

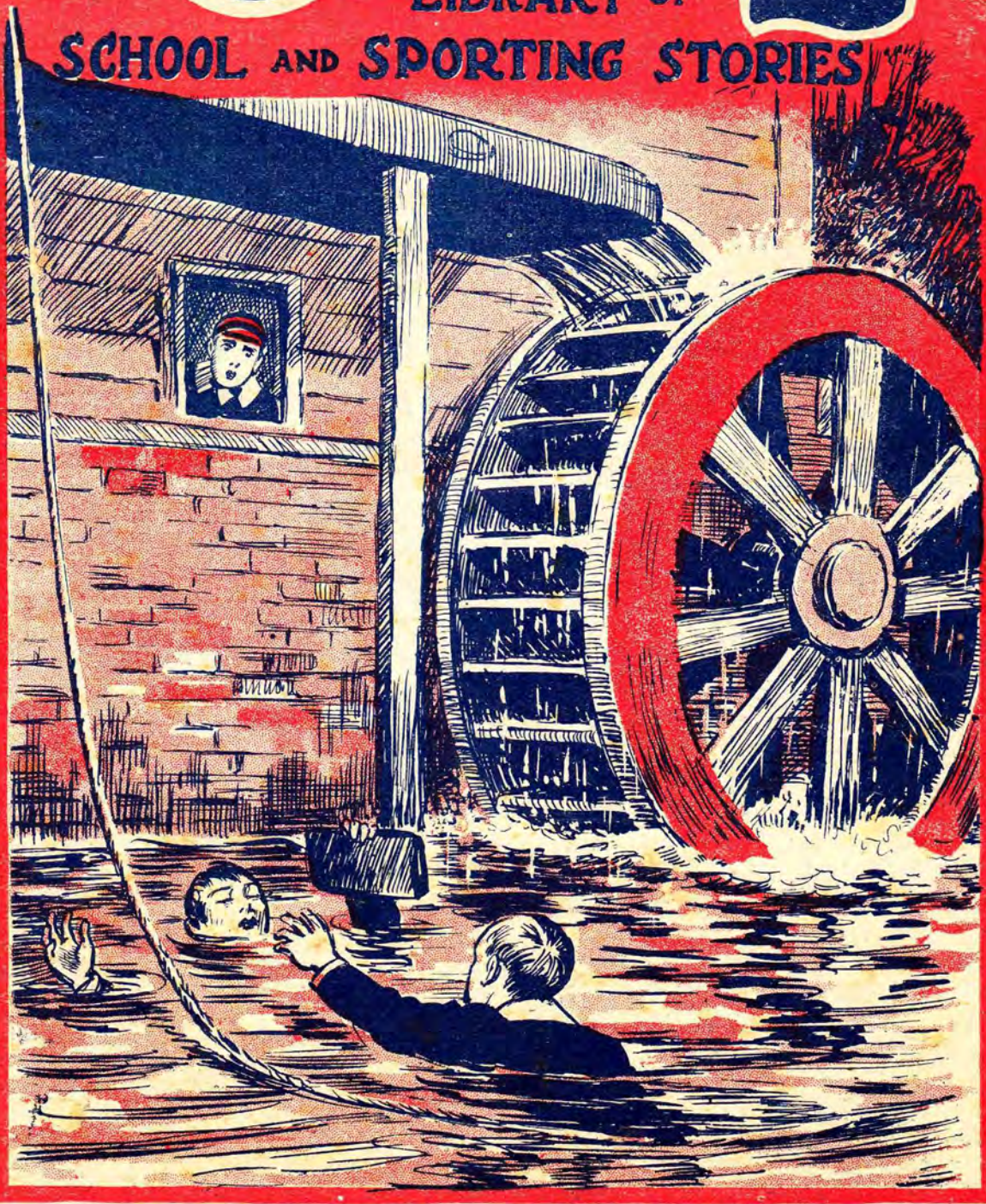
845
THRILLING LONG STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO. IN THIS ISSUE!

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

No. 848.
Vol. XXV.
May 10th,
1924.

LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



KERRUISH'S ATONEMENT!

The plucky Fourth-Former risks life and limb to put right a great wrong! (A thrilling incident from the grand long complete school story: "THE KIDNAPPING OF KERRUISH!" contained in this issue!)



Address all letters: The Editor, The "Gem" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Write me, you can be sure of an answer in return.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS.

"THE BOYS' FRIEND" Every Monday
 "THE MAGNET" Every Monday
 "THE POPULAR" Every Tuesday
 "JUNGLE JINKS" Every Thursday
 "THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL" Published Yearly

MY DEAR CHUMS,—With the boating season in full swing, naturally Mr. Martin Clifford has turned his attention to aquatic matters on the rushing Rhyl. Pretty well everybody is interested in this subject, including Figgins, but I am coming to him in a minute. But boating fascinates lots of people, like punting, which latter has two special attractions. It enables you to show your skill, or you can lounge comfortably on cushions in the punt, and see the other fellow with the punt-pole land himself in difficulties. At St. Jim's, of course, the boating season is regarded very seriously, as will be seen in Mr. Clifford's new yarn arranged for the "Gem" next Wednesday.

"FIGGINS AT FAULT!"

By Martin Clifford.

Excellent as the author's boating tales have been in the past, this beats them all. This extra-special yarn, which is 25,000 words in length, shows Figgins in a quandary. Everybody is always asking what has become of Figgins. If the modest fellow stands aside now and then to let other characters have a chance, at least it will be granted that when he does make his appearances he invariably figures in a very striking fashion. So it is on this occasion. It is a grand story with a strong river interest, and a pretty big surprise to boot, for it is a matter of surprise to find two chums like Figgins and Tom Merry indulging in a serious quarrel. Who is it engineers this feud? There you have another sensation. Things would have been all O.K. had it not been for the mischievous interference of this third party. I am not giving the name of the spoilsport. It will keep. For the rest you have in the new yarn all the fine ingredients which go to make up a real winner. Mr. Martin Clifford is an old boating man, and knows the river from source to mouth.

A HOLIDAY AFLOAT!

A supporter in the North asks me whether he would do well to take a boating holiday this summer. I should say he would be doing a very wise thing, so long as the weather is anything like favourable. A few days passed in exploring the country in such a style are well spent. Of course, you do not want to take the water in some leaky old tub which sends you into liquidation, as it were, on the first day out, but with a trustworthy craft all can be very good indeed. There is plenty of chance for camping out, and you get a peep at the country as would be possible no other way.

"A CHASE IN THE AIR!"

By Martin Walker.

Few recent sensations have equalled the astounding adventures of Dr. Ziglio. A further exploit will be found in the next issue of the "Gem." Dr. Ziglio has brought all the powers of his scientific mind to the business of holding the world at bay. A man of this calibre brooks no opposition.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 348.

He shows the cunning of a spider in the weaving of his web, but, fortunately for the cause of peace and progress, such an enemy working busily in the shadows may find his match. In this remarkable series we see the tremendous fight put up by the detective, Jennifer Pettigrew Wren, the cool, astute, resourceful man who faces deadly peril in the ordinary course of business. Next week's superb yarn bristles with tense excitement. There is a whirl of incident, and in the end you are left with a sense of amazement, akin to awe, as you think over this, the latest episode in the amazing career of the master criminal.

A PLEASANT PICTURE!

We often talk of pictures being conjured up, some good, some the reverse. A particularly pleasant picture is in my mind as I turn to the innumerable letters to hand about the recent competition. Chums write to say that they have won a motor-bike, or some other fine prize, and that it is just what they wanted for the summer holidays. I am very much obliged to the writers of these letters. In my mind's eye I can see them taking trips on the brand-new "jiggers," or snapping picturesque bits of the scenery as they take a walking tour or go camping out.

"RIVALS OF THE RACECOURSE!"

By Andrew Gray.

There are some remarkable developments in the new instalment of this splendid racing serial, which presents so unerringly the life of the racecourse, with its excitement and colour. As a popular hero, Mat Martingale has won an assured position.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

From all the points of the compass entries for this competition pour in, and as the weeks fly by the popularity of the famous feature shows a steady increase. Send in your funniest storyettes. Postcards are best. All entries are carefully considered. They should be marked "Tuck Hamper," and addressed to the Editor, the "Gem," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Your Editor.



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TUCK FOR STAFFS!

"SNUBBED!"

A young man, a member of a certain club, was always singing the praises of his wireless set, until his friends got absolutely "fed-up" with him. One night he arrived at the club and started on the same topic—wireless. "Oh, yes," he said, "I sat up until three-thirty a.m. this morning and got New York." "Oh, that's nothing!" said one of his sarcastic friends. "I sat up till four-thirty a.m., stuck my head out of the window, and got 'Chilli'!" (chilly).—A Tuck Hamper filled with delicious Tuck has been awarded to P. Hickman, Mosspsits, Pelsall, Walsall, Staffs.

THE HIGHER, THE LOWER!

A Scotsman, while staying in London, inquired at an hotel how much it would cost him to stay the night. He was told by the manager that a room on the first floor would be one guinea, the second floor fifteen shillings, and the third floor ten shillings. The Scot walked away without saying anything. The manager, anxious to please, ran after him, and said: "Are my prices too high?" "No," was the reply; "but the house is too low!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Richard Beatty, Oakville, Oak Hill Road, Surbiton, Surrey.

THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH!

In a village school a little fellow was called up to read for the inspector. The boy was a good reader, but gave absolutely no heed to punctuation-marks. When he had finished, the inspector asked: "Willie, where are your pauses?" Willie dropped his book and held up both hands. "Here they are, sir," he cried excitedly. "I washed 'em afore I come to school, honour bright!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Frank Wilson, Belgrave Street, Belmont, West Australia.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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All Efforts in this Competition should be Addressed to: The GEM LIBRARY, "My Readers' Own Corner," Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.4.

Eric Kerruish, who is "on the rocks," adopts a surprising plan to adjust matters, and finds himself in a very uncomfortable position indeed. He acquits himself well, however, in a situation fraught with much peril!



THE KIDNAPPING OF KERRUISH!

A Thrilling New Long Complete School
Story of the Ever-Popular Tom Merry
& Co., at St. Jim's.

BY FAMOUS
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1.

Kerruish in Luck!

"HOW'S the money market?"
Tom Merry of the Shell Form at St. Jim's asked that question in Study No. 10 one Wednesday afternoon.

He and Monty Lowther and Manners—known to fame as the Terrible Three—had just finished writing out imposts for Mr. Linton, their Form master, and they were now free for the rest of the day, Wednesday being a half-holiday.

Monty Lowther turned out his pockets with a lugubrious look.

"Fourpence!" he said, when that operation was over. "And a penny of that has been so battered about that Mrs. Mumble refused it this morning. Say threepence, to be on the safe side."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm worth sixpence, and a French ha'penny with a hole in it!" said Manners.

"H'm!" remarked Tom Merry ruefully. "That's a grand total of one-and-eleven, with the one-and-tuppence that I've got. Two bob if Monty's dud penny can be worked off. Not much for three chaps to go to the pictures on is it?"

"Hardly!" grinned Lowther. "Unless we go in the five-penny seats!"

"Groooogh!" responded Tom Merry. "I don't fancy that much. Look here, kids, we simply must go to the Rylcombe Cinema this afternoon, to see 'Robin Hood.' It's a ripping film, and I wouldn't miss it for worlds. It finishes to-day, Wednesday, you know. So we've got to raise the wind somehow. Let's go along and see Blake & Co. Perhaps Gussy, being a bloated plutocrat, will have a few bob to spare."

"Good egg!"

The chums of the Shell left their study and made their way along to the Fourth Form passage, where Jack Blake & Co. had their habitation.

They had made up their minds to spend the afternoon at the local cinema where the thrilling film, "Robin Hood" was being shown.

Jack Blake & Co. were not at home when they looked in at Study No. 6, so they proceeded downstairs. They saw the chums of the Fourth standing in the School House doorway.

"Hallo, you chaps!" said Blake, as the Terrible Three came up. "We were just talking about you. Going down to the cinema this afternoon?"

"What-ho!" said Tom Merry. "The film's too good to miss! As a matter of fact—"

"We're thinking of going there, too!" said Blake. "Wouldn't be a bad idea to make up a party and go together—what?"

"Topping wheeze!" replied Tom Merry heartily. "If you chaps don't mind—"

"Wathah not, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "We—"

"Ahem!" coughed Tom Merry. "I meant to say, if you chaps don't mind lending us a few bob. We're awfully hard up!"

"Bai Jove!"

Jack Blake & Co. looked rather blank.

"Oh, I say, that's put the lid on it!" exclaimed Herries. "We were just going to ask you chaps if you had any tin. We're stony!"

"Broke to the giddy wide!" growled Blake. "We couldn't raise the price of a packet of popcorns between us! We've been relying on Gussy receiving a fiver. The blithering chump hasn't had one!"

"Weally, Blake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I wefuse to be chawactewised as a blithewin' chump! It isn't my fault that the fivah hasn't awvived. I wrote to my patah last night expressly statin' that the mattah was urgent. I wegard your wemark as most uncalled for, Blake. I must wequest you to wecall it immediately; othahwise I shall be undah the painful necessity of administahwin' a feahful thwashin'!"

"Oh, any old thing! Keep your wool on, Gussy!" said Blake. "The question is, how are we to get to the cinema this afternoon without any money? Things look jolly rotten!"

"I reckon Gussy ought to collect some of his toppers, and fancy waistcoats, and things, and sell 'em in the village, or pawn 'em!" said Digby. "What do you chaps say?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The swell of the Fourth regarded his study-mate severely through his monocle.

"Weally, Digbay, your suggestion is most imposs!" he said. "I wefuse to entahtain such a thing, bai Jove!"

There was a rustle of a gown in the Hall, and next minute Mr. Railton came up.

"Ah, just a minute, boys!" said the Housemaster. "Shall you be going down into Rylcombe this afternoon?"

"We—we hope so, sir!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Then I wish to warn you to be on your guard against a desperate gang of ruffians who have been terrorising the neighbourhood lately," said Mr. Railton. "These desperadoes, according to all accounts, have chosen Rylcombe and its vicinity as the scene of their nefarious activities, and during the past week have carried out a number of burglaries and daylight highway-robberies. The police are doing their best to apprehend them, but till they do so, it is well for everybody to take care not to fall foul of the miscreants. You lads had better be on your guard."

"Very good, sir!"

Mr. Railton nodded and walked away, and the chums of the School House looked gravely at each other.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 848.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "If we did happen to win across the wottahs, deah boys, we'd jollay soon have them undah awwest!"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "But blow the giddy desperadoes and highway-robbers. We've got to get to the pictures somehow, kids. I—Hullo! What's up with Baggy?"

Baggy Trimble came rushing up the School House-steps in a very excited manner. In one of his fat hands a newspaper was clutched. He halted before Tom Merry & Co., his plump visage quite red.

"I say, have you chaps heard the news—"

"Yes; it's stale now, Baggy!" laughed Tom Merry. "You're not first with the information this time, old son. Mr. Railton told us!"

"About Kerruish's pater?" gasped Baggy Trimble.

"Kerruish's pater!" exclaimed Blake. "What about Kerruish's pater?"

"He's a millionaire!" roared the fat youth of the Fourth.

Tom Merry & Co. laughed loudly.

"Baggy, old chap, you're off your rocker!" said the Shell captain, tapping his forehead significantly. "I've watched it coming on for some time, but I didn't expect you to go dotty quite so soon. Where do you feel it most?"

Baggy Trimble glowered.

"Rats! I'm not dotty! It's a fact, I tell you!" he spluttered. "Kerruish's pater is a millionaire!"

"Oh, draw it mild, Baggy!" said Blake. "We all know jolly well that Kerruish's pater isn't a millionaire—far from it, in fact! It's common knowledge here that Kerruish's people are not at all well off—not that that's any shame, of course. What is his pater, anyway—an ordinary stock-jobber in the City, I believe!"

"Yes; but he's made a fortune!" shrieked Baggy, waving the newspaper in the air. "Kerruish's pater has brought off a huge deal, and he's a millionaire now! Read that!"

Baggy handed Blake the newspaper, and indicated a column on the front page. Tom Merry & Co. gathered round to read it. Their eyes opened wide when they beheld the following:

"SENSATION IN THE CITY!

STOCK-JOBBER NETS THOUSANDS!

"Mr. James Kerruish, stock-jobber, of Throgmorton Street, E.C., has, by a clever and unexpected manipulation of Haykati Mine Shares, acquired a vast fortune. These shares, which were considered worthless some months ago, have leaped up in value by leaps and bounds. As Mr. Kerruish holds practically all the existing stock, it is computed that his net haul will be in the region of a figure that will stagger even the wealthiest magnates. Many experts hold the opinion that Mr. Kerruish's shrewd coup will make him one of the richest men in the City. The affair is the talk of the financial world."

Tom Merry & Co. regarded each other in great astonishment.

"My only hat!" gasped Blake at last. "So Kerruish's pater is rich!"

"How weally wippin' for Kewwuish, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I will make a point of congratulating him on his patah's great coup. As a fellow of tact an' judgment myself, I fully appreciate shrewdness in othahs. Oh, heah is Kewwuish, bai Jove!"

Two schoolboy figures crossed the Hall and approached the chums of the School House. They were Eric Kerruish and Harry Hammond, of Study No. 5 in the Fourth.

Kerruish looked very different from of old.

He was usually quite an ordinary junior, who never figured much in the affairs of the school. A decent, steady-going fellow, he was well liked by Tom Merry & Co. Never blessed with much pocket-money, and with no special trait in his character to make him prominent, Kerruish was not exactly one of the shining lights of St. Jim's.

But this afternoon he blossomed forth with unusual glamour before the startled eyes of Tom Merry & Co.

Kerruish had on a beautiful, expensive suit of Etons. His trousers were pressed with such meticulous care that the creases were like razor-blades. He had on patent leather shoes and white spats. His necktie was a riot of gorgeous colour; even D'Arcy, who was the acme of fashion at St. Jim's, had never sprung anything so startling on his school-fellows before! And Kerruish's topper was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. It vied with his patent leather shoes in radiance!

Tom Merry & Co. stood and blinked at Kerruish.

Harry Hammond, the cheery Cockney junior, grinned all over his freckled face. He evidently enjoyed the situation. Hammond also wore a fancy necktie and a topper.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Gussy, amazed at the sartorial effect Kerruish presented.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 348.

"My giddy aunt!" ejaculated Blake. "What's the idea, Kerruish? Are you trying to turn yourself into a tailor's dummy, like Gussy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"No, I'm not trying to swank," replied Kerruish, going rather red. "I suppose you fellows have heard by now that my pater's come into a lot of money?"

"Yes; we've just read it in the paper," said Tom Merry.

"I knew last night. My pater wrote me about it, you see," said Kerruish. "I didn't say anything, except to Hammond, because I wanted to surprise you chaps."

"Well, the giddy surprise has come—three bags full!" grinned Monty Lowther. "So you're rolling in filthy lucre nowadays—what?"

"My pater will come down handsome, of course," replied Kerruish, looking a trifle awkward. "As you chaps know, I've never had much tip to play with, and now my pater's really rich I mean to make the most of it!"

Tom Merry & Co. grinned.

Kerruish wasn't a bad fellow, but they could see that his pater's sudden acquisition of wealth had turned his head. Not that that was any actual discredit to Kerruish. They did not blame him for wanting to "make the most of it."

"Kerruish is doin' me real 'andsome!" grinned Hammond. He was known popularly as 'Arry 'Ammond, through his habit, formed in the slums from whence he had come, of not sounding his aspirates. "Life in our study is goin' to look up! 'Ow do I look in this necktie? It's a bit of a dazzler, ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. laughed good-humouredly.

They were glad, for Kerruish's sake, that his pater had become rich.

"Well, you're a lucky beggar!" said Blake. "Where are you off to now?"

"Hammond and I are going to the cinema in Rylcombe to see 'Robin Hood,'" replied Kerruish. "You chaps are going, aren't you?"

"Ahem!" said Blake. "We were, but, you see—"

"Short of cash?" asked Kerruish.

"Well, yes."

"Let me stand treat?" said Kerruish eagerly. "I've never had the chance of treating you chaps before. If you care to come to the cinema and let me pay the exes—"

"Corn in Egypt!" cried Monty Lowther jubilantly. "Kerruish, old chap, your offer is accepted unanimously. We all love you for it! Come to my arms!"

"Yow-ow! Leggo! Grooooooh!" gasped Kerruish, as the humorous Monty gave him a hug.

"It's jolly decent of you, Kerruish!" said Tom Merry. "We'll come, of course!"

"Like birds!" said Blake heartily.

"Right-ho!" said Kerruish, who had managed to struggle out of Lowther's fond embrace. "Just a tick! I must run in and get some money. Sha'n't be long!"

Kerruish hurried upstairs and went along to the Fifth Form passage.

He tapped at the door of Cutts' study.

Gerald Cutts' voice called out to him to enter, after Kerruish had told them who he was.

Cutts, Gilmore, and St. Leger were having a quiet game of nap and a smoke, little prohibited pastimes in which the gay dogs of the Fifth indulged in secret.

They welcomed Kerruish quite cordially. It was unusual for Cutts & Co. to be affable to a junior—quite the reverse, in fact. But Baggy Trimble had spread the news concerning Kerruish's pater all over the school, and Cutts & Co. felt that it might pay to be respectful to Kerruish. They were not adverse to "adopting" the junior, and getting him into their select and reckless circle, for the purpose of plucking him of his newly gotten wealth.

"Hallo, Kerruish!" said Cutts cheerily. "Come to have a little flutter at nap? You're welcome!"

