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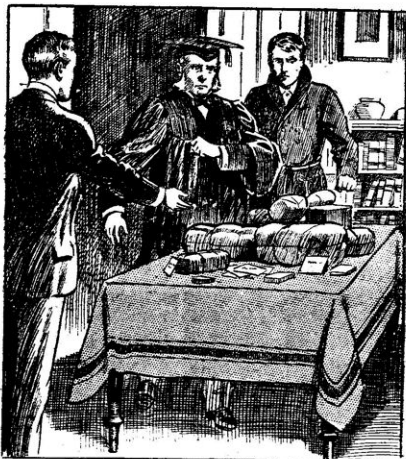


LOYAL MISS MARIE!



MISS MARIE CAPTURES A THIEF!

A Thrilling Incident in the Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale in this Number.



LOYAL MISS MARIE!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story dealing with the Adventures of Tom Merry and Co., of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Rounding up the Slackers.

"It's jolly mysterious!" said Tom Merry.

"About the biggest mystery we've ever known at St. Jim's!" agreed Manners.

"Oh, for the brain-box of a Sexton Blake, or the deductive ability of a Dalton Hawke!" sighed Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three of the Shell were discussing recent happenings at St. Jim's. This was their sixth discussion that day on the same subject.

The history of the old school had not been barren of sensations; but this latest sensation, as Monty Lowther remarked, "fairly put the golden helmet on it."

A series of daring burglaries had lately been enacted at St. Jim's. There were many victims, but the author of the outrages had not yet been brought to book.

The ball had been set rolling by the theft of a five-pound note from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth.

It had been thought at first that the swell of St. Jim's had either lost or mislaid the note, but it soon became only too obvious that it had been a case of deliberate theft.

Within twenty-four hours of the disappearance of D'Arcy's fiver another startling theft had occurred.

Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, had come over to St. Jim's to play a football match with Tom Merry & Co., and the visiting eleven had been robbed. Suspicion had fallen upon Jack Blake, but Blake had been able to clear himself in the eyes of his school-fellows, though not the eyes of the Rookwooders, who had left St. Jim's in a royal rage and vowed that they would never visit the school again.

Had the thefts stopped here the matter would have been serious enough. But they had not stopped.

The thief, who had hitherto performed his sleight-of-hand tricks in the day-time, had just carried out a daring nocturnal burglary on an extensive scale.

Seniors and juniors, School House fellows and New House fellows were on the list of victims.

Manners had been robbed of his

camera, Cardow of his gold watch, Knox of his cigarette-case, and Kildare of his gold tie-pin; while over in the New House Monteith and Figgins had suffered, the former losing his fountain-pen, and the latter the sum of three pounds.

But the crowning outrage had been the theft of Stewart's motor-cycle.

Stewart was a new fellow, recently admitted into the ranks of the Shell; and, although he had only been at St. Jim's a few days, he was already extremely popular. He had arrived at the school on a magnificent motor-cycle, his pride and joy, and the unknown burglar had forced an entry into the bicycle-shed and removed the machine.

The Headmaster of St. Jim's had, of course, been informed of these acts of larceny, and he had not been idle in the matter.

The services of Dalton Hawke, the boy-detective, had been enlisted, and Hawke had already arrived at the school in the role of Mr. Brown, the games-master. The only persons aware of his real identity were the Head and Mr. Raitton—though Stewart of the Shell more than suspected that "Mr. Brown" was playing a part.

The Terrible Three were in football-garb, but they were not thinking of football just then. Before a blazing fire in their study they were discussing the strange sequence of events which had paralysed the school.

"It ticks me hollow!" declared Tom Merry. "Thefts have happened before on a smaller scale, but the thief has invariably got it in the neck! This time, though, it looks as if he'll get off scot-free!"

Manners nodded gloomily.

"It's good-bye to my camera!" he said. "I shall never get another like it—not even if I live to become an eminent professor! It cost quids and quids—"

"Oh, bust your camera!" growled Tom Merry.

"The burglar's done that by this time, you bet!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"It isn't the stuff that's been taken that matters so much," said Tom Merry.

"It's the unpleasantness of knowing there's a thief in the school—"

"Or outside it," said Manners.

"Well, yes, the things might have been pinched by an outsider. But when you come to think it over, it's hardly likely. You see, an outsider wouldn't know the ropes so well as a fellow living on the premises."

"But there isn't a fellow here who's deep enough for the job!" said Manners.

"There are cads like Racke and Crooke, of course; but then their caddishness doesn't extend to thieving."

"And they wouldn't have nerve enough, in any case," said Monty Lowther. "Verily, my sons, this is a puzzle—and all the jawing in the world won't solve it."

"I only wish," said Tom Merry, "that the Head would engage a 'tec to come here and ferret things out!"

The captain of the Shell little guessed that his wish had already been carried out.

At that moment the study door opened, admitting Jack Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Both were in football attire.

"Hallo, Gussy!" said Monty Lowther. "Lost any more fivers lately?"

"I wogwet, Lowthah, that I have no moah fivahs to lose."

"Are all your toppers safe?"

"Yaas, deah boy, I've placed them undah lock an' key."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're quite sure your fifteen pairs of striped trousers haven't been tampered with?" said Lowther anxiously.

"Weallly, Lowthah! Don't be a silly ass—"

"Certainly not!" said Monty. "I know you dislike rivalry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any fresh light on the situation, you fellows?" inquired Jack Blake.

"None whatever," said Tom Merry.

"It seems that the burglar's got clear with the loot, and it's a hundred to one against his being captured."

"Rats!" said Blake. "In my opinion, he'll get more and more ambitious, and try to walk off with the Head's silver. And then he'll be collared."

"By Jove!" said Tom Merry. "If it's over my luck to meet him in the middle

of the night he'll wish he'd taken up a different profession. I'll go for him bald-headed!"

"But he may be armed, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I'd chance that," said Tom. "He wouldn't get away without the alarm being raised, anyway."

"Still, as you're never likely to meet him in the middle of the night you can cut the cackle, and come along to the footer," said Jack Blake. "The New House fellows are waiting."

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about the match!"

"You chump! Fancy forgetting an important House match! You'll forget your own name presently!"

"I can't help thinking about this Raffles bizney—"

"Bless you, if you think about it for a thousand years we shan't get any nearer the solution!" said Jack Blake.

"Look here—"

A very heated argument might have ensued had not Mr. Brown, the games-master, looked in at that moment.

Mr. Brown nodded cheerfully to the juniors.

"Ah, I see you intend to play football, my boys!" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Merry. "There's a House match on."

"Hope you win it," said Mr. Brown genially.

"Thank you, sir!"

"Would you mind telling me which is Racke's study?"

Tom Merry gave the desired information, and the games-master withdrew.

"What does he want with Racke, I wonder?" said Manners.

Monty Lowther gave a chuckle.

"He's going to bring the slackers up to the scratch, you bet!" he said. "Compulsory footer for all."

"Bai Jove! Wacke won't like that!" observed Arthur Augustus.

"Then he'll have to lump it!" said Tom Merry.

Mr. Brown went along the passage, and tried the handle of Racke's study door. It refused to budge.

From within the study came suspicious sounds. The chink of money was audible, and voices were raised excitedly.

Evidently Racke and his cronies were indulging in the unhealthy pastime of playing cards for money. Aubrey Racke's luxurious study resembled, in a small way, the Casino at Monte Carlo.

Mr. Brown rapped sharply on the door, and the chink of money ceased abruptly.

"Who's that?"

It was Aubrey Racke's voice, and it quivered with alarm.

"It is I—Mr. Brown!" said the games-master. "Open this door at once!"

Dismaying exclamations sounded from within.

Hurried operations in the nature of scene-shifting, took place inside the study, and quite a long interval elapsed before the door was unlocked and opened.

Mr. Brown advanced into the study, and the occupants—Racke, Crooke, and Mellish—quailed before his penetrating glance.

"You can put that newspaper down, Racke," said the games-master. "I am well aware that you have not been reading it, unless you are in the habit of reading papers upside down. It has been employed for the purpose of banishing smoke from the room. You have been smoking!"

Racke jumped. Mr. Brown's deductions were remarkably accurate.

"You have also been playing cards—for money!" rapped out the games-master.

"Oh, crumbs!"

Racke & Co. were astonished and dis-

mayed. They could not for the life of their understand how Mr. Brown arrived at his conclusions. They did not know that his keen eyes had alighted on the ace of spades, which had been swept into the fireplace during the general confusion. Nor did they observe, as Mr. Brown did, a stray sixpence lying on the floor.

The games-master looked grim.

"I consider it my duty, in the circumstances, to report this affair to Dr. Holmes," he said.

Racke turned pale, and Crooke and Mellish covered at the prospect of being hauled before the Head.

"I—we it was only a lark, sir," faltered Racke.

"Such larks," observed Brown, "are often a stepping-stone to disgrace and imprisonment."

The juniors shivered. Mr. Brown had a decidedly unpleasant way of putting things.

There was a long pause, during which Racke & Co looked beseechingly at Mr. Brown.

The latter spoke at length.

"As this is your first offence, so far as I am concerned, and as you have made no attempt to deny the charge, I am prepared to give you another chance."

"Oh, good!" muttered Racke, licking his dry lips.

"However," continued Mr. Brown, "such shady practices must cease immediately! You will hand me the pack of cards which at present reposes in your pocket, Racke, with the exception of the ace of spades, which you appear to have overlooked."

Racke handed over the cards, and Mr. Brown promptly consigned them to the flames.

"Now the cigarettes," said the games-master.

Racke went to the cupboard, and produced a box of gold-painted cigarettes.

"Thank you," said Mr. Brown. "I will send these to a friend of mine who is not yet demobilised. You also have some cigarettes on your person, I perceive."

Racke gasped.

"I—I—how do you know that, sir?" he stammered.

Mr. Brown stepped forward, and abstracted a silver cigarette-case from Racke's breast-pocket. He removed the contents of the case, adding them to his collection.

"You may keep this case, Racke," he said, handing it back to the junior; "but you will be wise to put it to some other purpose than that for which it is intended. If I find any cigarettes in it again, you will accompany me forthwith to Dr. Holmes."

"Oh!"

"And now," said Mr. Brown, "since the atmosphere of this study resembles that of a tap-room, I deem it expedient that you should all spend the afternoon in the open air. Are you footballers?"

"Football's a kid's game, sir!" said Crooke contemptuously.

"Then you will be coming kids for the duration of the afternoon. Follow me!"

"We—we haven't any football clobber, sir," stammered Mellish.

"Then you can play without it. Thousands of boys play every day without clobber," as you call it."

Mr. Brown set off at a rapid stride in the direction of the football ground, and the trio of juniors followed rather dejectedly in the rear.

"Beastly cute boulder!" muttered Racke.

"Yes, rather!"

"But he's not going to bully us into playing footer!" growled Crooke.

"No jolly fear!"

Figgins & Co. of the New House were on the junior ground, practising in preparation for the House match.

"This ground's going to be occupied all the afternoon, sir," said Racke, and there was a note of triumph in his tone.

"Indeed," said Mr. Brown, dryly. "Never mind. Perhaps the senior ground will be vacant."

Such, however, was not the case.

Racke & Co. noticed, with subdued chuckles, that the First Eleven was playing Abbotsford.

But Mr. Brown remained undaunted.

As the football grounds appear to be engaged," he said, "I will personally conduct a cross-country run. You will get into your running shorts at once, and join me at the school gates."

"Oh, help!" groaned Racke.

Cross-country running seemed just as strenuous as footer to the slackers of the School House. Indeed, of two evils it seemed to be the greater.

The trio put forward several excuses. But Mr. Brown waved them aside.

"Do as I tell you!" he commanded sharply.

And there was nothing for it but to obey.

Twenty minutes later, the nimble and athletic Mr. Brown was leading the way across some ploughed fields, and Racke, Crooke, and Mellish, like Jill in the nursery rhyme, came tumbling after.

Racke & Co. were not in good condition, and they soon had bellows to mend. But Mr. Brown proved a hard task-master, and the three slackers were given no respite. They stumbled on over the rough, uneven ground, and the things they said under their breath concerning Mr. Brown would not bear repetition.

CHAPTER 2.

Stewart Declines.

"YOU fellows ready?"

Tom Merry, with a football under his arm, asked that question as he looked into Study No. 9 in the Shell passage.

Talbot and Stewart were within, both in football garb.

"Quite ready," said Talbot.

"Buck up, then, dear boys!" called Arthur Augustus, from the passage. "The New House fellows will begin to think we're funkin' it. They've been waitin' for us for goodness knows how long!"

Talbot and the new boy prepared to quit the study.

"It ought to be a good game," remarked Talbot. "We shall have to be at the top of our form, you chaps. Marie Rivers is turning out to see the match."

The words seemed to have an electrifying effect on Stewart. But he pulled himself together before anyone could notice the fact.

"Look ready, Merry!" he said. "It wouldn't be difficult to get another fellow in my place, I suppose?"

Tom Merry stared.

"It wouldn't be difficult," he admitted. "There are plenty of fellows willing to play. But we want you!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chimed in Arthur Augustus. "You've pwoved yourself to be a top'n' player. Stewart, an' we shouldn't like to be without you."

"I'm afraid you'll have to be," said Stewart.

"But why?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"I—I feel rather off colour."

"You've only just made the discovery, then," said Talbot, staring hard at the new boy. "A few minutes ago you said you felt as fit as a fiddle!"

Stewart pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I feel quite dizzy," he said. "I was all right just now, but the feeling's just come over me. I—I'll lie down, I think."

