

FINE LONG COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.

The

GEM

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LIBRARY

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THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY!

(A Mysterious Incident from the Grand Long Complete School Story Inside.)

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"My Readers' Own Corner."

Half-a-crown is paid for each contribution printed on this page.

If your name is not here this week it may be next.

CLEAN ENOUGH.

Mellish had been boasting to Racke & Co., and showing them the fine points of his brand-new hat-rack. Just then in strolled Baggy Trimble, and carelessly threw his hat down on the table. "Baggy," said Mellish angrily, "what did I buy this hat-rack for?" "One-and-fourpence-halfpenny," replied Baggy, "only you told me not to let out."—George H. Coppock, 15, Manor Road, Heddington, Oxford.

A GOOD ANSWER.

Player to directing manager of F.C.: "Last year five hundred pounds would not buy me; but now thousands won't buy me." Directing Manager: "I am one of the thousands!"—L. Pescovitch, 21, Queen's Buildings, Gossett Street, Brick Lane, E. 2.

DOING HIS BEST.

"Look here," cried the village grocer to the new errand-boy, "this is the seventh time I've caught you asleep in the shop. What do you mean by it?" "Well, sir," replied the youth, "the advertisement said that you wanted a boy to sleep on the premises."—Joseph McDonald, Severn Villa, Cogill Road, Wynberg, near Cape Town, South Africa.

THE MANAGER'S PRIVILEGE.

The manager of a cutlery works at Sheffield had occasion to admonish one of the employees, whereupon the latter started finding fault with the whole management. "Are you the manager here, I should like to know?" cried the official angrily. "No, sir." "Then don't talk like a fool!"—A. Yelland, 69, Broadfield Road, Sheffield.

ON THE AVERAGE.

Teacher: "What is an average?" Boy: "Something a hen lays eggs on." "What makes you think that?" "I saw in a paper that seven hens laid on an average forty eggs a week."—Geo. Dyke, 125, Lichfield Road, Stafford.

THE NUTCRACKER ROCK.

Near a little village in Devon, named Lustleigh Cleave, there is a big rock called the Nutcracker Rock. This rock in some marvellous manner is suspended or balanced on another rock so that it will crack nuts. You simply put a nut in between the rocks, touch the rock, and down it will come on the nut, cracking it.—Horace Smith, 41, Baker Street, Heavitree, Exeter, Devon.

A CLEVER DOG.

A man found his dog sleeping in the best armchair, and turned it off with a sound smack. He entered the room again, and saw the dog sleeping on the hearthrug, but the seat of the chair was warm. He entered the room a third time, and discovered the dog with two paws up on the edge of the chair, blowing on the warm spot.—Miss E. Hurnell, 23, Hampden Street, Little Horton, Bradford, Yorks.

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AN ECCENTRIC CLOCK.

A man in a Midland town had a clock which must have involved its owner in much serious calculation. "Why, Mr. Jones, your clock is not quite right, is it?" said a visitor. "Well, you see, sir," said Jones, "nobody don't understand much about that clock but me. When the hands of that clock stand at twelve, then it strikes two, and I know the time is twenty minutes to seven." What the real time was when the clock struck half-past five would be a not unreasonable question for a Civil Service examination.—A. H. Burchett, 42, Seaton Street, West Brompton, London, S.W. 10.

SURPRISING.

Mistress to maid: "Mary, get me another knife. This one is dirty." Mary (taking the knife and examining it): "Well, mum, it oughtn't to be dirty—the last thing I cut with it was soap."—Edwin Hancock, Old Prospect Road, Wentworthville, N.S.W., Australia.

A LONG CHASE.

A rather dirty-looking man stopped outside a garden gate, and asked the lady whether she could not help him. "I've been a-followin' the water for nigh on fifteen year, mum," he said. "It looks as if you had not caught it up yet!" replied the lady.—Arthur Pedlow, 6, Argyle Street, Mornington, Dunedin, New Zealand.

A BRITISH POSSESSION.

"Tell me of a British possession in Africa," said the teacher to Tommy Jackson. Tommy thought deeply for some minutes, but he could not find the answer. "You goose!" said the teacher, getting angry. Taking this as a hint, Tommy promptly replied: "Uganda!"—Mervyn Williamson, 25, Russell Street, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

DEFINED.

The teacher was giving a geography lesson, and the class, having travelled from London to Labrador, and from Thessaly to Timbuctoo, was thoroughly worn out. "And now," said the teacher, "we come to Germany, that important country, once governed by the Kaiser. Tommy Jones, what is a Kaiser?" "Please, 'm," yawned Tommy Jones, "it's a stream of hot water springin' up and disturbin' the earth."—Eric Snare, Wooroolin, Kingaroy Line, Queensland, Australia.

THE COINCIDENCE.

There was once a tailor whose name was Dodgin. The tailor had a customer who owed him some money. One day the tailor made up his mind to call at the debtor's house and ask for the cash. When he reached the place, the customer said he was in a tremendous hurry, and could not wait to hear anything. "Do you know who I am? I am Dodgin, the tailor," said the caller. "So am I," replied the other, as he dashed off.—Lily Britton, 77, Holte Road, Aston, Birmingham.

RATHER CAUSTIC.

A well-known editor was constantly receiving boring manuscripts from a lady. The latter wrote with her latest batch: "Please do not be afraid to criticise the enclosed, as I have other irons in the fire." The editor replied: "Dear Madam,—I advise you to put this manuscript where your irons are."—R. Cosson, 65, Coghlan Road, Subiaco, Western Australia.

VERY USEFUL.

Tourist: "What! Five miles to the village from the station? What made them build the silly station all that way from the place?" The Porter: "I really couldn't tell you, sir, unless they thought the station might be more use down here by the railway."—George Marsden, 273, Briercliffe Road, Burnley, Lancs.

A GOOD IDEA.

The town officers had just installed fire-extinguishers in their big buildings. One day a fire occurred, but the fire-extinguishers failed to do their work. There was a council meeting to inquire into the matter. "Mr. Chairman," said one member, "I move that these fire-extinguishers be examined ten days before each fire."—Yousafali A. Fazalbhoy, c/o Abdullah Fazalbhoy, Chowpatty, Sea Face, Bombay.

A STRANGE NAME.

Station-inspectors usually call out the name of the station when a train arrives. Well, at a station bearing the name of Urelia, there were two officials, and they had different ideas as to how the word should be pronounced. One shouted out, "You're a liar," which was as near as he could get to "Urelia." The second man capped this with, "You really are!"—A. B. Friedmann, 50, Earp Street, Ohpirtion, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa.

NO GRATITUDE.

Mr. Graball had sent a boy to the village, which was three miles away, and since there were no conveyances, he had to walk. On the lad's return, Mr. Graball gave him a cent, and said jovially: "Now, don't tell anybody I gave you that!" "No," answered the boy sarcastically; "nobody would believe me if I did!"—J. MacCormack, 252, Lansdowne Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

BURIALS IN TREES.

The Queensland blacks had many ways of burying their dead. In some localities it was customary for them to remove part of a hollow green tree, and put the remains in the hollow. The piece was then put back, and grew together again. A fine specimen is to be seen in the Brisbane Museum, also a bark coffin obtained on the Laura River, Queensland, which is only used for chiefs.—R. F. Walker, Farm 527, Leeton, New South Wales, Australia.

Cardew Stands by Levison



A Grand Long Complete Story of the Chums of St. Jim's.
By Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Arthur Augustus Insists!

"LEAVE it to me, deah boys!"

"Bosh!"

"I considah—"

"Rubbish!"

"If you describe my wemarks as bosh and wubbish, Blake—"

"Both, old infant," said Jack Blake. "Ring off a bit, old man, and let's consider what's to be done."

"We'd better, before we go in," remarked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I think—"

"No, you don't, old bird," said Monty Lowther, shaking his head. "You couldn't, you know. Now, one of us had better go to the Head—"

"Volunteers!" said Manners.

"I have already volunteered, Mannahs—"

"But you're no good, old chap," said George Herries.

"You'll admit that, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to admit anythin' of the kind, Hewwies. I considah—"

"Oh, leave it to Gussy!" said Digby. "The chap who beards the giddy lion in his den will very likely get a licking. If Gussy won't be happy till he gets it, let him rip!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Leave it to me," said Clive. "I'm Cardew's chum, and Levison's—so I ought to see the Head."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Now, Gussy—"

"I wepeat, wats!"

A group of juniors had halted outside the School House at St. Jim's as the winter dusk was falling.

Tom Merry & Co. were in scout rig, and they had just come in from a long run. They looked tired; and, in point of fact, they were tired.

Other fellows were streaming at the gates as the dusk fell; but they went on to their House. School House or New House, as the case might be, without hesitation. Tom Merry & Co. hesitated as the dusk deepened, and lingered in the quad.

"I guess we've got to face the music," remarked Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior. "Let's all go to the Head together."

"Rather a crowd of us to interview the Head," said Tom Merry, with a smile.

"Yaas, wathah! Leave it to me! As a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Cheese it, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Kildare of the Sixth looked out of the School House. Kildare seemed a little tired, too. The mud on his boots showed that he had newly come in. He called to the juniors.

"Had any luck, you youngsters?"

"Yes, Kildare."

"You don't mean to say you've found the missing kid, Merry?" exclaimed the St. Jim's captain.

"Yes."

"You've found Cardew?" exclaimed Kildare.

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Twacked him down like Wed Indians on the twail, you know!"

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Kildare in astonishment. "Where is he, if you've found him?"

"He hasn't come in with us," said Tom Merry reluctantly.

"Why on earth not?"

"Because—because—"

"Leave it to me, Tom Mewwy. I can explain evah so much bettah. You see, Kildare—"

"You'd better go in and explain to the Head," said Kildare, interrupting the swell of St. Jim's. "Dr. Holmes ordered the news to be taken to him at once if anything was found out. Cut in!"

"Oh, very well!"

Tom Merry & Co. moved on into the School House. Frank Levison of the Third Form came up breathlessly.

"Did I hear you say—"

"Cardew's found," said Tom Merry. "That's all right, young 'un. Your brother hasn't come back, of course."

"Oh, no," said Levison minor, shaking his head.

"The Head will have to know he's gone home."

"It can't be helped," said the fag in a low voice. "But Cardew—where is he, if he's found?"

"He's gone after Levison," said Blake.

"Oh," said Frank.

"Oh, come on!" said Tom. "Dashed if I know how we shall explain to the Head; but we're not to blame, anyhow. We couldn't hold Cardew by the ears, could we?"

"Well, we could have!" grinned Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! I weally think it was wathah wepwehensible of Cardew to bolt without the Head's permish," said Arthur Augustus. "It was vevy wepwehensible of Levison also. I considah—"

"Put Gussy's muzzle on, Blake, old chap!"

"You uttah ass—"

"I'm going to the Head!" said Tom Merry. "You fellows can cut off and get tea ready."

"Good idea!" said Manners.

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

Tom walked away towards the Head's study. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy started after him, and caught him by the shoulder. Arthur Augustus was very much in earnest. In the present curious state of affairs it was quite an awkward explanation that had to be made to Dr. Holmes. Arthur Augustus felt that he was the man for the job. His well-known tact and judgment had never been more needed.

"Tom Mewwy, old chap, I hate shovin' myself forward in any way," said Arthur Augustus, "but I must weally insist—"

"Hook it, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to hook it, deah boy! In the pwesent peculiar cires, a fellow of tact and judgment is wequahed. Pwase leave it to me. The Head will probably be waxy. I shall put it to him as one gentleman to another."

Tom Merry chuckled.

"You'll put your hoof in it, you mean, Gussy. Clear off, there's a good chap, and leave it to your Uncle Thomas."

"Wats! I insist!"

"Carry him home!" said Tom Merry, with an appealing glance at the chums of Study No. 6.

Manners and Lowther had already started for No. 10, to get tea. Clive and Wildrake had gone up the staircase together. But Blake and Herries and Digby came in answer to Tom Merry's S.O.S., and they laid hands upon the elegant scout. Blake took one arm, and Herries the other. Digby took possession of Gussy's noble neck.

"This way!" said Blake pleasantly.

"Yawwoh! Welease me!"

"Come away, sonny!" grinned Herries.

"I wefuse—"

"Yank him!" chuckled Digby.

"Yawwoop! Your feahful wuffians! Welease me— Oh ewumbs! Gwoogh!" Arthur Augustus' noble voice died away in the distance as his devoted chums conducted him to Study No. 6. And Tom Merry grinned, and tapped at the Head's door.

CHAPTER 2.

Tom Merry Explains.

DR. HOLMES glanced inquiringly at the captain of the Shell as he entered the study. The Head of St. Jim's was in a troubled mood. The mysterious disappearance of Ralph Reckness Cardew from the school the previous day had troubled him greatly. Nearly all St. Jim's had turned out to-day to join in the search for the missing junior, and every hour the Head had expected to hear news. But none had come so far, and the winter dusk was falling.

The Head was also a little troubled about Levison of the Fourth. Levison had asked leave to go home, on account of his father's illness and his sister's distress; but the Head had felt bound to refuse. The request had not been backed up by Levison's father; and naturally the Head could not let Levison decide the question for himself. But the junior's distress had touched him, though certainly it had not crossed his mind that Levison of the Fourth would take French leave, and "clear off" from St. Jim's on his own responsibility.

"Have you any news, Merry?" asked the Head.

"Yes, sir!" said Tom.

"Cardew—"

"He's found, sir!"

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath.

"Thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "That is excellent news indeed. How and where was he found, Merry?"

"It was really Wildrake's doing, sir!" said Tom. "He picked up the track left in the wood by Cardew and his kidnappers—"

Dr. Holmes raised his eyebrows.

"Kidnappers?" he repeated.

"Cardew was kidnapped, sir!"

"Are you sure of that, Merry?"

"Quite sure, sir. We traced him to a lonely cottage near Wayland—or rather, Wildrake did—and we found him there. He was locked up in a garret, and guarded by a half-breed American Indian named Chiquito. His name came out when we took him to the police station!"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "You have handed the man over to the police?"

"He is in a cell at Wayland now, sir!"

"Good, very good! The School Scouts have done good work to-day, Merry!" said the Head with a smile. "But this is very surprising. The man was an American Indian, you say? It is amazing that such a person should be in England at all, still more amazing that he should interfere with any boy belonging to this school. You are sure—"

Tom paused a moment.

The story he had to tell was strange enough, and he wondered what impression it would make on the Head. But it had to be told.

"This Indian fellow, sir, was employed by the kidnapper, a man named Carson. He came to St. Jim's on Wednesday to pick out Levison, and Cardew was pointed out to him by mistake. Cardew let him remain in the error, so as to save Levison from him. He's told us so since. It was Levison that the man wanted!"

"This is amazing!" said the Head. "Who is this man Carson? How do you know anything about him? Has the Indian confessed?"

