

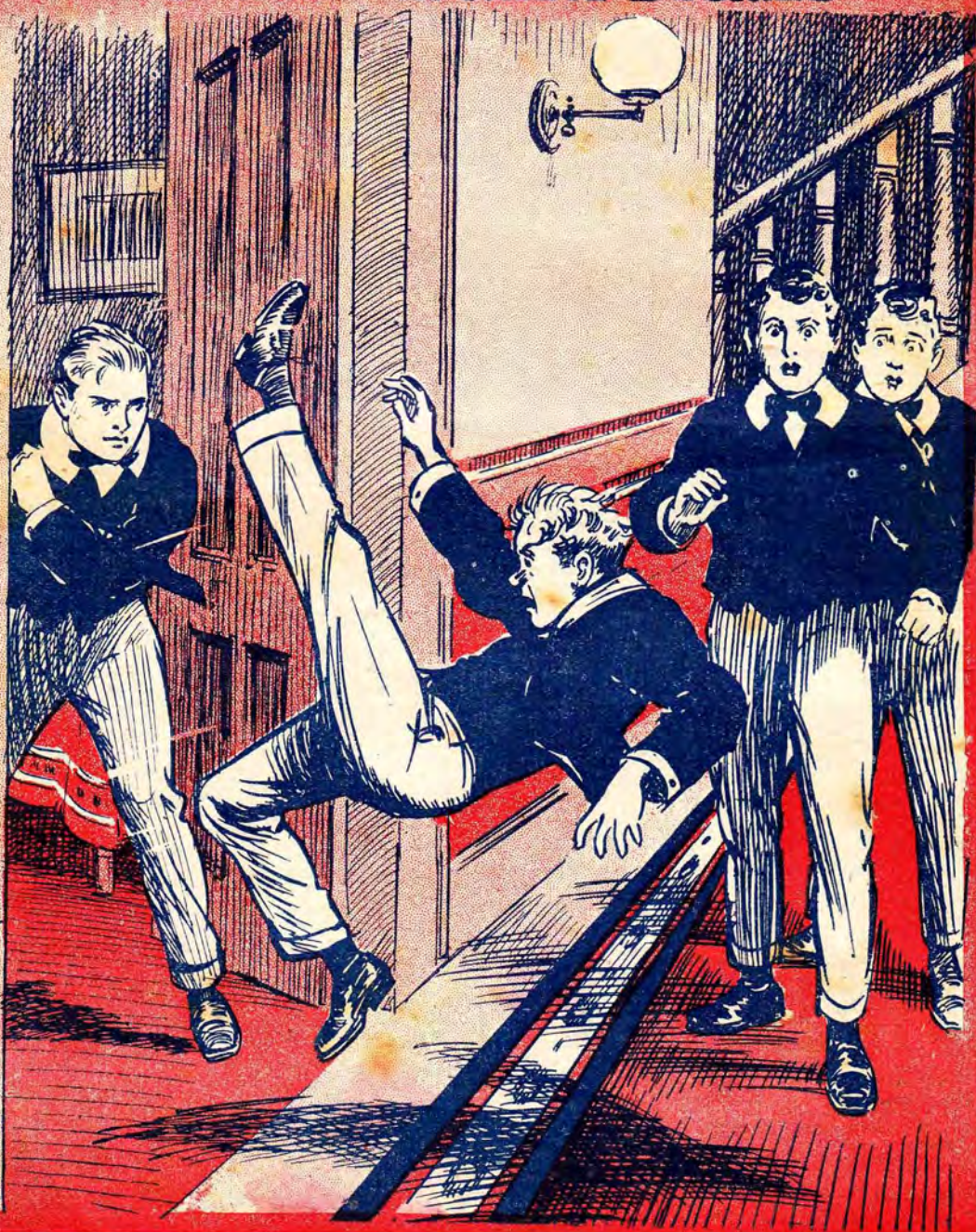
GRAND NEW YEAR NUMBER—£25 IN PRIZES!

The GEM 2^D

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

LIBRARY OF SCHOOL AND SPORTING STORIES

No. 882.
Vol. XXVII.
January 3rd,
1925.



CHUCKED OUT BY THE NEW BOY!

Harry Manners is ejected from his own study by Torrence, the new fellow at St. Jim's! (A thrilling incident from the grand school story of Tom Merry & Co. 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,—Order early for next week's bumper number of the "Gem." This coming issue will be extra important, and I want every Gemite to make sure of a copy. Tell your friends about it and the special features it will contain.

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Get going before this famous competition runs its course. It will close with the sixth picture, but those readers who have not yet taken a hand have still time. Let them remember that fact. The prize list is wonderful. The competition is as easy as it is interesting, and £25 is to be won. So jump for it!

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"A CHRISTMAS DREAM!"

On this page of the "Gem" you will see some verses written by a girl reader of the "Gem." Lots of people have jolly dreams about Christmas and how to spend it, but nothing could have been quite so good and so appropriate as this cheery poem, which I have as much pleasure in printing as you will have in reading. Its sentiments are right bang on the target.

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Your Editor.

SOME OF THE RIGHT SORT HERE, CHUMS!

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START THE NEW YEAR WELL
BY READING THEM!

THE rain was pattering down outside,
My GEM lay in my lap,
And, curled up in a big armchair,
I mean to take a nap.
What else was there to do, indeed?
The weekly story read.
The fire was bright; I was alone—
The drowsy feeling spread.
But just then came a postman's knock;
A letter—p'raps for me!
I reached the door, picked up the mail.
Ah! What is this I see?
A dainty envelope, indeed,
Surmounted by a crest.
What can it be? I opened it,



And read these words: "Request
The pleasure of your company
To Eastwood House. The car
Will call for you in half an hour;
It isn't very far.
My cousin Ethel will be here,
So do prolong your stay."
"A house-party at Gussy's place!
I'll pack up right away."
My mums came, too. I couldn't go
Away and leave her at home;
But Gussy wouldn't mind, I knew,
And mother's jolly—"some!"
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A GIRL READER'S CHRISTMAS DREAM.

In half an hour the car arrived,
And off we gaily went.
Oh, what a crowd awaited us,
With welcomes that were meant!
Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, too,
And Study Number Six.
Lord Conway and his friends among
The juniors did mix.
Old Gussy met us at the door,
A "weally lovely sight."
In fancy waistcoat, fine art tie,
And pumps like mirrors bright.
"How do you do? James, take this bag!
I'm awf'lay glad you've come!
You know us all—or most, I think.
Pwaw make yourselves at home!"
The tea was served in old-time style,



The table decked with green;
And Ethel as our hostess, happy
Faces to be seen
On every side, while laughter rang
Among the rafters high.
Then, after tea: "Let's have some games
And dancing!" came the cry.
A merry evening, on my life,
There then and there began,
And Tommy, by majority,
Was made the first "blind man."
The fun waxed fast and furious,
And when we tired of that,
We danced upon the polished floor,
Or on the staircase sat
And loes ate. I had a waltz
With Talbot. He can dance!



I'd like to have another if
I ever get the chance!
The one-step next. We gaily trod
The measure—slow, then fast.
My partner? Hush! I'll whisper—
'Twas the same one as the last.
Then all at once a voice exclaimed:
"You've let the fire go out!"
I looked around. I was at home;
Of that there was no doubt.
'Twas all a dream! That happy scene
Was fading from my view;
But ere it died I wrote it down
To send along to you!

A new boy comes to St. Jim's and quickly manages to fall foul of Manners of the Shell. A mystery about the new fellow's name increases Manners' suspicions, and the chums' inquiries lead to some strange revelations!



THE NEW BOYS' "SECRET!"

A Magnificent Yarn of the
Popular Schoolboy Favourites,
Tom Merry & Co.

By
Martin Clifford.

CHAPTER 1.

Manners is Wrathful!

"FOOTBALL!" said Tom Merry, the junior captain at St. Jim's.

"Bosh!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther grinned.

"I was thinking of the pictures," he remarked.

Manners gave a grunt.

"If the end of the world came in our time," he said, "I'm pretty certain that it would find Tom playing footer and you at the pictures, Monty. For goodness' sake, give 'em both a rest this afternoon! What's the matter with taking my camera for a walk?"

Whereat Tom Merry and Monty Lowther groaned in unison.

It was a half-holiday at St. Jim's.

Exceptionally, it was a fine afternoon.

The sun, which for weeks seemed to have forgotten how to shine, had come out in full force.

Being a fine afternoon, and a half-holiday, each member of the Terrible Three of the Shell felt that the fullest possible advantage ought to be taken of it.

On that point they were agreed. On details they differed.

The weather had of late seriously interfered with football. There was no match on for the afternoon; but Tom Merry's idea was that a match should be fixed up at once, to take full advantage of that brief spell of fine weather. Monty Lowther's idea was that a pleasant walk to Wayland, with a visit to the pictures, would fill the bill nicely. While Manners, whose camera had been rather idle of late, was convinced that this opportunity ought not to be lost.

"You see," said Tom Merry, "we want to keep in form for footer; we don't want Greyfriars and Rookwood to beat us when they come along. We can fix up a match with the New House fellows—"

"I hear there's a new picture at the Wayland Palace," observed Monty Lowther. "It's rather good, and you chaps oughtn't to miss it."

"Look at the sun," said Manners. "How often do you get a light like this for photographs in the winter? It would be a sin and a shame to waste an afternoon like this."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Blow photographs, and bother pictures!" he said. "I'll go and speak to Blake and Figgins about getting up a game. See you at tea-time."

And Tom Merry strolled cheerily out of Study No. 10 in the Shell, leaving his comrades to their own devices.

Manners sorted out his camera.

"Sure you won't come to the pictures, old man?" asked Lowther, with a grin.

"Quite! Sure you won't come and help me to look for some snaps?"

"Oh, my hat! More than quite! Ta-ta!"

And Monty Lowther departed.

Manners, left alone, took his camera from its leather case to examine it and place a roll of films in position. It was one of the ways of the Terrible Three, perhaps one reason why their friendship remained unshaken, that they could always part company cheerfully and amicably when different desires drew them in different directions.

Tom Merry and Lowther went their separate ways contentedly, leaving a contented Manners behind them.

But the cheerful smile, in anticipation of a happy afternoon, faded from Manners' face as he handled his camera. The back of the instrument was loose and unsecured; and Manners was always very careful to fasten it before putting his camera away. Someone, evidently, had been meddling with that camera, and had put it away quite carelessly.

Manners of the Shell uttered an annoyed exclamation.

If there was anything that really annoyed Manners of the Shell it was for a sacrilegious hand to be laid on his precious camera. It was a very handsome and expensive camera, and it was the apple of his eye. Manners was extremely careful with it; and though he would lend almost anything else to anybody, he never lent his camera. Even his nearest and dearest chums, Tom and Monty had realised that it was necessary to treat that camera with respect and consideration if they were to pull well with Manners.

And now it had been carelessly handled by an unpermitted hand. And as the annoyed Manners examined it further he was able—though not endowed with the perspicacity of Sherlock Holmes or Ferrers Locke—to trace the hand that had been there. For there was a jammy thumb-mark on the camera, and to the case there adhered an aniseed ball.

"Trimble!" growled Manners.

Only Baggy Trimble of the Fourth Form was likely to leave such traces behind him.

Manners breathed hard.

Baggy Trimble had had the audacity—the unparalleled audacity—to borrow his camera. He might have damaged it—and certainly he had made it jammy and sticky.

Manners made a mental resolve to kick Trimble hard next time he saw him. Then he looked in the drawer where he kept his films.

A whole roll of a dozen films should have been there. Manners found the loose wrapping that had once been round the roll. But the roll itself had vanished.

"My hat!"

Manners of the Shell began to glare. Baggy had not only borrowed the camera, but had evidently borrowed—and used—the films, too. Manners was left without films—just as he was starting on a photographing expedition.

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That meant a walk to Rylcombe before he could begin, and the expenditure of several shillings. And Manners, not being a wealthy fellow, had to be careful of his shillings.

"By Jove! I—I—I'll burst him!" howled Manners.

"Bai Jove! What's the mattach, deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form, looked into the study. The swell of St. Jim's turned his celebrated eyeglass upon Manners' excited face in surprise.

"Anythin' up?" he inquired.

"Yes!" snapped Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, you need not snap a fellow's head off, you know," said Arthur Augustus, with mild reproof.

"Br-r-r-r!" grunted Manners.

"I do not wegard that as an intelligible wemark, Mannahs! Is Tom Mewwy heah?"

"Can't you see he isn't?" said Manners curtly.

The Shell fellow was generally quite a nice-mannered youth; but just now he was in a state of irritation and annoyance. Arthur Augustus had butted in at the wrong moment, as he often did.

D'Arcy fixed his eyeglass on Manners.

"Now I look wound, Mannahs, I can see that Tom Mewwy is not heah!" he said. "That is no weason, howevah, why you should weply in such an extwemely snappish mannah. I wegard your weply as wude!"

"Oh, bosh!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Have you seen that fat villain Trimble?" exclaimed Manners.

"Yass, wathah!"

"Where is he?"

"I weally do not know where he is now, Mannahs. I saw him at dinnah—"

"You silly owl!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"He's been messing about with my camera; he's used up my films!" snorted Manners. "I'm going to smash him!"

"Bai Jove! Was it your camewah?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I saw him takin' photogwaphs aftah second lesson this mornin'. He said he was goin' to send some snaps to a picture papah. I—"

"I'll give him snaps!" growled Manners, jamming the camera into its case. "I'll jolly well kick him across the quad when I come across him! The cheeky fat villain!"

And Manners, slinging his camera over his shoulder, quitted No. 10 in the Shell. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass a little more firmly into his noble eye and gazed disapprovingly after the Shell fellow.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "It weally seems to me that havin' a hobby wathah detewiwates a fellow's mannahs—it does, weally!"

And Arthur Augustus shook his noble head and sailed gracefully away; while Manners of the Shell, quite indifferent to his noble opinion, walked out of the gates of St. Jim's with his camera—and one eye open for Baggy Trimble of the Fourth.

CHAPTER 2.

Baggy Comes in Useful!

"SCHOOL HOUSE cad!"

"Bump him!"

Tom Merry smiled, and held up his hand in sign of peace.

Figgins & Co. of the New House were adorning the steps of that building, and enjoying the unaccustomed sunshine, when Tom arrived there.

"All serene, old beans!" said the captain of the Shell.

"Keep your wool on!"

"What are you doing on the respectable side of the quad?" inquired George Figgins severely.

"School House fellows and dogs not admitted here!" said Kerr solemnly. "Bump him!"

"Hold on!" said Fatty Wynn. "If it's a feed—"

Tom Merry laughed.

"It isn't!" he said. "But it's pax. I want to pick up sides for a match this afternoon."

"Good egg!" agreed Figgins. "I was just thinking that it was a pity to waste the afternoon. But—"

"But we're booked," said Kerr. "At least, Figgy is, and we're going to Rylcombe with him."

"Oh, rot!" said Tom. "Lots of the fellows have gone out of gates; but I've got to dig up twenty-two somewhere. You can give Rylcombe a miss. What the thump do you want to go to Rylcombe for?"

"I don't want to," answered Figgins.

"Well, then, don't."

"It's a case of must," explained the junior captain of the New House. "There's a new kid coming along this afternoon, and he's coming into this House—kid named—What's his name, Kerr? I forget."

"Torrence," said Kerr.

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"That's it!" assented Figgins. "Mr. Ratcliff has asked me to meet him at the station."

"Tell him there's nothing doing," suggested Tom Merry. Figgins grinned.

"Yes, I can see myself telling Ratty that!" he said. "Requests from Ratty are like giddy royal commands. I'd jolly well rather play footer, though."

"Same here," said Kerr.

"And here," said Fatty Wynn. "I say, Figgy, you could get another chap to go to the station. Ratty won't mind, so long as the new kid is brought along safe and sound."

"That's a good idea," said Tom Merry. "Here's Chowle—ask him. He's a slacker, and won't want to play footer."

Chowle of the Fourth was coming out of the New House. Figgins called to him at once.

"I say, Chowle, are you busy this afternoon?"

"I'm going out with Racke of the Shell," said Chowle, stopping.

"We're getting up a footer match—"

"You can jolly well leave me out of it!" said Chowle promptly. "Tain't compulsory footer this afternoon."

Figgins snuffed.

"I'm not going to ask you to play footer," he snapped. "But there's a new kid coming by the three train at Rylcombe, and I'm booked to meet him. Will you go instead?"

"Thanks, no!"

"Look here, Chowle—"

But Chowle of the Fourth did not "look there." Evidently he was not keen on obliging Figgins. He ran down the steps, and crossed over to the School House.

"Rotten slacker!" grunted Figgins. "Lots of fellows I could ask, but we shall want them if we're making up a game. Hallo, there's Trimble!"

"Here, Trimble!" called out Tom Merry.

Baggy Trimble of the School House Fourth was loafing in the quad with his hands in his pockets. The fat Fourth-Former glanced round as his name was called and eyed Tom Merry warily. He did not approach.

"Come here!" called out Tom.

"No larks, you know," said Baggy cautiously. "I haven't been in your study, Tom Merry."

"What?"

"If Manners thinks I've touched his camera he's quite mistaken. I wouldn't, you know."

Tom stared at him.

"You fat boulder, have you been messing about with Manners' camera?" he exclaimed.

"Haven't I just said that I haven't?" demanded Trimble.

"Besides, I don't see why Manners makes such a fuss about that rotten camera. It doesn't take good photographs. Every one I took this morning turned out a smudge."

"You silly ass!" said Tom, laughing. "Never mind that now. Will you go down to Rylcombe for Figgins this afternoon?"

"No fear!"

"Look here, you fat slacker—"

"The fact is, I'm looking for a chap," said Baggy. "I'm stony this afternoon, and I want to find somebody to lend me a bob."

Baggy Trimble blinked at Figgins of the Fourth. Apparently the fat junior's services were to be had, if required, for the reasonable price of one shilling!

Figgins understood, and he grinned.

"I'll lend you a bob if you'll go down to the station and meet the new chap and bring him here," he said.

"Well, one good turn deserves another, doesn't it?" said Baggy cheerfully. "I'm your man. Where's the bob?"

Figgins extracted a shilling from his pocket.

"Catch!"

"Yow-ow!" howled Baggy. He caught the shilling with his little fat nose.

"Clumsy!" said Figgins. "Now, the train gets in at three, and the new chap's name is Torrence, and he's coming into this House. You'll know him all right. Get on the platform and wait for him."

"I shall want a platform ticket," said Baggy.

"Well, you can get one."

"You have to pay a penny for a platform ticket," explained Trimble. Baggy was evidently proceeding in this transaction on strict business principles.

"Oh, give the ghoul a penny, one of you!" said Figgins. "Mind you meet the chap, Trimble. If you forget, or anything happens, I'll jolly well take a bob's worth out of your hide. See?"

"Look here, you know—"

"Bring the chap to this House, and take him to the Housemaster's study—Mr. Ratcliff expects him," said Figgins. "Now cut off. You haven't too much time to get to the station, the rate you crawl at."

"I'm off!" said Baggy cheerily.

Baggy Trimble, the richer by a shilling and a penny, rolled away to the gates. Having made this satisfactory



As Manners stretched out a hand to take Baggy Trimble by the collar, the fat junior ducked his head and charged desperately. Crash! His bullet head smote Manners in the waistcoat. "Ow!" spluttered Manners. "Oooogh! Oh!" (See this page.)

arrangement, Figgins dismissed Baggy and the new fellow from his mind, and proceeded to consider the more important subject of football. In a very short time Tom Merry and Figgins had picked up sides for a scratch match, and they proceeded to Little Side to enjoy their afternoon in their own way.

Meanwhile, Baggy Trimble rolled away down the lane towards the village of Rylcombe.

His immediate destination was not the railway-station. He stopped when he arrived at Mrs. Murphy's little tuckshop in the village High Street. The expenditure of Piggy's shilling was the most important matter that Baggy had on hand. The new fellow could wait.

Baggy stopped outside the tuckshop and scanned the good things in the window with a hungry eye. A shilling would not go very far, and careful consideration was needed, in order to obtain the largest possible amount of tuck for that moderate sum.

Baggy was still scanning the window, and considering earnestly and deeply, when he was startled by a sudden exclamation behind him.

"You fat rotter!"

It was the voice of Manners of the Shell.

Manners of the Shell had come out of a shop a few doors away. He had purchased a new roll of films, and that purchase had exhausted Manners' available supply of cash—which was naturally very annoying to Manners. So he was glad to see Trimble. He was feeling a strong desire to kick the fat junior—and here was Baggy all ready to be kicked.

"Oh, I say!" Trimble spun round in alarm. "I—I say, Manners, I never touched your camera, old fellow! I haven't used your films. I—I wouldn't, you know?"

Manners did not reply; but he came straight at Trimble with a deadly gleam in his eye.

Baggy blinked to the right, and blinked to the left; but there was no escape for him. He was fairly cornered against the shop-front, and it looked as if he had to suffer for his sins.

But just as Manners reached him, and stretched out a hand to take him by the collar, Baggy ducked his head and charged desperately.

Crash!

Baggy's bullet head smote Manners on his waistcoat. With Baggy's weight behind it, it was a terrific charge.

Manners staggered back, gasping, and sat down suddenly on the pavement. His camera thudded on the pavement beside him. He gave a breathless howl.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Baggy.

The fat junior blinked at Manners for a second, almost terrified at what he had done.

But he realised that he had no time to lose. Manners was down; but if Baggy was still on the scene when Manners was up again the results for Baggy would be of the most painful kind. For one terrified second Baggy blinked at Manners, and then he fled.

