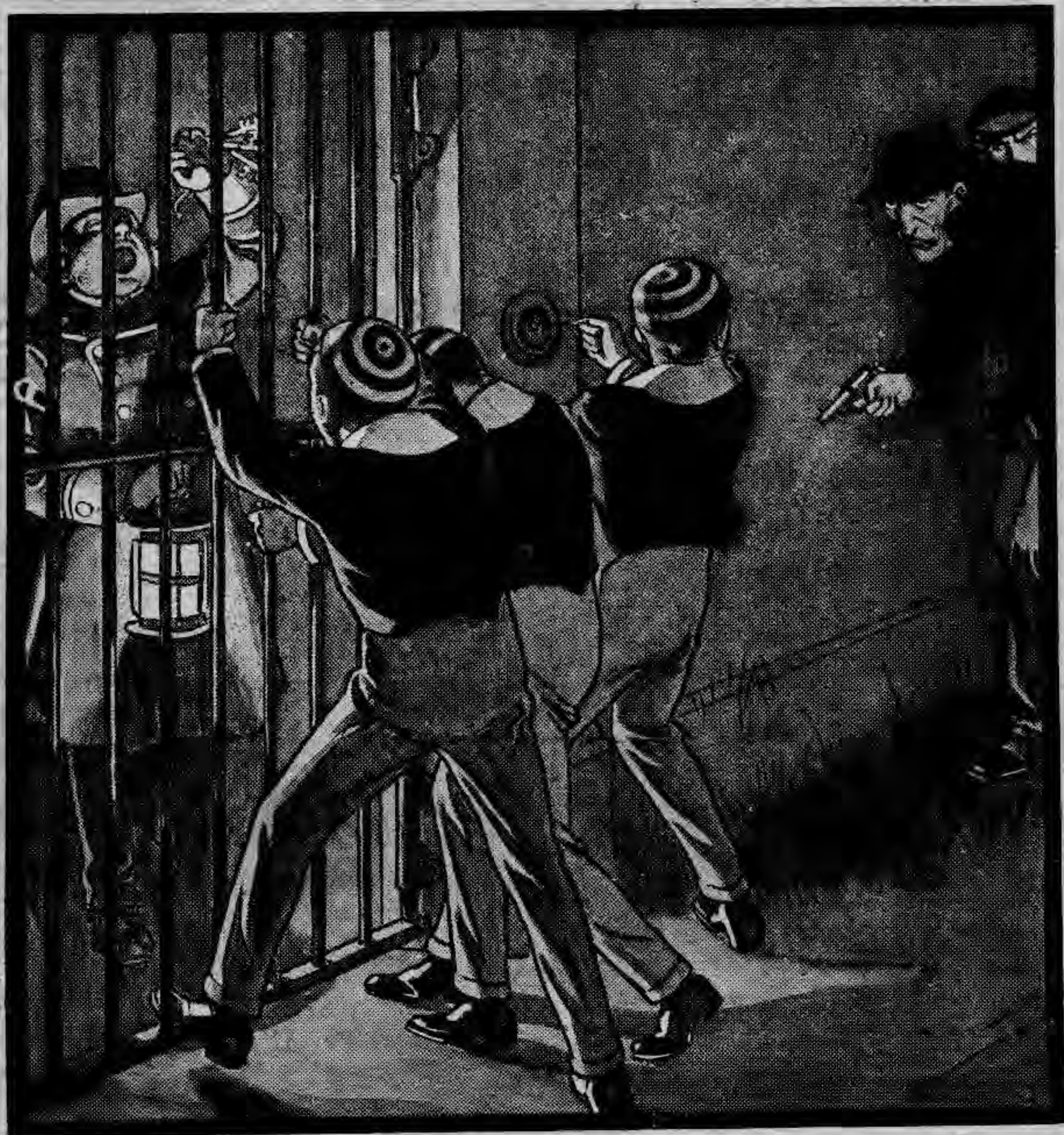
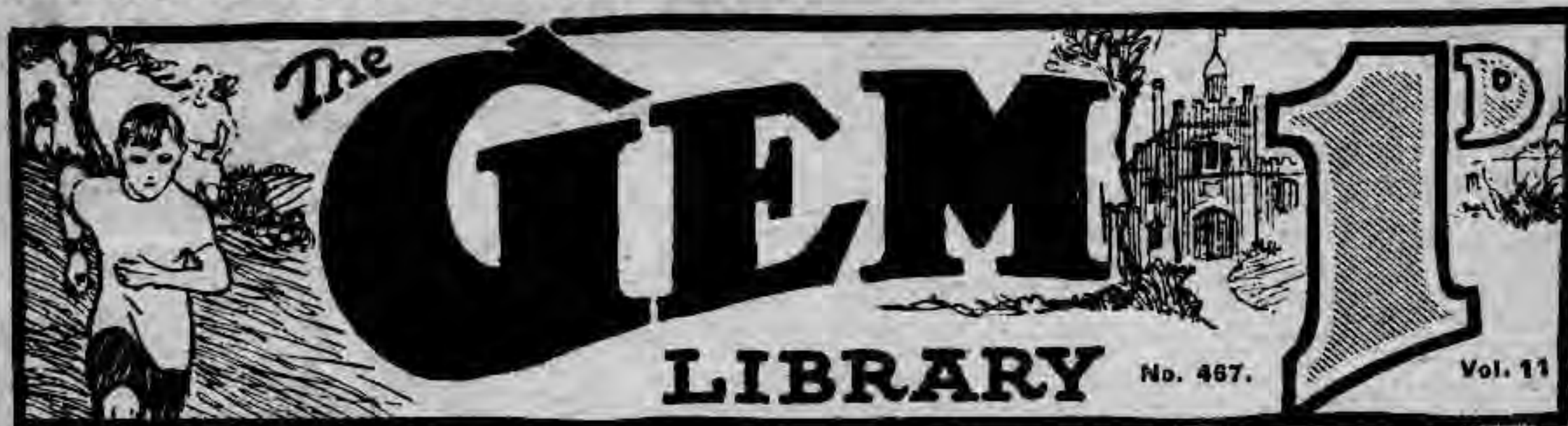


A PAL IN PERIL!

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



PURSUED!

(A Dramatic Scene in the Grand Long Complete Story in this issue.)



THIS WEEK'S CHAT



Whom to Write to — — — — —
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EVERY MONDAY — EVERY FRIDAY — EVERY SATURDAY.

For Next Wednesday :

"LEVISON FOR ST. JIM'S!"

By Martin Clifford.

The title of this story will be in itself quite a tonic to a number of our readers. So many of them are anxious to see Ernest Levison's reformation put beyond all manner of doubt. Last week's yarn showed the one-time black sheep firmly determined, for the sake of his young brother, if not for his own, to put behind him his old ways. Next week's will show with what difficulties he met in sticking to his resolution—difficulties from outside this time. Racke, Crooke, & Co. do not relish the desertion of their old crony, and when Tom Merry gives Levison a place in the St. Jim's team v. Greyfriars their discontent comes to a head. What steps they take, and against what opposition Levison major makes good, you can read next week in as good a story as has ever appeared in this paper—

"LEVISON FOR ST. JIM'S!"

ANOTHER AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT.

From New Jersey a reader writes: "I do not think 'Stars and Stripes' uses very much judgment or reason when he writes a letter, and it appears to me that he really does not know what he is kicking about." My correspondent goes on to tell me the story of George Washington and the cherry-tree, which he seems to think I may not have heard. No such luck! I have known that old chestnut—oh, my mistake, cherry-tree!—for—well, for more years than I am going to admit. I wonder whether all my readers know what some English wit says is the true version.

It runs thus. Not Washington, but William Shakespeare, chopped the chestnut—cherry-tree, was it?—all right! And when his father tackled him, the reply of the immortal William was: "I cannot tell a lie, father! Ben Jonson did it, with his little axe!" This is not so moral a story as the Yankee version. On the other hand, it is much funnier—and, I am afraid, much more likely!

"Uncle Sam, junior," as my New Jersey correspondent asks to be called, then goes on to say some quite nice things about John Bull. If that gentleman gets a licking handed to him, he says, John can take it like a sportsman. He fights his own battles, and does not ask the Japanese or anyone else to fight them for him. "Uncle Sam, junior" asks for the name and address of "Stars and Stripes." I cannot give them, not having them, though I received the other day a Christmas-card and an ode to Mr. Frank Richards from my earlier correspondent, whose address I shall be pleased to send on if he will let me have it.

THE CORRESPONDENCE BAG.

My readers must not imagine that because the letters referred to in this page are so often those with whose writers I disagree that the majority of the letters I receive are of that kind. Not a bit of it! Every day brings me a heap of appreciative missives, and it gives me great pleasure to read these, and to answer them, as I try to do, as early as possible. But they do not usually afford much matter for comment, and as they are all very much in the same tone, to print them is out of the question. I have lately taken up subjects on which there is room for some difference of opinion, and have given some of my readers an opportunity to express their opinions, in spite of the fact that they differ entirely from my own.

Of course, I have expressed my own opinion, too; but that is only natural. I admit that I have an advantage in the fact that it is always possible for me to have the last word; but, honestly, I don't think I have abused that advantage. Some arguments are really too silly to deserve the name.

One on the Irish question amused me very much. Several North-country readers wrote to say that I was quite in error in my views on the Irish and their wrongs. They know it because their school teacher, a Scots lady, has told them about the wrongs of Ireland, they say.

But I have never denied the old wrongs of Ireland. There are black pages in the history of England's dealings with the Green Isle. But they are in the past. There have been slights to Ireland—the kind of slights which a proud and sensitive nation was bound to feel—quite lately. But there is a difference between tyranny and slights. The mistakes of a stupid Cabinet Minister or Ministers do not in any sense prove the dislike of Ireland by Englishmen that some of my Irish readers assume. They are not the same thing as wilful misgovernment, and they should not be confused with it. And most certainly they are not things of sufficient importance to justify Ireland's taking on the role of a neutral in a war of Right against Wrong!

I am not prepared to admit that my young friends' teacher is a better judge of the matter than I am. Even if the information she gave them was absolutely accurate—and I don't mean to suggest it was not—there remains the doubt as to whether they got as good a grip on the lesson of it as they imagine!

OUR NOTICES.

Football.

Matches Wanted by :

ASH VILLA F.C. (15-16)—3-mile r.—R. Hudson, 346, Edge Lane, Liverpool.

ST. MICHAEL'S F.C. (16-17)—10-mile r.—F. W. Warren, 75, Star St., Edgware Rd., W.

MERSEY VILLA F.C. (15-16)—3-mile r.—L. Murphy, 142, Stanley Rd., Kirkdale, Liverpool.

HENDON ROVERS F.C. (15-16)—4-mile r.—H. Adams, 36, York Rd., West Hendon.

HAMILTON ROVERS F.C. (13)—1-mile r.—A. Da Costa, 27, Hamilton Avenue, Chapelton, Leeds.

HOLLINGWOOD PARK VILLA F.C. (12-14)—2½-mile r.—J. Summerscales, 11, Wicken Tree Lane, Failsworth, Manchester.

HALL GREEN S.S.F.C. (14-17)—6-mile r.; also need four good players.—W. Evans, Little Moss, Scholar Green, Stoke-on-Trent.

Other Football Notices.

GREENHAYES F.C. want a few good players.—J. Kean, 26, Seymour St., Hulme, Manchester.

WHITECHAPEL F.C. (12) want seven players.—C. Miller, 48, Brady St. Buildings, Whitechapel, E.

A. Westrup, Westcroft House, Weston Grove Rd., Woolston, wants to join club in Woolston or Southampton; anywhere on left.

G. A. Russell, 173, Locher Rd., Dundee, wants players for club he is forming.—Write, or call Thursdays between 6.30 and 8.

W. Twipie, jun., 316, Cricklewood Lane, Cricklewood, N.W., wants to join club (17½); outside or inside right.

HOLBORN JUNIORS F.C. (15-16½) want two or three good players; also matches.—A. Denyer, 9, Duncan Buildings, Baldwin Gardens, Grays Inn Rd., E.C.

A. Rick, 101, Arlington Rd., Camden Town, N. (14), wants to join club within 8 miles—any position; best in goal.

Strongly-built lads between 15 and 16 wanted to join footer club in Wakefield.—Write Sec., 4, South Gate, Wakefield.

Your Editor

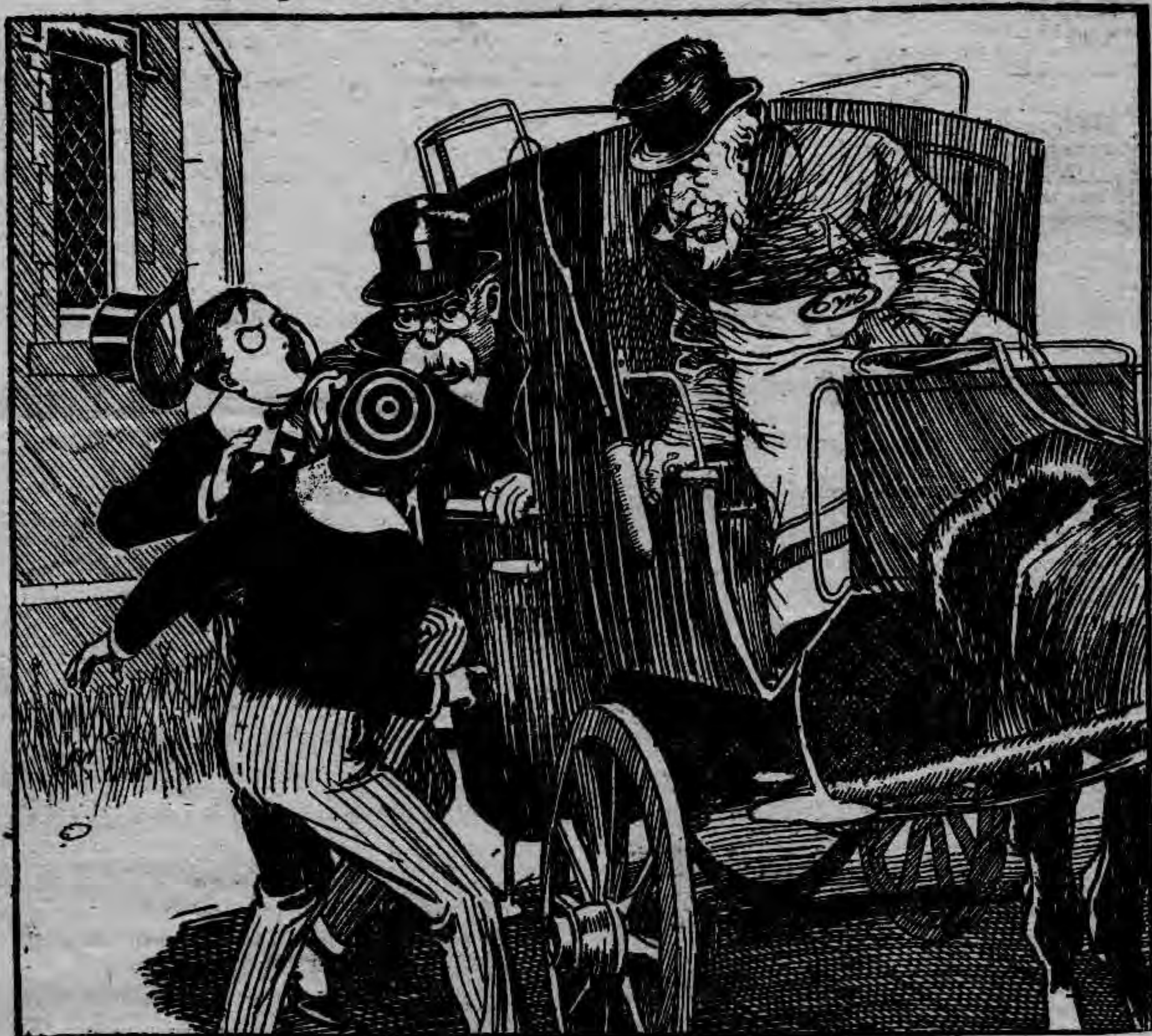
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A PAL IN PERIL!

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



Herr Schneider suddenly reached out of the cab. His fat and heavy hand smote the juniors in turn, boxing their ears with terrific vim. Smack! smack! (See Chapter 2.)

CHAPTER 1. Noblesse Oblige.

THREE cheery faces in Study No. 6 at St. Jim's were grinning.
Jack Blake, George Herries, and Robert Arthur Digby seemed to be highly entertained.
They were watching their elegant and noble chum, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.
Arthur Augustus was quite unaware of the fact.

He was seated in the study armchair, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, polishing his eyeglass thoughtfully upon the corner of a cambric handkerchief.

There was a deep wrinkle of thought on his aristocratic brow.

For five minutes at least the Honourable Arthur Augustus had been plunged in deep reflection, polishing his eyeglass the while, perhaps as an aid to thought.

The powerful brain of Arthur Augustus was evidently at

Next Wednesday:

"LEVISON FOR ST. JIM'S!" AND "FOES OF FORTUNE!"

No. 467. (New Series.) Vol. 11.

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work on a deep problem, and his chums watched him in grinning anticipation.

The swell of St. Jim's looked up at last. He seemed surprised to see three grinning faces regarding him.

"Bai Jove! What are you chaps gwinnin' at?" he inquired.

The three juniors chortled.

"Well?" said Blake inquiringly.

"Well?" said Herries.

"Well?" said Digby.

Arthur Augustus looked puzzled. He jammed his eyeglass—now well polished—into his eye, and surveyed the three Fourth-Formers.

"I don't quite comprehend, deah boys," he said.

"What's the result?"

"The result?" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Yes. You've been thinking for five minutes. I've timed you by the clock," said Blake. "That's more thinking than you've done all the term up to now."

"Weally, Blake—"

"So we want to know the result. I suppose you haven't wasted all that brain-fag for nothing?"

"Weally, you know—"

"Have you been thinking of a scheme for getting tea for four for threepence-halfpenny?" asked Blake. "If you have, tell us how it's to be done."

"I have not been thinkin' about tea, Blake."

"I suppose you've been working out which chap we're to stick for a loan till Saturday?"

"Certainly not!"

"Are we going to try Tom Merry, or Talbot, or Clive?"

"Pway don't wowwy about twiffes now, Blake! I have been thinkin', and I have decided that it is up to us."

"Now we're getting to it," said Blake. "It's up to us to get tea somehow, or else go down and feed in Hall. How's it to be done?"

"I wepeat, Blake, that I have not been thinkin' about tea. Nevah mind tea. Herr Schneidah—"

"You've been thinking about Herr Schneider?" yelled Blake.

"Yaas; wathah!"

"Well, of all the asses!" said Blake, in disgust.

"Of all the chumps!" remarked Dig.

"Couldn't you find something better than a Hun to think about, especially at tea-time?" demanded Herries.

