

Starts To-day "CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!" A Powerful Yarn of Adventure on the Railway

The GEM 2^d

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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LIBRARY OF
SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES



TRAPPED IN THE BURNING CRYPT!

A Thrilling Incident from the Grand Extra-Long Complete School Story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled:
"A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!" by Martin Clifford, inside.



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.

MY DEAR CHUMS.—An extra-special 25,000-word story of St. Jim's! That ought to please everybody. I have not the least doubt it will, too! Some of the keenest Gemites who ever wait for Wednesday morning and the "Gem" have been bombarding me for longer yarns of Tom Merry & Co. The demand grew so urgent at last that I phoned through to Mr. Martin Clifford and asked him what he intended to do about it. His reply was just like him—short, to the point, and eminently satisfactory. He said he was quite agreeable. Hence we have next week's topical and typical tale of the famous school.

"THE MAYOR'S CUP!"

By Martin Clifford.

That is the title. It is topical in that it deals with footer in the breeziest style imaginable, and typical of St. Jim's. Round the mayor in question hangs the plot, like his glittering chain of office. Mayors usually have nests in which they live. Jolly fine nests, too! Well-built mansions, with footmen in attendance and a Rolls-Royce waiting at the door. But in this case the mayor is the civic dignitary of Wayland, and he not only has a nest, but also a son. The mayor's son is a pompous ass and most unpopular, as all fellows of that kidney are sure to be. When Tom Merry & Co. hear a rumour that the silly duffer may come to St. Jim's they are ready to rise. But that is neither here nor there. Mr. Martin Clifford shows us in his brilliant yarn next week the kind of fate in store for plotters. The son of Mr. Tobias Bagley, the mayor, is too clever by half. There is a gay, glad surprise waiting for him when he comes to

represent his father at the kick-off of the great match for which the mayor has offered a cup. There is much in the new yarn to set you thinking for weeks, and your interest will be tickled by the scheme to make the match a wash-out. Everybody gets blamed for the turn of events. Gordon Gay is under a cloud, the same as Tom Merry, while the cunning plotter, who hates both sides, and only wants to cause bad blood, keeps in the dark. Read the "Gem" next week for this top-hole story. The "doings" are immense, and the grand wind-up is well calculated to please everybody, bar one, and he does not count.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

Shoals of tributes to the "Holiday Annual" have reached me. One reader says it is "one in a thousand," and that seems to fit the case like a glove, though for thousand, read million. The plain fact is, the "Holiday Annual," for brightness and vivacity, for cheery yarns, hobby articles, sidelights on collecting, Nature bits and all besides, stands unique. It is the greatest money's worth to be had. It is the book to be introduced into every home. The small chums will love the pictures, the seniors get lost in its contents and forget dinner-time, while those people who have never heard of St. Jim's are bound to be captivated by the complete story of the great school, and in consequence join the ever-widening circle of supporters of the "Gem."

THE "ST. JIM'S NEWS."

As I told you last week, there are great days ahead for our supplement. One of those

red-letter times falls next Wednesday. There will be a Fourth-Form issue of the St. Jim's weekly, and it is full of good things.

THE TUCK HAMPER!

Only the other day I read a yarn of a marooned victim who chanced on a hamper which had been washed ashore. It was a lucky find, but plaguey moist. But as regards our celebrated weekly Tuck Hamper there are no shortcomings of that kind. It is an absolute A1 prize, packed full of the most fascinating articles of diet certain to please anybody. There'll be another one offered next week, as usual. Then send along the brightest storyette in your repertory and see if you cannot be a winner. Address them to the "Gem," Gough House, London.

"CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!"

By Roland Spencer & Francis Warwick

People say that true chums want a lot of finding. But, as a matter of fact, the real chum usually turns up "accidental like." He is not found in the real sense of the word. He just "happens." It was so with the hero of the great serial, "Chums of the Iron Way," which is being read with the keenest pleasure. Jimmy Speed was cut out to be on the railway. The thing was in his blood, and it was a lucky day for him when he fell in with Sam Blundell, the fireman. There are many striking happenings in the splendid instalment which you will find in the next number of the "Gem." Jimmy is in his new job, and he likes it to end. He also finds himself right in the thick of a big dispute between the men of the electric railways and those who manage the steam routes. You have in this magnificent story the genuine atmosphere of railway life. Such is always amazingly fascinating, for is there anybody who could fail to be interested in the iron road? It may be a question of some little cock boat of a light railway, where the engine-driver collects the tickets, or, on the other hand, it can be the trunk line with the wonderfully equipped trains which speed on hundreds of miles, with sleeping, dining cars, and a travelling post-office all complete, and with a wireless installation as well.

Your Editor.

"THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!"

(Concluding chapters.)

Financed by Don Alonso Guadiana de la Mancha and steered by the capable hands of Sarky Marline, the salvage ship Result sets out on its great voyage in quest of sunken Spanish treasure. The crew is ably assisted by two staunch chums, Brian Carr and Dan Derrick. There are rivals in the quest, however, a rascally set of rogues, under the leadership of Moreno, commonly known as the Rat. In spite of their ruthless methods, the rivals are beaten at every turn, and the climax comes when a torpedo-boat suddenly appears in the distance, making straight for them.

Jefferson Rayne's Penance!

THE people on the Result showed no surprise at the appearance of the torpedo-boat. Marline cocked his eye at the signals, and read them out from memory. "Oriental lay-to. Wait naval officer to board," he said. "That'll make 'em open their witherin' eyes, won't it?"

It did. The Oriental, graceful, light, powerful, narrow, and shapely, began to streak ahead with all her power. She soon left the lumbering Golden Gain astern, and Jenks, at the wheel of the Result, telegraphed for full speed. Sarky Marline, however, bawled to Jenks for half speed again.

So the Result contented herself with holding on alongside the Gain.

Suddenly, a puff of smoke appeared from the destroyer. Then followed the shriek of a shell, like the frantic tearing of tough silk. A fountain of water leapt up just ahead of the Oriental, and then the boom of the detonation sounded.

The semaphore apparatus on the destroyer was busy, the arms wagging about in a ridiculous and hurried manner. Sarky read the message: "Next shot in your bows. Lie-to!"

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The Oriental took the hint and stopped her engines. So did the Golden Gain. The Result pushed on to get alongside the steam-yacht.

The torpedo-boat destroyer swept up like a streak of ruddy grey in the red light of the setting sun. Then she stopped her engines, and began rolling heavily in the swell. A naval lieutenant jumped into a boat that had been hastily lowered, and came over to the Result. The officer picked up the detectives and Guadiana, and off the party went to the Oriental.

"Owner not aboard?" said the officer, in reply to the blustering captain of the yacht, who was protesting against the "outrage." "Oh, very well! If we can't see him, we must act on orders. I have a warrant to search this ship, and—"

The captain paled.

"Wait!" he said. "Hold hard! Mr. Gurdley will come up!"

Gurdley arrived. He was the man whose photograph the detectives had shown to Rayne.

"Rex Dalby," said Blunt. "I have here a warrant for your arrest on the charge of clearing out the Torcombe branch of South-Western Banks, Limited; the receiving of stolen goods herein specified; the assault on the purser of the liner Hannibal, and the theft of jewels on that occasion; other charges which will be read to you later. Anything you may say may be used in evidence against you."

Dalby said nothing. He sneered and held out his hands. Handcuffs were slipped on to his wrists, and the "snick" of the bracelets spelt the end of freedom for Rex Dalby for many weary years.

The yacht was searched. The naval officer, in Dalby's luxurious suite of rooms, found condemning papers showing that the Oriental had been engaged on spying work under Dalby.

"My Lords of the Admiralty will be most interested!" murmured the young officer, as he chuckled over the find. Then followed the arrest of the Rat as accomplice in some of the charges against Dalby.

The half-breed seemed stunned into a trance at the turn

(Continued on page 28.)

Tom Merry & Co., by keeping their eyes open, manage to checkmate the rascally scheme of the Traitor in the School!



A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!

A Thrilling, Long,
Complete School
Story of Tom Merry
& Co.

BY FAMOUS
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

A Staggering Shock!

"GOING to tackle Glyn now, Tommy?" Monty Lowther asked the question in a whisper as the juniors turned out at rising-bell in the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's.

Tom Merry, who was just finishing dressing, glanced quickly across at Bernard Glyn before he answered.

At the moment Glyn happened to be looking his way, but as he met Tom's glance he turned his back abruptly.

Tom Merry winced a trifle.

"No—better get him alone," he muttered. "It—it won't be pleasant, apologising, you chaps."

"Got to do it, though," said Manners.

Tom nodded grimly.

"We've treated Glyn rather rottenly," he said. "He swore to us that he knew nothing about the mucking up of yesterday's match, and we ought to have taken his word."

"Well, that's so."

"He'll probably be on the high horse—and I don't wonder!" went on Tom. "We fought—though he started the scrap. Anyway, we know now that he didn't do it. We've proved that it was that cad Racke. And it's up to us to apologise!"

"Yes, rather!"

Tom hesitated a moment, and then he crossed over to Bernard Glyn.

Glyn must have known that he was behind him, but he did not turn.

"Glyn," began Tom Merry quietly, "we'd like to speak with you alone. If you'll come along—"

Glyn looked round then, his face hard and bitter.

"I've no wish to hear anything from any of you," he said, through his teeth. "I'll thank you not to speak to me, either, Tom Merry."

The junior captain flushed, but he stood his ground.

"You don't understand, Glyn," he said. "We want to apologise for having charged you unjustly in regard to the footer yesterday. We know now that you didn't do it. We're sorry—we can't say more than that!"

"Oh!"

"That's not all, though," said Tom, smiling. "You'll be relieved to hear, Glyn, that we've found that invention—Mr. Vining's gun! We found it late last night, and we took it along to Mr. Vining's room, and left it there."

The lines of care on Glyn's face cleared, and his eyes lit up eagerly.

"You—you mean that?" he breathed.

"Yes—it's true! Your troubles are over, Glyn! But we'd like you to come along to Study No. 10, and we'll explain matters there."

"Oh, thank goodness," breathed Glyn, his eyes shining.

"Yes, I'll come, Merry."

"Good! After breakfast, then."

Tom Merry rejoined his chums, and they went downstairs, looking considerably relieved.

The juniors in the dormitory who had witnessed the incident eyed Glyn curiously. As a matter of fact, Bernard Glyn was an object of no little interest at St. Jim's just then.

He was under a cloud!

It was an extraordinary affair altogether, and it had all started some days ago.

While out cycling, Tom Merry & Co. had been instrumental in rescuing a motorist from a couple of desperate rascals in a lonely lane near St. Jim's.

They had brought the injured man to St. Jim's, and he had proved to be a Mr. Vining, a well-known inventor, and an old college chum of Mr. Railton's.

It appeared that he had invented a remarkable gun—an electrical device resembling a miniature Lewis machine-gun in shape, which was capable of projecting an electric "shaft," somewhat on the principle of a wireless wave. He had named his invention the Lightning Shaft—though, in reality, its effects were harmless; for the instrument merely gave the person aimed at a slight shock, which caused him to lose control for a second.

None the less, its inventor claimed that, with capital to exploit his invention, he could make it a veritable "shaft of death," and a terrible weapon of destruction. And, obviously, certain people realised its tremendous value, for the rascals who had attacked him were agents of a certain foreign Power who were desperately anxious to gain possession of it.

Naturally, the inventor was deeply grateful to the juniors, and he had given them a demonstration of the weapon's powers on arrival at St. Jim's.

Hearing of this, Bernard Glyn, the inventive genius of the Shell, had become madly desirous of testing the strange

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weapon. He had managed to obtain possession of it, and while larking about with it Mr. Railton had suddenly appeared on the scene.

Thereupon the practical joker had hidden the gun in a cupboard, intending to recover it later on. When he had gone to do so, however, it had gone—had absolutely vanished.

Then the inevitable had happened. Mr. Vining had missed the gun, and Glyn had found himself in a very serious position. The loss of the gun was placed at his door.

But that was not all.

During the match with the Grammar School on the previous afternoon, St. Jim's had given a shocking display. They could do nothing right. Chance after chance of scoring had been muffled hopelessly. With an open goal before them they had either miskicked or not kicked at all!

It was an amazing mystery—until Tom Merry had stumbled upon the solution. He believed that somebody had been hidden in the copse bordering the ground, and, armed with the electric gun, had been taking pot-shots at the St. Jim's players, thus causing them to lose control at the critical moment!

As Bernard Glyn was the only fellow known to have had the gun that afternoon, he had been charged by Tom Merry with the offence, and trouble had ensued between the two juniors.

So that it was no wonder that Glyn's eyes shone with heartfelt relief when Tom Merry announced that the precious gun was recovered, and that he was cleared!

He could scarcely restrain his impatience to know the facts, and immediately breakfast was over he hurried along to Study No. 10.

Blake & Co. were in the room with the Terrible Three, and Glyn flushed a little as all eyes turned upon him.

"Well, I'm here, Merry!" he said curtly. "You say that the gun's turned up, and that you know who took it?"

"That's so!" said Tom Merry, nodding. "I'll soon explain, Glyn. We—we thought you'd played that rotten trick at the match, Glyn, simply because we knew you were the only chap who had the gun. We were wrong!"

"Go on!" said Glyn, compressing his lips.

"It was Racke who did it—Racke of the Shell!" said Tom. "He did it to get his own back out of you—knowing you'd get into trouble over it—and to pay me back for knocking him down."

"Oh!" gasped Glyn. "You—you can prove that, Merry?"

"Racke's admitted it," said Tom quietly. "It was all Gussy's doing, though—he bowled him out first."

"Good old Sherlock Holmes!" chuckled Lowther.

"Dry up, Lowther! Gussy did it—he fancied himself as a detective, and he started making inquiries. He was the only fellow who didn't believe you'd done it, Glyn!"

"I know!" muttered Glyn, with a grateful glance at D'Arcy.

"Well, detective or no detective," went on Tom Merry, smiling. "He bowled the rotter out. But we'll let Gussy tell the yarn himself."

Arthur Augustus blushed.

"It was weally simple enough, deah boys," he explained modestly. "I suspected Wacke from the vewy first. I made inquiries, and I learned that Wacke had been seen leavin' the copse just before the match ended. But he was empty-handed at the time, and it was only when I was lying in bed late last night that the solution flashed across my mind. I realised that if he'd been usin' the gun he must have left it hidden in the copse."

"And you—"

"I was wight, bai Jove!" went on Gussy. "I was so deeply impressed by the theory that I got up and went to look. And you can imagine my surprise, deah boy, when I found Wacke already theah. He had taken fweight, knowin' I was on his track."

"Phow!"

"He intended, I wathah imagine, to hide it elsewhere," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, he saw me, and washed at me like a wuffian. Then, just as we were fightin', those wassally men turned up, bai Jove!"

"The—the men?" ejaculated Glyn. "What—"

"I didn't tell you that," said Tom Merry. "What they were doing there at that time of night, goodness only knows! But they were there; they rushed up while Gussy and Racke were scrapping, and tried to nab the gun. Gussy grabbed it and bolted. They chased him up a tree, and good old Gussy kept 'em at bay until we came along."

"But—but—"

"Racke fetched us," said Tom grimly. "He played up after all. He was too cowardly to help Gussy, but he raced to the dormitory and awakened us. We just got there in time to save Gussy, and the men bolted."

"My hat!" breathed Bernard Glyn. "And this happened last night?"

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"Yes. We got the gun, and took it along to Mr. Vining's room for him to find this morning."

"And Racke—what about Racke?"

Tom Merry looked grim.

"Well, we could hardly report the matter after he'd saved Gussy, and, in any case, we didn't want him to be sacked—much as he deserves it, Glyn. We decided we'd just say nothing, except to you. The gun's recovered now, and that clears you. It was Racke who took the gun from the cupboard, Glyn. Anyway, it's all serene now, and all that remains to be done is for us to apologise, Glyn, for having thought you guilty of such a rotten trick. I'm sorry, Glyn, old man, and I hope you'll take my hand!"

Glyn hesitated a moment, and then he held out his hand frankly.

"I'm sorry, too, for having struck you yesterday, Merry," he said. "And I'm jolly glad it's all clear now. I don't bear any malice, you chaps."

Nor did he. Glyn was a good-natured fellow, and having made his peace with Tom Merry & Co. he left the study, his face bright and cheery.

As he left the study he ran into Mr. Railton in the passage.

"Ah, Glyn," exclaimed the Housemaster quietly, "I was about to send for you! Will you come to my room, please?"

"Certainly, sir," said Glyn cheerily.

He fancied he knew what the master wanted with him. The electric gun had been found, and Mr. Railton wished to tell him so.

But Mr. Railton told him nothing of the sort.

As he stood before the Housemaster, in the latter's study, all the brightness left the junior's face, as he noted Mr. Railton's grave expression.

"Glyn," began Mr. Railton, "I told you last night that unless Mr. Vining's invention was found by this morning I should be obliged to report the matter to Dr. Holmes."

"Yes, sir."

"I have now reconsidered that decision," said Mr. Railton quietly. "In the first place, Mr. Vining, though considerably upset at the loss, utterly refuses to agree to that. He will not allow the unfortunate matter to become the cause of trouble in the school."

"Also," went on the Housemaster, "I have decided to accept your word, Glyn, that you have no knowledge as to the whereabouts of the instrument. I have never known you to tell a lie, my boy, and I see no reason to doubt your word now. Mr. Vining has suggested another theory to account for its loss, and I am inclined to agree with it. You stated, Glyn, that when you placed the gun in the cupboard it was wrapped in brown paper. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir. Of—of course!" stammered Glyn, utterly bewildered. "But—"

"Very well, my boy. It is suggested that one of the servants took it from the cupboard, ignorant of the contents of the package. I believe that to be an extremely likely theory. We are very hopeful now that it will eventually turn up."

Glyn stared at the Housemaster. He was utterly taken aback.

"But—but isn't it found, sir?" he gasped.

"Unfortunately, no, my boy!"

"Wasn't it in your room this morning, sir?" asked Glyn in astonished dismay.

"Certainly not! The room was thoroughly searched again this morning!" said Mr. Railton grimly. "You have no further need to worry, however, Glyn. No suspicion rests upon you as far as we are concerned. Since last night I have thought the matter over, and I can see no reason why you should have kept the weapon. You have been punished for having taken it in the first place, and I propose to let the matter rest there in so far as you are concerned. That is all, my boy."

And with a kindly hand on the bewildered junior's shoulder Mr. Railton led him from the room.

Out in the passage Bernard Glyn stood motionless for several seconds. He was staggered. Tom Merry had said that the weapon was found—that he himself had placed it in the room Mr. Vining shared with Mr. Railton during the night.

Could Tom Merry & Co. have been pulling his leg? It was inconceivable. Tom Merry was the last fellow to play such a cruel, heartless trick. And yet—

The bell for morning lessons was ringing, and Glyn walked towards his Form-room. Despite Mr. Railton's assurance that suspicion no longer rested upon him he felt sick with bitter disappointment.

CHAPTER 2.

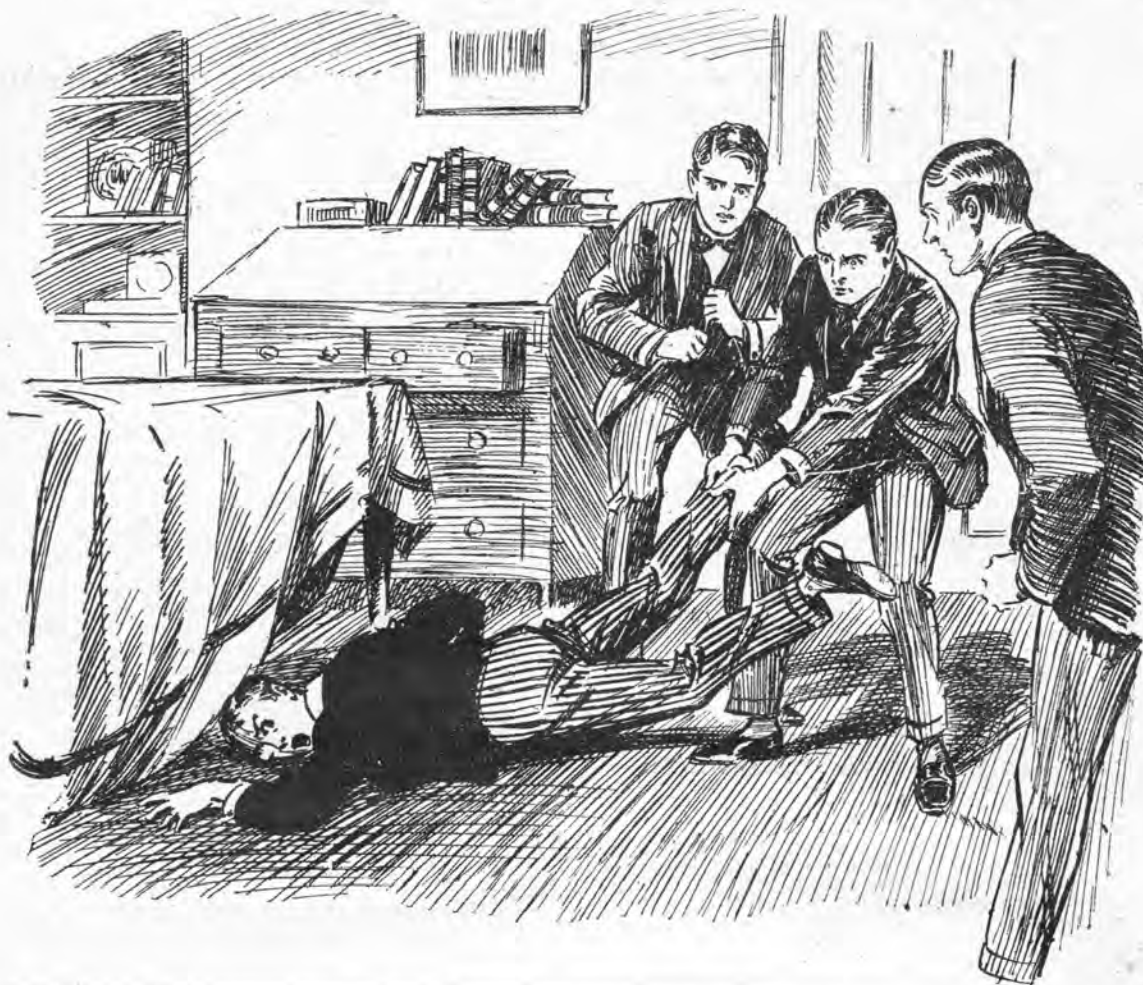
What Racke Knew!