"No, sir, he says nothing. But we found out about the man coming to St. Jim's. He's easily recognisable, he has a disfigured nose. And—Levison has told us about him!"

"Levison?" said the Head.

"The man is at Levison's home, sir!" said Tom. "Why Mr. Levison allows him there Levison doesn't know. He—he thinks there is some foul play going on. And—and that's why he's gone home, sir!"

It was out now, as diplomatically as Tom Merry could do it. Dr. Holmes stared at him over his glasses.

"Levison has gone home?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir!" faltered Tom.

"He was refused leave to go?"

"In the—circumstances, sir—his sister Doris was very distressed by—that man being in the house, and—and Levison thinks his father is too ill to deal with him!" said

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Tom. "If—if I may say so, sir, Levison ought to be at home now. We've had to give his father's address to the police, and tell them that Cardew's kidnapper can be caught there. The police will go to the house to take him, on the charge of kidnapping Cardew, sir. Mr. Levison is ill, and Mrs. Levison is away, and poor Doris—"

"Levison should not have gone home without leave!" said the Head gravely. "His father telephoned that he did not want him to go home, and I was bound to act upon that. However, I shall communicate with Mr. Levison at once, and see what he says. Where is Cardew, he has come back to the school with you, of course?"

The most difficult part of Tom's explanation was to come now. He gave a little cough.

"Cardew is Levison's best chum, sir!" he said. "He is anxious about him. He—he has gone to see him—"

"Merry! Do you mean to say that Cardew has also left the school without leave?"

"You see, sir!" faltered Tom, "the man who kidnapped him—Carson—is in Levison's house now. The police will go there to take him. Cardew thought that he ought to warn Levison what to expect—"

"Cardew had no right whatever to take such a step!" said Dr. Holmes severely. "I shall send him an order to return at once. But I thank you, Merry, and the others, for what you have done. I will telephone Lord Reckness at once and inform him that his grandson is safe. You may go, Merry!"

Tom Merry left the study, glad that that rather difficult business was over.

He joined Manners and Lowther in study No. 10, in the Shell, and was greeted by the pleasant scent of frying eggs and rashers.

"Just ready!" said Monty Lowther cheerily. "How did you get on with the old bird, Tommy?"

"Well, the Head is a bit waxy with Cardew," said Tom.

"That's only to be expected, I suppose!"

"He's a cheeky ass!" said Manners. "I say, Tom, this is a dashed queer business about Levison and his people!"

"Jolly queer!"

"The police will be at Cliff Cottage pretty soon to arrest that man Carson!" said Lowther. "It will be a bit of a shock for the Levisons, especially Doris!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"What does Levison's pater let the rotter stay in the house for at all?" demanded Manners.

"I give that up!" said Tom.

"Fishy!" said Manners sagely.

"Looks fishy!" said Lowther. "I wouldn't mention it to Levison, or to young Frank. But that man Carson, from Colorado, seems a regular desperado, and if old Levison lets him stay in the house, it's because he can't help himself. Why can't he? Jolly fishy, my infant!"

Tom Merry looked uncomfortable.

"Old Levison seems to have been a bit of a goer when he was out West in his young days!" said Lowther. "You remember that man, Dirk Power, who came after him once—"

"Mr. Levison wasn't to blame in that affair!"

"N-no—but he seems to have had some jolly queer acquaintances in his merry young days!" said Lowther, with a shrug of the shoulders. "As for this man, Carson, it looks to me—"

Monty Lowther did not finish.

After all, he reflected that it was no business of his, queer as it was. The Terrible Three, hungry as hunters after their long scout run, devoted themselves to eggs and rashers; and the subject of the Levisons was not mentioned again. But all three of the chums of the Shell were thinking of Ernest Levison, and wondering what was going on, in those very hours, at his home.

CHAPTER 3.

Levison Learns the Truth.

FATHER!"

Ernest Levison spoke quietly.

The man in the armchair by the fire seemed to shrink.

Ever since Levison of the Fourth had arrived home from school, Mr. Levison had evidently been dreading an explanation with his son.

But it had to come.

Dandy Carson, the man from Colorado, who seemed to hold such a strange power over Mr. Levison, had gone out after dinner, to smoke a cigar on the cliffs overlooking the sea. Levison had seized the opportunity to speak to his father without the man's presence. Doris Levison, pale and quiet, was in the room; but she did not speak. She had longed for her brother to come home, to help her in this strange and terrible emergency; and now that he had come she felt more able to face it. Levison, junior schoolboy as he was, seemed to have taken the position of a man in the

house; never had his coolness and quiet determination been so sorely needed, and never had they been so much to the fore.

In his first encounter with Dandy Carson, Levison had had the better of it.

He remained in Cliff Cottage—very much against the will of the man who had sought to kidnap him to keep him away.

He had won the first round, as it were. But affairs were only at the beginning.

Levison intended to know all, and to deal with the desperado who was darkening the lives of his father and his sister.

"Father!"

"Well?" said Mr. Levison, in a low voice.

"I want to know how matters stand, father."

"I have nothing to tell you, Ernest."

"Things can't go on as they are at present," said Levison quietly. "I've run away from school to come home, father. I find that man Carson practically in possession of the house. He gives orders, and you obey them."

Mr. Levison was silent.

He looked pale and ill and shrunken as he sat in the armchair, and his son's heart ached to see him. Mr. Levison had never been a demonstrative parent; but there was a steady affection under his hard exterior. Levison knew that. And his father did not look hard now. He looked a broken man. All his old sternness was gone. There had been a time when, whether right or wrong, he would have forbidden his son sternly to speak. But all the virility seemed to be gone out of him now. Levison thought of Doris' suspicion—that Carson had been undermining his father's strength of body and mind by drugs. His blood boiled at the thought; but he kept himself calm.

"Mr. Carson seems to be master here," continued the St. Jim's junior. "He told you not to let me come home when Doris asked me, and you let him have his way."

"You can do no good here, Ernest."

"I can turn that man out of the house, or hand him over to the police," said Levison, with a flash in his eyes.

"You do not understand!" muttered his father.

"I want to understand. He was so keen on keeping me away, that he came to St. Jim's and tried to kidnap me. He is afraid to have your son here—that's plain enough. He kidnapped Cardew, my chum, by mistake. I believe Cardew played up to save me from him. It would be like him. But Cardew's got to be found—he will be found—and when he is found, there will be a charge of kidnapping against Mr. Carson. He will be arrested."

Mr. Levison shivered.

"You do not want the arrest to take place in this house, father."

"I am powerless."

"You cannot be powerless in your own house."

"You do not understand," repeated Mr. Levison.

"But that is not all, father. My chum, Cardew, is a prisoner somewhere. I can't let that go on. If that man does not release him, I am bound to give information to the police so that they can force him to tell where he has put Cardew."

Mr. Levison raised haggard eyes to his son's face.

"Do you wish to ruin me, Ernest?"

"Father, tell me what hold that man has over you?" exclaimed Levison.

There was a long silence.

Mr. Levison stared gloomily at the fire. Ernest Levison and Doris waited breathlessly for his answer. He looked up at last.

"It is better for you not to know, Ernest," said the unhappy man at last. "But if you denounce Carson as a kidnapper, you ruin me."

"I can't allow Cardew to remain a prisoner."

"He will not be hurt. Carson would never dare—Besides, he has no object. Ralph Cardew is nothing to him. He was kidnapped by mistake for you, my boy."

"Can't you see, father," exclaimed Levison eagerly—"can't you see that if Carson would go to that length, and take that risk, to keep me away from home, he also has something to fear? Why should he fear to have your son in

the house, if his hold over you is so strong as you believe? Father, you are not yourself now—you think you dare not defy that man. Tell me, at least, why you fear him."

"And if I tell you, will you sacrifice Cardew to my safety?"

Levison was silent now.

He looked at Doris, but the girl could give him no help.

"Cardew's a good pal," said Levison, at last. "He would stand by me through thick and thin. He let himself be kidnapped rather than let that villain get at me. He would stick it out for my sake. Father, if it's necessary for your safety—"

"It is!" said Mr. Levison, in a low voice.

"If you make that clear to me, father, I shall place your safety first. I know that that is what Cardew would say."

"I will tell you," said Mr. Levison, with an effort.

But still he did not speak. His face, haggard and worn, grew paler and paler. His hands, thin and white, trembled on the arms of the chair. Levison felt a pang at his heart.

"Father," he said, in a low voice, "when I left you last you were strong and well. Now you look—" He paused. "Father, that man has been tampering with you. Doris has told me that Dr. Smith is puzzled by your heart attacks; you have been drugged."

Mr. Levison started.

"Impossible!"

"I am sure of it," said Levison. "He has reduced you to this state to keep you in his power. That is why he feared my coming home."

The haggard man in the armchair shook his head feebly.

"Tell me what you were going to tell me," said Levison.

"You have done nothing in the past that Doris and I may not know?"

Mr. Levison smiled faintly.

"You do not understand," he said, in broken tones.

"They were wild days—when I was a young man at the gold-mines in Colorado. Many things were done in those days—"

"It was there you met Carson?"

"Yes. He was what was called a 'sport'—a gambler by profession."

"He looks it!" said Levison, with a curl of the lip.

"I was—I was prospecting for gold-mines," said Mr. Levison, his voice sinking almost to a whisper. "I had hard



"Father," said Ernest Levison, "I want to know how matters stand. I've run away from school to come home. Things can't go on as they are at present." Mr. Levison looked pale and ill and shrunken as he sat in his armchair. "I have nothing to tell you, Ernest," he answered.

luck. I fell in with Carson—I fell into his ways. We became comrades. There are still men in Denver who remember Poker Jack." He smiled bitterly. "That is what I was called in those days. One night there was an affray—a man was shot."

Doris shivered.

"He fell by Carson's hand," said Mr. Levison. "But—but I was there—I was mixed up in the affair. We fled together—Dandy Carson and Poker Jack." He shuddered. "It seems like some evil dream now. It is so many years ago; I believed that it was all dead and buried. I—I parted with Carson the next night. My eyes were opened. There was a quarrel, and he attacked me. I struck him down. He bears the mark of the blow to this day."

"The hound!" muttered Levison.

"I was up in Alaska afterwards—for years—and then in Mexico. When I came back to England—before you were born—I thought I had thrown all that behind me. I did not know that Carson ever knew my real name. He knew more than I thought. He found me out—I believe he has had to flee from America to save himself from the law—he came to England, and he found me out. He came into our house in London one day, and the sight of his evil face and his smashed nose brought all the past back to me. I—I left London; we came here. I have not the nerve of the old days; I hoped to escape him. He followed. He installed himself in the house. He dismissed the servants—only old Jane remains. He has the power over me to tell all that he knows. What would it mean for me, Ernest, if it was known that I was once Poker Jack, the gambler of Denver—mixed up in a shooting affray in which a man was killed?"

Levison drew a deep breath.

"But you have committed no crime."

"How can I prove that?"

Levison's eyes dwelt pityingly on the shrunken man.

There had been a time when Mr. Levison would have faced the blackmailer with cool hardihood, and bidden him do his worst. More than ever Levison was certain that foul play had undermined his father's courage.

"After all, what can the man prove?" he said. "He cannot even betray you without betraying himself."

Mr. Levison made a gesture.

"He has nothing to lose—an outcast and desperado. But I—even if the law cannot touch me—the shame, the disgrace, the infamy—"

He groaned, and dropped his face into his hands.

"I knew," said Levison quietly—"I knew that you were not yourself, father, that the man's hold over you was not so powerful as you believed. He can prove nothing—he would be laughed at if he told his story, a story of twenty years ago. Father, he would not even dare to draw public attention upon himself; a man like that has too many crimes to answer for. He would not dare to come into contact with the police. If you were your old self, you would see it, and defy him."

Mr. Levison raised his head. Colour flushed for a moment into his pale cheeks.

It seemed as if he had borrowed courage from his son.

"And why is he here?" continued Levison. "What does he ask? Have you given him money?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"A few hundreds, so far. Ready money is hard to come by in these days," muttered Mr. Levison.

"He asks for more, then?"

"He—he has asked. I—I have done as he asks." Mr. Levison's voice faltered. "At first he demanded that I should leave him half my fortune in my will, and undertook to leave me in peace if I agreed. I—I would not rob my children. But we have made an agreement. I have insured my life in his favour."

Levison started violently.

"Your life, father?"

"For a large sum," said Mr. Levison. "That satisfies him. The matter is settled now, and he promised to go when it was settled. Yet he has not gone. He is waiting for something—waiting for news from his associates in America—to know whether it is safe for him to return there, I think. But he will go soon—he will go soon."

Levison's eyes met Doris'. They knew all now, and they knew why the man, pale and shrunken in the armchair, looked as if the hand of death was upon him. They knew why Dandy Carson stayed, revengeful, implacable, for the blow that had been struck twenty years ago. He was waiting, not for news from America, but to see his victim sink into the grave—to satisfy at once his revenge and his greed. That was why the man from Colorado had feared Levison's return home.

There was a long silence in the room. It was broken by a step at the door. Cool, insolent, smiling, the man with the flattened nose lounged into the room.

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CHAPTER 4.

The Coming of Cardew.

B UZZZZZZ!

The telephone-bell rang in the adjoining room as Dandy Carson lounged in.

Levison rose to his feet.

Mr. Levison sank back into his chair, the momentary colour dying out of his face, at the sight of his tormentor.

Dandy Carson grinned.

"Quite a happy family gathering, I guess," he drawled. "Have you persuaded your interesting boy to return to school yet, Levison?"

Mr. Levison did not answer.

"I am staying!" said Ernest Levison briefly.

The Dandy shrugged his shoulders.

"You would be safer at school!" he said significantly.

"You will hardly dare attempt any fresh kidnapping here, I think," said Levison coolly. "I shall be ready for you, Mr. Carson."

"Get out of the room, you young cub!"

Buzzzzz!

The telephone-bell rang again. Levison quietly left the room, and Doris followed. He went to the telephone at once. He hoped that the call was from St. Jim's—from Tom Merry—with news of his missing chum.

He took up the receiver. He started as he recognised the voice of Dr. Holmes on the wires.

"Is that Mr. Levison?" came the Head's voice.

"Ernest Levison speaking, sir," answered the junior.

"Levison! You have left school without permission—"

"I am sorry, sir! But I am wanted at home. My father has given me permission to stay, sir."

"If your father writes to me to that effect, Levison, I will overlook the matter."

"Very well, sir."

"But there is another matter. Cardew has been found."

"Oh! I'm glad!" breathed Levison.

"Some of the juniors found him, a prisoner. He had been kidnapped. The foolish and self-willed boy has not returned to the school, but has taken the express for Kent. He is coming to your house."

Levison started.

"Coming here!" he ejaculated.

"Yes. He is to be sent back at once. Ask your father to come to the telephone, Levison."

"He is ill, sir."

"Then you must give him my message. Cardew should be with you now, or he will soon arrive. He is to be told to return to the school without delay—by the first train in the morning, at least."

