

"RACKE, THE RENEGADE!" A THRILLING TALE OF ST. JIM'S INSIDE!

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

The GEM 2^D

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THE PRICE OF HIS TREACHERY!

Aubrey Racke betrays his schoolfellow into the hands of his deadly enemies! (A thrilling incident from the Grand, Long Complete School Story contained in this issue.)



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MY DEAR CHUMS,—Next Wednesday will be marked by a noteworthy event. On that day we shall see the publication of the Grand New Serial Number of the GEM. The issue is a record one besides, but its outstanding feature will be the opening chapters of Andrew Gray's magnificent racing serial. This is just the jolliest and most fascinating yarn about the great sport you have ever had a chance of reading.

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**DETECTIVE
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Every Other Friday

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"TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!"

By Martin Clifford.

Good old Baggy Trimble! He is in the cart again in our next splendid story of St. Jim's. Baggy has always, since we have known anything of him, clung like a champion limpet to the belief that findings are keepings. It won't wash, of course. The thing can be carried altogether too far. If Baggy "found" a prize elephant he would, if he could, take it for keeps, possibly from a brotherly, possessive feeling for so much adiposity in bulk. In the new story Trimble makes two "finds," one of them being trouble. But he has only himself to blame. It is nothing new for Baggy to be in hot water. But the method he adopts in next week's yarn is quite novel. The story is as amazing as it is ingenious.

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

Gussy figures prominently in the supplement next week. There has, I am glad to say, been no end of talk about the recent special issues of the "St. Jim's News." There has been one steady triumphal march of progress. Next Wednesday's edition would take a lot of beating. Proper enough in every way, too, that D'Arcy should have leading position. D'Arcy has always been in the van as regards dress. He knows what's what. No mixing up his best evening-coat with golfing knickers, or ringing absurd changes on costume such as is the fashion with some eccentric people. Gussy knows what to avoid in wear. You would never catch him sporting a tie out of keeping with the rest of his attire. But to return to the "St. Jim's News." The new issue is bound to go. It gives the most interesting biographical facts concerning the swell of St. Jim's.

"WHAT MONEY DID FOR HIM!"

By Jack Crichton.

Included in the coming "bill" is this capital and true-to-life tale, by an author who has probed deep into the mysteries of the world that runs. What happened to Mike Hunter after he had come into wealth you will see. Whether one is rich or poor, life is never a bit easy. Difficulties are for ever cropping up to confound you. To my mind Jack Crichton has managed his appealing theme very skilfully, and he shows some of the pitfalls of wealth, as well as those of poverty.

OUR TUCK HAMPER!

This admirable feature continues to increase in popularity. The storyettes that reach me show the widest range possible. I would urge on everybody the necessity of not being out of heart just because an entry does not romp home a winner. There is always another chance. Send your yarnlets to the Editor of the GEM, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

WANTING A JOB!

Several letters have reached me from chums who are seeking for work. They come from older readers of the GEM, fellows who have been through the war, and now find it difficult to discover suitable berths. It is practically impossible to give detailed advice in such cases. Every fellow has to find his own job, and only perseverance will do the trick. Luckily times are steadily on the mend, and work is proving more plentiful.

THAT SERIAL!

One more word about Andrew Gray's chef d'œuvre which starts in the next number of the GEM. As a special favour to me, and out of that feeling of loyalty to the GEM you all possess, just let your pals know what a treat is in store. "Rivals of the Racecourse!" is a topping story, plum full of dramatic situations, and with an underlying motive to it which will touch your heart. It is a tale to cause endless delight, and your stand to learn a good bit from it.

Your Editor.

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Rivals of the Racecourse!

BY
**ANDREW
GRAY.**

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With heavy debts hanging over his shoulders, Aubrey Racke, the black sheep of the Shell, is faced with a tremendous temptation and yields to it!

RACKE, THE RENEGADE!



CHAPTER 1. In the Nick of Time!

"**H**ELP!" The cry came eerily through the gathering dusk. Tom Merry, the captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, halted abruptly, and turned a startled face upon his companions.

"W-what was that?" he breathed. Manners and Lowther of the Shell, Tom Merry's chums and study-mates, shook their heads in token of their bewilderment. Behind them, on the narrow pathway between the trees and undergrowth of Rylcombe Woods, stood Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the staunch comrades of Study No. 6 in the Fourth Form corridor.

The seven juniors, returning to St. Jim's after a visit to Rylcombe for the purpose of selecting some gear for the Junior Sports Club, had elected to take the short cut through the woods, in consequence of having tarried overlong in the cosy little parlour behind the village tuckshop, and thus allowed themselves none too much time in which to get back to the school before lock-up.

They had been walking along fairly briskly, laughing and talking among themselves, when that sudden, startling cry had been borne to their ears.

"You fellows all heard it?" inquired Tom, in a low voice. "Couldn't very well miss it," replied Blake. "The question is, what does it mean?"

"Sounds as though somebody is in trouble," suggested Herries, rather fatuously.

Monty Lowther gazed admiringly at him. "What a thing it is to be gifted with super-intelligence!" he murmured. "We ordinary mortals might have been fools enough to think it was a woodpecker singing to its young."

Whatever the situation, Monty Lowther seemed incapable of suppressing his humorous proclivities.

"Look here, Lowther—" began Herries wrathfully.

"Shut up, you asses!" snapped Tom Merry. "Listen!"

The juniors strained their ears.

"Help!"

Again that despairing cry came floating through the gloom. Tom Merry set his teeth.

"It came from over there!" cried Blake excitedly. "And it's a boy's voice, not a man's. I'll swear to that!"

Tom Merry nodded.

"Come on!" he said grimly. "We'll find out what's wrong!"

"Yaas, wathab, deah boys!" came the voice of Arthur Augustus, in determined accents.

The St. Jim's juniors set off at a run, and in a few moments emerged from the narrow track into the main pathway that led from Rylcombe to Wayland.

Here they paused irresolutely. There was nobody in sight, and the juniors were at a loss.

"Hallo!"

An Extra-Thrilling, Long Complete
Story of the World-Famous
Schoolboys of St. Jim's.

By

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Tom Merry yelled at the top of his voice in the hope that there would come some answering cry.

For seconds that seemed hours they waited, stilling the very breath in their throats in order to make as little disturbance as possible.

"Hel—oooog!"

It was a very faint and feeble cry at best, and it trailed away into an inarticulate gurgle, as though a hand had been placed over the mouth that had uttered it.

But it was sufficient for the juniors, who at once recognised that it came from very near at hand.

They raced ahead with one accord, turning down a narrow path that opened into a glade within a few yards.

It was here that a startling scene met their eyes.

Two figures, dim in the faint twilight that filled the glade, bent over another that was struggling in their grasp.

The juniors had made plenty of noise in crashing through the branches and undergrowth, and as they arrived in the glade the two standing figures looked up with exclamations of anger.

Faint as the light was, there was sufficient to reveal them as men, though of slight build and not above the medium height. And as they turned their faces towards the juniors it could be seen that their skin was of a light coffee colour.

"Great Scott! Hindus!" gasped Tom Merry. "What the thump—"

He broke off sharply, clenched his fists, and raced forward across the glade, followed by the rest of the juniors.

In the face of this sudden attack the two men straightened up, turned swiftly, and dashed away among the trees with one accord.

"Come on!" yelled Blake excitedly. "After them!"

Tom Merry put out a hand and detained him.

"Let 'em go!" he said. "We've got no time to waste. And it's ten to one against our getting hold of them now."

A sudden exclamation from Digby turned all eyes in his direction. He had gone straight to the third figure, the one which had been the object of the two men's attack.

It was that of a boy, whom Digby was assisting to struggle to his feet.

And Digby had recognised the boy with an amazement that had found expression in his startled ejaculation.

"Great pip! It's Koumi Rao!"

"Koumi Rao?" echoed the rest of the juniors breathlessly.

It was true. The boy whose call for help they had answered, and whom they had rescued from the hands of the two unknown men, was none other than Koumi Rao, the Hindu junior of the New House, who leaned weakly against Digby's shoulder and flashed gleaming teeth in a forced smile at his schoolfellows.

"M-my hat!" said Tom Merry, rather blankly. "Koumi Rao! That explains the Hindus, then."

At the same time Tom was vaguely aware that it didn't, for all that. The mere fact that a boy happens to be a Hindu is not a satisfactory explanation of his being attacked by two compatriots in the heart of England.

It was evident that Koumi had received some rough handling from the men. His clothing was torn and crumpled, and he was obviously exhausted by his exertions.

Digby threw a supporting arm around him.

"Buck up, old chap!" he said, with rough sympathy.

"You look as though you've had a thin time. What were those rotters after—your money?"

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A troubled expression appeared on the face of the Hindu junior as he shook his head slowly.

"No, it wasn't a case of attempted robbery," he said, in his soft, musical voice, with the slight trace of a sort of slurred lisp. "It was something far more serious than that. And I shall never be able to properly thank you fellows for coming to my rescue as you have done."

"Oh, that's all right, deah boy!" put in Arthur Augustus hastily. "We're only too pleased to have been on the spot, you know. Isn't that right, you fellows?"

"Rather!" confirmed Tom Merry. "But hadn't we better be getting along? Time's passing, remember."

"Yaas, wathah! We shall have to hury like anythin', deah boys."

By the time they were back on the main footpath Koumi Rao seemed to have recovered himself to a great extent, although he still availed himself of the support of Digby's shoulder.

As the little party proceeded along in the direction of the stile that led into Rylcombe Lane he spoke in his quiet voice.

"I suppose you fellows are wondering what can be the meaning of this affair?" he said.

"Not at all," disclaimed Tom Merry, with more politeness than truth.

Koumi Rao smiled faintly.

"And as you've helped me out of a tight corner—a tighter corner possibly than you have any idea of—I think it is only right that I should explain matters to you."

"But if it's a pwivate mattah, deah boy—" began Arthur Augustus.

"It is, to some extent," confessed Koumi Rao, "but not so much so that I cannot tell you something of it. Enough, at least, to enable you to understand why I was attacked. As you all seem to have recognised the nationality of those two men in the glade, I need not inform you that they were Hindus. It may, however, appear strange to you that I should have been attacked in such a fashion by my own countrymen."

"Well, as to that," said Tom Merry slowly, "it seemed queer to see them in the woods at all."

"Exactly!" agreed Koumi Rao. "And I am quite certain that they have come over from India for the sole purpose of kidnapping me."

Koumi Rao's words evoked startled gasps and equally startled glances—some of them slightly incredulous—from his hearers.

"B-but what on earth—" blurted out Blake.

"It is a political matter," went on Koumi. "I am to be made a pawn in a far-reaching game of sedition. You fellows have some idea of the state of affairs in India, I suppose?"

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows.

"You mean the undercurrent of unrest and revolt, and all that sort of thing?" he said.

Koumi Rao nodded.

"That is what I do mean. India for the Indians, which really means rather less than nothing, in most cases, except a plausible excuse for stirring up trouble. India is full of agitators at the present moment, and ceaseless effort is being made to stir up the masses of the people into revolution against British rule. The worst feature of it is the manner in which the loyalty of native rulers is being tampered with. In cases where ordinary methods of persuasion make no impression, pressure is being brought to force the loyal princes to throw in their lots with the insurgents."

"I've heard something of this," said Tom Merry thoughtfully.

"You haven't heard a hundredth part of what is really happening," continued Koumi Rao. "Very few people outside India realise to what extent this sort of thing is going on. You fellows know that my father is Jam of Bhandahar? Well, I had a letter from him a few weeks ago, in which he told me something of the manner in which he is being urged to forsake his allegiance and pledge himself to the overthrow of British rule in his province. Now, my father's loyalty is second to that of no native ruler in India, and nothing would induce him to become a traitor. But these agitators will not take 'No' for an answer, and they are the type of men who will stick at nothing to gain their purpose."

"But what has all this got to do with those chaps tackling you in the woods?" asked Blake, in a puzzled voice. "I don't see—"

"Wait a moment," replied Koumi Rao quietly. "I am coming to that. I ought to explain to you fellows that I am the eldest son of my father, and, therefore, what you would call in England the heir-apparent. That makes me a person of some slight importance—in Bhandahar, at least, if not at St. Jim's." He smiled slightly. "Now, if the revolutionary party could get me into their hands, they could use me as a hostage in negotiating with my father. My life against his loyalty."

"Good heavens!" breathed Tom Merry.

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"Of course, even that wouldn't affect my father's attitude," said Koumi Rao proudly. "He would not betray the British, even to save my life, though it would cost him a great deal to make the choice, naturally. The revolutionaries, however, probably think that I should be a trump card."

"On the other hand, if I were dead, my cousin would stand an excellent chance of succeeding my father. Now, my cousin is well known to be hand-in-glove with the revolutionary party, so that even if they failed to make a bargain with my father they would still have something to hope from my death. And they would certainly have no hesitation about killing me."

The juniors drew deep breaths and looked from one to the other.

"I'm beginning to think it was a jolly good job we came along in time," said Tom Merry gravely.

"Yaas, wathah!" echoed Arthur Augustus fervently.

"I shall never be able to thank you enough for that," said Koumi Rao, with some show of feeling.

"Oh, rot!" protested Tom Merry uncomfortably. "We only did what any other fellows would have done, and it was only by luck we were on the spot at all."

Koumi Rao had been unable to hurry, so that when the juniors reached St. Jim's it was to discover that the gates had been closed and locked.

Taggles, summoned from the warmth of his lodge parlour, peered surlily at them through the bars.

"Hurry up, Taggy!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "It's jolly cold standing here!"

"Which I knows well enough, Master Merry!" grumbled the school porter. "And I don't thank yer for bringin' me out to catch me death o' rheumatics. Eight o' yer there was missin' at call-over, an' Master Kildare said as 'ow the School 'Ouse lot was to report to 'im, an' the one from the New 'Ouse to Mr. Ratcliff, soon as they come in."

One of the gates swung back, and the juniors passed through.

"I'll come along with you to Kildare and explain," said Koumi Rao.

"Better cut off to the New House first," suggested Tom Merry anxiously. "The sooner you report to Ratty the better."

"I will come with you," repeated the Hindu junior; and Tom Merry made no further attempt to dissuade him.

It was Koumi Rao who did most of the talking when the party got to Kildare's study, and the captain of St. Jim's listened with growing amazement.

"Come along to Mr. Railton with me, all of you!" he said finally. "I'll send a messenger over to Mr. Ratcliff in the New House."

Mr. Railton's amazement was no less than Kildare's had been.

"This matter will have to be reported to Dr. Holmes at once," he said. "As Koumi Rao is not in my house, Mr. Ratcliff will, of course, have to take the affair in hand."

"I have sent a message to him, sir," put in Kildare.

"Very good. You had better await him here, Koumi Rao. As regards the rest of you, your absence at call-over will naturally be excused in the circumstances. I must congratulate you all on having behaved with commendable promptitude and courage, which I shall bring to the notice of Dr. Holmes. You may go now, boys."

"Thank you, sir!" murmured the juniors as they turned to the door.

"Well, that's that!" said Blake, as they made their way towards the Lower School corridors. "Let's hope the police catch those Hindu rotters. It seems to me that Koumi Rao's in a rotten position while they're at large."

"That's so!" agreed Tom Merry gravely. "Still, there's one thing—he's safe enough while he's in the school buildings."

But Tom was destined to have cause to revise that opinion before many hours had passed!

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble for Racke!

AUBREY RACKE of the Shell sat in an armchair by the fire in Study No. 7 in the Shell corridor, and stared moodily at the dancing flames.

He was alone in the little apartment, and as he moved restlessly in the padded depths of the chair, nervously biting the finger-nails of one hand—a cigarette smouldered, unheeded, between the fingers of the other—it was evident that he was in no enviable frame of mind.

A soiled half-sheet of notepaper was on his knees, and a torn envelope lay in the hearth beside him.

The grubby sheet of paper was scrawled across by a few lines of illiterate, untidy caligraphy, quite obviously that of a man to whom the use of a pen was an infrequent task.

Yet that dirty, ill-written, mis-spelt note had struck terror



Digby assisted the attacked junior to struggle to his feet, then gave a startled ejaculation as he recognised who the boy was. "Great pip!" he cried. "It's Koumi Rao!" "Koumi Rao!" echoed Tom Merry & Co. breathlessly. It was true. The boy whose call for help they had answered was none other than Koumi Rao, the Hindu junior of the New House. (See page 3.)

to the craven heart of the black sheep of the Shell, and brought him to a state of mind bordering upon panic.

For it had come from Banks, the rascally bookmaker who frequented the Green Man at Rylcombe, and was in the nature of an ultimatum.

Racke was a "sportsman," and little "flutters" upon horse-races he never saw were one form of his "sportsmanship."

When Banks assured him that Sonny Boy was certain to lead the field in the three o'clock race at a certain meeting, Racke believed him to the extent of placing ten pounds on the event. Sonny Boy, however, shared the strategical opinions of a certain duke, and preferred to lead the field from behind. Possibly, like the duke, he "found it more exciting." Racke, however, discovered that it was merely expensive, so far as he was personally concerned.

On the advice of Banks, he doubled his stakes on another venture, in order to recover his losses, and in some mysterious manner—even Banks confessed himself unable to explain how such a thing could possibly have occurred—only succeeded in trebling the loss.

At the end of a frantic endeavour to straighten matters out, he found himself in the unenviable position of owing the bookmaker exactly fifty pounds.

Racke had been betting on credit. He felt safe in doing so, since he was the indulged son of a wealthy father. But he had discovered that even wealthy, indulgent parents have their ideas of a limit, and Racke senior had been drawing in his horns a little of late.

The note that Racke had received informed him that the bookmaker wanted a settlement, and Racke was not in a position to settle. Far from it.

As he sat there, staring unseeingly into the fire, he was acutely conscious of a cold, sick sensation at the pit of his stomach. It could not be attributed to indigestion, either, although Racke's habits were the reverse of healthy habits.

He was in a blue funk.

A step sounded in the corridor outside, and he came to himself with a startled exclamation. The cigarette hurtled

among the flames, and the bookmaker's note vanished out of sight, a crumpled ball, in the palm of his hand.

He had no cause for alarm, however.

The door opened to admit his study-mate, Crooke, a Shell junior of Racke's own kidney.

"Phew!" exclaimed Crooke. "What a smoke there is in here! Better open the window, hadn't you? Bad look-out for you if a prefect walked in suddenly!"

"Hang the prefects!" snarled Racke, scowling.

"Best thing to do with 'em, certainly!" agreed Crooke. "But while they're alive and kickin', a fellow can't afford to take chances."

Crooke dropped into the easy-chair on the other side of the fire. He yawned and glanced curiously across at his study-mate.

"You look worried!" he said.

"What the dickens has it got to do with you how I look?" demanded Racke.

"Look here, Racke—"

"I am lookin', and I can see a dashed inquisitive, interfering fool who hasn't got sense enough to mind his own business and leave other people to mind theirs."

"Gad!" ejaculated the astonished Crooke, sitting upright in his chair. "You've got 'em to-night, haven't you?"

"I suppose I haven't got to ask your permission how I may look or what I may say?"

This kind of mood was not at all uncommon with Racke. Adversity had a very bad effect upon his temper and nerves, and his associations were wont to suffer the effects.

Crooke shrugged his shoulders and took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket.