"MERRY!"

"Hullo!"

"I want a word with you," said Bernard Glyn.

The juniors were just leaving their Form-rooms, and Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther had stopped in the



"Somebody's been——" Gerald Cutts stopped abruptly, his eyes fixed, as if glued, to something sticking out from beneath the table. It was a shoe. "By gad!" With a sudden movement the Fifth-Former leaped forward and grasped the foot. Then he gave a hefty heave. Bump! "Yawwooh!" In a sprawling heap Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emerged from beneath the table. (See page 8.)

passage to speak to Blake when Bernard Glyn came up to them.

Tom Merry looked rather curiously at Glyn.

All through morning lessons he had noted Glyn's gloom and somewhat bitter expression, and he had wondered. He had noted also that Glyn had been eyeing him strangely.

"Well, what's up now, Glyn?" he exclaimed. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

Glyn nodded, and he eyed Tom Merry steadily.

"Something is wrong—yes," he said quietly. "You said that the electric gun was recovered, Merry—that you yourself had taken it to Mr. Railton's room last night?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, there's a bloomer somewhere," said Glyn. "I've seen Railton, Merry; he says it hasn't turned up yet. It was not in his room this morning."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I mean what I say, Merry. Mr. Railton was emphatic about it. It wasn't there this morning."

"Oh, but that's rot!" said the leader of Study No. 10 warmly. "I took it there myself. I placed it on the table where he couldn't fail to see it, Glyn."

"I can't help that. It wasn't there this morning, according to Railton."

And Glyn told them of his interview with the House-master.

The juniors were astounded.

"Well, this beats cock-fighting!" said Blake. "There's some dirty work in this, you fellows!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

"Looks as if Racke's double-crossed us," said Lowther.

"I can't quite see how he dare," said Tom, frowning. "Anyway, this won't do, Glyn. You'd better come along with us, and we'll see Racke."

Glyn hesitated, and then he shook his head.

"It's all right, you fellows," he said quickly. "I—I was badly rattled at first, but I can see there's some rotten work going on somewhere. Anyway, I'm satisfied now, and I'd rather not see Racke. I'm sick of the whole business, and I'm afraid I sha'n't keep my hands off that cad if I come. You fellows can go if you like."

With that Bernard Glyn nodded and walked away.

"He's upset, and I don't wonder!" said Tom Merry grimly.

"Come on, you chaps, we'll jolly soon get the truth out of Racke."

The seven juniors hurried along to Racke's study. Luckily Racke was alone, and, closing the door, Tom soon got down to business.

"Look here, Racke!" he exclaimed, eyeing the cad of the Shell steadily. "We want to ask you a few questions, and it'll pay you best to answer 'em. Did you get up last night after we'd gone to bed at all?"

"No, I didn't," muttered Racke sullenly.

"You didn't go along to Railton's study and get that gun again?"

Racke stared at the juniors in genuine astonishment.

"The—the gun?" he ejaculated. "Of course not! Why, you—you don't mean to say it's gone again?"

"I do!" said Tom, still eyeing Racke keenly. "I took the gun to Railton's room, as I said I would. It was gone this morning, though. It's missing again, Racke!"

Racke was staggered. It was impossible to doubt his genuine astonishment at the news.

"By gad!" he gasped. "I know nothing about it, then! I swear I don't, Merry! I went straight to sleep, and didn't wake until rising-bell!"

"That's the truth, Racke?" asked Tom.

"I swear it! I had my lesson last night. I wish I'd never

seen the dashed thing, Merry! Was it likely I'd dare to touch it again after that?"

The juniors looked at each other. It was obvious to them that Racke was innocent this time.

"Very well, Racke," said Tom Merry after a pause. "But—but it's queer. Somebody must have known we took the thing along to Railton's study last night, that's pretty certain."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Those men!" suggested Racke desperately. "They may have still been hanging round when you said what you intended doing with the gun. They may have broken in the school and taken it. They were the same chaps who attacked Mr. Vining—who were after the gun, I suppose?"

"Must have been!" said Tom grimly. "But they didn't do it—that's pretty certain. How would they know which was the room? Even if they managed to get into the school they wouldn't know where to look. That's no good!"

"It's queer!" said Manners.

"Jolly queer!" said Tom, still eyeing Racke's pale features narrowly. "Look here, Racke, we're not quite satisfied yet. When Gussy was scrapping with you last night he saw somebody else—or he fancied he did. He fancied he saw a face in the bushes when those men rushed up. He thought it was fancy—a trick of the imagination, at first. But now he thinks different."

"I—I saw nothing!" breathed Racke.

"Perhaps not, but Gussy did! I'm not saying who he thought it was. But I'm going to ask you this, Racke? Did anybody else know you had that gun yesterday?"

Racke gave a violent start—a start that was not lost upon the juniors. For the first time he showed signs of doubt and fear.

"I—I—"

He stammered and stopped.

"I see somebody did!" snapped Tom. "You've been hiding something from us. Now, look here, Racke, we mean to find out what this queer business means. If you wish to save your own skin you'd better tell us who that somebody is."

"Nobody knew! You're mistaken!" muttered Racke.

"You won't tell us?"

"I tell you nobody knew!"

Tom Merry compressed his lips.

"Very well," he said. "I promised to shield you, Racke, but that was before this happened. We'll see now if Railton can make you speak."

"You—you'll go to Railton?" panted Racke.

"Like a shot! It's only right to that poor chap Vining—and Glyn."

Racke licked his lips.

"I'll tell you," he muttered. "If—if you'll swear you won't tell the chap I told you."

"We'll promise that!"

"It was Cutts," said Racke in a low tone. "He knew I had it."

"Cutts."

"Bai Jove!"

"Then Gussy was right," said Tom Merry, his eyes gleaming. "He said he thought it was Cutts' face he saw. You'd better tell us all about it, Racke. You'd better own up."

"He caught me," exclaimed Racke slowly. "He was lying smoking in the copse yesterday afternoon, and he saw me using the gun during the match. He threatened to split unless I handed the gun over. I—I had to do so."

"But—but—"

"I was only too glad to get rid of it," went on Racke. "I handed it over, and cleared out."

"But Gussy here caught you with it in the copse last night!" snapped Jack Blake. "How was that, you rotter?"

"I'll explain that," said Racke. "When D'Arcy started asking me

about it I got frightened. I feared he would go and search the spot. I knew Cutts must have hidden it there. I went to put it in a safer place. Then D'Arcy turned up, and we fought."

"But what on earth did Cutts want with the thing?" asked Manners.

"I—I don't know," stammered Racke. "That's all I know about it. I swear I meant to take it back to Mr. Vining's room, though."

There was a silence.

"This makes it more of a mystery," said Tom at last. "And that's all you can tell us, Racke?"

"That's all. You—you won't tell Cutts?"

"I won't," said Tom curtly. "You ought to have been straight and told us this last night, Racke."

"I daren't," said Racke through his teeth. "You know what a vindictive brute Cutts is—he'd have half killed me."

"And you're certain you don't know what Cutts wanted it for?"

"No!"

"Very well, Racke. We know who to watch now, anyway. Come on, you chaps."

And Tom Merry led his chums out of the study.

As the door closed upon them, Racke drew a deep, deep breath. For some moments he sat motionless, his face dark and lowering.

"By gad!" he breathed at last. "It—it was Cutts! He must have known, and took it in the night."

He knew the truth now—he had good reason to know it. And as it happened, he was destined to have that knowledge verified sooner than he expected.

Even as he breathed the words the door opened and a senior entered, closing the door carefully after him.

It was Gerald Cutts of the Fifth. He turned from the door and fixed a pair of glittering eyes on Racke.

"I've been wanting a word with you all the morning, Racke," he said harshly. "You—you sneaking little fool! What did last night's business mean?"

"It wasn't my fault, Cutts!"

"If you've dared to sneak—"

"I haven't!" vowed Racke, flinching before the fury in Cutts' eyes. "It was that confounded spy, D'Arcy."

"What were you doing there last night at all, hang you?"

"You—you were there?"

"I was there—I saw it all," said Cutts, scowling. "I heard it all, too."

"Then—then it was you who took the gun from Railton's room?"

"It was me," said Cutts, with a sneering laugh. "I did the young cubs, after all. I've got the thing, and I'm keepin' it until I've finished with it. But you haven't answered me yet. What do they know?"

"Nothing!" lied Racke. "If you were there, you must have heard what was said. D'Arcy suspected it; he tackled me. I knew it wouldn't be long before he and his dashed pals were poking round the copse. I couldn't find you to warn you, so I went after lights out, intending to hide the gun elsewhere. Then D'Arcy caught me, and if you were there you must know the rest."

"But why the thunder did you own up?" said Cutts with another sneer.

"I had to—they'd bowled me out, and I could do nothing else. But I didn't mention you, Cutts. You know that."

"If you had," snarled Cutts, gritting his teeth, "you'd have been sorry, I'll promise you. You—you swear they don't know."

"I've told you," said Racke. "They know nothing."

"Then—then it's all serene," muttered Cutts, drawing a deep breath of relief.

"You—you're still going ahead with your scheme, then?" gasped Racke.

"I've got to," said Cutts, a baggard look appearing in his eyes. "I'm done if I don't. I owe that brute Banks over fifteen quid, and I've already laid those bets with Hake and other chaps from the Grammar School. I've got to do it, and the Grammar School have got to lose Saturday's match."

"It's risky!" said Racke, looking scared.

"Easy as falling off a form," grinned Cutts. "There's a bunch of trees just off the Grammar School ground. I'll be hiding there, and with that electric gadget I'll see the Grammar School don't win."

"They'll guess something," said Racke. "They soon spotted something yesterday, anyway."

"That was because you overdid it, you fool!" sneered Cutts. "You turned the match into a farce, Racke. I shan't make that mistake; I shall just concentrate on their best players, and pot them just when they're shooting for goal. It'll be a close match, and one or two little slips will do it. Better come in, Racke—it's money for nothing!"

"No thundering fear! I'm having nothing to do with it, Cutts. I've had enough!"

"I don't mind—as long as you keep mum," said Cutts.

"But—but I might as well warn you here and now, Racke,

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If you dare to split—if you cause me to fail, well, you go down as well as me. Got that?"

Racke nodded without speaking; his face was tense. He wondered what Cutts would say if he knew—if he knew that he had already given Cutts' name to Tom Merry & Co. He bitterly regretted having done so now.

"I'm saying nothing; you can go ahead, if you like, Cutts," he said at length. "But—but if you'll take my tip, you'll drop it. It's dangerous. I—I say, it was rummy those men turning up just then last night, Cutts. They—they weren't with you by any chance, were they?"

Cutts went suddenly white, and he looked sharply at Racke.

"With—with me?" he said hoarsely. "Of course not, you fool! Hang the brutes! Anyway, they don't trouble me. And when I want a tip from you, Racke, I'll ask for it."

And with that Gerald Cutts left the study.

His face was still white, and his eyes were hard and strained. He had told Racke that the men did not trouble him; but he had lied. They troubled Cutts very much.

For Racke's sudden question had been astonishingly near the truth. And he had good reason to trouble about them. Scarcely an hour before that raid in the copse, Cutts had been playing cards with them in the parlour at the Green Man.

He had not known who they were then, of course. They had been introduced to him by Mr. Banks, and they had been very genial and kind to Gerald Cutts. They had been introduced as two visitors staying at the Green Man, and their names had been given as Mr. Bulmer and Mr. Twine.

Why they had been so genial and friendly, Cutts had wondered at the time. They had even loaned him three pounds, for which Cutts had exchanged an I O U. Then Cutts had left the inn, and on his way had gone to see if the electric gun was safe in the copse.

He had arrived just in time to see Racke and Gussy fighting, and then the amazing thing had happened. From the shadowy bushes behind him had sprung the two men, and he had recognised them as Mr. Bulmer and Mr. Twine, his friends of the card-party.

He knew the truth then. Mr. Bulmer and Mr. Twine were the two rascals who were after the invention! He guessed that they had followed him, hoping to gain entrance to the school, and thus steal the precious invention.

It was far from being a pleasant thought to Gerald Cutts, and the thought that they held his I O U was less pleasant. He realised that he was in the power, more or less, of a couple of desperate, unscrupulous scoundrels.

It was no wonder that Gerald Cutts went suddenly white as Aubrey Racke reminded him of their existence. He had a very unpleasant feeling that he had not seen the last of them yet.

CHAPTER 3.

The Trials of a Sleuth!

"CUTTS!"

"Cutts, by Jingo!"

"This beats the band!" said Tom Merry blankly.

Back in Study No. 10, Tom Merry and his chums looked at each other rather blankly.

The discovery that Gerald Cutts, the black sheep of the Fifth, had been in possession of the electric gun was certainly startling.

It only added still further to the mystery of its disappearance, however.

What on earth a fellow like Cutts wanted with such an instrument was perplexing, and rather disturbing. Cutts was not a scientific youth, by any means. The only science in which he took an interest as far as they were aware was the science of racing, and backing "gee-gees." He was certainly not interested in electrical devices.

As a general rule, Racke's word was anything but beyond question; but they did not question it now. His astonishment had been obviously genuine, and it never occurred to the juniors that he had only told them half the truth in regard to Gerald Cutts.

Why Gerald Cutts was so anxious to gain possession of Mr. Vining's invention was utterly beyond them.

"It beats the band!" repeated Tom Merry. "But—but I'm afraid it's pretty clear he's got it."

"Looks like it!"

"The question is, what are we to do about it, you fellows?" queried Tom Merry, with a frown. "We've given our word to Racke not to report the matter, and in any case I don't fancy showing either of the rotters up. It would mean the sack for them, I fancy."

"We can't do it," said Blake.

"We can't let the matter rest as it is, though," said Tom. "It looks as if Cutts' has it, but that's only suspicion; we've no proof, you chaps. It's up to us to see the thing through ourselves."

"Bai Jove!" said D'Arcy. "Don't do that, you fellows."

"Eh? What d'you mean, ass?"

"You know what you youngstahs are," said Arthur Augustus, shaking his head seriously. "You'd only make a frightful muddle of the biz. Leave it to me, deah boys!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You silly dummy——"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Gussy's got a swelled head," remarked Lowther. "I thought he would have after last night."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, he did track that cad Racke down, after all," he grinned. "He must have done a bit of serious thinking—though how he did it with his limited apparatus beats me."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"But he did it," said Tom. "It's not likely, though, that lightning will strike in the same place twice, so you'd better hold your detective instincts in check over this, Gussy. Cutts is a crafty bird, and if he gets a wink that we're on his trail he'll never show his hand."

Arthur Augustus jammed his monocle in his eye and gazed at Tom Merry frigidly.

"You appawntly forget, Tom Mewwy, that you have been uttably in the w'ong ovah this affah," he said witheringly, "while I have been in the wight."

"Go hon!"

"You charged old Glyn with that wascally twick yestah-day," continued Gussy. "You w'efused to listen to me. But I was wight again, and I w'esolved to cleah Glyn's name. I not onlay succeeded in doin' so, but I twacked down and b'wought to book the guiltay pah'tay, bai Jove!"

"Bow-wow!"

"Under the cires," remarked Gussy bitingly, "I should wathah have expected you fellows to sing small ovah this affah. I don't wish to boast, bai Jove, but I wathah think I am far more likely to succeed twice w'eah you have failed once, Tom Mewwy. I wepeat, you had bettah leave it to me."

"You'll muck it up, Gussy——"

"Wats!"

"Well, if you mean to play the detective stunt, do it," said Tom, laughing. "But go slow with Cutts, for goodness' sake!"

"You were lucky with Racke," said Blake grimly. "If you go along to Cutts and charge him with it, as you did Racke, you'll get slaughtered, besides giving the game away."

"Wot—uttah wot! I wathah pwide myself on my ability to deal with a mattah like this, deah boys. I shall certainly visit Cutts and c'woss-examine the wottah. You youngstahs had bettah keep off the gwass, bai Jove!"

With that Arthur Augustus marched out; and as the dinner-bell rang just then, the other juniors followed him.

"We must stop the burbling chump somehow," said Blake in alarm. "If he goes barging in on Cutts, he'll get ragged baldheaded."

"That's not the trouble, though," grunted Tom Merry. "He's bound to give the game away. Our only chance of bowling Cutts out will be mucked up if Gussy does that."

"Oh, let him rip!" grinned Lowther.

"Don't be an ass!" snapped Tom. "We'll see him after dinner, and try to knock sense into his fat head."

But Arthur Augustus gave them no chance to do that!

He was the first fellow out of the dining-hall when dinner ended, and he proceeded without delay to the study occupied by Gerald Cutts.

D'Arcy's mind was made up. His cross-examination of Aubrey Racke had proved successful, and he saw no reason why a cross-examination of Gerald Cutts should not prove just as successful.

That the bullying Fifth-Former was likely to resent being cross-examined by a junior did not seem to occur to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Serene and confident, the amateur crime investigator tapped at Cutts' door, and entered. The room was unoccupied, and D'Arcy frowned.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I twust Cutts will not be vewy long. This mattah must weally be cleahed up quickly. I had bettah wait, howevah."

Selecting Cutts' easy-chair, Arthur Augustus lowered himself gracefully into it. He rose again the next moment, however, as a sudden idea entered his mind.

If Cutts was guilty—if he had taken the missing gun from Railton's room in the night, then it was more than possible that the instrument was hidden somewhere in the room at this moment.

It was a startling thought, and it brought a disturbing problem to Arthur Augustus. Was he justified in investigating? It might even prove more successful than cross-examining Cutts!

D'Arcy held very strong views regarding such matters. The idea of searching another fellow's belongings was more than distasteful to him. But, on the other hand, there was

justice to be considered—and Mr. Vining. And it was a detective's job to do such things.

After debating the problem in his mind for a few moments Arthur Augustus decided that, under the peculiar "circs," he was fully justified.

He closed the door carefully, and started to work, somewhat gingerly, his heart thumping a trifle faster than usual with excitement.

The cupboard struck D'Arcy as being a likely place, and next moment he was rummaging amongst the conglomeration of rubbish that it held.

Finding nothing of interest there, Arthur Augustus then turned his attention to the bookcase, looking carefully behind and underneath it. But again he drew blank, and went to the bureau.

One of the drawers was locked, but the rest were not; and Gussy started to go through them. The gun was not a large weapon, and there was plenty of space for it in one of the drawers.

"I weally twinst I am doin' the wight thing, bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus doubtfully. "Yet, aftah all, one must weise one's p'nciples when engaged in the cause of justice and duty. It does not appeal to be heah— Oh, bai Jove!"

He broke off with an alarmed gasp. Footsteps and voices could be heard approaching in the passage without. He recognised Cutts' voice.

Quickly he shoved at the open drawer to close it; but the drawer stuck. Frantically he shoved and jerked, but without avail. Then the door-knob rattled, and Gussy gave it up. With a flying leap he reached the table and scrambled beneath it. He crouched there, his heart palpitating, screened by the hanging cloth.

The thought of being caught prying into another fellow's belongings was not a pleasant one to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. And it suddenly dawned upon him then that Gerald Cutts was hardly the fellow to deal leniently with him.

Cutts, followed by Gilmore and St. Leger, entered the study. Cutts was talking, but he broke off abruptly on sighting the open drawer.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed blankly. "Who the thunder's been poking about in here? I wonder— By gad!"

With a sudden alarmed look, Cutts crossed to the bureau.

"I chucked a letter in here just before— Oh, here it is," he exclaimed in great relief.

He took a letter from a pile of papers in the open drawer and placed it in his pocket.

"From dear old Banks?" grinned Gilmore.

Cutts nodded, with a grant.

"More threats?" asked St. Leger, eyeing his chum keenly.

"I say, you were there last night, weren't you, old man?" Cutts nodded again, without speaking.

"I missed you from the dorm," said St. Leger, still eyeing his chum curiously. "Well, how did you go on with the dear man? I noticed you looked a bit chirpier this mornin'.

Has he climbed down?"

"Yes!" Cutts scowled, and flung himself into the easy-chair. "He—he's given me a bit longer to pay up—the brute! You fellows coming along there to-night?"

"Not me," said Gilmore promptly. "Once a week's more than enough for me, old top!"

"And me," yawned St. Leger. "Anythin' special on, Cutts?"

"No. Banks wants to see me, that's all. I—I thought you chaps might like to come."

"Not me, thanks," said St. Leger, looking quickly at Cutts. "By the way, old man, what was on last night? You were out jolly late. I woke after one, and you weren't back then."

"Nothing much," returned Cutts carelessly. "Had a few hands of cards, and we stuck it rather late."

"Hake and his pals there?" inquired Gilmore.

"No; only Banks and a couple of friends of his."

"Oh!" said St. Leger, looking up. "Not those two blighters we met the other night?"

Cutts nodded.

"H'm! I don't like the look of the beggars," said St. Leger. "Look to me like foreigners—both of 'em. Anyway, if you'll take my tip, old man, you'll steer clear of them. They're just a bit too curious about affairs at St. Jim's for my liking!"

"I thought that," said Gilmore, nodding. "Bit too soft-soapy, too!"

Cutts bit his lips. How he wished he had done what St. Leger advised! He almost wondered if his chums knew anything. But that was impossible.

"Oh, hang Banks, and the lot of 'em!" he snapped abruptly. "Look here, you chaps, what about that drawer? I left it closed just before dinner. I'm certain of that. Somebody's been—"

Cutts stopped abruptly, his eyes fixed, as if glued, to some-

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thing sticking out from beneath the table. It was a natty shoe, with a glimpse of purple sock just above it.

"By gad!" gasped Cutts.

