

"RUCTIONS UNDER CANVAS!" A Topping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. BY MARTIN CLIFFORD

The GEM 2^D

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.



FIGHTING THE FLAMES!

Headless of the flames which licked fiercely at their clothing and flesh, Tom Merry and Gordon Gay fought with a will to rescue their unconscious schoolfellows from the great camp fire! (A thrilling incident from the grand long story of Tom Merry & Co. contained in this issue.)



Your Editor Chats With His Readers.

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,—For long years to come there will be talk of the wonderful happenings at Lord Conway's Cadet Camp near Winchelsea. Mr. Martin Clifford's extra long yarn in next week's GEM carries on the record of a remarkable gathering. It is the finest and most thrilling story yet, and the account of the air crash is just tremendous.

"THE GREAT CAMP MYSTERY." By Martin Clifford.

It is only necessary for me to skim over the astounding incidents in a highly sensational plot. There have been exciting times at the camp as well as merry japes and cheery ragings. The new tale brings tragedy into the picture as well, and you will feel even more sympathetic than usual towards good old Gussy, thanks to the heroic part he plays. Look out for something which is thoroughly novel, and which at the same time makes one feel one is in the midst of friends. For the favourites of St. Jim's are well to the fore, and that inexhaustible fun-maker Gordon Gay does not sit idle with his hands in front of him doing nothing. But that is not all! The action of the story shifts to the gigantic Exhibition at Wembley, and here it is that a very curious adventure occurs to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's makes a discovery which is indeed amazing, and many and various are the consequences. Order your copy early to make all sure, as the GEM next Wednesday will be in greater demand than ever.

FED UP WITH ROUTINE!

It's that daily round and common task the poet writes about! How often you find the shoe pinches there! Sometimes the fellow who is putting in right down excellent work at his job suddenly has a day of dissatisfaction. He feels that his bright young life is being thrown away in the mere drudgery of humdrum wage-earning. He thinks it would be a fine thing to cut the shop where he is busy and launch out into something a bit more romantic. Ordinary work and getting a humble wage is not good enough! But these lofty, high-falutin' notions are all moonshine. We have all been down that road of unsatisfied desires, thinking our ambitions have all gone astray. The fellow in an office looks up from his desk, catches sight of a streak of blue sky through the window, and says to himself that he was really meant to be a giddy explorer. Luckily this fit soon passes. Life—the real life—does lie in work, and in sticking to it like the best glue when

you have found it. Therein, too, lies the real success. For a few there may be big and glittering prizes—only a few; and those winners, once they have conquered, are not really much the happier, apart from having done their duty. For it is there, only there, that is found the thing that matters.

"THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!" By Roland Spencer.

We are always hearing about things which are not exciting enough to write home about. But this serial now running in the GEM—an extra powerful instalment will appear in our next—is not down on that list. It is just the limit in sensation, and the doings are so vivid you feel you are on the spot as a silent spectator of the fight for fortune in the deep. Come to think of it, no subject ever dealt with anywhere has the same magic appeal as the chronicle of the romantic days of old Spain. Of course, the author of our serial has a definite line to follow; but, like the master of his art as he is, he keeps on suggesting what lies behind it all. We get glimpses of the old empire of Spain which the centuries have seen lopped away. In those old times Spain was the richest and the proudest country in the world, for her explorers and conquerors had swept into America, and brought vast areas under the Iberian flag. I think one of these days we ought to have in the GEM another story about Spain, the country which lies at the end of Europe behind the big barrier of the Pyrenees. I know lots of GEM readers want such a feature.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

A staunch supporter of the Companion Papers writes to me to say that he has five volumes of the "Holiday Annual." Let him just wait till September! Then he will have six, for he is bound to see the grand new volume of the famous book, which will be published in the first week of the month of St. Partridge. But he must not linger about sending in his order. There will be a rush, an extra sized one, this time, for the coming volume is the best of the bunch. You will find it the most wonderful budget of excellent stories, articles, and pictures you ever set your eyes on. And, as if most suitable, St. Jim's has a prominent position in the new book. Mr. Martin Clifford has done his best—as always—and that best is very fine indeed.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

A correspondent writes to me to say that he won a Tuck-Hamper last week. "We took it up the river," he says, "my chum and I, and after poling our punt into a pleasant little backwater we had lunch under the trees. The prize was the chief item on the menu, of course, and nothing could be better. Then we talked about the GEM, and wished the good old paper all the luck in the world." My best thanks to this reader. I hope others will follow suit. There is a grand Tuck Hamper going every week. Send in the brightest storyette you ever heard. It is a chance worth trying for.

Your Editor.

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

OUR TUCK HAMPER ARE PRIME!

Remember, boys and girls, we award a delicious Tuck Hamper for the best storyette sent us each week—also half-a-crown is paid for each other contribution accepted. Cut out the coupon on this page, and send it, together with your joke, to me.

TUCK FOR DURHAM!

Ona-Sided Honours!

"Well," said a farmer to an Irish lad, who was employed on his farm, "I heard you had a little encounter with my bull yesterday. Who came off best?" "Sure, your honour," said Patsy, scratching his head, "it was a toss up!"—A Tuck Hamper, filled with delicious Tuck, has been awarded to John H. Riggall, 11, Ramsay Road, Chopwell, co. Durham.

BETTER FOR THE LIONS!

A menagerie had stopped at a quiet country village, and one small boy, with more "cheek" than cash, thought he would see the show for nothing. So he pushed his head through a gap in the canvas. But the manager caught him and hauled him out. "Here, Agripper!" he yelled to the negro groom. "Throw this young scamp into the lions' cage!" Whereupon the boy, much to the surprise of the manager, said calmly: "Arl a minute, guv'nor, if you'll let me see the show for nothing I'll get the fattest boy in the village to crawl under the canvas to-morrow night!"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to C. W. Chapman, 80, Haylings Road, Leiston, Suffolk.

A BRAINY QUESTION!

Jean entered a butcher's shop in a little town in Scotland, and demanded to see a sheep's head. "Is it English?" she asked when one was shown to her. "No, lassie, it's Scotch," replied the butcher. "Then it'll no do," said Jean. "Mistress is English, and she said I was to be sure and bring English meat." "Here, Jock," said the butcher, tossing the sheep's head over to his assistant, "take the brains out of that, will you?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to W. Archer, 110, Keyes Lane, Livesey, Blackburn, Lanes.

A QUESTION OF GENDER

Little Boy (visiting the mummy section of the British Museum): "What are these, mummy?" Mother: "Mummies, darling." Little Boy (after a pause): "Where are the daddies, mummy?"—Half-a-crown has been awarded to Neville Warde, 128, Lansdowne Road, West Didsbury, Manchester.

TUCK HAMPER COUPON.

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No attempt will be considered unless accompanied by one of these Coupons.

The chums of St. Jim's have had some very lively experiences since being under canvas, but the latest development is pretty serious, and some of the campers find themselves in deadly peril!



RUCTIONS UNDER CANVAS!

A Grand New Extra-Long
Complete Tale of Tom
Merry & Co., and the
Cadets in their Summer
Camp.

By

Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1. Gussy is Landed!

"YAW-AW-AW!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy awoke, giving vent to that sleepy remark.

He rubbed his eyes and looked round him.

At first he expected to see the old familiar dormitory at St. Jim's, with its long row of beds and the Fourth-Formers sleeping peacefully in them, and Baggy Trimble snoring in his usual mellifluous tones.

The scene which greeted Gussy's eyes that summer morning was vastly different. The only thing which was at all reminiscent of the old life at St. Jim's was the snoring of Baggy. From his bed, which was beside D'Arcy's, the fat youth of the Fourth was giving forth sonorous nasal strains that could only be likened to a fog-horn.

The beds were not in a dormitory, however, but in a small canvas tent, which contained only one other bed besides Gussy's and Baggy Trimble's. In it was slumbering peacefully a small, tousle-headed fellow, whose face had not the refinement of D'Arcy's, nor the prosperous, well-fed plumpness of Baggy Trimble's.

He was the little cadet known as Clicky, who shared that tent with D'Arcy and Trimble.

Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's were spending their summer vac at Lord Conway's summer camp, with a corps of young cadets, who were mostly Council School boys.

Lord Conway, D'Arcy's noble elder brother, had thought it a good idea for the St. Jim's juniors to live under canvas with the cadets, and the juniors themselves had one and all voted it a very good idea indeed.

Dick Rawlings, the leader of the cadets, and his merry men, had turned out to be fellows after Tom Merry & Co.'s own hearts, and, although they had not been in camp very long, a strong bond of friendship had already sprung up between them, and they were having the time of their lives together.

"Yaw-aw! Bai Jove! What a weally wippin' mornin'!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, reaching for his monocle and adjusting it to his eye.

It really was a glorious summer morning.

The sun, mounting high in the blue sky, was blazing down upon the boys' camp in the wood, and, toning refreshingly with the heat, a salt-twang'd breeze was coming up from the sea, which was only four miles distant.

Birds were twittering merrily in the branches of the

trees, and Jeremiah, the camp parrot and the cadets' mascot, was answering them with strident whistles.

Gussy consulted his gold watch, and saw that it was only six o'clock. The remainder of the camp was still slumbering.

Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. had been out late the previous night, on a thrilling route-march and night manoeuvres on the cliffs, near Winchelgate. They had not turned in till past midnight, and so had bethought themselves that reveille should not sound until seven o'clock next morning.

"Bai Jove! What wot to lie slackin' in bed on a weally glowious mornin' like this!" murmured Gussy, as he arose and put on a pair of slippers. "I wathah fancy a swim in the wiver will be wippin'. I'll wun along and have a dip on my own, and Tom Merwy, Blake, and those othah boundahs will feel wathah ashamed of themselves when I weturn and wake them up."

Thus having made up his mind, Arthur Augustus put on his swimming costume, and, wrapped in a gorgeous dressing-gown of many startling colours—quite the latest thing from Bond Street—he set forth from the tent.

Figgins and Kerruish, who were on guard at the camp entrance, grinned and shaded their eyes when they beheld the swell.

"Hallo, here comes the one and only!" said Figgins. "My word! Look at his giddy dressing-gown! Joseph's coat of many colours isn't in it!"

"Properly hits you in the eye, doesn't it?" said Kerruish.

"Gussy must be walking in his sleep!" said Figgins loudly, as Arthur Augustus came nearer.

"Poor chap!" said Kerruish, with a shake of his head.

"I always did suspect traces of insanity in him, but I never thought it would develop into somnambulism! What can we do, Figgy?"

"Give him a clump on the napper!" replied Figgins, with a chuckle. "That will wake him, you bet!"

"Weally, you wottahs—"

Clump!

Prod!

Kerruish's scout's staff came down with a smart crack on D'Arcy's noble head, and at the same time Figgins gave him an energetic prod from behind with his own staff.

"Yawooooogh! Yah! Ow-ow! Oh deah! You wottahs—you—"

"Good egg! He's awake now!" said Figgins.

"Gwoooogh! You howwid wough wottahs, I wasn't—yow-wow!—asleep!" shrieked Gussy, rubbing his head and glaring most homicidally at his two schoolfellows. "On cumbahs! Yow! I'm hurt, bai Jove! I don't believe you boundahs thought I was sleep-walkin' at all! Ow-ow-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Figgins, you fwithful wottah, I have half a mind to give you a feahful thwashin'!"

George Figgins shook his head sadly, and sighed.

"There! That's all the thanks a chap gets for trying to give—I mean, do—Gussy a good turn!" he said. "Talk about gratitude! And from old Gussy, too! This absolutely sticks in me! Boo-hooo!"

"Shame!" said Kerruish.

"Weally, you fwabjous asses——"

"Boo-hoo!" sobbed Figgins.

"Bai Jove, you are wottin' Figgins, you feahful wottah!"

"Ha, ha—I mean, boo-hoo!"

"Wats! I waghah you both as wough, unweasonable boundahs!" said Gussy, with some asperity. "I hope I'm not lackin' in gwatitude wheah it is deserved, but undah the cires, you two can go and eat coke!"

"Oh, Gussy!"

Sniff!

And Gussy, with his aristocratic nose elevated very high in the air, walked onward into the grassy woodland dells, and Figgins and Kerruish remained on guard, chuckling deeply.

It did not take Arthur Augustus long to reach the pretty river that tumbled and sparkled on its course through the wood. Sight of the rippling waters fully restored his good humour. He laid slippers, dressing-gown, and towel carefully on the bank, at the base of a tree, and plunged in.

"Jollay good, bai Jove!"

Gussy ducked again and again, and swam out, and splashed and floated, and thoroughly enjoyed his early morning dip. He did not notice three prowling schoolboy figures on the bank.

The prowlers noticed Gussy, however.

Gordon Gay, the leader of the juniors of Rylcombe Grammar School, the rival establishment of St. Jim's, and his chums, Frank Monk and Harry Wootton, chuckled deeply as they watched the swell of St. Jim's.

"My hat!" said Gordon Gay. "Fancy old Gustavus being abroad so early! He's the only one out, too! Methinks this gives us just the opportunity we are looking for—what!"

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

Gordon Gay & Co., holiday-making at the seaside home of Frank Monk's uncle, near Winchelgate, were as keen as ever on ragging their rivals of St. Jim's.

Tom Merry & Co. had never dreamt of the Grammarians being anywhere near their camp until a few days ago, when the enterprising Gay and his followers had kidnapped the complete camp and carried out a gorgeous rag on a gigantic scale.

Gordon Gay did not believe in allowing time or opportunities to slip by his heels. He and Monk and Wootton had sallied forth that morning with the intention of following up their last rag by another effort to make Tom Merry & Co. sing small.

They had ropes with them, which were intended as bonds for the guards round the camp. Gordon Gay selected two long ropes, joined them neatly together, and made a lasso of them.

Now to capture dear old Gustavus!" he chuckled. "Shush-sh-sh, you chaps. Not a giddy sound!"

The cheery lad from Australia crept stealthily to the bushes at the side of the river, and, taking aim with the rope, he sent it twirling out across the waters in D'Arcy's direction.

Gordon Gay had learnt the art of lassoing among the bushrangers "down under," and was quite an expert with the rope.

Arthur Augustus, in blissful unconsciousness of the prowlers' presence, came up, after a dive, and shook his head like a collie, treading water the while.

"I suppose I shall have to be gettin' back soon," he murmured to himself. "I— Oh! Gwreat Scott! Wh-what the— Yah! Oh deah! Bai Jove! Yooooooh!"

A rope suddenly darted down at him from somewhere in the air, and a noose encircled itself neatly round his neck. The rope next minute tightened, and Gussy received an involuntary ducking. It happened that his mouth was wide open with astonishment at the time, and a weird, gurgling noise arose from him as he went under.

"Gewwooooooh! Yah! Oooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gordon Gay & Co.

Gussy struggled to the surface and trod water. He gouged water out of his eyes and blinked along the rope that held his neck. He almost sank to the bottom in amazement when his startled eyes beheld Gordon Gay and his two grinning followers.

"Yawwooh! Bai—bai Jove! Gwooooh! You feahful wottahs——"

"Top o' the morning, Gussy!" called Gordon Gay sweetly from the bank. "What are you doing here in the river so early in the morning? I think we are to be pardoned for

mistaking you for some horrible monster of the deep that had come up the river from the sea!"

"Bai Jove!" spluttered the swell of St. Jim's, struggling wildly with the rope in the water. "I wufuse to be likened to a howwible monster of the deep——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Welease me, you wuffians——"

"Rats! Haul him in, my sons!" chuckled Gordon Gay.

"Yawwooooooh!"

The three Grammarians grasped the rope and towed Gussy through the water and out on to the bank.

They landed him like a fish, and gave the luckless Gussy no time to get away. They bound his arms and legs with rope and laid him down in the long grass among the bushes.

"Gwooooh! You wuffians! Welease me! Help! Wescue, St. Jim's!"

"Gag him!" commanded Gay. "Use your hanky, Wootton."

"What-ho!"

D'Arcy was gagged, so that the only noises he was able to utter were weird, muffled gurgles. His looks, however, spoke volumes.

"Now, my sons, I have an idea whereby I can get into the camp unsuspected," grinned the Grammarian leader. "Just here lies Gussy's jazz dressing-gown and his big bath-towel. I think if I array myself in those, and place Gussy's monocle in my eye and keep my face well hidden, I shall be able to get past the guards unchallenged—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Topping wheeze!"

D'Arcy glared homicidally at Gordon Gay over his gag as that cheery youth proceeded to take off his boots and socks, tuck up the ends of his trousers, and put on the dressing-gown. The Grammarian leader then jammed Gussy's monocle into his eye and wrapped the towel round his head, so that his face was obscured.

"How's that, deah boys?" he said, in a wonderfully life-like imitation of D'Arcy's aristocratic drawl. "I wathah fancy I shall do those boundahs in the eye, bai Jove! How wippin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Frank Monk. "You'll do!"

"Now we've got to hurry and get our little jape over before those bounders wake up!" said Gay in his natural voice. "Gussy will be all right here for the time being. Kim on!"

And, leaving Arthur Augustus lying beneath the bush, clad in a macintosh, thinking things that were unutterable, Gordon Gay and his two cheery followers made off into the wood.

CHAPTER 2.

A Ticklish Problem!

"HALLO! Gussy's soon back!"

George Figgins made that remark as a figure came into view at the camp entrance clad in that multi-coloured dressing-gown which D'Arcy claimed to be quite the latest thing in dressing-gowns. Only D'Arcy would have worn such a gaudy affair; his school-fellows shuddered whenever they saw it, and Dick Rawlings & Co. regarded it in awe and wonderment.

Kerruish grinned.

"Gussy's got his head well wrapped up in that towel, hasn't he?" he said. "Frightened of getting his hair ruffled, I expect!"

"I say, Figgay, deah boy, do you mind comin' ovah heah?" called the figure in the dressing-gown, his monocle glimmering in the morning sunlight. "I've somethin' wathah important to show you."

"All serene!" said Figgins.

He left his position at the camp entrance and walked over to where D'Arcy—or the fellow he fondly imagined to be D'Arcy—was standing.

"This way, deah boy."

Figgins, wondering slightly, followed the other into the thickets. As he did so, two mysterious pairs of arms reached out from behind and grasped him firmly. At the same time, "D'Arcy" whirled round and clapped a hand over his mouth before he had time to yell out.

The startled New House hero went down beneath that unexpected onslaught, his scout's clothes were taken swiftly from him, and he was dumped, bound and gagged, into the bushes. There Figgins lay, wriggling and gurgling.

Frank Monk donned his scout's clothes whilst the pseudo Gussy went away to decoy Kerruish into the trap.

His voice was heard again very soon.

"Come along, Kewwuish, I've got wathah a surprise waitin' for you, deah boy."

Next minute the disguised Gay came into view, followed by Kerruish. The Manx junior, like Figgins, was taken completely by surprise, and in a twinkling he was down and gagged, and his uniform taken from him.

Gordon Gay thrust aside the towel that adorned his head, and smiled sweetly down upon the two prisoners.

"Well, dear lads, you didn't expect that, did you?" he chuckled. "Wathah a surprise, bai Jove—what!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Shurrup!" said Gordon Gay, looking severely at his chums. "Not so much noise! Now, Wootton, hurry up and get into those duds, and we will away to carry out our nefarious plot."

A few minutes later three figures walked boldly into the summer camp.

Two of the cadets—Dawson and Simms—were on guard at the other side. They saw the three go in, but had no suspicions. One, they thought, was D'Arcy returning from his early morning swim, and the other two, being fully dressed in scouts costume, they naturally took to be Figgins and Kerruish.

It was still early, and as yet there were no other signs of activity about the camp. The St. Jim's Scouts and their cadet comrades were sleeping the sleep of the just.

Gordon Gay & Co. indulged in deep chuckles.

"Well, here we are in the enemy's camp!" grinned the Grammarian leader. "Hark at the sounds of slumber from the tents! They're all snoozing, bless their little hearts. Have you got the cowhage, Monk?"

"What-ho!" said Frank Monk. He took from his pocket a brown-paper parcel. Gordon Gay opened it, displaying to view a mass of golden-coloured, hairy substance. They had managed to obtain this from a farmer in the neighbourhood of Winchelgate the day previous. It was, as Gordon Gay had told his chums, rare stuff. Cowhage, in the days before the Great War, had been retailed to the youth of the land in little tins and labelled "Itching Powder," but of latter years it had, with "stink bombs," "sneezing snuff," and other abominations, disappeared from the market and passed into oblivion.

Gordon Gay knew, however, that the substance called "cowhage" served exactly the same purpose as "itching powder," and, moreover, that it was quite harmless, in spite of the fact that it produced a pronounced tickling sensation wherever it touched on the human body.

"Now, if we can sneak into the tents and dose those bounders' socks with this stuff—" said Gordon Gay.

"My word!" breathed Frank Monk. "It will give them some exercise before breakfast, and no mistake!"

"Kim on, my sons! Let's share out this merry stuff, and get to work!"

Each with a goodly portion of cowhage in his possession, Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and Harry Wootton set to work.

They crept into the tents where Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. were slumbering. They made no noise, and performed their fell work with swiftness and expedition.

Gay and Monk crept into the big central tent together.

There was a row of beds on either side, and Fatty Wynn's deep snore was the only sound that disturbed the early morning peacefulness.

They went from bed to bed, treating every sock and stocking they found with the golden-coloured substance they had brought with them.

Gordon Gay paused before a large curtain in the corner.

"Well, we're getting on!" he murmured. "Poor little boys! We'll tickle 'em up!"

"Poor little boys! We'll tickle 'em up!"

The Grammarian leader almost fell down when those words sounded from behind the curtain.

"Mum-my hat!" he gurgled. "Wh-what the—"

"Someone's hiding behind there!" said Frank Monk with a scared look. "I'm blessed if I can understand why he mocked you, but—"

"I'll soon see!" said Gay grimly.

He dragged aside the curtain, and then gave a gasp.

Jeremiah, the camp parrot, was displayed to view.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Gordon Gay. "A blinking parrot!"

"Ha, ha, ha! My only hat! Right turn! We'll tickle 'em up!" said Jeremiah, cocking his head and blinking knowingly at the Grammarians.

Gordon Gay dropped the curtain.

"We'd better not start the giddy parrot talking now," he said. "We've finished in here, I think, so we'd better bunk."

They left the tent, followed by a shrill whistle and a round of raucous laughter from Jeremiah.

They met Harry Wootton outside.

"I'm nearly finished!" grinned Wootton. "Nobody woke up, except Lowther, and he was too sleepy to recognise me. Everything O.K."

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Gay. "I— Oh crumbs! There goes Reveille!"

A bugle's note sounded loud and clear on the morning air, calling the Scouts and the cadets to wakefulness. Jack Dawson was blowing the Reveille.

Voices sounded from the various tents round the Grammarians—some sleepy, others instantly wakeful,

"Tumble up, kids!" they heard Tom Merry shout. "Show a leg there, Fatty! It's a fine morning!"

Gordon Gay turned to his followers.

"This, my sons, is where we bunk!" he said.

"Those two cadets are at the camp entrance now!" gasped Wootton. "And here come Merry and Blake, and some more of the bounders."

Cadets and Scouts were turning out of their tents to revel in the fresh morning air.

Gordon Gay & Co. looked in alarm at each other. They had miscalculated their time, and they now stood in imminent peril of being seen.

"We shall have to hide!" gasped Monk. "Quick, you chaps! We can nip behind that stack of stores."

It was the only thing for the Grammarians to do, for Tom Merry, Blake, Manners, Digby, Dick Rawlings, and O'Connor were coming towards them.

So, their hearts beating fast with excitement, the three raiders "nipped" behind the large pile of camp stores that stood near by, and secreted themselves only just in time.

