they came in.

"What's happened to Lowther?"

"Is he hurt?"

"Great Scott!"

"Poor old Monty!"

Monty Lowther was laid on his bed, and Tom Merry, his face white and set, bathed his forehead in cold water. Lowther's eyes opened again. He put his hand up to his head and groaned.

"I say, we'd better call somebody," said Blake uneasily. "Lowther's had a rotten, nasty knock. A doctor ought to see him."

Lowther made a gesture of dissent.

"No. Mum's the word," he muttered.

"But you're hurt, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I shall be all right soon. It's only a bruise."

"And it was Levison did it?" asked Digby.

"Yes."

"The rotter! He ought to be sacked from the school!" said Blake wrathfully. "I suppose you're sure it was Levison?"

"Whom else could it have been?" said Lowther. "I didn't see him in the dark, of course, but it must have been Levison. I had gone down after him, you see. I heard him on the stairs when I was going to your dorm."

"We'll make him smart for it!" said Blake between his teeth. "But I think this matter ought to be reported. The Housemaster ought to deal with it."

"No, no! No good sneaking, even about a cad like Levison! I'll settle with him to-morrow," muttered Lowther. "Leave it alone for to-night. Let it rest."

"But weally, Lowthah—"

"Cave!"

Knox, the prefect, strode into the dormitory. Mr. Linton, the master of the Shell, followed him in, his face dark and frowning. It was too late to extinguish the light. The juniors were fairly caught.

"There has been a disturbance here to-night already, sir," said Knox. "I think you had better deal with them."

"Quite so, Knox," said the Form-master. "Now what—"

The words died on Mr. Linton's lips as he caught sight of Monty Lowther's white face and the huge black bruise on his forehead, and the smear of blood where Tom Merry had been bathing his face. "Good heavens, Lowther, who did this? What does this mean?"

CHAPTER 4.

Mr. Linton Makes Inquiries.

MR. LINTON gazed at the injured junior in horror. There was a grim silence in the dormitory.

Monty Lowther had wished the matter to be kept from the knowledge of the masters, but it was evidently too late now.

The Shell master came quickly towards his bed.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "How did Lowther receive this injury?"

"My hat!" murmured Knox, as astonished as the Form-master. "This is pretty thick!"

"I got a knock, sir," faltered Lowther.

"You have been struck a heavy and brutal blow, Lowther," said Mr. Linton. "Who did this?"

"It—it was done in the dark, sir."

"In this dormitory?"

"N-no, sir."

"You were out of the dormitory?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing out of the dormitory in the middle of the night?"

There was no help for it. Tom Merry explained. Mr. Linton listened with a grave and stern brow.

"Then you were going to the Fourth Form dormitory to see Levison when this happened, Lowther?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it Levison who struck you down?"

"I—I couldn't see him in the dark, sir."

"But you think it was Levison?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"I will see Levison at once. You Shell boys may go to bed. The Fourth Form boys will follow me."

Mr. Linton strode from the dormitory, his dressing-gown rustling. The Fourth-Formers followed him in silence. There was a troubling time ahead for the cad of the Fourth, and they knew it, but they were not sorry for Levison. The fellow who had struck Monty Lowther down in the dark deserved to be flogged and expelled, and they would be glad to see him go.

Mr. Linton rustled into the Fourth Form dormitory and turned on the electric light. All the fellows there were awake.

"Levison!" said the master of the Shell sternly.

Levison looked at him.

"You played ghost in the Shell dormitory to-night?"

"I suppose they've sneaked about me!" said Levison bitterly. "Yes, I did."

"And when Lowther followed you here, you struck him down on the stairs?"

Levison looked astonished. If he was not really surprised, his acting was very clever.

"I, sir! Certainly not! I didn't know Lowther had followed me."

Mr. Linton looked at him hard.

"Where did you go when you left the Shell-room, Levison?"

"I came back here, sir."

"You came back directly?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not meet Lowther on the lower landing?"

"I did not go downstairs at all."

"Was anyone awake here when you came in?"

"I don't think so, sir. I came in very quietly."

Mr. Linton looked round at the scared and startled faces of the Fourth-Formers.

"Did any boy here hear Levison when he came in?" he asked.

"I 'eard him, sir," said Harry Hammond, the Cockney schoolboy—the new boy at St. Jim's.

"Very good! When was it?"

"Just arter the row, sir," said Hammond. "I 'eard that, too—a row in the Shell dormitory! I 'eard Levison come back just arter."

"That proves what I say, sir," said Levison, with a breath of relief. "Hammond heard me come in, you see."

"You are quite sure, Hammond?" asked Mr. Linton, with a quick look at the Cockney schoolboy. "You are not saying this to shield Levison?"

Hammond grinned. He was on the worst possible terms with Levison, and all the Form knew it.

"No, sir. Levison ain't no friend of mine."

"Did you leave the dormitory again, Levison?"

"No, sir."

"Did you remain awake, Hammond?"

"No, sir. I dropped to sleep just arter I 'eard Levison come back."

"Then he might have left the dormitory again without your knowing it?"

"E might, sir," admitted Hammond.

"Was any other boy here awake?"

There was no reply.

"Someone," said Mr. Linton sternly, "met Lowther on the lower landing, and struck him a brutal blow! The suspicion is against you, Levison!"

"I—I didn't do it, sir! I didn't know Lowther had left his dormitory!" stammered Levison. "How could I know? Perhaps he fell in the dark and knocked his head, and thought somebody hit him."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Linton sharply. "However, I shall investigate! You boys may go to bed now, and mind there is no further disturbance to-night!"

Blake & Co. turned in.

Mr. Linton put out the light and left the dormitory.

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carrying his lamp, and followed by Knox. They descended to the next floor below, and Mr. Linton opened the door of the Fifth Form dormitory. All was dark and silent there.

Cutts, of the Fifth, woke up as the light gleamed in.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "What's the row?"

"Wake up!" exclaimed Mr. Linton, and his sharp voice woke up all the Fifth quickly enough. "I want to know if any boy here has been outside this dormitory since lights out?"

"Not that I know of, sir," said Cutts.

"I haven't heard anything, sir," said Pryce.

And the rest of the Fifth said the same.

Mr. Linton looked sharply round the dormitory, in search of some sign of the fellows having been out of bed, but there was nothing unusual to be seen.

"Very well," he said. "I am sorry to have disturbed you. Good-night!"

He left the dormitory with Knox, without any explanation of his surprising nocturnal visit. The Form-master and the prefect visited each of the dormitories in the School House in turn. But there was nothing to be discovered. So far as could be ascertained, no member of the Third or the Second had been out of bed.

"It must have been Levison!" Mr. Linton exclaimed, when his round of visits was over. "However, we shall see. The matter will be investigated by the Housemaster to-morrow. There is nothing to do but to return to bed now."

"Very well, sir," said Knox.

And the prefect and the master parted.

In the School House dormitories there was a buzz of excited talk. Most of all excitement reigned in the Fourth Form dormitory. There, the fellows had little doubt that it was Levison who had been on the landing when Lowther received that cowardly blow from an unseen hand.

Levison protested that he knew nothing about it, but the untruthfulness of the cad of the Fourth was well known. No one dreamed of placing any reliance on any statement that he might make, if it was to his interest to lie.

"It was Levison, of course!" said Blake. "Hammond was half-asleep, and he didn't notice the exact minute when Levison came in, that's all."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I think I did, though," said Hammond honestly. "I don't like Levison, but truth's truth, you know! He's played me rotten tricks, and he might have played this 'ere on Lowther, but he came back jest when I said."

"How did you come to be awake at all?" demanded Digby.

"I woke up and 'eard him moving," said Hammond. "I 'eard him go out, and wondered where he was goin'. That's all. I was thinkin' about it, and wonderin' whether he had gone out of bounds, when I 'eard him come back. Then I went off to sleep."

"Then Levison left the dorm. again, and laid for Lowther in the dark," said Blake.

"How could I, when I didn't know Lowther had come out of bed at all, you fool?" Levison demanded savagely.

"Well, if you didn't do it, intirely, who did?" Reilly wanted to know.

"How should I know? Some other chap was out of his dorm., and he hit Lowther, I suppose."

"Even if another chap was out of his dorm., and ran into Lowther in the dark, that was no reason why he should hit him like that," said Blake.

"Wathah not!"

"Well, I didn't do it, and I don't know who did!"

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"Wubbish!"

"You can tell that yarn to Mr. Railton in the morning!" said Blake savagely. "You'll get the boot over this, and serve you jolly well right!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison growled, and settled himself down to sleep. The talk in the dormitory died away, and the juniors slumbered. But in the Shell dormitory, Monty Lowther did not sleep. His head was aching terribly, and slumber refused to visit his eyes. When the pale winter dawn glimmered in at the windows Lowther was still awake, and he was very white and haggard.

CHAPTER 5.

Condemned on Suspicion.

THAT morning there was great excitement in the School House at St. Jim's.

The story of what had happened in the night was all over the House, and soon all over the school.

New House fellows came over in a crowd to see Lowther, and to ask about what had happened.

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And among all the fellows, there was only one opinion—Levison had done it.

No one else could be supposed to have had a motive for striking down Monty Lowther in that savage way. Levison had fled from the Shell dormitory in a fury, after the licking he had received there—Lowther had run into him in the dark—and Levison had struck him down. The fellows had no doubt about it.

Mr. Linton had reported the matter to Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, and after breakfast all the fellows concerned were called into the Housemaster's study and questioned.

Levison asserted his innocence, but the keen grey eyes of the Housemaster rested upon him very doubtfully.

There was only one point in Levison's favour, and that was the evidence of the Cockney schoolboy that he had come back to bed directly after the row in the Shell dormitory.

Hammond was certain on that point.

If that evidence had come from Mellish, of the Fourth, it would not have been worth much, for the two cads of the Fourth were pals in rascality. But Hammond could not be suspected of stretching the truth in Levison's favour. Levison was his enemy, and had been so from the first day he came to St. Jim's.

Hammond, the son of a millionaire newly rich, had brought with him to St. Jim's certain manners and customs from Bethnal Green, his native place, which set the more snobbish of the boys against him, and Levison had been down on him most of all.

Levison had by a cunning scheme almost succeeded in breaking off the friendship between Hammond and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's. There was no possibility that Hammond, therefore, was shielding Levison; indeed, Levison was openly astonished that Hammond spoke up for him at all, considering the terms they were on.

But that one point in Levison's favour told very strongly. It made it clear that if he was the fellow who had attacked Lowther, he must have left the Fourth Form dormitory a second time for the purpose. And how did he know that Lowther was out of bed at all?

But for Hammond's evidence, Levison would have been condemned out of hand, and Mr. Railton told him so.

"As it is," said the Housemaster sternly, "I must give you the benefit of the doubt, so far, Levison. Hammond appears to be certain of the time you returned to bed."

"Quite certain, sir," said Hammond.

"The matter, therefore, must remain in abeyance while further investigation is made," said Mr. Railton.

And with that he dismissed the juniors.

So the matter ended for the time.

That is, it ended so far as the Housemaster was concerned. But the juniors had quite made up their minds about it.

Mr. Railton, quite aware of the state of their feelings, and of the probable outcome, had strictly forbidden any ragings of the cad of the Fourth, and for that reason alone Levison was not touched.

But the juniors made their opinion of him quite plain.

He was avoided like one plague-stricken.

Even Mellish avoided him.

Not a word was said to him by any fellows in the House, and Levison found himself sent to Coventry by common consent.

It was in vain that he furiously protested his innocence.

No one believed him, and no one would listen to him, or answer his frantic asseverations.

He was cut by the House.

Curiously enough, the one person in the School House who did not feel quite sure was the Cockney schoolboy, whom Levison had injured beyond forgiveness.

"It's all wubbish, Hammond, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, when the Cockney junior hinted of a possible doubt. "If it wasn't Levison, who was it?"

Hammond shook his head.

"That beats me!" he confessed.

"Do you think any othah chap in the House is cad enough to do such a thing, deah boy?" said D'Arcy. "Besides, why should he?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Levison is a wottah all throught! You wemembah only a few days ago he forged a lettah in my hand to make you quawwel with me—"

"Oh, I know what a blighter he is," agreed Hammond. "Only w'y should he come back to the dorm., and then go out again, to lay for Lowther?"

"I weally don't know why he did it, Hammond, but I know he did do it," said Arthur Augustus. "I haven't the slightest doubt of it, and that settles it."

"I suppose it does," agreed Hammond.

In the Form-room that morning Levison received dark looks on all sides, and the fellows left him a clear space on

either side of him. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, looked at him in a peculiar way, and was very dry in his manner when he addressed him. Little Mr. Lathom shared the common opinion, and he was shocked beyond words at what had happened. Mr. Lathom would have been far from dissatisfied if Levison had been expelled from the school. Levison was not a credit to the Fourth or to St. Jim's.

When the Fourth came out after morning lessons Levison came up to Hammond. He was looking very pale and troubled. More than once Levison had found out that the way of the transgressor was hard. He realised it more than ever now. If he had been a boy of an honourable character his word might have been taken. But no one who knew him would have taken his word for a moment.

"I say, Hammond," he began.

"'Allo!" said Hammond shortly.

"It was jolly good of you to speak up for me as you did," said Levison awkwardly. "I don't know why you did it."

"I spoke up 'cause wot I said was true," said Hammond.

"Yes, yes, of course. But—but are you sure you went to sleep again after I'd come back to bed?"

Hammond stared at him.

"Course I'm sure," he said.

"If you hadn't gone to sleep, you'd be able to bear witness that I never left the dorm. again after coming back," Levison hinted. "Look here, Hammond, I stayed in bed, honour bright. I don't know who hit Lowther. Couldn't you—"

He paused.

Hammond's eyes glittered.

"Couldn't I—what?" he demanded.

"Couldn't you remember that—that you didn't quite go to sleep—"

"Couldn't I tell blooming lies for you, you mean?" broke out Hammond. "No, I couldn't, Master Levison. And I think you did it, too, and I don't want to speak to you. Go and eat coke."

And Hammond swung away.

"Pwax don't speak to that wottah, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, joining Hammond. "The whole House has decided to leave the beast severely alone. Come on; we've got time befoah dinner to twot down to Mr. Wiggs's about your new waistcoat."

"Right-o!" said Hammond cheerily. "I'll get the tin to pay his little bill."

And the two juniors went up to Hammond's study. Hammond shared No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage with Bates and Smith minor. Bates and Smith minor did not love the Cockney schoolboy, but they were getting used to him, and Hammond was finding life in Study No. 5 quite tolerable now. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's friendship had done much for him. And Arthur Augustus had lately bestowed upon him the very last mark of friendship by giving him an introduction to his tailor. Further than that friendship could not go.

Smith minor and Bates were both in the study, writing lines, when Arthur Augustus and his Cockney chum came in. Hammond crossed to his desk in the corner, a handsome mahogany desk, which was much envied by some of the fellows. The Cockney schoolboy, though he dropped his h's with unflinching persistence, and spoke with a Cockney twang that horrified some of the St. Jim's fellows, had all the advantages that unlimited pocket-money could purchase. He frequently had sums of money in his possession that made even rich fellows open their eyes, his "whack," as he described it, in the pouring profits of Hammond's High-class Hats, all one price—three-and-nine.

Hammond took a key from his watchchain, and slid it into the keyhole of a drawer inside the desk, and then uttered an exclamation.

"'Allo! Wot's the matter 'ere?"

"What's up, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy.

"Somethin's wrong with the lock; the key won't go in."

Hammond bent over the desk with a puzzled look. Then he glanced round at Smith minor and Bates.

"You blokes been playing a game with this 'ere desk?" he asked.

"Oh, blow your desk!" said Smith minor, who was busy with a hundred lines from "Arma virumque cano" onwards.

"Well, somebody's been busting the lock, some'ow," said Hammond indignantly. "I don't like 'tricks bein' played on my desk. I've got my money in that there drawer, and now I can't git at it."

"Burglars, perhaps," grinned Bates. "You shouldn't have so many giddy banknotes about you. This is what comes of selling so many High-class Hats at three-and-nine."

"Oh, rats; it ain't burglars! It's a rotten silly joke," said Hammond. "I can't open the drawer. The key won't go in."

"Pwax let me twy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"'Ere you are."

Hammond handed him the key, and D'Arcy essayed to insert it in the lock of the money-drawer. But it would not go in. The keyhole was jammed. The swell of St. Jim's shook his head.

"One of Levison's wotten twicks, powwaps," he said. "Somebody has been forcin' somethin' into the keyhole, deah boy. You will have to get a locksmith to open it."

"Then I shan't be able to pay Mr. Wiggs," growled Hammond.

"Nevah mind. I can lend you thwee-pound-ten. Come along!"

"Orlright."

And D'Arcy and his chum left the study, leaving the money-drawer still unopened.

CHAPTER 6.

A Precious Pair!

CUTTS of the Fifth was lounging in the doorway of the School House when Hammond and D'Arcy came back from their walk to Rylecombe. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was looking a little flustered. There was deep snow in the fields along the lane, and the two juniors had fallen in with some of the Grammar School fellows, with the result that D'Arcy's beautiful silk topper had been made a target for snowballs. Arthur Augustus hurried up to Study No. 6 to brush his topper, and Hammond lingered in the hall, whistling. Cutts of the Fifth gave them a friendly nod.

Hammond stared at him coolly.

He did not like Gerald Cutts, and he made no secret of it. He had been very much taken with the dandy of the Fifth when he first came to St. Jim's, but he had soon learned too much about Cutts to like him.

"I've been looking for you, Hammond," said the Fifth-Former genially.

"'Ave you?" said Hammond.

"Yes; I want to speak to you."

"Wot is it now? Another game of nap in your study, me to 'and back the money if I win, or pitch-and-toss, 'cads you win and tails I lose?" asked Hammond sarcastically. "Or is it a little game of billiards for a quid, and a row to foller if I beat you?"

Cutts flushed a little. He had devoted quite a considerable amount of time and trouble to relieving the millionaire hatter's son of some of his superfluous wealth, without succeeding in relieving him of any of it. The Cockney was as sharp as a needle, and Gerald Cutts, black sheep and sharper as he was, had found him more than his match.

But Cutts controlled his desire to take the Cockney schoolboy by the ear, and replied quite pleasantly:

"I want a little jaw with you, about something that will interest you. Will you drop into my study after dinner?"

"Thanks, no!"

"You don't get asked into a Fifth Form study every day, Hammond," said Cutts, with an effort to keep good-tempered.