With a sudden movement he leaped forward and grasped the foot. Then he gave a hefty heave.

Bump!

"Yawoooooh!"

In a sprawling heap Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emerged from beneath the table, and there arose a bump and a howl from the amateur detective as his head struck the floor with a fearful crack.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Gilmore.

"Young D'Arcy!" breathed St. Leger. "By gad!"

Cutts' face was like a thundercloud. He grasped the hapless junior by the collar and wrenched him savagely to his feet. Then he shook him—shook him hard.

"You—you sneaking little sweep!" he hissed through his teeth. "You've been poking in here—you've been spying and listening to us, have you?"

CHAPTER 4.

Arthur Augustus is Stubborn!

D'ARCY flushed to the roots of his hair.

He was fairly in the hands of the Philistines—he knew that. He knew from the looks on the faces of Cutts & Co. what to expect from them.

But he scarcely gave his danger a thought at that moment. He was thinking of Cutts' savage words. It was something new and decidedly unpleasant for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy to be called a sneak and a spy. It hurt the swell of the Fourth very much, and he could not help feeling that, on the face of things, Cutts was somewhat justified.

"Oh, bai Jove!" he gasped. "How feahfully howwid! Pway welease me, Cutts, and allow me to explain!"

"Explain!" sneered Cutts. "We're likely to accept an explanation, you little sweep. Hand me that stick, Gilmore. We'll teach the little whelp better than to come sneaking in here!"

He gave Arthur Augustus another savage shake, and the hapless junior gasped and wriggled.

"Ow! Oh, bai Jove! Welease me, Cutts, you wottah; you are wumplin' my collah and hurtin' me! Ow! St. Leger, deah boy, as the lesser blackguard of the three, I appeal to you to allow me to explain, bai Jove!"

But if Arthur Augustus expected that ingenious request to meet with success, he was quickly disillusioned on that count. For once the slack and good-natured swell of the Fifth was furiously angry. He knew the junior must have overheard that dingy conversation and the knowledge was not pleasant to St. Leger.

"You—you sneakin' little cad!" he breathed. "You're goin' to get the hidin' of your life for this, D'Arcy. Put the little sweep across the table, Cutts, old man!"

"Weally, St. Leger— Ow! Leggo! I uttally wefuse to— Bai Jove! I insist upon explainin'—"

"Oh, let's see what he's got to say for himself," grinned Gilmore.

Cutts, who was just about to swing the junior across the table, paused abruptly—not because of his chum's words, but because a sudden suspicion had entered his mind.

"Well, out with it!" he snapped. "What were you sneaking in here after, D'Arcy?"

"Oh, thrash the little sweep and kick him out!" rapped out St. Leger impatiently.

Arthur Augustus gave him a haughty look.

"I shall uttally wefuse to be thwashed, St. Leger," he gasped, "until I have explained my howwid posish. I weally must insist upon makin' one point cleah. You appeal to be under the impvesson that I was sneakin' and spyin'. I was not: I was meahly investigatin', bai Jove!"

"Oh!" gasped Gilmore. "There's a difference, is there?"

"Natuwally, deah boy. I was meahly investigatin'— Oh, bai Jove!"

D'Arcy stopped suddenly. He had suddenly caught sight of Cutts' face. That senior's features were red with rage, and his eyes were glinting.

"Well?" breathed Cutts. "What—what were you investigatin', D'Arcy?"

But Arthur Augustus saw, rather late, that he had already said too much. In his desperate anxiety to make it quite clear that he had not been guilty of such "howwid" practices as sneaking and spying, he had forgotten the necessity of keeping Cutts ignorant of the fact that he was on his track.

"I feah I cannot answer that question, Cutts," he said with dignity. "I expect you, howevah, as between gentlemen, to accept my word that I was not sneakin' an' spyin', bai Jove!"

Cutts stared at him with glittering eyes.

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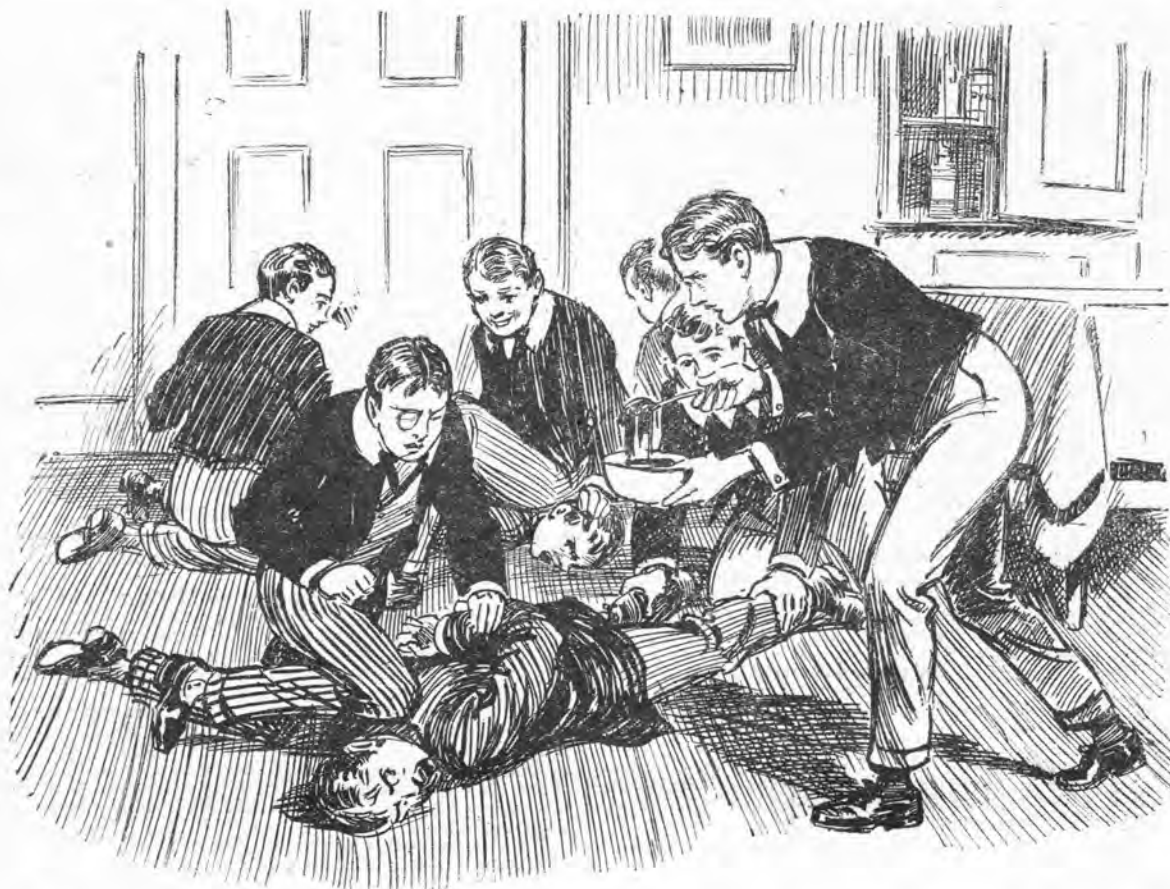
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Tom Merry approached Cutts, the basin in one hand and the big spoon in the other. The Fifth-Former glared at him, his features crimson with wrath. "You—you little cad!" he hissed. "You dare to—!" He broke off in alarm as he saw from Tom Merry's expression that he fully intended to dare. As the leader of the Shell stooped over him he gave a yell. "Rescue Fifth. Resc— Grooogh!" (See page 10.)

Cutts did not doubt it then—he knew! And a thrill of fear and rage surged through him.

But he did not repeat his question. He felt he had no need, and had no intention of letting Gilmore and St. Leger share D'Arcy's suspicions.

In a burst of rage he snatched the stick from Gilmore's hand, and with the other he grasped the junior and wrenched him across the table.

"Hold his legs, you two!" he hissed.

"Oh, bai Jove! Welease— Yoooop! Yawoooooh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

The hapless Arthur Augustus had known he was "in for it," and he had proposed to take his medicine like a man—to take his licking without a murmur, and with the lofty repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

But he had hardly expected this. The cane lashed down with vicious force, and Arthur Augustus forgot his stout intentions, and he howled.

"Yawooooogh! Oh cwumbs! Stoppit! Ow, help, bai Jove! Yawoooooh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Cutts laid it on with might and main, and Gussy howled and wriggled helplessly in the grasp of Gilmore and St. Leger.

It was St. Leger who fired of the business first.

"Here—hold on, Cutts!" he muttered. "That's enough, you ass! You'll have the dashed beaks here! Chuck it!"

But Cutts did not "chuck it." He was in a state of ungovernable fury, and the cane continued to fall, and the luckless amateur detective continued to howl.

"Do you hear, you fool?" repeated St. Leger. "You'll have all the school here with that dashed row— Hallo!"

A sound of tramping came from the passage outside, and St. Leger released his hold on Gussy and leaped to the door.

But he was too late to lock it. The door flew open, and into the room charged six juniors. They were Blake & Co. and the Terrible Three.

In a flash they took in the scene, and Blake gave a yell.

"I thought as much!" he shouted. "It's Gussy!"

"Wescue, deah boys!" panted Arthur Augustus, twisting round in Gilmore's grasp. "Wescue!"

"What-ho!" snorted Blake.

With a rush the juniors charged to the rescue. A combined charge of Blake and Tom Merry sent Cutts reeling; but he recovered himself, and began to hit out right and left with his cane.

"Yoooop! Yaroooooh! Oh, my hat!"

The juniors scattered before the whirling cane.

"Rush him!" gasped Tom Merry.

But Arthur Augustus saved the situation. Gilmore had released him to face the invaders, and the swell of the Fourth leaped at Cutts from behind, and wrenched at the cane.

In a flash Tom Merry and Blake had rushed in, and between them they wrenched the cane away, and Tom flung it on top of the bookshelves.

The next moment a wild and whirling struggle was taking place in the study. Lowther had kicked the door shut, and the fight became fast and furious.

It was not the first time that Tom Merry & Co. and the dingy Fifth-Formers had come to grips, and this time the juniors were in an overwhelming majority.

Arthur Augustus had recovered somewhat from his cruel castigation, and heedless of his still smarting pains, he flung himself into the struggle.

With the odds at seven to three, even the hefty Fifth-Formers stood no chance, and they were all down at last, with the juniors sprawling over them, and pinning them flat.

"You—you little fiends!" panted Cutts. "We'll make you sit up for this, by gad!"

"Then I think we'd better have our money's worth in advance," gasped Tom Merry. "Hold the bullying beauties down, you chaps!"

Leaving Blake and D'Arcy to hold the wriggling Cutts, Tom jumped up and ran to the cupboard. He took out, after a moment's searching, a pot of jam, a jar of honey, and a tin of syrup. He emptied a generous helping of each into a

basin, and after emptying the contents of the ink-bottles into it also, he got a big spoon and mixed the lot together into a conglomerated, sticky mess.

Then he approached Cutts, the basin in one hand and the big spoon in the other. Cutts glared at him, his features crimson with wrath.

"You—you little cad!" he hissed. "You dare to—"

He broke off in alarm as he saw Tom Merry's expression that he fully intended to dare. As the junior stooped over him, he gave a yell.

"Rescue, Fifth! Oh, great Scott! Resc— Grooooooh! Mumm-mumm-mumm!"

Cutts' wild yell degenerated into an extraordinary series of gurgles and gasps as Tom Merry tipped a generous spoonful of the mess into his open mouth.

"That's what you get if you shout, dear men!" he said calmly. "You've got to have it externally whether you shout or not. But if you shout you get it internally, too! Does it taste nice, Cutts?"

Cutts' reply was unintelligible, so after emptying a couple of good spoonfuls over his face and hair, Merry passed to St. Leger, who was wriggling vainly in the grasp of Lowther and Manners.

St. Leger was on the point of yelling but suddenly remembering Tom Merry's words, he shut his lips hard. It was fortunate he did, for, without ceremony, Tom emptied another couple of goodly spoonfuls over his face and hair also.

Gilmore also kept his mouth tightly closed as Tom Merry approached him. He saw there was no help for it, and, as Lowther put it, he "took his medicine like a little man."

There was still a little of the mixture left, however, and rather than waste it, Tom Merry gave it to Gerald Cutts—down the back of his neck!

"There!" remarked Tom, eyeing his almost frantic victims critically. "I am afraid you're all too excited at the moment, so we won't stay to discuss the matter of why you were thrashing Gussy. I expect he asked for it—"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"I expect he deserved it, too!" went on the Shell leader. "But that's not the point; the point is, that we can't have Fifth Form blackguards thrashing our fellows like that—see? Let this be a lesson to you! Ready, you chaps?"

There was a general nodding of heads, and Tom crossed to the floor and flung it open. Then he gave the word, and, leaping off their victims, the juniors bolted from the room as one man. From the expressions on the faces of the Fifth-Formers, they decided it best not to risk further trouble—despite their overwhelming numbers.

They bolted from the room and raced along the passage roaring with laughter. Nor did they stop until they were safe in the junior quarters.

Then their laughter ceased, and they surrounded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy with rather grim expressions.

"You burbling dummy!" snorted Blake.

"You blundering ass!" hissed Tom Merry.

"Trust Gussy to make a muck of things!" sniffed Lowther. "I suppose he's given the game away fairly now. Bump the idiot!"

"Bai Jove! Weally, deah boys!"

Arthur Augustus stared rather blankly at his chums at their outburst.

"You blundering dummy, Gussy!" went on Tom Merry warmly. "Didn't we tell you to leave it to us? You've just done what we feared you'd do."

"What happened?" demanded Herries. "Were you ass enough to go barging in on Cutts like you did on Racke?"

"I uttably wufuse to answah that question, Hewwies," said Arthur Augustus haughtily. "I pwesume you fellows have gone suddenly pottay. I see no weason whatever for this extraordinary outburst of wude wemarks, bai Jove!"

"We told you to leave the matter to us!" howled Blake. "We warned you what would happen. I suppose Cutts knows now that we suspect him?"

"You are quite w'ong, Blake," said D'Arcy with dignity. "I was investigatin', and they came in and caught me. Cutts was fwightfully watty, and he demanded to know what I was investigatin', you know. I wufused to tell him a single thing, bai Jove!"

"You—you told him you were investigating?" gasped Tom Merry in alarm.

"Yaas! I will admit, deah boys, that I was wathah incautious theah. Howevah— Bai Jove! Welease me, Tom Mewwy, you wuffian! Yoooh! Youp!"

Arthur Augustus sat down on the carpet with a bump.

"You burbling idiot!" snapped Tom wrathfully. "Then you did give the game away! He'll guess we've got him marked now, and he'll be on his guard. Blessed if I don't wish we hadn't happened along just then. Oh, you—you—"

"Oh, bump the dummy!" snorted Blake. "Bump the silly detective rot out of him!"

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"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, bai Jove, you wottahs! Leggo! Yawwooh!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

Four times the astonished Arthur Augustus was bumped on the carpet, and then, as the bell for afternoon class rang, the wrathful juniors streamed out. They left the hapless sleuth sitting on the carpet, gasping and groaning, and panting in a state of amazed bewilderment.

Why his chums had treated him thus was a mystery to the amateur detective.

He staggered to his feet at last, and jammed his monocle into his eye. Then he blinked in dismay at his dishevelled attire.

"The—the wottahs!" he breathed in sulphurous accents. "I shall uttably wufuse to speak to any of the awful wuffians afteh this, bai Jove! I weally must change my clobber before appeawin' in class. The wuffians!"

And Arthur Augustus hurried out and made tracks for the dormitory to change his clobber. In the opinion of the swell of the Fourth, certain trouble with Mr. Latbom for being late was far to be preferred to appearing in public in a state of rumpled clothes and dishevelled hair.

CHAPTER 5.

Gussy's Madness!

BLAKE and CO. looked at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy several times during classes that afternoon in rather a puzzled manner.

On entering the Form-room, fifteen minutes late, Arthur Augustus had listened almost dreamily to the scathing lecture Mr. Latbom gave him on the subject of punctuality, and even when the master closed his tirade by presenting D'Arcy with two hundred lines, the swell of the Fourth had still retained his air of thoughtful abstraction.

Evidently the noble mind of Arthur Augustus was engaged upon an unusually interesting problem, to which lectures, lines, and lessons were but small matters. And by the time lessons ended Blake & Co. were feeling quite sorry for their chum. His crop of lines had increased by yet another two hundred, and, in addition, he had been caned twice for gross inattention.

But their sympathetic glances were met with by looks of icy hauteur from Arthur Augustus. He was very evidently on the high horse, and no longer friends with his study-mates.

D'Arcy's chums only smiled, however. They were confident that by tea-time, at latest, their aristocratic chum would have climbed down from the high horse.

But they were wrong. As the juniors left the Form-room Arthur Augustus passed them by without a glance. He was not in Study No. 6 when they went there, nor did he turn up all through tea.

After tea, Tom Merry & Co. looked in on Blake & Co.

"What's up with Gussy?" grinned Tom. "He's fairly on the high horse this time. But—"

"I'm blessed if I know what's up with him," grunted Blake. "He's waxy, of course, about the bumping we gave him. But he's got something worrying his napper besides that. He's been like a fellow in a dream all through classes."

"He's been having tea with Talbot," grinned Lowther. "We looked in, but he wouldn't speak to us."

"Rather rummy to me," said Tom Merry thoughtfully. "Do you think he did find something out this afternoon—in Cutts' study, I mean? We hardly gave the fathead a chance to say much, you know."

"I'm inclined to think he did," said Blake, nodding. "Anyway, let him rip for a bit. We're just off to the village. You chaps coming?"

"Just where we were thinking of going," said Tom, nodding. "Half a minute, while we get our caps."

The juniors got their caps, and a moment later were strolling out of doors. As they crossed the hall a tall, clean-shaven man came indoors, hobbling along with the aid of a stick. It was Mr. Vining, the inventor.

He stopped with a smiling nod to the juniors.

"I'm still here, you see!" he exclaimed, nodding ruefully at his foot. "This foot's no end of a bother. Going out, boys?"

"Yes, sir," said Tom, smiling. "I—I say, sir, we're awfully sorry about your invention. I suppose you've heard nothing of it yet?"

Mr. Vining shook his head, and his face went grave.

"Nothing whatever!" he said quietly. "I'm just beginning to get rather seriously alarmed. We had hoped that a further search this morning would have revealed it. But now—" He broke off, smiling rather ruefully. "I won't worry you youngsters with my trouble, though. How's the footer, boys?"

For a few moments the juniors lingered discussing footer matters with the kindly inventor, and then they passed on into the quadrangle.

Tom Merry's face was clouded.

"He's a jolly decent sort," he said. "It—it's a thundering shame about that gun!"

"He doesn't seem to worry much about it," remarked Lowther.

"Doesn't he?" said Tom Merry grimly. "Can't you see he does? He's fairly at his wits' end, I believe. But he's a guest here, remember, and it isn't likely he'll make a fuss about it. I feel a mean pig over this business. We—we ought to have told everything last night, and blow Racke!"

"I'm afraid we did make a bloomer there," said Blake glumly. "It wouldn't have been missing now if we'd kept it until morning, and then handed it over properly. We're really responsible——"

"In a way, we are," agreed Tom. "And that's all the more reason why it's up to us to recover it again. We've got something to work on anyway. We know Cutts knew where the gun was last night——"

"If that idiot Gussy hadn't warned Cutts——"

"It beats me what the rotter should want with the thing," grunted Herries.

"That's just what we've got to find out," said Tom. "Anyway, let's get along to the village now."

The juniors changed the subject, and walked on through the gates en route for the village. At Tom's suggestion they took the river route. It was a longer walk, but it was far pleasanter along the towing-path, and soon they were striding alongside the gleaming Rhyl.

The juniors did not hurry—there was plenty of time before lock-up, and it was pleasant by the shimmering river in the early autumn evening.

But they were not destined to reach Rylcombe that evening for all that.

They were still a little distance from the old stone bridge when Lowther suddenly chuckled, and nodded ahead.

"Gussy!" he said. "It's dear old Gussy!"

"So it is," remarked Blake, after a look at the elegant form some distance ahead of them. "Give him a shout—nunno, don't! What on earth is the dummy up to?"

"That's Cutts just in front of him," said Tom Merry, with sudden excitement. "Phew! Don't you see——"

"He's tracking Cutts!" chortled Lowther.

There was no doubting Lowther's assertion. Cutts was about fifty yards in front of D'Arcy, and that elegant junior's whole attitude gave him away. Even as Lowther spoke, Cutts happened to glance round, and as he did so Arthur Augustus dodged quickly into the hedge bordering the towing-path.

Evidently Cutts did not see the junior tracking him, nor did he see the juniors in the distance behind. He gave one quick look around him, and then he vanished abruptly from the juniors' sight.

But Tom Merry & Co. knew quite well where he had gone. Above the hedge and trees at that spot showed the rusty-red roof of the Green Man Inn.

"The—the daring rotter!" gasped Manners. "My hat! Fancy daring to go into that beastly place in daylight!"

"Must have a jolly good reason," said Tom frowning. "But I'd like to know Gussy's reason for trailing the cad. Hallo, Gussy's on the trail again! He'll come to grief as sure as fate. Come—— Great pip!"

Tom broke off with an alarmed gasp—a gasp that was echoed by the others. For, after staring after Cutts for a moment or so, Arthur Augustus had emerged from hiding, and raced along the towing-path until he reached the little wicket-gate that gave admittance to the garden of the disreputable riverside inn. Then, like Cutts of the Fifth, he vanished through it.

"He—he's mad!" gasped Blake. "Oh, great Scott!"

The juniors blinked at each other. When on the warpath Arthur Augustus was accustomed to doing rather rash and unexpected things; but they had hardly expected him to go to such lengths as this.

"In broad daylight, too!" groaned Jack Blake. "It's a flogging or the sack if he's seen in there. Oh, the awful ass!"

"We've got to get him out, Blake," said Tom grimly. "I expect he's prowling round the garden; I hope he's gone no farther than that, anyway. Come on!"

The prospect of entering the disreputable and forbidden place was not a pleasant one; but they saw it was necessary to face it.