"Ow!" spluttered Manners. "Oooogh! Oh!"

He staggered up.

"Trimble, you fat rotter! Stop!"

Baggy Trimble was already disappearing round the nearest corner.

"By Jove! I—I—I'll—"

Manners made a stride in pursuit, and then he stopped. Baggy Trimble was gone. After all, Trimble would keep! Manners examined his camera with care to ascertain that it had sustained no damage; and then he walked out of the village, gasping a good deal as he went. For a long time there was a lingering ache in the spot where Baggy's bullet head had smitten him; and every twinge made Manners of the Shell more and more determined to give Baggy the thrashing of his life at the earliest possible moment.

CHAPTER 3.

Trimble Causes Trouble!

BAGGY TRIMBLE rolled into the little railway-station at Rylcombe. He leaned on an automatic machine and pumped in breath. Perspiration was streaming down his fat face, though the weather was cold. Baggy Trimble had fled for his life after the downfall of Manners, and he had not stopped till he dodged into the station.

Baggy was still gasping for breath when a train came in.

and he did not heed it. Until he got his second wind Baggy was not likely to waste his attention on the new St. Jim's fellow whom he was to meet at the station. Several passengers came out, and among them was a rather good-looking, sturdy fellow in Etons and overcoat and bowler-hat, with a bag in his hand. His glance fell on the fat junior, and he smiled slightly as he glanced at him.

He stopped at the station entrance, and glanced about him, as if expecting to see someone. Then it occurred to Baggy Trimble that this was the new fellow, Torrence, and he detached his fat person from the automatic machine and rolled after the youth.

"I say, are you Torrence?" he asked.

The youth looked at him.

"That's my name," he assented.

"New kid for St. Jim's—what?"

"I'm going to St. Jim's," said Torrence. "I understood that someone was to meet me at the station. Do you belong to the school?"

Trimble nodded and grinned.

"I've come to meet you," he said.

"Oh!"

"I'm Trimble of the Fourth Form," went on Baggy. "I belong to the School House, though, not the mouldy old show you're going into."

"Eh?"

"You're New House," said Baggy. "Pretty rotten show. We call it the casual ward on our side. He, he, he!"

"Do you?" said Torrence, staring at him.

"Oh, yes! Rotten lot in that House—crowd of measly bounders, you know," said Trimble cheerily. "Your House-master is a corker, too—old blighter named Ratcliff. Pretty beastly for a fellow to go into the New House. We're the gentlemanly House, you know, on our side."

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Torrence. "Are you?"

"Yes, rather! Wouldn't be found dead in the New House," said Baggy emphatically. "Still, I dare say it's good enough for you. I'm going to take you to the school. This way."

Torrence eyed him. Apparently the fat and fatuous Baggy did not make a very favourable impression on him, though he belonged to the "gentlemanly" House at St. Jim's.

"Look here, were you sent to meet me?" asked Torrence.

"Certainly."

"Then I suppose I'd better come with you. Get a move on fatty!"

"Eh?"

"Roll on!" said Torrence.

Baggy Trimble blinked at the new fellow. Master Torrence seemed rather a cool customer—much too cool and self-possessed, in Baggy's opinion. There seemed to be very little about him of the diffidence Baggy had naturally expected in a new boy coming to a big school. Baggy had naturally expected to patronise him. But really there did not seem much room for Trimble's lofty patronage.

"Look here—" began Baggy. "Don't you be cheeky, you know. You've got a lot to say for yourself, for a new kid."

"You seem to have a great deal too much to say for yourself," retorted Torrence.

"You've said quite enough, anyhow, so dry up!"

"Why, you cheeky ass—"

"Chuck it, and come on, if you're showing me the way!" interrupted Torrence.

And swinging his bag lightly in his hand, Torrence walked out of the station.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Baggy Trimble. "The cheeky cad, talking to me like that! I've a jolly good mind to punch his head to begin with!"

On second thoughts, however, Baggy decided not to begin by punching the new fellow's head. The new fellow looked as if he had a punch much more hefty than Baggy's, and Trimble didn't want to sample it.

He rolled after Torrence. He was tempted to leave the new junior to his own devices, to find his way to the school on his own, but he did not want to be called to account by George Figgins. So he rejoined the new fellow in the village street.

"This way," he said sulkily.

Torrence smiled, and walked along with Baggy Trimble. At Mrs. Murphy's tuckshop Baggy halted. He had been blinking cautiously up and down the High Street, and ascertained that Manners of the Shell was no longer in the offing.

"I've got to call here, Torrence," he said. "Wait a minute or two. You can come in if you like."

Torrence paused.

"Look here, I want to get on to the school," he said. "I can find my way all right. I've got a tongue in my head, anyway. No need for you to come, Trimble."

Trimble snorted.

"I've promised to take you to the school, and I shall get into a row if I don't," he grunted. "You just hang on a few minutes, and don't be cheeky."

"Oh, if that's how it is, I'll hang on," said Torrence good-naturedly. "I don't want to get you into a row, of course."

Baggy rolled into Mrs. Murphy's shop. Torrence waited for him, sitting down on the bench under the old oak-tree outside.

It did not take Baggy Trimble long to consume tuck to the exact value of one shilling and a penny. Then he rolled out of the tuckshop, dabbing at a smear of jam on his fat face.

"I say, Torrence," he said, eyeing the new junior, "do you happen to have a half-crown about you?"

"Several," answered Torrence.

"That's jolly lucky!"

"Yes. Come on."

"You see, I left my purse on the table in my study in the School House," explained Baggy.

"Anything in it?"

"Eh? You cheeky ass, all my currency notes and—and banknotes—"

"Then the sooner you get to the school the better," said Torrence. "You don't want to leave all that money lying about. Come on."

"But I say—"

Torrence picked up his bag from the bench and started again. Baggy Trimble blinked after him with an almost ferocious blink. He realised that this new kid had taken his measure already.

"Look here, Torrence, you cheeky cad—" he shouted.

Torrence looked back.

"Well?"

"You jolly well lend me half-a-crown or I jolly well won't take you to the school, so there!"

Torrence laughed.

"Please yourself," he said, and he walked on.

"Rotter!" grunted Trimble.

Again the fat Baggy was tempted to leave the new fellow on his own. But he knew that Figgins would require an account of his stewardship, and he did not want an argument with Figgins. Figgins would be only too likely to introduce a boot into such an argument.

So Trimble rejoined the new fellow, and they walked out of the village together into the lane towards St. Jim's. Torrence walked away, swinging his bag, with a light and springy step, Baggy Trimble puffing and blowing at his side.

"Look here, don't you go so jolly fast!" gasped Trimble.

"This isn't a blinking foot-race, you ass!"

"Oh, put it on," said Torrence. "It will bring down your fat a little, and you need it."

"You cheeky rotter—"

Torrence laughed and slackened his pace a little. At the cross-roads, half-way to St. Jim's, a fellow with a camera slung on his shoulder came in sight. It was Manners of the Shell, looking for a favourable spot for his hobby. Manners came out into Rylcombe Lane just as Torrence and Baggy Trimble reached the cross-roads, and they met almost face to face. Manners uttered an exclamation.

"Oh! It's you—"

Baggy Trimble yelped.

"I say, keep him off!"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Torrence, looking from one to the other in amazement.

Baggy Trimble dodged round the new junior as Manners rushed at him.

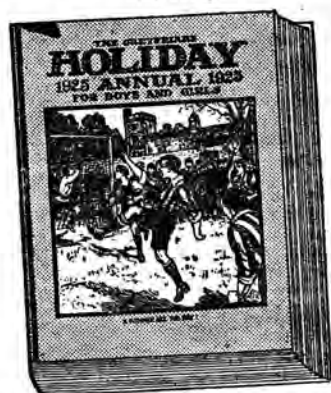
"Keep him off!" he yelled.

"Here, hold on, whoever you are!" exclaimed Torrence, and he stretched out a sturdy arm, arresting Manners' pursuit of the fat junior.

"Get out of the way!" snapped Manners. "I owe that fat villain a licking, and I'm going to lick him—see?"

"I never touched the camera!" howled Trimble. "Honest injun, you know! I say, keep him off, Torrence!"

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Torrence walked along, swinging his bag, with a light and springy step, Baggy Trimble puffing and blowing at his side. "Look here, don't you go so jolly fast!" gasped Trimble. "This isn't a blessed foot-race, you aas!" "Oh, put it on," said Torrence. "It will bring your fat down a little!" (See page 6.)

"What has he done, anyhow?" asked Torrence, standing between the Shell fellow and the fat Fourth-Former.

Manners snorted.

"I don't see that it matters to you," he said angrily. "But he's messed my camera about and used up a roll of films, and I've had to buy a new lot, and that fat rotter won't pay for them. And I'm jolly well going to lick him, so get out of the way!"

"I haven't!" roared Trimble. "I—I didn't! I wasn't—I wouldn't, you know! Keep him off, Torrence!"

"Look here—" began Torrence.

"Will you get out of the way, whoever you happen to be?" asked Manners. "If you don't, you'll get shoved aside!"

Torrence's eyes sparkled.

"Who's going to do the shoving?" he inquired.

"Little me."

"Then you'd better get on with it!" retorted Torrence.

And Manners, in great exasperation, got on with it, and the next moment they were fighting.

CHAPTER 4.

Torrence Arrives!

CRASH!

Torrence went over on his back, after a couple of minutes of strenuous scrapping.

He dropped in the lane, and gasped.

Manners panted.

"Now mind your own business!"

And he looked round for Trimble.

He looked; but he saw him not. During those two strenuous minutes Baggy Trimble had also been strenuous,

and his fat legs went like machinery as he fled. Baggy did not expect Torrence to defeat the Shell fellow, who was the bigger of the two; and he had sagely decided to be well off the scene before the combat ended. So, as Torrence sprawled in the lane, and Manners glared round for Trimble, Baggy was sprinting for all he was worth in the direction of the school, and was already out of sight in the winding lane.

Manners had time to give only one glance round for him, as it happened, for Torrence was on his feet again in a twinkling.

He did not speak; he came on again with a rush, and Manners put up his hands.

The fight was renewed.

Torrence had been by no means keen at the beginning of that unexpected scrap; he had felt bound to protect the fat fellow who had been guiding him to the school, knowing nothing of the cause of the dispute. His object had been to keep Manners from getting at Trimble. But the heavy drive that had laid him on his back had altered matters. He was keen enough now, and he came on hard and fast, his eyes gleaming.

Manners was angry, and irritated by what he considered the uncalled-for interference of this fellow whom he had never seen before. So he met Torrence more than half-way.

Torrence's bag lay in the road, and Manners' camera near it. Manners had even forgotten his precious camera. Tramping and panting and punching, the two juniors fought furiously, while Baggy Trimble, the unworthy cause of all the trouble, vanished in the distance.

"Hallo! Stop that!"

Kildare of the Sixth, coming along the lane with Darrell,

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sighted the strenuous combat and quickened his steps. He called to the combatants as he came up.

But both of them were too excited to heed him.

"Stop!" shouted Kildare. "Do you hear?"

Still they did not heed.

Kildare gripped Manners by the collar, and Darrell of the Sixth grasped Torrence by the shoulders. The two excited juniors were wrenched apart, gasping in the grasp of the big seniors.

Manners panted.

"Oh, it's you, Kildare!"

"What do you mean by this, Manners?" exclaimed the prefect angrily. "Who's this fellow you're slogging with like a prize-fighter?"

"I don't know—a cheeky, interfering cad, that's all!" said Manners. "I've never seen him before."

"Then what are you fighting about?"

"Because he's a cheeky cad, butting into what doesn't concern him!"

Kildare eyed the two juniors. Both of them showed signs of the combat, brief as it had been.

"I don't quite see what you're butting in for, you two chaps," said Torrence. "Will you let go my shoulder?"

"No," said Darrell, with a laugh. "But I'll shake you for your cheek!"

Shake! Shake!

"Chuck it, Darrell!" said Kildare, with a grim. "That kid doesn't belong to St. Jim's, you know."

"Oh, but I do!" exclaimed Torrence.

"You do?" said Kildare. "I've never seen you before."

"I happen to be a new chap—my name's Torrence. I'm going into the New House."

"Oh! You're a new kid, are you?" said the captain of St. Jim's. "Manners, it's rotten bad form to scrap with a new kid on the first day!"

Manners knitted his brows.

"I didn't know he was a St. Jim's chap at all," he answered. "Anyhow, he's only a New House cad, according to what he says. And he's a cheeky rotter."

"You're calling me some pretty names," said Torrence. "I'll make you swallow them, if this chap will let go."

"Well, I won't," said Darrell.

"You've said enough, Manners," said Kildare, frowning. "It looks to me as if you're to blame. Anyhow, take a hundred lines for fighting—you jolly well know better, if the new kid doesn't!"

Manners sneered.

"Aren't you giving him lines, too?" he asked.

"No; and don't ask cheeky questions, Manners, or you'll get the ashplant instead of lines! Cut off!"

The two juniors were released.

Kildare and Darrell walked on towards the school, leaving them. They eyed one another. It was impossible to renew the conflict, with the two Sixth Form prefects within sight and hearing. Torrence, indeed, was not keen on renewing it, so far as that went. Manners, dabbing a stream of red from his nose with his handkerchief, was a good deal keener. But he felt that it would not do, and he picked up his camera and walked away without a word or a look at Torrence.

Torrence shrugged his shoulders, and then smiled.

"Well, this is jolly for my first day at St. Jim's!" he murmured.

He looked round him.

Manners had gone by a lane from the cross-roads towards Wayland, and Kildare and Darrell were walking on towards the school, and had almost disappeared by now. Trimble had long vanished, and the new junior was left without a guide. He picked up his bag, and walked on in the direction the two seniors had taken, resolving to ask his way of the next passer-by he met.

But he did not need to ask, as a few minutes later the grey old tower of St. Jim's came in sight over the trees and meadows.

Torrence arrived at the school gates.

A number of fellows were passing in and out of the big old gateway, and no one gave him any special attention. He joined those who were going in and entered the old quad.

There he stood looking about him, rather puzzled. He was quite a stranger at the school; he knew that he had to present himself in Mr. Ratcliff's House, but which was Mr. Ratcliff's House, among the grey old buildings, was a mystery to him. He was about to retrace his steps and inquire at the porter's lodge, when a smiling Shell fellow bore down on him.

It was Monty Lowther.

Monty was at a loose end. He had cycled over to Wayland to see that new picture that was supposed to be good, and he had found that it was a wild and whirling American film that did not appeal to him in the least. So he had left the picture palace in disgust and cycled back, hoping to be in time for Tom Merry's scratch match. He had

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been in time to see twenty-two cheery footballers beginning the second half of the game, and for some little while Monty Lowther had watched them; and then he wandered away in search of other pursuits. And then he sighted the new fellow, bag in hand, looking rather like a lost sheep, and bore down on him. Monty wondered whether he could extract a little mild and necessary entertainment from pulling a new fellow's leg. So he came along to Torrence, with a cheery, welcoming smile that rather puzzled the new fellow.

"Jolly glad to see you!" said Monty Lowther blandly.

"So you've come?"

"Yes, I've come," said Torrence.

"You're Jones, aren't you?"

"Eh? No."

"Smith?" asked Lowther.

"My name's Torrence."

"Sure it isn't Robinson?" asked Lowther gravely.

"Eh? Of course." Torrence stared at him. "Can you tell me which is the New House?"

"Oh! You're for the New House?"

"Yes."

"Poor chap!" said Lowther sympathetically. "It's hard lines!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Torrence.

"Wha-a-at?"

"Don't be an ass!"

Monty Lowther breathed rather hard, and looked grimly at the new junior. Monty was a very good-tempered fellow, but he did not like being talked to like this by a new kid who had only just blown in, as it were.

"My House is all right," went on Torrence coolly. "You can't stuff me, you know. I'm a new chap, but not exactly green."

"Oh, I can't stuff you?" said Lowther.

"No. But you can tell me which is my House," said Torrence. "I've got to see my Housemaster."

"Come on!" said Lowther.

He walked Torrence across the quad to the School House. There he pointed to the big, arched doorway.

"Go in there and up the stairs," he said. "Take the second passage from the second landing and knock at the door marked No. 10. If your Housemaster isn't there, sit down and wait for him. Ta-ta!"

"Thanks!"

Torrence went into the House.

Monty Lowther sauntered away with a cheery smile.

"Can't stuff him, can't I?" he murmured. "Looks to me a little bit as if I can."

Certainly it looked like it. For it was the School House, not the New House, that Torrence had entered; and Monty Lowther's careful directions, carefully followed by the new junior, brought him to Tom Merry's study in the Shell passage, where he was extremely unlikely to find his Housemaster, or any Housemaster.

CHAPTER 5.

Trouble for Figgins!

TOM MERRY came off the football-field with a cheery, ruddy face. He had enjoyed his game that afternoon. It had been quite a good game, though the sides had been picked up rather hurriedly, and a good many of the St. Jim's junior footballers were out of gates and not available. The match had been drawn—two goals to two; but as pick-up matches did not count in the House records that did not matter, anyway.

"Jolly nearly beat you, Tommy!" remarked Figgins, as the footballers came off.

"And still more jolly nearly got beaten," said Tom, with a smile.

"Bow-wow!"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry threw on coat and muffler, and joined the School House fellows going back to the House. Figgins & Co. headed for the New House. And now that the football was over George Figgins remembered the existence of the new fellow whom Mr. Ratcliff had commanded him to meet at the station and bring to the school.

"I suppose that chap has got in all right?" Figgins remarked to Kerr and Wynn. "Better see, I suppose."

"There's Trimble. Ask him," said Kerr.

The podgy figure of Baggy Trimble was visible in the quadrangle, and Figgins hailed him. Trimble blinked round with an alarmed look.

"Oh, you!" he exclaimed.

"Did you think it was a ghost, fathead?"

"Well, I thought it might be that beast Manners. He's after me," said Trimble. "All right. I'm keeping out of Manners' way at present. I don't want to have to lick him, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He's not a bad chap, in his way, though he's quite potty about his silly camera," said Trimble. "Makes out that I borrowed it, you know. As if I'd touch the rotten thing with a barge-pole! Pitching into a chap, you know. Cheeky Shell cad! I don't want to have to thrash him. I'm a peaceable chap, so I'm keeping clear—see?"

"I see," grinned Figgins. "I suppose you could thrash Manners' little finger if he let you—perhaps?"

"Look here, you know—"

"But never mind Manners," went on Figgins. "Did you bring that chap to my House and take him to Ratty's study?"

"What chap?"

"The new chap, ass—Torrence," said Figgins impatiently.

"Didn't I tip you a bob to fetch him to the school, fathead?"

"You lent me a bob," said Trimble, with dignity.

"Well, it comes to the same thing—"

"It doesn't."

"Fathead! Did you land Torrence in the New House all right?"

"How could I when Manners pitched into me in Rylcombe Lane?" demanded Trimble. "I left them fighting."

"What!" exclaimed Kerr.

"Didn't you bring him to the school, then?"

"No. Couldn't, could I? Last I saw of him he was fighting Manners in the lane," said Trimble. "He's a bit of a rotter, I think. Suspicious sort of chap. Won't lend a fellow half-a-crown or so. But he stood up for me when Manners pitched into me, and I left them fighting, as I said. I thought I'd clear off. Bit thick, you know, scrapping on a public-road. No class. Not quite my style."

"Then where is the new chap now?" exclaimed Figgins blankly.

"Blest if I know!"

"Why, you fat villain—"

"Oh, blow the new chap!" said Trimble. "What does he matter, anyhow? Only a New House cad, if you come to that!"

Figgins & Co. glared at Trimble.

"I tipped you to bring him to the school!" howled Figgins. "Now I shall get ragged by old Ratty if he hasn't turned up."

"Well, I can't help it," said Trimble. "You'd better talk to Manners about that. It was all his fault. I'd have brought the fellow here all right if Manners hadn't chipped in."

And Trimble rolled away, evidently fed-up with the subject.

Figgins & Co. walked on to their House.

"I dare say it's all right,"

said Kerr comfortingly.

"Torrence has a tongue in his head, I suppose, and could ask his way to the school. And he would have sense enough to go to Ratty."

"I hope so," granted Figgins. "But if he's lost his way and gone wandering, it means a row. Blow! I really think Manners might have let the chap alone on his first day in the school. Bother!"

The three juniors entered their House, and Figgins proceeded as quickly as possible to inquire after the new fellow. But he was unable to get any news of Torrence.

Nobody in the New House, apparently, had seen anything of him, and it was clear that he had not arrived.

There had been ample time, of course, for the new fellow to arrive in the House and report himself to Mr. Ratcliff.

Figgy was still pursuing his inquiries when Monteith of the Sixth bore down on him.

"Mr. Ratcliff's study!" he said. "Sharp!"

Figgy rather dispiritedly made his way to his Housemaster's study. He knew that Mr. Ratcliff was going to ask about the new boy, who had so mysteriously failed to arrive.

Mr. Ratcliff fixed a very acid look on the junior as he presented himself.

"Figgins, did you meet the new junior, Torrence, at the railway-station as I requested you? He does not seem to have arrived yet."

Figgins coloured uncomfortably.

"I asked another fellow to go, sir," he said. "I thought it would be all right, sir, as—as I was wanted in a footer match, sir."

"Very good, Figgins, if the boy you asked has done what I requested you to do. In that case, where is Torrence?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Has he arrived in the school?"

"I—I haven't seen him, sir."

"What! Have you not questioned the boy to whom you assigned your duty of meeting him at the station?"

"Yes, sir, and—and it seems that he left him in the lane, sir. But I suppose Torrence could find his way here all right."

