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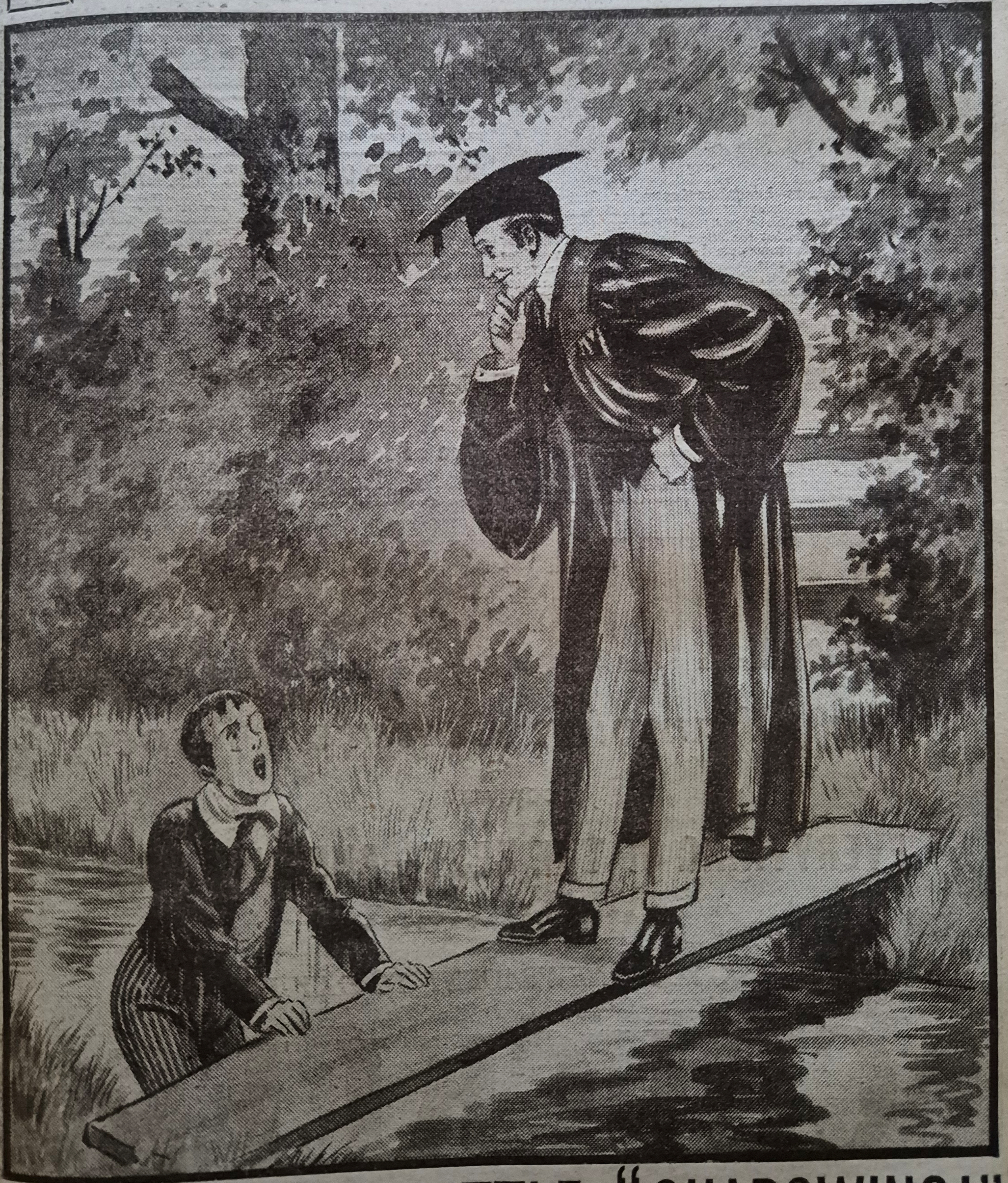
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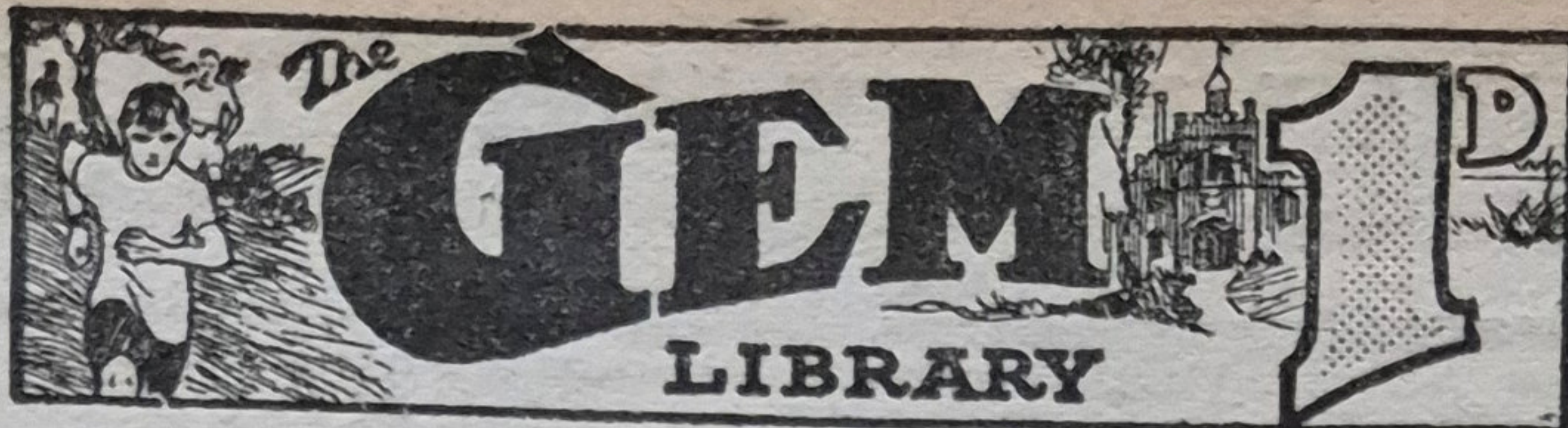
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THE HOUSEMASTER'S BODYGUARD

A Grand Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Tom Merry leaped into the water, and grasped the Housemaster as he swept by. And Manners and Lowther, up to their armpits in the river, held on to Tom Merry. (See Chapter 14.)

CHAPTER 1.

Extraordinary!

"**B**AI Jove! This is vewy sewious!"
Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's did not address that remark to anyone in particular. He bestowed it upon the desert air, as it were. He was standing on the steps of the School House, with an open newspaper in his hands. As a rule, Arthur Augustus did not read the newspapers, resembling a celebrated statesman in that respect. Just now, however, he was bestowing his noble attention upon the daily Press, from a desire to see how the County Championship was getting on.

But it was not the state of the County Championship which had drawn that ejaculation from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His eyes had fallen upon a paragraph in the paper that drove the County Championship completely out of his head.

"Bai Jove!" repeated D'Arcy. "This is vewy sewious indeed!"

Arthur Augustus's brow wrinkled over the paragraph, and his expression became anxious and concerned.

Three juniors, who were looking at him from the doorway of the School House, grinned, as he extracted his famous eyeglass from his waistcoat pocket, jammed it into his eye, and read the paragraph over again.

Next Wednesday:

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!" AND "A BID FOR A THRONE!"

No. 343. (New Series). Vol. 8.

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"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther exchanged glances. Arthur Augustus was too engrossed in that mysterious paragraph to notice them. He was reading the paragraph over again very carefully, the wrinkle deepening in his aristocratic brow.

"What's the matter with Gussy?" murmured Monty Lowther. "Is he looking for the winners?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gussy, old man!"

"Hallo, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus did not even hear. He was simply buried in his newspaper. Never had the "Daily Mail" had so intent a reader.

Monty Lowther trod softly down the steps, behind the swell of St. Jim's, and gently tilted his silk hat over his head. The silk hat toppled over on the newspaper, and rolled off on the steps, and bounced away into the quad.

"Gweat Scott! What—"

"Hallo! Have you woke up at last?" asked Lowther affably, as the startled swell of the Fourth swung round. "What do you mean by going to sleep standing up like a horse?"

"You uttah ass! I was not asleep! Where's my toppah!"

"Who's won?" asked Lowther.

"Eh? What are you talking about?"

"And how much did you have on him?"

"I fail to compwehend you, Lowthah!"

"Weren't you looking out the racing results?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

Arthur Augustus glared.

"You fwightful ass, Lowthah! You are perfectly well awah that I take no intewest whatevah in wacin' wesults. But this is vewy sewious. I must see Wailton at once."

"Railton?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Arthur Augustus, crumpling the paper in his hand, strode up the steps in a great hurry, leaving his shining silk hat still reposing in the quad.

"You've forgotten your topper!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Nevah mind that!"

"Wha-a-t!"

"This is awf'ly sewious, I tell you!"

"But—"

"No time to talk now; I must see Wailton!"

Arthur Augustus rushed into the House, leaving the Terrible Three in a state of unbounded astonishment. He rushed away towards the study of Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House at St. Jim's, and the Shell fellows stared after him. For Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of St. Jim's, to "never mind" his silk topper was extraordinary—amazing! As a rule, a sacrilegious hand laid upon his topper would excite Arthur Augustus's wrath to boiling point. Now he carelessly left that beautiful headgear lying in the dust, reckless of what might happen to it. It was astounding—amazing—almost unnerving. The Terrible Three could only stare.

"Well, this takes the whole giddy biscuit!" ejaculated Monty Lowther. "What on earth's the matter with Gussy?"

"Must be dotty!" said Manners dazedly. "He's forgotten his topper!"

"What does he want to see Railton for?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There can't be anything about our Housemaster in the newspaper surely?"

"Scarcely!"

"Oh, he's off his rocker!" said Lowther. "As he doesn't want this topper, we may as well use it for a footer! Look out in goal!"

And Arthur Augustus's beautiful topper sailed away from Lowther's foot, and flew into the doorway.

"Ow! You uttah ass!"

It was D'Arcy again. He was rushing back, and the sailing topper caught him with its rim on the bridge of his noble nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The topper fell to the floor inside the doorway. Arthur Augustus did not even glance at it, however. He rubbed his nose, and glared at the Terrible Three.

"Wailton isn't in his study!" he exclaimed.

"I could have told you that!" grinned Tom Merry. "He's gone out!"

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Gone out!"

"Yes. What are you goggling at? Housemasters are allowed to go out for a walk if they like, ain't they? We don't want Railton just now, and we've let him off," said Monty Lowther humorously.

"Gweat Scott!"

Arthur Augustus's face was full of alarm and consternation. "Gone out! How fwightfully unfortunate! This is awf'ly sewious. Do you fellows know which way he went?"

"Walked?" said Lowther.

"I mean, which way did he walk, fathead?"

"On his feet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah duffah!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "Don't I keep tellin' you that this is sewious."

"Well, I'm giving you correct information," said Lowther.

"You surely didn't expect to hear that a Housemaster was walking on his hands, did you? Mr. Railton is far too dignified to do anything of the sort. He doesn't belong to a circus."

"You—you—you—Where is he gone?"

"I forgot to ask him," said Tom Merry, laughing, "and he forgot to tell us before he went. But he went out of the gates!"

"Bai Jove! I must go aftah him!"

Arthur Augustus, still hatless, ran down the steps, and crossed the quadrangle as if he were upon the cinder-path in the direction of the school gates.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Lowther. "What the dickens—"

"What the deuce—"

Arthur Augustus vanished out of the school gates. The newspaper was clutched in his hand; his silk topper still reposed on the floor where it had fallen. Jack Blake of the Fourth came downstairs, and picked up the topper in surprise.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Isn't this Gussy's?"

"Yes. He's joined the hatless brigade," said Lowther.

"He's gone out without it."

"Wha-a-t!"

"Fact. He's gone potty, I think. He wants to see Railton, and he won't be happy till he gets it. My word, there's Railton!"

The athletic figure of Mr. Railton came into view. He had stepped out of the porter's lodge near the gates. The Terrible Three chuckled. The Housemaster had evidently come in from his walk, and stepped into Taggles's lodge to speak to the school-porter, and Arthur Augustus had passed the lodge and rushed out of gates in search of him. Mr. Railton came towards the School House. The juniors observed that the expression on his handsome face was very grave.

The Housemaster went to his study, and the juniors heard the door close. They wondered where Arthur Augustus was. About ten minutes later the hatless junior came in at the gates, looking round him as if in search. He came towards the School House with a worried look on his face.

"I can't see him anywhah!" he exclaimed. "There is nothin' whatevah to gwin at, you duffahs. This is fwightfully sewious. Blake, deah boy, have you any ideah where Mr. Wailton is? I simply must see him!"

"He's come in!" chuckled Tom Merry. "He's gone to his study. But—"

"Oh, good!"

Arthur Augustus rushed towards the Housemaster's study. Blake made a grab at him, and caught him by the collar.

"What's the row?" he demanded.

"Leggo!"

"But what—"

"Welease me, you ass! This is awf'ly sewious! Welease me—"

"But what the dickens—"

Blake did not finish. Arthur Augustus tore himself away, leaving his collar in Blake's grasp. Then he dashed away to the Housemaster's study. Blake stared at the torn collar in his hand and gasped.

"Well, my hat!"

"He's dotty!"

"He's gone in without knocking!" yelled Manners.

Thus it was. Arthur Augustus simply hurled open the door of the Housemaster's study and rushed in. And the astounded juniors in the hall heard the deep voice of the Housemaster, in tones of surprise and anger.

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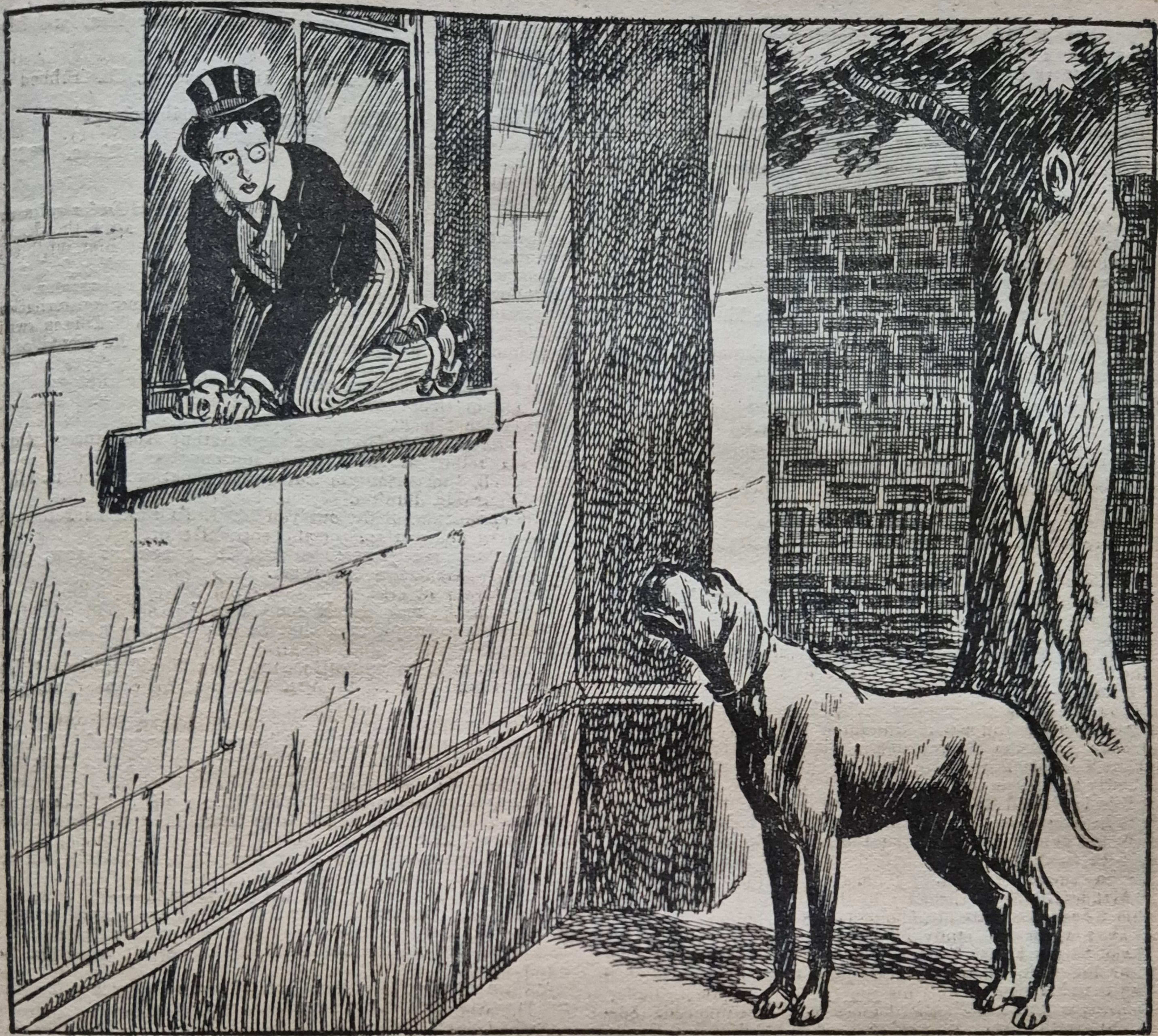
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OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY, Every Monday. "THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," 10. Every Saturday, 2.



Cæsar ceased to leap and bark at last, but he settled down to watch the junior. Evidently he did not mean to give him a chance of escaping. Arthur Augustus tried the effect of blandishments on the mastiff in vain. "Good old Cæsar!" he said. "Nice doggy! Nice doggy-woggy!" But Cæsar only growled! (See Chapter 7.)

"D'Arcy, what does this mean? How dare you rush into my study in that way—and in that state, too? Have you taken leave of your senses, boy?"

"Railton's hit it!" murmured Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Wailton——"

"Leave my study at once. Go and put your collar on immediately."

"My collah! Nevah mind my collah, sir! I——"

"And take fifty lines."

"Weally, sir——"

"Go!"

"But I came to——"

"Never mind why you came. You should not enter my study that way. I am astonished at this impertinence, D'Arcy! Go at once! Not a word!"

"But——"

Arthur Augustus ceased to expostulate, as a strong hand was laid on his shoulder. He was jerked out of the study, and the door closed after him. And the swell of St. Jim's stood in the passage, in breathless dismay, and gasped:

"Bai Jove!"

CHAPTER 2.

Danger Ahead.

TOM MERRY & CO. surrounded the swell of St. Jim's at once. Arthur Augustus had amazed them by his extraordinary proceedings, and they meant to have an explanation. Unless the elegant Fourth-Former had taken

leave of his senses, they did not know in the least what to make of the matter.

"Gussy——"

"Fathead——"

"What the deuce——"

"Pway don't bothah now, deah boys! I must speak to Wailton! He is in frightful dangah, and is unawah of it. I must speak to him!"

Arthur Augustus's hand was on the door-handle again. With one accord the four juniors seized him and dragged him away. D'Arcy struggled furiously in their grasp.

"Welease me, you asses! Hands off, you wottahs! Welease me at once, or I shall stwike you!"

"Bring him along," said Blake. "If he goes in again Railton will lick him. Blessed if I don't keep a strait-waistcoat for him in the study after this!"

"Welease me——"

"Yank him away!" said Tom Merry. "Railton will be out in a minute if he makes this row here! Buck up!"

And Arthur Augustus, in spite of his frantic struggles, was rushed away, and the four juniors bore him bodily up the stairs to the Fourth Form passage.

By the time they arrived there Arthur Augustus certainly did not look like the best-dressed fellow at St. Jim's.

His clothes were dreadfully rumpled, nearly all the buttons were gone from his waistcoat, and his jacket was slit up the back.

But four to one were enough to handle the swell of St. Jim's, infuriated as he was; and he was whirled along the passage in a most dishevelled state and rushed into Study No. 6.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

Herries and Digby, who shared that famous apartment with D'Arcy and Blake, were there, and they jumped up in astonishment as D'Arcy was whirled in.

Plump! The gasping swell of St. Jim's was hurled into the armchair. He sat there gasping, in a state of complete breathlessness. "Hallo!" said Herries. "What's the row?" "What are you ragging Gussy for?" asked Digby, in amazement. "We're looking after him for his own good," Tom Merry explained. "It's a sudden fit of insanity, and we're his keepers."

"You uttah ass! I am goin' to see Wailton!" Arthur Augustus bounded out of the armchair like a jack-in-the-box.

"My hat! He's beginning again! Collar him!" "Bump him!" Tom Merry put his back to the door. Blake and Lowther seized the excited junior and bumped him back into the armchair.

"Ow! Bai Jove! Ow!" Blake took up a ruler from the study table. "Now, you silly ass," he said, "explain yourself! What's the little game? What are you playing the giddy ox for? Get it out, before I start on you!"

"Ow!" "Are you going to explain?" roared Blake. "There is no time to explain! Wailton's life is in dangah!"

"Go hon!" "I am speakin' sewiously, you ass! Wailton has acted wudely towards me, but I am not goin' to leave his life in dangah. I insist on goin' to him at once." "You're jolly well not going out of this study," grinned Blake.

"I insist—" "You can insist till you are as black as the ace of spades, but you're not going out of this study till you've explained." Arthur Augustus D'Arcy cast a glance towards the door. But the Terrible Three were lined up against it, and there was evidently no escape that way.

"Pile in!" said Tom Merry encouragingly. "If Railton's life is in danger we'll see about it at once. I don't quite see where the danger comes in, but I'm willing to learn. I know you'd be in danger if you bolted into Railton's study again after he chucked you out."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Bai Jove, every moment is pwecious!" "Time is money!" agreed Blake. "I don't mean that, you ass! Howevah, as you insist upon my wastin' time when ewevy moment is pwecious, pewwaps I had bettah explain."

"Perhaps you had!" grinned Blake. "You're jolly well not leaving this study till you've done it, anyway!" "Mr. Wailton is in dangah while you are playin' the giddy goat like this. You would weceive a feahful shock if you found our wespected Housemastah wollin' in his goah."

"Well, it would be rather a shock," agreed Tom Merry. "If Mr. Wailton is murdahed while you are wastin' time beah I shall hold you wesponsible."

"We'll take the responsibility!" chuckled Blake. "If you're not quite off your silly rocker, Gussy, tell us what you are talking about."

"It's in the papah—" "What's in the paper? About Mr. Railton rolling in his gore?" asked Lowther, in surprise.

"No, you ass; about that man!" "Oh, there's something about a man in the paper, is there?"

"Yaas! Now you see how sewious it is!" "Not quite!" said Tom Merry. "There are often things about a man in a newspaper. It's not at all an uncommon subject."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "About that man!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "That man Munwo—you wemembah! Look! See it for yourselves, you silly asses!"

"Munro!" said Blake. "I remember that name—" "Look!"

Arthur Augustus brandished the newspaper at the juniors. Blake jerked it away, and the juniors gathered round to read. Blake looked over the page with a puzzled look.

"Well, there's the account of Yorkshire's batting—interesting enough, but nothing to get excited about—"

"It isn't that, you ass! There is the pawagwaph."

"Phew!" Blake's face became suddenly serious as he read aloud: "The escape is reported of a convict named Munro from Portmoor Prison. The man has obtained by violence the clothes of a shepherd in a lonely district in Sussex, and is still at large. The police are searching for him, and his arrest is expected immediately."

That was all! But it was enough to make Tom Merry & Co. look very grave.

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "That is serious!" "If it's the same man," said Digby.

"It's the same man, right enough!" said Blake. "No doubt on that point!" "Yaas, wathah!"

That brief paragraph, tucked away at the end of a column in the newspaper, was full of serious import to the St. Jim's juniors.

