

HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!

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



SHELTER FROM THE STORM!

(An Exciting Scene in the Grand, Long, Complete School Story in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT

Whom to Write to
EDITOR "THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 THE FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGTON ST. LONDON E.C.
OUR THREE COMPANION PAPERS!
"THE MAGNET" THE "PENNY" CHUCKLES.
— LIBRARY — POPULAR — 1/2 —
EVERY MONDAY — EVERY FRIDAY — EVERY SATURDAY.



For Next Wednesday:

"BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!"

By Martin Clifford.

The principal part in next week's story is played by Crooke, who comes under suspicion of having made a base and cowardly attack upon Monsieur Morney, the French master at St. Jim's. So strong is the suspicion that all Crooke's protestations of innocence are of no avail. All the evidence, direct and circumstantial, is against him; and the miserable fellow pleads in vain for belief. Whether he was guilty or no, you must read the story to find out; but in any case, having regard to the caddish tricks he has played in the past, one feels little sympathy for a fellow of his type when

"BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!"

IFISH READERS.

The publication of J. T.'s very silly letter has brought me quite a shoal of correspondence. Most of those who write condemn unreservedly the attitude of J. T.; but one reader, as wrong-headed and ignorant as he, says that it is all true—except that Scotland, not Ireland, is the country to which the remarks should be applied. Seeing that Scotland as a country has not been in the habit of voicing grievances of the sort, it will take more than the testimony of a youngster obviously lacking in judgment and common-sense to convince me that she feels them. This youthful Scot goes back to Flodden Field—a battle which, he says, the English won by treachery—and to Bannockburn. People who think that it is worth while cherishing bitter grudges on account of

"Old, unhappy, far-off things,

And battles long ago."

are really out of place in this modern world. Bannockburn will never worry me, though I am English to the backbone; and I have as high a respect for Robert the Bruce as any Scot can have.

S. A. W. writes: "I was very much surprised and disgusted at J. T.'s letter. I am Irish myself, but I think like me must be utterly mad. I do not agree that Ireland has been unfairly treated by England."

A. M. says: "Whoever J. T. may be he is no fair specimen of an Irishman. He cannot expect to be both competitor and judge. He makes a great mistake when he imagines that a letter such as his will do anything to stop the sale of your splendid papers in Ireland."

L. Pat McDermott is breezily Hibernian. Says he: "J. T. is either suffering with his liver, or he is a confounded idiot. I am an old GEM reader, and a red-headed son of Erin."

"An Irish Home-Ruler," writing from Cork, takes another view, and says: "I just see that Ireland has not the same privileges as England, Scotland, and Wales. I do. At present Ireland has many more—subsidised by the British taxpayer, made exempt from conscription, with a land-purchase scheme such as would be welcomed heartily in any one of the other three countries—the Green Isle is the pampered member of the family!"

OUR NOTICES.

Leagues, Correspondence, etc.

Harold Munday, 364, Barking Rd., Plaistow, E., would like to join a "Gem" or "Magnet" League in or near West Ham.

Miss Minnie Ardill, 259, Burnley St., Burnley, Melbourne, Australia, would like to correspond with girl readers.

Private G. Sinclair, 4th Seaforth Highlanders, Ripon, desires to thank readers who sent him back numbers.

Miss Irene Ferdinande would like to correspond with a reader in New Zealand, Australia, or Honolulu.—Address, 36, Church St., Chelsea, London, S.W.

Back Numbers Wanted, etc.

By A. Barber, Karinga, Rangers Avenue, Mosman, N.S.W., Australia—"Magnet" 1300; offers full price and postage.

By J. Gavan, 49, Field Lane, Batley—"Tom Merry in the Rockies," "The St. Jim's Airmen," and "Foes of the Sixth."

By B. Pattimore, 1, Oakfield Rd., East Cotes—"Loyal to the Last," "Talbot's Triumph," "Saving Talbot," and "Figgins' Fig-Pudding."

By E. C. Linington, Farm Institute, Sparsholt, near Winchester—"Gem" Nos. 50-300; also "Rivals and Chums," "King of the Fags," and "Tom Merry & Co."

By C. Crawford, 30, St. Andrew's Drive, Pollokshields, Glasgow—"Gem" Nos. earlier than 351.

By N. Dick, 48, Glantane St., Antrim Rd., Belfast—"A Mission of Mystery," "In spite of All," and "Grundy, the Detective."

By A. P. Keith, c/o Mr. W. Watt, Seedsman, Cuper, Fife—"Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Figgis' Folly," "The Schoolboy Explorers," "Nobody's Study," "The St. Jim's Airmen," and "Loyal to the Last"; double price offered.

By H. Glifford, 34, Park Lane, Royston, near Oldham—"Gem" Nos. between June, 1915, and August, 1916.

By T. King, Petersham Place Cottage, The Vineries, Byfleet, Surrey—"Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Figgis' Folly," "Tom Merry in the Rockies," "The Schoolboy Explorers," and "St. Jim's Airmen."

By G. Osborne, 23, Sheendale Rd., Richmond, Surrey—"Kaiser or King?" and "The Flying Armada."

By E. Freed, 21, Sandford Rd., Aberavon, Glam.—"Gem" and "Magnet" numbers earlier than 390, especially Talbot and Vernon-Smith stories.

By G. H. H. Eaton, 18, Oversetts Road, Newhall, near Burton-on-Trent—"Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Wingate's Folly," "Drummed Out," "Tom Merry & Co.," John Tregellis' war stories in the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library, and No. 621 of the "Marvel," containing an article on boxing.

By S. Reynolds, White Lea, Kirkbaugh, Alton, Cumberland—"Tom Merry in the Rockies," and "Figgis' Folly."

By Private T. J. Richards, 25370, Lewis Machine-gun Sec., D Coy., 17th Welsh Regt., B.E.F., France—Back numbers of companion papers, if any readers will oblige him.

By J. Smith, 19, Fairhaven Rd., St. Anne's-on-the-Sea, Lancs.—"The Gem," 1913, Christmas Number, and any very old "Magnets."

By Hyman Belz, 66, Barnett St., Cape Town, South Africa—Back numbers of "Gem" and "Magnet" below 350.

By Private H. Goddard, 6th Platoon, 8th Coy., Middlesex Regt., B.E.F., France—Back numbers of "Gem," if any readers will send them.

Will the correspondent who wrote from H.M. trawler Wm. Stroud communicate with the Editor again at once, as his letter, and his name with it, has been lost?

By Private W. E. Stent, 23373, 2nd Platoon, A Coy., 12th Batt. South Wales Borderers, B.E.F., France—Back numbers of the "Gem," and also to have it sent him regularly, if some reader will be kind enough.

Your Editor

PUBLISHED IN TOWN
AND COUNTRY EVERY
WEDNESDAY MORNING

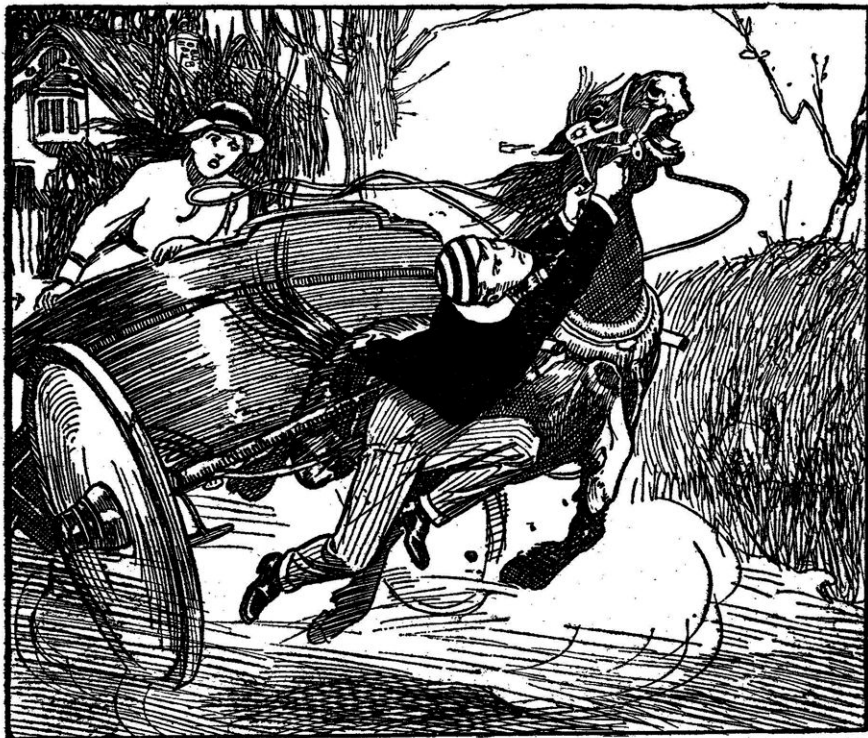


COMPLETE STORIES
FOR ALL, AND EVERY
STORY A GEM!

HERRIES' ORCHESTRA!

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**



Herries took a straight, swift leap at the animal's head, and succeeded in getting a tight grip on the reins. (See Chapter 6.)

CHAPTER I. Music Hath Charms.

TA-RA-TA-RA!
"Oh, my hat!" muttered Tom Merry.
Ta-ra-ta-ra!
"Drown it!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, putting his hands to his ears.
Ta-ra-ta-ra-pom!
"Carry me home to die!" moaned Manners.
The Terrible Three were on their way to No. 6 Study in the Fourth-Form passage when the unearthly din smote their

ears. They paused outside the door of the study, and looked at each other with wry faces.

"It's Herries," said Tom Merry. "He's mad!"
"Mad as a hatter, or a March hare!" said Monty Lowther.
"Did you ever hear such a giddy pandemonium? It's like the Royal Field Artillery blazing away at Huns over a dozen waterfalls!"

"Sort of knocks you sideways, don't it?" said Manners.
Blissfully unconscious of the fact that he had three critics outside the study, the musician continued to blare forth on his cornet.

It was not an unusual thing for George Herries to practise,

Next Wednesday:

BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!" AND "FOES OF FORTUNE!"

but seldom did he let himself go to such an extent as this. The sounds proceeding from that cornet were positively awful, almost sufficient in volume to jar the school to its foundations.

Ta-ra-ta-ra-pom! Ta-ra-ta-ra-pom!

"Ow!" muttered Tom Merry. "If I listen much longer I shall die in the passage! Come on, you fellows! Slaughter the silly idiot!"

With one accord the Terrible Three dashed into the study. Their looks suggested battle, murder, and sudden death.

Herries of the Fourth was seated upon the table, with his precious instrument raised aloft. He had no music in front of him, but was playing just as his fancy took him.

If the din had sounded fierce out in the passage it was fifty times worse inside the study.

The Terrible Three, stopping their ears, charged at Herries all together.

The next instant the wretched cornet-player appeared to be the centre of a Rugby scrum. Three vigorous bodies smote him from different directions, and he rolled off the table and descended to the floor with a bump which shook every bone in his body. The cornet fell from his grasp, and went clattering into the corner.

"Yaroooooh! Oh, you fabulous dummies!"

Herries sat up, felt himself all over to make sure that he was still in one piece, and then regarded the Terrible Three with the glare of a basilisk.

"What in thunder do you do that for?" he demanded.

"To put a stopper to your merry antics, my son," said Monty Lowther. "The row you were making was enough to set the dead leaping out of their graves! And, talking about graves, I think it's high time we buried that confounded cornet!"

"Don't you dare—" began Herries wrathfully.

At this juncture, just as things were warming up, the study door opened and its rightful occupants Jack Blake, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, came in.

The Terrible Three promptly lined up shoulder to shoulder, thinking they would be called upon to defend themselves; but, to their surprise, the new-comers showed no signs of antagonism—not towards them, at any rate. They were glaring at the prostrate Herries.

"Herries, you prize idiot—" began Digby.

"Herries, you burbling jabberwock!" spluttered Blake.

"Hewwies, you frightful chump!" chimed in Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The recipient of these doubtful compliments leapt to his feet.

"Look here," he roared, "I've put up with quite enough from these Shell bouncers, without you chaps chipping in!"

Jack Blake stepped forward, and flourished a newspaper in his study-nate's face. Blake's own face was very red, and his expression decidedly wrathful.

"What if you mean by this, you—your imbecile!" he roared.

"Mean by what?"

"This apology for an advertisement. I never saw such tommy-rot in my life!"

"Hallo!" said Monty Lowther. "What's our mad musician been up to now?"

Jack Blake handed the paper to the Terrible Three. It was the latest edition of the local "rag," the "Rylcombe Gazette," and Blake had blue-headed the following advertisement, which appeared under the heading of "Professional":

"NOTICE—A young gentleman who is a talented musician is desirous of forming an orchestra, with a view to giving concerts, etc., and the aid of the Red Cross Fund. Intending members should apply personally, on Wednesday afternoon, to G. Herries, Study 6, Fourth-Form Passage, St. James School, Rylcombe."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Monty Lowther, after reading this extraordinary announcement. "This must be a jape of some sort. Herries didn't put it in."

"Yes, I did," said Herries.

"What?"

"I had that advertisement inserted, and I'm not ashamed to own it," said Herries doggedly.

"But, my dear fellow, you must be stark, staring mad!" gasped Tom Merry. "What the merry dickens do you know about music?"

"Everything!" answered Herries coolly.

"Rats!" said Monty Lowther. "The only thing you seem capable of in the music line is blowing your own trumpet."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The whole thing's absurd!" said Tom Merry crossly. "Fancy, a freak like you thinking you can run an orchestra! And you've set aside Wednesday, of all days, for interviewing applicants! Have you forgotten that there's a House

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match on Wednesday, and that we've got to wipe up the ground with Figgins & Co.?"

"Blow the House match! And blow Figgins & Co.!"

"It's too late to cancel the advertisement, too," growled Digby. "Herries will have to go through with the bizney. But we can give him a jolly good bumping, and he'll learn not to put a House match behind his fifth-rate orchestra in future!"

"Hands off!" roared Herries.

But he was in a woeful minority. His study-mates and the Terrible Three whisked him off his feet, and sent him crashing to the floor.

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"And another!" panted Jack Blake.

Bump!

"Yaroooooh! Chuck it, you beasts!"

"One for luck!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

Bump!

For the third and last time Herries descended on the study carpet, where he lay gasping like a newly-landed fish.

"I s'pose the best thing the balmie idiot will want is to hold rehearsals in this study," growled Digby.

Jack Blake gave a roar like an angry bull.

"Just let him try it on!" he said. "There'll be a few pieces of dead cornet-player waiting to be swept up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep your hair on!" panted Herries, who was just beginning to recover his breath. "Blessed if I want to hold rehearsals among a crowd of duffers who don't know a crotchet from a treble clef! I shall do the thing in style; and the orchestra, when it's formed, will meet at the Public Hall in Rylcombe. I shall hire it for three nights a week. And if you chaps had an ounce of patriotism among you, you'd be jolly glad to back me up!"

"Rats!" said Tom Merry. "There isn't much the matter with our patriotism, and we'd give you a helping hand like a shot if we thought you'd do any good. But you won't. The whole thing's going to be a howling farce."

To which cheerful prediction Herries replied with the well-worn utterance:

"Wait and see!"

CHAPTER 2. The Merry Widow!

HERRIES had expected a good response to his advertisement in the local paper, and he was not disappointed. Indeed, the response proved altogether too good for his liking.

After dinner on Wednesday, Tom Merry & Co. got into football garb, ready to play the mighty men of the New House. A deputy was found to fill the place of Herries in the School House team, and his absence would not be sorely felt. Herries had won greater reputation as a maker of weird noises than as a footballer.

The School House won the toss, and Tom Merry & Co. swept down the field in the first minute.

The game had not been in progress long when a strange apparition was sighted coming towards the ground.

"Who—what—" began Tom Merry, in astonishment.

The queer creature who was approaching was evidently a lady, though she took strides which were remarkably masculine. Her costume was very impressive and tight-fitting, and she wore a pair of pince-nez on the top of her long, aquiline nose. In her hand she carried a gaudy parasol, which was more in keeping with a summer day at the seaside.

"It's a cross between a saffragette and a tight-rope walker," said Monty Lowther. "Wonder what she wants?"

"She's making tracks for us," said Manners. "I can't help feeling rather uncomfortable!"

"Rats! She can't eat us!" growled Tom Merry.

"She's going up to Gussy," said Talbot, with a chuckle. "That's all right. Gussy knows how to tackle the fair sex!"

"Fair!" gasped Monty Lowther. "Why, she's as ugly as—as a squashed milk-pudding!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus was standing on the touchline. He was wondering why the game had stopped, not having seen the approach of the intruder.

"Little boy!"

Arthur Augustus gave a jump.