There they would have to wait until such time as they could see a way of escape.

Meanwhile the whole camp was turning out.

Tom Merry, Blake, and Rawlings routed out the sluggards, and Kerr and Redfern attended to Fatty Wynn. Fatty was never very willing to get up, but Kerr had hit on the expedient of secreting a syringe full of water in the tent overnight. Two squirts from this syringe were sufficient to bring Fatty tumbling out from between the sheets with great alacrity.

Baggy Trimble came dashing out of his tent, followed by Blake and Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, who were prodding him from behind with their staves.

"Yow-wow-wow! Stoppit, you beasts! I'm awake now!" howled Baggy, his stentorian voice echoing all over the camp.

"I—I'll go for a bathe! Yaroooooh!"

Scouts and cadets all took a morning dip in the river before dressing. Gordon Gay & Co., crouching behind the stack of stores, watched anxiously for an opportunity to escape, but none came.

Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. all returned, looking fresh and vigorous after their dip.

"Morning parade in five minutes!" said Tom Merry.

"Now, you chaps, hustle up and get dressed!"

Five minutes later Dick Rawlings blew the bugle for morning parade.

The cadets lined up at one side of the camp, and a fine, sturdy set of fellows they looked. There were only two in the whole ranks to whom exception could be taken. One was George Farmer, the surly, hulking bully, who had already shown enmity to Tom Merry & Co., and the other was Leslie Snape, his crony, who followed him in everything. Snape's sallow, pasty face contrasted strangely with the healthy, radiant looks of the other Council School lads.

Tom Merry & Co. formed in line opposite the cadets.

The St. Jim's juniors were all bronzed with the sun, and were pictures of health and good spirits. They were enjoying their summer holiday under canvas, and were on the very best of terms with Dick Rawlings & Co.

Tom Merry faced his contingent, erect and soldier-like.

"Company—shun!" he commanded. "I have to report three absentees from camp this morning—D'Arcy, Figgins, and Kerruish. Has anybody seen either of them?"

Nobody had.

Dick Rawlings crossed over.

"Dawson and Simms report that D'Arcy was up early, went for a bathe, and returned to camp a little while before Reveille," he said. "Figgins and Kerruish, who had been on guard, were seen to enter the camp with D'Arcy on his return."

"H'm! Thanks awfully, Rawlings," said Tom Merry with a perplexed look. "I wonder where the bounders have got to? I'll call them over the coals when they do show up. Anyway, let's get on with parade. Company—shun!"

"Groooo-hoooooh!"

That weird sound came suddenly from Baggy Trimble, and Tom Merry fixed a severe look on him. His look gradually changed to one of blank astonishment. Baggy's face was wild and woebegone, and instead of standing still he was wriggling like an eel, and hopping first on one foot and then on the other.

"Stand still, Trimble!" rapped Tom Merry.

"Yow-wow-wow! My feet!" wailed Baggy.

"What's the matter, you young ass?"

"Ow! Yow! My feet tickle!" howled the fat youth of the Fourth, hopping about like a very plump and ungainly sparrow. "Ooogh! It must be the result of that rotten route march you dragged me out on last night! Yoooooh! Woooo-wow!"

"Bosh!" snapped Tom Merry. "You—why, my hat! What's up, Blakey?"

Jack Blake seemed to be showing the same mysterious

symptoms as Baggy. His face bore a strained, peculiar look, and he had some difficulty in keeping his feet still.

"Are you supposed to be on parade, Blake, or are you giving us a species of Irish jig as an entertainment?" demanded Tom Merry with heavy sarcasm.

"Grooooooh!" gasped Blake. "My blinking feet irritate and—"

"Ow! So do mine!" gasped Manners, giving a jump.

"And mine!" muttered Kangaroo, scraping his feet wildly on the ground.

By that time nearly all the Scouts were wriggling and hopping and stamping their feet, and giving vent to expressions of deep woe. Tom Merry and Dick Rawlings & Co. were amazed.

"Yow! Mum-my dear Merry, I am afflicted with a virulent irritation on my nethermost extremities!" gasped Herbert Skimpole, blinking furiously through his huge eye-glasses, and hopping about, in the manner of a stork, on one leg. "I assure you the sensation is most disconcerting!"

"Look here—"

"Ow-wow-wow!"

"Yah! Grooooooh!"

The tickling on the soles of their feet created devastation among the St. Jim's Scouts.

Instead of standing to attention, they jumped and hopped and stamped their feet and uttered doleful cries. Several of them sat down on the ground, took off their boots, and proceeded to rub their feet furiously.

"My only Aunt Tabitha! I'm blessed if I can make this out!" gasped Tom Merry. "You chaps must have been doing something to— Ow! My feet!"

"Hallo! Have you got the complaint, Merry?" asked Dick Rawlings.

"Groooooh! Ow! Yes! Yow! My feet! Yaroooooh!" Tom commenced to dance as wildly as the rest.

The cadets laughed. They really could not help it.

The luckless Scouts looked so utterly ridiculous.

Hiding behind the stack of stores, Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton found it difficult to restrain their mirth. They looked at their rivals hopping about and rubbing their itching feet, and they suffered inward spasms.

"Oh dear, this is awful!" groaned Blake, who had now his boots and socks off. "This must be a jape of some sort, and—"

"I say, deah boys—"

All turned sharply, as a well-known voice broke upon their ears.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Clad only in his swimming costume, Gussy hurried into the camp, and behind him came Figgins and Kerruish, both in a sad state.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Figgins, gazing in wonder at his gyrating schoolfellows. "What on earth is the matter with you chaps?"

"Woowoh! Yow! Our feet! They tickle!" moaned Tom Merry. "Where the—yow-wow—dickens have you been, anyway?"

"We were captured by Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton!" said Figgins swiftly. "The blighters are prowling about here somewhere dressed in our togs—at least, Monk and Wootton are. Gay is masquerading as Gussy. He caught that scatter-brained jossie—"

"Weally, Figgins, I pwotest—"

"So you were a scatter-brained jossie, Gussy, to allow yourself to be caught!" snapped Figgins. "Where are those Grammarian bounders now?"

"We haven't seen them!" gasped Tom Merry. "I—yow—wonder whether they had anything to do with this—this business! Groogh! Our feet itch like anything."

"Hard cheese!" grinned Dick Rawlings sympathetically. "I reckon this must be a jape of Gordon Gay's. He and his pals probably got in here while we were all asleep—"

"By Jove! Those must be the three we saw come into the camp, then!" exclaimed Jack Dawson, from the cadets' ranks. "My word! I wondered why the two guards had left their positions to walk round the camp with D'Arcy. They haven't left the camp yet, so perhaps we shall find 'em."

"By gum!"

Tom Merry & Co. looked grimly at each other.

They were all suffering tortures untold at the soles of their feet. Even Figgins, Kerruish, and D'Arcy had to laugh at their schoolfellows' capers.

Vigorous rubbing and washing at length allayed the itching, and the St. Jim's Scouts were able to walk about in more or less comfort.

Meanwhile, Dick Rawlings & Co. had commenced a thorough search of the camp, and the Grammarians' three victims had gone into their tents to dress themselves.

Tom Merry walked up to Dick Rawlings and Simms, who were standing near the pile of stores, behind which Gordon Gay & Co. were hiding, scarcely daring to breathe.

"Well, any luck?" asked Tom. "Isn't there any signs of—"

"Look out, you chaps!" shrieked Blake suddenly, from a distance.

But too late!

Two heads had appeared at the top of that stack of bundles, sacks, and boxes. A large sack of flour was inverted by those two fellows at the top, and they emptied it over the three standing below.

Swoooooosh!

"Yah! Yerrugh!"

"Gerr-rrrooooooh!"

"Oooooooosh!"

A gigantic avalanche of flour swept down upon Tom Merry, Rawlings, and Simms, and fairly enveloped them.

At the same time a hurried scrambling sounded from behind the stack of stores, and a well-known voice shouted out:

"This way, my sons!"

And a minute later, Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton leaped out from cover and pounded away like hares towards the wire railings that enclosed the camp, making a desperate bid for freedom.

CHAPTER 3.

The Major Objects!

"AFTER them!" howled Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped D'Arcy. "Wun like anythin', deah boys!"

A general rush was made in pursuit of the three Grammarian fugitives.

Gordon Gay flung away D'Arcy's borrowed dressing-gown, and the towel. He and his followers grasped Reilly, who made a valiant attempt to stop them, and hurled him against a tent. There was a rending crash, and the tent collapsed on top of the luckless Irish junior.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Stop, you rotters!" yelled Blake.

"Rats!" retorted Gay, taking the fence at one leap. "Catch us if you can!"

Monk and Wootton cleared the fence in fine style, and they dashed off after their leader.

Tom Merry and the two cadets, having gouged the flour out of their eyes, and ears, and mouths, pounded off to join in the chase. They were verily sights to see and wonder at, being smothered from head to foot in flour.

The pursuers formed into several parties, determined that the japers should be caught and brought to book. Gordon Gay & Co. had disappeared in the wood, but they had not had a great start.

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Blake, Lowther, Figgins, Herries, Kangaroo, and Clifton Dane kept together and, following a trail which they thought might have been left by Gordon Gay & Co., they at length reached the brink of the wood.

They arrived in the open just in time to see three figures disappear over a fence.

"There they go!" shouted Blake excitedly. "We've trailed the bounders, then! This way!"

All made a rush for the fence, and, scrambling over it, found themselves in a field.

Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton were several hundred yards ahead of them, and they dived into a spinney when they saw the St. Jim's fellows dashing after them.

It did not take Tom Merry & Co. long to reach that spinney. They chased the Grammarians through the undergrowth, and saw them pound across a narrow wooden plank that spanned a ditch on the other side.

"We're gaining on the blighters!" panted Tom Merry, who had shed a good deal of the flour in the chase. "Come on, over that ditch!"

Tom led the way, and was first on the plank.

His feet had hardly touched the plank, however, when a man in the garb of a keeper, with a gun tucked under his arm, stepped out from behind a clump of bushes and planted himself in the way. He was a burly, bad-tempered looking man, and his expression was decidedly not friendly.

"You little rascals, 'ave no right to be 'ere. This is private land!" he rapped.

"Sorry, but we can't stop to think about that now!" said Tom Merry swiftly. "Get off that plank and let us pass!"

"You get off this land at once, or it'll be the worse for you!" said the keeper roughly. "Didn't you see that notice over there? Trespassers will be prosecuted and—"

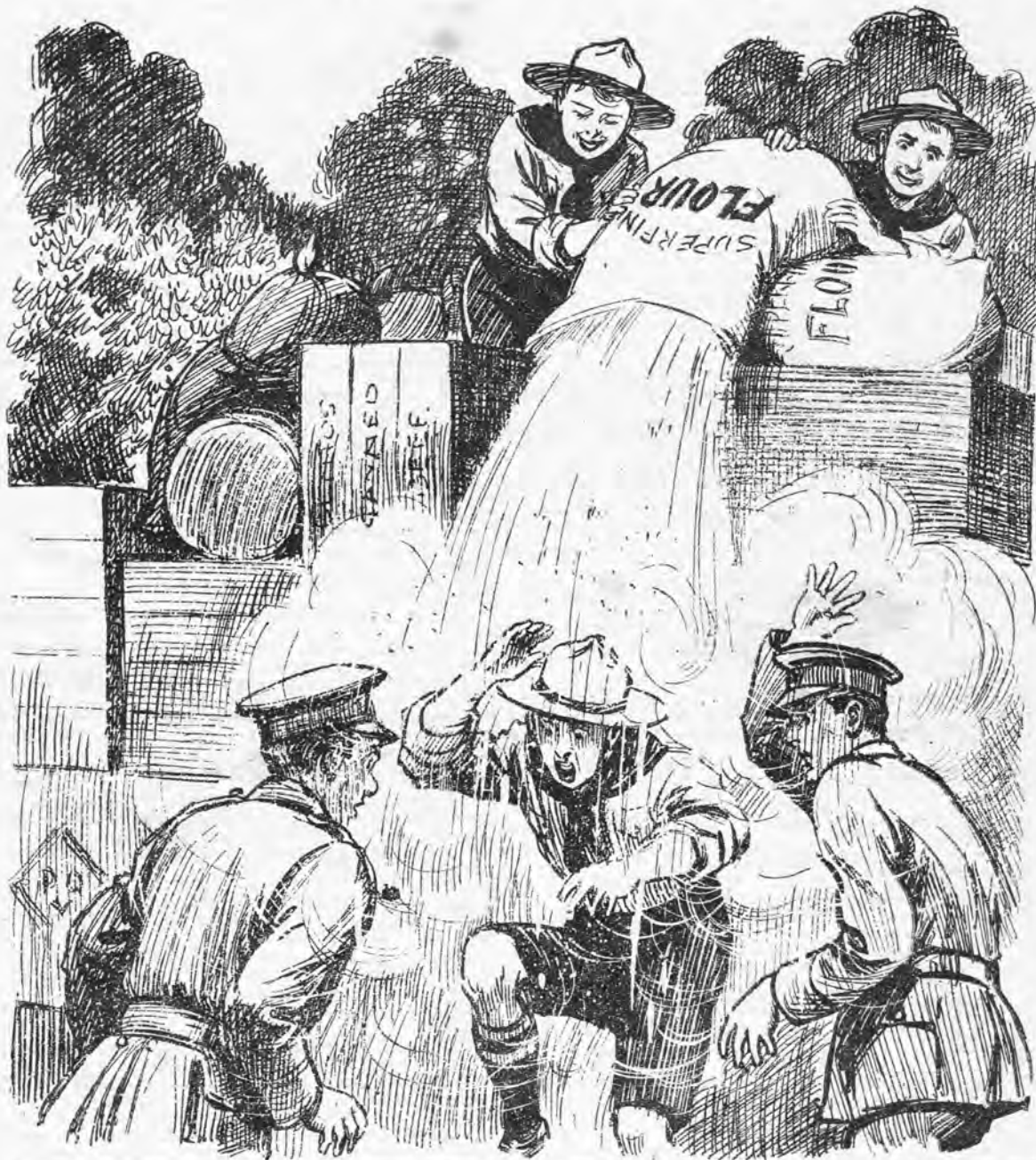
"Rats! Let us by!"

"Not much! Why, you young warmint, you dare come any further. Get off that plank!"

"No fear! We're going on!"

The keeper gave an angry growl and swung his heavy bulk upon Tom Merry. The two closed in the centre of the plank, the man wrestling with Tom in his rough efforts to thrust him back.

Suddenly there was a rending noise, and Tom's quick eyes saw the plank splintering.



"Look out, you chaps!" shrieked Blake suddenly. The warning cry came too late, for two Grammarian juniors had appeared at the top of the stack of bundles, sacks, and boxes, and had sent a large sack of flour toppling over the three juniors standing below. Swoosh! "Yah! Yerrugh!" cried Tom Merry, Rawlings, and Simms, simultaneously. (See page 6.)

"Look out, Tommy!" exclaimed Figgins. "The giddy plank is giving way!"
Cr-rr-rack!

Tom jumped to the opposite bank only just in time. The keeper was not so quick. The plank, splitting at the end, sagged downward. The keeper staggered, lost his footing, and went backwards into the ditch with a fiendish yell.

"Yoooooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the St. Jim's Scouts.

There was more mud than water in the ditch, and when the man stood up he presented an appalling spectacle. He was plastered with mud from head to foot, and was stuttering with rage.

"Never mind him—it was his own fault!" called Tom from the other side. "I think you chaps can manage to jump across."

"Yaas, wathah!"

One by one the Scouts leaped across the ditch, and they dashed off in the direction Gordon Gay & Co. had taken,

leaving the luckless keeper standing in the ditch and hurling lurid expletives after them.

"Those bounders have had a good chance to get away now," said Figgins. "They must have gone through this gate here—it's open!"

They had come to a fence which enclosed what appeared to be a large farmyard. The wicket gate was open, and Tom Merry's quick eyes saw Gordon Gay's head protruding over a shed inside the yard.

"This way!" he exclaimed, setting his teeth. "This is private property, I know, but we can't bother about that. We've got to catch those Grammarian blighters."

They ran into the farmyard, and Gay's head promptly disappeared behind the shed.

A furious-looking farmhand came running towards the juniors as they invaded the precincts of the yard.

"Get hout, you little rascals! You're trespassin'—"

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"Rats! There they go!" roared Blake.

The three fugitives were climbing another fence.

No sooner had they vanished from view on the other side than a commotion arose. Loud squeals and shrieks rent the air. Tom Merry & Co. dived over that fence, and then they discovered what the noise was all about. They had come full tilt into a pen of pigs.

The terrified porkers dashed hither and thither, squealing shrilly. Three youths were lying on their backs on the other side of the pen, and pigs were trampling over them.

They were Gordon Gay & Co.

The pigs, running between their legs, had bowled them over and thus arrested their flight.

"Here they are!" shouted Tom Merry. "Grab 'em—yow—yow! Yarooooogh!"

A huge black porker cannoned into Tom's legs and sent him sprawling. He clutched D'Arey in his downward flight to the ground, and the pair went crashing over.

Tom fell on his chest, whilst Gussy, to avoid that catastrophe himself, wildly clutched a big white sow round the neck.

Squeak! Squeal!

The pig dashed round the pen, dragging D'Arey after it, and the Scouts roared with laughter, in spite of the urgency of the situation.

"Yawoogh! Oh ewumbs! Bai Jove! Wescue, deah boys! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What—what! You young scoundrels! How dare you! What!"

An angry voice broke in, and, blinking round, Tom Merry & Co. saw a tall, red-faced, military-looking gentleman glaring at them over the fence at the other side of the pen.

"Trespassing on my land! Upsetting my pigs—what! By thunder, I'll make you little scoundrels pay for this!" roared the military-looking gentleman. "This is my land! I'm Major Rumbold, the owner of this property! I'll teach you young reprobates to come here creating this disturbance! Crake! Giles! Tolley!"

"We're 'ere, sir!"

Three farmhands, armed with pitchforks, dashed up.

Tom Merry looked desperately round him.

Gussy had let go of the pig, and was sitting dazedly on the ground.

Gordon Gay & Co. had risen to their feet, and at that very moment were climbing the fence.

Tom let out an excited shout.

"The bouders are escaping! Never mind Major Gumboil! After them!"

"Stop!" howled the infuriated major, as the boys dashed to the other side of the pen. "Come back and be horse-whipped! You won't obey me? What—what—"

Tom Merry & Co. were gone.

Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton scudded across the farmyard, scattering the ducks, geese, and chickens to right and left. Pandemonium reigned in the major's farm, and farmhands came dashing to his side from all directions.

Tom Merry & Co. did not care. They were desperate now.

They hemmed in Gordon Gay & Co., and drove them at last into a large barn.

"Huwwah! We've got them twapped now, deah boys!" chirruped D'Arey.

"Rather!"

The Scouts romped into the barn, and saw their three quarry climbing up a ladder that led into an open loft above.

Gordon Gay & Co. climbed into the loft and glared down.

"Don't you chaps dare come up here!" exclaimed the Grammarian leader desperately. "We'll—we'll—Yoww!"

A turnip, hurled by Blake's unerring aim, struck him on the chin and sent him reeling back.

Next minute half a dozen Scouts were clambering up the ladder.

Monk and Wootton appeared at the trapdoor above, and put up a good fight, but against such odds they were helpless.

Tom Merry & Co. swarmed into the loft and fell upon their rivals.

A short, sharp struggle ensued, and at last Gordon Gay & Co. found themselves lying on their backs in the loft, each with two St. Jim's juniors on top of him.

CHAPTER 4.

Cadets to the Rescue!

"GOT you, my beauties!" gasped Tom Merry, who was sitting on his rival's head.

"Yah! Yerrrrugh!" said Gordon Gay sulphurously.

"Gerroff!" gurgled Frank Monk.

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"Wathah not!" chuckled D'Arey, polishing his monocle, which he had, with great presence of mind, snatched from Gordon Gay before it became trodden on. "This is wheeah we get our vengege, deah boys!"

"Where are the little reprobates? What! Up the loft? What—what! They've run into a trap, by thunder! We'll get them now—what!"

It was the voice of the fiery major, coming from outside. Hurried and heavy footsteps sounded below, and looking down through the trapdoor Tom Merry saw the major dash in with a whole contingent of farmhands.

All were armed, and their looks were very grim.

The keeper who had fallen in the ditch was there, too. Major Rumbold was seen to keep that gentleman at his distance, for the aroma that arose from the mud was emphatic, to say the least of it. The juniors could smell it even in the barn loft.

"Oh jeminny!" groaned Blake. "We forgot all about Major Gumboil! We—we're done, Tommy!"

Tom Merry seized some rope that was lying on the loft floor, and hastily tied Gordon Gay's arms and legs together. More rope was found, and Monk and Wootton were likewise rendered helpless.

The St. Jim's Scouts crowded round the trapdoor, and blinked at the foe beneath.

"Those are the little whelps, sir!" snorted the muddy keeper. "Chucked me in the ditch, they did, and—"

"We did nothing of the sort!" rapped Tom Merry sharply. "You started to struggle with me on the plank, and when it broke you fell in—"

"You had no right to be trespassing on my land, playing your devilish monkey-tricks!" stormed the major. "I command you to come down and be horsewhipped!"

"Rats!"

"No takers, old sport!"

"What—what—"

"We'll go quietly like good little boys, sir!" said Tom Merry.

"What! You won't! By thunder, I'll get you down if you won't come of your own accord!" roared the infuriated Major Rumbold. "Up the ladder, men, and turn them out!"

The farm-men made a rush forward.

Two of them were on the ladder when Tom Merry and Figgins loosened it at the top, and pushed it violently forward. The ladder swayed, and then went right over, and the two men, losing their grip on it, fell off, and went whizzing right at the major.

The feet of one of the men caught the major in his ample waistcoat, whilst the other's fist thudded hard on his chin. The major gave a loud bellow, and collapsed in a heap of straw behind him, whilst the two men fell clean on top of him.

"Yarrrrrogh! By thunder—Yah! Ow-woogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the trapped Scouts above.

The major got up like a Jack-in-the-box, and he shook a furious fist at Tom Merry & Co.

"You dare laugh at me—what—what!" he roared. "I'll show you! I'll—I'll—"

Words failed Major Rumbold.

The ladder was re-erected against the trapdoor, and several men held it whilst others essayed to climb. But Blake by that time had discovered several barrels of mangel-wurzels in the loft, and the mangels were used as ammunition.

As volley after volley crashed into their midst, the major's men gave up the attempt, howling and moaning.

The major was beside himself.

"I'll have the law on you!" he raved. "I'll have you locked up—what! You dare behave like this! Surrender, will you? What!"

"Never!"

"Then, by thunder, you'll stay up there till you do!"

"Bai Jove!"

The major left the barn, and stationed his men all round it. The imprisoned Scouts blinked at each other in consternation.

"Well, here's a giddy go!" said Figgins lugubriously. "We've got to get out somehow! If we don't get back to the camp soon, those other Grammarian blighters might make a raid!"

Tom Merry caught Herries' arm.

"Look here, Herries, you've got your bugle, and you and I may be able to help matters," he said. "Dick Rawlings and the others are out somewhere, and they ought not to be far away if they've followed Gay's trail correctly. I suggest that you and I make a dash for it, and, if we can get past the men down below, and escape, we shall probably be able to pick up the cadets. They'd hear the bugle, and they'd come to the rescue."

"Bai Jove! That's a wippin' idea, Tom Mewwy!"

"I'm on!" said Herries. "Which way down?"

"Through this little window, and we can jump on the roof of that little shed down there," said Tom, walking

swiftly to the small window at the end of the loft. "I'll go first, Herries!"