"No, thanks," said the junior hastily. "As a matter of fact, Cutts, I came to ask if you could lend me another two or three quid till my pater's remittance comes."

"All serene!" said Cutts. "Take a couple of quid. That will make it a fiver you owe me. Anything to oblige!"

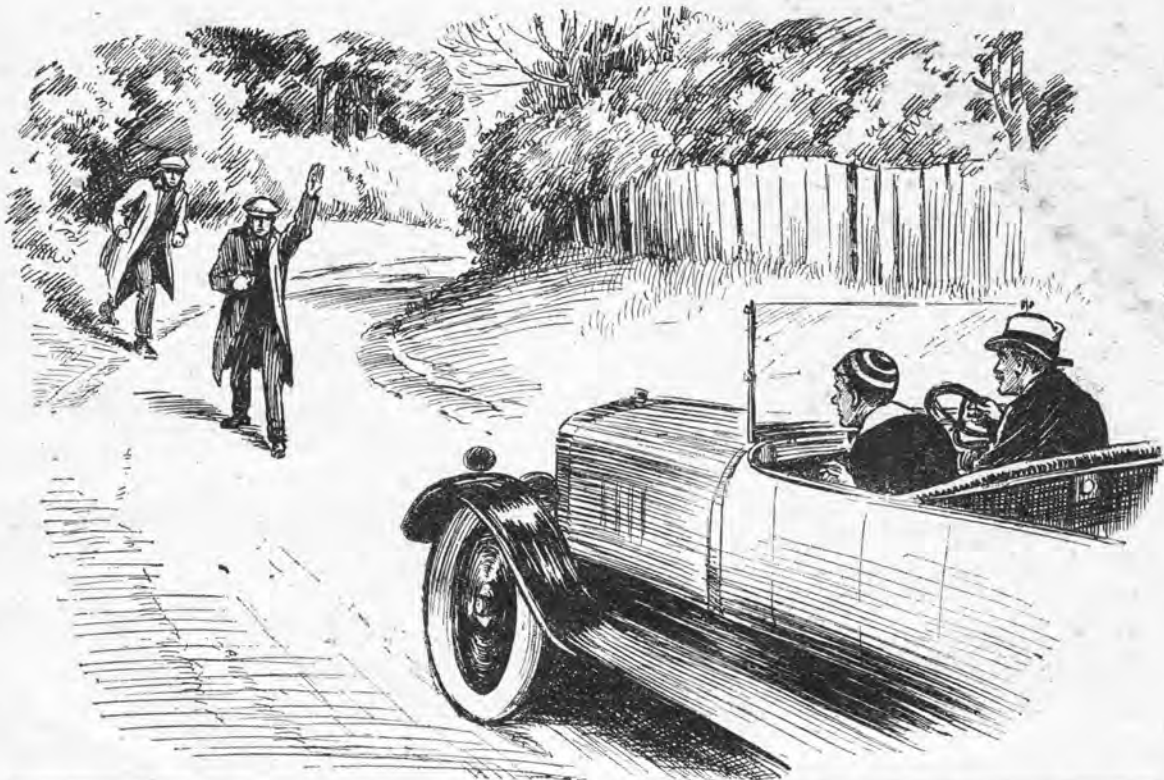
"Thanks awfully!" said Kerruish.

Cutts was in funds as a result of a recent successful gamble with Mr. Banks, of the Green Man. The money changed hands, and Kerruish, with a grateful nod, left the study.

Cutts & Co. chuckled as the door closed behind the junior. "We'll heap soft sawder on him and get him in with us," said Cutts. "Kerruish is easy, and it won't take long to work him round. Then we'll rook him through thick and thin!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

And, thus charitably minded, Cutts & Co. proceeded with their little game.



The car was humming along the lonely and deserted Rylcombe lane when two men, their faces hidden by mufflers, sprang out from the hedge and stood in the middle of the road. "Stop!" rapped one of them harshly as the car approached. "I have you covered, so you'd better obey!" (See page 11.)

CHAPTER 2.

An Attack in the Dark!

"JOLLY good show!" said Blake enthusiastically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry & Co., Kerruish, and Hammond emerged from the vestibule of the Grand Cinema, in Rylcombe High Street, looking cheery and pleased.

The chums of the School House, thanks to Kerruish's generous invitation, had gratified their wish and had thoroughly enjoyed the programme.

"Thanks awfully, Kerruish!" said Tom Merry. "You're a brick!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Kerruish carelessly, although in his heart he exulted at his position of being host to Tom Merry & Co. "Now, what about some tea?"

"Wot-ho!" said Harry Hammond.

"I say, Kerruish, it's awfully good of you, but we don't want to break you, you know!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, bosh!" said Kerruish. "It's my treat! Let's have tea at the bunshop."

"Good egg!"

The juniors crowded into the village bunshop, and there Kerruish ordered tea on a lavish scale.

One or two people in the bunshop glanced curiously in Kerruish's direction. The St. Jim's juniors were well known in the village, and the fame of Mr. Kerruish's big coup had been spread far and wide in the newspapers.

Tea in the bunshop was a merry affair. Kerruish told Tom Merry & Co. to order what they liked—and they took advantage of the invitation.

"Well, that was prime!" said Jack Blake, laying down knife and fork at last and leaning back with a deep sigh of satisfaction. "Kerruish, old scout, you deserve well of your country!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

Kerruish grinned happily.

It was not through motives of "swank" that he entertained his schoolfellows. He had never been able to stand treat before, owing to the small amount of pocket-money his pater allowed him, and Kerruish, being of a liberal nature, revelled in being able to do so now.

He went over to the little cash-desk and asked for the bill. It came to nearly two pounds.

"Need I pay cash now?" he asked easily. "If you send the bill in to me at St. Jim's I shall be pleased to send on the money."

"Very well, Master Kerruish," said the young lady sweetly, after speaking to the manager. "That will be quite all right."

"Thanks!"

At any other time, of course, the bunshop proprietor would have insisted on payment "on the nail," but the news of the sudden wealth of Kerruish's father altered matters. The tradesmen of Rylcombe were only too willing to oblige!

"Well, we'd better be getting back to St. Jim's," said Tom Merry. "We've had a fine afternoon, chaps—what? Thanks to Kerruish!"

"Good old Kerruish!"

The St. Jim's juniors left the bunshop and made their way up the High Street, en route for St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy halted outside the post-office.

"I say, deah boys, I think I'll telephone my patah and ask him about that fivah!" he said. "You fellows can be walkin' on, I'll catch you up."

"Right-ho, Gussy!"

Tom Merry and the others walked on, and Gussy disappeared into the post-office.

Some time elapsed before he was able to "get through" to Lord Eastwood. And then Arthur Augustus held a long and somewhat heated argument with his noble pater on the question of that belated fiver.

At length Lord Eastwood, although severely reminding Gussy that he had been spending far too much money on toppers and fancy waistcoats lately, promised to send on another fiver that evening. And Gussy, feeling quite cheery, hung up the receiver and set out from the post-office in the wake of his chums towards St. Jim's.

Dusk was now deepening over the countryside, and the street-lamps in Rylcombe were being lit by the ancient lamplighter. By the time Gussy reached the Rylcombe Lane it was dark, and the wood on one side and the trees and fields on the other side of the country lane were only dimly visible in the shadows. There was no moon.

D'Arcy quickened his footsteps, hoping to catch up with the others.

He was the only one about in the Rylcombe Lane, and the silence and darkness became quite oppressive. The swell of St. Jim's thought of Mr. Railton's warning concerning the gang of desperadoes who were terrorising the neighbourhood, and he involuntarily clenched his fists and looked about him in the shadows.

D'Arcy was not afflicted with "nerves," but he was quite alive to the possibility of the miscreants being at large and looking for prey in that lonely lane.

Suddenly he gave a start.

There sounded a rustling in the bushes on his left, and he heard a man's gruff voice. Next minute two burly figures darted out of the shadows and accosted him.

"Just a moment, young gentleman!" said one of the strangers suavely. His face was hidden under the pulled-down rim of a wide felt hat. "We think there may be a few things on you that we could relieve you of, and—"

"Out of my way, you wuffians!" exclaimed D'Arcy, adjusting his monocle tighter into his eye and then pushing back his cuffs grimly. "Pway allow me to pass, or—"

"Say, guv, it's young D'Arcy—the son of Lord Eastwood, you know!" muttered the other man. "Wonder wot 'e'd be worth to 'is lordship if 'e fell into our clutches?"

"By Jove! I see what you mean!" came the swift reply. "Hold the young bantam!"

Gussy was already making for the opposite side of the road.

The two rascals planted themselves in his way and made a grab at the St. Jim's junior. But they reckoned without their host. They soon discovered that Arthur Augustus was not the dude that he looked.

A fist with a punch like a sledgehammer behind it drove hard against the "guv's" chin, and that worthy, with a loud roar of pain, went staggering backwards.

"Yarooogh!" he roared.

"Now, you wottah!" panted Gussy, whirling on the other one.

"Biff! Wallop! Thud!"

D'Arcy knew how to hit and where to hit, and he waded in fearlessly. His telling blows made the rascals howl and dodge frantically. But Gussy, in spite of his pluck and hard hitting, was no match for the two grown ruffians, after they had recovered from their first astonishment.

He was punching heartily into one of them when the other darted behind him. Something hard and heavy descended on the junior's head with cruel force and with a cry he stumbled and fell.

"Got the little beggar!"

A great swirling mist tried to take possession of D'Arcy's senses. His head was reeling. But he fought back the numbing feeling, and, with the force of sheer desperation, he let out a loud shout:

"Help! Rescue, St. Jim's! Tom Mewwy—Blake—"

His voice broke off.

He became conscious of the two miscreants bending over him snarling. They were rifling his pockets. Then, dimly through the mist of ebbing consciousness, he heard the tramping of feet on the lane ahead, and a loud shout rang out:

"We're coming, Gussy!"

Tom Merry & Co. came dashing round the bend in the lane ahead.

They had lingered on the way, thinking of Gussy and of Mr. Railton's warning. They had heard their chum's shout in the distance and turned about hurriedly.

The two rascals bending over the prone figure of the swell of St. Jim's started up hastily. Their original intention had been to kidnap the junior, but they saw that that course was impossible now.

They crashed their way through the bushes at the side of the lane and disappeared.

"After them!" shouted Tom Merry. "We'll take different directions! Don't let the rotters escape!"

Blake and Manners dashed to D'Arcy's side.

At first they feared that he was seriously injured, but after a while Gussy struggled up and daubed at a cut on his temple that was bleeding.

"Bai Jove! Thank goodness you came in time, deah boys!" he gasped. "Gwoooogh! I feel wathah gwoggy! Did you catch those wuffians?"

"Tom Merry and the others are after them now!" said Blake. "What have the rotters done, Gussy?"

"Oh cwumbs! My pocket-book and fountain-pen and my diamond tiepin are gone, deah boys! Bai Jove! My gold tickah, too!"

"Whew!"

Half an hour later Tom Merry & Co. gathered at the cross-roads, dirty and disappointed.

"No go!" growled Herries. "The rascals got clean away!"

"We did our best to find them, but they were too cunning. Besides, it's pitch dark!" said Tom Merry ruefully. "How do you feel, Gussy?"

"All wight, deah boy! You fellows are weal bwicks. The miscreants were goin' to kidnap me and—and hold me to wansom!"

"My hat!" said Kerruish. "So that was their game!"

"It's past locking-up time!" said Monty Lowther. "We shall get into a row when we get in."

The chums of the School House hurried back. The gates

of St. Jim's were locked, and Taggles grumblingly admitted them after Digby had played a tune on the gatebell.

"Nice goings hon!" growled the porter. "Which I've reported yer! You young rips 'ave got to go to Mr. Railton immejot— Yow—wow-ow!"

Monty Lowther playfully tipped Taggles' ancient topper forward and rammed it over his eyes.

And, leaving the porter howling and struggling with his headgear, Tom Merry & Co. crossed the quad and went indoors.

Cardew, Lumley-Lumley, and Reilly of the Fourth, and Noble, Clifton Dane, and Talbot of the Shell met them in the Hall.

"Faith, an' it's late that ye are, ye spalpeens!" said Reilly. "Tare an' hounds! What's Gussy been doin'?"

"He looks as though he's been tryin' conclusions with a steamroller!" grinned Cardew.

"Weally, deah boys—"

Tom Merry explained the reason for D'Arcy's dishevelled state.

"Great pip!" gasped Lumley-Lumley. "So Gussy nearly got kidnapped! And those crooks have stolen all his giddy valuables! I guess we'd all better carry cricket-stumps about with us when we go out of gates!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Railton looked grimly at Tom Merry & Co. when they presented themselves in his study. His look changed to one of grave concern when they told him what had happened.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Housemaster. "I will inform the police immediately. D'Arcy, I am very thankful that you escaped. You lads are, of course, pardoned for being late. This is a most serious matter."

St. Jim's had plenty to discuss that evening. Kerruish and D'Arcy found themselves very much in the limelight.

CHAPTER 3.

Making a Show!

"HALLO! Wherefore all this thushness?"

Jack Blake asked that question, looking into Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form passage the next day.

Kerruish and Hammond had been making a great deal of noise, and this had attracted the captain of the Fourth to the room.

He beheld Harry Hammond mounted on a chair, armed with a box of nails and a hammer. Hammond was hanging pictures; and very gorgeous pictures they were! They were all in gilt-edged frames that in themselves were works of art!

Kerruish was busy nailing down a beautiful new carpet. The old one, sadly inkstained and threadbare, had been dumped on the table.

Sundry parcels reposed on the table also. The study was in a most untidy state—and so were Kerruish and Hammond. They appeared to have been working hard.

"We're just altering the study a bit," said Kerruish, rather breathlessly, wiping a smudge of dust on his nose, and thereby transferring more dust to his nasal organ. "You see, I've ordered some fresh props. These are the pictures, and this is the carpet. Those parcels contain some nice ornaments and things. The rest of the furniture will be delivered some time this morning."

"My hat!" said Blake. "Then you're refurnishing!"

"Wot-o!" grinned Hammond. "We're goin' to make things 'um in the Fourth! Must make a splash now Kerruish's father is a bloomin' millionaire!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A commotion sounded in the corridor, and next minute Baggy Trimble came rushing in breathlessly.

"I say, Kerruish, there's a van outside!" he gasped. "Your new study furniture has arrived!"

"Oh, good!" said Kerruish. "Show the men up, Hammond!"

Harry Hammond went away, and returned a short while later piloting two workmen, who bore between them a handsome settee.

A crowd of surprised juniors gathered round and watched the moving in of a fine array of furniture. Kerruish's study was soon full up!

"My word!" said Baggy Trimble, whose little round eyes were glistening. "This lot must have cost Kerruish a good bit. I say, Kerruish, old chap, I think I'll get a transfer to this study. I could help you put things straight, you know, and do your cooking—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the chums of the Fourth.

Kerruish gave the workmen a handsome tip, and they departed.

The juniors in the passage chuckled.

"Well, you are doing things in style, and no giddy error!" said Blake. "What a thing it is to have a rich pater!"

"Beastly swank, I call it!" sneered Mellish from the doorway.

Kerruish flushed.



Kerruish, crouched in the branches overhead, watched the man approach stealthily towards the tree and plunge his arm into the hollow. "Nab him, boys!" There was a sudden shout, and Kerruish held his breath, for the next minute the clearing was filled with swiftly moving schoolboy figures. Tom Merry led the attack, and behind him came Blake, Kildare, Lowther, Manners, D'Arcy, and Mr. Kerruish. (See page 12.)

"Look here, you chaps, this isn't done for swank!" he said. "I suppose if a fellow chooses to brighten up his den a bit, he can do so without being accused of putting on side?"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I quite agwee with Kewwuish, deah boys! This studey was wathah shabbay befoah, wasn't it? Kewwuish is all wight, bai Jove!"

Nevertheless, all the juniors discussed the affair with great animation. Some of them—fellows like Mellish, Crooke, and Racke—sneered openly. But Tom Merry & Co. backed up Kerruish, knowing that he meant well.

Cutts looked into Study No. 5 later that day.

The room presented quite a different appearance to that of yore.

It was sumptuously furnished, and Cutts glanced round in cynical appreciation.

Kerruish was at home. He was seated in the depths of a comfortable armchair, reading.

"We're getting quite swell—what?" grinned the Fifth-Former. "Care to come along to tea, Kerruish?"

Kerruish shook his head.

"Thanks all the same, Cutts, but I'm grubbing at home to-day," he replied. "Hammond's just run across to the tuckshop for supplies."

Cutts' cordiality diminished somewhat.

"Drop in afterwards for a little chat—and perhaps a game or two of cards—what?" he said.

"I don't play cards, Cutts," said the junior shortly. "I think it's a mug's game; and, besides, it's pretty rotten to play cards for money."

Cutts sneered.

"I suppose you're toadying up to Merry's goody-goody crowd!" he said harshly. "Well, what about that fiver you owe me? I shall be obliged if you will square that up, Kerruish."

"I'll let you have the cash to-morrow," replied the Fourth-Former. "My pater's remittance hasn't come yet. It's bound to be here first thing in the morning."

"Mind you let me have the money, then!" growled Cutts.

And, with a surly look, the gay dog of the Fifth left, shutting the door with quite unnecessary violence behind him.

CHAPTER 4. Driven to the Wall!

TOM MERRY & CO., Jack Blake & Co., and Kerruish were in the Common-room next morning, discussing the latest news. It was very startling news indeed.

The gang of desperadoes who were operating about Rylcombe had added three more crimes to the long list against them since the attack on D'Arcy the previous evening.

The village post-office had been held up just after closing time, and nearly a hundred pounds stolen. Soon after that a local tradesman, walking home along the towing-path by the Rhyl, had been attacked and robbed. And during the night Rylcombe Grammar School had been broken into and many of Dr. Monk's valuables stolen.

The whole village was in a foment of excitement, and the boys of St. Jim's viewed the matter with great concern.

"The police seem absolutely helpless!" said Tom Merry, frowning. "If these robberies and hold-ups continue, it will make things jolly rotten for us. The Head will put the village out of bounds. We shall be gated!"

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy. "That would be howwible, deah boys!"

Harry Hammond entered the Common-room with several letters in his hand.

"Hallo!" said Kerruish, walking eagerly over to him. "Are they for me?"

"Wot-o!" grinned Hammond. "Ere's one from your father!"

"Oh, good!"

They walked away together to Study No. 5.

Kerruish opened his father's letter eagerly.

His look turned to one of dismay and disappointment when he saw that there was no remittance in it!

"What the dickens—" he gasped; and then he turned to read the letter.

Hammond, watching him curiously, saw his face turn pale. Kerruish crushed the letter in his hand and stared straight before him, his breath coming in short, heavy gasps.

"Wot's up?" asked Hammond.

"My pater isn't turning up trumps with any money!" exclaimed Kerruish harshly. "He's got heaps, but he—he's going to stick to it all!"

"Gammon!" said his study-mate incredulously.

"It's true!" said Kerruish, his face the picture of dismay. "He says so in his letter! Dad always was careful with his money. I always said that he was as tight-fisted as they make 'em. But now he's made thousands I expected him to do the decent thing by me. But—but he's refused! He says that he's not going to encourage me to be extravagant! He's not going to let me have any more pocket-money than I have been receiving all along."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Hammond. "That's a nasty 'it in the hey, ain't it?"

Kerruish ground his teeth with rage.

"The pater will have to stomp up—he'll have to!" he exclaimed fiercely. "Why should he keep all the money to himself and stint me? Besides, I—I've borrowed money! I've ordered all these things on credit! I—I owe money everywhere!"

He turned to the other letters that Hammond had given him, and ripped them open one by one. His eyes glittered as he did so, and he flung them all on the table in a frenzy of passion.

"Bills—every one of them!" he cried. "Bills for the furniture and for my new clobber—a bill for nearly two quid from the bunshop, too, for the tea we had on Wednesday. And I owe Cutts five quid. He'll be dunning me for that to-day. I need nearly thirty quid to clear myself, and my father refuses to let me have any money!"

Hammond looked blankly at his study-mate.

"My 'at!" he gasped. "Wot will the other chaps say? We've been makin' a 'orrible splash, and they all think you're rollin' in wealth! You'll 'ave to send all these swell things back to the shops! But per'aps you can work your old man round?"

Kerruish groaned in very anguish of spirit.

"My father is as hard as iron—nothing can bend his will once he makes up his mind!" he muttered. "I was a fool. I took it for granted that he'd dole out some of his cash now that he's got plenty. Of course, I ought to have remembered what a skinflint he is. The other fellows will make me the laughing-stock of the school! And I've got to pay Cutts and—and— Oh, there must be some way out! I'm not going to let the school have the laugh of me! I'll ring up my pater after lessons, and—"

Tap!

The person who knocked on the door did not wait for an invitation. He came right in. It was Gerald Cutts of the Fifth.

"Well," said Cutts, "what about that money? I shall be glad of that fiver now, Kerruish."

The Fourth-Former strove hard to keep up appearances.

"I'm sorry, Cutts, but I—I haven't got it yet," he said. "My pater will probably telegraph the cash to-day. I'm going down to the post-office after lessons this morning."

Cutts looked hard at Kerruish.

"Look here, you're not trying to do me, are you?" he demanded. "If you're jibbing at paying up—"

"I'm not jibbing!" cried the junior. "I simply haven't the cash yet. Don't worry, Cutts, you shall have it."

"I'll jolly well see to that!" growled Cutts; and he went, in a very bad temper.

Kerruish and Hammond exchanged glances.