It was some time since the occurrence, but they had not forgotten it. The man Munro was a desperate character. A long time before Mr. Railton had been a witness against him at his trial for robbery with violence, and he had been sent to prison. He had escaped, and had come to St. Jim's, and made an attempt to attack the Housemaster, whom he regarded as the chief cause of his downfall. On that occasion the juniors had come into contact with him, and he had given them the impression of being not quite right in his head. At all events, he was a desperate and determined man, and his hatred of the School Housemaster amounted to a mania. If that man was free again there was undoubtedly danger for Mr. Railton.

The excitement of the swell of St. Jim's when he had read that paragraph was easily comprehended now.

"You can see yourselves that it is sewious now, you duffahs!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry nodded. "Yes, if the man should come here." "The pawagwaph says that he has been seen in Sussex already."

"Looks as if he means to come here," said Digby. "He seems to hate poor old Railton. He went for him before, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!" "He's an awful rascal, and he may mean mischief," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "But the paper says that his arrest is expected immediately."

"They always say that," said Blake sagely. "He's got a change of clothes, and he's a deep beast. It won't be so jolly easy to capture him."

"Mr. Railton ought to know about this, so that he can be on his guard," Lowther remarked.

"I was goin' to show him the pawagwaph—" "No hurry, fathead! You don't think an escaped convict could come here in broad daylight, do you, to pile on to Railton? But we'll show Railton the paper; he ought to know."

"I am goin' to take it to him, if you silly asses will allow me to pass!" said Arthur Augustus witheringly.

Blake sniffed. "Yes, you're in a ripping state to go and see a Housemaster," he said. "You'd better go and get yourself tidy, I should think. You look like a scarecrow."

"That is your fault, you ass!" "I'll take this to Railton," said Blake. "Righto!"

Blake left Study No. 6. There was no doubt that Mr. Railton ought to see the paragraph, and take warning of his probable danger, for it was quite within the bounds of possibility that the ruffian would make another attempt to injure him. But Blake proceeded a little more sedately than Arthur Augustus had done. He tapped at the door of the Housemaster's study, and Mr. Railton bade him enter.

The Housemaster looked inquiringly at him. "Well, what is it, Blake?"

"If you please, sir, D'Arcy found this in the paper, and we think you ought to see it, sir," said Blake respectfully.

Mr. Railton frowned a little as he glanced at the paragraph. Blake had wondered how Mr. Railton would take it. If he had expected the Housemaster to turn pale, or to jump up, or utter exclamations, he was disappointed. Mr. Railton's expression was simply one of annoyance.

"Thank you, Blake," he said. "I had already seen it in an evening paper yesterday."

"Oh!" murmured Blake, a little crestfallen.

"I am very sorry indeed that it has come to the knowledge of the boys," said Mr. Railton, his frown deepening. "It is very disagreeable to me to have this matter made subject of chatter among the juniors."

"Oh!" said Blake again. "It is, in fact, annoying," said Mr. Railton. "I suppose it cannot be helped, and I am obliged to you, Blake. I suppose this was the reason why D'Arcy rushed into my study in that ridiculous manner a short time ago."

"Ye-es, sir." "Very well; as D'Arcy probably imagined that he was

doing me a service, you may tell him that he need not do the lines I imposed."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton bit his lip. He was very much annoyed. For his personal affairs to become a common topic among the juniors was distinctly exasperating, as Blake began to understand.

"But—but you'll take care now, sir," faltered Blake.

Mr. Railton made an impatient gesture.

"Yes, yes, of course. But there is nothing to be alarmed about. The man will be recaptured at once; there is hardly any doubt about that. I may tell you that I have spoken to Inspector Skeat on the subject, and have warned Taggles to be careful. That is all that is necessary. I suppose it is no use asking you and D'Arcy not to let this become a topic for general discussion," said Mr. Railton irritably.

Blake flushed.

"If you don't want it talked about, sir, we won't show this to anybody."

"Have you not done so already?"

"Only the fellows in my study, sir, and Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther."

"Seven already!" said Mr. Railton, with a slight smile. "I am afraid that it will be impossible to prevent it from becoming common gossip now."

Blake looked, as he felt, hurt. The concern the juniors felt for the safety of their Housemaster seemed to be taken as a kind of impertinence. It was wounding to the junior, and Mr. Railton could not help seeing his thoughts in his face. His expression relaxed, and he spoke in a kinder tone.

"I am grateful to you and your friends, Blake, for your concern in the matter. I know that you mean well. But it is very annoying and disconcerting to me to have my affairs made a subject of gossip and discussion. In this case the danger is, I am sure, imaginary. Now, I know you and your friends very well, and I have reliance upon you. May I ask you not to talk about this? Keep it to yourselves, and let there be no gossip. I do not wish it to become a nine days' wonder in the school. It would be intolerable."

"We won't say a word about it, sir. Of course, some of the other fellows might see it in the paper."

"It is not likely, I think. Very few of the boys see the newspapers, and the paragraph is quite inconspicuous. I am surprised that D'Arcy found it."

"He was looking for the cricket news, sir, and this is at the bottom of the same column," explained Blake.

"Yes, yes! Please leave the paper here, and tell your friends that it is my desire that they should say nothing whatever about the matter."

"Very well, sir."

"And do not fancy that I am in any danger, my boys," added Mr. Railton kindly. "That is merely chimerical."

"But—but you'll be careful, sir."

"Oh, yes, I shall certainly be careful!"

Blake left the study, feeling very much as if he had received a douche of cold water. The chums of the School House had been prepared to rally enthusiastically round their Housemaster, for his defence; but Mr. Railton's view of the matter was a complete damper to anything like enthusiasm. Jack Blake took his way slowly and thoughtfully back to Study No. 6.

CHAPTER 3.

The Garde du Corps.

JACK BLAKE'S crestfallen look as he entered Study No. 6 attracted the attention of the juniors at once. Tom Merry & Co. gazed at him inquiringly. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned round from the looking-glass, where he was putting on a new collar and tie.

"Well?" said Tom Merry.

Blake grunted.

"Have you shown Wailton the pawagwaph, deah boy?"

"Yes."

"What have you done with the papah?"

"Left it with Railton."

"Was he vewy much startled?"

"Not at all."

"Bai Jove!"

"He says you needn't do your lines, as you were playing the giddy ox with some idea of obliging him," said Blake.

"Wats! I am quite suah that Mr. Wailton did not put it like that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's a damper," said Blake; "a regular damper! Froze me up! He's annoyed at us knowing about Munro at all—annoyed at being talked about. I never thought of that. He doesn't think there's any danger, and he doesn't care two pins, anyway. He saw that news in an evening paper yesterday, so it wasn't news to him."

"Bai Jove!"

"And he was quite ratty—not exactly with us, but at our knowing anything about it, and concerning ourselves with his business," said Blake; "and he's made me promise, for all of you, to keep it quiet, and not tell the other fellows a word about it."

"My hat!"

"I twust you did not make that pwomise, Blake?"

"Yes, I did, ass!"

"Then it was vewy wash——"

"I suppose I couldn't say no to Railton, could I, idiot?" growled Blake.

"I wefuse to be called an idiot, Blake. I wegard that pwomise as vewy wash. I had intended to call a meetin' of all our fwiends, and concert measuahs for lookin' aftah Mr. Wailton. I was thinkin' of formin' a committee of defence, and askin' Figgins & Co., of the New House, to join in it."

"Not a bad idea," said Tom Merry. "This is a time for all of us to rally round old Railton."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, he doesn't want to be rallied round," said Blake rather sorely. "He's annoyed and ratty about it. Damps you down at once like a cold douche. And I've given my word for all of you."

Tom Merry nodded.

"Of course, if Railton wants us to say nothing about the matter, we'll say nothing," he said. "I understand it would be unpleasant for him to have his name jawed up and down the school by all the fags. And if a set of kids started looking after him it would make him feel an ass, I suppose."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"All the same, we're jolly well going to look after him," added Tom Merry. "I quite understand Railton's feelings on the subject. He's afraid of being made to look ridiculous; he'd prefer the danger to that. It's quite natural in a Housemaster. But Railton is a brick, and we're not going to let him run into danger. We're going to look after him, whether he likes it or not."

"Hear, hear!"

"Blessed if I feel inclined to bother my head about him!" growled Blake. "If he catches us looking after him he'll give us lines, or a licking; I know that."

"Bai Jove! That would be wathah wuff!"

"He'll do it," said Blake. "He simply wants no notice to be taken of the matter. He thinks the police can look after this man Munro."

"They can't!" said Digby.

"No feah! It's up to us!"

And the juniors all nodded very gravely. They had great doubts about the reliability of his Majesty's Police Force in that serious matter; but they were not troubled with any doubts as to their own abilities.

"It's up to us!" said Tom Merry. "Quite so! We know that that man Munro came here once and attacked Mr. Railton. The man didn't seem to be quite right in his head, so there's no telling what he might or might not do. Mr. Railton's life might actually be in danger; and, anyway, he might get a bad knock on the head. Railton's got plenty of pluck, and he doesn't care for the danger; but we care for it for him. He's not going to run his head into danger if we can help it. Gentlemen, we are going to keep this dark, because Railton wants it kept dark; but we're going to look after him, whether he wants it or not!"

"Good egg!" said Herries. "This is where Towser will come in useful!"

"Towser?"

"Yes. My bulldog will——"

"Oh, blow Towser!" said Blake. "I suppose you're not going to ask Railton to lead Towser about on a string, are you?"

"Look here——"

"My idea," said Digby thoughtfully, "is that we should form a gardy kaw."

Robert Arthur Digby of the Fourth Form was very keen on French. He was a great French scholar, in fact, and he often graced his conversation with observations in that language.

But it was a slight drawback that Dig's French was, as a rule, comprehensible only to himself.

His remark caused his comrades to stare at him in amazement. They had not the remotest idea what a gardy kaw might be.

"A—a—a what?" asked Blake.

"A gardy kaw," said Dig emphatically. "That's the idea. There are seven of us in the secret, and my idea is that we should unite in a gardy kaw!"

"B-b-but what is it?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

Dig sniffed.

"Don't you learn French in the Shell?" he asked.

"Ahem! Yes. Is that French?"

"Of course it is, ass!"

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"And what does it mean?"

"It means a bodyguard, of course. Blessed if you oughtn't to go to Mossoo for some extra toot in French!"

"A—a bodyguard! Oh, a garde du corps!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "We're to form a garde du corps!"

"Yes, a gardy-kaw!" said Dig, who evidently preferred his own pronunciation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! If the seven of us form a gardy-kaw for old Railton, that villain won't be able to get at him!" said Dig.

"Well, the idea's all right, if the French isn't," said Monty Lowther, chuckling. "We'll form a—ha, ha!—gardy kaw!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah! It will be necessawy to have a captain of the garde du corps," said Arthur Augustus. "As captain, I shall expect you fellows to back me up—"

"You can expect us to knock you down if you start cap-taining us!" growled Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Well, as this study discovered the danger, and first got on to the bizney, the leader ought to come from this study," suggested Blake. "I propose that I shall be elected captain of the guard!"

"Rats!"

"Wats!"

"Bosh!"

"Look here, if you're going to raise difficulties, we may as well let the matter alone, and allow old Railton to be done in, and have done with it," said Blake excitedly.

"As senior members of the garde du corps, it's up to us Shell fellows to find a captain," said Tom Merry severely.

"Rot!"

"Yes, rot and piffle!" said Digby. "This study will find the cappytaine!"

"The—the what?"

"The cappytaine."

"Oh, the capitaine!" grinned Lowther. "I'll tell you what! If the man comes hanging about here, Dig's the man to deal with him!"

"Well, I was thinking—" began Dig, looking pleased.

"All Dig will have to do," went on Lowther, "will be to talk French to him. Then we shall see him put his fingers to his ears and fly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Digby, exasperated.

There was a knock at the door, and Reilly of the Fourth put his head in. A sudden silence fell upon the chums of the School House. By Mr. Railton's wish, the matter was not to be talked about. They would willingly have taken the Belfast junior into the bodyguard; but, under the circumstances, it was necessary to keep the existence of the garde du corps a secret.

"Faith, I want your Latin dic, Blake!" said Reilly. "Phwat are you all standing and looking like boiled owls for?"

"Ahem!"

"What's on?" asked Reilly, perplexed.

"Ahem!"

"Sowwy we can't tell you, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "You see, it's a secwet!"

"Shurru!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake, I am not goin' to tell Weilly anythin' about the garde du corps—"

"Ring off!" yelled Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"So you've got a secret, have you?" said Reilly. "And phwat's the secret intirely?"

"I'm afwaid we can't explain that, deah boy. You see, Mr. Wailton objects—"

Blake rushed at Arthur Augustus, and hurled him into the armchair.

"You thumping ass! Another word, and I'll sit on your head!"

"Gwooh! I uttably wefuse to allow you to sit on my head, you duffah! I was not goin' to tell Weilly a word about that man Mun— Yawooh! Gewwoff, you idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Looks to me as if you're off your rockers!" said Reilly, in astonishment. "What is it about Railton? And what on earth does Gussy mean by a garde du corps?"

"Ahem!"

"Gwoogh-woof! Gewwoff!"

"Here's the dic, Reilly," said Herries, handing it to the Irish junior. "Buzz off!"

"Gewwoff, Blake, or I shall stwike you!"

Reilly grinned and quitted the study. Tom Merry closed the door after him. Then Jack Blake removed himself from D'Arcy's head. The swell of St. Jim's raised a crimson and furious face from the armchair.

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"Gwooh! You uttah ass—"

"Jolly nearly let it out!" said Blake. "I stopped you in time, though. But Reilly knows there's a secret now, and he'll be inquisitive!"

"I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin', you silly duffah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I was not goin' to say a word to put Weilly on the twack. If anythin' should twanspire, it will be your fault. You fellows cannot keep a secwet!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I wegard that as a widiculous wemark, Blake—"

"Gentlemen," said Tom Merry, "the bodyguard is now formed. The chief rule of the bodyguard will be to jump on Gussy whenever he begins to talk!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I pwotest!"

"And I suggest that, as it is tea-time, we adjourn to my study to tea, and discuss the plan of campaign. I may mention that I have received a hamper from Miss Fawcett, and that the supplies are ample."

"Hear, hear!" said the bodyguard, more enthusiastically than before.

And the garde du corps followed Tom Merry as one man.

CHAPTER 4.

On the Alert!

MR. RAILTON was an object of uncommon interest to seven pairs of eyes for the rest of that day.

Tom Merry & Co. had always liked their House-master. Mr. Railton was very popular in his House, and also in the other House at St. Jim's. He compared very favourably with Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House, as even Figgins & Co. were willing to admit.

And the idea that Mr. Railton was in danger roused the enthusiasm of the Co., and they were ready and willing to rally in his defence. Indeed, they would willingly have "chucked" lessons for the purpose of devoting themselves to the care of their Housemaster.

That, unfortunately, was not to be thought of. And it was rather hard on the bodyguard that their devoted defence had to be conducted in secret, without the knowledge of the master who was to benefit by it; for Mr. Railton would certainly have been exasperated if he had known that Tom Merry & Co. had taken his business in hand for him.

But that made no difference to the Co. They had wisely decided that the Housemaster, in his contempt for his enemy, was likely to run unnecessary risks, and that it was up to them to see that no harm came to him.

Mr. Railton certainly did not show any signs of being in a state of uneasiness. He went about his usual avocations in a perfectly ordinary manner. No one but the seven could have suspected that anything was amiss at all.

The juniors admired his nerve, and respected his courage; but it made them all the more determined that he should not lack their fatherly care.

If he would not look after himself, he required to be looked after—that was certain; and they were the fellows who were going to do it.

It was unfortunate that, by the Housemaster's wish, the juniors had to keep the matter to themselves. They would willingly have taken Reilly, and Kangaroo, and Dane, and Glyn, and Lumley-Lumley into the bodyguard. They would gladly have enlisted the aid of Figgins & Co., their old rivals in the New House. And the larger the bodyguard, of course, the safer it would have been for the threatened Housemaster.

But Mr. Railton's wish on that subject was law, and the devoted seven kept the matter to themselves.

But they meant to be very much on the alert. The little question as to who should be captain of the guard had to be left in abeyance. Arthur Augustus claimed the leadership, as the fellow who had discovered the existence of the danger, and also as a fellow of tact and judgment, specially designed by Nature to be a leader. But six fellows were unanimous in declining to accept him as a leader. Dig had a claim, as the originator of the idea of a gardy-kaw, as he called it; but Dig was told to go and eat coke. Jack Blake modestly suggested himself as an appropriate leader, being the head of the top study in the School House—Study No. 6. To which the Terrible Three replied that Blake was a duffer, and Study No. 6 a home for duffers. It was evident that there would never be a complete agreement upon the point, and so the bodyguard were all on their own, captainless, as in the days when there was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Opinion as to exactly what should be done differed, too. Arthur Augustus's idea was that Mr. Railton should be kept under constant observation, especially when he went out of gates. Blake snorted at the suggestion, and asked the swell

of St. Jim's what old Railton was likely to say—and do—if he found seven juniors dodging his footsteps whenever he took his little walks abroad.

"Of course, we could not all go at once, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "The chap with most bwains ought to be appointed shadowah."

"He would get ratty if we started following him about, I know that!" said Herries.

Arthur Augustus smiled superior.

"My deah Hewwies, I should do it skilfully, of course. A shadowah's bizney is not to let himself be seen by the person he is shadowing."

"Ass!" said Digby.

"I wefuse to weply to that wemark, Dig. I am certainly goin' to shadow Mr. Wailton when he goes out. I wefuse to allow my Housemastah to be set upon by a despewate chawactah when I can save him by exahcisin' a little tact and judgment."

"What could you do?" roared Blake. "That chap Munro is a big fellow, and as strong as a horse. If you came upon him he would very likely wring your neck."

"I should uttably wefuse to allow him to wing my neck!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly. "I am goin' to pwactise a special uppah-cut with the punchin'-ball. My ideah is that when I come upon the villain I shall stwike him one stunnin' blow, and then make him a pwisonah befoah he can wecovah."

"Yes, I can see him letting you do it—I don't think!"

"I've got a wathah good uppah-cut," said Arthur Augustus, sparring into the air to show his unbelieving chums how it was done. "As that wottah Munwo is much tallah than I am, I might not be able to give him a wight-handah between the eyes. But a tewwific uppah-cut on the point of the chin would knock him wight out. Then I should secure him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am goin' wound Wayland lookin' for some handcuffs, too. A pair of second-hand handcuffs would come in vewy useful, when I have knocked him out. I know a shop in Wayland where I can get them, I think. It doesn't mattah if they're a little bit wusty, so long as they are stwong enough. That's the gweat point."

"Bow-wow!"

"My ideah is to go for him like this," pursued Arthur Augustus, sparring at Blake. "I come on him—like this! and I land out—like that!"

"Yow!" roared Blake. "You silly ass!" He clasped his chin and glared at Arthur Augustus almost as murderously as the villainous Munro himself could have done.

"I was only showin' you what I should do to that wuffian, deah boy."

"Then I'll show you what he would do in return!" yelled Blake. "He would rush at you—like this!"

"Weally—ow!"

"And give you a dot in the eye—like this!"

"Yawwooh!"

"And then a dab on the nose—like that!"

"Yow-ow-oh!"

"And then bump you over—like that!"

Crash!

And Blake walked out of the study, grinning, leaving Arthur Augustus gasping on the floor.

"Ow! Bai Jove! You wuff ass!" gasped Arthur Augustus, sitting up breathlessly. "Where is that wottah? There is nothing to cackle at, Hewwies. Dig, you silly ass, I fail to see any cause for idiotic laughtah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus picked himself up and dusted down his clothes wrathfully.

"I wegard you as silly, cacklin' asses," he said witheringly, "and I am goin' to shadow Mr. Wailton vewy carefully, and if we meet that wuffian Munwo, you will see what will happen!"

And Arthur Augustus stalked out of Study No. 6, rubbing his eye, and went downstairs. He did not go all the way down. Mr. Railton was in his study, and Arthur Augustus took up his post on the stairs, where he could watch the Housemaster's door through the banisters. If Mr. Railton went out, Arthur Augustus intended to go out too, and keep a careful eye upon the endangered Housemaster. Mr. Railton was, however, busy with examination papers in his study, and had no intention whatever of going out, so the swell of St. Jim's was booked for a long vigil.

By the time he had been sitting on the stairs, watching the Housemaster's door, for a quarter of an hour, Arthur Augustus had attracted a good deal of attention.

Gore, of the Shell, nearly fell over him coming downstairs, and he said things that were not at all complimentary, to which D'Arcy did not take the trouble to reply. Skimpole, who was short-sighted, quite fell over him soon afterwards,

and there was a dismal howl from Skimpole as he rolled downstairs. D'Arcy glanced after him.

"Sowwy, Skimmay, deah boy!" he said.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Skimpole, blinking up at D'Arcy through his spectacles. "I am hurt! My dear D'Arcy, what are you sitting on the stairs for? It is weally a most extraordinary place for you to sit!"

"I have my weasons, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus mysteriously.

"Dear me! What are your reasons, D'Arcy?"

"I am afwaid I cannot explain that, Skimmay. It is a secwet."

Skimpole blinked harder than ever at the swell of St. Jim's. For a junior to sit on the stairs for secret reasons that he could not explain was so extraordinary that Skimpole had some doubts as to D'Arcy's sanity. But Skimpole's surprise did not matter to Arthur Augustus. He had his eyeglass fixed on Mr. Railton's door again, and had no attention to waste on Skimpole.

Several juniors gathered in the Lower Hall, and looked up the stairs at the immovable swell of the Fourth. Arthur Augustus took no notice of them. They asked him what was the little game, and whether he was off his rocker, and other questions like that, to which Arthur Augustus did not deign to reply.

When Blake came along and spotted him, he stopped and glared.

"What are you doing there, you image?"

"Sittin' down, deah boy," said D'Arcy calmly.

"I mean, what are you sitting down there for?"

"Because it would be wathah exhaustin' to stand for houahs and houahs."

"So you are going to stay there for hours and hours!" ejaculated Blake.

"Yaas, if ness."

"What for?" howled Blake.

"Hush! I'm shadowin' Wailton."

"You—you—you're what?" yelled Blake.

"Don't give it away, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "I'm keepin' a wawy eye on Wailton's dooah, weady to shadow him when he comes out."

"You—you fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Get off!"

"I wefuse to get off. I am goin' to wemain at my post."

"You've got your prep to do!" shrieked Blake.

"At such a time as this I cannot give my mind to pwep."

"What about Lathom in the morning?"

"Nevah mind Lathom. If Mr. Lathom knew the circs. he would undahstand."

"But he doesn't know, and he'll snatch you bald-headed if you don't do your prep!"

"I shall have to wisk that."

"You'll risk something else if you stay there!" said Blake, breathing hard. "You silly chump, the fellows will think you're dotty!"

"I am uttably indiffewent to what the fellows think, so long as I am doin' my dutay," said Arthur Augustus loftily.

"You—you—you—" gasped Blake.

"Pway wun away, Blake. You are attwactin' attention, and a shadowah's work should be done in secwet, if poss."

"In secwet, with all the House staring at you, you image?"

"They are stawin' at you, Blake, because you are actin' like an excited ass. I should be vewy much obliged if you would wetire."

"Will you shift?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then I'll jolly well shift you!" roared Blake.

"I wefuse to be shifted. And if you act like a wuff beast, Blake, you'll dwaw genewal attention to the fact that Mr. Wailton is bein' shadowed."

That was very true, and Blake restrained himself with an effort, and went upstairs. Arthur Augustus settled down again victoriously to watch. In the Fourth-Form passage Blake consulted with the rest of the bodyguard. They looked down at Arthur Augustus from the landing. He was immovable. There were a dozen fellows staring at him from the lower passage now, laughing and talking. It seemed pretty certain that ere long the whole of the School House would be collected there, wondering what was the little game.

"He's got to be shifted!" said Blake wildly. "He ought to be boiled in oil, and scalped and slaughtered! What are we going to do? The chump is giving the whole show away!"

