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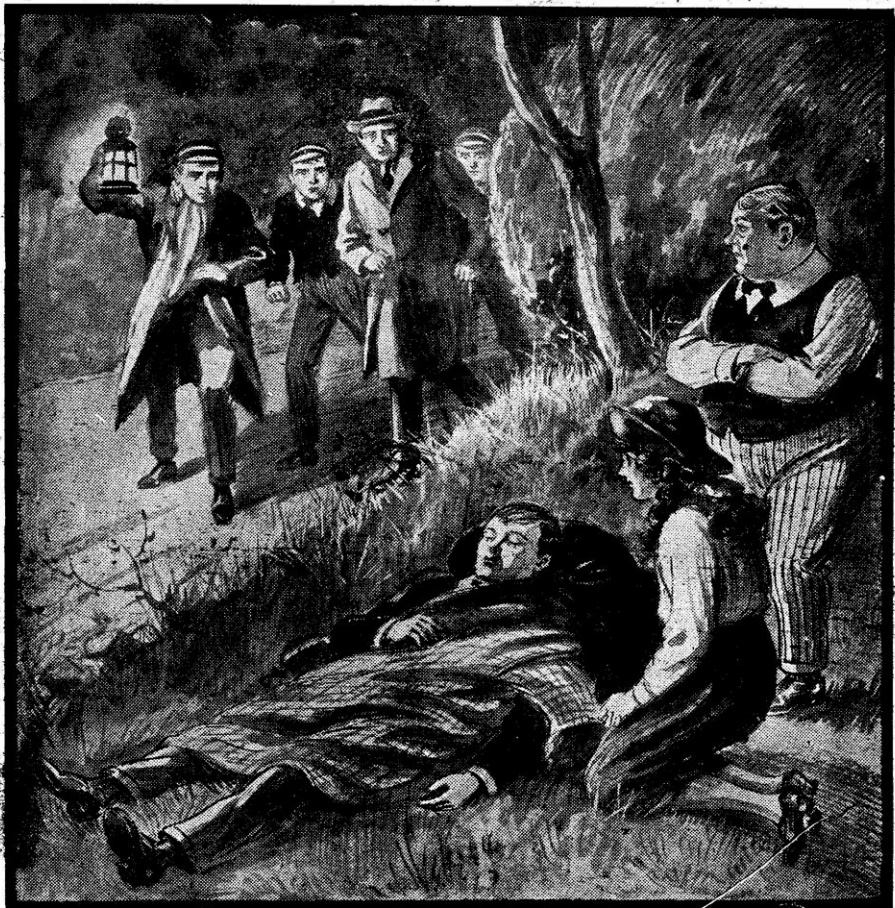
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THROUGH A TERRIBLE ORDEAL



GEORGE
FIGGINS

An Impressive Story telling of the unexpected result which attended George Figgins whilst upholding the honour of St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

What Wynn Knew.

"W H O'S that boulder with Lacy?" asked George Figgins of the New House at St. Jim's.

He was riding from Rylcombe, with his chums Kerr and Fatty Wynn. Two fellows wearing Grammar School caps had just passed them.

"Don't know him from Adam," replied Kerr. "But, though I don't much believe in judging from appearances, I can't say I like the look of him."

"I don't know him, but I know his name, and I know what he and Lacy have been to our show for," said Fatty Wynn.

"My hat! Here's our prize porker in possession of information that we lack!" exclaimed Figgins, in surprise.

"Rather cheeky, isn't it?" said Kerr. "Mind it doesn't happen again, Fatty-bus, or we may be forced to take a severe view of the matter."

"Oh, rats to both you silly asses!" retorted the Welsh junior. "I know lots of things you chaps don't. I know one thing that old Figgys would give a lot to be told. But as he's so jolly clever, I won't tell him!"

George Figgins made a long sweep with his arm and seized the Falstaff of the New House by the left ear.

"Yow! Skippin' Figgys! You'll have me over, you dangerous lunatic!"

"I don't feel so giddy rats that I'd give a lot to hear what you know, old top; but I guess I'll give you a lot that you won't like if you don't tell me this moment!" rapped out Figgins, clinging to the ear, while both he and Fatty rocked perilously, and Kerr prudently dropped back to avoid a possible smash.

"Ow! Yooop! You'll have me over, you maniac!" hooted Fatty.

"I will, you bet, if you don't tell me! You shouldn't be so blessed knowing! Why, you're nearly as bad as Baggy Trimble, hanged if you aren't!"

"That fat worm! Ow! Leggo. Figgys! Oh, I'll tell you if you only let go! But don't you compare me with Trimble again, or there will be trouble in the family! You may have the advantage of me while we're both on bikes; but I can lick you when I get my feet on the ground, and you know it!"

"If that's the thing I didn't know, I don't know it now, and I never shall know it," replied Figgins, with a grin. "I don't like hurting you, old grampus;

but it will be for your own good to get that potty notion knocked out of your head!"

He had released Fatty's ear now. Fatty was rubbing it ruefully. Kerr ranged up alongside again.

"Are you aware, Fatty, that, according to the scientific sharps, there is hardly any feeling at all in the outer ear?" the Scots junior inquired. "I don't like to see you making a fuss about nothing."

"The scientific sharps may have ears made of leather, for all I know," grumbled Fatty; "but mine aren't made like that. They're flesh and blood, like the rest of me, and pulling hurts them. I don't think I shall tell Figgys, after all!"

"Here's for your ear again, then!" snorted Figgins.

"Yow! Stoppit! I'll tell you, you mad ass! Cousin Ethel's coming to-morrow!"

"What?"

George Figgins would have denied angrily that that news made him blush; but most certainly a tide of colour swept into his lean, tanned face, and a new light came into his eyes.

Ethel Cleveland, who was the cousin of Arthur Augustus and Wally D'Arcy, in reality; the cousin of nearly a score of other fellows at St. Jim's, by adoption, and almost like a daughter to Dr. Holmes, the headmaster and his motherly wife, had no more loyal pal and staunch admirer than George Figgins.

It was a dull, overcast day; but the sun seemed suddenly to shine out for Figgins when he heard that news. Kerr and Fatty might not notice the change in the weather conditions; but Figgys was aware of it.

"It's right," said Fatty. "And you never told me till now!" said Figgins reproachfully. "I don't call you a pal, Wynn!"

"Forgot all about it," confessed Fatty.

Figgins snorted contemptuously. "Oh, you may snort, chump! I'd other things to think about—more important things!"

"Rats!" snapped Figgys. "It wasn't, then! You may like rats for tea, but I don't. It was tea I was thinking about, and whether we should have sausages, or sardines, or kippers, or salmon."

"And which did you decide upon?" asked Kerr.

"Well, I've brought kippers. Sardines are so jolly dear now, and a tin of salmon's nothing among three, and the sosses looked rather like last week's. Binks said he couldn't really recommend them. Decent of Binks, wasn't it? We've had kippers pretty often lately, but a bob's worth of them, with plenty of bread-and-butter, does make a decent snack, anyway."

"Who told you?" inquired Figgys.

"Nobody, fathead! I got them on my own. Seems to me you chaps never do take the proper interest a healthy-minded fellow ought to take in so important a subject as grub."

"Grub? Who's talking about grub?"

"Why, I am, Figgys! I thought you knew that. What are you talking about if 'tain't that?"

"Cousin Ethel, of course! Who told you she was coming?"

"Oh, that! I—"

"Don't you call Cousin Ethel that, you fat boulder!"

"I didn't. I wouldn't think of such a thing! I think as much of her as you do, Figgys!"

"You don't, you grampus!"

"Not so often, anyway," put in Kerr, smiling.

"Nor so much, or he wouldn't go burbling on about grub!" said Figgys hotly. "Disgusting, I call it! Kippers—yah!"

"All right; don't you eat any of them, my boy, that's all! I'll put away your share, then, how you feel!"

"Who told you, pudden-head?" roared Figgys.

"Told me what? About that fellow Gell? I forget—"

"So that's the boulder's name, is it?" said Kerr.

"No! About Cousin Ethel, you lunatic porpoise!"

"Oh! That was the parlourmaid with the dark hair—Esther, her name is. It's quite right, Figgys. Mrs. Holmes told her. All of them like Cousin Ethel. Esther seemed quite pleased about it. Now I come to think of it, she said I'd better tell you—I'm sure I don't know why. But she smiled when she said it. Esther's got rather a nice smile!"

Figgys flushed again. But he did not really mind much that his devotion to Ethel should be patent even to Mrs. Holmes's maids. He was not ashamed of it.

They reached the gates of St. Jim's THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 684.

at that moment, and jumped from their bikes.

Six or seven fellows stood at the gates—Tom Merry and his special chum, Manners, Lowther, and Talbot, with Grundy and his two liege henchmen, Gunn and Wilkins.

"Something ought to be done about it," the great Grundy was saying.

"And, of course, you're the chap to do it," said Tom Merry, smiling.

"I rather flatter myself that I am!" Grundy answered loftily.

"You're always doing it, old fellow!" murmured Lowther.

"What's that, Lowther? Why don't you speak up, if you've anything worth saying? Not that that's likely," said George Alfred scornfully.

"It wasn't, in point of fact. I merely remarked that you're always flattering yourself. But everyone knows that, so it was scarcely worth saying."

"What is it that something ought to be done about?" queried Kerr.

"That's what he halted, but Figgins passed on."

"Those Grammarian cads," answered Tom. "For once I agree with Grundy. Something certainly ought to be done."

"Figgins doesn't seem interested," remarked Talbot.

"Not in anything in this world except the news he's just heard," asked Manners.

"And what's that?" asked Manners.

"Ah, that would be telling!" Kerr said.

"It's only that—"

"Dry up, Fatty!"

Fatty Wynn dried up obediently.

"What have the Grammarian cads been at?" inquired Kerr. "I take it you mean Lacy and the fellow we saw with him just now. Fatty says his name's Gell."

"That's more than I know," answered Tom. "We haven't seen Gay and that crowd for quite a time. But they might not have mentioned this new chap, anyway. He's not their sort."

"Not if he's Lacy's sort," agreed Gunn.

"It's scandalous that those Grammarian bouncers should come over here to gamble with our chaps!" snorted the great George Alfred.

"They haven't been gambling with you, have they?" asked Kerr, with a good pretence of being shocked.

"Really, Grundy! Well, I hope you lost, it may be a lesson to you!"

"Rot!" snapped Grundy.

"Of course it's rot. Did you ever know Grundy to learn a lesson from anything, Kerr?" said Lowther.

"It's rot to talk of my gambling with them—that's what I mean!" roared Grundy. "Everybody knows I'm not that sort of cheap ass!"

"That's true, too. A good many other sorts, but not that sort, old top!"

"Dry up, Monty!" said Tom.

"Grundy's dead right about this. It's too late in the day to worry much about what happens to Racke and Crooke and their precious crowd, but it's the giddy cheek for those chaps to come over here to play the gay dog. I barred that fellow Gell on sight!"

"It's a pity the School House doesn't behave better, Tommy," said Kerr.

"Now, we wouldn't put up with that kind of thing in our show."

"Rather not!" agreed Fatty.

"We keep that kind of bouncer under."

"Does there happen to be a fellow in the New House named Clampe?" asked Manners.

"Yes. But we take care he doesn't get going the pace too much; not that we love Clampe, but that our House has a name to keep up," replied Kerr.

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"I wonder it bothers about keeping up the sort of name it's got, old fellow," said Lowther.

"Much better take it away and bury it," added Manners.

But Kerr was not to be drawn.

"Don't show your gross envy too plainly," he said. "We pity them, don't we, Fatty, old son?"

"Rather, Kerr!"

"But we do our best not to despise them," added the Scots junior, with a solemn face.

"It's hard, though," Fatty said, shaking his head.

"You two are fairly asking for thick eggs," remarked Tom. "But, to get down to brass tacks, I may mention that your illustrious Clampe and your delightful Chowle were among the glad gamblers who said farewell to those two on their departure."

"Bad eggs, both of 'em!" said Kerr.

"I wonder they don't go over and live in the School House. That's the proper place for them. But they won't be allowed to get up to their games over our side of the way, you bet!"

Kerr and Fatty passed on then.

"I was told that chap Gell was the wrong sort," said Fatty. "But you and old Figgys will soon put the kybosh on them if they try their rotten gambling games in the New House!"

"We will so!" answered Kerr emphatically.

CHAPTER 2.

Figgys Steps In.

"W HERE are you off to, Figgys?" asked Fatty Wynn, hurrying after his chum towards the bicycle-shed after classes had been held next morning.

"To the station," replied George Figgys.

"Oh, I'll tell Kerr," volunteered Fatty. "We'll come along, of course."

Figgys looked at him in what struck Fatty as rather a queer way.

"You can come, if you want to, both of you," he said slowly. "But I hadn't thought of asking you."

Fatty's china-blue eyes opened their widest in sudden enlightenment came to him. He grinned, causing Figgys to change colour and scowl.

"How did you find out what train she was coming by?" queried the Welsh junior.

"I didn't!" snapped Figgys.

"Somebody must have told you, anyway."

"Nobody did!"

"Then how can you know?"

"I don't know!"

"Oh, I see! You're going along just on the chance."

"Do you think it would hurt you very much if you tried minding your own business for a bit, Fatty?" asked Figgys incisively.

But when he saw the plump face grow troubled and the blue eyes cloud he hastened to take the sting out of that speech.

"There, I didn't mean anything, old fellow!" he said. "But it's a fact that I'm only going along on the off chance, and I thought you chaps would rather be at footer. Likely enough if Ethel does come, Mrs. Holmes will be there to meet her, and all we should get out of it would be just shaking hands and seeing her for a minute."

"That's all right, Figgys," answered loyal Fatty.

He understood how much more that possible minute meant to Figgys than it could to him or Kerr. And it was always easy to placate Fatty.

So George Figgys pedalled over the

muddy road to Kylesbane Station alone, with the strong wind right in his teeth.

Something went wrong with one of his pedal cranks on the way, and the mud had to be wiped off before he could bring the spanner to bear. Thus it was that the train was already in when he rode into the station yard.

He jumped from his machine, and hurried on to the platform. But as there was no sign of any vehicle except the antiquated station fly, he hardly expected to see Mrs. Ethel Cleveland, for he had felt sure Mrs. Holmes would be there to meet her.

Mrs. Holmes was not there—but Ethel Cleveland was.