Tom wormed his way through the narrow space, clung to the rafters outside, and then jumped to the shed roof. The noise of his feet on landing attracted the farmer's men, and three of them immediately made a rush in that direction.

Herries jumped at that moment, and, landing on the shed roof, he followed Tom to the ground.

"This way!" muttered Tom, diving for a clump of bushes.

"Buck up, Herries!"

"Stop, you little devils!"

Tom Merry and Herries did not stop.

One gawky farm-hand carrying a cudgel flung himself at Tom Merry. That youth promptly dodged, inserted his foot between the legs of his adversary, and brought him crashing to the ground.

"Run, Herries!"

Three other men came pounding furiously up, urged on from a distance by the major, who was fairly dancing with wrath.

Tom Merry successfully dodged into the trees and vaulted over a fence on the other side, but disaster overtook Herries. He tripped up on the protruding root of a tree, and before he had time to rise two burly men swooped down on him, and he was grasped in strong hands and whirled back to the barn.

Tom Merry's face appeared over the fence some distance away, and he gave a gasp of dismay when he saw that Herries had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

He could do no good by staying, so he made off, running with all his might towards the wood where the camp was situated.

Herries was dragged, struggling and fighting furiously, to the front of the barn, where the major, riding-whip in hand, awaited him.

"So you've got one of the young miscreants—what?" he said. "Watch that window at the back, and see that none of the others escape. By thunder, I'll make this little whelp an example to the others!"

Several other Scouts were thinking of escaping the way Tom Merry had gone, but the keepers kept a vigilant watch on the window.

Major Rumbold and his men dragged Herries into the barn.

The imprisoned juniors crowded round the trapdoor and looked down in dismay.

"I'll chastise this little rascal just to warn you others what you may expect if you do not surrender!" snapped the major. "Hold him, Crake and Brett! Face downwards! That's right!"

"Yaroooooop!" Leggo!" roared Herries.

He fought wildly, and some time elapsed before he was overpowered and held face downwards by the keepers.

"Bai Jove! The feahful wottah is goin' to horsewhip Hewwies!" exclaimed D'Arcy. "Major Wumbold, I demand that you release Hewwies immediately!"

"What—what!"

"We are prepared to leave these premises without causin' any further disturbance!" said the swell of St. Jim's with considerable dignity. "I am prepared to apologise to you, on behalf of us all, for the inconvenience we have put you to. Undah the cires, I considah that an apology, as from one gentleman to another, will make things all right."

"Impertinent young puppy!" snapped the major.

"Weally, my deah sir—"

"Hold that young rascal still!" roared Major Rumbold.

D'Arcy pushed back his cuffs and prepared to descend the ladder. The swell of St. Jim's had heaps of pluck, and was a mighty man of valour with his fists when roused. He would never shirk what he considered to be his duty, and he felt it to be his duty to stand by Herries.

Blake and Figgins tried to hold him back, but Gussy dragged his arm free and hurried down the ladder.

The attention of Major Rumbold and his keepers was at that moment directed upon Herries. The keepers held the wriggling junior while the major took a firm grip of the whip.

Lash, lash, lash!

The whip descended with cruel force on Herries' back.

D'Arcy sprang forward, his eyeglass glimmering with wrath, and he grasped the major's arm as it prepared to bring down the whip for another blow.

"Stop, you wottah! I refuse to allow this to go on, bai Jove!"

The major stopped in sheer astonishment, whilst the keepers, with ugly looks, closed in.

"Good old Gussy!" murmured Blake. "He— Oh, my only hat! Here come Tommy and the cadets! Hurrah! Rescue, St. Jim's!"

The Scouts above gave joyous cries as a tramping of feet sounded, and Tom Merry and Dick Rawlings, at the head of a large party of cadets, dashed into the barn.

CHAPTER 5.

Tit for Tat!

"ALL serene, kids!" shouted Tom Merry. "You can come down the ladder! We've got the odds in our favour now!"

"Hurrah!"

"What—what! More of the rascals! They've got reinforcements! By thunder! What—what— Yaroooooh!"

"Down with the fiery old blighter!" chuckled Tom, as he and Jack Dawson tackled the major, whirled the whip from his grasp, and sat him down heavily in the straw.

"Back up, kids!"

The keepers were overwhelmed, although they fought valiantly for their master. The cadets' arrival had turned the tables! Dick Rawlings & Co. held the major and his men at bay whilst Tom Merry & Co. fetched down their prisoners from the loft.

"Bai Jove! That was splendid, deah boys!" gasped Arthur Augustus, mopping at his nose, which was streaming with claret. "Now we'll make off and deal with those Gwammawan boundahs!"

"What—ho!"

The prisoners were taken out first, and then Scouts and cadets left the barn, locking the major and his men inside.

"Sorry, old sports!" shouted Tom Merry through the window. "All's fair in love and war, you know. I suppose you've declared war on us, Major Gumboil?"

"You—you insolent scamp! By thunder, you dare to— what—what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. marched away victoriously, and left the major's land.

They returned to the camp, where the rest of the Scouts and cadets were waiting.

"Where the merry dickens have you chaps been?" demanded Cardew. "Great, pip! I see you've got those bounders!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What shall we do to them?" inquired Monty Lowther. "I suppose they'll be ragged baldheaded?"

"You bet!" grinned Tom Merry. "We'll search 'em first, and find out what they used on our feet to make 'em tickle so. It was some hairy stuff they dosed our socks with!"

"The blitherers!"

Gordon Gay & Co. were searched, and the cowhage came to light.

"Good egg!" chuckled Tom. "This is the stuff that makes you itch, is it? Well, they can have it back—on themselves! Off with their boots and socks!"

The Grammarians' feet were bared, and the cowhage well rubbed into them.

Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton roared and wriggled; but they were in the hands of the enemy now, and were utterly helpless.

"Shovel up that flour, someone!" said Tom. "It's of no use for cooking purposes now, so these bounders might as well have it."

The flour was brought over in large quantities, and it was rubbed into the Grammarians' hair, and daubed all over their faces.

"Groooh!"

"Yah! Ooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, kids, we'll tie 'em in a bunch, back to back, and watch 'em wriggle while we have our breakfast!" said Tom Merry.

"Good wheeze!"

Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton were dragged to their feet, tied back to back, and secured by means of a loose rope to a tree. There they were left, whilst Fatty Wynn and a few cadets prepared the camp breakfast.

Some minutes elapsed before Gordon Gay & Co. commenced to wriggle. The itching powder on their feet was taking effect! Soon those three tied-together Grammarians were rolling and writhing on the ground, falling over each other, and struggling wildly, a mass of kicking legs and whirling arms. And from them came cries of wrath and anguish that ought to have evoked pity from all who heard. But Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. regarded it as a great joke, and the wood resounded with the sound of their loud laughter.

"Breakfast is ready!" announced Fatty Wynn.

"Good egg!"

The steaming hot morning meal was laid out on trestle tables, and the Scouts and cadets fell to with hearty willingness.

Gordon Gay & Co. kept them vastly amused with their weird wriggings and wonderful gymnastic feats as they struggled together on the ground.

By the time breakfast was over the worst of the effects of the itching powder had worn off.

Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton, propped against each

other, expressed their opinion of Tom Merry & Co. in lurid and flowery terms.

"Well, how do you feel, dear boys?" inquired Tom Merry sweetly.

"You—you—you—" spluttered Gordon Gay.

He had exhausted his vocabulary of epithets, and words now failed him.

"This now time for you to depart!" said Tom Merry. "Let me see, we must find out where you are living. Will you tell us?"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Gordon Gay.

"Naughty, naughty!" chided Tom, as he proceeded to search his rival's pockets.

An envelope soon came to light, addressed to Gordon Gay, "C/o. Sir Lawrence Monk, Cliffcombe Towers, near Winchgate-on-Sea."

"Ah! So that's your giddy summer hang-out!" chuckled Tom. "Cliffcombe Towers, I believe, is that large, greystone mansion on the cliffs, overlooking Winchgate. The other members of your mouldy crew are still there, waiting for you, I presume. Well, they shall have you back. We'll deliver you ourselves."

"Look here, you can chuck this rot!" exclaimed Gordon Gay desperately. "Let us go—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rats! Fetch those crates over, kids!"

Several large crates were standing by the pile of stores. They were empty now, the provisions which had been in them having been taken out.

Gordon Gay & Co. viewed these crates with alarm and foreboding. They yelled when they were grasped in violent hands, and each dumped into a crate...

Straw and packing were forthcoming, and each of the luckless Grammarians was packed tight into a crate and securely nailed there.

"Now we can load them on our large trek-cart, and we'll be off!" chuckled Tom Merry.

"You—you rotters!" spluttered Gordon Gay, glaring from inside his crate like a chicken from its coop. "You dare deliver us to Monk's uncle like this—"

"Ha, ha! We dare anything!"

Dick Rawlings & Co. joined heartily in the fun.

The crates with their human contents were loaded on the large trek-cart, and cadets and Scouts took the ropes in front. Tom Merry ranged the Scout band in front, and a party of Scouts and a good number of cadets followed behind.

Bang, bang, bang! went the drum.

The bugles joined in, and away went the procession.

Gordon Gay & Co., despite the fact that they were packed in straw, had a very bumpy journey over the cliffs.

At length, a large, handsome mansion, standing in its own grounds on the cliff, was reached. "Cliffcombe Towers" was the name engraved on the brass plates on both of the gateposts.

Monty Lowther rang a tune on the bell, and the gates were opened by an astonished porter.

"We've these three crates to deliver at the house," said Tom Merry in explanation. "Sir Lawrence, I think, is expecting them. This way!"

The porter had to dodge to the side of the drive, or the eager Scouts would have run him over with the trek-cart.

They drew it right up to the front steps.

There they unloaded the crates, and dumped them down on the drive.

At that juncture the front door opened and a short, plump, prosperous-looking gentleman strode out, followed by the rest of the Grammarians—Jack Wootton, Carboy, Mont Blong, Goggs, and Tadpole.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Sir Lawrence Monk, gazing in astonishment over the rims of his spectacles at the crates, and the Scouts, and the cadets. "What—what is this?"

Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. saluted respectfully.

"Three crates for your young guests, sir!" said Tom Merry.

The Grammarians on the steps were overwhelmed with amazement and curiosity.

Tom Merry & Co. and the cadets turned about on the command, and they marched away from the house.

Sir Lawrence and the Grammarians hurried down the steps and crowded round the crates.

"Geroooooh!" came from inside the centre one.

"Bless my soul!" said Monk's uncle. "These crates contain live animals! Hark at the strange noises they are making, boys!"

"Yow-yow-yow!" came in gurgling accents from another crate. "Lemine out!"

"Good heavens! They're human!" cried the astounded Sir Lawrence. "Who—who are you in there?"

"Grooooooh! I'm Frank, your nephew! Gemme loose, uncle!"

"Bless my soul!"

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"We're done up in straw, and can't move!" howled Gordon Gay from his crate. "Can't you chaps get us out instead of standing there like a lot of boiled owls? I'm cramped! Yow!"

"Mum-my only hat!" said Jack Wootton, in a faint voice.

"Carry me home to die, somebody!" gasped Tadpole feebly.

Wrenches, pliers, and chisels were fetched, and Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton were uncrate.

Their faces, where the flour was not plastered showed crimson. The other Grammarians stood round looking blankly at their chums. As for Sir Lawrence, his plump body fairly shook with laughter.

"Well, if this doesn't take the biscuit, my lads!" he chuckled. "The St. Jim's fellows have put it across you this time, Frank, and no mistake. But never mind! Come in and have something to eat. I'll get the gardener to clear away the crates and the packing. Ha, ha, ha!"

Gordon Gay & Co. did not see the funny side of the affair, however. Like Rachel of old, they mourned, and would not be comforted.

CHAPTER 6.

Gussy's Secret!

TOM MERRY & CO. and the cadets were soon to hear more of the irate Major Rumbold.

He presented himself at the camp entrance that afternoon, in company with the keeper whom Tom Merry had encountered on the ditch plank.

The major's rubicund face was more fiery-looking than ever, and the keeper's coarse face wore a malignant scowl.

Blake and Jack Dawson were on guard, and they immediately barred the way with their weapons.

"Halt!" rapped Blake smartly. "No admittance to this camp except on business."

"Bah! I'll give you business!" snorted Major Rumbold. "You little scoundrels have been poaching on my land!"

Tom Merry, Dick Rawlings, and a number of others crowded up. They looked in astonishment at the major.

"What are you accusing us of, sir?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"You have been poaching—shooting rabbits on my property!" roared the major. "Look here!"

He held up two dead rabbits for inspection.

"Jessop, here, says he saw some of you on my land this afternoon, and that when he gave chase these two rabbits were dropped! What have you to say—what?"

Tom Merry faced the major with a calm, steady gaze.

"All I have to say, sir, is that either Jessop was mistaken, or he was telling lies!" he said.

"What—what?"

"We are not poachers, sir, and we have plenty of stores of our own without resorting to shooting rabbits!" said Tom coolly.

"I say you have been shooting for devilment, you rascals!" cried the angry major. "I suppose you must make use of your rifles—"

"We have proper targets here for shooting practise, sir," said Tom, his jaw hardening and an angry note entering his voice. "You have no foundation whatever for accusing us of poaching. You have only the word of your keeper."

"I saw you!" exclaimed Jessop, his narrow, beady eyes glinting maliciously. "Some young scamps from this 'ere camp 'ave been trespassin' and shootin' rabbits—"

"Go and eat coke!" said Figgins bluntly. "You should take more water with it next time, old top!"

"You—you—you—"

"I hear you are little scoundrels from Council Schools—what!" snorted the major. "Such young reprobates should not be allowed the use of rifles without supervision."

Dick Rawlings' eyes blazed, and his handsome face went crimson.

"How dare you speak like that of us, sir!" he cried. "What difference does it make that we do come from Council Schools? Are we not as good as—as anyone else?"

"Yaas, wathah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy indignantly. "I wogard your wemarks as most wewehensible, Majah Wumbold! You surely have nevah had dealin' with fellows from Council Schools, or you would not make such an uttah cad of yourself. These chaps are all wight, bai Jove, and I considah that you owe them an apology!"

"What! You impertinent young rascal—"

"Bai Jove! Undah the cires, Majah Wumbold, I can only wegahd you as a twuculent, ignowant old boundah!"

"What! By thunder, if I lay hands on you, sir, I'll—"

"Weally, I am perfectly pwepaiahed to meet you, Majah Wumbold!" said the swell of St. Jim's, breathing hard through his nose. "Although I usually considah it infwah dig to engage in encountahs with my eldahs, I will waive those considewations in ordah to defend the honah of my fwiend Wawlings and his comwades—"



Hiding behind the stack of stores, Gordon Gay & Co. found it difficult to restrain their mirth. They looked at their rivals hopping about and rubbing their itching feet, and they suffered inward spasms. "Oh dear! This is awful!" groaned Blake, who had taken his boots and socks off to examine his feet. (See page 6.)

"Cheese it, Gussy!" said Blake. "Let the old bird run on. We won't take any notice of him."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Keep off the grass, Gussy!" said Tom Merry between his teeth. "Major Rumbold can say what he likes—he doesn't know what he is talking about—and if he cares to take the word of his rotten keeper—"

"I'll make you smart for this!" fumed the major. "Let me catch any of you on my land! I will personally

chastise him, and then hand him over to the police! I will not be robbed and bothered by a parcel of Boy Scouts and cadets—"

"Rats! Go and chop chips, you old boulder!"

"I'll—I'll—"

"Yah! Go home!"

The major seemed about to hurl himself forward and engage in battle with the whole camp, but he evidently

thought better of his intentions, for he suddenly whirled about, and, with a muttered command to Jessop, he strode away.

Jessop darted the boys a malevolent scowl, and then he disappeared into the wood after his master.

Dick Rawlings turned a crimson face to Tom Merry & Co.

"I hope you chaps don't think that—" he began.

"Oh, as if we'd take any notice of what that bad-tempered old war-horse said!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "It was jolly rotten of him to cast a slur on Council Schools, but he meant his remarks for the lot of us, you know. We're all equal in this camp, so it's all serene, old chap. Major Gumboil is a narrow-minded old jossler, and he can go and eat coke!"

Nevertheless, Dick Rawlings & Co. appeared to be very downcast and ill at ease that evening. The major's hasty words had stung them to the quick.

Farmer and Snape were the last to arrive back at the camp.

They usually went out together, keeping apart from Tom Merry & Co. and the cadets. They were unpopular with all, more especially since Farmer's cowardly attack on Blake in the gymnasium a few days previously.

Blake noted that Farmer and Snape carried rifles with them when they came in, and he mentioned the matter to Tom Merry when he arrived to relieve him at his post.

"Those two are the only chaps from this camp likely to have been poaching on the major's rotten land, Tommy," he said. "I wouldn't trust those cads any farther than I could see them."

Tom nodded.

"You're right, Blake. I believe Dick Rawlings suspects them, too. You may be sure that Farmer and Snape will get it in the neck from the others if they do bring the camp into disgrace."

"Rather!"

Harry Noble was sharing the first sentry-go with Tom Merry that night.

It was a warm, almost sultry night, with a full moon shedding its mellow, mystic radiance down on the camp and into the silent wood.

Tom Merry and Noble paced up and down, humming, their eyes and ears on the alert.

Suddenly Tom Merry caught sight of a light shining through the gloom round one of the tents. Noble saw it at the same time, and the two sentries exchanged wondering glances.

"What is it, I wonder?" said the Kangaroo. "I think we'd better see."

"Yes, rather! Come on!"

They crossed to where the mysterious light showed.

As they neared it they saw that it came from someone who was crawling about on hands and knees outside the tent occupied by D'Arcy, Trimble, and Clicky.

Tom bent down and seized the prowler, and a startled gasp arose out of the darkness.

"Bai Jove!"

"Gussy!" ejaculated Kangaroo.

Arthur Augustus stood up, and placed a finger warningly over his lips.

"Don't make a noise and wouse anyone, deah boys," he said. "This is an extremely delicate mattah, bai Jove!"

"What the thump do you mean, Gussy?" demanded Tom Merry, looking curiously at the swell. "And why are you crawling around here on hands and knees, flashing your pocket torchlight about like a giddy glow-worm?"

"I've lost my gold tickah, deah boy," said D'Arcy simply. "As a mattah of fact, I suspect that it has been stolen."

The other two gave violent jumps.

"Oh crumbs! Your watch stolen!"

"Draw it mild, Gussy!" said Kangaroo uneasily.

"Weally, deah boy, I wish I could draw it mild, but I'm afraid that my gold tickah has weally been stolen," said D'Arcy seriously. "When I came to examine my things in the tent this afternoon I made the discovery that my watch was missin'. I hunted everywhere, but it did not turn up. I waited till now befoah comin' outside to search, but I don't think it's heah. The cires all point to my watch havin' been stolen."

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Why on earth didn't you mention it before, Gussy, so that the whole camp could be searched?"

"I wefwained frowm doin' that, deah boy, because I did not wish to hurt the feelin's of Wawlings and our othah fiends," said D'Arcy. "You see, it's wathah wotten, havin' to cwy out about one's tickah havin' been stolen. Wawlings is awfully sensitive, and I wouldn't twouble him for worlds. I would wathah lose my tickah altogether, bai Jove, than have him or any of the othahs think that we suspected them of theft! So, undah the cires, I kept the mattah to myself."

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"Good old Gussy!" breathed Tom Merry. "I see exactly how you feel about it. But are you positive that your watch has been stolen? You are a careless young chump, you know, and you may have mislaid it."

"I have not mislaid it, Tom Merry. My tickah is not the onlay thing I have missed frowm my tent. I have had monay taken frowm my pockets, on no less than thwee diffevent occasions since we came to this camp."

"Oh jeminy!"

"I kept this a secwet for the same reason that I have hushed up the loss of my watch," said D'Arcy. "Wawlings and the othahs would feel jollay wotten if they knew of the thefts. Yet the fact wemains that theah is a thief in the camp."

Tom Merry and Kangaroo gave low whistles of consternation.

"Perhaps the thief is one of our chaps," said Tom. "Let me see, you have Baggy in your tent. You know what a thief Baggy Trimble is."

"Yaas, and I have watched Twimble vewy closely," said Arthur Augustus. "Frowm my observations of Twimble I have come to the conclusion that he is innocent of these thefts, at any wate."

"What about young Clicky?" asked Kangaroo. "He's a rum little cove, isn't he?"

"I wefuse to believe that Clicky is a thief!" said Arthur Augustus, with emphasis. "He's a stwange little beggah, and he's howwibly wuff and weady, but he's twue blue. He wouldn't willingly wob me of a farthin'!"

"No, I don't think he would," said Tom Merry slowly.

"Clicky fairly worships you, Gussy."

The little Cockney boy who shared the tent with D'Arcy and Trimble was the most humble in the whole camp. His speech and manners showed that he had had by no means a gentle upbringing, nor had he ever enjoyed anything but the poorest and most miserable of circumstances all his childhood. But the St. Jim's fellows had soon found that beneath Clicky's rough exterior was hidden a heart of gold. He had proved himself to be a willing and eager helper, and he was well liked by all.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had taken a special interest in Clicky, and the Cockney boy in return showed an admiration and devotion to the swell of St. Jim's that amounted almost to idolatry. Gussy was not a snob, although he was an honourable and a scion of one of the noblest and most wealthy families in England.

"Clicky, I am positive, is beyond suspish," said D'Arcy, a worried tone in his voice. "Weally, deah boys, I do not know what to do. I have been makin' investigations in secwet, but have failed to discovah any clue to the mystewy. The theft of my watch wathah puts the lid on it, as it were."

"Rather!" said Kangaroo. "I wonder who could have— Why, of course! Farmer!"

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Farmer and that shady kid Snape have both been out all day long," he said. "You had your watch during the early part of the afternoon, Gussy, because I remember looking into the tent to ask you the time, and you took the ticker from your pocket."

"Yaas, that's so, deah boy," said D'Arcy. "I weally fail to see how it could have been eithah Farmer or Snape. As a mattah of fact, I suspected those two wottahs frowm the first, and I have kept a careful watch on them, but I haven't found anythin' to confirm my suspicions of them."

"Then who the dickens is at the bottom of the mystery?" exclaimed Kangaroo, in exasperation. "It's all very well, Gussy, to hush it all up, but—"

"I will wait till to-morrow, and pewwaps a clue will turn up then," said D'Arcy. "Pewwaps you chaps will keep a careful look-out on my tent to-night."

"Yes, rather!"

"You can rely on that, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus went back into his tent, and Tom Merry and Kangaroo resumed their sentry-go.

Both were disturbed and alarmed at the news D'Arcy had given them. There must be a mysterious thief in the camp, but whom could it be, if, as Gussy himself believed, Farmer and Snape were not the culprits?

CHAPTER 7.

The Refugee of the Cave!

SOME time passed, and midnight had tolled from the distant parish church at Winchelgate when, all of a sudden, Tom Merry's quick ears caught the sound of a movement in the trees just outside the camp.

"Did you hear that, Noble?" he muttered.

"I thought I heard something," replied Kangaroo. "I— Hallo, here comes Gussy again. What's up this time, I wonder?"

Arthur Augustus, clad in pyjamas and slippers, came hurrying over. He was agog with suppressed excitement.

"I say, deah boys, young Clickay has just swopt out of the tent," he said swiftly. "Did you see him go?"

"No, but we heard something in the trees just then," replied Tom, with a start. "That must have been him—the awful little beggar! What on earth can he be up to?"

"Weally, deah boys, this has sent me into a feahful fluttah!" said D'Arcy. "I am afwaid Clickay has got something jolly mysterious up his sleeve!"

"I always did say that there was something fishy about that kid," murmured Kangaroo.