Mr. Ratcliff's frown became portentous.

"He has apparently not done so, Figgins. You have neglected to carry out my instructions. Torrence should have been here long ago. He is not here."

"Nunno, sir," mumbled Figgins.

"He may have lost his way or had some accident," said the New House master angrily. "If I am given unnecessary trouble in this matter, Figgins, I need not say that your punishment will be severe."

"Oh, sir!"

"Go and look for Torrence at once, and bring him to me immediately you find him," said Mr. Ratcliff harshly.

"Yes, sir!"

George Figgins left the Housemaster's study dispiritedly. Torrence's whereabouts were a mystery to him. All he knew was that Trimble had left him fighting with Manners of the Shell in Rylcombe Lane.

"The silly owl has wandered off and lost himself," Figgins said to Kerr and Wynn. "Bother that silly ass Manners! It's all his fault."

"Let's look for him," said Kerr.

"What about tea?" asked Fatty Wynn anxiously. "I'm hungry, you know."

"Blow tea!" said Figgins crossly. "Ratty will scalp me if that new chump doesn't turn up soon."

Fatty Wynn sighed, and joined his chums as they left the House to search for Torrence.

There was no sign of the new fellow in the quad, but they caught sight of Manners coming in at the gates. The three New House juniors bore down on Manners at once.

"Hallo, Manners! Seen a silly ass named Torrence?" asked Figgins. "A new chap. I hear you've been scrapping with him."

"Yes," granted Manners.

"Your nose looks like it," grinned Figgins.

"Never mind my nose," snapped Manners. "Go and eat cake!"

The swollen state of Manners' nose did not seem to have improved his temper.

"But where's the chap now?" asked Kerr.

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HAROLD BATES.

A member of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, sharing Study No. 3 with Bruce Macdonald. A quiet and reserved fellow is Bates, being of a studious nature. He is not much of a sportsman, but goes in for a great deal of cycling. You will mostly find him pedalling along the country lanes, caring naught for anything or anybody. Occasionally he tries his hand with rod and line, although his patience has not been awarded with many large "catches." Although not mentioned much, Bates is popular among his schoolfellows, especially Blake & Co.

"I haven't seen him since I scrapped with him, more than an hour ago, and don't want to."

"But—
"Rats!"

Manners of the Shell stalked on towards his own House. Figgins & Co. looked after him. There was no information to be had from Manners, evidently, and his cross temper, in the circumstances, was annoying. Besides, he was a Shell fellow, and School House, and Figgins & Co. were Fourth and New House. So they trotted after Manners, collared him, and bumped him on the ground.

Manners roared.

"Ow! You cheeky cads! I'll— Yarooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. chortled and scuttled off, to pursue their search for the new junior. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who had sighted the little incident, came up to give Manners a smiling.

"Wough wottahs, you know," said Arthur Augustus. "I way let me help you up, Mannahs. All wight now?"

"What are you grinning at?" snapped Manners, perhaps by way of thanks for the assistance he had received from the swell of the School House.

"Weally, Mannahs!"

"Nothing to grin at, that I can see."

"I was not gwinnin', Mannahs. Pewwaps I was smilin'," said Arthur Augustus. "You looked wathah funny, you know, spawlin' ovah—"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Mannahs!"

"Oh, rats!"

Manners stalked on towards his House, frowning, leaving the swell of St. Jim's staring after him with grim disapproval. Meanwhile, Figgins & Co., with growing irritation, were hunting far and wide for the new fellow, but they found him not.

CHAPTER 6.

A Scrap in the Study!

MANNERS came into the School House with a frowning brow.

That afternoon had turned out really "rotten," after all, from the point of view of Harry Manners of the Shell.

His precious camera had been carelessly handled, his films had been raided, he was "stony" after expending his last cash resources on a new roll of films; and Baggy Trimble, the cause of all the trouble, had escaped him, after "butting" him over in Rylcombe High Street, thus adding injury to injury. And Manners was feeling rather "bad" after his fight with the new junior, Torrence, and he was only too conscious of the fact that he had a "prize" nose. That nose, usually a rather good-looking one, was red and swollen, and anything but handsome, and several amused glances were cast on it as Manners came into the House. Every glance was a fresh annoyance to Manners. He was painfully aware that he had not had the better of the new fellow in the tussle, though he was bigger than Torrence. He wanted to believe that, but for Kildare's interruption, he would have thrashed the cheeky new fellow soundly, but he could not quite believe it.

Altogether Manners was in a state of great irritation, not at all his usual placid and placable self.

"Football over?" he asked Levison of the Fourth, as he met that youth in the hall.

Levison nodded.

"Yes. We drew with Figgins. Where did you pick up that jolly old nose, old chap?"

"Find out!" snapped Manners.

"Keep your wool on," said Levison with a smile.

Manners grunted, and went on to the stairs. Cardew and Clive were chatting there, and both of them smiled at Manners. The Shell fellow was quite aware that it was his prize nose that provoked the smiles.

"Has Tom Merry come in?" asked Manners.

"He's in the changin'-room," said Cardew, "fightin' his giddy football battles over again. Did it damage the car?"

"Eh?" asked Manners, bewildered. "Did what damage what car?"

"Haven't you butted into a motor-car with your nose?"

"You silly ass!"

Manners tramped up the stairs, leaving Cardew chuckling and Clive grinning.

He came into the Shell passage and walked on morosely to his study. As the football was over Manners thought that Tom and Lowther might as well have had tea ready in the study. He was in the mood when a fellow is liable to think that some other fellow might have done something that he hadn't done.

But, of course, Tom was going in for "football jaw" in the changing-room, and Lowther, if he had come back from

the pictures, was loafing about somewhere. Manners was crosser than ever as he threw open the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell.

A junior was sitting in the armchair in the study, and for the moment Manners supposed that it was Lowther.

"Oh, you're here, Monty! Might have started getting tea."

The junior rose from the chair and looked at him. Then Manners recognised him, and stared.

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Little me," said Torrence cheerfully.

"What the thump are you doing here?"

Torrence smiled.

"I might as well ask you that," he said good-humouredly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass," said Manners angrily. "You're not wanted in this study, and that's plain."

"You don't say so!" said Torrence, unmoved.

"I do say so!"

"Dear me!"

Torrence sat down in the armchair again. Manners stood and stared at him, puzzled and angry. Why the new fellow was there was a mystery to him, to Manners it seemed sheer, unadulterated cheek.

"Will you get out?" asked Manners, at last.

"Certainly not!"

"You won't get out of this study?" exclaimed Manners, more astonished than angry now.

"No!"

"You cheeky rotter!"

"Oh, draw it mild," exclaimed Torrence. "What's biting you, anyhow? Where's the harm in my waiting here?"

"You can wait somewhere else, if you want to wait," said Manners. "You can't wait in this study. Travel!"

"Bosh!" said Torrence.

Manners' eyes glittered.

"Can it!" went on Torrence cheerfully. "Do you think you can bully-rag me because I'm a new chap? I'm new here, but I've been to school before, and I know my way about. Can it, old bean."

Manners placed the door wide open.

"That's your way," he said. "Get going!"

"Cheese it!"

"You won't go?"

"Of course I won't."

"Then you'll jolly well be put!" roared Manners, quite losing his temper now. And he advanced on the new junior with his hands up.

Torrence jumped up again, and backed off a pace or two.

"Mind what you're about, you ass!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you don't want the Housemaster to come in and catch us fighting?"

"The Housemaster's not likely to come here," sneered Manners. "I give you one second to get out of this study."

"Rate!"

"Then I'll jolly well kick you out!"

Manners rushed at the new fellow.

They grasped one another, Manners savagely and Torrence with growing anger. Manners endeavoured to swing the new fellow towards the door, and succeeded. But Torrence swung back with Manners, and they crashed into the study table. Manners had laid his camera on the table, and as that article of furniture rocked under the impact the camera slid to the floor with a thud.

"Oh, you rotter!" gasped Manners. "Out you go!"

"We'll jolly well see!" panted Torrence.

The struggle was furious, and the two juniors reeled and staggered about the study. Then they came doorward again, just as Tom Merry and Monty Lowther came along the passage towards No. 10.

"Outside!" gasped Manners; and he made a herculean effort to hurl Torrence forth into the Shell passage. They parted.

But it was not Torrence who went whirling out, it was Manners—greatly to his surprise.

Manners of the Shell hurtled through the doorway, and crashed on the floor of the Shell passage, and rolled at the feet of his astonished chums as they arrived at No. 10.

CHAPTER 7. Bitter Blood!

WHAT the dickens—

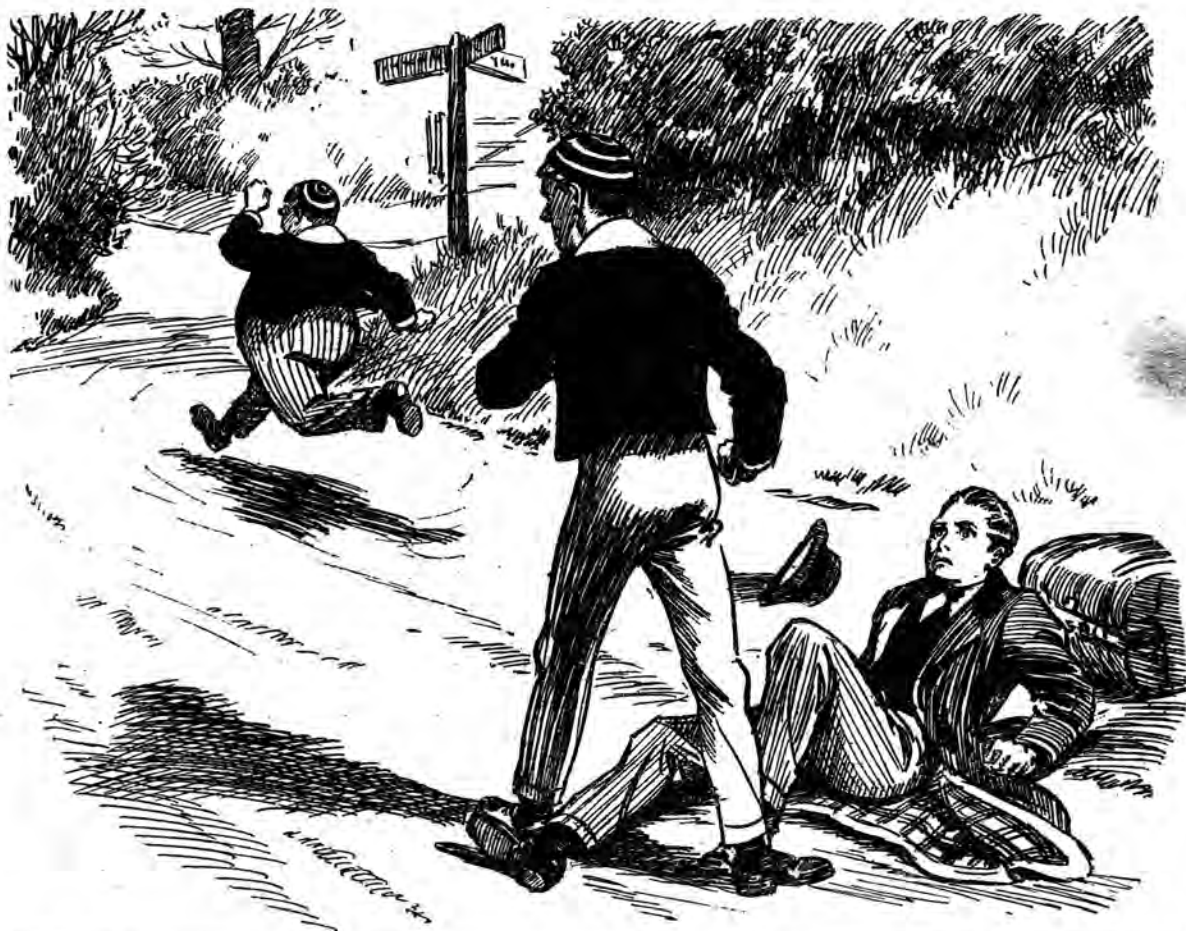
"Manners!"

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther stared blankly at Manners as he sprawled breathlessly in the Shell passage. Torrence looked out of the doorway of No. 10, panting.

Manners sat up.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You rotter! You cad! I'll—I'll— Just wait a tick, and I'll smash you!"

"Come on, then, you outsider!" retorted Torrence. "You haven't got on very well with the smashing so far!"



Crash! Torrence went over from a terrific right-hander from Manners and dropped in the lane, gasping. "Now mind your own business!" panted Manners. He looked round for Trimble, but during those two strenuous minutes Baggy had flown. (See page 7.)

"What the thump does this mean?" exclaimed Tom Merry, in great amazement. He caught Manners by the arm and helped him up, and kept hold of his arm.

"Let go!"

"But what's the row?" asked Tom. "Who's this kid, and what are you scrapping with him for?"

"I'm going to smash him!" roared Manners. "Will you let go my arm, you dummy?"

"No," said Tom quietly. "Let's know what it's all about first."

"Look here——"

"Come into the study," said Tom.

Manners breathed hard with rage, but he allowed himself to be walked into the study. Torrence stepping back from the door. Half a dozen Shell fellows were looking out of their doorways curiously, wondering what the shindy in No. 10 was about.

Monty Lowther looked a little dismayed. Apparently his little joke on the new fellow had led to this, though why Manners should have quarrelled with him was a mystery to Lowther.

"Now let's hear about it," said Tom good-humouredly. "I suppose this is a new kid? I've never seen him before."

"A cheeky cad for the New House," said Manners, with a glare of deadly animosity at Torrence.

"Cad yourself!" retorted Torrence.

Manners made a movement; but Tom held his arm securely.

"Will you let me go, Tom?" said Manners, between his teeth. "Do you think I'm going to let that New House rat call me names?"

"Well, don't call me names," suggested Torrence. "I'm not keen on slanging; but you can't have it all on one side."

"Oh, what's the good of slinging names?" exclaimed Tom. "Chuck it! I suppose this chap is the fellow Figgy was talking about, as he's New House. Is your name Torrence?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are you up to in this study? You've no business in this House, if you're New House."

Torrence stared, and Monty Lowther looked very conscious. It was not the first time that the humorist of the Shell had found trouble follow his little jests.

"I found the New House cad here, and he refused to get out," growled Manners. "I'd had a row with him before, too. He stood up for that fat beast Trimble when I was going to lick him. He had the cheek to tell me he'd stick in this study."

"Well, that's the limit!" said Tom, staring at the new junior. "Look here, young hopeful, you're a new kid, but you ought to know that you can't butt into a fellow's study without being asked."

"A fellow's study?" repeated Torrence.

"You see——" began Lowther.

Torrence turned on Lowther.

"Have you been pulling my leg, you silly owl? You told me that this was the New House, and this study Mr. Ratcliff's study, and that I was to wait for him here."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom; and Manners started.

"Draw it mild," said Monty Lowther warmly. "I never told you anything of the kind. I let you jump to the conclusion that it was so, being a silly new kid, and that's quite a different thing."

"Oh, you ass, Monty!" said Tom, laughing. "Is this one of your rotten practical jokes?"

"The new dummy thought he knew his way about like an old hand, and told me I couldn't stuff him," said Lowther. "I felt that it was up to me to take him down a peg, especially as he's a New House outsider. Blessed if I expected Manners to rag with him here, though!"

Torrence frowned.

"So that excitable duffer was thinking that I meant to stick in his study," he said, looking at Manners. "I thought it was the Housemaster's study."

Tom Merry laughed.

"Pretty sort of green ass, to take a junior study for a Housemaster's study!" sneered Manners. "Have you just got out of the nursery?"

"You must be rather an ass," said Tom. "Surely you'd know— But I suppose you haven't been at school before, or only a preparatory school, so you wouldn't know any better."

"I've been to school before, but—" Torrence paused. "It was a rotten joke to play on a new kid. I may get into a row for not seeing my Housemaster sooner than this. I've been waiting here a long time."

"More fool you!" said Manners.

"If you'd told me it was your study, I'd have got out fast enough."

"How was I to know you didn't know?" snapped Manners. "How could I guess you were idiot enough to take a room like this for a Housemaster's study?"

"Oh, draw it mild—it's his first day at St. Jim's!" said Tom. "But you'd better cut off, Torrence. Mr. Ratcliff must have expected you long ago. Look here, I'll take you over to the New House, if you like."

Torrence curled his lip.

"Thanks—I don't want any more help!" he said. "Goodness knows where I might get landed next time! I'll manage it on my own."

He walked out of the study with that, and Tom coloured with anger. But his anger passed quickly enough as he realised that Torrence had a right to be wary, after his experience with Monty Lowther.

Manners made a movement as Torrence went, but Tom caught his arm again.

"Nothing to rag about, old chap," he said. "The kid wasn't to blame for being here. It was all that ass Monty's fault."

"He's a cheeky cad, all the same."

"Well, I don't see—"

"He stood up for Trimble when I was going to lick him for taking my camera," growled Manners.

"Oh! Is that where you got that nose?" asked Lowther.

"Never mind my nose," said Manners savagely. "I'll make that cad's nose match it, and more, before long. Why couldn't you let me finish with him?"

"Oh, let's have tea!" said Tom Merry. "I'm jolly hungry after footer! We drew with the New House."

"Blow the New House, and blow footer!"

"Oh!"

Manners was evidently not in a good temper. As a matter of fact, he was feeling bitterly humiliated by the outcome of his tussle with Torrence—he could not forget that his comrades had seen him ejected from his own study by the new junior. That rankled deeply; and Manners did not mean to let the matter end where it was.

Tea in Tom Merry's study was not the usual bright and cheery meal that evening.

While the Terrible Three were at tea Torrence went out of the School House into the quad, where the winter dusk was falling. He did not need to inquire his way to his own quarters, however; for three juniors sighted him and rushed down on him.

"This is a new kid," said Kerr. "Never seen him before, at any rate. Are you Torrence, for the New House?"

"Yes," said Torrence.

"Then we're looking for you. Come on!" said Figgins.

"But, I say—"

"Oh, come on!" said Fatty Wynn. "We haven't had tea yet, looking for you, you silly owl! Ratty wants you. Come on, I tell you!"

And Torrence, realising that these must be New House fellows, sent to look for him, walked away with Figgins & Co., and reported himself, at last, in Mr. Ratcliff's study.

CHAPTER 8.

Manners Makes a Discovery!

"ARE you going to be my second, Tom?" Manners asked that question after tea. Tom looked up in surprise.

"Your second?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Manners.

"Fighting somebody?"

"That new cad."

"Oh!" said Tom, wrinkling his brows.

There was a brief silence in Study No. 10 in the Shell. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther looked at one another. Manners stared gloomily at them. There was an ache in Manners' nose—and it was so red and swollen that he could not fail to be conscious of it continually. It was quite unlike Manners to feel bitterness or malice; but there was no doubt that he was exceedingly sore now, and in a very unforgiving mood.

"Look here, Manners," said Tom, after a pause. "What is there to fight that kid about? Give it a miss!"

"I wasn't asking you for advice!" said Manners grimly.

"I was asking you to be my second. If you don't like the

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idea I dare say I can find another fellow. Talbot will do it."

"If you're going scrapping I'll be your second fast enough," said Tom. "You know that. But I think it's rot. It was Monty's fault that the kid butted into this study and you rowed with him."

"Guilty, my lord," said Lowther.

"I'm not worrying about that. I've told you that he stood up for Trimble and pitched into me—"

"Well, I dare say Trimble wanted kicking—he usually does," said Tom. "But it seems that he was showing Torrence the way to the school, and it was decent of the fellow to stand up for him."

"Oh, was it?" exclaimed Manners.

"Well, yes. He didn't know what the trouble was about, did he?"

"Probably not. But he shouldn't have butted in." Manners crimsoned with anger. "Look at my nose! Do you think I'm going to let a new kid give me a nose like this and say nothing about it?"

Manners' chums were uncomfortably silent. They felt for his humiliation, but their opinion was that the affair ought to go no further, unless Torrence gave fresh offence. Manners had given them an indignant description of the affair of the afternoon; but they did not see eye to eye with Manners on that subject. It seemed to them that Torrence had been bound, in a way, to stand up for Trimble, in the circumstances—which Manners could not see at all, or would not see.

They could not help feeling, too, that Manners' resentment was largely founded upon his ignominious ejection from his own study. But Torrence had not been to blame for the shindy in Study No. 10; Monty Lowther had been to blame for that, if anybody.

"I'm going to lick him!" said Manners savagely. "That's settled. You can act as my second or not, as you choose."

Tom Merry shook his head.

"Leave it over for a bit," he said. "It's dashed bad form to scrap with a fellow on his first day in the school, Manners. If you still feel the same in a day or two there will be lots of time."

"Be reasonable, old chap," urged Lowther. "The kid can't be expected to put up a fight his first day here. He's got plenty of other things to think of."

"You can take him my message, and fix it for Saturday afternoon," said Manners stubbornly.

"I'll take him your message to-morrow, if you're still keen on it," said Tom uncomfortably. "Leave it till then, Manners. It's too thick to go over bothering the chap in his House on his first evening."

Manners grunted.

"To-morrow will do then," he said ungraciously.

With that the subject dropped. Manners sorted out his books for prep, though it was not yet the usual time. Tom Merry left the study to attend a meeting of the junior football committee; and Monty Lowther, after a rather comical glance at Manners' lowering face, quitted Study No. 10 in search of more cheerful company.

Manners was left alone.