"All right!" he said quietly. "Don't get your blessed wool off! Have a fag?"

"Confound your fags—an' you, too!"

"Thanks!"

Crooke struck a match and lit his cigarette.

"By the way," he said, leaning back in his chair, "have you heard about Koumi Rao?"

"Oh, you mean the New House nigger!" said Racke contemptuously. "What about him?"

"He's been in some sort of trouble in Rylcombe Woods," replied Croke. "I've just heard about it from Trimble. It seems that Tom Merry and his crowd rescued him from a gang who were trying to finish him off, or something like that."

"Pity they didn't do it!"

"Hang it, Racke, that's a bit too thick!" protested Croke. "What's the matter with the chap?"

"Matter! Why, he's a dashed nigger, isn't he?" granted Racke. "What right has he to come here among gentlemen? Lets the tone of the place down. Whatever happens to him I sha'n't lose any sleep over it."

"Well, anyway, the Head's put it into the hands of the police, and Koumi Rao's had orders to keep inside the school walls until the men are caught."

"Hang Koumi Rao! I've got troubles enough of my own without bothering about his."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" murmured Croke softly. "Dashed if I didn't think so!"

"Think what?" demanded Racke fiercely.

"That you were in a hole," said Croke calmly. "What is it this time—gee-gees?"

"Mind your own infernal business!"

"Or cards?" pursued Croke. "I knew you'd come a cropper pretty soon. You've been going it a bit lately, you know, Racke."

"Go on!" sneered Racke. "Say 'I told you so!'"

"Well, I did, didn't I, only about a couple of days ago," replied Croke urbanely. "That last little party in Cutts' study, for instance. I suppose you gave a few IOU's, and Cutts is dunning you for the cash."

"Cutts!" Racke's lip curled scornfully. "How much do you think I should bother about him?"

"Then it's not Cutts?"

"No!"

"Then who—?"

"If you must know, confound you, it's Banks!"

Croke whistled, raising his eyebrows.

"My hat, that's bad! The beast will put the screw on like Shylock."

"Don't I know it?" mouthed Racke. "No need for you to rub it in!"

"How much is it?"

"Fifty pounds!"

"What?" gasped Croke incredulously. "Fifty pounds! My only aunt, Racke, you have been going the pace!"

"I don't need any fool to tell me that!" snapped Racke.

"Shouldn't say too much about fools, if I were you," drawled Croke, with unpleasant emphasis. "I may be a fool, but I'm not a big enough one to land myself in a mess like you're in."

"You haven't got pluck enough to take the risk!" sneered Racke.

"Perhaps not," agreed Croke calmly. "Better have less of that kind of pluck, and more sense. What are you goin' to do about it?"

"Heaven knows!" confessed Racke. "Banks says that if he doesn't get the money at once he's going to write to the Head."

"And you haven't got it, I suppose?"

"Not a tenth of it!"

"Why not write home?" suggested Croke. "If you pitched a good enough yarn your pater ought to be good for twenty quid at least, and that would hold Banks off for a time."

Racke laughed a short, bitter laugh.

"Nothin' doin'," he said. "I had a letter from home two days ago tellin' me that money's tight for a while; my pater's just had a bad time on the Stock Exchange, and he's going slow for a bit."

"Like son, like father!" murmured Croke satirically.

"What?" snapped Racke, who had not caught the remark. "Nothin'!" said Croke. "But wasn't there a remittance in that letter?"

Racke nodded glumly.

"A tenner," he said. "That went west in Cutts' study. It didn't seem much to offer Banks, so I was tryin' to add a bit to it, and—"

"And lost the bit you had got, eh?" put in Croke. "You might have expected it. And that tenner would have held Banks off for a while."

"What's the use of talkin' about it?" said Racke irritably. "Anyway, when I see Banks to-night I shall ask him to give me a little longer to pay in. That's the only chance."

"But surely you aren't goin' to see Banks to-night?" said Croke.

"I've got to. He's sent a note tellin' me to be at the Green Man at half-past eleven."

"Gad! It's risky, breakin' bounds at that time of night."

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"I know it's risky!" snapped Racke irritably. "But what else can I do? I daren't fail to go."

"Well, sooner you than me," said Croke, shrugging his shoulders. "Goin' to do your prep?"

"Blow prep!"

And with that ungracious rejoinder Racke lit another cigarette and smoked gloomily into the open fireplace, while Croke spent a few desultory moments over his books.

CHAPTER 3.

A Midnight Encounter!

BOOM!

The last mellow note of the clock bell in the School House tower at St. Jim's rang out through the clear night air.

Eleven o'clock!

The rows of white beds in the Shell dormitory were dimly visible in the faint light that glimmered through the windows overlooking the quad.

The sound of deep, regular breathing stirred the heavy silence. The Shell Form were in the arms of Morpheus.

With one exception!

Aubrey Racke lay tossing restlessly in wide-eyed wakefulness, staring unseeing into the darkness, waiting and thinking—or, rather, trying not to think.

He had not closed his eyes since Darrell had switched out the light an hour and a half ago, and left the dormitory with a cheery "Good-night!" to the juniors.

Racke dared not court slumber. He could not afford to run the risk of falling asleep, perhaps not to waken until it was too late to keep his appointment with Banks at the Green Man in Rylcombe.

And, in any case, he was in too great an anguish of mind to be able to compose himself, had he desired to do so.

Over and over again as he lay there in the silence of the big, dark dormitory, he cursed himself at having been such a fool. Bitterly did he regret his folly, now that it was too late.

Cudgel his brains as he might, he could devise no loophole through which he might wriggle out of the desperate position in which he found himself.

He endeavoured, with little success, however, to persuade himself that there was really no fear that Banks would put his threat into effect, even if the money was not forthcoming.

By reporting Racke to the Head of St. Jim's, the bookmaker would not gain any material advantage, and would, indeed, lose any chance of getting the money at all.

On the other hand, Racke was well aware that Banks was the type of man who would go to almost any lengths to gain his own ends, and if he lost his temper with the junior he was capable of risking the sacrifice of the money in order to revenge himself.

Given time, Racke knew that he could settle the debt. The question was, would Banks be so accommodating as to allow him that grace? It appeared to Racke that it was to the bookmaker's own interest to do so. He would promise to pay as soon as ever he was able to.

But then, Racke reflected uncomfortably, he had made so many promises to the man, and so often had failed to keep them.

There was that ten pounds that he had received from home nearly a week ago. Banks had been expecting that money. Racke had sent word to the Green Man that the money had come, and he was going to come down with it. Instead of which he had gone to Cutts' study with it, in the hope of doubling it at least, and had lost it all, like the fox with the meat in the fable.

Bitterly did Racke regret that "flutter." Better to have sent the money to Banks instead of taking risks. Too late did Racke realise that by adding folly to folly he had made matters worse instead of better.

He raised himself cautiously on his elbow, and peered into the darkness of the dormitory, straining his ears. There was no sound, other than that of gentle breathing, to be heard.

He slipped noiselessly from his bed and commenced to dress himself.

Fumbling in the darkness, he picked up his vest by a bottom corner, and a silver pencil dropped from one of the pockets, falling upon the floor. The slight noise sounded to his ears like a crash. He held his breath and stood rigid.

A minute passed. To Racke, standing there in suspense, it seemed an hour.

No sound came from any of the beds; not even the creak of a mattress that would have betrayed a disturbed sleeper. No drowsy voice murmured "What's that?" or "Hallo!"

The Shell Form, with one exception, appeared to be slumbering on.

With a sigh of relief Racke stopped and groped for the pencil. Then, carrying his boots in his hands, he crept



With the assistance of the faint light that came from the window up above, Tom Merry could see the two fierce eyes that glared at him out of the dusky face, and realised that his opponent was one of the Hindus who had attacked Kourmi Rao in Rylcombe Woods that very evening! (See page 8.)

between the lines of beds and stole cautiously out of the dormitory.

He made his way to the lower box-room, where he had previously concealed his coat, hat, and muffler, which, after drawing on his boots, he donned.

A wriggle through the partly opened window, a cautious drop to the leads of the outhouse, and from thence to the ground, and he was skirting the quadrangle in the deep shadow of the School House buildings.

In the meantime Tom Merry was standing by Lowther's bed, shaking him by the shoulder, a hand over his mouth to prevent the possibility of a startled exclamation that might rouse the dormitory, or some part of it.

"W-w-w—" gurgled Lowther, and tried to sit up. "Shut up!" hissed Tom Merry. "Get out and shove your bags on!"

"What the thump for?" demanded the astonished Lowther in a protesting whisper.

"Racke!" said Tom Merry tersely. "He's just left the dorm! Blagging, I suppose! It's time he had a lesson! Get your things on while I call Manners."

Manners was awakened by his leader in the same quiet fashion, and some idea of the situation was explained to him.

In less than two minutes the Terrible Three were standing in the corridor outside the dormitory, half-dressed but wide awake.

"He's sure to go down to the study for his hat and coat," murmured Tom. "We ought to catch him as he comes back to the box-room. Come on!"

"I don't see why we're bothering about the rotter at all," grumbled Manners, as they went silently down the corridor. "Why not let him go to the deuce in his own way?"

"Because he's in the Shell Form!" snapped Tom Merry. "That's why! Racke himself isn't worth wasting a thought over, I admit, but the credit of the Form is in his hands as much as anyone else's, and it's up to me, as skipper of the Form, to see that he doesn't let it down."

"Who'd be a Form skipper—or his' chum?" murmured Monty Lowther lugubriously, as he followed in Tom's wake.

"How long has the blighter been gone?" inquired Manners.

"Only about three minutes," replied Tom. "He dropped something while he was dressing, I think, and the noise roused me. I lay still for a bit, wondering what it was, but just as I was going off to sleep again I saw a shadow slipping out of the door. I guessed it might be Racke, so I nipped out of bed and went across to his. It was empty. And then I woke Monty and you."

At the door of the box-room they became conscious of a slight draught.

"My hat! The window's open!" announced Tom, in dismay. "The beggar's stolen a march on us! He must have been jolly quick!"

"What do we do now?" inquired Monty, shivering slightly.

"Follow him!" replied Tom promptly.

"What?"

"I'm not going back now!" said Tom doggedly. "I set out to stop Racke from going on the tiles, and I'm jolly well going to stop him."

to do it! He can't be far ahead. Ten to one he's not out of the quad yet. If we hurry we shall catch him up before he gets to the tree and climbs over the wall."

"Don't forget we've only got slippers on," Manners reminded him.

"Well, what about that? We're not going outside the quad, are we?"

"I hope not, anyway!" said Manners.

"What a life!" sighed Monty, but for all that he was at Tom's heels when the captain of the Shell dropped to the ground and began the cautious circuit of the quad in the shadows.

Here and there a lighted window indicated a master's study; but, with the exception of the staff, everybody at St. Jim's, from fags to lordly Sixth-Formers, had retired.

"Crums, it's cold!" said Manners, shivering. "I wish I'd known we were coming out for the night. I'd have stopped for a coat!"

"Hist!"

The warning whisper came from Tom Merry. He had caught sight of a figure skulking across a grass plot near the elms. In the shadow of the trees the figure stopped.

Tom Merry wrinkled his brows in perplexity.

He was more than a little puzzled. He could not in the least account for Racke's being on the other side of the quad, since it was quite out of the direct line from the out-house roof to the old tree by the wall beyond the tradespeople's entrance.

What was Racke's purpose for making such an apparently unnecessary detour the Terrible Three could not in the least understand, but it certainly had its advantages, from the point of view of the pursuers, since it shortened the chase, and made the capture of the black sheep of the Shell a certainty.

The three stole quietly forward until they were within a few yards of their unsuspecting quarry, who was apparently standing still with his back to them.

"Racke!" challenged Tom Merry, in a low tone.

The dimly seen figure turned like a flash, uttered an ejaculation, and the next instant was racing away at top speed.

"After him!" snapped Tom.

The Terrible Three sped silently in pursuit.

Right across the quad went the runaway, spurning the gravel beneath his feet with a reckless disregard for the noise he was making.

Tom Merry & Co. were amazed.

"The mad fool!" gasped Manners. "He'll waken the blessed place!"

Tom Merry set his teeth and spurred ahead, closing in upon the other, who, feeling a hand upon his shoulder, swerved like a Rugby forward, and left the captain of the Shell clutching at empty air.

Tom was thrown off his balance, and it was only by a desperate effort that he avoided measuring his length on the ground.

Considering his slowness and general unhealthy habits, the speed and dexterity that Racke was displaying were truly astounding. But his apparent disregard of the danger that he was invoking by running noisily about the quad at nearly midnight was still more astounding. Had it been Cardew, Tom Merry could have understood it, for the dandified Fourth-Former had nerves of steel, and would take the wildest chances with dare-devil sang-froid.

But Racke was by no means of a similar temperament, and courage of any kind was a quality that, if he possessed at all, he had succeeded in concealing, hitherto, in a very effective manner.

Certainly he was taking risks of trouble far greater than any that might come to him by falling into the hands of the Terrible Three, and the chums of the Shell could only assume that there must be more in this matter of Racke's midnight excursion than they had suspected.

Tom Merry, on his mettle, made a spurt, and caught up with the flying figure before him. There was a hasty grapple, a moment's swaying in each other's arms, and then they were rolling over and over on the grass that skirted the basin of the fountain in the middle of the quad.

Then it was that Tom Merry received a second surprise—and a far greater one than had been the first. For the form that he had clutched with that determined grasp was most certainly not that of Racke. It was not that of any St. Jim's fellow—not, indeed, that of a boy at all.

The confusion occasioned by the darkness and excitement

had been responsible for the error, and their failure to discover it during the subsequent chase, but it was clear to Tom Merry that they had made a mistake in assuming that the stealthy figure they had stalked under the elms was that of the erring junior.

But whom could it be?

It seemed to Tom Merry that he had grasped a bundle of steel springs and rubber. His captive writhed and twisted like an eel. Supple fingers reached for his throat and fastened there with cruel, remorseless pressure, stifling the cry that had risen to Tom's lips.

A blind rose upon a lighted window, and a far-flung beam of pale radiance gilded the struggling figures just as Manners and Lowther came racing up.

They paused in dismay at the sudden illumination, and glanced up at the window, where a black silhouette was manipulating the catch, obviously with the intention of flinging up the frame.

It was clear that the Housemaster—it was the window of Mr. Railton's study—had been aroused by the noise in the quad, and was going to investigate.

"My hat!" gasped Lowther. "That's done it!"

"And all through Racke!" grumbled Manners. "The mad fool!"

"Come on, Tom!" whispered Monty urgently. "Railton's on the war-path! Never mind Racke! Leave the mad fool to explain it as best he can. We'll eat back to the dorm. Come on!"

They were both, naturally, under the impression that it was Racke with whom Tom was struggling, and they had no inkling of the desperate plight in which their leader was finding himself. They saw the struggling figures, but they could not see the terrible fingers that were crushing Tom Merry's windpipe.

And, indeed, it was only with the assistance of the faint light that had been so suddenly cast out into the darkness and over them, that Tom Merry himself fully realised the deadly nature of the struggle he was waging.

Two fierce eyes glared at him out of a dusky face, and in that moment Tom discovered that his opponent was one of the Hindus who had attacked Koumi Rao in Rylcombe Woods that very evening.

CHAPTER 4.

Rescue—and an Escape!

WHAT the man was doing in the quadrangle of St. Jim's at nearly midnight was beyond Tom's power to guess. Indeed, he had no room in his mind at that moment for any conjectures on the subject.

He was solely concerned with the task of attempting to release himself from that murderous grip, and he struggled desperately, with bursting lungs and bulging eyes.

Dimly he wondered why Manners and Lowther did not come to his assistance. It did not occur to him that they still thought he was struggling with Racke.

"Who is there?"

The deep voice of the School House master boomed out into the quad.

"Tom, Tom!" hissed Monty Lowther almost frantically. "Bunk for it, you ass! Never mind Racke now!"

Tom Merry heard the words faintly, as he had heard the voice of Mr. Railton. They conveyed no meaning to him. Tom had forgotten all about Racke by now.

The pain in his chest was excruciating, his head felt as if it was going to burst, and there were noises in his ears like the tolling of huge bells and the screaming of steam-whistles. Lights danced and flickered before his eyes.

His senses were slipping away.

And all the time his two chums stood a yard or so off in the darkness, just beyond the pale beam that streamed from the window, suspecting nothing of what was happening.

"Who is there, I say?"

Again the Housemaster challenged the unseen occupants of the silent, night-shrouded quad.

"Tom! Racke! Chuck it, you mad idiots! Can't you hear Railton?"

And Manners, disregarding the danger of moving about in the light, stepped forward with the intention of taking a hand in the affair and awakening his leader to a sense of the situation before it was too late.

He caught a glimpse of Tom's opponent, and instantly gave vent to a cry of mingled astonishment and alarm. He forgot all about the listening Housemaster, and the need for caution at that sight.

"Lowther! he almost yelled. "It isn't Racke at all! It's one of those Hindu brutes. He's throttling Tom! Quick!"

Monty Lowther was at Manners' side in the fraction of a second, and the horrified Shell fellows flung themselves on the Hindu, beating unmercifully at him until he was forced to release Tom Merry, who sank limply to the ground, his eyes closed, gasping breath painfully into tortured lungs.

The Hindu, with a sudden reptilian wriggle, struggled to his feet, fighting like a wildcat.

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Mr. Railton again called out, and this time Manners responded with a loud cry of "Help!"

He had the Hindu round the body, while Lowther was holding both his wrists, twisting them savagely. The man grunted with pain, and lashed out with his feet.

"Oooooowp!" gasped Lowther, as he caught a crack on the shin. "The rotter's using his filthy boots! Mind your ankles!"

"You bet!" panted Manners. "Hi! Look out, Monty!"

Warned by that sudden yell, Lowther turned just in time to meet the rush of a figure that had come up at the rear of him. He was forced to release his hold of the first man, who instantly broke away from Manners and plunged his hand into his coat pocket.

Manners, who feared what the action might portend, at once sprang in and grasped him by the wrist; and in the ensuing struggle the junior took especial care that the man's hand never came out of his pocket.

Lowther, however, was not so fortunate. His opponent had come prepared for the attack, and as he came forward the light from the study window glinted upon something that was clutched in his hand.

Lowther, with a gasp of consternation, made a hasty grab at his assailant's wrist; but he was too late, and the next instant the sleeve of the arm that he had instinctively raised to cover himself was slashed open from wrist to elbow.

Mercifully, the junior sustained no more serious injury than a slight scratch along the forearm, but it served to forcibly acquaint him with the grim nature of the encounter; and his second attempt at gaining possession of the man's wrist was successful.

For all their slight build, both men were tough and wiry, and they were possessed of a hundred tricks of wrestling unknown to the juniors.

"Help!" yelled Manners desperately. "Help!"

The call was scarcely necessary, since the noise in the quadrangle had already roused half the school.

Part of the main door of the School House was flung open, and a tall, athletic figure showed up against the lighted aperture.

Mr. Railton had come down to investigate, and he ran down into the quad, followed by some half-dozen prefects, partly dressed, and armed with ashplants and cricket-stumps.

The Asiatics saw them, and for the second time that evening deemed discretion the better part of valour in the face of superior odds. They flung the two juniors from them and rushed away in the opposite direction.