The enthusiastic amateur detective was apparently bent on looking for trouble, and his chums had no intention of allowing him to find it if they could help it. The rest of the juniors followed Tom Merry with a rush.

At a gap in the hedge of the unkempt garden Tom called a halt.

"Better sneak through here," he said softly.

He took a cautious survey of the towing-path and river, and then he squeezed through the hedge. He found himself on a ragged, paper-littered lawn, well-screened from the house. There was no sign of Arthur Augustus.

He saw him a moment later, however. As he led the way cautiously through the bushes, Tom suddenly came in sight of the inn, and he stopped with a warning hiss.

There were two windows at the rear of the inn—a french

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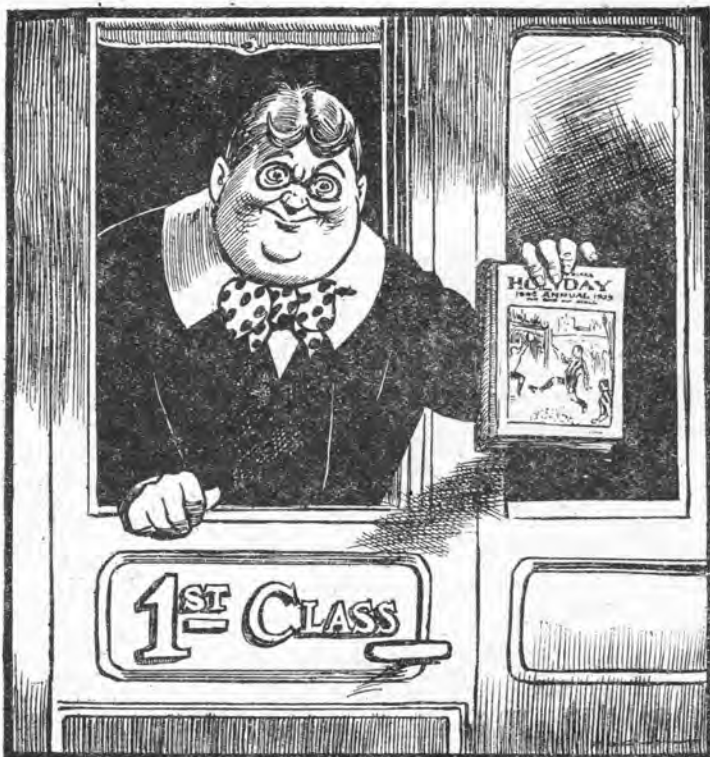
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window, and a much smaller sash-window—evidently the window of a private parlour.

And crouching below this was the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Even as they spotted him, he raised himself and peered cautiously through the curtained glass.

"The burbling chump!" breathed Blake sulphurously. "Pity you haven't your camera, Manners old man," grumbled Lowther. "What a subject—the Sleuth of St. Jim's at work!"

"Shut up, Lowther!" whispered Tom Merry. "This is no silly joking matter! Look here! It's no good calling the mad idiot, I suppose. We'd better make a rush and haul him out."

"There's Cutts inside—" "I know! We'll have to do it quietly, of course; we don't want trouble with those inside. You chaps collar him; and I'll tie a hanky round his mouth to prevent him yelling. Wizz him out like lightning."

"Right-ho!" "Come on, then!"

The juniors leaped from their hiding-place, and in half a dozen almost noiseless steps they were on the unsuspecting Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, bai Jove!" That was all the swell of the Fourth did articulate. That silent rush took him completely by surprise, and in a flash he was gripped firmly, and a handkerchief whipped over his open mouth.

His eyes almost started from his head as he turned with a startled jump and recognised his captors.

"Mum-mum-mmm! Gwoooooh!"

What that remark meant D'Arcy's captors did not know, nor did they stay to find out. They whirled the startled sleuth through the bushes, and fairly rushed him through the gap in the hedge on to the towing-path.

Nor did they stop then; they hustled the almost frantic Arthur Augustus along for fifty yards or so, and then they flung him down in the hedge bottom, and sat upon him.

"Now, you hopeless lunatic," breathed Tom Merry, wrenching the handkerchief from Gussy's mouth. "What the thump have you got to say for yourself?"

Arthur Augustus had a great deal to say for himself, and the moment he had recovered his breath, he said it at great length. Then he smote Tom Merry full on the nose.

As Tom happened to be crouching on his haunches at the moment, he went backwards, and all but turned a complete somersault.

"Hold him!" gasped Blake. "Oh, my hat!"

It took all six of them to hold the wrathful Gussy, but they held him fast at last. Tom Merry was breathing hard and clutching his nose. The blow had not been a hard one, but it was decidedly painful, and it took all Tom's self-control to keep himself from retaliating.

"You—you dangerous maniac!" he breathed.

"You—you blundahing wuffians!" gasped Arthur Augustus, in reply. "Welease me, bai Jove! I will administah a fearful thwashin' all wround for this! I ordah you to welease me, you wottahs!"

"If you'll make it pax, we will!" snapped Blake. "If you won't, we're going to frog's-march you back to St. Jim's!"

"I shall uttably wefuse to be fwog's-marched back to St. Jim's, bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus haughtily. "I uttably—"

"Pax or not?" snapped Tom Merry, grasping the swell of the Fourth. "Ready to lift him, you chaps?"

"Oh, bai Jove! Welease me, you— Yawoooooh! Oh ewwubs! Yaas, I'll make it pax! Ow!"

The juniors lowered Arthur Augustus to the ground again, and released him at once. Gussy's word was his bond, and they knew this. As they released him he gave them each a haughty, withering glare, and then he started back towards the hostelry, just visible through the trees.

But he did not get far. In a flash Blake and Merry were after him, and they yanked him to a standstill.

"It'll have to be the frog's-march, after all, you chaps!" gasped Blake. "He's absolutely potty!"

"Wot—uttah wot!" said Gussy. "I am far fwom pottay, Blake!"

This time the swell of the Fourth did not attempt to

struggle. He gave each of them a frigid glare through his monocle, which he jammed into his eye for the purpose.

"Are you awaiah," he inquired loftily, "that you are obstruclin' the course of justice by attackin' me in this weckless mannah? I was on the point of solvin' the mystewy of that missin' electric gun, and you iwvesponsible youngstahs have uttably wuined my investigations, bai Jove!"

"You burbling duffer!" howled Blake. "You're asking for the sack, you mean, going in that hole! You'll learn nothing about the dashed mystery there, you fathead!"

"I have already learned a gweat deal theah, Blake," retorted D'Arcy calmly. "I held the theowy that I should find those wuffianly foweygnahs theah, and I was wight, by Jove!"

"Wha-a-at?" They blinked at him, astounded. Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"You—you mean that, Gussy?" he breathed, his eyes gleaming. "Are those chaps there?"

"I wegwet that I cannot explain, Tom Mewwy," said Gussy, "as I am no longah on speakin' terms with you wottahs! Now perhaps you will allow me to continue my investigations?"

Tom Merry looked at him speechlessly. He felt he wanted to knock Arthur Augustus' already damaged topper over his eyes; but he restrained himself. He knew there was only one way to bring the swell of the Fourth off the "high horse."

"Look here, Gussy, old man," he said gravely. "We see now that we were wrong to interrupt your investigations. We can only say we're sorry—fearfully sorry, both for this and what happened this morning! Eh, you chaps?"

"Frightfully sorry!" agreed Blake, taking the hint.

"Shockingly sorry!" said the rest, in a chorus.

Gussy eyed them a trifle suspiciously, but as all their faces were grave, he nodded, his face losing its haughty expression.

"Vewy well, deah boys," he said gracefully. "As you have apologiseed, I will explain."

And he did.

He told of his suspicions—of the conversation he had overheard at noon in Cutts' study while hiding under the table.

"I weally could not help listening, deah boys," he concluded. "The thought of eavesdwoopin' was wepugnant to me. I decided, howevah, that I was quite justified, undah the cires, in actin' on what I ovahheard, bai Jove!"

"But—but why in thunder didn't you tell us, Gussy?" gasped Tom Merry.

"You weally gave me no chance, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, I gave the mattah a gweat deal of thought, and I came to the conclusion that the foweygnahs Cutts mentioned were stayin' at the Gween Man must be the wascals who attacked Mr. Vinin—the wuffians who are aftah the gun, bai Jove!"

"There's no doubt about that," said Blake grimly.

Tom Merry's eyes were gleaming, and his face was grave.

"And that rotter, Cutts, knows them—is friendly with them!" he breathed. "I fancy we don't need to look farther for Cutts' motive in wanting the gun, you chaps."

"You—you think—"

"It looks like it, though it's a rotten thing to suspect that Cutts is in league with the rascals," said Tom. "But—but why else should he want it? By Jove! So that's why you followed Cutts, Gussy?"

"Yaas. But I hardly imagined he would come here in daylight, deah boys! Howevah, my suspicions and theowies were cowwect. I wecognised them at once."

"You—you've seen them?"

"Of course!" said D'Arcy. "I wecognised them at once, though they are clean-shaven now. They were in that woom with that wascal Cutts. If you fellows hadn't dwaggd me away—"

"Well, my hat!" breathed Tom Merry, his eyes dancing with excitement. "And we're standing here gassing! I'm going to have a look, you fellows. Better not all go, though."

"I'm coming!" said Blake.

"Right! You'd better come, too, Gussy! The rest of you keep cave."

With that Tom Merry hurried away, with Blake and D'Arcy at his heels. They reached the inn, and Tom Merry squeezed through the hedge.

There was still nobody to be seen in the garden, and Tom Merry and his chums made straight for the window. They scouted round, and approached it cautiously.

Tom Merry reached it first, and, raising himself stealthily, he peered through the curtains. As he did so, his face hardened and his lips met.

D'Arcy was right—there was no doubt about that. The two men seated in the dingy room were the men who had attacked and robbed Mr. Vinin on the highway, and who

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As the party of St. Jim's juniors came within sight of the inn Tom Merry suddenly called a halt, for crouching below the window of the private parlour was the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Even as they spotted him, the swell of St. Jim's raised himself and peered cautiously through the curtained glass. "The St. Jim's sleuth at work!" said Lowther, with a grin. (See page 12.)

had attacked Arthur Augustus only the night before. Clean-shaven, as they now were, Tom Merry recognised them as Gussy had done.

And Cutts was there. He was seated before the table, and his face was white and haggard. The better dressed of the two men was speaking to him—and very obviously threatening him.

The window was closed, and only a dull murmur reached the juniors' ears.

"That's good enough!" whispered Tom Merry. "We've seen all we want to see, you chaps. And we don't want to be collared here. We'll clear out now, but we'll wait for friend Cutts outside, my pippins!"

"Phew! Yes, rather!"

And very cautiously the three juniors crept stealthily from the garden to join their waiting chums—and to await the appearance of Gerald Cutts.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Toils!

"AFTERNOON, Master Cutts!"

Mr. Joseph Banks, bookmaker and card-sharper, greeted Gerald Cutts genially as he stepped into the billiards-room of the Green Man through the french window from the garden.

For all his geniality, however, Mr. Banks' voice showed just a trace of uneasiness.

He was alone in the billiards-room, idly knocking the balls about, when Cutts stepped in, but he stopped his dreary occupation and looked narrowly at the senior as he spoke.

Gerald Cutts gave him a black look.

Without answering the bookmaker's greeting, he took a letter from his pocket, and threw it on the billiards-table before Mr. Banks.

"I got that this morning. It's from that—that pal of

yours, Mr. Bulmer, as he calls himself," he said, through his teeth. "I want to know what it means, Banks!"

Mr. Banks coughed behind a far from clean hand, and took the letter. He read it slowly and laboriously.

"Well," he remarked, a trifle nervously, handing the letter back, "that's all right, ain't it? He sez 'e wants to see you, and you've come, Master Cutts. You'll find 'im an' Mr. Twine in the parlour next door."

Mr. Banks picked up his cue again. Cutts eyed him, his eyes glinting.

"You—you rotter, Banks!" he muttered. "You know perfectly well what I mean. I mean what he says in that letter—that he's taken over my debts from you. Is that true?"

"Oh," ejaculated Mr. Banks, in pretended surprise, "you mean that?"

"You know I do, confound you!" hissed Cutts. "What d'you mean by sellin' my dashed I O U's to that brute?"

"No 'arm in that, Master Cutts," said Mr. Banks. "I just 'appened to be 'ard up, and 'e seemed friendly like with you. It only means you owe 'im the dubs instead of me."

"What right had you to tell him I owed you money at all?" asked Cutts furiously.

"'E seemed to know it arter that game the other night," said Mr. Banks. "And 'e seemed very interested in you, Master Cutts. You've no call to be afraid of 'im. Nice friendly gent 'e seems, too. 'E jest offered to take it over, and I thought it'd be a good thing for you. Anyway, I weren't goin' to turn good money away, Master Cutts."

"You—you rotter!" breathed Cutts. "You must have known he didn't do a thing like that for nothing, hang you!"

"It weren't my business to inquire."

"Do you know what you've done, you brute——"

"'Ere, 'old 'ard, Master Cutts!" snapped Mr. Banks, a

neatly gleam showing in his small eyes. "You've called me quite enough names, me lad! I don't know, and I don't care, what 'is game was! You get out'er 'ere! Chap you wants to see is in there!"

And after pointing with his cue at an inner door, Mr. Joseph Banks resumed his occupation of knocking the "ivories" about.

Cutts, quivering with rage, eyed him for some seconds, and then, realising the futility of further speech, he walked towards the inner door and passed through.

In the private parlour beyond two men were seated, with half-filled glasses on the table before them. They were his "friends" of the previous night's card-party—Mr. Bulmer and Mr. Twine.

"Hallo, here's our young friend at last!" said Mr. Bulmer. "Come in and shut the door, Master Cutts."

Cutts closed the door and stood with his back to it. His face was white, and he looked at the two men with eyes that held more than a trace of fear in them.

"You—you wanted to see me, Mr. Bulmer?" he said, a trifle shakily.

"Sit down," invited Mr. Bulmer. He drew a chair up to the table. "Sit down, and we'll get to business."

Cutts sat down. He did not fail to note that the man's voice had lost its usual genial heartiness; it was hard and metallic. It made Cutts shiver.

"I can only stay a few minutes," muttered the Fifth-Former. "It's already close on lock-up."

"I won't keep you long, my boy. We're wondering if you recognised us last night, Master Cutts?"

Cutts experienced a sudden, sickening feeling of disappointment. He had hoped against hope that these men were not, after all, the rascals who were after the invention—that they were not the men who attacked D'Arcy in the copse. He knew the worst now.

"I—I didn't recognise you," he faltered; "but—but I guessed."

Mr. Bulmer nodded and smiled.

"Then there's no need for further secrecy," he remarked calmly. "I am going to put my cards on the table, Master Cutts. Doubtless you are mystified—you are wondering why we are so anxious to get hold of that little invention? You are puzzled as to why we have taken so much trouble to make your acquaintance. I will tell you the latter reason first. We are hoping you will help us to get our hands on Mr. Vining's invention."

"Oh!" panted Cutts.

He had suspected that; but now he knew, and his face went suddenly haggard.

"We do not wish to keep it," laughed Mr. Bulmer, as if amused at the senior's obvious terror. "Our intentions are very innocent, and we are not such terrible fellows as you possibly imagine. We merely desire to handle the electric gun for a few moments. In short, we wish to examine and photograph it."

"Photograph it?" stammered Cutts.

"Exactly. We happen to be the representatives of a certain well-known newspaper. My friend is a Press-photographer. His job is to photograph the invention; mine is to write a descriptive article about it."

"Oh!"

"In other words," resumed Mr. Bulmer blandly, "we are after a scoop—a newspaper scoop. We merely require to handle the gun for a few moments. It can then be returned to its owner. We wish you to get it for us."

"It—it's impossible!" gasped Cutts. "I—I can't get it!"

Mr. Bulmer raised his eyebrows.

"How did those boys come to have it in their possession last night, then?" he inquired quickly.

"They—they were larking with it," gasped Cutts. "They must have taken it from Mr. Vining's room."

"You must do the same, then. You will bring it to me here. In return for your trouble, I will hand you your I O U's for twenty pounds, Master Cutts."

It was out now. The iron hand was showing beneath the velvet glove. It was no shock to Cutts, however; he had expected it.

"I—I can't—I won't!" muttered the Fifth-Former thickly.

Mr. Bulmer rose to his feet, and his eyes were glittering. He seemed to have decided to drop all pretence and make-believe.

"I think you will, Master Cutts!" he said, in a hard voice. "I think, upon reflection, that you will! I am sure you would much prefer those I O U's in your own hands, rather than, say, your headmaster's. You understand, do you not?"

Cutts understood well enough. He strove to steady his features and his voice. Not for one moment did he "swallow" the story of the newspaper scoop. It would scarcely have taken in Baggy Trimble, much less a sharp fellow like Cutts of the Fifth. The men were no more

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newspaper representatives than he was. He had no intention of showing his disbelief, however. Nor had he any intention of forcing the rascals' hands by refusing point-blank.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Bulmer. "Shall we take it that you will undertake this little—er—task, Master Cutts?"

Cutts nodded slowly.

"I—I'll try to get it," he said faintly.

Mr. Bulmer gave his companion a quick glance.

"That is well," he said. "How long is Mr. Vining staying at the school, my lad?"

"Over the week-end, I think," said Cutts.

"Very well. To-morrow is Saturday. I will give you until six o'clock to-morrow evening, Master Cutts. And"—went on the rascal in a meaning tone—"I trust that, for your own sake, you will not fail us!"

Cutts nodded, and as Mr. Bulmer stepped to the door, he rose to his feet, white and shaking. He scarcely knew what else he said to the rascals, and he scarcely knew how he got outside the stuffy, dingy room. But he found himself outside at last, and he hurried through the billiards-room without a glance at Mr. Banks, who was still at the table.

He stepped through the french window on to the lawn, and hurried across the garden. He passed through the wicket-gate, without even thinking of taking his usual cautious survey. A moment later he was hurrying along the towing-path.

But he did not get far. There came a rush of feet, and Cutts recoiled with a jump as seven determined juniors surrounded him.

CHAPTER 7.

A Warning for Cutts!

GERALD CUTTS caught his breath and stared.

"What—what—" he stammered. "Oh, it's you!"

"Little us!" assented Tom Merry, giving the Fifth-Former a grim look. "We want a word with you, Cutts!"

Cutts stared at the grim-faced juniors with startled eyes.

"You—you little cads!" he hissed. "What d'you want with me? What's this game?"

"We want to know what your game is, Cutts?" said Tom Merry, nodding towards the Green Man Inn. "You're playing a dangerous game, whether you know it or not!"

"What—what do you mean?" breathed Cutts.

"Just this!" said the Shell captain. "You've just come from that beastly pub—"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" sneered Cutts, with a scarcely concealed gasp of relief. "Well, if you're thinking of sneaking, you'd better think again, you little sweeps! You can prove nothing, and I fancy my word as a senior will outweigh yours."

Tom Merry's lip curled.

"We're not concerned with your visit there, Cutts," he said. "If you like to play the fool, you can, for us. I'm talking about something else—far more serious than that!"

"Oh!" gasped Cutts.

"I'm referring to those two men you've been with in that place," said Tom Merry coolly. "Do you know who they are, Cutts?"

Cutts caught his breath.

"You—you saw—" he began hoarsely.

"We saw them," assented Tom, nodding. "We saw you with them in that room, Cutts. We recognised them as the rascals who attacked Mr. Vining the other day—the villains who are after the invention. If you didn't know that, Cutts—though I'm afraid you did—I'm telling you now, and I'm warning you that you are dealing with unscrupulous and dangerous men!"

"Yaas, wathah, bai Jove!"

Cutts stared at Tom Merry, his face working. Rage, apprehension, and amazement seemed to be struggling for the mastery in him. He had guessed the juniors suspected something; he knew they did now.

"You—you confounded little spies!" he hissed at last. "It—it's all lies! I haven't even seen the men you speak of!"

"You were talking to them three minutes ago," said Tom quietly. "And we know you were in the copse off Little Side with them last night, Cutts. Now, listen! That electric gun's missing again. We're warning you now that it—"

Tom Merry got no further, for at that moment Cutts' rage got the better of him. With a deep growl he flung himself at Tom Merry.

But the leader of Study No. 10 had almost expected it. He had seen the signs in the senior's face, and as Cutts jumped, Tom Merry sprang lightly to one side.

"Look out!" yelled Manners.

It happened in a flash. Both Tom Merry and Cutts had forgotten where they were standing, and, unable to stop himself, Cutts floundered for a brief instant on the grassy bank



As the Grammarian's outside-right drew back his foot to kick he seemed to wilt, and his foot swept feebly like a child's kick. At that moment there came a rush of feet, and Kildare had nipped the ball from under his opponent's nose and was away with it. "O-o-h!" "Ha, ha, ha!" A yell of disappointment went up, and mingled with it was a roar of derisive laughter. But D'Arcy did not laugh. Was it possible that the electric gun was again at work? (See page 18.)

ordering the towing-path, and then he went over the edge. Splash!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom.

The juniors stared at Cutts, who was floundering in four feet of water and a great deal of mud. He was a shocking sight, and the juniors could not help laughing at his frantic efforts to regain a footing.

But he managed it at last, and he clambered out on to the towing-path, his features—or what could be seen of them—working with helpless rage.

"You—you little fiends!" he panted. "I'll—I'll—"

He made a savage rush at the juniors, and they scattered in a flash.

"Run for it!" yelled Tom Merry.

And they ran for it. They were in a majority of seven to one, but they had no desire to come to grips with Gerald Cutts in his present state. So they fled.

They stopped running, however, on discovering that Gerald Cutts was not in pursuit. Tom Merry's face was grave again by then.

"Well, you fellows," he exclaimed as they stopped, panting and breathless, "what the thump are we to do about this business?"

"Blessed if I know!" confessed Blake moodily. "We're not much further than we were before, it strikes me. We suspected Cutts—"

"We do know now, though," said Tom. "But the trouble is we can prove nothing."

"We ought to report the whole thing," grunted Herries shortly.