"I wegard it as being up to us!" said Arthur Augustus firmly. "It is twue that Herr Schneidah is a Hun, and wathah a Tartah. I do not like Huns."

"Has it taken you five minutes by the clock to think that out, fathead?"

"I wefuse to be called a fathead, Blake! I wepeat that I do not like Huns, and Herr Schneidah is wathah a Hunnish Hun. But he is leavin' St. Jim's this evenin' for a fortnight, owin' to his being seedy."

"Blow Herr Schneider!" said Blake. "I'd rather he were leaving St. Jim's to be interned! Let's hope he'll have a relapse, and stay away more than a fortnight. Now, what about tea?"

"Wats! I wegard it as bein' up to this study to set an example," said Arthur Augustus. "My ideah is for the fellows to give Herr Schneidah a send-off."

"A what?" shouted Blake and Herries and Digby together.

"A send-off, deah boys! Herr Schneidah is feahfully unpoplah, and ewevybody will be glad to see him go."

"Hear, hear!"

"But there is such a thing as good mannahs," said Arthur Augustus severely. "I think it would be a gwaeeful act to give him a send-off. We do not like Huns, of course, and especially Schneidah. For that weason, deah boys, it is up to us to tweat the old sport with scwupulous politeness. Noblesse oblige, you know. It would pprove that we do not allow the war to interfere with our good mannahs. I pwopose a cwowd of fellows seein' him off, and—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Duffer!"

"I wefuse to be called a duffah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wegard this as a wippin' ideah. I wegard it as necessawy to place good mannahs befoah ewevythin' else, even in dealin' with a Hun. I twust you fellows are goin' to back me up."

Blake and Herries and Digby looked at their noble chum as if they could eat him.

They had wondered what the outcome of Arthur Augustus' unusually deep cogitations would be. But they had not expected this.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet.

"Come on, deah boys!" he said briskly. "I have thought."

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SALE.

"THE DESERTER!"

it out, and settled that it is the wight thing to do. Come and help me wally the othah fellows!"

Blake looked at his chums.

"He's asked for it!" he said. "Asked for it as plain as he can speak! Let him have it!"

"You bet!" said Herries and Digby promptly.

"Bai Jove! Wharrer you at?" yelled Arthur Augustus, as his chums rushed upon him.

Blake & Co. did not explain. They left their actions to speak for themselves. And their actions spoke quite plainly. Arthur Augustus soon knew what they were at. They collared the swell of St. Jim's, swept him off his feet, rushed him out of the study, and bumped him on the floor in the passage.

"Oh cwumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You uttah wuffians!"

"Now sit there and think it over again!" said Blake. And the three juniors returned to the study to discuss the important subject of tea.

Arthur Augustus sat and gasped. Three juniors of the Shell came along the passage from the stairs, and stopped to regard him.

"Hallo!" said Tom Merry. "Taking a rest?"

"Gwooh!"

"Isn't that rather a draughty place to sit down in?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Oh, deah!"

"Let me give you a hand up," said Manners.

"Yawwoh! Leggo my cah, you silly ass!" roared Arthur Augustus, scrambling to his feet.

"Well, I was only helping you up."

"I wegard you as a silly chump, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his ear. "Bai Jove! I am fwightfully dustay. I have a gwreat mind to give those wuffianly wottahs a feahful thwashin' all wound! Howevah, pewwaps you fellows will back me up. My ideah is to give old Schneidah a wippin' send-off, and if you fellows will wally wound—"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry. "Rally round, you chaps!"

The Terrible Three rallied round at once. They seized Arthur Augustus, and bumped him on the floor again. Then they walked on, grinning, leaving the swell of St. Jim's as they had found him.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The—the feahful wottahs!"

He jumped up to rush in pursuit of the Shell fellows, but paused. There was no time to be wasted if Herr Schneider was to be given his send-off. Arthur Augustus decided to postpone vengeance. Certainly the idea of giving the German master a send-off did not seem to be popular. But Arthur Augustus was a stickler. He tapped at the door of No. 5 and opened it. Julian and Kerruish, and Hammond and Reilly were at tea there.

"Trot in!" said Hammond hospitably. "Just in time, Gussy!"

"Thank you, Hammond; I have not come to tea. I want you fellows to back me up in giving Herr Schneidah a send-off, to show that there is no ill-feelin', you know."

"Phwat!" roared Reilly.

"But there is ill-feeling!" said Dick Julian. "We don't like Huns."

"Yaas, but good mannahs wequire a certain amount of self-abnegation, deah boy. I twust you are goin' to back me up. Yawwoh!" roared Arthur Augustus, as a loaf hurled by Reilly caught him on his waistcoat. "Gwoogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus was clean bowled. He sat down in the passage for the third time, and Kerruish kicked the door shut after him.

"Oh, cwumbs!" groaned Arthur Augustus, as he picked himself up. "Good mannahs seem to be at wathah a discount in this House. Howevah, I shall not give in."

And, leaving No. 5 severely alone, Arthur Augustus moved on to Study No. 7, and tapped at the door.

"Entrate!" sang out a clear, musical voice, and Arthur Augustus went in.

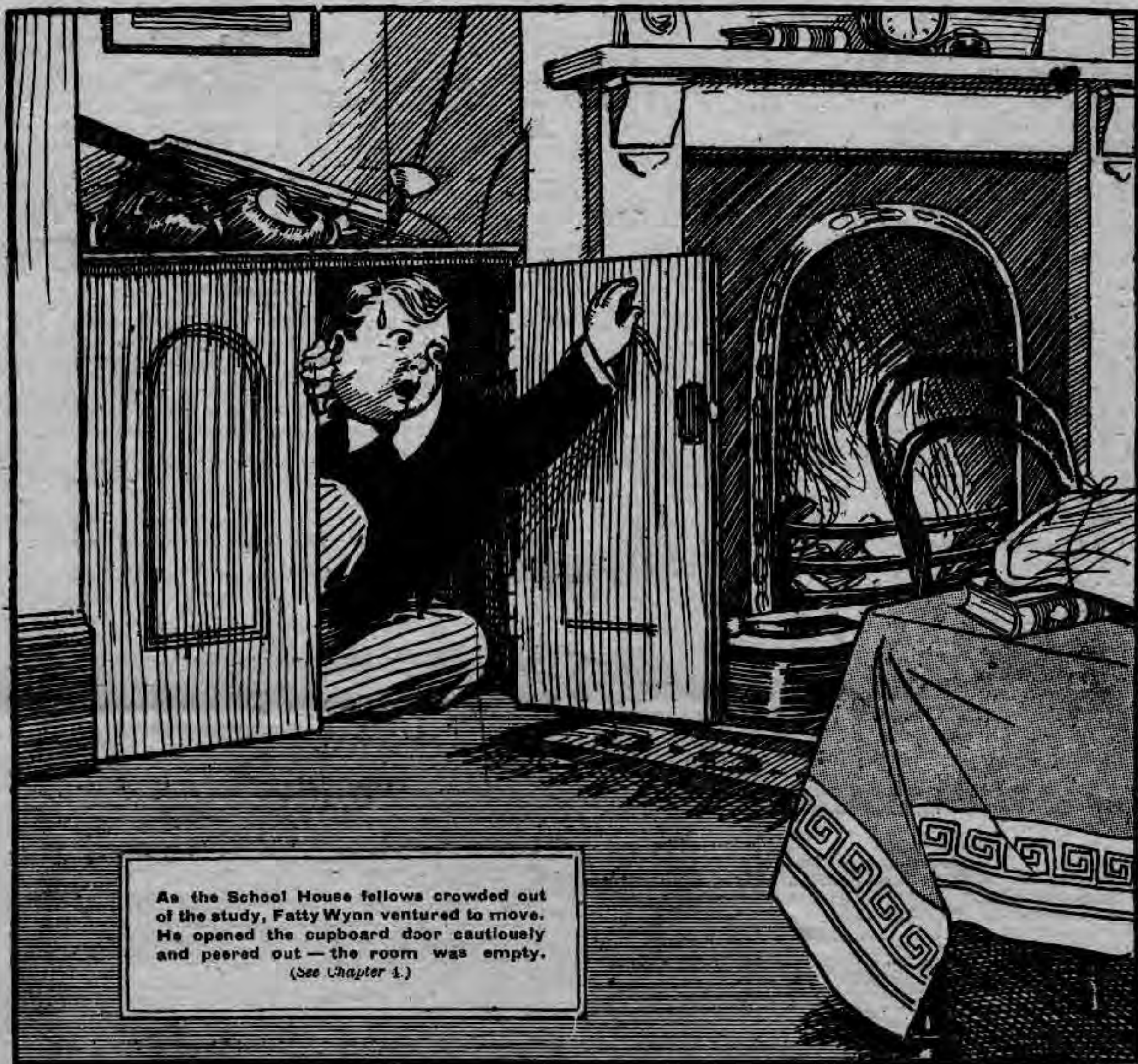
CHAPTER 2.

Not a Success.

THERE were three juniors in No. 7 Study, and they were at tea. They were Sidney Clive, the South African, Smith minor, and Contarini, the Italian junior. It was Contarini who had called out to D'Arcy to come in. Contarini spoke English like any other fellow at St. Jim's, but he sometimes used his own musical language without thinking.

"Sowwy to intewwupt, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus.

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As the School House fellows crowded out of the study, Fatty Wynn ventured to move. He opened the cupboard door cautiously and peered out—the room was empty.

(See Chapter 1.)

a little breathlessly. "I want you fellahs to back me up, you know."

"Any old thing," said Clive. "I heard somebody bumping in the passage. Who has been laying sacrilegious hands upon our Adolphus?"

"Weally, Clive—"

"Let him die the death!" said Clive seriously. "What shall we do to him—boil him in oil, or read one of Asquith's speeches to him?"

"You misappwehend me, Clive. You are awah that Herr Schneider has been seeday, and is leavin' the school for a change?"

"Yes; some other rotten Hun is coming in his place for a fortnight," said Smith minor. "I heard Kildare say so."

"Let's hope he'll get seedy, too," remarked Clive.

"Bai Jove, as Herr Schneidah is leavin' us, deah boys, I considah it would be a gwaceful act to give him a send-off."

"Well, you ass!" said Smith minor.

"Fathead!" said Clive.

"I wefuse to discuss the mattah with you, if you are goin' to use oppwobvious expwessions," said Arthur Augustus. "Contawini, I twust you will back me up, as you have bettah mannahs than these boundahs."

Giacomo Contarini grinned.

"Don't go, Jackeymo!" said Smith minor. "We're all jolly glad to see the last of the old Hun for a bit."

"Vero!" said Contarini. "I do not like Huns, D'Arcy."

"But it would be only a gwaceful act, Contawini. I

assuah you that it is the wight thing to do. You can wely on a fellah of tact and judgment, you know."

Contarini laughed, and rose to his feet.

"Jackeymo, you ass, sit down!" said Clive.

"Wats! Come with me, Jackeymo!" said Arthur Augustus.

"We sha'n't leave you any of the sardines, Jackeymo!" bawled Smith minor, as the Italian followed Arthur Augustus from the study. But even that dire threat did not make Contarini turn back. The Italian junior was very friendly with Arthur Augustus, and willing to oblige. Arthur Augustus sometimes entertained him by talking to him in his own language—as Arthur Augustus fondly believed. Giacomo always wore a merry smile when Gussy was talking Italian to him, and Gussy felt that it was a boon and a blessing to him to hear his own tongue in a strange land.

There was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle.

"Bai Jove," ejaculated Arthur Augustus, "he's goin'! There's no time to wally the west; and—and powwaps they would not come. Howevah, we can give Herr Schneidah a send-off on our own, deah boy."

"Andiamo," grinned Contarini.

The two juniors hurried downstairs. The cab that was to convey the departing German master to the station was already rolling away from the School House in the dusky evening.

"He is gone," smiled Contarini.

"We can catch him at the gates," said Arthur Augustus.

"Va bene."

Having taken so much trouble, and having induced at least

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NEXT WEDNESDAY: "LEVISON FOR ST. JIM'S!"

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one fellow to rally round, Arthur Augustus was not to be hindered from carrying out his scheme. He rushed after the cab with his comrade. The vehicle slowed down at the school gates, where Taggles stood with a lantern, and D'Arcy called to the driver to stop.

A red, ill-tempered face looked out of the cab. Herr Schneider was not a pleasant-tempered gentleman, and his seediness made him more morose than ever. He scowled at the sight of Contarini in the lantern-light. The German detested Italians even more than he detested British boys.

"Vat is dis?" he exclaimed angrily. "Vy for you stop mein cab?"

"Pway excuse me, Herr Schneidah," said Arthur Augustus, coming to the cab window. "Undah the cires—"

"Vat is it? Have you run message from te Head?"

"Nunno! I—"

"Caro, signore—" began Contarini.

"The fact is, Herr Schneidah—"

"Dis is a drick to make me lose mein drain!" exclaimed Herr Schneider savagely. "D'Arcy, I reports you to te Head."

"Bai Jove!"

"And you also, Contarini, you young rascal!"

"You misappwehend, Herr Schneidah," said Arthur Augustus, with a great deal of dignity. "If you will kindly allow me to explain— Gweat Scott!"

Herr Schneider suddenly reached out of the cab.

Smack! Smack!

"Yawwoh!"

"Per Bacco!"

Herr Schneider's fat and heavy hand smote the juniors in turn, boxing their ears with terrific vim.

Arthur Augustus staggered in one direction, Giacomo Contarini in another. Herr Schneider snorted at the grinning driver.

"Drive on mit you, ain't it?" he shouted.

The cab rolled on, and turned out of the gates of St. Jim's. Taggles, grinning, closed the gates after the vehicle.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rubbed his ear dazedly.

"Bai Jove," he gasped, "what a feahful Hun! The howwid beast has stwuck me, when I was goin' to give him a send-off! Gwoogh!"

"Oh, the rotter!" groaned Contarini. "La mia povera testa! He has made my head sing with his dirty German paw. Ow, ow!"

"The howwid wottah misundahstood, Contawini."

"Yow-ow!" groaned Contarini dismally. "You ass!"

"He did not know we were goin' to wish him a pleasant journey, deah boy."

"I wish him a most unpleasant journey!" growled Contarini. "I hope that some of his countrymen's bombs will fall upon him! Oh, my head!"

"Bai Jove, I am sowwy!"

"Siete stolto!" said Contarini. "Stoltissimo!" And he tramped away to the School House, still rubbing his head ruefully.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I am neably suah that stolto means stupid in Italian. I am afwaid that Contawini's mannabs have suffahed since he has been at St. Jim's. Oh, my eah!"

And Arthur Augustus went in, with a very red ear and with his head singing. The send-off of Herr Schneider had not been a success.

Arthur Augustus was looking very grim when he came back into Study No. 6. He found Blake & Co. at tea, funds having been raised along the passage. The three juniors grinned as he came in.

"Seen the Schneider bird off?" chuckled Blake.

"Oh, wats!"

"What's the matter with your ear, Cussy?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at, you uttah asses!" said Arthur Augustus, rubbing his crimson ear. "I have been stwuck by a wotten Hun."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Blake and Herries and Digby.

"It is not a laughin' mattah. The uttah wottah misundahstood me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He thought I was playin' a twick to make him lose his twain."

Blake & Co. shrieked.

"He would not have thought so if he had not been a wotten Hun. Aftah this, I shall wefuse to waste any good mannabs on Huns. The howwid wottahs do not undahstand it. And I fail to see anythin' whatevah, Blake, to cause this wibald mewwiment."

But Blake & Co. evidently did, for the ribald merriment continued for quite a long time.

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NOW ON SALE.

"THE DESERTER!"

CHAPTER 3.

A House Raid.

FATTY WYNN'S eyes gleamed. Figgins & Co. of the New House were sauntering under the elms of the quadrangle, chatting. Or, rather, Figgins and Kerr were chatting, and Fatty Wynn was thinking that it was tea-time. Figgins and Kerr were deeply interested in the forthcoming football match with Greyfriars and the problem whether Tom Merry would have sense enough to play a majority of New House fellows in the St. Jim's Junior Eleven. Fatty Wynn, who was going to keep goal, as usual, for St. Jim's, was interested in the footer match, too; but at the approach of a meal-time all lesser matters were banished from Fatty's mind.

Fatty Wynn's thoughts were upon tea, and he had ventured a hint every now and then that it was time to visit the tuck-shop for supplies—hints that passed unheeded. And then Fatty's eyes fell upon three juniors who had come in at the school gates, and his eyes gleamed.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther had come in, and each of them was carrying a bag or a parcel. Fatty Wynn never saw a parcel without suspecting that it might contain tuck.

"Hold on, Figgy!" he said breathlessly.

Figgy didn't hold on. Figgy was deep in footer-jaw.

"Of course, chaps like Talbot and Blake and Tom Merry will have to play," Figgins said. "And perhaps Levison of the Fourth might be put in—I don't say no. But in a game like the Greyfriars match we want the very best team St. Jim's can put into the field, and that means at least six New House chaps in it—if that fathead Merry can only be made to see it."

"Figgy, old chap—"

"Oh, dry up, Fatty! I know you're hungry!" said Figgins testily.

"Look at those bounders!" whispered Fatty Wynn, catching Figgins by the arm. "Looks like a feed—what!"

"My hat! It will be a big feed if that's all tuck!" said Kerr, glancing at the burden of the Terrible Three.

"Well, let's see," said Fatty Wynn. "We're at war with the School House, ain't we? And in war you always raid the enemy when you get a chance. It's our duty as patriotic New House chaps to raid the enemy—"

"Especially if it's tuck!" grinned Kerr.

"Well, if it isn't tuck, they can keep it," said Fatty Wynn.

"But if it is tuck, we're going to lift it. That's really war-time economy, you know."

"Ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on, and nail 'em before they get by!" urged Fatty Wynn. "Never mind jawing football now; this is important."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins. Figgy was always ready for a raid upon the rivals of his House.

Figgins & Co. hurried to intercept the Terrible Three. Figgins raised a commanding hand.

"Halt!"

The Shell fellows halted. They had to, as Figgins & Co. were lined up in their path. The Terrible Three were taken at a disadvantage. Tom Merry had both hands occupied, and Lowther and Manners were heavily laden.

"Don't play the giddy ox now," said Tom Merry.

"What's in those parcels?"

"Find out!"

"That means tuck!" said Fatty Wynn. "Go for 'em!"

"Look here—" roared Tom Merry.

But the New House trio did not stop to argue. They rushed to the attack. The laws of war, as understood by the rivals of St. Jim's, fully justified the interception of supplies to the enemy—in fact, the goods were contraband. In a moment the bags and parcels were on the ground, and the juniors were struggling for the possession of them.

"Buck up!" gasped Figgins. "Get off with the loot, Kerr, while we handle these bounders!"

"Rescue!"