"Stop!" called out Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster was evidently under the impression that the running figures were two St. Jim's boys. It was, perhaps, a natural mistake for him to make. When his command was ignored he snapped out an order, and three of the prefects took up the chase, while he himself went over to the Terrible Three.

"Manners! Lowther!" he said grimly, turning the beam of an electric torch upon each of the juniors in turn. "What does this mean? And who were those two boys who ran off when I came up?"

"They weren't boys, sir!" replied Monty Lowther. "They were men—Hindus!"

"Hindus?" The Housemaster's amazement was obvious by the tone of his voice. "What do you mean?"

"They were the same two who tried to kidnap Koumi Rao in Rylcombe Woods this evening," explained Lowther.

"Will you please turn your light on Tom Merry, sir. I believe he's hurt!"

"Tom Merry! Is he here? Why, good heavens—" Mr. Railton broke off as the light revealed the Shell captain in a crumpled heap on the grass, his head pillowed against the stone rim of the fountain basin.

Manners dropped to his knees and put an arm round his leader's shoulders.

"Tom!" he cried, with a half sob. "Tom, old chap! Are you all right? Oh, the cowardly rotters!" he flamed.

"They've nearly throttled him!"

"Steady, my boy!" The Housemaster put him gently to one side and bent over Tom Merry. "Ah, he seems to be reviving. Soak a handkerchief in water, someone, from the basin here, and lay it across his forehead. I have never heard of such a disgraceful thing! Darrell, you might assist Kildare to carry Merry into the House. We must arouse the matron, and, if necessary, summon medical aid."

"D-don't worry, sir," murmured Tom Merry faintly, with an attempt at a smile. "I shall be all right in a bit."

But for all his brave words, it was clear, when Kildare and Darrell raised him to his feet, that he was unable to walk, and he had to be carried across the quad and up the steps of the School House.

The Housemaster stood in the vestibule with a worried frown on his brow.

"This is an affair for the police," he said. "They have already been informed of the attack upon Koumi Rao, but

the matter is even more serious than I imagined. I regret now that I sent those prefects after the men, thinking them to be juniors. They appeared to be much too dangerous for boys to deal with. I never dreamt— Good gracious, Lowther, your arm is bleeding!"

"It's nothing much, sir!" replied Monty. "Only a scratch."

"But your coat sleeve is cut, too. How did it occur?"

"They had knives, sir," said Monty Lowther simply.

"And they actually tried to stab you?" gasped the horrified Housemaster.

He turned to the amazed prefects, a resolute look upon his face.

"Kildare, here are my keys!" He fumbled in his pocket. "You will find my revolver and a packet of cartridges in the right-hand drawer of my desk. Bring them to me. I am going after those three boys at once. I wish to Heaven I had never sent them in chase of those ruffians!"

He took an ashplant from Darrell and turned on his heel, his jaw set grimly. At that moment there came to their ears from the distance the noise of a suddenly started motor-engine. The sound changed to a gentle murmur, as though somebody had let in the clutch, and this in turn faded away with the suggestion of a departing vehicle.

The little group in the porch of the School House stood listening for a few moments.

"I think they've gone, sir," said Kildare quietly at length.

Mr. Railton nodded.

"I trust so," he said fervently. "For, although I should be immensely relieved by the knowledge that they were in custody, I must confess that I regard their capture as a matter that had better be left to the police."

A minute or so later Rusden, Baker, and Macgreggor came in, looking rather crestfallen, with the news that the men had escaped in a motor-cycle and sidecar that had been standing in the Rylcombe Lane, just outside the school walls.

The whole business was a mystery to them, as they had not managed to get sufficiently near to their quarry to discover who they were; and it was not until the motor-cycle came into the affair that they realised they were not dealing with a junior school escapade of a particularly daring description.

A few words of explanation left them more amazed than ever, but there was no time to discuss the matter. Mr. Railton issued his orders, and the prefects hastened to obey.

Dr. Holmes was aroused, and came on to the scene with a bewildered, perturbed expression.

A messenger was sent over to the New House in order to ascertain that Koumi Rao was safe and sound in the Fourth Form dormitory there. Tom Merry and Lowther were taken over to the sanatorium, the former to be detained for the night, the latter to have his arm attended to.

Manners went back to the Shell dormitory under escort of the prefect who was detailed to make a round of the awakened dormitories and explain what was likely to happen if the occupants did not immediately settle down again. Volleys of questions were fired at him, as happened to Lowther when he returned to the Shell; but Mr. Railton had been at pains to issue explicit instructions that everybody concerned in the night's happenings should keep their own council, which they did.

In the general excitement, and the necessity for prompt treatment of the injuries sustained by Tom Merry and Lowther, authority omitted to make inquiries regarding the presence of the Terrible Three in the quad. It is possible that both Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton, if they thought at all upon that point, assumed that the juniors had been disturbed by some noise made by the intruders, and had ventured out in an impulsive, if natural, attempt to investigate on their own.

Late as it was, the Head telephoned to the police-station at Wayland, giving such details as he had elicited from the Terrible Three, and was assured that steps would at once be taken to get on the track of the miscreants.

There was clearly nothing more to be done, and the prefects went back to their rooms after hearing that Koumi Rao had been undisturbed, and the daring raid of the Asiatics had proved abortive.

So St. Jim's resumed its disturbed repose.

CHAPTER 5.

An Accident in Rylcombe Lane!

RACKE plodded wearily along the Rylcombe Lane, sick at heart and utterly wretched.

A thin drizzle had commenced to fall, and was adding physical discomfort to the mental strain under which the junior was labouring.

He was on his way back to St. Jim's.

Thanks to his foresight in taking his cap to the box-room before bed-time, he had been enabled to get clear of the school

before Tom Merry & Co. had been afforded an opportunity for stopping him. He had, indeed, been on his way to Rylcombe before the Terrible Three had tackled the first Hindu in the quad, and the exciting events of the night at St. Jim's were unknown to him.

Racke's visit to the Green Man had been a complete fiasco.

He had not even seen Banks. Instead, he had been greeted by Abel Joliffe, the rascally landlord of the inn, with the information that the bookmaker had been called away unexpectedly. Before he went, however, he had empowered Joliffe to receive the money on his behalf, and to give a receipt.

But Joliffe, as he had been careful to point out to Racke, was not in a position to discuss the matter of the debt, nor to consider any arguments or suggestions concerning a postponement of the date of settlement.

In the event of the money not being forthcoming, the bookmaker had left a note for Racke, and with the handing over of this, as Joliffe explained, his part in the business was disposed of.

Racke had stood in the little private parlour of the inn and read the note with a sinking heart. He guessed at the nature of the contents even before he tore open the envelope.

"If you gets this letter it means as you ain't brought the money as was arranged. I ain't going to have no more of this messing. A honest man ain't to be kept out of his rights, not if it was a duke and not a school kid; and if that there fifty quid don't come down on the nail by Friday, your headmaster gets a letter, telling him what kind of chaps their is up to his school, doing down a hardworking man—"

There were several lines more of this kind of thing, but Racke did not wait to read it. He crumpled up the note in his hand, stared unseeingly in front of him for a few moments, then, thrusting it into his pocket without a word, he turned and slunk out of the room.

He knew that it was worse than useless to make any appeal to the leering Joliffe, to whose "Good-night, Master Racke!"—spoken in tones of thinly disguised mockery—he returned no answer.

Fifty pounds!

To be paid by Friday without fail. And this was Tuesday.

He no longer had any hopes that the bookmaker did not mean what he said.

But how was it possible for him, Racke, to get hold of a sum like that within what was virtually a few hours?

He licked his dry lips, and went plunging through the mud of the dark lane, with the drizzle beating into his face and soaking his clothes.

If only he could have seen the bookmaker. He might have persuaded Banks to wait a few days longer. Say a week. Much might happen in a week.

He approached a turn in the lane. From the other side came the roar of a motor-engine being driven at a great rate. Racke was walking in the middle of the road, but he made no move to the side. He was past caring about anything.

The next instant something came hurtling round the bend and straight at Racke. In that fraction of time he saw what appeared to be a motor-cycle and sidcar, without headlights, and being driven at a reckless pace.

There was a startled cry, and the roar of the engine ceased. The scream of hastily-applied brakes filled the sudden silence. The vehicle swerved, skidded, and swerved again. Racke was struck a glancing blow, caught up, and dragged a yard or so, until his clothing gave way under the strain, and he was sent spinning into the hedge.

From the other side of the road came a dull grinding sound, followed by a crash.

The motor-cycle combination had gone into the ditch.

For a few seconds Racke lay where he had fallen, half-stunned by the shock. When he struggled to his feet, collecting his scattered senses to some extent, he became conscious of a numbness in his right arm, where something—probably the handlebars of the machine—had struck him. His right-hand coat-pocket had been torn away, and he was covered with mud from head to foot.

Two men were scrambling out of the overturned machine. The man who had been driving was assisting his companion, and it was evident that neither was seriously injured.

But they were furiously angry. No doubt about that.

They crossed over to Racke and grasped him roughly.

"What do you mean by walking along in the middle of the road like that?" demanded one of them.

His English was excellent enough, but there was something about the quality of his voice that attracted the attention of Racke, half-dazed as he was, and he glanced curiously at them. Both were wearing large caps pulled down well over their faces, and heavy goggles, so that it was impossible to see much of their features. Racke was certain that

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they were foreigners, though he was utterly unable to determine their nationality.

He was roused to a sullen indignation by the words, however.

"Walking in the middle of the road be hanged!" he snarled. "What do you mean by driving round a bend at that rate, and without lights, too? It's a wonder I wasn't killed. I believe my arm's broken, anyway. And you've ruined my jacket," he added.

The second man stepped forward, and ran his fingers rapidly down Racke's right sleeve.

"That arm is not broken—merely bruised," he announced quietly.

Racke looked down. The speaker had removed his driving-glove, and Racke saw that the hand was dark-skinned—a pale coffee colour.

"Ugh!" he muttered, and drew his arm away. "A dashed nigger!"

The words and gesture passed unnoticed by the men, who were conferring together in low, eager tones. And the language they spoke was unknown to Racke.

Suddenly one of the men stepped forward and picked up something from the ground. He turned the light of an electric-torch upon it, and revealed it as a sheet of muddy paper, which he examined. He drew a quick breath, and glanced over his shoulder at Racke, who was cleaning some of the mud from his clothes with a pocket-handkerchief.

The other man had crossed over to the motor-cycle outfit, and was investigating the extent of the damage. He spat out several unpleasant-sounding words that might well have been oaths, and came back to his companion.

Racke had retrieved his cap from the hedge, and was preparing to continue his journey. He was anxious to get back to St. Jim's as soon as possible.

It had occurred to him that the men might endeavour to prove him responsible for the accident. And, considering the time and place of the mishap, Racke had no desire to be mixed-up in any sort of inquiry. How was he to explain his presence in Rylcombe Lane at such an hour in the event of any publicity arising from the affair?

So Racke decided that the sooner he was off the scene the better it would be.

He pulled on his cap with a savage gesture and stepped out into the road.

One of the men made a quick movement and stood directly in his path.

"Out of the way!" gritted Racke. "I've no time to waste. I want to get along."

"One moment, my boy!" interposed the man softly. "Surely you will permit my friend and I to express our regrets for the accident, which, we realise, was due to our own carelessness?"

Racke stared at him.

"Well, that's all right, then. And now——"

"Regarding your jacket, which you say has been damaged," went on the other, "I shall be happy to make some recompense. Unfortunately, I have very little money with me, but as I see by your cap that you are at St. James' College, if you will give me your name, I will call on your headmaster to-morrow, and we can then come to some arrangement as to what I am to pay."

Racke drew a sharp breath.

"Oh, th-th-that's all right!" he stammered hastily. Compensation was tempting, but not on such terms as that. "You needn't——"

"Oh, but I insist!" said the other, and Racke caught the gleam of teeth as he smiled. "After all, it was our fault——"

"I don't know about that," mumbled Racke uncomfortably. "Perhaps I was a bit to blame as well."

He would have hurried on had not the man put out a slim hand to detain him.

"Wait!" Softly as the word came, there was a note of command in the voice. "A thought occurs to me. It is surely an unusual hour for a schoolboy to be abroad."

Racke gritted his teeth.

"What the dickens has that got to do with you?" he demanded furiously.

"I was wondering," replied the other, with a purring intonation, "whether that circumstance had anything to do with your reluctance to have the question of compensation settled with the approval of your headmaster?"

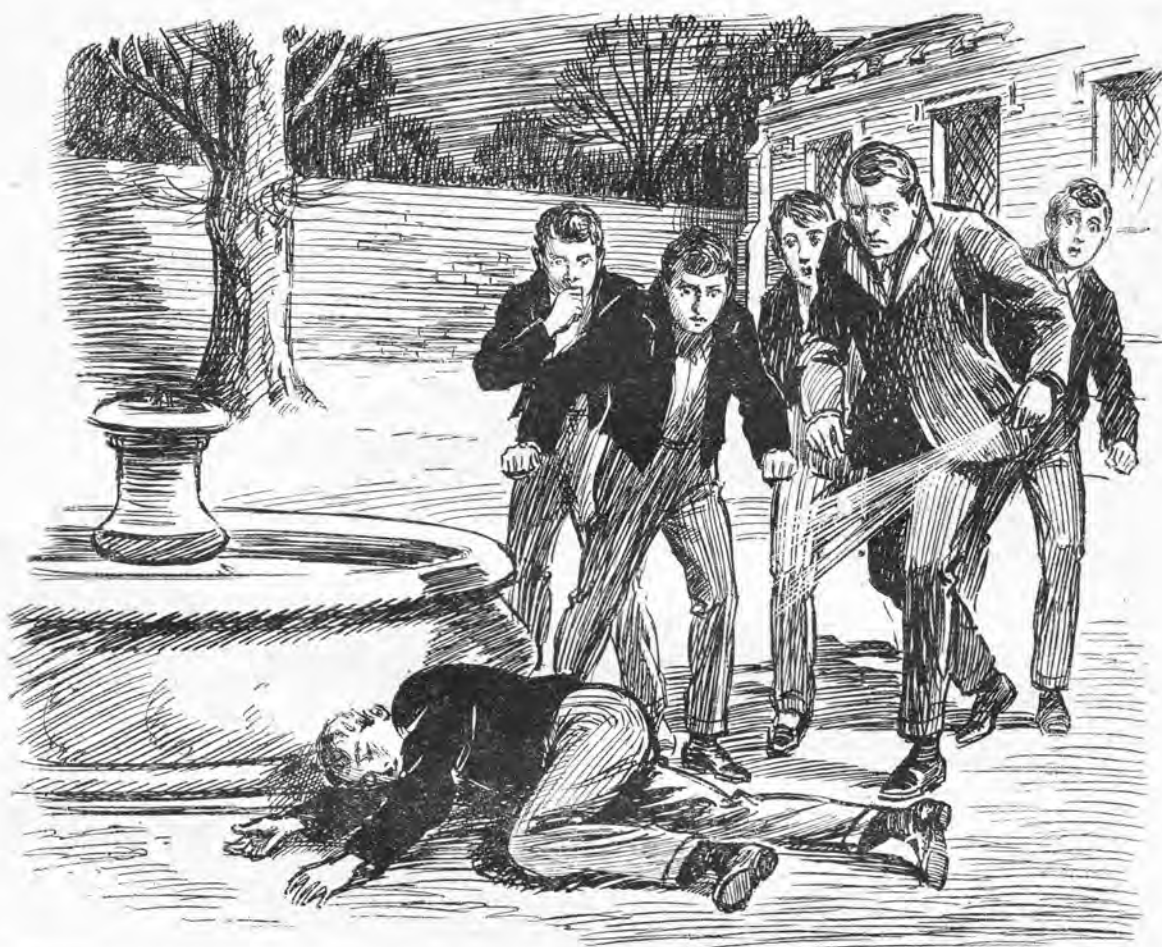
"Hang you!" grated Racke, and turned on his heel.

"Because I cannot otherwise account for the fact that a boy should refuse money when it is proffered to him, especially when he appears to be so desperately in need of it," went on the quiet voice behind him.

Racke stopped dead in his tracks as the significance of the words came to his mind. Then he whirled round and came striding back.

"W-what do you mean?" he asked hoarsely.

A circle of brilliant light shone from a torch the man was holding. It revealed a paper that he held in his other hand.



"Tom Merry, sir!" said Monty Lowther anxiously. "Look at him. I believe he's hurt!" "Tom Merry! Is he here? Why, good heavens!" Mr. Railton broke off as he in the light from his electric torch recognised the form of the Shell captain in a crumpled heap on the grass, his head pillowed against the stone rim of the fountain basin.

(See page 9.)

Racke stared wonderingly at it for a moment before he recognised what it was. He gasped, making a quick step forward to grab at it.

He was too late.

The paper vanished behind the man's back, and Racke found himself staring into the bulb of the torch, the glare from which temporarily blinded him.

"You—you rotter!" he uttered thickly. "That's my letter!"

"So I assumed when I found it," smiled the man. "It doubtless fell when your pocket was torn."

"Give it back to me!" demanded Racke.

The man shook his head.

"But it's mine, I tell you!" panted Racke. "What good is it to you?"

"That remains to be seen," said the man. "What is your name?"

"I'll see you hanged before I——"

"What's your name?"

"Racke!" replied the junior sullenly. "And now——"

"Well, Master Racke, I think it will be to your advantage to see me again. I might even yet be able to do something in the matter of that compensation."

"Give me that letter and take your compensation to the dickens!"

"I am prepared to be more than generous," went on the man coolly. "Any sum up to—well, fifty pounds, shall we say?"

"W-what!" gasped Racke incredulously.

"I have no more time to waste. To-morrow you will meet me at the woodman's hut near to the main path in Rylcombe Woods at a time convenient to you."

"And if I refuse?" inquired Racke insolently. "Why should I——"

"If you prefer that this letter should be forwarded to your headmaster, together with an account of to-night's incident," replied the man quietly, "you will refuse to come. It is for you to make the decision."

Racke stood irresolute. Of course, the man mentioned fifty pounds because he had seen the amount stated in the letter from Banks. But why should he suggest such a preposterous sum as compensation for a pound or so's damage?"

Racke was at a loss. But it was clear that he had no choice regarding the appointment, in the face of the man's threat. He made his decision.

"All right!" he said ungraciously. "Three o'clock. Though why on earth——"

"You will learn in good time," replied the other. "I need only say that you will have no reason to regret your decision. Three o'clock, then."

Racke turned and went off in the direction of St. Jim's.

The Hindu folded up the letter and placed it carefully in his pocket-book, then turned and addressed his companion in the tongue that had puzzled Racke. It happened to be Hindustani.

"Our breakdown has served us well," he smiled, alluding to an engine failure that had occurred soon after they left St. Jim's, and, by delaying them in their flight, caused the meeting with Racke. "Hopeless, I suppose?"—he indicated the wrecked machine.

His companion nodded gloomily.

"Ah, well! We must abandon it. Fortunately, we have another. And to-morrow, with the aid of this boy Racke I think we shall have the good fortune that has eluded us this night. But let us go! We have no time to lose!"

From which it might be inferred that there was more behind the offer to Racke of compensation for a torn coat than the Shell junior was likely to have guessed.

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CHAPTER 6. An Infamous Bargain!

WHEN Racke awoke, heavy-eyed, the next morning, it was to discover the School House in a state of excitement.