"What's the good of that? He'd swear he doesn't know the brutes, and his word will carry more weight than ours. And we can't sneak and get the fellow sacked, anyway."

"That's so. But—but—"

"We can't let it rest heah, bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "We owe it to Mr. Vinin', deah boys, to unwavel this mystewy and to recovah his pwoperty. If Cutts has the gun—"

"Has he?" said Tom Merry dubiously. "And even if he has, I simply can't think he would be such a traitor as to give it to them. He's a rotter—we do know that! But I'm certain he'd draw the line at treachery like that."

"It does amount to treachery," admitted Blake. "Those scoundrels are agents of a foreign power, and any chap who helps 'em to get that gun will be a traitor to his country. That's what it amounts to to me."

"Yaas, wathah! Weally, y'know I nevah looked at it in that light, bai Jove!"

"Well, that's how it strikes me," said Tom. "And that is just where the mystery of Cutts comes in. I can't see the rotter helping those rascals to get it, and yet—"

"Yet he's thick with them, and we know he was with them last night," said Blake grimly. "It looks jolly suspiciously like it after last night's affair."

"I don't know. He can't have handed it to them yet, if he did have it," said Tom. "When we looked through that window it looked to me as if they were threatening. Anyway, it's no good guessing. The only thing for us to do is to watch Cutts—watch him night and day. We'll take it in turns to-night to watch if he goes out, and if he does we'll follow. We'll get to the bottom of this somehow. You fellows game?"

"Yes, rather!"

They were all game—more than game!

"That's settled then!" exclaimed Tom. "And now let's—"

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get back, for goodness' sake! It's past locking-up time now. We can discuss plans after prep. Come on!"

With that Tom broke into a sharp trot again, and they made tracks for St. Jim's.

Meanwhile, some distance behind them, Gerald Cutts had also made a resolution—a resolution of a far different nature.

After washing his hands and face in the river, and wiping himself down with handfuls of grass, the Fifth-Former started back for St. Jim's at a fast trot. He was boiling with rage, and his state of mind was not to be envied. But furious as he was with the juniors, he scarcely gave them a thought as he ran back to school. He knew they suspected, but he also knew that they knew nothing—could prove nothing. He did not fear them.

But Mr. Bulmer and Mr. Twine—as those rascals called themselves—he did fear, and his heart was sick with dread. He did not need Tom Merry's warning concerning them. He knew them for what they were, and the thought of being in their power made him shiver with fear. He wished now from the bottom of his heart that he had never tampered with the affair—had never met the rascals.

But it was too late now. And Cutts realised that he had to go through with the matter, one way or the other. He had either to give way to the rascals' demands, and hand over the electric gun, or else find the twenty pounds.

And the former Gerald Cutts was desperately determined never to do, come what may. For Tom Merry had been right in his surmise regarding Cutts. Rascal as he was, he knew where to draw the line. Though unscrupulous enough to play traitor to his school, he was resolved never to play traitor to his country. The foreigners should never get the Lightning Shaft if he could help it.

But the other course was open to him; he did not shrink from that. He had got the gun, and he meant to stick to it until his task was done. At all costs the Grammar School had to lose the match on the morrow. He was desperately determined to carry through his scheme now more than ever. He had betted heavily with Hake & Co., and he shuddered to think of failure. The gun would enable him to get out of the clutches of the rascally foreigners—or so he believed—and he did not mean to part with it until its work was done. Then it should be returned to its rightful owner. That was the resolution Gerald Cutts made as he ran back to St. Jim's in the gathering dusk.

But he had not counted on Tom Merry & Co.

CHAPTER 8. Trailing Cutts!

"WE'LL have to toss up for it," grinned Tom Merry. Blake grunted.

"Well, I hope my luck happens to be in, then," he said. "I badly wanted to see the match! Oh, blow Cutts!"

"Blow the rotter as much as you like," said Tom grimly. "But we've got to keep an eye on him! Someone must! We all wanted to see the match, for that matter, but watching Cutts is more important than watching the Grammar School match."

"Yaas, wathah, Tom Mewwy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, at all events, agreed with Tom Merry there.

It was just after dinner the next day—the day of the big senior match with Rylcombe Grammar School. Since parting from Gerald Cutts the night before, the juniors had kept strictly to their resolve to shadow the Fifth-Former.

They had watched his movements closely all that evening, and during the night they had taken it in turns to keep an eye on the Fifth-Form dormitory. They fully expected the black sheep of the Fifth to break bounds that night, and they were taking no chances.

It was a dreary, uncomfortable job, and their vigilance came to nothing. Gerald Cutts had not attempted to leave the dormitory, much less break bounds.

But they did not relax their vigilance, and even now Monty Lowther was keeping guard at the gates, whilst his chums discussed the problem as to who were to watch Gerald Cutts during the afternoon.

But while all agreed that it was more than likely he would make a move that afternoon, none were at all keen to spend a half-holiday shadowing Gerald Cutts. There was no junior match listed; but there was the big senior match at Rylcombe, and all were keen to go over to see it.

Blake nodded at last.

"Oh, all right," he grunted, "we'll abide by the toss, then."

Tom Merry took a coin from his pocket.

"Heads you go, tails we go!" he said.

"Right!"

Tom spun the coin, and the juniors watched it eagerly. It came down heads up. Manners and Tom Merry groaned, and Blake & Co. chuckled.

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"Hard luck, Tommy!" grinned Blake. "Come on, you chaps!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

And Blake & Co. hurried out, en route for Rylcombe.

"Just our luck!" growled Tom Merry ruefully. "You'd better join Lowther at the gates, Manners, and I'll go and hang round the Fifth Form passage."

"Right-ho!"

Manners got his cap and hurried out. Tom reflected a moment, and then he stuffed his cap in his pocket and went along towards Cutts' study.

As he strolled carelessly past the open door he heard Cutts' voice from within. He was evidently talking to his study-mates.

"Blow the match!" he was remarking sourly. "I'm not coming! You fellows can shove off if you like. I'm sticking in here for the afternoon!"

"You lazy slacker—"

Tom passed on, and heard no more. He reached the end of the passage, and there he stopped suddenly. A tall cupboard stood by the landing window, and after a quick glance up and down Tom pulled the door wide and slipped inside.

There was only one shelf in the cupboard, and this was just above the junior's head, and he found he could stand up quite easily. He pulled the door to within an inch, and settled down to the task he had set himself.

Most of the fellows had already left the school, to go to the match, and several times as he waited Tom Merry heard the opening and shutting of doors, and the tramp of feet in the passage. Then silence fell.

But not for long. Cutts' study door suddenly opened, and St. Leger, Gilmore, and Prye crowded out into the passage. Laughing and talking they went off along the passage, leaving Cutts' door open.

Their footsteps had scarcely died away when the form of Gerald Cutts appeared in the doorway. He gave a quick glance up and down and went inside again, closing the door gently behind him.

"Phew!" breathed Tom Merry. "That's jolly suspicious, anyway."

He hesitated a moment, and then he left his hiding-place and tiptoed along to the door of Cutts' study. The thought of spying was more than distasteful to the junior, but he felt there was no help for it. From what he had discovered regarding Cutts he felt perfectly justified in spying upon him.

He stooped and peeped through the keyhole. To his satisfaction, the key was not in the keyhole, and he got a glimpse of the interior of the room.

What he saw almost took his breath away.

Cutts was stooping in the far corner of the room near the fireplace. Tom could only see his feet and his hands, but he saw clearly what he was doing. He had dragged the carpet back, and was prising up one of the floorboards.

He lifted the board out at last, and took from the hollow beneath a long, narrow package. Then he hurriedly replaced the board and carpet.

Tom Merry held his breath. He guessed in a flash what the package contained. Satisfied now, the Shell junior tiptoed back to his hiding-place, his eyes gleaming with excited triumph.

He was only just in time; for the next instant the study door opened, and Cutts emerged. He was wearing a raincoat, and his arm gripped his side as though he held something beneath the coat.

"My hat!" breathed Tom. "So—so we were right! Oh, the—the cad!"

Cutts vanished round the corner of the passage, and the juniors followed him cautiously. Cutts walked swiftly out of the School House and across the quad without once glancing behind him. He looked hard at Lowther and Manners, lounging about the gateway, but they did not appear to see him.

When Tom Merry reached them a moment later, however, their eyes were gleaming excitedly.

"See him, Tommy?" demanded Lowther excitedly. "He'd something under his coat!"

"I know!" said Tom grimly. "Come on! For goodness' sake, go carefully!"

The juniors left the shelter of the gateway, and, running across the road, they dived through the hedge. In the lane a hundred yards ahead was Gerald Cutts, and he was hurrying fast.

Well screened by the hedge, the juniors hurried on after him. A peep now and again over the top of the hedge revealed to them the tall figure ahead, and for the rest they kept out of sight.

"Making for the village," muttered Lowther presently.

"The Green Man!" sniffed Manners.

But both were wrong, apparently. For suddenly Cutts was seen to leave the lane and cross the stile that gave admittance to the Rylcombe woods.

"That's rummy!" said Tom Merry. "Where's he making for?"

"Can't be taking a short cut for the Grammar School ground, surely?" suggested Lowther.

"We'll soon know," grunted Tom Merry.

In his mind Tom Merry was feeling sick and disgusted. He had hoped to the last that their suspicions regarding Cutts were wrong—that there was some other reason than the affair of the missing gun to account for Cutts being friendly with the men. He had lost that hope now. He was certain now that the package under Cutts' coat contained the gun, and that Cutts was about to hand it over to the scoundrelly foreigners.

The thought that St. Jim's held such an unscrupulous traitor and blackguard hurt him deeply. But it also made him more determined than ever to stop Cutts' rascally game.

A moment later the juniors were in the deep shadows of the autumn woods. They had lost sight of Cutts through the dark trees, but they could hear him ahead, and they followed the sounds.

A sudden thought came to Tom Merry as they pressed on. It occurred to him what madness it was to allow Cutts to hand over the gun at all.

"What fools we are, you fellows!" he panted, in alarm. "We must catch Cutts and take that thing from him. Come on—"

"But he'll hear us coming—"

"We must chance that!" snapped Tom. "What chance have we against those two desperate men and Cutts? Once handed over, it would be gone for ever. Don't you see?"

"My hat!"

Lowther and Manners did see, and they followed their leader hot-foot as he charged ahead, heedless now of being seen or heard.

They sighted their quarry less than a minute later, and as they did so he turned suddenly and looked back. Then, to their surprise, he left the well-trodden pathway abruptly and dived deeper into the woods.

"Did he spot us?" panted Lowther.

"I don't think so," was Tom's breathless answer. "Don't you see where he's making for? He's making for the Priory ruins, if I'm not mistaken!"

"That's it, by Jove!" agreed Manners. "He must be meeting those brutes there."

"Come on!" snapped Tom.

The juniors left the pathway and dived into the heart of the thick woods. They had lost both sight and sound of their quarry now, but they felt certain he was bound for the ruins and they made straight for them.

They emerged quite suddenly on the edge of a wide clearing, and before them was the old Priory set amidst the solitude of the heart of the woods.

As they halted Tom scanned the crumbling brick walls and masses of broken masonry in search of their quarry. He was just in time to see Cutts' form vanish beyond a still standing but long since dismantled window.

"Come on!" breathed Tom. "We've got him!"

But Tom spoke too soon. The juniors raced across the mossy stones towards the spot where Cutts had vanished. They reached it in a flash, but there was no sign of Cutts. He had indeed vanished.

"Rummy!" muttered Tom Merry. "He must be here somewhere, you fellows. He couldn't possibly have reached the woods again without us spotting him."

They looked about them, not a little puzzled. Of the ancient building only a few fragments of walls and windows remained, and not a fragment of the roof. There was scarcely cover for anyone there. A deep, brooding silence hung over the desolate place.

Tom Merry suddenly pointed to a yawning gap in the stone flags.

"The vaults!" he whispered. "He must have gone down; he disappeared just about here."

"Looks like it."

It seemed the only possible conclusion. Cutts could scarcely have reached the shelter of the woods without their seeing him.

Tom hesitated a moment, and then he stepped cautiously into the opening and descended the old steps, with his chums at his heels.

He reached the bottom, where an arched doorway gave admittance to the old crypt, and then he stopped.

The ancient oaken door, black with age, but still sound as a bell, was wide open, revealing a black aperture that was the entrance to the ancient vaults. All was silent and eerie, and a damp chill pervaded the place.

"Going in?" breathed Lowther, with a shiver.

"He must be inside somewhere," muttered Tom through his teeth. "We're going in; I've got some matches. He's here, and he knows we're after him. Come on!"

He stepped boldly into the smelly vaults, with his chums at his heels. Taking a box of matches from his pocket, Tom stopped a few yards inside and struck a match. He held it up, and as it flickered in the dank air they peered about them searchingly.

As they did so a slight sound caught their ears, and they wheeled abruptly—too late!

The great, massive door behind them slammed into the arched doorway with a grinding crash. Then the match flickered out, leaving them in a darkness that could almost be felt.

With a startled exclamation, Tom Merry jumped for the door, fumbling helplessly in the blackness. He guessed instantly what had happened. Cutts had been hiding outside, and he had trapped them. He had known, after all, that they were following him; and, like fools, they had allowed him to lead them into a trap.

Even as Tom struggled frantically to open the door, he heard movements outside—the sound of stealthy footsteps—and then silence.

Desperately Tom fumbled for the old, rusty iron ring. He found it at last and twisted and tugged with might and main.

But it was useless. They were hopelessly trapped.

And while that fact was dawning in on the minds of the luckless Terrible Three, Gerald Cutts was stumbling out of the ruins, his face white and strained. And as he hurried he wiped beads of perspiration from his forehead.

It had been a narrow escape; he realised that only too well. But for happening to glance behind him when leaving the pathway, all would have been lost.

"The—little fiends!" he breathed. "They must have been on my track; they must have been watching me since last night, if not before. But, by gad, I'll beat the little cads yet!"

Cutts' eyes gleamed savagely as he tramped on through the woods. He did not tramp far. He came suddenly to the edge of the wood, and then he stopped. Had Tom Merry only seen him then all might have been clear to them.

Before him was a football-ground—the Rylcombe Grammar School footer-ground. A great crowd of fellows were round the ropes—Grammarians and St. Jim's fellows. In the centre of the field the players were grouped together; but even as Cutts' eyes took in the scene a whistle pheepped, and the players were in motion.

The match had started.

"Now for it!" breathed Cutts.

Gerald Cutts stepped back a pace and dropped flat. He undid the package he carried and brought to view a queer instrument shaped like a Lewis machine-gun.

It was the Lightning Shaft—the missing electric gun.

Cutts took a deep breath and settled himself down, well screened by bushes, but with a clear view before him of the field. He had already, in the privacy of his study, tested the queer weapon, and he knew how to handle it. And in a moment he was ready for the rascally task he had set himself.

CHAPTER 7. Bowled Out!

"IT'S Gussy!"

"Dear old Gussy!"

"The one and only Gussy!"

Thus Gordon Gay & Co.

Blake & Co. arrived on the Rylcombe Grammar School ground just before the match started, and as they took their stand on the touchline, Gordon Gay with his chums Frank Monk and the two Wootton brothers joined them. At the moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had happened to stop to drop a word in season to his minor, young Wally D'Arcy, and as Gussy joined his chums again—after a one-sided argument with the cheery Wally—Gordon Gay & Co. greeted him as above.

Arthur Augustus frowned portentously.

The swell of the Fourth was not at all keen upon the company of Gordon Gay & Co. Not that Gussy disliked them actually. But, in the view of Arthur Augustus, the cheery Grammarian juniors had no sense of the fitness of things, especially as regards a fellow's "clobber."

"Weally, you know, Gay—" he began.

"Good old Gussy!" went on Gordon Gay, with a chuckle.

"I say, Gus, is that the same topper I knocked off with a snowball last Christmas, old top?"

"Bai Jove, weally—"

"I'm blessed if I can see what he wants to come to a footer match in a topper for!" remarked Frank Monk.

"That is unless it's a fixture!"

"I've heard he sleeps in it!" said Wootton major seriously.

"So I suppose it must be."

"Bai Jove, you wotten asses—"

"Let's see if it is a fixture," added the humorous Gordon Gay. And he stepped forward and tapped Gussy's beautiful silk hat clean over Gussy's indignant eyes.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, struggling with his hat. "You—you uttah wuffians! I will thwash you feafefully for that, you wottah! Put your fists up, you weckless wottah!"

And having raised his hat from over his eyes after a struggle, Arthur Augustus advanced upon the grinning Grammarian leader, with a warlike gleam in his noble eye.

"Gussy!" ejaculated Blake, in a shocked voice. "Have you forgotten the fact that you are merely a visitor here? Is that the way to treat your hosts?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus went red, and he hurriedly pulled his cuffs back into position. There was a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you gwinin' wotiah, Blake!" said D'Arcy wrathfully. "You were pullin' my leg, bai Jove!"

"Go hon!" remarked Jack Blake. "Not at all, old dear! Aren't you a visitor here? You surely don't expect me to stand by and allow you to disgrace us by kicking up a disturbance here, Gussy?"

Arthur Augustus blinked round through his monocle at the grinning juniors for fully ten seconds. It was supposed to be a withering glance, but it had no effect on the smiles of Gordon Gay & Co. or Gussy's own chums. Then he spoke:

"Wats!" he snorted wrathfully. "Wats, you gwinin' idiots!"

And with that Arthur Augustus marched away with his head in the air.

As a matter of fact, he was not sorry to be away from the vicinity of Gordon Gay & Co. He never felt quite safe or at his ease when those cheery practical jokers were about. So Arthur Augustus strolled on loftily, and he did not stop until he had put the width of the footer ground between himself and them.

Then he stopped to watch the match. There were very few fellows on that side of the ground; and Gussy felt glad he had moved away from the crush. A fellow's "clobber" was apt to get muddled and rumped in a crush. That was Gussy's view.

Arthur Augustus was a keen footballer himself, and he soon became engrossed in the play.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "Old Delamere's playin' well to-day!"

Delamere, the Grammar School skipper was certainly playing well. He was leading his men with a rare dash, and it was easy to see they were "out for blood."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus again—breathlessly this time. "Oh, good man!"

The Grammar School forwards had got the ball, and after a brilliant orgy of passing they swept towards the Saints' goal like a well-oiled machine. The movement was followed by a terrific struggle before the goal-mouth, and then Delamere sent the ball in a beautifully timed pass out to his outside-right, who was unguarded, and ready. A wild yell went up from the Grammarians.

"Shoot, man—shoot!"

But the Grammarian failed to shoot.

He tapped the ball neatly enough, and steadied himself for the shot. He drew back his foot, but even as he kicked he seemed to wilt, and his foot swept feebly like a child's kick. And in that instant of time there came a rush of feet, and Kildare had nipped the ball away from him and was away with it.

"O-h-h-h!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A yell of disappointment went up, and mingled with it was a roar of derisive laughter. The "miskick" had been so hopelessly feeble that, angry as they were, even the Grammarians could scarcely refrain from laughing.

But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not laugh. He was astounded. The miskick had taken place scarcely a dozen yards from where he was standing, and he had seen what nobody else, apparently, had seen.

He had seen how, just at the critical moment, the player had given a violent start, as though he had been stung. And he had noted his look of stunned bewilderment as Kildare had nipped in and robbed him. He had noted, also, that immediately afterwards the player was rubbing his hands together as though they tingled.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

It reminded him of the Wednesday afternoon when so many of his fellow-players, including himself, had failed just as dismally in as exactly a similar manner. He remembered the curious tingling of his own hands, and his own bewilderment.

Was it possible that the electric gun was again at work? Racke had been the culprit before; he had been hidden in the copse off Little Side, and he had utterly ruined the game by taking pot-shots at the players. It struck D'Arcy quite suddenly as being more than possible. The gun was missing, and the dark woods behind him would have hidden an army of unscrupulous snipers.

The sudden suspicion took Arthur Augustus by storm; it aroused his detective instincts once again, and the next moment he was strolling casually along the touchline.

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He did not venture to look towards the black maw of the woods bordering the ground. He knew it would be folly to arouse the spoil-sport's suspicions by doing so. Nor did he wait for further proof.

There was a big crowd near the St. Jim's goal, and after mingling with them for a few moments Arthur Augustus edged his way nearer to the woods, and then made a stealthy dash for them.

He plunged into the woods, and a moment later was scouting stealthily along the edge, parallel with the ground. And he had scarcely been treading the soft carpet of leaves many seconds, when his suspicions were verified in a startling manner.

From a mass of thickets facing him there sounded a faint, curious crackling—sharp and crisp like the tearing of paper. It was followed almost instantly by a sudden roar from the distant footer ground—a roar of execration, mingled with derisive laughter.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "I was wight! It—it must be that wascal Cutts!"

It was Cutts. Arthur Augustus came upon him suddenly. He was lying full length in the long grass, the electric gun to his shoulder, his eyes glittering with triumph.

He almost jumped out of his skin as Arthur Augustus stepped softly to his side.

"You—you uttah wascal!" panted the swell of the Fourth, his voice trembling with indignant disgust. "You wotten spoil-sport!"

The gun dropped from the Fifth-Former's suddenly nerveless fingers. His face went white as chalk. Only three days ago he had dropped on Racke in just such another manner. And now he was caught.

Cutts' features showed horror and utter consternation for a moment. Then his sallow cheeks flushed with sudden, helpless rage, and he sprang up and gripped the junior savagely.

"You spying little hound!" he hissed. "You—"

"Pway welease me, Cutts!" said Arthur Augustus quietly, but tensely. "If you value your hide, I would advise you not to cause a disturbance heah. I have only to shout, and you would be mobbed by the crowd out theah!"

Cutts released his grasp and staggered back. He suddenly grasped the junior's meaning, and he trembled as it occurred to him what would happen if the crowd knew. He would get the ragging and mobbing of his life at the hands of the irate crowd.

His rage left him suddenly, and his face went haggard. Fury and temper would never help him now, and he knew it.