"I will tell him what you say, sir."

"And, further, Levison, I am very angry—"

Dandy Carson came into the room, and came over to the telephone. Levison jammed the receiver on the hooks, without waiting for the Head to finish.

"Your headmaster inquiring after you—what?" grinned Carson.

"Yes."

"You will do well to go back to school, my boy."

"I shall please myself about that."

Levison returned to the dining-room, with Carson at his heels. His heart was beating.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was saved from the clutches of the kidnappers—that was so much to the good. And he was coming to Cliff Cottage! That was a secret Levison intended to keep for the present.

"Father!"

"Yes, my boy?" said Mr. Levison faintly.

"The Head wishes you to write to him and tell him that you desire me to remain at home."

"Very well."

Carson broke into a scoffing laugh.

"You will not write, Poker Jack," he said. "Let the boy's headmaster send for him—that will settle the difficulty. I do not want him about the house."

"Your wishes in the matter do not count!" said Levison.

"Does your father say so?" sneered Carson.

Levison glanced at his father, sunken in the chair. Mr. Levison did not speak. But it was pretty clear that Carson's order would weigh with him, and that he would not write to the Head of St. Jim's.

"Get out of the room, boy!" said Carson.

Levison left the room quietly. It suited him, at present, not to come to an open altercation with the ruffian. Cardew was coming—he might arrive at any moment. Levison had that to consider. Cardew was coming, and it was in Cardew's power to hand over the man with the flattened nose to the police, on the charge of kidnapping. That was a strong card in Levison's hand; and he was anxious to consult with his chum.

In the hall he whispered to Doris.

"Cardew's coming. You remember Cardew of the Fourth?"

"Yes," breathed Doris. "Then he is free! Thank Heaven for that!"

"I'm going out to meet him. Better not let that villain know at present."

"Yes, Ernest."

Levison slipped from the house, and ran down the garden path to the gate. The moon was coming up over the sea, and a silvery light glimmered through the winter mists.

The long lane towards Clyffe was shadowed by leafless trees. By that lane Cardew had to come, and Levison of the Fourth waited and watched for his chum, heedless of the keen wind from the sea over the chalk cliffs. He waited long, but he was patient. Behind him the lights gleamed from the windows of Cliff Cottage. Once or twice he saw a shadow cross the blind of the French windows, and guessed that Dandy Carson was pacing the room—it was not his father who was moving. Levison's eyes glittered, and he shook his clenched hand at the moving shadow that passed and repassed the lighted window.

He feared for his father—there was a deadly fear in his heart. Like a flash of lightning in the darkness, a glimmering of the disfigured man's scheme had come to him, and he knew that his father's life was at stake. That was why the scoundrel had striven to keep him away—even to the length of attempting to kidnap him. The Dandy did not want Levison's cool head and keen eyes on the scene of his crime. But, cunning as he was, the rascal had failed—his own error, and Cardew's devotion had saved Levison. And that slip might yet be the villain's undoing.

Levison waited and watched, busy thoughts running through his mind. Cardew was coming! With all his outward air of light cynicism, Cardew was a loyal chum, the fellow to stand by a friend to the very finish. He knew—at least, he might suspect—the strange circumstances at Levison's home—the possibility, at least, of open disgrace and shame. Yet he was coming, without a thought of himself. This was the fellow who was called a dandy and a slacker at St. Jim's—the fellow who had more enemies than he could count on the fingers of both hands!

Levison of the Fourth longed to see him—he felt that he would be stronger, that his courage would be firmer, with his chum by his side. And to Cardew he could talk more freely than to another fellow—Tom Merry, or D'Arcy, or even his other chum, Sidney Clive. Cardew, with his wide, cynical toleration for the sins of others, was the fellow he would have chosen to know his father's shadowed story, since it must be known to someone.

When would he come?

A moving shadow in the moonlight—it was only a stirring branch. He waited.

There was danger at Cliff Cottage—Levison knew that! Danger for him—perhaps danger for Cardew, when he came—danger even for Doris. And certain death for his father, if he could not save him! If only Cardew would come!

There was a footstep at last!

Levison ran forward, his heart throbbing. An elegant figure in a grey overcoat loomed up in the moonlight.

"Cardew!"

"Levison, old bean!"

They gripped hands.

CHAPTER 5.

The Shadow On The Blind!

RALPH RECKNESS CARDEW glanced curiously at his chum.

Cardew was looking quite himself.

His elegant clothes, certainly, showed plain traces of his imprisonment in the garret of the Wayland Cottage. He was fatigued by his long journey by train.

But he was quite himself—cool, careless, good-humoured. For a moment, as he shook his chum's hand, there was earnestness in his handsome face—but the careless smile returned at once. Cardew might be capable of deep emotions; but it was rarely that a trace of them found its way to the surface. Indeed, as if he was ashamed of his momentary display of feeling, he went on to speak quickly, in laughing tones.

"Surprised to see me—what? I hope I am welcome! You've asked me to give you a look-in more than once, old

bean; but I haven't done it! Am I buttin' in at an awkward moment?"

"I was waiting for you."

"Waitin' for me?" Cardew raised his eyebrows. "Then you knew—"

"The Head telephoned."

"Dear old Head!" said Cardew, with a grin, "he will be in no end of a wax at my boltin' like this. Never mind—let him wax."

"He says you are to go back by the first train in the morning."

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"That depends!" he remarked. "Begad! I don't even know if you're goin' to put me up for the night, old bean. Bit of a nerve buttin' in suddenly like this, what?"

"I'm glad to see you, Cardew. I—I've been awfully anxious about you," said Levison. "It was Carson who kidnapped you—"

"The excellent jonny with the nose that has had a side-slip," assented Cardew, with a nod.

"How did you get away?"

Cardew laughed.

"I didn't get—I was got! That Canadian chap, what's his name—"

"Wildrake?"

"The merry Wildrake tracked me out—no end of an interestin' story. I was locked in a garret—doooid cold and dirty quarters—you can see that my clothes have suffered—"

"Never mind your clothes, if you—"

"Oh, I'm all serene—never better," said Cardew carelessly. "I was jolly glad to see Tom Merry and his giddy scouts, though. I figured it out that I'd better run on at once and tell you the news, Levison. That enterprisin' jonny Carson is here, of course?"

Levison jerked his thumb towards the lighted dining-room window.

A shadow was dark on the blind again.

"That?" said Cardew.

"Yes."

"With your pater?"

"Yes."

Cardew whistled.

"You'd better know what to expect, Levison," he said; "the flat-nosed merchant kidnapped me for you—I let him rip, partly to amuse myself by pullin' his cheery leg. He handed



Dandy Carson, with a fierce oath, sprang to the door and threw it wide open, revealing Levison in the hall. The instant his back was turned, Cardew changed the two glasses. It took him but a second, the doctored glass was now standing in the place of the other.

me over to an Indian, or half-breed, or somethin'—a silent animal he seems to have brought from America with him to do his dirty work. His name's Chiquito—a dickens of a name, what? He's taken."

"Oh!" said Levison, with a deep breath.

"Tom Merry and the rest handed him over to the police at Wayland," resumed Cardew, "charged with kidnapping and illegal detention, an' the rest of it. I gave them a description of Carson to hand in—anyhow they knew all about the man with the smashed nose—and that he was here at Cliff Cottage."

"The police have been told that?"

"Yes. It couldn't be helped, Levison."

"I'm not sorry."

There was a pause. Cardew whistled softly under his breath, waiting for his chum to speak.

"Carson is charged with kidnapping, then?" asked Levison.

"Yes."

"In that case the police will come here for him?"

"Not much doubt about that."

"And then—then—" muttered Levison.

"Get him out of the house," said Cardew quietly, "that's why I came. You can't have an arrest under your father's roof. Think of Doris! The man will have to stand his trial—you don't want your family's name dragged into it. Get him out."

"Has his confederate confessed?"

"To the police? I don't know—but I fancy not. He looks a hard nut to crack, and I fancy he won't round on Mr. Carson."

"He will go to prison?"

"Dead cert! I rather like to think of him breakin' stones on Dartmoor," smiled Cardew; "he bored me dreadfully."

Levison looked away towards the house. The two juniors were leaning on the garden gate as they talked in low tones. The shadow came on the white blind again.

So clear was it, with the strong light behind it, that the profile of the man from Colorado could be clearly seen, with the disfigured nose and the cruel lips.

Cardew nodded towards it.

"That's the merchant!" he said. "I'd know that mug anywhere. I shall have to identify him when the bobbies lay their hands on him, Levison. Not in your house if it can be helped."

Levison did not answer; he was watching the shadow on the blind.

There was a decanter in Carson's hand—and they saw the shadowed figure filling a wineglass. He laid down the decanter and the glass on a little table by the window. Then his hand went to his pocket, and was extended over the glass.

Levison caught his breath.

That little table at the window, he knew, was out of his father's sight, if Mr. Levison was still in his favourite seat, the big armchair by the fire.

What was the man from Colorado doing?

"Levison!" breathed Cardew.

He had seen, too!

From something in the hand of Dandy Carson, a thin dark stream shot down into the wineglass, shadowed on the blind. Levison turned a face like chalk on his chum.

"Cardew—you saw—"

"Doctored wine!" said Cardew. "Good heavens! Your father—"

Levison opened the gate with unsteady hands. He was shaking from head to foot.

What he had seen, shadowed on the blind, confirmed his blackest suspicions.

Cardew caught him by the arm, as he staggered up the garden path.

"Hold on, Ernest." His voice was quick, low. "You're knocked over. Leave it to me—"

"My father!"

"You don't know that it's for him—the fellow may take drugs himself. You'll give everything away with that face. Leave it to me—if it's for your father, he sha'n't touch it!"

Cardew ran fleetly up the garden path. In the moonlight he had seen that Levison had left the door ajar.

Levison followed him more slowly. He was almost frozen with horror. Instinctively he knew that he could trust his chum—that in this terrible moment Ralph Reckness Cardew was more use than he himself would have been. For his horrified face would have betrayed in an instant his terrible suspicions to the secret poisoner—if poisoner he was. He knew that Cardew would never let his father touch the wine, even if he had to knock the glass from his hand.

With shaking limbs he followed the dandy of the Fourth into the house. But Ralph Reckness Cardew was already in the dining-room.

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CHAPTER 6.

Cardew Chips In!

DANDY CARSON turned, with an oath on his lips, as the door opened, and Cardew of the Fourth came in. The wineglass stood on the little table beside him.

Another glass was in Carson's hand—he was about to pick up a decanter when Cardew entered.

He stood transfixed for a moment.

The sight of the junior whom he had kidnapped, and whom he believed to be at that moment safe in the keeping of his Indian confederate, Chiquito, startled and amazed him.

"You!" he stuttered.

Cardew nodded airily.

"Little me," he said cheerfully. "Good-evenin', Mr. Carson!"

"You—how—"

The sick man, shrunken in the big chair, looked round wearily. He recognised his son's chum, and nodded to him.

"Cardew! I thought— Ernest said—"

"Good-evenin', Mr. Levison! Sorry to surprise you like this," said Cardew. "I thought I'd drop in and assure you—and this gentleman here—of my safety and well-bein'. You seem surprised, Mr. Carson?"

"You young hound!" shouted Carson. "How did you get away?"

Cardew laughed.

He had no intention whatever of telling the kidnapper that his confederate was in the hands of the police, and that the toils were already spread for his own feet. Dandy Carson could make that discovery at his leisure.

"Walked!" he answered.

"That fool Chiquito! He was drunk, I suppose—and let you get away!" Carson swore savagely. "He shall pay for it, hang him!"

"Dear man, don't get excited!" urged Cardew pleasantly.

"I was the wrong bird in the cage, you know. You've probably discovered by this time that I haven't the honour of bein' Mr. Levison's son. You need trainin' before you take up the kidnappin' bizney seriously, Mr. Carson. Baggin' the wrong bird is an error, and liable to lead to troublesome results."

Carson glared at him.

"You are a friend of young Levison's, I understand?" he said.

"Your understandin' does you credit, old bean. You've hit the nail right on the head!"

"Do you want to see Levison's father disgraced and driven from all decent society?"

"I should be very sorry," said Cardew, with a compassionate glance at the shrinking figure in the chair.

"That is what will happen, if trouble falls on me," said Dandy Carson. "If you've any friendship for the Levison family, young fellow, you'd better keep your tongue between your teeth, with regard to what has happened between you and me!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew smiled ironically. He wondered what Carson would have said, if he had known that there were nearly a dozen witnesses to his imprisonment in the Wayland cottage, and that they had laid their information before the police already—at the same time handing over the flat-nosed man's accomplice. Evidently Carson suspected nothing of the sort. His belief was that the kidnapped junior had somehow contrived to escape from his place of imprisonment. He had never even heard of Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior at St. Jim's; and he was not likely to guess that a schoolboy had picked up the kidnapped junior's trail and followed it unerringly until Cardew had been found.

The dandy of the Fourth left him in blissful ignorance. It was time enough for Dandy Carson to know the truth when the police arrived.

"You understand?" snapped Carson.

Cardew nodded.

"You make it very clear," he answered. "I figure it out that you've got some hold over this gentleman, and that you will round on him if I give you away."

"Exactly!" sneered Carson.

"By gad, that will want thinkin' out, won't it?" said Cardew affably. "I certainly do not want to do anythin' to hurt my chum's father. And as you know I'm the wrong bird, I suppose you won't take the trouble to try to put me in a cage again—what?"

"You can go to Jericho for all I care!" snarled the man with the flattened nose. "I never want to see you again! I'll make Chiquito smart for letting you get away. The fool!" He broke off. "Why have you come here at all?"

"To see my old pal Ernest."

"The sooner you see him, then, and go, the better. He is about the house somewhere!"

Levison of the Fourth was standing outside the dining-room door at that moment. The door was an inch ajar, and Levison could see the glass in which the fluid had been

dropped. He was ready to intervene if he was needed, but for the moment he was content to leave matters in Cardew's hands. He knew that his chum had some plan in his mind—what it was he could not guess; but he was content to rely upon him. Cardew was playing the cunning adventurer as an angler plays a fish.

The dandy of St. Jim's yawned.

"Are you in a hurry to see the back of me, Mr. Carson?"

"Sure!"

"I'm sorry you'll have to put up with my charmin' society for a bit. You see, I've made a thumpin' long journey, and I'm tired!"

And Cardew threw himself into a chair beside the little table at the window, and yawned again.

The man from Colorado scowled at him.

He seemed rather at a loss how to act. To some extent, he was at the junior's mercy—and undoubtedly he would have preferred to see Ralph Reckness Cardew go in peace. He took up the decanter again, and filled the second wine-glass.

Both the glasses were exactly alike to look at: there was no difference to be seen in the wine they contained.

But the shadow on the blind had told Cardew that the first one was doctored; the second evidently not.

Cardew appeared to pay them no attention; but Levison, in the hall outside, saw that the dandy of the Fourth had seated himself within easy reach of both of them.