"Halle! Pile in!" yelled Blake, coming out of the tuck-shop and spotting the affray. "Back up, School House!"

"Yaas, wathah! Wush the boundahs, deah boys!" shouted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, waving his eyeglass in great excitement.

"School House! School House!"

Blake & Co. were on the scene in a few seconds. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence came racing up from the direction of the New House to the help of Figgins & Co. Kangaroo of the Shell, Clifton Dane and Glyn, Julian and Kerruish sped up from different directions. The affray became a regular battle. Kerr, dashing off with a parcel in each hand, was intercepted by Clive of the Fourth, and they rolled on the ground together.

"Back up, New House!" yelled Figgins.

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"Go it, School House! Give 'em socks!"

"Huwway! Give 'em jip, deah boys!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Cave!" yelled Hammond from the distance. "Prefect!"

Kildare of the Sixth was bearing down upon the scene.

The scrimmage ceased suddenly. But the School House fellows were in greater force, and they remained in possession of the plunder. Figgins & Co. scuttled off for their House. Tom Merry & Co. caught up the disputed bags and parcels, and rushed for cover.

Kildare arrived upon the scene, frowning, and found only a few scattered caps there, and grinned good-humouredly. The battle was over.

"Rotten luck!" said Figgins, as the trio foregathered in the New House. "Jolly nearly had the lot!"

"It must have been tuck!" said Fatty Wynn mournfully. "They wouldn't have put up such a scrap for anything else. What a feed we've missed!"

"A miss is as good as a mile!" grinned Kerr. "We shall have to stand our own tea, after all!"

Fatty Wynn looked quite dismal over the frugal tea in Figgy's study. Frugal teas were quite the thing in war-time; but Fatty's thoughts dwelt upon the feed which had been missed.

"They must be going to have a celebration," he said sadly. "Perhaps going to celebrate old Schneider going, you know, with a whacking feed. They won't ask us after this."

"Still thinking of the fleshpots of Egypt?" chuckled Figgins. "Have the last sardine, Fatty, and be happy!"

Fatty Wynn helped himself to the last sardine, but he did not look happy.

"I wonder whether there's a chance yet?" he remarked. "If that was tuck, you know, there's a whacking lot of it. What about raiding the School House?"

"Fathead!" said Figgins politely.

"Well, we might do it by strategy, you know," persisted Fatty Wynn—"might take 'em by surprise, like the chaps at the Front do with the German trenches, you know. Look here, I'm jolly well going to have a try!"

"They'll scalp you, fathead!"

"I'm going to risk it!" persisted Fatty doggedly. "It's a sin and a shame to waste all that tuck in war-time. And it is waste, letting the School House rotters have it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's a meeting of the N.H.J.A.D.S., Fatty," said Kerr—the N.H.J.A.D.S. being the New House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society.

But Fatty Wynn did not seem to hear. He left the study, evidently bent upon trying his luck in the enemy's quarters.

Fatty Wynn was a strategist in his way. He did not march up to the entrance of the School House; that would have been asking for a bumping. He scuttled round the building, and entered by a side door that led to the House-dame's quarters. Juniors had no business in that part of the House, but Fatty Wynn did not remain there long. He knew his way about the building, and in a few minutes he was in the upper regions by way of the back stairs.

The early winter darkness was setting in, but the lights were not yet on in the Shell passage, which favoured Fatty Wynn. Two or three juniors came in or out of their studies without noticing him.

Fatty paused outside Tom Merry's door. He had no doubt that the loot was there. There was no sound from the study. His luck was good. The Terrible Three were not in their quarters. The New House junior opened the door cautiously. The study was dark, save for a faint glow from the grate.

"Good egg!" murmured Fatty.

He slipped into the study, closing the door behind him. Upon the table, dimly visible in the gloom, were a number of bags and parcels, evidently not yet opened. The plunder was right under his fat nose, and his eyes gleamed with anticipation. And just as his plump fingers were beginning on the string of the nearest parcel there came a tramp of feet and a buzz of voices in the passage.

"Oh, my hat!"

Fatty swung round in dismay.

He heard Tom Merry's voice among the others—half a dozen at least. Tom Merry was coming back to his study, and apparently bringing a crowd of fellows with him. The raider was fairly caught.

He knew what to expect if he was found there. The School House juniors were quite sure to make an awful example of a New House fellow caught in the act of raiding their quarters.

Fatty Wynn looked wildly round the study for a place of concealment. It was no use dodging under the table; there was no cover. There was a screen in one corner, but it was in a state that made it quite easy to see anything behind it. The study cupboard was the only resource. The fat Fourth-Former made a dive for it, and plunged in the lower part of the cupboard, among all kinds of lumber stacked away there—

cricket-stumps, old boxes, disused footer boots, empty jam-jars, and all sorts and conditions of things.

There was just about room for Fatty Wynn to stow himself in the midst of the miscellaneous articles, several of which rolled and clattered round him. He drew the cupboard door shut, and crouched, palpitating, afraid to move lest something should clatter down and betray his presence, and wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had never thought of raiding Tom Merry's study.

CHAPTER 4.

Fatty Wynn Makes Discoveries.

TOM MERRY threw open the door of the study.

"Wait a minute while I strike a light," he said.

"Dwaw the blind first, Tom Mewwy. Wemembah the lightin' vegulations."

"You draw the blind, Gussy, while I get a match."

"Yaas, deah boy. Yawoooooh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Yow-ow! I have knocked my beastly shin against a beastly chair!" wailed Arthur Augustus, in tones of anguish.

"Never mind; I don't suppose you've damaged it," said Monty Lowther. "Those chairs have stood a lot of hard knocks in their time."

"You uttah ass! I am not thinkin' of your wotten chair, but of my beastly shin!" yelled Arthur Augustus.

"Are you going to draw the blind, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, striking a match.

"Yawooooh!"

"Remember the lighting regulations, you know."

"Blow the lightin' vegulations!"

Tom Merry chuckled, and drew the blind, and then applied the match to the gas. Arthur Augustus rubbed his chin ruefully.

"Got the things here, I see," remarked Blake, glancing at the parcels on the table.

"Yes; got the lot. The New House rotters jolly nearly raided them, though. They never guessed what was in them."

"Jolly lucky we came up, or they'd have bagged the lot!" said Herries.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"May as well get them undone," said Digby.

Fatty Wynn, in the depths of the cupboard, suppressed a groan. The great feed was evidently coming off, and he was not to take part in it! He was to listen to the sounds of feasting, unsharing, like a plump Peri at the gate of Paradise! Fatty Wynn realised at that moment what the tortures of Tantalus must have been like.

"Well, these things look all right!" remarked Manners.

Fatty's mouth watered.

"I should jolly well think they do!" said Tom Merry warmly. "We spent about an hour with old Wiggs going over them at his shop."

Fatty blinked in the darkness of the cupboard. Mr. Wiggs, of Rylcombe, was a hatter, costumier, and several other things; but Fatty had never heard of tuck being purchased at his establishment.

"I fancy those New House asses thought it was tuck!" chuckled Lowther. "I could see the hungry gleam in Fatty Wynn's eye."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All the better! They won't guess what's on!" remarked Blake.

"No fear!"

Fatty Wynn almost groaned. It wasn't tuck after all—whatever it was. He had ventured into the lion's den for nothing, and now he was curled up in the cupboard in a most uncomfortable position, with pins and needles already creeping along his fat limbs. And it wasn't tuck!

"One of you chaps call Contarini," said Tom Merry. "He's in his study, I think."

"I'll call him," said Dig.

He left the study, returning in a few minutes with the Italian junior. Giacomo Contarini was smiling good-humouredly, but he looked a little surprised.

"You want me, amici?" he asked.

"Eh? What on earth's amecchee?" asked Manners.

Contarini laughed.

"Sousate me—I mean, excuse me! Amici—that is friends. Is it that you want me for something?"

"Exactly!" said Tom Merry. "Shut the door, Gussy. In the first place, Jackeymo, it's a dead secret. You mustn't whisper a word outside this study, especially for the New House chaps to hear."

Fatty Wynn grinned in the cupboard. He was getting interested now. As a scout in the enemy's country, he was entitled to hear the enemy's plans if he could. And he had not much choice in the matter, for to show himself was to ask for a terrific ragging.

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"Tutto segreto," said Contarini, "I will say no word. But what is it?"

"This is a meeting of the School House Dramatic Society," explained Tom Merry. "We're getting up a new play. We're not going to let Figgins & Co. get on to it, because they'd muck it up for us if they could. We mucked up their last play, of course! It was rot! This is a specially corking idea, and until the announcement comes out we're keeping it dark. Figgins would think nothing of boning the whole idea, you know."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"We want you to take a character," went on Tom. "You can act, of course? All Italians can do those things!"

"Come, vuoi," said Contarini cheerily. "I am at your service."

"You see, it's really a play written round you," said Tom. "We haven't written it yet. We're all going to lend a hand."

"Written round me?" ejaculated Contarini.

"Yes. The title is 'The Kidnapped Kid; or, the Hunted Huns,'" said Tom impressively.

"Bai Jove! That's wathah a takin' title, Tom Mewwy!"

"You see, it's founded on what happened to you, Jackeymo," explained Tom Merry. "When you came to St. Jim's, some German rotters tried to kidnap you, you remember—"

"I am not likely to forget, caro amico," grinned Contarini. "Neither shall I forget that you fellows saved me from the Tedeschi."

"It was up to us to down the wotton Huns, deah boy."

"So you see the idea?" said Tom. "The hero of the play is going to be an Italian chap at school—same as you—the son of an illustrious Italian statesman. A gang of rotten Huns try to kidnap him—same as they did you—and a lot of splendid chaps rescue him—"

"Same as us!" grinned Lowther.

"Well, yes," grinned Tom; "same as us. The Huns' idea is to get hold of the chap, and influence his father, the famous statesman, by threatening to kill him—that's true to life, you know. That's just what those rotters were going to do, I understand, if they'd collared you, Jackeymo."

"Sicuro," assented Jackeymo.

"The scene's laid in a public school," continued Tom—"same as St. Jim's. New boy—that's you—arrives. Comic scene where a chap who thinks he knows Italian talks to the new boy in his own language—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—" began Arthur Augustus D'Arcy warmly.

"Then a rotten Hun—that's Manners—"

"Whom are you calling a Hun?" demanded Manners.

"Fathead! That's your part in the play. A rotten Hun comes along and tries to kidnap the new kid, to yank him off somewhere—say a Zeppelin—"

"The Zeppelin to be introduced on the stage?" asked Lowther.

"Of course not, fathead! The Zepp's behind the scenes—or supposed to be. A Zeppelin touch will make the thing right up to date. Next scene: A room inside the Zepp, which is supposed to be flying through the air. The stage represents the cabin, or whatever they call it in a Zepp. The disgusting Hun—Manners—"

"Look here—"

"Manners has the Italian—that's you, Jackeymo—tied up to a mast, or something, threatening death by torture unless he writes a letter to his father, begging him to make peace with Germany, to save the kidnapped kid's life. Kidnapped kid refuses, and calls Manners names—I mean, calls the Hun names—and they put a wire round him to electrocute him. Glyn of the Shell can rig all that up. He knows about electricity, and wires, and things."

"Va bene," said Contarini, grinning.

"Just then a Hun rushes into the cabin with news that Robinson, V.C., is coming in an aeroplane—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And Jackeymo is saved from the torture. End of scene."

"The Huns in the Zepp would have to have jolly good eyes to recognise Robinson, V.C., after them in an aeroplane," said Herries.

"Well, they have good eyes," said Tom. "That's easily settled. You see, introducing Robinson will make the thing go with a bang."

"Yaas, wathah! Wobinson, V.C., is a wegulah wippah! Are you goin' to have the fight between the Zepp and the aeroplane in the next scene, Tom Mewwy?"

Tom Merry snorted.

"Yes; if you'll lend us a Zepp and an aeroplane for the purpose," he replied. "Otherwise, not. Next scene: The Zepp has fled, and landed in England somewhere—near the school. Party of chaps—Shell fellows—"

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"Fourth-Formers, you mean," said Blake.

"Well, both. Party of chaps find the Zepp, and there's a terrific scrap, and the prisoner is rescued. Of course, that's all only a rough outline. The thing's got to be written up," said Tom. "What do you think of the idea, Jackeymo?"

"It is a corkero!" said Contarini.

"Ha, ha! Top-hole, and first-class!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"And you're going to be the hero, Jackeymo," said Tom.

"Troppo gentile!"

"Eh? What do you mean by troppo gentile?"

"You are too good!"

"Oh, I see. You like the part?"

"Oh, molto, molto. Very much."

"Very mucho," said Lowther.

"Then it's a go," said Tom. "You shall lend a hand at writing the play. You can put some Italian into it. That will make it sound rather classic. Not too much, of course. We've got the costumes here. Got them in to-day—all we hadn't in stock. A ripping lot."

There was a knock at the door, and it opened. Levison of the Fourth looked in.

"You chaps want to see the Hun?" he asked.

"Oh, bother the Hun! What Hun?"

"A new 'un?" asked Monty Lothar, who never let slip an opportunity for a pun, good or bad—generally bad.

"The Hun who's taking Schneider's place for a fortnight," said Levison. "He's just come. Jawing to Railton in the hall."

"Bai Jove! I heard that it was an English chap who was comin' in Schneider's place—chap named McCracken," said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, his name's McCracken—I heard Railton mention it," grinned Levison—"but he's a Hun right enough by his looks."

Arthur Augustus sniffed.

"One of those wotton natuwalised Huns who have taken Bwedish names!" he said. "I weally considah it ought to be stopped. If my name were McCwacken, I would wite to the 'Times' about it."

"Let's have a look at him," said Blake. "There's a German lesson due to-morrow."

"You can see him from the stairs without being spotted," said Levison.

The juniors were all curious to see the new Hun, and they followed Levison down the passage to the head of the stairs. It was Fatty Wynn's opportunity.

The fat Fourth Former was pins and needles all over by this time, and he felt that he could not have stood it much longer without betraying his presence.

As the School House fellows crowded out of the study Fatty Wynn ventured to move. He opened the cupboard door cautiously and peered out. The room was empty. With a deep sigh of relief, Fatty Wynn squeezed out, and stepped to the door. He could see Tom Merry & Co. at the end of the passage, but they were not looking his way. On tiptoe, the New House junior scudded away in the opposite direction and gained the box-room.

Five minutes later he had clambered down from the window of the box-room, and was eudding for the New House, with interesting information for Figgins and Kerr.

Little suspecting that an enemy had been on the scene and had escaped while their backs were turned, Tom Merry & Co. crowded at the head of the staircase, looking down into the lighted hall.

A fat man in an overcoat was speaking there with Mr. Railton, the Housenmaster.

His name might be McCracken, but it was certain that he had not been born in the land where the genuine McCrackens come from.

His podgy features, his pale-blue, fishy eyes, adorned by large spectacles, his almost colourless fair hair, and his accent were all German. Doubtless he was an Englishman, in a legal sense—that is, as English as a scrap of paper could make him. Otherwise, he was as German as Herr Schneider.

"I wegard this as wotton!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Well, I suppose we need a Hun to teach us the Hunnish lingo," remarked Tom Merry.

"I do not see any necessity for studyin' the Hunnish language, Tom Mewwy!"

"Pity the Head does!"

"I would wathah learn Wussian, though it is hardah than German. The Wussians use a civilised alphabet, and not a hideous welic of bawbawism like the German alphabet. Moreovah, I do not appwove of Huns takin' Bwedish names. Old Schneider might as well have called himself Murphy or Fitzgerald. I disappwove extwemely of that Hun callin' himself by an honourable Iwish name."

"Tell him to chuck it," suggested Lowther.



The German slid heavily to the ground from the window-sill, with the unconscious burthen in his arm. Dim as it was, the juniors made out clearly enough a still form in Etone, grasped in the German's fat arms. (See Chapter 13.)

"I fear that he would not take any notice of my telling him, Lowthah."

"Well, command him, then—fix him with your eyeglass and command him. I can see him obiding. I don't think."

"Weally, Lowthah."

"Well, we've seen the Hun," said Tom Merry. "Let's get back to business."

The leading lights of the School House Dramatic Society returned to the study, and business proceeded. Outside that study, excepting to a chosen few, nothing was said of that up-to-date and ripping play, for fear that it should come to the ears of the Dramatic Society's keen rivals over the way. They little knew!

CHAPTER 5.

Figgy's Great Wheeze!

THE Fourth Formers were the first to make a more intimate acquaintance with the German master. There was a German lesson the next day for the Fourth, and Mr. Lathom presented Mr. McCracken to them, and left him in charge. The juniors were rather curious to see how he would turn out, as they called

it. Whatever he was like, he could not very well be more Tartaric than Herr Schneider, that was one comfort. They had learned that he was naturalised fifteen years or so before the war, and had lived in England ever since, following the profession of a teacher.

They found him much better tempered than Herr Schneider. He was quite kind and patient, and did not seem to be aware that a pointer could be put to the use of rapping knuckles. Herr Schneider had been rather given to rapping knuckles. Never had the Fourth Form had so easy a German lesson—it was so easy that they felt they could almost forgive the Hun for having borrowed a British name. Mr. McCracken came as a very pleasant change after Herr Schneider.

Herr Schneider had always been a little extra hard upon Giacomo Contarini, because he was an Italian. The declaration of war upon Germany by Italy had seemed to the worthy Herr a piece of colossal impertinence; and he knew that Contarini's father, a great Italian statesman, had been one of the prime movers in opposing his country to the Hun savages. He had disliked the Italian schoolboy for that reason, and made the German lesson as troublesome to him as he could, in the spiteful German way.

But Mr. McCracken did not seem to share any feelings of

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that ~~see~~. He did not appear to observe Contarini at first among the rest. But when the Italian junior answered "Si, signore," to a remark from the master, Mr. McCracken's attention was drawn to him.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I mean yes, sir," said Contarini. "Excuse me, I sometimes speak in my own tongue without thinking."

"You are an Italian, hein?" asked Mr. McCracken. The new master spoke excellent English, but the German "hein" often crept out.

"Si, signore—yes, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Giacomo Contarini, sir."

"I was not aware there was an Italian scholar in the class," said Mr. McCracken, looking pleased. "I shall have the pleasure of speaking to you sometimes in your own language, Contarini. I also speak Italian. Are you a relation of the great Signor Contarini, the illustrious statesman?"

"I am his son, sir."

"You have a father to be proud of, my boy," said Mr. McCracken.

Contarini was quite aware of that fact; but he was a little flattered by the remark from the master, especially as the gentleman, being of German origin, would hardly have been expected to appreciate fully the great qualities of the illustrious Signor Contarini.

"Bai Jove! The old boundah doesn't seem such a bad sort, aftah all," Arthur Augustus D'Arcy remarked, when the Fourth Form came out.