And at a glance Figgys saw that it was well he had come!

Lounging against the wall of the booking-office were Algernon Lacy and Ezra Carker, two of the Grammarians whom the School House fellows generally were agreed to dislike heartily. Lacy smiled a supercilious smile. Carker had a nasty grin on his unwholesome, sallow face.

But Figgys gave them only the fraction of a glance. It was at Gell he looked.

For Gell stood in front of Cousin Ethel, with his right hand extended; and both the hands of the girl were behind her back. Her fur muff lay on the gravelled platform, where she had dropped it in surprise and alarm—or something very like alarm.

"I will not shake hands with you, and I don't want to have you speak to me!" Figgys heard her say.

Next moment Gell was swung almost off his feet, and into Cousin Ethel's face there came a rosy flush of welcome, though in her sweet eyes there was a gleam of fear.

Figgys' face of George Figgys was full of righteous wrath, and he shook Gell till the fellow's teeth chattered.

"Are you such an utter outsider that you don't know better than to force yourself upon a lady who's made it plain that she doesn't want to know you?" snorted Figgys.

"I—I— You're choking me, you cad, an' I don't even know who you are!" gasped Gell. Leggo! Lacy, Carker, pull this long-legged crane off me!"

But neither Lacy nor Carker seemed inclined to meddle with the long-legged crane, who was, in fact, of very much the same build as Edwin Gell himself, though Figgys was wirier and in far better condition.

Lacy and Carker knew George Figgys. They were aware that he would cheerfully take on the pair of them. And from all they had seen of Gell as yet, they had been given no reason to suppose that his aid would make them Figgys' masters.

"Let him go, George!" said Cousin Ethel, in low, troubled tones. "It's all right now that you're here, of course. I used to know Edwin Gell, but I thought he understood that I didn't want to know him any more. I think he might have done."

Figgys let Gell go. But he was ready to grip him again on the least provocation.

The sound of wheels came from the station yard.

"There's Mrs. Holmes, Ethel," said Figgys, with the girl's hand in his.

Gell moved away in a hurry. He and the other two sweet specimens disappeared into the booking-office.

"How did you know I was coming?" asked Cousin Ethel. "I meant it to be a surprise to you—and all of them, of course."

But the rest was plainly an afterthought. It was Figgys who was to have had that joyful surprise, because it was Figgys to whom it would have been

so much more joyful than to any of his comrades.

"Never mind that now," answered the Fourth Former. "I'll tell you later. That bouncer—I don't want you to tell me anything you'd rather not—but has he annoyed you before?"

"Yes, he has. I don't know him very well, really, but we were staying in the same house last Christmas, and—and he wasn't nice. He's not nice in any way. He's horrid! But don't quarrel with him, George, please!"

Mrs. Holmes adventured to be pleased at Figgins' lament; but he was relieved that she appeared upon the platform at that moment.

For the New House fellow did not want to make any rash promises. If he could quarrel with Gell without involving Miss Cleveland's name he meant to do it; moreover, he meant to thrash Gell most thoroughly.

Mrs. Holmes smiled upon him as he raised his cap. She kissed Ethel, then turned to the junior.

"You'll see about Ethel's luggage, won't you, Figgins?" she said.

And she knew that Figgys would feel it an honour to do that.

The two ladies passed out, and Figgins came after them with Ethel's suitcase, which he would cheerfully have carried all the way to St. Jim's had it been necessary. As it was, he could only bestow it with reverent care in the landau which had brought the Head's wife along.

Then another smile from Mrs. Holmes—a glowing smile and a warning glance from Ethel—Figgins's cap off to them, and away went the landau while he stood looking after it bare-headed.

"Quite an accident that Figgins should have been there, of course, Ethel?" said Mrs. Holmes.

"I'm not sure. I hadn't time to ask him. But I should think it very likely that it wasn't, though I did not let him know I was coming," Ethel answered frankly.

"I should think it quite likely it wasn't, too," said the Head's wife.

But she did not speak as if she thought it was wrong Figgys should have been there, and she gave no sign of an inclination to make fun of the boy's devotion. Ethel was glad of that. She could not bear having Figgys made fun of by anyone for thinking a lot of her. She wanted him to think a lot of her—more than the others thought, even—because, young as both she and he were, she had realised that there was a difference between his affection and that of any of the rest.

Figgins, left behind, turned at the sound of a snigger.

The snigger came from Carker. Lacy, grinning, said:

"You didn't get a dashed tip, Figgins! Haw! Rough luck after doin' the dashed porter act like that."

"I'll attend to you and that rattlesnake in a minute or two if you're asking for anything!" snapped Figgins. "Now, you Gell—you sheep shanked atrocity with a face like a criminal chimpanzee! Do you know that the moment I saw your dial I knew I should have to smack it before I could feel happy again? It asks for smacking!"

Gell shifted ground uneasily.

"You're tryin' to force a quarrel on me, because I spoke to that girl!" he snarled. "Why shouldn't I speak to her? She knows me very well. Perhaps she didn't want to spoon with me just then on account of expectin' you, but—"

"If you say another word about Miss Cleveland I'll knock your teeth down

your throat! I'll tumble you over, and jump on you with both feet! I'll dashed well slap you!" hissed Figgins.

Gell shrank yet farther back before his flaming face and ireful eyes.

"I'm not goin' to have a dashed quarrel forced on me by you or anyone," he said sulkily. "I can't fight; there are reasons why I can't."

"I can give you one of them," retorted Figgys. "You're too big a funk!"

If ever a fellow looked a funk all over, Gell did at that moment. His green eyes bulged with fear, and there was a curious blue look about his lips. If Figgys had been older, and had known more, he might have tumbled to it that that blue look had something besides fear behind it.

"I'll not fight; take your change out of that!" Gell snarled.

"Right-ho! I'll let you off this time, though your monkey dial is an awful temptation to anyone with decent feelings," answered the St. Jim's junior.

"What were you pleased to remark about a porter and a tip, Lacy?"

"It was only a joke," replied Lacy hurriedly.

"A blessed poor one! But we'll let it go at that. Anything to say, Carker—"

"Not a thing!" burred Carker, white with fear.

"Against my kicking you out of the yard, I was going to say. But never mind. You're hardly worth kicking, are you?"

And, without another glance at Gell, Figgys mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER 3. Trouble!

"H'E'D better not show his face in this house!" said Figgins warmly. "I know all about it now. I wouldn't have the sweep coming here to gamble with our bad eggs, anyway; but after what I've heard from Ethel, I can't bear the sight of him."

"Not much to look at, it's to be admitted," Kerr said.

"Loathsome, I call him!" snapped Figgys. "He's the sort that thinks every girl's ready to spoon with him—chap with a dial like that, too! Not one of the girls at the Throgmorton's, where Ethel was staying when she met him, liked him a bit; but, as far as I can make out, one of the Throgmorton boys is a bit of a bad egg, and he'd palled up with Gell. The sweep was giddy near being kicked out at the finish. It leaked out that he'd been expelled from his school, and Mr. Throgmorton gave him a pretty broad hint that they preferred his room to his company."

"What was he sacked for?" inquired Fatty.

"Dunno. I don't think Ethel heard. Don't suppose she cared to know; didn't expect ever to see the thing he calls a face again, I reckon."

"I'll bet old Monk doesn't know about the sacking," remarked Kerr, alluding thus irreverently to the headmaster of the Grammar School.

But the irreverence was only in speech. Kerr and every other decent fellow at St. Jim's respected Dr. Monk. He was as good a fellow as his son, Frank, they held; and that was saying a lot.

Figgins paced up and down the study that the three shared as he talked. Seldom had Kerr and Fatty seen him so worked up as he was then.

"If he dares to show his ugly nose in here—"

"He won't, Figgys," broke in Fatty Wynn.

"Clampe and Chowle are the only chaps in this house who go in for that kind of rot; and they lie low over this side. They've been over to Racke's study when that fellow and Lacy have come along, but—"

"But they won't do that again," said Kerr, interrupting in his turn. "Grundy's on his ear about it, and Tommy says he won't have any more of it, and Cardew hates the sight of Lacy."



Figgins gripped Gell by the coat-collar, and swung him almost off his feet. "Are you such an utter outsider that you don't know better than to force yourself upon a lady who's made it plain that she doesn't want to know you?" snorted Figgins. (See page 4.)

"Grundy's an ass, and so is Cardew, in a different way," growled Figgy. "But if Tom Merry says they've got to stop it I guess they'll have to. Hallo! What's up?"

Quite a crowd of fellows had poured out of the School House into the rainy quad. The Terrible Three were in the forefront, with Talbot and Kangaroo. Grundy and Wilkins and Gunn were there. Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Herries, and Digby, Levison, Cardew, and Clive, Durance, Lumley, Rounley, and a dozen more of the Fourth were of the number.

"Just what we were talking about," answered Kerr. "Don't you spot those two Grammarian sweeps in the midst? They're being taken to the gates—that's the game! And a jolly good game, too, if you ask me!"

Figgins and Fatty saw that Kerr was right. In the very middle of the crowd, not shoved along or hustled, but forced to move on by the crowd's movement, were Lacy and the new Grammarian, with angry and humiliated faces.

"Good for the School House!" cried Figgins. "That's the way to do it! They're turning the blackguards out; but the chances are that no master or prefect would notice that anyone was being taken out if they saw. There ought to be some kicking out when they get to the gates, though, with only old Taggy to see, if there isn't here. Come along, you fellows!"

And Figgy rushed out of the study and down the stairs, followed by his chums.

Others had spotted from the New House windows what was going on, it seemed, for Dick Redfern, with his chums, Owen and Lawrence, Clarke, Thompson, and others were bolting down to join the escort of the two intruders.

But not one of the St. Jim's black sheep showed up. Racke and Crooke, from whose study the two had been forcibly fetched, were left behind, looking at one another with faces of anger and dismay. Scrope and Faggy Trimble, who had also been there, had sneaked off. Neither Clampo nor Chowle was in evidence; it turned out afterwards that those two had been busy with lines, and had known nothing about the visit.

The augmented crowd moved on at a steady pace towards the gates.

Figgins ranged up alongside Tom Merry.

"What are you going to do with them, Tom?" he asked.

"They're going to be shown the road home," answered Tom. "That's all this time. If they've sense enough to take the hint, nothing worse will happen to them. After all, I suppose our sweet specimens invited them here, Figgy."

"Hanged if I'd let them off as easily as that!" snorted Figgy.

"Well, if you catch them in the New House you needn't. That will be your affair. This is ours. See? You're only spectators!"

"Next time," said Lowther, "we shall rub their noses in the mud, tie their hands behind them, hobble their legs, put placards on their backs making clear their crime, and send them back to their fold so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared those who heard. All but Lacy and Gell. They heard, but they did not chortle. Lacy bit his under-lip, and hung his head, and Gell's face was worked with rage.

"That's what I should do this time," said Figgy, with a baleful look at Gell.

"Would you? But, as I've already pointed out, dear man, it's really not your bizney," replied Tom.

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"Look here, Tom Merry—" "I don't want to argue with you, Figgy. That's the way we see it. If you catch the sweeps playing banker in the New House, you can do what you jolly well please with them! They'll deserve it, if they haven't savvy enough to be warned by this!"

Now, through the pouring rain that had reached up footer, the crowd had reached the gates. Taggles, the porter, appeared at the door of his lodge, curious to see what was going on.

But he saw little enough. The St. Jim's fellows parted, forming two irregular rows, and the two Grammarians quickened their pace in haste to get clear—that was all.

They were not even hissed. They went in silence, except for Cardew's gibe to Lacy.

"Tata, Lacy! Sha'n't be seein' you here again, I take it!"

Cardew and Lacy had been school-fellows before the one had seen St. Jim's or the other Rylcombe Grammar School, and the advent of Lacy had meant trouble for Cardew. Ralph Reckness Cardew did not easily forget or forgive.

Bestly time, I call it!" growled Figgy.

The gaggles seemed to think the same, for he disappeared into his lodge with a grunt.

"Might tell Taggy not to let those two through again," said Talbot.

"What's the use?" returned Tom. "He won't watch the gates all the time out of school hours just to please us. And I don't fancy they'll be likely to show up here again—for some time to come, anyway."

"I don't agree with you, Merry," said Grundy.

"I should be sure I was wrong if you did, old top," replied Tom.

"I'm not sure that I do, either," remarked Levison. "Gay told me yesterday that that chap Gell is simply crazed with the gambling spirit. He's ready to bet about anything, and they've caught him out rooking the merest kids at nap and bank. Lacy's pretty bad, but Gell's a heap worse. And I know this, when a fellow has the craze as badly as that he doesn't get choked off just by being walked off the premises."

Levison was right, as events proved. But that is not to say that the methods Tom Merry had insisted upon were wrong. As he had pointed out, the two Grammarians had probably come along at the invitation of Racke and Crooke, who were always ready for a gamble; and that did make a difference.

They came again after classes that afternoon, so little had their being escorted out impressed them, after they had found that nothing worse happened to them.

The weather had cleared by that time, and most of the Shell and Fourth were making up on Little Side for the lost afternoon's footer.

But Figgins & Co. were not there. They had been dropped on to heavily by Mr. Ratcliff, the New House tyrant, and were busy in their study with impositions which he insisted upon having shown up to him next day.

"I should like to see Ratty boiled in oil!" fumed Figgy, glancing out of the window. "I tell you what, Kerr, I'm not going to stick this long! We can cut peep short, and cram in these beastly lines then, can't we?"

"Mustn't risk anything, with a match to-morrow," answered Kerr. "But that cuts both ways, when you come to think of it. We haven't had too much practice lately, and we ought to be getting some."

"Let's go!" Fatty said eagerly. "I do like to get an appetite for my tea

when I've a tea for my appetite, and we've quite a decent spread to-day."

"You can go to footer; I'm not going," Figgy said.

Kerr only smiled. Fatty was less discreet.

"Cousin Ethel again!" he chuckled. "What does footer matter to Figgy when she's about?"

"Fat idiot!" snorted Figgins. "I haven't seen her at all except for a minute at the station yesterday and a few minutes in the evening. You needn't snigger as if you thought I'd fixed up to meet her, for I haven't. But—"

At that moment there sounded a tap at the door. Little did George Figgins think, when he rapped out an answer to it, what it was to mean to him, or under what conditions he was to see Ethel Cleveland next!

