

SPECIAL ERNEST LEVISON NUMBER!

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ERNEST LEVISON'S GREAT SECRET!

A Dramatic Incident from the Magnificent Long Complete School Story Inside.

HOW ERNEST LEVISON CAME TO ST. JIM'S.

MANY readers are under the impression that Levison, after being expelled from Greyfriars, thoroughly reformed, and was sent at once for the Sussex College. Such was not the case, however. His father decided it would be a better policy to take him abroad for a while.

Those of you who read the Levison series in the Gem last autumn will, no doubt, be interested to know that it was then that Levison's father first encountered his trouble with Dirk Power. Ernest Levison had been at St. Jim's more than five years before he attempted reformation. And during those five years some of the "monkey-tricks" he played people were much worse than anything he had tried at Greyfriars.

Levison stayed in North America about two years, and on his return to this side of the Atlantic idled another month in London and Paris. A short time again in London, and then he made his bow at St. Jim's. (It was in GEN No. 142—October 29th, 1910.)

He was met at Rlyconia Station by the chums of Study No. 6, and before any of them had addressed him he gave all a very accurate description of himself.

"You blackguards—you beastly blackguards!" he yelled at the porters who "dumped" out his box to the porterage.

That went down very badly with the Study No. 6 boys, and Blake reprimanded him severely.

"And who on earth do you happen to be?" Levison asked, starting round at the speaker.

"I'm Jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's," was the quiet reply.

"Well, nose-jack Blake, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, will greatly oblige me by keeping his best advice until I ask for it!" was Levison's retort.

Every fault and failing he had possessed at Greyfriars he seemed to have brought with him to St. Jim's. His eyes were like a hawk from the very moment he stepped alight on the train. Indeed, it was rather lucky for him that they were. Tower, Herries' pet bulldog, had been standing by his master's side, watching this new boy, and his gaze never once left Levison's face. With the instinct of an animal, Tower had read Levison's nature. And Ernest Levison, with his eyes wandering about, was just in time to escape a death-dealing spring which Tower was preparing.

Cold, distrustful, restless, ill-natured, but always cool and calculating, with nerves of

iron—this was Ernest Levison when he arrived at St. Jim's. In a strange circumstance, which surrounded him immediately he set foot in St. Jim's formed two of the finest stories Martin Clifford ever penned. The day after his arrival a chess-match was arranged between St. Jim's and Greyfriars. The week previous to his arrival a curious case, to which I can but refer briefly, had occurred. Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, of the Fourth Form had died from no apparent cause, and his body lay in its coffin down in the vaults under the school chapel.

A short while after being told the details of Lumley's death, Levison recalled to mind an incident which had happened in London just after his return from Paris. Levison's father had been conducting business with Mr. Lumley-Lumley, the South American canned-meat millionaire. Levison and the millionaire's son were left with several hours to spare. They spoke briefly, and decided to stroll through London for a couple of hours.

The scene Levison recalled to mind happened in a restaurant, Lumley-Lumley having been taken with a sudden seizure. He went into a mysterious trance, due to heart trouble, but recovered himself as quickly as he had been seized, and was made infuriated because a doctor had been sent for.

Ernest Levison put on his thinking-cap, and at midnight, with Melish, paid a visit to the vaults under the chapel. Melish waited by the door, while as death and terrified almost to the point of insanity. What Levison had thought out proved to be quite right. Lumley was only in a trance, and it was without doubt the nearest escape a fellow ever had from being buried alive!

The Terrible Three were just outside the chapel when Levison came up. If he had been a few minutes later in starting they would have doubtless stopped him from ever entering the place!

Levison was the principal character in "The Greyfriars Victory." Soon after he had arrived at St. Jim's he played a leading part in "Levison, the Schoolboy Detective," and again in "Nobody's Study." Then years later in "The Shadow of the Past" (Double Number, 1917).

To Nobody's Study, a raim held by many to be the best \$9,000-word mystery narrative of St. Jim's Mr. Martin Clifford has ever written, I would willingly give

several pages for a description were there only room.

Nobody's Study, a lonely apartment used as the punishment-room at St. Jim's, held a very strange secret. Levison, during a day's confinement in this room, had discovered it. And this discovery of the whole story was woven. St. Jim's is a very ancient building, home-combed with secret passages, and literally reeking with legends of ancient monks who died or were done to death when the first lot of snow appeared.

Herbert Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's, commenced the great sensation. One evening when the clerk of the weather deigned to send snow, Skimpole took a walk past Nobody's Study. As he strolled, thoughts of the ghostly monk entered his head, and he was terrified to hear soft sounds in the room. With hands that shook he turned the door-handle and peered inside. A dark, ghostly form immediately loomed up before Skimpole, and the genius of the Shell only just mustered enough strength to make himself scarce. He locked the door as he left.

The Terrible Three decided to put Skimpole's extraordinary statement to the test, and went along to see if what he said was true. Together with Bink & Co. a search was made. The room was found locked, as Skimpole said, but the apartment behind it was quite empty. Skimpole was told he must have been in his classes on upside down!

Just after they had left the dreaded apartment, a soft sound came to their ears. As they listened, with quaking hearts, it was repeated—a low, faint sound; the sound of a soft robe swishing on the stone floor. It needed some courage to enter after that; but on succeeding, the room was again found to be quite empty.

The next day carpenters and masons were sent for. Walls were tapped, and the floor was taken up. No discovery was made, however, of a secret entrance.

Interest became greatly increased as days went by and no explanation was forthcoming. The fags even debated on the subject, and in a large body paid a visit to the study. After a short while deep and fearful groans came from the depths of the thick stone walls. But D'Arcy minor, in spite of a great funkiness on the part of his chums, insisted on remaining. The heird groans continued from almost under their feet.

(This interesting article will be concluded in next week's GEN.)

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Levison's Great Secret

A Grand Long Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, featuring Ernest Levison.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Tom Merry is Annoyed.

"I'M sorry, really, Tom Merry, but I can't possibly play." It was Levison major who spoke.

Tom Merry, skipper of the St. Jim's junior cricket team, knitted his brows.

"Rot, old chap!" he said. "We can't do without you."

"You'll have to. It can't be helped."

"But—"

"It's no use butting. Any old goat can do that."

"Be civil, anyway, Levison!" snapped Tom.

"I didn't mean to be anything else. Can't you take a joke?"

"But this isn't a joking matter; and you don't look as if you were joking, either."

"Well, perhaps I don't." Anyway, I assure you that I wasn't intentionally uncivil.

Tom Merry's face took on its customary sunny look. He did not want to quarrel with Ernest Levison. In common with most other decent fellows at St. Jim's, he liked Levison these days.

There had been a time when they barred him. That time had passed. But it had left its marks upon Levison, and it had left memories in the minds of others.

Bygones are bygones, but the past cannot help but affect the present. Fellows like Levison and Talbot, Cardew and Gore, who had things to live down, could not reasonably complain if their comrades' faith in them was not quite as complete as their faith in fellows like Tom Merry or Jack Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Kangaroo, who, without being impossibly perfect, had nothing that could be raked up against them.

Levison had once been a thoroughpaced cad. He had been expelled from Greyfriars in black disgrace, and during his early days at St. Jim's he had been even as he had been at Greyfriars.

Then Frank, his minor, had come along, and because of his strong affection for his younger brother, Ernest Levison had amended his ways.

But he was still secretive sometimes, still moody, almost as difficult to size up in some matters as his chum Cardew.

Clive, who shared Study No. 9 with those two, and was their best pal, was as clear as crystal. One knew where one was with Sidney Clive.

But Clive did not always know where he was with either of his chums, and during the last few days Levison had been puzzling him a good deal.

He had said nothing to anybody, not even to Cardew. He had not questioned Levison. Clive had patience. Levison usually told him his troubles, and he had waited to have this one told him—if, indeed, there were any trouble that was fresh.

But Tom Merry and the rest had noticed nothing. It was easy enough for Levison to keep away from them when he chose. Since the new term began they had seen little of him except at the nets on the cricket ground, but that fact had not struck them as in any way peculiar.

No one had been more regular than Levison at cricket practice. Cardew, who could have been a fine cricketer had he chosen, but who did not care for the fag of keeping himself in form, had more than once remonstrated with him about his excessive devotion to a mere game.

But to fellows like Tom Merry and Kangaroo—to Levison himself—cricket was not a mere game. They were of the tribe of those to whom it is almost a religion.

And now Levison was saying that he could not possibly play in the match with Rylcombe Grammar School.

"See here, old fellow," said Tom coaxingly, "give yourself a chance. You've never been in better form than you are just now. Your bowling is every bit as good as it was last

season—better, if anything—and you're about cent. per cent. better in batting."

Levison smiled. But it was not the kind of smile that Tom liked to see on his face. There was about it something of the craftiness of the old days, the bad old days that Tom Merry would have preferred to forget.

"I think you're right there," Levison answered.

"Now, Fatty Wynn isn't up to the mark yet," Tom went on. "I don't know whether he's been gorging too much, or what it is, but his bowling hasn't the spin or devil it generally has. Any Talbot's chance. He'll bowl in great style one day, and another day he can't bowl for nuts. You're the most dependable trundler we've got."

Pleasure struggled with some other feeling very different in the mind of Levison, and the workings of his mind showed in his face.

"Say you'll play, old man!" pleaded Tom.

"I can't. If I could I would, you may be sure of that. But I've an important engagement on Saturday afternoon."

"Oh, don't talk rot! How can a chap have an engagement more important than a match with the Grammar School?"

"Easily enough, I should say. After all, a school game isn't everything. We sha'n't be here for ever, and—"

Levison pulled himself up as though afraid of letting out too much.

Again Tom Merry choked down rising wrath. He knew that last term Levison's father had met with losses that at one time had brought him near to smash, and that Ernest and Frank had been in danger of having to leave St. Jim's.

Could it be that the trouble had cropped up again?

That might account for Levison's talking as though he saw ahead of him, at no great distance, a road other than the familiar road of life at St. Jim's to be traversed.

It was not often fellows in the Shell or Fourth bothered their heads about the future. The present was good enough for them.

"I know that," Tom said. "But you're not thinking of leaving St. Jim's just yet, surely, Levison?"

"I've had to think of it once lately," answered Levison, with a clouded brow. "I don't know that I'm thinking particularly about it at this moment. Anyway, if I am, it's my affair, not anybody else's, that I can see."

It was not a very friendly reply to a fellow whose sympathy was so strong and so ready as was Tom's, and Tom did not half like it.

He would have gone on to ask whether there was anything wrong again at home; but he felt that he had been asked off.

"Oh, all serene, Levison!" he answered. "I didn't want to be inquisitive. Look here, I'll keep your name on the list till Friday night. It wouldn't be fair to another fellow to stick him in, and then stand him down at the last moment if you found yourself able to play. But I'm making Clive reserve man, and he won't be wanting to step into your shoes, or anyone's, keen as he is."

"Stick him into the team. He's in real good form. I tell you, Merry, I can't play, and there's an end of it."

And Levison turned away, shrugging his shoulders.

Tom frowned as he looked after him. Levison's manner was ungracious, to say the least of it, and Tom thought he might have vouchsafed some sort of explanation.

He went back to his study—No. 10 in the Shell passage. Manners and Lowther were there. Manners was getting tea ready, and grumbling at Lowther because he offered no help. Lowther was writing a humorous article for "Tom Merry's Weekly," and answering the grumbles of Manners with words that had no soothing effect.

"Lazy beggar!" growled Manners. "Put that piffle away, and spread some bread-and-butter, can't you?"

"Spread it yourself, Mary Ann! Th-th's about all you're

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fit for. You really aren't such a bad cook, and I could recommend you with confidence as a scullion—you never leave traces of mustard or egg after you've washed up the plates, not even on the teacloth. But for—"

"More than I can say for you!" struck in Manners. "Your notions of getting things clean are above a bit sketchy!"

"But for brain-work—for anything that requires—"
"I can lick your fat head off at maths, anyway, you dunder! And chess—that wants brains, I reckon! Then—Hullo! What's the matter, Thomas? Anything wrong with the pitch for Saturday's match?"

"That would be serious," Lowther said, with a touch of sarcasm.

Neither Manners nor Lowther took his cricket quite as seriously as did Tom Merry his.

"It would, of course," replied Tom, quite oblivious to the sarcasm. "But I don't know that this isn't as bad. If Levison won't play—and he says he won't—I'd just as soon not have the pitch too jolly perfect, for their bowling will be stronger than ours."

"What's the matter with Levison? Turned sulky about something?" queried Manners.

"No, I shouldn't say he was exactly sulky, though it did get on his car a trifle when I argued with him," said Tom, always fair-minded, though to be so cost him an effort just then. "Says he has an important engagement."

"Well, he might have," returned Manners, putting tea into the teapot with care as to the exact quantity needed.

"What, more important than the Grammar School match, ass?" snapped Tom.

"I suppose it might be, to his way of thinking."

"You're potty! Here, give me a bit of paper and a pencil. I fancied I'd got the team all cut and dried; but if Manners's falling out, I must overhaul the list, and see if we've bowlers enough. No good putting in a man who can only bat with your best bowler's gone back on you."

"Oh, leave it till after tea!" said Manners. "Everything's ready, and I'm peckish. Put that horrible rubbish away, Lowther! Any time will do for that!"

But Lowther went on plying his fountain-pen, and Tom took pencil and paper, and Harry Manners had to sit down to his tea alone.

"Pass me the butter, Tommy," he said.

"Oh, don't bother me!" snorted Tom.

"Lowther, could you come out of that long enough to hand me the butter?"

"Shurrup!" snapped Monty Lowther.

Manners reached the butter for himself.

"Shurrup, Manners!" said Lowther approvingly.

"I don't care about being the only chap in the study who has any," answered his chum.

"I wish you fellows wouldn't chatter like a couple of blessed jackdaws!" said Tom irritably.

"My Sunday topper! Thomas has the grumps!" Lowther said, marking a flourish under the last line of his article, finished now.

"Brrrr!" growled Tom.

Manners looked over his shoulder.