He rubbed his nose, and rose from his chair, and moved restlessly about the study. He was feeling upset and irritable, unlike his usual self in every way. The fact was that the struggle with Torrence had shaken Manners up a good deal, and the sense of having had the worst of it was rankling in his mind. And, determined as he was upon a fight with the new fellow, he did not, at the bottom of his heart, feel quite certain of pulling off a win; and that was a bitter misgiving, Torrence being a younger fellow than himself, and a couple of inches shorter.

Neither was Manners quite satisfied with himself for feeling so bitter towards the new fellow. He had a consciousness that that bitter feeling was unworthy of him, and that his resentment was quite out of proportion to Torrence's offences. If Torrence had been some "rotter" like Racke of the Shell, or Chowle of the Fourth, he would have felt justified in disliking him; but he had to admit that the new kid did not look like a rotter. Indeed, Manners could not find any special fault with him, excepting that he was rather cheeky for a new fellow. In his present mood Manners would have been glad of a fault to find.

As he moved restlessly about the study, hugging his sulky resentment to himself, as it were, Manners noticed, without specially heeding, a letter that lay on the floor. It was not unusual for odds and ends to lie about the floor of a junior study, till they were swept away by the boys' maid in the morning.

But Manners was naturally a tidy fellow; it was his way to stack up Monty Lowther's scattered papers, and to remove Tom Merry's football boots from the bookcase or the mantelpiece when he found them there. He stooped

(Continued on page 14.)

GRAND "ERRORS" COMPETITION!

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This is the Fourth Picture in our easy contest, and all readers who have not yet obtained the First Three Pictures should get them through their newsagent, or if he cannot supply, from our Back Number Department, Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO

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There are several "Errors" that the keen observer will soon discover.

Don't be satisfied with the most obvious mistakes, but look into the drawing until you are satisfied that no "Error" has escaped your attention.

Remember there are other readers competing against you, and it is up to YOU to beat them, if possible.

As you find the mistakes, jot them down neatly upon a piece of paper, then, when you have satisfied yourself that you have discovered all the "Errors,"

count them, put the Total—that is, the exact number of all the "Errors" found—in the space provided in the top right-hand corner of the Entrance Form.

Having followed these simple instructions, sign your name and address in the space provided on the Entrance Form. Then pin the Entrance Form to your neatly written list of "Errors," and put both in a safe place until next Wednesday, when the next picture containing "Errors" will appear.

In all, there will be six of these pictures, and readers are asked to study each in turn, making a SEPARATE LIST OF "ERRORS" for each picture.

After the last picture in this "ERRORS" COMPETITION has appeared you will be informed when and where to send in your complete six lists of errors.

Remember, all the above prizes

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"ERRORS" Picture No. 4.



at last and picked up the letter, and glanced at it to see to whom it belonged. It was not likely to be his own, as he never dropped letters about; he supposed that it must belong to either Tom Merry or Monty Lowther. Being tired of his own dismal company by that time he meant to take the letter along to its owner.

"Dear Parkinson—"

Manners stared at the name.

"There was no fellow, so far as he knew, at St. Jim's, of the name of Parkinson."

How a letter belonging to a fellow named Parkinson had been dropped in Study No. 10 in the Shell was a mystery.

"My hat!" ejaculated Manners in astonishment.

He could not help seeing what was on the first page of the letter, which was folded in half.

"Dear Parkinson,—I was jolly glad to get your letter, which shows that you haven't forgotten us here, though I really expected you would, in the circumstances. It was jolly decent of you to send along the tanner, and you can bet there was a celebration when it came. There isn't any news here, except that Smiley has been sacked. I dare say you remember he used to smuggle in smokes for some of the fellows, and they used to go to the boot-room for them. Well, he was found—"

Manners did not turn the page. He realised that he was reading a letter which did not belong to him or to either of his study-mates.

He stood with the letter in his hand, staring at it.

This letter had been written obviously from some school to a fellow named Parkinson, who had left.

That much was clear.

But how, in the name of wonder, had it arrived in Study No. 10 in the School House of St. Jim's?

There was no new fellow there named Parkinson who might have brought it in his pocket.

Manners started.

Torrence!

Only Torrence could have dropped that letter in the study. As soon as he thought of Torrence, Manners knew that he must have dropped it there. Evidently it had fallen from his pocket during the breathless rough-and-tumble in Study No. 10.

"Oh! It's his!" grunted Manners.

What Torrence was doing with a letter in his pocket which belonged to somebody named Parkinson was a problem. But that was no business of Manners', and he was not inquisitive. Torrence, clearly, had dropped the letter there, and it was for Manners to return it to him. Doubtless he knew Parkinson, whoever Parkinson was, though it was odd enough that he should have Parkinson's letter in his possession.

It was so odd—so extremely odd—that Manners' thoughts moved further. Fellows did not carry about other fellows' letters in their pockets, as a rule.

But the new fellow's name was Torrence—at least, that was the name under which he was entered at St. Jim's. The letter, addressed to Parkinson, could not therefore belong to him, unless—

Manners was not a suspicious fellow. But he was in the mood now to be very suspicious of Torrence.

He was tempted to read the remainder of the letter, which might have let in some light on the subject. But he resisted that temptation, and placed the missive in his pocket.

It had to be returned to Torrence, at all events; but Manners had no desire to take it over to the New House personally. Tom Merry could take it when he went over as Manners' second after lessons the next day.

That evening Tom Merry and Lowther, when they came in to prep, found Manners very thoughtful and quiet. They supposed that he was still thinking about the trouble with Torrence.

Manners was, in point of fact, thinking about Torrence. And he was thinking about Parkinson, too; and dark and strange suspicions were working in his mind. But of that he did not speak a word to his chums.

CHAPTER 9.

Torrence or Parkinson?

"LOOKIN' for somethin', deah boy?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth, asked that question in his most courteous tones.

Torrence looked up quickly.

He was coming up the passage from the stairs in the School House, and D'Arcy, of the Fourth, coming out of Study No. 6 after prep, spotted him. Torrence was glancing to right and left as he came along as if in search of something; hence Gussy's polite question.

"Yes," said Torrence. "I've dropped a letter somewhere—"

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"You're the chap who was scwappin' with Mannahs in the Shell passage, aren't you?" asked Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass rather curiously on the new junior.

"Yes," said Torrence, with a smile. "I think I must have dropped the letter while I was scwapping with him; but I don't want to butt into his study again if I can help it! I only missed it from my pocket a few minutes ago, and so I came across—"

"That's all wight. Mannahs won't bite your head off!" said Arthur Augustus. "Mannah is a wathah good-tempahed chap!"

"Is he?" said Torrence, in surprise. "He didn't strike me as good-tempahed. We've rowed twice to-day already."

"Bat Jove! P'wobably the fault was on your side, then."

"Eh?"

"P'wobably the fault was on your side," repeated Arthur Augustus, innocently.

Torrence laughed.

"Thanks! I'll get along."

"All sewene, deah boy. I'll help you look for your lettah," said Arthur Augustus amicably. "It's wathah late for a fellow to be out of his House, you know—or p'waps you don't know, bein' a new kid. Mr. Watchiff would most likely give you lines if he knew you were ovah heah."

"Oh, would he?" said Torrence. "Well, I've got to have that letter, and I must have dropped it over here; so I shall have to chance Mr. Ratcliff."

He moved on, and the swell of St. Jim's moved along with him, kindly lending his assistance in the search. But the lost letter was not sighted on the landing of in the Shell passage and the two juniors arrived at the door of Study No. 10.

There were sounds from the study that showed that it was occupied and Torrence hesitated to knock. He had had enough trouble with Manners of the Shell that day and did not want any more.

"It's all wight, old scout," smiled Arthur Augustus. "I will explain to Mannahs, if you like."

And Arthur Augustus knocked at the door.

"Come in!" sang out Tom Merry's voice.

D'Arcy opened the door.

"Hallo, Gussy! Trot in," said the captain of the Shell cheerily. "We've just finished prep."

"Wight-ho, deah boy! This new chap Towence—"

Manners started up as he saw the new junior in the rear of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He guessed at once why Torrence had returned to the scene of the scrap. He had discovered the loss of the letter.

A hard look came over Manners' face.

If Torrence intended to claim a letter addressed to somebody named Parkinson, Manners did not intend to make the matter easy for him. A letter addressed to Torrence Manners would have handed over at once without delay. But if Torrence wanted a letter addressed to another fellow—at least to another name—he could say so, and if he found it an awkward matter, that was his own look-out.

So Manners did not speak, but waited with a grim expression on his face.

"This chap has dropped a lettah somewhah in the School House while he was scwappin' with Mannahs, he thinks," explained Arthur Augustus. "He's come ovah for it."

"Oh, good!" said Tom Merry, relieved to hear that the new fellow had not come over on the warpath. "I haven't seen it, though."

"Same here," said Lowther.

Torrence stepped into the doorway. He did not care to enter the study, with Manners looking at him a good deal like a bulldog. From the doorway he scanned the room with keen eyes.

"None of you seen it?" he asked, with a rather troubled expression on his face. "I simply must have dropped it here. It could only have come out of my pocket while I was scwapping."

"You can look round the study," said Tom good-naturedly. "I'll help you, if you like. But if you'd dropped it, I suppose it would be on the floor somewhere and I don't see it."

"I picked up a letter here just before prep," said Manners, slowly and deliberately.

Torrence gave him a quick look.

"My letter."

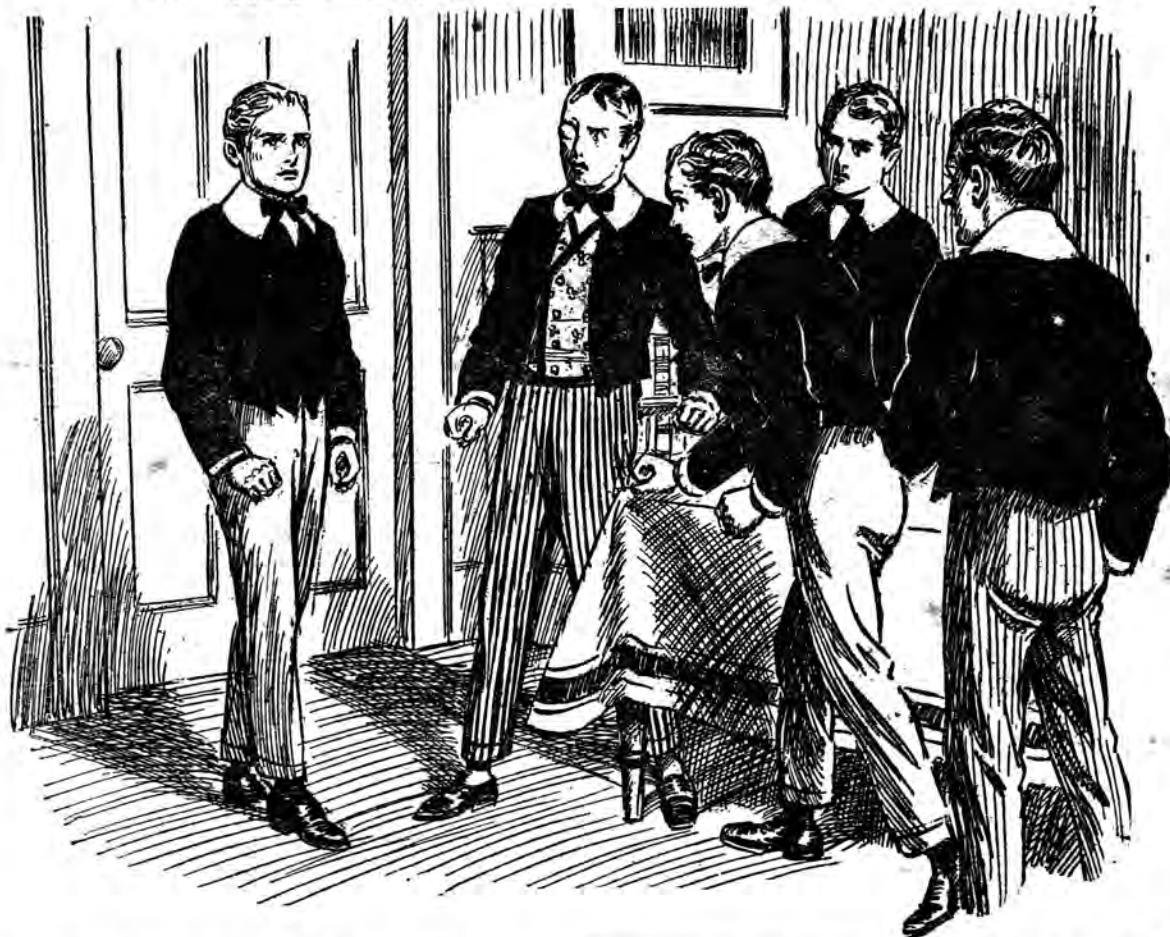
"I don't see how it could be your letter, Torrence," said Manners, in the same deliberate way. "I'm keeping it till I find the owner, as it doesn't belong to this study."

Tom and Lowther glanced at Manners, puzzled. There was a sneer on Manners' face now—though Manners, as a rule, was little given to sneering. But just now Harry Manners was very far from being in his usual mood.

"If you've found a letter here that isn't ours, it must be Torrence's, as he says he's lost a letter here," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah!"

Torrence's face was red now.



"You're the owner of a letter addressed to a chap named Parkinson?" asked Manners, grimly. "Yes," answered Torrence, with a deep breath. Tom Merry and Monty Lowther stared at the New House junior. "Bai jove! That is wathah wemarkable," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "How can you possibly be the ownah of a lettah addressed to anothah chap, Towwence?" (See this page.)

"If you will show me the letter, Manners, I can say at once whether it's mine," he said quietly.

"Your name is Torrence, I understand?" said Manners grimly.

"Yes—Eric Torrence."

"You haven't two names by any chance?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the letter I've picked up belongs to a chap named Parkinson," said Manners coolly. "Unless your name's Parkinson as well as Torrence, I don't see how it can be yours."

Torrence's eyes gleamed.

"You've read my letter!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not in the habit of reading other fellows' letters," said Manners disdainfully. "I looked at it to see who the owner was when I picked it up here, as any fellow would do. I thought it belonged to Tom Merry or Lowther, naturally. I couldn't help seeing the first page. I've seen no more than that, and don't want to. I've got the letter in my pocket now, waiting till I find the owner."

"I'm the owner," said the new junior, setting his lips. "I've told you so."

"Weally, Mannahs—" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"You're the owner of a letter addressed to a chap named Parkinson?" asked Manners grimly.

"Yes," said Torrence, with a deep breath.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther stared at the New House junior. Arthur Augustus jammed his celebrated eyeglass into his noble eye and turned it full upon Torrence.

"Bai Jove, that is wathah wemarkable!" said Arthur Augustus. "How can you possibly be the ownah of a lettah addressed to anothah chap, Towwence?"

"I'm not called on to explain that that I know of," said Torrence coolly. "How I came to have the letter is my own business."

"Yaaa, wathah! But—"

"Manners knows perfectly well that it's my letter, and I want it handed over to me," said Torrence. "Do you doubt that I dropped that letter in this study, Manners?"

Manners shook his head.

"Then hand it over to me!" exclaimed Torrence.

"Dash it all, Manners, give him his letter!" said Tom Merry, in perplexity. "What does it matter about the name?"

"It's jolly queer, at least," said Manners.

"I don't know about that. Parkinson, whoever he is, may have given Torrence the letter to read," said Tom. "Anyhow, it's no business of ours, is it? You don't suppose that Torrence has been bagging a letter belonging to somebody else, do you?"

"No, I don't suppose that," said Manners. "What I suppose is, that if a fellow named Torrence receives letters addressed to Parkinson, there's something very queer about it, and very fishy. He can have his Parkinson letter."

With that Manners threw the letter on the table.

Torrence stepped inside the study, picked up the letter, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Thanks!" he said icily.

Without a word of explanation, he turned and walked out of the study, leaving the Shell fellows staring. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, much perplexed, followed Torrence along the passage, and tapped him on the arm as he was about to descend the stairs.

"Towwence, deah boy, I undahstand that you are goin' into the Fourth Form?" he said gently.

"That's right."

"That's my Form," said Arthur Augustus. "My name's D'Arcy. You are only a New House boundah, of course—"

"Eh?"

"But we're in the same Form," pursued the swell of St. Jim's. "So pewwaps you will let me give you a tip."

"Get on with it!" said Torrence.

"It is wathah odd that you should cawwy anothah fellow's lettahs about in your pockets, deah boy. Mannahs seems to think it is vevy fishay, and, weally, it is vevy odd. Hadn't you bettah explain?"

"I don't see the need."

"As a new chap, deah boy, you do not know the wopes. It is weally vewy odd, and may cause you to be suspected of baggin' othah fellows lettahs, or of weceivin' lettahs in a false name. Wathah a sewious thing. See?"

"I see."

"There is a boundah beah named Wacke, who is pwetty well known to have weceived lettahs fwom a bookmakah at a newsagent's in an assumed name," said D'Arcy. "If the Head knew, he would bunk Wacke fwom the school."

"Serve him right!"

"Yaas, wathah! I quite agwee. I twust you have been doin' nothin' of that kind, Towwence."

"Nothing," said Torrence, with a smile.

"Vewy good. But it would weally be advisahle for you to explain that vewy odd circumstance, Towwence. It looks vewy queeah."

"Let it!" said Torrence.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Good-night!"

Torrence scudded down the stairs and disappeared, to return to his own House. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy shook his head very seriously. If there was nothing in the incident, and it admitted of a simple explanation, he did not see why the new fellow should not have explained. The inference was that there was "something" in it. However, the swell of St. Jim's reflected that it did not concern him personally, and he dismissed the matter from his noble mind.

It was not so soon dismissed in Study No. 10, however. Tom Merry and Lowther were perplexed, and Manners grimly cynical.

"That's a queer bizney," Lowther remarked.

"Very queer," said Manners.

"Oh, I dare say he could explain easily enough if he liked!" said Tom Merry tolerantly.

"Why didn't he like, then?"

"I give that one up," said Tom, with a smile.

"He said it was his letter," said Manners, "and it was addressed to Parkinson. I believe he was telling the truth. It was his letter. If his name's Parkinson, what is he doing here with the name of Torrence?"

"Oh, rot!" said Tom.

"Draw it mild, old man," murmured Lowther.

Manners shrugged his shoulders, and rubbed his swollen nose, and his comrades smiled. How much the state of Manners' hapless nose had to do with his suspicion of Torrence it would have been difficult to say. But Tom and Monty, at least, believed that it had a great deal to do with it. There was no logical connection between the two; but certainly Manners' nose was in a shocking state, and equally certainly he was deeply suspicious of Eric Torrence of the New House.

CHAPTER 10.

In Black and White!

"PARKINSON!"

Eric Torrence started violently.

He had slipped quietly into the New House after his visit to the other House, and hurried up to the Fourth Form quarters. Torrence had been assigned by Mr. Ratcliff to Study No. 3 in the New House Fourth, an apartment hitherto tenanted by Digges and Pratt.

The door of Study No. 3 stood half open as Torrence reached it, and he could hear the voices of Digges and Pratt within.

"Parkinson—Eric Parkinson!" Pratt was speaking.

"Ridsdale. What does Ridsdale mean?" That was Digges' voice.

"Must be the name of a school."

"There isn't any school of that name."

"My dear chap"—Percival Pratt's tone was loftily informative—"there are lots of schools you haven't heard of. Little twopenny schools, no class, you know. Some dashed private school, where the fees are about ten guineas a term."

"Oh, my aunt!" said Digges. "But a St. Jim's chap wouldn't know a bounder from a show like that."

"You're rather a snob, Diggy. Where would you be, for instance, if your pater hadn't made money in tallow?"

"You beast, Pratt!"

Torrence pushed open the study door, with a rather set face, and went in. Pratt of the Fourth was sprawling in the armchair with a "Holiday Annual" a year old open on his knees. It was open at the title page, and by sheer chance Pratt had come on the name inscribed there by the owner of the volume:

"Eric Parkinson, Ridsdale."

Pratt looked up and nodded to Torrence.

"I've borrowed your 'Annual,'" he said. "I hadn't seen this one before. It's last year's. You don't mind?"

"Not at all," said Torrence.

"You picked this up second-hand, I suppose?" said Pratt.

"There's another chap's name on the title page."

"Is there?" murmured Torrence.

"Same front name as yours, though—Eric," said Digges.

"Did you know Parkinson, Torrence?"

"Is that the name there?" asked Torrence calmly.

"Yes; and Pratt says that Ridsdale is a school. Ever heard of a school called Ridsdale?"

"Yes," said Torrence; "I've heard of it."

"Well, I haven't," said Digges. "It must be some cheap hole-and-corner show not to be heard of."

"Well, perhaps it is a cheap hole-and-corner show," said Torrence. "We haven't all made money in tallow, you know. There must be cheap places for the people who haven't."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pratt.

"Cheeky cad!" said Digges sulkily, as he stalked out of the study.

Torrence picked up a book and sat down. But he was not reading. He was waiting for Percival Pratt to go. It was not long before Pratt laid down the "Holiday Annual" and lounged out of the study, going downstairs to join the fellows in the Common-room before dorm.

Torrence rose quickly to his feet and closed the study door, which Pratt had left open.

He picked up the "Holiday Annual" from the armchair and quietly and quickly tore out the title page, and jammed it into the remains of the study fire, stirring up the coals.

Then he crossed to the bookcase and began to go through his books, examining the title page of each with keen scrutiny. One or two title pages he tore out and jammed into the fire.

He was stirring the fire over the last when the door opened again and Pratt looked in.

"Dorm!" said Pratt. "Better get a move on. Monteith don't like to be kept waiting."

"Right-ho!" said Torrence cheerily.