The Cockney junior was almost as dismayed over the affair as Kerruish himself. He shuddered to think of the consequences for Kerruish if his father failed to "stomp up." Hammond hoped, from the very bottom of his heart, that Mr. Kerruish would relax. But, then, Hammond had heard from Kerruish on several occasions of how his pater was a stubborn, hard-headed man.

Jack Blake & Co. noticed Kerruish's worried looks that morning, and they wondered what was disturbing him.

The junior hurried straight out of St. Jim's as soon as lessons were over, and he made his way down to Rylcombe.

He entered the post-office, and asked for the number of his father's office in London, and, after what seemed an interminable wait for the trunk call to come through, Kerruish stepped into the box and took up the receiver.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Kerruish?" he asked.

"Yes!" A deep, brusque voice came to him over the wires—unmistakably that of his father. "Who is that?"

"Eric speaking, father."

"Bless my soul! What's the matter, my boy?"

"I say, dad, about that letter you wrote me yesterday," said Kerruish eagerly. "You didn't mean what you said about keeping me down to the same amount of pocket-money?"

"Certainly I meant it, Eric!" replied his father tartly. "I do not approve of wastefulness and extravagance. Those traits should never be encouraged—especially in a youngster. I see no reason why I should send you money to squander. You already have quite sufficient pocket-money for a lad."

"But, father, you've got heaps of cash now!" exclaimed Kerruish. "The whole school is talking about it! They—they expect me to make a bit of a show now. Besides, I—I need some money—urgently—"

"What I have is no business of yours, Eric, or of anybody else's! As a business man I know the value of money better than you, and it is my desire to train you to be thrifty and careful."

"Father, I—I expected you to send me some extra cash, and I—I got reckless on the strength of that," said Kerruish desperately. "I'm head over heels in debt, and—"

"You little idiot! You will have to get out of debt of your own accord. It will be a lesson to you that you seem to be greatly in need of!"

"Yes, I know, father," said the junior miserably. "But I can't possibly square things up out of my pocket-money. I've bought fresh study furniture and clothes—"

"On credit, I suppose, expecting me to pay for your vanity?"

"Ye-es—"

"Then they will have to be returned! I refuse to pamper you, Eric, however rich I may be!"

"But, father, can't you see what a fool I shall look in front of the other chaps?" cried Kerruish. "I shall be the laughing-stock of the school, and—"

"That is your affair, Eric!" said his father grimly. "You must get out of your difficulty yourself. It will do you good. I am not going to send you any more than your usual pocket-money. I do not wish my son to turn out a spendthrift. That is all, my boy. I cannot waste any more time. I have business to attend to. Good-bye!"

"Father—"

Clang!

The receiver at the other end clattered down. Mr. Kerruish had rung off peremptorily.

Kerruish hung up the receiver and strode out of the call-box. His face was white, his lips set in a hard, drawn line. His brain was in a whirl. The castle of dreams he had built up had come tumbling down like a pack of cards. He had "made a show," expecting to share his father's newly-acquired wealth. He had become prominent at St. Jim's. He would remain prominent, only in a different way. He would be ridiculed and laughed to scorn.

These thoughts raced through his brain as he walked up the Rylcombe High Street towards St. Jim's.

He met Cardew by the station.

"Hallo!" said Cardew. "You're looking pretty blue, Kerruish. Anything the matter?"

"No," said Kerruish dully. "I'm all right."

His tone of voice belied his words, and Cardew glanced curiously at him.

"Heard the latest?" he asked casually. "Those deuced robbers have been up to their tricks again. They tried to kidnap young Monk of the Grammar School this morning. Gordon Gay & Co. set about the rotters, and they got away. I had it from Carboy just now. Things are getting a bit thick—what?"

Kerruish nodded, and his eyes took on a sudden gleam. He hurried on, and returned to St. Jim's.

Hammond was in Study No. 5 when he arrived there.

"Allo!" said the Cockney junior hopefully. "Any luck?"

"No," growled Kerruish. "The tight-fisted old miser! My pater's got heaps of money, and he's sticking to it! He told me to get out of the trouble myself."

Hammond gave a low whistle.

"Whew! That's done it! Cutts won't 'arf rave when he knows he can't get 'is fiver back! And wot about all these 'ore bills? They've got to be paid, or the things will 'ave to go back."

Kerruish clenched his fists hard.

"I won't be shamed, I won't!" he exclaimed fiercely. "I'll make my father pay! He can well afford to, and I'll get the money out of him. Look here, Hammond, if I confide in you will you promise, honour bright, not to say a word to anybody?"

Hammond stared.

"I promise, o' course," he said. "Wot's the big idea?"

Kerruish looked at him with gleaming eyes.

"I can't square my debts, and I'm not going to be made the laughing-stock of the school!" he said, in measured tones. "So I've decided to—well, to try a novel stunt I thought of

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on my way back from the village. Mind, Hammond, I'm relying on you to keep mum about whatever I tell you!"

"I'll be as mum as a bottle!" grinned Hammond. "'Onest Injun!"

"Right-ho! Well, there's a gang of desperate ruffians doing all sorts of things in the neighbourhood lately—robbing and kidnapping."

Kerruish laid emphasis on the last word.

Hammond opened his eyes wide.

"My 'at!" he said. "You—you ain't goin' to 'ire them to burgle the cash from your father?"

"No fear," said Kerruish. "I've got a deeper scheme than that. I shouldn't think of robbing my father, however mean he may be. The thing I'm going to do is a bit rotten, I admit, but—but I think I am justified under the circumstances. My father will get a big surprise to-morrow. He'll hear that I've been kidnapped, and that he'll have to fork out a few quid for my release."

"Crumbs!" gasped Hammond, more amazed than ever. "You—you're goin' to get kidnapped! By them rascals wot tried to kidnap D'Arcy?"

"No; I'm going to kidnap myself!" replied Kerruish calmly.

"Eh?"

"It's a scheme I thought of suddenly, and it's bound to work!" said Kerruish. "I shall disappear from St. Jim's, and make out that I've been kidnapped. The yarn will easily hold water, because of that gang in the neighbourhood. It will immediately be thought that I have fallen into their hands. My father will receive a demand for a good sum to be put in a secret place as the price of my release. He'll stump up, because I know he's fond of me, in spite of his hard ways. I shall collect the money, of course, and turn up again safe and sound. Then I shall settle everything, and things will be O.K."

Hammond regarded his study-mate in breathless astonishment.

"My only 'at!" he gasped. "You—you'd never work it, Kerruish!"

"Well, wait and see!" said Kerruish grimly. "I mean to have a try, anyway. I've got to get the money out of my pater somehow, and this is the only way. I must do it to save my face. My pater deserves to be spoofed. Why should he keep all his thousands to himself? Lumley-Lumley's father's a millionaire, Racke's pater is a War profiteer with heaps of cash, and D'Arcy's pater is rich. None of them stint their sons. So why should my pater? I'll get something out of him. I'll go through with the scheme."

Kerruish, shrinking from the ridicule he knew would come, lost all other sense of reasoning. He forgot his better self.

"You'll help me, Hammond?" he asked eagerly.

The Cockney junior shook his head.

"No, I'm not 'avin' a finger in the pie!" he said decisively. "If Blake or Tom Merry knew they'd bump you! They'd think it a rotten trick on your father, and so it is. You go ahead with the idea if you like. I'll keep mum about it, as I promised, but that's all."

"All right," muttered Kerruish. "Don't give me away, whatever you do, Hammond. I'm desperate, and I'm going to see this thing through!"

When lessons were over that day Kerruish left St. Jim's with a parcel.

He made his way into Rylcombe Wood, and, in a secluded part, he opened the parcel, which contained some old clothing and a few of his amateur theatrical things.

Ten minutes later Kerruish crept through the wood, looking a very different person. He had the appearance of an ordinary working lad. With his face "made up" very slightly but cleverly, and wearing spectacles, nobody would have recognised him as Eric Kerruish of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

Kerruish still had nearly two pounds in his pocket.

He went into Rylcombe, more grimly determined now to carry out his amazing scheme.

He soon found a small bed-sitting-room to let in River Street, a narrow turning that led from the High Street to the Rhyll.

The rent was seven shillings a week, and the room, though tiny and humbly furnished, was clean and comfortable.

Kerruish grinned slightly to himself at the incongruity of his surroundings. He, the son of a rich City broker, having to "dig" in such a place!

When he was settled in his new temporary home, Kerruish indited a note to his father, writing it in a disguised hand.

He then left the house in River Street, and went into the Rylcombe High Street. He passed Wally D'Arcy & Co. of the Third, and later on came face to face with Monteith, the New House prefect. None of them recognised him.

Kerruish chuckled softly to himself, and posted the letter. He was beginning to enjoy the novel situation to a certain degree.

"Now I'm free for the evening," he murmured. "No prep and no lessons in the morning! I'm supposed to be in the hands of the kidnappers. Ha, ha! So long as the police don't run those rogues to earth just yet I shall be safe."

CHAPTER 5.

On the Track!

GERALD CUTTS glared into Study No. 5 that evening. "Where's Kerruish?" he demanded of Hammond, who was seated disconsolately in the armchair.

"Dunno," replied the Cockney junior shortly.

"I've been looking for him all over the school!" snapped the senior bad-temperedly. "I want my money. Tell him that if he doesn't square up this evening I shall apply to the Head."

"Orl right!" said Hammond. "I'll tell 'im—when I see 'im!"

Slam!

Cutts stomped away.

As bed-time drew on the absence of Kerruish from St. Jim's began to be noticed.

"What's happened to Kerruish?" asked Blake, when Hammond strolled into the Common-room. "He's not in the school, is he?"

Hammond shook his head.

"No," he said. "Kerruish went out before tea-time. 'E said 'e was goin' to the village. I haven't seen 'im since."

"Wonder what the ass is doing?" said Herries. "It's nearly locking-up time now. He'll get it in the neck if he's late, especially now those ruffians are at large in the neighbourhood."

Locking-up time came, and still Kerruish had not come in.

At call-over the junior did not appear in Hall. Mr. Railton looked up sharply when no reply of "adsum" came to his calling of Kerruish's name.

"Kerruish!" he repeated loudly.

No reply.

"Blake, has not Kerruish come in yet?" asked the House-master.

"No, sir!"

"Bless my soul! What ever can have happened to the lad?"

Mr. Railton hurried over the register and then left the Hall. He went straight to the Head. It was apparent that the Housemaster was worried over Kerruish. And the rest of the school, too, began to entertain fears for the missing junior.

There was only one boy in the school who did not share the others' misgivings. Harry Hammond knew that Kerruish was in Rylcombe somewhere, in hiding, and that he had no intention of returning to St. Jim's yet.

When bed-time came round the anxiety of the school over Kerruish reached concert pitch. Kildare, Darrell, Rushden, and Monteith of the Sixth had been sent into Rylcombe to search for Kerruish. They returned to St. Jim's at past ten o'clock with no news.

Dr. Holmes immediately telephoned the police.

The juniors went unwillingly to bed. They laid awake far into the night, discussing the strange disappearance of Kerruish. The missing junior did not come in.

"Didn't he give you any idea of where he was going when he went out?" demanded Blake of Hammond, in the Fourth Form dormitory.

"No!" replied Hammond shortly. "All I know is, that 'e went to the village."

Cardew darted the Cockney junior a curious look.

There was something strange in Hammond's manner. He appeared to be awkward and ill at ease when asked questions concerning Kerruish, and this Ralph Reckness Cardew was quick to notice.

Hammond did not join in the general conversation that went on in the candle-light, but rolled himself up in his bed-clothes and went to sleep.

Cardew was silent also.

He lay in bed thinking. He recalled to mind his meeting with Kerruish in Rylcombe that morning, when he had asked his Form-fellow whether anything was the matter.

Cardew had wondered then what had happened to upset Kerruish.

Next morning Kerruish's bed in the Fourth Form dormitory was still empty. It had not been slept in.

Jack Blake & Co. dressed themselves hurriedly and went down stairs.

Kildare was at the foot of the stairs talking to Sefton.

"Any news of Kerruish?" demanded Blake eagerly.

The stalwart St. Jim's skipper shook his head.

"No, I'm afraid not, Blake. Kerruish hasn't been in all night, and nothing has been heard of him."

"Oh jeminy!"

The news spread dismay and consternation throughout the school.

The rascals who had been ravaging the neighbourhood were still at large, and it was universally believed at St. Jim's that Kerruish had fallen into their hands.

Baggy Trimble dashed into the Common-room after breakfast. Tom Merry & Co., and Jack Blake & Co., and a large number of juniors were discussing the strange disappearance of Eric Kerruish.

"I say, you chaps!" Trimble could hardly splutter out the words for excitement. "I say, have you heard the news?"

All turned to Baggy at once.

"What is it?" demanded Blake. "Get it off your chest, porpoise!"

"Kerruish has been kidnapped! It's a fact! His pater's had a letter from the kidnappers, demanding money!"

"Whew!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry looked hard at Baggy.

"How did you get to hear of it, Baggy?" he demanded.

"Ahem!" coughed the Peeping Tom of St. Jim's. "I—I happened to be passing the Head's study just now when my shoelace came undone. I knelt down to do it up, and couldn't help hearing what was going on in the study. The Head had just been rung up on the telephone by Mr. Kerruish. He was telling Mr. Railton about it."

Blake's lip curled.

"You'd better not spread the yarn about, in case the Head gets to know of your rotten eavesdropping, Baggy!" he said.

"Listening at keyholes is barred, and—"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Master Merry!"

Toby, the page, looked in. Tom Merry stared.

"The 'Ead wants you, Master Merry," said Toby.

The juniors looked surprised.

"I wonder what's in the wind?" said Tom. "I haven't been up to anything, have I?"

"Perhaps the Head's got to find out who buzzed the tennis-ball through the chemistry lab window," observed Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry went along to see the Head. Dr. Holmes looked gravely at the young Shell captain over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"Merry, I wish you to do me a small service this morning," he said. "A most distressing development has occurred in the mystery concerning Kerruish. His father this morning received a letter, posted at Rylcombe, demanding money for the lad's freedom. My apprehensions were not without foundation. Kerruish has been kidnapped, amazing though it may seem."

The Head paused, and drummed on the desk with his fingers.

"Mr. Kerruish is coming to St. Jim's, Merry," he went on at length. "He arrives by the eleven-forty train at Rylcombe this morning. As he is a stranger to the neighbourhood I told him that I would send somebody to meet him and escort him to the school. I wish you to do that."

"Very well, sir," said Tom Merry.

"I will instruct Mr. Linton to allow you to leave lessons early, so that you may get to the station in time to meet the train."

Tom Merry was not at all adverse to this arrangement. His face was quite cheerful as he left the Head's study. His chums were waiting at the end of the passage.

"Well?" demanded Monty Lowther. "Did you get a wigging?"

"No fear," said Tom. "Kerruish has been kidnapped. It's true what Baggy said. Mr. Kerruish is coming here this morning, and I'm leaving the Form room early to go to the station to meet him."

"Lucky beggar!"

There were quite a number of fellows who would gladly have taken on the job in Tom Merry's stead.

At eleven o'clock that morning Mr. Linton, in the Shell Form room, intimated to Tom Merry that he could go.

Tom went with alacrity. The lesson was Euclid, and Tom did not exactly shine at Euclid.

He went to his study, put on his cap, and set out from St. Jim's.

He arrived at the railway-station long before the train was due.

The village was very quiet and almost deserted, and Tom devoted his attention to the automatic machines in the station booking-hall whilst waiting for the train.

Some time before the train was due to arrive a motor-car drew up in the station yard outside, and a well-dressed gentleman, with rather a hard, but not unpleasant face, descended.

He hurried into the booking-hall and glanced round. Seeing Tom Merry, he went over to him.

"Are you waiting for me, my lad?" he asked brusquely. "I am Mr. Kerruish."

Tom raised his cap respectfully.

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"I missed the train in London, so came on in my car," explained Mr. Kerruish. "I thought I had better look in here, as Dr. Holmes had said he would send a lad to meet me. You are Tom Merry, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom.

"I recognised you from a photo of the junior eleven that Eric sent me," said Mr. Kerruish. "Any news of Eric this morning?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid not," said Tom.

"Jump into the car, then!"

Tom sat next to Mr. Kerruish, and the car drove away from the station, the Shell captain indicating the way.

Mr. Kerruish drew a letter from his pocket.

"Look at this, my lad. It came this morning!" he growled, handing the missive to Tom Merry. "What do you think of it?"

The notepaper was of the cheap variety, and it contained this message, scrawled in long, spidery characters:

"Your son is safe, but something may happen to him unless you agree to our conditions. There is a hollow tree in the centre of the Rylcombe Wood. Place £40 in there in a packet to-morrow (the day you receive this) at 11 p.m. Take warning not to inform the police, or to attempt any treachery, if you value your son's life. Obey, and all will be well."

The letter was not signed.

Tom Merry gave a low whistle.

"My hat! This is the sort of thing one reads about in a story-book, sir!" he exclaimed. "What a fearful cheek! I wonder if the kidnappers mean what they threaten?"

"The rogues! They shall be brought to book, whoever they are!" said Mr. Kerruish fiercely. "I have never heard of such a thing in all my life! What are the local police doing? These outrages have been going on at Rylcombe for some time past now, I believe?"

"Yes, sir. The police haven't been able to lay hands on the rascals so far," said Tom slowly. "They are a terror to the neighbourhood, and— Oh! Look out, sir!"

The car was now humming along the Rylcombe Lane, which at that time in the morning was always lonely and deserted. Two men, their faces hidden by mufflers, had sprung out from the hedge and were standing in the middle of the road in front of the car.

"Stop!" rapped one of them harshly, as the car approached.

"I have you covered, so you had better obey!"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Kerruish. "What the dickens—"

Zip!

The spiteful note of a revolver sounded, and a bullet ripped a hole in one of the car's tyres. The tyre deflated with a fierce hissing of the escaping air.

"Now will you stop?" grated the man with the revolver.

Mr. Kerruish, his face going red, closed the throttle and applied the brakes.

Tom Merry jumped up as the two desperadoes approached the stationary car, clenching his fists and setting his teeth hard.

"Let us go on, you rotters!" he cried. "We—"

"Hop down, young 'un!" laughed the other. "It won't pay you to start any larks!"

"This—this is daylight highway robbery!" spluttered Mr. Kerruish, giving a desperate look up and down the road.

"Come down here!"

Tom Merry, ignoring the rascal's revolver, made a dash at him, fists flying. But Tom reckoned without the other miscreant. This fellow swung round on him and dealt the junior a cruel blow that sent him reeling into the grassy bank at the side of the lane.

"Now, look smart!" muttered the man with the revolver.

Mr. Kerruish pluckily put up his fists, but he was powerless to resist the highway robbers. He was relieved of his money, and all his valuables. He and Tom Merry were kept at bay by the menace of the revolver.

A large leather handbag reposed on the driving-seat, near where Mr. Kerruish had been sitting. He gave a cry of alarm as one of the desperadoes picked this up.

"Don't touch that, you villains! Leave it alone—"

But, with a mocking laugh, the man took possession of it. He and his companion glanced up and down the lane, and then, at a signal from the leader, they darted off into the trees.

"After them, Merry!" shouted Mr. Kerruish desperately. "Get back that handbag, for Heaven's sake! Don't let them get away with it! The contents are valuable—"

Tom was already dashing after the miscreants.

He did not think of the revolver that one of them carried. The man in front did not use it, however. Both the desperadoes turned suddenly in the field and came back to meet the plucky St. Jim's junior.

He gave a loud cry as a heavy weapon dealt him a blow



Kerruish's eyes gleamed as he watched the chief of the gang take up a leather portfolio with the initials "J. R. K." engraved on it. His father's satchel, containing the precious papers! "I'll keep this as part of my share!" grinned the chief. "The contents ought to be worth a couple of thousand to old man Kerruish. I see he's offering a reward for them, so they must be very important!" (See page 17.)

on the head. Stunned, he groped forward, tried to grasp one of his assailants, and then fell.

He remembered nothing more until he opened his eyes and became conscious of Mr. Kerruish bending anxiously over him.

"Are you hurt seriously, my lad?" he asked quickly.

"No," said Tom, pressing a hand to his throbbing forehead. "My head aches—that's all. I'm all right. I—I'm sorry they got away, sir!"

"It couldn't be helped, Merry. You did your best," said Mr. Kerruish grimly. "This is a most serious matter for me. That bag contained all my business papers, which I took away from my City office this morning. Without them I am helpless. I shall be ruined unless they are recovered within a very short time!"

Tom Merry staggered to his feet.

"Let's go back and tell the police, sir," he said quickly. "They must get on the track of these rascals at once."

The car was started and turned, and Mr. Kerruish drove swiftly back into Rylcombe. He dashed into the police-station and gave them full particulars. He also stated his opinion of the police in emphatic and uncomplimentary terms. The inspector gave a helpless shrug.

"We have been straining all our resources to try to run the rogues to earth, sir," he said. "They are a clever and organised gang. We will do our utmost to recover the stolen property, sir, and to trace your son."

"If I don't get those papers back soon, my whole financial stability will collapse!" cried Mr. Kerruish desperately. "All my money has been staked in the new venture of which you have read in the newspapers, and if the thing falls through—as it will do unless I recover those stolen papers—I shall be worse off than ever before. I shall be ruined!"

He paused.

"I was a fool, I know, to have brought those papers with me to Rylcombe. But who would have dreamed of being held up in broad daylight on the highway? Bah! The rogues ought not to be at large to perpetrate these outrages!"

Mr. Kerruish, chafing with dismay and anger, strode back to his car in which Tom Merry was waiting.

