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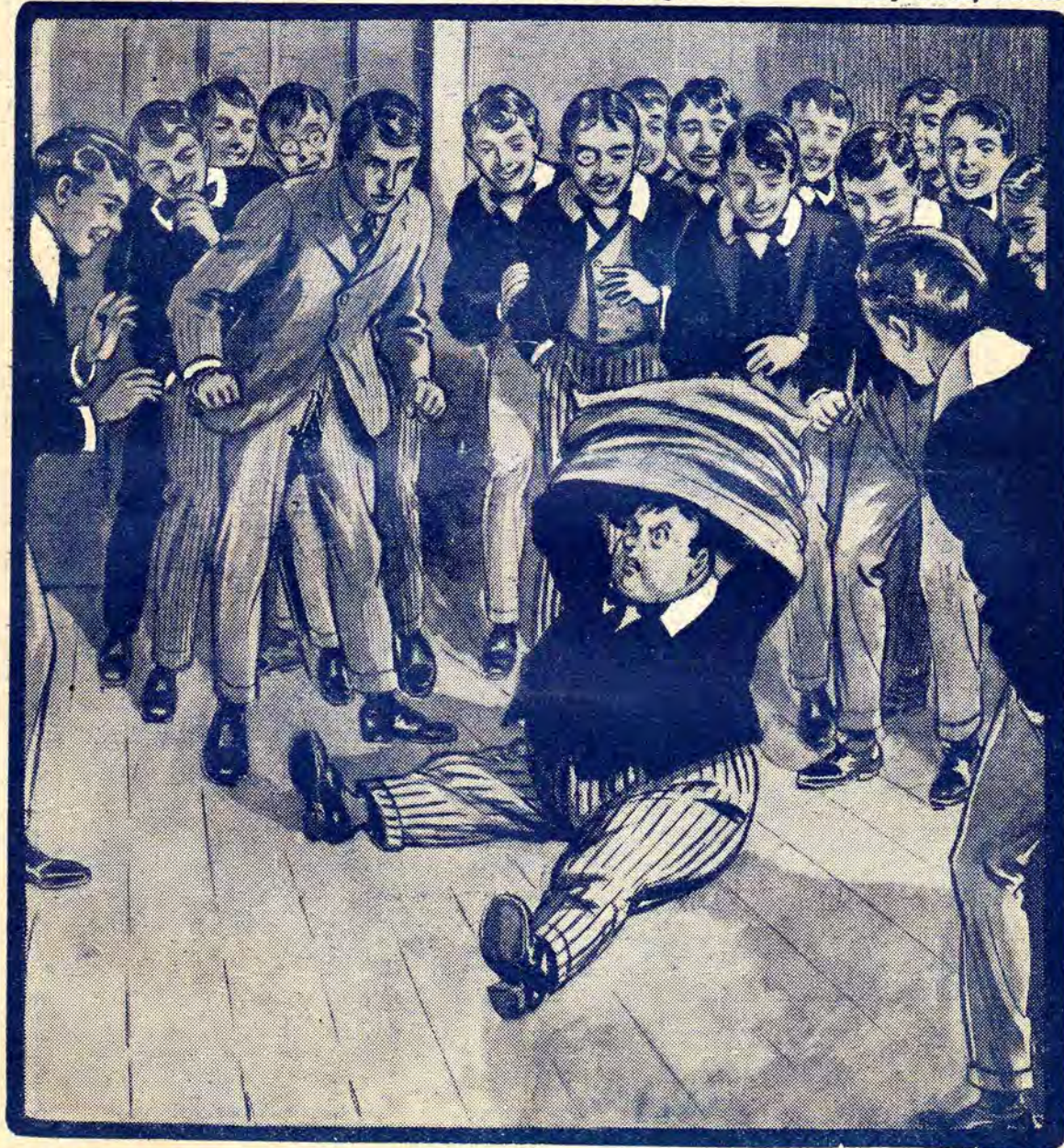


A. DONALDSON (Sunderland)

No. 744. Vol. XXI.

Every Wednesday.

May 13th, 1922



BAGGY TRIMBLE FINDS HE IS NOT KIDNAPPED AFTER ALL!

(An Amusing Incident from the Thrilling Long Complete School Story Inside.)

TWO STAR FOOTBALLERS!

ROBERT KELLY,
OF
BURNLEY AND ENGLAND.

ALEC DONALDSON,
SUNDERLAND'S OUTSIDE-
RIGHT.

POPULAR Robert Kelly, the inside-right of Burnley, is also deserving of the title of England's inside-right, for he appeared in that position in every International match in which England took part during the season just closed. What is more it is pretty safe to say that the claims of other people for the position were scarcely considered at all. In a phrase, Kelly has played such wonderful football since the war that he has really "picked himself" for the big games.

There may be people who do not consider Kelly quite so wonderful in the sheer individualistic line as Buchan of Sunderland, but, on the other hand, the Burnley man is a bit easier to play with, and is really high up among the football artists of the present day. His dribbling is of the close, bamboozling variety, and, what is more, he can finish his efforts with a telling shot. It was Kelly who scored the one goal which enabled England to beat Ireland in the last International match played against that country, and on behalf of Burnley he has sent in no end of successful shots.

Kelly is an out-and-out Lancashire man, having been born in Ashton-in-Makerfield, and was picked up by Burnley in 1913 when he was playing with St. Helens. Comparatively small as footballers go, standing only 5ft. 7in., and weighing but 10st., he has overcome the natural handicaps by the perfection of the art of ball-control. During his spare moments he is very keen on motor-cycling as a hobby, and is also fond of a game of bowls. In fact, along with his club-mates, Halley and Boyle, he has taken part in a number of bowling handicap events in the Burnley district. Like many another leading footballer of to-day, his early life was spent as a miner in the coalfields of Lancashire.

ALTHOUGH in March of the present season Donaldson was transferred to Sunderland for a fee bordering on £3,000, it was with Bolton Wanderers that this fine outside-right made his reputation. Donaldson went to Bolton from Ripley Town Athletic in the season of 1912-13, and although he was laid aside with a bad knee injury for the greater part of two seasons, he is now declared thoroughly fit again, and as he is only just thirty years of age, there should be much useful football left in him. Sunderland people think so, anyway, and during the season just concluded he played for Scotland in an International match. He had previously played for the land of his birth—he first saw the light at Barhead—on five occasions, apart from two Victory International matches.

Once Donaldson came near to playing in a trial match for England, but just in time it was discovered that Scotland was his birth-place, though he moved to Leicester at a very early age. He is not at all a bad cricketer, and before he signed on for Bolton Wanderers he had a month's trial with Sheffield United. He was then only a boy, though, and the Sheffield official opinion was that he was too small and light to develop into a first-class man. In this opinion the Sheffield people were wrong, even though now when he has "filled out," Donaldson is only 5ft. 7in., and weighs but 11st.

(Another article next week dealing with Howard Gregory, of West Bromwich Albion. Also a Real Action Photograph of this popular player will be presented FREE with next week's GEM.)

EDITORIAL CHAT.

The Editor would like to hear from his reader chums. Address all letters to Editor, "The Gem Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

My Dear Chums,—

This week's splendid number of the GEM is full of important features. I keep on urging you all, every one of you, to make sure of your GEM. Don't be sorry—be sure you get it. It would be a pity to miss one of the magnificent photographs, for these portraits of famous footballers will make up a gallery second to none.

They call big days red letter days. Every Wednesday is a red letter day. It is the GEM day. Next week I am giving a real photograph of H. Gregory, of West Bromwich Albion. The famous player is seen in action on the field. Just study this picture, and you will agree with me that it is a work of art—a real photograph which in its vividness gives one of those impressions which stick in the mind for many a day.

In the "Magnet" next week you will find portraits of Danny Shea, of Fulham F.C., and J. E. Davison, of Wednesday.

The "Boys' Friend" has a trump card in the splendid likeness it gives next week of Johnny Basham, who won the Lonsdale Belt outright, and who is considered to be the most stylish boxer of the day.

Now you will want to have an album to keep these photographs in. I have arranged for a special GEM Photograph Album, and this album can be obtained, price 6d. post free. Just send 6d. in 2d. stamps, or a sixpenny postal-order—do not send coins—to the Manager, the GEM Album Office, 7-9, Pilgrim Street, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4. Mind you write your name and address very distinctly so as to avoid all delay and mistakes. A tremendous number of orders are pouring in, but my staff is coping with the demand; please remember its work can be made much simpler if you stick to the rules, namely—2d. stamps, or a postal-order, and very plainly written addresses.

If you have missed one of the photographs, 2d. should be sent to cover the cost of another copy of the paper containing the photograph. Photographs are not sold separately.

Just a word about the grand yarn of St. Jim's in this week's number. It carries on the amazing mystery of the disappearance of Tom Merry in positively breathless style. I am hearing a good deal about the impression these new stories are making. That impression is tremendous. Never in the whole history of St. Jim's has there been anything comparable to the present sensation. Mr. Martin Clifford is a man who knows his job from A to Z, and he may well be proud of his new success. So far as that goes, I am, too, for it is good to register a fresh triumph.

YOUR EDITOR.

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All one has to do to become a member is to cut out the coupons from two issues of the "Gem" Library—the one from this week's issue and one from next week will answer the

purpose—pin them together, and post them to "The President, The Rally-Round Club, The 'Gem' Offices, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4."

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May 13th, 1922.

Held to Ransom!

"Dr. Holmes,

You will have realised by this time that you are helpless. Unless five hundred pounds is paid in ransom for Tom Merry, serious steps will be taken.

The money, in pound notes---not banknotes---must be left to-night---Thursday---according to these directions. The money, in a packet, shall be laid in the hollow of the big oak tree near the footpath in Wayland Wood, at nine o'clock this evening. Unless this is done, you may accept my assurance that Tom Merry will never be seen alive again.

NEMO."

A Grand, Long Complete School Story telling of the further mysterious happenings at St. Jim's, and of the fruitless efforts made to capture the unknown kidnapers.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. Startling News.

"WHAT is it, D'Arcy?"

Dr. Holmes, the Head of St. Jim's, spoke kindly enough; but there was a frown of deep trouble on his brow.

He was alone in his study, plunged into deep and painful thought, when D'Arcy of the Fourth presented himself.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy coughed.

His aristocratic face expressed a mingling of determination with hesitation. He coughed, and he coughed again.

"The fact is, sir—" he began, at last.

"Kindly be brief, D'Arcy. I have much to think of just now."

"I am awash of that, sir," said D'Arcy. "I know you are vewy much troubled by the vemarkable disappearance of Tom Mewwy, and of Kildare of the Sixth. But—but I think I can help you, sir."

Dr. Holmes started.

"If you know anything about the matter, D'Arcy—" he exclaimed.

"Not at pwsent, sir."

"Then what do you mean?" asked the Head testily. "This is no time for idle talk, D'Arcy, when the whole school is plunged into anxiety."

"I twust I am not talkin' idly, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "All day yestahday, sir, the fellows were searchin' for Tom Mewwy, and they did not find him. We were goin' to search again to-day, but, to our surprise, sir, theah is a notice on the board, gatin' the whole school."

"Quite so, D'Arcy."

"How are we to search for Tom Mewwy, sir, if we are kept within gates?" inquired the swell of St. Jim's.

"You are not to search for him, D'Arcy."

"But, sir—"

"Kildare disappeared during the search for Merry!" said the Head. "The matter is still quite unexplained; and until something is learned, I cannot allow other boys to take risks."

"We don't mind the wisk, sir."

"You may go, D'Arcy."

"I may go searchin' for Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus eagerly.

"No, no, no! You may leave my study."

"Bai Jove! That is just what Blake and Hewwies and Dig said you would say, sir," said Arthur Augustus. "I wondah how they knew? Of course, sir, I recognise that you are quite wight in keepin' weckless youngstahs frowm wunnin' into dangah."

"I am glad you recognise that, D'Arcy!" said Dr. Holmes, very dryly. "Now you may go."

"But that does not apply to me, sir. If you would allow Blake and Hewwies and Dig to come out with me lookin' for Tom Mewwy, I would undahtake to look aftah them, and see that they did not land in any twouble, sir."

"Nonsense!"

"Bai Jove!"

"The matter is in the hands of the police, who will do everything that can be done," said the Head. "Kindly leave my study, D'Arcy. I suppose you do not mean to be impertinent—"

"Bai Jove! Nothin' of the sort, sir! I twust I should nevah be guilty of the bad taste of bein' impertinent to my headmastah, sir."

Dr. Holmes' troubled face broke into a slight smile. It was not quite possible to be angry with the cheery Gussy.

"Well, well, say no more, D'Arcy!" he said. "You may go. Dear me!"

The Head turned, as the telephone-bell buzzed loudly at his elbow.

Taking no further heed of the swell of the Fourth, Dr. Holmes picked up the receiver.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not go. He had not yet gained his point, and he hoped still to gain it.

The mysterious disappearance of Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell, had thrilled St. Jim's from end to end. And when it became known that Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of the school, had vanished completely while searching for him, the excitement reached its height.

The "gating" of the whole school was only a prudent measure, on the part of the headmaster, after what had happened. But it came as a blow to the army of fellows who were planning to search for the missing junior and senior.

Nobody, however, had the "nerve" to remonstrate with the Head—excepting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was a case, as Cardew remarked, of fools rushing in where angels feared to tread.

Arthur Augustus had not finished yet, and he waited for the Head to be "through" with the telephone.

Dr. Holmes, unheeding him—probably forgetting, in his troubled frame of mind, that the junior was in the study at all—spoke into the transmitter. Of late the telephone at St. Jim's had been very busy; and Dr. Holmes hoped fervently that this was a call from the police-station, to announce that a discovery had been made regarding the missing St. Jim's fellows.

"Is that St. Jim's?" came a voice over the wires—a clear, cool, metallic voice, quite strange to Dr. Holmes' ears.

"Yes."

"I must speak to Dr. Holmes, the headmaster—"

"Dr. Holmes is speaking."

"Good! You have no news yet of Tom Merry, I think?"

"As yet, no," said the Head. "Who is speaking? If you have any information to give—"

"I could give the most complete information, Dr. Holmes. I know where the missing boy is at this moment."

The Head caught his breath.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Where is he?"

"Very close at hand!" There was a soft chuckle on the wires. "I have the best of reasons for knowing where he is, Dr. Holmes, for he is in my hands—a prisoner!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You are aware, I presume, that the boy was kidnapped?"

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"Yes, yes."

"I am the kidnapper!"

Dr. Holmes almost dropped the receiver in his amazement. He had hoped to receive news of the missing junior—but a message from the kidnapper himself was about the last thing he had expected to receive.

"Are you—are you serious?" he gasped. "Is this some unfeeling jest?"