"Well, don't let's waste time here jawing!" said Tom Merry. "We'll follow the young bouncer and see what his game is!"

The three juniors hurried along the pathway from which the mysterious sounds had come. All was dark and still in the wood, but now and again they caught the sound of someone moving ahead, and they knew that they were on the right trail.

"He must be making for the cliffs," muttered Tom Merry.

Rounding a bend, they came to a straight part of the woodland path, and a short distance ahead they saw the frail, diminutive form of Clicky.

He did not make direct for the cliffs, but crept round the fringe of the wood. Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and Kangaroo were thus able to keep on his trail without the risk of being detected.

The dull crashing of the waves against the cliffs could now be heard from the distance, and far beyond the cliffs the moonlit sea was revealed to view.

Where was Clicky going so mysteriously at the dead of night, and what was his mission?

The youngster rounded a tall mass of rocks ahead and vanished from sight. Tom Merry and the others followed quickly and silently, but when they reached the other side of the granite pile they halted in astonishment.

All around them stretched a wild, open waste of rocks, yet no sign of Clicky could be seen.

"Perhaps he's hiding behind one of the rocks," said Kangaroo. "And yet there are no rocks large enough to cover him—"

"Look here!" exclaimed Tom Merry in low, tense tones.

He was standing at the base of the mound of rock round which Clicky had disappeared. A fissure showed between the ground and the bottom of the rock—a black gap wide enough for anyone of medium size to squeeze through.

"He must have shifted this other rock here and uncovered the hole," said Tom Merry, pointing to a small rock that showed signs of having recently been moved. "It's a safe bet that Clicky's gone through the hole, anyway. Are you chaps coming after me through there?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I want to know what all this means," said Noble grimly.

One after the other the chums squeezed through the aperture, and they found themselves in a narrow, dank tunnel which led downwards at a steep angle. D'Arcy had his pocket torch, and, flashing the light to and fro, it was seen that the tunnel was cut through crumbling sandstone, which was wet to the touch.

The juniors scrambled down the tunnel, having to take great care not to slide along the soft, yielding sandstone.

"Now, quiet!" muttered Tom at length. "I can hear voices. Mind how you go!"

Little by little they crept silently forward until they came to the end of the tunnel. It terminated in a narrow, upward cut in the sandstone, and through this a light could be seen.

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and Kangaroo stood at the aperture and looked through in amazement.

They found themselves looking into a small cave. In the centre was a box, on which a candle, stuck in a bottle, was shedding a fitful light on the scene. Standing round the light were Clicky and a short, poorly-dressed man.

"I couldn't bring anything to-night, father," the boy was saying. "The stores was locked up, and I 'adn't a chance to sneak anythin'. I feel just about fed-up wiv everything. I 'ad to steal a watch to-day—D'Arcy's watch. It makes me mis'erable, dad, 'cos Master D'Arcy is very good to me, and I—'d rather steal from anyone than 'im! But wot am I to do?"

The man passed a thin hand wearily across his forehead.

His face showed haggard in the candlelight, and deep lines of suffering and care furrowed the pallid skin.

"I—I must get away—somehow—"

"But you've nowhere else to go, father!" Clicky's voice was harsh and anxious. "You daren't leave 'ere. 'Ang out a little longer, and I'll see wot can be done. I'll be along to-morrow—as early as I can. I got to be off now, 'cos Master D'Arcy may miss me. If 'e did suspect me of robbin' 'im, I—I— Oh, I don't know wot I'd do! I'm goin' back now. Good-night, dad!"

The other muttered a weary "good-night," and turned away as Clicky clambered through the fissure at the end of the cave.

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and Kangaroo had already hurried on ahead.

They squeezed out into the open at the top of the tunnel, and waited behind the rock for the young cadet to reappear.

He came out some minutes later, and, bending down, he replaced the rock which covered the space through which he had come.

He straightened up, and then gave vent to a sharp cry on seeing the other three confronting him.

"Well, Clicky!" said Tom Merry in a quiet voice.

The youngster turned to D'Arcy, a look of piteous appeal in his eyes.

"You didn't follow me down there, Master D'Arcy?" he cried. "You didn't 'ear wot—"

"Yaas, I heard you speakin' to a man who appears to be your father," said D'Arcy, fumbling agitatedly with his eyeglass. "So you have been wobbin' me, Clickay. May I ask what for?"

Clicky's eyes glistened with tears. His voice was husky as he spoke.

"I—I'll tell you everything, Master D'Arcy, and perhaps you'll forgive me. I 'aven't been stealing for myself, but for Farmer."

"Bai Jove!"

"Did you say Farmer or father?" asked Tom Merry quickly.

"Farmer—the chap at our camp! 'E forced me to do it, Master D'Arcy. 'E follered me one night, the same as you 'ave just done, and found out where my father is 'iding. Since then 'e's been threatenin' to give him away to police, unless I did as 'e told me. It either meant me stealin' for Farmer, or seein' my dad go to prison."

"But—but why is your pater in hidin'?" asked D'Arcy in amazement. "Has he committed some cwise for which the police are aftah him?"

"No—no, Master D'Arcy! My dad ain't committed nothin'" cried the little Cockney. "'E's innocent, and I know it. 'E came down to see me a fortnight ago—'e'd lost 'is job in London, and 'ad no money, only 'is fare to Winchgate. I thought there might be some work goin' for 'im at one of the farms. That's why 'e came. 'E did get a job, on Major Rumbold's land, but a few days arter 'e'd started a robbery took place at the 'ouse, and my dad woz accused. They got up a case against 'im—you know 'ow unreasonable and 'ot-tempered the major is—and 'e woz arrested. But 'e broke lose on the way to the station, and came to the camp that night. I waited outside for 'im, and showed 'im to that cave I'd discovered while lookin' for seagulls' eggs. It woz quite an accident I found that secret smugglers' tunnel that leads to the top of the cliffs 'ere, and it came in wery useful, 'cos I was able to 'ide my dad from the police. I got wot money I could—not by stealin', but by wood choppin'—and bought him food, and when I couldn't get enough I took it from the camp stores. That's all the thievin' I did; until one night Farmer and Snape follered me and discovered my dad's 'iding-place. Since then Farmer 'as been makin' me steal for 'im—threatenin' to give my dad away unless I did as 'e told me. 'E forced me to steal from you, Master D'Arcy, as you are the richest one at the camp and your bed is next to mine, and I 'ad to obey 'is orders to save my dad. Oh, you don't know wot a 'orrible cad I feel, and I suppose you don't believe me—"

He broke off, as D'Arcy's hand fell warmly on his shoulder.

"I believe you, deah boy! I knew you were all wight at heart. Then that wottah Farmer has been tewwowisin' you! Bai Jove, when I get back to camp—"

"Master D'Arcy, please don't give Farmer away! If you do 'e will tell the police where my dad is 'idin'!"

"We'll make that all right, old son," said Tom kindly. "We'll have a few words with Farmer in private. Come on, it's time we got back to the camp."

They returned to the camp, and Tom Merry led the way straight to Farmer's tent.

The bully of the camp was sitting up in bed, and he glared at the St. Jim's leader.

"Come outside a minute, Farmer, will you?" said Tom Merry quietly. "I want to speak to you without rousing the others."

"I—I won't! You've got no business with me, Merry!" snarled Farmer.

"Haven't I? Will you come out, Farmer, and bring D'Arcy's watch, or shall I rouse the camp?"

This had the effect of moving Farmer. His evil eyes glittering with rage, he took the watch from inside his pillow and came out into the open.

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Noble, and Clicky were waiting for him.

"Clicky has told us everything, Farmer," said Tom between his teeth. "You would betray his father, I know, if we gave you your just deserts, so for his sake we'll let you off. Give D'Arcy back his watch, and we'll hush up the matter."

Farmer, snarling, handed over the watch.
"Mark what I say, Farmer! A word about Clicky's father, and you'll catch it extra hot for your caddishness!" said Tom.
"Do you understand?"

"Yes, hang you! I understand!"

"Then get back to bed, you low-down worm!"

Farmer slunk into his tent, and a little while later D'Arcy and Clicky returned to their beds, leaving Tom Merry and Kangaroo to resume their patrol of the camp until O'Connor and Digby relieved them. And the remainder of the night passed uneventfully.

CHAPTER 8.

Farmer's Ruse!

FARMER and Snape were more than usually sullen and silent next day. Dick Rawlings & Co. noticed this, and wondered at the cause of it. Nothing was known of the midnight episode, however, and Tom Merry, Kangaroo, and D'Arcy took good care that no word was mentioned concerning it. As for Clicky, he wore a more cheery expression than he had shown for a long time, his open confession to D'Arcy having taken a great weight from his mind.

"Manœuvres on the cliffs this afternoon, you chaps!" laughed Dick Rawlings, at dinner-time, when Scouts and cadets were gathered round a festive board ably prepared under the loving supervision of Fatty Wynn. "We're going to give you a run for your money!"

"Rats!" retorted Tom Merry, with a grin. "You fellows are going to be licked into a cocked hat, you know!"

"Just wait and see, old sons!"

Both Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. were keen for the afternoon's manœuvres to commence. When dinner was over their respective leaders held a council of war to discuss plans.

"I suggest that one party forms a line of defence round the camp—say, on the outskirts of the wood—then the other party would have to attack from Winchelgate way, and attempt to get through to the camp, taking as many prisoners as possible," said Tom Merry. "How does that idea strike you?"

"It's jolly good!" replied the cadets' leader.

"Then we'll fix it. Let's toss to see which shall run the attack."

"Heads!" said Dick Rawlings, as Tom spun the coin in the air.

Down came the penny, and the hero of St. Jim's gave a grin.

"Tails it is! Cadets defend the camp while the Scouts get through."

"Try to get through, you mean!" said Dick Rawlings warmly. "Of course, you chaps don't stand an earthly against us. You'll probably all get taken prisoners!"

"Oh, stuff! We shall do all the prisoner-taking, you bet! So that's settled."

The two leaders went out to acquaint their men of the arrangements, which were met with great approval.

Tom Merry marched his Scout patrol out of camp and down to Winchelgate, where they "mooched about," to use Monty Lowther's expression, until half-past three, when manœuvres were timed to begin.

Dick Rawlings & Co., meanwhile, established themselves at vulnerable points in the wood, and made ready to hold back the oncoming attackers.

The St. Jim's Scouts were standing in a group by the harbour at Winchelgate, when suddenly Tom Merry gave a chuckle.

"My hat! I've got a ripping wheeze, you chaps!"

His chums looked curiously at him.

"Well, what is it?" asked Blake. "Get it off your chest, old son!"

"If we could find out the cadets' exact position, things would be much easier," said Tom swiftly. "Of course, we could send on spies ahead, but they would run a certain risk of capture. Spies have got to go on ahead, though, and my wheeze is that they go in disguise!"

"In disguise! Great pip!"

"All's fair in love and war, and a disguised spy is a topping notion!" chuckled the Scouts' leader. "Both Monty Lowther and Kerr are dabs at make-up, and there's an amateur theatrical shop in the town where we can get all we want. I propose that Monty and Kerr dress up and go on ahead and spy out of the land."

"Bai Jove! That's a toppin' notion, deah boy!"

"First chop!" said Lowther readily. "I'm on!"

"Same here!" said Kerr promptly.

A visit was made to the theatrical shop at Winchelgate, and Monty Lowther and Kerr were both soon transformed into very different personages. Each wore a man's suit over his scouting clothes, and each had on a wig and set of whiskers that gave them quite a venerable appearance.

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Lowther put on a pair of eyeglasses and a check cap, whilst Kerr donned a bowler hat.

The St. Jim's Scouts chuckled mightily when the two disguised spies came out of the shop with Tom Merry, Figgins, and Blake.

"My word, they look proper old skulls, don't they?" grinned Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, you two will each take a different direction," said Tom Merry to the spies. "I have reckoned it out that Dick Rawlings will concentrate his defence on the road that leads to the wood alongside Major Gumboil's land, and on the other road that runs near the cliffs on the other side of the wood. Monty, you can take the cliff road, and Kerr will take the other one. We'll wait for you at the crossroads by Cliffdene."

"All serene, Tommy!"

The two disguised Scouts made off with an energy and speed that was surprising in persons so venerable looking.

Tom Merry & Co., their flag held proudly at the head of their ranks, marched through the town and along the country road that led to Cliffdene, a village outside Winchelgate.

Monty Lowther and Kerr, meanwhile, were well on their way to spy out the defenders' position. Kerr left Monty at the crossroads, and walked along the narrow lane which ran at the side of Major Rumbold's property. He had not gone far before he heard a rustle in the trees on either side of him. Kerr peered closely into the foliage, and his keen eyes detected a lurking khaki figure.

"I wonder how many of the bounders are actually here?" he murmured. "I think I'd better try a bit of wangling in order to find out."

Kerr, who was an accomplished actor and the great shining light of the Junior Dramatic Society at St. Jim's, suddenly seemed to lose his balance in the roadway, and he fell over with a yell that awoke the echoes.

He lay where he had fallen, moaning loudly.

Startled voices sounded among the trees, and next minute Dick Rawlings himself and seven other cadets appeared. They gasped when they saw the "old gentleman" lying prostrate in the middle of the road, and there was an immediate rush to go to his assistance.

Kerr, however, scrambled up before any of the cadets reached him.

"Are you all right, sir?" asked Dick Rawlings, quite unsuspecting that he was addressing a disguised spy.

"Oh dear! Ye-es, my lad; I am all right!" gasped the "old gentleman" feebly. "Just a slight fall, you know. Thank you very much. I'll get along quite well now."

Dick Rawlings & Co. returned to their ambush, and Kerr chuckled softly to himself as he hobbled on.

"So there's eight of 'em in a bunch there!" he murmured. "Quite a nice little capture for our chaps when they come along. I don't suppose they'll shift their position. I wonder where the others are?"

Kerr reached the wood and plunged into its leafy shades. By posing as an old gentleman who was out for an afternoon walk, he was able to locate a good number of the cadet defenders. When he reached the main road beyond the camp, he saw the other "old gentleman" in the check cap walking towards him.

"Hallo, Kerr!" grinned Monty Lowther behind his whiskers. "How does everything?"

"Fine!" chuckled Kerr. "Several of the cadets saw me, but they didn't tumble to who I was. How did you get on?"

"First-rate!" said Monty. "I've located a little nest of cadets along the cliff road. They've got a communication-line stretching right from that road, through the wood, to the road you've been patrolling."

Kerr nodded.

"That's what I surmised," he said. "Now, the next thing to do is to reach our chaps as soon as possible, and give them the information. I suggest we cut through the major's land—we shall miss the road that way, and at the same time it will save us about a quarter of an hour in getting to the crossroads where the others are waiting."

"All serene!"

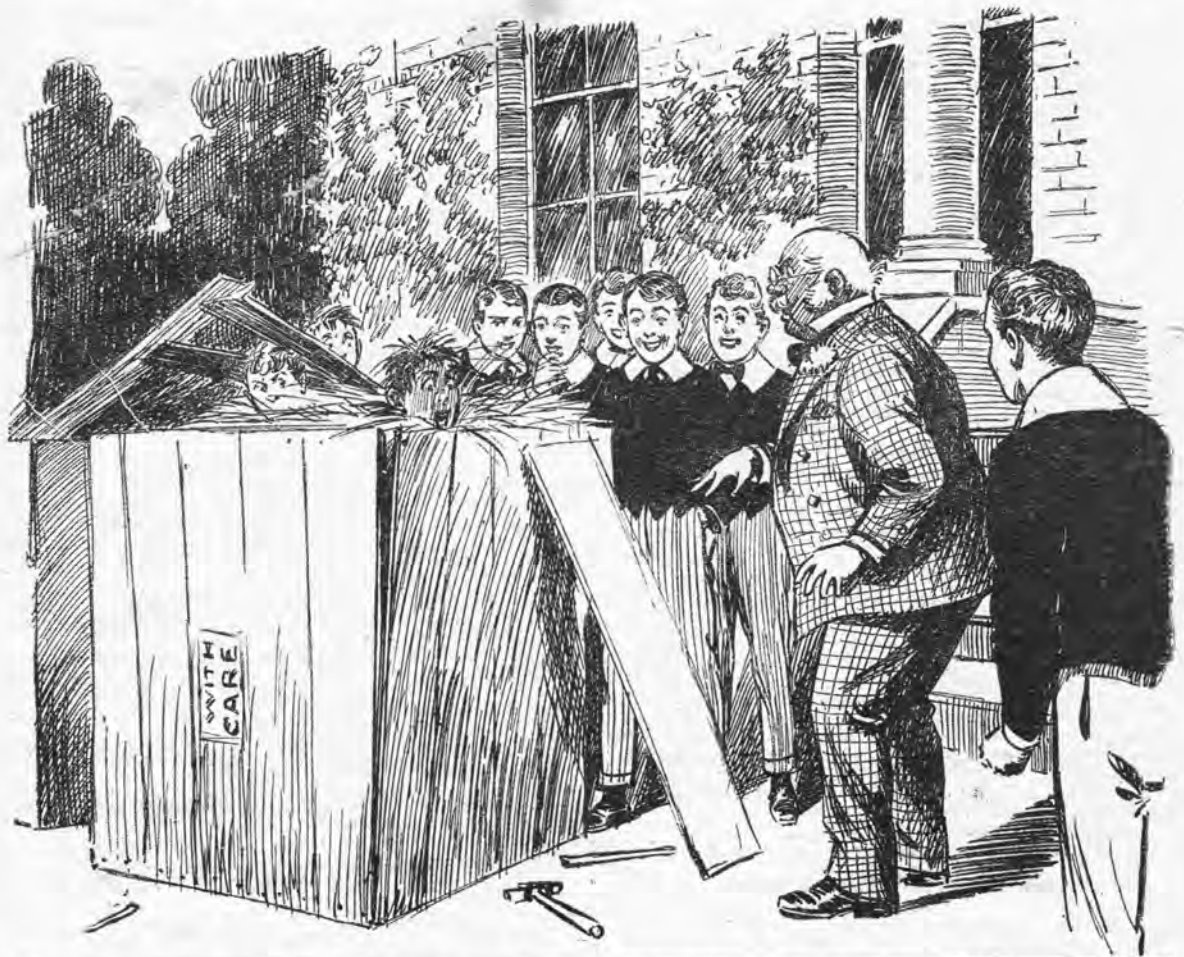
They made their way to the major's fence and climbed over. Anyone seeing those two venerable old gentlemen scaling the fence would have marvelled greatly, but Kerr and Monty Lowther took good care that they were not observed.

They hurried through the long grass, keeping well under the trees. A cool wind was now blowing steadily, and it brought to their ears the distant sounds of gunfire.

"My hat! Listen, Kerr!" exclaimed Lowther. "Did you hear that shooting?"

Kerr nodded.

"Yes; there are evidently poachers about. We shall have to be jolly careful now, or we may be mistaken for poachers. The major's keepers aren't very gentle folk, and they may start potting at us with their guns. On the other hand, if the poachers spot us, they may take us for enemies, and fire



Wrenches, pliers, and chisels were quickly brought to bear on the packing-case and Gordon Gay, Monk, and Wootton were uncrated. Their faces, where the flour was not plastered, showed crimson. The other Grammarians stood round looking blankly at their chums. "Well, if this doesn't take the biscuit, my lads!" chuckled Sir Lawrence. "The St. Jim's fellows have put it across you this time, and no mistake!" (See page 10.)

at us, too. We've got a long way to go yet. Let's make for that large spinney over there."

The two disguised Scouts crouched low in the grass as they hurried over to the spinney. They plunged in among the trees, but they had not gone far before Kerr clutched Lowther's arm.

"Listen! We are not alone in this spinney, and—"

Cr-rack! Cr-rack!

The juniors stopped in alarm and dismay. It was the sound of guns, fired within a hundred yards of the spot where they stood! They stood with beating hearts, silent and still, now fully realising the danger into which they had entered.

"We can't turn back now," muttered Kerr. "We shall have to lay low here and hide till the ruffians are gone."

They crouched beneath some bushes, watching and listening intently.

Behind them, in another clump of bushes, two khaki-clad figures were watching them.

Farmer and Snape made no movement or sound as they crouched in their hiding-place. They held their guns in hand, and each had a sack containing rabbits which they had shot. The keepers were on their track, and they, like the two new arrivals in front of them, were lying low.

"I say, Kerr, I hope we don't get caught, that's all," said Monty Lowther, sufficiently loud for the two rascally cadets to hear. "It would put the tin hat on everything. We've got to reach the others at the crossroads and give our directions—"

"I believe the keepers or poachers, or whoever they are, have given up the search in this spinney," broke in Kerr, whose trained ears were listening intently. "Did you hear that shot just then? It sounded from a farther distance than before. They must be going."

"I jolly well hope they are!" said Monty Lowther fervently.

They waited for five minutes longer, and at the end of that time were convinced that the danger was past.

They were preparing to leave their hiding-place when, all of a sudden, a swift movement sounded behind them. Each turned swiftly, but not in time. A rifle butt descended with cruel force on Kerr's head, and he staggered forward, his senses reeling. He heard Lowther give a cry, and then he fell and lay on the ground, momentarily stunned. As he fell a heavy figure planted itself on his back, and his wig and other disguise were taken from him. His head was then enveloped in a sack, which was drawn tight round his neck. Thus handicapped, and with his brain still reeling, Kerr was unable to cope with his mysterious assailant. All his disguise was taken from him, and his wrists were bound with cord. Then he felt himself being carried a short distance and dumped beside a wriggling form.

He heard retreating footsteps, which gradually died away in the distance.

Unable to see, he called out:

"Who is there beside me?"

"Yow-ow! Is that you, Kerr?"

"Yes. What has happened?"

"Groooh! I don't know exactly," came the muffled reply from Monty Lowther. "My head's fastened in a sack, and it feels like splitting—my napper, I mean. I got a terrific bash on it, and whoever did it has also made off with my disguise."

"Then you've been treated the same as me," growled Kerr. "I wonder who the dickens trapped us like that?"

"Goodness knows! Ow! This is beastly!"

Meanwhile Farmer and Snape had hurried away, after leaving their victims in a gully. Their hastily thought out ruse had worked successfully so far. They halted in a small glade in the spinney.

"Now we'll get into this make-up, and the Scouts will take us for those other two," said Farmer with a burly laugh. "They have evidently been sent on as spies, and Tom Merry and the others are waiting at the crossroads for

them. We'll decoy them in here, and lead them into those man-traps."

"Hee, hee, hee!" sniggered Snape. "That's a good idea. And they'll never know our real identity, will they? The major is bound to give it to them hot—"

"Not so much jaw, Snape! Get into that disguise!"

The two rascally cadets put on the disguise they had wrested from Kerr and Lowther. They looked just the same as those youths had looked before the cowardly attack in the spinney.

"Jolly lucky we managed to spot where the keepers laid the man-traps for the poachers!" muttered Farmer. "We'll lead Tom Merry and his gang right into them all right. There are twenty traps, all pretty close together, so most of the Scouts are bound to be caught."

"Hee, hee, hee!"

Farmer and Snape made off towards the fence that skirted the lane beyond. They climbed the fence, and saw Tom Merry & Co. waiting at the cross-roads some distance away. Farmer waved and beckoned to them.

The Scouts saw him and hastened to the spot.

"Well, what's the news?" asked Tom Merry eagerly. "You've been long enough gone!"

"You can catch Rawlings and his crowd on the hop nicely if you come this way," said Farmer, in a passable imitation of Kerr's rather deep voice. "There's no risk of the major or his keepers catching us—they're well out of the way."

"Oh, good egg!"

"Hop over the fence, boys!"

Tom Merry & Co., all unsuspecting, climbed over the fence, taking their flag with them, and they walked swiftly and eagerly through the long grass after the two rascally cadets.