"Soft and soapy!" said Levison. "He knows we're down on Huns, and he's trying to get on our right side."

"Well, Schneider never took that trouble," said Figgins. "I don't think he's a bad sort. After all, all Huns can't be rotters!"

"I feah there are vewy few exceptions, Figgins. However, pewwaps Mr. McCracken is one of the few."

"Any way, he isn't a Tartar like the Schneider-bird, and that's a comfort," said Kerr. "We sha'n't learn so much with him, I think. He was letting us do pretty much as we liked."

"That's what I call a master!" said Fatty Wynn. "Old Schneider was grinding his rotten language into you all the time."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, that's what a master's for, really," said Clive, laughing. "If McCracken lets us do just as we like, it's rather wasting time."

"Well, who wants to learn German?" said Blake.

"Nobody that I know of, intirely!" chuckled Reilly. "He isn't bad for a Hun, and so long as he lets us alone, more power to his elbow, I say!"

"That isn't the way to pass exams, though," remarked Dick Julian.

"Oh, blow the exams!"

"Yaas, wathah! McCracken is quite a nerve-west aftah Schneidah. We shall have enough gwindin' when Schneidah comes back."

So, upon the whole, the Fourth Form were pretty well satisfied with the temporary German master, and were rather sorry that he was only temporary. And, if they were not likely to make headway with their German under his charge, that really did not seem a matter of very great moment. The Fourth Form were not keen on learning the language of the Huns.

"Coming down to footer, Figgy?" called out Jack Blake, as Figgins & Co. moved off towards the New House together.

"Not this time," said Figgins. "We don't need so much practice as you School House duffers, you know."

Figgins & Co. hurried away to their House. They had something more important than football practice to think of just then.

There was a gathering in Figgins' study after morning lessons. Redfern and Owen and Lawrence came along, with Koumi Rao, and Diggs, and Pratt, and Thompson, and several more fellows—all members of the N.H.J.A.D.S. Figgins had some interesting information to impart to those young gentlemen.

"Well, what's it all about?" said Redfern, as the juniors

crowded into the study. "We are missing footer practice, Figgy."

"You can miss it for once," said Figgins. "This is an important meeting. We're going to give the School House the kybosh this time, and no mistake."

"Go it, Figgy!" came a chorus. The New House juniors were always ready to give the rival establishment the kybosh.

"It's the School House Dramatic Society," explained Figgins. "They're getting up a new, up-to-date play, founded on what happened to young Contarini when he came here—Italian kid being kidnapped by Germans and all that. It's a dead secret—not a whisper outside their own select circle, you know, in case we bag the wheeze over on this side, and dish them. Well, we've bagged the wheeze!"

"How the dickens do you know, if it's a dead secret?" demanded Lawrence.

"Ways and means, my son," said Figgins loftily—"ways and means! The School House isn't up to our form. They'd have to get up very early in the morning to pull the wool over the eyes of this study. We've got on to it—scouting among the enemy, you know. They don't know we know, but we do know. I've been making inquiries, too, and I've found that Tom Merry has asked permission to use the lecture-hall for a play on Saturday."

"Well?" said Redfern.

"Well, that means that 'The Kidnapped Kid; or, the Hunted Huns,' is coming off on Saturday," said Figgins. "They're keeping it dark till the last minute, and then they're going to announce it just before the performance. They think it's a ripping idea that we'd like to pinch."

"Well, it isn't a bad idea for a play," remarked Redfern. "Is Contarini in it?"

"Yes—leading part."

"That makes it rather a good idea. The Italian kid can act, too."

"Well, the tremendous drama isn't coming off," said Figgins, with a chuckle.

"Why not?"

"Because the day before it's due we're going to give a ripping new play, entitled 'The Kidnapped Kid; or, the Hunted Huns'!"

"What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And after we've given it, I don't suppose the School House chaps will feel inclined to give a second edition of it," grinned Figgins.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the N.H.J.A.D.S., in chorus.

Figgins' idea took the New House fellows by storm. They could imagine the looks and feelings of Tom Merry & Co. when they found their own play being given by the New House Dramatic Society on the day before their own intended performance. It was a wheeze worthy of the great Figgins.

"We know the lines the play is to run on," resumed Figgins. "We've got all that. We shall be able to write it jolly nearly word for word. But that's not all. Tom Merry's great idea is to have Contarini playing the leading role as a prisoner of the Huns, because he really was kidnapped by Germans once, you know. Well, we're going to have Contarini as 'The Kidnapped Kid' in our play."

"But—but he won't do it!" exclaimed Redfern, in astonishment. "He's a School House chap. You can't even ask him without letting on that we know their game!"

"We're not going to ask him."

"Then I don't see—"

"Of course you don't," agreed Figgins. "Not till I tell you."

"Oh, no swank!" said Redfern. "Cut the cackle and come to the horses! You talk too much in this study."

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Order!"

"Well," said Figgins, with a glare at Redfern, "this is the scheme. Contarini's part in the play is that of a kidnapped prisoner—and that's what he's going to be in our play! We're going to kidnap him—"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"And he'll be a real prisoner, and a real kidnapped kid, in our edition of the merry drama!" grinned Figgins. "How does that strike you?"

The N.H.J.A.D.S. gasped. Figgins' amazing idea fairly took their breath away. But as the possibilities of that great idea dawned upon them there was a roar of approval.

"Good egg!"

"First chop, Figgy! Topping!"

"Only keep it awfully dark," grinned Figgins. "We've got to keep the secret a bit better than the School House duffers did."

"What-ho!"

And the N.H.J.A.D.S. discussed the great scheme till dinner-time, and when the meeting broke up, not a word was

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uttered outside the circle of the N.H.J.A.D.S. It was a glorious opportunity of scoring over the rival House, and Figgins & Co. did not mean to run any risks with it.

CHAPTER 6.

Amateur Kidnappers!

TOM MERRY & CO. were very busy during that week. There were rehearsals galore of "The Kidnapped Kid," the great School House drama, which was to stagger humanity in the lecture-hall on Saturday, and which was to excite the envious admiration of the New House fellows. Rehearsals took place generally in the box-room—a quarter which was safe from interruptions on the part of the enemy.

Tom Merry rather suspected that Figgins & Co. might guess that something was on, and might be inquisitive about it. But Figgins & Co. appeared to be totally unsuspecting. They were, as a matter of fact, busy with the rehearsals of the new drama to be performed by the N.H.J.A.D.S. Tom Merry had an idea that the amateur dramatists of the New House were busy, but he little dreamed what drama they were busy upon. That secret was well kept.

"The Kidnapped Kid" had been written in a very short time. Many hands, it is said, make light work; and certainly the writing of that great drama was very rapid in the School House—and equally rapid in the New House, as a matter of fact.

Tom Merry & Co. all took a hand in producing their edition. Every fellow had a go at his own part, and a committee revised the parts, and erased or added here and there. Contarini entered into the spirit of the thing with great gusto. He was quite ready to enact on the mimic stage the strange experiences that had actually befallen him—with artistic exaggerations. The Italian junior was a very clever actor, and quite fitted to play a prominent role.

There was keen competition as to who should be Robinson, V.C., naturally; but Tom Merry bagged that part. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was assigned to provide the comic relief, considerably to his indignation. Manners and Lowther were gentlemen in khaki—Manners having firmly declined to be a Hun, even for dramatic purposes.

There were soldiers and sailors galore—most of the fellows were willing to wear khaki or blue. It was a little difficult to get recruits for the Hun parts; but Levison, who was very clever in amateur theatricals, consented to be Captain Snortz. And the other parts were filled at last. Then rehearsals were the order of the day.

Much time had not been allowed for the actors to become letter perfect, and their stage-manager kept them hard at work. Even football practice was left over for a time, and in the evenings, and the intervals of lessons, fellows ground away at their lines, and declaimed aloud in all sorts of places. And not a word was uttered which could apprise the New House fellows of what was on!

On Friday there was to be a dress-rehearsal in the box-room after lessons, as the performance was to come off the next day. When the juniors were released from the Form-rooms the New House fellows cleared off to their own House at once, rather to the relief of Tom Merry, who was quite satisfied thereby that Figgins & Co. suspected nothing.

The School House fellows streamed away to the box-room at the end of the Shell passage, for the final dress-rehearsal.

"Where's Contarini?" asked Tom Merry, noting that the Italian junior had not turned up. "The duffer hasn't got himself detained, surely?"

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus. "We've all been awfully careful this afternoon. We gave Lathom his head."

"Well, where is he?"

"Gone to McCracken's study," said Blake. "He drops in there to jaw Italian with the Hun, sometimes."

Tom gave an emphatic sniff.

"This isn't a time to jaw Italian to Huns!" he growled. "The silly ass will be late for rehearsal, and he comes on in the first scene!"

"Bai Jove! Heah he is!"

"Trot in, Jackeymo!"

Jackeymo trotted in, with a somewhat clouded brow.

"You are ready for me?" he asked.

"Yes; you come on in the first scene."

"I am sorry—"

"Nothing to be sorry about, as you're here," said Tom Merry briskly. "Have you got your script?"

"But, I am sorry, I must go down to Rylcombe—"

"Rot!"

"Mr. McCracken has asked me," said Contarini. "He has been so kind that I could not very well refuse."

Tom uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, dear! Couldn't he get somebody else to go down to

Rylcombe for him?" he exclaimed. "Tell him to get somebody else, Jackeymo."

"Yaas, wathah! It is weally vewy inconsiderate of McCracken."

Jackeymo shook his head.

"I could not refuse," he said. "Mr. McCracken has a cold, and he has asked me to take his prescription to the chemist to get it made up. I do not like Germans, but he has been very kind. I could not refuse."

"Well, I suppose you couldn't," granted Tom Merry. "But another chap could go as well as you."

"But the signore asked me specially to go myself, because he thinks I should be very careful."

"One of the fags would do," said Blake.

Contarini looked uneasy.

"It would be ungracious not to go, after he has asked me," he said. "Of course, the signore knows nothing of our rehearsal. If I had told him it would look like an excuse, and he has been kind. But I shall not be long. I will hurry back as fast as I can."

"Well, go on your bike," said Tom. "You ought to be back in half an hour. We shall have to leave you out of the first scenes, that's all. Dig can take your place till you come back, as he's your understudy."

"Va bene," said Contarini. "I will hurry—presto, prestissimo!"

And the Italian junior hastened away. He caught up his cap, and hurried out into the dusky quadrangle, and made for the bicycle-shed. A voice hailed him in the dusk:

"Hallo, Jackeymo!"

Figgins of the New House joined him. Figgins, for some reason best known to himself, had been hanging about the School House for some time. There was a peculiar gleam in Figg's eyes as he joined the Italian.

"In a hurry?" he asked.

"Si, signorino."

"I'll tell you what" said Figgins. "Come over to the New House for a few minutes. Kerr wants to see you specially."

Contarini shook his head.

"I am sorry, but I have to go down to Rylcombe at once, to fetch something for Signor McCracken."

"You're going out? Gates are locked, you know."

"Mr. McCracken has given me a pass."

"Oh!" said Figgins.

Contarini hurried into the bike-shed, and wheeled out his machine. Figgins dashed away. Kerr and Wynn were waiting under the elms.

"Well?" said they together.

"It's all serene," said Figgins, in a breathless whisper. "Jackeymo is going out of gates. It couldn't be better for us. It would be a bit risky collaring him in the quad; anybody might spot us. But outside—"

"Good egg!"

"Means breaking bounds," said Fatty Wynn.

"Well, we can do that, fathead! It won't be the first time."

"But if we collar him outside, how are we going to get him to the New House?" asked Fatty Wynn doubtfully.

"Easy as winking. We'll nail him, and walk him round to the west wall," said Figgins. "There's a fir plantation over that way. Safe as houses for us. We can get him in over the wall. Nobody's ever there after dark. You cut off, Fatty, and get half a dozen chaps there with a rope ready; and when you hear me whistle, you'll know we're outside the wall with Jackeymo."

"Right-ho!"

Fatty Wynn scudded off to the New House, and Figgins and Kerr cut off to the school wall bordering the road. They clambered over the wall in the thickening gloom of the winter evening, and dropped into the road outside.

That Contarini was going out on an errand for Mr. McCracken was a trifle of which Figgins had no time to take account. In fact, it did not enter his mind at all. He was too keen on the success of his project to think about it. In the New House all was ready for the drama to be staged as soon as the raiders had captured the junior who was to play—very realistically—the part of the "Kidnapped Kid." The New House chums glided along the school wall outside as the gates were opened, and Giacomo Contarini wheeled his machine out. Taggles closed the gates after the junior, and Contarini mounted his bike.

"Not here," murmured Kerr. "Taggles can see through the bars of the gate."

"After him! In the lane will be best," agreed Figgins.

"We'll call to him to stop, and collar him when he jumps down."

"Good!"

Contarini pedalled away towards the village, and the two New House juniors broke into a run behind him. They ran on the wet grass beside the road without a sound, and kept

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pace with the bicycle. The thick mud on the road prevented Contarini from scorching. Figgins and Kerr were first-class sprinters, and they kept Contarini's red rear light well in view.

"He will have to slack down at the rise," muttered Kerr; "then we nail him."

"That's the game?"

Crash!

Contarini's red rear light vanished into darkness, and from the gloom ahead came the clattering crash of a falling bicycle.

"My hat! He's had a spill!" exclaimed Figgins. "Come on!"

And they ran on harder.

CHAPTER 7.

The Huns.

CONTARINI had slackened speed a little as he reached the sharp rise in the road, where thick trees covered the lane with gloom. Once over the rise, he intended to scorch for Rylcombe. But he was not destined to see Rylcombe that evening.

As he laboured up the rise in muddy ruts left by market-carts, two dark figures suddenly appeared from the shadows and rushed on the cyclist.

The junior was taken completely by surprise.

He had been thinking only of getting his errand done, and hurrying back to the dress rehearsal in the School House. He had never dreamed of anything like danger. But there was deadly danger for the Italian junior lurking in the dark road.

The two men were on him in a twinkling.

Contarini was grasped on both sides, and dragged off his machine, which went clattering and crashing on the road.

Astounded as he was by the sudden attack, Contarini struggled fiercely after the first moment.

Back into his mind came the remembrance of the attempted kidnapping in his first days at St. Jim's. This sudden attack could mean nothing but that the attempt was being renewed—that the son of Signor Contarini was once more a mark for the machinations of the Huns. He was in the hands of German kidnappers, on a lonely road in the dark, far from help.

He struggled fiercely, and he was strong and active and full of pluck. The two rascals did not find it easy to hold him.

"Be still—be still!" hissed a harsh voice. "Do you want to be stunned, young fool?"

"Help!" shrieked the junior. "Help! Oh, help!"

"Silence him, Karl!"

"Help!"

Contarini's loud, piercing voice rang shrilly along the dark road, and it reached the ears of the two New House juniors, dashing along the grass by the lane.

"Help!"

"Stun him!" hissed the harsh voice.

A cry of pain rang out in the night as a pistol-butt struck the unfortunate junior upon the forehead. He was not stunned, but he lay helpless and limp in the grasp of the kidnappers, half unconscious.

"Quick—to the car! Schnell! Schnell!" panted the guttural German voice.

Two moving shadows loomed up in the gloom.

Figgins and Kerr were close on the spot, and they heard the savage, hurried exclamation.

They realised what was happening.

Contarini had not had a spill, as they had supposed when they heard the bicycle clatter over.

He was in the hands of his old enemies!

"Kerr," panted Figgins, "it—it's the Germans! They're after Jackeymo again!"

"Come on!" said Kerr between his teeth.

The New House chums were there to kidnap Contarini for a jape on the School House, and

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they had found him in the hands of real kidnappers. All thoughts of the jape vanished from their minds. They were thinking of only one thing as they dashed breathlessly up—to rush to the aid of the Italian-junior.

Contarini, moaning faintly, lay limp in the hands of the two ruffians, who were lifting him to carry him away.

In the dim dusk, under the trees, they did not see Figgins and Kerr till the new-comers were fairly upon them.

Figgins and his chum did not speak.

They rushed right on, and were upon the two rascals in a twinkling, hitting out with all their force.

Figgins's right, with all his weight behind it, was planted fairly in a fat florid face, and the man went down like a felled ox.

Kerr caught the other rascal under the chin with his right, and his left followed it up fairly in the eye. The Hun went down with a crash.

Contarini dropped into the mud.

Savage exclamations of pain and rage and surprise came from the two kidnappers. The New House juniors had taken them by surprise, and bowled them over at the first charge.

But there was no time to lose. It was pretty certain that the two scoundrels were armed, and were desperate enough to use their weapons rather than be baffled of their prey.

Figgins grasped Contarini, and jerked him to his feet.

"Run for it, Jackeymo!" he panted.

Contarini reeled in his grasp. His head was whirling from the cruel blow he had received.

Kerr grasped his other arm, and the Italian junior was half-dragged, half-carried away up the lane towards the school, while the two kidnappers were still scrambling and cursing in the mud.

One of them scrambled up, and rushed after the juniors, and there was a loud crash, and a louder yell, as he stumbled and fell over the fallen bicycle in the darkness.

"Put it on!" panted Figgins.

"Buck up, Jackeymo!"

Contarini was running now. His brain was whirling and confused, but he understood, and he made every possible effort. The grip of Figgins and Kerr on his arms helped him. The three juniors covered the ground quickly.

Heavy footsteps crashed in the mud behind them, and a hoarse voice roared to them to stop. The juniors were not likely to obey.

A sharp, stunning report rang out in the darkness.

"Stop!"

"My hat! They're shooting!" muttered Figgins. "Put it on!"

The juniors ran desperately.

St. Jim's was in sight now.

They arrived, breathless, mud-spattered, panting, at the school gates, and Figgins rang a terrific peal at the bell.

CHAPTER 8.

Glory for Figgins.

CLANG, clang! Jingle, jingle, jingle!

Taggles, the porter, growled morosely.

Somebody at the gate was evidently in a hurry, but Taggles, the porter, wasn't in a hurry. He grunted emphatically as he took his keys in quite a leisurely manner and rolled out of his lodge.

Outside, Figgins was dragging furiously at the bell, and Kerr was shaking the bars of the gate with both hands. Contarini held on to the gate to keep himself from falling.

"Open the gate!" roared Kerr. "Help! Help! Help!"

His shouts rang across the quadrangle.

"My 'at!" ejaculated Taggles. "My heye!"

And he condescended to hurry his movements a little, and came down to the gates.

"Let us in!" roared Figgins. "Help! Help!"

Heavy footsteps were upon the road, coming nearer. The desperate rascals were pursuing the juniors to the very gates of the school.