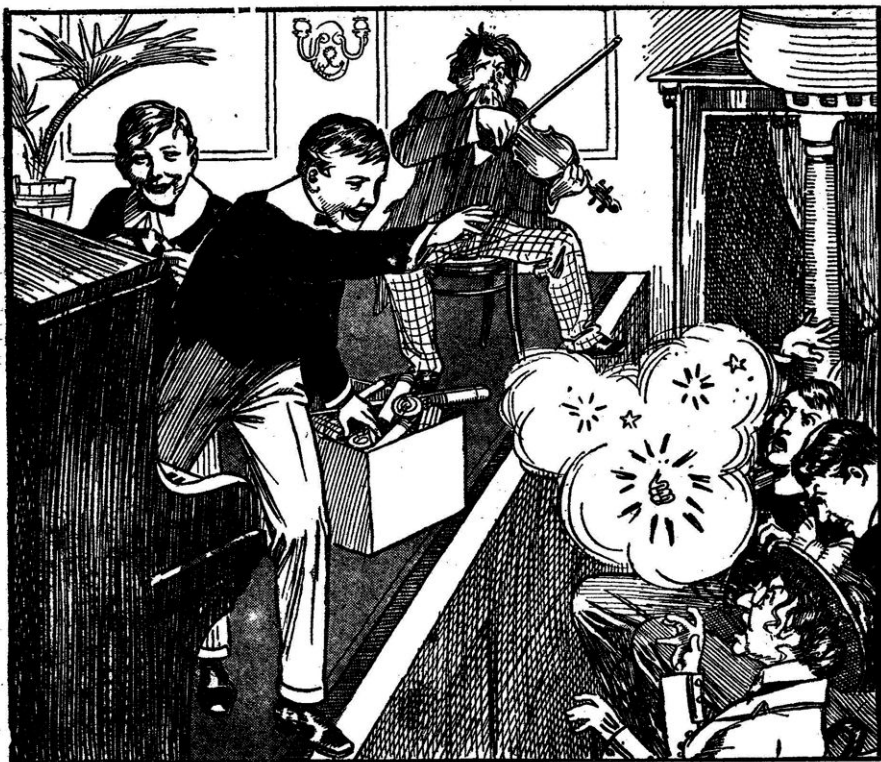
"Bai Jove!" he murmured.

"Little boy!" repeated the strange lady.

The swell of St. Jim's tilted his chin in the air.

"Pardon me, madam—"

The lady with the aquiline nose struck her parasol impatiently on the ground.



Herries applied a match to a huge jumping-cracker, and hurled it towards the astonished audience.
Bang! Bang!! Bang!!! (See Chapter 8.)

"Why did you not speak when I first addressed you?" she demanded, in a voice which Monty Lowther, under his breath, likened to the sound of a nutmeg-grater.

Arthur Augustus affixed his celebrated monocle to his eye with an air of great deliberation.

"I am not accustomed," he said, his face crimson, "to bein' addressed as 'little boy'! Pway, allow me to inform you, madam, that I am fifteen!"

"Pahl! A mere infant!" sniffed the alien lady. "I am Mrs. Tyle-Loose, authoress of 'War Work for Wayland Women,' published locally. You have doubtless heard of the book?"

"I only wead Shakespeah, Bywon, an' the 'Fancy Dwess Journal," he said. "All other books are tommy-wot!"

Mrs. Tyle-Loose pranced about like a cat on hot bricks. Her parasol was flourished in dangerous proximity to the swell of St. Jim's. But Gussy was almost as heated as the authoress, and he stood his ground.

—“You dare”—Mrs. Tyle-Loose was almost beside herself
—“you dare to characterise my writings as tommy—
tommy—”

"Tommy-wot!" said Arthur Augustus. "Most emphatically, madam! If, as you wemark, your book was published locally, it cannot be up to the swatch!"

But, although "War Work for Wayland Women" might not have been up to the scratch, its compiler was. She shot out a somewhat skinny hand, and her clawlike fingers clutched Arthur Augustus by the ear.

"My only Aunt Sempronia!" murmured Monty Lowther.
"Gussy's in for it now! Give him beans, mum!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Arthur Augustus was not proof against that hostile attack from a member of the fair sex. He tore himself away from the incensed lady and fled, Mrs. Tyle-Loose giving chase with her parasol.

The football match was temporarily held up. The players held their sides with helpless laughter.

Luokily, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was an athlete, while Mrs. Tyle-Loose did not shine in this direction. Consequently, Gussey got well away from her in next to no time, and thus escaped the vials of her wrath.

"Bai Jove! What a beastly, howwid person, begad!" he panted, as he sought refuge in the gymnasium.

Meanwhile Mrs. Tyle-Loose recovered her breath, and made her way back to the ground. She regarded Tom Merry & Co. with haughty disfavour.

"Can any of you children inform me where I shall find Mr. Herries?" she asked.

"Ch-ch-children! Mum-mum-Mr. Herries!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Answer me, boy! You are not a parrot, I presume?"
Before Tom Merrý could reply Monty Lowther obligingly came forward.

"Follow me, ma'am," he said, with great courtesy. "I shall be happy to take you to Mr. Herries!"

Mrs. Tyle-Loose sniffed, but condescended to let Monty Lowther lead the way.

The humorist of the Shell had no intention of taking his objectionable escort to No. 6 Study. That wasn't good

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enough. It would create a far finer atmosphere of fun, if he left Mrs. Tyle-Loose with the Head.

"This way, ma'am!" said Lowther briskly. He guided the authoress through a maze of corridors, and indicated the Head's study. Without even saying "Thank you!" Mrs. Tyle-Loose swept on with rustling skirt, and entered the sacred apartment.

Dr. Holmes, who had been enjoying an afternoon pipe, and was just lighting another, gazed at the strange creature who had invaded his study as if she were Hamlet's ghost.

"M-m-my dear madam!" he managed to stammer. "To—to whom do I owe the pleasure—"

"Enough formality, sir!" snapped Mrs. Tyle-Loose. "You are forming an orchestra, I understand?"

"I—"

"And I have come to offer my services, seeing that the proceeds of the performances will be devoted to the Red Cross Fund. I am a strenuous war-worker, and I pride myself that I should make a big hit in your orchestra. I can play the violoncello divinely!"

"But, my dear madam—"

Dr. Holmes sat back in his chair, nearly overcome. He could not for the life of him understand what his extraordinary visitor was driving at, and concluded that she must be suffering from some form of insanity.

"When shall you wish me to attend rehearsals?" asked Mrs. Tyle-Loose.

"Re-rehearsals!" stuttered the Head.

"Yes, yes! Are you hard of hearing, sir, or are you a parrot, that you should mimic me in that ridiculous manner?"

The Head bristled up at this. He could stand a good deal, but human endurance has its limits.

"I do not think you are aware, madam," he said stiffly, "to whom you are speaking. I am Dr. Holmes, the headmaster of this school."

"What!"

"I shall be glad to know who you are, and what your object is in claiming an audience with me?"

"But—but I understood you to be Mr. Herries!"

"Herries? Good heavens! He is a member of the Fourth Form here—a mere boy! How came you to labour under that delusion, Mrs.—"

"Tyle-Loose!" said the owner of that name. "One of your boys, when I asked him if I could see Mr. Herries, directed me here. Do you mean to say that the person I am visiting is only a boy?"

"That is so!"

Mrs. Tyle-Loose gripped her parasol grimly.

"Then I must conclude that the whole affair is a practical joke?" she said.

"Which affair, madam? I am quite in the dark."

The Head's visitor produced a copy of the local paper, and flourished it under his nose.

"Do you see that advertisement?" she demanded.

Dr. Holmes ran his eye over the announcement which Herries had inserted.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured, when he had perused it.

"I must say it is very presumptuous on Herries' part to imagine he can take upon himself the formation of an orchestra. However, his motives are commendable, and I shall not interfere. You have been the victim of a practical joke, Mrs.—Tyle-Loose. You will find Herries in No. 6 Study, in the Fourth Form passage."

"I am a stranger here. Cannot you use a gentleman's privilege of directing me?" asked the authoress reproachfully.

"I have other and more pressing matters to attend to," said the Head tartly. "Good-afternoon, madam!"

Mrs. Tyle-Loose bounced out of the room, and the Head, sinking back, mopped his heated brow with his handkerchief.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "What a—vixenish creature! I am more relieved than I can say to know she is gone, and only hope there will be no trouble in another quarter!"

But the Head's hopes were not destined to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER 3. Hot for Herries.

"MY child!"

Skimpole, of the Shell, who was leaning up against one of the old elms in the quad, reading the outpourings of Professor Balmyscrampet, looked up with a start, and blinked through his big glasses at the person who had dared to address him in such a high-and-mighty manner.

"Direct me at once to Master Herries!"

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Skimpole was a very meek and mild youth, and at all times ready to oblige. So, instead of taking Mrs. Tyle-Loose to task for having called him a child, when he was really—in his own esteem—one of the giants of the intellectual world, he humoured her.

"With pleasure, madam!" he murmured. "Follow me!"

"And no jokes, mind!" said Mrs. Tyle-Loose severely. "Do not dare to mislead me, or—"

The speaker made a threatening movement with her parasol, and Skimpole shuddered.

The walking dictionary of the Shell, as Monty Lowther called him, led his charge to No. 6 Study.

"You will find Herries within, madam," he said.

"Ah!"

Flinging open the door, Mrs. Tyle-Loose rushed in like a whirlwind, causing Herries, who was trying to tackle "Tannhauser" upon his cornet, to bowl over the music-stand in his alarm.

"Boy!" said Mrs. Tyle-Loose vindictively. "Infidel! Ill-bred puppy! Presumptuous idiot—"

"W-w-what!" gasped Herries.

"It is you, I take it, who had the audacious effrontery to advertise for an orchestra—you, an infant of immature years—and with as much knowledge of music as a cat has of needle-work!"

"I—I—" stammered Herries, the wind taken completely out of his sails by this most sudden and unexpected attack.

"Deny it if you dare!" snapped Mrs. Tyle-Loose. "Here is the advertisement in black and white! You ought to be ashamed of yourself for pretending you were a musician!"

Herries squared his shoulders at this.

"Look here!" he said, losing his temper. "I don't know who you are, or what you're doing outside an asylum; but I don't allow anybody to say I'm a rotten musician, when I can play the cornet as well as anybody in the county!"

"You—you—" Mrs. Tyle-Loose seemed on the verge of an apoplectic fit. "Do you know, child, to whom you are speaking?"

"Yes!" growled Herries, with delightful candour. "To an ill-mannered hussy!"

"That did it, of course. Neither things past, nor things present, nor things to come, nor principalities, nor powers could have stopped Mrs. Tyle-Loose from opening the attack at that moment."

Raising her parasol aloft, she rushed at the intrepid youth who had dared to be so cheeky to her.

"M-m-my hat!" muttered Herries, in alarm.

He deftly got behind the table, and dodged about on the other side to escape the fast and furious blows which Mrs. Tyle-Loose rained upon him.

How he escaped injury was almost miraculous, for the incensed lady was wound up, and her blows did not err on the side of mercy.

"Help!" roared Herries, the perspiration standing out on his brow. "I'm not a coward, but I'm blessed if I can stand this!"

Whack!

The parasol descended with stinging force upon his shoulder.

"Xarocoooh!"

Roused by his master's cry, Towser, the faithful bulldog, who had been curled up before the fireplace asleep, rose, stretched himself, and barked furiously at Mrs. Tyle-Loose.

Herries took advantage of the diversion to scramble out of the window. With a cry of relief, he dropped on to the flagstones below.

But the next moment he had the shock of his life, for Mrs. Tyle-Loose was following him; and, to judge by her screams of abject terror, Towser was following her.

There was a terrible, rending sound as a portion of the victim's skirt came away from the rest, to repose triumphantly in the jaws of Towser; and then Mrs. Tyle-Loose, still gripping her parasol, came whirling down.

Fortunately, the drop from the study window was not considerable, or an ambulance might have been needed. As it was, Mrs. Tyle-Loose alighted upon her rather large feet, and immediately rushed after Herries.

That junior, scared almost out of his wits, sped away towards the football-field. The House match had been resumed, but it was held up again inlander as Herries and his pursuer came tearing across the turf.

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Figgins. "This beats the cinema! Charlie Chaplin'll have to play second fiddle to Mrs. What's-her-name after this!"

"See how they run!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Look at old Herries! You can't see his heels for dust!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The affair was a screaming joke to all except the unfortunate Herries, who was almost at the end of his tether. He

dashed up to Lefevre of the Fifth, who was acting as referee.

"Keep her off!" he panted.

"No, thanks!" laughed Lefevre. "I don't war with women!"

"She's not a woman! She's a fiend incarnate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The wretched Herries lifted up the folds of Lefevre's rain-coat—which was a very roomy one—and sought refuge beneath it.

But Mrs. Tyle-Loose was not to be balked of her prey. Speeding to the spot, she brought her parasol down with terrific force.

"Yow-ow-ow!" came in a smothered roar from the hapless Herries.

"Yarooooop!" yelled Lefevre, as one of the blows, missing Herries, caught him on the leg. "Help! Gerraway, you old hag!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The players had thrown themselves down in an abandonment of helpless meriment. Pantomimes were "also ran" by comparison with this wildly exciting scene.

Whack—whack—whack—whaek!

Mrs. Tyle-Loose was certainly going strong—a good deal too strong for Herries, who, the more he struggled to break away, became more hopelessly entangled in the folds of Lefevre's coat. His yells were rather like those of a boy of ten being thrown into the deep end of a bath for the first time.

The avenger did not desist until lack of breath and the sudden snapping in two of her parasol compelled her to do so. Then she drew back, flushed and furious. "There!" she panted, as the bruised and battered Herries crawled out of his futile shelter. "Perhaps you will refrain from playing practical jokes in future! The chastisement I have just administered will do you good, my child!"

"Ow-ow-ow!"

"I go!" said Mrs. Tyle-Loose tragically. "And I hope never to set foot in this—this hotbed of iniquity again!"

Herries hoped so, too, as he watched the indignant authoress, with the broken parasol still clutched tightly in her hand, take her departure.

The musician of the Fourth was beginning to wonder if he had been altogether wise in advertising for an orchestra. Amid the hysterical laughter of the footballers, he limped slowly back to No. 6 Study, hoping and praying that Mrs. Tyle-Loose would be his last visitor that day.

But when troubles come they come, not in single spies, but in battalions, as the bard of Avon so truly remarks; and George Herries had not yet paid the full penalty of his patriotism.

CHAPTER 4. The Uninvited Guests.

"SCHOOL HOUSE for ever!"

"Hooray!"

"Well played, Tom Merry!"

The captain of the Shell had scored the winning goal for his side, and the House match was over. Figgins & Co. had been defeated, after an exciting game, by four goals to three.

In high good humour, the School House footballers trooped away from the scene of their triumph.

"Who says tea?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Tea!" responded Manners and Lowther, in one breath. "We're doing things in style this afternoon," said Tom, "so Talbot and Jack Blake can come along if they like!"

"What ho!" ejaculated the two fellows referred to. "Tom Merry had received a remittance that morning from his devoted aunt, Miss Priscilla Fawcett. That well-meaning spinster was somewhat of a bore when she came to St. Jim's, and the persistency with which she still regarded Tom Merry rather in the light of an infant in long clothes caused many a blush to mount to the cheeks of the captain of the Shell. Miss Fawcett was one of those people to whom distance lent enchantment; but her remittances, when they came, were as welcome as the flowers in May.

"I gave a quietlet to young Joe Frayne," said Tom, "and told him to lay in a first-rate stack of provender from Dame Taggles. There'll be enough and to spare for five. Blessed if I'm not hungry, too, after wiping up the ground with those New House bouncers!"

"Same here!" said Monty Lowther. "I could eat a donkey's hind leg off! Did you ask young Frayne to lay the table?"

Tom Merry nodded.

"I promised him a bag of currant buns if he set everything shipshape!"

"Good egg!"

But the five juniors had the surprise of their lives when they reached the study.

Talbot pushed open the door, uttered a queer sort of gasp, and staggered back into the passage.

"What in thunder's the matter?" asked Tom Merry.

Talbot nearly choked.

"It—it's like a blessed tap-room!" he said.

"What d'you mean?"

"Go in and see for yourself!"

Greatly wondering, Tom Merry obeyed, and Manners, Monty Lowther, and Jack Blake followed close on his heels.

The study had, indeed, undergone a startling transformation. It was occupied by five or six persons, none of whom the juniors ever remembered having seen before.

"Who—what—" gasped Tom Merry, stopping short in amazement.

"Pardon me," said a stout gentleman, with a florid face and a moustache like the Kaiser's, "but are you Master Herries?"

"No, I'm not!" said Tom Merry warmly. "And I'd jolly well like to know what you're doing in my study, you—"

"No, don't you know who I am?"

"No; and I don't want to!"

"I am Mr. Boozey-Smith, doctor of music!"

"The first part of his name suits him well," murmured Monty Lowther sotto voce. "He seems three-parts squiffy already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jack Blake and Manners, while Talbot discreetly got out into the passage.

"It isn't a laughing matter," said Tom Merry angrily. "These—these villains have gone and wolfed our feed! A quid's worth of stuff gone to pot! Who invited 'em here, by all that's scandalous!"

Mr. Boozey-Smith, who was leaning back in a chair, with his feet on the table-cloth, and a fat cigar between his teeth,

supplied the necessary information.