"Not at all, sir! Tom Merry is in my hands at the present moment, and if you have any thought of finding him, you may as well dismiss it. You cannot track a motor-car—"

"A motor-car?"

"Which has disappeared after covering a hundred miles," went on the voice. "The task would be, at least, difficult. You had better come to terms, sir."

"What do you mean?" panted the Head.

"This is a business proposition to me. The price of Tom Merry's return to your school is five hundred pounds."

"Bless my soul!"

"I understand that he has a wealthy uncle, who will doubtless provide the money."

"You scoundrel!" gasped the Head.

"Thank you! I did not, however, ring you up in order to listen to compliments. When the money is paid, Tom Merry returns to St. Jim's. Unless it is paid, he will never return!"

"Villain! The police—"

"You will take measures to hand over the money—"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" shouted the Head. "I hope, sir, to see you in the hands of the police, and sent to penal servitude! I—"

"Good-bye!"

"Listen to me! If you— Are you there?" exclaimed the Head. "You unscrupulous rascal—speak! Are you there?"

There was no reply.

Dr. Holmes' unknown, unseen interlocutor had rung off. Breathing hard, the angry old gentleman put up the receiver. He turned—and met the astonished gaze of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"D'Arcy! You are still here?"

"Yaas, sir. I was goin' to wemark—"

"Leave my study at once!" thundered the Head.

"But, sir—"

Dr. Holmes made a clutch at his cane. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy backed promptly to the door. There was no argument possible with a cane.

Arthur Augustus quitted the study rather hastily. And Dr. Holmes, as soon as he was gone, turned to the telephone again, and rang up Inspector Skeat at the police-station in Wayland.

CHAPTER 2.

No Bike for Baggy.

"**W**HAT luck, fathead?"

Jack Blake of the Fourth asked that question as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into Study No. 6. Tea was going on, that Monday afternoon, in Study No. 6, and Manners and Lowther of the Shell were there with the Fourth-Formers.

Manners and Lowther, Tom Merry's best chums, were in a very subdued mood. The vanishing of Tom Merry had been a heavy blow to them.

"What did the Head say?" asked Digby, with a faint grin. "He did not seem to cotton to my suggestion," confessed Arthur Augustus. "I agreed to look after you youngsters vewy carefully if he let you out of gates, but—"

"Ass!" said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies!"

"It's rotten!" said Blake, with a frown. "Of course, we all want to take a hand in looking for poor old Tommy. What the merry thunder can have become of him?"

"We're going to look for him," said Monty Lowther quietly. "Gated or not, we're going out."

"Yes, rather!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! Without the Head's permish, deah boys!"

"We're not going to sit down quietly while Tom's missing," said Monty Lowther.

"As a mattah of fact, I wathah think that the Head has some news," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Somebody telephoned while I was in the study, and it was somethin' about information of Tom Mewwy, frowm what the Head said. He was callin' the chap names—scoundwel and villain and wascal. Watinah stwong language for the Head—what!"

Lowther looked up quickly.

"There might be news," he exclaimed. "Tom must have been kidnapped, and the villains could only do that for one thing—money. They're bound to open communications sooner or later."

"Yaas, wathah! And if the Head would take me into his confidence, I wathah think I could help in twackin' them

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out. But I suppose it is no good puttin' it to him," said Arthur Augustus regretfully. "He is a vewy obstinate old gentleman!"

Manners and Lowther rose from the tea-table. They returned to their own study, leaving Blake & Co. discussing the amazing mystery of Tom Merry's disappearance—a subject that had been worn almost threadbare already at St. Jim's, and yet was no nearer to a solution. In Study No. 10, in the Shell, there seemed to be an air of desolation to the two juniors. They sorely missed the sunny face of their old chum.

"We can't hang about doing nothing," said Lowther restlessly. "It doesn't seem much good looking for Tom, old chap, but we must do something."

Manners nodded.

"The gates are locked, though," he said. "I fancy the prefects have been told to keep a look-out. It won't be easy to skip."

"We'll chance it."

Baggy Trimble of the Fourth looked into the study. He nodded cheerily to the two glum Shell fellows.

"I've been looking for you chaps," he said.

"Well, now you've found us," grunted Monty Lowther. He was in no mood just then to be bothered by the fat and fatuous Baggy. "Hook it!"

"About Tom Merry," said Baggy. "You see, he's been gone two whole days now. I don't believe he's been kidnapped."

"You don't know anything about it, ass!"

"Well I'm a pretty keen fellow," said Trimble complacently. "It's all my eye about kidnapping, you know. My idea is that poor old Merry's taken a tumble into one of those old quarries on the moor. Don't you think it's jolly likely?"

Baggy blinked inquiringly at Tom Merry's chums as he asked that pleasant and interesting question. Manners and Lowther gave him black looks. That fearful possibility was at the back of their minds, haunting and tormenting them. It did not seem to be disturbing Trimble's fat equanimity in any way. Trimble could always bear other fellows' misfortunes with considerable calmness.

"That's what I think," said Trimble. "He was rambling on the moor, you know, and came a mucker. Sheep have been found dead in those old quarries. Lots of people say they ought to be fenced in, but it's never been done. Depend on it that's what's happened to poor old Merry."

"Oh, dry up!" growled Lowther.

"Well, we want to clear the matter up, don't we?" said Trimble cheerfully. "I'm as sorry as anybody could be—quite grieved, in fact. I'm not exactly off my feed, but deeply grieved. Still, a fellow must be practical. And there's the question of the bike."

"The bike?" repeated Manners and Lowther together, staring at the fat Fourth-Former.

"Tom Merry's bike, you know."

"What on earth has Tom Merry's bike to do with it?" demanded Manners impatiently. "He wasn't on his bike when he disappeared. The bike's in the shed now."

"I know that; that's why I'm mentioning it. If Tom Merry's broken his neck falling into a quarry—"

"Shut up!" shrieked Lowther.

"Better face the facts," advised Trimble. "I'm deeply grieved myself. Tom was a pal of mine, as you know. But I'm facing the facts with—with fortitude. If Tom Merry's done for, it stands to reason that he will never want his bike again."

"Eh?"

"He's got no kid relations who might like it," continued Trimble. "His uncles couldn't possibly want a juvenile bike. They're middle-aged old jossers. His guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, wouldn't want it, of course. She's too ancient to bike. Besides, it's a man's jigger. Now, you know what's happened to my bike."

Manners and Lowther did not speak. They seemed unable to. They only looked fixedly at Baggy Trimble. That happy youth rattled on:

"I was Tom's pal, as you know. You were his pals, too. I admit it. But you've both got bikes, and mine's a goner. You can't want his bike. Now, some time ago Tom actually mentioned to me that if anything ever happened to him he'd like me to have his bike. Said so in so many words."

Still Manners and Lowther did not speak.

"You see how the matter stands," said Trimble, encouraged by their silence. "That bike's practically mine. I don't say it will console my grief, but I should like to have it in memory of Tom. I'm going to take it, you know—just bag it as it stands; and I've explained the matter to you fellows, so that you'll understand. Nobody else would have any right to raise any objections; in fact, you wouldn't have, only you might fancy so. Catch on now?"

And Trimble gave the chums of the Shell another inquiring blink. Monty Lowther stirred at last.



The miller watched the juniors as they came up. "I thought your headmaster was not allowing his boys out of school at present?" he said. "We're out of bounds," confessed Manners. "We can't sit about doing nothing while Tom Merry's a prisoner somewhere." "I should advise you fellows to go back at once. You ought not to be out without your headmaster's leave!" said Mr. Brown rather sternly. (See page 9.)

He did not speak. He made a rapid stride at the cheery Baggy, and grasped him by the collar.

"Here, hold on!" roared Trimble, in surprise and alarm.

"Hold on—I mean, let go! Wharrer you at?"

"That stump, Manners—quick!" said Lowther, in a choking voice.

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Wharrer marrer?" shrieked Trimble.

"You don't want the bike, you rotter! You've got one. Yoooop!"

With a swing of his arm, Lowther flattened Trimble's fat features on the table. Manners lifted the stump, and brought it down on Baggy's fat person with a terrific swipe.

The yell that rose from Baggy rang the length of the Shell passage.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Manners laid on with the stump as though he were beating a carpet. The dust rose from Trimble's trousers, and fiendish howls from Trimble. He wriggled and roared and kicked, and still the stump rose and fell.

"There, that will do," panted Manners at last. "Kick the horrid worm out!"

"Yarooooooop!"

Baggy Trimble went spinning through the doorway. He sat on the passage floor and roared.

"Yow-ow-ow! You rotters! I'm going to have the bike, all the same. If you think you're bagging Tom Merry's bike, you're jolly well mistaken!"

Lowther made a furious rush into the passage. Baggy Trimble picked himself up and fled frantically. At the head of the staircase he bumped into Grundy of the Shell. He dodged round Grundy, panting.

"Keep him off!" yelled Trimble.

"Eh? Keep who off?" ejaculated Grundy.

Lowther had gone back into Study No. 10, and the corridor was deserted.

"That beast Lowther—ow-ow-ow—wow! Licking a fellow because he wanted an old pal's bike as a keepsake!" wailed

Baggy Trimble. "I say, Grundy, you'll see fair play, won't you?"

"Eh—what?" said Grundy.

"I'm going to have Tom Merry's bike——"

"What?"

"Now he's dead, you know. Those two rotters think they're going to bag it, you know!" gasped Trimble.

"They're after it, you know; and they pitched into me because—— Yow-ow-ow! You'll see fair play, old chap, won't you? Yaroooh! Wharrer you kicking me for, you beast?" roared Trimble.

Grundy of the Shell did not explain why he was kicking Trimble. He only kicked. His heavy boots tattooed on Baggy as the fat junior fled for the staircase. Baggy went down the stairs three at a time, and did not halt till he had taken refuge in a deserted Form-room, where he squirmed and groaned and gasped, burning with indignation over his many wrongs.

CHAPTER 3.

A Surprise for the Inspector.

"HEAH'S the mewwy inspectah!"

The spring dusk was falling when Inspector Skeat came in at the school gates, and crossed, with his ponderous stride, to the School House. Blake & Co. were in the quad, and they regarded the portly gentleman with eager inquiry as he passed. There was nothing to be read in Mr. Skeat's plump and purple face, however.

"Nothing doing," Jack Blake remarked.

"Nothin' will be doin', deah boys, until Studay No. 6 gets on the twack," said Arthur Augustus sagely.

"Hear, hear!" grinned Digby.

"If they'd let us get out, and I took Towser," said Herries thoughtfully. "You know what Towser is like when it comes to following a trail—regular bloodhound, you know."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was thinkin' of askin' Wildwake to join up; he is vewy keen on a twail. Of course, I have not vewy much to learn fwom Wildwake when it comes to woodcraft, but—"

"Only tons and tons!" remarked Digby sarcastically.

"Weally, Dig—"

"Wildrake's tried, and Le's failed," said Blake. "He's jolly clever, but he can't work giddy miracles. Time Manners and Lowther came in, if they're not going to cut call-over. Silly asses to hook it! They won't be able to find out anything."

"Wathab not."

Manners and Lowther were out of bounds—surreptitiously. Probably their own hopes were very faint; but Study No. 6 certainly had no expectation whatever that the two Shell fellows would discover anything. They had still less faith, if possible, in Mr. Skeat—in fact, there only hope was in Study No. 6 itself getting to work.

Mr. Skeat, unconscious of the juniors' criticisms, which probably would not have disturbed his equanimity in any case, entered the house, and was shown to the Head's study. He found Mr. Railton there with the Head, and both the masters were very glad to see him. Mr. Skeat's manner indicated that he had some cause for satisfaction.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Skeat. I am very glad indeed to see you," said Dr. Holmes. "From your telephone message, I understand that a discovery of some sort has been made."

Inspector Skeat nodded.

"I think so, sir," he answered. "We are at length on the track of the rascals, I fully believe."

The Head's face lighted up, and Mr. Railton looked very curiously at the portly inspector.

"It was fortunate, sir, that you reported to me immediately the telephone message you received from the kidnapper," continued Mr. Skeat. "I set to work instantly, of course. Inquiry at the exchange elicited rather important information. The call came from Birmingham."

"Birmingham?" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes, sir. It was a trunk-call from Birmingham that you received to-day," said the inspector. "It came from a post-office telephone, and inquiry in that quarter has obtained a description of the man who used the public telephone."

"That is very good!" exclaimed the Head.

"We do not let the grass grow under our feet, sir," said the inspector, with portly satisfaction. "I have been in communication with Birmingham. It fortunately happens that the man who used the telephone-box on that occasion was of rather striking appearance."

"That is certainly fortunate," remarked Mr. Railton. "He was, then, taken note of by the post-office people."

"Exactly! He was a man of middle age, with very striking red hair and beard," said the inspector. "Several of the young ladies in the post-office noticed him—indeed, probably there were some little jokes about his very striking red hair. A complete description of the man has been furnished—red hair, red beard, and moustache, and a very prominent nose with blotches on it. The description is something to work upon. The Birmingham police are taking the matter in hand, of course, and there is every hope of the rascal being traced out."

"Very, very good!" exclaimed the Head.

"You mentioned to me that the rascal referred to a motor-car in his talk with you, sir."

"That is so."

"It is a natural inference that a car was used in the kidnapping," said the inspector. "That accounts for no trace of the missing boy being discovered in this neighbourhood, of course. He was bundled into a car when taken, and rushed out of the district at once."

Dr. Holmes nodded.

"One moment," said Mr. Railton quietly. "That would account for Merry's complete disappearance. But what of Kildare? It was on the following day that Kildare disappeared, while searching for Merry."

The inspector looked a little put out for a moment. "That is still a mystery," he admitted. "Of course, it is very probable that Kildare met with some mishap in the course of the search. I understand that he was last seen on Wayland Moor, in the neighbourhood of the disused quarries. We have no reason to suppose, so far, that Master Kildare was kidnapped, or came into any contact with the rascals who spirited Merry away."

"But no trace has been found of him."

"None, though the quarries are being searched. But they are very extensive, and their windings are not all known; it is nearly a century since they were worked," said Mr. Skeat. "The search may be a very lengthy one. But with regard to Merry, it is obvious that he was carried off in a car, and is now a prisoner somewhere in the Midlands—"

Buzzzzzzzz!

It was the telephone-bell interrupting Inspector Skeat.

"Excuse me," said the Head.

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He took up the receiver. Mr. Railton and the inspector watched him with some interest as he murmured into the transmitter. There was a startled expression on his grave face.

"If, by any chance, that should be the kidnapper again—," ejaculated the inspector.

Dr. Holmes handed the receiver to him.

"It is!" he said briefly.

Inspector Skeat, with a gleam of excitement in his eyes, put the receiver to his ear. The voice was coming through—the cool, metallic voice the Head had heard earlier in the day.