"No, I don't; never, in fact, unless somebody wants to git somethin' out of me," replied Hammond calmly. "Wot do you want this time?"

"I don't want anything; but I can put you on to something."

"A dead cert for the Welsher Handicap?" grinned Hammond. "Or a dead sure snip for the Mugcatchers' Plate?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Well, I ain't coming," said Hammond. "Thank you all the same, but I ain't comin'. Master D'Arcy don't like me talkin' to you."

"You can bring D'Arcy with you if you like," said Cutts.

"Oh, is it somethin' you wouldn't mind 'im knowin'?"

"Yes, certainly. Now, be a good chap, and come."

Hammond hesitated a moment, and then nodded.

"Orlright! But I'm goin' to bring Master D'Arcy. That's understood."

"All serene!" said Cutts, and he nodded and strolled away.

When the juniors came out of the School House dining-room, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was making for the quadrangle, when Hammond stopped him.

"I want you to come with me," he said.

"Wight-ho! Where, deah boy?"

"Cutts's study."

Arthur Augustus's aristocratic face became very grave at once. He jammed his famous monocle into his eye, and regarded Hammond severely.

"Weally, Hammond, I am wathah surprised at you. You know that wottah Cutts isn't the wight kind of person to meet!"

"Yes, I knowed that; but he wants us to come for somethin'. All serene if you come with me, you know," said Hammond.

"Yaas, I suppose I shall be able to look aftah you all

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wight," said D'Arcy innocently. D'Arcy had a fatherly way of looking after his chums. "But Cutts isn't weally a respectable chap, you know. He smokes and gambles, and he is suspected of dwinkin'. Howevah, if you've said you'll go, we'll go, deah boy!"

And they went.

Cutts and Prye of the Fifth were in the study when they arrived there. Cutts was looking as debonair as usual, but Prye had a pale and harassed face. Prye of the Fifth was Cutts's companion in most of his shady adventures; but he did not have the same luck as Cutts. Cutts's luck was phenomenal. He very seldom came a cropper, and when he did, he had a wonderful gift for wriggling out of a scrape—generally at the expense of somebody else. Cutts's people were rich, and he could afford to go the pace, as he called it; but with Prye it was different. Prye did not have a large allowance, and he found it very difficult to keep up to the pace set by his dashing chum.

Like most foolish fellows who take to gambling, he was always hoping for a stroke of luck that would set him fairly upon his feet; but that stroke of luck never seemed to come. Every fresh plunge, instead, seemed to land him deeper in difficulties.

And Prye had not Cutts's iron nerve. Gerald Cutts would have been cool and smiling and debonair if he had been going to execution; but when Prye was in trouble, he showed it only too plainly. Prye's look was quite enough to show fellows who knew him that the "gee-gees" had been more unreliable than ever of late.

"Come in, you chaps!" said Cutts agreeably; and the chaps came in.

Cutts could be very agreeable when he liked, and notice from the dandy of the Fifth was very flattering to mere Fourth-Formers. In spite of his prejudice against Cutts, Arthur Augustus felt his severity melt a little.

"Shut the door, Prye," said Cutts. "Now, I'm glad you chaps have come. I can put you on to a good thing—something you oughtn't to miss!"

"If it's anythin' to do with waces, we don't want to have anythin' to do with it!" said Arthur Augustus.

"No fear!" said Hammond.

"Races!" said Cutts, raising his eyebrows in surprise. "Surely you don't think I should propose anything of the kind?"

"Oh!"

"It's a matter of football," said Cutts.

"Oh," said D'Arcy again, "that's all wight! If you want us to back you up in a match, we're willin'. I should have no objection to playin' for the Fifth-Form team."

"Same 'ere," said Hammond.

Cutts could not help grinning at the idea of asking Fourth-Formers to play in the Fifth-Form eleven.

"Ahem! Lefevre's captain of the Fifth, and those matters rest with him," he said. "It isn't exactly that."

"You want our advice—eh?" asked D'Arcy. "Well, pile in, deah boy!"

"Ahem!"

"If you are in any difficulties in football mattahs, Cutts, you can't do better than ask me. I have always regarded myself as a fellow of tact and judgment."

"The fact is," said Cutts, "it's a little sweep!"

"A little sweep?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Bai Jove! Do you mean a chimney-sweep?" asked Arthur Augustus, in astonishment.

Cutts laughed.

"No; a sweepstake, you know."

D'Arcy was on his guard at once.

"That's gamblin'," he said.

"Not at all—nothing of the kind. It's a sort of lottery, you know, like those they run in the competition papers," Cutts explained. "You simply take tickets, and—"

"And the winnin' ticket gets the prize," said Prye.

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"It's gamblin'," he replied.

"Course it is," said Hammond.

"You're the only juniors we're letting into it," said Cutts, his eyes beginning to gleam. "You ought to be glad to get into a Fifth-Form sweep!"

"Wats!"

"Now, look here—" said Cutts persuasively.

"Wubbish!"

"You cheeky cub!" exclaimed Cutts, losing his temper at last.

"You beastly, gamblin' wascal!" retorted D'Arcy undauntedly. "Come on, Hammond! I knew it was some-thing of the sort. I wese to remain a moment longah in the company of that wank outsideah!"

"Ear, ear!" said Hammond, who always followed his noble chum's lead with lamblike docility. "Kim on!"

"So you say no?" exclaimed Cutts.

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"Yaas, wathah!"

"Wot-o!" said Hammond.

Cutts made an angry step towards them.

"You cheeky cads—"

"You wottah!"

"I've a jolly good mind—"

"You have a jolly bad mind, in my opinion," said Arthur Augustus; "and a jolly bad chawacter, too; you wottah!"

This was too much for Cutts. He made a spring at the juniors; and Prye, equally exasperated, followed him up. D'Arcy and Hammond hit out manfully; but they were no match for the two big seniors, and there were two sudden and heavy bumps in the passage, and then Cutts's study door slammed.

"Ow! Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, as he sat up on the floor. "Ow! Ow!"

"Crikey!" murmured Hammond.

D'Arcy jumped up.

"Come on, deah boy; we'll wush in and give them a feahful thwashin'—"

Hammond caught him by the arm.

"We can't!" he grinned. "We should only get chucked out again. Come on, D'Arcy; let's get out of this!"

"But weally—"

"Kim on!" said Hammond.

And he succeeded in dragging his indignant chum away.

In Cutts's study the black sheep of the Fifth was gritting his teeth. Prye's face was gloomier than ever.

"Well, that's no go!" said Cutts savagely. "We might have managed young Hammond by himself, but D'Arcy was bound to cut up rusty, hang him!"

"I knew it wouldn't be any good!" grunted Prye. "That Bethnal Green cad was too deep for us all along!"

"It can't be helped."

"But what's going to be done?" said Prye, with a black look. "Look here, Cutts, I'm in awfully deep water! What's going to be done?"

Cutts shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't ask me. I'm not your banker, I suppose!"

"You helped to get me into this," said Prye gloomily.

"Without you, I don't suppose I should ever have betted on a race at all!"

Cutts sneered.

"Put it on me, of course," he said. "It's always the same, if a fellow has bad luck. If you'd made a stake, you'd be chippy enough!"

"It's a serious matter. I owe three times as much as I could pay, if I could get time—and I can't get time. Something's got to be done, Cutts, or I shall get the order of the boot from here!"

"Well, I can't do anything."

"Something's got to be done," repeated Prye doggedly.

"We're in this together, Cutts. If it all comes out, and I get sacked, you'll get it in the neck as well as me!"

"You'll mean that you'll give me away—what?"

"Why shouldn't I, if you won't help me?"

"I can't help you!" said Cutts savagely. "I've been hit as hard as you have. I've overrun my allowance, and borrowed money I can't pay till next term. I dare not ask my pater for any more; he would get suspicious at once, and write to the Head, asking how I spent so much money!"

"Your uncle—"

"My uncle's chucked me over. I did him for a big sum, and he found me out," said Cutts. "I've lost all I ever expected to get in his will. I tell you, I shall have all my work cut out to keep my head above water for the next few weeks. I've been piling it on—getting things from tradesmen, and pawning them to raise the money—and the shoppies are getting restless. I'm in as much danger as you are, for that matter!"

"Not so much," said Prye miserably. "What's going to be done? I can't face the sack. We've got to get money from somewhere!"

Cutts gave another impatient shrug of the shoulders. He had troubles enough of his own, without being bothered with Albert Prye's special difficulties.

"Something must be done!" Prye repeated. "I'm in debt on all sides, and the crash may come any day—any hour, almost. Something's got to be done!"

"Then you'd better go and do it," said Cutts. "As for rounding on me, that wouldn't do you any good. I'm as deep in the mud as you are in the mire; and you couldn't prove anything, anyway. If you're found out and sacked, and you accused me of being in the same boat, do you think your word would be taken against mine? You can put that out of your head, even if it would do you any good—which it wouldn't. Keep a stiff upper-lip, and things may come round!"

"They won't come round for me."

"Well, it's not my fault," said Cutts, with a yawn.

And Prye gave him a bitter look, and quitted the study.



The light of the matches gleamed upon the unhappy practical joker, rolling on the floor, tangled in a dark robe, and yelling under the mighty swipes of the pillow. "It's all right!" panted Tom Merry. "It's the ghost—and I'm laying it!" (See Chapter 1.)

CHAPTER 7. A Warning for Levison.

"W!" Monty Lowther made that remark for the fiftieth time that day, as the Terrible Three of the Shell sat down to the tea-table in their study.

He pressed his hand to the big bump on his forehead as he spoke lugubriously.

It was a big black bruise, showing up under the dark hair, and it was likely to be a long time before it disappeared. It had left Lowther with a bad headache, which had eased off a little by the evening, but was far from gone.

Mr. Linton had been very easy with Lowther in the Form-room that day. He was excused from work. He was, in fact, in no state to work. He was feeling, as he expressed it, utterly rotten.

Tom Merry and Manners looked sympathetic.

"It's beastly!" said Manners. "Levison ought to be sacked. There's no two ways about it. He ought to go."

"Or to be ragged!" said Tom.

"Well, he is getting it in the neck," said Lowther glumly. "He's cut by the House. That can't be pleasant for him."

"He ought to have something with boiling oil in it!" growled Manners. "He would have been sacked but for that ass Hammond."

"Well, Hammond was bound to say what he knew. It

was really decent of him to speak up for Levison, considering the way Levison has treated him."

"Ye-es. But we know it was Levison who biffed you, Monty."

"I suppose it was."

"It's a pity you didn't see him," said Tom Merry. "If you'd just managed to get a glimpse of the beast, it would have been all right."

"He hit me just as I was striking a match," said Lowther.

"Of course; he knew you'd recognise him in the light."

Lowther nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes. But why should he have minded if I saw him?" he asked.

"Why? Well, I—I don't know," said Tom Merry, rather taken aback by the question.

"Queer that he should have biffed me like that, really for nothing," said Lowther. "I was going to bump him, but that wasn't a reason for stunning me with a stick. Queer that he should have had a stick with him, too."

His chums stared at him.

"Don't you think it was Levison?" demanded Manners.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was. I don't see who else it could have been. Still, as I didn't actually see him, I can't swear to it. On the whole, I'm glad he hasn't been punished for it. I'd rather make quite sure first."

"Well, I feel sure enough," said Manners. "But after what Railton's said, we can't very well rag him."

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"What he's getting is rough enough, if he's innocent," said Tom Merry. "But he's only got himself to thank for it. If he wasn't such an Ananias, we could take his word."

"That's so."

"He won't play ghost again in a hurry, anyway," said Manners. "Hallo! What's that? Come in!"

Jack Blake, of the Fourth, entered the study, with some excitement in his face.

"What's the news?" yawned Manners.

"I've found something out."

"About what happened last night?" the Terrible Three inquired together eagerly.

Blake shook his head.

"No; about what's going to happen to-night, I fancy."

"Well, that sounds a bit mysterious," said Tom Merry. "Are you setting up as a giddy prophet?"

"Levison was playing ghost last night," said Blake, unheeding. "He had the old monk's robe that's kept in the school museum."

"Yes. Knox took it away from the dorm; Levison left it behind him."

"Well, it's gone again."

"What!"

"I've just been in the museum," said Blake quietly. "I wondered whether Levison might be up to his tricks again, and I looked for the old robe. It would be just like him to keep up the game, you know. Well, I looked in the cabinet where the robe is kept, and it isn't there. Knox put it back this morning, and it's gone again."

"Sure?"

"Yes; I looked carefully for it, and it's gone."

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"That means that that cad is up to his tricks again!" he said.

"Of course it does," said Blake. "He's been looking pretty blue all day over being sent to Coventry, and I suppose he thinks he'll give us a scare to-night to make it even. He must be a silly ass to think he can frighten us, now that we know who the ghost is; but my idea is to nip it in the bud. I'm fed-up with him, for one! I'm going to see him, and talk to him like a Dutch uncle. You fellows care to come along?"

"What-ho!"

"Come on, then!"

The Terrible Three promptly left their tea-table, and followed Blake down the passage. The news that Levison was up to his tricks again, after the harm he had already done, had an exasperating effect upon them. They marched into Levison's study with grim looks, prepared to call him to prompt account. But the cad of the Fourth was not there. His study-mates, Lumley-Lumley and Rook and Mellish, were having tea, but there was no sign of Levison in the study.

"Hallo!" said Lumley-Lumley. "What's the giddy trouble?"

"We're looking for Levison," said Tom Merry abruptly. "He's up to his tricks again. Do you know where he is?"

"We don't allow him in here, I guess!" said Lumley-Lumley. "We've agreed to boot him out whenever he comes here!"

"Good egg! But where is he?"

"I guess you'll find him with Cutts. I spotted him going to the Fifth Form passage. He's very thick with Cutts, of the Fifth."

"H'm!" said Blake.

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry. "We're not afraid of Cutts!"

"I'll call Dig and Herries, in case there's trouble," said Blake.

And six juniors made their way to Gerald Cutts's study in the Fifth Form passage.

It was not common for juniors to be on visiting terms with the Fifth, but Levison was an exception. Levison performed many little services for Cutts, such as smuggling cigarettes into the school, and taking messages to places where Cutts did not care to be seen if he could help it.

Tom Merry knocked at the door, and opened it. Cutts and Prye were there, having their tea, and Levison was with them.

Cutts gave the juniors a dark look. He was on the worst possible terms with Tom Merry & Co.

"What do you fags want?" he demanded.

"We want Levison."

"Well, Levison's having tea with me, so you can wait! Clear out!"

"We can't wait," said Tom Merry quietly. "What we've got to say to Levison can be said here, and it won't take long."

"If you want to be kicked out——" began Cutts.

"If you can kick out six of us, you're welcome to start!" said the captain of the Shell.

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Cutts looked at him as if he would eat him, but he decided, apparently, that he was not equal to the task of ejecting six sturdy juniors by force, for he did not rise.

"What do you want with me?" growled Levison. "I want to have nothing to do with you—hang you!"

"Same here!" said Blake. "But we've got to have a heart-to-heart talk with you! You played ghost last night, dressed up in the old monk's robe out of the school museum."

"That's an old story!"

"And you're planning to do the same to-night."

Levison stared at him.

"What's put that into your head?" he demanded.

"Isn't it true?" asked Tom Merry.

"No, it isn't!"

"Then what have you taken the monk's robe from the museum again for?"

"Rats! I haven't done anything of the sort!"

"What rot!" said Prye. "Why should Levison do anything of the kind? I expect the thing is in its place."

"I've looked," said Blake.

"Well, I haven't touched it," said Levison. "Mr. Railton told me that if I touched it again he'd cape me, and I haven't been near it."

"It's gone, I tell you!" said Blake.

"Well, I can't help it—I haven't touched it!"

"And that cardboard mask you wore last night," said Tom Merry. "I kicked it under my bed last night; but I remember now, I looked for it this morning to burn it, and it was gone. You've taken it back."

"I haven't seen it since I wore it last night."

"One of the maids may have swept it away," said Prye.

"Well, that's possible," admitted Tom Merry. "But one of the maids hasn't swept the monk's robe out of the museum. Levison's taken that, to play his rotten tricks again!"

"I haven't!" shouted Levison.

"You'd better say what you've done with it, and have it put back!" said Prye. "Under the circumstances, it's a fool's trick to play, Levison!"

Levison glared at the Fifth-Former.

"I tell you I don't know anything about it!" he exclaimed. "I suppose somebody has taken it, and means to put it on me—Tom Merry, perhaps!"

Tom Merry clenched his hand.

"Well, we can to give you a warning," he said. "Mr. Railton has ordered us to let you alone for what happened last night. But if you begin again to-night, you'll get such a ragging you'll think that life isn't worth living!"

Levison scowled sullenly.

"I've said that I don't know anything about it, and I don't!" he said. "That's all I've got to say, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"There's the door!" said Cutts.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake.

But there was evidently nothing more to be done, and the juniors quitted the study.

"It must have been Levison," said Blake savagely, as they went down the passage. "Perhaps he'll put it back, now that he knows we know; but I'll sleep with one eye open to-night, and if he plays any tricks——"

"We'll pulverise him!" said Herries.

"And I'll keep an eye open in the Shell dorm," said Tom Merry.

And with that the matter dropped.

CHAPTER 8.

The Voice in the Dark.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY was sitting at the study table in No. 5, with a pen in his hand, and a wise expression upon his face.

Harry Hammond was on the other side of the table.

The two strangely-assorted chums were working together. Hammond, since he had been at St. Jim's, had learned much, and at a very rapid rate, but he was still far from being quite suited to take his place in the Fourth Form on a level with the other fellows.

And D'Arcy, in the kindness of his heart, frequently spent an hour or two coaching the junior from Bethnal Green.

Hammond was painstaking, and quick to learn, and he did his very best to profit by the coaching of his noble chum. In the course of time, D'Arcy even hoped to get him into the habit of pronouncing his h's. But that was likely to take a very long time indeed.

But the coaching was interrupted now. There was a knock at the door of the study, and Mr. Keyser, the locksmith from Rylcombe, presented himself.

Hammond rose to his feet.

"It's the locksmith to see my desk," he said. "Come in, Mr. Keyser! 'Ere you are!"

Mr. Keyser came into the study.

Hammond opened the lid of his desk, and pointed out the drawer in which he kept his money.

"Some bloke has been monkeying with it," he explained. "I can't get the key into it. I want you to open it."

"Yes, sir," said the locksmith.

He examined the lock carefully, and then turned a somewhat peculiar look upon Hammond.