"A sallow-faced youth directed us here," he said. "He told us to make ourselves at home, and pitch into the tea, and that Master Herries would arrive in due course."

"Yes, that's correct," said another of the party—a meek-looking man, who might have been a curate or an undertaker.

"Sounds like Levison," said Jack Blake. "That's just the sort of rotten trick he revels in! My hat! We'll make him sit up for it later on!"

"Is Master Herries here?" asked Mr. Boozey-Smith, placing his lighted cigar negligently on the new cloth, in which it began to burn a conspicuous hole.

"No, he isn't!" said Manners. "You've been brought to the wrong shop!"

"That is most annoying—'pon my soul it is!"

"Better go and bring Herries along," said Tom Merry. "He can cope with this precious set of beauties! They've come about his confounded orchestra, I suppose!"

"But what about our feed?" protested Jack Blake.

"The only feed we shall get is stale bread-and-butter in Hall!"

"Grooh!"

Manners proceeded to No. 6 Study, where Herries was seated at tea with Digby and D'Arcy.

"Come in, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus cordially. "Sowwy we haven't any gwub to offah you, beyond a few stale sardines!"

"Blow your sardines!" growled Manners. "Herries, you're wanted!"

Herries turned pale.

"Don't," he said—"don't say that horrid old cat from Wayland has come back again!"

"You'll find several specimens worse than her in our study," said Manners. "They've been making themselves at home, wolfing our tea, and slinging cigar-ash all over the show. They want to see you!"

"About joining my orchestra?"

"I suppose so. My hat! You've got a lot to answer for, I can tell you!"

"Oh, I don't mind if they're men!" said Herries airily.

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"I can hold my own against any man, even if he's got the strength of a Samson and the snarl of a wild beast. It's those snappy, suffragette sort of women that I can't stand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Herries rose to his feet, and accompanied Manners to the Terrible Three's study.

Mr. Boozey-Smith—his name had probably been Boozey-Schmidt before the war—still had his feet on the table, and the rank odour of his cigars permeated the study.

"Master Herries?" he asked, as the Fourth-Former entered.

Herries nodded, and turned to the juniors who were congregated in the doorway.

"Run away and play, you fellows!" he said. "I want to have a private jaw with this gentleman!"

"You're welcome!" growled Tom Merry. "Blessed if they're the sort of people I care to associate with!"

And Tom and his comrades, their tempers rather on edge by reason of the fact that their feed had been wolfed, tramped off to the Hall, to refresh themselves as best they could with bread-and-butter and weak tea.

Herries closed the door, and looked round for a seat. Failing to find one, he stood and surveyed the assembly.

Besides the half-sober Mr. Smith and the clerical-looking gentleman, there were a couple of stolid rustics from Rylcombe, and a man of pugilistic appearance, who imbibed something from a suspicious-looking bottle, which he passed on in due course to Mr. Boozey-Smith.

"So you're the cove advertisin' for a norckster—wot?" said the pugilistic gentleman.

"I am," said Herries.

"Wot yer goin' to pay us?" Herries flushed.

"Oh, really?" he said. "Of course, I shall expect you to give me your services gratis, as it's in a patriotic cause!"

"Gratis me grandmother! D'you think we're goin' to give yer the benefit of our val'ble time an' talents fer nothin'?" If so, then I may say as 'ow you're quite off-side!"

"Ear, ear!" said Mr. Boozey-Smith, rather thickly. "That's what I always say! Never work without no pay! Come, Master Herries! Make it half-a-crown a rehearsal, and a guinea at every public performance!"

"Rats!"

"Eh? What's that?" Mr. Boozey-Smith rose unsteadily to his feet, jerking off the tablecloth and its contents as he did so.

"No man ever shies those expressions at me with impunity! There was once a feller who called me a drunken scoundrel. They buried him in Wayland Cemetery. Jest you moderate your transport, my son, or there'll be trouble!"

"If it's a straight left as you're wantin', or a 'arf-arm's jolt, it's Jim Betts as can oblige yer," said the pugilistic giant.

Herries shivered a little. When he had advertised for an orchestra, he had expected to receive applications from refined and genteel musicians, and not from dissolute village roughs, who threatened him with all sorts of pains and penalties if he didn't humour them.

But he stood his ground.

"Look here!" he said. "It's like your confounded cheek to come and take possession of this study, and wolf grub which belongs to other fellows! Let me tell you, once and for all, that I want clean-looking and clean-living men in my orchestra—not a gang of thorough-bred wasters!"

"Boy!" Mr. Boozey-Smith was almost foaming at the mouth. "Boy, I am a doctor of music, and have gained the distinction of a Sullivan and the fame of a Mozart!"

The speaker waxed very excited, and put his foot in the teapot—which had fallen to the floor some moments previously—without noticing the action.

"You can take yourselves off, all the lot of you!" said Herries, clenching his hands hard. "You've turned this study into a beastly beer-garden, and if the Head came in now and saw you smoking and drinking, he'd come down on me like a thousand of bricks! So you can jolly well bunk!"

Whereupon one of the rustics, who had not yet opened his mouth, for the simple reason that it had been distorted with a huge chunk of chewing-gum, gave tongue.

"Teach the young juit a lesson, Jim!" he said.

"That's jest wot I be a-goin' to do, matey!" replied Jim Betts.

He turned upon Herries with a wicked light dancing in his eyes. It was evident that he had made too indierect an inroad upon the contents of the suspicious-looking bottle.

"Now then," he said, "put up yer dooks! Put 'em up, and, by jiminy, I'll give yer the lickin' of yer life!"

"Hear, hear! I begs to oppose that proposition!" said Mr. Boozey-Smith, who was becoming a bit mixed in his speech.

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Herries realised that the situation was ugly. The attitude of the men was most menacing; and Jim Betts was already rolling up his sleeves.

"Help!" roared Herries, at the top of his lungs. "Rescue, St. Jim's!"

"I'll 'elp an' rescue yer, so I will!" said Jim Betts, lurching forward. "Take that!"

Herries easily evaded the clumsy blow; then the door of the study burst open, and Tom Merry & Co., who had made short work of their unsatisfying feed in hall, rushed to the assistance of the unfortunate Herries.

The scene was an animated one. The applicants for admission to Herries' orchestra, having found that the advertiser was a mere schoolboy who didn't intend to pay them for their services, were simply spoiling for a row, and they had their hearts' desire at that moment.

The furniture went flying, the crockery on the floor was shivered to the minutest fragments, and the haze of tobacco-smoke which hung about the room lent the scene the appearance of a tavern brawl.

"Sock it into 'em!" roared Tom Merry's voice above the uproar.

Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!

To and fro the combatants surged, and youth and physical fitness soon began to gain the upper hand.

The Terrible Three fastened on to the pugilistic Jim Betts with terrier-like tenacity, and together they dragged him to the floor, where he was promptly sat upon.

Although the strife was fierce, the warfare wasn't long. Mr. Boozey-Smith seemed to be a trifle out in his perspective, for he was engaged in battering the clock on the mantelpiece, apparently under the delusion that it was the face of a St. Jim's junior.

The two country yokels fared very indifferently at the hands of Talbot and Jack Blake, and the meek-looking, servile man was not of the stuff of which heroes are made. He discreetly remained a non-combatant.

"Yaropski!" roared Mr. Boozey-Smith, as he was seized suddenly from the rear and hurled to the floor. "Oh, my stars! This feels too much like Flanders for my likin'! I gus!"

What the alleged doctor of music guessed was never made known, for at that moment, just as the juniors had completely got the whip-hand of the precious pack of applicants, the study door was thrown open, and somebody stood on the threshold.

A general gasp of dismay followed.

For the somebody was Mr. Railton, the Housemaster!

CHAPTER 5.

Getting to Business.

CROOKE of the Shell had been responsible for Mr. Railton's sudden and dramatic intrusion.

Crooke, never missing an opportunity of bringing about trouble for Tom Merry & Co., had heard the sounds of strife in the Terrible Three's study, and had drawn Mr. Railton's attention to it.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I feel frightened—really frightened!"

"Good heavens! What is the matter, boy?"

"There's murder being done in Tom Merry's study, sir! Listen! The cries and groans are awful!"

Mr. Railton brushed the speaker aside, and hastened towards the scene of the combat. He had the surprise of his life on seeing what was afoot.

"Boys," he thundered, "what is the meaning of this—this outrageous conduct? Merry, I demand an explanation at once!"

"These scoundrels, sir!"—Tom Merry gave Jim Betts a vicious dig in the ribs as he spoke to keep him quiet—"were making things warm for Herries, and we just managed to chip in at the right moment."

"But what are they doing on the premises at all?" demanded Mr. Railton sternly. "Why, some of them seem to be under the influence of drink!"

Mr. Boozey-Smith struggled into a sitting posture.

"I—I wash never more sober in my life!" he said huskily.

"If any man says otherwise, I—I'll slaughter him!"

"Be silent, sir!" said the Housemaster; and there was an imperative ring in his voice which even the semi-intoxicated man could not fail to detect. "Who is responsible for the presence of these dissolute scamps in this study?"

"I am, sir," said Herries.

"Indeed! Then you shall render me an explanation of your conduct later on. Meanwhile, I will have these persons ejected from the school by force!"



Missiles smashed upon the orchestra in a deluge, and they were compelled to clutch their instruments and run—anywhere, so long as to get clear of that deadly cannonade. (See Chapter 12.)

At this juncture Jim Betts caught sight of Crooke's face peering in at the doorway.

"It was 'im," he said dramatically—" 'im with the long nose an' beady eyes, wot showed us in 'ere!"

Crooke's face turned almost an art-shade in green, and he made a hasty movement to escape. But Mr. Railton was too quick for him. Striding out into the passage, he caught Crooke by the collar.

"You also will accompany me to my study in a few moments!" he said. Then, turning to the defeated gang of villagers, the Housemaster added: "I will now summon some of the senior boys to turn you out!"

The meek-looking man—the only member of the party who had stood clear of the fighting—here put in:

"We'll go quiet, guv'nor. There's no need for force."

"Very well," said Mr. Railton, consulting his watch. "I will give you three minutes to get clear of the premises. Get off that man's chest, Merry!"

The captain of the Shell obeyed, and the discomfited aspirants for musical honours were quick to avail themselves of the opportunity to get away. Mr. Boozey-Smith tottered about uncertainly, being utterly incapable of walking, and it became necessary for the two country yokels to carry him off between them.

"Bye-bye!" he called back, with a flourish of his hand. "See you Saturday, Susie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" roared Mr. Railton. "Herries and Crooke, come with me!"

The juniors addressed obeyed. The hearts of both of them were somewhere in the region of their boots.

The Housemaster entered his study, and faced round upon

the delinquents with his back to the mantelpiece. Through the open window he had a last fleeting glimpse of the departing musicians. Mr. Boozey-Smith was engaged in throwing kisses to Taggles, the porter.

"Now, Herries," said Mr. Railton, "you say that those persons came here to see you?"

"Yes, sir."

"For what purpose?"

"I'm forming an orchestra, sir, to give performances on behalf of the Red Cross Fund."

Mr. Railton's brow cleared somewhat.

"Of course, when I advertised for applicants to come here on Wednesday afternoon, I didn't expect a rotten crew like that, sir," said Herries. "Most musicians are decent enough fellows, and you could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw that beastly gang. We were just going to—ahem!—pitch 'em out on their necks when you came along, sir."

The Housemaster nodded, and turned to Crooke, whose knees were almost knocking together.

"What was your object in showing the men into Merry's study, Crooke?"

"I—I thought they'd be comfortable there, sir!"

"I think I know better than that, Crooke! You took them there so that they might cause a disturbance, and possibly wreck the study. We masters do not go about with our eyes closed, Crooke, and I have long been aware that there is no love lost between you and Merry. You will hold out your hand!"

"What for, sir?"

"Do not assume that attitude of injured innocence!" thundered Mr. Railton.

Reluctantly, Crooke put out his hand.

Swish!

"Ow!"

Swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now the other!" said Mr. Railton, grimly.

"Swish, swish, swish, swish!"

"Yarooooo!"

"I trust that will teach you a lesson, Crooke! You may go!"

And the cad of the Shell, with malice and uncharitableness in his heart, quitted the study. He seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a penknife.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "Hang Herries and his orchestra! I'll see that he has it taken out of him for this!"

Meanwhile, George Herries was awaiting the fate which had befallen Crooke. But, to his surprise, Mr. Railton put the cane away, and turned to him without a trace of anger.

"I can clearly see that you were not to blame for what took place this afternoon, Herries," he said. "It was, perhaps, a little thoughtless to advertise for people to come here and see you; but patriotism covers a multitude of sins."

Herries brightened up.

"You mean that I may go ahead with my orchestra, sir?"

"Certainly, my boy! I see no objection. But do not invite applicants to come to the school. It is only courting trouble."

"Quite so, sir. I'll go into Wayland to-morrow and have a look round. Thanks awfully, sir! You—you—"

"Well, Herries?" smiled Mr. Railton.

"You're a brick, sir!"

Herries left the Housemaster's study with a light heart. Fortunately, Mr. Railton was a sportsman, and understood boys.

The first genuine recruit for his orchestra came along much sooner than Herries anticipated. In the corridor he was buttonholed by Dick Brooke, the day-boy.

"Hallo!" said Brooke. "I hear you're forming a giddy orchestra, that's going to take the world by storm."

"That's so!" said Herries.

"Well, I shouldn't say so if you asked me to join," said Brooke. "I'm a pretty good hand at the violin."

"Good man!" said Herries cordially. "That's ripping!"

Herries was aware that in Dick Brooke he had found a very useful partner. Herries was a musician to the finger-tips. Only a few weeks before he had collaborated with Miss Sylvia Carr, one of his girl-chums in the neighbourhood, in the composition of a stirring war-melody, entitled "The Khaki King." It had proved immensely popular, and his school-fellows had recognised in Dick Brooke for the first time the qualities of a skilled musician.

"You shall be first violin—hanged if you sha'n't!" said Herries.

"Thanks!" said Brooke. "Let's hope the orchestra will be a stunning success right from the word go! Shake!"

And they shook.

CHAPTER 6. Going Great Guns!

THE morning post brought Herries the following extraordinary epistle:

"Dear Master Herries,—I wish to tender my profuse apologies for the deplorable state in which I appeared before you yesterday.

"All men of genius have their lapses from the path of virtue, and I unfortunately fell under the influence of that beetle-browed blackguard, Jim Betts. He insisted that on the way to St. Jim's a stimulant would be constantly necessary, with the result that I arrived in the deplorable state aforementioned.

"I am afraid that in my state of inebriety I said many things of which I am now ashamed, among them being that I would not join your orchestra without payment. I readily take that back, and shall be most happy to give you my services gratis, provided you will forgive me for my lamentable behaviour yesterday.—Believe me, yours very faithfully,
C. BOOZEY-SMITH, Mus. Doc."

The heart of Herries, never hard, melted on reading this letter.

"I'll take him on," reflected Herries. "After all, he's a doctor of music, and those sort of people aren't as plentiful as blackberries in this part of the world."

Then the thought occurred to him that perhaps Mr. Booze-Smith was only romancing when he described himself as a doctor of music. On reference to the local telephone

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directory, however, Herries saw that the statement was correct.

He at once replied to Mr. Booze-Smith as follows:

"Dear Sir,—I freely forgive the rotten exhibition you made of yourself yesterday, and I shall be pleased for you to join my orchestra. I haven't got all the members yet, but hope to bag a few to-day.

"The first rehearsal will take place in the Public Hall at Rylocombe, on Friday evening at seven. Please to be there. Yours sincerely,
GEORGE HERRIES."

Tom Merry clapped Herries on the shoulder as the fellows streamed out of afternoon school.

"Chucked up the orchestra bizney?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it," said Herries. "I had a beastly day yesterday, I admit, but it's going to take a jolly sight more than that to drive the wind out of my sails."

Tom Merry glanced admiringly at the Fourth-Former, "Well played!" he said. "I'm hanged if you don't deserve to make a howling success of the wheeze!"

"I shall!" said Herries confidently. "Can I borrow your bike to run into Wayland?"

"Certainly."

Herries dashed off to the bicycle-shed in high spirits. He had high hopes of getting his orchestra complete that afternoon.

He rode at a leisurely pace into Wayland, and, after refreshing himself with ginger-beer and cake, made tracks for the little music-shop in the High Street.

Mr. Palmer, the proprietor, was a dapper little man, with a face as long as the fiddle which hung over his counter. He was singing "Maid of Athens" in a most mournful tone when Herries entered.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Palmer!" said the junior.

"Afternoon, sir! What can I oblige you with to-day? Something classical or comical? I can let you have all the tip-top pieces, from Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' to 'The Irish Lips are Grinning.'"

"Nothing doing," said Herries, shaking his head. "I'm forming an orchestra, Mr. Palmer, to give performances for the Red Cross, and I thought you might be able to put me on to some people who'd join."

The music-seller stroked his chin sadly.

"Wayland ain't musical—more's the pity!" he said. "The folk in this blessed town likes to eat, drink, and be merry; but their merriment don't take the form of music, worse luck, or I should be doin' a roarin' trade. As it is, it's as much as I can do to get my bread-and-butter."