Everybody was discussing the mysterious disturbance of the night before—everybody, that is, except those most qualified to discuss it, and to whom the affair was no great mystery.

The Terrible Three were the only members of the Lower School who really knew anything about it, and of them only Manners and Lowther were in the House. Tom Merry had not returned from the sanatorium, where he had spent most of the night.

Of course, the two juniors were assailed with literally thousands of questions; but, true to their promise, they refused to answer even the most trivial inquiry regarding the matter.

Naturally, this secrecy bred rumours, which spread about the school like spilled quicksilver.

Figgins & Co. came racing over from the New House directly after brekker, in the hope of unearthing the truth. Rumour had, of course, been busy in the New House. But Figgins was decidedly sceptical regarding the information—imparted to him in the strictest confidence by Pratt of the New House, who had gained it from Baggy Trimble—that a midnight battle had taken place in the quad between the entire School House and a gang of anarchists who had been endeavouring to blow up St. Jim's with bombs.

The fact that Baggy was represented as having been the leader of the defending forces and the hero of the engagement served but to deepen Figgins' doubt.

The New House trio managed to buttonhole Manners and Lowther just as those two juniors were returning from the sanny after a visit to Tom Merry, who was having an extra hour or so in bed.

The School House fellows made no bones about being rude to Figgins & Co. During the last hour they had been brought up against more inquisitiveness than they had any use for, in their own House, so they certainly had no desire to encourage an imported brand.

"Go away!" groaned Monty Lowther. "Your face worries me, Figgy!"

"Look here, you cheeky School House sweep—" began Figgins wrathfully.

"Pax!" put in Kerr hastily. "No rags, you fellows! We came over—"

"That's pretty obvious," murmured Monty Lowther.

"Give it a rest, old man," implored Kerr. "We've heard that there was some sort of trouble in the School House last night, and that you were the Little Johnnies-on-the-spot. There are all sorts of rumours floating about, and we thought we'd drift over and dig out the truth. Information straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak."

"As distinct from the donkey's!" grinned Figgins. "We've heard Trimble's version," he added, in explanation.

"Then I'm afraid you'll have to be satisfied with that," said Monty.

"But there isn't a word of truth in it, surely?" gasped Figgins.

"Can't say, as I haven't heard what it is," said Lowther. "But, knowing what I do of Trimble, I don't suppose there is. Anyway, we have nothing whatever to say."

"But—"

"Housemaster's orders!" said Manners briefly. "Sorry, and all that, you know. Matter of fact, we're getting a bit sick of choking off rubbernecks."

Kerr smiled.

"Tom Merry still in the sanny?" he said. "You must have had a pretty hectic time, whatever it was. I suppose they made a mistake. Looking for the New House, really, weren't they?"

"Eh?" Figgins and Fatty Wynn stared wonderingly at their chum.

"Whom are you talking about?" inquired Lowther.

"Why, the Hindus who broke into the school last night, of course," said Kerr calmly.

Manners and Lowther exchanged startled glances.

"W-w-what do you know about it?" stuttered Figgins, turning on Kerr with a stare of complete bewilderment.

"Nothing—except what I've guessed," confessed the Scottish junior, with a slight smile. "One puts two and two together, that's all. An attempt to kidnap Koumi Rao in Rylcombe Woods yesterday. Then midnight prowlers in the quad. One fellow knocked out badly enough to be bunged into the sanny, and another has to have his arm bandaged." Lowther instantly thrust his arm behind him.

"It's obvious that the intruders, whoever they were, are stick-at-nothing sort of blighters—like the men who attacked Koumi Rao. A prefect comes into the dorm at midnight to have a look at Koumi Rao. I woke up, if you others didn't. And Koumi Rao is summoned to the Head's study immediately after brekker this morning."

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"Great pip! So he was!" gasped Figgins. "But I never thought—"

"Do you ever, Figgy?" snapped Lowther rather irritably. "And I wish that lump of haggis there had no more brains than you have. But, whatever you know—or think you know—for goodness' sake, keep it to yourselves! I don't want Railton to think we've been jabbering."

"You mean to say I'm right?" said Kerr keenly.

"I don't mean to say anything."

"Perhaps not," smiled Kerr. "But you have done, indirectly, all the same. Rely on us. We sha'n't let it out." And, linking arms, the New House trio grinned cheerfully and departed.

"Blow them!" growled Manners. "Kerr's a dashed sight too keen!"

"Don't worry," said Monty. "They'll keep it dark."

Tom Merry turned up in the Form-room as usual for morning lessons, a little pale, perhaps, but otherwise looking none the worse for his ordeal. He was the recipient of many curious glances, and several persistent fellows took advantage of every opportunity for addressing whispered inquiries. Mr. Linton became seriously annoyed at the epidemic of muttering that broke out every time his back was turned, and by the end of the morning quite a number of the Shell were condemned to tremendous tasks in the way of impositions, without, however, having gained any compensating information.

As soon as dinner was over the Terrible Three, wearied of the ceaseless catechism, went straight up to Study No. 10 and sported their oak.

A few doors away Racke threw himself gloomily into an armchair, and it was not long before, tired after his eventful night, he fell asleep. Clampe and Chowle, who had planned a little game of poker in a box-room as a pleasant method of spending the half-holiday, visited the study in search of Racke and Crooke, but failed to find the latter or arouse the former.

Racke awoke about two hours later, feeling considerably refreshed.

It was a few minutes past the time for the appointment when he reached the hut in Rylcombe Woods, and the Hindu was awaiting him with obvious impatience.

"You are late," he said, as Racke came up. "I was beginning to wonder if you had been foolish enough to decide not to come, after all."

"I fell asleep in my study," replied Racke ungraciously. "Anyway, it was you who made the appointment, not I, so you can't grumble if you've had to wait a bit. Now I am here, what do you want with me?"

"I thought I made that clear to you last night," said the Hindu blandly. "I wish to settle with you regarding the compensation for your damaged clothing. Let me see! Fifty pounds, we said, didn't we?"

"Rot!" said Racke roughly. "Fifty pounds for a torn coat?"

"Why not?" said the man. "I am willing to pay it."

"Then you must be mad!" sneered Racke. "And, anyway, I don't believe you."

"No? But I think I shall succeed in convincing you, for all that."

He produced a pocket-book, from which he extracted a packet of notes. Racke's eyes glistened greedily. The man counted out five of the notes.

"There you are," he said pleasantly. "Twenty-five pounds!"

"You said fifty!" Racke reminded him.

"And I meant fifty. But I am prepared to hand over half now."

"And the rest?"

In spite of himself, Racke was beginning to believe that there was some possibility of his getting the money. It was fantastic, almost incredible—but there was the bundle of notes. Racke could only assume that the man must be either slightly mad or else an eccentric plutocrat.

"The rest?" said the Hindu. "Oh, that will be forthcoming when you have complied with the one little condition I wish to make!"

"Oh!"

Racke began to appreciate the drift of things. If the man was mad, it was evident that there was some method in his madness. There were conditions, and it became clear to the black sheep of the Shell that the "compensation" was a convenient euphemism. Well, condition or no condition, there was fifty pounds at stake, and in the circumstances Racke was prepared to do, or agree to, almost anything that was in his power so long as he received the money.

"Well, out with it!" said Racke impatiently.

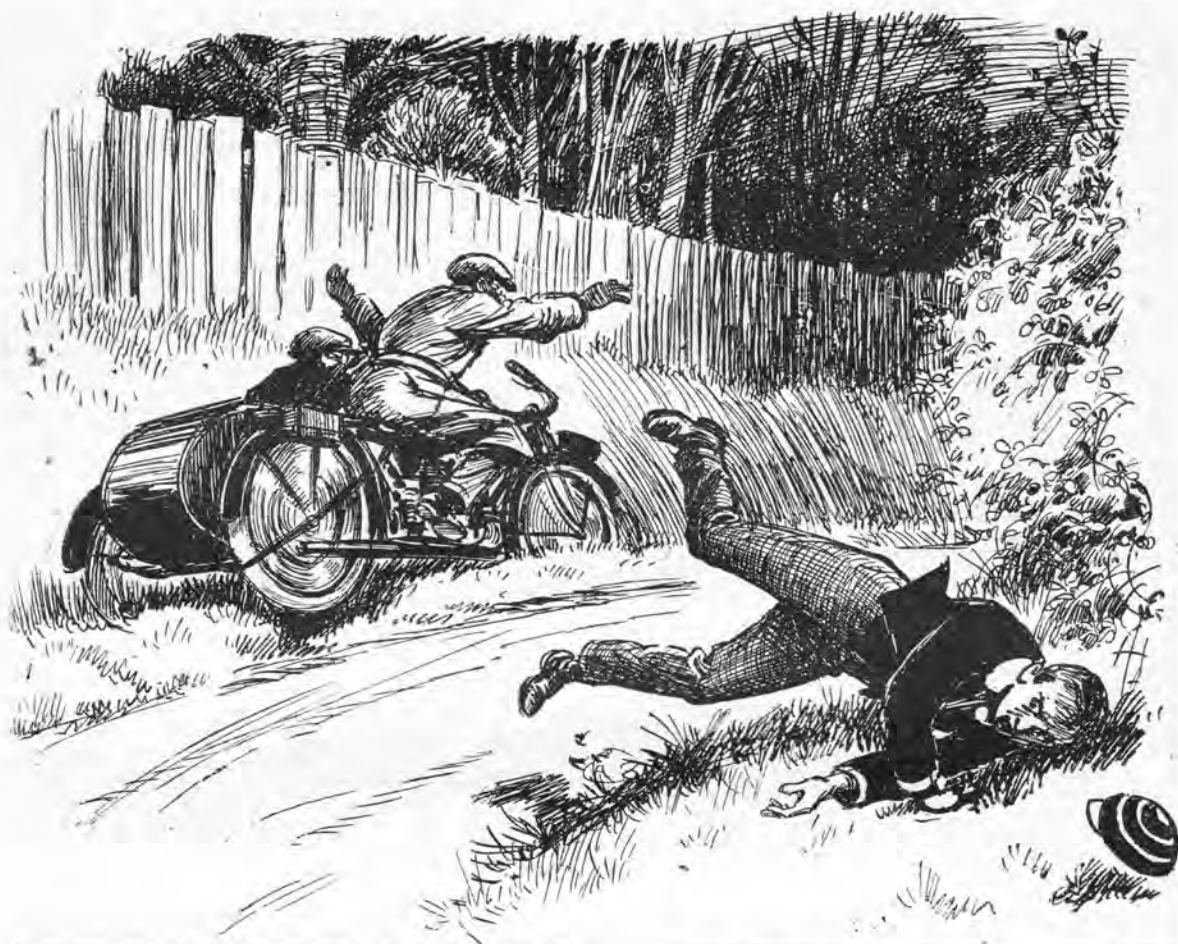
"You have a boy at your school named Koumi Rao?" said the man.

Racke stared.

"Koumi Rao? Yes, that's so. He's a New House cad. Why?"

"You are not, I take it, a friend of his?"

Racke laughed sneeringly.



As the vehicle swerved, Racke was struck a glancing blow, caught up, dragged a yard or so until his clothing gave way under the strain, then sent spinning into the hedge. From the other side of the road came a dull grinding sound as the motor-cycle combination went crashing into the ditch. (See page 10.)

"Hardly likely, is it? Hang it, he's a dashed nigger!"

The man's eyes gleamed.

"It has evidently escaped your notice," he said softly, "that I also am what you call a 'dashed nigger.' No matter! I require no apology, real or assumed. Listen to me, instead of trying to talk. This condition of which I speak relates to Koumi Rao. There are reasons which make it necessary for me to—have speech with him, and I want you to assist me in getting into touch with him."

"But why don't you go up to the school and ask for him?" said Racke wonderingly. "I don't see what—"

"That is impossible!" said the Hindu curtly.

Racke caught sharply at his breath as a sudden thought came to him.

"Gad!" he said. "I suppose you're one of the fellows who nearly scragged him in the woods yesterday. No wonder you daren't go up to the school."

The Hindu scowled.

"Silence, boy!" he said, in a tone of voice that somehow chilled Racke's blood. There was a venomous glitter in the eyes of the man. "I want to know what you are prepared to do in this matter. Unless I am very much mistaken, you are a boy without too many scruples. Even now you are in some kind of trouble, out of which it would appear that money alone will get you. I am ready to afford you an opportunity of obtaining that money in a very easy fashion. Can you afford to refuse the chance?"

"But what do you want with Koumi Rao?" asked Racke uneasily. "I'll be a party to nothing that's going to get me into more trouble!"

"You need have no fear," the Hindu assured him, with a touch of contempt. "We merely desire to have him in our hands for a few days."

"But why?"

The man's hesitation was momentary.

"Koumi Rao's father has committed an act of injustice on—on my brother," he said slowly. "When he hears that we have his son as a hostage he will at once take steps to right the wrong."

"Suppose he doesn't?" objected Racke.

The Hindu smiled evilly.

"That is our business," he said. "But, in any case, no harm will come to the boy."

Whether Racke really believed the explanation was a question that he himself could not, probably, have answered. At any rate, it suited him to persuade himself that he did, and the thought of the fifty pounds, and what it meant to him, was enough to overcome any reluctance he might otherwise have had in falling in with what was, even as it had been represented to him, a dastardly outrage.

"I don't care what happens to the rotter," he gritted, "so long as I'm not mixed up in it! What do you want me to do?"

The Hindu produced an envelope from his pocket.

"You will hand this letter to Koumi Rao," he said. "After he has read it he will ask you to describe the man who handed it to you. Everything depends on the accuracy of that description. You will say that it was given to you by an old, white-haired Hindu, with the first finger of his left hand missing, and a scar across his cheek. Koumi Rao will ask you to take him to where you saw this man—"

"No chance of that," put in Racke. "He's had orders from the Head not to go outside the school. I heard that to-day."

"He will ignore that order when he has read the letter and heard your description," said the man positively. "Bring him into the lane just outside the school gates, and leave the rest to me."

"All right!" muttered Racke. "I'll do it! What about the money?"

The man held out the small roll of notes, of which Racke possessed himself with a quick movement.

"The rest will be yours when you have carried out the scheme," promised the man. "You had better do it as soon as possible. I do not wish to remain in the neighbourhood longer than is necessary."

(Continued on page 16.)

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The WHEEZE THAT WOULDN'T WORK!

by Monty Lowther.

"**C**ARE for some plum cake?" Baggy Trimble put that question to Mellish of the Fourth. Mellish stared at him. "You haven't got any cake to give away, have you?" he asked.

"No; but I know where I can get some."

"Where?"

"Talbot's study. There's a ripping plum cake on the table. I saw it through the keyhole. Help me to burgle that cake as easily as falling off a form—halves."

"Can't be done," said Mellish, shaking his head. "Talbot's just gone into his study to have tea."

"But I've got a wheeze!" said Trimble, with a chuckle. "I can bag that cake as easily as falling off a form—if you'll agree to help me. I'll tell you how we'll work it. I'll trot into Talbot's

study, and say that I've come to interview him, as the special representative of the 'St. Jim's News.' Then, while I'm talking to Talbot, you must shout to him from the passage. When he goes out to see what you want, you must keep him in conversation for a minute or two. During that time I shall collar the cake, and escape with it by way of the window."

"My bat!"

"Quite a brainy notion—what?" said Trimble. "It will work like a charm. Are you game, Mellish?"

"Yes. Go ahead, Baggy!"

The two precious rascals made their way to the Shell passage, and Trimble tapped on the door of Talbot's study, and rolled in. Talbot was alone in the apartment. He was in the act of cutting a big plum cake which stood on the table. He viewed Trimble with some disfavour.

"What do you want, Baggy?"

"I've come to interview you on behalf of the 'St. Jim's News,'" said Trimble, producing a notebook from his pocket. "Tell me about your past life, so that I can write up an interesting story."

"I'll jaw to you after tea, if you like," said Talbot. "Too busy now."

"Hi, Talbot! You're wanted! Come quickly!"

It was a frantic shout from the passage. Talbot jumped up, greatly wondering, and hurried out of the study. He found Mellish of the Fourth awaiting him.

"Who wants me?" demanded Talbot.

"I do," said Mellish. "I want to jaw to you about—"

Talbot spun round suddenly as he heard the sound of a window being hastily thrown up. He seemed to know instinctively what was happening. Paying no heed to Mellish, who tried desperately to detain him, he darted back into his study, just in time to see Baggy Trimble scrambling through the window. The plum cake was no longer on the table.

Unfortunately for Baggy, he had not opened the window wide enough to enable a person of his ample proportions to get through the aperture. He got stuck, and could neither go forward nor get back. His head and shoulders were outside; his legs were still in the study.

Talbot picked up a cricket-stump, and proceeded to apply it with great vigour. Baggy Trimble was in a very convenient attitude to receive chastisement, and he howled and roared as the lashing stump came down.

"Yow-ow-ow! Chuckit! Stoppit! You're murdering me by inches!"

But Talbot did not desist until he considered that Baggy had had enough. Then he opened the window wider, and hauled Baggy back into the study, and recovered his plum cake.

And so the poor dogs—Baggy Trimble and Percy Mellish—had none!

WHAT I THINK OF TALBOT!

Praise and Criticism from the "Toff's" Schoolfellows.

TOM MERRY:

I consider old Talbot to be the best and least selfish fellow I have ever known. True as steel; a splendid sportsman; and a staunch pal in dark days as well as in sunny ones. If the world was populated with Talbots what a ripping place it would be!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY:

"Weginald Talbot is, I considah, a weally first-wate fellow. Yaas, wathah! If anybody disagvees with this view, I shall have to talk vewy seriously to him, an' possibly administrah a feaful thwashin'! For Talbot is my pal, an' I nevah permit my pals to be scandalised, bai Jove! I have only one fault to find with Talbot. He does not pay pweopah attention to the cut of his clobber. He only pwesses his twousahs once a week, whereas I pwess mine evvery night. Besides, he always wears a plain necktie, an' I considah a stwiped or spotted one would suit him admivably. I hope Talbot will take these hints in the spivrit in which they are given."

JACK BLAKE:

Nothing wrong with old Talbot. He's one of the best. St. Jim's could do with a few more fellows of his calibre.

AUBREY RACKE:

I don't like Talbot in the least. A goody-goody sort of fellow, in my opinion. He always reminds me of "Blameless Bertie—the Boy who Loved his Kind Teachers." Talbot is an angel

without wings; and I can't stand those sort of creatures.

CURLY GIBSON (Third Form):

I think talbot is an Awfully Decent Fellow. that broot Gore was bullying me the other day. he was twisting my arm, and old talbot came running up and he said hi what's all this and Gore said mind your own bizness and then talbot Dotted him on the Nose; and you ought to have seen the gore that flowed from Gore! good old talbot! i shall always be attached to him—as one of the Siamese Twins said when speaking of his partner.

HERBERT SKIMPOLE:

Talbot is a study-mate of mine, and on the whole I have a great admiration for him. But his education is being sadly neglected, for he thinks more of a brutal game like football than he does of the wise works of Professor Balmy-crumpet. I have tried to get Talbot to take an interest in various sciences ending with "ism," but he absolutely refuses to imbibe at the fount of learning. I have despaired of educating him to higher things. He hasn't a soul that rises above football and boxing!