"You keep money in this drawer?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Much money?"

"'Bout thirty quid," said Hammond, surprised by the question. "Why?"

"It is not a safe place, I should think," said Mr. Keyser.

"Someone has been trying to force the lock."

"Oh, crickey!" said Hammond.

"Bai Jove!"

"I shall have to remove the lock, and replace it," said Mr. Keyser; "and I should recommend you to put your money in a safe place, Master Hammond. That damage to the lock was done by someone trying to pick it."

"Quite sure?" asked Hammond incredulously.

"I know something about locks, sir."

"Yes, I s'pose so. But it beats me. Smith minor or Bates wouldn't want to touch my spondulies, I know that," said Hammond. "O'wever, I'll look arter it all right."

Mr. Keyser removed the lock, and took it away with him, and the two juniors stared at one another as the study door closed.

"Bai Jove, that's queeah!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked.

"Jolly queer," said Hammond. "E must 'ave been mistook. Nobody in the 'Ouse would want to get at my money, I s'pose."

"Wathah not. I hope not, anyway. But it looks vewy queeah. You had bettah lock the money up somewhere quite safe," said D'Arcy uneasily. "It looks wathah wotten."

"But there ain't a thief in this 'ere study."

"Someone might have come in fwom some othah studay, deah boy. I suppose Mr. Keyser knows what he is talkin' about. As a matter of fact, old man, you have too much money about," said Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah bad form to have a lot of money."

Hammond grinned.

"Well, I'll pay you the three-pun-ten I owe you, and then I shall 'ave less," he said. "Wot am I to do with the rest, now? I ain't anythin' else with a safe key to it, and I don't want to carry about nearly thirty quid in me trousin-pocket."

"Tom Mewwy has a safe place where he keeps the club funds locked up," said Arthur Augustus. "Ask him to put it there till your lock's mended."

"Good hegg!"

Hammond paused a moment uneasily.

"I s'ye," he said abruptly. "Better not say anythin' about wot Mr. Keyser's said. Smith and Bates would be awfully rattly if they 'eard it. They'd think that they was suspected of monkeyin' with my desk."

"Wight-ho! A still tongue shows a wise head, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus approvingly. "But let's take the money to Tom Mewwy's studay."

"Orlright!"

Hammond carelessly crumpled up four five-pound notes and nine sovereigns in his hand, and left the study. Levison came along the passage, returning from his visit to Cutts of the Fifth.

He stared curiously at the banknotes protruding from Hammond's hand.

"My hat! Where did you get all that tin from?" he said, in surprise.

"It's mine!" said Hammond shortly.

"All got out of the High-class Hats at three-and-nine?" sneered Levison.

"Mind your own business!"

"Yaas, wathah! I object to your addwessin' remarks to my fwient Hammond, Levison," said D'Arcy severely. "You are bein' cut by the House, and you have no right to speak to us."

"Oh, rats!" said Levison.

"Weally, you wottah—"

Levison went into his study, and slammed the door.

"Bai Jove! I've a jollay good mind to go aftah him, and give him a feaful thwashin', you know," D'Arcy exclaimed wrathfully.

"Kim on!" said Hammond. "I want to get these spondulies put away."

"Oh, vewy well!"

The two juniors proceeded to Tom Merry's study. The Terrible Three were at work at their preparation, Monty Lowther giving an occasional grunt as the bruise on his forehead gave him a twinge of pain.

"Hallo! Are you giving fivers away?" asked Tom Merry, laughing, as Hammond laid the money on the table.

"I want you to lock it up fur me, if you'll be so kind,"

explained Hammond. "The lock in my desk is out of order, and I want it kept syfe."

"Count it first, then."

"There's twenty-nine quid."

"Soveigns, deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Soverings!" agreed Hammond cheerfully.

"I'll lock it up for you with pleasure," said Tom Merry, rising and opening his desk. "I've got a safe place here for the club funds. They don't amount to as much as that, though. Here you are, shove it in!"

There was a secret drawer in Tom Merry's desk, where he kept the footer club money. It was not a very deep secret, as a matter of fact, and would not have eluded a careful search. But there was a lock on the drawer, and it was quite safe enough for Tom Merry's purpose.

Hammond dropped the money carelessly into the drawer, and Tom Merry locked it up.

"Safe as houses!" he said cheerfully.

"Thanks!"

"Oh, don't mench!"

Arthur Augustus and his Cockney chum left the study.

"Just time for a spwint wound the quad, befoah bed-time," said D'Arcy, looking at his watch.

"I'm on!"

And they walked out into the quadrangle.

There had been a fall of snow that afternoon, and the quadrangle of St. Jim's gleamed white under the murky sky. The leafless old elms held out snow-ridged branches like the white arms of ghosts.

The snow had been swept from the gravel walks, but fresh flakes had fallen since then, and the feet of the juniors crunched the snow.

"Not much chance fer footer ter-morrow," Hammond remarked.

"Wathah not!"

"All the syne, it's a good wheeze to keep in form. I'll race you round the quad, and back to the School 'Ouse," said Hammond.

"Done!"

They ran quickly down the snowy path, their feet making no sound on the velvety white powdering. Hammond, who was a little ahead, suddenly stopped as they came along in the dark shadow of the school wall.

"Old on!" he muttered.

"What's the mattah, deah boy?" asked D'Arcy, sinking his voice, because Hammond had spoken in a cautious tone.

"Listen!"

Through the silence of the night came the sound of a voice. It was husky and low, but the juniors knew the tones of Albert Prye, of the Fifth Form.

"To-morrow, without fail. I give you my word, Marks."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

They could not see Prye of the Fifth, the darkness wrapped him from their gaze. But the direction of his voice told them where he was. He was at the school wall, talking over it to someone who was standing in the road outside.

As the wall was high, Prye must have climbed upon it to talk to the man standing below in the road.

A growling voice was heard in reply to the Fifth-Former.

"That's what you said yesterday, Master Prye. I ain'—"

"Come on!" muttered Arthur Augustus hurriedly. "We don't want to listen to them, Hammond. It doesn't concern us."

"Orlright!" said Hammond.

The two juniors ran on. Prye of the Fifth was speaking again, but they did not hear what he said. D'Arcy and Hammond finished their run round the quadrangle, and returned into the School House.

They did not speak of what they had heard. But they could not help thinking of it—and wondering what was the meaning of that strange interview between Prye of the Fifth, and the unseen and unknown Mr. Marks.

CHAPTER 9.

The Mystery of the Night.

JACK BLAKE, of the Fourth, had fully made up his mind, when the juniors went to bed that night, that he would sleep with one eye open.

That Levison had taken the monkish robe from the school museum, with the intention of playing ghost again, Blake was certain.

And he intended to keep watch, and catch the cad of the Fourth in the act, and then and there to administer a lesson to him which would cure Levison of the desire to play ghost again in the future.

Mr. Railton had forbidden any ragging of Levison over what had happened on Monday night. But, as Blak remarked sapiently to his chums, he could be ragged for anything else, without contravention of the Housemaster.

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orders. And if he sallied forth again as the Ghost of St. Jim's, he should have a dormitory ragging—and that infliction would be severe enough to be a lasting lesson to him.

Unfortunately, though Blake's intentions were excellent, the performance did not quite come up to the intention. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

The juniors went to bed at half-past nine, and for a quarter of an hour or so there was the usual buzz of talk, during which Jack Blake found it easy enough to keep awake.

But when the voices died away, and the Fourth-Formers dropped off to sleep one by one, Blake found his self-imposed task a little more difficult.

He heard ten o'clock strike, in a drowsy way, and roused himself to keep awake.

Half-past ten found him nodding very sleepily.

When eleven boomed out from the clock-tower, Blake's ears were deaf to it. He was fast asleep—and dreaming that he was keeping wide awake and watchful.

All was dark and silent in the dormitory.

Midnight boomed out.

At that hour, the last light was extinguished in the vast buildings of St. Jim's; the last door had been closed; the last sound was still.

Only the faint moan of the wind in the elms in the old quadrangle broke the silence of the night.

Jack Blake stirred uneasily in his sleep.

He was dreaming that he was sitting up in bed, awake and watchful, and that Levison was stepping out of bed, clad in the ghostly garb of the old monk who was supposed to haunt the School House at Christmastide.

So vivid was the dream, that Blake made a sleepy clutch at the dream-figure—and the movement awoke him.

For some seconds he lay in bed, trying to gather his confused thoughts into order, slowly realising that it was only a dream, and that there was nothing stirring in the room.

"My hat!" he murmured. "I believe I've dropped off to sleep after all! I wonder what the giddy time it is!"

He roused himself into broad wakefulness.

Now that he was awake, he would keep awake, and watch—until he fell asleep again. He raised his head and glanced drowsily up and down the dormitory.

A chill draught caught his face.

The window at the end of the room was open at the top, as usual; but Blake knew that it was not from the window that that chill draught came.

In a moment all his faculties were alert.

The door was open.

In the intense darkness, he could not see it—but he was sure of it. The door of the dormitory was open—and what he had intended to watch for had happened while he slept. Blake sat up in bed, his eyes gleaming.

He strained his ears to listen.

There was a faint rustling sound in the silence of the dormitory. It came from the direction of Levison's bed. There were two or three beds between Blake's and Levison's; and beyond Levison's there was Hammond's, and half a dozen more. But Blake was pretty certain that it was Levison who was moving. Whom else could it be?

"The rotter!" murmured Blake. "I was right after all—I knew it! And this time I'll catch him!"

He groped silently beside his bed for the matches he had placed there in readiness.

The faint rustle continued.

Then it ceased.

Blake found the matchbox—and as his hand closed on it, he heard a slight sound in the direction of the door.

It had closed.

Scratch!

The match flared out.

Blake held up the match, his eyes alert—he remembered what had happened to Monty Lowther on the dark landing, and he was prepared for anything.

But nothing was stirring in the dormitory.

"The rotter! He's gone out!" Blake muttered.

He jumped out of bed, found a candle-end he had placed ready on a chair, and lighted it. His movements awoke the fellows in the next beds.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's sleepy voice.

"What's the wot, deah boy?"

"Levison again!" said Blake.

"Oh, the wottah!"

"We'll catch him this time," said Blake. "I just heard the door close, so he must have gone out."

"Or come in," said Herries.

"Yes—I'll soon see."

Blake stepped towards Levison's bed.

Levison was there.

His eyes were closed, and his face was calm and peaceful as if in the deepest slumber. Half a dozen juniors gathered round his bed, gazing at him in the candle-light. They did not believe for a moment that he was really asleep.

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"The wottah!" said D'Arcy. "He's only shammin', of course."

"Looks like the real thing," said Herries dubiously.

"Touch the end of his nose with the candle," suggested Digby; "that'll show whether he's shamming or not."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison's eyes opened.

"Hallo!" he said.

"I knew you were awake," said Blake scornfully.

"Awake! I'm awake now," said Levison, in surprise.

"You woke me up, I suppose. What's the little game now?"

"Where have you been?"

"Dotty?" asked Levison. "I've just woke up."

"You've been out of the dorm."

"I haven't."

"I heard the door close not two minutes ago."

Levison grunted.

"Well, I didn't close it. Perhaps one of the Shell fellows has been here."

"Rats!"

"Yaas, wats to that, you wottah!"

"Where's that giddy robe?" asked Blake. "If you've been playing ghost again, you've had that on."

"I tell you, I haven't been out of bed," said Levison impatiently. "I suppose you've been dreaming, or it's a case of nerves."

"Allo! Wot's the gime?" came a sleepy voice from Hammond's bed, as the Cockney schoolboy woke up, and blinked in the candle-light.

"Some more of Levison's tricks," said Blake angrily. "He's been up and about, and he won't admit it. I heard him close the door."

"You didn't," said Levison. "I haven't been out of bed. And I defy you to find the monk's robe here. I haven't had it."

"We'll look," said Blake grimly; "and if we find it in the dorm., we'll give you the biggest licking you ever had in your natural!"

"You're welcome to, if you find it."

The Fourth-Formers were all awake now. A dozen fellows joined in the search, but the monk's robe was not discovered. Neither was the cardboard mask to be seen. If Levison had been playing ghost again, he had evidently left his disguise outside the dormitory.

"Sure you didn't dream it, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, beginning to be a little doubtful.

Blake snorted.

"Of course I didn't, fathead!"

"I refuse to be called a fathead—"

"Somebody shut the door. I know that. When I woke up, it was open—I felt the draught—and then I heard it close."

"Well, we shall know to-morrow if Levison has been playing tricks in the other dormitories," said Herries. "I'm going back to bed now."

And Herries turned in—and the other fellows followed his example, Blake feeling very puzzled and dissatisfied. He had intended to catch Levison in the act—but once again it had been impossible to find direct proof against the cad of the Fourth.

The Fourth-Formers were soon fast asleep, and they did not wake up again till the rising-bell clanged out in the misty winter morning.

Blake yawned, and rolled out of bed.

"Grooh! It's c-c-cold!" he ejaculated.

"Orrible cold!" remarked Hammond, as he turned out. "If I was you, Levison, I'd leave it till the summer afore I played ghost at night."

"I haven't been playing ghost, you Cockney idiot!" snapped Levison.

"Gammon!"

The juniors dressed themselves, and Hammond turned back his pillow for his watch and chain, which he always placed there overnight. A puzzled expression came over his face, and he moved the bolster, and then searched through the bed.

"Lost anythin', deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus, who was ready to go down.

"I ain't lost anythin'," said Hammond, "but somethin's been taken away."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I suppose it's a lark," said Hammond, looking round. "But the bloke wot has taken my watch and chain is perlitey requested to 'and it over."

"Your watch and chain?" said Blake.

"Yes. I put 'em under my pillow as usual last night, and now they're gone."

"Oh, you'll find them in your bed," said Reilly.

"I've looked."

"Look again, then."

Hammond looked again, stripping the bed in his search. But there was no sign of the watch and chain. The articles were evidently missing, and all eyes in the dormitory, with common accord, turned upon Levison.

CHAPTER 10.

Dark Suspicions.

LEVISON had been watching Hammond with a sneer upon his lips.

But as the looks of the Fourth-Formers turned grimly upon him, he started a little, and a gleam came into his eyes.

"Well, do you think I've stolen Hammond's watch and chain now?" he asked bitterly.

"Stolen isn't the word," said Jack Blake. "I don't think you've stolen it, but I think you've taken it. Another of your little jokes, I suppose."

"I don't know anything about it."

"I want that there watch and chain!" said Hammond. "That watch cost twenty quid, and I ain't losing it!"

"Better find it, then," said Levison. "I haven't seen anything of it."

"You was up in the night."

"I wasn't!"

"We all know you were," said Blake. "Somebody was, and it could only have been you. You'd better tell Hammond at once what you've done with his watch and chain, or you'll be accused of stealing it."

"Oh, I expect that anyway," said Levison sardonically. "I suppose the Cockney cad has hidden it, and is putting this on to me to get me into trouble, as you're all down on me already. It's a lie to say I touched Lowther, and it's another lie to say that I've touched that outsider's watch and chain!"

"Rot!"

"Wats!"

"Gammon!"

"Sure, and ye'd better own up!"

"Hand it over, you silly ass!"

"I've said that I don't know anything about it," said Levison, "and I've got nothing more to say. Go and hang yourselves!"

And he walked out of the dormitory.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "This is wathah sewious. If Levison doesn't hand back that watch and chain he will be a thief."

"I suppose you're quite sure you put them there, Hammond?" said Blake.

"Course I am! I do the same every night."

"Yaas, and I saw Hammond put them there last night, now that I come to think of it," said Arthur Augustus. "I wemembah it quite well."

"That settles it. They've been taken away," said Blake. "It's one of Levison's rotten jokes. I believe he's quite rotter enough to steal them, but—"

"But he wouldn't be rotter enough," said Hammond. "You see, that watch 'ave got my name engraved on it, and it couldn't be sold."

"It could be pawned," said Lumley-Lumley. "I guess anybody could pop it by giving your name."

"But 'e'd be found out, when the police send round a description of the watch to the pawnbrokers," said Hammond, with a shake of the head. "Only an idjit would risk it. The pawnbroker wot lent money on it would be able to identify him."

"Yaas, it would be a fwigthfully wiskey thing to do," said D'Arcy. "I weally can't think that Levison intends anything of the sort. It's just a wotten joke—like the wotten joke Mellish played when he collared my fivah and hid it in my Sunday toppah."

"P'raps Levison 'ave done this 'ere?" said Hammond, turning a suspicious eye upon Percy Mellish.

"Rot!" said Mellish savagely. "You all know it was Levison!"

"Yaas, I feel pwetty sure of that," said Arthur Augustus. "If he doesn't give it up, you'll have to weport the mattah to the Housemastah. Suppose you give him till dinner-time to woturn the watch?"

"Orlright," said Hammond.

And when the juniors went down, Hammond looked for Levison, to deliver that ultimatum. He found the cad of the Fourth in the quadrangle, looking savage and unquiet. Levison met him with a glare of bitter animosity.

"Well, have you found your rotten watch?" he snapped.

"It ain't a rotten watch, and I ain't found it," said Hammond quietly. "I want you to 'and it back to me."

"Go and eat coke!"

"I'll leave it till dinner-time, as Master D'Arcy says so," said the Cockney schoolboy. "If you don't 'and it back by then I shall 'ave to speak to Mr. Railton about it."

"You can speak to everybody in the School House about it for all I care! I don't know anything about your watch."

"Be sensible," urged Hammond. "You can't keep it. If you was to try to pawn it you'd be bowled out for a dead cert."

Levison's eyes blazed.

"So you think I've stolen it!" he exclaimed.

"Wot am I to think if you don't 'and it back?" Hammond demanded.

"I tell you I was fast asleep all night, excepting when those fools woke me up, and I wasn't out of bed till I turned out at rising-bell."

"Gammon!"

"You East End rotter!" said Levison, clenching his fists.

"You're planting this on me because I've always been down on you because you're a rank outsider here. This is one of your Bethnal Green dodges, I suppose!"

"You can eye wot you like, but if you don't 'and back that there watch afore dinner-time, I goes to Mr. Railton," said Hammond, and he turned his back on Levison.

"Go, and be hanged!"

Levison sat sullenly by himself during morning lessons. The looks of his Form-fellows showed that they were more down on him than ever. Figgins & Co. of the New House shared the feelings of the School House fellows.

Levison's face was dark and sullen.