The journey to St. Jim's was made in silence.

The car drove in at the gates and drew up outside the School House.

Boys in the quadrangle raised their caps respectfully to Mr. Kerruish.

Dr. Holmes was standing on the steps. He extended his hand in welcome to Kerruish's father.

"You are considerably upset at this most unfortunate affair, I can see, Mr. Kerruish," said the Head of St. Jim's. "I am very, very sorry. I assure you, however, that it was through no negligence on our part that your son—"

"I am not worrying so much about my son, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Kerruish, in a hard, strained voice. "I can be assured of his safety for a matter of a few pounds. What is worrying me is the fact that, on my way here from the station just now, I was held up and robbed. Not only were all my valuables taken, but also a case of private papers that mean everything to my business."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes in horror. "You don't say that those same miscreants—"

"They robbed me in broad daylight—in broad daylight, sir!" fumed Mr. Kerruish. "The police in this neighbourhood must be asleep. The men responsible for these outrages ought to have been under lock and key days ago!"

He accompanied Dr. Holmes indoors.

And, out in the quadrangle, Tom Merry was surrounded by a crowd of his schoolfellows eager to hear details of this latest sensation.

CHAPTER 6. Kidnapped!

TOM MERRY, Manners, Lowther, Blake, and D'Arcy went together to the Head's study later on that day. No news had been heard of Kerruish, neither had any report come from the police.

Tom Merry tapped at the door, and in response to the

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Head's grave "Come in!" the chums of the School House entered.

Mr. Kerruish was seated with the Head.

They both looked in surprise at the juniors.

"Dear me!" said Dr. Holmes. "What do you lads require?"

"Ahem!" said Tom. "We have come to—to offer a small suggestion, sir, if Mr. Kerruish would care to hear it."

"By all means, Merry!" said Mr. Kerruish. "What is it?"

"We suggest that you carry out the instructions in that letter you received this morning, sir—only that you leave the money out of the packet you put in the hollow tree to-night," said the Shell captain. "We could be in hiding among the trees nearby, and we'd make an attack on whoever comes to collect the money from the hollow tree. We'd soon make the rascal, or rascals, tell where Kerruish is hidden. We'd stand a chance, then, of rescuing him—and of getting back your papers."

Mr. Kerruish and the Head exchanged glances.

"That sounds a very useful scheme, Dr. Holmes," said the former. "I think we might adopt Merry's suggestion."

Dr. Holmes, after some consideration, nodded.

"Very well, Mr. Kerruish. I hardly care, however, to allow these juniors out so late at night—especially on such a risky errand—"

"Wely on us to take care of ourselves, sir!" spoke up D'Arcy warmly. "We'll be vewy careful, bai Jove!"

Dr. Holmes smiled.

"I will ask Kildare to accompany you," he said. "On the condition that you go under Kildare's supervision, I will agree to the scheme."

"Right-ho, sir!"

Tom Merry & Co. departed from the Head's study feeling greatly gratified.

They had spent quite a long time in debating the matter and discussing the proposed scheme.

They waited eagerly for night to fall.

Tom Merry & Co. did not go to bed with the others, but remained in the Common-room. At half-past ten Kildare and Mr. Kerruish came in and announced that they were ready to depart.

They left St. Jim's by the side door, and made their way to the wood.

The night was very dark, and the silent stillness of the wood seemed eerie to the St. Jim's juniors as they made their way carefully to the spot near the hollow tree.

Trained as Boy Scouts in woodcraft, they were able to proceed quietly, at the same time keeping eyes and ears on the alert for signs of anybody else lurking there.

Hidden in the branches of the hollow tree in the centre of the dark wood was Kerruish himself.

He was waiting for eleven o'clock, and wondering whether his father would yield to the demand he had sent. He was still grimly determined to go through with his scheme to obtain from his father the money necessary to save his face at St. Jim's.

Kerruish crouched in the branches, making no movement, his heart thumping wildly. Several times he thought he heard sounds of people moving among the trees. It had occurred to him that his father might lay a trap for the supposed kidnappers, but he felt safe from discovery in his hiding-place up in the tree.

Eleven!

There was a rustle in the trees opposite, and a stalwart figure came dimly to view in the darkness.

It was Kildare of the Sixth.

The St. Jim's captain placed a small packet in the hollow tree, and darted back into the dark shadows of the wood.

Kerruish's eyes gleamed.

Was the money in that packet? Had his father yielded, and sent Kildare to put the money in the tree? Or was there a trap ready for him?

He decided to wait.

Ten minutes passed, and then came another rustle in the trees from a different direction. The moon had by now come out, and its mystic radiance was pouring down into the leafy wood.

A man, roughly dressed and with a curious twist in his nose, emerged into the small clearing in front of the hollow tree. He glanced round him stealthily and then moved swiftly to the tree, plunging his arm into the hollow.

Kerruish caught his breath.

Was this man after the package that Kildare had placed inside the tree? Who was he, and—

"Nab him, boys!"

Tom Merry's voice rang out loud and clear on the night air.

Next minute the clearing was filled with swiftly-moving schoolboy figures. Tom Merry led the attack, and behind him came Blake, Kildare, Lowther, Manners, D'Arcy, and Mr. Kerruish.

The man at the tree gave a startled gasp and wheeled round.

An instant later Tom Merry & Co. were upon him. They bore him, struggling and kicking wildly, to the ground.

"Yah! Leggo! Oooogh!" roared Tom Merry & Co.'s captive.

"Got you, my beauty!" chuckled Blake, sitting astride the fellow's chest. "You didn't expect little us to chip into the proceedings, did you? Now you've got to give us a few bits of information, or we'll rag you baldheaded. In the first place—Woooooop!"

Blake uttered that yell as the man beneath him gave a heave and sent him sprawling off his chest. That sally had come so unexpectedly; Tom Merry & Co. had imagined the man to be breathless and spent from his struggles. He proved himself to be a powerful ruffian. He struggled to his feet and backed away as Tom Merry & Co. closed round.

It seemed impossible for the man to get away. The St. Jim's juniors had him surrounded.

But next minute there was a dazzling flash of light, so vivid that Tom Merry & Co., Kildare, and Mr. Kerruish staggered back, half blinded.

Kerruish, watching from the tree, had seen the trapped ruffian take something quickly out of a side-pocket and hurl it to the ground, at the same instant covering his eyes with both arms. Directly the light burst out the man, his eyes still shielded, dashed away into the wood.

By the time Tom Merry & Co. recovered from this unexpected sally their prisoner was nowhere to be seen.

"He's gone!" howled Blake furiously. "He reckoned on being attacked, and had that trick ready! Come on, you chaps!"

Tom Merry & Co. plunged into the wood in different directions. They had no idea of the course the runaway had taken, and realised that the task of finding him would be very difficult.

They hunted high and low in the wood, but without result.

Either the rascal had made good his escape from the wood, or he was so cunningly hidden that it was impossible to find him.

Tom Merry & Co. had to give up the search at last in bitter chagrin.

"We had the rotter, too!" said Blake, between his teeth. "If it hadn't been for that dodge of his with the light—"

"Never mind!" said Mr. Kerruish grimly. "It's no use crying over spilt milk. You lads are not to blame for the rascal getting away. I think we had better return to St. Jim's. Dr. Holmes will be anxious."

Kerruish clambered down from his hiding-place when the others had gone. He was bewildered by the amazing turn events had taken.

"Thank goodness I waited!" he muttered to himself. "I should have been bowled out in no time! I wonder who that other chap is, and what he was doing at the tree? The others jumped to the conclusion that he was my kidnapper, and—Oh, my hat!"

He gave a startled cry as a dark figure detached itself from the shadows nearby and approached him. Kerruish was about to turn and run when a well-known voice broke on his ears.

"Old on, Kerruish! It's only me!"

"Hammond!" ejaculated the runaway junior.

Hammond of the Fourth came up, and Kerruish looked at him in amazement.

"What—what are you doing here?" he demanded. "Have you been spying on me—for my father—"

"No; none of the others know I'm out!" said the Cockney junior in a quiet voice. "I 'opped out of the dormitory after Blake and the others, and got over the school wall. I knew they was makin' plans to capture you. And I wanted to find you if I could and warn you to chuck playin' the giddy goat. I reckon you'll 'ave to give yourself up, Kerruish. There won't 'arf be some trouble for you when you do. Did you know that your father was 'eld up in the Rylcombe Lane this mornin' and robbed?"

"My father held up and robbed!" ejaculated Kerruish, giving a start. "I—I didn't know! I— What happened, Hammond?"

Briefly, Hammond told Kerruish of the hold-up in the Rylcombe Lane that morning, when his father had been robbed of all his valuables and the private papers, the loss of which would mean ruin to him.

Kerruish's face was the picture of dismay.

"Good heavens!" he muttered. "I—I've let my pater in for this by bringing him to Rylcombe! If he doesn't get those papers back, and he loses all his money, it will be my fault. What a rotter—an out-and-out rotter—I am! I played this trick on my pater, and fetched him to Rylcombe—to be robbed. I'm a cad, Hammond—a miserable, cowardly cad!"

Kerruish's voice broke harshly. He was stricken with remorse at his folly.

"I'm going back to face the music! I'll make a clean breast of the whole affair to my father. I don't care what the



The struggling pair on the roof lurched outwards, groped for a fresh hand-hold on the thatch, but missed, and then fell into space together. Mr. Kerruish, on the towing-path, stood spellbound with horror as he watched his son and his rascally assailant plunge downward into the rushing waters of the mill stream. "Help—help!" The cry came from Kerruish. (See page 18.)

school thinks of me now; I deserve to be kicked out! I—I'll tell everything!"

"That's the best way, Kerruish," said Hammond quietly. "Are you comin' back to school now?"

"No; I must go back to my room in Rylecombe to-night and settle things," replied the unhappy junior. "But I'll be at St. Jim's first thing in the morning. You needn't say anything, Hammond; don't let it come out that you knew what I was doing. I don't want you to get into trouble."

"Orr right," said Hammond. "I 'aven't said anything, of course. Where've you been 'idin', Kerruish? I've been tryin' all day long to find you in Rylcombe."

Kerruish smiled bitterly. "I've been living in digs—in a room at No. 35, River Street," he said. "I didn't realise what a rotten trick I was playing on my father. But I'll pay the piper. You cut back to St. Jim's now, Hammond. I'll see you there in the morning."

"Right-o!" said Hammond. "I say, who was that merchant Tom Merry and the others went for? I was nearly knocked flat when I saw 'im go to the tree. I thought it was you at first, and then I wondered whether you 'ad sent that chap to collect the money."

"No; I'm as much in the dark about the fellow as you are," said Kerruish. "I don't know what he was up to, I'm sure."

"Per'aps 'e is one of the gang wot robbed your father," said Hammond. "It was jolly 'ard lines that he got away, anyway."

"Yes," said Kerruish dully. "I was glad at first, but I'm sorry now. I—I wish I'd known before about my father being robbed. I could have caught that rascal easily."

He ground his teeth in rage and bitter self-condemnation. Hammond made his way back through the wood to St. Jim's, leaving his studymate alone in the wood with his unhappy thoughts.

Kerruish went at length to the hollow tree, and felt inside it curiously. The bundle that Kildare had placed in there came

to light. He tore it open, and, as he expected, it contained nothing but pieces of impot paper.

He flung the parcel and contents away with a bitter laugh.

Then, feeling curious to know what the stranger had come to the hollow tree for, Kerruish reached once more into the cavity. A low gasp of astonishment escaped his lips as his fingers closed on an envelope. He withdrew it from the hole, and was looking at it when a noise behind him caused him to wheel round sharply.

"And over that letter, you little whelp!" scolded a harsh voice.

Kerruish found himself gazing at the man with the twisted nose, who had eluded Tom Merry & Co. a short while previously.

He jumped up with a cry and sprang at the man. But a massive hand swung round and, gripping the junior's throat, forced him backwards, choking for breath.

The letter was snatched from his hand, the terrible grip on his throat tightened.

"So you're another young spy, are yer?" hissed the ruffian. "Well, you've got to come with me now, and tell me and my pals exactly what you know."

Kerruish tried to cry out, but the attempt failed. He could scarcely breathe, so tight was the cruel grip on his throat.

His assailant gave a low, long whistle. Several minutes elapsed, during which time he held Kerruish down in the grass, his vice-like fingers still encircling the junior's throat. And then there was a rustling in the tree, and two other men came up.

"I caught 'im at the tree, with the letter of instructions in 'is 'and," said the man who held Kerruish.

"Who is the young whelp?" demanded the taller of the two newcomers.

His companion ran through Kerruish's pockets. The letter from his father, and other papers, were disclosed.

(Continued on page 18.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 848.



EDITORIAL!

By Tom Merry.

CUSHIONS and COMFORT!

By Ralph Reckness Cardew.

REALLY IDEAL!

By Bagley Trimble.

YOU may, perhaps, suppose that the cult of the Ideal Home, and all that sort of thing, doesn't much affect us at St. Jim's; but if you do, you're utterly and completely wrong.

We're just as keen as anyone else to be as comfortable as possible, and you can bet we don't miss any opportunities for making our studies bright and cheerful.

Of course, we don't get many chances to do very much, more's the pity! For one thing, cash doesn't run to it, as a general rule, though there are, of course, some fellows, even in the Lower School, who can afford to furnish their apartments "regardless," so to speak.

Cardew and Racke and Grundy are among the lucky ones in this respect, and a glance inside one of their respective studies would probably be in the nature of a revelation to those people who fondly imagine that public school boys live under conditions of Spartan rigour and simplicity.

Carpets and easy-chairs, fire-screens, club fenders, and even plush window-curtains, are among the many little refinements and luxuries that these plutocrats install.

Cardew indulges a taste for old English prints and delicate water-colours on the walls of the study he shares with Levison and Clive. Grundy has a huge cabinet gramophone with which he frequently makes the evening hideous with ragtime and brass band selections, for which he has a curious passion, due probably to the enormous volume of sound of which they are capable. That is Grundy's invariable test in the matter of music. The louder it is, the better music it must be, he argues.

Racke's study is full to overflowing with furniture. There is a gate-legged dining-table, admittedly very useful, since it takes up very little space when not extended, and it can be made to serve for a first-class study spread on occasion.

It was when he attempted to add a piano, that authority, in the person of Mr. Raitton, stepped in and forbade such an innovation.

As a matter of fact, it seemed to us to be a most mysterious thing that Racke should wish to possess a piano, since he is unable to play one, has no desire to learn to do so, and is, indeed, without any taste whatever for music. We learnt later, however, that he regards the instrument merely as an article of furniture, without which "no home is complete," as the advertisements phrase it.

You will find plenty more to interest you in this issue, anyway.

Tom Merry

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 848.

MY idea of an Ideal Home?

Well, to tell you the truth—an invariable habit of mine, by the way, provided, of course, that it is quite convenient to do so—I really don't know that I've got any cut-and-dried notions on the subject.

I mean to say, it's not the sort of topic that a fellow can rush into print about all at once, so to speak. It needs a lot of thinking over.

A big armchair—one of those in which you can stretch yourself out full length—a footstool, and plenty of cushions. These are absolutely essential to a really serious thinking bout. I know, because I'm working under those conditions at the present moment, and look how splendidly I'm getting along. Like a house on fire.

By the way, I'm not writing this article in the ordinary way. I'm dictating it to Levison. Awfully fine fellow, Levison. You ought to know him.

Let's see, what were we talking about? Oh, yes! Ideal Homes!

Well, present conditions convince me that my first requirement in an ideal home would be an armchair. A large armchair—the bigger the better. One of those jolly old chairs that can be made into a bed at night, for preference. Save you the fearful fag of wrenching yourself out of it, and walking into another room at bed-time. Look at the advantages. Somebody drifts in at the bye-bye hour, and lets down the back and turns over a couple of cushions to make a pillow, and there you are—what?

And, again, in the morning. No trouble about getting up when you don't want to. Speaking for myself, I never do want to.

Simply arrange for somebody to trickle in about eleven o'clock, and turn your bed back into a chair, and you're ready for the strenuous daily round again. No trouble; no fuss. So simple! A child could use it, sort of thing.

Cushions, too! Oh, absolutely! My ideal home would be mostly cushions. Nice cushions, y'know, with plenty of feathers. You can't have too many of 'em.

And a bungalow, of course. Most decidedly! No stairs to fag up and down. And all the latest labour-saving gadgets, such as—such as—

Oh, confound it! Levison's disturbed me just as I was thinking out some first-class notions. Says I'd gone to sleep. Rot! I was just thinking, that's all!

Rather an ass at times, Levison. I don't think you'd like him much. Too jolly energetic!

By the way, I hope he's not putting all these little remarks down.

(But I was!—E. L.)

This is certainly my unlucky day. Not only have I been called upon to contribute an article for this issue of the "News," but Tom Merry has also relegated to me the task of sub-editing this remarkable effusion of Trimble's. It is true that in its original state the MS. was perfectly hopeless, but I really think that dear old Tommy might have handed it over to some other member of the editorial staff. Surely I have enough—more than enough—of the egregious Baggy, in the ordinary course of existence!—R. R. Cardew.)

TALK about Ideal Homes! You ought to see Trimble Hall! That is an ideal home, if you like!

Trimble Hall lies—(We've heard thousands of them, Baggy; and Bagley Towers lies as well.—R. R. C.)—in the midst of well-wooded country, surrounded by fertile fields. (If the fields are as fertile as your imagination, my fat pippin, they are some fields, as Wilddrake would phrase it.—R. R. C.)

Inside, it is the last word in luxury. Everything is done by electricity. All you have to do is to press a button, whatever you want done. All the cooking is done by electricity. (I thought we shouldn't be long in coming to the grub part of the article.—R. R. C.)

You really ought to see the kitchens. They cover several acres, and we employ about three hundred cooks. There is electricity everywhere, and you have to be careful, or you'd get some shocks. (Dear old Baggy! If he thinks we could get worse shocks from electricity than from the thought of acres of kitchens and hundreds of cooks, he's made a bad error.—R. R. C.)

Some of the St. Jim's fellows would open their eyes if they could see the wonders of Trimble Hall. (That's a peculiar thing, now, for Baggy only sees them when his eyes are closed in sleep, and then only if he happens to be dreaming.—R. R. C.) Why, these people who run Ideal Homes Exhibitions at Olympia come to Trimble Hall for their ideas! In fact, it's really rather like Olympia, only much larger, of course. (Oh, of course, Baggy! We quite understand that!—R. R. C.)

I've got a beautiful houseboat of my own, that can be turned into a motor-caravan, a bungalow, an airship, a charabanc, or a private railway-coach simply by pressing a button.

(What a pity, it can't be turned into a pigsty, Baggy, and then you'd feel sufficiently at home in it to stay there for the rest of your life. And see what we should be spared at St. Jim's, especially little me, who's had to wade through this conglomeration of rubbish.—R. R. C.)



SPRING-CLEANING STUDY N°6!

By Robert Arthur Digby.

But, then, four hefty chaps can't live and eat and swot and box and fence and rag and generally have their being in one small room, and expect it to look like a boudoir, or a state-room in the Palace of Versailles. We were pretty well used to the place as it was, and personally I didn't much care what it was like, so long as the chimney didn't smoke, and there was enough crockery to go round.

At the same time, I was prepared to admit that possibly something might be done in the direction of brightening up the happy home. After all, we are occasionally honoured with visits from peers of the Realm, in the persons of the Earl of Eastwood and Lord Conway, and it's rather embarrassing to have to fish out a duster as a preliminary to inviting a guest to sit down, to say nothing of the awkwardness of standing like a stuffed dummy in one particular spot so as to conceal the torn portion of the carpet.

Herries, incidentally, generally gets detailed for this duty, it being the only use we have ever found for his out-size feet.

So we held a committee of ways and means, which lasted until the dorm bell rang, by which time we had decided upon a super spring-clean.

The next day, being a half, gave us the opportunity for starting. Directly after dinner Herries and Gussy went down to Rylcombe for some paint, and also some cheap cretonne for recovering the cushions, while Blake got out his tool-chest, and commenced nailing into the bookcase and a couple of rickety chairs. A handful of nails and a hammer, and Blake is really happy!

After he'd banged his thumb with the hammer about half a dozen times, he got a bit fed up, and started on repairing the broken sash-cord in the window. I think he had an idea it was going to be a nice easy job; but it didn't work out like that. Still, Blake certainly did his best, and it wasn't till he'd knocked out a couple of panes of glass, and dropped the lower frame on his other thumb, that he decided to leave it for a while.

By that time my own little contribution to the proceedings—brushing the carpet with a borrowed besom—had raised such a dust that a London fog would have looked like a clear day off the Dover coast, by comparison. So we propped open the window with a Latin die, and went out of the room to give it a chance to settle.

Then Gussy and Herries returned, and we set to work once more. Having agreed that carpet sweeping couldn't be done to the best advantage in a study, we took it up and dropped it out of the window into the quad, with the idea of hiking it to an out-of-the-way spot, and beating it with stumps.

When we'd let go of it we all leaped out of the window to make sure that it hadn't caught on anything in its descent.

It had landed in the quad all right, but we got a bit of a shock when we saw it. We'd certainly expected to see it there, but we hadn't expected to see it wriggling about in all directions; but that was what it was doing!

It heaved and tossed and tumbled like a rough night at sea, and Gussy's silly monocle dropped out of his silly optic, and flinked against the window-ledge, as he went goggle-eyed like the rest of us.