"Answer, please! I have rung you up to know your decision. You know who I am, I presume?"

"Oh, yes!" muttered the inspector, hardly knowing what to say.

It was a novel position for the inspector, to be in actual talk with a daring and desperate criminal without being able to lay hands on him.

"That is not Dr. Holmes' voice." The unknown evidently had a quick ear. "Who is speaking?"

"I am speaking for Dr. Holmes—a friend of his," said the inspector evasively. "State your terms, please."

There was a faint laugh on the wires.

"Very good. Dr. Holmes knows my terms. If it is agreed to pay over the money, I will make arrangements for receiving it. I require Dr. Holmes' promise, that is all. Tom Merry will then return immediately to the school—immediately I have received the cash."

"Where is the boy now?"

"That is my secret," was the cool reply. "He is safe enough—with the other."

"The other?" ejaculated the inspector.

"The elder boy—Kildare!"

Inspector Skeat gave a violent start. It was evident, if the kidnapper's word was to be relied upon, that Eric Kildare had fallen into the same lawless hands as Tom Merry. Mr. Skeat was quite taken aback.

"With regard to Kildare, there will be further negotiations," went on the cool voice. "For the present we are dealing with Merry."

"Upon my word!" murmured the inspector.

"I am waiting for the answer," went on the voice. "Yes, or no?"

"You are aware that the Head of St. James' School cannot submit to a blackmailing demand—"

"That will do! Let Dr. Holmes come to the telephone, or I shall ring off at once!"

Inspector Skeat handed the receiver back to the Head.

"I am here!" said Dr. Holmes quietly, into the transmitter.

"Good! Do you accept my terms?"

"No!"

"That is your final answer?"

"It is final!" said the Head steadily.

"Very good! You will see me—at least, I shall be in the vicinity of the school again to-night." The cool voice had a ring of menace. "You will learn that you cannot defy me when another of your little community disappears!"

Dr. Holmes started.

"To-morrow," went on the voice, "another boy will be missing from the school. Then, perhaps, you will come to terms, Dr. Holmes!"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head faintly.

Nothing further came along the wires. Dr. Holmes understood that the kidnapper had rung off. He was about to put up the receiver, when the inspector took it from his hand and spoke through to the exchange. He exchanged a few sentences, and put up the receiver, and turned to the Head and the Housemaster with a puzzled, angry face.

"That call did not come from Birmingham," he said. "It was a trunk call, but it came from Reading."

"Reading!" exclaimed the Head.

"Yes. The rascal had already shifted his quarters," said Mr. Skeat. "No doubt he knew he was being looked for in Birmingham. The prisoners have already been removed to another quarter. It is clear that the rogues have a car at their disposal—if it was not clear already."

The inspector sat down heavily.

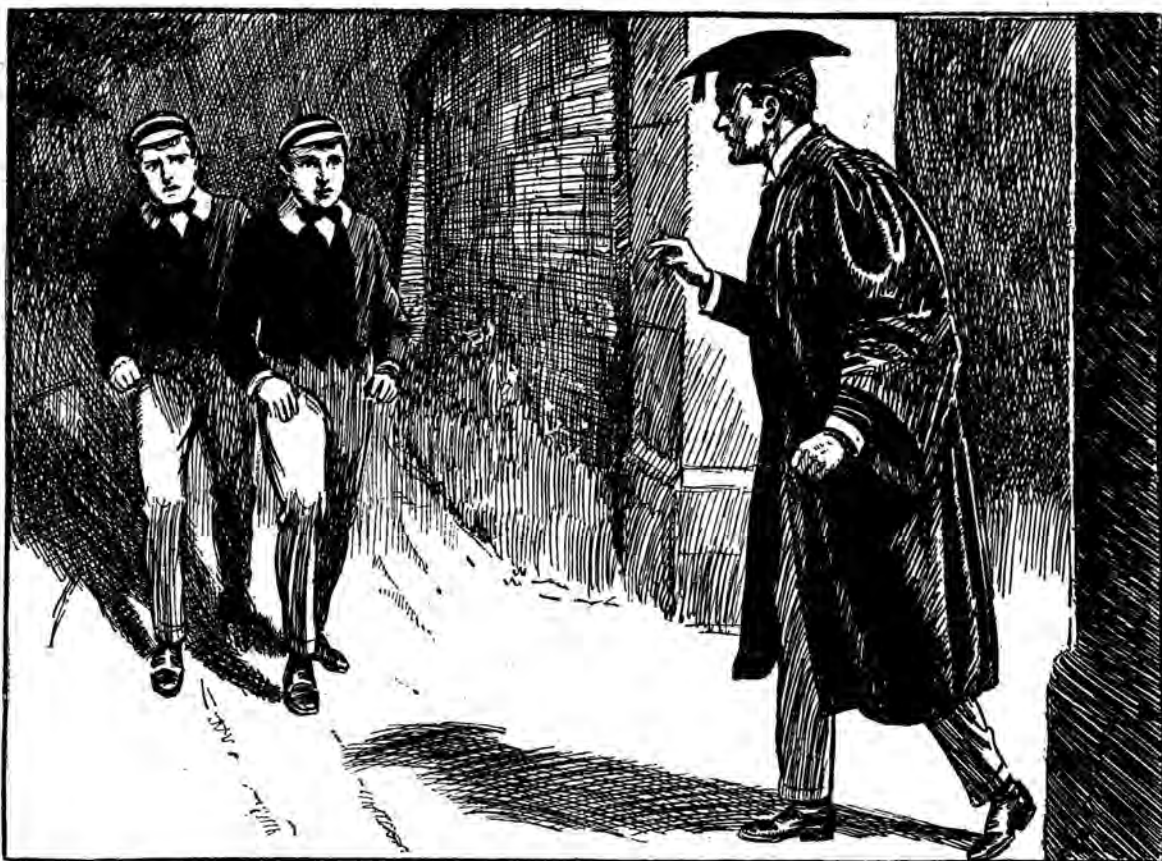
The country official had never had so curious a case as this to deal with before, and he was beginning to suspect that the unknown was a little above his weight. There was a discussion in the Head's study for some time, before the inspector rose to go. After he had departed the Head looked at Mr. Railton, his face grave and troubled.

"We must pay every heed to the rascal's threat," he said. "You will warn all the prefects to be very careful that no boy goes out of bounds, Mr. Railton."

"Most certainly!"

"Probably the threat is only an idle one. But we should be greatly to blame if we did not take every precaution. I should never forgive myself if another boy should fall into the hands of that villain," said the Head, in an agitated tone.

Mr. Railton nodded, and left the study. Call-over in Big



The Housemaster uttered an exclamation of relief as Manners and Wildrake loomed up in the dusk. "Has Lowther come in, sir?" asked Manners eagerly. "Lowther!" exclaimed Mr. Ralton. "Is he not with you?" "No, sir," answered Wildrake. "We separated on the moor, sir, and as Lowther didn't turn up by seven, we thought we'd better—" "How dare you leave the school against the Head's express orders?" fumed the Housemaster. (See page 12.)

Hall followed soon afterwards, and the School House master took the roll call personally. Every fellow answered to his name, and Mr. Ralton did not suspect that Manners and Lowther of the Shell had dropped over the school wall just in time to scud into Hall and answer "Adsum!" when their names were called.

CHAPTER 4.

Wildrake Takes a Hand.

ST. JIM'S, on the following day, knew what had transpired. In the general state of anxiety, the Head had deemed it best to make an announcement.

It came as a relief to Manners and Lowther to know that their chum was at least alive, though he was in the hands of kidnapers. The knowledge banished the darker dread that had gnawed at their hearts. The Head, moreover, knew that many of the St. Jim's fellows were chafing at the restriction of school bounds, and he sagely considered that the schoolboys would give up any wild schemes of surreptitiously searching for the missing fellows if they knew that the prisoners were as far off as the Midlands.

The announcement had that effect, as a matter of fact.

Many of Tom Merry's friends, as well as Manners and Lowther, had been scheming little schemes of breaking bounds and renewing the search. But it was obviously useless to do so if the prisoners were a hundred miles away from St. Jim's. And the little schemes were dropped at once. The kidnapper's threat also was made known—that another member of St. Jim's was to be taken. That considerably damped the keenness to get out of bounds.

But there was one fellow in the Fourth Form upon whom the Head's announcement produced quite a different effect. That one was Kit Wildrake, the Canadian junior. At lessons on Tuesday afternoon Wildrake had an unusually thoughtful expression on his frank, sunburnt face, and he did not give all his attention to Mr. Lathorn. Indeed, the Form-room work in the Lower School was much slacker than usual in these days. The general excitement made it almost impossible to work as usual, and the Form-masters judiciously loosened the rein a little.

After lessons, Kit Wildrake strolled away to the Shell passage, and he was sitting on the table in Study No. 10 when Manners and Lowther came into their quarters.

The chums of the Shell were not looking cheerful, though they had been relieved to some extent by the Head's announcement.

"Hallo!" said Lowther, as he came in and saw the Canadian. "Anything on?"

"I guess so. I've been thinking over this giddy little problem," said Wildrake. "You fellows went out of bounds yesterday, I guess."

"Yes. Keep it dark, of course!"

"Sure! Nothing doing, I suppose?"

"Nothing!"

"Trying it on again?"

"What's the good?" said Manners glumly. "Tom Merry's a hundred miles away. We've got to leave it to the police now. I hope to goodness they'll be able to do something."

Wildrake nodded thoughtfully.

"That's your idea?" he asked. "Well, I guess I've been turning over some 'other ideas in my little brain-box. I've come to tell you about it because you're Tommy's best chums, and you might like to go into the thing with me."

"Into what?"

"Looking for Tom Merry."

"What's the good?" repeated Manners. "Are you suggesting a trip to Birmingham or Reading?"

"Nope!"

"Not that they'd be found there," said Lowther. "It's pretty clear that they're keeping on the move. May be at Southampton, or Warwick, or anywhere now. It's a deep game, too. They can't be spotted."

Wildrake smiled.

"Not so jolly easy, moving prisoners about a thickly-populated country like this in a car," he said.

"Easy enough, in a closed car."

"Yep. But there might be a breakdown, and then—"

"Then they would be nabbed," said Manners. "Let's hope they'll barge into a motor-lorry or something."

"I reckon that's not much to hope for. Like to hear my ideas?" asked the Canadian junior.

"Go ahead."

"I guess I've been figuring it out. Do you fellows remember seeing in the newspapers some months ago a case at Bournemouth—man with a car being hunted for? The only mention of the car came from the criminal himself; but everybody went nap on the car. I reckon if I had been a detective, I should have looked for a man without a car—simply because the man mentioned the car."

"Might be something in that," assented Lowther.

"Same in this case. Kidnapper telephones from the Midlands—mentions a car. Telephones from another distant town—looks as if he must have got there in a car as he's got prisoners." Wildrake shook his head. "That giddy car is a little too obvious for me. I guess if I was the inspector, galoot I should eliminate that car."

"But he must have used a car!" said Manners blankly. "He couldn't get prisoners a hundred miles by railway, I suppose."

"I reckon he didn't get them!"

"Eh?"

"Figure it out," said Wildrake quietly. "The man's collared some fellows, and wants ransom for them. His chief object is to avoid being caught; his next, to prevent the prisoners being discovered. If he can give an impression that he's got them in the Midlands, with a car, the search drops in this locality. In fact, I guess it has dropped. The bobbies are going far afield, looking for a man with a closed car—looking for a galoot with red whiskers, who makes himself conspicuous at a post-office telephone. The information's a bit too easy—I guess I shall tell them to can it! What's the matter with a galoot taking the train to Birmingham, and telephoning from there, with a special set of red whiskers on his chivvy for the occasion?"

"Oh! It—its possible, I suppose."

"The galoot talks too much about the car," said Wildrake. "If he was shifting his prisoners around the globe in a car, the last thing he would mention would be the car, if he's got any sense."

"Oh!"

"And he's got some sense, to pull off a stunt like this," said Wildrake. "I calculate he's a pretty deep card. I figure it out that a man was sent to the Midlands to telephone. There never was an old car at all. Tom Merry's still in this vicinity!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Lowther.

Manners only stared at the Canadian junior.

"Look at it!" urged Wildrake. "If they were after Tom Merry, and whisked him a couple of hundred miles away in a car, how was it Kildare dropped into their hands the next day? Had they come back all the way for another? Can it! Kildare, I guess, dropped on some trace of poor old Tommy, and they roped him in to keep his mouth shut. Tom they want for ransom—he's got rich relations. They wouldn't want Kildare for that; his people are pretty well known not to be rich. If the man found out Tom's financial circumstances, he could find out Kildare's. Catch on? If they wanted a second victim for ransom, they'd pick out a rich chap—D'Arcy or Rake of the Shell, or Cardew—what?"

"Then you think—"

"I sure think that Kildare was roped in because he got too near the goods!" said Wildrake.

"It's possible!" said Manners, with a deep breath. "I never looked at it like that; but it's possible."

"The kidnapper would like us to think he was up in the Midlands," said Wildrake. "Because he wants us to think that, I guess I'd rather gamble on his being right here, under our noses!"

"Phew!" murmured Lowther.

"Then there's his threat of bagging another fellow to-day, as a warning to the Head," resumed Wildrake. "Is he coming in a car to do it? Why, any strange car in this neighbourhood now would be watched by a hundred people. The police will stop cars on the roads and look into them, same as they did in the Bournemouth case. My dear old galoots, the very last thing that Johnny will bring into this section is a motor-car!"

"By Jove, I think you're right!"

"But without a car, how is he going to get the next victim away—off to the Midlands?" grinned Wildrake. "Not in his waistcoat pocket on a train. He's going to bag that victim, if he can. He's after the spondulics, and he means business. But he couldn't get him out of this neighbourhood when bagged—sure. Putting two and two together, old beans, I figure it out that the merry kidnapper has his headquarters within a few miles of St. Jim's, and that Tom Merry and Kildare are there. Only he's got a confederate in the Midlands to telephone for him."

Monty Lowther's eyes gleamed.

"If you're right, and I think you are—" he said.

"It's a gamble," said Wildrake. "But the chances are on it. I guess my little stunt is to look for Tommy anywhere within rifle-range of the old school."

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"But where?" said Manners, rather helplessly. "The whole country is up about it. Everybody's been searching—there's hardly a stone been left unturned in the whole place for miles around!"

"I know! Wherever the galoot has burrowed, he's burrowed deep," admitted Wildrake. "But there's a clue."

"How? Where?"

"Kildare's disappearance. He was last seen on Wayland Moor. It's a big place, and a lonely place. But if Kildare hit on anything there, we can hit on it, too. If we trace Kildare, he leads us to Tom Merry. I don't say that we can find anything. But we can try."