And he followed Pratt.

Perhaps it was because he was a new boy, in strange surroundings, that Eric Torrence did not fall asleep very soon in the Fourth Form dormitory in the New House. Perhaps he was wondering what the other fellows would have said if they had known what he could have told them—what Manners of the Shell suspected.

In the Shell dormitory over in the School House, Manners, too, was slow to close his eyes. He, too, was thinking—of the fellow who, he was convinced, had come to St. Jim's in a false name, and whom it might be a fellow's duty to show up in his true colours.

THE END.

(What is the mystery surrounding this new junior's name? Has Manners surmised rightly or wrongly? Be sure you read: "MANNERS' FEUD!" by Martin Clifford—next week's magnificent yarn of Tom Merry & Co.)

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THE WHISPERING MAN!

by LESTER BIDSTON



This Splendid Series of Wireless Stories has been written specially for the "GEM."

CHAPTER 1.

"I Want You!"

ROLL UP! ROLL UP! ROLL UP!

ARE YOUR WORRIES WIRELESS ONES?

(If so, we'll worry 'em away for you.)

DOES THE ETHER EVADE YOUR EFFORTS?

(It may, but it won't evade ours.)

RADIO complaints cured nightly in the "SHANTY" clubhouse by Drs. Lindsay & O'Gorman.

THE notice—pasted on the "Shanty's" shop window—attracted wireless fans from all over Liverpool. Involved circuits, faulty frequency, troublesome tuning—all vanished under the expert advice of Lyle and Jerry, and the popularity of Radio Shanty radiated far and wide.

The proprietors had been undergoing an intensive bombardment about "beam" transmission, and Lyle was, he hoped, finishing a lecturette on this very tricky subject.

"Boiling the whole book of words down to one pithy par—beam research aims to cut a clean path from place to place, not to go leaking about all over the jolly old ether," he said. "Now, laddies, it's time to close down, so—"

"But it's your own Lindman beam we want to hear about," one impatient youngster interrupted. "Where does the Lindman come in, and what d'you expect it to do, Mr. Live-Wire?"

"The 'Lindman' is simply the head and tail of Lindsay and O'Gorman," Lyle smiled. "We'll tell you what it can do when we've completed our experiments."

"But what kind of experiments are they?" the curiosity-monger persisted.

"Bedad, you're like th' owld leddy that always read th' end av a buke to see if it was worth shartin'!" Jerry grinned.

Lyle saw the lad was hurt, and winked his chum to silence.

"We'll tell you this much, old man," he said. "There's scores of johnnies dabbling in 'beam' stuff at present—most of them working with selenium, the super-sensitive acid of wireless science. Well, we've discovered a selenium alloy—these wired screens are made of it—and, if our work's a giddy old winner, we'll be dealing the invisible ether a

gear punch that'll make it sit up and beg for mercy."

"I—I see," the young 'un stammered.

He didn't, really; but Live-Wire's flow of words had dazed him—which was exactly the result Lyle aimed at. After all, the Lindman beam was the outcome of many months of close study, and only its inventors knew how dangerous it might prove if it once got into alien hands.

Then, again, Lyle was particularly annoyed that the questions should have arisen when two queer characters were present—two muffled old men, who sat in a corner of the shed, never asking a question, yet listening attentively to every word he had uttered.

Only when the place was emptying did these elderly strangers move—and then not making for the door, but towards the platform that Lyle and Jerry occupied.

The partners eyed them with open curiosity. The "club" was free to the public, of course, and new faces appeared nightly; but these two were different—the one so old and frail that his companion was forced to support him across the few yards of flooring.

A step from the platform they paused, and the radio partners grew more and more amazed. The weak one—ghastly grey of face, wrapped in a heavy great-coat, his neck hidden by a thick woollen wrap—was making frenzied efforts to speak, but only voicing sound to the extent of a pitifully hoarse whisper that was quite unintelligible. And his companion—repulsively thin, his long, scraggy neck arching forward like that of an inquisitive stork—was grinning as though he took a ghoulis pleasure in the other's inability to make himself understood.

"I'm sorry, sir, we're working on different wave-lengths," Lyle apologised. "I don't quite catch—"

The old man waved him to silence, redoubled his efforts to speak, failed, and paused, panting and impotent.

"He's Mr. Craill Lemoine; I'm his man, Armstrong," the thin person giggled. "Got funny ideas about wireless, he has. You'd better jump down and 'ear 'em—make you larf, they will."

The old man took not the least notice of his servant's impertinence, but smiled gratefully when Lyle and Jerry dropped down to his own level.

He drew Lyle nearer—with a pathetically tremulous touch, then bent

forward until his lips were scarce an inch from Lyle's ear.

"Good lads! Clever lads! Want to give you an order," he whispered jerkily.

"Glad to have it, sir," Lyle answered. "Restful occupation, listening-in—just the thing for you, Mr. Lemoine."

But Mr. Lemoine most emphatically disagreed. His hand tightened on Lyle's shoulder, his eyes took fire, and his face reddened with sudden ill-humour.

"Listening-in child's play," he whispered, so quickly that the words cascaded into each other. "Want transmitting set. Want to speak other people. You clever lads—so came to you."

Lyle stared, first at Lemoine, then at the sneering servant.

"My dear sir," he gasped, "it can't be done—unless you can amplify the carrier wave—sorry, I mean—er—mend the throat trouble."

Mr. Lemoine shook his head.

"Ah, no! Permanent affliction. Growing weaker," he whispered gruesomely.

"What's the trouble, Lyle?" Jerry asked.

"He wants to transmit—without a voice!" Lyle explained. He turned again to Lemoine. "Forgive me, sir, it's just silly! For one thing, you'd never wangle a transmitting licence—they're not easy to get."

He felt really sorry for the pathetic old invalid, and tried to ease the blow. "Never your mind about the transmitter, Mr. Lemoine. You let us instal a jolly old four-valve receiver, and I'll promise—"

"No, no, no!" Lemoine interrupted. "I want a transmitter. I will have one. You're here to take orders. You take mine—you'll find me generous."

"I've no doubt about that," Lyle answered. "But we only take money for value given—and I'm certain you'd get no value from a transmitting set. No, Mr. Lemoine, I'm sorry, but your order must go elsewhere, unless you'll have the listening-in apparatus."

Lemoine's colour deepened.

"You refuse—and dare to call yourself a business man?" he challenged hoarsely.

"I call myself an honest one!" Lyle retorted, and tried to wriggle from the thin white hand that rested on his shoulder.

But the old man's touch tightened, and he paused, irresolute.

"Boy, you'll think again, please," he quavered. "I'm old, ill. I want that modern miracle more than I've ever wanted life itself." His eyes stared straight into Lyle's—sad, yearning eyes that told of years of pain and weakness.

"Do me this kindness, Mr. Lindsay. I'm rich—I can afford to indulge my fancies."

As Lyle had said, it was silly; but, faced by the old man's whispered pleading, he really hadn't the heart to refuse.

And, if anything was wanted to make him agree, it was the skeleton servant's unkind sneers at his master's strange fancy.

"He's weak in the head, as well as the throat," he squeaked in a shrill falsetto.

"Money—he's made of it! But he's choke-full of 'willies'—mad as a—"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 882.

"Armstrong!" Lemoine just whispered the one word, and the fellow fell silent as a clam.

"Very well, sir!" Lyle agreed reluctantly. "Better leave your address, and I'll run round to-morrow."

Mr. Lemoine patted Lyle's shoulder effusively—childish approval that the radio expert would have resented from one less helpless.

"Never carry cards—hate them," Lemoine whispered. "But come to Rivington—to Greystones. I'll let you know. Good-night!"

"Rivington? Why, it's forty miles away!" Lyle cried. "It'll need a dozen journeys to complete the job. Why not get a local man in and save a little fortune in travelling expenses?"

"I'll pay, I tell you," Lemoine whispered. "I want you—clever lad. No amateurs. I'll pay—I always pay! Now, good-night!"

Before Lyle could make further protest the old man's hand had dropped from his shoulder, and he was shambling for the door—Armstrong supporting him and venting ill-tempered gibes at his master's strange fancies.

"He, he, he! He always pays!" he shrilled. "Always pays—he always pays!"

"Well, if they're not the quaintest pair—" Lyle gasped, when the sound of a speeding car told that they had really departed. "Clever lads! Won't have anyone but the old firm—and always pays!"

"Shure, so long as he pays, that's good enough for us," Jerry murmured casually. "Bedad, you had enough objections to th' job as'd have sent an ordinary person flyin' wid both fate to the opposition."

"Babblin' ass!" Lyle retorted, then became thoughtful. "Rum go, though—chap without a voice wanting a talkee-talkee set, and coming all this way for his workmen. Um—queer—wish I'd stuck to my refusal."

Later, the radio partners were to wish that with all their hearts. But, for the moment, they dismissed Mr. Craill Lemoine with the thought that he was just a monied old crank, and turned their attention to the bedding down of the delicate and expensive gadgets with which the platform was crowded.

CHAPTER 2.

Lemoine's Voice Returns!

LYLE was too keen an enthusiast to worry much over his employer, once he had started the job.

But the amazing eccentricities of Mr. Craill Lemoine became more and more marked as their acquaintance grew, and Jerry—tied to the shop as he was—insisted upon hearing the latest about the whispering man.

"Y' know, Jay, I often think that snipe Armstrong is right in saying the old man's 'loco,'" Lyle said one day, whilst waiting for Lemoine's car to appear.

"What's he been doin' now?" Jerry inquired, industriously holing a vulcanite plate.

"Well, the latest is that I've got to act as his broadcasting ghost—hire out my voice to him," Lyle complained. "But take the whole quaint job from the start—from the day when first I went to Rivington."

Lyle paused, mentally arranged the affair in proper sequence, and smiled wryly.

"You remember that day—we had a

telegram early morning saying the car would call for me at four o'clock?" he continued. "It came, took ninety minutes to get to Greystones—a lonely house, walled like a prison—and dumped me there at dusk. Rum thing! Armstrong passed the main entrance, ran the car into the grounds via a side gate, and told me that his master objected to the villagers knowing that he was in residence."

"Why? D' th' villagers want to kiss him, or something?" Jerry asked.

"Said they pestered him for orders, and that he hated country folk," Lyle answered. "Anyway, he had a slap-up feed waiting for me—couldn't make enough fues, and agreed to everything I suggested for this transmitting-set he wanted."

"He's a good customer!" Jerry grinned. "About the best we've dropped on—an' a cash-on-th'-nail at that!"

"Oh, money's just mud to him!" Lyle admitted. "He's simply forced doles on me, saying I'm doing the work in overtime, that I'm not putting enough profit on the parts I've supplied—any old thing to make the job a really worthwhile one!"

"Shure! Don't grouse! We're not running this show for benevolence!" Jerry chuckled.

"N-no! But the whole affair's so queer! Gives me the creeps sometimes!" Lyle answered. "Imagine that huge house—forty rooms, if it has one—just whispering Lemoine and his skeleton servant in it, a silent countryside that now and again echoes with the snarling and roaring of wild animals!"

"Ot—phawt d'y' say?" Jerry yelled, the plate he was working on snapping with the clumsy jab surprise forced from him.

"Sorry, Jay. Forgot I hadn't mentioned it before!" Lyle murmured, as Jerry dumped three hours' work into the waste-bin. "It's the estate next to Greystones—Grey Gables it's called—a place bigger than Lemoine's, and just as rummy, in a different way! Owned by Mr. Jason Cremlin, a South African millionaire with original ideas."

"But the wild beasties?" Jerry demanded.

"They're part of the original ideas," Lyle answered. "Cremlin reckons it's homelike to hear a jaguar snarling, or a wild-cat spitting, or a lion asking if it's dinner-time."

But before he could enlarge on the strangeness of Cremlin, knuckles knocking on the glass door turned his attention in that direction.

"Hallo! There's skim-milk Armstrong, grinning like a cracked gargoyle as per!" he said. "Time to be moving, Jay! Don't forget! I'm trying out the set at eight o'clock, and that I'll ring you up in the club-house."

"An' don't you fail!" Jerry warned. "Th' bhoys are all excitement about it, and I've booked a 'capacity' house! An' look after y'self, Live-Wire! Seems to me Rivington's a square corner av th' world!"

"Oh, it takes all kinds of corners to make a world!" Lyle laughed lightly. "They're just a couple of rich originals, with no harm in 'em! You'll hear from me all right at eight-ought pip emma!"

Lyle travelled like a prince, the blue Dion was double-sprunged, and luxuriously cushioned. And at six o'clock he began the final coupling up of the parts he had installed in Greystones.

The house already boasted a fairly powerful motor generator for lighting purposes, and Lyle now proceeded to tap this and to connect it to the four-valve panel in Mr. Lemoine's study. For control, he worked on the "choke"

method, dividing his valves so as to produce the carrier wave and to regulate fluctuations of speech borne by the wave. By that system, aided by a super-sensitive microphone, and a six-wire cage aerial for radiator, he hoped that even Lemoine's throaty rasp might prove capable of agitating the ether.

Like all real wireless men, he began worrying over possible failure as the time approached for the first try-out, for radio experts are never optimists in their own line of business. They look for failure first—success is a never-ending surprise—for they know that the most delicate adjustments are necessary in new wireless-stations, that the apparatus is liable to unaccountable freaks and interruptions, that each one must be methodically overcome until resonance is perfect.

By seven-fifty Lyle had everything ready, and invited Mr. Lemoine to a preliminary listen-in.

"We'll just test reception for a few minutes to see if we can detect any faults that might be hanging about," he explained.

"Good lad! There'll be no faults, I know," Lemoine whispered, smiling pleasantly. "Lyle Lindsay clever lad—almost too clever sometimes—eh?"

"Not half as clever as he'd like to be, else he'd have made his fortune before now!" Lyle grinned, donning headphones and signing Lemoine to follow his lead.

A touch on one switch connected him with the house dynamo, a lift of another fitted the set in sympathy with the cage aerial, and rheostats and tuner occupied but a second—simple movements that carried them into mystery, noise, and romance right away.

"Um! Nothing wrong with reception, anyway!" Lyle thought, tapping Manchester and Glasgow broadcasting for several minutes, then tuning into seaboard "six hundred," and from that lifting quickly to the "C.W." chirrup of early Continental Press staff.

"There you are, sir! The world brought to your doors, via a mixture of wires and juice!" Lyle cried.

"Wonderful! But I want to bring my doors to the world!" Lemoine wheezed. "I want to transmit—to get in touch with others, to have them listen to me!"

"I'm hoping that even your whisper won't altogether fail," Lyle answered encouragingly. "Anyway, you can try it out at eight—when old Jay is ready for us!"

"No, no! To-night you do all the speaking; I only listen and learn the trick," Lemoine answered. "You say that a large audience will be waiting to hear from us?"

"Jay's putting the speaker on, and forty or fifty fellows'll be in the shed," Lyle replied carelessly.

"Ah! Then they'll want to be entertained," Lemoine suggested. "You will speak to them—on what subject?"

"Haven't thought of it," Lyle grinned. "Any old thing—song and clog-dance, whistlin'-coon, tell 'em a funny story. Doesn't matter so long as Jay reports clear reception."

"Ah! But it does matter!" Lemoine disagreed. "Bore the crowd if you don't have something interesting! They are your customers—bad for business, y' know! Tell you what. I play fiddle. Play it to them first; then I've written a little thing you can read to 'em. Bound to grip them! Interesting subject—fascinating, really!"

"Fiddle part's all right. But what's this lecture you want me to spout out?" Lyle asked. "Nothing highbrow, I

hope? It'd make 'em throw their boots at the 'speaker'!"

Lemoine took several sheets of typescript from his pocket and passed them to Lyle.

"Bound to grip them! Fascinating, really!" he repeated. "An account of Cremlin's place next door—his menagerie, his priceless treasures!"

"But—or—Mr. Cremlin might object to me broadcastin' this stuff," Lyle stammered.

Mr. Crail Lemoine laughed, without a sound issuing from his throat.

"No; Cremlin friend of mine," he explained. "Told him about it. Proud of his wild beast show—prouder still of his goods. Glad to let England know what he's got. Make 'em jealous," he suggested.

It was the first time Lyle had seen Mr. Lemoine in playful mood. It was not a pretty sight, that noiseless laugh of his. Somehow, Lyle felt glad that the job was almost finished, though his strange employer had been kindness itself.

"Oh, well, if Mr. Cremlin doesn't object, I've no kick," he said, beginning to glance through the papers.

But Lemoine took them gently from his hands, before he had read even the first sentence.

"They'll do later," he whispered.

"Tell me, what is this tank of liquid for, and all the curly wires in it? What do they do?"

"They're a little side-show of my own," Lyle explained. "With this bell they form the 'Lindman alarm' that Jay and I have just patented. Doesn't belong to your set, Mr. Lemoine; but I've taken the liberty to attach it, to give Jerry's audience a demonstration of its use—to show 'em we can ring up by wireless just as easily as one rings up by land line."

"Wonderful!" Lemoine wheezed. "But it is nearly eight. Get my fiddle; then you show me."

With that, Lemoine trotted from the room, as pleased as a pup with a meaty bone.

With his departure the uncanny silence of the place again struck home to Lyle's mind. There was not a sound in the house—there never was unless Armstrong got going—but the curious, menacing stillness seemed fraught with a thousand little whispers that vaguely troubled him.

From outside the tiny noises of the night vibrated to Lyle's super-sensitive hearing with startling clearness. A minute tap, tap from the study window rattled like distant grapeshot—that was a tree branch touched by the gentle wind. Afar off, the stillness was shattered by the soulless call of a hyena—one of Mr. Cremlin's pets—a hateful laugh that ascended the scale in jumps and broke at its apex to an insane chuckle.

"Ugh! The coughing monstrosity!" Lyle shuddered. "Quaint taste—housing a thing like that."

Then again—silence!

Somehow, Lyle found himself straining forward to listen. Why he knew not. But, as though his inner self was sending a warning, his hearing was questing through quiet Greystones—

searching for dangers intangible—searching in vain for something unknown—unknown but grimly repulsive.

"Pah! I've got the jim-jams to-night!" he muttered.

Then, because his hearing was fined and refined by years of wireless practice, he caught the faintest of faint whispers. He guessed they came from Mr. Lemoine's snuggery at the far end of the passage:

"—easy enough. I'll be in town before six. Last train'll take you. You'll get papers after the other one's left."

Nothing very startling in that, Lyle decided—just the shrill falsetto of Armstrong, giving orders to his master, as usual.

A moment later Lemoine re-entered the room, and with his coming Lyle's strange mind oppression lifted, and he turned his attention to more matter-of-fact affairs.

Yet even Lemoine's return made him stare and frown uneasily; a fact that his host was quick to note, and one that sent him bending anxiously over Lyle's ear.

"Anything the matter, dear fellow?" he whispered.

The frown vanished from Lyle's face and he grinned.

"Is that what you ring up with?" Lemoine inquired.

Lyle nodded.

"A call from this whistle sends enough force through the ether to release a feather-weight catch on Jerry's alarm," he answered. "Simple affair. I'll show you."

Placing his lips within an inch of the microphone he blew a shrill blast into the instrument, and, to his relief, heard Jerry's voice almost immediately.

"Bedad, Live-Wire, it's half a minute late ye are, and I was a-whalin' th' goblins had got you," his pal called.

"I thought they had—about half a minute since," Lyle chuckled. "Sound seems all right this end; how's the vibration at yours?"

"Not so bad. A bit cracked, but then that's natural in you!" Jerry chuckled. "There's a full house waitin' to hear you, so carry on wid whatever it is."

"Mr. Lemoine's giving a fiddle turn first; then I'm going to read out the bloodcurdling mystery of savage South Africa in darkest England. Now, gentlemen, Mr. Crail Lemoine, the eminent cellist."

The burst of applause came distinctly to their phone-capped ears, and Lemoine solemnly bowed towards the microphone. Then, gripping the big fiddle between his



Lyle Lindsay opened his eyes wide, and he saw—within six inches of his outflung arm—a tiny green-tinted snake arching its neck to strike him.

"Nothing," he answered. "Only the sight of that cello you've brought in gave me a reminder of an unfinished job, and of a very great rogue still enjoying undeserving liberty."

"Ah, yes!" Lemoine wheezed, without interest.

Common politeness forced Lyle to finish his explanation.

"Chappie named Ultima, or Maltravers," he said. "Wirelessed the 'Broken Melody' to Rotterdam, and nearly caused the murder of an inoffensive Frenchman by his twisted cleverness."

Still Mr. Lemoine was without interest; in fact, he looked decidedly bored.

"The 'Broken Melody'—all sighs and sobs. Like something jolly myself," he whispered. "It's striking eight, dear lad. Time to tune in or tune up, or whatever you call it."

"Right-ho!" Lyle answered, quickly tuning to wave-length 180 and taking a tiny silver whistle from his pocket.

knees, he started to roll out Irish jigs as readily as if he'd been born with a dozen or so up his sleeve.

That his turn was popular the calls and whistles amply proved. But he obstinately refused an encore, handed Lyle the typescript, and signed to him to carry on.

"Ahem! Good-evening, everybody!" Lyle began, mimicking a well-known announcer. "To-night, Mr. Lyle Lindsay, the famous pothook, will speak on beasts, human and otherwise."

Then, reverting to his natural voice, he began to read from Mr. Lemoine's sheets.

"Two miles from Rivington the strangest place in England hides behind high granite walls. It is the home of Mr. Jason Cremlin, a Johannesburg millionaire. It boasts a private park that houses the savage animals of a tropic country, and also a castle that houses many of the world's rarest treasures. Here, in this remote corner of Derbyshire, far

from police protection, the famous Kwang Ho Vase, valued at ten thousand guineas, stands on a pedestal of lapiz-lazuli. Here also is the famous jewelled snuff-box that was once Louis XIV.'s pride, worth four thousand guineas."