"Of all the silly idiots," remarked Monty Lowther, "Gussy is about the silliest! He's got to be shifted."

"Gussy!" called out Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus looked round.

"Pway wun away, deah boys! You are attwactin' attention!"

"Come and do your prep."

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NEXT
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"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

"Wats!"
 "Come and sing us a tenor solo, Gussy!" said Manners heroically.
 "I have no time for tenor solos now, Mannahs!"
 "Look here, Gussy—"
 "Wats! I am lookin' the othah way!" And Arthur Augustus looked firmly the other way, keeping his eyeglass glued, as it were, upon Mr. Railton's study door. And Tom Merry & Co. stared at him in helpless wrath from the landing.

CHAPTER 5.

Keeping It Dark.

KANGAROO of the Shell came upstairs with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn. The three Shell fellows were bound for the end study to do their preparation. They stared at Arthur Augustus in passing, but Arthur Augustus took no notice of them. When they reached the landing, they stared at Tom Merry & Co. inquiringly.

"What's the little game?" asked Kangaroo, in wonder.
 "What is Gussy sitting on the stairs for, like Patience on a monument?"
 "Mad!" said Blake.
 "Must be, I should think," grinned the Cornstalk.
 "Is it a jape?" asked Glyn.
 "He's getting a crowd round," remarked Clifton Dane.
 "If it's a jape, what does it mean, and whom are you japing? Is it a wager?"

"No; he's only dotty!"
 "Gussy, old man, come and do your prep!" called out Digby.

"Wats!"
 "You can't stay there, you know."
 "Wubbish!"
 "Well, this beats the band," said Kangaroo. "I suppose it's a joke, but I don't see where the joke comes in myself."
 "He's got to be shifted!" said Blake despairingly.
 "Well, why don't you shift him?" said Glyn. "Take him by the neck and carry him away."

But the chums of the School House could not explain. If they carried Arthur Augustus away forcibly, he was certain to resist, and something would come out. They were only too well aware of Arthur Augustus's way of keeping a secret.

"He'll have a prefect down on him soon if he gets a crowd round like that," said Glyn. "I'll shift him, if you like. I'll get my squirt."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good idea!"
 Bernard Glyn walked away to the end study. He came back with a large squirt in his hand and a large bottle of red ink. The juniors grinned gleefully.

"Good egg!" murmured Tom Merry. "Go it, Glyn!"
 "You bet!"

Glyn filled the squirt from the bottle, and took a deadly aim at the back of Arthur Augustus's noble neck.

Squizzzzzz!
 Arthur Augustus gave a sudden yell and a jump, and his hand went up to his neck. He spun round on the stairs, and as he did so a second stream from the squirt caught him under the chin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gwooh! Bai Jove! What's that? Gweat Scott!"

Squizzz! Another stream landed on D'Arcy's aristocratic nose, and splashed over his face, making him suddenly redder than the reddest of Red Indians. He staggered back, and caught hold of the banisters.

"Gwowowowow! Ow! You awful wottah! Ow!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Had enough?" asked Glyn. "I've got some more here, Gussy!"

"Gwooh! You feahful beast! How am I to shadow Mr. Wailton in this state?" shrieked Arthur Augustus furiously.

"Shadow Mr. Railton!" gasped Kangaroo. "Is that what the silly idiot is doing? What is he shadowing Railton for? Here, look out, Glyn!"

Arthur Augustus came charging furiously up the stairs. With his face and collar deeply stained with red ink, it was evident that he could not shadow Mr. Railton, even if the Housemaster came out of his study. And to have had all his trouble for nothing was extremely exasperating to the amateur shadower. He charged up the stairs to take immediate and deadly vengeance upon the humorous junior who had spoiled the little game.

"Run for your life!" yelled Kangaroo.

Glyn chuckled and ran. After him went Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, streaming with ink, and gasping with rage. Glyn dodged into the end study, and Arthur Augustus rushed in after him. Kangaroo and Clifton Dane followed him in, grinning; Tom Merry & Co. were doubled up in the passage.

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Kangaroo slammed the study door and locked it. Arthur Augustus was chasing Bernard Glyn round the study table.
 "Stop, you wottah! Stop, you wascal! I am goin' to give you a feahful thwashin'! Stop, you fwightful beast! Yow-ow! Hands off, you wottahs!"

Kangaroo and Dane seized the excited swell of St. Jim's and bowled him over. Arthur Augustus descended on the carpet with a bump and a gasp. Noble proceeded to sit on his chest and keep him there. Arthur Augustus wriggled under the weight of the Cornstalk junior, but he could not escape.

"My hat!" gasped Glyn. "He's quite ferocious! Hold him!"

"I've got him!" grinned Kangaroo. "Now, you blessed idiot, you're going to explain what you've been sitting on the stairs for."

"I wefuse to do anythin' of the sort."
 "What's the little game?" demanded the chums of the end study together.

"Wats!"
 "There's something on," said Kangaroo. "I can see that. Those bounders outside know what it is, and they're keeping us out of it. This champion idiot has started out to watch Railton for some reason. He's going to explain himself. They can't keep secrets from this study. Hallo! Who's there?" The door-handle had been turned from the outside, but as the door was securely locked it did not open.

"Hallo!" called out Tom Merry's voice. "Let us in, Kangy!"

"Busy!" replied Kangaroo.
 "Well, let Gussy out, then."

"Not till he's explained what he's been playing the giddy goat for."

"Ahem! It—it's a secret," said Tom Merry. "Sorry we can't let you fellows into it, but it's a secret. Don't say a word, Gussy!"

"I have no intention of sayin' a word, Tom Mewwy; but if you keep on talkin', you will pwobably let out the secret!"

"Gussy's going to let out the secret," said Kangaroo cheerfully. "We can't have you kids playing the giddy goat like this. Now, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to say a word!"
 "What were you watching Railton's study for?"

"Find out!"
 "That's what we're going to do!" grinned the Cornstalk.

"If you won't give up the deadly secret, we're going to put you to the torture. Is your electric battery working, Glyn?"

"Yes," chuckled Glyn.
 "Then give him a shock."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Bernard Glyn was a great dabbler in electricity and electric contrivances. His study was quite a museum of batteries, wet and dry, of wires and coils, and all kinds of weird and wonderful paraphernalia. Arthur Augustus wriggled apprehensively, as Glyn brought two handles, attached to wires, towards him.

"You uttah wottah! Keep off!"
 "Are you going to tell us?"

"Certainly not!"
 "Hold out his hands," said Glyn.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You feahful wottahs—gwooh—wooh—wooh! Leave off!"

Arthur Augustus wriggled wildly at the electric contact. The current from the battery filled him full of pins and needles.

"Gwooooooh!"
 Glyn shut off the current.

"Now, are you going to talk?"
 "Yow—ow! No!"

"Give him another shock!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gwooooooh!"
 "Now, Gussy—"

"I wefuse to say a word!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "And I will give all you wotten beasts a feahful thwashin'!"

Bang, bang, bang came at the door. The bodyguard were all outside, in an extremely anxious state of mind.

"Let us in, you bounders!" howled Blake.
 "Rats!"

"Don't give it away, Gussy!"
 "I am not going to give it away, Blake. I wefuse to say a word about why we are watchin' Mr. Wailton!"

"Oh, you're all at it, are you?" said Kangaroo, with a whistle. "The whole giddy family? We can't allow this sort of thing. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Gussy. It's shocking—more shocking than Glyn's battery!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You uttah ass! We are doin' it for his own good!"

gasped D'Arcy. "I twust you do not think I am capable of spyin' on people, like that wottah Levison or Mellish. We



"Got him!" panted Tom Merry, as the juniors piled on the unknown intruder. "Show a light, Manners!" Manners had his electric lamp in his hand already. He turned on the light, and there was a gasp from the heroic captors! "Gussy! Oh my hat!" "Leggo!" gasped D'Arcy. "You're suffocatin' me!" (See Chapter 8.)

are takin' care of Mr. Wailton because he is in dangah, you ass!"

"Oh, he's in danger, is he?" said Kangaroo. "In that case, you'd better tell us all about it, and we'll look after him!"

"It is imposs, you ass! That duffah Blake has pwomised Mr. Wailton that nothin' should be said about it."

"About what?"

"Shut up, Gussy!" howled Blake through the keyhole.

"It's all wight, Blake! I'm not goin' to say a word about Munwo!"

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Blake. "The silly ass has done it now!"

"Munro!" exclaimed Kangaroo. "What's that about Munro? I remember that name. Wasn't Munro the name of the rotter who went for old Railton some time ago?"

"That's it!" said Glyn. "We're getting at it! But the chap is in prison now; he can't do anything to old Railton. What do you mean, Gussy?"

"I wefuse to say a word."

"Give him another shock."

"Gwoooooh!"

"Now, Gussy, what is this about Railton and Munro? Is there any more trouble with that chap? Have you heard anything about him? Has he got away?"

"It's all out now!" came Tom Merry's voice from the passage. "May as well tell them now! Oh, Gussy, you ass!"

"Then he has got away!" exclaimed Kangaroo.

"Bai Jove! It is uttably wotten of you, Tom Mewwy, to

let out about Munwo escapin' fwom pwison aftah pwomisin' Mr. Wailton—"

"Munro escaped from prison!" exclaimed Glyn. "My hat!"

"Tom Mewwy, you uttah ass—"

"Let us in, Kangy!" growled Tom Merry. "It was to be kept a secret, but that silly chump has given it away now."

"I have not given it away. Tom Mewwy, you have betwayered the secwet in the most stupid mannah—"

Kangaroo grinned and unlocked the door. Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet, panting.

The bodyguard crowded into the study, looking daggers at the swell of St. Jim's.

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Duffer!"

"Chump!"

"You silly asses!" shouted Arthur Augustus excitedly. "I have not uttached a word! You have given it away, and I wegard you—"

"Oh, bump him!" said Blake. "Bump him hard!"

"I—I wefuse— I—I wegard— I—yawoooooooh!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Now give him the rest of the ink—"

But Arthur Augustus had had enough of the ink. He tore himself away and fled from the study.

"So that's the little game, is it?" exclaimed Kangaroo. "Munro has escaped from prison, and you fellows were keeping it dark."

"Railton wants it kept dark," growled Blake. "He

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of
Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

doesn't want to be jawed about. He made me promise that nothing should be said. Now that awful ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows know now," said Tom Merry. "But don't let it go any further. Railton will think we've broken our word—or Blake's word—if it becomes the talk of the House."

"Right-ho!"

"They'd better join the gardy-kaw now they know," said Digby.

"The—the what?"

"The gardy-kaw."

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed the chums of the end study together, in amazement.

"The bodyguard," said Tom Merry, laughing. "We've constituted ourselves into a bodyguard to take care of Railton. You fellows can join it now. The chief bizney of the bodyguard is to keep Gussy's head shut somehow. That's the most difficult part of the bizney."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Kangaroo & Co. gave in their adhesion to the bodyguard to carry out the difficult task of watching over the safety of Mr. Railton, and the still more difficult task of keeping Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's head shut.

It was an hour later when Arthur Augustus—still showing traces of red ink—came into Study No. 6 to do his preparation. He was met by three separate and distinct glares from Blake and Herries and Digby. He gave them a withering look in reply.

"Finished sitting on the stairs, you silly ass?" growled Blake.

"Owin' to your silly conduct, Blake, it is imposs for me to keep watch on Mr. Wailton's door. You have attwacted the attention of the whole House to the mattah. I shall have to think of some othah way. And I weally want to impwess upon you fellows to be more careful in keepin' the secwet. It does not weally mattah about Kangy knowin', as he will help us. But if you should be careless again and let othahs into it—"

"Us!"

"Well, Tom Mewwy was more to blame than you, but you were vewy careless. And I want to impwess upon you—"

But Blake and Herries and Digby did not wait to have anything impressed upon them. They rose in their wrath and bumped Arthur Augustus on the study carpet till the dust rose in clouds; and after that there were strained relations in Study No. 6 for the rest of the evening, and Arthur Augustus did not deign to speak another word. For which relief his study-mates were duly thankful.

CHAPTER 6.

On the Track.

TOM MERRY & CO. did not sleep soundly that night.

They could not help thinking of the escaped convict, who had once made a desperate attempt upon the School Housemaster, and might be expected to repeat it now that he was at liberty. The police might be keeping their eyes open in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's; but the juniors had no great faith in P.-c. Crump of Rylcombe, and very little more in Inspector Skeat.

It would be only too easy for the rascal to obtain entrance to the school precincts under cover of the darkness if he had found his way to the neighbourhood at all.

It would not be so easy for him to enter the School House certainly; and even if he did so he could not possibly know which was Mr. Railton's room; and probably the Housemaster would keep his door locked. The danger, therefore, was not really pressing. But as the shades of night darkened over the old school the juniors were very uneasy. They recalled the man's great strength and desperate character, and the impression he had given them that he was not quite in his right senses. Such a man was capable of anything; and the juniors were disquieted at the idea of what the night might bring forth.

Yet to stay up on the watch was manifestly impossible.

The juniors had to go to bed at half-past nine, and a prefect saw the lights out in the dormitories.

To come down afterwards to keep watch was hardly feasible. Besides, how were they to do their lessons on the morrow if they had no sleep?

Certainly the chums of the School House had set themselves a very difficult task. But they had no thought of abandoning it.

Arthur Augustus had a suggestion to make at bed-time. He proposed that the members of the bodyguard should take it in turns to watch over the House at night, and offered to start that night himself. But the other members of the garde du corps sniffed at that suggestion.

"You'll be spotted out of the dorm," said Tom Merry.

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"That must be wisked."

"You'll be caught out of the House."

"Another wisk; but if we're goin' to think of the wisk we may as well chuck up the whole bizney, deah boy."

"And you'd go to sleep, anyway," said Manners.

"Wubbish!"

"You'd go to sleep in the Form-room to-morrow morning if you don't get any sleep to-night!" growled Blake.

"Can't be helped, Blake."

"It's a rotten idea!" decided Tom Merry. "If the man comes here he can't get into the House, anyway. It's when Mr. Railton is out of doors that he's in danger. Besides, nothing may happen for weeks; and we can't stay up at night for weeks on end."

"I think the wuffian will come heah as soon as he can to knock poor old Wailton on the head. Pwobably to-night."

"Taggles ought to be told to turn his mastiff loose," said Blake. "That would keep the rotter from getting near the House."

"But he hasn't been told, deah boy; and he wouldn't do it if we told him. And old Wailton doesn't wealise his dangah."

"After all," remarked Kangaroo, "Railton's the person most concerned. Perhaps we're making rather too much of it."

"Wats!"

"I could fix up an electric burglar alarm all right," Bernard Glyn observed thoughtfully. "But Railton would spot it, and—"

"And he'd make you take it down again, and give you lines!" growled Manners. "That's no good!"

"I am goin' to stay up and keep watch!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "I wegard it as my dutay."

"Oh, rats!"

The juniors went to bed, but in an uneasy frame of mind. Arthur Augustus, however, was not uneasy. He knew what he was going to do, and how he was going to do it.

After Kildare of the Sixth had put lights out in the Fourth Form dormitory in the School House Arthur Augustus sat up in bed.

He intended to keep awake till about eleven o'clock, when the masters would be going to bed. After that, when all his Form-fellows were asleep, Arthur Augustus intended to quit the dormitory quietly and begin his vigil.

He leaned back against the head of the bed, determined to keep sitting up, in order not to drop off to sleep. But it was far easier to arrange to keep awake early in the evening than to keep his eyes open in the late hours of the night.

Sleep descended upon Arthur Augustus, and before ten o'clock had rung out from the old clock-tower he was nodding; by a quarter-past ten he was deep in slumber.

The rest of the Fourth were all asleep by that time.

Arthur Augustus would probably have slept soundly until the morning but for the fact that he was sitting up in bed. It was close on midnight when he slipped from the pillows piled up behind him, and knocked his head on the bedpost, and awoke with a yelp.

"Ow! Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus sat up again, rubbing his head.

He blinked sleepily round the dormitory. There was a glimmer of moonlight in at the high windows, and it shone on the row of white beds and the sleeping juniors. Twelve o'clock boomed out dully in the distance.

"Bai Jove, I believe I've been asleep!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

He whipped out of bed.

Taking great care not to awaken his comrades, the swell of St. Jim's dressed himself quickly in the gloom. He was late to take up his vigil, and he was oppressed by a dread that he might be too late. If the ruffian was coming that night he might have come before twelve o'clock.

Arthur Augustus mounted to a window, and looked out into the quadrangle.

All was silent and still there. The last light had been extinguished in the School House. Only the moonlight glimmered in the quadrangle. In the distance the mass of the New House showed up blackly.

The shadows of the elms lay black in the moonlight, moving fantastically as the wind stirred the branches and the foliage.

Arthur Augustus watched the moving shadows with an anxious eye. To his excited and uneasy mind, every lurking shadow was that of the ruffian Munro bent upon vengeance upon the School Housemaster.

Suddenly the swell of St. Jim's uttered a low exclamation. Across a wide patch of moonlight, between the elms and the house, a black shadow had darted.

It passed out of view in the shadow of the building so quickly that Arthur Augustus could not possibly see what it was, and the light was too dim for him to observe clearly.

even if the passing object had not been so rapid in his movements.

D'Arcy's heart beat with a thump.

Whatever it was, it was something living; the shadow of a branch could not have detached itself from the mass of shadows and darted towards the School House in that manner.

"Bai Jove, it's that wottah!"

D'Arcy hesitated.

There was no further movement below; no sound from the stillness. Had his eyes deceived him in the uncertain light of the moon? Should he call his comrades, or ascertain first whether his suspicions were well-founded? It was a critical moment, for if the ruffian was in the quadrangle the help of all the garde du corps would be required to secure him. Arthur Augustus decided to go alone. He reflected sorrowfully that Blake and the rest had no faith in his tact and judgment, and instead of getting up and following him to the attack, they would more likely collar him and throw him back in bed, and keep him there by main force. They would not think it necessary to go forth in pursuit of a whisking shadow, but they would very probably think it necessary to keep Arthur Augustus from risking getting into serious trouble by breaking bounds at night.

"I shall have to wely on myself," murmured Arthur Augustus. "Aftah all, if it is that wuffian I shall spot him, and then I can call the othahs. And even if I fall foul of the wottah I can disable him with one stunnin' blow. I will take gweat care to give him a tewwific uppah-cut to begin with."

And Arthur Augustus tiptoed out of the dormitory, closing the door softly behind him. He went down the dark passage on the tips of his toes, and reached the lower box-room and opened the window cautiously. Five minutes later he was on the ground and skirting cautiously round the house.

He was very careful to keep under cover as he came round the School House, and he kept in the shadow of the wall as he neared the spot where he had seen the whisking shadow. There was no sound in the quad—no sign that a desperate ruffian was seeking to obtain entrance into the house. But the very silence was fraught with meaning to Arthur Augustus. The ruffian, of course, would take care not to make a sound; the silence itself was, from one point of view, a very suspicious circumstance.

Arthur Augustus crept on, listening intently.

Suddenly he started.

There was a sound—a slight sound—from the dark porch of the School House. Exactly what sound it was he could not tell, but it was a movement of some sort, there was no doubt whatever about that.

Arthur Augustus thrilled from head to foot.

He was on the track, and he regretted at that moment that he had neglected to bring a cricket-stump or an Indian club with him.

"Bai Jove, I've spotted him!"

He listened with all his ears. The sound was not repeated. What was the man doing? Was he striving to effect an entrance by means of the hall-window? In that case some sound should have been audible.

It was necessary to know, and Arthur Augustus crept on towards the house-porch, his teeth set, and his eyes gleaming. Keeping as much under cover as he could, he peered into the shadow porch.

There was a movement again, and Arthur Augustus caught a glimpse of two bright and fiery eyes turning upon him in the darkness.

The next moment there was a savage growl, and a large dog leaped towards the startled junior, with flaming eyes and snapping jaws.

Arthur Augustus gave one surprised yell, and fled.

"Bai Jove, it's Taggles' mastiff! Oh cwumbs!"

And Arthur Augustus ran for his life!

CHAPTER 7.

The Amateur Cracksmen.

It was a horrible growl from the mastiff as he dashed in pursuit of the unfortunate junior.

Arthur Augustus was not thinking of keeping in cover now. He was only thinking of getting away from those savage jaws.

He realised too late what it was that he had been tracking down.

Taggles' mastiff was a fierce brute, and was generally kept securely on his chain. But this night he was loose in the quadrangle. Apparently Mr. Railton was not so indifferent to his safety as the juniors had supposed. Taggles must have had orders to let the mastiff loose after the houses were closed up for the night. With Cæsar loose in the quad there was little danger of any intruder obtaining an entrance to the house. Cæsar would have taken care of that.

Unfortunately, it was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of whom

Cæsar was taking care now. Cæsar's temper was not to be relied upon, excepting when he was on the chain. Cæsar was there to look out for intruders, and he was looking out. The growl of the mastiff close behind him sent a cold chill like a trickle of ice down Arthur Augustus's spine. He ran as he had seldom run before.

Gr-r-rhr-r-rhr!

"Oh, bai Jove! Oh cwumbs!"

Snap!

Arthur Augustus knew that the jaws behind him just missed him.

He was close to the School House, and he made a wild, scrambling leap upon the window-sill of the Fourth Form-room.

It was a wide, deep sill, about five feet from the ground. Arthur Augustus scrambled madly upon it, clutching and clambering. He hardly knew how he got his knees on it, but he did get them on, and the mastiff pranced below, growling and barking furiously.

Arthur Augustus's head knocked against the window, fortunately without breaking either the window or the head.

He scrambled round on the window-sill to keep his eyes on the mastiff, who was leaping up at him furiously.

"Bai Jove, what a frightfully nawwow escape!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Gr-r-r-r-r-r!

"The howwible, fewocious beast! Some of those silly asses ought to have found out that the wotten dog was loose! Oh deah!"

Fortunately, the mastiff could not reach Arthur Augustus. There was no doubt that he would have sampled the noble youth's lower limbs if he had been able to get at them. Arthur Augustus was glad to be beyond reach of Cæsar's jaws. But he was in a very awkward predicament.

He could not descend from the window-sill without encountering the mastiff, and that was not to be thought of.

On the other hand, he could not remain where he was until the morning.

To call for help would be to betray the fact that he was out of his house after midnight, and that also was certainly not to be thought of.

What was to be done was a mystery Arthur Augustus could not penetrate.

Cæsar ceased to leap and bark at last, but he settled down to watch the junior. Evidently he did not mean to give him a chance of escaping.

Arthur Augustus tried the effect of blandishments on the mastiff in vain.

"Good old Cæsar! Nice doggy! Nice doggy—woggy! Good dog!"

Cæsar only growled. Even the endearing epithet of nice doggy-woggy did not soften his hard heart. In the daytime he would probably have been more reasonable, but Cæsar did not know anything about Arthur Augustus's good motives for being in his present situation, and Cæsar was not taking risks. He was set on guard, and he was doing his duty. If he recognised Arthur Augustus at all he apparently regarded the peculiar circumstances as justifying him in looking on the junior as an enemy.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in distress. "What evah am I goin' to do? I cannot possibly wemain heah until the mornin', and if I did there would be a feahful wow when they discovahed that I had been out all night. It is simply howwid. I wondah if that beastly dog is asleep?"

He lowered one leg from the sill, and speedily discovered that the beastly dog was not asleep. Cæsar made a jump, and D'Arcy withdrew his leg in hot haste.

"Bai Jove! I am up a twee—fairly bunkahed!" murmured the swell of St. Jim's. "And that wotten dog's barkin' may have woke up somebody too! It's uttably wotten! How evah am I to get out of this feahful pwedica-ment?"

There was evidently only one way out, and that was by opening the window, and getting into the Form-room behind him.