"M-m-m my sus-sus-sainted aunt Sus-Sus-Sempronia!" stutered Blake. "W-w-what the—"

One corner of the carpet wriggled and flapped, and a head came into view. I've never seen a chicken coming out of its shell, but I've had a jolly good idea of what it must look like, since seeing Knox crawl from the folds of that carpet.

For it was Knox!

It appears that he'd made arrangements to go to Wayland to meet an uncle who was making a journey there, and he'd washed behind his ears and put on his best bib and tucker for the occasion, and sallied out

into the quad on his way to keep the appointment with his uncle. He was just in time to keep one with our carpet, instead.

He struggled out from beneath it, and stood sneezing until we thought he'd blow his head off. Not that it would have been much of a loss, for it's neither useful nor ornamental.

When he'd got the dust out of his nose, and some of it out of his eyes, he stood in the middle of the quad and danced; but not with joy.

A lot more fellows came out to see what all the festivity was due to, and they shared our opinions regarding the affair, which didn't coincide with those of Knox by long chalks. We laughed, while he howled blue murder.

But our mirth didn't last long. Of course, it was all Gussy's fault.

He shoved his silly arm out of the window to get at his eyeglass, that was dangling at the end of its cord, and his elbow knocked away the die that was holding up the window-frame.

Of course, the blessed thing came rattling down, a la guillotine, and we all got it where Cissy wears her pearls.

There we were, wedged in that rotten window, with our feet one side, and our nappers hanging over the quad on the other. And those silly chumps down below started to yell and cackle as though something funny was going on.

Knox spotted what had happened, and he made a sudden dive for the door of the School House. In about twenty seconds we heard him come blundering into the study, and then he started operations with a cricket-stump.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Try as we would, we couldn't get free, and Knox laid it on like fury till some of the Fourth who were in the quad below had a sudden rush of brains to the head, and came pouring up to the rescue.



Manners took a flashlight photograph of Knox.

That soon settled Knox, though there was a pretty hefty scuffle before he went under, and the bookcase and three chairs were wrecked during the scrap. The pictures had been taken down and stacked in a corner, and some idiot shoved his hoof through them.

It was pretty evident that spring-cleaning operations were off, but it seemed a pity to waste the paint and stuff that we'd laid in for the job. So we decided that the best thing we could do would be to make Knox a present of them.

And that's what we did. He didn't appreciate our generosity, said to say, but his ingratitude didn't deter us in the least.

We rubbed blue paint into his hair, and gave his face and hands a couple of coats of red. The cretonne we wrapped round him in as graceful a fashion as his struggling allowed us to do it. Then we stuck feathers in his hair, and he looked the complete article.

Manners went and fetched his camera, and took a flashlight photograph of him. It was getting a bit dusk, and there was very little light in Study No. 6 at the time. Then we booted him down to the Sixth Form corridor, and left him to his own devices while we went back to tidy up and have tea. Spring-cleaning is a very lively sort of job, I'm inclined to think!

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"IT'S about time we had a clear-out in this study," said Jack Blake.

The rest of us—Gussy, Herries, and I, that is—stared at him in surprise as he made the remark apropos of nothing in particular.

We had just finished prep, and were taking things easily for the few minutes that were ours until the bell summoned us to the dormitory.

"A clear-out!" I echoed, with something of my amazement expressing itself in my voice.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say," replied Blake. "We've got to have a turn-out!"

"But who's going to turn out?" inquired Herries blankly. "We're all pretty comfy together, aren't we? Of course, Gussy's a bit of an ass, but we—"

"Don't talk like an idiot!" snapped Blake, as Gussy opened his mouth to register a protest. "I'm not alluding to the personnel of the study—"

"Good word, personnel!" I murmured.

"What's it mean, anyway?"

"Shut up, ass! I'm talking about Lares et Penates!"

"Can it!" growled Herries inelegantly. "We get more than enough Latin from old Lathom."

"We do," I agreed heartily. "And I don't get you, Blake, either. We've got no household gods in this study—unless you mean that Brummagem-Chinese idol affair that you brought back with you this term."

"What d'you mean—Brummagem idol?" said Blake indignantly. "That's a pukka Buddha that my uncle got in Hong Kong."

"Really!" I said innocently. "Have Woolworth's got a branch out there?"

"Bah!" snorted Blake.

"But what are you weally talkin' about, deah boy?" asked Gussy.

"Have a look round, dummy!" snapped Blake. "And if you've got any eyes at all in your fat head, you'll see!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Judging by the warlike gleam in Gussy's noble eye, there were all the makings of a lively row present in the study, so I cut in hastily:

"We may be crass idiots, and thick-headed jabberwocks, and all that sort of thing," I said to Blake; "but, speaking for myself, I don't get you, even now."

"Don't you? Well, I'll put it into words of one syllable, and then perhaps you will. If you're satisfied to live in a sort of glorified pigsty, I'm not! We've got to have a spring clean in here!"

"It's news to me that 'satisfied' and 'glorified' are words of one syllable," I murmured.

"Look at the cushions," went on Blake unheedingly. "Look at the bookcase! Look at the carpet and the tablecloth! Look at 'em!"

We looked at them.

Not that they were particularly attractive to view. The cushions were torn and faded, with huge gashes in each through which the stuffing was liable to fall out—and did fall out—unless they were handled with great care. The bookcase contained an untidy litter of books, boxing-gloves, caps, muffers, foils, football boots, periodicals, cricket-stumps, fishing-rods, singleticks, and fencing-masks. The carpet and tablecloth were torn, faded, and threadbare, with patches of variously coloured inks staining them. The glass of the pictures was mostly either cracked, or missing altogether, and the rest of the furniture was in similar condition.



"So this kid belongs to St. Jim's—he's the son of Mr. James Kerruish whose very interesting documents we relieved him of this morning!" said the ringleader of the trio suavely. "I wonder what he is doing here in disguise? Some foolish amateur detective stunt, I suppose, on behalf of his father. Give him a whiff of the dope, Garvin, and bring him along."

The man addressed as Garvin took a handkerchief from his pocket. He approached Kerruish and held it over the lad's nostrils.

The handkerchief contained chloroform, and the sickly odour quickly robbed the helpless junior of his senses. With a groan he sank limply into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER 7.

The Escape!

KERRUISH awoke to find himself in a low-built, scantily-furnished room. A strange, musty odour pervaded the atmosphere. His limbs ached, and he attempted to move them, but found that he was bound hand and foot with cords. He was lying on an old flour sack in the corner of the room.

A smoky oil-lamp burned on the plain deal table, casting a fretful yellow radiance in the room. Kerruish looked to the window, which was small, with an iron grating outside, and saw that it was still night.

Gradually it all came back to him—the affair in Rylcombe Wood.

He was alone in the musty-smelling room. He judged it to be a basement room of some sort. Through the window came distant sounds of running water. Kerruish fell to wondering where he was.

Whatever the exact location of the place might be, he felt convinced that he was in the secret lair of the desperadoes who had been terrorising the neighbourhood of Rylcombe. The thought sent a warm thrill coursing through his chilled veins.

Struggling desperately with his bonds, he soon came to the conclusion that it was a waste of time and energy to attempt to get free. The knots were made tight and fast.

Hours passed by—it seemed like years to the imprisoned junior—until the first grey streaks of dawn filtered in through the window.

Dawn gave way to dull daylight, and sounds of animation came from outside. He heard men's voices in the distance, and then a rumbling noise began, accompanied by the fierce swishing of water.

At first the noises bewildered him, and then Kerruish realised that he must be in a mill. The rumbling sounds would be made by the mill-wheel.

A low exclamation suddenly escaped his lips.

"By Jove! This must be the old mill on the Rhyl, near the bridge. I wonder if that is where the gang have been hanging out? I—I wish somebody would come."

The wish was not gratified until some time afterwards.

Shuffling footsteps at length sounded outside. The door was unlocked, and it opened to admit a shabby, tousled-haired fellow. He carried a tray, on which was a mug of tea and two rolls of bread.

"This 'ere's your breakfast," said the newcomer, setting down the tray. "I'll free your 'ands so's you can eat it."

Kerruish, with his hands freed sufficiently to enable him to eat, devoured the frugal meal eagerly.

Four men came into the room afterwards. Three of them were those Kerruish had seen in the wood last night.

"Well, my young buck, how do you like this as a change from school life?" demanded the ringleader. "You will have to remain here, I am afraid, until we can come to terms with your father."

Kerruish winced.

It seemed a strange irony of Fate that he should now be really kidnapped after having pretended to be.

Hammond would be expecting him back at St. Jim's, to make his confession to his father. The thought made Kerruish writhe.

"Tighten up those cords again, Sam!" rapped the chief of the miscreants.

When this was done the four men left the room, the shabby lout addressed as Sam remaining behind to keep watch on the prisoner.

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Kerruish lay on the sack in the corner in miserable silence. Sam sat at the table and puffed at a cigar-end that he had evidently found. The stench made Kerruish cough, but Sam seemed to enjoy it.

The cigar was nearly burnt to the end when a sharp voice from outside called Sam by name. The tousled-haired fellow threw down the lighted cigar-end and shuffled out of the room, locking the door behind him.

Kerruish's eyes gleamed as he watched the brightly-glowing cigar-end. A sudden idea had entered his head.

He wriggled his way off the sack, and, by dint of great exertion, managed to reach the spot where the remains of the cigar was lying.

He then leaned over and brought the cord that bound his wrists to bear against the glowing end.

"If only it will burn through!" muttered the junior tensely. "Oh, good! It's caught!"

The cord began to smoulder, and Kerruish blew on it gently. At length a low cry of joy escaped his lips. The cord snapped!

Another cord was burned through in a similar way, and soon the junior's hands were free. It was the work of a few minutes to release his feet.

Kerruish at last shed his bonds and stood up, flexing his aching limbs.

"Now, when Sam comes back——" he muttered, and broke off.

The lout's shambling footsteps became audible outside. Kerruish sprang to the door and stood upright behind it, his teeth firmly set, his fist clenched.

The key grated in the lock, and the door swung open to admit Sam.

Biff!

Kerruish's left came out like a battering-ram. It caught Sam under the chin, and fairly lifted him off his feet. The fellow sprawled on the floor. Next minute Kerruish gave him a shove that sent him rolling under the table.

"Yaroooooooooogh!" howled Sam dismally.

Click!

Kerruish skipped out of the room and locked the door behind him.

He found himself on a flight of tumble-down stone steps.

He mounted them warily, and came to a door at the top.

This gave access to a lumber-room. The St. Jim's junior crept through this and reached a yard.

The open air at last!

A man's angry shout sounded from across the yard, and two brutal-looking ruffians came pounding towards him.

Kerruish waited to see no more.

He ran.

He cleared the fence in one magnificent leap that would have brought words of commendation from the gym master at St. Jim's.

As he had suspected, the rascals' stronghold was under the old mill on the banks of the River Rhyl.

Kerruish reached the towing-path, and ran as fast as his legs would carry him. His two pursuers came desperately after him, shouting.

Kerruish's eyes glinted suddenly.

He dodged into the side streets of the village, turned down an alley, and finally came to River Street.

"Good! I'll hop into my digs and lay low there for a little while," he muttered. "The rotters are bound to be scouring the village for me, but they won't dream of looking in here."

He stepped quickly into the doorway of No. 35, and opened the door with his latchkey. He walked up the dark, rickety stairs, and flung open the door of the little room he rented.

Next minute he fell back with a cry of amazement.

The Terrible Three, Jack Blake, D'Arcy, Digby, and Cardew were in the room. And lying on the floor and looking very woebegone and dishevelled was Harry Hammond!

CHAPTER 8.

Kerruish's Resolve!

"**K**ERRUISH!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Bai Jove! The feahful boundah has weturned."

Tom Merry & Co. looked grimly at the junior.

Blake closed the door behind Kerruish, and they all closed round on him threateningly.

"So, you rotten spoofer, we've bowled you out!" said Tom Merry coldly. "We've just made Hammond confess to your little game. It was really through Cardew that we got to know the truth. He watched Hammond, and followed him here this morning. We all came along and nailed Hammond up here. Then we bumped him until he told us the truth."

You mad fool, Kerruish! What a rotten trick to play on your pater—to make out that you were kidnapped and hold yourself to ransom! Do you know what trouble you have landed your pater in. We're going to take you along right now by the scruff of your neck and make you tell him what a cad you have been!"

Kerruish's face was deathly white.

"Look here, you fellows, I have really been kidnapped, and have only just escaped—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Tell that yarn to the marines!" snorted Blake. "Why are you in disguise, and in lodgings in the village? Kidnapped! You want a jolly good hiding!"

"It's true, I tell you!" said Kerruish miserably. "I have been in the hands of the rotters who held up my father. I have just escaped from them. Honest Injun!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I admit I ran away and made myself out to be kidnapped, so as to get some money from my pater," went on Kerruish. "You chaps know what a splash I made at St. Jim's directly I heard that my pater had come into a lot of money. He hadn't sent me any tin, but I took it for granted that I'd get plenty, and I—I got reckless. And when my pater refused to let me have any more money than I had always been having I was in the dickens of a stew. I was up to my neck in debt. I had made a show at the school. All that would fall through, and all you fellows would be laughing at me. So I—I decided to have my own back on my father and hold myself to—ransom."

"Rotten trick!" growled Blake.

"Yes, I know; but I didn't think of it at the time," said Kerruish. "I just went ahead and carried out the idea. I never dreamed that things would turn out as they have done—that my father would be waylaid when he came to Rylcombe. I never knew until last night in the wood, and I intended coming to St. Jim's this morning and making a full confession. I saw then what a rotter and a fool I had been. But last night I was attacked by the rascal who escaped from you. He belonged to the gang. It seems that they used that tree for leaving secret messages for each other."

"My hat!" said Monty Lowther. "No wonder we mistook that chap for the kidnapper!"

"He came back to the tree and caught me looking in it," said Kerruish. "Some others came up and I was chloroformed and taken away. I've been in their hands ever since. I could not come to St. Jim's to give myself up, you see. But I really intended doing so—honour bright!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"I believe you, Kerruish," he said. "I don't think you'd be such a rotter as to carry on with your mad scheme after knowing that your pater had suffered because of it. But it was a scatter-brained and rotten thing to do in the first place. Unless your pater gets those papers back to-day, he will be ruined. His whole business will collapse. He's at St. Jim's still, and he's nearly frantic about it."

Kerruish looked round, clenching his fists.

"I'll get those papers back!" he said grimly. "I know the headquarters of those ruffians. I have just got out, and I'm going back there to get those papers for my pater!"

The others looked in astonishment at him.

"The gang operate from the old mill down on the river!" went on Kerruish. "I should like you chaps to come along and give a hand. We can settle things up just as well as the police. Will you chaps come?"

"Like a shot!" said Tom Merry. "You've got some pluck. Kerruish, I must say. We'll all come along and lend a hand."

"Yass, wathah!"

The juniors hurried from the little house in River Street, and made their way to the towing-path.

A short distance along the river stood the mill. It was busily working. Nobody would have suspected the picturesque old structure of being the secret headquarters of a desperate gang of rogues.

Tom Merry & Co. halted behind some trees near the mill, in such a position that they could observe the mill without being seen themselves.

"I'm going in, and I'll get my father's papers by hook or by crook," said Kerruish between his teeth. "It's up to me. You fellows can be gradually closing in while I get inside. I'll give some sort of signal when I want you to chip in."

"Right-ho, Kerruish!"

"Perhaps one or two of us had better go in with you," said Jack Blake. "It's a jolly risky thing for you to undertake alone, Kerruish, especially as they know you have broken away and the alarm is raised—"

"That's just why I think I had better go in alone!" said Kerruish quietly. "The rogues will be getting ready to flit—that's if they're not already gone. I hope not. But one stands more chance of getting in undetected than two or three. Leave it to me. I'll manage to give some sort of signal when I want help."

Kerruish crept away.

He did not feel afraid in the slightest; his one consuming thought was to atone for his wrongdoing and the trouble it had brought upon his father.

He vaulted over the mill fence and crept to the rear of the building.

He crouched by the wall for some minutes, watching and listening. His presence there, so far, was unsuspected.

His eyes glinted when he saw a small window near at hand. He swung it open and looked in. All was dark and quiet inside. Flushing a glance back, he caught a glimpse of his schoolfellows in the trees opposite. Then, gritting his teeth, the junior clambered in through the window.

He was in a small kitchen, sparsely furnished. Through a door at the other side he saw a passage, and he made his way on tiptoe towards this.

He could hear voices from outside, and he wondered whether the men working at the mill knew of the sinister purpose to which it had secretly been put.

Traversing the passage without mishap, Kerruish came to a flight of stairs similar to those he had previously escaped by.

Now came the more perilous part of his venture.

Step by step, and with infinite caution, he descended the stairs. As he neared the bottom, he heard the muffled sound of men's voices coming from below.

The bottom at last!

Looking about him, Kerruish saw that he was in a narrow, musty-smelling passage. On his right lay the little room in which he had been imprisoned. And on his left was a doorway through which the men's voices sounded.

Scarcely daring to breathe, the St. Jim's junior crept to the door.

Peering through a chink in the crazy structure, he saw four men seated round a table. The man at the head of the table he recognised as the chief of the gang.

On the table lay a heap of valuables in a glittering array. There were also several bags, and a number of wads of banknotes.

So this was the rascals' lair!

"Well, boys," the chief was saying, "I reckon we've come to the end of our tether—so far as this neighbourhood is concerned, at any rate. That confounded boy will raise the alarm in the village, and the sooner we quit this place the better. We'll each take our share of the loot, and then go our several ways and lie low until the hue and cry is over. I propose that in three weeks' time we meet at our usual place at Abbotsford, and then, perhaps, we can start again. But we haven't done so badly, considering that we've only been operating at Rylcombe a little more than a fortnight."

Grunts of approval came from the rest of the desperado gang.

Kerruish's eyes gleamed when he saw the chief take up a leather portfolio with the initials "J. R. K." engraved on it.

His father's satchel, containing the precious papers!

"I'll keep this, as part of my share!" grinned the chief. "The contents ought to be worth a couple of thousand to old man Kerruish. I see he's offering a reward for them, so they must be very important. Now, as regards the rest of—"

The rascal did not finish that sentence.

The door came open without any warning, and the figure of Eric Kerruish hurtled across the room.

Before the chief of the desperadoes quite realised what had happened, the junior had snatched the bag from his hand and was making for the door.

An enraged shout arose from the gang.

"Stop the little hound!"

Kerruish pounded up the stairs, the satchel tucked under his arm.

Behind him came the chief of the gang, with the other rascals following on his heels like a pack of infuriated wolves.

Would he be able to give Tom Merry & Co. the signal?

He reached the lumber-room above.

Flushing a glance back over his shoulder Kerruish saw that every instant was precious.

Then a cry of dismay escaped his lips.

Three ugly-looking men appeared in the doorway!

"Hold him!" shouted the chief of the gang from behind. Kerruish acted in an instant.

His quick eyes had seen a wooden ladder leading upward from the lumber-room through a trapdoor to a room above.

With a wild spring the junior reached the ladder, just missing the men as they rushed towards him.

Hand over hand he climbed the ladder, pushed open the trapdoor and disappeared.

He heard the oaths of the gang below, and heard them coming up the ladder.

There wasn't a moment to lose.

Kerruish found himself in a room half-filled with sacks of flour.

There was a window, and he darted towards it.

A great sigh of relief escaped his lips.

Tom Merry & Co. were below.

Crash!

Kerruish shattered the window with one blow of his fist.

"Come in, you fellows!" he shouted. "Don't let any of them escape, and—"

"Now, you young hound!"

Kerruish turned with a cry as those words sounded behind him.

The threatening figure of the chief of the gang was coming towards him.

Kerruish, still hugging the satchel, darted away as the great sinewy hands reached out in his direction. He looked upwards and saw that there remained but one avenue of escape for him—there was another trapdoor, which was open, let into the ceiling of the store-room.

A snarl of rage came from the miscreant behind him as he divined the lad's purpose.

Kerruish dodged his would-be captor, and scrambled up the wooden ladder that led to the trapdoor.

He clambered through the aperture, and saw that he was in a loft under the thatched roof of the mill.

"Now you won't escape me, you little whelp!" snarled the man, darting through the trapdoor.

Kerruish picked up a plank of wood that was lying on the loft floor, and he turned at bay with his crude weapon raised aloft.

"Come on, you cad!" he muttered. "Touch me if you dare!"

The rascal halted, gritting his teeth.

From down below came sounds of fierce scuffling, and Tom Merry & Co.'s voices could be heard.

"Give the wottahs jip, deah boys!"

"What-ho!"

"Three have escaped, but never mind them! We've got the loot!"

"Huwah!"

"Wot about Kerruish?" said Harry Hammond's voice anxiously.

The two in the loft faced each other grimly.

"Give me that satchel!" said the gang chief in a thick voice. "If you don't I—I'll kill you!"

"Come on, then!" muttered Kerruish between his teeth.

"Just try it on—"

He broke off, for a sinister figure had come up behind him.

It was one of the gang who had been crouching in the loft.

Kerruish, quick as a flash, swung round his weapon and dealt the fellow a blow that stretched him on the floor next minute, stunned.

He was too late to deal similarly with the other, however.

The board was wrenched from Kerruish's grasp, and a snarling voice sounded almost in his ear:

"Now, you little jackanapes, I've got you!"

"Not yet!" panted Kerruish.

With the satchel hugged tightly to his side he gave a sideways spring and reached the little window in the loft. He wrenched his way through it and clambered out on to the thatched roof of the mill.

A cry of rage sounded from the rascal behind him, who was climbing through the window, still intent on wresting the satchel from the boy's grasp.