EPHRAIM TAGGLES:

"Wot I says is this 'ere—Master Talbot is a fine, upstandin', down-sittin' young gent! He gave me a jolly good tip last Christmas, an' he says to me, says he, 'Taggles,' he says, 'may you live long an' die 'appy!' He's a real good sort, is Master Talbot!"

(And so say all of us!—Ed.)

The Imaginary Epitaph of

EPHRAIM TAGGLES.

(By the St. Jim's Joker.)

"WOT I SAYS IS THIS 'ERE—"

**BENEATH THIS SPOT LIES
EPHRAIM TAGGLES,**

the worthy and respected gate-porter of St. Jim's, who consumed a pint of strong ginger-pop, and completely forgot to dilute it with gin!

As a result of this omission, he lost control of his nether limbs, and pitched headlong through his own cellar-flap, which he was unable to avoid in the darkness.

**HE WAS DISCOVERED NEXT
MORNING**

in the recesses of the coal-cellar, and was conveyed to this spot on the local ambulance.

DURING HIS LIFETIME

he was a sober and temperate man, and a staunch supporter of Mr. Pussyfoot. As he himself would have said:

**"I NEVER TOUCHES A DROP
UNLESS I FEELS SO DISPOSED!"**

He was quite one of the landmarks at St. Jim's, where he will be sadly missed by the fellows who used to "rag" him unmercifully from morn till eve.

"We've laid him gently down to rest (No longer we'll deride him);

With a bunch of keys perched on his knees,

And an empty cask beside him!"

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"RACKE, THE RENEGADE!"

(Continued from page 13.)

Racke nodded.

"In an hour's time," he said. "You will be there ready?"

"I shall be ready."

"Good!"

And the black sheep of the Shell turned on his heel and set off along the footpath towards St. Jim's with the intention of committing, in cold blood, the worst act of treachery that even he had ever been guilty of.

The Hindu stood for a few moments, a grim smile, tinged with contempt, upon his face, before he also turned and went his way.

And as they each disappeared among the trees, the bushes near to where they had been standing parted suddenly and a fat and frightened form rolled into view and set off in the wake of Racke as fast as a pair of short legs would carry him.

Baggy Trimble had heard most of the conversation, the purport of which was clear even to his dull brain, and now he was hurrying back to St. Jim's with the startling news.

CHAPTER 7.

Betrayed to his Enemies!

K OUMI RAO had a study to himself in the New House—Study No. 1, on the Fourth Form corridor.

He sat in the armchair by the fire, reading—or trying to read. He found it very difficult to keep his thoughts on his book. They persisted in straying, sometimes to the episode of the previous day, when he had so narrowly escaped a fate that he shuddered at contemplating; sometimes to that far-off land of teeming millions where human life is held so cheaply and mercy is an almost unheard-of quality—India.

He wondered how matters were in Bhandahar, and whether his father, in the midst of his affairs of State, complicated by ceaseless undercurrents of intrigue, had any suspicion of this latest move of the seditionists whom he was fighting tooth and nail.

There came a gentle knock at the door. Koumi Rao roused himself and called out a cheery "Come in!"

He was glad to have a visitor. He would be enabled to side-track, for a time, at least, the gloomy thoughts that were worrying him.

But he was certainly surprised when he saw Racke standing in the doorway.

Racke of the Shell was a very unexpected visitor. Between the Hindu junior and the black sheep of the School House—the fellow who sometimes went deliberately out of his way to express his contempt of "niggers"—there was nothing in common.

Racke, with a furtive glance up and down the corridor, stepped into the study and closed the door behind him. He took an envelope from his pocket and held it out to Koumi Rao.

"A chap in Rylcombe Lane gave this to me for you," said Racke, in as natural a tone as he could assume. "A nigger—I—I mean a Hindu, you know."

For a moment Racke met those eyes of Koumi Rao's, then they flickered away and focused themselves on the fireplace. His heart was thumping heavily against his ribs until it seemed that Koumi Rao must surely hear the sound of it.

The Hindu junior took the envelope wonderingly and tore it open.

He unfolded the letter that was within, and Racke saw that it was written on thin rice-paper, and in what were, to him, unfamiliar characters.

But it was evident that Koumi Rao understood them well enough. His glance travelled eagerly across the paper, and he drew a deep breath. When he had read the letter he looked up. His eyes were shining, and it was clear that he was in a state of suppressed excitement.

"You say a Hindu gave you this letter?" he said to Racke.

"What was he like?"

"An old chap," replied Racke readily. "White hair and beard. He was wearing a green turban—that's what you call the towel affair that nig—I mean, Hindus—wrap round their heads, isn't it? There was a scar across his right cheek."

"It must be he!" muttered Koumi Rao, as if to himself.

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"Yet how— Did you notice his hands?" he asked suddenly.

Racke wrinkled his brows as though in thought.

"He'd got one finger missing on his left hand," he said at length, as though he had just recollected the fact. "The first finger, I think it was," he added artfully.

Koumi Rao drew a deep breath.

"It must be Ahmouda Lwal!" he said. "Allah be praised! I must thank you for your kindness in bringing me this letter," he went on in his rather pedantic fashion. "The Hindu whom you describe is the oldest and wisest of my father's ministers. This letter is from him, but though it is in his hand, I might have feared it was some trick of—of certain men who are my enemies, had not your description of the man who gave you the note reassured me. For some reason he may not come to the school. I want you to take me to where you saw him. He is waiting. But we must leave the school unobserved, for the Head has forbidden me to go outside the gates. That precaution is needless now, for Ahmouda is here, and he has been sent to arrange for my protection by methods of his own. Let us hasten."

As they went down the stairs, Pratt of the New House passed them. Racke gritted his teeth. The fact of his having been seen in the company of Koumi Rao a few minutes before the disappearance of the Hindu junior, was likely to prove dangerous. It was not going to be so easy to keep clear of trouble as he had been hoping.

But he had gone too far now to draw back, and when they had slipped out of the New House by a side-door and reached the sloping tree, by the aid of which the climbing of the school wall was rendered a fairly easy task, he assisted Koumi Rao over and followed him without the slightest hesitation. For all that he was trembling violently when they dropped into the lane.

A motor-cycle outfit stood about fifty yards away, and it was in this direction that Koumi Rao turned upon Racke's muttered instructions.

He had not gone more than a step or so when two men leapt out of the ditch at the other side of the road and came at him.

He stepped back a pace, with a startled exclamation in his own language, which was answered by a cry of exultation from the foremost attacker; and then they were upon him.

There was a danger of somebody coming along the road, and they were taking no chances this time.

As they closed in on Koumi Rao, one of them clapped a thick pad of cloth over his mouth and nostrils. That it was soaked in an anæsthetic was evident from the manner in which Koumi Rao's first fierce struggles became feeble movements, to be succeeded by a limp helplessness.

Racke turned his head away. Like Macbeth he was afraid to think what he had done, look on it he dare not.

He stood trembling like a leaf a few yards away, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, his eyes fixed fearfully upon the gates of St. Jim's.

A touch on his arm, and he leapt away with a stifled cry. One of the Hindus who had approached with the silent, feline tread of his race, glanced contemptuously at him and held out a wad of notes—the rest of the Judas money.

Racke took them mechanically. He tried to speak, but though his lips moved, no sound came.

The Hindu turned without a word and ran towards the motor-cycle outfit, into the sidecar of which his companion was lifting the limp body of Koumi Rao.

Racke had a sudden impulse to run after him, smash fist and money into his face, and do his best, at least, to rescue Koumi Rao.

He even made a step forward, but his half-repentance came too late.

The engine of the cycle roared out, and the vehicle moved off.

The tinkle of bicycle bells sounded. Riders were coming down the drive from the quad to the school gates.

Racke glanced desperately about him. In another few moments those riders, whoever they were, would be in the lane.

The motor-cycle was out of sight by now.

Racke thrust the roll of notes into his inside pocket, tore his collar loose, cut his cheek with a sharp stone, and rolled over on the ground several times. Within a few seconds he presented the appearance of having been engaged in a fierce struggle.

Four cyclists swept out through the gates and into the road, to instantly clap on their brakes with cries of mingled astonishment and alarm.

Racke was lying, apparently unconscious, right in their path.

"Great Scott! What's happened?" gasped Jack Blake, as he dismounted.

"Bai Jove! It's Wacke!" said Arthur Augustus. "Probably the poor chap has been wun ovah by some weckless motowist. How dweadful!"

"Better get him in," said Blake. "Lend a hand, you fellows!"

Racke was picked up and carried into the quad, still sharing unconsciousness. He had his story prepared. He had been given a note for Koumi Rao and had, in all good faith, taken the Hindu junior to meet the man who had sent it, only to discover that he had gone, and that two other Hindus, whom Racke had never seen before, were waiting in ambush. He, Racke, had fought to protect Koumi Rao, and had been knocked insensible. What had happened to the New House junior after that he did not know.

It was quite a good yarn, and it might have served Racke well—but for an unexpected development.

In the quad, where a crowd of fellows came running across, he decided to show some signs of recovering consciousness. He opened his eyes and passed his hand wearily across his head, wincing as though in pain.

"W—where am I?" he murmured feebly. "Oh, my head!" "Stand back a bit, you idiots!" said Blake. "He's coming round. All right, Racke—"

"Murder! Help! I say, you fellows—" There was a fresh commotion on the outskirts of the crowd. Baggy Trimble pushed his way forward, shouting excitedly and incoherently.

He had lost his cap, his hair was in wild disorder, and his clothing was as dishevelled as Racke's.

"Hallo!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Baggy's been in the wars, too!"

"Murder!" babbled Trimble. "Niggers! Murder! They're killing him, you fellows!"

"Eh?" said Tom Merry blankly. "Killing whom?"

"Koumi Rao! Niggers with knives—in Rylcombe Woods—and Racke—money!"

Racke had come to himself with apparently miraculous suddenness.

"Shut up, you fat fool!" he snarled.

Baggy Trimble turned wild, scared eyes upon him.

"There you are!" he shouted. "Racke, you beast, where's Koumi Rao?"

"What's all this about Koumi Rao?" demanded Tom Merry impatiently.

"Th—those niggers are after him again!" panted Trimble.

"And Racke's helping 'em to get him."

"What?"

"It's true! Heard 'em talking in Rylcombe Wood. One of 'em gave Racke money, and—"

"It's a lie!" shouted Racke desperately. "The dashed fool's mad!"

"I tell you—"

"Hold on a minute!" broke in Tom Merry grimly. "There's something jolly queer about this. It seems to me, Racke, that you're not so badly hurt as you've been making us believe—if you're hurt at all. Now then, Trimble, let's hear all about it!"

"But—"

"Shut up, Racke! Go on, Trimble!"

The glutton of the Fourth blurted out his story. He embellished it with much sensational detail that was obviously the product of his melodramatic mind, but even in its essentials it was startling enough, and more than a little sickening when one considered the part that a St. Jim's fellow had played in it.

Racke added colour to the story by the frequent attempts that he made to get at, or shout down, Trimble.

The juniors stood aghast as the tale of Racke's almost incredible treachery was unfolded to them.

"Somebody cut across to the New House and fetch Koumi Rao," said Tom.

Several fellows went scudding across the quad.

"When did this happen?" asked Blake of Trimble.

"About an hour ago!"

"An hour ago!" echoed Blake in a startled voice. "Why didn't you—"

"I couldn't help it," whimpered Trimble. "I took a short cut to get back before Racke, and got collared by some Grammar cads. They ragged me no end!"

"You fat fool!" snapped Blake. "You should have told them—"

"I tried to," said Trimble miserably, "but the beasts wouldn't believe me."

"That's what comes of making a habit of lying," said Tom Merry scornfully. "It ought to be a lesson to you. If anything's happened to Koumi Rao it'll be partly your fault."

The search-party who had gone over to the New House came racing across the quad, accompanied by Figgins & Co. and some other New House juniors.

"What's all this about Koumi Rao?" panted Figgy, as he came up. "He's not in the House."

"Not?"

"The last time he was seen he was going down the corridor with Racke," went on Figgy. "Pratt saw 'em."

"I told you—"

"Shut up, Baggy! That settles it, then!"

Tom Merry's voice was grim. He turned to the cowering Racke.

"Now then, you blackguard, where's Koumi Rao?"

"Find out!" "Very well, we'll go to Mr. Railton and—" "You rotten sneaks!" hissed Racke. "There's no question of sneaking. This is too serious a matter for us. Koumi Rao's life is at stake."

"His life? What rot! Why, the men said—that is, I don't know anything about it at all!"

"It's a bit too late to start on that line. You've practically confessed! Now then, Racke, we'll give you one more chance! Where is Koumi Rao?"

Racke looked around the circle of grim faces and shuddered. He knew that Tom Merry's threat to take him to Mr. Railton was no empty one.

"I—I don't know! Those niggers have taken him away on a motor-cycle."

"And you—you helped them, you vile cad!" blazed Figgins furiously. "Why—"

"Steady on, Figgy!" said Tom Merry. "That sort of thing won't help Koumi Rao! It's he we've got to think about. We'll deal with Racke later. Now then, you rotter, which way did they go?"

"T-t-towards Rylcombe," stammered Racke. "But I don't know—"

"Manners, cut off and tell Kildare and Darrell!" snapped Tom Merry crisply. "Say nothing about Racke. They'll get their motor-bikes out. Let's get on to the road."

"What's the idea?" inquired Figgins.

"We'll hold up the first motor that passes, and persuade the driver, somehow or other, to take some of us aboard and chase the rotters."

"Good idea! Why, here's a car coming in at the gates now."

The crowd of juniors turned to stare at the big, powerful-looking grey car that was turning out of the Rylcombe Lane and poking its rakish polished metal bonnet between the stone pillars that formed the gateposts of St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 8.

Rescued!

"STOP! Stop!" What the driver of the big grey car thought when a crowd of some thirty juniors came rushing pell-mell out of the quadrangle, yelling wildly, to spread themselves over the short drive that he had just entered upon, it is impossible to conjecture. He was certainly a very surprised man.

He threw out his clutch and applied both brakes, bringing the car to a standstill in a little under her own length. An instant later Tom Merry was on the running-board at his side.

"I don't know who you are, sir," said Tom breathlessly, "or what you've come to St. Jim's for, but would it be possible for you to put your business aside for a little while in order to help us—on a matter of life and death?"

The motorist, a well-groomed, soldierly looking man smiled slightly.

"That sounds rather extraordinary, my boy," he said quizzically. "Matters of life and death do not usually affect junior public schoolboys to any great extent, I should have imagined. At least, in my day—"

"We're not rotting, sir," said Tom Merry earnestly. "I know it must sound like a silly jape, but it isn't, honour bright! I can't stop to explain it all, sir, but one of our fellows has been kidnapped. He's a Hindu—a sort of prince in—"

"What?"

Tom Merry gave a gasp of pain as the motorist's hand closed over his wrist like a vice. The smiling, good-humoured features had suddenly become a tight-lipped, tense-muscled mask, out of which two grey eyes glittered with the effect of sunshine on sword-steel.

"Do you mean Koumi Rao? Where is he, do you say? Kidnapped? How long has he been missing?"

Staggered as he was by the stranger's lightning change of manner, his knowledge of Koumi's Rao's identity, and the rapid string of questions, Tom managed to keep his wits about him.

"Not more than ten minutes ago, sir, if that," he replied. "Two men in a sidecar outfit—"

"Which way did they go?"

The stranger was backing his car out into the lane even as he spoke.

"Towards Rylcombe," replied Tom Merry. "One of our fellows saw them. He—he gave the alarm." The Shell captain was glossing over Racke's part in the affair as well as he could. "Are you going after them, sir?"

The grim-faced stranger nodded. The car was straightening out in the direction of the village.

"Could—could we come with you?" went on Tom wistfully. "We could explain why Koumi—"

"I know all about it, my boy," interrupted the motorist. "More, possibly, than you do. My visit to your school to—"

day was regarding Kouri Rao. I am a sort of Secret Service man, you see, and I've been put in charge of this affair by the Home Secretary. But it's not a boy's job. I'm afraid I can't—Wait a minute!" he broke off. "I've just remembered. Who were the boys who rescued Kouri Rao when he was attacked in some woods near here?"

"I was one, sir," replied Tom Merry. "And some of the others are here."

"Humph! Well, you seem to be likely youngsters, by all accounts. Seven of you, weren't there? Well, if you like you can pile into the car, but keep at the back and well down. There may be some shooting before we're through."

Manners and Lowther were missing, having gone to inform Kildare and Darrell of the startling news, so that only five juniors were able to take advantage of the invitation. They tumbled aboard joyously, Study No. 6 in full force, and Tom Merry, who was deeply regretting the absence of his chums, but realising that it was impossible to waste time waiting for them.

The car flashed off down the road, leaving an excited crowd clustered round the school gates.

They picked up the trail of the fugitives in Rylcombe, where the reckless pace at which the sidecar had been driven down the main street had attracted general attention.

Clear of Rylcombe, the big car leapt along the road. Through five or six villages and one small town they passed, slowing down to make inquiries upon occasion.

From the direction the fugitives were taking it seemed certain that they were making for the coast, where, in all probability, a vessel of some sort was awaiting them. So, at least, the Secret Service man conjectured.

Tom Merry was the first to catch sight of them. The big grey car was just commencing the descent of a long, steep hill when the Shell skipper sprang to his feet with a cry, and pointed to a speeding dot—that was visible on the road that ran like a pearly-grey ribbon through the country below.

"It's them sure enough!" shouted Blake excitedly and ungrammatically. "And they're not more than a mile and a half ahead—if that! Put it on, sir!"

The driver crouched over his wheel, in the shelter of the wind screen, while the juniors huddled in the rear of the car out of the way of the tearing wind that made breathing a sheer impossibility as they plunged down the hill and along the level road. The trees of a roadside spinney went by with the appearance of a wooden fence.

When Tom Merry ventured another survey, with the wind beating against his face like blows from something solid, it was to see the motor-cycle and sidecar plainly visible a few hundred yards ahead. It was being rapidly overhauled, and by this time it was certain that the men must have known they were being chased.

The man in the sidecar turned, took off his glove, and leaned over the back of the vehicle. Something went whining past over the heads of the car's occupants, and in the same second came the sharp crack of a firearm.

Zipp! Thud!

A second bullet buried itself in the leather upholstery of the front seat. A small hole, with what looked rather like a spider's web surrounding it, had suddenly appeared in the triplex glass of the wind-screen.

The driver turned his head slightly and shouted some unintelligible words. The juniors interpreted them as a warning to keep under cover.

Two more reports, and two more leaden messengers screamed past.

Another report.

The big grey car commenced to lose speed as its engine stopped its song. The man in the sidecar waved his arm mockingly.

With an angry ejaculation the Secret Service man jammed on his brakes. Before the car had stopped he was out of his seat and raising the bonnet. An unlucky bullet had severed the driving chain of the magneto. Two minutes' work would effect a repair, but in the meantime the combination was getting away, and now that the men knew

they were being chased, they might adopt some ruse for throwing their pursuers off the track.

"Well, of all the luck—" began Blake disgustedly.

"I—"

"Listen!" said Tom Merry, holding up his hand.

The noise of motor engines could be heard behind them. The juniors turned eagerly. Two motor-cyclists were coming down the road towards them. As they drew near they commenced to slow down.

"Great Scott! It's Kildare and Darrell!" shouted Blake.