"D'Arcy," he stammered, through trembling lips, "you won't give me away? I shall be mobbed! I shall be kicked out of St. Jim's! I'll own up—I'll explain if you'll promise—"

"I shall pwomise nothin', you wascal!" exclaimed the disgusted Arthur Augustus. "So—so this is why you wanted the gun, Cutts. It was not to hand ovah to those foweygn wuffians, aftah all, bai Jove?"

"It wasn't—it wasn't!" panted Cutts eagerly. "I swear to you, D'Arcy, that I would die, rather than hand it over to those brutes! I—I had to do this!" groaned Cutts, his face flushing with shame. "They'd got me, and this was my only way out. You—you won't—"

"I shall pwomise nothin'!" interrupted D'Arcy curtly. "I shall discuss what is to be done in the matiah with Mewwy and Blake, Cutts. Meanwhile, I will take charge of this w'etched weapon, bai Jove!"

He stooped to pick up the weapon on the grass, but Cutts was before him. He snatched it up, his face desperate.

"No, you don't, D'Arcy!" he hissed, through his clenched teeth. "I've not finished with it yet! St. Jim's have got to win—they must win! It's my only chance!"

D'Arcy's eyes flashed.

"Vewy well, Cutts!" he said, with deadly earnestness. "They shall not win by foul means, howevah!"

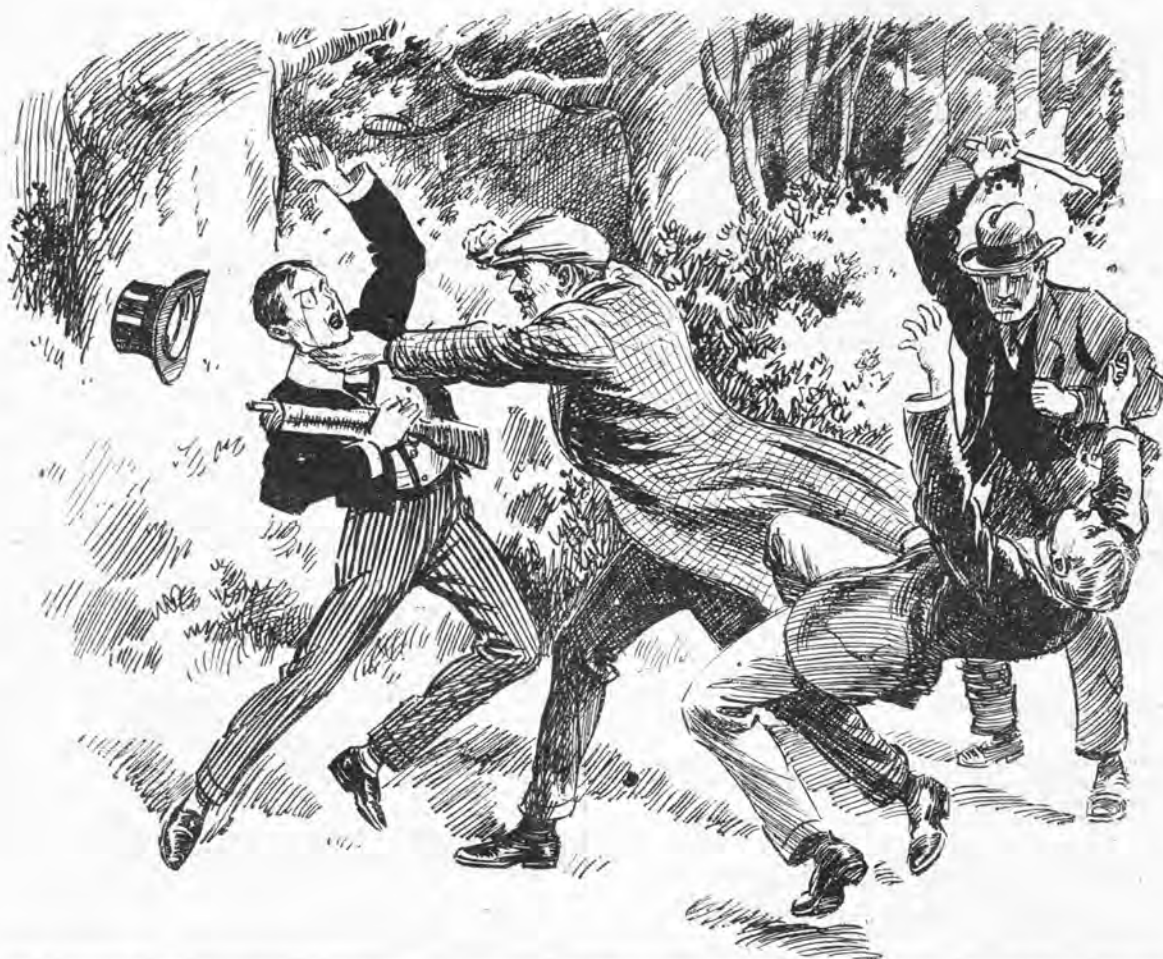
With that Arthur Augustus stepped determinedly towards the thin screen of bushes bordering the ground. His intention was obvious, and Cutts gave a hoarse cry and dragged him back.

"Don't!" he panted. "I—I give way, D'Arcy. Don't shout, for Heaven's sake!"

He offered the gun to Arthur Augustus almost eagerly. He saw there was no help for it now.

Arthur Augustus took it without a word, and turned on his heel. He was thankful that Cutts had saved him the necessity of shouting for help. He shuddered to think of the disgrace the revelation of Cutts' plotting would bring on St. Jim's. The thought of seeking his chums did occur to Arthur Augustus, but after a moment's reflection he decided against that course. The sooner the gun was safe in its owner's hands the better.

He turned abruptly and dived into the woods, intending to take the footpath to St. Jim's. In a moment he had vanished from the sight of Gerald Cutts.



Cutts took the combatants completely by surprise, and the sheer force of his rush sent them sprawling. His fist connected with Mr. Bulmer's clean-shaven jaw with a jar that almost numbed his knuckles. Then a wild swing from a heavy stick struck his forehead and Cutts went down in a heap. At that moment Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went down also, and the Lightning Shaft flew from his clinging grasp. (See this page.)

Cutts stared after him, motionless. His mind seemed numbed with fear and hopeless despair. He roused himself suddenly with a groan.

It was all up! D'Arcy would hand over the gun; he would tell all, and he would be ruined—would be kicked out of St. Jim's in disgrace, unless—

Unless he could stop D'Arcy from speaking!

He knew D'Arcy's character well. He knew that D'Arcy was what some people called good-natured and generous, and what he himself called "soft" and "soapy." It was hopeless thinking of the gun now; but he could perhaps save himself, could talk the good-hearted Gussy round to shielding him.

With that object in his mind, Cutts turned abruptly, and dived after Arthur Augustus. What a fool he had been to let him go!

He knew that D'Arcy was making for the footpath, and he started in pursuit, plunging through the undergrowth at breakneck speed. He stopped abruptly, however, as a sudden shrill cry ran out ahead—a cry for help.

"Help! Oh, help!"

It was D'Arcy's voice, and some strange intuition warned Cutts what it portended.

"By gad!" he panted, and without a second's hesitation he started off headlong for the sound. He reached the spot with a rush.

It was Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sure enough! He was struggling frantically in the grasp of two men, who were attempting to tear from his clinging grasp the precious weapon.

Cutts had no need to look at the men; he knew already who they were, and he went into the struggling three like a whirlwind. He had never been noted for pluck, but at that moment a change seemed to come over Gerald Cutts.

In that moment he forgot his own wretched troubles—forgot his hatred of D'Arcy! His one desperate thought was to save the invention from falling into the hands of the men who were his tormentors and his country's enemies.

He took the combatants completely by surprise, and the sheer force of his rush sent them sprawling away. His fist connected with Mr. Bulmer's clean-shaven jaw with a jar that almost numbed his knuckles.

Then a wild swing from a heavy stick struck his forehead, and he himself went down in a heap. At the same moment Arthur Augustus went down also, and the Lightning Shaft flew from his clinging grasp.

It dropped almost at Cutts' fingers, and though half-dazed, the senior's grasp closed upon it, and he leaped to his feet with a yell:

"Run for it, D'Arcy!"

As he yelled he dodged a second furious blow of Mr. Twine's stick, and leaped away into the woods, leaving the footpath behind him.

His brain was reeling, and he staggered drunkenly as he ran. That blow on the temple had almost scattered his senses, and he knew his only chance of escape was by losing himself in the woods.

He plunged on desperately. Behind him he heard the thud of pursuit, and he crashed on, panting hoarsely as he ran. There came from behind the sharp crack of an automatic, and something flicked away a twig just above his head.

But Cutts dashed on, unheeding, and then quite abruptly he emerged from the twilight of the dim woods into an open space, dotted with crumbling masses of moss-grown masonry.

It was the old Priory, and at sight of it Cutts' heart leaped, and he ran drunkenly among the ruins, and dived for the aperture that gave admittance to the crypt, shouting madly as he ran.

The crashing of pursuit was at his heels, and he almost hurled himself down the broken stairway. He came up against the closed door with a thud, and next moment was tearing frantically at the fastenings of the massive door.

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CHAPTER 10.
No Surrender!

"HALLO!" gasped Tom Merry. "What's that?"
In the gloom and damp of the vaults beneath the old Priory ruins, Tom Merry had leaped to his feet with a relieved gasp.

It was nearly an hour since Gerald Cutts had made them prisoners in that dismal prison, and the juniors had long ago ceased to hammer and struggle with the door. They knew that Cutts would never dare to leave them there for long, and they had spent the time crouching on the stone flags in the darkness discussing the position in low tones, and vowing that they would do to Gerald Cutts when he did release them.

It was a humiliating position, besides being decidedly uncomfortable, and the hapless juniors blamed themselves bitterly for having been tricked so easily.

And now, in a period of gloomy silence, a sudden sound from above had reached their ears, and Tom had jumped up with that relieved exclamation.

Even as he did so the sound resolved itself into running footsteps on the stone flags above, and then came a shout—hoarse and appealing.

"Merry—quick! For Heaven's sake get ready!"

"What the thump—"

"That's Cutts' voice!" gasped Manners. "Oh, my hat!"

There came the sudden scrambling of frantic feet on the steps, followed instantly by a thud on the door. Then other footsteps became heard from above—heavy footsteps that rang hollowly on the flagstones.

Tom Merry jumped to the door, and grasped the ring. He could feel rather than hear Cutts fumbling and wrenching at the ring without. Through the thick door sounded Cutts' voice again:

"They're after me, Merry! Look out!"

Just in time Tom leaped from the door as it swept inwards, and Gerald Cutts lurched rather than dived in.

"What—what—"

They caught a brief glimpse of daylight—of Cutts' white face, streaked with a trickle of red, and next instant the door crashed to again, and Cutts had his back to it.

"Help me!" he panted. "The door, you idiots!"

Heavy footsteps sounded on the steps without—the sound of a deep oath reached them; and then Tom Merry & Co. understood.

They were at the door in a flash—and only just in time, for even as they reached it and flung their weight against it, it gave a little under a furious onslaught from without.

"Hold on!" panted Tom Merry.

He left them to hold the door, and, striking a match, he glanced round the gloomy vaults. He soon saw what he wanted—masses of broken stone, and several big balks of broken timber, black with age.

In a moment he was at work, frantically dragging the heavy articles against the door. Lowther left the door then, and with his aid Tom managed to jam a huge beam of blackened oak between a stout stone pillar and the old door.

"Safe enough now," he panted. "Cutts—"

Cutts reeled away from the door, and stumbled against Tom in the blackness. Something fell to the stone floor with a metallic clang.

"The—gun!" gasped Cutts faintly. "I've beaten the brutes!"

"You—you've got it there," breathed Tom. "But—but weren't you—"

He broke off as he felt rather than saw Cutts slithering to the floor. He clutched him just in time, and lowered him gently, taking the senior's head on his knees.

"He's fainted, I think!" groaned Tom. "Oh, great Scott! What a fine pickle! I suppose those chaps out—"

Again he broke off as the thunderous blows on the door suddenly ceased, and a voice, hoarse with rage, came through to them.

"Master Cutts, do you hear me? Open this door, or it will be the worse for you. Hand out that instrument, and we'll let you go unharmed."

The juniors did not trouble to answer for Cutts.

There was a moment's wait, and then came the voice again, trembling with fury.

"Master Cutts, I'll give you one more chance! Open this door and hand us the gun. We mean to have it at all costs. You've double-crossed us, but we'll let that go. Hand the gun over, and you shall have your IOU's and go free."

"Rats!" answered Tom Merry in a shout. "Go and eat coke!"

"IOU's, eh?" breathed Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry said nothing, but his eyes were gleaming. He had not failed to hear that queer remark. But it told him little. The mystery of it all was utterly beyond him.

Outside, the men were waiting, and the juniors could hear their muttering voices. There sounded a savage exclamation

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at last, and the sound of footsteps tramping up the steps outside.

"What's the game now?" breathed Tom Merry.

They soon knew! Evidently the rascals were getting impatient. The footsteps were heard returning, and a moment later a faint rustling and crackling sound came to the startled juniors' ears.

"What's that?" muttered Lowther uneasily. "I don't like the sound—"

"Brushwood," answered Tom Merry in a low tone. "The ruffians are piling brushwood against the door."

"Oh, my hat!"

"They mean to burn us out, or smoke us out, you chaps," muttered Tom, feeling suddenly faint. "We're up against it, I'm afraid."

There was a heavy silence in the gloomy vaults as the horrified juniors grasped the horrible possibility. Tom felt Cutts move in his arms.

"What is it, Merry?" he gasped faintly.

"They're piling brushwood at the door," muttered Tom. "They mean to burn us out, the villains! Shall we open, and make a rush for it, you chaps?"

"No; don't do that, Merry!" It was Cutts who answered.

"Don't do that. The rascals are armed, and they won't hesitate to shoot. Stick it out! Young D'Arcy knows they were after me. He'll fetch help perhaps. They'll see the smoke if the rotters light the fire. Stick it out!"

The juniors were staggered to get this advice from Gerald Cutts. They felt a sudden respect for the black-sheep of the Fifth.

"We'll stick it as long as we can, anyway," said Tom Merry through his clenched teeth. "Perhaps help will come in time."

As Tom spoke the voice of Bulmer came from outside again. "You in there—listen!" he shouted in a tone of deadly menace. "I've piled brushwood outside against the door. I'll give you one minute to decide. Come out, and you shall go unharmed; refuse, and I set light to this brushwood, and burn you out like rats in a hole!"

"Burn away, you scoundrels!" shouted Tom Merry.

A silence fell on the occupants of the vaults. They were white-faced and trembling, but they were resolved to stick it out—to defy the scoundrels come what may. They still had a lingering hope, however, that the men, dangerous as they had proved themselves, would never dare to carry their threat into execution.

That hope soon left them. The minute ended, and suddenly from outside the door came a brisk, ominous crackling and hissing. A pungent smell of burning came through the cracks and crannies of the door.

"They—they've done it!" panted Tom Merry. "Back, you fellows—get farther back in the vaults."

The juniors and Cutts pressed back into the dark recesses of the vaults, and curling wreaths of smoke, visible even in the blackness, came after them. The crypt was not large, and soon they were crouching, white and shaking, against the far wall.

A sudden gleam of red light flickered at the door, and a gust of flame-riven smoke burst into the crypt.

"We're done!" gasped Manners with a groan, coughing as the pungent smoke entered his lungs. "The door's burning."

"We're not done yet!" panted Tom Merry. "Look here, it will be better to make a rush and fight for it rather than be burned or choked like rats. Are you game to try?"

"Anything but this," groaned Cutts. "Come on!"

"Half a minute!" gasped Tom. He fumbled about for a moment in the darkness, then he stood up. "I've hidden the gun; now I'm ready."

Through the choking, blinding smoke they worked their way towards the door, coughing and gasping painfully, their eyes smarting and stinging.

They reached the big baulk of timber, and grasped it. And in the instant they did so, from outside came a sudden shout—a shout that sent the blood rushing to the hearts of the besieged.

"Wescue, St. Jim's! Hold on, you fellows, bai Jove!"

"Gussy's voice!" yelled Tom Merry, choking and coughing violently in sudden delighted excitement. "Oh, thank Heaven!"

The door was now blazing furiously, and the four realized that it was neck or nothing for them now. They tugged frantically at the timber, and flung it away into the smoke-riven darkness.

Tom Merry grasped the door, heedless of burns. To their ears came the sounds of a furious struggle beyond the door, intermingled with shouts and oaths.

The stones and barricade was down at last, and as the door swung inwards, the juniors and Cutts rushed through the blazing mass of brushwood outside.

"Hurrah! Here they are!"

It was Blake's voice, and it sounded sweet to the half-conscious St. Jim's fellows, as they were helped by eager hands

(Continued on page 27.)

CHUMS OF THE IRON WAY!



A Thrilling Yarn of Exciting Adventure on the Railway! By ROLAND SPENCER and FRANCIS WARWICK.

CHAPTER 1.

The "Yellow Peril!"

"**G**REAT Electric Northern open!" shouted Jimmy Speed, newsboy. "Great Electric Northern's first London-Edinburgh electric express 'completes record run! Death-knell o' steam!"

The youngster dodged across the busy street to a fat man who beckoned.

"Death-knell o' steam!" cried Jimmy, as he thrust out the paper that contained that phrase as a headline. He hurried on. "Death-knell o' steam!"

But somehow Jimmy Speed, as cheery a youngster as was to be found in Blackhampton, the greatest railway town in the Midlands, did not look particularly cheery just now, for all that his papers were selling like hot cakes.

For throughout Blackhampton—that great, smoke-blackened city, a city of clanging workshops and mighty cranes, and mile on mile of gleaming sidings, and all the grimy glamour of a great railway town—on all sides was a depressing air of brooding anxiety, of tense apprehension, as though a dark, menacing cloud hung over the place and obscured the sun. And this odd atmosphere of gloom had affected even Jimmy's usual cheery grin.

At every street corner little groups of men were gathered—men, for the most part, black from the furnace or workshop, clad in greasy, dirty overalls, men of the Iron Way. For, excepting the shopkeepers, nearly all the male population of Blackhampton were employed by the Great Scottish and Central Railway.

The town was the heart and brain of that great railway—the premier railroad of Great Britain, before the Electric Northern, with its huge electric locomotives, weird yellow monsters, had been built at enormous cost, the lines electrified, and opened officially at last.

"Death-knell o' steam!" shouted Jimmy, as a group of railwaymen stopped him, and four more copies of the "Blackhampton Star" were changed into ready money.

"Death-knell o' steam, eh?" growled a huge man in overalls, and there was bitterness in his voice. "We'll see, that's all. Steam ain't done for yet, not by a long way! The Great Electric Northern's out to smash us, I s'pose, wi' their bloomin' yellow freak locos. But the Great Scottish and Central ain't dead yet, in spite o' this bloomin' Yellow Peril!"

Jimmy dodged round the group. A handsome private car had drawn up at the kerb. Out of it stepped an elderly man in a silk hat—a man tall and straight, with a well-clipped iron-grey moustache, and a strong, determined mouth. He slipped a hand into his trousers-pocket.

"Paper, boy!" he cried quickly.

Jimmy handed him the paper—it was his last but one. He saw that the strong, handsome face was a little haggard. Swiftly the other's eyes scanned the headlines: "Great Electric Northern Opens!" "Record London-Edinburgh Run!" "The New Locomotive!" "Death-knell of Steam!"

A bitter smile showed for a moment on the lips of the man

who read them. Clearly for the moment he had forgotten that he was in a public street, as he muttered half-aloud:

"So the fight has begun! Langrish swore to crush us, to smash us with the wheels of his yellow monsters. Those were his very words. Swore to bring us to our knees till we had to sell to him. But we refused to sell then, and we'll never sell! We'll fight him—brain and furnace and hammer—and the Scottish and Central shall win!"

Jimmy stood staring open-mouthed. He caught the low-muttered words, and he wondered who this haggard-faced man was.

"Some big pot on the railway, it's a safe bet," the youngster told himself. "Seems cut up about this new railway. Langrish? That's the name of the millionaire bloke at the head of the Electric Northern. Granite Langrish they call him at Carnborough."

Carnborough was the town, only nine miles from Blackhampton, that had been adapted as the headquarters of the new railway. A small town a few years ago, it was now as big as Blackhampton. Two hundred acres of ground were covered by the G.E.N.'s locomotive workshops and yards, and all around were miles of new yellow-brick streets where the employees of the first big electric railway lived. There was an entire absence of smoke and grime about Carnborough. It did not seem natural for a railway town.

Langrish, with his millions behind him, and his square-jawed determination, never did things by halves. The wages he paid his 7,000 workpeople at Carnborough had caused a good deal of murmuring and discontent at Blackhampton. The Great Scottish and Central had raised their own men's wages, but they could not afford to pay quite what Langrish paid. In consequence, some of the employees of the G.S.C. had left Blackhampton for Carnborough—but only a very few. For the people of Blackhampton loved their railway, and the majority would no more have thought of deserting to the enemy than Jim would have thought of backing the Carnborough Rovers against the Blackhampton Albion.

He sold his last paper to a gloomy coffee-stall keeper. Everyone, whether actually employed on the railway or not, was affected by the cloud that hung over Blackhampton. After leaving this man Jim turned down the steep road that led to his favourite spot in the country not far from the town.

This was at the northern end of the Blackhampton Long Tunnel, where gleaming rails of the London-Edinburgh main line of the G.S.C. ran through a straight cutting and plunged into the big tunnel on their way to London. Jimmy, who loved locomotives and railways with every fibre of his being, asked for no better holiday at any time than a seat on the grass by that smoke-blackened tunnel mouth, four miles from the town.

The boy reached the foot of the hill through which the tunnel led, and climbed the red-brick wall which bounded the railway from the road.

Jimmy was in luck. The first thing that met his eyes in

the deep cutting was a long express, standing motionless, the locomotive panting like a monster of life after great exertion. The boy sat down on the grass at the top of the steep slope, his shining eyes riveted on the locomotive below.

The great blue-and-gold monster seemed almost impatient to recommence her dash as fast as steam and steel could drive her towards the north as she stood by the signal that was raised against her. A plume of white steam hissed from her lifting safety-valve, and from the squat funnel the quivering fumes danced upwards in the still air.