And he staggered towards the sofa.

Tom Merry glanced at the new boy with concern.

"Sorry you're taken queer like this," he said. "Can I do anything?"

"No, thanks!" said Stewart wearily. "You carry on."

And the footballers retired, leaving Stewart alone in the study.

"This is rotten!" said Tom Merry. "I was counting on Stewart."

The new boy had acquitted himself so well in the recent match with Rookwood that he would be sorely missed.

"Never mind, dear boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's no use cwyin' ovah spilt milk. Kangaroo would be glad of a game, I expect."

"What's that?" said Harry Noble, coming up.

"Care to turn out for the School House?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, rather!"

"Buck up, then?"

Harry Noble hurriedly changed into footer garb, and accompanied Tom Merry & Co. on to the ground.

The New House fellows were still waiting, though their stock of patience had almost given out.

"You don't mean to say you've come!" said Figgins sarcastically.

"Sorry we're late—," began Tom Merry.

"Bless your sorrow! We've been waiting half an hour."

"Did you ever know a School House bouncer to be punctual, except at meal-times?" growled Kerr.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Oh, come on!" said Tom Merry impatiently. "Now that we are here, we'll show you that we mean business!"

"With a capital 'B,'" said Monty Lowther. "Set the merry old ball rolling, Tommy!"

The House match was soon in full swing. It was a fast, keen game, and the spectators who had had the patience to wait were rewarded by seeing some excellent play.

The New House opened the scoring, and just before half-time Arthur Augustus put the School House on terms.

Stewart's absence did not make a tremendous difference, after all, for Kangaroo played up like a Trojan.

The School House had all the better of the play in the second half, and Talbot scored a grand goal.

Towards the close, however, Figgins & Co. rallied, and they managed to equalise on the stroke of time. The result was a draw of two goals each.

"Quite a good game," remarked Tom Merry, as the teams came off.

"We should have whacked you," said Figgins, "only—"

"Only what?"

"The light was bad towards the end. Twice I missed the goal by inches. That is what comes of a late start!"

"Hear, hear!" said Fatty Wynn.

"You School House fatheads had better pull your socks up. When are you going to learn to be punctual?"

"As soon as you've learnt how to take less than six meals a day!" retorted Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the gathering winter dusk Tom Merry & Co. trooped back to their own House. As they entered the Shell passage there were sounds of a scuffle.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What's going on, I wonder?"

From Study No. 9 a fat figure emerged. He plunged wildly through the group of footballers, and sped along the passage.

"Trumble!" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"What's the matter with the fat idiot?" exclaimed Talbot. "Has he seen a ghost, or what?"

The question was soon answered. Another junior dashed out of Study No. 9, with a cricket-stump in his hand. It was Stewart, and he was breathing threateningly and slaughter.

"What's the game, Stewart?" inquired Tom Merry.

The new boy paused.

"I was out of the study for a couple of minutes," he said, "and when I came back I found that fat worm raiding my tea!"

"Gvreat Scott!"

"He's going to get it in the neck!" said Stewart grimly. "Which way did he go?"

Tom Merry indicated the direction taken by Baggy Trimble, and Stewart dashed off, brandishing the cricket-stump in his hand.

"Let's follow up, and see the fun," said Monty Lowther.

And Tom Merry & Co. sped away in Stewart's wake.

Baggy Trimble was not a good runner, but on this occasion fear lent him wings. He had been caught in the act of sampling Stewart's cake, and he knew that there would be short shrift for him if he were captured. Accordingly, he flew along the passage at express speed, and disappeared into the quadrangle, where he was soon swallowed up in the darkness.

Stewart followed hotfoot on the trail; but he was not so familiar with his surroundings as Trimble. He reached the top of the School House steps without being conscious of the fact, and the next stride he took did not land him on terra firma. Instead, it caused him to pitch headlong down the flight of steps.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry, running up behind. "Stewart's hurt. You fellows—"

The new boy had landed in a sprawling heap on the flagstones of the quad, and Tom Merry & Co. were very relieved to see him rise to his feet. They had feared that he might have broken a leg or an arm.

Stewart came slowly up the steps, and the juniors assisted him into the passage, where a gas-jet was burning.

"Hurt much, old chap?" inquired Talbot.

The new boy pushed back his coat-sleeve, which was rumpled and torn, and revealed a nasty gash in his arm. The whiteness of Stewart's flesh served to emphasise the injury.

"I ear, that's bad!" said Tom Merry. "Better come up to the sanmy, and have it bandaged."

"Oh, rot!" said Stewart.

"But, my dear ass, you can't go about with a gash like that!" exclaimed Talbot. "Marie Rivers will bind it up for you in next to no time."

At the mention of Marie's name Stewart grew more obstinate than ever.

"There's nothing to make a fuss about," he said. "I'll go and bathe my arm, and bind it up myself."

"But a skilled nurse can do it tons better than you can," said Tom Merry. "Don't be a prize idiot! Come along and see Marie Rivers. She won't mind showing the bandage on. That's what she's here for."

"I'll attend to it myself," persisted Stewart.

"Well, of all the obstinate makes!" said Monty Lowther. "I vote we take the silly ass up to the sanmy by force!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Collar him!"

That threat had an extraordinary effect upon Stewart. As the juniors came forward to seize him, he struck out at them savagely with his fist.

"Keep off!" he panted.

"Tawoooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus, who had stopped one of Stewart's "pile-drivers" with his auto-erotic nose. "Gvab hold of him, dear boys! He's mad!"

"Mad as a batter, or a March hare!" said Jack Blake. "Corner him!"

But Stewart had already darted away like a streak of lightning. He flew along to his study as if a pack of wolves was at his heels.

Tom Merry & Co. gave chase on the instant, but when they arrived at Study No. 9 the door was slammed in their faces, and there was the sound of a key being turned in the lock.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Tom Merry. "Did you ever?"

"No, never!" said Monty Lowther solemnly.

Stewart's conduct had been so strange that the juniors were beginning to entertain serious fears as to his sanity.

Why, at the mention of the school sanatorium, had he suddenly behaved like a madman?

Why had he displayed such ferocity at the mention of Marie Rivers' name? These were questions which time alone could answer. Try as they would, the juniors could think of no solution at that moment.

Tom Merry rapped on the door of the study.

"Stewart, you ass!" he exclaimed.

"Well, Merry, you ass?"

There was a chuckle at this prompt and unexpected reply.

"What's the little game? Why are you hiding in here?"

"I'm not hiding!"

"But you are."

"I'm not! I'm simply keeping a set of well-meaning but idiotic asses at bay!"

"Why don't you want us to come in?" demanded Talbot.

"Because you'll try to drag me away to the sanmy, and make a terrific fuss over nothing at all."

"No, we shan't."

"Will you promise that?"

"Honour bright!" said Talbot.

"All serene! Then I'll unlock the door."

And Stewart did so.

The juniors crowded into the study, and surveyed the new boy in great astonishment.

"Blessed if I can make you out!" said Tom Merry. "What makes you behave so jolly queerly? Is it a form of lunar madness?"

"I simply didn't want a fuss made, that was all," said Stewart.

"Weally, Stewart!" protested Arthur Augustus, clasping his damaged nasal organ. "But for the fact that you are already in a state of combat, I should administer a painful thwackin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Stewart was endeavouring to bandage his injured arm with a clean handkerchief. Talbot, who knew a good deal about first-aid, went to his assistance, and the bandage was made secure.

"By the way, who won the House match?" asked Stewart.

"I was a draw," said Tom Merry.

"I can't understand why you couldn't have turned out," he added, looking hard at Stewart. "If you were fit enough to chase Trimble along the passage, you were fit enough to chase a footer!"

"Hear, hear!" said Manners.

Stewart flushed.

"The—the fact is," he said, "I feel queer in spasms. I get sudden attacks"



From Study No. 9 a fat figure emerged. He plunged wildly through the group of footballers and sped along the passage. "Trimble!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "What's the matter with the fat idiot?" exclaimed Talbot. "Has he seen a ghost, or what?" (See chapter 2.)

of dizziness, which last about ten minutes, and then I'm all right again."

"Don't you think you'd better see the doctor?" said Jack Blake.

"I don't believe in doctors!" said Stewart. "And I don't believe in sanatoriums."

"Oh!"

"Would you fellows mind clearing out now? I want to do my prep."

With the exception of Talbot, who was Stewart's study-mate, the juniors dispersed.

They were very mystified concerning Stewart. There was something about him that they could not fathom.

There were some queer fellows at St. Jim's. Cardev of the Fourth wanted a good deal of understanding, and Levison major was also what was known as "a run card." But Stewart of the Shell capped the lot.

CHAPTER 3. The Valuable Idol.

"OH dear! I'm fagged out!"

"Same here!"

"Confound that fellow Brown!"

These dismal exclamations were uttered by Messrs. Racke, Mellish, and Crooke, who had returned from their cross-country run—an experience which had been far from pleasant.

The trio were disporting themselves, like limp rags, on the couch in Racke's study. Their limbs were stiff with the unaccustomed exercise; they groaned and grunted in a melancholy chorus; and their feelings towards their games-master were almost homicidal.

"The worst of it is," growled Racke, "we can't refresh ourselves with a little flutter at cards. That interferin' bounder tore up the pack."

"And he lifted our cigarettes!" said Crooke savagely. "He means to smoke them himself."

"You bet!" said Mellish.

"We've had a putrid afternoon," said Racke, "an' it looks as if we're booked for several more. Brown says he's goin' to take us in tow, an' make athletes of us."

"Groo!"

Racke & Co. were far from happy. And, instead of tackling their prep, they stored up trouble for themselves on the morrow by neglecting it, and spent the evening in hurling bitter invective at Mr. Brown and all his works.

Meanwhile, the subject of their conversation was on his way to Mr. Railton's study.

"Ah, come in, Hawke!" said the Housemaster, pushing aside his papers. The visitor raised a warning finger.

"Brown, please!" he said. "Walls have ears, you know."

"I am sorry——"

"Don't mention it!" said the detective. "But it is as well to be guarded."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"Have you anything to report?" he asked, in a low tone.

"As yet, nothing. I have to deal with a rascal whose skill and cunning are vastly superior to that of the average burglar. However, I am quite optimistic as to my chances of effecting his arrest."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said the Housemaster. "Will you smoke?"

"Well, as my disguise makes me look about ten years older than I really am, I think I may sample a cigarette without danger of being summoned under the Juvenile Offenders' Act!" said the detective, with a smile.

Mr. Railton had more than a passing regard for Dalton Hawke, and the couple were soon chatting away as if they were old college chums.

"You are looking remarkably fit," observed the Housemaster.

"I feel it," replied Hawke. "This afternoon I negotiated a cross-country run of eight miles or so."

"Bless my soul! Were you alone?"

"No; I was accompanied by three bright youths in your House—Racke, Crooke, and Mellish."

Mr. Railton stared.

"You don't mean to say they volun-

fairly accompanied you on a cross-country run?" he exclaimed.

Dalton Hawke laughed. "They came under pressure," he said. "I thought a little athletic exercise would do them good. They appear to be very weedy youths."

"They are the worst slackers in my House," said Mr. Railton. "Then I hope I shall remain here long enough to reform them. There should be a vast improvement in their physique and chest measurements by the time I've finished with them!"

It was the Housemaster's turn to laugh.

"You appear to be quite enjoying yourself in the role of games-master," he said.

"I am!" Next to being a private detective, I consider that being a games-master is the greatest fun going!"

For a time there was silence. Dalton Hawke's observant gaze roved round the study. His eyes finally lighted on a small image which stood on the mantelpiece.

"That's an interesting-looking curio," he remarked. "Might I ask where you obtained it?"

"It is a relic of the war," said Mr. Railton. "I found it when we were passing through one of the French towns which the Huns had devastated. Had it been of any value, I should, of course, have handed it over to the Government; but since it has no intrinsic worth, I am keeping it as a souvenir."

"Might I have a look at it?"

"Certainly!"

The Housemaster took the little image from the mantelpiece, and handed it to Dalton Hawke.

The latter examined it curiously. It was discoloured and dented, and was a little Eastern idol.

Presently the detective gave a low whistle.

"Is anything wrong?" asked Mr. Railton anxiously.

"This," said Dalton Hawke, tapping the image significantly, "is solid gold!"

"Good gracious!"

"Were you not aware of the fact?"

"I certainly was not," said the Housemaster. "If I thought about its composition at all, I imagined it was bronze."

"You may take my word for it," said the detective, "that it is otherwise. You remarked that it had no intrinsic worth."

On the contrary, it is extremely valuable!"

"You astonish me!"

"Now that you know the facts," continued Dalton Hawke, "it would be rank folly to keep the image on your mantelpiece. The light-fingered gentleman who has been so busy lately may take a fancy to it."

"Then what do you advise?"

"I suggest that you keep the image locked up in your safe. Its existence will then be unknown to the thief, should he chance to prowl into your study one night."

The Housemaster nodded. He crossed over to the safe, unlocked it, and deposited the image inside.

"I will keep it here for the present," he remarked, "and in the meantime will communicate with the Government as to its disposal."

"Gold is a very precious commodity these days," said the detective.

The couple continued to discuss the subject, and others, until the hour was late.

The first stroke of eleven boomed out from the old clock-tower.

Dalton Hawke rose to his feet.

"I must be going," he said. "Curious that my day's work should commence while others are asleep, isn't it?"

"You are going to be on the watch to-night?"