Farmer and Snape had seen Major Rumbold's men laying a number of man-traps in the grass for poachers, and they had noted the spot well. Towards this spot they led the St. Jim's Scouts, and when the danger zone was reached the evil-intentioned pair halted.

"You chaps go on while we do a bit of scouting. There might be keepers dodging about, and we can head them off," said Farmer.

"Right-ho!" said Tom Merry. "Don't get running into any danger, you know."

"No fear!"

The two disguised fellows hung back whilst Tom Merry & Co. went on.

All of a sudden Blake gave a loud cry of agony, as a pair of cruel steel jaws snapped over his foot out of the long grass.

"Oh! I'm caught in a trap! Yooop! Help! Help!"

Several fellows sprang to Blake's assistance, but a number of yells arose, and Herries, Levison, Clifton Dane, and Lumley-Lumley fell victims to the concealed man-traps.

"Oh, my only hat! This is awful!" gasped Tom Merry. "The grass must be full of those traps. I— Oh, look out, Manners!"

Too late! Manners' right foot drove into a hidden trap, and the steel jaws closed over like a vice.

The Scouts who were not already caught in the toils turned back, but only five got clear. Tom Merry, D'Arcy, Figgins, Talbot, and Digby were the lucky ones. All the others were helpless, struggling vainly in the powerful grip of the traps!

CHAPTER 9.

The Cunning of a Cad!

TOM MERRY turned fiercely towards the two disguised fellows who had led them into the trap-infested area. As he did so a gasp of amazement escaped his lips.

The pair were making off, carrying the St. Jim's Scouts flag with them. They were already too far away to be successfully pursued. They turned and waved mockingly at the Scouts.

"Great Scott! Those two are not Kerr and Lowther. They can't be!" stuttered Tom Merry. "We've been japed—tricked!"

"Bai Jove! Heah come the majah and his keepahs, deah boys!" exclaimed D'Arcy in dismay.

Major Rumbold, accompanied by a large party of keepers, came running into view. He was brandishing a gun angrily.

Blake turned an anguished face to Tom Merry.

"You chaps had better cut off. You can't do any good by staying," he said. "We're absolutely done for! Get away before those rotters catch you!"

Tom Merry saw that Blake's advice was the only sane course to take. He beckoned quickly to the other four, and they all ran off, followed by angry shouts from the major and his keepers.

"After them!" roared Major Rumbold. "Don't let them escape! I'll give them trespass on my land—what! Never mind these rascals in the traps—they can wait. They won't get free. The others must be caught."

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The major and the keepers dashed in pursuit of Tom Merry & Co.

The Scouts clambered over the fence, but when they reached the lane on the other side they saw the keepers pouring out of a gate, with their infuriated master in their midst.

"Oh crumbs! We must dodge the rotters somehow!" gasped Figgins. "Our only way of escape is in the wood. We shall have to risk running into the cadets."

"Come on, then!" said Tom Merry between his teeth. "I wish I knew who those two rotters are who played that trick on us."

"They may be Grammarians," said Digby. "In my idea they waylaid Kerr and Lowther, got to know of the plan, and rigged themselves up in the others' disguise to delude us."

"Ye-es; but it isn't the sort of trick one would expect Gordon Gay to play," said Tom Merry. "He deserves to be horsewhipped if he is at the bottom of this. Hurry up, you chaps. The keepers are gaining on us!"

They were now dashing through the wood, and behind they could hear the crashing of undergrowth as the major and the keepers pounded after them.

"I hope to goodness they don't start shooting, that's all!" said Digby with a scared look. "Those keepers look rogues enough for anything, especially that cad Jessop."

"They won't dare to shoot—not on public land," said Tom Merry. "This way, kids! We may be able to dodge the rotters on the cliffs."

"Yaas, wathah!"

They left the wood and ran across the rocks. Flinging a look back, Tom Merry saw that they were gradually leaving their pursuers behind.

"I know of a hiding-place!" exclaimed Tom, swiftly thinking of the secret smugglers' tunnel to which they had followed Clicky the night previous. "We're out of sight of those rotters now, so we can dodge behind that tall pile of rock without them knowing."

"But what—" said Figgins.

"It's a secret. Wait and see. Come on!"

They dashed behind the towering pile, and Tom Merry lifted the piece of rock that hid the fissure below. The Scouts eagerly squeezed through it one by one, and Tom Merry, who went last, drew the stone over the hole again.

"Wait here, kids!" he muttered. "We shall dodge them now!"

"By jingo, this is topping!" said Figgins enthusiastically. "How did you find this giddy tunnel, Tommy?"

"Shurrup! There go the old blighters!"

The Scouts, peering out from their hiding-place, saw the major and the keepers go running by, looks of blank bewilderment on their faces.

They went out of sight, and Tom Merry allowed ten minutes to elapse before he pushed the stone away, and, squeezing outside, announced the coast was clear.

The other Scouts came out of hiding, and the stone was replaced.

"Well, that was a narrow squeak, if you like!" gasped Talbot. "Things would have gone jolly hard with us if that brutal gang had caught us. If there had been more of us, we could have turned and given fight."

Tom Merry had walked to the edge of the cliff, some distance away, and was looking down intently. His look suddenly changed to one of sheer amazement.

"I—I say, come here, you chaps!" he gasped.

The others crowded to the cliff edge, and looked down. Two khaki figures could be seen clambering up the rugged cliff. One was carrying the St. Jim's Scouts' flag.

"Bai—bai Jove!" ejaculated D'Arcy, holding his monocle and gazing downward in astonishment. "Farmer and Snape—those wottahs! They've got our flag! Weally, deah boys, I fail to see how—"

"They've got hold of it somehow!" said Tom Merry. "They've gone into a cave now, and— My hat! The major and the keepers are following!"

The two rascally cadets were being pursued by Major Rumbold and his men. Farmer strode to the mouth of the cave and waved the flag defiantly. That act was like unto waving a red rag to a bull.

The major gave a roar that was heard by the juniors at the top of the cliff, and he renewed his efforts to climb up to the ledge that gave access to the cave.

At length he and the keepers managed it, and Tom Merry & Co. saw them enter the cave.

Tom Merry suddenly gave a low whistle.

"Oh, my hat! I believe that's the entrance to the cave where Clicky's pater is hiding! I see what Farmer's rotten game is now! He's used our flag to entice the major into the cave—to betray Clicky's father!"

"Bai Jove! The fealful cad!"

Tom Merry set his teeth grimly.

"Come with me, Gussy, we'll go down and see what is taking place!" he exclaimed. "You others go to the tunnel

entrance and wait there. If Farmer and Snape come out, grab them!"

"What-ho!" said the others heartily, and they ran off. Tom Merry and D'Arcy clambered down the cliff path and reached the cave. One glance into the interior proved Tom's surmise to be correct.

Clicky's father—a wan, miserable figure—was in the grip of Major Rumbold's men. The major himself was standing before the captive, glaring at him.

"So this is where you have been skulking, you miscreant!" he was saying. "You shall be brought to justice now! Where are the valuables you stole from my house?"

"I don't know, sir! I never stole anything—'onest, I didn't! You've made a mistake, and—"

"Bah! I do not make mistakes. Search the cave, and see if he has been hiding his plunder here!"

The keepers hunted in the cave, but the search revealed nothing.

"Take him away!" snorted the infuriated major, at last. "Never mind those impudent boys now; I'll find measures to deal with them later. This rascal must be handed over to the police at once!"

Tom Merry and D'Arcy hastily withdrew to the top of the cliff.

They saw the keepers hustle their protesting captive to the shore below, and then they disappeared from view.

Arthur Augustus polished his monocle in deep distress.

"Bai Jove! Then poor old Clicky's patah has been awwested, aftah all. Those wottahs are takin' him to the police. And it's all through Farmer and Snape—the outsidahs!"

"They evidently thought they wouldn't be suspected," said Tom Merry, knitting his brows. "They didn't actually give information, you see, but they enticed the major to the cave by means of a ruse. And, look here, Gussy, here's the missing disguise!"

Happening to glance behind a rock, Tom's eyes lighted upon the clothing and other disguise in which Lowther and Kerr had sallied forth from Winchelgate earlier that afternoon.

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Then the two who led us into those traps must have been Farmer and Snape!" he exclaimed. "Oh, the awful cads! Now that Clicky's father has been taken, we've nothing to conceal, so we'll make things warm for Farmer and Snape when—"

"We've got 'em!" Figgins' voice broke in triumphantly, and the lanky New House junior was seen waving from the tall mound of rock near by.

Arriving there, Tom Merry and D'Arcy found that the others had captured Farmer and Snape as those young rascals were essaying to escape through the opening under the rock.

The St. Jim's leader regarded the prisoners with blazing eyes, his lip curling in contempt.

"So, you cads, you have betrayed Clicky's father, after all!" he exclaimed. "It was you, also, who led our chaps into the traps. You'll get it in the neck for this, I give you my word!"

Farmer snarled, but did not speak. Leslie Snape let out a yell of terror.

"Let me go! It was all Farmer's fault! I— Yarooogh! Yah! Wooooo! Ow-wow-wow!"

"Give them a bumping to start with," said Tom Merry.

Farmer and Snape were bumped on the hard rock until they were howling for mercy. Then they were hustled to their feet and dragged away towards the wood.

Tom Merry & Co. were taking their prisoners along a narrow path, overhung with trees, when, all of a sudden, there was a shout, and a party of cadets, eleven strong, led by Jack Dawson, dashed out of the trees.

"At 'em, boys!" sang out Dawson. "Here are five prisoners, at any rate!"

"Bai Jove! Hands off, you boundahs, we— Ow-wow! Yah! Oh cwumbs!"

Tom Merry & Co. were taken by surprise, and the enthusiastic cadets did not give them an opportunity to explain.

The Scouts went down under the attack, and Farmer and Snape, thus released, took immediate advantage of the opportunity and ran off.

Tom Merry gave an angry shout when he saw the two rascals disappear into the trees.

"Leggo! Hands off, you idiots! Pax! Let us go! You've let those cads escape!"

"My hat! What's the rumpus?" asked Dawson, in surprise. "You are our prisoners, and—"

"Rats! You've let Farmer and Snape get away, and they are wanted to stand trial at the camp!"

"What on earth are you gassing about?" demanded Dawson.

Tom Merry gave a weary gesture.

"Oh, I suppose it's no use chasing them now!" he said. "I'll explain."

And he told the astounded cadets of the trick that Farmer and Snape had played on them that afternoon, and his betrayal of Clicky's father.

The little Cockney who was there gave a cry of dismay. D'Arcy patted him reassuringly on the back, for Clicky was on the verge of tears.

"Nevah mind, deah boy, things will be all wight!" said the noble-hearted swell. "I'll get my patah's lawyah to take up your patah's case, you know. These lawyah chaps can do lots of elevah things in a court of law, bai Jove!"

Jack Dawson made a rueful grimace.

"I'm sorry, Merry, that we allowed those cads to escape," he said. "But how were we to know?"

"They'll turn up again, never fear!" laughed Tom. "I don't suppose we have seen the last of them—not by a long chalk! We'd better call in the others, and discuss ways and means. Nearly all our chaps are in the hands of old Major Gumboil, you know."

Dawson sounded his bugle, and, in answer to the strident notes, Dick Rawlings and the other cadets came running up.

They gasped when Tom Merry explained everything to them.

"We saw Farmer and Snape in the wood just now, and we let them pass us by!" snorted Rawlings. "Oh, if only I had known! Cheer up, Clicky! It can't be helped, you know, and we believe your father to be innocent!"

"Yaas, wathah! And we'll pwove it, if we can, bai Jove!" said D'Arcy, with emphasis.

The wood was scoured for the two fugitives, but no trace of them was found. Farmer and Snape had lost no time in making good their escape.

Tom Merry & Co. and the cadets returned to camp, manoeuvres over for that day, at any rate.

Kerr and Monty Lowther were waiting eagerly for them at the camp. They had arrived there a short time previously.

"Well, you blitherers, what do you mean by letting Farmer and Snape rob you of your disguise?" demanded Tom warmly.

"Hang it all, Tommy! What would you do if someone gave you a sudden bash on the napper from behind with the butt-end of a rifle?" growled Monty Lowther.

Kerr proceeded to explain the catastrophe. Then he wound up with some cheering news.

"When we got free, we watched the farm-men getting our chaps out of the traps and making them prisoners," he said. "We didn't leave the major's land, but hung around to see if there was any chance of setting the others free. Nobody saw us, but we saw quite a lot. The major himself came back a little while ago, looking jolly excited about something. He's had all our chaps locked up in a shed together, under guard, and there they've got to remain all night, till the old bounder decides what to do with them in the morning."

"Gweat Scott! The wuffian!"

Kerr chuckled.

"But we know exactly where that shed is, and how to get to it without being spotted!" he said. "I suggest that to-night we make a raid and rescue our chaps. With ordinary luck, it should be as easy as rolling off a form!"

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry. "We will! We'll go to the rescue as soon as it's dark!"

And Scouts and cadets fell to making plans for their projected raid on Major Rumbold's domain.

CHAPTER 10.

Prowlers of the Night!

ELEVEN o'clock! The chimes of the church bells came faintly and musically through the dark stillness of the wood, and were heard not only by Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co., who were up and making ready for their attack on the major's land to rescue their captive comrades, but also by a party of stealthy youths who were creeping campwards through the trees.

Gordon Gay & Co. were also up and doing that night!

"We're not far away from the giddy camp now, my sons," Gordon Gay murmured. "Our wheeze ought to work, with ordinary luck. There will probably be four sentries on go—and we'll knock them off one by one. Then, while the other dear lads are asleep we can steal in and make off with that merry parrot."

"I say, though, suppose the bird starts yelling and wakes the camp?" said Tadpole nervously.

"Oh, rats!" said Gordon Gay. "The cage is covered over, and we'll take care to carry it gently. That will be all right. Once in the wood we can let the parrot talk as much as it likes. And we're going to make it talk—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

"We're going to teach it to say a few things that will

make those bounders gasp, my sons!" chuckled the Grammarian leader. "The giddy parrot will pick up anything you say, and such sayings as 'Strafe St. Jim's!' 'Down with St. Jim's!' 'Rotten hole!' and a few more like that will make Tom Merry & Co. sit up, I'm thinking."

"What-ho!"

"Come on, and don't make a row!"

The Grammarian raiders proceeded on their way through the wood, treading carefully and silently amid the ghostly shadows that were cast by the moonlight.

At length they came to the camp, and Gordon Gay called a halt.

He drew a deep breath as he peered between the trees.

"My only hat! What are the bounders up to, I wonder?"

"They're all leaving camp!" ejaculated Frank Monk.

Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co., fully dressed in their respective uniforms, and all armed with staves, were filing out of the camp en masse.

They were led by Tom and Rawlings, and the watching Grammarians guessed that they were going out on some expedition.

"I—I wonder whether they're out to raid us?" said Tadpole under his breath.

"Zey are out on ze wild goose chase, mes amis," said Mont Blong, the French junior. "When zey arrive chez nous zey vill discovaire zat ze birds have what you call done ze bunk!"

Gordon Gay grinned slightly.

"You're off-side, Mont Blong," he said. "They're not taking our way at all, but the opposite direction. Perhaps they're going out on night manoeuvres. Anyway, this little business helps us considerably. There's hardly anyone left in the camp now."

Tom Merry & Co and the cadets were gone.

They all disappeared into the trees opposite the Grammarians, leaving the camp silent and, to all appearances, deserted.

Gordon Gay, Monk, and the two Woottons did some reconnoitring, and returned to the others with the news that there were four guards outside the camp—two cadets, and Lorne and Bates of St. Jim's.

Inside the camp were two other cadets, and Skimpole, Baggy Trimble, and Cardew. The latter would have accompanied the others on their expedition, only he had injured his foot that day in climbing a tree.

"So, kids, our little raid will be as easy as rolling off a form!" grinned the Grammarian leader. "First of all, we'll deal with the giddy sentries. Got those sacks and ropes, Carboy?"

Four sacks were handed out, one to each of Gay's chums—Monk, the two Woottons, and Tadpole.

Gay led the way and showed them where the sentries were to be found.

The camp sentries were taken completely by surprise. Each suddenly heard footsteps behind them, and a minute later found a sack enveloping his head and pulled down hard.

"Got them!" chuckled Gay, as the four were dragged to the camp entrance, gurgling wildly in their sacks. "That part of the business has worked like a giddy charm. Now all we have to do is to capture the others, tie 'em up, and then make off with the parrot."

"Hear, hear!"

Ralph Reckness Cardew was awake in his tent, and he flinched to the opening on hearing sounds outside. He gave a start on seeing the Grammarians approaching, and he immediately grasped his scout's staff, which was lying on the ground.

"You're not coming in here, you rotters!" he exclaimed, standing at the tent entrance in a grim attitude of defence as the raiders came up.

"Aren't we?" said Monk, striding forward. "We'll soon see about that, and—Yah! Ow-wow-wow!"

Cardew brought his staff vigorously to work on Monk, and the Grammarians jumped back with a yell.

Tadpole and Mont Blong made valiant attempts to burst into the tent, but Cardew kept them at bay with his staff and showed that he would be a difficult customer to deal with.

Gordon Gay and Frank Wootton walked away, and while the others were still battling with Cardew they bent down and gently removed the tent-pegs from the ground.

Then, when all the pegs were out, they gave the centre pole a push from the back, and Cardew's tent collapsed in a heap.

"Yerrooooooooooh!" yelled Cardew, falling down with the canvas completely enveloping him.

"Now, kids, rope him up in the tent!" chuckled Gordon Gay.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cardew struggled pluckily, but he was at a complete disadvantage now. The canvas was wrapped round him, and ropes secured him in a very effectual manner.

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"Now for Skimmy and Baggy and the other two!" grinned Gay.

The two cadets put up plucky fights, but were soon overpowered. Skimpole and Baggy were caught in bed and made prisoners in a trice.

"Good! That's caught the whole merry issue!" chuckled Gay. "I think we'll dump them in a heap in the big tent, with all the bedclothes round them, and then make off with the parrot."

Gordon Gay & Co. dragged all the beds from the other tents, and made a heap of them in the centre tent. The luckless captives were then deposited on the pile and left there, wriggling and gurgling, whilst the raiders took down the parrot's cage and, keeping Jeremiah well covered with a cloth, left the camp with him.

"Won't Tom Merry and the others have a shock when they return?" grinned the cheery Grammarian leader. "They'll have to sort out their bedclothes and remake their beds before getting any beauty-sleep to-night. Ha, ha, ha! They'll be just ready to tear their hair!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather!"

Two hidden figures watched the Grammarians leave the camp.

Farmer and Snape had just come up, the former carrying a can of petrol. The two young rascals grinned evilly at each other.

"So those chaps have just raided the camp!" muttered Farmer. "All the better for us! It will be thought that they started the fire, and no suspicion will fall on us."

"He, he, he!" sniggered Leslie Snape. "Merry and Rawlings and the others will get an eye-opener when they find the camp on fire! We—we couldn't get into serious trouble if we were found out, I suppose?"

"What a rotten funk you are, Snape!" growled Farmer. "I don't suppose the whole camp will burn to the ground. They'll come back and put out the fire, no doubt, but the place will be pretty well ruined by the time it's all over. I said I'd get my revenge, and I will. Come on!"

The two rascals made their way to the rear of the camp, and they flung petrol in all directions on the tents and among the camp appliances. Then, starting the conflagration with lighted matches, they scurried away into the trees and disappeared.

The petrol ignited readily and flames arose in lurid, devouring masses, crackling and hissing as they ate their way amongst the canvas and woodwork.

And the prisoners, lying bound on top of the bedclothes in the large centre tent, watched with sickening horror the menacing red glow as it deepened, for they were powerless to get free.

CHAPTER 11.

A Great Capture.

"QUIET!" muttered Tom Merry. "We must be nearly there by now."

"Not much farther to go," whispered Kerr.

"There's the house, you see—over there, behind the big clump of trees. Someone must be up, for there's a light showing."

The St. Jim's juniors and Dick Rawlings & Co. were making their way swiftly and silently through the ground of Major Rumbold's house. Kerr and Monty Lowther were showing them the way, for the others had not ventured into this part of the major's property before.

"The farm lies on the right of the house, and the shed where our chaps are being kept is just inside the farm compound," said Monty Lowther. "We shall have to be jolly careful now. Old Gumboil evidently expected us to make a raid, because he posted guards outside the shed. There were four of them when we left this afternoon."

"Oh, we shall be able to manage them all right," said Tom Merry.

They reached the fence which enclosed the major's farm, and one by one the juniors dropped over into the yard.

"There's the shed!" muttered Kerr, pointing to the left. "Did you see those figures moving round it? Those are the guards."

"Come on!" said Tom, gritting his teeth.

Scouts and cadets pressed forward in a swiftly moving mass. A man dashed out at them from behind a shed.

Biff!

Dick Rawlings' staff caught the man in the nape of his neck. He staggered forward into Tom Merry's arms. Next minute he was seized upon by many hands, and he was gagged and thrown to the ground, his hands tied with cord.

"Next please!" muttered Tom Merry grimly.

They reached the shed, and found three brutal-looking men guarding the door. Tom Merry & Co. and the cadets walked up to them.

"We've come for those chaps you are holding prisoners in there!" said Tom Merry between his teeth. "Will you open the door and let them out?"

"Not much!" retorted one man. "We've orders to keep the young brats 'ere, and 'ere they stops! The master's goin' to flog them in the morning!"

"Grab them, you chaps! Don't make a noise if you can help it!" rapped Tom.

Hands were clapped over the men's mouths before they had an opportunity to shout out. They went crashing to the ground, and Scouts and cadets piled all over them. They fought savagely, but were overwhelmed.

"Huwah!" came the familiar accents of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Have you got those wottahs down, deah boys?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Sit on their heads!"

"We sha'n't be long now!"

"Ooooooogh! Gug! Gug!" gurgled the guards.

They were clamped securely, and left on the ground. Tom Merry discovered a bunch of keys in the pocket of one of them, and the door was unlocked.

The imprisoned juniors came piling out, their faces dirty, but joyful.

"Good kids!" said Blake enthusiastically. "We should have all been horsewhipped in the morning."

"Dump those guards inside the shed!" said Dick Rawlings with a grin. "The major can let them loose to-morrow."

"Hear, hear!"

The guards were placed in the shed, and the door was locked on them. Tom Merry retained possession of the keys.

"Well, so far so good!" chuckled Tom. "We don't seem to have raised the alarm in the house yet. I— Listen!"

From the gloom ahead came a muffled sound.

Cr-rack! Cr-rack!

The boys started. Guns again!

"My hat!" muttered Tom. "It must be the poachers that the major has been raving about so much lately. They are shooting from over there, in the large spinney, I should imagine. The wind is blowing from the sea, so that the sounds won't carry to the house."

"You're right, Merry," said Dick Rawlings in a low voice. "The poachers are in that spinney—hark! Did you hear that shot?"

Poachers were at work—armed and desperate ruffians. How many of them the boys could not tell, but at least three guns could be heard.

"What shall we do, Tommy?" said Blake. "We ought to catch them, and—"

"No fear!" the words came fiercely from Clicky, who had accompanied the rescue party. "Let the poachers alone. That rotten bully, Major Rumbold, oughter suffer somethink, even if it's only from poachers. Look at the way 'e's treated my father! 'E—"

"Major Rumbold is a hot-headed, unreasoning old fool, but he has had your pater arrested because he believes him guilty of robbing him, kid," said Tom Merry gently. "It's our duty to catch these poachers if we can, and clear ourselves. He believes that we come into his grounds and shoot his game. It's up to us to nail the poachers."