Jimmy Speed's eyes gleamed, fascinated.

"My hat, what a beauty!" he muttered. "Hanged if I wouldn't give a thousand quid—a thousand crackling quidlets—for a job on her footplate!"

The fact that at the moment Jimmy hadn't a thousand pence to call his own was a mere detail. If he had had the money, he would have been true enough to his word, for all that. For the ambition of his life was to find himself in the great cab of just such a monster as the blue-and-gold Pacific in the cutting below.

There came a rattle of wires, and, with a clash, the signal arm fell. The fireman, who had swung himself out with the oil-can to the big steam-wreathed cylinders, climbed back to the cab as the huge six-coupled driving-wheels started, slipped, ground sparks, gripped the sanded rails, and began to pull the heavy train off on its journey.

Slowly, majestically, the magnificent 4-6-2 engine plunged into the mysterious maw of the Blackhampton Long Tunnel, with a shrill, long-drawn whistle echoing back out of the darkness. Swiftly gathering speed, the long white coaches vanished one by one, till all that was left of the London-Edinburgh express was a lazy stream of smoke curling back out of the tunnel.

Jimmy sighed—a deep sigh, like that of a high-powered suction-pump.

"That's the life for you, James," he told himself. "If you don't take the Scottish express up north at eighty miles an hour some day, you're not the lad I hope you are!"

And his freckled face, with its snub nose and big, humorous mouth, was set with that grimly determined look that always meant business with Jimmy.

A slow goods-train on the down line rumbled out of the tunnel and clanked past in the cutting below. He watched it with longing eyes.

"Wish I could get a job in the railway shops of the G.S.C.," he mused. "But it would only be a waste of time asking, I know, with them so full. Still, I'm hanged if I mean to sell papers all my life!"

Jimmy broke off as there came two crashes in quick succession. He saw that both the home signal and the fish-tailed distant signal of the signal-post at the tunnel mouth had fallen. Jimmy knew from this that the line was clear for at least two blocks ahead, and glancing down the line, far away he could see a billow of white smoke rapidly approaching as an express goods train came thundering towards the long cutting, full speed for the tunnel mouth.

But the next moment the youngster had leapt to his feet. A startled look was in his eyes. Above the distant roar of the train, from not far away, a loud cry had cut the air like a knife.

"What on earth's that?" he cried.

Something in the sudden cry had set every nerve in his stocky frame quivering.

It seemed to have come from beyond the stone wall behind him—the wall over which Jimmy had climbed from the road ten minutes ago. Even as he swung round, a cry of horror leapt to the youngster's lips.

There came a staggering crash. The wall not ten yards away seemed to quiver and bulge. Jimmy had a brief vision of a white, staring face, as with outflung arms a hurtling form came spinning over the wall. With a nasty thud the flying form struck the grass at the top of the steep slope.

For a moment the boy was gazing into a face ghastly white, with closed eyes and a crimson gash on the brow. Even as the body began rolling, Jimmy's eyes instinctively turned towards the great locomotive that was roaring through the cutting. A cry of horror choked in his throat. Like a flash he leapt towards that rolling form, for unless he could seize the unconscious man he knew that a dreadful death under those flying wheels must be the other's fate.

He clutched desperately at an outflung arm. But his hand closed on empty air. Down the steep slope the man went, rolling faster and faster, down, down.

Jimmy was agile and wiry, but it was none too easy to keep his footing as he leapt down after the rolling form of this man who evidently had been flung from some motor-car that had crashed into the wall above.

With a despairing effort, Jimmy threw himself down in mad pursuit. Again he flung out a hand, and this time his strong fingers closed upon the lapel of the other's coat. He heard the cloth tear. But it held, and with a jerk Jimmy was dragged off his feet.

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The next moment, still clutching the unconscious man, Jimmy was rolling helplessly down towards the gleaming rails, with a piercing shriek from the onrushing train echoing in his ears.

CHAPTER 2.

By a Hair's Breadth!

JIMMY gave a gasping cry—a cry drowned by the sudden grinding of brakes from the flying train. The driver had seen the figures on the slope, and with a shower of sparks ripped from the rails by the locked wheels, the whirlwind speed was checked. But Jim realised as he felt himself slip that the train could never stop, in time.

His lips were dry and hot, but something in his brain seemed icy cold—the coldness of fear. His hand still clutched the unconscious man—the man whose weight was dragging him down to death.

For a moment the impulse was upon the youngster to relinquish his hold. He knew that if he had both hands free he could save himself. But that would mean death for the other, and he could not bring himself to leave the man to that dreadful fate.

He gripped tighter, his left hand clawing feverishly at the coarse tufts of grass. Then he ceased to slide, and the thought came to him that he had reached the bottom of the slope at last. The roar of the train was like thunder in his ears, and he could hear a torrent of wind tearing at his hair, could feel the flung sparks from the mighty wheels sting his hands and face.

Then the train was past, and Jimmy, panting and dazed, realised that when within a yard of the gleaming metals along which the train had swept, his fingers had caught at last. And his other hand, entwined in the torn cloth of the unconscious man's coat, had held the other a hair's breadth from a fate too terrible to be imagined.

The youngster's brain was in a whirl. Sick and dazed, he lay half senseless face down on the slope. Then he felt a hand on his shoulder shaking him. He looked up, to find himself staring into the face of a man in a guard's uniform. "What's the game, eh?" growled the guard, his face very white. "What do you fancy you're a-doing of?"

Jimmy felt a little aggrieved.

"Think I've been shooting the chute for the fun of the thing?" he demanded. "If so, guess again."

He sat up. His hands were torn and bleeding, his head was singing, and a great bruise was on his temple. But his thoughts for the moment were for the man whose life he had saved.

He glanced down, and a quick exclamation broke from him.

"My only hat!"

For he was looking into the face of the man with the iron-grey moustache—the man who had seemed so affected by the headlines of the paper Jimmy had sold him less than two hours ago!

Oddly enough, the guard, too, seemed startled when his eyes fell on the face of the unconscious man who lay by the gleaming rail. He turned with a low whistle of amazement to a young man in greasy overalls and cap, his boyish face thick with oil and coal dust, who had just come hurrying from the engine. The long goods train had come to a standstill in the mouth of the tunnel, and Jimmy could just make out the startled face of the driver as he leant out of the cab and stared back through the gloom.

"We hit him?" cried the young fireman anxiously as he ran up.

The guard shook his head.

"No," he answered hoarsely. "I saw we didn't strike either. But, Sam Blundell, d'ye see who this is?"

Already the guard was kneeling by the unconscious man. From the fireman came a sudden exclamation. He was a young fair-haired fellow, with pleasant, well-cut features, as Jim could see, despite their coating of grime. Now his face was startled and amazed as he gazed down.

"Thunder!" he breathed. "It's Sir Richard Grant, the chief director!"

Jimmy's jaw dropped with amazement. He could scarcely believe his ears. Sir Richard Grant, chief director of the Great Scottish and Central Railway! And he, Jimmy, had saved his life!

The fireman was kneeling beside Sir Richard now, his face startled and anxious. The driver, a short, tubby man, came running to the scene. Everyone had forgotten Jimmy for the moment. Then the fireman, whom the guard had called Sam Blundell, looked up.

"How on earth did this happen?" he asked Jim Speed. "Can you tell us that?"

Jimmy explained.

Down the slope three or four people, attracted by the

smashed motor-car and the unconscious chauffeur on the other side of the wall above, were already slithering. And then the senseless man's eyes flickered open at last.

Sir Richard was not badly hurt. The blow on the head when he had been hurled clean over the wall had stunned him for the time, but that was all. A man of strong brain, he soon regained his senses. And his eyes fell on Jimmy's torn clothes and bleeding hands.

"Why—why—" he began shakily. "My lad, you seem to have been hurt. Did the car hit you?"

All eyes turned on Jimmy. The young fireman laughed as Jimmy reddened.

"I think the youngster saved your life, Sir Richard," he said. "As far as I could see from the cab, he was holding you, stopping you from rolling under our wheels."

The railway magnate smiled faintly as he held out an unsteady hand.

"I feel a good deal shaken just now," he said. "I can't thank you fully at the moment, my boy. But I want to see you, if you'll come back with me."

And so it was that Jimmy Speed, wide-eyed and nervous, found himself an hour later in the library of Carrington Hall, with Sir Richard Grant of the G.S.C. leaning back a little wearily in his high-backed chair, his head bandaged, his eyes on Jimmy.

"You say you've no relations in the world, Speed?" said the baronet thoughtfully. "Well, I suppose you don't want to sell papers all your days?"

"That I don't, sir," said Jimmy decidedly. In his eyes was a sudden gleam. Was his long-cherished ambition of getting a job on the G.S.C. about to be realised?

"Would you care to start in the locomotive shops at Blackhampton next Monday?" asked Sir Richard Grant, and he laughed at the youngster's look. "I can see you would!" His eyes wandered thoughtfully to a cheque-book lying on the desk by him. "But apart from that, Speed, I should like—"

Jimmy interrupted in his eagerness.

"By jingo, sir, if you would give me a job on the G.S.C. I don't want anything else! I only did what anyone else would have done when I clung on to you on the side of the cutting. But ever since I was a kid I've dreamed of getting into the locomotive shops. I tried once, but they wouldn't have me."

The baronet looked into Jim's shining eyes. He held out his hand.

"Right-ho, Speed!" he said. "I'm a judge of character,

and I'll believe you'll get on. It's a hard life, perhaps, in some ways. I went through from the bottom myself, so I know. They call the railroads the 'Iron Way.' Well, it is indeed an iron way. But you've got the grit in you, and some day, perhaps, you'll be taking the G.S.C. London-Edinburgh express up north at eighty to the hour."

Jim's eyes shone, but a sudden shade crossed those of the man who had been talking.

"Unless the Great Scottish and Central rails are then red with rust, the mighty express locomotives lying derelict in railway sheds, and everyone travelling northward behind yellow electric engines," he said bitterly, to himself rather than to Jimmy.

Then he remembered Jimmy's presence, and smiled again, though his smile seemed just a little forced, as though he thought of other things.

"Right-ho, Speed!" he said again. "You start work on Monday—and thank you! Best of luck, lad!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Mischief-Maker!

NEXT Monday! Four whole days ahead! Jimmy Speed wondered how he could possibly get through the time. He was burning to begin work in the mighty loco building shops of the G.S.C., to hear the clanging and shouting, to see the great steel locomotives towering around him. He had not even seen inside the shops. They were guarded like a secret fort, and no one who was not employed in them could pass through the big wooden gateway without a signed permit from a high authority.

And next Monday he was to be one of those privileged persons who walked through those gates daily as unconcerned as they'd walk into the public park presented to Blackhampton by the G.S.C.

The day-work was over in the junction, and the few night shifts had settled down. Jimmy hung about near the sidings and peered through the chinks in the wooden palisading of the gate to the goods yard. Trains were always being marshalled in the busy goods yard. The occasional crashes as buffers met buffers, the shouts, the shrill whistles, were never entirely silenced.

Jimmy looked about him, up and down the road. It was falling dark. Why should he not slip over the wall farther along? He could scout about and see things without being



As Jimmy Speed's fingers closed on the unconscious man's coat the cloth tore. The next moment the two were rolling helplessly down towards the gleaming rails, with the piercing shriek of a fast approaching train echoing in Jim's ears.

discovered. He might be able to have a peep into the sheds in the locomotive department, and see the great iron monsters standing silent and still, taking their rest just like living things. Of course, he'd have to keep clear of the shops. There were glaring lights there, and guards. For the guarding of locomotive building departments was important now the other main line through the Midlands was being electrified. Only last week a spy had been caught and convicted for trespassing.

An idea in Jim's brain meant its instant execution. He ran some distance up the wide, well-made road, kicking up the black dust as he went. Then he made a running leap for the high, grimy brick wall that bounded the goods yard at that part. He caught the top, and was soon over and crouching, trembling slightly, in the shelter of a coal wagon beside a mighty heap of coal.

This was not the first time Jim Speed had trespassed on the line. But he felt less like a trespasser now, for was he not soon to be one of the mighty staff of workpeople who kept the most perfect railway in Great Britain working evenly?

Soon the boy began to move about warily. He scouted along the wide "gridiron" of the goods department, keeping in the shadow of trucks and cattle wagons. He was making for the locomotive department, to have a peep into the gaunt, black sheds, and to stand beside the mighty locomotives and marvel at their strength and power.

He began to get into a jumping-off position for his run across the grid, when he suddenly crouched back into the blackness thrown by a furniture van on a low truck. Two men were approaching. Jimmy, fearful of discovery, pressed backwards and waited.

As luck would have it, the men stopped just after they had passed Jim, one to light his pipe. As the match flared up Jimmy saw a big, flabby, pasty-coloured face, with puffy eyes and shaggy grey brows. The man's hands, as he cupped them over the burning match and his pipe-bowl, were fat and puffy and pale, in keeping with the face. The outline of a stout, heavy body could be seen in the darkness.

"Well, that's how it stands, Soper," said this man's companion. "Langrish won't rest until he's ruined the G.S.C., you can bet a week's wages. And he'll spend money like water 't' do it. Old Grant'll 'ave to pull up his socks an' sell out to the Electric Northern in the end. An' you bet, bein' employed by the Electric will be 'ealthier than on the G.S.C., wi' Granite Langrish chief director o' the whole bloomin' group!"

Soper puffed at his pipe, shook out his match, then replied slowly:

"Well, you've come to the right man, anyway. I've a lot of influence among the men, not on'y as one o' the foremen shunters 'ere, but on account o' them outside meetin's, you know. You say as Langrish wants t' see me at nine to-night at Carnborough? Sendin' a car, is he? Well, 'e does the thing in style, and so 'e should. It's men like me who'll spell success or failure for him."

"Don't kid yourself you'll be able to drive a soft bargain wi' Langrish, mate," replied the first speaker. "'E'll win out, whether you come in or no. Blow me, it's bound to come—the electrification o' all the railways, same as iron floated, though folks scoffed at the idea when ships was wood. Wot's steam nowadays? An' don't kid yourself as you're a big catch for Langrish. You're on'y one o' the thousands o' strings Langrish 'as to pull at the right moment. It's the shops 'e wants ter get at—the loco building department. You know, Sir Richard's dead nuts on the new-fangled Pacific. She's a 4-6-2, o' course, but 'e expects wonders from the new-fangled notions they're buildin' in at the moment."

"Well, Langrish can reckon on me, as I'll tell 'im to-night. Grant's a sinkin' ship, an' it's me to take Grant's miserable money 'ere for shuntin' work and Langrish's dubs for his work, in an' out o' workin' hours. Talkin' over the men's my metier, I tell ye."

The voices trailed off as the men moved away, and Jimmy found himself quivering in every limb. What was this? Treachery amongst the G.S.C. staff, already discovered by him in a stolen entrance inside the bounds of the mighty junction! Jimmy looked towards the glare of the throbbing great station, and clenched his fists.

Burning with indignation, the boy followed the men. Why, he did not know. His mind seemed to be in a whirl. He felt he ought to do something, to learn more. He just followed.

And his anxiety to learn more outran his prudence. He found the men again, and prepared to learn more from their scraps of conversation. But a crunch on the cindery surface of the goods yard made the men turn swiftly in alarm. They saw the dim form of the boy, backing between two trucks, and with low shouts of anger they dived for him.

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Jim dodged behind the trucks. He did not run blindly away, knowing full well that that would be useless. He just kept a wary eye on the men, and resorted to dodging tactics.

The man the other had called Soper made a ponderous lunge for him, and missed by a hand's breadth. Jim, gasping, ducked and dived forward, slipping under the couplings of the truck. There he met the other man face to face, so he fell flat and rolled sideways as the man leapt to pin him to the ground.

Up on his feet in a flash, Jim was round the trucks again, Soper, blowing like a grampus, following him up with a shunting-pole gripped in his fist. In and out amongst the wheels dodged the boy, agile as a monkey and as wary as a rabbit. He could have dodged one easily, but the two were keeping him very busy.

As Soper made one of his brutal lunges at him with the pole he slipped, under the couplings of the trucks again, and would have squirmed clear the other side had not the foreman shunter, a master at his art, deftly slipped the pole over the buffers and uncoupled the couplings of the vehicle, an easy and quick task with goods wagons.

The heavy links fell swinging on top of Jim. He received a blow on the head which made his brain sing, and by the time he had dragged himself clear of the truck he felt strong, determined hands on the back of his neck, his face on the cinders, pinned down to the ground, helpless.

Soper came doubling round. "So you've got 'im, mate?" he gasped, with satisfaction. "The little rat! 'Ere, boy, what was you up to? Pinchin' coal—or worse?"

Jim was dragged to his feet, gasping. "I—I'm to start in the loco shops on Monday," he stammered. "Sort of already on the staff. Didn't think it any harm to have a look round to-night—" "Loco mad," said Soper's companion. "Well, 'e'll learn better later on."

The men looked at each other queerly. Then Soper shook his head slowly in reply to his companion's unspoken query.

"I reckon not," he said. "Anyway, 'e'll learn better now! Loco shops, ye said? 'Ow did ye get that job, wi' them so full? Anyway, ye don't start till Monday, so you're a trespasser. Sir Richard Grant's give me a free 'and to deal wi' trespassers. Told me so over a glass o' wine yesterday. But when you start on the railway, you jest keep clear o' the goods yard, that's all. We don't want any loco shop rats overrunning us 'ere. Hang on to'n, mate, an' I'll give'n a pastin'!"

Soper spat on his hands and gripped the shunting-pole. Jim looked at the strong ash rod with alarm. The expression on Soper's heavy features was not pleasant. His anticipation of the treat—for to beat a youngster was a treat for Harold Soper—showed in his face. And the pole descended with a heavy thud on Jim's shoulders.

A dull pain shot through the boy's frame. He gritted his teeth and screwed up his eyes ready for the next blow. It came, and Jim had all he could do to prevent himself from crying out. He struggled in the grasp of his captor, jerked and tore at the steel-like hands that were gripping him, but to no avail.

Thud, thud, thud! The pole descended with brutal regularity, each blow jarring every bone in Jim's body. Still the boy did not cry out. If he had, the men would doubtless have desisted. But he didn't, and the beating went on.

Suddenly Soper drew back. A cheery whistling was heard not far off. A young man drew near, a dim form in the darkness—the form of a broad-shouldered, well-built fellow. The whistling ceased as the man stopped in his stride.

"Hallo!" said the newcomer, and Jim's heart leapt. It was the fireman of the goods-train which had very nearly been the ending of all things for Sir Richard Grant and himself in the cutting near Blackhampton Long Tunnel. "What's up? A kid?"

"'E was trespassing!" growled Soper, glowering at the boyish, open face of the newcomer. "Get 'ome an' wash your dirty face and 'ands, an' don't interfere where you've no right to!"

"I know you, Soper," said the young fireman, putting down his tea-can. "You're the man who spouts in the park. Dirt will wash off from faces and hands, but you can't wash dirt off your heart. I know we have to be strict with trespassers now, but not with a shunting-pole. Hand him over to the police!"

"'E'd rather 'ave a bastin'," grinned the man who was still gripping Jim.

"And what about you?" whipped back Sam Blundell—Jim remembered his name. "You'll break every bone in his body. Let him go, or take a 'basting' yourself. A kid trespassing isn't much, after all!"

The young fireman peered into Jim's face. "Why, if it isn't the youngster of the accident!" he cried,



Jimmy Speed's heart seemed to stop beating as he tugged with both hands at the signal lever. It gave; but the express was now shrieking past the box, a savage red glare in the night. With cries of fury, the crouching men leapt at the plucky lad.

"Here, Soper, I know this younker. He's to start in the loco shops on Monday. He's all right. Let him go!"

"Not by long chalks!" grinned Soper, swinging his pole again and bringing it down on Jim's shoulder-blades with more brutal force than ever.

Jim blazed with anger. The pain of that last blow made a mist swim before his eyes. And in the mist he saw the flash of a leaping form. He heard an ominous crack, and the heavy form of Harold Soper went reeling backwards, hand to jaw.

"I'll take the licking in place of the kid," said the young fireman. Then, turning fiercely to the man holding Jim, he cried: "Let go!"

The man released his hold and hastily backed away. Jim staggered, went down on his knees, then, with a tremendous effort, he got to his feet, and stood, swaying dizzily.

"I'll take him," said the young fireman, gripping Jim's arm. "Come on, you young ass! What did you want to be nosing about, trespassing in the goods yard for?"

Jim said nothing, but allowed himself to be led blindly out of the yard. Once in the street Blundell turned towards him.

"Lucky to get through the gate these days," he said. "Much hurt?"

"I'm all right!" gasped Jim. "Never mind my hurts. I—I say, there's a lot of treachery amongst the workmen, isn't there?"

Blundell's strong mouth set in a grim line.

"Too much," he said. "It's the 'Yellow Peril'! Why?"

"'Cos I heard something, and I want your advice," said Jim.

Speed told Blundell the whole story—all he had heard—and how it was he had been caught.

The working of Blundell's face was a picture as Jim talked. The young fireman's expression passed to indignation, then to blazing anger.

"I've suspected that oily waster all along!" he gritted. "He preaches sedition to the men. But this is terribly serious. Look here, kid! I like you, and I think you're loyal to the G.S.C., or will be! Do you feel fit to work with me a bit now?"

"Anything!" said Jim eagerly.

"Well, then, we'll get out to Langrish's place at Carnborough. We can just catch the eight-five. We'll be at Carnborough Park—Langrish's house—by nine o'clock, and we'll jolly well find out what business an employee of the

G.S.C. has with the Electric, being fetched in one of Langrish's cars, and what not. We'll denounce the rotter, and get him sacked. The union will be glad to see the back of that waster. He's too ramping mad even when there's a real grievance!"

"I'm on!" said Jim, with shining eyes. "I'd have gone on my own if I hadn't met you—if those brutes had left an ounce of go in me. But now I've met you I feel better. I'm on!"

Sam Blundell gripped Jim's hand.