If he was wrongly suspected he had only himself to thank for it. His tortuous nature, as full of trickery as a monkey's, was well known to all the juniors. It was his own fault that his word could not be taken upon any matter. But that reflection did not bring the hapless cad of the Fourth much comfort.

After morning lessons, Levison went out sullenly into the quadrangle by himself. His former chum, Mellish, was giving him a wide berth. Percy Mellish had no desire whatever to share the misfortunes of his former comrade.

But Levison was not left long alone. Blake & Co. came out, and as they came towards him, Levison edged away towards Cutts and Prye of the Fifth, who were in the quad. He felt safer near his friends in the Fifth.

"Hallo! You in trouble again?" said Cutts, not very civilly. "What's the row now?"

Levison gritted his teeth savagely.

"Somebody's taken Hammond's watch and chain last night, or else he's hidden them," he said. "The fellows are putting it down to me."

"And didn't you?" asked Prye.

"No; of course I didn't!"

"Rats!" said Blake, hearing the words as he came up. "Look here, Levison, time's up now. Are you going to hand over Hammond's watch?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"You stick to that?"

"Of course I do."

"All serene. You'll have to go to the Housemaster, Hammond," said Blake. "Mr. Railton will jolly soon make Levison shell out!"

"Hold on!" said Prye of the Fifth. "Are you kids quite sure about this?"

"Quite sure. And we don't want any help from the Fifth!" said Blake bluntly.

"You don't want to make a mistake," said Prye. "It's a pretty serious accusation you're bringing against Levison, and you'll put your foot in it badly if the watch turns out not to be missing after all. Has Hammond looked for it?"

"Of course I 'ave!" said Hammond. "It was took from under my pillow last night."

"You might have forgotten to take it up to bed with you," Prye suggested.

"I might 'ave, but I didn't. Master D'Arcy saw me put it under my pillow."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I'd look a bit further if I were you before I told the Housemaster about it," said Prye. "You would look pretty silly if it turned out that you left it in your study after all."

"Tain't possible," said Hammond. "I shouldn't leave it about, should I? I shouldn't take off a watch and chain in the study. 'Sides, I'm careful of it 'cause it's got my desk key on it—My 'at!' he added, as a sudden thought struck him. "P'raps that's wot it was took for—to get the key!"

"What should anybody want the key for?" asked Blake.

"It's the key of the money drawer in my desk," explained Hammond. "I always keep it on my watchchain for safety. It's a little gold key—you may 'ave seen it 'anging there."

Blake nodded.

"Yes, I've seen it. You ass, you ought to have looked to see if your money was safe as soon as you came down this morning!"

"The money's safe enough," said Hammond. "Somebody

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was monkeying with the lock of the drawer yesterday, or the day afore, and I 'ad a locksmith to take the lock off and mend it. The money's locked up safe enough in Tom Merry's desk now. If the bloke took the watch and chain to get at the key, he must 'ave 'ad a surprise when he went to my desk. There wasn't nothing for 'im."

"Well, I'd advise you to look a bit farther for your watch before you make a fuss about it," said Prye of the Fifth. "Least said soonest mended!"

And Prye walked away with Cutts.

"Something in what Prye says," remarked Digby. "May as well look in the study, to make quite sure."

"I'm sure already," said Hammond. "But we'll look, if you like. Anythin' for a quiet life."

The juniors proceeded to Study No. 5 at once. There was a general exclamation as they entered the study. For there on the table lay the watch and chain.

"Crikey!" exclaimed Hammond, in astonishment.

"Gwest Scott!"

"That's it?" asked Blake.

"Yes, that's the article."

"And the key—"

"It's 'ere orlright!"

Levison, who had followed the juniors to the study, burst into a scoffing laugh.

"Now perhaps you'll have the decency to say you're sorry!" he exclaimed. "Hammond left it here last night when he went to bed."

"Wats!"

"I didn't," said Hammond steadily. "I put it under my pillow. Somebody took it, and left it 'ere on the study table—a lark, I suppose. I don't see the fun in a lark of that kind, Master Levison. It looks to me as if the feller wot did it wanted my key, and not the watch and chain at all."

"You think I want to steal your filthy money, you rotten parvenu!" exclaimed Levison passionately.

"I know somebody was monkeyin' with the lock in my desk, when the money was there," said Hammond quietly.

"I know Mr. Keyser told me that the damage was done by somebody tryin' to force the lock. I know that. Now the same somebody 'ave took my watch and chain—not because he wanted it, for 'ere it is—and I reckon it was because 'e wanted that there key. That's my opinion. And if you want to know wot I think, I think it was you, Levison!"

Levison clenched his hands.

"And we all think the same," said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Hang you!" said Levison.

"Hang you! I don't know anything about it. I'm not a thief. You're all down on me, and you believe anything that Cockney cad says against me. Go and eat coke, all of you!"

And he strode furiously away.

But Levison's passionate denials carried no weight. After that incident there were few fellows in the School House who doubted that the cad of the Fourth had had dishonest designs upon the money in Hammond's desk, and that he had only been baffled by the accident of Hammond having transferred it to Tom Merry's keeping. And from that hour Levison was shunned more than ever.

CHAPTER 11.

Innocent or Guilty?

"MY hat!" Tom Merry halted suddenly as a strange sound fell upon his ears.

It was a sob!

Tom was entering the box-room to look for his fencing-foils, which were kept there. It was evening, and there was

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no light in the box-room, and Tom Merry fumbled in his pocket for matches as he entered. Then that miserable sound broke upon his ears in the darkness of the room.

"Hallo! Who's there?" exclaimed the captain of the Shell.

His first idea was that it was some fag of the Third or Second, who had been ill-used by a bully, and had retired to the box-room to "blub" over his injuries. And if it was some victim of Gore or Crooke of the Shell, Tom Merry would have something to say in the matter.

He struck a match and lighted the gas. In the glimmer of the light he caught sight of a pale and tear-stained face, with burning eyes.

The Shell fellow uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Levison!"

It was Levison of the Fourth! Tom Merry was simply astounded. No one had ever known the hard-grained, cynical cad of the Fourth to "blub." Even when he had been flogged he had not blubbed. Tom Merry looked at him blankly.

Levison, who had been sitting upon an empty trunk in the darkness, his head bowed on his hands, sprang to his feet with a cry as the light gleamed out.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed passionately. "Can't you let me alone?"

"I didn't know you were here!" said Tom quietly.

"Well, now you know, and you can go and tell all the House that you found me blubbing!" said Levison fiercely.

Tom shook his head.

"I don't want to do that," he said quietly. "I came here for my foils, and then I heard you. What's the matter?"

"None of your business."

"Well, no, that's so," agreed Tom Merry. "But I'm sorry if there's anything wrong."

"Liar!" said Levison bitterly. "You'd be jolly glad to see me kicked out of the school—you know you would!"

"I don't know that I should be sorry," said Tom. "After what you did to Lowther—"

"I did nothing to him!"

Tom was silent.

"It's the same with all of you. You're all down on me. You all think now that I wanted to steal Hammond's beastly money. I swear I never

touched his watch and chain—I never thought about his key. I wasn't out of bed at all last night. If Blake heard somebody moving about the dorm., it was somebody else. But nobody will believe me!"

Tom Merry looked at him curiously. Levison was so false, false to the core, that it was difficult to believe anything he said. But there was a ring of passionate sincerity in his voice now, or so it seemed to Tom Merry.

"I'm sent to Coventry," went on Levison bitterly; "even my own pals won't speak to me. And I've done nothing—nothing!"

"It's jolly hard to believe that," said Tom slowly. "You see, Levison, we all know you don't tell the truth."

"I'm telling the truth now."

"I'd like to believe you. I know this is pretty hard on you if you are speaking the truth for once. But—"

"What should I want to hurt Lowther for? I've got nothing against him. And do you think I'd try to steal Hammond's money?"

"Somebody tried to."

"Somebody—and, of course, that somebody was me!" said Levison, with bitter emphasis. "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him! Is that what you call fair play?"

Tom Merry hesitated. In spite of his dislike and contempt for the outsider of the Fourth, Levison's words made

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D'Arcy and Hammond hit out manfully, but they were no match for the two big seniors, and there were two heavy and sudden bumps in the passage; and then Cutts's door slammed. "Ow! Bai Jove!" gasped D'Arcy, as he sat on the floor. "Ow! Ow!" "Crikey!" murmured Hammond. (See Chapter 16.)

a deep impression upon him. And the tears that glistened upon the junior's cheeks were real enough.

"But if it wasn't you, who was it?" he asked doubtfully. Levison made an angry gesture.

"How should I know? How do you know that Hammond hasn't made up the whole yarn about his watch and chain, to get even with me?"

"He isn't that sort," said Tom drily. "You might do such a thing, but Hammond wouldn't. He's as straight as a die."

"You think I've taken that rag from the museum to play ghost again. It's no good my saying I didn't. Do you think I should be fool enough to do it, after what's happened? Somebody else has taken it. But you put it down to me, of course."

"But who the dickens is that somebody else, then?" said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"I don't know. But why can't you wait for proof before you're down on a chap? I suppose every fellow is entitled to justice, isn't he? If there's a rotten thing done, you all jump to the conclusion that I did it."

"That's your own fault. But—but—blessed if I don't think you are telling the truth now," said Tom Merry honestly. "Only you are so jolly deep—there's no telling. But look here, Levison, I'll look into this. If somebody else is planning to play ghost, we may be able to catch him at

it, and clear you. About Hammond's key, I'm afraid that can't be cleared up!"

"Why not?" said Levison. "If somebody has been trying to get at that Cockney cad's money, he may try again."

"Well, that's possible." Tom Merry wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. "But it's locked up in my desk now, and I've got the key in my pocket."

"You'll be suspecting me of trying to pick your pocket soon," said Levison bitterly. "I've got an idea of what's happened, but, of course, you wouldn't believe a word of it if I told you."

"Tell me, all the same."

"Hammond says his desk was tampered with the night before last. That was the night Lowther ran into somebody in the dark, and was knocked down. Mightn't he have run into the chap who'd been at Hammond's desk, perhaps just coming back to his dorm?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Yes, but there's nothing to prove that that chap wasn't you, Levison!"

"Then the next day," went on Levison unheeding, "the whole House knew that I'd been playing ghost in the old monk's robe. The robe was taken from the museum again. Can't you guess why?"

"Blessed if I can."

"I've thought it all out. The chap who was after

Hammond's money intended to have another try, but in case he was spotted, he meant to put on the robe and mask that I had used; then if he was seen, he would be taken for me, as all you fellows have made up your minds about me."

"By Jove, it's possible, of course!"

"If anybody really came into the Fourth Form dorm. last night, I believe it was that chap, very likely got up as a ghost in case he was seen. He got Hammond's watch and chain for the sake of the key. Then he found that Hammond's money wasn't in the desk at all, and he left the watch and chain on the study table. They weren't any use to him, as it wouldn't be safe to sell them. It was the money he wanted. And it must be some chap who's desperately hard up; and if that's the case, he will have another try. It will be easy enough for him to find out that you are keeping the money for Hammond, if he doesn't know it already."

Tom Merry whistled.

"You mean that he'll have a try at getting my desk key next?" he asked.

"That's what I think, and if he's got up as the ghost of the monk, you'll think it is I, if you spot him at all," said Levison bitterly. "I can foresee it all—that's what knocks me out. If the key's taken, and the money stolen, everybody in the House will say it was me, though I'm fast asleep in bed all the time."

"If you'd run straight, fellows wouldn't suspect you more than anybody else," said Tom Merry. "But there's certainly something in what you say. If the money should be taken, and a chap got up as a ghost should be spotted, I'm afraid you will get it in the neck."

"Without having anything to do with it," said Levison.

"Ahem! Perhaps."

"Oh, you don't believe me, of course! Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," said Levison savagely. "I'm going to stay awake to-night, and look for that chap who's going to play ghost and try for Hammond's money. And if I come on him, I'll put such a mark on him that he'll be known afterwards."

"You'd better keep in bed," said Tom Merry drily. "That's the easiest way to keep out of trouble, considering how the fellows suspect you already. You can leave it to us to hunt for the ghost."

"And you'll sleep like logs, and the money will be stolen, and it will be put down to me," said Levison. "I'm going to keep watch to-night. My belief is that somebody will come to the Shell dorm. to get your key. The chap, whoever he is, is a bungler at picking locks. He tried on Hammond's and failed. He will want the key, and he will have to come to your dorm. for it. It's a chance of catching him."

Tom Merry's eyes gleamed.

"I'll arrange for us to keep watch to-night in turns," he said. "You can leave it in our hands, Levison."

"I can't trust it to you. If the money's taken, I know I shall be sacked from the school on suspicion. I'm going to keep watch myself."

And Levison flung out of the box-room before Tom Merry could reply.

The Shell fellow picked up his foils, and put out the light, and returned in a thoughtful mood to his study.

"Where on earth have you been all this time?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry explained.

Lowther whistled, and Manners shook his head dogmatically.

"All rot," he said; "that talk about keeping watch is an excuse for being out of bed, in case he's found out. If anybody comes to the Shell dorm. for that key, it will be Levison of the Fourth."

"Well, if anybody comes, we're going to catch him," said Tom Merry. "You fellows won't mind taking turns at keeping watch? I'll ask Kangy and Clifton Dane, too."

"Right-ho! We can do that, but if we catch anybody, I'll bet you a Sunday topper to a white mouse that it turns out to be Levison."

"Well, we shall see what we shall see," said Tom Merry circularly. And as that was certainly true, Manners did not contest the statement.

CHAPTER 12.

An Empty Capture!

KANGAROO and Clifton Dane willingly agreed to take turns at keeping awake that night, when Tom Merry consulted them on the matter.

Both of them shared Manners's opinion that if anybody was caught it would turn out to be Levison; but they agreed that it was only fair to give the cad of the Fourth a chance. If he was innocent, the present state of affairs was certainly very hard upon him.

"You see, my innocent Tommy, he's been pulling your The Gem Library.—No. 306.

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simple old leg," Kangaroo remarked. "All that yarn is simply in case he's found out. We all know Levison."

"He's a giddy Ananias, and he never tells the truth excepting by accident," Clifton Dane observed.

"But it may be one of the accidents this time," suggested Tom Merry, laughing. "Somehow or other, he impressed me that he was straight this time."

"That's because you are a simple old bird. He was pulling your leg."

"Well, we shall see."

"It may even be one of his rotten tricks to keep us awake all night, while he's snoring in the Fourth Form dorm.," said Kangaroo, with a sniff. "He would have the laugh of us to-morrow, if nothing happened."

"Let him! Anyway, the monk's clobber wasn't taken out of the museum for nothing. Somebody means to play ghost," said Tom Merry. "Whoever it is, we're going to catch him and put an end to his silly tricks."

And the Shell fellows went to bed that night with their plans arranged.

Monty Lowther stayed awake from half-past nine till ten, and then he called Manners, who sat up in bed, and manfully kept his eyes open till eleven o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower.

At eleven o'clock Manners called Kangaroo; and Noble of the Shell yawned and sat up.

"Seen any ghosts?" he inquired.

"Not yet; it's your turn to keep watch."

"Oh, all right!"

Manners dozed off, and Kangaroo propped himself up with pillows and bolster, and blinked into the darkness of the dormitory till half-past eleven. But nothing happened to reward the vigilance of the Cornstalk. When the half-hour chimed out, Kangaroo tossed a boot upon Clifton Dane's bed, and the Canadian junior awoke with a start.

"Groo! What's that?"

"My boot!" said Kangaroo laconically.

"You silly ass!"

"Time to keep watch!"

"Ow!" Clifton Dane sat up and rubbed his eyes. "All right! Wharrer time?"

"Half-past eleven! Call Tom Merry at twelve."

"Groo! Right-ho! Groo!"

The Canadian junior remained awake until midnight boomed out. The School House was very silent. Outside the dormitory windows the old trees creaked in the wind, and the snow was softly falling.

Clifton Dane stepped out of bed and shook Tom Merry by the shoulder. Tom's eyes opened at once.

"Twelve!" said Dane. "Your turn!"

"Right-ho!"

The Canadian junior rolled in bed again, and was asleep in two minutes. Tom Merry sat up shivering in the cold. It was a bitter winter night. He drew the bedclothes round his shoulders, and rubbed his eyes. From up and down the dormitory came the sound of deep and steady breathing. Tom Merry was the only fellow awake in the long, lofty room.

His turn to keep watch was till half-past twelve, when he was to call Lowther to take his second turn.

With manful efforts he kept his heavy eyes open.

There was a faint glimmer of starlight in at the high windows of the dormitory, just sufficient to enable Tom Merry to make out the dim form of the beds ranged in a row.

His eyes were turned in the direction of the door. He could not see the door in the gloom, but if it should be opened he would hear the faintest sound in the stillness.

It came back into his mind, as he sat there watchful, how Levison had come to the dormitory a couple of nights ago in the guise of the ghostly monk of St. Jim's. The remembrance of that fearsome sight sent a slight shiver through him.

Suddenly there was a faint creak in the stillness, and a keener draught of cold air chilled his face. His heart beat hard. He knew that the dormitory door had opened.

The watch had not been kept in vain.

Tom Merry sat quite still, huddled in the bedclothes, scarcely breathing. In the silence there was a faint, rustling sound.

Dimly a figure draped in an ample old robe loomed up in the gloom.

There was no trace of a phosphorescent light about the figure, as on the occasion when Levison had played ghost.

It was black, shadowy, hardly visible in the darkness, and eerie and weird in the silence and stealthiness of its movements.

Convinced as he was that it was some rascal playing ghost, Tom Merry could not help a cold thrill passing through him.

The figure was advancing slowly and silently towards his bed, with no sound save the slight rustle made by the old monkish robe.

It stopped beside the bed, and Tom Merry sought to see the

face; but the face was covered. For a moment he caught a glint of two eyes, and that was all. There was a sudden start from the figure, as if the unknown had suddenly perceived that the Shell fellow was sitting up in bed, and therefore realised that watch was being kept.

The figure sprang away, just as Tom Merry grasped at it.

The Shell fellow leaped from the bed.

"Wake up!" he shouted.

He plunged through the darkness towards the dark figure. It had vanished in the gloom, but Tom Merry rushed in the direction of the door. He knew that the ghostly visitor would make in that direction.

In the darkness his hands came in contact with the figure, and he grasped at the heavy robe, and clutched it tight.

"Come on, you fellows!" he shouted. "I've got him!"

"Hold him!"

"I'll get a light!"

"Stick to him!"