"We can try!" said Lowther, clenching his hands. "I believe you're right, Wildrake. We're going to try! We've got to get out of bounds—"

"Careful!" smiled Wildrake. "The prefects are jolly keen now, and the masters have nearly as many giddy eyes as Argus, at present. If we're caught, it's trouble for three, and we shall be stopped. There's three hours to call-over. Don't stop for tea, put some grub in your pockets, and let's fit—carefully!"

Kit Wildrake's counsel was too good not to be followed. It was with very great caution that the Canadian junior and Tom Merry's chums made their exit from St. Jim's.

But they succeeded, and half an hour later they were hurrying through the woodland footpath to Wayland Moor, to take up their quest on that lonely, barren expanse. Their hopes were faint, but there was hope. And, at least, they were at work, seeking Tom Merry. Even fatigue and failure were better than marking time idly while their chum was in captivity.

CHAPTER 5.

Disaster!

"WELL, here we are!" said Manners.

He did not speak very hopefully.

Round the three juniors stretched the broad expanse of the moor. It was barred in one direction by the dark mass of the wood; and in another a patch of smoke against the sky marked the town of Wayland. Over the rise and fall of the rough moor the sails of a windmill showed, creaking a little in the wind, but not turning.

Lowther and Manners looked inquiringly at Wildrake.

The Canadian junior was silent.

The fact that Kildare, searching for Tom Merry, had disappeared—or, at least, had last been seen—on the wild moor, was all the clue that Kit Wildrake possessed. And the moor was many miles in extent.

Wildrake was looking at the old mill. From the mill a rough track ran to the road that crossed the moor.

A farm-cart was lumbering on the track away from the mill—the only moving object to be seen. A bronze-faced man in a smock was driving it.

"Well?" said Lowther.

"I guess inquiries have been made at the mill already," Wildrake remarked. "They'd know nothing there."

Manners nodded.

"Mr. Ralton's been there to inquire, I know," he said; "and Inspector Skeat must have been. Anyhow, the kidnappers wouldn't collar a chap within sight of the mill."

"I don't know," said Wildrake. "The mill stands high, and has a good view over most of the moor. I've been to the top of it, when it was empty a few weeks ago. It's occupied now?"

"Yes. I saw the miller when I was out photographing the other day," answered Manners. "Rather a decent old man, named Brown. He let me take photographs of the mill, and was interested in them. A bit of a photographer himself, I think. Decent fellow!"

Anybody who took an interest in photography was rather decent, from Harry Manners' point of view.

"I guess if the mill was still empty, that's the place I should think of looking in," Wildrake remarked.

"But it isn't; the new tenants have been there two or three weeks," said Monty Lowther.

"Let's have a look at the place."

"What's the good?"

"Let's look, anyhow!"

"Oh, all right!" said Lowther, with something like resignation in his tone.

The three juniors walked on towards the windmill. Now that they were on the wide heath, both Manners and Lowther were feeling that they might almost as well have remained in the study at St. Jim's. Even if the kidnapped prefect had left some trace, how were they to light upon it, on a wide expanse miles in extent? They did not even know the precise spot where Kildare had last been seen—they only knew that the Sixth-Formers had separated on the moor, to search in various directions, and that Kildare had not returned.

The old mill was solitary enough; there was no farmhouse within a mile of it. Two men were working on a potato-field adjoining, and they did not look up at the juniors.

A man was leaning on the gate as the juniors approached—a man who looked past middle-age, with a tinge of white in his hair, and a white moustache. He wore the white coat of a miller.

"That's Brown!" remarked Manners.

The miller watched the juniors as they came up, and saluted them politely when they arrived at the gate.

"Looking for more photographs—what?" he asked, addressing Manners, with a smile.

"Not now, Mr. Brown," answered the Shell fellow. "We're looking for a chap who has disappeared from our school."

The miller nodded.

"I've heard about that, of course," he said. "Haven't you had any news of the poor lad yet?"

"None, so far."

"You haven't seen or heard anything of him, of course?" remarked Monty Lowther.

"No; but I have told my men to keep their eyes open," said the miller. "If they should find any trace, they will report to the police at once. But does your headmaster allow his boys out of gates at present?" added Mr. Brown, looking curiously at the juniors. "I should have thought—"

"We're out of bounds," confessed Manners. "We can't sit about doing nothing while Tom Merry's a prisoner somewhere."

The miller looked serious.

"I advise you young fellows to go back to your school at once," he said, rather sternly. "You ought not to be out without your headmaster's leave."

"We're going to hunt for Tom Merry!" answered Manners doggedly.

Wildrake had not spoken; he was watching the rather red, bluff face of the miller with interest.

"Come on!" said Lowther.

The three juniors walked on, the miller watching them as they went. Kit Wildrake seemed deep in thought.

"Can't be much trade doing here," he remarked. "The mill is a jolly long way from any farm that has corn to grind."

"That's why it stood empty so long, I suppose," said Manners. "I believe there used to be a lot more wheat in this quarter in the old days when the mill was built; but, of course, it's turned a great deal into pasture now. If Mr. Brown has invested much money in that mill, I fancy he won't see it again."

"Windmills are a bit out-of-date, too," Wildrake remarked. "He doesn't seem to have any modern machinery installed."

"I haven't seen any," answered Manners. "But he must be doing some trade—there are a good many men working about the place."

"A good many?" asked Wildrake.

"Well, I've seen five or six, as well as the miller himself."

"Natives of these parts?" asked Wildrake.

"I don't know—their faces are new to me. You seem jolly interested in that dashed old mill," said Manners, rather peevishly. "I'm thinking of Tom Merry."

"So am I," answered Wildrake quietly.

"Well, what's the programme?" asked Lowther, rather restlessly. "We've got to get in by call-over, or there will be a fearful row. We haven't much time to waste, if we're going to do anything."

Manners and Lowther regarded the Canadian junior with growing impatience. He was standing on a hillock, looking back at the mill, with its old sails black against the blue spring sky. The miller had quitted his place at the gate, and was going down the path to meet a farm-cart that was lumbering towards the mill.

"Look here, we're goin' on!" said Manners abruptly.

"What the thump are you staring at the mill for, Wildrake?"

"I'm coming," said Wildrake.

The three juniors went on. The task before them was a difficult one, if not impossible. Here and there on the moor they found traces of footprints, but the traces were too vague to tell them anything. In one spot, on a sloping hillside, they found a space that showed signs of many tramping feet, though the signs were some days old. They could guess that this was the spot where the St. Jim's prefects had met on Sunday, after searching over the moor. Several tracks of boots were quite distinct, and they were not heavy country boots.

"Nothing to find out from that," said Lowther.

"I guess the prefects met here at sundown on Sunday, or a crowd of them, anyhow, after the search," said Wildrake.

"Kildare didn't come back and join them. He stayed on

the moor, and I guess that he's on the moor somewhere now."

"Where, then?" asked Lowther, rather crossly. His anxiety for his chum, and the hopelessness of the search, affected Lowther's nerves a little. "He might have tumbled into a quarry—but we know now that he was kidnapped. A prisoner couldn't be kept in open quarries, so we can bar them out. Where the thump could anybody be hidden on this moor?"

"That's the pesky question," said Wildrake. "If he's still on the moor, he's hidden well out of sight."

"And there's no place where he could be hidden," said Manners. "I can't help thinking that you've been theorising a bit too much, Wildrake."

"It strikes me about the same," said Lowther. "Still, as we're here, we may as well hunt."

Wildrake did not answer; but he went on, and the chums of the Shell followed him. The Canadian was examining the ground with intent and tireless eyes. But there was no "sign" to be discovered; and if the Canadian was tireless, the chums of the Shell were not. They were anxious and restless, and, perhaps, a little irritable.

"This isn't much good," said Manners, at last. "If you can see anything in that dashed scrubby grass, Wildrake, we can't! No good our following at your heels like this. We'll strike out in a different direction, and call to you if we find anything."

Wildrake looked up.

"Safer to keep together," he said.

"What rot! You don't think the kidnapper is wandering about the moor, do you?" said Lowther, with a rather scornful laugh. "We haven't seen anything of him, so far. Come on, Manners!"

"Don't get out of hearing; anyhow," urged Wildrake.

"That's all right. We'll meet you again near the mill," said Monty Lowther. "That's the biggest landmark hereabouts!"

The two Shell fellows walked away, leaving Wildrake to his investigation. The Canadian junior had come prepared for his task—he had taken the measurements carefully of a boot belonging to Kildare of the Sixth, and he was searching for a track to fit it. Once he found a certain indication of where the missing prefect had passed, he had a good hope of being able to follow it up.

But the tracks he found—such as they were—were old, and in many places rendered more indistinct by rainfall.

Keen and tireless on his task, however, the Canadian junior moved on, covering a good deal of ground. But as the sun sank lower in the sky he looked at his watch, and turned back towards the mill at last.

The windmill came in sight over a rise in the ground, and he discerned Manners waving a hand to him as he came up.

"Seen Lowther?" he asked.

"Wasn't he with you?"

"Yes; but we separated to hunt round," answered Manners.

"We agreed to meet here at six. It's gone six."

"I guess he'd better not be late—we haven't much time left for getting in before call-over."

"Found anything out?"

"Not yet," confessed Wildrake.

Manners grunted.

"I fancy it's a wild-goose chase, after all," he said. "Still, I suppose it's better than idling about in the studies."

"Much better, I guess."

The two juniors scanned the moor for Monty Lowther. The dusk began to fall, but Lowther did not appear. A grave expression came over Kit Wildrake's sunburnt face.

"Where did you leave him?" he asked.

"About a quarter of a mile from here. We separated to go round two sides of a little hill."

"It's sure queer that he doesn't come. We shall be late for call-over, at this rate."

"My hat, that will mean an awful row, in the present circumstances! I—I suppose he can't have gone on to the school—"

"He wouldn't leave us here waiting for him."

"No, of course he wouldn't. Dash it all, I wish he'd come!" said Manners irritably. "It's too bad. If we're bowled out this time, we sha'n't get another chance!"

The dusk deepened. The juniors were growing anxious now. It was impossible that Monty Lowther could be still keeping on the quest, and very unlikely that he had lost his way on the moor over which he had rambled so often. A scared look was coming over Manners' face.

(Continued on page 12.)

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**All Football Enthusiasts Should
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**DON'T MISS THIS SPLENDID
OPPORTUNITY!**

The ST JIM'S NEWS

Edited By TOM MERRY.

"Puffing and Blowing."

A CHATTY HEALTH TALK.

By the Sporting Doctor.

I REMEMBER once seeing a fellow trying to get his waggon up a steep hill. It was a big waggon, made for two horses to pull, but there was only one horse yoked to it.

He was pushing at the wheel, and the poor horse was pulling and straining between the shafts. But they could not move the waggon.

I asked the fellow how far he had come, and he said: "Ten miles." But the whole of those ten miles were flat. This was his first hill, and his first hill "got him."

It got him because he was making one horse do the work of two horses. There was nothing to fall back on—no strength, no power.

Now let me tell you that you have a two-horse waggon of the same sort to move along the road of life. It is called by doctors your circulation—which means the flowing of your blood round your body. Your blood does not flow of itself. It has to be pumped or pushed along, and the two horses which make it go are your heart and your chest.

Not one person in ten understands this. Ask anybody you like what makes the blood go round the body, and he will tell you: "The heart, of course!" He will say it as if he thought you a big fool for not knowing it; and yet he's wrong.

Because the heart is only one of the two horses.

It is the second horse which is the real trouble. It is the second horse you have got to worry about if you want to be really fit and to keep fit.

You see every time your chest opens it sucks things into it—just like a syringe when you pull back the piston. It sucks in air—your breath—but it also sucks in blood. The blood is just as important as the air.

Your heart—horse No. 1—is a force pump. It sends the blood rushing all over your body to the crown of your head and the tips of your fingers. But the blood has to get back again. It has to go round or "circulate." That is your chest's job—horse No. 2.

But suppose your chest is not opening properly when you breathe? Suppose you are slack and stooping? Then horse No. 2 is not pulling his weight. Horse No. 1 is getting the whole job to do. You will soon be puffing and blowing and lying down to get your breath.

It may be all right for a bit, on the flat. But when a hill comes when you have to run or jump or fight—then you will stick just as the waggon stuck.

Now you can see what I was talking about when I told you you could take the measure of a funk by putting a string round his chest, and when I talked about hitting and hitting back. If you have a slack chest that does not move properly, you cannot hit back. Horse No. 1 is not strong enough to do so much all by himself.

And so you will be in a mess just as the carter fellow was. You will funk and go under when you might have "stood up."

How can we get our chests to work properly? The answer is by playing games. Wearing a belt is a help, too, for it makes you breathe with your chest. However, I will tell you more about what to do next week.

(Be sure you read next week's splendid article.)

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Monteith Contributes.

I DON'T know what the world is coming to. Talk about Socialism, Bolshevism, and Anarchy—a combination of all three would not produce the changes that are taking place at St. Jim's lately.

Some of the things that happen certainly have the effect of relieving the monotony of existence, but the latest development is beyond a joke.

It appears that the juniors run some rag of their own—the "St. Jim's News," or something of the kind—and if there is not a drastic alteration in the method in which it is conducted, I can foresee an order for its suppression. The young sweeps seem prepared to go to any lengths to obtain stuff to print. They even appoint special representatives, with orders to go round and bother chaps in their studies, and even the Sixth do not seem to be immune from this form of impertinence.

Only last week young Thurzman came nosing round when I happened to be asleep, and he actually had the cheek to leave a sort of booby-trap in my fire, as a consequence of which I was suddenly awakened by a large cork banging me in the eye. Fortunately, I was able to trace the perpetrator of this little joke, and to reward him accordingly.

Now, if you please, they've actually had the impudence to ask me to write an article for them. Redfern came—I suppose Thurzman would not tackle the job, and I do not wonder at it—and said that they wanted to make the paper as representative of the whole school as possible, and that it would be very nice if they could print a contribution by a New House prefect. I told him that the only thing he was likely to get from me was a boot on the seat of his bags, and that if he did not clear out pretty sharply he would not have the option of refusing it. He took the hint and cut off, but later in the evening I received a note from Tom Merry repeating the request, and pointing out that Kildare had given a lead, and that he would take it as a favour if I would oblige them.

Upon inquiry I discovered that it was quite correct about the skipper, although I am best if I can understand his doing such a thing, and I am pretty certain that they did not preface the request by sending a junior to hit him in the eye with a cork, otherwise he certainly would not have been so keen on encouraging them.

Perhaps Kildare does not have as much trouble with the kids over in his house as I do here. Keeping the young scamps in order occupies enough of my time without writing articles for them. If ever I go up to the 'Varsity, it will be as a grey-headed old man, unless Figgins, Pratt, Redfern, and a few more of their kindred alter pretty considerably in the meantime.