Figgins nodded.

His face was a little pale.

Shot after shot was being fired in the spinney, and all the boys knew that if they fell foul of the poachers, those rascals would have no hesitation in shooting at them.

They were on the verge of an adventure that might have terrible results, yet not one of them—cadet or Scout—was afraid.

Clicky was the only one who offered any demur to the plan of capturing the poachers, but he was actuated by resentment against the major, not fear.

They all moved forward, making their way with infinite caution towards the spinney where the shots sounded.

At last they reached the spinney, and they trod carefully through the dark maze of trees, peering at every moving shadow.

Ghostly blackness surrounded them, and shadows which changed with every breath of the wind that rustled the branches or stirred the leafy bushes.

"Quiet!" muttered Tom Merry, halting. "I hear footsteps. Lie low in the grass and wait!"

Even as the boys ducked down into the long grass, a man in a rough coat and with a gun in the hollow of his arm came tramping through the thickets. That he was a poacher needed no second glance to tell. He was undoubtedly one of the gang at work in the spinney.

The watching boys felt their hearts beat fast. They laid there in tense excitement. All of a sudden Dick Rawlings' like form rose behind the rascal and his right arm went round his neck, bringing him crashing over with a low gurgle of amazement.

An instant later the fellow was piled upon by the others. Dick Rawlings kept a firm grip on his throat, so that he could not shout out.

"Curse you, let me—"

Blake deftly jerked off the rascal's red neckerchief and

rammed it into his mouth. Three cadets sat on him whilst the others plunged on in search of the poacher's confederates.

"Where's Clicky?"

Dick Rawlings asked that question a few minutes later as he looked round and found the little Cockney boy missing.

He had evidently run off in the excitement of capturing the poacher.

"I—I hope he hasn't gone to give the alarm," said Dawson. "We want to make a clean capture of these rotters ourselves—"

"Rather!" said Tom Merry. "Then if the major's a sport, he'll stop ragging us as he has done, and let bygones be bygones. Keep a sharp lookout for Clicky, but don't, for goodness' sake, call him!"

Cr-rack!

Another shot, ominously near, cut through the night stillness. It was not loud, and Tom guessed that the poachers had fitted silencers to their guns.

They plunged on, anxious to get to close quarters with the enemy as soon as possible. Of Clicky there was no sign. The little Cockney boy was not far away, however.

Anxious to redeem himself in the eyes of the others, for having at first suggested that the poachers should be let alone, he had scuttled off into the trees during the fight with the first poacher, following the sound of a muffled shot which his quick ears had heard. Under his arm was tucked the poacher's gun, which he had snatched up from the grass.

There was nothing to guide him—nothing but the impenetrable darkness of the spinney, which was relieved occasionally when the moon came out from behind the clouds.

He caught his breath as he heard a rustle in the thickets.

Another poacher showed for an instant—a burly rascal in cloth cap and a corduroy jacket, armed with a gun! Clicky's blue eyes glinted. There was another not far away—he heard a whistle. Could he attract all the poachers to attack him, and then call the others? His grip tightened on the gun.

He suddenly darted off into the thickets, making a rustling noise as he did so, and he heard a gasp of alarm from the poacher.

"By hokey! There's someone spyin'—"

The next moment two other poachers crashed their way to his side. The three, muttering curses, followed Clicky through the trees. The little cadet crouched under a bush and watched them come up.

Then he wrenched the silencer from the muzzle of his rifle, and, pointing the weapon upwards, he pulled the trigger.

Bang!

The shot rang out with deafening noise through the spinney. A savage cry came from one of the poachers, and next minute the man dashed forward, arms outstretched, towards the boy.

Clicky turned, tried to scramble away, but stumbled. He felt the poacher's large, hairy hand grip his neck.

"Come 'ere—quick! I've got 'im!"

Then came the pounding of heavy footsteps, and the other two burst into view. Clicky fought and wriggled in the ruffians' grasp, but he was thoroughly caught, and he knew it. His intention was, however, to gain time—to keep the three at bay until Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. arrived.

"Old 'im, Seth! -Don't let the brat get away!"

"Yow-oogh!"

Clicky hit out pluckily, and he landed several telling blows on Seth's stubbly chin.

He wriggled like an eel, and proved himself to be a difficult handful, even for those three burly ruffians. Then, at last, came the welcome rush of feet, and a score of Scouts and cadets crashed through the thickets.

"This way!" shouted Clicky. "They're all 'ere!"

"You little whelp—"

The man addressed as Seth, his face showing livid with rage in the sudden burst of moonlight that came out, raised his fist, and brought it down with savage, murderous intent towards the little Cockney at his feet. But a slim, athletic form whipped forward and planted a terrific upper-cut on the ruffian's jaw. The blow fairly lifted Seth off his feet, and he reeled back into the grasp of the cadets who followed up.

The intruder was D'Arcy!

"All sewene, Clickay, deah boy!" gasped the swell. "I just managed to stop him in time, bai Jove!"

"Thankee, Master D'Arcy!" muttered Clicky, his eyes shining with adoration at the swell of St. Jim's. "If you 'adn't—"

"Wats! Was it you who fired that shot, deah boy?"

"Yes, Master D'Arcy. I—"

"Bai Jove! You're a stunnin' little bwick! We've pwoably caught those wascals!"

They had!

The three poachers fought savagely and desperately, using guns, fists, and feet, but they stood no chance whatever

against Tom Merry & Co. and the cadets. Within a very short space of time they were overpowered and unarmed.

"Got them!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Drag 'em into the open!"

The four poachers were taken together out of the spinney. Figgins, happening to look round, suddenly caught his breath and gripped Tom Merry's arm.

"Tom! Oh, good heavens, look—look!" he muttered.

All turned, and faces blanched with horror when they saw a crimson glow behind the trees in the distance—a glow that cast a hectic light through the darkness and showed up the trees of the wood in gaunt, terrifying shapes.

"There's a fire in the wood!" cried Blake.

"The camp!" said Tom Merry, his voice harsh and strained. "The fire is in that direction. Our camp must be alight!"

CHAPTER 12.

Fighting the Flames.

A DREADFUL hush fell on the boys. They watched the distant crackling glow in terrified, fascinated amazement for some time.

"We must get back to fight the fire!" exclaimed Tom Merry. "There are only nine left in the camp, and it's a big fire, by the look of it."

"What can we do with these prisoners?" said Dick Rawlings swiftly. "We can't let them escape!"

"Take them to the shed where we were locked up!" cried Blake. "Tom has the key. They'll be safe there. And, right opposite that shed, is the shed where the farm fire-engine is kept. We can take that out and rush it to the camp. It will be very useful—"

"Yes, rather!" panted Tom Merry. "Come on! Hurry, for Heaven's sake! The flames are rising higher!"

The Scouts and cadets dashed back the way they had come—back to the farm enclosure. Tom flung open the shed door, and the four poachers were thrust inside, the door being afterwards locked.

Meanwhile, Dick Rawlings & Co. opened the fire-engine shed and dragged out the farm fire appliance. It was a very crude affair, consisting merely of a water-pump on a two-wheeled truck. There were several large coils of hose, and all were seized upon by the cadets.

"Good man!" gasped Tom Merry, as Dick Rawlings & Co. lifted the fire-engine bodily over the fence. "Now on to the camp! There isn't a moment to lose!"

Strong, willing hands pulled the fire-engine right across the major's land, over the fence, and into the wood.

Cadets went on ahead, and, with staves and hands, crashed down a path through the thickets of the wood.

As they came nearer to the camp the roar of the flames became louder. The whole wood seemed to be lit up by the conflagration.

Cries of horror and dismay arose from the boys when they saw their camp.

Tents and camp appliances were blazing furiously in a ghastly inferno of flame and smoke.

Already the large centre tent was well alight.

Tom Merry and Dick Rawlings marshalled their men with skilful leadership, and a cool, collected command of the situation. The hosepipe was joined up and taken to the pond. As luck would have it, there was sufficient to reach. Water was pumped up, and a powerful stream directed at the fire.

A deafening hiss arose as the water poured into the flames. There was a sound of running footsteps behind, and next minute Gordon Gay & Co., their faces white with horror and dread, dashed to the scene.

"The camp's ablaze! Good heavens! How—how—"

Gordon Gay broke off, and turned to Tom Merry.

"We've been here!" he cried thickly. "We raided the camp, but we didn't set fire to it! Don't think that—"

"We'll discuss that later on!" said Tom grimly. "You chaps can lend a hand. We need more water, and the tents that haven't caught yet have got to be taken down."

"We'll help—willingly," said Gordon Gay. "What about the chaps in the big tent. Are they out yet?"

"Whom do you mean?"

Gay darted a look of horror at the blazing tent.

"Skimpole, Trimble, Cardew, and the others!" he cried.

"We left them roped up in there—prisoners—"

"Oh, bai Jove! We haven't seen them—"

"Then they are still in that tent!" muttered Gay, setting his teeth. "I only hope to Heaven they are not harmed, because it was my fault that they were left there. I'm going in. Play the hose on me all the time—the tent is well alight and is full of smoke."

Tom Merry, Dick Rawlings, Dawson, Blake, D'Arcy, Figgins, and Kangaroo dashed after Gordon Gay, and they were followed by several others, including Monk and Wootton.

The hose was directed on the entrance to the tent. Inside nothing but flames and smoke could be seen.

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Gay, without a moment's hesitation, dashed in, and was lost to view. Tom Merry and Rawlings were the next to go in, heads down, and arms shielding their eyes.

The interior of the tent was a blazing inferno. The flames had caught the pile of bedclothes which Gordon Gay & Co. had left, and dense masses of nauseating smoke were rising from the blaze. Were the fellows who had been left there still alive?

The rescuers fought their way to the top of the pile, through flames that licked at their clothing and flesh with hungry relish.

"Here they are!" muttered Gordon Gay huskily. "I—I believe they are all right, although none of them are moving. Why don't the fellows outside bring the water?"

The canvas roof of the tent was sagging in, bringing down a mass of flames that were an additional menace to the boys below. The water was hissing outside, but they were in awful peril inside the tent.

One by one they lifted down the prisoners, who were unconscious. The smoke and fumes had robbed them of their senses.

Then Carboy appeared in the doorway, with a number of the cadets. They had the hose, and they played the water round the tent, and swamped their plucky comrades with it.

Others gathered outside, and they carried away the unconscious boys one by one as they were handed out of the blazing tent.

"Now, run for your lives!" shouted Gordon Gay from inside. "The whole place is collapsing!"

There was a stampede to get out of the tent. Fortunately, all the prisoners had been rescued, and were already in a place of safety. The whole structure of the marquee seemed to sway, and flames and smoke went belching skywards through a new rent in the canvas side.

Then there was a splitting roar and a crash, and practically on the heels of Gordon Gay and Tom Merry, who were the last to leave, the complete tent collapsed and burned away where it had fallen.

Nothing could have saved it, so the schoolboys concentrated their efforts on arresting the further progress of the fire. After a terrible, grim struggle, this was done, and the fire was put out. Smoke poured up to the sky and was driven by the wind into the wood, but all further danger was gone. The fire was out, having completely destroyed more than half the camp.

Tom Merry, grimed and wet, his clothes scorched and torn, turned to Gordon Gay, who was in a no less worse condition.

"Have you no idea how this started?" he asked.

"No—honour bright," replied the Grammarian leader.

"We raided the camp, but I swear we couldn't have started the fire."

"Right—ho, Gay. You wouldn't do such a caddish thing, I know. Let's see how the others are."

The four cadets, and Skimpole, Trimble, Cardew, Alan Lorne, and Bates had recovered under skilful first-aid treatment, and, except for headaches and burns, were little the worse for their awful experience.

Kerr came up, holding a handful of mould.

"Smell that," he said, holding his hand out to Tom Merry.

"I scraped this up from the place where I should imagine the fire started."

"Good heavens! Petrol!" exclaimed Tom. "We have no petrol in the camp. It means, Kerr, that somebody brought petrol here and deliberately set fire to the camp."

Kerr nodded.

"My dear Merry, I have something to communicate."

Herbert Skimpole's mild voice broke in, and all turned to the Shell fellow, whose lofty forehead was swathed in a large bandage.

"I think I am able to throw some light on the seemingly baffling question as to the manner in which this conflagration commenced," said Skimpole. "Soon after Gay had left the tent I saw, through the tent opening, two figures steal into the wood. I had no difficulty in recognising the fellows as Farmer and Snape, those particularly disagreeable fellows whom I have frequently had to reprove—"

"You are certain, Skimpole, that the chaps you saw were Farmer and Snape—that those chaps had been prowling about here since Gay and his gang left?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Yes, indeed, my dear Merry. I can assure you on that point."

The others exchanged grim looks.

"Then those rotters came back and set light to the camp—for revenge!" muttered Dick Rawlings. "Oh, the cads! If only we could lay hands on them—"

"Look here, they may still be hanging around," said Gordon Gay quickly. "As they started the fire, they would naturally keep in the neighbourhood to see how it developed. If we are quick, and spread out into different directions, we may catch them. There are plenty of us."

"Right—ho," said Tom Merry. "You chaps do that. I want a few, though, to come with me to Major Rumbold."

Those poachers we caught have got to be handed over before they escape."

"Bai Jove! I had forgotten about those! Yaas, wathah! We must do that, deah boy!"

Tom Merry, Blake, D'Arcy, Lowther, Figgins, and Rawlings went off to the major's land to see to their prisoners, whom they had left in the shed. Meanwhile, the other St. Jim's fellow, the cadets, and Gordon Gay & Co. broke up into parties and took various directions in search of the young rascals who had set the camp on fire.

CHAPTER 13.

Amazing Revelations!

TOM MERRY & CO. did not lose any time in reaching their destination.

All was dark and quiet on the major's land. Despite the rousing events which had not long ago taken place, no one had been awakened from the house. Tom Merry could not understand why the major's other keepers had not shown themselves. He was soon to learn.

Arriving at the shed, Tom Merry unlocked the door and the boys strode in. The poachers were still there, writhing in their bonds, which had held secure.

The rascals had lost all their bombast and truculence, and were now in a state of whining subjection.

"Let us go, young gent!" cried Seth. "I tell you, it ain't all us! We ain't the only ones to blame for this poachin' business. The keepers is all in the swim, too! They've been 'oodwinkin' the major for months. Jessop is the ringleader—we all work for 'im, and 'e takes all the swag. We gets our share-out from 'im afterwards."

"Then if that is so, you rotter, we'll make a point of capturing the keepers, too—that is, if they have not already taken alarm and made off," said Tom Merry sharply. "Can you tell us where to find Jessop?"

"Yes, young gent," said the poacher eagerly. "'Im and Crake 'angs out in a room at the back of the Orange Tree Inn, on the main road not far from 'ere. I bet you'll catch 'em there now. And they've got all the swag. You'll make it light for us, won't you, young gent?"

"If Jessop is really the ringleader, as you say, he'll certainly get the worst of the trouble that's coming," replied Tom grimly. "What about these chaps"—indicating the four captive men in the corner—"have they anything to do with the poaching?"

"No, sir. Only Jessop, Crake, and the other three."

"Right-ho! Figgins and Blake, will you guard these while we are gone? We're off to find Jessop and Crake, and the other three, if they are at the Orange Tree Inn."

"Right-ho, Tommy!"

Tom Merry, D'Arcy, and Rawlings left the shed, and made their way quickly to the main road, scaling the tall fence that divided the major's grounds from the highway. They soon came upon a party of cadets and Clifton Dane, Kerruish, Harries, and Manners.

Swiftly they told them of the new development, and all set out eagerly for the Orange Tree Inn, a small, tumble-down old hostelry, which the boys knew well by sight.

It did not take them long to reach the place.

Creeping up a yard they reached an open space which served as a garden at the back. A light was burning in a small window, and Tom Merry and Rawlings, treading carefully towards this window, peered through the slits in the crazy blind and saw a strange scene.

The room beyond was small, with low-raftered ceilings, and was lit by means of a hanging lamp in the centre. Round a crude wooden table was gathered a motley assembly of men. Jessop, the gamekeeper, with whom the boys had already had their rubs, was at the head of the table. The other men, with one exception, they recognised as being gamekeepers from Major Rumbold's estate. Bottles and glasses were on the table. Jessop also had before him a bag which contained Treasury notes. On the floor at his side were several sacks and a large portmanteau.

"Seth Jones is bound to blow the gaff now that he's caught," Jessop was saying. "We'll share out now, so that we can all be well out of the way by the morning. It can't be helped. It's all through those confounded boys at the camp, the interfering young—"

"Yes, and we're interfering again!" cried Tom Merry, in a ringing voice, driving his staff through the window and throwing up the frame. "Burst the door in, you fellows. We've got these rascals on the hop properly now!"

Jessop and his confederates jumped to their feet, blurring out foul curses at the unexpected interruption. Tom was quickly through the window, and as he jumped into the room the rascal nearest him raised a bottle and aimed a savage blow at him.

Tom ducked, quick as a flash, and in an instant he whipped round again and brought his left with smashing force on the point of his assailant's chin. It felled him like a log.

Crash!

The crazy door did not withstand for long the cadets' assaults upon it, and it caved in, to admit a horde of Scouts and cadets.

Jessop and his men backed against the wall and put up their fists desperately. They were, however, six to fifteen, and every boy there knew how to use his fists for hitting and his feet for dodging.

A fierce struggle ensued. Table, chairs, and glasses were sent spinning to the floor, to be trampled on by the combatants. Pandemonium reigned, and startled cries sounded from elsewhere in the old hostelry. But the door was locked, and Rawlings put up the bar and bolts. Jessop and the other rascals were soon out-fought. One by one they went down, each with several boys on top of him. When all were overpowered, Tom Merry had the door opened, and the innkeeper, his wife, and two manservants appeared.

"Wot's all this about?" demanded the innkeeper surlily, looking about him with narrow, covert eyes. "Why, you little whelps—"

"Not so much jaw, or you may find yourself being asked some awkward questions about your part in this shady business!" rapped Tom Merry sharply. "Have you got a telephone here?"

"Yes, young master," came the cringing reply.

"Then I want to use it, to ring up Major Rumbold. I— Why, what on earth is the matter, young Clicky?"

The little Cockney, who was kneeling down beside the portmanteau, which he had opened, had suddenly given a whoop like a wild Indian.

The other boys all regarded him in amazement.

His little freckled face was aglow with wild excitement, his eyes dancing.

"Crums! 'Ere's the finest bit o' luck that ever woz! Wot d'you think's in this 'ere bag? Why—the things wot my father is supposed to 'ave stolen! I know 'em by the description. I've 'eard of 'em—diamond necklaces, rings, and medals, and all sorts o' spondiferous joolery!"

Tom Merry & Co. examined the bag, which was crammed with valuables and piles of notes.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Tom. "This Jessop rotter must be a pretty desperate and cunning rogue. There's the swag of more than one robbery represented here. My word! What a fine bag we've made!"

"And my father's name is cleared—'e won't 'ave to go to prison!" "Urrah!" howled Clicky, in a wild delirium of delight.

Tom Merry hurried to the telephone, and, after what seemed an interminable delay, explained the whole situation to Major Rumbold.

"This is all honest Injun, sir," finished up the junior.

"You come along and see!"

Ten minutes later a motor-car drove up outside the inn, and Major Rumbold, partially dressed and looking very red in the face and excited, strode in.

He glared at Jessop and his other gamekeepers, who were still being sat on by the boys.

"By thunder! Then you are here! Were are the valuables you say you have recovered?"

"Jest feast your eyes on this 'ere bag, sir!" said Clicky jubilantly.

The major examined the contents of the bag. His face, when he rose, plainly showed his satisfaction and amazement.

"These are my things, practically all intact. So Jessop is the thief—what? The lying, underhand scoundrel! I'll horsewhip him, by thunder! I'll—"

"Don't you think we'd better call the police, sir?" asked Tom demurely. "We have ten prisoners to dispose of, and it's getting late."

"Very well. Call the police. I'll speak to the inspector at Winchelgate."

In response to the telephone message six policemen and the inspector arrived some time later from Winchelgate, and they took charge of Jessop and his confederates.

Major Rumbold was now purring with delight at the recovery of his valuables, which included many medals that were, to him, priceless. During the wait for the police Tom Merry and Rawlings had acquainted him with every detail of the night's happenings.

"So, my lads, you've nowhere to go back to, except a half burned down camp," said the major, when the police had taken away Jessop and his confederates. "You can stay the night with me if you like—"

"Thanks all the same, sir, but there are so many of us, and, besides, the others will wonder where we are," said Tom. "We'll make shift somehow for to-night, and see you in the morning, sir."

"Very well, I'm obliged to you, lads—greatly obliged. I will come to your camp in the morning."

"Right-ho! Don't forget the poachers in the shed, sir."

"What? By thunder, no, I won't!"

(Continued on page 28.)

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Sid Morris is more than delighted when he gets a job in the Ashdown House stables, but when a gang of crooks therein gets busy, the cheery lad finds himself in an extremely dangerous position!



A DOUBLE EVENT!

by CECIL FANSHAW.

A Story of Sid Morris, Stableboy.

CHAPTER 1.

Ambitions Realised!

"SID! Sid! Come here, boy!" "Hallo, dad! Coming!" called back the red-cheeked youngster, pausing with one hand on the garden gate. Then he dropped his bike, whirled about, and hurried back towards the tall, spare figure of his father, standing framed in the doorway of the little suburban house.

"What's up now?" thought young Sid Morris, as he hastened up the garden path. "Dad does look mad! If looks are anything, I'm for it again!"

Sid's dad did look mad, and his voice sounded a trifle ominous. So the boy wondered which of his latest escapades had come to light. He soon learnt.

"Where were you yesterday, boy?" demanded Morris senior, as his young hopeful came to a halt and regarded his sire anxiously with wide-open blue eyes.

"At Epsom races, dad," replied Sid promptly, but uneasily.

"Humph! I knew it! I thought I warned you against going to race-meetings!"

"That's so, dad," Sid's right boot scraped nervously at the gravel path. "But I just can't keep away from horses. You know I ain't such a fool as to bet. I just go and see 'em gallop—"

"And get a ride when you can, eh?" cut in Sid's father; adding a trifle less sternly: "How many times have you run away from home, and been found in racing-stables, working as a stable-boy? Answer me that!"

"Four times, dad!" chirped Sid cheerfully, encouraged by a twinkle in the old man's eye. "But the last time you hooked me out before I'd been there a fortnight!"

Old Morris' hand flew to his mouth, stifling a smile. But he managed to rap out sharply:

"Only a fortnight last time! It was a month the time before that! Why, last year you managed to lie low for six months in some stable before you were spotted. And I'd hoped to make you a business man! What on earth's to be done with you?"

"Lemme be a jock, dad!"

"Yes, I'm going to," was the amazing reply. "You seem set on horses. So I'm—"

"What?" cried young Sid, his eyes popping from his head and his shrill voice rising to a cracked bawl. "You're really going to let me be a jock, after all? Dad, you're a—"

But Morris senior, smiling now, cut in briskly.

"I've fixed things up with Mr. Hall, who trains at Ashdown House, down in Sussex," he said. "He's willing to give you a trial. He's just wired for me to take you down there at once."

Sid didn't wait for more. In his excitement he danced a wild fandango on the gravel path. Then off came his cap, and the boy whirled it round and round his head in a giddy circle.

Crash! The cap flew from Sid's hand, to flash through an open window. From within came the tinkling sound of smashing crockery, the

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yowl of a startled cat, and the raucous voice of an outraged parrot raised in abusive protest.

"You young imp!" bellowed Mr. Morris. "Sall right, dad!" yelled Sid, ducking under his father's arm and darting through the doorway. "That bird ain't dead! No such luck!"