Then followed a pithy account of treasures that would have made a moneyed collector's heart ache with envy. And then:

"Altogether, these fascinating objects are worth a quarter-million sterling. A quarter-million, and never a guard or gun to keep rogues distant! Think of it! All that wealth lying idle whilst others starve. Ah, but it's hard that men with brains should live and die like rats for want of a chance—"

So far Lyle read, then cut off abruptly. "My hat, that's a bit thick!" he gasped. "Why, it's almost an incitement to some silly ass—"

"I hadn't noticed it before," Lemoine whispered. "Here, cut in to the menagerie details; that'll take their minds off my blunder."

And, muttering against his foolishness, he quickly turned two sheets, and pointed to a paragraph headed "Lions Loose in England."

But now an amazing thing happened to Lyle. He looked at the page, found the printed letters dancing a dervish jazz up and down the paper, and felt that he was choking!

He stared at Lemoine, and saw only a huge, grinning face floating horribly before his eyes, and then the hated features of Armstrong came swimming into view.

"So it works well, boss," Armstrong chuckled.

And, at an echo, Jerry's voice vibrated in the phones Lyle still wore:

"Now then, old hoss, wake up! We're waitin'!"

Lyle realised that he had been trapped—that the half-sensed danger of ten minutes ago had been no idle fancy.

Dully, he tried to reason the thing out. He hadn't touched or tasted since he entered the house; yet, he had been drugged—of that he was certain.

He knew that his senses were going, knew that some terrible danger was closing in on him. With a supreme effort he bent over the microphone—intent on yelling a warning to Jerry.

And, most amazing of all, Lemoine held the instrument right up against his face—so close that it completely covered his nose and mouth!

"Eat it, dear lad, if you wish—it's the thing that's put you to sleep!" Lemoine whispered. "Breathe in it, boy—remembering that Ultima pays—as once he warned you!"

Lyle was incapable of movement. Inwardly, his struggles were terrible, yet he failed to move a finger; and, suddenly, he sagged back in the chair—conscious of the futility of further effort.

Contemptuously, Ultima pushed him aside—a broken thing that had served its purpose and was done with. But Lyle's mind still held some remnant of reasoning power—sufficient to turn his last wakeful moments to acute agony.

Through drooping lids he watched Armstrong rapidly and expertly couple up a second microphone. He watched Ultima bend over it—he thought that madness had gripped him when he heard his own voice issuing from Ultima's lips!

"Jerry, there's a giddy old game on, over here. Get rid of those fools—I've had enough of poverty—bring the old bus over to Rivington—we'll be rich men before morning!—I'll expect you in—"

So far—by fighting grimly against sleep—Lyle's brain registered. So far—then, with a little sigh, his eyes closed and he dropped into shadowland!

CHAPTER 3, Snake-bite!

LIGHTS floated before Lyle's half-closed eyes, faint and elusive as wisps of clouds. His head ached intolerably, he felt as if some ghoul had hammered a steel rod from ear to ear. Stupidly, sluggishly, his brain began to function—bringing a hazy picture of Ultima mouthing his amazing mimicry into the microphone. And a scent, sweet and sickly, vaguely troubled him because his mind refused to put a name to it.

"That's it—amised!" he mumbled, at last. "Now, where on earth does it come from?"

His eyes opened wide, and now he recognised that he was in Ultima's snuggery, and that the agony in his head came from the sharp edge of a table across which he sprawled. His face was level with the disorderly dishes of a past meal, an overturned bottle dripped the last of its contents over his coat, and—within six inches of his outflung arm—a tiny green-tinted snake was arching its neck to strike!

The sight jolted brain and body to whirlwind activity. Even as the little reptile's head darted forward Lyle jerked his hand aside and grabbed the heavy bottle; then, down it crashed—to burst into a thousand glittering fragments and to leave a venomous, broken horror twisting and squirming on the stained cloth!

Sick with the terror of his awakening, he finished his unpleasant job with a poker from the fireplace and stared down at the thing he had escaped being bitten by.

"Ugh! A death-dealing viper!" he muttered. "So that was Ultima's rotten game—to drug me with this stuff that's somehow attracted and angered this poisonous customer, to make my demise appear just rank bad luck. Well, he's good reason for wanting me out of his road, but—why this elaborate staging?" He frowned with an effort of thought, then laughed wryly. "Ultima, the expert wireless crook—and me trying to teach him how to use a microphone! Nicely he's bilked me—but, why this fantastic method of putting me permanently to sleep?"

Suddenly, his glance caught the glint of metal, its sparkling edge just showing beneath the rim of a plate. He was on it like a hawk.

"A gold snuff box, crusted with brilliants!" he gasped. "Great smoke! It's surely the thing I was broadcasting to-night—the one and only Louis sneeze-tank owned by Cremlin!"

For an appreciable time he stared at the wonderful bauble—not seeing it—trying to fathom Ultima's tortuous methods. Then, abruptly, Ultima's last words recurred to him—words spoken with his voice:—"bring the old bus over to Rivington—we'll be rich men before morning!"

"The abominable beast!" he groaned. "The whole thing's a carefully arranged plant. He's robbed Cremlin, and I've convicted myself by broadcasting that craftily-worded article of his! And—

Jerry! He's bound to come over, not because he'll believe I'm after Cremlin's jewels, but because he'll think I've gone dotty." Suddenly, another thought struck him and he groaned afresh. "Weepin' Willum! Only yesterday I was telling Jerry what a posh landing-place Lemoine's lawn would make for the bus! Oh, what added luck! He's bound to connect the two things and begin to wonder if Lemoine hasn't tempted me!"

Abruptly calm reason took the place of disordered excitement. That was Lyle's way. Let the world smile and life run smooth, and nothing could ever make him serious. But let the storm clouds gather—then Lyle became cold and purposeful, and grimly determined to see things through.

So now he glanced at his watch, saw with surprise that it registered 3.0 a.m., and stood for a moment quietly "connecting up," as he would have called it.

"Seven hours since Ultima stole my voice—thrice as much as Jerry'd need to roust out the bus and get here," he mused. "If he was really taken in, he'd dash over to stop me—if he wasn't, he'd guess that I was in a hot corner, and he'd dash over just the same. First thing—see if I can get out of here and scout round a bit."

To his amazement, the door opened to his touch. There was not a sound in the house, but the passage and hall lights were blazing away and, straight ahead, he could see the huge double doors standing wide open.

Mystified, fearing yet another trap, he crept down the long passage, listened intently, then cautiously skirted the hall.

But the way was free, the place deserted—a fact conclusively proved when he stumbled over a skin rug and thudded full length on the polished parquet.

"If this isn't the giddy limit!" he gasped.

But he took full advantage of the "limit" and sped out into the night.

In the faint moonlight, the black hulk of an aeroplane was plainly visible—the sight that Lyle had feared to see, yet one that caused sorrow without surprise.

"So they've got poor old Jay," he groaned. "But the open doors, the lights flaring, the bus abandoned—Oh, it's beyond me!"

But another link in Ultima's mystifying chain was soon unfolded. From the plane's locker Lyle routed out an electric torch. Its light told him many things.

First, he spotted a smashed under-carriage.

"My hat! Jerry crashed!" he yelled. "A moonlight night, perfect landing—I'll never believe it! Hallo!—what's this?"

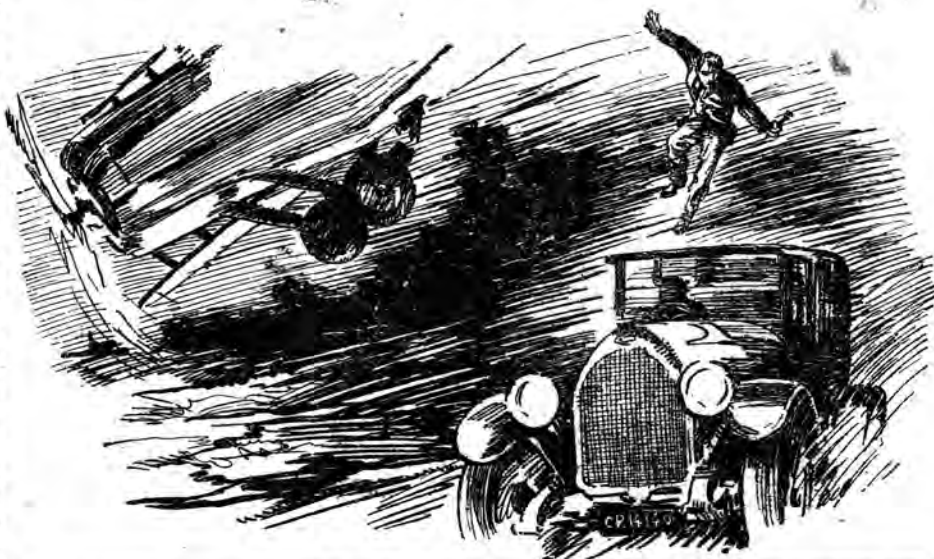
Bending close to examine the broken carriage, he saw a black attache-case lying wide open, its interior cunningly packed with a profusion of steel tools; and, though many of the implements were new to him, he had no difficulty in identifying a very complete "Bill Sikes" outfit.

"So—that's the way of it," he muttered, after a long pause. "I'm to be found—unhappily killed by snake-bite—with a bit of the stolen property on the table. And Jerry, smashing the plane in landing, makes a getaway on his own and leaves all this junk to tell its own story." He laughed wryly. "I'll give Ultima credit—a great scheme! He disposes of two who know overmuch for his comfort, and at the same time lines his pockets with a snug little fortune."

"That means that Jerry must remain hidden—the whole scheme hangs on that," he continued, with a frown. "They'd get him away from here, imprison him in some safe place, and—why, of course—that brings me to Armstrong's whisper: '—be in town before six!'"

He knew the position of the garage—a glance showed that the blue Dion was missing.

"Um, I've three courses before me," he mused. "I can go over to Kremlin's house, and be detained as a suspicious character. I can report to the police—they'll know all about my broadcasted envy—and be arrested pending investigation. Or I can go to Jerry's help—and I'm going, if I break my blessed neck in his damaged old bus!"



For a fractional second Lyle Lindsay hung poised. Then, venturing all, he dropped, to land half over the jolting car and to be nearly torn away by the swift rush of air.

CHAPTER 4.

Wizard Wireless Again!

HAD Jerry been there he would have shuddered at the risks Lyle took. It may have been ignorance—Lyle admitted he was no "ace"—or it may have been sheer dour determination not to be beaten; whichever it was, Lyle ought to have smashed the old Fleetwing to scrap a dozen times, if the rules of the flying game count for anything.

He did make an attempt to mend the damaged carriage, but gave it up as hopeless almost immediately. Then, chafing against delay, he jumped for the pit, fixed the engine on contact, and raced round to the propeller. Whirling it over compression, he made a flying leap for the pilot's seat, and let her out.

She moved—like a ship that staggers in heavy seas. She swayed and bumped, she groaned, rattled, and threatened to dig her nose into solidity. She swung sideways—a fault Lyle corrected with a lucky rudder adjustment—she started to get off with her tail too low, she nearly stalled to a very deadly crash. And, finally, how the aero gods must have sniggered—she bumped clear, barged for a tree, skimmed it by inches, and banked serenely into the blue!

"You—you hair-raisin' monstrosity!" Lyle gasped, recovering from that mad half-minute. "It's Flyin' Bronco you ought to be named, not Fleetwing—you rattlin' nightmare!"

After that he settled down to serious business, making sure of elbow-room by rising to four thousand; then, steadying the stick with his chin, he got the pit-lights glowing, and began a careful comparing of Jerry's roller map with compass, wind gauge, and chart. Finally, quickly deciding his course, he nursed the plane's nose round to sou'-sou'-east, and turned his attention to the speed indicator.

Until the moon paled and died, until the succeeding blackness had merged to a clean, cold dawn, Lyle held dourly to his task. He had minor mishaps, of course. For instance, he hit a "bump"—the exact opposite to an air-pocket—and thought, for a moment, that the old Fleetwing would open out like a sodden

paper boat. But she didn't; she nosed over or under that mysterious, invisible obstacle, raced sweetly for a time, then developed an irregular, spluttering misfire. It worried her pilot into fits, until he located and cleaned the plug that was causing all the trouble.

But, generally speaking, Lyle had a "cushy" ride, and with the coming of dawn he whacked her up to capacity. For a time he tried to locate his position without success, but Warwick Castle eventually gave him a line, and, turning another point east, he dashed straight on for London.

"Now, laddie, you may be fifty miles behind the Dion, or you may be a hundred in front of it," he muttered. "You're looking for a needle in a haystack, you aren't try to land with a broken carriage, and your name's 'domino' unless Jay's giddy old wireless is functionin'."

Again using his chin as third hand, he connected the wireless gadgets with the plane's magneto, released the weighted aerial with a touch of his boot, donned headgear, and sent the power flooding into the valves. Then, tuning in to nine hundred, keeping his eyes alert for sight of the blue car, he began a monotonous mouthing of an aerodrome call sign.

"G. E. D.—Hallo, Croydon? 2XD private bus calling Croydon Aerodrome. Hallo, G. E. D.?"

It is the proud boast of English airports that they never sleep, that they are alert for aero S.O.S. at any and every minute. Certainly it proved so in this case, for Lyle's call was answered within twenty seconds.

"Hallo, 2XD? Croydon calling! Where are you—have you trouble—can we help you?" came the anxious questions.

"No trouble. I'm crossing Oxfordshire, racing for London, and searching for a six-cylinder blue Dion registered CR14140," Lyle answered. "Please report to Scotland Yard that a big burglary has been operated at Grey Gables, near Rivington. Stolen property in car, car driven by a scraggy-necked blighter named Armstrong. Car probably houses a prisoner, one Jerry O'Gorman, owner

of this bus. Lyle Lindsay speaking—waits reply."

"Will get in touch with headquarters," G.E.D. replied briefly. And, a minute later: "Hallo, 2XD? I've spoken to the Yard. They've had reports of Rivington affair—wish to speak you direct. I'm connecting this set with the land line—now ready, 2XD!"

Then, while Lyle was still racketing at eighty per, several thousand feet above earth, a harsh, rasping voice spoke from that grim, grey building, and made him exceedingly wroth.

"Hallo, Lindsay? Your story is incredible. District report received that burglary committed by Lindsay and O'Gorman, and that they are trying to escape from England by aeroplane. Continent already advised, and it will count in your favour if you land at Croydon and give up stolen property!"

"You—you goat!" Lyle yelled. "The stuff was bagged by the famous Ultima, alias Maltravers, alias Lemoine! He arranged and worked the job from his house Greystones, next door to Grey Gables."

The reply was coldly sarcastic.

"Greystones, the house you mention, is the property of Lord Basingbrook. His lordship has been absent in India this past six months, and the house is closed. Lemoine unknown in the district!"

So that accounted for Ultima's care that he should only arrive at dusk, and then by a side entrance in a country lane! But Lyle had no time to make further explanations, for at that moment he sighted a tiny trail of dust—far ahead and below—that meant a car driven at racing speed.

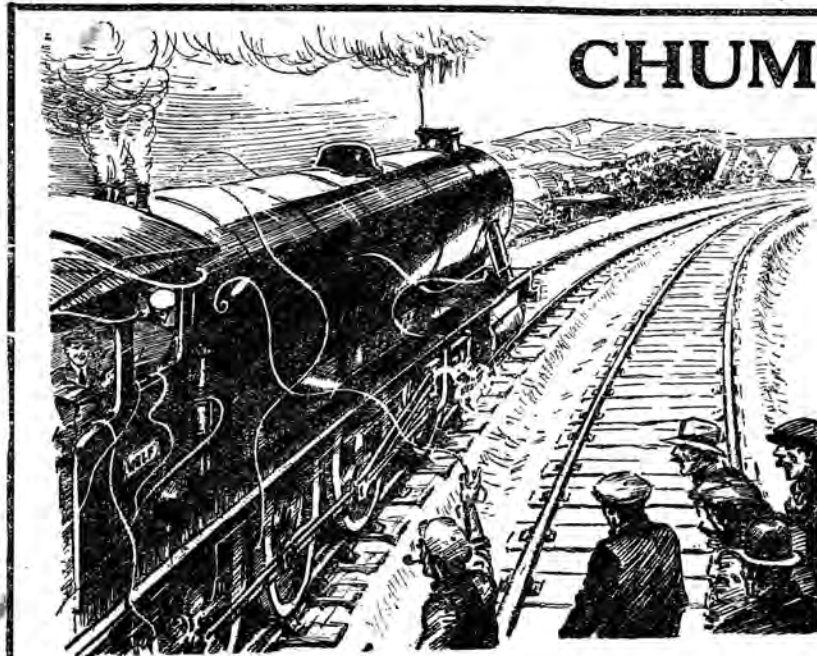
"Believe what you wish, I can only tell you that Ultima drugged me, left me nice and cosy for a deadly snake-bite, and that I roused up a minute too soon," he cried hurriedly. "Ultima's deliberately worked to throw dust into your eyes. Ask Inspector Dixon what he did in the cocaine case. There's a car racing five miles ahead. It may be the missing Dion. I'll work on my own, if I must!"

Some reply came, but Lyle ignored it and concentrated on the racer in front. It was doing a good sixty, but the game

(Continued on page 22.)

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 382.

Concluding Chapters of our Great Railway Romance!



CHUMS of the IRON WAY!

A Thrilling Yarn of Exciting Adventure on the Railroad.

By

ROLAND SPENCER

and

FRANCIS WARWICK.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED.

It was a day of days for plucky Jimmy Speed when he rescued Sir Richard Grant, the managing-director of the G.S.C. Railway, from a terrible death, for it meant the realisation of his long-cherished ambition—to get a job in the great workshops of the G.S.C.

But he was soon up against it when he crossed the path of "Granite" Langrish, chief director of the G.E.N. Railway, and a rival of Sir Richard Grant. He finds a friend, however, in Sam Blundell.

Langrish's craftiness knows no bounds, and, having failed in his endeavours to bring about the downfall of the G.S.C., he throws out a challenge that his electric trains will beat any steam trains the G.S.C. care to put up.

It is a great blow to the G.S.C., but brings about the chance Sam Blundell had been waiting for. The giant engine, Wolf, of which he had supplied plans, is put under way, and the great workshops of the G.S.C. bring to life what Blundell hoped would bring success to the G.S.C. and him!

The paid followers of Granite Langrish try their utmost to wreck the Wolf, but the workers of the G.S.C., ably led by Sam Blundell, put up a stern defence.

Clambering on to the footboard of the cab, Jimmy Speed is overjoyed to hear that permission has been granted for him to travel on the train in its great race.

"Oh, how great!" he exclaims excitedly.

(Now read on.)

Southward Ho!

JIMMY SPEED, thrilling with pleasure at the great treats in store for him, stood by patiently as Sam accelerated speed. The mighty wonder-locomotive gathered way swiftly—wonderfully swiftly—and Sam chuckled.

"She's great!" he said. "I'll bet such acceleration can't be bettered on the electric railways, chum. 'Course, we're pulling nothing yet—"

"How is it I'm to be on the train in the race, Sam?"

Young Speed asked the question eagerly.

"Oh, yes! Well, it was like this, Jimmy. I had a last interview with Sir Richard—he was there to see us off from Blackhampton, in fact—and he told me that a boy worker of the line was wanted as messenger in the wireless cabin. You know, of course, that one of the wireless coaches is to be used for the race. Messages telling Sir Richard of the progress of the electric train racing with us will come in, and Sir Richard told me that someone deserving the honour was to be chosen as runner. You're the chap. You'll have to take the messages written out by the wireless operator to Sir Richard and the other big nobs in their private coach."

"Crumbs, why have they chosen me for that?" gasped Jim.

"For a reason I 'hear-heard' heartily, chum. Because if it hadn't been for you, the Wolf would never have been born."

Jimmy looked out at the flying country on the left.

"There's many a chap would give his eyes for the chance I've got, Sam. And to think of it, right through the big race I'll be just behind you. I may be able to catch a glimpse of you in the cab, now and again. Gee, it'll be great—great!"

The boy relaxed into silence, thrilling with pleasure as he watched Sam and the fireman at work. He stood in a corner of the cab, out of the way, glorying in the warm glow from the fire every time the fire-door was opened by the fireman for a fresh lot of coal. Driving and firing was easy, for the locomotive was being driven gently, and had nothing to pull. Jim's eyes followed greedily every movement of his companions.

"Does Sir Richard know I've jumped the Wolf, Sam?"

"No fear, kid?" replied Blundell quickly. "He said you could travel down by the express in which he is travelling to-night. You're to meet the Wolf train at Northgate Station at nine a.m. I'll slip you off before we get into the Northgate district, and you can get a motor-bus down to town. You'll have to put up for the night—Northgate Hotel, the G.S.C. hotel in London, you know, THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 882.

will be best. Just you be there all right, and no one will know of this little stunt."

It was all very pleasant to think about, and everything seemed rosy to Jim Speed.

Sam allowed Jim to handle the regulator at one stage in the journey. He also explained the working of other controls—simplicity itself, and the beauty of the Wolf seemed to Jim the greater now he had felt her responsive to his steady touch.

The weather was genial. The sun broke through the clouds and bathed the countryside in brightness. And the mighty Wolf roared on towards London without exerting a fiftieth part of the power of which she was capable.