Kerruish looked below and shuddered. Forty feet beneath he saw the hissing mill-stream—a veritable death-trap to anyone caught in the vortex of the swirling waters.

A gentleman who was walking along the towing-path looked upwards, and Kerruish, clambering over the thatched roof, in a position of dire peril, gave a cry:

"Father!"

Mr. Kerruish started.

"Eric!" he exclaimed, almost unbelievably.

"It's all serene, father. I've got the papers! Look!" cried the junior, holding up the satchel. "Get ready to catch— Oh!"

With a hissing snarl the chief of the desperadoes forced his way to Kerruish's side, and his long, muscular arms encircled the junior.

"Give me that bag!"

Kerruish struggled in the miscreant's grip.

Hanging on to the thatched roof of the mill, the two fought for possession of the leather satchel.

A shout came from the window. Looking round, Kerruish saw Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Blake, and Cardew.

Then there was an ominous rending noise.

The crazy thatch on the roof gave way under the strain.

"Look out, Kerruish!" shrieked Blake in horror.

Too late!

The struggling pair on the roof lurched outwards, groped for a fresh handhold on the thatch, and then fell together into space.

Mr. Kerruish, on the towing-path, stood spellbound with horror.

The plucky junior and his rascally assailant plunged downward and went headlong into the seething waters of the mill-stream.

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CHAPTER 9. Kerruish Atones!

"HELP—help!"

The choking cry arose from Kerruish as he appeared on the surface. It was just audible above the fierce hissing of the foaming waters and the sinister rumble of the giant mill-wheel.

The junior held his arm out of the water, and a cry escaped Mr. Kerruish's lips. It was the satchel!

"Bravo, Kerruish!" shouted Tom Merry. "He hasn't let go of the bag! If only he can hang on till—"

The Shell captain's voice trailed off into a gasp of horror.

The rascal who had fallen into the mill-stream with Kerruish was fighting his way to the junior's side, reaching out every now and again towards the satchel. In his demoniacal fury at being thwarted, he intended to vent his spite by destroying the papers that meant so much to Mr. Kerruish.

Kerruish struggled in the swirling waters with all his might. He was not a strong swimmer, and with one hand holding the satchel he was doubly handicapped. He was tossed about and buffeted by the rushing waters that every moment bore him closer to the great, grinding wheel—the wheel of death!

Tom Merry & Co.'s faces were blanched with the horror of the situation.

They knew that if Kerruish were caught up by the giant mill-wheel he would be crushed—his death would be too awful to contemplate.

The man in the water was strong, and was evidently a good swimmer. He stood every chance of being able to battle successfully with the surging waters, but he was making no effort to save Kerruish.

"Help—help!" cried Kerruish again, and then the flood snatched him up and hurled him under. He was very close to the mill-wheel now. As he rose Tom Merry & Co. saw that the plucky junior was still grasping his father's satchel.

Kerruish was grimly determined to hang on to that till the last.

"For Heaven's sake keep up, if you can, Kerruish!" shouted Tom Merry from the mill-roof. "We're getting some rope! Oh, good!"

Hammond, who had been despatched to fetch some rope, arrived with an armful. A long rope was made that stretched from the loft window to the water.

The upper end was made fast to a rafter.

"I'm going down!" said Tom Merry. "You fellows pay out more rope as I want it. I'll try to reach Kerruish and make him fast to the rope, and when I call, you can haul him back."

Tom Merry clambered out of the window and swarmed down the rope.

He fastened the end of it round his waist when he reached the mill-stream, and then signalled to his chums above to pay out more of the rope.

They did so, and the Shell captain swam with long, powerful strokes towards the spot where Kerruish was battling grimly with the boiling torrent of water. He was terribly close to the wheel now, and it seemed that he would be snatched up any minute and taken to his doom.

Would Tom Merry be in time?

The boys above and Mr. Kerruish on the bank watched, with white, haggard faces while the valiant Shell fellow fought his way nearer to Kerruish.

The man was looking after himself now, and Cardew, Blake, and Herries had come down to wait for him when he left the water.

"Good old Tommy!" shouted Monty Lowther from above.

"He's got Kerruish!"

Only just in time!

Even as Kerruish sank, exhausted from his terrible ordeal, into the swirling flood near the rumbling wheel, Tom Merry reached his side. One strong arm went round the half-unconscious junior, and Kerruish was dragged away from the sucking stream.

The plucky lad still clutched his father's satchel in one hand.

The position was still fraught with direst peril.

Tom Merry, without the assistance of the rope, would never have managed to rescue Kerruish from the powerful mill-stream. Fighting grimly with the rushing waters, he at last unfastened the rope from himself, and flung the loop round Kerruish's body.

Then he waved from the water.

The juniors at the window pulled at the rope, and gradually Kerruish was drawn backwards—out of the jaws of death.

Tom Merry hung on to the rope, too, until he felt safe in letting go. Kerruish was conscious now, though dazed. His one thought, however, was for the satchel he had saved for his father, and his grip on that never relaxed.

"Bravo, Tommy!" shouted Manners. "He's safe now!"

Tom Merry grasped Kerruish when the calmer water had been reached, and swam with him to the bank.

A little farther on Jack Blake, Cardew, and Herries had

(Continued on page 27.)

A stirring episode in the life of Dr. Ziglio, the world's master criminal. Jennifer Pettigrew Wren, who is up against this elusive plotter, has his work cut out, as this thrilling yarn tells!



CHAPTER 1.

A Mysterious Crime!

"I SEE by this morning's paper," said Jennifer Pettigrew Wren, the eminent scientist and crime investigator, "that the young Prince Maharat of Zed has disappeared mysteriously on his way from England to Ceylon. An odd affair, Rob."

Robertson, who was standing with his back to the fire in the study of Wren's flat, looked down upon his chief from his vast height.

"Ziglio?" he queried meditatively, blowing a dense cloud of smoke ceiling-wards from his pipe.

"More than likely," commented Wren. "The prince was returning home from Oxford. His father lies seriously ill, and the latest bulletins entertain little hope of his recovery. A big coup for the enterprising person who secures the prince and succeeds in holding him hostage."

"Let's see," said Robertson, pulling out a small diary and turning over the leaves. "Our last information concerning Ziglio was that he was in—"

"Paris," concluded Wren. "The route that the prince took led that way. He picked up, or should have picked up, a P. and O. boat at Marseilles."

"Then," commented Robertson, "you suggest that the actual kidnapping took place between Paris and Marseilles, probably on the train?"

Wren shook his head.

"The news is wireless from Ceylon," he said. "The correspondent has only the bare facts. The Government of Zed, as with all these minor Eastern Powers, is foolishly independent and jealously secretive. The officials refuse to divulge anything of the mysterious disappearance itself. They consider that it is a distinct slur upon their tribal honour. Their dusky coat of arms has been blotted; maybe in blood. They are, in all probability, beheading at this very moment, the unfortunate bodyguard and personnel of Prince Maharat."

"Suggest what, then?" asked Robertson.

"I surmise," continued Wren, "that beyond a doubt the prince actually set his feet upon the shore of India; that he did not come through Paris at all, nor did he ever have the slightest intention of doing so. I surmise that he has been in the hands of his kidnappers now for at least two weeks, and that this news filtered through by accident,

and could he see you? Inspector Marlow sent him along."

"Show him in," said Wren, without further ado.

A couple of minutes later Augustus ushered into the study a short, stockily built man, wearing the uniform of an inspector of police. Hopkins had a full, red, heavy face, and a pair of very small blue eyes. A fierce moustache, perfectly waxed, covered his upper lip.

"Mr. Wren—" he said, addressing the detective.

"My name is Wren, Inspector Hopkins. On my left is Mr. Robertson, my colleague. Won't you sit down, inspector? Augustus, shut the door."

Augustus complied.

"Very nicely shut, Augustus; but you're on the wrong side of it," murmured Wren. "Ah, thank you!" he added, as Augustus, somewhat crestfallen, closed the door behind him.

"Now, what's your trouble, inspector?"

Hopkins wasted no bones. He came to the point straight away, speaking in quick, rather husky tones.

"I'm from Richardstown, Mr. Wren," he said. "We've got a very strange case up there. I can't make head nor tail of it, and, although, as you can imagine, it's pretty gruelling for me to have to come to you, I'm doing it because I think you're the only person who is equal to the case."

"I'm flattered, I assure you," said Wren.

"The case," continued Hopkins, "is one of murder, for no apparent reason, in a haunted house. The house, the name of it is the Gables, lies about three miles outside Richardstown. The owner, Sir Digby Scott-Digby, managing-director of the big firm of boot polish manufacturers, is on holiday in Europe. He went away three months ago, leaving his caretaker and a skeleton staff of servants in the house. He intended leaving the Gables and settling in Europe, I understand. He was a superstitious, imaginative man, and the place was beginning to get on his nerves."

"I don't know that there's any relation between superstition and boot polish," observed Wren dryly. "I beg your pardon, inspector. Proceed."

"From information that I have gathered—the inspector's tone was not a little irritable—" it would appear that from the time Sir Digby Scott-Digby departed, the house became alive with ghosts and the scene of uncanny occurrences. One by one the servants left, until, at last, there remained, apart from the caretaker, only the butler, a man

These people seldom, if ever, adhere to their advertised programme, and unless they are going on a personal tour, they purposely mislead the public through the medium of the newspapers. I base my theory concerning the length of time that he has been in his enemies' hands on letters which we have to hand. He left England six weeks ago. He would thus reach Ceylon in, roughly, three weeks. The news says that he was kidnapped while travelling. This must have occurred, then, at least two weeks ago. My dear old Rob, the thing proves itself."

"Certainly seems feasible," admitted Robertson. "But in that case, how about Ziglio? Doesn't that rather eliminate the possibility of his having had a hand in it?"

Wren smiled.

"I don't see how it alters his plans more than to send a coded wireless to his agents in Ceylon. He steps aboard the P. and O. boat at Marseilles, he finds that the prince is not travelling, so he gets busy on the wave lengths, as you would put it. No, no, Rob. We must not allow ourselves for one moment to imagine that Dr. Ziglio is a negligible quantity here. He is not. There is no one else that I know of who has the daring, the skill, and the means to carry out a scheme of this magnitude, and I'm convinced that he is not only concerned, but a very prime mover in the case."

As Wren finished speaking there came a knock at the door, and, in response to the summons, Augustus, Wren's factotum, entered the room.

"Inspector 'Opkins to see you, sir," he said.

"Inspector who?"

"Opkins, sir," repeated Augustus.

"Do we know an Inspector Hopkins?"

Wren inquired, looking across at Robertson.

The latter shook his head.

"I don't," he returned.

"Have you ever seen him before?" asked the detective of Augustus.

"No, sir," said Augustus, "and I'm not particularly glad that I've 'ad the honour now. He said as you probably wouldn't know 'im, as 'e's from up-country; but he said it was all right,

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who had been a batman to Sir Digby when the latter was in the Army as a young man.

"Both the caretaker and the butler had been in Sir Digby's employ for not less than fifteen years, and were reputed to be close friends."

"Their names?" queried Wren.

"The caretaker's name was Josling, the butler's Wilberforce."

"Who brought you the news of the caretaker's murder?" said the detective.

"Wilberforce phoned up the station, and I went along immediately," answered the inspector. "I found Wilberforce in a state bordering imbecility. Josling was lying on the floor of his bed-room upstairs."

"Was he dead then?"

"Yes."

"How had he died?"

"He had been stabbed through the right eye by what must evidently have been a stiletto. This had penetrated the brain. There was no blood."

"A skilled murderer," murmured Wren.

"I proceeded to question Wilberforce. From him I gathered that both he and Josling had retired to bed at their usual hour of eleven o'clock the previous night after a quiet game of cribbage. Wilberforce had slept soundly, and had awakened in the morning at half-past six. He rose and had a cold bath. When he got downstairs he found that Josling was not yet up, which was surprising, since the caretaker had risen at six o'clock for as long as he could remember. He made a search of the stables and kitchen gardens, and then, thinking that the man might be ill, he went upstairs to

his room, and found him on the floor as described."

"You used the word 'haunted' in speaking of the house, inspector."

"I questioned Wilberforce as to the nature of the supposed ghosts, and he admitted that both he and Josling had seen what the other servants had seen, but they had decided to stick the thing out on account of their loyalty to Sir Digby."

"What had they seen?"

"According to Wilberforce, the mystery took the form of a shining hand that grasped a stiletto, such as might have been used to murder Josling. The hand seemed to pass across one of the landings, through a door that led to a bed-room, and then disappeared completely. The hand was always in the position it would naturally occupy if a man held it out straight ahead of him. But there was no body visible, only the hand."

Wren looked at Hopkins keenly.

"Do you believe that story?" he inquired.

Hopkins nodded.

"I do," he responded.

"On what grounds? I mean, do you merely believe that the butler is not imagining what he has told you, or have you more tangible proof?"

"I have a more tangible proof. In fact, I have absolute proof that such a phenomenon, whether it is human or unearthly, does exist in that house."

"What is your proof?"

"I myself have seen it," said the inspector steadily.

"Ah, now, that's really interesting, inspector!" Wren leaned forward across the table. "When did you see it?"

"Last night," returned Inspector Hopkins. "That's why I came down to see you to-day. I felt that things were going too far. There was no clue as to the murdered Josling, and, although I strongly suspected Wilberforce, I had nothing upon which I could arrest him. Indeed, he was doing everything in his power to help me. Thus my investigations were going as badly as they could go. So I decided upon drastic action. The previous night Wilberforce, who still persisted in sleeping in the house, told me he had seen the shining hand once again, and I said I would remain in the house that night. I stayed. I saw the mysterious hand. I emptied the chambers of two revolvers into it, but without any result. So here I am. I must have help."

"You want me to take the case in hand, working independently?" queried Wren.

"I want you to come down to Richardstown with me to-day, Mr. Wren, and get busy right away!" returned Hopkins.

Wren pondered for a moment.

"You can demand your own fee," supplemented Hopkins.

"I'll come!" said Wren suddenly.

"We'll talk terms afterwards. I like the sound of the case, so I'll come. I must, however, write a note first. Will you excuse me?"

Wren went over to his desk and scribbled a quick

note. This he stuffed into an envelope, addressed it, and going over to Robertson, handed it to him.

"See that this gets away at once, Rob," he said. "It's important." He turned to Hopkins. "Do we go by train or car?"

"I have a car outside," said the inspector.

"My coat's in the hall," said Wren. "I'm ready now."

When they had gone Robertson looked at the letter. To his amazement, he saw that it was addressed to himself. Feverishly he tore it open, and read as follows:

"This is funny. The man's lying like a trooper. He's no more an inspector of police than I am, and his whole story is fabricated. But, since it is meant specially for me, I'm going to get to the bottom of it. Follow us wherever we go, and keep a sharp look-out for signs from me. Take Augustus with you."

Robertson shot out of the study like a bullet from a gun.

"Augustus!" he roared. "Get your hat and coat on! We've to follow the chief!"

He quickly changed into his outdoor clothes, made certain that he was well armed, and then dashed downstairs, closely followed by the faithful Augustus.

Outside, Robertson was just in time to see the car, bearing Wren and the inspector, sliding down the road about a hundred yards ahead.

He hailed a taxi.

"Follow that car ahead wherever it goes!" he said.

The driver of the taxi, who knew him well, grinned.

"'Nother job o' work?" he inquired, throwing the car into gear.

"Serious, too, or I'm mistaken!" returned Robertson.

CHAPTER 2.

Tricked and Trapped!

THE journey to the Gables occupied the larger part of three hours, and as they stopped at a small hotel at Windene, a mile or so away, for lunch, Hopkins and Wren did not actually reach the old house until about three in the afternoon.

When they did reach it Wren found that it was gloomy enough, and might well be credited with any mystery.

The house was big and straggling and ugly, almost entirely obscured from view by great trees that reared themselves up all round it. The gardens were quite well kept, but were beginning to look seedy. Evidently they had had little attention of late.

The whole of the grounds, which must have covered at least four acres, were hemmed in by a high, ivy-clad stone wall that was unbroken.

When the great iron gates at the entrance closed behind them Wren felt instinctively that here was a veritable prison, from which escape, if escape were desired, would be no easy matter.

There was a fairly long drive leading up to the large front door, and when at length they reached this, the detective was more than glad that he had left that note behind for Rob. Moreover, he had had ample proof that Inspector Hopkins was entirely an inspector of his own making. He had bowled him out several times on the journey without the latter's knowledge.

"Richardstown," Wren had said casually. "Then, of course, you must know Dr. Stevens, the coroner, very well."



Beads of perspiration were running down his face, and detective Wren was wondering when his end would come, when a sudden noise above his head attracted his attention. He looked up, and—

"Know him as well as I know my brother. See him very frequently," Hopkins had replied, taking a long shot. As Dr. Stevens had retired from the position of coroner for more than five years, and had never been near Richards-town in his life, Wren smiled inscrutably. Hopkins let himself in with a key, and stood aside, holding the door open for Wren.

"A bad spot," said the detective, as he entered the big gloomy hall. "The loyalty of both Wilberforce and the late Josling must have been almost superhuman, inspector. Ah! Unless I'm mistaken, here in Wilberforce."

The detective's last remark had been directed towards a tall, gaunt-looking man, who had emerged from a door beneath the wide stairs that ran from the hall into the upper regions of the house.

Hopkins shut by this time shut the front door.

"Hallo, Wilberforce!" said Hopkins. "This is Mr. Wren. I told you I was going to bring him down, if he would come."

Wilberforce made no remark. He gazed at Wren sourly.

"A pleasant day," said the detective lightly. "Although I expect you are still very upset over your colleague's death?"

"I am," returned Wilberforce. Apparently he was a man of few words.

"I admire your pluck remaining on here after such an unsettling occurrence," said Wren pleasantly. "And I hear from Inspector Hopkins that there are still uncanny things going on almost nightly."

"There are that," admitted Wilberforce.

"Well, well," continued Wren hopefully, "we'll get busy and see what we can do about it. Perhaps you would let me wander over the house a bit, Hopkins? You might first show me the room in which Josling was murdered."

"Certainly," agreed Hopkins.

Without further parley, Hopkins led the way upstairs and along the wider oak-panelled passage. At the end of this he stopped, and threw open a door. "This is the room," he said. "They had shifted from their proper quarters during their master's absence to more comfortable rooms."

Wren entered. It was a large apartment with a bay window on the right. Opposite to this was a brass bed, and at the far end was the grate and a marble mantelshef. A dressing-table was flung across one corner. The room looked on the whole, very comfortable.

Wren, although convinced that no tragedy of any kind had occurred in the room, made a very good show of examining minutely the bed, the carpet, and all that there was in the apartment. When he had finished he wisely pronounced no verdict, since he had none, and asked to be shown the route that the ghost, in the shape of the shining hand, usually took.

Hopkins conceded his request, and escorted him back along the passage.

"It comes," he said, "from that door." He pointed to a door that opened on to the landing. "It walks across the landing, thus—he went forward—till it reaches this door here. Then it disappears completely, how or where I cannot conjecture. It's an eerie sight, I warn you."

Wren examined both rooms, this time with a purpose that was more than a desire to bluff. He found nothing. Everything seemed solid. At last he finished.

"We can only wait until to-night," he said. "We must lay for it then. In the meantime, I'll take my promised lonely



—in the gray light of the dawn saw a man's head, a dusky head, and in the man's mouth was a dagger. Wren realised in an instant that help was at hand!

ramble. I must formulate some plan of action. You don't object, Hopkins?"

"Not in the least. Go where you like. Mr. Wren. Personally, I could do with a cup of tea. Can you manage it, Wilberforce?"

"Come downstairs," said Wilberforce. "The kettle was almost boiling when I left."

"Join us when you've finished," said Hopkins to the detective, as he moved away.

"Thanks," said Wren.

He waited until he heard the door beneath the stairs close behind them. Then he went along the passage in the direction opposite to that in which Hopkins had just taken him, and looked out of the window.

It was not in order to gain another view of the scenery surrounding the Gables that Jennifer Pettigrew Wren did this. It was to verify a suspicion that had come to him in the room where Josling was purported to have been murdered. It was a suspicion that on the outside of the ordinary glass was stretched a wire gauze of finely-tempered steel, guaranteed to stop anything short of a shell getting in or out. Wren knew the stuff well. He had seen Robertson taking cinema photographs of charging buffaloes in Central Africa in cages made of similar steel gauze.

In a moment his fears as to its present use were realised. He left the window at the end of the passage, and tried the first door along the right. This was locked. He tried the next. This was also locked. Indeed, on further investigation, it proved that the only doors that opened to his touch were the doors of the rooms he had already visited. And, on examination, he found that every window therein was fitted with the steel gauze.

Wren emerged from the room nearest the landing and went downstairs quickly. Crossing the hall, he tried the front door. It was locked. He crossed back to the door underneath the stairs, and turned the handle. This, too, refused to open. There were four other doors, presumably leading into rooms that lay off the hall. He tried all of them, and found them locked.

"I've overdone it—risked too much,"

he muttered, mentally kicking himself for having done so; and after a moment's thought he emptied his revolver into the lock; but the bullets merely flattened themselves blunt against what must have been bullet-proof metal, or ricocheted off dangerously.

Then a rare thing in Wren's history happened. A premonition of calamity overcame him. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Trapped, tricked, and a prisoner," he reflected. "They must have taken months to prepare this death hole. I—"

Wren broke off suddenly as there came the sound as of someone fumbling at the front door. Then something dropped with a dull thump into the metal letter-box. Wren approached cautiously.

Through the inlet of glass he saw the letter. He opened the box and took it out. It was addressed to himself.