Herries said he was sorry to hear things were so bad, and, with a short nod, strode out of the shop.

"I'd better ride into Rylocombe," he mused, "and see if I can get hold of somebody. Confound this beastly war! It seems to have swallowed up everybody except the halt, maimed, and blind!"

As he free-wheeled down the hill going out of Wayland, a sudden commotion arose in front of him. A pony and trap came careering out of a private drive into the roadway, and in the trap was a girl of about twelve years of age. By her excited cries Herries could tell that the pony had bolted.

But it was no time for reflecting on the why and wherefore of the situation. Herries fell, rather than jumped off, his machine, and, letting it run into the hedge, took a straight, swift leap at the animal's head, and succeeded in getting a tight grip on the reins.

Herries had never stopped a runaway horse before, and the task wasn't as simple as writers of fiction had led him to believe.

The pony continued his wayward course for at least another twenty yards, and if Herries had not hung on like grim death, a catastrophe would certainly have occurred.

When the frightened creature at length came to a halt, foaming but conquered, Herries raised his cap to the girl.

"All right, missy?" he said.

"Ye-o-es," she faltered. "I—I was so frightened!"

"Rats! You were splendid!"

At that moment a red-faced, agitated-looking gentleman came out of the drive and puffed his way to the spot. He wore clerical collar, and Herries recognised him as being Mr. Wardle, the rector of Wayland.

"My dear boy," panted the clergyman, "however can I thank you for your timely assistance? You have saved the life of my little niece!"

The girl got down from the trap, and although she did not speak—probably the shock of the situation had proved too much for her—she darted a look of gratitude at Herries, which answered more than the most eloquent words would have done.

"Your horse is a terror, sir," said Herries. "He came out of the drive like a giddy whirlwind."

The rector nodded.

"I have only had him a week," he said, "and this is not his first offence. I shall get rid of the brute without delay. He seems to have calmed down now, but I shall not allow any niece to venture out this afternoon."

"Then I'll lead him back, sir," said Herries.

"But your bicycle!" said Mr. Wardle, noting for the first time that the machine, which had careered into the hedge, was damaged in more places than one. "I cannot allow you to suffer any personal loss in respect of your great gallantry! What is your name?"

"Herries, sir."

"Well, Herries, pray permit me to purchase you a new machine, or, at any rate, to pay for the cost of repairing that one."

Herries grinned.

"It's not mine," he said. "It belongs to Tom Merry; but I'll make it all right with him."

Mr. Wardle, however, was persistent.

"Come!" he said. "You have rendered me a great service, and I shall not feel happy unless I can in some small measure repay it."

Then a sudden thought struck Herries. He remembered the object of his mission into Wayland—how he was bent on getting recruits for his orchestra—and it occurred to him that perhaps the rector, who was of a musical turn of mind, might consent to join.

Without hesitation, therefore, Herries popped the question.

"Why, my dear boy, I shall be delighted," beamed Mr. Wardle, "especially as the performances are going to be held for such a highly deserving cause. I can play the violin very creditably, as my niece will readily testify."

The girl laughed. The colour had returned to her cheeks, and she walked by Herries' side as he led the refractory pony back to the stable.

"I've been to Wayland to try and bag some recruits," said Herries, "but I drew blank."

"What!" said the rector. "Why, bless my soul, I am acquainted with several talented musicians in the district who would willingly rally round and lend their support. Shall I approach them on your behalf?"

Herries almost leapt into the air for sheer joy. He was in luck. The rector of Wayland was an influential man, and would have little difficulty in persuading his musical parishioners to give their services.

And he—Herries—would have the high honour of wielding the baton before this array of celebrities, and causing them to do his bidding. How the fellows at St. Jim's would envy him!

"I'd be awfully obliged to you, sir," he said gratefully, as he made the pony secure in the stable. "We're holding the first practice at the Public Hall in Rykcombe on Friday evening, at seven."

"I see. Will you stay and have tea with us, my dear boy?"

Herries declined, on the plea that his comrades were expecting him in No. 6 Study. Then he bade au revoir to Mr. Wardle and his niece, and wheeled the damaged machine back to St. Jim's.

He dreamed dreams as he went along—dreams of a highly competent orchestra under his supreme control, and of a successful performance which would draw throngs of people to the Public Hall for an encore. Oh, yes! Everything would go without a hitch, he reflected, and rejoiced exceedingly in the knowledge that he had found an outlet for his patriotism at last!

CHAPTER 7. The Plotters!

CROOKE of the Shell sat in his study. His face was set in a fierce scowl, and Mellish, who sprawled in the armchair with a cigarette in his mouth, could see that his companion was not finding the world a very pleasant place to live in.

"Hang it all!" muttered Crooke, starting to his feet, and stamping round the study to let off steam. "Hang Railton! Hang this rotten reformatory which calls itself a public school! And hang that beast Herries higher than all the lot! My hat! To think things should turn out like this!"

"Hard cheese!" said Mellish sympathetically, as he sent

up a wreath of smoke. "Railton gave it you pretty hot, didn't he?"

Crooke surveyed his palms, which still ached as a result of the recent licking.

"It couldn't have been stiffer!" he growled. "I wish Railton would buzz over to Flanders again, and work off some of his confounded energy on the Huns!"

"Oh, dash it all, he's done his bit!" said Mellish.

It was surprising to hear Mellish make a statement of that sort, but even the rankest outsiders sometimes give glimpses of their better nature.

Crooke grunted, and continued to pace to and fro, like a caged beast.

"Don't make such a row, for goodness' sake!" said Mellish. "We don't want one of the beaks to come in when the air's full of cigarette-smoke!"

"Blow the beaks! Blow everybody! Look here!"—Crooke wheeled round suddenly on his crony—"I'm going to get even with that beast Herries! His rotten orchestra was the cause of the whole bizzny. Don't sit staring at me like a dummy! Haven't you any suggestions to make?"

"What for?"

"Why, you chump, for making Herries squirm!"

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"He's had quite a warm enough time of it already, if you ask me," he said. "What with that prizefighter playing chase-me-Charlie with him, and those other louts leading him the dickens of a dance, I should think he'd chucked up the orchestra wheeze."

"Rats! I saw him coming in at the gates just now, grinning all over his chivvy like a hyena. That means he's in clover. He's been down to the village, most likely, and persuaded a pack of idiots to join his rotten show. I heard him say something to Tom Merry about a rehearsal on Friday night."

Mellish sat bolt upright.

"A rehearsal! Then he's going strong, after all?"

"I s'pose so. And it's up to us to wreck the show."

"Easier said than done," said Mellish, throwing the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"Oh, dry up!" snapped Crooke. "If you can't say something cheerful, keep your rat-trap closed! There's plenty of enterprise wanted for this job, and if you're not game to take a hand, I'll go round and have a jaw with Racke."

"Keep your wool on!" said Mellish. "Rely on me. But I don't quite see—"

"Of course not! You're as blind as a brace of bats! Look here. What about taking a ton of fireworks down to the hall on Friday night, and letting 'em off in the middle of the rehearsal?"

Mellish didn't seem much impressed.

"Just think of the sensation it would cause!" continued Crooke, pressing his point. "Herries has persuaded a lot of old fogies to join his orchestra, by the look of things. Well, if we bombard the show with crackers and squibs and things, they'll get fed up, and refuse to turn up for any more rehearsals. Twig?"

"Something in that," said Mellish. "It's going to run into a good bit of tin, though."

"That's all right. I'm pretty flush. This is the idea, then. We buy a box of fireworks, cart them into the hall, and let 'em off among the orchestra in the middle of the rehearsal."

"Topping!" said Mellish.

But he might not have thought it so topping had he seen a fat junior stealing along the passage outside. Baggy Trimble, the Peeping Tom of St. Jim's, had been busily engaged at the keyhole of Crooke's study, and the plans of the two plotters had not escaped him. He had taken in every detail of the scheme for wrecking Herries' orchestra.

With his fat face framed in a greasy smile, Trimble made his way to Study No. 6. Herries was there, playing a weird and wonderful melody, which was supposed to be "The Morn'g Hallel."

"Get out!" he said tersely on sighting Baggy Trimble. Instead of obeying, Trimble advanced into the study.

"Look here," he said, before Herries had time to remonstrate further with him. "I've just happened to hear a plot made by two rotters to smash your orchestra!"

Herries sprang forward, gripping his informant by the shoulder.

"Is that true?" he rapped out.

"Of course it is!"

"Then who are the fellows you heard, and what are they going to do?"

"Ah, that's telling!" said Trimble.

He rubbed his fat palms together, and eyed Herries with great satisfaction.

"If you care to make it worth my while, I'll tell you," he added cunningly.

"You warn! How much do you want?"

"A couple of bob would do!"

"I dare say it would. But, as I haven't got it, you'll have to take a bob or nothing. Which is it to be?"

Trimble acted on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread. He reached out his hand for the shilling, and pocketed it greedily.

"Out with it, quick!" said Herries. "And tell me the truth, mind, or I'll jolly well scalp you!"

Trimble plunged into his story. He told how Crooke and Mellish intended on the Friday evening to make use of fireworks, with a view to wrecking the rehearsal.

Herries listened with gleaming eyes. He sent Baggy Trimble about his business—which for the next ten minutes would consist of gorging—and flung himself into the armchair to think.

His first impulse was to rush round to Crooke's study and settle the matter with his fists. Herries wasn't a bad fighting-man, and would easily be able to leave traces of his handiwork on the countenances of the plotters.

But there were other and better ways of nipping Crooke's precious scheme in the bud. One of them occurred to Herries, and he put his cornet away with a smile, and, donning his hat, he strolled on towards the village.

There was only one place in Rykcombe at which fireworks could be obtained. It was a small store, kept by a man named Reeks, whom the St. Jim's junior encountered in the doorway.

"Good-afternoon," he said. "My name's Herries, and I—"

"Herries?" said Mr. Reeks. "You're the young gent that's running the orchestra?"

Herries nodded.

"Then put it there!" said Mr. Reeks affably. "Jolly glad to meet you. Mr. Wardle's told me all about you, and I'm joining your show."

"You are?" said Herries eagerly. "Good man! Then you won't begrudge doing me a favour?"

"Certainly not, if it's in my power."

"Well, it's like this," said Herries. "We're having our first rehearsal on Friday night, and a couple of rotters at the school are going to try and wreck it, out of spite. They'll probably be coming here for some fireworks, with the intention of letting 'em off in the middle of the rehearsal."

"The young hounds!" said Mr. Reeks.

"But we can easily turn the tables on them," said Herries cheerfully. "When they come for the fireworks, make 'em up a box of beastly things that haven't a spark of get-up-and-get-there in 'em! Drench 'em with water, if you like, so that they won't be capable of letting out a single spark! Got me?"

"I have," said Mr. Reeks, with a chuckle.

"Good! That's the first part of the biznez. But the master's not going to rest there. We must be revenged on the bounders. We'll have some genuine fireworks smuggled beneath the platform, and at a given signal we'll turn 'em loose on the cads."

Mr. Reeks laughed heartily.

"You've got them fair and square this journey," he said.

"Quite a clever dodge, by Jove! Trust me to keep my part of the contract."

"Shake!" said Herries.

They shook; and Herries strolled back to St. Jim's, congratulating himself that Crooke and Mellish, instead of wrecking the rehearsal, would walk into a veritable hornets' nest themselves!

CHAPTER 8.

The Worm That Turns!

WHEN afternoon lessons were over on Friday, Crooke and Mellish biked down to the village to carry out the first stage of their little plot.

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Racke had refused to lend a hand, and they had not asked Levison. They did not dream as they sped along the hard, white road, that their arrangements for wrecking the rehearsal had already leaked out.

"It'll be great sport," chuckled Crooke. "They're pretty certain to see us letting the fireworks off, of course; but we can bunk out of the hall before they've properly got the hang of things."

"Herries will make a song about it when he gets back to St. Jim's," said Mellish uneasily.

"Rats! If he does the fellows won't take any notice. They're just as ratty about his rotten orchestra as we are."

The juniors jumped off at Mr. Reeks' shop, and, after taking a stealthy glance down the village street, entered.

"Afternoon, young gents!" said Mr. Reeks, who looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. "What can I serve you with?"

"Fireworks—and plenty of 'em!" said Crooke.

"Shall I make you up a box?"

"Yes. Shove in plenty of those awful things that go off like bombs, and leave a stench in the air for half an hour afterwards. And as many jumping crackers as you like!"

Mr. Reeks got busy behind the counter. Crooke and Mellish could not see his face, and they would have had rather a shock had they been able to, for it was framed in an expansive grin.

In a few moments the shopkeeper bobbed up again, and hauled to the surface of the counter a large box.

"Strictly speaking," he said, "I'm not supposed to sell these things. It's against the regulations. So you won't go letting 'em off in the street, or anything of that sort?"

"Oh, no," said Crooke, with a wink at his companion. "They won't be let off in the open."

"That's all right, then," said Mr. Reeks.

"What's the damage?"

"Fifteen shillings," said Mr. Reeks. "But you can leave it, if you like."

Knowing, as he did, that the fireworks he had supplied to the juniors were worthless, Mr. Reeks wanted no money for them. He knew, too, that Crooke and Mellish would have quite enough fireworks from another quarter before long.

The two plotters carried the box across the street to the Public Hall. Crooke addressed the man in uniform who stood outside.

"Can we bring these in?" he said. "They're musical things, you know, belonging to Herries, the chap who's booked the hall to-night for a rehearsal."

"In you go, then," said the official.

Crooke and Mellish carted the box into the hall, and dumped it down beside the wall. It was not likely that anybody would tamper with it. The officials would suppose that it contained musical instruments.

In great glee the plotters cycled back to St. Jim's. They felt that fortune was serving them kindly, for to score off Herries and his orchestra, and to shatter the Fourth-Former's patriotic dreams would amply avenge the licking Crooke had received at the hands of Mr. Railton.

But the precious pair of rescals would have sung to another tune had they followed the movements of Herries that afternoon.

The leader of the orchestra, aided by Dick Brooke, smuggled into the Public Hall a box of genuine fireworks—fearful and wonderful things which spurted fire and flame in all directions.

A platform had been raised at the end of the hall, and on it the rehearsal was to take place.

Herries and Brooke deposited their box behind the grand piano, where it was not visible to anyone in the body of the hall.

"We'll go out and get some grub," said Herries; "then it'll be time for the rehearsal."

The juniors sat down to tea with good appetites. It gave them great satisfaction to know that the carefully-arranged scheme of Crooke was to recoil on his own head.

All the members of the orchestra were in their places when Herries and Brooke returned. Mr. Boozey-Smith, looking quite respectable, had turned up with his violin; and the Rev. Wardle, Mr. Reeks, and several other gentlemen of name

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ONE PENNY.



"And no jokes, mind!" said Mrs. Tyle-Loose severely. "Do not dare to mislead me, or—I!" The speaker made a threatening movement with her parasol, and Skimpole shuddered. (See Chapter 3.)

and fame in the locality were engaged in strumming on their various instruments.

Herries stopped his cars. "Dry up for a minute!" he shouted. "I have a few words to say to you, gentlemen!"

Gradually the strains of music died away. Herries faced the occupants of the platform.

"It's like this," he said. "Before the rehearsal starts we're going to have a sort of pyrotechnic display."

"A what-er?" gasped Mr. Boozey-Smith.

"A show of fireworks, you know," said Herries. "A couple of cads from St. Jim's are coming in with the object of wrecking the performance. Well, we're going to put a spoke in their wheel, and the wreckers are going to get wrecked. See?"

"Really!" said Mr. Wardle. "I fail to understand——"

"Behind the piano," said Herries, "there's a whacking great box of fireworks. Well, we're going to turn 'em loose on the audience before the show starts."

Mr. Wardle coughed.

"Ahem! It is—er—rather beneath my dignity, as a wearer of the cloth, to aid and abet a schoolboy lark."

"You can retire if you like, sir," said Brooke graciously. "Then nobody can suspect you of having a hand in the business. Those rotters deserve to be punished. We can't let 'em go scot-free!"

"Quite so—quite so!" said Mr. Wardle. "I will absent myself until the—er—conflagration is over."

He was not a minute too soon, for Crooke and Mellish entered the hall, and seated themselves on the row of chairs in front of the platform.

"You've no objection to an audience, I s'pose?" said Crooke carelessly.

"Not at all!" said Herries. "It makes one feel awfully bucked!"

"Now, gentlemen," said Herries, hauling out the big box a few minutes later, "the performance will begin. All hands to the pumps!"

The members of the orchestra, who were feeling hotly indignant towards Crooke and Mellish, plunged their hands into the box and started lighting fireworks as if for a wager.

Herries was first in the field with a huge jumping-cracker. He applied a match to it, and hurled it towards the astonished audience of two. A volley of squibs followed.

Crack, crack, crack!

Whizz-z-z-z!

Bang, bang, bang!

Yells of rage and pain from Crooke and Mellish rent the air. The gentlemen on the platform had by this time quite got their hands in, so to speak, and it simply rained fireworks.