Carson turned to Mr. Levison again.

"Here's your wine, old pard," he said. "Drink up—it will put new life into you!"

"I do not care to drink."

"With me?" sneered Carson. "You were not so particular in the old days, Poker Jack! You drank many a deep glass with me in Denver. In those days I would have shot a man for refusing to drink with me!"

Mr. Levison raised a feeble hand as the bully's voice rose. It was clear that he dreaded a dispute and a quarrel.

"I will do anything you wish," he said weakly. "What does it matter?"

"Take your wine like a man, then."

Carson stretched out his hand to the doctored glass. Evidently that was the one he was going to pass to Mr. Levison.

Cardew half-rose, staring at the door.

"Levison!" he shouted. "What are you doing there? What are you doing with that revolver?"

The question astounded Levison of the Fourth—he stood rooted to the floor with amazement. Dandy Carson, with a fierce oath, sprang to the door and threw it wide open, revealing Levison in the hall.

The instant his back was turned, Cardew changed the two glasses.

It took him but a second; but now the doctored glass was standing in the place of the other!

He sat down again and smiled—grimly.

Levison had seen his action, and he understood. Dandy Carson glared at him.

"A revolver—" he began.

"Cardew was mistaken," said Levison. "You can see that I have no revolver, Mr. Carson." He spoke with unusual meekness.

The man scowled at him. Cardew's words had been intended to startle him, and to make him believe, for the moment, that his victim's son had been driven to a desperate act.

The Dandy turned back into the room, and turned his scowl upon Ralph Reckness Cardew.

"You young fool!"

"Dear man," yawned Cardew. "Are you always as polite as that to your host's other guests?"

"You said he had a revolver—"

"My little joke!" smiled Cardew. "I wanted to see you jump! You jumped! Thanks for the entertainment!"

"So you were pulling my leg?" said the Dandy, with a very ugly look at the St. Jim's junior.

"Exactly!" assented Cardew, with a cool nod.

Carson checked the oath on his lips. He picked up the wineglass and crossed over to Mr. Levison.

The one he had picked up was the one that was standing where he had left the doctored wine.

But it was not the doctored one, as he supposed—owing to the rapid change Cardew had made while his back was turned.

Mr. Levison took it with a trembling hand.

Carson picked up the other glass.

He clinked it against Mr. Levison's glass, with an air of joviality that was only too plainly forced.

"Health, old pard!" he said.

Mr. Levison hesitated to drink. Perhaps there lingered in his mind the terrible suspicion his son had breathed to him. But as a black look gathered on Carson's face he drank, and the adventurer emptied his glass at the same time.

Mr. Levison's pale face flushed a little under the influence of the wine. Carson put down his glass, with a laugh.

"Something like old times—what?" he asked.

Mr. Levison nodded and sank back in his chair. The adventurer watched his face with glinting eyes—a cruel glint. And Cardew watched the adventurer grimly! The doctored wine had been swallowed to the last drop by the wretch who had doctored it. Evidently the liquid Carson had placed in it had no taste that was not disguised by the flavour of the wine. The rascal had no suspicion.

Was it poison?

That this man, desperate rascal as he was, could be so base and ruthless as to be sapping away the life of the man under whose roof he fed and slept, was hard to believe. Yet what else could his action mean?

In any case, whatever the dose was, Dandy Carson had swallowed it instead of his destined victim. And Ralph Reckness Cardew watched him, with a cynical smile, and waited for developments.

CHAPTER 7.

By His Own Hand.

DORIS LEVISON looked in at the door.

Cardew rose to his feet at once. So far, Dandy Carson had shown no ill results of the dose he had swallowed. He sat on the corner of the dining-table, swinging his legs, and smoking a cigar, and addressing remarks to Mr. Levison, which the sick man scarcely answered.

Ralph Reckness Cardew passed from the room with Levison, and the latter closed the door.

In the hall he shook hands with Doris.

"I am so glad you are free again—and safe!" Doris whispered softly.

"Safe as houses, and none the worse," said Cardew lightly.

"Too bad to butt in on your household like this, though."

"Ah! I am glad to see you. Ernest needs a friend with him now," said Doris. "It is kind—generous of you to come to a house like this—full of misery and shadows. You know—I suppose you know—" She faltered. Cardew interrupted her.

"Ernest has told me some things," he said. "Believe me, Miss Doris, I'm sorry, and I want to help you both, if I can."

"You've got to know the rest," said Levison abruptly.

"Come in here, where we can talk."

There was a fire in the little smoke-room opening off the hall. Doris hurried away to prepare some supper for Cardew.

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Jane, the deaf old woman, the only servant who remained in that shadowed household, had gone to bed. Levison stirred the fire, and motioned his chum to a seat.

"You needn't tell me anythin', old bean," said Cardew, as Levison was about to speak. "I'm not curious."

"You must wonder—"

Cardew shook his head.

"Not in the least," he said. "I'm famous for mindin' my own bizney! I never worry over other people's affairs—too much of a bore."

Levison smiled faintly.

"I shall have to bore you a little," he said. "You must know the kind of house you've come into, Cardew; and if you don't care to face what we've got to face, there's time to retreat. No reason why you should get mixed up in what may be a fearful disgrace."

"No reason—then I'm all the more likely to do it," said Cardew, laughing. "Dear old man, there's somethin' in bein' the grandson of a giddy peer of the realm—it frees a chap from the middle-class horror of a scandal. There have been scandals in my family ever since I remember. My poor old pater in his time was one of the most talked-about men in London. The giddy old granddad has set tongues waggin', too; and dashed if I believe he's done yet! Uncle Lilburn has been in the papers! Ernest, old bean, if there's a little more notoriety to be gathered in, I'm your man."

"I'll tell you what I know, and I sha'n't think any the worse of you if you clear on the spot," said Levison, unheeding Cardew's banter.

"I sha'n't do that."

"Listen, then."

In quiet tones Ernest Levison related what he had learned from his father of the dark old days in Colorado.

Cardew listened without comment.

When his chum had finished he smiled.

"Is that all, you serious-faced old duck?" he inquired.

"That's all."

"Little enough!" Cardew yawned. "From your solemn chivvy, old bean, I was expectin' a tale of battle, murder, an' sudden death! Why, what you've told me is nothin' to what I could tell you about my Uncle Lilburn!"

"You don't feel inclined to clear?"

"There wouldn't be a train from Clyffe, if I did. But I don't! If I'm not a frightful trouble to you and your sister, I'd like to stick it out with you, old bean. If I'm in the way, say so. I sha'n't be offended."

Levison of the Fourth drew a deep breath.

"You're a good chap, Cardew!" he said.

"None better!" assented Cardew, laughing. "No good tellin' them that at St. Jim's! But we know it, don't we?"

"I can't say how glad I am to have you here. You're the one fellow in the world I'd like to have standing by me now," said Levison. "If you'll stay—if you can stay—till the finish—"

"I can, and I will!" Cardew's eyes glistened. "By gad! I think I've never enjoyed anythin' so much as the prospect of a few rounds with that blackguard in the other room. We're goin' to down him between us, old bean, an' see Doris smilin' and cheery again! I'll telephone a wire to my grandfather, and get him to write to the Head beggin' me off, to stay with you till no longer wanted. When that brute is in chokey we'll have some fine days rambling on the cliffs around here. Man in the train was tellin' me about smugglers' caves in these cliffs—"

"Lots of them," said Levison. "There's a passage to the caves from the bottom of the garden."

"Good!"

"We're not clear of the man yet," said Levison. "And—and the police—" He shivered. "If he's arrested he will talk. I'm sure that he cannot hurt my father, but the poor old pater is so weak and feeble now—" He gritted his teeth. "That villain has been sapping away his strength by drugs or poison. His tale of twenty years ago wouldn't be listened to; there can't be any proofs in existence. If my father could only see that, and act with his old courage. But he's a changed man—a sick man—and it is Carson's work."

"We know his method," said Cardew quietly. "And he has been hoist with his own petard this time."

Levison's face paled.

"What do you think it was, Cardew?"

"A drug of some kind—the kind that brings on your father's heart attacks and makes him unconscious, I fancy."

"The villain! Oh, the villain!" muttered Levison.

"I had that in my mind," smiled Cardew. "If he has been doctoring your father, as we suspect—if this was the same drug, as it's pretty certain to be—it will have the same effect on Mr. Carson. When he is unconscious we can deal with the beauty."

Levison started.

"Two St. Jim's juniors against a desperado from the Wild
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"West," said Cardew, laughing. "We're going to win, Levison!"

Doris appeared at the door with a tray. Cardew sprang up to relieve her of it.

"By gad! I'm hungry!" he remarked.

Cardew ate his supper with cool enjoyment and a keen appetite. But his brother and sister were listening for sounds from the dining-room.

Levison had told Doris of the changed wine-glasses, and the girl had shuddered as she listened.

Her eloquent eyes thanked Cardew.

If he had saved her father from what might have proved a fatal dose, in his feeble state, even the kind and gentle Doris could not think much of the danger in which the poisoner stood.

They listened.

Well they knew that in the other room Carson was waiting to watch the effect of the dose on his victim! And they were waiting to learn its effect upon Carson! It was a strange and tragic situation.

Suddenly from the dining-room there came a cry. It was Mr. Levison's voice.

"Ernest! Doris!"

Levison rushed out of the smoke-room and sprang across the hall. He threw open the dining-room door.

Doris and Cardew were close behind him.

Mr. Levison stood on the hearth-rug before the dying fire, clutching at the arms of his chair for support.

On the floor lay Dandy Carson, his face white and set and strained, his wicked eyes closed—insensible.

CHAPTER 8.

Cardew's Next Move.

"COURAGE, dear Doris." Cardew caught the girl's arms as she reeled by the door, almost overcome by the shock of what she saw.

"Oh, heavens!" whispered Doris.

"Ernest! Something has—has happened. Telephone for the doctor."

"What happened, father?"

"I hardly know. He was sitting on the table, jeering and laughing, and suddenly he seemed to have a seizure," said Mr. Levison, in broken tones. "It was exactly like the seizure I had yesterday."

Levison exchanged a quick glance with Cardew.

"He fell from the table to the floor," said Mr. Levison. "It cannot be the drink. He had only one glass since dinner, the one he had with me when you were present. Villain as he is, he must be attended—"

Levison heeded no further.

He bent over the fallen man and examined him, quietly and calmly. There was no pity in his heart. This was what the ruffian had intended for his father! This was the meaning of the dose dropped into the wineglass, and betrayed by the shadow on the blind.

The man's heart was beating.

But his face was like chalk, his limbs rigid. The drug, whatever it was, had brought on this sudden seizure—a heart attack, as a medical man would probably have judged it.

"He is not dead!" said Levison, rising. "It is not exactly a poison. It is some horrible drug—probably something he learned from his Indian accomplice—"

Mr. Levison's face was startled and scared.

"Ernest! What are you saying?"

"I will tell you, father," said Levison steadily.

In quiet tones he told of the shadow on the blind, and of the changing of the glasses by Cardew.

Mr. Levison sank back in his chair with a groan.

"Then it is true—he has been drugging me. And this was intended for me! It was my life he was aiming at!"

"For revenge upon you, and for the insurance policy," said Levison bitterly. "That is why he has stayed, father! That is why he tried to keep me away. Thank Heaven Cardew came! He has saved you!"

"By gad!" murmured Cardew. "I do seem to have come in useful for once! Quite a novel position for little me."

"But the doctor must be sent for," said Mr. Levison feebly.

"Even if he is overcome by his own vile drug, he must be attended to."

"Let us put him on the sofa in the smoke-room, Levison," said Cardew. "Your father cannot stand much more of this."

"And send for the doctor!" breathed Mr. Levison.

Without replying, the two juniors lifted the insensible man from the floor and carried him out, across the hall, into the smoke-room. Doris remained with her father.

Dandy Carson was laid on the sofa in the smoke-room, and Cardew closed the door. Then he looked grimly at his chum.

"Caught in his own trap!" he said. "I fancy it's a fairly strong dose to knock over a hefty man like that, Levison. He had it in his mind to make a finish here—things were getting too thick. I've a strong suspicion that if your father

had taken that dose he would never have seen another sun rise."

"The scoundrel!" muttered Levison, clenching his hands. "Oh, the scoundrel!"

"He seems a pretty thorough villain," assented Cardew, eyeing the insensible man. "Your father has played into the rascal's hands, old bean. If he'd defied him in the first place—"

"If he only had!" muttered Levison.

"But once the man got a footing in the house he was able to play this game," said Cardew. "Your father's weakened in body and in mind, old fellow. He's very far from being himself now. We have got to act for him. And this scoundrel has tricked himself, and put himself at our mercy."

Cardew bent over the insensible man.

Dandy Carson's eyelids were flickering; his white lips moved slightly.

"He's comin' to!" said Cardew.

Levison started.

"Are you sure?"

"Cert. You see, he's a powerful, hefty blackguard, and it doesn't affect him so strongly as it would have your poor old father. But he's not going to give any more trouble. He's very kindly got himself down, an' we're goin' to keep him down," said Cardew grimly. "Have you got any cord in the house, Levison?"

Levison understood.

"But then—?" he asked.

"Never mind about then. It's now we've got to act. Get me some cord, old bean, and leave it to me."

Levison nodded and quitted the room. He returned in less than a minute with a coil of cord.

Even one minute had made a difference to Dandy Carson. He was breathing regularly now, and his hands moved feebly. It was evident that in a few minutes more he would come to his senses.

Cardew took the cord and calmly cut lengths of it with his pocket-knife.

He drew Carson's hands together and bound the wrists, and then bound the arms down to the sides. Then he shackled the insensible man's ankles and knees.

Levison watched him in silence.

His chum had taken the lead, and Levison was content to have it so. Indeed, he could not help feeling that it was

Ralph Reckness Cardew who seemed designed by Nature to deal with a scoundrel like the Denver Dandy. And Cardew seemed, so far as Levison could see, to be enjoying the strange, tragic situation. There was something in it that appealed to a wild, lawless element in Cardew's own nature.

A long, shuddering cry came from Denver Dandy, and his black eyes opened staringly.

He made a movement to rise, and sank back on the sofa.

For a minute or two more he lay, breathing hard, while the mists cleared from his confused brain. Levison watched him in grave silence; Cardew with a smile of cynical amusement.

The drug was a powerful one. But it was evident that the strength of the ruffian was asserting itself; he was throwing it aside. He raised his head at last, and gave the juniors a deadly look.

"Who trussed me up like this?" he asked huskily.

"Little me!" smiled Cardew.

"You young hound!"

"Thanks."

"What—what happened?" muttered Carson confusedly. "I—I seem to have lost myself. I—I couldn't have made a mistake, and—" He broke off.