"And Manners and Monty!" gasped Tom Merry, catching sight of the pillion riders. "Hurrah!"

"Don't stop!" yelled Digby to the two prefects. "The rotters are only a little way ahead."

Kildare had taken out his clutch and throttled down his engine until it was just ticking over. He snapped out a couple of questions, grasped the situation, and, with a word to Darrell, at once closed his fingers over the controls. His engine roared out, as did that of Darrell's, and the two prefects shot off.

The Secret Service man, busy inside the bonnet, seemed oblivious of their passing. He was solely concerned with getting his own machine back into the chase. Possibly he did not consider that the motor-bikes had any chance of overhauling the fugitives, but if that was so he was mistaken. The machines of the Sixth-Formers were no crocks. Though of different makes, both were eight horse-power, specially-tuned sports models, and within three miles of their taking up the chase they were fifty yards behind the combination.

Time after time did a bullet scream viciously past them, but the pace was too great for accurate marksmanship, and the prefects simply set their teeth, bent over their handlebars, and let their engines out. The plan they had agreed upon was to get ahead of the combination and block up the road.

It must have amazed the Hindus to see their pursuers go speeding past them, but the manoeuvre became plain to them when Kildare and Darrell, having gained a lead of some two hundred yards, slowed down and swung their machines right across the road.

Manners and Lowther jumped down from the pillion seats. Two seconds later they, with Kildare and Darrell, were taking refuge in the ditch.

The Asiatics, forced to slow down, had started shooting again, and at such short range there was every chance of some damage being done.

The Hindus climbed out of their vehicle, with the obvious intention of removing the obstruction, keeping the schoolboys under cover meanwhile with the menace of the revolvers. Given time, there is no doubt that they would have succeeded. But they were not given the time.

The Hindus had only one desire now—to escape. They were well aware that their pursuers were more concerned with the rescue of Kouri Rao than with their capture. So they kicked into life the two motor-bikes they had just picked up, and went roaring down the road.

Kildare and Darrell, taken entirely by surprise, jumped out on to the road, and stood staring ruefully after them.

"It's all right, you fellows!" called out the Secret Service man cheerily. "We shall have those fellows rounded up in a few hours, bikes and all. And if there's any damage done, you can look to me for its being put right."

Meanwhile, Tom Merry had run to the sidecar, and was already lifting up the limp form of Kouri Rao, who was beginning to recover consciousness.

Within an hour they were back at St. Jim's, where a wildly-excited, cheering crowd came pouring out to meet them.

The two Hindus, as the Secret Service man had predicted, were soon captured by the police, and suitably dealt with.

Racke's part in the affair never came to the ears of the Head.

No doubt none of the fellows who did know of it would have felt any regret had Racke's villainy come to light, and resulted in his expulsion, but there was the good name of the school to consider—as well as the inevitable effect upon the peace of mind of the venerable Head.

So they took his punishment into their own hands, and a Head's flogging would have been infinitely preferable to what Racke underwent. It was undoubtedly the record ragging of St. Jim's whole history.

And in the issue of the "Wayland Advertiser" which appeared on the following Wednesday, the House Committee of the Wayland Hospital gratefully acknowledged the receipt of fifty pounds from an anonymous donor.

THE END.

(There will be another topping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE!" By Martin Clifford. Don't miss this splendid number, which will also contain the opening chapters of a magnificent racing serial.)

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"FAN-TAN ONE EYE"

A TALE OF THE FORMOSAN PIRATES.

by Edmund Burton
& Captain Reginald Glossop.

CHAPTER 1.

The End of Wang Tsu—A Strange Request.

WANG TSU wiped away the blood streaming from a deep gash in his shoulder—one of many wounds—and gazed steadily at the towering figure before him.

"It is the end," he said quietly, his mask-like face betraying no hint of the agony he must have been suffering. "The end—and you, Wung Loo, have conquered; but before my spirit takes its flight to the shades, may I beg a favour?"

The powerful Chinese standing near the door of the junk cabin nodded assent. He was a fine figure of a man, gaudily attired, though his face was evil—as evil as one would have expected the face of Wung Loo, most dreaded of Formosan pirates, to be. Nor was his expression improved by the loss of his left eye in some former engagement.

"Speak on!" he commanded. "We have conquered, as you say, and all this ship contains is ours. Your crew are dead, or so badly wounded that none will likely recover. But you resisted us well, and for that, Wang Tsu, I would listen to your request!"

Terrible though Wung Loo's reputation was, his bravery could never have been doubted, even by his enemies, and that was perhaps why he secretly admired valour in others.

"Then, hearken!" said Wang Tsu, leaning back weakly against the cabin wall. "Aboard this craft—in the next compartment—are a youth and a maiden. The boy is white; the girl a Eurasian. They are the sole survivors of some disaster which occurred in these waters a little while back, and I have adopted them. I found them lashed to a spar, tossing at the mercy of the waves. Promise me, Wung Loo, that you will spare their lives, and also that you will let the girl have that mirror." He pointed to a handsome glass, framed in Japanese lacquer-work, hanging on the wall. "It is an heirloom—of little value in itself beyond that—and I would that she possessed it as a memento of me. Almost all the rest you have taken, and you will find the cargo a rich one."

"And that is all you desire?" Wung Loo said, stroking his chin.

"That is all—save, perhaps, that I may have a few minutes' speech with the children before—" Wang Tsu paused. "If you can grant me this additional favour, my conqueror, I shall indeed be happy."

For answer Wung Loo strode towards a narrow door in the partition and thrust it open. In a smaller cabin beyond, a boy and a girl clung together, still panic-stricken at the sounds of deadly strife which had only recently subsided. The pirate beckoned to them, and they came haltingly forward, their wonder changing to compassion as they beheld the sorely stricken condition of their foster-father.

"Nay, grieve not, my children," Wang Tsu said weakly, for it was plain that he could not last many minutes more. "I have lived my life, and now I die as I had hoped to die—at sea. My ancestors sailed these waters for centuries; but that scarcely

matters. Listen, carefully, both of you! Your lives are to be spared—at least, I believe so—and you are to take that Japanese mirror yonder with you. Guard it as you would your life, for upon it the whole future of both of you may depend."

The last words Wang Tsu addressed specially to the girl, dropping his tone to such a low pitch that what he said was quite inaudible to Wung Loo; but further converse was prevented by the approach of the latter at that moment.

"Your ship sinks rapidly, Wang Tsu. Therefore, I can delay here no longer," he said. "It is your wish that you remain aboard, or shall—"

"Ay, that is my wish," the other cut in, with characteristic Oriental calm. "It matters little either way. But the children. Have I your solemn promise that they shall be saved?"

Wung Loo nodded briefly.

"They shall be saved, also the mirror upon which you seem to place such uncommon value."

"As an heirloom only."

The tall Celestial shrugged his shoulders.

"It matters not to me," he said, moving towards the cabin door, where the stairs outside already showed a trickle of water descending from the deck above.

"It is well," Wang Tsu murmured, as the two children departed in the wake of Wung Loo—two wondering children, who, nevertheless, were old enough to know Wung Loo's reputation, and inwardly fear for the future.

Ten minutes later Wang Tsu had sunk into the depths, with his own junk for his coffin, and nothing remaining to tell the tale of yet another foul swoop by the prince of Formosan pirates—nothing, rather, except the two children, who knew sufficient to understand the wisdom of a silent tongue.

CHAPTER 2.

The Rich Junk Owner!

THE years passed by swiftly, and the kind-hearted Wang Tsu at length became but a cherished memory to the pair he had taken under his wing. The girl, whom Wang had called Sing Loo, was now in San Francisco, and the boy, whose name, from certain marks discovered on his clothing when rescued from the sea, appeared to be Gray, had been sent to Pekin.

For Wung Loo, strange as he was, had so taken a fancy to the young couple consigned to his care under peculiar circumstances, that he decided they should be educated, so that they might be of better use to him later in the management of his affairs.

Wung Loo never went to sea nowadays. He had since retired from active participation in piracy, and, instead, had turned his attention to a gambling-den which he ran at a place on the nearest point of the Island of Formosa to the coast of China. He ran it with considerable success, too, for he was surely one of the most astute and cunning persons who ever breathed in the warm winds of the Pacific.

"Fan-tan One Eye," as Wung was familiarly known, was dreaded even by the pirates who infested the channel, for his

cruel record and terrific strength were common knowledge with all classes. As a consequence, in addition to what he drew from his gambling saloon, many another valuable slice of plunder found its way into his possession. In fact, Wung Loo had only to ask in certain quarters to receive what he asked for, and it was little wonder that he found these days at least as prosperous as those when he was in the habit of taking his toll at the knife-point.

As time went on, Loo waxed richer and richer. Every week-end when the rovers from the seas, and the farmers, agents, and what-nots gathered in the town, money—and blood—flowed like water, although Fan-tan One Eye would seldom permit the bloodshed to occur on his premises, which were kept with scrupulous care. Lacquer, jade, and valuable porcelain ad lib decorated the ten rooms of the eating and gaming house, whilst his former crew, trained to the letter and minute, served their master as faithfully now as in those days when they were willing to slit a throat or sink a ship at the barest inclination of his head.

There was nothing that would appear to be out of order in One Eye's joint; but, it should be remembered, everything is quiet in China until the trouble starts; then it is Hades let loose.

Oh, yes, Loo was very astute. Not only did he keep his place to all outward appearances respectable, but he took good care to see that the winnings went where they would be most useful to himself. He would often permit, for example, one man in thirty to go home with a small fortune, especially if the player in question came from a neighbourhood where the "honesty" of Wung Loo's gambling saloon would be talked about to advantage.

It was just when Fan-tan One Eye decided to recall Sing Loo from "Frisco, to help him manage his books and accounts, that a newcomer came to try his luck at the saloon—a young and wealthy Chinese junk owner, Lou Low by name.

Sing Loo soon got to know him, and to admire him, for in Lou Low she found something different to that which she had found in other men she had met on her travels. And, to make a long story short, the regard was mutual. The young junk owner was enraptured by the petite Sing Loo from the first moment he set eyes upon her trim figure as she flitted about the richly decorated gambling-rooms.

They met frequently after that, with the usual result. Each discovered the other to be just what both had been waiting for. And then came the climax.

Wung Loo, who had been cunningly watching these little interludes, began to fear for the success of a certain plan he had formed. So long as Sing Loo's bright eyes watched her lover, and all he did, it would be difficult to clean out this newest and richest patron, so the girl was sent away on a trumped-up mission for an hour or two, during which Lou Low was freed of all he carried on his person, and more besides.

Sing Loo returned later, to find the gambling-den almost deserted, and her lover gone.

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"Where is he—the illustrious Lou Low?" she asked of One Eye.

"Oh, he has departed for the present," Wung Loo replied, adding confidently: "But he will return—ay, he will return. They always do."

That his prophecy was sound was proved a few nights later by the entrance of Lou Low once more. He sat down at one of the tables, and immediately started playing. So far, he had not seen the girl, whom he doubtless believed was still absent; but she was there, watching him from behind a velvet curtain, and as she watched a plan formed in her astute brain. They would rob this young man again; they would rob him and rob him every time he came, until he was as poor as any beggar on the street—unless she prevented it.

Rapidly she took stock of the room. The game in progress was played with a ball, numbered squares, and a wheel, not unlike roulette, and Fan-tan One Eye was, as usual, in charge of the proceedings.

Swiftly Sing Loo retired, to reappear presently with a brimming cup of some native drink.

"You look fatigued, honourable guardian," she said. "Pray drink of this. 'Tis hot here."

One Eye quaffed the liquor greedily, then set down the empty vessel with a sigh, and continued his manipulation of the gaming-wheel.

Presently, however, his head began to nod drowsily, and finally it fell forward, as One Eye dropped into a sound slumber. Sing Loo was at his side in an instant, and beckoned to a couple of attendants.

"Your honourable master has been too busy of late, and has overtired himself," she said. "Bear him to his couch, whilst I take his place here until he wakes."

CHAPTER 3.

The Wit of Sing Loo—Suspected—Within an Ace—Secret of the Mirror!

THIS order was at once carried out, the Eurasian girl then turning her attention to the gaming-wheel, which she sent spinning rapidly.

From that moment onwards Lou Low's luck changed. He won and won, piling up his

store of counters with such extraordinary good fortune that the other players, who were losing as rapidly as Lou was winning, began to exchange questioning glances.

Just at that moment the swing door was thrust open, and a tall, well-built youth entered. His face was deeply tanned, yet his features were unmistakably European, and his smile was frankly British as he strode towards the girl at the head of the long table. Lou Low, puzzled, half rose from his seat.

"You!" Sing Loo cried, in surprise. "Why have you left Pekin?"

Young Gray smiled afresh.

"To see you," he answered. "I got leave unexpectedly, and as you had mentioned in your last letter that you were coming back from San Francisco, I— Stay! What's the trouble?"

The lad paused, and glanced anxiously round the assembly, and small wonder that he did so, for almost every man present had drawn a weapon, and all eyes were focused upon Sing Loo and the young Chinaman, whose pile of winnings had swelled to such gigantic proportions.

"She cheats us, friends—this girl of Wung Loo's!" a metallic voice suddenly cried; and as a match sets fire to a powder-train, a blaze of fury ran round the throng.

In an instant Gray found himself fighting back to back with Lou Low—fighting to save the girl who was dear to them both from what seemed certain assassination.

Then the velvet curtain was savagely torn aside, and into the soft glow of the lantern light staggered the swaying figure of Fan-tan One Eye, the drug at length having somewhat relaxed its grip, and given him power to understand things, however vaguely. The heaving throng in his gambling-hall swept away the last shreds of doubt from his brain, and he realised everything.

"Sing Loo!" he gasped thickly, his solitary eye suddenly blazing like a live coal. "So this is how you show your gratitude! Because you love yonder man"—he pointed a long-nailed finger at Lou Low—"you would rob my other patrons on his account! Shame! Shame! I brought you here and had you educated, and now you turn upon the hand that feeds you! I am to be pitied!"

Wily Wung Loo! Now that the gaming-

wheel had been found to be capable of manipulation, according to the controller's desire, he was anxious to save his own reputation by putting all the blame on the Eurasian girl, even though it might cost her her life. Sing Loo could never be of any further use to him, now that she had blundered like this, and given the game away.

In an instant all was pandemonium. The temporary check which the reappearance of Fan-tan One Eye had put upon the passions of the mob could not hold them for long, and they surged forward like a human wave. Gray's hard fist connected with a yellow face that seemed about to be thrust into his own, whilst Lou Low, who had drawn a short dagger, was also busily occupied in the defence of the girl he had learned to love.

But it could not last. A score of talon-like hands were clutching at the clothing of the trio, and almost dragging them down, when a sudden, panic-stricken cry arose from the rear. Someone had kicked over a lamp, and the flames were already licking the velvet curtains that draped the walls of the gambling-hall.

In that moment the hard-pressed three were forgotten. The crowd, fearful now for their own safety, were fighting like wild beasts to reach the exit—some of them, indeed, jamming tightly in the narrow doorway as they strove to push their way through. Swiftly Gray's hand closed over Sing Loo's wrist.

"Come! There must be another way out," he said. "Where is it?"

"I shall show you!" she panted. "But first, we were almost forgetting something."

"What is that?"

The Eurasian girl glanced warily round.

"The mirror of Wang Tsu," she replied. "He told me to guard it as I did my own life, though why I have never found out, although the glass has never left my keeping. Come—quickly!"

She led the way through a series of passages, finally pausing at the door of a small apartment, where very little of the smoke had so far penetrated. Here she unhooked the Japanese mirror from its nail in the wall, and hastened ahead, followed by her two companions, until they gained the open via a side door, which emerged on a narrow street—a safety exit, possibly, in case a raid was ever made on the gambling-saloon.

Here a strange thing happened. Reaction now setting in after the nerve-racking experiences of the past half-hour, Sing Loo, suddenly feeling faint, swayed against the wall, the precious mirror slipping from her grasp, and smashing to fragments on the cobbles below!

For a moment all three contemplated the damage in consternation; then Gray, uttering a peculiar cry, stooped swiftly and picked up a folded piece of paper from the wreckage—a paper which had evidently been concealed between the mirror itself and its back-board.

Tremblingly he opened the square out, an amazed light dawning in his eyes as he read the contents by the aid of a lantern swinging just overhead, for it was nothing less than the last will and testament of the deceased Wang Tsu, by which Gray and Sing Loo equally shared all of which he had possessed—his remaining junks, house property, investments, and so forth, which, he having been a childless widower, still awaited a claimant.

This has been rather an unusual story, yet it ends in the usual way—with a wedding. For Sing Loo married her rich suitor, Lou Low, shortly afterwards, and the pair started on their honeymoon on the same day as young Gray left for England in order to try to trace his relatives, should any still be living.

As to Fan-tan One Eye, he perished in the conflagration that consumed his gambling-den. He might easily have escaped, but for the greed which was second nature to him, and he stayed just too long in his attempt to save his ill-gotten gains from the licking tongues of flame that advanced with each passing second.

He had, in fact, barely shouldered his last load, and was half way to the exit, when the roof crashed inwards amid a shower of sparks, and a tall pillar of smoke marked the funeral pyre of Wung Loo, the Wicked.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's bumper number of the GEM, chums, containing a grand story of Tom Merry & Co., a topping adventure yarn, and the opening chapters of a grand new racing serial.)



In an instant, Gray and Lou Low found themselves fighting back to back against the surging mob. Then suddenly the velvet curtain was savagely torn aside revealing the swaying figure of Fan-tan One Eye!

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The MYSTERIOUS IVORY TRAIL.



In the hunting grounds of the scoundrelly Khamis Mursal, Ted Fawcett, in company with his uncle, makes a discovery more welcome than all the ivory and gold in the world.

By CECIL FANSHAW.

CHAPTER 1.

The Mysterious Message!

THE buck are getting mighty scarce! Maybe lions are about and have driven them off."

The speaker, Ted Fawcett, a well-built British youth, whose bronzed face and clear eyes told of healthy living, gazed wearily across the green expanse of downland.

But there was no sign of game; so, with a grunt of disgust, the lad shouldered his rifle, swung round, and started for home. He little thought that, within very few minutes, he was to encounter a far mightier beast than a bush buck or hartebeest—with astonishing consequences.

Ted, who had no parents, worked on his uncle's estate, a farm of several thousand acres, situated in the Highlands of British East Africa.

As soon as he had left school Ted had come straight out from England to help his uncle, old Seth Fawcett. But that was over a year ago, and young Ted had learnt a lot about natives and farming in that time.

The sun, a red ball of fire, was sinking behind the forest-clad hills as Ted started for home. And the lad was not in a very good mood. For, that morning, being in need of meat for themselves and their "boys," Seth Fawcett had told his nephew to take his rifle and try for a buck.

All day the lad had tramped over rolling country, at times forcing his way through dense cedar forests, but not a buck had he seen. Something seemed to have scared them away.

Ted, plodding slowly homewards, was just about to enter a patch of tall elephant grass, when suddenly, close at hand, there arose an appalling yell. It was followed immediately by an earth-shaking roar.

Ted stopped dead in his tracks, then he whirled round, his rifle at the ready. To his right, a few yards away, the high grass shook and trembled, as if some gigantic struggle was taking place within.

Again came the wild shriek—a scream of human agony—and the roar died down to a rasping snarl. The grass waved and fluttered violently.