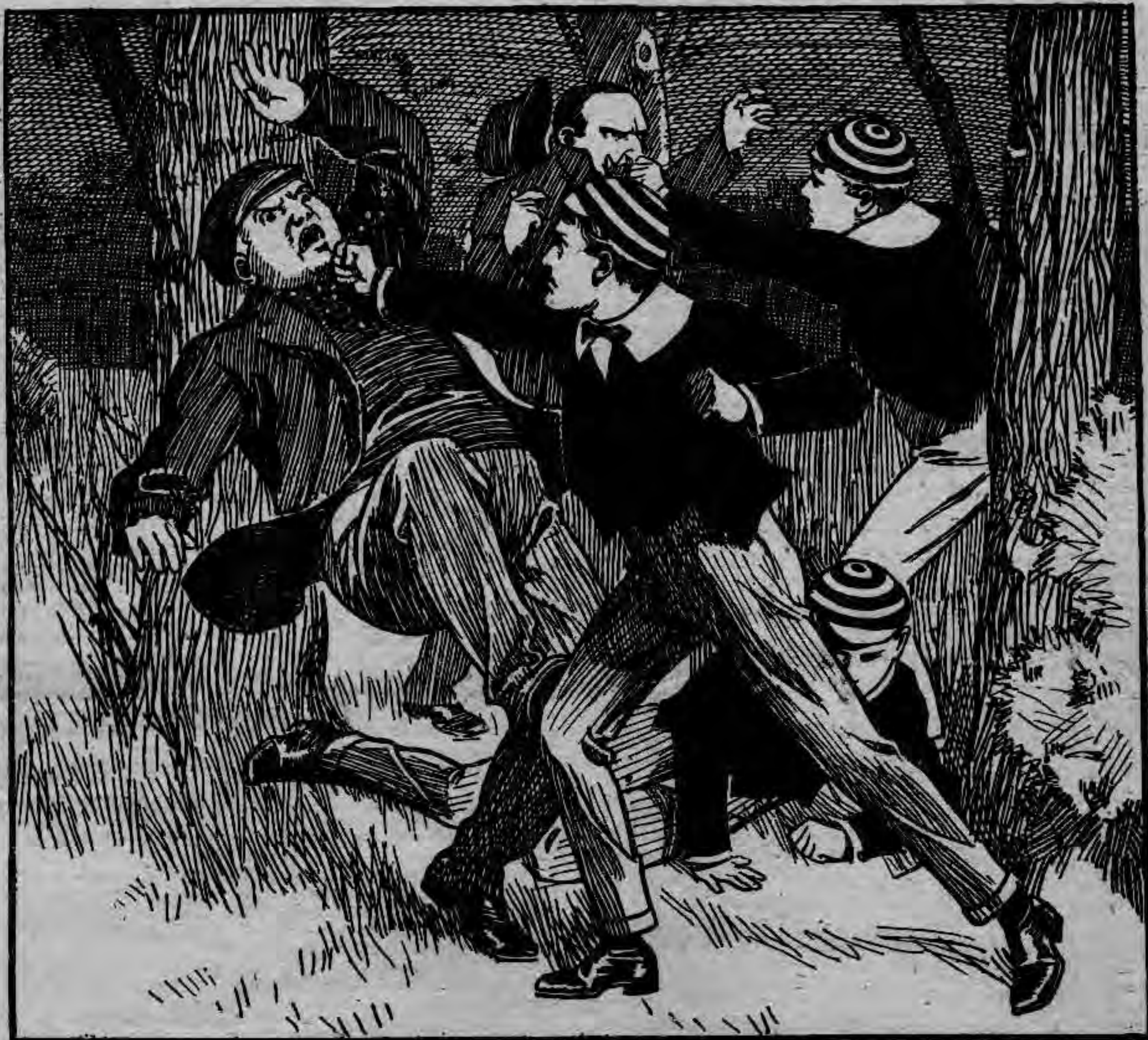
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Figgins and Kerr rushed right on, and were upon the two rascals in a twinkling, hitting out with all their force. (See Chapter 7.)

From both School House and New House fellows came dashing out with exclamations of alarm. The desperate shouting of the juniors outside had reached their ears.

Fatty Wynn & Co., waiting patiently by the west wall for the "kidnapped kid" to be delivered into their hands, heard the shouts, and came racing towards the gates in astonishment and alarm.

The big key grated in the lock.

Kerr hurled the heavy gate opened, almost knocking down Taggles, and dragged Giacomo Contarini within. Figgins cast a last look behind. Two burly forms loomed up in the darkness only a dozen paces distant.

Figgins ran in after his comrades.

"Shut the gates, Taggles!"

"Look 'ere—" stuttered the amazed porter.

"Shut the gates, you idiot! Germans—kidnappers!" shrieked Figgins.

"My heye!"

The gate clanged shut, and the key turned. Taggles' staring eye caught a momentary glimpse of two shadowy forms, but they vanished in an instant. The game was up, so far as the kidnappers were concerned, and their chief thought now was to escape. But it had been a very near thing.

"Figgy!" gasped Fatty Wynn. "What—what—what—"

Figgins reeled against the lodge, panting for breath.

"What's happened?" yelled Redfern.

"Look after Contarini! He's hurt!" gasped Figgins.

"Jackeymo! What the thunder—"

"Bai Jove! What's the mattah, Contawini?"

"Jackeymo!" shouted Tom Merry. "What the dickens—"

Tom's strong arm supported the Italian. There was a black bruise and a streak of red on Contarini's dusky forehead.

A crowd surrounded them now. There were loud exclamations on all sides. Mr. Railton, the master of the School House, came striding through the crowd.

"What is all this?" he exclaimed sharply. "Good heavens, Contarini! What has happened to the boy?"

"I Todeschi!" groaned Contarini, putting his hand to his head.

"What?"

"The Germans, sir!" gasped Kerr.

"Germans!" repeated the astounded Housemaster. "What can you possibly mean, Kerr?"

"They collared Contarini, sir—the kidnappers!"

"Bless my soul!"

"We got him away, sir!" said Figgins breathlessly. "The rotters followed us right up to the gates. One of them fired after us in the road—"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

He lifted the Italian junior in his strong arms.

"Figgins and Kerr, follow me!"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Railton carried Contarini into the School House, and in a few minutes the Italian junior was laid on his bed in the

Fourth Form dormitory. The Housemaster examined his injury. Contarini was quite conscious now, and he smiled up at the anxious face of his Housemaster.

"I—I'm not much hurt, sir!" he muttered. "They hit me with something because I called for help!"

"It is a bad bruise!" said Mr. Railton. "Fortunately, no serious injury appears to be done, but I shall telephone for the doctor immediately. Remain quiet here, my dear boy!"

"Si, signore!"

Mr. Railton hurried downstairs, and called up the school doctor on the telephone. Figgins and Kerr were waiting in the hall, surrounded by a wildly excited crowd of juniors. The dress rehearsal was quite forgotten, and in their excitement Tom Merry & Co. had also forgotten that they were in costume.

Huns and men in khaki were swarming in the hall. The dress rehearsal had been going strong when the sudden alarm called the schoolboy actors from the box-room. Mr. Railton came out of his study after telephoning, his handsome face stern and set.

"Merry, you may go and remain with Contarini till the doctor comes. Bless my soul! What are you dressed in that extraordinary manner for?"

"We—we were rehearsing a play, sir!" stammered Tom.

"Oh"—the Housemaster's stern face relaxed for a moment.

"I see! Well, no matter, go and stay with Contarini in the Fourth Form dormitory. Do not let him talk, as he must keep quiet!"

"Yes, sir. Is—is"—Tom faltered—"is he badly hurt, sir?"

"No, it is not serious, and I have done all that can be done until the doctor comes. But he is to be kept quiet!"

"Yes, sir."

Tom Merry, still in the garb of Robinson, V.C., hurried away to Contarini's dormitory.

"Figgins and Kerr, kindly follow me to the Head!" said Mr. Railton.

The two juniors followed the Housemaster, leaving a buzz of excitement behind them. The astounding occurrence thrilled the school from end to end.

Dr. Holmes was startled as Mr. Railton came into his study.

"What has happened, Mr. Railton?" he exclaimed.

"A brutal attempt upon Contarini, of the Fourth Form, sir, it appears!" said the Housemaster. "You remember that there was an attempt to kidnap him when he first came to the school? That attempt has been repeated!"

"Good heavens!"

"It is yet to be explained how he came to be out of gates at this hour!" said the Housemaster. "By some strange chance these two juniors were also out of gates, and they appear to have rendered him aid. I have not yet heard their account."

"Is Contarini injured?"

"He has a bruise upon the head. I have seen to it, and the doctor is on the way here, sir!"

"Thank you, Mr. Railton! Figgins, kindly tell me what has happened."

"Certainly, sir!" said Figgins. Figgins was quite cheery now. It occurred to him that the affair, though it interfered grievously with the plans of the N.H.J.A.D.S., was likely to redound very much to the credit of the New House. "Contarini was going down to the village, sir, on an errand—for Mr. McCracken, I think he told me—and we were following him down the lane without his knowing it."

"That is very odd, Figgins. Why were you following him down the lane?"

Figgins coloured, and looked at Kerr. Both the masters regarded the juniors very curiously.

"Well, Figgins?" said the Head impatiently.

"Ahem!" stammered Figgins. "We—we were following him, sir—"

"Had you permission to be out of the gates?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"This is very extraordinary!" said the Head. "Kindly make a full explanation."

"We—we were going to collar Contarini, sir," mumbled Figgins.

"To what?"

"Kidnap him, sir. It—it was a jape!" stammered Figgins, crimson now. "A—a sort of joke on the School House, sir. We—we were going to collar him and yank him off to the New House."

"Only a joke, sir!" said Kerr.

"And you broke school bounds for this purpose?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"And then?" said the Head.

"We heard his bike go over, sir, and thought he'd had a spill," said Figgins. "We were running up to help him, if he wanted help, but to—to collar him anyway, and get him to the New House. Only a—a joke on the School House chaps, sir. Then we heard a man speaking in German, and saw Jackeymo struggling with two of them—two big rotters, sir, in coats."

"He was yelling for help, and one of them hit him with something, sir," said Kerr. "Then we remembered what happened when he first came here, so we knew it was German rotters trying to kidnap him."

"And then?" said the Head.

"We rushed in, sir!" said Figgins. "Of course, we were bound to buck up. We took the rotters by surprise. They didn't know we were there, any more than poor old Jackeymo did, and we bowled them over, and picked up Jackeymo and rushed off with him. They chased us right up to the gates, and one of the beasts fired after us. I think it was only to frighten us and make us stop, though; the bullet didn't go anywhere near us, so far as I know."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"The boys have acted very courageously, sir!" said Mr. Railton.

"Very courageously indeed!" said the Head. "I shall certainly say nothing about your being out of bounds, Figgins, as your intended practical joke has had so very fortunate a result. You have acted, my dear boys, in a very creditable manner, and I thank you! But for your presence, Heaven alone knows what might have happened to Contarini. You may go for the present."

"Yes, sir!"

And Figgins and Kerr left the study in a very cheery mood.

CHAPTER 9.

Admission Free!

"F IG GAY, dear boy!"

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"I congwatulate you, Figgins. I wegard you as havin' played up in a weally wippin' mannah! I quite appwove!"

Figgins put his hand upon his heart and bowed almost

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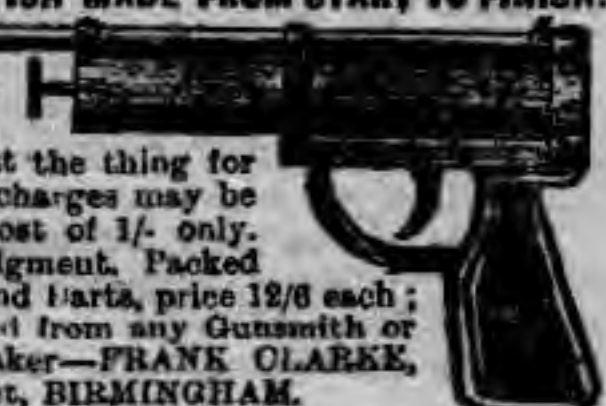
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to the passage floor. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy watched that proceeding in some surprise.

"Weally, Figgins—"

"My lord, you do me proud!" said Figgins. "After that, I shall require a larger size in hats. Come on, Kerr! Let's go and tell the New House that Gussy approves of us!"

"You uttah ass!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus, as Figgins and Kerr walked off grinning.

Tom Merry came down the stairs. The doctor had arrived, and was with Contarini in the dormitory. Mr. Railton had telephoned to the police-station at Ryloombe to give an account of the affair, and had gone out personally to speak to Inspector Skeat about it, and perhaps to help in the search for the kidnappers. Dr. Short's verdict on Contarini brought considerable relief to his friends. The Italian junior had a bad bruise and a severe headache, but he was likely to be quite all right in a day or two. Meanwhile, he had a soothing draught, and remained in bed.

"Jolly glad it's no worse with Jackeymo!" said Tom Merry, as he joined his chums. "But it rather knocks the 'Kidnapped Kid' on the head, doesn't it? Jackeymo won't be able to rehearse to-night, or play to-morrow, for that matter!"

"Rotten!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Pewwaps I had bettah take Jackeymo's place in the play, Tom Mewwy? As I speak Italian, you know—"

"My dear chap, your part can't be cut!" said Monty Lowther. "And nobody else could take your role!"

"Bai Jove! You flattah me, Lowthah!"

"Not at all, old fellow! Nobody could do the comic relief bizney like you!"

"You uttah duffah!"

"I've got an idea!" said Tom. "The play had better be put off a bit till Jackeymo gets well and can take his part in it. Figgins & Co. have played up rippingly in getting him away from those scoundrels!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly queer how Figgins and Kerr came to be on the spot," said Manners. "They haven't explained how it was—to us, at any rate!"

"They were out of bounds," said Herries. "What the thunder were they doing out of bounds just then? Looks to me as if they were going to play some lark on old Jackeymo."

"I shouldn't wonder!" said Tom. "They were right on the spot when the Huns got him, anyway. But what I was going to say is this, they played up jolly well, and I think we might recognise it by letting them into the play. What do you think? We shall have to put it off a bit, anyway."

"After keeping it dark all this time!" grinned Blake.

"Well, it's got to be put off. And we can't keep it dark now, as Figgins and Kerr have seen us in costume. They'll know there's something on, anyway. Suppos we go over and see them, and make it pax, and give them a show in the play? It will be an honour for them."

"Yaas. I wegard that as the pwopah capah, undah the cires, Tom Mewwy!"

And the rest of the amateur actors agreed. After the ripping way the New House juniors had chipped in on behalf of Giacomo Contarini, some kind of recognition was due, and the honour of taking roles in the great drama, "The Kidnapped Kid," would be a fitting reward. The authors could easily fatten out the play a little and introduce a few more characters. Indeed, Tom Merry was willing to relinquish to Figgins, by way of reward, the great part of Robinson, V.C.

Tom Merry & Co. resumed their ordinary attire, the dress rehearsal being indefinitely postponed. They were about to start for the New House when Jameson of the Third, a New House fag, came in grinning.

"Tom Merry!" he called out.

"Hallo, kid!"

"Here you are—from Figgins!" said the fag.

He thrust a paper into the hand of the surprised captain of the Shell, and retired with a chuckle.

"What the dickens is that?" asked Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry opened the paper.

It was a large sheet, got up in the manner of a handbill, the large capital letters being neatly written in with a brush. It ran:

"GREAT MODERN DRAMA!"

'THE KIDNAPPED KID; or, the Hunted Huns!'

Special Performance by the New House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society.

This Splendid Drama of the Present Time will be performed in the Junior Common-Room, New House, St. Jim's, commencing at 7.30 precisely.

The Drama, produced by the best Talent of the N.H.J.A.D.S., is founded upon the experiences of Contarini

of the Fourth. The part of Contarini will be taken by F. G. Kerr, Contarini being unfortunately prevented from appearing.

Admission Free. Doors open at 7.30.

All are invited to witness this great drama.

School House kids will be expected to wash their necks and wear clean collars.

"Signed for the N.H.J.A.D.S.,

"G. FIGGINS."

Tom Merry stared blankly at that precious handbill.

His chums blinked at it.

For some moments they were quite speechless. They gazed at it like fellows in a dream.

Up to that moment Tom Merry & Co. had supposed that their rivals knew nothing about the great drama. They supposed that Figgins and Kerr would guess that some dramatic scheme was on, through seeing them in costume, but that was all. The discovery that Figgins & Co. knew the whole game simply astounded them.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus at last.

"Oh, great pip!"

"They—they know all about it!" stuttered Lowther.

"They—they're doing our play this evening! Oh, crumbs!"

"Our play!" roared Blake.

"And—and asking us to see our own drama!" ejaculated Clive.

"The cheeky rotters!"

"Bai Jove! Some of you weckless duffahs must have been talkin', and givin' the game away!"

"Gussy, most likely!" said Julian.

"Weally, Julian, you ass!"

"They've got on to it, anyway!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath. "That's why they have been lying so low lately. They've been rehearsing our play, and they've booked it to appear the night before our performance. And—and we were just going to take them into the game!"

"And now they've taken us in instead!" grinned Lowther.

"Bai Jove! It's wotten!"

"We're not going to stand this!" exclaimed Jack Blake wrathfully. "Look here! We'll go over in a body and muck up the whole show!"

"Hear, hear!"

"They've dished us!" said Talbot of the Shell. "Why, it's a quarter-past seven now. They left it late so that we can't chip in before the performance in any way."

"We'll chip in at the performance," exclaimed Blake.

"We'll all go, and take our pea-shooters, and some eggs!"

"Bravo!"

"Yaas, wathah! We're jollay well not goin' to take this lyin' down!"

There was wrath and indignation on all sides. How Figgins & Co. had discovered the secret was still a mystery. But that was an unimportant point; they had discovered it, and they had coolly bagged the play, and were producing it themselves. It would not be much use for the School House Dramatic Society to produce it again afterwards. The novelty would be gone, and they would be supposed to be producing a hash-up of a New House idea. All their amicable feelings towards Figgins & Co. had vanished all of a sudden. There was only one idea in their minds now—to "muck up" the bagged play by any and every means.

"We'll be there at seven-thirty," said Tom Merry wrathfully, "and we'll be there in force. Call the fellows together!"

"Carry round the fiery cross!" chuckled Lowther.

The words were quickly passed round the School House. Preparation was forgotten.

It was a case of all hands on deck, and the School House juniors gathered in great force to march on the New House; and when they started their pockets were bulging with all kinds of ammunition, and their eyes were gleaming with the light of battle.

CHAPTER 10.

'Not as Per Programme.'

"THIS is where we smile!" said Figgins, with great satisfaction.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The New House juniors smiled loudly.

Jameson had returned, after delivering the handbill in the School House, and his description of Tom Merry's face as he read it made the New House juniors yell.

The kidnapping affray in Ryloombe Lane had put Figgins' plans out a little. The Italian junior being laid up in the School House dormitory, he had to be scratched from the cast of the drama.