"Dear man, you're always makin' mistakes," said Cardew blandly. "You made a mistake in thinkin' I shouldn't be found in that dirty garret. You made a mistake in figurin' it out that I escaped, instead of bein' rescued by cheery old Tom Merry and his crowd. You made a mistake in thinkin' that it was still in my power to let you off—when the police were already on your track. You made a mistake in swallowing the doctored wine you intended for Mr. Levison."

Carson started violently.

"What?" he hissed. "What?"

"You remember my little comedy

with Levison at the door?" smiled Cardew. "That was to make you turn your back, old bean, while I changed the glasses!"

"You—you changed the glasses!" breathed Carson.

"That was my little game!"

"You—you knew—"

"Dear old bean, it would astonish you to learn how many things I know!" said Cardew. "You can look on me as next door to an epitome of human wisdom!"

Carson's teeth grated together.

"That accounts!" he said. "That accounts—I myself—" He checked his words. "You have no proof—"

"Only what I saw, and Levison saw, and Mr. Levison's present state when a good specialist examines him, instead of a country doctor johnny!" said Cardew lightly. "The insurance people will want to look into it, too; they will be interested, havin' regard to the policy on Mr. Levison's life in your honourable favour. Don't you seem rather to have put your Transatlantic foot into it, Mr. Carson?"

"Let me loose!" hissed the bound man on the sofa.

"Hardly!"

"I—I guess; oh, you young hound—" The Denver Dandy writhed in his bonds, and spat out a stream of curses.

"Eloquent, when he gets goin', isn't he?" said Cardew.

"But you're wastin' your breath, Mr. Carson. Did I mention that your cottage at Wayland is in the hands of the esteemed peelers, and that dear old Chiquito, your coffee-coloured pal, is in a cell at Wayland Police Station?"

"You lie!" said Carson hoarsely.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Any minute now the police may be here!" he said. "I came away by the first express to warn Levison. Tom Merry went to the station to give full information. They've got your pal, Mr. Carson, and they're after you. One charge of kidnappin', and another of attempted poisonin'. Didn't you make rather a mistake, my friend, in quittin' the salubrious climate of Colorado and comin' over here?"

Dandy Carson, in spite of his bonds, sat upright on the sofa. He glared at the two juniors with deadly hate and rage.

"If the police take me, they take Poker Jack too!" he snarled.



Cardew bent over the insensible "Dandy" Carson as he lay on the couch. The scoundrel's eyes were flickering; his white lips moved slightly. "He's coming to," said Cardew. Levison started. "Are you sure?" he exclaimed. "Yes," answered Cardew, "but as he's very kindly got himself down, we're going to keep him down. Bring me some cord."

Cardew laughed contemptuously.

"That chicken won't fight!" he answered. "You can frighten a sick man with that, Mr. Carson. But it won't wash with us! There's nothing against Mr. Levison, and you couldn't prove it if there was! You can rake up old scandals, and that's your limit!"

"And that?" hissed Carson. "I'll make Levison's name ring from one end of the country to the other. I guess I'll—"

"Another mistake!" said the St. Jim's junior coolly. "You won't! If the police once get their hands on you, my pippin, they'll begin inquire into your history; they're bound to find it interestin'. They'll ask the bobbies on the other side of the pond whether they want you. Do they, Mr. Carson?"

"Let me loose!" he hissed.

"That isn't the game, old infant. You're safe now, and you're goin' to remain safe. But you're not goin' to be arrested in Mr. Levison's house, and link his name with yours. You're goin' to pass the rest of the night in quarters a bit more uncomfortable than the garret your Indian pal kept me in. You know the way to the caves, Levison?"

"Yes!" breathed Levison.

"Get a bike lantern, and then lend me a hand with this brute. No need to tell Doris, it's not girl's work!"

Carson panted.

"You—you don't dare—"

"Wait and see, old bean!"

Carson opened his mouth, evidently to shout. The man he had wronged and persecuted—the man whose strength he had sapped away by cunning drugging—that was the only man who could save him now. Doubtless the rascal still hoped to bring his victim to heel, once he was in his presence. But Cardew was watching and ready. As Dandy Carson's mouth opened wide for the yell, Cardew jammed a folded handkerchief in it, and the intended cry was choked into a feeble gurgle.

"That's better!" said Cardew, with a nod.

The Denver Dandy's black eyes glittered at him in unspeakable rage.

Cardew did not heed.

Levison, unquestioningly following his chum's lead, took the ruffian by the feet, while Cardew took him by the shoulders.

Quietly enough they carried him out at the back of the house.

Doris was with her father; the old servant, Jane, had long been in bed. There was no one to see—no one to hear. Cliff Cottage lay a mile from the village. In the misty moonlight Dandy Carson was borne away to the chalk cliffs, and the dim cave that opened under the chalk, booming with the echo of the breaking waves; and as he felt the chill of the

winter night air and the sea spray upon him, something very like despair crept into the heart of the ruffian.

CHAPTER 9.

Carson's Last Chance!

KNOCK!

The hour was late.

By a cheerful fire quite a smiling group sat; even Mr. Levison, feeble as he still was, seemed to have found new life since the Denver Dandy had gone. Cardew and Levison were chatting, there was a smile on Doris' sweet face, and Mr. Levison's pale cheeks had regained a little colour.

Of what had happened to Dandy Carson he knew nothing. He had simply been told that the man had left the house and was gone for good; and though it seemed to him too good to be true, he brightened under the news.

Knock!

Cardew exchanged a quick glance with Levison as the knock came loudly at the door.

Mr. Levison started.

"What at this hour—" he ejaculated.

"Don't worry, father!" said Levison soothingly. "It's the police, I think, from Wayland, looking for Carson—"

Mr. Levison shivered.

"He has been gone from here an hour, sir!" said Cardew.

"There will be no arrest in this house. Don't worry, sir!"

Mr. Levison nodded without speaking, but his hands gripped the arms of his chair.

Ernest Levison went to the door and opened it. A portly figure in the uniform of a police-inspector stood without on the frosty step. Levison knew him by sight. It was Inspector Skeat, of Wayland. Mr. Skeat had evidently come over in person to effect the arrest of the kidnapper. Levison could guess that he had the warrant in his pocket.

"Come in, Mr. Skeat!" he said, and the inspector entered and saluted Mr. Levison and Doris politely. He started and stared at Cardew.

"You here, Master Cardew!" he exclaimed.

"As you see, Mr. Skeat!" said Cardew, with a nod.

"I was given to understand that the man Carson is here—the man who kidnapped you, Master Cardew, and whose confederate is now in the hands of the police!" said Inspector Skeat.

"He was here!"

"He is gone?"

"He cleared!" said Cardew urbanely. "By way of the back garden. I'm pretty certain he went towards the cliffs. Don't you think so, Ernest?"

"Yes!" said Levison in a low voice.

The inspector made an impatient gesture.

"You should not have shown yourself here, Master Cardew. You practically gave him warning to escape!"

"Oh, gad!" exclaimed Cardew. "I—I suppose it would come to that, now that I think of it!"

"But he cannot escape, after all!" said the inspector. "The local police will aid me in the search. We have his confederate safe!"

"Good!" said Cardew. "And I suppose you've got hold of the cottage where they kept me in the garret?"

Inspector Skeat smiled.

"Naturally. And we made some interesting discoveries there!" he said. "This Mr. Carson seems to have made a good haul before he left his own country, and there are a good many valuables for the New York police to identify. It will be a rather big case!" The inspector rubbed his hands and almost beamed on Cardew. Big cases did not often come Mr. Skeat's way; and he looked as if he was really obliged to Cardew for having been kidnapped by the man with the flattened nose.

"And now," he said, "I shall be glad to know what you can tell me of this man, Mr. Levison. It seems that he has been staying here."

"I knew him twenty years ago, in America," said Mr. Levison faintly. "I have no more than that to tell you."

Levison broke out.

"He took advantage of my father's illness, Mr. Skeat, to install himself in this house; if my father had been well, he would have turned him out at once. We have proof that he has been drugging my father, and reducing him to his present state."

The inspector opened his eyes.

"You had better give me the details," he said.

A quarter of an hour later Inspector Skeat was gone, with quite a volume of notes in his pocket-book, and the happy consciousness that he was "on" the biggest case of his official career—if only he could bag his man. And he had little doubt of that. Dandy Carson had had only an hour's start, and in the morning the police would be searching the coast far and wide. Inspector Skeat felt that the handcuffs were as good as upon the wrists of the desperado.

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CHAPTER 10.

Midnight!

DORIS had gone to bed; Mr. Levison had retired to his room. Cardew and Ernest Levison still sat by the dying fire. They were waiting till the others should be fast asleep.

Cardew stirred at last.

"Now for the merry merchant with the handsome nose!" he yawned.

Levison nodded, and rose and followed his chum.

They let themselves out quietly, and followed the path through the garden to the chalk cliffs, where the cave opened. Levison lighted his pipe-lantern, and they pushed into the cave, extending deep and irregular into the heart of the chalk.

On the chalky floor of the cave, a dozen yards above the lapping water, lay Dandy Carson.

His gag had been removed; but the bonds were still fast upon his wrists and ankles.

He blinked up at them in the light, with a white, furious face.

The cold had penetrated his limbs; he had not had a pleasant couple of hours in the sea-cave. And the drug was still working in his system; he was not the man he had been earlier that day. But there was no compassion in the faces of the St. Jim's juniors as they looked at him. His wickedness, his ruthless cruelty, had been too black for that.

Cardew nodded to him cheerily.

"Feel'n the draught, old bean?" he asked.

"A thousand curses—" mumbled the Denver Dandy through his frozen lips.

Cardew held up his hand.

"Dear man, swearin' won't help. The police-inspector from Wayland has been here for you. You can thank us for your liberty—so far. But for draggin' Mr. Levison's name into your trial, you'd have been handed over to Mr. Skeat, my pippin. An' there's a little more news for you. The loot you brought with you from New York has been found in the cottage in Wayland, where you seem to have kept it hidden with the cheery Chiquito. There's quite a collection of charges against you, old bean. An' there's only one reason why you're not handed over to the police—I want to keep Levison's name out of the case."

Carson grated his teeth.

"If I'm taken—"

"If you're taken, old bean, you won't have much time for talkin' about old times with Poker Jack—you'll be too busy standin' your trial for kidnappin' an' poisonin'. An' when the police here have done with you, they'll hand you right over to your own merry countrymen, who want you badly. You're in a cleft-stick, Mr. Carson! That kidnappin' was a mug's game," said Cardew, shaking his head. "Baggin' little me has been your undoin'. But I'm goin' to give you a chance. You're not a nice man, Mr. Carson, an' even an English prison is rather too good for you. This little island will be ever so much better off without your excellent company. You're goin' to have a chance to clear; make the most of it."

He stooped over the shivering, scowling ruffian, and loosened his bonds.

"I'm not settin' you loose," he said. "But I reckon you'll work your way out of that rope about dawn, if you keep busy. Then take your chance. Bear in mind that the police will be on the hunt for you at sunrise, up and down the coast."

"Let me loose!" said Carson hoarsely. "Let me—"

Cardew shook his head.

"You'll be loose by mornin' if you keep busy! A little exercise will keep you warm! It's more than you've a right to expect. Good-night!"

He took up the lantern and left the cave, followed by Levison.

"If he escapes—" said Levison, as they reached the house.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"We're not bound to act as giddy police," he said. "If he escapes, so much the better—it will save the chance of his draggin' your father's name up. He'll clear out of the country, if he can; and his own cheery fellow-citizens are welcome to have him back, for all I care. He will clear if he can—you can bet on that! He's lost his game here, and chattrin' about your father's old times in Colorado wouldn't compensate him for seven years on Dartmoor. I fancy he's got brains enough to get clear, given a chance. We're well rid of him."

Levison nodded.

CHAPTER 11.

Back to St Jim's.

"**B**AI JOVE! Heah they are!"

It was several days later, when Arthur Augustus D'Arcy uttered that exclamation in the quadrangle at St. Jim's.

"Heah they are, Tom Mewwy!"

Levison and Cardew came in at the gates, and strolled towards the School House. Both of them looked very cheery.

Tom Merry & Co. surrounded them at once.

"Jolly glad to see you back!" said Tom Merry. "All serene at home, Levison?"

"Right as rain!" answered Levison.

Frank came racing up.

"Ernie, old man, I'm glad you're back. Your letter bucked me no end. Father's all right?"

"Much better," said Levison. "He's going abroad with the mater for the rest of the winter. Doris is going, too. That will finish pulling the pater round."

"Oh, good!" said Frank, with great satisfaction.

"And that man with the prize nose?" asked Monty Lowther. "What's become of him?"

"That man—what was his name?" said Cardew meditatively.

"Carson!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, yes, Carson! Quite an unpleasant character," said Cardew gravely. "He seems to have abused Mr. Levison's hospitality in the most unjustifiable manner. The poor old gentleman was ill, you know, and not quite able to look after himself, and this rotter, Carson, planted himself on him with some yarn of an old acquaintance in America. He cleared off before the police came for him."

"Got away?" asked Tom Merry, with a rather curious look at the dandy of the Fourth.

"Yes."

"That's wathah wotten," said Arthur Augustus.

"How did he get away?" asked Frank.

"He seems to have bunked into the caves—you know those caves in the chalk cliffs round your country cottage," said Cardew. "The Clyffe police and old Skeat hunted high and low for him. We helped—didn't we, Ernest?"

Levison nodded without speaking.

"We went up and down and round about," said Cardew, "lookin' everywhere. Curiously enough, bits of cord were found in one of the caves, an' the police connected them somehow with the wanted man, though they couldn't quite make out what was the connection. Later it was found that a boat was missin' from the fishin' village, and they reckoned he had collared it and put to sea. It was a rough day. It's quite possible he went to the bottom—not much loss to anybody if he did. He seems to have been quite an unpleasant character."

"Yaas, wathah," said Arthur Augustus. "And what about the othah wogue, that Indian half-breed chap—"

"He's goin' to chokey," said Cardew. "I've got to put in an appearance at the trial, bein' the kidnapped party. Frightful bore—what? Still, it means gettin' off lessons. Every cloud has a silver linin', you see."

And Cardew and Levison went into the School House to report their return to the Head.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy looked very thoughtful.

"Bai Jove!" he said at last. "Do you know, deah boys, I cannot help feelin' a slight suspish that Cardew hasn't told us everythin'."

"Go hon!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I wathah think that they are keepin' somethin' back," said Arthur Augustus sagely. "Howevah, I suppose it is not our bizney. It is wathah a pity Cardew butted in as he did! If I had gone ovah there, instead of Cardew, I wathah think that that wottah Carson would not have got away! I am suah that I should have succeeded in layin' him by the heels! Cardew is wathah an ass!"

Tom Merry smiled, but made no rejoinder. He was pretty certain that the whole story had not been told, and never would be told. But he was glad to know that the shadow on Levison's home had lifted at last—and that the man from Colorado, whether dead or alive, was gone for good!

THE END.