Gordon Gay and Frank Monk of the Grammar School entered when he sang out: "Come in!"

Gay and Monk were cheery-looking fellows as a rule, but they hardly looked cheery just then. Their faces were quite unusually serious.

"Glad you fellows are in," said Gay.

"Always pleased to see you," answered Kerr. "Hope you've come to tea. Fatty has just mentioned the fact that we have a decent spread."

The Welsh junior's face took on almost as serious an expression as those of each of the visitors were, as he made mental calculations about division by five as compared with division by three.

"Nothing so pleasant as that," replied Monk. "Oh, it's not war—it's only black sheep herding. Two of our rotters are here, we understand, and we've come to fetch them out of it!"

Do you mean Lacy and that fellow Gell?" demanded Figgy, looking ferocious.

Monk nodded.

"In this House?"

"We believe so," said Gay. "Is it true that they were turned out of the School House this morning?"

"Yes. You've nothing against that, I suppose?" returned Figgins hotly.

"Not a blessed thing! Perhaps it will make it clearer to you chaps if I tell you that we're completely fed up with those two. Lacy never was the right sort, but Gell's the giddy outside edge! We've kyboshed them over at our place. We won't have their rotten games."

"And we're not going to have them coming over here," added Monk. "Anything in the way of fair and open warfare with you chaps is good enough for us. But it isn't good enough to have Gram-mar-ians chucked out like detected card-sharps, though we've nothing against anyone for chucking them out! See, Figgins?"

"I see," answered Figgy. "Well, if they're here— But what makes you think they are?"

"We don't think—we know it," said Gordon Gay. "Taggles saw them come in, and young Levison told us that it was here they'd come."

"Right-ho! They'll be in Clampo's study, sent to one. Come along! But I'm not willing to hand them over to you until we've dealt with them."

"If you thrash the sweeps till they howl for mercy we shall say nothing against it," answered Monk grimly. "You'd have to start killing before we made a fuss about it."

"Not sure that we should then," Gay said.

They followed Figgy along the passage, and Kerr and Fatty Wynn followed them.

CHAPTER 4.
Tragedy!

TAP! "Who's there?" came the voice of Leslie Clampe of the Shell.

Clampe's study had been made fast, and in the passage there was more than a suspicion of Egyptian cigarettes. Beyond all doubt the two errant Grammarians were there!

"Open this door!" yelled Figgins. "You'll have Ratty up, if you make such a row as that, Figgys," Kerr warned him.

"I don't care a scrap about that! If this giddy door isn't opened inside three seconds I'll get something and bash it in!"

Sounds of scuffling came from inside the study. Figgys beat again upon the door.

It was opened by Clampe. Chowle sat at the table, and at first glance there seemed to be no one else in the room. No cards were visible, no cigarettes. But the air was thick and pungent with smoke, and Chowle's pretence of being engrossed upon a book, held upside down, deceived no one.

"What have you got behind that screen?" demanded Figgins.

"That's an affair of yours, Figgins. I don't mind tellin' you that I haven't anythin' behind it that can possibly concern you, however," replied Clampe, between sheer funk and bravado.

As he spoke, he stepped before the screen, as though to keep Figgys back. "You don't mind telling any rotten lie—I know that!" snapped the leader of the New House juniors. "Just you stand aside, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Fourth-Formers can't dashed well come into Shell studies an' order their seniors about," said Clampe. "An' what have you brought these Grammar School chaps here for? I never invited them, an' I must ask them to clear out!"

"When we clear out all the Grammar School fellows here are going, my buck," said Gordon Gay pointedly.

"We're aware that Gay and Monk weren't the Grammarians you invited, Clampe," Kerr said. "They're not your sort—luckily for them!"

"Stand away from that screen!" roared Figgys, clenching his hands.

It could not be denied afterwards that Figgins had seemed to want a row. Gay and Monk did not want that—at any rate, not at St. Jim's. They meant to teach their two black sheep a lesson when they got them into the fold again. Kerr and Fatty Wynn did not want it; they dreaded that every moment they would be pounced upon by Mr. Ratcliff. And most certainly Clampe and Chowle did not.

"Hallo! Oh, I say!"

It was Crooke who spoke. He and Racke had just appeared at the door of the study. No doubt Clampe had sent a message to them.

"You two, is it?" said Kerr. "I'm not surprised. Come in! There are pal's of yours here."

The two School House fellows seemed inclined to hand back for the moment. But they pressed forward in curiosity when Figgins, brushing Clampe aside roughly, tore down the screen and revealed Gell and Lacy.

"I knew it!" cried Figgins.

"You two come along out of this!" said Gordon Gay hotly. "You've been warned, both here and at our show, and now you'll find you'd have done better to take heed of your warnings!"

"Petter clear!" Racke said nervously. "No sense makin' a dashed lot

of trouble. We only came over to say that, did we Crooke?"

"That's right," answered Crooke. "Dash it, Lacy, you ought to have more sense, y'know!"

Lacy moved forward. He would have asked nothing better than to clear out at once. Gell had enticed him into this folly.

But Gell was not of the same mind as his partner in the folly. The fellow had a queer temper, and he was hardly sane in his craze for gambling. There was a dangerous light in his eyes as he spoke to Figgys, ignoring everyone else present.

"So this is your way of getting even with anyone who comes between you and a girl—"

"Dry up, or I'll knock you down!" hissed Figgins.

And there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes too, and his face was pale and red by turns. Gell could have taken no surer method of infuriating Figgins than this.

"Knock me down, will you? Two can play at that game! Take that!"

And Gell dashed his right fist into Figgys's face.

Even as he did so, Kerr, always observant, noticed how curiously blue about the lips he had gone. The Scot wondered whether that was a sign of funk; if it was, it was one he had never seen before.

Figgins hit back. The blow took Gell on the jaw, but not on the point of it, and he crashed down.

It was a hard punch, with all Figgys's strength and all his rage behind it, and no one was surprised that Gell, rather than the fellow, should fall to it.

But it was not, in the ordinary way, a knock-out blow, and when Gell did not stir most of the onlookers thought it was because he had no desire for more.

Figgins stood over him, waiting. Then it struck him, and struck him with a shock, that the fellow's eyes were closed, and that his face was still. Not a muscle of it moved, and around the mouth that peculiar blue tint had deepened.

"Now you've done it!" said Clampe spitefully. "You've knocked him senseless! That's what comes of your buttin' in where you'd no right!"

"It was a fair blow," said Figgins dully.

He felt such fear as he had never felt in his life before.

Fear was upon the rest, too. It was Racke who voiced it.

"By gad! Suppose he's dead?" he exclaimed.

Five fellows there felt as though icy hands had clutched their hearts. Kerr and Fatty Wynn, Gordon Gay and Frank Monk, all realised what this would mean to Figgins if it were true. Two of them were his best chums; the other two were good and generous fellows who had him well. And it was of him they all thought, for him that they felt fear.

It was little enough the other five—Racke and Crooke, Clampe and Chowle and Lacy—thought of Gell in that moment. But it was little enough they thought of Figgins, either. All their concern was for themselves. If Gell were really dead, this would be an awful mess for everyone present!

Kerr was down on his knees by Gell's side almost before the words had left Racke's lips. But he was hardly quicker than Gay, and it was the Grammarian who put his hand to Gell's heart. Kerr, with all his courage, could not bring himself to do that.

Chowle was shaking with fear and wringing his hands. Lacy was in no better case. Fatty put his hands before

his face to shut out the sight that he could not bear. Racke and Crooke clutched one another, and their faces went almost green.

"I'm afraid that I can't feel any movement!" said Gordon Gay huskily. Lacy and Clampe made a simultaneous bolt for the door.

"You needn't run away; you didn't do it," spoke Figgins, in a voice so utterly unlike his own that his chums could hardly recognise it.

He did not stir. He stood as if turned into stone, and his face had gone suddenly old and haggard.

Kerr jumped up and threw his arm round his beloved chum with the instinct of protection and consolation. Whatever came of this, Kerr was ready to stand by that chum's side through it all. He did not falter in that first terrible moment, and he would not falter later.

But Fatty Wynn had not Kerr's resolution. For the very life of him he could not have done then what Kerr did.

Monk was down by Gay now. Both were shaken; but both were plucky.

"Can you feel anything, Frank?" asked the Australian junior.

Monk shook his head. Gell's heart had stopped like a clock run down.

"Somebody ought to tell Ratty," said Clampe tremulously from the door.

"I'll do that," Figgins said, his voice as hoarse as a raven's.

"No, I'll go," volunteered Kerr.

Gordon Gay's eyes met Frank Monk's across Gell's body. They were good chums, these two. Perhaps they wondered, both of them, whether they would have rung as steel true in such a test as this as did Kerr.

Figgins and Kerr went together. Racke and Crooke made a motion as if to clear off; but they changed their minds. After all, they had been present; if there was an inquest they could not escape appearing as witnesses, and they were curious to hear what Mr. Ratcliff would say.

He had begun to say it before he came into sight. The sound of his high-pitched, querulous voice came to them all from the staircase.

Then he appeared, gripping Figgins by the collar, as if the unfortunate junior might try to bolt, which was a thing that had never entered his head as a possibility. Kerr followed, and neither he nor Figgins answered the master by as much as a word. They had told him what had happened, and after that they were dumb.

But when he released Figgins to kneel by Gell, the arm of Kerr went round Figgins again. And now Fatty, having got the better of his brief feeling of revulsion, stole up to them, and clutched Figgys by the hand. Doing that, he realised at once that this could make no difference to him. If Figgins had killed Gell it was an accident, with no guilt attaching to it. Figgys's hand was cold; it did not return Fatty's pressure. It was the hand that had struck that fatal blow. But Fatty did not care. He was sorry for Gell, but he was heaps sorrier for Figgins.

Mr. Ratcliff lifted a scared and angry face.

"Unhappy boy, what have you done?" he said shakily. "Your vile temper will come near to bring you to the gallows this time!"

"I couldn't help it," answered Figgins brokenly. "I only hit him. I didn't mean this."

"And Gell struck him first, sir," said Gordon Gay.

Much as the New House tyrant disliked Figgins, he seemed somewhat relieved.

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lieved to hear that, partly, no doubt, because it meant a less black aspect of the matter to be presented to the coroner's jury. Mr. Ratcliff, though humanly shocked by the tragedy, naturally thought of the outcome of it to St. Jim's, and to his own House in particular.

He got up. Gay and Monk also rose. "There is no room for doubt," the master said. "This unfortunate boy has been killed by what must have been a most ferocious blow!"

"Figgins hit him hard, sir," Monk said. "I don't know that it was any harder than Gell hit him, and I do know that it wasn't a bit harder than I've hit lots of fellows without any harm coming of it."

"Let this be a lesson to you, and to all here!" grated Mr. Ratcliff. "Learn from this to what your angry passions may lead you!"

Nobody replied to that. But even Racke and Crooke felt that Ratty must be a cheap idiot to suppose that a fellow was going to have his head punched and not hit back.

"What was this boy doing here?" asked the master. "What were you other Grammar School boys about in my House?"

"I'll explain, sir," answered Gay. "It's bound all to come out now. Monk and I came to fetch Lacy, and—and—his voice faltered there, and he cast a glance at Gell's dead face—and Gell away. They'd no right here, and they'd come for no good, and we'd warned them. But Figgins and Kerr and Wynn had nothing to do with their coming. We went to them first because they're friends of ours, and it seemed decent to let them know."

"It was to me you should have come," said Mr. Ratcliff sourly.

But that was absurd. Mr. Raitlon would never have said it. The code of school honour was dead against Gay and Monk's doing anything of the sort.

"You say they came here for no good, Gay. Tell me precisely and categorically for what they did come."

"I don't know that I have the right, sir. I can't prove it, and it affects other fellows as well as Lacy and—again he paused, as if he had a difficulty in getting out the names—"and Gell."

"You have made a vague charge. I demand that it be defined! For what did those two boys come here?"

Gay was silent, and his sunny face had taken on a mutinous look.

"Clampe, this is your study!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "You can explain, surely!"

"I suppose Figgins and Kerr told you, sir?" replied Clampe, with a spiteful look at those two.

"They did not. Tell me at once, Clampe!"

But it was Chowle who told. No one there was in a bigger funk than Chowle, not even Lacy.

Chowle fairly flung himself at the master's feet.

"They came to play cards, sir!" he answered. "I—I didn't know that when Clampe asked me."

"Liar!" snorted Clampe.

"I'm telling the truth! I wasn't in this, sir, not really! If it was anyone's fault besides Figgins, sir, it was Clampe's. Not mine! I swear it wasn't mine!"

"Do you deny this, Clampe?" asked Mr. Ratcliff.

"I deny that Chowle wasn't in it. But what he says is true apart from that. You'd find out, so it's no use my sayin' anythin' else!" replied Clampe sullenly.

"That is enough! More will no doubt come out later. You two?" Mr. Ratcliff

turned to Gay and Monk—"had better hurry back to your school, and acquaint Dr. Monk of this dreadful happening. Figgins, you will go to your study at once, and you will stay there alone! Clampe, you will not under any pretext enter this room again till you are given permission. The body must lie where it is until Dr. Taylor, for whom I shall telephone at once, has seen it."

"Isn't there any chance—Are you sure, quite sure, that he's dead, sir?" faltered Fatty, still clinging to Figgins's hand.

"He is most certainly dead! There is no room for hope. Go at once, all of you!"

They went. But Figgins did not go alone, and he did not stay alone in his study.

"There will be a row, old chap," said Kerr, aside to Fatty. "You heard what Ratty said."

"A row? Of course there will be a row. What do you think I care? I'd stay by old Figg if I knew I should be court-martialled and shot for it!"

"Right-ho!" said Kerr.

CHAPTER 5.

A Bad Time for a Good Fellow.

TOM MERRY and a crowd of other juniors, muddy and ruddy from footers on Little Side, were met in the quad by Racke and Crooke, and heard the story.

"Dead? But, I say, you know, Racke, that can't be!" cried Tom, in dismay.

"It's right, by gad!" said Racke.

And his face and Crooke's showed that at least they believed what they said, that they were not making the case any blacker against Figgins than it actually was.

For the moment they had no wish to do that. They were too badly shaken to remember that Figgins had always been among their enemies.

"There's some mistake," Jack Blake said hopefully. "A chap doesn't peg out because he gets a knock on the jaw, you know."