"Self, Talbot, Blake, Noble, Kerr, Figgins, Wynn, D'Arcy, Lowther," he read. "I'm glad you're shoving me in, Tommy!"

"I'm not—at least, I haven't made up my mind yet that I will," replied Tom.

"What's 'self' mean, then?"

"Why, me, of course!"

"Not when I read it."

"Ass!"

"What's the matter with me, anyway?" asked Manners, as Tom added Clive's name to the nine already on the list.

Manners might not be as keen as Tom, but he was keen enough to want a place.

"It's a question whether I can afford to play a fellow who can't bowl much when I've lost my best bowler," Tom answered, biting the end of his pencil.

"But you've got Clive down. He bowls, and you said he would be reserve. He comes in instead of Levison, and I—"

"Clive can't touch Levison as a bowler. The question is whether I put you in for your batting and fielding, or stick in Roylance, who can bowl a bit, too."

"Oh, if it's Roylance, I don't mind!" said Manners.

Tom looked up quickly. He knew that Manners had much the same feeling about Roylance as he had about Talbot. The Terrible Three stood nearer to one another than any of them did to anyone else. But after Manners and Lowther, Talbot counted for far more to Tom than anyone else at St. Jim's; and after Tom and Lowther, Roylance counted far more to Manners.

"You mean that, old chap?" Tom said.

"Of course I mean it!"

"Then I'll shove him down, and you will be twelfth man. I must have bowlers, you know, and Fatty's not in his best form."

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"Right-ho!" said Manners.

If he was disappointed he did not show it. But probably he was not. There was a good deal of unselfishness in Harry Manners, as Tom and Monty Lowther, who knew all his dealings with that wayward minor of his, could testify.

The list was posted directly after tea, and before prep Levison had had to give answers to at least a score of fellows who wanted to know why he was not playing. No, he had not really answered them; but he had growled something in response.

And as yet his own chums, Clive and Cardew, had not asked him.

CHAPTER 2.

Minding One's Own Business.

"SEE here, Ernie, I can't make out why I'm in the team and you're not!" said Sidney Clive to his chum, Levison major, as they got together their books for prep.

"Well, you needn't trouble to go and rag Merry about it!" growled Levison. "I might have played if I'd wanted to. I don't want to—that's all about it. Even if I had been in, I don't see that you might not have been, just the same."

Clive stared at Levison. The little compliment to himself passed unnoticed. At another time it would have pleased him, for Clive took his cricket seriously enough even for Tom Merry.

"You don't want to play!" he gasped.

"Don't talk as if the world was coming to an end!" snapped Levison.

Cardew chuckled behind a book that had nothing to do with the work of next day. Cardew was apt to be giving his attention to English literature at times when it should have been devoted to that of Rome and Greece.

"It isn't the world comin' to an end, Sidney dear," he said. "It's only Ernest comin' to his senses, by gad! Most over-rated game, this cricket. Some of our players—I don't know how many, an' I can't remember their illustrious names—took a little trip to Australia last winter, an' lost some matches, and you'd have thought that the sky had fallen by the fuss people made."

"Shurrup, you potty ass!" snapped Levison. "I'm not coming to my senses—that is, I'm—"

"Sorry to hear it, by heeh!" yawned Cardew. "Still, as you don't mean to play on Saturday, will you—"

"I won't do anything!"

"My dear Ernest, that doesn't sound like you! Dash it all, a vigorous, active fellow like you must be doin' somethin'! That's what I complain of in you. You would be a much more suitable pal for a debonair chap like me, incapable of exertion! himself greatly without disastrous effects, if—"

"Oh, do dry up! I mean I'm not going to do anything that you can possibly come into. Is that straight enough for you?"

"Quite, dear boy. This is where I chuck in my hand. If you are wise, Sidney—"

And Cardew, without bothering to complete his sentence, relapsed into "Strictly Business." The manner in which he held the volume of O. Henry, so that its title was plainly visible to Clive, might—or might not—have been suggestive.

But, anyway, Clive had little use for Cardew's particular brand of wisdom.

"I can't make out what you can be after that you'd put before cricket, Ernest," he said.

"Don't you think that it would be quite a good notion to try minding your own business?" growled Levison.

Clive shut up then. He was hurt, but he said nothing about it. To him, half the pleasure of playing for Tom Merry's eleven would be taken away by Levison's absence. But Levison did not seem to think of that.

Cardew got on with O. Henry, and Clive and Levison got on with their prep.

After half an hour or so Levison looked up.

"Ralph," he said, "there's a stiff bit of Cicero to do. Don't you think—"

"I think, my dear boy," said Cardew, in his most honeyed accents, "that it would be quite a good notion for you to try to mind your own business."

Levison glared at him.

"Right-ho!" he said hotly. "I will, in future, I promise you that!"

"Good!" replied Cardew, unmoved.

Clive always had it when these two got jangling, as they did now and then. But he did not attempt to play peacemaker this time.

Cardew had at last taken up Cicero, and Levison and Clive had done their work when Levison minor looked in.

"Hallo, Ernest!" said Frank. "Hallo, you fellows! I say, isn't old Selby a beast? Reggie Manners—"

"We don't want to hear anything about that young ass!" snapped Frank's major.

Frank looked at him in surprise.

"Ernest speaks only for himself," said Cardew, ready for

any excuse to neglect his work—even one that he could not possibly offer in extenuation to Mr. Lathom. "He's minding his own business, an' of course, the affairs of Manners minor don't come into that. But I am less consistent. I can refrain from interfering in Ernest's business, but I should find it dashed dull if I confined myself strictly to my own. Therefore, say on, ingenious youth!"

"Well, it's nothing much, I suppose," said Frank, with a deprecating look at his major. "It's only that Reggie's had a letter from an aunt of his who wants him to meet her at Brighton as her train goes through, and he asked Selby if he might go, and the old Hun said 'No.' Reggie's no end mad. He says the aunt is good for a tip of a quid at least, and he doesn't see losing that."

"Rough on Reggie, Frank!" said Clive. "Also a bit rough on the rest of you, as no doubt Reggie would have stood treat with his quid."

"Oh, he'd have done that all serene! Reggie's not mean—I'll say that for him."

"Manners major seems to be out of it," remarked Cardew. "Yes; the aunt isn't very fond of him. I don't know why. Reggie's a chum of mine; but I must say that Harry Manners is a much better chap, really. His temper's awkward now and then, but it's nothing to young Reggie's."

"Levison minor! Franky!" called a voice in the passage.

"The Hon. Walter Adolphus requires your presence immediately, if not sooner, Frank, my—er—nephew," said Cardew. "Give the Hon. Walter Adolphus my kind regards, won't you?"

Frank grinned and went to join his chum, D'Arcy minor. "I say, Franky, that kid Reggie says he's jolly well going, for all old Selby may say!" announced Wally. "He hasn't the chink to go by train, but he can get to Brighton on his bike, he says. And he wants us all to go."

"I'm not on," replied Frank at once. "There would be no end of a row if old Selby found out. Perhaps if we won't go, Reggie won't. It's rot, after he's been turned down, you know. Besides, there's cricket. Wouldn't you rather have an afternoon's cricket than fag all that way on a bike?"

"I believe I would, come to that," Wally admitted. "But Hobby and Jammy want to go; Reggie's fed them up with a notion that it may run to a ten-bob note each for all of us if the old aunt likes the look of our mugs. I don't see why she should—at least, not Hobby's or Jammy's. She might like yours—you look so nice and innocent. I dunno about mine—old ladies do like it sometimes. But then they call you a dear little fellow, and want to kiss you. I bar fagging over to Brighton to be kissed, even if there is ten bob hanging to it, and that's a long way off being a dead cert."

"Joe and Curly don't want to go, do they?" asked Frank.

There were seven members of the Third who hung together through thick and thin—D'Arcy minor, Levison minor, Manners minor, Hobbs, Joe Frayne, Curly Gibson, and Jameson, who belonged to the New House.

"Well, no, they don't. But they'll go if we do."

Frank knew what that meant. If the seven did not go it would be because he refused. And if he refused Manners minor would say he was a funk, and Hobbs and Jameson would back up Manners minor.

Brighton was far out of bounds, of course. The other six would be breakers of bounds, which in itself was a heavy offence. But Reggie would be in a worse case. It would be open and flagrant disobedience of his Form-master.

But if the hot-headed and wayward Reggie went—if he was caught out—what would his chums feel about having deserted him?

That was what worried Frank.

"Let's try and choke the silly kid off it," he said. "Where is he now?"

"Gone to speak to his major, I fancy. Come along to Study No. 10. We shan't be intruding—Tom Merry's a pal of mine, when I let him be."

Frank grinned.

As they neared No. 10 of the Shell studies they heard the voice of Manners minor raised in anger.

"Reggie's on his ear again!" said Wally.

But Frank did not think it funny. Frank, who had more than once suffered from Reggie's awkward temper, had lots of sympathy with Manners major.

"Glad you didn't trouble to knock," said Tom Merry, as Wally pushed open the door and entered, followed by Frank.

"Well, I might have knocked if the door had been shut," answered Wally. "But I don't really see why I should, when you've got one of my silly asses in here."

"You may take the animal away," said Monty, Lowther.

"I assure you we have no use for him, Balaam."

"Eh?"

"Wasn't Balaam the gentleman who owned the talking ass?"

"Oh, that chap! Reggie is a bit like his donkey—only more obstinate."

"You shut up, D'Arcy minor!" snapped Reggie. "It's a pity you can't mind your own business, I think. What do you want to follow me here for?"

"To hear your major talk sense to you, kid," returned Wally, grinning.

"Well, if you like his blessed sermons you're welcome to them! I don't, and I'm not going to stand them!"

"Don't be a young idiot, Reggie," said Harry Manners kindly enough. "It's a bit rough on you, I own. I do think Selby might have let you go. But I'm not sure that you haven't yourself to thank for his saying 'No.' If you were a bit more dependable—"

"That don't make a scrap of difference to old Selby," put in Wally. "Why, he'd have said 'No' just the same to me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and Lowther; and Frank laughed, too.

"Can't make out what you silly asses are cackling about," said Wally. "Come along, Reggie, old top. After all, it's a jolly long way on a hot day to Brighton, and I'd rather play cricket myself than fag after aunts."

"I'm not going to play cricket!" answered Manners minor hotly. "I'm going! Selby's an old beast, and I shan't take any notice of him!"

"But that won't hinder him from taking notice of you, kid," Tom Merry said. "You'll go precious close to the sack if you get caught out!"



Fifty yards or so from the fags Manners had averted suddenly to avoid a bit of broken glass. He had side-slipped in the dust and came crashing down by the side of the road. All the fags were looking back at imminent risks of accidents among themselves.

"I don't care! I won't be tyrannised over like this!"

"Look here, Reggie, I ask you not to go," said Harry Manners.

"Fat lot of difference that will make—I don't think!" Reggie replied rudely.

Manners major flushed. He was getting angry.

"I forbid you to go!" he said sternly.

"Mind your own bizney!" snorted Reggie. "You're only jealous because Aunt Grace wanted to see me and not you!"

"That's not true, and you know it! She never has liked me since something you did and I was blamed for years ago."

"Just like you, Harry! Sneaking about a thing that happened over so long ago, when I was a mere kid. Besides, I never asked you to shield me. You could have said it wasn't you if you'd wanted to. I suppose?"

"It's no good talking to you, Reggie. I thought you had come to have some sense of honour and fair play. Wally has, and so has young Levison. Neither of them would have let me down as you did that time. You'd better clear out of this, or I shall get angry with you. But you won't go to Brighton to-morrow—I'll see to that!"

"Will you? I bet you I do go! You mind your own business—preacher!"

And with that Partisan shot Reggie went.

In the passage he turned upon his chums.

"I asked you fellows to go with me," he said nastily.

"At least, I asked D'Arcy, and I meant to ask you, Levison. Now I don't want you—I jolly well won't have you! If I get sacked I'll get sacked alone. I don't suppose any of you will care, and my beastly major will be pleased!"

And he swaggered away from them.

"Nice kid, what?" said Wally.

"He'll come round before Saturday," said Frank.

But he did not more than half believe it.

CHAPTER 3.

The Road to Brighton.

LEVISON MAJOR was not at dinner in Hall on the Saturday. He had said nothing to his chums about being away, and they were surprised at his absence. But Baggy Trimble, who had a way of knowing things that others did not know, said that he had seen Levison on his way to the station soon after morning classes.

"He wouldn't have gone off anywhere by rail without telling us, do you think, Ralph?" said Clive.

"Oh, he might, just by way of teachin' us to mind our own business," answered Cardew lightly. "What Trimble says isn't evidence; but on the whole I wouldn't be surprised if it happened to be true—for once, y'know."

"I don't see why you should imply that I'm in the habit of telling lies, Cardew!" said Baggy, with his snub little nose in the air.

"Short-sighted—what!" returned Cardew.

Racke came up to him just then. He ignored Clive. Racke and Clive had never been on friendly terms, and since the South African junior had attacked the war profiteer's heir and his pal Crooke in their own study they were not even nodded.

"I say, Cardew!"

"Yaas, Racke?"

"Care for a motor-drive this afternoon?"

"Who's goin'?"

"Only Crooke an' I, besides you, if you accept. If you're not on, we may ask Scrope an' Clampe."

"Better ask Scrope an' Clampe, I think," answered Ralph Reckness Cardew. "I'm puttin' in the afternoon watchin' that entrancin' game, cricket. Ever heard of it, Racke?"

Racke departed, scowling. Cardew's reply had certainly not erred on the side of over-politeness. But then Cardew knew perfectly well that there was something behind that invitation—that it was not so much his charming company Racke and Crooke desired as the chance to get something out of him, or to play him some low trick if they failed in that.

Clive's face brightened.

"I'm glad you're coming to watch the game, Ralph," he said.

"Eh? Oh, yaas; I'll come. I don't understand it, of course; but I'll come, by gad!"

If Clive had said that he knew Cardew had made up his mind to be there that his presence might atone for the absence of Levison, Cardew would probably have denied it. But so it was, and Clive knew it.

The South African went up to change. Cardew lounged along to Study No. 9. On the way he ran against Frank Levison.