Then, almost together, they burst into the dining-room, the boy beating his laughing dad by a short head.

"Dad, you're a trump!" said Sid, when they had picked up the remains of three cups and two plates, coaxed the cat out from under a chair, and put a hood on the parrot's cage. "If ever a chap had a first-class dad, that chap's Sid Morris! But how did you know I was at Epsom yesterday?"

"I was there myself!" answered Morris senior blandly. "I always was fond of horses. But I didn't want you to get mixed up with racing, in case you fell into the rotten habit of betting."

Father and son eyed each other for a second. Then simultaneously they burst into roars of delighted laughter.

A second later the dining-room door slammed behind young Sid. Then there came the sounds of flying feet as the youngster darted hot-foot upstairs to throw a few things together for the journey to Sussex.

Within a few minutes the boy joined his father; and half an hour later saw them seated in a train bound for Horstead.

Sid, with his face pressed to the glass, saw the rows of suburban houses whiz past in an endless, confused procession. The train then dashed into a gloomy tunnel, with thick, acrid smoke swirling into the carriage.

It shot out of the tunnel, to emerge into a wide country of sun-bathed, irregular downland. The green, rolling downs were broken by little valleys, dotted here and there with miniature forests.

Sid's spirits rose higher and higher. He was to live in this wonderful country, and ride thoroughbred horses every day of his life!

Naturally, the boy saw everything through rose-coloured glasses. He knew nothing of the shady side of racing, and never dreamt of having to mingle with crooks who would strain every nerve to make him as crooked as themselves.

But at last, with a grinding of brakes, they ran into Horstead Junction. Sid and his father tumbled out of the train, and hired a cab to take them to Ashdown House.

An hour's drive along a white, dusty road that wound across the downs brought them in sight of their objective.

It was an old grey house, with the stables lying on one side, and, some distance away to the right, a long fir plantation that gave shelter to the horses from cold winds in bad weather.

At the entrance to the stable yard stood a large man in drab breeches and white gaiters. He was wearing a fawn-coloured waistcoat, a white stock, and a cutaway riding-coat, with a black bowler-hat jammed down on his iron-grey hair.

It was Sam Hall himself, who trained for the owners of some score of first-class race-horses.

"Morning!" bellowed Hall, as the cab came to a halt. "You've brought the lad with you, I see."

"That's it, Mr. Hall," replied Morris senior, climbing down and pushing his son in front of him. "It was easier to bring him than keep him away. If he's half as good as he's keen, you ought to make a first-class jock, of him."

"Umph!" growled Hall. "Riding ain't everything. He's got to learn to obey orders as well."

Stroking his blue-black chin, the burly trainer swung round and led the way into the stable yard.

"Hi, Jim!" he bawled. "Slap a saddle on Dynamite an' run him out!"

"Very good, sir!" came a shrill voice from the saddle-room. Then out darted a fair-haired youngster with a light saddle on his arm.

He nipped across the yard, ran down the row of loose-boxes, and dived into the end box. From within came a rustling of straw, a scream of equine rage, then a slapping of heels on wood.

A few seconds later, with a rattle of hoofs on paving, Jim emerged, looking rather scared. He was leading a great bay thoroughbred, who showed the whites of his eyes and laid his ears back flat.

At a sign from Hall, Sid tore off his coat and ran towards Dynamite, who was trying to back into his box.

"Look out for this brute!" gasped the boy Jim in a whisper. "He'll bolt with you if he can, or chuck you off and try to eat yer! It's just like the boss to shove a new chap on—"

"Thanks!" laughed Sid. "But I guess I can manage."

Then to Jim's astonishment—and secretly to Hall's—Sid vaulted into the saddle and headed his plunging mount out of the yard.

"Don't gallop!" roared Hall. "A gentle canter!"

Sid nodded, and flashed out of the yard, to thunder away across the sound turf.

Dynamite bucked like a two-year-old, arching his back and boring his head to his knees. But Sid pulled him up and clapped in his heels.

Away shot the big bay like a catapulted stone. He snatched at the reins, fought for his head, and sent flecks of white foam flying back on to Sid's boots and his own broad chest.

Keeping a steady feel on the bit, Sid sent Dynamite forward at a hard canter. But he kept him well in, listening with delight to the drumming hoof-beats and the whistle of the wind in his ears.

The great muscles bunched and rippled under the satin skin, and the big horse swept forward with a swinging, easy stride. But he quit fighting, for the feel on his mouth was light, and Sid was sitting as steady as a rock.

They swept round in a great circle. Then Sid headed back to the stables, to draw reins beside Hall and his own astonished father.

"What do you think of him, Mr. Hall?" asked Morris senior, as Sid rode quietly across the yard, and the wide-eyed Jim sprang at Dynamite's head.

"Oh, he can sit a horse all right, Mr. Morris!" answered the big trainer. "I'd heard that from the place he worked at last year. But," added Hall, rubbing his blue

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chin doubtfully. "It remains to be seen how he obeys orders."

"You'll have no trouble about that," replied Sid's father, little knowing what was in Hall's mind. "I've never known the lad break away, except to get amongst horses."

Five minutes later Sid had said "Good-bye!" to his father, and was watching his tall figure stride away across the downs.

Then the boy gathered up his kit, and made towards the quarters pointed out to him.

"I've jolly well got my wish at last," young Sid told himself, "and I'm guessing I've got a jolly hard nut for a boss, too! But I'm holding to this job at any price!"

The "price," however, proved a mighty tough one.

CHAPTER 2.

A Shady Business!

"**Y**OU'RE to ride Amethyst in the trial to-day—eh? Lucky dog! She's a dandy filly!"

Thus Jim greeted Sid as the two boys almost bumped each other hurrying across the stable-yard.

It was shortly after daybreak, about three weeks after Sid's arrival at Ashdown House. During that time young Sid had discovered that Jim was the only boy in the outfit he was likely to make a pal of. The others seemed a surly crew, and the "head lad"—a man of about forty—was a cross-grained fellow who could not speak without an oath.

"You've said it, Jim," replied Sid, pulling up. "Amethyst's a fizzer! Who's her owner?"

"Major Grindlay," Jim answered. "A slap-up swell, too. He's about the only decent cove we train for! But watch out! 'Ere's the boss!"

Jim scurried away. But Sid, somewhat astonished at his pal's words, glanced towards the yard entrance. The burly Sam Hall was just entering, and with him a soldier-looking man, whom Sid rightly took for Major Grindlay.

Hall let out a bull-like roar, intimating that Sid should get a move on. And young Sid promptly behaved as if he was attached to a live wire.

Darting to the saddle-room, he scooped up a bridle and light saddle. Then he raced across the yard to hurl himself into Amethyst's box, and deftly strip the beautiful black filly.

She stood like a rock, nosing the boy with her velvet muzzle and whinnying softly. But Sid had no time for endearments. He was working like greased lightning, desperately anxious to show up well before the major and get the mount on the filly in the Goodwood Cup.

But as he worked Sid caught the sound of his boss's voice as the two men approached the loose-box.

"Yes, major," Hall was saying in his smoothest voice; "Amethyst's good enough to win a little race. But I doubt she'll stay the distance at Goodwood. She was going a bit short yesterday, too."

"Good enough to win a little race!" gasped Jim to himself, nearly dropping the racing saddle. "Why, she can show her heels to anything here. An' I never noticed her going short, by cripes!"

But at that moment the red face of Sam Hall appeared above the low door, accompanied by the dark, lean face of Amethyst's owner. So Sid, realising his boss knew a sight more about horses than he did, clapped on the saddle and tightened the girths.

Then the boy led Amethyst out into the yard, Hall stooping to give him a leg-up. The major said nothing. But he nodded affably to Sid, and ran his keen eyes over the handsome filly.

A few moments later, with a cheery clatter of hoofs, a little cavalcade swung out of the yard on to the swelling downs.

Hall and the major led the way, both mounted on blood-like cobs. Close behind them came Sid on the black mare, who was dancing about and arching her neck.

The rear was brought up by Jim on a slashing chestnut, and another boy on a rangy bay. For Hall did not let his riding-boys stroll down to the starting-gate and mount there; he made them get up in the stable-yard.

"If you'll gallop over to that pine-tree, major," cried the trainer, pointing with his whip. "I'll join you in a moment! I just want to have a word with my head lad."

Major Grindlay nodded, and cantered away. Hall led the string down to the starting-gate, where Foster, the head lad, was waiting to let the horses go.

Dancing and tossing their heads, the three thoroughbreds started circling round. But Hall called Sid over to him, and the lad pressed the black filly towards his boss.

"Listen, boy!" breathed Hall, dropping his hands on his cob's neck and leaning forward in his saddle. "Let the chestnut make the running—and keep it! Hold hard, you! Got that?"

There was a cold, ringing snap in the trainer's voice, and his grey eyes in his big, red face looked as hard as diamonds. Sid gasped.

"Meaning, sir?" faltered the boy.

"Just what I say!" barked Hall. "Now get back to the others, and obey orders!"

Sid, absolutely bewildered, swung the mare round on her hocks. Hall cantered away to join Major Grindlay at the improvised winning-post.

A few moments later the lads had their horses formed up in line, and brought them forward on their toes towards the starting-gate. The surly Foster released the tapes, and the horses shot forward as though released by steel springs.

Jim, on the chestnut, was away like a flash, setting a cracking pace. But Sid laid Amethyst alongside, keeping her nose at the chestnut's girth. The boy on the bay was thundering along some yards away on Sid's near side.

Galloping easily and steadily, head high and outstretched, Amethyst seemed to glide over the ground without visible effort. And Sid, sitting perfectly stiff, with his hands low, felt as if he was flying.

The green downs blurred past. The drumming hoof-beats deepened to a steady roar, and the wind beat on Sid's cheeks and screamed in his ears.

The track formed a circle of about two miles. But by the time they had covered about a mile and a half, the chestnut was a lather of sweat, and the big bay was rolling in his stride. No so the black mare. She was running freely like a well-oiled machine.

Sid forgot his orders—or, rather, he had not understood them. He only knew he was on a superb horse, and could lose the others when he liked.

He gave Amethyst her head, and shot

past the chestnut like a bolt from the blue. Jim shouted something. It sounded like a warning. But Sid only sent a mocking laugh back down the wind and galloped on.

With a furlong to go, Amethyst was leading the others by two lengths. Then they flashed past Hall and the major, Sid about four lengths out in front and going strong.

As the lads reined in, Hall and Major Grindlay galloped over to them.

"You under-estimated my horse, Hall!" laughed the major in clear, ringing tones. "I think she'll be good enough to lift the Goodwood Cup! And, by Jove, I'd like that boy to ride her! He's got a good seat, and doesn't worry his mount like so many jockeys."

"You're right, major!" boomed Hall, in what was meant for a cheery voice, but fell a good deal short of one. "I made a mistake about Amethyst. I'm darned glad I did! The boy's name? Oh, Sid Morris! Yes, he's a capable youngster. Perhaps you'll see about getting his licence."

"I will!" cried Major Grindlay.

Then he complimented young Sid on his riding before turning his cob's head towards stables. Sid was bursting with pride. But he got a rude awakening before he was much older.

They reached the stables, and each boy took his horse into its box and proceeded to rub him down.

After seeing Major Grindlay into his car, Hall strode across the yard to Amethyst's box, where young Sid was getting down to work like a Trojan.

A shadow fell across Sid's face, blotting out the sunlight. The boy looked up, then gasped in surprise, for his boss' red face looked purple with rage, and the veins stood out on his forehead like knotted cords.

"What did I tell you, you young whelp?" growled Sam Hall thickly.

"I didn't quite understand, sir!" exclaimed Sid. "I thought you said the chestnut was to make the running a bit. Then I was to ride hard—or hold hard—or something. But I found the filly could win on her head, and—"

"Take that!" choked Hall. And he lunged out suddenly, dealing young Sid a ringing box on the ear. "Let that teach you to obey orders next time!"

Sid staggered back, clenching his small fists and blinking. He was enraged at the injustice, and dumbfounded beyond belief. But Hall strode heavily away, which was mighty lucky for Sid, who might have said what he felt.

Talking to Amethyst and fuming under his breath, Sid got down to his job again. But, very shortly afterwards, a fair-headed lad thrust his head over the low door. It was Jim, and he had a finger to his lips.



Sid Morris gave Amethyst her head, and the black mare shot past the chestnut like a bolt from the blue. "You under-estimated my horse, Hall," laughed Major Grindlay in clear ringing tones. The old trainer tried hard to conceal a scowl.

CHAPTER 3.

Sid to the Rescue!

"Don't worry none, Sid!" he hissed. "Just do as you're told! We all has to here!"

Then he scuttled away.

"Do as we're told!" muttered Sid wrathfully. "Why, hang it, I've landed in a stable of crooks! But I'm to ride in the Cup, by jingo! And the filly shall dashed well win if she can! The major's the only straight cove I've met here! It beats me he can't see through Sam Hall!"

But the major did not know Hall for a crook, and Sid himself could not see why his boss wanted Amethyst pulled in the trial. It was Jim, working late in the saddle-room, who stumbled on Hall's plot.

Dusk had fallen, and young Jim was hard at it soaping saddles. The door of the saddle-room was closed. Not a ray of light was visible outside. But suddenly there came to the boy's ears the sounds of footfalls in the yard and the voices of men talking.

"It's the sulphuric limit, Foster!" came in Hall's harsh tones. "That cub Sid Morris has queered the whole scheme! I'd backed Firebrand to win the Goodwood Cup for all the cash I can lay hands on—"

"You mean the bay in training at Laughlin's, guv'nor?" snarled Foster.

"Of course!" snarled Hall. "An' I know of nothing to beat him except this filly Amethyst. You see, I meant to have Amethyst pulled in the race. That won't work now, for the major saw his filly walk away from two cracks this mornin'!"

"If," continued Hall, "Sid had pulled in the trial, he could have pulled in the race. Now the major would smell a rat!—Of course, we could give the filly a slight dose before the race, but the major wants to see another trial! He insists on Sid riding, and I don't trust that boy to obey orders to pull!"

"It would be awkward," sniggered Foster. "If the filly walked away in two trials and ran a rotten race afterwards! The major'd want to make inquiries! He, he!"

"What the deuce are you laughin' at?" snarled the trainer.

"This, guv'nor!" chuckled Foster. "I was at Horstead yesterday, and I seed a black filly the dead spit o' this Amethyst—same shape, same colour! I was fair knocked out! And she's for sale—cheap. She's as slow as a house."

"Well?" Hall ground out.

"It is well, guv'nor," came the quick reply. "Go an' buy the dud filly, shove 'er into Amethyst's box, an' let young Sid ride her in the next trial. Neither he nor the major would spot the difference! Then we dope the real Amethyst for the Cup, an' let her run. The major'd think he saw his own horse beaten in the next trial—an' he suttin' would see her lose the Cup!"

"Good scheme!" breathed Hall. "But what's to be done with the real Amethyst until the race?"

"Keep her in the old stable across the downs. Send young Jim to live with her and exercise her alone. The dud lives here an' Sid rides her, ignorant, of course, o' the change. Just before the race we swaps 'em round—send the real filly to Goodwood, doped, Sid with her. How's that?"

There followed a moment's silence. Then came Hall's throaty chuckle.

"You always were a clever scamp, Foster! I'll buy the dud filly an' hoodwink both young Sid and the major! And now beat it!"

Jim heard Foster's footsteps die away. The boy breathed a sigh of relief. But the next instant his blood froze. For the saddle-room door burst inwards, and big Sam Hall stood glaring on the threshold.

"You puppy!" bellowed the trainer. "I heard you move! You were listening!"

Jim protested he had not meant to. But Hall pounced on the boy, gripped him by the collar, and shook him till his teeth rattled.

"Take heed, boy!" gritted the trainer. "You'd ha' had to learn of the scheme in a day or so. But if you breathe a word to young Sid or anybody else, I'll flay the hide off your back! Got that?"

Jim nodded.

Hall then hurled the lad aside and stamped out.

"You big cad!" Jim breathed after him. "So I'm to live at the old stable with Amethyst while you fool young Sid an' the major—the only straight cove about! Gee! I'd give my head ter be able to split!"

But young Jim daren't split. He had relations dependent on his earnings, and had to keep his job, as Trainer Hall knew very well.

"NOW then, Amethyst! What's got you?"

Sid jumped back in surprise. For the black filly, usually so docile, had jumped at the boy and tried to bite his shoulder.

There followed a wild scuffle. But at last Sid got saddle and bridle on, and was ready for the trial gallop.

As he worked, Sid wondered where Jim was. He hadn't seen him since the previous day. But Jim was away in the old stable with the real Amethyst. Young Sid was really saddling up Satan, the dud black filly specially bought by Hall.

It was a week since the last trial. And during that time Sam Hall had bought Satan, Amethyst's double. The night before the second trial Hall brought Satan over. It was an easy job to put her in Amethyst's box and send young Jim with the real filly away across the downs.

Being ignorant of the plot, Sid was much puzzled at his mount's temper as he led her into the yard. Away by the yard entrance Hall and Foster were watching.

"It's a marvel!" chuckled Hall. "I couldn't tell 'em apart myself."

"They're as like as two peas!" sniggered Foster. "But they're both bred by the same sire. Mebbe that accounts for it."

Then the two villains swung round. For a car had swished up to the entrance, and Major Grindlay was just stepping out, removing his gloves.

"Good-morning, Hall! 'Morning, Foster!" he cried. "How's the filly?"

"Very fit, major," replied Hall, scratching his chin nervously. "Have a look at her."

Major Grindlay strolled over. Hall and Foster held their breaths. It was an awful moment for the two conspirators. But the dejection passed. With a careless nod, the major swung back to them, and once more they breathed freely.

In less than ten minutes four horses were facing the starting-gate on the Downs, and the major and Hall were up at the improvised winning-post.

A high wind blew across the downs, rippling the grass in waves. It ruffled the horses' manes and tails, and apparently ruffled the temper of Sid's mount, for she lashed out with her heels and snapped viciously at the other horses.

"Bring your horse up, Sid!" yelled Foster. "She's gone crazy!" bawled back the boy. Then the tapes flew up, and the horses shot from under.

From the start Sid sensed something wrong. His mount fought for her head, her ears went back, and her tail went round and round.

Hammering a pounding tattoo, the four horses swept onward, bunched together. Clods flew from their hoofs, and the wind hummed like a telegraph-wire.

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A mile was soon covered. Sid was sitting still. But when a big bay drew away from him he started to work.

"Come on, Amethyst!" whispered the lad. "You're gettin' left!"

But Satan, the supposed Amethyst, would not come on. She had no reserve left, and Sid felt her dying away under him.

When they flashed past Hall and the major the rogue filly was last by a couple of lengths.

"I can't understand it!" Sid heard Major Grindlay say, as-trainer and owner, heading homewards, swept by on their cobs. "She ran like clockwork last time."

"It beats me, too, major," boomed Hall, thinking nothing of the sort. "But fillyes are queer-tempered brutes. Maybe she'll leave her field standing at Goodwood."

Sid heard no more, for the cobs were travelling at a smart clip, and the boys on the thoroughbreds were going home at a walk.

But Sid thought a lot; and when later he met his boss in the stable yard, he blurted out:

"Something's upset Amethyst, sir. She seems mighty vicious to-day, and she ran like as if she wanted to sit down half-way. I think—"

"You ain't paid to think, boy," snarled Hall. "You're paid to work. Get on with it!"

So Sid got on with it. But he could learn nothing about his pal Jim from the other lads, and he was mighty puzzled by his horse's ill-temper.

Nothing unusual happened for a few days, except that the temper of the rogue filly grew worse. And Sid, supposing her to be Amethyst, worried his head off.

But what worried Sid most was the absence of Jim. Sid feared his only pal had been sacked.

But Sid shortly met Jim again in astounding circumstances.

It was on a gorgeous July morning, about a week before the Cup. Some dozen of Hall's string, moving gracefully and swinging their long tails, were trotting across the downs in single file. Sid was leading on the dud filly.

Suddenly, from away to the right, came a rolling of hoofs. Hall's thoroughbreds danced and nickered. The next instant there hove into view a galloping horse, going all out. The rider was hauling at the reins, but seemed powerless to stop.

"Jim!" yelled Sid, in amazement. "Where the blazes has he come from?"

Then, as the runaway horse raced up alongside, Sid's jaw dropped, for Jim's mount was a black filly, the exact double of Sid's!

"I can't stop her!" shrieked Jim, hurtling by at breakneck speed. "She'll cart me to the river—an' I can't swim!"

"Turn her, you fool!" bellowed Hall, galloping up.

But Jim could neither stop nor turn. And Sid, getting a glimpse of his pal's white face, shot off in pursuit. There came a bellow from Hall behind, but Sid took no notice.

The two black horses swept across the downs like wildfire. Clods and small stones shot up from their pounding hoofs.

But Sid, to his horror, found he was losing ground rapidly. He sat down and rode like mad, desperate to catch up Jim and head his horse from the river.

The gap between the two blacks grew bigger and bigger.

All at once they crested a rise, to see at the bottom of a slope the sparkling waters of the broad river. Jim's mount dropped down that last green slope like a black thunderbolt.

Sid, pounding in the rear, caught his breath, for Jim's mount struck the water with a resounding splash.

He saw a great spout of green water shoot up like a geyser. Then a riderless, streaming black horse was scrambling up the bank, and Jim was being carried downstream and spinning round like a teetotum.

Sid let out a yell, and thudded along the bank. Then he flung himself to the ground as his pal, struggling desperately, was swept abreast of him.

"Right, Jim! I'm comin'!" yelled Sid, diving into the swift-flowing water.

Half a dozen strong strokes, and Sid had reached Jim, got a firm grip on him, and was swimming for the bank.

There came a rush of feet down the slopes above. It was Hall and three of his lads,

dismounted, hurrying down to secure the two black fillies that were so amazingly alike!

"Where the mischief did you come from, Jim?" asked Sid breathlessly. "Why have we got two black fillies here now? An' how was it I couldn't catch you on Amethyst?"

"You wasn't on Amethyst, Sid!" whispered Jim.

"Not on Amethyst? You're daft!"

"I ain't! Come into that empty loose-box. I'll tell you everything, if it costs me my job!"

Lightfooted, the two lads stole across the stableyard, lit now by the pale light of a myriad twinkling stars. In the dark, empty box Jim pulled Sid close to him.

"I was warned not to tell you, Sid," hissed Jim, "but you saved me from drownin'—an' I ain't goin' to see you an' the major fooled any longer! The whole thing's a fake! Your mount was a dud—Amethyst's double!"

Sid gasped. But Jim poured out the whole plot in a hissing whisper. He told Sid how the dud filly had been bought, and put into Amethyst's box; and how he—Jim—had been sent away across the downs to live with the real Amethyst in a deserted old stable.

"The boss has had to have 'em both here now," ended Jim, "because there's no more use in hidin' the real filly. But I'm sure ain't sorry Amethyst bolted with me. Some gipsy-kids startled her. Not that it'll help to queer Hall's plot now."

"Why not?" Sid burst out.

"Cause it's only two days to Goodwood, an' the major won't come here again. But you're to ride the real Amethyst in the race—'twouldn't be safe to run the dud. But Amethyst'll be doped. Just because Hall's backed somethin' else!"

A few seconds silence followed, both lads breathing heavily. Then Sid gritted:

"I guessed it, Jim—they're all crooks here!"

"You're right," Jim hissed fiercely—"all crooks! The boss is crooked, so's Foster an' all the boys. Even all the owners are wrong 'uns, except Major Grindlay. He's as straight as they make 'em. But he'll lose the Cup, for all that."

"When's the filly to be doped, Jim?" queried Sid hoarsely, after another pause.