It was really a pity, for the drama would certainly have

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been much more lively with a real prisoner in it. But it could not be helped, and the N.H.J.A.D.S. were not to be dismayed by a mishap like that.

Kerr took Contarini's part at short notice, and the part was safe to be a success in the clever hands of the Scottish junior. Excepting for that change in the programme, the great drama was to be performed as planned.

"They're bound to come," said Figgins—"sure to come! They'll want to know how we got on to the wheeze, and to see how we do it!"

"There'll be a rag, of course," said Redfern. "They won't take it quietly, you know!"

Figgins sniffed.

"There won't be a rag," he said. "I've thought of that. I've asked Monteith and Baker to come, and the School House kids won't rag with a couple of prefects in the room. I thought of that!"

"Good old Figgy!"

"Here they come!" chortled Fatty Wynn.

The Common-room in the New House had been prepared for the performance.

The stage was marked off at one end; curtains were rigged up, which would go up and down as required, with a little persuasion. Forms, chairs, and stools filled the room, to accommodate a numerous audience. There was already a goodly crowd of New House fellows in the auditorium, in great good-humour.

It was not only the great drama that attracted them, but the fact that the play had been bagged from the School House, and that it was a triumph over their old rivals. There was a general chuckle as the School House fellows began to arrive.

Tom Merry & Co. came in in a very quiet and orderly manner. They filled rows and rows of seats, apparently oblivious to the grinning and chuckling of the New House audience.

Figgins & Co., on the stage, watched them through a chink in the curtain.

"They're going to take it quietly," Figgins remarked.

"Looks like it."

"They'll be able to learn something from seeing some really good acting," Redfern remarked. "It ought to be a treat for them!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom Merry & Co. certainly were very quiet. As a matter of fact, their little demonstration was timed to begin along with the dramatic performance. Quite a large supply of eggs had been bought, purchased cheap at the school shop on account of their age.

"Time!" murmured Blake, as seven-thirty came round.

"My hat! Look there!" said Lowther, with a nod towards the door.

Monteith and Baker, the prefects, walked in, and were shown to front seats.

The School House juniors looked dubiously at one another then. Ragging in the presence of prefects was a rather risky business.

They realised that Figgins had scented trouble, and prepared for it accordingly.

"Bai Jove! It looks as if we're dished, aftah all, deah boys!" murmured Arthur Augustus dolefully.

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"We're going ahead!" he said.

"But—but we can't, with prefects here," said Manners doubtfully. "That's what they're here for—to keep order!"

"Must draw a line somewhere, Tommy!" murmured Lowther.

Tom wrinkled his brows. Certainly a rag in the presence of the two prefects was not quite feasible; but to take a defeat all along the line lying down was rather too much.

"We'll go ahead if you say the word, Tommy," said Blake. "But it means a frightful row. Monteith will call in the Housemaster if we cheek him!"

"Bai Jove! We don't want Watty heah!"

"There goes the curtain."

The curtain rose, and disclosed the first scene. Kerr, as Contarini, was arriving at his new school, and was being greeted by a party of fellows. Lawrence, dressed with great elegance, with an eyeglass jammed in his eye, was

evidently playing the part of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's frowned at the sight of that sacrilegious imitation.

"Cheekay wottahs!" he murmured. "Bai Jove, somethin's got to be done, Tom Mewwy! We're not goin' to stand this!"

"I've got it!" murmured Tom. "Get your munitions ready, and give them a volley when the light goes out!"

"Is the light goin' out, deah boy?"

"Yes, when I get at the switch."

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry rose and moved to the door, beside which was the switch of the electric light. Grins from the New House part of the audience followed him. They supposed that the leader of the School House was retiring to hide his diminished head, so to speak. But that was a little mistake. Tom Merry was not retiring. He stopped at the doorway, and leaned carelessly on the wall there, his hand behind him.

His fingers found the lighting switch, and there was a faint click.

The light went out instantly. Darkness fell upon the scene.

There were loud exclamations on all sides.

"What's that?"

"Turn on the light!"

"Great Scott!"

Whiz! Whiz! Crash! Splash! Whiz!

The School House juniors were ready. As sudden darkness descended upon the amateur theatre, the play stopped, and actors were blinking in wrath in the gloom. And from every School House fellow in the audience came a whizzing missile, directed at the stage.

Eggs—mostly aged—smashed and crashed all over the actors, and the smell that pervaded the stage was terrific.

Wild yells rose from Figgins & Co.

"Go it, School House!" roared Blake.

"Huwah! Fiah, deah boys—fiah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, there!" roared Monteith, jumping up. "Turn on the light at once! Order!"

But the prefect's voice was drowned in the roar. Chairs and forms were falling over on all sides, and the darkened room was like unto pandemonium. Missiles whizzed upon the stage in thick volleys till the munitions were exhausted. The heavy fire was followed by a charge. As Monty Lowther remarked afterwards, in military phrase, the artillery preparation was succeeded by an infantry advance, which captured the enemy's trench.

There was a terrific rush of invaders upon the stage, and the eggy and smelly actors were hurled right and left. Curtains were dragged down, scenes knocked over and trampled on, and actors and audience were mingled in a wild and whirling scrap.

Monteith and Baker were roaring for order, but they roared in vain. Monteith struggled through swaying forms and chairs to the electric switch. But he pressed it in vain. The wire had been cut.

Meanwhile, the uproar was deafening. The rivals of St. Jim's were engaged in terrific combat, though in the darkness many punches were given by mistake to friends instead of foes.

"Down with the New House!"

"Yah! School House cads!"

"Yaroooh! Oh, my nose!"

"Give 'em socks!"

"Turn 'em out!"

"Hurrah!"

The room was in wild disorder; the stage was a wreck; the actors were still greater wrecks. In five minutes more damage had been done than could have been repaired in as many hours.

A light glimmered in the passage. Baker had struggled out, and was returning with a lamp. Then Tom Merry's whistle rang out—the signal of retreat. Tom Merry groped his way to the window and threw it up, tearing aside the blind.

There was no retreat by way of the door, but Tom Merry's plans were already laid. There was a rush of the School House juniors to the window, and they tumbled out in hot haste.

Baker came into the room with the lamp. The light gleamed on a scene of wild disorder. The last of the invaders was vanishing through the open window. On the stage, curtains and scenes and actors were mingled together in a scene which looked as if the Prussians had been there.

Figgins struggled to his feet. He was plastered with eggs, and his costume was in rags and tatters.

"Ow, ow, ow!" wailed Figgins.

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Monteith was making attempts to light the gas with matches. But the gas would not light. Both burners had been plugged with toffee immediately after the electric light had been turned off.

"I'll skin the young villains!" roared Monteith. "Figgins, you young ass—"

"Grooooh!" said Figgins.

"It was those School House rotters!" yelled Clampe. "They came here for a row."

"Where are they?"

Monteith saw the open window, and grinned a little.

"Oh, the rotters!" groaned Figgins.

"I'll report this to their Housemaster!" growled Monteith.

"I—I say, Monteith," said Figgins hastily. "It—it doesn't matter, you know. We—we bagged their play, you know—we dished them—and—and—"

"I see. Some more of your confounded House rags," said the prefect. "Well, you can put this room in order, and don't leave till you've done it. If I find a single thing out of place when I come back, I'll give you five hundred lines all round."

"Oh!"

Monteith slammed the window, and the prefects retired from the scene, grinning.

Figgins & Co. exchanged dolorous looks. They did not want their rivals reported to the Housemaster; but they were simmering with fury.

The great drama had come to a sudden end. Instead of rendering "The Kidnapped Kid; or, the Hunted Huns," the N.H.J.A.D.S. and their audience had the pleasure of setting the room to right—a lengthy and laborious task. It was close upon bed-time when they finished, tired and furious.

And the great Figgins had to admit that the New House had not, after all, scored. Indeed, some of the members of the N.H.J.A.D.S. were almost ready to scalp Figgins for having evolved that great scheme at all.

But in the School House all was merry and bright. Tom Merry & Co. had retreated to their own quarters. They rather expected the rag to be reported to Mr. Railton, but they were quite prepared to face the music. Lines and lickings were a trifle, compared with the satisfaction of dishing the enemy. But they were not reported, as it happened, and they rejoiced with a great rejoicing.

"I wathah think," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I wathah think that Figgay will weflect a little before he bags

anothah School House dwamah, deah boys! I wathah think we have scoahed this time."

"I wathah think we have," grinned Monty Lowther. "In fact, I wegard the whole affaiah as a wegulah corkah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry & Co. went to their belated prep with great satisfaction.

CHAPTER 11.

Arthur Augustus Surprises His Chums!

THE following day there were a good many signs of damage to be seen among the members of the rival dramatic societies of St. Jim's. But upon the whole good-humour reigned; Figgins & Co. were good sportsmen, and they could take a reverse in a sporting spirit. It was doubtful whether that great drama, "A Kidnapped Kid," would ever be performed at all; for certainly Figgins & Co. would have distinguished themselves as raggers if the performance had been given in the School House.

But there was another matter that put even "The Kidnapped Kid" into the shade. That was the adventure of Contarini of the Fourth. Contarini did not appear to lessons that morning; but in the afternoon he took his place with the Fourth Form as usual.

Inspector Skeat had been to the school, and had interviewed the Italian junior. But Jackeymo could tell him little more than Figgins. In the darkness in the lane he had not been able to distinguish the features of the ruffians who had attacked him. He knew that they were Germans, and that was all.

The Italian was an object of general interest at St. Jim's now. The Head had given strict orders that he was not to go out of gates, even in the daytime. The story of his earlier adventure was recalled and discussed among the fellows. It was clear that the Italian was in danger again; that his liberty, if not his life, was threatened by the machinations of the plotters at Berlin. By kidnapping the son of Signor Contarini, the powerful Italian statesman—the signor's only son, and the hope of his old age—the Hunnish schemers hoped to influence Italian policy; to detach, perhaps, one of their foes from the Alliance that was closing in upon the Central Empires like a ring of fire and steel.

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Contarini had been saved from the kidnappers; and now that the danger was known every precaution was to be taken against it—the rascals would not have another chance.

Meanwhile, the police were searching for them. Contarini's bicycle had been found in the lane and brought back to the school. Traces of a motor-car that had waited in a side lane had been discovered, but the motor-car had vanished, and with it the two kidnappers. That they were Germans was certain; but the probability was that they were naturalised Huns, who, after their unsuccessful attempt, simply had to motor back to their homes and resume their ordinary existence in order to escape detection. It was pretty certain that they lived at a distance from St. Jim's; in looking for them the police had, as a matter of fact, the whole country to choose from.

Contarini was warmly congratulated on all sides on his lucky escape; and especially by Mr. McCracken. That gentleman stopped Contarini in the passage, after lessons that day, and spoke to him, with deep emotion in his voice.

"My dear Contarini, I cannot say how glad I am that you are safe," he said, laying his fat hand on the junior's shoulders. "If harm had come to you, I should never have forgiven myself. I was not aware, of course, that you had ever been in any danger of this kind."

"It is all right, sir," said Contarini. "I am sorry that I could not bring your packet from the chemist's, as I did not get to Rylcombe."

The German master smiled.

"That is nothing," he said. "I am only glad that you are safe. After this, surely you will remain within gates."

"The Head has ordered me to do so, sir."

"Quite right—quite right. Even in the daytime?"

"Si, signore!"

"That is best," said Mr. McCracken. "It is a little hard for you, my boy, but you must remember that it is for your own safety, and be patient."

"Si, signore!"

"Come into my study this evening," said Mr. McCracken. "I have received some new books from Italy; one of them a 'Life of Signor Contarini,' your noble father. I am sure you will be interested."

"Grazie tanto, signore," said Contarini gratefully.

The fat gentleman passed on, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy joined his Italian chum. There was a peculiar expression upon Arthur Augustus' face.

"You get on wemarkably well with Mr. McCracken, deah boy," he remarked.

Contarini smiled and nodded.

"Yes. You see, he speaks Italian, and nobody else here does so—"

"Weally, you know—"

"Ahem! I mean, excepting yourself," said Contarini, smiling. "He is very kind, too. He has lived in Italy, and loves my country."

"Wathah nichan than old Schneidah, what?"

"Oh, si, si! Herr Schneider detested Italians, because they have gone to war with his country," smiled Contarini. "But Mr. McCracken is naturalised, so I suppose he feels as an Englishman."

"Those howwid wascals who twied to kidnap you last night must be natuwalised, deah-boy, or they would not be fwee in England now."

"Vero!" assented Contarini. "They are not all alike."

"I have a vewy stwong suspish, deah boy, that all Huns weally are alike," said Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's walked away with a deep wrinkle of thought in his noble brow. He paced in the quadrangle with a stately step, evidently thinking something out. A slap on the shoulder awoke him from his deep reverie, with a yell.

"Yawooh! You uttah ass, Lowthah!"

"Thinking of a way of dishing the New House?" asked Lowther affably.

Arthur Augustus rubbed his shoulder.

"I wegard you as a wuff ass, Lowthah! I was not thinkin' about the New House boundahs. There is somethin' wathah more important to think of."

"Something new in toppers?" asked Tom Merry.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Or a new thing in neckties?" asked Manners.

"Wats! Look heah, I've been thinkin'—"

"That's the third time this term," said Lowther gravely.

"Pway don't be a funnay ass, Lowthah! I have been thinkin' vewy sewiously. I want you fellows to come to No. 6—"

"We've just come to fetch you there," grinned Lowther.

"Tou's ready, fathead!"

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"Vewy good! I have somethin' wathah important to tell you chaps."

"Good! You shall talk, while we scoff the tommy," said Lowther. "That will be an equal division of labour."

"Wats!"

Blake and Herries and Dig had tea ready in Study No. 6. Blake had received a remittance that day, and there was a spread of unusual magnitude, and the Terrible Three were honoured guests.

"We've found him," announced Lowther. "He has been thinking. At least, he told us so; but he hasn't told us what he was doing it with."

"Wats! Pway dwy up, Lowthah! I've got somethin' feahfully important to tell you fellows," said Arthur Augustus impressively.

"Pour out the tea while you're telling us," said Blake. "Make yourself useful."

"I wefuse to pouah out the tea, Blake! I have no time to think of tea when old Jackeymo is in dangah."

"My hat! Are we going without tea so long as the Huns are trying to kidnap Jackeymo?" asked Herries.

"He isn't in danger now, fathead!" said Digby. "He's gated till the kidnappers are caught."

"That makes no diffewence, Dig."

"Do you think the kidnapper will come here for him?" chortled Lowther.

"No, Lowthah, because I think he is heah already."

"Wha-a-at!"

Blake almost dropped the teapot in his astonishment. The six juniors fixed six amazed stares upon the swell of St. Jim's.

"Here!" stuttered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"In this school?" yelled Tom Merry.

"Yaas!"

"My hat!"

CHAPTER 12.

A Pal in Peril!

THERE was the silence of astonishment in the study for some moments. Then Monty Lowther looked round as if in search of something.

"Anybody got a bun?" he asked.

"A bun?" repeated Blake.

"Yes. Gussy takes the bun, I think. If anybody's got a bun—"

"I twust you are goin' to be sewious on a sewious subject, Lowthah. This is no time for wotten jokes," said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"A biscuit would do," said Lowther, unheeding. "Anybody got a biscuit?"

"Cheese it a minute, Monty," said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Look here, Gussy, if you are trying to pull our leg—"

"Wats!"

"You say the kidnapper is here in this school?" said Tom. "If you're not off your silly rocker, what are you driving at?"

"Pway lend me your eahs, deah boys, and I will explain!" "I'll lend you a thick ear if you're pulling our leg!" growled Herries.

"I should wefuse to have a thick eah, Hewwies! I wepeat that Jackeymo is in dangah, and that the dangah is in the school."

"Kidnappers coming down the chimney?" asked Manners.

"Certainly not, you ass!"

"Perhaps they're here in disguise," suggested Lowther.

"Toby may be a Hun in disguise. The Head himself, now I come to think of it, some of his actions are a bit suspicious."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pway be sewious, deah boys, and lend me your eahs. I have been weflectin' ovah this mattah, and I twust I have come to a cowwect conclusion."

"Well, if you'll come to any kind of a conclusion it will be a relief," remarked Digby. "Then we can have tea."

"Pway don't intewwupt, Dig! You fellows are awah that an attempt was made last evenin' to kidnap Jackeymo."

"The whole school knows that, and half Sussex," said Blake. "Is that your latest news?"

"Jackeymo was out alone, goin' down to Wylcombe."

"My hat! We know all that!"

"Yaas, but you have not appeahed to weflect, deah boys. How was it that Jackeymo was out alone, on a lonely woad aftah dark?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"No, you uttah ass!"

"Because McCracken sent him down to the chemist," said Tom Merry, in wonder. "There isn't anything about that, I suppose?"

"Exactly!" said Arthur Augustus triumphantly. "And those two wottahs were waitin' for him in the woad. They jumped out on Jackeymo as he came by, and collared him."

"Well?"

"Bai Jove! I must say you fellows don't seem vewy bwright," said Arthur Augustus. "What were those fellows doin' there?"

"Looking for a chance to nobble Jackeymo, I suppose."

"Yaas, pwecisely! And why should they have supposed that Jackeymo would be outside gates, goin' down to Wylcombe, aftah lockin' up?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"By gum!" said Blake. "It looks just as if the rotters knew Jackeymo would be going down to Rylcombe last evening, and were lying in wait for him! They collared him in the darkest part of the lane, too, from what Jackeymo told us, just at the rise, where a bike has to slow down."

"They were waitin' for him," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "They knew that Jackeymo would be comin' along aftah dark on that woad, Blake!"

"It looks as if they knew; but I don't see how they could have known."

"They knew, because they had been told!" said Arthur Augustus. "Look at it for yourselves, deah boys. Two wotten Germans were waitin' there for Jackeymo to pass. They couldn't have been on the watch for him in such a place unless they knew he was comin'. And Jackeymo was there, because he had been sent down to Rylcombe by a—German!"

"By a German!" ejaculated Blake.

"Gussy!" murmured Tom Merry.

"Mr. McCracken is a German!"

"Great pip!"

The juniors stared blankly at Arthur Augustus. They understood what he was driving at now.

"Gussy," gasped Blake, "you—you think McCracken—"

"Look at it calmly, deah boys! McCracken is a Hun with a Bwittish name. A Bwittish name does not make a Hun Bwittish, any more than a natuwalisation papah does. It was a vewy unusual circumstance for Jackeymo to be out of gates aftah dark, yet those two wottahs were waitin' for him to come. McCracken sent him to the chemist. You wemembah suggestin' that somebody else should go, as Jackeymo was wanted in the wehearsal, and Jackeymo said McCracken had specially asked him to go himself. Of course, the wottah did not want anothah chap kidnapped."