Ted clenched his teeth, pushed out his rifle-barrel in front of him, and hurled himself in the direction of the sound.

As he burst through the jungle of

grass-stems an alarming sight met his eyes.

A few feet away, stretched flat on his back, lay a big Masai, and over him stood a full-grown lioness. It was the native's screams that had drawn Ted, but now the man lay inert, seeming unconscious.

Ted halted, catching his breath. It was impossible to use his rifle without hurting the man.

At Ted's hurricane arrival the lioness swung up her gleaming yellow head. Her ears lay back flat, her yellow eyes glared at the boy, and from her frothy, sawing jaws issued a deep growl.

As Ted paused the beast crouched, her head sank lower, but her eyes still flashed fury. A yard of tail lashed angrily from side to side. Then came another growl—a menacing roar—and the spell was broken.

To avoid hitting the man, Ted flung himself flat, thrusting up his rifle at the cruel, gaping jaws, simultaneously pressing the trigger.

The crash of the explosion seemed as one with a deafening roar. Ted had a vague vision of a tawny mass hurtling above him, and then heard a dull crash in the dense grass behind.

It was followed by a fearful worrying-rending sound, a mighty commotion amongst the screen of six-foot grass; then silence.

Somewhat shaken, Ted scrambled up, proceeding cautiously to investigate. He parted the jungle with his rifle.

There lay the lioness, stone dead, with the back of her head blown to pieces. But so tenacious of life is a lion that, for quite a minute after receiving the death wound, her flailing paws would have killed anything within reach.

Ted, not being new to Africa, had known that and acted accordingly. Satisfied that she was now dead, he turned back to the Masai.

The savage, a magnificent specimen, clad only in a blanket, was just sitting up, a dazed expression on his not unhandsome features. His left arm was badly gashed.

"Wow, bwana (master)!" exclaimed the fellow in Swahili, as his eyes fell on Ted. "Did you slay the lioness? That was fine work!"

"Why did she attack you?" asked Ted. "They don't usually."

"True, bwana," replied the man quietly, scrambling to his feet. "But as I was forcing my way through the grass I came on three half-grown

cubs. They fled, snarling. Instantly, from behind, came their mother, like a yellow thunderbolt. She hurled me down, dashing my spear from my hand. As I fell I shouted, but my head struck this stone, and I knew nothing more."

In proof of his words, the imperterable Masai picked up his bent spear, hammering it straight with the stone he had indicated. This finished, he allowed Ted to bind up his arm, meanwhile pouring out thanks and congratulations.

"Where were you going?" asked Ted. And suddenly noticing that, all the time, the Masai had been tightly clenching his right fist, he added: "What have you got there?"

The Masai clenched his fist tighter, and his eyes snapped.

"I was going to the house of Bwana Fawcett," he replied, "to the big bungalow behind yonder hills. Perchance you know him?"

"He is the brother of my father, who died up near Abyssinia," answered Ted quietly. "If you have a message for him, give it to me. I will deliver it."

The Masai gaped.

"Bwana Fawcett is thy uncle!" he exclaimed. "Assuredly, bwana, when you saved me from the lion you did a better deed than you guessed. But my message—No! I can only deliver that to the big master himself. But it may have great import for thee, also."

"All right," laughed Ted. "Come along, then. It's nearly dark, and the country must be full of lions—a wandering troop, perhaps. Anyway, all the game have been scared away."

Ted started off to lead the way home. But as he went he thought.

"This fellow must have a mighty important message if he won't trust it to me! And, by Jove, he managed to hang on to it even after the lioness had knocked him down! It's mighty mysterious!"

An hour after sundown they reached Seth Fawcett's land. And shortly afterwards, passing through a strip of cedar-forest, they emerged into a fair-sized clearing.

In the centre stood a one-storied bungalow, with a thatched veranda running round three sides of it. The veranda was lit by a hanging lamp, and under the lamp, stretched out in a long chair, sat a tall man.

The yellow circle of light fell on his

strong face, adorned with a full brown beard just streaked with grey.

"Hallo, uncle!" cried Ted, as he reached the veranda steps. "I've brought a Masai along, who says he's got a message for you. I—er—came across him just about sundown—"

Ted broke off, gazing at his uncle amazed. For in one bound Seth Fawcett quitted his chair, sprang down the steps, gripped the Masai by the shoulders, and stared eagerly into his face.

"You know him?" began Ted weakly. "Yes!" shouted his uncle. "It's Wyfangi! He was my gun-bearer ten years ago! On the trip when—"

Seth Fawcett stopped abruptly, and whirled again on the Masai, speaking to him in his own dialect. Ted knew Swahili, the common tongue of East Africa, but the Masai language was Greek to the lad. He just gaped.

But Wyfangi's face creased in a grin of pleasure. He opened his right fist, revealing a folded green leaf, and this he pressed on to Ted's uncle.

Ted saw that it was covered with tiny red scratches.

"Can it be possible?" exclaimed Seth Fawcett a moment later, bolding the leaf at arm's length and staring at it with bulging eyes. "Or is it a trick—a joke?"

"I had the leaf from my chief, bwana," broke in the Masai, explaining, "who had it from his brother. It has passed through many hands. But my chief says that the writing on that leaf is true. Moreover, he knew that I was once your gun-bearer, therefore he ordered me to give you the message—to you only!"

"What's it all about, uncle?" Ted put in. "Why all the mystery? What's the writing mean?"

"It means, my lad," rapped out Seth Fawcett, "that we're probably in for a three months' trek—or more. But wait a moment."

"Listen, Wyfangi!" he continued eagerly, turning again to the Masai. "Can you guide us? And can you bring twelve spearmen to help? Many cattle will be your reward if we succeed."

The big Masai made a gesture of disdain.

"I seek no reward, bwana," he answered. "All you ask I can and will

do. Ay, anything to help my old master. My chief, Ganeza, who has not forgotten you, will doubtless furnish the spearmen."

"Right!" shouted Ted's uncle. "Then return forthwith to Ganeza. Give the chief my greetings, and thank him for sending the message. Then ask for the loan of the warriors. With them return in four days. We will be ready, and—"

and—"

Seth Fawcett, who had been too excited to notice anything, suddenly noticed the Masai's bandaged arm. Wyfangi briefly explained what had happened, and his sombre eyes glowed as he pointed to Ted as his rescuer.

"Shot the lioness, did you, Ted?" cried Seth Fawcett, clapping his nephew on the shoulder. "Magnificent! And you'll probably find that in saving Wyfangi's life you did the best day's work you ever did in your life."

"Yes, bwana," broke in Wyfangi. "Had the white youth not arrived in the nick of time my message could never have been delivered."

With that, the tall Masai turned about and stalked swiftly out of the moonlit glade. Seth Fawcett crammed the mysterious leaf into his pocket, and stood staring after him, lost in thought.

"Well, uncle," broke in Ted, "what's it all about? What's written on that leaf? I gather you're going on a long trip, and jolly well taking me, too, I hope!"

Brought back to earth, Seth Fawcett swung round on his nephew.

"Yes, Ted," he cried, "I am going on a long trip, possibly to the borders of Abyssinia, and you shall certainly come, for more reasons than one. It may prove a wild-goose chase, but from what I know of Wyfangi it probably isn't. That fellow used to be my gun-bearer, and I had him and a score of Masai up in Somaliland about ten years ago. Ganeza was there, too, but he wasn't a chief then."

Ted's uncle paused for breath, then continued:

"We were elephant hunting, but didn't get any. Instead, we nearly got massacred. Well, to cut the yarn short, we were attacked by a gang of Somalis and Arabs under a blackguard called Khamis Mursal.

"I saved Ganeza's life, and now he's a

Masai chief he hasn't forgotten it. It seems he's heard of a great 'find,' and thinks it would be worth my while to follow it up. I know I never told you the yarn before, but—"

"But what's the message say, uncle?" burst out Ted. "Does it say where this 'find' is?"

"Yes, yes. And now no more questions. Wait and see!"

Seth Fawcett turned about, and started back up the veranda steps. But his nephew kept alongside.

"Hang it all, uncle!" cried the lad. "Why this mystery? What is the 'find'? Is it gold—or ivory?"

"Oh—er—ivory!" exclaimed the elder man, plainly flustered. "Yes, ivory—of a sort."

And that was all Ted got out of him. For his uncle shut up like a clam, refusing to answer any more questions.

But most of that night Ted puzzled over the riddle. Then, just as he fell asleep, he thought he had struck the solution.

"I've got it," the lad told himself. "Uncle's following up that old yarn about some chief who's supposed to have an ivory stockade. And probably it isn't made of elephants' tusks at all, but polished wood. He won't tell me, in case it's all a 'frost,' and he gets mighty touchy if he finds he's on a wild-goose chase. Well, anyway, I guess we'll have a jolly good shooting trip."

And, chuckling at his own smartness, young Ted fell asleep.

CHAPTER 2.

On the Track!

BOOM! Boom!

The roar of an elephant gun rang out suddenly, splitting the silence of the sun-scorched bush. Followed a wild trumpeting, then a mighty thud. Then the scrub parted, and two wild-looking figures stepped forth.

They wore turbans and torn, faded robes that might once have been white. But in their brown hands they clatched modern cordite rifles.

"That was a straight shot, Bilal!" exclaimed the taller of the two in Arabic. "Now get thee to that village by the stream. Tell the black dogs within that Khamis Mursal has had an elephant slain for them. Bid them come and feast. Forget not to tell them that, in return for the meat, I only need the tusks carried a two days' march. Go quickly! Meanwhile, I will make things ready."

The smaller Somali salaamed. "Effendi (sir)," he exclaimed, "the orders of Khamis Mursal shall be instantly carried out."

Then the thorn-bush swallowed the man up. Khamis Mursal, on the other hand, stood for a moment by the carcass of the fallen elephant.

He was a tall, angular man, with a straggling black beard, thin, cruel features, and narrow, sinister eyes. By birth half Arab and half Somali, he looked what he was, a callous, vicious scoundrel.

Suddenly, kicking at one of the giant feet, he exclaimed, with a hoarse laugh: "This brute should bring us quite fifty slaves!"

Then he, too, swung away, and vanished into the bush.

But Khamis Mursal did not make for the native village. He went in quite the opposite direction, and soon reached his destination.

This was a fair-sized camp, pitched in

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a clearing in the scrub. It consisted of several grass huts and multi-coloured tents, all of which blended well with the red sand.

About two score Arabs, Somalis, and half-naked savages were sprawling about under the blazing sun, and all were armed to the teeth. While from a "zareba" at the far end came wails and groans.

"Didst not hear my gun?" bellowed Khamis Mursal, in a voice of thunder. "Get hence, sons of Shaitan! The elephant is slain, and speedily the black dogs will gather for the feast. Go! Cut out the tusks and prepare the carcass. We should reap a rich harvest, for the spot is excellent for ambush."

At their leader's shouted commands, the slavers—for Khamis Mursal's men were nothing but a gang of slave-raiders—sprang to their feet.

But some were not quick enough for Khamis Mursal, who dashed amongst them, driving the butt of his rifle into any laggard's ribs.

Five minutes later, leaving a few on guard over the zareba, the motley gang swarmed out into the bush.

Arrived at the carcass of the elephant, they got to work. While some hacked out the big tusks, others ripped open the huge beast's body.

Then, as soon as they were satisfied with their work, they retreated into the bush, lying prone, not without much chuckling and hoarse laughter, which their leader quickly suppressed.

Hardly had the crew of ruffians vanished from sight than a mob of naked savages swarmed into the open space. At sight of the dead elephant they uttered yells of glee, and fell upon it as one man.

They had brought axes and spears, and they swarmed over the dead animal, attacking it in fifty different places at once. Great chunks of meat they hacked off, some even scrambling inside.

Then, with wild whoops of delight, they sat down to feast.

It was a sight that would have disgusted any Englishman. And Englishmen were watching.

High above the level of the plain, on the crest of a great boulder-strewn ridge, and well concealed amongst the scrub, lay Ted Fawcett, his uncle, and twelve Masai spearmen.

The whole party looked travel-stained and worn, for they had been trekking steadily northwards for two months. But at the sight of what was happening beneath them they gritted their teeth and craned their heads forward.

Suddenly, with a gasp, old Seth Fawcett put down his field-glasses and turned to his nephew.

"Got it, Ted!" he growled, pointing. "D'you see that ring of Somalis lying in the yellow grass, watching those mad idiots stuffing themselves?"

Ted nodded, but was none the less puzzled.

"Well," his uncle growled on, "those ruffians are waiting till the savages are so full they can't move! Possibly the meat's drugged; but that's the game, anyway. Then the slavers'll round 'em up and make a big haul. What's more, I could almost swear I've glimpsed Khamis Mursal down there—the very scamp I fell foul of ten years ago!"

"Snakes!" cried Ted, scrambling to his knees. "The same man! Then let's drop down on them!"

But the elder man placed his big hand in the centre of his nephew's back, pressing him down again.



Like a living tornado the attackers whirled into the little camp. The Somalis on guard were taken completely by surprise. With yells of dismay they snatched up their muskets, discharged a volley at the line of invaders, then broke and fled.

At the same time Seth Fawcett shot a meaning glance at Wyfangi. For, unknown to Ted, his uncle had, all the time, intended to come to grips with Khamis Mursal. And Wyfangi, the Masai, had been pretty certain he could lead the expedition into the scoundrel's present hunting grounds.

"Steady!" cried Seth Fawcett to his eager nephew. "As it happens, I want to meet Khamis Mursal; but there's something else I want a sight more! I reckon the message on the leaf that Wyfangi brought was probably true after all. Leave the handling of this job to me, young fellow!"

Ted dropped prone, thinking his uncle must refer to the hoard of ivory he thought they were seeking. But the lad was completely bewildered.

For, throughout the gruelling trek, Ted had been unable to learn anything more concerning the details of their quest. Wyfangi, also, who acted as chief of their Masai spearmen, had maintained a stolid silence—a silence, it seemed to Ted, imposed by his uncle.

Also, more extraordinary still, their ten Kikuyu porters carried no loads of blankets or brass wire, which might be exchanged for ivory.

Yet the lad knew his uncle would not take ivory by force from savages. How then were they to get any, beyond shooting an elephant or two?

The further they travelled the more mysterious did the ivory trail seem to Ted.

For a while, the Englishmen gripping their rifles, the Masai their spears, they lay watching the grim scene—those gorging savages, and that sinister line of silent Somalis!

Then, suddenly, there was a rustle in the sun-dried grass behind Ted. The

lad looked round, to see one of the Masai, who had been off scouting, crawling forward like a snake.

Right up to Seth Fawcett crept the Masai, then, his eyes glittering, he gasped out:

"Bwana, I have found the slave-hunters' camp. There are but few on guard. If we attack swiftly, before those human vultures return, you may find what you seek."

"Muzuri!" Ted's uncle burst out.

Then he gave the signal to withdraw.

On hands and knees, keeping close to the ground, the whole party withdrew from the crest of the ridge. Once clear of the skyline, invisible to the ruffians below, they sprang to their feet.

Then Wyfangi, leading with the scout, they set out along a bush trail at a smart clip. The Englishmen, scenting battle, set their jaws grimly; and the Masai spearmen emitted fierce grunts and made stabs at the air in vivid pantomime. The unwarlike porters had been left in a safe hollow.

About a mile was soon covered at a swift trot; then they reached the end of the long ridge, rounded it, and struck a fresh trail through the clutching thorn scrub.

Then, all at once, a cluster of dingy tents and yellow grass huts burst on their view.

"The, camp of Khamis Mursal, bwana!" hissed the Masai scout, and his fierce eyes gleamed.

Seth Fawcett nodded calmly, then strung his Masai out in a line.

"No firing, Ted, if it can be helped!" he warned under his breath. "We don't want Khamis Mursal to come charging

* Zareba.—An enclosure surrounded by a fence of thorns.

home—yet!" Then: "All ready? Right! Charge!"

In the still bush the clear, ringing command rang out like a trumpet-call. And, with a sonorous roar, the Masai leapt forward, their brown bodies gleaming and uplifted spears flashing back the sun's rays.

At their heads dashed the two Englishmen, rifles at ready.

CHAPTER 3.

A Great Discovery!

INTO the little camp the attackers whirled like a living tornado, the bush ringing with their shouts.

And the Somalis on guard over the zareba were taken completely by surprise.

With wild yells of dismay they snatched up their muskets, discharged a volley at the line of invaders, then broke and fled.

Two Masai, wounded in the legs, bit the red dust; but the rest swept on, chasing the fugitives into the heart of the scrub.

"Come back!" roared the elder Fawcett. "Don't scatter! Khamis Mursal will be on us directly! Now down with that zareba!"

The orders, shouted in Masai, brought the warriors rushing back. Then the whole party flung themselves on the ring fence of thorns, tearing at the spiked branches with their bare hands.

From within the enclosure arose sounds of Bedlam—shrieks and yells, wails of terror, and cries for pity.

Ted and his uncle were the first to break through the high barricade; and a harrowing sight met their gaze.

At one end of the cruel prison, huddled, crouching on the ground, were nearly a hundred black men and women. All bore marks of savage treatment, and, distraught at the sight of the invaders, they stretched out their hands, appealing for mercy.

"Speak to 'em, uncle!" cried Ted, horrified, halting in the gap they had made. "Tell 'em we won't hurt them."

With one hand upraised, Ted's uncle advanced towards the shivering throng.

"Have no fear!" he cried, in a tongue they seemed to understand. "We have come to free you. Now run—before thy cruel gaolers return!"

The sight of the big Englishman, with his kindly features and bushy brown beard, instilled confidence into the wretches like the touch of a magic wand.

One instant they hesitated, scarcely daring to believe their good fortune. Then, amidst a babel of sounds, uttering shrill cries of delight and jabbering like monkeys, they swarmed out of the zareba.

Past the fierce Masai they ran—a rush of pattering feet, stirring up a cloud of red dust. Then, a moment later, all had vanished into the bush.

The sounds of the fugitives grew fainter and fainter; but Ted was not heeding them. He was staring, amazed, at his uncle.

For Seth Fawcett, clutching at his brown beard with one hand, his eyes dilated with anger and dismay, was glaring round the now empty zareba. Grouped by the gap in the thorn barrier stood the Masai, breathing heavily, but awaiting orders in silence.

Ted found his voice.

"What's up, uncle?" he cried, astounded. "Did you know that gang of slaves was here? Did you come on purpose to free them? Or were you gambling on finding a hoard of stolen ivory as well?"

For a moment Seth Fawcett could not answer. Still tugging at his brown beard, still glaring round, he muttered to himself:

"Was the message wrong? Was there some mistake after all?"

Then, all of a sudden, he became galvanised to action.

"Follow me!" he roared. "Search the huts and tents!"

He whirled round, dashed out of the zareba, and made a bee-line for the nearest tent. Ted was at his uncle's heels, and the Masai, spreading out like a pack of hounds, charged across the scattered camp.

Too late! Before they were half-way across the intervening space there came a wild uproar from the other end of the camp.

Khamis Mursal, warned of the attack by his Somali guards who had escaped, had come charging back to wipe out the invaders, leaving his unsuspecting prey to feast on the dead elephant.

The slavers, aflame with fury, a weird, brightly-clad rabble, a mass of fluttering rags, brown limbs, and flashing weapons, now surged into their camp like a whirlwind. The din, issuing from the fog of stirred-up dust, was indescribable.