"Well, nephew Frank, what are you doin' this afternoon?" he asked. "How do you propose to improve the shinin' hours, like the little busy bee, whose nature it was so to do it? Was he going to play cricket," replied Frank. "But I

don't know now. You remember what I told you about young Reggie, Cardew?"

"About Manners minor? Oh, yaas, my child, I remember!"

"Well, the silly young ass has gone to Brighton, after all! Cut off directly after dinner, all alone!"

"Best he should go alone, Franky," said Cardew, his voice changing suddenly. "He'll be sacked if he's rabbed. Now, I shouldn't like you to be sacked—I shouldn't, really, by heck! Ernest an' I might both go to the bow-wows if we lost you."

"I— Oh, see here, Cardew, we can't leave young Reggie in the lurch like his! We're going after him."

"What, out of bounds? Franky, you're—"

"I don't care what I am. And it isn't only me. We're all going. After all, Reggie's our pal. If Ernie was making a silly ass of himself like that you wouldn't—"

Cardew held up his hand to check the flag's eager flow of speech.

"My dear kid," he said, "for anythin' I know to the contrary, Ernest may be makin' precisely the same sort of silly ass of himself that Manners minor is doin'. An', as you see, I'm not movin' hand or foot in the matter."

Next moment he was sorry he had spoken. He had only meant to choke Frank off a risky project; but he saw that he had done more.

The youngster, already worried about Manners minor, had now a fresh source of trouble.

"Oh, I say, Cardew, what's Ernie doing?" he asked, looking up into the Fourth-Former's face with clear, innocent eyes—eyes that always seemed to Cardew the cleverest and most innocent at St. Jim's, though that was not because Frank Levison had been shielded from all knowledge of evil.

"I don't know. Ernest invited me to mind my own business, an' I'm doin' it—hard! I should say you'd better do the same, Frank."

"Do you know where Ernie's gone? I couldn't make out his not playin' in the match."

"I don't. If I did, I'm not sure I'd tell you. We've got to have some faith in your brother, Frank. He deserves that we should, don't you think? I do, my gad!"

"Yes, Cardew. But—"

Frank did not know quite what to say. He appreciated Cardew's faith in Ernest, but he was not wholly free from suspicion that that faith was less complete than Cardew pretended. It is not always easy for perfect understanding to exist between natures so widely different as were those of the sophisticated Cardew and the guileless Levison minor.

"Don't worry, Frank! Ernest is all right. It doesn't follow that because he omits to inform me an' the dear Sidney where he's goin' that he should be goin' on the razzle, does it?"

It did not, of course; but Frank could not feel easy, and he would have said more but that Joe Frayne rushed up just then, seeking him.

"Wally says he wants to know whether you're coming or not, Frank," said Joe.

"Tell him, Frank's not, an' you'd much better not," said Cardew.

"That ain't for you to say, you know, Cardew," Joe answered stoutly.

"True! Out of the mouths of babes an' sucklin's—"

"I'm no babe, nor yet any sucklin'!" protested Joe.

"An' I am not my nephew's keeper," said Cardew. "I must leave it to your common-sense, Frank—if any."

Could it have been left to that, the six might not have followed Reggie Manners. Frank saw clearly enough that it was a silly thing to do. If they were all caught out it would make matters no better for the original culprit—worse, perhaps. But not to go after him was to desert him; so had Wally decreed.

But Wally said things about Reggie as they pedalled away from the gates for Wayland and up over the Downs into the Brighton road.

They were passing through Wayland when they saw Racke and Crooke at a garage. A big touring car was just being run out for those festive young gentlemen. They had come over to the market town by rail, for that was safer than to take the car anywhere near St. Jim's, seeing that they meant to go far out of bounds. But their programme was to be driven back right up to the gates, since on the return journey there would be nothing to prove that they had not hired the car at Wayland.

"Hallo, you kids! Where are you off to?" Racke hailed them.

"Don't answer him, any of you!" ordered Wally. "Like his giddy cheek, calling us kids!"

So the six passed in silence, not even glancing at the two black sheep.

"Wonder whether we shall catch Reggie up?" said Jamieson, when, out beyond Wayland, they were pushing their bikes up a steep hill.

"If we do, I shall make him come back," said Wally.
 "You'll have your work cut out," replied Hobbs. "Young Manners is an awkward little beast."
 "There won't be much in it, either," said Jameson. "I suppose you know we're out of bounds now, Wally? We're as deep in it as he is."

"Not likely! Old Selby didn't refuse us leave to go."
 "He didn't give it to us, any road," Joe Frayne objected.
 "And he'd have said 'No' like a shot if we'd asked him," added Frank.

Wally halted.
 "Do you chaps want to turn back?" he asked scornfully.
 "It wouldn't be half a bad idea," answered Curly Gibson, who had never been exactly in love with the adventure.

"Go, then! But I'm going on!"
 That settled it, of course. No one would have turned back for much money after Wally's pronouncement.

Now the big car passed them, going smoothly and easily up the steep grade, with Racke and Crooke lolling in lordly fashion against its luxurious cushions.

"Nice warm day, kids, what!" called Crooke.
 "Don't answer him!" commanded Wally again.
 They did not answer. They did not even look at the two Shell fellows.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorled Racke and Crooke in chorus.
 "Then they sped on over the top of the hill and down the slope beyond; and some four or five miles farther on they saw in front of them a single cyclist wearing the red-and-white St. Jim's cap."

"Manners minor!" said Racke. "That explains it all. They're chasin' him."

"What for?" asked Crooke.
 "Dashed if I know! How should I? Perhaps the kid's runnin' away."

The horn sounded, and Reggie swerved nearer the edge of the road. He looked up as they passed.

"Hallo, young Manners!" said Racke, grinning. "They're after you, my tulip!"

Reggie's perspiring face puckered itself up in sudden fear. "Who?" he rapped out. For the moment it was of Mr. Selby he thought.

"Your crowd," replied Racke. "Pull up, chauffeur, will you?"

The car halted. Reggie drew alongside, and steadied himself with a hand on the side.

"I don't care about those silly young asses," he said. "But I'd like to know how far behind they are."

"Only just out of sight," said Crooke untruthfully. "See that cloud of dust? I shouldn't wonder if that's them."

"I say, though, that's rather rotten! I shouldn't wonder if they try to make me go back."

"Kick their shins if they do," suggested Racke, with an ugly grin.

"They could stop me. There are half a dozen of them. Both the silly kids! Why can't they mind their own business?"

"Like a lift, Reggie?" inquired Racke.
 "My word, wouldn't I just!"

There had been a time when Reggie Manners had been taken up by this precious pair, who had done their worst to make him as complete a little blackguard as they had helped to make Reuben Piggott.

Harry Manners had stopped that, taking a stronger course than most of his chums would have dared. If those two would not leave his minor alone, he would go straight to the Head, he told them, and not care what anyone might say about sneaking.

Racke and Crooke owed him a grudge for that, and it was not the only grudge they had against him. They did not want Reggie now, but they knew that his brother would hate to know that he had been with them; and he could hardly do anything in the matter without dragging Reggie into a row. Moreover, the chums of Manners minor had refused to take any notice of Racke and Crooke, and to give Reggie a lift was to put him quite out of the reach of them pursuing.

So Reggie's bike was fastened on behind, and the fag got into the car, settled himself with his back to the windscreen, and enjoyed himself greatly, speeding along without labour, where, otherwise,

he must have pedalled wearily and hotly through the thick dust and the glaring sunshine.

He chuckled as he thought of the six toiling behind, dropping yet farther and farther behind with every minute that passed.

But he did not think at all of another who was also on the road to Brighton. He had not guessed that his major would follow; and Harry Manners had passed through Wayland after Racke and Crooke had gone.

As reserve man, he had put on fannels and blazer, and was on his way to Little Side when he ran against Cardew and Clive.

Cardew had just told Clive about the fags' expedition, and the South African thought that Manners major ought to know.

"I say, Manners, I don't want to butt in," he said diffidently, "but do you know that that young ass of a brother of yours has cut off to Brighton after Selby had refused him leave, and that all his crowd have gone after him?"

"What? Oh, the little idiot! I thought he'd given up that fool notion. Thanks for telling me, Clive. I ought to go after him—I must go after him—but—"

At that moment Tom Merry and Lowther came up.

"Tom," said Manners, "that silly kid has bunked off to Brighton, and Wally D'Arcy and young Levison and the rest of them have gone after him. Is it to fetch him back, Clive?"

"What do you make of it, Cardew?" inquired Clive. "It was you who saw Frank."

"I rather fancy their intention is to retrieve him. But I'm not so dashed sure they'll bring it off."

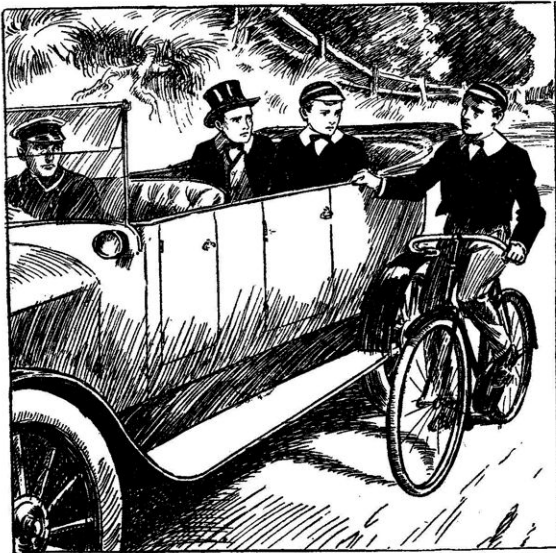
"Hang it all, this is serious!" said Lowther. "Baggy Trimble says old Selby's gone to Brighton himself this afternoon!"

"My hat! Tom, I must cut after them! I sha'n't be wanted for the match, you know."

"We might want a man. But that's all right. You can get your fannels on, Cardew," said Tom. "I certainly think you ought to go, Harry."

Manners, not willing to lose time in changing out of his cricket garb, hurried off to the bike-shed at once. Cardew went back to the School House, and Tom, Lowther, and Clive proceeded on their way to Little Side.

Thus did it come about that Manners major was also on the Brighton road that hot May afternoon.



"Hallo, young Manners!" said Racke. "They're after you, my tulip." Reggie's perspiring face puckered itself up in sudden fear. "Who?" he rapped out. "For a moment it was of Mr. Selby he thought. 'Your crowd,' replied Racke. 'Pull up, chauffeur, will you?' The car halted."

CHAPTER 4.

At Brighton.

THE six fags were freewheeling down the far side of the hill, on the near side of which they had been overhauled by the motorists, when Harry Manners, mounting his machine on the crest, espied them.

It was at an absolutely reckless speed that Manners rushed down that hill. The wind whistled past his face as he rode, catching his breath if he opened his mouth, so that to shout was of little use.

At the foot of the hill Wally looked round.

"My hat!" he said. "Here comes one of our chaps in some hurry!"

"It's Reggie's major!" said Frank.

"He'll send us back," Curly Gibson said.

Wally snorted, and Hobbs and Jameson followed suit.

"I'd like to see myself taking orders from a Shellfish!" said the leader of the Third.

"Rather not!" agreed Jameson. "Who's Manners, anyway?"

"You dry up, Jammy! Manners is a jolly decent chap—much better than any of your mouldy New House fellows!" "The New House is—"

But what the New House was they never heard, for Jameson's speech was cut short by something that caused them all to gasp in alarm.

Fifty yards or so from them Manners had swerved suddenly to avoid a bit of broken glass, had sideslipped in the dust, and came crashing down by the side of the road.

All the fags were looking back, at imminent risk of accidents among themselves, and as they witnessed the fall of Manners there was a collision between Gibson and Hobbs, who both sprawled.

No one took any notice of them. The other four had dismounted with quite as much haste but with less clumsiness, thrown down their bikes on the grassy edge of the highway, and started to rush for Manners.

He was sitting up when they reached him, his face covered with blood. His body had smitten the turf, and, though shaken, he was not much damaged anywhere but about the face; but that had landed on a pile of road metal and was cut about nastily.

"Is my bike crocked?" was the first thing he said.

Wally and Frank examined the machine with care, and pronounced it practically unaffected. It was scratched a bit, but there was no buckling, and the pedal cranks were not bent.

"You kids are out of bounds," was Manners' second speech. "What's the odds?" answered Wally. "So are you, come to that!"

"But that's different. I'm going to fetch my minor back."

"No difference at all," replied Frank. "That's what we're going for; though I'm not so jolly sure that he'll come back for you or for us, unless we make him."

"And it won't be easy making him if he refuses to ride," added Jameson.

"I'll make him!" snapped Manners, mopping his bleeding face.

"We'll come along and see you do it," Wally said.

Down the hill by the hedgerow trickled a clear little stream. Frank went to this, and came back with water in his cap. It leaked fast, but enough was left to help Manners to clear his face from blood, though the scratches still oozed.

"Thanks, young Levison!" said Manners. "Look here, you lot. I know you mean well. You're standing by a pal—who isn't worth it, by the way. I've nothing against that. I think the better of you for it. But I ask you to go back. It only means a wretched row if you're caught out."

Two or three of them wavered. Curly Gibson and Joe Frayne had not wanted to go, any more than Frank really had; and all three of these were impressed by the fact that Manners asked them to return, instead of ordering them to go. But, while Gibson was glad of an excuse to chuck the quinine enterprise, and Joe would willingly have returned had the others agreed, Frank was as firm as Wally.

"It would be much better if you went back, Manners," he said. "You aren't any way fit for a long ride in this heat after that spill."

"I'm going on," replied Manners doggedly. "The question is whether you're going to show sense enough to turn back."

"Can't be done!" Wally said resolutely.

"All right! But I wash my hands of it!"

"Will you let us ride along with you, Manners?" Frank asked, for he did not think the Shell fellow fit to ride on alone.

"I can't hinder you, if you can keep up," answered Manners ungraciously.

They kept up easily enough. Manners had been shaken by his fall, and could not ride at his usual pace. Even at that most of the six would probably have been able to ride beside him.