Half the Shell were awake, and tumbling in frantic haste out of bed. Tom Merry had both hands on the monkish robe, grasping it fast. But suddenly the dragging at the robe ceased, and he felt it hang heavily on his hands. He realised in an instant what had happened. The figure had slipped out of the robe, leaving it in his clutch, and fled without it.

There was a quick sound as the door shut.

The ghostly visitor was gone, leaving his garb in the hands of the captain of the Shell.

A bike-lantern gleamed out, lighting up the darkness of the dormitory. Monty Lowther held it up.

It revealed Tom Merry, panting and furious, with the rustling robe in his hands, but the unknown rascal who had worn it was gone.

"He's got away!" panted Tom Merry. "He slipped out of this! But he can't have gone far! Follow me! After the cad!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry tore open the door, and ran out into the passage. He heard a sound in the darkness ahead, and dashed on furiously. He did not intend to let the rascal escape if he could help it.

Close by the door of the Fourth Form dormitory, some distance down the passage, he collided with a form in the darkness, and grasped it at once.

"Come on!" he shouted. "I've got him!"

Kangaroo rushed up with the lantern, the rest of the Shell fellows at his heels.

"Show a light here! Let's see who it is!"

The light gleamed on the face of the fellow who was struggling in the powerful grasp of Tom Merry.

Then there was a general shout:

"Levison!"

CHAPTER 13.

Only Levison.

LEVISON blinked with scared eyes in the light.

"He's passed me!" he panted. "I—I thought I'd got him when I got hold of you, Tom Merry!"

"What?"

"I tell you I passed him! Come on, and we may get him yet!"

Tom Merry looked at him sternly.

"Who passed you?" he demanded.

"I don't know—somebody in the dark, running from your dorm."

"It's pretty plain now," said Tom Merry. "I was close after him, and I collared you here, Levison. You may as well own up!"

"I?"

"Yes, you!"

Levison gave a cry:

"Oh, you fool—you fool! I tell you he's clearing off while you're wasting time. I haven't been in your dorm."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Liar!"

"Give him a chance!" said Kangaroo. "If there's another fellow out of bed, we can find him. Which way do you say he went, Levison?"

"Down the stairs!" panted Levison. "I've been keeping watch in the passage ever since eleven o'clock. Somebody passed me in the dark, going towards your dorm. I was leaning on the wall, dozing a bit, I think. But I heard him, and I waited here for him to come back, but he rushed past and shoved me out of the way. Then Tom Merry collared me, and I thought it was the rotter himself turning back!"

"Too thin!" said Lowther.

"Or, too thick!" said Manners.

"Won't wash, anyway!" remarked Clifton Dane. "Still,

we may as well look on the stairs—give the rotter every chance!"

"Good egg!"

The Shell fellows crowded down the stairs, Levison going with them. They searched the stairs and the passages, but they searched in vain. There was no sign of anyone to be seen.

"Nobody's out of his dorm," said Kangaroo, "and the sooner we get back the better, before we're spotted ourselves!"

"He's hiding somewhere!" said Levison.

"We'll go right through with it," said Tom Merry quietly.

"We'll visit every one of the junior dormitories, same as Linton did on Monday night, and see whether there's anybody out of bed."

"You'll find somebody out," said Levison. "He can't have got upstairs again, without our spotting him."

"We shall see!"

As quietly as they could—for they did not want to bring a master or a prefect on the scene—the Shell fellows made the round of visits.

In the Fourth Form dormitory only Levison's bed was found vacant. Blake & Co. turned out promptly to join them, as soon as they heard what was on.

In the Third Form dorm. Wally D'Arcy was awakened and questioned, and he sleepily told the searchers to go and eat coke. All the Third were in their beds. The same was the case with the Second Form.

Levison's face was pale and troubled when the juniors gathered in the passage again. It seemed as if he had reckoned on finding at least one bed unoccupied in one of the junior dormitories, and he seemed quite taken aback by the discovery that none of the juniors could be found out of his place. But all the fellows with him were quite convinced that he was acting.

"Well, what have you got to say now?" asked Tom Merry grimly.

Levison stammered:

"I—I don't know! I know that I was keeping watch, and that somebody passed me in the dark, and ran downstairs!"

"Then who was it? Nobody could get upstairs again without our spotting him, and all the fellows are in their places."

"It's gammon, of course!" said Hammond.

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy chimed in with great severity:

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I'm telling you the truth!" said Levison wildly. "I swear it! And there's only one possible way out of it. It must be that—that—"

"Well, what?"

"It wasn't a junior at all," said Levison. "It must have been a senior."

There was a scoffing laugh in response.

"Yes; I fancy I can see Kildare, of the Sixth, playing ghost!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Or old Darrel or Langton! You ass!"

"Or Cutts, of the Fifth," said Manners. "Draw it mild, Levison! We all know jolly well that it wasn't a senior!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"That's all rot," he said. "A fellow in the Fifth or the Sixth wouldn't be silly ass enough to play ghost like a fag!"

"It must have been!" persisted Levison. "Besides, he wasn't simply playing ghost. He came to your dorm. to get the desk key. You imbecile, didn't I warn you to keep watch to-night? And do you think I'd have done that if I meant to come to your dorm?"

"Somethin' in that, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, only some more trickery, as usual!" said Lowther.

Levison panted.

"It was a Fifth Form or a Sixth Form chap—it must have been!" he exclaimed. "You ought to make sure."

"Shall we rout out the Sixth and ask them?" asked Blake sarcastically. "I can imagine the kind of reception we should get!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's more likely a Fifth Form chap!" said Levison. "The Fifth Form dorm. is on the next floor below. He ran downstairs, and stayed there. And that would account for Lowther meeting him on the landing on Monday night, instead of up here. He was going back to his own dorm."

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, we can't go to the Fifth Form dormitory investigating," said Tom Merry. "They'd only chuck us out, and report us to the Housemaster to-morrow for being out of bed. And it's not worth while. It was Levison all the time, and he's only trying to make fools of us."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Levison gritted his teeth. Again he was suffering the fate of the habitual liar; nothing that he said would be

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believed without corroborative evidence, and there was no corroborative evidence to support him now.

"You're fastening it on me, and letting the real chap get away!" he said bitterly.

"Wats!"

"Rot!"

"You're the real chap!"

"Gammon!"

"Chuck it!"

"Let's get back to bed," said Lowther. "It's jolly cold here. We've found Levison out for certain this time, and I vote that to-morrow we give him the ragging of his life for playing his rotten tricks again, and lying afterwards!"

"Hear, hear!"

There were no dissentient voices to that suggestion. The Shell fellows went back to their dormitory. Levison lingered in the passage as Blake & Co. went towards the door of the Fourth Form-room.

Blake turned his head.

"Aren't you going to bed?" he demanded.

"No," said Levison savagely; "I'm going to find that chap, whoever he was, and prove to all you fools that you're making a bungle of it."

"You're going to play some more rotten tricks, you mean!" said Herries, with a sniff. "I say, you chaps, shove him in bed, and tie him there if he won't stay quiet. I'm fed-up with the trouble he's giving us."

"Yass, wathah!"

Levison backed away.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I tell you—"

"Rats!" said Jack Blake. "You're going back to bed. We're all fed-up, fed right up to the chin! Come in!"

"I won't!"

"Then we'll jolly well make you!"

The juniors made a rush at Levison. The cad of the Fourth turned and fled along the passage at top speed, and vanished round the first corner. Blake halted with an exclamation of anger.

"Wun him down, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin'!"

"Hold on!" said Blake. "We can't run him down in the dark. Let the beast stay out if he wants to! We'll make him sit up for this to-morrow. I'm going back to bed."

And Blake went. And the other fellows decided that, upon the whole, they couldn't do better than follow his example. And they did!

CHAPTER 14.

A Chase in the Dark.

"BAI Jove, what's that?"

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed as he uttered the exclamation.

The dormitory door had opened, and heavy footsteps came into the room. There was a sound of someone sinking upon a bed, and a faint groan.

"Is that you, Levison?"

Another groan.

"Gweat Scott!"

D'Arcy jumped out of bed, and lighted a candle.

Levison lay extended upon his bed, groaning. There was a red smear across his forehead, and a bruise growing blue.

Arthur Augustus ran towards him.

"You ass! Have you fallen downstairs?"

Levison did not reply. He lay on his bed, and pressed his hands to his forehead. The Fourth-Formers, disturbed for the second time that night, gathered round him, looking at him in wonder.

"What's happened, Levison?" asked Blake. "Have you had a tumble?"

"No," groaned Levison.

"Then what is it?"

"He hit me—with a stick!"

"He! Who?"

"The same chap who hit Lowther, I suppose," groaned Levison. "Oh, it hurts! All the fault of you fellows. If you'd stood by me—"

"Do you mean to say you've been knocked down as Lowther was the other night?" Blake asked incredulously.

"Look at my forehead."

"He has had a feahful blow, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus.

"Looks like it; but—"

"Tell us what happened," said Blake quietly.

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Levison panted.

"I've been in Tom Merry's study!"

"Tom Merry's study!" exclaimed Blake. "What on earth have you been there for?"

"Can't you understand? Won't you understand? I tell you there is somebody who is after Hammond's money, and he went to the Shell dorm. to steal Tom Merry's key. I knew it, and you ought to have known it," said Levison savagely. "I thought that as he couldn't get the key he might try to break in the desk, so I waited in Tom Merry's study to catch him if he came."

"And did he come?"

"Somebody came in the dark, and just as I was striking a match he spotted me, and knocked me down, and ran."

"Did you see who it was?"

"He had the cardboard mask on his face, the one that I made when I played ghost," groaned Levison. "I couldn't see his face."

The juniors exchanged startled glances.

They would not have believed a word of Levison's strange tale, but for the hideous bruise and cut on his forehead.

But was it possible that he had inflicted that injury himself in order to give colour to his story?

The endless duplicity of his nature, his love for tortuous scheming, made it only too possible.

"Don't you believe me?" shrieked Levison.

Blake shook his head.

"I can't—quite."

"How do you think I got this bruise, then? Do you think I did it myself?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Oh!"

Words failed Levison.

He threw off his clothes, and rolled into bed, and lay silent, refusing to speak another word.

Some of the juniors questioned him further, but he would not open his lips, only an occasional groan of pain escaping him.

"I syc, this 'ere looks as if it ain't gammon," said Hammond, at last. "E's really 'urt, you know."

"It looks wathah a bad knock."

"I think I'll go and 'ave a look in Tom Merry's study," said Hammond. "If any bloke is arter the spondulics, we may find 'im there."

"I don't believe it."

"No 'arm in lookin'."

"I'll come with you, deah boy," said D'Arcy.

"Waste of time," said Blake. "Go if you like. I'm going to bed."

Arthur Augustus and Hammond left the dormitory, and descended the stairs to the Shell passage.

Tom Merry's study was dark and silent.

Hammond struck a match, and lighted the gas.

The study presented its usual aspect. The desk was locked, and showed no sign of having been tampered with.

The two juniors exchanged doubtful glances.

"Must have been lyin', as usual!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"I s'pose so. But that whack on the 'ead—"

"Levison is awfully deep," said D'Arcy. "I shouldn't wonder if he did it himself. It doesn't look as if anybody had been heah."

"No, it don't, fur a fact."

Hammond turned out the light again, and they quitted the study.

Silently, in their socks, they crept back towards the Fourth-Form dormitory.

Hammond suddenly stopped, and caught D'Arcy by the arm.

"Listen!" he muttered.

In the blackness ahead of them on the stairs they heard a sound.

D'Arcy uttered an involuntary ejaculation.

"Bai Jove! There's somebody up!"

"Hush!"

A sound as of a retreating footstep, and then silence. Hammond ran forward in the darkness, and stumbled on the stairs. He picked himself up, and ran on. There was a sound ahead of him, in the passage where opened the door of the Fifth-Form dormitory.

"Come on, D'Arcy!"

"I'm afaah you, deah boy."

Hammond ran on, and turned on the switch of the electric light in the passage. In a twinkling the long passage was flooded with light.

The two juniors glanced round them quickly.

There was no one in sight.

Near them was the door of the Fifth-Form dormitory, but there was no one but themselves in the passage. Hammond pointed to the door.

"I 'eard 'im runnin'," he muttered. "'E dodged in there."

"Bai Jove!"

"Whoever he is, he's dodged into the Fifth-Form dorm.," said Hammond. "Let's go in."

"They'll make a wow if we do—"

"I don't care."

"Oh, all wight!"

Hammond opened the door and looked in. The dormitory was dark and still. Hammond found the switch of the electric light, and turned it on. The dormitory was lighted up, and several of the Fifth-Formers awoke.

Cutts sat up in bed, and blinked at the intruders.

"You fags! What do you want here?" he exclaimed, in anger and amazement.

"We're all lockin' for somebody wot's dodged in 'ere," said Hammond. "It might be a burglar fur all we know."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" growled Cutts.

"We was arter him, and 'e ran down this 'ere passage, and he didn't 'ave time to get to the end afore I turned on the light," said Hammond.

"Get out of this dorm.!" said Cutts. "I'll report this to the Housemaster to-morrow."

"But I tell you—"

"Get out, or I'll come and chuck you out!"

"Weally, Cutts—"

Gerald Cutts put one leg out of bed. The two juniors withdrew from the dormitory, and closed the door.

"Nothin' doin'," said Arthur Augustus. "Let's get back!"

They returned to their own quarters. They found most of the Fourth-Formers still awake. There was a groan from Levison's bed.

"Well, found anything out?" asked Blake, with a yawn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

There were exclamations of interest at once.

"What was it?"

"Get it off your chest!"

"What's happened?"

Hammond explained. Levison sat up in bed to listen. His eyes were gleaming, under the hand that he held pressed to his forehead.

"Now do you believe me?" he exclaimed savagely. "You all know that I've been in bed here while Hammond was chasing this chap into the Fifth-Form dorm.!"

Blake whistled.

"Looks like it!" he agreed.

"Cutts wouldn't let us look for him in the dorm.," said Hammond. "Looks to me as if it's one of the Fifth!"

"Just as I said!" exclaimed Levison.

"Yaas; and Cutts was vewy watty," said D'Arcy sagely. "I wondah if it was Cutts? He is an awful wottah, you know!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Digby. "Cutts wouldn't steal. He's not quite rotten enough for that. But it certainly looks as if somebody was after the cash. And if it wasn't Levison—"

"Do you think I can be in two places at once?" sneered Levison.

"It wasn't Levison I chased along the passage," said Hammond. "It was somebody wot dodged into the Fifth-Form dorm."

"Then he must be still there!" said Herries excitedly.

"I s'pose so."

"Let's go and have him out!"

"Rats!" said Blake. "We don't want a Form fight with the Fifth. If he dodged into that dorm., it's because he's one of the Fifth, and we couldn't tell which one it was!"

"Yaas, that's quite twee."

"I'm blessed if I quite know what to make of it," said Hammond. "But I'm beginnin' to think that there's somethin' in wot Levison says. Somebody's arter my money that I've got locked up in Tom Merry's desk; and as he can't get 'old of the key, he was goin' to try to do without it!"

"Then he may try again," said Blake.

"Hardly likely, after nearly being caught," said Herries. "Not much good keeping any more watch to-night."

"Wathah not."

"I don't know," said Hammond slowly. "He might leave it another couple of hours, till all is quiet again. There's plenty of time before rising-bell, and he won't expect us to be on the watch all night. And if he's desperate 'ard up for the money, he may not be able to leave it till another time; 'sides that, I shall 'ave the money put in a safer place to-morrow!"

"Then you think—"

"I think that I've got an idea, since I know the bloke dodged into the Fifth-Form dorm.," said Hammond quietly.

"You fellers go back to bed. I'm goin' down!"

He was dressing himself rapidly as he spoke.

"I'm comin' with you, then, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus.

"Jest as you like, Master D'Arcy."

"I'm going to bed!" yawned Blake. "I wouldn't stay up all night for the price of all the high-class hats in Bethnal Green!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The candle was blown out, and the juniors turned in; but Hammond and his aristocratic cham, fully dressed, and in rubber shoes, quitted the dormitory.

CHAPTER 15.

Trapped!

HAMMOND listened intently in the passage.

All was silent. The marauder—if marauder there had been—had evidently gone back to bed, evidently giving up his design for that night, or perhaps waiting for another opportunity before the late winter dawn.

Arthur Augustus's teeth chattered a little. It was very cold in the dormitory passage.

"I say, deah boy, what's the wheeze?" he asked, a little repenting of his determination. "Have you weally got an ideah, you know?"

"Yes, Master D'Arcy."

"Then get it off your chest, deah boy, and I'll give you my opinion on it," said Arthur Augustus. "It's wathah parkay beah, and weally I would much wathah be in bed, if there is nothin' doin'."

Hammond spoke in a low, cautious voice.

"I'll tell you now," he said. "Arter we get downstairs we ain't to speak again, in case the bloke spots us!"

"Wight you are!"

"Whoever it was I was arter dodged into the Fifth," whispered Hammond. "That looks as if it was a Fifth-Form chap."

"Yaas, that's wight!"

"You remember last night, when we was takin' a trot round the quad, we 'eard Prye of the Fifth talkin' over the wall to somebody?"

"Yaas—somebody he called Marks."

"Marks was dunnin' 'im for money," said Hammond.

"Yaas, I pwesume so wrom what they were sayin'. But weally that is no bisnay of ours, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, somewhat severely. "Pwyce has a wight to be dunned for money if he desiahs!"

Hammond chuckled.

"I fancy he doesn't desire it," he said. "Cutts and Prye wanted to git me into a sweepstake, you remember. They're 'ard 'it over their gambling, and 'ard up. Marks, whoever he is, was dunnin' Prye. Now we find a chap from the Fifth monkeyin' arter my money. Looks to me as if we might put our finger on the spot now!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's some rotter wot's been gambling and got into debt that's arter my quids—"

"Soveweigns, deah boy!"

"Yes, I mean sovereigns. I'll lay you it's either Cutts or Prye—or both," said Hammond, "and that's wot we're going to find out. Levison is a rotter; but if he's innocent this time, he ought to be cleared."

"I quite agree to that."

"Then we're goin' to see. My idea is that the bloke is so desperate 'ard up that he mayn't dare to put it off to a safer time. 'Sides that, he knows I may put the money somewhere else safer. 'E'll be at it agin to-night; there's four or five hours to daylight yet. P'raps about an hour afore dawn he'll be down in Tom Merry's study agin."

"Bai Jove!"