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(Note.—I cannot come to a definite conclusion whether Ralph Cardew actually experienced the following adventure, or dreamt it. The crowd mentioned below seem to be keeping up appearances very well, but whether it is make-believe, or genuine, I cannot fathom. Anyhow, you can judge for yourselves.—Tom Merry.)

PART 1.

OLD CUTTS thought of the stunt! He informed me that his brain-wave arrived during a particularly boring lecture given the Fifth by that dear, sweet child Ratcliff. Well, it was a "stunt," in the true meaning of the word, and within twenty-four hours of pal Gerald having confided to me, full arrangements had been made for it to be put under way. Crooke agreed to write the letters to Greyfriars and Rookwood.

Cutts' idea was to hold a great motor-cycle race between the three big public schools, with a large award for the winner. With studied foresight, Gerald had realised that such a feat would have been unexciting, uninteresting, and practically impossible if it were held in the day-time. His only alternative, therefore, was the time when all good people are in bed. When Gerald had talked to me for about half an hour, I approved of it. Aubrey Racke also agreed, so the motion was carried.

Shortly afterwards every fellow in the school who possessed a motor-bike was tackled on the subject, the idea being to get entrants for the race. St. Leger and Gilmore, Cutts' study-mates, were both owners of first-class machines, and they readily complied. George Gore of the Shell told us he could ride a motor-bike. He said he would borrow a machine without asking; so his name was put down. French of the New House thought the idea capital, and his name was placed on the list. On the other hand there were quite a dozen refusals. Bernard Glyn would have willingly entered had not Racke and Cutts been connected with it; Levison said the police would ambush us, and shove us all into cells for the night—I emphatically said they would not. But, anyhow, he declined on the grounds stated. Several others would have entered had not the speed been higher than ten miles an hour, or if the race had taken place in the day-time, or something equally as potty as that. The result, in all, was seven entrants from St. Jim's. A couple of days afterwards letters came back from Greyfriars and Rookwood in reply to those Crooke had written.

Aubrey Angel, of the Upper Fourth Form at Greyfriars, said he was overwhelmed with delight at the offer; Harold Skinner of the Remove would turn up like a bird (on a motor-cycle borrowed without permission from its rightful owner!—T. M.); Horace Coker would condescend to walk off with the big award; and Herbert Vernon-Smith would be pleased to try his luck. Valentine Moran

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ington's and Cyril Peele's replies were brief but to the point. Mornington's letter contained one exclamation mark "!" and Cyril Peele's answer was, "Can a duck swim?"

The Lucky Thirteen.

I think a little explanation of the programme will help readers to grasp what a wonderful event this was. The orders for the fellows from St. Jim's were to leave their beds without disturbing anybody, and make their way from the dorms to Pepper's barn. In the subterranean cellar of this far-famed building seven motor-cycles would be waiting in readiness. At ten o'clock four fellows would leave their beds at Greyfriars and immediately make their way to the Priory, in Friardale Wood. Two fellows would do the same thing at Rookwood, and find their cycles hidden in the ruined wing Greyfriars is about fifty miles from St. Jim's, and Rookwood is about forty. The main roads of Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire connect with the town just three miles from Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Taking an hour and an hour and a quarter respectively, the two parties ought to arrive at the appointed meeting-place near Wayland between eleven and a quarter-past. Here the three parties would hold a brief council, and then commence a non-stop ride to Brighton and back. I will now pass along to the great day—or, rather, night!

The Night-Riders Start.

Most men feel widest awake at ten o'clock at night—I do, at any rate! You see, the whole thirteen of us had been snoozing—or, at least, that was the arrangement—in our studies all the evening, instead of voicing our views on all the subjects brought under discussion in the Common-rooms. So when the six fellows, as aforementioned, arrived at Pepper's Barn, I instantly observed a wild, excited look in nearly every pair of eyes. The fellows were itching for the start, and our trusty speed-makers, all in the pink of condition, were waiting impatiently to commence roaming over old England in the approved express-train fashion. Personally, I was as cool as a cucumber hanging in a greenhouse.

After several minutes talk, we prepared to get into our special night-riding clobber. There were two garments—one, a long, black, flowing robe, which covered the body from head to ankles, while the other was a contrasting white pointed hood, with holes cut out for the eyes and nose. The gowns were made so that they would not hamper the progress of the rider; they would simply flutter behind in a ghostly, uncanny manner. At eleven o'clock Cutts gave the order to depart. Then I and six others wheeled our motor-bikes noiselessly from the cold cellar under the barn, across the white, frozen grass to the white gate which gave access to the lane. After pushing our bikes for about five minutes the Fifth-Former decided to mount. Seven fellows, including myself, threw a leg over the saddle, and jogged steadily along the main road to Wayland.

Clearing Rylcombe, we opened out, and flew over the three miles to the town in about five minutes. Of course, we had to make a large detour of the place, and avoided the principal streets. There were no vehicles about, neither did we meet a single pedestrian. This fact made a high speed quite safe. Two miles beyond Wayland we pulled up and swiftly wheeled our machines into a near-by field. This was the appointed place where we should receive the fellows from Greyfriars and Rookwood.

For ten minutes we waited and talked. At length, when Gore and Racke began to grumble and growl impatiently, a faint sound came to our ears. It grew and grew until it resembled the throb of a small air-scout. Then suddenly the roar came from a different direction—from the road just a quarter of a mile ahead of us.

Half a minute later two breathless motorcyclists were being supported in the strong arms of yours truly and Gerald Cutts. The fellows, Morny and Peele, were just about fagged right out. Morny told us how he had gone clean off to sleep when lights had been turned out. Peele had awakened him at a quarter past ten, and by twenty past eleven they had put thirty-five miles between themselves and Rookwood. Now, that is what I do call a piece of smart work!

Barely two minutes after Morny and Peele had arrived, four large electric headlights appeared over the crest of the hill in the distance. Gerald Cutts rubbed his hands together joyfully when he saw them.

"Every giddy man turned up!" he exclaimed. "I reckon I deserve a big pat on the back for organising such a clever stunt as this!"

At twenty-five past eleven, thirteen eerie, weird-looking forms lined up for roll-call. The tallest of the thirteen held a pencil and a notebook before a dazzling white headlight.

"Cardew!" called the figure.

"Not here!" I replied calmly.

"Skinner!" droned the tall figure next.

"Ten bob each way on Treacle-bender!" came the extraordinary reply from one of the mysterious shaped figures.

"Racke!" shouted the roll-call officer next. This time one could easily distinguish the irritable tones of Gerald Cutts.

"Mine's a Guinness!" replied the well-known voice of Aubrey R.

"Don't make such dry remarks!" growled Cutts gruffly, from 'neath his sinister white hood. To prevent any more funny answers being given he ran off the remainder of the names in one long line.

"Vernon-Smith, Angel, Coker, Mornington, Peele, St. Leger, Gilmore, French, Gore!"

From nine of the black-gowned figures came the proper reply to a roll-call. Then Cutts, apparently satisfied with his little bit of red tape, tucked away his pocket-book, and gave the curt order to push the bikes into the road. We mounted in pairs, and then the "right-away" was given.

Immediately the terrifying squad of thirteen—including your humble—began to move over rural Sussex at a fast pace. When the main road became straighter we accelerated to a furious speed, and at last, when we received a signal from Aubrey Angel, who was the leader of the outward journey, that it was all clear, we slipped in our top gear, and hummed along at an average pace of a mile a minute.

The sensation was little short of grand. I can tell you. Not a soul appeared in sight for miles and miles. Every village and hamlet we thundered through gave one the startling impression that we were traversing an uninhabited world. If it hadn't been for the terrific row of our engines, I'm quite sure the "creeps" would have set in. As it was, the moon overhead cast down a cold wintry light. But, together with our powerful headlights—well, it was simply ideal. We were all as warm as eggs on toast, each of us being muffled up in fur-lined gloves, leather coats, and tight, fur-lined motor-hoods. Over this attire, of course, came our other ghostly raiment.

The well-known seaside resort of Brighton is just twenty miles from Wayland. Midway is a place of which I have some very unpleasant recollections. It is

the small town of Paddlewood. Twelve houses and about twenty-four public-houses comprise this eminently respectable district. All I can say of it now is that we flashed through it in one long line, two deep. At twelve o'clock we had cleared Paddlewood, and for the next two or three miles came a stretch of really decent road.

Aubrey Angel led our party, and behind him came six couples, riding abreast. I was one of the third pair, and Harold Skinner was my partner. About the centre of this stretch of decent road where we attained the truly terrific speed of sixty miles an hour, the distance between Angel and the last pair was over half a mile. But the fellows behind soon caught us up when the speed slackened.

As I rode I wondered what things were like at St. Jim's—whether we had been discovered, or whether things were as quiet and peaceful as usual. I also wondered what we must have seemed like to any unfortunate individual who saw us. No doubt he would think it was a horrid nightmare, or that he should have taken a little more water with his most recent liquid refreshment.

The Police on the Track.

At a quarter past twelve we raced through the town of Fernhurst. It was just five miles from our destination, and quite suddenly we lost the main road, and tapered on into a narrow, winding alley way. Our speed was so reduced that we were compelled to paddle along for a considerable distance. At last we got clear to the main road again, and were able to lift our feet on to the rails.

We opened out, and quickly accelerated to a furious speed. In two minutes we had made up for lost time.

But our luck was out, for only a mile beyond Fernhurst the road became so horribly bad that we were obliged to throttle down to about ten miles an hour, and proceed with extreme caution. Then suddenly Aubrey Angel, who was the leader of the party switched on his red rear-lamp—the warning it had been arranged he should give in the event of his sighting danger! As a matter of fact, the nut of the Upper Fourth had seen a bullseye lantern being flashed towards him from about a hundred yards ahead. But Angel evidently thought it worth while taking the risk, for just as we were preparing to stop his red light disappeared, and a green one twinkled in its place.

We swept on!

In a few moments the disguised thirteen whisked past the spot where the bullseye lantern had been, and I just remember catching a fleeting glimpse of a startled country constable.

That meant sooner or later the police would get on to our track! Four miles further on was our outward destination, Brighton. It would take another good mile to make our way round, and get back to the return road to St. Jim's. Even then we should have another four miles to travel before we were back to the place where we had seen the constable.

(What would happen during that time? Should we find a huge barricade across the road on our return, or would there be a dozen armed motor-cars full of police ready to pursue us until we had been hounded down? All this I shall describe next week in Part 2.—Ralph Cardew.)

The Great Footer Match.

ST. JIM'S versus MILVERTON.

MORE "GEM" HISTORY.

By Cousin Ethel.

IT was three weeks after Christmas, many, many years ago, and it was a very important day at St. Jim's. Milverton College were coming to play the Saints' first eleven, and the match was one of the most important of the football season. In Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form passage, four juniors were hastily scamping through some lines, eager to get down to the grandstand before the Rats collared all the front seats.

Milverton were a strong side, and St. Jim's had all their work cut out to hold their own against their rivals in the Soccer field. At last "the beastly lines were knocked off" as Blake joyfully cried, and in a few minutes the four chums were down at their riverside playing-fields.

George Figgins & Co. were already on the scene, as Blake had half expected, and the New House fellows had naturally collared all the best places against the ropes.

A scrap threatened, and in about five seconds it was taking place. The New House juniors stood bravely to their guns, but they were outnumbered by the School House fellows by two to one. Poor old Figgys was hurled forth, and the Co. followed him. Jack Blake kissed his hand to the New House leader, and he and his chums quickly took the position they had so gallantly won.

But unluckily for Blake, Eric Kildare came past just after they had made themselves comfortable for the match, and he quietly instructed them to "Scoot!" Another terrific scuffle followed, but again Figgins had to give Jack Blake best. All rows ceased, when the Head and Mr. Ratcliff walked across the field to take up their seats in the pavilion. Nowadays the Head is rarely present at football matches, but in these old times, he witnessed every big senior match played on Big Side.

The First Half—A Surprise for Blake.

The kick-off was followed by a rush into the home half, before which the familiar red-and-white were compelled to fall back.

Milverton were on the warpath—they were out for scalps!

Their attack was hard and incessant, and Philip Rushden, the goalkeeper for the Saints, had his hands full. The School House naturally stuck up for Eric Kildare, George Darrel, and the other School House seniors. Figgins, on the other hand, had no alternative but to back James Garston Monteith, his House captain. Figgins and Blake quickly found something to argue over again. Blake stated his opinion that St. Jim's hadn't an earthly hope of pulling off the match with so many New House wasters in the team. Figgins did his best to shout Jack down, but it was only a warning from a prefect which caused the disturbance to cease.

So the School House started to cheer Rushden as another way of giving vent to their fiery enthusiasm. Rushden really did deserve cheering, though, for he played up really nobly against great difficulties. Figgys & Co. had a chance to roar, however, when Monteith was seen to trap the ball, and race it up the field.

But the Milverton backs quickly marked him, and Kildare's brow grew anxious. He cried out to Monteith to sling the ball over to him. The New House senior took not the slightest notice. Kildare had a good opening, and the ball should have been passed to him as a matter of course. But Monteith was selfish natured; he was bent upon making a coup himself, rather than playing the game. The New House senior firmly believed he could net the goal, and he raced on, roughly charging off the backs who closed in upon him. Kildare gritted his teeth as the chance seemed to fade away. But, no! Before he could even be tackled forcibly, Monteith with a low, fast shot, sent the ball in, and it just beat the Milverton goalkeeper!

The Saints fairly shouted themselves hoarse, and loudest of all rang the stentorian tones of lanky George Figgins. Nothing succeeds like real success, and Monteith's selfish action was misunderstood. He got all the credit for the goal, and Kildare could not very well say anything.

St. Jim's Unlucky Day!

Jack Blake, of Study No. 6 fame, shook his head solemnly, and said:

"The defence is rotten—useless! It simply comes about through sticking New House wasters in!"

Three of the defence were New House fellows, and it was quite apparent that they were rank failures. At half-time, when Milverton were three up, and the score of the Saints remained at one, it was evident, as Herries sagely remarked, "That the match was a complete gonner!"

The St. Jim's forwards were brilliant, and they played splendidly. But the feeble backs

made things entirely hopeless for the Saints. At half-time Kildare decided to alter his team. He brought up Sefton and Rake, the New House half-backs, into the forward line, and sent back Darrel and North. These changes improved the team considerably, and the defence was much sounder. But the Milvertonians were fairly on the warpath, and despite the splendid flashes on the part of the home team, it was quite evident that they were hopelessly outclassed. The visitors scored again just after this, and the faces of the boys round the field lengthened. However, Eric Kildare was going all out to lead his team to victory. With grim determination, he penetrated the invincible defence of Milverton, and sent the ball into the net, beating York, the goalie, all the way.

His action bucked up the Saints no end, and if the match had continued another half-hour or so, they might have equalised, or even been ahead. As it was, the ref blew his whistle immediately time was up, and Milverton licked St. Jim's hollow by four to two.

Kildare's Great Wager!