Between Two Fires.

With them and Ratty, I am between the devil and the deep sea. When one is not kicking up some sort of trouble someone else is. That is where Kildare scores. He has got a first-class Housemaster, who backs him up and helps to make life worth living for him. I am not so lucky.

Ratty vents his spite on me when things go wrong, either with the House or with his digestion, and you can bet that at any

given moment one or the other is not up to standard.

He is always thinking out some fat-headed idea—some new stunt to try on the House—and he passes them on to me to work out. If they come off all right—which they very rarely do—he takes the credit. If they go bang and make a mess of things, he blames me for it. Oh, I can tell you, it is a jolly life!

He expects me to be everywhere at once and to have eyes in the back of my head, and if ever anything happens without my knowing all about it, he accuses me of neglecting my duty. He seems to consider that my duty is to spy and hand out lickings to everybody within reach. He is a jolly sight too fond of using his cane, and although his bullying ways have brought him trouble again and again, he never seems to learn sense.

Last week some of the juniors had a bit of a dust-up with the School House fellows, and, of course, Ratty sent for me at once.

"Monteith," he snapped, "have you noticed that Figgins and Redfern are bearing black eyes, or are you, as usual, occupied with your own interests to the neglect of your duty?"

"I have certainly seen the two juniors you mention, sir," I replied curtly, "but I took no particular notice of them, as such things as black eyes are not uncommon with schoolboys. They may have been boxing in the gym."

"You know perfectly well that is not the explanation, Monteith," said Ratty acidly. "Several other of the juniors exhibit signs of a recent conflict, and I suspect they have been taking part in another of those disgusting affrays with the boys of the School House. The matter should have been instantly reported to me."

"If they have really been fighting, sir," I suggested, "it is unlikely that the School House boys have escaped without visible injury, and I have not heard that Mr. Ralton has taken any action with regard to his juniors."

Ratty's jaws closed with a snap.

"Mr. Ralton's methods are not mine!" he snapped. "What did you say, Monteith?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing in particular, sir," I murmured. "Ratty's too sharp ears must have caught something of my muttered, 'And a thumping pity, that is,' but it was not so much an utterance as that I was incautiously thinking aloud."

"I will not permit this degrading horse-play," Ratty went on, after favouring me with a suspicious glance. "You will send Figgins and Redfern to me at once. I am convinced that they are the ringleaders."

He picked up a cane as I quitted the study to take the message to the Fourth Form corridor, and he must have used it to some purpose judging by the expressions on the faces of the two juniors when I met them on the stairs a few minutes later. Of course, in one way, it served the young beggars right, because they are always making nuisances of themselves, but Ratty goes too far sometimes. In fact, he had done so this time.

Not that he realised it, of course. Ratty never does realise anything until it is too late.

Honours Even.

I saw the Fourth Form to their dormitory that evening, as usual, and went back to my study. I was sitting in an armchair when suddenly I heard a most frantic yell. It came from the direction of Ratty's quarters, so I dropped my book in a hurry and left the study to investigate the cause of it.

In the corridor I bumped into Gray, who

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was on the same errand, and he clutched me by the arm.

"What the merry dickens is the matter?" he gasped.

"Goodness knows!" I replied. "It sounds as though Ratty is being pole-axed."

That unearthly yell came echoing down the corridor again.

"Yoowp! Ooowp!"

We reached the door of Ratty's room, and Gray put his shoulder to it. The catch gave way, and we dashed in, to fall back with gasps of amazement.

Our worthy Housemaster, clad in his pyjamas, was practising some new kind of jazz dance in the middle of the floor. At first we thought he had gone mad, but the next second showed the cause of the disturbance. Clinging to the big toe of his right foot—the one he was not dancing on—was a hefty-looking crab.

As soon as Ratty saw us he yelled out for help. I might have pointed out that it was no part of the duty of a prefect to remove live crabs from his Housemaster's toes, and that exceeding one's duties was quite as bad as neglecting them, but Ratty was in no state to see the force of such an argument. He was too busy feeling the force of that crab's claw.

"Ooowp! Yoowp!" he shrieked.

Half a dozen other fellows had been attracted by the noise, and were clustering at the door, staring at the scene in amazement. One or two of them were chuckling as they became aware of the state of affairs.

Gray and I went for the crab, but the job was no joke, as the blessed thing had got one or two claws unoccupied, and we were not exactly hankering after sharing Ratty's fate.

We got him free at last, and then we heard all about him. It appears that the crab had been hidden in Ratty's bed, and that his toe was grabbed as soon as he put his foot between the sheets. He tried to pull it off, and got his fingers nipped for his pains.

When the old boy recovered a bit the merry music started. He was out for blood, and swore that he would discover who put the crab in his bed. I was more than doubtful about his succeeding, although I was jolly certain in my own mind as to who was responsible.

Late as it was, he went up into the dormitories and had the whole of the House paraded while he made inquiries. Nothing came to light, however, and there was not the faintest clue for him to work on. The greatest mystery of all was where the crab came from. It was, and is, a puzzle to me how the young beggars got hold of it. Somebody must have broken bounds and gone down to Rylcombe during the evening, and, if Figgins and Redfern were responsible, that must have taken place between the time that Ratty cased them and bed-time. But all of them proved an alibi for the whole of the evening.

The next day Ratty's toe swelled so that he could not get his boot on, and he was slithering about the school in one boot and a carpet-slipper. His temper was even worse than usual, but nobody was in the least sorry for him.

I overheard Kerr saying that it was entirely his own fault, as a man who suffers from dyspepsia ought to know better than to indulge in crab just before going to bed, whether he ate the crab or let the crab eat him.

But in my opinion it served Ratty right, though I do not suppose he sees it in that light himself.

Trimble, The Truthful.

Sub-edited by Cardew.

(I seem fated to be bothered by Baggibus. Whenever the fat clam takes it into his silly head to write an article for the "News," Tom Merry always hands it over to me to sub-edit. And, 'pon my soul, his articles take some dealing with. In the form in which I get them it's hard enough to find out what they're all about. Long, ungrammatical, meandering sentences, wandering round and round the point, and never managing to quite get there. And the spelling! Grimes, the village boy, can't hold a candle to him in the matter of putting the wrong letters into a word. However, here is his latest effusion, for what it's worth—which, in my opinion, is rather less than nothing.—R. R. Cardew.)

I KEEP sending in things for Tom Merry to put into his paper, and most of them get sent back again. I'm not surprised. I know why it is. It's all through jealousy. The whole of the editorial staff are against me. They're afraid that people should find out that I can write a lot better than they can. But when I have left St. Jim's, and am the editor of the "Times," and they want to write for me, I shall do the same thing to them, and send all their rot back. They'll be jolly sorry then that they didn't give a clever chap like me a better chance.

If they only knew it, I am the best fellow they could have to write for them. Quite apart from the fact that I can do it so well, I know all about everything, and what I say is well worth listening to. There are lots of things that go on at St. Jim's that nobody but me knows anything about, but you bet there is very little that passes me. If I liked to say what I have seen and heard, there would be some surprises, I can tell you. I'd make some of the rotters sit up and take notice.

H. GREGORY IN ACTION. (West Bromwich Albion.)



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For instance, who knows what the Head said to old Ratty after that barring-out in the New House? Nobody but the Head and Ratty—and me.

I know, and it would astonish a few people if I ever told how Dr. Holmes choked off Ratty about what he did then. He said that it was all Ratty's fault, and that he was to blame, and that the next time he was away the school would be left in charge of Railton.

Lots of the fellows wondered what was said, but I'm the only one who really knows, and I could write a fine article about it. In fact, I offered to do it, but that beast Tom Merry wanted to know how I heard all this, and I wasn't going to tell him the source of my information. Of course, it was purely accidental. I happened to be over at the Head's house that day, and though I would scorn to listen, I couldn't help hearing. I put my hands over my ears to try and prevent myself hearing, but they were talking so loudly it was impossible to avoid it.

My hat! They weren't half going for each other, and yelling, specially when Ratty told the Head he was a silly old white-whiskered idiot, and an antiquated fossil.

"Sir," said the Head, just like that—"sir, you dare insult me like this! Why, I'll have you thrown out of my study! I—I'll throw you out myself!"

(I can imagine it.—R. R. C.)

Oh, I can tell you it was well worth listening to; but there were some bits that I didn't hear, though I was straining my ears all the time.

But, of course, that's nothing to what I could tell if I got the chance—or, at least, if I wasn't so honourable that I should never dream of telling anything that I accidentally overheard.

If I told how Racke arranged to go down to the Green Man, at Rylcombe, with Clampe, last week, and how they wangled a pass out of Kildare by saying that they wanted to go down to the village for some notepaper, there might be a row about it; but they know they can trust me not to breathe a word, especially after Racke gave me half-a-crown to say nothing. It's against my principles to sneak, and I never do unless it's made worth my while.

There are some papers that would pay me a thumping big salary to act as special correspondent, and I think the staff of this rag have got a cheek to expect me to give them the benefit of my gifts for nothing, and then refuse to print it unless I tell them just how I got to know all about the things I put into articles.

Of course, there are some fellows it's difficult to find out anything about, as the suspicious beasts leave the keys in their keyholes. Did you ever hear of such a mean trick as that? One thing, it jolly well proves that they've got something to hide, and if I can't find it out one way, I do another.

Knox doesn't lock his door and hang a coat over the keyhole for nothing; and he does it nearly every day, besides having stuff round the door frame that keeps in the sound, and, I suppose, the smoke as well.

There are some fellows so blessed mean that they even lock the cupboards when they're out. As if anybody wanted to see what they've got, or to take any of their rotten grub. I reckon that sort of thing is an absolute insult, and not the kind of behaviour one would expect at a school like St. Jim's, where the fellows are supposed to be gentlemen. If there were a few more chaps like me there would be a better tone in the place. But there, you can't meet a fellow like me every day.

(Thank goodness for that!—R. R. C.)

Generally speaking, the fellows here are a mean lot, though, or else they haven't got the money. I shouldn't wonder if it's really that, and, of course, such a thing is very strange to me, accustomed as I am to moving among people who've got piles and piles of cash. Occasionally I run a little short myself, in consequence of my generous manner of lending my cash to fellows who are not so well off. I'm frightfully reckless with it, you know, and think nothing of handing out a fiver here and a tenner there, to chaps who take advantage of my kindness. Very few of them pay me back—in fact, I don't remember any of them ever doing so, but if I happen ever to be a bit short, it's not often that anyone offers to oblige me until I get one of my whacking remittances from home. I don't know why it is.

(I do, though, Baggy!—R. R. C.)

Some of the fellows here owe me pounds and pounds, and I don't suppose I shall ever see the money again. One or two of them wouldn't be able to stop at St. Jim's if it wasn't for the financial assistance that they get from me.

But, of course, I never talk about it. I do all my good by stealth, you know, and nobody ever knows about it. Charity is my great hobby.

(Baggy is quite right there. It is, and a pretty paying hobby he makes of it, too, only he takes it instead of giving it. Baggy is a believer in the code, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"—so long as somebody else is doing the giving.—R. R. C.)

But the school isn't what it was. The fellows don't leave grub in their cupboards like they used to do. It's shameful, really, the way in which some of them play tricks on me. That rotter Cardew once left some tarts filled with pepper in his study, and when I tried one, just to see that it was all right, and he wasn't likely to get poisoned by eating something that wasn't good, it made me ill for the whole of the evening.

(I am very sorry, old bean, that you recovered so quickly! I wish I'd put more pepper in them!—R. R. C.)

Wait till my next whacking remittance comes. I shan't give a penny of it away, but I shall stand myself a big feed.

(My only hope is that you don't quite choke yourself.—R. R. C.)

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"HELD TO RANSOM!"

(Continued from page 9.)

"Wildrake," he muttered, "you—you don't think it's possible that—that anything's happened?"

Wildrake's look was sombre.

"I guess we ought to have kept together," he said. "Goodness knows what we shall say to the Head if we have to go back without Lowther!"

Manners shivered at the idea.

"That brute threatened that another St. Jim's chap was to be taken to-day!" he muttered. "Oh, have we given him his chance by coming out like this? What fools we've been!"

"Here's somebody coming, anyway."

There was a rumbling of heavy cart-wheels on the path to the mill. The two juniors hurried through the dusk towards the sound.

A farm-cart, piled high with straw, driven by a man in a smock, loomed up in the dusk. Wildrake called to the driver.

"Have you seen a chap on the moor—a schoolboy?"

The driver looked down, and shook his head.

"Not to-day," he answered. "Seed some yesterday."

The cart rumbled on into the mill enclosure. The driver had not stopped.

Manners and Wildrake looked at one another. Wildrake had to turn on his electric torch to see the time by his watch.

"Seven," he said. "They're taking the roll at St. Jim's now."

"Good heavens!" muttered Manners. "And—and Lowther—we can't go back without him, Wildrake."

Wildrake was rather white. He did not blame himself for the expedition, but it was evident now that it had ended disastrously. Monty Lowther would have rejoined his companions ere this but for one reason—he had been prevented. There could be no doubt about that now. Kit Wildrake stared round him desperately into the growing darkness of the moor.

"He's been got at," he said at last. "Unless he's gone on to the school, and left us, he's been got at."

Manners clenched his hands.

"But how—where—who?" he muttered helplessly.

Ten minutes passed. By that time they had been missed at the school, they knew that. A storm awaited them when they returned; but that did not trouble them much. They were too anxious about Lowther to think of themselves. Manners broke the dead silence at last.

"He can't be coming," he said. "We'd better get back, and—and let the Head know what's happened, as soon as possible. The police have got to know."

Wildrake nodded.

"Nothing else to be done," he said. "Let's get."

And, giving up hope of seeing the missing Shell fellow, the two juniors started at a run for the school.

CHAPTER 6.

Missing!

HERE was a thrill of excitement at St. Jim's after roll-call that evening. Three juniors had failed to answer to their names—Manners and Lowther of the Shell, and Wildrake of the Fourth. And in both Houses at St. Jim's there was excited discussion and endless surmises. That any lawless hand had reached the juniors in the school was scarcely possible. The obvious theory was that they had broken bounds to renew the search for Tom Merry and Kildare. But where were they? And why did they not come back? Would they come back? The Head, angry as he was, was more alarmed than angry, the threat of the kidnapper still ringing in his ears. On that day the unknown plotter had threatened that another St. Jim's fellow should disappear, as a warning. Doubtless he had been lurking about the school, on the watch for a chance, and the three breakers of bounds had given him his opportunity.

In the darkness, Mr. Railton stood at the school gates, watching the road with anxious eyes. It was certain that the three juniors had gone out, but it was not certain that anything had happened to them. Search was impossible in the darkness, and the master was in complete ignorance of the direction they had taken.