"And if the cash is taken, he knows the chances are it'll be put down to Levison, under the cires."

"What an awful wottah!"

"Well, Levison brought it on 'imself, first by playin' ghost, and then by bein' such an awful liar!" said Hammond. "But what we want to git at is the truth. We're going to catch the bloke if he comes monkeying round agin to-night!"

"But, weally, deah boy, he seems to be a wathah despewate chawactah," said the swell of St. Jim's uneasily. "I weally don't care about waitin' in the study in the dark, and gettin' a feahful cwack on the head like poor old Lowtah!"

"We're not goin' to wait in the study."

"Where then, deah boy?"

"In the next study—Gore's. We can keep the door an inch or two open, and listen. We shall hear him if he comes. And if he goes into Tom Merry's study—"

"Good! Then we can waise the alarm—"

"No fear! He's a shippy customer, and he'd bolt again and give us the slip. I'm going to put Tom Merry's key on the outside of the door. If we hear him go into the study, we'll turn the key on him!"

"Bai Jove! What a wippin' ideah!"

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"And then he'll be fair caught!" grinned Hammond.

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that! Come on, deah boy!"

"Not a sound!" whispered Hammond.

"Wight-ho!"

The two juniors crept down the stairs silently in their rubber shoes. The School House was very still.

They reached the Shell passage, and Hammond quickly transferred the key of Tom Merry's study door to the outside of the lock.

Then they crept into Gore's study, which was next to Tom Merry's.

Hammond placed the door about an inch ajar, and stationed himself close to it to watch and listen.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy blinked round the study, and as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he discerned Gore's armchair, and promptly sat down in it.

"I shall keep watch bettah sittin' down," he murmured.

Hammond grinned in the darkness.

"Right you are!" he said. "No 'arm if you go off to sleep, Master D'Arcy. I'll wake you up if I 'ear anythin'!"

"Wats! I'm not goin' to sleep!"

"We mustn't speak 'ere, Master D'Arcy."

"I was about to make the same remark, Hammond," said D'Arcy severely. "Weally, it is wathah incautious of you to talk so much. The slightest remark may put the wascal on his guard if he comes along the passage and heahs us. I should wecommend not sayin' a single word!"

"Yes, D'Arcy."

"A still tongue shows a wise head, Hammond," said D'Arcy sogley. "Speech is silvah, and silence is golden, you know!"

"Yes."

"Hadh't you bettah sit down, deah boy? You will get wathah tired standin' up."

"That's all right."

"Vewy well; only mind you don't talk."

Hammond grunted.

"It is impos. to be too cautious, in a case like this," continued D'Arcy. "One syllable may betway us."

Another grunt.

"I shall not go to sleep," pursued Arthur Augustus, a little drowsily. "I feel wathah sleepay, but I shall make a point of it to keep wide awake. If you should nod off, Hammond, you can wely on me to keep wide awake."

Hammond began to wish that Arthur Augustus D'Arcy would go to sleep. He was greatly attached to his noble chum, but certainly Arthur Augustus was not exactly the most useful person in the world for keeping watch, when silence was required.

"Wely on me," repeated Arthur Augustus, still more drowsily; "and wemembah, Hammond, deah boy, not a word—not a single syllable."

"Yes."

"Awfly quiet, isn't it? There doesn't seem to be a sound in the house, deah boy. If you should speak, the wottah would be certain to heah you. Nothin' like bein' thowoughly cautious."

Fortunately, D'Arcy nodded off to sleep at this point, or he would have continued impressing upon Hammond the necessity of silence until dawn.

Hammond drew a breath of relief as soon as the regular breathing of the junior in the armchair warned him that D'Arcy was safe in slumber.

He did not doze himself.

He would not sit down, in case he should be tempted to nod off; but kept his post by the slightly-open door, watchful, wakeful, with every sense on the alert.

Two o'clock boomed out from the clock tower.

Silence followed.

Arthur Augustus slept on as peacefully in George Gore's armchair, as if he had been in his own bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Hammond watched and waited.

Three o'clock

Then another long hour of watching.

In spite of himself, Hammond felt his eyes heavy with sleep, and his thoughts beginning to wander a little.

But in his early days, in the little shop in Bethnal Green, he had been accustomed to long hours of work and wakefulness, and he was more fitted for his task than the noble swell of the Fourth

Half-past three.

Hammond began to wonder whether it was all for nothing. The temptation to snatch a few winks of sleep was strong. But he resisted it. And he had his reward.

All drowsiness vanished from his eyelids as he heard a soft and stealthy sound in the passage.

He braced up, his eyes gleaming, his heart thumping.

Someone was coming along the Shell passage, with slow, soft, and cautious footsteps.

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It was the marauder at last—Levison or another!

Not Levison, certainly—for Levison knew that Hammond and D'Arcy were keeping watch. Not Levison—and, therefore, evidently another. It was to be Hammond, the Cockney schoolboy, who was to be the means of proving the innocence of the cad of the Fourth, who had persecuted him ever since he had come to St. Jim's.

The stealthy footsteps passed Gore's study.

Hammond listened intently.

He heard Tom Merry's study door softly opened—he heard it softly shut again. The Unknown was in Tom Merry's study.

Hammond drew a deep breath.

"Caught!" he muttered.

He pulled the door further open, and crept into the passage. From under the door of Tom Merry's study came a faint gleam of light. Whoever was there needed a light for the work he had come to do, evidently—but he did not venture to light the gas. That pale and flickering light was shed by a candle. Hammond stood outside the closed door and listened. He heard low sounds of movement in the study—and suddenly an ominous crack.

He grinned a little. He knew what that meant. The rascal, having failed to obtain Tom Merry's key to the desk, had been driven to his only resource—forcing it open. The crack was the sound of the opening desk.

Crack again, and again.

"That's the money-drawer!" murmured Hammond. "I don't 'ardly think he'll be able to deny wot he was arter now."

And his fingers closed on the key, and turned it in the lock with a sharp, sudden click.

CHAPTER 16.

The Thief Exposed.

CLICK!

In the stillness, the click of the turning key, faint as it was, had all the startling sharpness of a pistol-shot.

It was followed by a sudden husky exclamation in the study, and the immediate extinction of the light there.

The next moment a hand tried the door from inside—the handle turned, but the locked door, of course, did not open.

Then there was another exclamation—of rage and despair.

The rascal was trapped—and he knew it.

There was no hope for him. Locked in the study, he could not escape—and the broken desk would be a conclusive proof what he had come there for.

Hammond stepped back from the door, and calmly turned on the electric light in the passage. Then he ran into Gore's study and called D'Arcy.

"Gussy, wake up—"

"Bai Jove!" The swell of St. Jim's started up, and rubbed his eyes. "Bai Jove, deah boy, I believe I nodded off for a moment."

"Yes, and a good many moments," grinned Hammond.

"I've caught him."

"Gweat Scott!"

"He's locked in Tom Merry's study. Buzz off and call the fellows. I'm going to watch here till they come."

"Wight-ho! What luck!"

Arthur Augustus, fully awakened now, rushed away.

Within Tom Merry's study, the handle was being frantically tried again. The imprisoned rascal was almost beside himself. Hammond heard next a sound of a chisel scratching on the lock inside. The rascal was trying to force it—but the door-lock was strong and stout, and it was not likely to yield easily. And in less than two minutes Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was back—with a crowd of fellows at his heels.

He had shouted into the Fourth Form and Shell dormitories the news that the unknown rascal had been trapped; and Tom Merry & Co. had turned out in force to see the result. They did not care now if the house was awakened. If there had been an attempt to break open Tom Merry's desk and steal Hammond's money, it was a matter that the House-master would have to deal with.

The grinding sound of the chisel on the lock could be heard by all the juniors as they swarmed into the Shell passage.

"Faith, and he's there!" exclaimed Reilly. "And here's Levison, be jabbers."

Levison was in the crowd of half-dressed juniors. His eyes were blazing with excitement—the bruise on his forehead showed up dark on his white face.

"Yaas, wathah—it can't be Levison, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass upon the cad of the Fourth. "Levison, I am quite satisfied now that it isn't you."

"Go hon!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"But who is it, then?" exclaimed Tom Merry.



RUGGER AND SOCCER MIXED!

(A highly-amusing incident in "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number," the grand, complete tale of Greyfriars School contained in this week's issue of "THE MAGNET" Library. Now on sale. Price One Penny.)

"One of the Fifth, I reckon," said Hammond. "But we'll soon see. He's a giddy prisoner now in that there study, and he can't git away."

"What is all this? What does this mean?" It was the deep voice of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House.

Mr. Railton strode upon the scene, in his dressing-gown. The excited voices of the juniors had awakened him; as, indeed, they had awakened nearly everybody else in the House.

"What are you boys out of bed for?" the Housemaster exclaimed sternly. "Levison—have you received an injury? What does all this mean?"

"We've caught the bloke, sir," said Hammond.

"What!"

Hammond breathlessly explained.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. "Is it possible? But perhaps this boy, whoever he is, may have gone into Tom Merry's study for some innocent purpose. We shall see."

"He can't 'ave broke open Tom Merry's desk for an innocent purpose, I s'pose, sir," said Hammond, with a chuckle.

"No; that, of course, is impossible."

"I 'eard 'im break it open. And if he was doin' no 'arm there, he'd 'ave called out to be let out afore this, I reckon."

"We shall see!"

Mr. Railton strode to the study door and unlocked it. The juniors—many seniors among them now—crowded behind him as he threw the door open. The study was in darkness; but the electric light from the passage streamed in—and disclosed a figure there—a figure wrapped in a dark coat, with a cardboard mask on his face. The figure sprang back with a low, inarticulate cry at the sight of the Housemaster.

"Light the gas, Merry!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Yes, sir."

The wretched, detected rascal made a wild spring towards the door. He could never have got through the crowd outside—but he did not even reach them. Mr. Railton's strong hand closed on him and swung him back.

The Housemaster dragged the cardboard mask—the same

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that Levison had used when playing ghost—from the face of his prisoner.

Then his features were revealed. And from all who saw him there came a shout.

"Prye!"

"Prye of the Fifth!"

"Great Scott!"

"Yaas, wathah; it's Pwy, the wascal!"

Prye's face was haggard. Mr. Railton's eyes searched the pallid face, the wild eyes, for a moment, and then turned upon the smashed desk—the money-drawer open, the bank-notes and gold scattered on the desk, where the thief had dropped them in his alarm and consternation at hearing the key click in the lock. His eyes fell, too, upon a short thick stick that lay upon the table, and it was not necessary to ask with what weapon, and by whose hand, Monty Lowther had received the injury that had been attributed to Levison.

"Prye!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

Prye gasped speechlessly.

"Have you anything to say?" demanded the Housemaster.

Prye struggled for words, but he had nothing to say. What could he say? He had been caught in the very act.

"Rascal!" said the Housemaster, in deep tones of indignation. "So it is you! This was your object—the theft of money! It was you who struck down Lowther. And, taking advantage of Levison's folly, you allowed your own base action to be attributed to him!"

Prye did not speak; he could not. Only a groan of despair came from his lips.

He had nothing to say; no lie could serve him. All was clear now, and there was no hope for the detected rascal.

Cutts of the Fifth was in the crowd in the passage, and his face had gone very white at the sight of his chum. He understood, and he backed away quickly and disappeared. He did not want to catch Albert Prye's eye just then; he did not know what wild words the wretched Fifth-Former might have uttered.

But Prye was not thinking of him—he was hardly thinking at all—his faculties were dazed and confused by his overwhelming ruin.

He had twice struck, cruelly and brutally, in the dark, to save himself from recognition, and Monty Lowther and Levison bore the marks of his cowardly blow. But there was nothing that could save him now. He was seen, recognised, and his guilt was evident. The wretched Fifth-Former covered his face with his hands.

"Come!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

With a firm hand on Prye's shoulder, he led him from the study.

Prye went without a word.

The School House fellows returned to bed in a state of the wildest excitement, and there was little more sleep in the House that night.

CHAPTER 17.

Arthur Augustus Thinks It's All Right.

THE next morning there was a fresh, startling discovery for the School House.

Prye of the Fifth was gone.

Quite certain of being expelled, the wretched victim of his own vices fled before the dawn, and St. Jim's was destined to see him no more.

He had been left in his dormitory, but in the morning a rope of sheets was found hanging from the dormitory window, and Prye was not to be found. Nobody else in the Fifth appeared to know anything about it, but some of the fellows were pretty certain that Cutts had helped his friend to escape—whether from friendship, or from fear of being dragged into Prye's disgrace, was an open question.

At all events, Prye was gone, and by his flight to his home he had saved himself from the disgrace of public expulsion from the school.

"It's all the bettah, deah boys," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked. "He was an awful wothah, but he's got it in the neck, and no mistake. I'm glad he's gone."

"And Levison was telling the truth all the time!" said Monty Lowther. "That's the most wonderful part of the whole bizney."

Levison was called into the Housemaster's study, but if he expected any expression of regret on Mr. Railton's part he was disappointed.

Mr. Railton spoke to him sharply and sternly.

"You have had a narrow escape, Levison," he said. "You can see that for yourself. But for the fact that Prye was caught in the act, his wickedness and dishonour might have been laid to your charge, and you would have suffered his fate."

"I know it, sir," said Levison. "I hope I may get something more like justice another time."

"It was entirely your own fault, Levison. I hope this incident will prove a warning to you. Had you been known to be a boy of honourable character, your word would have been sufficient to dispel suspicion, the evidence being entirely circumstantial. I hope you will take warning by this, and amend your conduct in the future."

And with that Mr. Railton dismissed him.

But Levison was not quite without better feelings, for that morning he sought out Hammond, and spoke to him with something like good feeling and gratitude.

"I'm sorry I've been down on you, Hammond," he said awkwardly. "You've treated me well—better than I deserved, I suppose."

"Much bettah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"I don't know that I should have done as much, in your place," went on Levison, flushing a little.

"Jollay sure you wouldn't, deah boy!" chimed in Arthur Augustus.

"And I'm much obliged," said Levison; "and—and there's my hand, if you choose to take it, Hammond."

Hammond took it heartily enough.

"It's orl right," he said. "No 'arm done. I don't mind bein' chipped about the 'igh-class 'ats. I don't bear no malice. And there's my fist, too. All serene!"

And Levison walked away, feeling more shamefaced than he had ever felt in his life before.

Arthur Augustus turned his famous eyeglass approvingly upon Hammond.

"Vewy wight and pwopah!" he remarked. "Levison has said that he's sowwy for havin' tweated you like a cad, and an apology from one gentleman to another is quite suffish. My deah boy, it's all wight!"

And Hammond grinned, and agreed that it was all right.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete tale of TOM MERRY & CO. next Wednesday, entitled "CAUGHT NAPPING," by Martin Clifford. Also a grand instalment of our amazing new serial, "SECRET SERVICE," by "Agent 55." Order your "GEM" in Advance. Price One Penny.)



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SECRET SERVICE!



The Opening Chapters of a Grand New Serial Story. By AGENT "No. 55."

NOTE!

The author has, for obvious reasons, to conceal his real identity under the pen-name of Agent "No. 55." Concerning his position, I am allowed to say no more than this: that if his real name were revealed it would cause something like consternation in Diplomatic and Secret Service circles.

THE EDITOR.

THE FIRST INSTALMENT.

Jerry Osborne, a young Britisher taking a holiday in Berlin, goes to the assistance of a man who has been knocked down by a motor-car in the street in

THE GERMAN CAPITAL.

To his surprise he recognises in the injured man his employer, Mr. Muller, the head of the London office in which Jerry works. After the accident Mr. Muller's brain seems to be affected; he has lost his memory, and mutters continually. As

THE INJURED MAN'S ONLY FRIEND

in Berlin, Jerry is asked by the German police to accompany him home to England. The lad therefore takes charge of his employer. He is surprised to note how much attention his charge attracts during the train journey to the frontier.

The train is nearing Flushing, when Jerry, having left his compartment for a short time, returns to find a burly German bending over Mr. Muller, apparently feeling his pulse.

"Here! What's the matter?" the English lad demanded, alert and suspicious at once.

(Now start the second instalment.)

CHAPTER 2.

The Fight—A Friend in Need.

It was odd how many persons had seemed interested in Muller during the journey.

In vilely mangled English the big man tried to make Jerry understand that he had feared Muller was taken ill and had gone to his assistance.

"He isn't ill! And will you mind your own business?" retorted Jerry. "Get out of this!"

"You haf me insult most wickedly!" the big man cried angrily.

And he got out in a hurry, muttering something about English pig-dogs.

Jerry did not believe robbery was intended; he did not

know what to think. But that he was being followed and watched by some persons to whom Muller was known seemed clear as glass. It was the object of the attention that puzzled him.

Once more he went over the strange words the German had muttered, but their meaning eluded him. Getting out an envelope, he wrote them down on the back, and put the slip into a pocket-book.

At last the Hook of Holland was reached, and, picking up his gladstone, Jerry took Muller's arm, and assisted him upon the platform. As a matter of fact, he had to lift the man down, for Muller had fallen to his muttering again, and obstinately refused to budge.

Setting Muller down, Jerry grabbed his bag in one hand and his companion's sleeve with the other, and started along the platform, now deserted, the other boat passengers having got away.

All at once Jerry felt a violent impact from behind, and he went staggering, Muller being dragged after him.

"This way to de boat!" cried a hoarse voice, as Jerry regained his balance, feeling his fingers parting with the grip of Muller's sleeve.

A heavily-built man had hold of Muller's other arm, and was endeavouring to pull him away. As Jerry swung round the light from a lamp fell upon the fellow's face, and Jerry recognised him as the man he had turned out of the compartment.

Jerry didn't stop to inquire why he was trying to take Muller away. He dropped his bag, clenched his fist, and struck at the man's face. The blow went home, and an oath left the man as he released Muller and staggered back.

"Here, you fools, come quick!" he shouted, and sprang to attack Jerry with greater quickness than his bulk seemed to warrant.

Jerry heard quick-running feet, and out of the shadows two men came running to attack him in the rear. To fight and retain hold of Muller, who stood looking on vacantly, was impossible.

Putting his weight behind a straight left, he stopped the big man with a flush hit on the nose, and followed it up by a right-hand drive for the mark that brought a grunt from the

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"CAUGHT NAPPING!"

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

recipient. The man fell back, gasping something in German. Then Jerry swung round, bringing off a neat pivot blow that toppled one of those behind him sideways.