"Assuredly! Our friend the burglar has lain low for a night or two, and it is quite on the cards that to-night he will get busy again. I—"

Dalton Hawke paused, listening intently.

"Is anything amiss?" asked Mr. Railton.

"I thought I heard a sound as of someone moving along the passage," said the detective. "It may be merely my imagination, of course."

The speaker stepped swiftly to the door, opened it, and flashed his electric torch along the dark passage. It was deserted.

"I must have been mistaken," murmured Dalton Hawke. "There is no one here. Good-night, Mr. Railton!"

"Good-night! And many thanks for your advice on the subject of the image!"

"Don't mention it!"

Dalton Hawke paused in the act of taking his departure.

"Will you be sitting up very late?" he inquired.

"Only for another twenty minutes or so," said Mr. Railton. "Why do you ask?"

"I am thinking of setting a burglar alarm in your study."

"Oh!"

"There is just a chance that the thief is already aware of the existence of your Eastern idol, but has not yet had an opportunity of taking it. In case he should contemplate such an act to-night, I will set an alarm, which will arouse the whole house in the event of an emergency. The chances are a hundred to one against anything happening, but it is as well to take every precaution."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I shall set another alarm in Dr. Holmes' study," said Dalton Hawke. "Sooner or later the burglar will turn his attention in that direction; and if he does so to-night, so much the better."

"I sincerely hope you will be successful in making a capture," said the Housemaster.

And, needless to add, that hope was shared by the youthful detective.

CHAPTER 4.

Tom Merry & Co.'s Capture!

BOOM! It was the first stroke of midnight.

In the Shell dormitory, Tom Merry, who had slept by fits and starts, definitely awoke, and found it impossible to go to sleep again.

The captain of the Shell was troubled and uneasy.

By the last post he had received a remittance—a really handsome remittance—from his aunt, Miss Priscilla Fawcett.

Forgetful for the moment of the burglaries which had been committed at the school, Tom Merry had left his aunt's letter, together with the remittance, on the mantelpiece in his study. And it was this set of carelessness which now weighed on his mind, and robbed him of his full quota of sleep.

"Can't think how I came to be such a careless ass!" murmured the junior. "I'm always chipping Gussey about leaving his fivers in an exposed position, and now I've done the same!"

Five pounds was a sum which Tom Merry could ill afford to lose. Remittances of that extent were not as plentiful as blackberries. Indeed, it was doubtful if any more fivers would arrive for Tom during that term.

The loss of the money would be a blow not only to Tom Merry himself, but to Manners and Lowther, who happened to be in a state known as "stony," and who were relying on their loader for funds. They would reciprocate later, of course.

To leave the money on the study mantelpiece was simply asking for it. If the burglar happened to go the rounds of the junior studies that night, he could hardly fail to find it. Wherefore, Tom Merry was restless and uneasy; and he could have kicked himself for his lack of foresight.

At length, the captain of the Shell could endure the suspense no longer. He made up his mind to rescue the fiver—if it still happened to be there—and to place it under his pillow for the remainder of the night.

The night air was very chilly, in marked contrast to the saug warmth which was to be found beneath three stout blankets. But Tom Merry resolved to take the plunge, and he was soon out of bed and slipping on a few necessary garments. Then he stole noiselessly from the dormitory.

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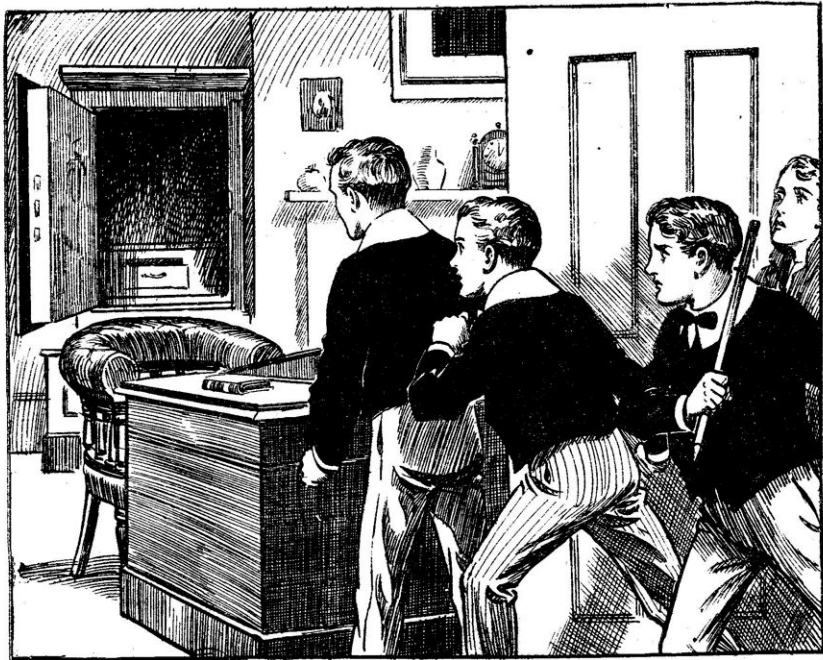
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The juniors dashed into the study. Then they paused, with varying expressions of astonishment. The room was empty! "Oh, my hat!" panted Monty Lowther. "Empty, by Jove!" "But it hasn't been empty long," said Talbot quickly. "Look there!" And he pointed to Mr. Railton's safe. (See Chapter 4.)

"Croo! It's jolly cold!" he muttered as he went.

The way was dark, but Tom Merry knew every inch of it. Had he been blindfolded, he could have found his way without much difficulty to his own study.

Down the stairs he went, and along the winding corridors.

The House was silent and still, and there was no indication that anything was amiss.

Tom Merry halted outside the door of Study No. 10, and listened, as if expecting to hear someone moving about within. Then he laughed aloud at his own fears.

"My hat! It's something new for me to be so nervy!" he muttered.

But perhaps it was not altogether surprising, in the circumstances. Not many fellows would have cared to traverse the dark passages of St. Jim's after midnight.

Tom Merry threw open the door of his study, and entered.

He had no matches, but he groped his way to the mantelpiece, barking his shin against a chair en route.

His fingers groped along the mantelpiece, and closed upon the envelope. He felt inside it, and was rewarded by a familiar rustling sound.

His five-pound note was safe!

"That's a blessing, anyway!" muttered Tom Merry. "I was afraid the burglar might have got here first."

Stowing the envelope away in his

pocket, the captain of the Shell quitted the study.

On his way back to the dormitory, he passed Mr. Railton's study, and was surprised to see a faint glimmer of light underneath the door.

Tom Merry stopped short, his heart beating faster than usual.

He had not noticed the light when he passed the study before; and he might easily have missed it on this occasion, had he not chanced to look downwards.

What did it mean?

Mr. Railton was a man who sometimes kept late hours. But it was now half an hour after midnight, and he must have retired before this.

It was only too obvious that there was an intruder in the Housemaster's study.

Tom Merry's first impulse was to throw open the door and see exactly what was happening; but he realized the folly of attempting to tackle single-handed a man who would probably be armed.

"I'll fetch the others," he reflected.

Fortunately, the junior was wearing slippers, and he was able to steal quietly away without disturbing the midnight marauder.

Tom Merry's first action, on regaining the Shell dormitory, was to seize Monty Lowther by the shoulders and shake him.

"Wharrer marrer?" granted Lowther drowsily. "Tain't time to get up yet, you duffer!"

"Shush! Turn out, Monty—quick! There's something doing! I've just

spotted a light burning in Railton's study!"

"Let it burn!" was Lowther's sleepy retort.

"But don't you understand? It's probably the burglar!"

"My hat!"

Monty Lowther was wide awake now, and he lost no time in getting out of bed and slipping on his coat and trousers over his pyjamas.

Whilst Lowther was thus engaged, Tom Merry roused Manners. That youth promptly told his chum to go and masticate coke, adding a rider to the effect that he wasn't going to budge from his bed for fifty burglars. But within a few moments he was following the example of Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry wondered whether three fellows would be sufficient; and he decided to rouse a couple more, to be on the safe side. He awoke Tabbot, who turned out promptly enough; but when he approached Stewart's bed, and shook the new boy, he received no response.

"The fellow's sleeping like a blessed log!" he muttered. "Tumble out, Stewart!"

There was no reply.

Tom Merry threw back the bedclothes, expecting Stewart to wake up with chattering teeth and demanding to know what was the matter.

But still Stewart did not stir.

"Anybody would think the fellow was THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 617.

drugged!" growled Manners. "Show a light, somebody!"

Talbot flashed on his electric torch, and there was a gasp from the four juniors.

Stewart's bed was certainly occupied, but not by Stewart himself.

The light of Talbot's torch revealed a very cleverly constructed dummy figure.

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Tom Merry. "This is about the rummiest thing I ever struck."

"Stewart's awfully deep," said Manners. "I thought so from the first. I suppose he's gone out on the razzle, and rigged up this dummy so that he shouldn't be spotted!"

"Looks like it," said Talbot. "But Stewart doesn't strike me as being one of the razzling sort."

"It's jolly queer, anyway," said Tom Merry. "But we can't bother about Stewart now! Let's go and investigate this burglar bizney."

The four juniors quitted the dormitory and stole down the stairs.

They advanced towards the Housemaster's study, beneath the door of which the light still glimmered.

"What do we do now," whispered Lowther—"walk in, and say 'Good-evening'?"

"We'll all rush in together when I give the signal," replied Tom Merry, in a undertone.

The juniors were all in favour of taking the burglar by surprise. They knew that they might have a desperate man to deal with, in which case it would be fatal to dally.

Tom Merry's fingers closed over the door-handle.

"All together!" he muttered.

The door was pushed open, and the four juniors dashed into the study.

Then they paused, with varying expressions of astonishment.

The room was empty!

"Oh, my hat," panted Monty Lowther. "This takes the cake, beats the band, and prances off with the whole giddy box of tricks! Empty, by Jove!" "But it hasn't been empty long," said Talbot quickly. "Look there!"

And he pointed to Mr. Railton's safe. The door of the safe was wide open, and the burglar had evidently decamped with the loot.

"He must have heard us jawing outside, and bunked through the window," said Manners.

That seemed the most likely explanation. But when Tom Merry thrust his head out of the window, and peered into the quadrangle, he neither saw nor heard anything of the nocturnal prowler.

"He's gone, right enough," said Monty Lowther, "and he seems to have cleared off in a hurry, too. He's left the safe open and the electric light burning."

"If only we knew which direction he'd taken," said Manners, "we'd—Hellup!"

That was not what Manners had intended to say, but at that moment he happened to trip over a wire on the floor. Instantly a deafening jangle of bells rang out.

The juniors jumped as if they had been electrified, and Monty Lowther also tripped up on a wire, causing a renewal of the sound, which was sufficient in volume to awaken the celebrated Seven Sleepers.

Not only in the Housemaster's study, but far along the corridor the din was audible.

Tom Merry & Co. exchanged dismayed glances.

"That's done it!" groaned Manners. "We've let off a blessed burglar-alarm!"

"My hat!"

"Half the School House will be here in a jiffy!" said Talbot. "We must scout!"

"Scout!" echoed Tom Merry.

"Why?" "You're not pining to be taken for a burglar, are you?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

The presence of the four juniors in Mr. Railton's study at that hour of the night would have been rather difficult to explain. Tom Merry & Co. would, of course, have said that they were burglar-hunting; but certain suspiciously inclined people might think that they themselves were the burglars.

Accordingly, the juniors stood not upon the order of their going, but went at once.

No. 5.—JACK BLAKE.



May be considered the leader of the Fourth in the School House. A fine, manly specimen of British boyhood. The staunch chum of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Jack and Gussey stand shoulder to shoulder in loyalty, straightforwardness, and courage. Practical, like most Yorkshire folk; always ready to stand against tyranny, and to help a fellow down on his luck. A splendid all-round athlete. (Study No. 6.)

As they emerged into the passage, however, a startling thing happened.

A dark form was running towards them. It seemed to be the form of a distracted man, who was endeavouring to escape from a tight corner. He appeared to have a bundle under his arm, and the juniors, who had slipped quickly into the shadows, surmised that he was making for the box-room window.

"The burglar!" muttered Tom Merry, adding, almost in the same breath: "Collar him!"

The juniors needed no second bidding. With one accord they hurled themselves at the flying figure.

"Down him!" panted Manners. "He

might be armed, and we can't afford to take any risks."

The victim offered a good deal of resistance, and in the dark passage it was difficult to grapple with him. But at length Talbot managed to locate the man's legs, and he threw his arms round them with dire results.

The burglar—or, to be more correct, the man who was suspected of being the burglar—toppled to the floor, with four sturdy juniors sprawling on top of him.

"Sit on his chest!" muttered Monty Lowther. "I've got hold of his wrists all right, so he can't get at his revolver." "Oh, dear! Help—help!" gasped the prisoner.

The juniors were surprised. They could not help reflecting that most burglars would have said something quite different.

The captive was speedily overpowered, and he was soon incapable of uttering anything but a faint gurgle.

Then came a sudden gleam of lights along the passage, and quite a procession streamed into view. It was headed by Mr. Railton, in his dressing-gown.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Housemaster, hurrying to the spot. "Who—What is the matter?"

The answer came in triumphant tones from Monty Lowther, who rather relished the idea of being in the lime-light.

"We've collared the burglar, sir!"

"What?"

"He's been helping himself to the contents of your safe, sir," said Manners, "but I think you'll find all the loot here."

The prisoner, who was almost obliterated from view, made frantic efforts to rise.

As he did so, Mr. Railton happened to catch a glimpse of his features.