Along the hot, dusty road they plugged together for a time,

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until the fags were delayed, and Manners major went on without them.

Meanwhile, Reggie was doing the journey quite comfortably.

"Where are you chaps going?" he inquired of Racke and Crooke.

"On through Brighton to Shoreham and Worthing, and back by another road—part of the way, at any rate," replied Racke. "It isn't too safe hangin' around in Brighton—place where you might meet anybody, by gad! Care to come with us, kid?"

"I shouldn't mind," answered Reggie. "This suits me all right. But I've got to meet my aunt at Brighton Central at twenty past four."

"Time to come along with us a bit farther, anyway," Racke said. "Tell you what. We'll drop you at Hove station. We're not goin' to the Central, but we can pass within a few yards of Hove, an' there's a train from there to Brighton every few minutes."

"Right-ho!" said Reggie.

And thus it was that, driving along one of the less-frequented streets north of the Western Road and its continuation under various names towards Shoreham, all three saw Levison major come out of an hotel.

He was not alone. There was a fellow with him whom none of them recognised.

"Oh, by gad! Levison on the randan again!" chuckled Crooke. "He's goin' pretty far afield this time, I must say!"

"But there's no doubt about the randan!" returned Racke, with an evil leer. "Quite like old times, this—what, Gerry? Shall we turn back an' join him?"

"Leave the sweep to himself!" growled Crooke. "I don't want his company, if you do!"

"I don't think he saw us," remarked Reggie.

A minute or so later he bade farewell to his Shell patrons. He and his bike were set down only fifty yards or so from Hove station, according to promise, and then they drove on.

"I don't see why you bothered with that young pup, Aubrey," Crooke said pleasantly.

"If I hadn't the pursuers might have caught him up an' headed him off!" answered Racke.

"Do you want him sacked, then?"

"Not so much on his own account. But it would be a score against his brother, wouldn't it?"

"Well, yes, so it would," agreed Crooke. "I say, I'm gettin' bit fed up with fresh air, an' all that sort of rot. Let's stop somewhere before long for a game of billiards."

Ernest Levison had not noticed the occupants of the car. It had not occurred to him that he was likely to see anyone whom he knew in Brighton.

But within half an hour of being seen by those three he nearly walked into the arms of Mr. Selby.

It was not often the master of the Third Form went off for an afternoon by the sea; and it is quite possible that it was not enjoyment that brought him to Brighton that day, for he was some distance from the front when Levison, turning a corner hard by where select Hove merges imperceptibly into more popular Brighton, saw him just in time to dodge back.

So close was he that Levison could do no better than retreat hastily into an open garden, and crouch behind a shrub till he had passed. There he felt as though the eyes of half the residents in the street must be upon his back as he hid, and he hoped devoutly that the people to whom that particular garden belonged did not chance to be at their front windows.

Mr. Selby passed. Levison darted out and round the corner in desperate haste. Whether he had been seen by anyone he never knew. But it did at least seem that he had not been spotted by Mr. Selby.

He got on top of a bus, and stayed there till the end of the Western Road was reached. Then he scrambled down, and made his way to the Central station.

Just as he drew near its gloomy portals he became aware of quite a small crowd of fellows wearing the red-and-white St. Jim's caps ahead of him.

"What on earth are those silly kids doing here?" he muttered. "Why there's young Frank among them! It's Wally D'Arcy's little lot, of course. But surely they've never had the cheek to come here after me?"

A moment's reflection convinced him that this could not be the explanation of the fags' presence in Brighton. He had told no one where he was going, and it was impossible that anyone should have guessed.

Levison knew that Mr. Selby would not have come to Brighton after him, though he also knew that the master would not be at all sorry to make trouble for him had he caught him there.

But nothing was more likely than that he should come in pursuit of these stray lambs from his own flock.

They must be warned.

It was a nuisance. Ernest Levison had particularly wanted

to keep his visit to the big seaside town a dead secret. But he did not hesitate about what he should do. He might run foolish risks himself, but he was not going to have his minor nabbed by the Form tyrant if he could help it.

He followed the fags into the station. They were looking about them rather uncertainly. Somehow they had quite expected to spot Reggie at once. But he was not visible, and they did not know quite what to do.

"Hallo, Frank! What are you doing here?" spoke a familiar voice in their rear.

All turned their heads. Wally and Jameson grinned cheerily. Levison major was not a senior, and they did not care about anything he could say to them. But Frank did not grin.

"Oh, Ernie, Cardew said—"

Then he stopped short, feeling that he ought not to repeat what Cardew had said.

"Well?" snapped his brother.

Wally struck in.

"Seen young Manners, Levison?" he inquired. "We're after him."

Then Levison noticed that there were only six of them, not seven, as was usual.

"After him? What for?" he asked.

"The young ass asked Selby to—"

"Oh, I've heard all about that, though I'd forgotten it completely," Levison interrupted him. "Do you mean to say that you little idiots came along to fetch him back?"

"Well, you've let yourself in for a pretty row! Selby's after you!"

"What?"

"Have you seen the old Hun, Levison?"

"Did he see you, Ernie?"

That last query was from Frank, of course.

"No, he didn't. But I only just dodged him. Where is young Manners?"

"That's just what we want to know," Wally said.

"We don't know where his major is, either," added Jameson. "He rode on when Hobby's back tyre went bust, and we haven't seen him since."

"Manners major? What was he doing with you lot?"

"Came after Reggie," explained Joe Frayne. "Caught us up—at least, we stopped for him, because he'd had a spill, an."

"Oh, my hat! We'd better all get together, I should think, and give old Selby the chance of his nasty life!" groaned Ernest Levison. "What a haul for him! Seven of his own Form, and a sample each from the Shell and the Fourth! Won't he be pleased?"

"But you've got leave, haven't you, Ernie?" asked Frank anxiously.

"What's that to do with you? No, I haven't, if you must know. I'm in the same box as the rest of you, except that I wasn't idiot enough to come here on anybody's business but my own!"

"Well, it was jolly decent of you to come along and warn us, anyway," said Wally.

To Levison major that smacked just a little too much of the old adage about giving the devil his due. He did not want the thanks of the fags; he told himself—though it was not quite true—that he would not have bothered about warning them had not Frank been there. He spoke rather ill-temperedly.

"I shouldn't have been here, only I came by train, and I'm going back by train. The best thing you kids can do is to take the road home this moment!"

"Not without young Reggie!" replied Wally determinedly.

"Hallo! There the young maniac is!"

"And there's Manners major!" said Curly Gibson.

The brothers were together; but that was the merest accident, for Harry Manners had only just found his minor.

CHAPTER 5.

Taking Too Much for Granted!

"YOU are a set of silly chumps!" said Manners minor.

"What did you want to come tailing after me for? I told you I wouldn't have you."

"Oh, dry up, you young idiot!" snapped his brother. "They seem to think a dashed sight more of you than you're worth, if you ask me. They will get into no end of a row if they're spotted, and—"

"And it's about even chances they will be!" broke in Levison major. "That old Hun of a Selby is in the town!"

"Whew! The sooner we all clear out of this the better," answered Harry Manners. "You kids bunk this moment!"

"Aren't you coming with us?" asked Wally. "Levison's going back by train, you know."

"I'm not! I've had enough of my minor for one day. Take him along, and lose him on the way, if you like. He's no good to anyone."

Reggie put out his tongue at his major. Next moment he ejaculated:

"Ow!"

Wally had chucked him under the chin—hard.

"You're an ungrateful young beast, and you oughtn't to be named Manners, for I'm banged if you've got any!" said D'Arcy minor hotly.

"I didn't ask him to come, did I? I didn't ask any of you to come, and if you get in a row for it you've only got your own silly selves to blame! Why can't you mind your own bizzey?"

"Oh, take it away, or I shall do it a damage!" snapped Manners minor.

Reggie did not put out his tongue again. But he made a rude grimace.

The seven cleared off, jangling. Frank would have lingered, but his brother waved him away.

"You've got leave, I suppose, Levison?" said Harry Manners.

"I haven't, though."

Manners stared at the speaker in surprise.

"You're taking a big risk," he said.

"No more than you are!"

Levison's tone was not very friendly.

"I came to fetch that silly young ass back. But you couldn't have come after your minor, for you must have started before he did. I don't think it's quite the thing to chuck an important match to come over here."

"I'm not aware that I've asked you for your opinion."

"Don't get on your ear, Levison! You know yourself that—"

"I suppose you think I've taken to blagging again—eh?"

"Well, if I had that notion, I don't see how you could say it was a very far-fetched one. When a fellow—"

"That's enough, Manners! If you don't want to get nabbed you'd better hook it. I'm bound to take the risk of Selby's going back by the same train as I do; but there's no need for you to hang about here, and if you fancy that I want you to share my risk, you're jolly well mistaken!"

Manners turned his back at once. He went off to get his bike, which he had left in charge of a porter, and Levison made for the platform whence his train would start. He was safer in the train than elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the seven fags had soon made up their differences. When once they had reached the outskirts of Brighton they felt that they were fairly safe from Mr. Selby, and Curly Gibson inquired of Reggie the result of his meeting with his aunt.

"Oh, I saw her, all serene," replied Reggie, "and she stumped up better than I'd expected. I've got a quid! Let's go into this shop and have some ginger-pop and a snack of grub."

"Good notion! But I reckon your major ought to have half the tip," replied Wally, as they dismounted.

"Rot! It wasn't meant for him, and, anyway, he wouldn't take it. I say, young Levison, it's a pity your major should have gone on the loose again! I'll say this for my beast of a brother—he doesn't do that. Not so jolly sure that I wouldn't rather he did than be such a giddy old sermoniser, though. Why, what's the matter, you silly kid?"

Frank's face was working, and his hands were clenched.

"You've got to take that back, Manners minor!" he said hotly.

"Take what back, fathead?"

"What you said about my major!"

"Why should I? It's true."

"It isn't true! You're lying!"

"Look here, young Levison, you can't call me a liar, you know. I'm not a plaster saint, like you and my major; but I'm not a liar!"

"Come along, Franky, and don't get your wool off!" said Wally soothingly. "I know you're thirsty—we all are—and there's no sense in quarrelling with Reggie because—"

"Because he tells lies about my major? I'd quarrel with anyone who did that!" flashed Frank.

"Are they lies? It's no good saying things like that, Reggie, unless you've some proof," Wally said judiciously.

"But if you have any proof, I don't see why Franky should kick."

"I don't want to make a silly fuss; but I saw Levison major come out of a pub," replied Manners minor. "That's all I know. Young Levison may believe he went in there just to ask the time; but I'm not so green as all that comes to. And two more of St. Jim's fellows saw him."

"Who were they?" demanded Wally.

Frank said nothing, but there was trouble in his face that made Reggie Manners sorry he had spoken. He did not really want to hurt his chum's feelings, and he realised that he had made a mistake in saying anything about those other St. Jim's fellows.

"That doesn't matter a scrap!" he replied hastily. "You bet it does!" retorted Wally. "Reggie, you young cad, you've been with Racke and Crooke!"

"Young rotter!" exclaimed Jameson, with scorn as withdrawing as his leader's.

And if the other four did not voice their scorn they looked it.

Manners' minor's chums were all of one mind as to the folly of his having anything to do with Racke and Crooke. "That's how it was we didn't catch you up, then!" said Hobbs.

"You wouldn't have caught me, anyway. And where's the harm of riding a few miles in a car with those two? They aren't so bad as all that comes to."

"It wasn't a decent trick to play on us!" Wally answered severely. "You knew we were after you. Those two sweeps told you, I'll bet. I'll bet!"

"I never asked you to follow me, and I think you were silly asses to do it!" broke in Reggie. "If anyone wants a drink and some grub, he'd better come along sharp, that's all. We shall be late for locking-up if you hang about here like this!"

Five of the other six wavered. They saw that it was impossible to go on ragging Reggie if they let him stand treat then. They were very thirsty, and ragging Reggie was not a profitable business, after all.

They gave way, and followed him into the shop.

The only one of them all who did not waver was Frank Levison. He was as thirsty as the rest, but if his tongue had been fairly hanging out of his mouth, he would not have accepted a drink at Reggie's expense.

"Aren't you coming, young Levison?" asked Manners minor, rather unpleasantly.

"No, I'm not!" replied Frank.

"Do as you like! It was the truth I told about your major, and there's no harm in telling the truth, I suppose?"

"Come on, Frank!" pleaded Wally. Frank shook his head. He waited outside while the rest ate and drank; and when they rode on afterwards he and Joe Frayne left behind the rest. He would not go anywhere nearer Reggie than he could help; and Joe—as usual, when the two fell out—took Frank's side, and felt sorry that he had not been resolute enough to decline Reggie's treat.

Manners major did not catch them up. He could have done had he chosen, for two or three of them had had more than enough before St. Jim's was reached; but when he sighted them ahead he slowed down.

Ernest Levison, in spite of the change into the branch-line train at Wayland Junction, got back as soon as they did, and was at the gates when Harry Manners rode up to them.

He did not speak. Manners opened his mouth to say something, but, seeing the look on the other fellow's face, closed it without a word, and walked his bike to the shed, with a very thoughtful countenance.

Not for a long time past had Levison looked more like the Levison of old.

"Self-righteous idiot!" he muttered. "Ready to believe that chap's going to the bow-wow on the slightest excuse, without a scrap of proof. It's almost enough to make one stop playing the game. If it wasn't for Cardew and Clive, I'd feel more than half inclined to stop it!"

Manners, having had a wash and attended to the cuts about his face, went to Little Side. The match was not yet over. In point of fact, it was in a very interesting stage.

Manners was surprised to find his chum Lowther in the pavilion. But when Lowther showed him a bandaged hand he understood.

"It was rough luck!" said Lowther. "I'd made twenty three, and felt really in form, and then a ball from Gay got up and gave me that most shocking whack on the hand! I've put arms on it—that's why the rag's on. But I wasn't fit to field, so Cardew's got a job on hand. Joke, isn't it, considering how fond he is of hard work?"

"Where is he?" inquired Manners, looking round for the substitute. "Oh, I see! Tommy's put him in the long field!"