"I have warned you many times, Wren," he read. "This is the end, but I shall see you before you die. A pleasant night. ZIGLIO."

Wren crushed the letter up in his hand, and in a positive furore of frenzied anger, took a second revolver and blazed away at the front door. The voluminous sound of his shots echoed and re-echoed through the house, but nothing more happened. The front door was just as impenetrable as the others.

He realised the uselessness of it, and, panting, sat himself down in a neighbouring chair. It can be said safely that Jennifer Pettigrew Wren had seldom, if ever, so completely lost his temper.

CHAPTER 3.

The Shining Hand!

AT eleven o'clock that night Wren went upstairs to the room to which Hopkins had first taken him. The detective had more or less resigned himself to whatever fate might have in store for him. To make his escape seemed to be impossible. He had tried every conceivable way, and had found himself completely baffled at every turn.

And now the utter silence of the great house was beginning to tell on him. He was not afraid—only uneasy. He was hungry, too, and his nerves were jagged, and on edge. He looked at his hand. It was by no means as steady as he would have liked. A creaking board made him swing round involuntarily. The scuttering of a rat overhead sent a cold shudder down his back.

Wren decided that he would not take off even his overcoat, since it was quite cold. He looked at his watch. The time was exactly five minutes past eleven. He looked at his revolvers, and saw that he had refilled both. And at that moment, and without the slightest warning, the electric light went out, and the room was plunged into inky blackness. Wren sprang to the door, opened it, and looked out. The light at the end of the passage, which he had left on, had also been turned out. The whole house was utterly black. The darkness seemed to envelop him like a cloak.

He stood stock still, listening. No other sounds than those he had already heard came upon his ears, yet he, somehow, felt that a crisis was very near at hand.

He strained his eyes into the blackness beyond, his fingers clutching the barrels of his revolvers. His nerves jangled horribly. Then, far away down the passage, he perceived a tiny pin-point of light, a curious, phosphorescent, pale light that, even as he looked at it, grew bigger. It was approaching him, yet there was no sound whatsoever.

It stopped suddenly. Wren emitted a low gasp. For the pin-point of light was slowly turning round, and a pale, shining hand, gripping a thin stiletto, was shaping itself out of the blackness. The weird, ghastly, dismembered hand crossed the landing. Then it recrossed; then, in an oblique position, it continued its course in the direction of the watcher. As it neared him, slowly, inevitably, Wren broke out into a cold sweat. With marvellous self-control, however, he held himself together, and when this horrible thing was ten yards away, as far as he could judge, he opened fire with both revolvers.

Up and down, round and round, he fired. If anything human had been there, it must needs have been riddled with bullets.

But Wren, to his horror, perceived that the hand had not so much as stopped in its advance. He ceased firing only when his cartridges were exhausted, and stood transfixed.

A sweet and sticky smell came upon his nostrils. His head swam; the pale, yellow, shining hand seemed to travel round him with dazzling speed.

And a low chuckle from out of the darkness, a chuckle that froze his blood, reached his ears.

Then merciful oblivion claimed him, and he fell to the ground with a dull thud, a helpless mass.

When the cloud of oblivion slowly lifted from Wren's brain some six hours later, he became aware that he was in a sitting posture, in a lighted room. He tried to move his arms, but could not. Nor could he move his feet. Still muddled, and feeling intensely ill from the effect of the chloroform that had drugged him, it was several minutes before he could think coherently.

Then the truth flashed upon him so vividly that he nearly swooned again. He was bound hand and foot in an electric chair—the chair of death.

He took stock of his surroundings with greater interest as fuller consciousness came.

He was in a bare room; it seemed to him rather like an attic. Above his head was a fanlight, and opposite to him was a window.

He was about to make another attempt to struggle free from the bonds that bound him when the sound of a door opening on his right attracted his attention. He could not turn round sufficiently to see who it was, as a metal band, connected with wires bound his head, and was fixed to the back of the chair; but the low chuckle that came upon his ears brought back the horror that he had previously gone through.

It was the chuckle that he had heard in the darkness of that dread passage. He waited.

Slowly there came into his line of vision the figure of a man; a man garbed in a great coat that stretched from the top of his ears, with the collar turned up, right down to his feet. Upon his head was a felt hat, the brim of which was turned down so as to almost entirely cover up his face. He stopped directly in front of Wren, and stood, his hands plunged into his overcoat pockets, regarding the captured detective.

"Well, Wren," he said, "how are we now?"

"Dr. Ziglio," returned Wren, "I admit that I'm not quite myself."

"I hardly expected that you would be," said Ziglio. "However, you will not be feeling so ill in a short while. I have just looked in to say farewell to you before I leave for good, and to explain briefly one or two little things that must be a little vague to you."

"That's very good of you," murmured Wren. "Perhaps you'll explain why I'm sitting in this chair, trussed up like a chicken?"

"It's all a matter of scientific research," Wren said Ziglio calmly. "And I could think of none better than yourself upon whom to experiment. You are about to die, Wren, in the cause of science. You will be a hero. How does that appeal?"

"I'm interested," said Wren. "Go on quickly."

"During the past month or so," said Ziglio, "I've invented a bullet-proof suit that fits one like a glove, and I've invented the chair upon which you are sitting. The suit I have already tested. I am still alive. If ever a man shot to kill, Wren, you did to-night. Don't you remember? In the passage downstairs? Did it never strike you that that terrible hand and stiletto were nothing more than my own hand with phosphorus rubbed over it? Curious, Wren! I should have thought that to a man of your intelligence— But, no; you were probably well keyed up by the excellent yarn I invented concerning the murder of an imaginary caretaker. How well everything has gone."

The criminal paused for a moment and took a step nearer to Wren.

"And the chair in which you are sitting is a curious chair. Every second you sit there, Wren, the metal becomes warmer. And at a certain temperature a delicate mechanism will function. Wren, a voltage of electricity will pass through you that will shrivel you to a cinder. I don't know when it will occur. That's the beauty of it. It may be in a minute's time, or it may be in an hour's time. It depends entirely on you, Wren. But isn't it rather clever?"

Wren, pale as death, clenched his teeth, and tightened his lips. Ziglio looked at his watch.

"I must be going, Wren," he said. "Good-bye! A pleasant journey. You've been the worry of my life, but I think we can say that the end has come."

Dr. Ziglio moved out of the detective's sight, then Wren heard the click of a switch.

"I have switched on the current," said Ziglio. "Sooner or later my little invention will act. By the way," he added, "my latest coup. Have you heard of it? The young Prince Maharat of Zed. Not at all bad, eh? He's coming with me from the very house now. He'll be worth a hundred thousand pounds, you know."

Even in his hour of utmost danger, Wren permitted himself to be just a little pleased at the accuracy of his deductions. His words to Robertson that morning flashed back to him.

He sat in the chair of death, a little smile playing on his lips.

Ziglio closed the door behind him, and the detective was alone.

A quarter of an hour passed. Wren was still alive. But for how long? Beads of perspiration stood out on his face. It was terrible, this cruel uncertainty—to know that you were slowly, inevitably bringing about your own destruction!

Wren wondered when it would end; wished that it would end. The suspense was almost more than human flesh and blood could stand.

Half an hour passed. Heavens, why didn't the mechanism function? It couldn't be long now. Any minute—any minute—

A sudden noise about his head attracted Wren. He looked up. In the grey light of the dawn he saw a man's head, a dusky head, and in the man's mouth was a dagger.

Wren realised in an instant that this man was an emissary of the Kingdom of Zed. He had tracked his prince down across the waters, and was even now searching for him with the deadly accuracy of the East.

"Tuaanna Invuuddut!" (Come in!) shouted Wren. "Tuaanna Invuuddut! Poolah! Poolah!" (Hurry! Hurry!)

The Zedian heard the command, and like a flash threw back the skylight. Then he sprang into the room with the agility of a panther, and, without a word, unfastened the straps that bound the detective.

Wren sprang to his feet and leapt away from the chair. He was saved. Alive!

The Zedian looked at him keenly. "Where is Prince Maharat?" he said, in even tones and in perfect English. "He was here."

"He was here, I know," returned Wren, mopping his streaming forehead with a handkerchief. "But he left with his captor about half an hour ago."

"So," said the other, "I must follow."

"Wait," said Wren. "You have saved my life. I am eternally grateful. My name is Wren. I know who has got Prince Maharat, and I should be honoured to assist, if I can, in his rescue."

The Zedian looked at Wren steadily.

"Mr. Wren," he said, "your fame is world-wide. I should be honoured if you will assist. But we must hurry, hurry. I have companions outside!"

"I should have, too," vowed Wren. Together they left the attic.

They found Robertson and Augustus in the car outside the gates waiting.

But Dr. Ziglio had vanished.

Whither, Wren was determined to find out.

THE END.

(Be sure you read of the further exciting events in this thrilling chase in next week's rattling story, entitled:

"A CHASE IN THE AIR!")

There are a host of exciting adventures in this powerful sporting serial!



BY
ANDREW
GRAY.

The most thrilling tale of the Turf ever told!

Lord Dungarrin Becomes Excited!

DICK DERRINGER had been too long in the wild and woolly West to let himself be taken by a couple of fat bobbies for a crime he had never committed.

He sprang at bay into a corner of the jockeys' dressing-room, with a chair whirled above his head ready.

"I mean it!" he roared. "By George Washington, I swear that the first crass fool to touch me gets this across his skull—wallop!"

The two bobbies skipped back, but the inspector was not the man to be thwarted. He was just charging in to down his man when Scarfe saved the situation with an alarming groan.

"G-o-o-o-o-oh! G-r-r-r-r-r!" he moaned, writhing as he came back to consciousness. "Oh, I'm so bad! What ever made me swallow the beastly stuff, I don't know! Kill me somebody! I wish I was dead!"

The inspector paused in the very act of leaping on Dick. He turned a startled face to the patient who was still oblivious to all around him.

"Well, look here now, I say!" blurted the police officer, realising that the words bore out exactly what Mat had just said.

The latter had already wriggled free from the constable who was supposed to be holding him. He ran to Scarfe's side just as that unhappy youth was fishing out of his mouth a wad of half-chewed paper.

"Here! There you are! What did I tell you? It's the paper the doping stuff was wrapped in!" cried Mat, snatching it in triumph. "He's had it in his mouth all the time, and he's confessed he took it himself!"

The doctor looked flustered and foolish. But without doubt it was the remains of a package that had held some sort of a drug. Mat ripped out a wild cheer of delight, whereat Scarfe sat up.

"Hang your beastly eyes, so it's you, is it?" he half snarled, half groaned. "Well, I'll get my own back for this, see if I don't! You've made me half poison myself—"

"One minute!" struck in a third voice sharply; and it was Sir Roger Rackstone who had spoken.

If ever a man looked sick and savage it was he.

"Let us start at the beginning, please. And be sure you understand, Scarfe, exactly what these two are saying against you."

There was more behind this interruption than a mere desire to see the case started square. In fact, it was the very reverse. Sir Roger's intention was to see that it started crooked, hence his interruption.

"The story they've told us levels a very serious accusation against you," he went on, fixing the apprentice with a gaze that made him forget his sufferings promptly and sit bolt upright.

"If it were only half true," warned the baronet, wagging his finger at him, "it would mean that you would be warned off the Turf for ever as a very dangerous young scoundrel. So remember that before—"

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE!

LORD RIPLADE, late owner of the estates of Furzedown and the famous racehorse, Whiplash, the most-talked-of two-year-old of his day.

TOM MARTINGALE, his lordship's "trusted trainer and esteemed friend," and "gav'nor" of the renowned Furzedown training stables, in whose charge are sixty thoroughbreds, famous among them being the Stunt and Whiplash.

MAT MARTINGALE, his sixteen-year-old son, a true and trustworthy apprentice.

SCARFE, another apprentice, but an unscrupulous rascal.

SIR ROGER RACKSTONE, a mean and despicable scoundrel, and owner of the Stunt, a most unreliable racer.

The late Lord Riplade had so willed that, should his property be unclaimed by his missing heir within one year of his death, the Whiplash colt was to become the property of Tom Martingale, providing the trainer was still at Furzedown. Failing this, it would go to Sir Roger Rackstone.

Realising the situation, Sir Roger Rackstone sets a plot in motion, and gets Tom Martingale hounded out of Furzedown.

Mat Martingale, the old trainer's son, who is left in charge of the stables, finds a friend in Dick Derringer, an American.

Fearing further treachery at Furzedown, the American sets a trap, and Scarfe is found in the act of doping the famous Whiplash.

A dramatic scene follows, which results in Mat's arrest. The police advance to arrest Dick as well; but the American snatches up a chair, and, with his back set to the wall, cries: "Stand back!"

(Now read on.)

But here Sir Roger found that he was not going to have it all his own way by any means.

"Look here, confound and hang it all, what the dickens do you mean, sir?" chipped in an angry voice, as someone thrust his way out of the crowd filling the dressing-room.

It was Lord Dungarrin, who so far had left Mat to fight his own battle, and now was heartily ashamed of himself.

"Who made you judge, jury, and counsel in this affair, I'd like to know—eh?"

His lordship's round face was red and shiny with rage. He clutched his cane, as if for two pins he would break it over Sir Roger's head.

"You're prompting this young ruffian to be careful in case he blurts out the real truth—that's what you're doing!"

"Sir!" stuttered Sir Roger.

"Don't splutter all over me!" bel-lowed his lordship, thumping the floor with his stick. "I won't have it! I repeat that you're prompting this young sweep—putting him on his guard, in fact, instead of letting him give himself away if he likes."

"But what has he done?" cried Mat. "Didn't you hear him just now—"

"Shut up!" roared his lordship, turning on the boy in a blaze, and smiting the table a resounding whack with his stick. "How dare you interrupt me when I'm talking? Sir Roger knows very well what I mean. Let the brat alone, I say, to tell his own story! Do you hear me, you young scoundrel?" he shouted, shaking his stick in Scarfe's terrified face. "You're guilty, and you know it. It's all perfectly true what young Martingale says. You were in his stable, trying to dope his Whiplash—"

But it was Sir Roger's turn to interfere at this. Seizing Lord Dungarrin by the coat-tails, he slung the old gentleman wildly into the crowd.

"You impertinent old windbag!" he panted, wild with rage. "How dare you make such charges against me? You accused me of tampering with a witness! Then what the dickens are you doing now?"

The old peer's answer was a succession of roars like a whole menagerie impatient for its beef-bones.

"Hold him, gentlemen—hold him back!" implored Sir Roger, promptly.

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regretting his assault, and dodging the whizzing cane which now avenged it.

It was a disgraceful scene, of course, and it had to be stopped. But before anyone could be found to take the lead in smothering his lordship, Sir Roger's tall hat had been hacked almost in half, his collar burst, his knuckles skinned, and generally he was in a pretty bad state of repair.

"Sue me! Take me into court! Arrest me now, if you choose!" yelled the old gentleman in defiance, as they swept him out of reach of his victim. "I know all about you, and so shall the world before I've finished with you. I say you're a blackguard, sir—a low-down racecourse ramper—a—"

But here, fortunately for his lordship, some kind friend clapped his handkerchief half-way down his throat; and he was borne, kicking and apoplectic, into the open, where his daughter received him.

Mat and Dick Derringer were left splitting their sides with glee at the scene. Lord Dungarrin's timely interference had swayed opinion altogether in their favour, as they could see.

There was no getting past Scarfe's own confession, what was more.

"This case must be taken farther, of course," said the chief of stewards, who had been a disgusted witness of the scene.

"And so it shall, by Jupiter! I'll have that old fool's last penny out of him for this!" spluttered Sir Roger, punching out the wreck of his topper and clapping it on his head. "And as for these two scoundrels—" he stormed, facing Mat and his friend.

"These two scoundrels, as you choose to call them, are acquitted, so far as the stewards are concerned," was the shattering rejoinder of the chairman. "It is not they whose conduct calls for investigation, but that of your own jockey, Sir Roger, whose cause you are espousing with such unnecessary heat. So now we'll say no more about the matter for the present," he went on. "We must decide first whether we have jurisdiction to deal with it; and if so, you may attend at the inquiry."

"I may? That's infernally generous of you, I'm sure!" laughed Sir Roger viciously. "But, as a matter of fact, it is no concern of mine. I was only trying to help the course of justice."

"Then oblige us by saying not another word just now, and so put an end to a very painful incident!" was the chief steward's cold reply.

That finished Sir Roger. Out he stamped, telling everybody on his way how he was going to have Lord Dungarrin's blood. But nobody seemed to want to hear, and most, in fact, abruptly turned their backs on him.

The race that the Stunt was entered for had, of course, been run without him. Realisation of this led to a fresh paroxysm of fury on his owner's part.

"The confounded brute!" he spluttered under his breath. "I wish to goodness I had never seen him! He's lost me a fortune, as it is, and if I don't take care he'll be the ruin of me altogether."

The race had been a "selling" one, though, as usual, this was only a matter of form, and most of the horses were being bought in by their owners as fast as they were put up.

The auctioneer was just getting to the last of them when Sir Roger pushed through the ring. A sudden determination had seized him.

"Hi! Whoa!" he called out. "You can put up my Stunt, too, and knock him down to whoever is fool enough to buy

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him. There is no reserve, and I'll not bid, I promise you."

The auctioneer stared, so did the crowd of sportsmen around, and not least of all young Mat, who had come into the open, only too glad to get a breath of fresh air.

"Sir Roger is going to sell the Stunt!" he gasped aloud in astonishment. "Why, what the deuce have you got to say about it, then, young impudence?" said a voice at his ear.

And, turning, Mat found Lord Dungarrin beside him, all the thunder and fury vanished from his round, jolly old face.

His lordship's pretty daughter was with him, still looking a little scared, and evidently not sure that her dad would not be ramping round again like a raging tiger. Hence her little frown to Mat to beware how he picked his words. But Lord Dungarrin was out for information.

"You know the horse, if anyone does."

"Yes; to our cost!" said Mat bitterly. "If Furzedown had never seen the brute, it would have been a happier place now."

"Then you don't want him back again?"

"I? No—well, I can't say I do. But he's a good horse, however much they've blackened his reputation, and I can't help feeling sorry for the old brute."

"Then that settles it. You'll buy him!" laughed his lordship.

"I, my lord?"

"Yes—for me, if you like. We'll talk about that later," said the old chap.

"No, don't be bashful. You've got to make a start on your own some day, and the sooner the better. Let these people round feel you're someone in the world. You were going to apply for a trainer's licence, weren't you?"

"Why, yes," answered Mat; "but—"

"No; no buts," persisted his lordship. "You bid for the horse. I'll see you through. Here; they're putting him up now!"

An Amazing Auction!

WHY Mat should have felt so nervous about it, he could not tell. After all, it would rag Sir Roger no end to see him bidding away like a young millionaire after he had flattered himself that he had trampled him into the gutter.

Meantime, the knight of the hammer had duly taken Sir Roger at his word, and the Stunt was being led into the sale ring.

"There you are, gentlemen! The famous Stunt; one of the best-known animals of the year, as I need not remind you," rattled the auctioneer, raising a laugh which he had not intended.

"You impudent clown, what do you mean by that?" fumed the indignant owner.

"I say he is a famous animal ("Hanged sight too famous!" chipped in a bystander, with a sardonic chuckle) and a good one!" cried the auctioneer, turning red. "And, anyway, Sir Roger Rackstone has decided to part with him on the terms you all heard him give just now."

This was a hint to the baronet to keep his nose out of it. The Stunt was distinctly offered without reserve; Sir Roger also declaring that he would not bid for him himself.

"So, gentlemen, I'll ask one of you to give me an offer just to start things going. The Stunt, gentlemen, is in the

'aged' class, perhaps, but a flyer still and—"

"When they let him," chimed in the same wag who had interrupted before. "Why didn't they turn him out for the last race? Couldn't they wake him up enough to get him to the post?"

This was rubbing it in a bit hard, and though a few round the ring laughed, the majority looked down their noses.

"Gentlemen—gentlemen!" remonstrated the auctioneer, while Sir Roger danced with rage. "To serious business, please! The Stunt is offered without reserve. How much may I say for this very fine and plucky stayer, a winner of many races? How much, gentlemen—how much?"

"Fifty shillings!" came promptly from somewhere, in a light, high-pitched voice, and everybody roared. They thought it must be the wag again. But the auctioneer knew better.

"Fifty shillings!" he sneered, looking as if he had been hit with a brick. "Who—who offers that, may I venture to inquire?"

Everybody began to look round, too, for the bold bidder. As a matter of fact, it was Mat who had popped out this amazing figure.

He had meant it for "Fifty guineas" really, which was about a fifth of what he knew the Stunt to be worth. But in his nervousness he had said shillings, and there it stuck.

Lord Dungarrin, at his elbow, promptly exploded as if struck by a shell.

The auctioneer began to get annoyed, while Sir Roger danced with rage. Sight of the latter and sound of all the jesting laughter put sudden heart into Mat. Why should he be ashamed to own up, after all?

"Gentlemen—gentlemen," remonstrated the auctioneer, "just because a catsmeat merchant seems to have intruded himself into your company by mistake, that is no reason why the most important sale of the day should be delayed. This is the Stunt before you, gentlemen," he cried magnificently, "who, if he has failed in one or two races, at least has the satisfaction of knowing that certain persons responsible for his lapse are now enjoying their deserts."

The last dig at his dad decided Mat. "I ask you again for a serious offer, gentlemen, to start the bidding at!" cried the auctioneer.

"And you've got it!" retorted Mat promptly. "I've offered fifty shillings, so what more do you want?"