"He had dozens of 'em, scores, hundreds!" chimed in Herries. "And look at me! I'm none the worse for them."

"I'm afraid it does happen sometimes," Talbot said, with trouble in his voice. "I've heard of several cases."

"What a perfectly tewwible thing for Figgay if it is true!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arroy.

"Don't see it," replied Cardew. "It wasn't his fault, by gad! Thing might have happened to anyone, y'know. If it had happened to me I fancy I could keep my wool on in spite of it. After all, that fellow Gell wasn't a valuable life."

"Weally, Cardew, you shock me extremely!" protested Arthur Augustus.

Others besides Gussy were shocked by what seemed to them Cardew's callous levity. But Cardew was not quite as callous as he seemed.

"I suppose Cardew would say the same if it was me or Racke instead of Gell?" said Crooke sullenly.

"I might. Yaas, by gad, on the whole I think I should!" returned Cardew.

"Oh, shut up, Ralph! You know you don't mean it!" said Clive.

"Anyway, it's right!" Crooke went on. "It's not only what we think. Ratty's been there, and he hasn't any doubt. He sent Gay an' Monk to fetch Dr. Monk, an' he's phoning for old Taylor. Then he'll go an' tell the Head, I suppose. Yes, there he goes now!"

Mr. Ratcliff glanced at the crowd gathered round Racke and Crooke in the fast-gathering dusk, but he said nothing to any member of it.

A few minutes later he came back across the quad with Dr. Holmes. The Head did not even look towards the crowd. His face was very grave and troubled. During his many years at St. Jim's he had worry and anxiety enough, but never anything quite like this before.

"I'm going to speak to Figg," said Dick Redfern. "Don't know what you fellows think about it, but I've made up my mind. This thing wasn't old Figg's fault, and I'm not going to treat him as though it was. Come along, Owen! Come along, Lawrence!"

But for once Redfern's chums would not follow his lead. They hung back. There was something about the notion of going to speak to Figgins then which was distasteful to them. Of course, it was not his fault, and yet—

Just so felt many of the others, among them some who counted Figg a pal of the best.

Defern, a big-hearted rival, good friend in need, went alone. He said nothing to Owen and Lawrence when he saw that they were not coming. He did not even look contempt at them. He did not feel it, indeed. He could understand.

"I'm going, too. Anyone coming with me?" said Tom Merry.

Talbot stepped forward at once, but not Manners, not Lowther. Blake hesitated, then ranged up alongside. But Arthur Augustus and Digby and Herries all held back.

"I'd come like a shot if I was sure Figgins would care to see me," said Cardew. "But I've never been his pal as you fellows have. I think I'm best away."

"Same here!" said Levison. "But I'd like him to know that—well, that I'm on his side."

"Weally, Levison, anyone might fancy that you imagined the worst of us were against him, bai Jove!"

"It looks rather like it," replied Levison, who never troubled to mince his words when he felt strongly.

"We're not, then!" snapped Roylance. "But it's a horrible thing, and—and it takes a bit of getting used to, you know, Levison."

"That's it. I'm sure Figg never meant to do it. But he did it, and there it is," agreed Herries.

"I—I— Oh, weally you fellows, I—"

Arthur Augustus choked in his throat, and hurried after the three.

And it seemed that some one else was not going to wait to get used to it, for Harry Noble, without a word, went after Guss.

"In my opinion you're a set of funks!" snorted George Alfred Grundy.

And he also went.

But of them all Redfern was the only one who saw Figgins then. Just as Tom, Talbot, and Blake reached the door of the New House they heard the voice of Mr. Raitlon behind them.

"Come back!" called their House-master. "No one is to go in there. It is Dr. Holmes' order."

The six stalwarts came reluctantly back to the crowd. Then Mr. Raitlon spoke to them all.

"A terrible thing has happened," he said. "I see that you have heard of it. I can't talk about it. But I must insist that none of you—not even those who belong to the New House—should enter there to-night. Merry and Blake, I entrust to you the making of arrangements for the New House juniors to have tea and do their preparation in our House this evening."

"Very well, sir," answered Tom.

"Precious lot of prep will get done—"

I don't think!" muttered Gore, as Mr. Railton strode away.

The master saw Monteith, head prefect of the New House, and within a few minutes Clarke, coming out at the head of a crowd of the New House juniors, told the fellows waiting that only the Sixth and Fifth Formers were allowed to stay there during the evening.

"Well, we'd better get in," said Tom. "No use hanging about here. Come to tea with us, Clarke, and you, Owen, and Lawrence? I don't suppose any of you feel much like tea, but you've got to be taken in somewhere."

"We'll wait for Reddy," said Lawrence.

"Bring him along when you come, then," answered Tom.

Koumi Rao, who had been one of those ordered out of his House by Monteith, went off with Jack Blake & Co., very downcast, for he thought no end of Figgins. Thompson was the guest of Talbot. The rest were soon found temporary quarters, though Clampe and Chowle might have had a difficulty in finding anyone to take them in but for the insatiable curiosity and the want of popularity that were characteristic of Percy Mellish and Baggy Trimble. Racke and Crooke and Scrope all gave their quondam allies the cold shoulder. Menzies, Dick Redfern had reached the study of the three comedians.

Figgins sat at the table with his head on his arms, and his shoulders were shaking with sobs. Kerr stood by him, one hand on his bowed head. Poor old Fatty was huddled up in the armchair, crying openly, and not thinking to be ashamed.

"It's Reddy, old man," said Kerr, as the door swung to again.

Then Figgins looked up, and Redfern, his own vision curiously blurred, yet saw that there were no tears on his face. Those sobs were the dry sobs that tear and rend the strong spirit in a strait, where weaker ones find relief in tears.

And Redfern, to whom had been given the sympathy without which none may move others by the written word, as he hoped in future days to move them, understood it all.

It was to George Figgins in that terrible hour as though his whole world had fallen in ruins about him. Life could never be the same again to him after—though with no intent—he had taken the life of another. That was how he felt; but Redfern somehow knew that he was wrong. With his pluck and his common-sense he would win through this heavy trouble, Redfern was sure. And even at the worst of it the knowledge that some of his friends were standing by him would help.

Redfern was glad he had come, though he knew he did not mean to Figgins what Kerr meant.

He held out his hand. He could not speak.

Figy gripped the friendly hand. Then again his head went down, and again his shoulders shook in those painful, tearless sobs.

And Redfern turned away to comfort poor old Fatty. He might do something there; that silent grip had done all that he could do for Figgins.

Fatty will never forget how decent Dick Redfern was to him then. And Kerr will never forget, either. And it pierced through all the trouble straight to Figgins' heart, too. When three fellows stand as close to one another as did those three, what is done for one of them is done for all.

By-and-by Redfern managed to persuade Fatty to come out. He had a feeling that Figgins would rather be alone with Kerr. For Kerr was bearing up manfully. It was no blame to Fatty

that he could not do likewise; but his breakdown was not good for his chum.

When they had gone Figgins lifted his head again.

His face then nearly broke Kerr down. It was drawn and haggard; the eyes were wild; and there was blood on the lower lip, bitten almost through.

"Kerr, I can't bear it! Ethel—what will she think? And my people? It's more than I can stand!"

Even then he thought of Ethel Cleveland first. The depth of feeling for her thus shown surprised even Kerr, who knew him better than anyone.

"I'm a murderer! That's what they will think! They can't help it. They can't ever care for me again!"

"Rot, Figgy! You never meant to do it. It hasn't changed me or Fatty—not even Redfern. Do you think it can change your father and mother, or Ethel?"

"I didn't mean to do it. But I hated the fellow, Kerr! That makes a difference. If it had been you I hit and killed—"

"I wish it had been—upon my soul I do—if—"

And then Kerr did break down, and at that the tears came to Figgy at last.

"I didn't mean it like that!" he sobbed. "If it had been so I should have missed you all my life; the thought of it would have been always with me. But I shouldn't have felt guilty, as I do now. It would have been a thousand times worse; but I shouldn't have felt that, because I couldn't mean harm to you, Kerr."

"You didn't mean it to him," answered the Scot, softening his voice by a great effort. "Look here, Figgy. I'm going to see Ethel, and tell her if they'll let me. And if you can't count on her as you can on me, then never trust me again. She wouldn't go back on a pal, I know."

"It's bad for her—she may think it was—because of her, you know, Kerr. That row at the station—"

"You did nothing that any decent fellow wouldn't have done in your place, old chap. And it wasn't because of that at all. You wouldn't have hit Gell in Clampe's study if he hadn't hit you first."

"Not so sure," answered Figgins, invincibly honest. "I was aching to punch him. I'm not going to deny that."

There followed a few minutes of silence, while both did their best to pull themselves together. They had managed that to some extent when Mr. Railton tapped at the door.

He knew that Mr. Ratcliff had believed Figgins alone; but he was not surprised to find Kerr there, and he spoke no word of blame to him.

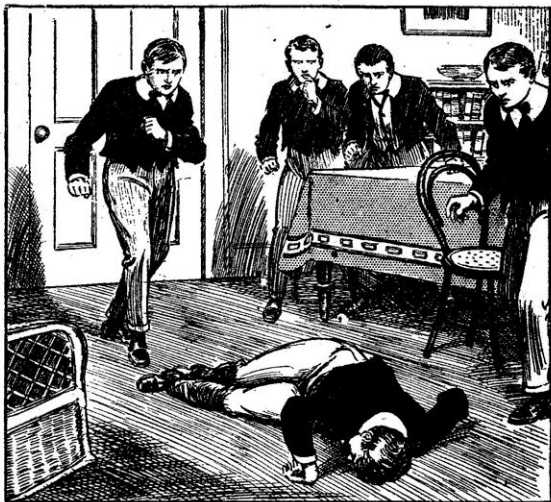
What he said to Figgins was as kind and as manly as could have been hoped for even from Victor Railton, and that is saying much. He did not try to burke the seriousness of the trouble; but he made it clear that to him Gell's death was an accident, and that the share of Figgins in it was not a guilty one.

"Cling to that, my boy," he said. "And believe that you have the sympathy of all whose sympathy counts. You will lose no friend through this, I am sure."

"I shall lose a lot, sir," faltered Figgins. "The Head can't let me stay here after this, I know."

"Even if you go you will not lose your friends, Figgins! But it is neither for you nor for me to say what the Head will do. I am only sure that he will do what he holds right, and that he will be kind."

There was hope in that for Figgins, and he felt more hope yet when, after Mr. Railton had gone, Kerr went off to try to see Cousin Ethel.



Figgins' fist shot out and caught Gell in the jaw, crashing him to the floor. It was a hard punch with all Figgins' strength and all his rage behind it. Figgins stood over the prostrate form, and suddenly noticed that around his victim's mouth there was a peculiar blue tint, also that his eyes were closed, and that his face was still. (See page 7.)

CHAPTER 6.

Not Ah Against Him.

KERR'S mission was not successful.

He saw Mrs. Holmes, however, and got some comfort from her for Figgy.

"Ethel has taken this to heart very much, Kerr," said the Head's wife. "You boys have always meant much to her, and perhaps Figgins has been her best friend among you all. But she is sure—as we all are—that it was an accident. It is terrible for Figgins; but he will come to see after a while that he was guiltless. I will tell Ethel that you came, but you cannot see her now."

When Kerr returned, Mr. Ratcliff was in the study. The master lifted his eyebrows in surprise, and pursed his lips in annoyance when Kerr walked in.

"I said Figgins was to stay here alone, Kerr," he said sourly. "I presume you heard me?"

"I heard you, sir. But I'm not going to leave him alone! If the Head ordered me out, I wouldn't go! I may be sacked, but I'm going to stay here!"

Mr. Ratcliff was narrow-minded and flinty-hearted; he had long disliked these two; but that outburst from the usually cool Kerr moved even him. Kerr had never thought less badly of him than when he answered, morose even in giving way.

"Ah! I understand your feeling, and perhaps—well, in the circumstances, we will say no more about it, Kerr."

He went then.

"Ratty tried to be decent," said Figgy. "But I wish he'd leave me alone."

There followed something over an hour without a word spoken, after Kerr had reported the result of his mission.

Then Figgins said suddenly:

"Where are all the fellows?"

"Over in the School House. Fatty and Reddy had to go, too! Monteith hustled them out. But he saw me and said nothing."

"Are they at prop?"

"I don't think there's any prep doing to-night. Nobody's thought about it."

"I'm going over there!"

"As you like, Figgy, but—"

"Oh, I know some of them will look upon me as a criminal! I want to know if there are any who don't! But I can stand it if they're all against me, now I know that Ethel isn't. I wish you'd seen her, though!"

"They won't be. I don't believe any of them will be, really. But you must count on some of them feeling this thing a goodish bit, and—and—well, shrinking from you perhaps, did I say?"

"I can stand that. Don't I shrink from myself when I remember how I hated Gold?"

The Shell and Fourth Form studies in the School House were all dark. Everyone had congregated in the junior Common-room.

Kerr guessed where they would be found, and it was to the Common-room he and Figgy went. On the way they met two fellows, and both spoke friendly words.

"Oh, Figgy, I'm so sorry!" said little Frank Levison, clutching Figgins by the sleeve. "But everybody knows you didn't mean it, and—Ernie's on your side, and Cardew, too, anyway!"

Frank thought that must comfort Figgins. It did. But there were fellows in the Common-room who mattered more to Figgy than Ernest Levison or Ralph Reddy Cardew.

"Thanks, kid!" he said huskily. "I'm glad you're not against me, anyway."

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Then it was Kildare, captain of St. Jim's.

"Buck up, Figgins!" he said cheerily. "It couldn't be helped, you know. Must have been something organically wrong with the fellow for him to collapse like that, I should say."

Figgins hardly paid heed to more than the words of sympathy, but Kildare's suggestion stuck in Kerr's mind.

The junior Common-room was all abuzz when the door opened suddenly, and Figgins and Kerr were seen standing on the threshold.

Instantly silence fell. A pin dropped would have made an audible sound.

The silence was broken by a harsh laugh from Figgins. His overstrained nerves were near to giving way.

"Don't be afraid! I'm not killing anyone else to-day!" he cried.

"Figgy, old chap!" whispered Kerr. "You'd better not have come! You aren't fit for this!"

"Weally, Figgy, I cannot undahstand how you—"

"Shut up, Gussy, you idiot!" hissed Blake.