"Quick!" hissed Crooke in Mellish's ear. "Stir yourself! They're not the only people who've got fireworks!"

He dived at the box which he had obtained from Mr. Reeks, and speedily hauled out the contents.

"Matches!" he rapped out. "Don't stand there shouting 'Ow!' and 'Wow!' like a blessed talking dummy!"

Mellish hastily produced some matches, and handed them to his accomplice.

With a snort of revenge, Crooke applied a light to the fuse of a bomb-shaped horror; then a cry of anger and annoyance burst from his lips.

"It won't light!" he yelled wildly. "Somebody's been tampering with the confounded things! They're all damp, and— Yaroooooh!"

While he was speaking, a yellow terror pitched at his feet, and sent up a fusillade of sparks, causing the cad of the Fourth to dance about like a dervish.

"Here, I'm off out of this!" he muttered, shaking his fist at Herries, who surveyed him with a grin of triumph. "Oh, the rotters! I'm scorched all over, and my bags are ruined! Come on, Mellish! I can't stick this any longer!"

But Mellish was gone. He had had enough of that terrific bombardment; and enough, the old maxim tells us, is as good as a feast!

CHAPTER 9. Rogues in Council.

TWENTY minutes later the Rev. Wardle put his plump features round the door at the back of the hall.

"Is the—er—little exhibition of trench-warfare over?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Reeks, rubbing his hands with relish. "We've put the foe to rout. They had a good dose, and aren't likely to follow in the footsteps of Oliver Twist."

"It was great!" said Mr. Boozey-Smith. "Simply sublime! 'Pon my soul, if that's the way German trenches are taken, I'm almost sorry I'm over military age!"

Herries and Brooke were chuckling. They would have a good story to tell when they got back to St. Jim's. Crooke and Mellish would discover that, like the gentleman in Shakespeare's play, they had heated a furnace for their foe so hot that it had singed themselves.

"Now to business!" said Herries. "We'll start off with an easy piece—" Little Grey Home in the West."

And a moment later, in time to the schoolboy-conductor's baton, the rehearsal was in full swing.

It was a great success. There were little disputes, of course. Mr. Boozey-Smith, whose knowledge of music was as boundless as the ocean to his own way of thinking—didn't like to be pulled up by Herries for failing to keep time, and Mr. Wardle was also a difficult customer to tackle. Quite unintentionally, Herries called him a chump and a burbling jabberwock in the excitement of the moment, and no parson likes to be classed as a burbling jabberwock, especially in the presence of some of his parishioners.

But the members of the orchestra made allowances, realising that Herries was being carried away by his enthusiasm. Indeed, when the little party broke up, the Fourth-Former was openly praised for his patriotic zeal.

The days sped by, and Herries' orchestra flourished apace. Tom Merry & Co. went ahead with their football fixtures minus the services of Herries, and vowing that he was more or less of a thundering idiot. Monty Lowther predicted that the first public performance of the orchestra would also be the last, and that the musicians would reek of stale eggs for days afterwards. To all these withering comments Herries turned a deaf ear.

At length the orchestra reached such a state of perfection that Herries went about with his head held very high in the air.

He felt that he was well on the way to becoming another Handel. Fellows could laugh and chaff now; but how they would cheer when it became known that the funds of the Red Cross had put on flesh considerably—and all through Herries!

When the orchestra had been in training a fortnight Herries had a number of circulars printed to the effect that a great musical entertainment would be given in the Public Hall on the following Saturday evening. People were invited to roll up in their thousands—rather an impossible feat, when it was considered that the Public Hall only held two hundred or so.

One of the circulars found its way into Crooke's hands.

"This is where we come in," he said to Mellish. "We must think out some plan for smashing the show to a pulp."

Mellish grunted.

"I'm sick of schemes!" he said. "That firework affair—"

"Oh, dash it all, let the past alone! We were badly bitten then, but there won't be any hitch this time."

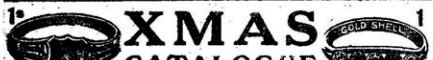
"I'm not so sure."

"Don't be such an idiot!" snapped Crooke. "You get on my nerves! You're one of the cautious sort, who don't like to put one foot in front of another. As I said once before, if you haven't any stomach for the business, I'll have a jaw with my pal Racke."

Mellish melted at once. He was a coward at heart, but he was conceited, too, and didn't like the idea of Racke being preferred to himself.

"I'm game!" he said. "Only for goodness' sake try and think out something a little more sensible this time!"

Crooke was silent for some moments, but his brain was



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busy. He was not done with Herries yet, and there were no depths to which he would not descend in order to bring about the downfall of the orchestra.

"I've hit it!" he said at length. "It's a great wheeze—simply stunning!"

"If it comes off," said Mellish dubiously.

"Of course it'll come off, fathead! Sling over some writing-paper!"

Mellish obeyed, and Crooke, drawing a chair up to the table, started to write.

His companion watched him in moody silence. Crooke's little schemes had an unpleasant habit of turning out the wrong way, and Percy Mellish was not a fellow who faced the music without a good deal of fear and trembling.

"There!" said Crooke, blotting the sheet. "That's a triumph of forgery, I reckon."

"What have you done?" asked Mellish, in alarm.

"Only written a letter in the name of our friend Herries."

"But why?"

"Read this, and you'll see."

Mellish scanned the letter. It was addressed to Billy Bunter, the fat boy of Greyfriars, who possessed an amazing capacity for stowing away the maximum amount of tuck in the minimum of time.

The letter ran thus:

"St. James' School,

"Rylcombe, Sussex.

"Dear Bunter,—As you have no doubt heard, I have formed an orchestra, and it was my intention to conduct at a public performance in Rylcombe Public Hall on Saturday evening. By the most rotten stroke of luck, however, I've caught a chill, and shall therefore not be able to attend.

"It occurred to me, as I lay in bed in the sanny, that I could place the conductorship in no abler hands than your own. I've seen you several times when you've come over to St. Jim's, and what you don't know about music isn't worth knowing.

"Will you take my place? The men are rather a difficult crowd to manage, but I know you'll put 'em through it and not stand any bunkum. Be especially firm with the parson fellow—Wardle, his name is—and come down on him like a thousand of bricks if he won't do as you tell him.

"You'd better tog up in evening-dress for the occasion, and I will see that there are plenty of good things in the way of refreshment.

"Enclosed is the amount of your railway fare to Rylcombe. You won't let me down, will you?"

"Your sincere chum,

"GEORGE HERRIES."

Mellish read the letter, and drew a deep breath.

"You—you're going to send this to Bunter?" he exclaimed.

"Right on the wicket, first time!"

"But—but what about Herries? He won't be likely to let Bunter take a free hand in the conducting."

"He won't be able to help himself," said Crooke, grinning evilly. "We're going to kidnap him beforehand. See? Broke, too, if necessary."

"My hat!"

"Then the whole affair will be a howling farce," said Crooke. "Bunter will turn up—you know what a conceited ass he is—and he'll bully Wardle and the rest of 'em till they're fed up, and kick him out of it. Bunter won't like that, but we're not out to study his feelings. So long as we make Herries knuckle under, nothing else matters."

Mellish brightened up.

"It's not a bad wheeze," he said rather grudgingly.

"Not bad? Why, I like that! I think it's jolly good," said Crooke. "You wouldn't have thought of it! It's going to be one of the sensations of the term, my son."

"I'll take your word for it. D'you think Bunter'll turn up?"

"Yes, rather! The word refreshment will fetch him like a shot. It's like dangling a carrot under a donkey's nose."

Crooke sealed the letter in high spirits, and went out into the quad to post it. Tom Merry & Co. were there, punting a football about, and they glanced curiously at the cad of the Fourth.

But had they read the thoughts that were passing through Crooke's mind at that moment the incident would not have ended merely in looks.

CHAPTER 10.

Bunter Bites.

"LETTER for Bunter!"

The sonorous voice of Bob Cherry boomed through the Remove passage at Greyfriars.

"Letter for me, did you say, Cherry?"

Billy Bunter, pompous and important, puffed his way along the passage like a human steam-engine.

Bob nodded.

"It's on the rack," he said.

"That's where Bunter ought to be—or else on the treadmill!" said Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter made his way to the letter-rack with all speed, followed by a wondering crowd.

Letters for Bunter were like angel-visits—few and far between. The Owl of the Remove often spoke of his "vast correspondence," which existed, for the most part, in his own imagination. He was also supposed to receive ample allowances from his titled relations, but this was another fairy-tale. Bunter simply teemed with fairy-tales. He had not been brought up on the lines of the late lamented George Washington.

But this time the letter was an assured fact. Blogg, the postman, had brought it along with the midday delivery, and the Greyfriars juniors were naturally curious to know if one of the titled relations had at last turned up trumps.

"Might be a county court summons," laughed Harry Wharton.

"For obstructing the public thoroughfare," grinned Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter turned a deaf ear to these remarks. He reached up for the letter, and examined the postmark.

"Rylcombe!" said Skinner, looking over his shoulder.

"Who lives at Rylcombe—Lord Bunturde de Bunturde?"

"It's a St. Jim's fellow, I suppose," growled Johnny Bull.

"The fat worm's been trying to squeeze a loan out of D'Arcy, or something of the sort."

Bunter tore open the letter with feverish fingers. He made a great pretence of having expected it, but in his heart he didn't know the writer from Adam.

A postal-order fluttered from the envelope, and Bunter grabbed at it, with a shout of triumph.

"My remittance!" he exclaimed.

"Gammon!"

"It must be a fake!" said Harry Wharton.

But it was no fake. The postal-order was genuine enough, and Billy Bunter tucked it carefully away in his pocket. The amount payable to him was seven-and-sixpence. It was not exactly princely, but the Greyfriars juniors were so unaccustomed to seeing Bunter in funds that they gasped.

"Who's the Good Samaritan, Buntie?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Mind your own bizney?"

Billy Bunter read the letter, and his little round eyes twinkled behind his spectacles. As he read, his chest began to swell, and his snub nose gradually tilted itself into the air.

"What the merry dickens has happened?" asked Nugent.

"Don't keep us in this harrowing suspense, Buntie!"

The Owl of the Remove turned to his schoolfellows with a superior smile.

"At least!" he exclaimed.

"Well, you needn't be so melodramatic about it," said Wharton.

"At last my talents have been properly recognised!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Talents!" said Bob Cherry, in surprise. "Has anybody ever known Bunter to possess any talents? He can get through a pound of cherry-cake in record time, and he can guzzle ginger-pop like a fish!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You fellows have closed your eyes to 'em," said Bunter loftily. "You're simply eaten up with jealousy. I suppose you never heard me, I take it!"

"No, except in the dormitory," said Wharton. "Your snoring would wake fifty Rip Van Winkles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can laugh!" said Bunter. "I've just been offered a

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job that'll fairly make you turn green with envy. I've got to conduct a big orchestra at Rylcombe on Friday evening."

"Rot!"

"He's talking out of his hat!" said Bolsover major.

Bunter handed over the letter.

"Read that," he said, "and then you'll see for yourselves that I'm not rotting!"

The little group of Removites read the letter which Crooke of St. Jim's had so skillfully forged, and exclamations of astonishment arose.

"Of course, it's a jape," said Harry Wharton, at length.

"Herries is pulling your leg, Bunter."

"Absolutely!" said Bob Cherry. "If he's ill, as he says, he'd get somebody at St. Jim's to act as deputy. Why should he want a tame lunatic like Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I reckon he knows a good conductor when he sees one!"

"Bow-wow!"

"It's a trick of some sort," said Nugent. "Bunter's going to walk right into the trap with his eyes shut, as usual. Let him!"

Billy Bunter giggled.

"You fellows are mad because none of you have been asked," he said. "There's going to be refreshments, and plenty of 'em; and that's where you'll be left out in the cold. He, he, he!"

Harry Wharton & Co. resisted a strong inclination to bump the fat junior on the flagstones, and strode away. They were confident that Bunter was being made the victim of a practical joke; but he had chosen to disregard their warning, and must abide by the consequences.

"I won't write and tell Herries I'm coming," mused Bunter. "It's Saturday morning, so there's really no need. Lemme see! What does the fellow say? 'You'd better tog up in evening-dress for the occasion.'"

Billy Bunter made a grimace. He was not at all averse from wearing evening-dress, but in the present circumstances it seemed impossible. Evening-dress was unknown to his limited wardrobe.

"I must bag some," he muttered. "Now, I wonder—"

His thoughts instinctively turned to Lord Mauleverer, the schoolboy earl, whose wardrobe was on the most lavish scale.

"Yes, I can get 'em from Mauly," said Bunter.

And he scuttled off to his lordship's study.

Mauly was there. That is to say, he was present in body, but far away in spirit. His elegant limbs were stretched at full length on the sofa, and a gentle snore vibrated through the air.

"Good!" said Bunter. "I won't wake him, as he looks so comfy. Here goes!"

And, creeping to the wardrobe, he tumbled all the clothes out in a disorderly heap.

"Aha!"

Billy Bunter pounced upon a white, stiff-fronted shirt, and proceeded to change his clothes, while Lord Mauleverer snored blissfully on.

There were numerous drawbacks confronting the newly-appointed band-conductor. In the first place, the trousers were uncomfortably tight, and the shirt felt as if it would burst like a toy balloon at a moment's notice, while the collar chafed Bunter's fat neck, causing him to gasp with pain.

Then, again, the topper which Bunter purloined from Mauly's hat-box wasn't at all a good fit.

Bunter bore these discomforts like a hero. He soon equipped himself, and then, calmly annexing a gold-mounted walking-stick, strutted out of the study, as proud as a peacock.

Bob Cherry, who was in the passage, nearly fell down at Bunter's appearance.

"M-m-my only maiden aunt!" he gasped.

Bunter gave a condescending glance downwards.

"Don't act the giddy goat, Cherry!" he said. "Is this the first time you've seen a person well-dressed?"

"Over-dressed, I should say!" panted Bob. "My hat! Whose pawnshop have you been raiding now?"

"My pal Mauly kindly lent me this change of clothing," said Bunter, with great dignity.

Bob Cherry shot up like a jack-in-a-box.

"What's that?" he roared. "You've been robbing Mauly, you fat toad!"

"Nunn! I didn't—I wasn't—" stammered Bunter.

And then, filled with alarm at the fierce look on Bob Cherry's countenance, he took to his heels and sped down to the school gates like a champion of the cinder-path.

With all his short-sightedness Billy Bunter was aware that Bob was a past-master in the art of hitting straight from the shoulder!

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OUT NEXT MONDAY! THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "MACNET" LIBRARY, PRICE 2D.

CHAPTER 11.

Spirited Away!

FEELING down in the mouth—what?" Crooke of the Shell asked the question. He was strolling with Mellish through Rylcombe, and sighted Jim Betts, the powerful pugilist, who had caused such a commotion in Tom Merry's study a week before.

Jim Betts was standing with his back to the door of the Green Man public-house. His lips were moving, and he was probably engaged in slanging the Government for causing licensed houses to be closed for the better part of the day.

It was at this juncture that he was hailed by Crooke.

"Go are you?" he asked amiably.

"A pal," said Crooke. "And here's another!"

He indicated Mellish, who nodded assably to the prize-fighting gentleman.

"Wot d'yer want?" said Jim Betts, removing his pipe from his mouth and glaring at the St. Jim's juniors.

"You!" said Crooke. "We want you to do a little job for us—a nice little job, exactly in your line."

"Is there any oof stickin' to it?"

"Oh, pots!" said Crooke confidently. "How'd you like to earn a quid for a trifling bit of work?"

"Work!" murmured Jim Betts. "I don't like that word. It sort o' leaves a nasty taste in the mouth."

"It won't be hard work, you know," Crooke went on. "A couple of chaps have got to be collared, and we want you to give us a hand."

"Ho! An' wot sort o' blokes are they?"

"That chap Herries, who made things so jolly unpleasant for you the other day, and a pal of his."

Jim Betts stirred himself at last. The idea of paying off the score he owed Herries appealed to his brutal nature.

"I'm game!" he said. "You want me to 'elp you nab 'em for a quid—hey?"

"And put them out of the way somewhere," said Mellish.

"This is the wheeze. Herries is giving a public performance of his beastly orchestra to-night, and we want to nip it in the bud. Herries and the other chap—Brooke—will be along shortly. I heard 'em say they intended to be on the scene early."

"And they've got to be stopped!" said Crooke grimly.

"Ave you thought about 'ow you're goin' to do it?" asked the pugilist.

"I can't say that I have. Anyway, it's simple," said Crooke, rather vaguely. "We can knock 'em down—or, at least you can—and then, after stringing 'em up, we can take 'em along to some barn, and make 'em prisoners."

Jim Betts shook his head.

"Sounds alright," he said. "These things always do, until you comes to carry 'em out."

"Don't you think it's possible, then?"

"No; barns ain't no good. I've shut many a cove into a barn in me time, but they generally manages to get out an' show themselves at an awkward moment. No; shove the idea of a barn outer yer noddle. An' the knockin'-down part, too. That's no good. Somebody'd see us, an' it'd only lead to ructions. I know a trick worth two o' that. Gimme a minute to think, an' I'll tell you 'ow we'll set about it!"