The Housemaster fairly jumped.

"Boys," he rapped out, "release Mr. Selby at once!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom Merry, in dismay.

"We've fairly put our foot in it this time!" groaned Monty Lowther. "Both feet, in fact: Selby, by Jove! Who ever would have thought it!"

The four juniors sprang up with the velocity of jack-in-the-boxes.

Mr. Selby sprang up, too, and his face was livid.

"You—you disgraceful young hoodl-gans!" he spluttered.

"We—we're awfully sorry, sir!" stammered Tom Merry. "We mistook you for the burglar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A chorus of merriment arose from the fellows who flocked in the wake of Mr. Railton.

"Oh, help!" sobbed Jack Blake. "Those Shell-fish will be the death of me! Fancy mistaking Selby for a burglar! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" commanded Mr. Railton. "This is no laughing matter, my boys!" "But the crowd seemed to think otherwise. They laughed until they were on the verge of becoming hysterical.

"Merry," said Mr. Railton sternly, "this is a very serious matter! You have assaulted Mr. Selby—"

"It was a prearranged attack!" fumed that individual. "These young rascals deliberately waylaid me in the passage!"

"That's not true!" said Tom Merry indignantly. "We saw you running along the passage, with a bundle under your arm, and it looked for all the world as if you were a burglar making for the box-room window."

"That's so!" said Talbot.

CHAPTER 5.

The Vanishing Trick.

"SEEN anything of the burglar?" It was Stewart of the Shell who asked the question. The new boy was fully dressed, and he joined his schoolfellows at the foot of the stairs.

"Railton thinks he'll soon be collared."

No. 6.—GEORGE HERRIES.



A member of Study No. 6, which he shares with Blake, D'Arcy, and Digby. A big, burly fellow for his age, and probably the heaviest in his form. Not really outstanding in any way. On the whole, slow, and does not shine either in the classroom or in the field of sport. Very great affection for his bulldog, Towzer. Has considerable talent as a musician.

said Tom Merry. "Goodness knows what makes him think that! But—but where on earth have you been, Stewart?"

"I've been on sentry-go in the quad. I knew that something was going on in Railton's study, and I was waiting for the burglar Johnny to come rushing out with the loot. But he never came. Must have escaped in some other direction."

"But what made you suspect, in the first place, that something was wrong?" exclaimed Talbot.

"Three nights ago," said Stewart. "I happened to wake up and hear someone moving about. I couldn't be certain whether it was a burglar or merely a master on the prowl. Anyway, I decided to investigate. And I've carried on my investigations every night since then."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Of course, it was a risky thing to do," said Stewart. "If it had happened to be a master, and not a burglar, and my bed had been found empty, I should have got it in the neck. So I rigged up a

"It was a conspiracy against me!" raved Mr. Selby.

"One moment, Selby!" said Mr. Railton. "Merry mentioned a bundle."

"Bundle!" roared the exasperated master of the Third. "It was not a bundle at all! It was my coat, and I carried it under my arm because I had not had time to put it on. On hearing the alarm, I at once hurried to your study, Railton, in the hope of intercepting the burglar!"

Mr. Railton looked sceptical, and so did most of the fellows. They could not picture Mr. Selby in the role of burglar-catcher. He hadn't enough nerve for the part.

"It is obvious," said Mr. Railton, "that these boys jumped to a wrong conclusion, and attacked you without realising their error. You have been roughly handled, Selby, and I cannot overlook the action of these juniors, even though they were under a misapprehension! Merry, Talbot, Manners, you will each take a hundred lines!"

Mr. Selby nearly choked.

"A hundred lines!" he shouted. "Such punishment is woefully inadequate! I insist upon these young rascals being severely flogged!"

"Your insistence, I am afraid, is useless," retorted Mr. Railton. "These boys are under my jurisdiction, and I shall punish them as I think fit."

"Bware!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in the background.

Mr. Selby saw that further argument would be futile. Ruffled and dishevelled, and sporting with fury, he pushed his way through the throng of grinning juniors, and returned to his own quarters.

Mr. Railton advanced into his study.

"Be careful, sir," warned Tom Merry, "or you'll have all the bells clanging again!"

The housemaster looked grim as he surveyed his ransacked safe.

The little golden image had disappeared, together with a number of important documents.

But Mr. Railton did not rave or ramp, as Tom Merry & Co. had anticipated. Instead, his grim features relaxed into a smile.

The burglar had escaped, but the housemaster felt confident that Dalton Hawke was hard on his heels, and that the youthful detective would effect a smart capture.

Mr. Railton turned and addressed the crowd which surged in at the doorway.

"You will return to your dormitories at once, my boys!"

The juniors looked dismayed. They had anticipated a thrilling chase after burglars, or, at least, something with a spice of excitement in it.

"Can't we help, sir?" inquired Tom Merry.

"No help is required, Merry."

"But—but the burglar, sir!" protested Arthur Augustus. "Suahly you do not propose to let him go scot-free?"

Mr. Railton smiled.

"He will not go scot-free, D'Arcy," he said. "Unless I am very much mistaken, his capture is imminent!"

"Bai Jove!"

Knowing nothing of Dalton Hawke's presence in the school, the juniors failed to see any grounds for Mr. Railton's confidence. They were longing to undertake the pursuit themselves.

But the housemaster's word was law, and very reluctantly Tom Merry led the procession away to the upper regions.

dummy—not a bad imitation of a sleeping figure—and stuck it in my bed every time I went burglar-chasing."

"My hat!" exclaimed Manners. "That explains everything! We saw the dummy in your bed, and we thought you might be in the habit of going out on the razzle."

Stewart laughed.

"My name's not Knox of the Sixth!" he said.

Monty Lowther shook his forefinger reprovingly at Stewart.

"You deserve a jolly good bumping, my son!" he said.

"Why?" asked Stewart. And there was a trace of alarm in his tone.

"For going on these midnight prowls alone, and not inviting your kind uncles to join you."

"That's so," said Tom Merry. "It was your duty, Stewart, when you heard someone moving about the other night, to wake us up, so that we could have given you a hand."

"I didn't want to disturb your beauty sleep," said Stewart.

"Rats!"

The Shell fellows and Fourth-Formers returned to their respective dormitories, but not with the idea of going to sleep. They were far too excited to think of slumber just then.

George Alfred Grundy, who was one of the few fellows who had not been awakened by the burglar alarm, was now sitting up in bed.

"What's all the rumpus about?" he inquired, as Tom Merry & Co. trooped in. "Have you been raiding another dorm?"

"No," said Tom Merry; "there's been a burglary."

"Oh, my hat!" said Grundy excitedly.

"Where?"

"Didn't you hear the alarm go off?" said Manners.

"I seemed to hear a faint sound while I was dozing—"

"A faint sound!" gasped Monty Lowther. "My only aunt! It was enough to bring the Wyland Fire Brigade on the scene!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's been burgled?" asked Grundy.

"Railton's safe."

"Great pip!"

"Here's a golden opportunity for an amateur detective to cover himself with glory," said Lowther. "Why don't you capture the burglar, Grundy? The sight of your face would do it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy stared.

"You—you mean to say you've let the bounds escape?" he exclaimed.

"We didn't so much as get a glimpse of him!" said Tom Merry.

"Well, I'm dashed! Of all the idiotic, brainless, helpless asses—" said Grundy, in disgust.

And he stepped out of bed, and started to dress.

"Here, where are you going?" said Tom Merry, in surprise.

"On the track of the burglar, of course! I'll give him burglar when I get hold of him! I should advise one of you to telephone for the ambulance. It'll be wanted!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get back to your bed, you silly chump!" said Talbot.

But George Alfred Grundy, with his usual zeal, had quite made up his mind to succeed where others had failed. Tom Merry & Co. had come back empty-handed, but he—the great Grundy—would show them what he could do in the burglar-catching line.

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"Would you like me to come along, old man?" inquired Wilkins.

"And me?" said Gumm.

"No, thanks!" added Grundy. "You're not bad fellows, but you're too clumsy to be of any use as detectives. I mean to find my own clues, and to follow them up without assistance."

"Why, you burbling ass!" snorted Tom Merry, "the burglar's miles away by now!"

"I'll collar him," said Grundy grimly, "if it means chasing him right through Sussex!"

"You—you—"

"Oh, let him go ahead!" growled Manners. "I only hope somebody mistakes him for the burglar, and scatters little bits of him all over the quad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Having scrambled into his clothes, Grundy prepared to quit the dormitory.

In the doorway he paused.

"You fellows can cackle," he said; "but I'll show you that I mean business!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll catch the burglar, and make him deliver up the loot. And I dare say I shall get on the track of all the other things that have been stolen—Stewart's motor-bike, and so forth!"

"Some hopes!" murmured Stewart.

With an expression of great determination on his rugged face, George Alfred Grundy took his departure. A chuckle followed him as he groped his way down the stairs in the darkness.

"Silly ass!" snorted Harry Noble. "He'll put his foot in it, as usual!"

Tom Merry & Co. started to undress, while Stewart lifted the dummy off his bed.

"Where do you keep that thing?" asked Manners.

"In my locker."

"But how on earth can you squeeze it in?"

"It isn't all in one piece," explained Stewart. "It unscrews. You see, I can bend it, and take its limbs off!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "That's about the nearest invention I've ever clapped eyes on!"

"Not bad, is it?" said Stewart. "I dare say Racke, or one of the bold bad blades, would give a small fortune to get hold of a thing like this! They'd be able to break bounds every night!"

Having taken the dummy figure to pieces, the new boy stowed it away in his locker.

Scarcely had he done so, when a deafening peal of bells rang out.

"Great Scott!" gasped Monty Lowther. "That's the burglar alarm over again!"

"Shall we go down and see what's happening, Tommy?" asked Manners.

The captain of the Shell shook his head. "Railton's probably tripped over the wire by accident, like we did," he said. "The din died away, and for ten minutes or so all was silent."

Then the door of the Shell dormitory opened, and a forlorn and dejected junior limped in. It was George Alfred Grundy, and he did not look like a fellow who had successfully apprehended a burglar.

"Ow-ow-ow!" groaned Grundy.

There was a chorus of inquiry at once.

"What are you making that row for, Grundy?"

"What's happened?"

"Have you collared the burglar?"

"Or did the burglar collar you?"

Grundy hobbled towards his bed.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" he moaned.

"Sounds cheerful, doesn't it?"

remarked Monty Lowther: "I often wish I'd taken up the study of *Excremento*."

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy became coherent at last.

"Railton's a beast!" he muttered.

"Instead of thanking me for doing him a good turn and chasing the burglar, he gave me six cuts on each hand—and he laid it on, too!"

"But—what the merry dickens—"

gasped Tom Merry.

"It was like this," explained Grundy.

"I went along to Railton's study, to see if I could pick up a clue, and I tripped over a beastly wire, and set about a dozen bells going!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners.

"That was the burglar alarm!"

"I picked myself up," continued Grundy, "and was wondering whether I was on my head or my heels, when Railton came in. He didn't ask me what I was doing, and before I could explain to him that I was acting in his interests, he picked up a cane and walloped me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's nothing to cackle at!" growled Grundy. "Railton's got the strength of a horse. He gave me six on each hand, and told me to go back to bed."

"And all lived happily ever after!"

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EVERY FRIDAY.

chuckled Monty Lowther. "There's only one thing that puzzles me."

"What's that?" asked Grundy.

"The burglar's still at large!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up at the expense of George Alfred Grundy. After all his boasting—after all his vainglorious talk about capturing the burglar—he had come empty away!

"Serves you jolly well right!" was Tom Merry's unfeeling comment. "That will teach you to keep off the grass in future!"

Grundy crawled limply into bed, pouring out a savage stream of invectives against burglars, housemasters, and idiots who didn't know what they were cackling about.

Tom Merry & Co. ignored Grundy, and remained awake for upwards of two hours discussing the burglary, and expecting at any moment to hear of fresh developments.

But for the remainder of that eventful night the School House remained still and silent.

It looked as if the burglar had successfully decamped, in spite of Mr. Railton's confidence that he would be captured.

Finally, the juniors sank into a doze, from which they were rudely awakened by the clanging of the rising-bell.

Taggles, the porter, was blissfully unaware that anything had been amiss, and he tugged the bell-rope with his usual savage violence.

Kildare of the Sixth happened to glance into the Shell dormitory while the juniors were dressing.

"Everybody getting up?" he asked. "That's right! I was afraid some of you kids might be taking an extra forty winks after being up half the night."

"Any news about the burglary, Kildare?" inquired Stewart eagerly.

"Nothing fresh," said Kildare.

"You must say to the beggar wasn't caught?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"So far as I can gather," said the captain of St. Jim's, "he got clear away with the loot!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"This is what comes of Railton refusing to let me take a hand!" said Grundy.

"Rats!"

"What was stolen, Kildare?" asked Talbot. "Anything special?"

"A valuable image belonging to Mr. Railton, and a number of important documents."

"My hat!"

"I must say I feel very disgusted at Railton's conduct," remarked Monty Lowther. "We volunteered to chase, catch, and pulverise the merry burglar, and he said: 'It's all right, my boys, get back to your kennels, or words to that effect.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You must not speak of your House-master in that way, Lowther," said Kildare.

"Well, don't you think it was a bit thick?" growled Monty.

"You wouldn't have collared the burglar," said Kildare. "He was well away by the time you kids arrived on the scene."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Tom Merry. "The window of Railton's study was open, and the electric light was left burning, and it looked as if the bouncer had only just escaped. I wish we could have gone after him!"