"That is the joke!" chuckled Lowther. "He's had to run about no end. But I'll say this for the bouncer—he's fielded clinking well!"

"He can if he chooses!" replied Manners. "He's lazy. But there aren't many fellows in either the Shell or Fourth who could lick him at anything he liked to take up seriously."

"What have you been doing with your face?" Lowther asked. "You look rather as if you might have had an argument with a garden-rake!"

Manners explained. Then Lowther told him all about how the game had gone. The wicket had been a trifle on the fiery side, and throughout the fast bowlers had bunched a bit. In spite of that, Tom Merry, Talbot, and Kangaroo had all made over forty in St. Jim's first. No one else had done much, and the total was 155—credible, but not remarkable! The Rylee fellows had only been able to get 108, and would have been in a very bad way but for Gordon Gay, who had carried his bat right through the innings for 61, no one else making more than a dozen.

Then Gay and Carboy, pounding them down hard, had

lowered five wickets of St. Jim's for 25, Talbot going for a single and Tom Merry and Kangaroo for a duck each. But Lowther and Roynance had made a stand at this point, adding 35 before Monty was obliged to retire hurt, and after that Clive and the New Zealander had stuck together and added 30 more. The result of their plucky play was that Gordon Gay's team were set 145 to get for victory, which promised well for the home team.

But, after Gay himself had gone cheaply, the Wootton brothers had played up in great style. Talbot, who had taken eight wickets in the first innings, was little use this time. Patty Wynn was dead off colour, and never looked like getting a wicket. The Australian brothers had put on nearly 80 before Clive, who had been tried before without success, lowered Harry Wootton's middle stump, and a minute or two later Roynance got Jack Wootton caught at a point.

Now the two colonial juniors were still on, both bowling well; two more wickets had fallen; Carboy and a new fellow, named Willis, were in and playing well; and Rylecombe needed 46 with five to go.

Cardew, sprinting finely, turned what had looked like a boundary into a hard-run two, and then threw himself down on the turf as though utterly exhausted.

"Get up, lazybones!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Oh dear! What a blessing it is to-morrow's Sunday!" groaned Ralph Reckness, as he rose.

Carboy slammed out at Clive, and the ball looked like going over the ropes.

"Catch it, Cardew!" yelled Tom.

"Oh dear! Oh, by heavens! Oh, really!" panted Cardew, as he started for the catch.

Perhaps he was the only person on the ground who thought he had the slightest chance of making it. Few there had realised that Cardew could run so fast. None knew that he was so sure of eye, or had such judgment, though all were aware that he was cool enough for anything.

He had twenty yards to run to get in the line of the ball's flight, and then he had to swing round, face it, and judge it, hampered by the sun, now getting low in the sky.

"My hat! He's done it!" exclaimed Manners.

"No, he's dropped it! No, he's got it again! Oh, well caught, Cardew!" roared Lowther.

And the fieldsmen shouted applause as Carboy, who had looked dangerous, made his way to the pavilion, out to the best catch of the day.

After that the Grammar School resistance petered out. A few more runs were made by the tail-end men; but nothing like a stand occurred, and inside of a quarter of an hour Tom Merry's team had won by 32 runs.

As Tom Merry, Lowther, and Manners made their way together across the quad to the School House they sighted Levison.

Tom's forehead contracted.

"Levison!" he called.

"Well?" returned the Fourth-Former, stopping, but not moving towards the leader of the juniors.

Tom walked up to him, and Lowther and Manners accompanied him, though Manners, at least, had no notion what was coming.

"I'm going to talk straight to you, Levison!" said Tom.

"I prefer that way of talking," replied Levison.

"Do you? Then have it! I think a fellow who leaves his side in the lurch to go to Brighton pub-haunting is a wretched outsider!"

Levison's hand shot out, and those near heard the sound of a slap almost like the crack of a pistol.

But it was not Tom Merry's face that was slapped. It was the face of Harry Manners.

"What the—why—Oh, you silly idiot! What's that for?" demanded Manners hotly.

"You don't know, do you?" sneered Levison, his face gone suddenly pale.

"I know that you'll jolly well have to fight me for this!" returned Manners.

"That's what I want," said Levison.

But he would not have wanted it had he known the truth. Levison was taking altogether too much for granted!

CHAPTER 6.

Four Fights!

"WHAT on earth did the fellow do that for?" asked Manners, when the Terrible Three were in Study No. 10.

He put his hand to his smarting face. Harry Manners had no ill-will towards Levison major. In spite of all their trouble with him in the past, the Terrible Three had been as one man in their willingness to accept him as the right sort when once he had shown himself so. Tom Merry may have been readier than either of the others to perceive the earliest signs of grace in him; but that was Tom's way. And, later, when all had to admit that Levison

was going straight, Manners and Lowther had been as quick to establish new relations with him as Tom had.

Now, all three felt as though, after all, they must have been badly wrong about Levison; and Manners felt it most keenly of all. When he had spoken to the Fourth-Former at the Central Station there had been nothing in his mind but friendliness. The expression given to his well-intended words had annoyed him; but he had got over his resentment before he saw Levison at the gates.

It had been made plain to him then that Levison had not conquered his. But, even so, Manners could not understand why the fellow should slap his face for something Tom Merry had said.

"He must have thought that I got it from you!" said Tom.

Lowther nudged Tom. Manners did not see that. "Why, I didn't even know it!" he said, in surprise. "I saw him at the station, not at any pub, and there wasn't any sign on him of having been to a pub, either!"

"I'll go and see him," Tom volunteered. "Look here, Harry! I don't want to fight Levison. If he apologises—"

"I won't take an apology from him—confound the fellow! Don't you go and see him thinking that you'll please me."

But Tom went. He thought it only right that Levison should know the truth, anyway.

If there was a spark of decency left in the fellow he would apologise after that. And if he apologised, Manners would hardly insist upon fighting, once he had cooled down.

"Who did tell Tommy that yarn?" asked Manners of Lowther.

"You didn't. I can answer for that. So it must have been someone else!"

"Of course it must, fathead! Question is—who?"

But Lowther did not want to answer that question. He had nudged Tom Merry to prevent his saying too much. Monty Lowther was not sure that he had not been talking too much himself.

Talbot, Harry Noble, and Gore came in at that moment. "That fellow Levison is the giddy outside edge!" said Kangaroo.

"I hope you'll give him a dashed good hiding, Manners!" Gore said.

"And I hope Manners won't!" rejoined Talbot. "I don't see why he should! When Levison knows that he has made a mistake—"

"Would you accept an apology from a rotter who had slapped your face?" snapped Manners, turning on Talbot fiercely.

"Not from a rotter," replied Talbot quietly. "But I don't think Levison is that."

"You were always a bit soft about Levison," said Manners, with something like a sneer. "But I don't put up with having my face smacked, especially when I've done nothing to justify it. Either I thrash Levison, or he thrashes me; there's no other way out of it! I'm going to ask Roylance to second me; it doesn't look as if Tom or any of you fellows would be very keen."

"I'll second you, like a shot, Manners!" said Gore.

"I don't mind, if you'll have me," Kangaroo said. "I don't quite agree with Talbot. He and Tom are the only juniors at St. Jim's who could afford to take a slap in the face and not have a go at the slapper. No one could suspect either of them of cold feet. But for the rest of us—well, I'm not turning the other cheek for one, and I shouldn't expect you to do it, Manners."

"Thanks, Kangy," replied Manners, his face softening. "I'm obliged for your offer—yours, too, Gore. But if you don't mind I'll ask Roylance."

He went. Talbot turned to Lowther.

"How did Tom hear about Levison?" he asked.

"I told him," answered Lowther. "I wish I hadn't said anything now."

"But how could you know? You've been on the ground all the afternoon, and this seems to have happened at Brighton."

"Oh, hang it, I suppose I've got to confess! When I came

in to see my hand I ran against Manners minor. He and the rest of that crowd of kids had been over to Brighton, and he'd seen Levison come out of a pub."

"Manners major ought to be told this, and Levison, too," said Gore. "If this came out through young Manners sneaking—"

"Hardly sneaking; I'm not a person in authority," broke in Lowther. "I don't want to make the kid out worse than he is."

"I don't see that it makes much odds," Gore said bluntly. "He didn't mean to do Levison a good turn when he told you. But Levison will apologise if he knows it wasn't Harry Manners, and Harry will accept the apology when he knows that it was through Reggie the yarn leaked out."

"But he mustn't know!" exclaimed Lowther. Gore stared at him, and Kangaroo looked surprised. But Talbot understood.

"Why not?" rapped out Gore.

"If you knew half the trouble he's had over that minor of his! Old Manners doesn't show things much; but Tommy and I can see—Talbot, too, I fancy. He's fagged all the way to Brighton to stop that silly young ass this afternoon, and had a nasty spill on the road; and he will feel beastly sick if he knows young Reggie's been making mischief like this."

Well, I suppose you know best," Gore said. "What do you think Tom?"

"I'm doubtful," replied Kangaroo. "I wouldn't go a giddy inch out of my way to shield Manners minor. But as far as I can make out that's not what Lowther's after. I think it's a pity those two should fight as it is, though."

"I don't care about that young beast, Reggie," said Lowther. "It's my pal I'm thinking of, and perhaps a bit of myself. It won't be pleasant for me if Manners knows that that slap in the face came to him partly through me."

But none of the three believed that Lowther was thinking much of himself. Where Tom Merry or Manners was concerned that was not like Lowther.

Tom came back.

"He won't apologise," he said. "He seems to have got it fixed in his mind that no one but Harry could have told me. Says he's certain Harry knew. I nearly blurted out the



Mr. Selby was some distance from the front when Levison, turning a corner, saw him just in time to dodge back. So close was he that Levison could do no better than retreat hastily into an open garden, and crouch behind a shrub till he had passed.

truth; but somehow I felt that that would only make matters worse. Levison might say Harry put the kid up to it, or something. He's in an awkward mood, and ready to believe any rot."

"Well, I don't much see keeping it dark," said Gore.

"But I won't say anything."

Talbot and Noble and Gore left.

"Where's Manners?" inquired Tom.

"Gone to ask Roylance to second him. Won't have either of us, and turned down his shoulders."

"I suppose we've got to go through with it," he said.

"After all, there are worse things than a fight. It's a thousand times worse if that fellow Levison really has broken out again."

"Think so?" growled Lowther, who seldom growled. "I don't. I'm worrying a heap more about our pal than I am about that outsider!"

But Cardew and Clive, who naturally were not so ready to believe their pal an outsider, were worried about Levison.

He did not vouchsafe any information to them. They heard what he said to Tom Merry and what Tom said to him; but when Tom had gone, Levison relapsed into silence.

Cardew touched Clive on the shoulder, and the two went out together.

"I don't know what rum games the dear Ernest has been up to, or why he's been up to them, Sidney," said Cardew. "But I take it that we don't renounce him on account of anything he's done or supposed to have done?"

"I should jolly well say not!" replied Clive.

"So good, so far. Now I know who spread this yarn about him; an' I propose to take measures accordingly."

"It wasn't Manners, then? I'm glad of that, though I can't see that he'd have been so far wrong in telling Tom Merry, anyway."

"No, it wasn't Manners."

"Who was it?"

"You'll see! Come along with me, an' do as I do!"

Cardew led the way to the study on the Shell passage which was shared by Racke and Crooke. Clive followed him, wondering.

Cardew tapped at the door.

"Come in!" called Racke.

The two walked in. Cardew, smiling blandly, stepped up to Racke and smacked his face hard.

Clive, wondering still, smacked Crooke's face.

"What's that for, you sweep?" snarled Racke.

"All right, Clive. You'll pay for this!" roared Crooke.

"I don't like your dial a little bit, an' I felt a sudden temptation to slap it," drawled Cardew. "Of course, I know what it means. Pistols are out of date. Shall we say fists, an' soon?"

"It's true about your precious pal, an' I don't see why you two rotters should come here an' assault us for mentionin' it!" Racke said sullenly.

Then Clive understood.

"Do you mean Levison? I haven't mentioned his name till now, but, of course, he's our best pal," answered Cardew, looking ingenuously mystified.

"Yaas, I mean Levison, an' you know I do. I tell you we saw him comin' out of a pub at Bri—"

Smiling still, Cardew smacked Racke's face again; and Clive, following suit, smacked Crooke's, though Crooke had said nothing.

Racke and Crooke were not great fighting men; but they agreed to fight after that.

"Good lad, Sidney!" said Cardew, when they were in the passage again. "I heard those two had been shootin' off their mouths, an' as it appears that either our good Ernest has to thrash the worthy Manners, or the worthy Manners has to thrash him—alternatives repugnant to every well-regulated mind—I felt that it was up to me to provide for two thrashings that all well-regulated minds will appreciate. Q. E. F. 'Nuff said!"

But that was not all. In the Third Form-room at that same moment Frank Levison, red with anger, faced Reggie Manners, sulky and more than half-ashamed of himself.

"You are a rotten young cad, Manners minor!" Frank said hotly. "I never thought even you would do a thing like this!"

"I did it to get even with you," replied Reggie. "What did you want to go making a silly fuss for when I'd only told the truth? Now your beastly major is going to fight my beastly major, and I hope they'll jolly well pound each other to jellies!"

"Sneak!" hissed Joe Frayne.

"It wasn't sneaking to tell Lowther, was it, Wally?" demanded Reggie.

"Don't speak to me, young Manners! If it wasn't sneaking it was worse. Look what you've let your brother in for!"

"I don't care about my brother!" snorted Reggie.

"No; because you're a young cad, and he's heaps too good for you!" said Jameson. "We think a lot of him, any road. And you might have remembered that Franky's major warned us about that old Hun Selby being in Brighton."

Hobbs and Curly Gibson murmured agreement. The whole six were dead against Reggie.

"Right-ho! I'll fight you as soon as you like, young Levison!" said that youthful hero.

"You'll have to," replied Frank quietly.