"You'll do, kid!" he said. "And we want a lot like you on the G.S.C., for there's a terrific struggle brewing. Come on, West Central Station. We'll just catch that train!"

CHAPTER 4.

The Train-Wreckers!

JOHN LANGRISH'S house at Carnborough was a gloomy place, and it seemed the gloomier to Jim and Blundell, as they scouted through the plantation, on account of the depressing rain that had begun to fall.

The trees and bushes dripped monotonously as the pair pushed forward towards the house. The night was very dark, and it wanted but ten minutes to nine o'clock. Blundell whispered as much to Jim.

"We'll have to look alive, sonny, if we're to do any good!" he said.

Jim shivered.

"Crumbs, it does look a formidable place!" he said, eyeing the tall, square, sombre-looking mansion through the drizzling rain.

Carnborough Park was indeed a sinister residence. It was an old house. Square built, coped roof, tall, windowed, the window-niches supported by impressive Corinthian pillars, the house seemed to exude an atmosphere of something forbidding, cheerless, ruthless, in spite of its classic appearance. Perhaps the character of the man who lived in it had something to do with the impression made on Blundell and Jim. If it had been Sir Richard Grant's place all would have seemed different.

The pair halted under the trees at the front of the house. Numbers of windows were illuminated, and the next problem before Jim and Blundell was to discover what sort of a plot was being hatched between Langrish and Soper that night. The obvious thing was to discover the room. But, which window?

"We've a tough nut to crack, Jim," said Blundell, looking upwards into the rain, clearly visible to the pair in the path of light thrown out by a tall window in the centre of the house.

"My yes!" agreed Jim. "Well, we must get ahead with something, or we might just as well have stayed away. What about getting up to the coping under the first-story windows, creeping along, and listening at each window? The coping looks wide enough to walk on."

"Jolly good idea, kid!" replied Blundell. "Most of the lighted windows are on the first story. None on the ground floor show lights here in the front, so I'll bet we'll hit our mark here on the first floor. We can get up by that big elm-tree—or, rather, I can. If you're too sore from that brute Soper's shunting-pole, wait below."

"I'm not too sore," replied Jim quickly. "But you climb first, and give me a hand up here and there."

Soon the pair were on the wide coping of the house. They crept along to the nearest illuminated window. It was the largest—big double windows inside a low balustrade, which made a sort of small platform in front of the window.

Blundell sank down on his knees when on the leaded surface of his position, and motioned swiftly to Jim to crouch down, too.

"It's here, in this room!" excitedly whispered Blundell. "See, through the crack in the slightly-opened windows! You'd better look, too, if witnesses are wanted later on for anything."

The windows were tall and pointed, like the Norman design. They opened casement fashion, and Jim and Blundell were well situated for finding out what was passing in that high, luxurious room, with its painted ceilings, heavy mouldings, and cut-glass candelabra, from which many candles threw a mellow and restful light.

John Langrish was modern to his finger-tips in business, but he clung to old fashions in the furnishings of his house.

Jim had his first view of the railway magnate, John Langrish. The man, a commanding figure, stood at the head of a long table. His rugged features seemed to be chipped from a lump of granite, hard and unchanging, and Jim well understood now why people called him "Granite" Langrish. Heavy and determined were those features, cruelly clever and keen. A strong face, clean-shaven, square set jaw, steely eyes, but with something cruel and ruthless in the mould of it. Broad-shouldered, heavily built, Langrish was the very picture of a man to be feared and obeyed.

Before Langrish stood Harold Soper, nervously shuffling about. He had evidently been there quite a long time, judging by the litter of papers and what not on the table. Though Blundell and Jim did not know it, Soper had come in full of bounce and importance; but he had quailed before the hard, steely look of the railway millionaire. Beside Soper stood the man who had held Jim while the brutal foreman-shunter had belaboured him with the shunting-pole.

"I am working on detail," Jim and Sam Blundell heard Langrish say, in his hard, metallic voice. "You have satisfied me, Soper, that you can help a bit . . . that I can trust . . . You know . . . will accept no offer. He is foolish."

The snatches of the conversation came to the ears of Blundell and Jim. They pieced the parts together, and understood all.

"We must have . . . especially the G.S.C. . . Fair offer. . . Sir Richard to lose his own row. Well, he'll fail!"

Langrish looked squarely at Soper, and the foreman-shunter visibly quailed. He was as putty in the ruthless hands of John Langrish. The great railway magnate extended his hand, palm upwards. A great, strong hand it was, but white and soft. The big fingers hooked inwards, and the fist was clenched till it became a hard, knotted ball.

"I want you . . . part of my plan . . . there shall be strikes. . . Discontent amongst the men . . . first step. . . There shall be accidents. . . Steam a thing of the past . . . danger to the public . . . flooded railroad . . . tunnels shall cave in, trains derailed. . . Even now, to-night, the great London-Edinburgh express at Lagthorne Junction. . ."

Some low words, almost hissed out, followed, and Soper covered backwards. Langrish dropped his hand and laughed—a laugh as hard as himself.

"Desperate measures, yes. Yet . . . I mean all. . . Accidents, however slight . . . newspaper headlines. . . Smashes? Bah! What matters it . . . one or two? The quicker for . . . public and parliament . . . a frantic shout for all railways to be electrified."

Blundell gasped, and gripped tightly at Jim's arm. Could

he be dreaming? It was monstrous—impossible! Yet he was hearing! He seemed struck dumb. Jim, too, was speechless.

"You know, Soper . . . in the park. Huh, the very park the G.S.C. presented to the town. . . Leave the unions alone. . . Blackhampton doomed . . . works at Carnborough, for Carnborough men . . . eighty miles an hour . . . acceleration, all the lot. Coming thing . . . steam can't stand. Let 'em have it, and rub it in!"

Something was handed to Soper, and the man, with a trembling hand, signed his name. Langrish folded the paper and handed Soper a wad of Treasury-notes. Then the man, with scrapes and smirks, to which Langrish paid not the slightest heed, left the room.

Blundell dragged Jim away from the window, and they descended to the gravel below by the old elm which had enabled them to mount.

"Can you run, kid?" asked Blundell. "You heard and saw all that? Then keep up with me to Lagthorne Junction signal-box!"

"You—you mean, the express?"

"Yes."

"Never be in time!" snapped Jim.

Blundell halted, suddenly alive to the fact that they were ten miles from Blackhampton Long Tunnel and the small country junction where the branch line forked off to Carnborough. At last he crashed his fist into his other hand.

"I know! My pal, Tim Parks! Got a small garage in East Street. He'll lend me a motor-bike. Best foot foremost kid, for East Street! You'll have to ride pillion!"

And Sam Blundell swore by fire and steel and steam that he'd fight to the last for the G.S.C. against the Great Electric Northern.

Tim Parks was comfortably seated with his wife in the little flat above the garage. He gaped stupidly when Sam Blundell, unwashed, still in overalls and wet through, burst into the little sitting-room.

A storm of inquiries followed Blundell's demand for a high-powered motor-bicycle; but the young fireman's wild face and strongly-worded appeal made the motor mechanic bustle about quickly.

"Many thanks, Tim!" said Blundell, as the engine roared out, and Jim sat astride of the carrier. "Tell you later! Hope you won't read about it in the papers, that's all! Off we go!"

They did, the jerk very nearly leaving Jim behind, in mid-air; but he clung on, and, Blundell, driving recklessly, the rushing air making a mad sort of joy surge in their breasts, they very soon arrived at the sleepy little country junction.

As the pair dismounted from the bicycle, they felt that it must all be a dream. There was the signal-box, quiet and peaceful, with its lights shining brightly. The wet metals—for it was still raining—shone from the light from the box, the points gleaming within easy view of the signalman.

Blundell paused, perplexed. The signalman was moving about in the box. He was muffled up round the ears with a woollen muffler. All seemed undisturbed.

Tong!

Blundell gripped Jim's arm.

Tong-tong-tong! A pause. Then, again—tong-tong-tong! The signalman was at his instrument.

"He's accepted the down express!" muttered Blundell.

"You know, the 'tong' note for down, 'ting' for up. Everything seems all right."

"Listen!"

Jim cocked his head to one side. They had already drawn close to the signal-box, and were standing at the foot of the wooden ladder-way. The buzzing of an alarm-bell was heard from the box.

"What's that?"

Blundell made answer.

"Lamp of a signal gone out, by gum!" he said. "That's enough, Jim. We're up and into that box!"

Blundell suddenly leapt up the ladder-way and Jim followed closely. They burst into the signal-box together, and in that flash Jim saw a lot. A man, obviously the real signalman, was lying seemingly senseless on the floor. A half-empty bottle of whisky stood on the table, beside it an overturned glass, the spirit spilt on the white wood. The smell of whisky pervaded the atmosphere.

"A plant!" rasped Blundell, as he leapt at the false signalman who had just clashed over one of the many heavy levers set in a line along the length of the signal-box.

Jim prepared to lend aid, when three more men rose from concealment in the box. One held a revolver. The faces of all the men were muffled, but the eyes, which were visible, were startled.

Jim lowered his head and charged at the three men, as Blundell, with a mighty blow, felled the pseudo-signalman to the floor. The plucky youngster upset the villains who now shouted to each other to trap the intruders.

Blundell swung round desperately. In a flash he took in the situation—the signalman was doped, evidence arranged to make it appear as if he were drunk, possibly whisky poured down his throat, too; the lamp of the main-line signal extinguished, the alarm-bell, set going by the cooling of the lamp in the signal, still shouting out its warning; the points leading to the curving branch line over, to take the express off the straight—the green light of the branch signal showed that this was the case.

The express—now it could be heard, thundering along the tunnel—would be gripped by the facing points, and, at the speed the train would be travelling it would be derailed, and the engine, at least, wrecked, even if no great loss of life occurred.

What was it he had heard? Accidents on the G.S.C. for the newspaper headlines! This was to be the first. If only he knew the working of that signal-box! But he had no time to ruminate, for his flash of thought was interrupted by the flying form of a man, who hurled himself at the muscular young fireman with the fury and agility of a panther.

Sam swiftly drew his arm back and registered a short-jab at the man's ribs, sending the form crashing against the bright steel levers, to fall in a gasping heap on the floor.

The signalman was now stirring, peering with bleary eyes at the scene. Jim turned to grapple with the man nearest to him, he found himself covered by a revolver, and fell flat on his face. Blundell now drove in a straight left to the point of the muffled man's jaw. The blow got home, but the muffer saved him from a complete clean knock-out. The revolver, however, flew from his grasp. Another man raised a chair and crashed it down on Blundell's head.

Sick with apprehension, Jim saw Blundell knocked out. The boy's wild eyes fell on the revolver on the floor. He pounced on the weapon, and swung round to the levers.

"Keep back!" he yelled shrilly. "By gum, I'll shoot!" A man laughed harshly and threw himself forward. Jim pulled the trigger hard. The shot crashed out, and resulted in a shattering of glass in the signal-box, the kick of the revolver twisting Jim's wrist.

"Gum, the little cur means it," muttered one of the two men who had not fallen foul of Blundell's blows, as he retreated towards the door, where he crouched, glowering. The other man, with no stomach for a revolver in the steady hand of a strong youngster with deadly purposes blazing from his eyes, crouched down, too.

The thundering of the express drew nearer and nearer. The train had been accepted by that block by the villains. Some foul play was being worked. Jim, hovering near the levers, glanced wildly round.

The signalman, having collected some part of his shattered wits, looked up.

"Durned lamp's out!" he muttered, looking at the signal lamp alarm bell, still buzzing frantically.

"Quick, man!" shouted Jim. "Tell me what to do! Express coming—quick, what's wrong?"

The signalman passed his hand over his brow. He coned the levers, then started suddenly.

"Them two there—over wi' them, quick!" Jim crashed over the levers.

"That one," grated the man, pointing with a trembling finger. "Branch line points! Over wi' it—over, or the express'll be derailed! Lamp out, driver can't see main-line signal, too fast to pull up. Branch line points over! Grasp the brasted thing, boy, an' jerk it hard—"

Jim, still covering the men with the revolver, gripped the lever. He squeezed the hand-catch and tugged. But his strength was insufficient, with one hand, to change the points. And the express was shrieking madly now, not fifty yards distant, well clear, by this time, of the tunnel mouth.

"Drop gun! Tug both hands!" yelled the signalman, struggling to rise.

Jim's heart seemed to stop beating. He flung the revolver crashing and splintering through the window on to the line, and tugged with both hands at the lever. It gave; but the express was now shrieking past the box, a savage red glare in the night.

The crouching men, not now menaced by the revolver, leapt with cries of fury at Jim.

Was he to lose at the last second? Could he close the points before the leading bogie wheels of the tearing locomotive should reach them? If not, the great London-Edinburgh express would be swerved round the curve on to the branch line and derailed instantly!

(Jimmy Speed has soon met with thrills in his new venture. Will be instrumental in averting one of the greatest railway disasters of the day? Be sure you read the next instalment of this gripping and most powerful yarn.)

"A TRAITOR IN THE SCHOOL!"

(Continued from page 20.)

up the broken stairs into the open air. They collapsed on to the mossy stones in limp, gasping heaps, heedless of what was going on around them.

Tom Merry was the first to open his eyes, and as he looked up he saw Blake stooping over him.

"What—what—"

"All serene, Tommy!" said Blake, eyeing his chum anxiously. "One of the brutes got away, but we've nabbed the other. I finished him by dropping a chunk of stone on his napper."

Following his glance Tom saw that the captured man was Bulmer—or, rather, Cutts did. He lay flat on the stones, and D'Arcy and Herries were trussing him up with their scarves and handkerchiefs.

"Oh, good!" breathed Tom. "And we've got the gun, Blake. It's safe in the vaults, and we'll get it when the door's finished burning. It's all serene now!"

And it was all serene.

Both Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were still completely mystified, however. But when D'Arcy had told how he had caught Cutts, and when Tom Merry had told how Cutts had trapped them, they began to get an inkling of how matters stood. And to clear up the affair, Tom Merry turned to the shivering Cutts and demanded an explanation.

And Gerald Cutts gave it—he could do nothing else.

Tom Merry's brow was dark as he ended his recital, and for some moments he remained silent, thinking hard. Then he rose to his feet, and crossed to the fuming Mr. Bulmer. Without the slightest compunction, he ran through the pockets of that discomfited gentleman. He found what he sought, at last, and crossed to Cutts with several slips of dirty paper in his hands.

"Are these your I O U's, Cutts?" he said quietly.

"Yes!" Sudden hope almost choked the wretched fellow's answer. "Yes, those are my I O U's, Merry."

Tom nodded, and tore the slips of paper into tiny fragments, and tossed them to the four winds of heaven.

"You don't deserve it, Cutts!" he said in a steady voice. "But if these fellows are willing, I'm going to give you another chance. You've played a dirty game, but at the finish I can't help seeing that you played the man."

"Yaas, wathah! That is quite twee, Tom Mewwy. We weally must give cweedit wheach cweedit is due, bai Jove!"

"Dry up, Gussy!" Tom paused and frowned thoughtfully. "Now, listen, Cutts! Whether St. Jim's wins the match or loses it, this betting's got to stop. There's to be no money paid one way or the other. If Hake wants to kick up a fuss, I shall go straight to Delamere, and show him up. I fancy he won't, though, when I've had a word with him, as I'm going to."

Cutts nodded, his heart leaping with thankfulness.

Tom Merry crossed again to Mr. Bulmer, and after disarming him, he cut him loose with a few slashes of his pocket-knife.

"Now get out, you dangerous brute!" he said thickly.

Mr. Bulmer cleared quickly enough. It was extremely unlikely that, after what had happened, he would dare to show his face in Rylcombe again. He departed hastily, and it was the last the juniors or Cutts ever saw of Mr. Bulmer.

"Now," said Tom Merry. "I vote that for Cutts' sake, we mention not a syllable of this business to a soul—unless it's Glyn. That much is due to him. I vote we simply watch our chance and leave the gun in Mr. Vining's room, and let the matter rest there."

They were all agreed upon that, and a moment later, after reclaiming the precious invention from the crypt, they started back for St. Jim's.

They arrived there in time to learn that the great match had ended in a draw, and secretly, they were all thankful for that. And as Tom Merry had hoped, with the return of the invention, matters did rest there. During tea, Tom scouted round, and finding Mr. Vining's room unoccupied, he laid the long parcel he had hidden under his coat on the table, and withdrew from the room. And when Tom Merry & Co. heard that evening that the gun had mysteriously turned up, and that nobody knew how, or where it had been, they chuckled grimly.

Nor did anyone ever find out the true inwardness of the matter, excepting Tom Merry & Co., and Cutts, and Glyn. And as Mr. Vining left St. Jim's on the Monday morning the mystery was soon forgotten—excepting by Gerald Cutts, the fellow who had, for a time, been the "Traitor in the School!"

(There will be another topping yarn of Tom Merry & Co. next week, chums, entitled: "THE MAYOR'S CUP!" By Martin Clifford. Make sure you read it.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 269.

"THE SECRET OF THE GALLEONS!"

(Continued from page 2.)

of events. He submitted meekly, and was led away as if in a dream.

The parties got back to their ships, and then the message fluttered out from the destroyer: "Ship-masters take their vessels into Stornoway." The mates of the Oriental and Golden Gain, now the captains, took their new commands into port, and there followed formal proceedings in regard to the prisoners.

The people of the Result, Rayne being now numbered amongst them, were at last free. They met in Guadiana's apartments. Rayne was most crestfallen. When Guadiana told him he was a free man, he looked up and blurted out his thanks.

"And please, please believe that I knew nothing of the fact that I was working for such a man as Dalby," he ended.

"We do believe it, Rayne," said Brian. "But I want to talk to you about Tony. You know that I shall be the head of a big firm commercialising my father's invention soon? Well, I'd like Tony to be trained to join me later in that business. Dan Derrick's buying shares with his share of the huddle we've raked up from the galleons, so Tony will be in good company—if we may call ourselves good company—"

"None better!" muttered Rayne. "Carr, you're English right through!"

"And how about you? We'll need an expert in diving matters at the head of our works—"

Rayne, flushing suddenly, held up his hand.

"No, please!" he said. "I've got to make good before I can even listen to you. I may say, foolishly generous offers."

"Rot!" said Brian. "Didn't you save my life? You could easily have left me—"

"Don't rake up any more of the business, Carr. I am sincerely grateful to you all for not making a charge against me. I want to disappear—to go to the South Seas and see what can be done diving in the pearl-beds. I'll make some money—pure, honest money—and then, perhaps, I'll see if you'll have me for your works, as a working shareholder. But about Tony. His education was disgracefully neglected by me, I'm afraid, after I joined with Morveno. I ask as a father—what about that? I'll send money later."

"Well, we've talked to Tony about it, and we have discovered he would like to go to a good school for a few years longer. Then he'll be right for my business. Dan and I have agreed to be Tony's guardians, if you're agreeable, till either you come home and can take him, or till he is old enough to earn his own living in my business."

The man half extended his hand, and Brian gripped it. Rayne then sheepishly shook hands all round, and when he came to Tony he took both the boy's in his.

"I'll write, son!" he said. "You write, too, if you are allowed to do so. I'll come home again before long, I hope. As it is, remember my parting advice—never forget what has passed in this room to-night, and remember that the men you are working for have given your father the chance he did not deserve!"

Rayne vanished, and a sudden silence fell on all in the

room. Tony looked utterly miserable as he gazed at the shut door. But Sarky slapped him on the back.

"Pull yerself together, young feller-me-lad!" roared the old sailor, something suspiciously bright glistening in his eyes. "Worse things than this 'appen at sea! You'll see your dada again before long, or I'm no judge o' men. Now we're all off t' th' south'ard in th' Glance, my yot, my very own nah, since I bought 'er out o' me own good money. I'm a yot-owner now, and a gentleman, and don't you forgit it, none o' ye!"

All laughed heartily and sallied forth to board the Glance, and so get round to the south coast to wait for the trials and for Brian and Dan to get the business of the manufacture of the diving-dresses going, and also for Guadiana to put his head alongside his legal adviser's and clear up the sharing out of the value of the treasure raised.

On the way the letters from the post-office were handed to the chums. There was one from Captain Daredevil Derrick, who was convalescent in a home on the south coast. On the Glance Dan read the letter. It was characteristic of the old, hard sea-captain. This is what Dan read:

"My Dear Son,—This will maybe be the last letter you'll get at Stornoway. I'm getting stronger every day, alive and kicking, instead of rotting in the earth, as I should have been if you hadn't thrown up your job and nursed me in your garret back of Tottenham Court Road.

"I hope as you'll get through the last stage of your adventure in safety. 'Tis often the dangerest, and mark what I said about the Rat. He's not finished till he's down with your heel on his neck. Wire when you've scuttled him, will you? I've got that house on the Sussex coast. It's the place I've often dreamed about when hitting into the thick of it off the Horn. I've named it 'Haven-Steady.' I'd like it to be called the 'Anchorage,' but I reckon you'd think that too common and played-out-skipper-like for a great place like I've now got the deeds of. It's made your bank balance look sick, but I reckon that'll be all right when the final share-out is made.

"Sarky Marline's told me he's bringing you all down in the Glance. Tell him to mind his sticks, and haul down a reef if she gets down below the rail. I'll knock his wooden block off when he comes if he does ought to delay you all from getting here. Give him my message and my kindest regards.

"Getting the Steady ready for the house-warming. I wish it was the Anchorage, though; but you don't mind me having put an old pal in the lodge, and calling that the Anchorage, do you?"

"Here's to you, son, and if you have any of the equinoctial gales coming down, remember always to get a grip on something when you move about. It's just when things seems rosiest something happens. I'm like a beehive myself, my brains all of a raffle, and I don't think it can all be true.

"SILAS J. DERRICK."

The Glance made a splendid passage down to the English Channel, and came safely to anchor at Littlehampton.

The house-warming took three weeks! And then the trials came on— But why mar the ending of a romantic tale by giving further sordid details of trials and punishments awarded such out-and-out villains as the Rat and Rex Dalby for many crimes, if not for their pains in trying to wrest the galleon treasure from the owners thereof by right of discovery? THE END.

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