"You!" Both the auctioneer and Sir Roger gasped the word simultaneously, and in much the same tone of indignant disgust. The crowd of racing men twirled round and regarded Mat, too, as if he were some wild animal out of a show.

And then one who knew him suddenly shouted:

"Why, dashed if it isn't young Mat Martingale, son of old Tom himself!" And off he went into a perfect howl of laughter, in which everyone else promptly followed suit.

The humour of the situation smote them at once. Being good sportsmen, they had secretly resented the auctioneer's ill-natured thrust at a trainer whose case, after all, had not yet been properly investigated.

And here it was old Tom's own boy who had scored both off him and Sir Roger, too. They all guffawed and stamped and thumped Mat on the back, even some of those who, two days before, had been frantically telegraphing to remove their horses from Furzedown instantly.

"Bravo, boy! Stick to it! Fifty shillings is the bid!" went up the shout. "Pfaugh!" scoffed the auctioneer. "Then I refuse to accept it!" "What the dickens do you mean?" flashed out Mat. "You can't help yourself. You've got to!"

"Then I won't!" snapped the gentleman with the hammer. "Sir Roger is here to do serious business, not to be trifled with. So run away, little boy, and wash your face!"

Mat stiffened under this cheap insult. The next instant he was shoving his way through the crowd right to the front of the ring.

"Look here!" he cried, clenching his fists. "Don't you try to be funny with me, or I'll show you who'll need his face washed pretty quick! You've put the Stunt up for auction, and Sir Roger has said himself that it's to be knocked down to the highest bidder!"

"Hear, hear, young 'un; we all heard him!" chimed in the crowd.

"Then my offer is the highest so far!" declared Mat. "Either I claim the horse, or you get on with your job and try to raise a higher bid. Isn't that fair?" he cried, appealing to the bystanders again.

And with one accord they all roared:

"Quite right! It is!" "But this is foolery!" spluttered Sir Roger, jumping into the breach. "I refuse to let my horse pass into the hands of a——"

He suddenly became aware how Mat's fiery blue eyes were boring holes in him, and so he came to an ignominious halt. The crowd was quick to mark the climb-down, and cheered ironically.

"You can't help yourself, old boy," said one old veteran. "The youngster's quite within his rights. If you don't buck up to get a pal to outbid him, the horse is his, and we'll see he's not done out of it, too!"

"Gentlemen—gentlemen," bleated the auctioneer again pathetically, "this isn't a funny turn at a pantomime!"

It looked as if the crowd were selling the horse, not the gentleman on the rostrum. Yet they were no more successful in extracting a more handsome offer than Mat's. All saw the joke, and no one intended to spoil it.

"Going at fifty shillings! Fifty shillings is offered! Any advance on fifty shillings, gentlemen?" vociferated a dozen amateur auctioneers at once in various corners of the crowd. The clamour collected a vast mob round the enclosure railings. Everybody wanted to know what was up now.

"I protest! I cancel the sale! I withdraw the horse!" yelled Sir Roger, trying to make himself heard above the din.

But the auctioneer saw that popular opinion was against them, and, after all, it was nothing to do with him.

"You can't cancel the sale, sir!" he snapped. "They were your own terms, and you've got to stand by them now!"

"Then I'll make it five hundred guineas!" howled the baronet, purple in the face.

"And you can't do that either!" snapped the auctioneer again. "You said you wouldn't bid yourself, and hang me if you shall!"

The crowd fairly rocked with laughter.

"So, gentlemen, the bid is only fifty shillings!" cried the auctioneer, anxious to get it over. "Only fifty shillings! A famous thoroughbred going at fifty shillings! Going at fifty! At fifty it's going! Going—going!"

Whack! The hammer had fallen. A tremendous outburst of cheering greeted

the conclusion of one of the most amazing auctions on the Turf.

"Bravo, boy! Oh, bravo! Splendid!" applauded Lord Dungarrin, slapping Mat on the shoulder as if he meant to break his collar-bone. "And he's yours, boy! I make you a present of him. You deserve him if ever a man did!"



"Here you are, gentlemen! The famous Stunt!" cried the auctioneer. "How much may I say for this very fine and plucky stayer?" "Fifty shillings!" Every eye was turned upon the bold bidder. It was Mat Martingale!

"But I don't want him, sir," answered Mat, aghast. "I'd never have offered sixpence for him if I had known you didn't mean to take him. He's no earthly use to me!"

"Oh, very well, then!" said his lordship. "I vowed I'd start and turn owner myself, didn't I? Well, here you are! The Stunt shall be the first of my string. I'll buy him off you for two hundred and fifty guineas now, and you shall train him."

Mat was quite swept off his feet. He hated the notion of the money. But it meant all the world to him just now to have one powerful patron backing him thus openly.

"Make it twenty-five guineas, my lord, and he's yours, and welcome," said Mat quite genuinely, whereat everybody roared again with laughter.

"Well, the kid's no money-grabber, anyway!" said one to his neighbour.

"Nor was his father, either, whatever other faults he might have," was the prompt reply. And thus Lord Dungarrin, by a simple act, had scattered seed in a good many minds, where it sunk deep and struck root.

Mat was able to think about getting out of his jockey kit then. Dick Der-ringer, like the sound chap he was, had gone off long ago to look after Whip-lash. When Mat marched up with the Stunt, and related how he had "done Sir Roger down" at the auction the American laughed fit to split his sides.

"But what became of Scarfe? Have they taken him to hospital?" inquired Mat.

"Hospital, no!" said Dick scornfully. "He was as right as ninepence once he had come to his senses, and he slunk away with nobody to stop him."

Humble Pie!

THREE days passed, and then the message came that Mat was pining his heart out for. At last he might visit the hospital and see his dad.

It was the first time since the coach smash, when the old trainer had been pitched off on his head. For days he had hung between life and death, but now he was conscious and strong enough to see his son, at least.

"You must be prepared for a great change, however," the hospital surgeon warned Mat in his letter. "Your father, though able to see and hear, has not regained the power of speech. He is paralysed, in fact, and, indeed, may never be able to move again. It is impossible to tell, but we hope for the best."

Bitter news, this, after all these weary days of waiting. Still, there was no bemoaning.

"I'll go over to the hospital to-morrow forenoon, as suggested. And you—what will you do?" he asked of Dick Der-ringer.

"I don't know. There's nothing urgent, and Philper says we can have that man of his over whenever we want him. Shall I come and meet you?"

"Right! And then we can go on to Hurst Park. Lord Dungarrin is sure to be there, and I'd like to know what he means to do about the Stunt exactly."

"Good!" answered Dick. "He'll be anxious to hear how your father is, too. He's really fond of the old chap, I know. He was telling me yarns about him yesterday when I met him."

"You met him? Where?" demanded Mat, to whom this was news.

"Oh, I ran across him up in town! He stopped me in Piccadilly, and we had a chat together," was the easy reply.

Mat still looked mildly astonished. Dick, in that old cowboy hat of his and flannel shirt, was hardly the sort of customer the average nobleman would be seen talking to in Piccadilly, or anywhere else, for that matter.

But then, Lord Dungarrin was one who did not care two straws for anyone's opinion generally. And old Dick—well, he was Dick, the very best in the world. What Mat would have done without his help and advice these days he trembled to think.

In the morning, therefore, the youngster rode over from Furzedown to Ewell Hospital, steeling himself for the shock which he knew was coming.

His father was paralysed, and might never recover. In that case, what would the Jockey Club do about the inquiry? Surely they would not be so cruel as to warn him off then, even if they thought him guilty of the infamous charge.

Mat could not help feeling that it was the shock of this, far more than the accident, that was the cause of his dad's break-up now.

He reached the hospital and the ward where Mr. Martingale lay. Tears started to his eyes. For there lay his poor old dad, looking at him, yet never moving so much as a muscle of his face.

"Dad!" cried Mat, heartbroken. The hand and arm were limp in his grasp. "You know me? Oh, I'm so sorry to see you like this! But you'll be well again soon."

It was hard work, this make-believe. The boy could see from the eyes watching him that his father had no hope that he could ever be his old self again.

Yet, if the body was inert, the eyes were burning. To Mat it seemed as if they were trying to tell him something,

or that there was something the trainer wanted to know.

"How Whiplash is doing, of course," decided Mat, and straightway told him. He rattled on with forced gaiety about everything at the stables, suppressing the bad news, of course, and telling his dad his scheme for applying for a licence as a trainer himself.

He hoped to see his father's eyes light up at that. It should amuse him. But though the eyes certainly danced more brightly, it was not laughter that was there.

"I wonder what the deuce it can be," thought Mat, perplexed. "I know he's got something on his mind to tell me. He can't write it, I suppose."

Being paralysed, of course, he could not. Nevertheless, Mat took out pencil and paper. The eyes grew hopeless instantly. Yet, when the boy put the pencil into his father's nerveless hand, and gripped his fingers on it, to his joy he seemed to feel the life thrilling again through the pulseless veins.

"Write, father! What is it? One word may tell me," urged Mat breathlessly.

And very slowly and feebly the point traced in spidery letters the one word "Mort." Then the head fell back all of a sudden, and there was panic among the nurses who had not seen what Mat was doing.

"You've overtaxed him. Now one cannot say what sort of a set-back he has had," upbraided the matron, promptly pushing Mat out of the ward.

"But it proves that he may recover the power of his limbs yet!" declared the youngster, frightened though he was.

"Yes, it proves that he might have done if this had never happened," was the unkind retort. And Mat had to take his leave, content with that.

Before he went, though, the doctor saw him. He was not so depressing. He feared no serious turn for the worse, and promised to let Mat know the latest whenever he telephoned him.

"And, by the way," finished the medico, "there have been several constant inquiries after Mr. Martingale's health."

"Lord Dungarrin?" suggested the youngster.

"Yes; and Sir Roger Rackstone!" was

the startling answer. "He seems most anxious about the patient."

"Really!" gasped Mat.

"Yes. I told him you were coming over to-day—the first visitor he has had." Mat was thunderstruck. But an even greater surprise awaited him. For there, outside the hospital, advancing to meet him at the gate, was Scarfe, of all people. And just as sympathetic as he could be.

"I know you'll be wondering how I can have the cheek to be here," he said humbly, after Mat had taken his hand. "But the fact is, I could not stand it any longer. I had to come to hear for myself how Mr. Martingale was."

"Really," said Mat, not quite able to believe his senses, though his generous heart was always so ready to forgive and forget.

"Yes, I've behaved like a beast, and I know it," Scarfe went on, with real emotion in his voice. "If I'm not all as guilty quite as you think, I've done several dirty tricks that I am heartily sorry for, and I want you to forgive me."

Mat could not answer yet. He was still too bewildered. First to hear that Sir Roger was inquiring tenderly after the man he had wronged, now to have Scarfe here pleading pardon for his sins.

"Oh, don't think I'm fooling you!" said Scarfe. "I've done with that. What's more, I've done with Sir Roger Rackstone, too."

"You have? Has he thrown you off?"

"I don't know. I haven't given him the chance," was the prompt reply.

"But he's a wrong 'un, and I knew it all along. So the more shame to me for siding in with him as I did. And now I want to ask you a great favour, Mat."

"What is that?"

"To take me back to Furzedown," came the answer.

Mat darted a keen look at Scarfe.

"I know we left you in the lurch in the dirtiest possible fashion," confessed Scarfe, "and you'd be perfectly entitled to keep the door shut in our faces, particularly mine."

"Then you're not the only one who wants to return?"

"No. All the most decent chaps did from the first, only I'm ashamed to say I prevented them."

Really, if this was not genuine repentance, Scarfe would make a fortune as an actor. Mat accepted it as such, anyway.

"But look here," he said frankly. "supposing you did come back, what would there be for you to do? The gov'nor will never be well enough to run the show again."

"He won't?" echoed Scarfe, with a note of eagerness that rather jarred.

"No. He's paralysed, I'm afraid. Can't move nor speak."

"Can't speak, even?" Scarfe echoed again quickly. "Not a single word? Have you been in there all this time, and he has said nothing at all?"

"Not a syllable," answered Mat, forgetting the scrap of paper in his pocket. Scarfe half turned away.

"I must be going now," he said. "You won't want my company, anyway, I expect, even after what I have said."

"Oh, rot!" answered Mat impulsively. "If you are sincerely sorry I'll let bygones be bygones, and gladly. But about your coming back to Furzedown—some of you—I shall really have to think. I've scarcely any cash, you know—hardly enough to feed ourselves with."

"No, you don't say so," said Scarfe.

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"I thought your guv'nor was rolling in cash!"

"No. He was once, perhaps. But the new Furzedown took a lot of money to build. Still, it's all his own. Thank goodness, whatever happens, I can always count on having a roof over my head!"

"Yes, by George, there's some comfort in that!" agreed Scarfe, and a moment later he had said good-bye.

Mat made his way to Hurst Park Racecourse then. The Stunt was under his charge, eating his head off, and he must see Lord Dungarrin to know which of his engagements he was to fulfil. Dick Derringer was awaiting him near the paddock. It was a lovely afternoon, soft and sunny, and like a holiday to Mat to have no horses to ride or attend to. He told his chum about his dad.

"That was all he wrote. The one word 'Mort,' he said, relating the incident of the paper and pencil. 'Mort is French, isn't it?'"

"Yes; the French for 'death.'"
Dick was sorry he had said it the next instant. For Mat turned white and sick, as if he had dealt him a blow. Yet what could he say to turn the edge of it?

"Did your father know French?" he asked lamely.

"Yes, thoroughly. He has raced in France a lot," answered Mat. "So it means 'death,' does it?" he groaned, half to himself. "Of course, I remember it now. It was poor dad's message to me that there was no hope left—that he knew he was done for."

"Fudge!" snapped Dick. Yet he could offer no other explanation to comfort the youngster.

Fortunately, Lord Dungarrin came up just then to divert Mat's thoughts.

"Aha, my 'boy trainer'—eh?" he cried, shaking hands. "Well, your father is better, they tell me. Have you seen him yet?"

Mat told him he had, and what the end of his visit had been. His lordship tapped his chin.

"Oh, well, cheer up, youngster!" he said. "Keep up heart and hope. I think that writing was a good sign, if you ask me. As for the word, don't bother your head about it. By the way, have you sent in that application of yours yet for a trainer's certificate?"

"Why, no—not yet, sir," confessed Mat.

"Then why the dickens haven't you?"

fumed his patron. "What is the good of making resolutions if you don't act up to them, I'd like to know! Here, Engleton! Hi!"

It was the Earl of Engleton, a member of the Jockey Club Committee, that Lord Dungarrin was hailing in this off-hand fashion.

"Engleton," said Lord Dungarrin, "you remember that youngster I was talking about at the meeting—eh?"

Dungarrin was one of the Jockey Club committee, too.

"About the trainer's licence—you know—Tom Martingale's son?" said his lordship, jogging the other's memory.

"Oh, yes, I remember!"

"Well, here you are. This is the lad."

His lordship turned and surveyed Mat with a calm yet searching gaze.

"I hear you want to gain a trainer's certificate, so that you may carry on the Furzedown stables during your father's unfortunate illness?"

Mat bowed.

"Well, you haven't made much effort to get it so far," was the mild reproof; "but Lord Dungarrin has pleaded your case, and if you do apply it has been decided to grant it. The circumstances are special," he went on. "A grave charge is made against your father, and the case has not yet been heard. His accuser, moreover, desires strongly to withdraw."

"He does! Sir Roger Rackstone, do you mean?" gasped Mat, to whom the whole world seemed suddenly to be turning topsy-turvy.

"Yes, Sir Roger Rackstone. That, though, will not affect the action of the committee. The case must be gone into. But, meantime, it is recognised that it would be unfair to keep the stable under a ban indefinitely. So if, as I say—"

"I apply to be made a trainer, you will grant it!" cried Mat, his eyes dancing with glee. "Oh, sir, how can I thank you, or my father, either? He is absolutely innocent, as he will be able to—"

But here the Earl of Engleton stayed him with a wave of the hand.

"We won't say anything more on that head," he said a little coldly. "There is one other condition, though, if you take the certificate, and that an important one. The apprentices who were already indentured to your father must be allowed to transfer and resume their duties with you if they wish it."

"All of them?" asked Mat, dismayed. For now he came to think it over he mistrusted Scarfe still. There was Browner, too, and Cuffen. He had no wish to see them back at the stables, with only himself to boss them.

Nevertheless, that was the Jockey Club's ruling. Their wish was to settle the indenture difficulty with as little disturbance as possible.

"Then I must accept, sir," consented Mat at last. Whereat Lord Dungarrin clapped him on the back, and cried:

"Bravo!"

That ended the memorable interview. Trainer Mat, as he might call himself now, went back to Dick, his chum.

"Hookey gee! I say, that's a bit stiff!" was his verdict on the new situation.

"I've seen Scarfe since," said Mat, "and he's apologised out and out. In fact, he's already asked me to take him back again, even with things as they were."

"That's blamed cheek, if you like!"

"Not if he really means it," answered the youngster, who, since he was compelled to accept the condition, would rather put faith in his late enemy than not.

Dick Derringer saw this, and wisely kept his further opinions to himself.

"Say, though, but this is a great day for you, sonny!" he said heartily, as they at last drew in sight of home again that evening. "A full-blown trainer of horses—eh? And how old are you? Not sixteen? Hookey gee! That's about a record, I guess!"

He broke off with a gasp of astonishment.

"Great landscapes! Why, what in tarnation is this now these blamed galoots have been up to? Snakes alive! It's a welcome arch!"

"Welcome arch!" echoed Mat, spurring forward.

"Yep, and a brass band, too; blessed if there isn't! The news has got ahead of you, sonny. Look! Two horseshoes in white, and across the middle, 'Good Luck to Trainer Mat! Welcome Home!'"

(Next week's splendid instalment will be extra long and extra thrilling, so don't miss it!)

"The Kidnapping of Kerruish!"

(Continued from page 18.)

captured the leader of the desperadoes as he clambered from the water. The miscreant now lay helpless on the grass, his limbs bound with rope.

Blake and Cardew ran forward and assisted Tom Merry and Kerruish from the water.

The rope was then unfastened, and the juniors at the window hauled it in.

"Merry, how can I thank you sufficiently, my brave lad?" cried Mr. Kerruish, hastening up. "You have saved Eric from death!"

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" said Tom, flushing. "I think Eric deserves all the praise. Look! He's still got the bag. He has saved the papers for you!"

Kerruish sat up and gave a twisted grin.

"Here's the bag, father," he said. "The papers will probably be wet, but they're all there, I think."

Mr. Kerruish pressed his son's hand as he took the satchel. He opened it eagerly and examined the contents. The papers were not very wet, thanks to the tight clasp of the satchel, and Mr. Kerruish announced, with a fervent sigh, that they were all intact.

"Eric, my poor lad, you have suffered terribly!" said Mr.

Kerruish huskily. "To have been kidnapped by those rascals and—"

"But I wasn't really kidnapped in the first place, father," said the junior, in a quiet voice. "It was a trick—a trick of mine to get money out of you. I was a cad—a rotten cad, father, and I deserve all I have had—and more!"

"Eric!"

"I should have confessed before, but I got really kidnapped," went on the junior. "It was all through me, father, that you lost these papers, and the least I could do was to get them back for you."

"But, Eric, I don't understand!" said Mr. Kerruish, in bewilderment.

Kerruish then told the whole story to his father, making a full and frank confession of why he had pretended to be kidnapped and held himself to ransom.

"So, you see, father, I'm several sorts of a rotter!" he finished up miserably. "The whole school will look down on me—"

"No, they won't, old chap!" said Tom Merry quickly. "The chaps will understand when we explain. You were a mad ass to play that trick on your pater, but I don't think you really meant any harm. You just let yourself go unthinkingly, and you realised your mistake afterwards—when it was nearly too late. But I reckon you've made up for it now. Your pater's got his papers back, and, moreover, we've captured most of that horrible gang, and secured their loot!"

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy enthusiastically. "Things have turned out all wight, deah boys!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 348.

I've got my gold tickah back, and my tiepin and fountain-pen, and othah things! We've made a wippin' haul this mornin', bai Jove! And it was mainly through Kewwuish. I wathah fancy you will forgive your son for his slight delinquency, Mr. Kewwuish?"

Mr. Kerruish nodded.

"Yes, Eric has my full forgiveness," he said. "He has atoned for his thoughtlessness."

"Huwah!"

Tom Merry & Co. returned to St. Jim's in triumph, after having handed over the captives and their plunder to the police. It came out that the chief of the gang, Jasper, owned the mill, having inherited it a month ago from his old father, and had thus been able to use it as a secret headquarters for his gang of desperadoes.

Kerruish's affair created a great stir at St. Jim's when the truth became known.

But he was not ridiculed, neither did the school condemn him.

Mr. Kerruish settled his son's debts, and then left St. Jim's, hurrying back to the City with his papers.

He had had a long talk with his son, and explained to him that he needed most of the money he had acquired for settling business debts of his own. His business had been very bad for some time, and it was through sheer desperation, in the face of imminent bankruptcy, that Mr. Kerruish had taken the great plunge, which had resulted in his leap to fortune. But the bulk of the money would be taken up with settling his business on a firm foundation again, so that Mr. Kerruish was not so well off, actually, as the newspapers had made him out to be.

Kerruish was very quiet and subdued for several days afterwards, but he gradually settled down to his old place in the school, and the affair was soon forgotten at St. Jim's.

THE END.

(IMPORTANT! You must not miss: "FIGGINS AT FAULT!" by Martin Clifford, next week's magnificent extra long complete school story of Tom Merry & Co. This grand yarn will be 25,000 words in length and undoubtedly will prove one of Martin Clifford's best.)

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