Crooke and Mellish remained respectfully silent, though they cast several anxious glances down the village street. It would not do for a master or a prefect—or even clean-minded juniors like Tom Merry & Co.—to see them in conversation with one of the worst characters in the neighbourhood.

"I've got it!" said Jim Betts at length. "The crypt!"

"The what?" asked Crooke and Mellish together.

"The old crypt underneath the church. Nobody ever goes there, an' our two friends will lie there nice an' quiet, an' give no trouble!"

"I see," said Crooke. "First of all, you'll bowl 'em over—"

"I shan't do nothink of the kind! Let's walk up to 'em 'orridified, like, an' say we can 'ear groanin' down in the crypt under the church. They'll foller us there like 'umble lambs, an' we'll bang the door in their faces as soon as they're inside. There you 'ave the whole thing in a nutshell. It's a simple plan, but the simple plans nearly always work out best!"

"By Jove!" said Crooke, in tones of excitement. "I see your point now! Mellish and I will trot round to the crypt at once, and you can bring the two beasts along! They'll be suspicious if they see the three of us in the street together!"

"Quite so," said Jim Betts. "You get off, an' I'll wait 'ere till they come!"

"You won't fail?" said Mellish.

"Me fail? Not likely! By the way"—the speaker cleared

his throat—"you couldn't let me have the quid beforehand, young gent? I've run out o' baccy!"

Crooke handed over a ten-shilling note.

"You can have the other half when we're through with the job," he said.

"Werry good, sir! Thank you!"

Crooke and Mellish sauntered away in the direction of the church, and Jim Betts remained on guard at the door of the public-house.

He didn't have long to wait. Herries and Brooke, deep in conversation, came striding along the street.

Jim Betts detached himself from the doorpost, and approached the two juniors, puffing and blowing as if he had just reached the tape after a marathon race.

"Young gent! Young gent!" he panted.

"Hallo!" said Dick Brooke. "What's the matter?"

"Which I've just 'eard the most 'orrible sounds as ever in me born puff!" said Jim Betts dramatically. "If you asks me anythink about it, there's murder bein' committed!"

"My hat!" said Herries. "You must have been drinking, man!"

"No fear!" said the pugilist, shaking his head sadly. "The pubs is closed!"

"Where are these horrible sounds coming from?" said Brooke, with a laugh.

"Down in the crypt under the church. I dursn't look in, but there's somebody there a-sufferin' terrible hagony, you can take my word for it!"

Herries looked at Brooke, and Brooke looked at Herries.

"Better come and see what's up," said Herries at length.

"Might be something in it. Lead the way, Betts!"

Without a suspicion that they were being lured into captivity, the two juniors followed Jim Betts towards the church.

"Ark!" he said.

"I can't hear anything," said Herries, in disgust. "Befts, you scoundrel, is this your idea of a joke? D'you call it funny? Why, my hat!"

He broke off suddenly, as he caught sight of the grinning, leering faces of Crooke and Mellish. "Brooke, old man, this is a trick! We're trapped!"

"Exactly!" sniggered Jim Betts. "In yer go!"

And before the victims could make a single struggle, the heavy iron door was flung open, and they were hustled into the dank, gloomy vault.

"Good-bye, Bluebell!" sang out Mellish.

And then the door clanged to again, and the kidnappers' work was complete.

In the crypt, Herries and Brooke regarded each other with glum faces.

"What asses we w're!" muttered Herries. "We might have expected something of this sort! That brute Betts had it all cut-and-dried, and Crooke and Mellish put him up to it, of course! Oh, it's rotten!"

"But—but what's the idea?" said Brooke dazedly.

"Don't you see? Crooke's been doing his level best to knock our orchestra on the head, and now he's succeeded! It's too awful for words!"

"And what's going to happen about the performance?"

"There won't be one, of course, fathead! How can there be a performance without me there to conduct? Oh, my stars! I feel like murdering somebody!"

"Well, don't start on me!" said Brooke, with a laugh which sounded hollow and eerie in the depths of the crypt.

"We must grin and bear it, I suppose, though it's hard to grin! Is there no way out?"

"None," said Herries gloomily. "I heard the key grato in the lock. We're prisoners, fair and square. And if we don't make those cads writhe for this when we get out, I'll never put my lips to a cornet again!"

And Herries meant what he said.

CHAPTER 12.

Billy Bunter's New Role.

"GOIN' to the concert, deah boys?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, resplendent in his Sunday best, and smoothing a silk topper with his slim white hand, looked into No. 6 Study. Blake and Digby were there, wrangling on that undying topic, the off-side rule in football.

"What's that?" said Jack Blake. "The concert, Gussy? Which one?"

"The one in the village, of course!" said Arthur Augustus. "Hewies has already gone down to lick his orchestra into shape!"

"Blow Herries and his orchestra! Who wants to tramp all the way to the village to hear a row like cats performing on the tiles!"

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"But it's not all instrumental music, dear boy! In between the selections there will be some songs. I shall want 'Three Fishes Went Sailin'.'"

"Mercy!" moaned Digby.

"Why, you wretch—"

"Three Fishes Went Sailin' would be nearer the mark!" grinned Jack Blake. "They couldn't help wailing if they heard Gussy's unearthly screech. It's enough to make the dead leap the loop in their graves!"

"Dwy up, you ass! Are you comin' or are you not?"

"Not!" said Blake promptly.

Then he paused. He had forgotten that the proceeds of the performance were to be devoted to the Red Cross Fund. That made all the difference, of course. It behoved him, as a patriotic British subject, to rally round for the good of the cause.

"Might as well come along," he said. "We'll lynch Herries afterwards, though, if the show's a wash-out!"

"It won't be a wash-out, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus confidently. "I'm singin', you know!"

"Br-r-r!"

Blake and Digby put on their caps, and accompanied the swell of St. Jim's into the road in the gathering dusk. Quite a number of fellows from both Houses were going towards the gates, evidently with the same intention as the chums of Study 6.

"It's a noble sacrifice we're making!" Monty Lowther was heard to exclaim. "To sit for hour after hour listening to Herries' orchestra will require nerves of steel! The fighting in Flanders will be a mere footer-match by comparison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But the Red Cross will benefit," said Tom Merry. "We mustn't forget that. Bung cottonwool into your ears, kids, and sit tight till it's over, and you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you've done your bit for your country!"

The juniors tramped on towards the village. Many of them carried missiles in their coat-pockets, lest the orchestra became simply unendurable. Upon the whole, the prospect in store for the patriotic musicians could scarcely be called rosy.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jack Blake, a few moments later, stopping short in the village street. "What's this?"

"Solomon in all his glory, by Jove!" murmured Monty Lowther.

A fat figure, clad in a suit of evening-dress several sizes too small for him, so that the seams looked like bursting at a moment's notice, came strutting along the street. It was Billy Bunter, freshly arrived from Greyfriars.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was the first to identify the weird and wonderful apparition.

"Buntah!" he gasped.

"That's me!" said Billy Bunter, his face beaming like a full moon. "So you fellows are coming along to swell the gate—what? There'll be a record attendance."

"But—but I don't understand!" stammered Tom Merry. "What in the name of all that's wonderful are you doing here?"

"Why, my dear chap," said Bunter, linking his arm affectionately in that of the captain of the Shell; "haven't you heard? I'm deputising for Herries!"

"What!"

"It's a fact. I'm conducting the show to-night, and it's going to be the biggest success of modern times!"

"What Scott!"

Tom Merry gazed at the fat junior more in sorrow than in anger.

"You poor old ass!" he said. "Somebody's been pulling your leg. Herries is running the show himself, of course!"

Bunter smiled.

"Really, you're misinformed," he said. "Herries has caught a chill, and he's asked me to come over and take his place."

"But Herries was as right as rain a few hours ago!" protested Digby. "It's all a mistake!"

"It isn't," chimed in a cool voice. "Herries is seedy, and Bunter's taking his place."

The juniors swung round, to find Crooke standing before them. With him was Melish, and both were lurking grins.

"Of course," continued Crooke, "we shall miss the cornet solos that Herries intended to give; but that's a detail."

Tom Merry and Co. were too thunderstruck by this sudden turn of events to enter into an argument with Crooke, although they more than suspected that the cad of the Shell had been up to some shady trick. But Bunter had come all the way from Greyfriars to conduct the concert, and it would be bad form, the fellows felt, to kick him out now.

"See you after the show, you fellows!" said the fat junior.

And he waddled away in the direction of the Public Hall. Crooke and Melish were not slow to follow. They did not

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wish to remain too long in their schoolfellows' company, lest awkward questions should be asked.

Meanwhile, the members of the orchestra, got up in style for the occasion, had put in an appearance, and were not a little disgusted at finding Herries conspicuous by his absence.

"If he doesn't come soon," observed Mr. Wardle, glancing at his watch, "I shall have to—ah—wield the baton in his place."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Boozey-Smith doggedly, "but I'm the man to do that. Every man to his trade, you know. You're a parson, I'm a musician. Even as a youngster in arms I was able to make melodies."

"I don't doubt it," said the rector dryly.

Matters were warming up when Billy Bunter suddenly came upon the scene. He was looking pompous and important, and glanced critically through his glasses at the men under his command.

"Let me introduce myself," he said airily. "My name is Bunter, and I'm conducting this show in place of Herries, who is ill."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Reeks. "Herries ill! What a nuisance!"

"Rats!" said Bunter promptly. "It's a blessing in disguise really. He wouldn't have made half such a good job of it as I shall. Now, I'm going to stand no nonsense. Understand that! You—you red-nosed freak with the fiddle—d'you hear what I say?"

Mr. Boozey-Smith, to whom the remark was addressed, stood petrified. He tried to find speech, but in vain, which was perhaps just as well, for the words he would have uttered would most certainly have shocked the Rev. Mr. Wardle.

Billy Bunter glanced over his shoulder.

"The audience is beginning to roll up," he said. "Clear the decks for action! By the way, is there any grub knocking around? I understood Herries to say—"

"G-g-grub!" stammered Mr. Reeks, aghast. "Is it your intention to—"

"Dry up!" said Bunter. "As conductor of this show I've a right to do as I like."

A screen had been erected on the platform, and Billy Bunter went behind it to explore. Then, to his unbounded delight, his eyes fell upon a huge dinner-wagon, stacked with all sorts and conditions of pastries, and with bottles of ginger-beer posted like fortresses right along the top.

"Oh, my hat!"

Billy Bunter flung out his arms in rapture, splitting his seams at each shoulder as he did so. Mauly's dress-coat was ripped up at the back, too; but what did these things matter at a supreme moment like this? There was grub—whole stacks of it—and as for the orchestra, reflected Bunter—well, blow the orchestra! It could go to that much-recommended resort, Jericho!

Clamorous cries began to go up from the members of the audience. The performance was timed to commence at seven, and it was five minutes past already.

"Back up, Bunter!"

"Set the ball rolling, there!"

Billy Bunter, who was at grips with a huge jam sponge, came to himself with a start. Perhaps, after all, he had better go and conduct, or the indignant audience would hurl him forth on his neck.

So, with ponderous steps, Billy Bunter marched on to the platform.

His appearance was greeted with a ringing yell of laughter. Ventilation-holes peeped in profusion from his evening-dress, and there was a long, red smear of raspberry jam across his fat cheek.

"Disgusting!" said Mr. Wardle. "If Herries were ill, he might have arranged for a rational human being to take his place—not this—this beast of the field!"

"Stop that jaw!" said Bunter. "You're like a pack of old women! Now, then, where do we begin?"

"The Lost Chord" was the first item. It was a lost chord in every sense of the term. Billy Bunter flourished the baton after the manner of a Suffragette wielding a poker, and his wild whirls put the long-suffering members of the orchestra hopelessly out of tune.

Mr. Boozey-Smith performed at a stately pace on his fiddle; but the piccolos and the clarinets, taking their time from Bunter—as far as it was possible to do so—galloped along at breakneck speed, as if they were playing a particularly lively hunting ditty. Ever and anon arose the solemn tinkles of the triangle, which was being manipulated by the village blacksmith.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Drown it, somebody!"

To judge by the excited shouts of the audience, the performance was anything but a concord of sweet sounds. The

more the musicians tried to keep in time, the more Billy Bunter put them off their stroke, so to speak.

Mr. Boozey-Smith shook his head in despair, and his instrument went clattering to the floor.

Billy Bunter strode towards him.

"Get on with the washing!" he said. "I'm not putting up with any slackers, my man!"

Mr. Boozey-Smith flushed crimson, and leapt to his feet. At the same instant Billy Bunter gave him a smart rap on the head with his baton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"One for his nut!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Now we shall see some fireworks!"

They did. Mr. Boozey-Smith seemed to possess a desire—not altogether unreasonable—to transform Bunter into a sort of table-jelly.

He rushed at the fat junior, who promptly dodged to one side.

The result was appalling. Mr. Boozey-Smith, with all the grace of a skilled roller-skater, skidded across the platform and disappeared over the edge.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter, seeing that his enemy was hors de combat, hastened to the dinner-wagon, and proceeded to make merry with the pastries.

As for the other members of the orchestra, they had stopped playing, and were gazing at the audience in mute appeal, as if to say: "Please arrange for the floor to open and swallow us up!"

But the audience was not sympathetic. On the contrary, it was stony-hearted. Somebody rapped out an order, and the next instant a fusillade of eggs—more ancient than modern—together with boots, peas, overripe apples, and squashed tomatoes—crashed into the orchestra.

There were many casualties. Mr. Wardle caught one of the eggs on the tip of his nose, and was almost overcome. He had read of the fumes of German poison gas; but they were nothing compared with the stench of that awful egg.

Mr. Wardle's colleagues, too, had a terrible two minutes. Missiles smashed upon them in a deluge, and they were compelled to clutch their instruments and run—anywhere, so long as they got clear of that deadly cannonade.

"The hand-race!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Go it, ye cripples! The chap with the triangle ought to go scratch: he hasn't got such a load as Boozey-Smith and the rest of 'em! Oh, my only maiden aunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The terror-stricken members of the orchestra beat a hasty and undignified retreat from the premises. Peal upon peal of laughter followed them; and as they plunged into the village street, with the odour of bad eggs still clinging to their clothing, they heaped bitter imprecations on the day when they had agreed to take part in that ill-fated orchestra.

CHAPTER 13

The Reward of Valour

THE only person remaining on the platform after the practical jokers of St. Jim's had finished their bombardment was Billy Bunter. He had got behind the screen, and in that safe place had partaken of one of the finest feeds he could ever remember.

Billy Bunter was not an utter fool. He realised that the sooner he shook the dust of Rylcombe from his feet the better it would be for him. The ejected members of the orchestra, if they came across him, would certainly show no mercy.

So Bunter examined as many pastries as he could into his pockets, and slipped out by the back door. Then, seeing that the coast was clear, he made hurried tracks for the railway-station. He had made his first—and probably last—appearance in public as a conductor of music.

As for the St. Jim's juniors, they left the assembly-hall with mixed feelings. Some felt sorry that such a highly patriotic movement should have come to nothing; others regarded the whole affair as a huge joke.

But none were so elated as Crooke and Mellish. It was not very often that they scored such a distinct triumph; and the knowledge that they had "downed" Herries once and for all made them as proud as peacocks.

But pride goeth before a fall; and the fall of the precious plotters was already at hand.

The St. Jim's fellows were moving in a solid mass along the High Street, when suddenly there lurched into sight the familiar figure of Jim Betts.

The pugilist was imperfectly sober, and he cannoned heavily into the Terrible Three, who were walking ahead.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Here's that prize-

fighting brute! He's been drinking, too! Let's bump him!"

"Good egg!" said Manners.

Jim Betts steadied himself, and his eyes, blinking at the throng of juniors, finally rested on Crooke and Mellish.

"See 'ere," he said thickly. "Where's my ten bob?"

"Shurrup, you idiot!" muttered Mellish, in alarm.

"But, am I? I'll jist yer! You give me ten bob for puttin' them two coves away, an' now you owes me another ten. Wot I says is this 'ere—pay up, an' look pleasant!"

"Oh, you scoundrel!" hissed Crooke. "You've properly let the cat out of the bag now!"

Tom Merry placed a firm grip on each of the pugilist's shoulders, and looked him squarely in the face.

"What little game have you been up to?" he demanded. "Answer me, or you'll get the bumping of your life!"

Jim Betts was cowed at the sight of so many determined-looking youngsters. He deemed it wise to obey.

"These two fellers 'ere," he said, indicating Crooke and Mellish, "offered me a quid if I'd put Master 'Erries an' 'is pal outer the way. They give me ten bob when I started off, an' now they owes me another ten. Make 'em 'and it over, young gent. You looks a sport."

Tom Merry ignored the request. His eyes were gleaming. "Where are Herries and Brooke?" he asked. "Quick, man!"

"Down in the crypt under the church," said Jim Betts.

"And these two fellows told you to hide 'em ta're: 'Certinly!"