"Don't be a silly young ass! You might have had a bullet through your head!"

"I'd have chanced that!"

"Well, it's no use brooding over what might have happened," said Kildare. The burglar disappeared—and the loot, too."

But another disappearance, no less startling, soon became apparent.

Mr. Brown, the games-master, failed to show up at breakfast-time.

No great alarm was experienced at first, it being thought that Mr. Brown, having been disturbed in the night by the burglar alarm, was staying in bed longer than usual.

But when Mr. Railton despatched one of the seniors to Mr. Brown's room, it was discovered that the bed was empty; moreover, that it had not been slept in.

The Housemaster was alarmed. He had not seen Dalton Hawke since the conversation overnight. At two o'clock in the morning he had looked into the detective's room, and found it empty. But he had supposed that Hawke was still on the track of the burglar, and would return anon. The discovery that "Mr. Brown" had not returned at all gave rise to a good deal of anxiety in the Housemaster's mind.

What had happened?

Was Dalton Hawke still pursuing his quest, or had he been cornered and overpowered by the burglar, or by the burglar's confederates?

The more Mr. Railton thought about



A forlorn and dejected junior limped into the Shell dormitory. It was George Alfred Grundy, and he did not look like a fellow who had successfully apprehended a burglar. "Ow-ow-ow!" groaned Grundy. "Sounds cheerful, doesn't it?" remarked Monty Lowther. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See chapter 5.)

it the more probable it seemed that the detective had been trapped—that he had been outwitted by the midnight marauder.

It was not a pleasant thought, and the Housemaster scarcely knew what steps to take in the matter.

Whilst the masters and boys were still seated at breakfast, a sudden din became audible—a din which was becoming familiar.

It was the burglar alarm!

For a moment Mr. Railton, like most of the breakfasters, sat thunderstruck. He could not understand, at first, why the alarm should have gone off, because he had removed it from his study. And then he recollected the fact that an alarm had been set in the Head's study as well. The Housemaster hurriedly made his way in that direction.

Dr. Holmes was standing by his study window with a perplexed expression on his face.

"Bless my soul, Railton!" he exclaimed, as the Housemaster entered. "I inadvertently stepped on a wire, and it created a most appalling din! Can you explain, such an extraordinary circumstance?"

"It is a burglar alarm, sir."

"Oh!"

"Dalton Hawke told me he proposed to set one in your study. He set one in my own, too, and it went off shortly after midnight. Did you not hear it, sir?"

"I certainly heard a noise," said Dr. Holmes, "but I had no idea it was a burglar alarm. Has anything startling occurred?"

Mr. Railton described to the Head how his safe had been rifled, and how he had sat up for the greater part of the night, hoping that Dalton Hawke would effectually secure the burglar.

"The hope proved to be a forlorn one," he added. "Not only did the burglar get away, but I have now made the discovery that Hawke has not yet returned."

"He is missing from the school?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it would seem that he has fallen into the hands of the burglar or his accessories?"

"Precisely!" said Mr. Railton. "It is only too obvious that he has not returned to the school, or he would have removed this alarm from your study."

"Dear me! And you say that your Eastern idol was of great value?"

"Hawke declared it was solid gold, sir."

The Head looked almost haggard.

"Is this long train of burglaries never to cease?" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul, it appears as if the school will soon be ransacked of everything that is of value. I think I had better communicate with the police. I have no great faith in their abilities, as compared with those of an individual like Hawke. At the same time, something must be done."

"I think I should be inclined to take no action for a day or so, sir," said Mr. Railton. "There is a possibility that Dalton Hawke may return during the day."

"That is so," agreed Dr. Holmes. "We will take no steps in the matter at present."

But the day dragged out its slow length, and Dalton Hawke, alias Mr. Richard Brown, did not reappear at St. Jim's.

His absence aroused endless comment amongst the juniors, many of whom, not knowing Mr. Brown's real identity, were of the opinion that he had perpetrated the burglary.

Tom Merry & Co. did not incline to this opinion, however. They felt convinced that Mr. Railton's safe had been

ransacked by the same person who had carried out the previous burglaries.

St. Jim's was in a buzz from end to end.

The fellows could not concentrate on lessons, and neither, for that matter, could the masters.

All was chaos and consternation, and everyone was wondering what the burglar's next move would be, and when he would make it.

CHAPTER 6.

Face to Face!

MIDNIGHT! Twenty-four hours had elapsed since the raid on Mr. Raiton's study. And Dalton Hawke was still absent from St. Jim's.

In the Shell dormitory Tom Merry & Co. were sleeping soundly.

Gladly would they have remained awake, in case fresh developments occurred; but they had a good deal of sleep to make up in the way of sleep, and although the Terrible Three had propped themselves up on their pillows, with a view to keeping awake, sleep had conquered them at length.

There was one fellow, however, whom sleep had not conquered—a fellow who seemed to go through life with the minimum amount of sleep. It was Stewart.

At the first stroke of midnight the new boy slipped cautiously out of bed.

"You fellows awake?" he asked, in a low tone.

There was no response.

Stewart chuckled softly to himself in the darkness. He opened his locker, and took out the various portions of his dummy figure. Having put them together, he laid the dummy in his bed, put on his clothes and a pair of rubber-soled shoes, and glided out of the dormitory.

The new boy's features were framed in a grim smile as he went down the stairs.

"The last job of all to-night!" he muttered. "Now that Hawke's out of the way, it'll be dead easy."

Stewart's hand went to his pocket.

Yes, the implements were there, all right—the implements of a cracksmen!

"I've made a far richer haul than I ever dreamed of making!" murmured Stewart, as he groped his way along the winding corridors. "Jim Dawlish will be agreeably surprised! When he comes out of prison he'll be able to equip himself with a motor and goodness knows what. But my share of the takings will be just as big as his—just as big. I shall insist on it! After all, I've had to bear the brunt of the business. I've taken risks which most fellows in my profession would have fought shy of. Therefore, it's only fair that I should have a decent finger in the pie!"

Stewart was feeling very pleased with himself that night.

He had been playing a part, and he had played it well. He had come to St. Jim's in the ordinary way, and there none suspected him for what he was—a member of a gang of cracksmen.

Even Talbot did not suspect, though Talbot's intuition might have told him that Stewart was playing a deep game.

Stewart had done what so many fellows had failed to accomplish. He had succeeded in spoofing the school. He had deceived his schoolfellows completely and utterly. They voted him a sound sportsman and a jolly good fellow; they would have refused to credit him with dishonourable motives; yet all the time he was a cracksmen, and a master of his craft at that.

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It was Stewart, and no other, who had planned and carried out that amazing series of burglaries. It was Stewart who was responsible for the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of Dalton Hawke, alias Mr. Brown. It was Stewart who had caused one of the most stupendous sensations ever known at St. Jim's. And nobody knew—nobody even guessed!

Stewart's explanation as to why he had been absent from his dormitory on the previous night had been decidedly feeble. He admitted that himself. And yet Tom Merry & Co. had cheerfully swallowed it, and had believed that he had gone on the track of the burglar.

No. 7.—ROBERT ARTHUR DIGBY.



Son of Sir Robert Digby. A good sportsman all through. Level-headed than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quicker and smarter than Herries, and perhaps cleverer than Blake. Cannot be ranked with the pick of the athletes, but can always be relied upon, and is very keen. In every way a real good fellow, and popular with all at St. Jim's. (Study No. 6.)

What would they have said had they but known that Stewart himself was the burglar?

The youthful cracksmen chuckled as he made his way in the direction of the Head's study.

He did not proceed so cautiously to-night as he had done on previous occasions. It had been necessary to tread warily before, because of the presence in the school of Dalton Hawke.

But the detective was now miles away—a prisoner in the hands of Stewart's confederates. And therefore the coast was clear. Stewart thought so, anyway.

The Head's study was the place appointed for the cracksmen's final visitation.

Dr. Holmes invariably kept a considerable quantity of money in his safe, and his study had proved a happy hunting-ground in the past. Members of the light-fingered brigade had often raided the safe—frequently with disastrous results to themselves. But Stewart was confident that there was no danger in his case. Had he not carried out a successful raid on Mr. Raiton's study? Had he not performed a lightning theft in the football pavilion, at the expense of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood? Had he not enacted a number of thefts almost under the very noses of the victims?

Conscious of his former triumphs, Stewart told himself that there would be no difficulty at all on this occasion.

It would be as easy as falling off a form to extract all that was valuable from the Head's safe.

And then, his task accomplished, he would steal away from St. Jim's under the canopy of night, and return to the gang, the leader of which, Jim Dawlish, was serving a term of imprisonment.

Stewart came to a halt outside the door of the Head's study. He peered through the keyhole, and saw that the room was in darkness.

"All clear!" he murmured.

Gently he turned the handle of the door, and advanced into the darkened room.

Even as he did so, however, he experienced an instinctive feeling that he was not alone in the apartment.

He could see nobody, he could hear nobody; but he knew that his instinct did not fail him.

Stewart paused irresolutely, and before he had time either to advance or retreat, the electric light was switched on, and the cracksmen found himself face to face with—Marie Rivers!

It was a dramatic moment—dramatic for both of them.

Ever since the day of his arrival at St. Jim's, Stewart had, for reasons of his own, studiously avoided Marie Rivers.

Shortly after his arrival at the school, he had astonished Tom Merry & Co. by suddenly turning tail during a fight with Grundy. To the juniors, such conduct was inexplicable; but the reason for it had been that Marie Rivers was approaching the scene of the encounter.

And then there was another occasion, when the fellows had been discussing the disappearance of Stewart's motorcycle. He had dashed suddenly into the building without a word of explanation. And the reason, again, had been the approach of the school nurse.

More recently still Stewart had declined to play football for the School House, Talbot having let drop a chance remark to the effect that Marie Rivers intended to watch the game.

And when Stewart had fallen down the School House steps and injured his arm, he had fiercely refused to go to the sanatorium to have it bandaged.

Why?

Because he would meet the one person in the world he was most anxious to avoid—Marie Rivers.

Stewart had successfully dodged Marie until now. And to dodge her at this moment was out of the question.

Tall and straight and fearless, the girl confronted him. She had nothing to defend herself with, but she was unafraid.

Stewart remained where he was, clenching and unclenching his hands.

For an instant their eyes met. And then Marie's demeanour changed completely.

The discovery had not dawned on her at first; but it dawned on her now with startling suddenness, and she gave a low cry of mingled astonishment and reproach.

"Cousin Arthur!"

The fellow thus addressed said nothing. For once in a way he was completely thrown off his balance. He tried to speak, but his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

Marie's face was very pale.

"Arthur!" she repeated. "What—what are you doing here?"

But the question was superfluous, and Marie knew it even as she uttered it.

It was only too obvious that a person who entered the Head's study by stealth at that time of the night could have only one motive—that of committing a felony.

Dr. Holmes had been greatly agitated as a result of the previous night's burglary, and he had discussed over the tea-table that day the advisability of keeping watch and ward.

It so happened that Marie Rivers was at tea with the Head and Mrs. Holmes, and Marie had cheerfully undertaken to assist the kindly old doctor in carrying out the projected vigil.

It had been decided that the Head should remain in his study until midnight, that Marie should relieve him between the hours of twelve and one, and that thenceforth they should take alternate hours until dawn.

Dr. Holmes had protested against Marie sacrificing her rest, and he had pointed out to her the danger she would run in the event of an armed burglar appearing on the scene. But Marie had overruled all his protestations.

Seated alone in the study, which she had plunged into darkness, the plucky girl had waited for something to happen. And she had not waited in vain.

The burglar had arrived. And, with a thrill of shame and horror, Marie had recognised him as Arthur Rivers, her wayward cousin!

The exploits of Stewart of the Shell had received a check at last!

CHAPTER 7.

Marie's Loyalty!

ARTHUR RIVERS stood with downcast eyes, unable to meet the reproachful gaze of his girl cousin.

For a full moment there was silence. It was Marie Rivers who broke it.

"Arthur!" she exclaimed. "I thought—I hoped—that you had abandoned this sort of life for good!"

The youthful cracksmen motioned Marie to a chair.

"Sit down, Marie," he said, recovering his self-possession somewhat, "and I'll explain."

Marie obeyed. Her eyes were still fixed on her cousin's face, which was now as pale as her own.

"It's not a pleasant story," said Arthur Rivers. "In fact, it's a dashed unpleasant one! But you may as well hear it, since it's not likely I shall have another chance to relate it."

"Go on," said Marie quietly.

"It's a good many years since we were together, Marie, and I hoped against hope when we came face to face just now that you would find to recognise me. The Toff failed—but then I never saw much of the Toff in the Angel Alley days. I quitted the gang before he had time to know much about me, so p'raps it's not surprising that he can't place me after all this time."

Marie nodded.

"But when you left the gang, Arthur, I thought it was with the intention of turning honest. I remember the vow you made at the time. You said, 'If ever I take up the life of a cracksmen again

may I be shown no mercy!' My father was intensely angry with you. He told you that honesty didn't pay—that you would soon be starving in the gutter. He urged you to remain with the gang, but you defied him. And I admired you, Arthur, for your courage."

"I have thought of you often during the years that have intervened. I have wondered where you were, and what you were doing. And I was hoping that you were earning your livelihood by honest means. But—"

"I tried to, Marie, believe me! It was in war-time, as you know, that I said good-bye to the gang. Young as

No. 8.—REGINALD TALBOT.