Two shadowy, tired figures loomed up in the dusk on the road, and the Housemaster uttered an exclamation of relief.

"It is you!" he exclaimed.

Wildrake and Manners came into the radius of the light at the gates. They had come to the gates. It was useless to

climb in over the wall now that it was certain that their absence was known.

"Has Lowther come in, sir?" asked Manners eagerly.

"Lowther? No. Is he not with you?" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"No, sir."

"You have left him?" exclaimed the Housemaster.

"We separated on the moor, sir," said Wildrake. "Lowther hadn't turned up again by seven, so we thought we'd better—"

"How dared you leave the school against the Head's express orders?"

The juniors were silent. There was no reply to be made to that question.

"Go in at once," said the Housemaster sternly, touched a little, in spite of his wrath, by the distress in the faces of the two juniors. "You have done very wrong; but I think you know it."

The juniors tramped wearily in. Mr. Railton, after a last look on the darkened road, followed them to the School House.

There was a buzz of voices as Wildrake and Manners entered the lighted house.

"Bai Jove! Heal they are!"

"They've come back."

"Where's Lowther?"

"You awful young duffahs, you will get into a feahful waw!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The Head is awfully waxy!"

"And Railton looks like a giddy gargoyle!" chuckled Baggy Trimble. "You're for it, you fellows."

"But where's Lowther?" asked Blake.

Mr. Railton came in before the two could reply to the questions showered on them, and he directed them to follow him to the Head's study. With gloomy and downcast faces, Wildrake and Manners followed him. Dr. Holmes was looking very anxious, but his face cleared a little at the sight of the juniors.

"Manners! Wildrake!" he exclaimed. "I am glad to see you safe, disobedient as you have been. Has Lowther also returned, Mr. Railton?"

"I am sorry to say that he has not, sir," answered the Housemaster. "These reckless and foolish boys separated on the moor, and Lowther did not rejoin them."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Head.

He looked at the two downcast faces.

"I will not speak of punishment now, in an hour of such anxiety," he said. "You look as if you realise the harm you have done. For the present, you may go."

In silence the two hapless juniors left the study.

The Head turned to Mr. Railton.

"This is distressing!" he exclaimed. "Is it your opinion that something has happened to Lowther, Mr. Railton?"

"I fear it," answered the Housemaster.

"Then that unknown ruffian's threat—"

"Those reckless boys have given him the opportunity of fulfilling it."

"The boy may yet return," said the Head, after a pause. "He may have lost his way. But I suppose Inspector Skeat had better be informed of this. Upon my word!"

The telephone-bell rang, and the Head started, jarred by the sudden, discordant sound. His eyes met Mr. Railton's; the same thought was in the minds of both the masters. Were they about to hear from the unknown?

With a hand that trembled the Head took the receiver from the instrument.

"What is it?"

"Good-evening, Dr. Holmes! I know your voice, you see."

"Who is speaking?"

It was not the metallic voice that the Head remembered.

"Someone you do not know, and never will know," came the reply. "Have you missed a boy from your school to-day?"

"Yes," breathed the Head.

"Take the lesson to heart, sir! You will not see him again until you have agreed to my terms. I am speaking from Wayland Post Office, and my car is waiting on the road. You understand? In a few hours Lowther will be in another county—to remain there until you have paid the ransom of Tom Merry. You will hear from me again to-morrow."

"One moment!" panted the Head.

But there came no reply. The unknown had rung off.

Dr. Holmes put up the receiver, his hand shaking.

"It was the kidnapper?" asked Mr. Railton, with his eyes on the Head's startled face.

"Yes. Lowther is in his hands—about to be borne away to an unknown destination in a car," faltered the Head. "This is terrible, Mr. Railton! The villain has carried out his threat. But I will speak to Inspector Skeat at once. He may yet be in time to stop this dastard!"

The Head turned to the telephone again.



Mr. Ralton groped into the hollow of the trunk, with a strange and startled expression on his face. "Is it possible?" he muttered at last. "Good heavens! The packet's not there. The trunk is hollow—empty. It has been taken away!" Inspector Skeat almost staggered, staring at the Housemaster in utter bewilderment. "Taken away?" he gasped at last. (See page 19.)

CHAPTER 7.

The Head's Resolve.

"IMPOSSIBLE, my dear sir!" Inspector Skeat spoke warmly. Dr. Holmes made a weary gesture. "I am responsible for my boys," he said. "This unknown villain has me at his mercy!" The portly inspector looked excited.

It was two days later, and during those two days the mystery of St. Jim's had remained unpenetrated and impenetrable.

Since the hapless adventure of Wildrake and Manners there had been no more breaking of bounds.

Kit Wildrake retained his belief in the theory he had worked out; but for the present, at least, he was not disposed to put it to the test again. The disastrous result of the expedition to the moor had dismayed him, and Manners of the Shell was looking almost like a ghost. Both his chums were gone now. Since the disappearance of Monty Lowther it was scarcely necessary for the prefects to watch that St. Jim's fellows did not break bounds. Most of the fellows were keen enough to remain within the safety of the walls.

Dr. Holmes looked older, with deep trouble on his brow. He had come to a decision at last.

It was a decision that dismayed Inspector Skeat, who still nourished a hope of handling the case successfully, and was reluctant to appeal for aid to Scotland Yard.

Dr. Holmes had decided to pay the ransom demanded. It seemed the only course open to him.

"I am responsible for my boys!" he repeated. "Merry was under my care. He has now been missing for nearly six days. He disappeared last Saturday, and it is now Thursday. We are at the mercy of that unknown scoundrel. He threatened, and he has carried out his threat. He threatens again, and—"

"But—" said the inspector.

"Merry's uncle is absent on service in India," said the Head. "I cannot consult him. His guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, is at present far from well, in the doctor's care. She

cannot even be informed of what has happened. I must act on my own responsibility. The sum is a large one, but I cannot leave my boys prisoners in the hands of a kidnapper!"

"But—"

"Look at his letter, sir!" said the Head brusquely.

The inspector glanced at a typewritten sheet that lay on the table.

The letter had arrived by post that morning at St. Jim's. It ran:

"Dr. Holmes,—You will have realised by this time that you are helpless. Unless five hundred pounds is paid in ransom for Tom Merry, serious steps will be taken.

"The money, in pound notes—not banknotes—must be left to-night—Thursday—according to these directions. The money, in a packet, shall be laid in the hollow of the big oak-tree near the footpath in Wayland Wood, at nine o'clock this evening. Unless this is done, you may accept my assurance that Tom Merry will never be seen alive again.

"NEMO."

That was all. The whole was typewritten on ordinary paper. There was no clue to the sender.

"But—" said Mr. Skeat again.

"I have no alternative, sir!" said the Head. "That this villain is desperate enough to harm the kidnapped lad, I fully believe."

"Such a step, sir, as handing money to a kidnapper, in response to threats, is perilously near to compounding a felony!" exclaimed the inspector warmly.

"I have no choice. The boy was in my care."

"But, sir—"

"If you have any alternative to suggest, sir, I shall be glad to hear it. I am no more anxious to yield to this villain's threats than you are that I should do so."

"I have a plan already," said Mr. Skeat. "I know the hollow oak well enough. It is a well-known landmark in the wood, clear of other trees on all sides. It would be easy to watch it from cover. I suggest making up a dummy package, and placing it in the tree as directed, and I and my men will

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be on the watch to-night. When the rascal comes to take the packet—"

"I cannot believe that so cunning a rascal will walk into so obvious a trap," said the Head. "If the spot is watched, he will not come."

"We shall take proper precaution, sir," said the inspector, rather ruffled. "I will engage that the watchers shall not be seen. In fact, sir, it will be my duty to watch the spot, in any case, whether you consent or otherwise."

The Head reflected.

"I am, of course, anxious to see the villain taken," he said. "I will consent to the plan, with one alteration. The packet shall not be a dummy one, it shall contain the ransom, so that if it falls into his hands, the boy will be set free."

"How do you know that he will keep his word?" grunted the inspector.

"I do not know, but I think it probable," said Dr. Holmes. "If he plays me false, he will know that I shall not pay anything further, as it would be useless. He cannot want to keep a prisoner in his hands for no object. For these reasons I think the boy will be released as soon as the ransom is paid."

"It is, perhaps, probable," assented the inspector grudgingly. "But I hope that we may be able to lay him by the heels instead."

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"In making this arrangement he could not have been blind to that danger," he said. "I feel that he must have some way of defeating a watch, or he would have made other arrangements."

"We shall see, sir."

"I have asked Mr. Railton to carry out this task for me," continued the Head. "The money will arrive from the Wayland bank this afternoon."

"Then you are quite determined, sir?"

"Quite."

"I only hope that it will prove a bait to catch the rascal, Dr. Holmes," said the inspector, rising.

"I share your hope to the full," said the Head. "But I have many misgivings. At all events, I shall have done what I believe to be my duty."

"I will see Mr. Railton before I go, then."

"You will find him in his study, Mr. Skeat."

A couple of minutes later Inspector Skeat tapped at the Housemaster's door. For some time afterwards he was in consultation with Victor Railton. He found the Housemaster in full agreement with him that a watch should be kept on the hollow oak after the packet had been placed in the trunk, and it was Mr. Railton's intention to be a member of the party keeping watch. When the inspector left St. Jim's at last, all arrangements were made, and the portly gentleman had high hopes of placing his finger on the mysterious kidnapper at last.

Later that day Mr. Railton called Darrell and Langton of the Sixth into his study. The two prefects were looking very grave when they emerged. They were to take part in the task of the evening, and they were glad to do so, only hoping that it would bring them in contact with the mysterious criminal who had, so far, eluded all searching.

CHAPTER 8.

Bagging Baggy.

"SOMETHING'S on, you fellows!" remarked Baggy Trimble.

"Wats!"

"But it is," said Trimble sagely. "I say, I believe they're going to look for the giddy kidnapper!"

"Br-r-r!" grunted Blake.

"I looked into Railton's study," continued Trimble. "He was cleaning his old Service revolver—the one he used to kill Huns with, you know."

There was a movement of interest in the junior Common-room. Baggy Trimble had succeeded in making an impression.

"His wevolvah?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"That's it!" said Trimble. "And he had cartridges on the table. He scowled at me when I looked in, though I was only going to ask if my lines would do to-morrow, as I haven't had time to do them. I wish he'd take me with him, you know," continued Trimble. "I'd jolly well deal with that kidnapping rotter, you know! I say, Darrell and Langton are in it."

"How do you know that?" inquired Levison.

"Because Darrell's asked Rusden to see lights out for the Fourth to-night, instead of him," said Trimble complacently. "I heard him. And Langton has put up a notice that somebody else is taking the chair at the Sixth Form Debating Society. They've both been to see Railton. So I figure it out—"

"I guess you ought to be a detective!" said Wildrake.

"I fancy I could do better than old Skeat," said Baggy. THE GEN LIBRARY.—No. 744.

"I'd like to take a hand. You see, I've got a personal interest in this matter. Not only that Tom Merry was my dear old pal—"

"Wats!"

"And Kildare was a sort of chum, too—"

"Fathead!"

"Some juniors have chums in the Sixth," said Baggy. "Kildare was very chummy with me. But, you see, I've got a lot at stake, too. This kidnapper chap is looking for wealthy fellows to bag. Suppose he heard about Trimble Hall, you know, and my father's vast wealth! It rather puzzles me that he bagged Tom Merry instead of me in the first place. I should have been a bigger prize, you know."

"A fatter one, anyhow!" growled Grundy of the Shell.

"Not that a kidnapper would find me very easy to handle," remarked Baggy. "If I'd been in Tom Merry's place I should have given him one of my terrific right-handers—"

"Oh, dry up!" said Manners.

"And if I'd been in Lowther's place I should have knocked him out, you know, and walked him off to the police-station," said Trimble. "That's how I should have dealt with the ruffian. Of course, it would take a fellow with some nerve. I only jolly well wish that the kidnapper would try to collar me! I'd show him!"

"I jolly well wish he would!" growled Blake. "There wouldn't be so much loose gas about afterwards."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Yah!" said Trimble.

Baggy Trimble's attitude on the subject of the kidnapping was rather irritating to Tom Merry's friends. Baggy's view was that he, in the kidnapped junior's place, would have dealt very effectively with the kidnappers—very effectively indeed. He indulgently agreed that all fellows hadn't his pluck and resource, which was sufficiently irritating on the part of the biggest and fattest funk in the Lower School.

"You see, if I'd been there—" he resumed.

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Manners angrily. "For goodness' sake give us a rest, Trimble, or I'll give you a kicking!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "You weally ought to try to be sewious on a sewious subject, Twimble."

"But I am serious!" hooted Trimble. "I tell you that if I'd been in Tom Merry's place I'd have— Yah! Keep off, you beast!"

Trimble beat a strategic retreat from the Common-room as Manners made an angry movement towards him. He howled "Yah!" at the doorway, and retreated down the passage. The light had been turned out in the passage, and Trimble grumbled and groped his way. He gave a sudden jump as two pairs of hands were laid on him in the darkness.

"Silence!" hissed a voice.

"Yow-ow!"

"Silence!"

Something round and hard pressed on Trimble's fat neck.

Baggy's fat heart almost stood still.

"Silence!" said the hissing voice for the third time. "One word, and you die! You are my prisoner!"

Trimble gasped helplessly, shaking from head to foot with terror. He was in the kidnapper's hands. He realised that.

"One cry, and I shoot!"

Baggy was not likely to utter that cry. He stood shivering while a bag was drawn over his head.

"Bring him along by the secret passage!" hissed the voice.

Baggy Trimble was lifted from the floor.

There was a grunt from his kidnappers. He was no light weight. But they managed it, and Baggy felt himself being carried away.

He did not venture to make a sound.

In palpitating terror he abandoned himself to his fate, quite forgetting the heroic deeds he would have done in Tom Merry's place.

How far he was carried he could not guess. He felt himself turned again and again, and lost all sense of direction. He was borne through a doorway at last, and through the bag over his head there came a faint glimmer of light. He was in a lighted room now, he knew that; but where, he had not the faintest conception.

"Silence!" hissed the voice. "Here is the prisoner. We have brought him to his doom! Speak no word!"

Trimble, gasping in the bag, heard a sound that indicated the presence of many. But he could catch no word spoken. There was a shuffling of feet, that was all. He realised that he was in the midst of the gang.

"Can you hear me, Bagley Trimble?" hissed the voice, from outside the bag.

"Ow! Yes," gasped Trimble.

"I shall leave you here! Dare to remove the bag from your head and you die!"

"Ow! Mercy!" howled Trimble.

"Remain silent and still if you value your life!"

Baggy Trimble was sat down on the floor with a heavy bump. Then there was a sound of receding footsteps. He sat shivering.

Where was he?