"It's a lie!" shouted Crooke. "The man's drunk, and doesn't know what he's saying. Surely you're not going to believe such a cock-and-bull yarn, Merry?"

For answer, Tom Merry transferred his grip from Jim Betts to Crooke, and requested his chum to take care of Mellish.

"March 'em along to the crypt," he said grimly. "We'll soon see if there's any truth in the business. As for you, you precious skunk!"—the speaker gave Jim Betts a glance that ought to have shrivelled him up—"we'll give you ten seconds to get clear!"

Jim Betts promptly took the hint. He dived into a side-alley, and was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

Then a big procession of St. Jim's fellows made its way to the church. All were talking excitedly—all save Crooke

THE CHILDREN'S FAVOURITE COLOURED PICTURE PAPER.



The Joliest
Entertainment for
the Little Ones

and Mellish, who were quaking in apprehension of the wrath to come.

The Terrible Throe, pushing the culprits before them, plumped down the steps and halted outside the door of the crypt.

"Where's the key?" demanded Tom Merry, tightening the pressure of his grip on Crooke's arm.

"How should I know? Betts had it," said Crooke sullenly. Luckily, Jim Betts had left it hanging up outside, and Jack Blake pounced upon it at once.

"Now we shall see what we shall see," he said, unlocking the big door.

The juniors crowded into the crypt, and above the hollow echo of their voices came a cry of relief.

"At last!"

Herries and Brooke leapt to their feet, only too eager to breathe the fresh, pure air of the outer world once more.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Hewhies—Bwooke, deah boy! You've been locked in!"

"It doesn't need a Sexton Blake to make that out!" grumbled Herries. "I s'pose the concert fell flat?"

"Not exactly," grinned Monty Lowther. "Billy Bunter came over from Greyfriars to conduct."

"My hat!"

"He said you wrote and asked him to," said Tom Merry. "What!" roared Herries. "I did nothing of the sort! This is some more of Crooke's shady work. My hat! I—I'll make a table-jelly of him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall have to punish the feafuhl wottahs!" said Arthur Augustus. "Shall we bump them, deah boys?"

"Bumping's no good," said Tom Merry. "I'll tell you what wouldn't be a bad wheeze. Let Herries tackle Crooke, and Brooke tackle Mellish. We can stand by to pick up the pieces."

Mellish turned pale.

"I—I don't want to fight—"

"Of course not!" said Jack scathingly. "You're the sort of chap who'd be a conscientious objector if you were a few years older. But you've got to take your gruel this time. Come on!"

A movement was made to a quiet meadow near by, and Herries and Brooke, who had chafed under their long confinement, peeled off their coats grimly in the gloom. The orchestra had been ruined; and the respective countenances of Crooke and Mellish seemed likely to share the same fate.

Like the man in the song, the two rascals "didn't want to do it"; but they had no choice in the matter. Herries and Brooke opened the attack almost at once, and the next moment a couple of one-sided scraps were in full progress.

Nobody attempted to interfere, even when Herries, in his righteous anger, knocked Crooke clean off his feet with a sledgehammer blow. The cads of the Shell were only getting their just deserts, and no one had a grain of sympathy to waste on them.

Mellish made no sort of stand whatever against Dick Brooke. His fists lashed the air wildly, and shortly afterwards he was on his back, groaning as if his last hour had come.

Some time later, a couple of tottering, war-weary specimens of humanity crawled in at the gates of St. Jim's. Their faces were pictures; their clothes were torn and dishevelled; and they had come to realise the truth of the old saying that the way of transgressors is hard.

After the nasty reverse he had sustained, George Herries might have been excused for throwing up any idea of future public performances.

But enthusiasm and enterprise go a long, long way; and Herries on the Monday after Crooke and Mellish had been punished, made a personal visit to the members of his orchestra, and invited them to turn up again, when he himself would be there to conduct.

Mr. Boozey-Smith and his colleagues took a great deal of persuading. They had not forgotten—nor were they likely to forget—the fusillade of bad eggs which had been levelled against them.

But eventually Herries won them over, with the result that on the following Saturday a fine entertainment was given to the public. There was a crowded house, and the Red Cross Fund benefited to the extent of nearly twenty pounds.

And so Herries was happy. His cherished dreams had at last been realised; and his schoolfellows, at the conclusion of the concert, applauded him with ringing cheers.

THE END.

Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's! BARRIED BY THE SCHOOL! b. MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 460.

NOTICES
To Readers of THE "GEM" LIBRARY.

Correspondence, Leagues, &c.

Sydney Wright, 34, Upperthorpe Road, Sheffield, wants members for his club. Will anyone interested write, enclosing stamped and addressed envelope.

D. Chambers, 53, Walton Road, East Molesey, wants more members for his "Gem" and "Magnet" League.

Gordon McLanachan, Cauld Hamo, Llanthunshwre, would be glad to correspond with an Australian boy reader of about thirteen.

Harold Coote, 49, St. Thomas' Street, Portsmouth, and Douglas A. Shand, 23, Lancaster Road, Portsmouth, would be glad to correspond with other boy readers.

Back Numbers, &c., Wanted.

Private W. Burns, 18516, C Coy. 1st West Yorkshire Regt., B.E.F., France, would be glad to receive the "Gem" and "Figgins' Popular" each week, if some reader will be kind enough to send them.

Drummer A. J. Cox, 1239, 1/24th London Regt., The Queen's, 11th Camp, B.E.F., Le Havre, France, would be glad if some reader would send him a cornet or clarinet for a small string band which he and his comrades are forming.

By W. H. Tucker, 89, Park Hill Road, Dingle, Liverpool—"Gem" Nos. 1-12.

Private H. Alderson, 1815, C Coy. 17th Middlesex Regt., Sappers' Platoon, B.E.F., France, would be pleased to have back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet."

By A. Ilowe, 38, Brampton Road, Harringay, N.—"Britain Invaded," "Britain at Bay," and "Britain's Revenge."

Private W. McDougall, 1/6th Highland Light Infantry, 8C Ward, 3rd Scottish General Hospital, Stobhill, Glasgow, would be glad of back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet," and would also like to correspond with some boy-readers.

Gunner H. Ingram, A Battery, 87th Brigade, B.E.F., France, would be glad to have back and current numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet."

Lance-Corporal R. E. Lloyd, 1362, would be glad to have the "Gem" each week, and Lance-Corporal W. H. Merry, 2185, to have the "Magnet." Address of both: Battalion Orderly Room, 5th (R.) Batt. South Staffs Regt., Scotton Camp, Catterick, Yorkshire.

By Driver John Duffy, 160052, A.S.C., B.H.T.D., No. 8 Camp, B.E.F., Le Havre, France—Back Nos. of the "Gem," if readers will oblige.

By C. Cottam, c.o. Branch 34, Burnley Co-op. Society, Hasling Lane, Burnley—Back numbers of both "Gem" and "Magnet," earlier than 200, and any issue of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library dealing with St. Jim's or Greyfriars, except the last three published.

Private A. Thomas, 29/168, A Co., 13th Durham LI., B.E.F., France, would be glad to have back numbers of the companion papers, the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library, or the "Union Jack."

Lance-Corporal A. E. Attwood, 3310, 1/4 Hants Regt., c.o. India Office, London, would be glad of back numbers.

By Harry Smith, 1544, Great Western Road, Anniesland, Glasgow—"Figgins' Fig-Pudding," "Figgins' Folly," and the "Magnet" stories, "The Taming of Harry Wharton," and "Bob Cherry's Barraging-out."

By H. Gulliver, 108, Gladstone Road, Wimbledon—The number of the "Gem" containing the first Tom Merry story.

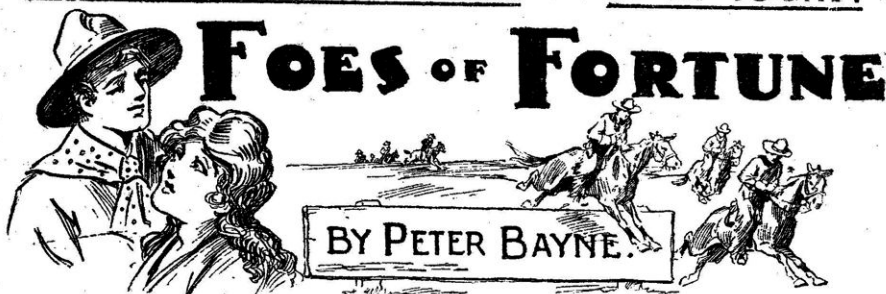
By W. Woodhouse, 2, Quarry Road, Maeswood, Pontypridd—Nos. 50-70 of the "Gem," and also "Figgins' Fig-pudding," and "Bob Cherry's Barraging-out."

By Miss Doris Smith, 55, Hillcrest Avenue, Chapelton, Leeds—"One of the Best," "Figgins' Fig-pudding," "Figgins' Folly," "Captain D'Arcy," "Caught Red-handed," "Ashamed of his Father," "Bob Cherry's Barraging-out," "Through Thick and Thin." Double price offered.

By Corporal Hannigan, 7573, 1st Royal Irish Rifles, No. 2, Hut, Irish Command Depot, Tipperary—Back numbers of the companion papers, if any readers can spare them.

By F. Depledge, 27, Granville Street, Barnsley—"Figgins' Fig-pudding," "Captain D'Arcy," "The School-boy Auctioneer," "Bob Cherry's Barraging-out," "Ashamed of his Father," and "Through Thick and Thin."

OUT NEXT MONDAY! THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY, PRICE 2D.

A NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL.START TO-DAY!**The First Chapters.**

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, is attacked while asleep by a party of brigands, led by DIRK RALWIN. He is disarmed, and narrowly escapes with his life by plunging into the roaring waters of the Amazon. He is picked up by a small boat, which is carrying HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter, LORNA, to their home at San Ramo, a small settlement some miles away.

Carton's father (the son of CYRUS ROSS, a famous money magnate) has just died, and Cyrus Ross, with the rest of his sons and relatives, is drowned by the collision of the financier's yacht with a battleship in the Channel, during a fog. Carton Ross is, therefore, the sole surviving member of the Ross family, and heir to millions, though he is unaware of it. Dirk Ralwin, who has stolen Carton's wallet containing papers which reveal his identity, hears of the great calamity which has befallen the family, and at once sets out for San Ramo, where Carton has gone with the Milburnes, and demands that the lad shall be handed over to him. Harvey Milburne, however, refuses to do so, and an attack is made upon his house by the brigands.

In the Hands of Dirk Ralwin.

"But why are they attacking you?" asked the lad. "The other day you told me that they never harmed you, and that you had nothing to fear from them."

"You can never trust such people," Milburne replied. "I was a little too confident. For some reason or another, Dirk Ralwin has decided that it is time I was made to feel the weight of his displeasure."

In his brave chivalry it never occurred to him to tell Carton Ross the reason for the unexpected visit of the outlaws. The lad was his guest, to be protected from all avertible harm while under his roof at any and every cost, and rather than seek safety by being untrue to the dictates of honour and friendship, he was ready to lose all that he possessed in the world.

The nature of the next attack on the house was soon disclosed. Gathering great bundles of dry brushwood, the outlaws piled the inflammable material all round the building and set fire to it. The doors and other woodwork were quickly alight, and dense clouds of smoke poured into the rooms and passages.

The smoke was followed by darting tongues of fire that seized greedily upon the interior and forced the occupants back step by step. The heat became overpowering. It was almost impossible to breathe in the stifling atmosphere.

"Follow me!" cried Milburne at last. "We must seek the open and fight our way down to the bay. There we may find safety."

Flinging open a side door that the outlaws had neglected to fire, he darted into the garden at the head of his followers. For a moment or two it looked as if the little party would be able to reach the shelter of the trees covering the hillside without attracting notice.

But their enemies caught sight of them, and, yelling and spurring their horses, rode up on all sides to cut off the retreat. Seeing how useless armed resistance would be at that juncture, Milburne ordered his followers not to fire, and he had scarcely spoken, when a revolver-shot laid him on the ground.

Uttering a loud cry of horrified grief, Lorna knelt down

at her father's side and gazed with tearful eyes into his face. Just in time to save her from being trampled underfoot, Carton Ross caught the girl and swung her out of danger.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling to release herself from his grasp. "I must return to him!"

"It's impossible!" Ross answered, as the infuriated horse-men surged all round them. "Look! You could not live a minute amongst that crowd!"

She ceased to struggle, and he relaxed his hold on her wrist. In an instant she had freed herself and was hurrying away from him. Terrified for her sake he followed, but before he could overtake her a horse galloped alongside him and its rider seized him by the shoulder.

"Yield!" shouted Dirk Ralwin, for it was the bandit chief himself. "The game's up! You are my prisoner!"

Other hands seized the lad, and, though he fought like a lion at bay, he could not escape from the ring of foes encircling him. His arms were bound behind his back, and he was lifted into the saddle of a spare horse, a trooper sitting behind him.

Their captive having been made secure, the outlaws rode away, with scarcely a backward glance at the home they had left in ruins. The entire building was now in flames, which, fanned by the morning breeze, consumed everything they could feed upon with fearful rapidity.

As this scene of cruel and wanton destruction flashed before his gaze, Carton Ross almost wept with rage and grief, and in his heart he vowed that the evil done to the man who had befriended him should not go unpunished, if he lived to avenge it.

Not knowing what had become of Lorna, he feared that the worst had happened to the girl. In returning to the assistance of her stricken father, he imagined, she must have been herself struck down by the brutal miscreants from whom he had striven to shield her, and he despaired of ever seeing or hearing of her again.

The day was well advanced when the outlaws reached their camp, which Ross saw very little of, as he was at once placed in a closely-guarded tent and kept prisoner there. Worn out and exhausted, he fell into a deep sleep, not waking again until late in the afternoon.

Food and water had been put by his side, but he saw no one until an hour or so later, when Dirk Ralwin made his appearance. The outlaw chief was alone, and before reclosing the flap of the tent after him he ordered the guards, who were on duty outside, to move away.

"Hallo!" said Ross to himself. "He doesn't want his men to hear what he has to say to me. I wonder what it is?"

For some moments Ralwin did not speak, but stood and looked at his youthful prisoner with a keenly scrutinising gaze, as if seeking thereby to read the other's character.

"You must think it very strange," he said at last, "for me to have gone to so much trouble to make your acquaintance. When you know the reason why," he continued, as the lad remained silent, "you will not be surprised. Did your father ever say very much to you concerning his family?"

A flush of angry resentment crimsoned Carton Ross' face. "That is my own affair!" he answered sharply. "Mind your own business!"

Ralwin gave vent to an amused laugh.

"It's most probable that he never did," he went on to say, "for he had good cause not to. Many years ago he

NEXT WEDNESDAY: "BARRED BY THE SCHOOL!" A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Serial Tale of
THE GEM LIBRARY—No. 460.
Tom Merry & Co., By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

quarrelled bitterly with his father, Cyrus Ross, the multimillionaire, and left home, never to return again. Now, Cyrus Ross had several other sons, and numerous relatives, all of whom were actively interested in the great money business that was carried on in his name, and your father was soon forgotten by most of them. He had cut himself adrift from them of his own accord, and, as you know, he died in this part of the world a penniless trader. A few private papers that he left behind might have been of little or no value in the ordinary course of events, but, as things have turned out, they are worth untold gold."

Carton Ross gave a quick start.

"Were those the papers in the canvas bag," he questioned, "that your men stole from me?"

"Of course!" answered Ralwin, with a smile. "Did you never read them?"

Ross shook his head.

"They were given to me by my father as he was lying on his death-bed," he said. "He told me that I must take them to the nearest coast port, and there entrust them to the care of the British Consul, who would tell me what to do about them."

"And you never did so?"

"I didn't have a chance to. While I was on my way down to the coast I fell in with a party of your ruffians, who robbed me of everything I had in the world."

A look of pleased cunning showed in Dirk Ralwin's dark eyes. He was confident now that the precious knowledge he possessed was shared by no one who was in a position to prevent him from reaping the full benefit of it.

"Perhaps it is as well for you," he said "that those papers have come into my possession, otherwise you might have lost them, and never known their value. Take this," he continued, handing a newspaper to the other, "and read the news on the first page. Then you will understand everything. Later on I will return."

With a mysterious smile on his lips, he turned and left the tent. Puzzled, yet deeply interested, Carton Ross gave his attention to the newspaper, and the first glance that he gave to the huge headlines of the page made him catch his breath with uncontrollable excitement.

With bent head and fast-beating heart he read on, never lifting his eyes until he had scanned the last printed word of the amazing narrative that revealed to him the fact that he had inherited the greatest fortune in the world!

Then he let the paper fall to the ground, and, his brain in a whirl of feverish thought, stared unseeing into vacancy. The light grew dim, and quickly faded into the darkness of night.

Suddenly Carton Ross became aware of the fact that he was not alone. Someone else was in the tent.

"Who's there?" he called out.

"Hush!" whispered a soft voice. "It's Lorna!"

The Escape—A Bold Venture—At the Point of the Pistol—I rapped.

Carton Ross, wondering and amazed, quickly crossed the tent to the girl.