A somewhat quiet and reserved fellow of the School House Shell. Old beyond his years, having learnt many hard lessons in his younger days. Had been a member of a gang of cracksmen, and known as "The Toff." Now thoroughly reformed, and absolutely above suspicion; courageous, steadfast, and true. The greatest chum of Marie Rivers, the school nurse, who had also been connected with the "gang" in the old days. (Study No. 9.)

I was, I managed to enlist and served a couple of years abroad. It was a rough life, but I enjoyed it, and it was not difficult to keep straight. But when the Army had finished with me—when they fired me out shortly after the Armistice was signed—it was then that I felt the draught. I could not get work and—"

Marie looked incredulous.

"But you are young and strong and fit, Arthur. And boys of your stamp need never lack honest employment."

Arthur Rivers smiled faintly.

"When I say that I could not get work,

Marie, I mean that I could not get work that suited me. There were heaps of jobs going begging in City offices, but the tame life of a City clerk would have bored me stiff! I wanted something with a spice of adventure in it—some profession that was well paid. And after a good deal of searching and disappointment I came to the conclusion that the best-paid calling was that of a cracksmen."

Marie looked pained.

"I am surprised that you went back so easily on your vow."

"Believe me, Marie, I didn't resume this sort of life until I was driven to it. I was penniless, and in want—I was desperate—and it was then that I stumbled across Jim Dawlish. I recognised him at once as having belonged to the old Angel Alley gang, and I asked him what had become of the others. He told me that your father had reformed, that Hookey Walker had done likewise, and that the Toff and you were here. I persuaded him to engage me—though he didn't want much persuading! He knew that I would be really useful to him after it was arranged that I should come here and make as big a haul as I could."

"And you've done so?"

Arthur Rivers smiled again.

"You must admit, Marie, that I've made things go—in more senses than one—in the short time I've been here."

"Then you are responsible for the whole of these thefts?"

"Every single one of them," muttered the cracksmen, but there was no pride in his tone now.

"Oh, Arthur!" Marie's voice faltered a little. "I—I hardly know what to say to you."

"I simply carried out my chief's instructions," said Arthur Rivers. "Dawlish himself tried to raise this very study, but I understand Dalton Hawke was too smart for him. He wasn't smart enough for me, though. I knew who Mr. Brown, the games-master, was within a few hours of his arrival."

"And where is Dalton Hawke now?"

"I don't know his precise whereabouts, but the other members of the gang have got him in a safe place."

"But—but how did they capture him?"

"They were waiting outside the building last night. I deliberately allowed Hawke to find me in Dalton's study, and when he came in I nipped out through the window. Hawke followed like a shot, of course, and there were three sturdy rogues waiting for him in the quadrangle. He was bound and gagged and carried off before he had time to raise an alarm."

"Arthur!" said Marie wretchedly.

"Do you realise what this means? You are a kidnapper as well as a cracksmen!"

"Fellows in our profession must learn how to protect themselves, Marie. There was a long pause. Then Marie said:

"But how did you gain admission to St. Jim's, in the first place?"

"Easily enough. The various documents and letters were forged."

"Oh!"

"Of course, the trick would have been discovered in the long run, but not before I had disappeared from this place with the loot."

"And what do you propose to do now?"

Marie's heart beat faster than usual as she put the question.

"Well, I can hardly carry out my original plan of looting the Head's safe," said Arthur Rivers, with a curious smile.

"It would look as if you were a confederate of mine. This was to have been my final job, and it will have to be cancelled. I shall simply clear off with the haul I've already made."

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"You have all the stolen property here?"

"Yes; it is hidden."

Marie Rivers rose to her feet. There was nothing of reproach now in the glance she directed at her cousin; but there was appeal.

"Arthur, don't do it! You must not!"

"But, my dear girl—"

"Those articles must be restored to their rightful owners!"

Arthur Rivers laughed outright.

"Is all my work to be wasted?" he exclaimed. Am I to return to the gang empty-handed? Why, they would disown me! They would suspect me of treachery—of working for my own ends, instead of for the gang as a whole. There is such a thing as honour among thieves, Marie."

Marie stepped towards her cousin. The girl's hands were outstretched, and the appeal in her eyes was now almost irresistible.

"Don't go back to the gang, Arthur! Make one more effort to live honestly—to go straight—for my sake!"

The cracksmen hesitated.

"You are as persuasive as ever, Marie, and it is hard—very hard—to refuse you. But put yourself in my position for a moment, and look at things from my standpoint. I have two courses open to me. Either I continue to be a cracksmen and flourish, or I go straight and starve."

"There is no question of that, Arthur. You will not starve. Go to my father. I will give you his address—and tell him all that has happened. He will not fail you. He is an honest man now, and nothing would delight him more than to know that you were prepared to turn honest, too. Rest assured he will find you employment—not in a City office, but something with a spice of adventure in it, to suit your own tastes. There are honest professions that will satisfy your craving for excitement. It is not necessary to be a cracksmen in order to get full value out of life. Promise me—promise me here and now—that you will abandon this career once and for all!"

For a long time Arthur Rivers made no answer. He stood leaning against the Head's mantelpiece, debating the position. A severe mental conflict seemed to be taking place within him. The good and bad angels were striving for possession of his soul.

And the good angels—thanks to Marie Rivers—eventually triumphed!

The cracksmen pulled himself together. His eyes met those of his girl cousin, and this time he did not lower them, but met her gaze steadily.

"I promise!" he said.

Marie drew a deep breath of relief, and her face brightened.

But the next moment she gave a violent start.

"There was a sound of footsteps in the corridor. Someone was coming!"

Marie knew it could not be the Head, for he was not due in the study until one o'clock, and it was now barely half-past twelve.

Swiftly the girl turned to her cousin. "Quick, Arthur!" she panted. "Get behind that screen!"

Not an instant too soon, Arthur Rivers darted behind the screen.

He had barely enclosed himself in safety, when the door opened, and a muffled, breathless, bedraggled individual presented himself.

It was Dalton Hawke.

A cry of astonishment escaped both Marie Rivers and the detective. "You here, Miss Rivers?" exclaimed Dalton Hawke. "What on earth—"

Marie explained that she had arranged "THE GEM LIBRARY"—No. 617.

to keep watch in the Head's study for alternate hours.

"And you?" she gasped. "Tell me—what has happened?"

"Last night," said the detective, "I was kidnapped and carried off by a precious gang of scoundrels. But I have got away, as you see, and I have lost no time in getting back to the school. Where is Dr. Holmes? I must see him at once!"

"But—"

"I have discovered who is responsible for these burglaries which have bewildered the school. It is Stewart of the Shell! He must be apprehended immediately!"

Marie Rivers betrayed no sign of the emotion she was feeling.

"Patience, Mr. Hawke!" she said. "Dr. Holmes will be here in half an hour. It is not advisable to disturb him before one o'clock. He is snatching an hour's sleep while he can. He will, of course, be delighted to know that you have made good your escape. In the meantime I suggest that you retire to your room, and make yourself presentable. You are—ahem!—just a trifle muddy!"

To Marie's intense relief, Dalton Hawke took her at her word.

"Very well, Miss Rivers," he said. "I will return at one o'clock. As you say, I am hardly a presentable object at the moment!"

The detective nodded to the girl, and took his departure. When his footsteps had died away along the corridor, Arthur Rivers emerged from his hiding-place.

"That was a close call!" he murmured. "Thank you, Marie!"

Marie took the precaution of turning the key in the lock.

"You are in danger, Arthur!" she said. "You must get away from the school with all speed!"

"Trust me!" said Arthur. "There's my motor-bike."

Marie stared.

"I thought it had been stolen!" she exclaimed. "But, of course, that was merely a blind on your part!"

"Of course! The bike's at the back of a garage in Wayland. Once I am mounted on her, I shall be away like the wind! Hawke can raise as big a hue-and-cry as he likes, but I shall be in London in a little over an hour—and London is the safest hiding-place in the world!"

Marie Rivers had betrayed no excitement during those critical moments when Dalton Hawke had been in the study; but she was trembling now for her cousin's safety.

"Oh, Arthur," she murmured, "you must not be taken! That would be too great a loss to you. You are about to abandon the old life for the new! Oh, dear! I almost wish Dalton Hawke had remained a prisoner. He is a clever and persistent man, Arthur!"

"But not quite so clever and persistent as your erring cousin!" replied Arthur Rivers, with a smile.

CHAPTER 8.

An Amazing Discovery!

MARIE RIVERS and her cousin proceeded to form hurried plans for the latter's escape.

"I'll go now," said Arthur, "and lie low until Dalton Hawke comes along to see the Head. Then I'll restore all the loot to Ralston's study, and get clear."

Marie nodded.

"I will remain here," she said, "and keep Dr. Holmes and Dalton Hawke engaged in conversation as long as possible. Everything hinges on your getting a good start."

"There's just one difficulty," said Arthur.

"Well?"

"I have a number of bags—seventeen in all—and I can't very well do a Marathon race to Wayland loaded up like a camel!"

Marie soon surmounted that difficulty.

"If you will smuggle them up to the sanatorium," she said, "I will send them on to you early in the morning. You are going to my father's?"

"Yes."

"I am ever so glad! You will find my father a changed man. He used to say that there were two classes of people in the world—the looters and the looted, and that he would always be a looter. But his views have undergone a complete transformation. You will find him a staunch friend, Arthur. He will do everything in his power to help you."

Arthur nodded.

"I shan't be sorry to clunk this sort of life," he said. "If your father finds it possible to keep his head above water by playing with a straight bat, why, so shall I!"

Marie glanced at her watch. "She saw that it was nearing one o'clock."

"You must be going, Arthur," she said.

Marie extended her hand, and her cousin pressed it lightly.

"I shall never be able to thank you enough for what you have done to-night, Marie," he said, in tones which were low but full of sincerity. "You've made me feel thoroughly and utterly ashamed of myself; but I know you've got faith in me, and I mean to justify that faith. Good-bye, and—Heaven bless you!"

"Good-bye!" said Marie softly.

She stepped to the door and unlocked it, and peered down the dark corridor.

"It is safe to venture," she said. "But you must go wisely."

With a last muttered word of farewell to the girl without whose aid he would assuredly have met disaster, Arthur Rivers—who had masqueraded so successfully as Stewart of the Shell—vanished into the darkness.

For a moment Marie remained standing in the doorway, straining her ears to listen.

Dalton Hawke might return at any moment, and if the two were to meet—

But the silence remained unbroken, and Marie knew at length that her cousin was safe.

A few moments later a solitary chime sounded from the clock-tower.

One o'clock!

Dr. Holmes, knowing nothing of the drama which had been enacted in his study, entered from the adjoining room. "Miss Rivers?" he exclaimed. "Bless my soul, you must be exhausted with your vigil!"

"Not a bit!" said Marie cheerfully.

"Have there been any developments?" Marie told a white lie.

"None," she said. "That is to say, the burglar has not put in an appearance. But Mr. Dalton Hawke has returned, and he will be here at any moment to see you."

The Head uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Dalton Hawke returned! This is indeed gratifying news! What has happened to him during the past twenty-four hours?"

"A great deal, Dr. Holmes," said a quiet voice.

And the detective, looking as clean as a new pin, stepped into the study.

Marie Rivers remained, and she joined in the discussion which followed, prolonging it as much as possible.

For upwards of half an hour the two men sat engrossed in conversation.

Dalton Hawke recounted his capture, and the details of his escape. He also informed the Head, greatly to the latter's surprise, that Stewart of the Shell had been responsible for the series of burglaries which had astounded the school.

"I caught him in the act of rifling Mr. Railton's safe," said the detective. "He escaped through the window, and in pursuing him I fell into the hands of his associates, who were waiting outside."

"Bless my soul!" murmured Dr. Holmes. "To think that Stewart—a boy who seemed to comport himself remarkably well—should be a crackman!"

"And a very ingenious crackman at that," said Dalton Hawke. "Had I not been fortunate enough to escape, the young rascal would doubtless have continued to carry out his impudent thefts. It will be a great blow to him to know that I have returned to the school to take him into custody!"

Marie Rivers could scarcely repress a smile. By this time, she reflected, Cousin Arthur had shaken the dust of St. Jim's from his feet.

"I suggest, sir," said the detective at length, "that you allow me to place Stewart under arrest at once. It would be unwise to defer it till the morning, for he may get wind of the fact that I have returned, in which case he would lose no time in clearing out."

"That is so," said the Head. "We will rouse Mr. Railton, and the three of us will proceed to the Shell dormitory. Would you be good enough, Miss Rivers, to remain in this study, in case of eventualities?"

"Certainly," said Marie gravely. Before the Head and Dalton Hawke reached the door, however, it opened, admitting Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster was in his dressing-gown, and he was looking unusually excited. His excitement grew when he caught sight of Dalton Hawke.

"Then you are back?" he exclaimed. The detective nodded.

"What's more, I'm nearing the end of my quest," he said. "Rest assured, Mr. Railton, that your Eastern idol will be restored to you to-morrow."

"But it is restored to me already!" Had Mr. Railton exploded a bombshell in the Head's study, he could not have created a bigger sensation.

The expressions of bewilderment on the faces of Dr. Holmes and Dalton Hawke almost caused Marie Rivers to laugh.

"I—I—My dear Railton, I quite fail to understand you!" gasped the Head.

"It is incredible!" exclaimed Dalton Hawke.

"If you will step along to my study," said the Housemaster, "you will see for yourselves."

The three men hurried from the apartment.

When they had gone, Marie Rivers seated herself in the Head's armchair and laughed softly.

"Cousin Arthur has worked the oracle!" she murmured.