If he could do that, he could easily return to the dormitory; but the difficulty was to get into the Form-room.

The window was fastened inside with a strong catch, and Arthur Augustus was quite inexperienced in the manners and customs of burglars.

He examined the window very carefully, and made the joyful discovery that the sashes were not very tight, and that it would be possible to pass the blade of a pocket-knife between them.

"Bai Jove, it makes me feel like a wotten burglah!" muttered Arthur Augustus. "But it is the only way. Blow that wotten dog!"

Cæsar had settled down to watch again. But whenever Arthur Augustus made a movement, Cæsar opened one eye, and the swell of St. Jim's could not venture to descend from his perch.

He fumbled in his pocket for his knife, and found it and opened it, and essayed to pass the blade between the sashes.

He succeeded in doing so, and then he tried to force back the catch inside.

Snap!

"Oh, cwumbs!"

The blade of the knife had broken off short.

Arthur Augustus breathed hard. He opened the second blade of the pocket-knife, and jammed it between the sashes.

This time he was more careful.

With slow and cautious care he forced back the catch; and when there came a snap again, it was the catch springing back.

The window was unfastened. Arthur Augustus gave a little chirrup of glee.

"Saved, bai Jove!"

His next task was to prise up the lower sash, which was not easy from outside; but he succeeded in raising it at last.

The sash rose slowly, with a creaking sound that sent Arthur Augustus's heart into his mouth.

But it rose, and there was room for Arthur Augustus to pass inside. Cæsar awoke to attention as soon as he saw the swell of St. Jim's disappearing in at the window.

Bow-wow-wow-wow!

The mastiff's barking rang through the quadrangle.

"Gweat Scott! The beast will wake the whole house!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Quiet, Cæsar! Quiet, old doggy-woggy! Oh, you wotten beast! Good dog—good dog! It's all wight, old boy! Oh, you beastly, wotten bwute!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled into the room, and cautiously lowered the sash behind him.

He stood in the darkness, and the mastiff's barking still resounded outside. Cæsar was disappointed at the escape of his victim, and probably he knew that something was amiss when the house was entered at that hour and in that manner.

Bow-wow-wow-wow-wow-woooof!

"The wotten beast! Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus refastened the window, and trod lightly across the Form-room towards the door. There was no doubt that the mastiff's barking would awaken a good many people in the house, and D'Arcy was anxious to get back to bed before anyone came down.

He reached the Form-room door, and turned the handle.

The door came open, and Arthur Augustus stepped through into the darkness of the passage outside. Inside the house was almost pitchy darkness, and D'Arcy could not see a step before him. But he knew his way about the house blindfold, and he would soon have reached his dormitory—if he had not been interrupted.

But he was interrupted!

Barely had he taken a step outside the Form-room when there was a sudden quick breathing and a hurried sound of footsteps in the passage, and two pairs of hands were laid upon the swell of St. Jim's in the darkness.

"Got him!" gasped a voice.

And Arthur Augustus, before he could speak a word or make a movement, was dragged to the floor.

CHAPTER 8.

"Got Him!"

TOM MERRY sat up in bed as Cæsar's barking sounded through the night.

The captain of the Shell had been sleeping very uneasily, with the thought of Mr. Railton's danger in his mind even while he slumbered.

He awoke at the furious barking from the quadrangle, and sat up, with every sense on the alert.

"That's Cæsar!"

"Yes, rather!" came a voice from Lowther's bed. "Up with you!"

"Wake up, Manners!"

"I'm awake!"

"So am I," said Kangaroo. "Something's up!"

Tom Merry leaped from his bed, and jumped into his trousers, tying his braces hastily round his waist. Then he ran for the dormitory door.

Lowther and Manners and Kangaroo followed him fast.

"It must be somebody trying to get in," panted Tom Merry. "Cæsar wouldn't make all that row for nothing!"

"Yes; come on!"

The juniors ran downstairs, making little sound with their slipped feet.

In the lower hall they paused, listening. That someone was attempting to enter the house they felt certain; but there were some hundreds of windows in the School House,

and it was not easy to tell in which direction to seek for the intruder.

"He's barking outside one of the Form-rooms," said Lowther, listening. "You can hear where it comes from! This way!"

They hurried into the Form-room passage.

A sound from the Fourth Form-room caught their ears—the sound of a stealthy footstep within!

"He's here!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Shush!"

"He's got in at the window, then!" muttered Kangaroo. "He'll be coming out of the Form-room in a tick! Stand ready to collar him—and quiet!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I've got my electric flash-lamp," murmured Manners. "I put it in my trousers-pocket in case it should be wanted. I'll turn it on when you've got him; but——"

"Not yet; don't give the alarm. Let's nab him first. We don't want him to bunk!"

"Right!"

"Shush!" murmured Tom Merry.

The faint creak of the stealthy footsteps was close to the door now. The juniors stood silent, almost breathless, in the darkness outside the door. They heard the door swing softly open—they heard, but did not see, the form that stepped out.

The next instant Tom Merry and Lowther had their grasp upon the unseen form, and it was borne to the floor.

"Got him!"

"Gwoogh!"

"Hold the scoundrel! Sit on him! Don't let him get up!"

"I've got him!"

"Let me get a grip too!" gasped Kangaroo.

The unseen villain was well secured. Tom Merry was sprawling over him, Lowther had an arm jammed round his neck, and Kangaroo secured a grip on the back of his collar, and ground his knuckles into the neck inside the collar. Certainly there was not much chance of the enemy either resisting or getting away.

The unknown was gasping and gurgling, but he could not speak. The arm round his neck and the iron grip on his collar shut off his voice, and very nearly his breath.

"Got him!" panted Tom Merry. "Show a light, Manners!"

Manners had his electric lamp in his hand already. He turned on the light. A sudden gleam fell upon the three Shell fellows and their prisoner.

Then there was a gasp from the heroic captors:

"D'Arcy!"

"Gussy!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Gwoogh!" came faintly from the unfortunate prisoner, as the hold on his neck relaxed. "Ow—gwooh—leggo! You're suffocatin' me, you fwrightful asses! Gwooh!"

"You—you silly chump!"

"Gwoogh! Gewwoff!"

There was a sound of a door opening above. Others had been alarmed by the barking of the mastiff, as well as the Shell fellows. A light gleamed from the direction of the stairs.

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. He was gasping for breath, being very nearly in a state of asphyxiation.

"Ow! Ow! Oh, you uttah asses! Ow!"

"You thumping idiot, what were you doing down here?" hissed Tom Merry. "So it was you all the time? Oh, you awful idiot!"

"Gwoo—hoo—wooh!"

"Was it you made Cæsar bark, you thundering thump?"

"Gwoo—yaas! I didn't know the beast was—gwooh—loose!"

"Shush! There'll be a row now!" groaned Manners, shutting off the light. "They're coming down! I can hear Railton, I think!"

"Cut back to the dorm——"

"Too late! There's a light on the stairs!"

The Shell fellows looked daggers at Arthur Augustus. They knew now what he had been down for. The man Munro had not come, but Arthur Augustus had succeeded in causing an alarm and waking the house. And they knew very well how Mr. Railton would take it, if he found out that the midnight alarm had been caused by a member of Tom Merry's bodyguard looking after his safety.

"Who is there?" called out Mr. Railton's voice from the direction of the stairs.

"We've got to face it out," murmured Lowther. "Drag that idiot's things off, and make him look as if he's just come out of bed!"

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Quick!"

The light was descending the stairs. Lowther ran towards

it. "It's all right, sir."

"Lowther!"

"We heard the dog barking, sir, and came down to see if anything was the matter," said Lowther.

"You should not have done so, Lowther. You should have left that to your elders," said Mr. Railton sternly.

"Sorry, sir! I—I thought perhaps—"

"Have you seen anyone?"

"Only Merry and Noble and Manners, sir, and D'Arcy. They're here," said Monty Lowther glibly.

"They should not have come down! Go back to your beds at once, and leave this matter to me," said the Housemaster.

"Very well, sir."

Mr. Railton came along the passage, with a poker in one hand and a lamp in the other. His brow was very stern. Tom Merry and Manners and Kangaroo had torn off D'Arcy's jacket and collar and waistcoat, and the swell of St. Jim's, in his shirt, looked as if he had partly dressed himself to descend in haste like the other fellows. Fortunately, Mr. Railton did not suspect that anything else was the case.

"You should not have come down," he said severely. "If there had been a burglar, you would have been in danger. Go back to bed at once, and do not come down again."

"Yaas, sir—but—"

"Go at once," said Mr. Railton, frowning.

Kildare and Darrel and two or three more of the Sixth had come out of their rooms, and they, with Mr. Railton, proceeded to make a search of the house. Cæsar had ceased barking now, but the Housemaster felt that he had not barked so furiously without cause. While the Housemaster and the prefects were making a round of the house, Tom Merry & Co. returned upstairs.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus, as they reached the dormitory passage. "Wailton seemed to think that I had come down like you fellows—"

"Lucky for you," growled Tom Merry. "If Lowther hadn't thought of that, you'd have got a licking, and serve you jolly well right."

"You have torn my collah—"

"Blow your collar!"

"And wumpled my jacket—"

"Jolly good mind to rumple you as well as your jacket," said Tom Merry. "What have you been playing the giddy on for in the middle of the night?"

"I have been watchin' ovah Wailton's safety—"

"Better go and tell him so, and see how he takes it!" snorted Kangaroo.

Arthur Augustus did not think that would be advisable. It was only too probable that the Housemaster would have rewarded D'Arcy's fatherly care with a severe caning. The Shell fellows went back to bed, and Arthur Augustus proceeded to the Fourth-Form dormitory. He found most of the Fourth-Formers awake, and they had already discovered that Arthur Augustus's bed was empty.

"Well, you thumping ass, where have you been?" asked Blake, in withering tones.

"Doin' my dutay, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "Bai Jove! Wailton is goin' woun' the house, and he may find that the box-woom window is unfastened!"

And Arthur Augustus, as that thought struck him, fairly scudded away to the box-room, and fastened the window, fortunately getting back to the dormitory unseen, the searchers being occupied downstairs. The swell of St. Jim's undressed and tumbled into bed with a sigh of relief.

"That was a wathah nawwow escape, deah boys! If Wailton knew—"

"What have you been up to?" asked Levison. "Breaking bounds at night—what?"

"Wats!"

"Been down to the Green Man?" chuckled Mellish.

Arthur Augustus sat up in bed again.

"I should be sowwy to make a disturbance at this time of night, Mellish, but if you insinuate that I have bwooken bounds for any wotten weason, I shall considah it my dutay to get up and give you a fearful thwashin'."

"Oh, go to sleep!" growled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Well, what have you been out for?" asked Kerruish.

"That is a secwet, deah boy."

"Will you shut up, you burbling idiot?" demanded Blake, in sulphurous tones.

"I wefuse to be called a burblin' idiot, Blake. Howevah, I

am too sleepy to talk now, so I will tell you what I think of you to-morrow."

And Arthur Augustus laid his aristocratic head on the pillow, and was soon in the land of dreams. Meanwhile, Mr. Railton had found nothing wrong downstairs, and, much puzzled by the alarm Cæsar had apparently given without cause, he returned to bed. But if the Housemaster had known the facts, certainly Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's excellent intentions would not have saved him from an exceedingly painful interview in Mr. Railton's study.

CHAPTER 9.

Mr. Railton Goes Out, and Arthur Augustus Goes In.

TOM MERRY & CO. were very eager to see the "Daily Mail" on the following morning.

They wanted to know whether there was any further news in the newspaper of the man who had escaped from Portmoor Prison.

The bodyguard, however, had to control their impatience. Newspapers were not supplied for the use of the juniors, and they had to look for a chance of seeing a master's paper after he had read it.

And so it was not till after morning lessons that the coveted "Daily Mail" came into their hands, and they were all able to scan its columns for some news of the man Munro.

"Bai Jove—here it is!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus eagerly, as the juniors crowded over the paper. "There's the name Munro."

And Tom Merry read out, "Mr. Herbert Munro, the son of the celebrated banker, has arrived at the Grand Hotel, Wiesbaden."

"You silly chump!" said Tom. "That isn't our Munro!"

"But—"

"And they don't put news of escaped convicts in the silly society news!" howled Blake. "Turn over."

"But he might be in disguise," suggested Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps the wottah has scuttled off to Wiesbaden, disguised as the son of a celebated bankah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, you fellows, I don't see anythin' to cackle at. We know that the man is a vewy gweat wascal, and he may be able to disguise himself. Pewwaps he is only pwetendin' to go to Wiesbaden," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "Nobody would suspect the son of a celebated bankah as bein' an escaped convict. If he has disguised himself like that, he is an awful deep wottah."

"How can a man disguise himself as the son of a celebrated banker?" shrieked Blake. "Do the sons of celebrated bankers have special sets of features?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"He may be disguised as a Chubb lock," suggested Monty Lowther gravely. "Or he may be passing himself off as a ledger."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you are going to be a silly ass, Lowthah—"

"Here it is," said Tom Merry, turning over the page. "A couple of lines at the bottom of a column, same as before. 'The convict Munro is still at large, but he has been seen again near a village in Sussex, and his capture is hourly expected.'"

"Yaas, that must be the wight Munro!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

"Still in Sussex!" remarked Kangaroo. "Doesn't say which village. Rylcombe is a village. Might be close at hand."

"Very likely hanging round on the chance of getting at poor old Railton, the same as he did before," agreed Clifton Dane. "He can't get at Railton here, though. He couldn't venture into the school in the daylight—and with the mastiff loose at night, he couldn't possibly burgle the place. Only Gussy could do that."

"Weally, Dane—"

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"My idea is that he will hang about, and look for a chance of getting at old Railton when he goes out," he said.

"Yaas, wathah; and pewwaps you will agree now that old Wailton has got to be shadowed whenever he goes out."

"Railton will be awfully ratty if he catches us doing it," said Bernard Glyn.

"Leave it to me, deah boys. You know I am wathah deep. I will undahtake to shadow old Wailton without his smellin' a wat."

To which the whole of the bodyguard replied, with wonderful unanimity:

"Rats!"

The devoted juniors kept an eye—in fact, a good many eyes, upon the master the School House that day. He did not go out, however, and Arthur Augustus's powers as a shadower were not called into action. After dinner, Mr. Railton strolled into the quad, and two or three of the bodyguard strolled after him. But he only went to the Head's garden, where he

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ANSWERS

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chatted with Dr. Holmes till nearly time for afternoon lessons. In the afternoon Mr. Railton took the Sixth Form, and the bodyguard was comforted by the knowledge that he would be safely occupied till they were out of classes, and able to look after him again.

But that evening, Tom Merry knew, Mr. Railton was sure to go out. It was his regular evening for going down to Glyn House to play chess with Mr. Glyn—the father of Glyn of the Shell, who lived near St. Jim's. The Housemaster would go in the daylight, but he would return after dark through a lonely lane. And Tom Merry's mind was much exercised on the subject.

"No need to see Railton to Glyn House," he remarked; "but when he comes back—there's the rub!—he might run right into that rotter Munro."

"We've got to see that nothing happens to him," said Blake.

"Leave it to me, deah boys."

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off. I am goin' to look aftah old Wailton. I wegard it as a sacwed dutay."

And when Mr. Railton walked out of the School House that evening Arthur Augustus D'Arcy walked on his track.

Mr. Railton stopped in the quadrangle to speak a few words to Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, and Arthur Augustus affected to be busily occupied near at hand in studying the old elms.

But when Mr. Railton walked out of the gates, Arthur Augustus sauntered after him, and dogged him down the lane.

Mr. Railton glanced back, and his eyes fell upon the swell of St. Jim's. He frowned slightly, and retraced his steps.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir?"

"Have you a pass out of gates?"

"Nunno, sir."

"Then go back immediately!"

"Oh!"

Mr. Railton stood in the lane, watching him as he went back. He had to go back; there was no help for that. But when a bend of the lane hid him from the Housemaster's sight Arthur Augustus paused.

"I can't help it if he is watty," he murmured. "I am bound to look aftah him. I'll take jollay good care that he doesn't see me again!"

And Arthur Augustus dodged through a hedge, and went on the trail once more.

Keeping on the inner side of the hedge, he retraced his steps towards the spot where he had left Mr. Railton.

He reached that spot, with the hedge between him and the lane, and stopped and listened. He could hear foot-steps dying away in the direction of Glyn House. Mr. Railton had gone on his way again.

A side lane led up from the road up to the gates of Glyn House. Arthur Augustus cut across the fields, and reached the little lane, and looked out through a gap among the trees.

The athletic figure of the Housemaster appeared in sight, striding on towards Glyn House. Arthur Augustus smiled serenely. There was a wide, deep ditch between the field and the lane at this point, and it was nearly full of water. A plank was laid across the ditch, giving access to a gap in the hedge and the lane beyond. Arthur Augustus stood on the plank, peering out cautiously through the gap. Mr. Railton was in full view, walking straight on, without looking to right or left.

But as he came nearly abreast of the spot where Arthur

Augustus lurked in cover, he caught a glitter among the twigs of the hedge, and paused to see what it was.

It was the glitter of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's silk hat shining in the sun.

The Housemaster frowned, and strode directly towards the gap in the hedge with a stern brow.

"D'Arcy!" he shouted.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

He spun round on the plank, and his foot slipped, and the next moment Arthur Augustus was in the ditch.

Splash!

The swell of St. Jim's had disappeared for a moment in the muddy water, but he came up quickly.

But when he came up there was a remarkable change in his appearance.

His silk topper was floating on the muddy water, and Arthur Augustus came up with streaming face and dripping hair, gasping and puffing and blowing.

"Gwoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Bai Jove! Gwoogh! Wescue!"

Arthur Augustus floundered wildly in the water, and caught hold of the plank. He clung on to the plank, and gasped and blinked at the Housemaster.

Mr. Railton's stern face relaxed as he looked down upon the miserable object in the ditch. It would have been difficult to be angry with Arthur Augustus at that moment.

"D'Arcy! What are you doing here?"

"Gwooh!"

"Get out of the ditch!"

"I—I—I c-c-can't!" gasped D'Arcy, struggling in vain to pull his feet out of the thick bed of mud into which they had sunk. "I—I'm in beastly mud up to the beastly knees! Gwooh!"

Mr. Railton smiled, and came through the gap in the hedge. He leaned over, and caught the swell of St. Jim's by his wet collar.

He exerted his strength, and dragged the unfortunate junior bodily out of the ditch. Arthur Augustus came up, streaming with water and mud. Mr. Railton landed him like a fish, pitching him into the grass, where Arthur Augustus sprawled and squelched.

"Gewwooh!"

"You utterly ridiculous boy!" said Mr. Railton.

"Weally, sir—"

"You are in a most disgusting state!"

"Gwooh! I feel wathah disgustin'!" groaned Arthur Augustus. "That mud smells howwid—weally howwid! Those beastly ditches ought to be kept cleanah! Gwooh!"

"You have been following me, D'Arcy."

"Gwooh!"

"I think I know your reason, D'Arcy, or I should punish you severely for dogging my footsteps in this impertinent manner. As it is, you will take fifty lines."

"Gwooh!"

"Now go back to school at once, and if you leave gates again this evening I shall cane you! Go!"

"Gwooh!"

Arthur Augustus picked himself up, squelching out mud and water, and dismally limped away across the field, leaving a wet trail behind him. Mr. Railton watched him out of sight, and then, with a smile, turned and walked on towards Glyn House. But Arthur Augustus did not think of going on the trail again. He was only thinking of getting a bath and a change of clothes. He simply tore away towards the school.

"My only hat!" yelled Blake, as Arthur Augustus came in at the gates. "Here's Gussy! Look at him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's happened, Gussy?"

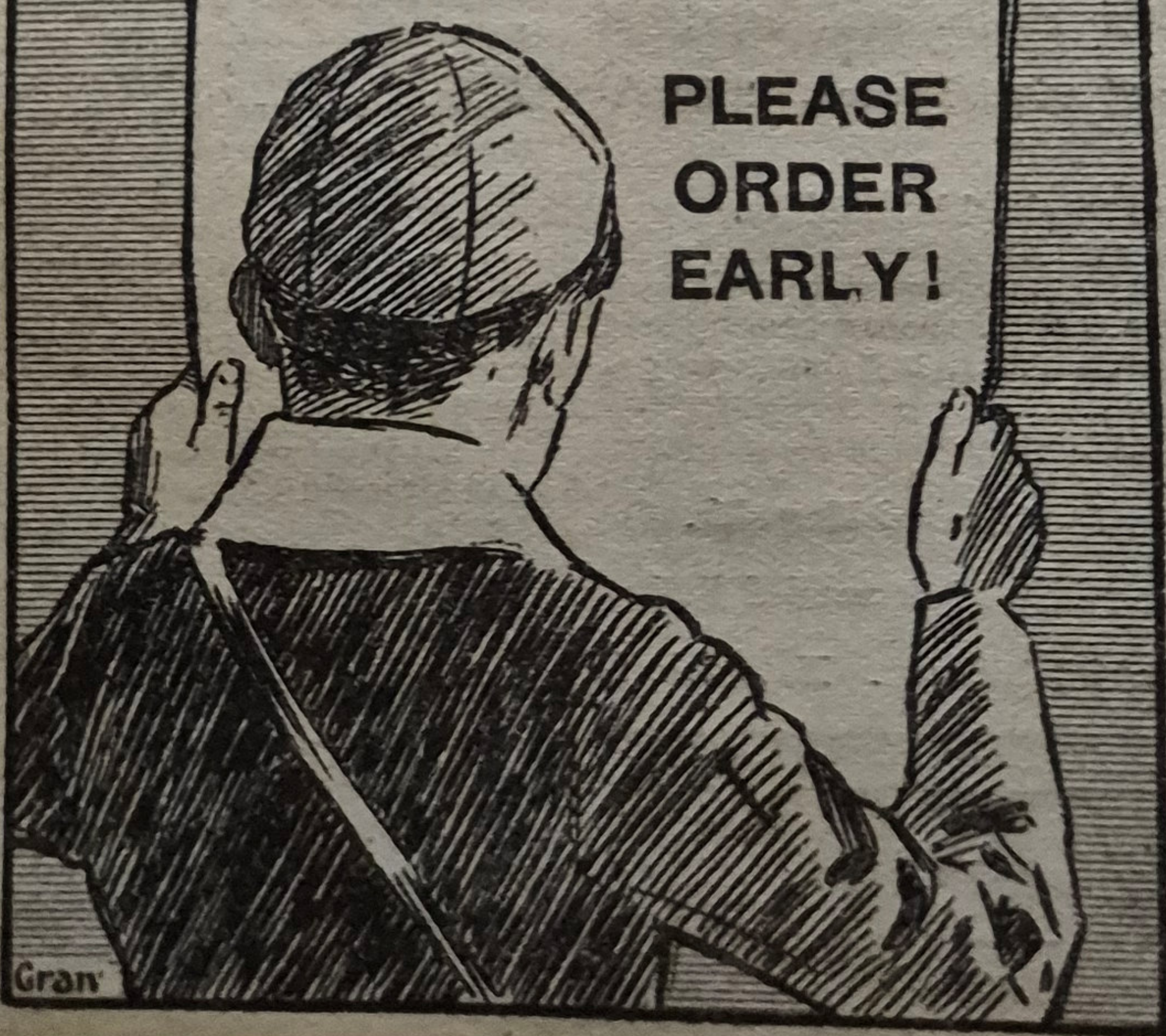
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Glyn filled the squirt from the bottle, and took deadly aim at the back of Arthur Augustus's noble neck. Squir-z-z-z! Arthur Augustus gave a sudden yell, and a jump, and his hand went up to his neck. "Gwooh! Bai Jove! What's that?" he cried. "Gweat Scott!" (See Chapter 5.)

"Been mud collecting?"