"My hat!"

"Moreovah, his weason for sendin' him was to get a pwescription for a cold made up at the chemist's. I have observed the wottah vewy carefully to-day, and I cannot see any sign of a cold about him. It was only a German whoppah."

"Well, that's so," said Manners.

"But—but he's always been jolly decent to Jackeymo," said Dig. "Not a bit like Schneider, who was down on the kid."

"That was to ward off suspicion, deah boys, and also to make Jackeymo willin' to do him any favah—such as goin' down to the village aftah dark," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "Huns are awf'ly deep, you know."

There was a long silence in the study. Arthur Augustus polished his eyeglass with the air of a fellow who had said the last word.

"Blessed if it doesn't look as if there was something in it, though Gussy suggests it!" said Tom Merry at last. "McCracken is a German, and most Germans are plotting rotters, I suppose. He may have come to St. Jim's for that very purpose."

"Of course he did, deah boy! Old Schneidah goin' away for a change gave him the chance. Schneidah doesn't know anythin' about it. He is a wotten bwute, but he is honest—for a German."

"But—but it sounds rather thick, all the same. I know that if you said such a thing outside this study, Gussy, it would mean a flogging from the Head."

"I do not intend to say it outside this study, Tom Mewwy. But a pal of ours is in feahful pewil, and we are goin' to look aftah him."

"Well, if Jackeymo is sent out again by McCracken, and there is another attempt—"

"That is imposs, Tom Mewwy, as Jackeymo is gated. McCracken is only heah till Schneidah comes back—a fortnight in all, and he has been heah ovah a week already. If he is goin' to twy again, he will have to twy befoah he goes. The same twick will not work twice."

"If Gussy's right, he migh' let the kidnappers into the school at night," muttered Manners.

"Wathah a wisky bizney, twyin' to kidnap a chap in the dorm," said D'Arcy. "Some of us might wake up. But I am suah that he will twy again—that is what he is heah for,

and he has only a few days left. He has Jackeymo in his study sometimes."

"He's there now," remarked Lowther.

"Yaas. And as soon as it is dark, I am goin' to keep an eye on that study," said Arthur Augustus firmly. "The wottah twied it on first to kidnap Jackeymo without givin' himself away and wunnin' wiska. But now Jackeymo is gated, he will have to wun the wisk himself, or chuck up the ideah. I don't know what he's up to, but I know he's up to somethin', and I'm goin' to keep an eye on him."

There was a tap at the door, and the handsome, dusky face of the Italian looked in. The conversation ceased suddenly.

"Come in, kid!" said Blake. "I forgot you were coming to tea. I thought you were with McCracken."

"I am going later," said Jackeymo cheerfully. "The signor is busy this evening, and he has given me leave to stay down after bedtime."

"What!" yelled the juniors all together.

Jackeymo looked surprised. The sudden excitement that followed his remark was past his comprehension.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "It is very kind of him. He will be busy, and so I am going to his study when the others go to the dormitory. I shall be glad to stay down for half-an-hour."

The juniors looked at one another with startled glances. Arthur Augustus' theory of McCracken's complicity in the kidnapping plot was staggering enough—it seemed too thick, as they would have expressed it. But the Italian junior's unexpected statement came like confirmation strong as Holy Writ, so to speak.

"Let's have this clear," said Tom Merry. "What are you going to McCracken's study for, Jackeymo?"

"He has some new books from Italy—one of them a 'Life of Signor Contarini,' my father. I shall like to see them very much."

"And he is too busy to see you before bedtime?"

"Certo. He has told me so."

"So you're staying down in his study after bedtime?"

"Si, si!" Contarini's dark eyes looked from one face to another in surprise. "What is the matter, then?"

"I hope you'll have a good time with your giddy Italian books," said Tom Merry. "Let's have tea."

Tea in Study No. 6 was a rather silent meal for once. After tea Contarini left. Then Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass inquiringly upon his chums.

"What do you think now, deah boys?"

"It looks jolly suspicious," said Tom. "Unless it's a coincidence, it's dashed suspicious. And somebody's going to be down as well as Contarini to-night, in case Gussy is right for once."

And there was a general nod of agreement.

CHAPTER 13.

"Buck Up, St. Jim's!"

"BEDTIME!" said Kildare, looking into the junior Common-room.

Fourth Form and Shell were shepherded off to their dormitories. There was one exception. Giacomo Contarini, with a very cheerful face, made his way to the German master's study. Kildare saw lights out for the Shell.

But for three of the Shell, at least, there was to be no sleep just yet. Tom Merry's plans for the night were laid. Wild as the suspicion concerning the German master seemed, the juniors did not intend to leave anything to chance. Until their Italian chum went to his dormitory they meant to keep watch.

"Hallo! Going out?" yawned Gore, as the Terrible Three slipped from their beds. "Jape on the New House—what? You can leave me out!"

"What's going on?" asked Kangaroo.

"We are!" said Monty Lowther cheerfully.

And, with that as the only explanation, the three juniors slipped out of the dormitory and tiptoed away to the box-room. The passage was dark, though the lights, of course, were still on downstairs. There was the murmur of a voice as they entered the box-room.

"Heah we are, deah boys!"

"First in the field!" chuckled Blake.

Tom Merry slid open the box-room window. Seven juniors climbed silently out and dropped on the leads of the outhouse below. Tom closed the window silently. In a few minutes more the Terrible Three and Study No. 6 were on terra firma, and creeping cautiously round the School House.

Faint gleams of light came from several windows. Every window was covered with dark blinds, owing to the lighting

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regulations, and only a glimmer here and there showed of the light within. The quadrangle was almost pitchy dark. The juniors stopped at a short distance from the window of Herr Schneider's study, now occupied by the German master's substitute.

"Well, here we are!" murmured Lowther. "Let's hope that a prefect won't go nosing into the dorm."

"We must wisk that, deah boy, with a pal in pewil."

"It won't be long," said Tom Merry. "Jackeymo can't stay down long."

"I've arranged with Reilly to let us know when he goes to the dorm," said Blake. "Reilly is going to whistle from the dorm window. I had to tell him, but he will keep mum."

"That's all right."

Keeping close in the shadow of an elm, the juniors waited in darkness. They could not help thinking that most likely they were there upon a wild-goose chase, though Arthur Augustus had no doubts. But they were not sorry they had come. If the German master was in the plot against Contarini, he had every opportunity of doing his evil work.

The junior was alone with him in his study. He could be seized, stunned or chloroformed, and removed, not by way of the door, certainly, for the hall was lighted, but by way of the window into the black quadrangle. If such a scheme was working in the German's head, undoubtedly his confederates were near the school, ready to help him from outside—to take Jackeymo over the school wall and bear him to the waiting motor-car. Was it possible? Unless a series of strange coincidences had happened, it was more than possible. But even the bare chance of it was worth half an hour's wait in the cold night.

Ten strokes boomed out from the clock-tower.

"Ten o'clock," murmured Manners. "He can't keep Jackeymo down much longer."

"He's leavin' it as late as possible befoah he bweaks out," said Arthur Augustus calmly. "The latah the safah!"

"Jolly cold here!" murmured Herries.

"Wats!"

Tom Mewwy made a sudden movement.

"Shush! Look!"

The light had gone out in the German master's study. The few faint gleams that escaped the dark blind had died away. The juniors felt their hearts beat.

The German master's study was in darkness. Jackeymo—if all was well—could be no longer there. Yet he had not gone to his dormitory, for Reilly's signal whistle had not been heard.

"Look!" breathed Blake.

Dark as it was, there was a faint glimmer on the study window into the night, where a fugitive ray of starlight caught it. A moving shadow appeared at the window. The dark blind was being removed from within. Then a faint, faint sound—but faint as it was, the juniors knew what it meant. The window was being opened with great caution.

Their hearts beat almost to suffocation.

This confirmation of their worst suspicions came as a shock. Why was the German opening his window so cautiously from within, after extinguishing the light?

Keeping close in the shadows, the juniors waited and watched, their hearts thumping.

The window was open now, and faintly, faintly they saw a head and shoulders protrude. The head was turned to right and to left. The man was looking along to the other windows, evidently to make sure that they were closed and darkened.

Then the head disappeared.

"Weady, deah boys?" breathed D'Arcy.

"Hush!"

There was a faint dragging sound from the open window. The dim form was seen again, this time with a burden in the arms. A faint, sickly smell floated to the nostrils of the juniors. They knew what it was—they knew what it must be—chloroform! They did not need telling what was the burden in the German's arms. They knew that it was Giacomo Contarini, and that he was insensible—drugged by the scoundrel who had trapped him!

The German slid heavily to the ground from the window-sill with his unconscious burden in his arms. Dim as it was, the juniors made out clearly enough a still form in Etons, grasped in the German's fat arms. Only for a moment he stood beneath the window, breathing hard. Then he started directly towards the juniors, taking the shortest way towards the school wall where it bordered the road.

"Ach!"

He did not see them till he was almost touching them. Then he started back with a guttural exclamation.

A yell from Arthur Augustus rang across the quadrangle.

"Down him!"

Like tigers the seven juniors sprang upon the German.

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The attack was so sudden, so unexpected, that the rascal had no chance of defence. Before he could even drop Contarini they were upon him, and he was grasped on all sides and dragged to the ground. Tom Merry grasped his right wrist, Lowther his left; Blake flung an arm round his neck; Manners had both hands in his hair; Digby seized an ear; D'Arcy trampled excitedly on his fat legs; Herries hurled himself on his plump stomach, driving all the wind out of him. Under that terrific attack the German simply collapsed.

"Help!" roared Blake.

"Buck up, St. Jim's!" yelled Arthur Augustus, trampling on the kicking legs of the German, hardly knowing what he was doing in his excitement.

Contarini had fallen to the ground. He lay still. The School House door opened as the shouts rang out. Mr. Railton dashed out, followed by Kildare.

"In Heaven's name, what has happened?" shouted Mr. Railton. "What—"

"Bwing a light! We've got him!"

"What—what is it?"

"The German kidnapper, sir—"

"Good heavens!"

Kildare rushed in for a lamp. The light streamed on the strange scene. The German was struggling feebly under the clutching juniors.

"Contarini!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. He raised the insensible junior in his arms. "Good heavens! He is drugged! What man is that, Tom Merry?"

"McCracken, sir!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "We've got him!"

"Mr. McCracken!" exclaimed the Housemaster dazedly.

"Are you mad? You have attacked a master—"

"He was kidnapping Contarini, sir!" gasped Blake.

"Boy!"

"It's true, sir," said Tom Merry. "We suspected him, and kept watch here. He got Jackeymo out through the window—you can see he's been drugged—"

Mr. Railton gazed at him aghast.

"He's a wotten Hun, sir!" chirruped Arthur Augustus. "But we've got him!"

The amazed Housemaster could not doubt. The open window—the fact that the German master had evidently left his study by the window—and that Contarini was drugged, convinced him, in spite of his amazement.

"Secure that man, Kildare!" he said. "Bring him into the house!"

He strode into the School House, carrying Contarini. And with seven juniors still clutching him, Mr. McCracken was marched in, Kildare bringing up the rear. The German master spoke no word. His face was ashen white. He knew that the game was up, and the chill of despair was in his heart.

Tom Merry & Co. told their story in the Head's study, much to the amazement of Dr. Holmes. Mr. McCracken, with his hands tied, was locked in a room by himself. And when the excited juniors had explained, and the Head could no longer doubt the amazing story, he went to the telephone. There was little doubt that the kidnapper had confederates outside the school, and Inspector Skeat's chance had come.

The juniors were sent back to their dormitory, gently chidden by the Head for having taken matters into their own hands. But there was no sleep for them till a very late hour. The Fourth and the Shell had to be told all about it, over and over again. Contarini remained under Mr. Railton's care for the night. He had not been hurt, but it was likely to be some time before the effects of the chloroform wore off.

Tom Merry and Co. slept at last—the sleep of the just—but they were down in the morning at the first clang of the rising-bell. They were eager for news, and there was good news. Inspector Skeat, warned by telephone, had taken his measures promptly. A motor-car, with two men in it, had been found waiting in the road near St. Jim's, and the two men had been arrested on suspicion, and they proved to be two naturalised Germans belonging to London. They could not explain their presence there; but, as a matter of fact, it did not need much explaining. McCracken was in the cells, and his two confederates in the same cheery abode, in safe hands to await their trial.

"Cari amici!"

Giacomo Contarini rushed up to the juniors and hugged them in turn. The Italian was brimming with delight.

"Cari amici! You have saved me! Ero in pericolo, pericolo di morte—"

"Pitch it to us in English," grinned Tom Merry.

"Tell us what happened, Jackeymo."

Jackeymo shuddered.

"Oh, it was terrible! We had been reading the books in—
(Continued on page iv of cover.)

A NEW ADVENTURE SERIAL.

START TO-DAY!

**The First Chapters.**

CARTON ROSS, a lonely and friendless youth, sole heir to a great fortune, though unaware of it, is hunted by a party of outlaws led by DIRK RALWIN. He is befriended by HARVEY MILBURNE and his daughter LORNA, who lose their home and are separated in an attempt to defend him from his pursuers.

Ross is captured by the brigands, but, with Lorna's help, recovers his wallet—containing papers which prove his identity—and escapes. Later they fall in with RODDY GARRIN, an Englishman, and his companion AH CHING, a Chinaman. The outlaws continue the chase, together with HUXTON FENNER, a Yankee, who had previously been a companion of Garrin and Ah Ching, but had deserted them.

They are all captured and taken aboard a Mexican cruiser, from which they escape, the cruiser afterwards being blown up during a mutiny aboard her. Eventually Lorna is captured, and taken to Dirk Ralwin, at Quito, a settlement on the banks of the Amazon, and is confronted with her father, who is in chains, and thin and pale from the privations he has suffered. Ross, who is on the balcony outside the room in which the scene takes place, hears the outlaw chief threaten to kill Harvey Milburne unless Lorna tells him where her friends are in hiding. He shows himself through the window, and Dirk Ralwin screams out an offer of ten thousand dollars to the man who captures him. But Ross escapes, and returns to Garrin and Ah Ching, who are hidden in a hollow covered by foliage, close to the river. He tells them what has happened, and Ah Ching proposes a plan for obtaining the ten thousand dollars. Just as they have completed the arrangements a sound is heard outside. It is CAPTAIN ESHMAN of the cruiser which had been blown up.

He is dragged into the hollow, and bound and gagged. Ah Ching obtains the ten thousand dollars from Dirk Ralwin, and, after a thrilling escape from the outlaw's ruffians, whom he misleads, returns to his friends.

(Now read on.)

The Death of Harvey Milburne.

"Surely," Garrin said, in a hushed tone, indicative of great emotion—"surely you don't mean to insinuate, Ah Ching, that you've brought back the ten thousand dollars with you?"

"My insinuate nothing!" the other answered. "My tell you the facts of the case. The dollars are mine—ours. Here they are!"

With a dramatic movement worthy of a great actor, the little Chinaman drew the canvas bag from beneath his blue gown, and, opening it, poured the contents on to the ground.

"Crikey!" gasped Roddy Garrin. "You're a treasure, Ah Ching!"

"He generally does what he sets out to do!" said Carton Ross laughingly. "But he's surpassed himself this time!"

"As he told us he would," replied Garrin. "And I was ass enough to think he was only a braggart! Ah, well! We all live and learn, and I've learned that Ah Ching is a man of his word."

The sudden acquisition of wealth by Ah Ching was an event that at any other time would have been celebrated in a fit and proper fashion. As it was, the three comrades did celebrate it in a memorable manner by at once starting out to release Lorna Milburne and her father.

The information acquired by Carton Ross concerning the environs of Quito proved of the greatest value. The lower part of the Customs House, where Lorna was imprisoned,

had a covered passage-way leading to it from the gardens at the back of the building.

This approach had been minutely described to the comrades by their prisoner, Captain Eshman, who had voluntarily offered to lead them directly to it, on condition that he was in return set at liberty.

The offer was accepted by Carton Ross without hesitation, for he had no fear of Eshman playing him false now that he had the whip-hand of the Mexican officer. All Ross wanted was to see Harvey and Lorna Milburne released from Dirk Ralwin's tyrannous power.

He knew of the vindictiveness displayed by Ralwin towards Milburne, for whom he entertained the highest friendship and regard, and he fervently hoped that the old Englishman would suffer no harm while in prison. That Lorna Milburne herself was in serious danger he refused to believe, but he dared not feel confident as to her safety.

"Ralwin is scoundrel enough to carry out the threat he used against her father, even now," he said to Roddy Garrin and Ah Ching—"and especially so if we fail in our attempt!"

"Luck's on our side to-night," rejoined Garrin; "so don't speak of failure. Harvey Milburne is already as good as free!"

The words were scarcely past his lips when he sprang to his feet, uttering a shout of amazement, for there before him was Harvey Milburne, the very man of whom he and his friends had been speaking but a moment before.

"Mr. Milburne!" cried the lad excitedly, running to welcome the other with outstretched hands. "How in the world did you manage to find your way here? Where is your daughter?"

A sobbing groan of something extremely like despair came from Milburne, who, tottering to the stump of a tree, sank wearily down on it and covered his face with his hands.

"Where is Lorna?" Carton Ross asked again, anxiety and alarm stirring afresh at his heart. "Have you escaped and left her behind?"

"She went before me," said Harvey Milburne, glancing sorrowfully up at the speaker. "After you had appeared, only to vanish as mysteriously as possible a minute later, Dirk Ralwin was wild with rage and baffled desire. Then he grew calmer, and I saw him laughing to himself as one laughs over some plot that promises to bring him in a profitable return."

"Soon I was to know what that plot was, and that it most closely concerned me. Ralwin declared that Lorna was to be sent back to the place from which she escaped in your company, while I myself was to go free."

"To go free!" exclaimed Carton Ross, puzzled and amazed. "I can't understand why Dirk Ralwin should give such an order!"

"But I can!" said Harvey Milburne. "It was to be revenged on both of us—on Lorna by tearing her away from us all again, and on me by giving me a liberty that should only be a mockery and a sham. Such a freedom, even if it lasted, would be a kind of living death."

Carton Ross was silent, and he and his two friends looked pityingly at the man before them; while at the same time their thoughts went swiftly out to Lorna, the beautiful, fearless girl who had once more fallen under Dirk Ralwin's powerful sway.

"We were parted without being given the opportunity of seeing each other in private," said Milburne, "and the last I saw of Lorna was her sweet, kind face turned to me as she was led away. There was a smile on her lips—a brave

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smile, for I knew how full her heart must be with grief and despair. Poor Lorna! I shall never see her again!"

"You mustn't talk in that way, Mr. Milburne!" rejoined Carton Ross, with an affected cheeriness that he was very far from feeling. "Lorna will be with you again far sooner than you expect. I and my two friends here will never rest until she is free again!"