The astonishment of the Head and Dalton Hawke, on their arrival at the Housemaster's study, was no less than Mr. Railton's had been.

The study table was strewn with packages and envelopes.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes. "What does this mean?"

"It means, sir," said Mr. Railton, "that the whole of the missing property has been restored!"

"Good heavens!"

"I happened to come down to my study a few moments ago," continued the Housemaster, "to see if everything was all right, and when I switched on the electric light, I saw this array of parcels

and envelopes. They have each been labelled, as you see. Package number one was labelled 'Eastern idol,' and when I opened it, the image, sure enough, was disclosed to view. So far as I can see, every single item of the stolen property has been returned."

"Well," ejaculated Dalton Hawke, "I've had some surprises in my time—my life's full of them, in fact—but I've never had a bigger surprise than this!"

"It would almost seem," said the Head, "that Stewart took all these things for a joke!"

"Stewart!" exclaimed Mr. Railton. Dr. Holmes nodded.

"Dalton Hawke assures me that Stewart has been responsible for all these thefts."

"Then we had better visit him in his dormitory," said Mr. Railton, "and hear what he has to say about it all."

The visit to the Shell dormitory, however, proved fruitless.

A lifelike dummy figure was installed in Stewart's bed, but of Stewart himself there was no sign.

"He has gone!" said Dalton Hawke, as the trio left the dormitory. "He evidently guessed that the toils were closing in on him, and he escaped while he had the chance. But I can't for the life of me understand why he didn't take the loot with him!"

"No doubt," said the Head, "his conscience reproached him at the last, and he decided to restore the spoils."

It was found on examination of the various parcels and envelopes, that the stolen property had all been restored.

Dalton Hawke turned to the Head with a rueful smile.

"My work is finished here, sir," he said. "There is nothing further for me to do. I am sorry to have failed you on this occasion—"

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Holmes. "You did your best, and no man can do more. I am indeed thankful that everything has ended so satisfactorily."

And the Head shook hands cordially with the detective, who retired to his room in order to snatch a few hours' sleep before finally quitting St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 9.

All's Well.

NEXT morning an announcement appeared on the notice-board which caused the St. Jim's fellows to rub their eyes:

"NOTICE!"

"All boys who have lost any of their belongings in the recent burglaries are requested to report to Mr. Railton after breakfast, when the missing articles will be returned."

"(Signed) RICHARD HOLMES, Headmaster."

At first it was thought that some practical joker, with a bent for forgery, had "faked" the notice in the Head's handwriting.

But when the various claimants presented themselves at Mr. Railton's study after breakfast, they found that the announcement was genuine enough.

Kildare, Knox, and Monteith, of the Sixth, Figgins of the New House, and D'Arcy, Manners, and Cardew of the School House, swarmed into the Housemaster's study.

Mr. Railton looked as if he were conducting an auction sale.

"Lot Number Two—a camera," he said, quoting from the label on one of the packages.

"That's mine, sir," said Manners promptly.

Mr. Railton handed over the parcel, and Manners hurried away, in a state of great astonishment, to acquaint his chums with the recovery of his beloved camera.

"Five-pound note, belonging to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy," continued Mr. Railton. It was an envelope he had picked up this time.

"Bai Jova!" murmured Arthur Augustus, in tones of stupefaction. "To think that my fivah should turn up like this!"

The Housemaster handed the envelope to the swell of St. Jim's, who went on his way rejoicing.

One by one the various articles were handed to their rightful owners.

Kildare received his gold tie-pin with

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an exclamation of satisfaction, and Monty's fountain-pen, which he prized very highly, was restored to him in good condition.

Mr. Railton frowned when he came to Lot No. 6, which was described as "a silver cigarette-case," the property of Knox of the Sixth.

"Are you aware, Knox," said the Housemaster, "that you are not permitted to have such an article as this in your possession?"

Knox flushed.

"Ahem! I don't use it as a cigarette-case, sir, I can assure you," he said. "I keep letters and things in it."

Mr. Railton took Knox's explanation not with a grain of salt, but with a whole salt-mine. He did not believe the perfect; but he handed over the cigarette-case without further comment, intending to keep his eye on Knox in future.

Cardew of the Fourth embraced his gold watch as if it were an old friend, and Figgins was delighted to receive the three pounds of which he had been robbed. The loss of the money had weighed heavily on Figgins' mind; but now that it was restored to him the clouds vanished from his brow, and he went straightway to Dame Taggles, and made arrangements for a junior feed on an elaborate scale.

As Figgins emerged from the Housemaster's study the Terrible Three of the Shell entered it.

"What is it, Merry?" asked Mr. Railton.

"All the loot seems to have been returned, sir," said Tom, "with the exception of one thing."

"What is that, Merry?"

"Stewart's motor-bike, sir. You will remember that the bike-shed was forced and his bike stolen."

The Housemaster smiled.

"Stewart doubtless knows where the motor-cycle is, since he himself took it," he said.

"My hat!"

"It was Stewart, I regret to say, who perpetrated the whole of these felonies. He was here under false pretences. His profession is that of a crackman."

To say that the Terrible Three were surprised was to put it mildly. They nearly fell down.

"Stewart a crackman!" gasped Manners.

"Talk about a wolf in sheep's clothing!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"The wretched boy has had the sense to return the stolen property, and to evacuate the school," said Mr. Railton. "We are well rid of such a dangerous rascal."

It was some time before Tom Merry & Co. could master their astonishment.

They had liked Stewart; they had voted him one of the best. And all the time they had been chumming up with a crackman!

Mr. Railton picked up an envelope which lay on his desk, and handed it to Tom Merry.

"This is the money which was stolen from the Rookwood boys when they came here to play football," he said. "You have my authority to return it to them, and to explain that this school has been at the mercy of a crackman."

"Thank you, sir," said Tom Merry. "The Rookwood fellows are feeling jolly sore with us at the moment; but I've no doubt, when they receive my explanation, they'll come round."

Mr. Railton nodded.

"They will at least have the assurance that their money was stolen by an outsider, and not by one of the regular pupils here," he said.

The Terrible Three left the Housemaster's study with their heads in a whirl.

Talbot met them in the passage.

"Anything wrong?" he exclaimed.

"I should jolly well say so!" said Monty Lowther. "We've got news that will shock you, stagger you, and cause you to turn back-somersaults!"

Stewart, the pride and joy of the Shell, the noble youth whom we thought could never stray from the path of virtue, has turned out to be a crackman!

"What?" shouted Talbot.

"It's a fact," said Tom Merry. "It was Stewart who walked off with all the loot."

"And now he's walked off for good," added Manners.

Talbot looked dumbfounded.

"I simply can't believe it," he said.

But as the day wore on, Talbot, like all the others, could not fail to believe it.

Stewart, his study-mate, the fellow whose integrity he would have roused for, was a crackman, even as Talbot himself had been in the old dark days.

It was a big blow for Talbot, who had come to have more than a passing regard for Stewart.

But the blow was softened that evening, when Marie Rivers confided to Talbot, and to the Terrible Three, that Stewart was her cousin, and that he had resolved to reform.

"I thought all the time that the fellow's face seemed familiar," said Talbot. "I must have seen him once or twice in the old days."

"That's so," said Marie. "But he left the gang before you had time to know him intimately."

"Well, it's a nine-days' wonder, and no mistake!" said Tom Merry.

"The sensation of the term, by Jove!" said Manners.

"Of course, I can rely on you to keep this information to yourselves?" said Marie.

"Of course you can, Marie," said Talbot.

"We'll be as mum as mice," said Monty Lowther.

The knowledge that Stewart of the Shell was a cousin of Marie Rivers came as a great surprise to Tom Merry & Co. and to Talbot. But they guarded their secret well, and not even the Head knew the real facts of the case.

Marie made no mention of the important part she herself had played in expediting her cousin's escape from the school. But for her loyalty, Arthur Rivers might never have been given a chance to set his feet in the straight path. Dalton Hawke would promptly have handed him over to the police.

Thanks to Marie's enterprise, however, that calamity had been averted, and the ex-crackman, with the world at his feet, and with youth on his side, now had every opportunity of making good. And if temptation assailed him in the future—as it was certain to do—the sweet influence of his girl cousin would prevail, and he would trample down the impulses to revert to a career of dishonour.

In short, the reformation of Arthur Rivers was likely to be every bit as complete and sincere as the reformation of his one-time fellow-crackman, Reginald Talbot.

In the fulness of time, Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, came over to St. Jim's to replay the match which had been abandoned under such regrettable circumstances.

The Rookwooders, who had been in a very bad temper over the affair, were more than satisfied with Tom Merry's explanation and the return of their money. They had at first suspected Jack Blake of being the thief, and they had hastened to apologise for their blunder.

The replayed match proved a thrill from start to finish.

Tom Merry scored for St. Jim's, and Jimmy Silver replied for Rookwood. Then Arthur Augustus D'Arcy put the Saints ahead, but Tommy Dodd equalised the scores shortly afterwards.

Two goals each was the state of affairs until five minutes before the end, when Talbot scored a grand goal for St. Jim's, who ran out winners after a keenly-contested tussle.

Talbot, as the scorer of the winning goal, was the hero of the hour. And, as was only fitting, the first person to congratulate him as he came off the field was loyal Miss Marie.

THE END.

(Another long complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's next week, entitled—"THE SCHOOLBOY EMPLOYERS!" Order your copy in advance.)



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"The Schoolboy Employers" to hand over their business to older and more experienced people.

THE GREYFRIARS HERALD.

This week I take exception to something the poet said about life. You remember he pointed out that—

"An ass, and a cow, and a goose on a green

Is the pleasantest sight that ever was seen."

And after this last week's glimpse of the editorial table of the "Greyfriars Herald" I am disposed to differ from him; for it is still more cheery to see the congratulations of thousands of readers. Letters have been pouring in on the Editor of the "Greyfriars Herald" by the hundred, and they all tell one tale. Everybody is right down pleased with the new paper.

It is really a mistake to speak of the "Greyfriars Herald" as new, for, though this present is a new issue, the old "Greyfriars Herald" was never lost sight of. Readers of the Companion Papers have long memories, and the fame of the original "Greyfriars Herald" was never permitted to grow dim. Hence the special note found in the communications which are pouring in.

TOO MUCH MONEY.

That is what a Leeds correspondent considers some of the fellows in the stories possess. His letter was ingenious, but it only showed one view.

It made me think of the old lady of Harrow, who would do her travelling in a barrow, and complained that the streets were too narrow. For this opinion of my chum's is on the narrow side.

One is not going to suggest that the fellows who have wads of bank-notes in their possession are met with frequently, but they do occur.

We often deal with exceptional cases in the stories. It is necessary. There must be decided contrasts. There have to be special cases.

I was sorry to have the Leeds letter. Do not think it was because of its influence on me. It had none. What I regretted was the babyish narrowness of the view-point. It is a big mistake to be captious without good cause. There is seldom cause.

We are all out for a purpose, and the main purpose is not to pick holes, but to help. My Leeds friend cut out a picture of a little upset in a school corridor. He said he did not think such things ever happened. Well, they do. Perhaps he does not remember what life at school was really like. Then he says that the boys always seem to be going out on tours. Just fancy that! A few tours might surely be allowed.

BORROWING MONEY.

People have always borrowed things. They loaned axes in the Stone Age. Long before the days when the British Warrior Queen, smarting 'neath the Roman rod, vowed with an indignant mien vengeance to her country's god, folks went about raising the wind. For all we know the Ancient Britons did the same. But there is very little to be said in favour of the custom.

I was thinking of this world-wide subject when I read a letter the other day from a correspondent who told me that he had been entrusted with a pound to buy books. Instead of hurrying to the bookshop and laying out the cash, as desired, he seems to have been waylaid by a scheming camera. He bought the camera for his own personal use with the twenty shillings of which he was the temporary steward, and he hoped to do so well with the photography that he would be able to pay back the money.

Was there ever such a muddle-headed yarn in this life? Fancy an amateur imagining for a single instant that he could make photography pay well enough to bring in immediate funds! I should say the writer had come straight out of Fairyland, or that he had been spending the holidays amidst Greenland's icy mountains! So he wanted to borrow a pound to make it all right.

If you are in debt, get into debt again! It won't do at all. His duty lay in explaining to his friends the nature of the mischievous prank he had been up to, and trusting to their good feeling in the matter. I am sure he would not have appealed in vain.

"Truth may be blamed,
But never shamed."

It is true all along the line. Besides, when a fellow gets in a mess it is up to him to get himself out of it on his own. The world admires that sort, and then comes hurrying in to help.

You remember the carter who prayed to Jupiter to help him get his cart-wheel out of the rut?

"You stupid ass!" said Jupiter, "Put your shoulder to the wheel and give it a shove."

And so that's that!

THE END OF THE SUMMER.

While I write these lines comes the news of real summer weather in Somerset. But it is not only in Somersetshire that the summer is lingering so pleasantly.

I never can rightly place all these little summers folks talk about during the autumn, but I do know that a few days since I happened to be travelling about the country, south and north, within fifty miles of London, and it seemed to me that the country had never looked finer.

There have been some really hard frosts, but they missed a lot of the valleys, and the gardens were still ablaze with flowers. Through the sunny mists you saw the old world countryside looking just beautiful.

Of course, the leaves are falling. 'Tis a soft, brown, and yellow shower all day long, and the woodland pathways are choked with the litter of dying summer-time, but there is just that something about autumn which cheers one up.

It is no use looking upon the Fall as a sad time. Some people do, and it is really a mistake. The trees and plants must have a rest, so that they can think out fresh plots for the new stories in the spring!