"To-morrow night. But what can we do?"

"We'll swap 'em!" Sid almost cried out. "Change the two fillies about. Then that brute Hall will dope the dud! After that we'll put 'em right again!"

"Gee! You've got brains!" whispered Jim admiringly. "But we'll have to be mighty careful."

"We will," Sid assured his chum. "But ain't it a lark? I'll ride the real Amethyst in the race while the dud one's rocking itself to sleep in its box, chock-full o' Hall's dope! 'Twould be a rank shame to see the major swindled. What's more, neither of us'll lose our jobs. Hall will think his stuff was stale. Who's to guess we changed 'em?"

"Who? Nobody!" gasped Jim. "We'll do it!"

The two lads clasped hands on their bargain. Then they stuck their heads out stealthily to see if the coast was clear. It was. So, soundless as ghosts, they stole away to their quarters.

CHAPTER 4.

Amethyst Wins!

A BIG clock drifted across the face of the crescent moon, plunging the stable yard into darkness. Silence reigned, save for the restless stamping in some of the loose-boxes and an occasional rustling of straw.

Then, a few seconds later, the big stable clock rang out twelve sonorous beats.

As the last boom died away two small figures glided soundlessly out of the saddle-room. Parting, each made a bee-line for a different box. In their hands they carried mysterious, voluminous bundles.

The leading figure was Sid, and he noiselessly let himself into the stall of the rogue filly, Satan. The boy expected trouble. But the filly had got to know him, and did not resent the intrusion.

Meanwhile, Jim was busy with Amethyst. And though for two or three minutes silence reigned, very queer things were happening in the two boxes.

At last a low whistle came from Sid. Jim answered it; and then the doors of the loose-boxes swung open.

Into the dim yard stole the two boys. Each was leading a horse of so black a hue that it melted into the darkness like a lump of charcoal in ink.

But there was something strange about those horses' feet. They made no sound on the paving, and each foot appeared as big as a Christmas-pudding!

High-stepping like circus horses—for they found the rolls and rolls of rags swathed



"Take that!" choked Hall, lunging out and dealing Sid a ringing box on the ear. "And let that teach you to obey orders next time!" Sid staggered back, clenching his small fists and blinking wildly, dumbfounded beyond belief.

round their hoofs very uncomfortable—the two animals were led past each other in opposite directions.

It was a side-splitting sight. But the business on hand was too serious for laughter. Sid and Jim were bursting with suppressed mirth, but they only emitted bubbling gurgles.

Then Sid vanished into Amethyst's box with Satan, and Jim was as quick putting the real Amethyst into the box just vacated by the rogue. The dodge had worked splendidly. Thanks to the hoof wrappings, there had been not a single clink of iron shoes on stone pavings.

Within three more minutes both lads, tightly clutching the rags they had whipped off, were back in the dark saddle-room.

"O.K.!" whispered Sid, in Jim's ear. "What time did you say the doping comes off?"

"Half-past twelve!" hissed Jim. "Now, shut up! Don't make no more noise than an oyster!"

A tense interval of waiting followed. Then at last came a voice from out in the yard. It was Hall's, in a thick, hoarse whisper.

"Shove that light out, Foster, you clown!" it gritted. "We don't want to advertise this business. I ain't trusting any of the boys not to peach."

Foster growled something. But he put out his lantern before joining his boss.

"Amethyst's in the last box on the right, guv'nor!" he hissed, a second later. "Got the dope?"

"Here it is," grunted Hall. "And I guess I know Amethyst's box all right!"

Then to the ears of the two listening, chuckling boys came the sounds of Hall's and Foster's feet making stealthy progress towards Amethyst's box—as they thought!

A door creaked in the darkness. Then came muttered whispers. Hall and Foster were getting busy. A second later came a stifled scream.

"Dash you, Foster!" growled Hall. "She bit me, guv'nor!" protested the head lad. "Snakes! I hope we've shoved the poison in the right brute. Taint like Amethyst to bite!"

"What in Hades did you think she'd do," choked Hall, his voice thick with rage. "When you shoved a great needle in her hide—kiss you? You should ha' looked out, man. And of course this is Amethyst! Don't I know the position of the boxes in my own stable? Come on, now; clear out!"

Hall and Foster faded away. Shortly afterwards Sid and Jim crept forth from their hiding-place.

It was the work of a very few minutes to wrap the two black fillies' feet up again, and then high-step back to the proper boxes. That done, the two boys sped off to their quarters.

"They doped the wrong horse!" gasped Sid, running, doubled up. "Oh, my aunt! They doped Amethyst's double!"

"Ere you are, then! 4 to 1 Amethyst! 6 to 1 Firebrand! 7 to one bar 2!" The raucous shouts of the bookmakers rose high above the surrounding clamour. But all sides was a confused babel of sounds, a humming like a giant swarm of bees.

For the horses for the Goodwood Cup were just going down to the post, and the stands on the pretty Sussex course were crammed from the bottom step upwards.

The blazing July sun seemed to put everyone in good humour—all except one man, who was standing alone by the rails.

(Continued on page 28.)

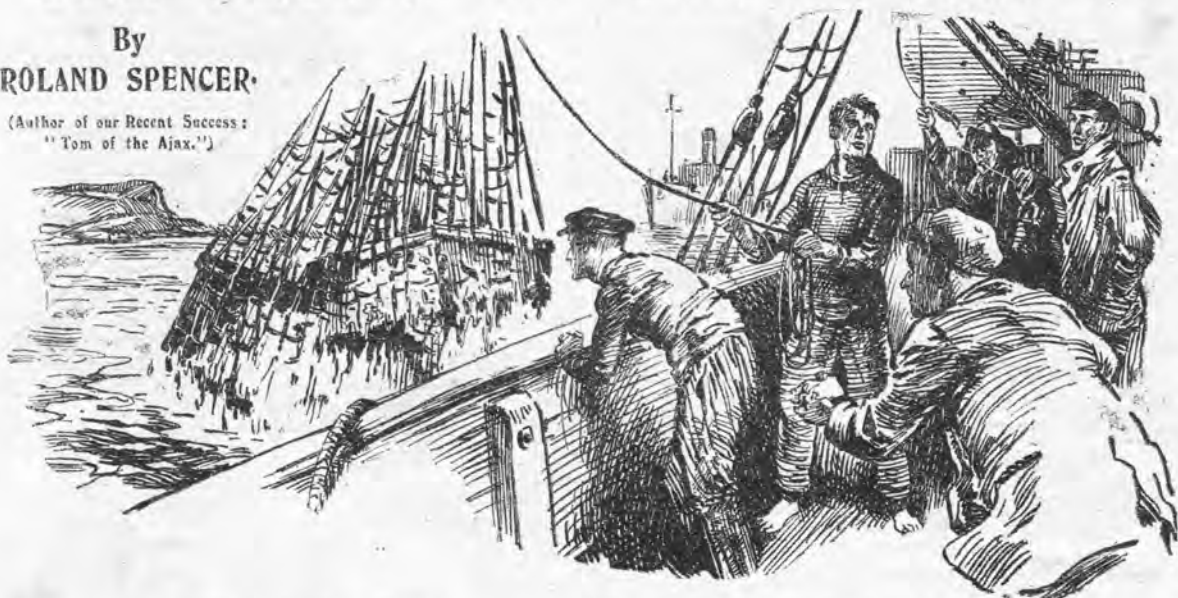
THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 860.

After a grim battle on the sea bottom the salvage ship Result wins through on its first stage of adventure!

THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!

By
ROLAND SPENCER.

(Author of our Recent Success:
"Tom of the Ajax.")



CHARACTERS IN THE STORY.

DON ALONZO GUADIANA DE LA MANCHA, a Spaniard and financier of the expedition aboard the salvage boat Result.

SARKY MARLINE, a trustworthy, bow-legged old seaman in command of the Result.

DAN DERRICK, a cheery youth, and son of Captain Derrick—known as "Dare-Devil" Derrick—a rugged sea captain of some sixty-five years.

BRIAN CARR, a chum of Dan's, and son of "Amphibious" Carr, inventor of a patent diving-dress which Brian is in his research work had perfected.

Their unscrupulous rival, known as the "Rat," a round-shouldered, beady-eyed Mexican half-breed.

Steered by the trusty hands of Sarky Marline, the salvage boat Result sets out on its great voyage in quest of sunken Spanish treasure. Reaching Thirlbeach, Brian Carr and Dan Derrick, garbed in their patent diving-dresses, take the first plunge into the depths of the mighty ocean, where they locate the *Maria de Castellon*, an old Spanish galleon, in whose lazaret hold lies hidden fabulous wealth. The chums find themselves up against great odds, for there are rivals in the quest, a rascally set of rogues under the leadership of Morveno, commonly known as the Rat. Brian gets captured, but, thanks to the hard hitting of Sarky Marline, he is able to gain his freedom. Further gruelling fights on the sea bottom follow, but the cool courage displayed by the chums is rewarded with the first fruits of victory. It is only the first of four galleons in the quest, however, and the Rat, beaten at the first attempt, is determined not to take his defeat lying down!

(Now read on.)

A Respite!

IN fifteen minutes Dan was fit to stand by himself. His diving-suit was peeled off, and then a cry rang out: "There she comes, all awash! All the blinkin' treasure o' the flamin' Armada! Hurrah! Hip-hip-hurrah!"

Dan staggered to the side to join in the excitement! It was a wonderful moment for all. Guadiana had told Dan that all the divers had now come up, and that there were no casualties. The Result had won through in this first stage of the adventure. The Result had won!

The heavy chests, greeny-black with weed growth, covered with barnacles, crusty with other shell deposits, were hoisted on to the Result's deck. The salvage men whooped and skipped and shouted like children, and danced round the prize.

Far other sounds came from the Golden Gain. Hoots and yells of vengeance promised came over the water. Rayne, helmetless, sat with his head lowered in utter dejection.

The skipper stuck his brutal jaw out farther than ever. His silence seemed grimmer even than the shouts of fury.

Above the cries of the Golden Gain's maddened crew sounded the maddened shriek of the Rat as he hung over the canvas weather-screen of the bridge, shaking his bony brown fist at the Result, foaming like a madman and vowing that he would torture all on that little ship before he was finished; torture them so that a certain sultry place of which they had all heard would be sweet in comparison.

The next few days at Thirlbeach were quiet—ominously quiet. Dan spent most of his time with Brian, who was beginning to look bright and chirpy again after his touch-and-go experience on the bed of the cove.

Sarky busied himself about organising the Result's company, telling off watches, and warning the men that he intended to have some show of discipline on the ship. For your salvage hand is a wild sort of fellow, who knows no law but his own, and who, being, in effect, in partnership with his employer, has that strong rooted idea that Jack is as good as his master any day.

Sarky had the biggest job he had ever tackled to break down this feeling amongst the men. He implored, on the excuse that it was not an ordinary salvage stunt, but a job when a well-disciplined company would pull through where an ill-disciplined one would go under to their enemies. The men gullawed at Sarky's words. And it was from then that Sarky's knuckles began to ache. Discipline became better and better every day, for there was not one of those salvage men who could beat Sarky in a hard fight with bare fists.

Dan and Brian enjoyed to the full the respite from their labours. Every day, Guadiana had business with his legal adviser, a solicitor who specialised in marine work, and who was to take on the burden of the necessary work in regard to their legal position respecting the treasure. This first lot was already in the hands of the Receiver of Wrecks of the district.

The Golden Gain weighed anchor and moved further off, to the satisfaction of the people of the Result, who cheered loudly and derisively as the Rat's ship steamed slowly away. But she did not go far—just far enough, Dan and Brian judged, to prevent any spying and eaves-dropping; for, no doubt, the Rat and Rayne had much to discuss and plan in regard to the other three galleons.

Brian soon became quite himself again, and the whole company took up their quarters on the Result. Guadiana, who had completed legal matters ashore, called a conference in his cabin to discuss the next step in securing further treasure. Dan felt that here was his opportunity to trot out his ideas regarding the other galleons—the thoughts that had struck him while he was keeping guard during the raising of the treasure.

After the Don had opened the conference with a statement as to the approximate value of the gold raised—no less than twenty thousand pounds—Dan spoke.

"We found this Thirlbeach galleon easily, senior," he said. "She was lying on her keel, practically dead on the spot set down in the abstract log of the ship. But we can't be at all sure of finding the other galleons just right. Apart from the destroying action of the salt water—I mean the eating away of metals in contact with different metals, galvanic action, I believe it's called—and the hiding of the ship by the silting up of sand, and so on, I think we might not find these wrecks. I think this, because it seems to me funny that in days when the coasts of Scotland were uncharted, your forefather, Miguel Rodrigo, could hit exactly on the right bearings, and, above all, the correct landfalls."

"You are right, my boy," said the Don, smiling in a confident manner. "But you must remember that my people were the leading navigators, with the Portuguese, of that day, as you people of mighty Britain are of this. Also, we Guadianas are not without information, which is not contained in the abstract log of the Maria de Castellon de la Plana. My forefather, being a shrewd man and wonderful navigator, knew the danger he ran on account of his buffeting, with the other galleons, off uncharted coasts. Thus, he fought and captured a merchant ship—or she may have been a pirate—out of Dundee. He, I am sorry to say, sank this ship with all hands, but the captain, who must have been a craven, for this man, in fear of his life and the torture which my people then were not averse to practising, gave correct information as to landfalls and positions as the galleon drove southward. How else, my boy, do you think a Spaniard could steer clear of all dangers with an unwieldy galleon like the Maria, right down between the Inner and Outer Hebrides, clawing clear of danger from the north coast of Ireland and so entering English seas? In fact, getting so far down as the coast of Wales, where disaster overtook them at last—"

"Oh, I see," said Dan. "That accounts for mere landfalls and bearings given instead of marks on a chart—"

"Which, of the coasts we are dealing with, did not exist in those days, my boy. There was only in my forefather's possession a crude map of the British Isles, so grotesque in outline that it would make you smile. The Isle of Wight was shown as big as Wales! However, I feel confident that the positions given are correct. As to your other observations, we must trust that my forefather's informant was correct, and that his other galleons, when they foundered, descended to rock. Now, we have a very important matter to discuss. How are we to find the next galleon and secure the treasure for ourselves by outwitting the Rat and his men?"

"By outwitting Rayne, I should say," put in Brian dryly. "He's a holy terror below water. He's the 'compleat' diver, if ever there was one—so complete, thank Heaven, that he cannot see another diver, even a rival, in difficulty on the bottom without rendering aid. For all his unscrupulous methods, there is something of a gentleman about Rayne, according to Dan."

Dan nodded, and the Don looked out of the porthole towards where the Golden Gain could be seen riding to anchor.

"Thank Heaven, comrades," he said, "there is at least one gentleman amongst our rivals. But we are rivals, after all, and so long as we ourselves don't stoop to unsportsmanlike action in securing this treasure, though Heaven knows we should be justified in doing so, we need have no scruples about outwitting them on every occasion. They are thieves, anyway—"

"Ay," broke in Sarky Marline, "an' Heaven protect any man that now gets into the Rat's hands. Scruples? Shove 'em in the chain-locker. Gentlemen? Bah! There's too much soft talk in this 'ere packer. Let's get down to bed-rock, an' talk business, for the love o' Mike!"

And business it was. Before the conference broke up, Brian and Dan had worked out as pretty a little scheme as one could find in foiling their rivals at the next galleon.

At Dead of Night.

THE weather had become hot and windless. Sarky said it foreboded no good, and that they'd have a rough passage north, forbye. They would start on the morrow, and MacFayden was told to have a strong head of steam up for a quick passage, in order to try to shake off the Golden Gain.

The chums slept in the paint-locker with Sarky Marline, the same little apartment in which they had had such a stirring time at the outset of the adventure. The weather

being so hot, and the little iron ship so like an oven, they left the door wide open. Despite the discomforts of their sleeping-place, they were soon asleep.

Dan did not sleep well. He tossed and turned, in semi-consciousness, for hours. At last he woke and sat up. The atmosphere was stifling. Sarky was snoring like the fog-horn on the pier-head at Aberystwyth. Brian was dead to the world.

"(Grubs, if stillness portends a storm, we're for it!)" muttered Dan. "I'd be best on deck. It'll be cooler there. I'll just warn the anchor watch and coil down on a soft plank in the deck of the wheelhouse."

Dan rose and left the paint-locker noiselessly, his blanket over his arm.

On deck all seemed as still as the grave. Dan peered forward, and saw a form huddled up with his back to the anchor-winch. That would be the anchor watch.

Dan padded over. The man was asleep!

Peering round in affright into the velvety darkness to make sure that Sarky hadn't been roused, Dan crept forward and laid his hand on the sleeping man's shoulder. The man started up suddenly, but Dan motioned him to be silent.

"You chump!" whispered the youngster. "What if it'd been Mr. Marline instead of me?"

"Well, wot if it 'ad," said the man sullenly, but he walked to the bulwarks all the same, and prepared to keep the watch to which he had been detailed.

Suddenly the man seemed to freeze where he stood. Dan crept up to him.

"See," said the man, "over there! Sort o' disturbance in the water. 'Tain't fish playin' as I well know. List!"

Dan stood rigid, tense, all ears.

"If it ain't a man swimming, I'll swallow the cable."

It was, and Dan motioned the man to keep silent. The swimmer came along silently, with a powerful breast stroke. Dan and the watchman could make out his white form now as it moved through the water with a sinister, graceful motion, straight towards the after part of the Result.

"Stay here," whispered back Dan. "You're armed? Yes? Right. Well, I'll rouse Mr. Marline and let him know what you've seen. The man's hanging to the open porthole of the Don's cabin."

Dan streaked silently below, and woke Sarky and Brian without a sound. He whispered his news, and Sarky sent Brian off to rouse the bands quietly.

"It be a raid," muttered the tough little sailor. "An' they's goin' to raid a hornets' nest, sink me if they ain't!"

With that, Sarky and Dan padded off to the door of Guadiana's cabin in the after bulkhead. They turned the handle silently and peered in.

The table was littered with the charts and papers they had had before them all at the conference. The Don was sleeping quietly in his bunk. All seemed normal.

"E's restin' by hanging on to the Don's scuttle," whispered Sarky. "Restin' an' listenin'. 'E'll give 'is pals the wire in a minute. Then Brian'll 'ave our chaps all ready above."

"Hist!"

Dan gripped Sarky's arm, and the little sailor emitted a low, swift exclamation. A white hand and arm had appeared in the open porthole. Something small and black and cylindrical was held in the fingers.

(Next week's splendid instalment is full of thrills, chums. Don't miss it on any account.)



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JUNO

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 860.

"RUCTIONS UNDER CANVAS!"

(Continued from page 21.)

The major drove away, his recovered valuables on board the car, and Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. returned to the camp.

There a gratifying surprise met them.

Gordon Gay & Co. and the other cadets and St. Jim's fellows were there. They had captured Farmer and Snape—at least, Gordon Gay & Co. had. They had redeemed themselves by bringing in the culprits.

"Well, you awful rotters, we ought to hand you over to the police for what you have done," said Tom, looking grimly at the two prisoners. "As it is, we'll give you a ragging now, and decide what to do with you in the morning."

Most of the boys were tired, but not too tired to join in the ragging of Farmer and Snape. Those two young rascals were tossed in a blanket until they yelled for mercy, and then they were tarred and feathered and tied to a cart for the remainder of the night.

Gordon Gay & Co. took their departure, and the campers settled down to enjoy what sleep they could in their sadly despoiled camp.

Major Rumbold came into camp early next morning, with Clicky's father, who looked radiantly happy. He could not have looked happier than Clicky himself, however.

"Well, my lads, all the rascals are under lock and key now," said the major, with an affability which none of the boy campers had thought him capable of. "Your last night's work was splendid. By thunder, your camp is in a mess—what! I was offering a reward for the recovery of my valuables, so I'll commence by having your camp refitted right away."

This decision was greeted with joy and approbation by all. When Major Rumbold left the camp Tom Merry and Dick Rawlings led a chorus of hearty cheers that followed him—cheers that came wholeheartedly from scores of lusty throats.

That evening two pantechicians arrived, laden with more than was really necessary to refit the camp.

Not only were there new tents and appliances, but a stock of provisions as well that sent Fatty Wynn into transports of delight.

Farmer and Snape were drummed out of the camp that night.

Freshly tarred and feathered, they were driven forth into the woods and forbidden to enter or come near the camp again.

Tom Merry & Co. and Dick Rawlings & Co. slept the sleep of the just that night, most of them in comfortable new quarters, and peace and order once more settled on the boys' camp in the woods. All were more than pleased that the feud with the major was ended.

THE END.

(Another exciting story of the famous chums of St. Jim's next week entitled: "THE GREAT CAMP MYSTERY," by Martin Clifford. Don't miss it on any account.)

"A DOUBLE EVENT!"

(Continued from page 25.)

This solitary, disgruntled individual was the burly trainer, Sam Hall, and he was rubbing savagely at his blue-black chin as the horses thundered past, one by one.

"Confound it all!" he grunted, as the black filly he had trained swept by at a canter, arching her neck in response to Sid's light hand. "Amethyst looks uncommonly fit! I hope to goodness that dope wasn't stale! I'll be in a nasty hole if Firebrand don't pull it off!"

Then Hall put on a pleasant expression, for he had just sighted Amethyst's owner coming towards him.

Hall and the major then clapped race-glasses to their eyes, for down at the post the brilliant colours of the jockeys' jackets were no longer shifting back and forth. The line was even. Then went up a great cry:

"They're off!"

The biggest field had got away to a good start. But the bay, Firebrand, was quickly out in front, making the pace a rattler. The rest were well bunched up. A handker-

chief would have covered the lot save the leader.

Amethyst was lying fourth or fifth, but Sid did not worry. The length of the race was two miles and four furlongs. So he just sat still, keeping a steady feel on his horse's mouth.

The steady roll of the drumming hoofs grew louder and louder. Then the straining horses neared the end, swept round it, and people began to shout.

"The favourite's lost! Firebrand's still leading! Come on, Firebrand!"

It looked as though Firebrand was going to win as he liked, for the field was now tailing off, and only two horses threatened danger—a bright bay and a chestnut. Amethyst was still back in the crowd. Hall's hopes rose.

"Firebrand!" roared the crowd again, and the din became deafening.

Then an amazing thing happened.

With the speed of a hurricane a black filly had shot out of the rack—shot past the bright bay and the chestnut, and was now challenging Firebrand.

They swept on, hoof-beat for hoof-beat, stride for stride; and now the two leaders were running neck and neck. Amethyst's fast-moving legs looked like whirling spokes of polished jet.

The last ten yards, and Amethyst drew away from the big bay. Then she flashed

past the judge's box, to win by a couple of lengths.

"Suffering Mike!" groaned Hall inwardly, gnashing his teeth. "There must ha' been something wrong with the dope, after all!"

Then he found himself gripped by the arm and dragged towards the paddock by the elated Major Grundlay.

Sid rode triumphantly into the paddock, and Jim, who had come to Goodwood to help with the horses, sprang to the black filly's head.

But the major reached Amethyst's side just as Sid leapt to the ground, and, after congratulating the boy, he swung round on Hall.

"My best thanks, Hall!" he cried. "And, by the way, this is a tremendous stroke of luck for me, for I backed Rookwood to win the plate as well as Amethyst for the Cup! I hardly ever bet, as you know; but this time I've pulled off a double event!"

Sid caught Jim's eye and winked. Then he got close enough to whisper:

"I guess it was a 'double event' in more than one sense o' the word! And probably Amethyst's double is feeling mighty sick just now! But I'm going to stick to Ashdown House, even if it is a stable of crooks!"

THE END.

(There will be another rattling fine yarn of Sid Morris soon. Keep a sharp look-out for it, chums.)

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