Harvey Milburne sadly shook his head.

"No," he replied. "I am speaking what I know to be true. My long imprisonment with the outlaws has not only broken down my health, but brought me very near to the end of my days. I can hope but for time in which to return to the scenes of many years of happiness at San Ramo. My old home there, I know, is now a darksome ruin, but I shall, in imagination, be able to live those days over once again before death ends all for me."

His appearance was a silent testimony to the truth of his words. He looked far worse than he had done that morning when Carton Ross had seen him dragged before Dirk Ralwin. His physical breakdown had been complete, and now there had fallen this crushing blow to hasten on the end.

Now that there was no necessity for the comrades to remain close to Quito, they gave their attention to providing Harvey Milburne with the means necessary to reach San Ramo. The same boatman who had brought them to the place they were in was found without much difficulty by Ah Ching, and, after considerable haggling over the price to be paid, he agreed to let them have his sailing barque for the journey.

After the moon had sunk, and when a profound darkness veiled earth and sky, the voyagers set out on their journey down the river. The barque reached San Ramo early on the following morning, and the comrades went on shore, to find that what once had been a flourishing little settlement was now a blackened ruin and desolation.

The natives who once lived there had fled, and no white man was to be found in the neighbourhood.

Overcome with grief though he was by this depressing change, Harvey Milburne bore himself with an attitude of calm resignation to his evil fortune. He made various dispositions of property that he possessed in writing, and showed no sign of what was so soon to befall him.

But that night, while he and his companions were resting by the riverside, Carton Ross heard Milburne give a cry that brought him quickly to the sick man's side.

"I am dying," said Milburne, looking up into Ross's hand, some young face. "Yes," he went on to say, as the other uttered an earnest protest; "I speak what I know to be the truth. But while there is yet time I would ask you to look well after my daughter Lorna, should it ever be in your power to do so. She is now a prisoner, but she may one day regain her liberty!"

"She shall regain it!" Carton Ross declared energetically, his cheeks flushing with emotion. "I and my friends will not rest until she is free!"

Harvey Milburne gave the other a grateful look.

"You are brave and kind and generous," he said, "and one day you will be justly rewarded for all that you have done and are doing for those in distress."

He lapsed into silence after uttering these words, which were his last, and died peacefully not long afterwards. The three comrades mourned his fate, for though they had not seen a great deal of him, they knew Harvey Milburne to be a true white man, and they were indebted to him for much help and kindly treatment in the past.

They dug his grave beneath the deep, green shade of the trees near the mighty river that he had known and loved so well in life. The coffin they made from planks found in the dismantled house of a former settler, and a wooden cross was placed at the head of the grave, bearing the name of Harvey Milburne, his age, and the date of his death.

Solemnly, with bowed heads, the three comrades stood by the graveside, and looked down at the freshly-dug turf that hid from sight the mortal remains of their old friend.

"Before he died," said Carton Ross, "I told him that I would never rest until Lorna, his daughter, was freed for ever from Dirk Ralwin's power, and I mean to fulfil the promise, even though it costs me my life!"

Roddy Garrin held out his hand.

"I am with you," he said. "Where you lead I follow!"

"So do I," remarked Ah Ching, emphatically nodding his big head. "You can rely on me, Mista Ross, to the velly death!"

So it was that the three comrades, united as they never had been before by trial and suffering and desperate peril, made their vow to snatch Lorna Milburne from the grasp of the man who was the dangerous foe of them all. In no more fitting place could they have registered their resolve than where the father of the beautiful girl who was their comrade had been committed to his last mortal home.

Alone in the Forest.

In the mountain stronghold of the outlaws, where she had once before been a prisoner, Lorna Milburne was standing by the grated window of a wooden hut, looking out across the rocky heights that everywhere met her gaze.

She could see very little, but, even then, her thoughts were far away. Her memories were of her father, from whom she had been so cruelly separated a second time only three days before, of her trusty comrades, and of the dangers by flood and field that they had all passed through since she had first fallen in with them.

It seemed impossible, Lorna mused, for a girl of her years to have had such breathlessly exciting experiences in so short a time. But they were real experiences, as she knew only too well, and they had brought her to this place, that she had hoped and prayed never to see again.

The journey from Quito, made on horseback, had been quickly accomplished. An armed escort of six men accompanied Lorna. They treated her with courteous politeness, in marked contrast to their former behaviour when she was first taken captive.

The hut she was imprisoned in stood by itself, but there was no hope of her effecting an escape from it, all alone and unaided as she was, and without a friend to help her in her extremity.

Scarcely a word had passed between the girl and the two men who guarded the hut. She could see them now, as she gazed out of the window, gambling for silver five-cent pieces, their playing-table the huge butt of some fallen tree.

They were talking excitedly, quarrelling, and Lorna suddenly became intensely interested in the dispute. For the men started to fight, not with their fists, but with knives snatched from the short leather sheathes fastened to their belts.

Springing to and fro with cat-like agility, the combatants struck fiercely at each other. The sunlight flashed and flickered on the cold steel until it dazzled the eye to look at it. All at once, one of the knives shone red, and Lorna's face paled as a man dropped to the ground.

The other, uttering a shout of triumph, ran forward and peered down into the upturned face of his defeated opponent. But his joy was of brief duration. The man he had struck was not dead, but shamming, and suddenly his neck was clasped in a vice-like clutch.

Losing his balance, he fell on the other. Then a grim struggle began between the two whilom friends, who were now inveterate foes. First one and then the other gained and held a momentary advantage. Rolling over and over, they fought like wild beasts, uttering snarling cries, and striking at each other with their clenched fists.

At last both of them gained a throttling hold on the throat. They held on grimly. Slowly their struggling ceased. Lorna, terrified and trembling, averted her gaze. When she looked again the outlaws were stretched out motionless on the ground, the right hand of each still clutched round the other's throat.

They were dead! To this tragic end their dispute had brought them. Lorna had instinctively foreseen what would be the result of the sordid quarrel. Her will power came back to the girl.

Here was the unlooked-for opportunity that a few minutes before she had despaired of ever being placed in her way. With no one to hinder her, she might escape from her prison and gain the forest before the other outlaws were aware of what had taken place.

Darting to the ponderous wooden door of the hut, Lorna pushed it open. For a moment she paused on the threshold to look round. Not a living creature was in sight. Only the two dead men lay still in the bright sunlight that shone pitilessly down on them.

Next instant Lorna was running fleetly across the wide open space that formed the immediate approach to the camp. A belt of trees immediately ahead of her was her objective. She reached it in safety, and vanished from view.

Following the same track along which she and Carton Ross had galloped on the memorable night of their escape from Dirk Ralwin, the fearless girl lost not a moment in putting an ever-increasing distance between her and the outlaws' stronghold.

The sun, a blazing red disc in the blue sky, poured its rays upon the earth with sultry fierceness. Not a breath of wind relieved the great heat. The rocks and stones that strewed the path were like coals of fire to the touch. It was the time of day when travellers broke their journey for a much-needed rest and siesta, but Lorna thought not of rest or fatigue.

On she went, walking with the light, agile footsteps of the born mountaineer, and never slackening her pace unless to circumvent some more than usually awkward obstruction lying across the track.

(Continued on page lii of cover.)

FOES OF FORTUNE!

(Continued from page 20.)

Towards the afternoon she caught sight of an advancing body of horsemen, riding in single file, and, crouching down behind some rocks, she waited until they had gone past.

They were some of Dirk Ralwin's followers. Soon they were out of sight, and Lorna, devoutly thankful that they had not seen her, continued her journey.

For the rest of the day she moved onward without a halt. It was not until the shades of night were falling over the earth that she reached the boundaries of the great forest region, which, with all its unknown perils and dangers, was to her as a sanctuary of peace and refuge.

The moment she stepped into the deep shade of the trees that stretched before her in an endless vista, Lorna knew that she had little to fear from the outlaws who, discovering that she had escaped, might have followed in pursuit.

Flinging herself down on a mossy slope, the travel-worn, exhausted girl almost at once fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. She awoke suddenly, with a queer consciousness in her mind that someone was watching her, and, rising to her feet, stared apprehensively around.

Bright moonlight filled the open glades of the forest, and fell in silvery beams at Lorna's feet. The girl did not move for several moments. Then, believing that she had no justification for her fears, she took a step forward.

Immediately a slight rustling in the bushes on her right made her heart leap with fear that she could not repress. Still, the bushes showed no sign of hidden life beyond that faint rustling sound, and again Lorna summoned up her courage, and moved onward once more.

Suddenly the shaking of the foliage burst out afresh, this time louder and more insistently than before, and from the midst of them sprang three figures, at sight of whom Lorna shrank back, with paling cheeks and fast-beating breath.

They were pigmies, natives of the Amazonian valley, who lived in the forests and rarely ever ventured beyond it. For centuries this queer race had existed, and many were the mysterious rites and ceremonies attributed to them, although few people in a position to speak authoritatively on the subject had ever seen them.

The pigmies confronting Lorna were curiously dressed with the skins of wild animals and feather headresses. The only weapons they carried were blow-tubes, which discharged small, finely-pointed darts, dipped in a deadly poison that caused a terrible death.

Knowing that she could not escape, Lorna remained motionless as a statue. Standing there, with the moonlight shining full upon her beautiful face and figure, she looked like some fair divinity of the forest.

As such the pigmies seemed to regard her; for, coming slowly but alertly forward, they prostrated themselves at her feet with gestures of the most abject submission. This unaccountable attitude encouraged Lorna to walk on, but directly she did so the pigmies sprang to their feet, and raised the deadly blow-tubes to their lips.

"Why do you threaten me?" the girl inquired. "I am alone and unarmed, and could not hurt you even if I wished to."

The three little men of the forest stared at her uncomprehendingly, shook their heads, and then commenced jabbering to each other in a native lingo of their own that was utterly new and unintelligible to the girl standing before them.

At last they became silent, and one of them made a sign to Lorna to follow him, while his two companions placed themselves one on each side of her.

"I'm their prisoner!" the girl said to herself. "I've escaped from the outlaws, only to fall into the hands of these strange forest-dwellers about whom such stories are told. Well, at least they are disposed to treat me kindly if I am obedient."

So, unresistingly, Lorna followed her guide along paths that wound deviously in and out between the tangled foliage of the forest undergrowth.

After a long journey the little party suddenly entered a wide glade, surrounded by scores of little huts, built of matted grass and thatched with leaves, sewn together by thread made from some fibrous substance largely used by the pigmies for such purposes.

The guide went forward alone. A drum was beaten a minute or two later with a loud, rolling clamour that awakened a thousand sleeping echoes in the forest, and out of the little huts there rushed a multitude of the pigmies, shouting and gesticulating with every sign of uncontrollable excitement.

Leaping and dancing, they surrounded Lorna. Some flung themselves on their knees, and bowed; others, not so rever-

ently inclined, came close up to her and touched her hair, her face, and hands, and fingered the clothes she was wearing, all the time giving vent to queer-sounding cries of excitement and curiosity.

The tumult was stilled as quickly as it had arisen. A man, young and richly dressed, came through the lane that the pigmies opened out for him at a sharp command, and, approaching Lorna, bowed before her with every mark of admiring obeisance.

"Welcome!" he said in Spanish. "Long have we dwellers of the forest waited for your coming, white queen, and now that we see you we worship you!"

Again he bowed in reverence, those around following his example, while drums rolled out a noisy salute.

"My people," the young man continued, when all was silent again, "will be impatient, now that you are here, for the prophecy of their wise men of a hundred years ago to be fulfilled at once!"

Lorna looked inquiringly at the speaker.

"White queen," he continued, "I claim you as my bride!"

An Interrupted Ceremony—Comrades All.

Lorna gazed at the man with a wondering surprise that swiftly changed to maidenly shame and humiliation. She drew back, pride and aversion in her look and bearing, and shook her head.

"You propose an impossibility," she said. "And I am not the person for whom you and your people are looking. I am but a homeless, friendless girl, who was fleeing from those who sought to harm her, when your men captured me and brought me here."

The king of the pigmies, for such he was, smiled proudly.

"None can harm you here," he said. "You are safe from all your enemies. We are your friends, your servants to do your bidding, for you are she whose coming has been long foretold by our wise men. Many years since they prophesied that when the ruler of our tribe took to himself as bride a white girl, who would seek our protection, then the tribe would once more become strong and powerful. I am that ruler, and you are the bride, before whom I and my people make obeisance."

Again he bowed low with a courtly grace that was strangely out of harmony with his barbaric aspect and surroundings. Again the drums rolled. Once more the surging, excited crowd of little people uttered shrill cries, and prostrated themselves as before an idol which they regarded with the greatest fear and veneration.

The absolute helplessness of her position was realised by Lorna in all its clearness. She could see that these strange people of the forest whom she had fallen amongst were in deep and heartfelt earnest in regarding her as the white girl whose advent had been foretold in the far-distant past.

Any outward show of resistance would be of no avail. It might, indeed, cause the homage now paid her by the pigmies to change to open hostility and hatred. A seeming acceptance of the impossible proposal made by the king was, she decided, the wisest course to take.

Inclining her head, she remained silent, and a great shout of joy and triumph went up from the pigmies, who misinterpreted the meaning of the gesture.

Laying his hand on her shoulder, the king led Lorna across the square to a hut superior to the others, both in size and appearance. At the doorway she was met by a bevy of native girls, dressed in flowing white garments, and having crimson flowers artistically placed in their dark hair.

These attendants conveyed Lorna to a room hung with reed mats and carpeted with the skins of the jaguar and the deer. Food of various kinds was piled high in pyramidal shape on shell plates, but Lorna did not touch any of it, although pressed to do so by her female servitors.

Dismissing them, she sat down on the bamboo couch near the far wall, and thought deeply over her position. It was far from being an enviable one, but there were encouraging features about it, and Lorna was not the girl to give way to despair. She was so accustomed to being confronted by unexpected dangers and difficulties that it had become almost second nature to her to meet them with a brave confidence.

That there was some way out of the gilded prison she was now an occupant of she did not doubt for a moment. It only remained for her to keep calm and watch for a favourable opportunity of regaining her freedom.

But when, after a sleepless night, Lorna looked out of her hut window as morning dawned, she realised that she was guarded as effectually as though she were the inmate of some Royal dungeon. There were pigmy guards, carrying their blow-pipes, stationed in a dozen different places.

All of them were facing the hut she was in, keeping vigilant watch on every approach to it. Remembering the flattering reception that had been accorded to her on the previous night, it was hard for Lorna to believe that these

(Continued on page iv of cover.)

FOES OF FORTUNE !

(Continued from page iii. of cover.)

men had orders to see that she did not escape by using their blowpipes in case of necessity.

Never before had Lorna yearned so ardently for the presence of her brave and trusty comrades as she did now. Where were they? she wondered. Somewhere far away, in peril and difficulty themselves—perhaps even worse situated than she was herself, and with no thought to spare for another's danger.

Suddenly Lorna gave a violent start, and a vivid blush overspread her beautiful face. The foliage of a large, flowering bush that her dreamy gaze had chanced to alight on had parted, and in the opening made there appeared the yellow, wrinkled face of Ah Ching, the little Chinaman.

It vanished immediately, and though Lorna stared intently for several minutes at the bush she did not see Ah Ching again. But the knowledge that he was near by gave her renewed hope and courage.

"Ah Ching!" she murmured aloud. "Can he have followed me here? If so, Carton Ross and Roddy Garrin must have come with him. They know where I am, and what has happened to me. Brave, true hearts! With them to help me, there is nothing I need fear."

At the rolling beat of the drum, the forest dwellers awoke to life and activity. Emerging from their houses, they gathered in the square—men, women, and children—and wended their way into the forest, accompanied by musicians, who played quaint airs on short reed flutes and beat drums, whose rolling tattoo drowned every other sound.

Soon afterwards the same girl attendants who had waited on her before appeared before Lorna, carrying garments of fine, costly texture that she allowed them to put on her without a protest.

When this ceremony was at an end, Lorna, attired in her bridal array, was taken into the square outside the hut. Here a palanquin was in waiting for her. Stepping into it, she sat down on a cushioned seat, and the bearers, six stalwart dwarfs, lifted the conveyance from the ground, and marched off at a sharp pace.

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Wednesday's issue of THE "GEM" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)

A PAL IN PERIL!

(Continued from page 18.)

the study. The Tedesco was all kindness. Then he said good-night, and shook hands with me; and seized me suddenly, and pressed a cloth over my face. Then all was dark!" He shivered. "I knew no more till I woke up in Mr. Railton's room. But he has told me. It was you—you who saved me! Grazie, tanto grazie!"

"It was Gussy!" said Blake. "Gussy spotted the Hun's little game. Gussy all the time! Blessed if I understand it! Yet somebody said the age of miracles was past!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

Contarini rushed upon Arthur Augustus, and hugged him again, pouring out streams of gratitude in musical Italian. Figgins & Co. bore down upon them to demand what the row was about.

"I suppose the danger's past now," said Kerr. "The merry kidnappers are in chokey, and it won't be easy to play a game like that again. I think we can say honours are divided this time—we rescued Jackeymo once, and you fellows once—"

"Cari amici!" said Jackeymo affectionately. "Come son felice!"

"Well, you ought to be felice, if that means cheery, as it's turned out," said Tom Merry laughing. "Figgy, old man, it's honours divided—and, if you like, we'll do the 'Kidnapped Kid' together, and Jackeymo shall play the leading role after all, with last night's little game as the big scene in the play. It will bring down the house!"

"It's a go!" said Figgins.

And, while the rascally kidnappers went to their just punishment, that great drama, the "Kidnapped Kid," was played by the combined talent of the N.H.J.A.D.S. and the School House Dramatic Society, and it was a tremendous success. Herr Schneider, who had returned by that time, was a specially invited guest. He did not seem to enjoy the drama, and left before the finish, but everybody else voted it topping, as, indeed, it was.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Wednesday's Great Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's—"LEVISGN FOR ST. JIM'S!" by MARTIN CLIFFORD.)

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2.—All notices must be written—one word in each space—on the form below, and if more than 24 words are needed, another form must be obtained. But we will accept one form from the GEM and one from the MAGNET, or the forms from back numbers may be used.

3.—The charge is 3d. for any notice not exceeding 24 words. If exceeding 24 words, 6d. The fee must be paid by penny stamps pinned—not stuck—in the space provided.

4.—The Editor reserves to himself the right to refuse any notice sent in, and he will not accept in any case notices of articles to be

sold or for exchange, or requests for correspondence with readers of the opposite sex.

5. Insertion at any specific date will not be guaranteed, and no notice can be expected to appear in less than five weeks from its receipt, while it may have to be held back much longer. Nor will the Editor undertake to insert any notice in the exact form received. Space is precious, and readers should do their utmost to keep notices as short as possible. The argument that more than 3d. has been paid will not be heeded.

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