JUST A FEW QUESTIONS.

A correspondent at Leytonstone shows his keen interest in the GEM by sending me a cartload of questions, and I am doing my best for him.

For the benefit of any other readers who may be on the look-out for similar information, I may say that all the boys at St. Jim's, above the Third, have studied, the number of occupants ranging from one to four.

I shall be giving a new "Who's Who" presently, with full details.

Dr. Holmes has been the Head for over thirty years. There are nine masters of note at St. Jim's—namely, Dr. Holmes, Mr. Raiton, and Mr. Ratcliff, who take the Fifth and the Sixth; Mr. Linton the Shell, Mr. Lathom the Fourth, Mr. Selby the Third, and Mr. Carrington the Second. The French master is Monsieur Morrey, the German master, Herr Schneider.

My correspondent asked for a great deal more, though. I can tell him that Eric Kildare is nearly eighteen. There are about a hundred and fifty boys in the School House, and fifty in the New House.

Tom Merry is not only the best pugilist in the Shell, but the whole of the Lower School. Harry Noble, Grundy, and Jack Blake rank next.

There is no regular test whereby entrance may be gained. One occurs now and again. Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence are the only scholarship boys. Tom Merry was, of course, at Clavering School in early days. The first story of him at St. Jim's was in No. 11 of the GEM, May 25th, 1907.

Your Editor



SYNOPSIS.

Dick Danby, a stalwart lad of sixteen, obtains the promise of partnership from Captain Morgan Kidd, skipper of the auxiliary schooner Foam, and his daughter Stella, in a treasure cruise to the wrecked Pathan. Dick is the sole survivor of the Pathan, which was torpedoed, and is lying, half-submerged, off an island in the South Seas. In the strong-room of the ill-fated ship is two million sterling in bar-gold and money, and the Dragon's Eye—a wonderful diamond.

Otto Schwab, posing as a Dutchman—though in reality the commander of the U-boat which sank the Pathan—and Solah Mendoza, a villainous Malay, are their unscrupulous rivals for the treasure.

Harry Fielding and Joe Maddox join the expedition, also Wang Su, a Chinese boy. They reach the island off which the Pathan is sunk, and a fierce encounter with the Red Rover takes place, in which our friends are victorious. Later, Dick and Stella go for a swim round the island. During their absence from the ship a cyclone approaches, and the Foam has to leave them and make for safety.

The Red Rover is sighted, and later Stella and Dick hear the sounds of firing.

They climb to the top of the rock, and are just in time to see Captain Kidd fall to the deck of the Foam. Stella dives into the sea, followed by Dick. They are attacked by a shark. Stella is saved, and the shark darts towards Dick.

(Now read on.)

On Board the Foam Once More.

THE next moment Dick felt the cool breeze blowing on his face, and, opening his mouth, drew in a long, deep breath of life-giving air. Then he looked around him, to find that the waves were streaked with blood.

The thought flashed through his brain that it was his own, but the next moment he remembered that he had felt no pain.

The next thing he knew was a rush of water close at hand, and a huge, dark object looming overhead.

A smart blow caught him across the face.

Instinctively he grasped the object which had struck him, and the next moment he was being pulled rapidly through the water.

Then something solid hit him on the side, and he knew that he was being dragged up the vessel's side.

A few seconds later hands grasped his wrists, and he was drawn to safety over the side of the Foam.

For a moment the solid deck seemed sinking beneath him, the white faces of his comrades, the brown faces of the

Kanakas grew indistinct, and, for the first time in his life, Dick Danby fainted.

Dick Danby recovered consciousness to find the Foam at anchor, and Stella bending anxiously over him.

From the striped awning above his head he knew that he was in the schooner's stern.

"Hallo, Stella! So we both put it across the shark," was Dick's first remark.

"Say, rather, Wang did. It was he who killed the voracious brute just as we on board the Foam thought it was all over with you!" replied Stella.

"Good old Wang! I verily believe that if I was going to be hanged I'd find him on the gallows ready to cut the rope at the last moment!" laughed Dick. "But what of the skipper?" he added anxiously.

"He's all right, my lad, barring as neat a little hole drilled clean through the shoulder as a man need wish to have. Not a bone touched or an artery broken," returned that worthy, answering for himself.

Dick turned, to find the skipper, his shoulder bandaged and his face a trifle paler than usual, but otherwise his old genial self, stretched on a deck-chair alongside him.

"That's splendid, sir! I thought the bouncers had got you!" he said.

"Got me!" roared the skipper, laughing, as though at some huge joke. "Do you think that Morgan Kidd is going under at the bidding of a set of penny-plain, tuppence-coloured, knock-kneed, swivel-eyed, twisted-mouthed, crooked-nosed, make-believe pirates, like Mendoza and his lot? Bah! If they'd had the spirit of a dog—that my great name-sake would have strung up at the mast-head for cowardice—they'd have run alongside the Foam, and scuttled the lot of us!"

"At any rate, you've put the kibosh on them for the time being, skipper!" laughed Dick.

A thoughtful frown furrowed the old sailor's brow.

"Maybe, lad, and maybe not," he replied doubtfully. "Anyhow, the sooner we get the treasure on board—Stella tells me you've found the poor old Pathan's stern—the better! Somehow, I can't see Schwab and Mendoza sitting round on that island twiddling their thumbs whilst we're walking off with a cool two million, or more."

Dick nodded, then turned to Wang Su, whose head popped out of the tiny companionway at that moment.

"Come here, you 'velly frightened' Chinaman, and give me your hand! You saved my life again, Wang. I'll not

forget it as long as I live!" he said gratefully.

For a moment the mask of perfect impassiveness lifted from the Chinaman's face, and Dick was almost startled by the look of genuine affection that shone from his eyes.

"You Wang's fiend, Mastel Dick, Wang die fol you!" he replied earnestly.

Dick Danby squeezed the faithful fellow's hand, and Wang, with his usual, almost imbecile smile, hastened forward.

For the next hour the five white people discussed the future, and at length decided that, as his wound would incapacitate him from taking part in the diving operations, Captain Kidd should remain on board the Foam, the more so as the schooner would be unable to cross the reef even at high tide, and the Kanakas could not be induced to work in the lagoon.

To Stella was allotted the task of getting the recovered gold on board the schooner.

As it was a laborious and difficult task to get even an empty boat over the reef, it was arranged that the beautiful mate of the Foam should ply backwards and forwards from the Chair Rock to the reef with her precious load, which would then be transferred to the schooner's boat, for conveyance to the ship.

For this purpose Stella was to use a collapsible canvas boat the Foam carried to enable her skipper or mate to row themselves ashore, without taking a boat's crew, when in harbour.

As the ill-fated Pathan's stern was lying in comparatively shallow water, and there were no cross-currents to be dealt with in the lagoon, it was decided to dispense with the air-pipes and pumps, and to fit both diving-suits with patent air cylinders, which, though it would necessitate more frequent visits to the surface, would enable the three white men and Wang Su to assist in the actual recovery of the gold.

The seat of the Chair Rock was also taken the place of the usual boat, and the Kanakas were at once set to work making a rope-ladder, long enough to reach from thence to the bed of the lagoon, and to prepare a derrick, with running rigging, to raise the treasure.

These preparations occupied the rest of the day, and when they knocked off with the fading daylight, all was ready to begin work on the treasure the following morning.

Supper over, the little party gathered in the stern, and listened whilst, between puffs at his pipe, Captain Kidd related his adventures.

He told how the sudden coming of the



"You Wang's friend, Mastel Dick. Wang die for you!" Wang replied earnestly. Dick Danby squeezed the faithful fellow's hand, and Wang, with his usual almost imbecile smile, hastened forward. (See page 18.)

cyclone had forced him to run for the open sea, for, though by so doing he left Dick Danby and his daughter in great peril, he was obliged to consider the safety of his vessel and those on board her.

It was not until he returned and saw the Red Rover anchored off Pathan Rock that he felt any real anxiety regarding them.

The Malays had slipped their cable, and had attempted to make off, but the skipper had engaged them at long range, and, his first shot having brought down their mainmast, soon had them at his mercy.

He had at first shot only at the rigging, fearing lest Stella and her boy chum should be on board, but knowing that Mendoza never would hesitate to expose her to his fire, and thus shield himself and his rascally crew behind her, had she been in his power, he commenced plunging her hull with shells, with what result the reader already knows.

Dick and Stella then related their adventures with the islanders, whilst Wang Su who was, as usual, squatted just outside the little circle, eagerly drank in every word that was uttered.

"It's no good hearing about that grotto," declared the skipper. "Storms don't give much notice of their coming in these latitudes, and any day the sea might get up, and make the reef impracticable. So it will be as well if you sleep in the grotto. If you can't get all

the gold aboard it would be as safe there as in a bank."

"Safer than in some!" laughed Dick. "You think Schwab and his lot will not give us any more trouble?" he added, after a moment's thought.

"Oh, they'll give us trouble enough if we give them time! What you boys have got to do is to put your backs into it, and work like niggers. As I figure it out there are some two tons of gold in the Pathan's strong-room, and two tons of gold takes a lot of shifting!" replied Captain Kidd.

"Oh, we'll work hard enough!" promised Joe Maddox, and the others expressing the same determination, Captain Kidd knocked out the ashes of his pipe, and went below.

The Return of the Snake God.

ALTHOUGH the boys were as good as their word, and worked their hardest, it was too late to commence operations the following day by the time they had got the diving-suits and necessary appliances on the rock, and a small store of provisions, carried by Wang Su and Dick in a water-tight box, into Stella's secret cave.

The lovely mate of the Foam remained on board the schooner with her father, but Dick, his companions, and Wang Su slept in the grotto.

Perhaps it would be more correct to

say that the Britishers slept, for Wang Su had other work on hand.

During the day Dick had often caught him smiling, as though amused by some good joke. Once or twice he actually laughed aloud.

But when Dick demanded the cause of his merriment he at once became serious, and, holding his middle with his hands, murmured:

"Wang got tumme ache! Chinaman's always laugh when he gotte tumme ache!"

Then looked in pained surprise at the boys, who were convulsed with laughter at his strange reply.

Although Dick had wondered at the Chinaman's persistence, he had thought little of it when Wang disclosed a sudden curiosity to see the feather head of the islanders' snake god, and gave him no rest until he had showed it to him.

Even when Wang crept inside it, and performed a weird dance round the pool, he had no suspicion of the strange plan that had taken root in the Chinaman's mind when he first heard that Stella and Dick had removed the snake god from its temple.

Had he known the celestial's plans he would have thought that he had given up the idea, when he saw Wang curl himself up in a corner of the grotto, and begin to snore loudly.

But Wang Su's snores were merely camouflage. No sooner was he assured by their regular breathing that his white companions slept, than he glided

stealthily from the grotto, and, taking the feathered image under his arm, made off, as directly as though he was treading a well-known path, through the crevice that led to the distant temple.

Now, Wang Su had been intended for the priesthood of his native land, and, as an aspiring acolyte, had spent years in a temple cut out of the living rock in the mountains of Northern China.

To this he owed an almost catlike gift of being able to see in the dark, or, at least, to find his way easily over the rough ground without the aid of natural or artificial light.

Crouching in the darkness, he gazed through the open doors, and realised that he had arrived at a very critical moment.

Immediately in front of the entrance appeared a number of whirling lights that disclosed a crowd of savages, who, armed with torches, were advancing in a series of strange leaps and bounds towards the temple.

Chuckling to himself, Wang Su crept into the serpent's head; then, seating himself in front of the upright beam, from which Dick had torn the mask, awaited the oncoming procession.

In the cleared space before the temple the procession halted.

Yelling at the top of their voices, as

though striving to drown the cries of their victim, a squealing pig, the priests advanced to within a few feet of the altar.

Then, as though at the word of command, every voice was hushed, as the priests gazed with bulging eyes at their god.

Then a mighty cry arose.

"The Great One has returned! The snake god has come back!" echoed and re-echoed from the domed roof.

The cry was taken up by these without, who, following the example of the priests, flung themselves face downwards on the ground.

Wang Su was enjoying himself immensely, but he had not come there to be worshipped, and was anxious to combine business with pleasure.

Old Kao, the Samoan boatswain, had told him that the islanders were said to be allied to the Malays, and he was anxious to find out if the crew of the Red Rover had yet opened up communication with them.

"Grh! Wo, wo, huh!" he growled, his voice borrowing additional depth from the hollow head through which he spoke.

Springing to their feet, the savages gazed in consternation at their god.

Never before had mortal man heard a sound proceed from his godship's lips.

Uttering blood-curdling groans, Wang Su advanced to the foot of the altar, and, after turning the serpent's head from side to side as though surveying the trembling spectators, sprang to the ground.

This was more than the priests could stand.

Screaming with terror, they turned, and fled, tumbling over each other, those behind hacking madly at the men in front of them.

Whereupon the injured ones spread the panic to the islanders by shouting that their god was angry, and was devouring them alive.

The yells and shrieks of the islanders, as they fled towards the village at the foot of the slope leading to the temple, was the sweetest music to the mischievous Chinaman's ears, as he followed the flying crowd as fast as the narrow bottom of that snake's neck would allow.

Castling frightened glances over their shoulders, the islanders dived into their houses, until at last, save for a priest—who was thundering with closed fists on the closed door of a large building, evidently the Guest House—Wang Su was sole master of the village.

(Another long instalment of this magnificent adventure story will appear in next Wednesday's GEM. Be sure to order your copy in advance.)

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