The following week-end St. Jim's were due to play Clifden College, and the Saturday after that they were down for a return match with Milverton. Kildare made it a fairly public statement that if his team did not lick Milverton by a decent margin, he would resign his position as captain of St. Jim's in favour of James Garston Monteith, of the New House.

When Monteith heard this statement, he called in his friends, and together they decided to do all within their power to see that St. Jim's were defeated hollow a second time, and thereby getting the rascally prefect into the shoes of Eric Kildare.

What is the result of the return match with Milverton? Does Kildare find out the sweet intentions of the New House seniors, or do they succeed in their underhand treachery? The answers to these questions I shall explain shortly in the "St. Jim's News." Be sure not to miss your copy!

ETHEL CLEVELAND.

Bow, Wow.

WANTED—A DOG.

There has been considerable excitement over the advertisement which appeared in the Rylcombe paper, asking anybody who had a dog for sale to communicate with Herries, Study No. 6. It seems that George Herries and his study companions, the noble scion of the house of Eastwood, Robert Arthur Digby, and Blake the Benevolent, were discussing prep and other matters when Taggles himself appeared in the corridor, and demanded to see Master Herries at once.

Taggles had a red face and a stuffy manner. He had been worried, evidently, but the chums of No. 6 had no time to notice these things. The porter was followed by a stream of people, and they all had dogs. Doors opened, and everybody was talking at once, while the din of dogs barking and the would-be sellers declaring that Herries must buy each four-footed beauty, was terrific.

As soon as Herries could make himself heard, he said he knew nothing about it. He had never advertised for a dog. He had Towser, and Towser satisfied him amply. The crowd was not convinced a bit. Meantime, Gussy had taken a fancy to a Pekinese, which he said he thought he would buy and give away.

"But it's a most extwaowdinawy thing, deah boys!" he said, as some of the miserable curs and mongrels were walked off by the angry owners. "I call it a most uncommonly poor joke, and—What is w'ong, Baggy?"

Baggy said "He, he, he!" until Herries collared him, and asked Trimble what he meant.

"He, he, he!" came from Baggy. "I know who did it. I happened to see Cardew stroll down to the newspaper office. I heard him talking about dogs."

Gussy looked wrathfully at his kinsman, who was surveying the scene with mild interest. After all, several of the chaps did get permission to keep dogs, so the joke passed off much better than might have been expected.

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The Queer Case of Dr. Brutell

Written by Professor Hector Gordon, Science Master of St. Jim's.

should not meet the eyes of anyone belonging to the gang.

Would it be read by someone at the restaurant in time for help to be sent to her? That was the next thing which occupied her mind.

Anyhow, even if the effort failed, it could not be helped. She had done her best. But for some reason or other she felt very hopeful indeed. She was happier now than she had been for hours.

Queer Case of Dr. Brutell.

FORTUNATELY for Madeleine, the message she had written upon her serviette with the aid of a burnt match was noticed by one of the men in the restaurant when the tray containing her tea-things was returned.

It was at once pointed out to the proprietor, and he looked at the serviette in a puzzled manner. He wondered if it were a joke, or whether it was really a case for investigation.

Then he suddenly remembered how mysterious were the movements of the occupants of that large house a short distance away. For some time his attention had been arrested by them, but nothing had occurred so far to give him any grounds for believing that they were wrongdoers. All the same, he had decided that it would be interesting for him to keep an eye on them. They were worth watching, he thought.

These thoughts which entered his head helped him to make up his mind. He looked again at the queer message written upon the white serviette, and he came to the conclusion that it was a matter worth going into.

He would not delay, for the unfortunate writer of the message might be in serious trouble. Had the proprietor of the restaurant known that Madeleine had recently been sentenced to death, there is no doubt that he would have acted even more promptly.

He went over to the telephone and rang up the police-station. The instrument was answered by the chief of police, and when he heard all that the man at the other end had to say he gasped in astonishment.

It was the mention of the name of Dr. Brutell that seemed so queer to him, for he explained that a gentleman of that name had recently been brought into the police-station.

It appeared that the scientist, while still in his evil mood, had been accidentally knocked down by a motor-car as he was crossing a busy thoroughfare. But Dr. Brutell was not seriously hurt, and the accident, apart from a few slight bruises, really did him more good than harm.

The shock had forced out the evil presence, and he returned once more into his normal mood. Dr. Brutell was once again the respected scientist and doctor—the friend of the kidnapped millionaire rancher, Robert Stanton.

The proprietor of the hotel had read out the message which Madeleine had written, and the chief of the police in turn told Dr. Brutell about the whole affair.

Brutell, of course, now that he had got rid of his strange malady again, had not the slightest recollection of the part he had so recently played as the leader of the Black Circle gang.

Little did he realise as he stood there and listened to what the police official had to say, that only an hour or so before he had helped to sentence the daughter of his friend, Robert Stanton, to death.

Dr. Brutell called to his assistance once again the wonderful power of his double X-ray. Holding the serviette upon which Madeleine had written, he flashed upon it the green rays of his mysterious electrical device.

The police chief and some of his men who

were standing around wondered what on earth was happening. But Dr. Brutell seemed to forget all about their presence for a moment or so. He was gazing intently at the serviette upon which was flashed the wonderful green light of the double X-rays.

Soon he was able to obtain a very clear vision of Madeleine imprisoned in the cellar where she was waiting her execution. It was indeed a triumph for the great scientist, who had spent long years in study thinking out this extraordinary device of his.

Brutell could see the vision of the helpless girl so plainly that it almost seemed as if he could have touched her. He said very little to the policemen. He decided that it would be safer by far to keep them guessing for the present, at any rate. He had made up his mind to endeavour to find the house in which the girl had been imprisoned without delay.

And with this purpose in view, he hastily collected together a number of instruments that would come in handy for his little enterprise. The vision he had created was so good that Dr. Brutell felt convinced that he would be able to trace the house sooner or later.

He felt extremely sorry that Madeleine had got into such a sad predicament, and he felt inclined to blame himself for not looking after her a great deal more carefully. Still, the trouble was really no fault of his.

Madeleine had been a little too venturesome when she had ridden on in advance of her party, and she thus fell an easy prey to members of the Black Circle gang. He could not help thinking of what a terrible time she must have had at the hands of the bandits, and of the cruel suffering which she must have endured.

Brutell hoped that he would be able to render her some assistance. It would be a terrible tragedy for all her friends at the ranch if anything more serious happened to her. She might even be dead before he managed to reach her prison.

It made him shudder to think of it, and he hurried forward. Brutell was determined to get to Madeleine at the very earliest moment.

Working on the clues which he saw in his vision, Dr. Brutell had very little difficulty in finding the thoroughfare which he was so desirous of reaching. He hurriedly walked down the street until he came to the particular house in which Madeleine was being held captive. He looked at it for a moment or two from a safe distance, and made sure that his movements were not being observed.

Then Brutell got down into an areaway running alongside of the cellar wall, and he at once produced his famous X-ray battery. When this was applied to the masonry of the house, it soon had the effect desired by the doctor.

The mysterious power quickly and silently dug a hole through the masonry of the wall. When it was finished, Dr. Brutell bent down and whispered some words of encouragement to the unfortunate girl within. He told her that he had come to rescue her.

Madeleine was overjoyed to hear the voice of her great friend once more.

(To be continued next week.)

In This Week's

"BOYS' HERALD."

Long complete story of FRANK STURDY & Co., the chums of H.M.S. Thundercloud.
Long complete Detective Story of FERRERS LOCKE & JACK DRAKE.

And a thrilling long instalment of the great school story entitled:
"THE COLLEGE OF SPORTSMEN."

DON'T MISS IT!

Continued from last week.)

MADELEINE'S gaoler, the deaf mute, left her almost immediately, and she was left alone with her thoughts.

Although she did not for a moment expect the gang to go back on their decision, Madeleine had by no means lost heart. Indeed, she was feeling a good deal brighter now that the so-called trial was over, but why she should be in this mood she could not tell.

There did not seem to be much prospect of anyone coming to her rescue before the appointed time.

Madeleine was so far from feeling depressed that she sat down at the table and started to eat the meal which had been provided for her. She had had nothing for many hours, and although the fare was plain she did it full justice.

The men upstairs were also having their meal; she could hear the rattle of knives and forks, and the sound of china.

Apparently, the strange man who was their leader had left the building, for Madeleine had heard him giving them some final instructions; and almost immediately after she heard the front door bang.

When she had finished eating, Madeleine relaxed once more into a thoughtful mood, and it was then that she noticed upon the tray upon which the food was set that there was a serviette. This she had not used.

Madeleine had a good deal more than the average amount of intelligence, and already a clever scheme had entered her head.

This food, she concluded, had come direct from a restaurant, and it was probably quite near, for the coffee with which she had been provided was still hot.

Madeleine pursued this train of thought, and endeavoured to think out some method of getting into communication with them without arousing any suspicion.

It then occurred to her that one of the men had been sent to the restaurant, and that he would almost certainly collect the tray and china and return them.

How could she communicate with the restaurant people, and let them know of her predicament? That was the problem that confronted her.

Her gaoler had taken the precaution to remove almost everything out of the cellar. She looked in vain for a pencil, and was almost despairing when her eyes fell again upon the box of matches resting upon a shelf.

With luck, she would be able to trace an appeal for assistance upon the white surface of the serviette. But she must get to work rapidly, for either the deaf and dumb man or one of the others might come in at any moment to collect the used crockery.

Her heart was beating wildly as she walked across the room and picked up the box of matches.

Madeleine took out a match, struck it, and then, with the burnt end started to trace out her cry for help upon the snowy surface of the serviette.

It was a long job, but she did not mind this in the least, and she cut the message as short as possible. She gave full details of her place of captivity, and then said that help was urgently required.

When she had finished this she addressed it to Dr. Brutell. Madeleine folded up the serviette once more, with the side which contained her message inside, so that it

THE VALLEY OF SURPRISE

Read this magnificent story dealing with the adventures of three chums in a strange country.

By REID WHITLEY.

FOR NEW READERS.

Hobby Tarrant and Tony Matthers, with Billy Kettle, a trusted negro servant, are on an expedition in the Andes. A volcanic eruption, causing a tremendous tidal wave, carries their canoe into the Valley of Surprise. The party explore the valley, and experience many adventurous times. Reaching a village, they are confronted by a race of strange, primitive men, who show great hospitality, and make friends. But Maxia, the medicine-man, hates the newcomers, and through a dastardly scheme which he hatches, they very nearly lose their lives. For this action the Ariki loses faith in him. He succeeds in making friends with the Mangas, but with the assistance of these semi-human brutes his cunning schemes prove futile.

Hobby invents a kite with a basket attached, to carry the trio out of the valley. A trial trip sees him forced to land in the middle of the lake. His chums build a raft and rescue him. Viewing the surroundings, the party come across a huge statue carved in the rocks. Lalo explains about this, and the party prepare a fire to dry their clothes.

Now read on

A Much Needed Rest.

SPEEDILY they had a fire going, for Tony's matches were in a waterproof box. For a while they sat about it on logs, holding their saturated clothes to the blaze. Tony dealt out a tabloid of quinine all round as a precaution against fever. Presently Billy asked a question of Lalo, who answered it with a long speech.

"Marse Tony, I ask him if none of his people ever been here since de time dey went away. He say none of 'em have, because of de beastesses. Some of dem was eat up when dey move. Ain't nobody been here since. Dat was mebbe fifty years ago. Now, look at dese here logs us is setting on. Dey ain't been cut more'n three or four months I'll bet, even if some is older."

It was true. Though part of the wood pile was composed of ancient branches far gone in decay, a good many of the pieces were nearly fresh. Indeed, the hissing of the fire told that some still had sap in them. Therefore they had been cut recently. Who had cut them?

"Ask Lalo if none of his people stayed here," said Tony.

"Him say he don't know. Him very small when his grandfather tell him the tale. P'raps there was some, but he ain't never seen 'em or heard tell of 'em."

"Some must have stayed. This wood couldn't cut itself," muttered Tony. "It's odd, though, that he shouldn't have seen anyone, or seen the smoke of fires."

He looked up to the high rock roof, and as the fire flared, caught a glimpse of a dark opening through which the smoke rose. Evidently there was some outlet that way. Possibly the vent led into an upper cave, or perhaps the smoke filtered through cracks in the cliff face at many points so that it would escape notice.

Then his eyes wandered to several dark doorways in the rear of the hall. Where did they lead to? Were there other chambers beyond? What did they contain?

The morning would perhaps bring an answer to these questions. Meanwhile the whole party were weary. The warmth, after the chilling rain and spray, made them sleepy. Already the Indians were snoring, and Billy's eyes winked.

"You two had better get to sleep," said Tony. "I'll keep watch for a while, then I'll rouse you, Hobby." And, nothing loath, the pair lay down in front of the fire, and though the rock floor wasn't downy, were soon fast asleep.

In the House of Stone.

TONY sat motionless for some time. His drowsiness had passed off. All the stirring events of the day passed through his mind in vivid panorama. He lived again through the battle with the creatures on the lake, and shuddered as he felt again the grip of the octopus' tentacles.

He was very anxious. Cartridges were beginning to run low. Although they did not depend on their guns for food, the Mangas might attack again, or some other huge beast of the valley make another raid, and so deplete the supply still further. They had to return to the tree village, and could scarcely hope to do so without expending more precious rounds.

If ever they succeeded in escaping from the valley, they would have to depend on their guns until they found a way back to civilization. There would be no kindly Indians to feed them.

"So the sooner we try some dodge to get out the better," he murmured. "It would be madness to wait till we had only a few rounds left. I wonder who these people were originally? Lalo's tale suggests that they were perhaps the Incas of Peru, flying from the Spaniards. I wonder if they brought any treasure with them? I'll have a look at those pictures on the walls."

Taking a torch, he began a round of the walls. But the paintings told him nothing. An expert would have known that they represented various Peruvian gods, with terrible, jaw-twisting names like Huathia-curi.

But Tony wasn't an expert. He saw a number of brightly-coloured figures, some with the heads of birds or animals, and all hideous, but nothing which gave him any clue to the origin of the folks who painted them, or where they came from.

He was puzzling over an odd-looking creature at the end of the chamber furthest from the fire, when a slight sound made him turn towards one of the doors. There on the threshold, its eyes glowing like hot coals in the firelight, superb, beautiful, and deadly, stood a huge jaguar.

Tony's first impulse was to shout an alarm and leap back to where he had laid his rifle, his second to charge the beast, whirling his torch, and trusting that it would fly from the blaze.

Instead, he stood still, for as the creature turned its head towards him, he saw that it wore a massive collar which glistened and sparkled with every movement. It was tame.

With a confident step the great animal moved silently across the floor, halted before the fire, and selecting a position between Hobby and Billy, lay down and stretched out its big paws, luxuriating in the warmth of the flames for all the world like a cat.