Three fights came off in the gym that evening. Two of them did not last long. Clive put Crooke down for the count in the second round, getting fairly home on the point of his jaw. Cardew did not suffer Racke to finish quite so soon. He tried to nurse him, with intent to prolong the agony. But he tumbled him over in the fourth round, much to his own disgust, and Racke would not try to get up till he had been counted out.

Levison major v. Manners major was a sterner battle.

They were feeling very sore with one another, and they were pretty well matched. Punishment would have been heavier on both sides but for the fact that both had been through a good deal that day and were tired. It was heavy enough as it was, and no result had been arrived at when Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, came into the gym, and ordered everyone out, asking them what they were doing there at a time when they should have been going to bed. Though Kildare must have been blind if he could not see what they were doing, Kildare had rather a way of being blind about such things.

Frank and Reggie had settled their differences before that, and were nursing bruised and aching faces in bed. Frank had won. He had gone at Reggie from the outset, seeming not to care a bit how much he got hurt, and his small fists had inflicted considerable punishment upon Manners minor. He was sorry when it was all over. So was Reggie—sorry only for himself at first.

Reggie would not have confessed it to anyone; but his pillow was wet when he fell asleep that night. He made next morning a confession better worth—he admitted to the other six that he had been wrong, and was ashamed of himself!

Which was quite a lot for Manners minor to admit.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mystery Cleared Up.

"WHAT on earth have you been doing to your face, kid?" asked Levison major, when Frank looked in at Study No. 9 the next day, between morning and dinner.

"Just what old Selby wanted to know," replied Frank, with a wry mouth. "But it's no worse than yours, Ernie."

"Well, mine's no worse than Manners major's," said Ernest Levison sourly.

"And mine isn't half as bad as Manners minor's!" countered Frank.

The three chums stared at him.

"A row in the happy family!" said Cardew. "Tell your loving uncle what it was all about, Franky."

"Because that young cad—no, I mustn't say that, for he's sorry now—because Reggie told Lowther about Ernie's—oh, you know it!"

"What?" shouted Levison major. "Manners minor told Lowther?"

"Yes. He was mad with me, and he did it to get even."

"I—I— Oh, see here, you fellows, how am I ever to put this thing right with Manners?" faltered Levison.

"Just go and say you're sorry," replied Clive simply.

"But it means so much explaining, and I don't suppose Manners will forgive me even then. It's quite true that I did go into a pub yesterday; and as far as I can make out now Manners minor and Racke and Crooke all saw me come out, though I didn't see them. It was the County Ground Hotel at Hove—a place the Head needn't mind going to. I only had a dry ginger-ale. One of the other fellows asked me to go in, and I didn't think much about it—no, that isn't quite true. I thought it would look priggish to say 'No,' and I was breaking bounds anyway, so it didn't matter a lot."

"What other fellows, dear boy?" asked Cardew.

"Here goes for the whole story," said Levison; "but you'd better cut, Frank."

"Not likely! I want to hear it as much as anyone, Ernie."

"Well, you shall, then. Poor old kid; you got those bruises for me. I know. You fellows don't need telling that my pater hasn't been doing too well in business lately. Things are a bit better than they were; but I know it's a strain on him to keep us both here. So I thought that if I could find a decent job I might leave, and it would look

"And let me stay on! As if I should care about staying after you'd gone, Ernie!" put in Frank reproachfully.

(Continued on page 13.)



A Magnificent Story of Life at Millford College. By IVOR HAYES.

NEW READERS START HERE.

TOM MACE, whose father is a professional crackman, wins a scholarship for Millford College. His father is rather pleased, for MR. BILL MACE has certain unlawful reasons for wanting to see the inside of the school. Mrs. Mace darts up her son's clothes, and Tom sets off for school. In the train he overhears a conversation between a man in a sea-green suit and a muffled ruffian. The ruffian is addressed as SPIKEY MEADOWS, and there is some suspicious talk that sets the lad thinking. At last he arrives at the school, only to be jeered at by the other juniors. Just as Lundy & Co. are fooling with Tom's things, a new master appears on the scene. He is Mr. GORDON GALE—the man in the sea-green suit, whom Tom had seen in the train. Tom sees the headmaster, who is kind to him, and sees also MR. MULLINS, the master of the Fourth Form. He finds this man a snob, and he is feeling downhearted. He goes to Study B—Lundy and Bradshaw's study—to which he has been allotted, but he is roughly handled. BOB PEEL finds him, is friendly, and lends him a feed at the tuckshop. Bradshaw & Co. advance upon the tuckshop. A battle royal ensues, and Tom, after being pelted with eggs, is thrown out. He knocks into a man as he falls into the lane. The others, frightened, run away. This man is SPIKEY MEADOWS. He talks to Tom, and tries to persuade the lad to leave a window open, so that he can enter the school at night, explaining the consequences if he fails to make up his mind within a certain time. Tom returns to the school. Being late, he is questioned by his Form-master, Mr. Mullins, who is startled when Tom mentions the name of Meadows. The mysterious Mr. Mullins, who evidently knows something of Meadows, dismisses Tom with a slight punishment. Tom reaches the dormitory, to find that his new clothes have been tampered with. His anger is aroused, and, with Peel's assistance, he sails into the jokers, but the odds soon tell upon them. That night Tom is ejected from the dormitory and made to sleep on the landing outside. The following morning Mr. Gale requests Tom's presence in his study. There, in spite of the threats made by Spikey Meadows, Tom promises Mr. Gale never to speak to this man again. Tom goes to the class-room, and proves that he is far from being backward in his studies. Indeed, his master, Mr. Mullins, is quite surprised to find how he outshines his other pupils, including his especial favourite, Bradshaw. The latter is the youngest son of an earl's brother, and for this reason the snobbish Mr. Mullins overlooks many of his faults.

(Now read on.)

A Visitor for Tom.

IN plain, hard words, Mr. Mullins was a snob. And, that granted, it is not difficult to realise that Tom Mace was not his favourite. But what was that Tom excelled in all lessons he could not withhold his praise, grudging though it was.

He soon gave Tom a rest, and devoted his attention to the others. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that toward the end of the morning classes Tom's mind began to stray to other subjects. Of course, all his thoughts should have been centred on algebra; but having with the utmost ease solved numerous equations, he could not clear from his eyes the vision of Spikey Meadows as he had last seen him—Spikey, threatening, coaxing, and pleading. Each of these devices the criminal had used, and each had been successful.

At first the scholarship lad, with his bright hopes for the future, had been frightened at the threat of a "showing up," but Tom saw now that it was bluff. He had been cowering with a threat to tell the police all he knew—to tell them that he had been approached with a plan to rob the school. And he would carry out his threat—yes. Otherwise, he was an accomplice. The word stuck in his throat, but he knew it was the right word—an accomplice before the fact.

He would go directly after school and report to the police. But—There was a "but." His father! If he told all, Meadows, in his rage, would reveal all. Tom had not much affection for his father; his father deserved to suffer. It might teach him that he was on the wrong path, and might even lead him to reform before it was too late.

It was worrying the lad; and Mr. Mullins, glancing round, noted that Tom's attention was not focused.

"Mace!" he ejaculated sharply. "What were my last words?"

Tom started.

"I—" he stammered.

"You were not listening!" snapped the master. "You come here to learn, my lad. You did not think that these kind people who are paying for your charity education can afford to keep you in idleness."

Bradshaw giggled, and Mr. Mullins gave his favourite a kindly glance.

"And I have not yet had those lines I gave you!" rapped out the master.

Poor Tom flushed crimson. Those lines! Of course, he had forgotten them.

"I'm sorry, sir!" he gulped. "I—I will do them after lunch."

"They were for this morning, Mace. I gave you only fifty, and you have had time to do them. They are doubled. One hundred lines I want by tea-time."

"Yes, sir!"

At that moment relief came to Tom with the clanging of the bell for the termination of morning classes. And to hear that clanging bell none was more relieved than the charity schoolboy.

Out dashed the Fourth-Formers in a shouting throng, glad to be free of the Form-room after being cooped up there all the morning.

But Tom Mace was far from happy. He was troubled by the rebuke he had received, and by the unnecessary sting in the master's words.

"Cheer up, old chap!" said Peel, placing his arm round Tom's shoulders. "Don't take any notice of that ass Mullins. He had to lay it on for you, 'cos you're not the youngest son of an earl's brother. But cheer up! We all get it at times."

"Thank you, Peel!" said Tom gratefully. "You're a dear old chap to me! I'm a fool to worry. But I must get those lines done. I'll go up to the study—"

"I'll write some for you," offered Peel.

"No. Thanks all the same, old man. I—Hallo! Do you want me?"

He looked sharply at the pimply-faced page who approached him.

"Yes, Master Mace," said the urchin cheekily. "There's an old woman down at the gates wants you—"

"Old woman?" asked Tom. "What do you mean?"

"She says as 'ow she's yer mother— Why, 'e's gone!"

He turned round; and Peel grinned. For Tom Mace had gone flying through the doorway into the quadrangle.

His mother at the school! was his thought. What had happened?

An Unwilling Promise!

"MY hat! What's this?"

Simon Lundy gave vent to that rather startled ejaculation, and pointed towards the school gates.

In the gateway Potts, the school porter, was talking to an elderly lady. Her clothes were shabby and showed signs of hard wear.

Bradshaw sniggered.

"Oh, rather! What is it, you know?"

The knuts grinned, and followed Lundy as he strolled towards the visitor.

"Look at old Potty!" said Garnet.

Potts was scratching his head doubtfully. He looked round, and waved to the approaching Fourth-Formers. Potts had really no liking at all for the supercilious Lundy and his friends, but apparently he wanted to ask them something.

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Tom and his mother walked down to the gate. They failed to observe the figure that slid round in the woodshed. It was Garnet, and he had heard their conversation.

"Mister Lundy," he said, when the leader of the knuts drew level, "this lidy wants a young feller 'ere—Mace."

"Mace!" ejaculated Lundy. A gleam of joy came into his cruel eyes. Mace! Could this be a relation of Tom Mace's? His lips curled. "Yes, ma'am," he said in oily tones. "You said Mace?"

"Yes, sir," answered the lady, with a kind smile. "I've come for my Tom—Tom Mace, you know. He's a new boy. Won a scholarship, he did."

"She—she's come for her Tom!" stuttered Garnet explosively.

The newcomer turned red, surprised at the rudeness shown by the knuts, most of whom were grinning broadly.

"Yes—yes, my Tom. Oh, surely you know him?"

"Oh dear!" giggled the empty Bradshaw. "She wants her Tom, doncherknow! Her Tom! Oh begad!"

"Tom Mace?" said Lundy reflectively, with a sly wink at his companions. "Mace? Is he the new bootboy, ma'am, or the under-gardener's assistant?"

Lundy's rude interrogation of the little woman was rewarded by giggles and chuckles from his friends, and Lundy swelled with pride.

Mrs. Mace went redder than ever.

"I suppose there's no harm—" she began.

"Oh, not at all, my woman—not at all!" said Lundy. "I'll take you to him at once—I mean 'im,' of course. I never can get used to these foreign lingoes."

Lundy's impertinence apparently knew no bounds. He saw the look the little woman gave him—the hurt look, not unmingled with scorn; but it failed to impress him. For Simon Lundy had a hide-comparable to that of a rhinoceros.

"I only want to see him for a minute," pleaded the woman.

Garnet started to hiss, but Lundy stopped him with a quick gesture. Lundy felt that he had a prey, someone to taunt, so that he could see the cruel result of his taunting and get the enjoyment he required.

"Follow me," he said, and turned round.

Mrs. Mace opened her mouth, but said nothing, and followed him in silence.

The knuts stared at their leader and looked at one another in surprise.

"What's his game?" asked Garnet.

"Blessed if I know!" sniggered Bradshaw. "Let's follow, though—what?"

He led the way, and soon the whole string of them followed the elderly lady across the quad.

"Look at her hat!" grinned Garnet.

"And her old mid-Victorian jacket—"

"And her boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

These remarks were quite audible to the quiet little woman in front, and her ears burned. But she could say nothing.

That only made the knuts snigger all the more, however.

Lundy was still leading, but not to the School House. His way was round the back of the school. His friends in the rear gave gleeful chuckles, realising that the great Simon had once japed on hand, but what it was exactly they had not the slightest inkling.

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Potts was staring after them. There was a look of amazement on the porter's face, for he knew that Tom Mace was not to be found there.

Only the night before he had let Tom into the school, and had discovered that he was a Fourth-Former. Lundy was heading for the kitchen!

Potts hailed the pageboy, who, with a broad grin on his simply face, was watching the caterpillar-like procession.

"Ere, run off to Master Mace, and tell 'im 'is ma's arrived!" said the porter. "Quick about it!"

The page hesitated, then scuttled off to do as he had been told.

Lundy, still smiling blandly, led the way past the kitchen-gardens to a small shed that stood behind. This, as all knew, was the woodshed—a dark, ill-ventilated place, where wood and lumber was stored.

Outside, Lundy halted, and took off his cap with a sweep.

"Enter," he said. "Madam, this is where you must wait for Thomas Mace. There is a seat inside."

The quiet little woman stared at him for a moment, obviously surprised at Lundy's manner and words.

"In—in here?" she asked. "But—but—"

"That is quite all right, madam," said the playful Lundy.

"I will fetch Tommy. I dare say he's darning his coat now; he loves darning. You wouldn't believe the number of darns there were in the coat—"

Tears started into the woman's eyes. She knew for certain that Lundy was being intentionally cruel and rude, but she knew not what to say. The mention of the darned coat hurt her, for she had spent many weary hours upon it, making it fit for her son to wear at this big school.

Lundy saw this, and perhaps was a little ashamed of himself. At any rate, he mumbled something.

Mrs. Mace dabbed the tears from her eyes, and walked into the shed. No sooner was she inside than Lundy made a quick movement.

Slam! The door was closed, and it was but the work of a moment to slip home the latch.

Mrs. Mace was a prisoner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The knuts held their sides and roared.

"Oh dear, what a giddy rag!" sniggered Bradshaw.

"Y—rather! I—oh, look out!"

Lundy broke off, and jumped back. For Tom Mace, his hands clenched, and his eyes glittering, had come dashing round the corner.