"Gwooh! I have been shadowin' Wailton——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah asses! There is nothin' to cackle at. I have lost my toppah, I am howwibly wet and mudday, and my clothes are wuined!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus snorted, and tramped on wearily towards the School House. For the next hour or so he was very busy in a bath-room. Meanwhile the garde du corps were

holding a council of war—without the valuable assistance of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

CHAPTER 10.

In Peril of His Life.

DARK clouds veiled the moon, and the lane was very shadowy as Mr. Railton came out of the gates of Glyn House and set his face towards St. Jim's. It was nearly eleven o'clock.

The Housemaster strode along in the shadows, apparently quite without any nervous apprehension as to what those shadows might hide.

But he kept his eyes well about him. Cool and courageous as he was, he was not reckless, and he knew that the escape of his old enemy from prison meant danger to him. The man Munro nourished an almost insane hatred for the man whose evidence against him had been the chief cause of his sentence. Mr. Railton had no regrets on that subject. The man had been guilty of crime, and had more than deserved his sentence. And the Housemaster had no fears for himself; but he was upon his guard.

He turned into Rylcombe Lane, and strode on towards St. Jim's.

A slight sound in the hedge caught his ears, and he looked round, but no one appeared in sight, and he strode on.

Again there was a sound in the hedge—a rustle as of a moving body—and Mr. Railton even thought that he caught a quick-drawn breath.

He stopped in the middle of the lane, his grasp closing more tightly upon his stick. He was not nervous, but he did not wish to give an enemy—if an enemy were there—a chance of attacking him from behind in the gloom.

But deep silence followed.

"Pooh! I am getting nervous!" the Housemaster murmured. And he strode on towards the school with an impatient gesture without turning his head.

He reached the walls of St. Jim's. The school gates were locked, but Mr. Railton had a key to the private gate. He paused there, slipping his stick under his arm as he felt in his pocket for the key.

As he did so a dark shadow detached itself from the wall where the shadows of the trees inside fell thickly.

Mr. Railton stepped back.

A powerful form loomed up before him in the dark. A glimmer of light came through a rift in the clouds; the moon was emerging.

The light fell upon a hard, white face and two shining eyes. Mr. Railton's stick slid into his hands again, and his fingers closed on it, for he knew the powerfully-built ruffian who stood before him, clad in rough and soil-stained clothes, with thick, muddy boots and a rag of a cap. It was the man who had escaped from Portmoor Prison! They had met at last!

"Munro!" said Mr. Railton quietly.

"You!"

"So you have come here?"

Munro showed his teeth in a savage grin.

"I've come here to see you, my friend. I did not expect to have the luck to meet you like this—outside the walls, and alone."

"Perhaps it is not so lucky as you imagine," said Mr. Railton calmly. "The police will now have exact information where to look for you, my man."

"They will get no information from you!" said Munro between his teeth, and with a wild light gleaming in his eyes. "You will give them none, my friend. I have come here to settle with you the old, long account. I owe you years in prison!"

"You owe that to your crime," said the Housemaster coldly. "You were guilty of a brutal robbery, and I helped to bring you to justice. I would do the same again cheerfully. And now that you have shown yourself I shall see that you do not escape. I call upon you to give yourself up, otherwise I shall seize you!"

The man laughed.

"I mean what I say!" said the Housemaster, advancing upon him. "Resist, and I shall use force."

Munro did not reply, but he made a sudden spring.

The Housemaster's stick swept through the air, and descended upon the convict's head with a crash, and Munro reeled back with a cry.

Mr. Railton dropped the stick and sprang upon him, and bore him backwards to the ground.

The convict crashed down heavily, and the strong knee of the Housemaster was set upon his chest.

He struggled fiercely, but the heavy knee pinned him down, and his head was whirling from the blow he had received.

"You had better give in," said Mr. Railton quietly. "I do not desire to hurt you any further, but I am determined to make you a prisoner."

Munro made a terrible effort.

His powerful form heaved up beneath the Housemaster, and Mr. Railton reeled a little. The convict's grasp was on him now like iron.

Mr. Railton set his teeth and struggled hard.

He had not calculated upon the enormous strength of the man, and he realised now that he had abandoned his weapon too soon.

Munro seemed to have the strength of two men.

With gritting teeth and panting breath they struggled.

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and suddenly Mr. Railton went sideways, and the ruffian rolled upon him.

Munro had the upper hand now.

It was his knee now that was planted upon the Housemaster, and his fierce eyes were gleaming down upon him.

"My turn!" he snarled.

"Help!"

Munro laughed savagely.

"Who is there to hear you here?"

The Housemaster's heart sank. Who was there, indeed, to hear him on that lonely road? Taggles, perhaps, in his lodge. But even if he heard and unlocked the gates and came out, he would be too late! And a single blow from this powerful ruffian would have felled the old porter.

There was no help, and Mr. Railton felt his strength giving way as he struggled with the herculean ruffian.

"Help!" he panted again.

"My turn now, Railton—my turn——" The ruffian broke off suddenly.

There was a sound of running footsteps on the road.

The moon was veiled with clouds again, and the gloom was thick in the road. Like two dim shadows the men struggled on the ground, and the runner who was approaching could not be seen.

Footsteps, footsteps!

Munro glared savagely round.

Crash!

A cricket-stump swept through the air, and almost broke from the force with which it crashed against the head of the convict.

Munro uttered a yell of agony, and reeled to one side.

Crash!

Down came the stump again, this time across the man's shoulder. He was half-stunned, but his wits did not forsake him. He made a desperate leap towards the roadside, and vanished among the trees.

He was gone in a twinkling, his heavy footsteps and gasping breath dying away in the torn and trampled underwoods.

Mr. Railton panted and sat up.

A dim shadow fitted before his eyes for a moment. It was his rescuer. But at once, and without a word, his rescuer was gone!

The shadow vanished!

Mr. Railton staggered to his feet, breathing hard. He had had a fearfully narrow escape. He realised that. The convict had meant murder. But who had saved him? Who had dashed up so opportunely from the darkness and struck that timely blow?

"Where are you," called out the Housemaster—"you who helped me? Come here! Who are you? Where are you?"

There was no answer from the darkness.

The Housemaster was utterly amazed.

Someone had helped him—probably saved his life—and that someone refused to show himself—refused to appear and receive his thanks. It was amazing.

"Where are you?"

Only the echo of his voice answered. Twice again he called, and the echo came dully back from the woods. But that was all.

"Extraordinary!" muttered the Housemaster. "Who could it be? Perhaps——"

He started.

He remembered the juniors who knew of his danger. He remembered how Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had followed him that evening, evidently with the intention—Mr. Railton smiled at the thought—of watching over his safety.

Was it one of the juniors—D'Arcy, perhaps—who had come up in the nick of time and struck that doughty blow?

That would explain his keeping out of sight—fear of punishment for being out of bounds at that hour of the night.

Mr. Railton frowned at the thought now. He had been rescued, but the idea of the juniors venturing to break bounds at night for the purpose of looking after him was not agreeable.

He unlocked the gate and entered, locking the gate carefully behind him. He hurried to the School House, and in a few minutes later he was looking into the Fourth-Form dormitory. He turned on the electric light. Every bed was occupied. The face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in repose, was lying on his pillow. Mr. Railton turned off the light again, and closed the door softly. Certainly it was not Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who had been outside the walls of St. Jim's that night.

He made his way quietly to the Shell dormitory. He opened the door and switched on the light, and glanced along the row of beds. In every one of them he could detect the outline of a sleeper.

None of the juniors opened an eye, and Mr. Railton, glad

that he had not awakened them, extinguished the light and retired.

He was greatly puzzled.

Satisfied now that it was not a St. Jim's junior who had helped him, he was utterly mystified. He went to his study at once, and to the telephone, and rang up the police-station at Wayland, to give information of Munro's visit to the school.

CHAPTER 11.

The Rescuers.

TOM MERRY chuckled softly.

The captain of the Shell stepped out of the dark mass of bushes where he had taken cover by the roadside.

He had heard the click of the gate as Mr. Railton closed it behind him, and he knew that the coast was clear.

Standing in the lane, Tom Merry whistled softly.

There was a patter of running feet, and Monty Lowther came along in the darkness. A couple of minutes later Kangaroo and Manners joined him breathlessly.

"Gone in?" asked Manners.

"Yes."

"Anything happened?"

"Yes, rather!"

"I thought I heard something," said Lowther, "but I wasn't sure, and we agreed that a whistle was to be the signal."

"It was all right," said Tom. "I'd have whistled if I'd needed you. He's got away."

"Who's got away—Railton?"

"No, ass! Munro!"

"Munro!" exclaimed the three Shell fellows together.

"He's been here?"

"Yes; and he had old Railton down when I clumped him on the head with this stump!" grinned Tom Merry. "Then he cleared."

"My hat!"

"Jolly lucky we came out, after all!" remarked Kangaroo. Tom Merry nodded.

"I should say so! Railton got him down first, but you know what a strong beast he is. He turned the tables on Railton, and I really believe he would have throttled him if I hadn't chipped in with the stump."

"Good egg! Railton saw you?"

"No jolly fear!" chuckled Tom Merry. "He called out to me, but I kept out of sight. It's all serene."

"Oh, good!"

The bodyguard had laid their plans very carefully for that night. They had been determined that Mr. Railton should be seen safe to the school after he left Glyn House. And at intervals along the lane the four juniors had been concealed in the hedge, waiting for him to pass.

Tom Merry had been posted nearest the school; and it was Tom Merry who had heard the Housemaster's panting cry for help, and had rushed to the rescue.

If it had been possible to secure Munro, Tom would have been willing to show himself; but as the ruffian had escaped Tom had promptly taken cover.

True, after the aid he had rendered, Mr. Railton could hardly have been angry with him for having broken bounds. But it was quite certain that the Housemaster would take care that he never did anything of the kind again.

And that would not have suited the plans of the garde du corps. They intended to keep watch and ward over their Housemaster until the convict was recaptured.

"Railton must have been awfully puzzled," Kangaroo remarked, with a grin.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"I fancy he was. But I was jolly careful not to let him see me. There wasn't a chance of capturing that villain, you see. And if he'd seen me—"

"Might have marched you in to the Head!"

"Well, I don't know; but at least he'd made me promise never to get out again at night to look after him," said Tom.

"He wouldn't look at the matter as we do."

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Better to leave him in the dark. Now we're free to look after him as long as we like, so long as he doesn't bowl us out."

Monty Lowther was looking very thoughtful.

"He might suspect. Suppose he looks in the dorm?"

"Well, the dummies are rigged up in the beds, and he's not likely to examine them," said Tom, laughing. "The bizney now is to get back to the school without old Railton hearing us. It won't do to give it away now."

"That blessed mastiff's loose by this time," said Manners. "I've been paying Caesar a lot of attention to-day," grinned

Tom. "Feeding him, and petting the beast. Caesar won't hurt us!"

"Well, we've got to chance it."

The four Shell fellows climbed over the school wall, and dropped into the quad. As they crossed cautiously towards the School House there was a patter of feet, and the mastiff came trotting up, growling.

"Caesar!" whispered Tom Merry. "Good doggy. You know me, Caesar, old chap!"

Caesar had not forgotten the blandishments Tom Merry had expended on him that day. He rubbed his head against Tom's leg in quite an affectionate manner.

Tom Merry patted him, and the Shell fellows went on.

A light was gleaming in the window of Mr. Railton's study.

"Not gone to bed yet," murmured Tom Merry. "Careful, you chaps!"

Five minutes later they had clambered into the box-room window, and closed and fastened it behind them.

From the box-room they trod cautiously on their way to the Shell dormitory. The four juniors breathed more freely when they were safe inside the dormitory, with the door closed behind them. They undressed quickly in the darkness.

"That you fellows?" came Clifton Dane's voice.

"Yes."

"Railton's been here!"

"Phew! Did he—"

"He turned the light on," chuckled Bernard Glyn. "But he was satisfied with looking round the dorm. Lucky he didn't examine your beds."

"Jolly lucky!"

"Anything happened?" asked Glyn.

Tom Merry quickly explained. Only Glyn and Clifton Dane were awake in the dormitory; they had remained awake for the return of their chums.

"My hat!" said Glyn. "It was lucky you were there, Tommy. All the same, Railton would be ratty if he knew that you'd been out. He would call it running into danger, and he would be more anxious about you than you are about him."

"He's jolly well not going to know!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"But you were in danger, as a matter of fact," said Dane.

"That villain might have turned on you, and—"

"Well, the other chaps would have chipped in, and we'd have caught him," said Tom. "And Railton would have been on to him again if he'd stopped another minute. I wish he had. As it is, we've got to keep it dark, or Railton will take jolly good care that we don't get out again to look after him. And we're going to—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

And the members of the bodyguard, feeling that they had done very well indeed, turned in, and were soon fast asleep; and they did not awaken till the rising-bell clanged out in the morning.

When Tom Merry & Co. came down in the morning, they found Study No. 6 down already, and waiting anxiously for news.

"Railton came into our dorm last night," Blake exclaimed. "I was awake, though you can bet I didn't make a sound. Has he spotted you? What's happened?"

The story had to be told again.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It was vewy fortunate you were upon the spot, Tom Mewwy; but this pwoves what I have wemarked to you befoah, that it would have been much wisah to leave the mattah in my hands. It was weally vewy much against my bettah judgment that I consented to wemain in and let you fellows go out. Vewy much indeed. You see how it has turned out!"

"Why, you silly ass!" exclaimed Tom Merry wrathfully. "I think that we've done jolly well!"

"Yaas; but if I had been there, deah boy, the wascal would have been capchahed, you see, and the twouble would all have been at an end," explained Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, rats!"

"I had the whole plan cut and dwied. All that was necessary for me to meet the wottah; and I should have met him if I had been there!" said Arthur Augustus regretfully. "I weally feel inclined to kick myself for lettin' you go without me! If I had only been on the spot—"

"Well, what would you have done?" demanded Tom Merry, breathing hard through his nose.

"Oh, I had it all cut and dwied. I should have dealt him one stunnin' blow—a tewwific uppah-cut, and then—"

"You silly fathead—"

"I wefuse to be called a sillay fathead! I do not blame you for not catchin' the wascal, Tom Mewwy; it was a job wathah above your weight; but I certainly ought to have been thah. Weally, I could kick myself!"

"Oh, if that's all that's necessary, it's all right," said Monty Lowther, "we'll kick you!"

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

"Weally, Lowthah, you ass—yawwooh—gewwoff—you howwid beasts—yow-ow!"

And Arthur Augustus fled incontinently, as the whole exasperated bodyguard started operations with their boots upon his aristocratic person. And the members of the garde du corps who had so distinguished themselves overnight were relieved from any further criticisms from the swell of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 12.

A Suspicious Character.

MR. RAILTON looked none the worse in the morning for his perilous adventure overnight. Perhaps he was feeling a little irritated, and that was all.

Now that the ruffian had appeared near the school, and had actually attacked the Housemaster, the matter could not very well be kept a secret much longer.

It had been necessary to inform the police of the occurrence, of course; and it was certain to creep into the papers, and probably into the local Rylcombe paper.

In a day or two, at the most, all St. Jim's would be buzzing with the news that Mr. Railton's old enemy, the convict Munro, had escaped from prison, and was lurking about the school. The Housemaster would be the cynosure of all eyes, the object of attention from everybody at St. Jim's—a most annoying position for him. He hoped fervently to hear of the capture of the escaped rascal during the day.

But Munro seemed to have good luck. He was being searched for now along the countryside round the school; and Inspector Skeat had promised to ring up St. Jim's as soon as he was run down; but the day wore on without that welcome telephone message arriving.

Somewhere in the wide, deep woods the convict was lurking, hidden—waiting in all probability for another opportunity of coming to close quarters with the man he hated with so insane a hatred.

Mr. Railton was very much puzzled, too, by the strange incident of his rescue. In all probability he owed his life to the unseen rescuer who had dashed up in the darkness and struck down the savage ruffian. And he could imagine no reason why the rescuer should have vanished without a word or a sign.

He gave Tom Merry & Co. some sharp looks that morning, with a lingering suspicion that he might have owed his rescue to some of the juniors; but the bodyguard looked as innocent and unconscious as little lambs; and Mr. Railton, of course, had not the faintest knowledge of the existence of the garde du corps.

So he had to give it up as a puzzle.

But the news of Munro's attack, as he feared, was not long in getting out.

On Friday Figgins of the New House rushed up to Tom Merry excitedly in the quadrangle, flourishing a copy of the "Rylcombe Times."

"See that?" demanded Figgins.

Tom Merry glanced at it carelessly.

"Never read the local rag, old man," he said, with a yawn.

"What is it—report of one of our matches?"

"No, fathead! That fellow Munro is out of prison—"

"Go hon!"

"And he's come back here—"

"Really?"

"And gone for your Housemaster!" exclaimed Figgins, brimming with excitement. "What do you think of that?"

"My dear chap, I've done thinking about it—that's ancient history!" said Tom Merry loftily. "The New House is behind the times, my son!"

Figgins stared.

"You—you knew!" he ejaculated.

"Known it for dog's ages!" yawned Tom Merry. "We don't want local papers to give us our news. We get on to things on the spot—in the School House! Your blessed old House is miles behind the times."

And Tom Merry strolled away, leaving Figgins simply glaring.

"What do you think the cheeky rotter says?" exclaimed Figgins, joining Kerr and Wynn, his two devoted chums. "Says he knew it all the time. Gammon!"

"I don't know," said Kerr thoughtfully. "The paper says Mr. Railton was attacked, and assisted by someone who did not make himself known. I thought that was very queer."

"Phew! You don't think it was—"

"One of those School House bounders!" said Fatty Wynn, with a nod. "I shouldn't wonder. If they knew of this before they may have been on the watch or something—"

"But we didn't know—"

"We didn't happen to see it in some paper or other," said Kerr. "They might have. Munro has been out of prison."

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a week or more now, and it must have been in the papers. Of course, they found it out by chance, if they found it out at all. It didn't require any brains, or they couldn't have done it."

"By gum!" said Figgins. "If it was one of those duffers — Look here, chaps, this is up to us! Railton ain't our Housemaster, but he's a good sort, and I vote that we take a hand in the game. What price scouting after that villain and collaring him?"

Kerr grinned.

"Not an easy job," he remarked. "There must be a good many police on his track by this time, and they haven't found him."

"They haven't had any training as Boy Scouts," replied Figgins. "We have!"

"Ahem!"

"It would be a jolly big score over the School House bounders if we captured the rotter," said Figgins eagerly.

"I don't see much chance of it, but—"

"Let's try it, anyway. We can keep our eyes open for suspicious characters hanging round the school. If we could drop on the villain and seize him we'd soon put a stop to those School House cads crowing."

And the Co. agreed that they would.

Meanwhile, other fellows were talking over the news. The members of the bodyguard grinned as they heard it discussed up and down the House as something new.

Mr. Railton, as he had expected, came in for much curious attention. The fellows wanted to know how he took it. So far as could be seen, Mr. Railton took it quite calmly. His manner was perfectly ordinary, and he never made the slightest or most distant reference to the subject. Many of the fellows were greatly disappointed. A man in such circumstances might have been expected to show signs of perturbation, at least. If it had been Mr. Ratcliff, for instance, he would have had a guard of policemen to look after him. If it had been Selby he would have been on tenterhooks. And here was Mr. Railton acting just as if nothing was happening, and not even a single solitary bobby to be seen anywhere near St. Jim's!

"There ought to be some sort of watch set on the place, you know," Tom Merry remarked to his chums. "The police don't know anything about us—"

"They wouldn't be likely to guess that we've formed a gardy kaw!" agreed Digby.

"They wouldn't be likely to guess that we called it a gardy kaw, anyway!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here—"

"Order!" said Tom Merry. "I say, the bobbies don't know that we are looking after Railton; and that villain may go for him any minute, so really it is up to them to keep a bit of a watch over the school. That man Munro is dotty; not dotty enough for an asylum, but I'm sure he's not quite level in the upper crust. Well, then, he might think nothing of rushing into the place at any risk; and there ought to be a peeler somewhere about."

"I dare say Railton has told them not to bother," said Blake. "This fuss gets on his nerves—it's easy to see that."

"Yaas, it is wathah neglectful of the police, whethah Wailton wants a man on the watch or not," remarked Arthur Augustus. "Fortunately, we are heah!"

"Very fortunate you're here, Gussy!" said Blake sarcastically. "If anybody's required to track down a watch-dog you can do it, of course."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Or to burgle a Form-room—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"The man might get himself up differently, too," said Tom Merry. "We know how jolly easy it is to disguise oneself—us honourable members of the Junior Dramatic Society. He might come here in some new rig or other, and nobody would know him till he's done his damage."

"I think I should know him in any wig," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "I have a wathah keen eye for faces, and in any wig—"

"He wouldn't have a wig on his face," said Lowther.

"You uttah ass! When I say 'wig' I mean wig, not wig!"

"Go hon! Gussy gets more and more lucid as he gets older. Perhaps you mean a rig, though," said Lowther, as if it had just occurred to him.

"I said 'wig,' and I mean wig; not wig, you duffah! And whatever kind of wig-out the wottah had, I am suah! I should spot him," said Arthur Augustus. "I am keepin' my eyes open, I assuah you. It's a gweat pitay I wasn't on the scene that time—"

There was a threatening motion of several boots, and Arthur Augustus sniffed and walked away.

Arthur Augustus had long suspected that the deadly convict would attempt to penetrate into St. Jim's in some disguise.

Exactly where a hunted fugitive was to obtain a disguise from was not clear; but the man was cunning enough for anything. And the swell of St. Jim's spent most of his time keeping his noble eyes wide open for suspicious characters lurking about the school.

More than once in the last day or two tramps who had stopped to rest under the trees in the lane had been startled to find themselves fixed by a glittering eyeglass; and the swell of St. Jim's had walked round them, inspecting them suspiciously; and they had lost no time in clearing off, under the impression that the elegantly dressed junior was not quite right in his head.

After school on Friday Arthur Augustus sauntered down to the gates to have another "look wound," as he described it.

In the sunny road outside there was nothing of a suspicious nature to be seen; but Arthur Augustus had studied modern detective literature, and so he knew that when there was nothing of a suspicious nature to be seen, that was in itself a very suspicious circumstance.

A haycart rumbled by, and Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass keenly upon the sleepy driver, not at all satisfied that he wasn't the escaped convict in disguise. The haycart rumbled away, and D'Arcy shook his head in a far from satisfied way. There was a chuckle from the gateway, and D'Arcy glanced round and observed Figgins & Co. adorning the old gateposts with their persons. They smiled at him cheerfully.

"Keeping watch—eh?" said Figgins.

"I am afraid I cannot weply to your cuwious questions, Figgins. We are keepin' the existence of the garde du corps a dead seewet."

Figgins & Co. chuckled gleefully as Arthur Augustus walked away down the lane.

"So they've started a garde du corps!" grinned Figgins.

"Well, their old garde du corps will have to go out of business when we've captured Munro."

"When!" murmured Kerr.

"Hallo! What is Gussy stopping for?" asked Fatty Wynn, who was following the elegant junior with his eyes.

Arthur Augustus had halted in the lane and was surveying a roughly-dressed man with a straggling beard, who was seated in the hedge, apparently resting in the shade from the sun, not twenty yards from the gates of St. Jim's.

"He's spotted a tramp!" grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. strolled down the road after Arthur Augustus. The swell of the School House was regarding the roughly-dressed man intently.

"Good-aftahnoon!" he said finally.

"Arternoon, sir!"

"Are you a twamp?"

"I'm looking for work, sir," said the man civilly.

"You won't find any work undah that hedge," said Arthur Augustus. "I wecommend you to go and look for work somewhere else. I wegard you as a suspicious chawactah."

The man stared at him and rose and walked down the lane. Arthur Augustus shook his head seriously and went on his way, sauntering through the meadows, with a keen eye open for shady characters.