For his life he dared not touch the bag over his head. He could hear sounds, indicating that there were others in the room, though no one was speaking. And once or twice he heard a sound like a chuckle. The wretches were gloating over their victim.

Ages passed, as it seemed to Trimble. A lifetime of terror and dismay was compressed into minutes.

Then suddenly the silence was broken—by a voice, a voice he knew. It was the voice of Rushden of the Sixth Form of St. Jim's.

"Bed-time!"

Trimble gave a jump.

"Off you go, you kids!" continued the amazing voice, amazing enough to hear in the den of a gang of kidnappers. "Great Scott! What is that young ass doing, sitting on the floor with a bag over his head? Is it a game?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of laughter rang round Baggy Trimble. He felt the toe of a boot stir him in the ribs.

"Get up, you young ass!"

Baggy Trimble, dazed and amazed, tore the bag from his head. He blinked round like an owl in the sudden light.

Rushden of the Sixth was standing there, staring down at him. And about twenty fellows stood round, no longer silent, but yelling with laughter. Trimble blinked at them. He blinked round him. The room he was seated in was the junior Common-room in the School House of St. Jim's.

"Why, what—what—what—" he stuttered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth are you doing, sitting on the floor with a bag over your silly head?" demanded the prefect.

"I—I—I've been kidnapped—"

"What?"

"Somebody put a—a—a pistol to my head in the dark, and—and—"

"You young ass!" roared Rushden. "What are you spinning that silly yarn for?"

"I—I—I—" gasped Trimble, bewildered.

"What is that fat idiot burbling about?" demanded Rushden, looking round at the chortling juniors.

"I think somebody's been pullin' his leg," yawned Cardew of the Fourth. "He's been braggin' so much of what he would have done to the kidnappers, that some kind friend gave him a chance. Some practical joker turned out the light in the passage and put the rim of an inkpot to his silly neck—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Rotter!" roared Trimble.

He scrambled to his feet. He realised now that the kidnappers had been Cardew and Clive, and that he had been carried up and down the same passage several times.

"He didn't hit out," continued Cardew. "Nobody bears any marks of his terrific left-handers!"

"Get off to your dorm!" exclaimed Rushden, laughing.

For once, Baggy Trimble had nothing to say for himself. He was glad to hide his blushes in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory. And during the chat that ran from bed to bed after lights-out on the subject of the kidnappers, Baggy was not heard once to state what he would have done in Tom Merry's place.

CHAPTER 9.

A Baffling Mystery!

"NOT a word!" whispered Inspector Skeat.

Mr. Railton nodded quietly.

The inspector moved on with a cautious step.

The dusk was deepening in Wayland Wood, all was quiet, silent, the birds seeking their nests. By the well-worn footpath the old oak-tree stood, a clear space round it separating it from the other trees.

Mr. Railton had placed the packet containing the five hundred currency notes in the deep hollow that yawned in the gnarled old trunk.

If anyone had been watching, the Housemaster's stalwart form would have been visible enough in the sunset light that fell through the branches overhead.

But it seemed impossible that anyone was watching unknown. For in the cover of the wood Inspector Skeat and two of his men were hidden, themselves watching keenly. Not a pedestrian on the path but had been carefully scanned, and watched out of sight.

Mr. Railton retired after placing the packet in the hollow trunk, and walked away down the footpath.

At some distance from the oak he turned quickly and disappeared into the thick wood.

A few minutes later he joined the inspector, in cover in a thick mass of bushes a dozen feet from the oak.

In silence they watched, themselves hidden completely out of sight. Mr. Railton had in his hand the old Army revolver that in other days had seen good service in Flanders. His handsome face was grim. He was prepared to deal with "Nemo," as the kidnapper called himself, if the scoundrel should appear.

If he came, there was nothing to hinder him—but departure would not be so easy. On the other side of the oak, at a little distance, Darrell and Langton, of the St. Jim's Sixth, lay in ambush, each with a loaded stick in his hand. North and south, the spot was well guarded. And east and west it was watched by two Wayland constables, both of them in cover, with drawn truncheons.

The spot was surrounded at an early hour, watched keenly, tensely. If the kidnapper came, he should not go.

The inspector's hopes were high. But Mr. Railton, though also hopeful, felt deep misgivings. For it seemed impossible that Nemo could have overlooked this obvious preparation for his coming. The Housemaster could only hope that the watchers, being so carefully concealed, would escape discovery, and that the approaching rascal would believe that the coast was clear, until he was well in the trap.

Nine o'clock sounded faintly over the woods from the distance.

This was the hour at which the kidnapper had directed that the ransom should be placed in the hollow oak.

At any time afterwards he might come for it—at any hour of the night or the early morning.

The inspector was prepared to watch grimly till the dawn broke in the sky, if it was necessary.

An hour passed.

The last glimmer of light had gone; darkness reigned over the woods and the lonely footpaths.

In silence the watchers waited and watched.

Eleven o'clock.

They were tired and weary; the vigil was a weary one. But before midnight, at least, they could scarcely expect the kidnapper to make the venture, and they waited with grim determination.

From the distance, midnight tolled out from Wayland Church.

There was a rustle in the underwoods, but it was only a scuttling rabbit. Through the opening in the branches of the wood, the starlight fell upon the oak, brightly, clearly. No one could have approached the oak unseen by the many watchers—unless they slept. And, weary as the vigil was, the excitement of expectation drove away all possibility of nodding on the watch.

The stroke of one sounded.

Inspector Skeat helped himself from a pocket-flask, and offered it to Mr. Railton, who shook his head. No word was spoken.

Slowly, on wings of lead, the minutes passed, each weary hour seeming to draw itself out to unending length.

Three o'clock. Four. They heard the strokes dully in the far distance.

(Continued on page 19.)

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Val Meets His Uncle.

DONALD GORDON and his brother Val, together with Tommy Binks and Septimus Todd, left St. Christopher's School on an expedition to the Solomon Islands to join Hector Gordon, an uncle of the two brothers, who is on a big plantation there.

Captain Targe, captain of the Wittwake, and a scoundrel at heart, heard of the party's quest. He planned to abandon the boat, and leave the party to their fate—this, in order that he might carry out his plans, and more easily overthrow the wealthy plantation owner, and obtain hold of his land. His dastardly scheme proved futile, however, Targe, the black cabin boy, warning the party, and assisting them in making their escape. They were about to leave in one of the ship's small boats, when Anna, anxious to get away from the harsh treatment of her father, joined them.

Not long after they started on their perilous sea journey a severe storm arose, and the party got washed up on the Island of Pleasure.

They prepared their new home, living on the products the island offered. Shortly afterwards the happy party were startled by the reappearance of the Wittwake out at sea. Don kept watch, and, to his surprise, saw Targe, together with Ralph, land carrying with them a metal box, which they deposited in the bed of a pool, to be guarded by a slimy, tentacled monster of the deep. Don wisely decided to keep the grim secret to himself.

It was some time afterwards, when the party were returning from a picnic, that a severe storm broke over the island. The chums were only just able to escape from their hut, which, with the combined forces of wind and waves, was brought crashing to the ground. The party underwent a terrible time that night, the angry waves carrying them hither and thither in their fury.

The storm subsided with the break of dawn, and of the separated party, Don, Anna, and Targe were reunited, but of the others there was no sign. Targe and Anna, tired after their night of terror, fell asleep, but the ever-watchful Don kept on the alert.

Meanwhile, of the others, what had happened? Tommy had luckily managed to get a footing on the roof of the hut, which, having fallen in, had acted as a raft. He found Val struggling with Scat, and the two had dragged the exhausted tutor on to the crazy raft. Washed on the sands, Val three chums fell into a deep slumber. Val dreamed of his old enemies, and, waking up suddenly, is horrified to find himself looking into the very faces of the men who had haunted his dreams—Captain Targe and Ralph Siddeley.

"Where are the others?" demands the scoundrelly Ralph.

"I have got nothing to say to you," Val returned, looking steadily into Ralph's eyes. "If you want to get any information, you will have to seek for it yourself."

An angry exclamation broke from Ralph, and he leapt forward, raising his fist; but Captain Targe gripped him by the shoulder, bringing him to a halt.

"All right, Ralph," he said. "There will be plenty of opportunity for that sort of stuff later on. I am going to look into this matter myself."

He turned, and barked out something to one of the armed natives.

The man produced a coil of rope, and a few moments later Val and Scat and Tommy were tied together, wrist to wrist, then they were forced to walk across the sand and head on up the slopes.

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It was only then that Val realised where they were. They had been carried on by the storm round to the other side of the island, and in front of them arose the high hill, while to the right lay the ruins of the old plantation and house.

When they reached the fringe of trees Targe ordered his captives to seat themselves, and, leaving one of the armed natives to guard over them, he and Ralph, with the other armed native, continued along the slope.

Val saw them reach the ruined house and vanish into it.

Fortunately for Val and his companions the search party discovered the recent traces of the fire, and of the meal which had been eaten there, with the result that the captain of the Wittwake fell into a not unnatural error when he came to the conclusion that the three castaways had been living on that side of the island.

It was a small thing, but it served to prevent Targe from finding the real truth.

After an hour's search he returned to the trio, ordering Val and his chums to follow him.

They went down to the edge of the beach, and a boat put off from the Wittwake, into which they were bundled and carried on board.

Scat and Tommy were forced to go forward, and were thrust away into one of the evil-smelling holds; then Targe turned and beckoned to Val, leading him aft down the companion-way and into the small saloon.

As the youngster entered the saloon he saw a figure rise to its feet, and a haggard, bearded face was turned towards him for a moment.

Targe had halted in the doorway of the cabin, and his booming voice rang out now.

"You don't seem to know each other," the rascally skipper called. "Let me introduce you. This is one of your young nephews, Hector Gordon—one of the rats whom I told you were drowned."

The bearded man took a sharp pace forward, and held out his hand to Val.

"Are you Don?" he asked.

Val caught at the outstretched hand.

"No, Uncle Hector, I am Val," he said.

"Where is your brother?"

Val's back was towards Targe, and he gave his uncle a quiet, meaning look.

"I—I don't know," he replied. "He may be dead by this time, for all I can say."

This was not exactly an untruth, but it served to hoodwink the rascally listener at the door of the saloon.

Targe turned round and shouted something, and presently an armed native appeared. He was placed on sentry at the top of the companion, then the skipper swung round and climbed the staircase, gaining the upper deck, and leaving Hector Gordon and his nephew together.

"It is all right, uncle," Val said. "I didn't care to tell you everything while Targe was listening, but there's every hope that Don is safe, although something may have happened to him last night in the storm."

In a few words Val gave a brief outline of the adventures which had befallen the little group of chums, and Hector Gordon listened without making any attempt to interrupt.

At the end of the report, he leaned back and shook his head.

"I wish I had known that," he said. "I am afraid that this scoundrel, Targe, has got the better of us all."

"What has happened, uncle?"

"Targe managed to get me on board the Wittwake by a trick," Hector Gordon said. "He told me that you youngsters had landed on an island, and a storm had arisen, forcing the Wittwake to leave the island. According to Targe's account, the ship was blown miles out of its course, and he thought it best for him to come and pick me up, then return in search of you."

An angry expression crossed the bearded man's face.

"I was not on my plantation when he called the first time, and I have reason to believe now that he stole something from me. In any case, when I did get back to my island, I found that an iron-box had been taken, and my native servants told me Targe had been there."

He was silent for a moment.

"It was months after before he put in at the island again, and he denied all knowledge of the box, and swore he had been searching for you everywhere. At his suggestion I accompanied him, and as soon as we were clear of the island he told me the truth. I am practically a prisoner here, as you see, and I don't know what his plans are, beyond the fact that he came to this island for a special purpose. I believe it was here that he hid my box."

"I think you are right, uncle," Val broke out excitedly. "Targe did come back to the island shortly after we landed, and none of us on the reef on the other side, and none of us knew what he was doing there. He only just landed on the reef, then sailed away again, and we never saw him from that time to this."

Hector Gordon shrugged his shoulders.

"I had been warned about Targe," he remarked grimly, "but I never thought he was such an evil-hearted blackguard as he is. However, I know the worst about him now, and I can tell you he is a dangerous man, who would not stop at murder to attain his ends. It was lucky for you youngsters that you got away from the Wittwake as you did, for it seems to me he would never have allowed you to join hands with me anywhere."

Val's uncle rose to his feet. "Perhaps it was my fault," he said, "for some years ago I admitted to Targe that I was collecting pearls. Now and again I had



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traders come to my place, and I was always ready to drive a bargain. I have been collecting pearls for this last thirty years, Val, and I had stored them away in a little iron box which I had specially made for them."

He took a restless turn up and down the cabin.

"One night years ago, while Targe and a couple of other captains were at my place, I showed them my collection, and I remember now how interested Targe was in them. I believe, too, he was anxious to get hold of my plantation. That young scoundrel who was with him is the son of an old enemy of mine, and the project was that Ralph was to take charge of my plantation, while Targe was to take possession of the pearls. And it seems to me they have won, too."

"It seems impossible—incredible, uncle!" Val broke out. "After all, there is surely some protection for people out here?"

Hector Gordon smiled grimly.

"Oh, there's a small gunboat and one or two steam pinnaces run by the authorities," he remarked; "but the islands are so many, and the distances so great, that they have very little chance of keeping in touch with all that happens. Targe means to get me to sign papers, transferring the plantation to Ralph, and although I have refused to do so so far, he holds the upper hand. He is quite capable of shooting me in cold blood, and ending the matter there and then. In fact, he told me that his new plan was to land Ralph at my plantation, giving it out that he was your brother Don, whom everybody knew I was expecting."

He paused, and glanced at his nephew.

"In this way he would be able to take possession of the plantation, and carry out the sale of it later."

It was a grim, evil story which Val listened to, and at the end of it fierce indignation against Targe made his blood boil.

"It doesn't seem possible that the man should be allowed to carry out such a scheme," he said. "I don't believe he'll win through, uncle. Even if we cannot stop him, something or someone will intervene."

The arrival of one of the native crew, carrying a tray with food, brought the conversation to a close, and, later on, Targe and Ralph came swaggering into the cabin.

Targe crossed to Val, and waved a warning finger in the youngster's face.

"You have been lying to me, you young hound!" he broke out. "I had another look round, and I am sure you haven't been living all the time on this side of the island. Where have you been living? Quick, tell me the truth, or I'll brain you!"

He leaned forward, his fist clenched, and glared into Val's eyes.

Val drew himself up, and returned the angry glance.

"I am going to tell you nothing at all, Captain Targe," he said. "You are a murderer and a bully, and you can do your worst!"

For a moment the evil face of the skipper of the Wittywake glowered its fury, then Targe drew back a pace, and turned to Ralph.