An ill-aimed volley screeched and whined over the heads of the Masai and the two Englishmen.

"Fire into the brown!" bellowed Seth Fawcett, and dropped on one knee.

Ted did likewise. Then both poured in a withering hail of bullets.

The effect was magical. Not having been warned that Englishmen were amongst the rescuers of the slaves, the main body of the slavers had only expected to encounter spears.

They soon learnt their error. Half a dozen dropped, and the remainder reeled back, the foremost masking the fire of those in rear.

Before they could rally the Masai were amongst them.

The resistance put up was feeble. After five minutes of half-hearted fighting, the slavers scattered like chaff.

All fled but one; and he, a tall, thin man, his black beard almost red with

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dust, his clothes torn and dishevelled, detached himself from his followers and rushed at the Englishmen.

"Khamis Mursal!" roared Seth Fawcett. "You black-hearted scoundrel! There's many old scores to wipe out!"

Then white and brown man dashed at each other. But before they met, Khamis Mursal, grimly silent, fired from the hip.

Seth Fawcett flung up his arms and crashed on his face.

Instantly Ted clubbed his rifle, and whirling it round his head, charged in. Standing his ground, the ruffian reloaded, but before he could fire the butt of Ted's rifle crashed down on his head. Khamis Mursal slumped to the ground and never stirred.

"Uncle!" cried Ted, swinging round and flinging himself on his knees beside Seth Fawcett. "Speak! Surely—"

Ted's uncle groaned, then sat up and dashed away the blood that was trickling into his eyes.

"I'm all right, lad!" he cried. "That fellow's bullet merely scalped me. We've won! Now search the huts."

Then, to Ted's amazement, his uncle, half scrambling up, darted out a pointing finger, shouting:

"Why, bless my stars! There he is!"

Seth Fawcett ended in a yell of joy. Then, with a herculean effort, he gained his feet. As he stood, pointing over Ted's shoulder, his finger shook, and his eyes snapped and glistened with delight.

Dumbfounded, Ted spun round and saw, emerging from one of the huts, the Masai Wyfangi, on whose arm was leaning an aged white man, clad in a single robe and with a great beard hanging on his chest. His face was the face of a man over sixty, though really he was not yet fifty.

"My old master," exclaimed Wyfangi proudly, "for whom I said I would do anything!"

But Seth Fawcett scarcely heeded the Masai. He sprang forward and gripped the white man's hand, wringing it as if he could never let go.

"Ned!" was all he could exclaim again and again. "Ned! After all these years! So the message on the leaf was right!"

"Thank Heaven you got it, Seth!" breathed the stranger fervently. "Ten years of living death have I had with Khamis Mursal! But who is the lad?" pointing at Ted. "Is it—is it—"

"It is!" cried Seth Fawcett. And he beckoned to the bewildered Ted to draw near, adding: "It was he who struck down the villain who has held you prisoner!"

"Who," stammered Ted, as he approached—"who is this?"

"This is your father, Ted!" the lad's uncle broke in. "My younger brother!"

"Impossible!" cried Ted. "My father died before I was eight years old. They told me he died of fever, somewhere near Abyssinia."

"You were told that, Ted," his uncle explained, "because you were a child, and people wanted to spare you details. What really happened is that ten years ago I was hunting elephant in these parts with your father. Khamis Mursal attacked us with a hundred men and scattered us. After the fight, the next day, we found your father's revolver, hat, and some blood-stained clothes. I searched for a month with the Masai, but found not another trace. A sandstorm had blotted out the raiders' tracks. We had to presume your father killed in the fight, and devoured by some beast of prey."



Crack! Khamis Mursal fired, and Seth Fawcett flung up his arms and then crashed on his face. Instantly Ted charged in, and the butt of his rifle crashed down on the ruffian's head!

"Yet here he is, alive!" cried Ted. "I understand it all now!"

The lad sprang forward, seizing both his father's hands.

"Wow!" exclaimed Wyfangi, with a broad grin. "If the young bwana had not saved me from the lioness my message on the leaf would never have been delivered, and my old master would have remained in the hands of Khamis Mursal!"

Late that night Ted, his father, and his uncle were gathered round a campfire. Guards had been posted, but since the slave raiders had seen their chief slain there was little fear that they would return to attack.

"There's a heap you haven't explained, uncle," said the lad, suddenly withdrawing his gaze from the crackling logs. "To start with, why all the mystery?"

"Because, Ted," was the laughing reply, "I didn't want to raise your hopes and then disappoint you. The message scratched on that leaf—by your father—was so vague. All it said was that a white man, in the hands of Khamis Mursal, begged someone to rescue him."

"You've heard your father's story—how one day he saw a wandering Masai in the slavers' camp, gave him the message, and told him it was for Ganeza, who was with us in the big fight. Ganeza, now chief, passed it on to me, through Wyfangi, as you know. But how could I be certain it was your father after all these years? I thought it a long chance, but would never have told you who I was seeking if I'd been wrong."

"I've got it! You're a tramp, uncle!"

laughed Ted. "But," he added slyly, "why did you say we were after ivory?"

"I didn't!" was the quick retort. "You pestered me, so I said: 'Yes, the Masai's find is ivory—of a sort!' Well, I guessed if we found Khamis Mursal—and Wyfangi was not quite certain of his whereabouts—we'd find black slaves and liberate them, anyway. And we did."

"Well, in Africa slaves are sometimes called 'black ivory.' That's ivory of a sort, isn't it?"

There was a burst of laughter from all three, Ted joining in at his own discomfort.

Then the lad's father took up the tale, telling how Khamis Mursal had kept him alive for ten years because of his skill in working iron and steel. He had kept at the work, never doubting that one day he would win his freedom.

Although he had heard the din when Ted and his uncle assaulted the camp, he had been unable to make known his presence in one of the huts, because he was lying gagged and bound, as a punishment for refusing to help guard the black prisoners.

Ted fell silent; then exclaimed: "I guess it was a jolly mysterious ivory trail—without any ivory in it at all! But I reckon we've done a sight better than if we'd found all the ivory and gold in the world!"

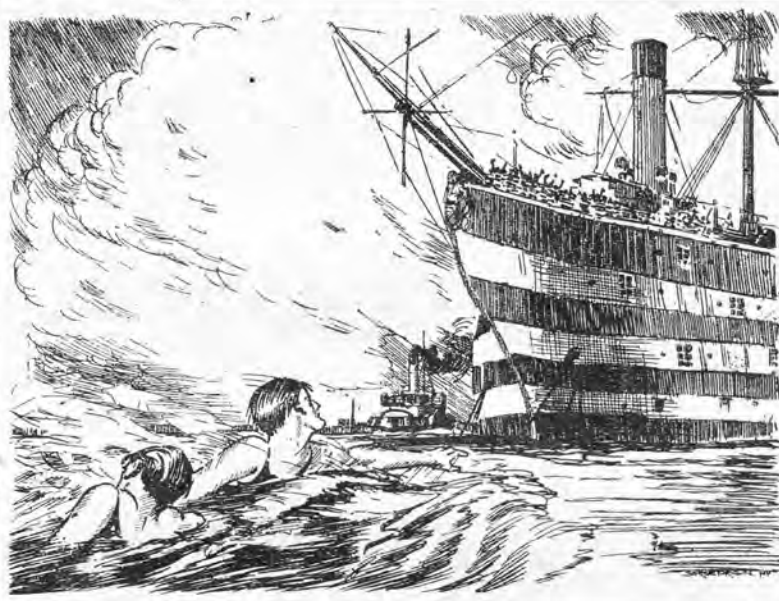
And his uncle heartily agreed with him.

THE END.

(Don't miss the splendid adventure story next week, chums: "WHAT MONEY DID FOR HIM!" by Jack Crichton. It is the most true-to-life story ever written. How Mike Hunter comes into wealth will amaze you all.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 845.

The Conclusion of this Great Story!



TOM OF THE AJAX!

BY
ROLAND SPENCER.

The Most Enthralling Training-
Ship Story Ever Written.

A Close Finish!

TOM GALE, Dicky West, and Hemming made their way to the upper deck. Avalanche and Mrs. Hume were walking on the poop with Commander Boyce. Mr. Cosine was on the upper deck, and came over to speak in a friendly way with Tom. The navigation master, though in the course of his duty he had been largely instrumental in getting Tom disgraced, had been only too glad to learn that Tom had been innocent of the charge made against him.

The great race was timed for three o'clock, and it was five minutes to three now. The course, of two hundred yards, was from the inner boom of the training-ship, round a buoy, and back again. It was a long swim, and promised to be a tough one, although it was taking place at slack-water, before the ebb of the tide.

A door from the mess-deck opened on to the boom, and at a minute before the hour sixteen youngsters in swimming-costumes came running out. A mighty shout went up from the rest of the training-ship youngsters, looking down excitedly from the bulwark high above.

The draw for positions had already been made, and Tom was fairly central, with about five fellows between himself and Hemming. Tom glanced up towards the poop, and, hanging on to the balancing-rope with one hand, he waved the other cheerily to his father and mother, who were watching from there with Commander Boyce and a few other officers.

The sixteen youngsters in swimming-costumes, lithe and strong every one, their well-moulded muscles showing up clearly on their flashing limbs, were a fine picture of athletic manliness. From above Tom heard the voice of Dicky West above the others—Dicky had the lungs of a Thames bargee:

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 843.

"Hoods! Hoods! Go it the Hoods!"

"Nelsons! Nel——"

"What-ho the Raleighs!"

"Blakes! 'Rah for the good old Blakes! Hemming——"

The medley of excited voices suddenly died away. Six bells was already sounding from the break of the poop. Three o'clock! And a moment later a whistle shrilled.

It was the starting-signal, and, with a mighty splash, sixteen flashing forms took the water, diving cleanly from the ten-foot high boom into the swell. Sixteen pairs of arms lashed out, churning the quiet water to foam.

Although every youngster on the Ajax wanted the representative of his own division to pull off the race, everyone was keenly excited in the tussle between Hoods and Blakes for the cup itself, since none of the other divisions were left in the running for the coveted trophy. And as the swimmers thinned out gradually into a long stream, and it was seen that both Tom and Hemming were well to the fore, the excitement grew rapidly.

Tom was swimming with a powerful side-stroke, cutting through the water like a seal. But he was reserving his full energies for later, when the last

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

TOM GALE, C.P.O. of the starboard watch aboard the training-ship Ajax.

DICKY WEST, a cheerful youth, and a staunch chum of Gale's.

STONIKY BURR, a bully of the first water.

KALCHE, a mysterious, sinister man in green spectacles, who enlists the aid of Burr to capture Gale.

AVALANCHE HUME, the famous detective, who, after many thrilling fights, rescues Gale from the clutches of his enemy.

In the chase which follows Kalche's launch is wrecked, and the criminal is drowned.

It is only after this that Hume learns that Gale is none other than his long-lost son.

The happy reunion is followed by sturdy young Hume gaining the honours for his match in the contests for the Avalanche Cup.

(Now read on.)

great tussle would call for every ounce of his skill and strength.

Hemming, barely four yards to his left, modelled his tactics on Tom's. He stuck to the Hood fellow like a leech. Both ignored the half-dozen or so of the swimmers, who had driven ahead with full strength, and were now several yards in front. The Hood and the Blake fellows both realised that those in front could not hope to keep up the terrific pace, and must soon drop behind, exhausted after their ill-judged efforts.

Tom and Hemming shot past the mighty, bluff bows of the Ajax, where the great mooring-chains spread down into the water. Tom abruptly changed his stroke to the Navy-stroke, to minimise as far as possible the slight eddying cross-current that met them, and Hemming did the same. It was the stroke that had helped Tom escape from his enemies over the swift-running waters of the creek in the fens, when he had been captured and taken by Kalche to the lonely house. It helped him now, and with Hemming still keeping grimly level, he began to overhaul without extra effort the swimmers ahead.

The leading man was rounding the buoy now, but still Tom did not increase his pace. He was biding his time; and even when a couple of fellows—Field of the Frobishers, and Porson of the Grenvilles—went driving past, full steam ahead, the Hood youngster was not tempted into a waste of his energies. He knew too much of the game.

Hemming, with the inside berth, had an advantage now. He suddenly forged ahead, just sufficiently to round the buoy a length in front of Tom. From the training-ship the distant shouting swelled out again.

And then Tom, too, was round the bobbing buoy, driving back to the boom. Hemming was still nearly a length in front. He had passed all the swimmers ahead but one; their too early spurt was telling now, and one by one Tom and Hemming left them behind.

With a hundred yards still to go, and his whole frame taut with the strain,

Tom found that he and Hemming were leading, though he could not know for how long they would keep ahead. Half a length separated the two youngsters now, and Hemming seemed to be swimming as strongly as ever.

"I'll overhaul you if I burst!" Tom told himself.

But he realised that he had no easy task cut out for him. The inside position at the start had given Hemming an advantage, and it began to look almost as though he would keep it.

Then Tom spurred.

Hemming, as if instinctively, spurred, too. The two fought their way on with every ounce of strength at their command. The shouting on the Ajax had died away. The onlookers were too intent on watching that grim, dogged struggle for victory.

Tom seemed to be lessening the other's lead; then Hemming drew away from him again. They were very near now.

Tom's head was throbbing, throbbing. He was swimming with the strong side-stroke he had used almost throughout the race. He wondered, had he the strength left to spurt with an over-arm stroke, or would the effort be too much for his tired arms? If he wasted time now in a useless attempt at the over-arm stroke, he knew that the game was up as far as he was concerned.

Already the boom seemed to be towering above them. Hemming was still ahead, breathing painfully, but striking

out hard in spite of the exhausting weariness that had him in its grip. Tom knew that he was beaten unless he tried that over-arm stroke. But could he do it? If he found when too late that he had not got the strength left—

Abruptly he twisted in the water for the other stroke. His arms flashed, forcing him along in spite of the burning ache of his muscles. He saw that he was overhauling Hemming, heard dimly through his water-filled ears the mighty shout that rose from the boys on the Ajax. But the boom was so very near—it seemed impossible that he could pass Hemming before the other had his hand on the looping rope below it.

The next few seconds seemed like hours of almost intolerable agony. He fairly hurled himself out of the water on that last desperate, dogged stroke, felt his hand claw at the rope. Even then he could not tell whether he or Hemming had won, with such a bare hairsbreadth between the two.

But the next minute, as he clung panting to the looped rope that ran along the boom at the water-line, with Hemming gasping a few feet away, he heard the voice of a ship's officer come booming out through a megaphone on the upper deck of the great training-ship:

"Chief Petty Officer Gale of the Hood Division wins!"

A queer thought flashed into Tom's mind, and he smiled even as he thrilled at the words. So they still called him

Gale! Then his eyes met Hemming's. Behind them they could both hear the thrashing of the water as the other swimmers came wearily in. Tired though he was, Hemming swung himself along the rope to Tom's side. He smiled and held out a dripping hand.

"So the Hoods get the Humsa Cup!" he said, still breathless. "Congrattlers, old man!"

Tom, his training all but completed, had not much longer to stay aboard the Ajax. And when he had to make his final choice of a profession, in spite of the vast new possibilities now open before him as the son of Avalanche Hume, Tom did not hesitate for an instant. He chose the sea!

It was six months later that the fine five-masted ship, Golden Thistle, bound for the Southern seas, dropped down the London river in the wake of a fussy little tug one misty evening. As she passed the big, dim shape of the Ajax, two youngsters in brass-bound uniforms leaned eagerly over the ship's bulwarks, gazing across at the training-ship till she was swallowed in the haze.

They were Tom Hume and Dicky West—premium apprentices on the Golden Thistle. And the world was before them!

THE END.

(Don't forget next week, chums, the opening chapters of "RIVALS OF THE RACECOURSE!"—the finest racing story ever told.)



Tuck Hampers and Money Prizes Awarded for Interesting Paragraphs.

(If You Do Not Win a Prize This Week—You May Next!)

All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: **The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.**

THIS WINS OUR TUCK HAMPER! PUZZLE—"WHO'S THE ROGUE?"

Whilst on a visit to London, Wun Fi, a Chinaman, entered a jeweller's and asked to be shown some "welly good watches." The proprietor being absent, the Chinese was attended to by his daughter, who got out three watches, marked respectively £10, £6, and £3 10s., and laid them in a row on the counter. Wun Fi, after looking very closely at them, called the attention of the girl to a watch on a shelf behind her. As she turned to obtain the watch he placed the higher priced watch in the place of the lower priced one, and not caring for the watch now shown him, said: "Me no likee that. I takee cheapee watch." He paid the £3 10s. and departed. Soon the girl discovered the deception, and told her father on his return. "Never mind, my dear," he said, with a smile. "Those watches cost all the same price—£1. But what a rogue that Chinaman must be!" A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious tuck has been awarded to Lewis Stoboff, 56, St. George's Street, Commercial Road, London, E. 1.

BARRACK-ROOM CHATTER!

Scene: Soldiers' barrack-room at dinner-time. Orderly-officer inspecting men's dinner: "Any complaints, men?" Voice from the other side: "Yes, sir." Officer: "Well, what is it?" Voice: "Spuds is bad, sir." Officer: "Spuds is bad, eh? Haw, haw! What does he mean by spuds, sergeant?" Sergeant (glaring at culprit): "The man is ignorant, sir. He means tatties!" Half-a-crown has been

awarded to Thomas Glastenbury, 14, Gelli-Crug Road, Abertillery, Mon.

WAITING FOR IT!

"Hist!" whispered Paddy. He was crouching beneath the sign of the three balls, watchful, alert, and he had no ears for the pleasantries of his old friend, Mike. "Phwat's the mather, Pathvick?" whispered Mike anxiously. "Tell me, Pathrick, phwat is it?" "It's loike this," whispered back Paddy. "It's just twelve months to-day Oi pawned me suit, an' Oi'm told in a twelvemonth it'll run out. Niver a word, Moike! Oi'm shandin' here waitin' to be ready for it as it comes through the doorway!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to William Mitchell, 5, North Shore Street, Campbelltown, N.B.

WHAT WAS HE IN FOR?

"Yes, look at me," said an orator, as he waxed eloquent. "Sixty years of age—never had a day's illness, and can do my four miles an hour! Why? Because, like Mr. Ramsey Macdonald, our new Premier, I've lived a regular life. No luxuries for me, no late hours. Every day, summer and winter, I went to bed at nine, got up at five, lived principally on porridge, worked from eight till one, then dinner, then an hour's walk, and then—" "I say, guv'nor," said a listener, "wot was yer in for?" Half-a-crown has been awarded to A. Yelland, 69, Broadfield Road, Sheffield.

THE WINNER!

A man was boasting to some others he had met that he could take any article from a shop without being detected. One of his hearers bet him five pounds that he could not take a box of chocolates in this way. The man agreed, so they went along to a grocer's shop. "You wait here," said the daring one, "and you'll see." With these words he went into the shop, took a box of chocolates from the counter, and walked out. "There you are!" he said proudly. "I've won the wager!" The stranger smiled. "You're very smart," he answered, "but I happen to be a detective, and I am going to arrest you for stealing." "Wait a bit," said the other coolly. "I happen to be the proprietor of the shop!" Half-a-crown has been awarded to E. K. Trener, 3, Bristol Street, Eastwood, South Australia.

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