Tony lowered his torch and walked steadily towards it. The great beast turned its head, but did not move from its position, even when Tony replaced the brand on the fire and sat down.

The two eyed each other steadily for a minute. Tony had never seen so fine a specimen before, or, indeed, one which seemed so well disposed, for usually the jaguar in captivity is even more ferocious than in its wild state. Then suddenly the animal rolled over towards him, and, lying on its back, stretched out its neck. It wanted to be scratched!

Feeling somewhat as though he were about to take a thunderbolt by the tail, Tony stretched out a hand and gently rubbed the fur beneath the jaguar's chin. It wriggled in ecstasy, then, with a sound like the distant rumbling of a freight train over a viaduct, began to purr!

"You've been well brought up, Spots old fellow," said Tony softly. "You're in jolly good condition, too. Where's your master, and who is he, I wonder?"

At sound of his voice the big beast wriggled still closer till he almost encircled Tony's knees. His purring grew louder, his thick tail swung out, and dropped across Billy Kettle's face. With a snort and a gurgle, Billy awoke, and sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Reckon I thought someone hit my nose, sah," he began. Then his jaw dropped, his eyes bulged. "What's dat?" he exclaimed in a low, horrified whisper. "Marse Tony, dere's a thundering great jaguar lying round your feet! Is I dreaming, or does you see it, too?"

"I see it—and feel it. It's tame," said Tony reassuringly. "It came in just now and made, itself at home. Look at its collar."

"Yes, Marse Tony—yes, I sees it! All blue and red glass things. But, lordy, is dat gold? Is dem red and blue things jools, Marse Tony?"

"They certainly look like it," replied Tony. "Yes, I believe the collar is gold."

"Worth a heap, eh?" The negro's eyes gleamed covetously, his fingers twitched with desire. "Marse Tony, s'posin' you take dat collar off, dat beast would be a heap comfortable—and so would us, Marse Tony. A jagger don't want to carry no gold collar with jools in it. Us would get a lot o' dollars for that there when us gets out o' here, Marse Tony."

"But someone owns the beast, Billy, and the collar as well," replied Tony. "We're not thieves. Even if we were, it would be foolish to make enemies of the people here—and most likely the Ariki as well. No, we'll leave Spots his decoration. And remember, Billy, you must take nothing you may see, except it is given to you. Promise!"

"Sure, I promise, sah!" growled Billy. "Dey's only a parcel of Injuns, but if you says so, all right. I ain't no thief, sah."

The jaguar lay a little longer, then, apparently remembering something, rose, stretched himself, yawned, and went off through the door by which he had entered. Tony waited a little longer, but the animal did not return. Since Billy declared that he would now keep watch and rouse Hobby in his turn, Tony lay down, and was soon asleep.

The light of morning and a low-voiced chant aroused him. Hobby sat by the fire. Beside him sat the jaguar, purring an accompaniment to Hobby's song, an absurdity of the sort he sometimes composed when moved by hunger.

"The poor young white man sat in the house of the Inca

Without any grub, without any grub. He was so peckish, he couldn't think a How to get any. That was the rub!"

"Purr-purr-purr!" rumbled the jaguar. Tony sat up and looked about him. The Indians had disappeared. Billy snored.

"Shut up that abominable row!" begged Tony. "Where's Lalo?"

"Don't know. He and the others went off to forage. They left this beauty. He turned up while I was on watch. If Billy hadn't warned me about him I should have fired at him, or had a curly fit, or something. Lalo turned green when he saw him, but he and the others lay down and worshipped when they saw the collar. Then they went off. What d'you think about it, old chap?"

"I think that they're the descendants of Peruvians who fled from the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. Lalo doesn't know much about it, or else he won't talk. Indians are very tight-lipped, but perhaps we'll see more presently. Someone is coming."

A moment after Lalo and his men returned. They bore bowls of steaming maize porridge, covered with a brown treacle, in which were laid earthenware spoons. Billy awoke as the fragrant odour reached his nostrils.

"Golly! I smells molasses!" he exclaimed. And without waiting to ask whence came the provender, fell to work on his share.

So, too, did Hobby and Tony. Not till they had finished did Lalo speak.

"Him say we is to come along with him. Him say dere is Injun chief along in dere wants to speak to us," translated Billy.

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Accompanied by the jaguar, who marched alongside them, rubbing his sleek flanks against their legs, they proceeded through the door, down a long, low passage, lit only by the faint light from the hall, up a flight of shallow steps, and so into another apartment much like the one they had quitted, though it was smaller.

A minute later they were standing on a low terrace overlooking an open, circular bit of ground, fenced by perpendicular cliff walls, so high that the sunlight could only reach the bottom for an hour or two at midday.

None the less, the fields into which the ground was divided seemed to be in flourishing condition. Maize and sugar cane grew luxuriously, while the lower ledges each supported grass enough to graze several tethered goats.

But this sight, so wonderful in that place, scarcely detained the eyes of the adventurers for an instant. Something that thrilled them with hope drew their gaze like a magnet. Zigzagging up the perpendicular flanks of the rock, clear to the top, was a stair!

"There's a way out!" exclaimed Tony joyously. "And the people here will be able to guide us, perhaps. There they are! Look at the old fellow! He's rigged like some of the figures in the pictures on the wall."

They turned to the group awaiting them at the end of the terrace. There were several Indians of middle age, two or three young men, half a dozen women, and a few children, all grouped behind an old man who stood majestically upon a block of stone that lifted him a foot above the others. Lalo began to speak.

"Him say that is a big chief—much bigger than him. Dat fellow's grandfather and some more stay behind when Lalo's grandfather and de rest had to go away, 'cos dere wasn't enough for 'em to eat here. Lalo say we is to speak to him good."

"Let's begin, then," said Tony, and strode down the terrace towards the old man on the stone. As he came near, he noted that the chief wore a necklace or collar of broad gold plates, set with various precious stones, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, while a fillet of gold was set upon his white locks.

His face was fixed in a steady stare which showed neither surprise, pleasure, hatred, or any other emotion. Tony saw at once that he was different from Lalo. He did not imagine that the three strangers were gods, nor had he any fear or reverence of them. As Tony and his friends halted, he raised a hand and asked a question.

"Him want to know how us got here," said Billy.

"Tell him. Tell him that we want to get out as soon as we can," Tony replied.

The old fellow received Billy's short account without moving a muscle. Then he spoke at some length.

"He say that his people came here a long time ago to get away from white men. White men a bad lot. Him say us mebbe not so bad, but he ain't taking risks. We better go back the way we came, or else stay along with Lalo."

"But what about that stair up the cliff?" asked Tony indignantly. "Say that we will promise not to say anything about the valley if we are allowed to get out of it that way."

"But that's a bit too much, Tony, old chap!" remonstrated Hobby. "In the interests of science, you know, we ought to return with an expedition to secure specimens. Of course, we shouldn't interfere with him. Tell him we would bring him all sorts of fine things—weapons that will kill at long range, and all that sort of thing."

Once more Billy repeated what he was told. The old man was adamant. He had smiled grimly when Tony pointed to the stairs, but otherwise he showed no feeling. His reply left no loophole of hope.

"Tell them they must go back the way they came, or not at all," he answered firmly. "The stair that you see is not for them. No white foot shall tread it. Rather than that you should go out that way, I would cause it to be broken down. It can easily be done. Our ancestors were cunning. I have but to pull a lever to send it all crashing in ruin to the foot of the cliff."

This was the substance of what he said to Billy, though the nigger didn't put it quite in that way.

"Say that he is perhaps dooming us all to end our days here," said Tony.

It was of no avail. The old fellow shrugged his shoulders. He said that what happened to them did not concern him. They were welcome to as much food as they needed. Then they must go back with Lalo as best they could. Then, as though to show that he had the power to enforce his commands, he waved his hand.

Instantly the men behind him moved. Their hands came from behind their backs. Each held a weapon—a huge knife, a bow, or toothed club, or spear. At the sight Lalo groaned.

"Lalo say come away. He not like dese people. I don't like 'em, either," said Billy.

"Yes, let us go. We can come back again at night," urged Hobby. And, very reluctantly, Tony gave in.

"Tell him we are going," he said, and turned away, followed by Lalo and the others.

Through the dark corridors they went, and the chamber where the fire still burned, to the terrace beyond, and halted at the head of the stone ladder by the huge figure. Behind them the group of armed men appeared in the doorway, as though to forbid their return.

"Yes, we'll go, because we must not drag Lalo into this," said Tony, in a low, fierce whisper. "But we'll come back. That old beggar sha'n't stop us next time."

They looked out across the stretch of sand towards the lake. The raft, apparently little the worse for its battering, lay rocking in a bay of the reef. There was nothing in sight save a few ducks swimming serenely on the placid waters.

"Now is our time," said Tony. "Perhaps those brutes are asleep. At all events we've got to go, so the sooner we get along the better. Quick march!"

They descended, and crossed the sand without interruption. Soon they had reached the raft, and found that though a few of the ropes binding the timbers together had given way, it was nearly as good as before.

The Indians quickly repaired the damage while the three stood on guard, and presently they had shoved off. Tony, looking back at the terrace below the tall statue, thought he saw several heads along the parapet, but the watchers gave no sign. In a little the raft swung round a projecting spit of land, and the place was lost to view.

The Ariki were evidently in deadly fear, for they pulled frantically on the oars, doing a little better with practice as the minutes lengthened into hours. When at last the village came into plain sight they gave loud cries of joy, and redoubled their efforts, with such effect that half an hour later the raft grounded beneath the great trees, and they swarmed aloft to be greeted by the entire population.

Tony and Hobby made the raft fast before they followed, but not till they had refreshed themselves did Tony reveal what he had in mind.

"We'll make a mast and a sail," he said. "The night wind usually blows down the lake. If we started at dusk we could reach that place by midnight. It would be risky, of course, but we've been through so much that risk hardly counts any more, does it? We would go straight through that corridor, and across the field to the stairs. If we are attacked, we will defend ourselves. We have a right to get away if we can, but we will not strike the first blow."

Hobby and Billy agreed, and they at once set to work on the sail. It was easily made from the same bark as had furnished the material for Hobby's kite. But by the time they had made fast the sail to the yard, and prepared rigging, it was too late to think of

starting. They had to postpone the attempt to the next day.

In the afternoon they rigged the mast, and laid the sail ready for hoisting, not without risk, for an alligator appeared, and had to be driven off by a bullet in the eye. But as the sun was setting, all was ready, and with their blankets and some food they dropped silently aboard.

The Ariki, clustered above, had been told that they were going fishing, and although this seemed to them a mad thing to do, the simple savages accepted it as they accepted everything else the wonderful three chose to say or do.

The sail was hoisted, the three entered the cage, Billy took the steering oar, and, impelled by a steady breeze, the raft surged out upon the swiftly darkening waters of the lake.

Ashore, the usual night song of roars and howls began to swell, and from the water about them came an occasional splash, but for some time the three on the raft neither saw nor heard anything alarming.

More than an hour had passed. Tony, who had been keeping an eye alert for certain landmarks on the dimly seen outline of the cliffs, gave the word, and Billy swept the head round half a dozen degrees.

"What's that?" exclaimed Hobby. "D'you hear anything? There it is again. A regular pad-pad, like the beat of paddle-wheels."

"I hear it, Marse Hobby. Wish I didn't!" grunted Billy, glancing nervously in the direction of the sound.

It grew louder. A dark object that left a trail of luminous foam passed across their bows at a pace that left them rocking in the waves it threw up. But it did not go far. Soon it circled and came back, passing behind them, and this time they saw a pair of eyes, large, moonlike, which glowered at them owlishly.

Evidently the creature could make nothing of the raft. For a little it kept at a respectful distance, then gradually curiosity prevailed. It began to edge in until it had come within easy distance of the cage. Its head swung high above the raft on a long neck.

"Ready, Hobby?" asked Tony, in a whisper.

Hobby grunted, and, raising his gun, pulled the trigger. There was only a slight report, but a long flash of flame darted from the muzzle straight to the creature's nose. It snorted, exactly as a startled horse might have done, whirled about with a mighty splashing, and fled at a wonderful pace.

"Golly! Dat's de stuff to give him!" chuckled Billy. "What ever was in your gun, Marse Hobby?"

(To be continued.)



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EDITORIAL.

My Dear Chums,—

There are several rather important items of news which I want to bring forward this week. I am sure you will all be pleased to hear that we are to have in the St. Jim's series of yarns a particularly dashing and brilliant succession of stories describing the war between the St. Jim's fellows and the Grammarians.

Rivalry between schools is always interesting. The Grammar School champions, Gordon Gay & Co., are, in the opinion of St. Jim's, at least, always disposed to get out of hand, and consequently troublesome. Naturally, therefore, it is up to the famous school to show these fellows what they are made of.

You will be amused, I know, by the account of the trifling incidents which originally led to all the bother. Grammarians may be lacking in tact—I shall not offer an opinion—and they certainly do step in where they ought to keep out. When chaps step in where they have no business, and interfere with matters which are really no concern of theirs, the fat rushes into the fire with a mighty roar.

It will be sufficient for the moment for me to tell you that the new series of yarns describes the campaign most vividly. Time and again a certain cele-

brity of St. Jim's, a fellow noted for the perfection of his dress and his eyeglass, to say nothing of his numerous titled relatives, has been attacked by a nest of hornets—otherwise a select group of Grammar School champions. They have a way of working in company. It is safer. Not but what the Grammar School contains plenty of true blues who stand for fair play.

Just keep your eye on the new yarns. I have had a big serial up my sleeve for no end of time. It is coming out at last!

"The Island of Pleasure" is the name of the new "Gem" serial. It is what Figgins would dub a corker. That is not my term. But I do consider the new feature beats the record, to say nothing of the band.

Personally, I think, to make the "Gem" really complete, it wants a serial with adventure in it, plenty of it, and a real note of romance. You will find all this, and abundant incident in "The Island of Pleasure."

I hate comparisons. Comparisons are "odorous" as somebody said, and occasionally they cause big trouble and damaged noses. But there are times when they may be indulged in without fear of upsetting anybody's apple-cart.

The new serial contains something which may remind you of Robinson Crusoe, and the old story, "The Swiss Family Robinson," but the reminder stops short at that point. "The Island of Pleasure" does deal with a remote section of the globe with water all round, but the whole story bristles with novelty and excitement. It will prove a worthy successor of "The Valley of Surprise."

Just let me know what you think of the yarn. It is written by a man who has travelled extensively, and worked his way through the tropics.

Come to think of it, a life on an island far away in a cheery sort of climate would have points. Think of the absence of worry, the good days of sport, the camp fire, the thorough-going interest of each hour—seeing things which nobody had seen before.

And this island is brimful of mystery, please remember that!

Meantime, the bright and amusing supplement continues on its triumphant way. Some of the best writers of St. Jim's are coming forward with offers of stories and articles, all bearing on the deep and varied history of St. Jim's. Look out for next week's "Gem"!

YOUR EDITOR.

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