"Lorna!" he whispered, grasping her outstretched hands in the darkness. "Why are you here? I can scarcely believe that it is you. Have you, too, been taken prisoner?"

"No," she answered. "I followed you to this place, for I knew that you were in great danger. For an hour or more I've been watching for an opportunity to have a word with you. Now the men of the camp are sleeping, except a few who are on guard duty, and you will be able to make your escape. Come, follow me! In a little while not far away I have left two horses. Once we are in the saddle, Dirk Ralwin and his followers can never overtake us."

Thrilling with joy and hope, Carton Ross followed the girl as she turned and moved silently away. But even as he bent down to raise the flap of the tent he paused, in sudden doubt and irresolution. Lorna, surprised and impatient, flashed a questioning glance at him.

"Why do you hesitate?" she said. "There isn't a moment to lose. Now, or never, is the time to regain your freedom."

"Lorna," answered Ross, "you must go without me."

"Go without you!" she said, astonished and incredulous.

"Why?"

"Let me tell you," he replied. "Dirk Ralwin has some private papers of mine that are of the greatest value and importance. They belonged to my father, and were stolen from him by the outlaws on the day when first I met you and Mr. Milburne. Now, since then, Ralwin has discovered their worth, and means to make use of them for his own benefit. I cannot, and will not go, leaving those papers in his possession."

The calm firmness with which Carton Ross spoke con-

vinced Lorna that nothing she might say would turn him from his purpose. It was a keen disappointment to her in the circumstances, and she was silent for some moments.

"You know what is best," she said then; "although I fail to see how you will get back these papers you prize so highly, unless you take them from Dirk Ralwin by force."

"That is quite true," Ross agreed, with a little sigh. "And Ralwin isn't likely to give me the chance to do that, however long I remain here. Still, I've quite made up my mind to have them again."

A quick, whispered warning came from Lorna at this moment. The sound of heavy footsteps approached the tent, and a man carrying a lantern appeared in sight.

"It's one of the guards," whispered Ross, as he looked out and caught sight of the fellow; "and he's coming here. Slip away, Lorna, while there is time to do so."

The girl did not move. Into her dark eyes there flashed the light of a daring inspiration.

"Listen!" she said quickly, in a low tone of voice. "We must overpower him before he is able to give an alarm. Then you can put on his uniform, seek out Ralwin, and force him to give up your papers, and then escape with me."

The sheer audacity of the plan made a swift appeal to Carton Ross, who, moreover, had no time to decide how it should be acted on. Scarcely had Lorna finished speaking to him and drawn back into the shadows, when the light from the lantern carried by the guard illuminated the tent with its flickering rays.

"Hola!" cried the man gruffly, yawning and staring round with blinking eyes. "Where are you, Ingles? Show yourself!"

He was sleepy and stupid with drink, facts that his young prisoner was swift to discern and act upon. With the noiseless quickness of a cat, Ross crept across the tent and sprang at his foe. Straight and true of aim, his fist crashed against the other's jaw with all the strength that he could put behind the blow.

The outlaw fell without uttering a sound, his lantern, as it slipped from his grasp, being caught by Lorna. In a few moments Carton Ross was attired in the uniform of his unconscious enemy. Worn over his own clothes, it fitted him better than he had expected, and the disguise gave him fresh courage and confidence in himself.

Having bound and gagged the guard, he and Lorna emerged cautiously from the tent. Few sounds disturbed the silence of the night. The camp fire was burning low, and the men lying near it, wrapped in their blankets, were asleep.

Keeping in the shadow of the great trees, whose dense foliage obscured the light of the moon, Carton Ross and his companion made their way from point to point of the mountain stronghold of the outlaws. It was a fastness made by Nature itself for defence against attack, and Ross speedily realised how formidable a task it would be for even an army to capture it by direct assault.

The great cliffs and wooded heights surrounding it were everywhere pierced by innumerable passages, leading to caves in which men might easily find safe shelter and refuge. Here and there machine-guns were placed to guard the few steep and difficult approaches to the retreat, and there was ample evidence for the eye to see of abundant stores of food and other necessities.

"That is where Dirk Ralwin is," said Lorna suddenly. "I found out when I was watching the camp before seeing you."

She pointed to the narrow mouth of a cave dimly lighted by the glow of a lantern that was hanging from an overhanging jut of rock. There was no sentry in sight. Apparently the bandit chief was so confident in his own sense of security that he had no need for a guard to watch over him during his hours of repose.

"Then, in that case," said Ross, "I ought to have an easy task. No doubt Ralwin is asleep. I shall take him by surprise, seize the papers, and rejoin you. Where shall I find you on my return? It won't be safe for you to remain here."

Lorna's white teeth flashed in a brave smile.

"As safe here as anywhere else," she answered. "Have no fear for my sake. Go, and all good luck be with you."

Making sure that he was not being spied upon, Ross entered the subterranean passage. After he had traversed some five or six yards the glimmer of a light caught his eye. Going towards it, he found that it came from the interior of a cave—a wide, lofty recess, well furnished, and provided with every aid to comfort and convenience.

Thick curtains of bright hues and fantastic designs draped the rocky walls. Valuable carpets covered the floor. Here and there were stacks of rifles and other weapons, cases of cartridges, and stands of swords.

In the centre of the room burned an oil-stove. Near it,

(Continued on page 21 of cover.)

FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

stretched full length on a truckle bed, was Dirk Ralwin. The famous outlaw had fallen asleep while reading a newspaper, which had fallen from his hand to the floor. He was dressed, even to his long riding-boots and the sombrero hat on his head, and had only troubled to divest himself of his sword belt.

Securing the two Browning revolvers which were lying on a small table at the head of the bed, Ross proceeded to make a swift but careful search for his lost papers. He soon found the brown canvas bag that had contained them when they were stolen from him, but it was now empty.

High and low he hunted, prying into every nook and corner, but without success. There could be no doubt but that Ralwin had deposited the papers in some secret place. That being so, it would be useless to continue looking for them.

Feeling baffled and perplexed, Carton Ross stood, undecided how to act, for he was in no mood to confess himself defeated. Then his face brightened, and he smiled.

"Guess I'll do it," he muttered. "It seems to be the only way."

Revolving in hand, he bent over the couch, and pressed the cold steel of the weapon against Ralwin's brow. Instantly the sleeping man opened his eyes, which filled with an expression of fear and angry amazement.

"You can sit up," said Ross coolly, "but don't forget that I shall fire at the least sign of treachery on your part. You recognise me—eh? Well, that will save me the trouble of introducing myself."

A look of terrible hate and fury showed in the bandit's dark face, but he forced a harsh laugh from between his twitching lips.

"You look well as an insurrecto!" he said sneeringly. "That uniform suits you. I thought at first that you were one of my own men. But what is it that you want?"

"The papers," Ross answered. "The papers of mine that you stole from me!"

"Indeed! And do you imagine for a single moment that I am to be frightened into giving them back to you?"

"Yes, I do," said Ross; "for you will not lose your life when you can save it."

The veiled threat, so calmly uttered, produced a visible effect on the man against whom it was directed. His face paled and his feigned attitude of contempt and unconcern was not in the least convincing.

"More bounce and bluster!" he said. "You would not dare to shoot me!"

The revolver levelled at him was firm and steady as a rock.

"Dirk Ralwin," said Ross. "you are an outlaw on whose head there is a high price. You have been responsible for much suffering and bloodshed, and your cruelties are notorious everywhere. If I shot you for all the evil you have done, my own conscience would not upbraid me, and all men would applaud my action. You want to use the papers stolen from me for your own base purposes, and in that way you would bring more misery into the world. I am determined that you shall not succeed in your purpose. Unless the papers are in my hands in two minutes from now by that clock on the wall above your head you are a dead man!"

"Fine words!" sneered Ralwin, flicking his lips. "Why, you fool, some of my men may enter at any moment, and then your fine words would not be worth a snap of the fingers."

"At least I should be warned," answered Ross, "and before any of them could lay a hand on me I should have fired a bullet through your brain!"

A tense silence followed, that was only broken by the measured ticking of the clock that had been suddenly called upon to play the part of a decisive factor in the situation.

Every moment Carton Ross expected to hear the sounds of a sudden onrush from behind of the outlaws who must be near at hand, and who would kill him with as little compunction as they would kill a chicken. Yet he never wavered in his resolution. His was the cold, strong courage that no sense of lurking danger can weaken.

And Dirk Ralwin, desperately brave and callous though he was, realised that in this handsome, cold-eyed British youth he had met one braver than himself. The knowledge infuriated him, but it also chilled his blood with a strange, numbing terror of that moment when swift death should leap upon and claim him for its own.

Where were his followers? He cursed them for not being there. An almost irresistible impulse possessed him to shout an alarm, to hurl himself upon the lad who defied him, to do anything that promised to end the maddening sense of impotence and fear that had him in its grip.

"Ten seconds more!" said Ross. "Quick, and make up your mind! It's either those papers for me, or death for you!"

The perspiration broke out in tiny beads over Dirk Ralwin's face. His clenched his hands so tightly that the finger-nails pierced his flesh. And as, on the fatal moment, he saw the revolver in front of him rise up until it pointed straight between his eyes, he gave vent to a savage laugh that had in it the snarl of a trapped wolf.

"You win!" he exclaimed. "The papers are yours! Let me get them for you."

Tearing back a curtain on the wall, he removed a loose piece of rock and disclosed to view an aperture containing a small steel box. Unlocking the receptacle with a key that he took from his pocket, he opened the lid with shaking fingers, and drew out the precious papers that Ross was risking so much to gain.

"Here they are," he said, his eyes glittering malevolently.

Eagerly Carton Ross grasped them. A single glance told him that they were all there. Not one was missing. He looked up again, to spring aside as Ralwin, quick as a snake to strike, hurled the steel box at his head.

The missile missed his head, but struck him on the shoulder with a force that sent him staggering back across the cave. And before he could regain his balance he was lifted up and thrown to the floor. Falling with him, Dirk Ralwin knelt on his chest and clutched at his throat with a horrible, throttling grip that robbed him of his strength in a moment.

Lorna to the Rescue—Flight—The Pursuit.

Through the black mist that seemed to gather before his eyes, Carton Ross beheld the evilly-smiling face of the bandit chief lowering over him.

Taunting, mocking words, whose meaning he could not grasp, fell from the lips of his enemy. Then the dull sound of a sharp explosion rang in his ears, and at the same moment he became conscious of the fact that the pressure round his throat was at an end. Then the weight lifted from his body, and Dirk Ralwin, starting up and then rolling back, slipped sideways to the floor.

Staggering to his feet, Carton Ross, weakened and dazed as he was, would have fallen had not a quick hand caught his arm. At his side was Lorna Milburne. She had saved him from death by following him into the cave and shooting Ralwin with her revolver.

"Quick!" she said, before he had time to speak. "The report of that shot will have been heard outside most likely. We must be ready to fight our way through to freedom."

Snatching up the papers that he had dropped in the struggle and hastily placing them in an inner pocket of his coat, Ross followed Lorna out of the cave, into the passage.

As they reached the entrance they were met by five or six of the outlaws to whom the firing had sounded an alarm. Both fired almost simultaneously. A man dropped at each shot. Those who were not hurt fled in confusion from the danger, and before they rallied again as more of their comrades came hurrying to the scene, Lorna and her companion had run past and left them far behind.

"Follow me!" said Lorna, never hesitating an instant. "I know the best way out. We shall soon reach the wood."

Angry shouts and curses followed the fugitives. The whole camp was now in an uproar. Like bees disturbed in their hive, the outlaws poured from tent and cave to hear of what had taken place and join in a revengeful pursuit of those who had dared to defy them in their stronghold.

Scrambling over walls and rocks, forcing a way through thick clumps of bushes whose thorny leaves and branches tore the skin from their hands and ripped their clothes to pieces, Lorna and Carton Ross raced on, with never a pause nor backward look.

Some three hundred yards beyond the boundaries of the camp they reached the wood of which Lorna had spoken. It consisted of about a score of pine-trees and scattered patches of undergrowth.

A wide way inside, tethered to the low-hanging branch of a tree, were two horses, who pricked up their ears and neighed in friendly recognition of their young mistress.

"Here we are!" said Lorna, breathing quickly. "You take the white one. He's the stronger of the two."

Vaulting lightly into the saddle, they rode off like the wind. As they cleared the wood fierce shouting and a volley of rifle shots, that whistled over their heads, told them that they were seen by their foes.

Giving them the reins, they urged their horses on to full speed; but the noble brutes needed little urging, for instinct warned them of the danger ahead. Through winding defile, up the steep, slippery slopes of huge cliffs, and down rough, rock-strewn paths where other living creatures than the mountain goats but seldom ventured, they swept along at breakneck speed.

(Another grand instalment next week.)

A Cash Prize for Every Contributor to this Page.



Our Weekly Prize Page.

LOOK OUT FOR YOUR WINNING STORYETTE.

HAVE A BANANA!

The tramcar was full, and the meek little man sat by the side of his wife. At the next stop a man in khaki, whose head was swathed in bandages, entered the crowded compartment.

"George," said the lady to the meek little man, "make room for the poor wounded soldier."

The husband, somewhat grudgingly, gave up his seat to the man, and—reached out for a strap, while the newcomer sank gratefully into the vacant seat.

"My poor fellow," said the sympathetic lady, "how did you receive your injury—Germans?"

"No," replied the hero. "Banana-skin!"—Sent in by E. Lowe, Staffs.

NOT ALL THE TIME.

The class was being taken for the first time by the new teacher. The teacher, a lady, had asked questions of all the pupils except Tim, and it was now his turn to answer.

Poor Tim stuttered rather badly, and the new teacher, never having been in conversation with him before, jumped when the explosion commenced, in answer to her question.

After he had finished stammering, she looked at him in a very troubled way.

"Do you always stutter like that, my boy?" she asked. "Oh, n-n-o, m-m-ma'am!" Tim hastened, in the best way he could, to assure her. "Only w-w-when I t-t-talk!"—Sent in by G. Stephenson, Yorkshire.

NONE TO SPARE.

The motor-car dashed along the country road at a break-neck speed, much to the disgust of a tramp, who failed to get out of its way in time, with the result that he had his foot run over.

The driver immediately stopped, got out of his car, and went over to the tramp to express his sympathy and to ascertain the extent of his injuries. His exclamations of sorrow failed to appeal to the tramp, whose only thought was for damages.

"Forty pounds damages, that's what I want!" said the tramp.

"What! Forty pounds for a slightly injured foot!" said the motorist. "I'm not a millionaire!"

"No!" replied the tramp. "And I ain't a centipede!"—Sent in by H. Towler, Dalston, N.E.

SPOTTED.

Johnny's mother was very strict, and Johnny's mother had made a rule. The rule she had instituted was that a fine of one halfpenny should be made for every mark made on the tablecloth. One day Johnny was observed by his mother rubbing his finger for a long time over the cloth in the neighbour hood of his plate.

"John, what are you doing?" asked his mother at last.

"Nothing, mother! I was just trying to rub two spots into one!"—Sent in by J. Lillemann, Sheffield.

NOT OLD ENOUGH.

It was a cold December day, and for the sake of warmth a gang of navvies were working extra hard on their task of taking up the roadway, at a place just outside Manchester.

A tramp, a very ragged tramp, whose toes could be seen protruding through his boots, came along the road and stood watching the men at work for some time.

At last he approached them, and said:

"Mate, have any of yer got an old pair of brogues you could give me?"

The navvies all shook their heads, and expressed their sorrow at being unable to oblige him.

The navvies were resuming their work, when a witty Irishman, who for some time past had been making a careful study of the unfortunate tramp's boots, remarked:

"Shure, and ain't the ones you got on old enough for you?"—Sent in by W. Webb, London, S.E.

DRY ROT.

A certain country church was badly in need of repair, so the vicar decided to send to London for a well-known architect to come down and examine the building.

The architect arrived in due course, and, having chatted for some time with the vicar over the necessary work to be done, was escorted to the church by an old deacon, who was to act as his guide. The architect, who was himself a very conscientious man, tested the walls and pillars with the most minute care.

Arrived at some rafters, the architect tapped them with his stick, at the same time saying:

"Dry rot."

"Dry rot!" replied the deacon. "That's nothing to what we get in the pulpit!"—Sent in by F. Murray, Ilford.

TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS.

The service at the village church had finished, and the vicar of the parish was entering the vestry. Just as he got in the doorway he was accosted to see his vergen, an old man, take a two-shilling-piece out of the plate, in which he had collected the offertory.

The good minister pondered for some time over what he had witnessed, trying to puzzle out the best way of bringing the accusation before the vergen in such a way that the old man would be really ashamed for his indiscretion.

So on the next Sunday the minister called the vergen on one side after the service.

"I was most grieved," he said to the vergen, "to see you take a two-shilling-piece from the collection last Sunday!"

The vergen looked completely worried before he blurted out:

"Why, sir, you don't mean that old two-shilling-piece of mine? Why, I have started the collection off with that this last fifteen years!"—Sent in by W. Phinn, Walthamstow.

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