He saw that Figgins' outburst had been more than half hysterical.

Koumi Rao made his way through the crowd, swollen beyond its usual dimensions in that room by the presence of so many New House juniors, straight to Figgins' side.

"You are my friend," he said, his voice thrilling and clear. "That you did not strike to kill I know. But if you had struck to kill, you would be still my friend!"

Koumi Rao held life cheaper than the rest, for he had never quite learned to be English. He would always be of the Orient, where life swarms, and the individual counts for less than in Western lands.

None there but Koumi Rao could quite truthfully have said that, it may be, unless it was Kerr. But the Indian prince's declaration had an immediate effect.

Fatty Wynn and Dick Redfern were already making their way towards Figgins. Tom Merry and Talbot, Kangaroo and Grundy, Blake and D'Arcy followed them. It was as though Figgins had asked the ages-old question so often heard when feeling runs high in clash of opposition: "Who is on my side?" Yet Figgins had uttered nothing but folly out of a mind too sorely tried.

It was not what he said that they answered, but what he was. They knew him, for one of the best, and in that dark hour they stood by him.

More yet! Cardew lounged across, elbowing Mellish and Chowle out of his way contemptuously; and with Cardew came Levison, and after them Clive. Manners and Lowther had hesitated; but they had made up their minds now. They also came.

Herries and Digby could not hold back. Ovea and Lawrence joined Redfern. Roylance and Durrance came too. Gynn and Wilkins with more of doubt on their faces; yet still they came.

No one said anything. That crossing towards the place where Figgins stood was more eloquent than words.

More yet! Lumley-Lumley came—Clarke, Thompson, Glyn, Clifton Dane. The majority was but a small one now.

Gore surprised most by deserting it. Then Skimpole, first of all to speak, piped up as he moved:

"I am not too well assured that I correctly apprehend what is intended by this demonstration; but I presume that it is of the nature of a tacit vote of confidence in Figgins, and I have pleasure in joining it."

"Thanks all of you!" blurted out Figgy.

Next moment he had gone. He had not counted on so many overcoming their natural feeling of revulsion against one who, however innocently, had the stain of blood on his hands; and if he had stayed he would have broken down.

Kerr let him go alone, divining that for the next few minutes he would be better alone. And when he had gone there was a sudden babel of voices in the Common-room, for the slackening of that tension let loose tongues, though hardly on fellow-foggy, because he hadn't anything to say that was worth saying.

What Scope said certainly was not. Cardew testified his opinion that it was not by pulling Scope's nose vigorously.

"Anyone want a dose of the same medicine?" he asked. "Did I hear you ask for it, Trimble?"

"Nunno! I only said that after all Figgins did—Yow! Lemme be, Cardew, you beast!"

"Don't, Cardew! It's not the thing to do just now," said Tom Merry. "This is no joke, and I suppose they're entitled to their own opinions."

But somehow the look he gave those in opposition made the many among them who had merely been too faint of heart to come over, but who nourished no spite against Figgins, feel rather ashamed. And, though they never confessed it to him or to one another, it made Monty Lowther and Harry Manners feel very glad that they had not hung back at the last!

CHAPTER 7.

Courage Gives Way.

QUITE a number of St. Jim's fellows had a novel experience the next morning, though it was not on that, in the circumstances, they could enjoy.

The coroner's inquest opened at eleven o'clock in the dining-hall of the New House. The Head, Mr. Ratcliff, Mr. Railton, and two or three other masters were present. Dr. Monk, from the Grammar School, came along with his son Frank, Gordon Gay, and Algernon Lacy. Lacy looked like a whipped cur, and no doubt felt like one. Kildare and Monteith were allowed to be present; and, of course, Figgins, Kerr, Wynn, Clampe, Chowle, Racke, and Crooke were all there.

Gell's family was represented by a London solicitor. It turned out that the only near living relative Gell had had was an uncle who had been for years past in South Africa.

Figgy naturally had the feeling that he was on trial for his life, and he did his best to keep stiff up to it. He had expected to be examined at once; but, to his surprise, several witnesses were called before his turn came.

It was of no use trying to keep anything back. The fact that the dead boy and Lacy had come over to St. Jim's to gamble was not calculated to do either that school or the Grammar School any good; but the headmasters made no attempt to keep the matter a secret; it was called first, and whined answers to the coroner's questions, seeking to throw as much of the blame as he could on Gell. During his examination it came out that he and Gell had been warned off earlier in the day; and, when he heard that Dr. Holmes sent for Tom Merry, Talbot, and Noble.

All three of these were questioned about the warning-off, and all answered frankly. Their evidence was to Figgins' feelings in the matter told in his favour, that was plain. He had felt strongly that Gell and Lacy should have been more

cratically dealt with, and the coroner, a medical man with a keen, thoughtful face, nodded as if agreeing.

Clampe and Chowle did not make good witnesses. Each tried to show that anybody rather than he was to blame for those two coming along. Both swore that they had not been invited; but they could not deny that a game of banker had been started before they were interrupted.

Then came the turn of Gay and Monk. Those two helped to make it clear what a complete rotter Gell had been—not by speaker ill of the dead unnecessarily, but by telling the simple truth about the reasons that had led them to follow him and Lacy to St. Jim's.

They also gave evidence that Gell had struck the first blow, and that Figgins' return punch had been perfectly fair.

Kerr, watching the faces of the jurymen—Rylcombe farmers and tradesmen, for the most part—began to feel sure that the verdict would not be a bad one for Figgins. The Scots junior knew enough of the law to be certain that it could be no worse than manslaughter. But the sympathies of the jury were so obviously with Figgins that he was hardly dreading even that when his own turn came.

He was glad that they did not call Fatty. For himself, though it was some thing of an ordeal, he was able to keep his head, and answer clearly.

Racke and Crooke were also left un-called. The evidence of Gay, Monk, and Kerr had made it plain that Figgins' blow was struck in self-defence and under provocation.

Figgins trembled as he was sworn. There was one thing of which he was greatly afraid—that he should be asked questions that might tend to bring Ethel Cleveland's name into the case. But no one present, except his own chums and Lacy, knew anything about the trouble at the station.

But the coroner let him off very lightly. Perhaps the official's mind was already made up; certainly the minds of most of the jury were.

"The evidence shows that Gell struck you first, and that your blow was such as anyone might have given in the circumstances," Figgins' the coroner said, not as if speaking to a possible criminal, not even with schoolmaster-like authority, but as one man to another. "Is that correct as you see it?"

"Yes, sir, quite," answered Figgins. "But," he added honestly, "I should most likely have hit him in another moment, anyway."

That admission did him no harm. "You did not strike with intent to do serious damage, did you?" the coroner went on.

"I hit to hurt him. He had hurt me, and I didn't like him, and I thought it was too thick his coming back within a few hours after the warning he had had, sir. But I didn't intend anything—like this."

Figgins nearly broke down there. "You have given and taken blows as hard in the course of your schooldays, I am sure," the coroner said, with ever so slight a smile. "Plenty of them, sir," replied Figgins eagerly.

"That will do, Figgins."

Mr. Ratcliff was the next witness; but all he was called upon to testify was that Gell was unquestionably dead when he came upon the scene.

Then came Dr. Taylor, who seemed puzzled. He could not account for a fatal result from a blow such as described. The blow had killed, in his

opinion; but, as a medical man, he could not understand it.

"Perhaps the next witness can help us there," said the coroner.

The next witness was Mr. Husting, the solicitor.

But he could not help. Kerr's heart had leaped up at the suggestion; it sank again now.

Mr. Husting knew of nothing organically wrong with Gell. The boy was probably not in first-rate physical condition, he said. The boy's habits were against that. Pressed as to just what he meant, Mr. Husting admitted with some reluctance that he had once asked Gell to his house for a week or so, but had never cared to ask him again. Gell smoked, drank, and was in every way not the kind the father of other boys cared about entertaining.

That told in Figgins' favour, too. Most of the jury were fathers, and their feeling about Gell seemed much like that which Cardow had expressed. They might not have cared to say that they thought him better dead, but they had a notion that he was no great loss.

Dr. Monk rose from his seat in indignation when a question put by the coroner elicited the fact that Gell had been expelled from an earlier school. But Rylcombe's Head sat down again without speaking. It was too late for reproaches on that score now.

All the witnesses had been examined, and the coroner spoke to the jury.

"It is for you to give a verdict," he said. "I can only guide you by summing up the matter as it appears to me. The medical evidence affords no explanation such as is often to be found in cases of sudden death as the result of a blow. But that really does not affect us much. This boy's death was an accident. He had given great provocation by his conduct, and he struck the first blow. Figgins does not seem to me to be in any way to blame for hitting back. I cannot see how anything else could have been expected of him. You will now consider your verdict."

The jurymen put their heads together

for a minute or two. Figgins turned his face from them, but Kerr and the rest watched them with eager attention.

Then the foreman—the Rylcombe butcher who was Binks' employer—spoke.

"We find that the death was an accident, as you say, sir, and we wish to make it clear in our verdict that there ain't any blame hanging to the young gentleman that hit the boy."

"That amounts to a verdict of 'Death by misadventure,' with which I am fully in agreement," said the coroner. "There is no necessity to name Figgins in the verdict. I have no doubt, however, that the reporters will let it be known that, in the opinion of this court, he was blameless."

Some of the hearers felt very much inclined to cheer, but they knew that they must not give way to that inclination.

The court broke up. The coroner shook hands with Figgins very kindly, and said a few words that ought to have comforted him. But Figgins was not easily to be comforted just then.

Kerr ran after the official as he crossed the quad, on his way to lunch with the Head in the School House. Dr. Holmes had turned to speak to Dr. Monk, and Kerr saw his chance.

"I say, sir, you're a doctor, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy."

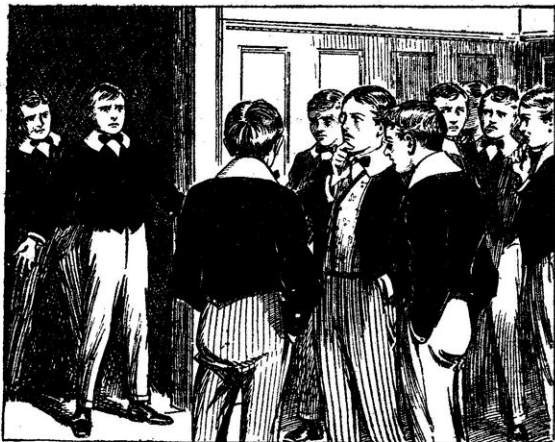
"Would you mind telling me whether it means anything that a fellow should go very blue about the lips when he gets excited?"

The coroner halted and looked down at Kerr.

"It may do," he answered slowly. "It generally does. Why?"

"Gell went like that, sir. What does it mean?"

"Heart disease usually. Rather a pity this was not mentioned earlier, Kerr. A post mortem might have been held. But as the case is closed, and your chum completely exonerated, I cannot see that there is much use in pursuing the subject now."



The Junior Common-room was all abuzz when the door opened suddenly, and Figgins and Kerr were seen standing on the threshold. Instantly silence fell. The silence was broken by a harsh laugh from Figgins. "Don't be afraid! I'm not killing anyone else to-day!" he cried. (See page 10.)

"Thank you, sir! I quite see what you mean. It wouldn't be any good to go through all that again. But I'm going to make sure about this if I can, for it may mean a whole heap of difference to how Figgins feels about it, you know."

"You are a friend worth cherishing, my lad. Let me know if you hear anything. Meanwhile, I should not tell Figgins if I were you. It might raise false hopes. And, in any case, he ought soon to free himself from any fancied burden of guilt."

Then the coroner passed on, joining the two headmasters, and Kerr hurried back to Figgins.

Figgy had just received a wire, and he stood, with stricken face, gazing stupidly at it.

Both Figgins and Kerr had wondered that Mr. Figgins had not turned up for the inquest. Now they understood. The dreadful news had made Figgy's mother so ill that her husband could not leave her.

"Well, I, I know she will, and I shall have killed her as well!" groaned Kerr. "What's to become of me, Figgy? The Head's bound to sack me, and if the mater dies I can't go home. The pater couldn't bear the sight of me."

"Don't you believe it, old man! She won't die. And he doesn't say a word of blame to you in this wire. Nobody blames you. You're cleared. It was just an accident."

"I blame myself, and I always shall," replied Figgins bitterly. "I hated the fellow. Can't you see what a difference that makes? No, don't come with me now, Kerr. I want to be alone."

Perhaps it was best he should be, Kerr thought. But he would hardly have thought so had he known how his chum spent two miserable hours of that afternoon.

Down on his knees by the side of what had once been Edwin Gell, trying to pray, trying to feel that he was guiltless, with all the hate purged out of him now, with heart almost breaking as he thought of his mother—that was how George Figgins spent those two hours.

Kerr occupied part of the afternoon—a half-holiday, but without any footer, for none cared to play till after the funeral—in an attempt to do something from her about Gell's health, but at first he was told that she was too unwell to see him, and later that Mrs. Holmes had taken her for a drive.

A weaker spirit than Kerr's might have had doubts concerning Ethel, but Kerr, in his utter loyalty, would not believe that she could go back on Figgy. Perhaps it was natural that she should not care to see him yet, but she was loyal, even as he himself was, as Fatty was, Kerr was sure.

It was Fatty who found Figgy in the chamber of death, and got him away by refusing to go without him, though every second spent there was like a week of purgatory to Fatty.

Figgins occupied that night one of Mr. Ratcliff's spare rooms. He had occupied it the night before, but he had not slept there. Not one moment of sleep had come to him through all the night. He expected nothing better this time.

The dead Gell, Ethel, his mother, his father, the Head—who must now be considering the question whether he could be allowed to stay at St. Jim's—his chums—Figgy's brain was so full of trouble about them all that there were times when he felt as though he must go insane.

He did not know that Kerr was watching his door from a dark corner only a

yard or two away. Perhaps it would not have comforted him had he known.

Kerr had no right, there, of course, and Mr. Ratcliff had no notion that he was there. But the Scots junior felt that he could neither leave his chum quite alone nor intrude upon his grief.

The long hours wore through. Kerr heard eleven strike, and the quarter succeeding it chime.

Then the door of Figgy's room opened, and Kerr saw his chum pass out.

CHAPTER 8.

But Loyalty Holds Fast.

NOT for a moment did Kerr doubt what Figgy meant to do. Somewhere at the back of his mind there had been all through that vigil the dread of this.