A knife glittered in the hands of the second assailant. He struck, and Jerry sprang back, colliding with Muller, their heads meeting with a smart crack. Muller staggered, and fell helplessly upon the platform, his head striking with a thud.

Came a shout in the big man's voice, then a blow that missed Jerry's head and dropped on his shoulder. There was a knuckleduster on the striker's fist, and a thrill of pain shot down Jerry's arm. But the man with the knife absorbed all his attention; he could not see what was going on behind him. Could he have done so, he would have been astonished.

Lifted and stood upright by the big man, Muller was gaping about him, eyes wide open.

"Where am I? What is all this?" he cried in German.

The big man made an answer, and, catching his arm, cried to him to come along. As one awakening from a dream, Muller stared at him.

"Hendrick, what are you doing here?" he cried sharply. "Why, a moment ago I was in Berlin!"

"And now you're on the platform at Hook of Holland," the other interrupted. "What's the matter with you, Krug, I don't know! Have you been crazy? But the boat is waiting. Come, hurry! Schmidt and Wessels will look after that British pig-dog detective! Hurry, man!"

A complete transformation had come over Muller since his head had hit the ground. He was like a man who awakes to find himself in a wholly unexpected place, yet he had his wits about him. One look he gave at Jerry, now locked in a close embrace with the man with the knife, and then, with a word to the big man, started running to the quayside.

Jerry found his adversary a handful. A hard blow on the inside of the wrist had made the fellow drop his knife, and then they had closed. Athlete though he was, Jerry found the man a tough opponent. He heard the voices behind him, recognising the well-known one of his employer—very different from that Muller had used since the accident in Unter den Linden, but his brain had no time to speculate on the wonderful change. The man with whom he was wrestling had caught him by the throat with a grip that told the lad he was actually fighting for his life.

To and fro they wrestled about the platform, Jerry with the under grip and striving to force the man over backwards. Suddenly they tripped over the body of the fellow knocked out, and both came down heavily. As they fell Jerry loosed his hold, and his right fist caught his opponent a smashing blow on the temple.

Panting, Jerry regained his feet, and looked about. One glance showed him that Muller had vanished, and, without any hesitation, he started along the platform to find the outlet to the quay where lay the British steamer. That he had left his gladstone behind never occurred to him. His business was to find Muller and stick to him.

The meaning of the murderous attack he had escaped he could not guess; but it was evident that someone, for some reason unknown, meant taking Muller from out of his custody.

Two porters caught sight of him, shouted something unintelligible, and ran towards him. Swerving, he evaded their clumsy attempts, found an open doorway, and bolted through it. He was in the big room where the Customs examination takes place. A couple of men in uniform were loafing around, and shouted to him. But he gave no heed, dashed across the floor and out by a door opposite, to find himself upon the quay.

Fifty yards off lay the Great Eastern Railway Co.'s steamer, short puffs of smoke jutting from the funnel. He heard the grunting hiss of escaping steam, warning of immediate departure, and sprinted like a hundred yards' competitor.

He was too late. Already the gangway had been hauled inboard, and the steamer was on the move. Five feet separated her from the quay as Jerry pulled up abreast, and with every moment the distance was increasing. A cry of rage escaped the lad, and for an instant there came to him the mad idea to make a desperate leap and clutch for the steamer-rail.

"Stop! Stop! I must come aboard! Stop!" he yelled wildly, with all the breath left in his lungs.

But he might as well have tried to stop the vessel by hauling on a tow-rope. Several persons gathered at the side heard his angry shout.

"Chap missed the boat! What a lark!" he heard one say. And then there was a merry laugh.

"Don't worry, old chap!" one of the laughers called out. "Another one soon—about twelve hours! I'll tell her at the other end what's happened! So-long!"

And there was more laughter.
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"THE MAGNET" LIBRARY,
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Jerry was so furious he shook his fist at the mockers. He would have given a sovereign down on the nail for the chance of hammering their silly heads.

Shaking with impotent anger, he turned away, to hear a voice asking him in excellent English if the speaker might be of any assistance.

Jerry saw a tall man in a long, light coat and with a golf cap pulled down well over his eyes, standing near him. The light was not good, and there was little he could make out of the man's face save a strong and prominent chin and a thick, fair moustache above.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

And his natural loss of temper was some excuse for the roughness and suspicion in his voice.

"Well, I was on the quay—been to see a friend off—and noticing that you had lost the steamer and seemed to be a stranger here, I thought I might possibly be of assistance," the stranger said politely.

"How d'you know I'm a stranger?" cried Jerry.

"Well, you're British," was the slow, rather amused answer.

And then Jerry looked up quickly at the man. He liked what he could see of his face, and he liked his voice.

"Are you a Britisher?" he asked suddenly.

"I am glad to say I am!"

"Thank goodness!"

It was heartening to be with a fellow-countryman again.

"You seem relieved," the man went on. "Are you in any trouble? You came down here in a mighty hurry."

"My luggage is on the platform. I couldn't look after it and scrap at the same time, and when I got away I didn't think of the bag."

"We will go and look for it, and then— Oh, by the way, my name is Elton."

"What!"

Jerry stopped dead.

"I said my name is Elton," the man repeated. "It is best always to know to whom one is talking."

"Elton! Why, that's the name Muller was repeating!" cried Jerry. "He's the first, and not later than September—"

He broke off, his eyes on his companion. "Elton! Why, surely the name—"

"You know it? A few persons have heard of it lately." Mr. Elton seemed to be somewhat amused. "I've done a bit in the aviation line, y'know."

"The Elton who was the first man to fly fifteen hundred miles without a break?" cried Jerry excitedly.

"That's so."

"And Muller was to write to Zophel!" exclaimed Jerry, his brain in a whirl, and not very clear as to what he was saying.

And then it was Mr. Elton's turn to halt dead and be surprised. From under his cap he looked steadily at Jerry.

"Muller is to write to whom?" he asked.

"Zophel he said. I don't know how it's spelled, but that was the sound," Jerry answered.

"Herr Zophel," Elton murmured to himself.

And then he gently took Jerry Osborne's arm.

"My friend, I'd like a talk with you," he said very quietly. "Will you come with me? I live not very far off, and my car's waiting. You need not be afraid. You know who I am, and you're British."

"I'm not afraid, and my name's Gerald Osborne," Jerry answered readily.

"Thank you! If you don't mind, Mr. Osborne, we'll get off without further delay," Elton said.

Max Elton, the Inventor.

Max Elton was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. Having decided what he was going to do, he went to work and did it without fuss or delay. He sized up a man or a situation quickly, and with an instinctive judgment that rarely proved inaccurate. Osborne had let fall words that had aroused his curiosity and suspicion, but not for a moment did he feel the slightest suspicion of the young man whose acquaintance he had made in such peculiar circumstances.

In the first place, the young man was English; in the second, one long, scrutinising glance at Osborne's clean-cut face had been sufficient to convince him the young man was wholly genuine.

"D'you know," he said pleasantly, "I think it's a bit of luck for me meeting you. What you've had to tell me has been very interesting. But we'll talk about that later, when we get home. You don't mind coming along with me, do you?"

Osborne didn't, and said so heartily. He thought he was to be congratulated for having fallen in with such a chap as Max Elton who was willing to befriend him.

On the other side of the line a car was waiting. There was

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no chauffeur, and if Osborne had expected to see a fine-looking, luxuriously-fitted vehicle, he was disappointed. Elton's car was long, and something of the shape of a racing-car, painted a dull grey, very dirty, and anything but imposing.

"Can't see much of her in this light, but she isn't a lot to look at when you can," the inventor said cheerfully. "But she can go, that's the main thing, and she doesn't make a dickens of a row travelling."

"What's her speed?" asked Osborne, climbing into his seat.

"Oh, she'll do eighty," Elton said carelessly. "More when it's necessary. I have got over a hundred out of her."

"On a racing-track?"

"No. Never had her on a track in my life." And Elton laughed. "It's too dangerous a sport for me. But I reckon a good driver could knock a hundred and twenty out of her at, say, Brooklands."

Osborne whistled.

"But the record—"

"Oh, yes, I know. But you see, the engine has a special little attachment of my own that other cars haven't—just a simple matter. Some fellow's bound to discover it one of these days, and then there will be racing. This isn't a car built for speed, you know."

"But it'll be your own invention if the attachment is invented over again, as you say," said Osborne, in surprise.

"Why don't you patent it now?"

"Not worth while. Only a little thing, you see. Besides, I'm interested in something just now a bit more fascinating."

Elton went on talking—about fifty different things—and getting his companion to talk, too, and Osborne felt almost sorry when Elton suddenly pointed to a light and told him they'd reached the end of their journey. He looked at his watch.

"By George! Over an hour gone by!" he exclaimed. "How far have we come, Mr. Elton?"

"Well, here's my house, and I reckon it nearly seventy miles off the Hook of Holland Quay. Don't look surprised, my dear chap! Absolutely level road, no traffic, that little attachment I spoke of—not to mention the tyres—do help one to get over the ground. Have to see those tyres when it's light. Neat idea. Fell across it quite by accident. Not rubber, you know, but a substance that's a lot more rubbery than rubber itself—if you can swallow such an Irishism. Come along in! We'll have a wash and a bite, and then you can tell me just what has been happening lately. You've got me on the tenterhooks of excitement."

Which, if true, was wonderful, Osborne thought, for a less excited-seeming person than Max Elton he had never seen in his life.

The wash was welcome. The bite proved to be quite a substantial cold meal, brought in by a small, wiry, dog-and-horsy looking man with side whiskers, who seemed as dumb as an owl, and whom Elton addressed as Neb.

"Parents were wicked enough to christen the poor chap Nebuchadnezzar, taking a mean advantage of his small size and inability to make any useful protest," Elton explained to Jerry, as they tucked into the plentiful and well-cooked and well-served food, for both proved to be hungry. "But you couldn't humanly expect me to bring out that awful jaw-cracking-mouthful every time I want to speak to him, so we compromised on Neb. Neb doesn't mind. Fancy he wouldn't mind what anybody called him, unless he was called a German, and then he'd get so hostile I'd pay good money to avoid being in the same room with him."

"And his other name?" asked Jerry, highly amused.

"Worse, if anything, than his front name, as the Americans call it," Elton answered. "I'd feel I was insulting the poor chap every time I used it. But I never do—got too much respect for Neb. It's Muddiman. And the poor fellow keeps himself as spick and span as though he'd just come out of a bandbox. He never is dirty—couldn't be. Now tell me! You said that your friend Muller mentioned the name Zophel. Have you any notion who Mr. Zophel is?"

"Never heard the name before," Jerry admitted.

"Well, I have," and Elton smiled. "A Herr Zophel happens to be the chief of the German Imperial Secret Intelligence Department. Now, what does that suggest to you?"

"That the department has some interest in yourself, Mr. Elton. It certainly was your name Muller mentioned, not once, but many times."

"I'm conceited enough, Mr. Osborne, to believe you are correct. Now, doesn't it suggest itself to you that Mr. Muller may have some connection with the G.I.S.I. Department?"

"You mean Muller is a spy?" And Jerry looked excited.

"Well, it's not an unreasonable assumption."

Jerry Osborne drew a deep breath. This was a new view

of the matter. And yet it was difficult to conceive of Muller, a London business man, being a spy in the pay of the German Government. The notion seemed wild, far-fetched. Muller had always struck his clerk as being a particularly insignificant, commonplace individual, with no object in life beyond the pushing of the motor engines for which he acted as agent.

"D'you mind describing this Muller to me?" asked Elton suddenly.

He listened carefully to the delineation of his employer that Jerry gave.

"Can't fix him," he said, shaking his head. "I've met a queer fish or two in one place and another, but I can't identify any chap as resembling your employer, Mr. Osborne. I say! D'you think that little moustache which you say ornaments your Mr. Muller is a real one?"

Jerry stared, and then broke into a laugh.

"Such a notion has never entered my head," he replied.

"No; that's not surprising. Now, d'you mind giving me, as nearly as possible, an account of your meeting with Mr. Muller in Berlin, and what transpired afterwards?" asked Elton.

So Jerry told of the accident in Unter den Linden, and his very great surprise when he discovered that the victim of it was the man by whom he was employed, and whom he had understood to be in the North of England at the time. Here Max Elton interrupted him.

"Odd, isn't it, that, after he'd said he was going North, you should run across him in Berlin?"

"So I thought, but no explanation suggested itself."

"Very natural. Please go on, Mr. Osborne."

And Jerry followed up with an account of his compulsory visit to the police-office, the interrogations put to him, and the care taken by the police not to lose sight of him.

"The police officials didn't seem to recognise Mr. Muller?" Elton asked.

"Not a bit. There was nothing on him by which he could be identified as anybody," Jerry answered. "I told them all I knew about him, and they were satisfied."

"And then they asked you to take him home. Did anything unusual happen on the way?"

"It did."

And Jerry related the incident of the attendant whom he had found in the compartment reserved for them; the hurried conversation, of which himself or his charge had obviously been the subject during the change of trains at Innsbruck; and the entry of the big, pugilistic-looking fellow into their compartment after dinner.

"You thought he was someone who knew Muller?"

"Certainly I did."

"Then doesn't it appear to you—seen in the light of what took place at Hook of Holland, the presence of the three men, the murderous attack on yourself—that Muller was known to be on the train and was expected by some persons anxious to see him?"

"That sounds feasible," Jerry said slowly. "But why should they be so anxious to take him away from me?"

"Because they didn't know who you were, but suspected something was wrong. They didn't know you were one of Muller's London office-clerks. And the big fellow had satisfied himself something was not all right with Muller, though they couldn't tell what, knowing nothing of the Berlin accident. But they suspected you, and they were anxious to get Muller out of your custody."

"Custody?" repeated Jerry, laughing. "You speak as though I'd been taken for a policeman."

"And a very likely mistake, too, Mr. Osborne. Don't feel annoyed." And Elton smiled. "I know several detectives who look no more like policemen—whatever that means—than you do. Probably Mr. Muller's friends have good reason to fear their friend falling into the hands of the police."

"The English police."

"Exactly, my dear Jerry."

"I feel flattered."

"You ought. You've plainly given Muller & Co. no end of a bad scare, and incidentally you've contrived to acquaint me with something the importance of which is great, though at present I'm not able to estimate just how great. And now what d'you say to a snooze? You've had a moderately busy and exciting day, and a sleep should do you good. But, I say—"

"Yes?"

"I'd have given a fiver to have seen your scrap on the platform. My rotten luck again! I must have been standing within a hundred yards of one of the heftiest bits of rough-and-tumble scrapping any man could want, and wasn't able to lift a finger to assist a fellow-countryman. Rotten! Come along; I'll show you where you can have a pitch."

Elton led the way to a neatly-furnished, if rather small, bedroom, provided Jerry with what was necessary, and wished

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him good-night. At the bed-room door he halted for a moment.

"I've a hunch—as the Americans say—that your pal Muller and his admirable friends—such as you left alive, anyway—didn't catch the steamer you so narrowly missed."

"Oh, I think they did!" Jerry said quickly. "Why else were they in such a hurry to get off?"

"Well, we'll see. Good-night, old fellow! You've done me no end of a good turn to-night. Sleep well."

Jerry Osborne did sleep well, the exciting events of the day notwithstanding. No sooner was his head on the pillow than he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep that lasted until, midway between sleeping and awakening, he was fully aroused by the entry into the bed-room of Nebuchadnezzar Muddiman, who brought a cup of tea.

"Bath—at once, sir. Breakfast—whenever you're ready, sir," the little man announced.

Within twenty minutes Jerry was dressed and downstairs in the room where he had fed overnight. Elton was there, busy writing, but left off at once.

"Glad to see you. Sleep well? Say, I didn't tell you last night—this morning, rather—why I thought Muller didn't cross to England by your steamer. I was on the quay, but I never noticed two persons such as you described go aboard. And they didn't."

"How do you know?" Jerry asked, for he had quite made up his mind he was right.

"Sent off a wireless message to a friend of mine at port of destination. Got a little private apparatus of my own, y'know. No one approaching description of Muller or your pugilistic friend aboard."

"Where, then, did they go?"

"Ah, that's what I'd like to know. May learn soon. Come to breakfast, there's a good fellow. Neb told me he had something ready."

While the meal was in progress, Jerry was thinking over what Elton had last said. It had been a perfectly natural assumption of his that Muller and his friends intended catching the Harwich steamer; but since, it appeared, they had not done so, there must be some good reason at the back of it.

"Mr. Elton," he said suddenly, "you know about this Herr Zophel. Isn't it likely he also knows about you?"

"I think it very likely—very likely indeed," Elton replied.

"And there's some connection between Zophel and Muller, who, from what you say, may well be a spy. Suppose Muller knows where you are living—here, I mean."

"Yes," Elton was smiling.

"Well, then, Muller not catching the Harwich steamer, taken in conjunction with those queer words of his while he was suffering from the effects of the crack on the head, suggest a reason to me."

"Which is?"

"Why that he's remained here for the purpose of doing some harm to you. You're to be 'the first,' he said; the 'first' what? Your reputation as 'the greatest living authority on aviation—one of England's best assets if trouble were to arise between England and Germany. Why?—Jerry jumped up in his excitement—"why, your life may be in danger!"

"Not impossible, old chap. And that's why I'm going to run you back to Hook of Holland as soon after breakfast as you like, so that you can get the next steamer home."

And then Jerry Osborne took the sudden decision that was to have so important an influence upon his future.

"I'd much rather stay here with you, Mr. Elton," he said simply. "Of course, if you'll have me," he added.

Elton looked at him hard for a few moments. Then he rose and came to the other side of the table, and laid one hand on Jerry's shoulder.

"My dear lad," he said huskily, "you're a brick! I knew it after looking at your face, and hearing you say ten words. You've nerve and grit, and I wouldn't want a better pal. I know you mean what you say about stopping with me, but I'm not going to take advantage of you. Listen, Jerry. There's danger in this business, and I've no right to drag you into it. What would your people think of me if I did?"

"I haven't any; alone in the world except for a sort of cousin who doesn't care a rap whether I'm alive or not. He never takes any trouble to find out, anyway. Then you won't let me stay?"

And then Elton gripped his hand hard, making no attempt to disguise the pleasure he felt.

"You're an obstinate villain, Jerry; and I like you all the better for it!" he cried heartily. "And I tell you that I'm jolly glad you will stay with me. To tell the honest truth, I'm more than a bit afraid."

(A long instalment of this splendid New Serial next Wednesday, when some startling developments may be looked for as a result of Jerry Osborne's strange story.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 306.

"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."