"You cads!" he panted. "My mother—where is she? Lundy, you gaping idiot! The porter told me that you had taken her here!"

Lundy flushed, and strode forward as though to strike at the scholarship lad. But the look on Tom's face made him change his mind with humiliating suddenness.

"Where is she?" asked Tom thickly.

"Tom, Tom! I'm in here!"

The scholarship lad wheeled round as his mother's voice came plaintively from behind him, and dashed across to the woodshed. He flung open the door, and his mother emerged.

She held her head low, so that he should not see her tear-brimmed eyes.

"Oh, mother," he cried, "what have they been doing? Have they been taunting you?"

His mother did not answer, but laid her head upon his shoulder and cried softly.

"Oh, gad, what a touchin' scene!" sniggered Bradshaw.

Garnet smiled broadly.

"What a joke!" laughed Lundy.

The others stood aside, shamefacedly, wishing they were miles away.

Tom Mace wheeled round. In his eyes there was a look so fierce that the knuts made an involuntary step back. Lundy bit his lip, for his courage had suddenly ebbed away. Once again he had gone too far. And this time he knew there would be revenge. There was no mistaking the look in Tom's eye.

"Oh, come away!" he snarled. "We don't want to see this touchin' reunion. We— Oh!"

Bump!

Tom Mace drove his fist hard into Lundy's face, and the cad's cry, as he fell heavily to the ground, was as music in the scholarship lad's ears.

Lundy, his hand to his injured nose, lay on the ground, and scowled at the scornful Tom.

Tom Mace held his mother close to him, and looked down angrily at the fallen idol of the Millford knuts.

"You cad!" he exclaimed. "You howling cad! Get up!"

Lundy staggered to his feet, and ducked away, lest worse should follow that punishing blow on the nose.

His friends had already backed away. When he was a few yards from the lad, Simon Lundy shook his fist.

"You worm! You rotten, low-bred worm!" he shouted venomously. "I'll make you pay for this! I—"

Tom made a forward, and Lundy turned and ran off into the School House.

The scholarship lad turned to his mother.

"Mother," he said softly, "please don't cry. Tell me all. What have they said?"

"It's all right—all right, Tom, my boy," sighed his mother. "I'm all right now. They—they said cruel things. But it's all right. I only came to tell you—"

"Yes, mother?"

"To tell you that you must never, never listen to your father if he asks you to steal. And he will, I am sure he will. He may come to the school."

"What? Father may? Oh, mother!"

"I know, I don't; but he will. And if he does, don't listen to him. Promise me that, Tom!"

"Of course, mother. He ought to be arrested—I-I mean—"

"Oh, Tom, no! He isn't a bad man really," Mrs. Mace sighed heavily. "He mixed with the wrong sort, Tom. He wasn't always the same, you know. But he—he mustn't go to prison. Oh, Tom, it would break my heart!"

A troubled look came into Tom Mace's eyes. His decision had to be made. He could not report Meadows to the police now. He would have to keep his mouth closed about the criminal's movements.

"I will never listen to what he says, mother. Don't—don't you worry, dear. Dad won't ever go to prison."

The woman shook her head, and stood for some moments silent, wiping her eyes, which were red and tear-stained.

"How are you getting on, Tom, my dear boy?" she asked at length.

"Oh, all right, mother!" answered Tom, rather heavily.

"You've made an enemy, though, dear. Oh, Tom, I do hope you won't fight! Tom, it's not asking much, but do, do, please, promise me you'll never fight! I can't bear to think of you fighting with these boys!"

Tom started, and stared at his mother in surprise. He had not expected this. It was a great deal to ask. It might mean— But he was sorry for his mother, and knew how she was worried.

"All right," he said haltingly. "I—I promise, mother. I won't fight if you don't want me to."

"Thank you, Tom!" sighed Mrs. Mace. "I knew you would promise, you dear, dear boy!"

She wiped her eyes.

"I'd better go back now," she said. "I—I had to come to warn you against your father. But I've been away from home a long time."

Tom nodded.

"I'll take you down to the station, mother," he said, "if you don't mind waiting."

"No, Tom; don't bother. I can go alone. It must be your dinner-time. There! There's a bell ringing now. Is that for dinner?"

"Yes, mother, I think so."

"Very well, then, leave me at the gates, dear; I can get back to the station."

Tom and his mother walked down to the gates, and as he retraced his footsteps across the deserted quadrangle, the scholarship lad sighed wearily.

He failed to observe the figure that slid round by the woodshed, and scampered into the schoolhouse. It was Garnet, and Garnet had heard the last half of the conversation, having strolled back for that purpose. He had flattened himself against the wall, heart in mouth, when Tom and his mother passed. But he had not been seen. And now, with the knowledge of Tom's promise not to fight, he dashed in to dinner.

"What news!" he muttered joyfully. Tom Mace had promised not to fight! What a heyday for the knuts!

When Lundy heard, he grinned, and his courage flowed back at once, for he knew that in challenging Tom to a fight he would be safe.

All unconscious of these plans for his future, Tom Mace ate his dinner in silence, saying nothing, not even to Bob Peel. He was worried and considerably ill-at-ease.

His father might come to the school. And what would happen then? And what could he say now to Meadows? He would still refuse; but what of the man's threat?

No wonder that Tom all through the meal sat silent, answering Bob Peel's questions with only vague monosyllables. What was to happen?

They Called Him a Funk.

TOM MACE kept his attention riveted on his dinner, unconscious of the sniggers of Lundy & Co. farther down the table. Tom indeed had no thoughts then for the cads of the Fourth.

But Lundy & Co. were enjoying some joke, and it was not difficult to tell what was the origin of it. From time to time Lundy glanced at Tom, and grinned, and Bradshaw gave a brainless giggle.

"I say, Tom, what's wrong, old man?"

Bob Peel glanced at Tom's thoughtful face, and gave his chum's arm a gentle nudge.



"Dear me!" exclaimed the master, with a frown. "Mace, a plate is provided for the purpose of holding the food! The tablecloth is a civilised form of decoration!" Bradshaw giggled, and Simon Lundy laughed outright.

Tom stabbed his fork nervously into a new potato, and dropped it. His thoughts had been far away, and he had been eating his dinner rather absent-mindedly. But Peel's friendly jolt of the elbow had brought him back to realities with a disconcerting start.

"I—I was thinking," he said. His face went rather red, for in dropping his fork, he had spilled some of the salad on the tablecloth.

His sensitive ears caught Lundy's whispered remark, and the scholarship lad became flustered.

"I—I was only thinking," he stammered. Then he stooped suddenly to retrieve a fallen potato.

"Blessed navy!" sneered Lundy. "Great Scott! It's a fine thing—Milford is turned into a pig-sty! Don't suppose he's been used to a fork."

"Probably used his fingers before," grinned Garnet.

"He, he! Oh, rather!" giggled the foolish Bradshaw.

"Used his jolly fingers, don'tcher know! He, he, he!"

Mr. Mullins, the Fourth Form master, looked down the table.

"Less laughter, please, Lundy," he said gently. Mr. Mullins always spoke gently when addressing any of the Fourth Form bouncers. For the master himself was rather inclined to snobbish views.

"But I say, sir," protested Lundy. "That—that fellow" Lundy pointed to Tom with a contemptuous gesture—"that fellow can't even use a fork without knocking half his dinner on to the table."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the master, with a frown. "Mace, a plate is provided for the purpose of holding the food! The tablecloth is a civilised form of decoration. It is not usual to place one's food upon the tablecloth, and knives and forks are always preferred to fingers."

Bradshaw giggled, and Simon Lundy laughed outright. But Tom Mace's hands clenched tightly, until the knuckles showed white.

The master's biting words burned into his brain; but he said nothing.

"Rotten cad! Mullins ought to be kicked!" grunted the loyal Peel.

"Peel!" snapped the thin-faced master. "Fifty lines!"

Bob Peel merely grinned. He felt that his remark had been well worth the punishment.

But the thoughtful frown soon returned to Tom Mace's troubled forehead, and Peel noted it. This time, however, he took care not to jolt his chum's arm.

"Tom," he whispered, "what's the matter, old man? Not worrying about that ass Mullins, are you?"

Tom Mace shook his head.

"No, Peel," he answered; "it's not that. But—but I'm rather worried, that's all. It's nothing much. I shall forget it soon."

But he did not.

(This splendid story will be continued in next Wednesday's "GEM.")



JOHN SHARPE.

INTRODUCTION.

John Sharpe, the great analytical detective, is engaged by Chief Burnett, of the Secret Service, to track down the band of organised and dangerous criminals operating under the guidance of Iron Hand—a fearless, clever man of dominating personality. Marna Black, one of the band of crooks, is captured, and Burnett induces Anne Crawford, a woman agent of the Secret Service, to assume Marna's identity and get into the confidence of Iron Hand.

She is instructed to keep her real identity a secret even to Sharpe; but she often assists him and sends him information concerning the movements of the gang, and he is puzzled to know just where it comes from.

Iron Hand has a number of hiding-places in different parts of the country, which are referred to as "Nests," the most important of which is Eagle's Nest, situated on a deserted cliff.

The Raid.

ANNE CRAWFORD was fully aware of detective John Sharpe's great danger. Arriving at the wharf seated upon her "borrowed" horse, she pulled up the

The INVISIBLE HAND

Vitagraph



IRON HAND.

animal for an instant, and looked horrified towards the sea.

The motor-car to which John Sharpe had been tied by the leaders of the gang, Iron Hand and Potsdam, was now almost covered by water, and it could not be long before the unfortunate detective was drowned.

Anne hesitated no longer. She realised that the two outlaws could not be very far off; indeed, she imagined that they were in all probability hiding somewhere near, but she decided to run the risk of discovery.

Anne galloped her horse a little farther along the wharf, and then when she was quite opposite the car, she drove the animal off the end of the quay-side. The horse and rider immediately fell headlong into the water.

Even now Sharpe had not quite given up hope, and he struggled fiercely in a desperate effort to release himself. So far, he was unaware that there was aid near at hand. But the detective's struggles were growing weaker.

Anne, spurred on by the thought of the helpless plight of John Sharpe, swam rapidly towards the motor-car. In a few moments she had reached the almost drowned man, and severed the ropes by which he had been lashed to the car.

The plucky girl was a strong swimmer, but it was beyond her power to take the detective with her to the wharf. His legs and arms were still bound up, and, of course, he was still quite at the mercy of the waves.

Anne decided to support him until further assistance arrived, and, successfully holding Sharpe's head above water, she shouted loudly for help.

Fortunately, it was not long before her cries were heard.

There were a number of fishermen at work some distance along the shore, and two of them immediately entered the water and struck out towards Sharpe and his rescuer.

Iron Hand and Black Flag were still hanging about the scene. They had hoped to have witnessed the last of the hated detective; but once again they were to be disappointed.

The two outlaws were amazed when they realised who it was who had come to the rescue of John Sharpe. Iron Hand could scarcely believe what he saw. His look of amazement quickly turned to one of intense rage.

At last the leader realised that he had been fooled all this time, and that the warnings of his second-in-command, Potsdam, were justified.

Iron Hand decided to wait no longer. Turning to Black Flag, he said:

"We will separate now. Inform the rest to meet at Rowley's—Room 42."

Black Flag nodded in reply. Then both men hastened away from the wharf, taking opposite directions.

The fishermen soon succeeded in bringing Anne and Sharpe to the shore, and a number of people amongst the crowd which had collected volunteered to render further assistance if necessary. One of them busied himself by loosening the hands and feet of the detective.

It had been a very exhausting time indeed for Anne, and she sank to the ground in order to rest awhile.

Curiously enough, at this moment the owner of the horse which Anne had

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borrowed in order to ride to Sharpe's assistance, arrived on the scene.

He was very angry, and glared at Anne, in whom he recognised the girl who had stolen his favourite mount.

He stormed and raved, and demanded his lost animal back.

Anne, of course, remembered the incident quite well, and pointed some distance along the shore where the horse was strolling along quite unconcernedly.

He had swam back to land, none the worse for his unexpected dive into the water.

Everyone looked in the direction indicated by the girl, and the owner felt considerably happier when he saw that the horse was quite safe. Anne gave a brief explanation of the affair.

"It was for this that I stole the horse," she said, in conclusion.

The owner of the horse was quite impressed by the girl's account of the rescue of John Sharpe, and he hastened to inform Anne that he was glad to have been of some assistance in the matter.

The crowd which had collected was, of course, highly interested in the affair, and everyone looked at the great detective with wide-open eyes. It was a rare occasion for these fisherfolk to come face to face with such an eminent personage as John Sharpe.

One of the fishermen's wives took charge of Anne, and led her to a cottage for a rest and some refreshment, while Sharpe strode off in the direction of a small fishing-hut.

A few minutes later he emerged in a dry suit of clothes.

Sharpe was about to proceed on his way when his attention was attracted by a motor-car approaching the scene.

The next minute the Chief of the Police jumped out and strode over to Sharpe. The chief quickly explained his presence.

"The officer I placed in Nest Two, who was captured by the gang, managed to get free!" he stated. "The man gave me a valuable clue, and here I am."

A smile crossed the face of the detective as he caught sight of Anne coming out of the cottage.

"You would have been too late again, chief," he said. "I should have been drowned by now if it hadn't been for the mysterious Miss Roberts, who arrived on the scene, as usual, in the nick of time." The chief looked in the direction of the approaching girl.

"I still can't understand you!" said Sharpe to Anne, when she reached them. "How on earth do you manage to be mixed up with that gang of criminals?"

"That is my business!" replied the girl politely. "Now, please, may I go, Mr. Sharpe?"

The detective hesitated for a moment.

"Yes," he replied at length, "if you'll promise to keep away from them. At last their hours are numbered. It is only a question of a very short while before the whole gang are captured. You have a chance now to live an honest life. You have been very kind to me, and I hope you will accept this opportunity of going free!"

Anne could not help smiling at the unconscious humour of this speech.

John Sharpe, of course, did not know that she had no more real connection with Mr. Iron Hand & Co. than he had himself.

Anne bluntly refused to carry out his request, and leave the gang.