"They are hiding something from us," he said. "There's only one thing to be done. We cannot work the Wittywake round to the other side of the island yet, but you and I can go overland. It can't be very far. In any case, I have a reason for wanting to get to the other side of this island as soon as possible. You clear off now and get some grub ready, and we'll make a start as soon as we can."

And so it came about that, half an hour later, when Scat and Tommy, blinking from their long confinement in the hold, were brought into the saloon to join their chum and his uncle. One of the crew, a half-caste, with a particularly evil-looking face, was placed in charge of them by Targe, and it was obvious that the captain had perfect reliance on his lieutenant.

"Don't forget," the skipper warned. "So long as you sit down there in the saloon, you'll be safe. I have given orders for you to be watched, and the first one who puts his head up over the companion-way will be shot. My men are armed, and will be watching out for you. If you take my advice, you will lie low, otherwise your blood is on your own head."

"By Jiminy, Val, isn't he an out-and-out skunk?" Tommy breathed, clenching his fist. "I wish we could get our own back with him, but—but it doesn't seem very likely, and from what I can hear of it, there's a chance of his getting poor old Don and the others as well."

It was this grim fear which haunted Val,

and just before dusk, when he saw the boat putting off with Targe and Ralph on board, to be rowed to the beach, he watched them with an angry sigh.

The two figures alighted, and started off across the sand, heading for the ruined plantation and the road beyond it.

By this time the storm had cleared away, and Val knew that it would be a calm, moonlit night.

From the way in which Targe moved, Val was inclined to think the burly ruffian knew the road across the island, and it seemed to Val more than probable that he would reach the other side by next morning.

"If I could only warn them!" Val thought. "They won't have the slightest suspicion of danger, and that hulking brute is armed. Don and Targe will have no chance against him."

Again his eyes sought the two figures moving up the slight slope towards the plantation.

Targe was ahead, and his burly figure stood out against the hillside, with Ralph plodding on a yard or two behind.

Val was joined by his uncle, and the two watched the figures moving on until they vanished round a clump of trees.

"There's been a bit of bad blood between these rascals for the last two days," Hector Gordon said. "They've been quarrelling violently at their meals and at other times. From what I can make of it, Targe didn't want his confederate to know anything about the iron box and its contents, but I took care Ralph should know the value of the pearls. Another thing which puzzles me is that he's not quite sure what Targe did with it. I heard them talking about the reef, and it seems to me that the skipper must have concealed the box somewhere there. Of course, it was all very hazy to me when they were discussing the affair."

"I know that Targe and Ralph were on the reef," Val declared; "but Don knows more about it than the rest of us."

He turned to his uncle.

"I feel that I ought to make an effort to get away from the Wittywake," he said. "It doesn't seem fair to let those two murderous wretches descend on Don without giving him a warning."

Half an hour passed, then the flip-flop of naked feet on the companion heralded the arrival of one of the native crew.

The man was wearing a strip of blanket, which was wound round his brown body, and was carrying a fish filled with baked yams. This he placed on the table, grunting out something in the native tongue.

Hector Gordon spoke to the fellow for a moment, receiving one or two surly replies; then the man went off, and Hector turned to his nephew.

"The man tells me that Targe is not ex-

pected to return until to-morrow afternoon," he said. "There are about eight of the crew on board here, and they are all of them armed. I am afraid we haven't much chance against them, for they are completely under Targe's control, and would not hesitate to fire if the occasion arose."

Val looked across at his uncle.

"I suppose that chap will be coming back for the tin presently?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I—I have got a plan," Val breathed.

"It is a bit risky, but it's better than sitting here doing nothing. When this fellow comes down here again, one of us can wait behind the door and go for him, then I suggest I slip into that blanket of his and take a chance of getting on to the deck."

He glanced at his uncle.

"The Wittywake is not very far from the shore, and I'll slip overboard as soon as I

have an opportunity, then swim ashore. I know the way across the island, and although Targe has got a good start, I might be able to beat him."

"No, no, Val; you must not take such a risk!" Scat broke out.

A quiet argument arose then; but Val stuck to his guns, and at last he managed to persuade the others into his way of thinking.

At first his uncle was for taking Val's place, but the youngster pointed out that the native was a small, slim individual, much about his own height.

"It would not do, uncle," Val said. "They would spot you at once. You will have to leave it to me."

They finished their meal; then another long wait began, and at last there came the sound of naked feet on the dark companion-way.

Scat and Tommy took up positions behind the door, the former with the folds of a blanket ready, and as soon as the fuzzy-headed native came into the saloon, Scat made a catlike leap, throwing the blanket over the fellow's head.

At the same time, Tommy flung himself bodily at the man, gripping him by the throat through the folds of the blanket.

They rolled over on the deck together, and the native put up a fierce fight; but he was overpowered at last, and a gag, thrust between his thick lips, brought the fight to an end.

A few moments later Val had possessed himself of the native sailor's blanket and had wrapped it round his slim form; then, lifting the empty tin, he stepped to the door.

"Good-bye, old chap; good luck!"

Tommy gripped Val by the hand, then Scat, and finally Hector Gordon, whispered a few words to the youngster, and Val, emerging from the door, began to climb the companion-way.

A lighted lantern had been slung to the rigging, and the light fell full on the top of the companion-way, so that Val's head and shoulders, rising out of the gap, came full into the view of the half-caste.

The man was seated on a pile of rope, with the rifle across his knees, and for a moment Val felt the hard, black eyes on him; but, by shifting his blanket slightly, and pretending to trip over the edge of the companion-way, Val dropped the tin with a clattering sound, and fell on his hands and knees.

The armed watcher laughed hoarsely as the youngster picked himself up again, snatching the tin from the deck.

The half-caste said something, and Val made an angry sound; then a few paces saw him out of the beams of light, and he continued his way forward.

A solitary boat was swinging from its davits 'midships, and when Val reached it he dropped the tin with a clatter on to the



Realising now his chance of escape, Val attached the rope to the low rail of the Wittywake, then hand-under-hand he descended to the waves below.

deck, then went on, finally edging round beneath the overhanging beam, and waited there for a moment.

He could see the shadowy figures of several of the crew sitting forrard beside the open hatchway, from whence a faint beam of light came.

They were evidently having their evening meal, and it was the usual gorge which the native loves to indulge in.

Realising that now, if at all, was his best chance of escaping, Val slipped out of the blanket, allowing it to drop beneath the boat, then, gliding along beside the low rail of the Tuckhamper, he found a coil of rope.

He attached it to the rail, and lowered it into the sea; then, hand-under-hand, the youngster descended until he felt the warm waves close round him, then, pushing off from the side of the trading schooner, Val allowed himself to drift away until he was clear from the ship, at last beginning his long swim ashore.

He had always been the best swimmer of the group, and he swam steadily and swiftly until finally the touch of the soft sand under his feet told him he had completed his journey.

He waded out on to the silver sand, and halted to look back at the bay.

He could see the black hull of the Wittywake, with the lantern swinging from the rigging, and the faint glow of the light from the forrard hatch; but there was no sign or sound that his escape had been observed.

And, with a quick breath of relief, the youngster turned and headed across the sands for the dark hillside looming in front of him.

He knew the lay of the ground, and found himself at last passing through the ruins of the old plantation to finally strike the road which ran on up beside the trees, then went to the left over the rough, broken ground which marked the end of vegetation.

He passed close to the quarry, and on up the track, following the road taken by Don and himself on their memorable journey.

And so, when the moon arose, he found himself on the uplands, pacing steadily across the lava bed on the top of the hill.

He was steering by the stars now, and he kept up a steady pace, moving on swiftly and silently.

He must have been journeying for the best part of a couple of hours before he caught sight of the figures of Targe and Ralph far ahead.

They were pacing along side by side.

Val noted that Targe seemed to be arguing over something or other, and once they came to a halt, and the tall, burly figure turned and shook its fist at the other.

Ralph dropped back a pace or two, then, as they moved on again, the sound of Targe's voice came plainly to the youngster's ears, although what he said could not be heard.

"Quarrelling, eh? Well, all the better for me," Val thought grimly.

(A splendid instalment next week.)

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

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

This Wins Our Tuck Hamper. AGES OF BIRDS.

How long do birds live? There is still much speculation on this subject. Some birds have lived to the following ages: Thrush, 15 to 25 years; swallow, 9; canary 20; cardinal, 21; raven, 69; magpie, 21; large owls, 68; golden eagle, 46; white pelican, 41; large blue heron, 60; swan, 102; gull, 44; ducks, 11 to 23.—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to D. Longthorne, 5, The Crescent, Tadcaster.

THE MENU.

Cannibal King to his Chef: "Here, you, what was that dish you served up to me for lunch?" Cook: "Stewed motorcyclist, your Majesty. King: "It tasted very burnt." Cook: "Well, he was scorching when we caught him, your Majesty."—Half-a-crown awarded to J. Clement, 3, Jersey Road, Cwmavon, Glam, South Wales.

NOT IN THE REGULATIONS.

A Highlander from a Northern depot was put on guard at the C.O.'s tent. In the morning the colonel looked out, and though he prided himself on knowing all his men, the sentry's face was unfamiliar. "Who are you?" he asked. "A'm fine, thank you," was the reply; "and hoo's yerself?"—Half-a-crown awarded to Jack Yates, 21, Chadwick Street, Rochdale, Lancs.

IN THE RESTAURANT.

An Irishman went into a restaurant and sat opposite another man, who happened to have the bill of fare in his hand. The Irishman could not read, but he did not intend to give himself away, so he

said what the stranger said. "I will have some soup," said the stranger. "Give me the same," said Pat. "And some oysters," went on the stranger. "Same here," jerked out Pat. The other man ordered everything he wanted; Pat ordered the same. At last the stranger said: "Order me a bootblack, please." "Bring me one, too," said Pat. "Won't one do for the two of you?" asked the waiter. "No," cried Pat, "it won't! If he can eat one, so can I!"—W. Porter, 13, Sheals Crescent, Maidstone, Kent.

IMPOSSIBLE.

An old villager, who had just come back from a visit to London, described to his friends the splendour of the hotel where he stayed. "Everything was perfect," he said; "all but one thing. They kept the light burning in my bed-room all night, a thing I am not used to." "Why didn't you blow it out?" asked somebody. "Blow it out!" cried the countryman. "How could I? The blooming light was inside a bottle."—Half-a-crown awarded to Kaundin A. Bharucha, 10, Sholapur Road, Camp Poona, India.

THE STRENGTH OF AN APE.

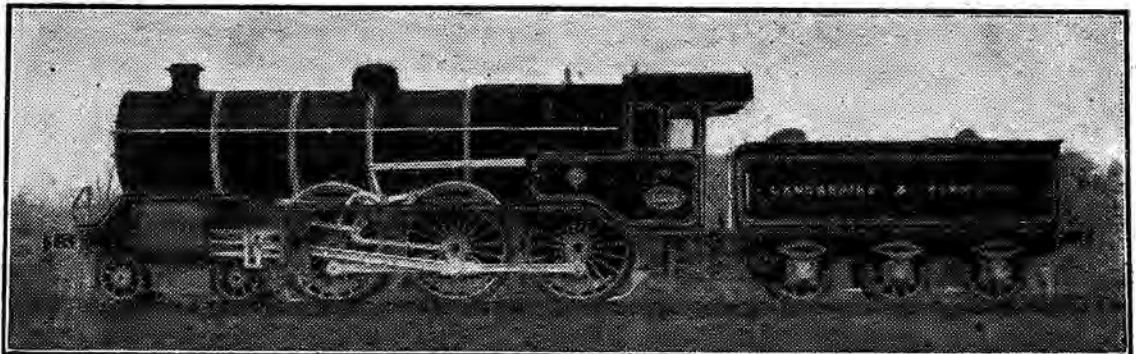
The gorilla has the strength of half a dozen men. He can uproot an average-sized tree, or bend a steel rifle-barrel over his knee. If a creature of such muscular power could be taught to work he could mine as much coal as five or six men, and could be made to do most of the rough work of the world.—Half-a-crown awarded to A. E. Bramwell, 7, Payton Road, Handsworth, Birmingham.

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DH

"HELD TO RANSOM!"

(Continued from page 15.)

Was the kidnapper coming?

Had he suspected, or discovered, the trap, and kept away? Was the long vigil in vain? Five hundred pounds lay in the hollow oak, waiting to be taken—and no hand was stretched forth to take it.

Weary enough were the watchers now—wearied, but determined. They watched and waited.

The stars had paled; over the treetops came a faint rosy flush. Dawn was at hand.

In grim silence they watched the light strengthen over the trees, and listened to the awakening chirping of the birds in the branches. A new day was dawning. Cold, cramped, tired, and savage, the watchers still waited, with diminishing hope.

The inspector stirred angrily at last. It was more than light enough now to see his watch, and he looked at the time.

"Five o'clock! Too late for anything now! We've had our watch for nothing," he muttered, between his teeth. "We've been fooled!"

Mr. Railton compressed his lips.

"I feared it!" he said. "You think it is useless to wait longer?"

"Quite!" grunted the inspector. "The rascal guessed that we were watching, and kept clear."

"It is a disappointment," said the Housemaster. "But, at all events, the scoundrel has not fingered the ransom."

"That's some satisfaction," grunted the inspector. "We should have seen him if he'd come."

He stretched himself and yawned.

"Take the money from the tree, Mr. Railton," he said. "We've been fooled, and there's nothing more to be done." Mr. Railton nodded, and left his cover, crossing over to the hollow oak.

He put his hand into the hollow trunk to take away the package of notes he had placed there the previous evening. Darrell and Langton came out of cover, with the two yawning policemen, all of them tired and disappointed and savage. Mr. Railton groped round the hollow in the trunk, with a strange and startled expression on his face.

"Is it possible?" he muttered at last. "Good heavens!"

The inspector stared at him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The packet—"

"It's there?"

"It is not there!" said the Housemaster. "The trunk is hollow—empty! It has been taken away!"

Inspector Skeat almost staggered, staring at the Housemaster in utter bewilderment.

"Taken away?" he gasped at last.

"Heavens knows how, or by whom—yes!"

"But we've been on the watch! Unless he's invisible, we should have seen him. You're mistaken!" stammered the inspector. "It's impossible—impossible! We're dealing with a man, not a ghost. It's impossible!"

He rushed to the tree, and thrust his arm into the hollow, feeling round its sides. He withdrew it at last, with a dazed expression on his face. For the hollow in the oak was empty! The packet was gone!

THE END.

(Next week's grand long story entitled "THE HAND OF THE UNKNOWN," by Martin Clifford, tells of the further mysterious happenings at St. Jim's. Be sure you order your copy early.)

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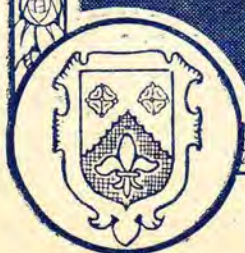
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