G. M. Keay, Landsdowne Road, Claremont, near Cape Town, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 17-18.

C. W. Prenger, Simpson Street, South End, Port Elizabeth, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles, age 15-17.

B. Bloom, 1201, Pacific Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, and late of Rochester, England, wishes to correspond with girl readers of that town, age 18.

Miss L. Fisher, 101, Evans Street, East Brunswick, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with readers interested in postcards.

H. Hinton, General Delivery, Sioux City, Iowa, U.S.A., wishes to correspond with a girl reader.

Miss M. Hughes, Wellington, Pahiatua, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with a boy reader in England, age 14-15.

L. E. Norman, 1778, Davie Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers interested in stamps and photography.

Miss T. Hill, 544, Ross Avenue, Winnipeg, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers, age 17-18.

M. Wilson, care of J. Dan, River Street, Ballina, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers in the British Isles, age 18-21.

W. C. Long, P.O. Box 254, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with girl readers in the United Kingdom, age 17-20.

C. Severin, Second Street, Orroroo, South Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 14-15.

W. Lubenberg, 58, Height Street, Doornfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in the United Kingdom, age 15.

H. A. Law, Box 282, Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 16-17.

C. Fitzpatrick, care of Stevens & Hollingworth, 9, Bears Street, Kimberley, Cape Colony, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 17-18.

H. Creagen, 445, Dufferin Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, wishes to correspond with a girl reader, age 18-20.

Miss K. Church, care of Roslyn Mills, Kaikora Valley, Dunedin, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with an English girl "Gemite," age 20-21.

A. Dyce, 11, Durham Street, Stanmore, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in Scotland or Ireland, age 16-17.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE CORINTHIAN

The Concluding Chapter of Brian Kingston's Magnificent Sporting Story.

Ned Harley's Last Fight.

And then pandemonium broke loose. The most violent threats were hurled at the fighters, the officials, Mr. Brayne, Sir Patrick Bevan, and all whom the infuriated crowd assumed might be parties to the most extraordinary and bare-faced fraud that the Ring had ever known.

Alone, in the centre of the ring, Sir Patrick faced the mob. He demanded to be allowed to speak, and by degrees the clamour lessened.

"The man—no, he is less than a man," cried the old aristocrat, his voice ringing with indignation, "tells you I have paid him to lose. The creature lies! I have not paid him a farthing. Not until three hours ago was I aware that Ned Harley was my son."

Some tried to shout him down, but others cried for silence that he might have a hearing.

He told them of the making of the match, of his doubt of Ned Harley's invincibility, although he had never seen him. He called upon the referee to prove his insistence that the fight should be carried through, even when he learned who actually was Ned Harley—the precaution he had taken against the escape of Bully Power, whose conduct had excited his suspicions. And when Mr. Craven and Mr. Jackson declared that such were the facts, some, at least, of the mob shouted their belief.

"If Power has received money to lose—and why he should lie without reason I cannot understand," cried Sir Patrick, in the partial silence that followed—"the money must have come from someone who had an interest in Ned Harley winning. And you cannot all be such fools as to believe that I had any such interest. His victory means to me the loss of fifteen thousand guineas!"

It was an argument that appealed to the mob.

Before the effect of it could weaken, D'Arcy Vavasour stepped to where still stood Power.

"My man!" he cried sharply, and loudly enough for those half a dozen rows back to hear his question. "From whom did you receive the money to lose?"

And Bully Power's eyes went straightway to where a white-faced man stood penned between the outer ropes and those crowding behind him. He extended his arm, and pointed.

"He's there, sorr, th' man that paid me th' money!" he cried.

The gaze of hundreds of excited men fell upon Sir Vincent Brookes' livid face; hundreds more had no chance of seeing the culprit; but they yelled for his name, and their question was answered by a thundering shout. It was a name well known, too well known for the well-being of its owner.

There came a sudden movement of the crowd towards him, and the pressure hurled him beneath the ropes, across the intervening space, and inside the inner ring. A sharp command from Mr. Jackson, and the beaters out, the pugilists whose business it was to keep the crowd away from the ring, reached and surrounded him as he regained his feet.

Denial of his guilt! No thought of it came to him; he was overmastered by terror. The fury in the voice in the crowd when it had shouted his name had driven from him every feeling save fear of their threatened vengeance. At Sir Patrick's first words he had cursed the bold assurance in his absolute safety that had led him to take his position at the outer ring. Confident had he been that the whole rage of the spectators when they learned how they had been tricked, would fall upon the two men whom he hated most—Sir Patrick Bevan and his son. So cleverly had he safeguarded himself that discovery of his part he believed impossible.

Like all cunning persons, he had overreached himself. It had never occurred to him that Power would deceive him, and reveal that it was himself who had paid over the money which was the price of his losing. And now that the revelation had come, he knew well enough that to attempt to impose on the mob by the lie with which he had imposed upon Power was futile.

His fine scheme had failed, his villainy made manifest. Gone was his face of brass, his cold, sneering, ever ready smile. Quivering in sheer physical fear, from behind his living shield, he emitted a scream of fear.

What next would have happened cannot be conjectured, but it is certain that the combined anger of the mob would have prevailed over the strength of those who would have tried to shield Brookes from their corner where he had remained since Power's sensational admission, ran to the centre of the ring.

"Stop!" he yelled. "This man has said he was paid to lose to me. If he will fight me, and try to beat me I will make him a present of a hundred guineas."

"And I," D'Arcy Vavasour joined Hil, "and I will add a thousand guineas to the hundred."

It was an inspiration, a stroke of genius, and it succeeded. Checked, those about the ring stared at the pair, for the instant forgetting Brookes. And Bully Power it was who completed what Hil and Vavasour had begun. With a shout he sprang towards them.

"Begorra, an' it's meself will take th' offer. I'll foight ye fair, an' beat ye fair, be all th' powers but I will!" he cried excitedly.

And then the crowd cheered. This extraordinary encounter was going to terminate, after all, in such a battle as they had come expecting to see. A "cross," one of the most flagrant ever perpetrated, had developed into a fair stand-up fight. Again and again the mob signified its approval.

Its good humour restored, none but a few roughs paid attention to the removal of Sir Vincent Brookes. Through a lane amid the pack and mass his bodyguard carried him, and on the outskirts of the ring dismissed him with a hearty kick, eloquent of contempt, leaving him to make his way wheresoever he might.

In such manner did Sir Vincent Brookes, all his villainous schemes having recoiled upon his own head, go out from the company of those whom he had fleeced, deceived, and degraded by his presence into that which was worthy of him. None of those to whom he had wrought so much harm saw or heard of him again.

A fighter by nature, a cheat and rascal because of weakness before temptation, Bully Power redeemed in some part the character he had lost. But desperately as he strove, stubbornly as he fought, his brute strength and immense bulk served him little against the cool science, the skilful defence, and the wonderful activity of Ned Harley. With a bigger prize than he had ever dreamed of awaiting him, the big Irishman did the best that was in him, but it was insufficient to gain him victory. For twenty-two rounds, one and a quarter hours' hard fighting, he held out, nor did he succumb until Nature deserted him, and all the work of his seconds failed to bring him to the scratch.

Wrapped in a long coat, with his father holding one arm, and D'Arcy Vavasour the other, Hil made his way through the wildly-cheering crowds that gathered about him to the carriage in which to return to the inn at Croydon where he had put up overnight.

"Hurrah for Ned; it's champion of England he'll be next!" the more enthusiastic cried, and wanted to know when a match with Carter was likely to be made.

Smiling, he told them that neither that match nor any other would be made as far as he was concerned. He had fought his last fight in the ring, but they refused to believe him.

"What does it matter if ye are a gentleman, sir?" one big fellow asked, almost plaintively. "We've had one gentleman champion of England, why not another?"

"No reason, friend; but he will not be myself. I shall fight no more. My promise is given."

And that is the reason why, in the records of the Ring, you do not come upon the name of Ned Harley, called "The Corinthian," in the list of the holders of the English championship, a title which, in the opinion of that greatest of authorities, Mr. Gentleman Jackson, he was worthy to bear.

But although he battled in the ring no more, the turn-up with Bully Power was by no means the last fight Hilary Bevan fought, nor did it by any means mark the termination of his interest in the Fancy.

THE END.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 306.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"CAUGHT NAPPING!"

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete, School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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,
AND **EVERY MONDAY**
"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
EVERY FRIDAY.

For Next Wednesday.

"CAUGHT NAPPING!"
By Martin Clifford.

In this splendid long, complete tale of the chums of St. Jim's, Tom Merry & Co. and Jack Blake & Co., of the School House, once more join forces against the New House, and a keen struggle for superiority commences again between the rival Houses at the old school. Tit for tat is given with a will, and without ill-feeling on either side. At last, however, one faction fairly catches the other napping, and all St. Jim's roars over "the jape of the season."

For particulars of which of the "Co.'s" is

"CAUGHT NAPPING!"

See next Wednesday's "Gem" Library.

A GREAT PIECE OF NEWS!

The majority of my Gemite chums will no doubt have seen from the correspondence and Editorial notes which have recently been published on the Chat page of our companion paper, "The Magnet" Library, that there is "something in the wind." It is time, I think, for me to explain here just what that "something" is.

It is nothing less than a new companion paper, a fresh addition to the family at present composed of "The Gem" and "The Magnet" Libraries and "The Penny Popular." The immense success of this "Invincible Trio" of papers encouraged me to lend a favourable ear to the suggestion of a "Magnet" reader that the trio be still further augmented.

I therefore published this reader's letter in the "Magnet" Chat page, inviting all my Magnetite chums to comment on it. The result was astonishing. A perfect deluge of postcards descended on this office, commanding, cajoling, and entreating me to take the suggestion in hand and give it some definite shape.

When the voice of the huge body of my readers makes itself heard so emphatically and unanimously as this it is something not to be lightly disregarded. I therefore set to work on the idea at once, and, as a result of much discussion and labour, I am able to announce that

A NEW COMPANION PAPER,

devoted partially to humorous pictures and partially to reading-matter of the kind that "Gem" and "Magnet" readers have come to love so well, will make its appearance early in the new year. There will be many special and original features about this new paper which will inevitably cause it to appeal irresistibly to every Gemite; but of this more anon.

For the present I will content myself with this definite announcement, with the further piece of good news that this wonderful new addition to our group of grand companion papers will be published at the popular price of

ONE HALFPENNY!**REPLIES IN BRIEF.**

F. Evans (Sheffield).—Thank you for your suggestion. I will consider it.

D. L. (Glasgow).—You can be apprenticed to a cabinet-maker at 15.

Miss T. Minchin (Western Australia).—I expect by the time you see this, you will have noticed that Greyfriars have started a school magazine like St. Jim's. I am putting your request for a correspondent in the column in its turn.

ANIMAL CINEMA ACTORS.—No. 6.

In this article I want to chat to you about a dog who is one of the cleverest and best known of all cinema animal actors. I am speaking of "Jean," who has acted in over a million feet of film for the Vitagraph Company. If you just work this out you will discover that it took all the films in which Jean has acted they would stretch for one hundred and eighty-eight miles, and, in fact, would give you quite a long walking tour for your next summer holidays.

Before a cinema story is produced in the studio Jean has her part explained to her, just the same as another actor. For instance, supposing there is a scene in a cellar, where the villain is about to give the hero a rough time of it, and Jean has to rush in in the nick of time to effect a rescue. The producer waits until the right moment, and then, pointing to the villain, turns to the dog and says "Rescue, Jean—rescue!" And Jean springs on to the villain, often tearing holes in his clothes as she drags him to the ground.

Although she is often rough in scenes where she gets excited, Jean never bites anyone, but she sometimes tears huge pieces out of their clothes.

In one pathetic story, where Jean was supposed to belong to the hero, she is the cause of saving him from sudden temptation. He is about to sell his honour, when Jean quietly leaves the room, to return a few seconds later with the photograph of his sweetheart. The hero is so touched that he flings aside the temptation, and immediately seeks out the girl—when the story ends happily.

Let me tell you how Jean first came to act for pictures. Mr. Larry Trimble, a Vitagraph producer, was in need of a clever dog to perform in his pictures, and so he advertised for trained performing dogs in all the American papers. Out of about six hundred he finally selected Jean, who soon proved herself worthy of the choice.

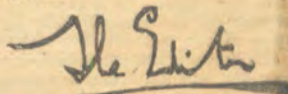
Miss Florence Turner is the mistress of Jean, and now Miss Turner and Mr. Trimble have brought the dog over to England, where they are busy making their own pictures.

Miss Turner tells a remarkable story of Jean's cleverness. She—Miss Turner—had gone into her dressing-room in order to fetch a costume, made for a special picture at a cost of about thirty guineas, but when she arrived at the threshold she found the room in flames. For a moment she did not know what to do. But just then Jean came bounding up the stairs, and at Miss Turner's gesture and command the dog rushed in and saved the burning garment.

Jean has just become the mother of a litter of jolly little puppies, and every one of them will have the chance of the very best training for cinema work from babyhood.

Jean's sense of hearing is almost uncanny. No matter where it is, as soon as a camera commences "purring" she finds it out, and begs plaintively to be allowed to take part in the play. If she is refused she gives a short, angry bark and trots away, but when her turn comes for acting all her bad humour vanishes immediately.

(Another Interesting
Cinema article next
Wednesday.)



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE!

COLLECTED LATER.

Micky and Pat had been the victims of a powder-magazine explosion. Micky, who was in hospital, and hardly recognisable for the bandages on his head, was being interviewed by his superior officer. Said he to Micky:

"I hear you and Pat were calm and collected when the explosion occurred."

In reply poor Micky slowly moved his head and said: "Well, sorr, I was calm enough, goodness knows, but poor old Pat was not collected till afterwards!"—Sent in by S. Moreton, Kirkdale, Liverpool.

YOU CAN TELL—

The solda-water man by his "phiz."
The temperance man by his "No's."
The conceited man by his "I's."
The surveyor by his "feet."
The employer by his "hands."
The soldier by his "arms."
The miser by his "chest."
The farmer by his "calves."—Sent in H. Smith, Sunderland.

ECONOMY.

The village grocer had been drumming into his new apprentice his views on the virtue of economy, until the boy had had rather enough of it. At last a fly settled on the brown sugar, and the grocer deftly caught it, killed it, and threw it away.

"Wasn't that rather wasteful, sir?" asked the boy meekly. "You threw that fly away without brushing the sugar off it."—Sent in by C. J. Wood, Thornton Heath.

THE WRONG STUFF.

Mrs. Jones: "You're here again, I see, Mr. Brown. Did you meet my old man up the street?"

Mr. Brown: "Just left 'im at the Cuckoo Tavern. He's getting stout, I notice."

Mrs. Jones: "Stout? The block'ead! I sent 'im for 'arf and 'arf!"—Sent in by W. Attwood, Birmingham.

MODERN LATIN.

"My daughter Susie is getting quite an excellent Latin scholar," said the proud father to a visitor. "Here is one of her exercise-books, and you can see for yourself."

Susie blushed scarlet, and made a wild grab at the book. She was too late, and the delighted visitor read aloud to the company:

"Boyibus kissibus
Sweet girlorium;
Girlibus likibus—
Wanti sumorum!"

—Sent in by F. Wilcox, Birmingham.

RUDOLPH WAS WISE.

A man, who was a regular patron of a certain restaurant, said to the waiter:

"Rudolph, instead of tipping you every day, I'm going to give you a tip in a lump sum next Christmas."

"Thank you, sir," answered Rudolph. "But—or—would you mind paying me something in advance, sir?"

"H'm! It's a funny request," said the patron, "but here's five shillings for you. Don't you trust my memory?"

"Oh, no, sir," smiled Rudolph, "it isn't that; only I'm leaving here to-day, sir!"

—Sent in by Miss A. Kitchen, Liverpool.

THE ARM OF THE LAW.

His last hour had come—or, at least, he thought so. He opened his eyes, and turned to the lawyer standing by his bed.

"Wish to explain about my will," he gasped feebly. "There, there, that'll be all right!" said the lawyer reassuringly. "You leave everything to me."

The sufferer sighed.

"Yes, I suppose that's the best thing to do," he murmured. "You'll get it anyway."—Sent in by S. Rippon, Sheffield.

TWIRLED.

Small Boy: "Ma, why will our cockerels have no here after?"

Ma: "I am sure I don't know."

Small Boy: "Because they will have their necks twirled in this world."—Sent in by J. M. Rowland, Bedford.

A GOOD FIRST LESSON.

"Where's Tommy?" asked Mr. Jones upon his return home from business one evening.

"Gone to bed," was his wife's reply.

"He's not ill, I hope?"

"No. I sent him as a punishment for swearing."

"Swearing?" repeated Mr. Jones, in a top note. "I'll teach him to swear!"

Without waiting to switch on a light, the angry parent dashed upstairs to interview the culprit, only to fall over a loose stair-rod and bump his chin severely on the edge of a step. Instantly Mr. Jones was amazingly fluent, and when the atmosphere cleared sufficiently for his wife to make her voice heard in the hall, she remarked:

"Better come down now, dear. I'm sure Tommy has heard quite sufficient for his first lesson."—Sent in by P. R. Clewes, Nottingham.

QUITE CHARACTERISTIC.

A famous American humorist was about to take his departure from an hotel at which he had been staying, when the landlord begged him to write "something characteristic" in the "Visitors' Book."

He wrote the following lines:

"I came here by my doctor's orders
For a little change and rest.
The waiter got the change, and
The landlord got the rest."

—Sent in by S. Ryley, Strickley, Birmingham.

HOW A MAN CAN BECOME HIS OWN GRAND-FATHER.

I married a widow who had a grown-up stepdaughter. My father came to see me, and, being a widower, fell in love with my stepdaughter and married her. My father, therefore, became my son-in-law, and my stepdaughter my mother, because she had married my father.

In due time my wife had a son, who was, of course, my father's brother-in-law and my uncle; for he was the brother of my stepdaughter. My father's wife, who was my stepdaughter, also had a son, who was my brother, and at the same time my grandchild, for he was the son of my daughter.

Now, my wife was my grandmother, because she was my mother's mother. I was, therefore, my wife's husband and grandchild; and as the husband of a person's grandmother, is his grandfather, I was, therefore, my own grandfather.—Sent in by J. Horn, Partick.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED!

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short, Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the senders will receive a Money Prize.

ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED
The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House,
Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

No correspondence can be entered into with regard to this Competition, and all contributions enclosed in letters, or sent in otherwise than on postcards, will be disregarded.

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20/12/13