"Mr. Sharpe," she replied, "you have your task, and I have mine. I must return to the gang."

The detective was sorry to hear this, and he was worried over the possible danger to the girl.

"That settles it," he replied after

a while. "You shall not go free, then. I am sure you would get hurt in the fighting."

This decision did not please Anne at all, and she started to protest, but Sharpe turned abruptly to the Chief of Police.

"Place this young lady under arrest," he ordered. "It is for her own sake that I take this action. Now I'm going to trail the gang again. Good-bye!"

The detective shook hands with the chief, and he bowed in a formal manner to Anne. She returned the courtesy with quiet amusement and admiration. She liked the detective more than ever.

As Sharpe walked away, the chief placed his hand on Anne's shoulder to indicate that she was under arrest. But he was distinctly amused over the affair.

As he led her off, she pretended to be highly annoyed at being arrested; but this performance was chiefly for the benefit of the crowd who had been watching the proceedings in wonderment.

The police chief and Anne walked back towards the motor-car, and then the girl glanced back to make sure that Sharpe was not watching. Satisfied on this point, Anne spoke to the officer who accompanied her.

"You know me—you know who I am?" she asked.

The chief nodded. "Yes; I have been informed that you are a member of the Secret Service," was his reply.

"Then you must let me go," Anne continued. "I must finish my work. The band has a room at Rowley's Hotel."

The chief was excited to hear this piece of information, and an idea for a raid immediately occurred to him.

"I'll go on ahead," said Anne. "Your men can follow, and wait until I give a signal at the best time for them to enter!"

The police chief hurried to this proposal, and Anne hurried away, while the officer entered his car and drove off.

At Rowley's Hotel!

IRON HAND had chosen a very comfortable and luxuriously furnished apartment in Rowley's Hotel, which was serving as the temporary headquarters of the gang.

The leader certainly believed in comfort, for he usually studied this item first of all.

At the present moment he was smoking one of his special brand of expensive cigarettes, and around him were Black Flag and a number of other outlaws.

Presently the second-in-command, Potsdam, entered and handed his chief a letter to read. He was greatly excited over some proof which he had obtained, pointing to the fact that Anne was a traitor.

Potsdam was very anxious to spring his news, but at the moment Iron Hand was explaining his recent adventures to the company.

When he came to the account of the detective's rescue by the girl they believed to be Marna Black, Potsdam saw his opportunity.

"Now what do you think of her?" he asked, looking hard at Iron Hand. "I knew all along she was a traitor." The leader, however, was still a little doubtful.

"I saw her rescue Sharpe, of course," he muttered, half to himself. "Yet I can't understand—"

Potsdam interrupted and produced a telegram.

"Her name is not Marna Black," he almost shouted in his excitement.

"Here's a wire from her brother in Chicago. His sister is in the same prison from which he just escaped. This girl is Anne Crawford, a Secret Service agent!"

There was an evil grin on Potsdam's face. He enjoyed bringing this news home to his master, who had always refused to believe in his suspicions.

Iron Hand could scarcely believe it, even now.

"And I loved her," he muttered to himself. "I thought she also cared."

It had never occurred to him that this was part of Anne's acting.

Potsdam sneered savagely, and many of the others registered their hate of the girl.

"Our vengeance will keep," said Iron Hand, as a final word on this subject for the present. "Now we must get money and cross the border. Look at this letter."

He handed it over to Potsdam to read, and his eyes sparkled as he perused it; for a moment his hatred of Anne was forgotten.

Potsdam's greedy eyes sparkled with delight as he read the letter, which Iron Hand had given him. The address it bore was Alta Vista, California, and it contained the following message:

"Royal Mining Company.—Make shipment of gold ingots value \$250,000 Thursday morning. Special car attached to train.—OLD FAITHFUL."

Potsdam handed it on to Black Flag, who was anxiously waiting to see it.

"Thursday! Why that's to-day!" suddenly exclaimed Potsdam.

Iron Hand nodded, and held out his hand for the return of the letter. Then he walked over towards the fireplace, took out a box of matches, and set fire to it, and dropped the lighted paper into the grate. He rejoined the rest of the party without waiting to see whether it was entirely consumed or not.

"We'll get that gold!" the leader said emphatically. "One of you get in touch with Antonio, and have him bring the schooner to the hidden cave!"

The group closed around the leader, and he commenced to enlarge on the plans, when suddenly all eyes were turned towards the door. They could hear the sound of approaching footsteps.

The men were considerably alarmed at the prospect of a visitor, for they did not expect anyone else just now. The door opened slowly, and the next moment Anne Crawford appeared.

There was a smile upon her face as her eyes met the astonished gaze of the members of the gang. She still kept up her pose of being a member, and gave not the slightest evidence that she knew of the suspicion that must be pointed to her.

This was an occasion which would try her courage to the utmost.

The men glared at the frail, pretty figure standing in the doorway, and hatred was plainly written upon their evil countenances.

Potsdam started as though he desired to seize her immediately, and have her put to death; but once again Iron Hand restrained him.

"Not now! Later—in the cave!" he muttered.

The second-in-command realised that the leader was so deadly earnest this time, and he willingly obeyed his orders. Iron Hand walked over to the door, and there was a forced smile upon his face as he bowed gracefully to her. When she stepped into the room he closed the door after her.

(The continuation of this grand serial will appear next week.)

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ERNEST LEVISON'S GREAT SECRET

(Continued from page 12.)

"You'll have to some day, I suppose. I didn't say anything to you two because I knew you'd kick, and I said just as much to anyone else because I didn't see that it concerned anyone else."

"And you Tom Merry's best bowler!" said Clive. "An' our best pal!" added Cardew. "That's just it—the bowling, I mean. I saw an advertisement that the Sussex County Club were willing to give a trial to any fellow who was pretty good at the game. Of course, I didn't reckon on playing for Sussex just yet, though fellows have played county cricket who weren't so very much older than I am. But I reckoned that if I could get a job on the ground staff it would keep me going. So I wrote, and it was fixed up that I should go yesterday."

"What was the result?" inquired Clive eagerly. "He had lots of sympathy with his chum's cricket ambitions. Cardew had little, all he thought of was the gap that Levison's leaving would make."

The would-be county cricketer grimaced. "It wasn't absolutely rotten," he said. "Mr. Newham—the old county player, you know—Dickie, they call him, and he's no end of a good sort—said I was distinctly promising, and in a year or two they might be glad to have me if I were still of the same mind. But not just yet. Then he asked me some questions about St. Jim's and all that, and finished up by saying that he hoped I should play for Sussex or some other county some day. So that's off!"

"Good thing, too!" said Frank. "Mother says things are coming round quite all right at home now." "A very good thing," agreed Cardew. "I can't do without you, Ernest, dear boy. I should die of boredom. I don't care a scrap for anyone at St. Jim's but you three; an' Sidney an' Franky are much too well-behaved to be really interestin' company for me."

Clive threw a book at Cardew's head; but to Levison he said:

"After all, it was a good deal for Dicky Newham to say, Ernest. You ought to feel bucked."

That was like Clive. And it was like Levison to growl in response:

"But the chap I had the drink with was taken on, and he is only fifteen months older than I am."

"What's to be done about Manners?" he asked a few minutes later.

"Do you mind those three knowing the whole story?" queried Clive. "No, at least, not much. I think I owe it to Tom Merry to tell him."

"Well, cut along and say you're sorry; then explain."

"You two had better come with me," said Levison.

They went. Frank, seeking his chums, met Reggie alone.

"I've told Harry. He was ever so decent about it," blurted out the chief cause of all the trouble.

"He's always decent," answered Frank soberly.

"Yes; he does preach a bit, but no chap could have a better major, I'll say that. I say, though, Franky, what a mug you've got on you!"

"Not as bad as yours," returned Frank.

"And Frank was right. But neither of them minded. Arm-in-arm, they wandered out into the sunny Sabbath peacefulness of the quad, seeking the rest of the happy family."

When Levison entered Study No. 10 Harry Manners stood up, looking uncomfortable.

"I have to apologise to you, Levison," he said stiffly. "I find that it was my young brother who told that yarn about you, and that's pretty much the same as if I'd done it myself."

"Rats!" replied Levison. "It's nothing of the sort. I've come to say that I'm ever so sorry, and to explain everything."

He held out his hand, and Manners took it without waiting for the explanation.

Levison told his yarn, and Tom Merry's face was very sunny as he hearkened to it.

"Is anyone else to know this, old chap?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes, I think Talbot and Noble and two or three more of the team might be told—Figgy and Kerr and Wynn, anyway. I shouldn't like them to think me a rotter again. But I don't want all St. Jim's to know."

It was not much of a secret after that, though none of those taken into it spread the yarn.

There was one curious result—Levison major and Manners major became better friends than they had ever been before.

That Frank and Reggie were completely reconciled was nothing; that same thing had happened after a dozen former quarrels.

But Racke and Crooke did not love Cardew and Clive any better. That would have been quite too curious a result for anything!

THE END.

(There will be another grand long story of Tom Merry and Co. and the Chums of St. Jim's next week.

Order your copy EARLY.)

CHAT ABOUT ST. JIM'S AND GREYFRIARS.

Well, here is the long-awaited special Levison Number. Ernest has returned to the fold once again, and, thank goodness, without a stain on his character. Will he give us further cause to doubt him? we wonder. I should esteem it a great favour if every reader would lend his copy when finished with to a chum who is not a reader. I feel sure he would look upon it as a kindly action on your part, and would read the good old GEM always.

Harry Noble's batting is coming on very well indeed, and there seems much likelihood of his proving the best man St. Jim's has ever yet had. It cannot be said, though, that the Kangaroo of the Shell has improved the least bit faster than that of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's bowling for Greyfriars.

It is surely a masterpiece where Horace Coker gets all the money from that he spends so lavishly. Sure enough, he has

just purchased another brand-new car. A beauty, too; everything up-to-date. I hear that the great Horace has "run over" many friends since his new purchase.

So Arthur Augustus D'Arcy has thrown over his "topph" for a while and has replaced it with an extra large "boater." Really, this is an "extra-ordinary" change in headgears! Our noble swell of St. Jim's is brimming over with splendour now.

Luke Scrope seems to have earned the enmity of most of my readers. True, there is no decency in him whatsoever. He will always appear the same old worm "without a leg to stand on."

Having attained the age of fifteen this day, he has had the audacity to smoke

cork-tipped cigarettes. Allow me the pleasure of wishing our little man "Many happy returns" of the fragrant weed!

I gather that Mr. Martin Clifford, owing to a nervous breakdown, has got to spend a week or two at Brightlingsea. Poor old chap! He has my sympathy. Only the last time I saw the good gentleman he was filling up the Census paper, which included all the juniors at St. Jim's! But he has promised us some more real good yarns, in spite of this unfortunate set-back.

Herbert Skimpole, the naturalist of St. Jim's, has evidently given up the idea of turning over the leaves of the famous works of Professor Balmyscrump, and has now taken to picking flowers. Well, this is far better than picking quarrels.

EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

Well, here is the second of our special numbers, and it contains much useful information about the Levisons. I am sure this will be a popular move, seeing that my friends are always inquiring about the Levison family. Ernest stands first, of course, but there is plenty of interest in his minor, Frank, the youngest, who in tale after tale has been shown playing up so well to his major, and acting in the most chivalrous style. Then, I should think it would be difficult to find

a girl character who is more valued than Doris Levison, whose occasional visits to St. Jim's are always so welcome. Doris Levison has suffered any amount of criticism, but in this case, as so often happens, criticism has served as an index of popularity. Readers like her, and are keen about her actions because she is Ernest's sister, and also for the reason that she is her own loyal self. She gets condemned for inaction and reserve often enough, but even her critics admit her charm. I am disposed to think that, as regards general

popularity, Ernest Levison runs it hard with Ralph Rackness Cardew. I get any number of inquiries about both. As we go on I hope to have more of these Special Numbers. The next will in all probability deal with Tom Merry. They give more scope than is possible in the ordinary way to show the real history of a character. Next week's "Gem" will be a splendid one in every way, and you must not miss the excellent story by Martin Clifford. It is one of his very best.

YOUR EDITOR.



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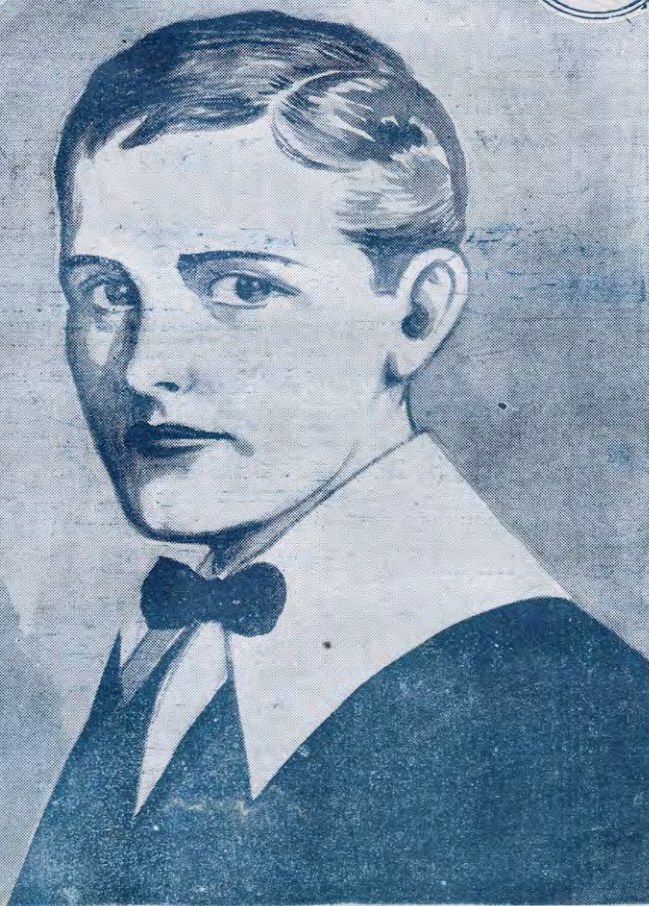
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