Figgins & Co. chuckled. They did not think it likely that the escaped ruffian, if he came, would have much to dread from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's watchfulness. They strolled up and down the lane, chatting over the somewhat difficult task they had set themselves, without any clear idea of how they were to begin upon it. Suddenly Figgins uttered an exclamation:

"There's that chap again!"

"By Jove!" said Kerr.

The rough-looking man with the straggly beard had gone away towards Rylcombe. But he had evidently doubled back across the fields, for he was now in the lane again, some hundred yards from the spot where Arthur Augustus had seen him. He was leaning against a tree and smoking a pipe, within easy view of the school gates.

Figgins & Co. exchanged quick glances.

It was odd, to say the least of it, that the man, who certainly could have had no business near the school gates, should persist in hanging about there. Why had he pretended to go away, and returned after Arthur Augustus had departed?

Evidently it was because he did not want to attract attention to the fact that he was hanging about the school.

The New House juniors scanned him keenly. He was a big man; and they remembered that Munro was a big man. His features were hardly to be distinguished under the straggly beard, the heavy eyebrows, and the pulled-down cap.

"My hat!" murmured Figgins.

"Looks to me as if he's watching the school—what?"

"Watching for old Railton to come out!" said Fatty Wynn, with suppressed excitement. "Is it possible—"

"I say, don't let's make assef of ourselves!" muttered Kerr.

"We don't want to jump on a common or garden tramp in mistake for Munro, you know. We should be laughed to death if we made a bloomer like that."

"Let's speak to him," said Figgins.

The New House juniors strolled along, and came up to the man leaning on the tree. They paused.

"Warm afternoon, isn't it?" said Figgins diplomatically.

"Yes, sir."

"Taking a rest—what?"

"Yes, sir. 'Bout time I was gettin' on, though."

And the man touched his cap, evidently uneasy, and slouched away up the road.

The juniors watched him out of sight.

"Now, then," said Figgins, "we're jolly well going to see whether he comes back again. If he comes back when we're gone we shall know he's our man. It will prove that he's watching the school gates, won't it?"

"Yes, rather; but how shall we know if we're gone?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Ass!" said Figgins politely. "We can keep watch over the wall."

"Good!"

The three juniors strolled in at the gates again, and Figgins, looking round quickly over his shoulder as he went in, was almost certain he saw a ragged cap appear for a moment among the trees up the roadside. His heart beat with excitement. He was almost sure now, and he was going to make quite sure. The juniors went into the quad, and along the inner side of the school wall. There Figgins was "bunked" up by his loyal chums to look over the wall into the road, almost hidden from sight by the overhanging trees.

"My hat!" muttered Figgins suddenly.

"See him?" asked Kerr breathlessly.

"Yes; he's come back, and he's watching the gates."

"By George!"

"That settles it!" said Wynn.

Figgins's eyes glittered. There in the road, as soon as the coast was clear, appeared the rough-looking man with the ragged beard and the pulled-down cap. He had only waited for the juniors to go in, and then he had come back, and taken up his old position, leaning against a tree by the roadside, with his eyes turned in the direction of the school gates.

Figgins slipped down from the shoulders of his chums.

"Come on!" he muttered. "It's a dead cert now. And I'm almost certain his beard is false—almost certain I spotted a wire. If it is—"

"My hat, this will be a score over the School House!" muttered Kerr. "But—but be careful, Figgy, old man!" Kerr was a canny Scot, and keen as he was to score over the School House, he was very anxious not to make a faux pas.

"I'll be careful," said Figgins. "Come on!"

And with hearts beating with excitement the three juniors hurried out of the gates.

CHAPTER 13.

Figgins's Capture.

TOM MERRY gave a soft whistle.

"What the dickens are those New House duffers up to?" he murmured.

Figgins & Co. had been too intent on "stalking" the suspicious character to observe that there were any eyes upon themselves. But there were. The Terrible Three had observed them from the quadrangle, and they were astounded to see Figgins & Co.'s performances inside the school wall. When the three Fourth-Formers hurried out of the gates again Tom Merry and his comrades exchanged glances of astonishment.

"Must be playing some game," said Monty Lowther.

"Let's see."

The Terrible Three hurried in their turn to the gateway, and looked out.

Figgins & Co. had halted directly opposite to the rough-looking stranger who was leaning against the tree by the roadside. The man started as they came up, and looked decidedly uneasy.

"Back again—eh?" said Figgins.

"Ye-es, sir."

"What are you doing here?" asked Figgins, edging closer to the man. He intended to make a sudden snatch at the beard. If it was genuine, Figgy felt that the man's suspicious conduct would justify his action. If it was false, of course that settled the matter beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Jest takin' a rest, sir— Oh!"

Figgins had made his snatch.

His grasp closed on the straggling beard, and he jerked at it, and it seemed almost too good to be true, proving as it did the startling theory of the Co.; but the beard came off in his hand.

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A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"



The man, showing a bare and clean-shaven chin, jumped back with a cry, and Figgins, almost overcome by that astounding confirmation of his theory, stood for a moment dazed, with the false beard in his hand.

But Kerr did not lose his presence of mind. Even the canny Kerr was convinced now. A man who was watching the school, disguised by a false beard, whom could he be if not the bitter enemy who had threatened the School Housemaster?

"Collar him!" yelled Kerr.

And he leaped at the surprised man, grasped him, hooked his leg round him, and brought him to the ground with a bump. Big as he was, the man was taken so by surprise that he was down before he knew what was happening.

"Back up!" gasped Kerr.

"What-ho!"

Figgins and Fatty Wynn sprang to Kerr's assistance.

The unmasked man was struggling violently, and he would have tossed off the Scottish junior in a few seconds, but the three together made it quite a different matter. They pinned him down among them.

"Got him!" panted Figgins. "Hold him tight! Help—help!"

The Terrible Three rushed up.

They had seen the beard come off the stranger's chin in Figgy's grasp, their eyes almost starting from their heads in astonishment. They were upon the scene in three seconds. The man was struggling furiously and yelling, and in the struggle his moustache came off, too, and his cap and some of his hair. His face was revealed—a brick-red in colour, and very dirty, but that was probably make-up.

"Let me go!" he yelled. "How dare you touch me! Let me get up!"

"Sit on his head, Fatty!"

"How dare you—Grooooh!"

Fatty Wynn promptly sat on the prisoner's head. The man fairly collapsed under the weight of the fat Fourth-Former. Only faint and muffled moans came from him now.

"Got him!" trilled Figgins.

"But—but who is it?" gasped Tom Merry.

"Munro, of course."

"Munro!" yelled the Terrible Three.

"Yes. Lay hold! He's an awfully strong beast. We spotted him," said Figgins breathlessly. "He's been watching the school for a long time. I spotted that false beard too! Got him!"

"My hat!"

"Grooooooooooh!" came from the squelched prisoner.

"We've got him!" chuckled Kerr. "You fellows take hold of him too; he mustn't get away. But mind, he's our capture."

"Ours! Rather!" said Figgins. "Don't you School House bounders pretend you had a hand in it, for you hadn't! He's ours!"

"Yes, rather!" chimed in Fatty Wynn. "Figgy said as soon as we heard about it that it was up to the New House to rope him in, and we've done it. This is where the New House scores—what?"

"But—but are you sure it's Munro?" gasped Manners.

Figgins snorted.

"Who else could it be? I tell you he was watching the school, hanging about the gates and watching, and he was wearing a false beard. Do you want any more proof than that?"

"Well, it does look as if you've got him," said Tom Merry. "He's about Munro's size. It was like the cheek of you New House rotters to chip in, though."

"Yes, rather! He was really our man!" growled Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is where your giddy garde du corps takes a back seat!" chortled Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the Co.

The Terrible Three looked very grim. It was rather rough on them after they had formed a bodyguard and taken the matter in hand for two or three days to have their prize snatched from them like this. Figgins & Co. had chipped in only that day, and they had effected a capture at once. Like Cæsar of old, they came, they saw, they conquered!

"Well, you seem to have done it," said Tom Merry. "Like your cheek, I must say!"

"Oh, rats! Lend us a hand to get him in," said Figgins. "I—Hullo!"

"Yaroo!" roared Fatty Wynn.

He made a sudden leap into the air, as if the prisoner's head had turned red hot all at once.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Yow! Ow!"

"What on earth's the matter?"

"Yow! Ow! I'm bitten! Grooooooh!"

"Hold him!" shrieked Figgins, as the prisoner, relieved of Fatty Wynn's weight, began to struggle again.

"Release me!" yelled the prisoner. "Help! Police!"

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"Well, my hat!" gasped Figgins. "What awful cheek! Fancy an escaped convict calling for the police! Hold him! Pile on him!"

"Help! Release me! I am a policeman! Ow!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Hold on, Figgy!" shrieked Tom Merry, as he peered at the fallen man's flushed and discoloured face. "Oh crumbs! You've made a bloomer this time! That isn't Munro!"

"Rot!"

"It isn't, I tell you! I know the man's face. This isn't him. Munro's got a big nose, and this chap has a little snub!"

"My word, that's so!" gasped Lowther. "His face is so jolly dirty I didn't notice it; but I know his nose now—I mean, I don't know his nose. If that's Munro, Figgy, he's wearing a false nose as well as a false beard!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Terrible Three.

Figgins and Kerr released the prisoner in astonishment and dismay. They had a very dim recollection of the man's features—Munro's—but they remembered that he had a large nose. And their prisoner's nose was a small one of the snub variety. And Lowther's humorous suggestion that it was a false nose was, of course, impossible. The man was not Munro.

"You've made a mistake, Figgy!" chortled Manners. "But, as you said, he's your prisoner. We won't pretend we had a hand in the capture. We won't claim any of the credit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I don't care," gasped Figgins. "If he ain't Munro—and I suppose he ain't—he's a suspicious character—very likely a confederate. He was watching the school, and he was wearing a false beard. You've seen that yourselves!"

The breathless and furious man sat up.

"You silly young idiots!" he rasped out. "I'll take you into custody for this! I'm a plain-clothes' constable, you stupid idiots!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Lowther. "You've put your foot in it this time, Figgy!"

"I—I don't believe it!" stammered Figgins. "You were watching the school, you villain!"

"Of course I was watching the school, when I've been stationed here by my inspector to watch the school!" hooted the unfortunate man, staggering to his feet; "and I'll go and complain to your headmaster of this outrage!"

"I—I say, hold on, we—we—"

"It was all through that false beard," said Kerr, in dismay. "I—I say, we're sorry, you know—really sorry!"

"I shall complain—"

"It was a mistake, officer," said Tom Merry, trying to pour oil on the troubled waters. "And it won't do you any good if your inspector knows that your disguise was spotted by a schoolboy, will it?"

"I'm not going to be 'andled—"

"Do you mean to say you were here watching the school for Munro?" asked Figgins, in blank dismay.

The man calmed down a little now. He had cause to be angry, but he seemed to be naturally a good-tempered fellow, and he understood that the zealous juniors had made a little mistake.

Probably, too, he realised that if the matter were reported, Inspector Skeat would certainly not consider that he had done his work well.

"Of course I was 'ere watching for Munro!" he snapped. "I've been detailed for the job, as the man is expected to come back 'ere. And he wouldn't be likely to show himself if he saw a policeman walkin' up and down, would he?"

The juniors understood now. The plain-clothes' man had adopted the guise of a tramp, which was undoubtedly the best he could have adopted for the task he had to perform.

Figgins had spotted him with remarkable keenness, but it had never even occurred to the keen Figgins that he might be a detective on the watch.

"Well, it was a mistake," said Tom Merry. "We—ahem!—we're looking for that villain Munro too! Sorry!"

"Awfully sorry!" said Figgins. "Here's your beard!"

"Oh, clear off!" grunted the plain-clothes' man. "Don't you say a word about this 'ere, and I won't! Only clear off, do!"

And the watcher retired among the trees to renovate his disguise, and Figgins & Co., feeling a strong desire to see the earth open and swallow them out of sight, fairly slunk in at the school gates.

The Terrible Three followed them in, grinning.

"Your capture, Figgy!" murmured Tom Merry. "It was up to the New House to make a capture, and you've done it!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Figgins.

"Don't be discouraged," said Lowther consolingly.

"You've only captured a common or garden bobby this time, but next time you may catch the inspector himself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. glared at the chuckling trio, and walked away and hid their blushes within the walls of the New House. In Figgins's study the three chagrined juniors looked at one another with long faces.

"Well, it was a mucker!" groaned Fatty Wynn.

Figgins snorted.

"What about looking for the convict after this?" murmured Kerr.

Figgins snorted more emphatically than before.

"Oh, rot! It was a rotten idea!" he growled. "For goodness' sake, don't suggest any more rot like that, Kerr, there's a good chap!"

Kerr stared, as well he might.

"Oh, I didn't suggest it!" he yelled. "You suggested it!"

"Oh, don't argue!" said Figgins crossly.

"But you—you—"

"For goodness' sake, Kerr, don't jaw!"

And Kerr, like a loyal chum, took compassion upon the discomfited Figgins, and forbore to "jaw."

CHAPTER 14.

To Save His Enemy!

"H E'S going out!"

"And so are we!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

It was Saturday afternoon. Under ordinary circumstances, the chums of the School House would have been busy on the cricket-field that afternoon.

But the circumstances were not ordinary. The circumstances, in fact, were far from ordinary.

For there had been no news of the escaped convict. Munro was still at large. If he had ventured near St. Jim's again, nothing had been seen or heard of him. The school—as the juniors now knew—was being kept under surveillance by the police, in the hope of "nabbing" the rascal if he came in that direction. Perhaps Munro guessed as much, for he had not been seen there.

But he had not been captured. Whether he was still in the neighbourhood was not known.

It was probable enough that, baffled in his attempt upon Mr. Railton, he had fled, seeking safety in distance.

But the garde du corps of the School House did not trust to any such theory. Until the man was safe under lock and key again, they did not intend to relax their vigilance. They had formed themselves into a bodyguard for the especial purpose of safeguarding their Housemaster, and they were not going to slacken in their efforts.

Once they had saved him, and it was up to them to save him again if danger threatened. Whether he liked it or not—and certainly he would not have liked it if he had known—Tom Merry & Co. meant to keep him under their eye, and see that nothing happened to him.

So when, after dinner that afternoon, Mr. Railton took his hat and stick to go out, there was a flutter of excitement in the bodyguard.

"This means cutting the cricket this afternoon," Kangaroo remarked.

"Not at all, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "You fellows go and play cwicket, and leave Wailton to me!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "Gussy had better go and play cricket. He'll do less damage there than anywhere else!"

"I wefuse!"

"But what are we going to do?" said Blake. "We can't march out after Railton like a giddy army! He would be certain to spot us, for one thing!"

"Bettah leave it to me!"

"It's all serene," said Tom Merry. "I heard him tell Mr. Linton he was going to Wayland. He's pretty certain to walk, as there isn't a train for an hour yet, and he's starting now. Now, there are two ways to Wayland—by the footpath and over the hill, or down the village and over the bridge. We can separate into two parties—one lot to line the footpath, the other lot to keep an eye on the road by the bridge. We can easily cut round and get ahead of Railton."

"Good egg!"

The arrangements were soon made, and a few minutes after the athletic figure of the Housemaster swung out of the school gates the bodyguard were at work.

Kangaroo and Glyn and Dane and the chums of Study No. 6 made for the wood, to post themselves at intervals along the footpath, which was the longer route. The Terrible Three made for the bridge over the Ryll, to keep their eyes open in that direction.

The more numerous party disappeared into the wood. Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther hurried along the

towing-path, Mr. Railton having gone down by the village way.

The Terrible Three were following a longer route to the bridge than the Housemaster; but they ran most of the way, and by the time they reached the old stone bridge they knew that they were on the spot well ahead of Mr. Railton.

It was an unfrequented spot where the old stone bridge spanned the shining waters of the Ryll. The towing-path was on the near side of the river; but on the other side was a thick wood, through which the road ran from the bridge in the direction of Wayland town.

Tom Merry halted under the trees along the towing-path.

"We'll wait here till old Railton passes," he remarked.

"Then we can keep him in sight down the road to Wayland. Easy enough to follow him and keep him in cover; we're not silly duffers like those Fourth-Form kids!"

"Hear, hear!" said Lowther.

And they waited, keeping an eye on the road that led up to the bridge. It was about twenty minutes later that Mr. Railton came into view, striding on towards the bridge.

"There he is!" murmured Tom Merry.

Then the juniors ducked out of sight in the thickets. Mr. Railton had stopped on the bridge, and, leaning on the old stone parapet, he was looking up the river. The shining Ryll, flanked with green woods and flowery meadows, was beautiful to the eye on that sunny afternoon, and the Housemaster had paused to admire the scenery, and the Terrible Three had only just time to dodge out of sight as the Housemaster's glance swept down from the bridge.

"How long is he going to stay there?" murmured Tom Merry. "Jolly nearly spotted us!"

Mr. Railton seemed in no hurry to move. With his elbows on the stone parapet, he gazed along the sunlit river.

It was a stealthy step behind him on the bridge that caused him to turn his head.

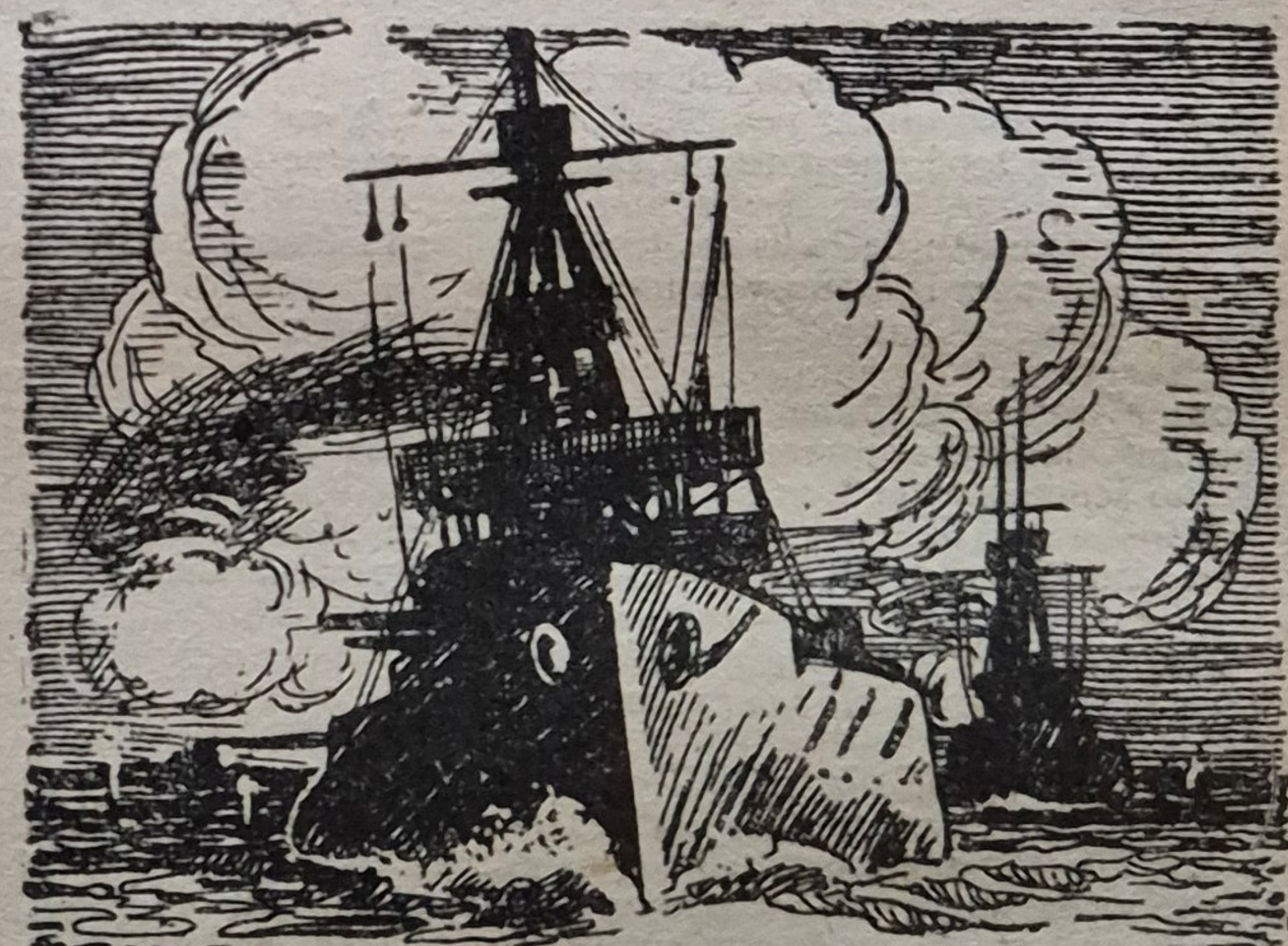
He swung round.

A burly man, with a stubby chin and haggard face, was almost upon him.

Mr. Railton sprang back with a cry.

"Munro, you again!"

"The second time—and the last!" muttered the convict.



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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

"My luck is good, after all! You will not escape me this time!"

He was rushing on the Housemaster as he spoke.

Mr. Railton's hands went up in defence, and his right came out like a hammer, catching the ruffian full in the face.

Munro staggered back with a panting cry—back—back—reeling on to the low stone parapet of the bridge.

Mr. Railton gave a sudden shout, and sprang forward—not to strike, but to save. But it was too late. The convict had fallen backwards over the low parapet, and the Housemaster's grasp came too late. The man's hard and haggard face went horribly white as he felt himself falling. He clutched wildly at space, and shot downwards from the bridge towards the shining surface of the Ryll.

"Good heavens!"

Mr. Railton looked down with a pale face from the parapet. The convict struck the water, and disappeared. Under the bridge the Ryll ran with a strong, fierce current, and the man was whirled out of sight under the stone arches in a second.

"He will be drowned!"

The ruffian had attacked him murderously. But the Housemaster was not thinking of that now. He was thinking only of his enemy's danger. He rushed across the bridge to the other side, tearing off his coat as he ran. He looked down, just in time to see a white and despairing face swept from under the stone arch. Either the man could not swim, or he had deprived him of his senses. Without a struggle, he was whirling away to his death in the deep waters of the Pool.

One glimpse at that deathly, despairing face was enough for the Housemaster.

He leaped upon the parapet, put his hands together, and dived. Like an arrow he cleaved the air and the water, and came up, swimming strongly. The fierce and rapid current tore at him like a living thing. A few powerful strokes, and he reached the convict, who had come up after sinking, and was about to sink again. A moment more, and the Housemaster's strong grasp was on the drowning man.

Up came the dripping head and the white face—up from death.

Munro's eyes opened wildly, and fixed on the Housemaster's face. He did not struggle; his limbs seemed powerless. But he spoke hoarsely.

"Let me go!"

"I am going to save you!"

"Save me! You! Let me go!"

The Housemaster did not heed. He struck out powerfully for the bank, supporting the haggard man above the water.

But the current was fierce and strong, and Mr. Railton, powerful swimmer as he was, was swept out from the bank out into the broad, shining river.

Three juniors came tearing along the towing-path with white faces.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had seen what had happened, and they were running along the bank to help. But the Housemaster was far out of their reach.

"He—he will be drowned!" panted Tom Merry. "Once in the Pool, he can't be saved—loaded up with that man—"

"There's no boat in sight—"

Tom Merry threw off his jacket.

"I'm going in!"

"Look out! He's coming!" gasped Manners.

Mr. Railton was making one more effort to reach the shore. His teeth were set, his eyes glinted like steel. With wonderful strength and courage he stemmed the whirling current, and swept up to the steep bank. His hand grasped at the grass, and the roots tore out in his hand.

A second more, and he would have been swept away to death. But in that second Tom Merry was in the water, and his grasp was on the Housemaster. And Manners and Lowther, up to their armpits in the river, were holding on to Tom Merry.