Jimmy began to think of the Great Electric Northern Railway somewhere out to the westward. He knew full well that along that permanent way of triple-lined tracks, flashing blue sparks and whirling along at great speed, was a great yellow electric monster speeding down to London for the start of the race, as was the Wolf. He knew, too, that at crossings and stations, bridges, and other points of vantage, many people were gathered, cheering and waving, worked up to full excitement by the Press in anticipation of the wonderful race that was to mean so much to the nation.

If Langrish could prove that electricity would be a better motive power than steam, then the G.E.N. would have to take first place, no matter what hardships would result in Blackhampton!

Langrish!

Jimmy's brow clouded as he thought of the man. If only he would be a sport! If only he would play fair, what a wonderful thing this great struggle for supremacy would be!

"Well, anyway," thought Jim, as he gazed at the flying country to his left, with glimpses of the mighty Trent reposing like a gigantic snake in its wide valley, "if Langrish won't play fair, Sam and I'll have to see what Cridland knows. If the G.E.N. continue fouling us right and left, the only thing will be to get Langrish smashed somehow, and a decent man in his place. Wonder what that mystery is? Cridland will tell one day, perhaps, but if this race isn't ours—well, he'll have to tell soon! But we'll win. Gee, I don't doubt it for a minute. The Wolf will mop up the miles better than any yellow electric brute, I'll bet my shirt!"

But for all Jimmy's thoughts, he blinked rather wistfully out to the west where lay the G.E.N. main line, along which whirled the "yellow brute" of his musings. He and Sam knew what she could do! Had they not travelled behind her in one of their greatest thrills? Ay, she was something to be reckoned with, and the Wolf would prove wonderful indeed, to beat her record. But wonderful the Wolf certainly was!

The great locomotive dashed into a tunnel and roared her proud way through the blackness, sending along her gong warning as

she proceeded. For this was an important tunnel fitted with gong-pipes along its length, on which sounded the warning of the approach of a train or engine.

The occasional dim lights flew by, and the sparks whizzed overhead. Water splashed down from the resounding roof in the centre, and the three in the cab of the Wolf sought shelter under the coach-roof of the cab. Then—a sudden clatter and louder roar, a thinning of the darkness, broad daylight, and the open, smiling country again burst to view.

On, on, driven towards the south, the mighty Wolf roared. Blocks were signalled clear, for great care had been taken not to delay the queen of the line at any part. But a signal check was experienced at one part, and the Wolf, panting slowly, drew to a standstill just before a level crossing.

Hundreds of people lined the fences alongside the railway—cheering, shouting, waving people. They seemed to go mad with delight as the Wolf pulled up, and a few climbed the fence bounding the railway and dropped down to the track beside the throbbing Wolf.

"Blundell! Blundell!" cried the people. "Let's see you, mate!"

At the G.E.N. Terminus!

SAM'S grinning face was pushed from the cab, and the people cheered loudly.

"Good luck, boy!"

"Show 'em what coal's good for yet!"

"Horseshoe for luck!"

An old horseshoe clanged on to the footplates of the locomotive, and Sam stooped and picked it up. He fixed the shoe at the end of the cab-roof, and the spectators yelled with delight. A paper streamer shot out—a blue streak right over the high boiler of the Wolf. The paper caught in front of the steam dome. Another followed, and another. Then white streamers were sent over, and the great grim Wolf, unmoved at the honour shown to her, was soon festooned with the streamers.

Sam, Jim, and the fireman laughed happily. Then as the home signal in front clashed down, Sam's hand went to the regulator handle and the mighty Wolf hissed and roared as the eight mighty driving-wheels began to revolve.

Off they went, the streamers blowing and fluttering on either side, the Wolf in veritable gala array, and the cheers of the people died away.

Again the open country, the flashing panorama of farmsteads, hamlets, square fields, long, straight hedges, lonely houses, solemnly flowing rivers, broad white motor-roads, copses, ponds, rugged moorlands. The Wolf was again mopping up the miles, and Jim watched with ever-increasing delight as they sped towards London.

"Here we are, kid!" cried Blundell, at last. "Northgate—the station not far ahead. Nip out at this cinder patch. I'll show down—"

Jimmy, pausing only to grip Sam's hand, swung himself from the footplate, and the Wolf having slowed down to a crawl, he dropped lightly to the track, and in a moment was over the black railing and standing on the cinder patch, the sports ground of many a youthful local football team.

The mighty tender of the Wolf seemed to grow smaller and smaller. Sam Blundell waved, then the side of a bridge hid him from view. The Wolf took a curve majestically, and suddenly disappeared, her blue-and-white streamers fluttering gaily.

Heaving a mighty sigh, Jimmy walked across the cinder patch, and was soon in a broad, crowded street. He spent a good fifteen minutes gazing about him, trying to get the hang of the names lettered on the fronts of the big red buses. At last he spotted the name Northgate Station. Running over, Jim boarded the bus and climbed to the top.

It was only a penny fare to Northgate Station, but it was a journey packed with interest for James Speed. Here he came upon one of the mighty London thoroughfares of his dreams. Blackhampton was a busy town enough, but the youngster marvelled at the choked traffic of London. The broad ways, flanked with handsome buildings, were literally packed with motor vehicles, and the wonder was that the traffic could get along at all!

The vehicle at last arrived at a big junction of many thoroughfares. Jim stared round him with keen interest. A great glass-roofed arch, with a mighty clock in the middle of its front claimed his attention. A number of entrances were to be seen.

Under the clock, in huge white letters on a black background, well-loved words could be seen:

GREAT SCOTTISH AND CENTRAL RAILWAY.

So this was Northgate Station, the mighty, pulsing London terminus of the G.S.C.!

Jim stared with admiration at the imposing entrance to the station.

"Gee, it's a mighty place!" he said to himself. "And the Wolf's to start from here to-morrow. Big things are happening with the railways now. I'm blest if they aren't!"

The youngster had tea at a teashop near by, then strolled out in search of a place of lodging for the night. He would be a lone hand till the morrow, for Sam had relations at Hackney with whom he would spend the evening and who would put him up for the night.

Jim, shunning the palatial entrance of the G.S.C. hotel opposite the station, engaged a room at a less expensive place in a by-street, then, at a loose end, he strolled along the bustling thoroughfares, looking at the shops and generally killing time.

Soon he arrived at another converging point of big thoroughfares, and here he saw the impressive arched glass front of another great station.

"GREAT ELECTRIC NORTHERN RAILWAY," read Jim to himself. "Gosh, this must be Calbourne Station, the terminus of the Northern Electric. Well, James, you couldn't do better than

have a stroll round here and see what the London station of our rivals is like!"

Jim entered the station and peered with interest through the crowds hurrying about near the entrances to the arrival and departure platforms. He was about to push on when he came face to face with a man, and the meeting made him exclaim quickly:

"Cridland!"

White-faced, tight-lipped, as if choking back a wild fury that surged in his breast, the man had apparently just descended the stairway that led up to the chief offices of the big terminus—the place where, Jim knew, the private office of the chairman of the company, would be situated.

The Thirteenth!

JIMMY'S first instinctive thought was that he must try to have Cridland brought to book at last for his share in the crimes on the G.S.C. Then he realised that that was utterly impossible. He had no proofs; besides which, Sir Richard Grant had deliberately refrained from taking action against the men who had tried—and to some extent succeeded—in smothering the name of the G.S.C.

Cridland's face was strangely white and set. There was an ugly light in his eyes when he had emerged from the doorway of the G.E.N. offices. But now his expression changed. Clearly he was trying to "place" Jimmy in his mind, and suddenly he seemed to remember.

He drew back a swift step, a startled exclamation escaping him. Jimmy Speed laughed shortly.

"So we meet again, Cridland," he said grimly. "What dirty work have you been up to, lately for Granite Langrish?"

Cridland's teeth came together with a click. Then suddenly he stepped forward and gripped Jim by the shoulder.

"Just the one I want to see!" Cridland laughed harshly. "D'you want to do the G.S.C. a good turn?"

Jimmy stared at Cridland in amazement.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked suspiciously. "You're not likely to help me do that, anyway."

A sneer twisted Cridland's lips. He glanced round almost furtively at the crowds who streamed past before he spoke.

"How do you know that, eh? What if I'm the man who can help the G.S.C. more than anyone? I tell you I can break Langrish—I know something of the G.E.N. that Sir Richard would give his right hand to know. I've done with Langrish—"

The low words snapped suddenly. There was something strangely wild in Cridland's eyes as he spoke, and his voice was broken and quick, nervously excited. As Jimmy gazed in startled surprise at the white face staring into his own he remembered what he had overheard a long time ago now, in Black Hill ruins; Cridland's boast to Soper that he could smash Langrish, and would if he and Langrish fell out.

Like a flash the thought leapt into Jimmy's brain:

"By gum—he and Langrish have fallen out at last! Never any love lost there—and now—"

Was he to learn Cridland's secret knowledge at last?

"We can't talk here," went on Cridland jerkily. "Come outside—no, into the buffet—"

Two minutes later the two were seated at one of the little tables. Cridland's eyes glittered queerly as he drew something from his pocket.

"I want you to take something to Sir Richard Grant for me," he muttered. "A message—but don't deliver it yet—no, not till to-morrow night, at the earliest. Ay, to-morrow night will do. After the great race."

Jimmy was on the alert at once. He realised well enough that Soper's attempt to wreck the Wolf had been engineered by Langrish; was this another hidden scheme to ruin the G.S.C. chances in the great railway race? The fame of the Wolf had spread abroad; its powers were an utterly unknown quantity; that Langrish was afraid that his locomotive might not pull off the race after all was evident, and it was likely enough that a second attempt at foul play would be made.

"After the great race?" he repeated. "Why then?"

Cridland laughed shortly.

"Don't be afraid. There's no harm to come to the Wolf or the G.S.C. from me."

Jimmy was a little taken aback to find his thoughts read so easily. Cridland went on quickly, glancing round as he spoke.

"I could post this message," he said. "But for reasons that you'll understand later, I don't want to do that. I swear that you will be doing your railway a good turn by delivering a note

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to Sir Richard Grant for me. But first you must promise me not to deliver it until the great race to-morrow is over."

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy nodded, for so far as he could see there could not possibly be any harm in acceding to Cridland's request. But he was burning with curiosity to know what this man's message to the chief director of the G.S.C. could be.

Rapidly Cridland wrote on the sheet of paper he had taken from his pocket. Then he slipped the folded sheet into an envelope and fastened it down.

Jimmy took it, and put the letter in his breast pocket.

"Sir Richard will get it all right, I'll see to that," he said.

Cridland laughed again, and his lean face lit with gloating satisfaction. As though forgetting Jimmy, he muttered half aloud:

"So much for Langrish! The last laugh shall be mine after all—"

And then, without another glance at Jimmy, the man was gone, slipping away into the crowd and vanishing.

"Well, this is a rum go!" muttered Jimmy. He took out the letter from his pocket, staring down curiously at the scrawled name on the envelope. "What on earth is in this? Cridland's as bad an egg as any of 'em, but maybe he's going to be useful to us for all that."

Slipping the letter back into his pocket, Jimmy left the station. He spent the evening wandering through the great lighted thoroughfares of the West End. And when at last he returned to his lodgings he was so dog-tired that he "turned in" straightaway.

But he awoke early next morning—the morning of the Thirteenth! The day of the great railway race!

Jimmy had an early breakfast, and after that the hours seemed to drag past with amazing slowness. He was at Northgate terminus by eight o'clock, and there one of the first people he saw was Sam Blundell.

"Come along and have a look at her!" said Sam eagerly. "She's looking in the pink this morning—they pushed her up last night again, and she's fine. Going well, too, as you'll remember from yesterday. She'll put up a stiff fight, Jim."

Jim went with Sam to the crowded goods yard. As they crossed the sidings towards the big shed where the Wolf had been put for the night Jimmy told Sam of his strange meeting with Cridland at the G.E.N. terminus.

"That's rum!" said Sam. "Looks as though we shall know Cridland's secret at last. It may not be much, but so long as it helps the G.S.C.—"

In the engine-shed the great wonder-locomotive was standing like a monarch beside one or two small tank engines used for the London suburban service. Jimmy's eyes ran over the familiar, beautiful lines of the Wolf with pride. To think that he had driven that splendid giant of the Iron Way with his own hands!

Smith, Sam's fireman, was already at the shed, laying the fire in the fire-box, seeing to the standing gear, and making all ready. He gave Jimmy a cheery nod.

"Not long now, Speed," he said.

Jimmy grinned.

He did not stay very long with Sam and Smith. He had to report to Sir Richard Grant, and hurried off to do so.

Already Northgate Station was full of spectators, anxious to see the start of the Wolf on her rush for the North in the great race. The offices were crowded with directors and officials, big newspaper correspondents, together with shareholders and others, who had been invited to be on the train.

Jimmy reported, and was told to stand by. Slowly the minutes passed.

The Wolf was timed to start at nine o'clock, the identical hour of the G.E.N. train's departure from Calbourne Station. Already the long train, consisting of Pullman cars and the handsome white coaches of the G.S.C., had been shunted into the station. Jimmy was introduced to the wireless operator with whom he would work in the wireless coach, which would be between the locomotive itself and the front Pullman where Sir Richard was to travel. And then at last a mighty cheer rose echoing to the station roof. With the great driving wheels turning slowly, the Wolf came gliding majestically to her position at the head of the race train.

A sprig of white heather had been fastened to the handle of the smoke-box door, and Jimmy thought that he had never seen the handsome locomotive look more splendid than now. A hefty porter jumped down on to the line, and in a few moments the Wolf was coupled to the train.

Jimmy glanced at the big station clock. It was still many minutes to the hour.

He jumped out of the wireless coach and walked along the platform to have a last word with his chum. But Sam Blundell was in conversation with Sir Richard Grant, Steel, of the drawing office, and other big men of the G.S.C. Jimmy turned away again, and watched the enthusiastic crowd that was staring with admiration at Sam's loco.

"Five more minutes," muttered Jimmy.

Those minutes seemed like hours. Jim's heart was beating fast. Suddenly his hand went to the pocket where Cridland's letter lay, the letter that was to be delivered to Sir Richard after the great race. And again he wondered, what could that letter contain?

Now those who were to travel in the train were entering the coaches. A minute more only, Jimmy, who had returned to the wireless coach, slipped out on to the platform again.

"It's all right!" he called back to the wireless operator. "I'll be all right, but if you don't mind I just want a word with Blundell!"

He ran along to the cab. Sam's hand was already on the regulator.

"Good luck, Sam!" cried Jimmy.

And Sam turned a serious face to his chum.

"Thanks—we'll do or die, depend upon it," answered Sam.

Jimmy ran back to the wireless coach and slipped in. A whistle shrilled.

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There was a hiss of steam from the Wolf. Then slowly, smoothly, the mighty eight-coupled driving-wheels drove forward. The great race had begun!

The Race for Supremacy!

"JINGO—off at last!" breathed Jimmy. He gazed out of the window at the long platforms slipping past, thronged with cheering people. Above the clamour the youngster could hear the steady pulsing of steam from the great blue-and-gold locomotive as the Wolf went gliding smoothly from the big terminus on its long journey to Scotland.

The huge arched station roof of glass receded into the distance, as the long train clicked rhythmically over the maze of points, glittering brightly in the sunlight, that criss-crossed in all directions outside Northgate Station.

From distant sidings came full-throated cheers, as shunters and platelayers, drivers and firemen sped the champion of the G.S.C. on its way.

The wireless operator was writing busily, the receivers on his ears. Half-turning in his seat, he beckoned to Jimmy.

"First report here, Speed." He pushed a slip of paper across to the youngster. "Read it if you want to. Then take it through to Sir Richard."

Jimmy glanced down at the paper as he turned towards the communicating door that led from the wireless coach to the front Pullman.

"G.E.N. train left to time, amid great enthusiasm. G.E.N. hopes high," ran the message.

Jimmy opened the door and passed into the coach where Sir Richard Grant sat with the chief mechanical engineer, the chief civil engineer, the traffic manager, Steel, and other big men of the Great Scottish and Central. The men were grouped at the little tables, smoking, and engaged for the most part in earnest talk.

Jimmy's eyes went quickly from face to face, curious to read the expressions he found there.

He read hope in the faces of these men, certainly; but for the most part he found an expression of grim determination, of iron resolve that to-day the great railway must do or die, must fight to its last breath.

He crossed to Sir Richard Grant's side and handed him the wireless report. The baronet read it, and nodded. His face, like those of his companions, was set and grim.

Jimmy returned to the front coach. The train was gathering speed rapidly now as she swept through a district of tall warehouses and factories.

"My hat, we're moving!" he remarked, with a chuckle of excitement.

But the operator did not hear. He was busy taking down the second report.

"G.E.N. train passed Callingsways Junction 9.18," read the report. Sir Richard quickly glanced at the big map on the table before him when Jimmy handed the message to him.

"That means that the G.E.N. train is four minutes ahead—four minutes ahead already," muttered Sir Richard to the men with him. "Afraid I'd not expected that."

"It's the electric locomotive's acceleration," said Steel. "Better than ours, good though ours is. We have got to gain the advantage on the distance, that's all."

The speed of the train was terrific now. Jimmy needed a good pair of sea-legs to negotiate the coaches, and when, back in the wireless coach, he put his head out of the window to glance forward, hoping for a glimpse of Sam, the rush of air was almost frightening. With a gasp, he drew in his head, utterly breathless.

The train roared on, flying through deep cuttings, racing at breakneck speed along high embankments, over bridges, under bridges, through short, echoing tunnels, through shadowed woods and sunny meadows. On any other train Jimmy would have felt alarmed, so terrific was the pace. But he pictured Sam Blundell's steady hands on the controls, thought of his chum's cool, sure touch as the giant 4-8-2 skimmed down the glittering rails like a live thing; and though the youngster thrilled at the thought, he knew that all was well.

"Wish to goodness I could get a sight of 'em!" thought Jimmy wistfully, peering out of the window, as the train tore round a curve in the line, at the deep-blue sides of the mighty tender and of the curved roof of the cab beyond. "Wonder what speed we're going at now?"

In the coach where Sir Richard sat poring over the big railway map a speedometer had been fixed, showing the mileage and speed of the G.S.C. train. When he entered, with a further bulletin from the wireless operator, Jimmy saw that the needle of the speedometer was steady at sixty-nine miles an hour.

"The G.E.N. 4-10-4 averaged seventy on that trial run of hers!" Jimmy muttered gloomily to himself.

He handed the slip of paper to Sir Richard.

"G.E.N. train passed Bridmouth Bridge at 9.41," read this report.

And Sir Richard Grant frowned.

"They're still ahead!" he said shortly, making a rapid calculation. "More, they've gained ground on us. Their average speed so far has been two miles an hour greater than ours!"

He glanced up at the speedometer. The needle had moved round a point.

"Ah, we're increasing speed still, I see! No; back again—back fast! Sixty-seven—sixty-six—We're slowing down for Tivert Junction bend; that's what it means."

Swiftly the terrific speed slackened. The Wolf clearly was capable of wonderful deceleration—a thing quite as important as good acceleration. The wheels round the sharpest curve on the G.S.C. main line. A few minutes later there came a hollow echo as the train flashed through a big crowded junction. Jimmy had a brief glimpse of waving hats and cheering men; then Tivert

Junction was passed, and slowly the speedometer-needle moved round again, higher and higher.

"Sixty-nine!" said Sir Richard grimly. "Ah, now it's seventy again! But we don't seem to get past that. But, of course, there's an upward gradient here."

He referred to the map and nodded.

"One in two hundred. Soon it's one in two-fifty."

Jimmy tore himself away, though he would have liked to stay and watch that fatal needle all the time. But he was soon back in the Pullman again. He heard Sir Richard chuckle as he entered. The speedometer registered seventy-two miles an hour.

"But the G.E.N. is ahead still. They're three miles to the good; they've done forty-five miles to our forty-two. But it's four hundred miles to Edinburgh; time enough to catch them yet if we can."

"If we can!"

Those three words were hammering in Jim Speed's brain.

Northward Ho!

"G.E.N. train crossing the Nen, 9.45," was the next message.

Jimmy took it to Sir Richard, and saw that the speedometer was registering over seventy-eight miles per hour!

"G.E.N. still maintaining the lead," remarked Sir Richard, with forced calmness. "But we're travelling as fast as them now—"

"There's the Nen, Sir Richard!" remarked Mr. Steel, motioning with his cigar towards the north-east, where Jimmy saw a silver-winding river.

The river seemed to rush at them, there was the clatter of the bridge, and the watershed of the Nen was behind.

"We're up to our eighty!" said the baronet, glancing at the speedometer. "Blundell's making good, by Jupiter!"

"Trust him to get the best out of the Wolf!" replied Steele seriously. "But I wish we were creeping up!"

The next message read that the G.E.N. train had passed Ashby-de-la-Zouch—one hundred miles out, and the time was 10.30! And the Wolf was just shrieking through Melton Mowbray! The Wolf was dropping behind a bit more, and Jim felt sick at heart. How could it possibly be done—this madcap dash all the way to Edinburgh? Keeping up such a speed? It seemed impossible.

The Vale of Trent was ahead, and the two great lines drew nearer to each other as they approached their respective works—Carnborough and Blackhampton. There was the winding Trent, as Jim had often before seen it, seeming to sweep round towards them like a mighty arm. Over the bridge like mad—north, north—all eyes now peering through the left-hand windows of the train, because soon a glimpse of the G.E.N. line would be had.

Jim looked over with the rest. The view of the Carnborough line could be seen to the north-west—a distant view. And there, sweeping along, the champion of the Great Electric Northern could be seen!