Courage too sorely tried had broken down. Figgy meant to run away!

Not home, though, Kerr guessed. He caught his chum by the arm.

"Who's that?" hissed Figgins. "Is it you, Kerr?"

"Yes, of course it is. What are you after?"

"I'm going. I can't stick this. I shall be sacked, anyway. And the mater's dying, and it's all my fault. And—and I haven't had another word from Ethel! She thinks I'm a murderer! I—I can't stand that, Kerr!"

"Don't be an ass! The Head won't sack you, I'm sure. And your mater will get over it; and you've no right to doubt Ethel."

"I'm going!" repeated Figgins doggedly.

"Where?"

"I don't know. Anywhere—anywhere but home, I mean!"

"I won't let you go!"

"That's no use. If we get struggling Ratty will come. If I don't get out of this now I shall first chance I have, and Ratty can't stop me, and he'll see that you don't when he knows you've been here!"

A device to save Figgy flashed into Kerr's brain. But he needed help for it, and in that moment help came to him.

"I say, is that you, Kerr?"

It was the voice of Fatty Wynn, and Fatty loomed up through the gloom, fully dressed.

"Yes. You get back to the dorm, you fat chump!"

To Figgins, Kerr whispered:

"He'd better not see you. He would only worry himself into fits. I'll get him back."

And he seized Fatty by the shoulder, and forced him along the passage, hissing in his ear:

"Keep your head, old man! There's lots hanging to it. If Figgy bolts—and he means to—you've just got to follow him and see which way he goes."

"But what are you going to do, Kerr?" asked Fatty, puzzled.

"I'm off to fetch the only person who can get him back. Don't get too close to him, and watch out for me all the time. Understand?"

"I think I've got it, Kerr."

If Fatty failed it would not be from want of devotion.

Kerr did not go back to Figgins. He went downstairs, unbarred the front door with cool audacity, let himself out, and made straight for the Head's quarters in the School House, and for cousin Ethel.

Gravel flung at her window brought her to it almost at once. She had not been asleep.

"Who is it?" came her voice from above, as she leaned forward out of the window.

"Kerr. Ethel, if you want to save

Figgy, come down directly! Don't tell anybody. Just come!"

"I'm coming! I will be with you in a minute or two."

So he had not rated her courage and her loyalty too high. And she could save Figgy from himself. Kerr counted on that most surely.

She could not have gone to bed, for in less than two minutes she stood, fully dressed, by Kerr's side.

"Where are we to go? You can explain on the way," she said.

"You're game for it, whatever it is, Ethel?"

"You know that, Kerr!"

"Yes, I know. What a good pal you are, Ethel!"

He told her all that was necessary to make her understand before they reached the old tree overhanging the wall, which must be their way out. Kerr did not dwell upon the state Figgy was in, but he knew that the girl by his side understood something of that, and shared the dread that he would not put into words.

"Can you get over if I help you?" he asked.

"I could get over without help, but, of course, you may help me," replied Ethel.

In fifteen seconds they stood outside the wall together.

Now it's a question which way. If only old Fatty's remembered to leave some clue!" said Kerr.

"What's that?" said Ethel, stooping to pick up something white from the ground. It was not quite dark, for the moon, though in its last quarter, gave some illumination.

Kerr struck a match to see if there was anything written on the paper, weighed down by a stone, which Ethel had spotted. And there, scrawled across it—for Fatty had not been able to strike a match—were the words: "Rylcombe Lane."

"Good old Fatty!" said Kerr.

"I quite expected it," replied Ethel.

And Kerr promised himself that he would not forget to tell Fatty that.

"Let's go!" said the girl.

"If you'll catch hold of my hand," returned Kerr.

She took it at once, and side by side girl and boy sped on through the gloom under the trees in Rylcombe Lane.

Ethel Cleveland ran well; but she could not stay so long a course as Kerr, and there was still no sign of Fatty ahead when she had to halt a minute or two, out of breath.

"If you would rather go on, Kerr, I'm not afraid to be left alone," she panted.

"I don't believe you're afraid of anything," answered Kerr admiringly. "But I shan't leave you, I shan't! No good without you, anyway. I've tried, and failed. He'll come back for you."

"But how do you know that?"

"Because it's of what you'd think about it all that he's worried most. Even when he heard from home that he had bowled his mater over he couldn't stop worrying about you."

"Oh!"

There was distress in that exclamation, but there was something else. That Figgins should have cared so much even in his trouble what she thought went straight to Ethel Cleveland's heart.

"Just one thing, Ethel, before we start again. I noticed that Gell went blue about the mouth in a queer way when he got excited, and I asked the coroner—he's a doctor, you know—what that meant. He said it would probably mean heart disease. Do you—"

"Why, of course! He had heart

disease. Didn't that come out at the inquest? I thought it must, but I felt so sure that—George would know it wasn't really his fault when he heard that."

Again Kerr's heart leaped in joy. The coroner might think it was of no great consequence to Figgy, since Figgy had been pronounced blameless; but Kerr knew better.

"Who told you? How do you know?" he asked quickly.

"I'm not sure who told me. But I think they all knew at the Throgmorton's. I'll find out, Kerr. Let's start again now."

Again they ran. They were nearing Rylcombe when the voice of Fatty called to them out of the shadow by the roadside.

"He's here! Must have fallen over something, I fancy, and whacked his head. Anyway, he's unconscious."

"I'm not!" snapped Figgins.

But the fall had so dazed him for a few minutes that he had been but partially conscious.

"George!" cried Ethel Cleveland.

"Ethel!" came from Figgins, in joyful, yet shocked surprise. "I say, though, you oughtn't to be here! The Head and Mrs. Holmes will be no end mad. What made you come?"

"I fetched her," said Kerr. "I knew she could make you come back, though I couldn't."

"And Fatty followed me up, I suppose? You must think me ungrateful, you three, but I can't come back. What's the good?"

"But you must, George! You will, I know, when I beg you to! Think of your mother, too! What would be more likely to make her worse than to be told that you had disappeared?"

"I didn't think of that," groaned Figgy. "I—I couldn't think straight—I was more than half potty. Why, I thought you'd never want to speak to me again, Ethel!"

"Oh, but you were silly—silly!" cried the girl, down on her knees in the damp grass now. "You ought to have known that—that if everyone else failed you there were—were three of us that wouldn't!"

"Now I call that particularly decent—for a girl—to remember you and me, Kerr," whispered Fatty.

"Cousin Ethel's no ordinary girl. She's a real pal, Fatty!" Kerr whispered back. "I say, old sport, I think we might fade out just a little piece now. She can manage him best alone."

They withdrew a few yards.

"It will be the sack for me, Ethel," said Figgy hopelessly. "But I'll go back and face the music; I can now. And you were right about the mater, of course."

"But it won't mean anything of the sort! I don't believe the Head even thought of it, if he did, he doesn't now. He told me that, though you might have something to live down among the rest, he was sure you had the courage to do it, and that the cloud would lift for you some day. Besides, it wasn't your blow that really killed Edwin Gell—it was his heart."

"What?"

"He had heart disease! I know it; I fancied everybody knew. I ought to have told them; but I didn't—I couldn't talk about it even to Mrs. Holmes."

"Oh, I say, Ethel, you don't know what this means to me! Kerr—Fatty, old chap—Ethel says Gell had something wrong with his heart!"

"Then, Figgy tried to get up, but fell back with a groan. He had twisted one of his ankles pretty badly."

They took counsel what was to be done.

"You ought to get back, Ethel. They mustn't know what you have done," said Figgins anxiously.

"I'm not ashamed of what I have done, and I shouldn't think of keeping it from them," replied Ethel bravely.

"I made up my mind when Kerr called me down that I would tell them directly I got back. Now I suppose Kerr will have to go and tell the whole story, and Wynn and I will stay here with you till he brings help."

Figgy protested. But Kerr and Fatty backed up Ethel. It was not a task that many juniors would have cared to take on; but Kerr accepted it as simply and as readily as Ethel Cleveland had assigned it to him.

When help came Fatty and Ethel were both shivering with cold. Fatty in his shirt-sleeves, the girl without her coat. That and Fatty's jacket were wrapped round Figgins. But he knew nothing about it; sleep had mercifully come to

him, propped up against a pile of stones, and those two had sacrificed their own comfort for his welfare ungrudgingly.

Ethel was not even scolded. But the story of her escapade—as the Head called it, smiling as he spoke—was kept dark from all but a very few. She left St. Jim's next day, but she was back again the day after, and she brought with her a letter from a doctor who had attended Edwin Gell, and who certified that he had suffered from valvular disease of the heart.

The doctor's opinion was that excitement and rage had had more to do with the unfortunate boy's death than the blow dealt him.

That went far to lift the cloud from over George Figgins, even before it became public property. How much it meant to him that Ethel herself should have gone to bring comfort for him, as loyally as she had gone with Kerr to fetch him back from his mad bolt, only he knew, and he could not tell.

And on the day that Ethel was away his father came, to tell him that his mother had partially recovered from the shock, and was getting along well, and to say more that did Figgy good to hear. For the Head saw Mr. Figgins first, and some things Mr. Figgins might have said about giving way to angry passions were never spoken. The Head held that for any wrong done the boy had been punished more than enough.

It was a week before Figgins went back to the New House; but he spent that week as a visitor to the Head, not in samny. And, in spite of the gloom that came upon him now and then when he thought of Gell, it was one of the best weeks of his life, for Ethel was his comrade day after day, and Kerr and Wynn ran in whenever they liked.

For the rest of the term there were times when the dark cloud came back. But they occurred less and less frequently. For at fifteen, remorse for what was hardly one's own fault does not eat into the soul, and for the most part Figgins was his own cheery self again.

THE END.

(There will be another grand, long, complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. next week, entitled: "GORE'S GREAT CONQUEST!" By Martin Clifford. Make a point of ordering your copy EARLY.)

JOY'S GOSSIP

Dear Mr. GEM Editor:—A reader writes from Garforth and asks, "Who is Joy? Her letters are ripping, but I can't say I adore her portrait." Well, of course, in the main, folks cannot help their faces, though some individuals might put their countenances into dock for alterations and repairs. Still, I am having a new one "done," perhaps it will be liked better.

I have been thinking about Cousin Ethel, and her part in the stories. I should like her to play a bigger part. She is worth it, judging from the chance, very attractive glimpses we have had of her temperament. She has always shown herself what is called a "nice girl," though that does not mean much. All girls are nice, only some are far nicer than others. I admit I am not very partial to the snappy, quick-talking, smart girl, who says pertly "I'd take something for it," to the boy with ginger hair.

She is disposed to take too much advantage of her position. Not that dainty,

captivating Cousin Ethel errs that way. If you look at her picture, you see a charming face with sympathy in her dark eyes, and a manner about her which quite explains why Skimpole fell in love with her. One would have thought Skimpole—of whom we hear so little these times—was too clever, too brainy altogether to fall in love.

I read a story in an old GEM the other day which shows how deep schoolboys can be: how they can plan to make a hero of one of their companions so that he might appear as a steady, trusty knight in the eyes of a girl. I love that tale where the silly, treacherous Aubrey Racke overreaches himself. The futile Aubrey had hired a tame tramp—not so very tame, either—to attack Cousin Ethel. Aubrey Racke was in ambush behind a tree, all ready to spring out, but something went wrong with the works, and Racke funk'd it, leaving the rescue to the doughty Manners.

But good as has been Cousin Ethel's role so far in the GEM, I feel sure there is much more for her to do. My uncle took me to see a football match the other day, and I met a boy who told me plainly that he did not see that girls were any good at all. Yet, if there were no girls the poets would have nothing except scenery to write about.

Now, I should like to hear something about the doughty pattern girl—not the far-away, beautiful, statuesque personages like Cousin Ethel, but the blue-stocking, over-learned, ugly-faced girls. Where do they come in? It is all very fine for a GEM reader at Garforth to say "Who's Joy?" Joy is just a girl, with nothing to boast about in looks. Handsome is as handsome does. Beauty is but skin deep. Ugliness goes to the bone. I know them all, and I think the ugly girl should have a chance. There are plenty of ugly girls. Some of them seem proud of the fact, drag back their hair till it hurts you to look at their foreheads, pince-naz when they do not need them, but just wear specs on their long noses out of sheer swank.

They live for studying, but they are characters, and there is no reason why we should not hear about such types. Suppose it were Leap Year, suppose a girl with a white flat face fell in love with D'Arcy! No fine, no suppose it is there? I verily believe the noble fellow would pretend she was beautiful, just to please her. That's where the British schoolboy comes in. He will help to bump an outsider, but he won't hurt anybody's feelings if he can help it.

Your chirpy chum,

JOY.
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JOHN SHARPE.

The INVISIBLE HAND

This wonderful story has also been filmed by the popular VITAGRAPH Film Company, and readers of the "GEM" should make a point of seeing the picture week by week at their favourite cinemas.



IRON HAND.

A Well-Planned Scheme.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service of Chicago, to track down the band of organised criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured. Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidences of Iron Hand. She is not known to Sharpe.

The mountain den, Eagle's Nest, is run by Potsdam, Iron Hand's lieutenant.

Sharpe spoils many of the plans of the gang. Later he discovers that the gang possess a submarine, and they plot to blow up the Oriental mail steamer. Sharpe sends word for the steamer not to sail, and communicates with a border patrol to have a bombing aeroplane ready for instant use. The submarine is destroyed.

Sharpe follows Iron Hand to Nest No. 2, another lair of the gang, and succeeds in gaining admittance to the house, after a fight with a savage dog. Iron Hand is warned of his presence, and Sharpe is made a prisoner. Anne arrives in time to see Sharpe escape. Sharpe follows Iron Hand to the latter's hotel. Anne also goes there. Iron Hand prepares to receive Sharpe. In the adjoining room, a gas machine is arranged so that a bag is to be dropped over Sharpe's head.

Sharpe is enveloped in the folds of the gas-bag. Iron Hand and others secure the bag around Sharpe. Inside the bag Sharpe adjusts a gas-mask, and then pretends to grow weaker and weaker, until he apparently becomes lifeless. Sharpe is thrown into a trunk.