Even then it was not easy. But by combined efforts Mr. Railton and his burden were dragged upon the steep bank. The convict sank into the grass, half senseless. Mr. Railton stood, drenched and panting.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther! My dear boys, thank you for what you have done!" gasped the Housemaster. "It was my good fortune that you happened to be here."

The Terrible Three did not explain how they "happened" to be there. It was the second time the School House master had owed his safety to the garde du corps.

Munro lay gasping in the grass, dazed and helpless.

"Got him now, sir," said Tom Merry. "That's Munro!"

"Yes."

"Better make sure of him, sir."

"Go to the school at once," said the Housemaster. "You must change your clothes immediately; you are drenched."

"But, sir, that man—"

"I can take care of him. You see, he is exhausted."

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Probably he has had no food for days. He seems to be utterly reduced. Go at once, my dear boys. I should never forgive myself if harm came to you."

The Terrible Three said no more. The convict was evidently in a state of exhaustion, and quite easy to deal with. The juniors cut off. Munro raised himself on his elbow, gasping for breath.

"You—you have saved my life!" he panted.

Mr. Railton nodded, looking down on the haggard wretch with a compassionate gaze.

"Why did you do it?"

"Because you were in danger."

"You—you know what I meant to do—"

"I know it!"

A look of wonder came over the haggard face.

"And yet you saved me!"

"Yet I saved you!" assented the Housemaster.

There was a short silence. The ruffian's face was working strangely. The wild light had died out of his eyes.

"I—I am your prisoner, Railton!" His voice was subdued and broken. "I am in your hands. Send me back to prison. But—but before I go I have something to say. It was you that sent me to a convict prison—"

"I did my duty!"

"I meant to be revenged for that, and I have tried. I brooded over it in the convict cell till my brain seemed to turn. Perhaps it did turn a little; I don't know. But—but now, after what you have done, I—I—I have something to say. I have been your bitter enemy—"

"Without just cause," said the Housemaster.

Munro staggered to his feet.

"I'm ready!" he said.

Mr. Railton drew back.

"I cannot give up the man whose life I have saved," he said. "I cannot do it! Go! Take your chance; I cannot touch you."

Munro gasped.

"You mean that?"

"Yes. Whether I am doing right or wrong, I do not know; but I cannot send you back to a convict prison when I have saved your life. The police must do their own work!"

"Then listen to me," said Munro, in a deep, eager voice. "You shall not be sorry for it. If I am captured, I must serve my sentence. If I escape, I swear that I will lead a new life. I have been within touch of death, and it has opened my eyes. I swear to you that from this day forward, free or not, my hands shall be clean from crime."

"God help you to keep your word," said Mr. Railton; "and He will help you if you look to Him!"

And so they parted.

Tom Merry & Co. noted that Mr. Railton wore a very grave expression the rest of that day at St. Jim's.

They wondered what had become of the convict.

The Housemaster thanked the Terrible Three again for the aid they had rendered him, but he made no mention of Munro; and they wondered.

But there was news that night. P.-c. Crump of Rylcombe had made a capture, and the news was telephoned to the school. Munro was in the hands of the police again, and on his way back to the prison he had escaped from. And later it was learned that Mr. Crump's capture did not reflect great glory upon him, for the convict had given himself up. Was it merely in hunger and desperation, or was it a proof of his repentance? Mr. Railton wondered. But upon one point he was resolved, and that was that when his once-bitter enemy came forth once more a free man, he should not lack a helping hand on the road to honesty.

"It's wathah wotten," was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's verdict. "I wegard it as wathah inconsiderate of the man to give himself up to a duffah like Owump, when we were awfully keen to capchah him. I weally considah that he might have let us wope him in, if he was goin' to be woped in at all. If I had had a chance, as you fellows had, I should have woped him in all wight—"

"What about the gardy-kaw?" asked Digby. "I suppose the gardy-kaw is done with now, you fellows?"

"Well, as there's nothing more to gardy, there's not much use in a gardy-kaw," grinned Tom Merry. "I suggest that we have a tremendous feed in the study to celebrate the success of the garde du corps. How's that?"

And the garde du corps replied with one voice:

"What-ho!"

And that evening there were high jinks in Tom Merry's study; and the high-jinkers were the noble members of the Housemaster's Bodyguard.

THE END.

(Another Splendid Long, Complete School Tale next Wednesday, entitled "LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!" by Martin Clifford. Order early.)

OUR GRAND NEW WAR SERIAL.



READ THIS FIRST.

Paul Satorys, formerly a nobleman in the State of Istan, is the principal witness against a clever criminal named Jem Stanton, and upon his evidence Stanton is sent to prison. Later he manages to escape, and, coming across Paul Satorys, who is out for a walk with his fiancée, Grace Lang, follows them until they separate, and then attacks Satorys. Taken by surprise, Satorys is overpowered, and Stanton changes clothes. In Paul's clothes, the escaped convict finds papers relating to State affairs in Istan, and learns that Paul, being the rightful heir to the throne, is going to push forward his claim. Being the exact double of Satorys, Stanton has no difficulty in securing the throne of Istan. It is some time before Paul can prove his identity to the police in England, and by the time he reaches Istan he finds Stanton firmly established on the throne. Grace discovers the deception, but is helpless. Having once captured Satorys, Stanton uses him as a weapon to induce Grace to marry him, stating that unless she complies, he will kill Paul. Lara, a priest, hears of this, and persuades her to marry Stanton, giving her a powder to take immediately after the ceremony. This is done, and the powder brings on a state of coma, and all believe her dead. On the way to the temple the priests are attacked by a tribe of natives, who are amazed by the beauty of the girl. They make her their queen, and events move quickly. Satorys, in company with a faithful old sailor, Peter Mardyke, and a gentleman of his own class, Duvigny, escape from Stanton's clutches, only to fall into the hands of the very natives who captured Grace Lang. They are brought before her, but as her face is hidden by a thin gauze, they do not recognise her, and Paul is astounded at her knowledge of his private affairs. She is known as Nada, and offers to help him in getting back his throne, an offer which Satorys gratefully accepts. The troops are called up, and Paul reviews them. They are a wonderfully efficient body of men, and Paul is more hopeful.

The march is commenced, and the troops extend for two miles in a straight line. One night, when in camp, Paul is awakened by a scratching at his tent, and a man appears. As soon as the latter sees that Paul is awake, however, he takes to his heels and escapes. Taking him to be a spy, Paul is put on his guard. Once the big hill, which, sheltering Istan City is passed, Paul decides to attack at once. Raya tries to dissuade him.

"No!" says Paul. "We will go forward!"
(Now go on with the story.)

For the King!

Raya submitted with the best grace in the world, and twenty minutes later the considerable force was debouching on to the open plain from out of the grey defile.

For ahead of them they saw the scouting parties of the enemy, and these little thought danger was so near. "You will not take part in the charge, sir?" said Raya, as he stood by Satorys. "It would be uselessly courting danger."

"No; I go with you and the rest," said Satorys firmly.

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By CLIVE R. FENN.

Raya gave a nod. He had long since realised that argument was vain when his chief had spoken, and now he gave an order which rang down the lines of the men.

Satorys had drawn his sword, and his left hand gripped his revolver. Ahead he saw a low range of hills, a scattered building or two—the ruined vestiges of the civilisation which had once reached thus far into the wilderness.

Then there was a sudden movement amidst the hills. Men were falling in; but as, with a roar of triumph, the black levies dashed on, confusion seemed to take possession of the opposing troops. They were among them—the black troops, led by Raya and the true king—cutting a way clean through the men from Istan City, swinging back, charging again, and yet again, and spreading wild confusion in the ranks of the enemy.

Satorys remembered fighting his way through with the others, he recalled seeing the sailor racing on in the sunlight, as if he were out for a picnic, and then he was down, a cut from a sword laying him low.

It might have been minutes, or hours, or days, but he came back to consciousness, to see Peter and Anton bending over him.

"Have we beaten them?" he said faintly.

"Well, we have, and then, again, we haven't, sir," was the sailor's reply. "Here, Mr. Anton, he isn't too heavy for me to carry, and you have got a nasty one. Help me to raise him, and the others will soon be back."

Satorys lost consciousness again, but by sheer force of will he came to himself once more, and told the sailor to set him down.

"I can walk," he said. "Now, tell me, where is Raya?"

Peter raised his hand.

"Up there somewhere," he said. "Thought you was with him, but you weren't. You were fighting like a lion, sir, and the men were mad to follow you. The enemy are rallying a mile away. The work isn't done yet, by long chalks. Ah, here they come!"

About a dozen of the black soldiers came racing up as the sailor spoke. One of them pointed to a long, low building of wood and stone—a ruined temple, to all seeming.

"Get the king there!" shouted one of the soldiers.

"That's just what we are going to do, Old Topknot!" growled the sailor.

Satorys saw a number of the enemy's infantry advancing, and he made light of his wound, though a faintness came over him every other minute, blotting out the scene.

"It's all right!" he jerked out. "Our fellows are close at hand, and we can hold that place for a bit."

"True for you, sir!" sang out Peter.

The little party hurried forward, but as they gained the entrance to the building Satorys was near sinking to the ground.

Peter dropped on one knee, and fired carefully at the pursuers, and the advance was checked while the king was got into the rough shelter afforded by the ruined sanctuary. The door was swung to just as the party of the enemy dashed up, and they fell back before a fierce fusillade.

"Well, Mr. Anton, sir," said the sailor, as Duvigny turned away from the corner where Satorys had dropped, "this

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

here is a nice go, and you won't mind me not waiting for you to point out the fact. Here we are high and dry—that is, I am dry as a lime-kiln—and you may believe me or not, but I wouldn't say 'No' to a glass of champagne with plenty of ice."

Peter stopped talking, and went over to see how Satorys was getting on. The next moment he had rejoined Anton.

There were reasons why he went on chattering. Anton was ready to drop, and the thought of the plight of his leader seemed to have broken the man's nerve.

"It's all right, Mr. Anton; you may take it from me. The chief is not so badly hurt as you think—a bad cut. But I have done what I could, and will do more the moment I can get this place to rights with the help of these black chaps. My! What a house, if they honour it by such a name! Seems to me— Now then, you, Erasmus, get those boards over that window. That's the style," he went on, as the black soldier hurried to obey the order. "Ah, they are going to leave us alone for a bit!"

The rattle of firing died away. The tide of battle had swept on. For the time being there was safety in the building where they had taken refuge, and Peter toiled on, and the soldiers flew to do his bidding, for the sailor was looked upon by them as something more than human.

Satorys received attention, and the wound in his arm was carefully bandaged by the sailor, while Anton took up the duty of the look-out, a duty shared by the soldiers.

As he came up to Peter, it was to see the sailor, with his rifle leaning up against the wall at his side, busy with his handkerchief at his own arm.

The sailor sat down on the floor and looked up at Anton, a comical expression on his face, as he gazed up at the other.

"You are hurt yourself?"

"Just a scratch, as you might say," was the reply. "Yes, you can take hold of that end of the handkerchief, if you don't mind. That's it! Reminds me of being stung back a long time down in the old garden before I took on the work of looking after kings and folks like that."

"Thank you very kindly, Mr. Anton," Peter went on, as he rose and seized his rifle. "I am better now, but it is just as well it aren't any worse, for there's tidy tight times coming, unless I am much mistaken. They know the chief is here, and we are placed between two fires. It would be all right if Raya knew it, but I am not sure that he does, for Mister Satorys left him, and took command of the left. Raya must be thinking that the chief has joined the rest of the army—that is, unless—"

The sailor stopped significantly.

"Unless what?"

As he put the question Anton darted a look at the rough couch where Satorys lay.

"I was only going to say, sir," the sailor continued, "unless Raya was cut up; but personally, I don't think it, for he is too tough."

He swung round before Anton could speak, and set about the work of defence. The sunlight faded, and darkness came swiftly.

"Another board here," said the sailor, as he stooped and wrenched off a door leading to an inner room, and placed it in position. "I call this place an insult, that I do. Why, I am almost afraid of breathing lest the walls should think it too much for them, and fall down!"

Anton was about to reply to the sailor's severe criticism of the curious barrack-like place which, despite its obvious deficiencies, was at least giving them shelter, when Satorys called to Peter.

The latter ran up to where the wounded man was lying. Satorys sat up.

"Better, sir?" asked Peter.

"Oh, yes; I shall manage now," said Satorys, as he rose to his feet. "I expect it was hearing you busy, you old talking-machine, which brought me round. I suppose I owe my life to you, Peter?"

"No, sir. We all have a share in the pleasure, and any time you may be passing—" He broke off, for there was a fierce volley from out of the growing darkness, and the black soldiers dashed to the posts which had been assigned to them, while Peter placed himself at one of the look-outs, and fired steadily at the dusky figures he made out creeping up to the fortified building.

The firing was continuous for twenty minutes, and then ceased. Satorys had seized a rifle, and was standing close to Peter, firing steadily.

"I am going to spoil that chap's career, sir," said the sailor. "See him, the fellow who is crawling up behind those trees." He fired. The figure rose and ran. "Don't you mind me, old fellow," muttered Peter. "You can have a cigar or a bag of nuts, just as you choose."

"They know I am here?" said Satorys, as he reloaded.

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and rested the barrel of his piece on the edge of the barricade.

"They do that, sir. They are not capable of much, but they have, as I understand, tumbled to that bit of information, and they are simply yearning to do us in before our fellows come up and make mincemeat of them. I never was a chap to yearn much so long as I could earn my living, which ought to be enough for any man."

Satorys winced as he made a sudden movement, for his roughly-bandaged arm was causing him no slight pain.

"They will be giving us a rest for a bit, sir. Hadn't you better try and make yourself comfortable for a bit? Mr. Anton, the black johnnies and yours truly will look after the varmints, and see that they don't steal the jam."

"No; I'm game!" said Satorys. "When I come to think of it, it was all my doing."

"I don't see that, sir," said Peter. "Do you, Mr. Anton? Oh, he's gone the rounds again! No, sir, you mustn't say that. You have done your trick at the wheel, as it were, and I liked to see it—sleeping with one eye open, and your bridle on your arm. No, it wasn't your doing, sir."

"I was thinking of that traitor Polla."

"Oh, 'im! Ah, but we were all taken in at last. How I should like to meet friend Polla, and have the swiping of the reptile! Remember how he used to rub his hands and snigger till your boot absolutely itched to get to close quarters with his posterity?"

Satorys leaned up against the wooden support by which he was standing, and laughed, forgetful of his hurt.

"Peter," he said, "if ever I get back to my rights—"

"Which you will, sir; I give you my best Alfred David!" chipped in the sailor. "Passed nem. con., as we say in Dutch."

"Well, if I do, Peter, you will have to give up all thought of the sea, and set up at the palace."

"What as, sir? A sort of jester chap, with a cap and bells? Not if I know it, sir. I have seen them. There was one at Portsmouth at a play I saw after we got back from the Plata year before last. He was a fairly hefty sort of fellow, too, but the only thing I envied him was that big, bumpy kind of bag he carried at the end of a string, with which he swiped people when their backs were turned."

"No; you should have a better post than that, Peter," said Satorys. He realised the motive for the other's chatter. Anton had told him of the actual position of affairs. There was no water, and the soldiers had exhausted their ration supplies.

Peter craned forward.

"See anything?"

"No, sir. I was only looking to see whether that was a water-cart over there; but it isn't. I wouldn't say 'No' to a nice tankard of beer if anyone was very pressing. Ah, of course, it was all Polla's doing, getting us into this mess; and I suppose he is wrinkling up his ugly face and laughing at us now, though he and his lot did not do half what they meant. Have a bullet, sir?"

"What for?" asked Satorys sharply.

"Oh, it would be a lot of use! It helps one when one feels as though one could drink the Thames dry, and there isn't so much as a glass of verdigris out of a ditch or a liqueur of mud. That's right, sir. You will find it a lot of good. One learns something at sea—things as land folk know nothing of."

"I am sure," said Satorys, who was straining his eyes, seeking sign of peril in the darkness.

"You was talking about Polla, sir; or I was. It comes to the same thing. Do you know what I should like to do to him if I had him here all handy? I see you don't. I should use him to clean the floor and the ceiling! Pretending to be so fond of us! Pretty sort of a trade that of a spy! Wonder what he gets paid? Thirty bob a week, and time and a half for big jobs, I should say; and if he comes near me he will get the regular bullet, and no mistake! He was too meek a man. I never could a-bear meek men—the soft-roed chaps what tell you pretty compliments before they have known you inside of five minutes. They gets on my nerves. As one of my skippers used to say to me, 'Always do as they are going to do by you and do it fast.' And it was very good advice—don't you think so, sir?"

"Excellent!" Satorys turned to speak to Anton, who had just come up from the far side of the building. "Anything stirring?"

"No," said Anton; "but one of our fellows says he had it from a wounded man out there as they charged in that the Istan Army is strong, and that they have full information of your being here."

Peter drew back from his look-out.

"Pity we haven't got the Macaroni," he said.

"Macaroni?" muttered Anton.

"Yes; so as we could send a telegram to Raya and the rest. We are strong enough to wipe the place with those

chaps, but the misfortune is that they—that is, our fellows—don't know where we are. They would be down here like an express train if they did know. There, it's all right, sir; I know what I am talking about. I wasn't born yesterday, and am quite equal to understanding all about wireless and flying-machines, although some of them contraptions do come a bit fresh to an old sailorman who has lived his life before chaps took to dropping spanners and empty sardine-tins out of airplanes. As the Duke of Wellington used to say to me—

"The Duke of Wellington!" murmured Satorys, with a laugh. "You don't mean to say you are as old as all that, Peter?"

"I may be, or I may not," was the reply. "But whether I am or not, I can remember the Battle of Waterloo, and the Naval Brigade was wanted there. Old Nap never could do with sailors, I know. I haven't got the wrong pig by the ear. We sailors know a deal more than folks give us credit for." Peter's manner suddenly underwent a change.

The Peril—And Afterwards!

"Look out, gentlemen!" yelled the sailor.

Even as he uttered the words, there was a hoarse shout from out of the darkness, and then came a rush, with volley

that it led down to a cellar seemingly, and he dashed back to apprise his chief.

"In with them!" cried Satorys once more.

He ducked to avoid a blow, delivered another which sent his immediate antagonist reeling back amidst his comrades, and then stood ready. It was their only chance. The black soldiers filed in, turning to meet the enemy as they went, and, despite the confusion, the little force got clear, holding its own.

Another rush and another; but Satorys, sternly declining to enter before the rest, stood firm as a rock. The main room was a scene of carnage; but the defenders had suffered least, and now Peter was standing at the entrance alongside of Satorys and Anton, all reluctant to cede.

"Get in, sir!" shouted the sailor.

How he managed to be last he never knew. The enemy dashed forward again, there was another sharp struggle, and then the secret way was entered.

Peter knew he was leaning up against the wall, and that it was dark as pitch around him; but for the moment he felt lost, and was unable to protest as Anton gripped his arm and hurried him further into the retreat. The sailor heard Satorys saying something. It was something about a second door, which was to be barricaded; and the soldiers were cheer-



"Get the King in here!" shouted one of the black soldiers. Peter dropped on one knee, and fired carefully at the pursuers, checking their advance while Satorys was got into the rough shelter afforded by the ruined sanctuary. (See Page 23.)

after volley, which were replied to by the three white men and their devoted black followers.

"Chap that built this shanty ought to be fried in oil!" said Peter to himself as he darted back, for the breastwork of wood gave to the impact of a battering-ram.

Satorys seemed to have forgotten his wound—forgotten all else but the danger which was there.

He, too, had drawn away; and now, with sword raised, he roared out an order to rally. The soldiers fell back on their leader, and as the darkness of the place was filled with assailants, a savage hand-to-hand fight ensued.

"Stand firm!" roared Satorys.

His sword hung from its knot, and now he clubbed a rifle and fought for his life and that of his friends.

For a moment the rush was stayed. Satorys thrust out his hand, and as he felt the wall a sigh of relief escaped him. He found there was a narrow passage-way which had been so far concealed by the gloom.

"In with you!" he cried.

The soldiers stood firm, a living wall, and as the cries from the besiegers redoubled Satorys gave his order again.

"We can hold this inner place!" he shouted to Peter.

The sailor had darted into the cavity. He had discovered

ing their leader, their cheers partly drowning the infuriated cries which came from somewhere far away, and seemed muffled and strange.

Peter did not know how long it was. Suddenly the weight, which appeared to have descended on his head, shutting out things, was lifted, and he knew he was sitting in a place so dark that it might have been the centre of the earth.

"Now those stones!" Satorys was saying.

Peter started up, and gripped anew his piece.

"We got through, then, sir?" he said faintly. "Hooroar!"

"Yes," cried Satorys. "We shall be able to hold this place till help comes!"

They were in a little octagonal-shaped cellar. Peter had not known exactly what had happened in that final rush. He learned piecemeal later how Satorys had caught him up and carried his brave adherent into safety, while Anton and the soldiers, who had dashed back into the melee, held the mouth of the refuge.

There was another door further down the tunnel—a tunnel which dropped steeply into the bowels of the earth, and, as appeared later, the sanctuary was the fortified portion of what had once been the temple of a religious sect which had settled

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NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

in the wilderness, and had had many difficulties with the savage tribes in the remote past.

There did not seem to be any outlet other than the way they had come, but for the moment there was safety against the hordes without.

"Like rats in a trap, all the same," murmured Satorys, as he made the tour of the place.

No; for as he looked up he realised there was a means of exit from what he had called a trap—namely, a little aperture high above his head in the shadowy, vaulted roof.

He saw a break in the murky darkness there—a patch of sky and a gleaming star.

Peter struggled towards him, and Satorys laid his hand on the sailor's shoulder.

"Near thing, my lad," he jerked out.

"Near it was, sir—all that and a bit over, as the man said when he kissed a porter with whiskers at the next station instead of his wife, the train was going so fast."

"It's a rum time to try to make jokes, Peter."

Peter gave himself a shake.

"Wish I could get rid of that buzzy feeling, sir. Talking about jokes, the chap who never made a joke never made anything at all, and that's what I believe. Here we are again, and—"

"Here we shouldn't be, Peter, if it had been left to you, you obstinate old pig! You wouldn't come!"

"Ah, I never like leaving a place where I have been comfortable!" Peter bent down and listened. "They are hammering to come in, sir!"

Satorys gave a grunt, and turned away.

"I hope the family is all here," said Peter. He gazed about him, his eyes now getting accustomed to the darkness, which seemed less opaque. "Oh, yes, to be sure! There is that dear old sport Erasmus!" He advanced, and slapped one of the powder-stained soldiers on the back. The man grinned. "And there is Sam and Joe and Uncle Toby! So we are all right!"

Seemingly, nothing could shake the good temper of the sailor. But as well as anybody he knew the peril of their position, buried as they were in the depths of the ancient cell. The sound of hammering died away. The prisoned party was minus food and water, and Satorys seriously doubted the wisdom of having sought asylum even from the overwhelming numbers of the foe, in a place where they were captives, shut out from any chance of help.

Peter went slowly and thoughtfully back to where Anton and Satorys were discussing the position.

"Have you gentlemen come to any decision?" he asked.

"No," said Satorys, "except that I am determined to get away and find help. We are closed in, and the enemy will keep a watch on this place. One man might get through, and that's all; a dozen, never!"

"I am with you there," said Peter. "But we are safe. We can't be shot at, or knocked into the middle of next week; and as for the small matter of victuals and a drop of something to drink—well, what is that, after all? I ask you gentlemen, as men to men, what does it matter? People eat a lot too much nowadays, partly because they haven't enough work to do. I don't say as how I couldn't pick a bit—just a basin of soup, a bit of fish, a bird, and a few ontrays, as them dishes are called, because of the way they are served, I suppose. Just pass me the book of words, and I will choose a dinner; but there's no maynoo, and so we must do what we can with a belt-tightener a la table dotty. But if only Polla were here, I would pickle him!"