Jim felt sick and hollow. The G.E.N. train was well ahead. And they seemed to be slowing down a trifle. There was no bad curve, as Jim knew, between them and Blackhampton; indeed, all anticipated passing through Blackhampton at their full eighty! What was the meaning of it? Was the Wolf feeling the great strain? Jim could hear the directors talking excitedly round the speedometer as he stood there by the window. How much had the Wolf dropped? And why had she dropped down in her speed at all?

"I'll have a look at the Wolf if I can!" muttered the youngster. "Oh, she can't be slowing down through lack of power! Sam said she would be good for eighty for hours if given straight running—and it's straight running to Blackhampton!"

Jim drew a deep breath, lowered the window, and peered swiftly out along the big coach towards the engine. One glimpse he had of the huge locomotive, when he caught his breath suddenly, and something seemed to snap in his brain.

It was not only the rushing, tearing wind which made Jim gasp. For beyond the straight side of the blue-and-gold tender of the Wolf he saw a hand hanging languidly—someone's hand. It was either Blundell's or the fireman's. The man was lying on the footplates, ill or senseless, obviously, since the hand remained there seemingly lifeless.

Giving himself no time for thought, Jim tore open the door and clawed and heaved at the handgrips outside. The next moment he was on the footboard clear of the door. The latter banged to behind him, and, the rushing wind nearly tearing him from his position, he crept forward, having to drag himself every inch of the way.

The countryside seemed blotted from Jim's view. He only knew that he was half-mad with the sense of speed—that he must hold on like grim death, must get forward! Was it foul play? Was it possible that both Sam and the fireman were senseless, and the wonderful Wolf, with her train of coaches, was careering on to possible destruction?



When Speed put his head out of the window to glance forward, hoping to catch a glimpse of Sam, the rush of air was almost frightening. With a gasp, he drew in his head, utterly breathless.

Edinburgh!

THE Wolf had travelled nearly ten miles before Jimmy found himself lying on the coal in the tender. He was about played out; but he was in for it now, and must get to the cab to see if all was as it should be.

Someone's head bobbed constantly just above the edge of the tender. It was the only sign of life in the cab, and Jim choked back a cry. A man fring! So it must be Sam who was lying senseless on the footplates!

His brain throbbing, Jim crawled forward and poked his head over the forward side of the tender. The sight that met his gaze made him gasp. Smith, the fireman, lay a senseless, huddled form on the footplates, as if hastily pushed out of the way. Sam Blundell, stripped to the waist, skin blackened with the coal-dust, down which the sweat streamed in white streaks, was fring furiously. His body swayed rhythmically as he swung to and fro between tender and fire-door, shovelling coal into the blazing maw of his famous firebox.

Jim saw his chum's face—it was all in a flash. Haggard and grimy, shining with perspiration, but with the jaw set grimly, the face was that of a man struggling desperately against great odds. Jim scrambled the rest of the way, and dropped into the cab of the locomotive.

"Sam!"

Blundell, as if suddenly confronted by a ghost, swung round with a half-cry.

"Jim! Thank Heaven!" he gasped throatily. "Boy, there's been foul play—Smith's tea doped! I've been fring and driving for the past twenty miles—it's been hell! I'm fireman, you're driver—to my directions—"

Blundell dropped the shovel with a clatter and rattled shut the fire-door. He seized his book and ran a grimy finger down the lines.

"Carnchester—gradient one in one-fifty, downwards one in a hundred to Blackhampton—"

Sam moved over the regulator, and the Wolf felt the extra power.

"There! She'll take that gradient all right. Jim, I'll tell you how to move the regulator as I cool. She's eating coal, pulling like this!"

Sam jerked the fire-door open again and recommenced operations with the shovel. His lips were set tight, but the haggard look was not now so terrible.

Jim stood by the regulator, white-faced and tight-lipped. So Langrish had fouled them again! What a low-down, dirty trick to dope the fireman's tea! Jim glanced at the empty tea-can lying on its side on the footplates beside the still form of the fireman. "I suppose it is just dope, Sam?"

Blundell started, and almost dropped the shovel he was plying so lustily.

"Gosh, kid, I never doubted it for a minute! Jove, you'd

better listen to see if his heart's beating! If it is, we'll carry on. If it is weak or is—if he's—in a dangerous state, we'll have to pull up and lose the race."

Jim bent over Smith, and pressed his ear against the man's chest. He rose immediately.

"All right, Sam," he said. "Heart's beating well—quite normally, seems to me."

"Then get to your regulator." Sam glanced at the speedometer. "Move it up about a couple of inches—we're doing our eighty now, but we can get another two, I should say!"

Jim moved the regulator a bit more, and eighty-two was registered—eighty-two and a half—eighty-three!

"Steady, Jim! Hold her at that for a spell!"

Sam quickened his movements as he flashed shovelful after shovelful of coal into his wonderful firebox. A familiar signal-cabin flashed by; Jim saw the home and distant signals ahead giving them the line clear. He caught glimpses of people crowding on either side of the permanent way.

Old Quarry Block! In a few minutes they would be roaring like mad through Blackhampton! Here were the suburbs already—the old paint factory at Freyne Heath, the paper works beside the canal—over the canal—through Breckhill Station, crowds of cheering people on the platforms—the first of the G.S.C. sidings at the big centre—the extensive repair and erecting shops ahead—home and distant signals giving the line clear.

"Whistle, Jim!"

Speed blew a shrieking, long-drawn-out blast on the whistle as the Wolf roared under an iron footbridge, crowded with Blackhamptonians standing by to cheer their champion on.

"You're watching the signals, kid?" asked Sam anxiously, as he peered ahead, having a few minutes' respite from his labours.

"Yes; I'm keeping a look-out at all blocks."

"Good boy! You're going to save the day for the G.S.C."

Sam turned to firing again, and so the race went on, seeming to Jim merely a dizzy whirl. Blackhampton Long Tunnel was past. They now swept through the busy West Riding of Yorkshire, over the Tees, the county of Durham, the Tyne! On they sped, the Wolf now like a maddened monster, and Sam calm and stern, but jubilant.

"I knew she'd maintain pace, Jim—I knew it!" cried Sam, as he began firing again. "Gosh, don't I wish the route was longer! The Wolf's staying powers are our chief hope!"

Hilly Northumberland was past, the broad Tweed crossed, Berwick on the right. More hills and brawling streams, rough moorland and pine woods. They were in Scotland, and tearing onwards at their highest speed on the last part of their journey.

Jim's brain was in a whirl, and his heart was singing wildly. He watched the signals carefully, and moved the regulator to Sam's directions as the plucky young inventor divided his time between firing and referring to his route-book.

At last Jim felt himself brushed away from his position.

"Let me take on, kid—we're there!"

Sam scrambled into his coat, and put his hand on the regulator. Jim stood by, peering anxiously ahead.

At last speed decreased quickly. There was a grinding of

brakes, and Sam motioned to Jim to see to Smith. Jim bent over the man and listened to his breathing.

"He's sleeping like a log, Sam," said Jim, rising, as the gloom of a station enclosed them.

Then the youngster peered out, and he saw packed platforms on either hand, as the panting Wolf slowed down to a crawl, then came to a stop six feet from the buffers at the station end.

Ringling cheers could now be heard, and the cab of the Wolf was surrounded by shouting men, cheering lustily. Someone was beating his way through the crowd, and cries of "Make way!" sounded. Jim and Sam peered out. Sir Richard Grant!

The baronet's face was radiant. He looked ten years younger. He swung himself up on to the footplates and gripped Sam's hand.

"It's two-twenty-three, Blundell!" cried Sir Richard. "We're twenty minutes ahead of the G.E.N. train! You've averaged 74.3 miles per hour! It's a triumph! And you, Speed! We soon found out what had happened. You've done heroic work, both of you. What about Smith? What's the trouble?"

"Perhaps, now we've won, you'd like to keep it dark, sir," said Sam quietly. "His tea was doped. But he's only sleeping it off now."

The news spread like wildfire. The fireman of the race train had fallen ill! But, despite that, thanks to Jim Speed, the Wolf had won!

At Carrington Hall!

"HALLO, what's this?"

Jim Speed made that remark. Both he and Blundell were standing in the hall at the foot of the stairs that led to their room.

"What's which?" asked Sam.

"Parcel for us," Jim said, lifting a small parcel from the little table, where their landlady had placed it on its arrival by post.

"Addressed to us both, it is."

"Let's get upstairs first, anyway, before we open it," suggested Sam.

Together the two chums mounted the stairs. It was on the Tuesday following the great railway race. The intervening days had been full for both of them.

Sam had interviewed the directors, and had been staggered by the news that a cheque for five thousand pounds was to be given him in return for his services to the G.S.C., including the plans for the Wolf. Further, he was to be transferred at once to the drawing office, to be trained there under Steel as much as he desired, preparatory to taking up full duties as a locomotive designer. A bonus of three hundred pounds had been voted for Jim's part in the railway's great victory.

Jimmy, though rather stunned at first, was now growing used to the idea. Though they were not moving till the end of the week, they had already taken a set of rooms in a pleasant district of Blackhampton on the strength of it.

"We've got to live up to it, you know!" Jimmy had said, with a chuckle. "One room overlooking the sidings won't do any longer, Sam, for men of means!"

Up in their room, Jimmy, his fingers still oily from his morning's work in the repair and erecting shop, opened the parcel. A letter fell out, and Jimmy whistled to see Sir Richard Grant's handwriting.

"Just a small souvenir of the splendid way you have both stood by me in our railway's hour of need," Jimmy read aloud. "Can you both come to dinner with me to-night at seven? I want a chat."

"He's a great chap, is the Chief!" said Sam. "We can go all right, can't we? Let's see what's in here."

Jimmy continued opening the parcel.

Carefully packed in cotton-wool, he discovered two inscribed gold watches.

"He's a brick!" cried Jimmy. "I think I'm glad for his sake more than anything else that we won that race."

Sam nodded.

"Wonder if he'll tell us what was in that letter of Cridland's?" he said suddenly. "I'm as curious as anything to know, I must admit, though it's no business of ours really."

Jimmy had duly delivered the letter Cridland had given him on condition that it was not to reach Sir Richard's hands till the great race was run. Jimmy, too, was very curious to know the contents of that letter.

"Shouldn't wonder if he does tell us," he agreed.

And he was right.

It was not till dinner was over, and the three were seated in Sir Richard's library at Carrington Hall, that the railway magnate spoke of Cridland's letter.

"It's occurred to me that you might be interested to know the contents of the letter you brought me from Cridland, Speed," he said, flicking the ash from his cigar into the tray at his elbow. "Cridland's reason for not wanting the letter to be delivered till the race was run was that in it he betrayed the fact that he was leaving England—going while the going was good—and wanted to be clear beforehand. If he had posted it to me I should have

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known the port from which he sailed. But though the man is a rogue—an out-and-out villain, in fact—who fully deserves the attentions of the law, I don't mean to wash the dirty linen of the G.S.C. in public by trying to get him caught."

Sir Richard paused thoughtfully. "So Cridland might have said himself that anxiety! As for his letter, now that we have won the great race, it is of little use to us. If we had been the under-dog in this struggle, it would have been knowledge worth its weight in gold—if it's true. On the strength of it, we should have fought on, undismayed by bluff from Langrish. Cridland's news—"

"Yes?" put in Jimmy eagerly, as Sir Richard paused again. "It is simply this. According to Cridland, the G.E.N. is not the powerful concern it would appear to be. According to him, the whole structure is but an empty shell that might be broken at any moment if pressure were brought to bear. He declares that the published balance-sheet is a tissue of lies, cleverly compounded. The financial side of the G.E.N., according to him, is as shady as their methods of fighting us, their enemies. In short, the whole balance-sheet has been cooked, to throw dust into the eyes of shareholders and general public, and the Great Electric Northern is on the verge of bankruptcy and ruin!"

Jimmy Speed and Sam Blundell stared at Sir Richard's grimly smiling face in utter amazement.

"But—but the money they've spent, splashed everywhere, the huge advertising, the race itself—"

But Sir Richard interrupted him. "An empty shell, Blundell," he repeated. "That's why they used such desperate methods against us in the first place, and why they challenged us to this race, being then confident of victory. If they had won, all would have been well. But we won, and the G.E.N. takes second place. That must finish it, if what Cridland says is true."

"Why did Cridland want to tell you this, sir?" inquired Sam. "It seems that he and Langrish fell out. It was his revenge. But, as it happens, we don't need this knowledge now."

"You're sure it's not all bluff, this letter?" suggested Jimmy cautiously. "Some wheeze of Langrish's to keep the G.S.C. fighting on if they were beaten in the race, to keep them butting their heads against an iron wall, so to speak, to break themselves upon it in the end?"

"I don't think that," Sir Richard shook his head. "Of course, as we know only too well, the G.E.N. are up to anything—even to putting dope in our firemen's tea in the great race. But I don't think they'd bother to—"

He broke off as the butler entered. The figure of a man could be seen behind the old butler—a powerful, familiar figure. A quick cry broke from Jim Speed, even before the butler announced:

"Mr. Langrish, sir, wishes—"

The next moment, without waiting, Granite Langrish himself had pushed his way roughly past the old man, and stood in the room, facing them.

King Steam!

SIR RICHARD GRANT had started to his feet. He and Langrish stood staring into one another's faces in silence. Langrish's face was grim and hard—the Granite Langrish of old. But it was odd to see a queer, hunted look in those glinting, steely eyes. And Jim and Sam saw that the iron face was a little lined, a little haggard.

Utter silence filled the room. Jim and Sam had also risen, and stood uncertain. Langrish glanced towards them.

"Sir Richard Grant, I want to speak to you—alone."

The hard voice was not quite steady. Sir Richard's lips tightened. Despite all that had passed during the last few months, he was prepared to be polite to a beaten foe. But Langrish's forced entrance he keenly resented, and his voice was cold as he answered:

"These gentlemen are my guests, Mr. Langrish. This surely is not the time—"

Langrish laughed bitterly. "It is my time, Sir Richard. It only remains for me to speak before these—these employees."

Again Sir Richard's lips tightened. Sam and Jim made a movement to go if that were necessary, but the baronet motioned them to stay where they were. Langrish went on:

"After all, why not? It will be no secret soon. Sir Richard, I vowed that I would smash the G.S.C. in the wheels of my electric locos! I know that I have failed, that I am beaten. I had thought to finish things by victory in the railway race, but, instead, the G.S.C. triumphed in that. My railway is down and out—I make no secret of that to you. There is one chance only for the G.E.N., and after to-night it will be too late. I have come to ask if an amalgamation could be arranged between the two railways—"

Langrish broke off. His face was working queerly, and Jimmy realised what that speech must have meant to such a man as Granite Langrish. His voice had snapped as though under stress of great emotion. But the youngster had no sympathy for such a man as this—a man who had proved himself utterly ruthless, unscrupulous, callous, and cruel.

"Really, Mr. Langrish," began Sir Richard, eyeing the man



His brain throbbing, Speed crawled forward and poked his head over the forward side of the tender. The sight that met his gaze made him gasp!

with a hint of puzzled surprise, "this is no time for such a proposition! Surely you must realise that. The usual channel—what power have I to—"

Langrish's face twitched. He licked his lips, and opened his mouth as if to speak. Then, without another word, he swung upon his heel, and with bowed head strode from the room. Sir Richard made a motion as if to follow, but did not. They heard the butler's footsteps, heard the outer door open and close again. Granite Langrish was gone.

Jimmy stood staring at the door through which he had seen the last of that grim figure. Something of a shock it had been, something of horror to see that big, strong-hewn head bowed, to see Granite Langrish broken on the wheel!

Langrish, as Sir Richard Grant said to Jim and Sam that night, was clearly a mental wreck, upon the verge of a nervous breakdown. His extraordinary visit to Carrington Hall showed that. And the triumph of the G.S.C. over the G.E.N. was not the sole reason by any means.

For a few days later the newspapers proved that Cridland's letter had been true.

The facts of the faked balance-sheets were made public property. Not only was the G.E.N. bankrupt, but warrants were out for the arrest of three men, auditors and chartered accountants, in connection with the affair, and another warrant for Langrish himself!

But Langrish was nowhere to be found. Like Cridland, he escaped the law that had dealt with Soper, by leaving England, and out in the unknown he remained for good.

But, for all that, the two railways were amalgamated eventually. The G.S.C. bought up the G.E.N., lock, stock, and barrel, and Sam Blundell's mighty express engines were soon running over the old G.E.N. lines, together with the experimental electric locomotives that were still being perfected.

But though Sam admitted that electricity had its uses, and believed that some day it might be the one power in the railway world, he still pinned his faith to steam. And some years later, as chief of the drawing office in Steel's shoes, Sam designed locomotives that were to astonish the world, every steam locomotive on the Great Scottish and Central line being the product of his skill.

"That's a type I'm fond of," said Sam one day, as he and his chum, Jimmy Speed—now one of the fitters in the Blackhampton workshops—sat on the grass, smoking, by the mouth of Blackhampton Long Tunnel.

He nodded towards a little, sturdy tank engine that was puffing away busily in front of a long, heavy goods train.

"Yes, she's a beauty!" said Jimmy Speed. "And to think that you made her, Sam?"

"Well, you tuned her up, Jimmy," grinned his chum. "It's thanks to you she's going like a bird now, sweet and true in every inch of her. They tell me there's not a fitter in the shops that can do to a loco what you can. You've got a magic touch, or something."

"No, it's just that I love 'em so," Jimmy told him, as they rose and turned away.

THE END.

NEXT WEEK A. S. Hardy starts his Grand New Football Serial:

"FOOTBALL CHUMS!"

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"THE WHISPERING MAN!"

(Continued from page 21.)

old Fleetwing dropped and overtook it inside twenty minutes; and once ahead of the dust-cloud, a single glance identified the car and showed him the thin, giggled Armstrong crouched grimly over the wheel.

Then, abruptly and sharply, the Yard again called him.

"2XD Lindsay. Wish to report that Dixon vouches for you. We are sending out an 'all-station' call to ring the roads and stop every Dion!"

If Lyle was annoyed before, he was furious now.

"Thanks!" he said. "I also wish to report that the Dion is immediately below me, that it is fitted with a frame aerial, and that the estimable Armstrong has heard every word you've spoken! He's slowing, turning into a side lane. He's making for woods two miles ahead!"

It was evident that Armstrong had altered his plans, for soon the car had entered the woods, and was completely hidden by its dense foliage. Lyle, gloomily aware of the impossibility of landing a damaged bus in open country, was forced to ring slowly overhead, and ruefully wonder what the crook's last move would be.

Then Armstrong's shrill treble agitated the phones he still wore.

"Are you listening, Lindsay?" the fellow demanded.

"Armstrong, the game's up," Lyle answered. "You'd do no good by skulking there."

"I know it," Armstrong replied calmly. "I only wish to tell you that I've unloaded O'Gorman and the jewels, that I'm leaving them in this wood. In return, I ask you to clear off, to give me a chance to dodge the police. I'll never be taken alive, I'll smash into the first obstacle that bars my road; but I'm confident I'll avoid capture if—"

Then, like a fired shell, the car shot from the trees; but not for a moment did Lyle believe that Jerry and the plunder had been abandoned.

"Cute beggar!" he gasped. "Trying to put me off—knows I've been unable to give the police our definite whereabouts, hopes to make a getaway before they close in on him."

In a moment he was racing the car, dropping until he was perilously near its level, and swiftly comparing its rush with his indicator.

"He's desperate," Lyle groaned. "He'll smash anything that comes his way, and himself with it. If Jerry's inside—"

The thought was enough. With a touch he shot thirty feet ahead, snatched up a steel wrench, snapped off his engine, and climbed outboard!

For a fractional second he hung poised. Then, venturing all, he dropped—to land half over the jolting car, and to be nearly torn away by the swift rush of air!

He was dimly conscious of a fearful crash ahead—the Fleetwing striking solidly. He was more nearly and forcibly aware that Armstrong was streaking straight for the wreckage—grimly keeping his promise to hit anything that came his way.

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But Lyle hit first. Hating the job, but driven by dire necessity, he brought the wrench smartly down on Armstrong's temple. Then he sprang forward and tore madly at brakes and wheel, stopping the car a scant foot from the wrecked plane, its tyres ripped to shreds and smoking with friction fire!

In a moment he had the door open, spotted his pal huddled up in a corner, rope swathed and gagged, and set about releasing him from his trying position.

Jerry, stiff and sore though he was, bombarded him with questions the instant his mouth was in working order.

"Shure, it's dhramin' I am," he gasped. "I saw 'em smash the plane, yet you come traipsin' round like a King's Cup winner. But ye've saved my life, and ye've outed Armstrong; and now you're going to tell me all about it before the police come wadin' in."

"We'll fasten up this giddy old skeleton first," Lyle grinned.

And only when the job was done did he begin to satisfy Jerry's justifiable curiosity.

But long before Jerry had ceased seeking information two police-scouts arrived and took a hand in the question game.

They also took an absorbing interest in the contents of the car, and promised Armstrong a good long rest from road-hogging, thieving, and other questionable pastimes.

But Lyle had one big "grouch"—he aired it when they were at last allowed to begin the journey home.

"It's all right swottin' the giddy little jacksharps," he sighed, "but the big fish—Ultima—has again gracefully and successfully retired to deep water."

"Shure, he'll swim to th' surface again," Jerry grinned cheerfully. "We all have a little argyment to settle, an' he brags that 'he always pays,' doesn't he?"

THE END.

(Ultima has again escaped the clutches of the two Aero Chums, but Lyle Lindsay and Jerry O'Gorman are determined to capture the arch-villain, come what may. Look out for the next splendid yarn in this exciting series, chums.)

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