Iron Hand orders his men to get a porter, and then dump the trunk in the river. Anne watches, helpless. With a sudden idea she slips out to the hall, lures Iron Hand from the room by a false message, and then returns and unlocks the trunk. She is frightened by a noise in the hall, and goes to her room. Sharpe rises, freed of the gas-bag, and quickly substitutes some rugs and logs from the fireplace, putting them in the trunk, so as to make up the difference in weight. Hartmann and others remove the trunk.

Sharpe and some troops under Captain West chase Iron Hand and the gang to Eagle's Nest. Later, Sharpe discovers a plot to steal some valuable jewels, and he tracks the gang down to a "house of mystery." Anne Crawford is on a roof outside the window of the room in which Iron Hand and his party are making the arrangements. As a precaution, the leader orders the shutters to be put up, and the girl is in great danger of being discovered.

(Now read on.)

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IRON HAND'S assistant advanced towards the window in order to close the shutters, and Anne slowly and stealthily backed towards the fire-escape. To her relief he did not discover her. When he had finished his job the whole party prepared to leave the room. Iron Hand, Potsdam, and two other members of the gang headed off towards the stairs leading to the roof, while the man dressed as a woman and three others descended the stairs.

Anne Crawford, who had her ear close against the shutters, heard the gang leave the room, and she decided that it was time for her to get busy herself. She produced a jemmy, and commenced work upon the shutters, endeavouring to force them. By this time, Iron Hand and Potsdam and their assistants, with the aid of a rope, were descending into the room below, where the valuable jewels were stored.

When the last of the men had made his descent in this unaccustomed manner, Iron Hand walked over to the spot where the section of the floor had been sawn through, and, lifting the part up, he poked his head through the opening. The shop below was but dimly lit, and it was all he could do to see through the gloom.

All this time Anne was busily occupied trying to force open the shutters leading to the room above, where the deliberations of the gang had taken place.

As his eyes grew more accustomed to the light, Iron Hand discovered that there were two watchmen, walking slowly up and down the room. They proceeded from the rear of the store, reached the counters containing the valuable jewels, passed one another in front, and walked towards the rear again. All the time they kept up this somewhat monotonous journey. But in addition to this precaution, on the corner opposite the shop, there was a policeman on fixed duty, so that the jewels were certainly well guarded.

Meanwhile, an interesting little scene was being enacted outside the shop by the four members of the gang, one of whom was dressed as a woman. According to their arrangement, the three men appeared to be following and annoying the woman. She approached the policeman and asked for his assistance. Then the three members of the gang stood round him and commenced a fierce argument.

With every minute that passed the men became more threatening towards him, and the representative of the law placed the woman behind him for safety's sake. This was just what the gang wanted. The policeman had played right into their hands.

The gang closed in on him, while the "woman" behind delivered a terrible blow on the back of his head, and the other three then rushed at him and

brought him to the ground. The policeman, by this cowardly action, was rendered unconscious.

Just outside the shop another watchman had been placed, and, hearing the noise of the scuffle, he looked over in that direction. The two watchmen inside the shop were also attracted by the tumultuous struggle outside, and they walked towards the entrance, in order to find out what all the trouble was about. It was a golden opportunity for the men above.

Iron Hand's men, dressed as fake watchmen, rapidly descended the rope lowered from the hole in the ceiling, and, crouching down low along the shadows of the counter, they moved towards the front of the shop, taking the precaution of getting out the heavy weapons which they carried.

The attention of the two real watchmen was fully taken up by the commotion outside, and nearer and nearer the two members of the gang quietly crept up behind them. At a pre-arranged moment, each hit his man, felling him to the floor instantly, and the unconscious watchmen were quickly dragged from view under the counter, and the two fake men took their places. It was all accomplished very easily.

The watchman on the outside of the shop was anxious to go over to the scene of the struggle and assist the policeman who had been knocked out in so cowardly a manner, and he glanced into the shop to see if all was well within. The two fake watchmen caught the questioning eye of the guard outside, and they motioned him to go over and give aid, indicating at the same time that they would watch the store; and the man, believing the two within to be his assistants, went over to the opposite corner.

As soon as he had taken his departure, the two men signalled to Iron Hand and Potsdam that all was well, and then they took up positions close to the counter containing the valuable jewels, in order to hide from the street their operations behind the counter.

Iron Hand and Potsdam quickly slid down the rope, and, crouching low behind the counter, they hastened to the front of the shop. Iron Hand carried a satchel.

With the two men standing close together, completely hiding the jewels from the view of any curious eyes outside in the street, Iron Hand and Potsdam set to work to force open the lock of the cabinet containing the valuables.

It did not take them very long to complete their task, and they quickly swept them into the bag, and rapidly made their exit towards the back of the shop. The whole robbery was over in a very short time, and the two fake watchmen, presumably on their patrol, started to walk casually back and forward again.

While this had been going on, Anne

Crawford had succeeded in forcing open the shutters and entering the room at the top of the house. She silently darted over towards the cupboard, and quickly opened the door.

The figure of John Sharpe, the detective, lying bound and gagged on his face, met her gaze. The girl reached in, cut the bonds on his hands and arms, and, slipping the knife into one of his hands, she laid a revolver beside him and then at once hastily made her exit. She thought it best that he should not see who his rescuer was.

This was an opportunity that must not be missed. Sharpe at once set to work with the knife and cut the ropes which bound his legs, but he was now over too late to see who the good Samaritan was who had come to his aid and get him out of his uncomfortable predicament.

It was a great relief to be free again.

The detective picked up the revolver and rushed out into the hall; stealthily he descended the stairs. Unfortunately, however, the member of the gang who had been left on guard, heard him, but Sharpe was not to be beaten so easily. He leaped from the stairs on to the side of the man, knocking him heavily to the floor; the crook clung to him, and the two rolled over and over on the floor in a desperate struggle.

The fight went on for a minute or two, but in the end Sharpe's superior strength told, and he got the best of the battle.

Anne Crawford, on the other hand, who was rather puzzled as to what her next move should be, had stumbled upon the rope used by the gang in making their descent, and, judging what it was for, she quickly untied it and dropped the end down the chimney. She smiled mischievously as she regarded her handiwork.

The members of the gang who had attacked the policeman soon dealt with their new adversary, the watchman. And soon they received the signal from the shop, which intimated that everything had been carried out successfully, and that the gang were now in possession of the valuable Littlebach Jewels. They broke away and ran in different directions.

The policeman and watchman intended to pursue them, but when the latter looked towards the shop, and failed to find his assistants in view, he called the policeman's attention to the matter, and they both walked over to the shop.

They were astonished when they looked through the window, and saw that the jewel-case was completely empty. A further search revealed the fact that the watchmen were also missing.

The guard felt for his keys, and, unlocking the door, the two of them entered the shop. It did not take them very long to come to the conclusion that a very clever robbery had been planned, and the policeman immediately rushed out and called for help.

Meanwhile, Iron Hand, Potsdam, and the others were also in trouble. They had managed to make their way to the floor above quite successfully, by the aid of their rope, but when they rushed towards the chimney, they were amazed and alarmed to find that the other one was at the bottom, and they were unable to make their escape from the building according to their arrangements.

The truth of the situation dawned on them at once. Somebody had untied it above. The gang had seen that it was secure enough, and it could certainly not come untied by itself. That was plainly evident. There was no time to be lost if they were to evade capture. They knew that an alarm would soon be raised.

"Somebody is a traitor!" growled

Iron Hand beneath his breath. "Break open that window! We've got to get out that way!"

The gang immediately rushed to obey his order, and after smashing the glass, each man worked with feverish haste. They realised their danger.

Sharpe had by now quite got the better of his antagonist. The man was unconscious, and, securing his pistol, he leaped to his feet and rushed out of the door.

When he had gained the street an amazing scene met his gaze. At the rear of the shop he could see Iron Hand, Potsdam, and other members of the gang climbing down a pipe and dropping into the street. The fact that the gangsters were escaping told him that he was too late to stop the robbery, and his thoughts suddenly flew to the motor-cars that he had overheard were waiting in the passage-way, and he rushed off in that direction.

Arriving at the spot, he found two touring cars waiting in readiness, one of which was a high-powered car, and the other one not so fast. In the first car there was a chauffeur with cap, heavy coat, and goggles; the other one was unattended.

Without hesitation, the detective, with revolver levelled, rushed up to the chauffeur.

"Are you waiting for Iron Hand?" he demanded.

The man nodded in reply. That was sufficient information for John Sharpe.

He directed a forceful blow at the man's head, and dragged him unconscious from his seat. Then he set to work to remove his cap, goggles, and coat, and started to don them himself.

He had just finished dressing himself in his borrowed garments and lifted the chauffeur out of sight over the fence, when Iron Hand and his followers breathlessly entered the car. John Sharpe took up his position at the wheel. The remaining members of the gang, those who were engaged in the attack upon the policeman, then appeared upon the scene from various directions, and leaped into the second car.

Soon they were all seated, and the detective started off at a rapid speed, and the smaller one followed at some distance behind. The "new chauffeur" chuckled—the worthy leader of the gang did not suspect that Sharpe, the hated detective, was at the wheel.

The Tables Turned.

IN an amazing short time, a number of policemen appeared on the scene of robbery. They examined the place thoroughly and came across the bodies of the two unconscious watchmen, which they dragged out and administered to.

The senior member of the Force pointed to the ceiling, which he concluded rightly was the means by which the gang entered the shop. They were all of the opinion that it was a very skilful and deeply-laid plot.

After thoroughly examining the place and taking copious notes, they carefully locked the whole building up, and, leaving one man on guard, the rest retired to the headquarters.

John Sharpe was rather enjoying his novel experience as a chauffeur. He had now taken the party along a lonely road, and his very rapid driving alarmed and puzzled Iron Hand. At length, no longer satisfied with the strange behaviour of his chauffeur, he leaped over and told him to slow down a little.

Sharpe obediently applied the brake,

and the car slackened its speed. But the chauffeur was going from one extreme to another, for a moment or two later he brought the car to a standstill.

The leader of the gang very indignantly stood up and demanded to know why he was stopping. Sharpe judged that this was no occasion for idle words, and he turned round and delivered a stunning blow upon the head of the unexpected leader. Then he grabbed the satchel containing the jewels, and held up the rest of the gang with his revolver. Looking over in the direction of Potsdam, the detective ordered him to tie up the others.

"We're going back to police headquarters," he announced to the amazed band.

Iron Hand stirred a little. He was beginning to recover from the effect of Sharpe's blow. His friend Potsdam did not like the idea of going to the police, and he endeavoured to argue with the detective over the matter. Sharpe was about to cut him short, when he suddenly noticed that the other motor-car was rapidly approaching the scene, and this caused him to change his mind a little.

"Don't trouble to tie them up, Potsdam," he said. "I'm afraid there isn't time just now. But get out of the car, all of you!"

And under the point of the detective's revolver, Iron Hand, Potsdam, and all his motley crew alighted.

Sharpe dashed back into the driver's seat, and, one hand holding the revolver, he moved the gear lever with the other, and the great car bounded forward.

He crouched low in his seat, and not a moment too soon, for bullets began to whiz all round him.

When the second car drew up to the gang, the driver stopped it to see what all the commotion was about. Iron Hand speedily explained the situation to him, and pointed out that it would be useless for this car to pursue, as it was not capable of anything like the speed of the other. Cursing their luck, the men crowded back into the car, and the vehicle drove off.

While these extraordinary happenings had been going on, Anne had safely made her exit from the scene of the robbery, and she returned to her own apartment, looking forward to a rest after her exertions. She smiled fondly as she thought of Sharpe.

"Wonderful man!" she reflected. "I wonder what he is doing now?"

At the headquarters of the chief of police there was a scene of great activity. The chief was attentively listening to the report of the robbery from the policeman who was attacked by the gang.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the door, and all eyes were turned in that direction. A moment later detective John Sharpe entered.

The chief of police at once recognised the important visitor.

"You're just in time," he said, nodding in his direction. "The Littlebach Jewels have been stolen."

Sharpe smiled, and produced his bag. Opening it, he said, to the surprise of all:

"Here they are—such as they are!"

The chief of police was astounded. Everyone listened eagerly to Sharpe as he continued.

"I left the would-be robbers up beyond the cemetery," he went on. "If you're quick you will catch them. I'm going off to get some sleep now."

And wishing the officer good-bye, he made his exit.

After his departure, the chief gave orders to his men to go out and pursue the gang.

Sharpe made his way back to his THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 684.

rooms, and when he entered his own apartment to prepare for rest, his thoughts were also of one particular person.

"I wonder who that girl can be who saved us from the explosion at Eagle's Nest?" he reflected. "She seems too nice to be mixed up in that gang."

Sharpe walked into the adjoining room, which was but dimly lit, took off his chauffeur's hat, coat, and goggles, and prepared to light up, when an uncanny feeling came over him. He seemed to sense a presence in the room, and he stood tense for an instant, listening.

Then he groped for the electric switch and turned on the light. He felt frozen where he stood. From behind every possible hiding-place—chairs, settees, cupboards—figures rose up, and he found himself staring into the cruel, leering faces of Iron Hand, Potsdam, and other members of the gang!

Each man had a revolver, which was levelled at the detective. Slowly Sharpe lifted his hands above his head, in obedience to Iron Hand's command. The leader was glaring at him with a look of triumph on his vindictive face.

Trapped Once More.

SHARPE realised only too well how completely he had been trapped. But he was as dauntless as ever, and cool in the face of this new danger.

Iron Hand walked forward slowly and deliberately, and glared at his captive. Then he commenced to speak in a coldly polite voice.

"Good-evening, Mr. Sharpe!" he said. "I am delighted to see you again. Though uninvited, I assume we are all thoroughly welcome."

John Sharpe smiled at him. He was not going to cower before the gaze of this master-criminal.

"Why, certainly!" he replied. "Make yourselves quite at home, boys. What can I do for you?"

"This was too much for Iron Hand. His face took on a look of rage and bitterness, and, losing all his politeness, he demanded in a gruff voice:

"First we'll trouble you for those jewels."

Sharpe smiled back again in an exasperating manner.

"Sorry, but I handed them over to the police," he replied, "and I presume they have been restored to the jewellery company by now."

Iron Hand was becoming more angry at every moment. He was tired of always being outwitted by this clever detective, and with difficulty Potsdam restrained him from assaulting Sharpe, who stood calm and defiant, with a trace of weariness, as though the proceedings bored him.

Iron Hand spoke again. "I am sure and certain to the late Duke of Ittlesbach, and the jewels belong to me!" he growled. "I mean to have them!"