Satorys gave a laugh. Then he touched Anton on the arm.

"In an hour's time," he said.

"But it shall not be, sir!" cried Anton. "I will go myself!"

"I don't give work to others which I should shrink from doing," was the firm reply. "One man could get through, and that man myself. I shall wait till the first excitement has died down. If we all attempt it, what does it mean? Every one of us being cut down to a man!"

Peter went slowly towards one of the soldiers.

"Hallo, Sambo!" he said softly. "Hungry?"

"Velly hungry, sah," said the black.

"Thought you were," said Peter. "If you were old Polla you could live on your own sauce. The dirty blackguard!"

Satorys seemed to have forgotten the existence of the sailor, and Peter, as he stood by the black soldier, did not appear to be troubled.

He was busy, and the task was laborious, for, though ready with his tongue and silver speech, writing with the stump of blacklead on a scrap of paper—it was a fragment of tobacco wrapping—was not easy; but the task was finished at last, and he folded the paper and gave it to Sambo.

"See here, old fellow," whispered Peter, "you are a very good sort, and as fine a chap as any white man, and you

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won't mind giving this note, which I forgot to post, to the chief in half an hour's time?"

The man nodded, and Peter glided away. He had taken in much, and the lofty aperture over his head had been one of the first things he had studied. He was close to the wall now, and climbing—climbing as only a sailor can climb.

Satorys was talking to Anton, and the latter was still protesting.

"I command," was the quiet response. "It is now. I am not running the danger you think. You are wanted here. I cannot send one of the men; and Peter, though he makes light of it, is a good bit knocked about, and he will be asleep by now."

Sambo approached the chief over the sanded floor.

"This for you, sah," he said, as he handed the note to Satorys.

The latter took the paper, and struck one of his last matches to read it. He read:

"This is my job. I have gone for help.—PETER."

Satorys looked in amazement at Anton in the light of the vesta which was burning to its end.

On for England!

"If anybody can get relief, Peter can," said Anton. "You owe your life to the cause, and—"

Satorys checked him as there came the sound of renewed firing, while clouds of smoke rolled into the underground room.

What followed was confused and well-nigh indescribable; for the defences were sent crashing inward, and Satorys and Anton and the blacks were fighting for their lives. A blow sent Satorys staggering back, and he dropped, losing consciousness, realising that the end had come.

How long after it was he did not know; but he found himself being supported by Anton, and he heard Peter talking in a low tone. The truth came back to him then. It hardly needed Peter's words.

"No, sir, I didn't get relief; nothing doing. The black army has had to retreat, and the Istan fellows are everywhere; and we shall be taken as we are unless we look slippy. I see you are coming round, sir, and this is our only chance."

Satorys drained the water-bottle which Anton held out to him, and his strength returned. Peter had set down a bundle close to him.

"The poor chaps who owned these didn't want them any more, sir; and we had better slip 'em on, and make out that we are just ordinary soldiers, for the enemy are everywhere, and it is our only chance of getting through. We can't get back to the blacks. Look!" He pointed through the trees. The three friends were safe for the time in a little valley. "There are the Istan soldiers all round us, and we had better pretend we belong to them."

Anton nodded.

"We may at least get through to Istan. Perhaps it is a useless thing to do, but we shall be received as soldiers, and there will be no suspicion as to whom we are." He gave a low laugh. "I don't fancy that I look much like the man who is supposed to be a pretender to the crown—with this beard, and the rest of the change. I had a cut across the face which has marked me well."

"That's right, sir," said Peter. "Nobody will know you for what you are, and it is safety for us all three. We shall be reported as dead."

It was ten minutes later. Three men dressed as soldiers of the Royal Guards stepped out of the clump of trees. In his uniform Satorys bore little or no resemblance to the individual whom Stanton, the false king, had condemned to death.

"It is capital!" said Anton.

Peter nodded.

"I am glad you put that one on, sir," he said.

"Why?" asked Satorys.

"Why? He asks me why!" the sailor went on, apostrophising the sky. "Why am I glad, sir?" he went on. "Why, because it is an officer's rig, that's all; and if you can't be a king, at least you may as well be an officer. I am only a simple soldier, same as Mr. Anton there, and it will be bad for me if they find me dancing a hornpipe. Wish I hadn't lost my fiddle! But never mind!"

The three fell in with a scattered party of the troops, which had suffered serious losses at the beginning of the fight the day before. There was never any question of their bona fides, and as he accompanied other officers he felt that Fate was being rather kind. He found himself at the end of the first day's march regarded as one of those who had thrown in their lot with the Istan Army, while Peter and Anton passed as his two soldier servants.

"I shall be able to play my part, sir," said Peter, on the second day, as the returning force came within a few hours

march of the railhead into the city; "but I am not so sure about Mr. Anton."

"You need not trouble your head about that, Peter," said Anton. "I will take very good care that I do nothing to betray us."

The rail reached the edge of the forest land. Here there was a small township of the most primitive sort; and Satorys, as he rested in the little cafe where he and some of his new friends had a meal, heard the latest news.

It was accepted that the black revolt had been quelled for good and all.

An officer a step higher in rank than Satorys himself held out his cigar-case to the man he regarded as a captain of the Royal Army. Satorys was calling himself Captain Villars now.

"You have heard the news, sir?" he said.

"No."

"Ah, you were with the advance, and that accounts for it! We were all discussing it as we came on. Our king has many enemies yet, and he is determined to establish himself by the aid of a foreign war. That brings the whole army to his side."

"But is it not there already?"

"By no means," was the reply. "Truth to tell, the soldiers are disappointed with the new ruler. There was always that question of his right; a shadowy something. The details escape me, for I was away on outpost duty at the time, and, anyhow, it is all gone now. But there was the report—the report that the king had filched his right, and done the real heir to death. Again, he was hated for his forced marriage—a marriage which ended in complete disaster, as you may have heard."

Satorys nodded.

The cafe was full. All around there was a continual buzz of talk. The one subject was the utter discomfiture of the black army, which was reported to be now in full retreat to the mountains.

Satorys saw Peter and Anton seated at a table near the door. There was only one place of public resort in the township, and officers and men foregathered there indiscriminately.

The officer who had spoken to Satorys went on to refer to the rumours which had reached Istan.

"Our king will, maybe, win popularity," he said. "He wants it badly. He has surrounded himself with soldiers of fortune—dregs of humanity kicked out of their own lands, adventurers, ex-prisoners even, it is said—men with a price on their heads, and who accordingly owe everything to the king. It is with such men that he is bolstering up his throne."

"A poor support!" said Satorys thoughtfully, as he raised his glass. "Do you not think so?"

"Ay, indeed; but so it is. Our king has had several risings to put down, even as far as things have gone. I saw him once, but he seldom troubles about anyone who is as low down as a captain of the old army. He seems to doubt us all. He appeared to me to be living in deadly fear, and I asked myself whether the old story might not be true. I remember seeing the Prince Paul some years back. It was in London. He certainly bore not the faintest resemblance to the present king. But time alters everything!"

"I suppose so," said Satorys, eager to hear more. "Then the king is not liked?"

"No. Hated, if you ask me. He goes in fear of assassination. That form of justice is not unknown in our country. It is the army alone that has saved the case. The Republic was hated as much as the new king, for its leaders were time-serving rats, nest-featherers of the best. Well, it will be good news to the king that he has no longer to fear Nada and her troops. They have never given any trouble, so far, beyond frontier skirmishes of no special account. Maybe this foreign war will wipe out the past, and bring Istan into the front rank of nations."

"But a foreign war against whom?" asked Satorys quickly.

"How little you have heard!" The officer threw himself back in his chair and called for another glass of beer. "Germany has declared war on the British Empire. Europe is already in a blaze. France and Russia are hurling their armies across the German frontier. It is the design of our king to stand as ally to Germany. Our army corps is already on the move. It is a policy which may bring Istan into the first line of States!"

"We fight England!" cried Satorys.

(Another long instalment of this splendid war story in next Wednesday's issue of "The Gem" Library. Order in advance. Price One Penny.)

NEXT
WEDNESDAY—

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

"THE GEM" LIBRARY 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."

Keith Munro, 126, Forest Street, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers living outside Australia, interested in foreign stamps.

G. H. Allen, c/o G.P.O., Brisbane, Queensland, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles or United States, interested in postcards, age 17-24.

R. Smith, Inverbourne, Day Street, Henty, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England or Scotland, age 16-18.

Frederick Arthur Williams, 14, Herford Road, Albert Park, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 17-18.

R. T. Belsey, 123, Melrose Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in the United Kingdom, age 14-15.

A. King, 7, Elthema Street, Newmarket, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles.

R. Jordan, Walbeth, Beach Street, Hampton, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in India, age 15-16.

T. R. Allen, 15, Normanby Avenue, Malvern, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in the British Isles.

R. Coughlin, Dumaresq Street, Armidale, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Canada, interested in stamps, age 15-16.

J. Mann, 16, Chapel Street, Windsor, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a boy reader living in Scotland, interested in photography, age 13-16.

Miss Jessie A. Gough, 37, Llandaff Street, Waverley, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to correspond with boy readers, age 18.

Miss Ida Wilson and Nellie Leight, Reservoir, Yan Yean, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with college boys living in England, France, or Australia, age 17-18.

Miss D. Doran, 60, Langridge Street, Collingwood, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wishes to correspond with a girl reader living in Canada, age 15-16.

J. Raymond Rowley and George Marshall, Box 74, Perdu, Saskatchewan, Canada, wishes to correspond with girl readers living in England or New Zealand.

Jack Kuny, P.O. Box 3,425, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, wishes to correspond with a girl reader in England, age 15-16.

G. R. Russell, 426, Scotland Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, wishes to correspond with readers, age 16.

Tasman Woolcott, 29, Jackson Street, Petone, Wellington, New Zealand, wishes to correspond with girl readers, age 14-16.

The Editor specially requests Colonial Readers to kindly bring the Free Correspondence Exchange to the notice of their friends.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 343.

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

OUR SPECIAL WEEKLY FEATURE

THIS WEEK'S CHAT



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"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

By Martin Clifford.

In this grand, long, complete school story Levison of the Fourth, for reasons of his own, determines to play in the great match between the juniors of St. Jim's and their rivals of Greyfriars School. After trying all ordinary means, the cad of the Fourth determines to stake all on a last desperate chance, and to resort to foul play.

Tom Merry & Co. are pretty wide awake to Levison's plots, but such is the cunning of the cad that, in spite of their precautions, it looks as though Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars will be prevented from arriving. It is only the prompt action of the visiting team in taking the law into their own hands at the crucial moment which prevents the success of

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE!"

AN APPEAL TO ALL MY LOYAL READERS.

By the time these words appear in print, it is all too probable that a crisis will have arrived in the affairs of our beloved country, which is engaged upon a terrible struggle in a just cause. In any case, the situation will be one in which it is necessary for every citizen to keep his head, and do all in his power to help the Government of the country. We cannot, of course, all of us go on active service; those who are able will already be serving the Colours. But one thing we can all do to help—we can take the advice which has been impressed upon us again and again—namely, *to alter our habits as little as possible*. This, I think, is the best possible advice to follow. In time of war we are all dependent upon one another; the sudden alteration of the habits of any section of the public is bound to upset business, to cause loss of employment and widespread distress. In this time of stress I have no hesitation in calling upon all patriotic readers, as fellow-Britons loyal to their country and loyal to the paper which has so long enjoyed their patronage, to rally round the good old "Gem" Library now as they have always done in the past. I am bold enough to say that it is my chums' actual duty not to give up reading "The Gem" Library, but to order it as usual every week. This is the only way to enable our splendid little journal to weather the storm, and I am confident that my chums will stand by me and by their favourite paper.

The Editorial, Commercial, and Printing Works staffs of "The Gem" Library have already contributed their full quota of citizen soldiers to serve under the Flag, and I am holding myself ready to respond to the call of duty at a moment's notice. When these words are read, in fact, I shall be with the Colours. Needless to say, however, I have made every arrangement beforehand for a special programme to be carried out in "The Gem" Library, which will be left in thoroughly capable and efficient hands. The paper will be conducted, as before, upon lines which will ensure the best school tales, the best war stories and pictures, and the best serials being presented to my readers.

On patriotic and personal grounds, then, I appeal to all my chums to give me their loyal and steady support through thick and thin, so that when the storm is past, and times are happily calm again, the good old "Gem" Library will emerge stronger, brighter, and better than ever.

Yours, in true comradeship,

THE EDITOR.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Will the following readers please accept my best thanks for their letters received, some of which contained valuable suggestions: Reggie Thurlow (Australia); M. Harris, (High Wycombe); H. A. Bangs (Canning Town); and "A Mansfield Reader."

HEROES OF THE LIFEBOAT.

A Desperate Game.

The rescue of the survivors of the Swedish schooner Christean on the night of the 15th of October was an act of splendid audacity. I think only Englishman could have done it. The sea was in one of its wildest moods, and the night black and blinding. Warning guns from the St. Nicholas lightship suddenly punctuated the tumultuous roar of the sea and the wild shrieking orchestra of the wind. No bugle call was ever responded to more readily or more quickly than the warning boom of that gun. Away went the lifeboat Elizabeth Simpson; it had not taken her many seconds to launch. In a few minutes she was out of the harbour, a few more minutes and she was swallowed up in the darkness.

For five hours we watched and waited, saw nothing, heard nothing, and time went slowly. During those hours the lifeboatmen were groping their way in the dark along the edge of a very dangerous sand that has swallowed up many a ship and many a life. Every moment was full of menace to the lifeboat. The wind freshened, but the desperate game of hide-and-seek went on. At last they found what they were in search of; not so much a ship, as the remains of one.

Then it was that the real grim fight began. The task before our men seemed hopeless. The crew of the ill-fated ship thought so, for five of them launched their boat in a forlorn hope. It was immediately engulfed, and three men sank to rise no more. The sea, as if in grim, sportive sarcasm at their efforts, threw two men back on the deck of the vessel.

The lifeboat was every now and then touching the sands, bringing all within a hair-breadth of disaster. Again and again she struck, shuddered, and righted herself; but the crew held to their post; they had not come to go away again baffled and beaten.

It was cool seamanship and splendid audacity pitted against the merciless blows of the savage sea. People who only see the ocean in summer have but a faint idea of what it can be in the winter. As we hear it whisper its caress to the pier and the sands in the sunshine of an August day, it seems impossible that it can arise in its might and probably sweep the pier away.

This night of the 15th October a sullen, swirling mass of water eddied round the sunken ship, beating back that lifeboat. How many times did they try that night, and how many times were they beaten off again! But they won, and the shipwrecked crew were brought to land.

That was a deed of splendid daring which will compare with any in the history of our race. I feel proud to know such men and to work among them. Such deeds are not recorded; the newspapers take little notice of them—a brief paragraph when a dozen men are drowned is about all. But many a port on the Baltic, many a hamlet on the Norwegian Fjords know Gorleston because its brave lads have again and again rescued their kith and kin from death.

(Another Splendid Article

Next Wednesday.)

The Editor

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our

Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE

PASSING REMARKS.

"And now, Mr. Donovan," said the magistrate, "tell me exactly what passed between you and the plaintiff."
"Sure, yer 'onner," answered the defendant, "there was wan brick, several spuds, seven turnips, and some bad language!"—Sent in by S. Leatherdale, Plymouth.

WHOLLY GREEDY.

Schoolmaster: "What creature contents itself with the least amount of food?"
Pupil: "The moth."
Schoolmaster: "Wrong. On the contrary, the moth is a very greedy creature."
Pupil: "But it eats nothing else but holes!"—Sent in by Alex. Ross, Manchester.

THE FRUIT SEASON.

The teacher was telling them about the seasons. He asked:
"Now, one of you boys, tell me which is the proper time to gather fruit?"
Tommy replied instantly:
"When the dog's chained up, teacher!"—Sent in by F. Dunn, Warwickshire.

A GENTLE RETORT.

Pat and Mike were both strolling along the road, when Pat, who was a little in front, picked up a two-shilling piece.
"Hey, Pat," said Mike, "that's my half-a-crown ye've jist picked up!"
Pat looked at the two-shilling piece, and then said:
"Begorra, Moike, Oi'll owe ye saxpence!"—Sent in by Harry Binns, Yorks.

EXPLAINED.

Mrs. Brown: "Goodness, Mary, what a kitchen! Every pot, pan, and dish is dirty! The table looks like a jumble sale! What have you been doing?"
Mary: "Well, ma'am, the young lady has just been showing me how they bile a pertater at their cooking-school."—Sent in by Miss A. Almond, Blackburn.

NO RETURNS.

Kind Lady (to little boy crying by a penny-in-the-slot chocolate machine): "What are you crying for, little boy?"
Little Boy: "Please, I've put the sixpenny-bit my mother gave me to buy a loaf of bread with in this machine, to have some chocolate, and I haven't had my change!"—Sent in by W. Jones, Newport.

FORCE OF HABIT.

At a certain country race-meeting there was an open event to all-comers. The sun was blazing down on a field of hot, excited horses and men, all waiting for a tall, raw-boned beast to yield to the importunities of the starter, and get into line. The patience of this official was nearly exhausted.
"Bring up that horse!" he shouted. "Bring him up! You'll get into trouble pretty soon if you don't!"
The rider of the refractory beast yelled back desperately:
"I can't help it! This here's been a cab-horse, and he won't start till the door shuts. An' I ain't got no door!"—Sent in by Miss E. Barnett, Paddington.

NO ALIBI FOR HIM.

"If you are innocent," said a lawyer to his client, an old darkey who was charged with stealing a ham, "we ought to be able to prove an alibi."
"I doan' specs we kin," said the darkey doubtfully.
"At what time was the ham stolen?"
"Bout 'lebben o'clock, dey say."
"Well, where were you between eleven o'clock and midnight—in bed?"
"No, sah; I was hiding the ham."—Sent in by James Gilbert, Fulham, S.W.

A BIG HIT.

Irate Officer: "Look here, you aimed at No. 5 target and hit No. 2!"
Pat: "Shure, sorr, it would be a grand thing in war! Bedad, I might aim at a private and hit a general!"—Sent in by E. Godbehear, Luton.

HARD LUCK!

Visitor (in penitentiary): "What brought you to this place, my friend?"
Convict: "Sneezing."
Visitor: "Sneezing?"
Convict: "Yes, sir. It woke the gentleman up, and he nabbed me."—Sent in by C. Fell, South Africa.

AN EXPLANATION.

Two country youths were on a visit to London. They went into the British Museum, and saw a mummy, over which hung a card bearing this inscription: "B.C. 87."
They were mystified, and one said:
"What do you make of that, Sam?"
"Well," said Sam, "I should say it was the number of the motor-car that killed him."—Sent in by C. W. Morgan, Lincoln.

HARD LINES!

Grandma: "Hallo, my dear, what are you crying about?"
Georgie: "Teacher caned me because I couldn't find Moscow on the map of Europe!"
Grandma: "And no wonder you couldn't find Moscow, poor dear! It was burned down in 1812!"—Sent in by Frank Davies, Wolverhampton.

ON HIS GUARD.

Percy: "Do you know, my brother can tell the time without looking at the clock."
Alice: "Can he, really? How does he do it?"
Percy: "Why, he looks at his watch!"—Sent in by Reginald Buss, Kent.

PREFERRED THE MONEY.

Magistrate (to prisoner in dock): "Well, and what brought you here?"
Prisoner: "Two policemen, yer honour."
Magistrate: "Drunk, I suppose?"
Prisoner: "Oh, begorra, they were, yer honour—both of them!"
Magistrate: "Forty shillings or a month."
Prisoner: "Thank yer honour kindly. I'll take the money."—Sent in by H. Walter, Birmingham.

MONEY PRIZES OFFERED.

Readers are invited to send ON A POSTCARD Storyettes or Short Interesting Paragraphs for this page. For every contribution used the sender will receive a Money Prize.

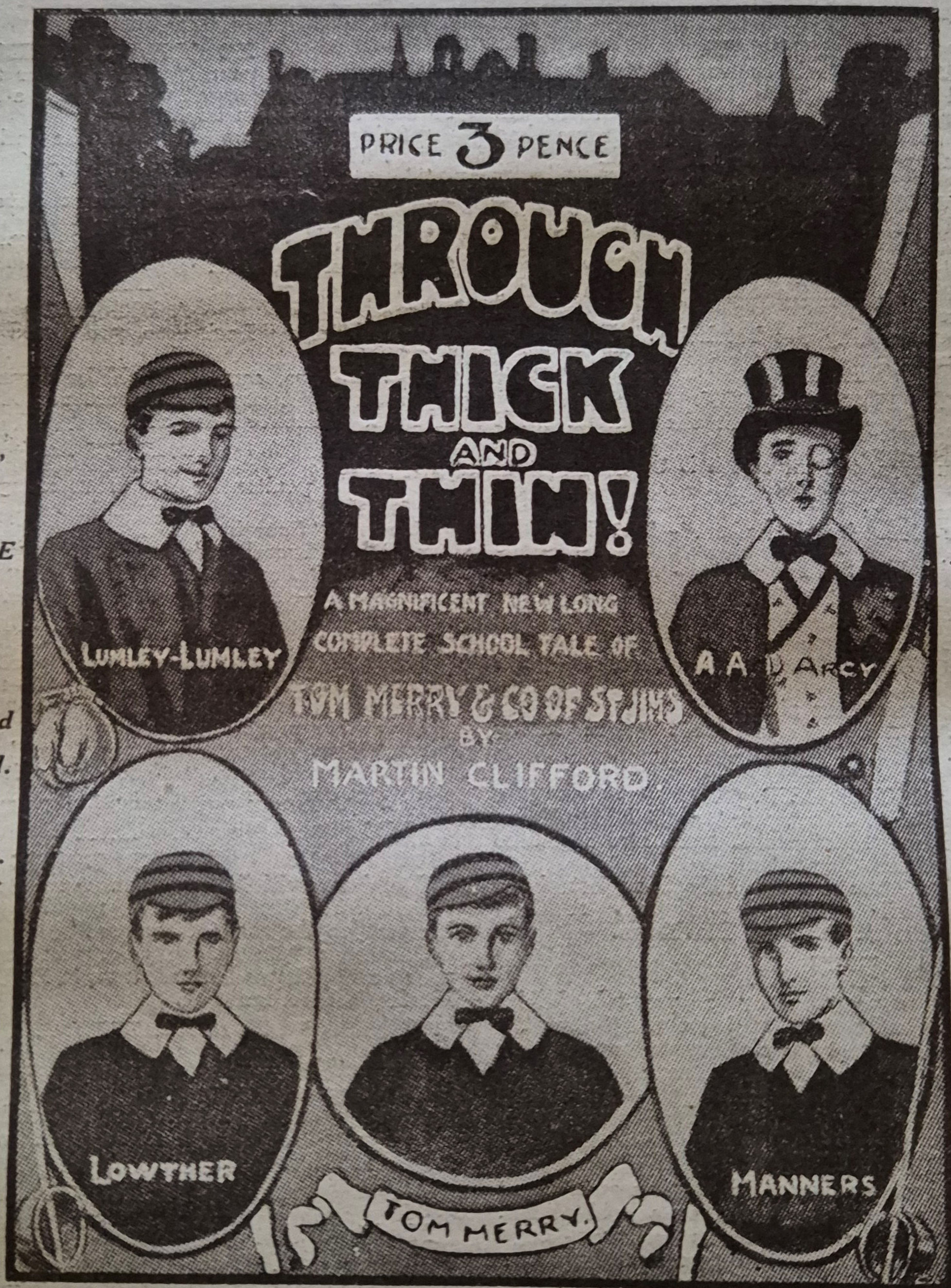
ALL POSTCARDS MUST BE ADDRESSED—The Editor, "The Gem" Library, Gough House, Gough Square, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THIS OFFER IS OPEN TO READERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD.

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