"You'll have to tell that to the police," responded Sharpe.

Iron Hand made no further remark to the detective, but turning round to his assistant, Black Flag, one of the most villainous of all the gangsters, he ordered him to bind and gag Sharpe.

While this was taking place, Iron Hand conferred with Potsdam, and told him of his plan to regain the jewels.

"We'll keep Sharpe as a hostage," he explained.

When the detective was bound and

gagged to his complete satisfaction, he instructed that he be moved to the adjoining bed-room.

Black Flag, and the others dealt none too gently with the detective, and after shoving him roughly into the other room, they placed him in a position where they could watch him. One man remained on guard, and the others went back to the parlour. Iron Hand now outlined his plans further, and he cautioned his assistants to keep quiet while he reached for the telephone. He asked to be put on to the proprietor of the Anglo-American Jewellery Store.

The police were once more on the scene making further investigations, and Mr. Amidon, the proprietor, who had also been sent for, turned sharply on the inspector when he caught sight of him, and said, with evident sarcasm:

"Well, the criminals pulled it off all right, in spite of your friend Sharpe!"

The officer smiled and commenced to open the bag.

"You don't know Sharpe," he replied. "He's worth of his name. He brought the stuff back to me an hour ago." The chief officer poured the contents of the bag upon the table.

Mr. Amidon was delighted. His faith in the police system returned again, although, of course, he was aware that these were only good imitations of the real jewels.

At that moment the telephone-bell rang, and the policeman who answered it, informed Mr. Amidon that he was wanted on the 'phone. Iron Hand at the other end again warned his men to keep quiet while he attempted his ruse. Then very politely he commenced to speak while the rest of the gang looked on smiling, wondering what their brainy leader had up his sleeve.

Mr. Amidon listened, and a surprised look entered his eyes; then, hanging up the receiver, he turned to the chief of police, and said:

"Speaking of angels, that message was from Sharpe. He's made an important discovery, and wants me to go to his rooms at the Beresford at once."

The chief nodded. "Yes, that is where Sharpe lives," he said.

Mr. Amidon informed them that he expected to be back soon, and asked them to wait for him. He made his way to his car, which was waiting below.

Iron Hand turned to his men with grim satisfaction on his face.

"The scheme seems to be working all right," he told them. "We shall have the gentleman along soon, no doubt." And the others were delighted. Iron Hand then spoke to Potsdam.

"The proprietor is on his way here," he said. "Get your job done quick and, by the way, you'd better call at Marna Black's rooms, and ask her to call here."

The second in command sneered slightly at the sound of her name. He still suspected her. Iron Hand ordered most of the other members of the gang to go with Potsdam, and there were thus left on the scene only the leader and Black Flag.

When Anne Crawford heard the knock at the door, she was a little alarmed, for she guessed it was either Potsdam or Iron Hand, and she wondered whether they had discovered that it was she who had endeavoured to prevent their escape by unfastening the connecting rope. Potsdam got quickly to the point.

"Iron Hand wants you to go to Sharpe's apartment at the Beresford," he said.

The girl gave a start, for she realised that the detective must again be in the coils of the gang. Potsdam told her to hurry, and, closing the door, left her.

She quickly donned her hat and coat,

and slipping a pistol into her pocket and taking from the drawer a useful-looking knife, she placed this also in her pocket.

While they were waiting for the arrival of Mr. Amidon, Black Flag kept a sharp eye on Sharpe in the next room. Presently the noise of a motor-car reached their ears, and Iron Hand went over to the window, and peered out through the curtain.

He saw the proprietor of the jewellery shop alone in his big car. The leader watched him alight and walk to the door of his house.

Iron Hand warned Black Flag that their expected visitor had arrived on the scene, and both men drew their revolvers and waited in readiness. Black Flag slightly closed the door to the bed-room. Soon they heard the sound of footsteps in the hall, and Iron Hand shouted "Come in!" in response to the knock.

Quickly Black Flag dodged behind him and closed the door while Iron Hand held on up with a revolver. The proprietor was now thoroughly alarmed, and he realised the trap into which he had walked. He could offer no resistance when Black Flag started to bind his hands behind his back.

Mr. Amidon had now recovered from his first fright, and he showed his bravest by defying the leader of the gang. Iron Hand was growing a little impatient. He dictated his terms to the man, and told him that his freedom depended upon the jewels being turned over.

The proprietor protested against such treatment, but it fell on deaf ears. Then there came another knock at the door. Both Iron Hand and Black Flag glanced round with their ever-ready revolvers in their hands. But there was no need for immediate alarm on their part, for when the door opened, Anne Crawford entered, smiling.

Sharpe turned first over to Iron Hand, and, pretending to be glad, she said, as she gripped his hand:

"I'm so pleased you're safe! Did you get what you went for?"

"No, we did not get them," he replied in answer to her question. "But we've got Sharpe and this man, and they'll get them for us."

"I do hope so!" returned Anne, not meaning in the least what she was saying.

Iron Hand turned from her to Black Flag, as a sudden inspiration came to him.

"We must put on two watchmen's uniforms," he said, and they commenced to don them over their other clothes, turning their backs to Anne and Mr. Amidon.

Anne was quick to take advantage of even this slight opportunity. She flashed a significant look towards the proprietor of the jewellery store, and intimated that silence was golden.

Anne now edged nearer towards him, and placed the knife in one of his hands. She withdrew her hand just in time, as Iron Hand and Black Flag, now fully garbed as watchmen, turned round again.

Iron Hand took Amidon over to the door of the bed-room, and pushing him unceremoniously through, he called the man who was on guard over Sharpe.

"Take this message for me," he ordered. "To the place indicated."

Sharpe now had a companion, and he soon recognised the proprietor of the jewellery shop. Both were gagged as well as bound. But Amidon was able to indicate that he had something in his hand.

Then he walked over towards Mr. Amidon, and stood back to back with him, and the proprietor opened the knife and commenced to cut Sharpe's bonds.

(To be continued in next week's "GEM.")

ANSWERS TO READERS.

"TALL THOMAS" (Cork).—Bernard Glyn has certainly invented several weird and wonderful things, but I don't know whether he can manage a mechanical racehorse, my chum.

"ONE OF THE OLD SCHOOL" (Maidenhead).—Miss Joy is about 15, I think. Readers write and ask all sorts of questions about her. The first story of Doris Levison at St. Jim's was entitled: "Levison's Sister." The next one she appeared in was, "The Tribulations of Trimble." And again, later, in "Rivals in Sport." I will introduce Sylvia Carr into a yarn again in a while. When she does appear, though, Arthur Augustus will be in the vicinity. Marie Rivers is not married. Wherever did you get that idea from? The splendid portrait of Jack Blake was welcomed on all sides.

"PETER PAN" (Peebles).—Kit Wildrake's arrival at St. Jim's created quite a sensation. I quite agree with you, my chum, in what you say. Readers who look on the bright side of things are always thought more of than those who mourn for the lights of other days.

JACK JACKSON (Melbourne).—Most of your questions are answerable. No. 1. Grundy came from Redcliffe, after receiving the sack for "whopping" a prefect. No. 2. Fatty Wynn is the best junior goalkeeper at St. Jim's. Herries usually plays custodian for the School House when a match with Figgins & Co. is in progress. No. 3. You think Baggy Trimble gets fearfully bullied? Well, I don't quite agree. No. 4. No other junior at St. Jim's has a finer physique than Tom Merry. No. 5. Yes, now you happen to mention it, Harry Noble is not unlike Tom Merry in appearance.

"BUDDING MARTIN CLIFFORD" (Newbury).—Who is the finest poet among my GEM readers? Why, Jimmy R., of Repton, of course! There are not more than six fellows who could beat George Figgins in a fight in the junior school.

Dick Roylance has not been forgotten by any means. He will be sure to shine later. So you thoroughly enjoy stories where George Alfred Grundy makes an utter fool of himself? Here are some yards in which Grundy figures prominently: "Grundy, the Detective," "Grundy's Great Game," "Grundy, the Ventiloquist," "Grundy, the Hypnotist," "The Great Grundy," "Grundy, the Patriot," and "Grundy's Luck."

"A GEM NAMESAKE" (St. Helens, Isle of Wight).—The name of Racke's sister is Gladys. Owen is the best swimmer in the New House. The St. Jim's junior footer team is pretty hefty. They don't often play Rugger. There is little call for it as regards challenges, and they have all settled down to Soccer, which makes picking up the other game rather difficult.

"THE RED ROSE."—The mistake you mention was only made by a printer. It can easily be seen what is wrong. Manners is the oldest fellow in the Sell. His exact age should have been published. 16 years, 5 months. Thanks for your reminder, but another time you can take it for granted that we have discovered it long before the paper comes out, but when, however, it is too late to alter any mistakes.

IVOR. A. R. (Hereford).—Glad you like the Soccer team, my chum. Beckett's photo appeared only a few weeks ago in the GEM. What do you think of the Art Portraits of the boys of St. Jim's?

"MY PAL CHARLIE" (Meadow Road, Salisbury).—You are a very loyal reader. It was a real treat to receive such a letter as yours. I am sorry to say, though, that the two back numbers you mention are out of print. "After Lights Out" was a 3d. Library.

MASTER D. WALLACE (Rob. Jep. Johann).—I should welcome any letter you care to write a St. Jim's fellow, at this address, and will see that you receive a nice reply. Tell this to any of your pal readers!

"SCHOOL AND SPORT" (Epsom).—Says he was so enthusiastic over the Special Cardew Number that he spilt a cup of tea down his brother's neck. Gracious, and as there are even better numbers following shortly, I tremble to think what might happen. I must only implore you to keep clear of teacups and brothers when you read these grand numbers. Otherwise I can see myself coming in for the blame.

"RICHARD DOEKNET" (Hanwell).—What a choice non-de-plume you have chosen for yourself! George Edward Barby is no longer at St. Jim's. The GEM started in 1907. Kildare is by far the best footballer and cricketer at St. Jim's. Langton is the best bowler. Tom Merry is a fine all-rounder. Some of the St. Jim's juniors have been roller-skating along the best roads around St. Jim's before now.

JIMMY BOLT (Jersey, C.I.). writes: "I should like a story about Cardew and old Lord Reckness. I forget the name of the tale in which Cardew shows his anxiety because he thinks a certain piece of news would trouble his grandfather; but here Ralph Reckness Cardew was seen at his best."

"GEM READER" (Selkirk). says: "I think everybody admires Cardew. You can't help liking him. I expect even Aubrey Racke has a sneaking regard for him. Anyway, Aubrey owes Cardew a lot. Perhaps that feeling in most cases would bring hate. Not so with Cardew: His is a master temperament, and rides over ordinary characters. "LOVAL CHUM" (Ancoats), writes: "Three rousing cheers for Cardew. I shall never forget the way he mopped up Cutts."

CHAT ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

News is to hand to the effect that there was a "slight" fire in the study of the Rev. Dr. Herbert Henry Locke, D.D., the other day. Surely this is nothing unusual. What with the standard of coals we get nowadays we seem to be more or less overrun with "slate" fires.

The junior who was responsible for the breaking of the window in the Head's study has at last been traced. We fear the said culprit will have a most "painful" punishment.

Rumours are afloat that the school tuckshop is to be sold owing to its high taxation. David Llewellyn Wynn has kindly consented to make room for all the goods therein.

George Alfred Grundy seems to be very upset of late owing to the fact that his rich uncle has made no advances to him this year yet. Probably this is due to the fact that this is hardly what one could term "Spring" season.

We should like to point out to all readers interested, that there is no truth in the statement that "Joy" has bobbed her hair.

That Banks, the bookie, would do well to read the "Grand National" story which appears in this week's issue of the "Boys' Herald." The "Lure of Gold," which starts in the same journal in the near future, is bound to prove a great hit to all.

With reference to Herbert Skimpole's "Help the Hero's Fund," which you will hear more about in next week's grand school story, we have been informed that our worthy anticipates a goodly supply of "dough" from George Baker, the prefect.

From information received, we learn that William George Bunter, of the "Boys' Herald," has made known the fact to all that he has ceased borrowing any further cash until all his previous debts have been settled up. News of this description is likely to prove "debt-rimental" to one's health.

Castigations seem to be plenty of late in the Third Form at St. Jim's. Only yesterday, Walter Adolphus D'Arcy received severe chastisement from Mr. Henry Solby, for entering the Form-room with a somewhat dirty neck and likewise grimy hands. Others would do well to take note of this, and make full use of the soap. Let's "soap" so, anyway.

We regret to hear that Bernard Glyn the inventor, has met with a nasty accident, thus necessitating his admittance into the "sunny." Rumour has it that, whilst experimenting with electricity, he picked up a live wire. It's pretty "current" that the poor fellow must be having a "shocking" time.

We overhear that Otto Gottfried Schneider, the German master, contemplates "running" over to Germany in the summer. We are of opinion that, should he undertake such a task, he would be somewhat "fagged" at the end of his journey.

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All exhibits submitted for entry become the sole property of Adams & Beemans, Ltd., and competitors may only enter on this distinct understanding. Observance of these simple conditions is an express condition of entry, and the adjudicator's decision is final. Entries must be sent before May 7th, addressed to "Competition," Adams & Beemans Ltd., 89, Great Eastern St., London, E.C.4.

Names and addresses of prize-winners will be announced in the "Daily Mail" of June 6th, 1921.

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EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

Well, I wonder if our story, "Through a Terrible Ordeal," has come up to your expectations? I sincerely hope that you all found it as interesting as I did when I read it. Some of you may come to the conclusion that it is a rather unusual kind of story, and I must confess that this is certainly the case. Now I will let you into a little secret, which no doubt will surprise and interest you not a little. "Through a Terrible Ordeal" is founded upon fact, and it was this which influenced me most of all, and made me decide to publish the story. Truth, as you all know, is often stranger than fiction, and although the effect of the story will be to sadden some hearts, I am sure the publication of it will be all to the good. Needless to say, I am looking forward with great eagerness to your letters so that I can obtain your opinions of this splendid story. Next week I have got a rattling good story for you entitled: "Gore's Great Conquest," and it is one which is certain to meet with your approval. The demand for your favourite paper increases each week, so you would do well to order your copy early to prevent disappointment. The "Gem" so quickly sells out! By the way, I must not forget to mention that there will be another excellent art plate next week. Don't miss it!

YOUR EDITOR.

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